



TEMPT ME ONCE, SHAME ON YOU...
TEMPT ME TWICE... YOU'RE MINE.

little
temptation

RACHEL DE LUNE

Little Temptation

a novella

Rachel De Lune

Copyright © 2023 Rachel De Lune

All rights reserved

The characters and events portrayed in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Cover design by: Shower of Schmidt Designs

Copy Editing by Claire Allmendinger, BNW Editing Proofreading by Roxanne Leblanc

Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Little Temptation](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Also By Rachel De Lune](#)

[About Rachel De Lune](#)

Little Temptation

a novella

Rachel De Lune

Chapter One

As we make our final descent, my stomach drops, and I grab the armrest, gulping a lungful of air. I've not flown for years – not from choice – but rather time and money.

A little round of applause sparks up as the wheels finally touch down, and I can relax; we made it in one piece. I don't know how Grammy must have coped. She's never been abroad before, let alone flown. So when my brother, Eric, announced his beloved wanted to get married abroad, there was some debate as to if we could even attend given the venue change, let alone afford it.

We don't have a big family, and Grammy isn't even our real grandmother, but it's important she be part of this day, and we all celebrate together. I could tell my dad wanted to put his foot down, but he's never been the disciplinarian, even when we were children. Why would it start when we're adults? And my mother has been looking forward to all the trappings that come with a wedding since the day Eric said he wanted to ask Miriam to marry him.

I can feel the pressure for a wedding in her eyes when she looks at me, and I'm only twenty-three.

Of course, Eric had an answer to all the questions about cost. In the shape of Liam Ford.

As I wait for the seatbelt sign to go out, I think about the last time I saw Liam, the best man. It's been years now. Maybe when he came back to visit with Eric before they went travelling together after university?

Until then, he was as much a constant in my life as my brother. Someone I grew to rely on, to trust. And to fall completely in love with.

I shake that thought away, wrestle my case out of the overhead compartment, and wait with the other impatient passengers to be released from the tin can. As we start

shuffling along, I smile at the flight attendant and then take a breath as the wall of dry heat smacks me in the face.

My hands are full, and I can't grab my sunglasses from my bag, so I squint to take my first look at the Greek island. Dry, desert-like hills greet me, and I can't help but feel a little underwhelmed.

It's early evening, and the sun's starting to set. The flight was due to arrive much earlier in the day, but even Liam couldn't control the flights. I file along and onto a bus to take me into the arrivals building. The heat clings, even at this time of day, and I can already feel sweat gathering on my chest, threatening to drip down my cleavage.

Thankfully, we are quickly whisked away, and the air conditioning of the building bathes my over-heated skin.

A firm stamp follows a speedy inspection and check of my passport, and I'm free to find my lift.

Liam has provided everything for the wedding on the island – his generous gift to my brother. The hotel is ours for the week of the wedding, including our rooms, suites, a private bay with our own beach, transport to the resort, food, and drinks... all thanks to my brother's best friend. It's just a shame I'm late – and not just a few hours late due to the flight delay today, but days late.

Sure enough, a man dressed in what I assume might be the hotel uniform is holding a sign with 'Little' printed in neat black marker. I nod and walk over, dragging my carry-on case. The name brings a smile to my lips. My driver grabs my case and heads off toward the car. It's as if he's the one in a rush, and I have to quicken my pace to catch up.

I'm already arriving three days later than the rest of the family and guests, so I only have a couple of days to enjoy the hospitality and celebrations. I should be grateful I made it at all, considering I've only just started my job, but looking at the time, I'll be pushing it to arrive for the rehearsal dinner. I mean, it's not a big wedding, so why do we need to rehearse, anyway?

A black, sleek-looking car, completely at odds with the rest of the rental and family vehicles, sits waiting. He opens the back door for me, and after he gets in and starts the ignition, I say a little prayer for the blast of frigid air. The sweat on my boobs is tickling, and I'm pretty sure there's a small river working its way down my spine. My t-shirt clings to my skin as I sit back against the leather, but I accept my fate and try to get comfy.

I relax in the back of the car and gaze out the window as I'm driven to our destination. The roads are windy and small, but as I explore the landscape, I notice it's greener than I first thought. Olive trees litter the fields against the dusty roads, and houses and shacks punctuate the countryside, some painted and finished like a Greek picture postcard, others worn and weathered by the sun.

Eric hasn't shared much about the resort, just that it's ours to use and, of course, five-star, so when the driver announces that we're nearly there, I pay closer attention. We drive through a large wooden gate with a plaque on the white pillar, but I can't make out the name. We seem to wind our way down a steep road, and I have to wonder where this hotel is because there aren't any tavernas or restaurants nearby like any other holiday resort.

But my doubt and worry lift as we draw up to the entrance. A white-washed building emerges amongst foliage and olive trees. It looks small, but as I look around, I see a clear view through to the sea, and I catch the most perfect setting sun – golden, like fire – sinking into the ocean. I get out of the car, stand, and gaze at the view, mesmerised by how perfect it is. In fact, it's hard to keep the excitement from spilling over now that I'm here.

My driver nearly pushes me into the main reception building where another member of staff greets me, but the view through arched glass pulls my attention. The vivid blue of an infinity pool is just on the other side, with branches framing the vista. The pool boasts a clear and uninterrupted view that takes my breath away.

“Miss Littlewood, I’ll show you to your room, but we ask you to join the rest of your party in the dining room as soon as you’re able.” She smiles and starts heading to the left. Of course, all I want to do is explore and soak in the tranquillity that is the sunset.

She leads me down a series of steps out of the main building, and I see there’s a small olive grove and gardens leading to the edge of what must be a cliff, the sea and the sun beyond. More steps, and into a building that is slightly curved, fanning outwards as we go. Doors to bedrooms start coming up on our left, and I hope this will mean I have a gorgeous sea view. We pass a few doors before she stops and raises her wrist to the handle, and the little green light blinks her admittance. She hands me a white key card as she opens the door and holds it open for me to follow.

Oh my god!

Swathes of cloud-like material billow in the breeze, the separation between the room and the private outdoor pool, beyond which is the view over the ocean. I dump my bags on the bed in front of the doors leading outside and take a closer look. The last of the sun’s warm glow has dipped too low to cast me in its warmth, but small tea lights decorate the hotel grounds, making it look magical.

It’s perfect.

I turn back to thank the staff member, but she’s disappeared. So, I set about exploring the rest of the room. Thankfully, I can slide the door shut, affording me a little more privacy than what was on offer a second ago. The bed looks bigger than my room at home, and the rest of the decoration is simple yet sumptuous. White is the colour scheme, set off with bright pops of olive and gold on the cushions, chair, and headboard. I turn to find the bathroom and nearly gasp. Half the wall that adjoins the rest of the room is solid, but the top is glass, providing an uninterrupted view of the pool and outside, even from the shower. Fortunately, the tiled marble of the bottom half does give you the privacy you need.

I've never been able to afford an indulgence like this – our family hasn't either, so the little touches in the room and the sheer opulence of it make me feel special.

Suddenly I'm a small child again, and it's Christmas morning. Except, it's summer, and I'm all grown up.

My instructions when arriving were to join the rest of my family at the rehearsal dinner in the dining room, but the sweat and grime on my skin tell me to shower and change before I make my appearance. And they can't tempt me with this rainwater shower head and not expect me to make good use of it.

My bridesmaid dress, shoes, and anything else wedding related travelled with the rest of the dresses and outfits, so I only had to pack a few essentials to bring with me. I unzip my bag, shake out the two dresses and hang them up, hoping the few creases will fall out. Grabbing my mini toiletries bag, I set about turning the shower on and cleaning up.

Hot water drenches my hair and cleanses my skin. Complimentary shampoo, soap, conditioner, and even lotions and potions are lined on an alcove shelf in the shower. I help myself, breathing in the exotic scents and essential oils and set to work on my hair and body, ridding any remaining specks of dust or sweat.

Because the water raining down feels so blissful, I take longer than I should and realise that if I'm not careful, I'm going to miss all the wedding rehearsal.

Reluctantly, I speed up getting ready, dry using the thick and luxurious towels and run a comb through my long hair. I cover my skin in the lotion from the bathroom counter and then slip into my white sundress. It clings in all the right places but doesn't make me look like I'm trying too hard.

I grab my phone and the card for the room and head back towards the reception. It can't be too hard to locate the dining room, surely?

I walk back up the hallway to where I started. The magical fairy lights continue throughout the grounds, providing just

enough illumination to stop you from straying off the path. It's romantic and dream-like all at the same time.

Before I have a chance to explore the infinity pool that caught my eye through the arched glass doors, the same woman beckons me to follow her. She even grabs my hand and takes me across to the other side of the resort. Of course, there are no other guests around – they're all where I'm supposed to be. She rushes us to the open dining area that spills out onto a beautiful vista overlooking the olive grove and the sea below. I'm pushed inside, and I step from the back, making my way to the horseshoe table where my loved ones are sitting.

I take a moment – before they notice me – to feel the happiness shining on all their faces: my mother and father, Grammy, and my brother. And then I turn my attention to Liam, standing with a flute of champagne in his hand.

“I'm not going to give all my speech material away tonight, but suffice to say I hope–” His eyes look up and spear me, sending a jolt of recognition and longing through my body.

He stands there, mid-sentence, just staring at me. The smile of happiness I had for my family extends to him, but it doesn't spur him on.

“I hope–” he tries again but seems unable to get the words out. His eyes stay fixed on me, and it turns my stomach in a weird, nervous excited way.

“I hope you finish your bloody speech,” Eric finishes for him, and a few claps and cheers echo around the room.

Feeling one hundred feet tall, I step forward and head for the one empty seat at the table between my mother and one of Eric's groomsmen, Taylor.

Taylor looks me up and down and sends a chef's kiss into the air before standing to pull my chair out for me. Some might say we're closer friends than he and Eric are. I smile, greet my mum and dad, and offer a wave to Eric. Before I sit, I go over and kiss Grammy on the cheek, squeezing her shoulders.

“Hey, Grammy. You okay?”

“Wonderful, dear. Now, sit, sit. I believe my grandson was in the middle of something.” She gives me a wink, and I move back towards Taylor and my seat.

“My little sister, ladies and gentlemen.” Eric stands, taking over from Liam, who still looks a little confused. My confidence soars at that moment because my younger self is relishing in the simple yet seemingly unobtainable accomplishment: I stopped Liam Ford in his tracks.

Chapter Two

Liam

Damn.

The champagne flute is still poised to toast, but there is nothing in my mind except the vision of Isla Littlewood walking into the room.

And not the Lil I remember, but a full-blown goddess version of the girl who used to hang around with us.

I clear my throat.

“As I was saying...” but the words fail as I watch Isla take her seat. My eyes develop a stubborn streak as I try and regain some form of authority, but I force myself back on task. “Let’s try this again. Ladies and Gentlemen, the wedding.”

The hum of the toast rumbles around, and I smash down half the champagne and take a seat, relieved and a little embarrassed.

“Dude, that better not be the precursor for the speech tomorrow.”

I look at Eric and see he’s not actually joking.

I grab Eric’s shoulder. “We’re all good. As I said, I didn’t want to give away the material.”

“Oh yeah. Nothing to do with Lil walking in.” He raises his eyebrow at me.

“She was late and threw me off, that’s all.”

“Yeah, right. Man, she’s my sister, and your jaw needed picking up off the fucking floor.”

I shake my head at him and down the rest of the champagne because I know he’s fucking right. Luckily, Miriam pulls his attention away, saving me from the interrogation.

Fuck. Little Isla Littlewood.

Chapter Three

My eyes keep watch on Liam and, more noticeably, where his own eyes land. To my disappointment, they are everywhere except on me. But I guess I've had my moment – it's passed now – and I'm back to being Lil. Nothing more.

“Well, even though it was unintentional, that was quite the entrance,” Taylor whispers to me as we sip our bubbles.

“Please. It was maybe ten seconds of a reaction. Probably because I've not seen him in so many years.” I shrug off Taylor's comment, even though my heart sings at his words.

I watch Liam and Eric exchange glances and read the tension in their body language. Eric is less than happy with Liam – perhaps his little stuttering speech dented his confidence in him. As long as he doesn't screw up at the wedding, I guess.

We have a free day tomorrow, and then the wedding is the day after. My flight back is the day after the wedding – in the evening to afford myself a lie-in and recovery time before the trip home.

And, because I'm only a bridesmaid because of Eric, I'm not obligated to spend any more time with Miriam than strictly necessary – her words, not mine. She's perfectly fine and loves my brother, but I kind of hoped that when he found the one, she'd be someone I could grow to call a friend, like a female version of Liam, in a way. Although he pretty much dumped me as soon as Eric and he were old enough, so the question of true friendship still hangs in the balance.

“I wouldn't be so sure, Isla.”

I shake my head. “So, what's the plan for tomorrow?” I change the subject.

“I think the groomsmen are all heading into the local town, at least for part of the day. You?”

“I have no wedding obligations, and I plan on making the best use of every minute of it.” I stretch my arms out and smile.

“Sun, sea, and sleep?”

“You know me so well.”

“Don’t burn that peachy skin of yours. That would not be a good look for the wedding.”

“Relax, Taylor. It’s one day. I want to see Grammy, too.”

To my delight, the servers deliver coffee and dessert, and I waste no time spearing the glossy cake with my fork. Light, airy, and completely delicious, I make short work of the treat. After all, I don’t need to fit into a wedding gown anytime soon.

The formality of the evening seems to fade away as people get up to visit and talk with others. I know that I should speak with my parents, but they both look busy with others, so I slip over to see Eric.

“Well, well, big brother. I have to say this is all very impressive. I approve.”

“Hey, Lil. Nice of you to drop in.” He pulls me in for a hug, and I allow myself to enjoy the closeness and air of nostalgia between us, even if it’s just for a moment. It wasn’t just Liam that I missed seeing so regularly, but my big brother, too. He, at least, remained a small presence in my life.

“You look nice.”

“Why, thank you. A genuine compliment, I believe. Do we need to mark the occasion?” I make a grand gesture of a fake curtsy-come-bow in front of him, and we both break into fits of laughter, but they die quickly, and I feel the conversation become stifled and awkward.

“So, all set for the big day?” I ask.

“According to Miriam, it’s all in hand.”

“She looks calm.” I glance over to her, talking with a cluster of what I presume are her relatives.

“She’s great. And fingers crossed, it stays like that.” My brother watches his soon-to-be wife with a look of awe and wonder, and I know that the love he has for her is utterly genuine. The look he gives her – the magic in his eyes – is something I’ll remember for a long time.

“It was good of Liam to offer all of this.” I gesture to the room as I clock Taylor heading in our direction.

“Yep.”

“Come on. This is epic. It deserves more than a yep. God, this would have cost you a fortune.” I look around at the lavish room, tastefully decorated in keeping with the rest of the hotel I’ve seen.

“Yeah, yeah, all hail Prince Liam. I thought you’d dropped the idol-worshipping act, Lil.”

“Oh, fuck off, Eric.” He’s always teased me about my crush. And, at times, been particularly cruel about it.

“Wow, what’s he done?” Taylor catches the end of my comeback.

“He’s just being my big brother. Come on, Taylor. Let’s go and see Grammy.” I loop my arm through his and march us over to her.

Grammy is tired after our chat, so Taylor and I walk her back to her room and from then on, the guests all dissipated. Miriam and Eric are nowhere to be found, and – not that I was looking – neither is Liam.

“I guess I’ll turn in, too.” Taylor picks up my hand and kisses the back of it. “See you at breakfast.”

“Maybe. I might indulge and sleep in. Or watch the sunrise. I can’t decide.”

“Well, I’m sure I’ll bump into you at some point. Night.” Taylor leaves, and I look around the deserted dining area.

My body is weary from the travel and months of work with no real break, but my mind’s alive, so I take a short walk out and look over the railing separating the precarious edge of the cliff. Even in the dark, it’s impressive. The sound of the waves

lapping in the cove is rhythmical and soothing. I could stand and listen to it all evening.

“Penny for your thoughts?”

I close my eyes to the deep sound of his voice and take a fortifying breath to keep myself from sliding back into childhood.

“You’ll have to give me more than a penny for them, Liam.” I finally turn to face him.

“Shucks. I’m all out.”

“Liar.”

“Nice to see you, Lil.”

In the dark, it’s hard to make out his expression, but he sounds sincere.

“Same. And thank you. For this. The flight and the car to the hotel. It’s a very expensive gift.”

“There’s got to be some advantages to having a healthy bank account.”

“I think the size of your bank account could be described as a little more than healthy.” I smirk, knowing he’s the wealthiest man I know and probably will ever know.

“How’ve you been?”

“Great. You?” We’ve not spoken in years, and it shows. He’s been a no-show at any family event I would have expected him to be there for, and I could never understand it. One minute we were all getting along fine. We spent years hanging out. Confiding in each other. Being friends. And sometimes his eyes would linger just that second too long, and he’d make sure he sat next to me on the sofa or at the cinema when we watched movies.

A hundred small, fraction-of-a-detail behaviours all built in my mind, causing me to think that there might be something between us. But I was just a kid. And apparently, I knew nothing.

“Busy.”

“What are you up to these days, anyway? Eric’s never really said.”

“Oh, this and that.”

“Wow, I can see how you’re so busy then.” I roll my eyes and turn back to the sea.

“I’m sorry. Did I say something wrong?”

“No, not at all. I’m sure you’ve got a busy day tomorrow – last-minute best-man duties, so I’ll let you get going.”

“Brushing me off. Not the reaction I thought I’d get from you, Lil.”

“I’ve done some growing up since the last time we spoke. I think it was at your graduation.”

“God, really. That was years ago.” He steps forward and leans against the railing I’m resting on. “And now Woodsy’s getting married.”

“Yep. Good for Eric.” I can hear the annoyance and frustration in my voice, and I hate that all it’s taken is one conversation, and already, I’m bitter and cross.

So what – we’ve not spoken in forever. I’m over Liam Ford.

“Do you like Miriam?” he asks.

“Do you?”

“I asked first.”

“On three... one, two, three.”

“Not really.”

“Nope.” We both answer together.

“Really?” he questions.

“Look, I love that she makes him happy. And Eric is completely in love with her. That’s all that matters.”

“Man, I hoped it was just me.”

“Why don’t you like her? You probably know her more than I do. It’s only been a dozen family occasions I’ve seen her at.”

I turn around and lean back against the rail, so Liam and I are standing next to each other.

“She’s just not who I pictured him with. She’s so prim and proper.”

“Cutting into your bro time together?” I laugh.

“Kind of. I don’t know. You’re a bridesmaid, though, so…”

“So, so nothing. Obligatory position as Eric’s sister. I have a free day tomorrow, which I plan to spend in this gorgeous place soaking up the sun. I want to spend some time with Grammy, too.” I look up at Liam, and he’s nodding.

The spurt of banter dies, and the stiffness between us returns. I shift on my feet before stepping forward. “I’m going to call it a night. Thank you again for this. It’s the first break I’ve had in years.”

“Pleasure.” That word on his lips knocks me back to adolescence and to a time when I’d have given anything to be having a moonlit talk with Liam.

“Night.” I turn and walk away. Liam could be dangerous to my health and sanity, and I don’t want to have the wedding overcast with my old hang-ups. Liam Ford is an old friend. Nothing more.

Chapter Four

Warm air and a soft breeze stir my sleep, and I stretch out on the soft sheets. I take a deep breath and smile, already knowing that the view will be spectacular when I open my eyes.

And it is.

Bright blue sky meets with the pools outside my open doors, inviting me to venture out and explore.

I pull back the covers and enjoy the fresh air. In any normal life, I'd never sleep with the doors open like this, but when I got back last night, I just couldn't shut out the perfect night. It was warm, but how many other times in my life will I get this opportunity?

I get up, use the facilities, and plait my hair. Taking the travel-friendly sunscreen from my bag, I slather it on my face, shoulders and chest, and nearly empty the bottle covering the rest of my body. Next is hydration, caffeine and food; and my first stop is the dining room.

The room looks similar to last night, but a huge buffet table is decorated with all sorts of goodies.

"Hey, darling, join us!" Mum calls from her table in the corner.

"Good morning," I greet. "I'm going to grab coffee."

"Oh, they'll bring you a fresh pot," Mum confirms. "Help yourself. The pastries are delicious."

I collect an assortment of fruits, cakes, and pastries, and sure enough, when I reappear, the table has an extra cup and a large carafe of coffee. *Bliss.*

"Hey, Dad. Enjoying yourself?" I ask gently as I pour the coffee. I know this isn't the wedding he envisaged.

"It's very nice."

"Oh, come on, Adam," Mum scolds.

He gives me a glance that tells me that while he's not happy, he's going along with the plan to keep the peace.

"You like it, Mum?"

"I think it's wonderful." She leans forward and grabs my hand. "I never really knew how rich Liam was." Her eyes widen as she nods at me as if this is a big secret.

I smile to myself and take a sip of coffee. "He's certainly got the money, Mum."

"What are your plans today, Isla?" Dad asks.

"Not a lot. Sunbathing, relaxing. You?"

"Oh, we have a morning at the spa, then a lunch out with the bridal party," Mum interrupts, full of enthusiasm.

Dad gives me another one of his looks.

"Sounds like fun. Dad?"

"I'm off for a round of golf."

"Golf? Here?" There was hardly anything green on the drive here. Surely, it's too hot for green grass.

"There's one course, and Liam's arranged for me to play as a guest."

"He's always been so generous." Mum swoons again.

"Mum, okay, I think we get it. Liam's wonderful."

"Oh, don't be like that. You used to idolise him and your brother when you were younger."

"Well, I've grown up since then." I take a breath and count to three, four, five... "I'm going to get a head start on the sunbathing. Enjoy your golf, Dad. Say hi to Miriam, Mum." I pick up my plate and leave, not wanting to be drawn into bickering, and head right over to the railings from last night.

The view over the cliff this morning is astonishing.

A hundred shades of blue stretch out before me. Tranquil and beautiful, glistening with the sun. I see a set of steps that looks like the path down, and I take them, gently watching my step as I weave down the cliff face to the beach below.

A row of sun loungers and parasols line one side, and I pick one at the end and just sit, looking at the water lapping at the pebbly shore.

The other end of the cove is home to a jetty and a shiny-looking boat-come-yacht thing and a few Jet Skis bobbing on the tide.

Nobody else is here, and as I look around, I can't quite believe it – my own island paradise. I finish off the plate of breakfast treats, take off my sundress and lie back in the sun in my bikini.

My skin begins to glisten as the heat breaks me out in a fine sheen of sweat. It's baking hot, and my quiet doze in the sun is now barely comfortable, so I leave my spot and walk right into the ocean.

Even the water's warm, but it quenches the heat attacking me. The beach shelves quickly, and I swim out past the gentle ripples of waves and then turn to look back at the beach and the resort above.

Foliage covers the cliff, and you can see the tops of the buildings above the cove. Idyllic. It must be something to have this lavish type of life. I think back to my studio apartment and the mismatched furniture. Being a student doesn't guarantee you a job these days, so I was extremely lucky to walk right into one, but it will be years before holidays abroad can be afforded on my salary.

As I leave the water, I see Eric and his groomsmen walk across the beach towards the jetty.

"Hey, Lil," he calls.

I don't know all of his party, but I watch as Taylor jogs over to me.

"It's too hot for exercise," I joke to him.

"Tell me about it," he pants.

"You off to party in town?"

"Appears so. This is the best way to travel, according to Liam. You?"

“Relaxing, remember.” I glance over his shoulder as I watch Liam walk by, wearing khaki shorts and a white short-sleeved shirt, open, and his chest on view, which is both annoying and frustrating.

“Eyes on me, girl.”

“Sorry.”

“Oh, don’t be. He knows what he’s doing. He’s the player we all love and hate. All I can say is I’m glad I don’t have to compete with him.” He rejoins the group, and I stand and watch as they head to the jetty. Over the years, Eric and Taylor have filled me in about Liam’s exploits. I’ve never asked, but he has come up in conversation.

In a way, Taylor has become the friend I had hoped Liam would always be – or at least the friend I wanted him to be if there couldn’t be more. And there’s never going to be more than friendship between Taylor and me.

As if Liam can hear my thoughts, he turns back to look at me. And just like at dinner, it’s a shot to my ego and my younger self triumphs.

They climb onto the boat, although on closer inspection, it’s more like a small yacht, laughing and joking, and of course, Liam takes the captain’s position and manoeuvres them out. I wave as they leave and decide I’ve had enough of the heat for one morning.

The morning of the wedding is frantic. It’s like the hotel has come alive with people, staff, and errands. We all have a schedule of where we should be, at what time, and for what purpose.

I have to hand it to her – Miriam has coordinated it to perfection.

With half an hour to go, all the wedding party are exactly where they should be for the grand entrance.

My dress is, thankfully, beautiful. Light and flowy, yet fitted around my bust, it’s perfect for a destination wedding.

Each of the bridesmaids is escorted down the aisle between rows of white folding chairs to a flowered arch, positioned with the backdrop of the beautiful sea view. It's idyllic.

And lucky for me, I have Taylor walking with me.

I grin and wiggle my eyebrows at him as he comes to collect me, and we turn to face the aisle and wait for our turn.

"Looking good, T."

"Are you planning on breaking some hearts because I can see it happening in that dress?" he compliments.

"Smooth. Very smooth." In time with the music, we take our steps down the aisle.

"Okay, why does Ford look like he's going to kill me?"

"Don't be ridiculous," I whisper back to him.

"No, I'm serious. He's got that brooding, don't-touch-what's-mine look down."

"I am not his, Taylor."

"Have you told him that?"

Taylor lets go of my arm and joins Eric and Liam on the groom's side while I take my spot and stand next to the other bridesmaids on Miriam's side as we wait for her to walk in.

Taylor's words linger, though, and I glance in Liam's direction, but he's not looking my way.

The music changes, the small congregation stands, and all look back to see Miriam's entrance. Her dress is a simple gown that suits her, paired with a modest veil. I can't help but smile at the look on my brother's face as he watches the woman he loves walk toward him.

And that's when I clock Liam. He's not looking at the bride. His eyes are firmly on me, and for some reason, he looks angry. Our eyes lock for a moment, my stomach tightens, and my heart thuds a little harder.

I snatch my eyes away and blink back the stupid sensation and focus on the wedding. This is not the time to be swept up

in fairy tales.

The service starts, and I enjoy watching the admiration and joy on my brother's face. He's besotted, and I'm so happy for him. I keep my eyes firmly on him and not his best man.

After the I-dos and cheers, Taylor and I help Grammy down the aisle behind the rest of the party. We all spill out into the grounds and the olive trees, where the waitstaff start to bring champagne and canapes.

"It was a beautiful service, wasn't it." Grammy pats my hand before she accepts a glass of bubbles and takes a swig. Her grey and white hair is plaited down her back, peeking out of her wide-brimmed hat. Her dress has a bohemian flare, and it fits her character perfectly.

I grab my own glass. "It was. I'm so glad you got to celebrate here with us."

"Oh, dear, wild horses wouldn't have kept me away. You two are like my own flesh and blood. Now, shade and a seat." We go to one of the covered white tables and enjoy the reprieve from the heat. "Now, what is going on between you and my grandson?" She pins me with her stare, and I know I can never lie to her.

"Nothing. We've not seen each other for a long time." She nods. And I take a sip of my drink.

"And there's no harboured feelings still?"

"Grammy..." I shake my head. "I'm just Lil to him. Eric's little sister." She just nods again.

"To friendship and family." She raises her glass, and I return her toast, and we both smile.

Several glasses of champagne, numerous posed photographs, and three courses of delicious food later, we're all waiting for the speeches. The alcohol, helped by the soaring heat, has gone to my head, and I'm feeling more than giggly. Fortunately, I'm not on the top table. That's reserved for the best man and Miriam's best friend, so I have a perfect view of Liam.

“Woo hooo!” I cheer and clap as he stands to make his speech.

“Maybe you’ve had one too many of those.” Taylor takes the flute of champagne from my hand and replaces it with a goblet of water.

“Spoilsport.”

“You don’t seem like the drunk-at-your-brother’s-wedding kinda girl. You can thank me later.” He’s right. But I’ve not been free to have fun in forever. With starting work, and before that, uni and final exams, I’ve been focused and diligent, and if I want to have some fun here, I should relish the opportunity.

Sitting back, I listen to Liam and his speech. Annoyingly, he’s good. He’s sincere and kind and measures the level of embarrassment to put my brother through.

“I’ve had the privilege to call Woodsy my best friend for a very long time. We grew up together—” His eyes land on me, and his words blast me back to every single time I got excited to run after them both, desperate to hang out with them and catch Liam’s eye. He keeps our eye contact for that split-second too long, and I can’t look away. “We wanted to conquer the world. And in a way, I’m a little sad about today because I’m not the partner in his life anymore. Miriam is, and I know they’ll go on to conquer anything they put their minds to.”

He has the guests in the palm of his hand, and I tear my eyes away to look at the happy couple. They are the epitome of happiness. I reach across the table and snag my glass of champagne back, ignoring the looks from Taylor.

We toast. I cheer. And I finish another glass.

When it’s time for dancing, we all gather to watch the first dance. Eric looks more nervous about this than the wedding vows, and it’s not long before Liam takes the maid-of-honour into a dance.

“Pfft,” I sneer. Not quietly enough as Grammy looks around and gives me a knowing look. So, I pull her onto the dance

floor.

“Missy, I know what you’re doing.”

“I’m having fun, Grammy.”

More people join us until there’s barely any room.

“Mind if I cut in, Grams?” Liam taps me on the shoulder.

“Of course. You should dance with your grandmother.” I step back and avoid his gaze.

This is stupid. I’m over this man. I’ve been over this man for years.

“I was hoping to dance with you, actually, Lil.”

“Oh.”

“Go. Dance.” Grammy pushes Liam towards me, and he pulls me against him and swoops me into a dance before I can say no.

“You dance?” I shriek in astonishment. “You can actually dance?” My eyes are wide in surprise.

“You wound me, Lil.”

“Oh, I know your ego is big enough to take it.”

The music switches up a gear, but Liam keeps up. His hand cradles my back to keep me close while I try everything in my power not to notice that he’s touching my bare skin. He’s not caressing me as he holds me. Nope. That’s not happening in my mind.

I grip tighter just as he moves me into a spin, sending me entirely off balance and catching me before I fall. “Not cool, Ford.”

“Oh, but it’s fun.” His wicked smile spreads across his face, and I give in and laugh with him.

We stay out dancing for the following two songs. His hands touch every exposed inch of skin from my neck down to my wrists and down my back. So much so that I miss the connection when we finally stop dancing.

God, I need another drink.

“Champagne?” I ask. “I could do with another drink.” I pull our hands apart, but he holds on, again, that second too long, before dropping them.

“Better not. I’m going to offer that dance to Grams now.” He nods and turns away. And like a fool, I watch him walk away.

“Can I get you a drink? Champagne?” I glance to my side and see a guy I recognise from the wedding.

“Thanks, I’m good.” I don’t move from my spot and keep watching Liam.

What am I doing? Why am I torturing myself?

“Urghh!” I spin around and march back to the table and hope there’s more drink there.

Chapter Five

Liam

“Grams, how about that dance?”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

“Come on.” I make sure I support her as we gently glide around the dance floor.

“So, young man.” Oh boy. This won’t be good. “What, may I ask, are you doing with Isla?”

“What do you mean?” I smile and ask.

“Your charm doesn’t work on me, Liam. But that girl is another matter.”

“Grams, we’re friends. We used to be close, and I’m just getting to know her again.”

“Well, be careful.” She narrows her eyes at me.

“I will.”

“Liam Ford, you listen to me. She is like a granddaughter to me. If you hurt her, you’ll have me to answer to.”

I look a little stunned at my grandmother. “You know that I’m actually your grandson.”

“Yes, I’m well aware.”

“But you’re protective of Lil?”

“Isla is a keeper. She’s special.”

“I’m aware of that fact, Grams. Painfully so, but thanks for the reminder.” I know I’m not as close as I should be to my grandmother, but to hear her take Lil’s side over mine stings. And worse is, I know she’s a hundred percent right. Seeing her now is a lot fucking harder than I thought.

We carry on dancing in silence, and I spy Lil at the bar talking with Taylor. Again.

I bet she doesn't even know how fucking good she looks.

The music stops, and I walk Grams back to Dad and head towards the bar. And Lil.

Bloody hell.

By the time I reach it, dodging well-wishers and family, I can't see Lil anywhere. I order a drink and look along the gleaming surface, just in time to see Eric heading right for me. "Hey, dude." I pull him into a hug, slapping his back for good measure. "What's up?" I've barely taken a sip of a drink. And, after the dancing and conversation with Grams, I need one. Sitting and staring at Lil all afternoon felt like a personal kind of torture – or punishment, perhaps. Dancing with her was all kinds of good, but now I'm questioning it.

"I could ask you the same thing. What gives?"

"Sorry, I don't follow?"

"Isla. What's up with you? First, you make a complete dick of yourself when she arrives, and now this – dancing, hands everywhere like she's just some girl to score with. You know she's had the biggest crush on you since we were kids."

"That was years ago. I've not seen her in ages. I'm just having fun, as she is." What's with everyone and the warnings, like she's some precious family heirloom?

"Well, I'm pretty sure she'll still be crushing on you."

"Okay, well..." Eric and Lil were close, like all of us were when we were younger, but he's never indicated he didn't like the idea of us together. There were plenty of times that I liked the idea of something between us, even wanted it, but she was too young then. But now... hell, watching her and holding her, she certainly didn't feel like Eric's little sister anymore.

"No. Stop that shit. She's my baby sister. You are not going there because I'd really fucking hate to punch that face of yours. Especially after all this." He looks around at the wedding celebrations going on.

"She's off limits?" I ask, already feeling the frustration rising and wanting to grab another look at her.

“Hell, yeah. The fact you have to ask is not cool.”

Eric’s had a few drinks. Maybe he’s being overprotective because of the occasion. That must be the explanation because I’m his best friend. Why wouldn’t he be okay with us hooking up?

“And if she puts the move on me?” I ask because I’ve seen her look at me, too. And maybe I know that she’s harboured feelings for me, and now that we’re both older, there’s no harm in seeing where things could go.

“I don’t fucking care. She knows what you’re like. I know what you’re like, and I might love you, but there’s no way you’re hooking up with my sister and ditching her. She deserves better.”

“Ouch.”

“Deny it.”

He has a point, but I don’t want to look too hard at that right now. “How does Lil know what I’m like?” She can’t. Not really, because we’ve not spoken in years.

“We talk. And she’s friends with Taylor.”

“Yeah, how and when the fuck did that happen?” I feel annoyed by this – more than I want to be.

“Don’t hate on Taylor because you ghosted. She knows your reputation, man. And besides, it doesn’t matter because you’re not going to do anything, are you?”

Fuck.

“You’re serious.”

“Afraid so.”

I shake my head and look back at him. “Whatever, man. I’m not going to do anything. Now chill out and enjoy your wedding.”

I hide out at the bar, determined to avoid any more confrontations or warnings about who I can and can’t go after. Hell, it’s practically in the best man’s guidebook to hook up with a bridesmaid. But as I think that, I’m not sure if Lil would

fall into my category of a hook-up. Hell, every part of me wants to taste her on my tongue, but she's not an anonymous girl. She's Lil.

"Hey? What's up." I see the smile on Lil's mouth and close my eyes for a moment to stave off the impulse in my dick to grab her and kiss her like I've wanted to do since she walked in. My head might know I shouldn't be reacting to her like that, but my body is taking a while to catch up.

"Nothing." I down the whiskey, hoping for some semblance of control, put the glass back on the bar and order another.

"I thought we were having fun? Come on." But I stay put. She pulls at my arm, twisting me around on the bar stool.

"We were. I'm good here, thanks."

"What did Eric have to say?" Her pout is sexy, and I fucking wish it wasn't.

"Just thanking me for the wedding," I lie.

"Yeah, I call bullshit. I saw the looks you were giving each other. He was not a happy camper, and on the day of his wedding, he should be pretty damn happy."

"It's nothing."

"Let me guess. He didn't like us dancing." She pushes her way closer to me, leaning against the bar.

"No. Give it a rest, Lil. I mean it." I stare at her, pleading that she drops this, but she's stubborn, at least she used to be. She always wanted to be included in whatever Eric and I did, and she was fun. Is fun. And maybe a little drunk.

"I'm going to take a stab at how the conversation went. Let me know if I get warm." She moves against the bar, pushing herself between my thighs. "Dear brother sees you, his best friend but man-whore, dancing with me and slapped a warning on you." She tilts her head to the side and raises her eyebrows.

She's definitely had too much to drink. She's come out of her shell and isn't on the defensive like she was the other night, and somewhere along the line, she's lost all elements of innocence.

I don't answer her and hope she'll just stop. I need her to stop.

"And now, you're questioning your loyalty to my brother."

"Lil."

"Oh, come on, Liam. Am I close?" She runs her hands up my chest and leans into me. "You're questioning your loyalty versus how good it would feel – how hot," her voice grows husky as she whispers in my ear, "how hot it would be for me to be desperate to have you inside of me."

My cock pulses in my trousers, and with her this close, she must feel how hard I am right now. I take a second to picture it, to imagine her face as I fuck her and make her come apart under me, and it fucking kills me not to act on that vision.

My hand clenches at my side, and I take a breath, hoping for control. I grab her arms and push her back. "For fuck's sake, Little. Don't–"

"Don't what?" she purrs.

"Don't tempt me."

"Why?" Her pout is back, but all I can see is the vixen she's grown into. The vixen, I want to bend over this bar and screw into submission.

"This is your only warning. You won't get another one. You don't know who you're playing with, and you have no idea of the consequences." My words are sincere. She doesn't know the real me, but they seem to finally get through because all the fun and spark in her eyes die, and she shoves away from me.

"Playing. See. That's all I'll be, right? A challenge? A distraction. Something you want because you can't have." Of course, she only hears that word in all the others. She looks cross. Well, I'm cross too, at her fucking stunt. She knows what she's doing, and being a tease won't end well for her.

I shake my head and try and ignore her.

"Fine. Well, screw you. I'm over it."

She marches off, and I fight the urge to run after her.

She's got it all wrong, but explaining that to her when we're both half-wasted is going to end in disaster. I've been warned, anyway. The two of us together would be a disaster that even I'd struggle to find a way back from.

So, I let her go and cool off.

Hell, we both need to cool off.

Chapter Six

God, my head.

A sledgehammer could have done less damage than I've inflicted on myself. With ginger steps, I creep into the bathroom and look in the mirror. I'm still in the bridesmaid dress, my makeup is now smeared down half of my face, and my hair is a bird's nest of epic proportions.

Beautiful.

I ransack my toiletries bag for painkillers and set to work out the rest of the issues before me and then head to breakfast with sunglasses firmly in place.

I don't have to order the coffee. An angel brings me a fresh pot that I set to work on. They also deliver me a plate of pastries, croissants, and a fruit bowl, clearly taking pity on my fragile state. Once my second cup of coffee hits, my head begins to feel a little better.

"Oh, boy, I'm surprised to see you here." Taylor heads right over to me. I'd chosen the first table I reached, and for me, that meant sitting at the back of the restaurant, away from the rest of the guests.

"Please, please, for the love of everything, be quiet." Everything's too loud.

"Not feeling too hot there?"

"Not particularly. I just need some caffeine, and I'll go and find a nice quiet place in the shade to recover peacefully."

"What time's your flight?" he asks, which makes me want to be violently sick.

"Late. Now, shhh!" I drink the coffee and pick at the pastry.

"Do you remember much about last night?"

"Taylor, I'm going to cry if you keep talking to me."

“Fine. Sit in peace and hydrate yourself. I’ll come and fill you in on your exploits later.” He leaves, and I internally sigh in relief. Although I’m not too sure I want the highlight reel from last night.

Although my hangover is of momentous proportion, I do still have my memory of last night.

The wedding, the speeches, the dancing. The drinks. More drinks and then storming off after coming onto Liam Ford, coming onto him and being rejected.

Why the ground couldn’t swallow me up whole is a mystery I’m not yet equipped to answer, but I will have to face the music at some point. Just not before I feel better.

My biggest regret is not being able to make the most of this fantastic hotel and surroundings. That’s what’s running through my mind as I find my way back to the room and collapse on the bed with a pillow over my head. So, I down another round of painkillers, drink half the bottle of water I came back to my room with and pull myself up. The doors of my room open onto my personal pool, but I pull a sun lounger into the shade and just crash. At least this way, I’m ‘enjoying’ the surroundings of the hotel.

Oh, Champagne. What have you done to me? I send up another little prayer that I had the sense to book the latest flight of the day.

“There you are.” My brother’s voice reaches my ears, and I wonder how long I can talk to him behind my glasses with my eyes closed.

“Hey.”

“Suffering?”

I pinch my fingers together and hold my hand up to him.

“Well, Mir and I are leaving, and I wanted to say bye.”

I push through the pain and sit up. He’s got the goofiest smile on his face, and just looking at him, so happy, dulls the ache in my head.

“I’m sorry for the poor send-off. How long will you be gone?” I ask.

“Two weeks. We’ll catch up when I’m back?”

“Of course. Come here.” I put my arms out, and he perches on the edge of the lounge to lean in for a hug. “I’m so happy for you,” I whisper.

“Thank you. Your turn next.”

“Oh, shh. I’m not even seeing someone.” I pull away from our hug.

“No. But you got plenty of attention last night.” He scrutinises me for a moment.

“I got no attention.”

“You did, and if you weren’t so hung up on Ford, you’d have seen it.”

“What are you talking about? Do I need to remind you that I have a monster hangover?” I drop back down on the lounge.

“Just be careful. You blew Pete off, and I know why.”

“Who’s Pete?” But as I ask the question, I have a funny memory of someone asking me for a drink. “Oh, no.” I put my hands over my face. “Can we put a pin in this conversation and pick up when you’re back? I have a few hours of holiday to enjoy, and then I’m sure Liam will go back to being someone I used to know. Done. Forgotten about again.”

I’m surprised at how hard it is to say those words.

“Sure. Love ya, Sis.”

“Love ya, too.”

As the day progresses, I say goodbye to more and more guests and family. My parents and Grammy leave together, and I’m a little surprised that Liam doesn’t take his gran home.

Taylor messages me, saying he’s gone with the rest of the party into town before catching their flight, and we arrange a drink back home in the next couple of days. Apparently, I’m

not off the hook for explaining my behaviour. And, mortifyingly, I can remember the behaviour he's referring to.

It's a little eerie being here with nobody else.

My hangover is finally in the realm of a dull headache, and I go for a walk on the beach, desperate to soak up the sun and the view and pick a spot on the sand. My car isn't booked until dinner time, and I'll land at a ridiculously late hour, but I'm not due back at work for a couple of days. Why I couldn't have the time off before the wedding and enjoy the time away with the rest of everyone is beyond me, but I think it's just because my boss likes the power trip of having control over the small things. I'm new and junior, so I can't fight it too hard.

"I thought I'd find you here." I look up to see a dark silhouette, but I don't need to see his face to recognise Liam.

"Come to say goodbye?"

"I'm not leaving yet."

"Lucky you." I'm back to being defensive and frosty. There's no real reason except that I feel humiliated and stupid for what happened between us last night – and that's a big fat nothing because everything's a game to Liam.

"Well, it's my hotel. I think I have the right to stay if I want."

"It's yours? We thought you just hired it out for the wedding."

"Not many people know."

"How come?" I question, confused, why he wouldn't have told anyone that all of this is his.

He drops down onto the sand, and I turn towards him. "Some things are just for me."

"That's very secretive."

"Call it an insurance policy."

"I don't follow." And I'm sure it's not the headache impairing my brain.

He takes a deep breath and lies back on the sand next to me. “Most of my friends and family know we have money.”

“We, you mean you and your dad have money.”

“Correct. I had a shit tonne of money as soon as I graduated, and before that, I had whatever I wanted.”

“Yeah, but you were never like that. You never acted like the spoilt rich kid.” My instinct is to reassure him, but I don’t reach out to grab his hand like I want to. My words are true – Liam Ford never acted entitled towards me.

“You’re just saying that because you liked coming to use the pool.”

“Maybe the pool was a draw.” We giggle a little, the tension between us shifting.

“Anyway, I wasted a lot of money. And I got to the point where I wanted something that nobody knew about in case it failed. I didn’t want to deal with announcing I’d lost or failed again. So, I kept this to myself.”

“You couldn’t have lost all your money. You’re like a millionaire, right?” We never talked about money when we were kids. It didn’t matter. Still doesn’t, but the thought that Liam isn’t this rich playboy makes my heart ache just a little bit.

He smiles. “Well, no. I didn’t lose it all. Since the hotel venture, I’ve been more careful, and it’s paid off.”

“So still richer than sin?” I jest.

“Interesting analogy, and yes, I am.” The sexy tone in his voice, and the un-challenged confidence he has hits me in my chest, stirring up thoughts I should leave well alone, so I nod and lie back onto my back, happy to soak up the sun.

“Stay.”

“Sorry?”

“Stay. For a few extra days, here with me.” The words register in my brain, but I can’t quite wrap my head around

them. “I’m sorry, I’m having difficulty here. One more time.” I sit back up to get a better look at him.

“Come on, Lil. I want you to stay here. Enjoy the sun. You came late, so at least this way, you aren’t missing out.”

“Oh, right. You won’t be here.” I shake my head feeling dumb that I thought he might be asking more than he is because there’s a big difference between staying to enjoy the hotel and staying with Liam. God, I need to grow out of my adolescence and stand up for myself.

“No, you heard me right the first time. Stay here. With me.”

I stare at him before I push my sunglasses on top of my head, needing to get a clear look at his face. Or rather, his eyes.

“You’re serious?”

“Like a heart attack.”

I’d spent years pining – pining for a love I’d built up in my mind into a palace of grandeur, complete with walls of safety, securing my heart behind them. Only to have Liam crash the same walls and sack off the love I’d kept inside. He humiliated me when I was younger, always letting me believe there was a chance. But no. I was the foolish Lil who would never be anything other than Eric’s sister. At least that’s the message that screamed when he ghosted me as soon as he was old enough to move on and not be shackled to me.

Well, the palace doesn’t exist anymore. I’m not the princess waiting on the prince because I tore my palace to the ground.

And while he might have been the prince in my story once upon a time, he’s not now. Now, he’s a handsome and sexy guy offering me something I’d love to jump at.

The red flags are waving, and alarm bells are sounding so loud I’m deafened by them because, after last night, I’m not sure I can be trusted around Liam. But who am I to turn him down? Can I even say no to this man?

“What do you say, Lil?” He shifts in the sand. “You said yourself, this is the first holiday you’ve had in years.”

“It’s a tempting offer.” Too tempting. But I’ve grown up, at least enough to ask some questions. My head might still be cloudy and recovering from too much alcohol, but I want to know why. “I have a question for you. Why now? Why me?”

From everything Taylor and my brother have told me, I should stay clear of Liam. Hell, even I know that myself deep down. But knowing something and acting on it are two completely different things.

“Honestly, I think I may need to make up for some things. Eric’s off on his honeymoon. It would be nice if we could get to know each other again. Clear things up and enjoy the sun.”

“And Eric’s restraining order?” I remember that part of my speech and Liam brushing me off.

“Won’t be a problem. Scouts honour.” He does a silly salute which tweaks the smile on my lips. He even looks cute and totally un-scout-like.

“You are no boy scout, Liam Ford.” And I’m going to prove that to you because Eric didn’t give me the same warning.

“Is that a yes?”

I look out to the horizon and the gorgeous Ionian Sea. “It’s a yes.” My pulse picks up as I turn back to look at Liam. He’s smiling. Not his charming smile, but his deadly sexy smile – the one that I was first introduced to when I was just a kid. Forgetting that smile has been a little harder than I’d hoped. But remembering that gut-wrenching disappointment when I was looking for him at my graduation or birthday party, and he didn’t show up, helps.

“Great.”

“So, what are the rules?” I start.

“Rules? There aren’t any.”

I pull my mind away from where it wants to go. “Dinner, eating together... you said you wanted to make up for stuff. So, what are the rules?”

“Fine. Dinner. Tonight, to celebrate your extended stay. I’d like to take you out tomorrow.”

“Sounds great.” I lie back down and get comfortable in the sand. It sounds perfect.

Now, to clear my head before I agree to anything else involving Liam.

Chapter Seven

Alone, at a five-star resort, on a Greek Island with Liam Ford.

It's a situation the younger me would have invented in my mind, not what I'd have thought would happen at the end of my brother's wedding.

It might have crossed my mind to seduce him at the wedding – but that was mostly the alcohol talking. Or my inner siren. Now that I have time and space on my side, I might be able to get over how handsome he is and get to know him as he suggested. We were all good friends, after all. And aside from my little teenage heart getting crushed, I missed him as a friend or rather felt let down by how he vanished. I'd like to put that to rest.

I pull out the other dress I'd packed to wear to dinner, then look around the hotel room for a laundry bag or card to get my limited wardrobe cleaned and returned. Liam didn't mention how long this little stay would be for, but I should be able to cope for a couple of days.

My skin looks like it's caught a little sun, and I pile my hair into a messy bun and finger a few strands to frame my face before leaving the room and heading to the restaurant area.

Crickets chirping set the ambience around the grounds as I wander through the lit path I took the first night I arrived.

Liam's already at the table, his phone in hand, and he's scowling at it. He's dressed in an open-collar shirt, so he's dressed up a bit, and that thought makes me smile. He looks up and sees me, drops his phone, and stands as I walk over.

“Fancy seeing you here.”

“Indeed. Is there nobody else here?” I question as I search the rest of the tables.

“Just us.” He pulls out my chair, and I take a seat.

“Isn’t that a poor business decision? I mean, this place is beautiful. I’d imagine you’re losing a lot of money keeping it to yourself.”

“I’ll cope. But it does mean the kitchen is preparing a specific menu. They aren’t set up for guests.”

“I’m sure it will be delicious.”

A bottle of wine is already chilling in the cooler to the side, and Liam pours. “Is white okay?”

“Just one glass. A small one.” My head is finally clear, thanks to a day of doing nothing, but I don’t want to wake up tomorrow in the same state.

“Don’t trust yourself after last night?”

“Less about trust, more about the crippling hangover I’ve been fighting most of the day.

Want to fill me in on the last few years?” I look around at the empty tables again. There’s no atmosphere other than that between the two of us, and right now, with the lack of alcohol, it’s a little stifled.

“Where do you want me to start?”

“How about the beginning – it’s as good a place as any.”

“True. You got me there.” He leans back and takes a sip of his wine. “Well, we graduated. Then travelled. A lot. You know this, right?”

I shake my head, taking the smallest sip of wine. “Not the details.” I knew what Eric shared with me, and that was it – not the full story.

“Well, I travelled. Some of the time with Woodsy, but he had a job lined up and couldn’t afford to just bum around the world.”

“Is that what you did?” I smile.

“For a big part, yeah. Dad made sure that money wasn’t a problem, but I wanted to travel and actually see the world, not just the inside of the next hotel. So, I did. I backpacked, stayed

in hostels, and saw everything I wanted. The air travel was the only thing I didn't scrimp on."

"Nice to travel first class."

"Yep. What about you? What have you been up to?" He changes the focus quickly. His description of the last six years wasn't quite the colourful retelling I had hoped.

"I was still in school when you ghosted."

His brows crumple together, unhappy with the description; however, in my head, that's exactly what he did. It started a bit when they went to university and moved away, but they still came back a lot, and we had dinner, went to the cinema, or just hung out. He was always happy to spend some time with me. But then, after graduating, he stopped showing up – stopped visiting altogether.

"You might not see it like that, but for a teenage girl who'd had a friend her whole life, disappearing and then not showing up certainly felt like ghosting."

"You might have a point."

"A big fat one. I genuinely thought we were friends."

"We were."

"So?" I wait for the explanation, and it seems I'm certainly not over the way he treated me.

"What do you want me to say? You were sixteen the last time I saw you. Too young and too innocent." He shakes his head.

"So that means you just cut ties? No birthday visits or even Christmas. Up until then, you were there for every one of our family celebrations. You missed my eighteenth and twenty-first."

"I'm sorry, Lil." He looks down and takes a drink of his water, avoiding my eyes. Even his posture is uncomfortable, and while that wasn't my intention, I'm glad he can see the problem. And maybe this conversation can finally put my mind at rest. There was no reciprocal feeling between us. He

saw me as Eric's kid sister. Nothing more. And my over-active imagination did the rest.

The server arrives with our starters, and we both seem a little easier with the distraction. We eat in relative silence, and a little bubble of disappointment surfaces. We used to get on so well. Now, it's painful to stir up a conversation after years of not talking.

We continue our meal with small chit-chat. It's excruciating, and I start to second-guess my decision to stay – aside from the obvious.

“Meet me after breakfast at the beach?” he asks as we walk slowly past the swimming pool.

“Sunbathing?” I'm a little underwhelmed, but I'm going to take all the time I have out here.

“No, I'm going to show you the best part of the island.”

“Sounds fun. Do I need to pack anything?”

“A bathing suit, sun cream, and that's it.”

We both have that moment of awkwardness, not sure if we should say goodnight or have a drink or coffee or something else. Neither one of us looks directly at the other, and I cringe internally.

“Goodnight then.” I smile at Liam. “Thank you for dinner.”

He nods, and I turn and make my way towards my room, but as I walk away, my pulse quickens. In my head, I imagine Liam is going to run after me and pull me back to kiss me. Or ask to come back to my room or something much more romantic. It's a huge stretch for my fantasy world, considering the dinner date we just endured.

But I reach my room with no interruption, and I fall back against the door, confused as I'm both disappointed and feeling like I'm caught in a dream.

I open the doors back out to the private pool and listen for a few minutes.

“This is ridiculous,” I scold myself and go to bed.

But as comfortable and relaxed as I feel, I don't drift off into peace. I toss and turn, unable to clear my mind of the boy I once knew and the man he is today.

My sleep did not vanquish my memory of the awkward dinner last night, and I'm hesitant to go and repeat it at breakfast, but I'm craving coffee. Before making my way to the dining room, I drain one of the travel sunscreens and apply it to my chest, arms, and face, put on my bikini, and shove the only other dress I have over my head.

The dining space is deserted when I enter. A single table – the same one we occupied last night – is set up for breakfast. As I take my seat, the lady who checked me in appears with a cafetière of coffee.

“Oh, thank you.”

“You're welcome. Mr Ford will meet you on the beach shortly.” I nod. Maybe one dinner with me was enough.

I sit in the quiet and enjoy the modest breakfast options on the table. The coffee is delicious, and I take a cup and wander the grounds a little. This place is certainly something special. The blue of the sky and the sea pull me to look over at the view, and I feel infused with peacefulness by just watching the world pass before me.

I glance down and see the boat at the small jetty, and I also spy Liam. He's doing something on the boat, and I smile at the thought of what we'll be doing today. Finishing my coffee, I head down to the beach and walk along to the jetty.

“Morning,” I call, a little unsure if I should just climb aboard.

“Hey.” He's wearing an open cotton shirt and khaki shorts again and looks like he's been out in the sun for weeks.

“Shiny,” I comment as he holds his hand out to beckon me onboard. I take it and am glad of the assistance as the boat sways gently. Looking around, I notice it's much bigger than I first thought from the beach.

“Well, yeah. And it's the best way to see the island in all its glory.”

“Really?” He leads me up to the top deck, where I take a seat on the corner sofa section next to the captain’s controls. I have no idea if that’s the correct term, but who cares. This must cost hundreds of thousands of pounds, and I keep quiet as the awe and giddiness of the luxury washes over me.

“Yep. The island is all about the water.” Liam starts the engines and drives us out of the bay and around the headland.

The colours of the sea are everything I’d imagined them to be when I first heard we were heading to Greece. As the light hits the surface, brilliant shades of turquoise and cobalt reflect back.

I lean back in my seat and let the world pass us by, breathing in the salty warm air.

Greenery decorates the cliffs and rocks jutting out from the coastline. Pebbled along the edge are small harbours and boats. Houses and buildings dot the landscape, and I wonder if this is what the hotel looks like from farther out to sea.

There’s no need for conversation; I’m mesmerised by the scenery as we pass along the coast.

Twenty minutes or so later, Liam navigates us around a craggy outcrop of rock and powers down the boat. There’s a small sliver of beach at the base of a cliff to one side and a collection of rocks rising out of the sea on the other. The sea is a bright cerulean here and looks far too inviting.

“Wow, this place is gorgeous.”

“The island is littered with these little spots. Can I get you anything?”

“Water, if you have it?”

“Sure. We have a fully stocked galley.”

“How big is this boat?” It’s funny, knowing Liam for so many years, I’ve never really seen his wealth up close and personal. Until the wedding, at least.

“A couple of bedrooms, bathroom, dining area.”

“So, bigger than my apartment,” I mock.

“It might be, yes. Be right back.” He chuckles and heads down the stairs, and I turn to gaze out at the view.

He hands me a bottle of water and takes a seat at the other end of the sofa. Plenty of space between us.

“Do you spend much time out here?” If I had the money he has, I’d be tempted to move. Permanently.

“Not really.” It’s non-committal and doesn’t leave room to elaborate.

“So, not something you do regularly?” I enquire again, my eyes flicking up to his and back to the view.

“Why don’t you just ask me the question you want to, Lil? Then we can both be happy.”

Fine. It’s annoying that he knows I’m fishing. “Do you do this with all the girls you bring here? Wine them, dine them, and take them out on the boat?” I feel foolish for asking, but I also need to manage my expectations. If this is just a game to him – a show – then I want to know.

Liam has a bad habit of making everything we do together feel special, bigger than the sum of its parts, and this is the biggest one of all.

He smiles to himself. “Feeling insecure, Lil?”

“Not insecure, jerk. I just want to know how many poor victims of this elaborate ‘date’ might be back home.”

I used to stay awake at night, wishing for attention of this kind from Liam. Alone, with no interruptions from my brother. And now he’s handed it to me on a plate, tied up in a big ribbon, and it makes me nervous about what might happen if I start to untie it. Will it explode in my face?

“We’re not on a date, at least in the traditional sense of the word. And no, this isn’t what I do to get girls into bed. That, if you can imagine it, takes a lot less effort.” He cocks his head to the side.

“You are incorrigible, Ford.”

“I know. But you’re not so innocent yourself.”

The distance the deck affords us has been a blessing for this conversation. We're far enough away that there's no chance of contact, and I can't get lost in the pull of his eyes. Rich and deep and brown, they've always pulled me in.

"Oh, prey tell. What has little ole me done that's so utterly sinful," I jest but know I'm straying into dangerous territory. This is banter with a clear undertone.

"You know, Lil. You know what you said to me at the wedding. You know you're gorgeous, and you know my reputation. You." He points at me. "Gasoline, match." He gestures with his hands, indicating an explosion.

It would certainly be hot – the two of us.

Hell, how many girls get to live out their fantasies? I'm torn. I'm not going to give in that easily. But after all the years I longed for him, why shouldn't I?

"I'm going to cool off." I peel the dress up and over my head and throw it on the cushions, take my sunglasses off, and walk over to the stairs leading down. At the back of the boat, there is a platform and some metal steps into the sea.

Without looking back, I pinch my nose and jump into the blue.

The swooshing noise of the bubbles fills my head as my body gets over the shock of the cold. But before I even surface, another muffled splash sound hits my ears. I surface and brush the water from my eyes and look around, seeing the white bubbles where Liam must have followed me into the water. I'm smiling as I surface and start to look around, giggling to myself. But there's no sign of him.

I tread water and turn, expecting him to pop up like I did any minute but still nothing. Seconds continue to tick by.

"Liam?" I call, feeling idiotic and a little panicked. I can't see him or any dark shadows. "Ahhh!" I squeal as I'm dragged back under the water, Liam's hand wrapped around my calf and pulling me down. I swallow a mouthful of salt water and frantically splash to try and make it back to the surface.

Spluttering as I gasp for air, I wipe my eyes and look around to see a laughing Liam. His hair has darkened with the water, making him look even hotter. Not fair.

“You’re evil. I forgot that about you.” I shove water in his face.

“I told you we were here to have fun.” He splashes me back.

“Half drowning me does not constitute having fun.”

“You spent most of the time under the water at the pool when we were kids.”

I remember. They had a huge indoor pool, and we got to go over and mess about, play, and swim whenever we wanted.

Pushing the memory away, I stretch out and swim through the sea to do a lap of the boat, ignoring Liam and soaking up the water and view around us.

The sea feels like it’s warming up as I swim through it, and I sense Liam shadowing me at my side.

“You’re crazy if you don’t spend more time here, Ford,” I declare.

“Maybe.”

“Enjoying the simple things in life cut into your bachelor lifestyle too much for you?”

“You don’t have the best opinion of me, do you.”

I keep swimming. “It’s like you said. We need to get to know each other again.”

Chapter Eight

Liam

She climbs the ladder back onto the boat and gives me the best view imaginable of her peachy arse in all its glory. I wait and enjoy every second of the show she's delivering.

She's challenging and frustrating and beautiful all at the same time. And this is why I've stayed away. In part, anyway.

Now, I'm perving on her and imagining her in my hands, even after my best friend told me to steer clear.

Lil might not know me that well anymore, but Woodsy does, and he knows what I'm like, and I agree with every opinion he has of me. Isla Littlewood is too good for me. But she's already playing with fire. I've warned her. If she does it again, all bets are off, and she is mine.

When my head stops with the fuck reel playing in my mind, I pull myself up onto the boat behind her. She's drying her hair on one of the towels left out on the sofa as she looks out to sea.

"It's so beautiful." Her voice is wistful, and I love that I made that happen.

"It is." I step closer towards her but keep my hands to myself. "I want to show you another spot tomorrow. I wasn't sure how long you wanted to stay."

"Technically, I have to be back at work the day after tomorrow," she muses as if she's running the thought over in her head. "But I don't want to think about work now."

"What do you do, Lil?" I ask.

"I told you. I don't want to think about work."

"Are you happy?" The thought that I could make her happy slams to mind, and suddenly it's something I want to do – make her happy. Not just for today or tomorrow.

“Feeling philosophical now?”

“Just trying to get to know you.”

“Well, my family is happy and healthy. I have a job, and I have a place to live. I can’t complain.”

“That’s not what I meant, but good to know.”

“Here. I could do with some help.” She hands me the smallest bottle of sunscreen in the world. “Will you do the honours?” She pulls her damp hair to the side and angles her body so she’s leaning a little forward.

Seems she’s tired of talking about happiness. Fine.

“If I didn’t know better, Lil, I’d assume you were trying to tease me.”

“Rubbing sunscreen on my back doesn’t constitute any kind of move, Liam. Would you rather I burn?”

Soft, supple, creamy skin that looks so good under my touch stretches out before my eyes. I empty the bottle and begin my torture. My tanned hands contrast with her pearly white back, and I feel her delicate bones as I trace up her spine to her neck.

She tilts her head to the side, and I imagine my hand gliding around her neck, up her throat.

Fuck.

“What’s the matter?” Her voice is full of sugar, and just to prove my hunch correct, she tilts her hips back towards me.

“I warned you, Lil.” God, what she does to my imagination.

She twists around, challenge as clear in her eyes as the crystal waters around us. “And if I said you don’t scare me, what would you do then?”

“I say you’re too good for the likes of me.” It’s the truth. “And maybe there’s a line I’m not sure I want to cross.” I’m fucking desperate to cross it. Ever since the wedding, hell, ever since I set eyes on her again, I’ve been desperate to take her. Just a little taste. But I know this will end badly.

“We can cross any line, Liam. It won’t change anything because you’ve not cared enough to speak to me in years.”

Ouch. Her words are sharp and not entirely true. What am I supposed to say to her? “I thought we went over that last night. You want to punish me now?”

“Not exactly. But seeing you want something and being able to deny you does make up for those years of radio silence.” She smiles at me, and I remember how good she looked last night – how her voice told me everything I needed to hear.

“I just want to make it clear I didn’t invite you to stay just to try and fuck you.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.” Her smile turns sweet, and it just makes me want to punish her, not in a cruel way, but in a sexy-as-hell, blow-your-mind kind of way.

“So why are you messing with me?” My restraint isn’t good at the best of times. Having Lil act like this isn’t helping. “I warned you when you were shoving yourself at me and whispering in my ear. I warned you and said very clearly that you won’t get away with teasing me again.”

“There you go, playing games with me again, and you accuse me of doing the same.” She turns away from me.

“I’m not playing, Lil.” I run my hand through her hair and pull a handful, gently tugging her back against me. “Feel that?” I shove my hips forward into her arse so she has no confusion as to what I’m talking about. “That’s how serious I am.”

“No, that’s how horny you are.”

“I’m not fooling around here, Lil.” God, this girl.

I twist her, keeping my hands on her skin because, like it or not, I’m not letting her go. She might have been too young before. She isn’t now.

My lips crash against hers, hard and fast. Isla’s rigid for the first second, but then I pull her hair, tilting her head back to me, and she moans. A pure, unchecked sigh of pleasure that makes me want to come in my shorts.

I lick at her lips as I deepen the kiss, and she opens for me. My tongue seeks hers, and I'm suddenly desperate to get inside her any way I can.

This is going to be too fast. Too frantic.

With Lil, I want to stop time and worship her body, watch her reactions as I demonstrate my patience on her skin and make her beg for every touch, every kiss, every thrust. But as I imagine it, I'm not sure I'll be able to hold back.

Her arms wrap around my neck, and she pulls me in closer. I step forward so we're plastered together. Her skin is still cool from the water, but this is only going in one direction now.

“Do you remember what you said to me the night of the wedding? How hot it would be to have you desperate. Well, I'm going to make you desperate, baby. There's no going back now.”

“Liam, just don't stop.” Her nails drag down my back, and I have to catch myself from wrapping her wrists in my hand and bending her over.

All of my instincts are screaming to just fuck her. Take her in every way I want. But this is Lil, and I want her to be more than just my next fuck.

Chapter Nine

Oh my god, I'm going to have sex with Liam Ford.

His arms scoop me up, and I wrap my legs around him. With ease, he carries me to the sectional area of the boat, which is covered as protection from the sun. He drops me and bends down, grabbing my bikini bottoms and yanking them off.

“Liam,” I start to protest at the thought of being naked for anyone to sail past and see, but that immediately vanishes from my head as he shoves my legs apart and keeps them wide open with his shoulders.

His hands press against my inner thighs, and my heart is in my mouth.

I'm open and vulnerable to the guy I gave my heart to as a kid, and now he's about to lick me out. God, I hope he's about to because I'm going to combust with anticipation if he doesn't.

He swipes through my folds with his tongue, once, twice, in quick succession, and I'm trapped between being overly aroused and ticklish. My arms drape over my face, covering my eyes and stopping me from watching what he's going to do next.

When I think about who is doing this to me – that this is Liam – it makes it hard to concentrate.

I try and breathe calmly, but he knows what he's doing. After the quick licks, he drags his tongue right to the tip of my clit, slowly and patiently. And then he repeats like he's licking me clean or trying to send me crazy.

Each time he gives the faintest touch to my clit, just enough to turn me on but nowhere near enough to build my climax.

It's been a while since I slept with anyone, and they certainly didn't show me the kind of attention Liam's now displaying.

His hands press my thighs wide again, and he concentrates his attention on the one point, sure to send me insane.

My toes want to curl in pleasure as he continues to work me up. My pulse quickens, my heart pounds, and I feel the urge and the need for him to do more. I raise my head and look at him between my legs. His eyes lock with mine, and it's pure lust – pure heat.

Without breaking contact, he moves one of his hands and slides one finger inside me while still flicking his tongue over my clit. He adds another and then curls them around.

That's when my legs begin to quiver, and a needy sensation builds urgently. I grip the cushion as the feeling grows, and I let my head drop back. God, it's bliss. I'm on the verge of shattering if he could just... a little...

“Oh, yes!” Every nerve in my body explodes as his tongue continues to lick at me, sending wave after wave of spasms through my body.

His pace lessens as I crest the high and begin to float back to earth, feeling utterly blissed and content.

“While that's an awfully sexy look on you, I'm not finished with you yet.” Liam stands and looks down at me.

He pulls me to my feet, and I'm not even sure if I'll be able to stand after what he did to me. He spins me around and bends me over, his hands smoothing down my back as he does.

“Now, I'm about through with any restraint I had. So tell me you want me to fuck you. I want to hear the words.”

“Liam...”

“Lil, please, for fuck's sake.”

“Take me, Liam.”

He's not gentle about pushing my legs a little wider and rubbing the tip of his cock in my wet pussy. Taking him is sobering, though, and as he pushes in, I inhale deeply before slowly exhaling.

“God, you feel so fucking tight, Lil. You’re going to squeeze my dick like a fucking vice. Arch your back for me. Fuck, you look perfect. You feel fucking perfect.” His words run into one another as he thrusts in and draws back slowly. “Keep your arms tight because I’m not going to be gentle, Lil. You’re too damn hot for gentle.” He slams into me, jarring me forward, and my fingers dig into the cushions on the sofa. There would be no way I could take him if he hadn’t just made me come so hard my eyes hurt.

I twist back and watch him holding my hips and pistoning into me – his head tilted up to the sky. Chords of muscles glisten in the sun from his shoulders down his torso, and from this angle, it’s sexy as hell.

Each time he thrusts, he gets a little harder, and his hands squeeze at my hips. My limbs are still recovering from the orgasm he gave me a few moments ago, but it’s his words, his urgency, that turns me on this time.

“Fucking hell, Lil,” he grunts. His hand slaps my arse, and I yelp in surprise. “I want to see you.” He stills, and whatever was building fades as he pulls out gently and pulls me to standing. “I want to see your tits. I want to see your beautiful tits as I fuck you.” His hands undo my bikini top, and he throws it to the side, so I’m now naked on his yacht. “Lie back, spread those gorgeous legs and let me see all of you.” His words are erotic as hell. He sets out his commands, and I follow, falling back to the cushions and spreading my legs as best I can.

He kneels down between my legs and lifts one to rest on his shoulder as he pulls us closer together. He pushes his cock inside of me and repositions for a second so he’s as deep as I can take him.

Then he starts to move. His eyes find mine, and he watches me – studies me – as he pulls out and pushes back in. It’s slow and deliberate, and this angle means he brushes against my clit, which is already so sensitive from the attention earlier.

Every time he catches it, my mouth opens a little more with the threat of a deep, plea-full moan.

“You like your clit being played with. You drenched my tongue when I rubbed it with my finger. Are you going to come around my dick if I rub it now?” His eyes blaze with heat as he talks to me, and I can feel my cheeks flame in response. “First, I want to fuck you so hard you want to scream.”

Without any more warning, he pushes into me, grips my hips, and begins to fuck me. With each stroke, he pushes me up the sofa, and my boobs jolt.

“I don’t think you’ve ever looked so sexy. Naked.” He shoves forward. “On the cusp of begging for me.” Another thrust. “Your nipples, hard and ripe, ready for me to play with.”

“Liam, stop playing,” I beg.

He pauses for a second, and his eyebrows rise before that smouldering look returns. “As you wish.” He adjusts and holds onto my hips again before he loses control. He hammers into me like he’s racing to finish. Only, I’m the one now hurtling towards a second climax. He’s bent my leg back, and the position makes him hit deep inside of me and brush my clit even more.

The urge to move, to thrust my hips in response, or to hurry him infects my body. My breathing feels laboured, and I start to pant – to moan – to cry in desperation.

“Yes, fuck, fuck. Harder, Liam. There. There.” I press my hands into the sofa and lift up a fraction, giving my clit even more friction.

All of my muscles tighten, and the pull in the pit of my stomach intensifies until I’m screaming for Liam to tip me over the edge. “Yes, Liam. Yes. Yes!”

My eyes close as the pulsing sensation of my orgasm beats around my body. But Liam doesn’t still. He thrusts harder, with urgency, until he pulls me against him, digging his fingers into my skin and slowing.

“Jesus, Lil. Fucking hell,” he groans through gritted teeth.

Neither of us moves, but the leg that's been over his shoulder starts to get pins and needles, so I let it slide to the side, and Liam manoeuvres, causing my leg to drop to the sofa. He collapses back in the corner, and I watch him for a moment out of squinted eyes.

Did we really just do that?

My heart is still racing against my chest, and I take a long, deep breath.

Sweat covers my body.

Despite the shade from this section of the boat, the heat is cloying at my skin. I want to lie here and do nothing. Not move, not open my eyes, just bask in this feeling. I'm also terrified of opening my eyes and looking at Liam.

But I can feel the sweat tickling over my chest and running towards my neck, and the urge to fidget to stop it overrules everything else I'm feeling.

I stand and realise I'm still naked. A quick glance tells me there are no other boats around, so in a daring move to match sleeping with Liam Ford, I walk to the back of the boat and jump into the sea.

Sweet relief bubbles around me, and I pop back up to the surface, feeling refreshed. And this time, there's no sign of Liam following me in. I swim to the ladder and climb back up and sit down in the shade, away from where I left Liam, and happy for the cold dip.

"You okay?"

"Fine, now." I look for my bikini, put it back on and lie back out and stretch my limbs.

"Do you want to go back to the hotel?" he asks.

"Not yet. I could eat, though. Didn't you say this was stocked?"

"I did. I'll get us lunch." Liam stands, but as he passes me, he plants a kiss on my forehead before he walks to the stairs and heads down to what I presume is the kitchen. It's a tender act that I wouldn't have associated with him after sex.

The sun beats down and warms my skin, and my mind runs over every second of Liam Ford owning me like I was his. Because that's how it felt – at least, that's how he made me feel. He took me and talked to me like he'd been waiting his whole life – desperate. Or he was just really fucking horny.

God, he's dangerous. To my heart as well as my head.

I tune out the spicy elements of my daydream and focus on the gentle lap and sway of the boat, letting it send me into a trance-like state.

Chapter Ten

Liam comes back up from the galley with a tray of food – bread, meats, cheeses and salads, all in little bowls for us to pick at.

“Oh, yum. Did you do this all yourself?” I ask as he places everything out on the table, although there’s an air of doubt in my mind.

“Would you believe me if I said yes?”

“Um, maybe?” But we look at each other, and the lie fades when he cracks into laughter.

“No, the chef put it together. I just served it.”

“Well, I appreciate the thought.”

We both focus on the food, and I’m suddenly famished. The olives, vine leaves and fresh breads are all delicious, and once again, I’m struck by the idea of hiding away in a place like this.

“So, if you don’t spend all of your time here, what do you spend your time doing?” I ask between mouthfuls, hopeful that maybe, with the tension out of the way, there will be less awkwardness.

“Well, I have a few other businesses. Most I only oversee and don’t have any direct dealings with the everyday running, but I still meet with my team regularly. Review progress, finances, and performance. And, when I’m not doing that, I’m travelling. Looking for potential new places to invest in.”

“Parties and girls,” I add for him.

“You know that’s part of it. But it’s a small part. It’s just that’s all Woodsy and Taylor see.” His voice sounds sour when he says Taylor’s name.

“Don’t you like Taylor?” I ask.

“Sure, I do.”

“You just don’t seem very friendly towards him.”

“He’s a friend of Eric’s, and he’s sort of part of the extended group.”

“That’s not an answer. And you were staring at him at the wedding.”

“Because he was touching you. I didn’t like it.” He reaches across the table to take my hand.

“But we’re not…” I start.

“Look, I’m always going to be protective over you, no big deal. Come on.” He stands and starts clearing the empty dishes away.

“Where are we going?” I ask, trying to keep up with him and still reeling from his confession.

“I want to take you on a sightseeing trip.”

“I don’t have anything to wear except this.” I look down at my damp bikini.

“Don’t worry. We’re not leaving the boat.” He takes the leftovers down below deck, and I’m still left wondering what’s going on – with everything.

“Suck it up, Isla,” I whisper to myself.

The boat engines spring to life, and we start to move, so I head to the back of the boat to watch the water. I kneel on the cushions of one of the small chairs and stare out at the wake we’re creating.

“Lil!” Liam calls, but it’s hard to hear over the motor and the water. I turn around and see him still at the controls, waving his hand for me to come up, so I do.

“Yeah?”

He nods forward, and I look to see a green island in front of us. “Is that where we’re going?”

“We’re not going ashore. What we’re looking for is in the water.”

“Dolphins?” I ask, suddenly excited.

“No. Turtles.”

“Really?”

“If we’re lucky. We can’t get too close. The development of tourism at this end of the island has caused problems for the turtles, so now there are areas where they are protected,” Liam explains.

He cuts the engines and lets the boat lap with the water, a way off the island.

It’s beautiful.

“Go to the back of the boat or climb around to the front to watch.” I rush to the back of the boat and lean over the chrome rail, staring into the clear blue waters. I feel Liam come up behind me, his hand resting on the small of my back as he peers over the edge.

“What are we looking for?”

“A turtle.”

“Duh. Just anywhere in the sea – there’s a lot of sea?” I shove at him.

“Just keep your eyes peeled – they’re bigger than you think.” He steps closer to me again as we both scan the water. “There!” He points his arm out to the water.

I look but can’t see anything. “Where?”

“One o’clock. About fifty meters out.”

I focus on where Liam’s pointing but don’t see anything. The changing shapes and shades of blue in the water keep my eyes busy until, finally, I see a darker shape. It drifts closer to the boat and to the surface of the water, and I can make out an outline. For only a moment, the head of a beautiful green turtle lifts above the surface to take a gulp of air before diving back below.

“Oh my god,” I shriek as my smile erupts over my face.

“I know.”

“Did you see that?”

“I did.”

“He was so graceful. Amazing.” I beam.

Liam grabs my face between his hands and pulls me in to kiss me. It’s so sudden, I’m stunned, but I don’t stop him. It only lasts for a moment, and then it’s over. He smiles at me and carries on, looking out at the water. But he doesn’t drop contact. He touches me every chance he has. Nothing over the top. Gentle, soft caresses as if he can’t keep his hands from doing it – like he wants to be close.

After another half an hour, and with no more turtle encounters, we finally set about heading back to the hotel.

Liam docks the boat and helps me back onto dry land. Only he doesn’t let go of my hand. Instead, he keeps it in his as we walk back up the beach towards the steps.

He’s been making contact like this ever since... and it’s been nice, unexpected, and not fitting with the playboy persona I’ve held in my head. But I don’t pull away. Not until the steps, anyway.

“What happens now?” I ask when we reach the top, a little unsure what the next move is.

“Dinner. Say seven? Maybe we’ll be able to talk more than last night.”

“You weren’t the only one who wasn’t talkative.”

“Fair point.” He lifts my hand and kisses it. “I’ll see you later.” Our fingers finally part, and I drop my hand. It’s weird, we’ve known each other for so long, but it’s as if we are on a first date.

I head back to my room, feeling like I’m walking on air. If I could have scripted the date, I don’t think I could have come up with something as magical as today. And it’s not even over yet.

When I get to my room, I check my phone, annoyed that I left it behind and got no photos of the scenery or waters – nothing to cement the day.

How was your flight? Did you survive the hangover?

It's from Taylor. He doesn't know I stayed. Nobody does.

I'm fine. Recovering. Drinks at the weekend, maybe?

I fire off the message, even though I'm poised to spill on my adventures today. Taylor would die with excitement if I told him. He's over the top with everything that involves romance.

But I can't tell him. I can't tell anyone about this because it will get back to my brother. And while Eric didn't tell me to stay clear, I don't want to cause Liam any problems over a little fling.

A fling.

It tastes bitter on my tongue, but I know that's all this is.

The pain of how I felt – betrayed by Liam – for all those years would be just as acute, if not worse, for my brother if he finds out. It could ruin them.

My stupid heart starts to question and second-guess, but I shut it down. I shower, wash my hair, and put the dress from the first night back on. After all, it was the thing that started all this. I remember the look on Liam's face and how good it made me feel – how powerful. It's insane that it was only a few days ago. So much has changed so quickly. But as I think that, I know I've fallen into a trap. I was the one that said nothing would change – the one that pushed this. Did I really believe that would be possible? Or is there a part of me that tempted Liam just to see if it could happen?

It has. And now I have to live up to what I said.

Nothing can change.

Chapter Eleven

The same table is set up for dinner, and once again, Liam is waiting.

He stands when he catches me walking towards him. Of course, all of this would be easier if he didn't look like the million dollars I know is in his bank.

He kisses me, not on the cheek like a friendly greeting, but on my mouth, lasting longer than a friendly peck.

"Shall we?" I pull away and sit down.

"You look amazing in that dress."

"Thank you."

"Wine?"

"Only one." He pours.

"Here's to old friends."

We clink, and I hope that he's serious about that. "So, no more ghosting when I'm back home."

"I wouldn't do that to you, Lil." He takes my hand in his, and it suddenly feels very serious. I pull back and take another sip of my wine.

"How often do you see Grammy?" he asks out of the blue, although I'm grateful for the rescue.

"Most weeks, I suppose. If I can't visit, I call her. Why don't you visit her?" I ask back.

"I make sure she's okay. And I do visit. I'm not around as much as you, and we both know you're her favourite anyway." I smile because it's true.

"Well, maybe if you visited more, you could turn the tables." I think about her for a moment. "She's a wonderful lady. So full of life."

"She is."

“Why doesn’t she travel or do anything else that would befit a wealthy older woman? Cruise, lavish train excursions, that kind of thing?”

“She didn’t want that. She’s got her house, her health, and her garden. I know Dad had a hard time getting her to accept any of his money or support.”

That sounds like Margo.

“I do appreciate you taking the time to visit her,” Liam says rather seriously.

“Well, she was as much a part of our lives as you were. All your family were.” I won’t say the rest of the sentence because we both know what I left out. Liam and I should have been the perfect couple to bridge the family. But no.

The starters arrive, and I’m famished. We eat between a few stolen glances at each other.

“More wine?” Liam picks up the bottle and moves to pour.

“No, thanks. I’m not going to go through a hangover again.” I put my hand over my glass, stopping him from topping it up.

The conversation over the rest of dinner is easier like something has finally shifted between us, and the flow is back. We talk a little about Eric and Miriam, about Liam’s family, the films he’s watched recently, and why I bought the smallest ever tube of sunscreen with me.

It feels good.

Dangerous.

Hand in hand, we take a lap of the silent grounds.

“Don’t you just want to dive in?” he asks as we skirt around the pool.

“No. Of course not.” But it’s a lie. The twinkling candlelight, the pool lights, and the mirror-perfect surface all scream to be messed with. Maybe it’s my inner child speaking.

“Liar. Come on. I want to show you my room.”

“Oh, original line, Ford.” I laugh at him.

“You seem to like my lines, Lil.” Heat rushes to my cheeks at his comment, which is crazy considering what happened on the boat today.

Liam leads us to a part of the hotel I’ve not explored yet. It’s at the far end, completely away from where the rest of the rooms are.

“Here we are.” He opens the door, and I step inside.

“Wow, and I thought my suite was luxurious.” I look around at the acres of space. It’s like a whole apartment. Everything looks so sumptuous and extravagant. I can see similar themes to my room, but this has been dialled up a hundred percent.

He doesn’t let go of my hand as I scope out the rooms. “Do I want to know how much you charge to stay here?”

“Probably not.”

“I doubt I’d afford the basic level accommodation, let alone this. Thank you for treating me.”

“It’s my pleasure.” He strokes a strand of hair behind my ear and pulls me against him.

I don’t want to say no to him, even though it’s the right thing to do. But there’s something about Liam Ford that is hard to resist.

He leans down to kiss me, and I melt.

Gone is the frenzied race to get inside of me. Liam’s taking his time and drugging me into submission with every touch and kiss. It’s like the air around us is thick with lust, pushing us closer together.

His hands tangle in my hair, holding me in place as he kisses me so thoroughly it’s hard not to get lost in him.

But this isn’t what we’re about. This is a moment of fantasy – an opportunity that I’m happy to indulge in – that’s all. There aren’t hearts and flowers in this. It’s a pure, unadulterated attraction, and I’m good with that. I’m under no illusion that there’s anything more. Hell, it’s already been more than my wildest dreams. More will mean problems and heartache.

I can't let my heart get involved.

“What're you playing at, Ford? I thought you brought me back here for one thing only?”

“Impatient for the main event? Lil, you surprise me.”

“Oh, there's a lot about me to surprise you with.” My voice is low and husky, but I know there's absolutely nothing that I could surprise Liam with. He's probably done everything I can think of, and what's happening now is probably the wildest I've ever been.

“Oh, I'm sure of that. But, as much as it might surprise you, I'm not only after one thing tonight.” He leans in to kiss me, but I turn my head and lean up to brush my lips on his cheek.

“I don't believe you,” I whisper as I slide my hand down his chest to his trousers, needing to keep this focused on our physical connection rather than anything close to emotion.

“Lil,” he growls, but I can feel his dick is certainly enjoying every move I'm making. “Stop.” He grabs my hand and pulls it away but keeps my wrist in his grasp. “I want to take my time and savour you as you deserve.” He looks at me longingly, and it's nearly the image I'd imagined at night in my head back when I was pinning for him. But the real-life version is a lot sexier.

“That's not what this is about. It's too late to turn romantic on me now. It doesn't suit you.” My warning isn't just for his benefit. “How many times have I got to tell you to fuck me, Ford?”

His grip tightens, and I catch my breath as he pulls me against his body. “I know what you want, Lil. I can read your body, and as tempting as it is to just get inside that tight little pussy of yours, you're not going to better me. Anticipation can be a strong motivator.”

“Do your worse.”

“As you wish.” His eyes turn dark before he punishes me with a kiss that steals my breath and all rational thought.

My body is spent, and my limbs ache. After the boat exploits, I thought I'd reached the height of sexual pleasures. But I was wrong.

And worse, it felt like it was more than just sex. Like he was purposefully building a connection between us, and that, in my postcoital haze, is terrifying.

He reaches out his arm and pulls me closer to his body, and I let him, content to have his body flush against mine.

My mind races, keeping pace with my heart, which is, if I'm honest, a traitor, but I'll deal with that another day. Now I wait.

Liam's breathing evens out, and his grip around my body loosens a fraction. I ease from his hold an inch at a time and pause to ensure he doesn't wake. There's just enough light in the room to gather my clothes, and I pull on my dress, ignoring the other items, as I tiptoe toward the door.

I creep out of the room and shut the door behind me, finally letting out the breath I was holding. Careful of every step I take, I find my way back to my room and quickly pack up all my stuff. There's not much, and I swiftly shove everything into the carry-on with little care.

The overwhelming urge to escape drives me, and that's all I can listen to.

Escape and protect.

I check myself in the mirror and ignore the blushed cheeks and wide eyes. There's a mark on my collarbone from Liam's attention, but I don't cover it. I'm sure there will be other signs all over my body. He mixed his pleasure with a scary amount of pain. Not scary because I didn't like it, but because I did.

Leave.

That's what I need to do before Liam wakes.

I head to the reception desk, and despite the hotel being empty, there's a woman there.

"I'd like a taxi or a car to the airport," I state my intention but don't make eye contact, fiddling with my bags so I don't

have to see the scrutiny or confusion about my request in the middle of the night.

“Of course. A car will be around shortly.”

I look up at her. She offers a kind smile that settles my nerves. She gestures with her arm to the entrance where I got dropped off, and I take the hint, heading outside to wait.

The air is still warm despite the hour, and I listen to the night chorus of insects in the surrounding foliage.

This place really must be the best because a car pulls up within minutes despite what Liam said about the limited staff. The driver takes my suitcase, and I climb in the back.

It’s only been a couple of days, but it feels so much longer. I arrived solely to celebrate my brother’s wedding and maybe cancel out the what-ifs about Liam Ford.

Now, I’m fleeing in the middle of the night after a holiday fling with the boy who stole my heart when I was a child and forgot to give it back. But I’m making the right call. This is a fling and nothing more. A sexy, sordid, mind-altering fling, but that’s it. I said nothing would change between us, and I’m confident of keeping to that.

A fantasy checked off my list.

An experience.

Nothing more.

I straighten my spine in the car and close my eyes. It’s too dark to see any of the countryside, anyway.

Chapter Twelve

Liam

I stretch out with my arm, seeking Isla's warm body. Morning sex is definitely what I want to try next with her. I can't even remember the last time I woke up with a woman in the same bed, but it's different with Lil. Everything's different with her.

My hand reaches out further, patting the sheet, but it comes back empty. "Lil?"

No answer.

"Lil?" I open my eyes and look at the empty space in the bed next to me. "Lil?" I listen, but there's no other sound in the room or ensuite.

I pull back the covers and walk around the suite looking for her, but it doesn't take me long to realise she's not here. I open the door and head in the direction of her room.

I use the key card to open her room. "Lil?" But there's no sign of her. And no sign of any of her things.

"Fuck."

I pick up the phone and dial reception.

"Can I help?"

"Yes, where is Isla Littlewood?"

"I'm sorry, sir. She left. Asked for a car to the airport."

"What time?" I grit out through my teeth.

"About two a.m. I'm sorry, sir. I didn't realise you didn't know."

I roll my eyes and count to three. "No, it's no problem." I hang up.

Now what?

Well, this was not how I was expecting things to end.

Hell, I'm not sure I even wanted things to end – but especially not by her ditching me in the middle of the night. It's a very Ford move, and here I was, thinking we were getting to know each other again. I'd never peg her as an up-and-leave girl.

Girl.

My mind flicks over the positions I wrapped her into, the arch of her back as I licked her out, and the moan of my name as I bit her skin. Erotic and sinful, she was a fucking dream, and I didn't want her to leave.

Fuck!

I go back to my room and snatch my phone and pull up the departures list. There wouldn't be a flight out in the middle of the night. It crosses my mind to race to the airport to catch her, but I scrap the idea. Hell, I'm not that guy. I don't run after the girl. They run after me.

“Fuck.” I chuck the phone back on the bed. “Not cool, Lil. Not cool.”

With nothing keeping me on the island, I make arrangements with the staff to close properly. We're fully booked from the weekend out, and the staff could use a couple of days off after the wedding. They won't get any more until the end of the season.

There's little tying me to the other hotels I manage in Europe. They all have different names, staff, and unique points of interest. But Greece was my first and my favourite. What I told Lil was right. I'd failed a lot, but not with this. This is my favourite place in the world, and Lil has infected it with her beauty and innocence – her siren call. I'll never be able to come here and not see her walking in, stopping me in my tracks, and taking my breath away.

She was easier to walk away from when we were young. I could push aside the connection we shared. But not now.

The flight is tedious, and I'm impatient to get back to my apartment. It's been weeks since I stepped foot inside, enjoying the time on the island before the wedding.

I dump my bag in the hall and head straight to the bar to pour a drink. Vodka neat has its purposes. I pull my phone from my pocket and scroll to find Taylor's number. If Eric's right, and there's no reason he wouldn't be, Taylor will have Lil's address. It might be easier to ask for her number, but I know that I can't leave this up to chance. She's not going to have the opportunity to run out on me again.

"Taylor, it's Ford."

"Hey, long time no speak."

"Very funny." I don't usually see Taylor without the rest of the lads. Eric is the connecting force when it comes to us.

"What can I do for you, man?"

"I need a favour. And considering I just shouted you a trip to a Greek island, I'm expecting you to deliver."

"Fine. What's up?"

"I need Lil's address."

"Lil? You mean Isla?" I can hear he's messing with me. He knows who the fuck Lil is.

"Yes, who else do you think I mean?"

"I'm not sure, but considering she's meant to be your family friend—"

"Do you have her address or not?"

"Of course I do. The question is, why don't you?"

"Not now, Taylor. Just text it to me." I hang up, not in the mood to deal with Taylor's question. I'm in a terrible mood, and I don't like the thought of why.

I look at my phone, waiting for the text to come in, but the screen stays black.

"Oh, come on!" I shout at the screen, cursing Taylor.

Are you sure about this, mate?

His text stops me for a second. Am I being the selfish arsehole I normally am for wanting to go after her? I warned her, and she fucking left me. I put stuff on the line for Lil.

Hell, she's my best friend's little sister. I'm already the asshole, but I did this because I don't want to walk away. She's Lil. And she means something to me. Something important.

Send me the fucking address, Taylor. I'm sure.

Her address finally appears on my screen, and the relief I feel is unexpected.

This is the girl I've not seen for years. Yet one day with her – a fucking memorable day and night with her – and I'm desperate to see her again.

Damn the consequences.

Chapter Thirteen

My shift is uneventful, and in truth, my mind isn't even on the job. It's stuck back on a Greek island with the boy I idolised as a teenager.

Way to be Miss Independent. My scolding is pathetic and only brings down my already drab mood. I played with fire, and now I'm healing the burns.

Leaving was the right decision. I know that. I can chalk the experience up to an adventure that I'll recount to my grandkids when I'm old and grey, reminiscing about my youth.

"Scandalous, Grandma," they'll say.

The thought makes me smile, but I find it hard to picture the man standing beside me in that future – the man I'd grow old with.

I change, throw my uniform in the wash, and put on my pyjamas before filling the kettle for a cup of tea. As I hug the cup in my hand, the buzzer to the door sounds, and I roll my eyes.

It's been a long few days, and I'm not in the mood for visitors, not even Taylor. I go to the door and open it. "Look, Taylor, can we –"

I stop dead.

It's not Taylor.

"How do you even know where I live?" I scowl, cross that he's standing on my doorstep.

"Oh, come on, Lil. Is that any way to greet me?"

I shake my head and walk away.

"Can I come in at least?"

I stop and turn back, grabbing the door and barring him from coming in. "No. Not until you tell me what you're doing here, Liam."

“Nice PJs.” He looks me up and down, and I inwardly shrivel at the baby pink shorts and worn t-shirt combo on display for him.

“I’m serious. What do you want?” My molars bite together.

“Well, I thought that was obvious.”

“Nope. Elaborate.”

“I came to see you, Lil. Come on. Invite me in. After all, you’re the one that ran out on me. You don’t have a reason to be pissed.” He steps forward and grabs my waist, hoisting me up and out of the way.

“Um, what?”

“No. You’re going to let me in and hear me out.”

“Oh, really?” I look up at him, and his eyes lock with mine. Damn – those eyes.

“Yes. Don’t push me away.” His hands travel from my waist up to my neck and jaw, keeping me hostage.

“Liam—”

He silences me, slamming his lips against mine. Sensations erupt through my body like all of my nerves have come alive. He feels right. This feels right, but there’s a part of me terrified that if I let this happen, I’m in for a world of pain later on.

The kiss grows urgent – desperate – and I let myself get caught up and swept along. He presses his body against mine as his hands continue to hold me against him until he’s backed me up against the nearest wall.

It shouldn’t feel sexy, but it does, and my stomach flips at the thought of what’s coming next.

“I need to be inside of you.” His words are hot on my neck as his hands move to the dubious elastic on my shorts. He shoves them down, and they drop at my feet. A shiver rushes up my spine as Liam works the fly of his jeans. His eyes are focused on mine, and I can see the hunger in them. A hunger for me, making me feel a hell of a lot sexier than I do, standing here in pyjamas.

I nod as he kisses my throat, moving his lips over and up my jaw to my face. As he does this, his hand creeps up to squeeze my boob through my t-shirt, and then his fingers wrap around my throat. He's in total control, and my heart races for it. The pressure is just enough to raise my pulse so he can feel it. He's holding me in the palm of his hand, and all I can think is for him to hurry up and fuck me.

As if he can read my mind – or my eyes – he grabs my thighs and lifts me, shoving me against the wall for purchase.

I want it hard and fast because slow, meaningful sex with Liam will destroy me.

And he obliges.

But for a second, just as he's pushing the head of his cock to my entrance, he pauses to stare at me. His eyes sweep over every inch of my face, and I see his lips twitch into a smile.

My mind reaches out to wrap that image in bubble wrap, securing it away in the depths of my heart so I can preserve it and keep it safe and sound.

A second later, he pushes deep inside of me, and I catch my breath as he stills. My arms wrap around his shoulders as he starts to move, shoving me against the wall with each thrust forward.

“Liam ...”

“Don't beg, don't plead. I'm holding on by a thread.”

“You don't need to hold back,” I pant.

“No, but I don't want to come so fucking fast.”

I squeeze my legs around him, drawing him closer still. We find a rhythm, and it hits in all the right places to stoke my climax. “Yes. Keep doing that.”

His hands grip me tighter as he bangs me against the wall, the drive to finish now taking on a means of its own.

The thud, thud, thud echoes in my head as I close my eyes and concentrate on the touch and pressure on my clit, each

time bringing me closer and closer to orgasm. And I know how good Liam can make it. I wish it – willing it – to happen.

“Yes, there. Again. Again.” I feel my body overcome with heat and a rush of energy through my limbs as I pulse and explode around him.

“Jesus, yes!” He grunts.

He pumps into me a few more times and then stills, both of us breathing deeply.

I unwrap my legs and slide down the wall until my feet hit the floor. I pull up my shorts as Liam steps back.

Next comes the awkwardness, so I point to the bathroom on the other side of the room and vanish.

I clean myself up and wrap a dressing gown around me as if it might help protect me from Liam’s advances.

When I come back out, Liam’s found his way to the sofa, his head tipped back against the cushion.

“So,” I start.

“So.” He doesn’t lift his head to look at me, just stays where he is.

“Is that it then? Said what you’ve come to say.”

“No. We haven’t talked, and you know that.”

“Well, how about you put me out of my misery then.” My words are harsh, but I can’t help but feel defensive. The holiday fling is sitting in my apartment after some really hot sex, and I need him gone.

“I’m not going anywhere until you listen to me.” He finally lifts his head from his little rest.

“Well, get on with it, Liam. For Christ’s sake.” I cross my arms over my chest.

“Why are you making this harder than it has to be?”

“Making what harder?” I shout in frustration.

“Us.” He stares at me as if I’m the one being obtuse.

Us.

The word floats around my head. But it doesn't fill me with hope or happiness. It fills me with rage.

"You can't do this. You can't barge in here after all this time and just expect something."

"I don't expect anything. I want to see where this can go – because there's always been something between us, Lil. You know that." He reaches out for my hand and pulls me down to sit with him.

My head screams in frustration and anger. "Yes, I do." My words are soft, and I take a breath. "And you're the biggest jerk of all for waiting all this time to tell me. I might have been a girl back then, but you broke my heart. You led me on and then bailed."

"I'm sorry. I've said that. But we were young." He picks up my hand and plants a kiss on my palm.

"Yes, I was – we were. And now you've got your pick and choice of whatever girl you want. I know how you operate. You've never had a girlfriend. That's what Eric's told me."

"And he's right. I've never had one."

"Well, this isn't just a game to me. You can't just play hook up with me. I'm not doing that." I shake my head and stand, confused and mixed up because of what we've just done – or what I let happen. Again.

I'm starting to regret Greece because at least without that, I'd always have the what-if notion of how Liam might come back into my life. Now I have the unsavoury story of just being another girl in the long line of his conquests.

I pace around the small apartment.

"I don't want other girls, Lil. I want you. Only you."

I shake my head.

"Look at me, Lil." He stands and grabs me, holding my shoulders. "Look at me," he growls, and it snaps my eyes to his. "All my life, I've had the world at my fingertips, at least

according to my dad, and I thought I was happy until you walked into the middle of my rehearsal speech. Let me give you the world.”

“And what about Eric? He’ll never understand and might never forgive you.”

“You’re worth that risk, Lil. You really are.”

“But ... he’s your best friend. He’s my brother. There’s too much at stake.” I protest. What he’s saying is crazy.

“And he’s married. I said it in my speech. I thought we’d conquer the world together. What if I got it wrong? What if the one I’m meant to conquer the world with was you all along, and I just couldn’t see it.” My heart thuds in my chest, drinking in his words as if I’ve been waiting for them for a lifetime because, in a way, I have.

But this is bigger than just us. “What if you’re wrong?” My head is telling me to hold back. There’s so much to lose. And I know my heart won’t be able to take it if I say yes to Liam Ford and he leaves.

“I’m not wrong. And you know it, deep down. All I need is for you to say yes. Yes, to me and to us. The rest we can figure out together.”

He holds my gaze, and I curse him because I can feel myself weakening.

“Liam—” I start to pull away, needing distance to think this through rationally, but he holds me tight and leans down to kiss me. An all-encompassing, tender kiss that brings tears to my closed eyes. How am I meant to fight the man I’ve loved forever?

The kiss ends, but Liam looks calm and happy like he knows the decision has been made.

“What about Eric?” I ask again.

“Leave Eric to me.”

“Liam, this is a huge risk.”

“No, it’s not. I know risk, and you are anything but that. Listen to that heart of yours for once in your life. Let me make you happy.” His hands caress my cheeks, and again, the threat of tears pierces my eyes.

“There’s one person aside from Eric that we have to talk to first.” The thought of telling her brings warmth and comfort to my mind.

“Really?”

“Grammy. You have to talk to her,” I state firmly.

“For permission?” he questions.

“Not permission. I just want you to realise how important this is.” Call it self-preservation, but it was a test. Losing Liam Ford would shatter my entire world and not just my heart if this ended badly. Telling Grammy might make him think about what this means to all of us.

But all he does is smile – that dangerously sexy smile that makes me weak. “You’re on. Making you her actual granddaughter. Hell, I might get a chance at that coveted favourite grandchild spot,” he jokes, kissing me again. “Go and get dressed.” He swats me on the arse, suddenly impatient.

“I didn’t mean now.” But I can’t keep the smile on my face. He’s serious about this – about us. The butterflies in my stomach swarm, making me feel giddy.

This whirlwind of a holiday fantasy might actually turn into reality. All I have to do is say yes, which I know I will.

“Too bad. The sooner I make you mine, the better.”

Also By Rachel De Lune

THE EVERMORE SERIES

[The Evermore Collection](#)

...To Lovers Collection

[The Two Halves of my Heart](#)

[Blush](#)

[Sweeter Than Sin](#)

STANDALONES

[New Tides](#)

[Unfinished Summer](#)

[Reminiscent Hearts](#)

[The Break](#)

HART DE LUNE

The Cane Novels

[Innocent Eyes](#)

The Broderick Saga

[The Muse](#)

The House of Skin Series

[Darker Shades](#)

When Sinners Fall

About Rachel De Lune

Rachel De Lune writes emotionally driven contemporary romance.

She began scribbling her stories in the pages of a notebook several years ago and still can't resist putting pen to real paper. What ifs are turned into heartfelt stories of love where there will always be a HEA.

Her darker side can be read in her co-authored Hart De Lune books.

Rachel lives in the South West of England and has a love of coffee, chocolate, and gin. If she's not writing HEAs, she's probably reading them. She is a wife and has a beautiful daughter.

For every woman who's ever desired more.

Sign up to her newsletter to receive giveaways, news, and exclusive excerpts.

[Keep in touch](#)