



Married
B L I N D

MORGANA
BEVAN



Married

BLIND

MORGANA
BEVAN



Married
BLIND
MORGANA
BEVAN

Copyright © 2022 by Morgana Bevan

All rights reserved.

Married Blind is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are all products of the authors imagination and are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Cover Design by: [Pretty Little Design Co.](#)

Editing by Dayna Hart

ISBN: 978-1-9196091-7-1

Copyright © 2022 by Morgana Bevan

All rights reserved.

Married Blind is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are all products of the authors imagination and are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locals or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Cover Design by: [Pretty Little Design Co.](#)

Editing by Dayna Hart

ISBN: 978-1-9196091-7-1

CONTENTS

[Disclaimer](#)

[Also by Morgana Bevan](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Interview I](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Interview II](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Interview III](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Interview IV](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Interview V](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Interview VI](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Interview VII](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Interview VIII](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Interview IX](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Interview X](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Interview XI](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acting Counsel](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Also by Morgana Bevan](#)

[About Morgana](#)

[Interview XI](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acting Counsel](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Also by Morgana Bevan](#)

[About Morgana](#)

DISCLAIMER

Although *Married Blind* was inspired by an existing reality TV show, it is entirely fictional. I work in television when my characters allow, so that certain portrayals within *Married Blind* are over the top and would not take place in the real world. That's the beauty of fiction: we can marry real concepts, characters, settings and situations into something totally unique.

I am a British author, and the concept of this book is British and the Irish. Therefore, you'll find British English ahead. For my American readers, that means there will be s's where you expect z's and a few other certain words. All vocabulary used by Abi is however Americanised to reflect her upbringing and experiences.

DISCLAIMER

Although *Married Blind* was inspired by an existing reality TV show, it is entirely fictional. I work in television when my characters allow, so I know that certain portrayals within *Married Blind* are over the top and would never take place in the real world. That's the beauty of fiction: we can manipulate concepts, characters, settings and situations into something totally unique.

I am a British author, and the concept of this book is British and the hero is Irish. Therefore, you'll find British English ahead. For my American readers, that means there will be s's where you expect z's and an extra u in certain words. All vocabulary used by Abi is however Americanised to fit her upbringing and experiences.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Will it be love at first sight, or are they fated to hate?

Abi

Some people go for dinner or coffee for their first date.

I got married.

Time and opportunities to meet Mr Right are slim, since I'm working two jobs. It's ridiculous to think a reality-TV husband might be the one... but it *will* mean a break from my regularly scheduled life.

And what if he *is*?

Finn

To rehab my image — one I've cultivated for years, thank you very much — my agent has given me the hardest role I'll ever have to play. A 24-hour loving husband, on reality TV.

It's just 3 months. I can handle that. That's all it will take for my latest sexcapade to be forgiven and forgotten, and instead of finding myself on D-List, I might salvage my career.

I just have to stay strong and not fall for the perfect woman they've chosen for me.

That's the problem with reality TV. It's so hard to know when it's TV and when it's real.

Married Blind is a standalone marriage-of-convenience Hollywood ro

set in the Kings of Screen world.

hree

ut

ich —

ir

on the

osen

nd

mance

set in the Kings of Screen world.

ALSO BY MORGANA BEVAN

True Platinum Series (Rock Star Romance)

(Rhiannon)

[Chasing Alys](#) – Ryan (Resistant to Love)

[Charming Daphne](#) – Matt (Force Proximity)

[Winning Nia](#) – James (*Second Chance*)

[Enticing Mel](#) – Dan (Secret Baby)

Needing Emily – Emily (Accidental Marriage/Runaway Bride)

[Defying Ella](#) - Jared (Close Proximity / Snowed-In)

(The Brightside)

[Braving Lily](#) - Lily (Feb 2023) (Opposites Attract)

[Daring Ceri](#) - Alex (August 2023) (Second Chance)

Kings of Screen Series (Hollywood Romance)

[Between Takes](#) (Enemies to Lovers)

[Married Blind](#) (Marriage of Convenience)

[Acting Counsel](#) (2023) (Close Proximity, Forbidden)

Sign up for Morgana Bevan's mailing list:

<https://morganabevan.com/mailling-list/>

ALSO BY MORGANA BEVAN

True Platinum Series (Rock Star Romance)

(Rhiannon)

[Chasing Alys](#) – Ryan (Resistant to Love)

[Charming Daphne](#) – Matt (Force Proximity)

[Winning Nia](#) – James (*Second Chance*)

[Enticing Mel](#) – Dan (Secret Baby)

Needing Emily – Emily (Accidental Marriage/Runaway Bride)

[Defying Ella](#) - Jared (Close Proximity / Snowed-In)

(The Brightside)

[Braving Lily](#) - Lily (Feb 2023) (Opposites Attract)

[Daring Ceri](#) - Alex (August 2023) (Second Chance)

Kings of Screen Series (Hollywood Romance)

[Between Takes](#) (Enemies to Lovers)

[Married Blind](#) (Marriage of Convenience)

[Acting Counsel](#) (2023) (Close Proximity, Forbidden)

Sign up for Morgana Bevan's mailing list:

<https://morganabevan.com/ mailing-list/>

*To my determined editor, Dayna. Thanks for battling Word and helpi
meet my deadline.*

To my determined editor, Dayna. Thanks for battling Word and helping me meet my deadline.

PROLOGUE

FINN

“C’mon, Charlie. You can’t be serious.”

“I’m sorry, Finn, but you knew the consequences.” My
sighed on the other end of the phone. “I don’t enjoy playing the b
Honestly, I don’t.”

“Then don’t.”

Ordinarily, I would work to keep the slightest hint of desperatic
my voice, but all bets were off in this situation. I needed out,
Otherwise, I’d be putting a ring on a stranger for America’s reality-TV
masses in just two weeks.

Finn McCarthy didn’t do reality TV.

Finn McCarthy had multiple awards under his belt, and he didn’t s
cheesy gimmicks.

He also didn’t talk about himself in the third person.

Jesus. I’m losing it.

“You knew the deal, Finn. I warned you the last time, and you sti

hushed voice cut him off, and I sank deeper into my sofa while he
with his assistant.

“Take your time, Charlie. It’s not like you’ve tied my life to a
bomb or anything.”

He sighed again. “How long have I looked after your best interests
town?”

“Five years, but clearly you’ve lost your damn mind. Making me
gold-digging stranger and broadcasting it to millions is not looking a
best interests.”

My heart pounded and sweat beaded on my forehead. The longer
situation spiral, the more it made me panic. How could a TV show
agent you to legally marry someone? The entire industry had gone insane
ad guy alongside my agent.

“Seriously, Charlie, what if they pair me up with a right geezer, and
tries to fight the prenup?”

Not to toot my horn, but multi-award-winning actors raked in the cash
ASAP. *When they weren’t caught in the bathroom with the studio head’s
loving year-old daughter.*

Okay, so I’d fucked up royally, but did that mean they should put
with potentially life-alternating consequences because a pretty
toop to offered herself to me?

Hell no.

“Next time you decide to make an ass of yourself in public,
remember the next three months,” Charlie said. If his voice held so much
ll—” A grain of remorse, he hid it well. “I’m doing everything I can to make s

argued have a long career, Finn. How about you get on board and help me?"

"Okay." I blew out a breath, a small fizzle of hope springing to life, ticking off me. "What about one of those survivalist shows? That's got to be better for my rep than this."

Charlie chuckled. "I like the image, bud, but the world already knows me as the macho man."

I'd even eat a spider if that would help me get out of tux fittings after my shopping.

"It's not good for a well-rounded career actor." Charlie let those words drop like the dagger they were. "You told me you wanted to be the next big thing like Reynolds. Is that still true?"

I chewed my lip and wished I hadn't picked Charlie for a second. I should have picked a ruthless American. Someone born in LA. Hell, keep me and she British agent might have worked more to my favour. Instead, I was a Canadian transplant.

The second passed fast, unfortunately.

"Yes," I grumbled.

"Then trust me to do what's good for you."

I dragged a hand through my hair, biting back the desperate 'no' sign with the tip of my tongue. I did trust him. Usually.

The thought of marrying someone for damage control put a sour taste in my mouth. Add cameras, producers, and undoubtedly awkward questions, you'll see the mix, and I would turn feral.

I'd seen the original of this show. After working extra hard to keep my personal life as personal as possible in this business, I did not want it

all over billboards.

“I hate talking to reporters, Charlie. How am I meant to handle that?”

My best friends were taking bets on how fast I tanked the whole show. You honestly, they weren't wrong. I'll be standing at the altar, feet tapping, my eyes on the wrong door while I worked out my fifth exit strategy.

The point is, it made me feel dirty, and I was not in the business of doing things that aligned me with the lowest tier of Hollywood scum.

“Like you do everything else, Finn.” Charlie's faith in me rang loudly. Given my knee's uncontrollable bouncing or shaky hands, I don't deserve his misplaced faith. “It's a role.”

Everything froze: my breath, my frazzled thoughts, my hands. “Sing again.”

“You're an incredible actor. Just pick a persona and give them a name. There's no reason they have to see you unless you want them to.”

Pick a persona.

Just another job.

“Let's say, hypothetically, I can do that,” I whispered, a temporary relief flowing through my body.

“There's that confident Irish attitude I expect from you.”

I snorted. “And there's that full of Canadian bullshit I expect from you.” Shaking my head, I collapsed back against the sofa cushions. The cushions whined beneath me. “There's really nothing I can say to talk you out of this.”

“You'd need a time machine, my friend. Suck it up and take your punishment, McCarthy,” Charlie said, a thread of steel in his tone. “Never again.”

a pretty woman comes on to you, you might think better of fucking her in the very public bathroom.”

“What if my new wife is one of those pretty women?”

Charlie’s heavy sigh rattled the phone.
ing and

ABI

New Email.

Subject: The solution to ALL your problems.

I snorted. Solutions to my problems wouldn’t fit in an email. I needed a time-turner and a fourth job to help my sister clear her medical debt. I didn’t matter how many pretty vintage garments I flipped or how much commission I made as a travel agent; we needed a miracle.

Despite my doubts, I clicked on the email, a tiny grain of hope working its way to the forefront.

Did I mention the solution came with a total hottie attached?

Click the link and thank me later... with all the details.

ry calm

Ros x

frowned at the glaring neon blue web link. *Why did Ros think Productions could help me?* A small thread of common sense screamed at me for even thinking about clicking on a strange link in an email.

Maybe someone had hijacked Roseline’s account... although she communicated in links and memes.
xt time

her in a Throwing caution to the wind, I hit the link. The page loaded a
head cocked to the side, considering the brightly coloured advert before

TV SHOW SEEKING BRIDES FOR A BRAND-NEW MARRIAGE EXPERIMENT.

She can't be serious.

I had my cell in hand in a blink. *What the hell are they after?*

“Abi! Did you get my email? Omigod, isn't it amazing?” Roseline
her words merging into one excited whoosh of breath.

eeded a “Uh, possibly, but Ros, I don't know what I'm reading.” I chewed
t didn't scanning the limited details again. “What is it?”

mission “You know that TV show, *Married Blind*? I used to force you to
before I moved out.”

forming “Yes...”

“They're making a celebrity edition.” She paused, expecting a
awe, I imagined. We'd been best friends since college. We were prec
to each other at this point. “And they want perfectly normal people to
them with...” She waited again, and this time I smirked, sensi
frustration. “Get a little excited, Abi. They'll pay you to marry a ce
take part in the show for three months. It's perfect.”

“What's the catch?”

Infinity Roseline snorted. “No catch beyond the obvious, honey.”

shouted “The obvious being what? Spell it out for me.”

usually “Well, for starters, you'd be marrying a stranger.”

“Got that part.” I brushed it aside as if she could see. “Next?”

“They're celebs, so you'll probably have to move for the duration

and my show.”

me. I swallowed hard at that.

RIAGE Sure, Eva had been back on her feet for nearly a year now. She returned to her job, and her gorgeous red hair had grown back. She was happy, almost like before the diagnosis and chemo, but did that stop worrying?

he said, Of course not. I’d nearly lost my sister and my best friend. The thought of leaving her now, of vanishing to the other side of the country, even to pay off her substantial medical bills... How could I?

my lip, “Stop the internal debate,” Ros said. All the excitement drained from my voice. “You can talk to your sister, Abi. She’ll understand. Heck, she’ll beg you to go.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Hmm...”

gasp of “You already talked to her.”

dictable “Maybe...”

match “Maybe? “Ros!”

ing her “Alright! She sent *me* the link.”

leb and I gasped. Every eye in the travel shop shot toward me, custom colleagues alike. Roseline always had the worst timing. My boss’s brother in question, genuine concern flickering across her face. I shook my head and pushed back from my desk.

“Why wouldn’t she talk to me herself?” I hissed as I rushed to the backroom and away from curious ears. “Why are you the messenger?”

1 of the “How should I know?” Her attempt at innocence fell flat, and she

“Fine! Eva thought you’d feel pressured into saying yes if she asked.”

I rolled my eyes. “That’s not true.”

’d even “Isn’t it?”

he was “No.”

mean I Ros sighed again, her exasperation exploding in my ear. “Think about it for a second, Abs. I’m telling you about a fun thing, an exciting experience. Bonus, it just comes with a nice paycheque.”

to help “What’s your point?” My brows furrowed.

om her I sank into an uncomfortable plastic chair, my mind spinning enough to think I didn’t really feel the pinch of the seat. We only really used the backstore to store our coats and bags, but the bosses had set it up with chairs, a fridge and a microwave. With the lack of windows, none of us ever wanted to spend too much time inside with the door shut. Far too depressing.

“Imagine how you would have taken my pitch if Eva asked.”

I would have filled out the form already.

I dragged a shaking hand through my hair.

“So, now that you’ve listened to the specifics, are you going to take the job?”
The excitement returned threefold.

ers and I blew out a breath, indecision a heavy weight in my chest. “How much money are we talking about?”

head at “I don’t know. You’d have to fill in the form and hope you get paid what you find out.”

to the I nodded, even though she couldn’t see me.

sighed. Right at this moment, the decision had to be about me. Could I really leave my family and friends for three months? Did I want to leave my family and friends for three months?

It had been a tough couple of years, and as much as I hated to admit it, New York didn't have the same happy hold on me anymore. Too many things had happened within the city, including my sister's battle with cancer. Working three jobs also robbed any of the joy from my life.

Even if I had the hours to fall in love with the city again, constant exhaustion didn't allow for much.

Maybe a brief break from the city and my normal life would revitalize me somehow. I could get in some excitement and shake off the shadow of my sister's death, hopefully earning enough to pay off my sister's debt for good.

How could I say no to that kind of opportunity? The answer was simple: I couldn't.

"I'll do it."

do it?"

very much

checked to

narry a

It had been a tough couple of years, and as much as I hated to admit it, New York didn't have the same happy hold on me anymore. Too many bad things had happened within the city, including my sister's battle with cancer. Working three jobs also robbed any of the joy from my life.

Even if I had the hours to fall in love with the city again, constant exhaustion didn't allow for much.

Maybe a brief break from the city and my normal life would revive me somehow. I could get in some excitement and shake off the shadows while hopefully earning enough to pay off my sister's debt for good.

How could I say no to that kind of opportunity? The answer was simple. I couldn't.

"I'll do it."

INTERVIEW I

Question: How would you define your type?

Finn: I don't have a type.

Interviewer: Are you sure about that?

Finn: I wouldn't have said it if it weren't true.

Interviewer: So if I googled your red carpet company, they wouldn't be tall, blonde, and leggy?

Finn: Maybe. I don't remember.

Interviewer (handing over papers): So you didn't date these women?

Finn: Why did you print pictures? Jesus, man, that's creepy... Yes, they're all blonde supermodels. Don't you understand what image control is?

Interviewer: Does that mean none of your past companions were your type?

Finn: They were gorgeous, but I dated none of them. My agent picked them all for whatever publicity stunt he had planned.

Interviewer: So, what is your type, Finn McCarthy?

Finn: Do we really have to do this? Can't you just pick someone and send them through this entire ordeal along?

Interviewer: I'm not interested in furthering your acting career, Mr

McCarthy. I'm here to find your perfect match.

Finn: You don't really mean that. C'mon, it's all a farce. We'll all divorce in three months.

Interviewer: I can't say I agree. Now, how about you try to get on board with the process, so I can do my job?

Finn: Fine. If you trap me with a starry-eyed fan, I swear I'll make you go to hell. Find me a redhead with fire in her eyes and an interesting story.

Interviewer: That I can do.

all be

ey're

type?

them

speed

McCarthy. I'm here to find your perfect match.

Finn: You don't really mean that. C'mon, it's all a farce. We'll all divorce in three months.

Interviewer: I can't say I agree. Now, how about you try to get on board with the process, so I can do my job?

Finn: Fine. If you trap me with a starry-eyed fan, I swear I'll make your life hell. Find me a redhead with fire in her eyes and an interesting story.

Interviewer: That I can do.

CHAPTER ONE

ABI

D-Day had arrived, and nerves had claimed me as their bitch. Amid the unbearable heat of Los Angeles, the cameraman and producer huddled in the corner adjusting their equipment, the assistant setting up lights, I'd be lucky if I didn't collapse.

Just getting married to a total stranger for TV. No pressure at all.

Eva and Ros gave me awkward thumbs-ups from the doorway. I saw them grinned at me, excitement dancing in their eyes. Side by side they looked like night and day dressed to match, Eva with her bobbed auburn hair and Ros with her raven pixie cut, in pink, Grecian-inspired bridesmaid dresses — Ros's claimed they'd be the next trend. The true angel was perched on my shoulder. Punk-rocker Ros had not been unimpressed when the producer handed her it.

I tried to return their excitement, revel in their support, but it felt like I was being crushed. Right along with my hair.

The hairdresser had spent a good hour fighting my curls. She'd started out so sunny and welcoming. All of that had morphed fairly quickly. Now, I'

her glaring at a fizzing chunk.

“How does an updo sound?” she asked, forcing a smile back to her

Her southern accent came through stronger than it had before. I twitched at her frustration before I schooled myself for the incongruous reaction. Just because her efforts would cause this nerve-racking train speed didn’t mean I should be unkind.

“I’m good with that.”

“Is that air conditioning unit for show?” she snapped at an assistant

He skittered away, muttering promises to fix it. She shoved her hand back with the back of her hand, grimacing at the sweat transfer.

“If you expect her hair to stay put, someone should fix the heating, and” I shouted, glaring at the producer.

My lips twitched again, and she smirked at me.

“Nothing happens if you don’t light a fire under them.”

“Is that an inside tip?” I asked. A genuine smile claimed my lips for the first time since I’d set foot in the building.

When we’d arrived outside the bland white hotel, Eva, Ros, and the lesmaids looked at each other in absolute confusion. AA TV show with celestial devil could have sprung for a hell of a lot more.

And then the producer, Tyler, whisked us through a back door and into the most opulent hallway I’ve ever seen. Colourful art déco mouldings outfitted every corner of the ceiling. Intricate pillars lined the hallway.

Then he opened the door to a team of beauticians who plucked and pinched us to the nth degree while they briefed us on the day’s events. To say it was a distracting would have been an understatement.

The Élysee Atelier lace mermaid dress I'd picked out weeks ago lapped at my lips. In the corner, taunting my sweaty face with its beauty. I worried for all those minutes back in New York when I tried the dress on that it would be delicate and the train too long.

to gain *What if it came across as over the top? What if all the other brides for neck-to-toe lace, too? Was the plunging neckline too revealing on national television?*

Thankfully, Eva quickly slapped the camera-shy insecurities out of me. She'd reminded me, in no uncertain terms, that everything about my experience needed to be my choice, including my clothing, hair, and nails. So I chose the dress I loved and quit worrying about it.

at," she "Oh, aren't you an angel?" the hairdresser gushed as a runner set up next to me.

I blinked at her sudden change in mood, but then I spotted an eye in the corner. Her backhanded Southern charm made sense. I needed to spend more time on the outside of New York.

Tyler clapped his hands when my hair finally took shape and I had caressed my glistening skin. Then there was a camera in my face again. "How's everything going here?" He smiled wide, working over my hair.

put me at ease. Seated as I was, he towered over me, even though he only stood a couple of inches on me normally. He pushed his floppy brown hair out of his face, grimacing. "I really should have gotten my hair cut before this."

Bora Bora. We'll both be suffering in the heat soon enough." He flashed an amused smile. "Mind if I grab a couple of thoughts before you head out?"

He'd done everything he could to help me chill out. Unfortunately,

hung in only thing that would put me at ease was a shot of bourbon
of five understandably frowned on that kind of thing at 11 AM.

be too “Sure.” I tried for sunny, but the word came out as more of a croak

“Some water?” Tyler asked. His gaze already scoured the room, se
es went for an assistant. “Ethan, grab Abi a bottle of water from the fridge.”

ing for He settled down on a chair across from me, leaning forward
notebook clutched in his hands and an eager gleam in his eye
of me. lightweight black suit creased in the wrong places, but he didn’t care.

ut this “Liam here will shadow you until the ceremony.” He nodded toward
akeup. dark-haired guy hidden behind the camera. “But you won’t need to tal
camera, anymore. Act naturally, and talk to your family and friends. If
ip a fan excited or nervous, don’t be afraid to experience it.”

“Sure.”

roll and The word tripped off my tongue, but did I truly mean it? No matt
re time much he briefed me, or how patient they were, it still felt weird to ca
flashing red dot of the camera from the corner of my eye.

ool air *You’ll get used to it. Chill.*

l. “Once we’re done, I’m going to slip out and check in on your g
time to His brows danced, eyes shining with mischief. “Make sure he’s l
nly had handsome for you.”

ir back I chuckled, and he grinned, nodding at me encouragingly. Some
before tension drained from my body for the first time since they had whis
hed me into the bridal suite.

ad into “Ready for some quick questions?”

ely, the “Fire away.” I nodded, shifting in my seat and tightening the tie

. Theyrobe.

“Okay, remember what I said, answer in full sentences and count before you respond.”

Satisfied, Tyler glanced at the cameraman, lifting his chin. The r flicked on and Liam nodded.

“Okay, Abi, are you excited to meet your groom?” Tyler ask es. His smile encouragingly as I hesitated.

“I—”

“Take your time if you need to think about the answer.”

Was I excited? My hands shook, and a lump kept trying to form throat. But was that excitement or terror?

The same cycle of doubts had run through my head for weeks went through the process of joining the show. Yet, despite the r ter how questions about my sanity, I hadn’t pulled out. Could I thank my drive atch the my sister for that? The answer should have been an immediate yes, but

“I’m nervous to meet my groom,” I said, focusing on Tyler rather t camera lens. “This might be the riskiest thing I’ve ever done. I’d be a s groom.”wreck if I didn’t have my best friend and sister with me.” I swallowed lookingmy focus shifted to their smiling faces, urging me on.

“You got this,” Eva mouthed. She leaned her head against the doo e of the moisture forming in her blue eyes — identical to mine.

I returned my attention to Tyler, and he nodded. Between the them, I somehow found a strength I sorely needed.

“But I am excited. Excited to meet him, excited for a couple of mc on mynew experiences and a break from my normal.” My smile turned shy

resisted the urge to cover my face. “I’m hoping it’ll be a refreshing
t to ten from what I’ve gotten used to in New York.”

“Perfect.” Tyler flicked through his notebook, scanning a list of qu
ed light I could barely read. The man had terrible handwriting. “How do y
about your sister walking you down the aisle?”

ed. He I sucked in a breath. I knew the question would come. They’d war
plenty of times. Yet it still hit me hard in the gut. I’d naively hoped
wait a couple of weeks before making me talk about the painful things

“I’m so grateful to my sister for agreeing to walk me down th
today.” That lump threatened to choke me again, and I paused, re
i in my myself to say the hard words that usually turned me into a puffy-eyed

I’d argued with Tyler for weeks about leaving my parents out of
while I sad stories make for great TV. In the end, I’d had to concede defeat.

peated “When I was a kid, I always thought, when the day came, it woul
to help dad...” I glanced down at my fists twisting the material of the robe. /
t...

deep breath and I refocused on Tyler. “But our parents died in a car
han the few years ago. A drunk driver ran a red light at a busy intersecti
shaking caused a massive pile-up. Eva and I lost them both in one night, and w
hard as the other has had ever since. We’d do anything for each other.” In

embarrassing ourselves on national television. “I’m not sure I could
rframe, without her support, honestly.”

“Excellent, Abi. Okay, one more and I’ll leave you to finish
two of ready.” When I nodded, he jumped straight in. “Why do you want to
celebrity like this?”

onths of My eyes widened. Talk about starting with the hard questions. M
/, and I raced at the wildly incorrect assumptions people could make from my

change— from my participation in the show. How the hell did I answer a question like that without sounding like a gold digger?

“I don’t know who I’m marrying today, but I can’t wait to meet you.” My mind raced as I scrambled for more.

You’ve got this, sugarplum, a small voice whispered at the back of my mind.

It sounded suspiciously like my mother, the last words she said before she died, encouragement on my first day at a new job.

Despite the pang of sadness the reminder sent through me, it set me readying too.

“It doesn’t matter to me they’re famous. I’m looking for a person. Some chemistry would be nice, but above all, I hope we get along.” I glanced at Eva, desperate for some validation that I hadn’t just made a mess of it, but I be myself. She waved her hand at me, urging me to keep going. “I work in New York. Three jobs, just to keep the bills paid. Opportunities to crash and burn have dwindled. I might be naïve to hope for a real connection and that’s what I want more than anything.”

I probably shouldn’t have admitted that part, opening myself to rejection and all that. But I didn’t want to lie. The prospect of someone to truly get *me* filled me with tingles of delight. Gimmick show or not, I wanted this to work, so I’d give it my all.

“That was brilliant, Abi.” Tyler clapped, his hazel eyes sparkling with excitement. “I’ve got all I need for now. You relax, finish getting ready.” He stood, glancing around the room as if searching for someone. “Ethan’s here if you need anything at all. He’ll even pop the bubbly in the other room for you.”

question “How did I miss a bottle of booze?” Ros muttered before vanishing
the doorway.

them.” Tyler left quickly, while Ethan scrambled into the other room after

“I’m perfectly capable of popping champers, kid.” Her disgruntle
of my carried, and I bit my lip, feeling marginally sorry for the assistant.

“You all good, Abs?” Eva asked. She crouched down in front of
l to me brow creased with concern. “It’s not too late to get out of this if you
your mind. I can figure out another way to pay down the debt.”

bled me I bit back the ‘no’ that immediately sprang to the tip of my tongue
took her hands, smiling at her instead. Staring into her almost identical
genuine felt like I was reassuring myself instead of my baby sister. Her auburn
long.” I flowed down her back, framing her pale skin and striking blue eyes.

fool of With the amount of concern creasing the skin around her eyes, I’d
a lot in her to be tugging at her hair by this point. Hell, I expected *myself*
meet Mr tugging at my hair. With both of us pinned up in some fashion and we
on, but least a can of hairspray, it wouldn’t be advisable to give in to old hab
hairdresser still lurked in the shadows, waiting for last-minute touch-up

up to “I know, but I want to do it.” I squeezed her hands. “Yes, I’m not
finding but wouldn’t you be if you were marrying someone you’d never met?”

ky TV *Even if I hope it turns into more than an arranged marriage.*

At the thought, my nerves morphed into a tremble of excitement.

with his *The love of my life could be just behind those doors.*

ly.” He “I wouldn’t be in this position, Abs.” She frowned. “You always were
will be adventurous one.”
er room

Once upon a time, maybe. Before our parents died, and I had to talk

ing from making sure Eva made it through college.

Back then, I'd had dreams of travelling. Spending a year in Paris. Milan to continue my fashion studies. Walking in the footsteps of some of the great designers who had left their mark on the best industry in the world.

Reality made it all impossible in the end. I couldn't exactly spend time here as an underpaid, overworked fashion intern. I had Eva to support. I lived in one of the most expensive cities in North America.

Maybe the next three months should be about me, instead of us.

If I could shove the pang of guilt the thought produced into a heavy box.

"Why the hell are you two not in here consuming champers with us?"

Ros shouted from the other room. "We have thirty minutes before the makeup artist turns up. Do you think they'll let us drink after that?"

Eva and I smirked at each other. "No," we called back in unison.

"Exactly. So get your asses in here!" Ros poked her head around the door, her eyes sparkling, and the bottle dangling from her fingers. "Have you ever had this expensive shit? I'm going to need to take a bath in it. It tastes that good."

Chuckling, I took Eva's offered hand and stood. We followed Ros into the other room.

ere the

ce over,

making sure Eva made it through college.

Back then, I'd had dreams of travelling. Spending a year in Paris and Milan to continue my fashion studies. Walking in the footsteps of some of the great designers who had left their mark on the best industry in the world.

Reality made it all impossible in the end. I couldn't exactly spend years as an underpaid, overworked fashion intern. I had Eva to support and we lived in one of the most expensive cities in North America.

Maybe the next three months should be about me, instead of us.

If I could shove the pang of guilt the thought produced into a heavy-duty box.

“Why the hell are you two not in here consuming champers with me?” Ros shouted from the other room. “We have thirty minutes before the make-up artist turns up. Do you think they'll let us drink after that?”

Eva and I smirked at each other. “No,” we called back in unison.

“Exactly. So get your asses in here!” Ros poked her head around the door, her eyes sparkling, and the bottle dangling from her fingers. “Have you seen this expensive shit? I'm going to need to take a bath in it. It tastes that good.”

Chuckling, I took Eva's offered hand and stood. We followed Ros back into the other room.

CHAPTER TWO

ABI

I thought the nerves were bad before. I'd been wrong.

Eva and I stood before two enormous doors waiting for a word from the producer. Liam hovered nearby, his camera fixed on us, while I tried very hard not to fidget. My fingers dug into the handle of my bouquet.

“Remember what we talked about, Abs,” Eva muttered, her voice stern but coaxing. Her hands rested on my shoulders, squeezing and forcing me to stay upright. “Say the word and we bounce.”

I nodded, but kept my mouth shut. Sure, my voice had skipped off my own jolly, but that didn't mean I had to follow. No, I'd made a commitment and I refused to break it.

“I've got this,” I whispered, repeating my mother's encouragement. She forced my shoulders back, lifted my chin and relaxed my death grip on the bouquet.

Eva studied me for a second before nodding. She released her grip and turned towards the doors. Beyond them, strings started up and my stomach flipped.

“Then let’s get this show on the road.” Eva held out her arm, offering a soft smile.

“Just follow your instincts now, Abi.” Tyler approached me, expression plastered across his features. He gathered the veil she insisted on, lifting it over my head. “Go knock him dead.”

My lips felt strained, trying to hold a smile in place while butterflies amok in my stomach.

Tyler leaned in, whispering in my ear. “I’m confident you can handle him, by the way. Don’t hide that fire from him and you’ll ace this.”

My brows drew together at the tip. *What on earth did that mean?*

Before I could ask, the veil fell into place and Tyler rushed out of the doors. Two seconds later, they swung open on silent hinges. The room beyond was bathed in white light. They had set the chairs up to fold around a central altar, which looked like something out of a Greek myth, columns holding up a canopy of greenery. Arched doorways surrounded the entire space, all of them covered with flowing white sheets.

So many faces swivelled toward me, their expressions blurring before the light and my frantic mind. My breath froze in my lungs, but I was moving by sheer force of will.

“Oh my god, Abi.” Eva pinched me. “He’s gorgeous,” she hissed.

My body tensed up for an entirely different reason.

He stared at me, a small smile tugging at his lips. He’d restrained his black hair at his neck, but rogue curls broke free from the tie, falling over his face and making me think of Jane Austen novels. I swallowed my amusement fast when his piercing sapphire eyes scanned down my body. His hands clenched at his sides, but otherwise, he gave nothing away.

ring me “Yeah, he is, isn’t he?” I whispered back, forgetting that they’d attached a microphone to my dress and the producers could hear every word.

a calm A navy suit and grey waistcoat hugged his trim build while a pink rose on his lapel tying him into the sea of pink flowers surrounding us. Not even the pink rose could ruin the rugged edge that emanated from him.

lies ran “I call dibs on the blond next to him.” She chuckled. “Make sure you tell Ros. She’ll be pissed.”

handle I grinned at her, although she couldn’t see it beneath all the lace and veil.

Three guys stood at his side, nearly all of them wearing matching suits and navy waistcoats. One of them paired the look with a tartan tie. Together, they looked like an ad for a tailor. Or a rom-com.

round a All of them were equally hot and all staring at me with open excitement. *What was that about?*

ded the Ros stood on the opposite side of the altar, rather indiscreetly tilted her head towards the men. It seemed Eva already had a fight on her hands between dibs.

I kept Before I knew it, Ros took my bouquet and Eva handed me off to a mystery man. His hand engulfed mine, smooth but firm, and instead of listening to the officiator, I stared into his eyes, daydreaming about the things he could do to me with those hands.

ned his “Ms Johnson, are you okay?” The officiant asked me.

around I forced the images from my mind, grateful for the veil hiding my flushed cheeks and the glaze in my eyes. My focus jumped to the officiant, his white brows rising in question.

ached a “Yes, I’m fine. Sorry, carry on.”

He nodded to my soon-to-be husband. “You may unveil your bride,
rose sat McCarthy.”

ot even McCarthy. Abigail McCarthy. I let my new name roll around my
liked it.

you tell He reached for me, his hands steady and his focus unwavering on
fingers grazed my neck as he drew the veil up and over my head. I
e of the suppressed the shiver just one sweep of his skin against mine generated

At least you won’t have to worry about attraction.

ig navy His piercing eyes roamed my face as the veil settled down my back
an kilt. “I’m Finn,” he whispered.

Did he have a foreign accent?

tement. I held in my squeal of delight. I’d always loved a good accent. C
get enough of British TV shows. Eva had banned me from watching C
ing her Thrones in our flat. Apparently, I ruined it for her.

nds for “What’s your name, *dotey?*”

to my “Abi,” I said, my voice croaking.

thead of The corner of his lips twitched. His fingers flexed against th
e things pressing against my bare shoulder.

“Hi, Abi.” My name *danced* off his tongue. “Are you ready
married?”

burning I nodded, my ability to speak lost to the shiver of need rushing do
s bushy spine from one touch. He stepped back, glancing toward the officiant.

Besides that slip of amusement, I couldn’t read the man. No matt
hard I studied him, his expression didn’t shift. It remained locked

expressionless mask — a pleasant one, but a mask all the same.

ide, Mr Clearly, they'd given me an actor.

Whether that would be a blessing or a curse remained to be seen.

mind. I “Mr McCarthy, have you prepared vows for your bride?”

“Yes,” he said.

me. His His friend handed him a small sheet of paper. Finn cleared his
[barely glanced at the sheet once, and pocketed it.

d. “I wasn't expecting to get married, much less to a stranger...”

6. The vows passed by in a blur while I sank into my head, my lips
on autopilot. The production had provided me with vows. Had they d
same for Finn? And if they did, did the lack of emotion in his eyes n
didn't agree with a word of it?

ouldn't Why hadn't I realised that a show like *Married Blind* meant nothin
ame of to the celebs than an ego and image boost?

Nothing serious would ever grow between us.

ie veil, That shouldn't send a pang of regret through me. I just wanted the
and a break from my boring life. Why did it matter to me if Finn only
me to further his ego?

Because you're a romantic at heart?

to get “Do you, Finn McCarthy, take Abigail Johnson to be your l
wedded wife? To have and to hold from this day forward, for better
own my worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to ch
long as you both shall live?”

ter how “I do,” Finn said, his voice deepening and his gaze fixed on me.

l in an The officiant turned to me, and I swallowed hard.

Last chance to jump ship, Abi. Decide quick.

“Do you, Abigail Johnson, take Finn McCarthy to be your lawfully wedded husband? To have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as you both shall live?”

I turned, searching for Eva and Ros as if the entire room had frozen in my throat, stood behind me, tears shimmering in their eyes. Both of them wore smiles that made my heart twist painfully.

How could I turn back when they looked that happy?

moving
one the
Simple. I couldn't.

mean he
turning me back to him. “Abi?” Finn’s hand grazed my arm. His fingers closed around my hand, turning me back to him. “Are you okay?” he whispered, his face close to mine while his body blocked me from most of the prying eyes in the audience. “If you don’t want to do this, you don’t have to. We can end this now.”

money
wanted
“I’m fine,” I lied. I turned to the officiant and Finn backed away, his mask slipping for all of a second. His lips compressed into a thin line. I had no clue what that meant. “I do.”

“The rings, please?” The officiant glanced between Finn’s fingers and mine.

awfully
r or for
erish as
Ros placed a thick piece of gold in my palm.

“Finn, please place the ring on Abi’s left ring finger and repeat after me.”

Finn took my hand, the ring poised at the tip of my finger as he listened to the Officiant list off the vows, while two cameramen circled us.

“I give you this ring, in token and pledge of my constant faith and love, as long as you both shall live.”

love.” Finn paused, his lip twitching again.

awfully His friends weren’t so circumspect. One covered his mouth, or for another outright grinned. Okay, so the words were extreme for a rehearsal show.

“With this ring, I thee wed.”

n. They The ring slid onto my finger, and despite the absurdity of it, my heart skipped a beat. *Yours would too if you had those eyes gazing into you* didn’t think too hard about it, I could almost trick myself into believing the flicker of emotion in his eyes meant more than it did.

“Abi, please place the ring on Finn’s left ring finger, and repeat after me.”

I followed his instructions, pausing when the producers demanded I repeat myself when needed. The entire exchange probably took ten minutes long because we kept having to stop for the cameras.

“Finn and Abigail, you have given and pledged your love and faithfulness, each to the other, and have declared the same by joining together, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the State of California, I now pronounce you husband and wife.” The officiant turned to Finn, and I was playing with the edges of his lips. “You may kiss your bride.”

Finn’s gaze bounced from him to me, to the camera over my shoulder and back to me. His lips tightened, but he stepped forward. His hands pressed against the lace bodice of my dress, grazing my skin yet again on their way to my lower back. This time, he stood too close to miss me shiver, and I tightened as he lowered his head. My hands skimmed up his chest, determined to find for some kind of support. He caught one hand, holding it still against my pounding heart.

Then his lips pressed against mine. My eyes fluttered shut, and I realized

the nerves coursing through my body. His trimmed beard grazed against my sensitive skin, focusing all of my attention on him. *As if it could be anything else.*

His fingers flexed against my back, right at the very edge of the navel, bridging the gap between my ass and the dress's open back.

His heart jumped into overdrive as he deepened the kiss. For a second, I got lost in the sensation. The cameras and the crowd faded away. I forgot that I'd only just met this guy. We were just two people, enjoying a mind-blowing kiss filled with possibilities.

And just like that, every nerve evaporated.

led and
wice as

ve and
hands,
I now
a smirk

der and
glided
way to
his grip
perate
inst his

released

the nerves coursing through my body. His trimmed beard grazed against my sensitive skin, focusing all of my attention on him. *As if it could be anywhere else.*

His fingers flexed against my back, right at the very edge of the material, bridging the gap between my ass and the dress's open back.

His heart jumped into overdrive as he deepened the kiss. For a second, I got lost in the sensation. The cameras and the crowd faded away. I forgot that I'd only just met this guy. We were just two people, enjoying a mind-blowing kiss filled with possibilities.

And just like that, every nerve evaporated.

CHAPTER THREE

FINN

I should have pecked Abi on the lips and backed away. I kept scratching the same thing at myself, over and over again.

Yet, I couldn't stop.

Couldn't release my grip on her soft skin, couldn't pull myself away. I got lost in the taste of her, in the almost timid caress of her lips against mine. One soft gasp from her as I deepened the kiss, and I needed no more. My hesitation melting away was like catnip.

It consumed all of me. An on-camera kiss never did that. No matter how much it was, I always had control.

Jesus. When did I turn into this person?

Cheers and applause invaded, pushing my common sense to the forefront and reminding me of my surroundings. Renewed determination filled me. This kiss could be that off the charts when it shouldn't, the next three would be a piece of cake. I'd play the perfect husband for the cameras, save my career, and then divorce her and be done.

I broke the kiss and forced my mask back into place. *Nothing to see*

This Irishman isn't the slightest bit affected. Which would be a lie, but I needed to know.

And then I focused on her again, and my control almost slipped.

She gazed at me, her lips swollen, her baby blue eyes glazed, her cheeks flushed. The need to make her look at me like that with her auburn hair spread out on my pillow, mussed from a good fucking, took me by surprise.

Christ on a bike. What is wrong with me?

Caught in a daze of my own, I took her hand and turned us to face the raucous crowd. I led Abi through them, aiming for the door.

beaming

People threw confetti over us, shouting their congratulations with their eyes. *Where did they get these people?*

Aside from Shaun, his fiancée, my friends, and my agent, no one else on the guest list mattered to me. Charlie had better skip the reception if he's going to murder him for inviting the studio execs.

re. Her

“Are you alright?” Abi asked as we reached the door.

ter who

“Fine,” I growled.

refront

“Okay...” She hesitated, her fingers twitching in my grip. She leaned in to kiss me, and for a second I thought she planned to kiss me again. “I was just mumbling to yourself, so if you don't want them to broadcast it, zip it.”

me. If a

months

, rehab

The doors opened, and I did just that. I needed to remember they were perpetually mic'ed. The producers would have zero concerns about my inappropriate comments for their show if it increased the drama.

re here.

So, for the next three months, I needed to break a habit of a lifetime and put on a full-time bloody show.

no one *Shite in a bucket. What have I done?*



The producers thankfully abandoned us for a couple of n
and her Unfortunately, a camera followed, hanging back in the corner
vibrant room like we wouldn't notice the scrutiny.

I hadn't wanted to be in the situation in the first place, but e
everything felt awkward. The idea of not knowing what to say to a
woman didn't sit right. It wasn't how I rolled.

One look at Abi, chewing her lip, probably thinking the same thin
that weird pang of need returned. I wanted to protect her from all of th
seemed so innocent, and bizarrely, I wanted her to stay that way.
tears in

Hollywood had a nasty habit of gobbling up people like her and
them out a couple of months down the line, irrevocably broken.
else on

I wouldn't let that happen to her.

*But you plan to spit her out yourself, when you're done with her, j
so what does it matter?*

I ignored that concerning thought. For the moment.

"I can get the cameraman thrown out for a couple of minutes if yo
'You're a second." The offer tripped off my tongue.

"It's okay. I guess we just need to get used to it," she said, her so
had me sweeping over me like the smoothest bottle of whisky.

Shite.

Her fingers pressed against my forearm, urging me to turn around
me and gave in. The guys were going to have a field day with this bullshit.

into her eyes, searching for even a tiny sign that she wasn't the gold c

feared. Or worse, an attention whore hoping to get her five minutes of fame with the gossip rags. How could someone that sweet and innocent-hiding that kind of shallowness?

Maybe she isn't hiding anything.

I almost snorted at the thought.

My gaze roamed down her lace-encased body. I hadn't been able to tear my eyes away from her when she'd walked through the doors, her veil covering the low reveal of her dress and tight fit hugging her body all the way up to her knees before it flared out across the floor. It had been a long time since I'd had to worry about getting a hard-on in public, but one glance at her and I lost control.

Christ, did they have to pair me with such a fine thing?

"Are you sure you're okay? You look stressed." She chewed her lower lip, that damn need sprung up again, only this time I wanted to stop her from torturing her lips. *Fuck.*

"I'm fine. Just a weird, high-stress situation." I shrugged. "Nothing really." My gaze flicked to the wanker with the camera pointed at us.

"This is weird, right?"

"Abso-bloody-lutely," I grumbled.

"So you don't make a habit of meeting women at the altar?" I chuckled.

"Christ, no."

"So I'm your first wife?"

"I should hope so."

I let her see some of my true horror at the thought. She snorted.

of fame scrambled to cover her mouth, her eyes widening. I didn't hold my grip
looking "What about you? Do you make a habit of meeting men for the first time
wearing a wedding dress?"

Her expression fell.

The desire to put that bright spark back in her eyes burned hot. After
to tear years in LA and I'd avoided therapy. It might be time to get my head
I barely "I guess we should get to know each other before the producers come
the way and grill us."

He since "That sounds like a plan." She nodded, an odd note of relief creeping
er and I her voice. "So you're from Ireland."

"Northern Ireland."

lip and Her brow furrowed. "There's a difference?"
er from I licked my lips, biting back my instant indignation. One day, it
stop surprising me that Americans didn't know that Ireland was divided
most of them didn't even know that England wasn't the only country
ng new UK.

"Yes, a big difference, but let's not ruin our wedding day with poli-

"Okay, so you're Northern Irish and an actor. How did you end up
US?"
?" She

"Necessity mostly. I wanted to do big things and there's more opportunity
here." I shrugged, hoping that would be the end of it. Her gaze re-
fixed on me, eager for more. I sighed and continued, "I moved out
soon as I graduated from drama school. Met my best friends a few years
Now, I never want to leave."

led and Except some days, I craved something more than the fakery

n back. Something more real.

rst time “How old are you?” she asked, her gaze sweeping down my boots. She could read me like a tree.

“Twenty-nine. You?”

ll these “Twenty-six.” She smirked when I said nothing. “No quips or drunk. someone like me being single at my age?”

come in My brows climbed. “Do people seriously say that to you?”

“All the time.” She nodded and some of the confidence wilted out of her. “Made it kind of easy to stop dating, honestly. Although I never understood what they meant by someone like me.”

I chuckled. “Sure you don’t.”

Her head tilted to the side, eyeing me with confusion. No way in hell would she not know. It had to be an act... yet the confusion didn’t clear, and she didn’t comment on it again. Every woman I’d ever met would have used the line to fish for compliments. Abi just turned away, studying the room with interest. How intriguing.

tics.” “Anyway, that’s pretty much my life story. Yours is probably more interesting.”

She chuckled without turning back to me. “I’m not sure that’s remotely true.”

mained “Well, tell me yours, and let me be the judge.” I grinned as she turned back to me, her brows risen in question. “We can’t compare unless you share.”

She sighed. “You’re right. Sorry.” Her gaze dropped to the floor of LA, skittering over to the camera and back to me again. “I just don’t norma

about it. It's not exciting."

ly as if A beautiful woman who didn't want to talk about herself. The r
continued to grow. Despite my common sense, she'd piqued my intere

about "I don't need it to be exciting, Abi." I flashed my classic Hol
smile, the one that usually resulted in a woman wrapped around my
and on her way to my bed in under a minute. "Just give me the truth."

Not that I wanted Abi in my bed...

of her. *Liar.*

erstood She stared at me for a while, her throat working, and her cheeks fl
fought a triumphant grin. No need to scare her off or give any
impression that I could take satisfaction in dirtying her mind.

all does "Fine. It's not a happy story though, fair warning." She went to d
and she hand through her hair but froze before she could damage whatev
sed that everything in place. "I'm a travel agent, and I flip vintage pieces that I
m with thrift stores on the side. I don't really have a lot of spare time in Nev
and when I have any, I'd rather spend it in the flat with my sister and
y more sorting through new stock..."

's even I listened as she explained her jobs, the surprising characters wh
their weekends wandering around their local pharmacy where she wor
extra hours. I avidly devoured the sparkle in her eye as she talked ab
sister and her love for fashion.
tensed.

re notes I shouldn't have cared and shouldn't have been filing the info
away for some future unknown need, captivated by the sweet curl of h
and the slight blush that claimed her cheeks when she talked too fast.

' before "What did you mean it wasn't a happy story? None of that was sad
lly talk

“I...” She pressed her lips together, hesitation written across her face. I seriously needed to get a grip on the intrigue. The information matter, couldn’t matter.

“You what?” I asked, losing the battle of common sense yet again.

“Nothing.” She shook her head. “Slip of the tongue.”

“Okay.”

There would be one benefit to this match, at least. She couldn’t lie. It was an open bloody book. Sadness and indecision flashed across her face. If lit up by a beacon.

“Do you have any hobbies?” she asked, a forced edge to her voice.

“I don’t get a lot of free time, but I dive and surf whenever I have the chance.” I pressed my lips together, fighting the polite need to reciprocate. “You?”

“I already mentioned fashion.” She shrugged. “I used to enjoy going to concerts, but mostly I just read now.”

“Do you have any favourite bands?”

“A couple. I don’t get the chance to go to shows much anymore. I never miss Marable when they play New York.”

A jolt of amusement hit me, testing even my control of my facial expression. She couldn’t have picked a band not fronted by one of my friends?

“So, an actor. Will I have seen anything you were in?” She breezed through the question.

I shrugged. “Depends if you like action films, I guess.”

“Ah. Not really.” She grimaced.

A fucking grimace should not have been attractive. I’d well and truly lost my damned mind. Maybe Shaun could recommend someone.

ce. “I’m more of a romantic comedy person. Sorry.”

I didn’t “Don’t be.” My focus moved to the cameraman camped out in the
“Do we need to stay here?”

“I think so.” He straightened up and shrugged. “Sorry, man.”

Grand, just bloody grand.

“Then can you get a PA in here, or that gobshite Tyler?”

lie. Abi I ground my teeth as I watched him place his camera down, moving
face as glacial pace. He picked up a radio, muttering his call too low for me to

“Does it bother you that much that I haven’t seen one of your m
Abi asked, her voice scratchy with confusion.

can.” I I glanced at her, working extra hard to keep my expression neutral.
”

“No, it doesn’t make a difference to me.”

oga and “Then why are you suddenly annoyed?” Her brows rose and her
sharpened.

“They’re dawdling and wasting our time.” I crossed my arms, the t
e, but Isuit jacket pulling at the seams. The faster I could get the monkey-s
the happier I’d be. “The less time they have to ask our friends a
muscles. questions, the better.”

I didn’t want to think about the shit Shaun, Nathan, and Jackson
l on. share just to wind me up. No one knew me better than the three of
couldn’t imagine anything more dangerous. Especially when the t
them knew how much I hated this situation.

uly lost Abi’s face paled.

“It’s a terrifying thought, isn’t it?” I smirked.

She nodded hard before making a beeline for the cameraman.

“Can we get out of here now? I really need to talk to my best friend in the corner.” shrill of panic underlined her rushed words.

The cameraman shook his head, smiling in a bullshit attempt to be sympathetic. I could see right through him. There would be a process to the entire thing. Keep us contained, interview the family and friends, introduce us, then announce our entrance and get all the angles.

I might have watched an episode or two...

ing at a
hear.

No wonder they scheduled the ceremony so early in the day.

ovies?”

My focus drifted while the cameraman radioed the rest of the crew. I was trailing down her exposed back to a biteable ass contained in tight lace. I didn’t want to resist her so badly, I could have found some fucking interesting ways to pass the time. I almost groaned at the mental image of my hands on her.

er tone

Why’d she have to choose a tight-fitting torture dress?

I’d bet my Oscar that it had been Tyler’s idea. That weasel knew how to get tailored under my skin somehow.

suit off,
awkward

“They’re nearly done,” the cameraman said, as if that was some consolation. “And Ethan’s grabbing you drinks. He should be in soon.”

it would
them. I

Abi spun to face me, outright panic blanketing her expression.

“They’re hardly going to sacrifice you. It’ll be fine.”

hree of

“You haven’t met Ros.” The panic didn’t recede. “She can spin a generic, normal story into something outlandish and ridiculous. I don’t want to imagine the crap she’s going to come up with for a TV show.”

A twinge of sympathy hit me hard. *Far too innocent for this business.* I must have been nice to not have to worry about people lying about you.

end.” At their five minutes of fame.

“You should probably get used to that.” I shrugged and shoved my hand into my pockets. “Whatever your friend makes up won’t be anywhere as bad as the shite some random stranger will sell to the tabloids next interview. Anyone who remotely knew you growing up will come out of the woodwork by the weekend and morph into your absolute best friend.”

She stared at me. “How can you be so blasé about it?”

“How can I be blasé about a disgusting industry built on selling lies for ten years of living with it first-hand?” I snorted. “Dotey, you can’t be naïve.”

“Did you ever think that not all people are like that?”

“Christ. Where did they find you?” I dragged a hand through my hair and turned away from her.

how to

as any
”

in any
it’s even

ness. It
u to get

their five minutes of fame.

“You should probably get used to that.” I shrugged and shoved my hands into my pockets. “Whatever your friend makes up won’t be anywhere near as bad as the shite some random stranger will sell to the tabloids next week. Anyone who remotely knew you growing up will come out of the woodwork by the weekend and morph into your absolute best friend.”

She stared at me. “How can you be so blasé about it?”

“How can I be blasé about a disgusting industry built on selling lies after ten years of living with it first-hand?” I snorted. “*Dotey*, you can’t be that naïve.”

“Did you ever think that not all people are like that?”

“Christ. Where did they find you?” I dragged a hand through my hair and turned away from her.

INTERVIEW II

Question: Tell me about your first impression of Abi

Finn: *snorts* We aren't doing this.

Tyler, Producer: Right now?

Finn: Ever.

Tyler, Producer: Bu - but it's a part of the show.

Finn: And?

Tyler, Producer: You can't - you have to answer our questions.

Finn: No, I don't think I do.

Tyler, Producer: Yes, you do. It's part of the show.

Finn: You said that already. Listen, *mucker*—

Tyler, Producer: Muck what?

Finn: *sighs* Listen, *pal*, I didn't agree to this fiasco, and I didn't agree to have cameras shoved in my face every five minutes. Got a problem with that? Take it up with my agent.

Tyler, Producer: Mr McCarthy! Wait!



Question: Tell me about your first impression of Finn

Abi: Right now?

Tyler, Producer: Please.

Abi: Okay, but can we step away from the ladies' bathroom first?

Tyler, Producer: Of course.

Tyler, Producer: So your first impression of Finn?

Abi: Finn's confusing, honestly. One minute he's lovely; the next he's snapping at people and muttering to himself. I'm not sure what to make of him.

Tyler, Producer: Are you attracted to him?

Abi: Do I have to answer that?

Tyler, Producer: No, of course not. It just gives the audience a good idea of where you stand. Are you happy you got Finn?

Abi: I think it's too early to say whether I'm happy about marrying Finn. I don't really know the man. Is he attractive? I'm not blind, so yes. Are there any interesting possibilities there? Sure. But do I think this will be easy? Absolutely not. I feel like I'm missing half the picture and until he trusts me, I doubt I'm going to get far with him.

ee to

th that?

Abi: Right now?

Tyler, Producer: Please.

Abi: Okay, but can we step away from the ladies' bathroom first?

Tyler, Producer: Of course.

Tyler, Producer: So your first impression of Finn?

Abi: Finn's confusing, honestly. One minute he's lovely; the next he's snapping at people and muttering to himself. I'm not sure what to make of him.

Tyler, Producer: Are you attracted to him?

Abi: Do I have to answer that?

Tyler, Producer: No, of course not. It just gives the audience a good idea of where you stand. Are you happy you got Finn?

Abi: I think it's too early to say whether I'm happy about marrying Finn. I don't really know the man. Is he attractive? I'm not blind, so yes. Are there interesting possibilities there? Sure. But do I think this will be easy?

Absolutely not. I feel like I'm missing half the picture and until he trusts me, I doubt I'm going to get far with him.

CHAPTER FOUR

ABI

“*F*or the first time, ladies and gentlemen, Mr and Mrs McCarthy

The large doors swung open for the second time today, revealing a completely rearranged room. The altar had vanished to be replaced by a dance floor surrounded by round tables, all decorated with pink and white flowers and greenery. Edison bulbs hung from the ceiling, casting a warm glow over the room and stealing my breath.

“Did you pick all this?” I asked Finn, leaning into him to make sure I was heard over the crowd cheering at us.

People swarmed in, shaking his hand and offering congratulations. Our marriage was real and we’d done something momentous.

“What?” He glanced at me sharply, then lowered his head. “No, I didn’t plan any of it. I thought they’d handed it over to you.”

My gaze cast across the room again. I revelled in the shock of finding the space decorated exactly to my taste. Then I spotted Eva and Ros bearing down on me.

I wonder...

Finn led me toward them, or more toward his friends waiting on the sidelines. All three of his friends dwarfed Eva and Ros and I tucked into one of their sides. None of us were tall. Until today I considered Ros's five-foot-seven towering over mine and Eva's five-foot-five. Finn's friends were veritable giants. They must have been over six feet tall and lined up together, they looked like a colour wheel for Hollywood heartthrobs.

My face hurt from forcing a smile to my lips while strangers invaded my personal space. A quick glance at Finn gave me absolutely zero insight into whether he felt the same awkwardness. If I couldn't learn to see beyond the walls, the next three months would consist of nothing more than me tiptoeing around him, unsure of every aspect of our lives.

Finally, we cleared the crowd, and our friends swarmed us. Finn released his grip on my hand just in time for Eva and Ros to tackle me.

"I can't believe you did it," Eva shouted.

"Please, as if she'd quit once she saw that face." Ros chuckled, squaring her shoulders. Then she pulled back. "I can't believe you married Finn-flora McCarthy. You lucky B."

"B?" Eva asked.

"Flipping?"

We stared at her, heads tilted.

She leaned in close. "I'm trying not to swear so the producers don't come at me."

"You? Not swearing?" Eva snorted. "Good luck with that one."

"I know. They're crazy to even suggest it." She shrugged. "At least"

at their try..."

woman Eva rolled her eyes but turned back to me with a massive grin taking her lips. "That kiss looked scorching hot. Was it?"

five-foot- "You were gone ages," Ros whined before a devilish twinkle entered her green eyes. "Please tell me you tested out the merchandise."

lywood My face heated. "Of course not."

ded my I glanced over my shoulder, hoping Finn hadn't heard her. Of course, my gazes locked instantly. His expression gave nothing away. His friends might into other hand...

ond his "Yeah, Finn, you don't kiss someone like that and not follow the footsteps of the blond-haired guy with an English accent said. His hair was close-cut and tidy and controlled, while his crystal blue eyes sparkled with teasing mischief.

At his blank expression, his friends burst into laughter.

reezing "Don't tell me the show's already changing you?" the shaggy-dirty blond with an intense Scottish brogue gasped. He clapped his hands on Finn's shoulder, whistling. "Wow, man, I'm shocked. Didn't think you'd ever turn over your playboy ways."

Playboy?

"I call dibs on that one," Ros muttered as she pointed at the Scottish guy. His voice almost a purr.

"Can you all shut up?" Finn hissed.

't shout He dragged his hand through his hair, making his curls even wilder than they'd been before.

ast if I I'd like to say the idea of him being a playboy didn't track, but I remembered that practised flirty smile back in the holding room. Finn

exactly what he was doing, in life, in business, and in bed. Stupidly, part made my core ache enough that I needed to squeeze my thighs together to stop it.

“Why would we do that, when we can wind you up instead?” the blonde-haired woman with a slightly weaker Scottish accent asked. She gripped his arm, her brown eyes sparkling with the promise of more to come. “It’s a little more fitting, considering you all messed with me at first.”

“Mona,” Finn groaned. “Please don’t encourage them.”

“Oh Finnie-Boy, you know pleading with Shaun’s missus will never work,” she said. “You’ve got to be a little more assertive, you.” The blond chuckled, rubbing his hands together with glee. “Nothing you want to know about Finn, you come to us. We’ll give you the lowdown, 411 even when this asshole’s being all tight-lipped and broody.”

I nodded, but every inch of me froze under their rambunctious attention. It was like being confronted with two and a half Roselines in one go.

“Finn, how about you introduce us to your wife?” Mona smiled at me, her hand on my shoulder. “I’ll be watching you.”

Finn hesitated, a flicker of indecision dancing across his face before he finally locked it down.

“If he won’t, I will,” the blond announced, exasperation dripping from his voice. “I’m Nathan. Shaggy over there is Jackson.” He pointed at the blond and then slapped his hand against Shaun’s chest. His dark hair was slicked back, his suit cut perfectly to his swimmer’s build. “This bastard, stylish as he is, is a photo shoot, and over there is his fiancée Mona.”

“Christ on a bike. Bring it down a notch before you scare the lass,” the blonde said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

A pang of sympathy worked through me. Eva and Ros could tell I was in a bit of a state.

the last much sometimes too, and he had four of them.

together They all snorted and continued ribbing him. Eva rested her chin on her shoulder and Ros bumped my arm.

the pink- “Pretty sure that was your cue to do introductions, Abs,” Eva whispered in my ear.

“Seems Did I have to?”

“Fine,” I sighed. “This is my sister Eva.” I tilted my head to the left and gestured to Ros. “Roseline, my best friend.”

not save A chorus of greetings went around and the next thing I knew, I’d seen my best friend and my sister. Nathan and Jackson whisked them away, leaving me and Finn staring after them, puzzled. Well, I was puzzled. Finn did not so much as frown.

attention. “Do I need to be worried?” I asked, watching the lot of them laugh on the dance floor, tucked in tighter than strangers should be with alcohol in their systems. Ros’s raven pixie cut clashed with Jackson’s blond laid-back surfer look while Eva and Nathan almost seemed to belong before her well with their clean-cut, ready-for-business appearances.

Finn rubbed at his trimmed beard, considering it. He glanced at Ros and Mona for help.

the dirty “Don’t bloody look at me, mate.” Shaun backed away, tugging away from me with him. “Should have set some ground rules.”

and for a Right. So my sister and best friend were going to spend the night as fools of themselves with two of Hollywood’s hottest actors.

!” Finn “I guess it’s a real wedding now.”

the a bit Finn glanced down at me, the question written plain across his face.

once.

on my “Friends hooking up and regretting their decisions ton
Although...” I trailed off, studying the lot of them. “Aren’t people n
ispered drunk when they make poor decisions?”

“I don’t know.” He eyed me, a slight smirk claiming his lips. “W
drunk when you signed up for this show?”

ft, then “No,” I squeaked. “Were you?”



lost my

leaving

idn’t so

Thank fuck Mona wasn’t around to hear me say that. She’d have sco
me, even if Abi’s shocked face entertained me on some sick level.

hing on

limited

s dirty-

pair off

“What? It’s a fair question.”

Did I wish my friends hadn’t deserted me? Of course. The t
probably figured more time with my wife would convince me to just
with the show. As if a week in Bora Bora with her wouldn’t be long
to test my strength.

: Shaun

“No, I was perfectly sober.” She turned to me, her hands falling
waist. “Why did you agree to do the show?”

; Mona

I shrugged. “I had a gap in my schedule.”

making

“He didn’t have a choice,” Jackson called as he spun Ros past u
agent forced him.”

face for

I scowled after him. “The next time you need a wingman, don’t cal

Jackson snorted. “As if that’s a threat, Mr Groom.”

He danced away, leaving me alone again with a far too intrigue

She studied me like she could pull secrets from my head through
narrow determination. The woman had a shock coming if she thought it would
normally that easy.

“You can keep staring. I’m not going to crack, *dotey*.”

ere you “Why do you keep calling me that?”

I froze, realisation hitting me hard in the face. It didn’t hit hard enough.
Someone needed to knock some bloody sense into me.

What did I think I was doing, using that word as an endearment without
thinking?

Why the hell was I using an endearment to begin with?

wled at *Fuck.*

My Da had used it on my mother ever since I could remember.

“It’s just a word.”

astards “Yeah, but what does it mean?”

get on Bloody hell. I’d made a right mess of this farce of a relationship
enough weren’t even two hours in.

“I’d really rather not say.”

to her She frowned. “Is it bad?”

“No, but you’ll get annoyed.”

is. “His The crease between her brows deepened. “If it’s not bad, why would
annoy me?”

l me.” I sighed. “The next three months with you are going to be a right
hell of a time.”

She crossed her arms, her face smoothing out into a look of
determination I never wanted to see again.
d wife.

h sheer “Fine, but don’t say I didn’t warn you!” I scratched my beard and
ould be around the room, hoping stupidly that there wouldn’t be a camera po
us. Which of course there fucking was. Who was I trying to kid? “It
little.”

“I’m five-foot-five, that’s hardly little.”

enough. I snorted. “Lassie, your nose hardly reaches my shoulder. You’re s
My breath stilled as I hoped she’d accept the explanation. She cou
without up for all I cared, as long as she stopped questioning me. Thankfully,
here knew the other meanings. The last thing I needed was Abi realis
been calling her adorable for an hour.

“Why do I feel like you’re not telling the whole truth?” Abi
towards me, stabbing her finger into my chest. “We only just me
would you be insulting me?”

I caught her hand before she could repeat the action. A n
Something told me I could easily get addicted to touching her. I
and we craved the fire I’d kept seeing in her gaze. She wasn’t as timid a
originally let on... why did my brain take that as a challenge?

“It’s not an insult, Abi.”

“Then why are you being cagey?”

I hung my head, fighting the frustrating urge to bite at her and put
ould it to the entire thing. “Because the slip embarrassed me.”

Her head cocked to the side, studying me yet again. Jesus, all my y
raic.” acting and I let it slip on something like that? I seriously hoped she
of pure my flare of genuine feeling.

“Why would that embarrass you?”

glanced “Jesus fucking Christ, woman.” I dropped her hand and stepped
inted at “Can you stop with the questions?”

means If I didn’t have the attention of the cameras before, I’d put a bet on
single one in the room being focused on me now. Every blood
swivelled towards us, so why not?

hort.” Shaun slung his arm across my shoulder and leaned in close. “I
ld blow you didn’t want to make a flipping scene.”

no one “I don’t,” I hissed. “But she won’t stop and let tiny pissing things
sing I’d Abi chewed her lip, her gaze fixed on me. I couldn’t tell if I’d hurt
feelings or just surprised her. I’d leave my future shrink to figure out
stepped thought of hurting her feelings bothered me.

t. Why “I’m going to find my sister and let you guys catch up.” She
away, plastering a subpar excuse of a smile on her lips.

nistake. Nathan stopped on my other side, watching her go. He whistled
already “Well, that didn’t take long.”

s she’d “Why do you sound surprised?” Jackson asked, joining us. “Finn
do aftercare. Hell, he’s barely had to sweet-talk a woman into his
years. I’m shocked you lasted this long without putting your foot in it.”

“Thanks for the votes of confidence. Much bloody appreciate
an endwankers.” I shook Shaun’s grip off. “Anyone want to tell me where
the bar?”

years of They all crossed their arms, a range of serious expressions but
missed over their amusement.

“I’m not sure we should tell you,” Shaun said. “Alcohol won’t make
situation better.”

d back. “Not, it won’t, but at least I’ll have something to do with my hands.”

n every Nathan frowned. “Why would you need to keep your hands busy?”

y head I glared at him. “Because I’m mic’ed up, five cameras caught m
Abi’s first tiff, and you can bet they’re going to make a big deal out
thoughtscanned the nearby faces, hunting for one familiar, bearded face. “My
around here somewhere.”

go.” “I’m sure that’s not...” Nathan trialled off as I cut him with a dark

urt her “Don’t even bother.” My jaw shifted. “I unconsciously gave her a
why the flipping nickname and got slated for not telling her what it means. How
for reputation rehab?”

backed “Let me get this straight.” Shaun’s grim expression cracked a
shoulder shook with laughter. “You wanted nothing to do with this s
ed low, your new wife, and you’ve already given her a nickname with too
meaning to share?”

doesn’t He cracked up fully as my scowl deepened and the rest of th
bed in followed suit.

” “Oh man, that’s too good.” Shaun wiped his eyes.

ed, you “If you care so much about how you’d come across, why didn’t y
to findtell her?” Nathan asked, confusion deepening his voice. “You coul
avoided an outburst entirely.”

ldozing “What have you been calling her?” Jackson asked.

I grimaced. “Dotey.”

ake the Jackson’s lips twitched, Shaun snorted, and Nathan glanced betw
all, brows furrowed in confusion.

bloody “What does it mean?” he asked.

“I don’t know what it means, but I’ve heard his dad using it v
, mom, so...” Jackson grinned at me.

ine and “I can’t with you lot right now.” I stalked off, determined to find
of it.” I and a bottle of whisky to drown myself in.

agent’s

scowl.

a stupid

w’s that

and his

how or

o much

ie guys

ou just

ld have

veen us

“What does it mean?” he asked.

“I don’t know what it means, but I’ve heard his dad using it with his mom, so…” Jackson grinned at me.

“I can’t with you lot right now.” I stalked off, determined to find the bar and a bottle of whisky to drown myself in.

CHAPTER FIVE

ABI

“This is your suite for the night,” Tyler said, his voice far too casual when you considered the implications of the moment.

An entire night in a room with Finn, Mr Snappy. His routinely grumpy expression wouldn’t shield me from his grumpy side. Snapping at me over a perfectly reasonable question. Who does that? My husband apparently.

“We’ll do some filming of you guys getting ready for bed and then leave you to yourselves for the night.” His brows rose on that last part, and my stomach flipped.

When he said suite, he meant an almost open-plan room with far more space than the average hotel room. He led us into a sitting room that opened straight into a dining room that just consisted of a bench and table set under glass barn doors. The massive bed beckoned me from the entryway, feeding a pinch of foreboding in my stomach.

They’d set a plush sofa in front of the black steel four-poster bed. The sight of it inadvertently eased some of my nerves. Between that and the leather sofa in the living room, we didn’t have to share a bed. If

convince Finn...

“Your bags are in the closet back there.” Tyler gestured to the bed. Then he glanced at Finn, his lips pinching slightly. “I hope it’s to your liking.”

Finn snorted. “As if you care.” He brushed past Tyler, tugging at the lapels. “Am I allowed to get out of this suit now?”

“Actually, no,” Tyler called after him.

Finn spun around, a scowl darkening his blue eyes. “Why the hell not?”

cheery “We need to get your reactions.”

His brows rose. “To what?”

y blank “The room, of course.”

over a “Can’t you do that after we get changed?”

Tyler shook his head. “Sorry.”

n leave He didn’t look sorry. In fact, it looked like he was enjoying pissin
and my off. He gestured to the sofa in the living room, and his grin grew wider.
stomped back to us with a face like thunder. A surprising break from his
r more mask.

flowed Two cameramen set up on the opposite side and Tyler lowered
t before into an armchair.

eding a Once Finn and I sat down, he studied us. A glint entered his eyes
almost groaned.

ed. The Why was it that I could anticipate Tyler’s antics from one look, but
and the remained an enigma? Seriously, the man could give me whiplash with
I could fast his emotions shifted from seemingly genuine to practised.

“Can you shuffle in a little more? Need to make the audience think
droom, at least slightly happy with each other.”

to your Grumbling, Finn shifted towards me. There were still a couple of
between us. Tyler chewed his lip, tilting his head.

his tie. “Hmm, why don’t you put your arm around Abi, Finn?”

Every inch of my body froze up. Surely we didn’t need to...

Finn sighed but did as asked, shuffling so close our thighs
dy hell together and his fingers grazed the back of my neck on their way
shoulder. Goose bumps broke out on my skin, sending a shiver do
spine. Any hope that it wasn’t noticeable died with Tyler’s next words

“Ethan,” he yelled without taking his eyes off us. “Turn
conditioning down for Abi, please.” He flashed me a sympathetic
“Can’t have you shivering on camera, now can we?”

I pressed my lips together and kept my head straight forward. I
need to see Finn’s reaction. No need to make the situation mortifying.
ig Finn do that without his help.

en Finn His fingers didn’t retreat from my shoulder, but they also didn’
his calm around. If one graze sent shivers down my spine, I didn’t want to kno
would happen if he started toying with my skin.

himself “Okay so, the first question,” he glanced down, checking his notes
are you feeling about your first night together?”

e, and I Awkwardly nervous. *Can I even say that?*

ut Finn “Sharing space with another person is going to be a bit of an adjust
ith how Finn said, saving me from having to shape my nerves into somethin
positive. “We’re still strangers, so it’ll take us some time to get comfo

you're His fingers smoothed across my bare shoulder, robbing me of breath.
I'm sure we'll get there. Right, Abi?"

inches Finn squeezed me towards him. I glanced up at him and my mind went
out of control. *What's with the soft look in his eyes?* Between the glow of
his words, and that almost intrigued gleam, he confused the ever-loving
out of me. For a couple of moments, he turned into the perfect husband.

pressed "Absolutely," I agreed, working extra hard to stop the frown from
claim my face. I turned back to the camera. "It feels like we're on a
to my date, except we sped everything up and it's taken an extra serious turn
wn my course, we're going to be awkward for a little while."

the air Finn squeezed me again, the movement feeling almost praising the
around. When I glanced up at him again, his eyes were on Tyler and
smile. softer expression had melted from his face.

did not "Next question?" Finn asked, his tone bored.

I could For thirty minutes, we ran through questions in almost a cycle.
end, patterns started to emerge in Finn's mood changes.

t move "How important is it that your partner has the same tastes in music
w what you?"

s, "how I blinked at Tyler. Why would anyone care about our music tastes?
he chuckled. snuck a peek at Finn from the corner of my eye. His expression softened.

tment, "If Abi's going to fill my house with hard rock screamo, we might
g more problem." Finn glanced at me, outright grinning, his sapphire eyes twinkling.
rtable." "But otherwise, I don't care what music she likes. Who picked our first
song? Fleetwood Mac is one of my favourite bands."

I stared at him, perplexed. The second I thought I had my feet under

h. “But he changed entirely and made my head spin.

“My sister did,” I said with absolutely no conviction.

id spun “Remind me to thank her.”

estures, We stared at each other, me unable to contain my confusion and
ng crap the loving look in his eyes could not be real.

l. “Brilliant.” Tyler snapped us from our staring contest. “Finn, you
hing to perfect. Abi, I’m going to need a little more emotion from you.”

our first The cameras started to reset and Finn eased away from me slight
urn. Of softer edges fell away from him. A lightbulb went off in my head as I
put it together. My actor played it up for the cameras.

his time
and the *He’s not my anything.*

The shift went on and on as Tyler ran through a long list of ques
gave up trying to predict Finn halfway through.

By the “Okay, that was perfect.” Tyler shut his notebook and stood. “Ian’
to stick around to get some more shots of you guys getting ready for l
everything. I’ll see you in the morning for the flight to Bora Bora.”

music as Tyler left us, and I did my best to ignore the camera hovering ne
followed Finn into the bedroom, my brain focused on getting out of m
astes? I and into a shower. I wouldn’t be able to sleep with the number of pins
ed, and rock-solid consistency of my hair.

He stopped dead in front of the bed, making me dodge around h
: have a stared at the massive thing, chewing his lip.

inkling. “You alright there?” I asked, very distracted. I turned my back
it dance quickly, making a beeline for my suitcase.

der me, “I’ll sleep on the sofa if it makes you more comfortable.”

“If you want.” I pulled my suitcase out of the closet and c
kneeled.

“Sofa it is,” he muttered.

Finn... I glanced at him over my shoulder, confused by the odd determin
his voice. I found him staring at me with enough heat in his gaze to
ache free inside of me.

“What is it?” I patted my hair and my face, certain my eye
ly. The deceiving me.

“Nothing.” He shook his head. “Nothing at all. Do you want first
the shower?”

I shook my head, freeing my toiletry bag from my suitcase. “I
going to take me forever to get my hair down, so you can go first.”

I regretted those words sheer minutes later when the water turned
s going my mind wandered down a path it had no business finding in the first
ed and Images of Finn naked in the next room set me aflame. I resolutely re
on the floor, with my back to the camera, fussing with my suitcas
though I’d found everything I needed.

How would I survive a week in Bora Bora with him and not make
of myself?

By the time the barn door rolled back and he returned in a puff of
my cheeks were red and my body ached in all the places it shouldn’t
fake husband.

Then I turned around and it all got worse. He sauntered into the be
chest bare, cut abs on display and sweat pants hanging low on his hi
mouth went dry.

arefully “All yours,” he said, oblivious to the train wreck happening ins
head.

I rushed past him without a word, my pyjamas bundled close to m
ation in and my focus fixed on the tile ahead.

o set an “Uh, Abi?”

“Yeah?”

s were I stopped in the doorway and reluctantly turned back to him. He
his trimmed beard, a sheepish expression playing across his face.

it go of “Do you need any help? With your hair?” His gaze roamed my ha
sister used to enter dance competitions. She always needed someone
No, it’s fish the last of them out.”

“That would be great. Thank you.” I led the way into the bathro
on and dropped everything on top of the marble countertop between the two
t place.hers sinks.

ained Black slate tile stretched across the floor while huge white marbl
e, even veined with gold patterns covered the walls. A gorgeous freestanding
tub stood off to one side, surrounded by a bed of black rocks. A
: an ass shower with more nozzles than I knew how to use took up the enti
wall. The space was the size of my New York bedroom.

steam, Then Finn stepped up behind me and the room shrunk, taking my
for my to ignore him with it. He started plucking pins from my hair, the burn
body heat caressing my bare back.

droom, *Focus on your hair.*

ips. My I started dragging my fingers through the almost solid mass of my
hair, digging for the metal pins and breaking up the smooth run of ha

side my chest Every now and again my fingers faltered as I caught Finn's blue eyes on me in the mirror, or he leaned a little too close and his bare chest brushed against my back.

"I'm sorry about earlier," he whispered, his voice low enough that the cameraman probably wouldn't pick it up, since he'd taken his microphone off.

rubbed A flash of his frustrated expression danced through my mind, but I was dumb, raising my brows at him in the mirror.

ir. "My chest" "For snapping." His fingers caressed the nape of my neck as he spoke to me with open regret. "I shouldn't have."

else to "No, you definitely shouldn't have." I nodded, then pursed my lips, arguing with myself over pushing him again. "Are you going to do it or why?"

om and his and Finn hesitated for all of a second before shaking his head. "I'm sorry, I'm not great at this."

le slabs I waited, hopeful that maybe he'd say more. He continued to run his hands through my hair instead.

soaker double "So you're not going to tell me what dotey means, or why my waistline is so big?"

re back ability "Do you actually care?" he asked. His gaze bore into mine, hunting for the truth. "Or is it just that I got defensive about it?"

n of his I chewed my lip, considering him. He'd told me one meaning, of course, but I couldn't escape the feeling that he meant more by it. But if it really had been a slip of the tongue...

auburn hairspray. "You're not insulting me?"

is fixed His gaze roamed my face in our reflection, his edges softened. “Definitely not.”

“Okay, why did you get flustered?”

hat the “You’re going to think I’m nothing more than a pompous celebrity.” Amusement creased the corner of his eyes.

I turned, a small smile tugging at my lips. “Well, now I definitely know.”

“Fine,” he groaned. “I’m not used to people questioning me and tared at Besides my agent and my friends, and even they can recognise when push.” He shrugged. “Apparently, it’s a button for me, and you would y lips, jabbing at it.”

explain “Okay.” I turned around, going right back to tugging at my hair.

“That’s it?” he asked, his voice raising with incredulity.

ry. I’m “Yup. I’m not unreasonable, Finn. Just talk to me.”



digging

FINN

nting to

I stared at the back of her head, utterly perplexed by the woman I’d n We’d have three months together, and I already knew she would di ting for insane.

course, Especially if the producers kept forcing us close on camera. I only ally had much self-control. One touch of her against me and it had started to ur shouldn’t have offered to help with her hair. Escaping into the livin would have been the safest bet.

Yet I didn’t stop, didn’t remove my hands from the soft hair

ftening distance between us so the heat of her couldn't tease me.

When her hair fell around her shoulders, unrestrained, I forced away from her.

“I think we've got them all.” I took one last glance and then headed for the door. “I'll leave you to it.”

“Wait! Can you undo these buttons for me?” Abi asked before I could escape the bathroom. I turned back, my shoulders tensing at the thought of getting close to her again. “They're too small and too low for me. Finn?”

I almost groaned at the sound of my name falling from her lips. I shook my head and shut the door to the bathroom alone to deal with the distraction I had spent the better part of the day winding me on edge?

Of course not. She'd been breath-taking before, her hair tamed and framing a mouth-watering curve of her body hugged by that torturous dress. But now with her auburn hair mussed and flowing down her back in soft waves framing her pale face and making her almost look Irish? Abi had effectively stepped into irresistible territory.

I'm a fecking eejit.

Abi presented her back to me and my fingers, the grabby bachelorette, reached for her without pause. She sucked in a breath as they grazed the material line. Just three buttons and she should be able to get out. I had so could handle three buttons.

With an intense focus, I worked them free with deft fingers. No matter how fast I went, I wasn't blind. Her gorgeous ass already teased me, but the material loosened, revealing a white lace thong. My cock hardened for the fiftieth time today and yet again, as the image of all that auburn hair

out across my pillow hit me hard.

myself The straps slid off her shoulders, dragging my focus away from her. She caught the dress with a hand to her chest before it could fall from her body, leaving her nearly naked.

Shame, a stupid voice moaned in my head.

I could I straightened up and backed away from her yet again.
ught of “Do you—” I stopped, clearing my throat. “You got it from here?”
Please, Her cheeks were rosy and her blue eyes burned with desire I intended to ignore. She met my gaze in the mirror, nodding.

Did I As I slid the barn door into place, reality knocked me hard in the face. I had never run from the promise of an interested woman before, but I was going to spend the next three months in a world of sexually frustrated pain.

d every We might be married, but Abi Johnson needed to remain off-limits
ut now,
t curls,
rtlessly

astards,
l above
of it. I

matter
out then
for the
spread

out across my pillow hit me hard.

The straps slid off her shoulders, dragging my focus away from her ass. She caught the dress with a hand to her chest before it could fall from her body, leaving her nearly naked.

Shame, a stupid voice moaned in my head.

I straightened up and backed away from her yet again.

“Do you—” I stopped, clearing my throat. “You got it from here?”

Her cheeks were rosy and her blue eyes burned with desire I intended to ignore. She met my gaze in the mirror, nodding.

As I slid the barn door into place, reality knocked me hard in the face. I’d never run from the promise of an interested woman before, but I was going to spend the next three months in a world of sexually frustrated pain.

We might be married, but Abi Johnson needed to remain off-limits.

INTERVIEW III

Question: Did you have sex?

Finn: I don't see how that's any of your business.

Tyler, Producer: You're going to be married for three months. You do think intimacy is an important part of marriage?

Finn: I didn't say that. I said it was none of *your* business.

Abi: No, we haven't had sex.

Finn: Don't give in to him. He'll think he can ask even more inappropriate questions.

Tyler, Producer: Thank you, Abi. Why didn't you have sex?

Finn: See?

Abi: If we answer, he'll go away, and we can get to the airport.

Tyler, Producer: Listen to Abi, Finn. She's clearly the logical one in this relationship.

Finn: Christ. I'm going to kill Charlie.

Abi: I wouldn't have sex on a first date. Why would I change that?

Tyler, Producer: You know, our specialists recommend getting it out the other way.

Finn: *splutters* Getting it out of the way?! Get out!

Tyler, Producer: Now, Finn, we need to—

Finn: I said GET. OUT.

Tyler, Producer: We'll continue this in Bora Bora.

Finn: We won't.

on't

riate

this

of the

Finn: *splutters* Getting it out of the way?! Get out!

Tyler, Producer: Now, Finn, we need to—

Finn: I said GET. OUT.

Tyler, Producer: We'll continue this in Bora Bora.

Finn: We won't.

CHAPTER SIX

ABI

*M*y first time in First Class would have to be with a ridiculously good-looking actor attached to my hip. The female flight attendant was staring at Finn, eating up his every move. I'd sink a little deeper into my book, attempt to tune it all out, and then bam! They're back, hovering over us, brushing past him, inappropriately close.

Of course, I could admit that part of my annoyance might have come from a lack of sleep. Turns out not sharing a bed with Finn might have been more awkward than caving to the inevitable. Every time he shifted on the couch, I'd feel a pang of guilt for having an entire queen-sized bed to myself. Neither of us had looked all that fresh when we'd called it quits not long after the sun rose.

Still, the longer their extreme attentiveness went on, the more I grew impatient for him. Couldn't they leave the man in peace?

Then they served lunch. I'd never considered lunch to be a revolutionary part of my day before. Just a time with food, nothing special.

"Can I get you another whisky, Mr McCarthy? To go with your

one attendant asked, her voice hopelessly breathy.

If any of them had clocked the rings, I wasn't sure. Although I could have sworn anyone could truly miss the massive emerald princess cut diamond. The emerald slid onto my finger along with a classic gold wedding band. The pair of rings glittered no matter the light. The ring Production had given me for my wedding wasn't exactly conspicuous either. It had a spiral pattern running around the ring framing emerald stones that matched my engagement ring.

Maybe they didn't care.

Seeing our rings side-by-side definitely robbed me of breath at my wedding. Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined myself in this situation. I was good-married to a famous actor and flying first class to some exclusive resort. The resort kept its kept me into my wedding over reception last night. She tittered as she rushed away without so much as a glance at me to see if I wanted anything. Although, I couldn't blame her. I know how potent that smile was. My anger at them fizzled out. He encouraged them. If anyone deserved the full brunt of my distaste, it should have been on the him.

“Had to marry a spoilt jackass,” I muttered under my breath.

“What was that?” Finn asked, ducking his head towards me.

I glared at him. “Nothing.”

His gaze roamed my face, reading me like a book, I expected. He stepped forward and leaned closer.

“The jealous type, are we?”

“Nope. I'm good.” I turned away from him, twisting my body so

the window.

“We both know that’s a lie, Abi girl.” Amusement curled around his words. “I didn’t realise I’d married a hellion.”

His breath ruffled my hair. Against my better judgement, I turned toward him and found him inches from my face. His amusement faded fast, focus dropped to my lips.

“If you want them to stop, you’ll have to stake your claim,” he whispered.

“Or are you too chicken to kiss me without a camera pointed at you?” he smirked.

I slammed my lips against his before I allowed myself to think too much about it.

Finn’s hand dove into my hair, angling my head as he took control of the ill-thought-out kiss. His tongue invaded my mouth, massaging my tongue, glancing me of all thought. My fingers curled around his wrist, when I knew push him away or pull him closer, I had no clue. An electric charge coursed through me, building a hunger I had no hope of fulfilling at three thousand feet in the air.

I could get addicted to this.

A throat cleared above us, but Finn didn’t pull away. The kiss slowed until my panties were soaked through and all of my commotion had nose-dived off the plane.

Finn released my lips. His hand fell away, and he turned to the flight attendant. A blush claimed her cheeks, but she didn’t comment.

“Thank you, love.” He accepted his drink, grinning at her.

“Can I get you something, Ms...”

“Mrs McCarthy will have a glass of red wine, Gloria. Thank you
and the amusement deepened as her attention jumped to me, her eyes widening

Alright, she hadn't noticed the rings.

to face She nodded and turned away quickly. I watched as she rushed up
and his other attendants. Their heads bowed together as they whispered a
themselves. Every couple of seconds, one of them would glance at
ispered, puzzlement or surprise written across their faces.

s?” He “See, that wasn't so hard, was it?” Finn asked, his voice lazy, alm
he'd also felt the drugging effects of that kiss.

oo hard I nodded, glancing back at my book before he could question me
I failed to block out the way he'd played her.

l of my



ne and

FINN

ether to

worked

irty-six

We followed the hotel concierge across the boardwalk. He lis
information about the hotel, the amenities, and the restaurant hours
couldn't concentrate on a word he said. Abi walked by his side, r
along, absorbing every word. She appeared happy, and given she had
gentled, poker face, I was inclined to believe it.

n sense

Yet, she'd barely said two words to me since we'd kissed on the pl

waiting

“I can't believe how beautiful it is here,” she said, her voice fill
awe as her head swivelled around to take in the open blue water an
water bungalows lined up in front of us.

The concierge opened the door to our villa and waved her in befo
She gasped before I'd even set foot inside.

u.” His “This can’t be right.”

3. The man assured her she was in the right villa and her jaw popped. The bungalow didn’t contain more than the necessities — but amongst the necessities, but still. A huge bed sat opposite open patio doors that stretched the entire length of the bedroom. A glass cutout at the base of the bed us with view straight into the glistening blue waters below. One look at it and where I’d be the moment we got rid of the concierge. Honeyed wood cost like the floors and vaulted ceiling, adding warmth to the neutral whites and of the furnishings.

further. “Did you arrange this, Finn?”

For some reason, I kicked myself for not taking an interest in the p of it all before.

“No.” I shrugged before wandering out onto the patio.

ted off The damn thing had an infinity pool and a hot tub. How ridiculous considering the ocean was a mere foot beneath my feet. Still, I would s, but I patio a thing of beauty. Steps led down to another platform and then nodding into the water.

a shite “Well, I think it’s gorgeous,” she continued to gush.

ane. After giving her a quick tour of the suite’s amenities, the concierge abandoned us. I tuned it all out. You’d seen one five-star exclusive ed with you’d seen them all. The fact *Married Blind* had got them to allow film d over- the premises surprised me more than the opulently-decorated villa.

We had five minutes of peace before someone knocked on the door. I went to answer it, glancing at me quizzically. I collapsed into a chair re him. patio instead of following her. *Probably just the eejit producer.*

“Abi, hi. I hope you’re settling in okay,” Tyler said, his voice

excited and far too loud for our tranquil surroundings.

d open. “Well, we only just got in, so I’ll let you know.”

autiful My brows rose at the bite in her tone. Had yesterday’s timid act b
retchedthat?

gave a “Of course. We just need to grab some reactions to the suite.”

I knew voice grew closer. “Where’s Fi...ah, there you are. Welcome to Bora I
covered

l beiges He joined me on the patio, two cameramen trailing him with a wh
each, full of equipment.

“Everything alright with the flights?” he asked, twitching slightly
silence.

lanning “The flights were fine,” I muttered, keeping my tone bland.

“Great, great.”

I glanced around the perfectly normal bungalow, my eyes na
iculous,
call the
n down searching for the slightest suggestion of hidden cameras.

I found none. That didn’t mean they weren’t here. I gestured at the
decorated bungalow. “Is this room rigged? What about the pati
bathroom?”

ncierge Tyler’s eyes widened, and then his expression shifted.

resort, I clocked the moment his shrewd producer brain kicked in, connec
ning on dots between my past and my questions. If he thought I’d talk about it
show, he had —

or. Abi “The only cameras we use are the ones the guys are holding.”

on the I nodded, unexpected relief rippling through me.

“So the interviews...”

far too

“Give us a chance to settle in first,” Abi said as she joined us on the plane. Her hands landed on her hips, declaring business, while she smiled a little, a little confusing the entire image. My girl needed tips for playing intimidating.

She’s not your anything.

Tyler’s “I’m sorry. We need to stay on schedule.”

Bora.” “But if we’re both bleary-eyed from a nine-hour flight, what does a schedule matter?”

Tyler glanced between us, his brow furrowing with indecision. The camera men covered their smirks, rubbing their jaws or flat-out turning away. What were the chances they found this plonker annoying, too?

“I mean, we can do it, but I *know* I’ve got black circles under my eyes right now.” Her brows rose. “Doesn’t the camera emphasise those things?”

If kissing her hadn’t already gotten me into trouble, I’d have done it again. The timidness at the wedding must have been nerves. No way would I have rubbed off on her in a day. Either way, I liked what I saw, and I wanted more of that snarky fire in my life.

The

Except she’s only your wife for three months.

Why did I keep forgetting that part of the plan?

“Decide whatever you want,” I said as I stood. “I’m going for a switch.”

I wandered inside, leaving Tyler to splutter his displeasure and ignore the thrill that the shift of Abi’s expression from stern to triumph passed through me. I’d let them figure their own shit out. I needed to put some distance between us before I did something more stupid than teasing her by kissing me.

I bit back a groan as I dug out my swimming trunks. If the flight at

the patio hadn't returned, I don't know what would have happened. I'd like to
t Tyler, wouldn't have dragged her into the bathroom to join the Mile Hig
g. there and then, but I didn't have that much faith in myself. I wasn't
known for being sensible.

Abi might be attractive, and I might be craving her something fie
she was off limits.
oes the



he two
g away.

ABI

Somehow, I got Tyler to agree to give us the rest of the day. No th
ly eyes Finn. I couldn't believe it when he ducked out.

gs?" I rushed out the back, instantly spotting him face up, floating on h
done it with his eyes shut.

would I "Way to show a united front," I called to him.

needed He peeled an eye open. "You had it handled."

I had, but that shouldn't have given him permission to just abandon

"They're gone for the day." I crossed my arms. "But we have t
them tonight for dinner with the other couples."

im." "Okay." His eyes shut again and he spread his arms out.

gnoring He looked so relaxed.

nt sent I took a seat on a cushioned patio chair, sinking deeper into th
it some With the sun kissing my face and the cool breeze tickling my skin, I t
ner into first deep breath in months.

I lasted a glorious five minutes before worries wormed their way
tendant forefront. The most pressing of them: our one-bed situation.

think I Unlike the hotel room, it didn't look like we were going to escape
h Club a bed. Not unless he agreed to sleep on the floor and I just couldn't
exactly happening.

Water cascaded from him as he lifted himself out of the water
rce, but lower deck. My eyes took on a life of their own, devouring every gli
inch of him as he walked up the stairs back to our patio. For an Iri
he'd definitely embraced the LA lifestyle. I couldn't see an inch of p
on him.

My gaze dipped to the waistline of his shorts. *I wonder if his tan r*
anks to *entire length of him.*

He collapsed into the chair next to me, a grin toying with his lips.
his back "What was the serious expression about?"

For a second, he lost me, and then I remembered.

"How are we going to deal with the bed situation?"

He glanced back at the giant bed framed in the doorway behind us.
r me. "I'm not sure we have a choice."

to meet "That's what I was thinking." I covered my face, groaning into my
"I bet Tyler set this up."

"I don't doubt it," Finn said, amusement dripping from his voice.

I glanced at him sharply. "If you'd just answered his questio
e chair. morning..."

ook my "We'd still have one bed. My answering inappropriate questions w
have changed anything." Finn chuckled. "*Dotey*, they want us to fuck
/ to the drama."

I didn't know what to focus on first: the nickname slipping p

sharing defences again or the fact that one muttered fuck tripping off his tongue
to see it me squirm in my seat.

“It’s a massive bed. We’ll be fine.” He bit his lip and fixed wide eyes on me. “Unless you’re a cuddler?”

stening When I didn’t answer, Finn grinned at me. “This is going to be fun
ishman,
ale skin

uns the

r hands.

ns this

ouldn’t

. Better

ast his

defences again or the fact that one muttered fuck tripping off his tongue made me squirm in my seat.

“It’s a massive bed. We’ll be fine.” He bit his lip and fixed wide eyes on me. “Unless you’re a cuddler?”

When I didn’t answer, Finn grinned at me. “This is going to be fun.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

ABI

Somehow, we avoided each other for the rest of the day. I went to investigate the spa offerings on site and booked myself in for a pampering before we were forced to report for dinner with the other participants in the show. Despite my brain's refusal to let me forget about the possibility of sharing a bed with a man who could make me ache with just a touch, I enjoyed myself. I'd never been pampered before.

My phone pinged as I wandered back to the room. Our group chat lit up across the screen and I stopped in my tracks. Would it be bad of me to read their texts?

ROS

Bitch. Spill all the deets. How big are we talking?

My cheeks heated.

ROS

Don't leave me on read and stop blushing.
Share with your bestie.

EVA

She might be busy, Ros.

ROS

Yeah, deep-throating her Hollywood hunk.
Eyes widening, my fingers flew over the screen.

AI

went to
day of
couples
that I'd
look, I

Oh my god, stop, Ros. We haven't slept
together.

ROS

Why the hell not?

AI

flashed
to dodge

Because I've known him for a day and I'm
pretty sure he hates me.

EVA

He doesn't hate you.

ROS

You don't need to know him to enjoy that ride.

EVA

That's true.

AI

I'm ignoring you both now

My phone continued to ping but I ignored it. I didn't need someone filling my head with ideas. When it came to Finn, it seemed I could do perfectly fine alone.

When I returned to the bungalow, Finn had made himself scarce. Much as the silence felt weird, I relished the space and focused on picking my dress for filming. I might have taken a little extra care than I normally would, plotting all the ways I could get back at him for tricking me and kissing him on the plane.

I could get lost in his kisses.

Just get the money, pay off Eva's debts and enjoy the thrill of it all.

Except that wasn't all I wanted. I wanted him.

With my hair and makeup already done, I was dressed and ready to go pretty fast. Left to tap my foot and wonder if Finn would actually show up in appearance before we had to leave. At least if he walked through the door I could bury the overthinking again and go back to living in the moment.

My cell pinged ten minutes later with a new message. I fished the phone from my clutch, still frowning at the blushing horizon as the sunset.

FINN

I'll meet you at the restaurant.

I waited, my breath held as if another text would load and explain my absence. It didn't. We were meeting all the other couples and he was supposed to walk into dinner without him like it wouldn't immediately scream trouble.

Despite my burning cheeks and the ache in my chest, I pushed my shoulders back and made my way up to the restaurant. By the time I

to land, the cool breeze had soothed away the sting of abandonment.

Tyler frowned at me as I walked into the hotel lobby, my heels clicking against the marble floor.

“Where the hell is Finn?” he asked.

My acting skills must have improved. I didn’t so much as flinch at accusation in his tone.

“He said he’d meet me here.” I shrugged, working to keep my voice pleasant, but emotionless.

No one else loitered in the lobby so I could at least take a second. They pointed a camera at me. Tyler pulled out his cell and lifted it to his ear.

“I swear he’ll be the death of me before this show wraps.” He turned away from me, focusing his glare on the front doors.

I chewed my lip, liking that he’d moved on from blaming me but not taking a direction all the same. Delaying in the lobby like a chicken didn’t seem like a door with me. I never would have hesitated before. In New York, I would have gone into places alone, never waiting for permission or company. Why had the world changed now?

“What do I need to do?” I asked, ignoring his grinding jaw. He didn’t face me, his brows rising while the cell blared a dial tone in his ear. “Do I walk in there and get mic’ed after I sit down?”

“You can’t go in there without Finn.” Tyler’s eyes widened in horror.

His expression softened as he considered me. He hung up and pulled out his cell, taking a couple of steps toward me. His eyes scanned the lobby as if he were checking for eavesdroppers.

“I take it he hasn’t told you he didn’t want anything to do with me.”

show?” He quirked a brow. I shook my head and he grimaced.

licking My gaze flicked to the open restaurant doors, beckoning me with light and murmuring music.

“If you go in without him, we have to cover why he’s not there
1 at the edit.” Tyler crossed his arms. “The last thing his fans would want to
him standing you up...”

ice flat, I hadn’t thought of how they’d put the story together. Or how
control Tyler had over how the viewers saw our relationship. The tho
l before anyone misunderstanding it sat weirdly on my chest. All the same, I no

s ear. “He didn’t say anything about his plans for the day?”

turned “No. He was there when I left for my appointments. We didn’t tal
tonight.”

eeding Before Tyler could voice his annoyance, Finn sauntered through th
sit right his hands in his navy dress pants pockets, his trademark smile curling l
breeze He’d a couple of his shirt buttons undone, teasing bronzed skin that m
ad that mouth water. His hair was slightly mussed, like someone had dragg
hands through it while he made them scream. The perfect picture
spun to unaffected playboy.

o I just My gut twisted at the thought of him fucking someone else.

or. Why my mind went there, I had no idea. I didn’t want to know why
send a flicker of hurt through me. I smothered it fast and focused on t
ocketed at hand.

y, as if “Where the hell have you been?” Tyler exploded before Finn cou
his mouth.

with the His brows rose at the bite in Tyler’s voice.

“Out,” he bit out. He turned his attention to me, tuning Tyler’s out of the soft annoyance out. “Why are you standing out here? I said I’d meet you in

“He wouldn’t let me.” I tilted my head toward Tyler.

“And why is that?” Finn eyed Tyler. I caught amusement flicker across Finn’s face before it settled back into the blank mask.

“Go.” Tyler threw his hands up, then turned his back on us. He walked away, muttering to himself. “Fucking celebrities and their overinflated egos should quit.”

I stared after him, wide-eyed and mildly concerned.

“C’mon, let’s get this over with.”

Finn brushed past me, heading for the restaurant like we shouldn’t care about the weirdness.

“Where were you?” I asked, rushing after him.

He stopped outside the door, rolling his shoulders back and stretching his neck.

“Diving.”

He held out his hand without even glancing at me. I took it and threaded our fingers together, a new familiarity that shocked me. I sensed that connection for far too long.

“Why didn’t you just say that earlier?”

Finn tugged my hand and my focus snapped to his face. He stared at me, his lips pinched.

“I didn’t realise you needed to know my every movement.”

“I don’t, but the production...”

uttered His shoulders dropped and his blue gaze softened. “Sorry, I didn’t
side.” of that.”

He glanced toward the bustling restaurant. Glasses clattered, pianos
ckering drifted in the air, and guests chattered loudly, laughter reached us with
There was too much noise for us to be filming in the main dining room.

walked “Ready to face the land sharks?” Finn asked.

egos. I I grinned. Maybe he knew the other celebrities.

I nodded and we walked into the room. The cameras were easy
Six cameramen surrounded a table on the patio, shielded by a living
vines between them and the busiest part of the restaurant.

discuss “I’d heard rumours that they’d talked you into doing this,” a man’s
British accent making me work to understand him. He chuckled. “What
they have on you?”

ling out “Casey Jackson,” Finn growled.

For a man with a perfect poker face, he directed a lot of open hostility
the man. *Is he acting even now?* I narrowed my eyes on Finn, taking
burn of red on his neck and the crush of his hand in mine. *Maybe not.*

and he “Didn’t think I’d have to deal with your ugly mug tonight.”
tared at

His mousy brown hair stood on end, in desperate need of a cut or a
Even so, between his chiselled cheekbones and teasing smile, he
command the attention of everyone in the room.

d down His wife shifted uncomfortably in her seat, her gaze fixed on
beyond our table where one of the cameramen stood. Her shoulder
hunched and if her ash-blonde hair hadn’t been pulled back in a bun, I
feeling she would have used it as a shield.

't think She didn't look happy. Maybe she wasn't adjusting to the show?
disagreed. Casey towered over her. I frowned at the sight of it and sc
o music Finn's hand. He caught my eye and I tried to silently communicate to l
th ease. Tyler appeared before I could figure out what to do.

l. "Oh great, you're all together, at last." He clapped his hands whi
and I took our seats as far from the Brit as we could get. "Why don't
start with introductions? You could compare notes on how things are
Your food will be along shortly and your server here will grab more d
to spot. the meantime."
wall of

Tyler backed away and Liam, the cameraman who filmed our w
aid, his filed into his place.

What do "Anyone else feels like we've been set up?" A woman with jet-bl
asked from the end of the table. She glanced around the table, we
huge, welcoming smile. Her navy-blue halter-neck top hugge
emphasising her tan. "Like by compare notes does he mean our relati
tility at or this godawful show?"

g in the Finn snorted, but he otherwise didn't react, his focus attached
couple opposite us. A hulking man with white-blond hair I v
recognised as a professional hockey player and a beautiful woman wi
a brush. hair and lavender tips. They were absorbed in each other, their faces
e could close together while they murmured to each other, completely lost
own world.

a point *I want that.*

rs were It didn't look like they were acting, either. Maybe the
got the matchmakers did know what they were doing.

"They'll want relationships, but we could dissect the show and

My gut Tyler's face turn red." Casey twisted a glass of dark liquid.

queezed Everyone chuckled at that.

him.

"How about we start with introductions before we wind him up?" An American guy sat next to me suggested. He looked like your typical blonde Finn — If the boy next door were a surfer with long hair and a sweet smile. "I'm Kyle. Not sure if Aria actually needs an introduction." He gestured to the jet-black-haired woman next to him.

rinks in She chuckled. "Not everyone likes country, Sweetheart."

Casey looked her up and down, his smile turning my stomach yet not repelling. "I could learn to like it."

Aria stared at him, her eyes narrowing. "I don't think that long black hair is necessary."

aring a The hockey player introduced himself as Anders Olafsson, goalie for the Los Angeles Stingers and his wife Haley, another New York girl. (I'd heard of her.) Her wife introduced herself with a tentative voice that set me on edge. I should they have paired Nicole with a man like him.

to the While they all chatted, Finn turned toward me, leaning into me, I vaguely hovering near my ear. Every nerve ending in my body froze, despite the dark waiting for him to touch me. *What an idiot.*

pressed "I didn't tell you where I went because I didn't want you to freak out." His breath caressed my neck, ruffling strands of my hair. I braced myself against a shiver.

show's "Why would I freak out?" I asked, turning my face towards his.

To anyone else, we'd look like the picture of a loving couple. My hand squeezed tight with want. That just wouldn't do.

I watch

“It was a shipwreck in open water,” he whispered.

Finn pulled back enough to assess my expression. Whatever he saw on my face?” An him shut down. Shit. Despite it, he didn’t pull away. He pressed his face next to mine, maintaining the picture for the cameras.

He smiled. “I didn’t want you to worry.”

I tried to smile. Logically, I shouldn’t have believed him. My heart shouldn’t have been so soft for a playboy actor. Especially with a camera pointed at us.

But we were being filmed and we were meant to be playing a couple.

“I get it,” I said, deciding to play along. “But I worried.”

Finn’s jaw slackened. “Really?”

My eyes roamed his face and I barely restrained myself from frowning at Casey’s. For a second, I could almost convince myself his surprise was real. No way.

I nodded. “Yes, but I also thought you were avoiding me.”

“Ah.” Finn tilted his head, his focus turning inward. He winced. “My face was. Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” I shrugged. “It’s not like you need to explain it to me.”

Finn pressed his lips together and for a second I thought he would speak out. Then he nodded, straightening up in his chair to face everyone else.

“Can you stop looking at Aria like that?” Kyle asked Casey, his voice wavering. “She’s not a slab of meat.”

Casey chuckled. “Nice one.”

“Why are you even here?” Aria asked. She scowled at the musician who had heard about you.”

“Aria’s making a very good point.” Finn shifted in his seat with a glare at Casey.

He rested an arm across the back of my chair, his face set in hard lines.

“Where did Tyler run off to? He should be explaining this choice.” His gaze roamed the restaurant.

“I already tried,” Aria sighed. She crossed her arms, locked in a contest with Casey. “They didn’t realise he had a history of sexual assault when they locked him in.”

That got the attention of Anders and Haley, opposite us. They glanced apart, glancing around the table with furrowed brows.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Anders said, his voice lilted with a foreign accent.

“Allegedly,” Casey spat through bared teeth.

“Only because your Daddy paid off the victims and forced our company to sign an NDA.” Finn’s voice vibrated with anger.

Nicole stiffened, and her wide eyes flew to one of the cameramen.

“Allegedly,” he repeated.

“You can say the word as many times as you like,” Finn snapped. “It doesn’t change the fact your label dropped you last month after you passed at the wrong person.”

Finn’s knee bounced and his fist pressed against my back with a grip that gripped the top of my chair. One wrong move from Casey and I could hear him exploding.

“How the hell would you know that?” Casey leaned forward, any second and he’d be mounting the table.

hile he “It’s not exactly a state secret any more.” Finn shrugged, f
nonchalance, but the action was far too strained to be truly careless. “
nes. on the wrong band manager’s girlfriend.”

’ Finn’s I placed my hand on his thigh, squeezing to get his attention. Hi
dropped to the contact. He released the chair and smoothed his hand
staring down my back as if soothing me. All around us the outrage continue
assault tuned it out, focusing on only Finn’s sapphire eyes.

“Are you okay?” he asked, his voice low but deep with concern.

7 broke I almost laughed. I wasn’t the one losing my shit.

“Yes. Are you?”

ng with He blew out a shaky breath. “I don’t like people like him.”

I smirked. “I got that.” The lightness faltered a little inside of m
can talk to Tyler about it later? I’m worried about Nicole.”

1 entire Finn nodded.

“Hey Finn, how’d you feel about sharing?” Casey called across t
of noise surrounding us. “I hear you like that sort of thing.”

Finn stiffened beneath my hand. His gaze turned cold within the l
ped. “It an eye and his touch fell away from my back. He looked away fro
made a shooting daggers at Casey.

“Stay the fuck away from her,” Finn shouted, his voice shaking.

hile he Casey grinned. *Mark hit.*

uld see “It’s okay, Finn,” I whispered, pressing a hand to his chest.

7 closer “Yeah, listen to your woman, Finn.” His voice grated against me,
me sick. “She wants it.”

Finn shot to his feet, his intent clear. I scrambled up, stopping him

signing he could get too far.

You hit “Can one of you put your fucking camera down and go find ‘
Anders demanded.

s focus Someone rushed past me, but I couldn’t take my eyes off Finn to
up and his progress.

d, but I “Move out of the way, Abi,” Finn whispered through grinding teeth

I shook my head. “He’s not worth it. Especially not in front of camera
stepped into his body, pushing myself against him and wrapping myself
around his waist.

A small part of me worried that he’d reject me in front of the camera
when he wasn’t thinking straight, but I had to try something.

e. “We I smoothed my hands up and down his back. “You’re not the violator
Finn. Don’t let him get to you.”

Casey kept talking, his voice rising over the group, trying to dig deeper
he wall Finn. The longer he went on, the crasser his comments became, but
didn’t move, just kept watching me with a question in his eyes.

blink of “You seriously expect me to let him keep saying this disgusting shit
om me, you?” His brows rose, but then he noticed the camera pointed at
expression shifted as soon as he clocked it. His hands moved up my
caressing my bare skin like he could protect me from Casey.

He’d just shifted into actor mode faster than I could blink.

“No, I want you to keep looking at me like that.” I smiled
expression softened even more.

turning His arms wrapped around me, squeezing me to him.

before “I’ll look at you any way you want,” he whispered, the sound almost

with the ruckus at the table.

Tyler?” He lowered his head, his intent clear in his sapphire eyes. Surprised me to the spot.

follow

h.

eras.” I

ly arms

cameras

nt type,

eeper at

ut Finn

it about

us. His

y arms,

as his

ost lost

with the ruckus at the table.

He lowered his head, his intent clear in his sapphire eyes. Surprise froze me to the spot.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FINN

“*R*ight, what did I miss?” Tyler asked, raising his voice to crack the arguing at the table.

His appearance snapped some sense back into my head. I’d nearly Abi with the cameras rolling.

What the fuck was I thinking?

Clearly, I hadn’t been. With all the adrenaline firing through me, I was lost in her kind eyes, lost in the fact someone had tried to put my interests above themselves.

I released Abi and stepped back, turning to find Tyler poised at the head of the table wearing a deep frown. As if the wanker hadn’t expected an explosion when he left us at a table with Casey, the serial abuser.

“Why does the show think it’s okay to pair a sex offender with an innocent woman?” Aria demanded, her tone scathing. “I’d wager you’d feel the need to fill Nicole in on his history.”

Tyler spluttered, his eyes going wide.

Anders’ voice was quiet but seething. “My agent definitely didn’t

to my taking part in a show that would damage my reputation. I'm contract renewal." He gestured down the table at Casey. "Being in a with him will destroy my community credibility."

"Yeah, they sold me this stupid thing on the basis that it would be for me." Aria glared at Casey. "*That* is not good for anyone."

"Fix it, Tyler," I said, far too much joy in the words. "Or we'll be calling our agents and heading home in the morning."

"Now wait a minute," he sputtered.

All of us settled back against our chairs.

κ above
her shoulders. Abi slid back into her seat, her head high but tension radiating t

r kissed I liked her. Lying to myself wouldn't achieve anything, but it c
change anything. Abi Johnson would be better off without me. B
escape before I got attached to it all, to her.

e, I got "Alright then." I took my phone out of my pocket and hit speed dia
ny best The others followed suit before I walked a couple of paces away fr
table. I turned to watch the chaos while the phone rang. Charlie cou
be end of been asleep for all I knew. I didn't know what the time differen
cted an between Bora Bora and LA.

with an "Wait, you don't need to do this," Tyler shouted, absolutely
shaking his voice.

I didn't "Then fix your mess and get rid of him," Anders demanded.

't agree "And make sure Nicole gets therapy," Aria snapped before he
gentled, a mixture of horror and sadness clinging to her. "I can't i
what she's had to deal with sharing a room with him."

up for “Finn, my man, I wasn’t expecting a call from you,” Charlie s
t lineuptypical cheerfulness blaring in my ear. “What’s up?”

I filled him in while Tyler continued to panic, and Casey started sh
e goodFor a man who prided himself on being so suave and charming, he
cool quickly. It served him right.

I all be He’d worked for his father’s record label five years ago, taking ad
of any woman he could in the office. When his father’s company cras
reinvented himself as Casey Jackson, a singer-songwriter who requi
too much legal attention. From what Shaun had told me, he’d graduate
sexual assault to outright attempted murder before it all blew up in h
through He’d tried to put a guitar tech through a window at a soundcheck.

ouldn’t The sight of him made me sick. His name alone silenced Charlie.

etter to “You’re bullshitting to get off the show, right?” All the cheer
from Charlie’s voice. “Finn, please tell me you’re bullshitting?”

il. “Can’t.”

rom the “For fuck’s sake,” Charlie groaned. “I put you on *Married Blinc*
ld haveyour shit. How do you find trouble where there shouldn’t be any?”

ce was “Hey, I didn’t know he was on it until tonight.”

7 panic Tyler gave up trying to reason with the others and made his own
call. All the while, Charlie swore up a storm in my ear.

“What a fucking mess.” Something clattered on the other end of t
“You know the paps will eat this up, yeah?”

r voice I frowned. “The fact the show picked him or...?”

magine “If you divorce Abi before the show concludes, no matter the re
won’t look good.”

aid, his “Charlie,” I said, a clear warning in my voice.

“I’m just saying the better option for you is getting rid of that piece of routing. Englishman and staying on the show.” Charlie blew out a shaky breath, lost his composure. “Fuck. Don’t do anything drastic right now. Let me make some calls if I can fix it from my side. Leave it with me.”

With that, he hung up, leaving me even more agitated than I’d been before.

I stalked back to the table. Tyler talked in a hushed voice with a cameraman while Anders and Haley had moved to another table with Aria and Kyle.

Casey paced next to the table while Nicole stared at the table, pretending to be transfixed. Christ, we were all so focused on saving Casey’s drained skin, only Aria had even considered Nicole’s feelings in all this chaos.

I stopped behind Abi and placed my hands on her bare shoulders. I shouldn’t have done it, but the need to keep her safe overruled logic. Abi startled before tilting her head back to catch my eye.

“Do you want to get out of here while they fix this mess?” I asked.

“Sure.” Abi smiled, but then it collapsed. She stood, turning to glance at her phone as she chewed her lip. “I’m just not sure we should leave her here.” She whispered, leaning toward me.

“Nicole, why don’t you come and join us at another table?”

Her gaze snapped to us, surprise breaking through her fragile mask. She focused furious eyes on Casey. He had all of his attention on his phone.

Nicole collected her bag and edged around the table, keeping her distance from him. Abi threaded her arm through hers and led her towards the

couples. I collected our drinks and followed them. When Abi went
down opposite her, I bumped her shoulder before pressing my mouth
against her ear.
breath.

and see “Why don’t you sit next to her?” I whispered, working hard to keep
my suggestion light and not the protective measure it really was.

It’d been With Haley to her right and Abi to her left, Casey couldn’t
move himself next to her to scare her anymore. It might loosen her up.

a livid- “Great idea.” Abi turned around, smiling up at me.

entirely One piece of praise from this woman and my heart jolted. I never
worked harder at keeping her at arm’s length.

lecloth, She settled down next to Nicole and I slid her drink across the table
our own turned in her chair to face Nicole, that easy, friendly smile of hers played
her lips, brightening her entire expression.

lders. I They’d given me my perfect woman.

ic. She Tyler approached us, his panic replaced by a sheepish expression.
turned to him, brows raised in expectation. Mine were at least.

“The series producer extends his apologies. The background
research weren’t updated before filming began and the news about Mr Jackson
is,” she said through the cracks.” His gaze moved between Aria, Anders and
completely ignoring our spouses. “We’ll remove him from the show
with immediate effect and we won’t use any of tonight’s footage. Hope
you’ll all agree that we acted swiftly.”

call. “Try it again and talk to everyone at the table and we might accept
distances said, my blood boiling once again. “You put Nicole in danger.”

ie other “Finn’s right, of course.” Tyler nodded. His attention fixed on N.

it to sit last. “I’ve already arranged for Casey to fly out tonight. The staff are packing up his belongings now. It was a huge oversight, we never should have done that with you.”

Nicole nodded, moisture glistening in her eyes. Abi laid a hand on her shoulder in quiet support.

“Can I move rooms too please?” Nicole asked, her relief palpable in her voice.

“I’ll arrange it.” Tyler’s focus turned to everyone else. “I’m so sorry I wasted your time tonight. We’d like to try again tomorrow night. If you want to stay for it, we’ll just grab some quiet moments of you all while you eat separately.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Anders settled back in his chair, scowling at Tyler. “I think we all need time to process.”

“Yeah, everything we talk about is going to involve this instance. We all just waste more of our time.” Kyle pushed his chair back and Aria followed him. “We’ll make our own dinner plans, thanks.”

The pair stalked off ignoring Tyler’s protests.

“My agent is going to want all of this in writing by the way.” Tyler stood too, his hand gravitating to Haley’s lower back as she joined him. “He doesn’t have it by tomorrow morning, I’m walking and taking Haley home with me.”

Hayley smiled at Nicole. “Do you want to eat dinner with us?”

She quickly agreed and the three of them left, leaving me to stare after them.

Any moment we shared on camera needed to be a conscious one.

Abi is off-limits. Do not get attached to her.

packing If I needed to make it a daily mantra, I bloody would.
paired

on her

but her

orry we
u're up
dinner

s chair,

You'll
ollowed

Anders
im. "If
ey with

t Abi.

If I needed to make it a daily mantra, I bloody would.

INTERVIEW IV

Question: How did it feel watching Finn get angry on your behalf?

Abi: I thought you weren't using that footage.

Tyler, Producer: We aren't.

Abi: So why are you asking me about it?

Tyler, Producer: It seemed like a pivotal moment in your relationship

Abi: It might have been, but this interview will be pretty pointless with the footage or story to explain it. So, again, why are you asking me about something you agreed to cut?

INTERVIEW IV

Question: How did it feel watching Finn get angry on your behalf?

Abi: I thought you weren't using that footage.

Tyler, Producer: We aren't.

Abi: So why are you asking me about it?

Tyler, Producer: It seemed like a pivotal moment in your relationship.

Abi: It might have been, but this interview will be pretty pointless without the footage or story to explain it. So, again, why are you asking me about something you agreed to cut?

CHAPTER NINE

ABI

I'd taken my time brushing my teeth, washing the layer of makeup from my face, and changing into a pair of pyjama shorts and a tank top. I eyed the bed from the bathroom doorway, out of delaying tactics and to ignore the ball of nerves twisting in my stomach.

“C’mon, Abi,” Finn said, exasperation mixing with his tiredness. He pulled the covers back and patted the expanse of the empty mattress behind him. “I won’t bite, and there’s plenty of room. You won’t even know I’m here.”

He leaned against the headboard, cushions propping him up and his chest on display while the sheet pooled in his lap. My gaze wandered over his body, my brain begging for control, tracing the lines of muscle down to his legs.

“I could make a bed on the floor.” My cheeks burning, I glanced toward the closet where I’d found a pile of blankets and extra pillows waiting to be unpacked. “Couple of layers, and I’ll barely tell the difference.”

“Abi,” Finn groaned. He rubbed a hand across his face. “I’m not comfortable manhandling you if you don’t get in this bed right now.”

Finn slid down the bed as I climbed beneath the sheets. I caught his satisfaction from the corner of my eye and instead of calling him turned away from him, settling down against the pillows to pretend wasn't a mere two feet of distance between us.

"Thank you for earlier," I whispered into the silence of our room.

"What for?" he asked, his voice hoarse with tiredness.

"Take your pick." I shrugged, smiling into the darkness.

Finn sighed. "You don't need to thank me."

I pressed my lips together and didn't respond. He could deny it liked, but he'd played the perfect husband tonight. Laying in the dark no one to scrutinise me, I could acknowledge how nice it had felt.



FINN

ess. He

beside We'd started on opposite ends of the bed. Loads of space between us.

ow I'm

And then I woke at 3 AM. Rock hard with her body against mine. She just pressed, she'd flung a bloody leg across my waist and her head on my bare chest.

despite

ap.

l at the

nile we

pposed

My gaze fixed on the ceiling, jaw clenching, and my cock throbbing with a need I had no intention of fulfilling. It felt like torture.

I needed to move her.

My limbs had other ideas. My arm wrapped around her and my hand smoothed down her arm. I'd sworn to keep her at arm's length.

I hadn't thought resisting her would be hard, but I'd been very wrong.

She sighed, and I lifted my hand, bracing myself for her shock.

is smug Instead, she snuggled closer. Her thigh grazed lower, and my breath ex
on it, I from my lungs.

d there *Fuck.*

Even in sleep, she teased me. No woman had ever wound me so
that an innocent touch set me off. Evidently, I'd underestimated Abi.

I should have fucked a bunch of women before this all started...

As sensible as the idea would have been, I didn't believe it wou
helped. I'd lost interest in casual flings nearly a year ago. None c
t all he actually wanted me. Just the money, fame, and connections tha
k, with attached to me.

I shifted until Abi settled into the crook of my shoulder and I coul
her face. She looked so peaceful in sleep. All of that fire hidden. I didr
to believe she would be like the rest of them, but why else take part in
like *Married Blind?*



ne. Not

ABI

on my

I groaned, coaxed from a deep sleep, interrupting the best dream. Flic
ng with glistening skin and an intense sense of satisfaction clung to me. Brig
filtered beneath my lashes, chasing away the vague memory of it.

“Turn the heating off, Eva,” I grumbled.

fingers Oh, no.

Smooth skin pressed against my palm. Hard muscles tensed bene
ng. thigh. *Please tell me I didn't...*

d gasp. My eyes popped open, and horror sunk like lead in my stomach. T

exploded belonged to Finn.

I scrambled upright. The sun blazed in through the patio doors intense thanks to the water glistening beyond our terrace. I slid across tightly slowly, eying Finn for the slightest hint of movement. Instinct said he'd let it go if he caught me cuddling up to him.

Better if I made myself scarce.

I'd have I rushed into the bathroom and focused on showering. Or tried to.

of them Despite the shock, the dream still clung to me, a toe-curling, t camegrasping sheets kind of heated.

I had five minutes to develop a poker face before he saw straight t d studyme.

i't want *Shit.*

a show Ten minutes later, I tiptoed back into the main room, a towel w around me and another pressed to my hair. My pulse beat intensely throat despite my constant reminders that it would all be fine. He' asleep.

I didn't want to look at the bed. Or more, I was too much of a co :kers offace him in the intense silence. Only the sound of the water lapping ht lightthe bungalow's struts filled the room. I would have found it soothing hadn't been so high-strung.

"Why are you sneaking about?"

I jumped out of my skin, dropping the towel in my hand and spin :ath my face him. The picture of sneaky. He lay in bed, propped up again pillows, watching me with what I was coming to see as his trademark expression.

he heat

“I — I’m not.”

s, extra His brow rose and I blew out a shaky breath.

the bed “I thought you were still asleep.” I picked up the towel and rushed
d never my suitcase. “Didn’t want to wake you.”

Deafening silence followed me. The skin on the back of my neck
as if he were watching me.

“Are you going to shower?” I asked as a way of breaking the inte
. hands but also gauging my next move.

I turned to face him, clothes clutched to my chest, and my eyes
throughwide to not be suspicious.

“Maybe,” he said, the word popping as amusement danced acr
face. “You’re very tense this morning. Didn’t you sleep well?”

rapped My heart leapt into my throat again.

r in my *Do not react. He doesn’t know.*

’d been “I’m just trying to get ready before the crew comes knocking ag
you’re not showering right now, then?” I rushed past the bed, expe
ward to denial.

against “No, I think I’m going to cuddle in a bit more.” His voice dipped
ing if I cuddle. “It’s cosy in here, don’t you think?”

I kept my mouth shut, fighting the urge to not chew my lip. I mi
have a good poker face, well, any poker face, but I would not be the
ming to volunteer embarrassing information.

inst the The amusement slid off his face, and his brows drew together. H
k blank fixed on me intense enough to make me squirm. I tensed every mu
prevent that.

“If I have to restrain you to keep my personal space, I will.”

His tone dropped, grating over me deliciously while convincing me that the threat in his voice was no joke.

It should have horrified me. Instead, my core clenched.

Crossing my arms, I willed the feeling away. Something to pacify and not think about in his presence.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Sure, you don’t.” Finn threw back the covers and stood. “Next time I’ll wake you up and you can make your denials while your legs are wrapped around mine.” He stopped in front of me, lowering his face to mine and whispering, “I’m sure you’ll be able to sell it, love.”

He vanished into the bathroom, leaving me to shake off the pleasant warmth in my core.

If only he weren’t so hot and cold, I’d —

Something black caught my attention in the glass on the floor at the foot of the bed. When I looked properly, my blood ran cold.

“What? What is it?” Finn shouted, rushing back into the bedroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. I stared at him in wide-eyed panic and shrieked, “Abi. What’s wrong?”

I pointed down at the shark thrashing around less than two feet from my feet. My vocal cords had frozen up. Finn padded across to me, his face furrowed. The concern faded into annoyance as soon as he looked down.

“It’s just a shark.” When my panic didn’t ease, he shook his head. “Blacktip reef shark. It’s not aggressive, and you aren’t in the water with it.”

“I’m a New Yorker. We don’t do marine life.” The longer I watched

more the blood drained from my face. “You were in the water yesterday. What if it — oh my god.”

“Christ, Abi, save the drama for when the cameras are on.” Finn scooped a hand across his face.

That one sentence cut through my panic better than a cold splash of water. So I hadn’t been imagining his odd shifts in behaviour. On the surface, Finn was nicer, but it set me on edge every time. I much preferred the biting Finn, biting tone and all.

“It’s a shark. It lives here,” he continued, his voice dry and scolding. “You aren’t a fish, and man-eating sharks aren’t common in Bora Bora.”

“How do you know that? It could be one.”

I barely heard myself speak. Which Finn was real?

Finn growled. “I live in California. I know what a man-eating shark is like and that is not it.” He turned his back on me. “Pull it together.” He muttered before disappearing into the bathroom.

The glass door shut, snapping my focus from the reality adjacent to the unfolding in my head.

“You have an hour to spare before the crew collected us, we rushed through breakfast in what I’d like to call companionable silence. If I had known the way Finn kept his eyes on anything but me, turning away or grunting in response to any of my attempts to lighten the mood.

The longer it went on, the more my stomach knotted up.

“It’s a relief.” When one of the cameramen wandered into the dining room, trailing behind Kyle, his foul mood dissolved. They headed straight for us, smiling, their faces mirroring Finn’s. He turned into the perfect husband, reaching for my hand.

sterday.my hand across the table, coaxing me into the conversation with light t

My head hurt trying to see through it.

rubbed They stopped to chat pleasantries for a couple of moments before I
to their table at the far end of the room.

lash of The second the camera left Finn, his scowl came right back.

camera “What’s wrong with you this morning?” I poked at my eggs, peeking
the real his scowling face from beneath my lashes. He grunted but ot
continued to ignore me.

athing. “Seriously, Finn? You’re making me think you’re pissed at me, I
l.” would be ridiculous. I can’t control my body when I’m asleep.”

Again, he grunted.

“Stop acting like a sulking child and talk to me.” I pointed my
k looks him. “And if you grunt at me again, I swear I’ll drive this fork in
er,” he hand.” I wouldn’t, but he didn’t need to know that.

“I need to grab something from the room.” He pushed his chair b
istment stood, avoiding eye contact. “I’ll meet you out front before we l
leave.”

He stalked off, blazing across the open restaurant with his head do

shed to
ignored *Oh, no you don’t.*

ating in I abandoned my half-eaten plate and rushed after him. My
clattered against the boardwalk as I struggled to catch up. The m
almost a foot on me. I didn’t stand a chance.

ng Aria “Will you just talk to me?” I called after him.

files on He glanced over his shoulder, a scowl marring his gorgeous face.

ing for “Go back to the restaurant, Abi,” he snapped before continuing t

easing. our bungalow. “There’s nothing to talk about.”

I continued after him.

reading The bedroom stood empty, so I continued on to the patio, following
hunch. There I found him collapsed in a deck chair, staring out at the sea.

His gaze met mine as I approached, and his jaw tensed.

staring at “I’m not in the mood to play nice right now. Go.”

herwise I shook my head. Call me stubborn, but we had spoken vows
promises.

out that “Talk to me. I can help.”

His hands stilled where they drove through his hair. Something
expression shifted, chasing away the agitation and replacing it with
firm determination that made my body tense up.

to your “I’d rather not.”

He shot to his feet and stormed inside. I paused for a second on the
back and shut my eyes and took a deep breath. Logically, I should have left him
alone. So why did I feel compelled to do the illogical thing?

I followed him inside. “Then tell me what’s wrong.”

when.

He spun to face me, growling under his breath. “For Christ’s
woman, can’t you leave me alone for five minutes? I’m stuck with
sandals three months. Isn’t that enough?”

I had I crossed my arms and glared at him. “I was trying to be nice,” I
“You don’t need to be an asshole.”

“I told you to stay away. Did you listen?” he shouted. “No. When
refuse to listen, I’m allowed to be an asshole.” He dragged a hand through
his hair, lowering his voice. “Sweetheart, I’m Hollywood’s biggest play

ring isn't going to change me."

My mouth snapped shut. Both surprise and shame hit me in the
wing a because he was right. As legit as our marriage looked on paper, we we
ea. a relationship.

I shouldn't have expected anything from him. He didn't need to sl
feelings with me and I didn't need to make allowances for him.

, made "You're right." I nodded, my hands falling to my side. "We do
each other anything but to put on the right face and say the right thing
camera." A smile claimed my lips for the first time since I'd woken u
meet you at reception."

; in his "Wait. That's not what I — fuck."
a hard *Eye on the prize, Abi.*

e patio,
1 alone.

s sake,
you for

hissed.

ien you
ugh his
'boy. A

ring isn't going to change me."

My mouth snapped shut. Both surprise and shame hit me in the chest, because he was right. As legit as our marriage looked on paper, we weren't in a relationship.

I shouldn't have expected anything from him. He didn't need to share his feelings with me and I didn't need to make allowances for him.

"You're right." I nodded, my hands falling to my side. "We don't owe each other anything but to put on the right face and say the right things to the camera." A smile claimed my lips for the first time since I'd woken up. "I'll meet you at reception."

"Wait. That's not what I — fuck."

Eye on the prize, Abi.

CHAPTER TEN

FINN

I should have been happy.

Yet I couldn't stop studying her while she stared out the window the back of the minivan. Guilt gnawed at my gut, directly contradicting the elation I should have felt.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

Agreeing to *Married Blind* in the first place had been a huge mistake.

We stopped at the marina and Abi flung her door open, her excitement brightening her expression.

If we'd met under any other circumstance, I might have tried...

No, I couldn't lie to myself. Had I met Abi outside of the show, I might have sweet-talked her into bed and left the next morning. No attachments, no smiling at her singing in the shower or kissing her in public places, just wondering if there might be something real to unearth.

I would have played the perfect, unattached playboy.

Life was safer that way.

“So, what are we doing?” Abi asked as I climbed out of the car.

I slid my sunglasses on and turned my face up to the sun, absorbing one pleasure without hesitation.

“We’ll tell you once we’re on the boat,” Tyler said.

He ushered us towards a waiting catamaran and the request to change swimwear started to make sense. For once, the crew didn’t mess up. They loaded us onto the boat and headed out to sea.

I tried not to watch Abi soaking in the sun and sea breeze, but with her auburn hair flying behind her and her head tilted back, I couldn’t keep my eyes off her. At some point, my goals and my body had to get on the page. I needed to stop feeling guilty, needed to stop appreciating how her wild hair complemented her face or how stunning her blue eyes were. I needed to become just another woman, and one I didn’t want to sleep with.

About ten minutes later, the easygoing atmosphere changed. Tyler pulled out his notebook, and I knew our time to relax, and wallow, had ended.

“Okay, so we’ve got something exciting planned for today. Are you ready?” Tyler flashed a smile that failed to be infectious. Abi and I stared at him, the silence stretching between us. “You can strip down to your swimsuits and we’ll get started. This gentleman is going to outfit you with some snorkel gear, and show you how to use it.” He gestured to a tall, thin man with a captain’s hat perched on his head.

“What are we doing?” Abi asked again.

“You’re swimming with sharks!” Tyler’s enthusiasm made a resounding splash, and he flung his arms out at the glistening ocean.

Abi’s face paled. I unbuttoned my white shirt, eyeing her all the while.

“Do we have to?” She almost squeaked.

ing that “Fun, right?” Tyler said, totally missing the shake in her hands.

Stick with the programme, Finn. Do not engage.

o wearback on the swim deck and crossed her arms, almost hugging herself.

around. “Once you’re in your swimsuits, we’ll ask you a couple of questions

this should just be natural.” Tyler glanced between us, a slight frown
with her hitting as he studied Abi’s back. “This is a bonding exercise, so relax
keep my fun and stick close together.”

ie same He caught my eye and tilted his head toward Abi. The message could
ow well be clear. *What the fuck is her problem, and why aren’t you fixing it?*

re. She Sighing, I approached her.

with. I tapped her on the shoulder. “What’s up, dotey?”

r pulled I needed to *stop* using that word with her.

re you She turned toward me and my breath caught. Moisture shimmered
tared at eyes. She bit her lip as she studied me. Indecision flickered in her eyes
o your so, she leaned towards me.

ou with “I can’t go in there,” she whispered.

tanned “Why not? These people do things like this daily. We’ll be perfectly
safe.”

She pressed her lips together and shook her head.

rgence, “What is it about this that you don’t like?” I resisted the urge to push
into my chest. She kept rubbing her arms, seeking comfort where there
ile. none. “The swimming in the sea? The cameras? The sharks?”

She squeaked. I’d forgotten her reaction in the bungalow to the

shark.

“You’re afraid of sharks,” I said, purely to get a confirmation out

At her nod, something in me relaxed. “What sharks are out there?”

the skipper.

ned her

“Some Lemon and Whitetips, and the Blacktips of course,” he s

words lilting over a French accent. He glanced at Abi and his exp

ons, but

softened. “No reason to worry. They’re used to humans, and it’s unus

finally

them to bite. Just keep your eyes open, don’t splash around and don’t f

x, have

“What if I *do* panic?” She stepped closer, staring up at me with op

in her blue eyes.

ouldn’t

“Just keep hold of me.” I threaded our fingers together. “Tap my

you panic, and I’ll bring you back to the boat.”

For a couple of moments, Abi studied my face, a guarded light e

her eyes for the first time since we’d met. That pang of guilt resurfaced

“How are you so calm about this?”

l in her

“I told you, California has a lot of sharks. Surfing and diving, I’ve

s. Even

lot of them.” I smiled, squeezing her hand. “A couple of reef shark

scare me.”

“Okay, but if I can’t handle it...”

erfectly

“We’ll get out.”

“Wait —” Tyler snapped his mouth shut at my glare.

He wanted me to be a good husband and handle her. If he want

pull her

continue, he needed to shut up and back me up.

ere was

“Yes, of course.”

he reef

“Okay.” She nodded and released her death grip on my hand. “I

Her hands still shook as she tugged her summer dress over her head.

of her. My eyes had a mind of their own. My gaze dipped, tracing the line I asked bikini, absorbing details to haunt me later. Her full breasts, slightly r stomach, and toned thighs. Add in her long, wavy auburn hair, and if aid, the any concept about my type, Abi had bulldozed it in less than a minute. pression Abi approached the swim deck with a determined step. It cracked usual for skipper started his safety briefing and she turned to search for me. My anic.” itched to touch her and despite knowing I shouldn’t, I gave her w en trust wanted. I stopped at her side, my fingers pressed into her waist, re her I’d be by her side through it all.

hand if The cameramen went in first, their cameras locked inside underwater casing. One stayed on the surface, while the other disap ntering below. Then I jumped off the back of the boat.

l. When I surfaced, Abi still hadn’t joined me. She stood on the staring at the spot where I’d dived.

e met a “Are you coming in, Abi?”

s don’t I waited, my gaze fixed on Abi as she shakily climbed down the She paused on the last rung, her fingers clenching around the metal. to her, closed my fingers over hers, wrapped an arm around her wa pressed my front to her back.

“I’ve got you, *dotey*,” I whispered in her ear.

ed it to With a deep breath, she let go of the ladder and allowed me to p away from the boat. For a couple of minutes, we trod water wh adjusted. Her blue eyes shone brighter with the water reflecting snorkel mask. She kept trying to adjust it.

’ll try.” “Stop. The mask is fine.” I caught her hand, pulling it away fr

mask before she could dislodge it. "Take your time. Putting these things of her the water is a nightmare, so don't play around too much."

ounded Abi nodded, but beyond treading water, she felt like an empty vessel I'd had spun her to face me and she gasped. With her chest pressed against close enough that I could feel her nipples pebbling in the water, I l as the tongue.

y hands "Just breathe, Abi. We don't need to go under until you're ready."

hat she She stared into my eyes while her fingers dug almost painfully into ninding forearms. Nearly every inch of her brushed against me. Keeping expression calm and pleasantly blank took more work than it should have

plastic "Ready?" I asked when her breathing evened out.

appeared "You'll stay by my side?" She chewed her lip, staring at me with a vulnerable light in her eyes.

e deck, "Right next to you." I took her hand and lifted it out of the water. hold of my hand. Squeeze it when you need to, tug on it when you need attention. I promise you'll have fun if you can relax."

ladder. With one last deep breath, she nodded. Then we were off. She scooped I swam my hand the second she spotted some Blacktip sharks swimming in a list and of a black shoal of fish. Others patrolled the sandy seabed.

The fish engulfed us, and after a moment of stunned panic, Abi pulled down. Her shoulder periodically brushed against mine, as if she needed pull her than my tight grip on her hand for reassurance.

while she We circled in the water, tracking one shiver of sharks. Some passed off her by without so much as a pause. She loosened up, tugging *me* in whatever direction she wanted.

om the

gs on in The heady rush of relief hit me.

essel. Iboat. “That was incredible,” she shouted when we surfaced at the back. “Thank you, Finn!”

t mine, She threw her arms and legs around me, hugging me as she pressed bit myto my cheek. One impulsive move, and she unravelled all of my effort to ignore her body. Holding her felt right, and my dick couldn’t agree which was a problem considering I wore swimming trunks, and I still nto myget out of the water.

ng my “Told you you’d enjoy it.” I smiled before disentangling us.

ave. Giddy, she spun around and reached for the ladder without prodding the cameraman had stayed on board. He stood poised and ready to capture with a the most inappropriate shots of the show as Abi climbed back on board.

eed my “Hold on, Abi.” I swam to her, and she turned, her brow furrowed. “Keep edge in my voice. “Let me help you.”

and out She stared at me for a couple of seconds, confusion clouding her eyes. Then I tilted my head slightly towards the waiting camera, and her eyes widened.

and out “Oh. Thank you.”

settled the ladder. With a firm grip on her waist, I lifted her onto the swim deck and more back to the camera. Her expression softened.

I’m my own worst enemy.

sed her

ichever

The heady rush of relief hit me.

“That was incredible,” she shouted when we surfaced at the back of the boat. “Thank you, Finn!”

She threw her arms and legs around me, hugging me as she pressed a kiss to my cheek. One impulsive move, and she unravelled all of my efforts to ignore her body. Holding her felt right, and my dick couldn't agree more, which was a problem considering I wore swimming trunks, and I still had to get out of the water.

“Told you you'd enjoy it.” I smiled before disentangling us.

Giddy, she spun around and reached for the ladder without prodding. One cameraman had stayed on board. He stood poised and ready to capture one of the most inappropriate shots of the show as Abi climbed back on board.

“Hold on, Abi.” I swam to her, and she turned, her brow furrowing at the edge in my voice. “Let me help you.”

She stared at me for a couple of seconds, confusion clouding her eyes. Then I tilted my head slightly towards the waiting camera, and her eyes widened.

“Oh. Thank you.”

She placed her hands on my shoulders and her foot on the bottom rung of the ladder. With a firm grip on her waist, I lifted her onto the swim deck, her back to the camera. Her expression softened.

I'm my own worst enemy.

INTERVIEW V

Question: Why are you so resistant to the show?

Finn: Why do you need to ask loaded questions?

Tyler, Producer: Why do you think it's loaded?

Finn: Because you'll twist any answer I give.

Tyler, Producer: We're not a gossip show, Finn. Your words are your words.

Finn: *Snorts* As if. If you could splice a chunk of an interview specifically to sensationalise the drama on this show, you would. And don't say you would never do something like that. You're not the editor or the edit producer. You won't be in the room.

Tyler, Producer: That's true, but it doesn't change the fact that these interviews are here for you to get out any feelings you're not ready to talk about. Not about Abi.

Finn: Why would Abi care if I hate this show?

Tyler, Producer: You're not that obtuse. If someone you were involved with hated the thing that brought you together, wouldn't you wonder if they were involved with you too?

r

ifically

u

alk to

ed with

hated

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ABI

The crew packed up once we returned to the hotel, freeing us to off the salt water and enjoy the rest of our afternoon. With drying on our skin, Finn and I spent it in comfortable silence on the pa the first time since my parents died, I could actually relax, guilt-free.

I embraced the good life between the sun, the surrounding comfortable position on a lounge with a book, my phone on silent to blushing at Ros's inappropriate suggestions. And, of course, the odd the pool.

Maybe this is why people chase fame.

The one blip in my relaxation plans came in the form of six-foot inches of pure muscle. Seriously, had Finn McCarthy never eaten a butter cup? The abs on the man made my mouth water, and don't even started on the bulge I couldn't help ogling every time he climbed out pool or ocean.

Flashbacks wouldn't stop hitting me. Him pressing against me water. His long fingers wrapping around my hand. The way he'd lif

out, his biceps straining, just so I wouldn't flash my tits to the camera. The *feel* of his hardness pressed against me when I wrapped my legs around his waist.

He was hard...

Because of *me*.

That still boggled my mind. If there hadn't been cameras pointed at me, I might have tried my luck.

"What time is it?" Finn asked from the pool, pausing in yet another lap. The man couldn't stay still.

I glanced at my phone. "Nearly six."

He studied me for a second, his expression perfectly blank. Then something shifted. A small smile curled his lips, setting my heart off to a steady pitter-patter. What did that smile mean, and why did I wish he'd direct it at me more often?

"Do you want to get food?" He stopped at the edge of the pool, pressed his hands to the deck. "You probably need a drink after today, don't you?"

He lifted himself out of the pool as he spoke. My mouth dried and I lost control of my eyes. Who wouldn't when confronted with that body? Water cascaded from him, sliding down his skin in tiny rivulets, taunting me to follow their path.

"Abi?" he asked, amusement audible in the one word.

My gaze shot back to his face, eyes widening while my mouth stayed shut. He smirked at me, his brows rising, knowing exactly where my attention had gone.

"Yup, sounds like a plan." I nodded, my cheeks burning and my stomach

araman, twisting with a mixture of need and mortification. I gestured to the shower
around “You can grab the first shower.”

Finn picked up a towel and patted it against his chest. His blue eyes
remained fixed on me, mirth dancing through them. He glanced at the
outdoor shower and his expression turned devious.

at us, I “Or I could just shower out here...” He stepped towards it, a
mischievous curling his lips.

r round I shot to my feet and squeaked: “Then I’ll use the one inside.”

His laughter followed me inside. I shut the bathroom door with a
hand while my heart made a bid to escape my chest. I leaned against the door,
forcing air into my lungs and begging my core to stop clenching at the
thought of him touching himself as he showered....

t at me Shit, I meant washing.

“Fuck.” My brain short-circuited and threw up a very enticing picture of
Finn masturbating.

right?” With the cold water turned to full blast, I braced myself for the
shower of my life. Something needed to shock some sense into me.

Water ❄️

me to After a pleasant dinner, I climbed into bed, the tension unwinding
several cocktails. I might have giggled a bit and sighed over
when the cool sheets covered me.

popped “I need to know where they buy these sheets,” I muttered into my
head “They’re so soft.”

“You can ask in the morning,” Finn said from the other side of the bed.

t stomach I frowned as I lifted my head from the pillow, tracking his movements.

shower. He kept walking back and forth to the bed, dumping more and more on it.

the eyes “What are you doing?”

at the Finn flashed me a smile but didn't answer. Instead, he started pillows down the middle of the bed, forming a barrier.

absolute I chortled at the sight of it and his determined expression.

“You really don't like cuddles.”

He glowered at me. “I like my personal space.”

shaking “Ooookay. You must be fun after a night of fucking.”

ainst it, His fingers stalled and I should probably feel embarrassed about
idea of words.

I didn't.

cture of Finn recovered fast, continuing to pile the pillows down the entire
of the bed. Satisfied, he settled under the sheet without comment,
away from me.

e worst I frowned at the wall of pillows.

For a couple of seconds, only the sound of the air conditioning u
tten by the waves lapping the struts below us filled the room. Altogether, I f
ly loud oddly soothing. My eyelids drooped.

“Thank you for helping me today,” I whispered, losing the silenc
pillow. fast.

“No problem.”

room. I chewed my lip, wishing I could see his face. Did he mean it?

ements. “I didn't think I'd freak out that much.”

pillows He sighed and the sheets rustled. Rolling over?

“I thought you were brave,” he said, his voice so low I had to s
hear him.

l piling Heat burned my cheeks and the biggest smile claimed my lips.
you.”

Silence descended again, but words clamoured through my
desperate to get out. My tongue pressed to the roof of my mouth as I
stem the flow. *Whose idea has it been to have four cocktails?* I coul
hold my liquor.

it those “I promise I won’t cuddle you tonight.” Even if it felt amazing.

“Good,” he huffed. “Goodnight, Abi.”

Why couldn’t they have paired me with someone resistible?



e length

turning

FINN

The next morning, I woke to heat and the gentle weight of Abi cuddl
mit and my side again.

ound it The pillows lay all over the place, my barrier absolutely decimat
again, she’d wound herself around me, her leg hooked with mine, he
e battle pressed to my hip and her head resting in the crook of my shoulder. *A*
point, I’d wrapped my arm around her again, holding her to me.

I rubbed a hand across my face and groaned. *How could I keep he
from me when I couldn’t trust myself?*

Biting at her yesterday had been hard, almost painful, and I’d bl
the effort up within an hour. I was running out of options. If I were

honest with myself, I didn't have any to begin with. Abi needed to be
train to to quit.

I needed to get my head on straight and fast.

“Thank Abi stretched against me, and her thigh moved higher up my leg,
my morning wood with very little effort. I gritted my teeth against the
mind, sensation. The intense need I felt for her could not be normal.

tried to *Maybe she'd go for a one-time thing...*

d never Talk about stupid ideas. Those kinds of arrangements never end
one night and they never ended well. Mona and Shaun had started
relationship as a direct result of the “get it out of our system” lie.

Nope. I could hold on.

I just needed to last five more days. Then we'd be in my massive
sleeping in separate rooms and hardly seeing each other. I could de
wait.

“Sorry,” she mumbled. Her fingers skittered across my nipple and
bolt of need shot through me.

led into

Fuck.

ed. Yet A second later, Abi tensed. She lifted her head from my chest and
r pelvis gaze with horror widening her eyes.

At some “I'm so sorry.” She untangled our legs and sat bolt upright, tur
check out her destruction. “I don't know how I...” She glanced back
r away her teeth sunk deep into her lower lip. I couldn't tear my eyes away
feel my grip slipping on my self-control. The need to kiss her burned s
craved that ‘out-of-body, nothing else matters’ feeling she inspired.

own all

totally I hadn't craved someone since Natalie.

the one “I really am sorry.”

My restraint snapped and I reached up, smoothing my thumb along her lip, freeing it. Her eyes widened again, but this time, they darkened with grazing desire. Her tongue darted out, unintentionally caressing my skin. I froze, my thumb against her soft lips as my cock ached and my brain caught up to my wayward hands.

“It’s okay,” I said, surprising myself.

I dropped my hand and sat up. She watched me, the need warring with her face.

“Try not to do it again,” I muttered before climbing out of bed.

Heading for the bathroom, I didn’t look at her. One glance at her house, confused face, her hair mussed from sleep, and I might crack. But it definitely wouldn’t be good for either of us.

another

met my

ning to

at me,

, could

trong. I

“I really am sorry.”

My restraint snapped and I reached up, smoothing my thumb along her lip, freeing it. Her eyes widened again, but this time, they darkened with desire. Her tongue darted out, unintentionally caressing my skin. I froze, with my thumb against her soft lips as my cock ached and my brain caught up with my wayward hands.

“It’s okay,” I said, surprising myself.

I dropped my hand and sat up. She watched me, the need warring across her face.

“Try not to do it again,” I muttered before climbing out of bed.

Heading for the bathroom, I didn’t look at her. One glance at her confused face, her hair mussed from sleep, and I might crack. Breaking wouldn’t be good for either of us.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FINN

The production kept us busy for most of the day, shadowing our move from breakfast to lunch. Then they bundled us into a minivan with more secretive smirks, predictably keeping their mouths shut whenever we asked for clues about the day's torture.

The minivan wound up into the mountains, bracketed by thick foliage on each side. Abi sat next to me, chewing her lip, while Tyler nattered and I tuned him out pretty fast.

Half an hour later, we stopped in a gravel car park with a steel structure at the bottom end. The team filed out of the minivan. Their cameras were pointed straight onto their shoulders, ready to catch our "surprise" at the activity.

The urge to roll my eyes bit at me hard, but then I'd be a bad character, and I had no intention of giving Tyler an inch of ground.

"Okay, Abi, Finn, can I get you to stand here, please?" Tyler said. His tone would have been perfectly pleasant if not for the glimmer in his eyes. He guided Abi to me, turning us until our backs were to the building. "Excellent. Now, do you know where you are?" He stepped back, outright grinning.

as if his excitement would catch.

Abi shook her head and his focus shifted to me. I just glared at him.

“You’re going to tell us, so quit the theatrics and get on with it.” My voice dropped, hardening with my annoyance.

“Right enough.” Tyler smirked and rubbed his hands together. “You’re zip-lining over the gorgeous Bora Bora forests. Isn’t that cool?”

He paused, expecting something more than the stone-cold silence I gave him.

“I said, isn’t that cool?”

“Do we have to?” Abi squeaked.

“It’ll be fun, I promise.” He grinned, his eyes on fire with excitement. I missed the fact we weren’t mirroring him.

Abi paled and took a step back, bumping into me. Her back pressed against my arm, the heat of her body burning against me despite the cool afternoon. My fingers itched to touch her, to wrap my arm around her. I’d console her.

“Are you afraid of heights?” I asked her, keeping my voice low. Tyler waxed poetic about some psychological mumbo jumbo theory about couples who took part in terrifying situations forming tight, lasting bonds. I knew the answer before she turned her fear-ridden gaze on me.

Who was I fucking kidding? I didn’t stand a chance faced with her blue eyes.

I wrapped an arm around her, tugging her against my chest. Her head curled in my shirt, white-knuckling it.

“We’re not doing this, Tyler.” I kept my voice firm and stared him down. “I’m pretty sure you have a duty to not traumatise your contributors.”

Tyler offered Abi a sympathetic smile. “It’s perfectly safe. You’ll be strapped in and it’ll be over faster than you can say acrophobia.” He clapped his hands at his joke. “This is part of the show.” He held his hands out, trying to fail. “This is failing to claim his helplessness in the face of the system. “This is the first thing on the list for the day. We get through this and you’ll be able to do it.” My “Today, without the cameras.”

“You can’t be serious with that bullshit.”

“I’ll do it,” Abi croaked. She pushed away from me, turning her back to the cameras.



ent and

ABI

pressed
e warm
her and
As sick as I felt at the thought of being thousands of feet in the air, I was grateful when they strapped us together. *At least I don't have to face them alone.*

v while
y about
That didn't mean I relaxed though.

ids.
rub his hands over my arms and back, soothing me as best he could. His fingers twisted in his shirt, wishing I could get closer.

watery
to project my voice.
“Thank you for trying to stop them,” I whispered, my throat far too dry to project my voice.

fingers
my heart fluttered. “If you want.”
“There’s still time for me to try again.” He squeezed me against his chest.

1 down.
Oh, how I wished it were that straightforward.

“Thank you, but no.” I shook my head, forcing a smile to my lips.

be wellfrowned at me, seeing through my bravado. “I’ll just hide my face
ruckedchest and hope it ends quickly.”

ng and The instructor appeared at our side. “Okay, Abi, turn around and I
the lastthe last clips in place.”

to relax Every muscle in my body locked up. He gripped my arm, p
assuming the harnesses made moving difficult rather than seeing t
crippling my body. I shuffled around, my heart pounding at an alarmin

ale face “Can’t she stay facing me?” Finn asked, fighting for me still.

The instructor smiled kindly. “Sorry, it’s safer this way.”

Resigned to my fate, I let him strap me in. In any other situation, t
of Finn’s body cupping mine would have made me feel safe. Fac
endless run of a zip-line and a metal platform that did nothing to h
; I wasdrop, the close press of our bodies barely registered.

ly fears “Close your eyes, okay?” Finn said, his breath caressing my ear. H
wrapped around me, squeezing tight around my waist. “When we ge
this, I’ll book you into the spa for the rest of the afternoon.”

nued to I smiled at the promise but kept my mouth shut.

ild. My “And the production will pay, won’t they, Tyler?” His tone pr
painful consequences if he denied it.

oo tight Tyler readily agreed.

They strapped the cameramen into their own harnesses and riggs
im andcameras around them, ready to catch every second of my terror
viewing pleasure of millions of strangers.

The instructor called something, and we started moving. The edge
s. Finnme faster than I could handle. I squeaked and the air lodged in my t

in yours slammed my eyes shut before we could get too close, leaning into Finn, putting my faith in his promises.

’ll lock Air blew through my hair and my stomach dropped. The scream tore from my throat, resisting my every effort to squash it.

robably Finn’s grip never faltered, even when the drop jostled us together. He feared together.

g rate.



Finn smoothed my hair down as we stood by the minivan, waiting for the camera crew to decide their next move. He tilted my face toward him, forcing me to meet his concerned gaze.

he heat

ing the “Are you okay?”

ide the I blew out a breath. “I think so.”

My heart still pounded wildly and my pulse throbbed in my temples. I’d survived. I needed to lie down for a week to recover.

“A stiff drink would be good about now, right?” His lips quivered with a glimmer of the real Finn shining through. He coaxed a breathless agreement from me. Then the tiny glimmer of amusement faded, replaced with a look that made my stomach drop for an entirely different reason. “Do you have any other fears I should know about?”

I bit my lip.

“You told them you were afraid of sharks and heights, right?”

I nodded. I’d given them every detail. They’d said I should be honest, but it might affect the results if I wasn’t.

He glowered at Tyler’s back, swearing under his breath.

“It’s okay.” I stepped closer to Finn, placing my hand on his forearm.

inn and got through it.”

“Yes, you did. After they scared the shit out of you.” Finn frowned
re from that unusual concern darkening his eyes. One look and my heart w

“You don’t need to accept that shit, Abi. You can put your foot c
ainfully they’re pushing you too much.”

“Honestly, I’m past it now.” I squeezed his arm, smiling. “Thank
looking out for me again. Next time, I’ll push back.” Then I rol
ting for shoulders and winced. “Although I’m definitely going to need a mas
ace up, feels like I went a full-on hour at the gym.

What are you afraid of?” I asked, catching Finn off guard.

Something about our closeness made this moment seem private,
of time just for us. Probably thanks to adrenaline from the fear I’d ju
les, but forced to face.

Finn’s expression shut down, the light and concern slowly fading u
rked, a robot of an actor stared down at me.

“So we know what else they might throw at us.”

Finn nodded and his face smoothed out. “They can’t throw my
Do you you. You’d have to learn to dive first.”

He took a step back. I caught his arm, following him. “What is it?”

He studied me with a critical eye, assessing me for something, but
knew what.

“Drowning,” he finally said. “And I don’t mean simply losing co
the water.”

I frowned. “Then what do you mean?”

arm. “I He sighed, rolling his eyes to the clear sky before narrowing them

“This stays between us, right?”

l at me, “I promise.”

armed. Despite my reassurance, he still hesitated. His fingers twitched
down if body twisted away from me, bringing us closer but also convincing n
turn away from me.

you for “I’m scared of *something* drowning me.” He glanced towards th
led my again. “There’s no logic to it, and the animal doesn’t matter. It’s just t
sage. It of control. Tyler and his accomplices have no way of manufacturi
situation to put us through it, which is why he’s focusing on yo
sapphire gaze pierced through me.

a grain “Why do you dive and surf if you’re scared of that?”

st been “Why do you get in a car if there’s a chance it’ll crash?” He sh
staring into my eyes with a singular focus. “Fear is no reason to miss
until the life. I love diving and surfing. I’m not going to avoid the sea bec
irrational fear.”

It made a twisted kind of sense. Not a sense I had any inten
fear at applying to my fears.

Finn stepped back, breaking my hold and our close connection. S
passed and already I missed our little bubble of trust. We stared at eac
hell if I an awkward air weaselling its way between us.

What the hell just happened?

ntrol in

on me.

“This stays between us, right?”

“I promise.”

Despite my reassurance, he still hesitated. His fingers twitched and his body twisted away from me, bringing us closer but also convincing me he'd turn away from me.

“I'm scared of *something* drowning me.” He glanced towards the crew again. “There's no logic to it, and the animal doesn't matter. It's just the lack of control. Tyler and his accomplices have no way of manufacturing that situation to put us through it, which is why he's focusing on you.” His sapphire gaze pierced through me.

“Why do you dive and surf if you're scared of that?”

“Why do you get in a car if there's a chance it'll crash?” He shrugged, staring into my eyes with a singular focus. “Fear is no reason to miss out on life. I love diving and surfing. I'm not going to avoid the sea because of irrational fear.”

It made a twisted kind of sense. Not a sense I had any intention of applying to my fears.

Finn stepped back, breaking my hold and our close connection. Seconds passed and already I missed our little bubble of trust. We stared at each other, an awkward air weaselling its way between us.

What the hell just happened?

INTERVIEW VI

Question: How do you feel about Finn now?

Abi: I'm not really sure. It's all a bit muddled.

Tyler, Producer: In what way?

Abi: One minute, he's snapping. The next, he's... sweet. I don't know real, I guess.

Tyler, Producer: That's understandable when you meet someone new. You don't know how to read him yet.

Abi: Yes, but it's also the actor thing. Or more, I can handle his game now, I can almost see it coming. But when the cameras are around, he's different, and I can't tell if that's real either sometimes.

Tyler, Producer: Have you talked to him about it?

Abi: Why on earth would I do that?

Tyler, Producer: Communication is kind of important in a marriage, I

Abi: Yeah, but I've known the man for less than a week. In the real world, at this point, we might have gone on one date, and I'd be sat at home second-guessing whether I should call him or text to arrange a second. None of the normal rules of marriage apply?

Tyler, Producer: It's a sped-up process, granted, but every relationship

apart when communication breaks down, no matter how progressed it :

Abi: *shakes head* He was a sweetheart when I needed him to be. What question that and he never does it again?

what's

, right?

face

s...

Abi.

orld, by

ond-

f this is

ip falls

apart when communication breaks down, no matter how progressed it is.

Abi: *shakes head* He was a sweetheart when I needed him to be. What if I question that and he never does it again?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FINN

*F*ours later, we'd nearly escaped when they pulled Abi back for a one-on-one interview. I couldn't stand being alone in the bungalow, so I let my thoughts drift.

The call connected before I could formulate any kind of response. The Welshman loaded on my phone screen, wearing a massive smile. Shaun Martin and I had become friends very early in our careers. I'm not sure how I would have turned out without him acting as my sounding board.

"Hey, mate. How's the honeymoon?" Shaun asked. Amusement shined in his green eyes while his dark brown hair looked unkempt for once.

I twisted my lips into a wry smile. "A little more challenging than I expected."

Shaun snorted, dragging a hand through his hair.

We all had problems, secrets whispered to the wrong person at the time that could destroy us. Shaun had gotten out in front of his before they could get him down. It probably helped that he had sweet, smiling Mona on his arm to distract his fans.

Unfortunately, I hadn't needed to develop a problem for someone advantage of me. I got good at being the honey-lipped player who could get any woman into lifting her skirt no matter where we were or who could see.

"Wow. That's..." Shaun shook his head, shock and mirth shining in his eyes. "Unexpected?"

"Laugh it up, asshole," I grumbled, shifting further back on the chair. "I know you're all enjoying my pain."

"You make it too easy." Shaun shrugged without so much as an apology. "But in all seriousness, maybe you should just give it a chance."

"Give it a... Bloody hell, what have you been smoking, and does it even work?"

"It's not crazy to suggest you give someone a chance, Finn." I glanced behind him and then lowered his voice. "What do you have to say by giving Abi the benefit of the doubt and putting some faith in the systems?"

"A renewed media shitstorm. The loss of my remaining shred of credibility. Studio execs being reminded of the 'reputation' my ex-girlfriend had before fucking off with a boatload of money for selling me out. The loss of future jobs." I ticked them off on my free hand, tapping my fingers against the table through the list. "And maybe a bit of heartache," I whispered.

"I agree, it's a hell of a list, but what if Abi is different?"

"Shaun," I groaned, covering my face. "I. Don't. Want. To." I bit my tongue, words, acting every bit like a petulant child.

"I didn't want to stop drinking, but I did it." His face hardened. "I want to go back to acting, but you lot forced me. You can't just hide from me."

to take Why the hell not?
uld talk “We’re worried about you, man.”
d see. “Beyond my current situation, there’s nothing to be worried about.
g in his Shaun stared at me, his deadpan expression telling me exactly how
he believed me.
bed. “I “I need a drink.” I dragged a hand across my face.
unce of “Alcohol’s not the answer, Finn.”
e.” “Yeah yeah, I know, but it’s at least fun for a couple of hours.”
s Mona Shaun frowned at me, and I bit back the apology before it could
my tongue. He hated it when we apologised for living. Besides, his fro
nothing to do with my talking about drinking.
Shaun “Look, at least if I’m in the bar, she’s nowhere near me, right?”
to lose “You’re lusting after her and you don’t want to.” Concern de
show’s Shaun’s Welsh twang, making his words trip over themselves. “I
red of getting drunk going to help the situation?”
fted me “I’ll forget for a couple of hours.”
loss of “It’s not a good idea.”
as I ran I nodded. “Possibly.”
“No possibly about it. All common sense goes out the window wh
drink.”
out the “I don’t want to think so much anymore.”
“Think! For a second, just think.” Shaun growled, his expression
I didn’t frantic. “Where will you go after you get drunk, Finn?”
rever.” I’d go to bed.

“You’ll go back to your room where Abi’ll be waiting for you and make a fucking mistake.”

” “That won’t happen.”

” much Shaun snorted. I shook my head. “Christ, have some faith in me.” I glanced over his shoulder. He leaned forward, almost like he hid the truth from someone.

“I’m getting married in a couple of months,” he whispered. “A wife-to-be seems to be attached to the idea of *your* wife.”

slip off I stopped, my head spinning with all the unconnected shit.

wn had “She has her heart set on befriending her, Finn. I’m under strict orders to get involved.”

reopened “Mona is choosing my wife over *me*?” I shouted, absolutely outraged. “Put that bloody Scot on the phone.”

How is Shaun chuckled. “I’ve tried. Don’t waste your breath.”

I sat back on the bed, the blood draining from my face as my shoulders sagged. “Okay, so I’ve lost Mona... I think I can deal with that?”

Silence followed my question and I glanced down at the screen, expecting the connection to have dropped. Instead, I found Shaun staring at me, having lost my mind.

hen you “Some wingman you are,” I grumbled. “Clearly, I should have called Jackson.”

turning “Good luck with that. Pretty sure he’s busy trying to talk his lawyer into fucking him.” Shaun tilted his head, realisation flickering through his eyes.

“On second thought, yeah, call him.”

I’d hoped talking to Shaun would help clear my head, but m


l you'll conflicting wants still confused the ever-loving shit out of me. Shou
known calling the sensible one of the four Kings of Screen would back
me.

' Shaun "Thanks for nothing, asshole."

phone "Don't be a reckless tosser, Finn." With that parting warning, Sha
up.

and my I stared at the glowing patio and setting sun for less than ten s
before the devil on my shoulder chipped in.

Fuck it.

lers not 
"What is an Irish coffee?" Abi asked, her nose scrunching up.

traged. Abi leaned against my side, almost falling off her stoo
bar. Don't ask me how it happened. I'd been on my third glass of
when she walked in, looking far too delicious in her low-cut sundre
sandal heels.

oulders "Dotey, you don't like coffee."

pecting She grinned up at me, her head lolling against my shoulder. A
like I'd slipped past her lips.

called The barman might have surrendered the bottle to us and we mig
emptied it. Distantly, I knew tomorrow would be painful, but I couldn
myself regret it when that happy buzz thrummed through my veins.

yer into "So not a good idea?"

is eyes. "You'd hate it, so definitely not."

"Okay," she sighed.

uddled, How a sigh could sound happy, I had no fucking clue, but I ne

ld havehear it again.

Her eyelids fluttered shut and she sagged further again. Instinctively, I wrapped an arm around her waist, saving her from a fall to the marble tiles. I could just imagine the accusations of abuse tabloids would levy at me if a photo of her with so much as a bruise on her arm surfaced.

No negative shit allowed.

I squeezed her against me, enjoying holding her far too much. Tomorrow I'd blame the booze.

“Abi?”

“Hmm?”

“This isn't the best place to fall asleep.”

“Okay,” she sighed again as she turned her face more firmly into my shoulder.

I blinked at the row of brightly lit liquor bottles lined up on the front of me. All of them danced.

Maybe Abi has the right idea.

I gestured for the bartender's attention. He wandered over, his brows furrowed as he spied the empty whisky bottle.

“Can you add this to our room?”

At his nod, I slid out of my seat carefully, turning to catch Abi before she face-planted into my seat. She groaned as I slid an arm beneath her leg.

“Where are we going?” she mumbled, one word flowing into the next.

“To bed.”

ended to

“Hmm... yes, please.” Her voice deepened, grating across my skin as she ran her nails down my back.

Two words and she had me hard. Un-fucking-believable.

I carried her back to the room while her fingers toyed with the buttons on her shirt and she pressed open-mouth kisses to my neck and shoulder. Concentration eluded me, putting one foot in front of the other was difficult.

“You need to stop, *Dotey*.” I frowned at the boardwalk leading out to the bungalows. I remembered it being wider. “We’ll be going for a swim, so be not careful.”

Mercifully, or unfortunately, she stopped. Her fingers dug into her hair, hunting for what I hoped was our room key. The reprieve didn’t last long. She clutched the old-school key in her hands and went right back to nuzzling my neck.

“Abi,” I groaned.

I knew this was a bad idea. Now if only I could remember why, so I could give a reason with my idiot self.

“Yes?” she hummed against me.

Our bungalow appeared out of nowhere. Grateful, I stopped at the entrance and waited for her to unlock it. She didn’t even notice that we’d stopped. Her teeth and lips continued wreaking havoc on my shredded self-control.

“Can you get the door, Abi?” The words came out strangled.

Just like my cock felt. It pressed hard against the zipper of my pants. Every step I took, bumped Abi against me, both teasing and torturous.

She lifted her head. Her lust-filled gaze met mine and she licked her lips.

The final thread snapped on my control as her focus dropped to my don't know who moved first, but our lips crashed together, need over everything else.

Our tongues duelled. Teeth nipped. Her hands roamed. Desperate out over sense and sensations overloaded me.

“Open the door,” I panted, breaking the kiss long enough to press the door. She dragged her kiss-swollen lips between her teeth and I got to the “Abi. Open the door before I fuck you right here for anyone to see.”

Her eyes widened, interest flickering across her face. She slotted in the lock before my whisky-addled brain decided a little exhibitionist clutch, would be a good idea.

The door swung open and she wrapped her arms around my neck nibbling Her sinful mouth returned to torturing me before I'd even taken a step.

“About time you carried your bride over a threshold,” she mumbled lips caressed my neck again, grinning I assumed.

I snorted. “That a secret kink?”

“Nope,” she said before sucking on my throat.

I almost doubled over as lightning shot down my spine. *One foot in the door of the other.*

Kicking the door shut, I rushed across the room and lowered her bed. She sprawled across the sheets, a dazed look in her eyes and curling her lips.

“The tying me up thing though...” Her eyes fluttered shut on “That might be one.”

“That can be arranged,” I said, my voice hoarse.

lips. I lay down on my side next to her. She rolled into me, her fingers riding into my hair. Her lips crashed against mine, stealing my breath with eagerness. My hand rested on her hip, clutching her dress in a tight grip before gliding down her thigh, searching for the hem.

“Please,” she whispered against my mouth as I grazed her bare skin. Before I could follow through, Abi threw her leg over my hip and roared me back against the mattress. She shifted until she sat on top of me, her ass resting against my cock and her hands holding me down. She pressed her key against me, unleashing a strangled gasp. A knowing grin overtaken her features.

“Fuck,” I gasped as she did it again. My fingers pressed against her hips, urging her on. Her sundress covered nearly every inch of her, but I couldn’t make myself care when it rubbed against me. Her thrusts thrummed along my nerve endings. Then I blinked and missed the thrust as she tore it over her head and launched it across the room.

She giggled at my slack-jawed expression.

“Careful, Finn. You’ll make me think you genuinely like me,” she said, grinning before rolling her hips again.

“Can’t have that,” I ground out while my gaze dropped to her pussy. That should have been my cue to stop.

I didn’t. Need bit at me, urging me to move the show along, but I wanted to revel in the feel of her soft skin beneath my fingertips. Then she twisted her hips and robbed me of the ability to breathe.

I shot upright, pulling her tighter against me. Her gasp turned to a shriek, skittering across my neck while my hands roamed her body. I

driving her lips, enjoying the way she melted against me far too much for n
with her sanity.

ght fist, Thankfully, the buzz of whisky masked the warning inside my head.

With a quick snap of my fingers, I freed her from her bra and began
teasing her. I traced a line from her lips to her nipples, taking great pleasure
pushed in every quiet cry to fall from her lips. Her fingers tightened in my hair
er bite-her back arched as I sucked on a nipple.

rocked “Finn, please. Oh my god.” Words spewed from her lips, almost like
ok her string of gasps and moans.

I grinned, my lips curling against her tit. If she never stopped making
those sounds, I’d...

covered *Do nothing. Because we shouldn’t be doing this.*

pleasure The warning bounced off me and I turned us, lowering Abi onto the
moment Her grip on my hair loosened as I kissed my way down her body, I
every inch of her like a starved man. I slid off the bed, my fingers hooked
her lacy underwear and dragging them down her legs without delay.

.” Abi She draped her legs over my shoulders, her toes curling into my
before I could do more than skim my hands up her thighs. After nearly
y. days of resisting her, all of my chill evaporated. The teasing had gone
enough.

it I just I grazed a knuckle through her wet folds and her hips jolted.

hen she “Careful, Abi. I’ll think you’re eager for me.”

Her head thrashed to the side as I circled her clit. I licked my lips
pleased wetness coating my fingers, her folds soaking for me.

caught “You’d be right,” she whispered, a vulnerable edge to her voice

ny own have imagined.

I lowered my head, desperate to taste her.

d. *I'm in perfect control. I can stop whenever I want.*

ied into Then I tasted her.

leasure She writhed beneath me at the first lap of my tongue, her hips s
air and both trying to escape and urge me on all at once. My fingers delved in
her, crooking to drag against her inner walls. She clenched arou
ost in a flooding my mouth with more sweet liquid. Her fingers twisted in n
but I could barely feel the painful bite.

making Her hips rocked against me and I pressed a forearm across her st
holding her down while I tortured her with a mixture of slow ar
strokes. My cock strained against my shorts, begging for release
he bed. couldn't make myself rush. I enjoyed the sounds of her cries, my
earning falling from her lips, one minute an expletive and the next a benedi
king in worshipped her, taking her to the brink of orgasm twice before letting
over the edge, craving those little sounds far more than sober Finn wou

ly back She cried out, her hips bucking against my hands. Then she relax
rly four the bed, sighing with a sound of contentment I could get addicte
on long couldn't get enough of her sweet taste, couldn't stop lapping up at her.

Her tight grip on my shoulders relaxed. I pressed a soft kiss to
before climbing back onto the bed and laying a trail of kisses al
stomach, her breasts, her neck as I went. She hummed and stretch
every caress. Each sound shot straight through me, teasing me with
s at the feeling I craved far more than I'd ever let anyone know.

I must Her long lashes framed her closed eyes, the picture of perfect in
and not the woman who effortlessly rammed at my defences to keep

arm's length. Her lips parted slightly, making me want to devour her
again. Then her breathing evened out and my stomach sank.

“Abi?”

No response came.

My gaze roamed her face, finally taking in the sight of her wild
hair sprawled out beneath her, haloing her sweet sleeping expression.
I would suspect her of being an addictive hellion when she looked like
my hair, My cock ached, but I ignored it and tugged the sheets back. I picked
her up again, tucking her into bed and kissing her forehead like the sappy, c
idiot I was.

Tomorrow I'd slam myself over it.

, but I

y name

ction. I

her fall

ild.

ed into

d to. I

her hip

ng her

ed with

a light

ocence

o her at

arm's length. Her lips parted slightly, making me want to devour her all over again. Then her breathing evened out and my stomach sank.

“Abi?”

No response came.

My gaze roamed her face, finally taking in the sight of her wild auburn hair sprawled out beneath her, haloing her sweet sleeping expression. No one would suspect her of being an addictive hellion when she looked like that. My cock ached, but I ignored it and tugged the sheets back. I picked her up again, tucking her into bed and kissing her forehead like the sappy, drunken idiot I was.

Tomorrow I'd slam myself over it.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ABI

I stretched in bed, a sense of relaxation filling me. I almost melted under the screaming headache stabbing behind my eyes. It had been so long while since I'd felt so relaxed. I soaked it in, enjoying the caress of the sheets against my bare, sensitive skin.

Then the memories crashed in, flickering before my eyes and heating my face.

I turned my head slowly, grateful that for once I hadn't woken up alone around Finn. He lay on his side, facing me, his eyes thankfully closed. I didn't know what I expected to find: the spitfire glaring at me or the stoic schooled expression. I'm not sure which would have been worse.

Five days ago, Finn wouldn't have let me maul him, drunk or not. He was even sure he would have carried me back to our room or sat in the bed with me for hours sharing a bottle. He would have turned his back on me if I'd even sat down. Well, at least that's what I thought he would have done. Aside from a couple of weird moments, he'd never actually been mean to me.

Maybe we did have a chance after all.

Before I could get too comfortable, his eyes snapped open, fixing Pinched lines formed on his forehead and around his eyes. He covered his face, groaning at the light streaming in.

“Should have shut the fucking curtains,” he growled into his pillow, his voice strangled with pain.

My head hurt, but I could stand the light without it making it all worse.

“I can grab some painkillers.”

“No, I don’t need your kindness right now.”

I frowned at the brutal snap of his voice. After last night, I expected a different kind of shift.

“I don’t mind,” I said despite the urge to press my lips together and pull the sheets over my head.

Why does he have to be so confusing?

Finn groaned, the sound muffled by the pillow. “You’re overthinking it right now, aren’t you?” He turned his head slightly, catching the sunlight as he danced across my face. He frowned. “We were drunk. It didn’t mean anything.”

Something in my chest squeezed painfully tight at those words. “What do you say to every woman you share a bed with?”

Despite a slight tic of his jaw, his gaze roamed my face perfectly before I didn’t have memories of him desperate beneath me, I’d think he’d use me before I couldn’t believe that he had, even though it would make resisting much easier.

Silence stretched between us, filled only by the rocking of the bed beneath us. I stared into his sapphire eyes, refusing to be the one who

on me. away. If he wanted to pretend he'd felt nothing, I'd make him work for
red his "Let's forget it happened," Finn said, his voice sharp in the t
silence of the bungalow.

ow, his *What if I didn't want to forget?*



orse. "Where are we going now?" I asked, barely restraining a pained
The fact they'd loaded us into four-wheel drives didn't
well, honestly.

d some A guide drove the car while Tyler chatted with him in the front sea
sat in the row in front of us, his camera resting on the seat next
and say They'd rigged GoPros around us to capture who knew what. Finn had
looked at me since this morning. Nothing but awkward silence filled the
seat.

ing shit Then again, after Finn's suggestion that the show intended to
surprise fears to heighten the drama, I couldn't help but look for the possible
t mean points.

What do I fear that could come from remote, bumpy terrain?

"Is that Turned out, I didn't need to think hard. They pulled off the main
taking a narrow lane buffered by trees. Branches slapped against the
sides as we barrelled down a dirt path. Some might have called it a road
blank. If seriously, if another car came at us, we'd all be screwed.

sed me. "There's a private beach at the end of the track," Tyler called back
him so He turned slightly, grinning at us. "Finn's taking you for a sunset picnic

se water I sided-eyed Finn. "Is he now?"

looked Finn rolled his eyes. "Sure," he drawled. "Because I get any say

it. farce.”

I chuckled and Finn smiled. It lit up his sapphire eyes and gifted a very real peek into the real Finn. My heart warmed at the sight.

Then a small black and red bug landed on the ledge of my door. A moment passed. I squeaked. For a second, it was nothing but a bug. Then a groan. My brain caught up and I scrambled into Finn’s lap with a barely muffled shout. He stiffened beneath me, but I didn’t care, I wrapped my arms around his neck and tucked my legs tight to my body.

“Get it away from me,” I cried. My eyes widened as it crawled all over his door. It got no closer, but it was already too close for comfort. “Finn, please, I barely I didn’t even care that I sounded whiny and pitiful, begging him to rescue me back from a tiny bug.

“Get the camera on her, Liam,” Tyler snapped from the front seat.

Liam scrambled for his camera, shifting in his seat. Not an easy feat with the car jerking down the dirt path.

I really fucking hate spiders.

Finn’s arms wrapped around me at last. He rubbed my back, squishing me to his chest.

“Shh, Abi. It’ll go away now.”

“No, it won’t.” I whimpered as the spider crawled towards Liam. I didn’t pay it any mind. Tears burned my eyes while my heart pounded. “It looks venomous”

“Ic.” Finn placed a finger beneath my chin and forced my head back into his gaze. It freed me from staring at the spider, but equally, it made me feel in this spiral.

“How do you know that?”

“The hourglass. Know thy enemy,” I muttered, surprised Finn had I’d always thought it was common to learn everything you can about and the things you feared. How else was I meant to avoid them? “I’ve hated her since I was six, when she bit my mother in our kitchen. I developed a shriek. obsessive interest in learning about them after that.”

I shuddered at the memory of the false widow climbing out of a bananas while I distracted my mother with some inane question or another. I couldn’t even remember the question.

Finn studied me, his expression softening in complete contrast to the rock-solid tension riding my body and face. He smiled, his sapphires shining with something gentle for the first time all morning.

“You’re full of surprise, *Dotey*.”

I frowned at that but a motion in the corner of my eye caught my attention before I could figure out his meaning.

“Finn,” I whispered, his name drawn out as horror stabbed at me.

“You might want to move, Liam.” Finn continued to stroke my back, arms, despite the spider crawling towards the cameraman. “Of course you could get the shots but I’m pretty sure even you value your life above orchestrated bullshit.”

He said. “It” “I resent that,” Tyler shouted from the front.

“Oh really?” Finn drawled.

If I turned my head, I’d find him smirking. I didn’t look to confirm my fear froze me in place while Liam hadn’t so much as shifted away from the door. He continued to lean against it, his face pressed against the view-

“Yes. I didn’t orchestrate anything.”

to ask. “Oh, so you aren’t knowingly bringing Abi into a mountain
out the knowing she’s terrified of spiders?” When Tyler didn’t answer, Finn’s
spiders hardened. “Yeah, that’s exactly what I thought.” He patted me on the
slightly I’d assumed he meant to comfort me, but then he turned my face to
him. “I’m going to have to put you down on the seat for a second.”

bag of I shook my head hard. The urge to beg and plead with him faded
other. It through me.

“You don’t want anyone to get bitten, do you Abi girl?” Finn asked
to the voice low and honey-sweet. I shook my head. “Good, then let me get
re eyes the spider and then I’ll put you back in my lap, okay?”

Finn broke my grip on his neck with ease. He gently placed me in
next to him and then he unclipped a GoPro, over Tyler’s protests. I shifted
attention into his seat, getting as far from the spider as possible. My entire body
and my breathing started to hurt. I couldn’t take any more of these
exercises.

ack and “Shut up, jackass. I’m not touching the thing with my hand.”

se, you A clunk sounded followed by the plop of something hitting the
ove this front and clattering to the ground.

Then Finn’s spicy scent engulfed me again.

“It’s gone,” he whispered near my ear.

His hand forced its way under my clenched legs and his arm came
m. Fear me back. I released my death grip on my legs and glanced around. He
the car me with ease from the next seat, then shuffled us into the middle, pressing
finder. to his chest.

Liam still had the camera pointed at us. Honestly, I couldn't tell even reacted to the spider. The spot for the second GoPro stood empty wasn't surprised Finn hadn't put it back. One less camera to capture thigh. meltdown.

“We need to have words about your tactics, Tyler,” Finn called, thrumming through the words.

Despite the anger vibrating in his voice, he smoothed a hand down hair and back with gentle care. I lay my head against his chest and sensed, his eyes, exhaustion sweeping over me.

Just take a minute.

I sagged against Finn, trusting him to look after me.

the seat



huffed

FINN

shook

the fright

For the first time since we'd turned off the main road, Abi relaxed. Did she'd relaxed in a seat on her own and not curled up on my lap with irresistible heat burning against me and her head in the crook of my seat in Abso-fucking-lutely.

Would I move her?

Listen, I wasn't that much of a jackass. I knew my strength abandoning her when terrified was not one of them.

“It needs to stop, Tyler. You're dancing dangerously close to psychological abuse here.”

sing me

Abi shifted, her head tilting back until she rested against my shoulder. Her previously panicked expression smoothed out, relaxing in sleep.

if he'd thinking, my hand rose from her side, gliding along her jaw and i
y, but Iauburn hair, clenching. The strands wrapped around my wrist, silky so
ure my I couldn't tear my gaze from hers. Tyler shouted at me from the fr
I barely heard him, too focused on the sleeping woman in my arm
a threatcould she sleep after the fright she'd had?

Why couldn't I push her away? I felt like a broken bloody
own mypushing her away and caving the second she showed me even an
hut myneed. With the dinner, the sharks, the zipline and now this.

I needed to be stronger.

And then she smiled, nuzzling her face against my shoulder like I
only person she trusted to keep her safe. My chest squeezed tight, a
forming that I had never experienced with a woman. Not even my fam

Forget stronger, I needed to be careful.

I I wish
with her
neck?

hs and

ose to

oulder.

Without

thinking, my hand rose from her side, gliding along her jaw and into her auburn hair, clenching. The strands wrapped around my wrist, silky soft.

I couldn't tear my gaze from hers. Tyler shouted at me from the front but I barely heard him, too focused on the sleeping woman in my arms. How could she sleep after the fright she'd had?

Why couldn't I push her away? I felt like a broken bloody record, pushing her away and caving the second she showed me even an inch of need. With the dinner, the sharks, the zipline and now this.

I needed to be stronger.

And then she smiled, nuzzling her face against my shoulder like I was the only person she trusted to keep her safe. My chest squeezed tight, an ache forming that I had never experienced with a woman. Not even my family.

Forget stronger, I needed to be careful.

INTERVIEW VII

Tyler, Producer: Things looked very cosy in the back seat today.

Finn: Is that why you keep exposing Abi to her biggest fears?

Tyler, Producer: That was only a coincidence.

Finn: Nice line change. It was a purposeful action that could have resulted in your cameraman going to the hospital or Abi hurting herself while she freaked out. If you keep going, Abi'll be able to sue you for psychological damage, you do realise that, right?"

Tyler, Producer: How about we talk about you instead? You're very good at trying to comfort her. I'm surprised.

Finn: Unlike you, Tyler, I'm not an unfeeling asshole. Stop trying to hurt her, or I'll make sure any line in your contract you think protects you gets voided.

Tyler, Producer: Before you go, you might like to know that there are venomous creatures in Bora Bora.

INTERVIEW VII

Tyler, Producer: Things looked very cosy in the back seat today.

Finn: Is that why you keep exposing Abi to her biggest fears?

Tyler, Producer: That was only a coincidence.

Finn: Nice line change. It was a purposeful action that could have resulted in your cameraman going to the hospital or Abi hurting herself while she freaked out. If you keep going, Abi'll be able to sue you for psychological damage, you do realise that, right?"

Tyler, Producer: How about we talk about you instead? You're very quick to comfort her. I'm surprised.

Finn: Unlike you, Tyler, I'm not an unfeeling asshole. Stop trying to hurt her, or I'll make sure any line in your contract you think protects you gets voided.

Tyler, Producer: Before you go, you might like to know that there are no venomous creatures in Bora Bora.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FINN

“Oh, Christ!” I shouted the moment I opened my eyes the next morning. My entire body jolted at the surprise. “Abi, why the fuck are you staring at me while I sleep?”

She sat beside me, her legs crossed and her hands pressed together, restraining her excitement. That grin did not help the whole look. Even her blue eyes looked incredible, lit up with that much joy...

Or was it mischief?

“I had an idea and I think you’ll love it.”

“That does not explain the staring.” I rubbed my heavy lids and sat up to lean against the headboard. “Seriously, it’s bad enough we’re together. Don’t make it creepy.”

Her grin collapsed.

It was just a smile on the face of a woman who shouldn’t still be in bed. What did it matter in the grand scheme of things?

Still, I missed it.

“Do you want to avoid the crew or not?”

My brows rose. The distracting war for logical action inside me quieted.

“How?”

“Exactly as I thought.” She nodded, her excitement slipping away again.

Abi scrambled off the bed and started pacing. I bit my lip on the morning. when my gaze tracked down her body. She wore an oversized white shirt, *my shirt*, buttoned to her cleavage, and nothing else. It barely covered her ass and her pacing did not help the material stay in place.

are you My eyes narrowed on the shirt. *Why is she wearing my shirt?* That thing looked good on her.

, barely Or maybe it wasn't the way she looked but the fact she'd dressed in if her clothes, *my scent*. My cock hardened at the sight of it.

She stopped pacing at my silence, turning slowly to study me with an arched brow. “Are you listening, McCarthy?”

No. Who the hell would be able to?

shuffled “Carry on,” I said, forcing the gravelly notes of arousal from my voice.

is living My gaze tracked down her shapely legs while she continued talking in caught snippets, but not enough to make any of it make sense.

my wife. “You have a serious attention problem, don't you?” Abi met me with exasperation reducing her voice to a growl.

She glided towards me, those intense blue eyes fixed on me while the little minx swayed her bloody hips. I swallowed, my mind well and truly in the gutter while the voice of logic faded.

Her fingers gripped my chin, forcing me to meet her gaze as she y mind over me. Amusement clashed with annoyance, her lips pinched but h smiling— if eyes could even smile.

“Are you going to listen to me now?”

through I nodded and her fingers danced across my skin.

“They want us to be intimate, so let’s make them believe we ar a groan kept her voice low and soft, barely above a whisper. “If we stay e man’s bungalow, they can’t force a camera in our faces. If they knock, w covered them think we’re...engaged. We’ll order room service for every m actually enjoy a day without Tyler questioning us or forcing adre e damn producing activities on us.” Her brows quirked when I said nothing questions?”

d in my “You want us to bunk off filming together?”

She tilted her head, confusion scrunching up her nose. “Bunk off?”

with an “Skip.”

“Oh! Yes, that’s exactly what I want to do.” She frowned. “Don’t y

A day locked in a bungalow with the woman turning my commo oice. to mush? Sure. What could possibly go wrong?

lking. I 

ABI

uttered,

For a moment, I didn’t think he’d agree. He seemed reluctant and hile the skittish. He gave in with a tight nod and then vanished into the ba truly in without another word. For all of ten minutes, I worried that he’d ratf the cameras than be trapped in the bungalow with me all day.

leaned Then the first knock came.

er eyes I sat up straight in bed, panic squeezing my voice box. Finn's bro
at me when he stepped out of the bathroom, water dripping from his h
a towel wrapped around his waist. His sapphire eyes seemed to dare
follow through.

e." She My eyes dipped, tracing the glistening lines of his six-pack.

in the *Follow through with what?*

e make He cleared his throat, and then I remembered.

eal and I'd said we'd make noises. I'd meant sexual noises and, by the
naline- curling his lips and the glimmer of a dare in his eyes, I was pretty
s. "Any knew that.

Our gazes locked and my face heated. Another knock, and thi
Tyler called our names.

Finn crept towards me, indecision warring across his face.

I'd wanted the experience of the show, a break from my mundane l
/ou?" I'd also been hoping for more. It would be far too easy for me to fall fo

n sense He almost reached the bed, and panic gripped me.

A loud moan fell from my lips and the knocking stopped. Finn's g
to my lips, avid interest in his eyes. I did it again and again, louder, th
in his name for good measure. Through it all, our gazes locked, his l
with what I hoped was desire.

a little His hands clenched at his sides, almost as if he wanted to reach
throomgrab me... maybe he would if the expanse of the bed didn't separate us

er face It could have been a trick of the light, but I thought his towel tented

None of it helped keep my mind from replaying our short-lived ni

way he'd held me, watched out for me and then made me come all c
ws rose face.

air and Minutes passed before we heard the distant sound of the boards be
e me to on the boardwalk. By the time they gave up, my face burned and my
ached while Finn's eyes had darkened.

I scrambled off the bed and into the bathroom, shutting the door c
before he could say anything.



e smirk
sure he

FINN

I'd been wrongfully sceptical. I'd expected a day of boredom and
s time, agreeing to remain locked in the bungalow with Abi. Instead, we sp
time on the patio, reading in companionable silence, laughing over c
thing or another.

After five days of second-guessing and stressing about how I'd ap
life, but camera, I could relax for once. Maybe that would come back to bite
or Finn. day soon, but in the moment, I couldn't care less.

aze fell "Why would you get up that early for a show?" I asked, wincing at

rowing A tingle of laughter escaped her, the sound wrapping around me
burning hug. "Ros is obsessed with the Sanderson brothers. When she found
three of them would be on Jimmy Michaels's show that week, I didn't
hope in hell of escaping." Her lips twitched and her eyes shone
out and lounged back on the sun lounger, stirring her rapidly melting daiquiri
s? asked my boss for time off before I even knew about it. I had zero c
l. left."

ght, the I shook my head. "I've never been that dedicated to something."

over his “Yeah, I’m not surprised.” Abi snorted. “You don’t look like a fangirling type, Finn.” Her brows rose and she leaned towards me, her hands sweeping up and down my body. “Or are you hiding it?”

My pussy I swirled my beer bottle, watching the dregs of the liquid dance. Aiming to avoid her eyes and keep the grin off my face.

On Finn “Oh, you’re so hiding it.” She chortled, throwing her legs over the back of her lounge chair and shifting onto mine. She bumped against my thigh, pushing me aside to make room for herself on the edge. “Out with it. What or who are you fangirling over?”

I sighed, throwing my head back like she’d forced it out of me. “The first time I first got to LA, I might have lost my cool when I bumped into Bryce at a restaurant.” I grimaced, remembering how out of control and crazy I had been. “He was great about it, but I can’t look the man in the eye without feeling a trickle of mortification now.”

Appear on “That’s brilliant.” Abi slapped my thigh, her face lit up with amusement. “So you are human like the rest of us. Good to know.”

Before I could comment, a knock sounded at the door. I groaned and my head fell back against the lounge chair, biting my tongue against the urge to curse. Profanities desperate to slip out.

After hours locked in, we had a routine by now. If we were expecting a guest, one of us would get almost completely undressed and mess up our hair. If the knock was unexpected, we faked sex that left me hard, aching, and on the very edges of control.

Excuses “I’ll go,” I sighed when the knock came again.

“Let me.” Abi patted my chest, pushing me back down.

She climbed to her feet, silencing my protests with a look and a fi

like the her lips. I couldn't sit still when she disappeared into the bedroom.

er gaze I followed her in, catching her as she tugged her dress over her
stumbled in the doorway, breath trapped in my throat.

nything "Just a minute," she called to whoever was beyond the door.

All the while my gaze devoured every bare inch of her body, fr
side of black lace cupping the firm ass I'd had my hands all over days ago
shing its smooth, bare back. How hadn't I noticed her lack of a bra?

to have She scooped my shirt off the unmade bed and shrugged it on,
buttoning it up on her way to the door. She glanced over her sh
When I catching me staring with a smirk.

Reid at "Hide," Abi mouthed.

ngy I'd Then she gave me exactly two seconds to follow her command.
without away, racing towards the bathroom just as she pressed down on the ha

sement. "Hi, Abi. Everything alright?" Tyler asked, his voice slow and too

A jolt of possessiveness shot through me. No one else would be
her bare skin today. Roughly, I shoved the shorts off my hips and tug
and let t-shirt over my head.

nst the Before I couldn't stop to think, I rushed back into the room. I se
my features into the smarmy look of a well-satisfied man.

pecting "We're great," Abi said. "Just a little busy." Her voice rose, taki
ur hair. giggly edge.
, and at

"And we're not done yet," I growled as I wrapped my arm arou
waist and pulled her into my side.

Abi shivered, glancing up at me with wide, lust-filled eyes that
perfectly to the image of two people completely lost in each other.
inger to

“I’m glad to see you’re making progress.” Tyler grimaced. “But v
head. I to film.”

His gaze raked down Abi’s length as he spoke, pausing on her b
for far too long. It made my blood boil and my fists clenched with the
om the break his fucking nose.

to her “Sorry, mate, we’ve got other plans.” I grinned at him, forcing th
back and the lust forward. “Excuse us.”

quickly I bent and threw Abi over my shoulder. Before he could do mo
oulder, splutter, I had the door shut. The second it clicked shut, Abi giggled.

“That was incredible, Finn,” she huffed around her laughter.

Her fingers skittered across my back, searching for somewhere t
I jolted Really I should have removed my hand from her ass and put her
ndle. Instead, I found myself standing in the middle of the room, breathing
rough. too hard.

ogling “Finn?” Abi asked, her giggles dying and her tone turning tentativ
ged my you alright?”

Abi wiggled in my grip and my hand tightened on her ass. She sc
chooled in surprise, but she didn’t fight again. No, instead the little minx let h
drift to my ass, gripping me in what could be an innocent move.

ng on a My body didn’t care.

And that was a problem.

nd her With jerky movements, I paced to the bed and lay her down. Her fi
flushed, her auburn hair sprawled out on the white sheets, and her bl
t added sparking with desire I had no business feeding.

“Sorry,” I muttered, backing away. I made a beeline for the bathro

ve need my abandoned clothes, squeezing the nape of my neck and willing tl
of need to fade.

are legs “Wait,” she cried.

urge to “I need a minute, Abi.”

Whether she heard the struggle in my voice or not, I couldn’t say.

e anger

re than

o hold.

down.

a little

e. “Are

peaked

er hand

ace was

ue eyes

om and

my abandoned clothes, squeezing the nape of my neck and willing the burn of need to fade.

“Wait,” she cried.

“I need a minute, Abi.”

Whether she heard the struggle in my voice or not, I couldn’t say.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ABI

*H*alf an hour later, I heard the bathroom door click. Unfortunately for Finn, he'd given me twenty minutes too long to soak in my confidence.

Room service delivered our food and drinks, and the blush burn on my cheeks chilled out. I took the executive decision to set everything up in the hot tub we hadn't used once.

It would be a shame to leave without testing it out...

I repeated that line to myself as I changed into my bikini, turned on the jets, and slipped into the heated water.

At no point did I think it would be a bad idea. That is until Finn fell off the patio and froze.

"What are you doing, Abi?" he asked, suspicion rife in his tone.

"What does it look like?" Somehow, I pulled off nonchalant.

Or I thought I did. Finn didn't relax and he didn't climb in.

"Drink?" I pushed his new bottle a little closer to the hot tub entrance.

His jaw ticked and his fists clenched at his sides. The actor b character.

“I’m not getting in there.”

“Okay.” I picked up my refreshed cocktail and took a sip, watchi all the while over the rim.

“I’m serious.”

“Okay.”

Amusement bubbled beneath the surface but I held tight to it. No let him know I didn’t believe him.

open. He spun on his heel, stomping back inside with a huff. My sh long toshook with silent laughter. I didn’t want to question why I enjoyed him. He rarely reacted so it couldn’t have been because I enjoy ing my reaction.

by the When he returned moments later wearing swimming trunks, jo through me and I barely restrained it. I bit my lip, sinking lower bene water.

the tub He climbed in, grumbling under his breath and glaring at me. I just back at him sweetly. *Nothing to see here.*

stepped “Happy?” he grunted.

I lifted my brows in question, keeping up the innocent routine. F beneath the water, glaring at me, and my grin broke free.

“At least I know you’re not acting with me now.”

“Is that right?”

ice. “In front of the cameras, you’re all lovely and sweet. Perfect husband material.” I chuckled to myself, thinking about the shocked l

reaking Tyler's face when I opened the front door. "I don't think you convincing to the crew as you think you are. But I can tell." I gesture scowling face. "This is the normal I expect when we're alone."

ng him His expression smoothed out and his shoulders relaxed beneath the I eyed him with suspicion, searching for clues as to whether he'd back into character.

"Don't shut it down on my account." I feigned boredom and sip drink.

need to "What does that mean?" His eyes narrowed on me, scanning eve he could see both above and beneath the bubbles.

oulders Playing with fire would not keep my heart safe from Finn McCart testing then safety was wildly overrated. I'd joined the show for a break fr ed the mundane. Maybe I needed to take a couple of risks along the way.

y burst Finn lifted his head, catching sight of me next to him. He studied eath the sapphire gaze darkening the longer he traced my features. His focus c to my lips and I instinctively dragged the bottom one into my mouth.

smiled His hand coasted out of the water and up to my jaw. He rubbed a across my lower lip, freeing it from my teeth.

le sank One second, he stared at me with indecision. The next, our lips sl together. His arm wrapped around my waist, tugging me into his straddle him. I jolted at the hard press of his cock against my eager c other hand slid from my jaw and into my hair, gripping it tightly and my head to his liking.

Nerves fluttered in my belly, but they had nothing on the empty cl doting my pussy.

look on Five days in close proximity to Finn had not been easy on me.

u're aspush the need away when I thought he didn't want me, but he kissed m
d at his Our tongues danced and my hips jolted almost with a mind of the

We groaned at the delicious motion. His fingers gripped my hips, urg
e water.to keep grinding myself against him.

slipped Time lost all meaning. Dolphins could have jumped from the w
front of me and I wouldn't have noticed. Every fibre of my being focu
ped mythe enigma of a man beneath me.

Finn's hands coasted up my torso, cupping my breasts. He tea
ry inchthrough the bikini top, toying with my peaked nipples through the fa
my top, tearing another groan from deep in my throat.

thy, but The strings loosened and the top went flying to who knew w
om thecouldn't focus on anything more than the thrum of pleasure coasting t
me, chasing the buzz of pressure against my clit.

me, his Then he broke the kiss, his head dipping. His bearded jaw grazed
roppedmy skin, scattering goose bumps across my chest. The heat of his
latched onto my breast and any air I'd pulled in exploded from my lun

thumb As delicious as the friction felt, it wasn't enough.

"Finn," I moaned. My fingers delved into his hair, holding him
ammeddesperate for more and for nothing to change all at the same time.

lap to He hummed, the sensation vibrating through me as he sucked ha
ore. Hismy nipple. His free hand glided down to my ass, palming me more
l tiltingagainst him.

"It's not enough." I hated how needy I sounded, but fuck.

ench of Finn lifted his head, smirking at me before capturing my lips aga
not what I needed.

I could

le. Then he shuffled forward. I frowned, confused by the movement of his own, unwilling to break from the kiss. His rock-hard heat pressed against me, burning through the bikini bottoms, unhindered by fabric.

When the strings on my bottoms loosened, it all started to make sense. I wasted no time, teasing him as I rubbed myself along his cock. The pressure built fast, coiling until I couldn't feel much more than a mindless sensation.

Finn gripped my hips, forcing me to rock faster and faster again while his tongue danced with mine, stoking the fire.

My release snapped into place, locking up my muscles until I could no longer move. Finn didn't stop. He pressed me harder against his cock, rocking his hips and dragging me against his cock. He broke the kiss, falling forward, burying my face in his neck.

With each glide of him against my swollen clit, little flutters went off, stealing my breath and making me groan against my burning skin.

“Oh, fuck,” he grunted as his body tensed up beneath me and he still

Finn's fingers dug into my hips, holding me still. His heart beat against my chest, almost matching my own.

For countless moments, neither of us moved or spoke. My body trembled against him while the shock of what we'd done settled in my mind. *At least he got off this time.*

He released a ragged breath and stiffened beneath me. The tiny flutter of happiness fizzled out, replaced by trepidation that turned my stomach. Still, hesitantly, I straightened up, leaning back to assess his face.

My heart dropped at the sight of his closed-off expression.

ent, but “This can’t happen again,” he whispered, his voice devoid of feeling
y core, I could only nod as he pushed me away from him and scrambled
the hot tub. He rushed inside, leaving his shorts floating in the hot tub.

nse and Mindlessly, I gathered our discarded clothing and climbed out. My
ressure shook as I wrapped a towel around myself.

ation. Rejection stabbed at my heart and for a second self-doubt crept in
st him *did I do wrong?*

Cold logic slapped me and my jaw clenched.

ldn’t do He knew what he was doing when he reached for me. Yes, I tempt
st me, but he didn’t have to say yes, he didn’t have to strip me bare and dry ft
s and I

ters of
inst his

illed.

: wildly

nuscles
y mind.

itters of
omach.

“This can’t happen again,” he whispered, his voice devoid of feeling.

I could only nod as he pushed me away from him and scrambled out of the hot tub. He rushed inside, leaving his shorts floating in the hot tub.

Mindlessly, I gathered our discarded clothing and climbed out. My hands shook as I wrapped a towel around myself.

Rejection stabbed at my heart and for a second self-doubt crept in. *What did I do wrong?*

Cold logic slapped me and my jaw clenched.

He knew what he was doing when he reached for me. Yes, I tempted him, but he didn’t have to say yes, he didn’t have to strip me bare and dry fuck me.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FINN

“Absolutely not,” I growled at the producer. “It’s five fucking dollars. I don’t care what you have planned. We’re not doing it.”

I went to shut the door, annoyance swirling dangerously inside. After screwing up with Abi last night, I was already on edge. Didn’t matter how many times I reasoned with myself, it didn’t change the fact I’d go back to the allure of her again.

And we weren’t even pissing drunk.

“Wait, Finn.”

Tyler placed his foot in the doorway, catching the door before it slammed shut. It bounced back, slamming against the wall. The noise couldn’t disguise Tyler’s wince of pain. *Serves him right.*

“I’m sure Abi will love it and you’re already up,” Tyler said, his tone pleading.

He smiled and I narrowed my eyes.

“Will she actually love it, or is that code for another hell trap designed to force her to face yet another fear?”

Tyler shrugged. “Her questionnaire suggested she’d enjoy it.”

The need to slam the door in his face again stabbed at me, but if she would enjoy it... I owed her.

I couldn’t explain my actions without giving her more of myself; I wasn’t willing to do that.

I still couldn’t say for certain that she wasn’t after my money. Would someone agree to marry a celeb and bare their lives to the criticism of strangers? Surely it wasn’t just for the thrill of it all.

AM. I The faster we got home and I could put space between us, the more control I’d be. It wouldn’t matter how much she drew me in, there was plenty of things to distract me, plenty of distance.

of me. I sighed. “Fine, but you’re going to have to give us a minute.” I glared over my shoulder, taking in Abi’s serene form. “Abi’s still asleep.”
: matter
given in



ABI

“Next time you knock on my door at stupid o’clock in the morning, I’ll hit it harder,” Finn muttered, his tone low and threatening as he glared at me. I t could

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Tyler’s barely restrained anger belied his nonchalance. :ouldn’t

“Fucking couples yoga.” Finn fumed as the instructor told us to take our positions. one soft

I could understand Tyler’s smirk. Finn McCarthy doing yoga was something to behold. For someone with so much muscle, he couldn’t balance for a gned to

“None of your training for action films involved yoga?” I asked,

my head away so he couldn't see my gleeful amusement.

e really “No,” he ground out. “Surprisingly, bending at inhumane angles requirement.”

f, and I I chuckled at his pained groan as his hamstrings stretched out wobbled.

hy else “Laugh it up, sweetheart.” He glared at me. “You’re never getting cism ofdo this again.”

“Well, I didn't ask you to, but sure, let's point the blame at me.”

nore in For the next thirty minutes, I blocked him out and focused on m
ould beand our incredible surroundings. The pink of the rising sun painted t
glistening and bouncing off the open water before the patio. An exp
glancedlawn swept up to the main hotel building set on the hill behind us.

Aside from the rustle of the crew's clothing, Finn's occasional gr
Tyler's muttered orders, peaceful silence surrounded us. With mor
time being so tight in New York, it had been a while since I'd done a
yoga session. I'd forgotten how much I enjoyed it. How much I'd m
and the myriad of other hobbies I'd had to sacrifice when Eva got sick
'll slam

Tyler. When the instructor called time, I stretched out, my body deli
d smirk loose. Finn straightened up with a pained groan.

“Where are you going?” I shouted after him.

change He ignored me and continued to stomp across the lawn. I threw T
apologetic smile before racing after him at almost a dead run.

a sight “You know, this doesn't look good, right?” I asked as caught up,
shit. and puffing.

turning “I don't care.”

“I don’t believe that.” I gripped his arm, throwing all of my body into making him stop. He spun around, shaking me off as if the touch

“Wipe that look off your face. You’re the one who doesn’t want the camera to see the real you. You care about how the show makes you look to the American public.” I pointed at his glare. “That does not give the impression of a man falling for his wife.”

“I’m not,” he growled.

My brows rose. “I know! But you want *them* to think that.” I jabbed my finger towards the film crew gathered on the waterfront patio. “Why the hell’s gotten into you?”

“Nothing.” He crossed his arms.

“Try it again without the scowl.”

His agitation melted away before my eyes. His brow smoothed and his lips curled into a pleasant smile. If it weren’t for his sapphire eyes lit with annoyance, I’d think he’d morphed into a different person.

“Okay.” I blew out a breath. “Do you want to give them the united front they expect today?”

I held out my hand. He stared at it, making no move to get closer. Instead of reaching for me as I expected, he took a step back, and then another.

“I can’t, Abi.”

My brows shot up. “Let me get this straight.” My voice rose as annoyance and embarrassment twinged in my gut. “Grabbing me in the hot spot is perfectly fine, but god forbid, you have to hold my hand in front of cameras?”

weight A flicker of true emotion sparked in his eyes. Regret.
burned. “Don’t push me, please? I can’t do this right now.” He backed a
cameras pleading light entering his eyes. “I’m sorry.”

to the With that, he took off and this time, I let him go. I could feel the
pression Tyler’s gaze against the back of my head. He’d ask me a thousand qu
and demand an explanation. What on earth would I tell him? I c
exactly admit that yesterday had been fake...until it wasn’t.

bbbed a
hat the



FINN

I’d like to say I didn’t know what had gotten into me, but that would b

Abi had gotten into me, and I needed to get far far away from her l
out and made more bad decisions. Guilt, lust, and annoyance mingled insi
burning churning together until they created a volatile mixture.

Even free diving couldn’t quiet the chaos inside my head.
ed front

Over a hundred and fifty feet below the surface, surrounded by sha
the calm of the sea and I couldn’t push her out of my head.

Instead By the time I walked into our bungalow after 5 PM, I felt more hop
her and

It quickly died when I caught sight of Abi standing before the
wearing a dress that flared out at her hips. Sunlight danced around he
she brushed out her auburn curls.

oyance For a second, words caught in my throat and the awkwardness re
tub is head again. I squashed it fast. “Why are you dressed up?” I asked, l
of the my voice neutral.

She met my gaze in her reflection, her eyes narrowing as she asses:

“You ran off before Tyler could drop his latest task in our laps.”

My muscles twitched, ready to tense up at the thought of experiment. I couldn't honestly say I'd keep it together and the burn of concerning.

I forced my shoulders to remain relaxed as I walked past her, air wouldn't the shower. Salt coated every inch of my skin and hair.

“We're meeting all the other couples on a sunset cruise. You have hour to get ready.” The whip of her voice snared me and I turned again will to find her watching me with her hands on her hips. She looked to fuckable with her blue eyes spitting fire and her body bristling argument.

“Don't worry. I'll be ready.”

An apology formed, desperate to get out, to smooth the tension between us.

I bit it back.



ABI

Forty-five minutes after departure, the yacht weighed anchor as the mirror began to blush with the setting sun. Soft pastel colours lit up the sky, and yet another beautiful picture.

If not for the changeable actor, I'd miss Bora Bora.

I couldn't lie to myself. I'd miss it because I got to be so close to her

“Abi, hey,” Haley said. She and Anders gathered around me with sed me.

She'd restrained her black lavender-tipped hair in a tight top knot.

of envy hit me in the gut for that speck of foresight. I'd taken extra care
another my curls, but the moment the yacht got underway all the effort went
at was window. If I could avoid the bathrooms, I wouldn't have to know how
the wind had destroyed it all.

ing for "No Finn?" She glanced around the deck as if he would miraculously
appear.

half an "He's inside grabbing a drink."
inst my I sipped my champagne and tried not to think about the fact he'd
o damn for a drink as soon as we boarded and hadn't come back.

for an "How have you found it all so far?" Haley chuckled, the sound
strained. "We heard whispers about you and Finn playing hooky yesterday."
Tell me you got to have your way with that fine man."

etween "In a manner of speaking."

"Did they push you as hard as they did us?" Haley asked, changing
subject with an awkward smile.

"In what way?"

She shrugged. "They just seem to relish orchestrating situations that
hate."

horizon "Like things that would terrify you?" My head tilted, scrutinizing
ainting reactions.

"Exactly that." Haley's eyes widened. "Did they do it to you too?"
tapped Anders's arm, inexplicable excitement dancing across her face.
im. you it was planned."

miles. Finn chose that moment to put in an appearance. He settled at my
tentative arm around my waist while he greeted Anders and Haley.
A pang

ire with I snuck a glance up at him, working hard to keep the surprise fr
out the expression. He smiled and laughed with them, sharing notes about o
v badly brushes with my fears.

The perfect image of a happy couple.

ulously Then I caught sight of Tyler, watching us through a window. H
were crossed and his focus drilled into Finn. *Had something ha
between them?*

gone in “We should ask Aria and Kyle too,” Haley said, the excitement c
from her face and voice. “We’re already in a high-stress situation. Sure
a little can’t knowingly add to it like that.”

sterday. “As if they’d care.” Finn snorted. His fingers twisted in the mat
my dress, grazing my hip in distracting circles. “But you’d be surprise
they can get away with. We signed contracts.”

ging the Anders and Haley paled.

Anders tugged Haley closer to his side. “I’m going back to LA wit
training schedule. Life is going to be stressful enough without our p
is we’d manipulating us like that.”

“It’ll be okay.” Haley patted his chest. “At least we know
ing their coming.”

Anders hummed in agreement but he didn’t look too convinced. .
)?” She they seemed genuinely happy together.

. “I told I dreaded to think what would happen to us once real life ente
picture.

side, a “Let’s go check with Aria and Kyle.” Haley stepped back, c
Anders’s hand. She rocked back on her heels, her balance shot w

om my shifting of the yacht. “Maybe they’ve had a different experience.”

ur own The hope leaking from her voice made me wince. I squashed it when she said goodbye and turned to head down the side deck.

For a second, I enjoyed the peace and the heat of Finn’s body in my arms. Then I remembered we hadn’t started the day well and I was pissed at him.

Maybe I should go inside too...

I pushed away from him, took a tentative step, and the boat rocked. My heels slipped out from under me with a ripple of sharp pain. My gaze locked on the darkening waves. Other than a thin rope, there was nothing to stop me from going overboard.

I threw my arms out and squeezed my eyes shut. *Please be strong to hold me*, I silently begged the rope.

Heat engulfed me, a hard band wrapping around my waist and then pulling me backwards. My eyes flew open as I slammed into Finn’s chest. His arms tightened painfully around me, but I had no interest in complaining.

I smoothed a shaky hand along his forearm, patting it while my head pounded, and a wave of gratitude shook me to my core.

“Are you okay?” Finn asked, his voice hoarse.

At least “Only thanks to you.” I tried to regain my feet and a shot of pain ran down my leg. I whimpered, returning all of my weight to him without a moment’s thought. “Or maybe not.”

He swore and then swept me into his arms without so much as a word. He took off down the side of the boat, more surefooted than I would have been. I scrambled to wrap my arms around his neck. He might be fea-

the face of the moving yacht, but I really didn't want to take that dip. "Get me some ice," Finn shouted the second he swept inside. He sat on the sofa, holding me in his lap. "Where does it hurt, Abi?"

His fingers stroked down my calf, brushing lightly over my ankle. He frowned at the side of his head.

"Abi," he growled, cutting me a dark look. "Tell me where it hurts."

Anders dropped a bucket of ice on the sofa and started piling cubes. He grabbed an extra towel.

"It's just my ankle." I wiggled my toes experimentally. No pain. My second I rotated my ankle, I winced. "Yeah, just my ankle."

Finn's strong fingers engulfed my foot, holding me still. Anders handed him the makeshift ice pack and he gingerly rested it against my skin. I shivered at the sudden cold but held still.

Concern burned in Finn's eyes, his brow creasing with it. I couldn't deny any of it was real. Hope that he meant it, that he really did care, bit at my heart, digging its claws into my heart, determined to never let go.

He held me against him, his free hand gripping my side tightly. I could have sworn I felt him shake.

"You could have gone overboard," he muttered, emotion riding his words. He deepened his Irish accent. "There are sharks beneath us. You would have panicked."

I narrowed my eyes at his disturbed yet accusatory tone.

"I didn't make the boat rock, Finn."

"I know." He blew out a harsh breath and pressed his forehead to mine. "You scared me," he whispered.

I studied him, the single grain of hope tangling with suspicion. I wouldn't say these things to me now if he truly meant them.

Would he?

The cameras were rolling. The show would milk every second display of weakness. I barely watched TV, and I knew viewers would .” situation up.

But I couldn't tell if he was real.

Swallowing the need to question him, I relaxed in his grip a in. Then enjoyed it. If it all flipped again when we got to LA, at least I had a moment to hold on to.

handed

I hissed

't tell if

into me,

itly. So

s voice,

ld have

o mine.

I studied him, the single grain of hope tangling with suspicion. He wouldn't say these things to me now if he truly meant them.

Would he?

The cameras were rolling. The show would milk every second of this display of weakness. I barely watched TV, and I knew viewers would eat this situation up.

But I couldn't tell if he was real.

Swallowing the need to question him, I relaxed in his grip and just enjoyed it. If it all flipped again when we got to LA, at least I had this moment to hold on to.

INTERVIEW VIII

Question: What did it feel like playing Finn's damsel in distress?

Abi: I wasn't playing.

Tyler, Producer: Oh, I know, love.

Abi: And I resent the implication.

Tyler, Producer: Sorry, but for the show, what did it feel like?

Abi: It felt like my ankle was on fire.

Tyler, Producer: Right. You're focusing on the wrong thing.

Abi: Am I?

Tyler, Producer: Yes. Tell me how it felt to have Finn sweep in and r you. How did it make you feel having his muscular arms wrapped arou you?

Abi: I have a better question. Why do you insist on forcing me to do th made very clear in my application that I don't want to do?

Tyler, Producer: Uhm...

Abi: Not so fun when it's turned back on you, is it?

escue
md

ings I

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ABI

The flight back passed slowly while I wallowed in the post-blues. Although, I guessed the holiday wouldn't end for another and a half months. It wasn't like I'd be living my normal life in LA.

Finn barely said a word to me the entire time, absorbed in one scene after another. I'd tried to get lost in a book, but no romance could hold my attention. Not when the star of my own show sat so close, a total enigma. I had no hope in hell of keeping.

I didn't know what his normal looked like, but I couldn't imagine it included women like me. Eva had sent me a couple of photos from his red carpet walks, and I looked nothing like the leggy blondes he paraded. Especially not with my swollen, bruised ankle.

All the more reason to forget about it ...

We passed through the airport quickly, with Finn hiding his face behind dark-tinted sunglasses and a baseball cap pulled low over his face. When celebrities pulled that move in movies, I always laughed, but it got us a quick pick-up without anyone hassling us, so maybe I'd need to rethi

opinions.

The second we turned the corner to what I assumed would be house, chaos broke out. A herd of cameras surrounded the guard gate crowd of young girls with signs declaring their love to Finn lined the s

Flashes went off. People shouted and rushed the car.

I jolted back as a sign hit my window. It went by in a blur, but I'm sure it said 'Marry me instead.'

Who the hell were these people?

I tried to calm down, knowing there was a camera in the front and cameras rigged all around us.

Another took its place. 'I'll love you better than her.'

Then the cameras came. The flashes blinded me. The window tinted, but did that matter with a bright light going off that close?

"Shit," Finn muttered before his hands landed on my face. "Look I didn'tAbi." He gripped my chin, forcing me to focus on him. "Ignore everyone out there."

Staring into his eyes didn't make them all disappear, but it helped, his red-the banging got worse behind me and people crowded in on his side to around. "Is this normal for you?" I asked, my voice weak.

"Sometimes." He grimaced. "Normally when I've screwed up and a scandal. I guess they consider us getting married out of the blue a scandal betweenMirth creased his eyes. "Might be the first positive media frenzy nevercaused."

The car moved through the gate and the noise died away.

"That's better." His hands fell away and he settled back in his seat.

being one of those Hollywood assholes living in a gated community, Finn's worth it for the peace when they're like that."

while a His voice drifted around me, registering but not. I couldn't shake the street. He'd assigned the word *positive* to us. The man could give me words sometimes.

n pretty We stopped outside a massive grey stucco single-storey house that could shake the optimistic haze from my mind. Finn threw his dog while the cameraman worked his way out of the front seat and the driver me to mine.

smaller I winced as I stepped out of the car but smothered it quickly. There had been enough pitying glances at the party and the airport as I hobbled through refusing to let Finn help me. I could look after myself, I'd done it for years

rs were My eyes must have been round as saucers as I stared up at the house because Finn chuckled at me.

at me, "It's monstrously big, I know."

rything "Uh Finn, give us a second to catch up," Tyler called from his window. Their car had barely stopped when the second cameraman flipped the door open.

o. "If you want the shots, you move at my pace," Finn said, scowling at Tyler. "We already discussed this after your screw-ups in Bora Bora."

caused Tyler wisely kept his mouth shut. Finn had taken great delight in "scandal." throwing the show's errors back at him the last few days. I couldn't say I've didn't agree with him.

Finn's eyes narrowed on me. I had a second to feel the presence of concern before he came straight at me. He scooped me into his arms but "I hate" could question him.

but it's "I can walk you know," I muttered, indignation dripping from my
"I'm aware." Finn continued towards the house at a clipped
the fact assuming the cameras would follow.

hiplash "Then put me down."

He ignored me and kept moving forward. Scowling, I gave
before I wrapped my arms around his neck. No point making myself feel uns
or open he wouldn't see reason.

er beat "What about the bags?"

ere had "Frank will handle them."

hrough, The driver popped the trunk just as Finn reached the door. He unl
ears. and whisked me inside within seconds.

house I gasped the moment he crossed the threshold. The ceilings stret
least nine-foot. White walls contrasted with dark mahogany floors and
prints on the walls. The front door led into an open plan living room,
room and kitchen, flowing straight out to a full wall of glass do
is open framed the Hollywood Hills. It might have been luxe and ridiculous
ung his for one man, but no one could argue that it wasn't beautiful.

It didn't escape my notice that he'd unintentionally carried me o
vling at threshold like a normal married couple might have done. I squas
flutter of softer feelings the unconscious gesture inspired. Bora Bora
ight in have taught me not to read into the small things. I'd learn one day.

't say I "There's not a lot to explain. Main living area." Finn gestured
expanse of space five times the size of my New York apartment.

sure of "Is that a fireplace?" Awe overtook me as I caught sight of th
before I standing, oval-shaped black iron. The chimney corkscrewed into

words. ceiling, drawing the eye out the doors to the patio and view.

I pace, “Yep,” he muttered, his tone rushed and void of emotion. I missed him shutting down.

He gingerly put me down, keeping a hand close while I found n in and An ache twinged in my ankle but I ignored it. Liam used the opportu table if get in front of us. Then Finn wandered off down a hallway leading living room without checking that I’d followed.

“All the bedrooms and bathrooms are down here.” He stopped at t door, flinging it open. “This is your room.”

ocked it A pang of loss that we wouldn’t be sharing a bed anymore stabbed but logically I knew separate spaces would be better. Better for my he my resistance.

ched at I wandered in, mindful not to move too fast for Liam who had t l bright backwards to catch my reaction.

, dining The walls in the bedroom were as white as the main space. All ors that furniture carried a shade of deep blue that reminded me of Finn’ ly large Almost like the designer loved them as much as I did. A huge woode poster bed stood proudly in the centre of the room.

ver the *If I have to restrain you, I will.*

ned the Finn’s words echoed in my head while I took it all in. My face should but I still turned back to him, smiling.

I at the “I love it.”

“Great,” he said, his voice soft while he schooled his reactions ie free-cameras. “You’ve got your own bathroom and those doors open.” He the tall to the wall of glass behind me.

I spun around, my eyes widening at the key feature I'd missed beyond the little sitting area. I had a view! The doors opened directly onto the pool, stretching out over LA. I resisted the urge to pinch myself. It could be real. First Bora Bora and now this? And they were paying me to have to be dreaming.

"I'm glad you like it," Finn said. He scratched his neck and toward the door. "I'll let you get settled in. I need to..." He glanced at the cameras focused on us. "I have a meeting with my agent. I'll be back for dinner. Order anything you want."

He rushed out of the room.

Liam lowered his camera, frowning at the door. "That wasn't on the schedule."



FINN

"You need to help me," I shouted the second I walked into Shaun's home. Shaun stood in the kitchen, stirring a pot while Mona chilled breakfast bar surrounded by frilly things.

"How did you even know we'd be here?" he asked, incredulity in his tone.

"Where else would you be when your next project doesn't start next week?" I rushed across the open space, dodging the sunken lounge. I brushed the whole thing away. "None of that matters. Help me."

Shaun sighed. "I'm not helping you chase Abi off."

Mona gasped. "Absolutely not."

ond my “See?” Shaun pointed at her. “I told you you’d piss *my* wife off.”
itio and “She’s not your wife *yet*.” I collapsed into the seat next to her. “
None of rate, you’ll have to make Abi a bridesmaid.”
g me? I I covered my face when Mona squeaked excitedly at the idea.
backed “Christ woman, it wasn’t a suggestion.”
ound at “But it’s a good suggestion.”
ack for Pen scratched across paper.
“What the hell is that?”
“My wedding journal.”
on the I glanced at Shaun, horror widening my eyes. “Tell me she’s joking!
Shaun shrugged.
“Sweet Jesus, I’m friends with mad people.” The two of them jus
at me, enjoying my pain far too much. “Abi can’t be a bridesmaid,
She’ll be back in New York by the time you two tie the knot.”
use. Mona laughed.
at the “I’m serious.”
“Sure you are.” She went back to glueing things together.
soaking “She can’t stay.”
“Didn’t she move in today?” Shaun asked.
rt for a “Yes. That’s a problem too.”
waved “I have a perfect idea,” Mona said without taking her eyes off the l
“To help me get rid of her?” The words came out a little breathier t
like to admit.
“Of course not.” Mona frowned at me before turning her atten

Shaun. "Put that in the fridge. We're having dinner at Finn's tonight."

'At this "You're what?" I shook my head hard. "No. Absolutely not."

Mona smiled.

Shaun turned the stove off and focused his full attention on me. "I what, I'll help you—"

"Shaun," Mona growled.

"Under one condition." Shaun paused, raising his brows at his fian

"Anything."

"Give us a good reason why you can't see it through."

g." I stared at him. He couldn't be fucking serious.

"You're not even going to try?" Shaun asked, shock raising his voi

t stared "Just give me a bloody minute." I held my hand up, staving of
Mona.questions.

He knew my history with Natalie, he knew what she'd done to m
the hell wouldn't that be enough?

"She's only involved with me for money. She probably wants sor
of fame, they all do." I ticked them off, becoming more and more de
as Shaun's face remained blank. "I'm not a Hollywood whore, even
the press like to believe it."

"None of that is why she scares you," Mona said, dead serious.

"She doesn't scare me."

ace.

han I'd "Yes, she does." She grinned at me. "You're terrified she's per
you and you'll have no way to stop yourself from falling for her over t
few months."

ition to

Shaun's eyes widened. "Is that true?"

"Definitely not."

He frowned. "She's not Natalie, man. If she were, we would have told you at the wedding." He smirked. "She would have dumped your ass before bouquet toss for one of the Sanderson brothers."

I scowled at him. My mouth went dry at the very idea.

"See you don't like the thought of her with someone else, do you?"

I gritted my teeth, but kept my mouth shut. I'd underestimated them.

"So, you're not going to help me?"

Shaun snorted. "Come back to me when you fuck it up and you need learning how to grovel."

"That's not going to happen." I pushed out of my seat.

"Suit yourself." Shaun straightened up, shrugging.

"I'll call Nathan next time," I muttered, stalking towards the door.

"She's not Natalie, Finn."

"Yeah, yeah, you keep saying that," I called over my shoulder. "I'm not believing it."

"Natalie would have sold photos of you in Bora Bora to the paparazzi. The words stopped me at their front door. A cold sweat broke out on the back of my neck at the reminder. "You've been off the radar for a full seven days. I have new pics until you landed today."

"That doesn't mean anything." I turned to face him, my skin crawling. "Maybe she's waiting until I get comfortable."

Mona glanced between us, confusion screaming on her face. “Who’s missing?”

seen it Shaun rose a brow. “Do you want to tell her or shall I?”

fore the “Neither of us will.” I shot a warning look at Shaun.

“That’s not how it works in this house.” He shook his head. “Maybe time you stopped hiding from it.”

’ Easy for him to say. “No, I think I’m good.”

pair of I rushed out of the house fast, grumbling to myself with every step I knew better than to force that fucking topic on me.

Twenty-year-old Finn trusted far too easily and didn’t bother to check for hidden cameras where there shouldn’t have been any.

The thought of Abi knowing I’d been stupid enough to let a sex tape get out into the world made me sick. I had no plans to figure out why.

I’m still

is.” His

back of

ays. No

itching.

Mona glanced between us, confusion screaming on her face. “What am I missing?”

Shaun rose a brow. “Do you want to tell her or shall I?”

“Neither of us will.” I shot a warning look at Shaun.

“That’s not how it works in this house.” He shook his head. “Maybe it’s time you stopped hiding from it.”

Easy for him to say. “No, I think I’m good.”

I rushed out of the house fast, grumbling to myself with every step. Shaun knew better than to force that fucking topic on me.

Twenty-year-old Finn trusted far too easily and didn’t bother to check for cameras where there shouldn’t have been any.

The thought of Abi knowing I’d been stupid enough to let a sex tape get out into the world made me sick. I had no plans to figure out why.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

ABI

The doorbell rang almost two hours after Finn left. I dithered a couple of seconds, wondering if I should answer it. What if a flash went off in my face or one of the fans at the gate had come to make sure they got their shot at Finn?

But then I remembered I lived in a gated community now and that not all people able to get to the door had clearance.

Plus, I didn't exactly have anything else to do with my time.

Maybe I should ask Finn for a sewing machine.

I chewed my lip as I padded through the sprawling lounge to the door. The idea had merit, but it felt weird to ask him for things. I could just wait until my first pay cheque from the show and buy my own.

A screen next to the door lit up with a greyed-out video image of a woman on the other side. A short woman smiled into the camera, making it clear she recognised her and the hunk of a man behind her.

Why are they here?

I opened the door tentatively and Mona's smile went up a notch.

“Hey, Abi.” She asked, her accent just as interesting as it’d been at the wedding.

“Yes. Finn’s not here.”

She turned to Shaun, frowning. “He left ages ago.”

“Probably sulking in his car somewhere.” Shaun shook his head.

Why would he be sulking? His panicked expression when he’d rushed into the room came to mind. Clearly, I’d done something. I couldn’t say what I’d done. Walking into a bedroom he directed me to.

“Oh well, can we come in and wait?” Mona asked. “Since it’s your first night here, we thought we could have dinner together.”

I opened the door and gestured them in. “I don’t know where anything is, but make yourselves at home.”

“Tell me he didn’t duck out on you without a proper tour?” Mona asked when I hesitated. “Shaun.”

He sighed. “I’ll talk to him.”

Mona wandered into Finn’s kitchen, her black halter skater dress swaying with each step. She opened a drawer and pulled out a pile of takeaway containers while Shaun opened the fridge and unearthed a big bottle of water.

Did that man ever dress down? He wore a black shirt and cargo pants, almost casual but not when combined with his perfectly styled hair. I guessed it came with the territory.

It shouldn’t have surprised me that they both knew their way into Finn’s kitchen. They were his friends, not interlopers like me.

“What’s your favourite kind of food, Abi?” Mona asked as she scanned through leaflets. “We can order while we wait for the Irish sod to turn up.”

1 at the face the music.”

I hesitated. Something I’d never do over ordering food, but would I ordered something Finn hated? Should I even care?

“We should wait. I don’t know what Finn likes.”

“That’s his fault.” Mona shrugged. “No reason for us to suffer because he can’t communicate or be present.”

I studied her smiling face as her logic sank in. If he’d cared, he would have shared the mundane basics of his life. He hadn’t. He’d also ditched his first in a massive opulent house with nothing to do, but even if I had something to do, I probably wouldn’t through fear of ruining something.

“Do you have a menu for Mexican there?”

“Of course.” Mona grinned. She pulled a yellow leaflet out with a quick glance at the pile. “This is the best one in the area.”

“That sounds great.” I bit my lip on the urge to ask if Finn liked Mexican. *It doesn’t matter.*

“Shall we grab a seat while we decide?” Shaun placed a glass of water on the counter in front of me. He nodded towards the plush deep blue chairs framing the fireplace.

“Yes, sorry.” I flushed as I picked up the water. “I’m a terrible host. I have bad hair. I’m a terrible host.” Mona laughed. “I would be too in your situation.”

“We know our way around better than you do right now.” Shaun nodded before collecting his and Mona’s drinks. He led the way to the living area. “I promise we won’t hold it against you.”

We settled on the sofas opposite each other, sipping our waters and scanning the menu. Nerves twisted in my stomach. We hadn’t talked,

the couple of minutes I'd spent with them at the wedding.

What if I *What if they didn't like me?*

I took a deep breath and pushed it away. It didn't matter. They'd like me or they wouldn't, and there wasn't a lot I could do about it aside from being my normal self.

And my normal self would not be worrying her lip over other people's opinions.

"How did you both meet Finn?" I forced my shoulders to relax and leaned back against the sofa.

Making myself feel comfortable in this place went against the grain. I didn't start now, I never would. I tucked my feet under me, settling myself in a corner of the sofa with a huge pillow at my back. Much better.

"On the set of an action film. He was the cocky fucker the Mexican director spent a lot of time manhandling back to his mark." Shaun's blue eyes shining with remembered mirth. "Considering he went to school, he should have known better."

I considered Finn's relentlessness with Tyler, he fought to never give up much ground and always with such a serious expression. I couldn't imagine him being cocky, but it was an image I liked far too much.

"Was that here in LA?"

Shaun shook his head. "Nevada. All of us were just background actors at that point, finding our feet in Hollywood." The amusement faded, replaced with something close to wonder. Appreciation maybe. "Sorry, we stood out in that film. All four of us started landing bigger and bigger roles. Always together."

beyond

I needed to do a deep internet search on Finn.

“By all four, you mean the other guys who were with you like me wedding?” At Shaun’s nod, I tried to recall their names. “Jackson and Nathan being “Nathan.” Shaun grinned. “The Kings of Screen. A weird title American industry to dub four Brits but we’re not going to complain a people’s soon.”

“I still find it weird how that happened,” Mona said, settling back I settled Shaun. He wrapped an arm around her, his fingers smoothing slowly down her arm.

His expression softened as he gazed at her and a pang of wa g into a through me. Not for Shaun obviously, but for the look.

“Americans love our accents. Of course, they’d keep us together ssistant could.”

grinned, He couldn’t be more right. Everyone I’d ever known had been fas) acting by a foreign accent. I hadn’t plucked up the courage to ask where their from.

ive him “You can ask, you know?” Mona smiled at me. “We won’t bi magine Scottish and Shaun’s Welsh. Our accents have probably gotten a bit n though living together and over here.” She winced at that, and I ch relaxing even more.

rtists at “Jackson is Scottish and Nathan’s English too.”

l to be “Except Jackson’s from Aberdeen so his accent can be a lot strong nehow, mine when he’s had a couple of drinks or just isn’t thinking straight.’ bigger leaned forward, reaching for her phone. “Let’s get this order in befo comes back and demands we change our minds.”

“Order him the spicy soy tacos. It’ll serve him right.” Shaun smiled at the he sipped his water. He had a devious glint in his eyes I recognised well. Ros regularly flashed it at me before she got herself into trouble. Despite my nerves, I found myself liking them both. Enough to make my gigantic house feel a little homier.



We were just making a start on our tacos when the front door almost an hour later. Finn sauntered in, his eyes on the instead of us. I studied him, searching for signs of whatever he’d spent last few hours doing. His hair stood a little on end, but otherwise, he was normal.

He pattered around the front hall, putting this jacket and shoes away while Shaun, Mona and I shared incredulous looks. How in your head could you be not to notice a second car outside or the extra eyes circled

Finn paused in the entryway, his eyes on the hallway leading to bedrooms. His brow furrowed and I found my gaze glued to him. Why would he hesitate to walk to his own bedroom?

Shaun cleared his throat and we all chuckled as Finn startled. He waddled around to face us, a light flush burning into his face. Fascinating. Always been in such control, his mask either firmly in place or dropped in design. I’d never seen him blush. Or jump. It almost made him more than celebrity for once.

“About time you turned up,” Shaun called across the open plan space. “Mona says Finn scowled at him. “I said no to this.” I turned back around in my seat, sharing a grin with Mona.

“Too bad. Abi’s been enjoying our company.” Shaun flashed

arked as mischievous grin. “Haven’t you?” His eyes urged me to play along, but far too spending an hour with them, I didn’t need the encouragement.

“Definitely. We should make this a weekly thing.”

I could feel Finn’s gaze itching against the back of my head. The turn around and soak in his reaction burned through me but I held firm to see the teasing immediately and ruin the fun.

“Oh, we’ll need more than a weekly catch-up.” Mona grinned at me. “Abi’s agreed to be my bridesmaid. Isn’t that great? You can walk down the aisle together again.”

I bit my lip. We had talked about it and I agreed. With one caveat, I couldn’t rely on me. Their wedding would take place after the show every day. All I couldn’t delude myself enough to think Finn and I would still be together on our own. The idea of having something solid like that in the future felt amazing.

“Mona,” Finn groaned.

I glanced over my shoulder.

“We talked about this.” He stomped towards us, dragging a hand through his hair.

“And I ignored you.” Mona smirked at him before picking up her fork. “Besides, I don’t think you’ll be divorcing in three months.”

Finn spluttered. She took a bite of her taco, her eyes dancing with mischief. Mona enjoyed torturing him and I could get on board with it. Maybe I should think twice before abandoning me in a strange place next time.

“We’re not talking about that,” Finn said. His sapphire gaze drilled into her.

“No, we’re eating.” She pushed his container across the table. “Sit down and eat.”

ut after Eat. Show us the nice guy you've been trying to hide from Abi."

His jaw shifted but he pulled out a chair all the same. He sat next to me while Shaun covered his lips with a hand, but not fast enough. He couldn't need to disguise his smirk.

n. He'd "He has a nice side? I thought it was an act." I tried to keep it serious but I couldn't stop a chuckle from slipping out. I'd seen plenty of evidence at Finn's house to prove Finn could be more than a nice guy. It always made me crave more.

own the I flicked a glance at Finn, expecting a glare. Instead, he eyed me with a curious look in his eyes. Almost like I terrified him. *Interesting.*

eat: she Mona's eyes widened before she burst out laughing. "I can see why you're hooked. I think that. I can't imagine what he tried on you." She hooked a finger at Finn. "This one dragged me running at sunrise on my day off."

"I didn't do that to chase you away," Shaun muttered. His amusement vanished as he turned in his seat to face her.

through reacted?" "Oh really?" Mona's brows rose. "Shall we ask Abi how she would react?"

"No need." He shook his head.

er taco. "No, no. We should settle this argument." She glanced at me, a smile curling her lips. "Abi?"

1 mirth. "If a man makes me run, period, I'm out." I could feel Finn's glare as he'd burn against my skin. I turned my head, narrowing my eyes at him pointedly. "Don't get any ideas."

led into "See!" Mona shouted.

"Hey! I also took you to aerial silks and flat hunting." Shaun's voice came out flat but he couldn't quite pull off the annoyed demeanour. His expression

softening every time he laid eyes on Mona. “Neither of those things
t to me have chased you away.”

ouldn’t “Anyway.” Mona rolled her eyes and turned back to us. “Finn can
absolute gem if he wants to be. When I first moved out here and Sha
ous, but busy on a film, he took me to get all my paperwork sorted. He sat
ence to DMV with me for six hours! Would an asshole do that?”

ore. “Mona,” Finn groaned again. “Can we just eat?”

with a He tucked into his food while Mona and Shaun frowned at him. I
neither of them believed his denials. If I thought too hard abo
y you’d honeymoon, I wouldn’t either.

nger at And that would be a massive mistake.

How could I keep my distance from him if I thought he could be g
isementme?

“Are you going to Jackson’s premiere tomorrow night?” Shaun ask
ld have placed his arm along the back of Mona’s chair, a shadow of a smirk
face.

Finn nodded. “As if I could get out of it.”

a small “Have you sorted Abi’s stylist yet?”

Finn eyed me from the corner of his eye, freezing with a taco cl
’s gaze between his fingers.

on him “You can’t go alone, you plonker.” Mona tutted at him. “It would
good if you turned up to your first red carpet since getting married
your wife.”

ice rose “I don’t need to go. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

on kept Mona shook her head. “You do not want that kind of speculation

... would do the doorstep.” She shuddered. “Trust me. The less we do to draw the attention of those rabid paparazzi the better.”

...n be an “You’re right.” Finn’s shoulders sagged.

...un was “I’ll text Marie and get her to pull some things together for Abi.”
...t in the pulled out his phone. He glanced up at me from beneath his lashes, going to need your measurements, though.”

Mind spinning, I rattled off the details. Finn continued to eat his toast. My stomach seemed tense. Within five minutes, I had an appointment with Mr. Maxwell as a hairdresser and makeup artist to make a house call, and a delivery of jewellery because my lack was apparently bad for the wife of an A-list actor.

It felt like I’d stepped into a new world, where diamonds were the norm and people waiting on you hand and foot should be expected. I guess it was a new world. The Hollywood world.

...ked. He

... on his

...lenched

...n’t look

...without

... on the

doorstep.” She shuddered. “Trust me. The less we do to draw the attention of rabid paparazzi the better.”

“You’re right.” Finn’s shoulders sagged.

“I’ll text Marie and get her to pull some things together for Abi.” Shaun pulled out his phone. He glanced up at me from beneath his lashes. “I’m going to need your measurements, though.”

Mind spinning, I rattled off the details. Finn continued to eat his taco, his entire body tense. Within five minutes, I had an appointment with Marie, as well as a hairdresser and makeup artist to make a house call, and a delivery of jewellery because my lack was apparently bad for the wife of an A-list star.

It felt like I’d stepped into a new world, where diamonds were the norm, and people waiting on you hand and foot should be expected. I guess it was a new world. The Hollywood world.

CHAPTER TWENTY

ABI

*R*elax.

No matter how many times I muttered that word to myself, I couldn't do it.

I'd been plucked and waxed to within an inch of my life. My skin tingled. The hairdresser and makeup artist had made quick work of taming my frizzy curls and covering the spattering of freckles on my nose. *A dress...*

Sigh.

All of the fashion magazines had been plastered in the same basic design since multiple designers presented their takes on it in Paris in January: gold with vertical lines of narrow sequins and a cape. *A cape!* I felt like a princess. Material pooled at my feet, making me sweat ever so slightly. I thought of tripping over it on the carpet.

The neckline plunged though, making a bra impossible. For the first time in a month, I found myself strapped up with boob tape. I'd never experience someone else putting the stuff on me again, but t

evidently been wishful thinking. It didn't get any less awkward. At didn't have Eva and Ros smirking at my squirming.

I looked incredible though, and I should have been brimmin confidence.

Even so, nerves plagued me. I guess it made sense. First red carpe knew about them came from movies. I'd prepared myself for a rucku of noise and bright lights—but my hands shook and the longer the dri the more I started to freak out about the stylist's choice of shoes.

I didn't do heels often. With my ankle recovering from the sprain, shouldn't have agreed, but Marie had insisted and, sure, it made ser me next to six-foot-three Finn in flats and we'd look odd. I'd arguee yself, I least an hour over the need for them to be four inches.

It seemed like overkill.

in still Overkill that could break my neck and embarrass me for the ing my country to see.

and the I lost that argument and Marie handed me a bottle of painkillers she strapped my ankle up tight.

"Stop fidgeting," Finn said, his voice harsh in the silence that cou c style, us.

y. Rose He sat beside me in the limo, pinching the bridge of his nose.

t like a "Sorry."

y at the I pressed my shaking hands hard against the leather seat at my s second focused on taking a deep breath. Nothing bad could happen. I just oped to walk. Didn't need to answer a single question.

hat had "It'll be over in a flash, I promise." His fingers glanced over m:

least softest of brushes that sent tingles up my arm.

His tone had gentled, and I dared a peek at him from the corner of my eye. He'd turned his head, his frown smoothing out in favour of a real smile.

All I thought: *Why did he have to be so handsome? It's not fair.*

While I got ready, he'd had his own treatment. His beard had been trimmed. His black baby curls rested against his shoulders, slightly tamed than usual. Add that to his grey tailored suit, emphasising his shoulders and the hands that made me whimper in Bora Bora and had me concentrate.

"I only need a second to fall." Despite the horror of it, my body twitched at the thought of proving him wrong, resisting the smirk that wanted to take over my lips.

"It won't happen. I'll be holding onto you the whole time."

I studied him, hunting for signs of the guy who snapped at me before his honeymoon or abandoned me in his house. He appeared earnest. I appreciated his reassurance, but the pang of happiness in my chest concerned me.

"And you didn't need to wear heels," he grumbled. His eyes narrowed at my hidden feet. "It must be agony."

"I'll be fine." I suppressed the smile itching to break free.

"Fine, but if it becomes too much, tell me. We'll leave." His hand clenched around mine. "I'll bloody carry you out if I have to."

I lost the battle with the smile.

The noise level exploded, even with the car door between us and the outside.

“Are you ready?”

His gaze roamed my face. At my nod, he squeezed my hand and assuring another of those calm, suave smiles.

“It really will be fine.”

His expression morphed before my eyes, smoothing into the collected smile. The picture of beautiful and unaffected. The actor y more out to play.

The driver opened the door, and a wall of noise hit us. Lights flashed a bit of people screamed. White spots danced before my vision, and I hadn't made it to the carpet yet.

Finn got out first.

He waved at the crowd of fans gathered near the car. Then he turned to me and held out his hand. With a tremor, I took it, sliding out to join grateful that the length of my dress made it impossible for me to flash on our the onlookers. I did not need *that* photo on the front page of any gossip magazine.

With a firm grip on my hand, he led me down the carpet. Snippets of questions emerged the further we went. Reporters eagerly waved to wed on desperate for an interview.

“How did you meet?”

“Why was it a secret?”

“Are you in love?”

“Is it a publicity stunt?”

“Give us a kiss?”

“Finn! Look this way.”

On and on they went. I very quickly tuned them out. I didn't

know what they were speculating about me. I'd already had to field questions from Eva almost daily, and that would only get worse once I convinced her to visit.

At some point, I got too comfortable. I could see the end of the relationship at my lack of embarrassing stunts overtook me.

Then it all went to shit.

My heel caught in the train of my dress and I tugged hard at Finn as I tilted towards him. He turned. I had a second to register the wide of his eyes before gravity took over.

I can't believe I'm going to faceplant on a fucking red carpet.

Stupidly or not, I squeezed my eyes shut. My stomach whooshed back eyes fluttered open at the heated press of Finn's chest.

His face hovered above mine. He studied me, concern glimmering in any of his eyes. *For the cameras or just me?* My heart thundered in my chest even as I doubted, and it had nothing to do with my near miss. His fingers tapped against my back while his other hand gripped my arm.

He'd saved me from making a fool of myself. Not that this little incident would go unnoticed but at least I didn't have a bruise on me or a blood

A chorus of voices rose above the chaos, a chant spreading through the crowd. "Kiss her. Kiss her. Kiss her."

Finn's brows rose. *How can I deny them?* his expression seemed to

My gaze dropped to his soft lips. The smirk transforming his face drew my attention before our mouths touched. He wasted no time with a tentative peck. His tongue swept along the seam of my lips. I didn't have the strength to resist him.

need to

uestions Oh, I should have.

d her to Instead, I got lost in the taste of him, in the heat of him pressed so
me. I'd missed the feel of his body against mine in the night.

pet and I barely had the presence of mind to hold in my groan.

Finn jolted when someone wolf-whistled. He broke the kiss, sti
against me before pulling back. Again he studied me, only this time,
's handparted, his chest rose and fell erratically against my hand, and h
ning ofdarkened with desire.

I watched as his mask slid back into place, replacing the real, ra
with an artificial smugness. I missed the glimpse of the real him, but
ed. Mymany cameras around, I couldn't begrudge him wanting to hide bef
rest of the world.

g in his With a graceful move, he righted me. My breath caught as my feet
en withleft the ground and then his arm wrapped around my waist, his hand g
witchedmy hip firmly. With that smug smile in place, he urged me back into n

Tomorrow, there would be pictures of Finn kissing me plastered
displaythe internet and every newsstand in the country.

ly nose. When I agreed to *Married Blind*, I hadn't prepared myself for t
ugh thecourse, I knew I'd be participating in a tv show and strangers would
face and watch my every reaction to this strange situation, but this, i
, say. felt like another level.

caught It could roll out of control so fast.

entative



will to “I thought for sure he'd hide you from us,” an English accent s
behind me, cutting above the chatter of guests.

After the premiere, we moved on to an exclusive afterparty. I'd been ushered past a red rope before. The night held so many firsts, I couldn't take them all in.

Tiny lanterns hung from the ceiling of an otherwise black venue. Burgundy and royal purple cushions decorated every seating option, be it a high-top barstool or an overstuffed sofa. A rich dark oak wooden floor blanketed the room while huge copper drop lights illuminated the bar.

The place screamed expensive just as much as the perfectly manicured people surrounding me.

Despite my incredible dress, I couldn't help but feel out of place. Finn's hand resting lightly on my hip.

Finn turned at the sound of that voice, spinning me with him. His eyes lit up at the sight of Jackson Levi, decked out in his deep blue three-piece suit. Unlike at our wedding, he'd tamed his dirty blond surfer locks, tying them back at the nape of his neck. Despite the four-inch heels, he still managed to tower over me.

"I'm not a monster," Finn said, amusement curling his lips. He pulled Jackson on the back. "Nice showing tonight, man. I did not think you'd pull off the romantic hero."

"That's me. A natural talent." Jackson grinned, his gaze jumping between me and Finn. "Whether you need a battle-hardened soldier, a bodyguard, an investigator, a vampire, or a love interest, I can do it all."

Finn snorted. "Easy there. We don't want your head exploding."
"Too late." Jackson chuckled. Then his eyes sharpened on me with a mischievous smile tugging at his lips. "I hope he's been treating you well. You can tell me if not, and I'll use it to drive him off his rocker."

I never “Stop being obnoxious, Jackson.” Finn shook his head. “He’s
couldn’t drive me insane every single day since we met, and fails every time.”

“Maybe I haven’t had the proper ammunition.” Jackson lifted
the plush bottle to his lips, smirking as he eyed us both. “My luck might be a
be it a change.”

I chuckled at the devious mischief painted across his face.

He reminded me so much of Ros. She could be just as unpredictable
enjoyed teasing me whenever the opportunity arose.

“We’re figuring things out,” I said, bringing them back to the
question but dodging it all the same.

A handsome older man passed behind Jackson, his grey hair
controlled waves. He glanced at us and away quickly, then stopped
tracks to look again. His eyes widened with recognition.

“Finn McCarthy! I was hoping I’d run into you here,” he said, his
soaring above the chatter and low-level music. “I know I thanked you
the phone, but with the size of that donation, I have to do it in person.”
I stopped at Finn’s side, slapping his hand down on his shoulder.

Finn shifted, his neck flushing as he snuck a glance at me. “
problem at all. The least I could do.”

“Don’t undervalue it, my boy.” The man boomed happily. “That
will do incredible things for the Institute. There are so many selfish people
this business, it’s a pleasure when I come across gems like you.” He
me a smile, beaming with an inexplicable pride. “You’ve got a good
me, here. Hold on to him.”

With that, he patted Finn on the shoulder one more time and vanished
into the crowd, leaving me with a swirl of questions. Jackson and I turned

tried to Finn with raised brows almost at the same time.

“Finny boy, when did you do it, and why didn’t you tell me?” Jackson asked, his face lighting up with delight.

“It’s not that big a deal.”

“Don’t play me. We both heard the man.” Jackson shifted into the position, wrapping an arm around Finn and pulling him into a side hug. “How much did you give away?”

Finn glanced away, shifting in absolute discomfort. “Quarter of a million for cancer research charity,” he muttered, his lips barely moving.

Jackson whistled in appreciation. “My best friend, the philanthropist. Did not see that one coming.”

Neither had I.

Did he do it for me? No, he couldn’t have.

I hadn’t told him about Eva.

“It’s no

money

people in

flashed

and one

finished

turned to

Finn with raised brows almost at the same time.

“Finny boy, when did you do it, and why didn’t you tell me?” Jackson asked, his face lighting up with delight.

“It’s not that big a deal.”

“Don’t play me. We both heard the man.” Jackson shifted into the man’s position, wrapping an arm around Finn and pulling him into a sideways hug. “How much did you give away?”

Finn glanced away, shifting in absolute discomfort. “Quarter of a mil to a cancer research charity,” he muttered, his lips barely moving.

Jackson whistled in appreciation. “My best friend, the secret philanthropist. Did not see that one coming.”

Neither had I.

Did he do it for me? No, he couldn’t have.

I hadn’t told him about Eva.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

FINN

Eventually, Jackson fucked off to mingle more with his co-stars every glitzy name in Hollywood. He left us grinning like the Cat with his new fodder. I'd never hear the end of it.

I'd donated anonymously on purpose.

I didn't want people to know.

You'd think people knowing would elevate it somehow, but the magnitude of it hit harder. It didn't. Somehow, it cheapened the whole thing. People would just speculate about my motives.

Christ knows, I needed all the help I could get with my image. I hadn't even told my agent about it.

With Jackson escaping, I collected more drinks for us and led Abi to a darkened corner. We settled on a sofa in an alcove, sheltered from the rest of the party.

I sank into the cushion, letting my head fall against the sofa and my eyes shut.

"Are you okay?" Abi asked. Her thigh brushed against mine, teas

with things I couldn't have.

"Fine," I sighed. I didn't open my eyes. Didn't need to to know probably chewed her lip. One look and I'd kiss her again. "These things take more energy than I have sometimes."

"I can understand that."

Silence lapsed between us while I focused on relaxing. Honey enjoyed our quiet moments, breathing in her floral scent, feeling the heat of her body next to mine.

That could get addictive fast.

My eyes snapped open at that. Addictive? No, thank you.

"You did well tonight."

She sniggered. "At which point? When I tripped on the carpet or when I dropped a glass of red wine in your lap?"

I rolled my head to look at her, soaking in the carefree smile lighting up her entire face. They had to pair me with an absolutely stunning and beautiful woman. Couldn't give me a grain of a chance at keeping her at arm's length.

"I think the carpet one worked out well."

Truth be told, I'd have kissed her even if the fans hadn't been cheering for it. The shock and wonder in her eyes had been too much to ignore. Seeing the flush creeping into her cheeks and her parted lips, I didn't stand a chance.

Weak. That's me. Too fucking weak to stay strong.

"You didn't even tense up when I kissed you."

Why the fuck am I praising her?

Abi glanced at the couple leaning against the wall next to us. She looked toward me and my gaze dropped to her lips without thought.

“How much chaos will that cause?” she asked, her voice low and controlled. “There’s probably already some articles up and maybe a segment on a celebrity gossip show about my sudden behaviour change.” I took a sip of beer, shrugging the whole thing off. “Honestly, it’s nothing new. As the world knows right now, we’re happily married. That kiss probably didn’t hurt my image.”

She dipped her chin and the tension drained from her. She relaxed against the sofa cushions, her body irresistibly close to me. If I shifted across or two, my arm would brush against her tit.

“Finn!” An eerily familiar voice shouted from across the room.

Heads turned toward our alcove while a raven-haired viper bolted across the room at us, dragging along a scowling guy who looked like he stepped out of a GQ magazine. The fakest smile I’d ever seen stretched across his lips.

“It’s been ages,” Natalie said as she stopped in front of us. “I can’t believe we ran into you.”

Why the fuck did she look happy about it?

“You look great.” She raked her gaze over me, unmistakable intent in her eyes.

I ground my teeth. “What do you want, Natalie?” I asked, not making it perfectly clear her latest game wouldn’t work.

The heat faded fast, her pleasant socialite mask slipping into place. A guy wrapped his arm around her, laughably trying to stake his claim.

“This is my fiancé, Zeke.” She tilted her head towards him, that fake smile fixed in place while her eyes hardened. As if I cared.

areful. amazing that we both got engaged at the same time.”

running A click sounded in my head and a smirk claimed my lips. I slid
back a sip along the back of the sofa, resting it on Abi’s neck.

as far as “What a coincidence.” I closed the remaining inches between us, p
helped Abi tight to my side and resting my other hand high on her thigh. She
it, twining our fingers together. “But Nat, you’ve got your facts wro
against married.” I picked Abi’s hand up and pressed a kiss to it, the emeral
an inch glinting beneath the club’s low lights.

Natalie’s gaze dropped to the rock. I took great joy in watch
nostrils flare. I needed to send Charlie a thank you card for the beas
arrelled engagement ring.

ke he’d She recovered fast, moulding herself to Zeke, the poor guy. Her
hed her smile slammed back into place. Apparently, we’d gone from people w
each other to people who had a pissing contest over jewellery.

I can’t “I heard.” She puckered her brow, tutting as if she truly cared ab
“Didn’t think you were dating anyone seriously.”

I shrugged. “I haven’t heard any more scandal about you stealin
erest in people and leaking their personal shit for a quick payoff, so I gues
even.”

ly tone Zeke stiffened next to her, and a thrill of triumph rippled through n

“What is he talking about, Nat?”

ce. The She patted his chest. “Oh, nothing. Nothing at all.” She shot me a v
look and led him away. “He’s only joking.”

t sickly “Am I?”

“How She took a panicked step back. “We’ll leave you to your ev

Another step.

a hand “Good idea.” A menacing grin overtook me. I didn’t consider my
vindictive sort, but I would gladly tear her to shreds in front of an audi
ressing would be a public service. “Wouldn’t want me to spill too many
caught secrets.”

ng. I’m She spun on her heel, tugging her frowning fiance after her. My he
d stoneslowed as she vanished into the crowd. I hadn’t seen her in years,
pretty much assumed she’d quit LA.

ing her *What were the fucking chances?*

st of an “Who was that?” Abi asked, her tone tentative.

Christ, I didn’t want to get into it.

plastic “No one important.”

ho sued She scanned my face, hunting for a truth she wouldn’t find. If sh
wanted, she could find all the sordid details online. The fact she
out me. recognised Natalie suggested my wife hadn’t gone digging into my p
some reason that filled me with hope.

ig from “An old girlfriend?”

s we’re “Unfortunately,” I grumbled.

ne. Abi continued to stare at me, her scrutinising expression gr
softening.

varning “There you two are,” Mona shouted before collapsing onto th
opposite us, freeing me from Abi’s attention. “For a minute, we
you’d skipped the party.”

Shaun sat down next to her, eyeing me with a guarded look. “Di
ening.” see...”

“Yep.” I nodded. “Don’t ask me why.”

self the “You can’t be that oblivious.” Abi’s brows rose at my blank expression. It “How could you miss the ‘my achievement is bigger than yours’ vibes of your Shaun chuckled. “Remembering how artificial Natalie was, your got a point.”

part rate Despite the amusement creasing his face, Shaun watched me with and I’d in his eyes. Anticipation rolled off him in waves, and I could understand That one word would have been enough to send me to the bar a week. Add in the run-in with Natalie and I should definitely be deep into a bottle of whisky by now.

Nothing but calm rolled through me. Calm and an insane awareness of Abi’s skin beneath my fingertips and the pads of her fingers grazing around my knuckles.

So no, I didn’t rise to the bait. I also didn’t shift away from Abi.

ast. For “How’s your sister doing with you away?” Mona asked. She leaned forward, her gaze avidly fixed on Abi. “Did you ask her about visiting?”

“Not yet.” She shook her head. “I’m going to wait until the first payment comes through and book the flight for her. Flights aren’t cheap. I don’t want her to be able to say no.”

“Good idea. I didn’t think about that.” Mona nodded, sinking onto Shaun’s side. Her eyes narrowed as she stared off into the corner. “I’ll be relieved when it’s all paid off.”

I glanced between them, the dread eating a hole in my stomach. “All of what is paid off?”

Please don’t say debt.

If I couldn't spot the money-hungry whores, how could I avoid the
pression. Abi hesitated, her mouth opening and closing. My heart sank.

?" "My sister had cancer," she said, her voice cracking. She clea
wife's throat while my brain scrambled to adjust. "She's in remission now,
wracked up a pretty hefty medical bill getting treatment."

a glint "Did you know Abi worked three jobs trying to help her pay
nd why. Mona asked, the awe in her voice merging with the devious glint in h
ek ago, as she studied me. "Honestly, you're so brave, taking on the show to h
ottle of You must have been terrified."

My eyes narrowed on Mona while my grasp on reality shifted.
ness of "I think Finn's got the point now, Sparky." Shaun laughed as he sc
circles her hand. He shuffled forward on the sofa and for the first time
desperately hoped that my best friend would leave. "You've hit Fir
enough of a bomb, let's get a move on."

leaned They abandon us as fast as they appeared, leaving everything
?" down.

st show "You didn't tell me about your sister," I said, my tone soft... and n
eap so little miffed.

Would I have treated her differently had I known?

ng into Possibly, but I couldn't say for certain.

at she'll "I didn't think..." She trailed off, chewing her lip.

"What?"

"When She sighed. "We're having a good time, let's not ruin that with this

I stilled, my gaze roaming her pale face. "Why would telling m
your sister's cancer ruin this?"

m? “Fine,” she muttered, her tone hardening. She pushed her shoulder and locked eyes with me, determination riding her. “I didn’t think I should have cared.”

but she It should have hurt.

This close, I could make out the moment she braced for my next change. Her cheeks lifted and her lips flatlined. The sight of it drove a nail into my heart.

elp her. Maybe I’d been wrong.

I couldn’t get addicted to her because I already was.

I relaxed into the sofa, turning so my body angled toward her. “I’ll give you a fair assessment. I might not have when we first met.” My gaze dropped to her lips which parted slightly on an almost inaudible gasp. “No one should have been with me though, *dotey*.”

With the tip of my finger, I drew circles around the nape of her neck. I gave myself permission to get lost in her eyes for the first time. My heart pounded as I considered how I could make it up to her. It would take a long time, maybe a lifetime, but there was one thing I could share, one thing that tore me open, more than as much as her sister’s battle with cancer had her, but it felt like a price worth paying.

“That woman, Natalie,” I paused, waiting for her to acknowledge the change in conversation. When she nodded, I blew out a breath and forced the words out. “We were together for five months. Not a huge amount of time on the grand scheme of things, but for the damage she did, it could have taken decades.”

As the story spilt from me, I kept my gaze fixed on hers, absorbing every wince, grimace and trickle of sympathy.

rs back “I’d just won the first award of my career when I met her. We wer
k you’d bonfire rigged with explosives, burning up slowly and explodin
thousand directions in a shower of debris when it ended.” I toyed w
ring, circling the emerald and dragging the straight edges along the pa
finger. “I didn’t sense a shift. She went from being all over me to a
100d to my calls and messages in the blink of an eye. I couldn’t figure out w
dagger then my agent called...”

I thought I’d put it all behind me, but the shame rose, ramming in
Abi squeezed my hand and her quiet support messed with my voice.

That’s a the time, she pushed me out of my comfort zone, ready with one
d to her reasoning or another for why there’d be no consequences.” I winced
ays the memory of Charlie’s scathing voice rang in my ears. “She worked m
pro, urging me into incriminating positions and then she... then she sc
neck. I the tabloids.”

y heart “Oh Finn, I’m sorry,” Abi whispered. Moisture shimmered in her e
a while, “She took advantage of me. Used me to orchestrate a huge pay
ybe not herself.” My face hardened. “And in the process, she convinced anyo
ersonal would listen that I had forced her into half the shit. That I,” I swa
lge the “manipulated her, hurt her. Didn’t matter that she lied, didn’t matter
ced the thing she sold showed that she knew what she’d done.”

time in “What did she sell?”

ve been “Doesn’t matter.”

Christ, the idea of Abi *knowing* terrified me more than it should ha

g every “It took years to rebuild and at some point, I stopped trying. I lear
the playboy image the media had forced onto me.” I shrugged. “Why

e like a when everyone wanted something from me anyway? The studio
g in a wanted the cash my face would generate. The women wanted to be
with her they'd fucked me or try to take my money. The media wanted anothe
d of my more eyes on their pathetic gossip rags."

voiding "So you shut everyone out," Abi whispered.

Why and She watched me with more sympathy than I deserved. I'd perpetua
myth, fed it, rolled around in it until the real me couldn't be seen. Eve
nto me. I'd done since that moment had been a choice. I didn't deserve her syn

Most of
line of
l as the
e like a
old it to

yes.

day for
ne who
llowed,
that the

ve.

ied into
bother,

when everyone wanted something from me anyway? The studio execs wanted the cash my face would generate. The women wanted to brag that they'd fucked me or try to take my money. The media wanted another story, more eyes on their pathetic gossip rags."

"So you shut everyone out," Abi whispered.

She watched me with more sympathy than I deserved. I'd perpetuated the myth, fed it, rolled around in it until the real me couldn't be seen. Everything I'd done since that moment had been a choice. I didn't deserve her sympathy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

ABI

We left the party early.

I sat next to Finn in the limo, my hand still locked with thigh pressed to mine. I'm not sure I could have let him go even if I'd thought about it.

It felt natural.

And after he opened up to me, showing me the soft, scared man behind his facade, every defence I had against him crumbled.

That should have scared me, but I felt curiously hopeful.

And filled with a need that burned.

First, I wanted to jump his bones, but after that? Then I'd convinced that not everyone wanted to use him. I didn't. If I could make him see maybe he'd never look at me with that gut-punching sadness again.

The limo pulled through the guard gate, making the ascent to the top through the quiet, tree-lined streets.

I tugged on Finn's hand when the car stopped outside his front door.

he didn't react. His sapphire gaze clashed with mine for the first time we left the club. My breath caught at the intensity of his focus.

Something had changed between us. The walls he forced between dissolved somewhere between the club and his house.

Before I could react, the driver opened his door. Finn squeezed in and slid out of the car. He hovered outside, waiting for me.

He held his hand out to me when I cleared the car, clear expectant painting his expression. He didn't expect me to hesitate or refuse. A year ago, he wouldn't have opened himself to the rejection.

I slid my hand into his and let him lead me into the house. He closed the door, 'thank you' to the driver but didn't turn around. He also didn't increase his pace, seeming content to take our time. Another shift.

And really, "I'm absolutely knackered," Finn mumbled after he locked the door. "I can't stay up but I think I'll fall asleep on you." His expression turned sheepish as he silently apologised.

beneath "That's okay, I'm going to head to bed too."

We walked across the foyer, hand-in-hand still, nothing but the quiet silence of the house surrounding us and the tap of my heels on the hardwood.

When we reached my door, he turned me to face him. Muted moonlight cast his face in shadows, but I could still make out the spark of hesitation in his eyes.

"Thank you for tonight," he whispered, swallowing hard. "I'm sorry I'm a house runner after I told you about Natalie."

"I couldn't blame you for one woman's vindictive actions." I raised my hand to rest on his jaw. "It wasn't your fault."

He nodded, but he didn't believe it, which saddened me. One c
convince him.

"Well, good night."

He leaned down pressing a kiss to my forehead. My stomach tw
the chaste move after our scorcher of a make-out session on the carpe

I firmly shut the worry down. I couldn't coax him into giving us a real
if I didn't take risks.

Finn stepped away, trying to release my hand. I held on tight, i
with him.

"Wait, Finn. I..."

"What do you need, *dotey*?"

A shiver ran down my spine as that word tripped off his tongue.
he wanted me.

So ask.

"Will you stay with me tonight?"

"Okay," he whispered, his voice hoarse.

Words froze on my lips. I scanned his face, both surprised and elat
the dark
wood.

Smiling, I led him into my room, nerves babbling away in my ston
the while. I couldn't look at him while he stripped and turned my back
out a pair of pyjamas and unhook my dress.

The whoosh of the fabric sliding off me screamed in the silen
catch of breath in his throat shot through the room, ringing in my ears.

I tugged the oversized t-shirt over my head, smirking to myse
dropped the leggings back into the drawer.

Slowly, I made my way to my bed. Finn already lay beneath the

lay, I'd facing me. His gaze roamed my body with the help of the moonlight through the open curtains. The cool air burned against my bare skin touch.

I lifted the covers, sliding under to lie facing him. A couple of separated our bodies and nerves began to own me.

Calm the hell down.

I hadn't been nervous about sleeping with a guy since I lost my virginity. Why the hell should this time be different?

Finn's fingers grazed across my cheek and goose bumps prickled my skin. From an innocent caress.

Fuck.

He leaned forward, brushing his lips against mine in a sweet completely at odds with our unstable beginnings. I kissed him ratcheting up the pressure and coaxing him into giving me the dem guy I'd glimpsed in Bora Bora.

His fingers delved into my hair as he shuffled closer. As his invaded my mouth to tease mine, his solid chest pressed against me, engulfing me in the best kind of heat.

Finn broke contact and I moaned. He leaned away, smirking with his hand to pull studied me.

"Not going to fall asleep on me this time, are you?"

"Definitely not." I shook my head, then grinned. "Are you?"

"Nope, you've woken me right up," he whispered, lowering his head.

He grazed his lips along my jaw, then mercifully returned his mine. Our hands wandered, learning every divot and crease. His fingers covered,

shining lightly down my torso while mine mapped the lines of his back and side like a Finn made circles against my hip, the gesture so soft it focused all attention, anticipating the next brush.

inches “Open for me, Abi,” he whispered against my lips. He tapped and pushing a little to force me onto my back before his hand red skin skimming across my stomach.

virginity. I rolled onto my back and Finn followed, closing the gap between bodies. Wasting no time, his fingertips danced down my outer thigh. My hand reached with pulsing need and my hips shifted restlessly.

He scattered kisses across my jaw and down my neck, swirling his tongue and scraping his teeth until I wasn't sure which torture affected me more. His fingers continued to tease, running up the inside of my thigh and side, short of where I desperately needed him.

standing “Finn,” I groaned. My hips lifted, chasing his retreating touch, desperate to urge him on.

tongue “Yes, Abi?” he asked, his voice gravelly but filled with laughter.

first me, “Stop. Torturing. Me.”

He smiled, his lips curling against my collarbone.

while he “Are you sure that's what you want?”

“Definitely.”

His touch shifted, running light circles around the lips of my sex, touching but setting off pulses of pleasure all the same.

and. “Better?”

lips to “Finn,” I growled.

ers slid “So needy.” He chuckled.

le. “Stop teas— Oh!”

l of my He dragged two fingers through my folds, circling my clit with a determination that made my head swim. Leaning up on his elbow, my hip, watched me as he drove me out of my mind with nothing more than directed, digits.

When I came, a smug smirk claimed his lips, only this time, I didn't even have the urge to slap it off his face. Floating in bliss, I decided it looked good on my core him, especially when my pussy fluttered with aftershocks.

“Going to let me take all the time I want in the future, aren't you, I?”
tongue He slammed his lips down on mine, stealing my breath for a second before. His started moving down my body. “You're going to trust that I know what your body needs, aren't you?”

The way he said it, sugary sweet, but coated in no-argument steel. My desperate heat flooded me and my core clenched, desperate for round two.

“Yes,” I hissed on a breathy sigh.

He worked his way down to the bed, nipping, kissing, licking... He latched on to a nipple, bathing the taut nub in the warmth of his tongue. My breasts had never been particularly sensitive, but with all of his attention fixated on them, I didn't stand a chance.

He hovered above me, the hard tip of his erection grazing against my core, tantalisingly close. While Finn drove me out of my mind, rolling my nipple between his fingers and lips, I rocked my hips up, pressing my body firmly against him. His tip dragged through my soaking folds, skimming against my clit and making my eyes roll back at the tiny flutter of pleasure.

“Patience, Abi,” Finn growled. He pulled away, sitting back on his hunches. “If you want my cock, you need to be a good girl.” He grip

length, pumping his hand up and down, captivating me. With his smouldering gaze taking me in, he smiled and released himself.

Now, he reached into the bedside table, his gaze never leaving mine when I felt around inside the drawer. While he retrieved a condom, I propped up with my elbows as I watched him with bated breath.

It's not like I have any idea how much you've messed with my head," he asked as he rolled the condom on, slow and torturous, winding me up as much as he did himself. "I was meant to hate you."

"Dotey?" His sapphire eyes darkened and cleared in the blink of an eye. Before he curled, smug and knowing, making me want to wrap my hand around his nape and drag him back down to me.

"But how could I resist you when you look at me like that?" He leaned forward, leaning over me again, holding himself up with his forearms on either side of my shoulders. Minuscule inches separated our bodies, touching close. He ghosted his fingers across my jaw, smoothing a thumb across my lower lips. "Such sweet, innocent trust. It's bloody addictive."

My stomach flipped while my heart took a lap of victory. *Finn McCall* thinks I'm addictive. It filled me with a strong sense of control. Feeling confident, I darted my tongue out, swirling it around his thumb. His eyes darkened against my skin and this time, I wanted them to stay that way.

"You're my good girl, aren't you, Abi?" he whispered, dragging his thumb along my jaw to my lips.

I nodded and he tutted.

"Say it." His cock pressed against my pussy, achingly close.

I studied his hard, watchful face, chewing my lip. It seemed I had an endless list of firsts for Finn to claim. My cheeks burned at the thought

... saying something like that to him. Yet, as foreign as it was, my hands clenched.

“Abi,” he whispered, a warning in his hoarse voice. He rocked me, teasing us both and making my body shake with need.

“Yes. I’m your good girl.”

“Finn” His sapphire eyes lit up and his expression softened. I had a sense of awe as I took in the sheer beauty of him, the unbelievable fact I had all of his attention focused on me and me alone.

His lips Then he pushed forward, filling me inch by inch and my ability to think straight evaporated. Within seconds, he reduced me to nothing more than moans, groans and whimpers. His measured, slow thrusts stretched and shifted, brushing against all the best places.

At some point, he pinned my arms above my head, gripping my wrists with one hand. Something about the action wound my body tighter, and my back as shivers of pleasure danced up my spine.

“Fuck, don’t...” Finn trailed off with a breathless sigh as my hands clenched around him.

His fingers dragged down my thigh, a soft caress against feverish skin. Then he hooked my knee and tugged it up. He pressed it into the mattress, forcing me wider. At the first stroke, my eyes fell shut, soaking in the numbing fizzle of pleasure winding me tighter and tighter.

Finn picked up speed, pounding into me, grinding against my chest with each thrust. My toes curled into the mattress and my fingers hunted for something, anything to hold on to. He released my wrists and weaved his fingers together, filling my chest with the warmest sensation.

“Eyes on me, Abi,” he ground out, his breathing laboured.

ly core I forced my heavy lids to lift, meeting his intense sapphire gaze.

“Good girl,” he muttered as the pressure spiralled, tightening against didn’t matter how hot those two words made me.

The coil snapped and my muscles locked up, squeezing tight as lightning shot up my spine and consumed everything. Finn swore as he came, his face in my neck, sucking in deep shaky breaths.

Minutes ticked by as we came down from the high. He released me on my hands and knee, caressing my face, hair and arms with soft touches that heated my blood for an entirely different reason.

In the silence of my room, shadowed in the soft glow of moonlight, his body cradling mine, I felt loved. The words rushed to the tip of my tongue.

I bit them back and relaxed into the mattress.

ly core

sh skin.

mattress,

e mind-

lit with

ited for

ved our

I forced my heavy lids to lift, meeting his intense sapphire gaze.

“Good girl,” he muttered as the pressure spiralled, tightening until it didn’t matter how hot those two words made me.

The coil snapped and my muscles locked up, squeezing tight as lightning shot up my spine and consumed everything. Finn swore as he came, burying his face in my neck, sucking in deep shaky breaths.

Minutes ticked by as we came down from the high. He released his grip on my hands and knee, caressing my face, hair and arms with soft touches that heated my blood for an entirely different reason.

In the silence of my room, shadowed in the soft glow of moonlight, with his body cradling mine, I felt loved. The words rushed to the tip of my tongue.

I bit them back and relaxed into the mattress.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

ABI

I woke to the press of Finn’s chest against my back and sigh smoothed circles on my hip, rising goosebumps and awaker insatiable need for more.

“How are you feeling?” Finn asked, his voice groggy behind me.

“A little sore, but otherwise great.” I turned over, sighing happily delicious ache in my body. I dragged a finger down his chest, scr slightly with the nail. I bit my lip for a second before shoving the he away. “How about you? Still happy with your choices?”

He cupped my jaw, a soft smile brightening his eyes.

“Not a single regret.” Finn pressed a chaste kiss to my lips.

I recoiled.

“Maybe I should be asking you that question.” He chuckle scrambled out of bed.

“Sorry, I just have a thing about morning breath.” I raced towa bathroom. “Go brush your teeth and we’ll try this again.”

His laughter followed me. I rushed through brushing my teeth, splashing water over my face and jumped back into bed.

I lay there, grinning like a loon at the ceiling. Of all the ways I'd enjoyed yesterday to end, that wasn't it. A giddy feeling of triumph trickled through me.

My bedroom door shot open. Finn laughed again as he walked in carrying a tray.

"That was quite the shriek, *Dotey*." He grinned as he approached the bed. "I'm not that scary, am I?"

He placed the tray between us and lay down next to me. I slapped my hand lightly on the arm, my heart still racing.

"You scared me."

"I couldn't get the handle." Mirth danced in his eyes. "Sorry."

I didn't believe him.

"Can I bribe your forgiveness with waffles?" he asked, a sly look creeping into his eyes.

He knew full well he could. I'd made no secret of my love for waffles. Bora Bora.

My brows climbed as he tugged the tray closer. A pile of syrup-soaked waffles sat on a plate.

"How did you make those so fast?"

He'd only been gone for ten minutes at most.

"I might have put an order in with my chef last week. He left the kitchen in a bit of a mess, but I had the fridge for us last night." He scratched his scruff-covered jaw, the light blushes colouring his cheeks. "I remembered you saying you loved them."

plashed I wanted to help you feel comfortable. This was all I could come up with

“Rewind.” I circled my fingers. “You have a chef? No wonder the kitchen is spotless.”

through “He’s your chef now too.” He glanced away, that blush spreading from

I caught his chin, turning his focus back to me to study him. Funny how I went weeks accepting his controlled mask of emotions and now I can’t shake the fascination every time he let me see the real him.

he bed. Finn stared back at me, patiently waiting for my next move.

“You’re not even slightly comfortable with showing off wealth, are you?”

He shook his head, a small smile curling his lips. He seemed... pleased with me or the question?

“I grew up in an Irish Catholic family. Having money is like sin.”

“Is that why you donated as much as you did?”

His mouth opened and then his gaze sharpened on me. “I don’t know,” he whispered, his tone mildly freaked. “Shit. Maybe.” Guilt flashed across his face. “Christ, that sounds terrible.”

“Why? The charity doesn’t care why you did it.” I shrugged. “All I care about is how it’ll help people. It’s not like you announced it to the press and made a big deal out of it.”

Although, he probably hadn’t because of his Catholic guilt. Oops.

“You’re right.” The concern faded from his blue eyes and he grinned at me. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Take your pick.” He lifted a shoulder, his gaze glued to me. “I don’t want to put any sense into me. Not caring about the money. Not pushing me when I

ith.” ready to talk about something.”

er your “You don’t need to thank me for that, Finn.” I shifted onto my kn
pressed a quick kiss to his lips. He chased me as I pulled away, eli
urther. giggle. “It’s what you do for the people you...” I swallowed, halting
, how I before ‘love’ could traipse off my tongue. Far too early for that kind
ouldn’t “Marry. It’s what you do for the people you like.”

He scanned my face, scrutinising the blush working its way up n
and the panicked flare of my eyes.

e you?” *I can’t believe I nearly let that slip out.*

leased. “If I can’t thank you, what can I do?” His expression morphed in
of an eye.

The calculating gleam faded, replaced by a mischievous int
couldn’t look away from. His voice dropped, dragging over sensitiv
endings, reminding me of all the ways he’d made me scream his na
ow,” he night. He pushed the tray away and pressed a hand to my shoulder.

ross his “Or shall I surprise you and we can compare notes later?”

they’ll My core clenched as he shifted towards me. He pushed me back
e world onto the bed, tugging the covers out of the way until he straddled m
my hands gathered in his, he pressed them to the pillow above m
flared in his eyes and a wicked smile curled his lips.

nned at “Definitely need to tie you up sometime,” he muttered under his br

Then he kissed me and I forgot about everything else. I focused
press of him against me, the heat of him hovering over me, the comm
sweep of his lips and the tight pressure of his hands around my wrists.

Talking *Fuck, I could get addicted to him.*

I’m not



ees and **S**omehow, the waffles escaped destruction. We moved into the
citing a before I dared try one.

myself They were the fluffiest, softest, most delicious things I'd ever eate
of talk.bite turned into a religious experience, coaxing moans from me.

“If you keep that up, I’m going to fuck you on the breakfast bar
y neckwarned, his voice low and deadly serious.

He stared at me from the other side of the counter, a cup of coffee
to his chin. His smouldering gaze devoured me.

a blink I should have been sated. The thought of more sex should have s
running for the hills. Instead, my clit throbbed and the need we’d
erest I intensified. How we’d resist each other until now, I had no clue.

e nerve It took effort to swallow the waffle in my mouth without choking.

me last “Put it on the to-do list,” I said, my voice thick with want.

His jaw slackened.

“I want to be all in, give our marriage a real shot. What do you w
k down-willed myself not to chew my lip while I anxiously waited for Finn to
e. With Thoughts danced across his face, I couldn’t read any of them. Damn ac
e. Heat

“I want to try too,” he said, his voice hoarse.

“Terrifying, isn’t it?” I flashed a sympathetic smile. “Opening you
eath. to another person.” At his nod, I pushed the waffles aside. “Come over

on the He tilted his head for a second, trying to work me out. When he s
anding. in front of me, open curiosity shone in his eyes. I glided my hands
chest, trying to soothe any doubts.

“We can pretend we aren’t married, if that makes it better.” The ic

put a lump in my throat, but I could get on board if he needed it. “Take the kitchen off the pressure and just be a normal couple getting to know each other.”

He shook his head. “No. I don’t want that.” His hand captured my hand. Each playing with the rock on my finger. “As bizarre as it seems, I’ve gotten used to our weird beginnings. I don’t want to brush it under a rug.”

“;” Finn My heart swelled as I stared into his eyes. Oh yeah, I needed to be with him if I didn’t want to fall head over heels for him.

pressed “Okay, so we’re doing this. A real relationship.” I couldn’t stop myself from repeating it, the words wouldn’t sink in.

sent me “A real relationship,” he repeated, grinning at me. Then his expression shifted to the mischievous one that set my heart racing and liquid flooding through my core. He leaned forward. “Starting with me eating out on the breakfast bar.”

I clenched as heat spiralled through me. *Fuck*. The mouth on the counter needed more.

“Want?” I My fingers gripped his t-shirt, tugging him forward. His lips slid down on mine, coaxing groans from me in less than five seconds. Lost in the answer. pressure of his kiss, I missed him picking me up. Only the cold pressure of his fingers on my thighs. Stopped. marble against my bare legs clued me in.

I gasped and he swallowed it. He forced my thighs wide open, pushing himself up between them and closing the distance between our bodies and tugging me here.” the edge of the counter. My core pressed against his taut stomach with his fingers danced down my thighs. He teased me with light caresses up his mouth devoured me.

Finn’s hand slipped beneath my panties, grazing my slit. I grabbed the edge of the counter, leaning my back to give him better access. He swiped a finger through my hair.

re somefolds, gliding through the wetness with ease.

her.” It felt like seconds passed, but already the pressure built. He circled my clit, applying delicious pressure that made my eyes roll back and my head used to curl. When his fingers retreated, I whimpered.

“Do that again, Finn,” I groaned. “Fuck, please, do that again.”

careful Then the doorbell rang.

“I’m going to fucking kill whoever that is.” He pulled away, so I turned myself around. “Don’t move. I’ll get rid of them.”

He stomped into the foyer. I heard the front door open and then his voice hardened. I couldn’t make out the words, but he’d definitely gone from annoyed to furious.

My chair sat two feet away. Finn had kicked it out of his way to get to me. My feet dangled miles off the ground. With my ankle still held by him, I didn’t want to have to jump, but I couldn’t exactly stay put while Finn had a meltdown at the front door. Who knew what horrors waited out there?

Voices grew closer and then Finn emerged, his face shut down to a trademark clean slate. It flickered when he spotted me, panic flickering before he rushed towards me.

“We can set up in the living room if you’d prefer, Finn?” Tyler called from down the hall.

My stomach hit the ground. No way in hell could he find me like this. I did not want to be on TV wearing nothing but an oversized t-shirt.

Fuck it. I’d jump. Screw the sting.

I shuffled towards the edge of the counter, pressed my palms to the edges. Finn caught me, his arms wrapping around me while his gaze roamed over my body.

into mine. It could have been my imagination, but I could have sworn my eyes screamed at me to be quiet.

I glanced at the hallway, expecting Tyler to appear at any moment. I didn't. Neither did the crew. Rather than question my good luck, I wrapped my legs around Finn's waist and zipped my lips. He carried me to the bedroom door on swift feet, setting me down and gently shoving me into the room.

"Shower, take your time," Finn whispered. "I'll keep him busy."

With that, he turned away, a grim twist to his lips.

I shut the door and took a second... to catch my breath and mourn the loss of what would have been the hottest head I'd ever experienced.

Damn tv crew.

aling, I
n had a

in his
g across

r called

e this. I

he hard
e bored

into mine. It could have been my imagination, but I could have sworn his eyes screamed at me to be quiet.

I glanced at the hallway, expecting Tyler to appear at any moment. But he didn't. Neither did the crew. Rather than question my good luck, I wrapped my legs around Finn's waist and zipped my lips. He carried me to my bedroom door on swift feet, setting me down and gently shoving me into the room.

"Shower, take your time," Finn whispered. "I'll keep him busy."

With that, he turned away, a grim twist to his lips.

I shut the door and took a second... to catch my breath and mourn the loss of what would have been the hottest head I'd ever experienced.

Damn tv crew.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FINN

“I couldn’t help but notice your family weren’t at the wedding. I walked into the kitchen, a smug smile plastered to his face.

“It was a bit far for a farce wedding.” I crossed my arms and stared down.

The crew set up around us, adding LED lights on stands here and there. Overkill, considering the entire back wall consisted of wall-to-wall windows.

“So.” Tyler clapped his hands. “Where’s Abi?”

I scrambled for an excuse. Call with her sister, shower, sleep. Thankfully, she appeared before I settled on anything plausible.

“Right here,” Abi said. She turned the corner, her eyes casting across the setup, and joined me at the breakfast bar. “What are we up to today?”

Tyler frowned at her hair. She’d thrown it up into a messy bun, so the auburn strands escaped the hold and cascaded around her face. I thought she looked gorgeous, especially with the morning sun setting her pale skin aglow. Tyler evidently disagreed.

“What did you do to your hair?”

I fought every muscle in my body to prevent it from stiffening, my mouth shut. Abi and I might now be on good terms but that didn't want the show to catch the real me. Any more than they had anyway

“You didn't exactly warn us of your plans.” Abi smirked at him, e his annoyance. “Washing my hair is a luxury you didn't afford me. I take an hour showering and styling it if you'd prefer?”

Watching her sass Tyler, I couldn't say why I ever believed we w fit together.

” Tyler He grumbled to himself but dropped it. Shame.

“Go ahead and mic them up.” He nodded to the crew.

ed him “No need to be cryptic, Tyler.” Abi held her arms out while Ian her radio mic on, her expression much gentler than mine. “Just tell us d there. happening.”

-ceiling “All in good time.” He turned away, surveying the room, tha expression returning.

“Christ, you're annoying,” I muttered.

eeping. “Is that why you didn't tell us about the film premiere?” For a seco smarmy calm facade cracked and he glared at me. “You knew we'd capture Abi's first red carpet.”

ross the

So that's what's got his panties in a twist.

ome of “There were fifty cameras.” I shrugged. “I'm sure you could sou thought footage.”

le skin “That's not the point,” Tyler ground out through a clenched jaw.

“No, you just wanted me to mess with my friend's premiere so yo

go right back to manipulating us.” I grinned, enjoying his annoyance to keep know the rules, Tyler. You’re on *my* schedule now.”

mean I He spun away, grumbling under his breath. I wasn’t fooled, he’d way to pay me back.

njoying Once we were fully mic’ed up and Ian had his camera pointed can go Tyler’s grin returned, growing until it set me on edge. *Maybe the party already coming.* I watched him like a hawk as he pressed his phone to ouldn’t never taking his eyes off me.

“Send them in, Ethan.”

Four simple innocent words and yet my stomach churned.

“Send who in?”

clipped The front door opened and he turned, his arms open in welcome.

what’s “Fiona, Saoirse, welcome.” Tyler stepped out of the way, giving camera trailing my smiling smirking mother and sister a clear birth.

t smug If not for my training, my jaw would have hit the floor. Tyler surprised me. My mother, to her credit, didn’t look pissed. Her pale, face bore nothing but excitement, not a red tinge of annoyance in sight and, the mercies.

want to “Finn McCarthy! Don’t just stand there gawking.” My mother towards me, her arms open and a stern gleam in her blue eyes. “Get over and hug your Ma.”

since the My sister snorted as I followed her orders, old habits quickly falling place. I barely stopped my eyes from narrowing at her.

Arms wrapped around me, squeezing tight. “You got married telling me?” Ma asked, her voice deathly low. “You’d better have u could

2. “You bloody reason, child-o-mine.”

Then she released me, brushing me aside to engulf Abi in a hug. I found myself asqueaked in surprise but sensibly didn’t resist. Caught in the wrong, I thought of my mother liked to do the opposite of what people wanted. The wind howled at us, always knew how to get a rise out of me.

My back’s So can Saoirse.

In his ear, I eyed my sister from the corner of my eye, awaiting her reaction. From the twenty-five-year age gap, Saoirse and my mother were almost a mirror image. Both had short, raven hair flowing down their backs, pale skin, and piercing blue eyes.

Even as she hugged me, I moved with suspicion. I studied her from the corner of my eye, waiting for her happy smile to snap. My sister and I knew perfectly well, but I’d know she would be the wild card when I chose to tell them about the show.

“You robbed me of a Grecian bridesmaid’s dress, Finn,” she murmured into my ear, her voice low and hissing. She pulled back, her eyes narrowed at me. “Grecian!”

Small “I got married without telling you, and you’re pissed about a dress,” I asked as she released me, my voice climbing with shock. “Christ. Tell me how you really feel.”

“You’re my only brother.” Saoirse’s hands landed on her hips.

“Still doesn’t explain the outrage over a bleeding dress.”

Saoirse tutted. “Of course, you wouldn’t get it.” Her gaze settled on me.

“I bet Abi would get it.”

a good Saoirse had always had a penchant for the dramatics. “How the hell

the actor in this family?" I muttered to myself as I tugged at my hair.

ig. She *I'll kill Tyler. And then Charlie for putting me in this shitty position*
mood, "Now, don't read anything into his secrecy, Abi." Ma mostly r
-up sodAbi, holding her away by her shoulders. She grinned from ear to e
never did learn from every other one blowing up in his face."

Abi smiled at me, her eyes far too wide. That distracted me fr
l. Asidedownward spiral of the day. My wife, scared of my mother. Someh
lmost afit. I bit down hard on the grin tugging at my lips.

ale skin "Stop overwhelming her, Ma." I swept in, brushing my mother's
away and tucking Abi beneath my arm. "Give her a minute to catch
om theglanced towards the empty foyer, finally seeing what I missed when th
I got onwalked in. "Da didn't come with you?"

e not to "I'll make tea," Abi whispered. She pulled from my grip and
"Tea's right, isn't it?"

ured in She glanced up at me, worrying her lip. I squashed down the urge
ving onit with the caress of my tongue. Even if she did look adorable
uncertainty.

ress?" I "Yes, love. Tea would be brilliant," my mother said before I co
tell me more than smile at her.

Then she latched onto the subject change, just as I knew she w
guided her and my sister to the sofa while Abi pulled tea bags fr
cupboard and set the kettle to boiling.

on Abi. "Your Da couldn't get off work." Ma sat, her gaze sweeping o
modern open and airy room like she'd never seen it before. She had.
all am I spent every single Christmas with me here since I bought it.

“He’s what?” I asked, caught by surprise. I scowled. “Why ha
retired? I thought we agreed—”

“I tried, love. You know how stubborn he is.” Her head tilted
ar. “He studied me. “Where do you think you got it from?” Abi snorted in the
and my mother grinned. “Looks like your wife knows what I’m
om the about.”

Saoirse chuckled. “Of course, she does.” She shifted on the sofa,
so she could watch Abi moving around the kitchen with uncertainty
s hands long did it take Finn to kiss you, Abi?”

She stiffened, her hand hovering over the wheezing kettle.

“I kissed her within half an hour of meeting her.”

“Other than the required marriage kiss?” Saoirse’s brows rose.
paused. wasn’t for days.”

Only the buzz of lights drifted around us, as Abi and I stared at each
to free like deer caught in headlights.

“That’s exactly what I thought.” Saoirse frowned at me, the
judgement arriving right on cue.

“Oh, let’s hear it.” Resignation dripped from my voice. I leaned
against the cushions, rubbing a hand across my face.

The shuffle of movement drew my attention to the watching cr
om the worked so hard at keeping the real me from the show, but how
continue that with my family? They’d call me on my shit if I hid be
ver the facade.

They’d Tyler watched me, not even bothering to smother his smug smirk.

“What? I’m just saying I’m not surprised.” She shrugged, brush

sn't he dark hair over her shoulder. "You don't do affection easily, bro
imagine all of this,"—she gestured at Ian, holding a camera within f
as she of us— "is enjoyable for you."

kitchen Thankfully, Abi saved me from having to justify my caution v
talking came to women. She held a box of tea bags in her hands, her eyes na
on the tiny instructions.

turning "See this right here," I said as I stood, gesturing at myself and
. "How pointed eye contact with my wind-up sister. "This is me being
husband. Can we move on?"

Saoirse grinned at me and nodded. I rescued the tea bags from Abi.

With tea made, we both settled on the sofa, braced for my mother
"Bet it of many volleys. She smiled at us, her gaze softening for all of a sec
Abi settled against my side.

h other "Now Finn, how's about you tell us why you kept Abi a secret
assessed Abi, her eyes shining with approval. "She's lovely."

sisterly How many times... *Remember there are cameras.* I bit back a g
frustration.

nd back "I didn't keep Abi a secret." I forced my voice to assume
perfectly content tones. No expiration here. "I kept the show a secret."

ew. I'd Saoirse's brows rose. "Aren't the two mutually inclusive?"

could I "Unfortunately," I grumbled.

ehind a "He tried to keep defined lines." Abi patted my knee, grinning up
and making my chest ache. I'd ignore the mischief in her eyes. "But
out, he's not great with lines." She chuckled and my sister joined in.

ing her "Oh, I can imagine." Saoirse leaned forward, resting her elbows

. Can't thighs. "Tell us about Finn's avoidance tactics. We could compare notes
ive feet "No need for any of that right now." My eyes narrowed on Saoirse

I frantically searched for a way to change the subject.

when it "Yes, let's leave that alone." Ma sipped her tea, her gaze fixed
narrowed over the rim. "Finn's finally come to his senses and given his head

woman. We shouldn't question it too much, Saoirse. He might use u
making excuse to change his mind."

a good Saoirse grunted in agreement, picking up her own cup. My mouth
to deny them, but then I caught the glint in Ma's eyes and shut it
. would not get sucked into leading questions.

r's next "Just so we're clear, though." Saoirse held her cup to her lips, h
cond astilting as she considered me. "You didn't invite us to the wedding bec
the show?"

at." Ma "Yes." My hand unintentionally gripped Abi's. I squeezed hers,
she'd believe that my feelings had changed.

rowl of "So, I get to be involved with a second wedding?" Saoirse lowe
teacup, her face lighting up. "Like really involved? Bridesmaid, bache
natural, and wedding planning involved?"

I stiffened, my grip on Abi's hand reaching painful. "Let's not ge
of ourselves."

"I agree with Finn," Abi said. She smiled up at me but wigg
fingers. I loosened my grip before they could turn blue from l
p at me circulation. "We've only just moved in together. We've still got ages
it turns show. Best not jinx anything."

on her "Agreed," Ma said, placing her teacup on the coffee table. "And n
we've got that all cleared up, why don't we skip to the part you

es.” “you’d escaped?” She pulled her handbag onto her lap, patting it
e while grinned at me.

“Sweet Jesus woman, tell me you don’t have what I think you have
on me Tardis handbag?”

art to a “I know you weren’t planning to rob me of my right as your mo
is as an embarrass you, Finn McCarthy.” Ma popped the clasp and started
into the contents. “I raised you right, boy.”

opened “Abi doesn’t want to see pictures, Ma.”

again. I “Of course, she does. Besides, it’s a rite of passage.” She smirked
patted the sofa cushion next to her. “Come sit next to me, dear. Better
er head to see all the embarrassing pictures of Finn as a boy.”

ause of Abi stood, and my gaze caught on Tyler, his entire face lit u
laughter at my expense. He’d probably talked my mother into bringin
hoping pictures with her.

“Before we dive into these.” Abi tapped the huge photo album in
red the “Can I ask you a question?”

lorette, “Of course, dear.” My mother shuffled around to face her, a
delight plastered across her face. “We’re an open book for you.”

t ahead “Yes, we are.” Saoirse leaned around mother, grinning as her gaze
to me. “Especially when Finn tenses up like that.”

led her I released the tight clench of my fists as Ma chuckled.

lack of “Go ahead. What do you want to know?” Ma patted Abi’s arm.

on the “What does dotey mean?”

ow that “It depends on the context,” Ma said. Her eyes flicked between
thought head tilting as suspicions danced across her face. My mother was no fc

as she might stall but she knew the context.

“It means adorable,” Saoirse chimed in. Amusement lit up her face as she watched me fight to keep my mouth shut. “Has my brother been using you?”

“Yes. He didn’t want to tell me what it meant.” Her lips pursed while she studied me. “He said it meant short.”

“That’s one definition.” Ma smiled before she flicked the photo open. “I’m pretty sure he means adorable though. His Da gave me that nickname after we met.” She ducked her head, leaning close to Abi as she married two months later. You might have skipped the courting, but you’re right on track for the speed McCarthy men move at.”

“Ma!”

“What?” she cried. Her eyes widened with faux innocence. “Both my uncles married their girlfriends within six months of meeting them to her lap. don’t even let me start on your Granda.”

I scrubbed a hand across my face, barely restraining a groan of absolute frustration. Time to prepare for this meeting would have been nice, but then, I’m not sure I would have escaped unscathed.

“Abi doesn’t need to hear about that.”

“Is that so?” Ma’s brows rose. “I’d think *Abi* would like to know the situation isn’t that bizarre in our family, and I’m sure *Abi* can speak for herself.” Ma squeezed her arm, smiling at my smirking wife. “Shall we look at some photos and watch Finn squirm?”

Abi eagerly agreed and I spent the next hour eying the three of them, her growing trepidation. *Good thing I got my shit together and decided to tell Abi.*

My enabler wife made all the right noises as my mother flicked through the photo album as she looked at photo after photo. Even Saoirse's face turned red as she got caught in the act of showing it to the couple.

By the end of it, I could say one thing for certain. My mother had her head over heels in love with Abi. If we didn't survive the show, I'd never hear the end of it from my family.

album *Touche, asshole. Touche.*

Time flew by, and before I knew it, my mother and sister were leaving. They gathered their handbags, muttering promises from Abi to catch up with me whenever she needed a sympathetic ear — I took offence to that one she'd stay with them the next time I went home to Belfast.

"Where are you staying?" I asked as I led them to the door.

"We're flying out today, love."

I stopped in my tracks, turning to face my mother with confused eyes. "You're flying out today, love?"

"Tell me you didn't fly across an entire ocean just for this bloody show." I stared at my mother, fury quietly licking up my spine when she only smiled.

"You have got to be kidding me." I turned the full brunt of my ire on her.

"You forced them to travel for more than half the day for three hours of footage? What kind of twisted bastard are you?"

"It's okay, Finn." Ma caught my wrist, turning me away from Tyler. "We've all wanted to meet Abi, and we're glad we came. Right, Saoirse?" She pressed her hand to my sister's shoulder, her stern expression urging her to agree.

My sister grimaced instead. "I mean, a video call would have suited me better." She shrugged. "I could have made you a slideshow of embarrassing photos and not had to leave my flat."

through Ma shook her head at Saoirse, tutting. “Well, it wouldn’t have
ht in enough for me.”

“You could stay,” Abi said, weaving her fingers through mine.

d fallen I met her gaze and read the tight press of fingers for the restraints
d never truly were. So maybe my wife could read me better than I thought
shrewd blue eyes begged me not to throttle Tyler as I desperately itched

“Unless you have plans,” she added, never breaking eye contact with
eaving. “Unfortunately, we do.” Ma edged towards the door, snagging
ll them attention. “You remember Enid, right? Her baby shower’s tomorrow
— that need to be home for it.”

I frowned, searching the recesses of my mind for anyone called Enid.

“She’s your cousin’s sister-in-law.” Ma’s brows furrowed. “She
the summer BBQ. Don’t you remember?”

l horror Couldn’t say I did, but that wasn’t the point.

“You’d rather get on back-to-back flights for a stranger’s baby
show.” than spend a week with the daughter-in-law you claim to already love?
smiled.

Saoirse chuckled and Ma scowled at us both.

1 Tyler. “That’s not what I’m saying at all.”

ours of “You kind of are,” Saoirse said, amusement making her Irish accent
er. “We further.

nudged “Christ, there’s no reasoning with the pair of you when you’re like
Ma dragged a hand through her hair. “Call us on Sunday, Finn, or next
fficed.” get on a plane, I’ll stay for my full visa allowance and drive you insane

g baby My jaw slackened as she flung the front door open. She couldn’t possibly
mean...

re been “And drop that terrible tan,” she shouted over her shoulder. “You’re
Look it.”

She left us gaping after her. Saoirse stepped in, throwing her arms
nt they^{me}.

ht. Her “You should be impressed,” she whispered in my ear. “Ma’s adap
d too. the Hollywood lifestyle better than you are. Swanning across th
ith me. without a thought.”

ng my *One way of putting it.*

and we Saoirse released me, grinning as she turned to Abi. “And you,
number from this one, and text me. We can start planning you
id. renewal.” She clapped her hands together, glancing between us. “Thi
was at with you two is clearly going to be around for a long time.

With those shiver-inducing words, she rushed after Ma. If I hadn’t
camera fixed to me, I would have slumped against the wall and hugg
to me. The pair of them always could sweep in fast, all smiles, an
shower chaotic wreckage in their wake.
,”

I studied Abi, trying to be subtle about it. I couldn’t see any si
they’d scared her further than the fear of wanting family approval.

After last night, I couldn’t deny it anymore. I wanted her to stay. I
cent lilt her as much as I needed my next breath.

ie this.”

t time I

.”

ossibly

“And drop that terrible tan,” she shouted over her shoulder. “You’re Irish. Look it.”

She left us gaping after her. Saoirse stepped in, throwing her arms around me.

“You should be impressed,” she whispered in my ear. “Ma’s adapting to the Hollywood lifestyle better than you are. Swanning across the pond without a thought.”

One way of putting it.

Saoirse released me, grinning as she turned to Abi. “And you, get my number from this one, and text me. We can start planning your vow renewal.” She clapped her hands together, glancing between us. “This thing with you two is clearly going to be around for a long time.

With those shiver-inducing words, she rushed after Ma. If I hadn’t had a camera fixed to me, I would have slumped against the wall and hugged Abi to me. The pair of them always could sweep in fast, all smiles, and leave chaotic wreckage in their wake.

I studied Abi, trying to be subtle about it. I couldn’t see any sign that they’d scared her further than the fear of wanting family approval.

After last night, I couldn’t deny it anymore. I wanted her to stay. I needed her as much as I needed my next breath.

INTERVIEW IX

Question: Did you enjoy meeting Finn's family?

Abi: It was a pleasant surprise.

Tyler, producer: You can be more specific than that.

Abi: Fine. Fiona made me feel like a part of the family and... I didn't realize how much I'd missed that. Of course, I have Eva and Ros. They've been my only family for years and they're always there when I need them. But there's just something about having a mother pushing you, teasing you... loving you. I missed it.

Tyler, producer: Does it make you feel hopeful for things to come? After the show?

Abi: I think it's still early days to make plans for after the show. Finn and I need to settle into daily life. We need to figure out how we fit together in this weird world of fame... but yes, knowing his mother likes me, it feels like half of the battle has already been won and I'm... cautiously optimistic.

Tyler, producer: Perfect.

INTERVIEW IX

Question: Did you enjoy meeting Finn's family?

Abi: It was a pleasant surprise.

Tyler, producer: You can be more specific than that.

Abi: Fine. Fiona made me feel like a part of the family and... I didn't realise how much I'd missed that. Of course, I have Eva and Ros. They've been my only family for years and they're always there when I need them. But there's just something about having a mother pushing you, teasing you... loving you. I missed it.

Tyler, producer: Does it make you feel hopeful for things to come? After the show?

Abi: I think it's still early days to make plans for after the show. Finn and I need to settle into daily life. We need to figure out how we fit together in this weird world of fame... but yes, knowing his mother likes me, it feels like part of the battle has already been won and I'm... cautiously optimistic.

Tyler, producer: Perfect.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

ABI

Tyler and his crew cleared out soon after Finn's family. I kept my grip on Finn's hand while Tyler waltzed away, a smug gleam in his eyes. When the door closed on him, we both relaxed.

One glance at the other and we both chuckled. Finn collapsed on the sofa, sagging into the cushions.

"Not how I expected the morning to go," Finn groaned into his hand.

"I had other ideas too." I joined him on the sofa, fitting myself in beside him, hooking a leg over his.

He wrapped an arm around me, pulling me closer, smoothing his hand down my bare arm. I pressed my face into his chest, smiling at the 'walking on air' feeling something so small inspired in me.

He hummed in agreement. "Did yours involve the kitchen counter,

"Maybe." I drummed my fingers against his chest, enjoying the momentary peace.

"Nothing stopping us from picking up where they rudely interrupted." Finn sat forward, taking me with him, his eagerness making his Irish

more pronounced.

I laughed. "There's no rush, McCarthy."

"I just suffered through my mother's best efforts to embarrass me. I tucked an arm under my legs. "I need to prove to you I'm still in charge

"As if you were ever in charge."

My chuckle died as he speared me with a dark, heated look. It promised retribution for the lie. *Would he tie me up?* Liquid heat flooded me with the idea.

"A reminder it is." He stood, scooping me up with him. I squirmed, scrambling for a grip, throwing my arms around his neck.

I squeezed my thighs together, trying and failing to quell the ache he'd caused.

Finn placed me on the breakfast bar and pressed his hands to my thighs. With his eyes fixed on me, he forced my legs open and wedged himself between the gap. He slid me towards the edge of the counter, dragging me forward until my breasts pressed against his chest and the bulge of his shorts grazed my core.

His gaze fixated on my mouth, darkening as I licked my lips. He lifted his head, his intent clear. I held him off with a hand to his chest.

Questions first, then fucking.

"How old is your dad?"

Finn groaned. "I'm about to fuck you and you're asking me about your dad?" He dragged a hand across his face. "What the hell am I doing with you?"

I smiled, channelling my inner vixen. "Answer the question and

you do whatever you want to me.”

Finn eyed me, clear interest slackening his expression. “Anything.” He my nod, he gave in. “Fifty-five.”

“You looked shocked when your mother said he’s still working.” I hands smooth down his chest to play with the edge of his t-shirt. “I’m promised to figure out why.”

Finn bit his lip, and I decided waiting for him to answer my question at the before I got my hands on his skin would be a waste of time. I tugged my shirt over his head. He didn’t resist, lifting his arms and helping me.

He placed his hands on the counter at either side of me and he he’d forward, his lips teasingly close. My fingers took on a mind of their own, ghosting over his pecs, blindly mapping out the lines of muscle. I shook my head, fighting the lust-filled fog.

“I paid off all of their debts when I made my first million — my own too.” He pressed his forehead to mine, his nose brushing against mine. I set up investment accounts for them so they could comfortably draw interest for the rest of their lives. He doesn’t need to work. I guess I do have the idea of him putting unnecessary stress on himself and...”

His entire body tensed as he paused, peeking at me from beneath his lashes. Something about his watchful tension made me think he’d near something bad... or bad in his mind.

I turned his words over again, searching for the meaning that I’d missed out my him.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to...”

I dropped my hands from his glorious chest, placing them over his shoulders. I’ll let him squeezed, willing him to relax.

“It’s okay to say the word, Finn.” I smiled at his hesitation. “Dying?” At just a word.”

“I don’t need to.” He shook his head. “You got the picture, and I don’t want to let my death mean to remind you that your parents...”

Warmth flooded me. I wrapped my arms and legs around him, hugging him tightly. He patted my back, the gesture tentative and uncertain.

“I’m so sorry, Abi.”

“Shh, Finn. I’m okay.” I leaned back, smiling softly at the surprised expression on his face.

“My parents died five years ago, and I miss them. I’ve still got Eva, but it hurts sometimes, but it doesn’t cripple me anymore.” I caressed his forehead, dragging a finger along the crease between his brows. He relaxed beneath my touch. “You can talk about death. You can talk about my parents. I don’t want to collapse into a blubbering heap.”

Finn nodded, his gaze softening on me.

“I think I’m done asking questions,” I whispered. My brow furrowed suggestively, but Finn continued to stare at me like he’d gotten off the cataloguing me. I reached up, snagging a hand behind his neck, and pulled his head down. “Kiss me, Finn.” I ghosted my lips over his. “Remember who’s in charge.”

His lips crashed against mine, snapping out of his daze and going from zero to eighty. He devoured me. His tongue warred with mine while his fingers bunched in my shirt. The material went flying over my head with a little preamble.

“I hope you weren’t hoping to leave the house today,” Finn muttered under his breath. His head dipped back to mine.

The doorbell chorus floated around us.

ng. It's "Fuck off!" he shouted at the door.

Ding. Dong.

I didn't "I need to disconnect that fucking doorbell," he growled. He pulled from me with a severe look. "Do not move an inch. I'll be back."

ugging Finn stomped away, and I collapsed back on my elbows, gasping for breath. The door opened and closed quickly, with nothing more than a faint murmur of voices.

ing lug. Then Finn returned, carting a heavy-looking black box. He placed it on the counter beside me. A sheepish edge entered his eyes as he rubbed his face, beard, glancing between the box and me.

path my "What is it?"

I won't "I got you something." He stared uncertainly at the box. "Ros said she'd like it, and I ordered it on our way to Bora Bora. She grimaced when he met my curious gaze. "Now I'm thinking she could have been pulling my leg."

en lost "What did you get?" I asked as I shuffled along the counter toward the box. A flutter of excitement settled in my chest.

ind me Finn McCarthy bought me a present. A non-TV show exploited people's desire to scream.

ing from He kept his lips tightly sealed while I tore open the box. When I laid my eyes on the gift, I didn't stop to wonder if he'd be ready to catch me. I just trusted and launched off the counter.

ered as Air exploded from his lungs as he caught me.

"Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." I pressed kisses to his face, his neck. "Ros wasn't trying to wind you up. I love it."

He set me back on the counter, a cautious smile curling his lips. “sure?”

I glanced at the white sewing machine nestled in its box, waiting to put it to work. “It’s the best gift you could have ever given me.”

His shoulders sagged. “Thank Christ for that.” His smile fell a brief glance between the box and my excitement. “You don’t want to play now, right?”

I snorted, then tucked a finger into the loop of his belt, tugging him closer.

“You need to punish me first, remember?” I whispered, my voice l sultry.

Finn’s eyes darkened. “What am I punishing you for?”

Words collided in my throat as nerves got the better of me. I’d never had tried to be open to anything with him, but all the sex I’d ever experienced been very vanilla. Finn awakened kinks for me I never knew I had.

I swallowed. “For questioning your control.”

His lips curled and then his mouth slanted across mine. I handed over to him, not caring what he did, as long as he made me feel half of did last night. Thankfully, I had total faith in my surprise of a husband.

He made quick work of my clothing, but each time I reached for him. I jeans, he slapped my hands away.

“Lean back on your elbows, Dotey.”

Once I obeyed, he took a seat in front of me and my legs automatically tried to close. My cheeks burned, but he forced my knees open. He my clit with his thumb without warning, and then his fingers dragged t

You're my wet folds, forcing the slight sting of embarrassment out of my mind.

He leaned forward, ducking his head. His shoulders pushed me further apart and then his mouth latched onto my clit, and I shut up.

Between his mouth and his fingers working me, my body started to tremble as he as an impending orgasm gripped me. At the first twitch, he pulled back, but his fingers continued to caress my pussy, but the pressure wasn't enough to push me over the edge.

Not much. "Finn," I begged.

My hips shifted, shamelessly chasing his mouth. He didn't growl and instead, he held me down with a powerful forearm across my stomach. The heat of his arm across my abdomen and my over-sensitized body, combined with the freezing cold slab of marble beneath me made for an interesting contrast.

... I had "What are you doing?" Nerves thrummed in my throat, making me breathy.

Finn glanced a finger over the lips of my soaking pussy, barely to touch, but my core clenched all the same.

"Punishing you." His brows rose. "That's what you asked for, isn't it?"

"Yes, but this isn't what — Oh!" I moaned as he circled my clit again, his head falling back and my eyes fluttering closed.

"I'm going to take you to the edge of orgasm," he whispered, his voice deep and gravelly. "And then I'm going to stop."

My eyes flew open to assess him. He couldn't be serious. Only, only, he circled into his sapphire gaze and I knew he was.

"Finn, no." I frowned at him.

d. He smirked. "You asked for punishment."

ny legs "Yes, but I didn't mean..."

He lowered his head and dragged the tip of his tongue through my
to tense thought he'd finally given me what I wanted, and I sighed as p
ck. His unwound again. I'd been wrong.

to push *Intense pleasure and no reward? Okay. Carry on.*

I don't know how long I lay there, or how many times he stop
from going over the edge. What I do know is that, by the time he st
give in every muscle in my body shook with need. Sweat glistened on my ros
ch. The skin and my hair had worked its way out of my bun to flow acr
mbined worktop, no doubt leaving a tangled mess for me to fix later.

resting "Finn, no," I whimpered. I watched him stand through hooded lids

"On your hands and knees," he said, surprising me.

y voice "What?" Through some sheer miracle, I managed to lift my head.

I frowned at him, but it had no effect. His sapphire eyes burned wi
uching, and his jeans stretched taut with his constrained hardness.

it?" "On. Your. Knees," he ground out.

ain, my Gingerly, I shifted, following through without another question
moved further onto the counter, Finn unzipped his jeans, pushing th
his boxers to the floor with a relieved sigh. His cock hit him in the st
s voice rock hard and dripping with pre-cum. My mouth watered as he roll
condom.

ne look "Be a good girl, Abi, and turn around." Finn wrapped a hand aro
base of his cock, stroking once as he stared at me. "You've done
taking your punishment. Don't spoil it now."

My core ached at the feverish light in his eyes. I turned around, registering the warning note in his voice.

Despite technically obeying, I kept my head tilted in a direction that would let me watch him. He climbed onto the counter behind me. His hands coasted across my ass and lower back, gentle and loving even as he worked me.

I jolted slightly when he notched his cock against my opening. My body automatically rocked back, desperate to feel the stretch of him inside again. I expected him to stop me, even braced for a reprimand.

Instead, his fingers dug into my hips and he finished the job, filling me to the hilt. We both moaned at the tight fit. My arms gave out as he pulled and lightning bolts of pleasure shot through me. I collapsed onto the counter, my ass in the air and only my elbows stopping me from falling face first into the counter. Every inch of me shook.

“You’re so fucking tight,” Finn groaned as he thrust back into me.

Somehow, his thrusts went deeper, stealing my breath along with my strength. The hard surface bit into my knees but I couldn’t care less, as he kept driving into me... like... that.

Finn picked up the pace, slamming into me until only the sound of my gasps, moans and bodies filled the house. Everything tightened inside my stomach, and then the coil snapped, finally tipping me over the edge and into the land of an orgasm.

“Christ.” Finn’s arm wrapped around my stomach and a hand landed on my head as he leaned over me. “You’re going to be the fucking best I’ve ever had, so well. All I’m going to want to do after this is draw those million sounds of need out of you.”

barely He pressed his forehead to my heated back, holding still while m
settled down from the high of coming. Finn pressed a kiss to my neck
on that and tentative. The complete opposite of the determined way he hand
s hands body.

owned Then his fingers slipped between my legs and any thoughts of ger
evaporated.

My hips He swirled his fingers around my clit and I couldn't bite back r
side me Aftershocks danced through me, forcing my pussy to tighten arou
hardness. He nipped my shoulder, groaning as my inner walls tried
g me to him along with me.

lled out "Next time you want to question control," he whispered, pressing
counter, to my ear. "Remember how helpless you are right now."

into the He rocked his hips, barely leaving my body but still sending shoc
of pleasure through me. My knees shook and if not for his arm w
around my waist, I'd slid to the counter in a graceless heap.

with my "It's too much, Finn." I pressed my face into my forearms, crying
as long he grazed my g-spot on his next thrust. "I can't..."

"Yes, you can, dotey." His teeth grazed my neck, making me
of our "You're taking it so well. You don't want to stop yet, do you, baby?"

e of me My eyes slid closed as he rocked back into me, lighting me up fr
he bliss inside out. Teeth gritted, I shook my head.

Finn pressed a kiss to the nape of my neck. "Words, Abi. Tell m
ed next you want."

leath of "Don't. Stop," I groaned as he retreated.

mindless "Good girl." His lips curled against my neck and then he pulle

ly body straightening up again.

, gentle I let him manhandle me, pumping into me faster and faster while my muscle in my body tensed up from fatigue and pleasure. A litany of words flew from Finn's mouth as my next orgasm crested. This time when it came, he let go with me.

I must have blacked out, because the next thing I knew I was lying on my chest on top of the counter. His fingers smoothed up and down my back and his hand through my hair.

to milk "What have you done to me, dotey?" Finn whispered, his voice raw and open. I held still, getting the distinct impression he didn't think I'd hear his lips. "I wasn't meant to let anyone get close to me and here you are, stealing my heart. Should fight you. Instead," he pressed a kiss to the top of my head. My chest squeezed. "I'm handing it to you with a smile."

trapped

out as

shiver.

from the

ie what

d back,

straightening up again.

I let him manhandle me, pumping into me faster and faster while every muscle in my body tensed up from fatigue and pleasure. A litany of curse words flew from Finn's mouth as my next orgasm crested. This time when I came, he let go with me.

I must have blacked out, because the next thing I knew I was lying on his chest on top of the counter. His fingers smoothed up and down my back and through my hair.

“What have you done to me, dotey?” Finn whispered, his voice raw and open. I held still, getting the distinct impression he didn't think I'd hear him. “I wasn't meant to let anyone get close to me and here you are, stealing my heart. Should fight you. Instead,” he pressed a kiss to the top of my head and my chest squeezed. “I'm handing it to you with a smile.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

FINN

A few days later, I led Abi out to the patio, finally showing her around the house properly. She gasped at the pool, and one thing led to another. The next thing we knew, I was throwing her in.

Fuck.

I wanted her anywhere, anyhow. She'd walked onto the patio in a skimpy bikini, and I felt things I hadn't allowed myself to feel in *Borderline*. Arousal being the biggest of the lot, followed quickly by the intense desire to hold onto her and not let go.

So I did just that. Until we were both shaking and moaning with releases.

"Hold on." I caught her waist before she could climb out of the pool. "Put your bikini back on first."

"Why?" Abi's brows furrowed. "It's just a quick run to the towels."

"We don't know if someone's watching." I grimaced.

Despite the silence, I glanced up, checking for helicopters. The sky was clear but that didn't mean a paparazzo hadn't set themselves up with a long

lens and a clear view of the property.

“I should have waited until we were inside.” I dragged a hand through soaking hair, a ball of lead forming in my stomach. “I’m sorry.”

I readjusted my shorts, covering myself while Abi wriggled back in her bikini. She bit her lip, throwing me suggestive looks.

“It’s okay. I enjoyed it.”

“You wouldn’t if they had your sex life on replay for millions of years across the world,” I grumbled mostly to myself.

“Is that what happened to you?” She climbed up the pool ladder, glances over her shoulder. “Did someone catch you in the act?”

I huffed. “You could say that.”

Abi wrapped a towel around herself, watching me with raised brows and a quiet determination. I studied her, the need to keep my mouth shut in her

But she’s your wife...

“Let’s go inside and I’ll tell you.” I wrapped a towel around my waist, led the way, psyching myself up all the while.

It would be okay. She’d given me enough of herself for me to trust. And if I wanted this relationship to last, I needed to be open with her.

We walked down the hallway towards my bedroom. Abi paused at the door, her hand hovering over the handle.

“I’ll just grab a shower and then we’ll talk?”

“You can—” The words died as my throat closed up. *You’re serious, remember?* I shook myself and tried again. “You can show me your g-range room if you want.”

My gaze bore into hers while I silently communicated what my
ugh my wouldn't let me. *Me, nervous over a woman?* The thought of it m
scoff. I didn't do nerves. I faced difficult situations head-on an
into her confidence.

“Move into my room.” I winced at my commanding tone. “Please.”

For a second she stared at me, shocked and my stomach tied its
;awkers knots while I wondered if I'd completely misread her. Then she
unearthing my own.

casting “You want me to stay in your room?” she asked, her voice tentativ

“Only if you want to.” I scratched my beard, feeling oddly sheep
even asking.

ows and “I'd love to.”

driving In my room, she settled on the edge of the bed, a white towel w
teasingly around her damp body. My cock hardened but she contin
stare at me with a raised brow.

aist and “Well?” She patted the space beside her. “Spill the details.”

“Didn't you want to shower first?”

ust her. “That can wait.” Her gaze roamed my face, eyes narrowing. “Y
sharing mood won't.”

l at her “Okay, fine.” I sat next to her, stiff at first while reality hit me. *W
agree to this?*

getting not going to judge you. No promises I won't get angry on your
r in my though.”

I chuckled at the fierce burn in her eyes. “What Natalie did to r

nerves worse than a pap catching sight of something they shouldn't have." I made a deep, shaky breath and reached for her hand, needing support for the first time in my life. "Without my knowing, Natalie filmed us having sex and I don't know how long it went on."

"Abi paled. "Is that what you meant about her stealing from people?" I nodded. "She sold it exclusively to one gossip site, but once something hits the internet, it's uncontrollable."

Her eyes widened. "And then it spread and damaged your reputation." "Bingo." I smiled, not an ounce of happiness on my face.

"Is that why you needed to do the show?"

I chuckled, indecision racing through me at the thought of being with her on that. Never mind the fact it felt weird to share my sexual escapades with the wife I wanted to keep.

"No, I recovered from that donkey's years ago." I chewed my words. "I ultimately caved to the inevitable. "You could say having the wife thought I loved betray me like that for money and fame made me bitter." I winced. A lot bitter. "They wanted me to be the playboy, so I went into it."

Abi tilted her head, her eyes narrowing as she tried to follow. "Why did I that have to do with the show then?"

"I got caught on camera in a public bathroom with the studio daughter."

"I'm on your behalf." I studied her closely, braced for the moment she recoiled. Instead, she laughed.

"So your agent thought marriage would make for suitable punishment."

took as he asked through peals of laughter. Her eyes started to water. “Charles first sense of humour, huh?”

“I still” “If you say so,” I grumbled.

That only set her off more. Watching her take my failings in stride” couldn’t help but loosen up. I revelled in the feeling, smiling at her nothingwhile.

A month ago, I vehemently refused to get attached to anyone. I” could feel the first glimmer of hope.



ABI

honest

We didn’t make it to the shower. Finn’s secret sharing devolved into out his bed which devolved into... well, you know. I had to test the r lip butout. What if I hated it and need to change rooms again?

I” “You must see some bizarre things on sets,” I said, my voice over a littlein the silence of the room.

I leaned I lay against him, drawing random patterns on his chest while he same to my back. It felt... almost too peaceful. Like at any moment at doeswould drop and we’d revert to bickering with and resisting each other Bora.

head’s” “Hmm, you have no idea.” Silence fell and that was all I’d get, surprised me. “On my... I think it was my third feature film, we — tl ad, she were on it with me — were all excited to be working with this incredible director. He was award-winning, a true powerhouse in mainstream fi ment?”the job offer fulfilled an unexpected bucket list item for me.”

ie's got I smiled as he raced on, his Irish accent rising and falling at speed
talked with excitement. *I could happily listen to him read the phonebo*

“Good things aren’t always what they seem though.” His exc
stride, Ifaded and I lifted my head to study his downturned expression. “Non
all theknew that Mike Lewis spent his off moments coercing and blackmail
female staff into his bed.” He whispered the words with such vehemen

Now I A twinge of unease hit me in the gut as I absorbed his sudden ter
barely followed names in film and TV, but even I knew Mike Lev
directed some of the biggest movies on screen. How could that be if he

“No one knows, do they?”

“Some do.” Finn’s lips curled in a sad smile. “But he paid his victi
and the rest of us liked our lives too much to go up against Holly
golden goose without proof.”

My eyes widened. “That’s why you jumped to get Casey off the sh

ly loud Finn nodded. “I might have been powerless back then, and I mi
have the ability to out Mike Lewis, but things are different on *A*
Blind.” His fingers toyed with my hair while he focused on the ceili
brow creased with concentration. “I knew I could count on everyo
a shoe being outraged by the potential image damage. If they lost all their
in Bora just as they invested hundreds of thousands into weddings...” He sh
the motion jostling me slightly. “The series producer wouldn’t hav
then he happen, even if Tyler had.”

re guys *If he trusts me with this, does that mean he’s finally on board v*
ibly hot *long-term?*
ilm and

And if so, why did that thought fill me with unease?

My phone pinged before I had to figure out my feelings or

d as he respond to Finn. I shuffled across the bed, grasping for my device
ok. bedside table. A message from Eva lit up the screen and I smiled, the
itement momentarily forgotten.

ie of us EVA

ling the Talked to my boss. Can't make it to LA.

ce. I missed my sister. I knew she wouldn't want to waste money on
nsion. I but the show paid me more than enough to cut a decent chunk out of h
vis still and fly her to LA for a visit.

?...
At

Why no

ms off,

wood's EVA

It's just a busy period. I'll try to make it out next
ow." month.

ght not I should have been happy with the promise. Instead, I could only fi
Married the first half of the text. Pre-cancer, my sister had been a workahc
ng. His hoped remission would have changed that. Sometimes, it felt like she
ne else harder than she did before. *Yes, I realise that's hypocritical of a wom*
celebs, *three jobs.*

rugged, It still hurt even knowing we were both working our asses off to f
re let it from debt. Like did she not want to see me? We hadn't spent this lon
since I left for college.

vith the "Everything, alright?" Finn asked, tone careful. His fingers danced
back.

Five minutes ago, I would have stretched into the feel of them gra
how to my spine. I would have enjoyed the affection.

on the Now, it felt stifling. Like a touch could be responsible for the c
unease from my sister. Or the weight of Finn's trust resting on my chest.

It was all too much.

airfare
er debt

31
t?

ocus on
olic. I'd
worked
an with

free her
ig apart

l up my

zing up

Now, it felt stifling. Like a touch could be responsible for the distance from my sister. Or the weight of Finn's trust resting on my chest.

It was all too much.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

ABI

“*H*ey Abs,” my sister said, her smiling face filling my laptop on the coffee table. “I miss you.”

“I miss you too.”

“I can’t wait until you get back.”

My stomach dropped as her face lit up.

“Did you think about coming out for a visit?” I slid off the sofa, on the rug so I could be closer to the laptop and at the same eye level.

She winced. “I don’t think I’ll be able to get time off, I’m sorry.”

My gut twisted with disappointment, but I fought to keep it off my didn’t need to make her feel guilty.

“It’s okay. It was a long shot, right?” My smile felt brittle.

Things had been incredible with Finn in the last few weeks. I’d into his room after he fucked me senseless on the kitchen count glimpses of his kind heart I’d seen in Bora Bora had come out shadows. Unexpected flower deliveries, surprise dates in the most ran

places. He made me feel spoiled, and I couldn't get enough of him.

But I missed my sister. We hadn't been apart this long since I'd left for college.

"Has Ros been driving you crazy?" I asked, changing the subject either of us could dwell on the situation more. "She texts me like fifty a day."

"She spends nearly every night at my place." Eva chuckled. "I got up last night and she announced we were having a movie night. Can you see these dark circles?" Eva leaned closer to the camera, pointing at her eyes. "She picked the Lord of the Flipping Rings. For a Wednesday night!"

screen

I snorted. "Were they the extended versions?"

"Thankfully not." Eva shuddered. "The sooner you get back, the better. I can't handle all the attention."

What if I don't want to come back?

A pang of guilt hit me hard in the gut. Things were going so well, but I wasn't settling weren't pretending anymore and, every day, I could feel myself slipping further and further down the rabbit hole. I think I already loved him, but how could I leave him?

face. I

"A month to go." Eva grinned, excitement setting her expression. "Are you counting down the days?"

"I haven't thought about it," I lied.

moved

Another pang hit me. Lying to my sister. Who had I become?

er. The

of the

dom of

Honestly, you're missing—" A deep cough cut her off, shaking her shoulders and turning her face red.

Panic flared inside of me, tightening my chest. We'd been so close,

while she went through chemo, terrified that she'd catch something
ft home be able to fight it off. That pressure had eased once she got the all-clear
seeing her doubled over and not being able to touch her? Hell, pure hell

before "Eva! Are you okay?"

times a She held up her hand, urging me to wait as the coughing fit continued
how could I? Once it stopped, she lifted a tissue to her nose and blew
it home then did I truly see the signs that she'd caught a cold.

you see "Is Ros there with you? How long have you been sick?" Questions
er eyes. spewed from me in a stream of gasping panic. "You should be in bed, I

"I'm fine, Abi." My sister grimaced. "Seriously, it's just a normal
little fever and a cough. Everyone gets them."

better. I "You have a fever?" I cried. "Where the hell is Ros?"

I scrambled for my phone, opening the text box with my best friend
shaking fingers.

ell. We "She's at work. Leave her alone, Abs." Eva's brow furrowed as she
slipping to wave me off. "It's a busy week for her with preparation for Paris
n. How Week. She doesn't need the extra stress."

At

light.

Did you know Eva's sick

"Look at me, Abi," Eva said, her tone stern. I glanced up at her
fingers tapping on the table while I waited for Ros's reply. "I've got
It'll clear just like it does for everyone else."

ing her "Not everyone is a year into remission. Everyone else has a
network to fall back on." A network that went beyond an uber-busy but
vigilant flaky friend and a sister who stupidly thought she could leave the s

and not three months and not worry about her only remaining family member.

I scowled at her. A voice deep inside acknowledged that scowling at my sister for being sick probably wasn't the sanest thing, but at that moment it was beyond logic.

"How long have you been sick?"

My phone pinged while she dithered over a reply.

ROS

Yeah, she's been spluttering every time I've seen her in the last two weeks. She says she's fine.

I glared at the text as my fingers flew over the screen at a furious pace.

AL

And you believed her?

And you believed her?

"Eh, a week or so." She waved her hand, brushing it all off as if it were a mere annoyance. "Harassing Ros. She's our friend, not my keeper."

No, that had been *my* job.

"A week? Have you seen your doctor?" My voice rose, the pitch spiralling it higher. "Does she think you should be working?"

"I'm working from home. Hardly dangerous." Eva smiled, a look of patience she'd learned from our parents. Oh, how the tables had turned. The patience role had been assigned to me. I was the eldest after all.

"She thinks I'm recovering fine." Eva leaned forward, a serious expression entering her eyes. "Listen to me, Abs, I'm okay. It's just a cold. It will pass."

I chewed my lip, unconvinced.

“I need to go, Abs. Work calls. I’ll text you later.” She flashed
g at my and killed the call before I could even say goodbye.

ment, I My gut churned.

Mona sat down opposite me, picking up her cup. She didn’t say an
just sipped her tea and waited me out.

Eva might have recovered from the cancer, but she clearly need
Someone with her health conditions should not be working while
Logically, I knew avoiding a cold in New York was difficult with
closed-in spaces and crowds of people, but we’d managed it. For the c
of her treatment, we’d managed.

ace. Staying in LA would mean not being there for her when she need
never going to hers on a random evening, never getting a last-minute
31 meet her for lunch, or spending an entire weekend, with takeout
r? endless binge of Gilmore Girls.

. “Stop “Are you okay, Abi?”

I nodded. “Great.”

Mona continued to study me. She didn’t believe me. Hell, I didn’t
e panic me.

“It’s hard, isn’t it?”

of pure “What is?”

ed. The We’d been having so much fun, chatting about Mona’s wedding
and the vintage pieces I’d found in a thrift store in Hollywood. Th
is light deepened. How could I be this happy having tea with Mona when I
clear.” seen my sister since the wedding?

“Being away from your family.” She smiled when my eyes widened

a smileparents live in Cornwall, my sister is in Glasgow, and my brother London. I haven't seen any of them since we moved out here in January months with just calls."

anything, "How do you handle it?"

"I'd already been pretty separated before I got here so I don't think situations are identical." She bit her lip, her gaze dropping to her cup. "It's not so hard, I won't lie. We do a weekly group video call and have all the planned. They'll all be here for the wedding. But I do miss my sister. So I'll spend an hour away on the train before I met Shaun." She shrugged. "I wouldn't change a thing. I love Shaun. Before him, I was lost and pretty flippant. I've never been as happy as I am with him."

led me, "So you think I'd adjust?"

and an "That depends on whether you want to." She leaned forward, her gaze fixed on me. "If you love Finn, you'll do anything to stay with him. And for me, it's not simple with an actor." She smirked, her shoulders shaking slightly as amusement creased her eyes. "Shaun only accepts roles where I can work on the production team. He's very forceful about it. I don't believe something his agent was not prepared for when she hired me. It doesn't matter where in the world the job sends him, we'll always be together."

"And you don't mind moving about for him?"

"We haven't had to yet, but I'll jump at it when the time comes." She tilted her head, a thought flickering across her face. "But I always want to travel. The way I see it, I'll get two of my favourite things. The love of my life and the excitement of seeing new places."

It all sounded perfect, but guilt still gnawed at me. The other thing I'd learned was pretty fixed in her location. Eva loved her job. She'd never quit it.

er is in out West. Rosaline might. She'd always been changeable with her wa
ry. Five interests.

Two choices sat before me and neither of them made me feel
great. Lose Finn and get unlimited time with Eva. Or only see Eva
ink our couple of months and commit to a life with Finn, whatever that looked

“It can “You don’t need to figure it out, right now, Abi,” Mona said, h
e visits gentle. “I’d be sad to see you go, but you have to do what’s best for yo

he was I chewed my lip. “Even if it hurts Finn?”

ouldn’t Her sadness swept across her face, but still, she smiled. “Someti
ng sad. can’t avoid hurting the ones we love.”

And I did love him.



er gaze “Abi, are you here?” Finn called from the hallway later that day.
nd trust

I released the pedal on the sewing machine and glanced
shaking closed bedroom door. I rarely came in here anymore, but after Mona
es now couldn’t face sitting in the cavernous living area alone with my co
: it too, thoughts.
doesn’t

„ My fingers ached as I pushed back from the machine. *What time is*

I clicked my phone to life and my eyes widened. I’d been work
two hours straight without a break. No wonder everything hurt.
s.” She

Finn called again, an edge to his voice that made my brows rise.
nted to he thought I’d go without him, I couldn’t say. I didn’t have a car
e of my thought of using his car service like he told me to, made me uneasy
rich people used chauffeurs and I was not one.

I loved I opened the bedroom door just as he rushed back. He spun on hi
o move

nts and absolute panic on his face.

“There you are,” he said, his voice breathy.

all that “Are you okay?” I stepped into the hall towards him. Concern beat
a every pulse in my mind. His hair stood on end and his sapphire eyes were
like. “Did something happen?”

er tone “No, no. I just...” he trailed off, his gaze roaming my face as though
u.” gradually receded. “I don’t know what I thought.” He chuckled, shaking
head. “I’ve got far too active an imagination.”

mes we Finn caught my hand, tugging me into his chest. He wrapped his arms
around me and rested his chin on my head while his heart pounded loudly
my ear.

“What did you think had happened?”

“I don’t know.” He blew out a breath. “Too many terrifying things
at my through my head. The front door was unlocked and...”

a left, I I pulled back, staring into his exhausted expression.

nflicted “You thought someone had taken me.”

He pressed his lips together but didn’t deny it.

it? “Is that even a real possibility?” It seemed insane, but what did
ing for know about his life? “There’s a guard at the gate, and the house is packed
with alarms and cameras.”

Where “The alarms only work if you turn them on.”

and the Which I hadn’t.

y. Only “And the guard?”

s heels, He shrugged before a sunny smile swept over his expression. I narrowed
my eyes at him.

“I told you, I’m being irrational.” He broke from my arms, gripped my hands, he led me down the hallway, towards the main room. “It’s like a surprise for you.”

I let him guide me into the room. How could someone go from pure excitement so fast?

Someone sat on the sofa, their back to us. Finn just grinned at me, trying to silently demand answers. Short white-blond hair and broad shoulders that’s all I had. And Finn’s ridiculous excitement. Curious.

The guy stood when we were closer to the sofa. He turned, a cold smirk on his lips. Icy blue eyes, striking enough to rival Finn’s, fixed on me. He glanced at Finn, my mouth working but no words coming out.

How had he — why had he — Shit, was it real?

Had I fallen asleep at the sewing machine?

“Abi, meet Owen Parry. The —”

“Lead singer of Marable.” I blinked at him and gawked like a stunned deer. *Because you are a stunned fan, dipshit.*

Owen Parry was waiting for me to be normal.

“Why couldn’t you warn me?” I slapped Finn on the arm. “I would have changed.”

Finn chuckled. “That would have ruined the surprise. Plus, Owen doesn’t care what you’re wearing. Right, man?”

“Definitely not,” he said, that melodic Welsh accent sweeping over me, better than any recording could.

“I’ll grab us some drinks.” He pressed a hand to my back and shouldered forward. “Why don’t you and Owen chat, *dotey?*”

ing my I went without protest and miraculously avoided chewing my lip.

have a “Finn said you’re a fan?” Owen asked, his voice gentle. I nodded
he didn’t expect that. We arrived in LA around the same time. It’s
panic to running joke between us that our girlfriends always loved the other.”

“Only because you’re a careless flirt,” Finn said, amusement softer
when I words. He handed Owen a glass before joining me on the other sofa. “
oulders, got stadiums of screaming fans, you can’t leave me one person?”

The longer we chatted with Owen and Finn ribbing each other, th
careless the surprise and awe cleared. I tried to focus on the press of Finn’
on me. I against mine or the way his fingers toyed with my hair. Anything to k
focus away from his panic when he couldn’t find me.

Unfortunately, it didn’t work.

New York had its issues. I knew that, but New York had never tru
me despite all the sketchy corners and crowds of people. Stupid o
ned fan knew that devil and it had my back.

Whereas here, nothing felt familiar. Not LA, not the culture, not
glamorous life. Eva would have rolled her eyes at his flash of wealth
ld have put her in a private helicopter or whisked her into an uber-expensi
exclusive restaurant at the last minute. And if someone did break ir
have said he brought it on himself, flashing his cash the way he did.
doesn’t

But what if someone attacked her to get to Finn?

Nearly losing her once was bad enough and with our parents go
ver me were all the other had. We didn’t have any other family.

If I decided to stay, she’d smile and pretend to be happy for m
ved me knew her too well not to read the truth in her eyes. She’d be heartbroke

And if I left, Finn might be too.

l. “I bet Fuck, would the negatives ever stop?
been a

ring his
You’ve

ie more
's thigh
eep my

ily hurt
r not, I

: Finn’s
if he’d
ive and
l, she’d

one, we

e, but I
en.

And if I left, Finn might be too.

Fuck, would the negatives ever stop?

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

FINN

SHAUN

When's Abi free for dress fittings?

FIN

I don't know. Why isn't Mona asking her?

SHAUN

Because I'm asking you.

FIN

The wedding's in December.

SHAUN

Answer the question.

I sighed and let the tablet drop to my chest. "Is Mona pressuring you about the wedding?"

Abi pattered around the kitchen area, making something despite a lack of prepared meals in the fridge. Her hair was piled on top of her head and she wore tiny, lacey shorts, and a tank top that left nothing to the imagination.

cherished the sight.

Abi glanced at me, brows drawn and a question in her eyes.

“Shaun’s bugging me to get you to a dress fitting or something?” I flipped the tablet back up and flicked through his latest messages. “I keep telling you the wedding’s months away and he should chill out. Have you heard anything about this?”

Her eyes widened a fraction, and she went pale. I watched her for a second, mapping my fastest route to her if she passed out.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” she squeaked. She cleared her throat. “No, no pressure at this end anyway. Maybe Shaun’s the bridezilla in their relationship.”



N

r?

ABI

I spent two days avoiding Finn. Guilt consumed me— for avoiding him, for even considering staying in LA when my sister needed me. Take your reasons, I felt guilty for it.

N

r.

Hell, I wanted every ounce of attention he threw at me. But every time I tried to get close, every time he mentioned an event or plan in the future, my body froze up.

on the

I needed to be careful or he’d realise I had doubts. Why I thought avoiding him would be a bad thing, I didn’t know, but the fear of it consumed me.

the pile

and she

ation. I

A knock sounded on my door frame, distracting me, and I jolted, ripping up the stitch on my latest creation: a pleated tartan skirt. I might have found inspiration from Jackson’s kilt at our wedding.

I glanced over my shoulder to find Finn smiling at me with that scintillating smile that both made me ache and squirm uncomfortably.

“I was thinking, we haven’t been out in a while,” he said as he sauntered toward me. His skin glistened and his t-shirt stuck to his body, highlighting every divot and ridge of his abs. “After I shower, do you fancy going for a picnic or something?”

My tongue glued itself to the roof of my mouth.

It sounded incredible.

“Or we could do something else?” He edged towards me, a furrow of confusion marring his brow. “A sunset stroll at Venice Beach. You should want to check out Santa Monica Pier.”

“Won’t you get mobbed?” I asked, desperation leaking from my voice.

“Probably not, but I’ll wear a hat and glasses just in case.” He grinned.

“C’mon, dotey, bunk off with me for a couple of hours.”

My mind raced, fighting for a logical way out that would stop me from picking up from pining for the picture he painted.

“I already have plans with Mona.” I grimaced then pushed my chair back and shot to my feet. “In fact, I’m late.”

He frowned, crossing his arms. “And you just remembered?”

“Yep. Sorry.” I race around the room, collecting things. “I lost track of time,” I said before slipping into the attached bathroom to change.

His scepticism haunted me as I called a taxi and texted Mona to watch for my imminent arrival.

A hard pressure formed in my chest, settling against my lungs and restricting my ability to breathe freely.

oft light I couldn't keep this up.

It tortured me just as much as it confused Finn. I missed relaxing underedhim on the couch. Waking up wrapped up in his arms without feeling lightingbetraying someone else. Letting him spoil me with unexpected trips out for I'd have to make a decision soon. My heart couldn't take the terror of having him so close when the guilt begged me to stay away.



FINN

row of

aid you Charlie had argued his case and I conceded defeat. I couldn't put all and meetings off any longer.

oice. Abi sat at the breakfast bar, an orange juice and her laptop laid out grinned.counter. I wrapped my arms around her, squeezing her back against my

“Good morning,” I whispered in her ear before placing a kiss on my heartcheek.

“Morning,” she said, her tone hesitant as she patted my arm in a air backawkward manner.

Yet another oddity in a long line of oddities. I shook it off and r her.

rack of “I’m heading into Hollywood for an audition.” I slid into the seat her, smiling despite the strangeness. “I thought you could come with arn herI’ll show you around some after I’m finished with business.”

She stared at me, chewing her lip. A ball of lead settled in my stomach and *What going on with her?*

“I’m sorry, I can’t.” She glanced away, focusing on her laptop

instead. "I have a call with my sister."

against The hesitant note in her voice made me frown. "Can't you reschedule like I'm asked, now forcing the sunny upbeat note in my voice. "It's not even it. you get a guided tour around a Hollywood film studio."

aptation She grimaced and shook her head. "Sorry."

For some reason, I didn't think she meant it.

I might have taken my time opening up to her, but now that I had had no intention of beating around the bush. Some people might have away and left her to it. Not me.

ditions I scooped her out of her chair and into my arms. She protested loudly carried her to the sofa, but I ignored it.

t on the "What's going on, Abi?" I asked as I settled on the sofa with her y chest. lap.

on her She squirmed, trying to get away. Why? She'd been almost glued nearly a week ago.

a rather "Stop it. Just talk to me."

released So *that's how people feel when I do it to them.* The pang of hurt in my fascinated me for all of a second.

next to "I have plans, Finn. You don't need to turn into a caveman over it."

me and This time, when she pulled away, I let her go. She rushed away, up her laptop and disappeared down the hallway.

omach. I stared after her with a perplexing feeling of loss jabbing me in the

What had I missed?

screen

lule?" I
ery day

d her, I
backed

dly as I

r in my

l to me

l at me.
y chest

"

picked

e chest.

INTERVIEW X

Question: How did it feel meeting your favourite singer in Finn's living room?

Abi: Incredible. Shocking. Unreal.

Tyler, producer: full sentences, remember?

Abi: It felt incredible to meet Owen Parry. I didn't even know he and I were friends. It still feels unreal, like I'm dreaming and going to wake up any moment with a smile on my face.

Tyler, producer: how do you feel about Finn pulling strings for you?

Abi: I never would have asked him to arrange that meeting. I can't remember even telling him that I love Marable. I'm not sure how I feel about the personal aspect though. It's not like he took me backstage at a show. He brought Owen freaking Parry into our living room. There's something insanely privileged about that that I can't quite wrap my mind around yet.

Tyler, producer: *Our* living room? So you've accepted your part in his

Abi: I meant his. Slip of the tongue.

INTERVIEW X

Question: How did it feel meeting your favourite singer in Finn's living room?

Abi: Incredible. Shocking. Unreal.

Tyler, producer: full sentences, remember?

Abi: It felt incredible to meet Owen Parry. I didn't even know he and Finn were friends. It still feels unreal, like I'm dreaming and going to wake up at any moment with a smile on my face.

Tyler, producer: how do you feel about Finn pulling strings for you?

Abi: I never would have asked him to arrange that meeting. I can't remember even telling him that I love Marable. I'm not sure how I feel about the personal aspect though. It's not like he took me backstage at a show. He brought Owen freaking Parry into our living room. There's something insanely privileged about that that I can't quite wrap my mind around yet.

Tyler, producer: *Our* living room? So you've accepted your part in his life?

Abi: I meant his. Slip of the tongue.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

FINN

*A*fter a week of script reading and Abi dodging me at the strange moments, I'd reached my limit. Something had changed.

Something had upset Abi. She needed to confide in me so I could help, but I'd barely had half an hour alone with her in days. I needed to take some measures.

"Did you know there's a helicopter in the backyard?" Abi asked. She stopped in front of me, her brow furrowed as she glanced between me with a perfectly calm expression and the patio doors.

I sat at the breakfast bar, drinking my second cup of coffee this morning and trying to ignore the nerves twisting my gut.

Just taking my wife out on a day trip. No need to worry.

"It's our ride." I pushed a to-go cup towards her. She picked it up, her furrow deepening. "It's hot chocolate."

"Thanks." Uncertainty stretched out the word. "Where are we going?"

"You've been in LA for two months now and I haven't taken you sightseeing." I emptied the dregs of my coffee into another to-go cup.

she watched me with narrowed eyes.

See? Not normal.

“I hate the place at the best of times, but it does have some pretty a stood, collected my cup and rounded the breakfast bar to drop the coffee mug in the sink. “Figured not many people get to see it by he and what use is my money if I can’t give you exciting experiences?”

I eyed her, keeping my expression pleasant. Not an ounce of su here. I’d overheard her telling Mona more of her reasons for joining th and excitement had been high on her list. If she denied me now, I’d ha How I’d get the information I wanted out of her, I had no idea.

gest of “That sounds great,” she said. To the untrained ear, her enthusiasr have sounded genuine. I knew better. She couldn’t hide that little h d fix it, uncertainty.

drastic “Glad you think so. Shall we go?” I gestured to the back door as I up our hoodies. “The pilot’s probably finished his coffee by now.”

ed. She Abi followed me outside without a word of complaint. She shrugg en my her hoodie and sat through the safety briefing with avid attention. I v her surreptitiously through the visor, taking in her growing excitement

of the When the helicopter lifted off, she let out a tiny squeak and scraml my hand. A shiver went through her and I tensed, expecting her to rele grip. She’d done it enough times over the last week that keeping my up, thehad felt like slow torture.

For an hour, we flew over LA, taking in everything from the Hol g?” sign to the Santa Monica Pier, and more. Every now and again she’d s en you arm, excitedly, pointing at something below us.

p while After ten years, LA bored me. It was a stifling place I had to endu

seen and rub elbows with the right people to secure roles.

Watching her bouncing around in her seat, muttering in my ear through the built-in radio system, something eased in my chest. Even when I arrived, I hadn't enjoyed it. Too overwhelmed, too anxious, too paranoid about making the right impression. For the first time ever, I could look out the helicopter window and see the landscape below us, bathed in sunlight and see beauty in it.

When the helicopter began to make its descent over South Pasadena, I tensed next to me.

"Where are we going now?" she asked, practically breathless against my ears.

"It's a surprise."

She squeezed my hand and grinned at me through the visor of her helmet. One helicopter ride and all my worries about her distancing herself from me evaporated. At last, I could breathe easily, shrug it all off as a figment of my imagination.

You did just spend a week reading psychological thrillers.

We landed on a rooftop and quickly disembarked, ducking beneath the spinning propellers. I lead Abi through a doorway and down a flight of service stairs. I'd expected a stream of questions, but apparently she accepted the surprise part of the equation. Nothing but the sound of my footsteps on the concrete echoed around me.

I'd expected a gasp at least when I flung open the unlocked security door and ushered her inside. She stared around the room, her eyes wide and her lips firmly sealed. Mannequins dressed in fabrics from almost every era surrounded us. None of it meant anything to me, but I knew it would matter to her.

Only that silence didn't break as she spun on the spot, and concern
through to needle at me. *Had I gotten it wrong?*

I first "It's not Paris or Milan," I grimaced, taking in her slack
paranoid expression, "but I thought you might enjoy a few hours soaking
k at the favourite things."

She stopped spinning. A smile slowly bloomed, lighting up her
ark, Abi expression.

"I love it. Thank you." She glanced around the empty room. "W
inst my everyone?"

"It's just us."

Her brows furrowed and her lips flatlined. "Are they closed?"
helmet. "In a way. There are staff here if we need anything." I shrugged. "
haviour think you'd want people gawking at us or asking for pictures."
t of my

She took another look around, the tension in the air seeming to
Then it snapped just as quickly. Abi sank into the quiet atmosphere
began to survey the exhibitions.

ath the "I didn't even know this was here. How ridiculous is that?" she ch
light of

y, Abi "It's not ridiculous unless you want it to be."

of our Her blue gaze assessed me, and she sobered. Nodding, she co
down the line of displays, reading the plaques and exhibition notes.

ty door "Why don't you do more of this?"

but her "What?"

ery era "Go out. Enjoy the city." Her brows rose and she smirked. "Yo
esonate seem to leave the house if it's for a job commitment or one of your
forces you out the door." She continued down the line, her head tilting

started gasped over a piece of stitching or a button. “You haven’t even gone or diving since we got back from Bora Bora. Didn’t you say you loved that?”

in your “You’ve seen the line of cameras waiting at the gates.” I took a seat on a bench in the centre of the room, content to let her wander and take her entire “Why do you think?”

The media circus around our marriage hadn’t lessened. The hundreds of photographers at the gate seemed to lessen each time I left, but it returned to normal levels. Cars still tailed us and I lived on edge more waiting for the first sprig of gossiping lies about Abi to drop. None had but it was only a matter of time.

I didn’t Tyler forced me out of the house whenever he could with inane for domestic shit that made no sense. Why would anyone want to grocery shopping together? My chef handled all the ordering, I didn’t grow set foot in the overly lit and overly priced places anymore.

ere and “That’s no way to live surely.” Abi’s gaze snapped to mine, her focus shifting to me and only me. “Locked away, hiding from the world unless duty calls.”

“I like my house.” I waved it off. “Besides, I’m never usually home much. I need to pick the next project and get a move on.”

“Why haven’t you?”

My brows rose. “In a rush to be alone for days at a time?”

“Of course not.” Her cheeks flushed scarlet. The paranoid corners of my mind tried to convince me it was out of guilt. I squashed that. “I just don’t need to turn down work because of me. I can keep myself company as she *I noticed.*”

surfing I bit my tongue.

he doing “I’ll accept one when the right project comes up.” I stood, clapping hands. “Shall we go to the next room?”

that on a I wandered towards the door, working hard to keep my pace moderate and not rushed. Desperate to push her focus away after spending time wishing for it. *Geez, my head is fucked.*

and of “What about all those scripts you’ve been sent?” she asked, hadn’t seemingly genuine interest. “None of those interest you?”

st days, Now that my reputation was on the mend, the producers and studios had yet, started warming up to jumping on the tail end. I’d joked to Charlie they could make and edit a film in under a month, they’d do it just outings could release it during the airing of *Married Blind*. Every single one of us called me with an eagerness for the publicity barely contained in their need to

Each one should have filled me with joy. It had worked. The show put my career back on track.

intense Yet, it only served to drive home how fake the entire industry was. The world

Nearly three months ago, I’d been persona non-grata in Hollywood. No one wanted to touch me.

me that “None of the ones filming in LA interest me,” I said at last, a frustrated note leaking through.

“But there have been some not in LA?” Abi asked, seeing beneath my lines. She had a bloody knack for it with me.

s of my “Yes.”

... you Abi wandered around the edge of the room, appearing more interested in my.” the exhibitions. She couldn’t fool me though. I could read every tense

her back and the sly glances from the corner of her baby blue eyes
ing my fixed all of her attention on me. *Why?*

Five minutes ticked by while I pretended not to notice her s
easured Eventually, she stopped in front of me, her hands on her hips
g days determined set to her lips.

“If you had no constraints and you could accept any of them,
d with would it take you?”

I sighed. “What’s the point of this?”

ios had “Answer the question, Finn.”

that if “Fine,” I growled. “Prague. There’s an interesting fantasy film
so they production for the winter there.”

of them Abi nodded. “Okay. Why won’t you go for it?”
voices.

I stared at her, my brows rising and a smirk tugging at my lips.
ow had *dotey, why do you think?*

“Because of me?” she squeaked, pointing at her chest. I only r
“That’s ridiculous. We —” Her mouth slammed shut and she pursed h
od. No “We what?” I asked, my tone a little harsher than intended.

istrated She studied me, a silent war waging in her eyes. Rather than cor
me, she wandered away, pacing around the room in intense silence. I v
her, every polarising emotion and thought flitting through my head.

ath the Confusion that my next role meant so much.

Paranoia that her odd answers and reactions meant she planned t
me or worse.

ested in Elation that she might want to go with me, stay with me, make sor
line in off our strange beginnings.

. She'd Frustration that she had to stew in silence rather than *talk* to me.

"We what, Abi?" I asked again. I stepped in front of her, stopping
crutiny. her tracks.

and a She almost walked into my chest but dug in her feet, leaving mere
between us. Tilting her head back, she stared into my eyes with an un-
where look which deepened the claws of trepidation in my mind.

"Mona and Shaun travel together," she eventually said, tone subdu

I studied her, keeping a careful grip on the hope battering my

"They do."

in pre- She bit her lip. "So, we could do that too."

"Why would you want to uproot your life constantly for my job
brows rose, but playing devil's advocate at that moment might have b
Really, hardest role of my life. Elation and disbelief fought inside of me. "

fakest industry in the world. Every single person you'll ever meet w
10dded. an agenda. You'll never know if they're befriending you for you or
er lips. close to me."

I couldn't keep the bitter notes from my voice. The moment I sta
1rfide in let it out, it took on a life of its own, digging deep into my darkest fi
vatched The ones that haunted me at night, the ones that made me question
decision I'd ever made.

"If I didn't already know that you love *what* you do, I'd think you
miserable," she murmured. Abi canted her head, her gaze roaming n
o leave taking in every involuntary twitch.

"I love it when I'm in the role."

nething "But not everything surrounding it."

I snorted. “Everything surrounding it is a sea of fake. Getting in the producers, auditions, filming.” My voice hardened, remembering everyone handled my temporary exile. “All fake pleasantries and pandering get you to fall into line with someone else’s agenda.”

“Would you ever leave LA?” she asked, her voice quiet, distracted.

“I’m not sure I could.”

I couldn’t work out her angle. She wanted me to accept a role, barely seen each other all week by her own doing. *What exactly do you want from me?*

“Why? If filming is outside LA anyway?” She stood by a display of brooches, avidly studying each one, tracing a finger over the glass. Her back belied her carefree air, however.

I bit my tongue on an instant answer and gave it some thought. Moving to LA had been a dream that, year by year, morphed into a nightmare. I realized when I said I’d love to leave, at least some of the time. When I got outside the studios, I could push the fakery to the back of my mind and almost forget. Almost.

“It’s hard to schmooze and be seen when you’re not where they want you seen.”

She glanced at me, her brows furrowed. “What does that mean?”

“A huge part of the film and television industry depends on hiring people with name recognition.” My gaze panned across the room while my mind raced to put words to a fact I’d never needed to voice before. “But when you get to the point of having that recognition, it’s fleeting. You have to constantly remind the public of your existence by having more projects.”

front of up, and being photographed with the right people at the right rest: he way parties, events.”

aring to I bit my lip, hesitating over the flood of honesty spewing from n
But she’d asked, right?

almost “As much as I despise gossip rags, you can’t sell a film if ev
forgets your name.”

Abi absorbed it all. Yet when she turned away from me, I coul
ut we’d sworn a flicker of sadness flashed across her face.

oes she *Fuck.* What had I said wrong?

That paranoid panic wiggled in my chest, reminding me that the la
case of had not been a figment of my imagination. My wife had started to pu
er rigid from me.

We were three weeks away from the end of *Married Blind*. They
ving to be sitting us down separately to question our experiences and dem
neant it answer to whether we wanted to stay married or get a divorce. If the re
to film didn’t match...

nd and She’d leave me.

Or is something else going on?

ant you That paranoid voice whispered through my mind, stroking the me
of Natalie and her strange shift in behaviour before her parting gift
internet.

g talent While Abi continued to take in the museum, I let silence fall betwe

y mind I needed the time to study her, needed to look at all of our inter
ien you through a new lens. One where I wasn’t blinded by my growing feelin;

ave to *Were they one-sided? Had I tricked myself into believing she lo*
ts lined

aurants,too?

Really, if she wanted me gone, I could give her that space easily. I
ny lips.up my phone and dialled Charlie.

everyone

ld have

st week

ll away

'd soon

and an

esponse

emories

hit the

en us.

actions

gs.

ved me

too?

Really, if she wanted me gone, I could give her that space easily. I picked up my phone and dialed Charlie.

CHAPTER THIRTY

ABI

“Are you sure this is a good idea, Tyler?” I couldn’t hide the hesitation in my tone as I followed the producer through a line of massive trailers. They towered above us, metal steps pushed up against their corners to allow access. The heat beat down on us, bouncing off the metal, intensifying and unrelenting. “He’s up here working. I’m sure he doesn’t want to be worried about me too.”

Never mind that Finn had accepted a sudden guest role in Canada just two days after our trip to the museum. He’d knocked on my bedroom door, interrupting my sewing, and dropped the news like a bomb. No question, I was okay with it, just letting me know he’d be flying out by the end of the week.

Of course, I didn’t tell him I wasn’t okay with it.

I didn’t know how I felt. Too many conflicting emotions hit me all at once. They were still a muddled mess of relief and guilt.

I missed him, but part of me reasoned the separation would be good for us. Now with just two weeks left of the show, decision time fast approached.

Two weeks until they forced me to decide if I could be selfish and a my sister for the love of my life.

I still didn't know the answer.

When Finn had said he hated LA, a flutter of hope hit me hard.

And then he tore it away just as quickly.

I knew one thing for certain.

Tyler flying me to British Columbia would not be well received. end up looking needy and insecure.

"Don't you want to be with Finn?" Tyler asked.

He almost bounced as he walked, vibrating with excitement. I e whitereaction he anticipated no doubt, rather than any concern for what I wa loors to I kept my mouth shut, but he didn't notice. We stopped at one nse and trailers. A printed laminated sign had been tapped to the side of it d have to 'wardrobe.'

"Here we are." He clambered up the steps and through the ope literally "Hello, which one of you lovely ladies is Angela?"

I followed him in at a much more sedate pace. Ian trailed me, his n door, resting on his shoulder and headphone positioned over his ears, ta on of if every blip of my microphone. Thankfully, they hadn't recorded my c l of the protests. Ethan followed closely behind, holding a fuzzy boom mic ove

That wouldn't be unusual, but it gave me pause. at once. The boom suggested they weren't mic'ing Finn up, and all of it w a shock. Dread coursed through me, turning my stomach and mak ood for wish I'd let Finn disconnect the doorbell weeks before so I wouldn oached. opened the door and let Tyler steamroll over me.

bandon Reluctantly, I trudged up the trailer steps. Racks of clothing ran in
down one side while they'd left a large space open at the opposi
bracketing it with what looked like changing rooms. A grey-haired
chatted to Tyler quietly while another much younger one watched, h
eyes bouncing between them and the crew.

I'd just Tyler spotted me and grinned. "There you are, Abi." He waved m
"Come and meet your new boss and colleague."
My brows furrowed. *Boss?*

For the Tyler chuckled. "We got you a trainee position while Finn's on the
isn't that great?"

anted. Something about his enthusiasm grated across my nerves. Despite
couldn't deny the pang of excitement waiting for my attention. I'd
of the wanted to do more with fashion. Why not wardrobe for films and TV s
enoting Hell, if I went back to New York, why not costumes for Broadway?

n door. I let the excitement bloom until it thrummed through me, block
everything else. Tyler grinned as I threw myself into introductions, li
avidly as Angela, the grey-haired lady showed me around their on-l
camera space.

king in For the first time in years, I allowed the dreams I'd locked away w
constant parents died out of their box.
er Ian.



FINN

ould be The second the director called wrap on the scene, I let the mind
ing me character recede and instantly missed it. For three hours, I'd been fre
t have

n a line my concerns and worries. Nothing mattered but my lines and my character end, persona.

woman Greyson didn't care if his wife left or betrayed him. He only cared about catching up with his high school friends and throwing spanners in my carefully laid seduction plans.

ie over. I wandered back to the wardrobe trailer, following a production assistant determined to get me in and out of my costume change. He understood I didn't want to be blamed for the schedule running over. If only he knew my desperation to sink back into work.

Voices floated out of the wardrobe trailer, but my battle to press down on my worries captured all of my attention. The second I stepped into the trailer, I always knew I'd made a mistake.

shows? *How hadn't I recognised Tyler's voice?*

? The smarmy asshole smirked at me from across the trailer. I was laughing out loud when the camera pointed at Angela and...

stening "What the hell are you doing here?" I snapped.

ocation Abi spun around, her baby blue eyes wide and her vibrant auburn hair piled on top of her head. I'd have to be blind to miss the flash of anger when my skittering across her face.

A pang of loss hit me in the chest and I clenched my fists against the wall to sweep it all away.

of the Abi turned to Tyler, her eyes narrowing on him. I didn't need to have any thoughts to know the meddling producer was to blame for her appearance.

e of all "Abi's joining you here for a couple of weeks as Angela's approval..."

acter'sHe plastered a sunny fake-as-shit smile on his lips.

“No.”

d about His smile faltered. “What do you mean no? This is a wo
in their opportunity for Abi.”

I crossed my arms, begging myself to stay strong.

ssistant *Don't need to know if it's true, don't need to see... Fuck.*

andably Her lips curled slightly, a minuscule confirmation. Tyler woul
iew my missed it. Hell, Ian might have too. But I'd spent months looking
learning her every quirk.

own my How dare he use her against me? He knew I wouldn't say no to
railer, I matter how pissed I was. I still wanted her to be happy and make at le
of her dreams come true.

What a weak fucking sap I've become.

i had a “Fine,” I groaned. Abi's shoulders sagged and Tyler perked up. I h
hand out, warding off his next stab at meddling with my life. “But
leaving now.”

urn hair “What — Now, Finn —” Tyler spluttered.

concern “No. My contract specifically states that you are allowed to film
as it doesn't interfere with my job.” Despite all of my training, my
he need shook. I pointed at the door. “There is a production assistant out there
himself because he has to go tell the director that I'm late. I wouldn
near her been late if you hadn't pulled this fucking stunt and wasted the five m
sudden had to change.”

“Okay, but that doesn't mean we —”

entice.” “Read my contract, Tyler. You are not to do anything that neg

impacts my job.” My gaze shot to Abi. Meeting her had been the threat to my job, but I wouldn’t mention that now. “Turning up unannounced? Definite damage. Bring the source of my... *bring it*”
nderful
Massive distraction. How the fuck do you think I’m meant to get back to my character when I’m furious at you and distracted by all of your manipulative shit?”

He had nothing to say to that, but he still hadn’t moved towards the door.
d have
“If I have to get security here to escort you off the site, I will.” I looked at her, towards him and he took a step backwards. “Make no mistake, I’m not calling my agent and you will hear from your Series Producer. Now get the fuck out!”
her, no

Distantly, I noted Abi going pale as I shouted at Tyler. I blocked out the noise.
ast one
She wanted to use me for her own gain, and I still didn’t know what I had planned for me. She didn’t deserve my guilt.

Angela handed me my next costume with a nervous smile. Gina, my assistant, had vanished into the racks some time ago. Lucky woman. If I could escape the chaos, I would.

“Sorry, love, I didn’t think...”

“It’s not your fault, Ange.” I softened my tone before shooting a look at the producer. “He’s got a habit of manipulating everyone. Let me know if you need to call security.”
as long
y voice
shitting

She nodded and I closed myself into a cubicle. The fitting room was nothing more than some thick dark fabric on rails. I could hear every whisper from the main area.
i’t have
inutes I

The unmistakable sound of the ladder shaking under heavy feet came through to me and a tiny piece of my control unlocked.
gatively

biggest I couldn't do it anymore.

p here, I shoved my shaking hands into my hair and tugged. The pressure

g Abi? my scalp both hurt and gave me something outside of my head to focus

ick into *Why couldn't things just go to plan for once?*

ulative I needed the space. Being trapped in a house with her, seeing

e door. contorting herself to avoid me, it'd gutted me.

stalked Now I'd just be trapped in rural British Columbia with her.

will be Somehow, I'd gone from bad to worse in less than two days.

get the There would be no out now. When the cameras were around, I'd

l it out. put the mask back on and nothing had changed, but if Tyler wanted to

hell she my life difficult, I'd make his worse. He wouldn't get past the security

again.

I threw back the curtain with a little more confidence in my step. T

ny, her fizzled beneath the surface, but it had reached a manageable level. On

an. If I back to set and sank into character, it would clear.

"I told him it would be a bad idea to surprise you." Abi chewed

staring at me with open worry.

look at "Cut the crap, Abi." I shook my head, tutting in disgust. "You've

ow if I poker face."

Her brows rose as I stalked past her.

is were "What are you talking about?"

furious "If you truly didn't want to be here, messing with me, you wouldn't

My eyes narrowed on her, shoulders slumped, teeth permanently

filtered into her lip. Where had my spitfire from Bora Bora gone? The woman

faked an orgasm to get rid of the cameras? I wanted her back.

Only I really shouldn't.

against "You did everything you could to avoid me in LA and you had a
s on. house and a city to work with." I crossed my arms. "Why did you agree
from that to a hotel room with one bed in a tiny bloody town when
ing her decided to hate me?"

"That's not true," she said, her voice weak.

have to "You don't even want to fucking look at me," I shouted. Abi flinched
o make that stupid pang of guilt hit me again, making it all worse. She forced
ity line her eyes to meet mine, fire brewing in their depths. I stalked towards her,
my face to harden when all I wanted to do was pull her into my chest and
her. I couldn't stop myself from getting close enough to feel the heat of her
body. She tilted her head back, her gaze dancing across my lips before
back to mine.

he fury *Confusing fucking woman.*

ce I got I stormed out of the trailer, stomping towards the set with a fast
thunder.

her lip, The urge to do something reckless thrummed through me. Run through
the woods and only stop when I hit the coast. Dive off a boat in the middle of
e a shit Great White territory. Something. Anything to redirect the furious power
of my heart.

At least then I wouldn't be losing control of myself because of a woman

't be."

digging

an who

Only I really shouldn't.

"You did everything you could to avoid me in LA and you had an entire house and a city to work with." I crossed my arms. "Why did you agree to go from that to a hotel room with one bed in a tiny bloody town when you've decided to hate me?"

"That's not true," she said, her voice weak.

"You don't even want to fucking look at me," I shouted. Abi flinched and that stupid pang of guilt hit me again, making it all worse. She forced her eyes to meet mine, fire brewing in their depths. I stalked towards her, forcing my face to harden when all I wanted to do was pull her into my chest and kiss her. I couldn't stop myself from getting close enough to feel the heat of her body. She tilted her head back, her gaze dancing across my lips before jolting back to mine.

Confusing fucking woman.

I stormed out of the trailer, stomping towards the set with a face like thunder.

The urge to do something reckless thrummed through me. Run off into the woods and only stop when I hit the coast. Dive off a boat in the middle of Great White territory. Something. Anything to redirect the furious pounding of my heart.

At least then I wouldn't be losing control of myself because of a woman.

INTERVIEW XI

Question: What are you playing at Finn?

Finn: I don't know what you're talking about.

Tyler, producer: That's a lie, but I'll play. Why did you accept a job in another country without consulting the production or Abi?

Finn: It was a last-minute thing.

Tyler, producer: That part I can believe. Lucky for you the show's ex connections to the wardrobe mistress. Two weeks in British Columbia without your wife wouldn't have been good.

Finn: Okay.

Tyler, producer: What's changed?

Finn: I don't know what you mean.

Tyler, producer: Hate me. Hate the show. That's all fine and expected you and Abi seemed to be hitting it off— and don't tell me it's an act. Those little moments I've seen between you two, they're too pure to be faked.

Finn: If you want answers, Tyler, I'd suggest you talk to my tight-lipped wife. *stands* and when you find out, do me a favour and keep it to yourself. I've learnt my lesson.

in

ec has

d. But

The

l.

ed

ourself.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

ABI

“*I*’m sure it’s not that bad,” Eva said, her voice calm.

Usually, talking to my sister would be enough. I’d take breath and look at the thing bugging me all over again.

“You’re not here, Eva. You didn’t see him.” I shuddered remembering the hardness in his eyes. “He’s never looked at me like that, not even when we first met and he wanted to get out of the show.”

“Have you asked him about it?” She smiled when I shook my head. Her eyes held amusement and pity.

I hated the pity, but I couldn’t deny I deserved it.

Three months ago, I would have called Finn on his shitty attitude and been done with it. If I didn’t like his response, I would have shrugged and left it as his problem.

Now, my strength had vanished on me.

Of course, I had my suspicions about why it had abandoned me. I had them good. All of them tied up in guilt and my conflicting feelings.

“You can’t keep walking around on eggshells, Abs,” Eva said, her tone tugging me from the edges of a guilt spiral. “Talk to him. Maybe a misunderstanding.”

Only what if it wasn’t, and talking to him made the quiet sim-
tension between us explode?

Avoidance, of him and my decision, would only make it worse than
had to decide which I wanted more. If I choose Eva, there’d be no
fighting to get through to him.

Could you live with him truly hating you?

Probably not.

a deep
Eva grimaced and I braced myself for the question I’d hoped she’d
ask. “Is there a chance you’re unintentionally pushing him away?”

nbering
n when
I bit my lip as the truth tried to bubble to the surface and she
Evading Eva, with more than four thousand miles between us, was
Lying to myself... well that would be pointless because I already knew
truth. I’d set it in motion.

id, both
I’d been telling myself for two weeks to make a decision. My
waking moment had been dedicated to agonising over it.

But I’d made the decision, hadn’t I?

ide and
:d it off
I could pretend all I liked that avoiding Finn gave me space to then
process my feelings without clouding my judgement.

Unconsciously, it seemed I had chosen Eva.

None of
Only I hadn’t expected to be in a hotel room with the man whose
relationship unravelled.



ner soft
: it's all

FINN

“This had better be good, Finn,” Shaun drawled as he answered the ph
mering thought you went to Canada to stop being a moody bastard. That fa
pointed at me, “says you’ve graduated to irruption alerts.”

ough. I “She’s here,” I ground out.

o point Every muscle in my body had drawn tight the moment the directo
a wrap for the day. Now, sat in the back of a transport vehicle waiting
driver, I couldn’t ignore the disaster Tyler had dropped in my lap.

Shaun’s brows rose, but he shook it off quickly. “Okay, so maybe
d never as a sign that avoidance isn’t the best move.”

“No, avoidance would have protected me.”

ok me. From seeing her hurt expression every time I bit at her. From feel
s easy. stab of guilt because in nearly three months she’d softened me, m
new the complacent, made me love her.

I had ten minutes to shake all of that off. Ten minutes to find th
y every who sued Natalie and made sure she felt the sting of her betrayal as h
had. But I’d never been delusional.

“Fuck knows I’ve said this before, and you haven’t listened.”
ink and sighed, dragging a hand across his face before narrowing his eyes

“Abi isn’t Natalie. That woman doesn’t have a devious bone in her bo

I ground my teeth. “I’m not fucking imagining it.”

ren our Shaun held his hands up. “Okay, but remember how you feel ab
man?” At my stubborn nod, he continued, “Maybe giving her the be
the doubt *until* something happens, will make you happier.”

“Happier?” I snorted. “Happier playing pretend, waiting for the axe on my neck? No fucking thank you.”

“I thought you’d say that.” Shaun pressed his lips together, his frustration shining in his eyes. “Just... think before you do something okay? I’m not blind, I can see how you feel about her. You’ve got two maybe if you’re straight with her, the pair of you can patch up things before it’s too late.”

Shaun hung up and the fizzle of restrained anger and frustration for the abated.

“Jesus. I’m a fucking mess,” I groaned into my hands.

I needed to exhaust myself before I faced her. If I channelled this anger into a boxing bag at the hotel gym, I might stand a chance keeping my head. Might.

ling the
ade me



ABI

Hours had passed since I’d left the set. I’d paced circles in the car, Finn’s hotel room, mindlessly flicked through channels and sat staring at the wall for more minutes than I’d care to count, chasing the threads of my thoughts and feelings, struggling with the knowledge that I’d chosen my sister’s man I loved.

I’d also expected Finn hours ago.

With the mood he’d been in on set, he wouldn’t appreciate my clinginess. Even knowing that I couldn’t stop worrying my lip.

Fuck. I’m a mess.

e to fall Just as I reached for my phone, the door locks disengaged and in
Finn, dripping sweat.

is own It glistened on his face, arms and shoulders. He wore a loose-fitti
stupid, that did nothing to hide the definition of his abs and pecs from me
weeks, patches coated it, sticking the thin material to his skin.

e holes Every doubt and pang of guilt I had whirling around inside of m
silent for a couple of glorious seconds. My body forgot we weren't
hadn't talking — something I no doubt had caused.

He tensed when his gaze landed on me. His jaw ticked and I
myself in the leather armchair. My fingers curled around the arms, g
burn of them tightly.

ance of Time to put on the best show of my life.

Here's hoping I learned a few things from him.

“How was work?” I asked, the words sounding utterly rid
considering the stifling tension surrounding us.

He dropped his duffle back on the sideboard and grunted. *Grunted.*

urpet of “Sorry again about Tyler.”

g at the Grunt.

y wants “When he hijacked me, I said it would be a bad idea, but you kno
over the he's like.”

Grunt.

recking My brows furrowed as I watched him move methodically arou
room. He emptied his duffle bag, placing items in a laundry bag. I
repacked it. All without glancing at me.

“Did he leave the set like you told him to?”

walked “You can stop with the pleasant conversation attempts,” he muttered
Did he roll his eyes?

ng vest With the sun setting, casting the room in shadows, I couldn’t get
e. Dark read on him. He tugged the vest top over his head, momentarily dis-
me. I’d hoped we’d have two weeks to make more memories, some-
ie wenthold on to when it all came crashing down. Then he scrunched it up
exactlyfists and waited.

When our gaze finally clashed, he stared at me with a sardoni-
bracedlifted. Heat burned my face at the realisation that he’d caught me ogli-
rippingThen the guilt kicked in because despite us being legally married, I’d
to throw it away. I needed to get my head and heart on the same pa-
fast.

“Why are you even here?” he asked, tone dark. “You could have
liculous for another room.”

Had he expected that? No, he couldn’t have. There hadn’t been an
of surprise in his expression when he walked in.

But he was right. I could have. I should have.

“I didn’t—” I swallowed, giving myself a second to find an expl-
other than the truth... *I’m selfishly soaking in our last moments.* “I
w what think you’d want to deal with Tyler’s questions.”

Finn snorted. “I’m dealing with Tyler’s fucking questions dail-
eyes narrowed and his entire demeanour shifted. His hands shook
ind the shoved them into his sweatpants pockets. “What’s it going to be thi-
hen he Fetishes? Did you record me spilling industry secrets?”

“No.” It came out too breathy, too panicked. Instead of reassuring
only made his eyes narrow.

ed. “What are you waiting for?” I opened my arms. “Drop your bomb. Don’t wait for the show to end on my account.”

a clear I stared at him, confusion a twisting, living thing in my gut.

tracting He tutted, cutting me off. “Don’t waste your breath. I see you nothing toreached for the hotel phone. “I’ll get you another room.”

o in his “No!” I should have kept my mouth shut. A separate room would have made my life easier with him in such a volatile and confusing state. I only had two weeks left with him. I wanted to savour them if I could have had him. Sharing a hotel room would give me room to do that without losing my chosen *Maybe I can talk him down.*

age and “No?” he asked, incredulous. He dropped the phone back into the bag. “You avoided me like the plague at home, you’ve a bomb hanging off your head, and now you want to spend time with me?” His brows rose in silence. “Un-fucking-believable. I did not peg you for a mindfuck, *Abi* you’re doing a stellar job.”

“We only have two weeks left together... maybe we could...?”

I had no clue what I was asking for. Sex? Companionship? Preparation nothing had changed but keeping our emotions off the table?

I didn’t Either way, the moment the words fell from my lips, I knew I should have left.

y.” His Finn’s expression turned thunderous.

as he “You want to pretend to be a happy family?” he roared. He visibly s time? and his face turned red.

I tensed, forcing back the flinch that would have given me away.

him, it “I am not a pushover, Abi.” He stalked towards me and it took

bloody ounce of self-control I had to stay rooted to the ground. His face loomed over me, seething and hard.

Then it all shifted, gentled as he leaned closer. With gentle fingers, he pushed my hair back over my shoulder and lowered his face. His lips brushed my earlobe, and my eyes fell shut. I clenched my fists, fighting the urge to reach for him.

I should have

known. But I *You're getting what you want. Just hold strong.*

He would and "I hope the payday was worth it, dotey," he whispered, sugary sweet. His voice hardened again as he continued, grating across every nerve. "Everything you've got all you're going to get from me." He stepped back, glaring at me.

My cradle. *Payday?*

He backed away. I needed to mask the confusion, but my bravado evaporated at the brush of his lips against my skin. We'd reached the point of no return. He seemed hellbent on hurting me, why the hell couldn't he give me the favour?

"You're being such a dumbass right now." I shook my head, warping my mind to defend myself.

Finn's brows rose. "Ready to tell the truth?"

I should have "I'm not betraying you. There is no bomb." I spat the word at him, my lips curling in disgust that he could even think that of me. "I can't stay with you after the show is over. That's why I've withdrawn."

I shook my head. I stopped short of telling him exactly why. No need to drag Eva into the fight. He didn't speak, just stared at me with unrestrained loathing. He wouldn't believe me. Why did I care?

And every "I love New York. I don't have to worry about being tracked."

ed overphotographers whenever I leave the apartment.” I stepped toward
fuelled by the burn of my anger finally turning up to the party.

gers, he “You want the attention. No one signs up for a show like this if the
grazed to hide from the world.”

urge to “No one so much as looks at me twice. It doesn’t matter what si
hair is in. No one gives a shit and they certainly wouldn’t snap picture
to plaster all over the covers of gossips rags with big red circles highl
eet. His all of my faults.”

because He crossed his arms. “Then you won’t have any problem telling Ty
at me. want a divorce, and *you* want to be put on a flight to New
immediately.”

do had Suddenly, the reality of it all crashed into me. Had I really
point of decision? My indecision must have flickered across my face beca
I return turned thunderous.

“Don’t look at me like that, Abi.” He pointed a finger at me. “Y
ng with this. I bet you couldn’t believe your luck when I fell in love with yo
shook his head, his tone dripping with self-loathing.

How could a few words freeze time? I’d known before. Of course
im, my But somehow I’d been able to blank it out, put it to one side and prete
ay with my love was a one-sided thing.

I’d been prepared to lock my feelings away in a box, but for hi
nto our Faced with him throwing the words at me like they were no better th
e didn’t on his shoe, the first stab of pain, the first inklings of regret hit me.

You chose this.

ked by “You screwed us. Now deal with the fucking consequences and
fuck out of my life.” He pointed at the door, not even an ounce of he

ls him, in his eyes. “Just be aware, that my feelings won’t stop me from des
you if you leak any of my secrets.”

ey want I’d agonised over how we’d separate for a week. Yes, I’d in
something a little more...peaceful? But this would do just as well.

tate my Yet my feet remained stuck to the carpet.

s of me I hadn’t planned for my racing heart or the pain twisting in r
lighting Definitely hadn’t expected tears to burn in the back of my eyes.

When I didn’t move, he stomped toward the door and flung it ope
/ler you on with it. You’ve got a producer to find.”

York I willed my body to move but it wouldn’t.

His jaw shifted as he stared at my unmoving self.

made a
use his “Go!” he roared.

This time I couldn’t control the flinch. It served a purpose at leas
me moving.
ou did

I grabbed my bag and rushed past him, out the door. Tears spille
my cheeks the second I stepped into the hallway. I took off down t
without a second glance. One more look and I’d cave and b
, I had.
nd that forgiveness.

If I did that, it’d make all the pain I’d caused him fruitless.

Eva would still need me.

m to...
an dirt



FINN

I slammed the door the second she stepped over the threshold.
situation descended on my room, too stifling as my anger fizzled out. I collaps

...troying the bed and folded over, burying my face in my hands.

Part of me reeled from how easily she'd given in. The other part reminded me of the last two weeks.

Either way, I should have felt free, and the pressure should have come from my chest.

My gut. Yet it only deepened.

My face and eyes burned, my head swam and I couldn't stop shaking. "Get *She's actually gone.*

The first tear shocked me.

I hadn't cried once when Natalie ducked out and betrayed me. Flooded with a rage, sure. Never tears.

One led to another and then the floodgates opened until I fell back onto the bed. It got bad, a sobbing mess. My chest hurt like someone had reached inside and stolen my heart.

I'd sworn to never let a woman get the better of me again. When I gave the hallup to Abi, I never anticipated that this time a woman wouldn't get the better of me. She'd tear me to pieces and leave me broken.

Silence
led onto

the bed and folded over, burying my face in my hands.

Part of me reeled from how easily she'd given in. The other half reminded me of the last two weeks.

Either way, I should have felt free, and the pressure should have lifted from my chest.

Yet it only deepened.

My face and eyes burned, my head swam and I couldn't stop shaking.

She's actually gone.

The first tear shocked me.

I hadn't cried once when Natalie ducked out and betrayed me. Flown into a rage, sure. Never tears.

One led to another and then the floodgates opened until I fell back on the bed, a sobbing mess. My chest hurt like someone had reached inside and stolen my heart.

I'd sworn to never let a woman get the better of me again. When I opened up to Abi, I never anticipated that this time a woman wouldn't get the better of me. She'd tear me to pieces and leave me broken.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

FINN

The next morning, the pressure on my chest hadn't eased, but not for the state of my heart, I still had a job to do. 6 AM call time didn't give a man time to sort through his emotions.

I opened the door, blurry-eyed and barely thinking straight. One of the grim faces leaning against the wall opposite woke me right up.

"I'm not in the mood to deal with you right now." A scowl pinched his face as I shut the door. I took off down the hall, not waiting for him to catch up. Hell, I hoped he'd leave me alone.

"What happened with Abi?" Tyler asked, his voice far too loud for the time of the morning. "She says she's quitting the show."

"I'm not her keeper." I shrugged, clinging to an unaffected air I didn't feel.

I kept waiting for the elation of finally getting my way to hit.

He stalked after me, keeping pace but not really bothering to catch up.

I reached the lifts and hit the call button. The doors opened immediately.

unleashing a slither of relief. So close to freedom.

Tyler followed me in. He positioned himself opposite me, his gaze scanning my face.

I leaned my head back against the mirror and shut my eyes, too at the dark circles beneath my eyes, the red rims making the white bloodshot. Everything ached. My face, my teeth, my chest, my eye another new experience I didn't care to ever repeat.

"Something happened between you," Tyler said, tone hard. His hand burned against my skin. I didn't give him the attention he craved. "She it's all her fault."

no matter
n't wait
look at
"Again," I sighed. "I am not her keeper. She—" A lump formed in my throat, choking me. I pushed past it and speared him with the attention I desperately wanted. "She doesn't want me. I'm not sure why I'm surprised."

Even though I stupidly was.

held my
follow.
The lift opened and I stormed out. Tyler followed at a much more rapid pace. I could see my car waiting in front of the hotel and I picked up pace, desperate for the distraction of work... even if it meant I had to wait for another couple of days in Canada, away from my friends and home.

My stomach sank at the idea of going home. To a house filled with memories of Abi. Maybe Shaun would let me stay with him while I waited for the house to be fumigated.

I could sell it.

up.
diately,
"Despite what you think, Finn, I'm not stupid," Tyler called to me, his voice echoing in the almost empty lobby.

I slowed to a stop, the doors within reach and turned, holding tight control. Every single eye in the hotel had shifted to us. Because who to be conspicuous when your life's work consisted of making drama aware of Tyler.

“There's more to it than neither of you is telling me.” Tyler stopped. Yet front of me, a smirk curling his lips. “It's more complicated than that, isn't it?”

I pressed my lips together and glared at him. He could take my sympathetic tone and shove it up his ass.

“Are you done? I've got actual work to do.”

“Sure.” Tyler patted me on the arm and stepped around me. “Come on when you come to your senses.”

With that, he disappeared through the doors, leaving me with a blossoming headache.



ABI

I'd never been the type of person to wear sunglasses indoors. That changed when I walked into Vancouver Airport.

Maybe should have put makeup on before leaving the hotel.

But then Tyler would have more time to try and weasel information from me and I couldn't risk it. He'd barely agreed to do a final interview from New York. It was the only option I gave him, not trusting myself to sit in front of a camera and keep it together without letting the truth slip out.

Something told me if he found out I'd chosen the pain of losing

t to my he'd dig at me until nothing made sense. I couldn't have that.

needed The damage was done.

ia? Not Even if Finn could forgive me, he wouldn't leave LA, and I'd b
back to choosing between him and my sister. I couldn't do that. Not af
pped ingiven me the perfect out. I didn't need to choose between them anymor
at, isn't I should have been happy.

Why then did it feel like my heart had been split in two?

ake his The plane took off and I waited, my breath held, for the moment i
all fall away.

A hundred miles. Three hundred. A thousand.

Call me It never came.



with a

FINN

“Finn McCarthy, get your ass out here right this second!”

Distantly I heard the front door slam open and shut, heard Mona sl
for me. I couldn't muster the energy to care that she'd barged into my
hanged Instead, I rolled over and buried my head in Abi's pillow.

Christ, I'm pathetic.

n out of Two weeks since she left.

m New *Since you forced her to leave.*

ont of a I'd allowed myself to sink into work, finish my scheduled filming
think. It had worked to a point. I got through the shoots without sl
g Finn, more tears and wallowing in what I'd lost and the fact I *cared* that sh

me.

All the work to repair my reputation. All the manipulation. All of it
be for nothing.

ter he'd And I didn't care.

ie. *Fuck.*

My bedroom door slammed open. Footsteps sounded against
hardwood, stalking towards the bed. I didn't move.

t would "What did you do?" Mona demanded, tone hard.

"Sparky, stop," Shaun said, his voice gentle.

"No. Abi called me in tears." Mona got closer and my fists clenched
the pillow. "What the hell happened, Finn?"

"Take a second, and look," Shaun whispered.

Sighing, I rolled over and faced them. Mona gasped. Yeah, I'd exchanged
couple of odd looks on the way home too.

"What happened?" Shaun asked.

houting Mona's eyes widened as she took me in. Sympathy flickered across
house, face.

When Shaun first introduced us, I embraced her friendship. The fact that
ripped Shaun out of his shell and forced him to face up to the hard truth that
his life had been a massive bonus.

To have her think that *I* had willingly hurt *Abi* stung more than words
and not say.

redding I shuffled up the bed and conceded defeat. Avoiding them while
e'd left myself under control wouldn't work, and lying to Shaun would never work
with me.

So I let it all out. From falling for her to the weird changes
t wouldbehaviour to the disaster that unfolded in Canada. They sat on the edge
mattress and listened, shock and pain consuming their expressions.

Only when I got to my suspicions, Mona winced.

“What do you know?” I asked, my voice hardening. My eyes narrow
nst the she glanced away from me and twisted her hands in her lap. “Spit out,
If I can get in front of whatever bomb she’s going to drop on me, I
have a chance to at least keep my career.”

“Get real, Finn.” Mona tutted, her brows furrowing. “You spent
three months in close quarters with Abi. You’re so consumed with
ched inmight be that you haven’t stopped to think!”

“What are you talking about?”

“Can you honestly believe she’d do that to you? Sweet, caring Abi
icited a “What does it matter what I fucking believe?” I snapped. “Would
would she avoid me like she couldn’t face me?” I stared at Mona, will
to spill all she knew. Silence. “If you know something, Mona, share it
ross hertrying to make me feel guilty for protecting myself.”

Mona bit her lip. Shaun studied her, rubbing her back. “Your silen
ct she’dhelping, love.”

ruths of She sighed, but finally caved. “All I know is she went from ten
talking about a future here to dodging it at all costs.”

rds can “Which doesn’t reassure me that she’s not a snake waiting to
ground out. “Natalie played sweet and loving at first too. I refused to
le I gotshe’d plant cameras in my bedroom until the security team found them

sit right Mona’s eyes widened and her head whipped around to get confi

in her from Shaun. At his nod, she turned back to me, my pain mirrored in her eyes. "I'm sorry, Finn."

"That lapse in judgement resulted in every gossip rag in the world having a sex tape." I crossed my arms and my voice hardened. "Abi spent a couple of weeks dodging me, just like Natalie did. Whenever I asked her where she'd been, she got cagey. Whenever I tried to make plans, she'd just disappear."

Mona shook her head, tears shimmering in her eyes.

"Alright. That's enough." Shaun stood, dragging Mona up with him. He glanced at her, her brows furrowing and her lips pursed. "Give us a couple of minutes, Sparky."

When the door shut on her, he turned back to me, his disbelief evident. "You're hurting, so I'll give you a pass for talking to my fiancée like that, but don't fucking push it, Finn."

I dragged a hand across my face, scrubbing hard at my eyes. "I know I'm sorry."

"She won't hold it against you." He sat back down on the edge of the bed, his gaze softening.

"I don't want to believe it, Shaun." I stared at my friend, letting my emotions come through in my eyes and voice. "But how can I not? She's gone."

"I know I suspected her and she took the bait." I winced. Rubbing my eyes, I continued, "Fuck, if you truly loved someone, wouldn't you fight to stop her?"

Shaun nodded, every inch of him tense and watchful.

"She kept her mouth shut. If she's innocent, why do that?" My voice cracked.

er gaze. “We’ve built our relationship on never pandering to each other.”
eyed me, hesitation mingling with determination in his gaze. “So when
sharing this, understand it’s because you’re one of my best friends, and I don’t
the last to see you hurting. Okay?”

ked her I nodded, my gut twisting with dread.

she ran “You’re a fucking idiot.”

“What?” I sat up, my eyes widening and my body bristling.

“Mona’s right. Abi would never sell you out to make a quick buck
im. She grimaced, then glanced at the bedroom door.

ouple of “You don’t know that for sure.”

plain to her “Seriously? Why would someone who *willingly works three jobs*
her sister take the easy route?” His brows rose. “She didn’t
ée like personality transplant in the last month, man. She’s still the
hardworking, caring woman who married you with a tremor running
ow. I’m her hands.”

I stared at him, mouth opening and closing as words evaded me. *C*
he bed, *be right?*

“Despite her line about the attention, she’s brave and strong-will
he pain could have handled the paps better than any of us.” Shaun tilted his he
ne. She the real question is, what actually drove her back to New York?”

chest, I Maybe nothing did, but I’d rather believe his version than mine.
ay?”

Shaun stared at me, his expression hard, urging me to listen. “It’s
change your mind. It’s okay to love her, even though she’s hurt you.”

y voice My insides churned and my face burned at the reminder. *The first*
I hand my heart to in years, and she turns on me. What were the chanc

Shaun “No. It’s not,” I ground out. *Christ, I sound like a child.* “I can’t tell you what I say judgement, Shaun. I fucking *chose* to let her in. She didn’t force her way in. I didn’t want her. I’d wanted to I could have stayed detached and escaped the entire situation without a scratch.” My voice rose the more I spoke, dripping with loathing. “I made a choice and it blew up in my face. That is not okay.”

Shaun stared at me, sympathy clouding his eyes. “I made a choice that backfired on me once too. Do you remember how I dealt with it?”

“You didn’t apply for a green card to spite Mona. Don’t even compare our situations.”

“You’re right, but I didn’t sit around feeling sorry for myself.” He patted my leg and stood. “I knew she might never forgive me, but I wanted to help her and I brought her home.”

“Yes, you were brave, but our situations are not the same.” I pulled up the duvet, resolutely fixing my gaze on the material. *Or are they?*

“Just because Abi fucked up, doesn’t mean you can’t be the bigger person here.”

My head snapped back, eyes drilling into him while sudden anger flooded my hands shake.

“Don’t even say it.” Horror filled my tone. “Don’t you dare tell her to forgive her when she could be on her way to destroy my career.”

“What would it matter?” Shaun shouted, towering over me. “You’re here. You’re constantly complaining about how fake LA is. Why would it matter if she destroyed your reputation?”

I scrambled out of bed. “Because she’d have betrayed me,” I roared, sound tearing from my throat painfully. “Because she’d be just like every other piece of shit in this town, using me for the money and the fame.”

rust my I..." My anger fizzled out and my gaze dropped to the ground. "I love
way. If because she was nothing like them."

the fiasco Shaun placed his hands on my shoulders, holding me still and forcing
th self-to focus on him. "If your career went away today, would you still want
" Would you move for her?"

ice that Yes, my heart screamed.

But my head spoke louder.

compare I would have altered everything for her if she'd asked. I would have
her anything.

Shaun Instead, she chose money over me.

not after Even if everything Shaun described happened, and by some miracle
still wanted me, I'd never trust her again. So no, it didn't matter
checked at wanted. We were fucked no matter what.

person

or made

l me to

l hate it

ould it

red, the

e every

me and

I...” My anger fizzled out and my gaze dropped to the ground. “I loved her because she was nothing like them.”

Shaun placed his hands on my shoulders, holding me still and forcing me to focus on him. “If your career went away today, would you still want her? Would you move for her?”

Yes, my heart screamed.

But my head spoke louder.

I would have altered everything for her if she’d asked. I would have given her anything.

Instead, she chose money over me.

Even if everything Shaun described happened, and by some miracle she still wanted me, I’d never trust her again. So no, it didn’t matter what I wanted. We were fucked no matter what.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ABI

I'd experienced my fair share of breakups, some of them devasting, some of them a blip in time that had very little impact on my life, and some of them plagued me.

For two weeks, Eva and Ros tiptoed around me, letting me walk away happy and pleased. Neither of them asked questions and I loved them for it.

That all changed when my final paycheque from the show hit my bank account. The notification lit up on my phone, reminding me why I'd put myself in that position to fall in love in the first place.

I pulled out my laptop and loaded up the billing site for Eva's loan. If I ticked that massive goal off the list, maybe I'd feel better.

"What the...?"

The balance read zero. I blinked at it for a second, before logging back in again, certain an error had occurred.

Nothing changed.

Two hundred thousand dollars down to zero.

“Eva!”

“What?” She rushed into my room, breathing hard from the screen.
“What is it? Are you okay?”

I glanced at the screen again. Just to be sure. Still zero.

“Did — did you pay off your debts and not tell me?” Even as I said it, I knew it would have been impossible. We didn’t have that kind of cash.

“No, of course not.” She joined me at my desk, glancing over my shoulder. “Holy shit. I didn’t do that.”

“Then how...?” The question died on my lips. I knew how.

I rubbed at my burning eyes, overwhelmed. Disbelief, relief, indignation. None of it all rolled through me, a tsunami of emotions I had no idea how to deal with.

“You don’t think Finn did it, do you?” she asked, her voice shaking.

Why would he do it? Especially after I...

Tears slipped down my cheeks. I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the screen.

“Abi?”

I shook my head and brushed at my cheeks, desperate for the water to stop. Instead, I choked on a sob.

“Oh my god, Abs. What’s wrong?” Eva knelt beside me. “It’s not fair, but I should be the one crying, not you. Talk to me.”

“Why would he do that when I...”

“When you what?” Suspicion hardened her voice and her eyes narrowed on me.

“I...” Words failed me, and I sobbed harder.

I needed to stop crying. This didn't change anything. I'd made the choice. Eva's debts being paid off didn't make it okay for me to abandon

“We've left you moping for days.” She smoothed a hand down my hair. “We've kept our questions to ourselves.” She gripped my chin, the edge to her tone fading out. “Time's up. Spill it, Abi.”

I released a slow breath, willing myself to get it together. She was right. I couldn't keep it all in forever. It would only fester.

“I couldn't stay there, but I couldn't figure out how to tell Finn,” I whispered.

“What did you do?”

“Avoided him. Made him think I didn't want him.” I shut my mouth, squeezing them tight as I admitted, “Made him think I didn't love him.”

Silence.

“Why would you do that?” she eventually asked, her voice hoarse and quiet.

I frowned at her. Why didn't she get it?

“I have to be here for you.”

“Just so I'm clear, you love Finn?” She took a deep breath. I nodded, releasing it slow and measured. “And he loves you?”

“Probably?”

Only he had said it, hadn't he? The first time those words fell from my lips and they were in anger. I couldn't help but feel the burn of regret. I hadn't gotten to hear it in a softer light.

“And rather than stay with him and let him love you,” she grimaced.

she spoke, “you chose to lie to him, break his heart, and come home to me right of me?”

on her. I nodded, my gaze roaming her face as confusion stuttered through my cheek. Why did she sound disappointed?

gentle Eva shook her head, a tiny smile curling her lips. “I love you, Abs, but you can be such an idiot sometimes.”

right, I I spluttered at that. “No, I’m not.”

“Oh, you definitely are.” Eva stood, her grim, shocked expression gradually lifting as she chuckled.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Because for once, I’m not the fuck-up.”

my eyes, I followed her into the hallway. “You were never the fuck-up.”

She snorted. “Your memory’s not that shit, Abs.”

“No, it’s not. You were always the quiet, unadventurous child, but I glanced over her shoulder grinning at me.

She walked into the kitchen, pulled out a bottle of red and gestured for me to sit down while she poured it.

“You didn’t know about me being grounded for most of my teenage years when I sniggered when I continued to stare at her in confusion. “Mom was ready to tear her hair out. Friday nights, I crawled through my bedroom doorway reeking of alcohol.”

from his Eva had to be joking. I’d left a shy, sixteen-year-old behind. She’d told me I was a virgin in more ways than one.

“I’m deadly serious, Abs.” She pushed a glass of wine towards me and I smiled down, her eyes twinkling with amusement. “They were very happy

because moved out and became your problem.” Then her smile faded, and she
her head. “Why the hell would you give up a man like that for me?”
ugh me. “How can you ask me that?” I cried before gulping down a fortify
of wine. “What if you relapse and I’m on the other side of the country
Abi, but if you relapse, and I’m on the other side of the world? I couldn’t li
myself, Eva.”

Eva’s smile returned. It softened her face and made my heart a
some reason.
pression

“Babe, nothing in life is certain. We, of all people, should know h
it can change.” She reached for my hand, squeezing it. “With our pare
my diagnosis, it taught me not to take anything for granted.” Her hea
as she took me in, sadness creasing her brow. “I thought you’d lear
same thing.”

My chest ached. I guess in a way, my decision to do the show ha
l.” Eva exactly that... Life had gotten stagnant and I had started to take it
granted. I needed a shake-up. I just hadn’t been prepared to fall in lov
l for me the way.

It made sense, but it didn’t change anything. Even if she didn’t n
s.” Eva right now, I couldn’t live with myself if I couldn’t be here for her if an
eady to she did. The fear that her cancer would relapse would never leave me.

window “I appreciate the perspective.” I smiled at her, moisture brimming
eyes. “But it’s too late. I pushed him too hard. He’d never take me bac
l been a Eva leaned towards me across our small dining table. Her gaze s
as tears rolled down my cheeks unchecked.

and sat “Do you know how many times Mom and Dad fought?” she
when I smiling again.

she shook “I *never* saw them argue.”

Eva scoffed. “How? They went at it like cats and dogs every coming sip months. Huge blowouts.”

“What “How didn’t I...”

ve with “Not the point.” Eva brushed it away with a flick of her hand. “I’n to make you see some sense here. Stop interrupting.” When I zipped r che for she continued. “They never separated, Abs. Sure Dad slept on the couple of times, but they *always* made up, no matter the size of the fig

ow fast I dragged a hand across my face, swiping at the tears. “What a nts and trying to say?”

id tilted “Only one person is stopping you from fixing this.” She lifted my ned the and pressed my palms to her cheeks, grinning. “And that person, dea is you.”

ad been For a second, I let the possibility take root. I imagined what it w all for like to take it all back. We’d renew our vows. I’d travel with him w e along he got a job outside the city. Maybe invest the time I’d lacked for ye building my own career in fashion.

eed me Then Eva’s smiling face swam back into focus.

d when I’d still be leaving my sister behind. I’d still live on the other side country.

g in my Nothing would change.

k.” “Thank you for the pep talk.” I tugged my hands from her grip, oftended softly. “But it doesn’t change anything.”

asked, 

FINN

uple of

“Mr McCarthy, I’m sorry to disturb you, but there’s a lady at the gate
an appointment,” the guard said when I answered the incessantly
1 tryingphone

ny lips, Why hadn’t he turned her away? I’d put a hard do not disturb
sofa ahouse expecting a media-feeding frenzy. Even Charlie had started pr
ht.” for every eventuality.

are you The guard cleared his throat. “I’ve told her no one gets in with
appointment,” he continued when my silence stretched. “But she’s a
y handshe needs to speak to you today. What would you like me to do?”

r sister, “Who is it?”

“She says her name is Eva Johnson.”

ould be Abi’s sister. *Fuck.*

enever Before I could think too hard about it, I gave my okay.

ars into *Why is she even in LA?*

She’d refused to visit while Abi lived here, but decided our split w
the perfect time for a trip?
e of the

The bell rang, echoing through the house and booming in my ear v
proximity to the door. I should have taken a moment, composed
maybe found a brush to tame the dreadlocks my unwashed hair had be
smiling

Instead, I threw the door open, startling the woman who looked l
but not at the same time.

“Why did you fly to LA to shout at me?”

She blinked at me, startled.

“I didn’t.” She winced. “Much. Can I come in?”

without ringing
After a moment’s deliberation, I gave in to my curiosity. I stepped gesturing at the hallway. She edged inside, taking in the marble floor black ironwork I barely noticed anymore.

on my eparing
I led her in and stopped at the breakfast bar.

She sighed. “I’m not here to shout at you. I’m here to talk.”

I pressed my lips together. I had nothing to say to her.

about an adamant
“I’m serious, Finn.” Her blue gaze fixed on me as her hands landed on her hips, just like Abi.

Something in my chest squeezed tight.

Eva gestured to the sofas. “Can we sit?”

She didn’t wait for my okay, just breezed past me, expecting I’d
Just like—

Stop with the fucking Abi comparisons!

“I know you paid off my medical bills,” Eva said as she settled on the sofa.

“Okay.”

with my myself, come.
What else was I meant to say? She already knew I’d done it. Deriving would be pointless, and she hadn’t asked for a justification.

like Abi
“Considering the way things ended between you and Abi, that was surprise and an incredible gift. Thank you.” Her head tilted as she confronted me. “There’s no easy way to say this, Finn, so I’m just going to work all over you and let you do what you please with the information.”

My brows furrowed and I leaned forward.

“Abi’s the best person I know. Not many people would work their ass back to the bone to keep their family afloat, but that’s her, through and through. She’s loyal.”

I waited patiently for her to make her point. Inside, I squirmed. Over the last two weeks, I’d started to let Shaun’s words and my memories merge. It hurt, conceding that he might have been right, but reality was with him.

No story had dropped. No unflattering videos. No irate phone call from my agent about leaked voice recordings.

I couldn’t deny the truth anymore, but if she hadn’t betrayed me, I would have actively chosen to leave me.

“And that’s exactly why I’m here,” she said. “I don’t fully understand what she made you believe, but my idiot sister decided that staying here in LA, with you... would be as close to abandonment as she could get.”

“I’m not following you.” Even so, my stomach dropped.

She chuckled. “Yeah, I had a similar reaction.” She studied me, probing, seeing far more than I’d like. “Do you love her? A bold question, I know, but it’s important.”

“Why does it matter?” My brows rose, daring her to spew some bullshit. “She left *me*.”

“And I’ll say it again, she’s a bloody idiot.” Eva shook her head. “It doesn’t change the fact that she loves you. So I’ll ask again. Do you love her? Answer the question and I’ll try to explain.”

“Explain and then I’ll answer the question,” I countered, my tone

and unyielding.

“Fine,” she sighed. “Abi loves you, but she’s terrified. Afraid I’ll go through that she’d be off living her life to the fullest for once and too far away to me.”

I cleared my throat, my brow furrowing as I tried to make sense of Abi’s words. “What are you trying to say?”

Eva glanced over my shoulder, taking in the sprawl of LA beneath us. “I think she believes LA is too far.”

“It’s a six-hour flight.”

“I know.” Eva shrugged. “You don’t need to tell me. I know she’s being rational, but she won’t listen to me.”

The penny dropped and I shook my head.

“She pushed *me* away, Eva. If she hasn’t changed her mind by now, how does she ever will?” I took a deep breath, suppressing the pain that fact caused.

I refused to latch on to the hope she dangled before me. Oh, I was probably badly. But Abi had made her decision. She’d unwittingly used me against me, forcing me to lash out at her and presenting the perfect opportunity to leave me without a spec of guilt.

“Only because she thought she had to.”

She stared at me, her hope blaring at me from a far too familiar place. “But it’s not my job to force her to see reason. If I were the fanciful optimist, I would have been in New York days ago. As much as I’d wanted it, one thing stood in the way... hard way...”

“She wouldn’t forgive me.”

relapse, Eva smiled. “I think you’re wrong.”

y to get “Why?”

Eva leaned forward, her voice dropping. “You didn’t hear it from
of it all. she’s a mess. She’s never allowed a guy to reduce her to a mopin
before. You, though? She can’t shake you off.”

h us. “I “I accused her of using me for money, fame, and hatching a
destroy me in the process.” It hurt to admit it, but it needed to be sai
might be upset, but I drove her away just as much as she ran. If the g
ie’s not loved couldn’t see through your lies, knowing you had a shitty poker
begin with, and blew up on you, would you take them back?”

Eva chewed her lip, her shoulders slumping slightly. “Okay, so w
n, what need a bigger grand gesture than I thought.”

stab of My mouth dropped open. “I’m not making a gesture when she
bloody want me.”

nted it. Disbelief flickered across Eva’s face. “Stop being a stubborn ass
y fears listen to me.” Her jaw shifted and her cheeks reddened. Just like Ab
for her loves you. She made a stupid, misinformed decision and I’ve corrected

“Then why are you here but not her?” My voice echoed arou
snapping in frustration.

ar face. “Oh, give me strength,” Eva growled, pinching the bridge of he
me and When she refocused on me, her eyes narrowed. “Clearly, you bot
already issues, Finn. Abi’s dealing with hers. Now you need to fucking de
d in my yours and grow a pair. She seems to think you wouldn’t take her back
she begged.” Her brows rose. “Is that true?”

I considered it, let the possibility wash over me.

If I hadn't been blinded by my past and eager to mistrust.... In sank into the betrayal I expected and focused on nothing else.

me, but Abi might have needed money, but she didn't once ask me for it.
g mess no idea what medical debt equalled in the States.

It would have been easier for her to manipulate me into giving
plan to money than finding dirt and the contacts to sell it for the right price.

d. "She "What does that look mean?" Eva asked, wiggling her finger in my

buy you "She never intended for me to pay off your debt, did she?"

face to "Of course not," Eva snapped, indignation pinching her lips. "We'
to being on our own. Asking each other for help is hard enough."

e might "Okay."

doesn't "Okay?" Eva squeaked, sitting taller. "Does that mean...?" She g
somehow reading the answer on my face.

hat and "I hope you have ideas for this grand gesture," I muttered.

ii. "She "As a matter of fact, I do." She pulled a notebook out of her, bran
l it." it like a trophy. "I made a list on the flight."

and us,

r nose.

h have

al with

even if

I considered it, let the possibility wash over me.

If I hadn't been blinded by my past and eager to mistrust.... Instead, I sank into the betrayal I expected and focused on nothing else.

Abi might have needed money, but she didn't once ask me for it. I'd had no idea what medical debt equalled in the States.

It would have been easier for her to manipulate me into giving her the money than finding dirt and the contacts to sell it for the right price.

"What does that look mean?" Eva asked, wiggling her finger in my face.

"She never intended for me to pay off your debt, did she?"

"Of course not," Eva snapped, indignation pinching her lips. "We're used to being on our own. Asking each other for help is hard enough."

"Okay."

"Okay?" Eva squeaked, sitting taller. "Does that mean...?" She grinned, somehow reading the answer on my face.

"I hope you have ideas for this grand gesture," I muttered.

"As a matter of fact, I do." She pulled a notebook out of her, brandishing it like a trophy. "I made a list on the flight."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

ABI

“Thanks for coming in today, Abi,” Tyler said, waving me into his apartment with a smile. “We’ll make it as fast as we can, but as I said on the phone, we just need you to wrap things up for the show.”

I nodded and followed him into the plush penthouse suite. Floor-to-ceiling windows dominated the living room wall, framing a gorgeous view of the Empire State Building uptown. I knew the show had money, but I always assumed they reserved it for celebrities.

“Okay, so it’s been a month since you gave up on Finn,” Tyler said, as they’d mic’d me up and messed around with the lighting. “Tell me how you feel right now.”

I drew in a breath. It pinched. No amount of breathing exercises could shift the ball of tension in my chest. I’d tried meditating every single day. With Eva’s debt paid off, I’d quit my third job and taken an extra couple of weeks off from the travel agency.

The free time allowed me to spend more time doing the things I loved: hanging out with my sister and Ros, scouring thrift shops, going to

classes, and working on designs.

All of it used to feed my soul. I'd expected at least one of them to be the ache of loss. They never did.

Tyler watched me, that easy smile curling his lips. He held himself at ease for once, no tension whatsoever. He leaned back in his chair, perfume wafting from him in waves. I found the change startling.

None of that helped me decide how to answer his question.

"I didn't expect it to hurt this much," I said, at last. "Sure, I join the show hoping for more, but I don't think I expected to find it. I definitely didn't consider the consequences."

into the
it like I

"That's great, Abi." He grimaced. "Not the pain part, of course. But when we go further, I have something to show you, if you wouldn't mind."

door-to-
view of

"Sure." What else was I meant to say?

but I'd
id once

Tyler nodded and Ethan pressed a button on a remote. The TV flipped to life, displaying the apartment surrounding me, down to the armchair in. I snuck a glance at Tyler, confusion hitting me hard. He just smiled and tilted his head towards the screen.

ow you

My brows rose as Finn took a seat and went through the setup. He looked good, but something about the sight of him seemed tired... like me.

ould
gle day.

uple of

"Talk to me about how things ended with Abi," Tyler said, his voice echoing from the screen. I side-eyed the producer sitting behind the camera in front of me.

I loved,
o yoga

It felt rather meta to be watching part of the show while someone else was making me for the same show.

“Maybe we could back up a bit?” Finn asked, his voice surprised to ease tentative. Usually, he’d dictate the direction and breeze over suggestions. My brows furrowed at the change. “I haven’t exactly been self with with my feelings for Abi on the show.”

patience “You’re right. We’ve seen glimpses, but”

Finn took a deep breath and rolled his shoulders, then he looked into the camera. For a second, it almost felt like he saw me.

ned the “I took on this project expecting to walk away unaffected after finitely months. I’ve realised recently that my past relationship history set me expect the worst from women,” he said, his voice gravelly. “Every sin Before of them wanted one of two things from me, and in my experience, they care how they got it. So I just wouldn’t take the risk.”

He sighed and the sound rushed through me. I couldn’t believe nickered or ears. Finn had spent months working to keep even a grain of his t air I sat from the show, and he blew it all on an exit interview?

led and “That all changed with Abi. Despite my best efforts, she snuck l my defences and then bulldozed them to the ground.”

I drank I soaked in every word like a dehydrated woman.

reamed “With her, I got a glimpse into what a relationship should be, two equally caring for and loving each other.”

s voice *He did?*

mera in “She made me laugh, she made me burn in all the right ways swallowed hard, hesitation flickering in his gaze for all of a second be filmed stared at me once more, determination blazing in his eyes. “She m *feel*, for the first time in seven years. I can’t tell you when it happened fell in love with her.”

risingly I sucked in a breath.

Tyler's Finn shook his head, chuckling. "The irony in that, right?" He s
an openwincing ever so slightly. "As much as it hurts right now, I wouldn't
moment of it back."

He wouldn't?

directly "I'm not proud things fell apart for us, but I guess it was inevitabl
were incredible together... until we weren't. Abi started pulling away
or threefelt like my fears were coming to life. It all mirrored my ex's action
e up tobefore she leaked a sex tape I had no knowledge of making."

gle one "Oh no," I whispered. Why did he say that? He'd worked so hard
y didn'thimself separate from the show.

"For a week, I stewed, believing that Abi would betray me in a
ny eyesfashion. I didn't want to be trapped in a house with her, waiting
rue selfevidence to drop. So I escaped, accepted the first job I could, and got
out of LA. For a couple of days, I could pretend my life wasn't a
beneathimplode." His eyes narrowed on someone beyond the camera, p
Tyler. "And then you dropped Abi in my lap in Canada, which by th
was a shitty move, even for you."

people "Yes, it was," I agreed in a low murmur.

Tyler handed me a box of tissues with an apologetic smile. I accep
offering, but forgiveness would take a while. Without him, Finn and
..." Hehave coasted to the end of the show. Avoiding each other would hav
efore heeasy. No explosive argument, no gut-wrenching pain.

ade me "It took losing her for me to realise how much of an idiot I'd been
d, but Isaid. His jaw shifted and his eyes burned into me, a promise in their c
couldn't understand. "I expected everyone to want me for my mon

fame. I was terrified of it, in fact, and refused to let anyone put me
position of making the same mistakes again. When you introduced me
obeyed, a woman in debt, agreeing to disrupt her life for months for money
take a could I think anything else?"

A lump formed in my throat at the watery glimmer in his eyes. I
that. I'd known about his ex, he trusted me with that, and I'd used it
ple. We him.
y and it
is right I pressed a tissue to my eyes, willing myself to pull it together. He
be better off without me.

"But you weren't using me, were you, dotey?" Finn asked, startling
to keep

His voice hadn't come from the screen. I lowered the tissue, glancing
similar around the room with pinched brows.

Finn stood a couple of feet away from me, devouring me with
for the the hell interest than I deserved. His curly black hair was perfect, and his beard
about to finely trimmed, but he didn't look perfect. No, the tiredness I'd been
robably to place in the recording clung to him.

"It's time to admit the truth, Abi. Time to tell me how you really
re way, Finn took a step, then another and another, until he stopped at my side.
knelt with a smile. "But first I need to apologise to you."

"No, you don't." I shook my head hard, reaching for him before
sted the I could common sense could scream at me. My fingers smoothed along his temple
I could jaw and he captured my hand, holding it there as his eyes fell shut.
ve been didn't do anything wrong."

Finn's eyes popped open, spearing me with an intensity that made
l," Finn I want to squirm in my seat.

"I believed you'd willingly hurt me, even though you'd never give
ey and

in thereason to expect it.” Finn’s brows furrowed. “I’d say that was wrong. I
to Abi,fears control me, blind me, when if I’d taken a moment to remember w
y, howwere, I’d have seen right through it all.” He grimaced, his hand di
from mine and his focus skipping away from my face in shame. “I sai
’d donepretty nasty things I wish I could take back too.”

against “But it doesn’t change anything,” I whispered. I gripped his chin,
his gaze back to mine. “I pushed *you* away. I made you feel all of th
e wouldnot your fault, but it doesn’t change my choices.”

Finn studied me, assessing and then he bit his lip, holding back a
g me. “So does that mean you forgive me?”

lancing “I don’t need to forgive you.” I frowned.

“But if you did, you would?”

h more “Yes.”

ard was “Good.” He grinned as his hands landed on my arms. He shuff
unablearound to face the camera again. “Tell them you don’t want a divorce.”

“I can’t, Finn.” I shook him off and stood.

y feel.” Ian huffed but scrambled out of his seat and rushed to unclip the
ide andfrom the tripod.

“Yes, you can.” Finn climbed to his feet, determination shining
ore myeyes. “You love me, I know you do.”

bearded “Of course, I do,” I shouted. “But it can’t...” I dragged a hand t
t. “You my hair, tugging at the auburn strands. “It’s not that simple.”

ade me “If being in LA full-time is too much for you, we’ll live here.”

I stopped dead, sure I’d misheard him. Heart pounding, I slowly tu
face him. “You don’t mean that.”
en me a

[let my “I do.”

who you “No, you don’t.” I stomped back towards him, suddenly angry. “You’re robbing me, you’d never leave LA because you had to be there when you’d need some working. You can’t just decide you’re moving to New York on a whim and expect me to...”

forcing To what? Cave? My god, I wanted to cave so badly. Elation and relief. It’s through me, robbing me of breath and sense.

a smile. “I told you I hated LA too, dotey.” Finn’s voice softened.

His hands smoothed over my shoulders, gripping tight enough to draw my attention. I glanced up, meeting his gaze and forgetting how to breathe for a second. He smiled at me and I swallowed hard at the conviction in the line of his expression.

“You mean it?” I asked shakily.

led me He glanced around the room with a smirk, then nodded. “Yes, I mean it.”

“You won’t change your mind?”

Finn leaned forward until his face hovered inches from mine, grinning at me.

“You didn’t think the production could afford to rent this apartment for you in his one interview, did you?” He chuckled as my eyes widened and a glimmer of an idea took root.

through “You... you bought it?”

“Do you like it?” he asked instead.

I bit my lip and concern trickled into his gaze.

turned to “I’ll sell it if you don’t, and we can go flat-shopping together.”

I glanced around again. How had he realised...

“I don’t understand,” I finally admitted.

You said Finn kneaded my shoulders, smiling despite my hesitation. “You weren’t came to see me.”

him and “You don’t mean she...” My eyes widened when he nodded. “E sister. Took away off from work and went to LA?” Disbelief dripped worked the words.

She wouldn’t take a day off to visit me, but meddling was perfectly

“I was shocked too, but she had some convincing arguments.” He demand me towards him, his expression turning serious. “Like the fact you tathe for you’d be abandoning her if you stayed with me.” His brows rose, dan every to lie and disagree.

“Yes, that might be true.” I winced as he speared me with a sardon

“Definitely true. I started to try, but...”

an it.” “I told you I couldn’t leave LA, and you gave up.”

“Yes,” I groaned. “I’m sorry.”

ming at “Our relationship is still fresh, Abi. You didn’t — neither of us kne I truly felt about the city.” He pulled me into his chest, wrapping l ment for around me.

mer of I’m ashamed to say my first instinctive reaction was to breathe Between his spicy scent filling my lungs and the delicious heat of h wrapped around mine, the ache started to ease, and I relaxed for the fi in weeks.

Weeks of pain that I’d brought on myself and inflicted on Finn. I deserve his comfort or forgiveness.

“No, it’s not this simple.” I pressed my hands to his chest and j

Finn refused to loosen his grip, so I leaned back and stared into his sister's expression.

"It is this simple."

My head from that hurt us both." Tears rolled down my cheeks again. "How can you do that?"

He released me to brush them away. "Because I need you more than I thought I did. I want to live without you, dotey," he whispered, his tone softened but he peered at me. "I love you. Don't make me live my life without you, Abi girl."

"You would move to New York for me?"

"I still need to be in LA sometimes." He pulled me back into his arms. "My next project is mainly in LA, so we'd have to spend some of time there, but the rest, yes we can spend here if you want. We can go to Paris, wherever you want." A devious glint entered his eyes and I'd never will to resist him. "You just have to talk to me, Abi. I want you to be how He grazed his knuckles across my cheek. "I can't make that happen his arm don't tell me what you want."

"And if I never want to leave New York again, or I want my sister to travel with us?" My voice shook as I asked the question.

"Then your sister would travel with us." He lowered his face to mine, the sadness filtering back into his gaze. "I missed you. Please make me experience that again."

"Okay," I whispered before sliding my hands up his arms and pushing his hair. "Under one condition."

"Name it," he said without pause.

is grim “I get to keep working. I’d like to keep learning and keep p
fashion.”

A smug smirk curled Finn’s lips. “Your final stipulation is that I
though jobs on my projects?”

forgive “Not necessarily. I just—”

“I just told you I don’t want to be separated from you. If I got yo
e than I on someone else’s film, how would that benefit me?” Amusement si
t sad as Finn’s eyes, and I could only stare at him as the realisation hit. “Done
please, Now fucking kiss me.”

His fingers drove into my hair, tugging me forward but also stopp
from dodging him again. His lips pressed against mine, coaxing but i
s chest, as he took control. I didn’t need the gentleness.

he year I bit his lip, silently begging him to speed things up, and he pulle
Milan, grinning like a maniac. He started into my eyes, desire darken
lost all expression as the fun and amusement drained away.

happy.” “Your time’s up,” he said, confusing me. Then I realised his foc
t if you shifted to Tyler and his crew.

I shriek-laughed as he scoped me off my fit and into his arms,
ister to style.

“See yourselves out,” he called over his shoulder.

owards Finn carried me down the hallway and through an open bedroom
e don’t the end. This room at least had a bed. He lay me down on it and
back, his gaze devouring me.

into his “Stop teasing me, Finn.”

“Why? I’d say a little punishment is in order, wouldn’t you?”

ursuing I groaned, but collapsed onto my back, wholeheartedly agreeir
him.

get you He could do anything he wanted to me, as long as he never let m
him again.

u a job
hone in
, dotey.

ing me
nsistent

d back,
ing his

cus had

bridal-

door at
stepped

I groaned, but collapsed onto my back, wholeheartedly agreeing with him.

He could do anything he wanted to me, as long as he never let me leave him again.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

FINN

Three weeks later, I'd say we'd finally settled into our New York apartment. Some things were still a work in progress, like my work schedules, but the important things were in place. I had Abi with me more times.

Between my parents and my friends flying in, I had a matter of hours before I lost my coveted alone time with Abi. And the woman had to go she needed to go to the corner shop instead of spending it with me.

Abi wandered towards me with bags of groceries hanging from her hands. The sight of them gave me pause.

"I thought you were going down for a bottle of wine, not to buy groceries at the shop." I rushed towards her, freeing her of every single one of them. "I should have asked Chris to go if you needed all this."

With things starting to get back on track with my career, Charlie had suggested that I hire an assistant. I missed a couple of auditions and forgot to read the script or two while I focused on Abi. So I conceded defeat.

"I'm not used to having an assistant, Finn." She stole a bag back

brushing past me, into the kitchen area. “Besides, he’s your assistant
mine.”

“It’s the same thing.”

I placed the bags on the island in front of her and started unpacking. I
didn’t understand why she needed to go to the shop when we had
turning up in less than an hour.

“It’s definitely not the same.”

I hummed, refusing to agree but tired of arguing over it. She’d get
the lifestyle change eventually.

“I just thought your mother might like the chocolates we talked
and your sister was desperate to try a cronut.”

I stopped with a pack of marshmallows dangling between my fingers
eyed my wife. “You didn’t just go to the corner shop, did you?”

She snorted. “Of course not. I would have been back hours ago.”

Ordinarily, I’d use this as an opportunity to remind her why she needed
bodyguard. *Married Blind* had officially aired and half the country now
her and her connection to me on sight. But with our home being invaded
the people who mattered most to us in a matter of hours, I took the hit
and decided *not* to add more stress.

Once we’d packed the groceries away, she turned her attention to
of the apartment. She narrowed her eyes on a set of chairs she’d
repositioned five times.

“Leave the furniture alone.”

“But maybe they’ll look better over there.” She pointed to a
framed by windows.

ant, not “You tried them there yesterday.”

“I know but—”

I tugged her into my arms and slanted my lips over hers, ending my argument. She moaned, clutching my chest for a second before she pushed me away.

“Don’t get me all hot and bothered when we don’t have time to make out,” I pouted and I couldn’t help but grin.

used to “I’m pretty sure I could blow your mind in under an hour, dotey.”

“Doesn’t mean I want to rush.”

I about, My brows rose. A month in and she turned down sex. *Unbelievable.*

ers and “You dragged me into the bathroom at your sister’s for a quickie last week.” Incredulity screeched through my voice. “Why is this any different?”

“Because Eva didn’t care if my hair went into a bun.” Abi crossed her arms and glared at me.

w knew “And I do?”

ided by “No, but your mother will.”

gh road I couldn’t help it, I laughed.

the rest “That’s not helping, Finn.”

already “Sorry, it’s just hilarious.” I bit my lip, struggling to stem my amusement. “My parents can’t keep their hands off each other, dotey. Never have been able to. I guarantee you, they’ll disappear into the spare room at the end of the night in a matter of minutes of making nice.”

corner

Her mouth dropped open in shock. “You’re joking?”

“Nope.” I grinned as her face turned a lovely shade of scarlet. “we’re not going to fuck, how bad’s the heat out there?” I nodded
ing the window. “Will I die if I go for a run?”

pushed I had no intention of setting foot outside the air-conditioned apa
People could say what they liked about LA, but at least there was a
e.” She No, I wanted an argument. It had fast become my favourite way to
get my way and get Abi off.

She’s stressing out over something inconsequential? Start an arg
we fuck, Abi has an orgasm, bye-bye stress.

I eyed the tension in her shoulders. If she didn’t ditch it before the
ucking- turned up, she’d get in their way and make her life more difficu
necessary.

kie last “It was fine.”
rent?”

I frowned. “My fine, or your screwed-up fine?”
sed her

“My fine is not screwed up!”

“So it’s not forty degrees outside masquerading as twenty-nine
won’t collapse the second I leave the building?”

Abi’s brows furrowed. “Jesus, Finn, speak American. It’s only
three.”

“But is it actually?” I barely contained my smirk. “I’m Irish, lo
sement. don’t do humidity, remember?”

ve been A growl of frustration fell from her lips before she launched he
fter ten me. I silently congratulated myself on a job well done and then focu
getting us to our bedroom before Abi decided she wanted it on the
counter. Something I’d ordinarily get behind but with caterers comi

Well if had to draw the line somewhere.

I rushed into the room, lay her down on the bed and started to
around to remove my clothes. Abi laughed at me, a glorious sou
rtment, echoed around the room.

“Stop laughing and get your clothes off, woman.” Naked, I reac
equally her arms, tugging her up before I gripped her dress and tore it over her

“I can’t help it.” She hiccuped, her eyes streaming with t
gment, amusement. “You just look so serious while - while... Oh!”

I dragged my fingers through her folds and she swallowed her la
e caters Her head fell back on a moan as I circled her clit.

“Now do I have your attention?” I grinned as I lowered myself
knees.

“Yes,” she moaned.

Satisfied, I ducked my head and focused on teasing an orgasm from
might have promised a quickie, but I had no intention of rushing. He
, and I muscles twitched at the scrap of my beard against her sensitive skin
hips jolted forward at the first lap of my tongue.

I catalogued it all, enjoying her loud moans and cries for me
driving her higher and higher only to pull back, time and time again.

“Please, Finn,” Abi eventually begged. Her fingers drove into m
tugging hard enough to lift my head. “I want to come.”

“Since you asked so sweetly.” I smirked as I lowered my head agai
ised on My lips latched onto her clit. Sucking. Nibbling. Caressing. H
kitchenshifted restlessly until her cries for more soon turned to release.

She smiled at me when I climbed onto the bed, a look of pure

moved her into the centre of the bed and sat back on my hunches, stopping myself. There was something addictive about seeing her boneless and and that after an orgasm. I'd never get enough of it.

Abi reached for me and I gave in happily, lowering myself on top of her. I dragged the tip of my cock through the folds of her soaking wet head, torturing us both with the smallest flickers of pleasure.

"Finn," she gasped as her hips jolted forward, trying and failing to get me deeper. Her fingers clutched at my forearms with desperation. "We don't have—"

We both groaned as I sank deep into her tight heat. For a second, I was clambering for control and patience as her body squeezed and pulsed me.

I'll never get enough of her.

Her nails dragged across my back, urging me on. I slammed into her again and again, eliciting a chorus of moans from us both, driving us to the edge fast.

Just as the tingling started in my back, I slowed and rolled us until I was on top of me, gasping and groaning at the sudden position change.

My fingers dug into her hips, encouraging her to rock against me. She jolt and she whimpered, collapsing against my chest.

"That's not helping." I chuckled, the sound muffled by her hair on my face.

I continued to rock up into her, dragging an endless stream of noise from her hips.

"Do I need to reconsider putting you on top?" I asked, half joking.

stroking “Yes,” she groaned against my neck, the vibration sending a shiver
flushed my spine. “Please.”

I grinned, accepting her admission as permission to take control. I
of her. I liked it. Flipping us back over, I tucked an arm under her knee and lifted
pussy, leg. My cock slid deeper inside of her. The walls of her pussy flexed
around me, pushing me closer and closer towards the end. I ground
to draw her clit with every thrust, determined to make her boneless and incoherent.
“Please.” I picked up the momentum once again.

This time when I felt the edge coming, I didn’t slow down. “I
I froze, you’re close, dotey.”

around “Fuck, yes,” she panted.

Her fingers dug into my biceps, clinging to me as she shattered
cock. I buried my face in her neck and shuddered through my own release
into her. Satisfaction and gratitude coursed through me as my heart pounded
s to the our bodies settled down from the high. Abi’s fingers grazed up and down
back, caressing my heated skin and making me wish we had all day
Abi sat night.

I lifted my head, smiling down at her, absorbing every detail—her
ie. One face, her pleasure-drunk glazed blue eyes and her auburn hair sprawled
my pillow.

in my Her lips curled as I caressed her jaw. “What?” she asked.

I shook my head, lost for words for a moment as gratitude overwhelmed
es from me.

“I love you, dotey,” I said after clearing my throat.

Her smile grew. “I love you too, Finneas.”

r down For a second, I gawked at her, not believing my ears. “That happening.”

ust as I “Why? You call me dotey. I need a nickname for you too.” She puffed her cheeks.

luttered “And you can have one. Just not *that*.” I shuddered, amusement against her.

erent as The movement caused my hips to press harder against her. Her breasts fluttered as she groaned and her pussy squeezed me once more.

Tell me “Fuck,” I groaned. “Do we have to get out of bed?”

Abi chuckled.

“Why am I not surprised?” Nathan’s voice cut through the silence.

on my Abi startled beneath me, squeaking slightly at the surprise. Her breasts
ase. tightened around my half-hard cock and I barely suppressed a groan.
led and grabbed the sheet and dragged it over us before pulling out of Abi. I
own my to the side, making sure she stayed covered by the sheet, while I glare
and all friend.

“I knew I shouldn’t have given you lot the code.”

flushed “Nah, you’re not. You’d be grouching at us for interrupting
ed over otherwise.” He chuckled. “You two might be worse than Shaun and M

“Hey!” A high-pitched Scottish voice shouted from down the hallway.
resent the implication.”

helmed Nathan’s brows rose and he shook his head. He had a point, but
have to make it standing in our bedroom doorway?

“It’s not an implication if it’s the truth,” he shouted back at Mon.
he grinned. “Plus, aren’t you lucky we turned up early and could I

is not caterers in?”

Abi stiffened against me. “Who’s out there?”

outed at “Oh, just Shaun, Mona, Jackson...”

She blew out a relieved sigh and sagged against me. “That’s okay t

t in my “And Finn’s family of course.”

eyelids “What?” She sat upright, clutching the sheet to her chest. I grab before she could jump off the bed, leaving me naked in her panic. “ joking, right?”

Nathan smirked and sauntered away without responding.

“He’s joking, isn’t he?” She turned to me, her eyes wide with panic

“Probably not.”

r pussy “Finn! I told you we shouldn’t have.” She slapped my chest
roan. I scrambled out of bed, her eyes wild. “I can’t believe I let you talk m
shifted quickie. What will your parents think?” she hissed.

d at my I chuckled and didn’t move an inch. “I guarantee they won’t care.”

g you,
ona.”

hall. “I

. did he

a. Then
et your

caterers in?”

Abi stiffened against me. “Who’s out there?”

“Oh, just Shaun, Mona, Jackson...”

She blew out a relieved sigh and sagged against me. “That’s okay then.”

“And Finn’s family of course.”

“What?” She sat upright, clutching the sheet to her chest. I grabbed her before she could jump off the bed, leaving me naked in her panic. “You’re joking, right?”

Nathan smirked and sauntered away without responding.

“He’s joking, isn’t he?” She turned to me, her eyes wide with panic.

“Probably not.”

“Finn! I told you we shouldn’t have.” She slapped my chest, then scrambled out of bed, her eyes wild. “I can’t believe I let you talk me into a quickie. What will your parents think?” she hissed.

I chuckled and didn’t move an inch. “I guarantee they won’t care.”

EPILOGUE

NATHAN

Four Months Later

The things I do for my friends. No one else could have come to wear a baby blue tuxedo and walk down a flower-strewn aisle with a woman on my arm who wasn't Catrina.

Technically, I shouldn't have been going *anywhere* with Catrina, but my dick wanted what it wanted.

"Smile," Isla whispered, barely moving her lips as she side-eyed me. "Better." She pinched my arm and I just about held back a glare.

"What was that for?" I hissed.

"For potentially ruining my sister's wedding photos." She smiled at an older woman off to our right, tears streaming down her face. "I don't care how you screw up your love life. Keep it away from my baby's special day."

The side door opened, and in stepped Catrina, almost like she'd been summoned. Her golden-brown hair curled into perfect waves tricking me into believing her soft-hearted image. If not for her pinched li

narrowed eyes, she'd pull it off.

Of course, those eyes narrowed on me.

What have I done now?

"Stop," Isla growled. She pinched me again and nodded towards the approaching alter and my perplexed best friend. "You're an actor. Act.

Cowed, I blocked out the burn of Catrina's gaze against my neck and focused on Shaun. The lucky wanker looked normal in his black suit and tie compared to the rest of us. The only patch of blue on him came from his tie.

Isla left me with a parting warning look before stepping up onto the altar to Shaun's left. The moment I stepped into line beside him, he turned towards me, a flicker of concern in his gaze.

convinced

with a

"I'm fine."

but the

His brows rose. "That's why your lawyer's crashed my wedding. Because you're fine?" He nodded to where Catrina leaned against a wall with her arms crossed as she watched me.

ed me.

"I don't know what she wants." The lie slipped off my tongue with

sweetly

Well, partial lie. I had no idea why she'd followed me to Edinburgh. A simple email would have sufficed.

'I don't

sister's

Finn and Abi reached the end of the aisle, clinging to the other until the very last minute.

'd been

A couple of months ago, I would have sneered at the sight. I would have had immense fun ribbing Finn for his sappy moments.

people

ps and

Now, things had changed. My gaze tracked to Cat again.

At least, for me they had. The damn woman had far too strict a sense

propriety for my liking.

All the more rewarding when I finally fuck it out of her.

“I don’t want drama at my wedding, Logan,” Shaun said, a warning in his voice. “This is a drama-free space. Do not stress Mona out today.”

“What are we talking about?” Finn asked, joining us with a cock and painted plain across his face.

“Nothing,” I grumbled.

I eyed Finn. Somehow he pulled off the baby blue suit. How? I had my tongue on the whine of frustration dying to get loose. *Hollywood royalty does not whine.*

“Nathan’s brought his drama to my wedding.”

“Oh, did he, now?” Finn grinned, his brows climbing as utter skittered across his face. “Are we taking bets on how long it takes for wedding? fall into bed?”

“Don’t waste your breath.” I turned to face the crowded hall.

Ornate, antique chandeliers hovered above their heads. The Assembly Rooms barely needed decorating with their decorative walls and arches. The place looked like a fairytale come to life.

Shaun had to pull some serious strings to get the venue for New Year’s Eve but he’d managed it. Despite the chaos of the annual Hogmanay party outside, they made the entire space over into their very own Wonderland, with ice sculptors, faux furs and every white, blue and red looking flower on the planet.

They’d even dressed us to look like Jack Frost. Every single one of our protests fell on deaf ears and honestly, we’d do anything for Shaun,

owed Mona for rescuing him.

Once Jackson and Mona's friend Tilly had made it to their position, the orchestra switched pace and the room collectively held their breaths. "I turned to the door, ready to watch the bride make her way down the aisle."

Curiosity Mine didn't make it. I got caught up in the shimmer of moisture in the air.

For a second, I thought my mind deceived me, but no, the Ice Maiden melted. For a moment at least.

A fanciful dream crashed into me, stealing my breath. One where I watch Cat walk towards me in a flowing white dress and a soft expression of utter joy on her face.

Fuck.

I never thought I'd be the commitment guy, but for her, maybe I can be brave enough to feel what Finn and Shaun did towards Abi and Mona: endless love.

The thought of it both terrified and excited me.

There was just one problem. We were still client and attorney and my beautiful, fierce and rule-follower Cat — had resisted my every serious attempt thus far.

Time to up my game.

Loved Abi and Finn? Annoyed at me for not letting him tie her up? I'm sorry! It wouldn't fit in the book, but it makes for an awesome bonus scene.

Sign up for my newsletter and read it now.

If you enjoyed *Married Blind*, please consider leaving a review on your preferred platform.

Next in the Kings of Screen series is Acting Counsel (turn the page for
ons, the blurb). If you love strong women working their way through complicated
All eyes situations, falling in love at inappropriate times with their off-limits ac
le. client, then this one is for you.

Cat's. books2read.com/ActingCounsel

den had

I got to
sion of

ould be
a. Pure,

Cat —
duction

n
cene.

ir

Next in the Kings of Screen series is Acting Counsel (turn the page for the blurb). If you love strong women working their way through complicated situations, falling in love at inappropriate times with their off-limits actor client, then this one is for you.

books2read.com/ActingCounsel

ACTING COUNSEL

Catrina

He's the most impossible, difficult, hottest client I've ever had. And closing this deal could make my career. And his, for that matter. So I will remind — and myself — that the line between attorney and client is one I won't cross.

And then he kisses me.

Nathan

She's the most beautiful, buttoned-up woman I've ever met. I just want to see her a little less put together.

So I kissed her. It wasn't supposed to mean anything — just a way to get under her skin. But it made me think about obliterating that line she's carved in the sand between us.

And the tabloids got hold of it.

Now we're stuck doing damage control from our shared hotel room in Scotland during New Year's Eve.

She's determined to keep things professional. And me? I'm determined to show her just how good things could be. If she just lets it.

Acting Counsel is forced proximity Hollywood romance with forbidden set in the Kings of Screen world. It can be read as a standalone.

Ready to meet Nathan Logan? Set a date with him for June 6th, 2019
preorder now —> books2read.com/ActingCounsel

osing
ind him
l't

ed to

et
lrawn

to

Acting Counsel is forced proximity Hollywood romance with forbidden vibes set in the Kings of Screen world. It can be read as a standalone.

Ready to meet Nathan Logan? Set a date with him for June 6th, 2023 and preorder now —> books2read.com/ActingCounsel

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Just as *Between Takes* was very much a book of my heart, *Married* wiggled its way into my head and refused to let go. Let's be honest, McCarthy hijacked me and refused ransom. The man was determined his story told and what a story it was.

Without certain people, you wouldn't have met Finn and Abi and to thank them.

To my amazing editor, Dayna, a massive thank you for.. everything. We had a hell of a time getting to the finish line on this. Thank you for filling me with confidence, fiercely cutting words, asking hard questions and powering through a terrifying twelve hours of tech failures. You're the best.

Big thanks to Janey for your endless support, daily encouragement and hilarious comments whenever I left you hanging in a spicy scene. I'm sorry, but you're the best critique partner a girl could ever ask for. Thank you.

Also thank you to my brilliant cover designer, Kirsty, for surprising me every single time you hit my inbox. The way you inadvertently craft scenes for this series is incredible. You're incredible.

To my ARC team and reviewers, your support and love of my books are always be incredible to me. Thank you.

To the readers, thank you for reading this book and joining me on the journey of Finn's story.

d Blind
st, Finn
to have

I I need

. well,
his one.
ing the
nology

ent and
still not
Thank

ing me
perfect

oks will

for Abi

ALSO BY MORGANA BEVAN

True Platinum Series (Rock Star Romance)

(Rhiannon)

[Chasing Alys](#) – Ryan (Resistant to Love)

[Charming Daphne](#) – Matt (Force Proximity)

[Winning Nia](#) – James (*Second Chance*)

[Enticing Mel](#) – Dan (Secret Baby)

Needing Emily – Emily (Accidental Marriage/Runaway Bride)

[Defying Ella](#) - Jared (Close Proximity / Snowed-In)

(The Brightside)

[Braving Lily](#) - Lily (Feb 2023) (Opposites Attract)

[Daring Ceri](#) - Alex (August 2023) (Second Chance)

Kings of Screen Series (Hollywood Romance)

[Between Takes](#) (Enemies to Lovers)

[Married Blind](#) (Marriage of Convenience)

[Acting Counsel](#) (2023) (Close Proximity, Forbidden)

Sign up for Morgana Bevan's mailing list:

<https://morganabevan.com/mailling-list/>

ALSO BY MORGANA BEVAN

True Platinum Series (Rock Star Romance)

(Rhiannon)

[Chasing Alys](#) – Ryan (Resistant to Love)

[Charming Daphne](#) – Matt (Force Proximity)

[Winning Nia](#) – James (*Second Chance*)

[Enticing Mel](#) – Dan (Secret Baby)

Needing Emily – Emily (Accidental Marriage/Runaway Bride)

[Defying Ella](#) - Jared (Close Proximity / Snowed-In)

(The Brightside)

[Braving Lily](#) - Lily (Feb 2023) (Opposites Attract)

[Daring Ceri](#) - Alex (August 2023) (Second Chance)

Kings of Screen Series (Hollywood Romance)

[Between Takes](#) (Enemies to Lovers)

[Married Blind](#) (Marriage of Convenience)

[Acting Counsel](#) (2023) (Close Proximity, Forbidden)

Sign up for Morgana Bevan's mailing list:

<https://morganabevan.com/ mailing-list/>

ABOUT MORGANA

Morgana Bevan is a sucker for a rock star romance, particularly if it involves a soul-destroying breakup or strangers waking up in Vegas. She is a contemporary romance author based in Wales. When Morgana's not writing steamy rock star and movie star romances, she's working in TV production in the UK.

She enjoys travelling, attending gigs, and trying out the extreme activities she forces on her characters.

Find Morgana online at morganabevan.com.

ABOUT MORGANA

Morgana Bevan is a sucker for a rock star romance, particularly if it involves a soul-destroying breakup or strangers waking up in Vegas. She's a contemporary romance author based in Wales. When Morgana's not writing steamy rock star and movie star romances, she's working in TV production in the UK.

She enjoys travelling, attending gigs, and trying out the extreme activities she forces on her characters.

Find Morgana online at morganabevan.com.