

TITANS
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CAPTIVATED

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TO TREASURE

SIERRA
CARTWRIGHT

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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THEIRS TO TREASURE

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Adult Reading Material

Disclaimer: This work of fiction is for mature (18+) audiences only and contains strong sexual content and situations.

It is a standalone with my guarantee of satisfying happily ever after.

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DEDICATION

For all the members of Sierra's Super Stars! I love interacting with you and sharing tons of giggles, stories, and of course all our wicked shenanigans.

And a special shout-out to my VIP newsletter subscribers. I appreciate you so very much. Your enthusiasm makes you the greatest readers ever!

CHAPTER ONE

Harper

“OH MY GOD! I can’t find it!” Caroline screeches from across the room.

I squeeze my eyes shut and take a deep breath. My younger sister is adorable, but often flighty. Right now, she’s looking for the ring I’m supposed to slip on Edward’s finger in less than three hours. “I’m sure it’s there somewhere.” *Am I reassuring her or myself?*

“Harper! Will you listen to me? It’s not here,” she insists miserably.

Even though my stylist is sweeping my hair into an elegant updo, I angle my head so that I can look at Caroline’s reflection in the mirror.

Like me, her dress is covered by a hot pink robe. Both have sparkly rhinestones on the back. My reads Bride, while hers says Maid of Honor.

In a single move, she upends her purse and dumps the contents onto the table in the bridal room of Vegas’s exclusive L’Impero Hotel.

Because I’m accustomed to my sister’s dramatics, I take a deep breath. There’s nothing to panic about.

Determinedly I ignore the silver of doubt that whispers, *Yet.*

Caro was with Edward and I the day we picked up our matching wedding bands. He carefully tucked mine inside his suit coat, while Caroline promised that she would keep track of his.

“After all, you have plenty of other details to worry about,” she’d told me.

At least a million of them, it seemed, with more added every day.

Despite our family’s dire financial circumstances, my mother insisted on an extravagant affair. I would have preferred a much smaller event. But because Edward wanted to be introduced to as many of Houston’s elite as he could, he’d sided with her. I’d given up trying to fight them both.

At this point, though, I’d happily elope—something neither Mother nor Edward would ever contemplate.

“What are we going to do?” Caro demands miserably, wide-eyed as she looks at me.

“Look again.” I keep my voice soothing. “I’m sure the box is there.”

“That’s the problem. I took the ring out of the box before we left the room because my clutch is so tiny.” Desperation has crept into her voice. “But I double-checked before we left the room. I swear I did.”

Now I’m alarmed, and my heart begins to race.

At that moment, our mother breezes into the room. “Hello, my darlings! It’s almost time!” Gwendolyn Pembroke is all smiles, beaming with pride.

And why wouldn’t she be happy? Each moment that ticks by brings me closer to being Mrs. Edward Beaumont which means she’s that much closer to receiving a big, fat, juicy check with her name on it. In return for his two-million-dollar investment, Edward will receive the social standing that comes with marrying into the esteemed Pembroke family.

As I’ve heard more times than I can count, our lineage goes all the way back to the founding of Texas. According to

lore, one of the relatives on my father's side fought at the Alamo. And one of Mother's ancestors served in the first Texas legislature. There are buildings bearing our name on college campuses as far away as Dallas.

Unfortunately we lost almost all the family money a few years ago when my dad fell for a Ponzi-type scheme—something that still infuriates my mother. How could he be so stupid?

Because of their financial situation, they've been forced to quietly liquidate some assets while frantically searching for a way back to great wealth. My parents have kept up appearances, not breathing a word about their crisis to anyone, not even close family. After all, the scandal would destroy her.

Edward—according to her—is the Pembroke savior.

I need to be the perfect wife and so very grateful for his attention, which suits me fine.

Though our parents introduced us, and I understood this was an arranged marriage, I've fallen in love with handsome, successful Edward. The way he looks at me—with simmering heat and intensity—makes my toes curl, and I can't wait to finally consummate our marriage.

With a proud smile, he tells me he adores the fact I'm a virgin. Even though he's frustrated me to no end with his kisses and teasing, he's been firm in his resolve not to despoil me until our wedding night.

I've protested his ridiculous, antiquated notion, but he's refused to budge, no matter how hard I try to tempt him by wearing skimpy lingerie and, even once, giving him a lap dance.

My mother crosses to us, and she studies me critically. "You're pale, darling."

"She'll be perfect when I'm done," the makeup artist reassures her, looking up from his phone. I'm grateful for his response. It's saved me from getting into an argument about how much sleep I'm getting and if I'm taking proper care of my skin so I don't get premature wrinkles.

As if I don't have other things that concern me.

"I will not have her matching the color of her gown," she informs the man. "She looks ghastly."

Though I wince, he picks up his glass, completely ignoring her. I wish I had that kind of confidence.

"I've looked again. It's not here!" Caroline insists.

My mother turns to her youngest child. "Whatever is the matter?"

"Edward's ring is gone!" Desperation makes her choke. "I've looked *everywhere*."

"Honestly, Caroline!" Gwendolyn snaps as she rushes to sift through the dozens of items, including cosmetics, nail files, tweezers, even a small silver flask with God knows what inside. "You'd lose your own head if you could."

Tears fill her eyes.

The last thing I need is for our mother's scolding to cause Caro to have a breakdown.

"I'll, err, be over here," my hair stylist says as she wanders away to join the makeup artist.

"Could it be somewhere else?" I stand to help the search, and the tie holding my robe together comes apart.

While knotting it tightly around my waist once more, I walk across the room to join the search. My high, strappy sandals looked great in the store, but they're murder to walk in.

Thank goodness I have a second gown with much more comfortable shoes for this evening's reception.

"Didn't you have a backpack?" I ask Caroline. Not that I can be sure. After all, we'd needed a bellhop to help us with our enormous number of belongings: my gorgeous veil and sparkling headpiece, our dresses, curling irons, safety pins, sewing kits, makeup, snacks, anything we could need in an emergency—including an extra bottle of prosecco, just in case.

"Yes! I do." She bites her lower lip. "Somewhere."

We all look, and she finally finds the small, silver bag buried beneath a settee.

As my mother shakes her head, I watch in anticipation while Caroline empties out the contents of that bag.

As she frantically digs through the pile of stuff, I pick up the backpack and open all the zippers to double check the compartments.

Within half a minute, we all recognize the awful truth.

The ring is missing.

“It must have fallen out in our room.” A tear escaping to trace a line down her cheek, she looks at me. “I’m so sorry. I’ll run back and have a look.”

“Be quick,” my mother warns. “Your hair is a disaster, and I will not allow you to embarrass your sister.”

With the enormous size of this resort, hurrying will not be an easy task.

Fortunately, I reassure myself, we have plenty of time left.

After Caroline escapes, my mother turns her furious gaze on me, as if I’m personally to blame for my sister’s failure, which, arguably, I am for trusting her. “This wedding must be perfect.”

“Of course, Mother.” The weight of the family fortune is on my shoulders, and she’s been absolutely certain I knew that.

“I need to see if any of our guests have started to arrive.”

Though it’s still early, my heart picks up a couple of beats as reality slips closer.

With a quick knock on the door, my wedding planner pops her head inside and smiled. “Marcella would like some final mother/daughter photos about forty minutes before the ceremony, when your hair and makeup is complete. That will give her some time for the shots but allow for last-minute prep and for you all to make your way to the chapel. Will that work?”

The renowned photographer has been in and out a couple of times already, getting snapshots that are supposed to look candid, but are fully staged with perfect lighting. She captured me gazing out a window at a fountain, apparently contemplating my future. Another featured Caroline and I toasting the day with mimosas.

The most ludicrous one is of my mother fastening a tiny satin-covered button on the back of my gown. I had a hard time not laughing at that comical request from Marcella. To say my mother is not an engaged parent is an understatement.

When Caro and I were young we had nannies who were responsible for dressing us. Still, Gwendolyn will do anything to appear like the perfect mom, even risk smudging her fresh manicure.

“Tell Marcella that will be fine,” Gwendolyn answers for me.

With a little wave of her bejeweled fingers, she sweeps out, leaving behind a puff of very expensive perfume.

Now, with the sudden peace and quiet, I manage to exhale and settle my nerves as I drop back into my chair.

My stylist makes her way back to me, carrying a glass of bubbly. “I think you need this.”

“Definitely. Thank you.”

About twenty minutes later, she’s satisfied with my hair and turns me over to the makeup artist.

Time seems to simultaneously drag and fly by, all on wings of nerves and excitement.

When my mother returns with the wedding planner to check on our progress, Caro still isn’t back.

With a scowl, Mother pulls out her phone. Moments later, across the room, the device skitters across the couch.

“That child will be the death of me.” After stabbing a button on her screen to end the call, she stalks to a house phone.

Once I tell her the number of the room we share, she dials.

There's no answer.

"Let me find out if anyone has seen her," my mother says as she types messages into her phone. "We don't have time for this nonsense."

"If she's not back by the time my makeup is finished, I'll go check the room," I promise. The door is opened by fingerprint access, so I'm the only one who'll be able to enter anyway.

Hopefully it won't be necessary, and Caro will breeze in, all smiles, ready for the finishing touches on her hairdo.

"It's important that those pictures are perfect," Mother reminds me.

To her and her group of friends, maybe. I've often wondered if the only purpose of their weekly gatherings is to show off photos that prove what excellent parents they are.

I've been forced to pose for more snapshots than supermodels have to endure. Graduations—even from kindergarten—recitals, choir concerts, a supporting role in the Christmas ballet... It was unending.

At least it's almost over.

When my makeup artist finally brushes on my setting powder, my panic notches up.

There's still no sight of Caro.

As I stand, the knot in my robe once again slips, and I tighten it again. If I didn't need to protect my expensive gown, there's no way I would have agreed to wear something so ridiculous. Give me terry cloth and fuzzy slippers any day of the week.

After promising the makeup artist and stylist that I'll be right back, I pick up my small clutch and the hem of my dress and walk to the elevator as fast as my beautiful but ridiculously uncomfortable heels allow.

I ride the elevator to our concierge floor.

When I arrive on our floor, there's no one in sight, and I hurry down the endless hallway, each passing second seeming to tick in my ears.

When I finally reach the room, I press my finger to the pad. A small green light flickers, and the lock almost silently releases.

Time slows at the sight in front of me.

And my life is ruined forever.

CHAPTER TWO

Harper

I'M FROZEN IN SPOT, unable to take in what I'm seeing...

A couple furiously fucking in my bed.

The door softly clicks closed behind me, jarring me back to reality.

It's not any couple, it's the people who mean the most to me in the entire world.

Caro is completely naked, and she's straddling Edward cowgirl style while he's waving his bow tie in the air as if it's a lasso.

Horried, shock making my hands shake uncontrollably, I dig my phone from my purse.

I'm not sure how I managed to access the camera, but I snap a couple of pictures before dropping my device back into place.

My thoughts are racing, all jumbled together.

This is the ultimate betrayal. I love them both so much I'd do anything for them. I had always believed in them and counted on their loyalty.

I'm utterly destroyed, mentally and emotionally.

As if he's sensed something, Edward suddenly goes rigid, and he lifts his head a little. His eyes open wide as he shouts

my name.

With no regard for Caro, he tosses her aside.

My God.

His dick isn't all that impressive, but I somehow manage to notice he's doing my sister without a condom.

I choke on my emotions.

Despite his pretty, lying words, this man refused to make love to me. All the while, he's been screwing my little sister?

“Please, *mi amor!* It means nothing!”

Screaming her fury, Caro slaps him and grabs her robe.

Not waiting for any explanation because there isn't any, I turn to flee. The door seems to click closed with a metal clang of finality, the same finality that ends my engagement.

Frantic, not able to think straight, I gather the hem of my skirt and dash toward the elevator.

I only know one thing. I can't stay here.

Run.

Behind me, Caro is calling my name, a sob catching in her voice. “Wait! Please, Harper!”

Thankfully the elevator arrives before she catches me, and I jump into the compartment and stab the button to close the door.

The doors shut at that moment, sealing out the sight of the tears streaking down her face and cutting off her heartfelt cries.

The compartment whisks me down to the lobby.

There are so many people there, and I have to dodge them as I rush through the busy area.

“And we have a runner!” a man seated at a slot machine calls out.

I finally push through the glass door that signals my freedom.

Outside in the hot Las Vegas air, I drag in a breath and dash to the front of the taxi line and beg the people waiting to let me take the car that has the back door standing open.

A man starts to object, but the woman with him grabs his arm and says, "Let her go first, Ronald."

Shouting my thanks, I yank the door closed behind me as I slide across the hot seat.

"Where to?" the driver asks, gaze focused on the rearview mirror.

I frantically look out the back window to ensure I'm not being followed. "As far away from here as we can get."

The driver accelerates away from the area. "Runaway bride?" he asks, as if this is an everyday occurrence.

"Yes," I manage as I collapse against the seat back.

To him, this might be the way things happen in Vegas, but my life, my hopes, my dreams have all been brutally destroyed. "Will you make sure we're not followed?"

"You got it."

The driver doesn't head down the Strip, he weaves his way through side roads, and I'm grateful for that.

A million thoughts crowd into my mind, and part of me still cannot believe what I saw.

My breaths still coming in frantic little bursts, I take out my phone and look at the horrifying images, scrolling through them, one by one, unable to look away.

Disgusted by the detail and renewed sense of devastation, I drop my phone.

I need a glass of wine.

Screw that. I need something much, much stronger.

"Have you decided where to go?" the driver asks.

"Just...away." I have no idea how much this will cost me, and suddenly I don't care.

Damn it. Why had I not thought to grab my big purse?

This morning, I transferred essentials to my clutch. So I only have lipstick, mascara, a small amount of cash, and a single credit card, which is in Edward's name. I'm not accustomed to spending someone else's money, so I've only used it for wedding expenses and for emergencies. And what I saw in my hotel room definitely qualifies.

Jolting me, my phone rings.

My mom.

At some point, I'll have to answer, so I decide to get it over with.

"Where are you?"

Since I have no intention of answering that question, I'm remain silent.

"You need to get back here immediately. Our guests are waiting."

"There will be no wedding," my voice is surprisingly calm, flat. Somehow, at least for now, I'm keeping my hysteria at bay.

"Look, Harper. You need to be reasonable."

Surely she can't know what happened, otherwise she would never make such an outrageous comment.

Gwendolyn is silent for so long that I realize she does, and further, couldn't care less. "*Mother!* I caught Caro and Edward fucking."

"Don't be so crass!" she snaps.

I gape at my phone. "*I'm crass?*" *After what I saw and will be unable to forgive or forget?* "You're the one who sold me to a man who is willing to screw my sister *on my wedding day.*"

"They've both admitted it was a mistake," my mother fires back.

"A... What?" I caught my only sibling moaning on top of the man I was supposed to spend the rest of my life with, and my mother is excusing it?

“He’s sorry it happened.”

“Or sorry he was caught?” I demand.

“Be reasonable, Harper.”

“Mother! It was hours before my wedding,” I almost screech.

“Men are men.” With extreme annoyance, she exhales. “They can get sex on any street corner. It’s meaningless to them. Ask your father. He’ll screw any woman who’ll spread her legs.”

The news makes me reel.

My father? The overbearing asshole who has curtailed my activities and dictated every step of my life since the moment I was born.

Actually now it makes sense...if he has the morals of an alley cat.

“The only thing that matters is that your husband comes home at night and financially supports you. Tell me you’re not stupid enough to believe otherwise.”

Maybe I’m old-fashioned, but yeah, I definitely believe otherwise. What about love? Commitment?

“Are you listening to me?” my mother demands.

No. My mind is spinning. I’ve heard enough. I can’t process one more thing today.

“Our guests are arriving.”

This conversation can’t be happening.

“I insist you come back here right now.”

Momentarily I hold the phone away from my ear.

“Stop your silliness this instant. Don’t you know how much this union matters?”

“Unfortunately, I do.”

“Think bigger picture, Harper. Their little dalliance isn’t what’s important. Preserving our legacy is. You’re too old for

rose-colored glasses. We brought you up better than this. If his ring isn't on your finger as scheduled, your father and I will disown you."

Breath leaves my lungs.

"Do you understand, Harper?"

I'm numb, but there's no way I can do what she wants, no matter the consequences. "I'm sorry, Mom."

Her voice drips with scorn and anger. "After all we've done for you."

Rolling my eyes, I press the red button to end the call, then I turn off my phone so that no one can track my location, something I wish I'd thought about before now.

"That was brutal," my driver observes.

"Yeah. You heard all that?"

"Enough."

"I need a good stiff drink." *And the wedding night I was robbed of.* It's time to get rid of my V-card. Surely it can't be too difficult to go find someone to fuck me. Even if my own husband-to-be wouldn't.

"Somewhere high class?"

"Only the best." Especially since it will go on the disloyal asshole's card.

"Bella Rosa?" he suggests.

There couldn't be a better recommendation. Sin City's newest resort, at the end of the Strip, is also its most exclusive. They'll be paying plenty of attention to security. "Perfect."

As we near the luxurious property, I wrench off my engagement ring and shove it into my purse.

The driver stops under the beautiful awning, and a door attendant rushes over to open the taxi door and help me out. If he's shocked to see me in full bridal attire, he hides it well.

Of course, it *is* Vegas, after all.

Courtesy of Edward, I pay the driver and tip him very well.

He smiles his thanks, then adds, “Look, lady. Not all men are cheating whores.”

With a shrug, I offer a half-smile. “Thanks for that.” Right now, though, I’m not sure I believe him.

Then, my clutch held to my chest, I square my shoulders and exit the car, heading for the resort entrance that’s held open for me.

Spying a trashcan to one side, I detour toward it. I shrug off the ridiculous robe with its fanciful writing and wad it into a satisfying ball and stuff it in the bin.

At this point, I don’t care if my gown gets ruined. If everything goes according to my plan, my makeup and hair will be a mess before too long anyway.

After brushing my hands together, continue through the glass door and stride toward the registration sign.

At the check-in desk, I’m informed that the rooms are sold out, not that this should surprise me. They have been for months.

Desperate, I throw myself on the mercy of the well-dressed representative. Honestly I have nowhere else I can think to go. And I need that drink.

Maybe my panic gets through to her, because she picks up a nearby phone and asks me to wait.

A few minutes later, my tension stretched to the breaking point, the resort owner—Lorenzo Carrington himself—joins us.

He works some sort of magic at the computer. Then he nods at me. “One night, Ms. Pembroke?”

“That will be fine. Thank you for your help.” In the morning, I’ll figure out my next move.

“Anything else I can help you with?”

Worrying my lower lip, I glance around. “If anyone is looking for me, I’m not here.”

“Discretion is a hallmark of our hospitality.”

“I appreciate your help.”

He nods. “Enjoy your stay at the Bella Rosa.”

“Oh,” I say. “One last thing? Where’s the nearest bar?”

When he points me in the correct direction, I grab the hem of my gown and start straight toward it.

Part one of my new life is underway.

I need to get laid.

And when I do, I vow that Edward—bless his miserable lying heart—will never know what he missed.

CHAPTER THREE

Forrest

“HOLY FUCKBALLS,” my brother, Zev, exclaims. “That went better than we expected.”

“Even with our egotistical goals.” After a long, successful day, I lift my very pricey celebratory Bonds whiskey and tip my glass in Zev’s direction.

Zev, younger by three years, is filled with visionary genius. His ideas are so forward-thinking that it might take years to bring them to fruition, if results are even possible. Mining asteroids, I’m still not convinced about.

Right now, he’s wearing the biggest grin I’ve ever seen.

And rightly so.

Four years ago, he’d brought me a new idea from IntelliChain Dynamics. The start up with its brash, ballsy CEO planned to develop a fully integrated supply chain management system that was enhanced with cutting-edge financial technology solutions.

At first, I was skeptical.

The idea was brilliant—even I could see that. But execution would be difficult at best.

In addition to requiring a shitpile of seed money, they needed a lot of help from us to set up the business, hire a

capable team, and source components from overseas—something our staff excels at.

Zev's intuition had been correct, and this was his first big win.

Today's demo, to some of the world's biggest tech venture capitalists, had gone off with only minimal glitches.

Afterward, we'd spent hours answering questions and talking strategy. We didn't need to sell anyone on the potential. This was the kind of innovative, disruptive technology we all get a hard-on for.

Before today's event, our family's firm—InnovateFirst Capital—set a lofty funding target of ten to twelve million dollars.

When the last person walked away, we were at fifteen.

“Not fucking bad for a day's work,” Zev said.

Or, rather, the culmination of forty-eight months of planning, strategy, calculations, crunching numbers, small successes, adjustments, spectacular failures, more adjustments, and finally, triumph.

Scaling a business is always a time-consuming challenge. “We still have a long way to go.”

“For Christ's sake, Forrest, take the win.”

Zev tends toward optimism, while I...don't. Which was probably why—before his death—our father had created the position of Vice President of Innovation especially for Zev. Dad knew how essential that was to the first evolving and remaining relevant.

As CEO, I do my best to ensure we bring in more money than we send out.

The partnership works because we view life through different lenses.

After clinking our glasses, we each take a sip.

Damn. Such a fine whiskey with a smoky finish.

“How are we going to celebrate this one?”

We have all night.

Since we have a follow-up meeting with the founders tomorrow morning, we’d scheduled our pilot for noon.

And anytime we’re in Vegas, Zev avails himself of all the lascivious offerings.

“Dinner at the steakhouse and then a cabaret at the Royal Sterling?” he suggests after a second sip. “Desiree is starring in it.”

The last two times we visited Sin City, we saw her risqué and entertaining show and then spent an enjoyable nightcap with the beautiful, talented, and *very* limber dancer.

She enjoyed entertaining brothers, and they hadn’t found anything yet that was off-limits.

“Strip club?” he asks when I don’t respond.

There’s an exclusive one that we frequent. It’s owned by a reputed gangster, and not open to the general public. On any given night, I’ve shaken hands with many of Las Vegas’s finest, along with two congresspeople and a US senator.

But I’m bored. Restless.

When I remain silent, he tries again. “The Ranch?”

The last time we visited, there’d been an orgy with at least a hundred attendees. Zev fucked until his dick was raw, and he grinned for two days afterward.

I spent my time in the lounge, enjoying a drink, watching basketball on the multiple screens, and enjoying very attentive, very personal service.

“Damn, Forrest. You’re jaded.”

I run my finger beneath my shirt collar. There’s nothing in Vegas that we haven’t seen—and done—a dozen times.

Jaded? Bored is more like it.

Zev rolls his eyes.

The cabaret, strip club, all of them are selling a pricey fantasy, even Desiree, whom we've fucked six ways from Sunday.

Days like today are what sustains me.

It's real.

Success and failure hang in the balance, and there's no predetermined outcome. No one is offering a fake smile, pretending they want to make me happy, when all they want is for me to open my wallet and to drop a wad of cash in front of them.

"Loosen up," Zev encourages. "We'll be back at the grind tomorrow."

Or sooner, if the buzzing of my phone in my pocket is any indication.

"There's a masquerade at the Ranch tonight. Maybe you can beat my old record. Seven women."

Shaking my head, I laugh. My wallet has a couple of emergency condoms tucked inside. Fortunately there are bowls filled with them in every room of the Ranch house.

"You up for it?"

"I'm not."

"Don't tell me you're ready to settle down?"

"No." There's still plenty of time for that. "No." More like the thrill of the chase and the conquest appeals to me.

Lorenzo Carrington, the resort's owner, moves through the lounge, flanked by his men, and he stops at our table.

Zev and I both stand to shake his hand.

"Always appreciate your business."

Since the Bella Rosa opened, we haven't patronized anywhere else. He spent years building the Strip's newest property, and he paid ruthless attention to detail.

We chat for a few minutes before his bodyguard leans forward and speaks in his ear. "You'll excuse me? I'm needed

elsewhere.”

After we take our seats again, our server walks over. “Another drink, gentleman?” she asks.

“Keep them coming,” Zev answers for both of us.

“Would you like the bottle?”

I shake my head.

“The night is still young,” my brother insists.

“And we will be going elsewhere,” I counter.

Zev grins. “That’s more like it.”

Twenty minutes later, we’re no closer to a decision.

The game on the television doesn’t interest me, but then my attention is captured by the reflection in the oversize mirror of a young woman striding determinedly toward the bar.

Interested, I turn my head.

The blonde is tall, with curves in all the right places.

Her hair is piled on top of her head, and big, fat curls frame her exquisite face.

Most intriguingly, she’s holding the hem of her dress in one hand, and she’s clutching a small purse in the other.

“What are you looking at?”

When I don’t respond, Zev glances in the mirror and lets out a long, appreciative whistle.

Without taking a seat, she slams her clutch on top of the bar and signals that she’d like to be served.

“Is she wearing a wedding dress?”

I shrug. “Could be.” Since it’s Vegas, it’s hard to know. Over the years, I’ve seen everything from cartoon characters to bigfoot walking down the Strip.

She could be taking part in a cosplay event. Or she could be needing fortification on the way to her wedding.

“What’ll it be?” the bartender asks.

Zev and I are both studying the beauty’s reflection.

Her gorgeous, full lips are red and pouty, begging for a kiss. If she really is a bride, her groom is one lucky sonofabitch.

But if she were mine, she wouldn’t be hitting a bar before taking her vows.

“What do you recommend?” she asks.

Her cheeks appear to be flushed, and she scans the mind-numbing array of bottles on display.

“What are you looking for? Something light? A champagne spritzer, perhaps?”

“God, no,” she scoffs. “I’m not celebrating.”

“How about a martini?”

She shakes her head.

“Margarita, maybe?”

“I don’t want to wait that long for it to hit my bloodstream. How about a scotch, maybe? Or bourbon?” Then she wrinkles her pert little nose. “Wait. Are they the same thing?” She blows out a little breath.

Has she ordered an alcoholic beverage before? She gives off the vibe of a young woman who’s been protected her whole life.

So what’s changed?

“I’ll trust you.” She taps a perfectly manicured fingernail to her chin. “As long as it’s expensive.”

“Coming right up,” he promises, turning back to the selections and reaching for the top shelf.

“Can you make it a double, please?”

The bartender nods. “You got it.”

After pouring her a Bonds whiskey, he turns and places her crystal glass on a coaster. “Would you like to open a tab?”

Immediately she digs a credit card from her tiny purse. “Run it now, please? No telling when it’ll be shut off.”

“Shut off?” I ask as Zev and I exchange glances.

“On second thought...” Instead of sliding it toward him, she places it close to her and then downs the drink in a single, impressive gulp.

“Jesus.” Zev shakes his head.

Coughing furiously, she slams down the glass.

Her eyes water, and she grabs a napkin to wipe them.

“That was...” She blows out a breath. “Wow.”

The bartender leans toward her. “You all right?”

“Yeah.” She grins. “No.” She looks past him to the bottle and signals for a refill.

“You sure?”

With determination, she pulls back her shoulders. “Never more certain of anything.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

As he pours, she leans forward and props her elbows on the bar top and then rests her cheeks between her upturned hands.

“Bad day?” he asks.

“I was supposed to be getting rid of my V-card tonight,” she tells him miserably.

The man almost spills a hundred dollars’ worth of spirits.

So she’s not heading to a cosplay event. Our beautiful young woman appears to be a runaway bride.

“Was promised all the orgasms I could handle.” She downs half of her next whiskey. “How many is that, anyway?”

“Jesus,” Zev whispers. “Poor girl.”

My brother and I exchange glances. “I hate to see a damsel in distress.”

“Can’t abide it,” he agrees. “What are we going to do about it?”

“Help a lady out?” I suggest with a casual shrug.

Zev nods. “It’s the only chivalrous thing.”

The man has become intrigued with her story, and her, and he’s standing there, repeatedly drying a glass.

“What does a girl have to do to get laid in this town?”

In that moment, as if suddenly aware of my scrutiny, she freezes and meets my gaze in the mirror.

Her beautiful mouth parts, in surprise, perhaps.

And I know one thing.

Those lips are most definitely kissable.

By me.

Within the hour, I’ll be claiming them. And her.

The evening suddenly looks much more promising.

I finish my whiskey and stand.

The innocent blonde, so trusting, stares at me, unblinkingly as I make my move.

CHAPTER FOUR

Harper

BEHIND ME, movement captures my attention. With my glass halfway to my mouth, I freeze.

The man standing there has to be well over six feet. His shoulders are shockingly broad, and a sports coat is tailored so that I'm drawn to his slim waist.

He's looking at me, and I'm unable to tear my eyes from him.

His raven-dark hair is rakishly combed back from his forehead, but it's his facial bone structure that holds me riveted. The man is stunning, all sharp, masculine angles.

Even in a room full of gorgeous men, he would stand out.

Then our gazes meet.

His eyes are beautiful, the color of the deepest ocean, every bit as intimidating and threatening.

He takes a step, and I'm frozen like a rabbit captured in headlights. A primitive instinct urges me to run as far and as fast as I can.

But when it comes to this, my survival instincts refuse to respond.

When he takes a second step, I know one thing for certain... He is coming for me.

Oh God. Of all the high-end places in Las Vegas, why did I have to choose this one?

Moments later, he's beside me, and he plucks the glass from my numb fingers. It's probably a good thing because I'm in danger of losing my grip and sending it shattering on the bar top.

"He's an idiot."

Breathless, I angle myself so that I can look at him better. Because he's so much taller than me—even in my heels—I have to tip my head way back to see the expression in his eyes.

With a frown, I ask, "Who?"

"The man you were supposed to marry."

This close, hardly a breath separating us, he is completely overwhelming.

Everything I'd noticed in that flash of time was accurate. But I hadn't been prepared for the way I feel branded by his spicy, earthy scent.

As I breathe him in, he fills my senses.

"If you were mine..."

Oh my God. Is he crazy? "How do you know it was him?"

Never breaking the contact of our gazes, the man sets my glass down.

"You appear as if you're fully ready to walk down the aisle. One option is that he got cold feet, which would make him a coward." He lifts a single shoulder in a casual shrug. "If that's the case, he's not a man you should spend your life with."

"You have an active imagination."

Disregarding my observation, he goes on. "My second—and most likely guess—is that he fucked up in some terrible way. Which makes him unbelievably stupid."

That, I can't argue with.

“In either case, it’s better to find out now than in the future.” He states this plainly, as if it’s a fact, and he leaves no room for argument. “I stand behind my statement. Whomever your groom was, he was too stupid to deserve you.”

“Thank you for that.” Words from a man I don’t know shouldn’t help. But they do.

“Someday you’ll look back on this and be glad you didn’t tie the knot.”

Spending a lifetime with a liar and a cheat would have been an awful fate. Still, I’m aware of the way I’ve let my family down.

Tipping my head, I regard him. “Do you make a habit of intruding on other people’s business? Or am I just unfortunate?”

Rather than taking offense and walking away, he winces but remains where he is. “As a habit, no. But when a lady has a problem she’d like to solve...”

How much did you overhear?

The gloriously handsome man sweeps his hot gaze down my body.

“One that I can solve for you, it’s only fitting that I offer my services.”

Have I heard him correctly? He wants to pluck my V-card?

Momentarily stunned, I gape at him.

No. Frantically I shake my head. *Absolutely not.*

When I spread my legs, it will be for someone a little less rough around the edges. Someone slightly less terrifying.

“Forrest Donnelly,” he introduces, extending his hand.

I’ve been carefully trained to behave as a polite young lady, smiling and never committing the cardinal sin of being anything less than gracious. But if this man touches me, I might go up in flames.

Deciding I am done making catastrophically bad decisions, I ignore his gesture. “I’m afraid I was just leaving, Mr. Donnelly.”

“Were you?” His lips quirk with a tiny smile.

Effortlessly he’s seen through my lie.

Heat rises in me, and I know it is turning my cheeks scarlet. My inability to hide my emotions has always been something that annoys my mother. How many times and ways have I tried to change who I am to suit others?

Realizing he’s waiting for an answer, I force out a breath.

When I’d escaped the future my family planned for me, I hadn’t thought much past booking a room and getting a drink.

I should have gone into a boutique and bought some suitable clothing and changed out of this gown that I now hate, especially since I have no idea how long the credit card will remain active. My actual purse is in the hotel room that I shared with my sister.

I only have a few hundred dollars of cash in my clutch, which, according to Edward, was more than I’d need. As his wife, he would provide for all my needs. And we planned to honeymoon at an all-inclusive resort.

Needing to escape, I signal for the bartender to bring me my check, and then I pick up my glass and slam down the remaining contents. “Damn.” The base of my skull seems to be on fire, and I cough.

Instantly Forrest Donnelly is there, taking the glass from me.

“You all right, ma’am?” the bartender asks.

“Fine,” I lie.

“I’ll take that,” Forrest says, accepting the bill.

“That’s not necessary.” My protest is instinctive. “I can pay for my own drinks.” At least I hope I can.

In that moment, another man, looking shockingly like Forrest joins us.

He's equally as tall, but not quite as broad. His lean physique makes me think he's a runner or bicyclist. "I'm Zev," he says, and when he extends his hand, I stare at it but don't freak out. "Forrest's younger brother."

The man's eyes are bluer than those of his sibling, kinder too. There's a calmness in the depths, rather than the turbulence in Forrest's.

Zev has a quick smile, and it's easy to imagine sharing my deepest secrets with him.

Aware of Forrest watching, I trustingly slide my palm against Zev's. Why, I can't be sure. The only thing I know is that the man is irresistible.

Breath vanishes from my lungs at my immediate, sensual reaction to his reassuring grip.

I could blindly place my trust in this man. But I dare not.

He quirks a brow, and I realize he's waiting for me to offer my name.

I still haven't run, and if I'm not careful, I'll fall under the spell of the Donnelly men.

"Anna," I say. I have no idea where the name came from.

"A pleasure...Anna." Instead of releasing me, he raises my hand to his lips.

I'm going to swoon. I know I am.

Resisting one of the Donnellys would be difficult. Two might be impossible, and that makes me doubly determined to get out of here.

After yanking my hand back, I reach into the clutch for the credit card.

"I said I have this covered," Forrest states, words clipped and assertive. Bossy.

"What this oaf means is that it's our pleasure to buy you a drink." Like Forrest, he is easygoing, seemingly not offended by my manners at all.

Because I am not entirely convinced the charge will still clear, I smile my thanks.

“We’ll close out,” Zev tells the bartender. “Add the lady’s to our bill and put it on our account.”

“Of course, Mr. Donnelly.”

The man draws my tab back toward him, but not before I catch a glimpse of the total at the bottom. Over four hundred dollars. Without a tip.

Holy crapballs.

“Thank you both.” I totally mean it. Then, with a smile that encompasses them both, I say, “Enjoy your evening.” Grabbing my tiny purse, I turn away and take a wobbly step toward the entrance.

In that instant, my knees weaken, and the room spins around me.

Once more, Forrest is there, one large hand pressed against the middle of my back, another beneath my elbow, catching me and simultaneously offering support.

And that’s a good thing.

I was dizzy to begin with, but his electric touch arcs through me, and I’m unable to stand up by myself.

Without me being consciously aware of his actions, he guides me to a chair at the table they’d been sitting at.

A few seconds later, Zev slides a glass of water in front of me.

I press my fingers to my temples. “I’m sorry. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before.”

As if the day’s events weren’t enough, being the center of their attention is too, too much.

“How long has it been since you ate?” Zev asks, taking a seat.

“I don’t know.” Did I snack on something this morning? “The rehearsal dinner last night, maybe?” I guess.

“Drinking four shots on an empty stomach was a terrible idea.”

I scowl at Forrest. Though I refuse to admit it out loud, the overbearing older brother is correct.

“How about we treat you to dinner?” Zev’s invitation takes all my attention away from the annoying Forrest.

“Thank you.” I smile at him. “But I’ll be fine.”

“But we won’t be.” Zev places a hand above his heart.

It’s all I can do not to laugh at his outrageous antics.

“Give us a chance to be chivalrous and show you that all men are not assholes.”

I hazard a glance at Forrest. “But some of them certainly are.”

“True,” Zev agrees so fast that it surely can’t be the first time he’s apologized for his sibling’s overbearing manner.

“What do you say, Anna?” Zev asks.

Forrest leans forward and regards me closely. “You’re going to say yes.”

His voice is as commanding as it is hypnotic.

“Mostly because you want to. But partially because you’re curious.” He pauses. “About what it’s like to get those orgasms, not just from one man, but from two.”

“You want the honeymoon of your dreams,” Zev adds. “You deserve it.”

Forrest holds my gaze and refuses to let it go. “And we’re going to make your dreams come true.”

“Those are big words, Mr. Donnelly.”

“Are they?” His voice is laced with confidence that borders on arrogance. “Why don’t you find out for yourself?”

CHAPTER FIVE

Harper

SKEPTICALLY I SWING my glance between the two men.

Forrest is stoic, his expression unreadable, though his eyes are dark with something that makes me shiver. Desire, maybe?

Zev is a little more readable and tempting because—right or wrong—he makes me feel safer.

“Why don’t we start with dinner,” he suggests.

Forrest grins wickedly as he adds a disclaimer. “Later this evening, you’ll ask for more.”

Damn you. I shiver, fearing I might do exactly that.

“Dinner,” Zev repeats.

There’s no doubt I need food. The whiskey was sour in my stomach, and my head feels as if someone has dropped a pile of bricks on it. “I need to change first.” Suddenly I can’t wait to get out of this gown.

“We’ll wait.” As if he has infinite patience, Zev sits back in his seat.

Naturally Forrest shakes his head. “We’ll walk you to your room.”

How could he have guessed that I might have changed my mind and ordered room service?

That's still a smarter option. And if Forrest were alone, I'd probably do exactly that. But Zev... He undoes me. And a rogue part of me wonders what it might be like to surrender to the brothers.

Having two men at one time would be a hell of a way to spend what was supposed to be my wedding night.

Am I that brave?

"Shall we say eight o'clock?" I suggest. "I need to shop for something suitable to wear." Fortunately the resort has several stores, even if they're pricier than I should consider.

"You escaped with just the clothes on your back," Zev guesses.

I shrug. Clearly dashing away was not the smartest decision I've ever made. I should have at least grabbed my purse with my passport and wallet. But shock dulled my ability to think straight.

"Now I'm certain your future husband fucked up bad," Forrest says, as if he's the all-seeing, all-knowing oracle.

When I don't respond, he continues. "You are not a coward. If he had chickened out and decided he couldn't go through with it, you would have at least insisted on having a reception. No need for all the money to go to waste. You'd have held your head high."

We've only just met. How is it possible he knows me so well?

"You've no doubt been taught to put up with a lot."

Wide-eyed, I stare at him.

He shrugs. In answer to my unasked question, he says, "You didn't want to shake my hand, yet you hesitated, searching for a polite way to refuse me."

Beneath the table, I knit my nervous hands together to keep them still.

"Etiquette classes starting when you were eight or nine?"

"Five." *Why did I admit that?*

“Which means something unspeakable happened in order for you to feel as if your best—or only option was to run.”

Which would be a good idea in this situation also, but I can’t bring myself to do that.

I check my watch. “I’ll be ready at eight.”

The gentlemen exchange glances.

“We’ll go with you,” Forrest says. His voice is firm, confident I won’t argue.

This man may be gorgeous, but he’s overbearing as fuck. “That won’t be necessary.”

“I’m a pretty good judge of what looks good on a woman’s body,” Zev supplies helpfully. “You’ll be faster if we’re there.”

I sigh. Together, they’re impossible. “Where are we going to dinner?” I’m surprised I’m thinking about agreeing.

“We’ll be staying on the property.”

“Which means it’s going to be fancy.” I wrinkle my nose. What else would I expect? These men didn’t blink at the size of my bar tab. And if two drinks had been four hundred dollars, how much is an elegant dinner? And the clothes I need will be extravagant. “Thank you for the offer. I’m going to pass.”

There are places—even drug stores—where I can find a T-shirt, sweatpants, and flip-flops for less money than the tax on something I’d wear to dinner with multimillionaires. Or are they billionaires?

Despite my upbringing, I wind a finger into one of the curls hanging next to my face.

At one time, I’d been comfortable around rich people.

Comfortable?

Hell, at one point, my family was considered rich, and I’d always thought we were.

But the reality is much, much different.

I graduated from college with a mountain of debt, and I've been taking care of myself, which has been a struggle.

The job I'd had working at a private museum didn't pay much—but it was something my mother would permit me to do. As long as it appeared I was working for personal fulfillment rather than necessity, the family image was safe.

But the truth is, between loan repayment and the rent on my tiny, one-bedroom Houston apartment, I've been living paycheck to paycheck.

“We won't hear of it,” Zev says. “You can return to reality tomorrow.”

Like Cinderella.

And right now, living in a fantasy is tempting.

Surely the whiskey is the reason I find myself wedged between the gorgeous men as we enter a boutique.

Forrest remains at my side, but Zev goes straight for a rack against the side wall.

“How about this one?” he suggests as he selects a short, black dress.

My God, it's beautiful. Slinky and scandalous, with an open back at a very low-cut front.

“Feel it.”

The fabric is amazing. And costly.

“Try it on,” he urges, extending the hanger toward me.

“I shouldn't.” Tempted, I worry my lower lip.

“It'll look great on you.”

I don't have that kind of confidence. The dress will hug my curves, and I normally select clothing that will minimize them. “It won't fit,” I protest. “I need something bigger.”

Determinedly Zev shakes his head and sweeps his gaze over me, igniting the same response that his brother does. “This is the correct size.”

“Trust him.” Forrest takes the garment from him.

Is this really happening? I'm in an exclusive shop with multimillionaires who are convinced they know my body better than I do.

A salesclerk hurries over, a big smile on her face and dollar signs in her eyes. "May I start a dressing room for you, sir?" she asks him, ignoring me completely.

"Thank you." He hands over the potential purchase.

Could he be any more dictatorial?

"If I'm wrong, I will personally fetch you something else," Zev offers.

The man is an expert at soothing my irritation with Forrest.

"You'll need something for tomorrow morning," he adds.

I shake my head, as if to clear it. How could I not have thought about that?

Between the shock and the alcohol, I'm unable to string two coherent thoughts together or consider anything more than five minutes in the future.

Not waiting for a response, Zev chooses a comfortable, lightweight knit shirt and a slim-fitting black skirt.

Though I roll my eyes at the clothing, I don't waste my breath arguing with them.

I'll try on their selections and prove them wrong.

"You'll need shoes for tomorrow."

Those will add another few hundred dollars or more to the already exorbitant bill. Even though the pair I'm wearing are killing my feet, they'll have to do until I can find others in the morning.

"What size?" he persists, proving he's more like his brother than I want to believe.

"You mean you don't know?" I shoot back, unable to hide my sarcasm.

Forrest about slays me with his frown.

Relenting, I sigh and answer Zev's question.

Immediately he moves toward the back section of the shop.

In his own way, he's every bit as assuming as his brother.

The next thing I know, the overenthusiastic salesperson is shepherding me into a luxurious fitting room, complete with a chair, a plush ottoman, three-way mirror, and plenty of places to hang things.

Forrest attempts to follow us inside, but I hold up my hand. "Absolutely not."

Maybe recognizing my tone, he takes a step back.

"Let me know if you need help."

"I won't."

Promising to be back, the clerk closes the door, leaving me alone.

In under twenty seconds, I realize I'll never be able to get out of this gown by myself.

I close my eyes in frustration. Then, hoping the clerk is nearby, I open the door and peek my head out.

The woman is nowhere close, but Forrest is still right there.

"Anything I can do to help?" His voice is smooth and inviting.

Embarrassed that I'm turning liquid inside, I confess. "I'm having a hard time getting out of my wedding dress."

"I'm happy to help."

"Thanks, but no," I refuse instantly, glancing around.

Unfortunately the clerk is helping someone else.

"I'm afraid you're stuck with me." He shrugs. "Or waiting."

Neither option appeals.

"Turn around." He makes a swirling motion with his index finger.

I hate that my first instinct is to obey, not just because of his implacable tone, but because I want his hands on my body.

“Turn around, Anna,” he repeats, his voice lower, more commanding.

He grips my shoulders and gently backs me into the dressing room so we have some privacy.

After he releases me, I set my teeth and do as he says.

Confounding man takes his time.

At this point, I don't care if he rips off the buttons, destroying the dress that I hate and would happily burn. But he is meticulous.

Is this indicative of his personality or is he prolonging my agony?

When the last button is open, his touch lingers at the base of my spine, searing me, igniting a flame deep inside—one that's been flickering since our gazes met and is now threatening to burst to life.

Finally he steps back.

Thanking him without meeting his gaze, I slam the door closed.

After stepping out of my gown and kicking it aside, I wiggle into the black dress then study myself critically in the mirror.

Though it's slightly tight in the hips, it does fit, and it flatters my figure. I haven't said that about many clothes.

“Do you have it on, dear?” the clerk cheerily calls out.

Without waiting for me to reply, she opens the door.

The boys are standing next to her.

What do I have to do to get some privacy around here?

Forrest's eyes smolder with approval while Zev offers a sexy wolf whistle. “Everything I imagined,” he says.

He was right, but I don't say so.

I reach for the price tag and blink at the sight of a comma in it.

“Worth every penny,” Zev assures her.

I’m not sure about that.

“Try on the other outfit,” he tells me. “Here’s some shoes to go with it.”

“Are you a fashion designer?” I ask.

“Merely a connoisseur of beautiful women,” he replies.

I hate how weak his words make me. I want to agree to anything—and everything he might suggest.

Minutes later, I have to admit the outfit is absolutely perfect. And the shoes and the flats that he picked out for me are wonderful too.

Since I’m planning to join them for dinner, and getting back into my wedding gown will take too long, I opt to change into the black dress.

Without a backward glance, I leave the expensive gown in a discarded puddle on the floor.

When I get to the checkout counter, I see Zev has added underwear and bra to my purchases.

I stand there horrified.

“You’ll need them,” he says with a shrug. “Do you have a pair of scissors?” he asks the clerk.

As he snips off the price tag, my purchases are rung up. And when the woman presents me with the total my mouth falls open.

My fingers are shaking as I turn over the credit card.

Happily she takes it and swipes away.

Then her eyes open wide, and she shakes her head as she looks at me. “I’m sorry, dear. Do you have a different form of payment?”

Mortified beyond words, I pray the floor will open up and swallow me.

The cash in my wallet won't even begin to cover this expense.

Forrest immediately steps in. "It's on my account."

"*No.*" Trying to convey my urgency, I touch his wrist.

The winking of jewels in his ring distracts me. They seem to be small emeralds, set as eyes in an owl. Because they're so unusual, I lose my train of thought.

When he nods at the woman, I shake my head to regain my focus. "I can't let you do that."

"Of course you can," Zev replies easily, as if this kind of thing is an everyday occurrence to them.

"You don't understand." Frantically I shake my head. "I don't have a job, and I can't afford any of this stuff." How could I ever have let my life come to this?

"We'll consider it a gift," Forrest assures me.

The clerk casts her glance toward a customer who is signaling a need for help, making me feel guilty for monopolizing her time.

Still, I stubbornly tilt my chin. "I won't be bought."

"I was never suggesting such a thing."

"We'll sort it out later," Zev offers.

If I don't accept, I'll have to go back into the dressing room and put my wedding gown back on. That's something I refuse to do.

Humiliated, I nod. "I'm not sure how long it will take me to pay you back."

After Forrest gives his name and room number, she begins to wrap up my selections.

Then with a big smile, she offers a beautiful gold-colored bag that Zev accepts on my behalf. "It's been a pleasure to serve you."

"Can you do something with my old dress? Donate it, maybe?"

“Certainly, ma’am.” She nods.

When we are outside the boutique, I stop, and both men follow suit, frowning at me quizzically. “This is far too extravagant,” I protest. “We can return it all. Or at least part of it.”

“You could try saying thank you,” Forrest observes dryly.

“For what?” I demand. In addition to the fact he wants to tell me what to do, I refuse to be bought ever again. “My mother tried to sell me to the highest bidder.” Maybe only bidder, but that’s beside the point. “I don’t want to be indebted to anyone.”

The men respond simultaneously.

“Jesus.” Forrest scowls deeply.

“You don’t owe us anything,” Zev immediately reassures me. “We didn’t mean to insult you.”

I shiver. I know that’s not Zev’s intention. As for Forrest, I have no idea what he’s thinking.

As I’m standing here, arguing about finances, another thought plows into me. Until this moment, I haven’t even considered how I will get back home, especially now that my funds have been cut off.

I might have to call my best friend, Amelia, and hope that she will be willing to help me out.

Everything is suddenly too much.

“Look,” Zev says with great patience. “One thing at a time. You’re not in this alone.”

I swallow deeply.

If only that were true.

The men might be good for an interlude, but tomorrow I’ll be on my own for the first time ever.

“Just for tonight, live for the moment.”

Which was what I planned to do when I met this devastating duo.

Forrest, with a gesture so kind and sweet I can hardly believe it, tucks a lock of my hair behind my ear. Then he captures my chin between his thumb and forefinger and tips back my head.

Determination glints in the depths of his eyes as he leans in a little closer.

He's not going to kiss me, is he?

I can't breathe.

I don't want to taste his possession.

Yet I'm afraid I'll die without it.

CHAPTER SIX

Forrest

THIS WOMAN.

With her sweet innocence, guts, and determination, *Anna* is getting to me.

An hour ago, all I was interested in was solving her virginity problem and offering her the honeymoon some fucking idiot denied her.

But now...

She already means so much more to me. To us.

She's clearly a good girl, having followed rules, and the path set for her by others. If my guess is right, this is her first rebellion. And that's exactly how her family will see it. No doubt she could return to them and her potential groom.

Of course, she'd be chastised for her foolishness. But throwing herself on her sword could solve her problems.

Instead she's meeting each challenge with resolve.

Being protective comes naturally to me, perhaps because I didn't have much choice. Our mother abandoned us when Zev was three. I was six at the time, and Dad was away on a business trip.

Somehow I figured out how to take care of both of us until he returned ten days later.

After that, Dad hired nannies, but most of them got sick of the long hours with no time off.

His true passion was his work, and he had no time for me or Zev until we graduated college and were ready to join his business.

Even at the time of his death, when he was killed by a motorist while out riding his bicycle four years ago, he was still very much an emotionless stranger to us.

We've both tried not to be like him, though Zev's had much more success.

Because I've always taken my duties and obligations seriously, I'm harder than he is.

Which makes my profound yearning to care for Anna perplexing.

Perhaps part of that is because she doesn't want the help, and I find challenges irresistible.

Telling myself that's what it is, I brush my lips against hers.

Anyone passing by can see us, and I shockingly don't give a single fuck.

I'm not given to public displays of affection, preferring to keep that kind of thing private, but her softness and compliance nearly wrings a moan from me.

Pressing a palm against her bare back, I nudge her closer to me. Then I cradle the back of her head with my free hand.

We fit together perfectly, as if it's meant to be.

"Open your mouth," I instruct her softly.

Though she chafes at my dominating nature, she's as mesmerized with me as I am with her.

Wide-eyed, our lovely runaway bride does as I say.

Though I hadn't meant to stake my claim on her, that's exactly what I do.

The first taste of her is like rocket fuel through my veins.

She's sweet and hesitant, but curious.

Had that fool not even sampled her mouth?

Suddenly I'm glad he hasn't.

She's come to us as an innocent, and we will show her how much we appreciate her gift. That much, she deserves.

Testing her responses, I deepen my kiss.

In my arms, she softens, allowing me greater access to her mouth, and I take it, plundering, promising.

My cock hardens as my body demands more.

Zev clears his throat, snapping me back to the present moment.

"I'm sure Anna would like to pick up some toiletries," he suggests.

For a moment, she and I continue to gaze into each other's eyes. Then intentionally she pulls back and looks at Zev. "Good suggestion."

Her absence from my arms feels like a loss.

She presses a fingertip to her slightly swollen lips.

Fuck. She's gotten to me. Hardcore.

The protective sensation magnifies tenfold deep in my psyche as puzzle pieces seem to click into place.

Anna is clearly a fake name. The credit card she pulled out was black in color, and no doubt belonged to the man she was going to marry. Since I carry one that looks much like it, I know it doesn't have a spending limit attached to it.

Her clutch bears the name of an expensive designer. And so did the gown she left behind in the dressing room.

Though she's been closed-mouthed about a lot of things, she was marrying into money. A whole lot of it. Which means that someone is looking for her.

The sooner we can get her away from public areas, the better.

“Mind going with Anna?” I ask Zev.

He frowns, and I pull out my phone. “Business.”

“Sure.” He offers his arm.

After a last look at me, she tucks hers inside his. Together they walk toward the gift shop, and I stride down a hallway to find an unoccupied private space where I lock the door.

I scroll to the number of Celeste Fallon, owner of the Fallon Group. No matter what time or day, she will answer calls from certain people. I’m fortunate to be one of them.

“Ah, Forrest.” She’s responded before the first ring is complete. As always, she wastes no time on pleasantries. “To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“I’m looking for information on a certain young woman.”

“Are you?” She’s quiet. “I’m seeking information on a certain runaway bride.”

Fuck me. “I’m certain she doesn’t want to be found.”

“I see.”

No doubt she does. “She’s not going back, and I’m going to need some assistance.”

“I believe we have a conflict of interest, Forrest.”

“I’m not fucking sure how, Celeste.” The Donnelly family has been doing business with her relatives for generations, and we are both Zetas, members of a secret society, sworn to help and protect one another.

Then I realize what she’s not saying. “Shit.” Whomever has contacted her is also a Zeta. “The way I see it, you have no choice but to cancel with your other client. I’m sure the woman you’re looking for is an adult capable of making her own decisions. And she’s not going back.” In frustration, anger nipping at the edges of my temper I add, “You don’t want any part of this.”

“This conversation never happened, Forrest.”

I end the call.

Seething with fury, I dial the one man who I know will solve this problem.

Hawkeye.

Like Celeste, he has little need for pleasantries, and tonight I have no patience for them.

In broad strokes, I outline the situation, along with Celeste's involvement.

"Her name?"

"Goes by Anna. It's an alias."

"And the wedding was supposed to happen in Vegas a few hours ago?"

Once I confirm, he goes on, "Won't be difficult to figure out who she is."

Though I am not concerned at all about her determination not to be sold off to the highest bidder, as she'd called it, she deserves the chance to sort out her own future and make her own decisions. I won't allow her to be bullied. "Hawkeye, she went to a great deal of trouble to ensure she wasn't found. I want it to stay that way." Selfishly, I don't want our evening disrupted.

"I'll make sure of it."

Then I make another decision. "I want to move us all to the Royal Sterling."

"One room?"

The three of us in a king-size bed, her in the middle? *Hell yes*. Then a better idea occurs to me. "The honeymoon suite."

"Interesting."

"She deserves it."

"Consider it done."

"And dinner reservations."

"You're fucking pushing it, Donnelly." There's a long silence, as if Hawkeye can't believe what he's heard. "I'm not your goddamn concierge service."

“Private dining room. Chilled bottle of champagne.”

He bites out another curse. “Inamorata will handle it. Anything else? Something in our normal scope of duties?”

“Just be sure she doesn’t notice.” He’s silent, and I realize I’ve insulted him. “Look, man, I didn’t mean—”

“If there’s anything else you need, let us know.” Hawkeye ends the call.

Once all that is handled, I breathe easier. Good to know someone has our back.

Next I make arrangements for a driver to meet us in fifteen minutes.

As I walk out of the room, I dial my brother’s number. “Where you at?”

“Our suite. Anna is just freshening up.”

“She’s with you?” I demand, hoping he was smart enough not to let her get away.

“Wasn’t difficult. One of us is more persuasive than the other.”

Scowling, I press the button for the private elevator. “You’re a dick.” But as I am whisked up to our floor, I grin. My younger brother had done well. Probably better than I could have.

I enter the suite as Anna comes out of the bathroom, her pouty lips an inviting shade of red. She’s refreshed her mascara and pulled all the pins out of her hair, leaving it tumbling in glorious blonde waves over her shoulders and down her back.

“You’re stunning,” Zev says softly as he crosses to her and kisses her cheek.

I fold my arms, perusing every inch of her. I’ve seen enough of her gorgeous body to lust for more. God, I want her beneath me as I plow into her, fucking her hard, making her scream my name.

Once Zev steps back, she looks at me.

“Beautiful,” I say.

Blushing, she glances at the floor.

Fuck.

I cannot get enough of her.

“Are we ready?” Zev asks.

When she slowly nods, I announce, “There’s been a change of plans.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Harper

BEING with the two of them again tilts my world off its axis, and I've barely recovered from what happened outside the boutique.

Forrest's kiss had consumed me.

He'd tasted of the whiskey's fiery burn, and then something slightly terrifying—possession.

He'd plundered my mouth, claimed it, as if he'd never let me go.

I'd never experienced anything like it.

I yearn to surrender to him—to them—even if it destroys me.

Until now, I hadn't known I had an appetite for risk.

But every time I think about getting away from them, I override my common sense.

"Change of plans?" Zev asks, shooting his brother a quick glance.

"We'll be having dinner at the Royal Sterling."

"*Oh!*" My rescuers certainly have good taste. "Is it true they have a cupcake ATM at that resort?" Seeing it—and choosing from the unusual selections—is on my Vegas "must-do" list.

“You have a sweet tooth?” Zev teases.

“Definitely.” I wrinkle my nose. “But I don’t indulge myself very often.”

“Appearances to keep up?” he asks.

We barely know each other, but at times I wonder if they have a crystal ball. Or maybe they’d grown up in the same way I did, with soul-crushing expectations and never-ending criticism.

“And yes,” Forrest says. “They have a cupcake dispenser. I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.”

“I was wondering something...”

“We’ll do our best to make any of your dreams come true, sweet princess.”

My breath catches as I look at Zev. He’s going to make it very difficult to walk away from them after tonight. “I’d like to pawn my engagement ring.”

“We can do that on our way,” Zev replies immediately.

Forrest holds up a hand, obviously not tolerating arguments. “We’ll handle that later.”

Zev narrows his eyes as he studies his older sibling.

“We’ll be late for our reservations,” he explains with an easy shrug.

“I’m sure it won’t take long.” I hate to be a burden, but this is really important to me.

In the time since I recklessly downed four shots of whiskey, I’ve sobered up...at least a little. Maybe.

At any rate, my brain is working overtime.

I hate being in debt, and I already owe the brothers a lot of money. “I need funds to buy a plane ticket to get back home.” And to pay for transportation to the airport here and in Houston. The cash I have won’t last long, even if I’m frugal. “I should have enough left over to cover the cost of the clothes and drinks you bought me.” At least I hope so.

“I’ll give you a loan against it,” Forrest says immediately. “What terms would you like? One hundred twenty days? A year?”

Scowling, I shake my head. “I don’t want a loan. I want to get rid of it.”

I dig into my clutch and pull out the hated reminder of the terrible mistake I almost made. It glitters in the light, and I remember almost swooning over its radiance and the fact I was going to become a bride. Now my greatest hope is never looking at it again.

Forrest extends his hand, and I drop the piece jewelry into his palm.

“Hmm.”

“What does that mean?”

“The diamond is a little small.”

“*What?*” To me, the gem was ridiculously big, like my dreams and hopes.

“And the cut is designed to hide the flaws.” He looks at me. “Inclusions.”

Do you have any idea how to behave in polite society?

As if he’s some sort of expert, Forrest continues to study the multifaceted thing. “I would never allow a woman of mine to wear this. I’d be too embarrassed.”

Flabbergasted, my cheeks heat as I gawk at him.

“I’ll give you twenty-five thousand for it.”

I blink. That’s more than I thought I’d get for the piece on the resale market, but it’s considerably less than Edward had coughed up at the jewelry store.

After everything he’s just said, I’m surprised by Forrest’s more-than generous offer. “Look Mr. Donnelly—”

“Forrest,” he ruthlessly interrupts. “Since we’ll be fucking later, I think we should be on a first-name basis. Don’t you?”

His crassness renders me speechless.

“Knock it off,” Zev warns. “You’re being an asshole.”

I’m glad he said it. Saves me the words.

Determinedly, I return to my point. “I don’t want your charity.”

“What Forrest means is that he believes he can sell it for at least that much. We’ll get our money back.”

Zev’s statements reassure me, and I exhale. “In that case, make it thirty thousand.” Then I decide to challenge Forrest. “Cash.”

Forrest’s beautiful, tempting lips quirk into a smile. “Done. Now can we go to dinner?”

“I should have asked for thirty-five.”

“You will never know how that might have worked out.”

Like he had earlier, Zev offers me his elbow, and I take it. Far less risky than touching Forrest.

Forrest leads the way to the elevator that I’d ridden in earlier with Zev—one I hadn’t known existed.

Instead of walking through the casino area where the main entrance is located, we head deeper into the resort.

We leave through a much smaller, private exit, and a vehicle is waiting for us.

Fancy.

How many times have I had that exact same thought since I met them? Edward may have had wealth, but not on this level.

Once we’re in the car, I can’t help but glance over my shoulder like I had earlier in the rideshare. Just in case.

The limo is comfortably air-conditioned, and Zev offers me a glass of champagne.

Though I’m tempted, I refuse. “I’m good for right now.” At least until I’ve had food...something other than the cupcake I’m craving.

When we arrive—again, not at the Strip-facing front of the building—we’re greeted by a woman dressed in a sharp business suit.

“Welcome to the Royal Sterling. I’m Julia, your personal concierge.”

She and Forrest step to one side for a private conversation.

Wondering what’s going on, I look at Zev.

Seemingly unconcerned, he shrugs.

As I watch the pair surreptitiously, I see Forrest touch his finger to the screen of the woman’s phone.

Less than a minute later, their conversation is over, and Julia guides us to an elevator. The four of us are whisked skyward to a private dining room.

I’m not sure if Forrest has made arrangements ahead of time, but there is already a basket containing a selection of breads on the table, along with two different kinds of butter and a small plate filled with olive oil.

The table is adorned with a white tablecloth and a small silver vase filled with tiny, bright flowers. A tall, silver ice bucket stands nearby, and an expensive bottle of bubbly is chilling inside it.

I’m drawn to the magnificent view of downtown Las Vegas. If I’m not mistaken, I see the Bella Rosa in the far distance.

The other direction is L’Impero, and I stifle a shudder.

For the first time, I wonder what’s happened in the aftermath of my grand escape.

Maybe my mother shoved my little sister down the aisle in my place. If so, she’s now married to Edward. Seems fitting since they’ve already consummated the relationship.

Do they care that I vanished?

Are they still trying to find me? I shudder. Maybe so, especially if Edward thought to cut off my credit card.

Then I realize that if he's logged into his account, he can see where I used the card.

Which makes me glad that Forrest made the decision to bring us here for dinner.

If Edward is looking for me, at least I'm not there.

"Enjoy your evening," the concierge says, bringing me back to the present. "Please let me know if I can do anything to make your visit more enjoyable."

With a tiny nod, she's gone, and in her place is a server wearing a black jacket.

With a smile, he picks up the bottle from the bucket and presents it to Forrest.

"Excellent vintage. We will wait until our appetizers are served."

"Of course, sir."

"You don't need to wait for me," I insist.

Both men ignore my protest.

I'm barely settled, sipping my water that Zev has squeezed a piece of lemon into when a cart is wheeled in.

"Since I didn't know your preferences," Forrest says, "I took the liberty of requesting an assortment."

The choices are dizzying, from caprese salad to octopus, along with a couple of things I don't recognize.

Perhaps an instinctive nurturer, Zev spoons several things to a small plate and slides it in front of me. "Thank you."

Each bite is more delicious than the last. As much as I hate to admit it, my equilibrium is restored.

When the soup and salad arrive, Forrest requests that the champagne be uncorked.

Mindful of what happened earlier, and scared the whiskey hasn't yet been fully metabolized, I take my time, sipping slowly through the main meal of steak, lobster, and fresh grilled asparagus.

Even though I protest that I don't have room for dessert, Zev grins. "Even the cupcake ATM?"

"Guilty." That, I'm helpless to resist.

We enjoy coffee. Then Zev suggests we head downstairs to get my treats.

"How about we save that for later?" Forrest counters.

He leans forward, looking at me as if he'd like to devour me.

Parts of me that I hadn't known existed spark with excitement.

"I have something else in mind first," he says, each word laced with seduction and promise.

To steady myself, I grab hold of the table.

Forrest pushes back his chair and stands, then offers his hand.

"Come with us, Anna."

Frantically my pulse races.

"We're going to make your every fantasy come true. If you dare."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Harper

HYPNOTIZED by Forrest's compelling gaze, I take his hand, accepting his help. He rewards me with a slow smile, one that sustains me.

As I'm now starting to expect, Zev offers his arm, and I'm grateful for the support. I tell me it's the shoes that make standing on my own two feet so difficult, but it's not. Being the center of their attention leaves me discombobulated.

When we arrive at the elevator, Forrest presses the button to take us up, rather than down.

Curious, I tip my head to one side and look at him.

"As I mentioned earlier"—his lips quirk into a seductive smile—"we've had a change of plans."

"Meaning?" I ask.

"You were supposed to have a honeymoon tonight."

As if I need reminding.

"The meal and champagne were the first part of your celebration. And because it was supposed to be an unforgettable night, I made arrangements for us to have the honeymoon suite."

As I widen my eyes, I gasp. "Do you mean that?"

Zev raises an eyebrow as if to say *well played*.

“We will settle for nothing less than the best for you, Anna.”

The made-up name is unfamiliar, and part of me burns to hear him whisper my real name.

When the doors open, we exit directly into a living room rather than a hallway.

I’ve seen this kind of thing on television, but never in real life.

Our accommodations are luxurious.

In addition to a full kitchen with high-end appliances and marble counters, we also have a dining area.

The living space is amazing, complete with a fireplace, massive television, oversize chairs, and couches adorned with comfy pillows.

In a silver stand, a bottle of champagne chills.

On top of a built-in marble buffet, there’s a fruit basket, charcuterie board, and crystal bowls filled with nuts.

Then I spy a three-tier display of cupcakes, in every imaginable color. “You didn’t!”

Forrest grins. “If all goes well, you’ll soon be very hungry again.”

Even without touching me, he turns me on.

This whole experience exceeds my wildest fantasies. There is no way Edward would have thought to do anything like this.

I feel like Cinderella. I’d ask someone to pinch me, but if I am living a fantasy, I don’t want to wake up.

“Have a look around,” Forrest encourages me.

The bathroom is opulent, with its steam shower and a jetted tub that appears big enough to hold all three of us.

“We’ll get you into that later,” Zev says. “After all, we want to make sure you’re not too sore to keep taking us.”

Embarrassment, mixed with desire, floods me.

“Happy to wash your back.” He grins. “Or anything else you may need.”

Heaven above. In his own way, he’s every bit as bad as Forrest.

There are three white fluffy robes—all embroidered with the distinctive Sterling logo—neatly stacked on the counter.

Next, I peek into the bedroom.

It’s huge, and a king-size bed occupies the center of the room.

The duvet has been turned down, and the snow-white pillows are propped against the headboard.

At the foot of the mattress, ruby-red rose petals are strewn about. Just like in a storybook.

Chocolate-covered strawberries, nestled on delicate doilies, have been placed on each nightstand.

This room also invites lounging, with its wingback chairs and reading lamps. At the far end, floor-to-ceiling windows beckon me.

Taking everything in, I wander over.

I’m stunned to see that one of the windows is actually a sliding door that opens onto a covered terrace.

I glance over my shoulder, and Forrest nods, encouraging me to explore, which I do.

There’s a private hot tub, lots of potted plants and palms, and seats for relaxing. How I wish we were here for days instead of hours.

I gaze skyward, feeling lost, and yet connected at the same time.

“Idyllic,” Zev observes, coming to stand next to me.

“I’ve always loved stargazing.” Why am I telling him this? “It was one of my only ways to escape my reality and imagine a different life.”

Something like this.

“It’s pretty special,” he agrees.

By unspoken accord, we return to the living room, where Forrest is waiting. He’s poured a glass of sparkling water, and he offers it to me.

“There’s no need to ever leave this suite,” I say as I accept.

He grins. “That might be the point.”

As I watch, mesmerized, Zev loosens his tie and tucks it into the pocket of his jacket, then he shrugs out of that and tosses it over the back of a nearby chair.

Then he removes his cuff links. As he tosses them onto a side table, something glitters, ensnaring my attention.

I dart my gaze in that direction. I see tiny emeralds and owls, just like on the ring that Forrest wears.

With great deliberation, he turns back his shirtsleeves, revealing his strong, powerful forearms.

Then with a slow smile he crooks his finger. “Come to me, Anna.”

I’m just as helpless to resist him as I am Forrest.

When I reach him, he plucks the drink from my hand and sets it down.

“I need to taste you.”

Yes.

His touch is much gentler than his brother’s and every bit as devastating as he feathers his fingers into my hair and imprisons my head.

“Tell me that you want this.”

Silently I nod.

Not satisfied, he shakes his head. “I need the words, sweet princess.”

“Will you kiss me, Zev?”

From deep in his throat, he moans, and I can’t think of anything I like more than that sound.

He takes his time, slowly exploring my mouth, asking before taking.

He tastes of the headiness of champagne, with a pure masculine promise mixed in. His touch is so seductive, I know I can stay in his arms forever.

Too soon he ends the kiss, but he remains where he is and arcs his thumb pad across one of my eyebrows. “You’re amazing.”

He makes me swoon.

“Everything I hoped.”

Then he closes his hands gently on my shoulders and turns me to face Forrest.

He crooks his finger, beckoning me.

I’m terrified of taking those few steps but I’m more scared of missing this experience.

As if caught in a tractor beam, I go to him and stop maybe a foot away.

“Earlier I said you’re not a coward. Prove me right.”

Once more I’m aware of how well he knows me after such a short period of time.

As I stand in front of him, he loosens his tie and drops it onto a side table. “Now take my jacket from me.”

On the surface, it seems as if he’s treating me in a subservient manner. But I don’t rebel. To me, it sounds as if his words are laced with husbandly command.

Part of me wants to protest that he’s taking this honeymoon thing too seriously. Yet my voice fails me.

Obediently I move behind him.

As he shrugs, I take his suit coat.

This close, I’m reminded of his kiss.

The scent of him, my hands on his body, overwhelm me.

My ankles threaten to give out as I walk to the chair and place his garment with Zev's.

“Good girl.”

Oh God.

Everything inside me melts. I'd do anything if it meant hearing him speak to me in that husky, approving tone.

I expect him to tell me to remove his shirt next. But he doesn't.

Instead he says, “We want you naked.”

I inhale sharply as I'm faced with the moment of truth.

When I tried to give Edward a lap dance, I was partially nude, and he rejected me. Though I'm sure my saviors won't behave that way, I battle a few seconds of nerves.

My fingers trembling, I reach for the hem of my dress.

“Allow me.” Forrest brushes my hands aside. “You're a gift we want to unwrap.”

Nervous, I close my eyes.

“Oh no,” he murmurs. “None of that. Watch me looking at you.” He eases a finger down the column of my throat. “I want you to see what it looks like when a man appreciates you and treats you as if he'll never let you go.”

CHAPTER NINE

Harper

“LOOK AT ME, PRECIOUS.”

Compelled by Forrest’s soft request, I comply, and breath vanishes from my lungs.

Approval is written in the depths of his blue eyes, and that kind of emotion can’t be faked.

How will I ever go back to my real life after this?

As I nervously curl my hands, he sweeps my dress up and off.

And then I’m standing in front of him, wearing only skimpy panties and a bra.

“*Sweet God.*” He sucks in a harsh breath. “You’re gorgeous. Curves in all the right places.”

Tension I hadn’t realized I’d been holding drains, and my shoulders relax.

“That’s it. Own who you are, in all your goddamn womanly beauty.”

“I...”

“Own it,” he demands. “Be proud of your body.”

Okay. I can do this. Tentatively, I say, “Thank you.”

“Much, much better.” He rewards me with a sensual grin.

Then he steps aside, and I see that Zev is studying me as well, arms folded, head angled to one side. “He’s right, sweet princess. About everything.”

How can I argue with two of them?

Forrest places my dress over the back of the couch while Zev walks behind me. “We want to uncover all your secrets,” he says against my ear as he reaches for my bra strap.

He doesn’t fumble, not even for a fraction of a second, and I shove aside thoughts about his sensual skill set.

I’m under no illusions.

This is a one-night stand, where they’ll pull my V-card and hopefully give me orgasms.

Tomorrow we’ll all go back to our regular lives.

I’ll look back on this moment and remember it forever.

But to them, this is another fun, Vegas evening that doesn’t mean anything.

“You okay?” Zev asks.

How is he so attuned to my reactions?

“I’m fine.”

He brushes my hair to one side to kiss my nape, effectively chasing away my wayward thoughts.

With the fastening now open, I inhale sharply, instinctively covering myself.

Zev moves to stand in front of me and draws the straps down my arms, gently parting them. “You have nothing to hide.”

Within a second or so, my breasts are bare to them.

“Even more spectacular than I imagined,” Zev softly says.

I take a deep drink of the confidence he gives me.

“Are your nipples sensitive?”

“I’m not exactly sure.”

“Perfect answer.”

Aware of Forrest looking on, I turn my focus back to Zev.

“Is it okay if I find out?”

“Yes.” *Please.*

He brushes a thumb pad over one nub, and it instantly hardens.

“That’s it.” He repeats the motion on the other one.

Both are now hard, and my breaths come in tiny bursts.

“May I?” He cups one and lowers his head.

Part of me can’t believe this is happening. But when I don’t protest, he claims it, drawing it into his mouth and sucking gently.

I’m so overwhelmed that I grab his shoulders for support.

“Mmm,” he says, releasing it.

Before I can say anything, he’s moved on to the other.

The air conditioner is whispering a cool breeze through the room, and the chill makes my damp nipple even harder.

“You are sensitive,” he proclaims when he releases me. “But not overly so. Forrest? Want to offer an opinion?”

Zev takes a single step to one side, and Forrest moves in beside him. They can’t mean to...

Simultaneously they each capture a nipple in their mouths.

Their actions are completely different. One brother sucks on me while the other uses his tongue to press my flesh to the roof of his mouth.

Then suddenly they’re doing the exact same thing at the same time, but just for a couple of moments before they switch it up again.

Zev and Forrest are bombarding me with sensation.

Delirious, I moan. This is too, too much, yet wildly I’ll never be able to get enough.

I'm lost as their hands explore my body.

And despite Forrest's earlier urgings, I can't keep my eyes open.

A handful of my hair is grasped. As my head is pulled back, I'm claimed by a kiss so deeply penetrating that I'm swimming in a sea of bliss.

As I'm adjusting to that, my damp nipple is pinched gently and tugged on.

I have no idea who is doing what to me, and the lack of knowledge is a sensual thrill.

Fingers trail down my back to rest possessively at the base of my spine, holding me prisoner for their sensual torment.

On and on it goes until liquid heat spills through me.

I moan as an orgasm begins to unfurl.

"I can smell your arousal," Forrest says.

So that means he can't be the one kissing me.

One of my heroes slides his hand inside my panties, and I end the kiss with a gasp.

"I'm going to get you off, sweet princess," Zev whispers against my ear. "If that's what you want."

Absolutely. Because I know they will demand my verbal consent, I somehow manage to force out a plaintive, "Yes."

He touches my pussy, and I'm ready to explode.

"Take it." He moves his hand.

Frantically I begin to gyrate my hips.

"You deserve this." With his touch, he teases me, encourages me not to hold back.

Zev—at least I think it's him—presses a thumb against my clit, and I nearly rocket out of my skin.

"Come for us," Forrest urges.

"No need to be quiet," Zev informs me. "Give us every one of your reactions."

The brothers suck my nipples into their mouths once more as Zev strokes me faster and faster. Shamelessly I jerk against him, wanting this, *needing* it.

Then Zev cups my breast and squeezes it as he gently nips my sensitive, hardened tip.

Screaming out both of their names, I orgasm, pitching forward, unable to support my own weight.

But I'm captured in strong arms and held tight while I drag in gulps of air.

When I finally manage to pry my eyes open, I blink to clear away a gossamer haze. When my vision comes into focus, Zev is smiling.

He slides his hand from the gusset of my panties, and he raises his fingers to his nose to inhale my essence.

Then, making my mouth fall open from shock, he coats one of my nipples with the dampness, and Forrest licks it off.

How is it possible that this is the evening that I'm having?

When I think about the millions of things that could have happened today, imagining what could have gone wrong, I count my blessings that these two men decided to protect and care for me.

Forrest looks up. "Exquisite."

Unable to help myself, I stroke back hair from his forehead.

The two are amazing.

A minute or so later, when I'm fully recovered, Forrest takes his phone from an inside jacket and sets it aside before requesting I undress him.

This was the demand I expected from him earlier.

Since I've never done anything like this before, I'm nervous, and I fumble with his buttons.

He waits with patience that seems out of character for him.

Moment by moment, I bare his chest as I go.

He has a smattering of chest hair, just enough to be beyond sexy.

When his shirt is off entirely, I feast my gaze on him.

Each of his muscles are honed, and his abs are chiseled. Obviously he lifts weights, heavy ones.

His legs are beyond powerful. This is a man capable of breaking an enemy in half.

Maybe as impatient as I suddenly am, he toes off his shoes and kicks them to one side. I unbuckle his belt, then unfasten the button at his waist before drawing his zipper downward, one tooth at a time. As I do so, his hardness presses against my knuckles, and I draw a steadying breath.

“Such a good girl.”

Hardly able to believe I’m doing this, I drop to my knees to lower his trousers.

Forrest’s cock is forcing the front of his boxer briefs out. Even though it’s confined by fabric, I can already see how enormous he is. *How am I going to take that?*

“You will.”

Once more he has read my mind.

“We’ll make sure you’re ready. Open and wet for us.”

When I glance at Zev, he is gloriously naked.

As I guessed, he is lean with chiseled calves and the elongated muscles of a distance runner.

Forrest helps me up, then sweeps me from the floor and carries me back to the bedroom and places me near the middle of the mattress.

Zev joins us, dropping a handful of condoms onto our nightstand.

I’m glad he thought of protection because I’ve been so swept up in the moment—and them—that I hadn’t given the potential consequences any consideration.

Then another thought quickly follows the first.

How many times are they planning to make love to me?

Forrest removes his underwear, and both men are now gloriously naked, their cocks ready for me. Zev's may be a little longer, but Forrest's has a greater girth.

I'm no longer convinced by Forrest's earlier assertion that I'll take all of him.

"I think our girl is concerned about the fit," Zev informs his brother.

"Maybe we should just get this over with."

Zev flashes a disarming smile. "Oh hell no." He crosses the floor and presses on my shoulder until I am lying flat on my back, trying to remember how to breathe.

"Now part your legs," Forrest tells me.

Perhaps they are going to show me some mercy after all and just get it over with as I asked.

"Good girl. Now put your feet flat on the mattress."

When I've done that, Zev adds to the instructions. "Let your knees fall open."

Exposing me to their hungry gazes. *And more.*

A little self-conscious, despite their constant words of praise, I do as I'm told.

Then Forrest kneels between my parted legs while Zev sits on the mattress near my hips.

I lift my head so I can see what they're doing.

Zev, facing away from me, spreads my labia.

This is already beyond anything I've experienced.

Tenderly he pulls back the little hood to expose my clitoris, and I frantically grab hold of the sheet beneath me.

In that instant, Forrest claims my mound with his mouth.

"Relax," Zev advises.

As if that's possible.

In the past, I've played with a vibrator, but nothing compares to this.

On and on he goes, licking, tasting, and then wave after wave of orgasms claim me.

Crying out, I reach for him, digging my fingers into the corded muscles of his shoulders.

He drives me wild, fingering my pussy.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I recognize they've taken over control of my responses as they relentlessly drive me to the edge.

I thrash my head back and forth.

The orgasms are incredible, but my body hungers for more. I need to be taken completely. "Do me," I implore.

Zev glances back at me. "Tell us again."

"Please." I'm lost. "I need you in me."

But they bring me to another couple of climaxes before Forrest relents.

While he's reaching for a condom, Zev holds my gaze, continuing to ensure I'm fully ready for his brother.

As Forrest rolls the protection down his shaft, Zev shifts so that he's between my thighs, and he gently slides a finger inside me. He does this dozens of times—maybe hundreds—before he adds a second, then third finger, stretching me a little.

"I'm losing my mind," I protest around a whimper.

"You'll be okay."

He doesn't stop what he's doing, and I'm wet, ready. Desperately I lift my hips in silent invitation.

"That's what we want." Zev nods, moving out of the way.

Then Forrest resumes his previous position. "You're going to take my cock."

Trembling, I nod.

With deliberate movements—and what also has to be great constraint—he strokes into me, a fraction of an inch at a time.

“You’ve got this,” Zev promises.

I nod, but when Forrest reaches that tiny feminine barrier, I freeze.

Zev places two, then three fingers to my mouth, and I smell myself on him. “Open up.”

Not knowing what to expect, I do as he says.

“Get them wet.”

He’s distracting me, and I’m grateful for that.

Slowly, his fingers damp, he plays with my pussy once more. “Surrender.”

I try, but I can’t.

Suddenly Forrest pulls out, and Zev exposes my clit to him.

Like a man who’s insatiable, Forrest flicks his tongue over the bundle of nerves, then eats me out until my entire world is fracturing.

With my eyes closed, I arch my back, and Forrest doesn’t hesitate.

Zev covers my mouth, swallowing my cry as a small pain rips through me.

“That’s it.” Forrest’s voice comes from a great distance.

After I’ve adjusted to the intrusion, pleasure erases any discomfort.

Zev ends the kiss as Forrest sinks himself balls-deep inside me.

“So tight.”

I open my eyes, and desire is etched in the hard angles of his face.

“Fucking perfect.”

“Wrap your legs around his back,” Zev coaches me.

I hesitate. That position will allow him deeper, and this is already too much.

Then I realize this is a once-in-a-lifetime event. I want the memories rather than the regret of holding back.

Once more I am lost in them as Zev kisses me and plays with my pussy while Forrest rocks my world.

“Such a sweet princess,” Zev murmurs.

All of a sudden, I come harder than I ever have.

As my pussy clamps down around Forrest, he lets out a guttural groan.

Then, satisfyingly, he pulses deep within me.

After he rides his orgasm, he kisses me hard.

“You took my dick like such a good little girl.”

Undone, my entire being responds to him, and I’d do anything to earn his appreciation.

Forrest rolls to one side and tucks me against him while Zev lays next to me, propped on an elbow.

They have me trapped, and I have no desire to move.

Losing my V-card to these brothers is the greatest gift I could have hoped for.

After some time, Zev brushes my hair from my face. “Ready for more?”

“More?” I echo. *What else can there be?*

“We’ve barely begun to rock your world, sweet princess.”

CHAPTER TEN

Forrest

FUCK.

I look at the beautiful woman next to me. She is spectacular with her lovely mouth slightly parted as she considers Zev's words.

“Are you serious?” she asks him.

“Very much so.” He looks at her with concern. “As long as you're not too sore?”

Does she have any idea what a gift she has offered us?

Zev and I are worldly—maybe jaded. We've seen everything, done everything.

But this is the first time a lady has entrusted her virginity to us.

Until this moment, I had no clue how the responsibility would impact me.

But now...

Her eyes have a glossy, faraway look.

Does our lovemaking have the same meaning to her as it does to me?

Or is it like she'd made it seem at the bar—an inconvenience that she wanted to get rid of?

That question annoys the shit out of me.

Zev and our mystery woman seem lost in each other, which doesn't surprise me. He has a much bigger heart than I do. Which is why we make a point of only playing with women who know the score and realize there is no happily ever after with us.

"I'll be right back." My cock is still semihard and leading the way, I walk into the bathroom to discard the condom.

What the hell had we been thinking?

Helping this beautiful damsel in distress may turn out to be the worst decision we've ever made. Because now that I've been inside her beautiful body, I'm not sure I can let her go.

Forcing myself to deal with events as they are instead of dealing in regrets, I shake my head then run hot water over a washcloth before returning to the bedroom.

Zev holds out his hand, and I turn over the small towel to him.

Gently he bathes her, tending to her red, swollen flesh.

She's tender from our possession, the gorgeous sight is one I will never forget.

While they're occupied, I go to the living room to check my phone.

Nothing from Hawkeye yet, and impatience gnaws at me.

I need answers. Sooner rather than later.

When I return, she is relaxed. After taking the cloth from Zev, I toss it in the direction of the bathroom.

My dick throbbing in incessant need, I stand there looking at her.

Making love to her again would be spectacularly stupid.

As if that knowledge will stop me.

"I want you on top of me," Zev tells her.

Prettily she blushes. "I'm not quite sure of the logistics."

“We’ve got you,” he swears. “All you have to do is trust.”

“Not always easy,” she muses wryly.

Guessing what he has in mind, I lie on my back and touch her shoulder to get her attention while Zev stands. “On your knees, my precious girl.”

How interesting that she trusts us completely with her body, but not her name.

My brother helps her into position, and suddenly I’m ravenous again.

“Now spread your knees as far apart as you can.”

I see the trust in her eyes as she follows his orders, and she curls her hand around the headboard for support.

When she’s where we want her, I move between her legs.

“What are you doing?” She looks down at me quizzically.

“Get that delectable pussy of yours on my face.”

She shrieks. “*What?*”

Not wasting my breath on arguments. I grab hold of her waist and pull her down.

“Oh my God, *no!*” Her tone screams out how scandalized she is.

I’m sure she thinks good girls don’t do that. But in my opinion, good girls do *exactly* that.

“This is too embarrassing.”

“Get over yourself.”

Next to the bed, Zev masturbates himself.

He’s too disciplined to come, but man, he’s taking a risk. I know from experience how hot and tight she is, and how difficult restraint is.

Clamping my hands around her middle, I lift her slightly. “You’re gonna fuck my face.”

Frantically she shakes her head. “Hell, no, I’m not.”

Wanna bet, my girl? I clasp my hands tighter and rock her body back and forth.

“Let go of your inhibitions,” Zev urges.

“I can’t,” she wails.

Instantly I counter with, “You will.”

Keeping her captive, I slide my tongue inside her warmth. I will grant her no quarter until she comes.

“Please,” she says miserably, even though she makes no attempt to escape.

“Close your eyes,” Zev suggests softly.

As she considers, she worries her lower lip.

“Do it *now*.” He adds the last bit with an uncommonly harsh inflection.

With obvious reluctance, she nods.

She will be perfect for the right man.

For me.

Ruthlessly I shove aside the intrusive thought. She doesn’t belong to me.

Yet.

Damn it. Why can’t I keep the persistent thoughts away?

While I continue to simulate a good fuck, Zev plays with her nipples. “Give him what he wants.”

“No...” There’s a sob in her throat.

She’s riding me, even without my encouragement. Gradually her body becomes more supple.

That’s it.

“I’m going to come,” she cries out miserably.

“That’s exactly right.”

“But...”

Zev kneels on the bed and reaches for one of her nipples.

Her little yelp lets me know he's done it hard.

Instantly her body convulses, and she whimpers as if trying to hold back the inevitable.

But biology has designed this moment, and gratification won't be denied.

In a sensual gush, she comes all over my face and in my mouth, and it's one of the most exquisite sexual experiences I've ever enjoyed.

As soon as she's able, she kneels up, lifting her pussy from my face.

"Such a girl." My praise is swift and sincere.

Zev helps her to one side.

Her face is painted scarlet with mortification, and she avoids my gaze. Refusing to let her hide, I capture her chin.

As she looks at me, I lick my lips.

Blinking, she swallows hard.

"Everything you have to offer, we want." We'll say that as often as it takes for her to believe it.

Zev reaches for a condom and offers it to her. "Put it on me, my sweet."

Though it's clear she has no idea what she's doing and her hands are shaky, she nods.

Patiently he talks her through it, and she takes her time rolling it down his shaft. Next time, I'm going to have her do that for me.

She might have come to us a virgin, but before the evening is through, we'll know what thrills her, and she'll have discovered what pleases us.

"Nice job." Zev drops a kiss on her forehead.

He takes my former position, and I offer my assistance as she straddles his hips.

"Take hold of my cock." Zev captures her wrist and shows her what he means. "Hold it steady and lower yourself on me."

Go as slow as you need.”

Pressing her lips together, she does, nervously at first, then with a little more confidence.

Zev’s got her, his hands on her waist, offering support.

I move in behind her, on my knees, reaching around to cup her breasts and to flick my thumbnails over the taut peaks.

Once she has taken all of Zev, she pushes out a breath, then shakes her head back, sending her hair across her shoulders in a torrent of silky, blonde waves.

As she rides him, I press my dick against her back, matching their rhythm.

She’s so damn appealing that it won’t take much for me to come, my seed dripping down her spine.

“Can I touch you?” she asks.

The combination of her innocence and curiosity is unholy. “There’s nothing I’d like more.”

In a few seconds, I’m next to her while she and Zev are frantically fucking, her full breasts bouncing with each of his thrusts.

With tentativeness, she closes her palm around me.

So damn close to the edge, I inhale.

“Is that too hard?”

Fuck no. “Jack me off like a good girl.”

Her grip is exquisite, and the motion is perfect.

“Oh...” Her head rolls to one side.

“Come for me,” Zev encourages.

“Wow... It’s so much.”

Stroking me harder, she shudders. Then she freezes and releases her grip on my cock.

I take over, finishing myself off while Zev lifts his hips several times before clenching his jaw in climax.

Her body goes limp, and drops forward, into Zev's waiting arms.

He holds her tight, stroking her hair as I ejaculate on her warm skin.

"I think we all need a shower," I observe a little later, when we finally stir.

"Or a bath," she adds.

"Lady's choice," Zev agrees.

I climb from the bed as my phone rings. "I'll catch up."

Zev shoots me a speculative glance.

"I need to take that." I'm hoping all my questions will be answered within the next two minutes.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Harper

ELBOWS PROPPED ON A RAIL, I look up at the night sky through the glass-covered terrace.

This has been one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I'm convinced that my real honeymoon would never have been this spectacular.

Looking at it from that point of view, it's hard to be too upset over what happened. Despite my inner turmoil, Forrest had been right to suggest it was better that I found out before the wedding that Edward was a lying, cheating sonofabitch.

Following our sessions of lovemaking, Zev and I went into the shower, and Forrest joined us a little while later.

As we took turns washing each other, I was more relaxed than I could ever remember being.

Afterward the three of us returned to the bed, and I had sex with each man. This time wasn't as frenetic as before because they wanted to go easy on me, but in its own way, the lovemaking had still been exquisite.

I fell deeply asleep and awakened slightly chilled to find myself alone.

The men were speaking quietly in the living room. Feeling safe and protected, I was lulled back to sleep.

About half an hour ago, I awakened, snuggled next to Zev.

Unable to drift back off, restless and not wanting to disturb him, I slipped from the bed, wrapped myself in a fluffy robe, and then peeked my head into the living room.

Forrest was nowhere in sight.

Fully awake, I tiptoed past the bed and quietly eased the sliding door open and stepped outside. Though the Strip still buzzes with activity, this is fully enclosed, almost silent, a piece of serenity amid the hustle and bustle.

Clouds meander across the sky, and then a shooting star snags my attention.

Fancifully, I make a wish.

To always be as happy as I am right at this moment.

“Hey...”

With a smile, I turn to see Zev.

“Didn’t mean to startle you.”

“I was lost in thought.

“Can’t sleep?” he asks, joining me.

He’s wearing his trousers and nothing more.

Even though my body is tender, suddenly I yearn for him again.

Realizing he’s waiting for an answer, I force my attention back to his question. “I used to think I had insomnia. But I think it’s deeper than that. There’s something magical about the middle of the night when nobody else is awake and everything is quiet. There’s a peace I never seem to find at any other time. It’s...” I search for the right word. “Magical.”

“Is it okay if I intrude?”

“Yes.” In fact, I like his company. He’s easy to be around.

I am attracted to both brothers equally, in totally different ways.

“You doing okay? Nothing hurts too bad?”

“Can I answer that in the morning?” I shoot him a quick grin. “I appreciate the way you take care of me.”

“Comes naturally.”

He’s provided an opening, and I take it. Maybe there’s something about the moment that makes him willing to open up too. “You and Forrest are alike, and yet totally different at the same time.”

“Different experiences, right?” He shrugs easily. “Our mother abandoned us.”

Wincing, I angle myself so I can see him better.

“Not that I remember her.” He shakes his head. “Forrest says I was three. Dad was overseas on business, and she went out for a drink with friends and never came back.”

He has to be kidding. “She left you alone? With no one at all to take care of you?”

“We know she’s alive, but we have no contact with her.”

“I can’t blame you. Who does that to their children? Little kids.”

“And your family?”

Since our time together is almost up, and he’s been open with me, it can’t hurt to reveal a couple of things. “I caught my sister in bed with my groom.”

“Fuck.”

“And my mother told me to come back and get married anyway.”

“After what you saw?” He sounds incredulous.

“All men cheat.” I wrinkle my nose. “At least according to Mother.” Will I ever get over the sight of Edward pulling his dick out of my sister’s body? “I’m not sure I ever want to speak to them again.”

“Sometimes family is the people you choose.”

“Wise words.” I tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. “By the way, do you know where Forrest is?”

“Right here.”

At the sound of his rich voice so close to my ear, I jump. How have I not heard his approach?

“I’m ready to take you back to bed where you belong.”

With the way his dick strains against the front of his pants, I’m don’t think sleep is on his mind. “From what I’ve heard, men don’t generally have this much stamina.”

“Is that a challenge?” His eyes darken.

I didn’t mean it as one. But if he took it that way, fine by me. “Maybe it is.”

“Huh.” He studies me with deadly intent in his eyes, making me shiver. “I do believe I’ll take it as one.”

In a single move, I’m off the floor and over his shoulder, breath forced out of my lungs. Frantically I grab at his shirt for some stability as he strides back inside.

I try to lift my head, seeking help from Zev.

He laughs. “Poke the beast,” he says. “Suffer the consequences.”

Forrest dumps me on the bed, and I scramble to get away, only to have him grab my ankle and pull me back toward him.

“You belong to us.”

“No.” I shake my head.

“Admit it.”

Stubbornly I tilt my chin.

Once again, his reactions are lightning fast as he sits on the edge of the mattress then grabs hold of me and turns me over his lap and raises my robe, exposing my ass.

I’m stunned, speechless. “No.”

“Poke the beast, suffer the consequences.”

Anxious, excited, I shake my head in refusal.

“Zev, warm her up.”

“My pleasure.” Vigorously he rubs the backs of my thighs and my buttocks.

“Last chance,” Forrest warns.

Needing to know what will happen and more than a little nervous that I’m pushing this alpha male, I remain determined. “No.”

Stunningly he spanks my ass, blazing it with the heat of his palm and sending shock waves through me.

“Say you belong to us,” he grinds out.

There’s absolutely no way I’ll do that. I’m enjoying the hell out of this decadently naughty experience.

Zev kneels in front of me and fists his hand into my hair, pulling back my head so that I am forced to meet his gaze. “Sweet princess. At some point you’re going to have to capitulate.”

“I’m not.”

Forest continues his beautiful punishment and I kick my legs. When he delivers a particularly hard one, I yelp.

“Tell him what he wants to hear.”

Zev’s eyes, darkened by the midnight-colored sky, are so compelling that I can’t look away.

“Yield to him.”

Never.

“It’s what we want.”

Oh God. To be wanted by both of them...

I can no longer deny Forrest. Or Zev. “Yes,” I whisper.

His spanking immediately stops, and Zev rubs my burning skin.

“The words,” Forrest prompts.

“Yours. I’m yours.”

Zev touches my lips. “Thank you.” He sounds truly grateful.

Forrest—the bastard—gives me one last shocking spank before uttering the statement that *I* need.

“Good girl.”

My heart flutters.

How has his approval become my drug of choice?

“We’re going to try a different position,” Zev announces.

“Oh?”

They help me into a reverse cowgirl. I straddle Zev, my ass is to his face, and Forrest kneels in front of me so I can suck his cock while his brother fucks me.

I may not be able to walk tomorrow between the spanking and this position that seems to tear me in two.

Oh yes, I’m suffering the consequences all right. And I’m loving every moment.

If they are trying to teach me not to poke the beast, the lesson has failed spectacularly.

Later, the salty taste of Forrest in my mouth and my pussy deliciously sore from Zev’s thrusts, I fall asleep.

Sunlight is streaming into the room when I blink my eyes open, and neither man is in the bed.

After yawning and stretching, then grinning like a fool, I manage to get up and wrap my robe around me.

I have no idea when it was removed or who took it off me.

Zev is on the terrace, soaking in the hot tub, a cup of coffee nearby.

In the bathroom, I find a note from Forrest.

AT THE FITNESS CENTER.

Room service will be delivered at nine.

WHICH IS HALF an hour from now.

Curious if there's more coffee, I walk toward the kitchen, and my footsteps falter when I see my purse on the dining room table.

Not my clutch, but the one I'd left behind in my hotel room at L'Impero.

Hardly able to believe it, I open it to find all my valuables inside, including my passport and credit cards.

Then I notice my suitcase, and I go numb.

How is this possible?

Then like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, memories fall into place.

Forrest's phone had rung before Zev and I showered, and then he left us in the middle of the night.

God.

No.

I shake. My purse, the luggage, can only mean one thing.

He knows who I am and who I was supposed to marry. And he confronted them without my permission—demolishing my boundaries and barging into my life when I didn't want him to.

The brothers were my escape from reality, but Forrest has ruined it all.

He wants to run my life every bit as much as my mother did.

Frantic to escape once again, aware of the clock ticking, I dress. Then I reach for my clutch.

A pile of cash is sitting there, next to the cupcake tower.

For my ring.

I dig the piece of jewelry from my clutch and drop it to the marble, then I grab up the money I'm going to need to start over.

Swearing, praying Forrest doesn't return and that Zev stays outside a little longer, I stuff everything in the luggage and

then leave the room, quietly closing the door behind me.

As fast as I can, I hurry toward the elevator...the regular one, not the one we'd taken last night because that's the one Forrest is sure to use.

Since running is now familiar to me, and I need to be more cautious than ever, I catch a ride to another property, then I repeat that process at the second.

In all, I leave three resorts behind before I enter a massive casino and seek out a rental car agency.

I'm no longer foolish enough to believe I have any anonymity, but that doesn't mean I have to make it easy for anyone to find me.

I'm the new me, and I'm in charge of my own damn life.

Forrest Donnelly can fucking go to hell. And take Zev with him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A Week Later

Harper

WITH MY BACKPACK slung over my shoulder, I head into a small coffee shop on the outskirts of McCall, Idaho.

I love this little gem.

Now that Las Vegas is behind me, I am able to breathe a little easier.

While I was on the open road, looking ahead, not in the rearview mirror, I remembered that one of my closest friends had a family cabin that we visited one spring break while we were in college.

At a gas station, I bought oversize clothing, snacks that I never permitted myself, and a baseball cap. Then I borrowed a phone from the cashier behind the counter and called my friend and gave her a quick overview of my situation.

Immediately she said I should go and spend as much time as I wanted. They even had an SUV in the garage that was available for my use.

The place couldn't be more perfect. The rustic, large log cabin is a long way from town, but has all the modern conveniences I needed.

After unpacking, I shopped for food and coffee, along with plenty of juices. Then, because nights were chilly and I only

had summer clothing in my luggage, I found a thrift store and purchased a lightweight jacket, sweatpants, and flannel shirts.

For the first couple of days, I was on edge, looking out the windows, jumping at every sound. And in the wilderness, there were a lot of them that I never noticed when I was here with a group of women. Being constantly vigilant exhausted me. Even so, I could hardly sleep.

When I did close my eyes, memories caught up to me, and my dreams were a terrible juxtaposition of events, from catching Edward screwing my sister to my mother shrieking that I needed to marry him anyway.

Worse, maybe, were the ones of the brothers making love to me.

Maybe four days later, I was finally able to unwind.

I lazed on the couch and took naps to catch up on the rest I'd missed.

Then, thankfully, my energy returned, and I began to venture outside. I visited a local outfitting shop for sturdy walking boots, and I discovered a locally owned coffee shop that also served bottles of cold-pressed juices that are to die for.

It's become my morning hangout before I venture out on a hiking trail.

Once I've ordered my favorite, a tall, dark Mexi-mocha coffee, I find a table in the corner and take out my laptop and open an in-private browsing session like I do every day.

When the barista brings me my heavenly drink made with dark cocoa powder, nutmeg, and other secret spices that are amped up by ancho and cayenne peppers, I smile my appreciation.

Because I'm getting close to the date I have to vacate my apartment, I send the property management company a message, asking if they have any other units available.

The manager jumps on a chat with me, expressing her confusion.

My rent has been paid for the next six months, and I don't have to move.

My hand shakes, and the coffee nearly sloshes over the rim of the cup.

Forrest.

There's no other possibility.

Edward wouldn't have thought to do something like that, and my mother is so obsessed with herself that it wouldn't have occurred to her either.

I remember the first time I'd seen Forrest naked and my impression that he was powerful enough to break a man in half.

Had he done just that?

After all, he'd left me and Zev that night at the Royal Sterling, and the next morning, all my belongings had been returned.

Though I hate his high-handedness, I have to admit he's made my life easier, at least temporarily.

I still need a job.

After a sip of the creamy drink, I send emails to a few friends who are excellent at networking, and then I reach out to my old boss.

Though my job has been filled, she suggests I contact a local art gallery who is looking for a salesperson.

It's not my expertise, but I did take a couple of classes in school that might be relevant.

My former employer assures me that hustling and customer service are more important than theoretical knowledge. As long as I'm willing to learn about the artists they're featuring, she's convinced I could make a lot of money from commissions.

She promises to put in a good word for me, and I send over my resume.

Feeling satisfied and somewhat more in control of my life, I finish my coffee before succumbing to the urge to see what's going on with my family.

Since I've kept my phone off, I have no idea if anyone has called.

There have been a couple of emails from friends, but nothing from my mother or sister.

Opening another in-private session, I do a quick internet search.

Surprisingly there are no results that mention my broken engagement or the wedding that never happened.

How much money did it cost Edward to keep it out of the press?

And how had he done it?

I check my sister's social media. She posted a picture of herself at a party last night, but when I scroll back, everything from the previous weekend and our couple of days in Las Vegas—including the rehearsal dinner—is gone.

It's as if the whole wedding fiasco never happened.

Stunned, I close the lid of my computer once again and sit back to enjoy the rest of my beverage.

A man—tall, broad, wearing jeans, a brown, workingman's jacket, and a ball cap like mine—enters, strides to the counter and orders their largest black coffee.

Though he's dressed right, an air of danger cloaks him, and it's as if he has to pretend to fit in.

I shake my head. Clearly there's nothing wrong with my imagination.

The situation with my family has me a little rattled is all.

When he turns, he sees me looking at him.

Quickly—but not fast enough—I look away.

Since I've been here, the place has filled up with vacationers and locals. Though there's plenty of seating

outside on the flagstone patio, there are no available tables in the shop.

He walks toward me, and quickly I grab my computer to stuff it into my backpack.

“Morning,” he greets casually.

Maybe he’s just being friendly. Still, I narrow my eyes at him. “Morning.” My response is clipped, as uninviting as I know how to make it.

“Mind if I join you?”

“I’m leaving. Give me a minute, and the table’s all yours.”

But he doesn’t wait.

Instead he slides into the chair across from me.

“Hawkeye,” he says.

“Is that a code or something?” This is completely absurd. “Like I’m supposed to say *moonbeam* in response or something?”

He grins, disarming me. “It’s my name.”

“First or last?”

For a moment, he hesitates before replying. “Yes.”

This has gone on long enough.

Standing, I grab my backpack and turn to walk away. “Enjoy your coffee.”

“Thanks, Harper.”

The wind knocked out of me, I freeze and turn back around. “What do you want?”

“Making sure you’re okay. That you don’t need anything.”

Struggling to breathe, a hand on my chest, I nod. “I need one thing. To be left the hell alone.”

“Understood.”

“Go crawl back under whatever rock you came out from.”

Rather than taking offense, he grins.

I head for the door, only to hesitate as I reach for the knob.

Curiosity getting the better of me, I walk back to the table where he is still sitting, sipping his coffee, without a care in the world. “Who sent you?”

“Does it matter?”

“Yes.” I bring up my chin. “It does. A great deal, as a matter of fact.”

He’s quiet, as if considering whether to answer. When he does, he’s cryptic. “The only person you’d want to find you.”

Since I don’t want anyone to know where I am, I laugh, a frantic, panicked sound.

“I won’t reveal your location, and you’ll be left alone now that I’m certain you’re safe.”

This exchange is surreal.

“If you need anything, look me up.” His words are somewhat ominous.

“Wait.” I frown. “How do I find you?”

Standing, he regards me. “You’ve got enough information to figure it out.”

“Are you going away? Actually leaving, not just the coffee shop but the town?”

“Yeah.” He grins. “I’ll go crawl back under my rock.” Tipping his coffee cup in my direction, he strides past me and out the door.

Moments later, he’s gone, and when I look out the window, I can’t see him at all.

Disoriented, I sink back into the chair I had just occupied.

Hawkeye’s words play through my mind. “*The only person you’d want to find you.*”

Damn.

Forrest.

It has to be.

My mind spins back to the hotel room and the spanking he'd given me because I had refused to repeat his words.

"You belong to us."

Had he meant it? I was sure his demand was nothing more than a sexy game he was playing.

I shudder.

Dear God. *What have I gotten myself into?*

And how will I ever get away?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Almost Three Weeks Later

Harper

AFTER TAKING A STEADYING BREATH, I exit my car in the parking lot behind the renowned Lumina Gallery. The Houston humidity settles around me, oppressive and hot, making my silk blouse cling to me and dampening my confidence.

Grasping the handle of my purse, I walk around the building to the front entrance, silently giving myself a pep talk. I've got this.

I hope.

Since I returned home a week ago and learned that Miranda Ellis the owner, was interested in an interview, I've been prepping.

I read every article that I could find about the gallery and her. I know her relationship drama and her educational background, as well as her passion for featuring the very best artists, as well as those that are still emerging. The businesswoman has a shrewd eye for talent.

After working my way through that information, I researched every artist she's currently featuring.

I'm as prepared as I can be for the interview. I just pray I don't blow it. Though I've applied for several jobs, I've had few responses.

When I pull open the door, cool air wraps around me, and I sigh in relief. Soft, instrumental music soothes my nerves.

The contemporary space is adorned with vibrant abstract paintings. To me, it's an oasis in a hustling, busy city.

Because it's before opening hours, I'm the only person inside, and I take the opportunity to wander around, familiarizing myself with the layout and the works. Most I recognize from browsing the website.

Behind a partition near the back wall, there's a desk with two chairs in front of it.

I peek my head in, but I don't see Miranda.

Just then, the phone rings.

Once.

Then a second time, the red light flashing incessantly.

I debate what to do. Then, on the third ring, my heart pounding, I answer. "Thank you for calling Lumina Gallery. This is Harper. How can I help you?"

"I'm looking for *Whispers of the Zephyr*."

"By Castellano?" I ask. He's one of Miranda's signature artists, someone who draws in a lot of visitors. The painting is exquisite, and I noticed the oversize piece the moment I walked in.

"Do you have it?"

"Absolutely." Will Miranda kill me for having this conversation? "It's exquisite, even more breathtaking in person than you can imagine. The colors, the evocative emotion..."

"How much is it?"

I answer honestly. "Priceless, like all amazing art, right? And this one is extra special. Dynamic. I'd be happy to arrange a personal viewing so you can experience the magic for yourself. When would you like to come in?"

"Wednesday evening."

“I’ll check the schedule and confirm the time, if I can take down your name?” I dig a pen and an old receipt from the bottom of my purse.

“Miranda Ellis.”

I drop the handset, and barely catch it before it hits the desktop.

“Well done, Ms. Pembroke.”

I turn, and the owner, with her upswept hair and form-fitting black dress is standing behind me, arms folded.

Shakily, I hang up the phone. Then I face her again.

“You’ve done your research.”

“I enjoyed it immensely. Your reputation is impeccable, and the gallery itself is spectacular.”

She offers her hand, and I shake it.

“Have a seat.”

We spend the next half hour chatting, and when she stands, signaling that the interview is over, I thank her for her time.

“I’ll be in touch.”

“Is there a day I should follow up if I don’t hear back?”

“Wednesday evening.” She smiles, the first hint of softening that I’ve seen from her.

I grin and turn to leave.

After I take a few steps, I stop and spin back to face her. “I hope it’s okay to say that I’d very much like to work for you.” I indicate the gallery. “And here. It’s an amazing space.”

“Thank you for that. I’ve worked very hard to make it a success.”

Cautiously optimistic, I drop by a coffee shop to enjoy a frozen mocha.

Once I have a job, my life will be normal again, and I can’t wait for that to happen.

Almost two weeks in McCall helped restore my sense of equilibrium.

Still, I'd been in no real hurry to return to reality, and I chose back roads and bypassed hotels in favor of finding unique cabins. Each one was rustic and wonderful, and privately owned, which meant I could pay in cash instead of using a credit card.

If the nosy Hawkeye was watching me, it might make it more difficult to track my movements.

I half expected the brothers to show up on my doorstep the moment I arrived back in town.

But so far, I haven't heard a peep out of them.

Which means I've started to breathe easier and let my guard down.

I'm now convinced that Forrest was genuinely concerned about me, and that's why he hired Hawkeye. Once he knew I was safe, he'd forgotten all about me.

What happened in Vegas is now part of my past, nothing more.

At home, I drop my keys on the small entryway table and kick off my heels on my way to the bedroom to change out of my blouse and skirt.

I'm pulling on a T-shirt when there's a knock on the door.

Probably the delivery I've been expecting.

With a smile, I open the door, and I am immobilized by shock.

Forrest and Zev Donnelly are standing there, Forrest wearing a serious frown, and Zev's eyes are lightened by compassion.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" Forrest demands.

"That I was free of you?" Immediately I step back and try to close the door.

But he wedges his foot in the opening, and I know I'm no match for his strength.

"We need to talk," Zev says. "Will you please give us five minutes?"

Because it's Zev, I consider the request.

"Open this damn door, Harper."

I squeeze my eyes shut.

"It's important," Zev says, voice imploringly.

I consider allowing just him in. But Forrest will never stand for that.

"I'm giving you to the count of three."

"Or you'll huff, and you'll puff, and you'll blow my house down?" I demand, rolling my eyes, so damn sick of his overbearing, know-all, see-all attitude.

"Five minutes?" Zev asks, always the mediator.

"And not a second more." Resolved, I step back, allowing them entrance. But I remain where I am, refusing to invite them in.

I make a show of checking the time on my watch. "Hawkeye's a real snitch."

"I'd have ripped every door off every building in this town until I found you."

My breath hiccups. With how ferocious his voice is, I believe him.

"Look..." Zev drags a hand into his hair, then extends a brown paper bag toward me. "We need you to do this."

Puzzled by the concern in his voice, I accept and look inside.

Then the bag falls from my nerveless fingers.

This can't be happening.

"A pregnancy test?" I whisper, looking from one to the other. "But why? We were careful..." My voice trails off, and

a knot forms in my stomach.

“Yeah.” Zev nods. “One of the condoms had a tear in it.”

I’m chilled from the inside out, remembering the pile of discarded protection in the hotel trashcan.

“It’s been about a month.” He retrieves the box. “We need to be sure.”

“This...” I shake my head. I’d know. Wouldn’t I?

“If it’s negative, we’ll get out of your life,” Zev promises.

Forrest, stoically, watching, calculating, doesn’t offer the same commitment.

In some other altered state, I take the box.

“I’ll go with you.”

Forrest’s demand has jolted me. “The hell you will.”

My mind racing, I walk down the hallway, my legs heavy and wooden. The possibility of pregnancy never crossed my mind. And why would it? Both men had been super cautious.

Inside the bathroom, I close the door.

Shaking, I lean against it for a moment. Then, when I’m in control, at least a little, I draw a steadying breath.

Feeling somehow detached, I follow the instructions on the box, reading and rereading to be sure I’m doing this correctly.

After it’s done, I wash my hands, then sit on the edge of the bathtub, unable to look away from the stick on the counter. Each second drags into an eternity.

A pink line appears, and I shake.

Then another joins it.

Surreal reality washes over me.

It’s positive.

I’m pregnant.

The walls close in on me, and I slide down onto the floor, my back against the bathtub.

This can't possibly be real.

In that moment, time grinds to a shaky standstill as the millions of implications zing through me.

An hour ago, I'd been happy, cautiously excited.

And now uncertainty has rocked my world.

"Harper?" Zev says softly, tapping the door.

Overcome with emotion, I can't answer.

"Can I come in?"

Moments later, he's there, beside me, holding me tight. "We won't let you go through this alone."

Heaven save me. This is happening to them as well. And now we'll be tied together for the rest of our lives, something none of us wanted.

"It's okay. We've got you. We'll be with you every step of the way." Gently he kisses the top of my head. "*Every* step of the way, Harper."

Despite myself, I lean into him as a sob catches in my throat.

Shaking, I allow myself to be comforted, and after a crying jag, I look up to see Forrest filling the doorway.

"We'll get married within the week."

"What?" *Married?*

The earth tilts.

As if this news hasn't been enough to deal with? "No." Frantically I shake my head.

"You'll need insurance. Our baby needs a father—"

"Two," Zev interrupts.

With a tight nod, Forrest acknowledges Zev's statement, but he's not distracted for long. "There are practical considerations."

I'd almost gotten married a month before because of *practical considerations*. No way in hell am I falling for that a

second time. “Thanks. But no.”

His bearing thunderous, he takes a step into the room.

He flicks a glance at the pregnancy test.

Instinct stronger than bravado, I back up, and Zev pulls me a little tighter.

I’d be foolish to succumb to his seduction though. He’s every bit as determined as his brother, but because he’s more nurturing, he’s far, far more likely to get his way, which makes him more dangerous to my emotions than Forrest is.

“I don’t think you understand.” He crouches in front of me, filling my vision, stamping my senses. “It wasn’t a request. We’re getting married within a week.”

Finding a shallow well of courage, I shake my head. “In this century, men can’t force women to marry them.”

“You don’t think so?” he asks softly, his smile daring me to defy him. “Try me.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Forrest

HARPER PEMBROOKE PUSHES every one of my buttons, protective and otherwise. And with everything she's been through, she's having none of it.

Zev's innate ability to calm her means she is much more likely to comply with what we want. When it comes to emotions, I'm an inept asshole. If I could fucking change that, I would.

"This is a lot to take in." Zev's tone is empathetic, a state I'm not sure I could reach even at the best of times. Since we met her, every moment has been a minefield, and I've misstepped more times than I can count.

If I wasn't so damn attracted to her...

Or hell, even if I had a little more patience, maybe she'd already be living with us, instead of spending weeks in God-forsaken nowhere.

"It won't get any easier if we're not under the same roof." Zev has continued to press our case while I battle annoyance.

"We'd like to get you in to see a doctor."

In fact, she has an appointment with one of the region's finest in an hour.

"Give us a few minutes?" Zev asks.

"We don't have much more than that."

Leaving them alone, I pace the confines of her small but cozy apartment, going out of my mind. Demanding to know where she spent the last month wouldn't help either.

Hawkeye had promised she was safe and that no harm would come to her, but I hadn't trusted the lack of intel. Since my normal resources hadn't turned up anything, she was off the grid, which meant remote, and my mind spun with every possible bad thing that could go wrong.

I had been out of my mind enough to threaten to get in my SUV and drive every road in the entire country. Zev had talked sense into me, saying that she'd come home eventually. *"After all, you ensured that she had somewhere to return to. We just have to be patient and wait."*

Fuck it all. Mining his goddamn asteroids had to be easier than what she had put them through.

It's maybe fifteen minutes later when they come out of the bathroom, his hand around her waist as he supports her. "It's a lot to take in for all of us," he explains.

A need for action crawls around inside me. I solve problems by doing something. We need to move her into our house. Plan the wedding. Get everything settled for the baby. For something so tiny, it seems they need a lot of stuff.

Biding my time, I curl my hands into fists.

I've never experienced this kind of turmoil before, even with Emily—the woman I'd almost married.

Because of that, I will not rest until Harper is safe in our bed.

Zev helps her to sit on the couch, then tells me to go get her a bottle of water. I scowl.

"Do it."

Which means he thinks he can handle her better than I can. Which is probably true.

When I return, her head is resting on his shoulder, her glorious hair spread across his chest.

“I just came from a job interview,” she’s telling him.

“How did it go?” Zev asks.

How did it go? As if that damn well matters. If I have my way, she won’t be working.

“It’s something I think I’d be good at and would love to do.”

“Where is it? What’s the job?” I ask.

Mutinously Harper looks at me and remains silent. “I’m not saying.”

“Why?” my brother asks.

“Because Forrest will sabotage it.”

Neither Zev nor I argue that fact.

She glances between the two of us. “I’m sorry. Right now, I’m not thinking straight. But I will figure this out and let you know what I’m—”

“We,” I interject.

If she thinks she’s making decisions about her future and our baby without consulting us, she’s very, very wrong.

“Fine.” She sighs. “I’m not getting married. We can draw up a joint custody arrangement. I agree that kids need both of their parents.”

“No fucking chance, Harper.”

“Look.” Zev brushes back her hair, obviously trying to defuse my growing irritation. “The sooner we can come up with compromises that we can all live with, the better.”

I sincerely doubt they’ll come up with compromises that I’ll agree with.

“Maybe you can work part-time,” Zev suggests. “Or we can hire a nanny.”

“Childcare is also the responsibility of fathers,” she insists.

“Of course.” Zev grins. “I work from home most of the time. And if we’re at our Austin office, I don’t mind taking our

baby boy or little girl to work with me.”

Blinking rapidly, she looks at him. “Are you serious?”

“Absolutely. And there’s no reason we can’t have a nanny at the house or when we travel.”

For once, I think we’ve rendered her speechless.

When she speaks, her words are measured. “I’m not sure how I feel about you taking the baby to Austin.”

“As you pointed out, dads are also responsible for childcare.” Using her words against her is a thrill I savor. “If we have joint custody, it will be a way of life.”

Her nose flares.

“If we were married, perhaps things would be different,” I counter. “You could go with us. Or remain at home with the baby and the nanny.”

“You’ve thought of everything, haven’t you?”

If it means keeping her in my life, yes. I’ll use any means, any tactic.

“Anyone told you that you’re a bastard?”

“You’re pushing your luck, Harper.”

“Back off,” Zev warns.

Cooling my heels, I stride to the window.

My Bonds watch vibrates against my wrist. “We need to get going if we’re going to meet the doctor on time.”

When she opens her mouth to protest, Zev presses a finger to her lips.

“Think about it. Do you want to make sure everything’s okay and that you’re doing everything you need to?”

Her shoulders fall in resignation as he goes on. “It will take you forever to find a doctor you can trust if you don’t have health insurance.”

She exhales. “What if I don’t like the doctor?”

“You will.”

“Forrest—”

Zev chimes in, “If you don’t like Doctor Bennett, we’ll get you an appointment with one of your choosing.”

The art of compromise. Too bad I failed the fucking class.

Because she’s still shaken, Zev helps her get ready to go.

In far more time than I’m happy with, we usher her into the back of our SUV, and our driver whisks us to our River Oaks home.

“I’m confused,” she says. “I thought I had an appointment.”

“You do,” Zev answers.

“I thought we’d go to the medical center?”

Which is where Alexandra has her offices, like many of Houston’s top doctors.

“She’s making a house call. We thought you’d be more comfortable here.”

Inside, she looks around, but doesn’t appear impressed. “It’s a mansion,” she wrinkles her nose. “Or a museum.”

She’s the first person we’ve brought here who hasn’t been in the least bit impressed.

“There’s more than enough room for a family,” Zev counters.

For a family. Suddenly, I’m picturing the three of us with a household of kids.

But Harper evidently doesn’t share the same vision.

She’s standing in the great room, looking around, hands on her hips. “Absolutely not. This is no place for children.”

Perplexing woman.

“It’s not homey.”

Before my mouth opens, Zev speaks, “We can redecorate.”

If that’s what it takes, fine. I’ll spend any amount, but there’s no way in hell we’re letting her raise a child in a small

one-bedroom apartment.

“Even buy new furniture,” Zev suggests.

“It’s still too formal. Kids should be allowed to play and run.”

Unlike her?

Having recently met her parents when I paid them and Edward a little visit that night in Last Vegas, I’d believe her childhood was highly regimented and not at all enjoyable.

Further conversation is prevented by the arrival of Dr. Bennett.

After we exchange hugs with Alexandra, I introduce Harper.

“Congratulations,” she greets her patient. “Or are you still trying to process? I understand it can be a bit much.”

“It’s all very new,” Harper replies.

Then, professionally but firmly, Alexandra addresses us. “Gentlemen, if you’ll excuse us?”

I scowl. “I’d like to know what’s going on.”

“For now, I’d like to spend some time with Harper by myself. If that changes, I’ll come for you.”

From the expression on Harper’s face, there’s little chance of that happening.

I should appreciate Alexandra’s protectiveness toward Harper, but it’s in conflict with my own, creating inner turmoil.

Zev shows them both to our massage room.

It seems like the perfect choice. Along with the stand-in for an examination table, there are a couple of comfortable chairs in the space.

When Zev returns, I glance at the decanter sitting on the nearby bar. “Too early?”

“If Harper were happier, I’d suggest popping a bottle of champagne.”

Unlike the woman of our dreams, we've been thinking about the baby for close to a month.

Factor in what Edward and her family did to her... No wonder she wants her independence.

I'd pluck the moon from the sky for her.

But letting her go a second time is the one thing I cannot grant her.

Our wait seems endless.

And this is only the first of dozens of interminable appointments, I'm sure.

I pace, take phone calls, try to burn off my excess energy. Knowing she is okay matters a great deal to me.

"We should consider house hunting—looking for a house we all like," Zev interrupts my musings.

"This is a damn estate. We have more than enough room."

"Apparently, that's not the only thing we need to consider. And if you intend to be the ultimate victor, then you're going to have to give in some areas."

Not a strategy I've ever embraced.

Finally Dr. Bennett emerges.

"How is she?" I ask.

"You'll have to discuss that with Harper." She smiles to soften the fact she's refused to answer my question. "We've scheduled a follow-up appointment."

At least that means Harper doesn't hate the doctor.

I turn my wrist to tap the date and time into my phone. "When?"

"I'm not at liberty to disclose that information. If Harper would like to let you know—"

"She wouldn't," Harper says, walking down the hallway toward us, bundled in her sweatshirt. She drills me with a hard stare. "This is not negotiable, Forrest."

“Could try a little sugar to go with your arsenic.” Zev shrugs, looking at me.

Beyond frustrated, I show Alexandra to the door. Even though I inquire, as subtly as I know how, I’m unable to get any more information from her.

When I return to the great room, Harper is sitting curled up against the corner of the couch, and Zev is in one of the two leather chairs.

“Everything is fine,” Zev comments, responding to a question I haven’t asked yet.

“The doctor says exercise, vitamins, taking care of myself, rest if I need to. And she wrote me a prescription for prenatal vitamins.”

“I’ll pick those up for you.”

“Got it covered.”

“Look...”

I’m aggravated, confounded that I can’t reach her. Why can’t she see that I’m trying to be helpful?

“I’ll let you know if I need something. But if you don’t mind taking me back home, the doctor suggests I eat regular meals. And I was in such a hurry to get to my appointment this morning that I forgot to eat breakfast.”

“Do you have a favorite restaurant?” I ask.

She blinks, seemingly surprised I’m being even the least bit accommodating.

Then she names a popular soup, salad, and sandwich place that’s not my favorite, but taking some advice from Zev, I instantly agree.

Over lunch, she fills us in on a few more details. “She’d like me to go to her office for a more thorough exam.”

“I’m happy to take you,” Zev offers. “I meant it when I said you don’t have to go through this alone.”

Like maybe our mother had?

Where has that unwelcome thought come from? Every time she's entered my mind in the last twenty-something years, I've reacted with condemnation. But my father was obsessed with his work and was never home. Her life couldn't have been easy. Not that that excused her for the unforgivable act of abandoning us. But already I am finding out that there's a lot to this baby business.

As we're taking Harper back to her apartment, Zev asks which area of town she'd like to live in. Frowning a little, she turns in his direction.

"We want you to be happy." He reaches for her hand. "And your apartment's a little small for all of us."

She gives a wry smile.

"And you have ideas about where to bring up kids. A backyard, parks, a good education, a place with neighbors."

This is one time where painting a rosy picture of the future is a talent I wish I had.

Quietly, he adds, "A place you can look at the stars?"

"Zev..."

"Can't hurt to look," he tempts. "If you want to send us a list of homes that you like, we'll get appointments."

"I—"

"Just don't say no."

We arrive at her apartment, and even though she protests, we walk her to the door. Zev pulls her close and kisses her forehead. "Reach out anytime. I'll come over, bring you food, anything you like."

"Maybe decaf mochas. Or hot chocolates," she says.

"Calcium is good for pregnancies."

She laughs.

The sound is music to my soul. We haven't heard her joy often, but now that I have, I want to hear it again and again.

“I like the way you think,” she tells Zev. “Hot chocolate is good for me.”

Then, when he steps aside, she meets my gaze.

Primal hunger consumes me, and I’m a beast who needs his woman to recognize who she belongs to. No argument.

I take hold of her, devouring her mouth, taking, demanding.

When I end the kiss—before insisting on something much, much more—I remind her, “I meant it at the hotel.”

Her lips are a little swollen, but she doesn’t try to run, and that tells me all I need to know. She may fight me, but deep down, even she knows. “You remember.”

Her cheeks turn scarlet.

“Yours,” she whispers.

For once, we’re in agreement. “Yes. You are.” I also meant my earlier words with the same kind of ferocity.

We will be married.

The entire world will know how much she means to me because I will have legally claimed her before God and man.

Nothing will stand in my way.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Harper

FOR THE SECOND time in less than six weeks, I'm slipping into a wedding gown.

This time, the only one with me is my friend Amelia Clarke, whose cabin I borrowed in Idaho.

Since I escaped from Edward and my mother, my life has been a whirlwind.

Forrest Donnelly is a force of nature, one I am powerless to stop.

If it weren't for Zev, I'm not sure how I would cope at all.

Which is why I am in the in the bridal room of a small chapel in outside of Houston.

The place has some meaning to Forrest. From what his brother said this is where they held a small memorial for their father, and it's a place of comfort for them.

I would have preferred to just go to the courthouse and scrawl my name on the bottom of the certificate. Forrest will not hear of that, even though I've had enough of weddings to last me a lifetime.

As he pointed out, this is the first time for him, and they've been involved in every single decision.

The two of them took me shopping for my wedding gown at Haustest Bridal Couture, the most expensive shop in the

city.

Then they dragged me to an exclusive jeweler to select an engagement ring. I have no interest in that. I've still got money from selling the previous one to Forrest. Even though I insisted that a plain band was fine with me, he refused to listen.

My diamond catches the overhead light and refracts it everywhere.

In Las Vegas, Forrest had been scathing about the gemstone that Edward picked out.

I'm not sure if he wanted to back up his words, or whether it's simply a show of his money and success, but the rock on my hand is stupidly big, and I keep bumping it into everything.

As I was trying on different settings at the store, I couldn't help but remember the way my sister had used Edward's ring as a ploy to run back to the room so she could hook up with my groom.

"Are you okay?" Amelia asks, bringing me back to the present.

I shake my head.

"Just memories." There have been a lot of them.

"Of your bitch of a sister?"

I smile, appreciating that she'll say the stuff out loud that I never would.

"I don't think you have to worry about either one of your men behaving that way."

If their actions are any indication, they'll be loyal.

If Forrest didn't keep trying to run my life, I might not hate this moment as much as I do.

Was it just two weeks ago that I'd been cautiously optimistic about my life?

And if it weren't for the pregnancy, I'd be working at the gallery. I'd been offered the job, but I'd been compelled to be

honest with Miranda.

The fact that I'm expecting a child and my future husband refuses to wait to get married and go on our honeymoon means that I wouldn't be an ideal employee. And I hate that.

Miranda insisted she understood. If anything changed for me in the future, I was free to reach out to her again.

Amelia straightens my gown.

There's no one better.

She owns one of the city's most exclusive clothing boutiques.

"You look beautiful."

There's a knock on the door, and I inhale sharply, but relax when I see Marcella, the photographer that Edward and my mother had hired.

Zev told me that Forrest had insisted she destroy the digital files from my abandoned wedding, and he paid the remaining balance that Edward had ignored.

The woman is talented as well as competent.

"Mind if I get a couple of snaps of the two of you together?"

She makes several suggestions for poses, and Amelia makes a joke that's so ridiculous that I smile for the first time in weeks.

"Beautiful." Before leaving, Marcella blows me an air kiss.

"I'm sure your grooms are impatient." Amelia squeezes my hand.

I nod. This is much farther than I'd gotten with my last wedding, and nerves have my stomach in knots.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

Once again, I have no choice.

Since the brothers showed up on my doorstep, I've done some research into their backgrounds.

As far as I can tell, the owl I saw on Forrest's ring and Zev's cuff links represents their membership in a secret society of billionaires, world leaders, entrepreneurs, politicians, scientists, authors, entertainers, and philosophers. Though there is no official list of the people who belong—if indeed the organization truly does exist—it's made up of the world's elites.

According to what I learned, they've been nicknamed Titans, and they are rumored to look out for one another.

Of that I have no doubt.

Forrest has an almost magical ability to get what he wants, from finding me in Idaho, to hiring a private doctor and even putting an offer on the house of my dreams.

I shake my head. How is it possible that this is my life?

If they can do all that, they have the resources to fight me in court over parental rights.

Giving up my child is something I will not do.

Protectively I touch my belly.

I never thought I could feel this way. But now that I've had time to process everything, I'm excited to become a mom.

Already I will do anything I can to protect and nurture this child inside me.

I've made myself a vow that he or she will not be raised in the same way I was.

And though Forrest annoys the hell out of me, I know he is equally as committed to his unborn child as Zev and I are.

If Forrest would be an absentee father, I would have refused to marry them.

I gave into his demands because I don't want to be packing up our baby and dropping him or her off at their house all the time, wondering if my child is safe in Austin, and alternating holidays and special events.

There's another knock at the door, and the crisp and efficient woman who runs the weddings here asks if I need a

couple more minutes.

With a resigned sigh, I respond that I'm ready.

Nothing I do will change my fate, so I might as well not delay the inevitable any longer.

Amelia picks up my flowers and hands them to me before lifting her own bouquet.

"I'll be with you every step of the way," she promises.

Together we leave the room and walk to the sanctuary.

Zev has selected a classical piece to accompany me as I walk toward the altar, and the moment I appear in the entryway, the familiar organ notes bounce off the rafters.

Both men turn.

Amelia gives me one last look before proceeding down the red carpeted aisle.

When she reaches the front, she steps aside, leaving me a clear view of my men. My grooms.

In tuxedos, they are even more devastating than I remember, and a fresh wave of butterflies dance up my spine.

Slowly, drawing strength from Zev's inviting smile, I begin my short journey.

There's a scattering of people in the pews, none on my side of the church, but several on theirs.

As I near them, my step falters.

Forrest breaks his position as if to rush toward me, but I shake my head, silently letting him know I'm fine.

When I continue, Zev smiles with genuine affection, and I use that as a lifeline while I make my way to Forrest's side.

Then, instead of patiently waiting, he takes a few steps toward me and offers his arm and his strength as we face the officiant.

With calm resolve, Forrest recites his vows, promising to honor and care for me.

He never utters the word *love*, and why would he?

Commitment is his version of love.

He slips my band into place.

Where it will remain forever if it's up to him.

Because I'd been unable to compose my own vows, Zev wrote them for me. When it's my turn to speak, I hand off my flowers to Amelia, and he slips a small piece of paper into my hand.

Thankfully, mine read much the same as Forrest's. My promises are about obligation, not genuine affection.

Because our ceremony is a little unconventional, Amelia offers me the first of two rings.

That one, I slip onto Zev's finger, and I raise on my tiptoes to kiss his mouth. If it wasn't for him, I'm not sure I could have gone through with this.

Then I slide the second band onto the finger of the man who is now legally my husband.

"You may kiss the bride."

Hungrily, deeply, as if we were alone, Forrest kisses me, leaving me weak with the promise of what will happen later that evening.

"Ladies and gentlemen..." The minister addresses the sparse congregation, "May I present Mr. And Mrs. Donnelly?"

The words almost make me swoon.

"Mrs. Donnelly," Forrest repeats, for my ears only.

I swallow, looking into his dark, unreadable eyes.

Slowly he leans toward me. "I will never let you go."

I'm unsure if that is a promise or a threat. But have no doubt I'm about to find out...

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Harper

AFTER A SMALL RECEIVING LINE, my husbands take me to a reception that they've arranged at the Braes, their exclusive country club. The gorgeous setting, in the heart of Houston is so exclusive that I'd never heard of it. That seems a little odd since my family had supposedly moved in the same social circles as the Donnelly brothers.

Which again tells me how little I know about my own parents, and maybe how much of my mother's narratives I'd bought into about our wealth.

In a private room, there's an enormous buffet and an open bar, along with a string quartet.

A large cake sits off to one side with a silver knife near it. It smells of sugar and heaven, and I'm tempted to bypass my meal in favor of an enormous slice.

I wrinkle my nose.

Both of my men would put a stop to that before I took my first bite.

They take my health and well-being seriously. Which I appreciate. Except when I don't. Which makes sense to me, somewhere in my pregnancy-addled brain.

The party is fancy for such a limited number of guests.

I'm tired and overwhelmed by the wedding and the changes in my life, so I'd have been happy to have just gone home to take a nap.

But this seems to matter to my grooms.

So I do what I've done my entire life: fulfill my social obligations, meeting and greeting the attendees.

With his hand on my back, Forrest guides me to a new arrival. "Altair Montgomery," he says.

Mesmerized, I shake the man's hand.

There's something old-fashioned about him, with his cape and nearby cane, and I'm almost overcome by a need to curtsy to him.

After regaining my focus, I notice his ring with an owl on it.

I no longer have any doubt that the Zeta Society is real, and that every single thing I've read is at least partially accurate. They're the world's elite, with yearly meetings. Their decisions impact the course of history. And they'd do anything to protect one another.

"I hope to see you again." Altair's smooth voice drags me from my musings.

"It'll be a while," Forrest responds on my behalf.

"Understood."

I check on Amelia, but she's doing fine. Some of the attendees she seems to know, and she grins as she tells me she's handed out several business cards. With the way she networks and the events she hosts, it's no wonder her shop is one of the premier locations in the entire Houston area.

As time goes on, more people enter the room.

Business associates, employees of their firm.

We're talking with the young, brash CEO of IntelliChain Dynamics, a company the brothers have recently invested in, when a woman joins us.

Forrest stiffens. “Surprised to see you here, Celeste.” His voice is chilly.

I’ve never heard him use that tone with anyone, and it spills ice through me.

“Congratulations on your wedding, Forrest.” She smiles and turns to me. “Celeste Fallon. My family has been friends with the Donnellys for years.”

“*Were* friends,” he corrects.

Zev hurries over and greets Celeste warmly, kissing her on the cheek. “I’m so glad you could make it.”

“Thank you for the invitation. I’m so happy for all of you.”

Either not realizing that her presence irritated the hell out of Forrest or not caring, she excuses herself to talk to Altair.

“The hell were you thinking?” Forrest demands. “I crossed her off the list.”

“Business is business, and we may need her in the future,” Zev replies easily, turning to the CEO to talk to him.

The exchange was awkward for all of us.

Considering I look at her.

When she arrived, she walked straight up to us. Her manners seem impeccable, and she’s totally composed. I have no doubt she knew exactly what she was doing.

I hide my grin, aware that Forrest is still scowling.

But frankly, I admire her style.

We eat, mingle, and I share a first dance with each of my grooms, and finally have a delicious piece of cake. “We get to take the leftovers home, right?” I ask Zev.

“I’ll make sure of it.”

A man standing near the back of the room captures my attention.

He looks so different in a suit and with a freshly shaven chin that I didn’t recognize him at first. But now I do.

Hawkeye.

Just who is this man?

Before I have a chance to talk to him, he's gone.

When my energy is ebbing, Zev claims me from the people I'm talking to.

"Sorry to interrupt," he tells the small gathering. "Please continue to enjoy the party for as long as you like."

The next few minutes are a blur as the three of us say our farewells.

Outside, a limousine is waiting for us. It's stocked with sparkling waters and caffeine-free beverages.

We're driving straight to the airport where a plane is waiting, and Zev assists me up the stairs onto their private jet.

But Forrest doesn't allow me to get settled before guiding me to the bedroom in the back of the aircraft.

Less than thirty seconds after boarding, Zev closes the door behind us, and I'm on my back with my dress around my waist and Forrest's mouth between my legs.

"I'm done waiting," Forrest says hungrily.

Uncaring that anyone might overhear, I turn myself over to him. I've been as hungry for him as he is for me.

I might fight my attraction, hate him at times, but my body craves his possession.

Zev lowers his zipper and kneels next to me.

Hungrily I suck him.

Then the man who has just placed his ring on my finger takes me without a condom. We're flesh to flesh, nothing between us.

He fucks me as hard as I want, need, and I scream his name.

When he's done, he pulls out, and his hot cum is dripping from me.

Zev strokes himself to completion, and he feeds me his ejaculate. Staring up at him, emotion welling in me, I swallow deeply.

Then he slowly makes love to me while I lick our combined orgasms from Forrest's shaft.

I'm drunk on desire, overcome with emotion and hormones, and I get lost somewhere deep inside myself.

Maybe I drifted off because I'm jolted back to consciousness when Zev begins to pull my dress over my head.

"Let's get you changed."

I nod my agreement.

"The pilot would like to take off," Forrest adds.

Somewhat mortified, I nod and accept his help into a comfortable T-shirt and the long, flowy skirt he's obviously taken from my luggage.

One man is ruthless; the other is considerate. But the truth is I need them both.

When we emerge, the flight attendant inquires what our drink preferences are, pretending nothing is out of the ordinary. Still, my cheeks are burning. To me, that had been anything but ordinary.

Hours later, we arrive at a private island in the Caribbean, owned by one of their friends.

The house is fully stocked, and a private chef arrives twice a day by boat to ensure I have exquisite and well-balanced meals.

Though I never expected it, one evening when we're outside stargazing, I comment on the fact Zev and Forrest have also given up alcohol and coffee.

Zev shrugs. "I told you we'd be with you every step of the way."

I trace my fingers down his jawbone. "I appreciate it, but it's not necessary."

“Yeah,” he counters. “It is.”

We spend the first week of our honeymoon snorkeling, relaxing, swimming, walking, reading, kayaking, and making love until my limbs are too weak to support me.

Several days before we’re due to leave, Forrest receives a call that his offer on the West University house I’d fallen in love with has been accepted.

I’m overjoyed.

The traditional house is everything I could have hoped for: cozy with a pool and spa, but with a yard that is still big enough for a swing set.

We’ll have neighbors nearby, along with parks and a school. Best of all, we’ll be within walking distance of coffee shops and restaurants.

The home is bigger than I would have preferred, but Forrest insisted we needed room to grow.

Which means he’s thinking of more babies.

When we return to Houston, there are moving vans at their River Oaks estate.

Dazed, I stare in amazement.

“We will be under the same roof every night from now on.” Forrest’s voice is flat with finality, leaving no room for arguments.

I marvel at how quickly everything happens, but I’m speechless at all the things they choose to leave behind.

“We want you to decorate the West U place according to your style,” Zev explains. “We’re only moving essentials, and those pieces can be donated when our new furnishings arrive.”

But I’m aghast when I discover he’s notified my apartment management company that I’ll be vacating my unit at the end of the week. Except for some of my clothing and toiletries, none of my belongings were moved to the new house.

True to their word, that night at bedtime, I’m wedged between them, Forrest’s palm resting on my belly.

When I try to wiggle away, he pulls me closer.

Which is pretty well how everything between us works.

As long as Forrest gets what he wants, marriage is fine.

The problem is, I'm getting tired of him making all my decisions without talking to me.

The happier he is, the more unhappy I am. And I don't know how much longer I can go on that way.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Harper

MY NIGHT'S sleep was terrible, haunted by nightmares of walls closing in around me.

When I was tossing and turning, trying to get comfortable, Forrest held me tighter, making me claustrophobic.

When he finally left the bed to get in his workout, I exhaled in relief.

I pretend to be asleep until Zev quietly gets up to go for his run. Then I wrap a robe around myself and head downstairs.

I'll be glad when they're both gone for the day, so I'll have some time to myself.

And I know the first thing I'll do.

Belatedly I realize it's Saturday, and the three of us are supposed to meet our designer at a trendy baby furniture store in Uptown at ten.

It's a task I can handle alone, or with Zev. As a duo, we work well together, unlike me and Forrest and our conflicting views on most things.

I'm in the kitchen, drinking a cup of hot chocolate—wishing it were a fully loaded Mexi-mocha like I'd fallen in love with in Idaho—when Forrest walks in.

He's already worked out in our home fitness center, and he's showered and shaved. He appears annoyingly fresh and

handsome in his white shirt and trousers while my hair is mussed, and my eyes are burning.

When we were on our honeymoon, and he wasn't totally overbearing, I'd enjoyed our mornings together.

Right now, I'd give anything to be away from him.

Smelling of masculine spice, he reaches past me to plop a pod into the coffeemaker.

Even though I'm aggravated with him, my body still responds to his nearness, and I hate that my hormones make me vulnerable to him.

With a frown, he studies me. "Everything okay?"

"Yes." I'm so accustomed to tamping down my own feelings to please others that my response is instantaneous—and a lie.

Adrenaline punches me in the stomach, demanding I tell the truth. "No."

The word hangs between us.

"No?"

"You canceled the lease on my apartment."

"And?" He places his mug, then pushes the Brew button.

"And?" I repeat, putting down my cup with a clatter before I drop it.

Once more he faces me. His eyebrows are knitted together in confusion. "What's the problem?"

Are you serious right now? My voice shakes. "You didn't ask my opinion, didn't consult me at all."

Gently he curls his hands around my shoulders. "Why would I? We're married, living together in the brand-new home that you chose."

"It's my apartment."

"And our house in River Oaks is on the market."

I roll my eyes as I shrug out of his grip.

“Harper, be sensible. Why would you pay for somewhere you’re not living?”

Not that I am actually paying. I have no idea who is. Forrest? Or my former intended? “It wasn’t your decision to make.”

“You’re my *wife*.”

“Not your fucking chattel.”

“Be reasonable.”

“Did you actually say that to me?”

As the coffeemaker hisses, he drags a hand through his hair.

“You have a million things going on with transforming our house into a home for us and our baby, and you’re juggling it all beautifully.”

No way will I allow his compliment to derail this conversation. “So you took care of that pesky detail on my behalf.”

He nods, as if pleased that I’m finally seeing what a hero he is.

“You’re missing the point. I’m tired of you making decisions for me, for thinking you know what’s best for me.”

“For God’s sake, Harper. I’m trying to be *helpful*.”

I take a breath. “It’s insulting.”

Drenched in sweat, Zev enters through the oversize sliding glass doors. “Morning.”

Staring at each other, neither Forrest nor I respond.

“Oh—kay.” He grabs a bottle of water from the fridge and uncaps it. “Trouble in paradise?”

I know he’s attempting to defuse the situation, but he’s not helping.

“What’s going on?” he asks a few seconds later.

“Forrest canceled the lease on my apartment.”

“And Harper has taken exception to my practical move.”

Furious, I ball my hands into fists at my sides.

“Let’s sit down and discuss this,” Zev suggests.

“There’s nothing to discuss.” I bring my chin up, looking at Forrest, refusing to be intimidated by the hot fury in his blue eyes. “I’m done with you making decisions for me.”

“What the fuck does that mean?”

“Just what I said.” Brushing past him, I start up the stairs.

“Where are you going?”

“To get dressed.”

“Good. We need to leave in an hour.”

Stopping, my hand curved around the banister, I look back at him. “You haven’t heard a single word I said.”

Without waiting for a response, I go into my closet and grab the clothes I want. Then I enter the ensuite bathroom and lock the door. That’s not something I normally do since neither of my husbands are overly concerned by the idea of privacy.

After dressing, I apply my makeup. Then, in the bedroom, I grab my purse and keys.

Determinedly I make my way back to the first floor.

My hand is on the doorknob when the sound of Forrest’s voice hits me like the crack of a whiplash.

“Where are you going?”

Instead of freezing like I normally do, I continue on while responding, “To make a few decisions of my own.”

“We have an appointment with the designer, Harper.”

“Feel free to keep it.” I open the door. Then I walk outside to climb behind the wheel of my car.

Because I’d done this once before in Vegas, the feeling is familiar. But I hate it more this time than I had back then.

Still, if I’d have been smarter and refused to marry them, this wouldn’t be happening now.

By giving in and allowing Forrest to rule my life, he'd made more and more decisions that impacted me.

At some point, I have to be true to myself.

He's striding toward me, so I back out of the driveway. The moment it's safe, I join the traffic that takes me away from my home.

When I reach a stoplight, I drop my head onto the steering wheel, tears stream down my cheeks, and my heart breaks into two awful and distinct, jagged pieces.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Forrest

“NO FUCKING WAY, FORREST.”

Across the table in our private dining room at the Braes, I study Zev. His face is set in don't-fuck-with-me lines.

I haven't slept in a week, and at this point I'm losing my shit. “I've goddamn well had enough waiting.”

“What you're gonna do is keep your ass in that chair before I tie you to it.”

Frustrated, needing something to do, I pick up my glass of whiskey and tip it back, downing the shot in a single gulp.

The burn hits my gut.

Shit.

Shaking my head, I slam down the glass and stare at it. “The hell?”

“You ordered the house brand, idiot. Not Bonds.”

It's been a hell of a week. My executive admin is threatening to quit because I've been a bigger asshole than usual. She hung up on me yesterday for the first time ever.

Since I've had no interest in food, Zev insisted we come here for a meal, and he ordered a steak for me when the only thing I requested was whiskey.

After refilling my glass, I look at him. “Being patient hasn’t gotten us anywhere.”

“You don’t have a choice.”

Ready to deck him, I come to my feet.

Zev seems spectacularly unconcerned. “For the last time sit your ass down.”

Impossible. I pace to the window and stare out. Then I sneer.

Families are frolicking in the pool, and a dad walks back and forth while holding what appears to be a brand-new baby against his chest.

Harper’s selfish behavior is costing us precious moments together.

I want to see the changes in her body, see how she’s doing, make sure she’s taking care of herself. Are her clothes still fitting? Or does she need a new wardrobe? “This can’t continue forever.”

“It’s been a week.”

I despise his reasonable response. “Eight days,” I counter.

He shrugs.

“You’re forgetting what got you into this mess in the first place. And you haven’t learned a damn thing.”

“She’s our woman, and she belongs with us.” Beside me, beneath me. In my arms.

He steeple his hands. “She would be if you didn’t keep fucking up.”

“You’re blaming *me* for her inability to be reasonable?”

Since we went to her apartment with the pregnancy test, Zev has always been able to smooth things over with her, but this time she won’t even answer calls from him.

“We know where she is.”

True enough. Like a besotted teenager, I drive past her apartment at least twice a day. I suppose it’s some consolation

that she hasn't left the state.

For the first time in my life, I'm helpless.

Making decisions, taking action, kept Zev and I alive as children, and my coolness in emergency situations enabled us to keep the company going while our father was lying in the hospital, fighting for his life.

For weeks, I was in charge of the company, a position I wasn't ready for. Then eventually I had to make the ultimate decision that no son should ever have to.

Frustration that I don't know what to do pushes my anger to the bottom of my soul, and I sink into my chair.

"That's the smartest thing you've done in a week."

Eight days.

"Look at it from her point of view."

There aren't two points of view here. I'd know. I've considered every angle.

At night, I toss and turn, lift weights, throw myself into my work, and no matter which way I look at it, I come back to the same conclusion. "She doesn't appreciate anything we've done for her."

"Jesus, man. Get a grip."

I have another whiskey.

"Harper is a grown-ass woman about to become a mother. She doesn't need anyone to tell her what to do."

We need to be together, and she has to understand that I'm looking out for our family.

If I don't protect her, who am I? "I'm trying to take care of her, take some burdens off her shoulders."

"That's not your choice to make."

Unable to contain my anxiety, I drum fingers on my thigh.

"Her whole life, she's has been told what to do. And her conniving mother tried to get her to marry a cheating sonofabitch."

“I fail to see what this has to do with me. With us.”

“In Vegas, you confronted her parents and Edward.”

And gave her little bitch of a sister a mouthful as well while I was at it. But I don't point that out. “She needed her belongings.”

“Did it occur to you, even for a moment, to ask her whether or not she wanted you to do it?”

Furiously I scowl. “I was righting a wrong.”

“Listen to yourself.” He takes a sip of mineral water. “You are not judge, jury, and executioner.”

I don't regret a single moment. Edward deserved everything that happened to him. The sound of that bone crunching had been satisfying, rewarding in a way few things have been. And my knuckles eventually recovered.

“Then you hired Hawkeye to find her. Imagine what that did to her sense of peace.”

“What about *our* sense of peace?” I counter. Knowing she was out there all alone and potentially carrying our child, a little boy or girl, the next generation. Until that moment, I hadn't realized how much I wanted a family.

When my former fiancée, Emily, had a pregnancy scare, I'd immediately done the right thing and proposed.

Maybe the false alarm came too soon after my dad passed, but I wasn't ready to be a father like I am now. I would have been there for her, taken care of my child, but I hadn't had this kind of connection, a need to be involved, a desire to be the same kind of dad like the man I just saw outside. Devoted.

When Harper walked out of the Royal Sterling and our lives, I'd really had no choice but to ensure she was safe and didn't need anything: money, resources, support...

As if trying to harness his annoyance, Zev sucks in a breath. “Put yourself in her shoes. We show up on her doorstep with a pregnancy test, insisting she takes it, and before both lines are fully formed, you insist she marries us, and you make it all but impossible for her to have her own job and money.”

Why would she need that when I will give her the stars above?

“Now you’ve taken away her apartment, the only thing she has that is familiar.”

“Throwing away money.”

Zev holds up his hand to interrupt me. “Stop being so damn self-centered. The point is, dumbass, if you had asked her, she might have agreed with you.”

The end result would have been the same.

He leans in. “If you don’t learn to consider her needs and wants, talk to her, be partners, she’ll be gone from our lives forever.”

“We’re having a baby together.”

“And we can take her to court.” He stands and raps two fingers on the tabletop. “But at what cost? She will hate you forever. Is that what you want? From the woman you love?”

Without another word, he turns toward the door.

“Where are you going?”

“To spend time with someone who’s not an asshole.” He pulls the door closed behind him so hard that the wood jumps in its frame.

As I probably deserve, I’m alone.

I sink back into the chair and fill my glass again.

Zev’s words play through my head, one of them bouncing around so hard I’m unable to shove it aside.

Love.

What a quaint notion, a word with no meaning. Anyone can say it, throw it around like confetti.

Providing for my family, taking care of them, protecting them... Those are the only things that matters.

Staring at nothing at all, I down that next drink, and it burns all the way to my gullet.

I'll leave the romanticism to poets and songwriters.

As for me, I'll deal with facts and reality.

And that makes me what I am right now: the loneliest, most miserable person on the entire planet.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Harper

“ARE you sure you want to hear this? It’s about your family.”

There’s a cautious note in Amelia’s voice that I can hear even though we’re on the phone.

Do I want to hear it?

I walk to the window of my apartment and stare out.

Since the debacle, I haven’t heard from any of them. No doubt that’s Forrest’s doing. Or maybe they no longer care. If they ever had.

Still, nothing can remain secret for long. Is it better that I find out now?

I appreciate the way she asked rather than just blurting out her news. Not that I’m surprised.

My friend has been a godsend, checking on me constantly since I moved out of the home I shared with Zev and Forrest, and yesterday she offered me a job.

Determined to make my own decisions, I accepted, and I’m grateful the position is administrative rather than sales. Her shop is constantly busy, and her employees spend hours a day on their feet.

Even though I’m not very far along yet, my energy level isn’t what it was even a few weeks ago.

Best of all, I can work from home when I need to, which means I don't have to quit when the baby arrives.

Finally she breaks the silence that I've allowed to grow. "Look, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked."

"No. I appreciate that you did. And yes, I want to hear the gossip." Why not? After all, since I ran, I've mostly stayed inside the apartment. I've read half a dozen books, watched endless shows about baby development, and now that I've exhausted those, I've moved onto baking programs.

"Keep in mind, this is just something one of my clients told me."

"Got it. Disclaimer has been noted."

"Edward married your sister."

The words bounce around in my mind.

Since I half expected that, I'm not surprised. Disillusioned, maybe. Even grossed out a little. If he'd married me, would he have kept her as his mistress?

I shudder. And where was loyalty from my family?

How is it possible I'm related to them?

"And..."

"There's more?"

"Someone posted his picture in an online group, you know, where women try to find out if their man has been cheating. Asking for tea or red flags."

"Oh?"

"Evidently he has at least two side women."

I return to the living room to sink onto a chair.

"I looked it up for myself. One of them says he's her baby daddy and is six months behind on child support."

I gasp. "He has a kid?"

"Take it with a grain of salt. Could be someone who's trying to stir up drama."

I feel a twinge of sympathy for my sister.

“He’s a real piece of shit.” She pauses for a second. “I’m glad you found out when you did.”

So am I.

We exchange a few more words, and I promise I’ll be in on Monday for some training before the current employee leaves the position in two weeks.

Reeling, I drop my phone.

I’m still dazed when my phone vibrates, skittering across the coffee table.

There’s a text. From Zev.

I’d like to talk to you. May I come over?

I’m unsure how to respond.

There’s no way I can avoid the pair forever. After all, there are a ton of realities to deal with. But still, I’m not in the mood for arguments. Or being bossed around.

A few minutes later, a second message follows the first.

I’m alone.

That information helps me relax a little. Still, I don’t want him in my apartment. It’s too personal.

I can meet you at Mocha Muse.

It’s my favorite place, but since it’s close to the home we’d shared in the West U area, I haven’t been there since I left. My craving for one of their hot chocolates with its layer of sweet whipped cream and chocolate syrup drizzled on top suddenly becomes a full-on obsession.

I’m happy to pick you up.

I quickly refuse. *I’ll meet you there.*

When I arrive, he’s already at a corner table, and when he sees me, he stands.

His handsomeness makes my pulse flutter, and I have to battle a wave of emotion as I make my way to him.

“May I hug you?”

My self-preservation instincts urge me to say no. Resisting either of them when we’re close is impossible. If I embrace him, I might lay my head on his shoulder and never want to move away.

And yet... I can’t deny him the one thing I want.

I had convinced myself that moving away from Zev and Forrest was my only choice to help settle me, but not having them in my life has done the opposite.

My days are too lonely. My bed is too empty.

“Yes,” I whisper.

Gently, tenderly, he takes me in his arms, holding me close but not too tight.

We breathe together, and I draw in his strength and the scent of masculine reassurance. He’s there for me, no matter what, but in a totally different way from his brother.

Someone brushes past us, jarring me.

Reluctantly I move away from him.

“Can I buy you a drink?”

I grin. “Your teeth might fall out when you find out what I order.”

“I’ll take my chances.”

Together we go to the counter. He orders a decaf Americano, black.

“You don’t have to stay off the caffeine because of me.”

“Yeah,” he counters. “I do.”

After paying, we move to the end of the counter, and we watch my beverage being made.

“That’s for you?”

“Every delicious drop.”

His laugh is an easy sound, making me realize again how much I miss him being in my life.

When we're settled at our table, I ask, "Where's Forrest?"
The two are usually together.

"The Braes."

Where we had our wedding reception.

"He won't know that we are together or where we are."

"Oh?"

"He was on his second or third whiskey when I left his sorry ass there."

As I take a sip of the heavenly concoction, I raise my eyebrows.

"Wasn't Bonds." He lifts his mug. "So he's going to have a world-class hangover tomorrow." He pauses. "Which he deserves."

"No sympathy from you?"

"Act a fool, suffer the consequences."

Quizzically I study him. "Why did you invite me?" Did Forrest send him?

"I miss you."

His simple response disarms me.

"And I was hoping you'd say yes."

We both know I wouldn't have if Forrest was around.

"I wanted to see how you were doing and if you needed anything."

Though I haven't meant to share much, I answer honestly.
"More tired than I've ever been."

"From what I've read, that's not uncommon. Or is it something more than that? Should I be concerned?"

"You've been reading?"

"You matter to me," he replies bluntly.

Warmth spreads through me.

“Is there anything we need to worry about? Do you need a consultation with the doctor?”

“She checks in with me every week.” No doubt, something Forrest arranged. “And it’s totally normal.” Especially since I have barely been sleeping. “What else have you been reading?”

“Parenting books.” He shrugs. “And I enrolled in an online class for expectant fathers. My parenting one starts next week.”

I blink. “Really?”

“I’m determined to do better than my mom and dad.”

In disbelief, I listen to him talk about the way their mother abandoned them while their father was away on business.

“Forrest has always been responsible, and he would get himself up and ready for school, even in kindergarten. If Mom was still in bed, he walked himself to class.”

I’m stupefied. My mother didn’t have a maternal instinct, but she hired nannies who made sure our needs were met.

“Dad traveled a lot, and taking care of kids was something he considered women’s work.” The statement is fatalistic, with no judgment. “He was in England when Mom walked out on us.”

“She...?”

“Left. Forrest was six. I was three.”

Unable to process what he’s said, I sit back.

“He skipped school to take care of me. What else would you expect?”

I ache to think of either of them as children, left alone in the world. “How long were you alone?”

“You’d have to ask Forrest. I was too young to remember. Seemed like forever.” He takes a large drink of his coffee.

He might pretend he wasn’t affected, but the pain in his eyes says otherwise.

“A week. Maybe ten days.”

What about groceries? Food?

“I’m not trying to excuse him. God knows he’s a fucking overbearing bastard.”

“I agree with that.”

“Protecting you is the only way he knows how to show love.”

“*Love?*” I laugh dryly.

“Ridiculous, right?”

He’d left the word out of our wedding vows.

Forrest Donnelly doesn’t love me. I’m not sure he’s even capable of such an expansive emotion.

“Do you think if he didn’t care about you that he would behave this way?”

“Forrest—”

“Hold up. Again, I’m not excusing his behavior. He deserves to be miserable.”

“He’s only miserable because he’s not bossing me around.”

“There may be some truth to that.” After laughing, he goes on. “Even with Emily, he wasn’t this way.”

Interested, I sit up straighter.

He hesitates, maybe thinking better about what he was going to say. “This isn’t my story to tell. He should be the one to explain it to you.”

“And we both know he never will.” He may be one of the least forthcoming people I’ve ever met.

“I’ll give you the broad strokes. They dated years ago, and they had a pregnancy scare.”

The new information has me speechless.

“Of course he immediately proposed.”

“She got a proposal?” I ask. “Instead of being told what she’d do?”

Zev shakes his head. “As I said, you’re different.”

Lucky me.

“He didn’t want to let you go even before we had our suspicions that you might be pregnant.”

That tidbit is news to me also.

“Later, she informed him it was a false alarm, but she still wanted to get married.”

“What happened?” I know Forrest well enough to know he wouldn’t withdraw his proposal. That wouldn’t be the honorable thing to do. And duty matters more than anything.

“She eventually realized he didn’t care all that much about her or their relationship.”

As I listen, I pick at the sleeve that insulates my cup.

“Late nights, lots of travel. To be fair, he had a lot of responsibilities. Dad had just died, and the business demanded a lot of attention.” He nods. “Still, he could have made the time for their relationship, but he didn’t.”

“She walked away?” I guess. Just like me.

“Have you thought about what’s next for you?”

I tell him about my job with Amelia. “She’s just leased the shop next door to her current place. She’s considering adding a maternity line, and she’s hoping I’ll do some modeling for her.” I’m not sure about that.

“You’d be perfect.”

No matter what, I can always count on his support.

“If you do, I’d like to attend.”

We’ll see.

“The house is big and lonely without you.”

And my heart is empty without them.

Zev's words make me ache. "I appreciate everything you told me about Forrest, but it doesn't change anything. I can't live like that."

"Even though I get it"—he stands—"I don't like it."

"Me either." I wish I could wave a magic wand and have the perfect life and perfect husbands where my wishes matter.

Where I'm loved.

"I'll walk you to your car."

In silence, I nod my agreement. There's nothing else to say.

Outside, the evening is mild, warm, but humid.

He gives me a second hug, and this time it's even more difficult to escape because I don't want to.

Always a gentleman, he opens my door. Then he reaches across me to fasten my seat belt. "Anytime you want to talk..." He trails off. "Or are in need of a hot chocolate, I'm here for you."

That offer is more likely to get me to agree to see him again.

Still not moving away, he twists a lock of my hair around his index finger. "You know I love you."

My eyes fill with unshed emotion.

"I fell in love with you that first moment at the Bella Rosa. Your innocence, your bravery..."

"Zev, please..."

He gives me a gentle kiss.

"I will always be here for you, my sweet princess."

How long has it been since he's called me that? And how desperately I've missed it. "I love you," I confess. And I do.

Stepping back, he closes the door, and he remains where he is, watching until my car is out of sight.

Seeing him may not have been a good idea.

His easy camaraderie and affection have left me more desperately lonely.

The tears have never left my eyes, making my eyes blurry.

Needing a moment to sift through everything Zev has told me, I pull off the road into a restaurant parking lot.

As if he's sitting next to me, I replay his words. "*Protecting you is the only way he knows how to show love.*"

In that moment, I'd dismissed what he'd said.

But now...

The truth hits me like a physical blow.

This is so difficult because I've fallen in love with Forrest, the hard, unreachable man.

Maybe he'll give me his devotion, his money, and his time.

But he will never give me the one thing I cannot live without.

His heart.

Sobs wrench from me as I lose the last thing I'd held onto. Hope.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Harper

THOUGH I HAVEN'T WANTED to let Zev's words about Forrest impact me, they do.

I can't stop thinking about him as a little child and all the things he went through. They tug at my heartstrings and has impacted my ability to sleep.

Though I have empathy, I can't allow the knowledge to sway my opinions.

I have to have control over my own life, or I'll end right back here.

"You look like you are a million miles away."

At the sound of Amelia's voice, I shake my head and look up from the screen where I was inputting information. "Sorry. I didn't hear you come in."

She drops into the chair on the other side of the desk from me.

My training period is over, and today I'm working in her back office.

I'm so glad that she's given me a flexible work schedule. On rainy days, I love working from home. But most times, I like coming to the shop because I get tired of staring at my apartment walls.

My home is perfect for a single woman with an outside job. But for a woman working at home and with a baby on the way, it's a little cramped and will be more so when I have a crib and changing table in my tiny bedroom.

“Sorry.” With a smile, I wiggle my mouse to wake up my screen so I can logout. “I was just finishing up.”

“How are things going?”

“Good. I love working here. Are you pleased with my progress?”

“One hundred percent. We'll be having a trunk show for one of our expectant mother's line, and I'm counting on you to model.”

When she'd said so previously, the idea was a vague concept, but now that it was a reality...

“You'll be perfect.

I'll have to take her word for it because I'm not feeling it.

“Still not sleeping well?”

As usual, she's observant. “Is it that obvious?”

“Not to everybody,” she promises. “Anyway, let me know if you want to go shopping at the baby furniture store on Sunday.”

I remember the excitement I'd had when Zev, Forrest, and I were planning to decorate the nursery. I wish I'd remembered to ask Zev if they'd kept the appointment.

Is the room ready for the baby that I will now have to share custody of?

The unwelcome thought makes my pulse stutter.

Amelia is called to the front of the store, and I wish her a good evening.

At home, a manila envelope has been shoved beneath my front door.

Frowning, I pick it up, and blood rushes from my body.

I recognize the name of the sender, a prominent Houston attorney who seems to involve himself in every big case. He's represented billionaires and politicians and made his mark suing everyone from governments to big corporations.

Dazed, I sink into a chair at the kitchen island and open the envelope and pull out a sheaf of papers.

I don't read the whole thing, but highlights of the proposed arrangements for our child leap out at me.

Forrest will be the custodial parent, and I will have visitation rights and be allowed to keep the child one weekend a month.

Suddenly Zev's words about Forrest, the ones that have played on my sympathies, turn to ash.

He's a ruthless son of a bitch who plays to win and doesn't give a damn that me and our child are collateral damage in his evil, manipulative game.

Still, if he thinks I'm going to give up without a fight, he doesn't know a single thing about me.

I pick up a big red, fat marker and uncap it to write two words on the proposal. My strokes are thick and satisfying. Then I tear the pages in half and shove them back into the envelope that I seal with packaging tape.

Since I won't be satisfied with dropping it off at the post office, I grab my keys and open my navigation app.

Once I type in the address of the attorney's fancy office, I'm on my way.

As I ride the elevator, I'm still shaking with anger.

I yank open the oversize, ridiculously heavy door, stride across the plush carpeting, and smack the package of insulting documents on the desk of the administrative assistant.

Then, needing to calm my nerves, I drive to Mocha Muse.

After making sure that the brothers' SUVs are nowhere in sight, I park and walk toward the front door.

Not taking any chances, I stick my head in the door to double check that neither of them are present.

Satisfied, I order my treat to go and hustle out with my cup as fast as I can.

Forrest may think he can use fear to gain my compliance. He couldn't be more wrong, and he's going to learn he fucked with the wrong pregnant woman.



FORREST

“How’d that work out for you?”

Annoyed as hell, I scowl at Zev.

On the desk of my home office is a pile of torn papers, and when I put them together, the writing was unmistakable.

Fuck you.

My lawyer had the envelope couriered over, and he’d called me in advance to warn me that her response was not what I’d hoped.

That was an understatement.

“Thought I told you to own up to your part in this.” Uninvited and uncaring that I don’t want anything to do with him, he drops into a chair. “Clearly your threats and demands are not working.”

“Don’t you have work to do?”

“Nah. Finished for the day.”

“I’m not,” I snap.

“At some point, you’re going to have to stop being an idiot.”

Knocking the papers to the floor, I glare at him. “Get the fuck out of here and quit annoying the hell out of me.”

“Face your demons, Forrest. That’s the only goddamn chance you have at getting what you want.” He stands. Then, with a stupid whistle, he ambles out, leaving me alone with my unwanted thoughts.

Now what in the hell am I supposed to do?

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Harper

I RECEIVE AN ENVELOPE FROM FORREST. Not opening it, I tear it in half and drop it in the trash can, and I do so every day for the next five days.

The next morning, I receive another one, large and thick, this time bearing the return address of the hated, slimy attorney.

Because I still have work to do, I drop it on the kitchen island and return to the computer keyboard.

When I'm on my lunch break, the lumpy manila envelope seems to jump out at me, demanding action.

Though I try to ignore it, I can't.

Once more, my hands shake as I slide my finger beneath the seal to look inside.

For a moment, I stare, unable to comprehend what I'm seeing, so I dump out the contents.

There are hundreds of pieces of crinkled, cross-cut paper inside, but I can see enough red marker on them to guess what they are.

A shredded copy of Forrest's outrageous custody proposal.

Blinking, trying to sort out what's going on, I shake the envelope again, and a handwritten note bearing Forrest's initials falls out.

Since he has nothing to say that I want to hear, I throw it away, eat my lunch, then go back to work.

Later that evening, as I'm watching TV, curiosity gets the best of me, and I fish the note back out of the garbage.

Harper...

I'm an asshole.

My mouth drops open. *Finally* something we can agree on.

You deserve to be treated with respect.

Not with manipulations and threats.

You're going to be an amazing mom, and I'm going to trust that you will make the right choices for our child. Zev and I want to be an active part of his or her life, and I want to support you in whatever ways you want.

Shaking, I make it to the living room couch before my knees give out.

We know you will be fair.

Unlike he tried to be.

Since there is no signature, I flip the card over. There's more writing on the back.

If I'm lucky and you're still reading, I only have two more things I need to say.

I'm sorry.

And then there are three more words.

I love you.

Closing my eyes, I press the card to my chest.

When I'm able to concentrate again, I continue.

We'd love to have you back. You may have some idea how much it has cost me to be patient, but you, my precious Harper, are worth any cost.

The note flutters from my fingers, and I wrap my arms around myself.

He's uncovered my deepest, most secret dream, one I hadn't known I was harboring.

Not knowing what to do, I pace my apartment before giving up and going for a walk.

I'm on edge, wondering what his next move will be.

A week later, when I have heard from neither of them, I realize he's not going to make any more moves.

He's honoring and respecting my boundaries, proving he's a changed man.

Does he deserve a second chance?

I'm not convinced of that, but I know that my baby does, and so does our future.

I'm willing to try, even though I've never been more terrified in my entire life.

Before I can lose my nerve, I drive to the West U house. At this point, I don't dare think of it as ours.

My palms sweaty, I walk up the path to the front porch that hasn't yet been decorated, and I press the bell, hearing an echoing chime deep inside the house.

Moments later, the door opens, and Forrest stands there, pale, unshaven, eyes slightly puffy, as if he hasn't slept in weeks.

And still, I've never seen a more handsome man.

"Harper." He grabs hold of the doorframe to steady himself. "I didn't think this moment would ever happen."

I wasn't sure it would either.

"Would you like to come in?"

The old Forrest would have told me to get my ass inside before berating me for running away, and maybe clamping a hand on my wrist to ensure my compliance.

The house hasn't changed at all since I was here last.

They still have the old furniture, and there is no art on the walls.

It's as if time has stood still.

"Can I get you something to drink?"

Since I'm not sure I'm capable of holding onto anything, I shake my head.

"A hot chocolate?" Zev asks, casually strolling into the room.

Choking on a happy laugh, I hurry into his open arms. "Welcome home," he whispers for my ears only.

After dropping a kiss on the top of my head, he promises to return quickly.

"You're really leaving me?"

"Yeah." He flicks a gaze at his brother. "You and me are good, sweet princess. And we always will be. But that asshole"—he points at Forrest—"has a lot to account for."

I nod.

"I'll be close by."

"Would you like to have a seat?" Forrest asks when we're alone.

"I'd rather stand." I move to the patio doors, keeping distance between us and allowing me the freedom to move around.

He sinks onto the couch, leaving a wide, inviting space next to him.

"I received your note," I say into the silence.

"Did you read it?"

We both know I wouldn't be here if I hadn't. "I'd like to hear the words from you."

"Starting with the part where I'm an asshole?"

"Well..." I repeat my inner thoughts aloud. "It's a good place to begin since it's something we are in agreement on."

"I deserve that."

"And more," I counter.

“Yeah.”

He hasn't betrayed even a flicker of annoyance.

“I get it now.”

I tip my head to one side. “Get what?”

“I can't excuse my behavior. The truth is, even from the beginning there was something about you that makes me want to take care of you, and your refusal makes me a little crazy.”

If we have any hope of being together, he will have to get over that.

“Without you, my life is empty. I tried some pretty fucked-up tactics to get you back.”

“You did.” I appreciate him admitting that. “You almost crossed the line into the unforgivable.”

Not missing anything, he lasers in on my tiny lapse. “*Almost?*”

When I say nothing, he admits, “You are my obsession. I've never felt this depth of emotion for another person.” He scrubs a hand down his stubbly chin. “I've always equated love with the honor of being there for people, solving their problems, taking care of them.”

And I understand that. His parents had never nurtured him or cared for him.

“My life is empty without you..” He falls silent, as if lost in memories, before he shakes his head and looks at me. “It took you walking away to make me confront my emotions.” He forces out a breath. “I'll be honest; it's not something I've had any experience with, and it's fucking uncomfortable.”

I ache to go to him, but I force myself to remain in place. The moment is too important for me to mess it up.

“Until you, I hadn't believed love existed.”

“And now?”

“I understand what it is to put someone else's feelings and emotions above my own.”

I twirl a finger into my hair.

“I’ve realized I’m not always right... My approach can be overbearing.”

Filled with restless energy, I pace, and he watches me intently. When I finally stop and meet his gaze, he speaks again.

“Love is the only thing that makes life worth living.” He comes to his feet. “Everything else...” He waves a hand. “Work, businesses, worldly goods... It’s bullshit. Doesn’t matter at all.”

“Forrest...”

“If you find me worthy, I will spend the rest of my life trying to prove my love. I can’t promise I won’t fuck up.” He offers a small smile. “I have a lifetime of unlearning to accomplish, but I do promise that I’ll try, for you, our baby, our family.”

He remains where he is, hands clenched, unmoving. Waiting, tension grooved beside his beautiful blue eyes.

Hesitantly I take the first step and then another.

“Will you give me a chance??

Unable to believe this is happening, I nod.

That’s all he needs.

He moves toward me, meeting me in the middle of the room to swing me off my feet, kissing me deeply, hungrily, conveying the depth of his emotion in a way that mere words can’t.

This isn’t raw sexual desire. It’s something deeper and more meaningful. Love and promise.

We’re kissing a second time, wrapped up in each other, when Zev clears his throat next to us. “I guess that went as well as I could have hoped.”

Laughing, smiling, we break apart.

Zev stands on my other side, holding my hot chocolate tight as he claims my mouth.

When we finally part, he tips my cup toward me. “Here’s to us.”

“*Yes.*”

Forrest drapes his arm around my shoulders, and I tilt my head toward him as I accept my hot chocolate from Zev. Then I toast each of them with it. “And to happily ever after.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Harper

TAKING A DEEP BREATH, I smooth the front of my dress. It's long, flowy, gorgeous, part of Amelia's newest maternity line—and perfect for the commitment ceremony that Zev, Forrest, and I are having.

Our officiant is Altair Montgomery, who was at my wedding to Forrest.

My husbands and I spent days discussing venues, but in the end, I'd won the argument. I wanted to swear my vows in our house, surrounded by the things we love.

The nursery is finally finished, and all the furnishings are perfect. The room is as beautiful and serene as I hoped.

Some evenings I find myself in there when I can't sleep, and I rock back and forth in the chair they bought for me, picturing our future together.

As I slowly descend the staircase, soft, instrumental notes greet me along with dozens of flickering candles, all in my favorite lavender and sage scent.

My grooms are dressed in business suits without ties, and they've left their top buttons undone.

I've been back home—and I think of it that way now—for two months, and every day has been better than the last.

They greet me with kisses, and I tuck my arm inside the crook of Forrest's elbow while Zev holds my hand.

Then we stand facing Altair, whose back is to the fireplace.

Each of us recite our vows, to live as a committed trio, to honor and respect each other. This time, as he looks deep into my eyes, Forrest promises to love me until the end of time.

A happy sob catches in my throat. I'm filled with such joy that it seems to run over.

Afterward Altair excuses himself even though we insist we'd enjoy visiting with him.

"I'm a decent judge of social cues. And yours are telling me I should have left five minutes ago." He grins. "I look forward to seeing all of you again."

Both men shake his hand and thank him for performing the meaningful ceremony.

He raises my hand to his lips. "Enchanted, as always, Harper."

"That's Mrs. Donnelly," Forrest snaps, with a warning growl in his voice.

Altair doesn't seem the least bit concerned.

The new and improved version of my husband still has a very sharp, sexy edge.

He hasn't always been perfect. And I know he still struggles not to make my decisions for me.

Yesterday, however, we had a battle that he'd won when he overrode my decision to make dinner. Ignoring my protests, he'd swept me from my feet and carried me up to the bed, saying I was being stubborn by refusing to admit how tired I was.

He was right. But as he slipped off my shoes, rubbed my feet, and ordered takeout, I had to admit that he wasn't always wrong about what was best for me.

As I watch, Zev fills three champagne glasses with sparkling cider. And because it's a mild evening, the three of

us wander outside as twilight yields to night.

“That ceremony couldn’t have been more perfect,” I tell Zev after a toast. “Thank you for suggesting it.” Would we be together if it wasn’t for him? “Altair did a great job.”

The two men exchange glances.

Suspiciously I ask, “What?”

“You don’t know who he is.”

I frown at Forrest. “A Titan?” We’ve had that discussion, and they both admitted their membership in the Zeta Society, though they haven’t provided many details.

“He owns a BDSM club in downtown Houston.”

“Oh?” I would have never guessed. Except... I remember my strange urge to curtsy the first time we’d met. “*Oh?*”

“It’s someplace we’d like to consider taking you sometime in the future,” Zev says.

Sex with them is amazing. And if they have ways to make it even more spectacular, I’m open to considering it. Then I narrow my eyes at Forrest. “Is this your way of getting to boss me around?”

“Absolutely not.” He captures my chin. “It would only be about your pleasure.”

His seductive words and stare turn me on.

That moment, a shooting star streaks across the sky, and I’m taken back to that night on the terrace in Las Vegas where I’d made a wish to be as happy for the rest of my life as I was in that moment.

Sipping my cider, I look at my men.

My wish has definitely come true.

I place my glass on a nearby table, kiss each of them, and then grin as I reach for their cocks. “Since my needs are always of utmost importance, let me be very, very clear, gentlemen.” I tighten my grip a little, and they both give me

their complete and full attention. “I’m ready for another honeymoon.”

“Oh yes,” Zev purrs.

Forrest takes over, removing my hand and carrying me up the stairs.

In our bedroom, our clothes land in discarded heaps on the floor.

When I’m bare to them, Zev captures my mouth, and Forrest parts my legs to lick my clit. Then he lifts his head to ensnare my gaze. “I love you, precious Harper.”

I’m not sure if I say the words back because my scream is swallowed by Zev’s possessive mouth.

It’s then that I realize one more truth.

I’m now happier than I was during that magical moment so long ago.

Our future will only get brighter from here.



Thank you for reading *Theirs to Treasure*. This book took a lot of out of me. From the beginning, I fell in love with the overbearing Forrest. Out of all the heroes I’ve ever written, I think he has been the least in touch with his emotions. For him to discover what love is after what he went through nearly broke my heart.

And Zev... Swoon. He was one of the most wonderful, perfect men I can imagine. I think Harper ended up with the best of all worlds. (And hot chocolate!)

IF YOU LOVE Titans ménage stories, I invite you to read *Theirs to Wed*.

An officer. A gentleman. And they intend to claim her forever.

Temporarily marry a billionaire for cash? Amelia Ryan would never consider such an appalling idea...except her

grandmother needs care Amelia can't afford. Cormac Flanagan is gorgeous and powerful. But he's also half of the Dastardly Duo, who, along with his heroic cousin Ethan Slater, are notorious for breaking hearts all over Texas.

Still, when Cormac offers Amelia a million dollars for her hand, he insists she'll be his bride—but his and Ethan's wife—in all ways. Once she's theirs and surrenders to their seductive touch, how will she ever protect her heart from the sensual, devastating Dominants?

★★★★★ “Oh Sierra! I couldn't put it down.”

DISCOVER THEIRS TO WED

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Are you looking for a new series to fall in love with? Let me introduce you to the Moretti family, where you'll enjoy four scorching hot billionaire romances that will make you swoon.

I'LL FORCE my enemy's innocent little sister to say “I do”—to my revenge.

Once, my sister fell for an American prince. An elite.

He used her. He abandoned her. He did nothing as she died.

He'll rue the day he crossed me.

I will have my vengeance—starting with his sweet sister.

I will put my ring on her finger

I will claim her innocence.

I will crush her heart.

And by the time he learns not to mess with the Mafia, it will be too late.

DISCOVER VENGEFUL VOWS

Turn the page for an exciting excerpt from VENGEFUL
VOWS

VENGEFUL VOWS

CHAPTER ONE

Bella

“I’LL SEE you to your door,” he insists.

There’s no need. After all, he’s already driven me home from the party, but his voice is filled with such determination that there’s no arguing with him.

Moments later, we’re in the elevator alone, and the space feels small and ridiculously personal. It’s the first time we’ve been totally alone. Realizing I’m completely at his mercy, I take a breath, but it’s as shallow as it is hollow.

With his fingers resting possessively in the small of my back, we walk down the hallway leading to my condo.

My fingers are shaking uncontrollably because I don’t know what to expect, and I fumble with the keys that I dig from the bottom of my evening bag. It takes me two tries to turn the lock and open the door slightly.

“I will have security improved tomorrow.”

“That’s not necessary,” I respond, shaking my head. “This is a perfectly safe building.”

Since he doesn’t respond, I can’t tell whether he agrees with me.

I anticipate that he’ll for an invitation to come inside. But he doesn’t.

“Have dinner with me tomorrow.” It’s a command, not a question.

I wish I could say yes. “I’ll be at a fundraiser for the garden club.”

“What time will you be done?”

“Maybe around eight.” Why am I agreeing to this? But it’s as if I am helpless to resist him.

“Give me your phone.”

“My...” Confused, I blink.

“Phone. So I can put my contact information in it.”

Nodding, I do as he says.

After he’s finished, he hands me back the device. “Text me the address where you’ll be, and I’ll pick you up.”

Once I agree, he tenderly places his hands on my shoulders. Then he leans forward, and we’re breathing the same air. My heart dances a jig in my throat.

“I meant every word I said to you tonight, Bella. Don’t forget it.”

Will he kiss me? I’m almost willing to beg him to do so.

“May I kiss you?”

It’s too soon. “Yes,” I whisper.

At first, he’s gentle, lightly brushing his beautiful lips across mine. Then he backs me against the door.

“Open your mouth for me.”

I do. His tongue seeks and finds mine, electrifying me in a way I’ve never known before.

He tastes of seduction and whiskey, a potent combination.

When my resistance melts, he claims more, deepens the kiss, and it becomes passionate, arousing me.

One hand is in my hair, the other on my lower back, as if he’ll never let me go.

His tongue thrusts into my mouth in crushing demand. He overwhelms me, and my unbridled response to his passion frightens me.

Still, he's not satisfied.

Marse devours me, making the world spin.

Only then, when my lips are swollen and my knees are weak, does he slowly let me go.

His eyes are stoked with satisfaction. And I want more.

After steadying me, he steps back to capture an escaped tendril of my hair that he tucks behind my ear.

“There's one thing you need to remember.”

Considering him, I cock my head to one side.

“No one touches what's mine. Are we clear?”

He's claiming me as his?

“Tell me you understand.”

Not for the first time, I wonder if he's a little mad. Still, I can't help but obey his command. “Yes, Marcello.”

“Sleep well.” He nudges my door open and makes it clear I am to go inside. Then there's a soft click as he pulls it closed behind me.

Alone, confused, I exhale a shaky breath that is part fear and part dizzying desire. What have I gotten myself into?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I invite you to be the very first to know all the news by subscribing to my very special **VIP Reader newsletter!** You'll find exclusive excerpts, bonus reads, and insider information.

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USA Today bestselling author Sierra Cartwright was born in England, and she spent her early childhood traipsing through castles and dreaming of happily-ever afters. She has two wonderful kids and four amazing grand-kitties. She now calls Galveston, Texas home and loves to connect with her readers. Please do drop her a note.



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Titans

Sexiest Billionaire
Billionaire's Matchmaker
Billionaire's Christmas
Determined Billionaire
Scandalous Billionaire
Ruthless Billionaire
Billionaire's Revenge

Titans Quarter

His to Claim
His to Love
His to Cherish

Titans Quarter Holidays

His Christmas Gift
His Christmas Wish
His Christmas Wife

Titans Sin City

Hard Hand
Slow Burn
All-In

Titans Captivated (Ménages)

Theirs to Hold
Theirs to Love
Theirs to Wed
Theirs to Treasure

Titans: Moretti Mafia

Vengeful Vows

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Hawkeye

Come to Me
Trust in Me
Meant For Me
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