

NEW YEAR'S EVE

*with*



THE  
CHICAGO

*Boys*

KAREN DEEN

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# Dedication

*To Grayson & Matilda,*

*Mason & Paige,*

*Tate & Bella,*

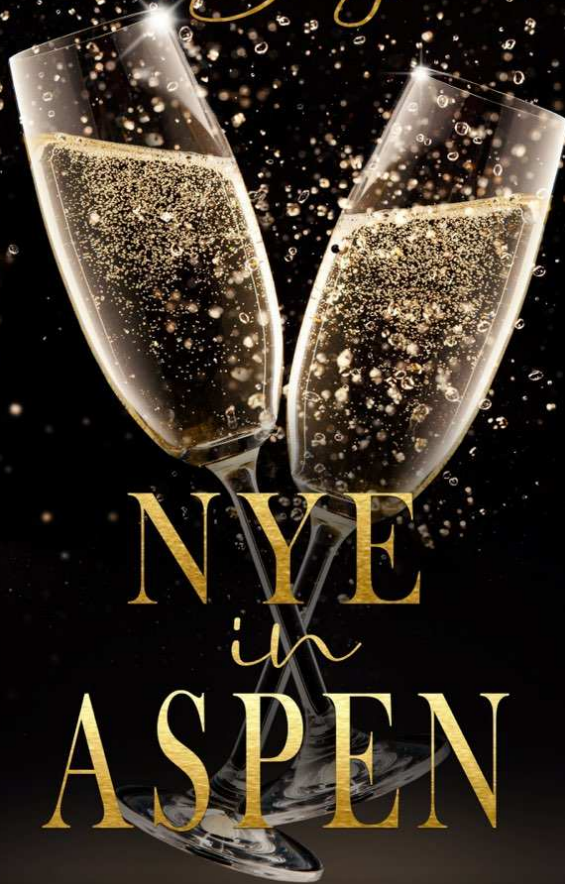
*and*

*Lex & Mia.*

*You are my family, and showed up when I needed you the  
most.*

THE CHICAGO

*Boys*



NYE  
*in*  
ASPEN

KAREN DEEN

THE CHICAGO  
*Boys*

NYE  
*in*  
ASPEN

KAREN DEEN

# Chapter One

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## GRAYSON

“Paige has a lot to answer for!” Shoulder charging Mason out of the way, I lay up my shot to the basket and dunk that sucker.

Our weekly basketball game is not only to take out the stress of work but to vent about our wives and their SS ladies club. They call themselves the Strong and Sassy Ladies, but we have our own definition, being the Stubborn but Sexy Ladies. Of course, we keep that between the four of us. No need to wave a red flag in front of them, asking for trouble to rain down on us.

“Watch what you say about my wife, man. I’m not afraid to drop you on your ass right here, right now.” Mason is half serious and half joking, puffing out his chest and sizing me up. He knows that I would never say anything bad, but he’s just putting me on notice anyway. Nothing wrong with protecting your family, but he doesn’t need to do it with me.

“Settle down. It’s just that Tilly is driving me batshit crazy with this New Year’s Eve getaway planning. Seriously, buddy, Paige has created a monster in my wife!” Tate, Lex, and Mason all laugh at me.

“Oh, you can laugh all you like. It’s your turn next, suckers!” I point my fingers at Tate and Lex. They have no idea what they’re in for.

“Maybe I’ll just hire an event planner. Got any recommendations, Gray?” Tate the smartass looks at me as he bounces the basketball.



“Fuck you, Tate, my wife is the best event planner in Chicago, but she is not available to work for any of you on New Year’s Eve... ever!” My yelling at Tate is enough distraction for Lex to steal the ball off him and take a sneaky shot, missing, but I’m close enough to try for the rebound. Once again, I’m facing Mason who is bigger than me, but I won’t back down. Taking my opportunity, I fake to my left and then lean to the right, shooting around his body as he swerves the wrong way.

The ball rolls around the hoop before finally dropping into the net at the same time the alarm on my watch goes off.

“Oh yeah!” Dancing in front of Mason, I lean to high-five Lex. “Looks like we are the kings this week.” I’m smiling as I hear the groan from both Mason and Tate.

“Such a gracious winner,” Tate says, rolling his eyes at me, while lifting his tank top up to wipe the sweat off his forehead. He’s already walking to the side of the court.

The alarm is telling us all that it’s time to head back to work, our playtime is over. It’s gotten to that point in the year where we had to move the game to an indoor court because of the weather. With only a few weeks until Christmas, the snow is already heavy on the ground some days. But we never let that keep us from our weekly game if we can fit it into our schedules. It’s getting harder now with our own families and trying to juggle our work commitments, but we still give this game a high priority, and luckily, so do our wives. Paige even tries not to book any meetings out of town that Mason has to fly her to on basketball day, especially if it’s the only day everyone else can make it. Not enough recognition is given to men’s mental health and the need to talk to your buddies without anyone else around. There’s no judgment at whatever

we need to get off our chest. Or if it's just a day we don't want to talk, even a good fast game to get the heart rate up is what will settle our minds.

“Like you can talk, Tate, you're the master of being a sore loser and an equally painful winner. Either way, you have something to say.” Lex laughs to himself as he takes a drink of water.

As I sit on one of the chairs, Mason plonks himself down beside me. “Anyway, like I was saying,” I say, “I'll be glad when this year is finished and I can have my wife back to her normal crazy self.”

“Can you at least tell us where we're going?” Tate, the impatient man he is, hates not knowing what is going on.

“I could tell you, but then I would have to kill you.” I try to look serious until we all start laughing—except Tate, of course.

“Come on, Gray, I won't tell Tilly you told me.” He's almost begging.

“Yeah, right, but you will tell Bella, who would tell Paige, who would struggle to keep it from Mia. It would be like broadcasting it in the group chat.” I squirt a little water at the child of the group.

“Jerk.” Tate wipes his legs where the water got him. “Mason knows our destination, why can't I?”

“He's the fucking pilot, he kind of needs to know where we're going. Idiot.” Lex is already throwing his water bottle in his bag and swinging it over his shoulder, while Mason makes the motion of zipping his lips.

“Just suck it up and enjoy the surprise. Next year you will be the one knowing all the details. Anyway, I've gotta run,

guys. I've got patients all afternoon, and I don't want to start late. Tilly is working tonight, and I'm in charge of the kids and dinner." Who am I kidding, there will be takeout for dinner, and if I'm lucky, the nanny will have worn them out today.

Grace, our oldest daughter, will be there helping me all night. She is so mothering to her little sisters, Brooke and our little surprise package Clara. I always thought I wanted a son but realized that being surrounded by all these girls in my life, I couldn't be any more blessed than this.

Every time Matilda was pregnant, we went through the stress of her panic of losing the baby, so after Brooke, we were content with two princesses in our life, and I was getting ready to book in for the snip. But my little Clara had other ideas, and although we were surprised, we can't imagine our lives without her. The taunting I got from the family about the gyno who got the unplanned pregnancy went on and on until she was born, and then Clara wrapped every one of her fruncles around her perfect tiny pinkie finger, and not a word has been mentioned about it since.

Having a five-, three-, and two-year-old in one house is a handful, but Tilly takes it all in stride, and I've learned really quickly when to just shut up and do whatever she asks me to do. Happy wife, happy life.

The afternoon was a busy one that resulted in an emergency C-section when the mother presented to her appointment in my office not feeling well. As soon as I started examining her, I found the baby was in distress, and we needed to move quickly. She was only thirty-four weeks pregnant, and thank goodness her husband was with her. Both mom and bub are doing well, with bub in the NICU, but just to help him with his breathing for a few weeks. I'm sure all will

be okay for them. But in the story of our lives, that means I'm late getting home, and Tilly already had to leave for work. Luckily, Dad was just a few streets away visiting Bella and the kids, so he stepped in until I could get home. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and we are lucky to have a big village around us.

"Hey, Dad," I call over the top of the three giggling girls who are all on his back and having horse rides across the living room.

"He's not Dad, he's Poppa horsey. You're Daddy," Grace calls out to me as she holds both her sisters tight in front of her on Dad's back, making sure they don't fall. Brooke and Clara hear my voice and try to scramble off. Dad, realizing, is already lowering to the floor. I'll never get tired of the reaction from my girls when I come home from work.

"Daddy!"

"Dadda!" Brooke and Clara are screaming at once, while mother Grace is worrying over them.

"Careful." Grace reminds me so much of my mother who she is named after. Always so caring and making sure everyone is being looked after. I worry that she will miss her childhood, but Tilly tells me not to worry, some kids are just like that, and it makes her happy. Her sisters are probably going to hate it when they are teenagers and she is constantly hovering over them and trying to be their mother, but better than a sister who doesn't care.

I can't wait for three hormonal high school girls; that should make life interesting. To be honest, the guys and I hovered over Bella her whole teenage years, and she always complained it was like having four big brothers. We were

protecting her, but in her eyes, we were smothering her life. Still, looking back, I would do the same thing all over again.

Dropping my bag at the door and crouching, I spread my arms wide open for the three little dark-haired girls launching themselves at me. No matter how tired I am, this is always the energy boost I need.

“How are my little princesses?” I kiss them all on the top of the head, squeezing them tight.

All three of them start talking at once about their day, and surprisingly, I can follow all the stories.

The next hour is chaos as bath time happens, followed by bedtime stories. Finally, Grace’s eyes are the last ones closing as she falls into her deep sleep. Putting the books away on the bookshelf next to her bed, I walk softly out to the living room. My body just wants to collapse on the couch, but I haven’t eaten dinner, and I still want to catch up with Dad.

“I’ve ordered some Indian for both of us.” Dad passes me a beer, and I try not to laugh. Maybe Grace doesn’t get her fussing from just my mom but also my dad, making sure I eat before crashing into a coma.

“Thanks, Dad, that’s perfect. I’m dead on my feet tonight. What would we do without you.” Clinking our beers together, I flop down on the couch across from him.

He laughs out loud. “Just no more kids, Gray. I’m not sure this old man’s back can take adding a fourth child for the horse rides.” His smile tells me how much he loves his time with his grandkids.

“How are you doing, Dad? Any news to share?” His smirk tells me he’s guessed Bella has already spilled the beans on what she saw earlier today, which was Dad kissing a woman

goodbye as he placed her in a cab outside of a café near Bella's apartment.

“That damn daughter of mine can't keep her mouth shut. Just like her mother, loves to share the gossip,” he grumbles, shaking his head with a scowl that I know is pretend.

“What, you weren't going to tell me?”

“No, the opposite. I wanted to tell you myself. But I should have known unless I called you on the spot, there was never a chance of that.” His chuckle always warms me on the inside. It took a few years for that laugh to come back after Mom passed away, but once it was back, it was a comfort for Bella and me. Now there are grandkids running around everywhere, and he is so hands-on with them that his laughter fills our houses with so much love.

“Well, lay it all out there, big fella. Who is she and why have you kept it all a secret for so long?” I take another gulp of beer that is going down nicely while we wait for the dinner to be delivered.

“I didn't keep her a secret on purpose, but I must admit, it has been nice getting to know her without the Bella inquisition, and we both know what that's like. If I show the slightest interest in anyone, first she is the crazy, superprotective daughter trying to scare them away, and then if they survive that, she gets attached, and if it doesn't work out, her heart is broken more than mine is.” Looking at Dad, I know that this time something is different with him.

“But...” I wait him out as he gets his thoughts together, and then the corner of his mouth lifts on either side into a relaxed smile.

“I like her, Son, really like her... in a similar way that I felt about your mother, but different.” He pauses for a moment, waiting to see my reaction.

“Dad, we all want you to be happy, including Mom. She would want you to find love again. It’s been wayyy too long.”

“Thanks, Son.” The stress lines in his forehead relax again.

“Keep going.”

“Her name is Annie, she is a retired nurse, lost her husband to a heart attack five years ago, has two sons, both in the military and neither married. She lives here in the city, and I have been seeing her now for about four months.” He looks sheepish, as he should after revealing those last words.

“Four fucking months! How the hell did you keep it from Bella for that long? That deserves a gold medal, Dad.” I laugh at how I can imagine Bella took the news that she had missed out knowing for so long.

“I don’t like keeping secrets from either of you, but I just needed to find my own way with Annie. Anyway, now that you both know, I would like to bring her to Christmas lunch so you can meet her. Neither of her boys will make it home for the holidays, so she will be on her own.” He still looks like he needs some sort of approval, but we’re interrupted when the door buzzer goes off when the food arrives.

Standing and heading to get the dinner, I keep talking as I’m walking away. “I hope we meet her before that, but Christmas is in your home, Dad. You don’t need my permission to have Annie there.”

I think I have underestimated how hard it has been for my father to date over the years. He obviously feels very deeply about the approval from Bella and me, and at the same time,

not disrespecting the memory of my mom. Why am I only just seeing it now? Maybe it's because for the first time, I think this is different.

I sort out the food and grab two more beers, and Dad meets me at the kitchen counter with cutlery in his hand, looking as hungry as I am.

Pulling it all out of the bag, we both sit and start devouring the steaming-hot butter chicken and naan bread. I only get to eat Indian food with Dad, as it's not Tilly's favorite; not that she would stop me, but it's sort of Dad's and my thing now. The awesome thing about being so comfortable with your other half is that you can still have your own special times with family and friends. In any relationship you need space, and truth be told, I'm sure Matilda needs plenty of space from me at times.

Now that the hunger in my stomach has settled with a bit of food in it, I want to push Dad for more about Annie, but I know I need to let him tell me in his own time. I hadn't realized how hungry I actually was, now looking at my empty plate. I push it away a little and reach up to stretch my tired shoulders. Dad is also taking his last mouthful.

"Rough day today, Son?" He knows after having both children become doctors, plus a son-in-law, that there are good and bad days, with some being extra gut-wrenching, but luckily, today wasn't one of those.

"Just a normal day that got turned on its head by a little baby boy who decided he didn't want to wait any longer. Nothing out of the ordinary, but yes, it's been a long week of impatient babies it seems. Keeps me on my toes, that's for sure." I remember how I used to cope with all this, going out partying with the boys when I was younger, without blinking



an eyelid. But now with a family and getting older every day, it does take it out of me that little bit more.

“Kids are like that. They make their own way in the world, in their own time frames, whether we like it or not.”

Dad and I both sit in silence for a little longer, until he starts talking again, and I’m happy to sit back and listen to everything he is ready to tell me about Annie.

I’ve seen this look in him before a long time ago, and I’m not sure he has realized he is back there yet.

My dad has fallen in love again, and all I can think about is how happy Mom would be for him. And that is a warm, comforting thought.

## MATILDA

Unlike my husband, I know how to come home and be as quiet as a mouse so I don't wake the girls—or him, for that matter.

I open the fridge to put in the four cupcakes that my chef sent home with me for the family. He tried to make it five, but I said four was enough. He thought I was mean for not taking one for Gray, but laughed when I said I don't need one. I snack way more than I should on the amazing foods he makes for our functions. Plus, I'm not stupid; if it's Gray sitting with the girls while they have a little tea party, then he gets to clean up the mess. There is method to my madness.

I smell him before I feel his arms wrap around me from behind. Freshly showered, the scent of his soap wafts through the still, dark room. With no words spoken, just the firmness of his hold on me, I feel all the work stress of the night falling from my shoulders to the floor. He nuzzles into my shoulder, and his hands wander up my torso, one landing on my chest just under my breasts and the other taking the side of my face, turning it toward him. He lifts his head, his voice barely louder than a whisper.

“Good evening, Mrs. Garrett.” His lips land softly on mine in a slow, sensual, panty-melting kiss. He has my complete attention.

“Mmm, good evening indeed, Dr. Garrett.” I smile at the wicked glint I can see in his eyes. He has plans for us, I can tell.

“It would be an even better night if you lost some of those clothes. You are so overdressed for the occasion,” he says, still

whispering, but now it's turned into his low growly sex voice. Here I was trying to enter the house and not wake anyone, but instead, he has been lying in wait for me like a panther stalking its prey. "Let me help put you to sleep after your long day."

He turns me slowly in his arms until we're facing each other.

"Are you prescribing me the sex drug, Dr. Garrett? Because I have taken that drug before, and it doesn't lead to much sleep; in fact, quite the opposite." I give him a wicked smile that tells him I'm all for his games tonight.

"Ahhh, I've heard that before from the one woman I have prescribed it to. But as I have reminded her every time, the amount of sleep may be less, however the quality of a post-orgasmic coma is worth ten times a normal sleep." His words are smooth, falling around me as he starts undoing my white blouse buttons, pulling the hem from my skirt and slowly pushing it off my shoulders. While it flutters to the floor, his hands are already on the back of my skirt, sliding the zipper down while he's kissing and nipping at my neck. My head falls backwards, mouth dropping open, but I'm careful not to let the moan that is on the tip of my tongue leave my lips.

Instead, the name of the man I love more than I ever thought was possible floats as a whisper in the silence.

"Gray..."

"I've got you, baby, time to relax." His voice leaves goosebumps all over my body as my skirt hits the floor.

Already, the clasp of my bra is released, and he drags the straps down my arms. Quickly, his hands are on my ass cheeks, and he lifts me up, my legs wrapping around his naked

torso. He's standing there in just his pajama pants that leave nothing to the imagination. In my mind, they're more lethal than gray sweatpants.

Impatient to get me to bed, he swings us around quickly, but the spike of my heel catches the back of the kitchen stool, sending it crashing to the ground. The bang as it hits the floor sounds so much louder in the quiet house.

"Fuck," he growls, and all I can do is giggle, making my boobs bounce against his chest, which just inflames the sensations I'm already feeling.

"Put me down..."

His voice cuts me off. "Not a chance!" He leans forward with me hanging off him like a monkey, reaching for the chair, when we hear the worst sound ever.

"Daddy." Grace is heading down the hallway in the dark looking for Gray, obviously waking from the loud crashing noise.

"Shit, Gray." I don't want my daughter to see me like this.

"Behind the counter." He stands up straight again with his feet moving quickly, dropping me down onto the floor, so I can stay out of sight from Grace.

Curling into a tight ball with my back against the cupboards, I hear her feet getting closer and again calling for Daddy, but this time a little louder and more unsure because she isn't able to find him.

"I'm right here, princess, it's okay." His voice moves away from me toward her.

"Daddy." Her voice is full of relief as she sees him in the dim light of the small lamp that we always leave on for the

kids. It doesn't give much light but enough that they can see and not be afraid.

Her footsteps get quicker as I'm guessing she's running to him.

"There was a big noise, and I was scared." Her little voice is still unsure, but I know she will be in her dad's arms, and he will make it all okay.

"Sorry, Grace, Dad was getting a drink from the fridge, and he knocked over the stool like the silly man he is." His voice is still getting a little farther away, which I'm very thankful for.

"What is that white thing on the floor?" Her words have me slapping my hand over my mouth to stop the laughter escaping.

"Oh, that is just a bit of cloth I had that wasn't needed, and it fell to the ground." That would make no sense to Grace, but Gray hates lying to his kids, so he tries his best to say something that is almost the truth.

"Okay," she replies, and I know by now they are down in the hallway heading back to her bedroom.

I'm not sure if I should move or not, but it seems like the right time to collect my clothes and do the nudie run down the opposite hallway to our room. When we bought this new apartment after Grace was born, my insatiable husband insisted that we have a bedroom away from the kids' rooms because he doesn't want to have to stop making me scream. All I could do was laugh at him, but on the inside, I totally agreed with his request.

We would have loved to live in a nice house with a white picket fence out of the city, but it's not possible with his job.

He needs to be close to the hospital, and I'm okay with that. Our apartment is huge, and there are plenty of places we can take the kids to play in parks with Memphis, our dog, who is slowing down now as he gets older. He is happy to run around with them and then take a seat with me while I watch them. I'm not sure what I'll do when we finally lose him. Memphis has been with Gray now for fourteen years, and we're on borrowed time. He is partly deaf and sleeps in the laundry at night now because he has accidents, but we love him as part of our family, and none of that matters. Which is why even though Grace woke at the chair crashing, Memphis will be snoring through all the noise.

Quickly taking off my shoes and collecting my things off the floor, I run on my tiptoes all the way to our bathroom and strip my underwear off. Jumping into the shower, I hope to be finished by the time Gray returns from settling Grace. Nothing better than a shower before you fall into bed after a long day of work. Even though my husband has every intention of making me dirty again, I'll be more than happy to sleep in that kind of sweat.

My hand is on the shower tap, about to turn it off, when his voice from behind startles me.

“Don't!”

Looking over my shoulder, I see him pushing his pants to the floor, and hello, Dr. Garrett is very pleased to see me.

“Fuck, don't look at me like that. It just makes me want to fuck you harder than I was already planning on.” As he steps in behind me, I become like putty in his hands.

“That's what I was aiming for...”

“Spread those legs now!”

“Yes, sir.” The day slips away from my memory, and my husband reminds me how much he loves my body.

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I’m sitting on the couch with Gray, watching his dad, Milton, and Annie playing with the girls. It has been a beautiful few days after a Christmas full of family time. Annie is adorable and fits in perfectly with all of us, and Milton obviously adores her.

For the first time in a few years, both Grayson and I have been on holidays at this time of year, and we are loving just being home with family, doing absolutely nothing.

Fleur and I both decided that we wouldn’t take any bookings this year after the twenty-third of December, giving everyone a two-week break over Christmas. Our business is doing so well now that it won’t hurt us, and we are booked out at least a year in advance for most events anyway. It took years to build Fleurtilly to this level of success, and I’m so damn proud of the business we have created.

“He is absolutely besotted with her,” I whisper in Gray’s ear, and he just nods his head to answer me.

I’m so happy for Milton and for both Bella and Gray that they get to see that their dad so happy. He was doing fine on his own, but seeing him with Annie, it’s like he has found a new lease on life.

My phone vibrates on the table with a text message. Gray reaches for it, and as he is passing it to me, the way he rolls his eyes, I know it must be the family group chat, and he pulls his phone out of his pocket too. We leave for our New Year’s Eve trip early tomorrow morning, and surprisingly, I’m not

stressed. Everything is in place, even the last-minute changes I needed to make. Grayson threatened that if I didn't stop with the panic that he would cancel the whole trip, and this time, I actually think he was serious. My overprotective man is always looking out for me.

I can't help laughing as I read the message.

Tate: You said to pack for cold weather, Tilly, but that gives me nothing! It's freaking December, it's freezing everywhere.

Mason: Seriously, you're like the kids on Christmas Eve. It's a surprise!

Tate: Says the asshole who knows where we're going.

Paige: Just pack a wardrobe for all occasions, that's what I do.

Mason: We know, Tiger, that's why we had to get a bigger plane just for your bags.

Paige: And???

Lex: Like you're complaining about your new plane.

Mason: What can I say, they always say bigger is better...

Tate: Ummm, can we get back to my problem here?

Bella: You are so needy, seriously. Aren't you supposed to be in the operating theater?

Tate: Already done, Tink, you know the master surgeon I am!

Bella: Oh, please Lord, give me strength. I don't give a shit how great you think you are. If you're done, get your ass home and deal with these kids.



Gray: The ego burn!

Looking across at my husband, I see the grin on his face as he joins the conversation to rib his brother-in-law. You would swear these two are actually brothers by blood the way they interact with each other. For men in their forties, I'm not sure they will ever grow up.

Tate: Fuck off, Gray.

Lex: Can't wait until tomorrow when I'm stuck with all of you... not!

Mia: Oh, please, don't talk crap. You're already packed, have the kids sorted, and have been pacing the house all day counting down the hours.

Lex: That has nothing to do with the rest of them, I just want time alone with you!!

Tilly: And the six of us. lol

Lex: We better have separate rooms, Matilda, otherwise...

Gray: Otherwise, what? You're calling dibs on spooning with Tate...? No problem, he's all yours, buddy.

Tate: Fuck off, all of you... except Tilly. Now, what am I packing?

Tilly: Clothes. That's it. I'm out, see you on the plane at eight am. Don't be late, Tate.

Tate: Okay, you can fuck off too, Tilly. I'm turning up naked, and you can all bask in the glory of my amazing body.

Mason: Not fucking happening. No naked men on my plane!

Paige: Ummm, Mason...

Lex: Do not answer that, I don't want to be thinking about how the seat I'm sitting on may have had your sweaty balls and hairy naked ass on it.

Mia: That's it, end of discussion. See you all tomorrow.

Bella: What she said. PS I can't wait. Chill that bubbly and bring on our New Year's Eve together.

Gray and I are both laughing as we put our phones down, and Milton looks at us both with a grin.

“Let me guess, village idiots group chat.” He reaches to tickle Brooke again, while Clara is in Annie's lap sleeping. They have formed a great connection since the day we first met her.

“Got it in one, Dad, got it in one.” Gray smiles at me, and we both know we wouldn't have it any other way.

## Chapter Two

## MATILDA

Although I was cool, calm, and collected yesterday, this morning is a totally different story.

I wish Fleur could have come with us, because she would have shared the load of my panic, making sure this trip is perfect. But instead, she chose to jet off with her man to some sunshine and peace and quiet. Right this moment, that sounds like a far better solution.

Last-minute calls have been made, emails sent, and all confirmations received that everything is set, but being an event organizer, I know that all best-laid plans can be derailed in a second. I have plan B, C, D, and even E mapped out just in case. There wasn't much sleep had last night, until about two am when Gray told me if I didn't switch off my brain and sleep, then he would take things into his own hands and make me sleep. He will use any excuse for sex, that man.

Paige puts her arm around me and squeezes me to try to give me some reassurance. "Stop stressing, Matilda. Remember last year? If anything doesn't go to plan, we just pivot and do something else. If all else fails, I'm sure we can find another Scrabble board."

Gray is behind me, already seated on the plane, and he groans at hearing the words *Scrabble board* again.

Mason is outside doing his preflight checks, after winning the argument with his wife—she wanted him to be a passenger, with someone else flying his plane. She got away with it once last year, but I doubt it will ever happen again. It's so sweet how protective he is of her—and all of us, for that

matter. I understand it, we are all control freaks in our own way, some just more than others, and Mason probably has more reason than most of us. With everyone who means the world to him on this plane, he wants to be the person who is responsible for keeping us all safe.

“The life of the party has arrived.” Tate’s voice booms into the cabin, and Paige and I just start laughing, watching Bella in front of him, rolling her eyes at his declaration. She heads toward us with her arms out, embracing us in a group hug.

“Save me, please,” Bella declares as we all start giggling.

“You love me.” Tate leans in to kiss both Paige and me on the cheek.

“Keep telling yourself that,” Bella mumbles as she finds her seat, and Lex and Mia enter the cabin too.

“Awesome, everyone is here. So, where are we going?” Tate is looking at me, waiting for me to spill the beans.

“Maybe I won’t tell you until we land. You seem to be the only one acting like you’re going to bust if you don’t find out the surprise.”

“Matilda Garrett, I thought we were friends. You wouldn’t do that to me, would you?” I watch him accept a drink from the flight attendant. This year we have a different cabin crew, as the regular ones are on leave.

Not answering him, I take the glass of champagne that is handed to me too. We’re all standing in the center of the cabin as Mason enters, with his glass of water being handed to him. That’s the one downside for him being our pilot, that he can’t drink alcohol until we land.

“Let the fun begin.” Gray gives me a wink as he raises his glass with everyone. Oh, my precious GG, you have no idea

the fun we are about to have.

Clinking our glasses with each other, Mason takes control.

“Alright, let’s get wheels up and this beauty into the air. Buckle up, people.” Kissing Paige and whispering something in her ear that has her blushing, he disappears into the cockpit, and I realize what a blessing it is that we’re able to do this. Spending New Year’s Eve all together without kids is a luxury that won’t last forever, so we should enjoy every minute of this we can. Tomorrow is a gift, and nothing is ever guaranteed in life, so today is ours to live to the fullest, which I intend to make sure happens on this trip.

The same as last year, the boys congregate into seats together, and us girls strap ourselves into our seats where we can all share the dramas of trying to get out of the house without the kids. What a challenge it is as a parent of young kids, to leave them with others even for a night. I’m sure I packed more clothes for the three girls for their stay with my parents than I did for Gray and me. Although, it is getting a little easier the older they get. At least we are finally out of the diaper stage.

“Good morning, this is your captain, Mason White, and I want to welcome you to our Ellen Corporation jet. The flight time for today is three hours and five minutes, and the weather is looking clear all the way to our destination, a cold minus five degrees on the ground in the stunning Aspen, Colorado.” His voice cuts out for a moment as I’m sure he can hear all the cheering in the cabin. Of course, Tate’s the loudest now that he knows the surprise.

“Wow, Tilly, this is so exciting. I’ve never been to Aspen.” Mia looks like she is about to jump out of her seat. From the

time she arrived in Chicago, her world has opened up so much, but there are still things that are new to her.

“Me neither.” Which is why I picked it when planning this little trip. I want to experience it with Gray first, and then maybe one day we can bring the girls back here and teach them to ski.

“Now that Tate has calmed down, we are about to start taxiing, so please make sure you are safely secured, and I’ll let you know when you can start moving about the cabin. Crew, please secure the cabin for takeoff.” No matter that it is all his family on the plane, there is still the professional part of Mason’s job.

We have about thirty minutes left on the flight, and although my nerves have settled somewhat over the last few hours, I can feel things starting to tingle in my stomach again. It’s a mixture of nervousness and excitement. I’m used to the stress of a job, but this is different. Lord help Bella next year, because we all know it will be her organizing, with Tate just being the ideas man and leaving the rest to her.

As the wheels of the jet come to a halt on the tarmac, everyone gives Mason a round of applause for a smooth flight. I often wonder what Paige and Mason’s life must be like, flying everywhere all the time. It just seems so far from a normal life, but the longer I’ve known them, it’s starting to become more normal to all of us too.

We stay seated for a while longer, giving Mason time to do all the things he needs to do to be ready to secure the plane after we all depart.

“Okay, get out of my plane. I’m ready for a drink, and I can’t do that until you get your asses off my jet.” Mason

comes into the cabin, holding his hand out to Paige to help her up from her seat.

“Yeah, you have a bit of catching up to do.” Lex is already up and collecting Mia’s bag as he takes her hand in his.

“Let’s do this,” Tate declares as they all start moving toward the cabin door.

“There will be two SUVs at the bottom of the stairs to take us to our hotel, so take your pick.” I know that one will have a trailer to fit the luggage that won’t fit in the trunk. It’s mainly Paige’s, but who am I to complain. Good luck to her.

Everyone is out of the cabin except Mason, Gray, and me. Mason gives me a wink as I pass by him.

“All good?” I ask without really asking anything.

“Everything just as planned.” His reply makes me breathe a little easier.

“Great, thank you, Captain.” I smile at him and step out of the cabin.

“Ugh, he’s just Mason, nothing special,” Gray grumbles behind me.

“Uh-huh, because you can fly a plane.” I laugh at the little streak of jealousy that just reared its head from my husband, even over his best friend.

“I’d like to see him deliver a baby,” are the quick words out of his mouth, and I can hear Mason laughing hard, following us down the stairs from the jet.

“You can keep that job for yourself, buddy.” Mason slaps Gray on the shoulder as we walk toward the cars where everyone is getting settled and the poor drivers are maneuvering all of Paige’s luggage into the trailer.



Heading into town in the car with Mason, Paige, and Gray, I'm just taking in all the scenery. Although it snows where we live, this is different. The snow-covered mountains and the contrast of the bright white to the parts of evergreen trees that are still peeking through the thick cover of ice. It's truly stunning.

"You know you could have stayed in our chalet here, it's big enough to fit everyone. Mason, you should have lined that up." Paige taps him on the shoulder, as he's sitting in the front seat, having the longest legs.

"What makes you think we aren't staying there?" Mason turns and looks at her, trying to keep a straight face.

"Of course you own a chalet here, Paige. Where don't you own property?" Gray loves to include Paige in the teasing that happens between all of us.

"Mason and Gray, stop it," I scold them. "Mason, you don't know where we're staying either. I only asked you to fly us to Aspen, and that was all you got out of me," I say, keeping my cards close to my chest. "Gray doesn't know either, so you can all just wait another five minutes until we're there."

As the cars pull up in front of The Little Nell, it has Paige smiling. She would know what a luxurious place this is. As soon as I saw it while doing my research, I just couldn't resist it. It's right on the snowfields, and the events they have here for New Year's Eve are just perfect for us, including a champagne party. Plus, the added benefit of great shopping in Aspen was a big tick for me.

Walking into the foyer, I stop and give my last set of instructions for a while.

“Okay, here is the plan. We flew out early this morning so we could spend some time relaxing before we start celebrating tonight. Boys, you have four hours to have some lunch together and get in a bit of skiing. The rental shop already knows you’re coming and have gear ready. But I swear to God, if any of you come back with injuries, then this will be the last New Year’s Eve that we even leave our homes!” My stern voice makes them all listen but smirk at me anyway.

Lex groans next to me. “Now you’ve done it, put the hoodoo on us. If it happens now, it’s your fault, Tilly.”

“What are you girls doing?” Mason’s fingers are circling on his temple like he’s using his mystery magical powers to predict. “Shopping and some pampering... How’s my super brain going with its guess?”

Paige smacks him on the arm before any of us can reply.

“Any dumbass could guess that, Mas,” Tate says. “Now let’s get going, I’m keen to get on the slopes.” Tate picks up his and Bella’s bags, ready to go.

“Agreed. Let’s check in. Girls, I’ll meet you back here in ten minutes after we get our keys.” I’m excited about what the day is going to bring.

“I need an hour,” Gray whispers in my ear but not quietly enough that Tate misses it.

“Pfft, yeah, right. You have five minutes, and that should be plenty.” That makes everyone laugh. Life is never dull when these boys are together, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.

“Not everyone is like you, Tate, some of us have more stamina. You should really see a doctor about that.” Gray picks

up our bags and walks toward the front desk, with the laughter getting louder.

Bella looks around at the other hotel guests in the foyer. “Yes, people, The Chicago Boys have arrived, we apologize in advance for the noise that will follow.”

With that, we all head to the desk and get on with checking in.

The Little Nell is just as beautiful as all the pictures I saw. The foyer is so luxurious but still rustic and perfect for an alpine hotel. Lots of wood accents as you enter a softly lit foyer that is all creams and golds that blend with the wood so well. It’s warm and welcoming.

I gasp as we enter our room and I see the windows looking out over the snowfields. It’s a vision that I dreamt of as a little girl. Like a winter wonderland where the snowflakes dance and paint the slopes to look just perfect.

“You did good, little one.” Gray wraps his arms around me from behind as I’m mesmerized by the view in front of me. His head resting on my shoulder, he gently whispers in my ear, “Such a beautiful view, but it has nothing on the view I have.” Turning me, he looks into my eyes. “No matter what life brings us, you will always be the most beautiful vision I’ve ever seen.”

He leans down and kisses me so tenderly. His lips are soft and gentle, until they aren’t, and the heat starts deep down in both of us. His hands pull me tighter against him as he takes complete control of my body. I can feel the change in him from the sweet Gray that started the kiss to the possessive man who wants to show me just how much he loves me. A feeling that I’m matching with every movement of my lips on his. We have gone from zero to a hundred in a split second, and as

much as I want more, I know I need to put the brakes on this moment.

I pull away, as hard as he makes it to do, not giving me much room to separate from his body.

“Nope, I’m not finished.” I can see the fire in his dark eyes that are zeroed in on me.

“Gray, we have to meet the others. And I’m not starting what we don’t have time to finish,” I say, trying to tame the beast that is about to unleash on me.

“Fuck.” He groans as he drops his head into my neck with a big sigh. “You know how cruel you are, right? Looking all sexy standing here in this room, and I can’t do anything to you. Cruel, woman, so cruel!”

My laughter breaks the moment when he reminds me of a boy sulking that he can’t have ice cream, but instead, it’s my husband sulking that he can’t have sex. I wonder if there will ever come a time when his sex drive slows down. The only word in my head to answer that is *never*.

I push him away properly this time and step back from his body that wants to take mine and never let it go. His frustrated scowl tells the story of how he’s feeling.

“Poor Gray didn’t get his way.” I walk to the bathroom to freshen up before heading out with the girls.

“Don’t even try sarcasm with me, Matilda. Do you know how painful it will be to ski with a rock-hard cock in my ski pants? I stand by my statement. You are a cruel woman.” He drops onto the bed and continues to mumble to himself.

“Well, at least you’ll have an extra ski pole if you fall, to stop you from face planting in the snow,” I yell from the bathroom and try not to laugh at my own joke.

“It’s so fucking hard that if I fall it will snap clean off, and then you’ll be stuck for the rest of your life without this magnificent specimen of a cock.” Gray continues to try anything to get me to give in and walk out there, practically begging for it. But he forgets I know how many activities I have crammed into today.

“From my pre-GG life, I remember vibrators can be pretty satisfying.”

I can’t help smiling at myself in the mirror after that comment, knowing what will be in store for me tonight when we finally make it back to this bed.

“You’d better not have just compared sex with me to a vibrator, that is just a piece of pathetic silicon with batteries. Just remember I have more stamina than any set of AA batteries will ever have. And the more you rev me up, the more you will see that tonight.”

There’s a smirk on my face, knowing he must be aching the more we talk about sex, because I’m feeling exactly the same.

Walking back out of the bathroom, I find him still lying on the bed.

“Comfortable?” Not that I would expect anything less from a five-star hotel like this one.

“Not as comfortable as it would be if you were here under me, and I was testing out the bounce in this mattress.”

“Really, Gray. Well, I guess we’ll have to put that to the test later tonight then, when, if you’re lucky, you will get to play with this,” I say, running my hands down my body, then I put my bag over my shoulder and head toward the door, making sure I sway my ass just a little more than usual.

“Damn woman, you’ll pay for this. Mark my words. I’m going to fuck you right through this bed tonight, I’m that frustrated now.”

Hearing him drag himself off the bed and his footsteps behind me, I whisper to myself, “That’s what I’m counting on,” as the slap on my ass stings just the way I like it.

Oh yeah, tonight is going to be hot!

## GRAYSON

“Who else hates my wife right now?” We’re standing waiting for the gondola to the top of the ski runs.

“Ten fucking minutes with our wives, like what the fuck was that, Gray!” Mason is the first to complain.

“Next year I’m in charge, and maybe I’ll just plan a night away where none of us leave our beds, and we’ll just send Happy New Year’s text messages at midnight. Who votes for that?” Tate is looking around at all of us, waiting for someone to agree.

Lex just shakes his head at Tate. “You truly are a dickhead, aren’t you. What even goes on in that apparently brilliant brain of yours. As if the girls will let you get away with that. The only one in bed at midnight will be you and your hand having a party for one.”

“Pfft, you’re all soft.” Tate glances out the window at the snow, ignoring us all laughing at him.

In my head, all I can think of is how I *wish* I was soft right now. Skiing like this will be a bitch!

On our third run down, I started to relax. I had forgotten how fun skiing with the guys is. We used to go on trips with our school, from the age of sixteen to eighteen. Man, the fun that was had flirting and talking it up with all the hot girls who were on the snowfields. The funny thing was, none of us ever managed to score with the girls, but it was fun trying. We talked a big game, but the truth was, we were a group of boys who were hormone-fueled but had no idea how to treat a woman at that age. That came later.

Then we managed to get one trip in during college when Mason was home on leave, and that was a disaster for Tate.

“Hey, remember that trip to Boyne Mountain Resort we took in college?” We all instantly turn and look at Tate as we take our seats in the gondola for another trip to the top of the mountain.

“Nope, we aren’t talking about that trip. It’s off the table. Next topic. Nice weather outside.” Tate points out the window, and Mason shoves him in the arm.

“Oh no, it is definitely worth talking about.” I can’t help but irritate him further. “That is one of the gold-star memories of our youth.”

“It may have been gold-star for you three assholes, but for me, it is just a painful time in my childhood memories.” Tate is still grumbling.

“It’s not a childhood memory; you were twenty-one. I’m pretty sure that makes you an adult by then,” Lex, ever the practical one, pipes in.

“On paper maybe, but that doesn’t mean he was acting like an adult at that age,” Mason beats me to the same comment.

“So, do I get the pleasure of recounting that day?” Now that we’re all thinking about it, we can’t let this opportunity slip.

“No!” Tate complains as the others reply.

“Hell yeah.” Mason cheers.

“Is that even a question?” Lex is laughing already.

“If I remember rightly...” I pause as Tate jumps in.



“Which you won’t. Half this story will be a fabricated, enlarged load of shit, but please, continue.” Folding his arms across his chest, he tries to look like he’s cranky, but we all know deep down he will be laughing by the end.

“Nope, every part of this is true. You were waiting for us to come down the medium-level slope and one of the beginner slopes was next to it. As per usual, you spotted a woman who was struggling on her skis, and being the horny gentleman you were, decided you could help her out in more ways than one. Chatting her up, you found out she was there on a girls’ trip, and you heard the golden words, that she was single. The fact that you were punching way above your weight was irrelevant to you.”

“Or that she was at least forty years old,” Lex makes sure to add.

“But fuck, she was hot though, you have to give him that.” Mason bumps shoulders with Tate who is sitting up straighter now and taking the compliment of catching the interest of the cougar.

“True, and good point,” I say, “although it didn’t help him in the long run. Maybe he should have kept to admiring her from a distance.” I can still picture it clear as day. “But no, not Tate. Offering to take her for a run down the beginner slope and teach her to ski was such a brilliant idea. I mean, he is such an expert.” Everyone roars out laughing, except Tate, of course.

“I was better at it than her,” is his quick response to our making fun of him.

“Debatable, when you started slowly down the slope with her, skiing backwards, trying to look like a smooth dude, until you got tangled in her skis just as you hit the top of the small

decline. It was like a cartwheel of arms and skis as you both started tumbling and ended up in a heap at the bottom of the run. Which wouldn't have been too bad, except for..." Everyone's trying to hold themselves together, before Tate beats me to the punchline.

"Yes, okay, you fuckers, until she started screaming and the snow patrol medic team came rushing over and declared she had a broken leg. Not my finest moment, and after paying all her medical bills and sending copious amounts of flowers, I'm just glad she never knew that I was a med student, because that would have made it even worse. So can you all move the fuck on now? And if any one of you even thinks about bringing this story up with the girls tonight, there will be consequences." All jokes aside, Tate was devastated he had helped to cause an injury to the woman who never blamed him and said it was just an accident.

"Oooh, what consequences, a free ski lesson from the master?" Mason gets out in between his laughter. "I had actually forgotten about that story until today. Man, we've done some stupid shit over the years, haven't we. We should just be thankful to be here, married to women we love that put up with our shit."

To that, we all agree unanimously.

"So, we all agree, no stories tonight!" Tate wants our word, to which through the comic relief, we all agree. Some things are better left between friends who were there. No point making him feel worse than he already did when it happened. We can laugh now that it's over and the woman is perfectly fine. But at the time, it was pretty awful for them both.

"I think one more run down the mountain, then who's up for drinks in the bar while we wait for the girls?" Mason

suggests. “There was no rule we had to ski for the whole four hours. I’m sure they’re off enjoying a drink or two while they shop.” As I think it over, he has worked all morning, he more than deserves it.

“Sounds great. Tate’s up to buy the first round, you know, to buy our silence.”

“Always me! How do I end up with first round every time?” Tate grumbles as the gondola approaches the station.

“Just lucky, I guess... or you’re the one always doing stupid things,” Lex declares as he steps off with his skis in hand, and we all follow, more eager than we should be to get down that mountain and into the bar. After all, this is the biggest night of the year to party hard. We’re just getting a head start.

“Yeah, what he said.” Chuckling, I click my boots into the skis and slide away from Tate and start off down the slope.

Nothing is better than spending time with these three men.

It’s good for the soul!

## MATILDA

“Okay, tonight, the party we’re going to has a theme of metallic, leather, and sequins. So, take that how you like, but I just want to give you one other piece of information—you will need a warm coat. We have an outside function to attend beforehand.” I can see the minds on all of them moving, trying to figure out what’s happening. “And yes, you could google it and work out where we’re going, but please, don’t. Just stay in the moment with me.”

It’s part of what is wrong with the world these days. Everyone wants instant gratification. We don’t just want an episode of a new show, we want the whole series to binge watch, or as soon as we get a hint of something that interests us, we have already researched it in so much detail that there is no hint of a surprise left. Some days I just want to leave my phone at home and be in the moment with my family or friends. So, when someone says, what’s the name of a certain song that Coldplay sings? We all sit around guessing and laughing at the random things people say, instead of the winner being the person who can type the quickest into Google, because where’s the fun in that?

“Of course, I love the element of surprise. This is becoming so much fun each year. It’s been a great day so far, Tilly, thank you.” Mia sees the world through such grateful eyes for any amount of happiness she gets to feel. Maybe we should all take a page out of her book.

“I’m not like my husband, I love someone making the decisions for me. Besides, this glass of champagne is really hitting the spot. I’ll agree with anything you like.” Bella lifts

her glass into the air, and it reminds me I have to watch that she doesn't drink too much. It's a long day, and we need to pace ourselves.

"I'm with them, my life is making decisions every minute of every day. I can't wait to see what the night brings." Paige is the last one to raise her glass, and we all clink together to seal the beauty of spending a weekend being in the moment.

"I love you girls. Here's to the best group of women that I'm lucky to be a part of." I'm getting emotional, thinking of everything we've been through together and knowing it has formed a bond we will never break.

"Love you," all the girls cheer, and we take another sip of bubbly and go about looking for an outfit for tonight.

"PS, the leather comment does not mean we are going to one of *those* clubs, so maybe keep it clean," I call across the shop as Paige starts laughing and lifts up a leather underwear set.

"Or not. I only care about what I can see from the outside." I shrug at her, and we all start giggling again.

This could be interesting to see what the girls come up with.

## Chapter Three

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## MATILDA

“This has been just what I needed. Time away from the kids and to relax with some pampering.” Bella is lying with her eyes closed, head back in the basin at the hairdresser’s next to Mia, while they’re both enjoying the head massage. I mean, who doesn’t love a head massage? It’s like they’re using their magical fingers to take away all your stress for just a few moments. And for all of us girls who lead such busy lives, even five minutes of peace is like gold.

Paige and I are just about finished with our hair being done, and then we’ll swap to the makeup artists while the others are getting their blow dry. I wanted to make sure we all look and feel beautiful for what I have in store this afternoon. I want it to be the perfect night.

“The guys must be having a good ski. Not one message from any of them. At least that means there haven’t been any injuries.” I want to slap my hand over Bella’s mouth for even saying those words out loud.

“Don’t you dare jinx us, Bella, otherwise you’re dealing with them. Today is going to be perfect, or else!” I point my finger at her like a mother scolding her child.

“No, I would bet money they’re already in the bar.” Paige starts laughing to herself. “They aren’t as young as they used to be and haven’t skied for quite a few years. There will be muscles screaming at them by now that they haven’t used in a very long time.” She smiles at us as the penny drops.

“Why didn’t we think of that? Of course, they would never admit that out loud, but let’s see when we get back to the

resort where we find them,” Bella agrees. Meanwhile, my brain is racing, thinking they better not be getting themselves shitfaced in the bar, or I will kill them with my bare hands for ruining my plans. I mean, I know I turned everything upside down in New York, but I still have a lot riding on this.

“What a stunning group of women you are,” Melissa, the owner of the salon, remarks as we stand together for a photo for her Instagram. None of us are good at compliments, but looking across at the mirror, I decide she’s right. Even though all of us look different in our own ways and our personalities are varied, we are beautiful both inside and out, and I can truly say looking relaxed and ready to take on the events ahead.

“Shall we do this, ladies?” Lifting my shopping bags into the air, I signal it’s time to head back to the resort and get dressed in our purchases. I can’t wait for Gray to see the dress I have in this bag. There is something to be said for running a busy business, being on my feet for hours on end, and chasing after three very active girls when I’m at home. My figure has slimmed down a bit over the years, and wearing a fitted dress doesn’t freak me out as much as it used to. Or maybe it’s that having Gray tell me so often how he loves my body, I have learned to love it too. Either way, I can’t wait to wow him tonight with this little baby.

In the car that has picked us up, I’m madly messaging all the people that I need to make sure are in place, ready for my surprise. We are due there in thirty minutes, so I’ve only left enough time to get dressed while the boys are changing into their suits, which was the only instruction I gave them before we left Chicago. Pack a suit. To which I got a groan from all of them, but too bad. They will thank me later.



Walking through the foyer, we can hear the boys coming from the bar, and Paige states, “Called it. Should have bet money on it.” To which we all giggle, gaining the attention of the boys as they get closer.

“Look at these hot women. I wonder if they have dates for tonight for their midnight kiss,” Gray announces as he walks toward me. And although I was worried they’d be drunk after an afternoon in the bar, looking at Gray, he just appears stress-free, and that makes me happy.

There are days I think my life is stressful, and then I take a reality check when I remember my husband has people’s lives in his hands on a daily basis. The worst that can happen for me is an event doesn’t go according to plan, which for the customer might seem like the end of the world, but it’s really not. Seeing him laughing, calm, and just enjoying the day lights my fire. My husband is hot, and I’m the luckiest woman on this planet.

“My husband is pretty possessive, so not sure he would be happy if he wasn’t my midnight kiss, but hey, I’m game if you are.” I walk into his arms as the girls are still laughing at the guys exiting the bar.

“You bet he’s possessive. Nobody gets to touch these lips except me.” He slips his arm around my back and claims what’s his with a kiss that makes me melt, and the next thing I know, I’m being dipped back, while the guys are cheering him on.

He sets me back on both feet with my stomach fluttering, because after all this time, Gray can still make me tingle all over.

“Oh yes, you’ve all had a glass of macho husband at the bar, haven’t you.” Settling myself against his side, I look

around at the rest of them that have all attached themselves to their wives.

Lex grins. “We can neither confirm nor deny your accusations. We did as you instructed and hit the slopes, enjoyed some skiing, and can report back there are no broken bones, and we are all still standing without a bruise or scrape, as you requested,” Lex says in his best courtroom voice that he doesn’t get to use anymore, and to be honest, sounds weird on him now. He is living his best life now.

Mia pokes him in the chest. “Thank you, Counselor, but the blank faces you are all trying to put on are useless in this room. We are your wives, and not only do we know when to call bullshit, but we can see through you just as easily as we see through our children when they deny eating a cookie with the evidence still plastered all over their faces.” Mia’s looking him straight in the eye, and he crumbles.

“Okay, we had a couple of beers, but they were light ones, so technically we only had one beer,” Lex professes.

“Man, what happened to protecting the brotherhood!” Tate laughs loudly which starts us all off as Gray starts guiding us toward our rooms.

Tate is a fool if he hasn’t worked out yet how much Lex will do anything for Mia, including dumping his buddies in the shit a few minutes ago.

All standing in the elevator and heading to our floor, I give my last instructions.

“Okay, suits on, guys. Ladies, get your bling happening, and I will meet you all in the foyer in...” I glance down at my watch. “Twenty-seven minutes, and... Do. Not. Be. Late! Got it, Tate?” I call him out before he even tells me I haven’t given

him enough time. “Remember, you’re going to get dressed, not undressed. Understood?”

“Technically, you have to undress to get dressed in new clothes.” Tate thinks he has me there. I scowl back at him, and he smiles and leans over and kisses me on the cheek. “Love you, Tilly, even though you’re no fun, but yes, I will be ready on time.” As the elevator dings and the doors open, we step out, and everyone is shaking their heads at Tate. We separate and head to our own rooms, and my heart is already racing knowing we are getting close to the surprise.

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“Wow, you look so fucking hot. Not sure I’m letting you out of this room looking so stunning. I’m not in the mood to be fighting off men on the dance floor.” Gray’s eyes darken and roam up and down my body. The emerald-green, fitted, floor-length dress is having the desired effect I was hoping for with him.

He lifts his hand and signals that I twirl for him so he can see every angle.

Slowly starting the rotation, I hear a light groan as he sees the low dip in the back of the dress that shows way more skin than I usually display, especially in winter. But I feel sexy in this, and it’s not often that we get to go out and spend the whole night without any kids to come home to. So, I’m making sure Gray knows we’re on the same page about what I’m hoping for later, after he made it clear as a bell this afternoon what he wants from our night away, alone.

“You should have been lecturing *me* earlier about the undressing rule, because right now, I want peel every last

sequin off you and kiss your skin as I unravel it.” The low, deep gravel in his voice tells me I’m in dangerous territory. As Gray stalks me across the room, I’m backing away but hit the wall behind me, and I’m trapped. His hands land on the wall above my head, and he lowers his face beside my ear.

“This dress leaves no room for a bra, not a panty line in sight, which has my imagination running rampant on what I could do with you on a darkened dance floor.” His mouth is now nibbling my neck, and his breath sends shivers through my body.

Not for the first time today I want to break my own plans and take him up on the offer to peel my dress down to the floor. I already feel so aroused, which is not what I need to keep my head on straight.

“That’s what you want, isn’t it, little one, for me to strip you bare and make you feel better, take the worry away of what you have planned.” He rolls his pelvis into me and reminds me of the rock-hard cock that he has been struggling with all day. “Right here against this wall, I could fuck you without putting one hair out of place or smudging your makeup.”

The lustful haze of the promise of sex is clouding over me, and my body is screaming yes.

Yes, I desperately want you.

Yes, I need you inside me like I need to breathe.

But...

No, we can’t, and I hate that I have to say that right now.

“Gray.” I almost moan his name from frustration and want. “We can’t. It’s time to go.” My breathing is quicker than I

would like it to be, but he does that to me whenever his hands and lips touch my skin like this.

“Ughh.” He leans his forehead against the wall beside me with disappointment.

“I hear you, but let me assure you, the wait will be worth it. I promise... the moment we enter the room, my body is yours.” My voice trails off to a whisper.

He bangs his head lightly against the wall. “Not helping, Tilly.”

With that, I can't help but start to laugh, and the moment is broken. Pushing him off me, we both stand, straightening ourselves out.

“Think of Brussels sprouts, sweaty gym shoes, waxing chest hair, dirty diapers,” Gray starts chanting as he paces the room, trying to stop thinking about the sex that he is not close to getting yet.

“Wait, waxing chest hair? How do you know what that feels like?” I make him stop and look at me, with his face all screwed up at the memory of it.

“A stupid college bet I lost with Tate, and yes, it fucking hurts, and I will never let hot wax near this body again. I can only imagine what waxing your balls is like. Holy shit, that's enough to make them start shrinking back inside me. I assure you that's enough to make me soft. You women need a fucking gold medal, between childbirth and waxing your vaginas. I mean, who even came up with that idea!” I can see the memory of the pain still in his eyes while I'm trying not to wet myself from laughing.

“I don't know, and it's why I switched to laser, but just remember, they all do it for you, Dr. Gynecologist. No woman

wants to turn up for her appointment looking like she has just dragged herself through a hairy bush. Surely you've seen the memes floating around of the woman who washed her pussy quickly to impress her gyno, only to have ended up covered in glitter from the kids' bubble bath the night before." Now I'm laughing so hard at the discomfort on his face.

"Matilda Grayson, stop that right now! I don't want those thoughts in my head today. What is wrong with you? Why is it so funny?" Horror is across his face at me talking about him looking at other women's vaginas. At first it felt weird, but I got over it when he explained that to him it's a clinical thing. I trust him, and the way he looks at me naked, I can't ever imagine him looking at another woman like that. "You know I don't give a shit what women do with their pubic hair before they see their gynecologist. All I care is that they make the appointment and get the checks to keep them safe done regularly." Here he is being serious, and I'm still being stupid and pushing his buttons.

"Maybe I should get some bedazzling done for you instead. I've seen pictures where they braid beads into the hair, or little stick-on diamonds to make me sparkle for you in the dark, or I could get glow-in-the-dark—" My voice is cut off before I can finish.

Gray takes my lips roughly, not only to shut me up but to make sure I know he is claiming me at the same time. Leaning into his body, all thoughts of stupidity are gone, my body filled with lust again, and it's all my own fault for poking the bear.

"I don't need to hear any more. I will show you tonight how much I love every single inch of your pussy when I devour my midnight New Year's Eve treat. Now go, before I

change my mind and take what's mine now." His voice is strained, and I know we are both hanging on by a thread.

"I'm going..." I grab my bag off the bed and turn toward the door while he watches me intently.

"I promise this surprise will be worth the pain," I say, standing with the door open as he walks toward me.

"I'll be the judge of that," he mumbles as he passes me, making me smile.

Oh, my grumpy Grayson, just you wait.

## GRAYSON

As I expected, Lex and Mia are already in the foyer waiting with Paige and Mason.

“Waiting on Tate, what a surprise. I’m sure he is doing it just to annoy me,” Tilly says, and I can feel the nervous energy zinging through her body. Matilda absolutely adores Tate, they have a special in-law bond, both being married to a Garrett, and I know it’s just stress that is making her complain about him, rather than laughing at him for not being here yet.

“He still has three minutes, don’t panic. He’s probably standing around the corner making Bella wait until it’s one minute past, just to make a point,” I say, trying to calm her down.

“We really should have learned over the years to tell him a different time than everybody else. How does he even function in the hospital?” Lex, our always-early-to-everything man, is looking at me to explain.

“Surprisingly, as soon as he walks into the hospital, he is totally focused and tears apart anyone who is late or disorganized. It’s like he has two different sides to his brain that are polar opposites.” I wonder if that’s why he’s such a genius in his field. He manages to keep himself completely focused when he is Tate the surgeon, and his intellect operates at such a high level, so then when he walks out of the hospital, he lets go of the discipline he needs and just resorts to being our fun-loving friend. I understand it totally, not wanting to take any stress in other parts of your life, when being a doctor never lets you completely switch off. How Bella and Tate manage a house, kids, and a healthy marriage while both being



doctors is beyond me. I am grateful every day for Matilda bringing me some stability in my life.

Just as we see Bella and Tate walk around the corner, Tilly says, “I can’t wait for next year. You wait, Tate, I’m going to be really annoying.”

“Hey, that’s not fair to me, you love me,” Bella whines and frowns at Tate like it’s all his fault.

“Why would you do that, Matilda? I’m here with one minute to spare, just like you asked. And might I say you look beautiful tonight.” The smoothness of his words just makes Tilly groan next to me.

“Lucky for you I do love Bella, and I tolerate your smartass attitude. Your beautiful comment saved you this time.” I can see the twinkle in her eye, though, that deep down she’s laughing on the inside at his groveling.

Mason pretends to put his finger down his throat behind Tate, gagging, while Lex mouths ‘kiss ass’ as we all start laughing. Tate steps forward and hugs Tilly as they both join in the fun.

“Okay, I have a huge surprise for you all. I’m not going to spoil anything, but if you can all come with me. Ladies, coats on.” Matilda takes my hand and leads us down a hallway away from the main foyer.

I have no idea what she has planned, and that was how she wanted it.

We walk into an empty function room, but all the tables are set and decorations on them, ready for a party tonight would be my guess. Looking over to the side of the room, there are rich red velvet curtains pulled open in front of the big glass doors, and we head toward them. Pushing the door open, we

step out to a boardwalk path that has been cleared of snow. It leads down to an archway that has been decorated with some beautiful evergreen garland that stands out against the white snowy backdrop of the mountains.

But before I can even process what I'm seeing before me, Bella's teary voice beside me is breaking as the words leave her lips. "Dad... Annie..." She grasps my free hand and squeezes it so hard.

We're both still looking down at our father in his black suit and bow tie, so proud, under the arch with Annie dressed in a long champagne-colored dress, and a black faux-fur shawl around her shoulders to match with Dad. In her other hand, she has a bouquet of long-stem champagne-colored roses.

I hear Tilly's voice as she stands on her toes and whispers into my ear, "Go to your dad with Bella, he's waiting for you."

Trying to shake myself to function, I take Bella's hand and wrap it in my elbow as we walk forward, and I feel Tilly step in behind me with Tate.

"Gray, what is happening?" Bella's soft voice reminds me of when we were younger and I protected her from everything hard in this world. Again, asking for me to be her strength as we head toward a new chapter in our lives.

All I can think to reply is, "Finally, a beautiful new beginning for the man we both love more than life itself."

Her snuffle I know is for happiness, but it's also a lot for us both to take in like this.

As we approach them, Annie looks worried, and I want to make her feel at ease as quickly as I can.

"Well, don't you two love to keep secrets, but I have to say, this is the best surprise ever." There's relief on Annie's

face as I let go of Bella, and Dad gives a chin lift to say thank you as he takes a crying Bella into his arms. Reaching out and embracing Annie in my arms, I can hear her starting to sniff a little too.

Pulling back, Bella and I swap, and instead of me giving the hug this time, Dad wraps me in the tightest grasp he can, and I hear him give the smallest sob on my shoulder.

“Dad, you deserve love and happiness,” I whisper just between the two of us.

To be honest, there are tears in my eyes too. Feeling your father laying his vulnerability on your shoulder is a lot to take.

Drawing in a deep breath and stepping back, Dad places his arm around Annie, pulling her tightly into his body, and I understand where I get my protectiveness from.

“I know this seems fast, but neither of us have felt like this for a long time, well, since your mother and Annie’s husband passed away. To be honest, we are both getting on in age and don’t want to waste time apart.” As he stops and looks down at Annie with such love and adoration in his eyes, I get memories of the way he looked at my mother and know this is so right for him.

“We are hoping that you will both give us your blessing, but we understand if you can’t. But before you say anything, I am putting myself first, which I haven’t done in a very long time, and I will be marrying Annie today no matter what.” I respect this man who loves a woman so much that he is even prepared to put her above his children, when he has never let anyone or anything come in front of us before now.

“Oh, Daddy, of course we give our blessing. These are happy tears for the love you’ve found together.” I pull Bella

into my side and hug her to let her know how proud I am of her. It was never going to be easy to replace our mother, but Bella's way of accepting it is just perfect.

"The only thing I ask is that you let us stand up for you today as you take such an important step in your lives, to show how much we love you and support you in this marriage," I say.

I feel Tilly's hand on my back to let me know she is here for any support I need, and it is the touch of reassurance I needed.

"That means the world to me, thank you both," Annie says. "I don't have anyone here. We were hoping my sons would be able to FaceTime with us, but unfortunately, that can't happen, so I would love to have you stand up for me, Bella." Annie is dabbing the tears from her eyes with the handkerchief my father has whipped out of his pocket for her.

"I think that's actually our role to fill," says a deep voice from behind me that is not one I know, and I realize what my amazing wife has managed to do.

"Ohhhh!" Annie bursts into tears and rushes forward as two men in full military dress uniform step forward and embrace their mother who is completely overcome.

Bella and I step to the side to give them a moment and allow Annie to introduce them to Dad.

I look across to my wife who is leaning on Tate's shoulder, her arm linked in his, with tears in her eyes too. I knew I loved her before, but my heart is almost bursting at how amazingly special she is. To give this to not only my dad and Annie but for Bella and me too, knowing how much I have longed to see

my father happy. I can finally rest knowing that he's not lonely in his life.

"I love you so much," I mouth to her across the pathway, to which she blows me a kiss and replies, "Me too."

Annie's sons turn to us, and you can tell they are as happy as we are. If I were them, I would be happy to know my mother had someone in her life to look after and protect her while they're away on military service.

"Hi, Grayson and Isabella, apparently we're about to become family. I'm Dane, and this is my younger brother Keegan." He outstretches his hand to shake mine, but once our hands are in each other's, we both lean forward for a one-armed embrace. As you would always hug a family member. His cap is still under his arm, and his body is stiff like I would expect from someone who has lived all his adult life in the service.

From what Dad and Annie told me at Christmas, both the boys are naval aviators and fly jets for a living.

"Please, call me Gray, and this is my little sister Bella who I will warn you is going to be the biggest thorn in your side from now on, but she has more love to give than you might be ready for." That earns me a jab of her elbow in my ribs.

"See what I mean?" I wince, playing it up to lighten the moment.

"Can't wait. We always wanted a sister, but Mom insisted that the two of us made her scared to have any more children. Not sure what she was complaining about, I mean, we aren't daredevil thrill-seekers or anything." Keegan laughs as he kisses Bella on the cheek and gives her a hug just as Dane had done before him.

Signaling Tilly over to me, I place my arm around her, squeezing her and kissing her on the temple. “And this absolutely amazing woman, who I’m guessing you have already spoken to, is my wife Matilda, or Tilly as we call her. Someone I will be having serious discussions with later about being so sneaky with all this.” The boys again greet her, as Bella then introduces Tate next.

“These four here are the rest of our family as we like to call them, Mason, Paige, Lex, and Mia. We can all get to know each other a bit later, as I’m guessing we have a ceremony to get on with before we all freeze to death out here.”

Quick greetings were made as a makeup lady appeared from nowhere to touch up Annie and Bella’s faces from all the crying, and behind her are the photographer, videographer, and the celebrant.

It now occurs to me why my wife has been so crazy these last few weeks. There is no way she would want one thing out of place for today, to make it as special as she could for all of us. I’m sure there will be a long story she is busting to tell me as to how this all came about.

Music starts piping through some speakers hidden somewhere, and the song “This Will Be an Everlasting Love” by Natalie Cole, makes us all stop and assemble together to watch this perfect union.

“Family and friends, Milton and Annie are so pleased you could all make it here to celebrate their joining as husband and wife and start off the next year as one.” The celebrant’s words continue as I stand beside my father and look out at the amazing surroundings and stars that are starting to appear in the night sky. I know Mom is with us up there, offering her blessing too.

Today is perfect and just as it should be, filled with love and immense happiness.

“Gray?” The celebrant calls me out of my thoughts as he asks for the rings that Dad gave me before we started.

I stay in the moment as we all cheer and clap at the words, “I pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss your bride.” To which my dad does not hold back.

I guess it doesn't matter the age, with love comes the overpouring of affection and lust that we all witnessed from our parents.

Oh man, I'm going to have to get used to this!

## Chapter Four

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## GRAYSON

**M**y dad holds his hand up to get our attention. “As much as we love you all, it’s time for us to leave you so I can spend some time with my wife.” To which we all cheer, and Annie’s face lights up hearing those words too. “Thank you to Matilda for making this happen and for you all being here. We couldn’t have asked for a more beautiful wedding, quiet and with the people most important in our lives.” Dad leans down and kisses Annie. They look so happy, which gives me a warm feeling seeing it.

“And don’t you all corrupt Dane and Keegan tonight while we aren’t here!” Dad waves his finger at all of us guys as we all repeat at the same time:

“Yes, Dad!”

That brings out the laughter from all of us standing in a small conference room that Matilda had secured for us to have a few drinks and some finger food after all the necessary photos were taken in such a picturesque spot.

I can’t help laughing at him glaring at all his extra sons as Dad and Annie start moving around the room to say thank you and goodbye to everyone. They’re staying here tonight and then leaving on a plane that Mason had organized to take them to Miami for a short honeymoon in the sun. Annie was upset that she would miss her sons on leave, but they will be home long enough that she can see them for a few days when she returns.

When Dad got to Tilly, he had tears in his eyes, and I can understand why. She gave them such a special day. A few

words between them and they were both in tears. Both of them are such emotional softies.

As they are finally out of the room, though, Tilly's tears are gone and the twinkle in her eyes is back.

“Who's ready to party!” She throws her arms in the air like a big weight has been lifted off her and she is ready to let her hair down, and I'm all for it.

“Hell yeah, bring it on.” Of course, Tate's the first to reply, but we're all thinking the same thing. It's nearly ten pm, and I know Tilly has something else planned for us.

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We're finally settling in at our private table that Tilly somehow managed to sweet talk them into letting us have ten people instead of eight so we could include my new stepbrothers. I'm sure she threw the military-men-on-leave card in to make it happen. An exclusive party is being held at our hotel that is set up just like a nightclub in New York, which I'm sure is her way of making up for last year's mishap. Champagne all round is getting the party started.

“I can't believe you, Tilly, how the fuck did you manage to get the boys both here to stand beside their mom on her big day? That's pretty impressive,” Lex asks the question we all want to know, as she, Dane, and Keegan are all laughing.

“Friends who have friends in high places. I may have asked Mason for a few favors to reach out to Ashton and some of his contacts to get me in touch with the guys. And then it went from there. I mean, it only involved another two private jets to get everyone here, owing Ashton big time, and these two for helping make it happen.” She points to Dane and

Keegan who had quickly ducked back to their rooms to change into regular suits so they didn't stand out, or as Mason said, dirtying the dress uniform is a pain in the ass.

“Hey, we would have flown our fighter jets here if we could have. We might have been court-marshaled, but I wouldn't want to miss seeing Mom so happy.” Dane laughs, and we all know that he's joking.

“Yeah, because Mom would have loved that phone call as a wedding present. We gave her enough grief growing up, we don't need to continue now. But not gonna to lie, getting to have a good look and a seat in the cockpit of the private jet was awesome.” It seemed Keegan had enjoyed his trip for different reasons than we do. The comfy ride and silver service was probably the last thing the boys were worried about, more into the technical aspects of the jet.

“Wait until you fly back with us tomorrow. You get to see my beautiful lady and can test her out,” Mason says, and Paige nearly chokes on her glass of Dom Perignon at his comment.

“My jet, Paige, what the hell did you think I meant?” Mason's not impressed, but Tate, Lex, and I are all roaring with laughter at his reaction.

“Calm down, Mason, my brain just short-circuited for a moment, must be all the champagne.” Rolling her eyes at him, she turns and starts up a conversation with Mia, trying to deflect and change the topic.

The night passes quickly, and the countdown to midnight happens as we're standing on the balcony. The stroke of midnight rings in with fireworks lighting up the sky over the snowfields. It's a magnificent sight, but nothing compared to my wife who is looking up at me as our lips meet.

“Happy New Year, babe,” I whisper as I start showing her the emotion that has been building all night inside me. The gratitude at what she did for my dad, the edging she inflicted on me all day, and then walking around in this dress all night that has me eyeing every curve on her luscious body and imagining how good it will be when I get it off her.

“Mmmm, happy New Year, my GG.” Her reply is only loud enough for me to hear as we pull slightly apart.

Everyone else is in the same sort of embrace, except Keegan and Dane, who disappeared from the group a little while ago, each with a hot woman on their arm. Good luck to them.

“After this display is finished, how about we go and make some fireworks of our own.” I bite down on her ear as I move down to kiss her neck after whispering in her ear.

The shiver through her body tells me she is on board.

Finally!

As the fireworks come to an end and the crowd cheers, I grab Tilly’s hand, turning toward our friends. “Okay, midnight is over, my wife’s job is done, so we’re tapping out. She is all mine now. See you for breakfast if you’re lucky.” I start to pull her away, and Tilly is scolding me.

“Grayson, you can’t say shit like that.” She looks at me with flushed cheeks.

“Yes, he can. Thank God I wasn’t the first to make the move.” Tate is behind me with his arm around Bella.

They form a trail of couples behind me, all heading to their rooms for the same thing.

“Tate, remember... she’s my sister, I don’t need to know.”

“Fine, Gray, I won’t tell you that I’m about to take Bella to our room and...”

This time it’s Bella yelling at her husband. “Don’t you dare finish that sentence or you will be going to your room to sleep on your own!” She rolls her eyes because nothing will ever change with Tate. That’s why we all love him. He’s not afraid of being the real him, no matter how annoying that can be at times.

Having walked away from our friends and standing outside our room, I pull the card from my coat pocket. Tilly is standing behind me, her hands slipping into my pants front pockets and running over my cock and balls. It takes every bit of strength to keep from moaning out loud. I’m hard as a fucking rock, and she is already pushing my buttons.

“I didn’t think you liked public sex, Tilly,” I mumble as I’m trying to get the door open, which is choosing right now not to work properly.

“I don’t...” The sensual words slip from her lips softly.

“Well, if you keep going, I’m going to fuck you against this fucking door that won’t open, and the whole world will see your perfect little...” The door chooses the right time to open before I could keep going.

Standing to the side as she walks into our room, and I can see she is just as ready as I am.

“You might not like being watched, but I’ll happily stand and stare while you strip for me.” I close the door behind me, and the outside world slips away. For the rest of the night, it’s just my wife and me, and I plan on enjoying every minute of that time.

## MATILDA

“Why are you looking at me like you want to eat me?” Gray hasn’t taken his eyes off me since he closed the door, slipping his jacket off and already unfastening his cufflinks. He’s dressed in all black, including his shirt, just accented with an emerald-green sparkly pocket square that I bought to match my dress.

A white shirt on a man looks hot, but a black shirt looks even better because it has that little hint of hardness in a man and a whole lot of naughty. The look in his eyes tells me that he has both on the agenda tonight.

“Because I do. Now I thought I asked you to strip for me, but since you didn’t listen, then I’ll undress you and live out my New Year’s wish,” he says, stalking toward me. “You were the most beautiful woman in that room tonight, but you will look even better in this room, completely naked.”

He gently takes my face in his hands as he gets so close that I can feel his breath on my lips. Teasing me, but not touching me.

“You have made me wait all day, but I’m done waiting.”

His tenderness slips as his lips land on mine. I can feel every bit of hunger he has been holding onto since this morning, pouring out in this kiss.

The way his tongue is pushing and exploring my mouth, I can feel his want for me.

The hands that were so tenderly holding my face are now roaming my naked back now that he has me in his arms, with

the passion of a man who never wants to let me go, and I'm all for it.

He pulls back slightly and looks down at me. "Do you know what this dress was doing to me tonight?" One of his hands pushes under the seam at the back of it that is just above my ass, and I mean, only just. "Fuuuckkk. I was right. You are completely bare underneath, aren't you? Not even a G-string, you naughty girl." His groan is exactly the reaction I was hoping for when I went with this dress. There are days when you go conservative or dress like a mom, but then, there are just some days that you want to feel like a sexy woman who forgets about her life at home and lets go.

"Yet you managed to keep your hands to yourself all night. I'm impressed," I whisper to him as he starts on my neck, knowing how sensitive I am there.

"Oh, you'll be impressed, that's a given."

He's so right, and now it's me that's becoming impatient.

My hands drop from his shoulders straight to his belt. This is not like unwrapping a present that's a surprise. I know exactly what's under these clothes, and that is what I want desperately.

"No, it's your turn to wait." Gray steps away from me so my hands fall from his body with just the belt and button on the pants open but nothing more.

The bulge of his cock clearly shows me that his pants are getting tight, and the restraint must be painful. Something I know he can handle.

"Turn around." His voice is ragged and a sign he's barely holding on. "Hmmm, nice and slow." Which is the opposite of

what I want to do, but my whole purpose of tonight is to please him.

I feel the touch of his fingers on the base of my neck, sliding toward the edge of my dress on my shoulders. This outfit fits me like a glove and there's not much room, but it doesn't matter now as he starts to push it from my right shoulder.

Taking my hand, he pulls down on the sleeve to help it fall just the way he wants it to. His lips follow it down my arm with soft kisses that are making me melt. As my arm releases from the sleeve, it's enough that the dress loosens to fall over the top of my breast as he is already pushing down on the left side.

Looking over my shoulder, he likes what he sees.

"You are so fucking hot like this. Unveiling your body to me so I can pleasure you just the way I like to."

The more I pull the other sleeve, the lower the dress drops to sit on my hips. The kissing stops as he wraps his arms around my body and takes my breasts in his hands. I can feel the heat of his body transferring to mine, but I want more.

"Please, let me feel your skin on mine." It's almost a whimper as he starts working me into that state where I lose all control.

"Don't move," he commands. I feel the loss of his hands on my breasts, the air tingling my nipples that are so firm it hurts in the best way. I can feel his hands brushing across the skin of my back as he undoes the buttons on his shirt. I can't stop myself from looking back at him as I see his bare shoulder and arm that is bulging in all the right places.



As he pulls me back against him, I can feel his abs on my back and the exchange of electricity between our bodies.

This is the part that I love.

The touching.

Exploring each other's bodies.

Changes in our breathing as the heat spreads.

The urgency that takes over our souls to join and be one.

Making love combined with the powerful force of having amazing hard sex.

I want it all tonight, the hard, the sweet, and everything in between.

Turning to face him, my hands now roaming his body, I look up into his eyes and tell him what I need. "Destroy me." Which lights the fire in his eyes and all he was waiting for.

He pushes the dress down over my hips, leaving it pooled at my feet. As he drops to his knees, I lift my feet one at a time as I step out of the dress to the side, and then he slides my silver heels off.

Completely naked, his eyes take their time looking over every part of my body. They finally land on mine, and we are locked together in such an intense stare. From the dirty smirk forming on his face, I know he is about to do as I asked him to.

He softly drags his fingers up the inside of my calves, and as he reaches my knees, he pushes my legs farther apart. His eyes never leave mine while his mouth now starts ascending the inside of my thighs, and I'm quivering with anticipation.

"I should toy with you and make you wait like you did to me." The mischief in his voice is concerning, that I'm about to

feel the pain of delay. “But that would be punishing myself, and I’ll be fucked if I’m waiting any longer.”

His teeth nip the inside of my thigh on both sides as his hands cup my ass cheeks, and the first swipe of his tongue up the folds of my pussy bring moans from deep down inside me.

This is exactly what I want, what I need. Don’t wait, just take me now.

“Mmmm, best late-night treat. Tastes divine...” He takes another taste, and I’m struggling to keep my legs from collapsing under me.

“Feels so good, Gray... I want more.” My head falls back as he is now alternating between fucking me with his tongue and flicking my clit, and it has me so turned on, I could explode any moment. But I don’t want to, not until he’s inside me.

“Bed... fuck me.” I’m stammering over my words as he is relentless, and the spark in his eyes that still haven’t left mine tells me how much he wants to push me over the edge whether I like it or not.

One thing my husband likes is to make sure I orgasm multiple times before he finally lets go. I’m forever impatient and begging him to fuck me straight away, but he knows what I truly want and need more than I do. In such a state of euphoria, I just want relief in a release, but in actual fact, the first orgasm is just the beginning of the immense high he loves to give me.

It’s how we are. I beg, he ignores me, and it results in the best sex ever.

“Stop holding back...” He bites down on my clit, and my body soars into the most amazing climax. I hear his groan as

he continues to take everything my body is giving him. My legs are wobbling, and he knows I'm only being held up by him. I don't know how he manages it, but before I can fall, he is on his feet and lifting me up, my legs wrapping around his waist. He carries me toward the large bed that he's been waiting to have me spread out on since we arrived here this morning.

“Now it's time to test out those mattress springs.” Placing me gently on the bed, I wriggle backwards as he unzips his pants and drops them to the floor with his briefs. His shoes were already kicked off and socks gone before his pants, so finally, we're both naked.

“Is it my turn for dessert?” I ask as he climbs on the bed on his knees, in between my legs.

“Not a chance. If I put my cock in your mouth now, this will be over.” Kissing my stomach, he starts moving up my body again with his lips.

Taking one breast at a time into his mouth and laving my nipple with his tongue, he releases it with a pop as he moves to the next.

“What a way to finish, though...” I purr. His face is now level with mine, and my hands are rubbing all over his back and sliding to the sides, trying to get to that cock that I want my hands on with urgency. Wanting him to feel as good as I do.

He cuts me off before I can finish my sentence. “This is how we finish, with me inside your wet pussy and making you scream loud enough to set off an avalanche!” Before I can even say a word, my mouth falls open, gasping, as his cock slides perfectly inside me. Pulling back slightly, he pounds

harder this time, making sure I can feel every single inch of him. I'm sure he's hitting my cervix with every thrust.

"You drive me crazy in the best possible way. Your beauty... love... and the way your body fits with mine."

"Oh, Gray... so good, I want to..." I'm mumbling through the intensity of what is happening inside my body. Electricity is zinging, and every nerve in my body is ready to explode.

"No, don't you dare... you hold it, you fucking hold it..." Gray's body is on fire, and sweat is beading all over us both. "...until I'm ready."

My vision starts to blur as we are right there, in pound town, and the roar of my husband screaming, "Now!" We both begin exploding together, and it's like we are experiencing the fireworks all over again in our room. He continues to fuck me through both our orgasm highs, and there is nothing better than my sweaty husband falling onto me, totally and utterly sexually satisfied and blissfully in love.

Lying together for a short while, I can feel the exhaustion hitting me. It's like the stress of a thousand days is catching up with me, and all I want is to fall asleep in my husband's arms, listening to the heart that beats for me.

"I should clean you up," Gray mumbles from underneath me where we've been comfortable since we finished.

"Don't you dare move, we're showering in the morning," I reply, knowing I couldn't move even if I wanted to.

"Whatever you say." And the tiredness in his voice is evident too.

"Tilly." His finger finds my chin and lifts my face to look up at him.

“Mhmm.” My eyes are barely open now.

“Thank you, for everything you did for my dad and for us. And for just being you. I love you more than I knew was ever possible. You are my everything, beautiful.” With tears in his eyes, he leans down, kissing me with all the feelings that he has just tried to tell me.

“Love you too, but you know that, and I would move a mountain for you if I could,” I whisper to him as our lips separate.

“You did, baby, you did.” Kissing my forehead, he rests my head back on his chest. Such a feeling of contentment settles in me as I finally let sleep start to claim me.

Wrapped in the warmth of Gray’s love, what a way to start a new year.

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“A message just came through from Dad. They have landed safely in Miami and asked if we’ve seen Annie’s boys this morning,” Gray calls out to me as I do my last little touch-up on my makeup before we head downstairs for breakfast.

“Oops, maybe the boys partied a little hard last night and haven’t surfaced yet. Good for them, I say.” Walking out and pecking Gray on the cheek, I place my makeup bag in the carryon luggage, and he starts zipping everything up.

We’re flying out after a late brunch because I didn’t want everyone to be rushed getting up this morning. Just lying in the silence in bed, just the two of us, was so nice. With the kids, it’s not very often we get that luxury anymore. Someone

always wants food, the television, or they're just simply up and awake, so we should be too.

"I hope they show up for brunch, and we don't have to chase after them to make the flight." I have my handbag in my hand, heading for the door, when Gray starts laughing behind me.

"What are you laughing at?" I give him the look of you better tell me right now.

"They're military, Tilly, I'm pretty sure they've been awake for a while, been for a run at some stupid time of the morning, and have already had the first course of breakfast. Besides, if they wanted to hide from you, there is no chance you would find them." He thinks he is so funny and full of knowledge. To be honest, he wouldn't know a thing about being in the military.

"Well, here's what I think." My hand settles on my hip as I look at him. "They are two men who are on leave for the first night. We saw them each leaving with a woman on their arm toward the elevator that heads to the rooms last night. My guess would be they enjoyed New Year's Eve just as much as you did and are probably trying to make the most of it until it's time to leave for the jet. Tell me I'm wrong."

The smile on his face gets bigger. "Oh, one hundred percent, that's what happened. I was just trying to make them look good, you know bro code, big brother's got your back."

"And so it begins. You've been their stepbrother for less than twenty-four hours, and it's already begun. I don't think they need a big brother to protect them like Bella did." Turning and opening the door, I leave him mumbling behind me. "Come on, I'm hungry. Plus, we can't be late. If Tate beats us there, we will never hear the end of it after yesterday."

Walking down the hallway, he takes my hand in his as we fall in step together. I'm not sure what Dane and Keegan are expecting, but it's too late now, they have just inherited a family of protectors with an abundance of love to share. Maybe I should warn them to start running now.

Breakfast is just like usual, with the guys eating up a storm and chatting about some kind of sport. Us girls are too busy sitting on our side of the table gushing over the proofs that the photographer has already sent to me from the wedding. Annie and Milton look so happy and so do their kids in the family shots.

Looking at the photos has me a little teary-eyed at what I managed to pull off without anyone guessing. I'll have to message Fleur once we get home and thank her for the help behind the scenes.

Mason's voice breaks the chatter between us all. "Look what the cat dragged in. Morning, gentlemen."

Dane and Keegan make their way to the table, looking very relaxed.

"Have you messaged your mother back yet?" I can't help asking, just to start the conversation.

"Man, I love her dearly, but I'm a thirty-five-year-old man who flies a fighter jet for a living, with the ability to drop bombs of mass destruction. I think I can manage to take care of myself. We often wonder how she copes while we're deployed with no communication." Keegan looks across at his brother.

"She probably doesn't," Bella says. "Most mothers worry every day of their lives. And I'm sure you two give her more

than most to worry about.” Bella laughs as she places her napkin on the table, finishing her brunch.

“Well, now she’ll have you to worry about and the grandkids she was madly telling us about last night. So, thanks for that, guys, you have taken the pressure off us to start producing the offspring,” Dane pipes up, then takes a sip of the takeaway coffee cup he has in his hand.

Everyone bursts out laughing, because if there is one thing this family does it’s fussing over each other, so Annie will fit right in.

“So, where did you two disappear to last night?” Bella’s smiling, loving she has someone else to annoy now.

“Now that is classified information. Sorry, sis.” Keegan, who is the closest to Bella in age, is already loving the connection with her.

Which of course brings a rowdy laugh from the guys, and I look across the table to Gray, pointing my finger and saying, “I told you so!”

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“I wish I had a wife who loved planes like we do. Pretty impressive, Mason, and thanks for the bit of time in the cockpit with you.” Dane is standing with Mason who has just come out after we landed safely back in Chicago.

“Agreed. Maybe I’ve found a job for when I finally leave the service.” Keegan looks at Dane, and they both shake their heads.

“Nahhhh!” they both say at the same time.



“You think you want the thrill ride of your life, boys, but just you wait. There will be a woman one day that will stop you in your tracks, and that, my friends, will be the most adventurous thing you will ever do, trying to chase her down.” Mason just smiles and walks past the guys to give Paige a kiss, and we all start grabbing our cabin luggage, or for our new passengers, their regulation rucksacks.

“We’ll see about that.” Keegan laughs as he exits the plane.

The eight of us stop for one last moment together.

“Thank you all for another amazing New Year’s Eve. Let’s bring on the next one. So, where are we going, Tate?” I ask, hooking my arm in his.

“Oh, get fucked, as if I’m telling any one of you. You can all just wait now and get ready for the spectacle of a lifetime. Mark my words!” Tate declares to us all.

“God damn it, this is going to be hell, isn’t it!” Bella slaps her forehead and starts the hugging around the circle. “I apologize in advance for what is about to transpire. We all know it won’t be as peaceful as this one.”

“That I can guarantee!” Tate proclaims.

“Same time, same place, see you all next year.” Lex looks around at the group who have become his home.

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Paige takes Mason’s hand, and we all start moving from the plane.

And all I can think in my head is God help Bella, this is going to be a long year for her!

THE CHICAGO

*Boys*



NYE  
*in*  
NEW YORK CITY

KAREN DEEN

THE CHICAGO  
*Boys*

NYE  
*in*  
NEW YORK CITY

KAREN DEEN

# Chapter One

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## MASON

“We’re only going for one night, Tiger! It’s just to the penthouse in New York, you know, the one we own, where you have a walk-in wardrobe full of clothes and shoes.” As I haul the last case into the trunk, it feels like she has brought every item of clothing she owns. “Fuck, I just broke my back on those two suitcases. They are severely overweight for any normal luggage limit,” I complain as I slide into the leather seat of the limo, next to Paige.

“But you’re so big and strong, Mason. And isn’t it lucky, I own the plane, so I make the rules and can take whatever I like.” She bats her eyelashes at me the way women in the movies do, feigning innocence, while trying not laugh at her own joke.

As usual, she dampens any annoyance in me with that smile. I’m already reaching over and pulling her closer, wrapping my arm tight around her. “Mm-hm.”

She sighs, relaxing into my body. “One night to spend with our friends, kid-free! I can’t wait to have time to actually talk in full sentences with the girls, without constant interruptions. While having a few glasses of bubbly and then sleeping through a full night without being woken by the little bed hog who seems to commando crawl into our bed every night.”

Paige glances out the limousine’s back window, watching the city spin past us as we head to the airport, ready to board our jet. For once I’m not flying the plane, which I’m struggling with. The control freak in me is not happy about it, but whatever my wife wants, it seems I’ll happily oblige. Well, within reason.

Especially if it means she agrees to spend New Year's Eve in New York with me, no kids, just adults.

But I can't promise I won't be sticking my head into the cockpit at some stage during the flight.

Kissing the top of Paige's head, the scent of her shampoo gets to me every time. It's like crack to an addict. Gets my blood pumping, and I need to keep a lid on that feeling until I can get her to the penthouse, away from the rest of our friends.

"What makes you think you'll be sleeping tonight?" I ask. Hearing the slightest hitch in her breathing, I know she's trying not to give away where her mind's now racing to.

"Me, that's who. Because my body is exhausted, and not in a good way." She turns her head up to look at me, with the straightest look on her face. What she didn't count on is the way her eyes darken, telling me exactly how she really feels.

"Such a shame my body didn't get that memo, Tiger. Maybe I need to remind your stubborn ass what it's like to be alone with your husband..." Twisting in my seat, my mouth now on her neck, I slowly drag my tongue up until I reach just below her ear. The place I know that tests her restraint. "Remember those nights where I would fuck you long and hard until you screamed my name while you exploded from my touch. Then I'd spend the rest of the night worshiping your beautiful body." The words I whisper into her ear have her whole body vibrating next to mine.

"Mason..." My name falls from her lips, like music to my ears.

My hand is now running up her thigh. I know the privacy screen is up and our driver is not part of this show.

"Do you want me to stop?"

“Yes,” she says, strong and definite.

“Your body disagrees, Paige.”

“Damn you, magic man, I’m not getting on that plane with all our friends while smelling like sex.”

“Our plane, our rules, remember.” I push my body harder against her, to show just how keen I am to break the rules.

Softly taking her lips with mine, I try to convince her that starting our night away in the best possible way is a good option.

Feeling her hand slipping between us and running up my abs, my anticipation is building until, in a split second, I’m on the floor of the car at her feet.

While I thought the hand was sending me one signal, she was just preparing to shatter my dreams with one hard push.

“You play dirty, Tiger. But just remember, two can play at this game.” I kneel in front of her, taking her face between my hands. Pure satisfaction is written all over it. “Let’s see how funny you think it is later tonight when you are begging for me to let you come. Let’s see who holds the control then.”

“You won’t... oh, who am I kidding, you totally will, asshole.” She rolls her eyes at me. I know she loves every bit of my dominance in the bedroom. Both our laughs are silenced by my kiss, showing Paige how much I still love my wife, with all that I am.

I settle back on the seat and feel Paige sink into the side of my body. Being a parent is unbelievably amazing, but a night with this woman on our own is long overdue.

Pulling up at the steps to the jet in the limousine, with Paige beside me, feels strange. Normally I’m already here to

do my pre-flight checks and make sure we're ready to take off as soon as she arrives. It gives her longer at home with the kids before we fly, or on the flip side, if they're flying with us, it's less time that she has to control our wild-child son, Johnny, who thinks the whole tarmac is his running track. We time it so he only has time to run from the car to my arms, where I then carry him up the steps after his mother, who's carrying Maisy. Shutting the cabin door lets us both sigh with relief that he is contained, at least for a short while.

Stepping out and turning to take Paige's hand, she's giggling before she even stands.

"Don't even think about doing a walk-around, Mason. You are mine for the night, not as my pilot but as my husband, who very much needs to relax with his family. Remember those people who are our friends but really our family."

Her grip tightens on my hand to make sure I can't escape.

"Ughh. You know I need to keep you safe," I mumble under my breath as we ascend the stairs after greeting the stand-in pilot and my crew—who are all trying to be professional and not laugh at how much this is killing me.

The voice from inside the cabin breaks me from my thoughts.

"Well, I'm still on the money for who will be last." Lex's serious tone is broken by Mia's giggle.

"You knew we were right behind you after you dropped off Anna and the kids at our place," I say. "Not like we were a bad bet." Gripping his shoulder, I give it a squeeze as I pass him to put Paige's bag in her locker.

"Mia, I bet Anna never realized what she was in for when you moved her to Chicago to be nearer to you and the kids," I



add. “She’s like a substitute grandmother that now has our kids driving her crazy too.” Paige and I can never thank Anna enough for all she did keeping Mia safe all those years ago.

“Are you kidding? She loves it,” Mia says, laughing.

“Now, Lex, don’t be mean about the others being late.” Mia looks at Lex like he’s one of the kids. “You know both Bella and Gray were finishing their shifts at the hospital and had to get their kids organized. Of course, they will be last.” Mia slaps her husband on the leg as she chastises him.

“Hey, it wouldn’t matter if he was given a two-hour head start, Tate is always late!”

Although Lex is a different man since finding Mia, the old grumpy lawyer still surfaces every so often.

“Fuck you, Lex!” Tate’s voice booms through the door from the top of the stairs.

“Not tonight, buddy, I have a far better option sitting next to me.” The look on his face tells us how proud Lex is of his quick comeback.

“Tate, be nice!” Bella steps inside the cabin and looks back, glaring at her husband. Sometimes it’s hard to work out that he is supposed to be the genius among us.

“And so, it begins.” Tilly, walking in through the door, is laughing to herself.

“I’d be worried if it didn’t.” Gray is the last of our family to enter the cabin. “It would mean something is wrong if we were normal around each other. Plus, adulting is overrated.”

Holly steps out of the kitchen area with a tray of champagne, proceeding to hand them out to everyone.

“Thanks, Holly,” Paige says, taking the last one off the tray. “Here’s to our night of freedom and look out New York City.”

Which brings the clinking of all the glasses and a mixture of laughing. All of us know it’s a miracle we managed to coordinate everyone’s schedules to get away together for the night.

Just one night, and not just any night but *the* night.

New Year’s Eve!

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“It’s an hour into the trip, and I don’t think any of those girls have taken a breath yet. How do they even understand each other when they’re all talking at the same time?” Tate looks over his shoulder where the ladies are all seated facing each other, oblivious to what we’re talking about.

“Best to let them get it all out now. It’ll only be about the kids anyway.” Lex rolls his eyes. “Or complaining about work and bitching about us—well, not me, because I’m the perfect husband.”

I cough to hide the scoff under my breath. He can’t possibly believe he’s perfect.

“Just the usual then.” Tate smiles, knowing full well Bella would agree with him if she heard that.

“So, what time did you book the restaurant for, Gray?” I ask. I’m thinking about how much time I’ll get with my wife before we’re expected to dinner.

“The reservation? Lex got that task, last I heard.” He tries to stay calm and look unsurprised by my question.

“Me? No, Tate was booking it.” All eyes shift to him, knowing this line of conversation can’t be good.

“What the fuck, why would I do the booking? I don’t know the good places in New York. That’s on him.” All three heads spin in my direction, with the look of pure fear in their eyes.

“Why are you all looking at me?”

Seeing the sweat start to bead on their foreheads, I know that their thoughts are racing, trying to remember if they were told it was their job to sort out this part of the trip. Especially Tate, because originally this whole trip away was his idea when he arrived one day at our regular weekly basketball game. His lack of sleep and frustration at spending a few nights with the kids on his own while Bella was away at a conference had him declaring that if he didn’t get to be an adult again sometime soon, then he was going to lose his marbles.

He had us in stitches with the stories of what Jessie had been up to and that baby Dominic is very much a momma’s boy. The only way Tate could keep him happy was to wear one of his shirts that had become Bella’s to wear around the house, because it now smells like his wife.

If there is one thing we’ve all learned since becoming parents, it’s no matter how tough and strong we think we are, our children always manage to bring us to our knees.

I want to string them out a little longer, but I just can’t keep it together. The laughter I’ve been holding in starts to echo through the cabin.

“You should see your faces right now... priceless.” With laughter breaking free, my whole body moves with it.

Until Tate shoves my shoulder and I fall out of my seat.

“Seriously! You let us all think we are about to have our nuts ripped off any moment when the girls hear we have nothing booked for dinner on New Year’s Eve.”

“I didn’t say I had anything booked either,” I say, knowing full well Paige has the whole night planned for everyone. As always, she wants everything to be perfect, even though I assured her that no one would care if we just sat around the penthouse in our sweatpants with a beer. The company is the important thing.

“Well, you better have something sorted, buddy,” Tate sassed, “otherwise we will all be sleeping in the snow on the streets of New York City tonight. Bella went out and spent some ridiculous sum of money on a dress for this big night, and if she doesn’t get to wear it, I’m not taking the crap for it. I’ll be sending her in your direction, my friend.” Tate raises his beer and tilts it to me to let me know it’s all on me.

Gray’s eyes are pinned on his wife across the plane. “Bella’s not the only one who went shopping. Mind you, I’m sure it was just an excuse for Tilly and Fleur to spend a day together where they weren’t actually working. Pity Fleur couldn’t make it, but I’m glad she offered to take one for the team so Matilda can relax and forget about work tonight.”

Lex rolls his eyes again which he seems to do a lot, lifting his hand and pointing over his shoulder with his thumb. “Well, I practically had to drag Mia to the shop to pick a nice dress, and of course, the lingerie that she needed to accessorize with it. Still, after everything we’ve been through, I can’t get her to accept that I have more money than we can spend in a lifetime.” Stopping to think a little, his voice softens as the realization washes over him. “But let’s be honest, it’s one of

the reasons I love her like I do. She just loves me and not my wealth, and still would even if we lived in a shack somewhere out of civilization.” I can see how important that is to Lex after the way his family treated him growing up.

“Well, you will all be pleased to know that the reason I didn’t book anywhere is because, as usual, my wife took control of everything. And that makes me a happy man.”

We all laugh and lift our beers to the air. Because let’s face it, the finer details in life are not my thing.

“Do we get to know where she picked?” Tate seems interested to know.

“Not a chance. I’m not spoiling her surprise.”

Gray, who knows me the best, looks at me with a stupid smirk. “In other words, you have no idea what is going on, just like the rest of us.”

“Spot on, buddy.” Glancing over at Paige, she seems to have been listening in on our conversation too, so I give her a wink to let her know I’m on to her. Trying to eavesdrop discreetly hasn’t worked with me.

Conversation pulls us both back into our groups, but there is still the frequent slight turn of the head and eyes meeting. No matter how long we have been together, she is still the grounding I need. Paige is my everything.

## PAIGE

“I can’t believe you haven’t told him yet. He’s going to flip when he finds out.” Mia gives me that look I get at work when she thinks I’m crazy.

“What? It’s time. I know he is super attached to this plane, but he will love a new one too, I guarantee,” I whisper, not wanting to spoil the surprise.

“Hmm, debatable. It’s like when one of the kids has a favorite toy and you buy all these new ones, and they smile initially, but then they keep going back to the old special one.” Mia has been trying to tell me for weeks that she’s not sure about my doing this without Mason knowing.

“Bullshit. He’s obsessed with jets. As soon as he sees something shiny and new, full of all the up-to-date technology, he will love it.” Well, at least I hope he will, considering it’s the plane we’re flying home on tomorrow. I know he can’t pilot the plane, but it’ll be a chance for him to check out everything in the new model I have reserved on the production line.

“You don’t think he’ll be annoyed you ordered it without him?” Bella looks cautious. “I wouldn’t even attempt a new car purchase for Tate. He would complain I took all the fun out of it.”

“Oh, I’m not that stupid. I’ve had his crew talking to him for a while about different new planes and what he would fly if he had a choice. If there is one thing I have learned in all my years in business, it’s to do your research, work out your target audience, and find out where their mind is at.” I look across at

Mason with one eye on the cockpit, itching to go and check on the flight and plane. I must admit, having him here with us is nice, but part of me is a little off knowing he isn't the one behind the controls. It's not that I don't trust the pilot, it's just that I trust Mason more.

“Besides, we all know even though we have strong, control-freak husbands, they are still boys at heart who love a new toy.”

“The only new toys Gray likes are ones that we won't be showing off to you all.” Tilly giggles, looking proud of herself, while I'm trying to remember how many drinks she's already had to be blurting that out.

“Tilly, no! Too much information!” Bella wails. “Remember the rules on talking about sex with my brother. It's off limits!” she exclaims loud enough that all the men stop and turn to look at us.

“Who's talking about sex over there, and why does it surprise me that it's the women and not us?” Lex exclaims, trying to keep a straight face.

“Because Tate hasn't started yet,” Mason says, laughing, “but give him a few more minutes and I'm sure it will happen now that you've brought it up.”

Tate glares at him. “How old do you think I am? My life doesn't revolve around sex,” Tate protests as Bella nearly chokes on the water she's drinking.

“I beg... to differ,” Bella gets out between coughing.

“Like you're complaining.” By the look of him, I know that if we weren't all on a plane together, he would be pushing the point with her. And it would be with more than just the stare that tells her everything yet tells us nothing.

Before we have time to continue the conversation, Holly steps into the cabin to let us know the pilot is starting to make his descent, and she starts clearing our glasses and food.

“Don’t worry, boss, everything is under control,” Holly says, tapping Mason on the shoulder with a giggle. “I’m proud of the restraint you have shown, still sitting in this part of the plane.”

“Not funny, Holly.” His voice tells her how difficult that restraint has been.

“On the contrary, it’s hilarious.” And her laughter has us all joining in. Holly heads back out of the main cabin.

I stand and take two steps to him, lean down, then kiss him on the cheek and whisper in his ear, “It will be worth it tonight when there is no restraint needed.” Standing and continuing toward the bathroom, I hear his low growl and know that neither of us can wait.

Looking in the mirror while washing my hands, the smile creeps up my face. The surroundings of my life haven’t changed. I grew up in luxury the likes of which most people will never know, my dear father making sure I never took it for granted. Yet I can see change written all over my face. Although I’m aging, and none of us can stop that from happening, the difference I see is the happiness shining back at me.

It all stems from one man.

Mason.

Since he came into my life, I have smiled more, laughed more than I thought possible, and found my inner peace. Even in the chaos that is our life with the kids, I am calmer than I was before, and that’s something I didn’t think I would ever



achieve in my lifetime. The irony is that it happened after he taught me to let go of some of the control. Who would have thought that chaos brings calmness of the soul?

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We pull up to the apartment complex in the long black stretch limo. It looks impressive, but the truth of it is that it's the easiest way to transport eight of us from the plane to here. It's not uncommon to see on the streets of New York, but that doesn't mean there aren't people staring as we all start stepping out of the car.

I pull my gray wool coat that little bit tighter as the December chill nips at my skin. Mason and the boys help the doorman load the bags onto the luggage trolley while I lead the girls inside to get out of the cold. If there is one thing you can guarantee in New York in December, it's that you need to be prepared to keep warm. Layering is the key, and that is always finished off by that coat that keeps out frostbite, even if you were in the North Pole. Fashion is for inside and keeping warm is for outside.

With Mia's arm linked in mine, we head toward Serena who is on the door today. Suddenly, my heart jumps at a scream, the quick shuffling of shoes on the icy sidewalk, and then the thud of someone hitting the ground.

Turning quickly, I see Matilda looking shocked and trying to push herself up off the ground, with Bella already kneeling beside her and Gray pushing everyone out of the way to get to his wife.

"Tilly!" The distress in his voice is clear.

“I’m fine. Don’t fuss.” Matilda’s cheeks are red, but I can see there are tears pooling in her eyes. She tries to push him out of the way so she can stand up.

“I’ll be the judge of that.” I can see his protective streak rearing up.

He helps Matilda to her feet, lifting her easily, and I can see his eyes are scanning her body, trying to watch for any place that may be injured.

“Gray, I’m okay, just embarrassed...” Her determined voice is quickly fleeing, and the hint of pain is coming from her instead.

“Where does it hurt?” He puts his arm around her waist and takes all her weight. “Fuck this.” Before Matilda even has time to answer, he swoops her up into his arms and marches toward the doors Serena’s already holding open for him. I can see under the strong-husband vibe, he is panicking at the whole situation.

“Gray, put me down, I can manage.” Her protest falls on deaf ears.

My brain suddenly clicks into gear.

I rush forward to the elevator and press the button to get it open. I hold the door while he walks in with Tilly, still protesting. Mia and Bella both follow as I swipe my card for the penthouse, and the doors close. I know Mason will sort out all the luggage and get the guys upstairs on a second trip. We would have all fit, but with all the bags, it would have been a struggle. Not that I’ll admit I overdid the packing.

“Don’t you think you are overreacting?” Matilda huffs.

Seeing the look in Gray’s eyes, I know his patience with her is done. “Tilly, enough!” The growl reminds me of Mason

when I have pushed him too far.

Watching her roll her eyes, I try not to laugh as this all plays out. It's good to know our men are all the same. Full of all the witty words, but when it comes down to it, they are just extremely protective of their wives, in every single way. Even if it is just after a simple fall on the ice.

Reaching the apartment, I lead Gray toward the couch so he can lay Tilly down.

“Baby, I need you to tell me where it hurts.” The change in his demeanor to complete softness, Gray shows he is starting to calm down, and he doesn't seem as worried. Maybe he figured out that she wouldn't have been complaining so much on the way up here if it was anything major.

“It's just my ankle, the right one. It hurt a little to put weight on it.”

He kisses her on the forehead, then the doctor kicks in. Pulling off her shoe so he can assess it, he moves her foot around and watches her face for signs of pain. She gives small wincing, until that one movement where we all work out it hurts.

“Ouch! Do that again and I will give you the question ‘*does it hurt*’ right in your balls!” She yells her words across the room just as the elevator doors open and the boys, along with half a jet plane full of luggage, start emerging.

I can't help it anymore. Between listening to Tilly and watching all the guys' eyes nearly pop out of their heads at the thought of their own manhood and the pain Gray is about to have inflicted on his, the laughter just slips out, and even though Gray looks like he wants to kill me, everyone else joins in, even Tilly.

“It’s not funny. She could have seriously hurt herself. We’re lucky, it’s just a sprain, I think. But I need an X-ray to confirm that. Either way, it’s not fucking funny.” Gray’s exasperated voice has us all laughing harder.

“Oh, but it is,” Bella gets out between giggles. “Is that what it was like in the delivery room when the kids were born? Any pain Tilly was feeling was about to be returned to you right where you deserved for putting her there?”

“Worse, she threatened to cut it off and feed it to me for dinner if she ever got the baby out that I put in there.” He rubs her leg just above her ankle.

“What kind of doctor are you if you didn’t give her every pain medication on offer to her so that she didn’t feel a thing?” Lex looks disgusted at his friend. I remember the trouble Mia went through when the twins were born and Lex’s reaction. He was prepared to go to jail for hurting someone if that was what it would take to get his precious Mia some relief from the pain. When he walked out of the delivery room, he was as white as a sheet of paper. The man who could stand up in a court of law and strip paint off the wall with just a stare had been brought to his knees by feeling so helpless.

“Have you met my stubborn wife? She was determined to do it on her own, against my *medical* advice,” Gray says firmly, trying to emphasize to Tilly that now is the time to remember again that he is the doctor, and she is the patient.

“Now, if it’s okay with you, can I sort out this ankle?” He looks up at Matilda from where he is still assessing her ankle. “We should order a car to take us to the hospital, so we can get that X-ray.”

“Gray, I know you are trying to look after me, but I’m not spending my New Year’s Eve sitting in a hospital ER waiting

room for hours on end to get an X-ray. Surely it can wait until we get home tomorrow where you can sort it out in your hospital?" She's using her eyes for the silent persuasion we all seem to have the power to summon when needed.

He now looks to the other doctors in the room, Bella and Tate, for backup, but it's not working.

"I kind of agree with her, sorry, big brother. The emergency rooms will be crazy. You know what this night is like in Chicago; now imagine that on steroids in the Big Apple." Bella is trying to be the rational one here.

As he thinks for a moment, I see the instant where he gives in. "Fine, but I need some ice to try to keep this swelling down and a compression bandage if you have one, please, Paige. I'm sure with your kids, the apartment has a well-stocked first-aid kit." Gray stands, looking at me for answers.

Mason's voice comes from behind me, and he wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me against him. "What are you trying to say about my son? We all know he is a quiet little angel all the time." I see his face reflected in the floor-to-ceiling windows, trying to look like he is dead serious. But to no avail.

The laughter rings out around the room again, and I'm the loudest.

My husband shakes his head. "Okay, fair point. I'll get the first-aid kit. Paige, can you grab some ice for Gray?" Mason directs to get everything in motion.

Feeling his lips on my temple as he releases me from his grip has my body perking up in attention again. His touch instantly has me remembering the promises he made earlier. When his hand was sliding up my leg, I almost gave in to my

desire. Oh God, I didn't want to stop him from finishing what he started, but I had to find some of that inner strength to resist my sexy husband. But tonight, there will be no resisting. He can do whatever he likes to me, and I look forward to totally losing my mind in the ecstasy of his touch.

My mind wanders off to places it shouldn't right now, obviously, when Mason calls my name as he's returning from the downstairs bathroom, and I haven't moved an inch.

"Yep, on it, ice to cool down, yep, got it." Rushing off to the kitchen, I hope like hell my cheeks aren't as red as they feel.

I might get some ice for myself, to calm down the sizzle that is heating up in my body.

## Chapter Two

## MASON

**R**etrieving the first-aid kit, I know Paige is likely freaking out on the inside. She has had this night planned for a month. Wanting to make it perfect for our friends, planning it as a surprise, including from me. So, I don't know what Tilly's hurt ankle is going to mean to her plans.

"Thank you," Gray almost grunts as he takes the bandage from me. He is not happy that they aren't on their way to the hospital as we speak, and I totally get that. If it was Paige, I would be the same.

With all the girls fussing over Tilly, I need to get things organized. All the luggage is still sitting at the edge of the living room where it was dumped as we all scrambled out of the elevator.

"Hey, Lex and Tate, want to help me get these bags into the rooms so we don't have anyone else injuring themselves tripping over them?" I signal with my head toward the chaos before us.

"The only injury will be from lifting Paige's bags, so that one is all on you, buddy." Tate laughs with Lex as they both look at me with those, "*sorry, not sorry*" eyes.

"Yeah, yeah, I know." I'm used to it by now. Paige never packs light, and as much as I've tried to convince her she doesn't need it all, I'm politely ignored. I've given up and just put up with being the pack mule.

"The downstairs rooms are all made up for you, so take your pick which ones you want. Gray and Tilly can get what's left. Not that he'll care right now. I think he's too busy trying



to sort out his wife and make her listen to him. Yeah, good luck, buddy, Tilly is one strong woman.” Walking down the hallway with the guys, I can’t help but think how lucky we are. Friends from such a young age and then to find wives that have completed us as individuals, as well as a group. For all the bad things I saw during my time in the military, I’m grateful for the good things in my life now.

Placing Gray and Tilly’s bags in their room, I head upstairs with half of Paige’s wardrobe from home, I’m sure.

We have multiple properties across the US, but this apartment is my favorite, apart from home, of course. We’ve spent many nights here, both with and without the kids. It’s nice when Paige is traveling for meetings to have a home and not just be stuck in hotel after hotel. Not that the hotels we stay in aren’t the best quality and have everything at our fingertips. It’s just nice to know that no one has slept in this bed except me and my wife—oh, and two little ones who somehow always manage to find their way into our room.

I doubt there is any parent in this world who hasn’t been caught having sex by their kids at some stage. Without the kids knowing, because you’re both scrambling for the bathroom, or telling the kids that you were tickling Mommy or play-wrestling. When they’re older, it will probably hit them, and part of them will be horrified at what they walked in on because you know parents having sex is icky. But the other part of them will realize that their parents love each other deeply, and no matter how old they get, will not be able to keep their hands to themselves.

“I can’t believe that just happened.” I can hear the panic in Paige’s voice from behind me, exactly like I knew would happen. Paige stops to look at me and then continues past me,

acing our bedroom. This woman can organize the takeover of a billion-dollar company without even breaking out into a sweat, but when it comes to anything to do with her family or our friends, her brain short-circuits for a moment.

“Paige, it will be fine, you need to calm down.” I can tell my words aren’t even registering with her.

I step in front of her to stop her mid-stride. “Paige, stop!” The low tone of my voice snaps her out of her spiraling.

Pulling her close to me, I wrap her in my arms, dropping my lips close to her ear. I kiss just under it and whisper, “I know how to stop your thoughts. Let me distract you,” knowing that will be enough. Not that I’m denying I would love to pick her up and fuck her against the bedroom wall right now, get her out of her head, but I know that’s not what she will want once she digests what I just said.

As Paige looks at me, I see the moment her thoughts reactivate, and the plans are in motion.

“Don’t even go there, Mason. Later if you’re lucky.” Well, that’s not a no, which my dick appreciates.

Paige is already moving forward, and who am I to stop a freight train that is about to wind up to full speed.

“Poor Tilly, that must have hurt,” she says. “And more than just her pride, like she would have us believe.” Leaning down to kiss the top of her head, I hear her take a deep breath.

“What do you need me to do, boss?”

Pulling back from me, her fake laugh makes me smile. “In this room, we all know I’m far from the boss.” Smiling, she takes a step toward me and leans up, kissing me quickly on the cheek. “But out there, you bet your ass I’m the boss,” she says, pointing toward the door to our room. I know it’s time to head

back downstairs and help put whatever plan she is already plotting into action.

Before I can say another word, all I see is her back disappearing out the door, and my feet move to follow her.

“Mason, can you please get everyone something to eat and drink while I make some calls in the office?”

“Yes, boss,” I reply in a low voice, so as not to provoke a comment from my smartass buddies downstairs.

The way she smirks as she looks over her shoulder and winks at me leaves me with a cock that won't seem to go down today, and then the words leave her lips, “I think I prefer when you're the boss.”

“Paige. Not helping,” I growl at her as she turns at the bottom of the stairs to head to her office, smacking her on that tight little ass in her straight skirt, and of course, as always, her bright red fuck-me heels.

Her giggles disappear into the office, and the door closes. I know that means stay out until she is finished.

I guess things have settled down a little in the living room, with everyone casually seated on the couch and only Gray still looking like a wreck and fussing over Tilly.

“Right, who's up for a drink then?”

“Me!” Tilly is the first to reply, knowing full well the reaction she'll get from Gray, and she is spot-on.

“Matilda, no drinking for you tonight!” Laughter fills the room, and his eyes tell us all to shut the hell up.

“Jesus, big brother,” Bella says with a smirk, “she's only sprained her ankle, not about to have lifesaving surgery. Surely

you aren't going to deny your wife a drink on New Year's Eve."

"Bella." His reply is quick and straight to the point.

"Not trying to. Lighten up. There are three doctors in this room. Two of whom are voting for giving *you* a sedative to calm you down, rather than the woman who is hurt. If Tilly tells you she's okay, then take her word for it. Just give her mild painkillers that won't be affected by the alcohol. Otherwise, pay the consequences." She looks at Tate with a smirk on her face.

"Which are?" he asks, glaring at his sister.

"You get to swap rooms and be next door to Tate and me tonight."

"Like hell!" Gray replies loudly.

And at the same time, Tate glares at her. "Not a chance, Tink!" Tate growls.

Trying not to laugh too much at the look on both my friends' faces, I ask Lex for help. "Right, it's settled then, drinks all around. Lex, you're up."

Standing and placing a kiss on Mia's head, he follows me into the kitchen. Both of us try to ignore the look on Gray's face, that he has been overruled by his wife and his sister and is annoyed at Tate for not backing him up. You know, bro code and all that. I think we can all see he has been a bit over the top, but it probably has to do with coming off a night shift with very little sleep. Lack of sleep can make a man crazy, and combined with his wife, that's a mixture for insanity.

I hear Tilly trying to soothe the beast. "I'll just have a couple. I'll be fine. One now and one at midnight." Her voice

is super sweet, and the *hmpf* that escapes from Gray tells me he is still not happy.

“Tell me I’m not as bad as that with Mia.” Lex looks at me with his eyebrows raised, and it’s a genuine question on his mind.

“Christ, no, Lex. You’re ten times worse.” I slap him on the back as he rolls his eyes at me, not believing one word I said.

Why is it we can see it in others but never in ourselves? Mind you, I’m happy admitting how overprotective of Paige I can be at times. I mean, during that flight, sitting in the cabin took every bit of strength not to be in control of her safety. She brings out the absolute caveman in me, but she never complains—well, most times.

“Should we be worried that Paige has been locked in her office for a while now?” Bella looks toward the closed doorway at the bottom of the stairs.

“Nope,” I say, sipping on my beer. “If I’ve learned one thing, it’s that when she is on a mission, you step away and wait until she is finished. Isn’t that right, Mia?”

“I love my sister with all my heart, but even I’m not stupid enough to open that door. She’ll be out when she’s done.” The smile on Mia’s face tells me after all this time, she still loves her job working with Paige.

“She’d better not be working in there, that’s against the rules for this getaway.” Tate’s oblivious as to what she could be doing. Like I’ve said, he is the most intelligent guy in this room, but when it comes to practicality, it’s not his strongest attribute.

Tilly sighs. “No, I have a feeling she’s changing our plans for tonight because of my clumsiness. I’m sorry, everyone.” Disappointment and sorrow show all over Tilly’s face as her eyes cast downward.

Before anyone gets a chance to reply, the door opens, and I see a triumphant look plastered across Paige’s face.

“Everything okay?” Not that I even have to ask her.

“Perfect, just perfect.” Being the sensitive woman she is, Paige heads straight to the couch where Tilly is lying with her foot up and ice wrapped on her ankle.

Perching herself on the arm of the couch next to Tilly, she makes sure she knows that everything is fine, and nothing is wrecked.

“So, we’ve had a quick change of plans. But we are going to have the best night. It will be a New Year’s Eve to remember.” Her face is beaming, and I know once again money has talked, and she has people scrambling somewhere to make sure Paige gets what she wants.

“Oh, I’m sure I’ve made it a night that everyone will remember, and not for the best reasons,” Tilly says with a huff.

“No, no, no. There will be no feeling sorry for yourself, Tilly. I mean it. We are going to have the best time.” She squeezes Matilda’s hand as she stands to present to the group, like she is about to sell her plans to a boardroom full of business colleagues. Not that she needs to give the big sales pitch. The people in this room will agree with whatever she is about to sell them.

“Initially, I had a booking for dinner for us all at Ignite, with drinks later at Smooth. Then back here to ring in the new year with our nearest and dearest. So, with a slight change of

plans, we will still be eating the amazing food from Chef Chloe Hetty at Ignite; it's just we will be doing it in the luxury of this apartment where we don't need to be quiet, and the boys won't have to be on their best behavior."

Pretending to fake shock, Tate's hand lands on his heart. "I take offense to that. We are always on our best behavior." He bats his eyelashes at Paige, hoping she will get sucked in by his pretend innocence.

"Bullshit, Tate." The girls all bust into hysterical laughter at once.

"Wow, even you, Tink? You are supposed to be on my side."

"Not when you're talking crap, dearest husband." Patting him on the leg, she snuggles into his side.

"Paige, I can't believe you got us into Ignite. That place has a reputation right across the country, and now I've ruined it." Matilda, being an event planner, knows the prestige of the restaurant. "Thank you for organizing for us to still enjoy the amazing food that everyone raves about. This place is on the top of the list for all the awards and the who's who of celebrities and the rich and famous."

"You haven't ruined anything. We can all go another time." All eyes are still glued on Paige while I wait to see if she will share her secret. "I have to confess, though, it wasn't as hard as it seems." Smiling across at me, I see the spark that lights up when she gets excited about things.

"Chloe Hetty and her husband, James Foster, are friends of mine, that I've known for a long time. Actually, I knew both of them individually before they became a couple."

Tate chuckles. “Oh, of course you do. Is there any of the big important people in the Big Apple—or the country, for that matter—that you don’t know?” Tate asks with all the confidence of a man who’s a household name in Chicago.

I try to hide my cough as I answer, “Not many.” My comment isn’t out of my mouth for even a second before a pillow comes hurtling toward my head. Ducking at the right moment, it instead hits the floor behind me, skidding across the tiles toward the dining room.

Bella, already one drink in, raises her glass at me to let me know I need to keep them coming. “You guys make it sound like it’s a bad thing. I think it’s freaking awesome. Makes our little life in Chicago seem dull.”

“Hardly,” Paige says. “I love my life in Chicago and the people in it. Our family always keeps it real. Grounded, and that is the most important thing. I’d give up all the money in the world for the people in this room.”

The girls all let out a communal “Aww” at the same time.

It sounds like one of those throw-away statements to make everyone feel warm and fuzzy, but I know that she means every word of it.

Money is nice, but it means nothing if you don’t have love in your life or the people to share it with.

Mind you, I’m not sure Paige even knows what it’s like to have nothing, but after finally finding her sister Mia, who grew up in poverty, the stories that she has opened up to Paige about her life finally gave her a good indication.

“Enough of this mushy stuff. Can we get back to the bit about some fancy and amazing food you promised me?” Tate



stands from the couch, on his way to grab another beer. “Anyone else?” he asks, lifting his empty bottle into the air.

“That’s my husband, always thinking about his stomach.” Bella hands him her empty glass.

“Partly true. I have something else that trumps that in my thoughts, though.” Everyone in the room groans before he even gets a chance to say it.

“What? I was going to say it’s my wifey here.” His cheesy smile is almost nauseating.

Gray finally joins the conversation. “Fuck, get me a beer, and someone find the man card that Tate left at the front door.”

“I’m not even going to acknowledge that, coming from the man who is sitting on the floor not more than five inches from his wife, still in full panic mode.” Tate throws the comment over his shoulder as he opens the fridge door.

“*Half* panic mode now, thank you, asshole.” Gray stands and runs his hand over the top of Matilda’s head and moves more than a few feet from her to prove his point, following Tate into the kitchen.

Paige takes command of the room again. “Can we get back to the plans for tonight when you boys are finished being, well... boys?” She proceeds to tell us how the night is going to run.

“So, about four-thirty, we should all get dressed up just like we planned, and the party will begin in the living room at six o’clock.”

“I don’t need an hour and a half to get ready,” Tate says, trying to give his impersonation of a GQ model. “This good-looking face takes five minutes.”

I can't help spitting my beer out. "Knew you would be one of those five-minute men." I watch as it dawns on Tate what he just said.

He opens his mouth to reply but quickly realizes it's just not worth it.

"Surely we can get through tonight without every conversation revolving back to sex." Mia who doesn't say much, giggles as she throws in her comment. The giggle telling me she is already on her way to becoming the funny Mia she becomes when she gets a little tipsy. Her confidence has certainly grown over the years, but still, the alcohol lets her guard down just that little bit more, and it's beautiful to watch. I'm sure Lex has seen it many times, but for the rest of us, we are still amazed at how strong she has become after all she endured.

"Not a chance," Lex replies. But I can't work out if he means that in a growly Lex kind of way where he is complaining about Tate as usual... or if he was putting his wife on notice.

I for one won't argue at the extra time we have to get ready for our special dinner. Paige owes me some alone time after all the flirting she has done today, with promises of what would come later. Well, I'm ready to cash in on every single one of those.

The afternoon continues with the usual laughter and stories. How we still manage to drag up stories that the girls haven't heard yet is beyond me, but then we did do some pretty ridiculous things before we grew up and met them. It's debatable that we have grown up at all.

"Seriously, you haven't heard the story about Grayson and the first time he took a girl parking in his dad's BMW? It was

Vanessa Schofield, wasn't it?" Lex is happy to start the next story to deflect the attention away from him after he was the star of the last. It had the girls laughing so much they had tears running down their faces, and Mia was gasping for air she was giggling so hard.

Tate, who always loves to ramp up the story, adds, "Yeah, that's right, 'Vanessa goody-two-shoes', or so Gray thought. Isn't that how it went, big stud?" The tale has grown over the years, the details more exaggerated.

"Do I get to tell my own story or is this the Tate movie version where the screenwriter has taken a little too much poetic license with the facts?" Protesting and trying to make himself not look so stupid never works. It'll just makes him look worse.

"See, here's the thing. We don't need to make this story funnier than it already is. You did that all on your own." This time us boys are laughing, Gray now throwing his hands in the air, knowing it's a lost cause.

"Oh, come on, let me hear my husband's version, and then you guys can fill in the blanks after." Tilly lays her head on Gray's shoulder where he's sitting on the couch next to her. Her foot is propped up on a foot stool and the swelling doesn't look too bad after the constant ice on and off.

"Or the truth as we know it." Tate's full of confidence, and I just know he's creating the stretched story in his head to annoy the crap out of Gray.

"Really? If I remember correctly, you weren't even there, so I'm sure what I'm about to say will be the true story." Giving Tate the bird, Gray settles in to give the girls the story.

“Right, so Vanessa and I met through the inter-school sports days we used to have with the girls’ private school down the road from us. A lot of the guys in our school had sisters who went there. Lewis in my English class turned out to be her brother.” He rolls his eyes at the memory of Lewis. “It should have triggered something, knowing him, that Vanessa was not as she seemed. But sometimes siblings are quite different. I mean, look at Arabella and me. I’m the intelligent doctor in the family, and she is the crazy one who married Tate. So, genetics doesn’t say much.”

“Get on with it and stop trying to deflect.” Bella’s now laughing as Tate pretends to pout at the insult.

“After a few meetings in our group after school, I asked her to the movies, which went smoothly, and then decided I would take her parking out near the lake in the secret spot that everyone talked about, so obviously not secret at all. Thought I might try for a few kisses, you know, because she was so quiet, and I wanted to be a gentleman like my mom had always told me to be.”

Bella’s face lights up at the mention of their mom. Fond thoughts are now a happy place for her to go when Maxine gets talked about.

“The car was parked facing toward the water and on a little slope. We sat and talked for a little while about anything that came to mind. Mostly school gossip and sadly schoolwork that we were both doing. Trying to get the confidence to kiss her, I leaned across the center console slowly so I didn’t panic her. Fuck, not sure why I bothered being slow. The moment my lips touched hers, it was like some wild cat was released from inside of her. It felt like she was eating my face, and the shock of it let her catch me off guard. Her hands on my shoulders,

she pushed me back and started scrambling over the center console and into my lap. To say I panicked is an understatement. Don't get me wrong, my cock was fully on board, but this was not the Vanessa I knew at all. I didn't want to run the risk of her running back to her brother or friends saying I forced her to do anything. I was just planning on kissing her, and it would be a bonus if I got a grope."

Mia looks across at him. "Why do I get a feeling this story is G-rated because your sister is in the room?"

He starts shaking his head in denial. "I was such an innocent boy growing up, Mia. It was these assholes who corrupted me."

"Bullshit," I say, coughing into my hand.

"Annnywaaaay... keep going." Tilly is getting impatient to hear the end of the story.

"Well, as she pushed me backward into the seat and started climbing over me, her sandal strap got caught on the gear stick, and the car lurched forward. I was trying sit up and move her, but she was in such an awkward position that I couldn't do anything. I was pinned to the seat, my hands stuck under her and hair all in my face. I couldn't see a thing. Vanessa was screaming, and I thought it was just from being stuck, but then I felt the car start moving. I had forgotten to put the parking brake on, and the car was rolling slowly down the embankment toward the water. Not just any car but my dad's very expensive car.

"I tried to move my leg enough to find the pedal, but the first one I found, of course, was the accelerator which was useless. Stomping my foot on the floor, finally it connected with the brake pedal. I could tell the car had stopped moving, but now I had to work out how to get Vanessa off me, the car

back in gear, and the parking brake on, all without moving my foot.”

“Can I ask where her face was right at this moment?” Paige is already laughing at the picture Gray is painting, but being a details person, she wants more.

“Not where you are thinking. Her ass was in the air, pinned to the windshield, her face turned to the side window, and all her strawberry-blond hair was on my face.”

“Oh God, please tell me her skirt or dress wasn’t hiked up around her waist, or even worse, was she wearing a tight skirt?” I can see Mia feels embarrassed for Vanessa, but the rest of the girls are too busy laughing at the images.

“Thankfully for her it was fall, so she had pants on, but the weather wasn’t as kind to me with the car. Once we managed to untangle each other, I could see we were only a few feet from the water’s edge. I tried to reverse back up the hill, but of course, the wheels spun on the dewy grass. The more they spun, the more panicked I got. I’d only had my license a few months and had no idea about much, other than driving in a straight line.” He’s laughing at himself by this stage, lost in his memory.

“And this is where the extra embarrassment comes into it. First, I had to interrupt one of the other cars at the secret/not-so-secret parking spot to drive us back to town so I could tell my dad what had happened. Then we had to take Vanessa home in a taxi and travel out to meet the tow truck out where the car was so he could pull it back onto the dry ground. The drive home in the car with Dad was silent, and I couldn’t tell if I was in trouble just a little, or if this was worthy of being grounded for. But I found out years later that Dad couldn’t speak, otherwise he would start laughing, and he didn’t want

to embarrass me more than I already had been that night. The next morning, he gave me a little talk about safe sex, and it was the most awkward talk of my life. Little did he know Mom had done it years before, and I wasn't stupid. There were no babies happening for me for a long, long time. I could barely look after myself, so children were the last thing I needed to complicate my life."

"Why didn't you keep with that motto, our life would be far less chaotic currently without the little mini versions of you we have running around." Tilly grins at him and kisses him on the cheek.

"Take that back. You wouldn't change our little family for the world." As much as we're all tired and complain about our kids, they are the best thing that we have ever done. For me, watching parts of Paige looking back at me through our kids is my greatest achievement.

"On a good day, yes." Tilly lifts her glass up to the other women, all instantly thinking about the kids they've left at home.

"Cheers to that," Bella cries out as they all down a little more of the champagne.

"Now my turn?" Tate, trying to gain the attention, just gets stared down by Tilly.

"Nope, I like this version of my husband being a pure gentleman... By the way, what happened to Vanessa?"

"Ugh, well, after all my best efforts to convince her not to tell anyone, by the time we got back to school on Monday, half the boys already knew I got the car stuck and didn't score with her either. Apparently, she was a quiet one, but they always say those are the ones you need to watch. By the time we

graduated, she had slept with half my grade, and that image was blown.”

Paige points her finger around the room. “Which one of you was on her conquest list? Confession time.”

“I wasn’t going back there,” Gray says, laughing.

Lex shakes his head. “I was too serious to even look sideways at her or anyone at that time.” He’s telling the truth of what he was like under the control of his dictator parents.

“Too much drama for me,” I said. “Plus, Lewis warned me off her. God knows why.” She wasn’t my type, even if he hadn’t warned me off.

“I had too many others lining up for me!” Tate stands and declares proudly.

“I call bullshit, Tate!” Bella cries out as we’re all throwing shade at him. If there is one thing you can guarantee with Tate, it’s that he’ll bring the life to the party.

As Paige glances at her watch, I know what is about to happen.

“As much as I want to hear more embarrassing, shaming stories, it’s time for us to get glammed up before the food arrives. Remember, no copping out, even for the guys. Full party clothes. We are about to have the best New Year’s Eve ever!”

As everyone heads to their rooms, I start picking up all the empties and taking them to the kitchen, making sure everything is tidy before dinner arrives. Hearing shuffling behind me, I watch as Gray refuses to let Tilly walk. My heart feels full. I love every person in this place with more than I ever knew I had to give.



The room's quiet, but I can sense Paige's eyes on me. Slowly turning, I see her leaning her hip against the edge of the kitchen counter. The laughing is no longer echoing around us, and instead, it's been replaced by the pure smolder and heat oozing off Paige.

"Time to get dressed, Mason..." Her voice is barely more than a whisper, and she crooks her finger, calling me closer.

"More than happy to remove these first." I run my hand up her thigh, her skirt sliding with it slightly. "But I don't fucking share, not with anyone. Bedroom now!" My voice is barely restrained as I lick up her neck and sink my teeth into her ear.

"We have guests in the apartment." Her purr has me hard and pressing against my pants.

"Then you better be quiet, because I have waited long enough."

Her eyes, dark and full of fire, give me the go-ahead to take what's mine.

"I'm ravenous, and it's not for dinner!"

## Chapter Three

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## PAIGE

**H**is look of pure devotion gets my body tingling without him even touching me. I know what it means, and I'm totally on board with it.

Not another word is spoken between us as I ascend the stairs.

Just like I do on the tarmac, walking up the steps to the plane, I sway my hips to lure my man to the promised land.

Climbing stairs in heels, in front of Mason, is his weakness. Especially when he's working and is trying to have his professional wall up. I've lost count of the number of times I got a text message as I was buckling into my seat on the plane, telling me what he plans to do to punish me. But God, it's worth it.

Every. Single. Time.

"Move that ass of sin, before I start spanking you here on the stairs for everyone to hear." Pausing at the top, on the last step, he reaches out and circles his hand on my ass cheek.

That's it. I'm almost running down the hallway. Reaching our bedroom, the door is about to bang closed, but Mason saves it at the last minute, keeping things quiet. The next second, without warning, I'm in his arms and pinned against the door, with my hands above my head and his knee spreading my legs. I'm not into pain play, but his hand on my ass branding me as his has me wet and longing for his touch to relieve me.

"You want to play, Tiger? Is that what today's flirting has been about?" His deep voice lets me know he means business,

and Mason, my boss, is in the room. I'm helpless and at his mercy.

This is what I long for.

Trying to deny it is useless.

Plus, who the hell wants to! This is hot as fuck.

"Yessss," slips from my lips as he slides his hand up under my skirt, flicking the first clip on my garter strap loose. I very rarely wear full stockings because the thought of easy access for Mason has me grabbing the thigh-high stockings every time.

"Don't move!" he growls, dropping to his knees, and I know what that means.

I can't touch but just have to take what he is going to give me. It leaves me guessing whether he plans on going slow and sensual to drive me insane, knowing I can't make a sound. Or hard and fast where I'll want to scream loud enough that everyone in this apartment will know what he's doing to me, but instead, I bite down on his shoulder to muffle the scream, marking my man in the best possible way.

The torture of keeping quiet is a massive turn-on for both of us. Mason plays my body like an instrument. He is the maestro.

Slowly, his large hands slide my skirt up my thighs. As his hands move past the stockings I still have on and onto my bare skin, the electricity shoots through every nerve in my body.

The hitch in his breath tells me he likes what he sees. Just for him, I have on a black silk G-string, trimmed with a small strip of tiger print. I can't resist anytime I see something like these in the store. I must buy them because I know what they do to Mason.

“Mm-hm, I see my girl has been shopping for me,” he says, running his nose up the outside of the silk and absorbing everything. I want to drop my hands and grab his head, holding him right where he is, but I know I don’t get to make those decisions.

Next, he removes my garter belt and lets it drop to the floor.

“I want you just like this.” He squeezes my ass cheeks and pushes his shoulders between my legs. One by one, he lifts each leg onto his shoulders so I’m pinned against the door. My heart beats faster and faster as he starts to run his tongue up my sex through the silk. The friction and pressure of his tongue and the smoothness of the material sends my senses into overload.

“Mason.” The moan slips out of my mouth, giving away how worked up I am. “More, I need more.”

“Maybe I want to make you wait.” He starts to nip little bites all over my sex, and I can’t take it much longer. With my body squirming, I push my pussy harder into his face, trying to get the pressure I need on my clit.

“Ah-ah, I told you that I was going to make you hold that orgasm until I’m ready.”

“Fucker, you can’t!” How am I supposed to hold it together when all I want to do is scream the house down, but I have promised to stay quiet.

“Oh, but I can, Tiger... and I just... might... do... that.” His words come in between the swiping of his tongue on the inside of my thigh. “I do remember someone making me wait.” As he looks up at me to see my reaction, the smile tells me he likes what he sees.

“Please...”

“What do you want, Tiger?”

“Everything... Oh fuckkkk, Mason.” He runs his finger down the crease in my ass, slowly hovering over my tight pucker. The thought of him breaching that sacred place has me jumping in his arms, exactly like planned. My sex pushes against his face, and just as his finger slips past the strap on my G-sting and inside me, he bites down on my clit. Being caged in makes everything heightened, and my body explodes in a spine-tingling orgasm. I couldn’t have held back my moan that filled the room even if I tried. It’s too much, but at the same time, not enough. I want more, and he knows that.

Mason has taught me to be greedy.

“I’m going to fuck you, but not here.” He lifts me off his shoulders and places my heels back on the ground. Standing before me, that vein in his neck is pulsing, and his Adam’s apple bulges as he swallows, trying to get himself under control.

“Stop that,” I say, my voice quivering.

“Stop what?” His hands are now on his shirt, undoing the buttons.

“Trying to hold back.” I pull my shirt out of my skirt and over my head. I want to give him the whole view, bra, panties, thigh-high stockings, and my fuck-me heels. Like a red flag to a bull.

“On the contrary, Tiger, I’m about to let loose on you and love you like you want me to.”

He drops his shirt to the floor, and the top button on his pants is already flicked open. His cock is bulging and just the top strip of his hair showing.

I wonder if it's okay for a woman of my age and social standing to drool out the corner of my mouth at the sight of him before me.

“Bed. Now!” That voice coming at me has me mesmerized and moving without even second-guessing him.

I stand in front of our large king-size bed, covered in the deep navy quilt, and look over my shoulder, waiting for my instructions. I keep my hands at my sides, even though I want to reach out to touch him.

“Crawl forward on your hands and knees.” My body is now covered in a light sheen of sweat, just from his words.

“Fucking perfect.” His hands caress my ass cheeks that are on full display for him and only him.

“Don't rip my new panties,” I struggle to get out as his fingers slip under the elastic on the side.

“Not this time.” He drags them down until they're around my knees and lying on the bed. I lift one leg to give him the space to pull them all the way off, but the sharp slap on my right ass cheek makes me put that leg back down.

The sting burns through to my sex, and I can tell I'm dripping with need. A few more quick taps on the left cheek and back to the right. My back arches like a cat, and the crying noise of pleasure I'm making is hardly quiet.

“What did I say about keeping quiet?” His zipper sliding down has me quivering.

“Make me!” I'm done waiting and playing this game. I want Mason, and I want him now.

Looking over my shoulder, I see him stroking his cock, the veins popping and the head weeping. A few slow strokes and

he's torturing both of us. I'm not able to wait any longer. There is no foreplay needed, and he knows that. He lines his cock up and pushes inside without stopping. Hard and fast is how it's going to be.

"Fuuucckkk, Tiger." The deep whispered words off his lips make me smile. My head hangs between my shoulders, my dark hair covering my face from the outside world. I don't care one bit because I don't need to see Mason. This is all about feeling him. Pounding into me, not letting up. I bite my tongue so I don't scream, and it brings praise from Mason.

"Such a good girl. That's it, take it all, Paige." The intense thrusting has me gripping the quilt with both hands to stay still. "You like to be a prick tease? Well then, this is what you get."

"Mason, I can't hold..."

"Don't you fucking come until I say. I told you I'd make you wait."

His thrusting gets quicker, and the tell-tale grunting sounds that means he's getting close are music to my ears.

"Please, I need to..."

He pushes so deep inside me as he gets the words out through gritted teeth. "Now, come now!"

Both of us explode together, and the world goes black with stars across my eyes. His cock is still pulsing inside of me as the release is as epic for him as it is for me. Mason leans forward, and I feel light kisses between my shoulder blades. His sweat from his chest mixes with the sheen on my back as he pulls me up onto my knees. Wrapping his big arms around me, he kisses my neck.



“I’m done,” I murmur as my head flops back onto his shoulder.

“Oh no, that was just the beginning. Save your energy. Because tonight, I’m not stopping until you can’t talk or walk. I’ve missed you, Paige.”

My body already feels like jelly, but my sex drive is perking up at his words.

The last few months have been busy, with work and with all the craziness of Christmas with children, so there hasn’t been much time for just us. You can have all the money in the world, but time is the most precious gift to give someone.

“Me too.”

His arms loosen from around me and place me on my back on the bed. Flicking my shoes off and unhooking my bra, the emotion in Mason’s eyes as he drops my panties and stockings to the floor is just what I need.

I need my husband wrapped around me for just a few minutes. Soft and caring to take all the tension away.

“You better set an alarm. We both know you’ll be asleep in five minutes,” Mason teases. And I can’t even deny that. Post-orgasmic bliss is the best sleeping remedy on the market.

But this time, it’s Mason who lets out the first long deep breath, and feeling his body relaxing, I know I’m not far behind him.

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“You all look stunning,” I say, looking around the room at everyone dressed for dinner.

Bella's wearing a silver fitted halter dress, all sparkly and sequined. She often talks about how she feels like all she ever does is walk around in her doctor's coat or scrubs. And when she isn't in those, then in her everyday clothes that end up with some sort of child's stain on her, whether it be food from sticky hands or glue from the craft they were doing. I don't know where she finds the energy, but she never ceases to amaze me by how hands-on she is with her kids after such long shifts. She and Tate have managed to be the best team raising their kids, always making sure they have their schedules balanced so one of them can be around when the kids need them.

Looking across at Tate standing behind her, in his dark charcoal suit, I see he is appreciating the view of Bella too.

I know Mia was reluctant to splurge on herself, but wow, that dress is just perfect for her. A deep emerald-green satin cocktail dress that Lex has matched perfectly with a tie that has a mixture of green shades. Dressed in a black shirt and pants, it makes the color pop on his tie. Mia's hair is all pulled up into a French roll, with a few loose curls on the sides to give her all the sophistication of someone who was born into this world. I'm so proud of the strong woman she has become, who I couldn't run my company without anymore. I didn't know how much I needed Mia in my life both personally and professionally until I found her by chance. But watching her grow into who she was destined to be has been magical. It's made up for the years we were apart.

One of the pluses of Matilda's sprained ankle is we can get all dressed and don't then have to layer our thick winter coats over the top in the cold. Hence Lex not in his suit jacket and happy to be rubbing his hands up and down Mia's bare skin from where his arm is around her shoulder.

It's not snowing outside, but it's cold enough that it should be. It's what brought the ice on the ground when we arrived. The culprit that now has us all here in the warmth and comfort of the apartment.

"Matilda, you should be sitting down." Gray is hovering behind his wife, ready to catch her if she falls again. I can't see her feet, as she's standing behind the couch, so I don't know if she won the argument about wearing the Louboutin shoes she bought especially for the occasion. Not that I don't agree with Gray this time, that stiletto high heels are probably not the shoe of choice with a sprained ankle.

"Seriously, Gray. I will once we take the photo. Now hush," she says, putting him in his place in a soft voice and gently pressing her finger to his lips. It has us all smirking at him as he rolls his eyes at her. I love her long, fitted black-and-white pinstriped dress with knee-length splits on both sides. It shows off her body beautifully and accentuates her curves in all the right places.

"Then somebody better get snap-happy with the camera before I sit your ass on that seat for the rest of the night." Gray's patience is growing thin as Tilly just ignores him.

For me, this is second nature to be dressed for nights of high-end entertaining or gala events for charities. But the difference is they are for work, whereas tonight is about the company of some of the most important people in my life, where we can all just be ourselves.

I knew the moment I saw it, the dress I wanted for tonight. It's a soft pink chiffon floor-length dress. The sleeves are see-through, with the bodice and the under skirt to my knees lined with satin, giving the color a bit of depth, as well as hiding the parts of me that should not be on show. The rest of the skirt

flows to the floor where you can still see my silver heels. Mason is in black pants and white shirt most days, so he tries not to wear that too often outside of work. Tonight, he's wearing a navy dinner suit, no tie, and the top button of his shirt is open. As much as seeing him in his pilot's uniform does it for me every time, I love this laid-back look that just exudes sexiness without even trying.

“Come on, Paige, we better take the picture before Gray loses it over there.” Mason's voice in my ear brings me back to the room instead of off fantasizing about him.

“Yes, right, photos. I have the small phone tripod set up on the kitchen counter to shoot us all standing near the dining table.” Everyone starts moving into place, with Tilly being her usual self and picking which couple should be next to each other, so the colors of our dresses complement each other. You can never turn off her creative flair when it comes to how something will look; that's what makes her a great event coordinator.

With the photo snapped and Tilly seated at the table, leg comfortably propped up on a cushion on another chair, Mason opens the wine, getting ready for the food that is now on its way up in the elevator.

I can't believe Chloe didn't even hesitate when I called her. I mean, it's probably one of the biggest nights of the year for her restaurant, and she said it was no trouble. She laughed and told me every night is the biggest night of the year in her business. One bad review from someone who is happy to share it on social media and the whole thing could start crumbling down. So, to her, tonight is just another night, and after being in business for as long as I have, I get that.

With the chime of the elevator arriving, I walk toward the two men who are pushing a trolley full of food containers. The older man quietly goes about his job in the kitchen, putting things in the oven and opening boxes of the dishes that are to be served first. Desserts are then tucked quickly away in the fridge.

There is a young man who looks quite shy and not very confident. But for some reason, his eyes are fixed on Mason who is totally oblivious to it. As Mia calls me so I can help her serve, it takes my attention away. By the time I think to turn back to the young man, he is already at the elevator with the empty cart, and Tate tips them both for being so kind as to do all of this at such short notice.

“Oh my God, Paige, this food looks amazing. I bet the taste is to die for.” Tilly looks like she is about to jump out of her chair and dance around in circles she’s so excited. I can just imagine Gray’s reaction if she tried to do that.

“You know I’m just a mere mortal man with no idea about food, but I can tell you now that these meals will blow your mind,” Mason says. “And even better, they aren’t those tiny little pieces on a plate that aren’t even enough to feed a sparrow. Chloe knows how to serve a man-sized meal.” Mason looks at the guys, and they’re all nodding like he is speaking their language.

“Then what are we waiting for, I’m starving,” Tate proclaims as he starts pouring the wine that Mason had placed on the table after he opened it.

“And this is a new revelation for everyone? I doubt it. You’re always hungry.” Bella rolls her eyes at her husband, and it brings laughter around the table as we’re all taking our seats.

Mason makes me agree that I have done enough to get tonight organized, so he says he'll be the waiter tonight. Pulling my seat out for me, his eyes tell me to sit, otherwise there will be trouble. Who am I to argue with my husband who is being the gentleman? I'm used to being waited on, but this is different, as it comes from a place of love and devotion. It means so much more.

Grayson has finally relaxed into the night and is back to his usual charming self as Mason places his entrée down in front of him. "Can you tell us about the dish, sir?" Grayson says with the straightest face, looking at Mason as he waits for the answer.

"Yep, it's brown and green and is covered in white liquid, with red swirls on the plate around it." Mason swats him across the back of the head for being a smartass.

"Sounds truly appetizing, sir, but I might need a little more information." Grayson looks back at him with a stupid grin.

Lex, helping Mason serve the food, is laughing now and joins in. "Then here you go. You eat this or you starve. Simple." Lex's response is blunt, and he and Mason high-five each other above Gray's head.

"I have to tell you, Paige, the staff in your establishment leave a lot to be desired. Might be time to look for new ones." Gray winks at me as Tate takes his seat next to Bella, after pouring all the glasses of wine.

"What do you mean? I poured every glass without spilling a drop," Tate complains as he takes the bait, just like Gray was hoping.

"That's because you never want to waste a drop of a good wine," Mia adds. "And if I know my sister, it's a very good,

very expensive wine.” She looks at me, waiting for my reply.

“Only the best for my family.” I lift my glass to the air, with everyone following. “Happy New Year to us all.”

“Happy New Year!” everyone cries out in chorus.

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We devour our entrees to the constant noises around the table of, “Mm-hm,” “This is to die for,” “I’d give my first-born for this,”—Wait, that’s my first-born too that Mason is giving away for food. I slap his shoulder, and he bursts out laughing.

“We need to pace ourselves with the wine, otherwise I’m not sure I’ll make it until midnight.” Bella is already yawning.

“Don’t you dare think you’re going to bed before we ring in the new year!” Tilly blurts out. She’s wired up and I’m sure running on the pain meds that Gray gave her. They were ones we had on hand from when my father stayed here with his sore hip.

“Give me a break, woman, you haven’t been up since five am for a medical emergency.” Bella lays her head on Tate’s shoulder, and he runs his hands over the top of her head and down her hair at the back. I can tell it’s not going to help her stay awake the way her face relaxes and her body sags further into his.

“I thought you were supposed to be off all day today.” Mia looks at both Bella and her brother. “But then you both ended up at the hospital anyway.”

Bella and Gray look at each other and shrug their shoulders to the rest of us.

“What can I say? If someone needs us, I can never say no.” And that is why they are such good doctors.

“Well, I know what will keep you awake after we eat dinner,” I say, clapping my hands. “Keeping your brain active! I’m sure we have some board games here. Oh God, yes, Scrabble, we can play Scrabble in teams. This will be so much fun!” I’m almost jumping in my seat like a child, which I think comes from growing up without any siblings. I missed out on a lot of the enjoyment of family bonding. It’s never too late to fulfill those dreams, though.

“Board games. What the hell, I don’t think I’ve played one since college.” Tate laughs but then tames it down a bit when he can see how excited I am. But he doesn’t understand, it’s not the simple game we’re playing, it’s the company we are playing it with.

“Just because we’re all wealthy, successful people, that doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy the simple things in life, Tate. Or is it beneath you to compete against your friends in a spelling bee?” I didn’t mean it to come out so harsh, but Tate gets the message.

“Fuck no, I’m going to whoop your asses!” Tate replies, trying to smooth it over.

“Ugh, can you imagine all the big words the doctors and the lawyer in the room will come up with? We’re doomed, Paige.” Mason’s looking at me quite seriously. “And you know I hate losing.”

Tilly scoffs. “Oh, like there is one man in this room that takes well to losing. I’ve seen you all playing basketball in your weekly game together. It’s like you’re playing for the keys to run a country.” Tilly points around the room. “I think it’ll be fun, but we’d better have rules. No medical or legal



terminology, and no swear words. Everything else is fair game. Oh, and no googling on cell phones. In other words, no cheating, boys!”

“Us? I don’t what you mean. Have you ever played with Paige? She is vicious, super competitive, and will do anything to win.” Mason peeks at me, trying to keep a straight face, and I know he’s thinking back to the game of basketball when we first met with the kids at the *‘End of Cycle Program’* that Mason volunteers mentoring at.

“Well, aren’t you lucky I’m on your team then, dear.” I kiss his cheek as I stand, heading for the kitchen.

“Paige! Sit.” His commanding voice makes me shiver, and I try not to show it. This is not exactly the appropriate place to melt at his directives.

Turning to him, though, is an automatic reflex I can’t stop.

“Let me look after you,” he says, standing and taking my face in both his hands and kissing me firmly on the lips. Not quite the appropriate kiss for the dinner table with company, but to hell with it. It’s my freaking home.

As he pulls away, I whisper, “Okay.”

“Okay,” he replies while I slide back into my seat.

Normally the guys would be all over the public display of affection, but for once, nobody says a thing, and I’m just basking in the moment.

It’s not unusual for the guys to take charge, but tonight it’s even more special to have them looking after us. It’s not the New York experience I planned for everyone, but this is just perfect, our kind of perfect.

Hearing the guys in the kitchen plating the food for the main meal and cursing at each other for getting in the way or for sneaking a taste, it has us girls sniggering behind our hands at the table. They may be making sure they take care of us, but waiters they are not, in any way, shape, or form.

“How come yours looks bigger than mine?” Tate’s exasperated question gets the loud combined answer from us girls.

“Boys will be boys, always measuring their assets.” Our laughter drowns out any reply he was trying to defend himself with.

“That’s the best comeback I’ve heard all night,” Lex declares as he places dinner plates down in front of Mia and Bella.

“We’ve told you before, we just let you guys think you’re funny, but really, we have that sewn up.” Leaning over the table, I hold my hand up for us girls to all high-five each other for a change.

“Where did we go wrong?” Tate laughs to himself, taking a seat back at the table now that all the food is served.

“Nowhere. For once we all managed to get it right.” Gray looks around the room, holding his glass up to cheers again. “To the family.” The noise of clinking glasses on New Year’s Eve is just what I was expecting. “Now, let’s eat.”

“How does she manage to get the beef so tender, even after it has been transported and kept warm in the oven?” Tilly asks, amazed. “I need to meet this magician. She could teach a few of the chefs I’ve worked with in my time at functions a lesson in what constitutes five-star dining.” Tilly looks totally in love with her food. Everyone laughs at her reaction.

“Don’t worry, I spoke to Chloe about bringing you all back again another time. You will love her... and not just for her food.”

“I’m so full I can’t eat another bite,” Bella declares as Tate then swoops onto her plate to finish off her meal.

I swear these men are never satisfied.

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Dinner has been demolished without a crumb left to be seen on the plates. The music is playing in the background, and it’s time for the boys to move onto the glasses of port, while us girls are enjoying an espresso martini courtesy of Lex. The Scrabble board is set up, and there are serious discussions happening in the camps around the table. Hands cover our letters as we whisper to each other our thoughts for the best words we can create and, of course, our strategies of cheating.

Starting off, everyone’s words are quite boring and conservative, until I see Tate and Bella trying not to laugh before it’s even their turn.

“Are you ready for this? I mean, it’s pretty spectacular if we do say so ourselves!” Tate says, always one to talk himself up, of course.

“We’ll be the judge of that. Now lay it on us.” Lex and Mia both look perplexed, and I’m guessing it’s because they have shit letters that they are trying to make some kind of word with.

“Stresslaxing!”

“That is not a word!” Tilly screams across the table, while Gray and Lex are trying to work out if they get the points or

not.

“If we say it, then it’s a word.” They look very proud of themselves.

“That’s not how it works, you idiots. It needs to be in the dictionary!” Mason says, trying to make sure Tate doesn’t get one up on us. We are currently leading, and he wants to keep it that way.

“Which dictionary? The Oxford one or the urban one? Because I’m sure our awesome word would be in the urban one,” Tate says to justify himself.

Lex shakes his head. “You know the urban dictionary is just for all the made-up shit that they can’t put into the proper dictionary because they don’t make sense.” Lex was brought up in a perfect world where there was no room for the fun of the gray areas in life.

“No, let them have their word, but that means it’s now game on for the most ridiculous words,” I declare, knowing full well I now have something up my sleeve.

“What are you up to, Tiger?” Mason whispers in my ear.

“Winning.” I smile at him with all the mischief I can show and point to some letters.

The chime of the intercom from the front desk downstairs sounds, and Mason gives me a questioning look.

Glancing at my phone, I see it’s eleven-fifteen pm, and I have no idea what the front desk would be calling up here for.

Picking up the phone, I hear the voice of Luigi, the night doorman. “Sorry to bother you, miss, but there is a young man here who is asking for a Captain Mason White from the United States Army?”

The hair on my skin stands upright as I relay the message.  
“Someone is looking for Captain Mason White, but not the private pilot, the pilot from the Army.”

The color on Mason’s face changes, and he stands immediately, almost to attention.

This Mason is from a whole lifetime ago.

“What the fuck?”

## Chapter Four

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## MASON

The nightmares have been gone for years, since I met Paige, but those four words, “*pilot from the Army,*” have my heart beating hard, my shirt dampening with sweat, and I feel like all the air has been sucked out of the room.

Everything has gone eerily quiet, and Paige’s sweet voice calling my name brings me back from where my brain has stopped working.

“Mason.” She waits for me to acknowledge her, and I slowly nod. “What do you want me to tell Luigi?” She places her hand on my arm, trying to give me the calm support I need.

“Is it just one person?” I wouldn’t put either Paige or my friends in any danger, and to be honest, I doubt this is bringing a threat of any kind, but you just never know. Why would someone be looking for me, here, and especially on New Year’s Eve?

“Yes.” Her face has the fear I’m feeling all over it, even though she’s trying not to show it.

“Send him up.” I know the other three men in this room have my back, and if for some strange reason, if I need it, there is a retired lawyer in the room.

I mean, what could it be? My mind is leading to something that happened all those years ago that has now surfaced. Not everything is easy in war, and things happen that in normal times would not be acceptable to the general citizen. But when you’re in a position of trying to keep your country safe and

your buddies alive, then you do what is necessary and commanded of you.

Like I'm on auto pilot, my body walks to the foyer in front of the elevator. Without saying a word, the scraping of chair legs behind me tells me all I need to know. My guys have my back, just like I've had theirs over the years.

I feel her hand on my lower back, and it helps me to let out the breath I've been holding. Paige centers me and grounds me at the same time.

I listen as the elevator gets closer, and the final chime of its arrival triggers something in me that I haven't felt in a very long time.

My military training kicks in, and I am on alert for whomever and whatever is about to be revealed. Instinctively, I push Paige behind me, and for once she just does as she is told without resisting me.

The shock of who I see as the doors open is more confusion than surprise.

The young man looks terrified, but I can tell he's trying to push through that to get out what he wants to say.

I signal with my hand for him to step forward out of the elevator and start explaining.

Clearing his throat and trying to take a breath, he finally gets the words to come out of his mouth.

“Are you Captain Mason White who was a helicopter pilot in the war in Afghanistan?” His eyes are almost begging for the answer to be yes.

Who the hell is he, and what could he possibly want from me? It's not like I slept with any women over there, so he can't



be some long-lost son. Plus, he looks too old for that.

“I was, a long time ago. How do you know that, and who are you?” Before I can even wait for him to answer me, he lunges forward and wraps his arms around me so tight. I feel his body shaking and hear sobbing coming from my chest.

What the hell is going on?

At least whatever it is, the element of danger is long gone, and now it’s just a heavy cloud of mystery that is hanging over my head.

Paige, now by my side and being her usual self, full of compassion, starts rubbing this complete stranger’s back to console him.

Looking up at me, she at least gives me something to work with. “He was here earlier tonight, delivering the food.” The softness in her voice is still there, which tells me she doesn’t feel threatened at all by him either. It helps to ease me a little more, but I still need to get to the bottom of this.

Gently peeling him off me, I can tell he’s embarrassed by his actions but is still overwhelmed by meeting me.

“I think you need to come in and sit down. I have a feeling you have a story to tell me.” Taking him by the elbow, I lead him to the couch to figure this out.

“Now, what is your name, and tell me how you know me?”

Mia hands him the tissue box because I think she’s right, just one tissue won’t be enough.

“I’m so sorry to interrupt your evening, sir, but I had to know. My name is Abdul Abdali, and I was an orphan refugee from the Afghanistan war. I will never forget your face. You were the man who flew us out of the refuge that night. They

were coming to kill us, and you brought the Army men who rescued us.”

*Fuck!*

I have never forgotten that night, and it’s only been in the last few years I learned to accept that I did all I could. Never in my wildest dreams and nightmares did I ever expect to meet someone from that rescue mission. The mission that has always haunted me.

“I don’t know what to say.” That isn’t a lie. My mind is totally blown.

“I didn’t think I would ever see you again, but the universe had other ideas. Maybe it is my mom guiding me.” Leaning forward to me where I’m sitting on the coffee table in front of him, he takes my hands in his.

“I want to say thank you. You saved my life, and I always knew that even though my mother didn’t survive, you tried your best to save her too.”

No, no, no, no, no. It can’t be him, not the one who lived in my dreams, screaming at me to save her, and I just couldn’t, no matter how hard I flew that day, I just couldn’t get her there quick enough.

Hearing Paige gasp next to me, I know she realizes who he is too.

“The Army man that came to see me in the hospital, he told me how fast you flew and that you tried your best. I was so upset and confused, but he helped me to realize it was the bad men in my country that killed my mother, and you were just the good man who tried to save her. I’ve always wanted to be able to thank you, like my mother would have wanted me to.”

And just like that, this man seated before me has given me the missing piece of the puzzle that I had no idea I still needed. For all the years of nightmares and then a life where I had come to the point I had forgiven myself, yet this last piece only he could have ever gifted me. That last brick that I have carried on my shoulder is crumbling to the ground in the watery but happy eyes of Abdul.

“I don’t know what to say...” My mouth is dry, and for all the things that are running around my head, I can’t seem to string them together to make a sentence. I should be the one saying sorry to him, yet here he is thanking me.

“I know this is so out of the blue, but when I saw you tonight, I had to come back. I just couldn’t miss the only opportunity I might get.” He looks like I have given him the best gift ever.

My brain fog finally clearing, I need to know everything.

“How did you get to the US? I want to know it all.” Hungry to find out about Abdul’s life, I can already feel my adrenaline rising.

Paige’s gentle hand rests on my shoulder. “Mason, it’s late, and Abdul has probably had a long day at work. Maybe we could continue this tomorrow.”

“Right, sorry, I just... it’s... you’ve sent me spinning.” I’m trying to be polite, but on the inside, I want to know everything right now.

Abdul nods. “I get that, the same as how I felt tonight when I walked in and thought I’d seen an angel.” He runs his hand through his thick curly black hair. “But I will just give you the quick story, and then I would love to meet you again

tomorrow. If it won't be too much of an imposition. I've already interrupted your celebration tonight."

"We don't mind," Paige replies as everyone around me agrees. To be honest, I had forgotten they were even here.

"No, I need to talk just as much as you do, I can imagine," I say, looking at Abdul, who nods his head at me.

"Yes, please. But to answer your question, after you rescued us, we were moved to another orphanage run by American nuns, where the Army was trying to help us with an American adoption agency. It took a while, but I was eventually chosen by my very kind parents, Helen and Trevor Jansen. I was transported to America with some of the other children, and then the ladies who took us on the plane introduced us to our new families. My life took a different turn from the moment I landed on US soil."

"Have they treated you right, your parents?" Mia asks in a frail voice. Having grown up in totally different circumstances to Paige, I can tell she needs to know he was okay.

"Like I imagined my own mother and father would have. I was blessed in that they never asked me to change my name or forget where I came from. They even took me to the local Afghani community leader and asked to join some of their groups so I could learn from them my heritage and not lose my identity. They are going to be so excited to know I found you." I can see the tears welling in his eyes.

"Well, can I just say, I'm so happy you found me too." I reach out and draw him into a hug that I think we both need.

My watch vibrates on my wrist as the alarm starts sounding to tell me we have fifteen minutes until midnight. I set it to make sure I had the champagne poured, the television

on so we could see the ball drop, and the lights turned low to see the fireworks lighting up the sky over the city.

“I should go, I have taken up enough of your time.” Abdul pulls back and stands, collecting his coat from beside him that we hadn’t even gotten around to hanging up for him. I think everyone else was in as much shock as I was. They all know my backstory, which both Paige and my doctor convinced me it was a good idea to share with them.

“Stay to celebrate the arrival of the new year,” Paige says, stepping close to me as I stand.

“Thank you, but I promised my girlfriend I would be home as close to midnight as I could. She’ll be asleep on the couch waiting for me.” The twinkle in his eye tells me that whoever she is, he is totally smitten with her.

“Then get going, son. Nothing beats a midnight kiss on New Year’s Eve.” Lex’s voice comes from behind us all. He is the full contradiction, that man. The full hard-ass in a courtroom but such a romantic at heart. Well, since he met Mia, that is.

“Thank you for seeing me, Captain White. Can we exchange numbers?” Abdul pulls his phone out as we’re waiting at the elevator.

“Damn, call me Mason, please. That Captain White disappeared a long time ago. The only exception now is on our private jet and then you can call me Captain every day of the week.” Seeing Abdul’s eyes almost pop out of his head, I can tell that I have just shocked him by showing how wealthy we really are. I mean, he would have had some idea judging by this penthouse, but a private plane is next-level even for me.

“Okay, Mason it is then.” I shake his hand just before he turns toward the elevator as it opens behind him.

As he enters the small space, he turns back to look at me.

“Just know the last thing your mom asked was to make sure we saved you. So never forget she gave her life for yours and left this world grateful that you were safe.” My voice is gravelly as I’m trying to hold back the emotion, but in case I never see him again, I needed him to know that. It was the one gift I could give the little boy I couldn’t help and the man who now stands before me.

“Thank you,” he manages to get out between tears, and as the doors are closing, I say one last thing.

“Happy New Year, Abdul. May it be full of love and happiness.”

Paige wraps her arm around me from the side, and her body tucks in under my arm. I know she is trying to comfort me, but the reality is she is actually holding me up.

“What the hell just happened?” is all I can get out as she turns me to walk back to everyone in the living room who still look as stunned as I am.

“I think for more than one reason, it’s time to crack open the top-class champagne we were chilling!” Lex declares loudly to break the moment. The movement around me is distracting, but I’m too busy still trying to return my breathing to a normal speed.

“Better make mine a double,” I call to the guys as the corks start popping.

The girls are all giggling now, and Paige leans close to my ear so only I can hear. “Are you okay, Mason?” She continues before I can even reply, “Because if you need to go upstairs to

take a moment, I don't give a fuck about midnight. All I care about is you.”

Closing my eyes and taking a deep breath, I realize for the first time I can truly answer that I am more than okay. Although tonight will take time to digest and process, I couldn't be better.

Opening my eyes again, I look into hers. “My beautiful wife, I'm the luckiest man alive to have you by my side. I'm perfectly fine. Now, let's get ready to light up this world in less than three minutes,” I say, looking at my watch.

“You don't have to tell me twice. I'm ready and waiting,” she replies as Bella slips champagne flutes into our hands, but I can't take my eyes off Paige. She is the reason that I exist. She and my two adorable children are my world.

Oh, and of course, the rest of the rough crew in the room.

The bang and flash of light outside the windows signals the arrival of midnight.

“Happy New Year, my love,” I whisper, leaning in and taking her lips so softly. I can hear everyone around us clinking their glasses and cheering, but I don't care. All I can think about is the woman wrapped in my arms who saw the real me hiding behind my grief, all those years ago. Now I get another rotation around the sun to show her how much I love her and am grateful she is mine.

Our mouths are locked and not ready to part, but it's not the place to be taking it further. Mind you, as I pull back to take a breath, there are three other couples in the room sharing the same joy of that midnight kiss. Washing away the past year and raising the tingling hope of what is to come in the new year.

The exhaustion of the day and night hits us all, and one by one, everyone puts down their glass and prepares to head to their room.

“Thank you for everything, Paige. Best New Year’s Eve ever.” Tilly blows her a kiss from Grayson’s arms where he is carrying her to their room. I’m sure her ankle is really hurting now.

“Yeah, what she said,” Bella declares as Tate puts his arm around her and guides her toward the hallway. “It’ll be hard to top this next year.”

“Well, next year it’s someone else’s turn. This is the beginning of a lifetime tradition,” Paige calls out to them all, as they disappear from the living room.

“Matilda!” is the unanimous name yelled back at us. Looking at Paige, we both start laughing together.

“Poor Grayson is all I can say. I think you’re a perfectionist, but you have nothing on Tilly.” Embracing her and feeling her warm body, I know all the mess can wait until the morning.

“Take me to bed, Mason.” Her voice rumbles in my chest where her face is leaning.

“There won’t be any sleeping,” I promise, kissing the top of her head and feeling her shiver in my arms.

“That’s what I’m counting on.” Although she sounds tired, I know that we both need to feel each other’s bodies, naked and joined. Celebrating our life, as only we know how.

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“I don’t know how I drew the short straw last night.” Tilly is still protesting over breakfast this morning.

“Because you’re the event planner, and if anyone can top Paige’s amazing night, it’s you.” Mason places her second coffee down in front of her.

“Fine, but you all suck, you know that, right?” Tilly takes a long smell of her coffee to help keep her eyes open.

Then a horrible grin slides up her face.

“Can I just say, I pity the poor person who will follow me then. If you expect to be able to compete with what I come up with, you are sadly mistaken.” Looking like she just won the lottery, Tilly sips at her coffee as everyone else starts registering what she just said.

“Oh, fuck, we should have volunteered for next year, Mia. We call dibs on year four, the one after Tate and Bella!” Lex shouts into the room before Tate can beat him to it. “Surely we can look better than them, at least.”

“Shit, Tate!” Bella bangs her shoulder to his. “We will never be able to pull something that spectacular off. We will be too busy *‘stresslaxing’* just thinking about it.”

“Touché, Tink, touché. And that, people, is how you use the word.” The two of them are still trying to claim victory in a game we didn’t even get to finish.

“Nope, I’m not hearing that,” Lex says. “I already checked, and it’s not in the Oxford dictionary, and that’s the only one that counts.” Lex is our judge and jury, plus he’s a bad loser. Not that I can say I’m a very gracious loser either.

“Well, looks like we need a rematch then. On the next weekend that all our schedules align, it’s games night at our

house.” Paige loves having everyone at our place. She is definitely making up for lost time as an only child.

“Oh, it’s on like Donkey Kong, people!” Grayson voices from the kitchen where he’s getting his second helping of Lex’s pancakes that have a big reputation in the family.

This morning’s discussion around the table is the reason why we will never worry about the future. This room of people will be with us, no matter what, through the good, the bad, and the ugly. Making jokes and competing in ridiculous games with each other, and then the next minute holding each other up in the moments we are struggling to stand.

“Any more pancakes left, Gray?” I call as I stand.

“That would be a negative. But just because it’s your house, I suppose I can share.” He cuts his pancake stack in half, ready to slide them onto my plate.

“You’d better, otherwise it’s a long walk home, my friend. Remember whose jet you’re hitching a ride on.” I stab my fork into the stack and slide it over, syrup and all.

“So civilized of you two sharing like that. Anyone would think you’re actually adults.” Mia giggles at us.

“Well, you thought wrong,” Tate proclaims as he stabs his fork into my pancakes and steals a piece.

“Asshole,” I grumble. He’s trying to chew and not end up spitting it out or choking while he’s pushing away his urge to laugh with the food still in his mouth. “Now, that choking is your karma, my friend. A lesson not to steal other’s food.” I point the finger at him like one of our teachers would have done back in the day.

“Yes, Dad!” His mock salute is ridiculous, but I just ignore it because I want to enjoy my pancakes while they’re still

warm.

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The morning of relaxing around the penthouse is over too soon. The girls want to at least get out to enjoy the sunshine and go shopping before we board the plane again. There has been a slight dusting of snow, and with the sun out, the beauty of the white city is something to be seen.

Gray insisted we all go out and he and Tilly would stay at the apartment. I actually think her ankle is hurting more this morning than she is prepared to admit to her husband. So, when he suggested that they stay behind, she was quick to agree.

For once my wife decided that boots were a far better option to walk around in today than her high heels. Walking past the Rockefeller center ice rink, I think about the kids back home. We've brought them here before, and watching Johnny trying to learn from Paige was hilarious. She had all the patience in the world with him, but of course, he was extremely impatient. He thought the moment he stepped on the rink he should be able to master it, but with the first few steps, he was on his butt on the ice. He just wanted to be perfect at it. I wonder where he gets his perfectionism and impatience from. Looking down at my wife talking with all her animation to Mia and Bella, I smile to myself. If those things he inherited from his mother make him grow up to be half the strong, independent person she is, then that will make me proud.

I talked to Abdul this morning and organized to catch up again in person as soon as we can make it back to New York. I can't help but feel how grateful I am for the life I have. I could have easily taken a different path many times before I met

Paige. Surviving my time in the Army with some very dangerous near misses in the air under enemy gunfire is something I will never take for granted. Then there were years after coming home that I felt lost in a world that just seemed hard, and the gray fog that lingered some days was all-consuming.

But instead, I'm here, with the woman I love, two amazing children, and friends that are the backbone of my survival and the reason I'm here. Then talking to Abdul, it has sunk in that things happen for a reason. He might not have worked out exactly what his reasons are for what he lived through, but I can see clearly now some of mine.

I may not have saved his mother that night, but I gave every other child on my chopper the chance at a life, and that alone should be reason enough. Yet that was just the beginning. I was put on this earth to keep Paige from a life of loneliness and working herself to death. More importantly, my reason for living is to love her with everything I am. And that's a role I take very seriously.

Her voice breaks me out of my thoughts. "Are you okay?" She leans up and kisses me on the cheek.

"Perfect, Tiger, just perfect." The cheek wasn't good enough for me, so I plant a firm kiss on her lips and make sure I remind her just how much I love her.

She knows exactly what I'm doing.

"Me too, Mason, me too," she whispers as we pull apart.

Looking at my watch, I see it's time to get everyone to the airport. As much as we joke about time away from the kids, I just want to go home and wrap them in my arms for the biggest hug.

Picking up Gray and Tilly from the apartment on our way, the limousine is full of chatter again, with the girls filling Tilly in on what was in the shops. Paige keeps looking at me with a twinkle in her eye every few minutes, like she wants to tell me something but there's too much else happening in the car.

Maybe she has something sexy on her mind, and that could be a little difficult on the way home with everyone around us, but I'm up for the challenge.

The car passes through the gate to the tarmac, and the next thing, Paige is leaning in for a kiss. Not just any kiss but a *not for public display* kiss, tongue and all. If that's what my wife wants, then that's what I'll give her. I turn my torso toward her, and I'll be damned the crap I'll get from everyone else after we're finished.

But the silence in the car should have clued me into something not being quite right.

"Damn, Paige." I take in a breath to replace all the air she took from me.

Her smile lights up her whole face as she looks at something behind me. The others are all starting to file out the other door. The driver opens my door, the sunshine streaming in, and the chatter of everyone else is in the background.

The first thing that strikes me is the shape of the plane.

It's not ours.

It's bigger, and the line is beautiful, but the driver has obviously made a mistake and pulled up to the wrong jet.

"Oh man, we need to get everyone back in the car before they drag all the luggage out. This isn't our plane."

I step out to tell everyone, but before I can even open my mouth, I see Holly, my flight attendant, standing at the top of the steps waving at us.

“Paige... what is going on?”

Her hand on my lower back drops as she walks in front of me, her arms out to her sides. “A little present for my favorite pilot. Do you like what you see?”

My brain short-circuits.

It’s not often I’m struck speechless, but this is one of them.

I don’t understand what is happening.

“Say something, Mason, you’re scaring me.”

“I don’t know what to say... Like, a present is a new tie, some cufflinks, or a holiday trip maybe. But not a plane. What the hell, Paige, a freaking plane!”

Her giggling at my shock grabs my attention.

“But why?” I ask, stepping closer to her.

“Because you deserve the best so you can keep us all safe. Because I can, but most of all, because I love you and just want to see you happy.”

I don’t know what to do except kiss her with so much passion, like I’ve never kissed her before, if that’s even possible. I pick her up and twirl her around, and everyone is cheering loudly now around us.

“What the fuck!” Standing there staring at the beautiful machine in front of me.

“We needed something a bit bigger. Our family has grown, and when you add the freeloaders over there, it just made

sense.” Paige tucks herself under my arm as I’m still standing just trying to take it all in.

“Do you like it? It’s the model you talk about with your crew all the time.” Looking into her eyes, I can’t believe she is a little unsure.

“Like it? Damn, I love it, and I haven’t even really seen it yet.”

“Then let’s go and check it out, on one condition.” Paige takes my hand and starts walking toward the stairs.

“What?” I ask, thinking that no matter what it is, I’ll agree to anything at the moment, just to take control of this baby.

“You can’t fly it home today until you have had time to do all the studying you need to do. Not that I understand any of that, but that’s what they told me. Plus, this one is on loan until you tell me it’s what you want. We can always change it to something else if this doesn’t suit you.” Paige is all of a sudden talking fast and all her words are running into each other.

Stopping just before the bottom of the stairs, I almost make her fall over from not expecting me to come to a halt.

As she turns back to look at me, I lean down and whisper in her ear, “Well, I have a condition of my own, Tiger. As long as your ass still looks perfect walking up these stairs, making my cock rock hard every single time, and it has a bed that I can fuck you in, then the rest will fall into place. Are we on the same page?”

“Not sure that was in the brochure, but it should have been. Number-one selling point.”

Happiness now spreads across her face.

“Do you think we could book the rest of them on a commercial flight home, you know, in economy, with the squishy seats?” Little does she know I mean it.

“Sounds like a plan, but you have to tell Tate.” Turning back to the plane, Paige starts to walk up the stairs.

“On second thought, it wouldn’t be worth it.”

“Exactly.”

Her hips sway just like normal, with the slight exaggeration just for me, bright orange fuck-me heels and the tightest black skirt taunting me.

From the bottom of the stairs, after I’m finished admiring the view, I call to her at the doorway.

“Sold!” I yell out which just earns me a loud laugh and her reply over her shoulder.

“Was it ever in doubt, Mason? I always get what I want.”

That she does. And I’ll be happy to give it to her for the rest of her life.

What a way to start another new year. Let’s see where this one takes us.

After takeoff, Holly brings out a tray of champagne. “Same time again next year,” Tate declares as we all lift our glasses into the air.

“It’s a date!” I reply.

“Yeah, and I have twelve months to plan it. It’s going to epic!” Tilly declares.

And I thought the Chicago Boys were competitive. The girls may just take that crown.

“Bring it on!” I declare.



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Thank you for reading *New Year's Eve with The Chicago Boys*.  
If you love The Chicago Boys novellas, make sure to visit my  
website [www.karendeen.com.au](http://www.karendeen.com.au) and subscribe to my  
newsletter to keep updated on where the next NYE  
celebrations will be.

## Acknowledgments

I love being back in the world of the Chicago Boys!

They make me laugh and smile, and they never disappoint me when they're ready to get down and dirty! I hope you all enjoyed reading this as much as I loved writing it.

A big shout out goes to my wonderful PA Lee Reyden. Since joining my team, she has got so many things organized, including me, and has everything running much smoother behind the scenes, allowing me more time to write, which means more books to publish and for you to read. So grateful I found you.

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Thank you for reading my words and see you soon in the pages of my next book.

Karen xx

## Also by Karen Deen

The Craving

Gorgeous Gyno

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The Chicago Boys Box Set (above 4 books in one set)

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That Day

Better Day

Defining Us

Love's Wall

Love's Dance

Love's Hiding

Love's Fun

Love's Hot

Time for Love Box Set (All *Love's* books in one set)

## About the Author

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Karen Deen is an author who loves to write stories that will stay with you long after you've finished reading them. Her stories are filled with spice and witty banter, while being full of emotion, comedy, suspense and twists and turns that you never see coming. All the time steering her characters to their happily ever after. Everything you need in a good love story.

Writing has become her career, which she is lucky to be doing in such a picturesque hometown near Sydney, Australia. Enjoying life over good meals with her childhood sweetheart husband, three adult children and their ever-growing family. Or a sneaky lunch or coffee date with friends that involve laughter until your sides hurt.