



WADE

HE'S BLOWN AWAY BY HER...

KATIEDOWE

Wade

He's blown away by her...

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.

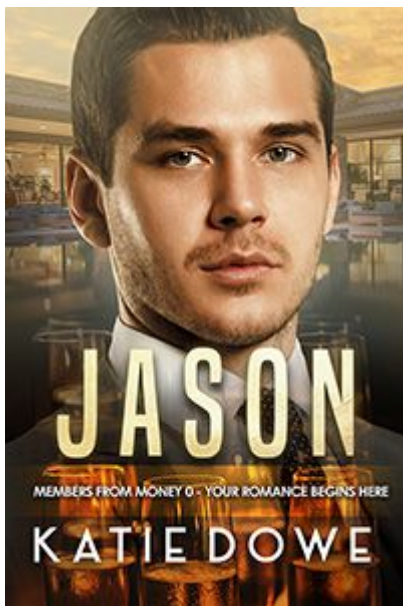
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Chapter 1

The nightmare was vicious and had her clawing her way out of what seemed like a drug-induced sleep. The scream was trapped inside her throat and as soon as she reared up off the pillows, she felt the tears on her cheeks and the burning sensation in her chest.

She started to reach for Wade when she realized that he was not there. He was on a business trip and it scorched her that she had become so accustomed to him being there to calm her from the terror that for a moment, her nausea and helplessness were exchanged by fury.

Damn him, she thought bitterly, reaching for the pillows and hugging them to her chest. Inhaling his subtle cologne, she felt herself settling in stages. Her heart slowed, as did the rapid panic breathing, and she could feel the tremors getting less.

A glance at the clock showed that it was half past one and she had just tumbled into bed at eleven. She could not sleep when he was not around and had filled the

hours with work so that she did not have to go to bed alone.

She started to grab the phone, when she stopped herself. He was in Italy, which meant that he was probably wheeling and dealing at some fancy restaurant. She was a grown ass woman who had existed and managed to do so quite well, before he came into her life.

Shuddering out a breath, she put aside the pillows and settled back, closing her eyes. She did not want to remember, nor was it fair for her to call her brother. He was no doubt fast asleep by now.

Scrubbing her hands over her face, she opened her eyes and stared off at the tan and gold wallpaper. She was about to get off the bed, when her phone vibrated. Rolling her eyes and ignoring the hammering of her heart, she reached for it.

“You are supposed to be in a meeting.”

“And you are supposed to be sleeping. Nightmares?”

“Just a little one. Manageable.”

“Remi.” His deep voice rang with a warning. It was uncanny how even at the distance between them, he was familiar with every nuance of her voice and somehow knew when she was in the throes of something horrible.

“It was bad,” she admitted shakily. “God. I hate this. I can deal with things. I am not a damn child who needs an adult to help me navigate through whatever the hell is going on.”

“I am on the next flight back,” he told her coolly.

“No. Dammit, just-“ Leaning her head back, she breathed in slowly. “You are just going to piss me off-“

“Then you will be pissed off.”

“You are not responsible for me.”

“Pissing me off is not going to change my mind. Is the housekeeper still there or did you give her the night off?”

“I gave her the night off.” She wanted to scream at him and tell him that she did not need him charging back in his fancy jet to hold her hand, but she knew him well enough to realize that would not work.

“Drink some tea.”

“I am fine. Look Wade, I am over the worst. You said you would be gone for another day and I am certain you have not finished with your business.”

“I am coming back. I will get there later today. Is there any way I can persuade you not to go in today?”

“None whatsoever. I guess we both are as stubborn as hell.”

He sighed. “I asked you to accompany me.”

“And I had work to do. The hotel is due to be opened in the next two weeks and I must get my part of the job finished before then.”

“I happen to be the owner- “

“I have been contracted to design the rooms and you promised not to interfere,” she pointed out.

“You held a metaphorical gun to my head.” He sighed.

“Darling, I miss you.”

She felt a jolt to her nervous system. Even after a year, she was not used to him saying that to her.

“You just left three days ago.”

“It’s okay for you to say you miss me too.”

“I certainly do not miss the nagging.”

“Take that back.”

She smiled and felt the heaviness inside her chest getting lighter. “Make me.” Settling back against the pillows, she sighed softly. “I am happy you are coming home. It seems I cannot sleep without you next to me.”

“Have you given any thought to what we discussed?”

“No. And we are not going to talk about it now.”

“When I get home.” There was a steely inflection in his voice that she recognized.

“I have no doubt we will,” she told him dryly.

“Go back to sleep baby. I love you.”

This time the jolt was much bigger and stole her breath.
“Um- well. Okay.”

“I thought we were past that.” His voice held a tinge of exasperation. “You are not going to choke on the words.”

“You are far away,” she said foolishly.

“And?”

“I am sure the distance is giving you some perspective. There are so many beautiful women in Italy.”

The silence stretched between them and she knew she had managed to piss him off.

“I will see you later today.”

“Wade-“ she began, but was talking to a dead phone. She thought about calling him back, but decided to make him cool off. He was Wade Bramwell, six foot three inches of gorgeous male with sable brown hair and light green eyes.

On top of that, he was a multi-billionaire with the most elaborate hotels all over the world. She was just – she was just her. A plus sized black woman with enough baggage to fill a carousel. She was still trying to grasp the idea of them being a couple.

She had seen the looks thrown at them whenever they went out in public. And did not have to be a mind-reader to know that people were wondering what he was doing with her. And now- She shook her head as she slid off

the huge bed, descending the steps onto gray carpeting that swallowed her feet up to the ankles.

Making her way to the gold and cream bathroom, she sat on the lip of the tub large enough to hold a dozen people, and simply allowed the memories to come tumbling back.

They had met at the hotel he had just purchased. She had put in a bid and been hired to do the interior. Something she had dreamed of but never thought would happen.

He had come in to look at her design and something had passed between them, that something she had forcibly put out of her head.

He was Wade Bramwell and there was no way in hell a man like him would ever give her a second look.

But to her shock and surprise, he had approached her and invited her out to dinner.

“To discuss the designs. I have some ideas.”

“We could discuss them at your office.”

He had smiled at that, just a slight curving of his very sensuous lips that had her heart jittering inside her chest.

“Or right here,” he said, indicating the newly renovated hotel. “The chef is already here; we might as well use him.”

She had succumbed cautiously because she desperately needed the contract. She had also been surprised that she felt at ease with him, the conversation ranging from her choice of colors and fabrics for the room and the fact that she only had one staff member.

“I outsource whenever I have a huge project. But mostly, I prefer to work independently and I usually know what I

want.”

His light green eyes had pinned her with an intensity that sent shivers along her spine and the sexual tension had made her want to run from the elegant dining room.

“You feel it?”

“No,” she told him firmly. “It’s nothing. I am here to do a job and then move on to the next. I really want this, but I am not desperate enough to sleep with the boss.”

“You are your own boss,” he had pointed out mildly as he cut into his rosemary chicken.

“You know what I mean.”

“I am attracted to you.” She had felt a jolt at that.

“You will get over it.”

“I doubt it. Eat.”

She had finished the meal and left and thought that was the end of it. But she had not counted on his persistence. He got in her face every chance until she had a showdown with him that ended up with them practically ripping clothing to get to skin. He ravaged her and left her breathless and trembling. But still, she would not give in.

Remi smiled slightly as she recalled how he had rolled over her objections and denials of what was between them. She'd found herself telling him of her childhood and the horror she and her brother had gone through.

But getting to the point where she agreed to come and live with him in his fancy loft had been a struggle. “You cannot be serious.”

“Where did you think this was leading to?” The impatience in his voice had been rife. “I am in love with you-“

No.” She had shaken her head and backed away, eyes wide with fright. “You don’t know what the hell you are saying.”

“I am in love with you and would like us to live together.” He had approached her purposefully. “I am not going to take no for an answer.”

“You think you can control me?” She had lashed out in defense. “You think because you are this big shot billionaire that you can just get me to do whatever the hell you want?”

“I am not either one of your parents.” He had told her patiently. “I am just a guy who is in love with you and would like nothing better than to spend the rest of my life showing you that love exists.”

“Why me?”

“My heart chose you.” He had sighed deeply. “I cannot explain it Remi, all I know is the first time I saw you; I knew.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

His eyes had flared, but he had held onto patience. For the first six months he had refused to let up, until she moved in with him.

Now they were at another crossroads. He wanted a child and she was trying to avoid the discussion. He had given her until he returned and that time was almost at an end.

She loved him. It had taken all she had to admit it, but it was clear that he had broken through her resolve and the steel barricades she had put up to keep him out.

So, now she depended on him for everything and it scared her spitless. He was now her focus and that was something she had never wanted to give to a living soul, except her brother.

Pressing a hand against her stomach, she deliberately turned away from thinking about her crappy childhood. She had major work to do tomorrow and knowing her man the way she had come to know him, there was going to be an argument. Shoving herself off the lip of the tub, she went to relieve herself with the intention of going back to bed.

“You look like hell.”

“Why thank you honey, just the kind of pick me up I was looking for. I need a gin and tonic.” She motioned the eager maître D’ over and placed the order.

“Isn’t it a little too early?”

“It’s evening in Europe.” She cast him an impish smile, more than a little proud of him. David Wilcox was on the fast track to making partner at his law firm and was driven and focused. She and her brother had beaten the odds and came out on top.

It was a major accomplishment. “And you are being judgmental,” she told him dryly as she accepted the drink. “I need it.”

His dark brown eyes studied her face intently. “You had nightmares?”

She took a sip of the drink and forced herself to relax. Wade was already on his way and in a few hours, she was going to be gearing up for the battle.

She needed liquid courage.

“Yes.” Taking a deep breath, she rolled her shoulders and stared at him. “It was bad. And just as I woke from it, Wade called. The man has some sort of homing device when it comes to me.”

“He loves you.” David had been skeptical and suspicious before, but he had grudgingly realized that Wade Bramwell loved his sister to distraction. The man’s fame and fortune were daunting and he was intimidating as hell, but when it came to Remi, he was incredibly vulnerable and protective.

“He does. And I had to piss him off by insinuating that he was hooking up with some Italian hottie.” She grimaced. “He had one day left on his trip and is cutting it short for me. Because I cannot get a handle on these blasted nightmares.” She shook her head,

“Anyway, that’s what’s happening with me. He wants a baby.”

“I thought you were okay with that?”

“I don’t know how to be a mother. Lousy history, remember?”

“And we already established that you are not her and I am not him.” He reached for his own fruit drink and gulped it down.

“I am sorry to bring it up-“

“It’s fine.” His eyes burned with bad memories. “You spent your childhood taking care of me and shielding me from him. You got the brunt of everything and you deserve some happiness. Wade makes you happy and you should not take that for granted.”

She studied his handsome face and the slash of temper there.

“Hey.” Reaching over, she placed a hand over his. “I did not mean for you to get angry. I am dealing with it.”

“And thinking that you will make a lousy mother.”

“Wade gave me the week to think it through.”

“And?”

She sighed. “I want to have a baby with him. Before Wade, I would never even entertain the idea. But he makes me yearn for things, to hope that somehow, I will be better, do better.” She took another sip and closed her eyes briefly.

“Then you need to put the guy out of his misery.”

“Still thinking,” she muttered. “Now enough about me. How is the case going?”

“It’s going.” He gave a noncommittal shrug and tore into his spicy vegetable and chicken wrap. “Keeping me on my toes.” He gave her a critical look. Remi was beautiful and even though she might not think so, it was clear to see.

She had a flawless cocoa brown complexion, thick dark brown hair with added highlights to the end and eyes of liquid brown. She wore her weight very well and since she had hooked up with Bramwell, her clothes were decidedly expensive and of excellent taste.

Today she was wearing raspberry red pants and a yellow silk blouse under her jacket. Her smile, when she bothered to do so, could throw one for a curve and reveal the deep dimple in her left cheek.

“You are being modest,” she chided him.

“I am being cautious,” he corrected dryly. “How is the design coming along?”

“I ordered some special fabrics from India and the damn thing was delayed.” She grimaced. “I don’t want anyone to think or say that it’s because of my relationship with Wade that I can get away with not finishing on time.”

“You have always been a professional.”

“Damn straight.” She glanced at the fancy smartwatch Wade had brought her from one of his travels. The man insisted on heaping her with expensive stuff and nothing she said was making an impression.

“Speaking of which, I have to meet with the hotel manager to discuss the color for the ballroom.” Finishing her drink, she leaned forward to kiss him on the cheek. “Come over for dinner on Sunday.”

“You are going to want to be alone with your man for the weekend. He has been away for almost a week,” David pointed out.

“I suppose.”

He grinned at her. “You are not going to use me as a damn shield.”

“Was it that obvious?” she asked with a grimace.

“I happen to know you.” He held onto her hand. “Give him what he wants sis. He deserves it.”

He was prepared for a fight and had worked it into his schedule. She pissed him off, was the only one who could get past his cool and formerly uncaring attitude to get to the heart of him. She was the heart of him and that pissed him off even more. She had the power to bring him to his damn knees.

He was Wade Bramwell, for Christ’s sake! He had thousands of people who answered to him. He made decisions involving staggering sums of money on a daily basis. His hotels were the talk of the whole damn world. In the past, women pursued him, and he did not have to lift a finger. Now he was the one doing the chasing.

He was in love for the first time in his life and he was caught up in the grip of uncertainty and fear.

Each time he left to go on his business trips, he was afraid that she was going to decide that it was not working between them.

He wanted a child with her. Desperately wanted that to happen and was furious with himself that he had practically begged her to think about it. He had given her a timeline. Give me an answer or – or what? He wondered in despair. It's over? Christ knew the very thought of leaving her was making him panic. She had that power over him.

He did not dare think or imagine that he was pushing the subject of a child because of his fear of losing her. That would simply be too pathetic and certainly beneath him.

And it made him as mad as hell that she would not consider marrying him. He had proposed to her several

months ago and she had looked at him as if he had asked her to sell her body to the highest bidder.

“We are not ready”

“You mean, you are not ready.”

“Then I am not ready. We are not even into a year of the relationship yet. You could find someone else and where would that leave us? Leave me?”

He had wanted to just leave. Right then and there, just say to hell with it and be on his way, but even the thought of it crippled him.

Setting his jaw, he dismissed his driver with a curt nod and made his way towards the elevator that would take him straight up to the suite. He was going to have it out once and for all. Either she was amenable to his request or- He broke off abruptly, angry that he could not even follow up on the thought.

Using his card, he swiped at the slot and the doors swung open. He was about to step down, when he saw her standing there and everything inside him melted.

She was wearing a slinky black robe, one that he had brought her back from Morocco. Her thick dark brown hair with the golden highlights was loose around her shoulders. The robe sagged open at the front and his hungry gaze took in the swell of generous flesh.

“Hi.” She was the first to speak, because frankly, he could not find the words.

“Hi.” Stepping in, he closed the doors behind him and made a show of shrugging out of his jacket.

“Let me get that.” She took the case from him and put it away and then took his jacket.

“What’s this?”

“I missed you.” Placing the jacket on the limb of the coat tree, she turned into his arms. “I made dinner.”

His thick brown brows lifted. “What have you done?”

She smiled at him, that dazzling smile that had the power to turn his knees to jelly. “I told Mrs. M. to take the time off and I made Chicken Alfredo. I wanted to be alone with my man.”

“We are using labels?”

“Hmm.” She was busy tugging at his sweater. “You are cold.”

“It was raining.” He fisted a hand into her hair and brought her face up. “And I was spoiling for a fight.”

“I know.”

“You have circumvented that.”

“I thought I would.” She went on her toes to meet his mouth. “I figured you had a long journey and you did cut your trip short for me. I wanted to show my gratitude. We should eat.”

“No,” he told her thickly. “Food is the last thing on my mind.”

“Conversation?” she teased.

“We should take this upstairs.”

“Or in the living room. There is a fire going and wine chilling.”

“You thought of everything.”

“I did. Shall we?”

Chapter 2

He stood there obediently in the vast elegant living room with its paneled walls and pale blue silk wallpapers and watched as she stripped off his sweater.

“Stay still,” she ordered, moving to his belt and then the zipper of his tan dress pants.

“That’s difficult.” He had taken off his Italian loafers and left them at the arched doorway. “I want to touch you.”

“In time.” She eased the pants over his narrow hips. It still managed to give her a thrill that this man was hers. That he was all hers and wonders of wonders, he was in love with her. She tossed the clothing aside and allowed herself the luxury of staring at the muscled chest with the sprinkling of dark brown hairs.

“Now what?” he demanded.

“You get down on the blanket and let me do the work.”

His heart quickened as he did as she requested. She had heaped cushions on the blanket and he propped himself up and watched as she took off the robe. His breath hissed out as he stared at her generously curved flesh.

“I took a shower before you got here.” She lowered herself and sat at his hip. “A long hot shower in that big ass tub of yours.”

“I bet you boiled yourself in the process.” He still took issue with her refusal to acknowledge that the place and everything in it was theirs, not his. He decided not to spoil the mood by bitching about it.

“You know me.”

“I do.” His light green eyes sizzled. “I want to touch you.”

“Not yet.” She started with his hair, the thick sable brown of it that was always expertly cut and shaped. Then wandered down to the firm jaw covered in stubble. “You did not shave.”

“I was in a hurry.”

“To get back to me?”

“Yes.” Her fingers were tracing the sensuous bottom lip and making him edgy. He was already as hard as the proverbial rock. “Remi-”

“Shh.” She parted his lips and worked a finger into his mouth. “Now you can touch me. Just your tongue.”

He seized the finger, sucking it into his mouth as he watched her reaction. His body flooded with heat as her own lips parted.

“I need more.”

“Eventually.” Pulling the finger out, she used the moistness he had left there to trace his nipple.

“Remi!” He hissed out a breath and felt his body shuddering.

“Yes?”

“I cannot-” His hands clenched into fists as she lowered her head and used her tongue on the nipple. He endured it, his body arching towards her mouth. But when she started down to his stomach, nibbling at the skin, he completely lost it. “Sweetheart-” His hand lifted and he clutched at her hair. “Stop.”

But she was edging further down. The minute she kissed the tip of him, he knew he could not stand any more.

Hauling her up, he pushed her back against the cushions and straddled her, his expression fierce.

“You witch,” he whispered as he used trembling fingers to guide himself into the tight moistness that had the ability to leave him completely speechless. “How I missed you.” He sank into her, his teeth gritted as she enveloped him.

He was thrown back to the first time he made love to her and how he had made a fool of himself, by telling her that she was the best he ever had. He had babbled as he poured himself into her, the climax premature and so powerful that it had left him shaken.

As if she understood what was happening, she wrapped her hands around his neck and brought his head down to hers.

“This is how much I missed you.” She took his lips in a kiss that he felt down to his very toes. His body splintered as he surged upwards, his body driving into hers. No woman ever had this power over him and it amazed and disconcerted him.

He sank into the kiss, his tongue tangling with hers, absorbing the sweetness and moisture mingling with his. He inhaled her essence, her breath mixing with his and making him acutely aware of her.

His control broke, just snapped and he was moving fast, driving into her, pushing her up against the wall. He felt when she lifted her legs and drummed the heels of her feet against his buttocks. He also felt when she stiffened, her fingers digging into his shoulders and then his back.

Swallowing her cries, he felt his own powerful climax starting. Dragging his mouth from hers, he buried his face against her neck as he instinctively tried to fight the emotions swamping him. Sinking his teeth into the fleshy part of her neck, his body shuddered. He faintly heard her cry out as he sucked her flesh into his mouth.

He could not stop, found himself pouring into her, driving into her with a desperation that he could not help.

It took several minutes before he could even stir.

Her feet slid off him, giving him the time and energy to lift his head. His eyes immediately zeroed in on the rash where his teeth had nibbled, mouth sucked and felt a dart of irrational anger that he had once again behaved like an animal.

“I should put something on that.” He spoke briskly as he started to slide off her.

“I am fine.” Her arms trapped him, forcing him to meet her eyes. “I will get to it eventually.”

“You could get an infection.” His voice was rigidly controlled as if making up for the lack of it earlier.

“No. Look at me.” When he did, she used one hand to touch the indentation in his strong chin. “I love it when you lose control like that.”

“You would. I don’t.”

Remi stifled a sigh of impatience. "It means a lot to me."

"I keep hurting you." He shoved off her and this time resisted when she would have wrapped her hands tighter around his neck. "I need a drink."

Hauling herself up, she spread the blanket over her as she watched him go to the Japanese cabinet. Her flesh where he had sunk his teeth was still throbbing as was the rest of her body. She could still feel him deep inside her and the thrill of the climax was still wrapped around her. He transported her to places she had never known existed.

A shiver went through her as she watched the long, lean body, moving with cat-like grace. He was tall, topping over six feet three inches, his muscles sleek and well defined.

"Want one?" He glanced at her over one broad shoulder.

“No. I feel lonely over here. And cold.”

“There is a fire blazing in the hearth.” He turned to face her; the drink cradled in one hand. “And you have a blanket.”

“You generate more warmth.” She smiled at him, brown eyes watching him closely. He hated that he was like an open book to her. And that he was so damn needy.

Aloof and distant, she thought as she stared at him.

“How was the trip?”

“Progressive.” He shrugged a shoulder. “I brought you something.” A smile touched his lips when she stiffened and her eyes flashed.

“I asked you to stop. Dammit Wade! I have more clothes, jewels and blasted stuff than one woman could ever need.”

“Oh, but I so love your grateful reaction when I hand you my gifts. What would I do without that charge?” Tossing back the drink, he went to get his case and brought it back with him. “It’s just a little something that caught my eye when I was in Pompeii.”

“You went to Pompeii? I thought you were in Venice.”

“I had to make a stop.” He had a red velvet box in his hand as he lowered himself next to her. His brows lifted as she stared at the oblong box suspiciously.

“What is it?”

“You can find that out by opening the box. It’s not a damn snake. And might I add that most women would be in throes of delight at receiving gifts from their man.”

“I am not most women,” she muttered, still staring at the box he was holding out to her.

“You are telling me,” he said dryly. Taking her hand, he slapped the box against her palm.

“Hey.”

“You are intent on pissing me off.”

“I did not ask you to buy me anything and yet you do. All the time. I don’t know-“ He watched as her eyes went wide as she stared at the contents of the box. It was not what she expected.

Ever since they met, he had started showering her with gifts that she felt uncomfortable accepting. But this was just something simple. The thin golden necklace was delicate looking with a ruby pendant that winked and glittered in the light from the flames in the hearth.

“It’s-“ She struggled to find the words and felt a lump inside her throat. In one of their discussions, she had

told him about the ruby pendant she had seen at a jewelry store when she was only fifteen and going through her hell and how she had yearned at that moment to be able to afford something like that.

“You remembered.”

“Yes. I take it that you approve.”

“Damn you,” she whispered. “God. I hate when you do this to me.” Taking the necklace out, she handed it to him so that he could put it on her. As soon as he did, she closed her hand around the stone, feeling a jolt as the warmth spread to her flesh.

“The one I saw was much smaller,” she pointed out.

Shaking his head at her contrariness, he cupped her face between his hands, “I can afford bigger.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“You are most welcome.” He wiped the tears away. “I adore you.”

Her heart stuttered. He was able to do that. Was the only one who could get past her barriers and tie her into knots. To bring her to tears and make her heart throb with need and yearning.

“There were so many times while I was growing up that I wanted to hear my parents say that they were proud of me, that bringing home a good report card was something to celebrate.”

The tears were flowing and she did nothing to stop them. She could be real with him, be vulnerable, knowing he would never use it against her. “When I got out, when they died, and I was free, I told myself that I did not need to hear the words, that it did not matter.

I had been through the worst and I brought us – David and I out of it and it was all good. Then I met you.” She gripped his hands. “I don’t know how to show you, to say

it back and most of the time, I am not certain I have the words. I Just know how to show you.”

“Then let that be enough.” He hated when she revisited her childhood and the difficulties of her past. And felt frustrated that he was unable to do anything to erase those horrible years.

“I know you, darling Remi. I know that you love me and how difficult it is for you to verbalize what you feel.” Shaking one hand loose from her grip, he wiped at her tears. “I know.”

“He would beat me.” She used her free hand to press against his cheek as if to assure herself that he was real and was here, right here with her.

“He would come home at night and find something to bitch about. She would be sleeping off the high from earlier and I would make dinner for all of us, making certain that David had something to eat and his homework done.

I would try to make sure the place was clean that he would not have anything to bitch about. But it would never be enough. He would pick at little things. The place was too warm or too cold.

The food was not to his liking. He would head for the room to wake up David and I would stand in his path so he would not get to my brother.” Her fingers gripped him and he realized that she was lost in the past. “He would hit me in the stomach so that it would not show. I would-“

“Enough!” His voice whipped out, causing her to jump reflexively. “I cannot bear it. I want to dig him up and kill him for what he did to you.” His eyes were fierce, his handsome face taut with tension. “No more, darling.” He lowered his forehead to hers and took fortifying breaths. “You never have to go through anything like that again.”

“I know.” She leaned into him and closed her eyes as his arms wrapped around her. It was incredible that this powerful man loved her enough to put aside his needs for her and that further cemented the decision she had been struggling with. David was right. He deserved everything from her.

She was going to have to put away the clawing fear of turning out like her parents and give him what they both need.

“I went to see Rachel a couple of days ago,” she whispered into his chest. A smile touched her lips as she felt him quiver when he recognized the name of the OBGYN.

“And?”

“I am ready.” Lifting her head, she looked at him. “I have been checked out thoroughly and the contraceptives have been flushed out of my body completely. I am officially a breeding machine.”

He had to laugh. Here he was, feeling emotions crowding him, and she injected humor into something so potent. The tears had dried on her cheeks, but the moisture made her large dark brown eyes luminous.

“Is that right?” He brushed back tendrils of hairs clinging to her cheeks. “And here I was prepared for a fight.”

“Aww. Sorry to disappoint you.” Her smile came, bright as the noonday sun, the deep dimple peeking out. “Just think,” Taking his hand, she pressed it against her stomach. “I might be carrying your seed inside me.”

“You might.” He felt the heat searing his skin and the emotions clogging his throat. He had spent last night and this morning thinking up ways to approach her, to issue an ultimatum. He loved her dammit and he was not accustomed to groveling.

But that was what he had been doing ever since he met her. Even his friends had noticed the difference in him. Now she had poleaxed him with her announcement. Was it any wonder he was so tied up in knots over her?

“How do you feel about it?” His light green eyes peered into hers and she felt as if she was under the microscope. She could not hide anything from him and it

was daunting and a little annoying. She tried to move out of his arms, but he was not allowing it.

She shot him an annoyed look and moved her shoulders helplessly. "I am damned scared. And I hope you realize what you are getting yourself into. I have bad blood inside me from both sides.

The woman who carried me inside her womb for nine months was a junkie and dear old dad was a mean drunk. Don't blame me if the kid turns out all screwed up."

He tilted her chin up, keeping his gaze steady and making her feel like a bitch. "William Bramwell was cold and distant and hardly ever there for me and mother. I went through all the different stages and decided that I was not going to let it define who I am."

"Good for you," she muttered.

“And you are you. I know you, dammit. I know the heart of you. I have seen you with the children at the center where you go to give something back. I have seen the look in those beautiful big eyes of yours. The warmth you reveal. I know who you are beneath the tough shell. You are going to make a wonderful mother.”

“I am supposed to take your word for it?”

“Precisely.” He smiled as she rolled her eyes at him.
“What did I tell you about that habit of yours?”

“I am not your damn child.”

“You are the heart of me. The love of my life and the focus of everything I am.” He stole her breath, she literally felt herself stop breathing.

“Oh crap.” She leaned into him, mashing her lips against him. The kiss took on a potency that had them clinging to each other. Pressing her back against the cushions, he

climbed on top of her, sliding into her smoothly, his body a mass of raging desire.

Later that night while she was curled into him and fast asleep, he had time to think and ponder. They had finally sat down to a meal and afterwards gone upstairs where he had ravished her body, unable to help himself.

He was always hungry for her. It had been the case since they first met. He had taken one look at the voluptuous beauty and felt something loosened inside him.

One minute he was striding into the freshly painted dining room of the newly acquired hotel, and the next he was enraptured by the woman sitting on the floor in the middle of the room with designs and swatches of fabrics strewn all around her.

For the first time in his life, he had been at a loss for words, his chest tightening up. A smile touched his lips as he recalled the conversation. He had disagreed with the color of the wallpaper. Instead of being intimidated, she had told him coolly that she was the expert here.

“I know this is your hotel, but I am exceptional at what I do. And I do not need you breathing down my neck. I am grateful for the opportunity to work on one of your hotels, but I am not going to tolerate any interference. Is that understood?”

He had given her the look he usually gave his opponents or competitors, but she had simply stared him down. That had been the beginning of the fascination for him. He had then realized that he could not very well keep his mind off her.

He actively pursued her, blocking every resistance she put between them. It was after two months of intense lovemaking, that she broke down one night and told him the ugly story.

“The reporters are going to dig everything up anyway, so you might as well know what the hell you are getting into.” She had told him in a voice devoid of emotions. Where she had been brought up, what her parents had put her through and how she had had to take care of her younger brother since she was the age of six.

He had listened and felt the anger mounting that people who were supposed to take care of her, had heaped astounding misery on top of her head and she had somehow managed to come out on top.

“I guess you want to end things between us, now that you know the ugly truth.” She had shrugged. “Not that this was a thing anyway.”

“I am in love with you.” He had felt it before and had delayed saying it, thinking it was too soon.

“You are out of your damn mind. Aren’t you too smart to mistake a very good roll in the hay for the word you just said?”

He had smiled at that. "I am in love with you." He had repeated it slowly and felt the power of it burning through his body. "And I am not going anywhere. You are stuck with me."

She had avoided him for a week and he had allowed it. Then he had turned up outside her apartment building and waited for her to appear. "I am prepared to create a scene," he had warned. "But I know for damn certain that we are going to talk."

She had stomped in, ignoring the curious looks cast their way as they made their way past the concierge and up to her rooms. She had refused to talk to him and stared straight ahead without looking at him.

It had amused him until she told him as soon as they entered her living room that she wanted him out of her life. "I know you are accustomed to getting what you want, but this time it is not going to happen."

"Let me tell you how this is going to go." He had proceeded by hauling her into his arms and taking her right there on the floor.

She stirred slightly and he soothed her by running his hands up and down her back. Loving her had changed him completely.

Chapter 3

She visited the place she had called home for many years. It could not be helped or so she told herself. She had made the monumental decision. She was off the contraceptive and was on the verge of becoming a mother.

The way he made love to her, every chance he got, meant that she would be carrying his seed inside her very soon. She had told him that she was ready and was trying to convince herself she was.

She wanted a child by him, a son or daughter who favored him, who inherited that determined streak, that capacity to love. She wanted that for the child. She was not certain what he or she would inherit from her.

She had not said anything to him this morning about coming here, because he would have had something to say about it. The man was so protective that it was annoying or endearing, depending on how one looked at it.

She sat in the car and stared at the small red brick house, long fingers tapping on the steering wheel. It had been renovated, somewhat. Someone, no doubt the family who lived there now, had put up a white picket fence. And there were big red posies hanging from baskets on the porch.

It was almost Christmas and there were pepper lights hanging around the roof. She had never had anything like that. This building had been a house of misery and pain for her and David. Especially her. She had shielded her brother by taking the brunt of their father's brutality.

Taking a deep breath, she exited the car and walked up to the gate. It was not yet ten and the neighborhood was quiet. It had always been a quiet area, except inside their house.

She had wondered if the neighbors knew what was going on and chose not to poke their noses in. It was a distinct possibility. Pushing the gate open, she walked up the cobbled driveway, stopping at the steps as a woman bustled out.

The scent of baking hit her nostrils as soon as the door was opened. Yes, it was different here, this was indeed a home.

“May I help you?” The woman was wearing casual leggings and a thick red sweater, over which she had tied on a cheerful looking apron with red and green leaves patterned over white. Her unruly black curls were pinned on top of her head and there was a smudge of flour on her left cheek.

“I am sorry to bother you.” Remi thought strongly about turning around and going back to her car. “I used to live here.”

“Oh.” The woman came down the steps. “I know you.”

“I imagine you do.”

“You are together with that gorgeous hotelier, Wade Bramwell.”

“Yes.”

“Would you like to come in?”

“I don’t want to intrude.”

“Nonsense. My name is Sheila Brown. The husband and kids are out for the morning, picking up last minute items.” She gestured to the porch. “We are having his folks and mine over for the holidays, so it is going to be a crush.”

She led the way up the steps and straight into complete warmth and coziness. The scent of baking permeated the air, making her feel as if she had stepped into a bakery. Remi could detect cinnamon and something else she could not identify.

“Your Christmas tree is huge,” she commented as they stepped inside.

“The bigger the better,” Sheila said with a smile. “Would you like some hot chocolate and a slice of apple pie? I just took them out of the oven and was about to take a break.”

“I don’t want to put you to any trouble.”

“You would be doing me a favor.” The woman winked light blue eyes. “Come on into the kitchen. ” She bustled away, forcing Remi to follow suit. “We made several changes to the place. The kitchen was too small and closed in for one.”

Remi stepped into a room bursting with sunlight. Even though the outside was cloudy and winter gray, inside the kitchen was like a beacon.

The tiles were a sunny yellow with patches of roses scattered at the top and bottom. They had added an

island, the smooth yellow and white tiles covering the surface, with a dusting of flour no doubt from the baking.

“Sit anywhere,” Sheila invited as she took out large cups from the cupboard. Several pies were cooling on the rack and Remi felt saliva pooling inside her mouth.

“You came here to revisit your old home?”

“I shouldn’t have.” She accepted the steaming cup of hot chocolate with thanks.

“I read about your ordeal.” Sheila handed her a thick slice of pie. “Ever since you hooked up with that gorgeous man, the papers have been printing stories. They even came around here to take pictures.”

“I am sorry for that.” Remi had tried to ignore the stories of her past, but her anger had surfaced, until Wade’s PR department had made a statement.

“The kids and my Andrew were psyched. They felt as if they were celebrities.” The woman took a seat across from her. “You have never been back before?”

“No.” She shook her head and took a sip of the beverage, her eyes widening. “This is damn good.”

Sheila laughed in delight. “I do this for a living. I own a cafe in town.” She handed Remi several napkins. “There must be a particular reason why you are here?”

“Yes.” Remi shrugged. “I want to remind myself that I am no longer chained to the past.”

The woman reached out to place a hand over hers lightly and Remi had to force herself not to pull away. She was not used to physical contact and it had taken her a long time to have Wade touching her in public.

“I read what happened to you and your brother and was so angry, I had to put it aside. No child should have to exist in a space where the people who are supposed to

take care of them, turned out to be the ones hurting them.”

“Thanks.” Remi felt a little uncomfortable talking to a practical stranger about what went on in this house.

Sheila gave her a considerate look as she sipped hot chocolate. “We added an extra bedroom. One for our son. You shared the room with your brother?”

“Yes.” She could feel a headache coming on and realized belatedly that this was a mistake. She had left the staff at the hotel where they were supposed to be dealing with the ballroom.

“We painted out the drab gray color, but left the carving of you and your brother’s initials over the dresser.”

She gave the woman a surprised look. “Why?”

Sheila shrugged as she sliced into the pie. “My husband and I agreed that it was symbolic. If that is not something you like-”

“It’s your house.”

“And your memories. I thought it was sweet. So did my Andrew. And a little heartbreaking.”

“More than a little,” she muttered, feeling the tension inside her chest uncoiling.

“Would you like to go up and take a look at the room?”

She started to shake her head and then decided what the hell!

“If you don’t mind.”

“I offered, didn’t I?” Sheila said briskly. “You finish that pie and go on up. I have to put the dough in the oven. I am making raisin bread.” She winked at Remi. “My mother in law’s favorite. Go on up.”

Remi finished the pie and slid off the stool. She was familiar with the layout of the place and made her way up the winding staircase and turned left. The wallpaper in the passage had been exchanged for a more cheerful one of shell pink with tiny little rosebuds.

Taking a deep breath, she pushed the door open and stepped into the room she had shared with David. It was different.

So different that she did not recognize it. The dingy gray walls had been painted a light mint green with wallpaper of a darker green with tiny cabbage roses covering most of it.

Instead of the old and broken-down dresser, there were delicate white furnishings - matching ones. The closet doors were thrown open to reveal clothes neatly hanging inside. Shelves had been added as well. It was clearly a

girl's room and she could see the shoes stacked neatly on shelves.

Taking another breath, she wandered over to the dresser to look at the initials. A circle within a heart. Lifting a hand, she traced the rough etchings, feeling the tears clogging her throat. It had been a particularly rough night.

The old man had come in stumbling drunk and making lots of noises. She had tried to placate him by getting out of bed and making him a plate of food. For her efforts, he had hurled the plate into the wall and called her a worthless piece of crap.

“Look at you!” He had screamed. “You are fat and lazy, just like your useless mother.” He had followed it up by cuffing her on the side of the head. Then he had charged upstairs. She had managed to get up and race up the stairs before he could get to him. She had found David cowering in the corner of the room, his hands covering his ears.

“No!” She had screamed as their father stumbled into the room.

“You are going to take the beating for him?” He had sneered.

“If I have to. You are not touching him.” She had stood there trembling in fear as he advanced.

“Look at him.” He had pointed at David. “You are not a man. What man would hide behind a woman’s skirt?”

“He is a boy. Get the hell out.”

“What did you say to me?”

She had braced for the beating she knew was coming and had stood there with David behind her as he backhanded her.

But David had recovered enough to rush at him, climbing onto his back and digging his fingers into his shoulders and back. Both of them had bombarded him enough to have him stumbling from the room.

They had spent the night huddled together on the bed right after she had carved their initials into the wall. It had been done on a dare, a kind of defiance against the monster who was their dad.

Her phone pinged and jarred her out of the horrible pit of memories. She was unaware that she had been crying until then. Swiping at the tears, she dragged the phone out of her jacket, hissing out a breath as she recognized the number.

“Wade.”

“You are not at the hotel.”

“On my way.” She cleared her throat and tried to be normal. “Had to make a stop.”

“What’s wrong?”

Damn him, she thought angrily. He could not even allow her a few minutes of privacy.

“I had to make a stop.”

“I heard you the first time Remi. Where are you?”

“Are you checking up on me?” She was using anger as a defense, but that was all she had for now. “Is this what I will have to look forward to when I’m carrying your seed?”

The silence ticked by and she closed her eyes in despair. He did not deserve any of it, but he was a handy target.

“I am here now with the rest of the crew.” His deep voice was cold and distant. “There is a problem with one of the fabrics and they have been trying to reach you for the past ten minutes.”

“I will be there-”

“See that you are.” He hung up on her.

“Dammit.” Shoving back from the wall and the memories, she scrubbed her hands over her face and left the room to go back downstairs.

“I packed a pie for you.” If Sheila saw the tracks of tears, she made no mention of it. “Come back whenever you want.”

Remi held out a hand to her. “You have been pretty decent about everything. Thanks.”

“You are welcome my dear.” The woman hesitated. “I have seen pics of you with that delicious looking man and he looks like he loves you to pieces. Make good, happy memories.”

Remi smiled. “I will. Thanks again.”

She braced herself for the argument she knew was coming. But he was not there when she arrived. The disappointment was acute. She needed him, had intended to apologize and confess that she had done the unthinkable. But he was not there.

“Mr. Bramwell said he had a meeting,” Jenny told her as soon as she stepped into the ballroom.

“Um. Okay. What’s going on?”

Jenny showed her the fabric and she went straight to work, sorting things out. She could not afford any further delays. She was determined that the project would be right on track.

She was not going to allow her relationship with Wade to give her any leeway. She was a professional and if she had to work through the night, harass the shipping company, then so be it.

Taking out her phone, she started to make the calls. He had not called her, which meant he was pissed. She was going to let him cool off first.

She picked at the wrap, her appetite nonexistent. It was after two in the afternoon and she had called and asked David to meet her at their spot. The restaurant was owned by a friend, which ensured some kind of privacy and that they would be left alone.

“Why on earth would you go back there?” David dabbed at his mouth impatiently as he stared at his sister.

“I wanted to see the place.” She reached for her glass of water.

“To what end?”

“I am going to be a mother, perhaps soon and I-” She spread her hands. “I just wanted to see for myself what had been done to the place. It’s different.

The family there appears to be happy. They added another bedroom for the son and there is a porch swing and a fence. A white picket fence.” She smiled slightly. “It’s a happy place. They left the initials we carved into the wall.”

He looked at her sharply. “What the hell for?”

“I asked that as well. Sheila - her name is Sheila and she bakes by the way. She said it was appropriate. Like she knew one day I would pass by. I pissed Wade off.”

She took a drink of water. “I was there and was feeling disconsolate and he called. I tried to appear natural, but he heard it in my voice. He asked me what was wrong and I just snapped at him.”

“Remi-”

“Yeah.” She shook her head. “He has not called me.”

“Did you call him?”

“No. I am letting him cool off. I said some nasty things to him. Why do I keep doing it?”

“Because you are still lashing out. You are still defensive. And now that you have decided to go ahead with the pregnancy, you are wondering if you are doing the right thing.”

She stared at him. “Stop shrinking me.”

“I am being your brother,” he corrected. “Look Remi-” he sighed it out and pushed away his drink. “We went through hell. You most of all. You protected me, stood up for me. You went through living hell for years and I am grateful for what you did for me.”

“But?”

“You have a good man there. He loves you and puts up with your crap-”

“Hey.”

“I am being honest. He does not deserve what you dish out. He was not that bastard who beat on us every chance he got. Do you love him?”

She gave him a look. “What the hell kind of question is that?”

“A reasonable one. Answer it.”

“I feel like a suspect,” she muttered as she picked at her wrap. “You know I do. I am scared of disappointing him. He could have any woman he wants and he chose me. Sometimes I find myself wondering why.

He is Wade Bramwell and I am well - I am me. I have learned to be confident in my looks after being beaten down by that - that sperm donor, but it is still hard, difficult for me to accept that a man like him could be interested in me.”

“You need to take another look in the mirror.” David’s expression softened as he reached for her hand. “You

are beautiful, talented, and fiercely loyal. No wonder he is in love with you.”

“He gave me this.” She used her free hand to snag the necklace from beneath her sweater.

“Crap!” He whistled, staring at the stone. “That’s - it’s a beauty.”

“I told him about the one I was eyeballing at that jewelry store so long ago when we were walking home from school and he remembered.”

“My God.” David’s eyes flew to hers. “He is-” His voice petered off.

“Unbelievable.’ Sighing, she put away the stone. “I am going to have to do some serious groveling.”

“Are you certain you are ready? It’s a damn big step.”

“I am. It’s just that I have some lingering issues that won’t go away.”

“And probably never will.” David shrugged. “I am learning to live with it.”

“And you are saying I should do the same?”

“Something like that. Or you are going to run the risk of messing up the very good thing you have going on.”

“And I certainly would not want that. God!” She took a gulp of the water. “I love him so much and every single day, I wonder what the hell he is doing with me. When will he find someone who is worthy of him? I am from a crappy background, what the hell does he see in me.”

“The same thing I see.” David gazed at her fondly.
“Someone who is one of the best people I know.”

He could feel the anger taking over. He had originally thought to wait for her, have it out right there in front of her staff. But he had been too riled up and if he had stayed, he would have said something they both regretted.

Damn her! He shoved at the proposals he had in front of him. He could not concentrate on the damn contracts although he needed them for his meeting this afternoon.

That's what she did. Whenever she was going through something, he could not keep still. He wanted to fix things for her, to make it so that she was not hurting. He wanted to erase the past, to take away the hurt and pain she had endured growing up.

The minute she answered the phone, he had known that something was wrong. He was attuned to her every mood and he sensed that she was going through something. He thought they had reached a place where

she would want to share whatever it was with him and it burned him that she was holding back.

His head jerked at the discreet knock on the door.

“Yes?” he snapped.

“I am sorry sir, the conference call you have been waiting for is on.”

“Thank you Corinne. Give me five minutes and put the call through.” He hesitated briefly. “Has- Did she call?”

His assistant knew him well enough to know who he was referring to. “No sir. Would you like me to call-”

“No.” He shook his head. “Give me five, will you?”

“Of course. You have not touched your sandwich.”

“I am not hungry. No.” He shook his head as she stepped forward with the intention of taking it away. “Just leave it and close the doors on your way out.”

Rising from behind the desk, he strode over to the cabinet to pour himself a drink. He was damned if he was going to call her.

And when he arrived home, they were going to have it out. Splashing the bourbon in the glass, he took a swallow before going back to the desk. He had work to do and was not going to allow her to distract the hell out of him.

There were times like this when he regretted how much power she had over him. Heaving out a sigh, he reached for the files he needed and engrossed himself in the details.

Taking out his phone, he stared at the screen where her picture, one he had taken on impulse of her with her chin

propped on her palm, a big smile beaming forth, stared back at him as if taunting him.

Hissing out a breath, he put the device away and pressed the intercom. "Put the call through," he ordered as he shrugged away his troubles.

Chapter 4

She knocked off early so that she could go to the apartment and make herself presentable. The housekeeper was still there, putting the final touches to the pot roast she was making for dinner.

“I was thinking we would eat in the small dining room.”

“I will get the fire going,” the woman told her with a polite smile. It had been a year since she had been with Wade, but Remi had the feeling the woman was still not warming to her. Not that it mattered one bit. Wade wanted her here and that was good enough for her.

“Thanks. As soon as you set the table, you may be on your way.”

The woman nodded, watching as Remi made her way upstairs.

She had some serious sucking up to do, Remi considered as she made her way into the bedroom suite and started shedding clothes. And it seemed to be a pattern. Stepping into the bathroom, she decided on taking a shower instead of her usual bath.

Stepping into the wide shower enclosure, she touched the button, stepped beneath the piping hot water and closed her eyes. There had been times in the past when all they had were cold showers.

Stingy ones because the bill had not been paid. Nights of just beans and rice and water to drink. Now she had a man who offered her every comfort money could buy and she was dicking around on him, snapping his head off.

Rubbing the scented body wash over her skin, she made a vow. From now on, she was going to do her best to be worthy of him and stop thinking of him as the enemy. Or that he was trying to control her.

He had not called her and she had stopped herself from calling him. What she had to say to him would be better said in person. She had no idea what his schedule was like and if he would be home for supper.

Turning off the water, she stepped out and grabbed a fluffy white towel.

She was in the middle of pulling on a sweater when he came into the room. Pulling the sweater down, she watched cautiously as he shrugged out of the charcoal pin-striped suit he had worn for work this morning.

“Hi.”

“Hi.” He barely gave her a glance as he went over to the loveseat to take off his shoes.

“I was thinking we could have supper in the small dining room.”

He nodded and continued taking off his clothes. "I am going to take a shower. I will see you downstairs." Without looking at her, he walked away and into the bathroom.

"Shit," she whispered. It was bad, definitely bad, if he did not even greet her with a kiss. Standing by the dresser he had provided for her, she wondered if she should let him steam and go downstairs or force him to pay her attention.

The sooner the better, she decided with a firming of her shoulders. Taking off her clothes, she marched forward and into the bathroom. He had his head bent beneath the beads of water. Stepping behind him, she touched the button and squeezed some of the soap he favored into her hand.

It was when she started to rub his back, that he realized she was there. She felt when he stiffened and shifted away from her.

"That's not going to work. Not tonight," he told her coolly without turning to face her.

“I am trying here.”

“Are you?” He punched at the button to turn off the jet and would have moved past her, if she had not stepped in his way.

“What are you doing?” His green eyes raked her face and she saw that he was careful not to look further down.

“Trying to apologize.”

“You are doing a poor job of it.”

“I have not started.” She slapped her hands on his chest.
“I am sorry.”

“I am tired.”

“Of me?”

“Of the fights, the accusations, tired of trying to prove myself.”

“Are you saying you want out?” she demanded.

His eyes flared. “Precisely what I am getting at. Let me pass.”

“I went to the - the place where I grew up!” she blurted out.

He went still at that. “What?”

She curled her fingers into his chest. “I did not tell you because I knew what you would have said to me.”

“I would have told you that it was not a good idea.”

“Exactly.” She stepped closer. “I had to go-” She shook her head as he opened his mouth. “I wanted to go. I made this decision to get pregnant and I just wanted to know if I am strong enough to go through with it. That the memories were fading.”

“And?”

“They were not. The place I knew was no longer.” She smiled slightly. “It was a happy place. With all new furnishings and a pretty porch and a white picket fence. The scent of baking hits you as soon as you turn up the driveway. The woman was nice and she invited me in.”

“Why the hell would you go back there?” he demanded.
“And when I called, you were upset.”

“Yes,” she admitted. “I was in the room I shared with David. They left the initials we carved into the wall.”

His eyes flared. “I offered to buy the damn place.”

“What?” She stared at him in shock. “When?”

“Six months ago. I was going to purchase it and raze it to the damn ground.”

“Why?” she asked, even though she knew the answer.

“It was a place of pain and horror for you. I wanted it gone.”

“They would not sell. Did they know it was you?”

He shook his head. “I went through a subsidiary of the company and they refused the offer, even though we

offered them twice what the place was worth.”

His hands came up to grip her arms. “I went there myself, because I was going to offer more money and that was when I saw what you did. Children playing outside and flowers blooming. I decided to leave them be.”

Her throat hitched and burned. “You did that for me.”

“It appears that there is nothing I would not do for you, as you have probably figured out by now.”

“I am sorry.” The tears were flowing down her cheeks. “Wade, I am so sorry. ” She clutched at him and his arms came around to hold her close. “It’s hard for me to know that you love me so much.”

“Why?” He shook her a little. “Haven’t I proven it to you repeatedly?”

“And still, it seems surreal. I love you.”

He tilted her chin up and wiped at the tears, his expression tender. “You are loved in ways you cannot imagine.”

“I am beginning to realize that.” She hiccupped. “You did not call me.”

“I was pissed. You distracted me and I could not concentrate on the damn meeting.”

“I do that a lot.” She leaned into him and he took her lips in a kiss that had her breath hitching. “Make love to me. Here and now.”

“The meal-”

“Can wait. I need you Wade. I need to feel you inside me. To touch my womb as only you can. To make me feel as if I am the most beautiful woman in the world.”

“You are.” He cupped her face. “And you are mine.” He braced her back against the glossy tiles and stepped between her open thighs. “I am yours.”

“Yes. All mine.” She scraped his flesh with her nails and felt when he quivered. Lifting her head, she crushed his lips with hers, her body jolting as she lifted her leg and felt him slide into her. “Don’t stop.”

“I won’t. Can’t.” He nibbled at her neck, his body heating up with the familiar desire. Within minutes, they were both lost in the intensity of the lovemaking.

“I am staying away from wine, just in case.”

He handed her a piece of homemade roll and ate the rest. “You think it is already happening?”

“I hope so.” She flashed him a smile. “It would not be for lack of trying.”

“It would not,” he agreed. “But I am certain that a glass every once in a while is allowed.”

“I am erring on the side of caution.”

He eyed her for a minute before slicing off a bit of roast and popping it into his mouth. “I see. We were supposed to have gone for drinks with the Willoughby’s.”

“We were?” A frown pleated her brow. “I had no idea.”

“Darling, if you would only check your schedule, it would help.”

“I am up to my ears in trying to get this thing done.”

“And I told you to hire more people.”

“Were they upset?”

“They understood that you are pressed for time. And I did not particularly feel like company.”

“Because you were pissed at me.”

“That’s right.”

“I have to stop doing that.”

His thick eyebrows lifted. He was flushed and sated from the intense lovemaking in the bathroom and at peace with the world. His woman was seated across from him and the fire was blazing in the hearth. He could afford to be generous. “Will you?”

She reached for the glass, unthinkingly and took a sip of the excellent blend. “I made a vow while I was in the bathroom.”

“And that would be?”

“I was going to be a better girlfriend.”

“Girlfriend?” Amusement tilted his sensuous lips.

“Lover, woman, your best friend. Whatever.” She ate the delicious roast. “I am going to work through my shit and tell you whenever I am going off at the deep end.” She took a breath.

“I will tell you whatever I am doing-” She stopped as his amusement deepened. “Okay, maybe not everything, because you are not controlling, but I will learn to live with the shit that took place in my past and not ladle it out on you.”

He inclined his head. "Can I get that in writing?" He ducked when she flicked a piece of bread at him.

"I mean it, Wade." Her expression sobered. "I cannot be without you. It's weirding me out, but it is what it is."

His expression softened. "You think it's easy for me?" Putting away his glass, he reached for her hands and linked their fingers.

"Before you, I was shallow, wandering from one woman to the next. Dissatisfied with life and throwing everything into the job. Now it's you." Lifting her hand, he kissed the back of it. "I cannot see my life without you either."

"Then I guess we are stuck."

"I guess we are."

“Good.” She grinned at him. “Finish eating. I have something planned.”

“What?”

“You will see,” she told him mysteriously.

“Sweetheart, it’s four days away from Christmas. How do you expect us to get a tree and decorations tonight?”

“By using your super powers as Wade Bramwell.” She had persuaded him to drive to the lot with her to pick out a tree.

“I thought you hated Christmas.” He parked a block away from the lot and hopped out.

“I saw the lights on the roof of the house earlier and decided that I want to change things.”

“We could have hired someone to do the work.”

“That would not be the same thing.” Taking his hand, she led the way through the forest of trees. A thin emaciated looking man with a harried expression on his face, came forward. “May I help you? We are short staffed at the moment and-” His eyes widened as he looked at Wade. “I - Mr. Bramwell, sir. What can I do for you?”

“The love of my life would like your biggest tree.”

“Of course. I will escort you to the back myself. It’s four days to Christmas and most of the best ones are gone-” He led the way deeper into the wooded area until they were facing a tree towering over all of them. “Will this one do?”

“It’s perfect.”

“It’s not going to fit into the SUV.” Wade pointed out.

“Oh no. We will have it delivered.”

“Now?”

“Darling-”

“Of course.” The man interrupted. “My name is Al and I am the owner. What about decorations?”

“What do you have?”

He beamed at Remi. “Everything you would want on the tree.”

“What about the thing on the top?”

“Would you want a star or an angel?”

She furrowed her brow and turned to look at Wade.
“Your choice.”

“Might I suggest an angel?” Al offered.

“An angel it is.”

He clapped his hands in delight. “Now let’s get you all sorted out.”

“I think this goes here.” She held up a shiny gold bulb.

“I don’t think there is any particular order.” He was tangled up with gold and red strings. Al had been true to his word and everything had been delivered within half an hour of them arriving home.

She had found a bowl of eggnog in the fridge and poured some into two glasses as they decorated the tree. “And we really should ditch everything and hire someone - a professional - someone who knows what the hell they are doing to get this thing done. We are making a mess.” He gestured to the pile of tinsel on the carpet.

“You are a hotshot multi-billionaire with fancy hotels all over the world and I am a hotshot designer whose designs have been featured in several magazines. We got this.”

“I am not certain we do.” He glanced at the clock on the mantle. “It’s getting late.”

“It’s just- Oh crap! Almost midnight? How can it be almost midnight?”

“Shall we dump everything and have someone deal-”

“No.” She shook her head firmly. “We are not going to let this damn tree beat us.”

“Remi, darling, nothing is wrong with waving the white flag.”

“I am not waving a damn flag, white or otherwise. Now reach up and put the angel on the pointy thing.”

“Pointy thing?”

“You know what I mean. Go. We should be finished in the next ten minutes.”

It took them thirty minutes before she was satisfied and as she was about to go and get a broom to clean up the mess, he took her hand and shook his head. “Bed now. Mrs. Mason will clean up.”

“She is going to hate me even more.”

He cast her a glance as they headed up the stairs. “She does not hate you.”

“She does too. You should see the looks she gives me.”

“What looks?” He nudged her into the bedroom and closed the doors.

“The one that tells me that she would prefer someone else for you.” She stood there while he took off her clothes.

“I am sure it is just your imagination. ” He walked her back to the bed.

“She thinks you can do better.”

“I have done better.” He dragged off his clothing and joined her. She snuggled into his arms and breathed in his scent.

“She does not think so.”

“Has she ever been rude to you?”

“No. Just really polite and snotty. She thinks I am loud and aggressive.”

“You are loud and aggressive.” He grinned as she poked him hard in the ribs. “But I love you anyway.”

Tilting her head back, she gazed at him.

“What?” he asked.

“Sheila, the woman who owns the house now, calls you a delicious looking man. I agree with her.”

“Do you, now?”

“Hmm.” Bending her leg at the knee, she nudged at his crotch.

“What are you doing?”

“What does it feel like?”

“Remi, I have an early breakfast meeting and you have- Christ, stop!”

“Or?” She introduced her fingers and had him spinning.

“Nothing.” His lips sought hers and she swallowed his groan as he entered her.

She stared at Dr. Rachel Monterey, not quite knowing what to say. She had been feeling a little off since the last few days and decided to check it out. Her periods were irregular and so queasiness and dizziness were her only indication that anything was going on.

She was finished with the design interior of the hotel, but Wade and the board had decided to put off the opening for another two weeks. She had decided to come without informing Wade because she wanted to be certain.

“How far?”

“Six weeks.”

“Oh.” She pressed a hand to her stomach. “What happens now?”

“I can tell you the expected due date and assure you that you are in very good health.” The woman folded her hands on top of her desk and smiled at her. “It’s September, around the first week. I am going to give you some folic acid and vitamins, I want you to start taking.”

“I hate pills.” Remi reminded her with a grimace.

“And you would tell me to suck it up.”

Remi laughed at that. “Exactly what I would say. Okay, fine. Load me up. I am going to brave the damn weather and go and tell Wade the good news in person.”

“Be careful, it’s bad out there.”

“I am carrying precious cargo, so that would be a yes.”

“Ms. Wilcox! I mean, Remi.” Corinne jumped up from her chair and came towards her. “He did not tell me you were coming by.”

“That’s because it is an impromptu visit. How is Georgia?” she asked, referring to the woman’s daughter.

“Doing much better. Thanks.” She beamed. “He is just finishing up a conference call.”

“Then I will wait.”

“No, I am sure he won’t mind you going right in.” She led the way and after a discreet knock, pushed the doors of the sumptuously lovely and masculine office with the breathtaking view of the city open.

He looked up, a smile wreathing his face as he gestured for her to come in.

“Would you like some tea?”

“No. I am fine.”

“Very nice to see you.” Corrine beamed at her again, before stepping back and closing the doors behind her.

She wandered over to the window and stared out at the towering buildings of the city. She was pregnant. It felt strange and scary at the same time.

“This is an unexpected pleasure.” She had been so wrapped up in her thoughts that she had not heard him approaching.

But who could, with the carpet swallowing every footstep? Turning, she took the time to admire the shell sweater he had on that stretched across his wide chest.

He had rolled up the sleeves to reveal the veins popping beneath the dark hairs covering his skin.

“Remi?”

“How was the conference call?”

His brows lifted as he stared at her. “We put in a bid for a derelict hotel in Hawaii. We succeeded. What brings you here?”

“I went to see Rachel.”

His eyes sharpened and he went still. “And?”

Reaching out a hand, she dragged his hand to her stomach. “We are six weeks pregnant.”

He did not speak for a minute, his eyes darkening. “You are sure?”

“I believe in Rachel’s expertise as an OBGYN.”

“You went without me.”

“I wanted to be certain.” She cocked her head as she stared at him. “That’s not the reaction I was expecting.”

“I don’t know what to say.,” he whispered hoarsely. “I thought it would not happen for a while.”

“And now?”

“Darling, I am overcome.” His brows descended. “I have not asked about your health.”

“No. You haven’t,” she teased him.

“Are you okay?”

“I am in tip top shape. Just a little queasy. Still waiting here.”

“I am in heaven.” He drew her to him and held her close, breathing in her scent. “What now?”

“I was given some essential supplements.”

He tilted her chin up. “You hate taking pills.”

“Rachel told me to suck it up.”

He smiled at that. “Will you?”

“It’s for a good cause. So yes, I will.”

“The roads are slippery-”

“I am being extra careful. Are you going to start nagging me?”

“Absolutely.” He kissed her slowly, stirring up her desire and making her cling to him. “We should celebrate.”

“We will. Later.”

“Where are you going now?”

“To have lunch with David and tell him the great news.”

“Are you sure you are okay with this?” he asked her anxiously.

“If I am not, it’s already too late.”

“Remi.”

“I am kidding.” She wrapped her hands around his waist.
“I am over the moon. The distended stomach, the swollen ankles and me looking like an elephant? Who wouldn’t be thrilled?”

“I would change places with you in a heartbeat,” he told her with a straight face.

“Very funny.” She poked her tongue out at him and was rewarded for that when he sucked it into his mouth. She went weak with need and the kiss turned torrid. It was the insistent buzzing of his intercom that had him ending it reluctantly.

“I adore you.”

“I adore you back,” she whispered.

“Be safe and take care of my girl.”

“I will.”

Chapter 5

“I am going to be an uncle.” There was a dazed expression on his handsome face as he stared at her. “It feels weird.”

“You are telling me,” she muttered. They were at their favorite place, at their favorite table and were being left alone. Wade was right. The roads were slippery and she had slipped several times walking towards the building. She shook her head as she visualized his reaction. He had called her twice already to ask if she was okay.

“You are beginning to get on my nerves.”

“I am not worried about that. You are carrying precious cargo and I do believe I am going to have someone drive you around from now on.”

“No, you are not. And if you call again, I am not picking up.”

“That is just going to piss me off.”

“Then you are going to be pissed off.”

“I just want to make certain you are okay. You know I could put someone on you.”

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“How would you know?” he had asked her mildly.

“Wade Bramwell, don’t make me hurt you.”

“Then promise that you will pick up.”

“Oh, damn you.”

“Is that a yes?”

“Just, bite me,” she had snapped at him.

“Still waiting here.”

“Fine. I will pick up. I really hate you right now.”

“I can live with that. I love you darling.”

She had fumed and hung up on him, but her heart had been splintering inside her chest.

“Wade is already being a nuisance. He’s called me three times since I left his damn office.”

“The man is over the moon,” David said with a grin. He searched her face curiously. “Are you happy?”

“Ask me when I am in my second trimester.” She moved her soup around with her spoon. The plain chicken broth was settling her stomach at least. “I ordered some books online and have been reading up. I cannot for the life of me understand how women do this more than once. No wonder our mother resorted to getting high.”

“That’s no excuse and women have been procreating since the beginning of time. She got high because she chose to. Not because of us.”

“My body is changing. My boobs will get bigger, hormones will rage and there are times when I will be a lunatic bitch on wheels. I will probably end up hating Wade and want to stab him in the eye with a dull knife.” She grinned at him. “The price of carrying another human being into the world.”

“And there is the upside to it.”

She gave him a wry look. “Says the person who never has to go through the hell of growing a baby. I get to do all the work for fricking nine months.”

“Wade started the process.” He grinned at her murderous look. “I am told it’s a beautiful thing and as soon as you hold that baby in your arms, the entire ordeal is no longer an issue.”

“Yeah right.” She snorted and took a spoonful of soup. “Do you think they were happy when we were born?” Her voice was wistful. “That they gazed at us and had tears in their eyes?”

David would have preferred not to go there, but his sister was the one who had endured the worst. She deserved some recollection time. “I would like to think so,” he said carefully. “Or else why would they go back a second time?”

“It might have been a mistake.” She shook her head at the look on his face. “Both times.”

“Once is a mistake, twice is deliberate.” He took a long swallow of his drink. “It doesn’t matter now, does it?”

“No. It doesn’t.” She smiled and tried to relieve the tension. “I am going to have a hell of a time decorating the nursery.”

“What do you think it will be?”

“I am sure Wade wants a son.”

“And you?”

“I think I want a son too.” She pressed a hand against her stomach. “I am carrying a baby inside me. How scary is that?”

“You are going to do great. And you have the mom thing down pat. You took care of me.”

“Yeah, that’s right and you were a brat.” She grinned at the look he threw at her. “Okay, enough about me. Tell me about that high profile case your company caught.”

“You know I cannot discuss the details.”

“You are representing a senator accused of channeling funds to the Caymans, the same guy who is allegedly responsible for transporting people from Mexico.”

“Alleged is the word and the guy is innocent until proven guilty.”

“You don’t think he is innocent.”

“That’s for a jury of his peers to decide. Our duty is to gather all the evidence and try and make a case, and represent him to the best of our abilities.”

“It does not bother you?” she asked him curiously.

“I am not here to judge the guy.”

“He seems guilty to me.”

David sent her an amused look. “Why? Because he is a politician?”

“Exactly.” She pointed her spoon at him. “They are all corrupt and intent only on getting rich off the backs of ordinary citizens like you and me.”

“You are not ordinary at all. You are Wade Bramwell’s girl. Do you for one moment think that Wade’s hands are squeaky clean? He is a very wealthy man who has built a formidable company. The papers classify him as being ruthless when it comes to getting what he wants.”

“He is fair when it comes to doing business,” she insisted. “I would not be with him otherwise.”

“Honey, you are smart and intelligent. Men like Wade Bramwell do not get where they are by being all the way fair.”

“He inherited the company from his dear old dad. A company that has been in the family for generations. He just made it more productive.”

“And his dear old dad was a piece of work. Be grateful he died before you two met. He would have done everything in his considerable power to stop the relationship.”

“I know. Wade told me that himself. His mother on the other hand was a sweetheart. I am sorry I did not get to meet her.”

David reached over to cover her hand. “I am happy for you sis.”

“Yeah. I am kinda happy for myself.”

She was curled up on the sofa with a blanket thrown over her lower body when he arrived home. Only the light from the electronic fireplace relieved the darkness of the room and he could see her sitting there and staring into space.

He had called and apologized for the delay in getting home. An emergency had come up and had to be dealt with. He had told her to go ahead and eat without him and he would grab something from the office.

He had shed his winter jacket and welcomed the warmth embracing him. It had started snowing while he was on his way. He stood there in the arched doorway and stared at her. She looked pensive as if she was lost in thought and he wondered if she was regretting the seed she was carrying. He could not bear it if that was the case.

He cleared his throat and had her turning to look at him.
“Finally.”

“You missed me.” Her smile lightened the tension inside his chest.

“Not really. I just need someone to rub my feet. Any old Joe would do. But since you are here...”

“Happy to be of service.” He shrugged out of his jacket and put it away, before pulling up an ottoman and taking a seat. “Cramps?”

“Hmm.” She wriggled her toes as he propped her feet on his knees. “That feels good.”

“How was lunch?” His long fingers kneaded the insteps slowly, watching as she relaxed against the cushions. She had showered and changed into a thin teal blue robe and he could clearly see the outline of her breasts.

“David is psyched about being an uncle. We are not going to spoil this child.”

“Okay.” he moved up to her calves and smoothed away the knots there.

“I mean it, Wade. I know we will be able to offer him or her everything money can buy, but no expensive sports car when he turns sixteen. He will have to work for it like a normal child.”

She shook her head as he arched his brows. “I know he will not be a normal child, but I did not grow up swimming in money like you did and I refuse to have our child becoming an entitled asshole.”

He bit back a smile at her fierce expression. “I will see to it that he is denied all the creature comforts. Shall we have him shoveling snow as well? Or perhaps we should get rid of Mrs. Mason and let him do the housework.”

She cast him a dirty look. “We do not have to go that far. But he is going to learn the value of a dollar and that nothing worth having in life is easy.”

“Noted.” He eased up to her thighs. “You keep saying ‘he’. Do you think-”

“I am just being generic. But I want a son.”

“I see. Any particular reason?”

She shrugged and realized that very soon, the conversation would fade away. His hands on her thighs were making it difficult for her to concentrate. “I don’t know. I just want a son who has your temperament, your determination and your looks.”

“Nothing of you?” He was peeling away the robe and untying the sash. A growl sounded inside his throat as he encountered her naked flesh.

“My personality, I guess. Wade?”

“Darling?” He was busy parting her thighs and rubbing the area near her sex.

“I cannot think.”

“What do you need to think about?” She sucked in a breath when he gently parted the folds of her vagina and started to massage the area.

“We were talking about- about- Oh sweet Jesus!”

“I don’t think that was the topic of our conversation.” His breath was shallow and unsteady, eyes darkened as he stared at her. “Was it?”

“Oh, damn you.” Her fingers gripped the edge of the sofa as he slid a finger in, working it in deep. A growl escaped him when he discovered her moistness. “Oh Wade.”

The whispery sound of his name coming from her made him as weak as a kitten.

“Relax,” he murmured softly.

“As if I could.” She widened her thighs and threw back her head, hips lifting as he stroked her in a slow and strong rhythm.

“You are so damn tight.” He could feel his cock throbbing painfully against his trousers. “That was the first thing I thought of when I entered you that first time. ‘How could she be so tight’? I wondered to myself.”

“You asked me that some time ago and I said-”

“That you had not been in a relationship for close to two years.” He was watching her closely, his body heating up at the transformation on her face. “I asked you if the men you were acquainted with were blind?”

I responded that maybe they were.”

“Their loss and my utmost gain.” He was doing something to the swollen flesh that was making her jumpy.

“I did not believe you. I thought it was a line.” Her fingers gripped him, digging into his wrist.

“You said I was spouting bullshit. I want you to come all over my fingers so that I can suck them into my mouth and taste you.”

“Wade, I cannot,” she whispered. “What do you expect from me when you say those things to me?”

“To feel me. Go over,” he ordered harshly. “Flood my fingers with your come.”

She came violently, her body arching, breasts quivering as he drove into her. She cried out his name, body trembling as the explosion washed over her. Through half closed eyes, she watched as he brought the fingers to his lips and sucked them off. "Wade."

"Darling." Stumbling to his feet, he dragged off his clothes and stood there with his fingers wrapped around the thick length of him.

"I want more," she told him raggedly, eyes sweeping over the muscled chest and flat stomach to the impressive erection. "I am greedy for you."

"Welcome to the club." He lowered himself between her thighs and brought her forward. "You are carrying my seed. After you left, I could not very well concentrate." He eased into her, teeth gritted as she gripped him like a sheath.

"My darling, the love of my life." He pushed into her, body shuddering as she wrapped her thighs around him. "I am yours. Do you understand that?" His lips brushed

against hers and he closed his eyes as her sweet breath filled his nostrils.

“Yes.” Her arms came around his neck to wander restlessly up and down his back. “I do.”

“Good.” He took her lips with his, tongues tangling, breaths mingling. The intimacy was more than a little unbearable. Something more had happened between them.

They were now responsible for creating a life and that made it even more solid. He wanted to marry her, but understood even though it pained him and pissed him off a little, that she was not ready. He was going to have to take it one step at a time and be patient with her.

But now she was carrying his seed and that humbled him. He never thought he could love her more than he did, but he was wrong.

She tore her mouth from his as the climax claimed her again and buried her face into his neck. Her fingers clutched at him as the moans of surrender escaped her. He came right behind her, his long, lean body shuddering as he poured himself into her. He sagged on top of her, utterly destroyed and flustered.

“I am crushing you,” he murmured into her neck.

“No.” She kept her hands wrapped tight around him.
“Just stay.”

“For a minute then.”

“I love to feel you inside me,” she whispered and he groaned.

“I love to feel you wrapped around my cock.”

She trembled at that. “You were involved with a lot of women.”

The sudden mention of his past had him jerking upright and staring at her. “That’s in entirely poor taste.”

“I know.” She grinned at him, with sleepy satisfaction. “You were a bit of a slut.”

“How would you know that?” He found the strength to ease out of her.

“I read stuff. You were involved for three months with some fancy lawyer.” She watched as he rose and came to sit next to her. She shared the blanket with him.

“And?”

“Why did it end?”

His eyebrows quirked. “Are we really discussing this?”

“Yep.” Easing back against the cushions, she propped her feet on his thighs. “Spill.”

“It did not work out.”

“Obviously. Why not?”

“We wanted different things. I really do not-”

“What different things?” She persisted and earned an aggrieved look from him.

“She wanted marriage.”

Her eyebrows rose. “And you didn’t.”

“Obviously.” He borrowed her word. “Not at the time. I had spent years with two people who plainly did not love each other and it made for a miserable life.”

“Why didn’t you love her? She appeared to check all the right boxes.”

“And those would be?”

“Gorgeous good looks, talent and she came from money.”

“Perhaps those are not the things I look for in a woman,” he pointed out.

“What you look for in a woman is voluptuous curves and someone from a crappy childhood?”

“It seems to be the thing.” He gave her an amused look.

“You always hooked up with skinny, emaciated women in the past.”

“I would not exactly refer to them as emaciated,” he responded dryly.

“Compared to me, they are.” She settled back even more and sighed when he started to rub her feet. “That’s why I did not believe you could be interested in me.”

“It took some convincing,” he agreed. “I had no choice in the matter. Even when you told me to stay the hell away from you, I could not get you out of my head. I had no intention of coming back for more insults, but I was unable to stay away from you.” He gave her a hard stare. “You were quite the bitch.”

She laughed at that. “You were Wade Bramwell and I thought to myself that you were just looking for something or someone different to sink your dick into.”

“Classy,” he muttered.

“Speaking of which, I recalled you saying something about my lack of class.”

“I was mad as hell when after I poured my feelings out, you told me to get real and that it was just amazing sex and we should leave it at that.”

“I thought it was until I realized I could not stop thinking about you. In demanding that you stay away from me, I was punishing myself.”

“And still, you would not call. That is your least attractive trait - your willfulness,” he pointed out dryly.

“Then you came to find me and I could have wept with gratitude.”

“And still, you continue to give me grief. I should have left you right then and there.”

“Why didn’t you?” she asked him quietly.

He stared at her in surprise. “I couldn’t,” he told her simply. “You knew that. I wanted to leave, to just say to hell with everything, but I needed you. I could not leave.”

“I was such an idiot,” she whispered.

“No arguments here. Let’s go to bed.”

“Wait. Have you eaten?”

“Yes. You?”

She nodded and held out her hands for him to help her up. “I was feeling a little queasy and I asked Mrs. Mason

to make some soup. I usually cannot stand the stuff, but it went down easily.”

He picked up her robe and draped it around her shoulders before grabbing his clothing strewn all around them. “How do you feel?”

“Dandy.” Taking his free hand, she led the way out of the living room.

“It’s nothing.” She shook her head as he lifted his from the pillows when he heard her stirring.

“Indigestion?”

“I think so.” She was now two months pregnant and along with the nausea coming at odd times during the day, she was also plagued with an upset stomach.

“Some ginger tea is in order.”

Before she could stop him, he was sliding off the bed and heading towards the cabinet he had installed in their bedroom. It was complete with an electric kettle, boxes of different teas and bottles of honey. The man did not miss a trick. She watched as he strolled over to plug the kettle in and selected a cup from the shelf.

“It’s not that bad.”

“You were twisting and turning,” he said, turning his head to look at her briefly. “And I am here.”

“You are making me love you even more.”

He switched the kettle off and poured the water over the pouch. Adding a spoon of honey to the mixture, he brought it over on a tray. “I thought that was impossible.”

“It seems not.” She blew on the tea. “I find myself wondering if you will always be this attentive.”

“Remi-”

“No.” She shook her head. “I am not being contrary or cynical. I am just-” She took a sip of the tea and closed her eyes. “I want this to last so much and I am wondering if I am being unrealistic.”

“It will last.” He settled next to her. “I have been in a number of relationships and I happen to know the difference. You have been in all of what? Two?” He grinned at the dirty look she threw him. “I am the expert here.”

“That is not something to be proud of.”

“I would like to think that all of it was leading me to you.”

“That’s utter BS and you know it.”

“Perhaps.” He grinned at her. “But I still think it is. How is the stomach?”

“A lot better. The opening is this weekend.”

“Yes.”

“Nervous?”

“It’s not my first rodeo,” he reminded her. “I ordered something for you.”

“I wish for once you would trust me to order my own damn clothes. And I have tons of items in that house you call a closet that I haven’t worn yet.”

“I know how busy you are and with the pregnancy-”

“The tea is still piping hot and you happen to be naked.”

He covered that vulnerable part of him. “Remember how you worship me.”

“Oh please. Right now, I am leaning towards intolerance.” Her eyes glittered. “And it better not be something that resembles a napkin.”

“I happen to be a classy guy,” he reminded her smoothly. Leaning over, he kissed her lips and tasted the honey. “Drink up.”

Chapter 6

The Royale's ballroom was overflowing with patrons eager to be part of one of the most sought-after parties since the beginning of the New Year.

Invitations had been sent out prior to the event and the RSVPs had poured in. Wade Bramwell was well-known as a visionary who had the ability to take a stark and utterly drab building and turn it into a piece of art.

Valets decked out in red, white and blue, the signature colors of the newest acquisition, were kept busy directing vehicles and helping with the parking. The lobby was thronged with guests checking in, not just for the party but also to spend a few nights in the sumptuous suites.

They wanted to be part of the history of the place. Before the acquisition and subsequent renovation, the building had been a dilapidated mess in the middle of downtown. As soon as work had begun on the project, others had jumped in with the idea to make downtown beautiful. Even the police precinct had been given a facelift.

Wade had wanted them to be among the first people there and she had made certain she was home with enough time to get ready. She had taken a small project to occupy her time. A private apartment residence belonging to a popular actress. And she was handling most of the designs herself.

“No heavy lifting,” Wade had warned her.

“I promise.”

Now she stood with her man in one corner of the room, the red sheath she had on molding to her voluptuous curves. She was wearing rubies at her throat, ears and wrists and could feel the excitement rushing through her body.

People had complimented her on a job well done and she was feeling proud. She had spoken to David and his date for the night before rejoining Wade who was surrounded by members of his exclusive club together with their wives.

She liked the women and agreed that they were a mixed group who did not put on airs. She also knew that most of them were from humble backgrounds and seemed to be in love with their very powerful husbands.

Wade had told her that some marriages were made to last, but she was not ready for that kind of commitment yet. Some nosy reporters had already cornered her to ask when the big day was.

“I think it is already here,” she had responded innocently, deliberately misconstruing the question.

“Good response.” Kelly Takahashi, looking stunning in a lime green dress, said with a smile.

“Thanks.”

“Very nice work darling,” Leesa told her in admiration. She was wearing a delicate pink and gold dress that left

nothing to the imagination, but somehow managed to be tasteful.

“I like the bold colors and the fact that instead of the traditional crystal chandeliers, you used candles, hundreds of them. It gives the place an intimacy that is unmistakable.”

“The building has been around for centuries.” She started to reach for a flute of champagne and then decided against it. Not that one glass would do any harm, but her stomach was acting up again. “It was in fact the residence of a cousin of the King of England, handed to him as a gift when the guy married the king’s daughter.”

“Fascinating,” Kelly murmured. “You do thorough research before diving in.”

“It’s required.” She went for a glass of nonalcoholic wine instead and lifted her head to look at Wade, knowing he had been the one to send it over. The man knew everything. It was decidedly uncanny.

“It made for fascinating reading. I spent half the time doing research, which is usually the most difficult part of the job. But this time, it was well worth it.”

“It is indeed a beautiful building,” Leesa commented.

“And durable. People are pouring in to make reservations.”

“Brad and I are staying the night.”

“I persuaded Kane to do the same. We almost did not get in, the place has been booked since the opening was announced.”

“You live a few miles away,” Remi pointed out in amusement.

“The same thing Kane said.” Kelly grinned as she sipped her wine. “But I finally persuaded him and bribed him with some very hot and wild hotel sex.”

“Which is far different from the sex we have at home,” Leesa concurred. They both glanced at Remi.

“We are going straight to the loft.”

“I thought you guys would want to stay here.”

“And mingle with all these people?” Remi scoffed. “Not a chance in hell. Present company excluded.”

“Of course,” Kelly said with a laugh.

“People are staring at us.”

“As they should.” His arms were wrapped around her body and he could feel the heat of her penetrating his clothing. “We do make a rather handsome couple.”

“So, this is just for show?”

“Photo op.” He grinned at her. “No doubt we are going to make the morning papers.”

“Wallowing in your victory?”

“Wallowing? I prefer basking.” He kissed her forehead. “A lot of people were commenting on how beautiful you look.”

“And I saw several of your exes giving me the dagger in my back look.”

“I had no idea any of them were invited. I should have specifically asked they not be included.”

“That would have meant half the women here.”

His eyebrows arched and he made a show of looking around. “You are exaggerating.”

“I am so not.” She aimed a look over his left shoulder. “Angela Bisasor. What kind of name is that?”

“She has her heritage in India. And we were together only twice.”

“You managed to make an impression.”

“We parted amicably.”

“Is that a thing?” she asked him mildly and could not help but demonstrate ownership by moving in closer and trailing her fingers down his neck.

“It is. We are friends.”

“She looks like she wants to be more. But, too late for her, because now that I am knocked up, you are not going anywhere. Being a baby daddy takes precedence over being a mere boyfriend and if they continue to look at you like their last meal, I am going to get possessive.”

He shot her an amused look. “Like you are doing now?”

“Even more.” She leaned forward to nibble at his bottom lip and sent white hot flames shooting through his body.

“Jesus! What are you doing?”

“Making my mark.” She gave him a smug look when she felt the evidence of his arousal.

“I am not going to be able to walk off this bloody dance floor.”

“Need a cold shower, darling?”

He glared at her and had to ease away a few inches. “I need a damn drink.”

“We could find a room and I could help you get rid of the - er- pressure. You do own the hotel.”

“You are right.” His eyes sizzled at the idea. “Let’s do that, shall we?”

“Think anyone noticed that we are not in the room?” She snuggled against him as she tried to get her breath back.

He had a suite reserved for him and had taken the private elevator there. They had barely entered the room when he started to take off her clothes. They had finally ended up on the massive bed.

“Considering that we are the hosts of the damn thing, I am figuring yes.” He was still fighting for control. “You did that deliberately,” he accused.

“Of course I did.” She trailed a finger down his chin, poking at the shallow dent. “I wanted to establish ownership.”

His eyes glittered. “And if I had done that, you would be all over me.”

“Maybe. It just felt right at the time.” She threw a thigh over his and snuggled. “Besides, I was feeling incredibly horny. This pregnancy thing has increased my sex drive.”

“Much to my extreme pleasure,” he admitted. “What now?”

“Round two? Are you up for it?”

His eyebrows rose. “Is that a challenge?”

“I was merely asking a question.”

“Then the answer would be a resounding yes.” He flipped her over and covered her body with his.

“It’s probably nothing.” She was staring at the pink and cloudy urine in the bowl.

“We are not taking any chances.” He flushed the toilet and turned her towards the double sinks so she could wash her hands. “And you have been fatigued for the last week or so.” He handed her a towel and took it from her when she was finished. “We are going to see Rachel tomorrow, first thing.”

“It’s probably nothing.” She stopped, grimacing at the tenderness in her private area.

“Or a bladder infection.” He walked her to the bed. “We should call her now.”

“It’s almost two in the morning.”

“She is a doctor and is accustomed to getting calls at odd hours.” He reached for the phone.

“Wade-”

“Rachel. I apologize for waking you.” He listened for a minute and then smiled. “Good to hear.” He shot a look at Remi. “She was up anyway. Could you pop by here? Remi’s urine is spotty and looks like blood.” He listened again. “It does have an odor.”

“Wow. I am not embarrassed or self-conscious at all,” she muttered.

“And there was some pain.” He listened again. “Thank you.” he said before hanging up. “She is on her way. There is a strong possibility that it is a bladder infection.”

“And ordinary women carrying babies, would have to wait to go and see their OBGYN in the morning. And you just waved a magic wand and she is on her way.”

He lifted a brow. “Are you complaining?”

“No. I am tired and sluggish and my pee smells like crap. Not to mention that you and Rachel discussed the fact that my pee smells like crap.”

“Rachel happens to be a doctor and I am your man.” He plumped the pillows behind her head.

“And now I feel like crying. I hate this!”

“You hate being pregnant.”

“Right now I do and don’t get up your high and mighty horse with me mister. You are not the one going through all this shit. I am, me alone. So I am entitled to bitch and hate you more than a little.”

“Point taken. Would you like some tea?”

The tears came then, just started to flow down her cheeks as if a pipe had been turned on.

“Darling.”

“Please do not hold me-” She dissolved even further when he gathered her into his arms.

“I feel like an idiot.”

“You are entitled.”

She eased back to peer at him. “I am entitled to feel like an idiot?”

“You are entitled to feel all these emotions veering throughout your body.” He grinned and using a corner of her robe, wiped at the tears. “And feel like an idiot.”

“Don’t make me hurt you.”

He kissed her wet cheeks gently. “I am going down to let Rachel in. Please don’t cry anymore until I am back.”

“Bite me.”

“I will indulge you on that later on.” Picking up his robe, he tied the sash and strode from the room.

“Definitely a bladder infection,” Rachel told her with a smile. “This antibiotic is not harmful to you or the baby and will clear it up in days.”

“Why do you look so efficient and professional at two in the morning?” Remi grumbled. “It’s not natural.”

“A patient of mine was having some problems, so I was at the hospital when Wade called.”

“Fortunate for me, then.”

“She is not her usual congenial self,” Wade supplied with a grin.

“And I told him that he should switch places with me and see if he could handle it.” She shot him a dark look.

“I sincerely doubt that.” Rachel finished her examination and took out the bottle of antibiotics. “She gets one dose right now and the other twelve hours after. It’s going to make you a little drowsy, so I suggest you stay in for today.”

“I had intended on working from home anyway.”

“Good.”

“I will see you out.”

“Thanks Rachel.”

“Anytime.”

She was half asleep when he came back into the room. “It started snowing again,” she murmured, looking out the large floor to ceiling window. “I love the fact that I am here cozy and warm and you are with me.”

“Does that mean we are not at odds?” Taking off his robe, he slid in and spooned her.

“No.” She placed her hand over his as she stared at the fat drops of snow splattering against the window. “It made me think.”

“About?”

“My childhood.”

“Remi-”

“No. It’s nothing to be crazy about. It’s just that seeing the snow, brought it all back. It was in March too and we had school. I was fourteen I think and the house was cold, so cold that we could see her breath in the air. He had not paid for the gas and electric and we had to drag wood chips from outside to build a fire.

Our winter jackets were old and worn and not enough to ward off the cold. He had threatened us so many times that if we reported him, we would be thrown into the system. We believed him and I did not want to be separated from David.”

“Darling, please-”

“No.” Turning her head, she kissed the worry from his lips. “It’s just that being in here with you, the home you have provided, the warmth and coziness for the winter and the right temperature for the summer makes me so incredibly grateful.

Not that I did not have any of it before. I did, but this is so much, that sometimes I think I take it for granted. And I realize that there are children going through similar situations and I want to do something about it.”

“You are.” He kissed her neck and pulled her closer as if to warm her body with his. Even though it was unnecessary. “You do. You give back darling and you never have to feel one moment of cold or endure a second of heat again.” His voice was thick with emotions. “I am promising you that.”

“I know.” Removing his hand, she turned to face him, her hands cupping his face. “I did not say all of that to make you unhappy.”

“How can I help it?” His eyes were bright with anger and grief. “I want to change all of it for you. I wish I could go back in the past and make it so that it had not happened.”

“Then perhaps I would be a spoiled and selfish bitch and it would not have brought you to me. Then that would have been a damn shame.”

He laughed as she had intended him to. “I hate hearing about it.”

“I know darling.” She kissed him again. “I kinda love that you want to kick ass for me.”

“Of course you do.” He kissed her forehead. “Now get some sleep.”

But even after she had drifted off and he heard her even breathing, he could not fall asleep. He relaxed as her body edged closer to his and she threw one foot over his. He was angry and felt helpless that he could not stop the difficult memories. She had been through hell and that was putting it mildly.

He had often wondered growing up why people introduced children in their misery. Was it because they

thought being so young, they would not be cognizant of what was going on? How foolish of them!

He had known from the beginning that there was no love lost between William and Irene Bramwell. To the public, they had made a perfect and beautiful couple. Wade had inherited her sable brown hair and light green eyes. The family manor had been sold as soon as the estate had been settled.

The living room, sporting the life-sized family portrait, had been cold and austere and he had been happy to escape when it was time to attend college. He had stayed away even during the short breaks. But during the long summer months, he had been required to work at the company and learn the business.

He had endured that, but during the weekends, he had gone to friends' houses to escape the oppressive silence between the couple and the awkwardness.

Conversations had been minimal and neither of them had ever expressed the slightest interest in what he was doing. His mother had not been half bad, but she had

been so caught up in the misery of a loveless marriage that it had been impossible for her to show any sort of affection to her only child.

But Remi and her brother had been through worse. At least, he had not been abused, not physically at least. He had had more than enough food to eat and had an entire suite of rooms to himself to escape the dreariness.

She had had to endure the physical and emotional and verbal abuse from a man who was supposed to love and protect her. She had had to grow up pretty fast so that she could take care of her younger sibling. It broke his heart and made him want to shower her with things.

He smiled slightly as he bent his head to look at her. It aggravated her when he did it, but he was unable to help himself.

He was proud of her. She had managed to redefine herself and come out on top. That took extreme guts.

And to him, she was a damn hero. No wonder he was so stupid over her. He could not help but love her. To him she was the ultimate woman and the one he had been searching for all his life. She murmured in her sleep and mashed her face into his chest.

“Shh, baby,” he whispered, kissing her forehead to soothe her. “Sleep now darling. I am here.”

“You need rest.”

“What I need is work.” She shifted through her design book to search for a fabric. “I am fine. The bladder infection is all gone and I am feeling like myself. I am not staying in bed and you cannot make me.”

“Don’t count on it.’ His eyes glowered at her. He was in the middle of a delicate negotiation with the property owner in Hawaii and ideally he would have gone in person to talk to the family.

But he could not trust her not to go overboard. He had not touched her for a week and he was feeling the strain of it. On top of that, she had slipped on some ice while coming back home from a luncheon meeting and had almost fallen.

“I promise to stay here and work from home. Shelly is going to call me with some changes to the dining room anyway.”

“You need rest,” he insisted, his jaw tight. “I will not have you working yourself to death. It’s not like you need the damn money.”

Her eyes shot sparks at him. “I pay my own way. You knew from the start that I am not the type of woman to sit and fold her hands while a man hands out pocket money.”

His green eyes grew cold. “Is that what you think is happening here? I am planning on controlling you?”

“Look,” She sighed and rubbed her hand over her forehead. She was feeling a little down and dejected and she missed him not making love to her. The tension was getting to both of them. “I don’t want to fight with you.”

“You have a damn funny way of showing it,” he growled as he glanced at his watch. “I am running late for a meeting.”

“I don’t want or need a babysitter.”

“Noted,” he said coolly as he turned out of the room he had given her for her office. “I will probably be late.”

He left without kissing her goodbye and she could feel the pressure of the depression pressing down on her. She hated it when they argued and she knew that she was the one who usually initiated it. He was trying to be patient with her up and down moods and he was worried about her.

The problem was that she was so used to taking care of herself that she did not know what to do or how to react when someone else was doing it.

Her parents had left them on their own to do the job and she had been the one to take up the slack where David was concerned. She had always been self-sufficient and he had to understand that. He should.

Rubbing a hand over her stomach, she tried to quiet the queasiness. She was heading to her second trimester and the damn nausea was getting worse. But she had to find a way to live with it and not take it out on him.

Chapter 7

“Angela, I hope everything is alright?” Wade greeted her with a warm smile as he gripped her hands in his. She had called and begged him to meet her at the Tea Room.

He had hesitated at first, not just because he was busy, but Remi had made specific mention of her last Saturday at the opening. But he was also reminded that she had pissed him off earlier this morning with her stubbornness. The woman was determined to drive him crazy.

He had not called her directly, but had asked Mrs. Mason how she was doing. He was slightly ashamed to realize that it was his way of checking up on her. He did not trust her to keep her promise to stay indoors. March had come in with not only bitter cold, but snow and sleet as well. He did not want her heading out and having a fall.

“You look good.” There was a wistful note in the woman’s voice as she took her seat.

“So, do you.” He fudged the truth a little as he took his seat and nodded to the eagerly awaiting maître D. “What are you having?”

“Just some of your delicious tea and cucumber sandwich, please.”

“I will have the same,” Wade remarked and waited until the man had departed. “You sounded anxious over the phone.”

“I should not have called you. We are no longer involved-”

“We never really were,” he reminded her gently. Her thick black hair was pulled back from her face, highlighting the gauntness there. And her dark brown eyes looked haunted.

“Not for lack of trying on my part.” She smiled slightly and reached for her water. “You seemed happy at the opening. You are in love with her.”

A smile ghosted his lips as he reached for his own water. “I am crazy about her. Love seems such an inadequate word for what I feel about her. She is my life,” he added simply. He eyed her over the rim of the glass.

“I suppose you will be marrying her.”

“In time.” He put aside his glass and decided to wait until the meal was swerved. The Tea Room was busy at this time of day, it was a place where deals and contacts were made. A place to be seen by the appropriate people.

He nodded to several acquaintances and was annoyed that he felt a touch of guilt that he was having lunch with a woman of his past. Some nosy reporters could run with this and their photos could end up in some society rags. Then there would be hell to pay where Remi was concerned.

“Thanks,” he told the man briskly as their meals were placed in front of them. “I am a little pressed for time-”

“I should get on with the matter at hand. I had no one else to turn to and I know what we shared was nothing significant where you are concerned, but I -I more than liked you Wade.” She picked at her sandwich listlessly. “I had hoped it would have turned into something permanent.”

“I made it clear-”

“You did,” she intervened swiftly, with a tremulous smile.

“And you are prevaricating. I have a meeting-”

“I am in trouble,” she blurted out.

He stared at her with a frown. "In what way?"

"You know I have been working at the law firm for the past fifteen years."

"And you made partner there." He nodded.

"We - the partners started to take on some shady characters, known criminals with deep pockets, money laundering and such-" She spread a hand. "I really should not be discussing this with you."

She gulped water. "I foolishly got involved with one of them. I am not going to say his name, for obvious reasons. I thought we had something - I knew of his reputation of course, and accepted gifts, expensive gifts from him because I foolishly thought we were a couple."

"And you are not?"

She shook her head and bit her lip. “He was just using me. Now I am in too deep. I stand to lose my license, my job, everything because I have been inadvertently leaking him privileged information. And I am in fear for my life.”

“You should go to the police.”

She laughed shakily. “You know better than that. He has threatened my family, my sister is married with children and he knows where they live.” She clasped her hands on the table top, expression haunted. “I don’t know what to do, Wade. I am in over my head.”

“I don’t understand what you expect me to do.”

“You have resources. I know I am overstepping, but I am fighting for my life. I have to keep passing him information, or he is going to make good on his threat. He has people in the police force, he told me so himself.

And I believe him. He is a very powerful man and I should never have gotten involved with him. But he started to show me attention and I was foolish enough to fall for his charms.”

“I have someone I can speak to discreetly.” He pushed away his tea, a frown on his brow. “You are the lawyer here Angela, so you know that you are going to lose your job. And it seems to me that the company you are a part of is one you should distance yourself from.”

“I have decided to go back to India, but I cannot do that until I know the threat is eliminated. My sister and her family live here, and have their lives here. I did this and have to deal with it.”

“Let me see what I can do.”

She leaned forward and placed a hand over his. “I am very grateful that you are even offering to help.”

“I don’t know that I can.” He removed his hand and took a sip of water. “But I will try.”

He sat at his desk and toyed with the paperweight she had given him for his birthday in September, a frown on his brow. He had contacted his friend, a high-ranking lieutenant in the precinct and spoken to him about the situation and it did not look good.

Even though Angela had not given him a name, he knew precisely who the guy was. A Russian mobster and a particularly dangerous man. He should stay the hell away from that sort of thing.

Or contact Nickolai. They were members of the same club and he had been part of that scenario some years ago until he had gotten out. Andrei Sokolove had been part of it as well. He could meet with his two friends and tell them the problem.

The haunted look on Angela's face was etched onto his brain and he had to try and help her. Yes, she had been foolish to get involved with a man like that, but he felt a little responsible for her.

And he could not tell Remi. It was eating at him that he could not involve her, for several reasons. He did not want her stressed and he did not want to bring this mess into their home. That was what he was telling himself.

Pushing forward, he picked up the phone and placed the call.

"Andrei. I hope I am not calling you at an inopportune time."

"I was just coming out of a meeting. I hope you are not bowing out of the card game set for Saturday. We have big plans for you, my friend."

"I am definitely in. Is there some way you can carve out a time for us to meet this afternoon?" He glanced at his

packed schedule. "I am afraid it will have to be after the usual business hours."

"How about six?"

"That sounds ideal. And I am calling in Mikhail as well."

"It sounds like a situation."

"It is. Could you make it to my office?"

"Of course. Want me to call Mikhail or-"

"No, I will do it. Thanks."

He hung up and placed another call.

She was restless. There was no going around it. She could not concentrate. She had sorted out a design, sourced fabric for the living room sofas, made arrangements for Jenny to swing by the Pied a Terre to take some more pictures, but she had been inside the loft for two days now and was feeling a little trapped.

He had not called her and she had not called him either. She knew he had spoken to Mrs. Mason because the woman had made it her point of duty to come upstairs and into her office to ask if she was okay and had also brought her some soup.

They were behaving like children and that was not good. How did they expect to bring up a child if they were acting like children themselves? She pondered the question as she walked around the room.

She had made changes here, reluctantly of course. He had invited her to - demanded that she did. "I want this to be your space and somewhere you are comfortable

working. Make the changes Remi, or I am going to hire someone to do it.”

The man had a way of getting under her skin, she thought wryly. So, she had changed the wallpaper, stripped off the gold and brown and added her own style, her own color to the place. The blue was striking and the green soothing.

The desk was serviceable, nothing fancy, but the computer was pricey, had to be to accommodate her work. Jenny came over sometimes when they had to meet in person and a desk had been set up for her as well.

She hated it when they fought. Glancing at her watch she saw to her surprise that it was almost four in the afternoon. Walking over to the window, she frowned out at the ominous looking gray clouds, indicating that they would be getting more snow heaped on the pile already on the ground.

The winter was showing no indication of going away and being cooped up inside the house was driving her crazy.

She had things to do. A shelter to look into. She had discussed it with Kelly and Leesa and they were on board.

Moving away from the window, she decided to bury her pride and give him a call. Sitting behind the desk, she picked up the phone and touched his number. He answered immediately, sending her heart into a tailspin. The man had such damn power over her!

“Are you okay?”

“I am fine and I have been under house arrest ever since you left.”

“Remi- “

“Okay fine. I get that you are mad at me as usual, but you did not call and dammit, I am accustomed to you calling me.”

“You said I was a nag.”

“Well you are. But you are my nag and it’s pathetic that I cannot go through the damn day without hearing your voice. When did I become this weak-willed needy woman who cannot do without her man? I hate this, hate the fact that I cannot concentrate on anything when you are pissed at me. God!” She blew out a breath.

“I adore you, darling.” The obvious love and devotion in his deep voice had tears flooding her eyes.

“Oh Wade,” she whispered huskily.

“I know my sweet. How are you?”

“Hating you at the moment.”

“It does not sound that way.”

“Well I am, in spirit. When are you coming home? You know what, scratch that, you are an adult and I do not need to keep tabs on you.”

“I have a 6pm meeting and then I am heading home. I miss you.”

“You just miss the sex,” she grumbled.

“That’s a given. Have you eaten?”

“The very vigilant Mrs. Mason did not report what I ate?”

“She said she served you some soup. How is the stomach?”

“Much better. This soup thing is growing on me.”

“I am happy to hear it,” he hesitated briefly. “About what you said- “

“I am ashamed of how petty I sounded.” She closed her eyes briefly. “I am hereby giving you permission to shower me with money.”

He laughed and she felt the relief coursing through her body. “I will keep that in mind. I have a call coming in darling. See you later?”

“Count on it. Wade?”

“Yes?”

“I love you to pieces.”

He groaned at that and the silence that followed was pregnant. "I am going to ask you to say it back to me later."

"I will. Later." She hung up the phone and felt herself growing light. Calling him had definitely been a good idea.

"Gentlemen, I was about to pour myself a half glass of scotch." He nodded as they came into the office. "Join me?"

"Absolutely." Nickolai closed the doors behind him and went to sit on one of the padded chairs in front of the desk.

"It's really coming down out there," Andrei remained standing.

“I really appreciate you taking the time to come here.”
Wade walked over to hand them their glasses before going back to get his. “I know it is out of your way.”

“It sounded urgent.” Andrei sipped the excellent scotch and watched as Wade sat on the edge of his desk.

“It is. I was involved with someone by the name of Angela Bisasor, some months ago and just today, she came to me with a very troubling story.” Wade twirled the liquid around. “I am hesitant to get involved, but in all good conscience, I could not just stand by and do nothing. She is involved with Valentin Volkov.”

He watched the recognition on both men’s faces with a nod.

“How involved?” Nickolai asked tightly.

“Romantically. He has her feeding him information and has threatened her family.”

“Something he will follow through with, if she does not toe the line,” Adrei told him grimly.

“I had dealings with him during the days of my difficult years or rather, the old man did.

He is ruthless and has a penchant for killing those who stand in his way. How the hell did she get involved with a son of a bitch like that?”

“He charmed her. What she said. According to her, the firm, where she is a partner, represents scums like him.” He took a sip of his drink. “The firm is being investigated by the feds.”

“Naturally.” Nickolai inclined his dark head, dark eyes watchful. “I am going to say what we are both thinking – you cannot afford to get involved.”

Wade tossed back the rest of the drink and put the glass away. "I cannot very well leave her to flounder with the sharks."

"It's not your damn problem. Volkov is not just a shark, he is the type that eats, chews and swallows without a thought to the palette. And he does not discriminate. You have a woman who is pregnant and if he knows of your involvement, he will go after her. We have friends, in the police force, high up—"

"And they have not been able to touch the son of a bitch!" Wade snapped it out. "Look, I care about her—"

"She was that good a lay?" His eyes flashed at the crudeness from Nickolai.

"Get your damn mind out of the gutter. I also knew her parents. When I went to India last year, they showed me extreme kindness." He shook his head. "There must be something we can do."

“I can reach out to my contacts in Russia to hear the latest,” Andrei murmured.

“And I will do the same.” Nickolai nodded. “I have to tell you, right now, that this is not going to end well. Does she have anywhere she can hide out?”

“She is worried about her sister and her family.”

“She is going to have to decide to turn state evidence against him and perhaps think of going into witness protection.”

“She is prepared to, but for her sister and the family. There are also her parents.”

“Volkov and his gang of thugs have long reach.”

“Then that’s a problem.”

“Yes.” Andrei rose to put away his glass. “I had dealings with him while I was trying to clean up the mess the family left and it was not pretty. He uses women as tools, is deep into human trafficking and extortion.

The different arms of law enforcement have been after him for years now and some have come close to shutting down his operation.

But his witnesses always turn up dead, violently. What I am assuming is that he targeted Ms. Bisasor because he wanted control in the firm. He is not going to let her off. She is either going to end up dead or worse.”

“What’s worse?” Wade asked grimly.

“Her entire family murdered, including the children,” Nickolai told him quietly. “We will see what we can do.”

“Thanks.”

After they left, he sat there on the edge of the desk, thinking. They were right, he should leave it alone. He never got involved with anything shady. That had been his old man and after his death, Wade had spent years cleaning up his mistakes and the habit he had of cutting corners. He was a respectable businessman.

He knew Volkov of course, the man had managed to worm his way into their society and he had been at several functions he had been invited to.

But now he had Remi and his baby to think about. But the look on Angela's face was not making it easy for him. He had connections with key law enforcement officials and he could reach out.

But he would wait until he heard from his friends before he decided what to do. He would offer his support to a woman he had cared about once. She had made a horrible mistake, one that felt like it was going to cost her plenty. He was going to do his best to minimize that.

Easing off the desk, he went to get his jacket. It was time to get his cleansing by being with the woman who occupied his every thought.

He found her in bed. She had showered and was wearing a thin white robe that barely covered her generous bosom. Her thick dark brown hair was strewn over the white cotton of the pillows and she had a tray table on the side of the bed.

“I felt like ice cream and cookies,” she murmured as he came into the room.

“What type?”

“Butterscotch.”

“Hmm.” He took off his jacket and sat down to take off his shoes and socks.

“You are late.”

“The meeting ran over.” He felt guilty not telling her what was going on, but he was not going to involve her.

“I thought about calling you again.”

“Why didn’t you?” He rose to take off his pants.

“I did not want to be a nag.” Her dark brown eyes gleamed when he took off his underwear.

“Like me?”

She smiled at him. “I figured that I would suffer in silence.”

“I would not have minded if you did. It would have been a pleasure.”

“I am supposed to be tough.” She nodded when he took the tray away.

“You still are.” He pulled her into his arms.

“I don’t feel tough.” She snuggled against him. “You smell nice.”

“I need a shower.”

“Not yet. We have not been together for a week.”

“That’s because you had that thing.”

She chuckled. “It has a name.”

“Something to do with your bladder.” He inhaled her scent and felt his heart settling. This was home for him, not the location of it, but just being here with her. She was his anchor and he was never going to allow anything or anyone to shift that.

“I am all better.” She pushed at him until he let go. Folding his hands behind his head, he watched as she took off the robe. “I need to be serviced.”

“I was not aware you were a machine.”

“A breeding machine.”

“I might be tired. I happen to be a very hardworking guy.”

“No problem, I will do all the work.”

“I might not be in the mood.”

“Yeah right.” She snorted, one hand reaching down to stroke him. “You are like a fricking Duracell battery, ever ready.”

“It’s a natural reaction. I am human after all.”

“And aren’t I happy about that?” She was toying with the tip of him and sending heat flooding through his body.
“Ready now?”

“Continue doing that and I will let you know,” he told her hoarsely, unable to stay still.

“How about now?”

“Now is fine.” Flipping her over, he covered her body with his.

Chapter 8

“Something I should know?”

He had not figured on her being so attuned to him, but he was to her and the relationship they shared was so close and intimate that she was aware of his every mood.

“No.” He forced a smile. They were attending the annual end of winter ball at his hotel and the place was jam-packed with patrons.

“She was staring at you.”

“Really?” He tried for tolerant amusement and wondered if he was pulling it off. “Don’t tell me you are jealous.”

“Just curious.” She gave him a long and steady look.

“Just remember what I said about you straying.”

“How could I forget?” he asked her dryly. “it’s still vividly etched in my mind. You told me that you would cut my cock off, boil it and stuff it down my throat.”

She grinned at him. “Now that we understand each other, I see Kelly and Leesa by the buffet and I have something to discuss with them. Go talk to your ex. She is trying hard not to show that she needs to talk to you.” Turning into his arms, she kissed him slowly, firing up his blood.

“You did that on purpose,” he whispered against her mouth.

“Just establishing ownership.” She placed a hand on his left cheek. “Making certain she and every other woman in the room knows which way the wind blows. I need to eat.”

“You witch.” He held onto her for a minute as he tried to settle himself. “You are going to pay for that as soon as we get home.”

“I am looking forward to it.” She kissed him again before drifting away, the scent of her perfume and the swirl of her red and gold dress following her.

Shaking his head, he watched her walk over to the rest of the women standing in a corner of the room.

He had heard from Nickolai and Andrei yesterday and the news was not encouraging. Now they were going to have to think of something else.

She started to approach him, but he gave a slight shake of his head to discourage that. He did not want Remi involved in any way. He would speak to her if and when it was deemed appropriate. Reporters were hanging around and snapping pictures, he was not going to take the risk.

“We need to talk.” Andrei walked over and fixed a smile on his face. “I had a brief conversation with Ms. Bisasor and things are heating up.”

“We cannot talk here.” He looked over to where Remi was entertaining the crowd. “Too many ears and eyes.”

“This is your hotel; we should find a room and get some privacy. I will tell Ms. Bisor to meet us wherever you want.”

“There is an office I use whenever I am here. It’s up a level and the first door on the right. I will-“ He gestured with one hand. “I will tell Remi that I have some business to deal with and join you.”

“Want me to send and get Wade?” Kelly asked her a little anxiously.

“No. It’s just cramps.” She closed her eyes briefly and pressed a hand against her stomach. She was just starting to show, but the style of the dress cleverly hid

the slight bulge. “It has been coming on more frequently, since I hit the second trimester.”

She blew out a breath and settled back against the padded chair. “I don’t want to be the kind of pregnant woman who runs to her baby daddy every time she feels something off.”

She grinned at the women seated around her.

It was a charity event and people had come out to donate to the very worthy cause.

“Besides, I told myself that I am going to enjoy every minute of this pregnancy. When the baby comes, I am going to be stuck in the loft for a long time.”

Kelly lifted her brows at that. “You obviously do not remember the man you are pregnant with. You can afford to hire a dozen nannies.”

“I understand that all of you took time off for the first six months to bond with your kids. I know I read something

about that. I intend to do the same.”

“You are forgetting that we had more or less resigned our lucrative and very demanding careers.” Leesa pointed out.

“By the time I had my first son, I was in charge of a division of Romano’s that took most of my time. But I wanted to stay home with him for a little bit,” Monique recalled with a smile.

“I know I will have to hire someone eventually, but it is not going to be for the initial stage.” She rubbed her belly absently. “I never thought I would want a child, because of what I went through growing up. But I am bonding with this baby. I find myself reading all the books I can get my hands on. I do the thing while I am doing my work out.

I play classical music during my stretches and I have to tell you that before that, I was not a fan. Now everything I do; I think about him/her. If I eat this, will it affect him? Should I have that last piece of pizza I am craving? Things like that.”

She laughed shakily. "It's like I am consumed and I want to be the protective mother bear and the baby is not even here yet." She looked at the women. "I am guessing I am preaching to the converted."

"You certainly are." Hayley told her with a fond smile.

"I was forty-five when I got pregnant and was scared as hell. Now I look at my children and thank God that I did not allow David's age to stop me from getting involved. Pregnancy changes us for the better and no matter what we go through during the nine months or whatever, it is well worth it."

Angela sat on the sofa with her hands clasped in front of her. "What do you suggest?"

“That you go to the police.” Wade sat on the edge of the desk facing her. “You already said he is making more demands of you.”

“Yes.” She pressed her lips together.

“And he is not going to stop. The feds are working assiduously to bring down his operation.” Nickolai added.

“And in the meantime, he is pressuring me to find out what they have on him.” She gripped her fingers tight. “I am at a breaking point and it is affecting everything. I have told my sister, insisted rather, that she takes the family and go somewhere and not to even tell me.”

“Will she?”

Angela looked at him and shook her head. “I don’t know.” She spread her hands. “I keep asking myself how did I get into this? I am smart and selective. I knew who he was, knew of his reputation, but I thought I was in love with him.”

She pressed a hand to her throat. “He knows that something is off. I canceled on him twice and when I left the firm the other day, there was a car tailing me. He did not even hide the fact that he was following me. I don’t feel safe at my place anymore.”

“I think you should just get the hell out,” Andrei told her firmly. “I have a yacht- “

“I cannot involve you.” Angela shook her head and firmed her shoulders. “I should not have said anything to you Wade and I thank you for taking the time to try and help.”

“We want to help.”

“But you can’t.” She looked at the three powerful men in the room and felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what they were trying to do. “I got myself into this mess and I am going to get myself out of it.”

“How?” Nickolai wandered over to sit next to her.

She smiled at the question. "I have been compiling evidence against him. Damaging evidence. Things he said to me, names he allowed to drop so that he could put the fear of God in me. I recorded everything and I am going to use that to get him to leave me alone."

"You think he will do so?" Wade asked with a frown.

"The things I have are compelling and explosive and will take him down eventually. I cannot live this way and I am certainly not going to live the rest of my life looking over my shoulder. This ends now."

"You are quiet."

He spared her a brief glance as he shrugged out of the cranberry-colored jacket he had worn for the function. He had listened to her amusing anecdotes about some

couples at the function and had made the appropriate responses. But she knew him.

“I was listening and I am usually not a talkative guy. I leave the talking to you.”

She searched his face as he came over to join her on the bed. “The meeting went to hell?”

He smiled at that. “You could say. Did you enjoy the party?”

“You were gone for almost an hour. I had to entertain myself. Should I be concerned?”

“About?” He shifted so that he was on his side and facing her.

“That you somehow managed to sneak someone up into that big ass suite of yours.”

“With you in the hotel ballroom and with reporters milling around? I am not that innovative.”

“Oh, I am sure that if a man wants to cheat, he will find a way.”

“I could say the same thing about a woman.” He tugged at a lock of her hair. “Somehow the threat you made about my prized jewel keeps ringing in my ears.”

“Is that what’s stopping you from doing it?”

“The love I have for you makes me unable to look at another woman.” He kissed her roughly on the lips. “You had cramps.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “Nothing is sacred.”

“You should have called me.”

“And say what? That I am feeling a little stiffness at the base of my stomach?” She shook her head. “I am pregnant, anything is possible.” She trailed a finger down his chest. “I have to be somewhere tomorrow.”

“Where?”

“Remember the children’s home we were talking about?”

“The one in the heart of downtown?” He stared at her with narrowed eyes. “It’s a mess down there. A lot of gang violence and disturbances. You are not going.”

“Leesa, Kelly and Monique will be there. If it makes you feel any better, I will have Manny drive me and stay until I am ready to leave.”

“No.”

She pushed at his chest, her eyes sizzling. “I was not asking your damn permission and I did not have to say anything to you.”

“You are pregnant- “

“Yes!” she snapped. “The operative word is pregnant, not disabled, not terminally ill. I am simply doing what women have been doing since the dawn of time. We want to make a difference. You renovated a hotel several blocks from the area, the place is starting to come to life again. We are trying to get funding for the shelter.”

“Then write a damn check.”

“It’s not that simple. There are kids there who are on drugs. Who have been abused. We are trying to set up counseling, and do what we can for them.

There are outside elements that are making it difficult for the people working there to make an impression. We are going to have to fight fire with fire. It is not simply handing them a check and wishing them the best. We are getting involved.”

“You are four months pregnant.” He pushed up against the pillows. “Over the past three months, you have been plagued with nausea, high blood pressure and swollen ankles. Not to mention the fatigue. You stayed in bed an entire day because you were so poorly, this is not the time to go traipsing around in the downtown area. I will not allow you-”

“Allow me?” She shoved up and turned to face him. “I am not your damn child and you keep forgetting that.

You might be a hotshot rich guy, but I am still my own woman. I might be carrying your baby inside me, but I get to say what happens in my damn life. You are suffocating me-” She stuttered to a stop at the cold mask that dropped over his face. “I did not-”

“That ends right here. Do whatever the hell you want.”
He shoved out of bed and she watched as he strode from the room and slammed the doors shut behind him.

“Dammit! Dammit!” She whispered, raking her fingers through her hair in an agitated movement. She had not meant to say that, but he had totally pissed her off.

She understood that he was looking out for her, but she was fine. She got her regular checkups and Rachel was monitoring her three times a month. She took her supplements and ate her damn vegetables.

She was even drinking milk every day even though she hated the taste of it. She was bonding with their baby, wasn't she? She had them listening to classical music every single day and had even suggested they attended the opera, just a week ago.

He was being unreasonable. He knew what the charity meant to her. He knew her damn past and that she felt compelled to reach out to children who were being taken advantage of. She had even started a program in

schools where kids living in broken homes could feel free to speak up.

She and David had been terrified to say anything because of the fear that had been drummed into them about ending up in the system. She was going to be a mother and she had every intention of trying to make the world a much better place.

Resting back against the pillows, she closed her eyes. She was not going to apologize this time because she had done nothing wrong. He was going to have to be the one to make the move.

Sliding down, she pulled the sheets over her and closed her eyes. He would come back to their bed. In the time she had started to live with him, he had never slept away from her, and now, she was pregnant. What if something happened to her during the night? He would never be able to live with himself.

She drifted off a few minutes later and woke shortly after to find the place next to her empty. A glance at the clock showed that it was almost midnight. Where the hell was,

he? She laid there staring at the intricate pattern of the ceiling as she rubbed her stomach.

“Your daddy is being a selfish prick. I am sorry dude or dudette, I did promise to stop cursing, but oh, he drives me up the wall.” Closing her eyes, she forced herself to go back to sleep.

He was gone when she woke up the next morning. She had slept through her alarm and when she opened her eyes it was almost nine. Pushing the sheets off her, she climbed off the bed and went into the bathroom to relieve herself. He had not come to bed, she thought dismally.

Going over to the sink, she washed her hands and towel dried them before heading out of the suite. Shoving the doors of the adjoining suite open, she went into the bedroom to see the rumpled sheets and pillows. Evidence that he had spent the night there.

Walking over to the bed, she sat on the side of it. Taking up the pillow, she held it to her nose and inhaled his scent before crushing it to her chest. She had never lived with anyone before, this was a first for her and he had told her it was a first for him too.

“I never wanted anyone invading my space. Until now.” She could hear his deep cultured voice inside her head.

And he was cultured. He had taken her to art galleries- private showings by Jackson Colby and his brother Jason. They had traveled to Italy to attend a wine-tasting party put on by one of his friends.

He belonged to the Exclusive Club; a place filled with the highest echelon of society. He had brought her into his society, something she had done her best not to be overwhelmed by.

“They are just people darling,” he had told her in amusement.

“People with lots of money.”

“Still just people,” he had insisted.

She admired him. He had so much talent and she had told him that from the initial stage. He could take a simple looking building and turn it into a work of art. The magazines raved about him, calling him the man with the magic fingers.

He knew what he wanted. He would study and research and had this vision inside his head that he would transform into something amazing. She loved him. She had tried to avoid getting involved emotionally, but had been unable to help herself.

“I love you. When are you going to let me in? I will never hurt you. Please let me in.” The tears slid down her cheeks. She was damaged and had told him that right from the start. “I have a lot of issues going on. You don’t want to be part of that.”

“Try me. I want to be there for you, to help you through whatever is going on. All I am asking for is a chance. Give me a damn chance Remi and let me prove myself to you. I need you.”

He had broken through her resistance and the walls she had put up. Now she was in love with him and carrying his child. And every single day, she was making mistakes, ones that were driving him away. He could have any woman he wanted. She had seen the looks whenever they went somewhere.

Women of beauty and culture, ones from his society. She was driving him towards one of them and the thought of him being with someone else was making her crazy. She would not be able to bear it.

If he left her- She reined in her thoughts and took a deep breath. Damn him for making her so vulnerable. Putting away the pillow, she touched the rumpled sheets again before leaving the room.

He was determined to focus on the job at hand. He had work to do and was not going to allow her to mess with his train of thoughts. He had not slept much last night. Sleeping next to her had become natural for him. Even when he was away for business, he would find himself reaching for her. She was intent on pissing him off. Suffocating her, was he?

He was Wade Bramwell, he thought furiously. In the past, women had chased after him and even now, he could get any woman he wanted. He just had to make a phone call. But he was so hung up on her, that he was behaving like a damn lovesick schoolboy.

And he had never been one, not even when he was a boy. She was driving him insane and he was not going to allow it. She was in control and of course she knew it. Well then, it damn well stopped now.

He would make certain she was okay, because she was carrying his baby inside her. He had peeped in on her this morning when he went to get his clothes. And she had been fast asleep, no doubt unaffected by their fight.

He had left earlier than he planned, because he did not want to face her. He was so angry at her, that he would have said something he regretted later on. Shoving the files into a pile on his desk, he lunged to his feet and went to the cabinet. He was reaching for the decanter when he realized what he was doing. Drinking so early in the morning.

She could do whatever she damn well pleased and if she ended up falling or God forbid, hit by a stray bullet, he would- he leaned against the pane of glass as his knees went weak. He would be destroyed. Damn her for making him so vulnerable. He was just looking out for her, why the hell couldn't she see that?

Closing his eyes briefly, he steadied himself. He had to get a handle on his emotions or run the risk of driving himself nuts.

He would send someone to ensure that everything was safe in the downtown area where she would be. He was friends with the captain of the precinct. He had donated

enough to ask a bloody favor and that was what he was going to do.

Chapter 9

It was snowing a little when she got to the shelter. Mrs. Mason had made her breakfast of oatmeal swimming in berries and some herbal tea and she felt refreshed and revived.

No doubt the housekeeper would notice that she and Wade had slept in separate bedrooms, but that could not be helped. And she told herself that she did not care. But she did.

He had not called her at all, to see if she was still going. But she had not expected he would do so. After her visit to the shelter, she was going to have lunch with the women. She was not married to Wade, but they had embraced her.

She was going to pick their brains about the marriage deal. They seemed to be happy. And some had been married for years and there was still the sheen of happiness on them. Her parents had been a lousy

example of two people who should have stayed the hell away from each other.

And they should not have had kids. The shelters were filled with that evidence. Children abandoned by people who should be caring for them and it made her so angry, she could not stand it.

Why couldn't he understand that she could not just hand them a check and be done with it? She had to get involved, to see what the check was doing. To talk to them and assure them that even though their parents had left them, they were valued and could be someone.

She knew firsthand what it was like to actually live with two parents and still be abandoned. But that had not defined her. She and her brother had risen above it, and had beaten the odds to make something of themselves.

Now she was with a powerful man, not because of his money, as she knew some people thought, but because they were hung up on each other.

Sighing raggedly, she exited the car and secured it. He had insisted on buying her something fancy and had gotten rid of her sensible Nissan. Now she was driving around in a black BMW convertible with soft leather seats that warmed her butt so much that she did not want to get up.

And on second thoughts, she should have requested his driver to take her. He was right. Yes, the downtown area was starting to come alive again, thanks to him and several other businessmen, but it was still riddled with gangs and infested with drug addicts.

There was a methadone clinic up the street and a broken-down apartment building a few blocks away. The mayor was making noise about razing the building, but so far it had not happened.

Parking in the lot, she scanned the area and saw two guys loitering. "Hey you!" She put on her tough voice. She might be with a multi-billionaire hottie, but she was not soft.

"What?"

“I need a minute.” She felt a frisson of fear as she swaggered over to her. They could be carrying and she had just invited them into her space. Wade was going to kill her when he found out what she had done. If they did not do the job themselves.

“We know who you are.” The one wearing the red hoodie smirked, dark brown eyes going to the vehicle. “Sweet ride and that bitch does not belong to this neighborhood.”

“That’s what I want to talk to you about.” She was certain they could hear her knees knocking together. “My friends and I are here at the shelter to make a difference. Not just to be of help financially, but to work with whoever is in charge to try and make things better for these kids.”

“What the hell do you want from us?” Black hoodie glowered at her.

“I want you to look after this sweet ride and make certain my friends and I are taken care of.”

“What’s in it for me?” Red hoodie demanded.

“I would like to say that it would do your heart and soul good, but I am guessing cold, hard cash is more appreciated.”

“Damn straight. We are not morons. We need money.”

“To purchase drugs?” She braved the fierce looks and felt the fear leaving her. They were just boys from the looks of them.

“Look, far be it for me to tell you how to live your lives, but there are so many ways you could make something of yourselves. It does not matter what it is you are going through; you can make it. I came from a crappy home myself-”

“We don’t need some rich bitch preaching to us.” Red Hoodie told her coldly.

“I am not some rich bitch and I was not preaching.” She shoved at him and had his eyes widening in shock.
“Have some damn respect. I am about to be a mother and don’t think I cannot whoop your damn ass.

This shelter is on your turf and I am certain you want the kids in there and the people taking care of them to be safe. If not, then you are definitely assholes who don’t deserve anything good. Will you keep the rides safe or not? There is cash in it for you when we leave.”

They both looked at each other and Remi held her breath as she waited.

“Yeah. I mean yes, ma’am.” Red Hoodie said respectfully.

“Oh, please don’t call me ma’am, I am not old enough for that. What’s your name?” She nodded at Red Hoodie.

“Steve and this here is Brad.”

“Okay Steve and Brad, I am leaving this sweet ride in your capable hands. My friends should be swinging by soon, see to it that they are okay.”

“Yes ma’am, I mean miss.”

“Good enough.” She swung away and marched towards the building.

“I saw everything from the window of my office and I felt the fear clutching my chest.” Mrs. Ivy Delaporte greeted her enthusiastically. “I could not believe you did that. Both boys were at the shelter for several years and are ones that slipped through the cracks.”

“I had to show them that I was not afraid, even though I was scared as hell.” Remi grasped the woman’s outstretched hands with a smile. “My legs were shaking the entire time.”

“You are a very brave woman.”

“Or a foolish one.” She glanced out the window to see both boys leaning against the fence. “Think they will stick?”

“I am sure they will. Shall we wait for the others or do you want to meet the children?”

“I want to meet the children.”

“Come this way, please. And I must say we are overwhelmed by the attention we are receiving.”

“Giving back should come naturally.”

“It should, but it is not always the case.”

“She is very brave, that one.” Detective Brown reported.
“We had men in the area as instructed. Plain clothes men and what they saw was something commendable.

She engaged those two boys in conversation and got them to guard the area like terriers.” The man grinned and shook his graying head. “We certainly could use someone like her on the force. She is fearless.”

“And foolish,” Wade said grimly. “She knew better than to confront them.”

“She got the results. By the time she was through, she had them eating out of her hands. She also invited them out of the cold to have a meal. I have a feeling that they were going to personally see to the safety of the shelter from now on. The place has been riddled with drug pushers and addicts.

As soon as we make a sweep, it would settle down for a couple of weeks and then back to square one again. The old dilapidated building is a hive for addicts and needs to be demolished.”

“It will be soon. Now that my woman has taken a particular interest in the shelter, it will be sooner rather than later. Thank you, Dan.”

“My pleasure. Those women are doing excellent work.’

“I agree.”

Wade tapped his fountain pen on the desk thoughtfully when he was alone. He had not called her, but at least he knew she was okay. She had left the shelter with the others and they were now seated at Luce’s having lunch. He could stop worrying now and get on with the business at hand.

His intercom sounded.

“Yes?”

“Your conference call is ready.”

“Put it through.”

“I cannot believe you got through to those boys.” Stacey gave her an admiring look. “Christian almost had a heart attack when I told him where I was going.”

“Did he try to stop you?” Remi asked her curiously. She felt as if she had accomplished a great deal.

“Of course, he did. But seeing as he is several thousand miles away in Italy, that was not going to happen. And I

am interested in this particular charity. It spoke to me. There was no way in hell he was going to prevent me from going.”

Remi poked at her salad. “I accused Wade of suffocating me when he said pointedly that he would not allow me to go.”

“Oh crap.” Kelly uttered a rueful laugh as she reached for her drink. “I can just imagine how that went.”

“He told me in that coldly remote way he has sometimes, that it would not happen again and left our bed.” She lifted her shoulders.

“I have no idea why I am telling you this. I am not used to baring my soul. In the past, I kept things to myself, only telling David. I did not have friends, because that would mean inviting them over and that was never going to happen.”

Leesa reached over to touch her hand lightly. “We are an eclectic group. The women who are involved with these powerful men. We are called a clique, black women who are involved with white men. But we are so much more than that.

We have formed our own club; indeed, we are making marks and now I sound like a damn newspaper report.”

Remi grinned and felt the warmth spreading over her. It had been a very good afternoon and a productive one. Wade had not called and she was feeling more than a little bereft, but right here and now, she felt as if she was part of a family.

“It sounds about right. But what I want to find out is this – how do you do it? You are married to these very powerful men who are used to giving orders.

I love Wade but he has this idea that I am one of his employees and I am supposed to fall in line and do exactly what he says. I am not used to that and as much as I love that man to death, I refuse to jump when he says.” She blew out a breath.

“And saying all of that, I might have to eat crow and say I am sorry again. That has been happening for the last few months.”

Kelly looked at her curiously. “You don’t want to do that.”

“What?” Remi gaped at her. “He is not speaking to me. He usually calls to find out how I am doing, how my day is going and nothing. And he has never slept away from me before.”

“Kane stayed away from our bedroom for a week.” Kelly admitted as she cut into her rare steak. “It was when we first got married. Our relationship was tempestuous-“
She cast a glance at Leesa who nodded.

“He had certain rigid standards and resisted me every step of the way until finally he came to the place where he had to face the fact that we belonged together.

I had decided to hang up my bikinis, but I was doing a charity thing and I had to model this skimpy lingerie. Mr. Kane Takahashi, the absolute love of my life, took it upon himself to point out that I was married to a respectable businessman and what I used to do before would not be appropriate.”

Remi stared at her in fascination. “What did you say to that?”

“Nothing. I went ahead and asked for something skimpier. He was so furious that he was more taciturn than ever. He did not speak to me and I in turn did not talk to him. He moved into another suite and I endured the cold wall of silence and further pissed him off by flying to the Bahamas to do a photoshoot.”

Leesa doubled over with laughter. “It was not funny at the time, but the cold war between them was interesting to watch and Brad and I were caught in the absolute middle.”

“I was complaining to Leesa and Kane was to Brad. And in the meantime, we were avoiding each other like the

damn plague.” Kelly shook her head.

“How did you resolve it?”

Kelly picked up her drink as she smiled at Remi. “I fell in the shower.”

“Deliberately?”

Kelly burst out laughing. “Now you are catching on. I waited until he was in the bedroom before I made the ‘accident’ happen. When I screamed, he rushed in and I could see the terrified look on his face.

I felt bad at first, but he scooped me into his arms and was checking for bruises and broken bones. When he started talking about taking me to the hospital, I relented enough to refuse. We ended up apologizing to each other and tearing up the sheets.”

“I hope you are not suggesting I do the same. I am a pregnant woman.”

“Of course not darling. Just fall a little bit, something staged and see how fast he comes running to your rescue.”

“I am not some damsel in distress and I refuse to put myself on display like that. We are going to do this the old-fashioned way.”

“Which is?” Monique asked in amusement.

“Have it out, once and for all.”

But he denied her the pleasure, by emailing her a message. “I have to fly to New York. Something came up and I won’t be back until tomorrow. I am going straight to the office when I get back. See you tomorrow. Wade.”

He was going away without her. They had not slept together last night and he had not called her during the day and he would not be back tonight. Well hell. She sat back in her chair and had no idea what to do next.

She had expected him to be home tonight so that they could talk. She had planned the argument and then the making up and afterwards she would tell him of the hours she had spent at the shelter.

She looked up at the discreet knock on the door.

“Mrs. Mason, I thought you had left.”

“I made some vegetable soup and cinnamon toast. I know you said you were not very hungry and with Mr. Wade not coming home-“

“I will be down to have a bite.” She forced a smile. “Just leave it on the small dining table and you may go.”

The woman nodded and hesitated inside the doorway.

“Anything else?”

“I just wanted to know how you are feeling.”

She looked at the woman in surprise. “I am feeling fine at the moment.”

Mrs. Mason nodded again. “I made some tea and left it in the pot.”

“Thanks very much.”

The woman tugged at her apron. “You need to take care of yourself and the babe.”

“I am.”

She felt better after the woman had retreated. She read the terse email again. He had not even had the courtesy of calling her. He owed her that, didn't he? He was an adult and could damn well do whatever he wanted, but he had left, taken off because he was pissed at her.

Heaving out a breath, she rose and left the room she used as an office. Making her way downstairs, she realized that Mrs. Mason had left and had set the table. A table for one. It was funny that she had relished the alone time when she was living on her own. But since she had started living with Wade, she felt bereft whenever he was not with her.

Pulling out a chair, she sat down and sniffed at the delicious soup. She recalled the first time she had come by for dinner. He had invited her out and she had refused.

“You are very high profile and I have no intention of getting my picture taken as your next flavor of the month or week,” she had told him firmly.

“I don’t have flavors,” he had told her, highly offended.

“Well, whatever you want to call it. The minute I step out in public with you, it will be all over the internet.”

“You could come by my place.”

“To have sex.”

“To have a meal. The sex is optional and entirely up to you,” he had told her smoothly. God, she missed him so much that it was like an ache inside her breast.

Was he really going to New York on business or was he hooking up with someone else? Had she driven him away? She had been sniping at him ever since they met. Maybe he was getting tired of trying and –

“No, dammit. I am not going to torture myself by thinking about that,” she said aloud.

Firming her lips, she pulled the bowl towards her and dug the spoon in. She was going to eat, do her stretches, listen to some Mozart, and go to her damn bed. Even if it meant wearing one of his t-shirts.

He could not concentrate on the contracts in front of him. Truthfully, he did not have to come to New York, but he had not felt like going home to her. He was still pissed and what she had said to him was still emblazoned across his brain.

He was not used to any of it. And was wondering if he had moved too fast. They did not really know each other when it came down to it, did they? Yes, he knew about the crap she and her brother had gone through, and he had told her of the coldness of his childhood.

He told her things he had never revealed to another living soul, bared his soul to her because she was the most important person in his life. But it had made him vulnerable, made him weak where she was concerned and he was finding that he did not like it one bit.

She held his heart in her palms. And yes, he knew she loved him, but was it enough?

Pushing away from the desk inside the sumptuous hotel suite he wandered over to the well-stocked cabinet to pour a drink. He had gone straight to the meeting, given into the associates insistence on having a meal with them and had engaged in casual conversation even though he was not in the mood.

He had declined dessert and headed up to his hotel room. He would be flying out early in the morning to catch another meeting at his office for nine.

He picked up the glass and stared sightlessly out the thick pane of floor to ceiling one way glass. It was still snowing – light drops of it, not enough to stick. He knew

she was at the loft, safe and warm and had called Mrs. Mason to see to it that she ate.

He felt like a coward, not calling her directly, but he could not deal with her right now. He loved her so much that he felt like a damn fool where she was concerned. She was the only one who could get under his skin with just a look or an ill-placed word.

And it grated on him. It pissed him off that she had accused him of suffocating her. Even now, being here without her, he was finding it very difficult to concentrate on anything. He tossed back the drink and slammed the glass down.

He was itching to call her and was pissed and annoyed that he was yearning to hear from her. When the hell did he become this person? When had he become a man who sought a woman's approval or phone call to make him feel better?

Shoving his hands into the pockets of the hotel robe, he walked back to the desk to stare at the piles of documents there. He had an early breakfast meeting and

then would be dashing off to the airfield for his flight. He was going to have to put her out of his damn mind.

Chapter 10

The nausea was bad. She woke up in the middle of the night with cramps. The cramps came with the nightmares and had her jumping up, one hand pressed to her stomach. She felt the sticky warmth between her thighs immediately and froze in panic.

“No! No! No!” Gripping the sheets and wadding them between her thighs, she reached for the phone. “Call Rachel. Oh please answer. OH God, please don’t make me lose this baby. Rachel! I am sorry to get you up. I am bleeding. I am having cramps and my stomach is heaving. He is not here.”

“I will send an ambulance. How bad is it?” she asked briskly.

“I don’t know. I am afraid to look.”

“Can you get dressed?”

“I-I think so.”

“The ambulance is five minutes away and I will meet them there. Try not to worry.”

“I don’t want to lose my baby.” She could feel the tears sliding down her cheeks.

“We will make certain it does not happen. Call me if you feel worse.”

She hung up and carefully made her way off the bed. The spots of blood on the sheets had her trembling. Walking carefully towards the chest, she dragged out black sweats, and changed her underwear. Balling them up, she dumped them into the hamper and went to wash her face.

Picking up her large pocketbook, she put on some comfortable shoes and headed downstairs. By the time

she reached down, the ambulance was there. The EMTs jumped out with a gurney and one took the bag from her.

“Still spotting?” the woman asked her briskly.

“Yes.”

“The doctor is on her way to the hospital. We will get you there in record time.”

“Thanks.”

The phone call dragged him from the troubled sleep he had fallen into just an hour ago and for a minute he wondered what was happening. Then the ringing penetrated the fog inside his brain and had him jumping up and reaching for the phone. Remi! He thought as he punched the icon.

“What is it?”

“Wade, I am calling from the hospital.”

“Jesus! Jesus!” He dragged shaky fingers through his hair. “How is she?”

“She called half an hour ago complaining of cramps and spotting. She came here in an ambulance.”

“She did not call- What’s going on? The baby?”

“Both mother and baby are fine. We managed to avert the crisis. But she is going to have to stay here for a couple of days just to make sure.”

“Is she awake?”

“Yes. But we have given her something to put her to sleep, so she will be out of it in the next few minutes.”

“I am on my way. Thanks Rachel.” He hung up and just sat there staring at the gold and white wallpaper. He had not called her, had been so angry that he had left to come to

New York and not even checked in. She could have lost the baby and her life and he was holed up in a hotel room sulking. This had to stop.

Throwing the sheets off him, he rushed into the bathroom.

“You called him.”

“Of course. He needed to know.” Rachel took her blood pressure and nodded in satisfaction. “Whatever it is that is going on between you, it needs to be put aside.” She nodded to the slight bulge of Remi’s belly. “The baby is what’s important.”

“I am mad at him,” she muttered, plucking at her hospital gown. “And why on earth have they never designed something more stylish than these blasted tents?”

“You need to relax and we put these on to make it easier to do the examinations,” Rachel told her mildly.

“How is the little one?”

“Breathing easy.”

“And still attached to my womb? That sounds so weird.”

Rachel smiled. “Still attached. And you are staying here for a couple of days. Your blood pressure was too high.”

“I was not sleeping very well,” she muttered. “Men should start having babies.”

“I will try and get right on that.” The deep voice just inside the doorway had her heart turning over.

“I will leave you two alone if you both promise that this discussion will be calm.”

“Absolutely,” Wade assured her as he walked into the room.

Rachel looked at Remi who remained stubbornly quiet. With a sigh, she left the room, closing the door behind her.

Pulling up a chair, he brought it next to the bed. “I don’t know what to say.”

Folding her arms over her breasts, she stared off in front of her.

“I should have checked on you.” He waited for her to say something and when she remained silent, he pushed on. “I was mad at you and I did something stupid. I went away without saying anything to you and did not call. But you made it worse by not calling me, Remi. This cannot continue. We are in this thing together.”

“We don’t have to be,” She finally turned to look at him, refusing to give into the yearning. He was wearing a black sweater that molded to his muscular chest and broad shoulders. His sable brown hair was wind tossed and gave him an endearing look. “I don’t like you right now.”

“I pretty much hate myself too.” His green eyes pleaded with her. “We have to stop pissing each other off. What you said hurt me to the core Remi and I compounded the problem by walking out without saying anything to you. I cannot allow you to get under my skin to the point where I freeze you out.”

She shrugged carelessly and looked away from him.

“We are not working out.”

“Dammit, Remi,” he exclaimed softly. “Why are you doing this to us?”

“I am tired,” she told him, without turning around. “They gave me some drip that has my body shutting down. I need to rest. Just go.”

“I am not bloody leaving.”

“I don’t want you here.”

“That’s too damn bad.” She heard when he rose and pushed back his chair. Her head whipped around when the bed sank down on one side. “What are you doing?”

“What does it look like?” He wrapped his arm around her shoulder and, ignoring her resistance, pulled her against him. “I love you and I am here to stay. You can piss me off all you want, but I am not going to allow you to push me away. Is that clear?”

“I hate you.” She stayed rigid, refusing to succumb.

“I can live with that. But I cannot live without you.” He tugged her harder until she was snuggled against his chest. “I spent the entire flight wondering if I was coming here to discover that there was something more going on.”

He kissed her forehead, his hand wandering up and down her back. “I am sorry darling. You made me mad, but that’s no excuse for deserting you.”

“I don’t care,” she said stubbornly.

“You do,” he whispered into her hair. “And if I have to spend the rest of my life showing you how sorry I am,

then so be it.”

“It doesn’t matter.” She was already sinking into sleep, the scent of him filling her nostrils.

“I am here now, darling.” He brushed back her hair, his fingers gentle against her skin. “I am here.”

“I had a nightmare and you weren’t there. You allowed me to get used to you being right next to me and you left,” she slurred, already half asleep.

Regret twisted him into knots. “Oh, my sweet.” He dropped kisses on top of her head, his arms tight around her body. “Please forgive me.”

“I have to think about it. I-“ She drifted off into sleep, her body relaxing against his. But he could not even close his eyes. No matter what she had said to him, he should have stayed and it was going to be difficult for him to forgive himself for that.

Combined with the cramps and bleeding, the nightmare had come as well. His fingers wandered up and down her back, more to soothe himself than her.

He had not slept well during the earlier part of the night, and had spent the two hours during the flight agonizing and impatient to get to her. He had a lot to make up for and was going to make certain it was done. Sighing deeply, he settled in against her and drifted off.

“You don’t have to stay. I am sure you have million dollar deals to finalize.” She was baiting him and trying to push him away, but he was not having it.

He had stayed at the hospital for two whole days, just leaving briefly to go home and change and then he was back. He had brought work with him as well and nothing she said to him was making him budge. She still had not forgiven him, but as usual, he was breaking down her resistance.

“I can do it from here.” He plumped her pillows behind her head and went to get her a glass of water.

“I don’t want you waiting on me hand and foot. I am not an invalid.”

“I know.”

His unwavering patience was getting on her nerves. She knew what he was doing. She had been a bitch to him and he was the only one being apologetic. It made her feel like an even bigger bitch.

She started to reach for the jar of cocoa butter to rub on her stomach but he got to it first. She watched as he uncapped the jar and sat on the edge of the bed.

“I can do it.”

“I know,” he repeated. Drawing the sheets down, he lifted her nightgown. Dipping his fingers in, he scooped up a generous amount of the cream and started to rub it slowly over her bulge. His gentle movements were getting to her and she could feel the tears at the back of her eyes.

“Damn you,” she whispered achingly.

“I am sorry.” His eyes met and held hers as he continued to rub her belly. “I adore you darling and that is never going to change. No matter what you say or do.”

“I was a bitch to you.” The tears were streaming down her cheeks. “I don’t deserve you and I wondered if you had found someone else and was with her. I could not stand it. If you leave-“

“Never!” he responded fiercely. Putting the jar away, he pulled her nightgown down and climbed in next to her. “How can you even entertain that thought?” He turned her around to face him.

“Sweet Christ Remi! I am head over heels in love with you. Don’t you get that? I cannot look at another woman. I see only you. You are the beginning and the end for me. You have me all twisted up inside. I am thirty-five goddamn years old and for the first time in my life, I am in love. It scares me.”

He cupped her face, uncaring that he was leaving smears of cream on her flesh. “You are it for me. I want you to finally believe that. I am going to hover and worry when you are out and about. Because the thought of something happening to you makes me weak. I love you so much darling.”

He was peppering her face with kisses. “You are my life.” He kissed her forehead and then moved to her nose. “My heart.” He was kissing one cheek and then the next. “My entire being.” He kissed the sides of her lips and then hesitated.

“Wade-”

“I should let you get some rest.” The painful evidence of his arousal was obvious. She could feel it against her

thigh.

“No.” She reached for him, fingers tearing at his sweater feverishly. “No.” She felt as if a fire had been lit inside her and someone was fanning the flames.

“No. I-” She dragged the sweater over his head and then the white undershirt to get to his skin. It had been just three days or was it four? She had no idea, but it was too long and she had to feel him. “Make love to me. Now.”

“Darling, I can’t,” he was whimpering, his heart working overtime. “We can’t.”

“We have to.” He groaned when she reached into his pants and cupped his hard pulsating flesh. “Wade, I need you. If you don’t do this for me, I am going to die. I am so wet-”

“Christ!” he exploded. He could not resist. He wanted her too much. Pushing her hand away, he dragged off his clothing. “I will try and be gentle.”

“You don’t have to.” She was panting, her fingers digging into his chest. She had never felt this horny before, it was like someone else had taken over her body and was directing the steps.

“Now! Now! Now!” She pulled him down on top of her. “I cannot stand it.” Her arms encircled his neck as he hastily entered her. They both went still and stared at each other.

“Darling.” His voice was broken, he was completely shattered by her. “My sweet love.” He bowed his forehead to hers and tried to move slowly, sinking into her, his cock swelling even more.

“Give me more.”

“I should stop-” He brushed his lips against hers lightly, but she was not having any of it.” Her arms tightened around his neck as she introduced tongue. The passion exploded between them, setting off a madness that had

him driving into her with a force that pushed her up against the padded headboard.

The climax claimed her immediately. He swallowed her cries, barely feeling it when her nails dug into his flesh. He was too far gone by then, his own body one long sensitive nerve ending. His heart felt as if it was being shoved out of his chest. His blood was boiling.

He tried to slow things down, but it did not work and before long, he was pouring himself into her. This was what had been missing, he thought hazily. Over the past several days that he had not been with her, this was what had been missing, the intimacy.

He had stayed away from her that one night and felt as if he was not whole. Now he was, the feel of her flesh against him made him whole again, made it right again. It was where he belonged, where he would always belong.

She was his, unequivocally his and there was no doubt about it. He found the strength to ease out of her and onto his side. Gathering her against him, he held her

close, his body still shuddering, heart still pounding inside his chest.

She curled into him; her face mashed into his chest. “I suppose you already know you are forgiven,” she whispered.

He chuckled, the tension and tightness in his stomach, getting lighter. “Am I?”

“Yes.” She kissed his damp flesh, the hairs tickling her. “I love you Wade.”

His body quivered. He had needed to hear it.

“I know, my sweet.” His fingers caressed her, moving slowly to soothe her. He knew every crevice and corner of her body. Was familiar with every curve of her flesh. “And I should have resisted you. I feel like an animal.”

“As if you could.” She snorted. Lifting her head, she met his eyes. “Did you have to go to New York or was that something to avoid me?”

He grimaced at that. “I could have done it over the phone.” He lifted one broad shoulder. “You made me so mad that I could not think straight. I could not come home to you.

I would have said things I would later regret. You are the only person who can get under my skin like that.” He brushed the hairs from her cheek. “You have the ability to twist me up like a pretzel.”

“It works both ways.” She was humbled by his admission. “I could not sleep.”

“I checked on you before I left.” His hand strayed to her throat where her pulse was beating unsteadily. “I came in to get some clothes and I stood there looking at you. I was torn. I wanted to wake you so that we could have it out, but I was irritated and angry that my sleep had been interrupted and you were sleeping like a baby.”

“I finally managed to drift off in the early hours of the morning. I spent the damn night staring at the wallpaper. I kept hoping you would cool off and come back. You have never slept away from me before and I kept hoping that maybe you were working to blow off steam and that you would be back.

When I woke the next morning, you were gone.” Her fingers brushed over his shoulder and then his chest. “I could not believe you had left without us having it out. I never want to feel that way again.”

“In the future, we will argue it out,” he promised. “I could not concentrate on a damn thing. I kept looking at my phone-” A smile touched his lips. “I asked Corinne if you had called and felt like an idiot when she said no.”

“I am sorry darling.” She snuggled against him and felt herself steadying. “I know I can be a little stubborn-” She stopped at his lifted brows. “More than a little. But I am still working through my issues.

I decided when I got out of that toxic situation with my parents that I would never allow anyone to control me again. Living with them, felt as if I was in a cage, that there were bars all around me and I never wanted that again.”

His eyes sizzled. “You think I would cage you in? Try and control you? For God’s sake-”

“No!” She placed a finger over his lips. “No. You have shown me more freedom than anyone else. It’s my mind, the years of being subjected to their toxicity. I don’t want to project Wade, but sometimes I cannot help it. I have flashbacks and when that happens, I get angry and scared.

I go back and I am trying not to. I am working on not going back, but I do and it is not fair that I take it out on you.” She bit her lip. “You happen to be the best thing that ever happened to me and sometimes I wonder how long it will take you to realize that you can do better. I-”

“Stop it.” His fingers gripped her chin to yank her face up. “You are better. My God, Remi, you are my light, the

dawning of an exceptional day that I never knew existed. I have done better, more than, when I met you.

You generate life and hope and love, something that was lacking in my childhood and even when I became an adult. I never had that, darling, and when I met you, it just flooded in, sometimes-” He shook his head.

“Sometimes it threatens to overwhelm me. I can feel the weight of it, washing over me and it leaves me breathless and unable to fully function. I hate that you have these memories, these nightmares and I want to change it, I want to be able to help you through them.”

Her eyes were blurry with tears. “I don’t have the words the way you do. You always know what to say to make me weak, make me humble and beautiful. I feel as if I am the most beautiful woman in the world-”

“How can you even doubt you are?” he demanded. “You outshine every other woman in the room. Whenever we go out, I am so proud to have you next to me that I want to shout it out loud and have everyone realize how fortunate I am.”

The tenderness on his handsome face had her trembling. How on earth had she gotten so lucky? Was God making up for the hell she had gone through in the past?

If so, she was incredibly grateful and all she could pray and hope was that she would not mess things up. She would always think he could do better, but he loved her and she was so grateful she could barely stand it.

“I had lunch with the girls after the thing at the shelter and we were talking about our men.” She touched his chin, her finger tracing the shallow indentation. “I wanted to get a feel of how it was to be married to men like you. Powerful men in society and I did. I understood.” her eyes met his.

“I want that, Wade. I want to wear your ring and have your name. It’s not enough to be carrying your child. I want it all. I thought that marriage was a trap and as soon as the doors closed on that trap, there was no getting out. I want to belong to you in every possible way.”

He had gone still when she began and now he could scarcely believe what she just said.

“You want to marry me.” His voice was thick, fingers gripping her arm. “You said-”

“I know what I said. But I have changed my mind. Will you marry me?”

Chapter 11

He was trembling, scarcely able to think straight. He had waited so long to hear those words that he had no idea what to say to her.

“Wade?”

“Yes?”

“Will you marry me?” she asked him huskily.

“I-” His tongue felt as if it was cleaving to the roof of his mouth. He had told himself that he would not push the issue. He had asked her to marry him earlier and she had rejected him. There was no way he was going to put himself through that again. He would wait until she was ready.

“Christ!” He mashed his forehead against hers and took several shaky breaths. His heart was shaking inside his chest and he felt removed from his body.

“Was that a, yes?” she asked teasingly.

“Yes.” His lips found hers and the kiss took on a potency that had them spinning out. She clung to him, pouring everything she had found so difficult to verbalize, the words that would not come when she needed them, into the kiss.

He understood what she was telling him and he felt humbled. His hands raced over her back, digging into her butt as he hauled her up against him.

But somehow, he found the strength to end the kiss and ease her away from him, green eyes glittering. “Yes,” he whispered thickly. “When?”

She laughed shakily, her fingers curling into his chest. “Now. Soon. I don’t want a big wedding. Just an intimate

ceremony in the park. Spring is here and I am imaging a place surrounded by the evidence of the season.

Just a few friends.” She touched his face lightly. “I am going to have to invite some of the wives I have become friendly with and their husbands. And I am not wearing white.”

“You can wear whatever you damn well please.” He still could not believe it. She had said yes, and more than that, she had been the one to do the asking. He felt as if he was floating on a cloud. “Black,” He tilted her chin up. “Gray, pink- “His lips curved when she shook her head. “Blue, azure- “

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“It’s a shade of blue.”

“So, same thing.”

“Yes.” He kissed her tenderly. “Anything you want to wear. If you want to appear naked, I would not say a thing.”

“Then it would have to be just the two of us and we need someone to officiate the ceremony.” She felt happy and buoyant. She had expected it to be difficult, but she felt as if she could marry him right here and now.

Whatever came, they would face it together. They were a team, a unit and that was something she was getting accustomed to. “Two weeks from now,” she decided.

He stared at her with a frown. “Planning a wedding in two weeks? That’s- “

“I am getting a wedding planner. There is no way I am taking that on.”

“We will speak to Leesa-“ Pulling away from her, he reached for the phone.

“What are you doing?” she squeaked.

“You’ll see.” He grinned at her, a boyish expression on his handsome face. “Leesa, I hope I did not wake you.” He listened for a minute with a smile. “I am going to put you on speaker.” His smile widened as he placed the phone on the pillow between them.

“My darling Remi who is now my fiancée is giving me the stink eye.” He leaned over to kiss the pout from her lips. “This woman here has asked me to marry her in two weeks and I am rushing before she changes her mind.”

Remi rolled her eyes as the scream came from the other end of the line. “You would think he would wait until a decent hour.”

“Darling, this is exciting news. You are now officially becoming one of us. Brad says congratulations Wade and that’s from both of us. Now Remi, honey, we have to get together as soon as tomorrow. We will come to you. How does noon sound?”

“Perfect. I am going to need a wedding planner. There is no way I am taking this on.”

“Of course. I know just the person. Cheryl is efficient and a genius at planning something short term. Mind if I bring her along? I will find out if Monique is available for a consultation. Kelly will of course be on board.”

“That would be great. Stop!” She mouthed as Wade hauled her over and started on her neck.

“No.” he whispered into her neck, breath stirring her skin. “Don’t mind me.” Lifting his head, he threw her a wicked smile before going back to his task.

“I think I already know what I want in terms of the dress, so I will give Monique an idea. I am showing now, so something tasteful- Oh!”

“Remi?”

“Yes. I am sorry.” She jabbed Wade hard in the ribs, but he responded by sliding a hand between her thighs. “I-er – I was thinking of Roseland Park. It is secluded enough and we could get it closed to the public-“

“I could make that happen.” Wade lifted his head as he palmed her sex.

“Perfect.” Leesa trilled. “I will call Kelly-“

“Oh God!”

“Remi?”

“I will talk to you tomorrow. See you tomorrow-“ She punched the red icon to hang up the phone before rounding on him angrily. “What the hell were you doing?”

“This.” He slid two fingers inside her and she felt herself dissolving rapidly. “You asked me to marry you and I cannot control my reaction.” He thrust in deeper, eyes on her face.

“I was having a conversation – Wade. Oh.” She lifted her bottom to meet his measured thrusts. “Wade.”

“Darling.” His voice thickened as her lips parted. “Come for me. Don’t hold back, my sweet.”

“I can’t,” she cried out, fingers digging into his wrist. “It’s too much.”

“I am here.” He drove her up and over, his body shuddering when she arched towards him, body trembling when the climax exploded inside her.

Muttering a curse, he waited until she was down from the high, before easing out of her and sliding in behind her. He entered her slowly, hands going around her

thickened waist, fingers wet from her climax, combing through the hairs covering her sex.

Within minutes, he was pouring himself into her, the climax vicious and swift and had him clutching at her.

Even after she had tumbled into sleep, her body sprawled half on top of him, he could not sleep. He wanted to get up and go and have a drink. His body was still shuddering, his blood heated. She wanted to marry him.

And that was something that made him want to skip and shout it to the world. She was going to be his wife! Bending his head, he kissed the top of hers and felt when she stirred.

A smile ghosted his lips as he stared down at her. Brushing back the hairs from her forehead, he studied her round face. He knew the dimple in her left cheek,

was intimately familiar with it. He knew the texture of her skin; how flawless the cocoa brown complexion was. The sound of her voice was familiar to him.

Before he met her, he had merely existed, because he would not call that living. He had existed inside a household with two people who could not tolerate each other and watched their relationship stay stagnant and decided at an early age that was not going to happen to him.

He had never been interested in marriage, had been drifting from one relationship to the next without any thought of making it permanent, until he met her. Then suddenly, everything he thought he believed in vanished into thin air. She had knocked the very air out of him and ever since that first meeting, he had never felt the same.

Settling back against the pillows, he pulled her snug against him and drifted off to sleep.

“What?”

“Nothing.” He shook his head, green eyes twinkling as he watched her while she knotted his tie.

“Don’t get used to it.”

“I won’t,” he promised solemnly. He was so delighted by her that he could barely stand it. She was the one who woke him up this morning with her mouth on his body. His cock had sprung to attention even before he took a conscious thought. “Practicing?”

“For?” she asked him loftily as she finished the job.

“This is not a requirement and even if you do a lousy job of it, I am still sticking.”

He meant it as a joke, but she peered at the knot in the tie with a frown. “I did it wrong?”

“It’s perfect.” He caught her around the waist. “And even if it is a little crooked, I would not throw you out on your fine ass.”

“You are a funny guy. Let go.” She pushed at him but he would not budge. “I thought you had an early breakfast meeting.”

“We are engaged.” He nuzzled her neck. “I just need to let it sink in for a minute.”

“Wade.”

“Hmm?” He was nibbling at her neck and sending white hot flames through her body.

“Your meeting.”

“I need another few minutes.”

“And I have to remind you that I am not wearing a ring.”

“That can be remedied as soon as this afternoon.”

“You do not know my ring size.”

“Oh yes, I do.” Lifting his head, he clasped her face between his palms. “I have been waiting for this moment since I first met you.” He kissed her roughly on the lips.

“Regrettably, I have to go. I love you darling.” With another kiss, he was gone, leaving her standing in the middle of the room, her knees trembling.

The bubble of happiness that had him floating from the breakfast meeting to his office dissolved as soon as he entered his office building.

“I am sorry Mr. Bramwell, I tried to call but you were not picking up.” Corinne rose from her desk as soon as he entered.

“I had my phone turned off.” He had already noticed the two men who also got to their feet. “We will take this inside my office.” He turned to his assistant and the woman handed him some messages. “No interruptions, please.”

The woman nodded.

Pushing the doors wide open, he stepped in and then closed them behind him. “I assume you would not like anything strong as you are on duty. I hope you don’t mind.”

He was already walking over to the cabinet and taking off his outer coat.

“Wade, this is SA Sara Blakely.”

Wade glanced at the director of the special task force who was also a friend. “Kevin, I am guessing you are not here to tell me that Volkov is behind bars.” He brought the drink over to the desk and gestured for them to have a seat.

“He is.”

“That’s good news, or is it?” He eyed his friend over the rim of his glass.

“At a price.” SA Sara Blakely said grimly.

“And that would be?”

“Angela Bisasor was found beaten half to death in her apartment early this morning.” Kevin told him. “She managed to call 911 and also managed to get a piece of Volkov beneath her nails. She lured him to her place by

telling him that she was willing to give him what she had on him.”

“And he paid her back by beating the shit out of her.”

“She also told him it was over between them and she was going to contact the authorities to bring him down. That was when he got off on her.”

“How is she?”

“In and out of consciousness. She managed – insisted rather on giving her statement and flash drive chock full of evidence on the bastard.” Kevin rubbed a hand over his face. “She is not going to make it Wade.”

“What?”

“The doctors are saying that there is severe brain damage. She has several cracked ribs, a punctured

kidney and massive internal bleeding. It's a wonder she hung on long enough to talk to us. She's asking for you."

"Where is she?"

They told him the name of the hospital. "They are working on her, but it does not look good. She sacrificed herself to put him down."

"Hell of a sacrifice."

"Yeah." Kevin rose. "He is in a secure location and isolated. He won't be contacting anyone. Not even his high-priced lawyers will be able to save him this time. I want to say she is a brave woman to go to that extent. We have been trying to nail that slime bag for years without success."

"But at what damn price?"

The guilt nagged at him. As soon as the feds left, he canceled the rest of his meetings. Two were just inhouse anyway. A follow up with the board on the project in Hawaii and a discussion with the CFO. They were not priorities and could be tackled at a later date.

He had to go and see her.

He called Remi.

“Hi.”

“Hi. I am just hopping out of the shower and about to get something solid to eat. I drank the tea and nibbled on saltines. What’s up? How was the breakfast thing?”

“Productive.” He hefted the paperweight in his left palm and stared at it. “How is the stomach?”

“Good. I spoke to our son/daughter just now while I was playing the weeping sound of Beethoven No. 9 in D minor. I have to admit, it’s growing on me. I found myself crying and so absorbed by the damn music that I almost scalded the flesh off my bones. I blame you.”

“What did I do?” he asked with a chuckle and could feel the weight of sadness rolling off him. She could always do this to him. And for that he was eternally grateful.

“You introduced me to it. Now I feel like going to the opera.”

“I will check to see what’s on and procure the tickets.”

“Yeah. We might as well make a date of it.”

“Remi?”

“Yes?”

He hesitated briefly and opened his mouth to tell her what was happening, but decided against it. "I love you."

"That's not news. Will you be home early?"

"I am not certain. I will let you know."

"Okay. See you then. And Wade?"

"Yes?"

"I love you too." She hung up before he could respond and he felt his insides trembling. Heaving out a sigh, he rose and prepared to be on his way.

“I feel very pregnant.” Remi complained as she returned from the powder room. “This is my fourth time in under half an hour.” She took her seat on the plumply padded armchair. She had decided to have the meeting in the lovely blue and white salon with the floor to ceiling windows and lovely furnishings.

Mrs. Marsh had served them lunch, a delicious salmon coupled with some fresh vegetables. For dessert, she had made strawberry shortcake and the others were drinking coffee while Remi was having tea.

“It will all be worth it, when you hold that gorgeous baby in your arms for the first time,” Kelly told her with a grin.

“Don’t make me hurt you.”

They all laughed at her pained expression.

“Now, let’s get to the matter at hand.” Cheryl, a willowy brunette with creamy complexion and large dark green eyes interrupted the chatter. “You want a wedding in two

weeks, which means that we have not a single minute to waste. I need the guest list, that's the first thing."

"I don't have many friends. I spoke to David and he is only bringing a date." She waved a hand at the women present. "You are all invited of course and your plus one, meaning your husbands. I will contact Wade's assistant, her name is Corinne-"

"You leave that to me." Cheryl was making notes on her device. "Now let's talk flowers and the menu. I am assuming that only the ceremony will be held in the park?"

"Yes. I have not decided on the venue for the reception." She frowned thoughtfully.

"I have a brilliant idea." Kelly held up a hand. "The Elite Club. They have exquisite rooms there and we could make a weekend of it. We all head there like the Friday, have a shower on the night while the men go on about their business."

Remi's eyes sparkled with interest. "That's actually a brilliant idea. They also have the most gorgeous gardens I have ever seen. We could do the wedding outdoors and have the brunch or whatever on one of the patios."

"Excellent." Cheryl nodded in approval.

"She is holding on so that she can speak with you."

"How is she?" Wade asked him tersely as he followed the white-coated physician past the front desk.

"She will not make it through the night. We did the best we could to stop the bleeding, but the damage to her brain was too extensive."

Wade felt the spurt of anger inside him. "And she is insisting on speaking to me."

“I have a feeling she is hanging on just so she can. Here we are.” He swept a door open and Wade felt the shock to his system when he saw the woman lying in the bed. Her face was swathed with bandages and she was propped up on several pillows.

“I will be near if she needs me.”

Wade nodded and walked into the room. As if sensing his presence, Angela turned her head slightly. One hand lifted slightly as she urged him closer. Pulling up a chair, he sat and took her hand in his.

“I did it.” She whispered, fingers applying pressure.

“There were easier ways. Angie, you did not have to sacrifice-”

“It’s done.” She squeezed his hand again, her breath hitching. “I have something to tell you.”

“They got him. I know.”

“No, not that. Please-” She took a breath. “Just listen. When we were together, something happened. I was pregnant.”

“What?” He stared at her in shock. “There is no way-”

“It happened. There was no doubt it was yours. I know we were together for a short time, but I wanted more. The condom must have broken or-” She swallowed again and closed her eyes wearily. “I lost it a week later. So I did not see the need to say anything. They called it a non-viable pregnancy. I loved you Wade.”

She smiled crookedly. “And I knew it was one-sided even before you told me. I told myself that it was a good thing the pregnancy did not go the full term or you would have been trapped.” Her breath was coming faster now. “I need a favor.”

“Name it.” He was still reeling from the news.

“I want to go back to India, to my parents. To be buried there. Make it happen for me.” She squeezed his hand again and took another labored breath. “That’s all I am asking. Promise me.”

“Yes. I promise.”

“Thanks.” A smile touched her lips. “I am happy you found happiness. I wish you all the best.” The machine started beeping madly. Pushing back his chair, he raced towards the door, just as the medical team came rushing in.

“She is coding. I am afraid you will have to leave.”

He waited in one of the rooms, pacing the length of the floor. He had no doubt that what she told him was the truth. She would have no reason to lie to him. Walking

over to the window, he stared out at the trees with their branches whistling in the wind, his thoughts in a maze. Turning as the door was pushed open, he read it on the doctor's face.

"She is gone."

"Yes. She held on longer than expected, but I suppose she was waiting to see you."

Wade nodded. "I am making arrangements to take her back to India as soon as it is possible."

"I will speed things along."

"Thank you."

Wade left the room and hurried out of the building to where his driver was waiting. "Take the long way home."

“Yes sir.” The man doffed his cap and closed the door as soon as he entered.

Wade sat back and closed his eyes wearily. He should call home and check on her. But he was not in the frame of mind to do so.

He was going to have to come clean and was not looking forward to it. He was going to have to tell her everything and she was going to be pissed and hurt. And hurting her, hurt him a hell of a lot and he could not bear the thought of it. He needed time to compose himself.

Chapter 12

He was stalling. That much he knew. He had walked into the loft and headed straight to the living room where a gentle fire was flickering inside the hearth and was grateful that she was not waiting for him there.

He needed some time and he was going to take it. He had ditched his outer coat, with the fine moisture from the rain clinging to it and had taken off his tie. The top two buttons of his powder blue shirt were open and his shirt sleeves cuffed at the elbows.

He needed a drink and time to think. He had acquired the ring and was going to slide it on her finger as soon as he went upstairs, but now his mind was a jumble of thoughts. Chaotic ones.

And the grief was surfacing. He had not loved Angela, but he had cared enough to form some kind of relationship and hearing that she had been pregnant with his seed even for that short period of time compounded his grief.

He had been careless. He had never been with a woman without using protection. Always uppermost in his mind was the consequences and the fact that he was Wade Bramwell.

He could not afford to be careless. At least, not until Remi. With her, he had not cared one way or the other. He knew from the upshot that he wanted her and that what he felt for her was different. She was different.

Now there was a woman lying in the morgue who confessed to him that she had been carrying his seed. He would have stood by her of course and would have been there for her and his child, but he had not loved her and that would not have happened.

He loved Remi, and adored her to the point of being foolish. Now he was going to have to come clean about everything and she was going to be mad and hurt. He was delaying the inevitable.

Pouring a drink, he took a gulp and almost choked as the fiery liquid entered his throat too swiftly. He would take one drink, just half a glass and go upstairs to face the music. He would try and convince her to accompany him to India, not to salve his conscience, because he felt guilty as hell! But he needed her with him.

Finishing the drink, he put the glass away and took a deep breath before he headed out of the room. He could not delay it any longer. It was getting late and she had already called to find out what was keeping him.

Bounding up the steps, he hesitated at the doors to their suite before pushing them open. He found her with fabrics and papers strewn around her as she sat cross legged in the middle of the bed.

“Hi.” She flashed him a dazzling smile before looking back at something on paper. “I was about to send out the cavalry.”

“What are you doing?” He walked over to the sofa to sit and take off his shoes and socks.

“I am in the middle of designing a Pied a Terre for Leesa. And deciding which one of these dresses I prefer. Monique has given me until later today to come up with my choice.” She glanced at him. “The meeting went well by the way and we got everything taken care of.

Cheryl is a dream and she is very efficient. I asked her to contact Corinne to get your list of people. Oh, by the way, the venue has changed. We decided on your club instead. An outdoor thing with the reception on one of the patios. What do you think?”

“It sounds like a plan.” He walked over with the box in his hand. He was going to get through this part of it first and pray that she did not throw the ring back at him. Flipping it open, he took out the dazzling square-cut diamond. Taking her hand in his, he slid it on and was satisfied that it was a perfect fit.

“Now we are official. What do you think?” He still had her hand in his and he watched as the stone picked out the light from the lamp.

“It’s perfect,” she told him huskily. “You have excellent taste.”

“Look who I am with.” Bringing her hand to his lips, he kissed it tenderly. “I am going to take a shower.”

“You got wet?”

“A little.” Smiling at her, he rose and went into the bathroom. He stood there staring into the mirror before getting rid of his underwear and stepping into the large shower enclosure. Touching the button, he adjusted the temperature and stepped beneath the needles of warm water.

His Remi preferred her water piping hot, enough to peel the flesh from the bones. But he knew it was due to what had happened in her childhood. When they showered together, he would tolerate it enough, because he understood.

Ducking his head beneath the sprays, he closed his eyes and was so absorbed in his thoughts that he had not noticed she had come into the room until she was behind him. Her touch jarred him out of his reverie and had him stiffening slightly.

“I thought you already showered.”

“It does not mean I cannot join my man- sorry, my fiancé to take another.” She rubbed some soap into the small of his back and moved up to his shoulders. “And you are tense. Rough day?”

“You could say that.” He closed his eyes and allowed the warmth from the water and her touch to flow through him. “But you are making it better.”

“What I am here for.” She continued to rub the soap into his skin. When she moved to press herself against him, he felt the familiar stirring of pleasure. His body jerked in awareness when she used both hands to cup him, sliding the suds up and down the length of him.

“Why Mr. Bramwell,” she purred. “What have we here?”

“What does it feel like?” he growled, his voice thickening. “Keep that up and we are not going to leave the shower for now.”

“I don’t have a problem with that. I love how you respond to my touch. And my voice. I am vain enough to be thrilled that I am the first in several things where you are concerned. The first woman you ever lived with, the first to wear your ring and the first to be carrying your child. It makes me feel so special.”

He felt the guilt rearing up and crushing his desire and realized that now was the time. He could not put it off any longer. He had to tell her. Clamping his hands on her wrist, he removed it from his deflating cock and turned to face her, expression bleak.

“We need to talk.”

“Okay.” Remi felt a flutter of fear at the expression on his face. “Here?”

“No.” Reaching over, he grabbed two towels and handed her one. Stepping out, he took her hand to help her out and then wrapped the towel around his trim waist. Not bothering to dry his hair, he strode into the bedroom.

She walked in to see him dragging on sweats and a t-shirt and felt a flutter of anxiety inside her chest. He never wore clothing to bed.

“If you have changed your mind about the marriage, I am going to have to kill you.” She took off the towel and put on her robe before sitting on the edge of the bed. When he did not respond to her teasing, she felt her anxiety increasing.

“I was at the hospital,” he told her abruptly as he faced her.

“Why?”

“Angela Bisasor died tonight.”

She stared at him in shock. “An accident?”

“She was attacked.” He shoved his hands into his pockets and rocked back on his heels. “She was involved with a very dangerous individual and put her life at risk to take him down.”

He told her the full story and watched as her eyes widened. “How long has this been going on?”

“About a month.”

Her eyes narrowed at that. “And you did not tell me.”

“It was not something I wanted to discuss with you.” He dragged restless fingers through his hair. “There is more.”

“Okay.”

“She was carrying my seed for perhaps a couple of weeks. She was pregnant with my child.”

The silence stretched long enough to become strained.

“I never knew. I was always so careful that it never occurred to me-“ He tried to decipher her expression, but couldn’t. “She told me just before she died. She wanted me to know.” He took a deep breath. “She also made a request. She wants me to take her body back to India and I said yes.”

“I see.” Remi took off the robe and reached for the nightie she had been wearing when he came in.

“When?”

“This weekend. I would like you to accompany me.”

“I have work and I do not think I am up to traveling all the way to India.” She got into bed and pulled the sheets over her.

“Remi, please talk to me.”

“I have no idea what to say.” She looked away from him and felt a wave of hurt and unreasonable jealousy for the dead woman who had carried inside her the seed of the man she was head over heels in love with. The man she was going to marry.

She felt when the bed sank down. “Argue, slap me, accuse me, do something. But talk to me, please don’t shut me out.”

She could not believe the tears, the damn tears! Why the hell was she crying? The woman was dead. A young woman whose life had been taken from her and all she could feel was a jealousy so sharp and biting that she could scarcely breathe.

“Look at me darling,” he pleaded and she did.

“Sweetheart-“ He felt something hit him right in the chest at the tears on her cheeks. “Oh God, I did not mean to hurt you.

Please-“ He started to pull her into his arms, but she resisted, pushing him away.

“I can’t do this right now.” She started to slide off the bed, but he held onto her.

“I need a minute.”

“No,” he said fiercely, pushing her back against the pillows and trapping her body with his. His expression was strained, his heart beating wildly inside his chest.

“No. We promised we would talk things through, no matter what.”

She pushed at his solid chest, eyes blazing. “You lied to me!”

“I never lied to you,” he bit out. “I did not want this mess to spill over on you, so I chose not to tell you. She came to me for help and there was little I could do to assist, even though I enlisted the aid of Andrei and Nickolai.

The bastard beat her to death and I –“ He bowed his forehead to hers. “I did not love her, Remi, I spent perhaps a month with her and after I left, I never gave her a second thought. And now she is dead.”

“She was pregnant with your child.”

He lifted his head to look at her, eyes haunted. “I never knew. It was not something I would have wanted. She said she loved me-“ He felt when she stiffened. “I have

never loved anyone until you. I would hope you believe me. After all- “

“I need time to think.”

“You are not leaving me!” His harsh tone had her flinching slightly. His eyes blazed at her furiously. “Don’t even think that you can get away from me. I am not going to allow that.

You love me, damn you! You asked me to marry you and we are getting married in two weeks.” His hands gripped her face. “I cannot let you go and this is – Christ!” He closed his eyes briefly. “I – it happened a long time ago and has nothing to do with us.”

“Wade-“

“No. No.” He shook his head. “You are not leaving me.” He kissed her cheek, sipping at the wetness of her tears, before moving down to the sides of her lips.

“Wade-“

“No.” He kissed her lips desperately, fingers digging into her hair. “I love you so damn much.” His tongue traced the outline of her full bottom lip before darting into her mouth. She went weak, literally felt when her body just dissolved. Everything inside her turned to liquid.

Her hands came around his neck, fingers digging into his neck, his shoulders, the bunched of muscles of his back as he ravaged her mouth. Reaching between them, he dragged out his throbbing cock and drove into her.

He knew he was probably being too rough, but he could not help it. He wanted to get through to her. He had to.

Remi dug her fingers in, scraping his flesh and drawing blood. Her body felt as if it was burning up, and she could not get enough of him.

The anger and pain dissolved, leaving her with the aching notion of how much she loved him. She came violently, her body arching upwards. He came right then, body bucking and shuddering on top of hers. Dragging his mouth from hers, he buried his face in the warmth of her neck, his heart thundering inside his chest.

He did not move off her, even though he might be crushing her. He waited a few minutes as he tried to recover his composure. His body was still shaking, his thoughts chaotic.

At least she was not pushing him away, her arms were still wrapped around his neck. He was afraid that if he moved, she would tell him that she wanted out. If he remained wrapped around her, she did not have a choice but to stay put.

“It’s fine.” As if she knew what he was thinking, she whispered the words against his bowed head.

“What?” He lifted his head to gaze at her. His heart went into overdrive as he stared at the swollen lips and the softened expression.

“I am not angry anymore. I was jealous of a dead woman and it’s not something I should be concentrating on. She is dead. She was beaten to death by a man she was involved with and all I could think about, concentrate on, was the fact that for one minute she was carrying a part of you inside her.

I felt betrayed- No.” She shook her head when he opened his mouth. “Just let me finish, okay? While I still can.

The first thought that popped into my head was that you had lied to me by omission and that I was not the first woman you had knocked up. I didn’t think about that poor woman and what she went through or what her family must be going through.

I hated the fact that she had a part of you inside her, that I no longer held that distinction and I was pissed.” She took a breath. “But that is not the issue here and I have to take myself out of it.

You made a promise to her on her deathbed and you need to keep it. I did promise that we would talk things through. I am carrying your baby inside me and in less than two weeks we'll be married and I love you dammit. I am not going to leave you." Lifting a hand, she cupped his jaw. "I love you and that is not going to change."

He blinked at her. "I did not want to tell you. If I could have got away with it, I would have kept it from you. I did not want to hurt you. This morning, I was so happy that you finally said yes. But as soon as I got to the office, I was met by the news about her."

He cupped her face, hands trembling. "I did not want to spoil what we had going on. I left the hospital and told Jake to drive around for a bit. I came home and stood there in the living room, wondering how to tell you."

"I knew something was wrong," she told him softly.
"There was something off and I realized it. That's why I came to join you in the shower. But I thought it was just work, that those deals you had going on, that something had turned hinky. I never dreamed- "
"I am sorry," he whispered.

“For what?” she asked a little impatiently. “For having a damn past? I love you and what you did before should not be a factor.”

“I still want you to accompany me.”

She shook her head. “You are not thinking and if you were, you would know that it’s not a good idea for me to travel that distance.”

“I don’t want to leave you- “

“Shh.” She placed a finger over his lips. “I will be fine. Mrs. Mason has warmed to me and is determined to take care of me. I also have David and the rest of the girls. I will be fine. You need to go darling and I promise that I will not do anything crazy.”

“Remi.” He kissed her forehead gently. “I came home expecting to be fighting, to be arguing, fearing that this

was going to throw a wrench into our plans for the wedding. That you were going to change your mind.”

“I won’t. I can’t. I am hooked.”

“Thank God,” he said with feeling, closing his eyes briefly. “I should-“

“Stay,” she whispered. “I need more.”

“So, do I.”

“I will ask Rachel to check on you as well.”

“You worry too much,” she chided.

“It’s my job. It’s nice out.”

“I am not planning on going anywhere much except lunch with the girls and Cheryl. I have a fitting for my dress tomorrow.” She narrowed her eyes at him. “it’s good you won’t be here, you cannot see it.”

He laughed, feeling the relief flooding through him. Even though the tension and uncertainty surrounding Angela had passed, he was still a little anxious.

He had taken her to dinner the very next day to celebrate their engagement and the papers had gotten a whiff of it. By the next day, it was announced that they were on the verge of tying the knot.

He had also ensured he came home extra early during the week to be with her. And had participated in the cake tasting. The other details he had wisely left up to the women.

“You know that’s utter nonsense, right?” He caught her around the waist and kissed her thoroughly.

“It’s not.” She fussed with his tie. “I am making certain we stick.”

“We will,” he vowed.

“I am making sure of it.”

“I love you.”

“I know.”

“I will be gone only for the weekend. They are planning on having the funeral as soon as the body gets there.” There was a pensive look on his handsome face.

“Will you be, okay?”

He nodded with a smile. "It saddens me to think of what happened to her. She was vibrant and talented."

"This Russian bastard, he is staying in jail this time?"

"Yes." Wade tugged at a lock of hair tumbling down her shoulder. "His fancy lawyers will not wriggle him out this time. It had to take someone dying for them to nail him and that pisses me off."

"But at least he is nailed." She rubbed the back of his neck to get rid of the tension. "And he is going to pay. I admire her, really, I do."

"So do I." He kissed her again. "And I kept thinking about you. What would I do if I lost you." He shook his head. "I would not be able to go on."

"I think about that sometimes. Not in any details, but just fleeting. Because I would not be able to function." She

wrinkled her nose at him. “I blame you for making me so damn dependent on you.”

“I am sorry?” He grinned at her.

“Yeah right.” She leaned into him. “Go, I have things to do?”

“How about a quiet evening at home later? We could watch something on the screen and eat popcorn.”

“Sounds like a plan. Will you be home early?”

“Absolutely. I have to be away early in the morning, so that’s a yes.” He kissed her again before letting go reluctantly. “Take care of my heart.”

“I will. I love you darling.”

Pulling her into his arms, he held her tight. “And I thank God for that every single day.”

Chapter 13

“It seems like ages since I saw you last.”

“I am happy you could take the time to drop by.”

“I did not exactly drop by.” He waited until the housekeeper had placed the tray on the table. They were having lunch on the very lovely and spacious patio with the spectacular view of the city spread out in front of them. He was still finding it difficult to believe that his sister was part of all this luxury, considering where they both came from.

“I had to make an appointment to see my own sister,” he reminded her as he reached for his glass of water.

“Bramwell keeping you to himself?”

She sent him a mild look as she handed him the basket with the heavenly smelling loaf.

“You know he is out of the country.”

“The whole world knows he is transporting the body of his ex to India.” David looked at her curiously. “The speculations are rife. You guys just got engaged and now this nasty bit with that Russian guy who beat your fiancé’s ex to death getting all this media play. Your pics are spread all over social media.”

She grimaced as she poured tea into a porcelain cup. She had spent a wonderful evening with Wade, both of them determined not to think of the shit storm his involvement or past involvement was going to cause.

He had arrived home early after blowing off a meeting and they had eaten on this very patio. Afterwards, they had gone into the theater room to watch a movie and eat their fill of popcorn. He had made love to her, spreading a blanket while the credits rolled.

And this morning he had woken her up with his mouth on her body.

She was not going to allow any of it to dull her happiness.

“We knew it could happen and I am not paying it any attention. I have not even read the various comments. I am getting married next Saturday and I have my dress to fit and several other things to go over with the wedding planner. I also have some designs to finish. My plate is full as it is. I don’t need the negativity.”

“Why did he agree to transport her body to India?” David demanded. “Surely he must have known what the publicity would be like.”

“We spoke about it.” She heaved out a breath and took a sip of her tea. “He made a promise to this woman on her deathbed. Would you have him break it?”

He dug into his chicken breast and avoided her eyes. “I don’t know.”

“Of course you do. He would not be the man I fell in love with, if he did. Look, at first, I was pissed that he kept it all from me. I want complete honesty between us, but I understand. He has this weird thing about wanting to protect me.” She shook her head.

“It’s strange for me. I am used to taking care of myself-“

“And taking care of me,” he added slowly, leaning back in the chair. “And you have found a man who wants to do it all. I am grateful. You spent your life protecting and caring for me.

You took the blows that were meant for me and Wade knows all of that. No wonder he wants to just keep you close to him. It’s a wonder he did not ask you to go with him.” His eyebrows lifted at the look on her face. “Of course, he did. Why didn’t you go?”

“Because I do not think the family would have felt comfortable with his fiancée being there. And I think this is something he should deal with by himself. He is

grieving for her and he is trying not to show that he is because of me.

He was involved with her before I met him but he was never in love with her.” She shook her head. “He needs to do this alone.”

“And you are okay with that?”

“Yes.” She smiled as she sipped her tea. “He loves me. I had a hard time accepting that a man like him could love someone like me-“ She held up a hand to stop his comment. “I know what I look like, even though I never put much stock into my looks. But I know he could have had any woman he wanted.

But he loves me, there is no doubt about that. I am his weak spot. There is nothing he would not do for me and it amazes me, it makes me humble to know that. He does not want to hurt me, because if I am hurting, he is.” She closed her eyes briefly.

“I am marrying this man, going in with my eyes wide open. I never thought I would want to tie myself to anyone because of my past- our past. Never thought I would want to have a child. The fact is, he changed things for me-“ She broke off when her phone vibrated.

David watched as a smile bloomed on her face as she pulled it out of her pocket.

“What time is it there?” She listened for a few seconds. “You must be exhausted. The funeral?”

She listened again and smiled. “Darling, I am fine. I am here with David having lunch.” She glanced at her brother. “Was it uncomfortable?” She asked, expression sobering. “I am sure it was. I feel so sorry for the family. I am fine darling, I promise. Just- just hurry and come back home to me.” Pushing back her chair, she rose and hurried inside.

It felt strange seeing his sister like this. She loved him and he could not begrudge her that. She deserved it after the crappy life she had lived.

He had seen her stand up to their brute of a father to defend him and never once cry. She had done that so that he could have a chance. Now she was with a man who loved her more than life itself. He was happy for her.

He looked up when she came back out, a smile wreathing her lips.

“I take it that everything is okay.”

“Yep.” She slid back into her chair and reached for her tea. “I warned him not to buy me everything in Delhi. But I know he is not going to listen.”

“How does it feel?” he asked her curiously. “To know that you are so loved?”

She shrugged and frowned a little. “It’s difficult to explain. I have this warm fuzzy feeling inside me all the

time, except when we are pissed at each other and even then, I have no doubt that he will always love me.

I used to be so damn cynical about happiness and all that in a relationship, but he has sold me on the notion that there is such a thing as love and longevity in a relationship.” She stared at him.

“We never knew that, we loved each other, you and I, because we were all we had. But at the time, I was not thinking about some sappy emotions, it was just survival for us.” A smile touched her lips. “I don’t have to wonder that if I happen to say the wrong thing, will I be getting a boot up my ass or a slap across the face.

We are equals. And just because we argue, it does not mean he is going to raise his hand to me. I am in this wealthy environment and he does not make me feel as if I do not belong.” She swallowed the lump in her throat. “It’s scary, but it’s scary good, if you know what I mean.”

David put away his glass carefully, lashes shielding his eyes. “I was also skeptical because of what we went through. The horror of it is still etched in my mind.

But seeing you, the way you look.” He waved a hand at the plump cushions piled on comfortable chairs. The spectacular view, the sign of piles of money. “It has made me into a believer.”

Reaching over, she covered his hand with hers. “We did well.”

“Yeah, we did.”

He could not wait to get back home to her. He had stood with Angela’s family, feeling the wave of grief and sadness enveloping them. He had offered his wholehearted support, accepted the family’s kind hospitality, and allowed the sister and family to hitch a ride with him on the jet.

He had been polite but firm when they offered to put him up. He preferred the anonymity and professionalism of a hotel. Besides, hotels were his thing and he was interested in studying the design of the one he had chosen to stay in. New Delhi was a thriving and crowded metropolis with quaint and beautiful buildings.

He had been there before in a business capacity when he was with Angela. She had insisted on them meeting her parents even though it had not been that serious between them. He had not been comfortable of course and had stated that as soon as they left.

“I am certain your parents expect to hear wedding bells. There won’t be any where I am concerned,” he had told her.

“They want me to marry a nice and decent Indian guy, so you are off the hook,” she had responded laughingly. Now she would never be married and the seed they had shared briefly had dissolved as if into thin air. He had stood with the family and found himself wondering if they would have been so accommodating if they knew the full details.

He had stood there watching the ritual of the burial and felt the yearning to be back home, in the arms of the woman he was ridiculously in love with. And ridiculous, stupid, all caught up was how he felt about her. Whenever he was not with her, he felt as if a vital part of him was missing.

He needed her, and could barely sleep without her by his side. The excitement of marrying her was something he could hardly stand. He had begged her not to leave him and there was no shame whatsoever in the desperation he had portrayed.

He was way past that now. He would follow her to the ends of the earth if it came to that. Putting aside the documents he was perusing, he stared out at the scudding clouds. It was dark and he could barely see anything out of the porthole.

It would be wise for him to catch a nap in the elegantly appointed bunker, but he was too wired to sleep. By the time the plane landed, it would be close to midnight where he was going.

But he was planning on taking the day. He had already called his assistant to reschedule the less pressing appointments and would be dealing with the more pressing ones from home. He just wanted to spend the day with her after being away for two whole days.

He laughed softly and did not mind becoming the guy who could not function without his woman. Very soon, she was going to be his wife and he would get to call her Mrs. Bramwell. Shaking his head, he forced himself to get back to the documents in front of him.

Remi could not sleep. The indigestion was bad and on top of that, she was restless. She had drunk a gallon of tea to settle her stomach. But she had an idea that it was more than that. She missed him. Lord! Getting out of bed, she dragged on her robe and made her way out of the suite and down the staircase.

Trailing her fingers over the handcrafted banister, she took her time, careful to watch her step. No carpets on the shiny floorboards, that was the first thing she saw when she first came here.

Heading into the living room with the electronic fire glowing in the hearth, she wandered over to the cabinet and decided on a sparkling water. Uncapping the bottle, she drank half of it before going to sit in front of the fire. He had ordered a rocking chair for her when it was confirmed that she was pregnant.

“Something to relax in when you are feeling a little tired,” he had told her with a smile. The man thought of everything. Rubbing her hand against the bulge of her stomach, she wondered when she had gotten to almost five months. But in a few days, she was scheduled for her checkup and thankfully, he was going to be here.

“Hey dude,” she whispered as she continued to rub her belly. “You are giving your old lady and speaking of which, if I ever hear those words out of your mouth, we are going to have a problem. Anyway,” she laughed softly.

“We are waiting for daddy and I am getting impatient. I miss him like crazy.” She sighed softly. “And I cannot wait for him to get here.”

“What if he is already here?”

Remi froze, the bottle in her hand suspended halfway to her mouth. He was standing in the doorway, and not some figment of her imagination. She had not heard the locks engage or even heard when the alarm was turned off. But he was standing right there, looking wonderful in a black turtleneck sweater and black dress pants.

“Missed me?”

“Wade.” She struggled to get out of the chair, but his long legs made the journey towards her first. “Hi baby.” His deep voice had her going weak and to her surprise, she felt tears springing to her eyes. “Why? How?”

“I am going to need actual sentences darling.” He went on his knees in front of her.

“You are supposed to be here in the morning.”

“I told you around two or three in the A.M. The pilot made very good time and for that I am grateful.” He took her hands in his. “How is my baby mama and why are you not sleeping?”

“Because your baby mama was suffering from indigestion and missing her man. You are here.”

“I am here.” Rising, he pulled her gently to her feet. “And I think I deserve a proper greeting.”

His arms came around her waist as he brought her flush up against him. “Hi darling.”

“Hi.” She wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned in as he took her lips. It started out slow and soft and then turned into a raging inferno until he was practically devouring her mouth. He ended the kiss reluctantly, his

forehead mashing against hers as he took several deep fortifying breaths. “Shall we take this upstairs?”

“Absolutely.”

“I think we broke something.” Remi was still trying to catch her breath after the very hectic round of lovemaking.

“That would be my cock. I think you wrenched it out of its socket.” His green eyes were twinkling. “Woman, you were quite enthusiastic there.”

“You were taking too long.” She spread her fingers over the dampness of his chest hairs and could feel the unsteady beating of his heart.

“I was trying to take my trousers off, you were just too impatient.”

“I was horny.” She traced a pattern through the hairs, her lashes lifting as she stared at him. “I did not hear you complaining.”

“Why the hell would I?” he growled, capturing her hand. “I spent the entire journey dreaming of ripping whatever clothing you were wearing to shreds. I almost snapped at the driver to tell him he was driving too slow.”

She laughed at that and snuggled closer. “Welcome home.”

“It’s good to be back,” he heaved a sigh.

“It was bad.”

“Not bad exactly, just incredibly sad.”

“Did the parents know? About the pregnancy.”

He shook his head. “It does not seem that way and the sister did not say anything to me.” He brushed back tendrils of hair clinging to her moist forehead. He felt settled and really at home.

Now that he was with her, he could feel the warmth of home and hearth and it was not just a cliché. “The dad tried to be strong, but Ms. Bisasor was holding on by a thread.”

“She lost her daughter to violence.” She shook her head. “How did she go from being with you to being with that snake?”

He smiled. “He charmed her. That’s what snakes do.”

“I am happy with how it turned out. I might sound damn selfish, but the thought of never meeting you, never experiencing what we have right here, makes me weak.”

His expression turned tender. “Somehow, I believe that we would have met each other. I believe that we would have found a way to be together. I was wandering around and certainly not looking for you and there you were. I was brought up in a very indifferent household and you were brought up in a violent one.

No one ever lifted a hand to me, perhaps because there was no love there. I don't know if that is entirely accurate, but to them, I was just a product of a duty coupling and nothing more. My father wanted an heir and mother obliged him.”

“I often wondered out loud of course, why they had two of us. Why not just me? Because it was plain that they had no love for us whatsoever.

My mother was stoned out of her mind most of the time and he would be drunk and violent. When we were growing up, I feared that David and I would inherit those traits and I would drum it into his head that he was not even to try smoking. I was afraid that we would turn out like them.”

He touched her cheek gently, the movement one of comfort. “It just proves that we do not have to become our parents.” He inclined his head.

“In my previous relationships, if you could call them that, I did not care, I did not make the effort. I would give pleasure of course, treat the woman with courtesy and buy plenty of gifts, all of which did not take any effort on my part, but the emotions were not there.

As soon as I left, it would all be forgotten. I thought I had inherited my cold nature from him, that was until I met you.” His hand shook slightly, his eyes darkening as emotions swirled within their depths.

“When I touched you at the hotel, I believed I was going to melt. So much was the fire burning inside me. And I knew without a shadow of a doubt that this was different, that you were different.”

“And to think that I fought you, I tried to deny what I was feeling. I went home that night feeling as if your body

was imprinted on mine. I could not get the feel of you off me, even though I took a shower. I could not sleep and the scent of your cologne was still clinging to me.

I tried to convince myself that a man like you knew how to give a woman pleasure and that was just it.” She shook her head in wonder. “In my limited experience, I figure that I was just dazzled by the very hot and heavy sex.”

“And hot and heavy it was,” he concurred with a faint smile. “I was rough with you,” he recalled. “I put marks on you, I had such a fascination with your nipples that I was like a starving man with a sumptuous banquet laid before him. I just wanted to feed and not stop. When I entered you-” He sucked in a breath and felt himself hardening even now.

“When I drove into you, I had to stop for a second - you stole my breath and I had no idea what to do.” His fingers tangled into her hair as he brought her face up to his. “You were wrapped around me so snug that it’s a wonder I did not come right then.

I held back or tried to-” His voice had thickened, his face taut with passion. “I did not want it to end. I wanted to make love to you until we were both exhausted from it.”

Remi felt the heat at the core of her spreading. “We made love three times before I ran. I had to leave and you did not stop me.”

“I wanted to. But it was too much. You were too much. I was reeling from the emotions pounding at me. It has always been that way.”

He pushed her back against the pillows and covered her body with his. He entered her slowly, eyes watching her face. “That look right there, the heat in your brown eyes and the parting of your lips had my cock doing a happy dance.”

She laughed breathlessly, arms going around his neck. “Happy dance?”

“I don’t know how to put it. Do you feel me darling?” He pushed in deeper.

“Always.” Her breath was a whisper against his lips.
“Love me.”

“Always.” He repeated her word as he increased the pace.

Chapter 14

“No strippers,” she warned.

“This is a classy joint, I am not certain that is allowed,” he responded with a twinkle in his eyes. They had come by the club for the weekend. The arrangements for the wedding were all in place and the excitement was high. They had been placed in the suite he used whenever he was here.

“Yeah right.” Sitting on the edge of the bed, she pressed a hand to her stomach.

“What is it?”

“A little queasiness. I think the plane ride contributed to it.”

He knelt in front of her, a concerned frown on his brow.
“The pills?”

“I took them before I left, remember?”

“Is it too soon to take another?”

She made a face that had him smiling. “You know how I feel about them. Why can’t they come up with something in liquid form?” she complained. “Aren’t we supposed to be so advanced technologically?” She aimed a glance at him. “You have all that money at your disposal, you should donate to research into that area.”

“I will get right on that.” He rubbed her belly, his eyes trained on her face. “Trying to get out of marrying me?”

“Was it that obvious?”

He narrowed his eyes at her. “I am afraid that I will drag you to the altar, or wherever, if necessary.”

“You are stuck with me buddy.” Her hands cupped his face. “Besides, the girls have several activities planned, including some sexy well-toned men with bulging-“ She laughed at the ominous expression on his face.

“You had better be about to say muscles.”

“What else would it be?” she asked innocently. She leaned into him, closing her eyes as she inhaled his scent. “Just think, tomorrow by this time we will be Mr. and Mrs.”

“I cannot wait.” He rubbed her back and felt torn. He was about to go into one of the conference rooms set up for his bachelor party when all he wanted to do was snuggle down with her. “How about some tea? I could call and have them send a tray.”

She nodded. “Just call for the tray and I will take some time to rest a little. And you don’t have to stay.”

“What if I want to?”

“Wade.”

“I love hovering.”

“Go away.” She kissed him full on the lips, arms going around his neck. “Finally,” she whispered. “It’s almost here.”

“I cannot wait.” He held her against him for a minute before letting go and rising to his feet. His hand cupped her face. “I don’t want to leave.”

“I will be fine.” She gripped his hand. “And tonight, we are going to tear up the sheets.”

He grinned at that. “I will probably be deep in my cups by then.”

“You had better be ready to sink that very impressive penis deep inside me tonight,” she warned, feeling a thrill shimmer up and down her spine when his expression changed. “When you put it that way, then I am going to stay away from most of the drinking.” He lifted her hand to his lips. “You did not have to sign that prenup.”

“I wanted to. I don’t like that snotty lawyer of yours, he insisted on explaining all the boring stuff to me. I almost fell asleep during the damn lecture.”

Wade laughed easily. “Leighton takes his job too seriously.” He squeezed her hand. “Let me get that tray up here for you.”

“Decent?” David knocked on the door and pushed his head in.

“Problem?” She looked up from studying her reflection in the mirror.

“Just wanted to see you before I head out to the bachelor thing.” He walked in and closed the doors behind him.

“Did that man of mine send you up here to check on me?” she asked suspiciously.

He smiled sheepishly. “Busted.” Taking her hand, he helped her up from the vanity stool and twirled her around. “New dress?”

“Yes. Is it too much?” She tossed her head back, the dark brown curls tumbling down her back. The bronze material clung to her voluptuous curves and emphasized her baby bump. The material was a light shimmering one that conformed to her body each time she moved.

“You are beautiful. If you weren’t my sister, I would be hitting on you,” he told her with a grin.

“Eew. That’s gross.” She pushed him away. “Now that you see for yourself that I am not puking my guts out, you can right back and report to Wade.”

“He wanted to know if you ate everything that was sent from the kitchen.”

“I did. Now go.”

Pulling her into his arms. David held her tight before letting go. “I am proud of you.”

“Thanks.”

“Here comes the woman of the hour!” The women inside the tastefully decorated room rose to their feet and started applauding.

“Honey, take a seat right in the center. We managed to have them hunt up a throne-like chair for you to sit in.” Kelly came forward to take her hand. “The room is secured and we asked the men to stay away.”

“They are busy getting up to all sorts of mischief anyway,” Leesa said with a wide smile.

“And I must say, you look wonderful.”

“I knew the dress would be perfect.” Monique clapped her hands.

“We decided to combine the wedding and baby shower.” Stacey waved a hand to the table in the corner of the room, heaped with gaily decorated gift bags. “We know you have probably been so busy that you have not had time to shop for the baby yet-“

“I don’t want to jinx it.” Remi settled into the chair, laughing as Kelly placed a gaudily decorated crown on top of her head. “I am planning on waiting until the little dude here reaches the six-month mark.”

“Don’t worry darling,” Leesa reassured her. “Monique provided us with gender neutral outfits. They look so cute, I fleetingly contemplated having another baby.”

“Brad would never hear of it and your biological clock stopped ticking some years ago,” Kelly reminded her dryly.

“Sadly yes,” Leesa said gaily. “Now let’s commence with the ceremony. We have a few games which promise to be fun and then the opening up of the gifts. Ready ladies?”

“Yay!”

“I promised Remi that there would be no strippers.”
Wade’s eyes narrowed when the women walked into the room.

“They are not for you.” David told him with a grin. “In case you have not noticed, there are several single men in the room. And the ladies are for luck.” He eyed the men seated around the card table. “I intend to walk out of here with a bundle.”

“You obviously have never played cards with Jackson, Adam and Kane before.” Wade told him dryly. “They are going to relieve you of what money you came here with. And have you crying real tears.”

“I have been studying. Now gentlemen, we need to hurry this along as we have the real activity of the night to get to. Let the games begin.”

Half an hour later, David was scooping up his chips in delight. "Told ya." He grinned at Wade.

"You did." He watched as his soon to be brother-in-law swaggered over to the cabinet.

"Decent of you to let him win," he said in an aside to Jackson.

"Figured he needs the win. Damn lawyer."

Adam grinned at him. "My sentiments exactly." He glanced at Kane. "I am surprised you allowed it."

"I promised my darling wife that I would not be taking money from people with less than I have. She has me feeling guilty as hell. It takes one look from that woman and that's that. It's exasperating." He leveled dark eyes at Wade. "Be warned, when they have your heart, they have you by the balls. Just saying."

“I have already discovered that.” Wade reached for a rolled cigar, taking a sniff before popping it into his mouth. “And I am fine with it. She has me twisted around her little finger but in a good way. I cannot wait for her to say, I do.” He grinned around the cigar.

“I have been doing it for several years now and I am still loving it,” Adam remarked with a whimsical smile. They watched as David came back flanked by Bradley and Christian.

“Let’s get to the second segment of the evening,” David suggested.

“It’s the Q&A section of the program.” Kelly took center stage in the last room, with an iPod in her hands. “Now that we have been fed and duly entertained by a very provocative dance from Barry, we are ready to continue.

“These are just some questions the girls and I threw together.” She grinned at Remi who had a paper apron tied around her neck and waist, with the words: ‘Ass kicking bride’ emblazoned in red letters.

“It’s a test to see if you are going to make a good wife.”

“Bring it on.” Remi shuffled her butt deeper into the chair and stuck her legs out.

“This question is in the form of a scenario. Wade goes out of town without you and after telling you he is meeting with some investors, some nosy reporter has his pic taken with a hot blonde bitch, her arm tucked intimately through his. What do you do?”

“You mean after I march over to wherever he is and chop off the blond bitch’s hair?” she asked airily. “Why, I would then allow him to explain himself and deny him sex for a month. If-” She held up a hand as the applause and comments exploded.

“If I am satisfied with the explanation. He was held at gunpoint by the blonde bitch or- “She grinned. “That said bitch was threatening his wife – me” She pointed to herself. “And our baby. I am still going to deny him the sex, but I would not kill him or cut off his dick.”

Kelly held up a hand to stop the applause and raucous laughter. “Ladies and gentleman.” She inclined her head towards the gaudily dressed and very gay Barry.

“Our Remi here apparently took some lessons.”

“It comes naturally to me. I love that man to pieces and I am not going to tolerate infidelity of any sort. Not to mention there is a child involved. He is tied to me for life.”

She patted her stomach and felt a movement. “Oh my God!”

“What?” Everyone rushed over, concern on their faces.

“He just moved. My baby moved.”

“Girl.” Barry shook his long blonde hair. “Don’t let me hurt you. We thought something was wrong. May I?” He pointed to her belly.

“Of course.”

“You are not drunk.”

“How do you know that?” He had been waiting for her inside the room much to her delight and surprise.

“I do smell liquor on your breath, but your eyes look alert,” she murmured. He had been naked and under the

sheets when she came in. “And don’t think I did not hear the rumor about the strippers.”

“Escorts,” he corrected, a smile wreathing his face as he rubbed the cream over her belly. “And you have your brother to blame.” He kissed her slowly. “I did not touch, just looked.” His hands jerked as he felt the subtle movements.

“He has been doing that since this morning.”

“Christ!” he whispered. “It suddenly feels so real.”

“It never did before?” she asked him teasingly, placing a hand over his.

“Of course, it did.” He swallowed the lump in his throat. “You are still convinced we are having a son?”

She shrugged. “Just a feeling. But I am going to be okay with any gender. I got a lot of gender-neutral onesies as

gifts and you should see the completely scandalous lingerie that was in all those gift bags. I am going to need a bigger space.

You already bought me more stuff than I could ever use and now all that.” She gestured to the heap in the corner of the room. “I used to roll my eyes in disgust at women who would be so excited at getting married, who could not wait for the day.

All the anxiety of getting everything perfect and all that. I used to think to myself that it was just one damn day and the marriage was not even going to last anyway.” She took his hand in hers. “Now I have become one of those women. I am so excited that I keep wanting to make the day go faster. I want to be your wife, have your name.

That’s another thing too. I am losing my name willingly and taking on yours. The name I have now belongs to a man who did not give a shit about us - me and David.” She brought his hand up to her lips and felt when he quivered as she kissed the flesh.

“Now I am going to be so damn proud bearing yours, wearing your ring, telling the world that I am Mrs. damn fricking Wade Bramwell. I think I am going to shout it from the rooftops. That’s how high I am on being completely yours. Darling, I love you so much.”

He swallowed the golf ball sized lump in his throat. For a few seconds he could not speak, he was the one who usually had the words, the emotions that seemed to be bursting out of him. She undid him with what she just said, simply destroyed his equilibrium with her words.

“My love,” he whispered thickly; eyes bright.

“At a loss for words?” she teased him.

“Quite.” He drew her to him, kissing her forehead, her cheeks, the sides of her lips, her chin and then her throat where the pulse was beating wildly for him.

Only for him. He would walk through fire for her, don a sword and fight her battles. He would take anything as

long as she was with him. It overwhelmed him completely and there were times when he was baffled by it.

“I adore you,” he told her thickly, his hands wandering all over her back and then cupping her breasts. “There is nothing I would not do-” He bent his head to kiss the top of her breast, before coming back to her throat. “Nothing you could ever do to make me want to leave.”

“Even when I piss you off so much, you want to strangle me?” she asked him shakily.

He laughed softly, head lifting to look at her. He gazed hungrily at her parted lips and felt the heat spreading all through her body. Her hair was spilling all over the pillows. In a few hours, she was going to belong to him, completely.

And like her, he could not wait. He would be putting his ring on her finger and joining them together as one. “Let me make love to you, my sweet.”

“You don’t even have to ask. Rock my world my soon to be husband.”

“Oh, absolutely,” he whispered as he climbed on top of her.

The day was beautiful, with birds chirping in the nearby trees. They were surrounded by the beauty of nature. A secluded spot had been assigned to them, far enough away from the other members and visitors to the club.

The dazzlingly white gazebo had been decorated by wisterias, trailing vines, daffodils, daisies, red, white and yellow roses and even babies’ breath. Chairs dotted the lush green grass and a red carpet was laid in the center for the bridal party.

The groom stood up front, looking resplendent and handsome in slate gray tux with a sprig of red rose and petunias in the lapel of his jacket. His sable brown hair

was brushed back from his face and even though he tried to appear neutral, the strain of impatience was evident on his face.

The minister, who was also a member of the club, stood there waiting, his black ceremonial frock billowing in the wind.

Wade felt tension growing inside him as the music started, indicating that the bride was on her way. His first sight of her took his breath away and had him going weak at the knees.

The dress, a coral blue wool was designed in such a way that it hid the bump of her pregnancy. Her hair was brushed, slicked back from her face and held in place by a jeweled barrette. Her face was artfully made up, but to his fevered mind she did not need it. She was naturally beautiful.

Finally, she was being handed to him by her brother.

“Hi.”

“Hi,” he whispered, taking her hand and turning her to face the minister.

“We will commence with the opening prayer to bless this couple.” He beamed at them. “Marriage is sanctioned by God and it is a binding union that should not be trifled with.”

Wade tuned out the rest of it as he gazed at the woman in front of him. She was wearing diamonds, ones that he had bought her, in her lobes, around her neck and at her right wrist. But not even the brilliant stones could compare to her exquisite beauty.

Shaking himself into awareness, he was just in time to hear the minister announce that the couple would be reciting their own vows.

“I will go first,” Remi murmured, eyes dancing. “I had this long speech planned and even wrote down some of it.”

Her face sobered. "But I decided that I need to speak from my heart." Her hands gripped his.

"Before I met you, I did not believe in love or happiness or forever. I never had the type of childhood where I was read a bedtime story, so I did not even have that chance to hear about it from that perspective.

I only knew that life was hard and tough and you have to make your own way. You showed me different, showed me that I could dream and have that dream come true.

You taught me how to be truly loved and to love in return." She felt the tears starting and shook her head. "And ever since I met you I have been leaking like a damn sieve-" She glanced at the minister and muttered, "Sorry." Much to the delight of the guests who burst out laughing.

"You make me feel, make me warm here." Using her free hand, she touched where her heart was beating unsteadily. "You have given me a family." She turned to look at her brother. "Before you, there was only David

and now I have you and our baby on the way.” She sniffed.

“Saying I love you is just not enough, but it is so much more than that. I can face any day, knowing that you are with me and to know that I am loved, it is something I am trying to accept. Thank you darling, for being the man you are. You epitomize power, yet you are not afraid to show me your vulnerable side.

I can be ugly with you, drop my guard, be the person that I am and know that you would never judge me. You love me, you who have seen all sides, the good and the bad and I will always be grateful that I am with you.”

Lifting her hand, he kissed it, closing his eyes as emotions swamped him. “After that, I am wondering if I have the words.” His smile was a little wobbly. “Remi, darling, you made me whole.

I met you and everything else paled into insignificance at that very moment. I knew it was you, that it could be no one else but you. You are the beginning and the ending for me.

No matter what happens, it will always be you. I grew up without love and never dreamed it would ever happen to me. I was not looking and there you were. You have given me so much, darling, that I find myself wondering how I ever lived, ever survived without you. I adore you, darling, and I always will.

For the rest of our lives, I promise to honor you, take care of you. I will celebrate your accomplishments and laugh when you do. I will protect you with my very last breath and stand with you through everything. This is my vow to you and I will be sticking to it.”

“Now that the vows have been said, I just want to add that marriage is legal and binding and of course beautiful when a man and a woman love each other the way this couple do.”

The rest of the ceremony went off smoothly and within a short period the rings were exchanged and blessed and they were declared husband and wife.

Chapter 15

They took pictures, dozens of them, in different areas of the huge grounds. By the meadow with the dazzling array of flowers, by the oak tree with the vines hanging down, and by the stream where they sat on the benches with their arms around each other.

The suite of rooms assigned to them was not the one Wade usually used at the club, but a different one, the pale blue very appropriate for the occasion. They would be spending the night at the club before going off to an undisclosed location for their honeymoon. Not even the bride was privy to that information.

“What if it’s somewhere I do not like?”

He cast her an amused look. They had retired to their room to change out of their wedding clothes. “I guarantee you will,” he assured her.

“How can you be sure?” she insisted. A simple blue and white dress with trailing transparent sleeves had been laid on the bed by one of the girls for her to put on.

“I happen to have excellent taste. Need any help?”

“With the zipper. Yes.” She stood there wearing only her exquisite white lace underwear and a garter high on her left thigh.

“We could stay a minute.” He ran his hands up and down her arms slowly. “We were just married; they cannot expect us to come right out.”

“Jerrold gave strict orders for us to come right out so that they can start the speeches. Or he was going to come and see what was keeping us,” she reminded him.

“We could lock the doors. I want to make love to my wife. And I am not afraid of Jerrold,” he growled.

“I am.” Leaning forward, she kissed him quickly and danced out of his arms.

“That’s ridiculous. I want you.”

“And we have all night.” Picking up the dress, she stepped into it and turned so that he could zip her up. “Is it Italy?”

“No.” He took his time with the zipper, admiring the curve of her back and the contrast of the white lace against her skin.

“Paris?”

“No.” Bending his head, he kissed the side of her neck, while pulling her against him, arms encircling her waist. “I am not going to give up the information, no matter what.”

“What if I decide to brave Jerrold’s wrath and give you sex. Will you tell me then?”

“Tempting but no. And you are absolutely right, we should get going.” He pulled the zipper up and stepped back.

His eyes twinkled as she turned to face him with a pout on her sexy lips.

“You could take me from behind. Just slide-”

“Uh Oh, look at the time. We really should get going.”

“You are not going to tell me?” She went to get shoes.

“No. It would spoil the surprise.”

“Well then, blame yourself if it turns out I am not satisfied.”

“Have I ever left you dissatisfied?” he asked softly as he took her hand in his.

“Right now, I am,” she pointed out.

“That will be remedied as soon as we get to our destination.”

“You are a spoilsport.”

“I am your husband.” He turned her around and cupped her face. “I am the man who loves you so much that I cannot verbalize it. I am the man who will love you for the rest of your life.”

“You are.” She blinked back tears and leaned into him.
“And damn you for making me feel so weepy.”

“You could always blame it on hormones,” he told her tenderly. “Shall we, darling?”

“Just another minute.”

“Of course.” He closed his arms around her and held on, breathing in her scent.

“I am ready now,” she told him quietly.

“Let’s welcome the bride and groom!” The thunderous applause sounded inside the elegantly decorated room. There were green, blue and white balloons floating against the arched ceiling.

And everywhere there were flowers, on the tables, the backs of chairs and on the dais where the master of ceremonies stood, there were flowers everywhere.

The guests were seated and white-coated caterers made the rounds with flutes of champagne and finger food. On a table in a corner of the room, wedding gifts overflowed. Wade guided her over to the table at the front of the room that was reserved for them. The gold glittery letters reading: 'Mr. & Mrs.' were placed near the edge.

“I was given specific instructions by the groom to make this short.” Jerry’s light blue eyes twinkled. “And I have to tell you, I have known this man since high school and he is much stronger than I am.”

“Kindly remember that,” Wade said mildly, much to the amusement of the guests.

“Duly noted my friend. Now we will get straight to the point. My dear Remi, I have to pause and give credit where it is due. You are beautiful and you and Wade make a terrific couple.”

“I agree with you completely,” she told him.

“We have the cutting of the cake and the bride and groom’s first dance as a couple. We are going to have some fun with this.” He gestured to the vintage wedding cake with the gold and silver flowers weaving the way at the side.

“We understand that the groom helped the bride to make the decision on the cake, quite an unusual occurrence.” He cocked a brow at Wade who nodded.

“We wanted to do things together and I enjoyed the cake tasting event. It – er- led to other things.” Leaning over, he kissed his bride on the lips.

Jerry waited for the cheers to abate. “Now it’s time to show just how good a husband you are going to be. Wade, my friend, I want you to take your bride’s hand and make your way over to the cake table. You will see a cake knife and I want you to do your thing.”

Wade pushed back his chair and took her hand, guiding her over to the table. “Now you are going to take the knife Mrs. Bramwell and stick it in- just like that. Wade, place your hand over hers- just like that,” he said in approval.”

Now on the count of three, you are good to go.” He started the countdown and stopped at two. “Go!” he shouted, clapping his hands as the knife cut into the cake.

“Excellent. Now, let’s see what you got Mr. Bramwell and how you are going to treat your wife. It is the old bird feeding method. Take a piece of- “He broke out laughing. “I see you already got it. Oh, would you look at that!”

“Ready darling?” Wade whispered as he popped the piece of cake into his mouth.

“Always.” Moving closer, she slid her hands around his neck and lifted her head so that he could place his mouth on hers and transferred the cake into hers. He deepened the kiss, his tongue darted into her mouth.

He felt the enormous craving coming on and realized that he was going to have to end it. Putting her away from him, he took several deep breaths to try and calm himself.

“Very well done. Now Mr. & Mrs. Wade Bramwell, we are going to ask the musicians to strike up the music and it’s time for your first dance as a married couple.”

She was sleeping and for that he was grateful. He did not want her to know of their destination until they had landed. She had been trying her damndest to get the information out of him. Even while they were boarding the plane.

She was snuggled against his shoulder, her legs curled beneath her. She was tucked out and had been stifling yawns at the reception. He had seen her dancing with several of the male guests and had to tamper down a spurt of jealousy.

His brother-in-law had cornered him at one point and expressed his appreciation.

“You have done so much for her,” he had remarked, his voice filled with emotion. “All I wanted for her was to be happy and you have accomplished that. She has been through so much and now she has you. I am so damn proud of her.”

“So am I. You are not so bad yourself.”

“Thanks,” David had told him earnestly.

But she had brought so much to his life. He shifted a little so that he could look at her. His beautiful wife, he thought, the emotions almost choking him. The only woman who had ever held his heart in the palm of her hand.

She was his now, and it completely overwhelmed him. Dropping a soft kiss on her brow, he settled back and closed his eyes.

“We are in Hawaii?” she exclaimed as soon as they got off the plane.

“Maui to be exact.” He gave her a boyish grin as he handed their luggage to the driver waiting next to the long and shiny black car.

“We are going to the hotel.” She took his outstretched hand and allowed herself to be guided to the door the driver had opened.

“Yes.” He settled her in, before sliding in next to her. The driver closed the door and Wade gave her his attention. “How about something to drink?” he suggested. Touching a button, he caused a small cabinet to slide out

of the slot. “How is the stomach?” He had seen her rubbing it a few times during her sleep.

“A little raw.”

“Tea, then?”

“Yes. How long is this journey?”

“A few miles. The hotel was a private residence several hundred years ago, before it was transformed into a hotel.” He handed her the steaming cup of herbal tea and settled for a finger of vodka. Settling back against the butter soft leather seat, he stared at her. “We are going to be completely alone and isolated.”

“Has work started on the building?”

He lifted one shoulder in a shrug. “On the exterior and some inside.”

“I could-”

“We are on our honeymoon and yes, I am going to need your kind of expertise at a later date, but for now, we are going to just sit around, swim, eat, make love, make love and make love. In that particular order.” He gave her a lazy smile that twisted her up inside.

“It’s always sex with you,” she grumbled as she sipped her tea.

“Now it’s legal sex.” He trailed a finger down her cheek, loving the feel of her smooth skin. “I thought pregnant women were supposed to have craters on their faces?”

She sent him a baleful look that had him laughing.

“Fortunately for you, that is not the case.” he added, tongue in cheek.

“This tea is piping hot,” she reminded him, staring pointedly at his crotch.

“I am shutting up now, but not before I tell you that you are the most beautiful pregnant woman I have ever seen.”

“That is not going to work.”

“I am just being honest.” He looped a hand around her shoulder and carefully nudged her closer to him.

With a contented sigh, she snuggled against his shoulder and continued to sip tea. “It’s beautiful.”

“We should explore, when we manage to climb out of bed. It’s a beautiful place.”

“How many times have you been here?” It was dark and they were leaving the busy town area and heading into the rural part of the city. It was dark but every now and then she could see flowers blooming and trees waving in the breeze.

“Several times. I had to come for meetings - face to face and to take a look at the property.” He trailed his fingers absently over her arms, loving the feel of her against him. “I admired the structural soundness of it and decided that it was exactly what was needed.”

She turned her head to look at him, admiring the handsome profile and the stubborn chin. This man was her husband, something she was finding difficult to become accustomed to. “And what Wade Bramwell wants, he gets.”

He turned his head to look at her, green eyes locking on hers. “I had to fight tooth and nail to get you to come and live with me,” he reminded her dryly.

“And eventually I caved.”

“Did you now? Finished?” He nodded at the cup.

“Yes.”

“Here.” Taking it from her, he put it away, along with his empty glass. “Or was it the fact that you fell madly in love with me?”

“That too. I love you.”

His heart slammed against his ribs and he felt his body heating up.

“That’s handy because I happen to love you too.” Placing a hand over where her heart was beating unsteadily, he felt the ruby he had given her just weeks ago. “I-” he paused when the car slid to a smooth stop. They had been so engrossed in each other that they had failed to notice that the driver had turned into the long, cobbled driveway.

The pink stucco building loomed in front of them and seemed more like a stately old mansion than a hotel. The door was whisked open and the driver, a friendly smile on his dark face, took her hand to help her out. It was just getting dark, but there was a light somewhere in the front, spilling out onto the wraparound porch.

“We won’t need you for the rest of the day Dave.”

“Yes sir.” Doffing his cap, he trudged towards the porch with the cases. A woman wearing a prim looking black pants suit stood aside so that he could pass with the cases.

“Darling, I would like you to meet Moira. Moira, this is my wife, Remi.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you.” Moira beamed at her and gestured them into the wide and elegant foyer. “I have prepared some refreshments in the blue salon.” Hefting the suitcases in her hands, she headed for the intricately

woven staircase. “I have put you in the honeymoon suite.”

“Naturally. Thank you.”

With a nod, the woman headed upstairs.

“She is bringing down our swimwear.” Taking her hand, he led her through a wide passageway, and nudged her into a faded blue salon with comfortable sofas and floor to ceiling windows.

“Oh my goodness!” Remi clapped her hands and raced over to the window facing the most spectacular view she had ever seen. The sea was spread out in front of them and along the pathway leading to the gently cresting blue water, there were dozens of flowers with the colors rioting and contrasting with the lush green grass.

“I take it that you approve?” He had come up behind her and placed his hands on her shoulders.

“I think this is what paradise looks like.” She leaned back against him and sighed as his hands slid around her waist possessively.

“What do you think? Eat first and then swim?”

“Oh, definitely swim.”

“I am not venturing any further,” she told him firmly.

“You are determined to stay in the shallow end?”

“Yep. You are the fish, I am not. I am very comfortable where I am.” Dipping her hands beneath the surface, she splashed water around her. It was a serene setting, and the blue-green water was surprisingly warm.

She had floated a little bit and then dived beneath the surface. But she was not taking the challenge from her husband to venture further.

“You should learn to take risks.”

“That’s not taking risks, that’s putting one’s life on the line.” She watched as he sank down until she could no longer see him, just the ripples where he had been. Telling herself that there was no cause for worry, she continued splashing water all around her.

A scream escaped her when she felt something tickling her feet.

“That’s not funny.” Huffing out a breath, she turned her head to send him a sizzling look as he came up behind her and hugged her. “I thought it was a shark or - what are those flesh- eating fish called?”

“Piranhas?”

“Yes, that.”

“You have a vivid imagination.” He turned her to face him, admiring the slick back hair streaming past her neck and shoulders and especially the fabric of her one-piece black swimwear clinging to her generous bosom.

“What are you doing?” she squeaked.

“What does it look like?” he asked her mildly as he continued to peel the suit off her. Lifting her up against him, he dragged it over her feet and let it float away.

“I am naked!”

“Is that so?” He was amused by her outraged expression. “Thanks for the update.”

“Wade-” The rest of her protests were cut off as he crushed his mouth to hers. Her limbs went weak with longing and her hands came around his neck to cling.

The kiss was potent and hungry, filled with heat so intense that the atmosphere around them sizzled from it. The water lapped around them lazily, the light from the moon, illuminating their water-soaked bodies. Somewhere birds were chirping and the occasional insect scurrying around in the brush.

But the couple were only aware of each other, the sensations, the emotions flooding their bodies as they poured everything into the raw and hungry kiss.

Treading water, his mouth still fastened on hers, Wade walked them backwards to the towels he had placed there before their swim. With unerring accuracy, he lowered her carefully down, ending the kiss just so he could take off his sodden shorts.

“How come you get to keep your shorts?” she asked huskily as he covered her body with his.

“I retrieved yours while you were busy swallowing my tongue,” he whispered against her mouth. “I am not allowed to litter the sea. I have to be responsible.”

“That’s good.” She combed her fingers through his hair. “Someone might see us.”

“No one is around. It’s a private property. We are quite alone.”

“What about Moira?”

“No doubt she is tucked in for the night. Shh, I want to make love to my wife.”

“I am not stopping you. I love you so damn much.”

“Ever the romantic.” He drank from her, tasting the water from her cheeks and then the sides of her mouth. “I adore you my sweet.” He slid into her slowly, his eyes on hers. “My darling.”

He felt a magnitude of emotions swamping him as he pushed into her. “My heart.” Lifting her leg and bending it at the knee, she arched her body to accept the welcome invasion of his.

The moon bathed their writhing bodies with a silver glow, birds chirped softly as if unwilling to intrude on the intensely romantic moment. The sounds of their accelerated heartbeats sounded loud in the quiet. A sigh here, a whisper there, words spoken in the heat of the moment just hung for a minute and floated away.

Wade relished the heat and embraced the uncontrollable fire blazing inside his body. His wife, his woman, the one carrying his baby. It was too much to even comprehend. This beautiful woman beneath him was giving him everything.

He did not have to fear that she would turn cold and unfeeling, that she would become his mother. She was warm and giving, feisty and independent and was all his.

She had willingly given up her name so that she could bear his. He whispered his love for her as he stoked the fire between them. There was no need for haste, they could stay out here all night if that was necessary. He wanted them to have the entire night. It was their honeymoon, she was his wife.

Oh, how he had longed for this ever since he met her! And now it was here, the feeling of her beneath him, wearing his ring and carrying his baby inside her was more than he could bear.

He swallowed her fevered cries, fueled by the desperate arching of her body, the way her fingers dug into his skin as the wave crashed all over her. He felt the tremors, gloried in the spasms the climax brought out in her. His own climax was not far behind. He felt when his testicles tightened and the blood rushed through his body.

Sliding his hand over her hip, he turned her body slightly, his own body shuddering and then going still. Like the calm before the storm.

The climax seized him with intensely powerful fingers, dragging him beneath the swirling rivers or what felt like it. It covered him completely. He felt when she wrapped her arms around his neck, heard the wind rushing into his ears as he poured himself all the way in.

“Remi.” His voice was a hoarse whisper, his heart hammering inside his chest as the wave abated somewhat and he was able to float back down. Shifting to take the weight off her, he gathered her in his arms as they both waited for the storm to pass.

Chapter 16

They ate right out there on the sand. He had instructed Moira to pack everything up in a picnic basket and now they were enjoying the fruits that were popular on the island.

“I am sure you have had mangoes before.” He watched indulgently as he licked the rich orange juice off her fingers in obvious delight.

“Not like this. This is too delicious for words.”

“I am going to make it my point of duty to take you to Jamaica. The place is riddled with fruit trees.”

“What’s this?”

“Dragon fruit and that’s starfruit and this is coconut.” He pointed to the almost translucent pieces floating in

delicious tasting water.

“I know coconuts.” She rolled her eyes at him and he could not help but snag a kiss, tasting the mango she had just consumed.

“Hmm,” he whispered against her mouth. “I might just use your mouth to fill my stomach.” His tongue darted in and for a few minutes there was complete silence.

Dragging his lips from hers, he settled back and sucked in much needed air.

“What you do to me.” With a shake of his head, he picked up his glass of pineapple juice with trembling fingers. “It’s mind boggling.” Tossing back the drink, he rose to his feet lithely, his magnificent body a thrill to behold.

“I am going to cool off.”

Without another word, he strode away and she watched as he dived cleanly into the water. Taking several deep breaths, she pressed a hand to her rapidly beating heart and tried to steady herself. He was not the only one affected, she thought wryly. Picking up a slice of the delicious mango, she nibbled and turned her attention to where he was.

She was here, on an isolated patch of land with her husband. It was something that was surreal to her. She who had come from such a nasty background where she and her brother had had to fight not to become sucked into the horror of parents who had not given a jot about their upbringing.

She was here with a man who was not only rich and powerful, but one who loved her to pieces.

It made up for her crappy childhood, for all the times she had to endure the abuse, physical, mental and psychological. It had all brought her here, not just the location, but here to this man who had opened his heart and world to her.

The fact that he loved her, that he was not afraid to show how much, humbled her and made it easy for her to show him that she loved him too. Sometimes it scared her, she contemplated.

The fire between them, the heat consuming them and sometimes overwhelming them, but she was learning to embrace it all. To embrace him and everything that came with it.

Sitting up, she reached for a towel to wrap around her to ward off the sudden chill made by the wind.

He came out of the water, hands lifting to get rid of most of the water from his hair. Her breath caught inside her throat as she took in the lean muscular frame, the rippling muscles and the impressive sex.

She felt heat filling her as he came closer. Dropping down next to her, he sent her a smug look. "I am not a damn machine."

“What?” She busied herself, putting the things back inside the basket.

“I know that look.”

“I was just admiring the merchandise.”

“Merchandise?” He flicked water at her, before tumbling her back.

“Now who is thinking about sex?”

“At least I am honest about it.” He kissed her hungrily.

“We should go on in.”

“Hmm.” He bit her lush bottom lip and felt her tremors.
“We will. Just a few more minutes.”

He slid in, no longer surprised that he was ready for her. He had spent the time swimming to try and clear his mind and the emotions crowding him. But he was willing to embrace it.

Being married to her was contributing to what he was feeling.

Taking her lips with his, he drove into her and felt when everything dissolved into nothingness, everything except her.

“Now you can bounce some ideas off me.” He felt like a very satisfied Sultan with his harem of one. It was the last day of their honeymoon and the days had gone by so quickly that it hardly seemed like a week since they had been here.

He had taken her out on the speedboat docked in the harbor and amused himself by her screams as he gunned the engine.

They had had dinner last evening at the Bistro Casanova and she had gorged herself on the excellent cuisine. Tonight, being their last night, they had decided to stay in.

“Tropical Paradise.”

“Pardon?” They had just finished a rather hectic and loud bout of lovemaking and were taking the time to cool off. And they had not bothered to get dressed. Moira had prepared the meals for the day and had gone off to visit friends on the island. The woman had discreetly left them alone in the big rambling building.

“That’s the theme I would go for. Instead of wallpaper, the suites should be painted individually, cool blues, deep greens and some shell pink as well.” She wrinkled her cute nose. “I am not a fan of pink, but shell pink and cotton candy pink in the mix. No carpets,” She shook her head.

“I have been studying the floors and the wood is excellent – all it needs is a good polish. And-“ She sat up on one elbow, the excitement glowing in her eyes. He loved to watch her work, or rather when she latched onto an idea and it began to form.

“Gaily painted throw rugs on the floor – an outdoor restaurant or two. Outdoor cooking, with the guests being part of the entire thing.” He tugged at a lock of tangled curls. “What do you think?”

“I think you are very talented and you know your stuff. That sounds excellent.”

“Am I – will I- “

“Will I be hiring my pregnant wife to take on such a big project?” His thick eyebrows arched.

“Now listen- “

“Considering that she is getting more pregnant as the months roll in and this project will probably mean that she will have to fly in to supervise the job? Not to mention the fact that my wife happens to be a perfectionist and will not rest until the right fabric is delivered and the- “

“I happen to be the best. And it is my fricking idea,” she pointed out.

“I can compensate you for the idea.”

She sent him a killing glance.

“But I would not hear the end of it.” He grinned at her ominous expression. “And I decided that I would like my life to be as peaceful as possible. There are conditions.”

“Of course,” she grumbled.

His hand cupped her cheek. “For the next four months, you will operate mainly by using the excellent devices available to you.

We are still in the purchasing stages and the transferring of titles. We want to concentrate on the outdoors part of it first before dealing with the interior. We are putting in a golf course, the swimming pool needs gutting and resetting.”

He trailed a finger over one smooth cheek, wondering if he was too much for her, if the fact that he could not keep his hands off her was going to be a problem. He had made love to her three times during the lazy day they were indulging in and he could feel the heat rising again. “Among other things.”

“How soon- “

“That is going to take months.” He edged closer to her, loving the feel of her naked body against his. “The tentative opening will be December. Hopefully.” He was nuzzling her neck and making it difficult for her to

concentrate on anything except his clever and addictive mouth on her skin.

“We could- I could source the fabrics, frilly curtains – matching ones-“ She arched her body as he kissed the hollow of her throat. “No privacy shades, the view should be taken advantage of.”

“Hmm.”

“You are not listening.” Her hands wandered up and down his back.

“Is it that obvious?” He slipped down to his favorite place. “Our son and I will be fighting over who gets to suckle.” He was tonguing the tight bud and sending heat to her core.

“Son?”

“You have sold me on the idea.”

“Wade.”

“Darling.”

“It’s too much,” she murmured faintly.

“Want me to stop?”

“Not unless you want me to hurt you.”

“I would not want that.” His hand slid between her thighs, nudging them apart.

“Wade.” Her breath was backing up into her throat.

“Sweetness.” He touched the kernel of sensitive flesh and had her rearing up.

“Oh please.”

Slipping a finger in, he grunted at the familiar and aching wetness of her. “Come for me darling. Just let go.”

She erupted, her body bucking and heaving as the climax exploded. He waited her out and slid back up and into her. His mouth covered hers, crushing hers as he drove into her.

“We are doing all we can to hasten the process. I suggest some walking. How are the contractions?”

“Coming at intervals.” Remi bit her lip as she felt her belly tightening. She was two weeks overdue and Rachel had warned that if the baby did not come today, they would have to do a C-section. It was not something she

wanted. Not something she was willing to accept. “Why is he being so damn stubborn?”

“Language darling.”

Turning her head, she gave her husband a sizzling glance. He was here with her and as they had been at the hospital since yesterday, that meant that he was not at his office.

The renovations for the hotel were underway and progressing rapidly. Remi had the designs, the entirety of them piled into a folder. But over the last few weeks, she had had to abandon everything.

She had been determined to be active in the design of their son’s nursery, even if she was not allowed to do any lifting. “Just shut the hell- Oh!” She stopped and pressed a hand at her lower back. She almost smiled when he flew out of his chair and dropped his tablet to march over to her.

“What is it?”

“Just a really painful jab.” She leaned against him and took several breaths.

“Can’t you do something?” he demanded of Rachel.

“Let me examine you and see where you are. I know how frustrating this is-“

“I just want to see my son.” She leaned heavily on her husband as he guided her back to bed. She laid back against the pillows and closed her eyes.

“You are so tired, baby.” He took her hand and brought it to his lips. They had been going for almost twenty-four hours and nothing.

He had not seen any indications from the doctors and nurses coming in and out that there was anything to worry about, but he could feel the quaking of his heart.

He had told his assistant to reschedule all his appointments for the next few days and send calls to him only if they were of vital importance.

“I just want it over and done with. It’s been too long.” She settled back against his shoulder and allowed herself to be examined again.

“Progress,” Rachel announced.

“Please tell me that you have seen the head.”

“Nothing so hopeful.” The doctor flashed a reassuring smile. “You are getting there. Five centimeters.

“Five?” She closed her eyes wearily. “This is killing me.”

“I am here baby.”

“There are things you could do to hurry this along.”

“God, anything. Just say it.”

“Massaging the belly is something as well as –“ She threw up her hands. “We are all adults here. It is not a scientific deal but sex has been known to work wonders.”

“Then I suggest you go on out and close the doors behind you.”

“We are not-“

“I am the one with this oversized baby pressing against my bladder, so you don’t have a say.” Remi told him frostily, before looking at Rachel. “Give us some privacy.” With a laugh, Rachel headed for the door. “Call if you need me.”

“Hopefully not right now.”

“We are not-“ Wade began as soon as she left and closed the door behind her.

“You will if you want to alleviate my extreme discomfort.”

“How am I supposed to get in the mood when I know you are in pain?” he demanded.

“I am not in pain now.” She grabbed him by the collar of his light blue cotton shirt. “You said you love me.”

“Really?”

“Yes really. I am willing to try anything Wade. I want this baby out of me.”

“There must be other ways.”

“I want to try this way. Please.”

His expression softened as he stared at her. One hand went to her baby bump and he felt the sensation quivering through him as he felt his son moving against his hand.

“I hate to see you hurting,” he whispered.

“Then do your part.”

Bending his head, he kissed her.

“Okay.” He shifted her until she was turned onto her side. Taking out his cock, he lifted her nightgown and massaged the tip of it against her butt. Grabbing his hand, she twined her fingers through his and held on tight. His breathing became constricted and he felt his cock hardening.

Sliding it from behind, he grunted as she wrapped around him like a tight glove, sucking him in. She came immediately and he could feel the contraction starting back up. Unable to withdraw, even when he heard her whimper, he poured himself into her, his body shuddering violently.

As soon as he could, he eased out of her and using the napkins in the holder, he wiped her out and cleaned himself off.

“Dammit!” he whispered as he sprang off the bed. “You are in pain,” he said accusingly.

“Contractions!” she gasped. “And this one is a doozy. Call Rachel.”

“He looks like you.” David could not stop staring at the bundle in his arms. Anthony David had finally made his appearance at five in the afternoon, weighing in at eight pounds two ounces, two weeks after his original due date.

“No wonder he could not come out,” Remi declared happily as she gazed at her son.

“And he does not look like me.”

“I was talking to Wade. He has your chin, see the little dent and what color are his eyes?”

“I think they’re hazel.” The proud father was making certain his wife was resting. It had been an arduous forty-eight hours, but they were both relieved the doctors had not had to do a C-section. And mother and baby had both checked out enough for them to come home.

“And you are going to get some sleep, my love.”

“The milk is still not flowing the way it should,” she reminded him.

“Me and the little guy will just go chill in his room. We don’t need to hear any of that.”

“It has everything to do with him,” she called after her brother. “It’s his food.”

With a wave, David left the room, closing the doors behind him.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Wade searched her face for signs of extreme fatigue. He had been terrified at one point when she started feeling the contractions coming on fast and furious.

“How are you?”

“Tired, but in a very good way,” she told him hastily. “It’s overwhelming Wade, I saw the baby in my arms, our

son, with his wrinkly red face and heard his first cries and I thought to myself, that's ours, we made him.

I mean, I loved him from the minute he was being formed inside my womb, but when he was placed into my arms, I felt this overwhelming love flowing in and spilling out." She blinked back tears.

"And I cannot understand why or how my parents could feel nothing for us. How my mother could hold us in her arms and just treat us the way they did. I don't-" She shook her head. "I am sorry. I am spoiling the wonderful moment."

"No," he said quietly, wrapping her up against him. "I was thinking the same thing too. When I asked you to do me the honor of having a child for me, I kept asking myself if I was doing the right thing. My father was cold and my mother was uncaring. All she cared about were the benefits of being married to him." He rubbed her arms slowly.

"When I held my son in my arms, I was convinced that I was not him, my father, and I could never be him."

“We are not our parents. Thank God for that.”

“Indeed.” Tilting her chin up, he brushed his lips against hers. “Now my darling, I am going to insist that you get some rest.”

“No arguments here.” She stifled a yawn and lifted her face to his. “I love you.”

“I adore you darling,” he whispered against her lips.

One year later...

“She is so beautiful,” Remi whispered.

“My princess.” Wade hefted his squirming son into his arms and brought him over to see his baby sister.

“They are going to be sharing the same birthday.”

“And will probably fight over the cake.” She smiled gently as her baby boy reached out his arms for her.

“You want your mama, don’t you? It’s fine darling, I am not really tired and Linda is taking Aaliyah to get some sleep.”

She laughed breathlessly when her son tugged at the lock of hair escaping from her ponytail. “No, you don’t.”

She kissed his smooth cheek and inhaled his baby scent. They had both been somewhat concerned that she had gotten pregnant so quickly after him, but Rachel had assured them that this second pregnancy would be a breeze. And it had been. She had barely realized that she was pregnant and had gone about her duties as usual.

Wade had insisted on hiring a full-time nanny and the middle-aged woman had come highly recommended.

Linda was now part of the family and had settled in nicely. Remi had gone into hospital just yesterday and was out by this morning. Now, she did not even feel as if she had given birth.

“I still think we should do something for his birthday.” She winced as he dug his fingers into her neck.

“A cake later on today. He is not going to remember a thing. And that’s it for you buddy, you are intent on running your mother ragged.” Wade plucked his son out of her arms and lifted him above his head, much to the boy’s delight.

Remi smiled as she looked at the two of them. She was a mother of two and the wonderful feeling motherhood brought on was like being high all the time. Her friends, the wives she had gotten close to, warned her that it would fade. “Wait until Anthony touches the terrible twos.”

“I will still be enjoying his tantrums and contrariness,” she said stubbornly.

“We will see.”

“Stay right there. Like that.” She reached for her phone.

“Aren’t you tired of taking pictures?” her husband complained, settling his son on his chest, and holding his wriggling body against him.

“Smile,” she demanded. “Hi baby.” Sticking out her tongue, she got him to smile, his two baby teeth shining, and the drool rolling at the side of his mouth. “That’s my guy. Now my other guy,” She flashed her husband a grin. “Your turn.”

Rolling his eyes at her, he did as he was told and waited for her to snap the picture. “I am going to put him down or a nap and then-“

“Not just yet.” She crooked her little finger. “Can you hop in for a minute?”

“Remi- “

“Please,” she said quietly. “I promise to rest in a few minutes, but I just want my two men right here with me.”

Hefting his son onto his hip, he toed off his shoes and climbed in next to her.

“What now?”

“I just want to feel you. And look-“ She nodded towards her son, whose head was lolling against his father’s chest. “I think he is out for the count.” Moving closer, she wrapped a protective arm around them both. “I just wanted to feel how blessed I am.”

“The feeling is mutual.” Wrapping his free hand around her, he settled in, a contented sigh escaping him. This was home, right here with his wife, son and daughter, this was his all.

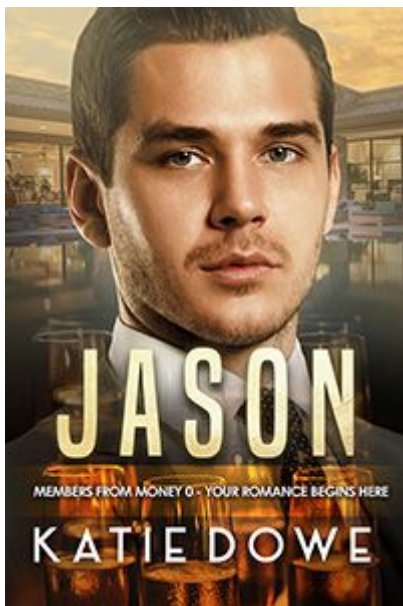
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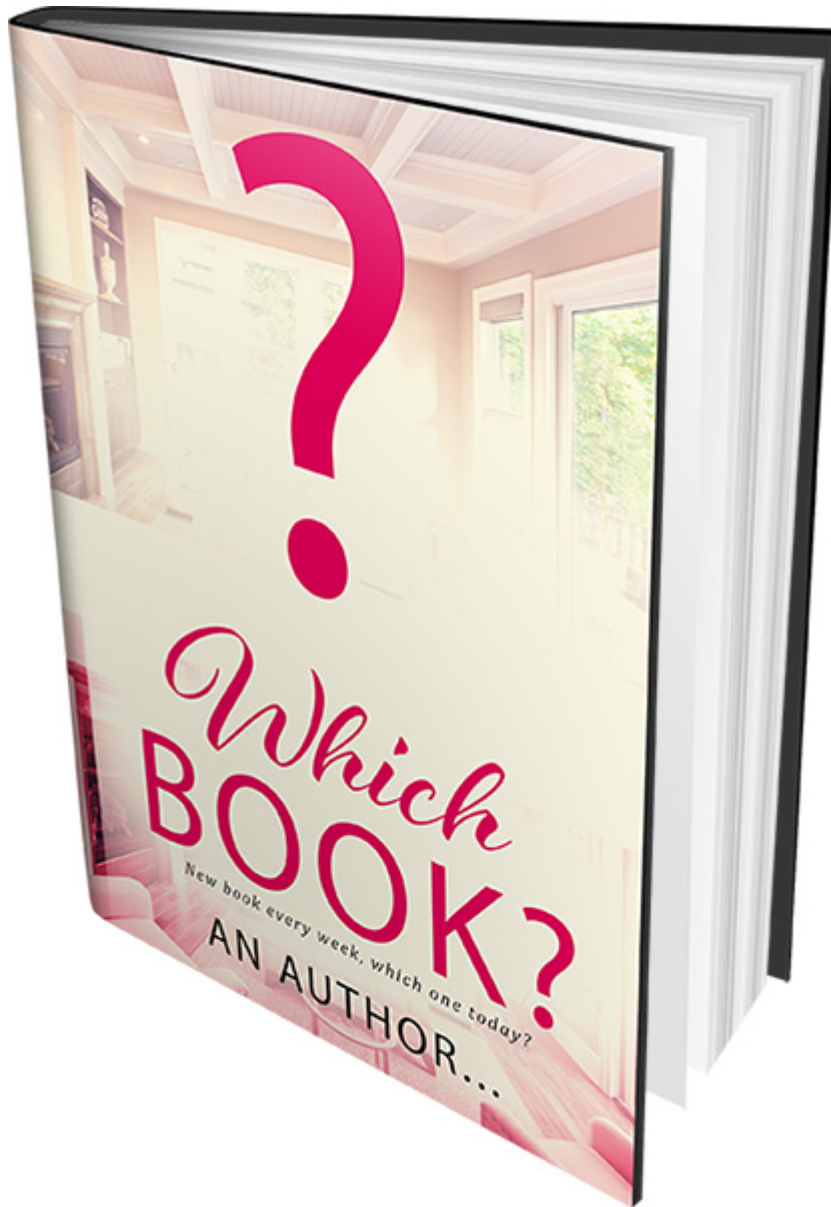
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Description:

A clean romance by Jasmine Carter of BWWM Club.

Nadiya, a talented plus size florist and writer, captures the attention of billionaire Donovan and his young son, Sebastian.

As their friendship blossoms, both find themselves grappling with emotions too powerful to ignore!

Donovan, intrigued and captivated by her, takes the slow road to win her heart...

But Nadiya wrestles with vulnerability, fearing her newfound emotions will lead to heartbreak!

When Donovan finally gives up his pursuit, Nadiya confronts the emptiness she feels without him, leading them both to a crossroads.

Torn between fear and love, Nadiya must make a choice that will change the course of their lives forever.

Can Donovan convince Nadiya that she's the missing piece to his life's puzzle?

And will Nadiya overcome her fears to let love in and say 'yes' to forever?

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Description:

A sexy BBW, quadruplets romance by Samantha Drake of BWWM Club.

When ambitious medical student Sofia finds herself in a medical emergency, fate throws her into the path of billionaire playboy Derek Collins.

Soon, they're caught in a whirlwind romance that neither expected!

But when Sofia lands her dream research job miles away, their love is put to the ultimate test—especially when they discover they're expecting quadruplets!

Long-distance love and multiple little ones are more stress than any couple should have to handle...

When Sofia's health takes a precarious turn, can Derek step up to be the partner and parent he never expected to be?

And can true love really conquer all, even from miles apart?

Find out in this emotional yet sexy romance by Samantha Drake of BWWM Club.

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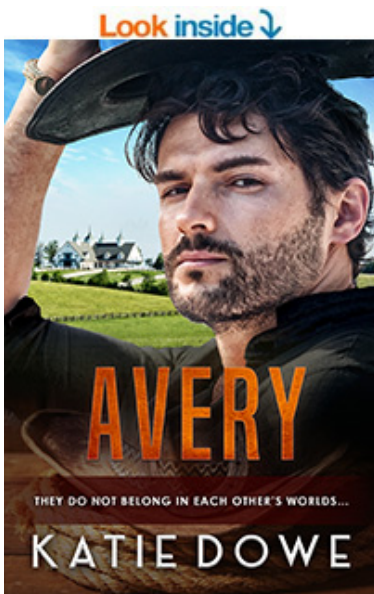


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Description:

A sexy cowboy romance by Katie Dowe of BWWM Club.

When aspiring actress Callie Crenshaw lands a starring role, she embarks on a two-week research trip to Triple-A Ranch—owned by the multi-billionaire McIntyre family.

Avery McIntyre, the rugged, blue-eyed cowboy running the ranch, wants nothing to do with her, convinced she'll disrupt his life.

But as sparks fly and tension builds, they find themselves irresistibly drawn to each other!

When a freak accident lands Avery in the hospital, they're forced to confront their feelings and the walls they've built around their hearts.

And the challenges they face are threatening to drive them further apart...

Can Avery put aside his past long enough to realize he's found the woman of his dreams?

And will Callie find a love worth giving up the spotlight for?

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

Suitable for over 18s only due to smoking hot scenes with a billionaire cowboy!

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Also available: [Be My Everything](#) by Jasmine Carter:

Look inside ↴



Description:

A clean romance by Jasmine Carter of BWWM Club.

Heather Grey, a plus-size woman with a sixth sense for the supernatural, never expected sparks to fly when she met Jonathan Burton, a billionaire paranormal investigator.

The two clash but can't deny the chemistry between them as they explore haunted locales in Heather's quaint town.

As they get closer, Heather sees beyond Jonathan's wealth and ghost-hunting gadgets, while Jonathan is enchanted by Heather's serene yet fiery spirit!

The dashing billionaire finds himself irresistibly drawn to Heather, feeling a sense of completeness and joy he never felt with anyone else...

However, just as they start envisioning a future together, Jonathan's past comes to find him, putting their newfound love to the ultimate test.

Can Jonathan push past his old emotional ties and prove his love to Heather?

And will Heather overcome her insecurities to embrace a love that seems too extraordinary to be true?

Find out in this emotional romance by Jasmine Carter of BWWM Club.

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