



BRADY

HOW COULD SHE POSSIBLY SAY NO?

KATIEDOWE

Brady

How could she possibly say no?

A sexy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Bestselling author Macayla Bledsoe's world turns upside down when her mother's dying wish thrusts her into the arms of Brady Randall—the one man who has silently loved her from afar!

Despite her reservations, Macayla is swayed by her mother's dire illness and agrees to the arrangement.

But what starts as a reluctant agreement spirals into a whirlwind of undeniable passion!

As their connection deepens, a budding love takes root, only to be shaken by a malicious act that could shatter their bond!

Now, Macayla and Brady stand on the brink, holding tight to the fragile new life they've defended with everything they have...

Can Macayla overcome her doubts to embrace the love that has grown in the shadow of obligation?

And will Brady prove that their unexpected family is forged from more than just a promise?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

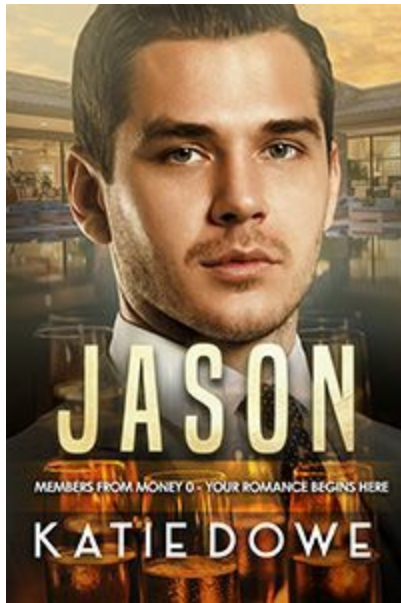
Suitable for over 18s only due to sizzling hot sex scenes!

Tip: Search **BWWM Club** on Amazon to see more of our great books.

Free: Get Jason from the Members From Money series where YOU'RE the star!!

Hi there. As a special thank you for buying this ebook, for a limited time I want to send a copy of Jason **free of charge** directly to your email! It's a **personalized story**, meaning you'll add a few details about yourself (these won't be shared with anyone else) and you'll become the star of the story!! :D

You'll be emailed a new chapter once a day for 7 days. You can get it by clicking the cover below or [going here](#):



Direct link: www.afroromancebooks.com/personalized-jason-members-from-money

This book is so exclusive you can't even buy it. As well as sending daily emails with the story, I'll also send you updates when new books like this are available.

Copyright © 2023 to Katie Dowe and AfroRomanceBooks.com. No part of this book can be copied or distributed without written permission from the above copyright holders.

Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Get Another BWWM Ebook Free](#)

[BWWM Book Of The Week](#)

[More Hot BWWM Books You'll Love](#)

Chapter 1

She was pushing herself beyond the limit, but she didn't want to stop. Being out here in the middle of nowhere had been a good idea. The isolation inspired her, and she needed the downtime to think. She could feel the muscles in her calves protesting, but she didn't stop.

The encroaching darkness covered the trees, helped by the sliver of clouds obscuring the moon.

She wasn't afraid, far from it. The cabin was owned by her mother and was tucked into a large piece of land with towering trees. Most of the leaves had been stripped bare by the season. Fall had descended like a vengeful monster, and the weather was making itself known.

She'd wrapped up well, the thick sweatpants and matching hoodie lending some warmth. She'd also been running for the past thirty minutes, which was enough to work up a sweat.

Skidding to a stop near a makeshift bridge, she bent and took several deep breaths.

She supposed she'd gone overboard, but she needed to get out of the cabin for a while. Writer's block was kicking her ass.

Her male character was sounding more like a douchebag rather than a decorated detective, and her female character was too whiny. Straightening, she took a deep breath, the air bracing and sharp and just what she needed.

She didn't mind the cold and could feel the sweat trickling down her back, the moisture gathering under her breasts. She stood there, a tall, willowy woman with curves in all the right places. Her thick, dark brown curls were scooped back into a messy ponytail.

Her golden-brown eyes scanned the area, taking in the scene, shielded by long dark lashes. Her skin was smooth and color the same as coffee mixed with cream.

The wind had picked up somewhat, cooling the moisture on her face reminding her that she needed to do her stretches. Leaning one hand against the rough tree trunk, she worked her calves and flexed her screaming and aching muscles.

She was going to finish the run and head back to the cabin. It was dark, but she had too much on her mind to contemplate going to bed. She was going to try and get some work in, but first, she had her mother's outlandish request to think about.

"You must be out of your mind." She'd stared at the ageless beauty reclining on the loveseat in her opulent sitting room in shock, Michelle Bledsoe (she'd reverted to her first husband's name as soon as her third marriage had finished). Michelle waved a hand dismissively as she stared at her only child. "I need this."

“That’s ridiculous. There’s no way I’m going to agree to something like that. It’s ludicrous.”

Then, she’d dropped the hammer. She had cancer and was going to need a hysterectomy. The doctors weren’t sure that it would be successful. Fifty-fifty chance of recovering was what they were saying. “You show no signs of settling down- “

“I’m thirty years old!”

“You’re married to your career. I can’t blame you for it. I did the same. I only took a break when I was carrying you and went straight back to work as soon as possible.” Her expression had become thoughtful. “I shortchanged you.”

“Dad was there- “

“I shortchanged him as well. Richard was such a good man, and he loved me, even knowing I didn’t love him.”

“Mother- “

“I’ve always been honest with you, darling.” The shadows had touched the beautiful golden-brown eyes. “You know that the love of my life is Sydney, and you know what happened-“

“Mother, is there a point to this?”

“Yes. I’m assessing my life, realizing there will come a time when I won’t be here, has me thinking.” She stared at Macayla. “I need this, darling. Both Sydney and I.”

She'd been so absorbed in the memories that she was at the plain wooden door before she realized she'd arrived back at the cabin.

Pushing the door open, she stepped into the warmth. Before her run, she'd hauled logs from the shed and made a fire. The reddish-gold flames were leaping and crackling, shrouding the small room in a haven of coziness.

"Water." She muttered as she kicked off her tennis shoes and entered the small kitchen. The cabin had been a gift from Sydney Randall to her mother and was very old. Macayla had discovered that it had been their meeting place, the place they had run to when they wanted to be alone.

She'd been coming here for years, and when she heard what the cabin was for, she'd balked at returning. Uncapping the bottle, she took a healthy gulp of the refreshing water and leaned against the island.

It was weird that the love between her mother and multi-billionaire investor Sydney Randall had survived over the years. She'd been through three husbands, and he'd married, according to her mother, a woman who'd been cold and unfeeling and had died a year ago.

“I'm surprised you haven't got back with him. You were both cheating on your partners when they were alive, now they're no longer in the way, why aren't you with him?” Macayla had asked.

Her mother smiled serenely. “Our love transcends everything. I'm not getting married again and Sydney respects that. Marriages never worked for us and we don't need a legal document to realize that we'll always love each other.”

It had freaked her out, but she had to admit, albeit reluctantly, that theirs was a love that had stood the test of time.

She respected and admired it, but didn't believe in it. Her love scenes were gritty and rough and heartfelt in her books, but it wasn't from personal experience. She had a vivid imagination and used it well. Finishing the water, she tossed it and went back into the living room. A drink of wine and then a shower to clear the cobwebs, she decided.

"I'm giving you an in."

Brady stopped pacing the length of the large, comfortable office to stare at the man behind the desk. Sydney Randall was an imposing six-foot three inches man with brown hair threaded with gray and an attractive face. He was CEO of Randall Investment and sat behind his baronial desk, he cut quite a figure.

“This is for your benefit and we both know it.” Brady told him wryly, the slight British accent slipping through his deep voice. He’d been sent to school in England when he was a thirteen-year-old boy, only coming back for vacations.

Those had become few and far between because he’d found the rambling brick house, cold and uninviting. Now he was back and trying to get the hang of things.

“You’re still in love with her and you can’t tell me otherwise.”

He shrugged, walking over to pour himself a drink from the silver decanter. “She just sees me as her friend. It’s been like that since we were little.”

“Going away hasn’t made a difference.” Sighing softly, Sydney leaned back in his comfortable chair and stared at his son. “It’s ironic, isn’t it?” He shook his head in wonder. “I fell in love with Michelle the first time I laid eyes on her.”

“Grandpa broke that up. He didn’t want you marrying a black woman, much less one who was a model.”

“No.” Sydney closed his eyes briefly at the pain. “He threatened to disinherit me and said he’d make life a living hell for her. It wouldn’t have mattered about me, but I couldn’t have him throwing the spokes in her career.”

“Now you want us to come full circle.” Brady tossed back the drink and poured another.

“Will she agree to it?”

Leaning his head back, Sydney took a deep breath. “Michelle was

diagnosed with cancer.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“That’s what’s going to get Macayla to agree.”

Brady eyed him with a frown. “Is this a genuine illness- “

“I’d never use something like that to get my way.”

“Wouldn’t you?” Taking the scotch with him, Brady walked over to sit on one of the chairs facing the desk.

“No.” The response was made in a flat tone of voice. “I love Michelle and that will always be the case. We spent years sneaking around to be with each other and now we’re both free, there’s nothing we can do about it.”

“Why not?”

“She’s ill, son, and over the years, she’s been disillusioned. I feel responsible that we wasted years being with other people when all the time we just wanted each other.” He stared at his son. “Your mother-“ He shook his head.

“Don’t think you should spare my feelings.” Brady’s lips curled in distaste. “She never loved us, having me was just a duty she was forced to do. She was never a mother to me-“ Brady took a sip of the scotch to wash away the bitter taste in his mouth. “You stayed in a miserable marriage for almost thirty years. What the hell for?”

"The stipulations in the will." Sydney wanted a drink himself but his day hadn't ended yet and he had some things to cover. "We had to stay married or the reins of the company would have gone to a distant cousin. I was already married to your mother and Michelle was also married.

There was no reason to rock that particular boat. Your mother was drawn into the mess as well. She never wanted to get married at all. It was just a duty, as the daughter of a wealthy and ruthless man, she had to perform. She did as she was told."

"And ended up resenting both of us." Brady shook her head. "How can a mother not love her own child?"

"She wasn't capable of emotion having been brought up in a household where love was lacking. She wouldn't let me touch her. Even after I decided we were in this together, she kept her distance. She'd performed her duty as my wife and produced an heir. That was it for her."

"You kept on seeing Michelle?"

His father eyed him without the slightest ounce of regret. "We love each other and at first we tried to fight it, but it wouldn't go away."

"Her husband loved her. Macayla's dad." Brady pointed out.

"She was easy to love." He shook his head. "She never cheated on him-" He smiled at Brady's skeptical expression. "She never did. He was a decent man and knew she was in love with me.

She cared about him enough to be faithful to him. When he died suddenly, it broke her apart. She turned to me and I comforted her. I begged her not to marry again and she couldn't bear the thought of me being married. Your grandfather was still alive and would have ruined her.

Then we had you and I wanted to try and make it work." Leaning back in his chair, he closed his eyes briefly, before looking at his son. "Now do you see why we need this? It's too late for Michelle and I, but you and Macayla have a chance, I'm urging you to take it."

"Under false pretenses?" Brady's tone was tinged with bitterness. "She doesn't love me and, even if she agrees to this madness, it will be out of a sense of duty to her mother. I don't want her resenting the child or me."

"You're thinking of your mother."

"Can you blame me?" He asked impatiently. "This is madness, Dad. Getting a child involved is irresponsible as hell. "

"You're in love with her?"

"Yes, and I have since I was a gawky five-year-old boy. She was amused by me. She was three years old and amused by the way I always wanted to play with her when you and Michelle met in the park." He lifted his broad shoulders.

"Even when we were teenagers and I would come back for the summer, she always had something going on. Then when she found out about you and her mother, she resented me. There'll always be that between us."

"She isn't seeing anyone and the relationship you had with that English actress is over seeing as you ended it."

"I did. It wasn't going anywhere and it wasn't fair to Giselle for me to pretend otherwise." he finished his drink. "It's frustrating to be in love with her and not able to tell her."

"Then it's time for you to change that." His father pressed. "Having a baby together will change that."

"It never did for you and Mom." Brady reminded him.

"That's because I was in love with Michelle and your mother was -she was incapable of love. Macayla is warm and giving-" A smile touched his lips. "She's moved past her resentment of me and we get along these days. She's determined to be a tomboy, but beneath that is a lovely young woman who knows exactly what she wants."

"You're a fan?"

"Of not only her as a person, but the books she's written. She refuses to use her own name and insists on a pseudonym. When she started writing, I offered to hook her up with one of the publishing houses we invested in and she refused.

She told me if she couldn't do it on her own then it wasn't worth doing. She's done extremely well, and I'm proud of her. I want her as a daughter and you want her in your life. It's that simple."

"Or that bloody complicated." Brady muttered.

"Has she agreed to meet you?"

"She's at the cabin and yes, she's agreed to meet."

"That's a good sign."

"Or she's just meeting me to say, hell no."

"I doubt that. When are you leaving?"

"This afternoon. It's a long drive and I won't get there until the evening." He glanced at his watch. "Which reminds me I have to get to my place to grab a shower and change."

"I'm hoping for the best."

"So am I."

He used the drive to reflect on the situation. The traffic was surprisingly light, considering it was a Friday afternoon.

It was probably too early and people were still at work. It was the beginning of fall and there was evidence of the season everywhere he looked. The trees made even more glorious by the moisture left by the rain that had fallen earlier.

He'd left the urban area and turned off into the rural area, where the houses were few and far between. He'd lived in Cotswold for years and had become accustomed to the wide-open spaces and the lush green trees and grass. He'd called her when he was heading out and she'd told him that she was busy writing.

"My creative juices are flowing, but I'll make sure I cook a meal."

" I could bring something with me?"

"It's no trouble. I need to take a break anyway. I've been at it since dawn. How does beef stew sound?"

"In this cold weather, it sounds heavenly."

"Good. See you soon."

He didn't bother hoping this was going to be a romantic getaway. He knew Macayla, had known her since they were children, and she'd told him at one point that she didn't believe in romance and all that crap.

"It's just a myth."

"You're being cynical."

"I'm being realistic. Nothing lasts forever."

"I agree, but people can love for a lifetime."

"Don't tell me you of all people believe that."

"Why not?" He'd argued. "Just because my parents barely tolerate each other, it doesn't mean that love doesn't exist."

He'd been unable to change her mind and had left her to it. He made the left turn onto a dirt road and stopped there for a bit. He was surrounded by farmland and towering trees. He knew the area well, having stayed at the cabin over several summers. It was peaceful and serene and there was no sign of any life whatsoever.

A rambling farm house was set back from the road, the red brick giving off a feeling of space and comfort. He'd grown up in a cold and

unfeeling house, with a mother who barely spoke to anyone. He hadn't understood it at first and it had hurt him to the bone.

Then his Dad, who'd desperately tried to make up for it, had explained to him how it was. It still hadn't made it any easier and he'd kept trying to reach her to no avail. Taking a deep breath, he touched the start button. It was no wonder he wanted a family of his own. The yearning inside him had grown even stronger, instead of dissipating.

"You're worrying needlessly."

"It's my job." He said lightly as he brought her the medicine and the glass of water. "I hate to see you like this."

"Why, Syd, you do care." She smiled at him sweetly as she took the glass and medication from him.

"Cut it out." He growled, bending to kiss the top of her head. "He's going to the cabin."

"I know, and you're tied up in knots."

"Can you blame me?" Lowering himself into the plump cushioned chair, he pushed forward, his elbows propped on his knees. She was still the same exquisite beauty he'd fell for all those years ago.

The illness had ravaged her face, giving the flawless complexion a few lines, and she'd lost her hair which had devastated her. But to him, she was still the most beautiful woman he'd ever known.

"They'll work it out." Reaching over, she took his hand in his. "Brady's in love with her."

"I know that. We both know your daughter is a tough nut to crack,"

"She has a weakness. Me. The fact I'm ill will sway her decision."

"You're not concerned we're using that to get her to come on board?"

Michelle shook her head. "Those two belong together and, unlike us, they have the freedom to be with each other."

His hand tightened on hers. He blamed himself for not standing up to his father all those years ago and denying them the happiness they deserved. He'd stayed in a loveless marriage for years and she'd drifted from one marriage to the next. It made him weak with anger at the time they'd lost.

"I'm sorry." He whispered hoarsely.

"Sydney Randall, you're about to piss off a very sick woman. There's nothing to apologize for as I keep telling you."

Bringing her hands to his lips, he kissed them. "I've asked you to marry me."

"And I said no." She smiled at him, love glowing in her golden-brown eyes. "We're exactly where we should be. We'll leave this to the young people. Our time for that sort of thing has passed. It's their time now."

Chapter 2

"You look more shabby than ever. A rich guy like you can't afford a barber?"

He wanted to tell her she was even more exquisite than he remembered, but he knew how that would go. So, instead, he grinned and dragged one hand through his tangled almost shoulder length blonde hair. "I happen to like it the way it is. Something smells good."

"Beef stew and take off those boots at the doorway."

"Yes, Mother." With a grimace, he did as he was told.

"How was the journey?"

"Solitary and kinda satisfying." He wandered into the warm, cozy kitchen and sniffed the air. She was wearing leggings and a thin sweater. Her thick curls were piled on top of her head and she wasn't wearing makeup or any jewelry. It amazed him she could be so beautiful without any sort of enhancement. "You baked?"

"I was in the zone. Pour me some of that wine, will you?"

"Always at your service." He said mockingly as he popped the cork and poured some into a glass.

"You're such a prick."

"And you're still the same bitch I've known for years." He handed her the glass and watched as she took a sip.

"That's what I aim for." Putting aside the glass, she went back to chopping vegetables for the salad. "How's your Dad?"

"Great."

Dumping the chopped lettuce into the bowl, she reached for the tomatoes. "I suppose we should talk about the elephant in the room."

"Before we eat?"

"Yes." She finished with the tomatoes and started on the apples. "I have to get it out of the way. It's absurd."

"I agree."

She gave him a sharp look. "Yet you want to go through with it? What happened to the bimbo you were seeing in England?"

"She's a sweetheart and we broke it off."

"Why if she was such a sweetheart?"

"She wanted more than I could give her."

"Marriage?"

"Something like that."

She finished chopping and went to get some herbs. Popping a slice of tomato into her mouth, she offered him a piece. "Boy, this is crazy."

"So you keep saying."

"We're more like siblings than anything else."

He had to force himself not to react to that. "Are we?"

"Yes, dammit." Her golden-brown eyes flashed as she went to get bowls. "We shouldn't have been put into this position." Slamming the bowls down on the counter, she opened a drawer to take out a ladle.

"I'm married to my career. I don't care what Mom, or anyone else says, I love being alone. I do better alone. I'm selfish and self-absorbed, how the hell am I going to pay attention to a kid?"

She dumped the beef stew into the bowls and slid one over to him. "When I'm writing, I'm in another world, wrapped up in my characters and plots. I barely remember to eat." Plopping down on the stool, she glared at him. "Say something."

"Oh, I thought you were talking for both of us." He responded dryly as he took a sip and swallowed. "This is amazing."

"Yeah, thanks." She waved away the compliment in her own distracted way. "It's not fair to ask us for a favor of that magnitude."

"I'm in if you are." He told her lightly.

"Why?"

"I'm thirty and I need an heir."

"You have women falling all over themselves to be with you. I've seen all of the articles. 'Son of multi-billionaire investor out on the town with such and such.'"

"Our parents need this."

"Yeah" She stared into her bowl moodily. "Mom gave me a hell of a guilt trip and I can't say no."

"It might not be that bad."

"It's going to stifle your social life."

"I don't have one and neither do you." He pointed out.

"If we go through with this, I'm not doing it alone." She warned.

His emerald eyes fired at that. "You think I wouldn't be responsible enough to stand by you?"

"I don't know. Goddammit."

"You can always say no and be done with it."

She glared at him before hopping off the stool. "I'm not going to break her heart, so, we're doing this."

"When?"

"Why did you think I invited you here?" She dug the spoon into the stew. "I'm ovulating."

"Oh."

"Yeah. We might as well start now, get it over and done with."

"It's not a death sentence and I happen to be an excellent lover. You just might enjoy it." He was stung and it showed.

"We're not doing it for fun and you're going to need to keep your ego in check. It's an inconvenience and I'm not feeling particularly romantic."

"Well, hell." Picking up the wine, he drained the glass and poured some more. "Since you put it that way, why not just do it right here and go back to our meal?"

They glared at each other and Macayla was the first to relent. "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For making things worse."

He inclined his head and forced the temper down. She'd insulted him and he could feel the pain of her reluctance through to his core. It was

humiliating being on the receiving end of a woman who wasn't into him, especially one he was so in love with. He'd tried to shake it over the years, telling himself that it was just a childish crush.

The years had passed and the crush had blossomed into something so potent and powerful he'd been unable to control it. Even distance hadn't changed his feelings. Now, he was faced with touching her, making love to her, and if he wasn't careful, he was going to show his hand.

He knew it would freak her out and possibly drive her away. He was going to have to be extremely careful and pretend this was a duty for him to perform.

"We could go into the living room or -"

"Just get on with it." He intervened crisply. "Like you said."

"Fine." With a careless shrug, she resumed eating her meal in silence.

They were both nervous and trying not to show it. Macayla had never been in a situation like this before. The two relationships she'd had previously had been casual, no strings attached deals. She'd made that plain from the beginning.

She wasn't looking for a partner, just someone to hang out with when she needed to take a break from her writing. She didn't have friends because she considered herself a loner.

She'd had the freedom before her success as a writer to go wherever she pleased and do whatever she wanted. Her parents had been wealthy, her mother making tons of money from her modeling and then as an actress.

She'd traveled the world and backpacked in Europe when she was in her first year of college. Writing fascinated and fulfilled her, unlike sex with the two men she'd been with.

She didn't want to be in love because she considered the emotion too messy. She'd seen what it did to her parents. Now, she was faced with this thing she was compelled to do because of an obligation to her mother.

"Here?" She gestured to the small living room with the fire blazing inside the hearth.

"Why the hell not?" Brady was trying for confidence and hoped he was achieving it.

"Can the attitude, will you?"

"Now you're going to dictate to me?" He gave her an amused, insolent look as he dragged his sweater off. "How I should feel?"

"If we're going to do this, we need to have a better frame of mind." She dragged her sweater off and sent heat straight through him. Her breasts were small, the nipples full and round and she hadn't bothered with a bra. How the hell had he missed that. His throat was dry and he was hard as a rock.

"Yes." He was at a loss for words and fumbling with the zipper of his denims.

"Good." With a decisive nod, she turned her back to wriggle out of her leggings, giving him an enticing and breathtaking view of her firm buttocks encased in black lace. Averting his gaze, he took off his denims, sitting on the edge of the sofa to get rid of his socks.

Picking up the blankets on the sofa, he spread it near to the hearth where the fire was crackling. Next, he went to get the cushions,

stopping short when he saw her already spread out on the blanket.

"You're ready then?" He had to clear his throat for the words to make sense. She'd taken her underwear off and was completely naked.

"I guess I am." She took the cushions from him and put them behind her head. "Shall we?"

Her voice sounded cool as if she was agreeing to have a meal. He had no idea what it was taking her to appear unaffected. Brady Randall was an impressive guy when clothed. Naked, he was magnificent.

All golden and rippling with muscles, not bulging, but lean and well-toned as if he worked out a lot. His chest was wide, as were his shoulders and his stomach wash board flat.

"I take it you haven't got any diseases?"

His eyes flared. "I had my physical two weeks ago. How about you?"

"Had my regular check a week ago, so I guess we're good."

"I guess we are."

"What now?"

"Am I allowed to kiss you?"

"No."

"Why the hell not?"

"We're not seeing each other-" She broke off with a muffled squeal when he crushed his lips to hers. She started to push him away, but when her hands encountered bare, warm flesh, she hesitated and he used that.

Gentling the kiss, he shifted so he was half on top of her. He'd dreamed about this, about holding her in his arms and tasting her. In the dreams she'd tasted like honey, but nothing could compare to this.

His tongue darted into her mouth and he could feel himself melting like wax against a flame. His heart was thudding inside his chest and he felt himself harden even more. He was afraid he was going to come prematurely and couldn't afford that.

He didn't want to stop kissing her though, tasting her sweetness. She was undeniably sweet and soft, her toned body moving against his with restless energy. His fingers balled into the thick curls of her hair as he got rid of the pins.

He went crazy when her hands came around his neck and had to force himself to calm down. He wasn't going to blow it. He couldn't afford for her to know what was going on inside him.

Ending the kiss, he slid down to kiss the hollow of her throat. Her fingers tugged at his hair and he wondered if it was to stop him or urge him on.

Not bothering to think about it, he headed for her nipple. His first taste made him sweat, his skin heating even more. Swirling his tongue around the tight bud, he noted her moans, filing it away for future reference.

Biting her lips, Macayla willed herself not to cry out. The pleasure wracking her body was new to her. She'd often viewed sex as just a release, a way to let go of the tension, but nothing in her limited experience had prepared her for this.

When he transferred to the other nipple, she felt as if she was going up in flames. It was too much, she thought feverishly, and he wasn't even inside her yet. She wanted to tell him that she wanted him to get on with it, to slide into her and allow her to feel it.

She hadn't been prepared to enjoy it this much. It was supposed to be a duty, but now it was much more than that. Even the request from her mother had faded away into nothingness replaced by a pleasure so intense, it was searing through flesh and bone.

When he released the nipple and covered his body with hers, she reached for him eagerly, her fingers racing over the muscles of his shoulders and back.

Brady couldn't help the gasp as he entered her slowly. Her tightness was enveloping, gripping him like a glove. His body shuddered, emerald green eyes darkening, as emotions swamped him.

For a few seconds he couldn't move and just stayed where he was. This was home, this was the place he'd been searching for his entire life as he slipped from relationship to relationship.

Right here, inside her, was where he belonged and he felt like weeping for the time he'd spent away from her. He was frustrated he couldn't tell her what he was feeling and what he wanted to say. Everything he needed to tell her was trapped inside his brain and under lock and key.

For now, he was just going to have to savor the moment, to cherish this and hope to Christ it was going to take several tries before she conceived. He needed more than a day or night with her and he was praying he would get it.

He started to move, unable to keep still when she wrapped those long and strong legs around his waist and lifted her body. Her arms were around his neck. Neither of them spoke, and for that he was happy. He didn't want conversation; he didn't want anything to spoil the moment.

He didn't expect her to blurt out her feelings or how much she was enjoying it, but he wished she would say something, like tell him it was good for her as well. Bending his head, he captured her lips in time to swallow her cries as the climax poured through her body and had her digging her fingers into his back.

He could feel her stiffening as if taken by surprise and was hoping and praying that this was because it was her first time feeling this way. It was the first time he'd ever been swamped by so many emotions.

He'd enjoyed women in the past, of course, but this made a difference as it was her. The woman he loved, the one. Ending the kiss, he increased the pace when he felt his own climax coming. Closing his eyes, he shuddered, and shot his load into her with a force that had

his heart thundering inside his chest.

He felt her slender curves trembling against him and it took a few minutes for them both to recover. She allowed him to stay in that position, before pushing at him.

"You're crushing me." She mumbled against his chest.

"Sorry." Rolling off her, he flopped back and stacked his hands under his head as he stared up at the ceiling.

Macayla had no idea what to say and, for the first time in her life, she was speechless. The sex had been so powerful and intense she'd felt as if she was burning up from the inside. The climax had practically destroyed her. It was the first for her and had been a shock to the system.

“Wine?”

“What?” Her head jerked towards him with a frown on her forehead.

“We have some wine left. I was asking if you wanted some.”

“Yes. Thanks.”

With a nod, he rolled lithely to his feet. Macayla averted her eyes, but not before seeing the tautness of his butt or the long, hairy legs. Waiting until he'd left the room, she put her clothes back on and went to sit on one of the sofas. This could complicate things, but only if she allowed it.

Brady had to hide his disappointment when he came back and saw her fully dressed. Handing her the glass, he put his down and went to

drag on his denims and sweater. Leaving it unzipped, he took the chair across from her and cradled the glass between his palms.

"Thoughts?"

Her tapered brows lifted as she took a sip to steady herself. "Surely you're not looking for validation?"

"What if I am?"

"I'd say you don't need it as I'm sure you realize." She took another sip of wine. "You're quite experienced, something that doesn't surprise me."

"I'd go as far as to say it was your first orgasm. Am I right?" He asked.

Her eyes blazed, fascinating him with the golden fire.

"Are you looking for a medal?"

"Perhaps." His lips twitched in amusement. He'd spent the few minutes retrieving the wine to gather his thoughts and composure.

"How many relationships have you been in?"

"None of your damned business." She muttered.

"On the contrary." He was enjoying seeing her flustered. The usually cool and unflappable Macayla Bledsoe squirming. He loved that. He'd seen her composure slip when he was making love to her. "As the soon to be mother of my child, I think I have a right to know."

"That has nothing to do with anything."

"Are you embarrassed?"

She gave him a scathing look. "Far from it."

"So, there's no reason not to tell me."

"Why are you so interested in my love life?"

"Love life?" He raised an eyebrow. "Is that what you're calling it?"

"Okay, my fuck buddies. Is that what you want to hear?"

"You're still friends with them? How many has there been?"

"Like I'm going to tell you that and, yes, we still communicate. We ended things amicably and they moved on."

"They. So more than one."

"Two, if you must know." She took another sip of the wine. "We can't say the same about you, can we?"

"No." He shook his head. "We can't."

"How nice for you." She said scathingly.

"I enjoy women, nothing wrong with that."

"As long as they knew you weren't really into them, right?"

"Right." His expression became hooded as she continued to stare at him. "I never enter something without laying out the ground rules."

"And that was accepted?"

"If it wasn't, I wouldn't go ahead with it."

"What were these ground rules?"

"No long-lasting attachment."

"And they agreed?"

"Yes." He said, shortly.

"Lucky for us, this is just an arrangement."

"Lucky for us." She was looking into her glass and missed seeing the tightness of his jaw.

Draining his glass, he rose. "I'm going for a walk."

"It's late."

"Why, darling, I didn't know you cared."

"Oh, go to hell." She snapped.

Without a word, he grabbed his jacket and strode from the room. She waited until she heard the door slam before leaning against the cushions and closing her eyes wearily. It was already turning out to be complicated.

Chapter 3

It was colder than he expected, but then again, the altitude was higher because it was on a rise. With the number of trees on the property, it was made even colder with the wind whistling through the leaves.

Hunching his shoulders, he shoved his hands into the pockets of the jacket and plodded on. He was pissed and feeling sorry for himself. What they'd shared in that small room, right next to the fire was something to be cherished and she had to spoil it by being bitchy about it.

What the hell had he expected? That she would praise his expertise as a lover? That she would suddenly make a one eighty and declare her love for him? She'd already made it plain this was just an arrangement. An inconvenience was the way she'd put it and it'd stung the hell out of him.

To him, it'd been special and he could still feel her wrapped around his cock, the tightness of her, the texture of her skin, and the feel of those long and well-toned legs wrapped around his waist. How could she ignore what had just happened between them?

The heat from the fire in the hearth couldn't compare to the one they'd experienced and yet she was still determined to play it lightly, as if she'd performed a duty and that was the end of it.

Sighing deeply, he stopped with a frown and realized that he'd wandered so far away he couldn't see the lights coming from the cabin. Turning around, he started back and heard the thunder before the flash of lightning.

Great, he thought bitterly. He'd forgotten they were predicting a thunder storm. He was going to be drenched before he got to the cabin. With that realization, he increased the pace and started running when he felt the first fat raindrop on his skin.

She wasn't going to worry it was raining like crazy and he was still out there. That was his problem. He was an adult and she wasn't his mother. Who the hell goes for a walk when it's freezing out? Hadn't he checked the weather to know it was going to rain?

Spinning away from the window where she'd been looking out, she went to add some logs to the fire. If he managed to come back, he was going to need to thaw out. Damn fool! Why had he been so upset anyway?

They both knew it was just an arrangement and she was still pissed that she'd agreed to it. She liked her life the way it was, and wanted things - like a baby and a man - on her terms.

But now, it was complicated. The lovemaking had been so powerful and unexpected that her mind was blown. It made her realize that the love scenes in her books, not that there were many because it was a

detective series, were tame compared to what had happened between them.

Spinning back to the window, she felt upset mixed with anxiety. Where the hell was he? That's why she didn't do relationships and was regretting inviting him. It'd been a foolish idea.

This was where her Mom and his Dad had come for their secret meetings and it felt super weird. Bad decision on her part, but then again, she hadn't wanted him inside her apartment. That was her space.

She felt her heart shudder in relief when she heard the door open and then close. The relief turned to anger as he came charging in and dripping water all over the floor. His hair was slicked back by the rain and his clothes were sodden.

"Are you always this stupid?"

"Don't start." He warned, his teeth chattering and his body shuddering.

"Oh, hell, I'm going to start. How could you go out for a walk in this weather?"

"It wasn't raining when I started." He was trembling so much; he could not get the jacket off. "A little help here?"

She glared at him and considered leaving and going to bed, but her conscience wouldn't allow her. Marching over, she dragged the jacket off none too gently and tossed it over the back of the chair. Next, she brushed his hands away and pulled the sweater over his head.

He'd taken off his boots at the doorway and hadn't bothered with socks. His toes felt like icicles. "I'm so bloody cold."

"You'll probably have a raging fever before the night is through." She managed to get his denims off and then his underwear. Refusing to look at his very impressive cock, she turned to get the blankets to wrap around him and shoved him into the chair in front of the fire.

"I'm going to get you some tea."

"Do you have brandy?"

"Yes."

"Then I'd prefer that."

Turning around, she marched out of the living room and into the kitchen. Closing his eyes wearily, he willed the tremors away and could feel the heat from the fire finally penetrating the cold. He was grateful she'd the presence of mind to add more logs to the fire and could feel the mesmerizing blaze lulling him to sleep.

His eyes snapped open when she came back with two glasses and handed him one.

"Thanks."

With a nod, she lifted the glass to her lips and took a sip.

"I had no idea you liked the stuff."

"It grows on you and, when I'm working, I like to mellow out a little. How are you feeling?"

"Getting warm. I guess I should have checked the weather."

"You think?" The sarcasm in her cultured voice had him bristling.

"We're not all as perfect as you." He snapped. The brandy was warming his insides and he could feel the tremors lessening.

"I'm far from perfect, but I happen to have the common sense to know to check the weather before storming out."

"You pissed me off."

"So your solution was to go out in the dark on a cold night and catch your death? Good plan."

He glared at her as he tossed back the rest of the liquor. "You happen to bring out the worst in me."

"Oh, believe me, I could say the same about you." She tossed back the drink and slammed the glass on the wooden table in the middle of the room. "I'm going to bed."

"There's only one bedroom."

"You're staying here by the fire where you can keep warm." Without another word, she turned and marched out.

Damn her! He fumed. Well, if that's the way she wanted to play it then so be it. Getting off the chair, he spread the blankets and cushions.

His overnight case was stowed in the corner of the room and he hadn't bothered to unpack. He'd just go to sleep and forget the woman in the bedroom and the fact that he'd wanted desperately to snuggle with her.

She drifted in and out of sleep, the guilt churning through her. She shouldn't have left him out there, but he made her so mad she couldn't think straight. Sitting up in bed, she frowned and wondered if she was hearing things. Was he calling her? A glance at the bedside clock showed it was just after midnight.

She would just go and peep in at him to make sure he wasn't awake and running a fever. Sliding her legs off the bed, she shoved her feet into the fuzzy slippers and made her way along the passageway and into the living room. A frown touched her brow as she saw that the fire had died down.

"I'll just add some-" His groans galvanized her into action and had her racing the rest of the way. Dropping down next to him, she put a hand to his forehead and realized he was too hot. His green eyes, glassy and unfocused fixed on her. "I'm so bloody cold." He whispered.

"That's because you have a fever." She glanced down to see that the shirt he'd put on was soaking wet.

"We need to get you out of this." Tugging at the ends, she pulled the shirt over his head.

"Stay." He whispered.

"I have every intention of staying."

Next, she tugged off his sweatpants and tried to ignore the fact he hadn't bothered with underwear.

"The blankets are wet. Let me get some fresh ones from the closet and I'll be right back." She was about to get up when the idea hit her. "Or we could share the bed. My body will generate enough heat to get the fever down."

He simply nodded.

"Need a hand to get up?"

"Please. I'm as weak as a kitten."

Taking his hands, she tugged.

"Give me a minute." Taking a deep breath, he heaved his body up.
"My head is spinning." They managed to get him up.

"I'm going to have to lean on you a bit."

"No problem." She supported his weight as they made their way into the bedroom. Leading him over to the bed, she went to get some blankets from the linen closet.

"I still think some tea is in order."

"Take off your clothes." He was lying stretched out on the bed with the blankets covering him to the waist.

"Look, I don't think—"

"I need your body heat and I'm too weak to try anything." His voice sounded scratchy and hoarse.

"You'd better not." She warned. She took off her baggy sweatpants and top and slid in next to him. Stiffening slightly when he reached for her, she forced herself to relax.

"Much better." He whispered against her forehead. "You feel so warm."

"I could cook an egg on your body." She jolted when he wrapped a thigh around her.

"Just getting closer." He murmured drowsily.

"Any closer and you would be inside me- I mean-" She stopped when he chuckled.

"I know what you meant. Thanks for being so generous."

"You don't deserve it."

"Hmm." Gathering her close, he heaved out a breath and drifted off to sleep.

She knew he was sleeping and could hear it from the sound of his breathing. Lucky him, she thought with a frown. He'd just gone off to sleep and left her here, acutely aware of his long lean body. The fever was going down and she could feel the moisture on his skin. She could also feel the rippling muscles of his chest and his cock-

Closing her eyes, she tried to will herself to sleep. Maybe she should try and wriggle away a little bit so that she wasn't as close to him. Taking a breath, she tried to get away, but his hold on her was so tight that she couldn't budge.

Trying again, this time harder, she managed to move away several inches. Her relief was short-lived when he murmured sleepily and pulled her back against him. Rolling her eyes, she gave him and settled against his chest.

He woke up the next morning, slightly disoriented and groggy. His throat felt a little scratchy and, for a second, he wondered where he was, until he felt the slender curves pressing against him. His eyes flew open and he recalled the events of the night before.

Shifting carefully, so as not to wake her, he had the pleasure of studying the woman sleeping in his arms. She was sprawled across

his chest, one well-toned arm thrown over him.

Her hair, some of which was curled against her forehead and cheek, was streaming against his shoulder. Her long lashes made shadows against her cheek. She had exquisite bone structure and her skin was flawless and soft

He was contemplating waking her up with his mouth on her body. Thanks to her, he was feeling much better and he was aroused. Surely, she couldn't blame him for taking what was there. Shifting ever so slightly, he managed to slide down so he could kiss her forehead and then her nose.

She stirred, but didn't wake. Smiling slightly, he eased her off and onto the pillows so he could get a good look at the body that was driving him crazy.

Trailing a hand over her arm, he admired the slender curves and the breasts he had every intention of feasting on. He was kissing the sides

of her mouth when the long lashes flew up, revealing the sleepy golden-brown eyes.

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like? Now that you're finally awake-"

"Brady, get off me."

"I don't think so." Instead of doing as she demanded, he settled his body on top of hers, effectively keeping her trapped.

"We're not- Lord." Her body came alive when she felt the brush of his penis between her thighs. "You're supposed to be sick."

"The fever is all gone, thanks to you and I'm horny." He pressed his lips to hers, before taking little nibbles on her bottom lip that sent shivers through her.

"Look-"

"I'm looking and tasting." His tongue darted into her mouth and she sucked in a breath when he rotated his hips suggestively.

"And feeling." Reaching between them, he cupped her pussy. "And you're ready."

"Don't flatter yourself." She breathed him in, the scent of his expensive cologne and sweat.

"Flattery? I don't think that's it." He drove into her and watched as her eyes widened. "I'm just repaying a favor you did for me."

"You could just say thank you." Her hands went around his neck to tangle in the wildly curling hair.

"It wouldn't be enough. Besides, we're trying to get pregnant. Just evening the odds." His thrusts had turned slow and steady as if he had all the time in the world. He wanted this to last because he had a feeling she was going to find a way to boot him out after this.

"So you're just making certain?"

"Hmm." He kissed the side of her neck. "Something like that. I want to make it count."

"Just shut up." She muttered as she pulled his head upwards and captured his lips. Her aggressiveness startled him for a moment and fired his blood. He couldn't do 'slow and easy' any more and when she

wrapped her legs around his waist, the passion turned into one of liquid fire.

He captured her cries as the violent climax claimed her, and he was right behind her, his body shuddering as he come inside her.

It annoyed and frustrated him that she was pretending it hadn't happened. He'd made love to her twice before she pushed him off, mumbling something about getting some breakfast. He hadn't resisted when she shoved him even though he could have.

He stayed in bed while she went to the bathroom to take a shower. He'd even contemplated going in after her, but decided against it.

He needed time to think and was still feeling a little weak after the bout of fever and the passionate lovemaking.

She came back into the room and put some clothes on. She hadn't bothered fixing her hair, but let it tumble around her face and down her back. He suspected she wanted to escape more than anything else.

He stayed a few minutes before rising to go and take a shower that had him feeling more like himself. His case was still in the living room. Wrapping a towel around his waist, he went to retrieve it and selected another pair of sweats and matching hoodie before strolling into the kitchen.

She'd made breakfast and the scent of bacon and scrambled eggs hit him the minute he stepped in.

"I need coffee."

"There." She nodded to the cup she'd poured in anticipation.

"The storm has let up and it's a beautiful morning or near afternoon."
He'd noticed, to his surprise, it was almost noon.

"I need to get some work done. I suppose you'll be leaving soon?"

Turning from his contemplation at the window, he gave her an amused look. "Booting me out?"

"I have a deadline and I'm sure you have things to do."

"You used me and now discarding me. If I were a lesser man, I'd be feeling insecure."

"But you're not, are you? We did what we were asked to do and, hopefully, it worked."

"So, we don't have to do it again, right?" He could feel the familiar helpless anger burning inside his gut. How the hell could she be so detached?

"Yes." She set a plate down on the counter and stood with her hands on her hips. Her hair was still loose and made a perfect frame for her small face with the pointed chin.

"You're going to stand there and tell me it wasn't good for you?." Walking over to the table, he put away the cup and faced her.

"You don't need validation if that's what you're after."

"I know it was good, excellent as a matter of fact, but pretending you weren't affected by what we did is pissing me off."

Her eyes blazed and turned into liquid gold. "What do you want? A trophy? Yes, it was good, the best I ever had, but that's beside the point."

"What is the point then, Macayla? We just go on about our business? You go on with your writing and life as usual and I do the same?"

"I know what I'm going to do and that's pick up where I left off. I have work to do and my writing is the most important thing to me right now. It keeps me steady and anchored. If this thing takes, and I should know in two weeks if it did, if it takes, I'll be plagued with all sorts of sickness and you won't be affected. I'm the one who'll be doing all the work-"

"Not all, by any means."

She snorted at that and turned to get her plate. "Are you talking about planting the seed, because let me assure you, that's the easiest part."

"Is it?" His voice had turned menacing and had her backing up against the counter.

"What are you doing?"

"Making sure it works." Before she could dart out of his reach, he grabbed the front of her shirt and hauled her against him.

"Let go of me."

"Not yet. You're kicking me out, so why not give us both something to remember?"

"You can't possibly-" She sucked in a breath when he pressed his lower body against hers. Pushing her back onto the stool, he wrapped his hand around her throat and crushed her lips with his.

Making short work of pulling down her leggings, he didn't give her a chance to push him away as he continued to ravish her lips. Sliding between her thighs, he released his throbbing cock and entered her swiftly.

Macayla grabbed at his sweater, her fingers gripping the material desperately. She couldn't believe this was happening again, that he could be ready for her, or that she could be so wet and needy, but she was and when he drove into her, she climaxed, her body jerking against his.

Chapter 4

"Darling, you're back!"

"Mom." Macayla's sharp eyes noticed the bags under her eyes that makeup hadn't managed to hide.

She knew she was feeling a little worse for wear herself. After Brady had left for the day, she'd tried to get some work done to no avail. Her male character insisted on taking on some of Brady's attributes and mannerisms and that wouldn't do.

The female character was leaning towards sappy and that wouldn't work either. For God's sake, the usually strong kick-ass woman was crying when Dean told her he had to go away for a while.

"How was your trip?" Michelle eyed her daughter curiously as she came into the elegant blue and white sitting room, she'd decided to take her lunch.

"Good." She murmured briefly. "Just some juice for me, thanks, Jane." She told the housekeeper. "How are you?"

"Fighting fit." She patted the space next to her. "Darling, I know Brady spent the night, did anything happen?"

"I don't want to talk about it." She muttered. "I still can't believe we're really going through with this. That you would ask me to do something like this."

"I'm doing it because I love you." She was told airily.

Macayla waited until Jane had brought the juice and left before commenting.

"That's not love. You're doing it for your own satisfaction."

Picking up her cup of herbal tea, she took a sip and eyed her daughter over the gold rim. "And yours. You can't sit there and tell me it was a boring job. Brady Randall happens to be quite a stud. Even better looking than his Dad and that's saying a lot. The fact he spent the night means that-"

"We did it!" She took a gulp of the freshly squeezed orange juice and almost choked on it. "Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"Darling, that's wonderful." Michelle's golden-brown eyes glowed in pleasure. "I suppose it'd be in bad taste to ask how it went?"

"Extremely bad taste. You're my mother and this is weird, to say the least."

"Darling, we've always been open and honest with each other."

"Still." Settling back against the cushions, she eyed the slender graceful woman who still had her trademark beauty. "How are you?"

"Chemo is kicking my ass, but I'm coping. Syd spent the night."

"Mom, that's over-sharing."

"Is it?" She smiled gently. "We did nothing but hold each other. I was sick for a little bit and he was there to wipe away the vomit." Her expression softened. "And he apologized."

"For?"

"The wasted years. He keeps doing that." She gave a philosophical shrug as she continued to sip her tea to settle her stomach. "I have to admit that when we were younger, I was mad at him for not standing up to that tyrant of a father. I wanted him to leave everything and fight for me."

"Then you both would have suffered as a result." Macayla pointed out. It was still a little strange for her to be discussing her mother's lover with her and not freak out about it, but she'd come to understand the arrangement surrounding them and she happened to like Sydney Randall a lot.

"Yes." Her mother gave her a warm smile. "I wouldn't have had you." Reaching over, she patted Macayla's hand. "That was my greatest accomplishment."

Macayla felt the tears blurring her vision. "Luckily I'm not wearing makeup." She sniffed. "I thought it would have been your illustrious career."

She waved that away and leaning over, kissed her daughter's cheek. "You know better. Mark was such a good and decent man and I dare say, if he'd lived longer, I might have loved him."

"Daddy was happy."

"I'd like to believe he was." A slight smile played around her lips. "He tried. When we met, I told him the truth about Sydney . He understood and didn't allow that to stop him from loving me. I made a promise not to cheat on him with Syl." She shrugged slender shoulders. "We'd meet up in public places and-"

"The cabin."

"Yes, but that was after your Dad had died. I'd never disrespect him that way." Her eyes sought Macayla. "I cared deeply for your Dad, he was the best man I've ever known and he made me happy. He certainly worked on doing so."

She squeezed Macayla's hand. "When he died, the security I had eroded and I was unhappy. Sydney was still married to that woman and I wanted to try and be happy again."

"Hence the bad decisions in marrying husband one and two."

"Yes." A smile crossed her lips as she looked at her daughter. "Steve was a very weak man who had a roving eye. He was sweet in his own way, but couldn't resist a beautiful woman. And John-" She shook her head. "He was just plain wrong."

"In every way."

"He tried to proposition you."

"That's putting it politely, Mom." Macayla said dryly. "He had his hand on my thigh right there in the dining room while you were entertaining members of your cast."

"You stamped on his foot and pushed him so hard; he fell to the ground." It still amused her, even though it'd mortified her that her husband had tried to grab her daughter's thigh in front of company. That had been the last of him. She'd kicked him out that very evening and told him never to come back. "I decided then and there that I was through."

"I guess you had to learn the hard way."

"I did that and managed to upset Syd." Her eyes mirrored her regret. "After Mark died, he begged me to wait for him. I was still pissed and grieving my husband.

I knew that things between him and Eleanor were frosty and it wasn't a lie when he said there was nothing going on between them, but dammit, he was still with her. That was what I couldn't understand."

"His father was still alive and would have carried out his threats." Macayla pointed out.

"Precisely what he told me." She sighed and sipped the rest of the tea before putting the cup away. "I couldn't see past my misery. I'd settled with Mark and was leaning toward happiness when he died. I realized I was still in love with Sydney. Nothing had changed. I was mad at God, wondering why I was in love with this man, one I couldn't have."

"Now you're both free to be with each other."

"Now I don't want to get married again." She said with a sigh. "I love that man to pieces and have loved him since I was a young girl and I'll love him until I draw my last breath." She looked at her daughter.
"That's what I want for you."

"I'm not sure I want anything as consuming as what you feel for Sydney. I don't want to lose myself-"

"Darling, far from that." Her mother exclaimed. "What I feel for Sydney is exactly the opposite. It's given me a freedom that defies description. One day you're going to discover that."

"I highly doubt it."

"I don't want to talk about it." Brady warned as his father walked into his office that morning. "I'm busy as it is. There's a question about the-

"

"Take a breath, son." Sydney went over to the cabinet to pour himself a cup of coffee, bringing it over to sit on one of the chairs in front of the desk. "Are you okay?"

"Just peachy."

"I'm guessing the visit to the cabin didn't go well."

"I got the job done, didn't I?" He growled. The headache that'd been brewing was making itself felt now. He'd arrived home angry and the feeling had stayed until morning. On top of that, he hadn't slept a wink last night.

Sydney looked at him as he sipped the coffee. "You spent the night?"

"For all the good it did." Blowing out a breath, he leaned back and closed his eyes wearily. "I don't mean to take it out on you. It's just she pisses me off so much I want to strangle her."

The deep chuckle coming from across his desk had him opening his eyes. "It's not funny."

"She's like her mother. Stubborn, willful and exasperating. They're very strong women and I suspect that's why we fall so hard. What now?"

"She's the one calling the shots. So, we wait to see if she's pregnant. In the meantime, I'm not supposed to get in touch with her."

"Why not?"

"She doesn't want me to."

"You're going to let her get away with that?" His father asked him mildly.

Brady simply stared at him. "What do you suggest?"

"She loves the museum and is a fan of the arts. Jackson Colby has a showing at his new gallery on Third. We should go. Michelle will be there."

"Macayla will be there?"

"I strongly think she will be. It's on Wednesday."

"Then what?"

His father shrugged. "It's up to you. She won't be able to avoid you."

"You're restless, black beauty." Todd grinned as she gave him a baleful look. "I know that expression. Book not going well?"

He was a bar owner, rough and ready with bulging muscles and piercings all over his body. He'd shaved his head and there was a tattoo of three naked women dancing on his skull. They'd struck up an

unlikely friendship when she was doing research for her book several years ago.

He was the only one apart from those close to her who knew she was the bestselling author of *Crime Beat*. The bar was almost empty at this time of day, which was the reason she'd stopped in.

"Not really." Grabbing the bottle of beer, she stared at it for a minute, contemplating if she should chance taking a sip. "I might be pregnant."

Todd raised his eyebrows as he put aside the cloth he'd been using to wipe the glass clean and sat on the stool facing her. "Come again?"

She gave a rueful laugh and decided that one bottle wasn't going to do her any harm. "What? I can't get pregnant?"

"Where's the guy?"

"There is no guy, not that way anyway. I think it's time I have a baby and I did the deed to try and make it happen. I'm just waiting to see if it does."

"You just suddenly decided, hey, why not make a baby? Who the hell are you and what have you done to my friend?" He demanded.

She rolled her eyes at him and put the bottle away. "What's wrong with trying for a kid? I'm twenty-eight."

"I get it, your eggs are drying up and you're erring on the side of caution."

"Bite me."

"I'm sure the dude did that many times. Who is he, by the way? Is he worthy of you?"

"Relax, Dad." She murmured dryly. "I just want a child; we're not planning on getting married."

"So, you're committing yourself to this man by having his child and what, he isn't good enough to hitch your wagon to?"

"I'm not the marrying type."

"Are you the mother type?"

"Yes." Reaching for the bottle, she took another sip. "I've thought about it and my mind is made up. You don't think I'll be a good mother?"

He stared at her before picking up the cloth and resuming his polishing of the glass. The first time he'd seen her walk into his bar, he'd been blown away by her beauty. But from that first time, he realized that she wasn't only beautiful, she was tough and no-nonsense about it.

She was no pushover and had proven that time and again. It was at the third meeting that he realized who she was related to. "I think you'll make a great mother."

She grinned at him. "My sentiments exactly."

"I don't have a kid."

"Why is that?"

"You wouldn't put out for me." He grinned at the scorching look she sent him.is

"I decided that fatherhood was not for me. My old man wasn't there and Mother dearest was a drunk. My line of work isn't the type that has me going home at night to change diapers." He gave her a quizzical look. "Which, by the way, you'll be doing a lot of."

"I'm rich enough to hire a nanny."

"How long before you know if you are pregnant?"

"Another week or two."

"Is that really what you want?"

She laughed huskily. "If you'd asked me that a couple of days ago, I would have said, hell no. Now that it could be happening, I have to say yes."

She almost didn't go. Her mother had managed to twist her arm and the excuse that she had work to do hadn't made a difference. "You might see something you like. I've been to that apartment of yours, and darling, I have to say I can't believe you're my daughter."

"I hate clutter."

"Your walls are bare and the furnishings are bland."

"They are furnishings and quite sturdy. It's just a place to crash, I don't see why I have to spend money buying things to impress people I don't even like in my space."

"It's called investment."

So, she'd capitulated. She hated dressing up and putting makeup on, but once again, she'd done it for her mother. The things she did for that woman. Now she was in a room surrounded by the city's elite and rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous.

The tinkle of glasses and the muted conversations in the cavernous room was a perfect background for the paintings on the walls.

Her dress of emerald silk was close-fitting and highlighted her slender curves. Her natural curls were somewhat tamed into one long braid over her left shoulder and she was wearing diamond earrings. Her date, someone she'd called up at the last minute, was glued to her side and she was getting annoyed at his constant fawning over her.

She hadn't wanted to arrive alone as she hated that guys came onto her when that happened, but Peter was getting on her nerves.

"This one definitely has potential. I wish you'd allow me to buy it for you."

"I can-"

"Why don't you go and mingle? I need to talk to Macayla." The rude and arrogant voice had her stiffening her shoulders.

She'd wanted to get rid of Peter, but on her own terms. Turning to face him, she felt a jolt to her nervous system at the look of him. He was wearing a thin blue sweater that hugged his wide chest and shoulders perfectly.

His dirty blonde hair was brushed back from his handsome face and curled around his shoulders. "Peter was just about to buy me this painting." She murmured, sliding a hand through the man's arm.

"You were about to tell him you can buy your own." Jerking his head, Brady gave the man a hard look that had him shifting. "Go and mingle, will you?" He repeated, green eyes sparkling dangerously.

To her disgust, Peter scuttled away immediately.

"Now that you've scared away my date, what the hell do you want?"
She asked as she snagged a flute of champagne.

"Should you be drinking?"

"It's only one glass and I'm thirsty. Besides, I don't know if I'm pregnant yet."

Taking her arm, he guided her over to the long trestle table where the buffet was on display. Letting go of her, he picked up a plate and started with the shrimp. "You haven't called."

"There's nothing to report yet." She told herself it was the boredom that had her so happy to see him, nothing more.

"You could still call." He handed her the plate and she took it automatically.

"And say what?"

He was heaping food on another plate, but stopped to give her an amused look. "Shoot the breeze, find out how I'm doing. Things like that."

"I don't do small talk." Putting her glass down, she speared a plump shrimp and plopped it into her mouth.

"It wouldn't be small talk." Jerking his head, he indicated an empty sofa for them to go and sit. "Come back with me to my place tonight."

She stared at him as she sat. "Why?"

"You're an intelligent woman, make an educated guess." Leaning back, he stretched his long legs out, portraying the wealthy and confident man he was. She couldn't help but recall what they'd done at the cabin and how he'd made her feel.

If she'd known there was a chance of him being here, she would have avoided coming. Things had changed between them and she was now so aware of him she couldn't stop thinking about him.

"You want us to have sex?" Even the word and the imagery that popped into her head was making her hot.

"That's right." He lifted his glass in a toast.

"I'm here with someone as I'm sure you are."

"I'm here on my own."

"Why?"

"I'm about to be a father," He murmured as if that explained it.

"You're getting ahead of yourself."

"Am I?" He sipped his champagne, emerald eyes wandering over her throat and flawless skin. "Get rid of that idiot and come home with me. You know you want to."

"How arrogant of you." She was trying to stem the excitement racing through her body. It wasn't a good idea for them to take this any

further. It was already complicated enough.

"Not arrogant." He denied. "Just stating a fact." His voice dropped and deepened and, for a minute, it felt as if they were alone. "I want to taste those sweet nipples of yours and make you come all over my cock. "

Macayla felt the breath strangling inside her throat and, for a second, she couldn't respond. The dress she was wearing felt too tight over her nipples and the material rubbing against them was sending fire down to her core.

"You know you want to." He insisted huskily. "We both want that."

"It's an arrangement-" She finally managed to croak.

"Which doesn't mean we can't have some fun while we're waiting." He pressed. "Come home with me, Macayla, and let me light your fire with my flames."

She managed to summon up a glare. "Does that kind of lame chat up line work with the rest of the women?"

"Usually. Is it working for you?"

"No." Taking a deep breath, she took a gulp of champagne. "Just let me tell my Mom I'm leaving."

"I'll meet you in the parking lot."

Brady watched her move away, admiring her hips in the clingy material. He hadn't expected it to be that easy. Taking a deep breath, he went to find and tell his Dad he was leaving.

Chapter 5

The business district as the area was called was home to the rich and famous and boasted sleek high-rising apartments, trendy restaurants, quaint galleries and museums and a police station that looked more like a five-star hotel than an precinct.

There was a park with several streams and paths to either walk their expensive dogs or jog along the winding tracks in search of peace and exercise.

Macayla had been here several times before and admired the clean lines and symmetry of the place. It was a gated community and people from the outside could only be admitted if they were on the list.

The security at the gate was very tight and they were paid well enough to be discreet. She drove in behind Brady assuming he'd alerted the guy as she was admitted without question.

His apartment was one of the newer models and she knew the entire apartment complex was mostly owned by them. Driving into the underground garage, she exited the vehicle and walked over to where he was waiting for her.

"Nice." She murmured. "It makes my place looks like a dump."

"I've never been to your place, so I'll reserve my opinion. Shall we?"
He led the way to a flight of stairs.

"No elevator?"

"It spoils the effect." Keying in his code, he pushed open the door to a wide-open foyer with pastel silk wallpaper.

"I wouldn't have pictured this for you."

"Why not?" He asked as he led the way through the hallway and into a sunken living room.

"Now, this is you." An electronic fire was blazing in the wide hearth that dominated one corner of the room. The sofas were bronze and looked as soft as butter. The floor to ceiling windows offered a stunning view of the city, the lights dazzling. "No TV?"

"I have a theater on the upper level. The idea is to have this as a family room where people can talk without distraction. There are no TVs in the bedrooms either. Drink?"

"Fine." Slipping out of the strappy sandals, she wandered around the wide and spacious room, admiring the paintings on the wall.

"Victorian?" She gestured to the exquisite center table.

"You have an eye." He came back with the glass of pale gold liquid and handed it to her.

"Being Michelle's daughter, you get to know these things. My mother is quite the connoisseur. Are all the apartments like this?"

Leaning against the marble fireplace, he studied her for a few seconds. His first thought was to hustle her upstairs and strip off her clothes, but he could wait. "No, tailor made for the individual's tastes." He took a sip of the wine.

"The privilege of being rich"

"Precisely." A smile played around his sensuous lips that had her nipples tightening. The man was lethal. "You can relate."

“I live in a dumpy apartment.”

“By choice. Your mother is a famous actress and your Dad was a lawyer, a very successful one, and you’re a bestselling author.”

“I don’t flaunt my wealth.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Are you implying that I do?”

She shrugged slender shoulders. “To each his own.” She wandered restlessly over to a particularly lovely painting of a family of four gathered around a blazing fire. “Very eye-catching. I don’t recognize the artist.”

“He’s standing right here.”

Her head swiveled around to stare at him, a frown on her brow. “You paint?”

“In my spare time.” He watched in amusement and slight trepidation as she turned back to study the painting in detail. He was nervous as he realized that her opinion meant the world to him.

“It’s good. So good I can feel the heat from the fire.” She took in a breath as she stared at the painting. A cabin was in the background and there were trees and flowers surrounding the plain log building. Something lodged inside her throat and she couldn’t identify the emotions roiling inside her chest.

“Thanks.”

She turned to him slowly. “Is it just a hobby?”

“Just a hobby.” He played with the stem of his glass and shifted off the mantle. “I started painting when I was eight as a way to cope. Apparently, I have a penchant for it.”

“I'd say this is more than a penchant.” She turned to look at the painting again. “Is this the only one?”

“There're several scattered around the apartment and I've painted for friends and my Dad. He has a room dedicated to them. Pretty embarrassing.”

She faced him again and noticed him blushing.

“He’s proud as he should be. You could make a living and give Jackson a run for his money.”

“I think I told him that.” He finished the wine. “Fortunately for him, I’m more interested in investing in properties. Shall we?”

With a nod, she put away the glass and followed him from the room.

“Would you like the tour?”

“Not really.”

“This way.” The stairs were impressive branching off to the left and right. The banister was made of chrome. She followed him when he turned to the right.

“Isn’t it a bit big for one person?”

Stopping at the faded red double doors, he pushed it open, stepping aside to allow her entry.

“I’m hoping to fill it with children.” He told her with a grin. She managed to ignore the jumping of her pulse and concentrated on the cozy gold and brown sitting room with yet another fireplace, this one smaller than the one in the living room.

Several windows dominated the space, giving it even more room. She had time to admire it fleetingly before he ushered her into a bedroom

that seemed to go on forever.

“I could fit my bedroom into one corner.” She stood in the center and appreciated the huge closet and the antique furnishings. The bed was set on a dais with steps leading up to it and the roof- “Holy crap! I can see the fricking moon and stars. This is breathtaking.”

He found himself flushed with pleasure at her approval.

“Glad you like it.”

“You must spend a lot of time here.”

“Sadly, no.” Taking her hand, he led her over to a sofa “I’m more out than in.”

“We should- “

“No.” He shook his head firmly.

“You don’t even know what I’m going to say.”

“You were going to say we should get on with it.”

She looked at her watch pointedly. “It’s almost ten.”

“Will your car turn into a pumpkin after midnight?”

She wrinkled her nose which sent warmth all through his body. “Very funny. I’m meeting with my agent in the morning. I’m not spending the night.”

“Even though you want to?” He gestured to the big bed. “We could get lost in there.”

“I have a bed.”

“I bet it’s not as nice as this one.”

“Still a bed and it’s firm.”

“This one is out of this world, but we won’t be sleeping.” Picking up her left hand, he smoothed the long, elegant fingers before lifting it to kiss the knuckles, his body tightened when he felt her tremor. “I want to make love to you, slowly, way into the night and next morning.”

She tugged, but he tightened his hold and turned her hand around to press his lips against the soft skin.

“Stop it. Damn you.”

“Shh. Relax and enjoy.” Scooting closer, he pressed his knees against her thighs. “I love the way you did your hair.” One hand crept around her neck to massage the tension there. “Why are you so tight?”

“What the hell are you doing?”

“What does it feel like? Ah, here it is.” He rubbed the knot slowly, his eyes on hers as he used his fingers to get rid of the tension. “I know you’re feeling more relaxed.”

“Brady- “

“More pliable-“ He grinned as her eyes flashed. “Not the right word? Limber then-“ He pressed her back and Macayla figured she could have him on the ground if she wanted to. Or that was what she was telling herself. He braced her back against the cushions and covered her body with his.

“We’ll get to the bed eventually.” He settled snugly in between her thighs. Her dress had hiked up around her thighs allowing her to feel the heaviness of his cock.

“When you stepped into the room tonight, I thought to myself, now there’s a woman who gives the word exquisite a different meaning.”

“I don’t know what you’re trying to do- “A moan escaped her when he kissed the sides of her mouth. He rotated his hips suggestively, pressing himself against her.

“To seduce you of course.” Pressing his tongue to the seam of her lips, he slowly traced the lush bottom lip. “Is it working?”

“No-“ She pushed at him, feeling as if her body was melting from the inside out.

“How about now?” He started nibbling on her lip, little bites that was sending electric shocks clear to her bones.

“|-“

“And now?” Reaching a hand between them, he slid a finger between the side of her lace panties and slipped a finger in. “You’re wet.” His breathing had accelerated.

“Brady.” She had to bite down on her lip to stop from crying out.

“Hmm?” He ventured in, introducing another finger, his body jerking at the slickness of her on his fingers.

“Oh, damn you.” She whispered, her hands going around his neck.

“Is that really what you want to say?”

“Just shut up and fuck me.”

His deep chuckle rumbled inside his chest. “I love the way you get to the meat of it.” Sitting up, he eased out of her so that he could pull the dress over her head.

“No bra? Nice.”

“Whatever. You’re still dressed.”

“So I am. Want to undress me?” Rising, he hauled her to her feet.

“Why not?” Her eyes glinting, she tugged the sweater over his head.
“A little help here.” She was struggling with the belt.

Brushing her hands away, he made quick work of releasing it and pulling the zipper down.

“Your shoes.”

“Already off.” He kicked them out of the way as she tugged the pants over his hips. He avoided her hands when she reached for him.

“Not yet.” Bending, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bed, taking the steps carefully. With a grin and mischief in his eyes, he dumped her in the middle of the mountainous bed, laughing as she squealed.

Taking a dive, he joined her in the middle of the bed, rolling on top of her, trapping her body with his. “What do you think?”

“About what?”

“The bed.”

“It’s a bed.”

“Unlike any other bed you’ve ever been in.”

“Really?”

“Yes, really.” He was laughing at her; this Macayla was making him heady. Bending his head, he nibbled at her throat, causing her to arch

her back.

“You taste like honey.”

“I’m not falling for that line.” She bit off a moan when he nibbled his way down.

“You think it’s a line?”

“Isn’t it?” She had to bite hard on her lip to stop from crying out. He’d reached her breast and was playing with the nipple.

“No.”

“Brady.”

“Hmm.” He was too busy ravishing her nipple as he inched in further. Lifting his head, he pushed deeper into her, emerald eyes darkened, his handsome face flushed with passion. “You feel something.”

“Just shut up.” Digging her fingers into the corded muscles of his neck, she wrapped her legs around his waist. The climax was explosive, proving to her that it wasn’t a fluke, but something real and intense. It was also disturbing.

“I need a sweater or something. I can’t go out looking like this.” She was freaking out. The plan had never been to stay overnight and not only had she stayed the night; she’d opened her eyes to see the sun streaming through the glass ceiling.

“Pick one.” He swept a hand towards the huge closet where there were rows of sweaters in various colors.

Marching over, she grabbed the one on top and pulled it over her head, thankful that it came to her knees. “Don’t you have a company to run?” Grabbing her dress, she put it on the sofa so she could wriggle into her panties. At some point during the night, he’d loosened her braid. Now her curls were tumbling around her face in an untidy mess.

“I only have to go in the afternoon.” Grabbing her around the waist, he lifted her for a kiss.

“Don’t!” She shoved at him and reached for her shoes. “This isn’t going to work.”

“I have socks.” He said helpfully, earning him another glare. Sitting on the sofa, she pulled on the heels and rose to put her jacket on.

“I’ll accompany you- “

“No. I can find my own way.”

Ignoring that, he dragged on her sweater and went after her.

“I said no.”

“I heard you.” Picking her way carefully down the steps, she walked rapidly towards the front doors.

“I need to let you out.”

“Then let me out.”

“Just one thing first.”

“Brady-“ She let out a squeal when he pushed her gently against the door, kissing her until she was like a puddle in his arms. When he ended the kiss, she had to lean against him weakly, her heart pounding like a trip hammer.

“Get off me.” She whispered.

“Why don’t you skip the meeting and we spend the day together?” He was kissing her neck, his hands busily roaming her thighs.

“Let go.”

“It’s hard for me to. Feel how hard I am for you.”

“You’re a walking erection.” She found the strength to push him away, even though her entire body was trembling.

“Okay, fine. I’m leaving early this evening- “

“Good for you. Open the door.”

“I think we should go and have dinner. There’s this charming Italian restaurant- “

“We’re not in a relationship.”

“We’re trying to have a baby.” Bracing his hands at the sides of her head, he managed to trap her.

“We’ve done that, have been doing that. I’m sure if I wasn’t pregnant before, I most certainly am now.”

“Sex?” He clicked his tongue at her, green eyes dancing in merriment. “Is that all you can think about? I’m simply inviting you out to dinner. One where we dress up and sit down for a nice meal and just talk.”

It was so tempting she almost said yes and that pissed her off. “I have work to do. The time we spent at the cabin and me being here last

night cut into my deadline. Now I'm going to have to spend ages making up for it."

"You have to eat."

"I'll grab something from home. Now, I really have to go."

"When then?"

"Get this through your thick skull, we're not in a relationship."

"I'll call and set up a – " He backed away at the heat coming from her eyes. "Or simply wait until you're in a reasonable frame of mind."

“Where you’re concerned, that’s going to take a while. Now, let me out.”

With a reluctant nod, he stepped back and keyed in the code.

“Don’t bother coming with me. I know my way out.”

Brady watched as she sashayed her way towards the flight of stairs and disappeared from view. Closing the doors, he leaned against it and dragged his hands through his hair. He would have happily blown up his day if she’d agreed to stay with him. With a rueful shake of his head, he strode through the passageway and headed up the stairs.

She refused to think about last night and this morning as she navigated through traffic. It was almost nine in the morning and she would have thought that traffic would be light. Tapping her fingers on the wheel impatiently, she waited for the light to change before zipping through and changing lanes. She smelled like him.

The sweater had been laundered because she could smell the laundry detergent and softener, but his expensive cologne managed to surface, making it difficult for her to stop thinking about him. She should have refused his invitation to go home with him last night.

“Oh Lord. Gimme some reggae.” When the music came on, she turned up the volume and tried to concentrate on the lyrics.

She wasn't interested in a relationship and she was firm on that. Hopefully, the time she'd spent with him for the past couple of days would do the trick, and if it didn't happen, well! She blew out a breath and braked at the light.

She was falling under his spell, whatever that meant. The man's touch was lethal, his body was magnificent, all that toned flesh and well-developed muscles.

He was good, no, she decided, good wasn't an appropriate word to describe what he could do.

But then again, he'd been at it for years, why the hell wouldn't he be excellent? An expert? His kisses – how can he make her dissolve with just one kiss?

Taking a deep breath, she continued the rest of the way home.

“I've been busy with some personal things lately.” Angela was giving her the beady eye which told her that she was hopelessly late. She'd

jumped into the shower and grabbed the first thing as she opened her closet.

A snug sweater dress and ankle boots. Her hair was a hopeless tangle and she hadn't had time to go through the usual ritual. Giving up and cursing Brady to hell, she pinned it up and hadn't bothered with makeup.

"Just coffee for me, Ben. Thanks." She told the besotted waiter.

"You said you went to the cabin to get some work done. Honey, this is just the first draft."

"I'm not satisfied with a few of the scenes. Thanks, Ben." She accepted the cup with an absent smile.

“Darling, you’re stalling.”

“I’m not. Have you ever known me to be this late?”

“No.” Angela moved forward, her light blue eyes piercing as she studied the younger woman. “I have to wonder what the hell is going on with you.”

“Personal.” She repeated. “I want to change the love scenes.”

Angela’s thin eyebrows raised.

“They’re good enough.”

“That’s just it. Good enough isn’t doing it for me anymore. The movements are too mechanic, the chemistry between the two come off as forced. Not natural.”

“Well.” A smile split the woman’s broad face. “Look who’s gotten herself a man at long last.”

“Why do you think I have a man?”

“Honey, I’m not a moron. In all the years you’ve been writing the series, you’ve never mentioned anything about changing the love scenes.”

“You are making a big deal out of nothing.” Macayla wished she’d kept her mouth shut.

“Now I can’t wait to see what you come up with.” Angela’s smile widened at the cross look on the exquisite face. “Congratulations, honey, it’s about time.”

Chapter 6

She was pregnant and she didn't need a specialist to confirm it. She'd known for the past week and wanted to balance her emotions, which had been veering from moodiness to cheerful over the last couple of weeks. She'd also refused to see Brady. He'd called and she'd told him decisively that she had work to do.

They weren't in a relationship. He'd stopped calling after the third attempt and she'd been telling herself that it was fine by her. She wasn't lying about the work. She'd fallen behind and, being a professional, it wasn't something she tolerated.

She'd ventured into a seedy part of town in order to document the area and the way people lived. she liked to believe the reason her books were so good was the research. Now, she was pregnant and she supposed she should tell the relevant parties. First, Brady and then her mother. This wasn't something she wanted to share over the phone.

She could invite him over. Turning in a circle, she noticed absently that the place needed tidying up and it was a dump compared to his. In the past, appearances hadn't mattered to her. She'd deliberately chosen this apartment because it was in a safe area and her building was a standalone one.

She didn't have nosy neighbors banging on her door every few minutes to borrow something. She could have continued to live with her mother, but she wanted her own space and after the second husband she'd decided it was time for her to leave.

She'd furnished the place by going to antique stores and the furnishings were solid. She hadn't spent much time or thought into the decor. She preferred bold colors as seen in the throw rugs and the curtains.

Red and blue were her main colors. Her sofas were comfortable rather than being elegant and that was fine by her. She'd thought about

purchasing a house, but hesitated. That was a whole other level of commitment and she wasn't ready for it yet.

Now, there was going to be a baby involved, she might have to reconsider. Rubbing a hand over her flat stomach, she felt a funny feeling in the pit of her stomach. He said he was going to be involved and she wouldn't allow him to back out.

They were going to be parents together and she wasn't taking that lightly. Heaving out a breath, she took another glance at the Christmas tree in the corner of the room before picking up her phone and calling up his number.

"Fancy hearing from you." His deep voice had a touch of sarcasm that she chose to ignore.

"Are you in town?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Can you come over later? I could order something or if I'm in the mood to cook, I will."

"What's the occasion? I've been trying to get you to go out to dinner with me and you shut me down. Now I'm supposed to rush to you when you call?"

She acknowledged he had a right to be pissed. "Do you want an apology?"

"No, because you wouldn't mean it."

"Okay, fine. I think I'm pregnant."

There was a pause and she waited.

"Think or know?"

"I haven't had my period and I'm as regular as clockwork, no matter what. Besides that, I've been reading up on the symptoms and I've checked all the boxes. I didn't want to tell you over the phone but you're being such a dick, I had to. Will you come or not?"

"Since you so graciously extended the invitation, I'll be there with bells on." His voice had turned warm and sent shivers through her body. "I'll bring dessert and the wine."

"It has to be non-alcoholic and I'd appreciate you not telling your Dad until I confirm it by going to the doctor."

"When?"

"As soon as I can get an appointment."

"What time would you like me there?"

"Sevenish. I have to tidy up and decide whether or not to cook."

"I could bring the food too."

"No. I'll deal with the food. So, see you later."

"I'm looking forward to it."

She hung up and continued to look around the room before stirring herself to go and tidy up.

Brady settled back against the chair and couldn't stop the wide smile splitting his face. He'd been so unsettled over the last couple of weeks. Yes, he'd been pissed. She'd avoided him for those weeks and after the night and morning they'd spent together, he was angry that she could just shrug him off just like that.

He'd called three times before giving up and found himself wondering if it was worth it. Yes, he was in love with her, madly in love with her, even more so now that they'd spent all that time together and it wasn't just the sex.

She was maddening and frustrating, but he'd never met anyone like her. She fascinated him, the train of thoughts, the lack of coyness, the fact she didn't give a rat's ass about what people thought of her or that she didn't cater to him. He had that with women in the past and had quickly become bored.

She was also warm and giving, unlike his mother. He needed this. Now, she wasn't going to be able to shake him. He wouldn't allow it.

He'd ease into the relationship, using the pregnancy as a stepping stone to get closer to her. Now she couldn't keep him away. He was going to be around whether she liked it or not. She wasn't going to call the shots this time.

Leaning forward, he picked up the phone and made the call to the bakery. She loved strawberry shortcake and he knew exactly where he should order from.

"How are you?" His emerald eyes searched her face as soon as she opened the door to let him in.

"I'm fine. Take those into the kitchen. I decided to make a seafood salad."

"Good." He hefted the bottle of white wine. "Like minds and all that." He wanted to kiss her but she turned away and headed towards the kitchen. He'd get around to it before the evening was finished and had every intention of celebrating in bed.

"It smells good."

"Thanks. The wine glasses are in the middle cupboard and I think we should eat at the counter."

"Nice." He admired the simple yellow kitchen with the large clock on one side of the wall. "And well used. I'd never have thought of you as the domestic type." She gave him a wry look as he came back with the glasses.

"Because I love to cook?" She shoveled out the meal into two plates and handed him one. "That sounds very stereotypical. Cooking relaxes me and I love doing it. I hate housework, and have someone come in twice a week to take care of the laundry and that sort of thing. I also hate having people around my space.

When I'm writing, I'm so caught up that I lock myself in and don't answer the phone or see anyone. Mom is annoyed by it and she complains every time." She took a sip of the wine.

"Thanks. Now tell me how sure you are of being pregnant?"

"One hundred per cent. I know my body."

"You said something about symptoms. This is very good by the way."

"I know." She grinned at him and he could feel his belly twisting into knots. He wanted to sink himself deep inside her and stay there. "I'm off coffee."

"Oh."

"And grapes,. and I've been feeling dizzy every morning."

"Nausea?"

"A little, not enough to have me running to the bathroom, but enough for me to realize that something is going on. My mood swings are off the chart as well."

She looked at him. He'd obviously come straight from the office and was still wearing a suit. The blue sweater under the dark blue jacket looked wonderful on him. "I might end up hating the hell out of you."

"I thought you already did." He murmured dryly.

"It might become even more intense."

"Do you hate me now?"

She shook her head with a smile. "Right now, I'm tolerating you."

"Why, thank you."

"You're more than welcome." She inclined her head graciously, making him laugh.

"Now what?"

"I made an appointment for tomorrow." She frowned at him. "I'm sorry, I should have asked if you can make it."

"What time?"

"Nine in the morning."

"Where?"

"Hillside clinic. It's private and I know the doctors there. They'll be discreet."

"I'll be there."

"Things are going to change. We're talking about bringing a human being into the world."

"I know. Are you scared?"

She shrugged, reaching for the wine and took several sips. “Down to my toes and if you aren’t then, you’re not thinking this through. What if we’re not good parents? Your mother.... “

“Don’t!”

His expression turned so ominous that it gave her pause.

“I’m sorry.” She told him quietly.

“I overreacted.” Picking up his glass, he took a sip before putting it back down. “She wasn’t a mother, not in any sense of the word. Eleanor Randall was the perfect example of poised and beautiful and had ice water running through her veins. She was the perfect hostess and would preside over a party like no one I’d ever seen.

She never had a hair out of place and ran a spotless house. She was the perfect wife from the outside and would plan a menu down to the tiniest detail. She was a tyrant and made the staffs' lives miserable." He took up the glass and stared at the liquid.

"You don't have to- "

"I want to." He shook his head as she opened her mouth to say something else. "I want to."

Picking up the glass, he moved back from the counter and paced over to the window. She had a view of the small park on the opposite side of the road and he could just make out a swing moving drunkenly in the wind.

It was dark and wet, which meant the park was empty. It flitted through his mind that it looked sad and neglected, like a child left alone in the dark. Shaking the disturbing image away, he turned to face her.

“She was determined to make a good impression and she did. I used to stand at the top of the stairs watching as she made her rounds. She’d be wearing this beautiful designer gown, with her hair perfectly styled. Her jewelry had to be more expensive than the rest of the women in the room.” He wandered over to pour himself some more wine.

“I’d hear her barking at the maids to do this or do that and would go back to my suite so I didn’t get in her way.”

“Brady.” Macayla rose.

“I’m fine.” He told her with a faint smile. “I need to get this out.”

“Not if it’s so painful. Look, I don’t need to know your life story- “

“Oh, just shut the hell up!”

Her eyes widened and then narrowed as temper came swiftly. “Oh no you didn’t.”

“Do you think this is just casual for me?” His emerald eyes glittered. “You’re supposed to be a writer, supposed to be adept at reading people and yet you never noticed that I have feelings for you. Christ! How stupid can you get?”

The rest of the insults flew right over her head as she stared at him in shock. “Define feelings.”

“Figure it out, you’re the goddamn writer.”

“I’m not going to allow you to talk to me that way.”

“What are you going to do about it?” He asked her mockingly. “Throw me out?”

“Don’t think I can’t.”

They stood there glaring at each other before she relented. “I don’t want to hear about your feelings.”

“What are you going to do about it?” He repeated.

“Not a thing.” Sitting back down, she pretended an interest in the meal even though her appetite had fled.

“Want me to take it back?”

“I don’t care.” Pushing the plate away, she rose again, this time to pace in a tight circle. “We were talking about parenthood.”

“And I was telling the distasteful story of Eleanor Randall.”

She stopped and turned to look at him. “You can always stop.”

“But it’s such a fun story to tell.” He gave a facsimile of a smile as he went to take his seat.

“Brady.”

“I want to.” He told her soberly. “I’ve done therapy years ago, and it worked to an extent.”

She came back and sat across from him. “But not enough.”

“Enough for me to not take it personal.”

She frowned at him. “How can you not take it personal? It is personal.”

He smiled at her, enjoying the way she looked as if wanted to fight his emotional battle. “You grew up in a loving environment.”

“I did and, as far as I know, your Dad was – he tried to be there for you.”

“He was busy building the company. Eleanor was a stay-at-home mother.”

“You called her Eleanor.”

“She answered to Mother, but basically, she didn’t give a crap what I called her or even if I called her at all.”

“She was a colossal bitch.” Her fierceness and choice of words had him laughing.

“Precisely.”

“I’m happy she isn’t around for the kid to have to deal with her.”

“So am I.”

She was weirdly relieved that the sadness and bitterness seemed to have dissipated. She’d heard about his crappy childhood from her mother, but she’d glossed over it somewhat. “I bet you couldn’t wait to get out of there.”

He grinned at that. "I counted the days."

"Did she redeem herself at the end?"

"No. That would have been beneath her. I went to boarding school, something I insisted on and, when I was leaving, she came into my room and dismissed the maid who was packing my suitcase."

Leaning forward, she placed her hands on the counter. "And? Did she offer some motherly advice?"

His smile turned grim. "She warned me not to disgrace the Randall name. I was thirteen and she told me that as a man I have certain disgusting urges and I had probably inherited those said disgusting urges from my father."

She warned me to be discreet. She didn't want to hear that the name is being dragged through the mud because she has a reputation to maintain."

Macayla wanted to punch the woman in the face. She was dead, which was lucky for her, but she wanted to dig up her rotting corpse and punch her in the face. Picking up the bottle she drank the wine to try and wash the anger away. "What did you say?"

She had a tight grip on her temper, but he could see it shining through her golden-brown eyes.

"I politely told her yes and asked to be excused as I was running late for the flight."

"Was it a private jet?"

He laughed at her wrinkled brow. “That’s what you are focusing on right now?”

“Absolutely. If I focus on anything else, I’m going over to that fancy cemetery and smash that pricey headstone or slab or whatever the hell it’s called.”

“She was cremated.” He said tongue in cheek.

“Why?”

“She requested it.”

Macayla frowned at that for a minute. “I think I was in Europe when she died and you were in England.”

“I was.”

“You were at the service.”

He inclined his head. “Naturally.”

“How did you feel?”

“Are you trying to shrink me?”

“No. Just-“ She spread her hands. “I just need to know.”

“Need?”

“Yes, dammit, need. We’re going to be parents together and this – your past – your life was so sad. Or was it?” She frowned at him. “I never did buy the poor little rich boy deal.”

“It is a thing.” He shrugged. “I stopped trying to get through to her a long time ago and on the plus side, Dad was there as much as he could be. He’d fly over for visits and there were the summers we spent at the cabin. Seeing you was the highlight of my miserable life.”

“Just bite me.”

Before she could pick up her wineglass, he reached over and bit her lightly on the cheek.

“You asked for it.” He reminded her when she glared at him. Rubbing her cheek, she went back to the question.

“Are you going to tell me or not?”

Settling back on the stool, he pushed away his plate. “Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Absolutely nothing.” He repeated. “Dad called and told me she was in the hospital. And then three days later I got another call that she’d died.”

“Were you planning on flying back for a visit?”

“I was in the middle of a delicate negotiation with some people from Eastern Europe and couldn’t leave. Or didn’t want to leave.”

“It would have looked strange if the only son of Eleanor Randall did not show up to say goodbye.”

“I said my goodbyes when I turned thirteen and was leaving.” He said mildly.

“Did she ever call you while you were away?”

“No. Regular reports were sent every quarter and I supposed that was good enough for her. Dad said she read them religiously and I guess I kept my end of it and didn’t disgrace the family name.”

She shook her head. “She was your mother. I can’t for the life of me understand how she couldn’t want to have anything to do with you.”

“Beats the hell out of me.” Reaching across the counter, he took her hands in his. “We’re going to be wonderful parents.”

“Maybe adequate.” She shook her head. “You’re right, we’re making the decision right now that we’re going to be kick ass parents.”

Lifting her hands, he kissed her knuckles. “I agree. There’s something else.”

“What is that?”

“Are we through with the meal?”

“I lost my appetite when you started to tell me about your crappy childhood.”

“Sorry?”

She lifted one shoulder. “I forgive you. What’s the thing?”

“I’m spending the night.”

“Look- “

“I’m not leaving.” His fingers tightened on hers. “We have that doctor’s appointment tomorrow and it makes sense that we leave together.”

She glared at him. “You just want sex.”

This time he was the one shrugging. “I want us to celebrate properly. Is that so bad?”

“You came over here with the intention of doing just that.” She accused.

Rising, he came around, without letting go of her hands.

“I smiled when you told me the news.” His fingers linked with hers as he pulled her forward and settled between her thighs. “I’m not leaving you tonight.”

“I have nothing to say about any of this?”

“I’m listening.” Letting go of her hands, he cupped her face between his palms.

“Stop looking at me like that?” She whispered huskily. She really should boot him out, spend the time assessing her emotions and what he’d revealed. He was doing something to her stomach to make it quivery.

“Like what?”

“Oh, hell.’ Blowing out a breath, she pulled his head down to hers.

Chapter 7

The lovemaking was slow and intense. It was as if he wanted to impress upon her the importance of the moment. They were celebrating life, he was celebrating love, one that had been a part of him since he was a child and had blossomed into something so intense that he was having a hard time not overwhelming her with it.

It was certainly overwhelming him. His hands played over the slender curves like a skilled violin, drawing out her reluctant responses.

A sigh turned into a moan. Quivers became tremors and whispers shivered along the skin. He murmured into her ear as his mouth took over from his hands. He found erogenous spots, weak spots and ruthlessly exploited them, turning her into a puddle. The texture of her skin, the taste of her, made him want to savor and linger.

Her impatience to have him inside her was ignored as he continued the torture, the sweet torment that had her breath catching. Her fingers searched for him, as she tried to pull him up against her, inside her, but he evaded as he continued to kiss her stomach. Where he lingered, the emotions washing over him like a flood.

His seed was planted, embedded inside her womb, where eventually it would form a life. One he was going to cherish. He realized that the time had come. He had to be inside her, to water her womb with his seed to wash away the bitterness of his upbringing.

With that in mind, he covered her body with his, sliding into the wetness of her, the tightness enveloping like a welcome and well-worn glove. Her face was flushed with passion, eyes shining like molten gold.

Her lush bottom lip quivered with the need for him. If she wasn't in love with him, she was getting there.

"Brady." Her cultured voice was a whisper, hands going around his neck to bring him down to her. They were joined together, bonded.
"Brady."

"Tell me." He urged.

"I can't." Her fingers dug into his skin and then soothed.

"Show me." Bending his head, he took her lips and allowed her to lead. The kiss was fire and heat, scorching them with flames that played over them, inside them, consuming and destroying them. The lovemaking started out slow and turned frantic as skin met skin.

They came together, the climax so powerful it had them clinging to each other, their bodies trembling from the aftermath. He held her against him, ending the kiss just to dip his head into the softness of her neck as he struggled to control his harsh breathing. His body was still trembling, the aftershocks making him weak.

Never in his life had he experienced anything like this. In the past, he'd used sex to forget, to lose himself, the way he'd done with his painting. To forget, to seek some sort of comfort from the coldness he'd left at home.

To his surprise and gratitude, she didn't push him away the way she usually did, but kept her arms around his neck. He was the one who made the first move, sliding off her and gathering her into his arms.

"Hungry?" He whispered against the thick dark curls.

"Starving." She admitted with a laugh.

"We didn't finish the meal."

"We were too busy arguing." She agreed. "We do that a lot."

"Perhaps we enjoy the battle."

"Perhaps. It might be the fact you're annoying and entitled."

"Entitled?" He rolled that around inside his head. "I don't think I am."

"All rich good-looking guys are."

"I'm taking that as a compliment."

"You would." She snorted against his chest. "I'm guessing you brought a change of clothes."

"You'd be right."

"You were that sure you'd be spending the night?"

"I was that sure I wasn't leaving."

"Is this going to become a habit?"

"Spending the night? Yes. Unless you agree to come and live with me." He ignored the stiffening of her body and plunged on. "It would make more sense. My place is much bigger and nicer, by the way. I'd get the chance to be there for you."

"Those aren't good reasons and I hate people in my space."

"I'm not people."

"You're a person and you'd be in my space."

Shifting slightly, he tugged at her chin. "I'm the man in your life."

"You're the father of my baby."

He gave her an irritated look. "You're deluding yourself if you think that. We're so much more."

"You just want regular sex." She grumbled.

"Nothing wrong with that. Like I said, the place is big. You could set up a suite for your office. I'm not there during the day and I travel, unless you want to accompany me. You can write from anywhere." He pointed out. "I want to be there for you and my baby."

"It's not a baby yet and it seems to me like you've been thinking about this for a while."

"The day you invited me to the cabin." He shrugged as she raised an eyebrow. "I'm putting you on notice that I not only want to be the father of your baby. I want a family."

"You're getting ahead of yourself." She tried to ease away from him, but he wouldn't allow it. She was strong, but he was stronger. "Let go."

"No. We're having a discussion and you can't always call the shots."

"Like what you're doing now?" Her eyes flashed dangerously.
"Expecting me to pack up everything and go and live with you?"

"It makes a lot of sense and if you'd just stop to think, you'd realize that. I'm going to be actively involved and that's a given." He bent to brush his lips against hers.

"I want to be here for everything, the good and not so good. To hold your hair when you're puking your guts up. To make you lemon or ginger tea-" He grinned at her. "I've been reading up. Soup will settle your stomach," He kissed the tip of her nose.

"To rub your ankles if and when they start swelling. I need this, Macayla, and I'm determined to make it happen."

"So, I don't have a say in any of it?" She had to admit it all sounded like something she wanted too. She'd already agreed to having a baby, this was something different altogether. "What if we decide that we can't stand each other?"

"We can't stand each other half the time, but I still want to be with you."

"I already told you I'm not interested in a relationship."

"What the hell do you think this is?" Letting go of her chin, he cupped her face. "We're in a relationship, whether you like it or not."

"We're just having sex and yes, it's good, but you're talking about a commitment that I'm not sure I'm ready for. I'm not easy to live with, I'm moody and when I'm writing I forget to eat-" She saw that register. "Now I'm expecting, that will change of course."

"I'm not leaving that to chance." He told her, the familiar, determined look stamped on his handsome face. "I want to take care of you, you just admitted that when you're involved in a story, you forget to eat. I have a housekeeper who'll be more than willing to prepare healthy meals and I'll see to it that you eat."

"I can prepare my own meal."

"I caught a glimpse in your refrigerator and there's hardly anything in there. The shelves are practically bare."

"I hadn't gone to the market yet."

"When was the last time you did?" He pressed.

"I was busy and dealing with this favor from my Mom and your Dad, I had to get away for a few days to think. It's on my to-do list."

"That'd be one less thing to worry about."

"We're going to get sick of each other and I'm going to hate your guts."

"I can live with that. I'll just take you to bed and make you forget why you hate me."

"You think sex is the answer to everything?"

"It can be. The way we do it certainly works." His expression sobered.
"I need this, Macayla, having a family has become the most important thing to me and I'm asking you to give it to me. Please, don't make me beg."

"Damn you." She whispered. The look on his face and the things he'd told her earlier made her weak. He'd made love to her just now and she'd felt the desperation. She'd wanted to soothe away the hurt and pain. She was getting caught up and she hadn't intended to.

"Say yes."

"There are rules."

"Of course."

She gave him a sizzling look. "I need my space."

“Naturally.” He was so happy; he would have agreed to anything.

“If at any time we realize it’s not working, we bail.”

“It will work.”

“Look, I’m not some wide-eyed moron who believes in happily ever after. I’m a grown woman who knows that things happen to people and that people change. If that happens to us, we’ll agree to part in a civilized manner.”

“I’m stating unequivocally that I’m here to stay.” The determination was stamped on his face. “I’m not going to leave you or my child because of some disagreement- “

“I’m just being practical.” She insisted.

“You're being a hard-ass and I’m not going to stand for it.”

“Look- “

“No, you listen-“ He rode over her protest. “You might not believe in happily ever after, but I do.

I grew up in a freezer where love wasn’t encouraged. My Dad tried, but he was hardly ever there. I want different, I want a warm and loving home where both parents, that is, you and I, will work together to make our home a happy one.

Whatever is wrong, whatever issues there are, we’re going to work it out. We’ll piss each other off, but we’re human beings and that will

happen.” His fingers tightened on her skin. “I’m not leaving. Is that clear? I’m not going to stand by and watch you walk out of my life.”

She glared at him before lowering her eyes. She was trying her best to ignore the quickening of her heart and the rapid beats of her pulse. He was making her yearn for something she’d never known she even wanted. A home and family.

“Whatever.”

His eyebrows lifted and a smile tugged at his lips. “Very profound.”

Her lashes lifted as she stared at him. “You’re not going to run my life.”

“As long as you’re eating properly and taking care of yourself and our baby, I’ll stay out of it. You won’t even know I’m there.”

“You’re a funny guy.”

“Hilarious.” His hands gentled as he bent his head to kiss her slowly, firing her desire.

“Are we done?”

“Not by a long shot.” She warned. “This discussion isn’t over. There are-“ He swallowed the rest of it as he seized her lips.

Michelle clapped her hands in delight, her golden-brown eyes gleaming. “This calls for a celebration.” She turned to look at her daughter who was standing by the window looking out. “You didn’t tell me.”

“We wanted to be sure.”

“Are you moving in with Brady?”

“He forced my hand.” She sent him a thin smile. “I hope he knows what he’s doing.”

“I’m pleased you children are working things out.” Sydney commented from his position next to Michelle.

As soon as they'd left the doctor's office, they'd called both parents and requested a meeting. Michelle had suggested her place and Sydney had told them he'd meet there for lunch.

"We're not children." Macayla closed her eyes briefly and held up a hand. "I'm a little on edge."

"We had the usual argument while we were leaving the clinic."

"Which clinic is it?" Michelle asked.

"Hillside."

“Excellent choice.” Sydney nodded at Macayla in approval.

“Your son proceeded to upset me by insisting I move today.”

“I offered to get some people to help with the packing- “

“I told him I didn’t want strangers pawing through my stuff.”

“I also told you that I’m free for the day and we could go back and do it together.”

“You’re pushing things. I already said yes, under duress. Why the hell can’t you wait a couple weeks?”

“You’re not putting this off.” He pushed out of the comfortable blue and white chair to walk over to her. “This is what you do, Macayla. I already told you I want you with me and that means starting now.”

“Well to hell with you!” She blazed. “I’m my own woman and I don’t answer to you.”

“The fact that you’re carrying my baby says otherwise.” He snapped back. “You have a very hard time taking care of yourself- “

“So what? It’s now your job?” They were so caught up in the argument that they’d forgotten the other people in the room who were looking at them with avid interest.

“I’m making it mine. I’m not going another night without you inside my apartment, and that’s final.”

They stood there staring holes into each other before she turned around and stormed out of the room.

“Oh, crap.” Dragging a hand through his hair he closed his eyes wearily.

“Don’t go after her.” A smile wreathed his Dad’s face.

“Why not?”

“She’s very much like me and your father and I had some very famous arguments.” Michelle told him with a laugh. “He tried that high-handed

crap with me several times and realized it only made me dig my heels in even more.”

“Then what the hell do I do?”

“She’s going to go to her place and pace and fume and damn you to hell.” Michelle told him with a smile. “Give her the rest of the day to cool off and then go back there tonight.”

“Oh, I intend to.” Brady rubbed the back of his neck wearily. “I messed up. It’s just she’s so aggravating.”

“And you are trying to fast-track things.” Michelle nodded in understanding. Reaching over, she took Sylvan’s hand in hers. He looked at her, his expression tender. “We know what you mean and what you’re trying to do.” She turned to look at the handsome young man fondly.

“But you’re going to have to slow things down. Macayla has a stubborn streak a mile wide and she’s used to doing things her way.”

“That has to change. She’s no longer on her own. I’m in her life now and I’m staying put.”

Michelle’s tinkling laughter had both men staring at her.

“You said the same thing to me all those years ago, remember?” She asked, looking at Sydney.

“Then I messed it up by getting married the next year.” His hand squeezed hers gently.

“Syd-“

“I still find it difficult to forgive myself for putting us through all of it.”
“Now we’re going to be blessed with a grandchild.” Her eyes
moistened. “Sydney James Randall, you’re not going to spoil it for us.”

They were so wrapped up in each other they never noticed Brady slipping out of the room to give them privacy.

She tried working, but as soon as she sat at the desk, everything came flooding back. The sheer arrogance of the man! Jumping up from the chair, she paced over to the window. Her apartment might not be as dazzling and richly decorated as his, but it was hers, and she was comfortable.

Did he think it was going to be easy living with someone? Leaning against the windowsill, she took a deep breath, she tried to settle her stomach.

She was pregnant and didn't know how to feel. She was so accustomed to packing everything up and taking off – whether to some remote location, a seedy bar on the West Side, a questionable club in the downtown area or just popping to the precinct where she'd do a drive-along with some of the detectives.

Yes, it'd be convenient for him to be around when she was going through whatever it is that will be coming. Now, she was feeling fine, aside from the crazy mood swings and dizziness.

It suddenly occurred to her that she owed her Mom and his Dad an apology for storming out without saying goodbye. Damn him for getting under her skin so much that she couldn't think about anything else.

Rubbing a hand over her stomach, she walked swiftly over to the desk to pick up the phone, just as it rang.

Her heart quickened when she looked at the LED.

“I’m not talking to you.”

“What are you doing now?” He sighed. “I’m outside your door.”

“Why?”

“I want to make sure you’re okay, and help you pack.”

“Brady- “

“Let me in, please.”

Biting off a sigh, she left the office and went to open the door.

“I’m not going to apologize.” He told her firmly, closing the door behind him.

“I never expected you to.”

“How are you? I brought you some of the Coq au Vin. You left without eating.”

“It smells good.” She relented enough to turn and lead him into the kitchen. “I’m fine. I don’t need you hovering.”

“You’re going to have to put up with it.” Pushing her gently onto the stool, he went to get a bowl.

“I was rude.”

“Really?” He tilted a brow at her as he handed her the meal.

“You make me so mad that I can’t think straight.” Digging the spoon in, she took a bite and closed her eyes in appreciation. “Thanks for bringing me this.” She watched as he sat across from her. “You can’t expect me to move with you tonight.”

“It’s the afternoon which gives us enough time to pack your stuff. All you need are your clothes-“ His green eyes wandered over the sweater she’d changed into. “Or not. If most of them look like that, you might as well toss them.”

She bristled, her eyes throwing daggers at him. “These are very comfortable and it’s not like I go anywhere that much.”

“That’s going to change.”

“Why?”

“I have every intention of taking you out.”

“I’m not a very social person.”

“I never noticed.” Abandoning his seat, he came around to lift her chin.

“I’m in this one hundred percent.”

“I don’t need you crowding me.”

“I’ll try my best not to.” Planting a kiss on her forehead, he stepped back and gestured for her to finish the meal. “I’ll go and start the packing.”

“I need to sort through- “

“Eat.” He kissed her again. “I know what I’m doing, and it has to be done today as I have meetings to attend.” He ran a hand over her hair, letting his touch linger.

“We’re going to be fine.”

“How do you know?” She demanded.

“Because we get along so well.” He laughed at her frown. “We got this. You’ll see.”

Chapter 8

“You should have called me.” He chided.

“And say what? I’m feeling sick and having back pains?” She eased up against the pillows and arched her back.

“Precisely. Turn around.”

“You don’t have to-“ She grunted when he turned her onto her stomach. Lifting the robe, he poured the cream into his palm and started rubbing it into her skin.

“You didn’t have to come running home.” She closed her eyes and had to acknowledge that his touch was soothing. “It would have eased

eventually. I know you're working on that Emerson deal."

"And?"

"I'm fine." She insisted. "I've proven I can take care of myself and Mrs. Bailey and I have gotten close." She added, referring to his housekeeper. "If I continue to eat what she cooks, you're going to have to roll me out of here."

"She promised to take care of you." He kneaded the small of her back where the pain had settled.

"Oh, that feels so good. If I'm two months in and having all of these issues, what's going to happen when I'm in my second and third trimester?" She popped up suddenly and almost knocked him back.

“What the hell!”

“We have that stupid charity thing tonight.”

“You’re not well.”

“Oh, we’re going.” Turning over, she stared at him. “Mom is being honored for her contribution to the acting and modeling world and she’d never forgive us if we bailed.”

“She’ll understand if you’re not feeling up to it.” He pointed out.

“No.” She shook her head. It’d been three weeks since she’d moved in with him and the transition wasn’t that bad. He gave her space and, aside from calling her twice a day and riding her about eating a healthy meal, she was getting used to him.

They'd argued about the sleeping arrangements.

"I'm not used to sleeping with anyone," She'd explained when she asked about separate suites.

"Well, get used to it." He'd told her tightly. "We sleep in the same bed."

She'd argued for a few minutes and then given in. It wasn't so bad. She found herself curling into his arms after a hectic bout of sex. She was also constantly horny. So much so, it was embarrassing.

She was the one who couldn't keep her hands off him. They'd tumble into sleep, exhausted, and in the early hours of the morning, she'd be all over him.

One night, they were having a late meal in the kitchen when the urge hit her. She pushed her plate away and climbed into his lap. That night she'd rode him like there was no tomorrow, managing to topple them both backward onto the floor.

Even now, seeing him wearing the ribbed, charcoal-gray sweater she knew she was going to jump him.

As if reading her thoughts or the expression on her face, he raised an eyebrow, the smile curving his lips.

“We have an hour.”

“I can control myself.”

“Can you?” Rising, he started to undress.

“You’re so smug, aren’t you?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” He was pulling his belt out of the loops and unzipping his pants. “When you have a woman who can’t get enough of you, what can you do?”

“Just-“ She bit her lip as he kicked his pants away, his erection in the cotton boxers sending the saliva pooling inside her mouth. He was so magnificent; the body lean and tight with well-toned muscles. She’d been given a tour of the gym on the ground floor and they’d started working out together.

She was always one for exercising, but he took it to another level, hence the well-defined muscles and strength in his body. She’d also

challenged him into sparring with her in the boxing ring. "Get over her and do me."

"Yes, ma'am." Peeling off his boxers, he settled in next to her. "How's your back?"

"You did wonders." Her hands touched his chest and felt the muscles quivered. "Pregnancy has its rewards."

"Such as?" He liked the aggressiveness she'd been portraying over the last month.

"The intense sexual urges." Her hand drifted down his flat stomach to cup him. "I see you're more than ready."

"For you? Always." He hissed out a breath as she circled the tip of him.

"Hmm."

"What?"

"I love the feel of you."

"Macayla." His voice was rough with emotions.

"I'm tasting you. Not bad."

"Darling-"

"I want to taste some more." Shoving him back against the pillows, she climbed over him, going down to his throbbing cock.

"Oh, Christ!" Squeezing his eyes shut, he felt his body stiffening as she closed her fingers around him. "You don't have to-"

"I want to." She touched her tongue to the thin slit and had his body rearing up in shock.

When her mouth closed over him, he felt as if his head was about to be blown off. Digging his fingers into the sheets, he used them to anchor him, even as his hips lifted desperately seeking the warmth of her mouth.

A groan escaped him when she fondled his balls gently, adding to the pressure building up inside him. He wasn't going to make it, the thought filtered hazily through his head. It was too much and he didn't want to explode down her throat.

Finding the strength, he managed to drag her up and on top of him, his body shuddering, heart thundering inside his chest. She settled over him, the wetness from her mouth making it easy for her to slide down to the hilt.

Only her, he thought feverishly. She was the only woman who'd ever had this effect on him. The madness, the heat and fire were something he'd never thought existed. He loved her so much it was like a fire burning its way through his body. She consumed him, so that he could think of nothing and no one else.

His hands gripped her hips as he lifted his upper body. With one long look at her, he bent to suck her nipple, making her whimper. She came then, her head thrown back, body bucking on top of him. She rode him furiously, sending him into a frenzy that had him climaxing, his long, lean body shuddering as he poured himself into her.

He held her to him, both of them trembling in the aftermath. Letting go of her nipple, he buried his face in her neck, breathing her in, inhaling

her essence and just savoring her. Macayla held him to her, fingers stroking the muscled back and warm skin. Ever since he'd told her the story of his mother; something had shifted inside her.

He made her feel weak and vulnerable and protective. She wanted to soothe away the pain and hurt that still plagued him and, because of it, she allowed the fuss he insisted on where she was concerned.

"We should go and take a shower." She murmured, still running her fingers up and down his back. It felt good being with him like this, his penis buried deep inside her.

"We should." He agreed, his face still nestled at her neck.

"You take a long time to shower. It amazes me a man could take that amount of time in the bathroom."

"You're in and out in less than three minutes. That's crazy." The first time they'd taken a shower together, it'd lasted almost an hour. Then again, it'd been interspersed with touching, tasting and then lovemaking against the tiles.

"I'm not dirty, and a shower is just washing off the day. I'm mostly in the house anyway and not out doing manual labor. Mrs. B, doesn't even allow me to pick up after myself."

He lifted his head to look at her. "Is that a complaint I hear?"

"I'm not used to people picking up after me." She loved the flushed look on his face and the sensuous slant of his lips. The man was too pretty, and hers. She felt a jolt at those two words, yes, he was hers and she was never going to share him with another woman.

"If you ever cheat on me, I'm going to cut off your dick and make you swallow it."

His eyebrows winged up as he stared at her in shock. "Ah-" He cleared his throat. "Duly noted."

"Just saying. Now, let's get going. I don't want to be late."

"Where did this come from?" She frowned at the stunning coral dress he pulled from the closet. "I told you not to buy me anything else."

"I chose to ignore you." Moving into the closet with the rows of revolving shelves, he picked up a brand-new pair of matching heels and handed it to her.

Grabbing it out of his hands after giving him a fuming look, she turned to look at the heap of clothing that'd made its way into the closet. His stuff was on the right and hers on the left and the pile just kept getting bigger every day.

Whenever she was at home, she'd be locked off in the office he'd arranged for her and would be dead to the world, except when the housekeeper knocked on the door to bring her something to eat.

So, she supposed it was during that time, things were brought up and put away without her noticing. He didn't miss a detail. There were sweaters in every color, folded neatly on shelves and not to mention the soft leather boots that she couldn't fault.

"When am I going to wear all of these?" She muttered, touching a boot made of the finest and softest leather, in buttercup yellow.

"We'll find places to go. There're always functions to attend." Taking her hand, he led her out and nudged her to the vanity. "We're running

out of time."

"And my hair!"

"Leave it loose." He advised.

"I don't-" With a shrug, she picked up the brush and decided to do just that.

The ballroom of the Regent Hotel was overflowing with people when they arrived. This wasn't their first outing as a couple, and the others had been met with excitement and too much attention by the press.

She'd seen the articles in the various magazines and had chosen to ignore it, even when her agent had called spilling over with excitement that she was seeing Brady Randall.

"You're one secretive bitch."

"My personal life is nobody's business." She'd stated firmly. There was no way she was going to reveal she was pregnant. It would come out eventually, but until then, it was being kept under wraps.

"It's quite a crowd." She murmured as they made their way through the throng of people. She'd been brought up in the public eye, being the only child of a famous actress and a well-known lawyer hadn't made it possible for her to fade into the background.

To her mother's credit, she'd kept her away from the sharks as much as she was able to.

When it became clear she wasn't going to follow in her famous mother's footsteps, the press had more or less left her alone, something she was grateful for. Now, they'd picked up again, since she was with Brady.

"Oh, look, if it isn't Clara." She murmured dryly as the svelte and nosy talk-show host made her way towards them. "I need a drink."

"No drinking."

"I can have a glass of champagne."

"One glass."

"Yes, Mother." She muttered dryly as the waiter came forward with the tray.

"Darlings!" Clara greeted them enthusiastically as if they were her long-lost friends who she hadn't seen in ages. She air-kissed them Hollywood style on both cheeks, actually pressing herself against Brady and bringing out the urge in Macayla to slap her across her face.

"I was just talking to your darling mother and saying I'd love to get you and this delicious man of yours on my show."

"We'll see." Macayla painted a smile on her lips as she gave the woman her attention. "We've been busy-"

"You're living together. How sweet is that?" Curious green eyes watched them closely. "Your parents are together and I have to admit they make an adorable couple, and now the two of you! Isn't it kind of incestuous?"

"Not at all and, even if it were, we wouldn't give a damn." Brady gave her a cool look that had her stepping back. "Please excuse us, will you?" Without waiting to find out if she was through, he purposefully led Macayla past her and toward the crowd surrounding her Mom and his Dad.

"Nicely done." She murmured with a smile.

"The woman is a pain in the ass and a hopeless gossip."

"I hate this." She whispered. "How do you handle this on a daily basis?"

Lifting their joined hands, he kissed her knuckles. "It takes a lot of practice." His green eyes twinkled. "You'll get used to it."

“Not in this lifetime. Mom.” Tugging her hand away, she went into Michelle’s fragrant embrace with a smile. “Love the dress.”

“I’m love the one you’re wearing.” Kissing her daughter’s cheek, she moved away to greet Brady. “I’m sensing your influence on the outfit.”

“I plead the fifth.” He told her with a grin as he returned her embrace. “I have to go home with her.”

“You two are very funny. Hi, Syd.” Slipping away, she tucked her hand through his arm. “Let’s ditch these two and go mingle, shall we?”

“Not before I tell you you’re looking particularly lovely tonight.” He kissed her cheek fondly, hazel eyes twinkling.

“How’s she doing?” Michelle asked as she watched them walk away.

“It’s entertaining every day.” He touched her cheek gently. “You’re looking spectacular by the way.”

“Aren’t I always?” She couldn’t help but reach out to tug at his tangled blonde hair. “Love the jacket. Coral, to match my daughter’s dress. I take it that was deliberate?”

“Absolutely.” His green eyes twinkled.

“Have you told her yet?”

“Bits and pieces. You know your daughter, she isn’t ready for the entire package yet.”

“I’m expecting to hear wedding bells anytime now.”

“That’s the plan.”

She nodded. “It never happened for me and your Dad and I’m beginning to believe that this was the reason. You two belong together.”

“So do you and Dad.” Lifting his head, he searched and found the woman who occupied his thoughts every day and found her surrounded by several of the ‘wives’. “Eventually I’m going to pop the question and won’t take no for an answer.”

She laughed at that and slipping a hand through his arm. “I have no doubt about that.”

“What is it?”

“Nothing. At least nothing much. My stomach is just a little queasy and these heels are killing me.”

“Why don’t you sit for a bit? Considering your mother has already done her acceptance speech, we can leave in a few minutes.”

“That sounds like a plan. Stop babying me.” She ordered as he nudged her to a comfortable chair in the corner of the room. “People are staring at us.”

“That’s because we make such a beautiful couple.” He pressed her down, forcing her to sit. “You didn’t eat anything.”

“The food is too rich for me. I had some caviar and those baby shrimp.”

“And two glasses of champagne.”

She eyed him dryly as she eased out of the shoes. “You were watching me?”

“Like a hawk.” He was tempted to hunker down and rub her insoles and just about managed to stop himself. “One’s the limit and you know that.”

“I don’t drink wine at dinner and I’m faithful to the ridiculous regimental menu you have your housekeeper following. I drink milk even though it makes me gag and am so filled with veggies and fruit I’m beginning to feel like Mr. Pete’s health food store.”

“That’s good to know.” He smiled as she glowered at her. “Let me go say our goodbyes so we can get out of here.”

“Finally.”

“Did you tell them?” He nodded over to where the group of women were gathered.

“No. I thought we weren’t telling anyone yet.”

“We aren’t. I’ll be right back.”

She watched him weave his way through the crowd and felt the familiar tug of awareness where he was concerned. He was tall, head and shoulders over more than a few of the men inside the room. He was also very distinctive, with his tangled and untidy blonde hair and impressive physique.

She wasn’t ready to own the emotions swirling inside her when it came to him, it was confusing and she was wary about commitment.

With each day that passed, it was getting more and more difficult not to go all the way. Pressing a hand to her stomach, she felt a quiver. They’d created something or what was going to be someone. She knew of all the risks involved, and she had several months to go, but she was looking forward to holding their little one in her hands..

She was a black woman pregnant by a white guy, complete with blonde hair and green eyes, ones that she wanted to drown herself in.

She knew that the kid's hair was going to come out screwy and eye color was to be determined.

She didn't care about that. He made her feel special and pampered. It was strange she hadn't allowed herself to want that sort of thing before. She also hadn't thought of him other than the son of her mother's lover.

Now they were together. A couple living together and expecting. She would have balked at the idea of such binding and lasting commitment before, but now it was growing on her. Now, she couldn't imagine herself without him and it was scaring the life out of her. She was jarred from her thoughts as her mother came gliding over.

"Darling, are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Brady is such an old woman." She pressed another hand to her chest. "Although, I'm feeling a little queasy. I think it's the shrimp."

“Don’t worry about staying, darling. I’m heading home shortly.” She touched Macayla’s hand briefly. “I’m in negotiations with Zeigfeld regarding a part in the movie he’s producing.”

“I thought you were through with all of that?” Macayla asked with a frown.

Michelle patted her hand again. “I’m feeling so better and I discussed it with Syd. The best thing for me at this point is to continue doing what I love.” She smiled, looking up as Brady came towards them. “You make such a lovely couple. Please give it a chance.”

Chapter 9

“The steak not to your liking?” Brady studied her as she played with her meal.

“I’m not really hungry.”

He stared at her with a frown. She seemed a little distracted since he came in this evening and was unusually quiet.

“Would you like something else?”

It was raining out, a steady, sleet rain that was certain to turn to ice in minutes. Christmas was right around the corner and he’d persuaded her to trim and decorate the huge tree in the living room.

They'd chosen to eat in the large dining room with the electronic fire glowing at their backs. He'd brought home work with him so he could have the chance to be here with her and check on her.

"No." She shook her head and reached for her glass of water. "I went running this afternoon."

"Macayla- "

She waved a hand to stop the rest of the sentence. "You're going to tell me it's freezing out and I could have slipped and fallen, and there's a perfectly good gym here I could take advantage of and that's going to start another argument. I had writer's block and decided to go for a run.

That's what I do. I go for a run to clear the cobwebs, and it felt good. Yes, it was frosty and I was soaking wet, but I met someone. Her name's Tiffany from Apartment B or whatever it's called. The one closest to us. She's an up-and-coming actress and five months pregnant."

"You made a friend."

"I have friends or rather, acquaintances. I don't make friends easily."

"I never would have guessed." He laughed at the dirty look she threw him. "What happened with this Tiffany that has you so down?"

"I believe contemplative is more like it." She shrugged and took another sip of the water. "She lives alone."

“What happened to the significant other?”

“Why do people say that?”

“Say what?”

“Significant other? Like one person is better than the other?”

“Want to start a debate?”

“Not really. Just wondering out loud. Anyway, the guy’s married. That’s another thing too. Why do women go for the unattainable? What the hell did she think was going to happen? He was going to leave his wife and marry her?”

Shaking her head, she put the glass down. “Anyway, that’s none of my business. It’s just she’s going through this difficult pregnancy and the bastard blew her off. He told her she was on her own and he wanted nothing to do with her or the kid.”

“He might change his mind.” Brady pointed out. “She still has several months to go. It might be he doesn’t want to blow up his marriage.”

“He should have thought about that before sticking his dick inside her.” Her eyes glowed with anger.

“Macayla.”

“What?”

“You’re not going to interfere.” He warned.

“Who said I was going to?”

“I know you and know that look.” He pointed to her. “You have that self-righteous anger that makes you do crazy things. Tiffany is an adult and should have thought about the consequences- “

“You’re being judgmental.”

“I’m stating facts. Leave her to sort things out.”

“She invited me over to have lunch and I accepted.” She shrugged at the look on his face. “What? It’s just lunch and she was crying.”

“You’re a stranger and she just unloaded all her problems? In the chilly rain?”

“We were sheltering under that shed with the comfortable chairs and we started talking. I don’t know. Something just clicked. She looks lost and forlorn and it touched something inside.” She started picking at her chicken. “When have you ever known me to attach myself to a perfect stranger?”

“Never, that’s why I’m worried. What do you know about this woman?”

“Only she’s knocked up and lives in the apartment a few feet away. Or is it a mile?”

She shrugged. “So, I agreed to lunch.”

“I thought you had a deadline. I don’t know if I want you going into that woman’s place. Does she know who you are?”

“Well yes, mother.” She smiled at him sweetly. “Do you want to run a background check on her?”

“One was already done. An extensive one. We don’t take chances with the people who apply and there’s a long waiting list because their records have to be as clean as a whistle.”

“So, only crime-free people with lots of money are allowed?”

“You could say that.”

“In that case, you have nothing to worry about and I have to remind you I can take care of myself. I’ve been in some really sketchy situations during my research and I’ve handled myself.”

“You’re pregnant.”

“Really? Thanks for telling me.” Sitting back, she rubbed her stomach.

“What is it?” He leaned forward with a frown.

“Just- “She took a breath, trying to dispel the nausea.

“Oh, crap!” Shoving back the chair, she bolted for the bathroom with him right behind her.

Hunkering behind her, he brushed back her hair to one side, holding her until she was finished.

“Better?” He asked quietly, feeling his heart twist into knots at the tremors racking her slender body.

“A little.” She leaned back against him and closed her eyes. “I hate those damn pills.”

“Did you take one this morning?”

“I was okay, so I decided to skip it. Besides, it’s huge.”

He kissed the side of her neck. “Want to take one now?”

“I just want to stay here for the rest of the night.”

“Or- “Shifting to his feet, he picked her up and into his arms. “I’ll make you some tea.”

Wrapping her hands around his neck, she snuggled, loving the scent of him and the solidness of his chest. “Are you gunning for the ‘Boyfriend of the Year’ award?”

He waited until he was up the stairs before responding. “Boyfriend?”

“Baby daddy?”

“Excellent lover?” Moving towards the steps he laid her down on the bed.

“Definitely.” Tugging at his collar, she pulled him down on the bed.

“I need to go and make the tea.”

“Not before I say my piece.”

“Are you just wrangling for sex.”

“That’s for later.” She placed a hand on his cheek. “Talking to Tiffany made me realize something.”

“What would that be?”

“I have something good here. You’re annoying as hell and the fact you call every few minutes- “

“I’m down to three times a day.”

She rolled her eyes and he couldn’t help but kiss her on the forehead. “What I’m trying to say is that I don’t want to take it for granted. I just want to get this out before I start bawling down the place and I’m going to blame it on hormones.”

“Of course.” He said with a nod.

“I never thought I wanted this, getting pregnant and shacking up with you was the last thing on my mind. I had my doubts, but you’re here for me. You take care of me and I’ve always told myself that I can take care of myself.

Even with your busy schedule, you make sure I eat and get all the proper nutrients. Not everyone has that kind of support. Basically, I’m saying that I’m grateful.”

His heart was so full he felt like it would going to burst through his chest. She wasn’t one to get all ‘soppy’ as she’d call it and he was hesitant to tell her what was inside his heart. “I can’t be otherwise.” He told her huskily, one hand caressing her throat.

“You’re making the sacrifice and doing most of the work. I want to do more, to take some of what you’re going through and bear it so that you don’t have to. What I’m doing now feels so inadequate that it

frustrates me.” Bending, he kissed her on both cheeks and then on the lips.

“I didn’t rinse my mouth.” She reminded him.

“I don’t really care about that.” He kissed her softly on the lips.

“That’s gross, by the way.” She whispered against his lips, making him chuckle.

“I’ll always be here and I want you to know that.”

“Oh, that much I know. You wouldn’t screw with me. I’d leave the kid with my Mom and hunt you down and maim you.”

“Maim, not kill?”

“I’d have passionate sex before cutting off-“

“Please don’t finish that sentence.”

“I was going to say fingers.”

He gave her a narrowed stare. “Is that right?”

She gave him an innocent look. “Yep. Tea. Now.”

“At your service.” He kissed her again before pushing off her. She watched him leave the room before settling back against the pillows with a satisfied smile. Even the grossness of puking her guts out in front of him didn’t feel so bad. This living together had its benefits.

She wasn’t alone and she’d always admired women who went at it alone, because the man decided that Hey! we did the deed, but guess what? I was only there for the sex.

He brought the tray table up the steps and placed it over her lap. "I found some plain soup and figured that would be better."

"You're a good man."

"I hope you remember that when we're having one of our fights." He brushed back the hair from her face as he sat facing her. "You were

saying something when I came in."

"What was- Oh." She took a sip of the soup and felt the ease in her stomach. "I was just thinking about Tiffany and women like her and men who think they can just do the deed, bang them and leave when there are consequences."

"Naturally." He concurred, watching as she took several more sips.
"He has a wife."

"He disrespected both of them."

"I'm going to play devil's advocate and ask this question. Was she aware he was married?"

She shrugged at that. "She doesn't seem to be a moron and I know guys tend to tell the women they want to screw that the wife doesn't

understand them and all of that BS and they're on the verge of getting a divorce.

So, get the divorce and when you sign on the dotted line, then come back and talk to me. If there are kids involved, then don't bother. I'm not messing up some kid's life and have them going into therapy because of me."

"Yet you're sympathetic toward this woman." He pointed out, delighted by her and fascinated by her reasoning.

"I'm not judge or jury and people make mistakes. It's called being human."

He tilted his head to study her.

"What?"

"Have you ever experienced anything like that? Having a married man approach you?"

"Of course." She told him loftily, finishing her soup.

"And?"

"I told him to take a hike."

"You weren't tempted?"

"He was hot and all that and was an actor." She pushed the bowl away. "I was twenty-one and there was this cast and crew party that Mom had arranged at our place.

He was the actor playing her son on the soap opera and he was cute and over thirty, which to my mind was pretty old. Like I said, he was smoking hot and I figured he thought I'd fall at his feet."

"He mustn't have known you." Brady said dryly.

"Exactly. He offered to take me to Paris and all that fancy shit. The guy cornered me in the library of all places. He must have followed me because I'd gotten bored by the endless rounds of small talk and the constant laughter for no reason. So, there I was sitting in the library reading a book when he came in.

He started talking at first and it wasn't bad, but then he started touching and talking crap about how beautiful I am and how he's attracted to me. I asked if he was married and he waved that away. Literally waved a hand as if his poor wife didn't matter. That pissed me off even more. Then he tried to kiss me and then I really got mad."

Brady felt his entire body tighten and had to resist the impulse to ask if he was still around.

"What did you do?" He asked casually, picking up the tray and putting it away.

She eyed him shrewdly. "I don't need you hunting the guy down and punching his lights out. I took care of that myself by kneeing him in the groin."

"Good." He said briskly.

"What about you?" She asked him curiously.

“What about me?”

“Have you ever been with a married woman?”

“Almost.” He admitted.

Her tapered brows lifted and she couldn't believe she was feeling a dart of jealousy. “Almost?”

He nodded, a slight smile hovering around his lips. “I was in London at the time and was lonely and feeling sorry for myself.” Rising, he kicked off his shoes and climbed in next to her. “I'd just finished university and decided a break was in order.

She was older and separated from her husband at the time. She was living in the flats we'd just bought and I was living there as well. We

bumped into each other on our way in and out and just started talking. It was just hi and small talks about the weather, things like that.”

He paused and took her hand in his absently. “Then she invited me to her flat.”

“Did she know who you were?” The jealousy was growing stronger, which was really ridiculous.

“No and I didn’t tell her. We had the same interests and would go to the Broadway shows and museums and art galleries.” Lifting her hand, he kissed her knuckles. “Like I said earlier, I was lonely and wondering if joining the company was something I really wanted to do.

I knew for sure I didn’t want to return home to face her – my mother. Her name was Jasmine and she filled a space in my life for several months. It just so happened that her husband had cheated on her and she was broken up about it.”

“What did she do for a living?”

“She was an attorney.”

“And you never slept with her?”

“When we decided to take it a step further, I couldn’t go through it.”

“Why not?”

He laughed, the sound a little hoarse. “She was married and still in love with her husband for one and I was-“ He looked away for a minute. “I was in love with someone else.”

“I don’t understand-“ The expression on his face sent jitters throughout her body and caused her heart rate to spike. “No.” She started shaking her head. “That’s not possible.”

Letting go of her hand, he dragged his fingers through his hair. “Isn’t it? Don’t tell me you didn’t know. It was clearly obvious I was into you.”

She stared at him for a minute before pushing the sheets off her and sitting up. “You were a snotty and arrogant teenager who didn’t want to have anything to do with me.”

He laughed at that. “I was angry and pissed at the world and jealous of the relationship you had with your mother.” He took her hand again.

“I wanted her to be my mother. I’d heard I was going to be shipped off to England, which was fine by me because I wanted to get away from that ice castle that was home.” His eyes met hers. “Why did you think I jumped at the idea of having a baby with you?”

“I just thought you were insane.”

“Perhaps.” He brought their joined hands and placed hers against his jaw. “Or it could be that I wanted to be with you, and I’ve felt that way since we were children.”

“You didn’t say anything.” She accused him.

“What was there to say?” He asked with a shrug. “I found out about your mother and my Dad and it was too weird or that was what I

thought back then. Like I said, I was going through my own issues. I just wanted to get as far away as I could and try to get my head on straight.”

“I don’t know what to say.” She muttered.

“That’s a first.” He grunted. “Let me ask you this, if I had the guts to tell you how I felt back then, what would you have done?”

Her fingers curled into his and she could feel the emotions churning inside her. “I’d have told you it was weird. I was resentful about the thing going on between our parents.

Granted, I didn’t know they had a thing until after my Dad died. It always struck me as strange they’d let us meet up at the cabin and now that I looked back, it was strange that all they did was talked and nothing else. She was faithful to my Dad when he was alive.”

“Somewhat?” He asked with a lift of his brows.

“She cheated on him in her heart.” She let out a breath. “She kept her body away, but she was in love with your Dad. He was her one true love and when I found out, I was mad. Dad was well- he was Dad. He was the best father a girl could ever want. He loved her and would have put up with anything because of that.”

She pressed her lips together. “She made him happy, but he was hopelessly in love and it showed. I think I decided at that time that was never going to happen to me. I kept my heart in a bubble, because I didn’t want to fall into that category.”

“What about now?” He asked her softly.

“I don’t want to feel this way. I’m scared.”

“Why?”

“Because.”

His lips tilted as his eyes twinkled. “Very profound.”

“Oh you know what I mean.” She stared at him, the familiar curls tumbling around his strong, beautiful face. The slight bump at the bridge of his nose was the only reason he wasn’t perfect. “I have a hard time saying it.”

“It’s just three little words” He told her dryly.

“Exactly. I pour my emotions in my writing, because it’s safe there. I get to navigate and call the shots.”

“I’m not going to use what you feel to control you.”

“I know.” She closed her eyes briefly. “What if you change your mind?”
“Macayla- “

“Just shut up and listen. People do that. We’re going to be parents together. I couldn’t bear it if you –“ She swallowed the lump in her throat. “Just make love to me, Brady. Let me feel you against me. I want to-“ She broke off when he hauled her into his arms and crushed his lips to hers.

Chapter 10

He did a check on Tiffany Knowles. He knew Macayla could take care of herself and she didn't suffer fools gladly, but his entire life was invested now. He'd spent last night just worshipping her body and whispering how much he loved her.

Suddenly, it didn't matter if she said it back to him. Her actions told him that she did. Eventually, before their baby was born, he was going to persuade her to marry him. In the meantime, he was looking out for her.

He was using the company's security team and they promised to get back to him ASAP. He could sense Macayla felt sorry for the woman and he suspected it was due to her own pregnancy.

He was about to call her, when he heard the discreet knock on the door before it was pushed open.

“Am I interrupting?” Sydney asked as he walked in.

“I was about to call Macayla and get on her nerves.” He said with a smile. “Anything wrong?”

“Just – how is she?” The older man settled on a chair facing the desk.

“The nausea is kicking her butt, aside from that, she’s the usual pain in the neck.”

“Sounds like her mother.” He stretched his legs out and ran his palms over the pristine sharpness of his gray pants. “I want her to marry me.”

“Ah.” Brady leaned forward and pressed the intercom. “Give me ten minutes.” Depressing the button, he looked at his Dad. “The apartment deal fell through and we’re going over why.”

A frown touched his brow. “It’s been plagued by one incident after another.”

“We think it’s deliberate. There’s a suspicion that one or both of the owners are involved.”

“The father and son.”

“Precisely.” Brady waved a hand. “It’ll be dealt with. What was her response?”

“Pardon?” His father frowned at him.

“Michelle. I’m assuming you proposed again.”

“Yes.” Scooting forward, he scrubbed his hands over his face. “I made a mess of things back then, but, in hindsight, even though there was never any love lost between me and your mother-“ A whimsical smile crossed his lips. “We had you. I have you and for that, I have no regrets. I hope you realize that.”

“I do.”

“I feel guilty for leaving you to her mercy or lack thereof.” The pain was shown on his face.

“You had the company-“

“Which shouldn’t have taken precedence over my son!” Surging to his feet, he walked jerkily over to the cabinet and tapped a button. As soon as it slid forward, he selected a bottle of scotch and poured some. “No comment about how early it is.” He warned.

“I wasn’t going to say a word.”

“Good.” Sydney grunted as he brought the glass over.

“I don’t blame you. Never have.”

“I blame me.” Sitting down again, he took a sip of the drink. “I knew what she was like and I left you there.” He took another sip to wash away the taste of bitterness.

“It had to be worse for you.” Brady offered quietly, sensing the pain his father was going through. “You were married to her. I escaped when I could and never looked back.”

“And because of that, we were cheated out of our relationship as father and son.”

“Dad-“

“No.” He shook his head. “I just want to get it out in the open. I shortchanged you, Brady. I was too spineless to stand up to my father. He threatened to destroy the woman I love- “

“He would have carried out that threat.” Brady pointed out firmly. “It was for the best.”

“I lost years with her and with you.” He declared bitterly.

“I’m here now and so is Michelle. You’ve been given another chance with so much to look forward to.” Brady leaned forward. “It makes no sense wallowing in regret.”

“Yet here I am wallowing as you put it.” A smile touched his lips and his hazel eyes twinkled. “That’s pretty generous of you.”

“I can afford to be.” Brady leaned back in the chair. “I’m finally with the woman I love more than life itself and we’re on our way to becoming a family. I always knew you loved me; you showed me every time we saw each other. That was what made living at home with her bearable.” His intercom sounded.

“That’s my conference call.”

“I’ll leave you to it then. Thanks, son.”

“You’re welcome.” He watched as his father went to put down the glass and turned toward the door. “Dad?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t stop asking her.”

His smile deepened. “I’m stubborn as well.”

"Please come in. It's brutal out there." Tiffany ushered her into the foyer and took her jacket. "I was hoping you wouldn't change your mind. I know you're busy and-" She shook her head. "How are you? I'm just rambling on."

"Fine. If you set aside the fact that I threw up right after breakfast. This is very nice." Macayla murmured as they made their way along the wide passageway and into a cozy blue sitting room.

"Thank you. I made tea and some sandwiches and ordered pastries from Lucille's. It's this sumptuous bakery-"

"I know the place and you didn't have to go through all this trouble."

"Please, sit. It's no trouble at all." Tiffany had her blonde hair scooped back into a ponytail and she was wearing loose shell pink pants and a matching chunky sweater. "I'm just so happy to have company."

She poured the tea into delicate white cups with pink borders and handed one to Macayla. "I unloaded on you yesterday and I feel pretty embarrassed about it."

"You could always blame it on hormones."

"I suppose I could." The woman fiddled with the cup in her hand and blinked back tears.

"Hey."

"I'm sorry." She said with a sniff, reaching for a sandwich. "I was stupid." Putting the cup aside, she touched the slight bulge of her

belly. "I knew Ivan was married-"

"Would that be Ivan Polinski?"

"You know him. Of course, you do. Your mother is Michelle."

"We also know his wife. Sara happens to be a friend of my Mom's." Putting down her cup, Macayla gave the girl a hard stare. "This makes it very uncomfortable. Sara is a sweetheart and their kids – Nicole and Devon are friends, casual ones, but friends nonetheless. How on earth did you get caught up in all of that?"

"I suppose you want to leave."

"I'll decide on that after you tell me the whole story. You don't look like a moron who'd believe a man, especially one like Ivan, when he said

he was going to leave his wife of thirty something years and set up home with you. If you did, then, well-" She left the rest unsaid.

"It's easy for you!" Tiffany cried; the tears evident in her eyes. "I wanted to become a serious actress and was on the way to making that happen. Ivan-" She took another gulp of tea. "He was charming and sweet and, at first, I just wanted a father figure and he offered that. Then it started getting to be more."

"You had the idea that he could advance your career." Macayla couldn't help the disgust from showing. "You could have used protection."

"I never thought of that. I was caught up and it just happened." She pressed her lips together. "Now he doesn't want to have anything to do with me. It's not right and you can't agree it is."

"None of it is and that's the point. Ivan is mature and old enough to realize he should stay away from his actresses, and have respect for

his family. You should have known better than to fall for that tired line. Now a child is going to be involved. What are you planning on doing? Using the kid as a bartering chip?"

"How dare you talk to me like that? I'm the victim-"

"The kid you're carrying is the victim." Macayla reined in her temper with great difficulty. "Look, I'm not here to be judge or jury-"

"Yet you're doing just that. You have your tidy world. A best-selling author, Mom is a well-known and respected actress and now you're carrying the baby of a multi-billionaire who happens to be there for you.

You don't know what it's like to be alone or unloved because you always have people in your corner. You have a man who dotes on you. I have seen you two together and he holds your hand in public.

He isn't ashamed or afraid to let people know how he feels. I have no one!" She cried, pushing to her feet, eyes blazing and spittle flying. "I just wanted someone to understand and be there for me and I thought someone would be you. I was wrong. Get the hell out of my place."

"Tiffany-"

"Go!" She screamed. "Just go."

With one last look at the quivering woman, Macayla made her way out.

He found her curled up on the long sofa in the library, a book on her lap and a glass of wine in her hand.

"It's non-alcoholic, in case you were about to say anything. I needed something stronger after the day I had." She felt oddly reassured seeing him standing inside the doorway. His blonde hair was tangled, no doubt by the wind.

She'd wanted to call him when she left Tiffany's, but had decided against it. She wasn't going to use him as a crutch, even though it was tempting.

"Hard day?" He came into the room, angling his head to stare at the title she was reading. "'Pregnancy dos and don'ts.' Something I should know?" Lowering himself, he lifted her feet to put on his lap.

"I went to lunch."

"How was it?"

"Horrible. She's pregnant by Ivan Polinski." Her eyes tracked to his face. "You already knew?"

"I had her checked out." He started rubbing her feet. "Baby, she's unstable and has a history of hooking up with producers and directors. It's not a certainty that Ivan is the one who got her pregnant."

She nodded at that. "I felt sorry for her."

"What happened?" He asked her gently.

"She told me off. Cussed me out and accused me of judging her. I felt awful because I know the family. Sara is a friend of Mom's and I know Nicole and Devon. We went to school together.

Sara isn't the usual Hollywood wife; she's sweet and caring. Why would Ivan jeopardize everything when he has so much to lose? Was it worth it to bang someone like her?" Her gaze swung to his. "What the hell is wrong with men? Why can't they stay with one woman? Why do they have to swing their dicks everywhere?"

"I don't." His expression turned stony at her glare. "I get you're upset and projecting, but hear me loud and clear. I don't do crap like that. I'm faithful to whomever I'm seeing. It's even more so where you are concerned, because I happen to be head over heels in love with you. I don't appreciate you lumping me in with men who cheat."

They glared at each other for a spell, before she turned her head away to look at the collection of books on the shelves. "I'm sorry."

"I didn't get that. Could you speak a little louder? I want to get this on record."

He winced when she used her left foot to nudge against his crotch.
"You're being a dick."

He eased her foot away from him carefully. "Tell me what happened."

She did, telling him everything and feeling the anger and despair dissolving as she did.

"She sounds like trouble."

"You should have seen the look on her face."

He gave her a considering look. "We both know that wouldn't have happened."

"I'd have slapped the shit out of her if she laid a finger on me." Uttering a sigh, she sat up against the cushions. "That's why I'm not friends with women, too much drama."

"You're friends with Leesa and Kelly." He pointed out.

"They're different." She shook her head. "She told me some story about her Dad being a drunk and Mom distant, and how she had to take care of her little brother."

"Who's now stashed in a halfway house trying to get clean."

"Oh. So, you were right about her. What the hell was I thinking?"

"That she needed a shoulder and you offered one. There's nothing wrong with that."

"I feel like an idiot."

"You don't look like one." He grinned as she gave him a dirty look. "All I'm saying is you tried to reach out and it backfired. You need to stay away from her."

"Oh, you don't have to tell me twice. You should see the crazed expression on her face when she told me to get the hell out of her apartment." She took a breath. "She also said something while she was ranting."

"What?"

"I have it pretty good, and I'm lucky to have a guy like you."

"I could have told you that myself." He gripped her feet to stop her from shoving at his crotch. "Watch the package."

"I have a long memory."

"You benefit a lot from where you're trying to kick." He reminded her with a grin.

"Anyway-" He laughed as she rolled her eyes. "I had a lot of thinking to do after I returned. And I-" She shook her head. "I might fool around and not say the words, but I appreciate you. No, dammit. That's not the word. I - I think I'm in love with you."

His eyes darkened at that. "Think or know?"

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"Immensely. Now answer the question."

"You're such an ass."

"Still waiting here."

"I'm in love with you." She heaved out a breath. "There, I said it."

Putting away the book, he lifted her so she was sitting on his lap. His hands framed her face, his expression fiercely tender. "I adore you

and I'm here. I see no one else but you, darling. I'm not going to look at another woman, well, because I see only you."

"You're getting sappy." She whispered shakily.

"I intend to get much more so. I've loved you for what seems like my entire life and now you've come to your senses- Ouch! That hurts."

"I intended it to. Come to my senses?"

"Seen the light, got your head out of your -"

"Stop while you're ahead."

He grinned at her. "Anyway, I'm here and when you're ready to take the next step, I'll be waiting."

"I guess you're talking about marriage." She said it with a sigh that had him grimacing.

"Precisely. You don't have to make it sound like a death sentence. It can be wonderful when two people love each other. I never had that growing up and from then I decided that I wanted the exact opposite and I want it with you. I want everything with you, darling."

"Soppy and emotional." She whispered, getting there herself. "These damn hormones-"

"I figured that's why you tearing up." He said teasingly.

"Exactly." She sniffed.

"Well then, baby, what do you want to do now?"

"Bang your brains out."

He laughed at that, delighted by her. "Here?"

"Why not? We're all alone and this sofa is comfortable. Let's bang away."

"When you put it like that how can I do anything else?"

Tiffany huddled on the sofa, a full glass of Cabernet in her hands. She sat there in the dark staring at the mess she'd made of the living room. The expensive vase was smashed in the corner and the table was now a mess of broken pieces on the floor and that still wasn't enough.

She'd wanted to scratch that bitch's eyes out. How dare she sat there like she was royalty, talking to her like that! She should have poured the pot of hot tea over her fricking head. Taking a gulp of the wine, she rose to walk over to the window. No doubt she was there cozied up to that man of hers.

How could some people have all the luck and people like her get the shitty end of the stick? It wasn't fair. She'd been through so much and deserved a break. Now, she was knocked up and didn't even know who the kid belonged to.

It could be anyone. She'd been with Ivan once and she'd done the seducing, but he was the one with the money and the one who could

advance her career. She'd threatened to tell his wife and the media and he'd invited her to do her worst.

"I've already come clean with my wife." He'd told her coldly. "If you go to the press with this, your career will be ruined."

He was right. He was a big-name producer; people are going to lean more to him and be sympathetic. They'll just look at her as a two-bit whore who opened her legs to get what she wanted. But who could blame her? She thought resentfully.

She had bills to pay. Her stupid brother had gotten himself in trouble again with drugs. Now she was having to pay for his shit again. She was sick to death of carrying him. Pity he didn't take enough to put his lights out for good.

Blinking back the tears, she swallowed some more wine and wondered if it was too late to get rid of the brat growing inside her.

She'd thought of using it as a bargaining chip, but that'd blown up in her face. Now, she was going to have to come up with a different plan.

She'd wanted to make friends with the snotty bitch, but that wasn't going to work anymore. She should have realized that being Michelle's daughter, she'd be familiar or even friendly with Ivan. She'd wanted someone on her side.

Now, she had no idea what she was going to do. She couldn't have this baby, she had her career to think about.

Taking another gulp of wine, she stared moodily at the gathering dusk and crappy weather. It was raining, icy drops pinging against the window pane and mirroring her own crappy mood. Yes, she was definitely going to have to come up with something else.

Chapter 11

The weeks flew by and she was so caught up with all the activities Macayla didn't give her crazy neighbor another thought. The weather hadn't let her go for a run and being sick most of the time, she decided it was prudent to use the well-equipped gym in Brady's apartment.

Her mother loved the season and planned all sorts of activities around it. There were also the different charities. "It's this time of year we realize how good we have it." Michelle told her daughter. "We're blessed and we need to spread it around."

So, Macayla was roped into serving at several soup kitchens and handing out baskets to people who weren't so fortunate. Then there was the toy drive for kids who couldn't afford to have toys. She went overboard and, along with Brady, went to do some shopping to add to the hefty parcel that was placed at the church.

"I feel sorry for them." She told Brady that night. "You should see the ones who are in care homes. Some were moody, but the others were so grateful, they started to cry and then I started to cry. I felt like an idiot."

"You're pregnant." He pointed out with a smile.

"That's no excuse. Anyway, there was this cute little girl with big pigtails and one arm that tugged at my heart. Turned out her Mom left her on the church's step because she lost the arm due to an accident. She just took off. How could a Mom do that to her child."

"How old?"

"Six - no, seven."

"Knowing you, you want to do something for her."

"She's so sweet and has this beautiful cocoa-brown complexion. I was wondering if your company would like to sponsor her."

"Sponsor her how?"

"She could get an arm, a prosthesis. It costs- well an arm and a leg - Ha ha. But with the right doctors and therapy, she could lead a normal life. No one wants to adopt her, which is a shame, but we, as in your company, could step up and do something."

"I'll have to run it by the board."

"That's going to take a long time. I'm sure you have personal funds. I never really asked how much you're worth."

"Why would you care?"

"Well, we're living together and we have a child on the way, I have a vested interest."

"You don't really care about the money."

"Right now, I do."

"We're not talking about this."

"Because you're embarrassed?"

"Because it's neither here nor there. I'll see what I can do."

Now, she was three months pregnant and going through hell again. She thought the nausea was behind her. "I hate taking those pills." She was lethargic and her emotions were all over the place. She ended by pissing him off for no good reason, with him slamming out of the apartment to go and cool off.

So, she'd left the apartment to go and cool off herself by going to visit her mother. "I think some tea is on order." Michelle declared as soon as she came into the salon.

"While Jane is getting that together, you sit right next to your Mama and tell her what has you so hot under the collar. Darling, you're practically steaming."

"Where's Syd?"

"Gone to the club for the day." She waved a hand as she settled back against the cushions. "We were getting on each other's nerves. I have some lines to read and he was in my way." She stared at her daughter. "Those men of ours have a habit of trying to call the shots."

"I told Brady to piss off."

"Because he was in your way?"

"He was giving me some not-needed advice on how I should be dealing with the sickness. You know me, Mom, I hate taking pills and I'm mad as hell that this thing isn't yet over. I'm three months pregnant and it's like it's starting all over again."

Sighing dejectedly, she dropped down on the sofa. "For the past few days, I've been unable to write anything. My thoughts are chaotic, I can't keep anything down and I feel so sad all the time."

"Hormones."

They waited until the tray was wheeled in. "Thanks, Jane, I'll pour."

"I want to blame it on that, but the truth is, I'm feeling a little off. I told you about that crazy neighbor?"

"Tiffany something." Michelle poured the tea into the delicate cups and handed her daughter one. "These pastries are lovely and light. If your stomach is still upset after eating them, I'll have the chef make you some soup."

Settling back against the cushions, with the cup and saucer in her hands, she looked at her daughter. "I spoke to Sara after you told me."

"Mom!"

"She's my friend and I wanted to know what was going on."

"And?"

"Sara told me that Ivan confessed. He's sorry, claimed that this bitch, excuse my French, that this girl practically jumped him. Said they were alone in his office and she came in crying to him, telling him some sob story about her brother. She started bawling her eyes out and he held her to comfort her.

That's when she was all over him. Started kissing him and rubbing the front of his pants. When he started to push her away, she dropped to her knees and took his penis out." She shrugged slender shoulders. "It went to hell after that."

“She planned it.”

“I’m sure she did. Now she’s claiming Ivan knocked her up and is demanding several million to keep her mouth shut.”

"I hope Ivan said hell no."

"The smartest thing he’s ever done." She gave her daughter a contemplative look. "Have you seen her around since?"

Macayla shook her head as she chose a thin slice of what looked like a strawberry pastry. "I haven’t been out much because of the weather and the way I’ve been feeling. I’ve been trying to catch up on my writing.

I’m past my deadline. That’s another thing that’s been bugging me, and what started the argument in the first place. I told Brady I need to

go back to the cabin to be alone so that I can concentrate on the writing."

"He doesn't agree?"

"No."

"Darling, I have to agree with him. That place is so isolated. If anything happened, who would tend to you?"

"I can take care of myself." She said stubbornly.

"Can you?"

Macayla rolled her eyes. "You sound like Brady."

"I'm being realistic. You forget to eat and when you're on a roll, as you put it, you sit at your desk and fall asleep. Like it or not, you're in a relationship. It calls for compromise."

"I compromise." She argued. "I'm living with him, aren't I?"

"And loving it. He does take the best care of you. That man loves you to pieces."

"He wants to get married. I'm afraid that marriage is going to change something between us." She muttered.

Michelle threw up a hand in exasperation. "You're living with each other. That's a commitment. Why not go all the way?"

"I'm not ready." She took a sip of the tea and grimaced. "I miss coffee."

"You can have it every now and then."

"Brady won't allow it because he knows that every now and then doesn't work for me. He's determined to run the show."

"He knows you very well. Now, about this Tiffany, you should stay clear of her."

"I know. What's going to happen with Ivan and Sara?"

"Sara is sticking by him and seeking legal counsel. Apparently, this young woman has a habit of sleeping with different men in order to advance her career." A grimace of distaste shadowed Michelle's face.

"No wonder the public thinks we're a joke. As a woman trying to survive in the world of acting, we're given a lot of bad breaks. Why the hell would you try to make it worse?"

"She claimed she had it hard as a child."

"That's no excuse. So did I and I made that decision when I first started I was going to make it without opening my legs and I did." She selected a pineapple tart and popped it into her mouth. "Now, darling, you're going to call that man of yours and apologize."

"Do I have to?"

"You do."

He found her in the kitchen when he returned. He'd been so mad he'd almost decided to go on to the club and spend the night. However, he'd made her a promise they would hash things out and the fact she wasn't feeling well was something that was weighing on his mind.

"I ordered soup from Chico's." She nodded to the large container in front of her. "The weather calls for it and so does my stomach."

He had shed his jacket and gloves as well as his boots.

"It smells good."

"It does." She watched as he came further into the room and moved to the cabinet to pour a glass of scotch. "It's started snowing. So, I figured we could sit or lie in the theater room after we finished eating and watch a movie."

His expression revealed nothing as he went to sit across from her.

"Is that so?"

"I already apologized."

"So you did." He sipped the brandy and watched her over the rim of the glass.

"You know what it takes for me to do that."

"You think you're above it."

"It might be for the fact that I'm almost always right." When he did not smile at that, she almost rolled her eyes. "I'm trying here."

"I'm sure you are."

"Look, this isn't easy for me."

"Do you think it is for me?"

"You've known you were in love with me for years and that's something I'm trying to wrap my head around. On top of that, this pregnancy is kicking my ass and my writing isn't going well. You need to cut me some slack."

His eyes glittered dangerously. "I'm bending over backwards to cut you some slack. All I want is for you to feel as comfortable as possible."

You refuse to take the pills which will help with the queasiness and if I or Mrs. Bailey aren't on you like white on rice, you forget to eat. You're not a child, Macayla, and you keep saying you're an adult, try acting like one."

"Oh, go to hell!" Pushing from the counter, she rose when he grabbed her arm.

"You're going to want to let go of me."

"Or what? You'll deck me? You're going to stay right here while we have this out. You claim you want to go to the cabin to work and you know I can't come with you. I-"

"I never asked you to!"

"There's no way in hell you're going there by yourself." He shouted back. Taking a deep breath, he tried for calm and barely manage it. "I promised to be there for you-"

"Don't do me any favors."

His mouth tightened. "You're carrying my baby. Why the hell do you have to be so pigheaded? I come home from the office as early as I can to be here with you. I hate you're going through all this and I want to be here as much as I can."

"You're not the one who feels like crap every day. You're not the one puking your guts out and feeling like death. It's me."

"I'm aware of that." He told her quietly. "Do you regret the pregnancy? Is that it?"

"Right now, I do."

He let go of her so quickly she stumbled back and the bleak expression on his face spoke volumes.

"I didn't mean-"

"I think you did. I have some work to do. Make sure you eat something."

"Brady-"

"I can't talk to you right now." With that, he strode from the room.

She almost went after him, but she was going to have to allow him to calm down first. She keeps making a mess of things by saying all the wrong things. She didn't mean it. She didn't regret carrying their baby and she'd hurt him by saying it.

Going over to the counter, she dropped down on the stool with a sigh. She was taking out her frustration on him and he didn't deserve it.

She was taking him for granted. He was always looking out for her and always there for her. Tiffany might be as crazy as hell, but she'd

hit the nail on the head. She had it good. Brady was there for her, tending to her, seeing to it that she ate and took her supplements.

She should be grateful, and she wasn't. What the hell was wrong with her? She thought dejectedly. She couldn't blame everything on hormones. It was her attitude that was at fault and if she continued like this, she was going to drive him away and that was something she couldn't bear thinking of.

First, she was going to have some of the soup and then she was going to do her best to grovel. It might stick in her craw, but it had to be done.

He couldn't work. He hadn't lied to her about having some things to go over. He'd brought home the complicated contract with him. They were investing in a rundown plaza with several shops in midtown and the negotiation wasn't going as well as expected.

The previous owners had allowed the place to go to hell and there were all sorts of things wrong with it. The zoning commission had come on board and was finding out things that had been done wrong in the first place.

The board was adamant it wasn't worth the hassle, but Brady had seen the possibilities there. He had several reasons to want to go ahead with the project. Now, on top of all that, he was faced with opposition from his own home. Why the hell was she so stubborn? And what did she mean about regretting the pregnancy?

Walking over to the cabinet, he poured himself a generous amount of whiskey and stood over at the window, looking out at the bleak landscape. It was January and the weather was as bleak as hell. He heard when the door opened, but didn't turn around.

"I'm busy."

"You don't look busy."

"I was just taking a break and don't need company." He forced himself not to react when she came forward to wrap her hands around his waist.

"I was a bitch."

"No argument here."

"I was unfair. I love you."

He couldn't pretend to be unaffected by the declaration, but still remained where he was.

"I love the baby I'm carrying. Our baby. I only said it to piss you off."

"Well, you succeeded."

"I'm not used to this, Brady." His body went rigid when her hands drifted downwards to cup him.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"I need your forgiveness."

"If you think- Oh Christ!" He almost spilled the drink when she squeezed him gently. "Stop it, damn you."

"I can't." She whispered.

He had to lean against the cold window pane when she unzipped him and reached in to take out his cock. "You make me feel special, and I'm an idiot who doesn't appreciate it." She was circling the tip of him and he felt as if he was going to burst into flames. "Please forgive me."

He was going to embarrass himself. Any minute now, he was going to come all over her fingers.

"Damn you," He finally turned, his eyes darkened with passion.

"Forgive me. Say you will."

"Yes." He said through gritted teeth. Lifting her into his arms, he carried her over to the desk. His cock was throbbing painfully and even though he wanted to hold onto his anger for a few more minutes, he had to have her.

Lifting her feet, he peeled off the socks and then the leggings. A grunt escaped him when he realized she wasn't wearing panties.

"I took a shower just before you came. Fill me, darling."

Her words had a cataclysmic effect on him. With a feral growl, he shoved his denims down around his hips and cupped her bottom with one hand. The other was used to guide himself into her tightness.

For a minute, he could not move as her tightness wrapped around him like a wet glove. When she lifted her legs to wrap around him, he was destroyed.

The sex was rough and the climax so violent it had them clinging to each other, their bodies trembling.

"I hurt you." He murmured hoarsely, fingers touching the bruise on her left breast where he'd sunk his teeth into her flesh.

"I'm not going to call the cops." They'd finally made it into the bedroom and were now sprawled on the huge bed.

"Very funny." His fingers lingered on the marks and he felt the shame and frustration churning through his body. He'd behaved like an animal. "I apologize."

"Don't you dare." She told him laughingly. "I pissed you off."

"You normally do." He was no longer angry with her.

"I can't seem to help myself."

"I realize that."

Lifting her head, she propped her elbow on his chest and stared at him. "You had a girlfriend in England?"

He jolted at the sudden change of topic.

"Yes."

"Did you live with her?"

"No. Why?"

"You must have felt something for her."

"I cared about her. We shared similar tastes in several things."

"Such as?"

He raised his eyebrows but answered the question. "She liked the arts and enjoyed the theater."

Ducking her head, she drew a circle in the center of his chest.

"What?"

"It's silly."

"Tell me anyway."

"You were with her for six months."

"Close to seven. I liked her a lot."

"Who broke things off?"

"She did." He lifted her chin up. "I was restless and not in love with her. She realized it and we spoke. I told her I was in love with someone else, and agreed with her it wasn't fair. That's when I decided to come back home. "

"The sex. Was it-" She shook her head. "It doesn't matter."

"Apparently, it does." There was a touch of amusement in his tone.
"And no. Before you ask, it was just sex. I've never felt this way before and that's the honest truth."

"I've never felt this jealous before."

"I have to say I'm flattered." Lifting his head, he brushed his lips against hers. "But there's no need to be, you're the only one for me."

"You're being sappy again." She whispered as she climbed on top of him. " I love it."

Chapter 12

"Hey. Haven't seen you in here for a while."

"I'm not here to drink."

"I figured that since you're knocked up." He grinned at her. "I read the society pages too. You look good with that white dude."

"Thanks." She muttered, climbing onto the stool.

"Does he know you're slumming it here?" He was polishing the glass and staring at her.

"He's not my keeper. Get me a glass of water."

"At your service." Putting the glass aside, he turned to the fridge behind him and picked out a bottle, twisting off the cap, he poured it into a glass and handed it to her. "What brings you around?"

"I haven't seen you in a while." Macayla took a sip of the water before putting the glass down.

"That's because you've been busy painting the town red." He looked at her long slender fingers pointedly. "I don't see no ring. Don't tell me that the pretty white boy knocked you up and isn't putting a ring on it."

"He's waiting for me to make my mind up about marriage." She told him with a shrug.

"Ah." He nodded his bald shiny dome in understanding. "You're being cautious." Looking up, he gave a jerk of his head to the man wandering over. "Take a hike. I'm busy."

"I don't want to run off your customers."

"Dave is a leech, and he's been here since I opened up." Lifting his head, he gave the man a glowering look. "Go somewhere and sober up." Looking back at Macayla, Todd smiled at her.

"It's good to see you, girl, and pregnancy agrees with you. I mean you had that flawless skin going on, but now you're positively glowing. So-" Putting away the glass, he leaned forward on the counter. "What brings you to my fine establishment."

She snorted at that and looked around the smoke-filled room.

"I probably shouldn't be here."

"It was good enough for you when you were coming before." He pointed out, not in the least bit offended.

"Things are different now." She sipped some more water as she took a look around. It was here that she'd written the bar-room scene where her detective had met up with the female C.I., he'd had a relationship that had almost cost him his badge.

From the beginning, she and Todd had hit it off and he'd made sure she was left alone while she observed and jotted things down.

She'd spent several nights to get a feel of the place and the ambiance. She'd insisted on sharing the wealth when her book was published even though he'd told her that he'd enjoyed her visits. They'd become friends during that time and he'd told her his story.

"I still want us to be friends. I don't want that to change." She continued, turning back to look at him, a sincere expression on her face. She hadn't told Brady where she was heading when he left this morning, or he would have freaked. She was loyal to friends and, considering that she had very few of them, she wanted to keep the bond.

"That's going to be difficult considering who you're hooked up with." Putting away the wash cloth, he sat on the stool and gave her a contemplative look. 'You don't have to feel guilty about not coming around. I understand.

This is a seedy bar, even if it is mine, and you've always been a classy lady who doesn't belong in this environment." He looked around at the faded wallpaper and the scarred linoleum on the floor and shook his head.

"Even with the money you insisted on giving me, I don't want to get the changes done. I like it this way. My customers are assholes, but

they're loyal assholes." He grinned at her.

"I want you to meet him."

His eyes bugged out of his head. "Say again?"

"You're my friend, we tell each other stuff and before Brady, you were my best friend. I want you to meet him."

He shook his head, a loud laughter rumbling out of him. "I'm a black dude from the wrong side of town. Your man is as white as a snowflake with blonde hair and green eyes. On top of that, he's rich - filthy rich. Night and day are the term I would come up with and guess who'd be the night?"

"He isn't like that and he loves me." She insisted.

"So, let me get this straight. You want me to come to that fancy apartment and have tea."

She acknowledged. "Or we could come here."

"Here as in this dump?" He shook his head. "Girl, you're not thinking straight. I'd do anything to protect you-"

"I can damn well protect myself." She retorted.

He grinned at the memory. One night he'd been busy serving drinks when two guys approached her and started getting handsy. It was the table splintering that had his head whipping around and what he saw made his admiration of her grow. She had them on the ground in minutes.

He'd never seen moves like that and for a woman so tiny, she packed a wallop. "As I very well know. In any case, having your man coming here would be a bad idea."

"So, you'll come to us." Her lips firmed. "Come to dinner. The place isn't open on Monday, so we could do it then. I'm not taking no for an answer."

"Girl-"

"I'm not going to stop asking, Todd." She warned. "This is important to me."

He gave her a sober look. "You're really serious about this?"

"What do you think?"

"Okay, if it'll get you off my back and if your man agrees, then I'm in. I'm not dressing fancy."

"You can come in your birthday suit for all I care."

He grinned at that. "I'm not sure your man would appreciate that. We wouldn't want him getting jealous when he sees the package."

Macayla snorted. "He has no need to be. His package is impressive enough."

"And he's a white dude. Go figure." Reaching over, he kissed her full on the lips. "I'll be there."

Her next stop was at the precinct. She'd spent so much time sitting around and interviewing the various detectives that it almost felt like a second home. Having the guys hit on her had become a normal occurrence that she'd become accustomed to over the years. She'd garnered a lot of information for her series.

"Hey, Mac! What brings you here?"

"I just missed seeing your ugly mug, so I was getting sentimental."
She told the lean and attractive Detective Deon Blake with a smile.

"You're a sight for sore eyes. Pregnancy agrees with you."

She rolled her eyes in mild exasperation. "It seems the secret is out."

"Pregnancy can't remain a secret for long. What do you need?"

The bullpen was buzzing as usual and the scent of bad coffee and sweat permeated the air. "Do you have a minute?"

"For you? Hell, yes." Taking her arm, he guided her through the narrow passageway and into an interview room. "What's going on?"

"You know I'm finishing up the book."

"I heard something to that effect. Need more info?"

"No." She shook her head. "This is personal."

His light blue eyes sharpened at that. "What is it?"

"I think I'm being followed."

"Think or know?"

She shrugged restlessly. "It's just instinct. I had an encounter with an uber bitch a couple months ago and it was ugly. I haven't had any further encounters and haven't seen her up close since.

But twice now, when I go out, it feels like I'm being tailed. I went to the bar and I could swear I saw her when I was entering and then later when I was exiting the place. Also, I'm sure it was her vehicle I saw when I went to the salon a few days ago."

"Make and model?"

"BMW. Black with a collapsible top."

"License plate number?"

"Partial. Echo, Charley, David-" She spread her hands. "That's all I got."

"You could have been a cop." He told her, a look of admiration on his face.

"I pay attention to details, I'm a writer, remember?"

"How could I forget? I've read the series and watched the TV show. I think the books are better."

"They usually are."

"I was touched to see my name on the appreciation page."

"You helped a lot."

"The only thing I regret was that you hooked up with that rich dude instead of me." His eyes twinkled as he stared at her.

"Probably because you're married with two adorable boys. How are they and the wife, by the way?"

"Great. Donnie, the eldest, is now six and a pain in the ass. His younger brother is imitating everything he does. The wife is great and is now working full time as a registered nurse at Hope General."

"That's great."

He nodded. "The nurse and the cop." He shook his head. "Spells crazy hours. Now back to your thing. Are you sure you're not being paranoid?"

"Nope. You know me."

"I do."

"Tell me more about this uber bitch."

She smiled at that and described Tiffany Knowles to him in detail.

"I'll do some checks."

"Keep it quiet, though. She's an actress and I don't want this getting to the press."

"I keep forgetting that you are a big shot."

"Always was." Rising, she took his hand in hers. "It's great to see you, Deon."

"Same here and I have to say that you're even more beautiful than before."

"Why, thank you."

On the way to the office that housed Randall's Investment, she kept looking for the tail in her rear-view mirror. She hadn't said anything to Brady about her suspicions, knowing his penchant for overreacting.

He would insist on her staying in the apartment or having a driver transport her around. She wasn't going to stand for that and she was erring on the side of caution. She could be wrong, but her gut was telling her that she wasn't.

The BMW wasn't behind her, she concluded after she turned off the main road. It was almost the end of January and the bitter icy winds were a testimony to the fact that winter was far from over.

She'd never been to his office, and it struck her that he'd never invited her. She'd called to make sure he was in the building before making her way there.

The barrier was opened by the security guard who gave her a nod of recognition as he directed her to a parking area designated for the executives of the company. She felt a mixture of surprise and pleasure when her door was opened and she saw him standing there.

"Hey."

"Hey yourself." Taking her hand, he brought it to his lips. "To what do I owe this pleasure?"

"I just wanted to see you."

Tucking her hand through his arm, he led the way toward the building and the towering glass doors which opened to admit them. "You saw me this morning."

She had to stop and take in the impressive reception area with the blue and gray decor. Receptionists manned the area, busy with phones and computers.

"Very nice." She murmured.

"I agree." With a nod at the woman passing by, he led the way to a private elevator and punched the button.

"I was just-" She didn't get further than that as she found herself pushed up against the wall and her mouth crushed beneath his. He managed to end the kiss, timing it perfectly just as the doors slid smoothly open.

"I need a minute." She whispered hoarsely, one hand going to her mouth.

"I need several." He said with a grin as he took her hand in his. "I'm in pain here."

"You should've thought about that before you jumped me."

"Natural reflex. I love jumping you." He guided her toward his office where a sleek and very attractive older woman was talking on the phone. "Give me a minute, please. Ms. Bledsoe, it's a pleasure to meet you."

"This is my assistant, Constance."

"Nice to meet you in person. We spoke over the phone."

"We did." The woman turned her sharp light green eyes to Brady. "I've moved your one p.m. to two and arranged for the parties to come here."

"I have no idea what I'd do without you."

"Hopefully, you never have to find out. I sent to the kitchen for tea and sandwiches. It's on the table by the window."

"Thanks, Constance."

With a nod, the woman went back to her conversation.

"I should get myself an assistant." Macayla murmured as they went into his office. "And wow!" They stepped into his office.

It had the same teal and gray as the rest of the building, but the large room screamed elegance with a huge fireplace tucked into one corner. The desk was an old-fashioned antique gleaming in the lights coming from the floor to ceiling window that offered a stunning view of the city.

"You like it?" Taking her coat, he went to hang it on the coat tree by the window.

"I love it. It's not too much, elegant yet cozy at the same time."

"I should give you the tour. Shall we?" Taking her hand, he led her over to the sofa. "What brings you to my neck of the woods?"

"A girl can't drop in and see her man?" She watched as he poured the tea and handed her the cup.

"My girl doesn't just up and come for a visit and her man has to wonder because she's never done it before."

"Which begs the question. Why have I never been invited here?"

Settling back with his cup, he gave her an amused look. "Perhaps because you didn't seem interested in coming."

"Or it could be that you have a fine piece of ass, one of those sleek receptionists, or someone in the finance department you've been banging and don't want me to have to whoop her ass."

He almost choked on his tea as the laughter burst out of him. When he'd heard from his assistant that she'd called and was on her way to him, the pleasure had been more than he could handle.

So much so that he'd left his office to meet her in the parking lot. He'd seen the looks from the people milling around in the lobby and had felt the pride welling up inside him. "No wonder you're a writer. You do have a way with words."

"So, is it the sleek blonde receptionist or someone in accounts?"

"I have a certain type and she's sat right next to me."

"Good answer. You took off your jacket." She observed.

"I like to be comfortable when I'm working. What have you been up to?"

"This and that." Putting the cup aside, she reached for a sandwich.
"These are good."

"Macayla."

"Okay." Taking a deep breath, she looked at him. His sweater, coal-black, was stunning against his golden skin and a startling contrast.
"So, I told you about my friend Todd."

"The one at the pub."

She rolled her eyes at him. "Your British upbringing is showing."

"I did spend most of my life there. What about him?"

"I invited him to dinner on Monday."

"I see."

"He's a very good friend." She hastened to add. "And before you, he was my best friend."

"You went to the pub?"

"Yes. Look, I was very careful and I know the area."

"A phone call wouldn't have done?"

"I had other things to do while I was out, so I dropped in."

His green eyes were expressionless and she had no idea what he was thinking.

"He's a friend."

"So, you keep saying."

"He's also black."

"You think I care about that? I'm in love with a black woman."

"Yes." She shifted a little and took another sip of the tea. "I should've told you I was going to invite him over."

"You should have."

"Stop being such a hard-ass."

"Is that what I am being?" He asked.

"Brady."

"Hmm." he looked at her over his cup as he sipped the tea he really didn't want. "You feel an obligation to this guy?"

She bristled at that. "You think that's the reason I invited him over?"

"Have you considered the fact that neither of us - meaning the guy and I - will be comfortable around each other?"

"Because he's black and you're white?" She asked heatedly.

"You're being a dick." He told her coolly. "I wasn't talking about the color of our skin. We're from different backgrounds and I'm sure we have nothing in common."

"You both have dicks. We can start with that."

"I'm going to ignore that."

"I had the feeling that it was my place too, or was I wrong?"

He put the cup away and rose to go to the cabinet. "I'm going to ignore that as well."

"So, I'm free to invite whomever I choose."

"Precisely. We live together and when you, or I for that matter, choose to invite someone over for dinner, the logical thing would be to discuss it first. That's what being a couple is all about. You don't go around and invite the person and then spring it on me after."

"It was spur of the moment." She ignored the guilt churning inside her and realized he was right. She should have discussed it with him before. "I'm still getting used to the couple thing."

"We've been living together for more than four months." He brought his glass with him and sat back down.

"That's hardly a lifetime."

He looked at her coolly. "I'm still waiting for the part where you say you were wrong."

"You want an apology?"

"One would be nice, but I have learned not to expect the unexpected."

"God! I hate when you're like this. Okay, fine. Next time when I invite a friend over, I'll be sure to ask your permission-" She rolled her eyes at the ominous expression on his face. "I'll discuss it with you first. Is that better?"

"Not by a long shot. I-" They both looked up at the knock on the door.

"I hope I'm not interrupting." Sydney pushed his way in, his eyes dancing in pleasure as he took in the scene. "I was told a very special visitor is here."

"Hey, Syd." Macayla took the coward's way out and jumped to her feet, the relief at being rescued, had her moving toward the older man. Taking her into his arms, he hugged her and glanced over at his son who remained seated. "It appears I've interrupted something."

Chapter 13

"Nothing, actually." She told him brightly. "Your son and I were having one of our little disagreements."

He looked from one to the other. "Should I leave?"

"No." They both said in unison. "I have a meeting in two minutes that I should prep for." He leveled a cool look at her. "We'll discuss this later at home."

"I'm sure we will." She turned to Syd. "Let's go get that tour."

Brady watched them leave his office with a frown on his brow.

"Want to talk?"

"No." She smiled at Constance and allowed herself to be led out of the office and along the passageway. "Your son and I are like fire and fire. With no middle ground in between."

He took her toward the opposite direction with several doors, some of them partially open.

"Is he being unreasonable?"

"Huh?" Turning her head from studying the designs of the various offices, she concentrated on Sydney.

"My son. Was he being unreasonable?"

"No." She admitted with a sigh as he ushered her through a set of wide-open doors, leading to another section of the building. "The opposite. It's just I keep forgetting we're a unit and I should check in with him before making the big decisions like inviting a stranger to dinner."

"A stranger?" He led them along a reception area with the sign HR department emblazoned over the top of the counter.

Nodding to the women behind the counter, before leading her towards another set of doors, and into an inner sanctum that was more like a cozy living room with an old-fashioned fireplace, comfortable sofas, a massive baronial desk, and a stunning view of the city.

"A stranger to him. He is, or was, my best friend." She turned a tight circle around the room. "It's like a lived-in space, comfortable and cozy."

"That's what I was aiming for."

"Where's your assistant?"

"Constance takes care of Brady and I. We could go down to the lower levels if you like."

"What's there?"

"The general staff areas, such as the dining room, the kitchen, a number of conference rooms and a ballroom where we have our parties if we don't feel like having it outside."

"I'll stick to the upper level for now." She took a seat by the window and stared out at the brilliant blue of the sky. "I feel very good. For the past three months, it's been rocky." She turned her head to smile at Sydney.

"Hormones raging, frustrations building, and basically, I've been giving Brady a hard time." She folded her hands in her lap. "I love him. Every single day, I love him even more and it's scaring me. I'm dependent on him. It's gotten so bad that I can't sleep without him."

She lifted a shoulder in a shrug. "The other night I turned around and he wasn't there and I panicked. He'd just gone downstairs to get a drink of water and I panicked. It pissed me off and I lit into him. I cussed him out because of how pissed I was that he has all this power over me."

She turned to look out the window again. "I want some of that power back."

"You don't think it's the same for him?" He asked her gently. "He's been in love with you since he was a child and had to do his best to hide it. Every time we'd get together with you and your mother, he suffered because he couldn't afford for you to know. On top of that, he had a mother who didn't care about him."

The pain was mirrored over his attractive face. "He looks like her, the same bone structure, the shade of hair and the eyes. She was Irish, you know?" His mouth tightened and his expression became pensive.

"The fact our son loved her did nothing to sway her. She was cold and unapproachable. He would try." He placed his hands on the desk. "I'd see him taking his work to show her and she'd dismiss him and send him away to his nanny. I could see the disappointment on his face and it would break my heart."

He started painting, and when he did, he'd try and show her what he'd done. He gave her a painting of a family sat around the fire and she told one of the maids to get rid of it. I managed to save it, but he heard when she gave the order and it crushed him even more."

Heaving out a breath, he sat back and closed his eyes. "I guess that's why he fell so hard for you. He loves you, my dear, and loving you sustained him throughout the years. Just as loving your mother made me sane."

Macayla had to clear her throat to respond. "How could you stand living with her?"

"I threw myself into work and when your mother met your Dad and decided to marry him, I wanted to die." He laughed harshly. "I went away to the club for the weekend and got wasted.

I was married because I was forced into it, and I held out hope she'd remain single. Selfish of me, I know, but I was married in name only and it was done so I could save her career. My father was a very powerful man with powerful friends and he would've made good on his threat against us."

"Charming guy." She muttered.

"You don't know the half of it. Then when I realized Michelle had found someone who truly loved her, I couldn't bear it." He shook his head.

"We fought viciously about that and he told me I should live with it. I left her alone for the time she was with your father, because she asked me to. After he died, I was there to comfort her, but I was still married and she couldn't bear it. Life has a way of working out if you let it.

Out of the dreadful life I had with Brady's mother came something wonderful. I love my son and even though he's forgiven me, there's still the nagging worry that I left him in that house with a woman who was incapable of love."

"You did what you had to do."

"That's what I keep telling myself." He rose. "Now my dear, I'm afraid I have a meeting."

"I have to get back to my writing." She wrapped her hands around him as he hugged her. "Thanks for telling me all that."

"You're welcome."

"I need a favor."

"Anything."

"Find out if Brady is in his office. I need a minute with him."

"Of course." He smiled at her and went to his desk.

"I thought you'd left." He looked up when she in and closed the doors behind her.

"I asked your assistant to give me five minutes."

"What for?" He was standing behind his desk and watching her.

"This." Moving forward swiftly, she came and wrapped herself around him. "I love you so much and I know I keep messing up, but I can't be without you. It's scaring the crap out of me."

His green eyes darkened and his arms came around to hold her against him. He couldn't stay angry with her, not when she held his entire life in her hands. He loved her so much it made him weak and needy.

Tilting her chin up, he brushed his lips against hers softly, slowly absorbing the taste and texture of her. His hands drifted down to her curves in the dark blue wool pants in gentle caress. "That's handy because I can't live without you either."

"If you want, I can cancel dinner with Todd."

He laughed gently, one hand cupping her cheek. "How else am I going to get the dirt on you?"

"I'm an open book."

"Yeah, right." Pressing his lips against hers again, he kissed her deeply and had her clinging to him as she returned the kiss. Breaking away, he stroked his hands up and down her arms as he breathed her in and struggled for control. "I'll try and get away early so we can have dinner on the patio."

"I was thinking the same thing. I love you."

"I adore you." He kissed her again. "Go before I forget that I have work to do."

Tiffany hid behind a trailer parked a few feet away from the building and watched as she drove out. She'd tailed the bitch to the precinct and wondered if, by chance, she'd discovered she was being followed. In case she'd set a cop on her, she'd played it safe by staying several cars away from her to avoid suspicion.

She'd play it safe for now, but payback was coming pretty soon. She'd tried approaching the stuck-up bitch a few times only to be shut down. On top of that, she had lawyers on her ass that the prick Ivan had set on her.

She was being pressured into taking a DNA test and she was off the set of the movie. She'd threatened to sue, but who was she kidding? They had tons of money on their side and she was a small fish. It didn't matter that Ivan might not be the brat's daddy, but she was pissed.

He could have done the right thing and offered to pay her off. A couple million dollars wouldn't have made a dent in his fortune. He was from money and so was that washed-out stick of a wife. He should've paid

her off and been done with it. Now, she was pregnant and getting low on funds.

Someone was going to have to pay, she thought viciously as she merged into traffic.

"Move!" Pressing down on her horn, she considered slamming into the back of the ugly green utility van in front of her but that would start an investigation and she couldn't afford one right now. She had work to do.

With the anger churning in her gut and a migraine brewing, she turned off the main road and took the dirt road that led to the ramshackle building that had belonged to her family.

She was going to stay awhile to cool off and make her plans. That bitch was going to get complacent and that was the time she was going to come at her. She was going to rock her tidy little world and shake things up.

"Your Dad told me something about your horrible childhood." She picked up a piece of the Italian loaf and offered it to him. He'd made good on his promise and came home early. Mrs. Bailey had served the meal on the patio and left for the day.

Considering the nasty weather outside, it was good to be wrapped up in the warmth of home. "He still feels guilty about the part he played in what you went through."

"Which is nonsense." Picking up his glass, he sipped the wine and settled back contentedly. He loved coming home to her.

At long last, he had what he considered to be a home. The woman he loved more than life itself was sat next to him and, even if he lost his

fortune, as long as she was with him, nothing else mattered. "I already told him that."

"Telling him means nothing. He's going to think he failed you." Taking the glass from him, she turned so that she was facing him. "You tried to please her?"

"Yes, well it didn't work."

"You gave her your painting-"

"I don't want to discuss it." His tone was brittle and a little cold, making his accent even more noticeable.

"I'd like to think you can tell me anything."

His expression softened as he stared at her. "I can. It's just that it hurts here." He slapped a hand over where his heart was beating. "It still does after all these years."

"She was your mother, so naturally it does."

"She was the woman who gave birth to me. There's a difference." He smiled at her. "Loving you has done a hell of a lot for me."

"I still can't believe you didn't tell me." Stretching out her legs, she put them over his lap. Immediately, he started to rub her thighs.

"And risk yet another rejection?" He asked her lightly. "My poor heart wouldn't have been able to stand it."

Tilting her head, she studied his handsome face. "You were pretty gawky back then."

"And you were skinny as a rail with bones sticking out."

"I was still growing." She reminded him.

"So was I."

"You had this annoying habit of explaining everything."

"What do you mean?"

"What makes the sky blue? Why was the earth so round? You'd give out a lot of scientific explanation that was not relevant at the time."

"I had a lot of knowledge and wanted to impart some of it."

"You were a geek, and it showed."

"I was and still am a very intelligent person."

"And superior with it too."

"Of course." He grinned at her. "You were a royal pain in the ass who insisted on trying to show off. You could climb the highest tree or run the fastest or hit the ball the farthest when we were playing baseball."

"I could, and still can, kick your ass in just about everything."

"Want to place a wager?"

"I'm pregnant."

He stared at her for a full second before bursting out with genuine laughter. "That's your excuse? You're pregnant?"

"It's not an excuse." She sniffed. " I'm pregnant and my activities have to be somewhat limited."

"If I'd said anything like that, my ass would have been on fire."

"You're learning." Her eyes twinkled merrily. "Anyway, back then we were both going through our issues."

"What was yours?"

Her eyes narrowed at him. "Are you implying that I had none?"

His eyebrows lifted as he reached for his glass and took a sip of the wine. "I plead the fifth."

"Taking the coward's way out."

"Oh, absolutely. "He told her with a grin.

"I loved my Daddy a lot. I'm not ashamed to say that I was a Daddy's girl. He coddled me and was someone I could always talk to.

Mom had to travel a lot and we were basically on our own, along with the household staff anyway. There was always this air of sadness around him and, when I asked him about it, he'd laugh it off and say I'm imagining things.

Don't get me wrong. Mom loved him in her own way, but he knew he wasn't the great love of her life and it had to be painful to realize that the woman you love was completely in love with another man." She shook her head. "To her credit, when she was home, she showered both of us with attention and that made him happy."

"And you wanted him to be happy."

"Yes. Like I said, he was the best father in the world. I wanted him not to have that sadness that I could sense, even though he denied it."

"You're a writer and even back then, you could pick up on things like that." He finished the wine and put down the glass so he could continue to massage her thighs. "It was the complete opposite for me." He mused.

"I always knew my parents weren't on the same page. Apart from a few sporadic topics, they would eat in silence. I often wondered if that happened at all dinner tables, but I soon found out it wasn't.

People talked around the table. It wasn't a cold and unfriendly place where the only sounds you hear were that of the cutlery knocking against the plates. Even that wasn't allowed. Elbows weren't allowed at all and proper eating etiquette was enforced. It felt like I was in boot camp."

Sliding forward, she ended up on his lap, her arms wrapping around his neck. She ached for him, for the little boy who'd endured all of that and still managed to fall in love with her. It made her humble and

made her want to fill him up with love, the very emotion he'd been denied of when he was a little boy.

"I love you." She told him softly, fingers toying with the fringes of his untidy hair. "I never saw you before because I was too caught up in my crap. It was all about me at that age and frankly I wasn't interested in boys that way. I wasted all that time." She whispered against his mouth. "When we could have been together-"

"Shh. No regrets." His lips brushed hers slowly, inhaling her sweetness that enveloped him completely. It was always her, would always be her for the rest of his life. "We're here now. You're with me."

His hand drifted to her stomach which was just beginning to show. "We're a unit, and very soon, we're going to be a family. The only thing left is to put a ring on your finger to make it legal."

"I've decided we should get married before our baby is born." She felt when he jerked at that and smiled against his mouth. "I managed to

shock you."

"Yes, You did." he admitted. "When did you decide?"

"A week or two ago. I want to marry you Brady, want to belong to you completely."

"Darling." He drew in a shattered breath. "Just say when."

"As soon as possible."

Chapter 14

He made sure to purchase the ring as quickly as he could in case she changed her mind. She'd agreed to marry him and that was having such a effect on him, he was having a hard time trying not to rush things.

"We'll hire a wedding planner."

"I don't want a circus. Just your Dad, my Mom and I have to invite Todd. I'm sure you're going to want to invite friends."

"Your mother is going to have something to say about that." He reminded her. "You're her only child and she loves a party. This is going to mean a hell of a lot to her."

“She’s going to try and guilt me into agreeing to the several hundred people she’s going to need to invite. We could elope.” She added hopefully.

“Your Mom scares me and my Dad would never forgive me.”

She hissed out a breath. “We have to put our foot down. It’s our wedding.”

“We will. You don’t have to do anything.”

“I want to have a say in some of it. Do you need like a best man or anything like that?”

“No. I just need you.”

“That’s sweet. This ring is perfect.” He’d given her a simple, yet exquisite, ruby and pearl ring that she really loved. “You know me.”

“As a matter of fact, I do.”

They’d celebrated their official engagement by making love by the fire in the living room. The excitement had started. They were throwing an official engagement party which Michelle insisted on arranging the entire thing. An announcement was sent to the papers and now they had invitations piling up.

“You need to get yourself an assistant.” He advised her.

“I don’t want people in my space, but I might have to think about it.”

“You’re nervous.” He watched in amusement as she circled the table again and rearranged the cutlery. She’d instructed Mrs. Bailey to set the table in the kitchen instead of the dining room.

“I want him to be comfortable and not overwhelmed. This place is already overwhelming as it is.” She bit her lip and stopped herself from rearranging the place settings again. “You were right.”

“About what?” Moving forward, he captured her hands and pulled her away from the table.

“I shouldn’t have invited him. What the hell was I thinking?”

“You wanted to reach out to a friend.” He captured her face between his palms. “Stop worrying. The guy is going to adjust.”

“His name is Todd.”

“I intend to call him by his name- what’s his surname?”

She furrowed her brow as she thought about it. “Oh, Lord, I’ve known him for years and I don’t know his last name. What kind of friend am I?”

“Stop.” His authoritative tone had her staring at him. “You’re making yourself crazy over nothing.”

“I want to pee.”

“What?”

“The baby is pressing down on my bladder. Now I want to pee and he’s due here-“ They both went still as the bell sounded.

“I’m sorry.”

“Macayla- “

“I have to pee really bad.” With a regretful smile, she dashed out of the room, leaving him with the unwelcome task of greeting a perfect stranger. Love makes one do silly things and put up with a lot.

Brushing his hand over his hair, he strode towards the door. Checking the security mirror to make certain, he punched in the code and pulled the door open. Brady was six foot three, but the guy topped him by at least a foot and his head was completely bald.

“Ah, please come in.” Stepping back, he allowed him to step inside.

Shrugging out of his jacket, Todd looked around as if searching for where to put it.

“I'll take that. I'm Brady Randall by the way.”

“I know who you are. Todd Williams. At your service.” He held out a hand that was as large as a dinner plate. Brady jolted slightly at the firm grip. “You make my girl really happy. For a white guy, you seem to be alright.”

“I was under the impression she was my girl.” Brady said dryly, feeling the relief when he heard the woman under discussion behind them.

“Todd! Everything good?” She looked from one to the other anxiously.

“Perfect.”

“Black beauty.” Brushing past Brady, he hefted her into his arms and spun her around before putting her back down. “This place is over the top.”

“It is. Shall we?” Looking over her shoulder, she gazed at Brady searchingly.

“Just let me hang the jacket up and I’ll be right there.”

He waited until they’d disappeared from sight before he did that and had to stop himself from searching the pockets for drugs. Hissing out a breath, he stepped back from the coat tree, he strode into the kitchen to see Todd with a glass of wine in his hand.

“I was telling Mac here you two should come and pay a visit to the bar.”

“I was telling him that you’re not much for seedy little bars.”

“It might be fun.” Walking over, he placed a possessive arm around her waist and kissed her full on the lips. “Anything I can do to help?”

“I just have to get the chicken out the warmer. Pour yourself a glass and I’ll have some water.”

“I’ll get it. Sit.” Brady took her hand and led her over to the chair that he pulled out for her. Patting her shoulders, he went to get the meal out of the microwave.

“This place,” Todd settled in the plush chair and looked around the elegant blue and white kitchen. “I have to tell you that I had second thoughts about coming. I almost called and cancelled.”

“I was feeling the same way.” Brady told him bluntly as he placed the bowl of chicken in the center of the snowy white tablecloth.

“Brady!”

“It’s okay, Mac. I like a man who speaks his mind.” Todd could feel the saliva pooling inside his mouth as he stared at the creamy chicken and bed of rice sprinkled with colorful vegetables on top. “You were thinking I don’t belong here.”

“I was thinking you and I have nothing in common.” He passed the bowl to Todd. “I agreed to this dinner because I can’t seem to say no to the woman I love and she told you were there for her.”

Todd shoveled out chicken and rice carefully, the delicious aroma tantalizing his taste bud. The place was over the top but it had a homey feel to it that was putting him at ease, and the guy clearly was over the moon about Mac. That was okay with him. “Who can say no to her?” He beamed over at Macayla who was watching them cautiously.

“I’m right here.”

“We know you are.” Picking up his wineglass, Brady studied her over the rim.

“That’s quite a rock you are wearing.” Todd realized that he was enjoying the visit.

“Thanks.”

“Did she tell you about the night she laid into two guys who refused to take no for an answer?”

“Not at all.” A smile played around Brady’s lip as he turned his head to look at her. “Something I’d be interested in hearing.”

Todd launched into it and before long, both men were laughing, dispelling the tension around the table.

After the dessert of raspberry crumble was served along with coffee for the men and tea for her, Brady suggested they retired to the game room.

“There’s actually a game room?” He asked, eyes wide.

“It’s pretty impressive too. Go, I will clear the table.”

“Feeling domesticated, darling?” Brady teased, leaning in for a kiss.

“Don’t get used to it.”

“I know better than that.”

“When you said game room, I thought a pool table and perhaps a dart board. This is something else.” Todd took in the large room complete with a pool table, dart board, a bar, a card table and a big television facing some comfortable sofas.

The drapes, a pair of teal blue fabric was swept back from the floor to ceiling. The view was spectacular and even though the weather was nasty, the recent snow had dumped a brilliant and dazzling white over everything.

“Drink?”

“Oh, yes.” Todd ambled over to the bar and made himself comfortable on a well-padded stool. “I’m surprised you’re not in here every day.”

Brady poured the scotch and handed him a glass. “With work and the woman I love, this room gets neglected.”

“I suppose you have a point.” He took a sip of the scotch and almost wept in pleasure.

“This has to be the real deal right here. It’s like liquid gold.”

“I’m glad you like it,” Brady came around to take a seat on one of the stools. “Macayla loves brandy but she can’t drink because of the pregnancy. I stand in solidarity with her and drink what she can.”

Todd eyed him quizzically as he took some more careful sips. "I can tell when a man is really in love."

"Have been for years."

The other man nodded. "When she issued the invite, I was floored. When she came walking into my little bar all those years ago, I thought to myself she must be lost. She just walked in like she owned the place. All confident and hands down the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in real life.

She just stepped in and came over to the bar and told me what she was about." He shook his head and took another couple of sips. "I tried to discourage her at first, but she was so determined she wouldn't take no for an answer. That gal you have the great fortune to fall in love with, has spunk."

“I know that.”

“You like him.”

“He’s okay.” They were alone now. Brady had gave him two bottles of the scotch and the man had been effusive in his gratitude. “He is a little in love with you.”

“Get out.”

“Can you blame him?”

“You think he is and he walked out of here on his own strength?”

He grinned at that. “He’s also incredibly loyal to you. That puts him in my good books.”

“Those bottles of scotch costs a small fortune.”

“He’s your friend and like I said he sort of grows on you. He topped my record on the dart board.”

“Are you going to have a rematch?”

“Oh, absolutely.” He finished and capped the bottle. “Feel better about inviting him?”

“Yep.” Tugging at him, she shifted so that he was lying next to her. “You’re more than okay for a pretty white guy.”

“Why, thank you.” He shifted further until he was on top of her. “All through dinner and dessert, I wanted to taste you. I could barely control myself.” He touched his lips to her. “You had raspberry sauce on your lips that I wanted to lick off.”

Her heartbeat quickened. Lifting her hands, she wrapped them around his neck. “We’re all alone now.”

“So, we are, and I intend to do something about it.”

“I feel we accomplished something.” Michelle rose and gave Ben a smile as he rushed over with their coats. “Thanks, darling, for the private room. I know it was short notice but we had some things to cover and had to stay away from the press.”

“You ladies are two of my favorites.” The suave-looking manager of the swank and popular eatery on Broadway Street beamed at them. “Anything for you. I hope you don’t mind my saying, Ms. Macayla; you’re looking even more beautiful than ever.”

“Something a woman never gets tired of hearing.” She squeezed his arm as she took the coat.

“Come on, darling, it’s starting to sleet.” They made their way out of the restaurant and straight into the messy weather.

“I had someone drove me here. Perhaps you should call Brady and have him send a driver.” Michelle stared at the icy roadway and the pile up of traffic.

“I’m going straight home and I’m not in a hurry.” Leaning forward, she kissed her mother on the cheek. “I’ll be fine.”

“Ah, here’s my ride. Be sure to call me as soon as you get home.”

“I will.” With a wave, she accepted the key fob the valet brought over.

“I turned the heat on high, Ms. Macayla.” He told her with a smile.

Sliding into the vehicle, she placed a call to Brady.

“I’m on my way home and the weather is pretty nasty.”

“I should send a driver for you.”

“I’m already in my vehicle and you worry too much.”

“It’s kind of my job. How long do you suppose it’ll take you to get home.”

“According to my GPS, it says twenty minutes. I’m hanging up now, I

need to concentrate.”

“Call as soon as you get home.”

“I will. See you later.” Hanging up, she waited for a break in the traffic before pulling out. She was concentrating so hard on getting home she failed to notice the BMW pulling in after her.

Deon had called to let her know there had been no sighting of the vehicle she'd told him about and as she hadn't felt the nagging sensation of being followed, she'd put it aside.

Snuggling into the warmth of the leather, she put on some classical music to keep her and her baby company as she made her way through the traffic.

“Finally!” Macayla hit the gas as soon as the traffic had eased up and putting on her left turn signal, made her way onto the private road that would take her to the Business district.

“A long hot bath and some tea is in order and then a couple of hours of writing until Daddy gets home.” Taking one hand off the steering, she patted the bulge of her belly.

She was five months gone and partially planning a wedding. She’d disagreed with the Valentine’s Day date. “April is more like it. The weather will be nicer and getting married on Valentine’s Day is pretty corny. Besides, it’s going to take a few weeks to get everything together.”

Her mother, bless her heart, was even more excited than she was.

“Darling, I’ve been dreaming of this day since you turned eighteen and you’re gifting me with a grandchild and a son. I’m blessed.”

“Most women with your status would be horrified at the prospect of becoming a grandmother.”

“Those women are fools. I’m looking forward to it.”

Macayla was looking forward to it as well. The nearer the date approached the more anxious and excited she became.

“Finally. Home is in sight. We’re-“ Those were the last words she said before she felt something slam into her side of the vehicle so hard it sent it against the iron fence. For a minute, she was so shocked she didn’t feel the pain along her side.

Clawing at the air bag that had been deployed, she tried to fight the nausea and dizziness assailing her. She couldn't lose consciousness, she thought hazily, grabbing for the handle. The second hit came again and this time it sent her hurtling over to the passenger side and crumpled into an unconscious heap.

She was hurt really bad, but she had to finish the job. She felt as if something was tearing inside her chest, but she had to make sure the bitch was finished off.

Gunning the engine, she rammed the vehicle again, feeling the pain blossoming inside her chest. A maniacal laugh escaped her. She was about to shift the lever into reverse to ram the vehicle again when she heard shouts coming from the security gate.

"Hey! What the hell are you doing?"

Letting out a frustrated cry, she slid into reverse and sped away as fast as her mangled vehicle could take her.

"Holy Christ! It's the boss's lady. It's Ms. Macayla. Bob call nine-one-one. Ms. Macayla? Can you hear me? The door is stuck. I can't open it" He frantically called out to the unconscious woman again as he tried the door. "Jesus Almighty, she's bleeding. I have to call the boss."

"The ambulance and police are on their way." Stan rushed forward to try and help him pry the door open. "It's no use. It's stuck."

Brady was in a board meeting when the call came in and without a moment's hesitation, he rushed out of the room. "Macayla was in an accident." He told his father who'd rushed out with him.

"Let me accompany you-"

"No. Call Michelle. I'll let you know. Stan, one of the guards mentioned a woman fleeing from the scene." He struggled into his coat, his entire body trembling.

"You're saying this wasn't an accident?"

"Not according to the guard. I have to go." He looked up as Constance came into the room. "Clear my schedule for the rest of the day."

"And yours as well, Mr. Sydney." She said with an efficient nod.

"Please call us when you can to let us know how she is."

The words 'head trauma and internal bleeding' made him weak with dread. He'd diverted to the hospital when he got the call that the ambulance was headed there. He'd arrived in time to see them rushing her into surgery.

The glimpse he'd caught of her- forehead covered in blood, lying limp and helpless, had stopped his heart for a few seconds before he demanded to see the doctor in charge.

"What now?" He asked dully, unable to believe this was really happening. All the time he was on his way, he'd been hoping that someone was playing a cruel trick on him. That the woman he loved wasn't lying in a hospital bed, broken and possibly dying. He couldn't even think about that.

"We're doing emergency surgery on her to find the source of the bleeding."

"And her head?"

"Like I said, we're doing all we can."

"The baby?"

"The heartbeat is strong. It's the mother we're worried about. I have to get back to her."

"I need updates."

"As soon as we have it. We have the best trauma team around and we're going to do our best to save her life." With a nod, Dr. Ian Drummond left the room. He hadn't gone two minutes before his father and Michelle came running into the room.

"My baby, what the hell is going on?" She demanded. He told them what the doctor said, repeating the prognosis woodenly. His mind felt detached from his body as if he were floating somewhere above the ceiling and looking down on what was happening.

"Son?"

Shaking his head, he concentrated on the two people in the room.

"Yes?"

"Sit."

"I can't. I need to know what's happening." They turned towards the door as it was pushed open.

"I'm Detective Deon Williams and this is my partner. I'm sorry to intrude-"

"What is it?"

"I'm a friend of Mac- Macayla and she came to me a month ago, with the suspicion she was being followed."

All three people stared at him as if he was talking gibberish.

"I'm sorry, what?" Michelle asked the question that was going through their minds, golden-brown eyes spitting fire.

"She didn't tell you?"

"No." Lowering himself slowly into the chair behind him, Brady gripped the arms and bored holes into the unfortunate detective.

Chapter 15

Deon took a seat and gestured for his partner to do the same.

"She came to me a month ago, saying she suspected someone was tailing her. She had a partial plate-" He smiled slightly at that. "She would've made a damn good cop, her attention to detail is astounding. Anyway-" He shook his head. "She said she had an encounter with some woman in the apartment complex-"

"Tiffany Knowles." Brady supplied numbly.

"That's the name. She didn't want to get the woman in trouble because she was pregnant and she, Mac – I'm sorry, but that's what I'm used to calling her."

"It doesn't matter." Michelle waved that away impatiently. "You're saying this woman is responsible for putting my daughter in the hospital?"

"I'm afraid so. We found the BMW she was driving a few miles away from the scene. The engine was busted and couldn't go any further."

"And the woman?" Sydney demanded.

"In ICU. She's in bad shape and not supposed to make it through the night."

"We certainly won't shed any tears." Michelle rose to walk over to the window. "We had lunch this afternoon with the wedding planner to discuss the plans for the wedding." She spoke as if to herself.

"The weather was nasty and I remembered suggesting that she called you, Brady-" She turned from her contemplation of the outside to look at the man who looked as if he was at breaking point. "I suggested she called and asked you to send a driver."

"I told her the same thing when she called." He was speaking, but it sounded as if someone else was. "She was talking about the weather and the pile up of traffic and I suggested sending a driver. She said no." He looked at the two men with a dazed expression on his face. "She made a complaint. Did you follow up on it?"

"Mac is a friend, so naturally, I'm going to look into the situation, even if I had to do it on my own time. We got the plate and everything and did due diligence for a couple of weeks, but she didn't make a move and Mac called and said it was fine.

She believed she was being paranoid. She even laughed it off and blamed it on hormones." He spread his hands helplessly, a worried expression on his attractive face. "Apparently the suspect waited until she dropped her guard to pounce."

"I need some air." Lunging to his feet, Brady strode out of the room and slammed the door shut behind him.

"I should go-"

"No." Michelle shook her head at Sydney. "He needs to be alone." She looked back at Deon. "What now?"

"We wait to see if the woman makes it." He lunged to his feet, the agitation clouding his features. "I should have followed up."

"You said yourself Macayla dismissed the entire thing." Sylvan pointed out.

"She did." Shoving his hands into the pockets of his khakis, he turned to face them. "Mac's instinct is always excellent. Like I said before, she could have been a cop. It's the reason her books are so good. That's why we shouldn't have ignored the warnings." Rubbing his hands over his face, he went to sit back down.

The other detective said solemnly. "I'm Detective Pete Saunders."

"Sorry. I was so out of it I didn't make the introduction."

"As is expected." Michelle smiled at Deon slightly.

"Do you know long it's going to be before we hear anything?"

"Probably a few hours. We are in for a long night."

He found himself taking a turn as he was about to venture outside. Stopping at the nurse's station he asked for the doctors working on Tiffany Knowles.

"Let me get that for you, Mr. Randall." Doing something to her keyboard, she gave him the name of the doctor in charge of the operation. "Ah, here he is now. Dr. Brownley, Mr. Randall needs to speak to you."

"Mr. Randall," The man's face was creased, a frown on his brow, light green eyes weary. "How may I help you?"

"How is she?" Brady asked him abruptly.

The man jerked his head toward an empty room that at a quick glance appeared to be a supply closet. "I'm not at liberty to discuss her condition with you, but I can tell you they're still working on her." He gave Brady a sympathetic look. "I know you're worried- "

"That doesn't even begin to cover it. John, That woman deliberately crashed into Macayla's vehicle, no doubt with the intention of killing her and my baby. I'm trying to hold it together, but I'm falling apart."

"I can tell you that Ian is the best trauma surgeon I know. And her OBGYN has been called in, to- "

"You can say it."

“The embryo is too young to try and deliver at this point. Just know we’re all working feverishly to ensure that your fiancée and the baby survive.”

“How long do I have to wait to hear some news?”

“The operation is going to take a while and then there’s the waiting period.” Placing his hand on the younger man’s shoulder, he gave it a reassuring squeeze. “Pray, along with the science, we need all the help we can get.”

She was a character in her own book, and was being pursued by the villain.

“Wait! Don’t I know you?” She stopped in time to ask the question which, in hindsight, was a careless and foolish move. She was at the cabin and the place was familiar to her. She was counting on that to survive.

“I needed a friend and you blew me off. You thought you were better than me, didn’t you, bitch?” The face was partially covered with blood, the hair matted with it. “Just because you have money and a man who fawns all over you.

You’re probably using him. That’s what bitches like you do. You use people. I went to the effort of preparing tea and refreshment and you just sat there behaving as if you were high and mighty. You crushed me!”

Macayla jumped back as the crazed woman bore down on her, wielding a sword.

“Sword? Really. Do you even know how to use it?”

“Bitch, I’ve been taking lessons and before I’m done, you and that brat you’re carrying, will be history. That man of yours will be burying both of you.”

“Think again.” She found a thick branch that had fallen off a nearby tree. “I’m fighting for myself and our baby. Brady and I belong together and I just discovered the love of a lifetime. I’m not giving up on it”

“Bitch!” The unearthly scream was followed by a vicious poke that was aimed straight at her heart.

“She’s crashing! And her blood pressure is dropping.”

“Give me some space.” Ian ordered. “You’re not dying on us, dammit.”

The three people inside the room turned simultaneously as Ian came into the room.

Brady felt his insides tightening at the look of weariness on the man’s craggy face. They’d been waiting for the past five hours and it seemed like a lifetime. Rising to his feet, he faced the doctor, a hopeless look on his face, the desperation obvious.

“She’s a fighter.” He told them with a faint smile. “We thought we lost her for a minute there, but she managed to bounce back.”

Brady felt as if the wind had been knocked out of his body. Moving over to the chair, he lowered himself unable to support his trembling knees. “She’s okay?”

“We’re going to have to wait for the next twenty-four hours to monitor her, but I can safely say she’s going to make it.”

“The baby?” Michelle asked in a hushed tone.

“Heartbeat is strong and everything seems to be okay.”

“Thank you Ian.” Sydney rose and came forward to take his hand.

“Thank you so much.”

“I was just doing my job.” He looked at his friend. “You need to go home,” He glanced at Michelle. “The same goes for you.” He angled his head to look at Brady. “I’m not going to waste my breath suggesting you go home- “

“I’m not leaving.”

He nodded. “Both of you go home and get some sleep. Brady will ring you when she regains consciousness.”

“When will that be?” Michelle leaned against Sydney wearily.

“Hard to tell. Go on home.”

“Oh, God. Syd.” She made it all the way home before collapsing in his arms.

“Here, baby,” He’d followed her home and guided her up the stairs and into the bedroom. “Why don’t we sit here.” He led the way to the comfortable loveseat by the window.

“Let it all out, darling.” Pulling her into his arms, he stroked her back as she wept on his shoulder. He rubbed her back slowly, feeling the love he had for her that had sustained him over the years, overflowing.

“Sweetheart.” Gripping her slender and suddenly frail shoulders, he moved her a little so he could look at her. Bending, he kissed her wet cheeks gently, before using his thumb to wipe the tears. “What can I do?”

“We could have lost her. I could have lost both my babies.” With a deliberate show of strength, she fought the tears. “She’ll be all right, won’t she? Both of them will be. That’s what we were told.”

“Yes.” Tilting her chin, he kissed her softly and would have ended it, but she deepened it by wrapping her hands around his neck.

“My sweet.” He whispered hoarsely when she stopped and dropped her head on his shoulder, snuggling against the warmth of his neck.

“My darling.” She wanted to wrap herself around him, in him. The only man she’d ever loved. Loving him had been a source of bittersweet twists and turns for her, but she’d never stopped loving him. Lifting her head, she stared at him with tears drenched eyes. “I love you.” She whispered.

“I know. My only love. You are the one. The only.” His hands cupped her cheeks gently.

“Always.”

“I want us to get married.”

“Darling- “

“No.” She shook her head. “Just let me get it out. I told you I didn’t want to make that kind of commitment again and I was wrong. I cared about Mark, perhaps even loved him in my own way, but you’re my one true love and I want to spend the rest of whatever years we have left together.

This illness, I don’t know what is going to happen. I have good days and bad, but I want to share them with the man I’ve been in love with for all these years. As soon as we get those two young people

hitched, we're going to the court house to pledge our lives to each other."

"My sweet." Sydney felt the thickness in his throat. "My love."

"Is that a yes?" She asked him shakily.

"Undoubtedly." He cupped her face. "You're not just saying it because of what- "

"Sydney James Randall, are you doubting my mental state?"

"Never."

“Good.” She leaned into him. “I don’t want to waste another minute. Make love to me, Syd.” She whispered.

His heart jolted and his body shuddered. “As you wish. Darling.”

He sat at her bedside, holding her hand, and tried to ignore the fact her face was bruised and there was a swathe of bandages around her forehead. Her shoulders, chest and ribs were also bruised. Her lush bottom lip had split in the middle and she looked so still he had to check the monitors to see if she was still breathing.

There were cuts and abrasions on her knuckles where the glass had shattered. He’d seen pictures of the vehicle and, each time he looked at them, he shuddered. She was supposed to be dead and, even now, it was touch and go.

He was going to have to wait until she wakes up to see if everything was going to be okay. He'd been shown the baby on the monitor and the heartbeat was strong.

“Oh, baby.” He whispered, stroking the bruises on her knuckles. “I’m scared. I can’t bear the thought of even stepping out of the room in case-“ He sucked in a breath and blinked the tears from his eyes. “Oh, darling,” Dropping his head, he allowed the tears to come. “Please don’t leave me.”

The pain was dull and throbbing, instead of sharp and breathtaking and something was heavy on her hand. Or someone. Turning her head, she blinked away the haze of the medication to realize it was Brady.

“Hey.” She tried to croak and realized that her throat was as dry as dust. Swallowing, she tried again, nudging at him. His head flew up, the green eyes focusing on her face.

“Jesus! Jesus! Macayla, oh, darling. You’re awake.” Grabbing her hand, he dropped it immediately when she winced. “I’m sorry. Darling. I need to get the doctor.”

“Not yet. Sit.” She patted the edge of the bed. “You look like hell.”

He laughed shakily as he took his seat at her hip. “Personal grooming has been the last thing on my mind. You looked pretty banged up yourself.”

“I was in a car crash.”

“Please don’t remind me.” His eyes darkened.

“I’m sorry.”

“Time for apologies later. I need to find the doctor and call my Dad and your Mom.”

“It was Tiffany Knowles.” She whispered. “I need water.”

“Of course.” Springing off the bed, he went to pour water into a plastic cup. Bringing it over, he lifted her head carefully so that she could take sips.

“Our baby?”

“Doing a lot better than you are.” Bending, he kissed her forehead and stayed that way for a few seconds. “I thought I’d lost you. Oh God, darling, I died, I wanted to die- No.” Taking a deep breath, he straightened, the sheen of tears in his eyes. “Let me get Ian.” Before she could stop him, he slid off the bed and press the call button.

“We encouraged him to go home and take a shower and get some sleep.” Michelle told her brightly, trying not to overreact at the number of bruises on her daughter’s face. She was propped up on the pillows and looking much better than she had when she was brought in. She was taking comfort from that.

“He looked wrecked.”

“That man’s life revolves around you.” She contemplated giving her daughter the news, but just as she was planning on doing so, there was a knock on the door.

“The doc said it was okay for me to come in.”

“Deon. Hey. Mom, this is- “

“We met.” Michelle rose. “Detective, is this an official visit?”

“I wanted to see for myself that you were okay. And yes, I’m also here in an official capacity.”

“Should I stay?”

“Yes, please.” Pulling up a chair, Deon took her hand briefly and pressed it. “I’m happy you’re doing better.”

“So’s my baby.” She gazed at her friend. “Where is she?”

“You’re talking about Tiffany Knowles?”

“I recognized the car and, of course, I saw her clearly when she rammmed into me. Is she in custody?”

He stole a glance at Michelle.

“What is it?”

“I didn’t tell her.”

“Tell me what?”

“She’s dead.”

Macayla jolted in shock. “How? When?”

“She wasn’t wearing a seatbelt when she rammed your vehicle and the impact practically crushed her chest. We found her a few miles up from the crime scene. She was dead and had been for a few minutes after she slammed into you.”

“Oh, good God.” She whispered. “Her baby?”

He shook his head.

She took in several deep breaths. “What the hell was she thinking?”

“She wasn’t.”

“Two lives.”

“Almost four.” Her mother said grimly.

“Do I need to give a statement?” She was still in shock and underneath could feel the underlying sense of helpless anger. The woman had been so bent on destroying her that she’d destroyed two lives, including an innocent, unborn baby. If only she’d listened to Brady!

“It can wait.” He patted her hand gently. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“I need Brady. Mom, could you call him please?”

“Of course, darling.”

They were alone in her room and it was then she allowed herself to let go, and the tears flowed freely. She clung to him tightly, her face pressed into his chest. Right here was her comfort space, her place of light and hope. She was so happy she had him she could hardly contain herself.

“Baby, you’re going to make yourself sick.” The concern was thick in his voice. He’d barely gotten two hours of sleep, but the minute the phone vibrated, he was up and running. When Michelle told him she was asking for him, he hadn’t hesitated.

“I’m sorry.” She whispered.

Lifting her head, he wiped at the tears gently. “Forgiven.” He kissed her wet cheeks gently. “I want to take the sadness away.”

“It’s going.” She touched the fringe of his hair. “She’s dead.”

“If she’d made it, I would’ve been tempted to wrap my hands around her throat.” He told her, with a glint of steel in his eyes. “She hurt what’s most precious to me. You’re here, you both are, and for that, I’m willing to forgive anyone.” He brushed his lips against hers again. “How are you feeling?”

“Sore.” She smiled at him. “But I’m feeling much better now that you’re here. I love you so much. I have to tell you about the dream I had.”

“Dream?”

She nodded and told him the details. “She was coming at me with a sword and I just knew I had to fight for my life,” Taking his hand, she

placed it on her stomach. “My baby’s life.

Our baby’s life. I told her I waited all my life for you and there was no way she was going to take it away.” Her fingers twined with his. “I want us to get married as soon as I get out of here.”

His eyes darkened. “What do you mean?”

“To hell with the big wedding. I want to marry you now.”

Chapter 16

"I've been thoroughly checked out by the doctors including my OB. I'm good to go. I need to do this, Mom and we're determined to. I almost died and when that happens, it brings things into perspective."

"I know what you mean." Michelle reached for Sydney's hand. "We have our own announcement to make. Syd and I are getting married. I've decided to put this wonderful man out of his misery." Her smile was broad, golden-brown eyes twinkling. "But we're going to wait until you two have gone through your own ceremony."

"Oh, Mom! That's great." Easing off the sofa, she went to wrap her arms around the two of them. She'd spent a week in the hospital and her bruises had faded considerably. She was almost as good as new.

The press had been hounding them for a story and confirmation, but Brady had instructed their PR department to deal with it. Now, she

was back inside the apartment she called home. "It's about time."

"You're right." Michelle gave her a kiss. "We're going to get out of your hair now and try and get ready for Saturday. The wedding planner is going to be floored, but we'll keep her sweet by having her plan the ceremony, a small intimate one at either my home or yours, darling." She murmured, looking at Sydney.

"We'll make that decision." He smiled at his son and soon to be daughter-in-law. "I've also decided to sell the house." He told Brady. "Too many unhappy memories and I'm sure you don't want it."

"I don't." Brady automatically reached out to pull Macayla to his side. Ever since the accident, he kept her close to him. He spent most of the time in the hospital, reluctantly leaving for meetings he couldn't do over the phone, but he refused to go home without her.

When she'd been discharged yesterday afternoon, he'd taken the time off and decided to make it a few days so he could spend it with her.

He'd almost lost her and the fear and horror of that was still fresh inside his mind.

"Good. I'll have the realtor put it on the market immediately." Turning his head, he smiled at the woman next to him. "I'm going to be moving in with this beautiful woman. Darling, I'm going to enjoy being a kept man."

"As if you could ever be." Michelle snorted. "Okay, darlings, we'll leave you alone and be on our way."

They saw them to the door and went back into the living room.

"Are you sure?" Brady settled on the sofa and pulled her gently onto his lap.

"About the small wedding." Wrapping her hands around his neck, she stared at his beloved face. "I thought I was going to die. Yes, I'm sure about the small wedding. We'll go to the courthouse and have the ceremony and come back here for supper. You, me, Mom, and your Dad, and of course Todd. I just want to be your wife."

She tilted her head to look at him, golden-brown eyes twinkling. "It's amazing the changes I've been through over the last few months. I always envisioned myself as being this independent soul, never really needing anyone.

Then Mom and your Dad asked this - what at the time seemed like a hell of a huge favor, and after you made love to me at the cabin, things started changing. I didn't want to acknowledge the change or identify it, but there it was."

She cupped his face gently. "It started slowly for me and then gathered momentum, until I was caught up in such a frenzy, I couldn't stop it. You've changed things around for me, Brady, and yes, I want to marry you, I want a family with you.

I want to be your wife in every way possible. I want to wake up next to you every morning and go to sleep in your arms."

She had to swallow the lump in her throat. "I want to do things with you, go on dates. Travel the world again. Raise our son - God! we're having a son! I thought my writing was the most important thing in my life, but I was so wrong.

It doesn't matter if I never have another creative thought. As long as you're in my life, then that's more than enough, and here I am crying again."

"Hormones?" He teased her shakily. Her words made it difficult for him to keep his own tears at bay. He was consumed by her and had been for so long it was now a part of him. "I adore you." He told her thickly. "When I heard you'd been hurt, I was destroyed. I saw you lying in that hospital bed and wanted to die.

I couldn't lose you. I'd waited a lifetime for you and losing you wasn't an option for me. I couldn't survive losing you." He kissed the tears on her cheeks. "You're the beginning and end for me. The hope that kept me moving all these years."

He kissed the slight bruise on her cheek and moved to the mark on the side of her mouth that hadn't quite faded.

There were more bruises on her chest and beautiful breasts and he was surprised she hadn't sustained even more. It was a miracle he was going to give thanks for every single day, one he wasn't. "My only love." He whispered hoarsely.

"I need a favor."

"Anything."

"Make love to me. I want to go upstairs to that big bed of ours and lose myself in you."

"Sweetheart-"

"I'm fine. A little sore here and there, but I'm fine. I need you, darling. I need to feel you against me, inside me. We can take it slow and let it build but I can't go another minute without having you."

"I'm yours." He told her hoarsely. "I've always been yours."

"Show me. I need to see physical proof."

"Then I'll show you." Rising with her cradled in his arms, he left the room and headed up the stairs.

Setting her down gently, he took the time to undress. Shaking his head when she started to take off the sweater and leggings, he came over to her and started taking off her clothes.

"You're still bruised." He felt the anger rising up inside him as he studied the fading red marks. "I want to kill her."

"She's already dead. I should have told you."

Lifting his head, he nodded. Bending, he kissed the marks gently as if to heal her completely.

“Oh, Brady.” His kiss was a whisper, an anthem, something so precious that it brought tears to her eyes. He peeled the leggings, along with the panties, and dropped them somewhere on the bed. Her bump was starting to become even more obvious and he could feel their son moving around inside her.

“It’s a miracle.” He kissed her belly, his hands roving over the smooth skin. “One I’ll never take for granted.”

She tensed when he went further down and kissed the hairs covering her pussy.

“Brady.”

“Hush, baby. Relax and let me adore you.”

“I can’t.” Her fingers dug into the sheets, her head twisting as her heart quivered inside her chest.

“Try.” His tongue touched the swollen and completely sensitive flesh, before taking it between his teeth.

“Oh, God!” She cried out, body lifting towards his mouth, her body poised and ready for him. His tongue slipped into her and she could feel the pain from her injuries starting. She wasn’t altogether over the injuries yet, but she needed this, needed the feel of his hands and mouth on her – to verify that she was alive and right here with her.

He wasn’t done yet. Even while her body was trembling,, he wasn’t through with her.

“More.” He whispered thickly, using his fingers this time, he watched the passion glazing her golden-brown eyes.

“Yes.” She went under again, the climax washing through her body like liquid silver. Before she recovered, he was inside her, sliding in

smoothly, his body shuddering as the familiar tightness sucked him in. His hands lifted to frame her face.

“You complete me. I’ll spend the rest of my life showing you how much you mean to me. You’ll always be the most important person in my life.

Everything else pales – nothing else matters except you. It’s you, darling. I grew up feeling the cold, the emotionally detached, but I’m warmed by you – you make me feel a love so overflowing, it’s practically bursting from me. It’ll always be you.”

She was crying now, the tears streaming down her face unchecked.

“Brady.” His name was the only thing she could utter. Everything else was clogged up inside her heart and she couldn’t find the words.

“Brady.”

“I know, darling.” Bending, he kissed her slowly, his hips surging towards her with slow and sweet intensity that fired her senses and made her melt. She was better because of him. All of her senses were heightened, her writing was more sensitive.

Her characters were more lively and emotional because of him. She came again, her slender body shuddering beneath his, as she gave over completely. She wasn't afraid to open up for him, in every area of her life.

He climaxed into her, flooded with emotions shuddering through his body.

Afterward, he stayed there, his breathing erratic, his body shuddering. Mindful she was still recovering, he found the strength to move so she was lying in the crook of his arm, head resting on his moist chest. His hands soothed her back, feeling the tremors there.

“I had no fricking idea what I was writing about in my books.” She murmured into his chest.

His deep chuckle warmed her, bringing a smile to her lips. “I’m going to be asking for some of that royalty you’re receiving.” He moved so he could see her exquisite face. Even the bruises couldn’t take away from the staggering beauty he so admires.

“You don’t need it.” She traced a pattern in the center of his chest.
“Speaking of money- “

“Were we?”

“Yes. I don’t want you giving me any.”

“You’re going to have to be more specific.”

“I just want you.” She pointed out. “I don’t need you buying me expensive jewelry or pricey clothes. I have all I need right here- “

“You know I’m going to be your husband, right? We’re also having a son- “

“That’s another thing.” A frown settled on her brow. “I don’t want you spoiling him.”

“So, no Porsche when he turns sixteen?” He kept a serious expression on his face as he gazed at her.

“I’m serious.”

“I’m sure you are.” He kissed her softly on the lips. “I’m not listening. I’m going to shower you with gifts because I love you and I love doing things for you. As far as spoiling our son, we’ll see.”

“Brady- “

He ended the conversation by seizing her lips in a kiss that made her forget what she was arguing about.

They were married in a simple ceremony at her mother's house. The ceremony was performed by the priest from the Catholic church where both mother and daughter were members. The ballroom had been transformed into a foyer, filled with fragrant tea roses, oleanders, lilies, and daffodils.

"Just because you're not having a big society wedding, doesn't mean it can't be tasteful and memorable. This will be your only wedding, that much I'm sure of." Michelle told her. "Let's make it count."

The staff was a part of the ceremony as well and Macayla felt overwhelmed by the tears glittering in their eyes as she came into the room in her simple, yet stunning, olive silk and lace dress. Her hair, the thick dark brown curls had been ruthlessly brushed and tamed into an elegant coif at the nape of her neck.

She wasn't wearing a veil, but had on a chic daring hat, that matched her dress, perched on top of her head. She wore a diamond necklace and earrings. Her mother had given her the something blue, a stunning sapphire bracelet she'd been saving for the occasion. Her something borrowed was the thin silver bracelet on her left wrist.

Now, she was standing facing her handsome groom who looked sleek and well turned out in an ash gray suit His usually tangled blonde hair

was brushed back from his face and his eyes mirrored his emotions.

The vows were exchanged and within minutes they became husband and wife. A professional photographer had been hired for the occasion and pictures were being taken to document the ceremony.

The legal documents were signed and the bride and groom and their parents went outside in the garden to take some more pictures.

It wasn't quite spring and the weather had cooperated. The sun was shining and even though the air was crisp and slightly chilly, the scent of spring and plants bursting through the earth made a pleasant backdrop.

"We'll leave you two alone and go see to our guests." Michelle told them with a beaming smile as she took Sydney's hand and walked along the meandering path back to the house.

"Cold?" Brady noticed a slight shiver and drew her into his arms.

"A little bit. I don't want to go inside yet." She leaned into him and drew a contented breath.

"Happy?" He whispered against her forehead.

"More than I can ever explain. Are we going to the cabin?"

"For a week. I figured it was the perfect choice." His hands soothed her back. She was his wife. She was his and he was hers. It was that simple and that meaningful. He was committed to her and would be for the rest of his life. "It was where we conceived our son. It'll always be a significant part of our lives."

Lifting her head, she stared into his face and felt the quickening of her heart. "I love you so much." Her voice was filled with emotions that triggered his own. He wanted to get away with her, to be alone with her, just the two of them.

"And I adore you my sweet, beautiful wife." His hands framed her face and drew her in for a kiss, one that quickly had them clinging to each other.

Dragging his lips from hers, he held her close and fought the compulsion and yearning shuddering inside his body.

"We'll leave as soon as possible." He whispered thickly.

"Absolutely."

“Mark should be in there somewhere.”

“Your Dad’s name?” He was flushed from the hectic lovemaking they’d indulged in as soon as they entered the cabin. Propping his head on his palm, he was rubbing her baby bump slowly.

He loved seeing her lying on her back, her hair spread out on the pillows and his ring on her finger. His own plain gold band was picking up the light from the bedside lamp.

“Hmm. What do you think about Andre Mark?”

“Andre?” He raised an eyebrow at her. “Why?”

She shrugged. “I just like the name. Surely you didn’t intend to give our son your name and call him junior?”

He grinned at her. “What’s wrong with my name?”

“Absolutely nothing. I just want our son to have his own identity and I hate the term ‘Junior’, it follows you around.”

“I don’t know where you’re getting that from.”

“How would you feel if your Dad named you Sydney?”

He grimaced at that and made her laugh. “My point exactly.”

“Brady is an honorable name.”

“Picking up her left hand, he stared at the rings he had given her. Bringing her hand to his lips, he kissed the rings and then her knuckles before turning her hand over to press his lips against the softness of her palm.

She turned into his arms, climbing on top of him. “I thought you were tired, my love.”

“Not by a long shot.” She cupped his face between her hands. “This is our honeymoon and I want all night.”

“Let me see what I can do.” Lifting her slightly, he showed that he was ready for her.

“I want the excitement” Michelle told her daughter as she studied her reflection in the mirror. Rising, she held out her hands to the younger woman wearing an blue pantsuit. Her baby bump was obvious and she looked radiant. “I’ve been in love with Syd for what seems like forever. How do I look?”

“Like a bride.” Leaning forward, Macayla kissed both her cheeks. “You're beautiful, Mom.”

“I’m so happy. The cancer treatment is going well and I’m keeping a positive outlook. I have a new lease on life. A son, very soon, a grandson and a husband.” She laughed lightly. “I can safely say this will be my last marriage.”

“I know. Ready?”

Letting go of her daughter’s hands, she turned to look at her reflection in the mirror. The chic shell pink dress was a classic and suited her immensely. Her thick brown hair was pulled back into an elegant chignon at the nape of her neck.

“I am.”

At their positions standing for their parents, Brady and Macayla exchanged looks as the couple repeated their vows. It’d been three weeks since their own wedding and they were still in the honeymoon phase.

The Catholic church was packed to capacity and the reporters were salivating at the romance behind the union, one that had been going

on for several decades.

The ceremony was brief and poignant, the reception followed at the Royal Hotel.

“It seems like déjà vu all over again.” Brady murmured as they made their way around the dancefloor.

“It does. They look so happy.”

Brady glanced over to look at the couple who were surrounded by well-wishers. “I’ve never seen him so carefree before. He deserves it.”

“I agree.”

“Tired, darling?”

“A little but I’m fine.”

“Sure?”

“Yes. Stop worrying.”

“Kind of my job.”

“Sometimes you take it too seriously.”

“Still my job. I adore you, darling.”

“Mom and Syd will be leaving for their honeymoon shortly. We could leave right after.”

“Have something in mind?”

“Absolutely.” She whispered.

Their son was born after four hours of surprisingly easy labor and delivery on a rainy day in the middle of August. The beautiful baby boy

with the dark brown hair and hazel eyes immediately became the object of everyone's affection.

The proud grandparents were present for all of it and the mother was allowed to go home that afternoon. "We'd like you to stay at our house. There are more servants here and we'd like to spend some time with this beautiful boy."

So they were at the house where Sydney and Michelle had gone ahead and set up a nursery for their grandson.

"You go on and rest, darling." She urged her daughter. "We'll see to little Andre."

"They're going to spoil him." Macayla leaned back against her husband in the bedroom that had been hers when she was growing up.

“I see it happening already.” He wrapped his arms around his flattened waist. “You were a trooper.”

Turning her to face him, he gazed at her and felt the familiar lump lodged inside his throat. “I’m so proud of you.”

Leaning into him, she closed her eyes and inhaled his scent. She was right here where she belonged. She had her family and nothing else mattered.

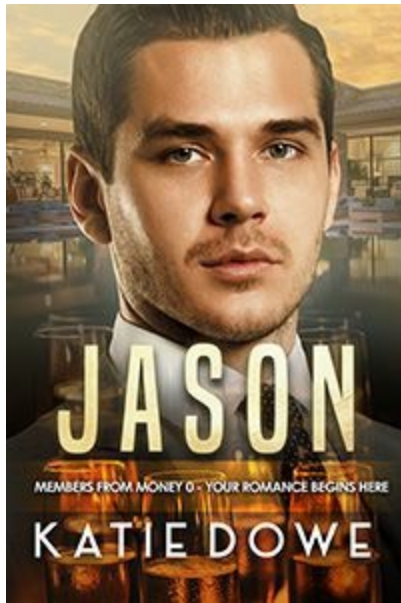
The end... but wait:

Great news: if you **genuinely** enjoyed this book, please consider giving it a review on Amazon. We highly appreciate them, and it helps us know which books you like the best (so we can write more like them in future). It's win win, so please take 1 minute out to do that now beautiful person. :)

Get Free: Get Jason from the Members From Money series where YOU'RE the star!!

Hi there. As a special thank you for buying this ebook, for a limited time I want to send a copy of Jason **free of charge** directly to your email! It's a **personalized story**, meaning you'll add a few details about yourself (these won't be shared with anyone else) and you'll become the star of the story!! :D

You'll be emailed a new chapter once a day for 7 days. You can get it by clicking the cover below or [going here](#):

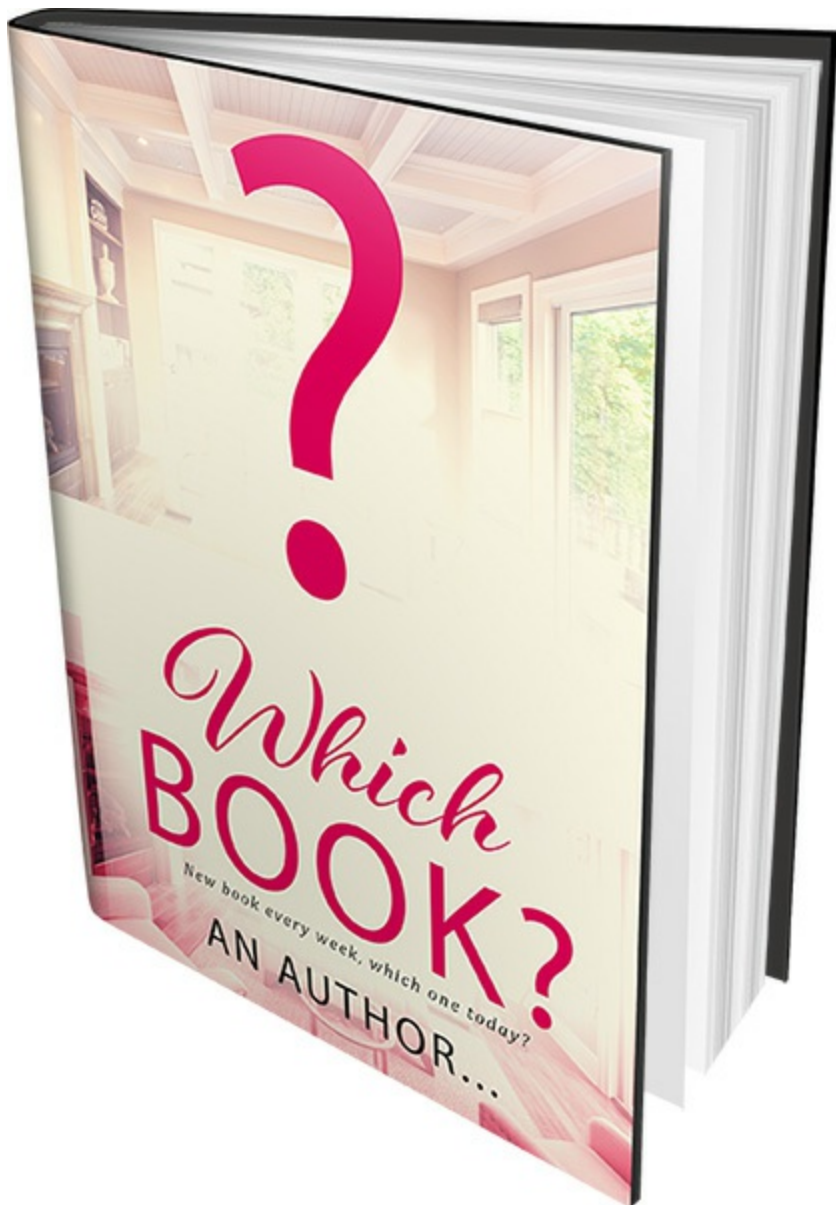


Direct link: www.afroromancebooks.com/personalized-jason-members-from-money

This book is so exclusive you can't even buy it. As well as sending daily emails with the story, I'll also send you updates when new books like this are available.

Now, if you enjoyed the book you just read, please leave a positive review of it on Amazon. It'll help get it out there a lot more and mean I can continue writing these books for you. So thank you. :)

BWWM Book Of The Week:



Every week we highlight a top read, and each week when you [click this link](#) there'll be a different book for you to read. So go on, [click here to get the week's top story now](#). :)

More Hot BWWM Books You'll Love

Want more handsome billionaires to rock your world? Then why not catch up with some [hot members from The Elite Club](#):



& MANY MORE...

[Click here to meet them now in the Members From Money series.](#)

*

Also available: [Her Best Friends Love](#) by Constance Michael:



Description:

A sexy twins pregnancy romance by Constance Michael of BWWM Club.

Ugandan-American model Layla craves motherhood, while her billionaire best friend Marcus needs an heir.

Together they hatch a plan to solve both their dilemmas—they'll have a baby!

But unexpected medical challenges force them to conceive naturally, sparking emotions they never dared to explore.

And when Layla realizes she's having twins, tensions rise and promises are tested...

Will they settle for friendship or dare to wish for something more?

And can Marcus step up, not just as a father, but as the man Layla needs?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Constance Michael of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to smoking hot sex scenes!

Want to read more? [Then click here to get Her Best Friends Love now.](#)

*

Also available: [Maxwell](#) by Katie Dowe:



Description:

A sexy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

In a world of social divides, Alessia, a philanthropist from old money, and Maxwell, a self-made CEO, secretly defy odds to be together.

A failed Italian rendezvous leads Maxwell to end it, but fate intervenes with a chance meeting and an unexpected pregnancy!

Alessia knows that she and Maxwell do not belong together...

And now she has no choice but to face her father and tell him the truth!

Can Alessia and Maxwell bridge the social chasm to build a family?

And will Alessia's father put aside his prejudices for the sake of his daughter's happiness?

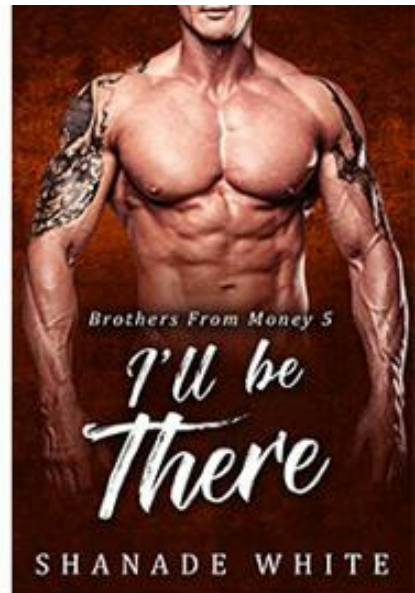
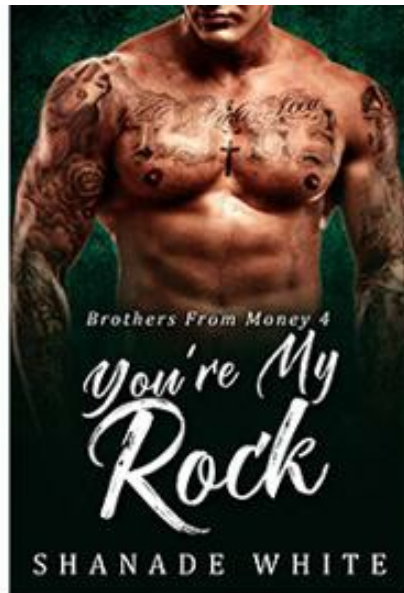
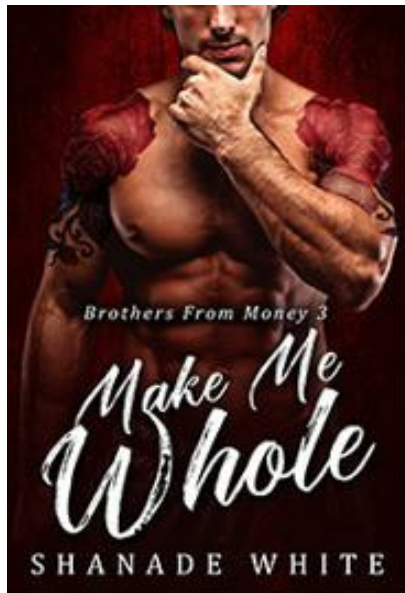
Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to shockingly hot sex scenes with a billionaire!

Want to read more? [Then click here to get Maxwell now.](#)

*

You'll also want to check out these hot billionaire brothers and cousins in the [Brothers From Money series](#) too:



& many more...

[Click here to meet them and more now.](#)

*

Also available: [Who Do You Love](#) by Constance Michael:



Description:

A sexy romance by Constance Michael of BWWM Club.

When fiery journalist Robyn Thompson vows to take down Health Tech—the corrupt company that ruined her cousin's career—she doesn't expect to find love along the way.

David Anderson, the enigmatic CEO of Health Tech, swoops in to save her from a disastrous date, igniting a passion neither can ignore!

As their worlds collide and secrets unfold, David finds himself at a crossroads...

Should he use his relationship with Robyn to save his company, or come clean and risk losing her forever?

As their connection deepens, the inevitable truth emerges, throwing their love into peril...

Will their love survive the explosive truth?

And can David win back Robyn's trust after breaking her heart?

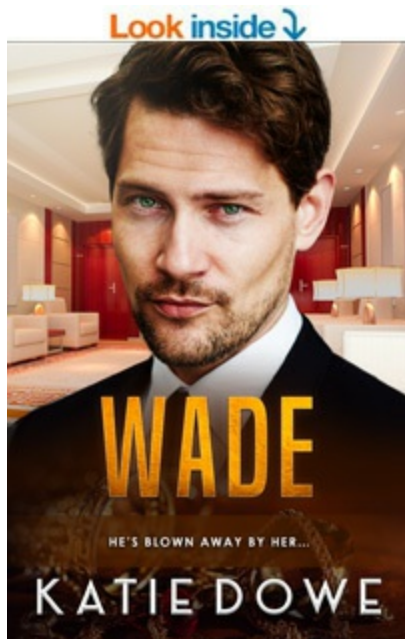
Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Constance Michael of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to scandalously hot sex scenes with a billionaire!

Want to read more? [Then click here to get Who Do You Love now.](#)

*

Also available: [Wade](#) by Katie Dowe:



Description:

A sexy BBW, pregnancy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Wade Bramwell, a multi-billionaire with a focus as sharp as his business sense, thought he could dodge love forever.

Then he met Remi Wilcox, a resilient interior designer with a troubled past!

Their love story isn't easy—Wade's history with other women and Remi's trust issues from a painful childhood keep them on rocky ground...

But when Remi falls pregnant, it seems like they're finally entering a blissful new chapter!

Yet secrets, unexpected twists, and past lovers come to surface, throwing them into turmoil...

Can Wade's love survive Remi's deep insecurities?

And when the truth comes out, can Remi put aside her doubts and fully trust the man she loves?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

Suitable for over 18s only due to smoking hot sex scenes!

Want to read more? [Then click here to get Wade now.](#)

*

Into alpha males? Then you've love these hot billionaires from the [Alphas From Money series](#):



& many more...

[Click here to meet them now in the Alphas From Money series.](#)

*

You can also [click here to get more sexy books by BWWM Club.](#)

Click below to get these free books now:

