



JAIMIE ROBERTS

*Until I  
Met You*

# Until I Met You

Jaimie Roberts

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For my sister, Angela.

Though miles may lie between us, we are never far apart,

For friendship doesn't count the miles,

It's measured by the heart.

# CONTENTS

Prologue	P	i
Chapter	1	1
Chapter	2	Pg 28
Chapter	3	Pg 34
Chapter	4	Pg 47
Chapter	5	Pg 56
Chapter	6	Pg 75
Chapter	7	Pg 91
Chapter	8	Pg 98
Chapter	9	Pg 121
Chapter	10	Pg 143
Chapter	11	Pg 153
Chapter	12	Pg 181
Chapter	13	Pg 198
Chapter	14	Pg 215
Chapter	15	Pg 224
Chapter	16	Pg 241
Chapter	17	Pg 254
Chapter	18	Pg 265
Chapter	19	Pg 273
Chapter	20	Pg 283
Epilogue		Pg 295

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## PROLOGUE

*I never put much thought into the way my life may turn out. I was only fifteen and having fun. It was hard to think of the future when you're having this much fun. My friends are all jealous of me at school because I'm the only girl in my class who has a boyfriend old enough to own a car. I must admit, it makes me feel real good inside knowing this. They're always asking me questions when they see him picking me up after school. It's hard to not be big-headed about it to be honest.*

*The only problem I have is that my best friends, Jack and David, don't like him. We always seem to be arguing lately. They keep asking why a boy of nineteen is hanging around with me. It hurts when they say things like that as I'm more than just a fifteen-year-old girl, I'm a person.*

*"Princess, are you okay?"*

*Turning towards Jaden, I couldn't help the silly grin on my face. He was a handsome boy with brown wavy hair and lovely green eyes. I always loved looking into those eyes. To me he was just the bee's knees. Of course I am a virgin still,*

*and of course he is patiently waiting, but he still tells me how much he loves me. I haven't said anything back to him as yet because I'm not sure what it is I feel. All I know is he makes me feel nice. That's always a plus—right?*

*“I'm fine, Jaden. I've just been thinking about Jack and David, that's all.”*

*Jaden sighed and I knew it wasn't a pleased sigh. “Do we have to talk about them now?”*

*I smiled gently towards him. “No, of course not. It's just —”*

*Jaden wrapped his arm around me, interrupting what I was about to say. “Listen, Princess. I know they are your friends, but right now, it's just you and me. Can't we just enjoy each other?” Jaden leaned in to kiss me and I smelt the alcohol on his breath. I didn't like it when he drank too much.*

*After he kissed me, I drew back with a smile. “Of course we can. Sorry.”*

*Jaden winked and pulled me into him again. “I've got a little surprise for you.”*

*Feeling excited, I looked up into his bright green eyes. “What is it, Jaden?”*

*Jaden dropped down from the fence and held his hand out to me. “Come, let me take you there. It's only a short walk, and I promise you it will be special.”*

*I looked around the expanse of the field and shook my head with a frown. What surprise could he possibly conjure up out here, in the middle of nowhere?*

*Getting down from the fence, I took his hand. “Okay, I'll go with you.”*

*With a smile, Jaden led me across the field to a barn. I wasn't quite sure what was happening, but I thought maybe he was just being romantic. Maybe there was a surprise waiting for me in there.*

*As we neared it, my heart began drumming a million miles an hour. I was a little excited, but a little apprehensive. When*



*I heard voices coming from inside the excitement disappeared.*

*“Jaden, what’s going on?”*

*He could see I was a little bit frightened so he wrapped his arm around my shoulder. “It’s okay, Princess. I’m your boyfriend and will take good care of you. I promise you that. I just want to show you something. You can trust me, can’t you?”*

*I looked up into his eyes and admired his beautiful face. Jaden never failed to amaze me.*

*Feeling a little better about it, I nodded my head. Jaden promised me he would look after me, so I had to trust him.*

*With that quick nod, Jaden smiled and opened the door.*

## CHAPTER 1

“Angelina... Angelina!”

*Oh boy, please, just give me some peace.*

“Angelina!” my mother bellowed again. “Come on, you need to get ready. It’s already ten-thirty.”

“I’m up, Mum, just getting ready now.” It was a lie of course, but she didn’t need to know that.

“Angelina Bradshaw, if you don’t get your arse up right now and get ready, I will personally drag you out of bed myself!”

“I’m up!” I shouted angrily. Gosh, you would think the Battle of fucking Hastings was about to go down, instead of my little sister’s wedding. I say little as I am reminded that every five minutes considering I’m now twenty-six and should be married myself. I personally thought we were living in the

twenty-first century, but obviously not when it comes to my family.

Rubbing my sleepy eyes, I was about to get out of bed when the aforementioned little sister, Julia, skipped into my old room.

“Eek,” she squealed excitedly. “Can you believe it, Angelina? I’m getting married today... fucking married!”

“I know,” I said groggily. “It’s your big day.”

“Oh, don’t be sad. It will be your turn one day. Maybe you’ll meet the man of your dreams in London. If not, there’s always Brian.”

I shook my head feeling a little annoyed. I didn’t see why at the age of only twenty-six, I should be married, barefoot and pregnant. I have always been different as far as that’s concerned. I wanted to work, and any fun time I had, was just that. Brian was my “go to” guy. If I felt horny, I’d go to him for help. He wasn’t the best sex in the world, but he always manages to bring me to an orgasm. Even if it wasn’t through sex, he would make sure I was taken care of. He’s a nice guy and we’ve known each other since school, but he’s not commitment material—even though he says he wants to be.

It all really doesn’t matter now though, as I’m moving to London after today is through. Tomorrow I’m going to pack my bags, leave Cornwall and set sail for the big city. My dad’s friend owns an estate agency in Chelsea, and asked if I would like to move into the flat above the shop. He also asked if I could virtually run the place when he wasn’t around. I jumped at the opportunity. It kind of helps that my dad’s friend is hot—even if we both know nothing can happen between us. The only problem being is... that it very nearly did once.

My dad, Clive, had a big fiftieth birthday bash last year and Jonathan came to the celebrations. I hadn’t seen him in five years and his age had done everything to improve the way he looked. He is tall with light brown eyes and silver hair. He

looked like a sexy George Clooney in his forties—definitely fuckable material.

To cut a long story short, we celebrated, Jonathan and I flirted, and we very nearly ended up calling it a night in his hotel. I bailed though. He is my dad's friend after all and I didn't want to over-complicate things. It was very hard to resist, but Jonathan more than understood. He even said we did the right thing in the end. My dad's been friends with the guy ever since he sold him the house I'm currently staying in now.

My only concern—which I raised—was our little indiscretion. Or shall I say, almost indiscretion. Jonathan put my mind at ease straight away and said that we needed to put that in the past and get on with life. He never mixes business with pleasure; it has always been his number one motto. With that in mind there was only one answer.

I gave my job—and place I was renting—one month notice and moved back in with my parents once I quit. I've been staying here for just over a week now and it's doing my head in! I'm so glad I'll be finally off tomorrow.

“Angelina,” my sister probed. “You're not mad at me for not making you Maid of Honour are you?”

Julia quickly snapped me back to reality, reminding me of the day ahead. “No, of course not, Julia, Mindy's your best friend. She likes all this wedding stuff. I would have been shit at it.” She smiled, nodding her head at me in relief.

Pretty soon, our peace was quickly snapped from us as my mum barged through the door. “Angelina, Julia, what are you still doing in your pyjamas? You should be getting ready.”

Julia looked at me for a moment and rolled her eyes. “Mum, my wedding isn't for another three hours yet. Chill.”

“How can I *chill* when my house is in chaos and the bride, and sister of the bride, won't get their arses out of bed? Now get! Come on!”

Both Julia and I snapped out of bed to salute my mum. It was so perfectly orchestrated; we couldn't have planned it better if we tried. Julia and I looked at each other and burst into a fit of giggles.

“Oh boy, I'm going to have trouble with you two today aren't I?” my mum said with a smile. She tried to act annoyed, but it just wasn't happening.

“Don't worry, Mum,” I replied soothingly. “We'll behave ourselves and get ready. I'll be done in a jiffy and help you out... promise.” I took her arm and she placed her hand on mine.

“Thank you, Angelina. I'm going to miss you.” You could see the hint of tears in her eyes as she stared at me.

“Mum, I'm not going to be that far away. Four hours by car, that's all. I'll visit as often as I can, you know that.”

She sighed. “I know. It's just Julia's getting married and now you're leaving. It's a lot to take in. I thought we would all live in this area, grow up together as a family. See my grandchildren.” The last sentence was definitely directed at me.

“Well,” I said eagerly. “I'm sure Julia will get straight down to it with Jack once they're married.” I looked towards Julia and she rolled her eyes at me, again. Weddings and babies are not my thing, and as soon as the conversation about them are off me, the better.

“Why are you so eager to become a grandmother anyway, Mum? I don't understand it. Normally women are reluctant for that so soon.”

“Well,” she answered smiling. “If I have grandchildren now, everyone can comment on how young a grandmother I look, can't they?”

The laughter started. “Your logic is quite frightening.”

“Don't forget, Angelina, that my logic is what brought you two lovely ladies into the world.”

“Fair point, Mum, but still not sure why you’re in such a hurry.”

Julia’s face fell, shocked into silence, she sat down. “Mum, you’re not ill or something are you?”

My head snapped toward my mum, wanting just as much to know the answer.

She looked shocked. “No, of course not. I’m as fit as a fiddle. I’d run rings around you two... which reminds me, why aren’t we getting ready yet?”

We both breathed a sigh of relief, and with the knowledge that everything was okay, we got ready.

I took a nice long shower, making sure I was suitably scrubbed and ready for this wedding. I was in the middle of pulling my dress on when I heard Jerry whistling. I ran to his cage and pulled the blanket off him so he could see me.

“Hello Jerry, how are you this morning, my beautiful hunk of a male?”

Jerry cocked his little head at me and wolf whistled. With his feathers puffed out, the serenading began.

“I see you baby, shaking that ass, shaking that ass, shaking that ass.”

“Will you stop encouraging that bird, Angelina?”

Turning around, I saw my mum in the doorway. “Hey, Mum, it’s funny, and he’s not just any old bird, he’s a cockatiel.”

My mother shook her head, but then noticed my dress. “Do you need help with that?”

“Yes, if you could zip me up, that would be great,” I said cooing at Jerry.

Once I was zipped up in my coral sleeveless number, I turned to face my mum. She instantly started gushing towards me. I suddenly felt like I was five again.

“Angelina, you look beautiful.”

“Thanks, Mum, so do you—as always.” And she did. My mother was a very beautiful lady in her early fifties. She had blonde hair, like me, but dark brown eyes, unlike me. I have very unusual eyes and I often get comments about it. My eyes are light brown, but with speckles of green. It’s normally the first thing someone notices about me.

My mum, in her elegant chiffon dress, sauntered over to the window to take a peek at the weather. “It looks like the rain may hold off today. Hopefully some sun will make an appearance later. Thankfully it is forecast.”

“Well that’s good. Julia will be pleased.”

“Julia Gulia,” Jerry squawked.

I couldn’t help the eruption that came out of my mouth. My mum turned to glare at Jerry, and then her eyes bore into mine. “What on earth are you teaching him?”

“What can I say, he likes The Wedding Singer.”

“The what?” she asked, confused.

“Never mind, Mum. I’m going to finish off the rest of my hair and go help out with Julia.”

She nodded her head and walked out just at the time Jerry squawks “Julia Gulia” again.

“You’re gonna get me into trouble, young man,” I said handing him a seed.

Once I was ready, I went out in search of my sister. I soon found her in her room, with my mum and a couple of Julia’s friends all fussing round her. Both were on the Champagne already. I could never understand why people would want to put alcohol near their mouth so early in the morning. I never even wanted to eat breakfast first thing, never mind booze.

“There you are,” my mum chimed.

“Yep, now where do you want me?”

“Nowhere, just sit by me,” Julia requested. “I have Mindy putting flowers in my hair. She’s doing a really good job.”

“She is,” I said admiring her work. She looked over and smiled, making her whole face light up. Mindy wasn’t particularly beautiful, but when she smiled, she could light up a room with just that one gesture.

“I could do yours if you want? I’ve done it a few times before for friends and relatives, so I’m used to it.”

I shook my head. “No, that’s okay. It’s all about Julia today.” I placed my hand on her arm and she smiled sweetly at me, squeezing my hand. I saw tears in her eyes and the sight made my own eyes threaten to sting a little.

“Now, stop it you two, you’ll ruin your make-up.” Mum looked away, dabbing her own eyes with embarrassment.

“Oh come on, Mum, you know it’s compulsory to cry at weddings.”

“I’m going to go and see if your father’s ready,” she said, heading for the door as quickly as possible.

Once she was out the door, I turned to Julia. “She doesn’t like getting emotional, does she?”

Julia looked deadly serious towards me. “Very much like you.”

I was confused all of a sudden. “What do you mean?”

“I have never seen you get excited over a man. I’ve never seen you actually cry, real tears. You just seem so, I don’t know... unattached.”

I was completely stunned by this. “Really?”

“I’m not saying that in a bad way, I know you’ve not met anyone who sets your heart fluttering yet, but it will happen, and when it does, I want front row seats for the show. At the moment, I keep thinking you were born the wrong sex.”

“I beg your pardon?” I couldn’t believe where this was heading. Both Mindy, and Julia’s other Irish friend Naomi,



looked at me sympathetically, but didn't add anything to the conversation.

“Well, you never seem to need anyone, Angelina. You seem to be happy as you are and that's fine, I get it of course. I just think sometimes it's a very lonely existence for you. You never want to let anyone in. I hope that changes for you when you get to London.”

I let out an exasperated sigh. “Julia, I have never felt the need to have someone in my life just so it fulfils some kind of morbid way of thinking that you have to have someone, just to have someone. I like being my own boss, having a career, not answering to anybody. It suits me this way.”

Julia smiled calmly and laid her hand on mine. “I know. Please don't be angry with me. I just worry about you at times.”

“Ah, she'll be okay, Julia. A few drinks and a couple of dances will see her right tonight. I know Brian will be there and looking forward to seeing you, so he will,” Naomi said, winking.

Shaking my head, I had to disagree with her. “I don't think it's a good idea to go there, Naomi.”

“Why not so? He likes you, you like him. You both need a good—”

“Okay, okay, I think that's enough.” We all started laughing and I felt more at ease after my sisters little speech about my love life—or lack thereof. I was always happy being this way and nothing will change that. I'm not interested in marriage, or children. In fact, I think on more than one occasion I have referred to children as “Sprogs”. That's not coming from someone with the greatest motherly instincts at all—and that's totally fine by me. Who said it was a written rule that once you got to a certain age, that you were to find someone, get married, and start a family? I would only be adding to the over-populated country as it is anyway. I'm doing the world a favour.

A couple of hours later we were all dressed, pimped out, and ready to go. We were getting close to being late, but Julia didn't mind that too much. It was tradition after all. It was my mother that was flapping about the place, getting herself in a right state.

There was a spectacular cream coloured 1977 Rolls Royce Silver Shadow waiting outside for us, courtesy of my father—who is a car salesman.

I've been brought up with a love of cars, as my dad feels so passionate about them. I've seen many classic cars come and go throughout the years of his career. He was always very good at it, too.

I smiled at my dad for his choice, and he beamed back at me. I went up to give him a hug and he quickly took me in, and held on tight.

“Angel, my girl. I'm going to miss you, honey.”

“Not you as well, Dad. I'm only going to be a few hours away by car. I'm not emigrating to Australia or anything. I'll come and see you as often as I can, and maybe even you can come visit me in the big city.”

He smiled, showing his little dimples. I loved dimples on men. With my father all he would have to do is ask me for something, and whether I like it or not—the minute I saw those dimples—I would agree to anything. I was a sucker for a cute dimple.

“I know you won't be far, it's just your mother and I have always had you so close to us. Even when you moved out of the house, you were still only five minutes down the road. Anyway, it doesn't matter what I think. Your career is soaring and I'm so proud of you for it. I just hope Jonathan looks after you over there, or he will have me to answer to.”

I rolled my eyes at him, but hugged him tighter. “I love you, Dad.”

“I love you, too, my angel.” He kissed the top of my head just as Julia appeared in all her glory. I know my sister thinks I’m a heartless bitch, but I could appreciate the enormity of the day for her. She looked stunning.

“Julia, you look beautiful. My precious little girl is getting married. It only seemed like yesterday I was bouncing you on my knee and you were vomiting all over me.”

My dad smiled and Julia frowned. “Err, thanks, Dad... I think.”

It wasn’t long before my mother ran out, practically dancing down the stairs as she went. “We haven’t got time for this. Now come on ladies, we have to go. Julia has her future husband waiting.”

We got there around five minutes late, and before the car even came to a halt, my mother was running towards the church like the hen that she is. I couldn’t help laughing, and that had my sister, eye-rolling at me—yet again.

“Do you think she’s worried that they’re going to start without you, Julia?” I asked chuckling.

Julia shook her head at me as she tried to get out of the car. “Possibly.”

Helping her with the dress, I eased her out as comfortably and gracefully as possible.

“I’m so fucking nervous,” she said, whispering in my ear.

Our father looked over at Julia with a reproachful glare. “I heard that, young lady.”

I laid my hand on his shoulder. “Come on, Dad, give her a break. She’s just about to walk down the aisle with a man she’s going to spend the rest of her life with. Cut her some slack.”

Just then Julia had a full on panic attack. “Julia, what’s wrong?”

“What you just said,” she blurted.

“What about, the rest of your life?” She nodded and I couldn’t help but laugh. “Oh come on, Julia, did this not occur to you when he popped the question?”

“Yes,” she answered breathlessly. “But it didn’t really sink in until you said it out loud.”

I looked up at dad and he didn’t look too pleased with me. I thought I had better try and defuse the situation as quickly as possible.

“Listen, sweetheart, Jack is one of the nicest people I have ever met. We’ve known that boy since we were in school. He was in my class, remember? We were, and still are best friends. I owe him a lot since he kept all the horrible bullies away from me. You remember what it was like in school, right?” She nodded her head, smiling. “Well, put it this way. There is no better person I could think of that would be deserving of your heart. He loves you and that has never changed in the twelve years that we’ve known him. I remember the first day he laid eyes on you. He was only fifteen, but he was smitten the minute he saw you. I realised this of course, and used to tease him about it, but deep down it was so sweet. I have never doubted his feelings for you. He loves you, Julia, never forget that. And if you don’t get in that church right now, I’m going to personally haul you in there myself—even if I have to carry you over my shoulder!”

She immediately calmed and even laughed. My dad looked at me, proudly giving me the thumbs up, and I knew then Julia was going to be okay.

My mother popped her head out of the door as we were walking, and I gave her the thumbs up. My dad took her arm and I graciously followed behind with Naomi and Mindy.

The music started on queue and off we marched down the aisle, feeling as proud as ever for my sister and my best friend. I saw Jack briefly looking at me and I winked at him as he smiled. He looked every bit the handsome man he always was with short, cropped black hair, and green eyes.

When he clocked his eyes on Julia, his chest expanded with pride. This day was going to be perfect for them.

The ceremony was beautiful and I could see Brian from the other side of the room staring at me. He looked especially sexy today in his suit, but I was determined not to let the fact that I hadn't had sex in about two months get to me. I was just going to have to avoid him at all costs.

We were ushered out of the church, where all the ladies stood anxiously trying to get front row for the bouquet throwing. I didn't join of course, but my mother had other ideas. She dragged me right up front where I crossed my arms in protest. I didn't want to play this game, but I was made to. It didn't help the fact that Julia threw the thing before I was even aware. When it went straight for me, my natural reaction was to—yes, you guessed it—put my hands out. The bloody thing was aimed at me just perfectly. I caught it, and my mother and Julia cheered, but the other ladies were not happy. They all seemed to turn away in disappointment once they saw me with the thing, cradled in my arms. I guess my reputation precedes me.

Brian was there and saw the whole spectacle. He looked at me, his eyebrow raised as I shook my head. He laughed a little and came over.

“Angelina,” he chimed.

I gazed into his soft brown eyes. “Brian.”

“You look beautiful as ever. How long has it been now, two months?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, remembering the whole fiasco. I went to a bar with Jack, my sister, and a few others, but the bar was close to where Brian lived. I found myself—after drinking two bottles of wine—knocking on Brian's door. Next thing I knew, I awoke with a hangover, lying—partially clothed—on Brian's bed. Not one of my best moments.

“I’ve missed you,” he said, stroking my arm with his finger.

Suddenly the lower half of my body was on full alert. I could even hear my—you know what—sounding the alarm.

“Brian, we can’t be doing this. It’s unfair to you. We both know that I’m off to London tomorrow, and I’ve never ever given you an indication that I want more from this than what we have—or had, shall I say.”

“I know that,” he said, putting his hands up in surrender. “I want to wish you all the best in London. It seems you’re really moving up in the world now. I’m proud of you.”

I smiled and looked across at one of my old frenemies, Veronica. If looks could kill. She never liked me, but even more so when I started my casual relationship with Brian. I’m a complete bitch for saying this, but her reaction was what made me go after Brian in the first place. I knew he liked me, but I kept my distance until I knew she liked him. Once I had that ammunition, there was no holding me back.

“I appreciate what you’re saying, Brian, thank you. I think Veronica will be glad when I’m gone though. She’ll get you all to herself now.” I couldn’t help the chuckle that escaped me.

“Stop it, Angelina. You know for certain that if I had a choice, what that choice would be.”

We smiled at each other for a few seconds, but I was soon interrupted by my lovely mother’s dulcet tones, shouting at me for photographs. I shrugged my shoulders, told Brian that I would see him later at the reception, and off I went to do my sisterly duties.

The reception was soon in full swing. We sat and ate, sipping champagne and listening to Jack’s best man giving a thoroughly delightful speech. It had my head spinning at the end of it, through so many memories. His best man, David—who I also knew from school—was telling everyone about all

the naughty things we used to get up to. Our headmaster was a right old miserable fart. He used to shout and scream at people for no reason, and everyone hated him. He took it too far once when he picked on one of the youngest girls in our school for losing her homework. His shouting made her cry and people thought he was even more of a monster because of it. She did find it in the end, it slipped out of her bag during one of her lessons, and luckily one of the teachers found it. He never apologised for his outburst though, so we decided to take action. We broke into school one Thursday night after having a little too much to drink. We had made a little poster for our lovely headmaster, Mr Jeffries. We quickly ran to his office and right outside—for everyone to see—we hung it as high as we could. In lovely bold capital letters it read, ‘MR JEFFRIES IS A KNOBHEAD.’

As you can imagine, the next day had everyone gathering around his office door in a fit of giggles. Even the teachers found it hard to hide the smiles across their faces. To say he wasn’t happy about it was an understatement. He vowed to find the ones responsible, but never did, to this day. Four months after the hanging of the banner, he left. We all had a party to celebrate after that.

Everyone laughed at the story, but my parents gave me a reproachful look. I giggled, but bowed my head in token dismay.

“Angelina, my bestest friend in the world. You’re looking good, kiddo,” Jack said, after the bride and grooms first dance.

“Thanks Jack, you’re not looking too bad yourself. You better treat my sister well or I’ll do more than pin a ‘knobhead’ sign outside your door.” He laughed heartily and that got me starting.

“Don’t you worry about that, my dear friend. I’ve got the rest of my years of nothing but love to give for your sister.” Jack rewarded me with a proud smile. “Come on, bestie. I have a dance with your name on it.”

He held out his hand and I took it with no hesitation. I was going to miss seeing Jack all the time. I've practically grown up with him. He's like the brother I never had.

Once the song had ended, I gladly handed him back to his new blushing bride. They both looked so happy and it was wonderful to see.

I danced my ass off with Mindy and Naomi, all of us drinking champagne like we had never drank it in our lives before. We giggled, we pranced, we even fell over a couple of times—but then, it was a wedding after all.

“I think I might let Wayne kiss me tonight,” Mindy giggled.

She fell a little and I caught her, making sure she was steady on her feet, before letting go. “I'm sure Wayne will be thoroughly pleased to hear you say that, Mindy.”

Mindy sighed. “It's been way too long.”

“Don't get me started on that, Mindy... please,” I said exasperated. I was three sheets to the wind and feeling horny as hell. It didn't help that I knew Brian was watching me dance. It made me move that little bit more seductively because of it. That wasn't helping my cause.

A few minutes later, we all decided to head to the ladies together to freshen up. I was feeling a bit hot and needed a little breather from all the loud music.

Once we were inside, the noise level dropped considerably and it was all too welcome. I pulled out some drying towels and ran it under the cold tap. “My God, it's hot,” I breathed dabbing the cool paper on my chest.

“Well, it didn't help the way you were dancing out there, Miss Lady Love,” Mindy replied.

I sighed, feeling my level of frustration turn up a notch. “I guess it has been too long.”

Just then the door swung open and in came Brian. “Brian, what the hell are you doing in here? Don't you realise that this is the women's toilets?”



He looked towards Mindy and Naomi, dipping his head. “Ladies,” was all he said, turning his attention back to me.

Naomi and Mindy smiled and gave a little wave as they headed out the door. “Mindy, Naomi!” I shouted, but it was too late. They were gone—giggling all the way out, I might add.

“Have I told you how sexy you look in that dress tonight, Angelina?” he asked, placing his arm around my back and pulling me to him.

“Brian, we ca....” I was about to protest, but then his lips were on me. A sudden burst of flame ignited and right now, I couldn’t give a flying fuck where we were.

“I wonder how that dress would look high above your waist whilst I’m fucking you hard,” he breathed in my ear.

“Oh fucking hell, don’t talk about it, just do it,” I said, a little too wanton.

Before I knew it, he picked me up and dragged me towards the disabled toilets. The rush we were in was phenomenal. We both wanted this as much as the other and I didn’t want to wait too long. As quick as a flash, I pulled my panties down as he unzipped his trousers.

“Have you got a condom?” I asked.

“Yes, but first of all, I want to give you a going away present.” He knelt down in front of me, running his hands down my legs as he went.

“Oh, yes, now what would that beeeeeeeeeee,” I said, as his mouth was suddenly there—that all too sweet spot I liked to call home—and oh mammy, was he hitting it home. He knew what I liked and made sure I got what I wanted.

“God, you look sexy with these stockings on,” he panted.

His tongue was back, lashing on my clit, over and over and over, until I thought my head would burst. “Oh God, Brian!” I shouted, unable to fathom any further words to form.

“You like that, baby?” he asked in between licks.

“Yes, and don’t fucking stop. Keep going!” I shouted. He squeezed my ass, burying himself deep into me and I thought I was going to explode. I could feel it building, feel the heat, the rise of the unknown force of detonation I was going to receive from Brian’s wonderful present.

He licked and licked, sending me into delirium. My head hummed and my body convulsed with each flick of his tongue. He squeezed my ass again, making me moan and grab his hair. My hand glided up towards my breast, gently pinching the end of my very erect nipple. I closed my eyes in sweet bliss. It’s been so long since I have had an orgasm this way and my body was feeling the effects of it quickly. The heat was rising rapidly through my veins and up towards my face. I felt like I was going to explode. I knew it was coming and I’d be damned if I was going to delay it any further. It just felt too good.

“Oh God, Brian. I think I’m going to... ahhhh!” I screamed, not caring where we were, or who was listening. The bomb went off and there wasn’t a damn thing anyone could do about it. The orgasm was explosive and my whole body tingled with joy at the pent up release.

With a contented sigh, Brian raised himself up and placed a finger onto my breathless mouth. A couple of girls came in whining about the lack of available hot guys and bitching about men in general.

Brian kissed me and leaned in to whisper in my ear. “My God, you’re beautiful when you come. Do you know how hard I am for you right now?”

I placed my hand in his trousers to find out just that. He moaned, but I quickly held my hand over his mouth.

“How do you want to do this?” he asked.

“From behind,” I said, breathlessly.

The girls were still nattering on, all the while we’re about to have rough sex in the toilet. Brian knew I liked it rough.

Helping him place the condom on his cock, I quickly bent over so he could enter me. When he did, it was so hard not to make a sound. The girls didn't seem in too much of a hurry to leave and because of it, Brian had to go slow. It was killing us both.

He made up time by slowly massaging my breasts and bending over to gently rub my sensitive clit. It was hard, but we managed to keep as quiet as possible. It helped that they were loud talkers.

Luckily, one of them shouted at the other to go and again all was silent in the ladies toilet.

Brian didn't waste any time, he was off, like an express train.

"Fuck, I've missed this. You feel so good, Angelina, so fucking good," he panted.

I moaned, and this spurred him on faster and faster. "You like it when I fuck you hard, don't you, Angelina."

"Yes," I cried, moaning loudly. He knew I loved dirty talk during sex. He seemed to enjoy that part, too.

"I could fuck your pussy for hours and hours, Angelina. You make me come so hard. I can't get enough of you."

My goodness he was on a roll tonight. I guess the build up of all these weeks without it would do that to you. "Keep going, keep going."

"I love hearing you moan, and the way it looks when I see my dick going inside you. You smell so good, you feel so fucking good."

"Oh God!" I shouted again, feeling a familiar sensation creeping back.

"Angelina!" he shouted one last time as he came.

Feeling going... going... gone.

"Fuck," he whispered as he withdrew. "I'm so glad I followed you into the toilets now."

Turning around, I saw he had my g-string in his hand. I smiled, holding my hand out to them, but he tugged them towards his chest. “Can I keep them?” he asked, sniffing them.

“Brian!” I scolded.

“Oh come on, you’re leaving tomorrow. Let me have a souvenir. *Please?*”

“Okay, okay,” I said giving in. “I can give you that, considering the present you just gave me.” And it was a great present. He was always good at going down on me, but never could last long enough during sex to make me come. As I said, he always made sure I did—even after he has—but he could never quite get there through sex.

“Are you okay?” Brian asked, breathlessly.

“Yes,” I said, smiling. “Although I can’t believe I actually did that.”

Brian beamed at me. “Maybe it’s my natural charm.”

“Okay, Casanova, don’t you think we better get out of here before we get caught?”

He paused for a minute, looking serious. “Why do you not want to tell your parents about me, Angelina? You always want to keep us so quiet.”

Oh no! I should have known this was coming. This was why I kept trying to avoid him. “Brian, we have gone through this before. Besides, I can’t talk to you about this in a toilet cubicle after we’ve just had sex.” I looked in his eyes and could see the disappointment written all over him. “Look, we’ll talk later, okay? I’ve got to go. Please wait a few minutes before leaving after me.” He nodded and I quickly fled. I had to get out of there before the suffocation set in.

I told Brian from the start that there couldn’t be anything serious between us. I’m just not that kind of girl. If I told my parents they’d have me in a wedding dress and marching me down the aisle before I could take a breath.

With a frustrated sigh, I waltzed back into the hall to find David marching towards me. “Angelina! I’ve been looking for you. I want to get a dance with you before you leave us all tomorrow.”

“Blimey, the way everyone was reacting to this, you’d think I was bugging off to Timbuktu,” I sighed.

“Aw, don’t be like that, Angelina. You should be glad you’ve got so many people that love you enough that they don’t want to see you leave.”

I smiled at him, nudging his arm. “You’re gonna miss me, are you, David?”

“Nah, I’m one of the few that can’t wait to see the back of you. I’ve known you for twelve years, I think it’s about time I got rid of you somehow,” he said winking.

I gave him a cheeky grin and nudged his arm. “Come on then, David. Let’s hit that floor and show them all how it’s done.”

We hit that floor, laughing and giggling. My sister was getting all loved up by Jack, with a constant grin on her face. I was so busy shaking my ass, that I didn’t even notice Mindy at first tapping my shoulder from behind. I carried on dancing, but turned my head towards her so she could talk in my ear. “So, did lover boy get what he came for?”

“Oh yes,” I said giggling.

“Bitch, I hate you!” I watched as she stomped off and couldn’t help the giggle that escaped me.

“What was that about?” David asked.

“Oh, nothing. I think she’s just jealous that I’m dancing with you.”

“What?” he asked, looking shocked. And I mean *really* shocked.

I looked at him for a few seconds trying to gauge his reaction. He must have known I was joking, but he was

looking all too serious about now.

Lightening struck. “You like her, don’t you?”

“No,” he said, a bit too eagerly.

I laughed, I couldn’t help it. “Jesus, David, your face. I don’t know why you can’t admit it to me. How long have you felt like this?”

He pulled his hand up around the back of his neck, squeezing as he shut his eyes. “For a while now.”

I was almost rooted to the spot in shock. “Oh my God, David, why haven’t you said anything?”

“I didn’t know how. Plus, we’re all friends and I didn’t want to complicate matters. She may not like me, and I couldn’t look at her again if she turned me down.”

Pulling David in for a big hug, I whispered in his ear. “I wish you had said something sooner. I’m your friend, you could tell me anything. I understand why you feel this way, but I think I know what to do. Can you trust me?”

He pulled away from our hug and looked at me. “I do trust you, but you’re kind of scaring me right now. What have you got up your sleeve?”

“Oh you’ll see,” I said, walking off to find Mindy.

Mindy had this thing for games. She was very competitive and could never shy away from a challenge. I knew this would be to my advantage now.

I looked around the hall and spotted her sitting next to my mum having a chat.

“Hi darling,” my mum slurred.

“Hey, Mum, you enjoying the wedding?”

“It’s great. I think they’re about to cut the cake soon, so they can get going. I can imagine they’re both eager to start their married life.” I saw the wink and knew exactly what she meant.

“Eww, Mum, could you not talk about that stuff with me?”

“What’s the matter dear, it’s only the truth? One day you’ll find the guy that gives you that ear-splitting orgasm and you’ll never want to let him go.”

“Mum!” I shouted. “Please shut up now,” I begged.

Within an instant she started laughing, but I was too eager to complete my mission. “Mum, I need to speak with Mindy a few seconds.”

Obviously feeling the effects of the alcohol, she just waved at us. Mindy was still laughing, but I pulled her from her chair and walked a few paces away from the table. “What do you think of David?”

Mindy frowned in my direction. “David? Why do you ask?”

Eager to get to the point, I thought I’d just be direct with her. “He’s cute, right? Don’t you think he’s cute?”

“Angelina, where is this going?” she asked, impatiently.

I took a deep breath and went in for the kill. “I dare you to walk up to David and give him a big smacker on the lips. And I’m not just talking a little peck either. I want to see tongues, Mindy. Tongues!”

“Fucking hell, Angelina. We’re not in school anymore,” she said smiling.

“I know, but I know you like a challenge. Do you want to forfeit the dare?”

She looked stunned—beyond stunned—she actually looked mad. “Don’t you dare ask me that question, Angelina. You know me better than that.”

“So you’ll do it?” I asked excitedly. I know I’m twenty-six, but I can’t help but embrace the child inside of me.

“Oh, you just watch me,” she said, storming off.

I watched from a distance as Mindy edged closer and closer to David. He spotted her soon enough and the look on his face was priceless. He could see her coming, see she was on a mission, but looked confused as hell.

I walked briskly toward the pair of them, wanting to see the outcome of this risky dare I placed on Mindy's shoulder. I hoped beyond hope that I was doing the right thing.

I started quickly self doubting what I had done, and wondered if I should pull Mindy away to tell her that I forfeit. If the outcome of this was that David thinks he was in for a shot and finds out it was a dare, he would never speak to me again.

Just as I was about to rush towards Mindy, she was there. She pulled a very shocked David to her mouth and gave him that belter of a kiss. All I could do was watch from the sidelines and hope and pray this didn't end badly.

What started off a bit robotic, within a nanosecond turned into something more passionate. They were kissing and it wasn't just a little kiss either. Very soon, Mindy had her hands in his hair, gripping tightly as she practically dived into his mouth. I thought she was going to swim in it, the way she was going.

David was just as bad. He pulled her to his body in one swift tug, his hands all over her back, then in her hair.

I stood there, frozen, my mouth agape. I looked across at Julia and Naomi, both staring with the same shocked expression as me. Julia looked across and signalled to them, but I just shrugged my shoulders and smiled. Just when I thought they were about to get it on, there and then, they broke off the kiss. I watched as they looked at each other and laughed. She leaned in, whispered something in his ear, grabbed his hand, and off they went. David turned for a split second and saw me. I smiled and pulled my thumb up to him. He smiled back, but he still looked as shocked as anything.

"David and Mindy, ha?" Brian asked, standing next to me.



“So it would seem.” I looked across at his face and his expression was a little sad. I knew I had to do something, so I pulled him out of the hall to find somewhere quiet.

“Brian, I think it’s a good thing I’m going tomorrow.”

“Why?” he asked, confused.

“I don’t like seeing you this way. You look so sad, and I hate the fact that I’ve made you this way.”

“So stay,” he pleaded. “We can get married. I’m a good guy, with a great job. I can promise you that I will look after you. You would never have to worry about a thing. I’d be a good husband.”

I sighed. I really didn’t want this at all. Of course Brian was a safe option and that’s probably why I should never have used him like this. I told him from the start I didn’t want a relationship, and at the time, he was all too keen so he could get me into bed. I should have known that, at some point, feelings may get in the way of things. Unfortunately feelings like that are not something I have ever felt, nor do I think I ever will. I’m just not that lovey-dovey, let’s get married and have babies, kind of person.

“Brian, I—”

“Please, just think about it, Angelina. Even if it means you have to go to London for a while. Just say you’ll think about it.”

“I can’t do that to you, Brian. I think I’ve let this go on far enough. You don’t deserve someone like me. I can’t commit, I won’t commit. I’m just not that type of person, and you deserve to have someone that will want that. That will want you. One day you will marry someone, settle down, have a family, but I’m afraid that person isn’t going to be me.”

He looked like a man defeated. His shoulders sagged, his face to the floor. It was almost like I’d hit him with the worst news ever, and I felt like such an ass because of it. Why oh why can’t two people just have sex without the complication of feelings getting involved?

“Oh,” he said, shuffling his feet. “I knew you felt that way, but hearing you actually say it like that to my face, hurt more than I thought.”

God, I felt like such a dick. “I’m really sorry, Brian. God, I feel awful.”

“Don’t,” he said smiling. “I knew what this was from the beginning. You told me as much before we started this. I just didn’t realise at the time that I would fall in love with you.”

The pain from hearing that hurt worse than I thought. I placed my hands on his shoulders and he grabbed me in for a hug. “Brian, I love you, too, but as a friend. You will always have a place in my heart, but this couldn’t have continued on like this if I had stayed. I’m glad that I’m going to give you the space you need to get on with your life without me. I don’t want to see you hurt. That was never, ever, my intention.”

“I know,” he said, hugging me tighter. “I just wanted you to know before you went. I needed you to know how I felt.”

I was about soothe him some more, but a door flew open, revealing my mother. “Oops, sorry I interrupted,” she said, with more than just a grin on her face.

Oh, shit. Now I have to face the twenty questions later!

“Julia and Jack are about to cut the cake. I came looking for you so we can see it done and say our goodbyes.”

“Okay,” I said, pulling away from Brian as quickly as I could.

Smiling up at him I made my way towards my mother. She held the door open for us both and hitched her eyebrow up at me. Just as we got to her table, she sprang, “You and Brian, eh? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because there was nothing to tell, Mum. We’re just friends.”

“It didn’t look that way to me, Angelina. He looked as smitten as a kitten with his arms wrapped around you.”

“Stop it, please. There’s nothing happening between Brian and I.”

She was about to argue back when my dad’s voice came booming from the stage. “Please everyone; get your cameras ready for the cutting of the cake. Julia, you look beautiful. Your father is so very proud of you. I love you, babes, and I know that you and Jack will be very happy together.”

Everyone went “Aww” as Julia blushed. “I love you, too, Dad!” she shouted, tears in her eyes.

Jack gently stroked her face, before retrieving the knife on the table. They both put their hands together and cut into the magnificent cake. Lights were flashing everywhere, including my mum’s camera, as the pair sliced into it.

They did the traditional feeding each other a slice, then it was on to the other greedy buggers to get a piece. Including me.

We saw them both off before deciding it was time for us to head back home. I was tired and had a big day tomorrow. Julia and Jack were going to stay in a very plush hotel tonight before venturing off to the Bahamas tomorrow. I couldn’t help feeling a little jealous of them going somewhere nice and warm. I don’t want to get married, but I’d never say no to the honeymoon.

Once we had cleared up a bit and made sure the rest of the cake was boxed up, we said goodbye to everyone, including a sad looking Brian. I looked for David and Mindy, but couldn’t find them anywhere. I tried texting them both, but no answer. I assumed they were extremely busy with one another. Well, at least I hoped they were.

My parents and I caught a taxi back home, and all the time we were there, my mother was itching to ask me questions about Brian. I could tell the little screws in her head were spinning. She was probably mapping out our wedding and how many grandchildren I was going to give her. I really didn’t want to be having this conversation.

Once home, I tried to make my excuses and head for bed, but my mother was having none of it.

“Oh no you don’t, Angelina. Get back here and speak with your mother.”

“What’s going on?” my dad asked.

I huffed and took back the two steps I had already climbed. How on earth I thought I could get out of this, I don’t know.

“I caught her and Brian having an intimate hug outside the hall.”

“Mum!” I protested as my dad looked on at me with mild amusement. “Listen, Brian and I are friends, nothing more.”

“So you haven’t... you know?” she asked, nudging her head to one side.

“Mum, please,” I begged, looking over towards my dad.

“I think I had better leave,” he said wisely.

*I wish I could bloody do the same!*

She looked practically animated. “Have you given him your flower?”

“No, I have not. I gave that to Robert Parkes when I was seventeen,” I smiled.

“I hated that boy,” she said, frowning.

“I know,” I said cheekily. “Why do you think I gave it to him?”

“Angelina Bradshaw, you are the most stubborn, insubordinate, unruly person I have ever met. I swear you were born the wrong sex.”

I shrugged my shoulders knowing I had already had this one today. “I know, I think we’ve had this conversation before.”

“But you don’t date. I’ve seen you with men, but you never seem to be in a relationship with them. Why?”

“Because I don’t need them, Mum.”

“It’s not about needing them, is it? It’s about finding someone who makes your heart sing and your belly dance. It’s about the euphoria you feel when he touches you and the feeling that you’ll explode when you’re not near him—because every time you are—it’s like nothing in the world could ever get better than this.”

My eyes widened. “Wow, Mum, that was beautiful. You talk like you know from experience. Is it always like that with Dad?” She smiled timidly and sighed. “Actually, on second thoughts, don’t answer that.”

“So, come on darling. Tell me. Speak the truth for once. What’s been going on?”

I took a deep breath, nervous of her reaction. “Brian and I have been seeing each other.” She smiled, but then I continued. “For sex.” The smile went, like I thought it would, and I was flinching, getting ready for the telling off I was about to receive. Instead she did something shocking. She laughed.

“Mum, what’s so funny?” I asked, joining in with her.

“I don’t know. Hearing you say it, just sounded... funny. How long has it been going on for?”

“About a year on and off. I told him from the start what it was, and he agreed to it.”

“And now he’s regretting that?” she asked.

I looked at her, unable to say what was on my mind.

“I saw the way he was holding you, Angelina. That was not from a person who is just after sex. He’s in love with you.”

“I know. He told me that much tonight.”

“Really?” she asked, shocked. “And what did you say?”

“I basically told him that it was a good thing I was going to London. I don’t feel that way about him, Mum. I never have.”

He's a great guy, but there has never been any connection there at all. At least not on my part."

She placed her hand on mine and smiled. "I can't force you to be something you're not. Of course I want you married, but I want you married to someone you love. Someone who will sweep you off your feet and make you feel like you're the most precious person on earth to him. I hope you find that, Angelina. I really do."

I smiled, placing my hand on hers. "I know you do, Mum. Thanks. I'm quite happy as I am for the moment though."

"I know, I know," she said, patting my hand back. "Hopefully that will change for you soon."

We sat there for a while after, deciding on a night cap before bed. We talked a little more about London and what it was going to be like working with Jonathan. He was one person I could never tell her about. I know we didn't do anything, but it didn't stop us from almost doing it. I don't think either my mum or dad could forgive Jonathan for that.

## CHAPTER 2

Today was the day!!

I was about to embark on a new journey to a completely different part of the world. Today was my first official day, and I had already had a brilliant time so far. Jonathan was great at getting me settled in. He helped me unpack, brought us back some lunch from the local store, and generally made the whole moving in process a lot less painful than it could have been.

That first evening he took me to the local supermarket so that I could get stocked up on some shopping. I insisted on cooking him dinner for helping me, but he told me he had to get back to work and make sure everyone was okay. It was probably just as well. The big silver fox was way too tempting!

I also made sure I rang back home to let my parents know I was settled. I called Mindy as I hadn't heard from either her or David since I saw them both that night. Turns out they headed straight over to David's house and hadn't left his bed since then. When I asked her why she hadn't thought about

David beforehand, she said she didn't know. That the kiss just somehow turned a switch on, making her see him in a completely different light. I ended the conversation by telling her how happy I was for them both and to send David my love. Thankfully my meddling paid off.

But today was a brand new day, and the start of my new budding career was now ahead. I was feeling good about my choices more than ever, but my first working day was the major hurdle that had to be jumped.

Yesterday was great. I was introduced to Shelly first, as she will be the one I'm sitting next to during my career at Francis and Co. She was very polite, with an eager smile and rosy cheeks. She had long auburn hair, light brown eyes, and was rather small in size. She must have only been around five foot tall, if that.

I was then introduced, in order around the room—from nearest to my desk, to furthest—a red haired guy in his thirties called Anthony. Another guy with brown spiky hair and brown eyes called Brad—which most of them all got a kick out of—and then there were the miserable bastards, the ones I thought I would keep at arm's length. They were called Timothy and Daniela. Timothy looked like he had a broom stuck up his arse and Daniela wasn't too far behind that look. Both seemed to be in their late thirties, snobs of the highest degrees.

They both said hello, but with a level of distaste. The other three were great, very warm, very friendly. I could see why Jonathan had put me close to the other three, and I was grateful to him for that.

I got to Francis and Co a whole half an hour earlier than opening time. I knew Jonathan would be there and it gave me a chance to settle in before everyone else turned up.

Sure enough, Jonathan was just opening up when I got downstairs. "We're keen, aren't we?" he asked with a mischievous grin.



“Raring to go,” I answered back.

Placing my bag down beside my desk, I went to make coffee with Jonathan. We were in the middle of discussing his biggest client when Shelly walked in.

“Hi, Angelina. So nice to see you again,” she said eagerly.

“Excuse Shelly’s excitement, I think she’s just glad to be getting some friendly female company,” Jonathan explained.

Shelly beamed from ear to ear. “I think it’s great. You’ll be the only girl in this office, apart from me, who doesn’t look like she’s chewing a wasp.”

We all started laughing, easing any last nerves I may have about working here. It would seem my first impressions were bang on about Timothy and Daniela.

“So, what were you talking about?” Shelly asked.

Jonathan smiled and grabbed his coffee mug. “Mr Jacobs, my biggest client.”

Shelly’s face suddenly lit up. “Oh yes. I haven’t had the pleasure of meeting him yet. I haven’t been working here that long myself and he always wants to meet Jonathan at the properties. I’ve been told he’s a bit of a male whore.”

“Really?” I asked intrigued. He was probably one to avoid, but certainly one to get all the gossip on.

“Yes, he’s a big property mogul around here. He saw an opportunity when he was eighteen to buy his first three properties and do them up. He hit gold and hasn’t looked back since. He’s been making a nice tidy living from all his buying and selling. He likes the old, run down properties. Ones he can do up and sell on later for a huge whacking great profit. Alright for some I suppose,” she said rolling her eyes.

I saw her expression and laughed. “We’re not jealous at all, are we?”

“No, of course not, Angelina. I don’t want any of the vast millions he must have sitting in his bank account doing nothing but adding interest every day.”

She turned to leave and I followed her out of the door, with Jonathan close behind.

“Shelly, is it okay if you could show Angelina a rundown of our client list, so she familiarises herself with some of them? Also, if you can show her some of the houses on our listings so she knows in advance what they look like before she visits any?”

Shelly smiled sweetly. “Of course, Jonathan, it would be my pleasure.”

Nodding to both of us, he smiled as he trotted over to his office. “You all call him Jonathan here then?” I thought I had better ask. I’m so used to calling him Jonathan, but I couldn’t do it here if everyone calls him Mr Francis.

“Yes, he insists on it. In fact, it was one of the reasons why I took this job when offered. Jonathan seems more down to earth than some of the other stuck up agents around here.”

That was good to know. I think it would feel strange calling him by his surname after all this time of just calling him Jonathan.

Shelly took a swig of her coffee and was about to speak when she looked up. “Ah, Anthony and Brad are here.”

“Hi Angelina,” Anthony and Brad said together.

“Good morning,” I chimed back. “I take it that you two are the other friendlies in this establishment?”

Brad gave me a knowing smile. “Oh, you noticed that yesterday?”

“Just a little,” I answered.

“I think it’s fantastic that we have our very own Brad and Angelina working side by side here,” Shelly beamed.

“I wondered how long it would take before that was brought up,” I replied. I noticed their smiles when his name was mentioned yesterday. “I suppose you and I are going to be the butt of a few jokes from now on?” I looked up to Brad, who was rolling his eyes.

“It would seem so, although you haven’t been here the whole six weeks since we knew you were coming.” He took his stance, hand on hips and glared at Shelly and Anthony. They both just laughed and turned their attention back to me.

“So,” Shelly began. “Why didn’t Jonathan introduce you to us when you came to stay here before?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know. Maybe he didn’t want to put pressure on me. Maybe he wanted to be sure himself.” Just as I was about to rant on, both Timothy and Daniela walked in. “Maybe,” I said with a whisper, “he didn’t want me put off by Victor Meldrew and Hyacinth Bouquet over there.”

Shelly was off in hysterics. She obviously knew who I was talking about, but her laughter radiated that much that it caught their attention. They both turned, scowling at me as they made their way to their desks.

“I can see I’m their favourite person here.”

“I wouldn’t take it personally. They’re miserable with everyone. They sell well, and as long as they’re doing that there isn’t much Jonathan can do about them. I can’t for the life of me understand how they do it though. Maybe they just like brown-nosing with the rich and famous, I don’t know.”

I smiled, agreeing with her one hundred percent. “I should imagine you’re probably right.”

“Right, I better get cracking on with this list with you before Jonathan finds out we’ve been gossiping instead of working.”

I nodded in agreement and we set to work. First of all she went through all the clients who were much like the famous Mr Jacobs, but not as successful. There were a handful of them, some nice, some not so very nice. She then went through some clients who are waiting on certain areas, or certain apartment blocks for sale. She took me through each folder on my computer so I knew where to go when the need arises. She then went through the list of properties for sale and even brought out a map so she could show me where each one

of them was. It was a lot of hard work for her, and she must have had the patience of a saint because I don't think I could have done all that.

“You've got to watch out for a lady called Belinda Charmers when she comes in here.” Shelly placed her pen on the table and winked at me.

“Oh, why is that then?”

“She likes the ladies,” she explained. “She's very attractive, in her thirties with mousey brown hair and long eyelashes that she likes to flick a lot whenever she's in here. I'm not gay, so it's completely wasted on me. She likes to flirt a lot though despite the fact, so watch out for her. Unless of course you're...?” she probed.

“Me? No,” I protested. “That would be completely wasted on me also. I like my men too much.”

“You and me both. Although—I must say—in the abundance of men around here, they sure seem in short supply of the good ones. It's hard to find anyone worth the while getting to know. I put it down to being in such a big city with too many people.”

Shelly slunk back in her chair and took a deep breath. I started to wonder about whether I could find a 'go to' guy now that I'm living here. That really does sound awful.

I regarded Shelly for a moment as she twiddled with an elastic band. “Are you originally from London?”

Shelly straightened her posture. “Yes, I was born and bred in Battersea. I love the London life, but pretty soon when I meet someone and settle down, I don't think living here is going to be an option bringing up children. That's my opinion anyway. I'd probably want to move just outside, somewhere like Surrey, Enfield, or Kingston Upon Thames.” She smiled at me and paused for a moment. “So what about you? Cornwall girl born through and through? Did you break any hearts to be up here with us?”

Leaning over the desk, I nodded. “Yep, born in Cornwall and most of my family are there. They didn't want me to

come, but I'd rather try and think of my career at the moment. I'm not into marriage and children, never have been. Makes no difference whether I stay in London or not. If I like it here, I'll stay, if not, then I will have to think of something else."

Shelly looked at me for a moment before speaking. "So, you don't want to get married? Have you ever fallen in love?"

"No, and I don't need to. I like my life the way it is. It's uncomplicated and free. I don't have to answer to anyone and I can come and go as I please."

"What about sex though?" she asked, shocked.

"Oh, I get by," I said. And that was all I was going to say. Shelly could see I wasn't going to elaborate, so she kept quiet. She still had a smirk on her face though.

"So you've never had feelings for someone? Not just a little bit?"

I thought about poor Brian and what I put him through. I care enough to know that it hurts me that I hurt him, but that's as far as it goes with me. "Nope. There's not a man out there that can change the way I feel, or even goad some sort of reaction from me."

Oh boy. Little did I know—that in three weeks time—I'd be eating my own words.

## CHAPTER 3

Three weeks later I had settled in nicely. I had made seven sales already—which Jonathan was ecstatic about—and I was slowly, but surely, getting to know the area a bit better.

I had met the infamous Miss Charmers and boy did she try to. I showed her around a house on Royal Avenue and I swear she touched my arse. I looked around at her once I felt it, but she was looking elsewhere. I didn't know whether I was imagining things, but as quickly as I could, I went round that house like a bullet. I don't think she knew what hit her after that. I think it must have been the quickest viewing in history. It didn't help the fact that she was learning Spanish and was trying to say as many 'cutesy' Spanish words to me as she possibly could.

She didn't take the house and I felt I had to say something to Jonathan. He thought it was funny, but assured me that if she came in again, he would ask Anthony, Brad, or Timothy to take her. This soon changed on Wednesday afternoon.

I was at my desk as usual when Jonathan called me in to speak with him. I made my way into his office and shut the door.

“Angelina, how have you been getting on? I know we haven’t had much time to talk, but I wanted to make sure you were okay and settling in well.” Swivelling in his chair slightly, he grinned, that swoon worthy grin of his.

“I’ve been fine, Jonathan. It’s certainly been an experience here, and you do get to meet some characters.”

He stopped swivelling and placed his elbows on his desk. “Yes, you certainly do. Talking of which, Mr Jacobs rang. It would seem he is looking for some properties again. I didn’t think it would work, but I have told him about some brand new properties. I had a penthouse that was bought off-plan, but the buyer has just pulled out. I told Mr Jacobs about it and he’s interested in seeing it. I mentioned that I thought you would be the best person for the job.”

“Me?” I asked, shocked.

“Yes, and why not? I think you’ve been doing exceptionally well these past three weeks. I have every confidence that you will be able to deal with him—as always—in your efficient, professional, and pleasant manner.”

I smiled from ear to ear at Jonathan’s compliment. “Okay.”

“Excellent. Let me know your schedule for tomorrow and I will call Mr Jacobs to make further arrangements.” He pulled his elbows off the table, ending our little meeting. I thanked him and excitedly made my way back to my desk.

“What’s put that smile on your face?” Shelly asked.

“I’m meeting the famous Mr Jacobs tomorrow.” I was so giddy at the prospect; I forgot how this might affect Shelly. I think I would be pissed off if some newbie came along and snapped up all the high end clients. As it turned out, Shelly was a very unselfish person in that respect. She just high fived me and wished me luck.

Upon checking my schedule, I could see an availability at twelve o'clock. I had a viewing for the same penthouse at two, and I thought it only fair that our VIP gets to see it first. I told Jonathan and he was pleased. He soon confirmed the appointment via email and told me that Mr Jacobs would meet me here.

"That's unusual," I said out loud.

"What's that?" Shelly asked.

"I thought Mr Jacobs always met at the property?"

Shelley's head snapped up. "He does. That's why I've never had the pleasure of meeting him," she giggled.

"He's coming here, tomorrow, at twelve o'clock."

Shelly could hardly contain her excitement. She was certainly desperate to see this famous 'man-whore', as she called him.

I thought my day was going pretty well until Jonathan called me back in the office. I walked in and he looked like a man who was about to receive a telling off. I didn't like where this was going.

"Take a seat, dear Angelina. I think you'll need to sit down."

"What is it?" I asked, now concerned. A million things were flying around my head right about now.

"Miss Charmers has just been on the phone. She wants to see that house again and she insists on you showing it to her."

I tried speaking, but Jonathan just put his hands up to stop me. "I tried telling her that you were fully booked, but she still insisted."

"Fuck!" I blurted. I looked up to meet Jonathan's eyes and I could see that little cocked eyebrow telling me off. "Sorry," I said, begging him to forgive me. "If I'm fully booked, I'm fully booked. What can she really expect us to do?" I was



pleading now and I knew it, but I could see that Jonathan called me in here for a reason, and it wasn't just to tell me I wouldn't have to do it if I didn't want to.

“Angelina, she is one of our biggest clients. I know you thought she tried it on with you, but you can't say that for certain, can you? Besides, you have obviously made quite an impression on her. It's not the normal procedure for someone like yourself willing to turn down such high commission if she decides to buy.”

I looked angrily at Jonathan, but I knew there was no way of getting out of this. It was four o'clock already and I didn't have any other appointments scheduled, so I couldn't really say no.

I sighed deeply. “Okay, but if she touches my arse again, I'm off.” I stood there with my hands on hips, having a right old dolly strop. All Jonathan did was laugh and shake his hands in front of him.

“Of course, of course. It's a deal,” he said, chuckling.

I very reluctantly rang Miss Charmers to schedule her in for five o'clock. All the while, Shelly was giggling in the background. She was going to pay for this.

“You owe me a drink after work.” I glared at Shelly as I waited for the ever so charming Charmers to answer her phone.

“Yes,” she said, seductively.

“Miss Charmers, it's Angelina here.” I was about to go on but she interrupted me.

“Oh, Angelina, how nice to hear from you. I thought you may have been trying to run away from me,” she said laughing.

I laughed too, but it was more of a hysterical—I'm about to lose the plot—laugh, more than a genuine, hearty laugh. Shelly decided it was time to play games and thought it hilariously funny to turn away from me and rub her hands up

and down her back, like she had someone kissing her. I so wanted to kill her right now.

“No, Miss Charmers, I’ve just been very busy, that’s all.” I grabbed the nearest thing I could find—which was a rubber—and threw it at Shelly’s head. She turned toward me and giggled.

“Sounds like you’re having a party in the office. Can I join?” she asked, laughing again.

My high pitched, nervous laugh had everyone looking. Including Victor and Hyacinth.

“Sorry, Miss Charmers, it’s just my colleague here being silly.”

“My dear, how many times do I have to tell you, it’s Belinda. Calling me Miss Charmers makes me sound like an old spinster.”

“Okay, Belinda.”

“That’s better.” The tone in her voice was seductive, making that high pitched laugh roll out again. I would have liked to crawl into a hole and never resurface. This is just a little more than insane.

“I have a five o’clock cancel on me today, so I can meet you then, if you’re free?” I was hoping she wasn’t. I had my eyes shut, mouthing the words, “please, please, please, please,” over and over again.

“That would be lovely, Angelina. I will meet you there. Look forward to it, Chica.”

*Oh, fucking hell!!*

“Okay, see you there at five.” I put the phone down as quickly as possible to a chorus of laughter from Shelly, Anthony, and Brad.

“You three are so dead meat. You’re all taking me for a drink after work. You owe me.” I was pissed off, exhausted, and in bad need of that drink now. I’d been so good these past

three weeks, hardly socialising, taking plenty of walks to familiarise myself with the area more, and going to bed at a decent time. It wasn't like me to be this way, but I didn't want to let Jonathan down. I've been trying my best and I think I've been doing well. Time to let my hair down a little.

"I can go," both Shelly and Brad said.

I turned towards Anthony with a questioning eyebrow. "I can't, sorry. It's my wife's birthday today and I promised her a slap-up meal."

I smiled at Anthony, but decided to play a little joke. "Any excuse, Anthony."

"Ah, come on, Angelina. Definitely next time, any day—tomorrow even, if you want—but not today. Katherine will never forgive me."

"Tell Katherine from me that I wish her a very happy birthday."

"Thank you," he beamed.

"And that her husband owes me a very large vodka tonic."

"Done." He held out his hand and I took it for a swift shake.

Dipping my head down, I buried myself in my hands. "Oh God, has anyone got any tranquilisers?" I was starting to wish this day would end already.

"Aww, come on, Angelina. You'll get through this."

Shelly rubbed my shoulders, trying to calm my nerves. "I didn't mean for me." I laughed into my arms and the gang joined in with me, but suddenly Shelly jumped across to her desk. With all of us staring, she retrieved a bag and pulled out a rape alarm. "Here, take this."

For a moment I tried to analyse her face, but she seemed deadly serious. Anthony and Brad both looked like they're about to spontaneously combust.

“Fuck that for a game of scrabble. Jesus, Shelly, are you trying to kill me here?”

Her face was confused, as she shrugged her shoulders. “Just trying to help.” She placed the rape alarm back in her bag and sauntered over to her desk.

“I don’t think I need that kind of help from you. That’s two drinks you owe me now—and make them large ones.” I was being demanding, but I didn’t much care after that.

“No problema, senorita,” she purred.

“Keep going and it will be three.” She wisely kept quiet and everyone went back to work at their desks. I couldn’t help looking at the time every sodding minute. I just want this over already.

Once it got to ten minutes to five, I thought it better to get going before I decided to leg it up to my flat, crawl into my bed and hide. That flat, and my bed, seemed rather enticing right now.

The gang wished me luck, to which I replied, “Go to hell,” and I swiftly made my way to Royal Avenue.

It didn’t help my mood that it looked like it was going to rain. It already had that new rain smell you get once it hits the pavements and settles there. I had my trustee umbrella tucked under my arm in the eventuality that it did rain once I had finished showing Cruella de Vil round the house.

I got to the house with a couple of minutes to spare and unfortunately Charming Charmers was already waiting for me.

“Hola, como estas, mi amor?” Her words were ringing out like a song almost. She was looking like a woman about to go to the races with her long red dress and even longer fur coat she had on. She was smoking a cigarette and very carefully breathed it up her nose as I came closer to her. She was flirting already.

*The vodka’s calling, the vodka’s calling!*

“Hi, Miss Char... Belinda, sorry. Are you ready to go in now?”

She flicked her golden brown locks and threw her cigarette in the street. “Si, lead the way, Chica.”

I walked past her and could feel her eyes follow me as I passed. They were practically burning a hole into the back of me as I unlocked the door.

“The current owners have just recently moved out the last couple of days, so you will see it as a blank shell now. That might help you better with this second viewing.”

Walking through the long hallway, we were greeted by a grand staircase. I took her through, room by room, trying not to maintain much eye contact—which was hard. I always like to look people in the eye when I speak, so this way was all foreign to me. We got to one of the bedrooms upstairs where she came so close to me I thought I couldn’t breathe.

“Has anyone ever told you that you have the most beautiful and unusual eyes? They’re brown, but they’re not brown. They’re green, but they’re not green. Remarkable.”

I briefly looked her in the eyes and she smiled. “Erm,” I began. “As you can see, this is the only item of furniture they have left. It’s way too big for them to manoeuvre.” The item I was referring to was a humungous king size, four poster bed, sitting very regally in the middle of the room.

“It’s fabulous,” she cooed. Very soon her hand was on my hair. Picking up a lock, she studied it for a moment. “You have the most gorgeous hair. It flows so elegantly down your beautifully curved back.”

I immediately stiffened at her touch and she noticed it straight away. “Do I make you nervous, Angelina?”

I cleared my throat. “No, I’m just not used to people playing with my hair when I’m trying to show them around a property.” I squirmed a little trying to gain some space between us.

“You must have had someone try to touch you in some way my darling. You’re a very attractive young lady.”

I tried to think of something fast, and the only thing I could think of to say was, “Yes, well... my boyfriend thinks so.”

A quirk of a smile touched her lips as she paced the room a little. She was looking around, going through the motions, but I was wondering if she was really interested in this place or not.

“So, you have a boyfriend?” Her back is turned, but I could tell she was still smiling.

“Yes,” I answered, quickly.

“And what is his name?”

Oh dear, I wasn’t ready for that. I didn’t know why this was relevant, but maybe she was just trying to put me on the spot. My head was spinning for an answer, but I didn’t want to hesitate too long. Eventually, the only name that popped into my head was the man whore’s name. “Jacob,” I said in one breath. My goodness, inventing boyfriends was harder than I thought.

“Jacob?” she asked.

“Yes, that’s my boyfriend’s name, Jacob. I love him very much.” It was a strange feeling having to explain myself to this devil woman. If she were a man, I would just tell her to fuck off. It’s not like I haven’t done that countless of times before. I suppose having a woman try it on with you for the very first time would do that to you. It was all new territory for me.

“I see,” she said turning towards me. “I very much like this house, Angelina. I would like to put in an offer, if I may?”

Wow, of all the things, I wasn’t expecting that. “Okay,” I said nervously. “How much would you like to offer?”

“Let’s round it down to four, shall we? I assume that’s what they’re after?” She swiftly turned again and looked out of the bedroom window.

“I think you may be right, but I will have to speak with the vendor first and get back to you.”

She walked towards me quickly and stroked my chin.  
“Please do so.”

I immediately tensed again, but she was outside of the bedroom door and heading down the stairs quicker than my head could register.

*Oh, thank God that's over!*

I practically ran down the stairs, and outside where Cruella was waiting for me. “I’ll speak to the vendors as soon as I get back to the office, and call you with an answer as soon as I have one.”

“Great,” she said, handing me a card. “Call me if you ever get tired of your boyfriend.” She locked eyes with me and winked.

I smiled awkwardly and took the card, but it wasn’t until I walked past her with my back to her that I felt it. Her hand on my arse!

Her hot breath was now invading my ear. “It was lovely seeing you again, Angelina. I look forward to your call.” She strolled off, shaking her hips back and forth as she went. To a man, this would be hot, but to me, it was completely wasted.

With a sharp intake of breath, I was ready to bolt. Suddenly my feet found so much movement that I was practically running back to work. It was starting to rain a little, so I tried putting up my umbrella. It was no use though. I was so uptight and anxious to get as far away from that woman as possible that nothing I did worked. I was so caught up in trying to undo the thing when my head practically slammed into a very solid chest. “I’m sorry,” I said, still looking at my umbrella.

“Would you like me to help with that?”

Oh my fucking God, that voice. If ever heaven invented the sound of a voice so beautiful, so sexy, so seductive, his

would be it. I followed my eyes up from the umbrella, to his chest. He was wearing a grey jacket with blue shirt and navy tie that clung to his broad shoulders. I followed higher and found his lips. The most curved, sculptured pouty lips I had ever seen on a man.

The next thing I noticed was his sexy stubble. What I wouldn't give to run my fingers up and down his face. Then I saw his eyes. The most beautiful light blue eyes—like swimming pools, I wanted to dive in.

Then there was his hair, or lack of it. He obviously liked a close shave, but there was a hint of very dark hair on top of his head. He must have been in his mid-twenties, and oozed sex appeal with an air of wealth—which only added to his allure.

*Could this guy be any sexier?!*

I found myself staring for what seemed like an age. My stomach was not only having butterflies, it had an all out war going on in there. I couldn't breathe, couldn't think, this man was so beautiful.

The feeling inside me was alien and I didn't like it. I watched as he drunk me in; his eyes were waving at me with those luscious eyelashes of his. I wanted to run—wanted to bolt—but it was like my feet were cemented to the ground. My heart couldn't seem to find any rhythm and my breathing quickly followed suit.

What is wrong with me?

I suddenly felt anger towards this stranger. How dare he make me feel this way. I didn't even know him and I felt my insides were going to explode if he looked at me one more time with those fucking come-to-bed eyes of his.

"I'm fine," I said with gritted teeth. Lords knows how I found the two words to string together, but I did. They came out like I was a baby practising speech, but I got there somehow.

"I don't think I recall ever seeing you around here before." The sexy stranger grinned at me and I nearly passed out.



“Well it is a big place,” I said, sarcastically. I’m not doing very well. I’m being rude to him and making it obvious. Instead I got back to fiddling with my umbrella just so I didn’t have to look at him again. No matter how much I actually did want to look at him.

“Here, Angel, let me help you with that.”

Snapping my head up at him, my eyes bulged. “How did you...?” I began. He stared at me, noticing my shocked reaction. “Oh, never mind,” I said storming off.

“Wait!” he shouted after me. “You’re name’s not Angel is it?”

I turned around, feeling the drops coming that little bit more persistently. “No, it’s Angelina.” I looked at him like I didn’t give a fuck, but I know I do. I sure hope I have a good poker face.

“Heaven must be missing one,” he said with a cheeky grin.

“Oh really.” I rolled my eyes at him. “Like I’ve never heard that one before.” He looked at me, somewhat confused. I could see he was trying to figure something out, but I didn’t know what. I’m about to turn around but then I hear that damn voice of his again. “Goodbye, my angel.”

With a swing of my heels, I was about to snap at him again, but it was almost like he had vanished into thin air. Poof, he was gone. I started to wonder if Cruella had slipped me something without my knowledge. I was starting to see things now.

I eventually got back to the office in one piece. Although it was difficult, I somehow managed to put the umbrella up in the end. I don’t know why I even bothered to tell you the truth, as I was all wet now. My hair was dripping all over the floor by the time I was back at the shop. I didn’t give a shit. I wanted a drink.

A full set of eyes lingered on me the minute I pushed the door open. Shelly, Brad, and Anthony were looking at me with great big fuck off grins on their faces.

*Pricks.*

“What you smiling at?” I wasn’t in the mood. I was wet, I was uncomfortable—I’d just been felt up by the Dalmatian lady—and had a mirage of the most gorgeous asshole I had ever seen on the planet.

“How did it go?” Anthony sat there, nervously twiddling his thumbs. He could see I was angry, so tried to ask as nicely as possible.

“It was hideous. I can’t believe I’m going to say this, but Cruella’s got roving hands,” I said, trying to dust myself off. “At least she made an offer.”

“She did?” Shelly almost squealed the words.

“Yes, now I have to ring the vendors and get this whole thing wrapped up as quickly as possible. The pub is calling me.”

I sat down—or rather flopped down—at my desk, and flicked through my list of contacts. I quickly found the Marcus’s mobile number and dialled.

They were happy when I called as it sounded as though they wanted the sale as quickly as possible. They were moving to the US and were keen to cut ties as quickly as possible. They were happy with the four million, and I was very happy with the nice commission cheque I was about to receive at the end of the month. Although the day didn’t go extremely well, at least I could be happy with one thing.

I rang Charming Charmers and told her the good news. She was happy and said that she would make arrangements for the transfer of the deposit tomorrow.

I was finally happy and breathing more easily by the time I had hung the phone up on her. I rushed in quickly to tell

Jonathan the good news—which he was more than pleased with.

“You better go home and get dried up, Angelina. You’ll catch a death.”

“Thanks,” I said, relieved. “We’re going for drinks in a little while, fancy joining us?”

He looked up, watching my wet hair drip down my blouse. I didn’t think he could help it, but he lingered as a very wet area was forming around my breast.

“Erm,” he said, clearing his throat. “I have things to do this evening. Maybe another time though.” He tried to look at anything, but me—which was quite sweet.

“Okay, I’ll be off then. See you tomorrow, Jonathan.” Turning around, I headed for the door.

“Yes, see you tomorrow. Oh, and Angelina... well done for today. Tell everyone they’re free to go. I think we’ve done about all that we can for the day.”

“Okay, thanks Jonathan.”

As I entered the shop I told everyone they could leave. Anthony had already gone home to be with his wife, so that just left me, Shelly, Brad, and the evil twins. They didn’t look best pleased that I had come out to tell them to go home. I just ignored them and concentrated on Shelly and Brad. “Do you two want to head over to the bar and I’ll join you once I change?”

They both nodded and told me that they’d be at Antonio’s across the road.

I ventured up to my beloved flat and quickly got changed into a nice pencil skirt and black polo neck top. I tried towel drying and brushing the tangles out, but it was no use. In the end, I just left it loose to dry naturally. I touched up my make-up and dabbed some shiny lip gloss on. I was as ready as I could ever be with the short time I had.

Right, time to do some heavy  
drinking!

## CHAPTER 4

As I walked into the bar I found it pretty lively. Shelly and Brad were propped up in deep conversation. They spotted me straight away and Shelly motioned to a drink on the bar.

“Double vodka tonic, me lady.” She smiled her sweet, childlike smile and I couldn’t help aim one right back at her.

“Thanks. I really need this.” And I did really need it. I picked it up and bolted it down in one go. I had been too good these past three weeks—time to be a bit naughty.

I had two pair of eyes bulging at me like I had just broke wind or something.

“Okay... time to get you another.” Brad motioned to the barman and I smiled.

“Now, that’s what I’m talking about.” I looked at Shelly, but noticed her eyes scanning something behind my back.

“Oh. My. Fucking. God.”

I turned around to see what she was looking at and spotted my mirage. It was almost as if he felt my eyes staring—as within seconds—his were burning into mine. He had company—lots of company. The women were practically drooling all over him. “Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit.” I kept saying it, and Shelly and Brad kept looking at me like I’d lost the plot. I think I may have—just a little.

“What’s the matter?” Shelly asked.

“I bumped into him earlier. He asked if he could help with my umbrella. He called me Angel and I nearly flipped.”

“Wow, what a coincidence. You must have checked him out a little, he’s hot—like, steaming hot.”

“There are no guys present in this group at all.” Brian motioned with his hands as if to say, “What the fuck?” He obviously didn’t like the fact he was the only man with a couple of girls—one of which was leering at a man.

“No, you’ll do.”

“Shelly!” I shouted. “That was rude. Excuse the lovely Miss McIntyre here, Anthony. She obviously left her manners at home.”

“Oh come on, Angelina. If Brad wants to check out the ladies, I won’t be offended. Check away my man. Indulge yourself. Talk about breasts and fannies, I don’t care.”

Brad handed me my second Vodka Tonic and I gladly took it from him. I was about to take a sip when Shelly was tugging on my arm. “What?”

“Sexy beast is heading our way, Angelina, and he’s certainly zeroing in on you my friend.”

I looked around and my breath caught instantly. His stare was intense, almost hypnotic. I couldn’t seem to keep my eyes off him.

“Angel, how lovely to see you again. Not following me now, are you?”

Oh great, not only was he the sexiest man I had ever seen, he was a wiseass as well. “Yeah, and wouldn’t you like that?” His eyebrow raised and I almost melted.

“Yes, I would actually. It’s very rare to find an angel fall at your feet—or in this case—collide into my chest when I’m out taking a stroll.”

Oh and what a chest it was. I looked briefly, but didn’t want him to see that he affected me.

“Can I buy you all a drink?” He looked at everyone and I saw Shelly looking like all those other drooling women he had waiting for his return. She was about to say something when I stepped on her foot.

“We’re fine,” I said, stubbornly.

Shelly glared as she bent over and started rubbing her toe. She wasn’t pleased. I knew she was going to say yes to the guy and I didn’t want him here. Even though I did. God, I hate him.

“You’re still wet I see. I don’t know what you normally look like dry, but...”

I had to stop him talking for my sake. I really couldn’t hear anymore. “Are you always like this?”

“Like what, Angel?”

“Don’t call me Angel. I only let one person call me that. My name is Angelina.” He studied me a moment with those fucking come-to-bed eyes of his. I had never in this world reacted so instantly to someone in my life. It was quite frankly pissing me off—but most of all—it scared the shit out of me. I didn’t want him here. I wanted him far away, so I could go back to my normal life I was in control of. When I looked at this man, my control wavered. I didn’t like it.

“So who’s the lucky man who gets to call you that?” He stood there looking all sexy, but I didn’t answer him. He patiently waited for an answer, but all I did was look indignant. Shelly saw my reaction and rolled her eyes at me.

“I think it must be her dad or something. She hasn’t got a boyfriend, I can tell you that.”

“Shelly!” I couldn’t believe she just told him that I was single. She had no right to tell this sexy stranger my personal life.

“Don’t be mad at Shelly, my angel. She’s just trying to help.”

“I. Am. Not. Your. Angel.” I think a little smoke was coming out of my ears.

Sexy asshole looked over at Shelly and Brad. “Is she always like this?”

“No,” they both said in unison.

“So, it’s just me then.”

It wasn’t a question, it was an observation. He was smiling now, but I didn’t know what was so amusing.

“Well, as you already know my name’s Shelly—this is Brad by the way—is it not too much to ask yours?”

He puffed out his wonderfully formed chest and smiled. “Seth,” he announced.

Oh God, even his name sounded sexy.

“Nice to meet you, Seth.” They all shook hands, but I didn’t offer mine. Seth just stood there smiling like the sexy prick he is.

“You know you look rather sexy when you’re angry. And you’re wet, too. You could drive a guy mental with that kind of image in his mind.” His eyes slanted as he looked me over. If my belly could dance, it would be doing every conceivable move known in the history of dance moves.

As I felt this, an unwanted memory quickly surfaced of my mum and I in the kitchen on Julia’s wedding night. Men don’t make my stomach dance. They never have. The thought scared me that much that I was actually contemplating going



back to Cornwall. Just that split second, an insane notion had me packing up my bags and going home.

Who on earth was this guy, and why in the hell am I letting myself be affected by him so much? That split second thought of running home was stupid. I don't know this guy and the chances of bumping into him again so soon, was remote... so why am I so frightened?

"You're a jerk, do you know that?" I'm desperately trying to stand my ground with this guy. If I had to have any kind of an emotion for him, it had to be anger. Judging by the group of girls waiting for him, he is obviously a playboy. That was a red danger sign right there.

"Keep that up, Angel, I may have to take you home with me and never let you leave."

My eyes bugged right out of my head. My mind screamed "Asshole," but my body screamed, "Yes, take me now!" He was making me weak.

"I am not your angel. Look, you obviously have company waiting for you and I'm here with my colleagues for a quiet drink. Why don't you just toodle off and make with your bunnies over there."

"Toodle off?" he asked, amused. His smile was infectious, but I couldn't let him see me back down.

"Okay, Angel. I'll 'toodle off', but I want you to know that this thing..." With a flick of his hand he pointed his finger between him and I. "Isn't over yet. I'll see you again, and when I do I will ask you out—and you will say yes."

I tried to see a hint of a smile, anything just to let me know he was joking—but he was deadly serious. "In your dreams, pal." I sneered at him and that made him smile.

"I'm sure you will be." He turned, revealing the most perfectly rounded, pert ass I had ever seen. It was just there and ripe for the touch. All I had to do was reach out and squeeze it. Just that little bit. Just a tiny squeeze.

I had to snap myself out of this. I looked to all the squealing girls and that was all it took to realise how silly my thinking was. He was a player. One to avoid at all costs. “Can you believe that asshole?” I asked Shelly and Brad.

“Oh yeah, sexy beast lurves ya. What a fucking bummer that must be.” She rolled her eyes again at me and took a swig of her drink, hand on hip.

“Well, I don’t lurrrrrve him. Who does he think he is coming over here being all, ‘I’m going to ask you out and you’ll say yes’, crap?”

“He was a bit forward,” Brad interjected.

“Thank you, Brad.”

“Wow, he really does wind you up, doesn’t he?” Shelly winked at me and I looked over to where Seth the Asshole was. His play bunnies were doing their giggly, drooly thing and it made me feel sick. His eyes still burned a hole in my insides and it made the hairs stick up at the back of my neck. I tingled when he looked at me and I loved it and hated it, all in one mushy, messed up ball of sexual energy. He oozed sex appeal like a prowling lion. I needed to get away from him and fast.

“Hey, I got an idea. I have a bottle of rum at home with our name on it. Instead of staying here and paying for our drinks, why don’t we just go to mine and get it for free?” Shelly looked at me like she wasn’t buying what I was selling. Brad just swigged the remainder of his drink back down and nodded his head. “I’m up for that. Lead the way, Miss Bradshaw.”

We drank what was left of our drinks and I grabbed my bag and coat. I didn’t want to look at Seth on my way out, but I couldn’t help it. The cheeky smile said it all. And then he had the gall to wave his fingers goodbye at me—all the while, he had women clinging from every limb.

*Bastard!*

Once we were outside, I took a welcome lungful of air. I was glad to be getting away from that man. It was almost as

though we had a surge of electricity running from him into me. I could feel it the whole time I was there. The pins and needles at the ends of my fingers. The strange tingly sensation you get when someone touches you ever so lightly—but this felt somehow magnified.

By the time we all reached the apartment—that I’ve quickly called my home—I was still feeling the slight hum from the charge. It was better though. Much more manageable now that he wasn’t around me anymore.

“I didn’t know you had a pet.” Both Shelly and Brad were bending down to take a closer look at Jerry.

“This is Jerry, my main man. He’s a cockatiel.”

“How sweet. Can he talk?” Shelly asked.

“He can a little bit, but he also likes to sing.” Shelly’s face was a picture of excitement. She almost looked like a child at times.

“Can we hear him?” Her eyes darted from me to Jerry and I had to laugh.

I retrieved three glasses from the cabinet and placed them down with my unopened bottle of rum.

Handing both Shelly and Brad their glasses, I shook my head. “He’s a cockatiel Shelly, not a wind-up toy. I can’t make him sing. He sings when he wants to. I can certainly try for you though. He may or may not be in the mood.”

Brad looked up to me, as intrigued as Shelly was. “How long have you had him?”

“About a year now. I raised him since he was a baby. I had to hand feed him milk. He used to screech like a banshee every time he saw me, and he wouldn’t stop until I put that syringe down his gob. And then the noise—blimey—you’d think a bike with a loose wheel was riding around the room.”

Walking over to his cage, I cooed at him. He responded with a full belter of a wolf whistle. “I think he’s happy. Let me try playing his favourite song.”

I swiftly made my way over to my CD player and pressed play—the sound of, “I see you Baby,” swiftly coming through the speakers.

Jerry reacted to it quite quickly, bopping his head to the sound, and moving up and down his perch. All of us laughed and had a little boogie ourselves—shouting, “Go Jerry... go Jerry... go Jerry!”

When the song ended I switched it off, but Jerry obviously thought it was still playing in his little world. He carried on singing, “I see you baby, shaking that ass... shaking that ass... shaking that ass.”

Both Shelly and Brad were in hysterics. They thought it was the funniest, adorable thing they had ever seen.

Brad asked if he could hold him, so I undid the cage and Jerry was straight there—standing to attention—desperate to get out. He climbed aboard my hand and right up to my shoulder where he sat contently perched up high. Things were going well—right up to the point Brad stuck his hand out towards Jerry. He screeched, flew at Brad’s face, causing him to fall head over, flat on his arse.

Jerry was flapping his wings at his face and Brad was screaming like a little girl. Both Shelly and I tried to help, but as soon as we did that, Jerry flew up and landed, flapping his wings on Shelly’s hair. Shelly screamed the place down—running around in circles. She was flapping her hands out, almost as if she was trying to take off herself. Jerry just sat on her head, perched up high, ignoring the whole spectacle. He was probably enjoying the ride from up there.

Eventually I managed to get Shelly to hold still so I could get Jerry off her head. I offered him my hand and he immediately shifted, climbing onto my finger. I grabbed him so that he couldn’t fly off anymore, and immediately put him back in his cage.

We all breathed a sigh of relief and heard Jerry shout, “Julia Gulia!” This ran a chorus of laughter around the room and it

just wouldn't stop. After about five minutes of continued roaring, I made sure both Shelly and Brad were okay—before we all sat down to relax.

“He can be a bit over protective.”

“Now she tells me,” Brad bellowed. The laughter quickly followed again and soon the drinks and conversation were flowing.

It got to around one in the morning when we all started drooping a little from tiredness and alcohol consumption. I held up an empty bottle and said, “Where has the rum gone?”

The giggles were soon back and it was hard to stop. “Well—Captain Jack—we must be off,” Shelly sighed.

“Now that all my rum's gone, you're both off. How treacherous you arrr.”

“Well, you know me, Angelina; it's all about the rum.” Brad winked at me and Shelly reluctantly stood up.

“You want to grab a cab, Brad? Your place is near to me anyway, isn't it?”

We all stood, stretching our drunken bones and yawned.

“Yeah sure. That'd be great.”

After they both thanked me for the rum, Shelly and Brad headed out to hail a cab. I walked back into my kitchen/living area and wondered what to do next. I decided it was best to let Jerry out for a bit—seeing as he didn't get a chance to fly around much earlier—and proceeded with my nightly—getting ready for bed—rituals.

Once I was in a tank top and boxers, I thought it best for a pre-emptive strike on my hangover tomorrow. I went into the kitchen to get myself a gallon of water and downed two Paracetamol. I made sure Jerry was nicely tucked up in his cage with a blanket over to help him sleep, and I proceeded to my bedroom, where I could not—would not—dream of Seth the sexy asshole.

## CHAPTER 5

I wasn't feeling too bad this morning. Everything seemed to smooth out quite well. I woke up with no headache, or nausea. I was actually feeling rather good about myself. I took a long, hot shower—I made sure Jerry's cage was clean and freshened with food—and I even managed to read a little before my working day had even started.

I had no appointments scheduled until my first one with Mr Jacobs, which was great considering I had some admin to catch up on. I was at my desk with a cup of coffee and a smile on my face when Shelly and Brad walked in. They both looked like they'd been dragged through a hedge backwards. "Oh dear, did I help do that to you two?" They both glared at me, nausea written all over their faces.

"Yes, I feel bloody awful," Brad moaned. "How come you look as fresh as a daisy?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know. Maybe I'm just naturally gifted like that."

“More like a natural bitch. I hate you. How can you not look sick?” They both flopped down in the chairs, looking like they were ready to die any second.

“I believe I didn’t drink as much as you two did last night. Besides, what happened after you left? Did you carry on the party without me?”

“No!” they both shouted. I couldn’t help but jump.

Looking over at them both, I noticed something straight away. They were nervous around each other. I had to chuckle. I think Shelly and I need to talk about that at some point.

Getting ready for my twelve o’clock appointment—I got my desk tidied up a little and grabbed my bag—just as Jonathan stood tall and lean above my desk.

“Your twelve o’clock is here,” he beamed.

“Okay, thanks Jona... oh hell no!” I screamed, making Jonathan jump. It was him, Seth the Asshole.

“I’m sorry, am I missing something here, Angelina?” Jonathan asked.

“Angel,” Mr Asshole chimed smirking at me. *That damn sexy, bastard smirk!*

“My name is not Angel, it’s Angelina. Please tell me this isn’t him, Jonathan? He’s Mr Jacobs?” I huffed, not once trying to hide my annoyance at his presence.

“I get the feeling you two know each other?” he asked, frowning.

“I had the pleasure of meeting this lovely angel yesterday, Jonathan. She really is rather rude though. I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve such vicious treatment.” He beamed, winking at me.

*The fucker winked at me!*

“Angelina, care to explain?” Jonathan asked.

“I went out last night with Brad and Shelly, she’ll tell you,” I said pointing towards her.

Everyone looked at Shelly and she put her hands up. “Don’t get me involved in this,” she said waving her arms.

*Shit, this wasn’t going well.*

“Angel, Angel, Angel, me thinks thou doth protest too much,” Asshole said—purring the words.

I gave him a frustrated sigh. “Oh great, first we think we’re a comedian and then we think we’re Shakespeare now?”

“Angelina, I think we’ve said enough. Mr Jacobs, I apologise for Angelina’s behaviour. If you would like another person to show you the penthouse, I would quite understand.”

I looked at Jonathan, a little annoyed. I know Seth’s a big client, and one that makes Jonathan lots of money, but there would be a reason for my outburst. I would never normally treat people this way, and he should know that.

“No, that’s fine Jonathan. I’m quite looking forward to Miss...?”

“Bradshaw,” Jonathan blurted.

“Miss Bradshaw showing me around the place.”

“Are you a masochist?” I asked defiantly.

“Angelina!” Jonathan shouted.

I quickly realised my mistake when Seth’s smile grew wider. He was really enjoying this and I was playing right into the fucker’s hands.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” Seth purred.

Oh great, now he’s flirting, and I’ve made the biggest cock-up by encouraging it in the first place.

Jonathan looked at Seth and then looked at me. He was about to say something, but quickly shut up. He shook his head and that was my queue to grab my bag. If he still wanted



me to show him around, I would, but I wanted it over and done with as soon as possible.

“Shall we go?” I asked reluctantly.

“Of course,” Seth said, clearing a way for me to pass.

My feet somehow managed to find movement as I stepped forward. Grabbing my arm, Jonathan held me back a second and looked at me.

“When you get back, I think we need to talk.”

Oh boy, not only was I having to spend some of my company with this asshole for the next half an hour or so, I’m in big trouble with the boss. Can this day get any better?!

I looked up at Seth and his intent stare was on Jonathan’s hand around my arm. Jonathan noticed and let go, releasing me quickly.

I don’t know how, but I managed to put one foot in front of the other, making my way out into the cool breeze.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm my nerves, and was gently directed towards a chauffeur holding the door to a black Rolls Royce. The driver smiled and ushered me in. I looked back at Seth and he motioned me inside.

“Phantom?” I asked.

That damn sexy eyebrow of his perked up as he answered. “You know your cars.” He looked impressed.

“My dad’s a car salesman. He loves luxury cars and I spent a lot of time with him at work as I was growing up. I learnt a thing or two along the way,” I said, dipping my head down to the seat and thanking the driver. Turning my attention back to Seth, I sighed. “Why don’t you drive?”

“I do, but London is big city. It’s just easier and quicker to get around this way.”

He smiled, making my heart skip a beat. I tried to remember last night and his arrogance. I can’t let him see that he affects me. That would just get his already massive-sized

ego another boost he doesn't deserve. I decided it was best to just try and ignore him as much as I could, and only answer when asked. I had a job to do.

We made the journey in less than ten minutes. It would have actually been quicker if we walked it there, but for some reason Seth wanted to use the car. I did notice a few times in the corner of my eye that Seth was checking my legs out. When I fidgeted, he smiled—making me want to punch his lights out even more. I don't think I have ever had this kind of reaction to man before. Ever.

We eventually got to the main entrance, where I keyed in the security code as he held the door open for me. He smiled, making me hate him that little bit more as I thanked him. It wasn't the most gracious of thank yous, but it would have to do.

Calling the lift, I pressed the key in for the penthouse suite. "I've been told this is not something you normally go for. It's more the projects you like to take on rather than the finished product, is that right?"

"Yes, I do like to turn something unloved, tired, and miserable into something beautiful, sexy, and enticing," he said, edging a little bit closer.

I knew what he was doing, I wasn't stupid. He was talking about me. Unloved, tired, and miserable my arse! And I'm not—nor will I ever be—his project.

"Having said that, I know buying off plain is profitable and sometimes I have to put my business head on, as it is just that."

"Well, as you know, it is still unfinished so you will have to see past all the mess."

"Oh, I always see past all the mess," he said seductively.

I traded one foot for the other in a bid to stop the throbbing downstairs. It was no use, and it just made me look like I wanted to pee. Luckily for me, the lift came to a halt and we were now walking inside the humongous penthouse. There

were builders everywhere, which made me feel somewhat safer around Seth. Not that I thought he was a psycho or anything, I just didn't want us alone together. That would be trouble with a capital T.

"This is the hallway," I said, starting my rambling.

"I gathered that," he said cheekily. I turned to him scowling and he winced. "You really don't like me, do you? This is going to be more of a challenge than I thought. But I do like a challenge."

Now I was beyond mad. "Excuse me?"

"You know, you really are rather sexy when you're angry. I could do all sorts with that anger, challenge it into something a bit more... beneficial," he said after a brief pause.

"You know, you really are something else," I said, agitated.

"I take that as a compliment."

"It wasn't meant to be one."

"Are you this rude to all your clients, Angel?"

"My name's not Angel," I spat. "And no, only ones who have humongous chips on their shoulders. Now, can I show you around, or are you going to stand here and argue with me all day?" He looked at me, raising an eyebrow and a cheeky grin. "On second thoughts, don't answer that," I replied stepping forward.

We walked around the expanse of the hallway and into the kitchen/come diner. The kitchen had yet to be fitted and the walls plastered, but you could already tell this was going to be one spectacular apartment. To the left hand side was a magnificent view of London, which was helped by the wall-to-wall windows lined up toward the oversized patio. On the patio, I noticed there was a Jacuzzi. That was obviously put there on purpose to help sell it that bit more. Not that it needed it.

I took him further through, showing him the four bedrooms and five bathrooms this flat had to offer. It also sported a

cinema room with bar attached to the corner. This was definitely a millionaire's playboy pad.

"So, how many are left in total in this block?" Seth asked, pulling me from my daydream.

"Well, as you know the original buyer for this pulled out, so you were lucky to have a viewing. I have another two lined up this afternoon to see it. Apart from this one, there are only three others left."

Seth nodded his head. "What floor are they on?"

"One is on the first floor, one on the fifth floor, and the other on the eighth floor, all three bedrooms."

I regarded him as he pursed his lips a little in thought. "Do you have the keys for those by any chance?"

"Yes, I always keep all the keys just in case anyone wants to see the others."

"Hmm, not just a pretty face," he sighed, smiling.

Why did he have to be so irritating? "That was nowhere near condescending at all."

"It wasn't meant to be. Angel, I think I've seen enough of this apartment. I know what I want when I see it. I'll take this one and will also take the ones on the fifth and eighth floor, if they're to my liking."

My head snapped up in shock. "What, just like that?"

"Yep," he quipped. "Just like that. I don't dilly dally, Miss Bradshaw. I take what I want, when I want it."

I walked away and muttered "Conceited little prick" under my breath.

"I heard that," he said amused.

Swinging my heels round, I faced him. "Oh, so we have x-ray hearing now do we?"

"I don't know why you're fighting this, my angel. It's going to happen one day."

This guy really got under my skin. “Number one, I’m not your angel—and two—one day will happen when hell freezes over!”

Most of the builders within earshot stopped the hammering and looked over to me. A couple of them smiled and one of them winked. Seth saw this and smiled himself.

“I’m getting out of here before I drown in too much testosterone.”

Seth followed, laughing, although I didn’t find any of this funny whatsoever. And did he also have to be so damn sexy when he laughed, too?

“You are just too cute; do you know that, Angel?”

“Will you stop calling me Angel?” I got in the lift, practically pounding my fist on the number eight button.

“Have you ever thought of taking Anger Management classes at all?”

I took a few calming deep breaths. I knew he was trying to get a rise out of me, and I also knew he was enjoying every minute of it. I was determined not to give him the satisfaction.

“Oh, we’ve lost our voice. That must be a first for you,” he said laughing.

I opened my mouth to bite—I very nearly did—but again, I wasn’t giving in to him.

I showed him around the apartment, which was about half the size of the penthouse, but still very big nonetheless. The views weren’t as spectacular, but it was still impressive.

Once finished, I began looking at my watch as it was getting closer to one, and I knew I had another viewing at two.

“Am I keeping you, my angel?”

“No, I have those other appointments in just over an hour.”

“You mean the ones coming here to see the penthouse?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“Well, I’ll soon deal with that. Be back in a bit.” Within a flash he made his way out onto the patio and shut the door.

As he stood outside I watched him with distasteful interest. Who am I kidding, I watched him like I was a bitch on heat. Not a lot of men tend to look like sex-on-legs in a suit, but this guy oozed it. He must have his suits custom-made as it just fitted to his body perfectly. I watched in interest as he shifted and then bent over the balcony in rapt conversation. His pert bottom, sticking out now as he hunched over, was begging to be touched—caressed even. I stared, biting my lip as he turned to look at me. His expression was one of mild amusement as mine turned from lustful to hateful in a tenth of a second. He winked at me and I turned away from him. I had to, so as not to give myself away.

I heard the patio door sliding and Seth’s voice appearing. “That’s great, thank you, Jonathan. I’ll get the funds transferred to you by first thing tomorrow morning.” He looked toward me and nodded his head. “I will, don’t worry, Jonathan. I’ll have her back in one piece by three o’clock.”

What? He hung up and I stared at him, waiting for his explanation.

“I asked Jonathan if I could take you to lunch to celebrate.”

“Celebrate what? And when do you need to seek permission from Jonathan about taking me to lunch? Aren’t you asking the wrong person?”

“You’re a tough cookie to crack, my angel.”

“I am *not* your angel!” I screamed. I think I may have stamped my foot a little. *I’m losing it, I’m losing it. Calm down Angelina, he’s only a man. A man-whoring sex God. Oh boy!*

“And another thing,” I said, trying to calm myself. “You’re not cracking my cookie!”

An eruption of laughter left Seth’s lips again as I tried to cling onto any remnants of dignity I had left after my little child strop. He looked at me and smiled. A great big, heart-

warming, show-stopping smile. I couldn't help it, my lips curved up.

“There it is! Blimey, it's beautiful.”

I almost went weak at the knees. “What?” I asked trying to be as casual as possible.

“Your smile.”

“Oh shut up,” I blurted, turning my heels to head for the lift. I couldn't help the silly grin plastered on my face. “By the way,” I said getting into the lift. “Not that I'm entertaining the idea of lunch, but why are you celebrating?”

“I'm going to buy all three. I asked Jonathan to cancel your appointments. There's no need for them to come now that they're all mine. Besides, I'll get to have you all to myself during that time.”

Heat and throbbing, heat and throbbing. Is it more heat, then throbbing? I couldn't tell, one seemed to mesh with the other. All I knew was, I ached, and it wasn't because I drank too much rum last night either. This was a different ache, in a completely different part of my body.

Trying to gather myself together, I punched in floor number five.

“There's no need to view it—unless of course, it's empty and you want me all to yourself?” he asked, smiling.

This man never failed to amaze me. “You can't just buy three apartments without looking at them all. What if there's something wrong, or you don't like it?”

Seth frowned a little. “Is there something wrong with it?”

“No,” I answered.

“Then I trust you,” he grinned. “They're pretty much all the same right?”

I nodded, but insisted on at least him taking a peek. He might not like the view, or something—anything. You don't

just spend two point two million just like that without seeing what you've bought first.

He seemed to go along with it; I think to amuse me more than anything. We got there, he peeked, spent all of about ten seconds looking around, and that was it, he was off.

“Now, can we get to lunch? We've wasted enough time already.”

“What, a few seconds?” I huffed.

“A few seconds less that I could be spending sipping a bottle of beer and staring into those magnificent eyes of yours. They look—I don't know—somehow familiar.”

I frowned and shifted again. What could I say to that? I'm supposed to hate him. Right?

Seth's driver took us to the restaurant around the corner from where I worked and lived. The one that's supposed to be over-priced, but oh so over-the-top, melt in the mouth good. I'd been dreaming of going there ever since I heard of the place. For three weeks I've been passing this restaurant on the way to the shops, and for three weeks I've been dreaming of one day entering it, rather than passing. Now I was here, with sexy asshole.

As we entered, Seth was greeted by name by the Maitre d', who escorted us to a discreet table in the corner. Of course he's well known here, silly me. He probably brings all his bunnies here, and now the Maitre d' thinks I'm one of them.

“What can I get you, Mr Jacobs?”

“I'll have a beer please, Terence, and Angel here will have a...?”

“Orange juice please,” I answered quickly.

“Had enough booze last night?” he asked, amused.

I shook my head, trying not to smile. “No, I have clients later; it never looks good when I turn up stinking of drink.”



That lip of his curved up as he drank me in. “Who says you’re not smelling of it now?”

I felt really conscious then, so pulled my blouse up and sniffed. This just caused Seth into a fit of hysteria.

“*Tosser*,” I said under my breath.

“I heard that.”

“Oh yes, of course. Mr X-ray hearing.”

Seth leant his elbows on the table and shuffled slightly. “You really don’t like me do you? I think if you ever took the time to get to know me, I think you would like what you see and hear.”

Thank goodness he couldn’t read my mind. “You’re so modest, do you know that?”

“I try my best,” he said smiling.

That smile. I was beginning to hate it despite the fact he looked too damn cute and sexy. The only thing I could do was just remind myself of who he really is. “I really am not in a hurry to become one of your bunnies, nor will I ever be. When hell freezes over, remember?”

“Bunnies?” he asked with a confused smile.

“Yes, bunnies, as in playboy.” He stared at me a little, still with an amused grin on his face. “What?” I asked trying to glance over the menu.

“This is going to be fun,” he answered.

I placed my menu on the table—after nearly having a heart attack at the prices—and tried my best to look annoyed. “Listen here, matey, I’m not a challenge, or a deal-breaker, or a project that you want to turn from miserable and tired, to sexy and enticing. I’m not interested, so stop trying to chase me. It ain’t happening.”

All he did was stare at me for a few seconds with a cheeky grin. “Don’t forget unloved and beautiful.”

“What?” I asked confused.

“You forgot to mention unloved and beautiful.”

In an effort to ignore him, I picked my menu back up. It was hard though as the prices were hurting my eyes.

“Steak,” Seth quipped.

His sudden outburst had my head snapping up to meet him. “Pardon?”

“The steak here is the best in London. If you like steak, then I would recommend it here.”

I had heard that, too. I placed my menu down, glad that I didn’t have to look at the prices anymore. I didn’t even want to know how much the steak was. “Okay,” I said. “You’ve sold it to me.”

“I thought that was the other way around today, Miss Bradshaw?” He smiled and I couldn’t help but smile back.

“You should smile more often. It makes your eyes stand out even more than normal. Where did you get those peepers from anyway?”

“I should imagine from my parents,” I said, trying to feign interest. He was about to say something when a waiter brought us our drinks. We said our thanks, ordered the steak, and away the waiter went.

“So, what’s the deal with you and Jonathan?”

I very nearly spat my drink out. “What do you mean?”

“Is he fucking you, because I have to know what I’m up against?”

If only he knew! “You’re very crass, do you know that?” I could feel the anger rise again.

“You think I’m crass?” he asked

“Don’t you think you’re crass?” I counter-asked.

“No, do you really think I’m crass?” he hit back.

“I’m not playing this game with you, Mister,” I seethed. He looked at me again and turned that sexy grin on. My God, he’s an asshole. A fucking sexy son-of-a-bitch asshole!

“Are you going to answer me, or do I have to guess?”

Feeling like I was in need of a challenge, I decided to play along. “I want you to guess.”

“Okay,” he said, placing his elbows on the table again. “I think he wants you. I think there may have been a time when you two could have, and you never did. Now Jonathan regrets that and wants to make you his.”

How did he...? “Hold on, have you been talking to Jonathan about me?”

His eyes lit up. “Ah, so I’m right?”

I sat back in my chair and crossed my arms defensively. “I never said you were.”

“No, but you implied it,” he replied with an impish grin. “So, you and Jonathan nearly had sex and now he’s brought you here to complete his mission.”

Now he was really started to piss me off. “Now listen here, Mr I’m God’s Gift to Women, who do you think you are making accusations like that about Jonathan and I? You think I can’t do my job properly? That he couldn’t have possibly asked me to come here because I’m good at what I do?”

He soon interrupted my rant by putting his hands up. “Hey, hold your horses there, Angel. One, I never said you weren’t good at your job. Jonathan gave you what must be his biggest client. He wouldn’t trust you with me if he thought you couldn’t do your job.”

I tried speaking, but he put his hand up again to shut me up. “Two, I think Jonathan does want you and maybe he thought that by asking you here and being near to you, would bring you both closer together. Three, I for some unknown fucking reason don’t like it, and four; you think I’m God’s gift

to women?” That last sentence had the show-stopping smile surface.

“I never said that,” I spat.

“Oh yes you did.” He practically purred the words.

Shifting uncomfortably in my seat, the ache for him intensified. “I said you think your God’s gift to women.”

He shook his head and waved his finger. “Ah, ah, that’s not how I heard it. You said, and I quote, “Now listen here, Mr I’m God’s Gift to Women.”

I couldn’t believe this guy. “What is this, do you have some sort of photographic memory or something?”

“So you admit that’s how you said it?”

I growled. It couldn’t be helped. He just frustrated me something chronic. He seemed to enjoy getting a rise out of me and I—all the time—bit when he did it.

Luckily our meals came before I could really lay into him. I took the opportunity to calm myself down a little, and not let him see that he affected me.

I bit into the steak and oh my God, it was melt in the mouth. I even moaned out loud.

“Keep doing that, I’ll get the bill and haul your arse out of here and keep you locked up in my dungeon.”

“You have a dungeon?” I asked, confused at myself. There was so many things wrong with what he just said, and that was all I asked.

“No,” he said with a chuckle. “But I’ll have one built for you.” He winked at me with an impish grin.

I knew he was only joking, but an unwelcome heat resurfaced. I had to try and cool it down. If he had a photographic memory, what other super powers did he possess?

He saw my reaction and stared at me with a worried expression on his face. “Are you okay?”

See, there it was. He knows he makes me hot. I can’t believe I’m even admitting this to myself! “I’m fine,” I said trying not to look too uncomfortable.

“I just can’t believe there was no comeback to what I said.”

The laughter came tumbling out naturally. “Ah, so you admit you’re a glutton for punishment?”

“Only when it comes to you, Angel.”

I sighed and closed my eyes for a moment. “How many times do I have to say that my name is—”

“I know, Angelina. Hello stropo, I thought I’d lost you there.”

I smiled. I knew again what he was trying to do and I wasn’t going to let it work in his favour. Instead I took another bite of my steak and decided to do a Sally on him.

“Oh God, this is so good. I think it’s the best I’ve ever had,” I said moaning.

Seth’s eyes went wide and I knew it was working. I took another bite, closed my eyes and when I opened them again, I said, “Hmm, so good.” As I stared at him, I tried to put on my best “Take me to bed” eyes as I could.

I picked up a carrot next and seductively placed it in my mouth. I pushed it in and pulled it out, making a slight sucking noise as I went. By the look on his face, it was working.

“Angel, as I told you, carry on like that I won’t be responsible for my actions.”

“Oh really,” I said challenging him as I sucked harder.

To my surprise he got up, waltzed his way to where I was sitting, sat down real close, and came in inches away from my face. My breathing immediately hitched. He

looked deeply into my eyes with those baby blues of his. I couldn't help my heart racing the way that it was.

He leaned in that little bit more, but I couldn't let him kiss me. He was a playboy and I didn't want to become one of his bunnies. "I'm not a bunny," I said, breathing heavily.

He leaned back, confusion written all over his face. "What?"

"I'm not one of your playboy bunnies, nor will I ever be," I snapped.

He started laughing and my eyes couldn't help travel over his heaving chest, but then they travelled lower to something else that was heaving.

"You like what you see, my angel?"

My eyes snapped up to meet his sparkling blues. "No," I blurted. "Can we just finish our lunch?" I thought it best to try and get away from this situation before I regret something later.

"Now can you see what you do to me? You should never start playing a game you have no intention of finishing, Angel." As he leaned back the smirk resurfaced.

With the smile still there, he got up and retreated back to his table. For some strange reason I felt a little disappointed. It felt good having him close. I didn't like that feeling, not one little bit. I decided it was best to try and get through this meal as quickly as possible, so I could get back to work. I started tucking into my steak with a bit more vigour this time, but it was so damn good, all I wanted to do was savour each bite.

"So, what is your all-time favourite car?" he surprisingly asked.

I looked at him rather confused. "Me?"

"Yes," He chuckled. "If you could pick any car in the world that you would want as yours—regardless of price—what would it be?"

“Well,” I said eagerly. “I would have to say the Aston Martin DB9. It is, and always has been, my favourite car.”

Turning his mouth down, he nodded his head. “Not the very rare One-77 then?”

“No, it’s beautiful—don’t get me wrong, I just always seem to prefer the DB9, no matter what they bring out next. Mind you, I have got a real soft spot for the new Jaguar F-type. Beautiful car.”

He looked at me and smiled. “Good choice,” he said, plonking another piece of steak in his mouth. “I think you and I have more in common than you think.”

I huffed, thinking how ridiculous it sounded, but then a wave of unease surrounded me. Maybe we were very much alike. He uses women for sex and I’ve called him every name under the sun. I do the same with Brian, so what does that make me?

“Are you okay, you don’t look well?” he asked concerned.

“I’m fine.” I had to snap myself out of this. “I should get back to work now.” Placing my knife and fork down, I looked up at him. He stared back at me with worry, but summoned the waiter for the bill.

“What other viewings do you have this afternoon?”

“Just the one now that you’ve bought the penthouse. What are you planning on doing with that anyway, a quick turnaround for profit?” No matter what I was still intrigued with his intentions.

“I will with the other two. I think the penthouse will be mine. I’ve kind of grown out of my apartment now anyway. If you can get that sold for me, I’ll move in once the penthouse is complete. Besides, I’ll be practically a neighbour of yours. I can pop round for some sugar, or maybe even a coffee, if I run out.” He raised his eyebrow with a questioning look, which I chose to ignore.

“Well, when you’re ready to put it on for sale, let us know. You can send all the details in via email to me if you want?”

“Hmm, yes. Do you have a card?”

Grabbing my bag, I pulled out one of the many cards I have. I handed it to him and he stared for a moment.

“Is this your personal mobile?” he asked.

“No, it’s my work mobile, so no funny business okay?” I said a little too quickly.

His smirk grew wider just as the waiter handed him the bill. He quickly placed his card down and the waiter retreated to get the machine.

“Thank you for lunch, you were right, it was the best steak I have ever had.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it,” he smiled. “Maybe next time I get to take you to dinner.”

“I want you to know,” I said emphatically, “that what we have is strictly business. I have no intentions of going to dinner with you. If you want to buy and sell properties, fine, give me a call, send an email, but don’t ask me to go to dinner with you.”

There was no reaction. He just stared. “You know Jonathan is going to ask you out tonight?”

“What?” I asked, shocked. “Where did that come from?” Looking at him, I couldn’t believe how deadly serious he was.

“He’ll make up some excuse, a celebration of your performance today perhaps, but he will ask.”

“Can you read people’s minds now?” I wondered if this was another super-power he possessed.

“No, but I bet I know what you really think about me.”



“Oh please,” I said laughing, but I couldn’t help the slight panic inside me.

Luckily the waiter saved us by coming over with his machine. He took Seth’s card with a smile, as we all waited for the transaction to go through.

When all was done, Seth and I rose to leave, but not before he dropped two fifty pound notes on the table as a tip. No wonder they all know him by name here. The waiters must be fighting to get his table.

With a shake of my head, I walked towards the door. As we went I felt Seth’s hand on the curve of my back. It felt good. Way too good.

“Would you like me to escort you back to work, Angel?”

I was about to correct him with my name, but gave up. He obviously wasn’t going to quit it, and after all, he did buy me lunch. “It’s only round the corner, I think I’m good. Thanks again for lunch.”

“It was my pleasure, Miss Bradshaw. No doubt we’ll be seeing each other soon.”

He placed his hand out and I took it, letting the heat surge through me. He only touched my hand, but it felt like a volcano had erupted inside me.

He turned towards his chauffeur, who tipped his hat to me as Seth got in. I smiled and went on my way back to work. All the while I was walking I kept thinking over and over, *I hate him, I hate him, I hate him*. But then another voice kept shouting, *I want him, I want him, I want him!* This was just too crazy for words.

## CHAPTER 6

Once I got back into work, everyone looked up. A couple of people smiled and the normal two scowled at me. I can imagine how pissed some of them were that I managed to land a six digit sum of money for the business within three weeks of being here. Not to mention the commission I've personally made out of it.

“Angelina,” Shelly called. “Jonathan asked me to make sure you see him the minute you got back.”

I nodded to her, but felt the bad butterflies in my stomach. I couldn't help but feel there was a telling-off coming my way. “How does he seem?” I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. “Fine.”

It was then I remembered what happened when Seth turned up. “Oh yeah, thanks for helping me earlier. Seth the Asshole really screwed me over, and you never helped.”

“My dear, you were helping yourself out enough I feel,” she said, scolding me.

I sighed, knowing she was right. “Okay, fair point, but do you think he’s pissed at me?”

Motioning to Jonathan’s office, she smiled up at me. “Well, there’s only one way to find out.”

I looked over to his door and took a deep breath. “Here goes nothing.”

I knocked on the door timidly and heard his booming voice shouting at me to come in.

“Ah, there you are,” he said as I entered. “It would seem you’ve had quite the day today, Angel.” He smiled at me cheekily.

“Don’t you start; I’ve had enough of Seth the Ass... I mean Mr Jacobs calling me that all day.” I visibly relaxed. He was smiling and didn’t seem too pissed.

“I must say I was shocked at your outburst earlier. I didn’t think you talked to people like that.”

I shook my head. “Oh no, not at all Jonathan. Only him.”

“He likes you,” he observed.

“I think he likes a lot of women, Jonathan. That’s the problem.”

“Hmm,” he mused. “He rang just before you got here. He told me about the apartment he wants to sell, and said he only wanted you handling all his affairs from now on. It would seem no matter how rude you were to him; he wants to come back for more. I can’t believe I’m about to say this, but whatever it is you’re doing—keep it up.”

He beamed up at me, causing my giggles to bounce off the walls. With a swift push of his chair, he got up and came round to me for a hug. “I knew having you here was a good idea. Let’s go out tonight and celebrate your victory, shall we?”

I immediately froze, thinking of what Seth said.

“Have I said something wrong?” he asked, sensing my reaction.

“No, of course not. I’d love to. Can I ask Shelly and a couple of others to come also?” I wanted to ask so he didn’t think this was an intimate drink. I never thought Jonathan asked me here to woo me, but now that Seth has planted the seed of doubt, it’s made me wonder.

*Stupid Seth the Asshole!*

“Of course,” he quipped. “We’ll go to Antonio’s after work, yes?”

“Yes,” I answered. “That would be great.”

Today seemed to be my lucky day. I was on a roll for sure. I had a client at three-thirty to take to a house around the corner from our offices. It was a lovely Victorian two-up, two-down house in pristine condition. The couple who were looking loved it and made an offer on the spot. Once I got back, my phone rang, and I had another viewing at five-thirty with yet another couple and another Victorian house. Again, they loved it and made an offer. By the time six-thirty came around I had both offers accepted and one extremely happy boss. If I kept up with this, I’ll be able to retire in my forties.

“Brad?” I asked, a few minutes before leaving.

“Yes, Angelina?”

I could tell he got a kick out of this. “Are you coming for drinks in a bit? Jonathan, Shelly and Anthony are going.”

“Yes, I’m in for sure,” he said smiling.

Getting my desk ready and cleared for tomorrow, I waited eagerly in my chair for Jonathan to appear. As I sat there, twiddling my hair, a text appeared.

*Thinking about me?*

I had a damn good idea who this was from, but I thought I had better check anyway. I looked at my contacts list on the computer and sure enough, it was him.

*I told you not to play silly buggers with my work's mobile, I texted back.*

Pretty soon another appeared. *Then give me your personal number!*

I knew that was a bad idea, so replied with a one word answer. *No!*

It wasn't long before another one came through.

*Then I shall have to find out from someone else. Anyway, you didn't answer the question.*

Putting the phone back in my bag, I chose to ignore him and his silly questions. Shelly, in no time, quick-marched it over to my desk.

“Are you ready, Angel?” she said, giggling.

I shook my head exasperated. “Oh God, not you as well.”

Shelly looked at me like she had seen the cutest cat. “I think it's sweet.”

“Well I think he's a fucking pain in the arse. Seth the Asshole.”

The room fell silent as she stared a little. “You know you should rename him Seth the Dickhead.”

“Why?” I asked intrigued.

“Because then you can call him STD,” she blurted.

The enormous ruckus of laughter from our little corner caught the attention of everyone. That was just too funny for words.

“It's a deal. I love it, Shelly,” I said patting her on the shoulder.

She chuckled a little into her hand. “Well, I’m glad I could help.”

Within an instant, Jonathan appeared. “What’s this, starting the party without me?”

I shook my head, smiling. “No, of course not, Jonathan. Are you ready?”

“As I’ll ever be,” he piped.

The evil twins had already left, just leaving myself, Jonathan, Shelly, Brad, and Anthony. We all made sure all the lights were off and everything was locked up tight, before venturing off to Antonio’s.

It was busy; obviously a lot of Londoners finishing off their day and heading for the one place which will help them wind down.

Now that my working day was finished, I knew I could kick off my heels and enjoy myself. I felt happy about the outcome of today, despite the antics I had to put up with from STD. I had to chuckle again at Shelly’s suggestion. It seemed a more than appropriate name for him.

“I think champagne is in order after today,” Jonathan beamed proudly.

“Oh hell yes!” Shelly screamed.

“Antonio, can you get us three bottles of champagne over here?” Jonathan shouted.

Antonio snapped his head up and looked at us all with a bright smile. “Of course, Jonathan, coming right up.”

We waited for the champagne and I decided to have a look at my surroundings. There were a couple of hot guys—one in particular. He caught my eye immediately and smiled. I smiled back but quickly turned toward the bar to await my drink. The champagne was poured and we all clinked glasses.

“Well done today everyone, Angelina in particular for the big sales. It’s been a good day.”

“It certainly has,” Anthony said. “So, Brangelina, when are you two getting married? You know you have to now, don’t you?”

I rolled my eyes. “Oh yes of course. It’s only ever in the name, Anthony. Hey, Brad, how about tomorrow?”

Brad lifted his drink up in salute. “Definitely, I’ll be up for that. We’ll pop down the road to the local Town Hall and do it there.”

“You can’t tomorrow, you have work,” Jonathan scolded.

We all started laughing and everyone seemed contented and relaxed.

A couple of drinks later, I needed the ladies, so quickly ventured off to relieve myself. Once I was out the door, the hot guy was standing nearby.

He took a few seconds to look at me before saying anything. “Hello.”

“Hi,” I said back, noticing how cute his brown eyes were. “Do you normally accost women outside the ladies loo?”

He smiled a little with a slight tilt to his head. “Only ones with wonderfully curly hair.”

I laughed, wondering where all this was going. “That’s a great pick-up line, I bet it does wonders for you all the time.”

“Funnily enough, I try, but for some reason I keep getting rejected. Maybe I should try something else?”

“Yes, I think you should.” I smiled and briefly glanced over him. He was good-looking in a cute way. He had short brown hair, a cute button nose, and was dressed to impress with his tanned cargos and cream shirt.

“I haven’t seen you in here before. I think I would have noticed if I had.”

That snapped me out of my appraisal of him. “I have been in here before, but I only moved up here about three weeks ago, so I’m fairly new around these parts.”

“Ah,” he said in conclusion. “I’ve been away on holiday and only just got back. Where did you move up from, if you don’t mind me asking?”

I smiled, thinking to myself that he was too cute to be corrupted by me. “From Cornwall. I worked as an estate agent there, and was offered a job here. It was too good an opportunity to miss, so I moved.”

“So you must know Seth Jacobs then?” he asked.

I rolled my eyes for the second time this evening.

“I take that eye-rolling of yours to mean you’ve met him then?”

Did everyone know this guy? “I had the pleasure yesterday and again today, thank you.” He started laughing and handed his hand out to me.

“Paul Jacobs,” he said chuckling at my now bulging eyes.

“Noooo!” I protested. “Brother?” I asked.

He shook his head. “No, uncle would you believe.”

I was confused as hell. That couldn’t be. “Hold on a minute, that doesn’t sound right. You look so young.”

He laughed at my baffled expression. “I’m actually younger than he is.”

I gasped a little. “Oh my God, how does that work out?”

Paul rolled his eyes slightly. “Let’s just say my father liked to have children, even when he was in his fifties. I think it’s a family trait.”



“Oh,” I said, a little disappointed. This family had sex and bred like rabbits it would seem.

*I'm not a bunny, I'm not a bunny.*

“I’m nothing like my nephew though. He’s a little bit out there I think.”

I smiled at him. I think he could see my unease so decided to try and put my mind at rest.

“So what are we celebrating?”

I sighed and just blurted, “Well, STD bought a penthouse and two other apartments today. I also got offers on two other houses which were accepted. A pretty good day all round.”

Now it was his turn to look confused. “I’m sorry; did you just say, STD?”

Oh shit, what have I done? My face flushed a scarlet red causing a burst of laughter from Paul. “I’m sorry, it was a joke. I called him Seth the Asshole and my friend suggested Seth the Dickhead, so I could call him STD.” I felt really ashamed of myself, but everything I just said nearly had Paul on the floor with laughter.

“STD, that’s classic. Although, I don’t think Seth will find that funny at all.”

“No, I should imagine he won’t.” I smirked, joyful at the thought.

“So you never fell at his feet or anything? Normally women do.”

“No,” I said annoyed. “He really pisses me off.”

“I think I’m just a little bit in love with you,” he said winking at me. “So tell me, how did he react when he knew you weren’t going to drop at his feet?”

I sighed, feeling the frustration washing over me again. “He’s been harassing me. Winding me up something

chronic, and he won't stop telling me that he'll chase me down and have me one day."

"Really?" he asked shocked.

"Yes, really. He thinks I'm a challenge."

Paul's eyes widened slightly. "Wow, I thought I'd never see the day." He shook his head a little. "I tell you something now; Seth Jacobs has never, ever had to chase a woman. They all find him. He's like a magnet for them. It's very refreshing to see that not only have you not chased him, you've completely rebuffed him. I don't think he's going to like that, not one little bit. Sorry, can I ask your name?"

I smiled at Paul eagerly. "Angelina Bradshaw."

He nodded his head with a smirk. "Well, it's really good to meet you, Angelina Bradshaw. I would offer you a drink, but I see you are already catered for."

"Yes, but thank you for the offer."

"No worries. You work for Jonathan I take it?"

I nodded, realising he was as familiar with the trade as Seth was. "Yes, that's right."

"Would it be too forward of me to ask you for a coffee sometime this week?"

I didn't think that at all. He was hot, and polite. A trait Seth could learn from.

"Of course not, that would be lovely."

He smiled, making me feel a little guilty. He seemed nice, and I didn't do nice. "Great, have you got your phone on you? I can give you my number and you can text or call me when you have a lunchtime free."

My personal phone was in my pocket, so I grabbed it and punched the number in he read out. I told him that I had better head back to the crowd and he said he would look forward to my call.

As I got back, Shelly looked at my smiley face. “What took you so long? You haven’t been up to no good in the toilets have you?”

I thought back to Brian and I at the wedding and I cringed. “No, of course not. I bumped into STD’s uncle of all people.”

Her eyes went wide. “Shit, no kidding?”

“Yep,” I said taking a swig of my newly filled champagne glass. I looked over to where he was, and sure enough, he was back at the table with his friends. He raised his glass to me and I leaned in towards Shelly. “In fact, he’s over there,” I whispered, raising my glass back. I saw the men he was with eyeing me, and then they turned his attention away by talking to him.

I smiled at Shelly and she gushed a little.

Turning back to the bar, I barely had time to swig another sip of my drink when I felt his hot breath behind my ear. I knew immediately it was him. His smell, his presence, everything about him I suddenly was in tune to.

“How come you know my uncle?” he whispered.

Turning back around, I smiled at him as his blue eyes burned into mine. “I had the pleasure of meeting him by the ladies loo.”

His eyes widened and I inwardly chuckled at his reaction. “He’s a very nice, polite guy your uncle. You could certainly learn a thing or two from him.” I could see his fists tightening at his sides and I was happy that—for a change—the boot was on the other foot. “We’re meeting for coffee one day this week,” I sang, deciding to have him hook, line, and sinker.

“Really?” he asked. “We shall see about that.” With a turn of his heels, he stormed off in Paul’s direction.

“What did STD want?” Shelly asked.

I sighed, but couldn't hide my delight. "It would seem, for some reason, he's not too happy about his uncle Paul and I meeting for coffee sometime this week." As I spoke, I spied him sitting next to Paul, but pretty soon a heated debate seemed to ensue. I hoped Paul would give him what for. He needed taking down a peg or two.

"Wait a minute, did I hear right, that's his uncle?"

She was obviously completely oblivious before when I said it. "Yeah," I said laughing. "It would seem that playboying runs in families. Paul's father had children in later years."

Shelly nodded her head. "Ah." She looked over to Paul and Seth, and saw their heated discussion. "It certainly looks like he's pissed." She laughed a little but turned back to the bar.

For some strange reason I was feeling a little warm inside that he felt some of the anger I did around him. He always looked as cool as a cucumber and it just made me hate him even further.

The feeling didn't last very long when a group of girls, in mid-discussion, interrupted Seth and Paul's conversation by landing practically on Seth's lap. He smiled sweetly at them and caressed one of their backs—at least I think it was her back.

He looked towards me and the fucker grinned like a Cheshire cat. What the fuck? Does he really think I care?

I turned around so I didn't have to watch the spectacle and carried on drinking my champagne. I was thinking that two could play that game, when I found myself wandering over to Jonathan. I knew Seth didn't like Jonathan liking me, so I thought I would use that to my advantage.

"Hi Jonathan," I purred.

He took one swift perusal of me and smiled his sexy grin. "Angelina, my favourite girl," he whispered in my ear.

He placed his hand on my back and I instinctively edged closer to him. I knew Seth was watching. I could almost feel the burn at the back of my head. Now all I needed to do was find some random guy and kiss him. Could I really do that?

*Why am I even caring for fucks sake?!*

“You did really well today my girl,” he said, pouring another glass for me. “I’m so glad I asked you here. You’re an excellent seller and I knew that about you from the start. Here’s to a budding relationship with Francis and Co.” Jonathan raised his glass with a wink.

“Thank you, Jonathan, that means a lot,” I beamed, clinking his glass.

Leaning his elbows on the bar, Jonathan regarded me for a moment. “Have you spoken to your mum and dad recently? How are they getting on?”

“Fine,” I said smiling. “They’re missing the fact that I’m not around anymore, but I’ll visit them when I can. You never know, maybe they can come to London.”

“Well, they’re always welcome to stay at my place if that happens.”

I looked at him, smiled, and he smiled back. Our eyes suddenly locked for a moment. I’m not sure if it was the alcohol, or the fact that he’s the sexiest mature man I have ever seen, but I knew that any other circumstances, that split second thought, could have got me into a lot of trouble.

Thankfully we were interrupted by a presence in the corner of our eyes. I turned, but wasn’t pleased by who interrupted us.

“Mr Jacobs,” I said with sarcastic enthusiasm. I had to smile inside though. He didn’t look too happy.

“Angel. Are we enjoying ourselves this evening?”

I sighed, wanting him to see how exasperated I was. “It’s been perfect up to now.”

Jonathan gave me a reproachful look and turned towards Seth. “Mr Jacobs, it’s been quite an eventful day.” He smiled and Seth followed suit.

“Yes, it has.” Seth smirked and raised an eyebrow at me. “I was hoping to speak with the lovely young Angel here, if I can steal her away from you for a few minutes?”

“Not at all,” he said gesturing with his hands to me. “Steal away.”

I gave Jonathan a dirty look and he just shrugged and turned to Brad. “Haven’t you got some bunnying to do?” I asked, looking towards the group of girls. They didn’t look none too pleased by Seth’s sudden interest in me either. “They don’t look very happy. I shouldn’t keep you... in fact, where’s your uncle? He’s so much nicer to talk to.”

Seth shook his head with a sarcastic smile. “First of all, bunnying? That isn’t even a word; second of all, those ladies will keep. They won’t mind waiting for me, I can assure you that. And thirdly, I don’t think it’s a good idea to let you speak with my uncle.”

What? Did I just hear him correctly? “Excuse me, where do you get off?” I huffed.

“Oh, believe me when I say, I never need to *get off*. I have plenty of women offering to do that for me.” The impish grin soon appeared.

I shook my head in distaste. “You’re disgusting, do you know that?”

“Yes, but I’d rather be disgusting with you. Just say the word and I’ll ditch those girls and have you screaming my name back at your place within minutes.”

I didn’t like it, but his presence, and the drink had me wanton. It would be so easy to say yes to this man. Maybe if I did, he would leave me the fuck alone. He said I was a challenge. I could give in and then he’ll be off onto his next target. The thought was tempting, but I hated him too much to relax my ground.

“You seriously have a chip on the shoulder issue, buddy. You really think you’re the biggest thing since sliced bread, don’t you? And seriously, screaming your name within minutes. Come on.” I rolled my eyes for good measure.

“Oh baby, I’m definitely going to crack your cookie, no matter how much you protest, it will happen. And yes, I bet I can have you screaming my name. You’ll feel how good I am inside you, love it, and I’ll leave you wanting more. I can guarantee it.”

My goodness it was tempting to find out. “Well, mister, this cookie isn’t for sale in order for you to crack. Go back to your bunnies. I think they’ll explode if you don’t return to them soon.”

“I’m in no hurry,” he said smiling.

“I can see that,” I replied, completely exasperated by him. “Anyway, let’s get to the point: your uncle, why do you give a damn about me meeting him?”

He leaned in closer sending my pulse into overdrive. “It’s bad etiquette and I told him that.”

No matter what I couldn’t give into him. “What’s bad etiquette?”

“To go after someone I’m after. It’s just not what friends and family members do to each other. I told him that much.”

I still couldn’t help myself. I was way too intrigued. “Oh yes, and what did he say?”

“He said that I had a cheek considering there is any number of girls I could pick. He said you were nice and he didn’t want me corrupting you.”

*If only his uncle knew!*

“He said that, did he?” I had to feel a little smug at that.

“Yes, and don’t smile like that. No matter how much you gush and think he’s a great guy, it ain’t happening.

Period.”

If we weren't in a very public place I think I would have smacked him one by now. “You're such an asshole.”

Seth's face looked just as frustrated as mine. “And you're the most stubborn woman I have ever met in my life.”

Shaking my head, I pointed at him. “Not stubborn, just not interested.”

Within an instant his features changed. He was back to being his smug self. “Now that's not true and you know it. You can't wait until I get between those silky thighs of yours,” he said whispering in my ear. “I assure you that you won't be disappointed.”

I shut my eyes, letting the flame take over. He just felt so good. Way too good.

“Hmm, you smell of champagne and roses.”

He gently bit my earlobe, making me shudder under his touch. I really hated my body at that moment.

Pulling his head back, he noticed my huge fuck up. He smiled knowingly and it instantly made me cringe.

“You never answered my text?” he said breaking me from my thoughts.

Thank God he never said anything. “What text?”

“The one where I asked if you were thinking of me. Were you thinking about me?”

I was, but I certainly wasn't about to divulge that to him. His ego's about the size of Mount Everest. He didn't need me to add a few more feet in height to it.

“No,” I said twiddling my hair.

“Do you do that a lot?” he asked

“What?”



“Twiddle your hair? You were doing it the today at the viewings.”

“Was I?” I asked bemused.

“Yes. It makes me want to twiddle it around my fingers and pull you towards me.”

I knew what he was doing and I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction. “I do it when I'm bored,” I said, trying to act it.

That sexy eyebrow of his raised itself again. “Oh really?”

He smiled, a crooked smile and it was then I noticed something different about him. He had a dimple. I was a sucker for dimples. Something else to hate him over.

“Yes really. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have drinking with my friends and colleagues to continue. I'm sure your company will be pleased you're *not* leaving with me tonight.” I was about to turn and remembered something else to say. “And another thing. Paul and I met, we like each other and I *will* be going for coffee with him this week—and there's not a damn thing you can do about it.”

I was hoping he'd get mad, but he didn't. He simply smiled and shook his head. “As I said, we'll see about that.” With a swift turn, he left.

Contriving, malicious, vindictive son of a bitch! I really didn't know who he thought he was.

He went back to his bunnies, smiling that perfect grin of his. His uncle looked like he was enjoying the show. He even winked at me.

“So, what did Mr Jacobs want?” Anthony asked.

“He wanted to know if he could take me back to my place and make me scream.”

“He what?” Anthony blurted. I could hear Shelley laughing her head off on the other side of me.

“The look on your face, Anthony. Priceless,” Shelley chuckled. “Anyway, what did you say?”

I could still see Seth staring at me. It was an intense stare. He didn't seem to want to move his eyes away. He was capturing me, and I was quickly becoming his prisoner.

“I told him to go back to his bunnies. He said that he didn't want me to go out with his uncle Paul.”

“He can't say that,” Shelly and Anthony said together, making me laugh.

“I know, right? I told him that I will go out with who I damn well please, and that me and him will be going for coffee.”

“What did he say?” Anthony probed.

“He said, and I quote, ‘We'll see about that’, and walked off. Little prick. He thinks that because he's after me, that means his uncle should clear the path for him. He said that friends and relatives don't do that to each other.”

Anthony nodded his head in agreement. “That is true. I'll give him that, but it doesn't look like he's spoilt for choice over there.” He pointed towards the group and all our eyes followed.

“Exactly what Paul and I tried to bury into that thick skull of his.” I shook my head, annoyed at all the girls making a fool of themselves.

I turned around again, not wanting to see Seth for the rest of the night. I took my glass and downed it in one go. “Let's talk about something else please. I'm bored of talking about STD now.”

Shelly giggled and Anthony just screwed up his face. “Never mind,” was all I said, swiftly getting on to other subjects.

## CHAPTER 7

The evening went in really well, after deliberately avoiding any eye contact with Seth. We all joked, laughed, and roundabout the time when I started to wobble slightly on my feet, I felt it was time to get home.

“I’ll walk with you,” Jonathan said, as we all said our goodbyes to one another.

I gave him a polite smile and placed my hand on his shoulder. “It’s only across the road Jonathan. There’s no need.”

“I want to. Besides, I think your parents would never forgive me if they knew I wasn’t looking after you here.”

“You know, I’m not a little girl anymore, Jonathan.”

He looked me up and down, and smiled. “No, that you most certainly are not.”

I chuckled at his cheeky grin. “You behave yourself there, Mr Francis. Anyone would think you were flirting with me.”

He nodded his head. “That I am, my sweets, but that’s as far as it will go. Now, come on. Let’s get you home.”

He took my hand, but I grabbed it and pulled it around my shoulders. I knew what he said was true, but I felt safe and warm around Jonathan.

He guided me across the road, making sure I got my key into the lock properly. I didn’t ask him in, and he didn’t make any noises that he wanted to either. I knew what we had now was a strictly professional and platonic relationship. We both had to make sure we kept it that way.

“Goodnight, Angelina.”

“Goodnight, Jonathan,” I said, smiling as I shut the door.

I was in my bathroom getting ready for bed when I heard music coming from my bag. It was a strange, alien sound. I recognised the song though. It was “Angels” by Robbie Williams.

I knew immediately who it was, and I didn’t know how, but that little fucker had somehow managed to steal my phone and change my ringtone. I was going to kill him.

I tried hunting through my bag and picked my work phone out, but it wasn’t coming from my work phone, it was still coming from my bag. I routed through until eventually I came across an iPhone 5—which by way—was definitely not mine.

I answered with an annoying hello and waited to hear his voice.

“You took your time answering. Did I interrupt anything?”

“You,” was all I said.

“Yes me. Aren’t you glad to hear from me?”

I shook my head in frustration. I couldn’t believe the levels this guy went to. “Are you some crazed stalker or something? Do I need to call 999 on your ass?”

“No, I just wanted to hear your voice. Did you like the ringtone?”

I smiled despite myself. “You really are something else, aren’t you?”

“Oh baby, you ain’t seen nothing yet. Do you want me to come over? I can bring my game of Twister with me. We can play it naked. Now that would be fun.”

The laughter came. I couldn’t help it. I didn’t like the guy, but he did have some sort of morbid, witty sense of humour.

“I’m sure your bunnies would have something to say about that,” I said after calming down a little.

“They’re certainly not my bunnies. However, you’re my angel, Angel. Now, quit playing hard to get and let me devour that beautiful body of yours. I take it you’re home alone, that you got back okay?”

“Yes,” I replied. “Jonathan made sure of that for me.” The smile I had at his silence was revealed only because he wasn’t here to witness it.

“He’s not there with you, is he?” I could hear the eagerness in his voice.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“Oh Angel, you’re breaking my heart here.”

“I didn’t realise you had one, dear Seth.”

I heard a sexy sigh on the other end of the line. “God you sound sexy when you say my name.”

“Really? You like that—do you... Seth?”

“You’re going to be the death of me woman. I’m telling you now; I’m going to crack that cookie of yours even if I have to use the biggest goddamned hammer you ever seen in your life.”

My laughter erupted again. He certainly had his charm.

“Now, Angel, please tell me he’s not there?”

For some reason I felt I had to put him out of his misery. “No, he’s not here. I’m all on my own.” I heard him sigh deeply, but I couldn’t help myself still. “Well, apart from Jerry of course.”

“Jerry? Who’s Jerry?”

It was hard keeping the laughter at bay but I managed it somehow. “Well, he’s the only man in my life at the moment. He’s loving, caring, doesn’t say a lot, but he’s loyal.”

He sighed again. “You have a dog called Jerry?”

“No, he’s a cockatiel.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” His tone was so serious I knew he meant every word he said.

“Well, now that you’ve made sure that I have no male company of the human kind with me, you can go back to your bunnies. Now hop along, playboy,” I chuckled.

He started laughing again, and my pulse sky-rocketed. “How do you know if I’m with any of them?”

On instinct I fell silent for a moment trying to get an inkling of where he could be. I couldn’t hear anything in the background, so he obviously wasn’t at the bar anymore. “Well,” I began. “I wouldn’t have thought it would be your thing not to have at least one of them with you.”

“Are you curious, Angel?”

“No, not at all.” I was of course.

“Not even just a little?” His voice was playful.

“Oh for God’s sake, just tell me if it means that much to you.”

“I thought as much. I’m actually in the Phantom—on my own. I’m going back home alone, too.”

I suddenly pictured a little version of me doing the can-can and shaking my ass. I haven't got a clue where that came from.

"Why are you on your own? I didn't think you ever went home alone."

"Normally no, but I have this huge problem you see."

"Oh yes," I said probing him for an answer.

"I met this girl yesterday. She hates my guts and I can't stop thinking about her. To be honest with you, she does my head in—but I keep coming back for more."

I was suddenly stunned into silence. My heart was beating like a drum—so much so—I was starting to think he could hear it through the phone.

"Angel?" he asked, worry in his voice.

"Yes."

"Have you fallen off your chair?"

I couldn't help but giggle. "No, but you'd like me to, wouldn't you?"

I heard Seth gasp. "Oh baby, I would never want you to hurt that gorgeous derriere of yours."

I couldn't believe I was grinning like an idiot now. "Oh really? Do you make it a habit of looking at my derriere?" Great, now I'm encouraging him.

"Oh yes, every chance I get. It's very round and peachy. I think I'd very much like to bite it."

My laughter erupted easily. The champagne and his voice mixed together was too much to resist.

"Am I beginning to see a hint of a crack somewhere, my Angel?"

"No!" I blurted. I was still determined not to give in.

"But you're starting to like me though, aren't you?"

“No,” I said, in mild protest.

“You can admit it to me you know? I won’t tell anyone.”

I laughed again. He was just too much. “I’m going to hang up now.”

“Oh come on, Angel. Just answer me. You know you want to.”

I didn’t think I could do this anymore. I think he would see me crack. “I’m going. Goodnight, Seth.”

“From now on I forbid you to call me, Mr Jacobs. My name on your tongue sounds just too delicious.”

“I’m going now, Mr Jacobs,” I said with a chuckle.

“You need to be spanked. Were you like this as a child?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” I was being way too seductive and I knew it.

“I think you know the answer to that, my angel.”

“Goodnight... Seth.”

“And a very goodnight to you, Angel. Dream about me tonight. You know you want to.”

With a click of the phone, I hung up and found myself staring at it. It was only then I realised what was in my hand still. He had this habit of conveniently making me forget where I am, who I am, and what the bleeding hell I’m supposed to be doing. I searched for his number and sure enough, it was the only one there. I decided to text as I knew he would never let me off the phone otherwise.

*By the way, why have I got this phone?*

As usual it wasn’t long before a reply came beeping through.

*So I can contact you. You said you didn’t want any funny business on your work phone, and you wouldn’t give me your number, so I improvised.*



I shook my head, but replied back. *But this is an iPhone 5. You didn't need to give me such an expensive phone. I'll give it back to you, and let you know my mobile number if it's that important to you, but don't go buying me phones!*

I was about to put the phone down when it pinged again.

*I want you to have it. I think you're the kind of girl that deserves the best of everything. No matter how much you hate me. ;)*

I didn't know how to possibly answer something like that. I knew I had to give him the phone back, but I couldn't help the butterflies now fluttering violently in my stomach. It was a strange sensation. I never get butterflies—over anyone. The thought frightened me to death. I had only met him yesterday and yet he seemed to have this vice-like hold over me. It was such an uncomfortable feeling of having no control. Seth had the control and I knew it. Fighting him was going to be a losing battle—and I don't like losing.

His name was suddenly swimming around in my head.

*Seth.*

It seemed to whisper off my tongue, making me feel light-headed and wanton. For some reason, every time I said his name, my fingers seemed to dance lightly on my chest. My eyes would close and I would picture his smiling face, his sexy dimple, and those pools of blue eyes, willing me to come to bed with him. Showing me just how much he wants to take me.

My eyes immediately snapped open violently, and before I knew it, I was panicking. I had to give myself a thoroughly good internal hiding. I can't, and won't think about him. It's just that simple. I have to do something else to distract myself. Maybe some reading, that should do it. I'll get lost in someone else's world and then I don't have to think about my own.

And that's exactly what I did.

## CHAPTER 8

For the next month, Seth actively pursued me. He would make appointments nearly every other day, and his flirty banter and my flippant comebacks were all we had to share. He was wearing me down and he knew it. He would ask me out, and I would say no. He would text me all the time, and for some unknown reason I kept texting back. He was forever in my thoughts and I hated him for it. I even tried giving him back his phone a handful of times, but every time we finished a viewing, that song would start to play in my bag. I couldn't for the life of me figure out how he did it.

In that month I tried calling Paul, and all it did was go to voicemail all the time. I was wondering what the hell was going on there. I didn't imagine this; he did seem keen to go out with me. I couldn't understand why he wasn't answering his phone.

It was now Thursday morning and all was quiet. Jonathan was in a spirited mood, which somehow lifted my own. I had been wallowing a little, but today was a new day. I had my first client at ten o'clock and all seemed free up until two. I started thinking about Paul again and thought I would try one last time to call him.

I retrieved his number from my phone and tried calling. It went straight to voicemail again leaving me sighing with frustration. I thought about leaving a message, but decided against it. It was time to just leave well alone.

“What have you got today, Angelina?” Jonathan was hovering over my desk, light dancing off his silver hair.

“It’s a bit slow today. I have a ten o’clock appointment at Lucan Place. It’s a fixer upper.”

His eyebrow raised. “Really? Who’s the client?”

“His name’s Mr Hare.” I looked at Jonathan for some spark of recognition, but his face seemed impassive.

“Not heard of him before. Do you know much about him?” Sitting at the edge of my desk, his hands clasped together on his lap.

“No. I didn’t get to speak with him. His secretary rang the appointment through yesterday.”

Jonathan’s lips immediately curved down a little, but he rose and walked back to his office. “Okay, Angelina. Let me know how you get on.”

I smiled sweetly. “No worries, Jonathan.”

Once I gathered all my belongings, I made my way down towards Lucan Place. The weather was cloudy and dull today, but at least it wasn’t raining.

As I started down the quieter streets—and nearing Lucan Place—I heard a phone buzz. I knew it wasn’t my personal

phone, or my works phone, so there was only one person this could be.

Pulling the iphone out, I looked at the screen. Sure enough there was a message.

*Did you dream about me last night, my angel?*

I couldn't help the big stupid grin plastered on my face. He'd been texting me that same sentence ever since that night he gave me the mobile.

I was so busy focusing on his text, and how I was going to answer, that I didn't realise I was being watched.

"I take it that smile is for me."

Looking up, I nearly jumped out of my skin. Seth was standing there as brass as anything. Smiling that cocky, sexy smile of his.

"You!" I shouted. His smile broadened and immediately my back was up. He saw a weakness in me and I hated him for it.

"You seem to be saying that a lot lately."

"So you're Mr Hare, ha, ha, very funny." I shifted past him towards the door of the flat, as his chuckles radiated around me.

"I thought you would have realised. You seem to have a fetish for rabbits."

As I opened the flat door, I turned to bite his head off. "I only mention it because you seem to like hanging around them a lot." I pushed the door wide and edged myself towards it, to let him pass. He took a few steps, halting once he was face to face with me. He came up so close that I felt as though the wind had been knocked out of me. I pushed myself back and I couldn't help the small gasp that escaped me. STD smiled at my reaction. Again, I couldn't seem to hide my obvious want.

“But I’m only interested in one.” He smiled, drinking in my whole face.

That was all it took to realise where I was and what an asshole he was. “I’m going to repeat this one more time for the record. I am not—nor will I ever be—your bunny.” I shifted my weight from under him. Despite how angry I felt, feeling him so close to me was making feel things I didn’t want to feel.

“No, you’re not a bunny. You’re a cookie. I think we already established that a long time ago. I just wanted to see if the cracks were forming yet.”

I was halfway up the stairs when he said this. I turned around to shout something back at him, but my mind went blank. I’m not a woman of few words. I can say what I mean when I want to. I have always been able to handle things—but lately—what with Cruella and this handsome bastard in front of me, I can’t seem to structure a bleeding sentence together.

With a shake of my head, I swiftly turned and walked the remainder of the stairs. I could hear Seth’s footsteps and could feel his eyes were upon me. It made me excited and nervous all at the same time.

I got the apartment door and pushed the key through. Seth’s hot breath was now behind my ear. “Have you lost your tongue?” he whispered.

It took all my willpower not to just let go and sink my body into him. Let him do whatever the hell he wanted to me. Luckily for me, my phone saved me from making a big mistake.

“I have to answer this. Excuse me,” I said, reaching into my bag. It was Jonathan.

“Angelina, hi—are you okay? I’m a bit worried about this new client and just wanted to make sure he’s not a bit of a weirdo or anything.”

I instantly chuckled, thinking he was bang on. “I think you are definitely right about that, Jonathan, but you already know who this person is.”

“Really?” Surprise filled his voice and I couldn’t help laugh at his tone.

“Yes, it’s actually Mr Jacobs for the viewing.” Seth snapped his head round to look at me and smiled his devilish grin.

“Then why did he call himself Mr Hare?”

I couldn’t help the giggles that formed. “It was a joke. He seems to have a thing for bunnies you see.” Seth smirked and raised his eyebrow. I couldn’t help but smile back.

“Okay then, I’ll let you go. Don’t want to keep Mr Jacobs waiting—or for this viewing, Mr Hare.”

I rolled my eyes. “Of course not, Jonathan. That would be sacrilege.”

“Eh, stop the sarcasm, Angelina. It doesn’t suit you. I’ll see you when you get back. Take care now.” He hung up, releasing me back to the sexy beast now staring at me.

“Do you know your laugh is the sexiest thing I have ever heard in my life? You should definitely do that more often.”

I instantly turned around so I didn’t have to face him anymore. Instead I took in the tired looking apartment. It had definitely seen better days. You certainly had to look past all of it, and have an imagination for how it could potentially look once it’s been done up. “As you can see, this definitely needs working on.” I turned my face around to look at him, but all I could see was his eyes on me. He walked a few steps towards me and my reaction was to walk a few steps back. He looked like he was a man on a mission and it both scared and excited me all at once.

Soon, my back was against the wall and I had nowhere to go. I thought Seth would stop, but he just kept coming. I could feel the hairs rise on the back of my neck. I could feel my breathing harsh and unforgiving. My heart racing like a band of a thousand drums.

Before I could react he was there—inches away from my lips. All he had to do was lean in and that would be it. I wouldn't be able to fight it. I'm not sure I even wanted to at that moment. I looked at his lips for what seemed like the longest time. My eyes trailed over to his sexy stubble. All I had to do was reach my hand up and touch the rough edges of his skin. To feel his tiny hairs upon my delicate fingers. But I knew that if I did, I would be lost.

“I don't like the fact that Jonathan can make you laugh so naturally like that, and I can't. I wish I could make you laugh, instead of you hating me so much. Why do you keep fighting this, Angel? Why won't you just give in and be mine?” His hot breath was seeping into my mouth, just waiting—longing for more.

“Because I don't want to be—” I began, before he stopped me.

“I get it; you don't want to be my bunny. I've already told you. You're more than that to me. Why is that so difficult to understand? You drive me crazy.”

I looked into those pools of his and could see my eyes reflected back. Right then I felt vulnerable. There has only ever been one time I felt like that, and I vowed to never let myself get in that position again.

“You know if I kissed you now, there isn't a damn thing you could do to stop me. I could take you in my arms whenever I wanted and I know you would give in to my touch.”

The madness erupted. I couldn't believe how brazen he was being. I knew what he said was right, and he knew that I knew it, but I'd be damned if I let him see me give in. “If

you do that I'll scream the place down." I looked into his eyes, telling him I meant business, but all he did was chuckle.

"You're one stubborn lady, my angel. It will take some time, but I'll get there in the end."

I was losing resilience. There only seemed to be one question floating around in my head right now. "Why me?"

It came out without meaning to. It was almost as if I was pleading. He looked deeply into my eyes like he was searching for something. It was almost as if he was, too, trying to find the answer to my question.

"What?" he finally said, breaking away somewhat.

"Why me, why go to all this trouble over me? You have countless of girls and yet you're here, pursuing me. Aren't you even interested in this apartment?"

He stood firm, not letting me drop my gaze. "Of course," he said, stepping away. "Lead on, Cookie." He winked and ushered me into the living room like nothing had happened.

Shaking my head, I had to gather momentum. It was very hard to switch from a wanton hussy to career girl within seconds.

So he couldn't see my reaction, I walked in front of him and closed my eyes. I took a deep breath and started my run down of the place. We went through the rooms, one by one, and all the time Seth was just humming his approval and smiling.

By the time I was finished, I felt physically and mentally exhausted. My body had this uncanny knack of being so aware of him around me that it was on constant high alert.

"You seem tired—and maybe just a little bit sad." He seemed to know me better than I knew myself. Something else to be deathly afraid of.



“I’m fine,” was all I said. “Have you seen enough?” He stood with his hands in his pockets just studying me for a while. His smirk returned and I just shook my head. “You’re impossible, do you know that?” I immediately remembered Paul and couldn’t help myself from asking. “Have you got Paul’s office number? I’ve tried calling him a couple of times and it just goes straight to voicemail.”

His smile cranked up a notch. “It does, does it?”

Tapping my foot, I laid my hand on my hip. “Yes, so what’s his number?”

He paced the floor a little, looking everywhere but me. “I have already told you—it’s not going to happen. Why can’t you just leave this endless pursuit of trying to go out with my uncle just to get back at me? It’s not fair on him you know.”

It didn’t take long for my nostrils to flare in anger. “You bastard. How dare you say that.” Shit, who am I kidding? He was right. I really like Seth, and Paul was just a distraction. A great distraction nonetheless, but it wasn’t fair on him. I knew I couldn’t have Seth, but Paul was ever so nice.

Damn, this was so confusing. I didn’t know what else to do so I just carried on ranting.

“You can’t dictate who I can, or can’t be with—and you can’t dictate who Paul wants to be with either. It’s not your decision to make.” I began shouting a little, all my composure slipping away into the cracks of this apartment. Stripping me bare to the one man I wished I could get out of my damn head.

Before I could keep going, he stopped me. All it took was his lips upon mine and I was gone. At first it was gentle, but hurried. Soon the kiss turned more aggressive as I wedged my fingers round the back of his head, pulling him deeper and deeper.

His mouth was hot and inviting. His tongue tantalising the tip of mine—I was falling—falling into a world of Seth Jacobs and right now I didn't care to climb back up. My head was spinning, and my eyes clasped shut, just letting the feeling of him close to me take over. His hands were on my waist, but very soon he moved them up my back and around my neck. He had one hand holding me there and another had a fistful of my hair. He groaned into my mouth and I thought I was going to explode with want.

I knew I would give in if he wanted me. I knew he would be able to take me, right here, right now. I had to get away. I had to break free from him.

Pushing him away our eyes locked with heated desire. I shook my head, trying to stop this feeling, trying to shake it away.

“I can't,” was all I said, my body so breathless, I thought I would pass out. “I can't do this.” I pushed him off me and ran. It was forbidden to leave a client alone in a property, but I couldn't stay. I had to get away—I have to get away.

I could suddenly hear the sound of “Angels” coming from my bag. Over and over I could hear Robbie Williams' voice telling me he was loving angels instead. That damn phone. I was supposed to give it back to him ages ago.

The sound stopped after a while followed by a message. I took it out and read it. It was only one word—one single, solitary word that is used a thousand times a day to let people know they regret what they did.

*Sorry.*

I walked into the office, breathless and tired. My feet ached and my body wasn't far behind. I saw Hyacinth screw up her face when she saw me. It was almost as if she had seen the most disgusting thing in the world. “What you looking at?” I snapped. I didn't care anymore. Her face was a picture of shock. She didn't say anything—I think

she knew I meant business—she just stared blankly back at me.

I looked over at Victor Meldrew and saw him shaking his head. “And you can shove your attitude up your arse an all.” I marched over to my desk to three sets of smiling eyes. Shelly, Anthony, and Brad could hardly contain their excitement at my outburst.

Shelly leaned over her desk with a whisper. “I don’t know what’s gotten in to you, but you go girl.”

I quickly remembered her attitude lately, and as swiftly as I was in my seat, I was out of it. “Come on, Shelly—you’re coming with me.” Pulling her out of her chair, I headed for the door. She looked stunned.

“Where are we going?”

I let go of her arm and she hurried along beside me like a child about to receive a present. I took her to a coffee house and bought her a latte.

“I have a client in thirty minutes, Angelina.”

“This won’t take long.” I took a deep breath and continued. “What happened between you and Brad?” Her eyes immediately fell to the floor like she was ashamed. I touched her hand to let her know it was okay. “You can tell me you know. I won’t say anything.”

She looked back up, but bit her lip. “I know. I don’t know how it happened, it just did. I like him as a friend, but nothing more than that. Now it’s just too weird between us. We hardly talk—we can’t even look at each other in the eyes, it’s so awkward.”

Sipping my coffee, I regarded her for a moment. “You had sex.”

Her eyes snapped to mine. “No, we just kissed. We were both really intoxicated and on the way back in the taxi he put his arm around me—and the next thing I knew—we

were full on snogging in the back of the cab. God, it's so embarrassing.”

I nudged her with my arm a little. “Come on, Shelly, it'll be okay. It was only a kiss.” The moment I said it, I knew how wrong I was. For me, what Seth and I just did wasn't just a kiss. It felt so much more than that. I could still feel his body pressed against mine. Still feel his hot breath sucking up my own like he was trying to entice my soul into him. That kiss could never be just a kiss. It was that one moment in a lifetime that I knew I would never forget. I have kissed guys before and it has been just that. I can't even remember any of my first kisses—but I'll always remember his.

“I know we'll have to talk at some point, I think we've just been trying to avoid that awkward moment where one doesn't know what the other wants.” Her anxiety pulled me out of my own situation as I let her words sink in.

“So you don't like him like that?”

Shelly shook her head. “Well, no. We have been friends for so long. I don't want to lose that. Plus he's my colleague, so it's not a good idea anyway.”

“I hear ya.” I took another sip of my coffee and placed it back down. “Why don't you ask him out for a drink tonight and tell him how you feel? If it's that bad that you can't talk to one another, then text—or even email. I understand that it's hard for you to ask in the office. Too many ears and all that, but no one will know if you send him a message. It's got to be done, Shelly. I've noticed there's tension, and if I have, others will do, too.”

She sipped her coffee and nodded her head. “You're right. I have to do something.”

“Good,” I answered. I thought that was going to be the end of it, but I was wrong.

“What happened at the viewing?”

“What?” I snapped, a little too noticeably.

“You seem stressed out. I assume you had a bad viewing.”

I saw her genuine worry, so I gave her a gentle smile. “Yes, sorry. I had a viewing with a Mr Hare, but guess who it was instead?”

She squealed a little. “Oh, was it STD?”

“The one and only.” I couldn’t help shaking my head with surprise.

She started laughing loudly. “He called himself Mr Hare, how funny. What did he do? He must have said, or done something because you’ve never once snapped at the evil twins before. You’ve always been so good at just ignoring them. They deserve it of course, but what’s changed?”

“He kissed me.” Now it was my turn to lower my eyes in shame.

“Really, what was it like? I bet it was hot—was it hot?”

I looked back up at her and nodded. “Yes, a bit too fucking hot. I hate myself for it.”

“But why?” Her face was a picture of concern. Her little crinkles at the top of her forehead were perfectly formed as she stared at me with worry.

“Because he’s all wrong for me, Shelly. You’ve seen how he is—hell, you even heard of his reputation before you met the guy.”

Shelly looked a little confused. “I know, but I thought you didn’t date anyway. He’s perfect for you, isn’t he? Well, I don’t mean literally, I just meant that you’re both not looking for anything serious.”

I didn’t know how to explain myself to her. What she said was right, but this situation was different. She seemed to see something in me as her eyes sparkled in a smile.

“Hold on a minute, you like him don’t you? I mean *really* like him?”

I wanted to argue. I wanted to shout and scream for her to shut up—that what she was saying was wrong—but I couldn’t.

“Yes.” I said the word before my brain engaged. I had been trying to deny it to myself for too long. Now it was time to finally admit it.

“I’m sorry, Angelina.” She grabbed my arm and squeezed it. “Now I can understand why you’re like this around him. You don’t want to get hurt.”

I closed my eyes for a moment with a sigh. “I don’t get hurt, that’s the thing, Shelly. No one hurts Angelina Bradshaw. No one.” My resolve was weakening quickly. I thought about Brian and what I had done to him. Now I knew a little bit of how he felt. It sucked!

“Have you ever thought that maybe he likes you, too?”

I knew that wasn’t the case. I was just a challenge for him. “Don’t be silly, Shelly, he’s a player. You know that as well as I do.”

“Yes, but according to what you’re saying—so are you. Have you ever been in love before?”

I heaved out a sarcastic laugh. “No.”

“Have you ever really dated, like just gone out with someone who you really like that you thought could turn into something more?”

I shook my head. “No.”

“Then what makes you so different to him? I’m not saying it’s wrong, I’m just saying that it’s not impossible to feel things. It just makes us human.”

I knew she was right, but I couldn’t shake off this huge need to protect myself from harm. “I think I need to go home for a few days. Clear my head.”

Shelly nodded her head. “That might be just what you need. Go home, see your parents—think about what you want to do with this situation. You can’t run and hide from it. He will still be here when you get back. Whether you like it or not, you can’t avoid him forever.”

I smiled at that. “Touché, my dearest Shelly.”

Once we got back, I tried my best at ignoring the evil twins so I didn’t end up saying something I regretted—or something I will be made to regret. Instead I knocked on Jonathan’s door.

I was starting to feel much better about my forthcoming trip back home. I have been here almost two months now, and I did promise I would visit as often as I could.

“Come in!” I heard Jonathan shout.

I did as instructed, entering his office and sitting down opposite his brightly lit face. “What can I do for you, Angelina? How did the viewing go?”

Shit, I didn’t know what to say. Do I say “I’m not sure because Mr Jacobs kissed me so I didn’t get a chance to find that out? Oh, and by the way, I left him behind in the flat that the vendors have trusted that you would take care of in their absence.”

“I think he’ll get back to me.” That was as good an answer as any. It leaves it open to anything.

Satisfied with my response, he nodded. “Is there something you want to ask?”

I could feel my heart beating suddenly. “Yes, actually. I wanted to know if I could go away until Monday? I don’t have many clients and any of the others, I’m sure Shelly, Anthony, or Brad won’t mind fitting them around for me.”

He frowned but smiled. “Of course. Is there something wrong?” He knew it was a bit sudden. Normally I would give plenty of notice if I wanted to take some leave, but this

was an emergency. I had to distance myself away from Seth—and thoughts of Seth—before it consumed me.

“No, I just think I should go. It’s been a couple of months and I know that my mum and dad will be pleased to see me. You know how fussy they are over me.”

His face of concern soon turned into a broad smile. “Of course. Who am I to keep their daughter away from them? They would never forgive me if you wanted to go and I said no.” He laughed a little and it made me relax somewhat.

“I tell you what, go home now and pack. Your car is still parked outside my house. Go pack yourself a little bag and head on out. I’ll take care of Jerry for you so you don’t upset him with the journey.”

“Really?” I was the one behaving like an excitable child now. He soon spotted my expression and laughed. “Hell, I never thought I’d see the day that Angelina Bradshaw was actually excited about seeing her parents.”

I laughed at that, too. It was a little ridiculous that I was behaving this way. I couldn’t wait to get away from them when I left, and now I’m more eager than ever to run back to them.

Taking a deep breath, I felt calm. I could feel the stress easing away from my shoulders. I knew that once I got on the road and put some distance between me and Seth, all would be better.

“Can I ask you something?” I pulled Seth’s phone from out of my bag and switched it off. “Can you please give this back to Mr Jacobs? I believe he left it behind when he was finished with our viewing.” I hated lying, but I didn’t know what else to say.

“Of course. I’ll get right on to it. I should imagine he’s not going to want to be without this for very long.”

I smiled and nodded. “Thanks, Jonathan. And thank you for offering to look after Jerry whilst I’m away.”



“No problems at all. Tell your mum and dad I said hi, won’t you?”

“Of course.” I got to my feet quickly and headed out towards Shelly and company. “I’m going to Cornwall for a few days. I’ll be back in the office on Monday morning.” Shelly smiled knowingly and the other two just nodded their heads and told me to have a lovely time.

“Call me!” Shelly shouted as I was heading out. “I will!” I bellowed back.

It was time to get away.

As I was only going for three days I packed one of those carry-on luggage cases that you take on the plane. I called my mum and dad, who were ecstatic that I was coming home to see them for a few days. My mother didn’t seem to care that it was such short notice. She just wanted to see me.

The four hour journey was long and tedious, but I felt better the further I got away from Seth. He clouded my thoughts, and my judgement. The more miles I put between us, the more focused I could become. It didn’t stop me thinking about him—which I hated him again for. The kiss was way too good to ignore and now that he has kissed me, there is no going back. His touch, his taste, the feel of his body on mine was filling me up so high, that it was almost jumping out of me. It wouldn’t stop—it kept going and going like an endless sky, and I knew it would never end.

The minute I pulled up outside my parent’s thatched cottage, I felt a huge sigh of relief leave me. It felt familiar, and that made me feel safe again. I pulled my bag out of the boot and barely had time to walk up the stairs before my mum opened the door and ran for a hug. Behind her I saw my dad, Julia, and Jack. I was glad they were here, too. We needed to catch up on a lot.

There were lots of stories to tell, which I was happy about. Julia and Jack's honeymoon had gone really well. They both had a certain honeymoon—not long been back from a wonderful holiday—glow about them. They looked just as in love as ever and it was great to see. I saw the way they looked at each other, and the way Jack held my sister's hand. For the first time I felt an uneasiness. For the first time I felt I wished I had that. It was an unwelcome shock and I put it down to Seth confusing the hell out of me.

They carried on much the same and told me all the gossip about town. What shocked me completely was when my mum told me that Brian was dating Veronica. She finally managed to sink her teeth into him. I had to smile at that. "How long has that been going on?" It was hard to contain the laughter building, but I managed to hold it together.

"About a couple of weeks. Not long. She's always been determined to get that boy." She smiled at me as if to say, 'I know why she never did'. I smiled back to let her know I was fine about it. I was actually happy for him. As long as she treats him okay, who was I to judge? I didn't like her, but she didn't like me. She might be a really nice person deep down. She was just jealous of mine, and Brian's relationship. Whatever the hell it was.

"So, come on—tell me—have you met a gorgeous hunk up there yet?" My mother's eyes were dancing; keen to get whatever gossip she had from me. I could tell both Julia and Jack felt the same. They were all eager to find out what I had been up to.

"No, Mum, no gorgeous hunks for me." Who was I kidding! Seth wasn't just a gorgeous hunk; he was the epitome of gorgeous hunks. No one has ever come as close.

They all looked a little disappointed that I couldn't come up with any juicy details, but they were interested enough to hear all about my work and my colleagues. They were all in stitches hearing about my run in with Cruella di Vil, and

how uncomfortable a viewing it was. They asked about Jonathan and if he was taking care of me. I said yes, not that he needed to.

We all had dinner and wine together later and it felt good. I did notice, however, that Julia wasn't drinking. She looked happy enough, but also a little pale. I would have to speak with her alone when I got the chance.

Once it was all over, Julia and Jack made their way home, leaving my dad and I to the washing up.

“Are you okay, honey?”

I looked at my father and frowned. “Yes, why?”

“You seem a little distracted. There's certainly something different about you. There's no one in London giving you a hard time is there?”

“No, Dad, I'm fine. Really.”

Once the dishes were dried, he set them down and looked at me. “You would tell me if there was anything going on, wouldn't you?”

I stopped all my loading up and turned towards him. “Seriously, Dad, I'm fine.”

He opened up his arms to me. “Come here, Angel. I've missed not having you around all the time. Your mother's constantly worrying about you in such a big city. I keep telling her you're okay, but it doesn't stop her.”

I walked into his arms, welcoming his comfort. It had been a while since I felt a warm hug from anybody. “Everything's just peachy, Dad.”

A little while later I got a text from Jack asking if I wanted to meet for a quick drink. I wasn't going to say no. Sitting in the house moping about Seth wasn't going to help me.

When I arrived, I was expecting Jack and my sister to be there, but it was Jack and David instead. “Hey guys, how are you?” David got up and gave me a big brotherly hug, as that was just what he was to me. They both were. “Where’s Julia? I just assumed she would come.”

Jack shrugged his shoulders and looked away. “She said she was tired, but she’ll definitely see you tomorrow. She doesn’t mind me coming to the pub if I’ve got big sis to keep me out of trouble.” He pulled his pint glass up to me and said cheers. “I took the liberty in getting you a double Vodka Tonic. Are you okay with that?”

“Yes, fine. More than fine.” I raised my glass to them both, glad that I was here with my two best friends.

“So, now that you’re not around your parents anymore, you want to tell me what you’ve really been getting up to in London?” Jack gave me a look as if to tell me he wasn’t buying what I said earlier. David just leaned in like he’s about to hear the best gossip ever.

“I already told you that there isn’t anything going on in London. My life is very boring compared to you two. One’s been on a honeymoon, and the other’s been shagging my sister’s best mate—which, by the way, I will get to in a minute—but first of all I want to know why my Julia’s tired. What have you done to her?” I raised an eyebrow with a wicked grin, but I soon softened my features. “No, seriously—is she okay?”

“We’re not sure yet, but we think she might be pregnant. She’s going to get the confirmation tomorrow at the doctors. She’s been quite sick, and she’s constantly complaining how tired she feels.”

I smiled brightly for him. “Well, that’s great news, Jack. I take it this is what you wanted?”

Jack nodded eagerly. “Yes, of course. We have been trying since our honeymoon. We both knew it’s what we

wanted. I just don't want to celebrate yet until we know for sure."

"I hear ya. You better let me know tomorrow. I take it Mum and Dad don't know? I'm sure it would have been the first thing mentioned to me otherwise."

He vehemently shook his head. "No, and please don't until we know for sure."

"Of course, Jack. It's not my news to tell."

With that news told, I took my drink and downed it in one go. I'm trying hard, but no matter what, I still keep thinking about Seth. He seems to pop up in my head like a cuckoo clock. He's constantly there letting me know he won't disappear in a hurry. The butterflies are there again. Just thinking about me not thinking about him has me going.

Jack and David watched with interest as I gulped the lot down. "Fancy another?" I asked them.

"Okay, big city girl. Let's get it started." David smiled at me and that was my cue to order another round at the bar. I felt contented being here, but something felt a little weird. My spidey senses were on high alert and I wasn't sure whether it's an uneasy feeling or not.

With a shake of my head, I got back to my seat and tried to ignore this strange sensation. Instead I turned to David, as I knew he was going to be my next target for a conversation.

"David, so what's the deal with you and Mindy?" I was keen to find out the gossip face to face. I have spoken with all of them on occasion whilst I was in London, but I didn't think I would get the true picture of what happened unless I saw it for myself.

"We're doing okay." He smiled and it was like one of those smiles where you're really trying hard to hide how happy you are—but failing miserably. "In fact, we're doing great. She's a great girl that Mindy. I've always liked her."

“So you told me at Jack’s wedding.” I smiled at him mischievously. Mindy had already told David what happened. He was a little pissed at first with me, but at the end of the day, it got him what he wanted.

“Yeah, about that. I’m glad someone was honest with me in the end. You’re a little bugger for that, Angelina. But I still love you.”

“Aww, shucks. Thanks David.” I winked at him and we carried on our drinking. We chatted about anything and everything, making me feel good about being back. I made sure I let my hair down. I think I may have let it down too much. After a couple of hours of drinking and laughing so hard until my sides hurt, I was starting to feel a little woozy.

“Come on girl, let’s get you home.” Jack rose out of his chair to steady me a little.

“Oh shit, boys, I think I might be a little intox... intox... I think I might be a little bit drunk.” I giggled into his Jack’s shoulder for good measure.

Jack wrapped one arm around me so I wouldn’t fall, and David dutifully held the other.

“What’s gotten into you, Angelina? You don’t normally get like this.” David looked concerned, but I smiled cheekily at him.

“I’ve just missed you guys is all. I’ve been such a good girl in London; I needed to let my hair down a bit. Don’t worry, I can take it from here, fellas.” I motioned for them to let me go and they hesitantly lowered their arms from me.

Turning towards the door, I walked out briskly into the cold night air. I quickly staggered myself to the right to head back home and bam... I walked straight into someone’s solid chest. Jack and David steadied me a little, and apologised to the stranger. “She’s just had a little too much to drink.”

“I can see that,” his silky voice said.

*Hold on, I recognise that voice!*

I looked up to that handsome, cocky, sexy grin of his and smiled. “Hey boys, it’s my mirage. You didn’t transport me back to London by any chance?” I asked giggling.

My mirage looked at Jack and David with interest. He could see they had their arms around me and he didn’t look happy.

“Hold on a second, you know this guy?” David asked.

Seth smiled with a nod. “Yes, she knows me. My name is Seth Jacobs. Nice to meet you.” He offered his hand and they all shake like men do.

“This is David and I’m Jack. We were in the middle of taking her home.”

The unhappy face was definitely showing itself. “I can take her. She looks like she needs looking after.”

Jack frowned. “No, we’re good thanks. We don’t know you. I’m definitely not leaving Angelina with a stranger. We’re good to take her home, thanks.”

“My knights in shining armour have come to rescue me again,” I whispered.

“Angelina,” Jack warned. “I think you’ve said enough.”

“What does she mean by again? I’m not here to hurt her. I’ve come to visit.” Seth’s face is a mixture of annoyance and concern. Even that face looked sexy.

I suddenly had an instinct to go and touch that stubble of his again. I thought it couldn’t hurt to do it. After all, he was just a mirage. Pulling away from Jack and David’s grip, I stepped towards Seth. He smiled at me, but was still a little weary of Jack and David.

“Hey guys, this here is Mr Jacobs. He has lots of bunnies,” I said giggling again. I ran my finger down his stubble, gazing into those beautiful pools of blue.

“Angelina, either this guy here likes to breed rabbits for a living or you really have had too much to drink.”

I started laughing at David’s comment and he soon followed. Jack still seemed a little uneasy about this stranger I’m now rubbing my hands all over. “Would you like me to show you some properties in Cornwall, Mr Jacobs? I know you would be keen on seeing the bedrooms.” I giggled again and nearly stumbled. Seth caught me, holding me steady in place. His hands were around me now and I was too bloody conscious of the fact. Why does life have to be so cruel? I came to Cornwall to get away from him and now I’m making up fantasies about him being here.

“We just don’t know you very well. Who are you to Angelina?” Jack glared at Seth and I could tell Seth was getting a little annoyed.

“Oh for goodness sake!” I shouted. “Seth, this is Jack. He’s my Brother-in-Law, and this here is David. I have known them both since I was at school.” I noticed Seth relax a little, so I decided to continue. “Jack, David, this is Seth Jacobs. He’s a client of mine in London and has been trying to get me into bed ever since we met.” I started laughing again and everyone but Seth joined in. “Oh, and did I mention that he likes bunnies?”

David chuckled. “Yes you did, Angelina. You seem to like his bunnies.”

“I don’t think so,” Seth interrupted. “I think that’s half the problem I have.” He looked down into my eyes and I nearly melted. “I don’t have any bunnies. Not since you walked into my life.” His eyes still buried into me—telling me just how serious he was being. “You’re cute,” I said flicking my finger at his nose.

“Well at least that’s better than asshole, or prick. I’ll take cute any day from you, Miss Bradshaw.”



With a wave of his hand, David flicked his finger from me to Seth. “Are you two?”

“No,” I said too quickly. “He’s not getting my cookie, David. I’ve told him that already.”

David laughed and shook his head. “What on earth are you on about girl?”

“It’s a private joke,” Seth explained. “And I’ve already told her that I’m not giving up.” He looked down into my eyes again making me gush. I can’t believe how beautiful my mirage is.

“That explains a lot.” Jack placed his hands in his pockets and smiled at David.

“What does?” Seth asked.

I glared at Jack for a second, warning him not to take this conversation further. He seemed to know all too well why I had this sudden urge to come to Cornwall now.

“Nothing mate, it’s nothing.” Seth looked toward Jack and then back at me. I think he could tell that something was said in silence.

“I think we better get Angelina home before her mum belts me one. She’s already not going to be very happy at me once she sees the state she’s in.”

“I’m fine,” I protested. “Would everyone stop fussing over me? I can take care of myself. Always have.” I gripped onto Seth a little tighter, not wanting to let him go.

“Listen, I’m staying in a little B&B down the road there. I’ll come by tomorrow and pay you a visit?” Seth still didn’t look happy about leaving me, but I nodded my agreement to him. He is—after all—just my imagination. I giggled to myself thinking, how preposterous it all sounded. I think I might be losing my marbles.

“Okay, Seth, nice to meet you,” Jack said putting his hand out. They all shook hands again and then Seth watched us as we walked off.

Jack pulled me in tighter to him, leaning his head down to my ear. “I think I will need to pay an unexpected visit to your parent’s house tomorrow.”

I was confused by this. “Why?”

Jack smiled and shook his head. “Because this, dear Angelina, I have got to see.”

I started laughing again. What is he talking about? That Seth’s not real, and I tell him as much. “You’re so silly, Jack. He’s just a mirage. He’ll be gone by tomorrow.”

He shook his head again and laughed. “We’ll soon see about that.”

## CHAPTER 9

I woke up in the morning with a hangover from hell. I didn't remember a lot about last night at all. I seem to recall getting very drunk and talking about bunnies a lot. I also somehow recall being put to bed with a lot of voices telling me to be quiet. This would then explain why I'm fully clothed in bed—minus my shoes of course.

I don't know why I let myself get into that state last night. I can't seem to get Seth out of my head no matter what I do. He was even in my dreams last night telling me things I wish I could hear. I don't know why my subconscious is being so evil towards me. I've done nothing to her.

In an effort to shake myself out of it, I decided to hit the shower in the hope I won't stink too much of booze once I'm done. My head was still pounding. It had a full on band playing, but I knew I only had myself to blame.

Once I had completely freshened up, and taken some strong tablets for my headache, I was in the kitchen to the

welcome of eggs and bacon frying. “That looks delicious, Mum.” She gushed at me and told me to take a seat.

“Did you enjoy yourself last night, Madam?”

I looked at her expression, but she was giving nothing away. I don’t know how much she may, or may not know about last night.

*Damn alcohol!*

“It was good thanks. It was nice to see Jack and David again. It’s hard not being around them all the time.”

With a tug of my hand, she patted it tenderly. “I know dear. They’re like brothers to you and I’m so glad you have them in your life.” She got up, trying to hide the tears in her eyes. I didn’t like my mum being upset.

“Mum, I’m okay you know... in London. I’m doing very well. I’m making friends and settling in nicely.”

“I know. You’re all grown up now and making your own decisions. I just want to make sure that whatever choices you make, will make you happy—will make you safe.” She carried on frying her eggs and said no more. I knew what she meant, and there was no need for me to add anymore. She doesn’t expect me to either.

After I had eaten my breakfast, I was starting to feel a little bit more human again. I sat there as my dad did the washing up. I insisted on helping but he was having none of it.

“Wow, didn’t think I’d see one of those down here.”

The sound of my dad’s voice had my posture pick up slightly. “What’s that dad?”

“The new Jaguar F-Type. What a beauty. In black as well.”

In an instant I shot up into the air and ran to the window. Sure enough what he said was right, but I couldn’t see anyone in it.

Out of nowhere a flashback of Seth came to me from last night. But I was dreaming that—wasn't I? I shook my head. It can't be him. I don't even know what car he owns, so why did I immediately think it was him?

My dad suddenly started laughing, so I asked him what was so funny. "Whoever this is, his number plate spells out Cookie. Look, C00 K1E. He obviously likes cookies. You're not expecting any visitors, are you?"

My head, which I thought was getting better, was now pounding again. It was him last night. I wasn't dreaming, he wasn't a mirage. I started to panic a little and then I heard my phone buzz. I snapped it out of my pocket and answered without seeing who it was.

"Angelina, is it time to come round yet?" It was Jack, and he was already laughing his head off. As quickly as I could, I ran out of the kitchen and into the living room for some privacy.

"This is not funny, Jack. His car's here, what the fuck am I supposed to do?" He was laughing again, but I was still panicking.

"I take it that you believe he's real now? You didn't think so last night. How's your head this morning? I bet it's playing the trombone now, eh, kiddo." I could hear a muffled sound and then Jack came back on. "Hold on one sec, Angelina. Your sister wants to talk to you."

"No!" I protested. Oh God, could this get any worse.

"Angelina, why did you not tell me about this Seth Jacobs guy? Who is he, and why are you hiding him from us?"

*Oh God, Oh God, oh God.*

"I can't deal with this right now. His car is right outside the freakin house, Julia." Just as I said that there was a knock at the door.

"I'll get it!" I heard my mum shout.

If I thought my panic couldn't get any worse, I was wrong. "Oh shit, Julia, I've got to go, he's here!"

Julia gasped. "Oh goodie. We're coming over."

"Noooo!" I protested again, but it was already too late. She hung up on me. Now my whole family was going to meet him. What has he got himself into, and why oh why had he come all this way to Cornwall?

I couldn't think too long as the door was open and Seth's voice could be heard down the hall. "Hi, I'm Seth Jacobs, a very good friend of Angelina. I came here to visit. I hope you don't mind the intrusion?"

"No, not at all," my mum's chirpy voice called.

"I take it that you are her sister?"

My mother giggled and I rolled my eyes. I could already tell by the sound of her voice that she was smitten.

I walked out of the living room and into the hall. Sure enough, my eyes were not deceiving me. Seth was there with two of the biggest goddamn bunches of flowers I had ever seen, and sporting the biggest, sexiest grin he could muster.

"Good morning, Angel. How's your head today?"

My mother looked as though she had just heard the most shocking news ever. My dad came out of the kitchen to see what all the fuss was about, and my mum just stared at him, mouth wide open.

Turning to me, she glared and pursed her lips. "He calls you Angel? You never let anyone call you, Angel, apart from your father. Angelina, I'm very disappointed in you. Why didn't you tell me about this lovely young man? Come in, come in." She waved him through, her face in all a fluster.

Seth strolled through the door and handed my mother one of the flowers. "This is for you, Mrs Bradshaw."

“Please, call me Rachel—or even Mum will do.”

“Mum!” I shouted. Could this *be* more embarrassing?

Seth just smiled, taking it all in his stride. If he went to the trouble of following me here, then he will just have to deal with the consequences. Let my mother at him!

“And these are for you, Angelina.”

I gracefully took the flowers from him, but I didn’t take much notice. Our eyes were too busy locked on one another to notice anything. In pure instinct, I thanked him and before we knew it, my mother had us ushered into the kitchen and offering Seth some breakfast.

“No, it’s okay, Mum, I had some before I got here.”

My mum blushed and smiled. She looked like she’s about to burst with energy if she didn’t slow down soon.

I glared at Seth, but he just shrugged his shoulders, smiling. “You do know what you’ve opened yourself up to?” I whispered towards him.

“Yes,” he said grinning. “Jonathan filled me in on that front.”

My eyes widened. I couldn’t believe Jonathan had done this. He’s obviously gone and told him everything about my family. Has he even given him my parents address? I’ve got a huge bone to pick with Jonathan when I get back.

“Is that yours out there, son?” My dad was still at the window admiring the Jaguar.

“Yes, I got her a couple of weeks ago.”

“Cookie?” I asked, with one eyebrow raised.

It didn’t take long for that cheeky grin to appear. “Yes, I thought you’d like that?”

“What’s the significance?” My dad tried to look at him, but he was obviously finding it hard to tear his eyes away from the car.

“It’s my little pet name for Angelina.”

My mother sat next to me, gushing at Seth, but looking none too pleased with me. “Angelina, you two obviously have a lot of history here and you failed to mention this to me yesterday. Why?”

I crossed my arms in front of me feeling annoyed at her question. Seth looked over, just as eager to hear the answer as my mother. “There’s nothing to tell, okay? He’s one of my clients. We met about a month ago at a viewing and that’s it.”

Seth sighed and shook his head. “Angel, it’s more than that, and you know it. It certainly felt that way when you kissed me yesterday.”

My mother’s posture immediately picked up. “You’ve kissed him?”

Feeling like I needed to defend myself, I uncrossed my arms and waved my hands to him. “He kissed me.” I sank back in my chair and folded my arms again.

My mother just seemed baffled as she looked across at Seth. With his full wattage smile he winked at her. My mother instantly blushed. It would seem that nobody was immune to his charms.

“I really like your daughter, Mrs Bradshaw.” My mother gave him a warning look. “Sorry, Rachel.” He smiled and she nodded. “Ever since she practically ram raided herself into my life I haven’t been able to stop thinking about her. I would very much like it if she would come out on a date with me one evening, but every time I ask, she runs away.”

My mother turned to me, confusion written all over her face. “Do you like him?”

Oh God, there’s that word. I do like him. I more than like him. I just don’t want to let him in. “I don’t have to answer that.”



My mother instantly laughed and grabbed one of Seth's arms. "She likes you."

"Rachel, don't you think we should leave these two to talk? They look like they need it." My dad motioned for my mum to get up and she reluctantly walked toward the hallway with my dad.

Just before she was out the door, she turned. "I hope you will be staying for dinner tonight, Seth?" My mum glanced over to Seth with hope in her eyes.

"Yes, that would be lovely, thank you. I'm actually here until Sunday. I'm staying at the B&B down the road."

Laying her hand on the door, she smiled. "Oh, Charlie's you mean?"

Seth nodded. "Yes, that's the one."

"We have plenty of room here. There's no reason for you to stay in a B&B. You can take Julia's old room. Unless of course..?"

"Mum, seriously?" I couldn't believe she just said that. In my embarrassment I looked at Seth but all he was doing was grinning from ear to ear. I want the floor to swallow me up.

"It's okay, Rachel. I don't want to upset Angelina. I'll stay at the B&B."

My mother nodded her head, but I knew she wouldn't give up. "Well, we'll discuss this later."

With her head held high, she walked out, but I could tell there was no way she was going to let this go. She wanted him here whether I liked it or not. I could already see her picking out the flowers for our wedding.

Talking of which.

"Now that you've bought us flowers and knocked my mum off her feet—you do realise that she's never going to let you go now?" He started laughing and I watched how

his chest rose and fell. He's not in a suit today. He's wearing a casual polo shirt and Chinos. Does he have to look sexy in everything he wears?

"After talking to Jonathan, I was kind of counting on it."

I rolled my eyes again. "Boy, you really are a glutton for punishment aren't you?"

"Only as far as you're concerned." We both looked at one another in silence for a while. I didn't know what to say to him. I was still in shock that he was even here. Why did he follow me to Cornwall?

"Why did you run?" He looked worried. I could tell he knew I was a terrible liar when it came to him, but my survival instincts kicked in every time.

"I just wanted to come home, that's all. I haven't seen them since I left for London." I was trying, but failing miserably, I knew it. He knew it.

"I meant from me. From what happened between us. I can't let that kiss go, Angel. I haven't stopped thinking about it since. About an hour or so after you left, Jonathan called about the phone I left behind. I didn't understand what he meant, so I just took what he said and went to retrieve it. When I saw it was the phone I gave you, it hurt. Jonathan saw my expression and asked me if I liked you. I said yes, more than she realises and that's when he told me what happened. I think he put two and two together when you asked to leave so quickly. I told him how I felt about you and he told me all about your family. He also said that if I was to ever hurt you, he would chop my balls off. I told him I was very attached to my balls."

The laughter came spilling out. That was the funniest thing ever. I could just imagine Jonathan in his office threatening to chop Seth's balls off. To be a fly on the wall.

"You see, I can make it happen."

"Make what happen?" I asked confused.

“Make you laugh.” He smiled and leaned forward to touch my cheek. I couldn’t help it. I closed my eyes, savouring the feel of him.

“Listen, I don’t want to be here if it upsets you. If you really don’t want me here, I’ll go. I promise I will leave you alone and you’ll never have to deal with me again. If that’s what you want of course.” He looked into my eyes, almost pleading that I make the right choice. What is the right choice? I’m so confused—my body, heart, and mind are having an all out battle with one another. I know I don’t want him to leave, but I’m scared of what will happen if he doesn’t.

His smile is what made up my mind up in the end. It would be hard to ever so no to that smile. “You can stay. I don’t think my mother will ever forgive me if I sent you on your way.” His reaction was one of quiet celebration. I could see the gleam in his eyes and the force of it hit me full on. “On one condition,” I began.

He sat up straight to attention. He was happy, and looked like he would take about anything from me right now. “Name it, Cookie.”

“No funny business. No trying to kiss me or touch me inappropriately whilst we’re here.” Because I knew that if he did, my heart would no longer belong to me.

“It will be hard. Very hard in fact, but I can do that. I want to be here and if it takes not kissing you, then so be it.”

“Good,” I smiled. I was about to tell him that he didn’t know what he was about to let himself in for this weekend when there was a knock at the door. “Aha!” I shouted. “Let the games begin. Just remember one thing, Seth. You asked for this.” I patted his knee for good measure.

“Oh, I love it when you say my name. Say it again.”

“Stop it,” I giggled.

“Is he here?” I heard Julia shout.

“Yes,” my mum squealed. You would think the queen of England was round for cup of tea the way they’re all carrying on.

I looked at Seth but he still looked as cool as a cucumber. Nothing seemed to faze him at all. The only time it really did was that time in the restaurant, his uncle, Paul asking me out, and that kiss. Oh God, that kiss.

*Stop thinking about the bloody kiss!*

Julia and Jack soon entered the room, but suddenly Jack was acting like a jerk, ducking all over the place.

“What the hell are you doing, Jack?”

With a smile, he just kept ducking and darting his eyes about the room. “It’s just too much in here. There’s so much chemistry bouncing off the walls I have to keep ducking to get out of the way of it.”

Shaking my head, I looked up to my sister. “And you married him, Julia.”

Julia was about to retort, but Jack beat her to it. “Aww, don’t be like that, Angelina. After all, I was about to defend your honour last night. I was ready to punch this guy’s lights out. No offence mate.” He smiled over at Seth and Seth just shrugged his shoulders. “None taken,” he answered. “It’s nice to know that Angelina has such close family and friends that want to take care of her.”

I rolled my eyes. “Smother her more like.”

Julia sat down and looked all dreamy across at Seth. “I’m Angelina’s sister, Julia. So nice to meet you.” She offered him her hand and he kissed it. I saw her blush and act all shy.

*Oh boy.*

Julia turned her attention away from him to me. You could tell it was a major effort on her part. “Angelina, where oh where have you been hiding this handsome man?”

Seth took a big deep breath and sighed. “She hasn’t been hiding me anywhere. She ran yesterday and I came chasing after.”

I huffed in his direction. “What are you, Jack, and I’m Jill?”

Seth smiled cheekily again. “I believe she went down a hill and Jack came tumbling after.”

“Whatever,” I replied, trying to feign interest.

“I don’t know why you’re bringing me into this.” Jack smiled at us. I could tell they were all fascinated by Seth and I.

“Why do I feel like a goldfish bowl?”

Julia slapped my hand. “Now stop being a grumpy little minx. Just ignore her, Seth. She must be premenstrual or something.”

“Julia!” My eyes bulged at her to shut up. Seth thought the whole thing was highly amusing.

“So, Seth, let us know a little about yourself.” Julia leaned in with her chin propped up on her hand. She was even flicking her eyelashes at him.

“Not much to say really. My mum and dad live in Kent, where I was born.”

“Really, what part?” my dad asked. “We lived in Ashford before Angelina was born.”

“Same area,” Seth smiled. “But they have moved to Sevenoaks since then.”

“Isn’t that a coincidence?” My dad looked over at my mum, but she was too busy leering at Seth.

“I lived there until I was eighteen, when I inherited a trust fund. I wondered for a while what to do with the money and then I came up with the idea to invest it in property. I seemed to make a few wise choices and soon found myself in the very wealthy areas of Belgravia and

Chelsea. I like it there, and so does my family. My parents and their brothers and sisters have all bought property there. My parents still use the Kent home as their main residence, and we all use it as many weekends as we can. London can get a bit claustrophobic at times. Sometimes it's nice to get away from all the people and fumes. I can see why Angelina wanted to come here. It's quite beautiful."

My mum gushed and everyone else hummed their approval. I tried busying myself, making cups of tea and gathering biscuits as everyone fired questions at Seth. I was actually feeling a little sorry for him, despite the fact he brought it all on himself. He seemed to take it all in his stride and answered everyone when asked. He even looked like he was enjoying himself.

"There is one thing I would really like to know." My father looked over at Seth once he was satisfied everyone had asked their questions. I was feeling a little nervous about what he wanted to say.

"What's that, Mr Bradshaw?" Seth straightened, ready for whatever my dad had to give to him.

"Please call me Clive," he asked, smiling. "What I really want to know is, when are you going to take me out for a little spin in that F-Type of yours?"

Seth and I relaxed and everyone laughed. "Right now if you want to?"

"Son, you don't have to ask me twice," he said, standing to attention.

Off they went, leaving me with twenty questions from everyone. My head was still reeling from him being here. I just couldn't believe that he had followed me, after everything that I have done to try and keep him at arm's length. There's certainly no way of doing that here. My whole family will make sure of that for me.

"Why didn't you tell us about him?" Julia asked.

“There was nothing to tell.” They all looked at me with interest. Jack had a massive grin on his face.

“It didn’t seem that way last night. You know she had her hands all over him. In fact, she couldn’t keep them off him. We had to pry her away when it was time to take her home. She also had a thing about his stubble. She couldn’t stop trailing her fingers up and down it. It was quite funny to watch. I’ve never seen Angelina like that with anyone before.”

Julia and my mum looked more than a little pleased at this. “Come on, Julia. Admit it. You really like him, don’t you?” Julia pulled a little on my sleeve, trying to get the answer she was so desperately looking for. What they were all looking for.

“If I told you yes, would you leave me alone?” They all eagerly nodded and said “Oh yes” and “of course, definitely.”

“I do like him, okay? He just drives me a little crazy.”

“That’s because you like him so much,” my sister chimed.

“Okay, whatever you say. Just don’t let him know I said that.” Their expressions were sad. I knew they wanted me to be happy. That’s why they were causing so much fuss, but I have always managed in life. I have been happy. I’ve been safe. Now I don’t feel safe.

“Why is it so hard to let someone in, Angelina? He seems like a really nice guy. What happened was in the past. You can’t take it back, but you have to move on now. He might be the love of your life—the best thing that’s ever happened to you.”

I felt a lump forming at my mum’s words. “Please don’t talk about it, Mum. I don’t want to hear it.” I got up and walked out. I didn’t want to hear what they had to say. It was all getting a bit too close for comfort. This was the whole reason why I didn’t want anything to do with Seth.

I could hear them all talking in the kitchen and I knew it was all about me. Soon, Jack came in the living room, where I was huddled, clutching my sides.

“Hey, kiddo.”

“Hey,” I said back.

“Listen; don’t be mad at your mum. You know she’s only trying to help. She wants you to be happy. We all want you to be happy.” He shifted his weight a little on the sofa, ready to offer any comfort if I needed it. Jack was my best friend and we had been together through thick and thin. Literally.

“I know, Jack, it’s just—none of it had been mentioned before now. As soon as Seth enters my life, it’s practically thrown back in my face. I don’t want to re-live it through him. I just want to be left alone.”

“Come here,” he said, wrapping his arms around me. “Look, one day you’re going to have to trust someone enough to let them in. Not every guy out there is an asshole. Even though I was protective of you last night, it doesn’t mean he isn’t a decent guy. Once I knew you knew him, I let my walls down and accepted him. On first impressions, it looks as though he really likes you. I can see the way he looks at you. It’s certainly not the look of a man just out to get into your knickers. He followed you all the way here for goodness sake. Despite the fact you’re a little bitch to him.”

“Hey,” I said, swatting him. He let go of the hug and placed his arms on my shoulders. “I didn’t say you were a bitch, I said you were acting like one to him. There is a difference. Now, why don’t you just stop being so nasty to the guy—accept the fact that he is here, and enjoy yourself? Don’t think too much, just enjoy your time with your family.”

Looking into Jack’s sincere brown eyes, I smiled. “Okay, I can do that.” He visibly relaxed, sinking down



further into the sofa. “Good.”

I watched as Jack sighed, and it was then I remembered. “Aren’t you supposed to be going to the doctors today?”

He looked at his watch and smiled. “Yeah, the appointment’s at two. We both wanted to take the day off work together and find out the news. I’m feeling quite nervous and excited about it actually.”

He was already acting like a proud father and they didn’t even know if they were pregnant yet. I could understand it though. They’ve known each other for years, and starting a family only seemed like the next big step in their wonderful future together.

“Let me know the minute you both know, please?”

With a push of his knees, he got up and held his hand to me. “Don’t you worry, the minute we know, we’ll be round here ready to celebrate—if it’s good news of course.”

Taking his hand, an idea came to me that I wanted to put into action straight away. I wanted to wait until Seth got back before I could go through with it though.

When I heard the sound of the Jaguar pull up, my heart skipped a little beat. I found myself wanting to run to the window and take a look outside. It was silly, but I couldn’t help it. I tried strolling over so that I didn’t look too obvious, but who was I kidding? I could see the others smiling and looking at each other. “It’s a really nice Jag,” I said, trying to explain my actions. I could tell it wasn’t working.

I didn’t think my heart could beat faster, until he got out the car wearing a New York baseball cap. Suddenly, everything burned, including places that shouldn’t—when I’m here—standing in my parent’s kitchen. I could feel my face flush and my body practically quivered at the sight of him in something so normal. My mouth was hanging open, and I was almost dribbling onto the sink. When he looked up, he caught my stare, and winked as he came closer to the

door. I noticed my dad was all smiles, so I could tell he had a great time in the car.

I could hear them both laughing as they got through the door. I was hoping that once he was inside, he would take the baseball cap off, but alas—no. He walked behind my father into the kitchen with a big cheeky grin on his face. I didn't know what my face was doing, but if lust was an item of clothing, I was wearing it now. He seemed to spot my change and his cheeky grin turned into something more serious—more intense. It just made the burn that more powerful. My God, he was sexy.

“That car is a beauty. I must say I'm a little jealous of you, Seth.” My father smiled and Seth reluctantly dragged his attention from me and onto my dad.

“I need to go out,” I said, breaking any conversation. They all looked up at me and Seth's grin was back.

“I'll take you wherever you need to go.” He placed his hands in his chino pockets, jiggling his keys as he stood.

“You'll have to go in that Jag, Angel. I promise you'll be impressed.” My dad looked up at me from the table and nudged his head in Seth's direction.

I smiled back. “Okay, I won't be long.”

“Take all the time you need,” my mum said, winking at Seth. I couldn't believe how obvious my mum was being.

Grabbing my coat and bag, I said my goodbyes to everyone. I hugged Julia deliberately and whispered good luck in her ear before I left. It was now lunchtime, so I would assume they both would be gone by the time Seth and I got back.

Once at the car, Seth quickly edged around me and opened the door. “I see chivalry hasn't been lost on you.” He leaned in close, one arm on the door and the other on the hood. I was pinned, with nowhere to go. Not that there isn't any other place I'd rather be.

“My parents brought me up to be courteous. It’s only the polite thing to do. Besides, you’re the sort of lady that should have doors opened for them.” He leaned in a little closer and I could feel his hot breath on mine. I know I said no kissing, but I knew that if he leaned in that little bit more, I would accept it and to hell with the consequences.

“You’re not going to make this easy for me, are you?” His smile broadened and I realised quickly that I’d made a mistake. I’ve just gone and told him that he affects me.

“I’m not kissing or touching you Angelina—but no—I never said I would make it easy on you. I will endeavour to perform your wishes to the fullest whilst we are here, but I won’t make it easy.”

I shook my head, and slipped down into the seat. The only problem was I was now face to face with his crotch. Somehow, I felt I was being tortured.

“See something you like?” Seth looked down into the car and could see my expression. I had obviously been leering.

Quickly turning my gaze away from him, I stared straight ahead. “No, not at all.”

*I was a big fat liar and we both knew it!*

“Whatever you say,” he said, closing my door.

As he ventured around the other side, I took a moment to look around the interior of this beautiful car. I couldn’t help but swoon. It was a contrast of red and black, making it look sexy and sleek. It didn’t have a lot of room, but what it did have was sex appeal. I could see why my dad was gushing when he got back home.

Once Seth was inside, he pushed a bronze button and the Jaguar came to life. The sound it made nearly had me orgasm on the spot. That coupled with Seth being so close was all too much.

“You like that, don’t cha?”

I couldn't hide it at all. "Oh God, yes." He laughed loudly and set off from my parent's home.

"So where am I taking you?"

"I need to go into town, about ten minutes from here. I'll give you directions. I want to get a couple of bottles of champagne."

He frowned, glancing over to me for a second. "What are we celebrating?"

"Hopefully some baby news." He looked over at me hesitantly and I couldn't help but laugh. "It's my sister and Jack. They have an appointment at two to see a doctor. They both think she might be pregnant." His mouth formed a big 'O,' and he looked relieved.

Seth fell silent for a few seconds, but then frowned. "Aren't you being a bit presumptuous?"

"I'm going to hide the champagne. If they're pregnant, then it's popping time, if not, I can just give the bottles to Jack, and he can keep them for when they are. I know they've been trying, so I'm sure it will happen for them one day."

"And what about you?" He looked at the end of the road and I told him to take a right.

"What about me?"

"Don't you want kids one day? Normally every woman does."

I shook my head. "Well, I'm not like every woman."

Seth chuckled. "You're certainly telling me. You're something else."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" I was immediately on edge making him wince a little.

"I didn't mean to offend you. I meant it as a compliment. I've never met anyone like you before. You

always seem so focused, so on edge, so determined to not let anyone break you.”

My posture picked up a little. “You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

Seth glanced my way with a smile. “It’s not, but soon you’re going to have to trust someone, Angel.”

I crossed my arms and huffed. I seem to be doing that a lot around Seth lately. “You have bunnies,” was all I could say. I think it was all I needed to say.

“Don’t you remember what I said last night?” I looked at him, confusion all over my face.

“I thought not. You obviously had more to drink than I thought.”

“It’s not my fault. I didn’t even think you were real.” He glanced my way, his expression, serious.

“I’m real, Cookie, and I’m not going anywhere.”

I sighed at his words, but more in contentment than anything else. He was here and I wanted him here. Despite my protests, I liked him, and I couldn’t hide away from that fact.

With that conversation ended, I gave him the directions to a local off-licence I knew which sells good quality champagne. I bought a couple of bottles but Seth bought a couple more, telling me that we may need more—if it’s good news.

At the car, Seth held the door open for me again, and again came in real close when I turned around to him. “I think you should take that cap off.” Seeing him in it was really bugging me.

“Why, is it distracting you?”

“Yes.” I was a little surprised I had admitted that, but who was I kidding? Of course it was a distraction. His

beautiful face was shocked, but then that cheeky smile formed on those beautiful rosebud lips of his.

“Then I’ll keep it on,” he said. “I’ll even wear it to bed, and then you can think of me in it.” He leaned in that little bit closer and my breathing hitched.

“You’re evil, do you know that?” I tried to make it sound like a joke, but I was failing miserably. He was hot and I’m seriously lacking in the orgasm department lately.

Our eyes were locked so tight on each other that we were not even aware of the company that was behind us. Not until I heard a, “Ahem.”

Looking over Seth’s shoulder, I saw it was Brian and Veronica. Oh shit, this was all I needed. Seth turned and gave them both a smile. Veronica immediately blushed.

Does he never have that effect on anyone?

“Angelina, you never said you were coming to town.” Brian’s face seemed a little bit hurt and confused. I could see him sizing up Seth, and the look he was giving didn’t go unnoticed. Seth’s back immediately arched like he was a man about to attend battle. The way Brian reacted to him soon saw to that.

“It was a spare of the moment thing really. I haven’t seen my mum and dad since I left and thought it about time I came here.” Brian looked at me for a long time. It was almost as if he was asking why. It was the same look I had to endure at Julia and Jack’s wedding.

I saw Veronica grip Brian’s hand a little tighter, giving me a very unwelcome fake smile. That was a smile I had become accustomed to by her. When she looked across at Seth though, her smile was completely different.

“And who have you brought with you?” she asked, staring at Seth.

“This is Seth Jacobs from London. He decided to come for a visit last night.” I wasn’t going to explain who he was

to them, and I didn't need to. Not to mention the fact that I wasn't quite sure myself. I can't call him a friend, because I have never fantasised about any of my friends the way I fantasise about Seth. I can't really call him a client anymore, because what client follows someone to their home and meets their parents? I couldn't call him my boyfriend, because he wasn't.

Just thinking about that last idea had spidey senses standing to attention.

"How long is he staying for?" Brian looked toward me, completely ignoring Seth. He didn't want to know how long I was staying, just how long Seth was staying.

"We're both leaving on Sunday," Seth said with obvious delight. Seth knew there was something off with this situation, and I already knew by now how much he liked to wind people up.

"Well, it was nice to see you both. Hope you have a pleasant stay. Brian and I were just doing some shopping before we headed back home, weren't we darling?"

I really wanted to laugh. I think she was flaunting the fact that she had Brian now, and was trying to wangle it in my face. It wasn't working though. I couldn't give a toss.

"Yes, we better be going. It was nice to see you again, Angelina."

I nodded in Brian's direction, but he seemed to huff in Seth's. If I was Veronica now, I wouldn't be too happy. All it did was confirm my theory that having a relationship was too damn complicated.

Once they were out of earshot, Seth turned to me. "I take it that was an ex-boyfriend with the way he was glaring at me? I'm assuming it's not been that long considering it's so obvious that he hasn't gotten over you yet."

"He wasn't my boyfriend." I didn't want to have to explain myself to him.

“Then what was he then?” He looked me in the eye and something in my expression must have given me away. “Ah,” he said. “He was one of *your* bunnies, wasn’t he?”

“Don’t be so silly.” I tried to get back in the car, but there was no escaping him.

“Don’t be coy with me, Angel.” He gave me a serious look. One that told me he wasn’t budging until he had heard my story.

“Okay, okay. We were friends,” I began. I couldn’t quite know what to say next. Seth answered it for me. “With benefits?” he asked.

“I suppose so. I don’t know. It got complicated in the end. I had to end it before I came to London. He wanted more, I didn’t. End of story.”

He searched my eyes for something and it made me uneasy. I kind of knew what was coming next.

“You knew I wanted you from the beginning. Why did you turn me down?”

I knew he was going to get round to that, and I was completely unprepared for an answer. I had to think of one quickly before he got suspicious.

“Because you were my client, and getting involved with you in that way would have just complicated matters. Not to mention the fact I could have lost my job.”

Seth shook his head, obviously unimpressed with my explanation. “You and I both know that’s not going to happen. Jonathan worships you too much to ever let it go that far. Besides, you and I also both know that you’re lying. I won’t push you, but one day you will have to admit it to me. But what I really want to know is, do you have any more bunnies around here I’m going to have to fend off you?” He edged closer again and I could feel the heat radiating from his body. It made me quiver slightly knowing how close he was to me.



“No, it’s just Brian.” Any of the others had long gone. There were a couple from school, and another couple that were passing by town, so thankfully there was only Brian left now.

“Good, but I may have to go all alpha over Brian’s arse.” I started laughing, and his smile warmed my heart.

“I love it when I can make you laugh. I want to be the one that can always make you laugh.”

His longing stare had the butterflies fluttering wildly in my stomach. That coupled with the fact he mentioned ‘us’ and ‘always’ in the same sentence.

He came closer to me so I was pinned to the door again. His eyes were searching my face, almost making love to every single inch of it. I thought I was going to faint with the pressure.

“You’re making this so damn hard, Angelina. Do you realise how much I want to kiss you right now? How much I want to run my fingers down that beautiful face of yours. The one that’s buried in my head. The one that I can’t let go—I don’t want to let go.”

I stared at his stubble, wanting so much to reach my hand up and touch him, too. Our eyes locked for what seemed like an age. Time stood still, lost in the moment. I was very nearly there. All I had to do was reach up and touch him. Tell him that it was okay to touch me, too. I could feel my hand rising, feel it without my mind telling it to. It was almost as if my body was in control and my mind had no say in the matter.

I was so close, so very close. But life—as always—played that unpredictable game. Seth reluctantly pulled away from me and glided round to the other side of the car. The moment immediately lost. In a way I was glad, but a huge part of me was bitterly disappointed at the lost opportunity. The next two days were going to be a killer.

## CHAPTER 10

Once back at home we had to figure out a way to hide the champagne bottles. I knew there was a fridge in the garage that my parents used in the summer for all their barbecues. Luckily for us, my dad was so worried about Seth's Jag that he offered the spot to him. His car was parked on the drive as always anyway.

He negotiated the car in, and once we were all parked up, Seth walked over to my dad and led him out of the garage. I shot out of the car and opened the tiny boot to retrieve the bottles of champagne. Once I knew they were hidden in there as best as possible, I made my way to the kitchen. Seth was sat all on his own smiling.

"You know your mum's still on about me staying here? I don't think she's going to let it slide."

I took a deep breath. "Me neither. I think it's okay for you to stay. Charlie's has rats anyway." I smiled as his eyes widened. I winked at him and he immediately rewarded me with a full on beaming smile.

*Oh yes, I'm definitely in big trouble now.*

“Ah, there you are, Angelina. I was just saying to Seth here that—”

“I know, I know,” I interrupted. “I’ve just told him that he can stay—in Julia’s room of course.” I glared at my mum so she knew I meant business. Normally mum’s try to keep couples apart when they’re in their homes, not glue them together in the same room.

My mind suddenly raced at the word ‘couple’. It’s like I keep having to remind myself that he’s not anything to me. God, who am I kidding?

“That’s great news. I’ll go and set up Julia’s old room for you now, sweetie.” I mouthed the word “sweetie” to Seth and he chuckled.

“Thank you, Rachel. That’s very kind of you.”

“Not at all. It’s wonderful to have you here. You’re very welcome. Make sure you make yourself at home here. If you fancy anything, just help yourself,” she said, waltzing out the door.

Seth looked over to me when she said this. His cheeky eyebrow was hitched up, and I couldn’t help but laugh. “I don’t think she means *everything*, Seth.”

Smacking his hand on the table lightly, he smiled. “Oh darn it. There was me thinking she gave me the go ahead to ignore the no kissing and no touching rule.”

I started wiggling my finger at him. “Now you listen here, buddy. I don’t want any funny business at night-time. No trying to sneak into my room or anything, cos I’ll have to beat you.”

“That sounds promising,” he said with a grin. “Anyway, maybe it’s *you* I’m going to have to worry about sneaking into *my* room. You may decide you want to get a little frisky with me knowing I’m wearing this baseball cap in bed—all alone—wearing nothing but this cap and a smile.”

My mind immediately raced to try and stop that image in my head from forming. Now I knew that when I lay in bed tonight, this is exactly what I'll be picturing. God, I hate him. Time for a comeback I think.

“Funnily enough, I wear absolutely nothing in bed also. In fact, once I undress at night-time I rub baby oil all over myself in the mirror. I get all wet and slippery. My whole body glistens in the light. It takes time rubbing it all in until it's all absorbed. I especially have to take time round my breast area, stomach, and thighs—rubbing up and down until it's all gone.” His smile disappeared as he shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

“You're going to kill me for the next two days with this, aren't you? Now I'm going to have that image in my head tonight.” He looked me up and down when he said this and shook his head. It took everything in my will-power not to just get up, straddle him and kiss him until I ran out of air.

Seth and my father were watching football when the expected knock on the door came. My mum was in her element baking cookies—which Seth thought was hilarious. I actually helped my mum out as I needed to do something to keep away from Seth and my wandering eyes. Even if there was a fire, explosion, hurricane, or tornado about, my eyes would seek out Seth. They were drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

With a turn of my heels, I went to answer the door, knowing exactly who was behind it. I was eager to see their reactions. If they were both smiling like idiots, then it was good news, but if they looked a little sad, it was bad news.

Once I copped a look of their faces, I knew.

*Yep, smiling like idiots.*

“It was positive?” I squealed.

“Yes, now shh. Are mum and dad here?” I jumped up and down for them and pulled them both in for a hug.

“What’s all this hollering about?” my mum asked.

Seth and my dad were soon in the hallway, wanting to know what was going on. Seth smiled; I think he knew what the outcome had been.

“Mum, Dad. I have some news for you. I’m afraid I have to tell you that you’re going to be grandparents in seven months from now.” The screaming from everyone soon radiated around the hallway as everyone kissed, hugged, and congratulated them both.

I immediately ran towards the garage to retrieve a champagne bottle. Seth offered to take one, so that he could open it. I graciously handed him the bottle and smiled. My mum saw the champagne and raised her eyebrow at me.

“Did you know about this before we did?” She placed her hands on her hips, waiting for my explanation. Julia and Jack were too busy smiling. They just didn’t care.

“Jack told me last night that Julia was feeling tired. I had to ask why and he told me she could be pregnant. They obviously didn’t want to tell anyone until they knew for certain. I just wanted to get these champagne bottles ready for ‘just in case’ purposes.” My mum eyed up Jack and he just shrugged his shoulders and winked. A smile soon took over and before we knew it, she was banging on about names for a boy, and names for a girl.

“Oh boy, now I know why I decided to never have kids.” I nudged Seth as he unhooked the champagne, his cheeky grin lighting up his whole face.

“Never say never, Angelina.” He popped the champagne before I could tell him to go to hell, and the whole kitchen erupted with cheers.

“We’ll only give half a glass to Julia just so she can wet the baby’s head. No more drinking for you for the next seven months.” I dangled the champagne glass in front of her, knowing full well how much I was teasing her about it.

“Ha, you just wait until it’s your turn. I’ll remember this.” She grabbed the glass from my hand and smiled.

“I’ll never be in your position, Julia, so it doesn’t really matter.” She smiled again, but this one’s as if to say ‘you wanna bet?’

I could see her eyeing Seth and then looking over at me. She kept nudging her head over towards Seth and it was bloody irritating.

“You should take care of that twitch before it gets worse, Julia.” She glared at me and I smiled back. Seth could tell that there was something going on, but didn’t say anything.

“What twitch is that, dear?” Mum asked.

“Nothing, Mum, Angelina’s just being a jerk.”

“Come, come now. We’re not children anymore, Julia. Stop fighting with your sister.” I couldn’t help but laugh. It was like I had gone back fifteen years to when we were bickering all the time.

We raised our glasses to congratulate them both and the conversation soon turned to babies. Seth could tell I wasn’t comfortable in that environment so he offered to save me by going for a walk. I gladly accepted, just so that I could get away from the brooding going on in the kitchen.

My mum was only too happy to see us go out again. I think the more time she thought we could get alone, the better. That way Seth could try and make his moves on me and I would eventually give in. What she doesn’t realise is, that I have already outlined the rules of no touching and no kissing, so the whole thing was fruitless really.

We walked just a few steps before the chilly air hit me. I wrapped my arms around myself tightly to try and shield me from the cold.

“You know, I would offer to wrap my arms around you, but you have this no touching rule going, so—”

“I’m fine, thank you. What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.” I wanted him to touch me, I really did. This stupid rule I made up is now keeping me from feeling his warmth, but I had to stay firm. I couldn’t back down now that I had already said it. It would make me seem weak and I can’t be weak. I don’t want to look weak.

“You know, you have a really nice family. I really didn’t know what to expect when I drove down here, but they seem the type that would open their doors to anyone in need of shelter and a warm meal. They certainly opened their arms to me. I wish their daughter could do the same. I really like her.”

“What, Julia?” I asked jokingly. “I think she would be more than willing to wrap her arms around you, dear boy.” I started giggling thinking of Julia’s fluttering eyelashes in the kitchen.

“Very funny, Angel. You and I both know that’s not who I’m talking about... although your parent’s have done a wonderful job raising you both. They’ve certainly brought one corker of a daughter into this world. She’s a right pain in the arse, but I can’t help but like her... a lot.” His eyes glanced over to mine and I couldn’t help looking at him in that baseball cap. It really is quite a distraction.

“You really like this cap, don’t you?”

“No,” I said, pushing him.

“Stop doing that, Cookie.”

“Doing what?” I asked, pushing him again.

“One more time and I shall have to tickle the bejesus out of you, rule or no rule.”

I pushed him again, not caring much for the rules anymore. This way I can get him to break it without me giving him the permission.

He looked across at me and the look said everything. “Right!” he bellowed—and before I knew it—I was off.

Running like the wind and giggling like an idiot.

I soon found some trees to duck behind, and every time my head ducked to one side, Seth's head would follow.

"I'm going to catch my fallen angel, and when I do, I'm not letting her go." He bolted towards the tree, causing me to squeal my head off.

I'm running like a batshit crazy person and all I can hear is Seth's laughter coming from right behind me. I could tell he was a good runner. He could catch me if he really wanted to. I think he just liked playing this little game we both started.

He stopped, causing me to stop. He placed his head between his legs, breathing hard. "That's it, I give up. I can't do this anymore."

Running back towards him, I laughed. I was about to call him a lightweight when he all of a sudden sprinted towards me. I screamed and ran into the nearest field. I was running so fast that I tripped and fell over a load of hay gathered by the fence. Seth soon caught up with me, asking if I was okay. I think my laughter told him the answer to that question.

"The sound of your laughter is one thing—but the sound of your laughter while you're rolling around in hay is another. You really are trying to kill me, aren't you?"

I picked up a piece of straw and put it in my mouth. "I don't know what yer talking about, cowboy." I winked at him mischievously and he shook his head.

"I would help you up, but that would mean touching you."

Taking the straw out of my mouth, I propped myself up on both elbows. "I seem to recall saying, no touching me inappropriately."

Seth nodded with a smile. "Yes, you did, didn't you? The problem being is, no matter where I touch you, I will



have inappropriate thoughts.”

Pushing myself up, I walked past him. “Well, we wouldn’t want you having any inappropriate thoughts now, would we?” I slid past him deliberately and I heard him groan.

“This is not fair, Angelina. I need you to distract me now. Talk about something else so I don’t keep picturing you naked, covered in baby oil, and rolling around in that hay.”

“Now, that would be messy.”

Seth closed his eyes. “Angelina, *please*.”

I could sense I had come far enough with my teasing. “Okay, handsome. Keep your hat on.”

Suddenly Seth beamed. “You just called me handsome. First it was cute, and now I’ve upgraded to handsome. All these compliments, Angelina—anyone would think you actually like me.”

I looked at him confused. “When did I call you cute?”

“Ah, of course, you can’t remember, can you?”

I looked at his beautiful, smiling face, trying to search for answers. I quickly remembered my drunken antics from last night and put it down to that. What else did I say to him?

“Don’t worry about it, Angelina. You were fine. There was one thing that confused me though.”

“Oh yeah, what’s that?” I thought he was going to tell me that I let something slip or did something over the top. I wasn’t prepared for what he said next.

“When Jack was being protective of you, you mentioned something about your knights in shining armour have come to rescue you again. What did you mean by that?”

My whole posture changed and Seth could sense it. “Nothing,” I said, shaking my head. “They’re just

protective of me, that's all. Can we carry on our walk now?"

He looked at my panicked face and said no more. I could tell he wasn't happy with my answer, but he was going to have to live with that. I wasn't going to offer him anything more than what I said.

He walked alongside me in silence for a moment. I couldn't stand the atmosphere between us now. He knew something about me that I didn't want anyone who came in my life to know. He knew I held a secret. A dark, disturbing secret.

"Tell me about your family?" I asked, trying to change the subject, and snap us out of this awkward silence. He looked at me like he was asking if I was okay, so I smiled. He smiled back and started his story.

"Well, you already know about my parents, and you've met my uncle Paul. Besides that, I have a younger brother, who's a little jumpstart, and an older sister who runs a charity organisation called Little Stars. It's to help children with illnesses and disabilities. We like to raise as much cash as possible, so that we can buy families all the equipment they need in their homes to cater for their child. We have specialised experts who can assist with families on hospital outings, or day trips out. We also go on a big holiday each year, where the children get to swim with Dolphins in Portugal, or meet Mickey Mouse in Florida. There are all sorts."

When I asked him about this, I didn't expect that. I had a blinkered view of rich people. I guess a lot of people do. I didn't think many gave to charity.

"I take it from that look of yours that you're shocked?"

I tried to shake my head, but I think it was written all over my face.

"I get it, I'm a playboy, and playboys only think of their bunnies."

“No, of course not, I didn’t mean to…” Oh shit, this was going badly wrong.

“Don’t worry, Angelina. I’m not having a pop at you. I think a lot of people think that way about me. I like to go out and have fun with lots of girls. People’s natural reaction is to call me a playboy who likes to drink away his money and party with lots of women. What people don’t realise is that whatever profit I make, thirty percent of it all goes to charity. I’m not a bad person, Angelina. I just don’t like to shout about what I do. I don’t do it for the praise. I do it because I want to help others—others who are not as fortunate as I am.”

I stopped our pacing for a minute and looked up at him. I felt really bad for being just another one of those people Seth was talking about, who had a misconceived idea of what he was about.

I touched his arm, not caring about keeping my distance. I needed him to know that I’m not the witch I portrayed myself to be. “I admire you.” Those three words were all I said. It was all that needed to be said. He wasn’t expecting apologies, or for me to rave on about how much good he does in the world. I knew he didn’t want that.

The mischievous grin was back. “What about the no touching rule?”

I laughed and turned to carry on walking. “Ah, you see, dear Seth. The rule was there was no touching *me* inappropriately. There was no rule about me not touching you.”

He placed his hands in his pockets and that little movement had the heat burning in my stomach. He quickly caught me staring at him and smiled.

“You know, you can touch me as much as you want. I know behind that hard exterior of yours, there’s a passionate, caring, beautiful woman just bursting to get out. The cracks will show eventually.”

I placed my arm in his as we walked, contented to just feel him close to me. And for the first time since I met this beautiful, sexy playboy—I didn't argue back.

## CHAPTER 11

I knew spending the next two days with Seth was going to be the end of me. I was falling head over heels and I knew it. I didn't want to feel this way, but I couldn't help myself from the endless pit I was diving into. It didn't help that my whole family were feeling the same way, too. Who wouldn't? He had charisma, sex appeal, courteous to a fault, and the most caring heart I had ever seen a man possess. How can someone so beautiful on the outside, be this beautiful on the inside? He was a once in a lifetime grab and my mum soon told me so. *"They don't make many men like him these days, dear Angelina. You have to grab him and hold him tight before he slips through your fingers and some other girl catches his heart. Whatever you do, don't let this one get away."*

Her words radiated around my head the whole time we were there. It was torturous enough knowing that he wasn't going to touch me. Sometimes I felt slightly neglected that he didn't at least try. I knew why he was doing it, but it still disappointed me nonetheless. And the thought of him being with another woman now filled my stomach with a fistful of knives. I didn't want to picture this, and I knew why I felt this way. There was no denying it to myself any longer. I was falling in love with Seth Jacobs.

I think he could tell there were cracks forming. In a way I didn't like it. What if I give in to him and he realises he doesn't like me anymore? I was—after all—a challenge to him from the very beginning. What if once he's completed his mission, he crushes me? The thought was frightening beyond words.

The night-times were even harder. Knowing he was right next door wearing that bloody baseball cap, was agony. He didn't take it off the whole weekend, because he

knew deep down how much I liked him in it. The first night in bed, a familiar ringtone was coming from my bag. I didn't know how he managed to sneak it in my bag every time, but he did. The conversation was long, despite the fact we had been with each other all day. We just seemed to be able to relax with one another, and enjoy each other's company. It ended with him pleading with me to keep the phone. He said he would be very upset if I gave it back to him. I told him that I didn't want to upset him and he sounded happy about that.

Sunday morning was upon us sooner than I would have liked, and we had Julia, Jack, and David join us for breakfast. They all wanted to spend some time together before we left, and I was happy that I got to see them one last time. David was still smitten over Mindy, who we only got to see very briefly whilst we were here. She was another one who swooned over Seth like she was a lovesick puppy. It would seem there was no one out there who wasn't completely immune to his charms. Everybody loved him.

Seth gave my mum and dad a present before we left, as a token of his gratitude for letting him stay. They were both over the moon with what he got them. My mum had a day at the spa, all expenses paid, and my dad was given a voucher to drive a super car of his choice. They both loved him even more now—if that was at all possible.

Saying goodbye was harder this time as I already knew how much I was going to miss them.

“Don't leave it too long before you come and visit us again, will you, Angelina?” I nodded my head as my mum continued her speech to Seth. “And you, my dear boy. I want you to know that you're welcome here anytime. It was so lovely to meet you.” She grabbed him for a hug and he dived right in.

“It was wonderful to meet you, too. You’ve all made me feel very welcome and I’m really grateful for the hospitality, especially as I just sprang myself upon you so suddenly.”

“Spring away, dear boy—spring away.” Everyone laughed at my mother as we all took turns saying our goodbyes.

“I’ll call you when I get home, okay, Mum?” I gave her a big hug and soon followed suit with my dad, Julia, Jack, and David. Seth shook the men’s hands and hugged my mum and Julia. My sister’s face was all flushed once he pulled away.

“You take care of my baby sister, and my niece or nephew you got growing inside there, okay?” I nudged Jack on the shoulder and he looked at Julia with a smile.

“Of course I will. You have no worries there.”

“I know I don’t,” I said, smiling at both of them.

Once we were both in our cars, we waved to my family and off we went. I followed Seth home as I knew I would need his help once we got back to London. About half way there we stopped off for a little break and had some coffee. Seth was all smiles about something and I couldn’t for the life of me figure out what had brought on this sudden beam of happiness.

Once we got to London, I found out why. I parked my car in the usual spot, Jonathan told me about. I rang him first thing to let him know I was coming home and he said that he would bring Jerry over for me, and make sure I had my space available for when I got back. Sure enough it was there and I parked up, getting my bag out from the boot.

I met Seth by his car to say goodbye, but instead he surprised me by getting out of the Jag and pulling me in for a kiss. My goodness, I was a goner. I was not expecting that and the shock caught me off guard a little. He was

gentle and sweet, stroking my cheek and nibbling on my bottom lip.

“We’re not in Cornwall anymore. I can kiss you and touch you as much as I like.” His lips were on me again and I melted. If only he realised the desire this man sparked inside of me. I was up in flames with it; no amount of water could put me out.

Cars were now gathering a line behind Seth’s Jaguar, but he didn’t seem to care. The horns were starting, but we were so lost in our kiss, it didn’t matter what was going on all around us. It was just me and him and nothing else in the world mattered.

He reluctantly pulled away from our embrace and cupped his finger underneath my chin. He rubbed noses with mine and exhaled a deep sigh. “Angelina, you smell of roses and taste of honey. How am I ever going to get along tonight knowing that you smell and taste this good?”

“Mmmm,” was all I could answer. I was in happy, dancing, Angelina land and didn’t want to leave. He giggled at my reaction, knowing full well the affect he was having on me.

“Now that, my dear, Angel,” he said, caressing my cheek. “Was worth waiting for.” He nibbled my lip again and I shuddered. All these feelings he brought out in me were like nothing I had ever felt before.

The cars were still blaring their horns and Seth did something completely unexpected. He turned to the cars, placed his hand on his heart and then bowed. It was the funniest spectacle I had ever seen. The people in the cars couldn’t help but smile at this crazy gentleman causing a tailback of traffic, all so he could give a girl a kiss.

Seth dutifully got back into his car and put his window down. “I’ll see you tomorrow if that’s okay, Cookie?”

I couldn’t help but say yes. Who wouldn’t after the romantic gesture he just made? Talk about being putty in



his hands. I was so mushed up; I was practically seeping through his fingers.

“And by the way,” he said, stopping briefly. “Charlie’s didn’t really have rats, did it?”

I started laughing and shook my head. I remembered quickly what it was like when we went to retrieve his bag. He was practically shuddering the whole time he was in the place, and I could tell he really wanted to get out of there as quickly as we could.

“I thought not,” he said, waving and accelerating away.

Once I settled in at home, I was welcomed by a chorus of chirping coming from the one and only Jerry. I let him out for the rest of the day because I felt so guilty leaving him for three days.

I called my mum as soon as I unpacked and she was itching to know if Seth was with me. I of course, told her no, and she didn’t hide the disappointment in her voice. I could tell she wanted us together—like—yesterday.

As the day progressed into evening I was starting to get a little suspicious of my lovely young Jerry. I could have sworn I heard him say ‘Bollocks’, but I put it down to me just feeling a little tired. When he said it the third time though, I knew I wasn’t hearing things. I had to give Jonathan a call.

In no time at all, Jonathan answered, his cheerful voice on the other end. “Angelina, so nice to hear from you. Did you have a nice time?”

“It was great, thanks. I just wanted to ring and let you know how grateful I am to you for looking after Jerry whilst I was away.”

“Don’t mention it sweetheart, anything for you.”

With the pleasantries out of the way, I thought it was time to dive straight in. “Is there any chance you could

explain to me why Jerry is cursing so much?”

“What? I don’t know what you mean.” I could hear the edge of seriousness in his voice.

“He keeps saying the word ‘Bollocks’ all the time. I can’t think of where he got that from.” Just as I said the word, Jerry as loud as anything, shouted, “Bollocks!”

“See! Did you hear that?” I could hear some rustling sounds in the background and it sounded as though Jonathan fell over.

“Bollocks!” he shouted down my ear.

“You are the worst liar in the history of liars, Jonathan. You’ve corrupted my bird now.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Angelina. Listen, I have to go.” I could tell he was panicking a little now.

“Oh no you don’t, not so fast, buddy. I have a bone to pick with you.”

“What is it?”

“Seth Jacobs.” That was the only two words he needed to hear. He went silent for a moment and then I heard him speak.

“Yes?” he asked cautiously.

“Care to explain how he knew so much about my family—and not only that—he also knew where my parents lived?”

It wasn’t long before he answered. “I put my hands up to telling him about your mum and dad, but not to giving away your parents’ address. You know I would never give out that information to anyone. Ever.”

His tone was so serious, so determined, that I knew he must have been telling me the truth. Seth must have got the address somewhere else.

“Okay, keep your silver hair on. I believe you.”

“He turned up at your folks’ house?”

I sighed. “Yep, as bold as brass, carrying two great big bouquets of flowers for me and my mum.”

“What happened?”

“Well, my mother, sister, and her best mate all thought he was the best thing since sliced bread. My dad fell in love with his car, and I was left feeling completely overwhelmed.” And I was overwhelmed. I still am.

“Wow, I knew he had a thing for you, sweetheart, but I didn’t think he would come following you down to Cornwall. He must really like you. But the biggest question here is... do you like him?”

I sighed heavily down the phone and I knew he could tell what the answer was before I even opened my mouth.

“Yes, Jonathan. I like him. Is this going to cause me problems at work?”

“I don’t see why, as long as you both keep it strictly professional when you are working. I could ask him if he would like someone else to take over the viewings with him if it causes too much angst between the two of you.”

“I don’t think he would go for that somehow.”

“No, me neither. You know the penthouse is going to be ready in a couple of weeks? I took the liberty of booking a couple of viewings for his apartment in Belgravia. Are you okay to deal with that tomorrow? I’ve left a message on Seth’s answering machine so he knows all about it.”

In my despair over Seth I had completely forgotten about that. “Yes, of course. That’s fine by me. Thank you, Jonathan.”

“Don’t mention it, Angelina. I’m not sure what’s going on between you two. It really is none of my business, but if he hurts you—”

“I know, I know, you’ll chop his balls off.” I laughed loudly down the phone and could hear the same from Jonathan.

“He told you?”

“Yes he did. I felt touched that you were defending my honour.”

“Well, it’s only what you deserve.”

We both fell silent for a few seconds as his last words sank in. “Thank you again for everything you did for me this weekend. I really appreciate it.”

“Don’t mention it, sweetheart. Have a nice evening.”

“You, too.”

After that I rang Shelly. I knew she would want to hear all the gossip and I also wanted to hear what happened between her and Brad. The amount of gasps and squealing she did over the phone was too much. I told her to calm down, but she thought Seth was the bee’s knees after what he did.

“Brad and I did go for drinks on Friday night,” she said, after finally getting her off the subject of Seth and I.

“Oh really? Did you shag him this time?”

“Angelina, you’re disgusting,” she said, giggling down the phone. “We talked and it turns out that we both thought the other wanted something out of this, but we don’t. Once we laughed about it, we were okay. We’ve been friends for a while now and I don’t want to lose that.”

“I understand, Shelly. We’ll have to find you a distraction.” She laughed, but told me that she was quite happy being single for now.

I started thinking about that word ‘single’ for a while. It is something I have always been. Now with Seth in my life, I didn’t know what status I was in. The whole thing was new territory for me. I wasn’t sure how Seth felt about it

and what his intentions were with ‘us’. I was quickly getting to that stage where I wanted to find out, but was too scared to mention anything to him. If I did, he would definitely see the cracks forming then.

“Are you okay, Angelina?” There was concern in her voice and it made me realise I must have been daydreaming a little too much for a moment.

“Yes, I’m fine thanks. Just a little tired. I’m going to have to go. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Okay, sure. Have a good evening.”

The minute I put the phone down, it started ringing again. I was beginning to think I wasn’t going to get any peace. Little did I know, my whole world was about to cave in.

“Angelina, it’s Jack.” His voice sounded panicked.

“Jack, what’s wrong? Is Julia okay?”

“She’s fine, listen—your mum and dad don’t know about this yet, but I found out something. He’s out, Angelina. The fuckers out!”

I nearly dropped the phone. My hands started shaking and I could quickly feel the sweat forming at my fear. I immediately began pacing the floors and checking that my door was bolted shut. I didn’t normally double lock my door, but tonight I was going to.

“How do you know about this, Jack?”

“I have a good police friend who found out. He knew about what happened and told me. The problem was he only found this out today, but Jaden was let out last week sometime.”

The sound of his name immediately had me on edge. I clutched my side, instinctively. The side that bared a scar from all those years ago.

“Angelina, do you want me to come? I can get to you in no time. I don’t mind. I want to make sure you’re okay.”

“No, don’t be silly, Jack. You have yourself and Julia to take care of. She’s your priority now, especially now you have a baby on the way. I’ll be fine, honest. What are the chances he knows I’m in London anyway? It’s you and David I’m more worried about.”

“Don’t worry about David, he already knows. We can take care of ourselves, kiddo. It’s you I’m more concerned with. Can’t Seth stay with you for a while, or you stay with Seth?”

Panic was forming again, but for a different reason. “No, I can’t. He doesn’t know anything, Jack. I can’t just spring this on him. Look, I’ll be fine. I have two doors separating me from the street outside. Both are locked tight and that’s the only way in—unless he likes climbing windows in full view of everyone. I doubt he’s stupid enough to do that. Besides, he doesn’t know I’m here.”

I tried to sound as calm as possible, but I was terrified on the inside. I had managed to bury my terror a long time ago. I had been living perfectly well, without any incidents these past eleven years. I wasn’t prepared to go back to that.

It suddenly dawned on me that Seth’s entering into my life and now Jaden’s release from jail was all too parallel for my liking. It felt as though I had a warning sign ricocheting around my head. I had let Seth in and now look where I am?

“I don’t like it, but I’ll have to take your word for it. You do realise once your mum and dad know—”

“Yes,” I said interrupting him. “They’ll probably be down here like a shot. I know they are going to have to be told, but could you please tell them that Seth is looking after me? I know it’s a lie, but they won’t worry about me if they

think I am with him all the time. They'll probably want to leave me alone then."

"I don't like lying to them, Angelina."

I could hear the frustration in his voice and it killed me to ask this of him. "I know, and I'm sorry, Jack. Please, just do this for me?"

"Fine," he sighed. "Only because it's you. Listen, I'm going to have to go. I'm outside the house and freezing my butt off here. I haven't told Julia yet. I wanted to let you know first. Expect some phone calls shortly."

We said our goodbyes and I found myself slumped into the sofa. I could feel a lump forming in my throat from the unwelcome memories now swimming around my head. The last time I cried was that night. I cried so hard and so much that I vowed I would never do it again. I would never put myself in a position of grief like that—ever.

About twenty minutes later I had a very panicked Julia on the phone. I told her I was fine, that I had Seth with me—liar—and that the flat I was staying in was like Fort Knox, so I was as safe as houses.

A further twenty minutes after that my door buzzed. I looked at the camera and found it was Jonathan, so I let him in.

"Let me guess why you're here," I said, after unlocking the door.

"You can't blame Jack, Angelina. He's just concerned for you. We all are."

I noticed he had a bag with him and immediately I understood his intentions. "You can't stay here."

"Oh come on, Angelina. Jack would beat the shit out of me if he thought you were left on your own."

"I'm not a little girl anymore, Jonathan. What happened was a long time ago. Besides, he'd be stupid to come after

me again. It will only send him back to the same place he's just been released from."

I knew that was a lie. In court on the day of sentencing, Jaden—with one eye shut—did a sign of a shooting gun in my direction. He's had eleven years of plotting my demise. I just hoped that prison had managed to rehabilitate him since then.

"I'm worried about you." His face was so soft and sincere that the anger I had built didn't last long.

"I know. I appreciate it, Jonathan, I really do. But you have to think of this logically. What would people think knowing that you stayed with me tonight? I already have Hyacinth and Victor out for my blood; I don't want to give them reason to think I'm sleeping with the boss. They'll put two and two together and come up with, 'she's sleeping to get ahead'. That's just not happening."

"Hyacinth and Victor?" He looked completely confused, which caused an unexpected laugh from me.

"Daniela and Timothy," I explained, giggling.

"Bollocks." Jerry had obviously heard Jonathan's voice so decided to give him the only welcome he knew how. I looked at Jonathan, pursing my lips. He looked sheepishly down to the floor like he'd just been caught in the cookie jar.

*Cookies—I must not think about cookies!*

"See, you've corrupted Jerry." Jerry quickly flew from his cage towards Jonathan, giving him what looked like a little peck on the cheek. "He likes you."

Jonathan smiled and looked at him. "Well, Jerry and I have become firm friends."

"I can see that." I turned away and headed for the sofa. I felt exhausted all of a sudden. Especially now the phone was ringing again. I looked at it and saw it was coming



from home. I told Jonathan it was them ringing and he just nodded his head and carried on playing with Jerry.

“Hey, Mum,” I sighed.

“Angelina, darling—I’ve just heard. I’m so worried about you. Your father and I want to come and see you.”

I knew this would happen. “No, Mum, I’m fine. I have Jonathan with me now and Seth will be back in a minute. Don’t worry about me.” I looked over at Jonathan’s shocked expression. He pointed to the door to ask if he should leave, so I waved my finger at him to stay. I would explain in a minute.

“I don’t like it, but okay. Are you alright?” I heard her sigh and could feel the parental concern seeping in from one end of the line to the other. It made me feel as guilty as hell knowing I had put her in this position.

“I’m fine—really I am. Are you and dad okay?” I could hear her sarcastic laugh.

“We’re fine. Just worried about you, that’s all.”

After about five more minutes of trying to convince my mum I was fine and in safe hands about a million times, I was able to hang up. I told her that I would call every morning and every night so that she knew I was okay. That seemed to settle her nerves somewhat.

“You should have told me Seth was coming; I would have left straight away, instead of arguing with you about it.”

I was going to tell him he wasn’t coming, but I had lied this much. Another one wouldn’t harm. “It’s okay; he won’t be here for another hour or so. Shall I make you a cup of tea?”

“That would be lovely.”

I was busying myself so much in the kitchen that I almost missed “Angels” playing in my bag. Jonathan looked up at me questioningly as I searched through my bag

again. It would seem no matter how big or small an item is, I can never seem to find anything in it. Eventually I got it rooted out and pressed the button to answer.

“Hello, Angel. Just wanted to see how you are. Are you missing me?”

I smiled without meaning to. It just seemed to happen whenever he was near, or I heard his voice. “In answer to your first question, I’m fine. In answer to your second question—I don’t have to answer that.” I could hear his laughter and the sound quickly brought the butterflies back.

“Well, according to your mother that means you are.”

“I’m not very happy that my mother has divulged all my trade secrets to you. It really is quite annoying actually.”

He laughed again, but changed the subject. “I got a message from Jonathan about the penthouse. I gather it’ll be ready in a couple of weeks and I have viewings for my flat tomorrow?”

“Yes, that’s right. I spoke to Jonathan about that. I guess you must be excited to be moving shortly?” I looked over at Jonathan as his head pricked up at the sound of this name. He quickly gathered what I was talking about and carried on with Jerry.

“Yes I am a bit. I wouldn’t mind seeing it again after the viewings. Is it okay if we go there together after?”

“I don’t see why not. That should be fine.” I didn’t feel fine though. I had a big problem of Jaden to deal with, without mixing in my growing feelings for Seth. I just couldn’t cope with it right now.

“Are you okay, you don’t sound right?”

Oh great! He can even tell there’s something wrong just at the sound of my voice. “I’m fine, really.” If I had a pound for every time I said that tonight, I’d be rich beyond my wildest dreams.

“Okay.” He sounded unconvinced, but took my word for it. “I’ll see you tomorrow. I look forward to it.”

I started laughing nervously. “Yes, see you soon.”

“Is that an invitation?”

Oh shit, he picked up on that. I was only saying it because I had already told Jonathan he was coming here within the hour. “No, no, not at all. Bye, bye now.”

I hung up the phone as quickly as possible and took a deep breath.

“Does he affect you that much?”

“Pardon?” I asked, shooting my head up towards Jonathan.

“You’re all flustered after speaking with him. Has someone finally managed to affect that normally cool exterior of yours?”

“Not at all.” I carried on making the tea and potted about a little. “Quite frankly it’s bad timing all this.”

Jonathan took a deep frustrated breath. “You can’t blame Seth for this you know. He didn’t know anything about you when you first met. It’s not fair to pin that on him.”

I knew he was right, but I still couldn’t help feeling the seed of doubt I had planted in my head.

“Anyway, I should imagine he’ll want to help you now more than anything. In fact, the timing couldn’t have been more perfect.” He smiled, placing his finger up to Jerry who just rewarded him by biting it. “Ouch, why does he keep biting me now? He did it twice when you were on the phone.”

“It’s probably because I’m his bitch and you’re now invading his territory.”

Jonathan frowned, looking across at Jerry. “But he wasn’t like this with me at my house.”

“Well, that’s because I wasn’t there.”

“So you’re Jerry’s bitch?” He gave me a cheeky smile which resulted in my laughter.

“Yep, he’s the only man I would let be his bitch,” I said giggling. He came over to where I stood and motioned for me to take Jerry. I put my hand out and Jerry gladly stepped onto my finger.

“I better be off, before *your* bitch gets here.”

“Hey,” I said slapping him.

“Sorry, I couldn’t resist that one. He seems a changed man since he met you.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked, confused.

“I used to see him out and about all the time with lots of girls on his arm, but since you walked into his life, I hardly see him out and about at all. Let alone with any girls. I don’t blame him though. He’s caught the heart of a very special woman.”

I actually blushed. Someone only has to mention his name and the butterflies started.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you blush before. It’s kind of cute.”

He winked, which resulted in a quick smack around the arm from me. “Stop that now, Jonathan. I think you need to go now.”

“Okay, okay. I know when I’ve overstayed my welcome. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I opened the door to let him out and he walked through, hesitating somewhat. Once he had obviously made up his mind he turned around with a cheeky grin. “Just remember one thing—be safe.”

“Jonathan!” I screamed, hitting him again. “Get out, you dirty bugger.” He laughed a little, but stopped to look at me.

“Seriously, Angelina. Will you be okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” I answered, rubbing his arm. “Thank you.” I pulled him in for a hug which had Jerry flapping his wings about like a mad bird.

After he left I went back to the unease of the empty flat. I made sure the doors were bolted shut again, had my dinner for one meal, and did my normal chores to get ready for bed.

I read for a bit, but it was no use. I tried to get lost in the story—help my mind go somewhere else—but it just wasn’t happening. Jaden’s face kept popping up from nowhere, haunting my mind and torturing my soul. Even in bed, I was restless in sleep. I kept thinking he was in my room, only to shoot up out of bed and realise I was only dreaming. I was kind of in a state of sleep without sleeping. To say it wasn’t one of the best night’s sleep I had had in a while was an understatement.

By the time morning came I was like a zombie. I went through the rituals of getting ready, but was kind of running on autopilot. I received a text from Seth telling me how much he was looking forward to seeing me and that he missed not having me around all the time like he did in Cornwall. It made me smile and my heart flutter that little bit, but something was telling I didn’t deserve to enjoy it. I let my guard down and look where it got me.

I went into work, but I was very quiet. I kept my head down and I knew Shelly and the others noticed, but I tried to keep my conversations to a minimum. I think they could tell I needed space to figure whatever it was I needed to—whatever the hell that was.

Jonathan was asking if I wanted the others to take my appointments, and I replied that this was my job and had to carry on with life as normal. I couldn’t live my life in fear forever. No matter what happens, the world still goes round and life still needs to be lived.

After a couple of viewings in the morning, I drove down to Belgravia to see Seth's apartment for the first time. I was excited and nervous about seeing him again after such a lovely goodbye yesterday.

My viewing wasn't for another hour, but I wanted to get there, see the place, and speak with Seth before the prospective buyers came.

I parked my car in Chester Square and took the little steps up to the front door. After he let me in, I walked up the steps to his door and was gobsmacked once I walked inside.

"Seth, this is beautiful."

"Well, hello to you, too. It is quite nice, but I'm looking at something much more beautiful than this."

I blushed a little as he stared at me. He was wearing a white shirt, with a maroon tie, and grey trousers today. He looked hot as hell, but then, he always does in anything he wears.

"Not wearing your baseball cap today?"

His smile brightened up my day and made me forget for just a second about the troubles I had from yesterday.

"I could put it on now for you if you want?" The cheeky grin of his filled up his face as he edged closer.

"No, no, that's fine. I have work to do."

"Ah, so it is a distraction. Tell me what you like about it." He came closer and placed his arm around my waist. His eyes searched mine as he took in every detail of my face. My body immediately released all my tension, and melted into the curve of his. Then his lips were there. A sound escaped me without any warning; the feel of his mouth on mine is just too good. I gave into to it completely, feeling safe and secure in his arms. No one had ever made me feel this way.

The kiss was so tender and sweet it made the butterflies flutter even harder. Seth moaned his appreciation and reluctantly pulled away. “I don’t have to tell you anything,” I breathed heavily into his mouth.

His lips brandished a winning smile as he gently trailed his fingers down my cheek. “You look tired, Angel. Are you okay?”

I immediately stiffened back to the normal state I was in since yesterday. Of course he notices and asks me what’s wrong.

“Nothing,” I said unconvincingly. “I didn’t get much sleep last night, that’s all.” He looked concerned and I knew he was going to want to press me about this, but I couldn’t let him. Not here, not now. “I need to look around this place before this couple turns up. I also need to know what price you are hoping to achieve.” He studied me for a moment, but didn’t push it. Instead he led me into a very spacious living room with the most enormous windows. There was a fireplace roaring to life which made it feel even cosier than it already was.

I suddenly had this image of Seth and I in front of it on a sheep skin rug... naked. It was hard to tear my head away from the image, it was so inviting.

Seth caught me staring at the fireplace and smiled. “I wonder what it is you’re thinking, my cookie. Could it possibly be the same thing I find myself daydreaming about each night since I met you? Maybe in this new place, we can live out whatever fantasy you got going on in that beautiful head of yours.”

I giggled and lightly slapped his arm. “Seth, you’re incorrigible.”

“So you were thinking about me and you naked in front of the fire?”

I gave Seth a cheeky grin. “I don’t have to answer that.”

That sexy eyebrow rose. “That’s a yes then.”

Suddenly, I remembered the conversation Jonathan and I had last night. “Do you know, I already have Jonathan talking about separating us because of our personal involvement? This is business now, and we really should be keeping it that way.”

“Really, he said that?” I nodded my head. “Okay, this is something that needs to be addressed—but for now—we’ll keep it business. I don’t want you getting into trouble because of me.”

I gave him an appreciative smile, and from then on it was all business.

Looking around the place it was hard to fathom why he wanted to sell it. The place was beautiful. It would certainly tear at my heart strings if I had to sell something like this.

He showed me his room, which was a complete distraction. His bed was huge and inviting. The only thing that put me off was wondering how many girls he has had in there. It wasn’t an image I wanted to conjure up. Suddenly the place didn’t look so appealing.

He told me that the furniture will stay and that he had already ordered new stuff for the penthouse, which would arrive the day he moves. The date was set for two weeks time for completion, and he was happier at the thought of being close to me.

I must admit, it was wonderful to hear, but I couldn’t help but wonder. “What’s so special about me, Seth? Why do you feel the need to be close to me?”

He looked frustrated. “You don’t realise it yet, do you? You look so hard and confident at times, but then you throw this at me.” He raced over and pulled me close, taking my breath away. “No matter what you think about yourself, my angel, you’re special, and you just have to live with that. You have family and friends who love, and care for you—that would do anything for you—and it’s exactly the way I



feel about you, too. You've stolen my heart, Angelina Bradshaw, and I don't want you to give it back."

Swallowing hard, I tried desperately not to let the tears show. Why did he have to pull that one on me?

With a gentle lift of my chin, I met his eyes. I could tell he wanted to kiss me, and I certainly didn't want to stop him if he did.

"I wasn't supposed to be doing this to you, was I? I'm sorry. I just can't help myself around you. You make it hard to ever stay away. You magnetise me."

"Seth," I whispered breathlessly.

"I love it when you say my name. Say it again."

"Seth," I sighed again, wanting so much for his mouth to be on mine.

And he didn't disappoint. Within an instant he leaned in that little bit more until our lips were practically brushing with one another. My stomach was on fire—the need to have him was too much. Just as I thought he was going in for the kill, the sound of the doorbell rang through the apartment.

Squealing, I jumped out of our embrace like a naughty child that's just been caught. Seth chuckled and rubbed his fingers through what little bit of hair he has on his head. Even that was sexy.

It took a couple of deep breaths, and some uncanny thought that I had to sort my clothes out before we could open the door. We were only nearly kissing each other. Why did I feel so guilty all of a sudden?

The two viewings we had went well. Both clients seemed to really like the place, and who could blame them? The wife of one nearly had a heart attack when she clocked Seth in the kitchen. He brandished his best megawatt smile and I think I even saw her wobble a bit. I couldn't blame her for that. I had virtually the same reaction when I first

met him. I still do. I think the fact that his furniture was staying was a clincher as far as she was concerned.

By the time they were all gone I relaxed a bit, and Seth seemed glad that we were finally left on our own. I knew I couldn't stay here much longer because I knew exactly what would happen if I did—and I really didn't want to be another bunny on his bedpost.

“It's okay; I'm not going to pounce on you. This isn't the right time, or the right place. I know what you're thinking; you don't have to say it. As I have said—on more than one occasion—you're more special to me than that.”

How did he do that? How did he seem to know exactly what I was thinking and feeling? What he was saying would be very romantic if it wasn't for the fact it scared the shit out of me.

“Do you read minds or something?”

Seth regarded me with an amused smile. “No, I'm just very good at what I do.”

I rolled my eyes. “Modest, much.”

Seth rolled his eyes, too. “Sarcastic, much.”

We both started laughing, easing the sexual tension between us a little.

My phone took that opportunity to chime, so I quickly retrieved it to find my mum calling. Oh shit, I forgot to call her first thing.

“Hi, Mum, sorry I didn't call you.” I looked up at Seth and could see him mouth, “Say hi to her for me.”

“Angelina, I've been worried. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I'm fine, Mum. Seth says hi.”

“Oh, is he there?” Mum squealed. “Let me talk to him.”

“No, I don't think that's a good idea.”

“Angelina Bradshaw, don’t disobey your mother. You know that’s not good enough... now hand him over the phone.”

Sheer panic started to rise inside of me. I didn’t know what to do. If I said no, she would get suspicious and demand to know why. If I said yes, when I handed him the phone, he’ll know something’s wrong.

Seth could see my change in posture and he arched his back in full alert mode. “He’s just this minute gone out, so you can’t speak with him.” Seth really stood up now. Too late, he already knew there was something wrong.

“I don’t believe you, but I’ll have to take your word for it. Just tell me, are you okay? Is Seth keeping you safe?”

I could see Seth’s unease and I had to look away. The tension was building back up rapidly and I knew that Seth could sense it.

“Of course he is, Mum. I’m fine, honestly. I’ll speak to you later tonight, okay? I promise.”

“Okay, sweetie. Take care of yourself and say hi back to Seth when you see him.” I ended the call and looked in Seth’s direction. “She said to say hi.”

“Why did you say I wasn’t here?” I could see the hurt in his eyes and it was torture to look at.

“It would just complicate matters, okay? Listen, I have to get back to work.”

He looked frustrated and I couldn’t blame him. “What’s so complicated about it? There’s something wrong, isn’t there? Will it take me to drive down to your parent’s house to find out what?”

I stood rigid, my eyes widening. “No, you can’t do that.” In my panic I raced to gather my coat and bag, just wanting out of there. “I have to go.”

I was out of the door as quick as a flash with Seth calling after me. I didn’t want to deal with this right now—I

couldn't deal with this right now.

I was in my car in no time at all racing away from Chester Square. I knew at some point he would question me about this, but I couldn't cope with that thought at the moment. The news of Jaden's release was still so fresh in my mind. I had to get the idea of that round my head first.

In my haste to get away, I quickly remembered that Seth and I were supposed to visit the penthouse together after the viewings. Things just couldn't get any worse. Jonathan was only saying yesterday that Seth and I together was okay as long as I kept it professional at work. Within twenty-four hours, that notion has already flown right out the window. I felt terrible, but I couldn't help but run.

Just like I always did.

When I got back to the office, Jonathan was all smiles. He called me in and I sat dutifully down, opposite his desk.

"The Miller's called and put in an offer."

I felt pleased but I still couldn't help the anxiety coursing through me. "That's great, Jonathan. How much?"

His smile widened. "Five point one."

I gasped. "You're kidding me? I think that's more than what he was expecting."

"I know, they must have really been impressed. Do you want to call Seth and let him know?"

I fidgeted somewhat, not knowing what to say. I didn't want to speak with him right now, as I knew he would fill my head with questions I didn't want to answer.

"Can you do it? I want to get some lunch. I haven't eaten anything yet."

Jonathan leaned over the desk with concern on his face. "Of course I can, but is there something wrong? Is everything okay between you two?"

“Fine. I’m just really hungry that’s all. I get grumpy when I’m hungry.” I smiled weakly at him and I knew for sure he was unconvinced.

I said goodbye to him anyway and headed straight for the door. I needed coffee and to sit somewhere on my own to think.

I was sat by the window after ordering my Americano when a familiar face walked past. It was Paul. When he glanced my way he waved enthusiastically and came in to join me.

“Angelina, hi. So nice to see you again.” He leaned in, giving me a peck on the cheek, and sat down beside me.

“I’ve been trying to call you.” I gave him a face that told him I was more than unimpressed.

He shook his head, and I could see the frustration as he sighed. “That’s nice to know, but do you want to know why I haven’t answered?”

“Tell me.”

“Well, the night we met, my phone miraculously disappeared.”

In an instant I knew why. Seth had this uncanny knack of being able to sneak phones into people’s bags. Would it be so preposterous that he would also be able to steal them?

“Seth,” was all I said. Paul’s reaction immediately confirmed my suspicions. “He told me that us having coffee wasn’t going to happen.”

Paul erupted with laughter as he ran his fingers through his golden brown hair. He certainly had the charm like Seth, but they didn’t hold any resemblance. “I think we should change that right now,” he said, patting me on the shoulder. “Do you want another?”

“No, I’m fine. I only really just sat down when I saw you walking past.” He ventured off to order a coffee, leaving me to shake my head at Seth’s obviously lack of

etiquette. I couldn't help but chuckle a little. For some reason it made him even more irresistible, if that were at all possible.

“He's a giant ass.”

The sound of Paul's voice had me jumping out of my skin, and nearly knocking my coffee over.

“I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.” Paul wrapped his coat over the chair and took a seat beside me.

“It's okay. I was in a world of my own, thinking about what Seth did.” I smiled politely at him, but I knew I was a bundle of nerves. I'm never normally this jumpy. I have an evil, sadistic monster to blame for that.

“You know he likes you, right? I had no idea just how much until I heard he went to Cornwall at the weekend. Most people didn't know why, but I remember you telling me that was where you were from originally. I put two and two together.”

My tension eased a little as the laughter erupted. “Yes, he did follow me. I was actually running away from him.” I couldn't believe how candid I was being with Paul. I'm not normally this open about things, but Paul somehow had this ability of making me feel comfortable around him—even though this is only the second time we had met.

“Can I ask why you were running?” He took a sip of his coffee and stared at me for a while until I answered.

“I can't believe I'm telling you this. Even Seth doesn't know how I feel yet. Please don't say anything to him.” With my look pleading, he nodded his head and gestured for me to proceed.

“I really like him. I can't believe I said that out loud.” I chuckled a little, but it was more of a defeated chuckle than a genuine, hearty one.

“You don't need to feel ashamed of that, Angelina. I can understand your caution with my nephew, but deep down,

he's not a bad man. He's been through some stuff that no one should have to go through. I can't go further than that, but what I will say is—he has learnt to shut out the outside world. He doesn't let anyone in to care enough about them. I think he's frightened of losing something—something solid—something real. I think you might be the best thing that's ever happened to him.”

I was in complete shock. In my time with Seth, he gave no indication that he was just as damaged and broken as I was. I had this urge to reach out to him, but at the same time something was pulling me back—telling me not to get too close.

“I had no idea. He never gave anything away. He always seems so cool and so in control of everything.”

Paul took a sip of his coffee and glanced out of the window for a moment. “I've probably given away more than I should, but you've got to know that this is the persona he has learnt to live with. He's had demons weighing down on him for many years. I'm sure you'll find out soon enough, but it isn't going to be from me. Just rest assured that I've never seen him like this with anyone, the way he is with you. I only want to say that if you like him too, please don't hurt him. He really doesn't need to suffer anymore than he has already.”

I was speechless. I didn't quite know what to say. I was so busy worrying about my own problems that I failed to realise that Seth might actually have some of his own to deal with.

All of a sudden I felt a huge weight on my shoulders. It felt like a lot to take in and endure. It was way too much—almost suffocating. Right then I didn't quite know what to do for the best.

“Look, I know it's a lot to take in. You seem like a really nice girl. That's why I warned him off you when you first met. Now I know how much he likes you, things have changed a great deal. I don't want to upset you in any way.

I just want you to know that there's more to Seth than meets the eye. He hurts just like the rest of us, and I care about him—even when I'm calling him an ass.”

I looked into his sincere eyes as we both started laughing. I know what he's saying. He approves of Seth and I as long as I don't fuck it up. Strange how the tables have finally turned.

“I appreciate you telling me, Paul. I don't want to hurt Seth either.” And that's exactly why I felt I had to walk away. I couldn't let Seth get embroiled in my mess when he had his own demons to face. It just didn't seem fair.

After giving Paul a hug and thanking him for his time, I went back to work in a daze. The pain gripped at the thought of never seeing Seth again, but it was what I had to do—and I had to do it to protect us both. It wasn't just about me anymore. I just couldn't do that to him.

By the time I was back at work I felt physically sick. I knew it wasn't because I had eaten something bad as I had hardly eaten a thing all day. I was love sick—pining over someone I had finally let into my life. Someone I had learnt to fall in love with.

Shelly was at my desk as soon as I walked in. She looked concerned and I could tell she really wanted to say something, but knew how serious I looked. This wasn't a discussion to be had at work.

“Jonathan told me that I must tell you to go and see him the minute you get back to work. He says it's urgent.” She gave me an apologetic look as I stumbled out of my chair and knocked on Jonathan's door.

“Come in!”

Shutting the door behind me, I quickly noticed how unimpressed Jonathan seemed. When he saw how I looked though, his face softened.

“Angelina, has something happened?” He shot out of his chair as quick as lightning and rushed over to be by my



side.

“I’m fine; I just don’t feel too well.” And I didn’t feel well. I wanted to throw up—really badly.

“If that’s the case you can go home now. But I have to tell you something before you do. I called Seth.” The unimpressed look was back again.

“Okay.” I was eager for him to get to the point so I could get the hell out of here.

“He wanted to know what was wrong with you. He said that you seemed jumpy and scared, and that when your mum rang, you freaked out and ran. I thought you told him, Angelina? You said he knew.”

“He had no right to say that.” I was trying in vain to be pissed off about it, but I was feeling too bad to even care.

Jonathan shifted his weight and placed his hands on my shoulders. I felt so ashamed of myself that I dipped my head. “Angelina, please look at me.”

The sincerity in his voice had my eyes lock onto his. “Why did you lie to me? Why did you lie to your mum and dad? They think you’re safe with Seth protecting you, but you’re not. Do you know how much this will hurt them when they find out? Do you realise how much this will hurt Seth once he knows? He demanded I tell him what’s wrong, but I didn’t say anything. It’s not my place, but he knows there’s definitely something wrong.”

I didn’t know what else to say, so all I could say was sorry. He gave me a great, big warming hug and tenderly stroked my hair. It was soothing and almost took the sickness away. It was still simmering on the surface, but at least it wasn’t boiling over now.

“Listen, I have to say this to you. Either you want him in your life or you don’t, but it sounds as though he cares about you way too much to let this lie. I don’t think he’s going to stop until he knows what’s wrong.”

I sighed into his shoulder in defeat. I'm not sure what I was going to do about this, but I had to be strong and try to push him away.

"I need to go. I need to think. I feel awful, Jonathan."  
Pulling away, I headed for the door.

"Okay, take what time you need, sweetheart. Just let me know by the morning if you're coming in."

"I'll be in tomorrow. I just don't feel too good now." He nodded his head and I made my way out with only a goodbye to everyone. I craved my own company for a while—with the exception of Jerry of course. He was the one living creature in my life I could seek solace in.

## CHAPTER 12

The next three days went by in a haze. I came to work, did what I had to do and went home. I would lock myself up in the tower, away from the outside world, and I hated Jaden for it. I would curse him several times for making me feel this vulnerable. I haven't felt this way since that fateful night—the night that my whole world was turned upside down. The night that guilt has been following me for the last eleven years of my life.

Seth tried calling over and over again. It got to that stage where I switched the phone off just so that I could stop hearing “Angels” haunting my every waking moment. My heart and body sought for him. I would wake from my dreams calling his name over and over until my head was spinning. My head seemed to override what my heart and body wanted. It had protected me all these years, and I wasn't about to let it down now.

The three days that went by were awful. I kept looking over my shoulder, convinced someone was watching me and following me. I was becoming a paranoid freak thinking I saw monsters in the shadows.

On the third day of my living hell, I was in the middle of closing my last client of the day. It was six o'clock and pitch black outside. I said goodbye to the lady who I was showing the house to, and was imminently aware of how alone I was once she got in her car and drove off.

For some reason I felt sick. Nausea was creeping in my stomach and my spidey senses were telling me something was

wrong. Seriously wrong. I thought it best to just lock up and get the hell out of there. I can reach the King's Road in under five minutes and then I should be safe.

I walked a little way down the road and everything was quiet—a little too quiet. I could feel the hairs rising on the back of my neck, and had to turn round to take a look at what could be causing this. I felt like I was being watched—or followed—or both. When I looked though, there was nothing there.

I kept my pace, quickening that little bit more. I could see the King's Road within reach. I could see how busy it was from a distance and how welcoming a sight that felt. I don't normally enjoy the noise, and the people, but this time I needed it—craved it. I didn't feel safe, especially when I had a voice inside my head shouting at me to get the hell out of there.

“Princess.”

My feet froze at the sound of an all too familiar voice. I hadn't heard that voice in eleven years. He appeared from beneath the shadows—the monster that haunts me. He had aged somewhat since his time in prison. His wavy brown locks I used to love were now lifeless and greasy. He still looked like the handsome teenager I came to dote on all those years ago, but life hadn't been too kind to him with age.

He circled around me, taking in every part of my body. I felt violated. He leaned in close and inhaled my scent. “Hmmm, still smelling good, Princess. You look stunning as always. As you can see, I haven't been able to spruce myself up that much since leaving the godforsaken hole you put me in all those years ago.”

He circled around me that little bit more as I stood rigid to the spot. I was clutching to my work files like it was the only thing keeping me safe from the terrifying memories having him being so close has resurfaced.

“What do you want, Jaden?” He laughed a little hysterically, but before I knew it, his face was levelling mine and he had the most horrifying look in his eyes.

“I want all those years back that you took from me, bitch. Do you have any idea the shit I’ve been through in that hell hole? All because you wouldn’t play ball that night. Stupid fucking slut.” He spat the last three words out with such venom I could practically taste it on my tongue.

I was determined to not let him see how frightened I was. “You hurt me—and worst still—you hurt my best friends. I hated you for it. I still hate you for it. How can you come here, blaming me for what happened when you and your little shitbags put me and my friends in hospital?”

He grabbed a fistful of my hair and I screamed. I dropped my files and the contents spilt all over the floor.

“You were a fucking little prick tease then and I bet you still are now. You’re a fucking whore of the worst kind and you ruined my life. Now it’s time I ruined yours.”

In that moment I felt my life flash before my eyes. I knew what he came here to do long before he produced the knife.

“Is it still there, my little princess? Did we cut you up enough to leave a nice shiny little scar? Does it twinkle in the light when you’re naked? Does it remind you of that memorable day?”

“Fuck you.” He was behind me now with the knife digging in my back, and an arm wrapped around my neck. I could feel the added bit of pressure—bit by bit—the knife was edging closer to my skin.

“I wish I could stay and chat a little bit more about old times, Angelina, but I have more important things to be doing with my time than standing around talking to a has-been. I’ve gone eleven years without the feel of a woman. Do you have any idea what that does to a guy?” His hand slipped up towards my breast and I tried desperately to fight him off, but

he's grip was too strong, and the knife was too close to my back.

His sick laughter entered my ear and the sound brought another unwelcome memory back to haunt my head. I snapped—pulling my leg up as high as I could—I crashed the heel of my shoe into his foot as hard as I could. He let go and I ran, screaming.

Soon, he came crashing into me with such force, it nearly toppled me over. He spun me around and punched me in the face, blood dripping all over the pavement. He came at me again, this time punching me in the stomach and kicking me in the back. The wind was taken out of me so much that I didn't see it coming—the knife.

He came at me like a man possessed. I could see the madness in his eyes as he charged at me. I could hear people's screams, but I knew it was too late. I knew this was the day that Angelina Bradshaw would die—never being able to tell the one man she let in her heart, just how much she loved him.

Everything happened so quickly, it was hard to digest it all at first. Jaden was there one minute and the next he was on the floor of the pavement being pummelled over and over again by a raging Seth. Screams could be heard again, but I didn't know if the sounds were coming from me or the now onlookers who came to have a peak at what was happening.

Soon, realisation of just how enormous this situation is kicks in. I knew that Seth was after his blood, and if I didn't stop him now, he was going to kill him.

“Seth!” I shouted. At first it seemed he didn't hear me, and just kept going. “Seth, please,” I begged—and finally he looked up. When he saw me and the state I was in, he pushed an unconscious Jaden to the floor and came rushing over.

“Angelina, you're bleeding badly.” I stared at him in shock. I still couldn't believe what had just transpired here. Lots of eyes were now staring at us as the sound of sirens were now filling our ears from a distance.

Seth handed me a tissue and held me in his arms. Immediately, I felt safe again.

The police and ambulance soon arrived and they come rushing forth to help Jaden. “Don’t fucking help that monster, help Angelina, she’s bleeding! He did this to her!” His anger radiated all over the street forcing everyone to look our way.

“Calm down, sir,” a policeman shot back. “We need to know what happened here. Miss, can we get someone to have a look at you? It looks like you may have a broken nose.”

I nodded my head, shaking somewhat as the shock started kicking in. I could see a couple of officers talking to the people standing by. I wondered how much of it they really saw. All of it seemed a blur. The only thing—or person I was focused on the whole time, was Jaden.

I looked over to him one last time, but started shaking uncontrollably. Seth had to tighten his grip round my arms so that I wouldn’t lose control. He led the way for me towards the second ambulance, which had now turned up, but my state of mind had me in a sudden panic.

“He hasn’t hurt you, has he?” I searched him all over for any signs that he might be cut or injured in any way. I was almost hysterical with it.

“Angelina, calm down. I’m fine. It’s you that needs to be looked at.”

I managed to relax a little as we neared the ambulance, but then I heard his voice.

“Bitch! I’m gonna fucking get you for this, and your fucking asshole boyfriend. Has she let you fuck her yet?” His voice was full of anger, but then he suddenly started laughing hysterically.

I stiffened in Seth’s arms and could feel his release as he tried to charge towards Jaden. I managed to grab his arm and scream his name before it was too late. Seth’s eyes were venomous as he looked over at him.

Jaden's laughter radiated around the street and I could hear him shouting at the poor paramedics that were trying to treat him.

"I can't believe they're fussing over that asshole. Is this what you call justice?" Seth's face searched the policeman's for answers, but the officer just motioned us forward, not willing to give any sign of humanity away.

I was ushered quite quickly into the ambulance after Jaden's outburst. I was glad about that. I didn't want to ever see that man again. I knew I would though. I had already gone through this once. I didn't want to have to do it again.

The paramedic smiled at me and went to work inspecting my nose. It was still bleeding and a little sore, but they soon had me patched up.

"It looks like you've escaped a broken nose, but still best we take you to the hospital to get checked out by a doctor." The ambulance lady smiled sympathetically towards me as I thanked her. I could tell the policeman was eager to get some answers, but I didn't want to go into details with him right now. My head was pounding and pain was suddenly radiating all over. Feeling hot now, I pulled my coat off, but heard Seth gasp.

"Jesus, you're back is bleeding. Her back is bleeding!" he shouted in panic. He was almost frantic with worry. It would have been so adorable if it wasn't for the huge mess I was in.

They inspected my back and sure enough I had been cut. I didn't even feel the knife at the time it happened. I could feel it all too much now that I was aware of it.

"Luckily it's not too deep. I think it will need a couple of stitches though." The lady smiled at Seth and he seemed to relax a little after that. He wrapped his big strong arms around me as the ambulance left. I slunk into the curve of his body feeling safer than I had in days. I knew we needed to talk, and I knew I owed him some answers—but for now—I was happy just being in his arms. Feeling him close.



The shaking subsided a little and I could tell that Seth was relaxing the more my shaking calmed. I could feel it in his arms—he cared for me.

At the hospital, I was looked at by a very nice, handsome doctor who didn't look old enough to be a doctor. In the time I was there, I learnt that he was originally from Jamaica, moved to London when he was three years old, and had two brothers and three sisters, two of which were following in his footsteps.

I was thoroughly inspected, stitched up and given medication for the pain.

As I was there, I asked Seth to give my mum and dad a call. I told him to say that they were not to worry and that I was planning on coming to see them tomorrow. I knew they would all come down here otherwise. I felt like I needed a break again anyway.

The policeman quickly came to see me after the doctor told him it was okay to come in to question me. I gave him a statement of the whole story and was glad that Seth wasn't with me through the whole ordeal. I only gave him snippets of what happened in the past. I told the officer that if he wanted to know more, then he would have to look up my records. I didn't want to have to relive that awful night.

As the policeman left, I could see through the door that another policeman was also interviewing Seth. I could see he looked pissed, and nodded his head a few times before catching my eye. He said a few words, but his expression was clear. He was eager to get to me. They seemed to notice and I caught them both walking away as Seth hurried to be by my side.

“I've just realised something,” I said as soon as he walked in. I scooted towards the end of the bed and Seth was there straight away to lend a hand.

“What's that, Angel?”

“I forgot to give you my mum and dad's number. I suppose I better give them a call.” He hesitated somewhat, causing me

to look up. The look of guilt on his face didn't go unnoticed.

“I have a confession to make.”

I didn't know whether I was going to like what I heard, but had to hear it nonetheless. “What is it?”

He sighed a little, unsure of whether I was going to be angry with him. I could tell. It was written all over his face.

“I drove down to your parent's house earlier today. I wanted to find out what was wrong. When they saw me they immediately panicked and asked where you were. When I told them I wasn't with you, and hadn't seen you for three days they went crazy. They said you had lied to them, and told them that I had been staying with you and keeping you safe. When they realised I didn't have a clue what they were on about they told me that you had been attacked when you were fifteen, and that the man that did it had now been released from jail. That was as far as they went with the details. I wanted to hear it from you, myself.”

I looked sheepishly down to the floor. I felt ashamed and a little guilty for putting Seth through all of this. “I was trying to protect you. I didn't want to embroil you in my mess. It just wasn't fair.” I felt his finger lift my chin up as he gazed into my eyes.

“I thought I had already told you how I felt. You're not getting rid of me that easily, my angel. You're stuck with me now. I don't want to ever let you go.”

Those words hit me like a punching bag. I could feel the familiar lump in my throat form and I had to swallow hard so as not to cry. I was still determined not to cry.

“How did you find me?” I was trying to change the subject. I couldn't cope with the emotional wreck I was becoming.

“I drove like a bat out of hell back to London. As soon as I got here, I marched my way through your office, trying to find you, and when I saw you weren't there, I demanded to speak with Jonathan. I explained to him about where I had been and

nearly ripped his head off for not telling me sooner. I then demanded he tell me where you were so I could come and get you. When he told me the name of the street, and that you were on your own, I nearly had a heart attack. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't come across you when I did. I'm so glad I went now. I debated it for hours about what to do before I set off. I knew you wouldn't tell me and I cared too much about you to ever let this go—to ever let you go.”

I felt my walls collapse around me as I took him in my arms. I loved this man with every fibre of my being and there was no escaping this now. He was my world.

After speaking with the doctor again, and calling my mum and dad to let them know I was okay—Seth brought me home. It was the first time he had ever been in my little flat and it felt good to know he was here with me.

Seth made us both sandwiches and a nice hot cup of tea before settling down for a cuddle on the sofa. “I don't want to push,” he said, surprising me somewhat. “Whatever happened in the past, I want to know, but I don't want to push you. I want you to tell me when you're ready. I would like to tell you something though. Something I haven't told anyone in a very long time.”

Reluctantly, I pulled away from his embrace so he could continue with his story. He pulled his wallet out from his back pocket, an expression of pain etched in his face. I felt an instant need to take that look of pain away. It was the most gut-wrenching look upon a man I had ever seen.

He pulled a photo out, but stopped and looked at me. “Have you heard of a case from over twenty years ago—a case involving the Delaney's?”

I thought for a moment. The name sounded oddly familiar. I searched through my brain to see if I could find anything that would register, and suddenly it came to me.

“That was the story of a young girl who was attacked and raped in her home when she was babysitting her brother.” He

nodded his head, clutching the photograph in his hand. He gritted his teeth waiting for me to continue.

“The little boy was only five. He was woken up by the noise and found his sister being attacked. He got his dad’s gun out from the closet and shot the rapist. Although he killed the rapist, the same bullet went through him and into his sister. Although she survived, it hit her spine, and she will never be able to walk again.”

I could see the tears flooding Seth’s face, his body clenched in pure agony. It was then that I realised. “Oh God, you were the little boy weren’t you? You’re Seth Delaney.” He nodded, looking all too consumed with pain. It was excruciating to witness. It was then I realised the reason why he was so frantic when he saw my back bleeding.

On instinct, I moved towards Seth and straddled him. I kissed each tear and soothed him as he cried in my arms.

“If it wasn’t for me, my sister would be able to walk.”

“Seth, if it wasn’t for what you did, your sister might not even be here. You were five for goodness sake. How could you blame yourself for this? You were just a child. An innocent child who saw his sister being hurt by a monster. You were only trying to protect her—only trying to make him stop.” He looked down at the photograph and it was only then that I saw who was in it. His big sister, Carla.

I remembered as a little girl how much this shocked everyone. The perpetrator had attacked several other girls before that night. He would watch and wait until he could catch a young girl in their homes. As soon as he knew they were on their own, he would break-in, rape them, and murder them. The only reason why I remember so much is last year on the twentieth anniversary they did a program on the TV about crimes that shook England.

“I carry this photo everyday with me as a reminder of what I did to her. I’ve never been able to forgive myself no matter

how much my sister protests. I love Carla so much and it kills me to know that I did this to her.”

It tormented me to see him this way. The confident, cocky man I first met all those weeks ago was a shell of himself. All because he had been carrying and hiding this guilt around with him all these years. It made me remember my own guilt, guilt that I had been carrying for the past eleven years. I’ve never been able to forgive myself for what happened on that night.

Looking into Seth’s sad eyes, I cradled his face in my hands. “Seth, you can’t keep blaming yourself for this. You’re sister is still here on this earth because of you. I bet your family have been eternally grateful to you all these years for saving her. You not only saved your sister, you stopped him from ever doing it again. You have to let this go. You have to move on and stop torturing yourself. I’m sure Carla doesn’t want you feeling this way. I’m sure she would want nothing more than to see you smile—see you happy.”

He grabbed my hands gently and stared intently into my eyes. “You make me happy. You’re the only one who has ever made me happy. When I’m with you it’s almost as though I feel I can live again—feel I can let myself be this joyful. That’s why I sought after you. That’s why I can’t let you go. You’ve shown me lightness in the dark I thought would never come—shown me a future filled with hope and opportunity. A life I thought I could never have—never deserve. I love you, Angelina Bradshaw. I don’t ever want to let you go. Be mine and I’ll promise to love you as long as you’ll have me.”

I smiled as I melted in his arms. I felt so elated that he was able to trust me with his secret—was able to let me in and tell me he loved me.

“I love you, too, Seth Jacobs—and I never thought I’d say this—but I do want to be yours—and I want you to let me love you as long as you’ll have me, too.”

We kissed tenderly for a moment, but for the first time, I didn’t feel the need to rip his clothes off. We were both

content just to be in each other's arms—delighted in the knowledge that we were both in love with one another.

The feeling of release was immense. I never knew that letting go would feel this good. I wanted to tell him my story—wanted so much to share that fateful night, especially since he had trusted me with his. But I knew that now wasn't the right time. Now was about him and me. Now was about us. I wasn't going to let Jaden spoil that—not ever.

Jonathan called round a little while later to make sure I was okay. He had obviously got the phone call from my mum and I was kind of glad she beat me to it. I didn't want to relive the same ordeal on the phone to Jonathan all over again. I had already had enough for one night.

I asked Jonathan for some time out as I knew I would look battered and bruised for a while. Not a good look when you're showing people around houses. I only wanted a few days, but he gave me two weeks to completely heel, take the time I needed to relax, and be with family. I felt eternally indebted to Jonathan for that. He could sense that of course and told me not to be so silly. He offered to take Jerry again, which I was grateful for. I actually think he enjoyed Jerry's company. He said that he would look after him as long as I needed him to.

After a cup of tea and stern warning from Jonathan to relax whilst I was away, he took Jerry, and left Seth and I to be alone. It was nice to feel Seth near me—be in the same bed as me. We slept there all night in each other's arms and it was the first time I had felt I had a decent night's sleep. The painkillers may have helped somewhat—and I did need to take another two during the night when everything started throbbing again—but I knew having him here with me was healing my heart.

The morning was a pain though trying to get a wash. I was told I couldn't get my stitches wet for the first forty-eight hours, so I had to lean over in the bath for a quick wash on top, and then was able to shower from my waist down. It's

certainly times like this you appreciate how much the little things in life you're able to do, that you would normally take for granted. I was bruised though, and it showed quite badly on my body. It was sore to look at, and even more sore to touch.

Seth's knuckles were a bit swollen and sore, but he was glad of the pain. He said the pain was a reminder of something good in his life. I couldn't help but smile. I kissed each one of his swollen knuckles and couldn't help but notice the love he felt in his eyes for me. I didn't doubt him for a second. Especially now after all that he's done for me. He never gave up, and if it wasn't for his tenaciousness, I wouldn't be here now. He was the love of my life, and there was denying or no running away from it anymore.

Seth made some calls and we ventured over to his place to pack some bags. He already had most of his stuff in storage, so it was mainly clothing and toiletries to pack. We made arrangements that we would stay at my parent's house for a week, and then get back in time for Seth's moving in day.

We took the Jeep as Seth's Jaguar would never fit all our luggage. The F-type was beautiful, but definitely lacking in the boot space department. I couldn't help feel a little disappointed that we weren't driving down in it though. It certainly would have been an experience.

On the way there, Seth seemed chirpier than ever and it was terribly infectious. By the time we reached my parent's house, my mum and dad couldn't believe just how happy we both looked—especially after what had happened the previous night. If it wasn't for the cuts and bruises, they would have thought that nothing had ever taken place.

They were singing Seth's praises for saving their daughter, and this time I was more than happy to let them. He was the one knight in shining armour I didn't have to carry any guilt over. We just loved each other. Period.

We had a full house by the evening with Julia, Jack, and David in attendance for dinner. Everyone was happy that Jaden was finally locked up again and I was safe.

After dinner I was able to sneak a bit of time alone with Jack and David in the garden. I wanted to speak to them for the first time in eleven years. I needed them to know how sorry I was.

We sat together on a three-seater swinging seat, sipping beer and gazing off into the stars. I somehow felt more confident in the dark. What I was about to say was going to be extremely hard for me, but I knew it had to be said.

“Guys, I just want you both to know how sorry I am for that night. I have never been able to forgive myself for what happened. You have both been my rock and I love you guys—more than you’ll ever know.”

David abruptly stopped swinging and turned to face me. “Angelina, you know how we feel about you. You never, ever, ever have to apologise to us for what happened. Jack and I would do it again in a heartbeat.”

“Here, here,” Jack said raising his bottle. “I don’t want to ever hear that crazy talk from you again, Angelina. We’re all here, alive and well—and quite frankly, dear girl, if it wasn’t for what happened, your sister and I may never have got together. I’ve always been her hero ever since that day. You don’t know what that does to a man’s ego.”

We all started laughing and we immediately relaxed. I knew deep down they felt this way, but it didn’t stop the guilt from surfacing. I was just glad that I had finally stepped up and told them both how I felt.

“You really like him, don’t you?” Jack said, interrupting my thoughts.

“I love him,” I said truthfully. Jack and David looked at each other with shocked smiles.

“Wow, I never thought I see the day that Angelina Bradshaw would be in love.”



I pushed at David's arm. "That was very hard for me to admit you know."

He held his hands up, laughing. "I know, I know. It's really good to see. I'm happy for you, Angelina. I really am. You deserve to find happiness."

Rubbing his arm, I thanked him, and we both just sat for a little while longer, sipping on our beers. "You know, Seth doesn't know the whole story yet. I will tell him when we get back to London, but I would appreciate it if you guys—"

"I know," Jack said, interrupting me. "We won't say anything. That's your story to tell."

My mum made up Julia's room again for Seth, which we were both kind of happy about. Now that we knew we loved each other, the temptation of being alone would have been too much. We both wouldn't have done anything—not under my parents roof—but it still would have been torture nonetheless. I knew when that day would happen, because I knew that would be the day he had all of me. The day I would tell him my story.

The week went in quick—a little too quick. Everyone was fussing over me like a child. Sometimes it was nice, but other times were damn right annoying. I knew why they were all like that though, so I kept telling myself not to be so bloody ungrateful and just suck it up.

By the time the end of the week was drawing to a close, I was glad to be heading home. I told my mum and dad that we needed to get back to move Seth's stuff into his new apartment. Of course, my mum wanted to know if I was moving in with him. I told her that this was all new and that baby-steps were required. I didn't want to upset what we had. I think she was just so happy that I had someone like Seth in my life—and for the first time ever—I had to agree with her.

Once we were back in London, we made arrangements to meet Jonathan at the penthouse with the keys. Seth's Solicitor

had Power of Attorney, so signed the completion contract on Seth's behalf two days beforehand. This was his official moving in day. All his belongings were moved in yesterday, thanks to Paul, who was more than willing to help. Everything was going according to plan.

Jonathan was pleased to see us and told me that my bruises were healing well. Everything was healing well thanks to my family, friends, and Seth. I couldn't help but feel a little nervous once he left us though. Thanks to Paul, there was hardly anything that needed unpacking since he'd practically done it all himself.

"This was so nice of Paul to do all this for you. The apartment looks great. I could live in that kitchen alone." I was so busy looking around the apartment in awe of the place, that I didn't even realise Seth was there in front of me. He took my hand in his and kissed it tenderly.

"Then why don't you?" His cheeky smile was back, but I could tell he was deadly serious.

"Seth, I didn't mean... I mean, I didn't say that bec—"

"I know you didn't. It was only what I have been thinking anyway. I want you with me—all the time. I want to know that you'll be here when I get home, or to know that you'll be coming back to me once you finish work. I want to be able to cook us dinner in that kitchen and be happy in the knowledge that you'll be in my arms soon. I want that every day—and I want it with you."

His face was so sincere. It was sexy, sincere. It almost made me smile. "I don't know," I said, finally answering him. "This is all just a little too—"

"Soon? I know. I just know that I want you in my life and I don't see how waiting is going to stop that. I don't expect an answer now. Just at least tell me you'll think about it?"

He looked at me with those pleading, sexy, come-to-bed eyes and I melted. I still couldn't help hating him that little bit for making me feel this way. "Okay," I said, smiling. "I'll

think about it. You don't need to bribe me with those come-to-bed eyes of yours."

His face beamed like an excited child. "You think I have come-to-bed eyes, Cookie?"

"I don't have to answer that." I give him a big cheeky grin and he rewarded me with a full-on smacker of a kiss. No matter how many times he kissed me, it still felt like the very first time all over again. I would never tire of feeling his lips on mine.

"Let's say we unpack the rest of these things and I will reward you with a bottle of champagne, and a slap-up take away meal—courtesy of our local pizzeria?"

I smiled at him, happy in the knowledge that despite all his worth, he could still be a down-to-earth regular guy. "You know, that sounds just about perfect."

## CHAPTER 13

We busied ourselves for a little while, unpacking some boxes full of his clothes and photographs. His family all

looked beautiful, with their beaming smiles and love for one another. It was only now, when I saw the photos of Seth, that he was the only one with a haunted look in his eyes. Even his sister looked completely contented. It must kill her in a way to know that he still carried the guilt of what happened that night, twenty-one years ago. It was only when he told me the story that I realised just how close in age we both were. In fact, there was only two months difference between us, and I was the eldest. Seth called me his cougar and we both laughed about that for a while after.

By the time the evening came and the pizza had arrived, I was more than willing to just sit by the fire and soak up everything Seth. Every now and then I would look up towards Seth's bedroom, knowing that we were going to sleep in there for the very first time. Together. I knew what was coming—there was no way of stopping that. I didn't want to stop it.

We ate the pizza, sometimes feeding each other slices. It was romantic and more than a little erotic. The champagne was going down a treat and was relaxing me a little.

Once all the pizza had gone, Seth leaned in to give me a kiss. "Mmmm, Champagne and roses. My favourite."

I giggled a little into his mouth and kissed him again—this time more hungrily. I wanted him—needed him—but I had to tell him my story first. I had to show him my true self.

I stood up from where we were sat on the floor, and Seth was about to get up when I told him to stay. "I have to show you something." I unhooked the buttons of my jeans and pulled my jumper off. It was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do considering no one had ever seen me naked before now.

I stood in front of Seth with only my bra and panties on, revealing to him the scars that will be forever be etched into my skin. This was me, Angelina Bradshaw—bearing my soul to the one I loved. I stood as he stared over my body—my body that bared the scars of that fateful night.

He came over to where I stood, kneeling in front of me. He looked up, devotion set in his eyes. How could he feel that way about me now?

His pools of blue glistened with the fire, telling me how much he loved me still. No matter what—I was his.

He faced my biggest scar of them all—the one on the right side of my stomach—the one that the monster marked me with. I thought Seth was going to touch it—trail his finger across it—but instead he gently kissed the tip.

I almost choked on the lump that was forming in my throat. I swallowed it down, just like I always did and ran my fingers over his extremely short hair. It felt so soft to the touch; I could have played with it all day.

Feeling it was now or never, I held his head to my stomach, leisurely trailing my fingers down his face. “You trusted me enough to tell me your story. Now it’s time I trust you with mine. I want to tell you. I need to tell you. This is the first time I have said this out loud in eleven years.”

I knelt beside him and began my story.

“I was fifteen years old when I met Jaden Covelli. He was nineteen and I thought he was the nicest, coolest guy ever to live on the planet. I was infatuated by him.

“He was nice to me and made me feel special. He knew I was a virgin, and I always felt he was waiting for me—because he liked me that much that he would. We would go for walks and he would buy me ice cream and tell me he loved me. He had a car he used to drive me around and I thought that was a big thing when I was fifteen. Not all girls in my school had a boyfriend who owned a car. I was almost like a lovesick puppy.” I took a deep breath, feeling the guilt rise again.

“The only problem I had is that my two best friends didn’t like him, and Jaden didn’t like them back. He would say that they both wanted to fuck me and were just jealous that I chose him over them. I didn’t like what he said, but I thought he was

right. I even told them that myself—the stupid child that I was. They just said that they were worried about me and that someone his age shouldn't be hanging around someone my age. It caused a lot of tension between us for a while.” The memory of that, along with the memory of that night, was almost too much. I had to tell him though. It was a part of my life, and now Seth is a part of mine.

“One summer's night, Jaden wanted to lead me to a barn in the middle of this field. I thought he just wanted to spend some time with me alone. I even thought it was romantic. It was only as we got to the door and I heard laughter that I realised it wasn't just him and me. There were five others in there. They had all been drinking and already seemed a little out of it by the time we walked in. I was hesitant to go, but Jaden soothed me and said that we were only going to stay with them for a little while and have some drinks. I trusted him. I took what he said and trusted that I was going to be safe—that he would keep me safe.” The pain of it was all too fresh in my mind. I had kept it hidden, buried deep down inside for so long that I thought I was coping. I was wrong. I wasn't coping. I was hiding. Hiding from myself and the potential of what life could bring me.

With a deep breath, I knew I had to carry on. I had come this far so couldn't back out now.

Gazing up into his beautiful blue eyes, I took his hand. “We were there for about an hour when things started going horribly wrong. Jaden started touching me in places he never touched before. I felt exposed—I felt vulnerable. I told him to stop, but he just kept going, getting rougher and rougher as he went. He then asked his friends if they wanted a go.”

Seth clenched his eyes shut in anger. I could tell this was hard for him to hear. It was hard for me to tell it—but I had to do this. I had to strip myself bare and reveal everything to him. It was the only way I felt we could move forward in our relationship.

Grabbing his hand, I held on as tight as I could for fear he would be ripped from me. He squeezed my hand back and took a deep breath. He nodded for me to carry on.

“They held me down and each took turns to violate me. My clothes would get torn and they would cheer each time a piece of my clothing got ripped. It was like there was a party and I was the bright new shiny toy to play with.

“I had so many hands upon me I didn’t know which ones were which. They weren’t gentle, they made sure of that. Every touch, every pinch was agonising, and the pain etched in my face seemed to heighten their excitement.

“In the end, Jaden knelt beside me as I lay there almost completely naked and exposed. He brandished a knife and told me that each one was going to cut me—brandish me, so that whenever I found a new boyfriend, it would reveal my first conquests to them. He said he was going to go first as he had taken so much energy with me to get me to this point. That he was owed that much, at least.”

I showed Seth the inside of my thigh. There were six distinct markings each in line, going down my leg.

“These are the lines that represent them. The one for each boy that was about to rape me.”

Seth closed his eyes again in anguish. When he opened them back up, a single tear dropped down his face. I tried to wipe away his tear, but he grabbed my hand.

“This isn’t about me, Angel. You have no reason to comfort me. It’s you that’s been through this, not me. I wish I could have known you back then. You would have never of had to go through all that—because you would have been with me.”

He kissed my thigh so tenderly that it was hard to keep focused on the story. I felt I was going to explode with tears. There was no doubt in my mind how much he cared for me.

Instead I took a deep breath, pulled my leg back into position and carried on.



“I was very fortunate that night. I had Jack and David out looking for me. I’m so glad they were both so suspicious that night as I don’t know what would have happened if they hadn’t of turned up.”

Seth’s rigid body had now relaxed. I knew I was hurting him by telling him this story. It was all too close to the mark for him after what had happened with his sister. I did wonder for a while if he would handle the story or not. I knew I had to tell him—I just didn’t know whether he would stay after he knew.

“They came in the barn, and when they saw me pinned down to the ground—all cut and half naked with my clothes all torn—they went ballistic. I felt ashamed that my two best friends had seen me in this state. I was crying and screaming from the pain, but the worst part about the whole ordeal was seeing their faces. I will never forget the look they gave me when they saw me on the ground. It was heartbreaking.

“They started screaming at them to get the fuck away from me. Of course a fight broke out, but there were six of them against three of us. We were all beaten to the ground, and that’s when Jaden decided to reward me this scar on my stomach—one he knows I’ll never get away from. It stares back at me every day—a testimony of what he did to me.

“They eventually picked up their stuff and went. I think they may have thought so much noise was made that they had better get going. We were left for dead. In fact, I would have died if it wasn’t for the fact the farmer was out and about in the field and noticed his barn door wide open. I should imagine he got the shock of his life when he saw us. I had lost so much blood by then that the hospital told me that if I had been left just another half an hour or so that would have been it for me. What didn’t help is the fact I have such a rare blood group that it was hard for them to find the right blood.

“To cut a long story short, they saved my life, and now I’m here to tell the tale. I had to go to court and reveal my whole story to them again. Jack and David also had to take the

stand. In the end, the attackers were sentenced to life for one count of Attempted Rape, one count of Attempted Murder, two counts of Grievous Bodily Harm, and three counts of Possession of an Illegal Substance.” I sighed closing my eyes as the memory of Jack and David being in hospital came washing over me.

“I have never been able to forgive myself for putting Jack and David in that position. If I had listened to them, I wouldn’t have gotten them in that fight that put them both in hospital. David had a collapsed lung and several cracked ribs, and Jack also had cracked ribs, a broken arm and a head fracture. It was devastating beyond belief.”

Seth grabbed both my hands and kissed them tenderly. “In the words of a very beautiful, wise lady I know: you can’t blame yourself for what happened. Jack and David love and care for you a great deal. They obviously don’t feel there is anything to forgive, so why put yourself through all that pain?”

I had to giggle a little when he said this. “I know. Practice what you preach and all.”

He pulled my hands up to his lips again, as I watched in awe at this beautiful man. He was my everything now. No going back.

“You see the thing is,” I began, not wanting to finish quite yet. “After what happened to me, I never trusted anyone ever again. I grew up thinking that the only way forward was to use men. Just like I felt I had been used. I was never going to let myself fall for anyone’s charms again. I wasn’t going to let anyone in—I was in control. I had the power and it felt great to be in that position. I wanted nothing more in life then to get what I wanted and be damned of the consequences. I became reckless and used men just for sex. That was all I needed. Just sex. I didn’t need love to get in the way, as it would only complicate matters—and I was doing fine—until I met you.” I smiled as cheekily as I could, and watched as his infectious grin appeared.

“I managed to build a wall, put up a door, and bolt it shut. I knew what was ahead of me and could control everything and everyone around me. I felt safe. I felt secure. My walls and that bolted door were my protection. My life was predictable with a future I knew I could handle.

“Then the day I met you everything changed. I didn’t feel safe anymore. I didn’t feel secure.”

Seth’s smile disappeared as my words sank in. “Why not?”

“You knocked on my door.

I knew my life would never be the same again. One look was all it took—one glint in your eye and I knew I was yours. I have never been anyone’s before. I hated you for it. I still hate you for it.” I chuckled and swatted him gently for good measure.

“And now?” he asked, smiling.

“Now the door is wide open. You’ve not only opened my door, you’ve bulldozed your way through it. How am I ever going to get it shut again?”

He spun me around and I squealed as he held me to the floor. “You’re never going to close that door again, my angel. That door’s mine now. I own it,” he said flicking my nose with his finger.

“Yes, you do. It is yours to take. I’m giving it to you freely and I don’t want you to ever give it back.”

He kissed me gently, caressing my face. He always had this special knack of making me feel like the most precious woman in the world. I didn’t flinch from the thought this time—I embraced it wholeheartedly.

He kissed each eyelid, and then my nose, before going back to my lips. He pulled away for a little while, sighing contently.

“You know, you’re the most amazing woman I have ever met. You’ve been through so much and yet you seem so

strong, so together. I admire the hell out of you, Miss Bradshaw, and I'm head over heels in love with you."

The giggling surfaced as he kissed my neck. "Keep talking like that, Mr Jacobs, and you just might get lucky tonight." He pulled his head up to face me as he smiled. The smile soon faded as he looked me in the eyes.

"I don't want you to do anything you're not comfortable with, Angelina. I mean it. If you want to wait a little while longer, I'll give you as long as it takes. You're worth every single second, every single hour, every single day until we reach months, if it takes that long. I love you and that's never going to change."

My eyes bulged as I looked at him. "You've got to be kidding me right? I've waited too damn long for this moment. I'm not wasting another second longer. Make love to me, Seth."

His smile widened. "Oh baby, when you say my name like that, how could I resist?"

His mouth was on mine within an instant, no hesitation, no holding back. His hands caressed my face tenderly as his mouth explored my lips, and then my neck. "Oh Seth," I gasped, the feeling exquisite.

"Oh God, Angel. You keep saying my name like that I'm going to come undone." His mouth was on my skin again and it felt so good. I had never had this before. Never had such intimacy before sex. All I knew was straight in and straight out. No questions asked, no hanging around for more—just in and out.

With Seth it was different. He was taking his time, savouring my body—devouring it. I was his, and he now owned every part of me.

His kisses moved from across my neck toward my chest. He cupped my breast and squeezed my nipple. "Oh God," I gasped, arching my back. I had never felt so turned on—never wanted someone so much in my life.

“Have I finally cracked your cookie, my angel?”

I gripped his head and held it to my chest, exploding with absolute love for this man. “Oh Seth,” I said breathlessly. “The crumbs are everywhere.”

He giggled into my chest and the feel of it tickled me a little. Even a little thing like that had me racing for more.

He pushed himself up a little and pulled his jumper off.

*Oh my fucking God!*

If I had seen this sooner, I would have been a goner. He had the most toned bronzed muscles and the silkiest skin I had ever seen. His pecks stood out a little, yearning to be touched. The curves of his waist seemed to swim beautifully down to his hips where his jeans were now in the way. God, those jeans needed to be off, and quick smart.

He spied my heated expression and giggled. “See something you like, Angel?”

“I don’t have to answer that,” I breathed, unable to hold my lust for him. “I want to show you instead.” Pushing myself up, I positioned my face in front of the buttons of his jeans. I couldn’t take it slow. I wanted them off, and quick about it. I unbuttoned each one before you can say “quick about it” and was yanking his jeans down past his waist.

“My, my, we are an eager beaver aren’t we?”

I shook my head, lust burning a hole into him. “Oh Seth, you have no idea.” I pulled his neck towards me and kissed him hard. The tension of wanting and needing this for far too long overflowing like a burst pipe.

As we were kissing, he somehow managed to get his jeans and boxers off, before placing himself back on top of me—where he belongs.

The tender touches and kisses have now been taken over by this carnal desire to have one another. It was always simmering—always on that tip where it turns from the tiny

bubbles forming at the bottom, to full on boiling point at the surface. We were right where we needed to be.

I couldn't help but explore his body. My hands at first were gentle and loving—stroking and caressing his back and his hips—but then the more he spreads his kisses over my body, the more animalistic I become, scratching and pinching at his skin. I almost wondered whether I'm hurting him, but the moans that escaped his lips told me otherwise. It seemed to spur me further.

“You're so beautiful, Angel,” he whispered in my ear. “I can't imagine a life without you in it. You mean the world to me.” He kissed the bottom of my neck and gently pulled the strap of my bra down over my shoulder. He carried on kissing and with one little tug, my breast was exposed. It was right there for him—heaving for his touch. My nipple rock hard awaiting his attention.

He soon gave it to me when his mouth was right there. He licked and sucked it until I was in oblivion. Who would have thought that such a tiny part of me being touched would set my whole body on fire? I was panting and breathless—the need for his touch so strong that it almost took my breath away. “Seth,” I cried, his name a seductive whisper on my tongue.

“Oh God, Angelina. You're so fucking beautiful, so sexy—so mine.”

With another tug, he pulled the remaining bra strap down on the other side, and started his relentless torture on my other nipple. The first nipple was screaming ‘What about me?’, but then his fingers were there caressing and pinching it until I thought I wouldn't be able to take anymore.

I arched myself up as he skipped his fingers around my waist and up towards my back. He unhooked my bra with one hand, awarding him a raised eyebrow from me.

“What can I say? I'm a natural at this,” he beamed.

I was about to reprimand him, when my bra was discarded and his mouth was back on my nipple. “Oh God, Seth, please,” I begged, not caring if it sounds like I am. I am wanton for him and I don’t give a damn who knows it.

“If you keep saying my name like that I’m not going to be able to contain myself.”

“Then why are you?” I asked, just wanting him inside me already.

“I want to take my time with you. You deserve to be cherished—you deserve to be adored, and I need to give that to you. Do you want to come to the bedroom now?”

I shook my head. “Maybe next, I’m comfy right here, thank you very much. Besides, I have never done this in front of a roaring fire before.” I stared up to his beautiful face, admiring the way the light danced in his eyes.

“Well there is a first time for everything. This is a first for me, too. I’m planning on having a lot of firsts with you.”

With a wiggle of my hips, I smiled at him. “Hmm. Well first of all, I would suggest you carry on where you left off.” I trailed a finger down from his cheek, towards his chest and then down his stomach. I watched as my fingers did the walking, and then my eyes rose up leisurely to meet his beautiful face.

Within an instant, a hiss escaped his lips. “It would be my pleasure, Cookie.”

The kissing started again, but this time he descended further. The fluttering in my stomach intensified as his face gets lower and lower, until eventually he is there.

His sexy blue eyes rose up to see me. He had this big cheeky, boyish grin that was so infectious, I nearly split my lip from smiling so wide.

“I think these have to come off,” he said with a sexy voice.

“I think so, too.” I watched as he lowered my knickers slowly towards my feet. His eyes were dancing with the fire,

his bronzed shoulders shining with the flames. I couldn't keep my eyes away from him. It's like they seek him out, determined to memorise every single little detail.

*And oh what detail.*

With a stroke of my thigh, he raised my leg up towards his lips. It was then I felt his mouth on my feet, and the feeling had me gasping with pleasure. I never thought something like that could be so erotic, but hot damn—it was bliss. His light lips trailed up my calf, below my knee—that was a G-spot right there—and up the inside of my thigh.

My chest was heaving with countless breaths, my mind spinning with everything Seth. I just know he will put his mouth on me soon—and I know I won't be able to control myself. He's worked me up into such a frenzy, I think I might just detonate on him.

He carried on kissing everywhere near there, but not actually there. My clit was tingling with anticipation. It's hard and heaving, seeking out his glorious tongue. I'm almost about to beg, when he's there—finally he is there. Seth's tongue gently flicked the tip, and just that tiny movement had me wriggling and shaking underneath his touch. I cried out a long, deep, satisfied moan as his licking intensified.

“Angelina, I never thought anyone could taste as good as you. I could kiss you all day.”

I arched my back again as his tongue raced back to find my clit. “Oh, yes please!” I cried.

With a tug, he pulled my hips up to meet him further and I nearly exploded. I knew I wouldn't be too long. I knew it's going to be explosive, but I just wanted this feeling to last that little bit longer.

I gripped onto the rug beside me, willing myself not to give in too soon—but then his tongue is everywhere, licking over and over and over again. I felt my face brighten with heat, and it had nothing to do with the fire. My body went rigid and my legs wouldn't stop shaking. My mind was willing, but my



body was having none of it. She wanted to go and she wanted to go now.

I felt the build up at the pit of my stomach, my mouth making the most incomprehensible sounds known to man. I knew the orgasm coming was going to be like no other. I could already feel the build up and the feeling itself was exquisite.

“Seth!” I cried—the orgasm so intense that I ended up ripping a few bits of fluff from his rug. I arched my back again one last time as I cried out in pure ecstasy. Nothing has ever come that close.

“Oh my God, Seth, I’m so sorry,” I said, clasping a hand over my mouth. I raised my hands up and let the wool slip through my fingers. He watched in amazement as they fell gently to the floor, and then a grin appeared out of nowhere.

“Don’t you dare apologise for that. Jesus, Angelina. Do you realise just how goddamned sexy you are? I’m going to buy those rugs by the bulk if I end up giving you an orgasm like that every time.”

I started laughing and Seth soon followed. I’m on the most amazing high, my body still tingling from the most magnificent climax I have ever experienced.

“You know,” he said rising up to meet me. “I have feather pillows—maybe you could rip a few of those apart later?”

“Now that, Seth, would be my pleasure.” I gave him a cheeky grin, but soon the smile was gone as he traced his fingers down my cheek. My body shuddered under his touch, making the goose bumps rise everywhere.

“You don’t realise how good I feel knowing I can have this affect on you. You’re so receptive, so... mine.”

“I think you may have said that already.”

“Well, you are mine and I am completely yours.”

He ended that conversation with a kiss, my desire building up in flames again. He soon positioned himself between my

legs as I spread them wide, inviting him in.

Before moving any further, Seth looked down into my eyes. “I always wear condoms, but I need to feel you, Angel—with nothing between us. I assure you I’m clean, but if you want, I can go and get one?”

Shaking my head, I stroked his cheek. “I’m on the pill, and I assure you that I am clean, too. I want to feel you just as much.”

With my acceptance, he manoeuvred himself. I felt a tinge of nerves as it was our first time, but all fears were eradicated once he was inside me. I gasped as he slid himself in—my heart thumping against his chest. It took a little while for me to adjust to him, but that was soon out the window once he started to move.

“Angelina, you feel so good,” he breathed into my ear.

“Seth,” I whispered as I dug my nails into his back. He moaned in my ear and suddenly his movements became faster. I wrapped my legs around his waist and felt the pressure of his beautiful cock at the point of no return. To describe the way he made me feel was indescribable. The way he felt when he pushed himself into me was heavenly.

With a tilt of my hip, I raised myself a little to meet him more, causing a moan from Seth. “You have to stop doing that, Angelina. I’m not sure I can last much longer.”

His mouth was soon on mine, and hungrily our tongues met—the feeling like no other. All too soon my body reacted to the wonderful sensations. I felt the familiar tingles rising again. I certainly didn’t expect to have another orgasm, but this one was rising faster than any one I have ever had before. I moaned into his mouth, unable to stop this feeling from taking over. I didn’t want it to stop.

“Oh my God, Seth,” I cried—squeezing his tight round buttocks into me one last time as I fell apart. The orgasm was ringing and ringing in my ears. My body felt like it was floating on air.

“Jesus, Angel!” he screamed, pounding faster and faster until his body stiffened and he collapsed on top of me.

I suddenly couldn't breathe, but it was such a good feeling. It was not oppressive in anyway. I was too busy enjoying the euphoria of the best *take your breath away* sex I've ever had.

With a sigh, Seth raised his head to look into my eyes. He was still inside me, locked together, and it felt just about perfect.

“I could stay like this forever, but I'm frightened that I'm squashing you.” He smiled, leaning in for a soft kiss. He still amazed me how perfect he is.

“I don't want you to move. I want to stay like this forever.”

“Oh, you do, do you? I think I could arrange that,” he said with the cheeky grin. “You're an absolute stunner of a woman, Miss Bradshaw. I think I might be a little obsessed with you.”

I rolled my eyes. “I know, you're my very own stalker—going in my bag and placing phones in there.” As soon as I said that I remembered what Paul told me. So many things have happened since then, that it completely slipped my mind. “Talking of which, I have a bone to pick with you.”

“Uh-oh, I don't like the sound of that,” he said, raising his head a little.

“You stole Paul's phone didn't you?”

That big, huge cheeky grin was back again. I already knew the answer before I even asked, but he would make a terrible liar if I didn't.

“I may have done, but the big question is, how do you know?”

I had to smile at that. I just couldn't help myself. “We bumped into each other, and guess what? We had coffee together. Now, stick that in your pipe and smoke it,” I quipped, sticking my tongue out at him.

“Oh, Cookie, you’re in big trouble now, you realise that, don’t you?” He had this playful look in his eyes, making my heart race at the thought of not knowing what he was about to do next.

“Seth, don’t you dare!” I knew he was up to something, but just didn’t know what. It was a warning to the unknown.

“Don’t I dare what, Angel? Do this,” he said tickling me like crazy. I was going absolutely mental underneath him, but he had me pinned. Now I wasn’t so keen on the idea of staying like we were forever. Now that his hands were everywhere, my instincts were telling me to run.

“Please stop!” I yelled, giggling like an idiot. He stopped abruptly and smiled down at me.

“I think you’ve made me hard again with all that wriggling. That was quite a turn on.”

I wriggled again for good measure. “See, I don’t hop like a bunny, I wriggle like a snake.” I didn’t know where that came from, but Seth thought it was hilarious. His laughter radiated the room and made me smile.

“That Paul’s a little shit. He never said anything to me.” He rolled off, lying beside me, and I couldn’t help but gawk at him again. He was just about perfect.

Of course he caught me though. “You’re leering at me again, Angel.”

I snapped my head up to meet his face and smiled. “Sorry, can’t help it.”

He sighed, rolling himself to the side so he could lean his head in his hand. “You know, I’m not sure how I can take being an obvious sex object to you. My face is up here, and yet your eyes always tend to wander. I wonder why that is.”

I turned myself over to the side and faced him. “I’m sorry. I just can’t help myself. You know I love you right?”

A sarcastic laugh ripped from Seth. “How cliché is that? I feel used and abused.”

Sitting up, I positioned myself on top of him. In an effort to get him back I started poking around his ribs, making him jump. “Now, you’re being the cheeky one. Two can play at this tickling game you know.”

His face turned deadly serious all of a sudden. “Aha, yes—but you’ll never be as good as me.” That grin appeared and before I knew it he was moving like lightning.

Racing to my feet as quick as a flash, I went squealing around Seth’s apartment. I ran around the huge expanse of the kitchen island, and quickly spot some grapes on the counter-top. With a pick of a few, I started throwing them at him.

“Now come on, Cookie, you’re just being childish now,” he said with a smile.

I threw another one at him and this one he caught dead in his mouth. I giggled so hard I almost didn’t see him coming. I bolted for Seth’s bedroom and grabbed one of his feather pillows. “Don’t move or the goose gets it!” I shouted.

He smiled, trailing a finger along the bed post. “They’re actually a special super microfiber filling. More expensive than the duck or down pillows, but it’s not from real birds.”

I had a little ‘Aww’ moment, but it was soon over when he saw my weakness and used that to his advantage. He came rushing towards me and I threw the pillow at him, screaming my head off. I jumped on the bed but he grabbed my ankle, yanking me down. I fell to the bed and immediately he was on top of me.

“I told you I was determined to get you into my bed, didn’t I? I knew it would happen one day.”

I stuck my tongue out at him again. I couldn’t help it. He brought the child out in me. “You’re so self assured aren’t you, Mr Jacobs?”

“Only when it comes to you. I had to have you, Angel. There was no escape.”

“Well, now that you have me, what are you going to do with me?”

His eyes looked down towards my face as he smiled. “Oh, Angel, I think I can show you that right now.”

And he did.

## CHAPTER 14

I woke the next morning with imitation feathers all over the bed. I picked one up and tickled it against my little finger. It felt soft and fluffy to the touch.

When I turned over I found that Seth wasn't here with me. Immediately I shot out of bed, ready and alert, wondering where the hell he was. I didn't bother putting anything on. It was a strange feeling walking around naked in front of someone. It was something I could quite happily get used to now.

Before I ventured out, I briefly looked in the mirror at my now fading bruises. They were all healing quicker than I thought, but then I guess having someone love you to death will do that for you.

I walked out into the huge expanse of the kitchen come living area and found Seth whisking some eggs with only a pair of chequered pyjama bottoms on. I had to stop a little and admire this sight. I still couldn't get used to the fact he was mine now.

All mine.

He turned around slightly and caught my stare. "Morning beautiful. Did you have a good sleep?"

I walked across to him and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "Yes, thank you," I said winking at him. He looked at my hair, and with a smile he plucked a feather from a strand at the top.

"I'm doing scrambled eggs, how does that sound?"

"Sounds lovely, but can I have you as a side order?" I gave him a cheeky grin as he placed the bowl back down on the counter. I watched in awe as he walked slowly towards me. Once he was inches away he wrapped his arm around my waist, pulling me in. I gasped unashamedly as he kissed my neck.

"Angel, you smell wonderful. In fact, screw the eggs; I'm having you for breakfast."

I squealed as he picked me up and placed me on top of the breakfast island. With a dip of his head, he started eating in to my stomach. I was giggling so hard, it made my sides hurt. "Stop, stop!" I yelled.

He stopped as instructed, and looked down at me. I didn't even realise until then that he had me at his mercy. I was lying completely flat and exposed, on top of his kitchen island.

Suddenly, Seth's big eyes widened like he'd just had the best idea. "Hold on a sec," he said, running towards his

cabinets. He started pulling out jams, marmalades and honey's—spreading them across the counter-top.

“What are you doing?” I asked, trying to get up.

He soon caught my movement and came running over. “Ah, ah, ah, Angel—you stay right where you are.”

After making sure I didn't move, Seth ran back to the condiments and began unscrewing the lids. He placed them all methodically by my naked, sprawling body, and proceeded to spoon some of the contents out of the jam jar.

“Now hold still, my beauty. You're about to become my breakfast.”

His cheeky grin had my stomach flying with butterflies. It was still a strange, alien sensation to me, but one which I welcomed with open arms now. No matter how many times I saw his face, his beauty never ceased to amaze me.

I watched as his excited blue eyes danced over me, as he placed jam on several parts of my body. He looked like a kiddie in a candy store, and it was more than heart-warming to watch.

He placed some on my nipples and I shuddered a little at his touch. “Too cold?” he asked, a little frown burrowing his beautiful features.

“No, it's not that. It's you—it's always you.” My smile widened that little bit more as his face changed revealing that little dimple I love so much. I couldn't help but touch that little dimple—it was right there for the grouping.

“Hey,” he scolded as I grabbed his cheek.

“Do you know how much that little dimple of yours turns me on?” He had to know.

“My dimple eh?” he replied, revealing it that little bit more with his smile. “I know something else that turns you on. Hold up a sec.” Before I could register he was out of the door, leaving me with sticky jam all over me. When he came back



in, I gasped. He was wearing that NY cap again, but this time he was wearing it backwards.

My goodness, he was so damn hot!

“I think I’ve changed my mind about this game. I think I want to lick jam off you instead.” I tried in vain to get up, but he raced toward me with a kiss. It stopped me dead in my tracks. His warm, enticing lips were so soft and inviting, it was hard to concentrate on anything else but him. There could be a band playing behind us and I would be none the wiser. It was just him and me, and right now nothing else mattered in the world.

Before I even realised, I was back to lying completely flat on the counter-top again. He pulled away a little but only so he could smile down at me.

“I love having you submissive underneath me. You don’t realise just how fucking sexy you are.”

I gasped as his words hit me right between my legs. Dipping his head, he kissed my neck again and gently moved lower towards my nipples. With a flick of his tongue he licked and sucked the jam off me, making little moaning sounds as he went. I was very nearly gone already. I couldn’t believe just how much one little touch could affect me.

“Hmm, Cookie with jam on top. What a combination. My mornings can’t get any better than this,” he whispered.

I didn’t think I could quite feel my legs at this point. He moved methodically towards my other nipple and started the same sweet torture on that one. Then he does something completely unexpected. He trailed his tongue all the way from my belly button right up towards my left nipple. “Oh my fucking God,” I shouted as I arched my back in surrender. He could do just about anything to me right now and I wouldn’t care.

“You like that, do you baby?”

“Oh God, yes.” My breathing was hitched and erratic, but I didn’t care. I was too lost in the moment.

“I want to learn everything inch of your gorgeous body, Angel. What turns you on and what makes you go crazy. You’re just too much for words.”

This time he grabbed the honey and requested that I turn over. I’m all too wanton with lust by now that I think I might just burst.

I did as I was told as my body just seemed to obey his orders without my brain engaging. It’s funny how things have changed.

I watched with interest as he turned the honey upside-down and started squeezing a line from my ankles all the way up to my thighs. Immediately he licked all the way up, stopping momentarily at the back of my knee. He licked and kissed there so tenderly that it immediately hit me straight between my legs again. “Oh God!” I shouted again. How on earth could the back of my knee be a G-Spot?!

“Ah, another crazy spot. I’ll have to remember that.”

With a contented sigh, he trailed his tongue up my other leg and did the same torturous licking and kissing on the back of my other knee. I started moaning louder than ever—it was just so good.

“You don’t realise how beautiful you look.” He poured more honey onto my buttocks and back, starting the same torture as he worked his way up.

The moans that were escaping me were loud and unforgiving. Every lick and every feel of his rosebud lips on my skin had me burning with fire.

“Turn around,” he instructed—and instantly again—my body obeyed. He grabbed my legs and spun me round to meet him. The fire in both our eyes were dancing with desire. He positioned himself between my legs and kissed me. The pressure of his body on mine had an instant reaction. I felt I was about to lose control.

“Seth, please,” I begged. I needed him inside me so badly I thought I might scream. He sensed my desperation and

quickly pulled his bottoms down. He was inside me even quicker, but he stayed for a moment, our breathing harsh as our eyes were locked on one another. His come-to-bed eyes were making love to mine as we took a moment to savour each other.

Pretty soon, he started a steady rhythm and I just couldn't believe how good he felt. With him kissing me, he placed a hand behind my neck and started massaging the base, where the spine meets my head. As he applied the pressure I felt a jolt of pleasure shoot through my body.

I moaned into his mouth, causing him to pull away slightly. "You like that, do you?"

"Seth, what is that?" I asked breathlessly.

"It's a pressure point. Relax and enjoy," he whispered.

He carried on this gentle, erotic message for a while, but then he moved his hand away from my neck, and down towards my belly. Once there, he seemed to measure roughly five inches away from my belly button and pressed down slightly. I very nearly climaxed then and there. I didn't know what the hell he was doing—all I knew was that it felt so fucking good.

I cried out again, causing Seth to smile a little. He was exploring my body as we were making love and it made me feel worshipped—it made me feel adored.

As if I couldn't take any more, his hands were wandering again back up towards my shoulders. With a brush of his hands, he started rubbing the spot where my neck meets my shoulder. I arched my back and closed my eyes in surrender. I didn't think my body could take much more stimulation. I was getting it from every point. I felt relaxed and super-charged on sexual energy all at the same time.

I thought the build up would be gradual, but then Seth quickened his pace that little bit more. With that, I was a goner.

I felt the build-up come in intense waves. It was nothing like I had ever felt before. The orgasms yesterday were like nothing I had ever experienced—but this. This had me on the edge of a beautiful precipice. I was about to fall and I didn't care how far.

He was back on my lips again as his hand found my nipple and squeezed it gently. That was it for me—I fell—and I kept on falling. I was screaming his name over and over and over again, his body all sweaty and sticky from the jam. Instead of feeling icky, it somehow added to the pleasure. It just kept coming and coming and wouldn't stop. I grabbed the nearest thing I could find and squeezed the bejesus out of it. Whatever it was went squishy in my hand, but I didn't care.

I could feel Seth's build-up. It seemed just as violent as mine. "Fuck, Angelina—you feel so good." He screamed as he too, came violently with me.

If I thought it couldn't get much better than last night, I was wrong. That just topped it—and that was saying something.

He remained on top of me, his breathing harsh. He looked down towards me and smiled. "You're so beautiful when you come. I didn't think life could get any better than this, my angel. You're just too much for words." He glanced across at my hand and chuckled. I looked too as I was wondering what it was I was squeezing to death.

"You really are quite violent when you come. I don't know what the banana ever did to you."

"I'm sorry," I offered—even though I wasn't.

"I told you, you don't ever need to apologise for being who you are. It's one of the many things I love about you."

I smiled sweetly into his beautiful eyes. "I love you, too." I was happier than I had been in a long time. Just staring at him again had the fires burning. It never seemed to end.

Looking down at my icky self had me wondering suddenly. "What on earth was all that massaging you were doing? It was

like nothing I had ever felt before. I have erogenous zones I never knew I had.”

He laughed a little and kissed me lightly on the lips. “I’ve read manuals. I like to know what pleases a woman.” He looked away slightly like he was a little embarrassed by what he said.

“Wow, no wonder you have lots of bunnies,” I chuckled.

“I thought I told you, Little Miss Naughty—bunnies don’t exist in my world. Not until you entered it.”

I smiled brightly at him. “I have a t-shirt with that on.”

“What, Little Miss Naughty?” he asked.

I nodded my head and he smiled. “I’d like to see you in that one day,” he said with an impish grin. “And only that.”

Spying the cap on his head, I shook my own. “I can’t believe you made love to me with your baseball cap on.”

His eyes danced over my face, taking every bit of my willpower not to moan. “But did it have the desired effect?”

My God I wanted him again. “Believe me when I say, everything you do has the desired effect.”

“Then my work here is done.”

He moved himself off me and kissed the inside of my thigh—and just as he did that—the telephone rang.

With an offer of his hand, he made sure he took the time helping me down before he answered. I took that as my cue to give him some privacy whilst I jumped into the shower.

Once I was dressed and ready for the day, I came back out and caught Seth in the exact same position, whisking his eggs in only his chequered pyjamas. But this time he had that baseball cap on still. It never failed to amaze me how sexy he looked.

Looking up, he spied me coming towards him as his blue eyes sparkled with delight. “Wow, at this rate I’m not going to

get anything done today. You look good enough to eat again.”

I wrapped my arms around his waist and came in for a kiss, biting the bottom of his lip. I lightly trailed my fingers down his pecks, counting each one as I went. “One,” I whispered, kissing him seductively on the lips. “Two,” I breathed, feeling the heat from his breathless mouth. “Three,” I whispered again as my finger travelled further. “Four,” I sighed as the burn resurfaced between my legs. I’m not sure when enough is enough with this man.

“Angel, you need to stop this. I already feel guilty about not making you breakfast sooner. It’s taking me so long to do these eggs that it’s nearly lunchtime. Now stop that and go take a seat like a good ‘Little Miss Naughty’ that you are.”

I started chuckling. “If I was a Little Miss Naughty, I wouldn’t do as I was told now, would I?”

He wrapped his arm around me and patted my bottom. “Stop that, Angelina. Now go sit.” He kissed me lightly, but I lingered for a moment causing him to moan. “Please go sit,” he begged. I laughed, but did as I was told as he finished off making the breakfast.

Once all the toasts and eggs were placed on the table, Seth sat and pondered for a moment.

“That was my mum on the phone. There was talk about having a barbecue a few days ago, but she wasn’t sure about the weather. Now she’s got the forecast for this Saturday—and knows it’s going to be a warm day—she wants to go ahead with it. I told her that I wanted to bring you. How do you feel about that? You’ll get to meet a few members of my family.”

That thought suddenly scared me. I had never had to meet parents before. Not ones I was supposed to impress anyway. Seth mattered to me and so did the thought of his parents liking me. That was what scared me more than anything.

“You don’t seem too thrilled with the idea.”

He noticed the way I hesitated and I felt a little guilty. I kept thinking back to the massive amount of energy he must

have put in by driving all the way down to Cornwall to meet all my family and friends. The least I could do is offer the same.

“It’s not that,” I finally said. “I’ve just never had to do this before. It’s all new to me and a little bit scary. I’ll do it though. I want to do it. In fact, I very much look forward to it.”

He gave me a big beaming smile and clasped my hand. “This is the first time I’m doing this also, Angelina. Don’t be surprised if I get a few phone calls throughout the day.”

And he did. Straight after breakfast from his sister. Then after the washing up from his brother. Then about an hour after that from his auntie. They were all shocked and stunned at him wanting to bring a girl, and they all said they couldn’t wait to see me. It was then that I had a little glimpse into what it was like for Seth when he met all my friends and family. He was like the most fascinating creature on the planet—all because they had never seen me with someone before. Not someone they knew I liked so much anyway. It was all quite frightening.

We spent the rest of the afternoon shopping. I was really amazed at how patient he was with me going through the aisles. He almost seemed to enjoy the experience—which shocked me a little. I thought it was only right that I buy something for his new home, so while Seth was trying on some new clothes, I went wandering about and found the most amazing crystal candlesticks. They were the most expensive candlesticks I had ever seen, but Seth was worth it. As soon as I saw them, I had to get them, regardless of price. They were beautiful and would look perfect in Seth’s new modern home.

## CHAPTER 15



I woke up on Saturday morning feeling lighter than air. I've had the most amazing two weeks off with Seth that I could ever wish for. He loved my present and I was glad he never reprimanded me for getting it. I wouldn't have liked that. He accepted them graciously and they now have a happy home being displayed in his clear glass kitchen cabinet. We used them that night with our meal and just basked in one another's company, enjoying the last remaining days we had together—alone—twenty-four seven.

The only annoying part about my stay was when we went out for a meal one evening and one of his ex-bunnies was there. Her name was Tania, and I remembered her as one of the girls from that night we first met. She threw daggers at me all evening, and when she introduced herself she made it plainly obvious she didn't like me. The thing with me is, I knew that two could easily play at her game, so I asked her if she wouldn't mind moving because she was interrupting the footsie Seth and I were playing underneath our table. Seth smiled, seemingly impressed, and Tania stomped her foot and marched away. It was the funniest thing I had ever seen.

"Now that one, I'll call Thumper," I said, and we both rolled about laughing, causing a right scene throughout the restaurant.

Other than that, the evening went well, and I was bathing in everything Seth. What I was quickly reminded of when I woke up, was today is the day I meet Seth's family. I wasn't quite sure I was ready yet, even though I've had five days to get used to the idea. Seth did say that Paul would be there and I felt a little relieved about that. At least I would know someone at the barbecue.

Once we were in the car I was a bundle of nerves and Seth could tell. He started up the F-Type and she roared to life, giving me slight relief from my nerves. Hearing that sound never ever gets old.

Closing my eyes, I took a couple of deep breaths. Once I opened them I saw Seth looking at me. He grabbed my hand

and told me everything was going to be okay. I instantly smiled with relief as he put the car into drive and headed out of the basement car park.

The drive itself was under an hour, considering Seth liked to open the Jag up whenever he could. It was all a thrill to me, and not once did I feel scared or intimidated by his driving. In fact it was too much of a distraction. He had his baseball cap on again and the stubble all round his chin looked good enough to lick. It was taking all of my self control not to undo my seatbelt and do just that. If I didn't think it would put us in danger on the road, I would have. He was just too irresistible.

He caught me leering at him a few times and laughed. He even chastised me when he caught me looking at his crotch a handful of times. It was a great distraction from what I knew was coming. I really didn't know what to expect other than I was going to meet them.

When we got there and entered a security gate, I almost had a full on panic attack. I knew they were rich, but I didn't realise they owned a mansion out here. The place was huge, and quite frankly, intimidating. The meticulously cut lawns and trees seemed to span for miles as we made our way to the enormous house. The house itself was brick with the most amazingly huge windows. It had climbing plants that curved graciously round each window, and the colours were a mix of violets and soft pinks. It was absolutely stunning.

We pulled out in front of the house onto the gravel, and Seth swiftly came round to open my door. He held out his hand, quickly pulling me up towards him with a smile.

“Don't be nervous. It's fine. You have nothing to worry about, Angel. I love you and you love me. That's all that matters to me. Nothing and no one can ever change that, okay?”

I nodded my head and he kissed me tenderly causing me to sigh contentedly.

“Hey, nephew, stop sucking on that poor girls lip, and get inside!”

Jumping out of my skin, I looked towards Paul coming down the stairs. “Sorry,” he said laughing. “I didn’t mean to make you jump.”

“That’s fine, how are you Paul? It’s good to see you.” I smiled at him as he pushed Seth out of the way, almost causing him to fall over—all because he wanted to give me a hug.

“You might be my uncle, you little jumpstart, but you ain’t family enough for a good knuckle sandwich.”

They started pushing each other around a little until a big female voice filled the air. “You two, cut it out this instant!”

Looking up to find the voice, my eyes nearly fell out of my head. She caught my gaze, stopped momentarily, smiled the same cheeky Seth smile, and carried on her journey.

I was shocked beyond words who it was. For a moment I forgot where I was and whispered, “It’s Cruella Di Vil.” It was only when Seth said, “Who?” that I remembered there were ears around me that could hear. I whispered very briefly who she was and he started laughing.

“She likes to do that a lot,” he explained.

“You mean she’s not really gay?”

“No,” he said, laughing harder. “She likes to play games with the estate agents. She says it releases some of the boredom of buying houses.”

I rolled my eyes, but then had this sudden unwelcome thought. She’s not Seth’s mum is she? Surely not, she’s way too young.

Seth soon put my mind at ease when he introduced us. “Angelina, I would like to introduce you to my aunt, Belinda. But then I believe you two have already met.”

“Angelina, darling. So nice to see you again,” she purred.

She kissed me on both cheeks and stood looking at Seth and I. “Okay, Miss Charmers. You can stop the act now.”

Everyone laughed and Seth politely told her I called her Cruela Di Vil, which earned an arm slap from me. Belinda thought it was hilariously funny. Considering she liked practical jokes, then my joke shouldn’t faze her one little bit.

“I can also do cock-a-ney,” she said with an impish grin.

“Cock-a-ney?” I asked, smiling.

“Yea, I wanna buy a Mickey Mouse. Preferably one with apples and pears ya know? And a dining room big enuff to put me Cane and Abel. It’s got to ave an hanger, once I gets in, so I know where to put me Weasel and Stoat, and the tables got to be big enuff for me Ruby Murray of a night time—Innit?”

The laughter came spilling out of me as I looked towards Seth, who was now rolling his eyes at her. He must have heard this a thousand times.

“Well, Cruella, you have to have something big enough to house all your Dalmatians.”

She laughed and stopped abruptly. “That’s true. I like her.” She pointed at Seth and smiled.

Seth beamed back towards me and some of the nerves I felt were gradually fading away. That is, until I hear and see what must be Seth’s mum. She walked down the stairs elegantly with her blonde hair flowing behind her. She looked a lot like Belinda, who I can see now looked a lot like Seth. I didn’t know why I never saw that before. She was very pretty—I knew that much—but I think I was too busy trying to avoid any kind of contact with her. Funny thinking about it now. All along she was just joking around with me. I should have felt like a sucker, but instead I was quite charmed by the lovely Miss Charmers—and I never thought I’d say that in a million years.

“Darling, it’s been ages. Where have you been?” she asked, racing in for a hug.

She seemed to completely ignore me, as she belted towards her son. Once the distinct impression that she was going to be difficult surfaced in my mind, the nerves kicked up a notch. Unfortunately, I quickly realised that my instincts were bang on.

“Mum, I’d like you to meet someone very special to me. Her name’s Angelina Bradshaw, and she recently moved from Cornwall up to London. She works for Jonathan.” He then turned to me and said, “Angelina, this is my mum, Melissa.”

I distinctly thought I saw her stiffen when he mentioned my name. I thought there was going to be trouble, but she politely offered me her hand, smiled—somewhat falsely—and ushered us to come inside.

I looked over at Seth nervously and he tightened his grip on my hand. He was trying to offer reassurance, but I didn’t think any amount of that could help the fact that his mother had taken an instant disliking to me. I wondered if she felt that way before we met, or whether it was just on first impressions. I could debate that over and over until my head was sore, but it still wouldn’t change the fact.

We walked up the many stairs to the most audacious entrance I had ever seen in my life. I did notice, however, that there was a lovely long winding slope coming from the door that led from both the left side and the right. I quickly remembered that this must be for Seth’s sister, Carla.

When I walked in I was greeted by one of the biggest halls I had ever seen in my career of selling houses. There was a grand winding staircase to the right that must have led up to God knows how many bedrooms and bathrooms. The scene all reminded me of the house the Grayson’s lived in from the TV show called *Revenge*. It certainly seemed they had the money to live in the Hamptons.

We were led from there into the vast kitchen area, and out towards the back garden. It certainly didn’t look like a back garden; it was more like a Botanical garden. There was a huge terrace which followed the most obscene amount of stairs

leading down towards the grass. There were tiers of the most beautiful flowers leading all the way down towards a massive, elegant marquee. Inside, tables were carefully laid out with mint precision. But what really shocked me was the people. There were hundreds of them. I thought it was just going to be a small gathering of family. I didn't realise it was going to be a full on house party.

I spotted Carla from a distance, and when she saw Seth, her smile lighted up my heart a little. You could tell how much she loved him. There was no denying that from his big sister.

Melissa excused herself for a moment to tend to some guests, which I was happy about. This left me trying to impress the other lady in Seth's life—and I really hoped she liked me.

"Seth," she cried opening her arms out for a big hug.

"Hey, Pumpkin, how are you?" He bent down to give her a great big hug, and when he managed to tear himself away, he looked over at me.

Carla spied me and gave me the most welcoming smile. "So this must be the famous Angelina. Your ears must have been burning for weeks. You've certainly been the topic of conversation many a time in our house."

My eyes bulged out of my head as she laughed. "Don't worry," she said. "It's all good. We're just so glad he's finally met someone that can calm him down a bit. There's certainly been a big change in my little brother lately—and it's a good thing." She smiled at him adoringly and it instantly relaxed me again.

"Angel, can I get you drink of champagne?"

"Oh yes please," I answered.

He ventured off, leaving Carla and I alone. I took some time looking around and found that Paul and Belinda had also disappeared suddenly. With this amount of people, it was hard to keep count.

“It really is nice to meet you,” I said, offering my hand.

Carla smiled and shook my hand. “Us, too. As I say, you’ve been quite the topic of conversation. I think I love you already.”

I giggled a little. “That’s good to know—although I’m not sure everyone feels the same.” I glanced over to Melissa, who was talking to a couple of middle-aged men. They all laughed at something she said, and it made me shudder a little. I think I called the wrong sister the Dalmatian lady.

Carla gazed over to where I was looking and shook her head. “I wouldn’t worry too much about my mum. She’s not used to Seth having someone important other than his family in his life. It will take some adjusting, but she’ll get used to the idea eventually. I told her not to come down hard on you. I hope she hasn’t got her claws out.”

She started laughing, but the whole thing made me nervous. She saw how serious I was looking so offered me her hand. “Come on, Angelina. You’ll be fine. Enjoy the day, drink champagne and eat all you can. You’ll never leave hungry after one of our feasts.”

Seth came over with my champagne and I felt more at ease. We found a table where we sat and chatted for a while. Carla told me all about her fantastic job at Little Stars. I told her how much I admired the work she does, and she just shrugged her shoulders, modestly. We then ventured onto the subject about me, telling her the story about how Seth and I met. I was so engrossed, I didn’t realise we had been gathering a little audience around our table until people started laughing at my cookie jokes.

“So, that’s where you got the number plate from,” Paul laughed and patted Seth’s shoulder. “He wouldn’t tell me when I asked,” he whispered in my direction.

Carla wanted to know a little bit about my job. She said she was always hearing stories about her family buying and selling houses, but never from the estate agents point of view.

I told her some stories and she was enthralled by them. Especially when I told her about a guy with a wig on his head that kept falling down little by little as I was showing him around the house. It was hilariously funny, but hugely distracting when you're trying to keep a serious face on. By the time it was over, it was practically hanging over his eyes.

I also told her about Belinda, and how much she had put a number over me. Belinda was there by this time and received a numbers of tuts from people—most of whom, I didn't have a clue who they were. It was then that Belinda looked at me with a frown.

“Hold on a sec, didn't you say at the viewing that you had a boyfriend?” My eyes bulged as she carried on. “Yes, that's right. What was his name? Jacob, wasn't it?”

I started laughing nervously and looked at Seth. “Jacob?” he asked, with one eyebrow raised.

I was feeling a little hot all of a sudden as the nerves kicked in. I knew I had to be honest about it. There was just no escape. “Belinda put me on the spot you see. Of course I didn't have a boyfriend at the time and I couldn't think of a name. I was due to have a viewing with you later and your surname popped into my head. It was just the first name I came up with.”

I played with my fingers a little as Belinda and Seth started laughing.

“Isn't that strange?” Belinda asked. “Who would have known that you were closer to the mark than you thought. Don't worry, darling, I'm not going to pounce on you anymore now you have Jacob as your boyfriend.”

Seth gripped my hand and smiled. Leaning forward, he breathed in my ear. “You look so sexy when you're nervous, Angel.”

“That's not helping, Seth,” I said, gritting my teeth.

“Sorry, babes,” he whispered. “I just can't help myself around you.”



A little while later, we were in the middle of discussing Seth's car when I noticed Melissa walk across the lawn towards a very handsome man. He looked to be in his late forties, early fifties, with black swept back hair and nice, clean-shaven skin. He was very tall, just like Seth, and looked like he kept in great shape. I saw Melissa lean in and kiss him softly. It was the only tenderness I saw from her—other than with Seth of course.

I saw her walk towards our table and my stomach immediately began to churn. I could just about handle Melissa not liking me for whatever reason, but I'm not sure how I would take it if Seth's dad didn't like me either.

All that seemed to fade though when he came towards me. I stood up, as it was the polite thing to do, and he gave me a fantastic, beaming smile.

“You must be, Angelina. It's so nice to meet you finally.”

I offered my hand and he took it, kissing me lightly. I stared into his eyes and immediately felt a familiarity about him. It was almost like being at home. His smile made me calm as he pried his eyes away from me to look at Seth.

“Son, you told me this lady was beautiful, but you never said how stunningly so.”

I blushed a little and Melissa drew daggers into me. I was starting to really dislike her, myself.

“Dad, don't. You're embarrassing the poor girl!”

The voice from behind Seth's dad made me jump. I looked over his shoulder and saw a very young looking version of Seth.

“How ya doing, buddy?” he asked Seth, as he pulled him in for a hug.

After their pleasantries, Seth turned back to me apologising. “Angelina,” he began. “This is my father, Thomas, and this here is my brother, Joey.”

“Nice to meet you,” I smiled, holding out my hand. He surprised me by coming in for a big bear hug. This boy only looked to be about eighteen, nineteen, but he was surprisingly big and strong. My eyes bulged for the millionth time today as I sought Seth for refuge.

“Joey, cut it out, you’re crushing her with your big self,” Seth said laughing. “Sorry, Angel. He can get a bit carried away at times.”

“That’s okay. I want to thank you all for inviting me. It’s really nice to meet you all.”

“You’re more than welcome,” Thomas said, squeezing my hand. “It’s nice to meet the girl that’s finally stolen my boy’s heart—and the way I see you look at Seth—it would seem the feeling is mutual.”

I smiled over at Seth, but I could still feel the daggers from Melissa’s stare. Seth smiled back, lovingly, and right then I just didn’t care. She could throw them at me if she wants to. It was me and him. No one else—just us.

“Come, come!” Thomas shouted. “Let’s all eat.”

Looking at the end of the marquee, I could see a huge row of tables. The tables were already filled with food, and were quickly being added to by what looked like staff. My goodness, they hired their own staff to do a barbecue!

Seth took my hand and led the way. I welcomed it as I thought I would get lost otherwise. Having Seth near had a calming influence over me, so the more he held my hand, the better.

The food was just endless. There was barbecue chicken and ribs. There were burgers and hot dogs—salads and pastas. The list just went on. I could see why Carla said that people never leave hungry after one of their feasts—and boy it was just that.

After an immense amount of food, and a couple of glasses of champagne later, I desperately needed the loo. I asked Seth, and he wanted to come with me, but I told him I could find my way. He gave me directions and I gladly took off to find my relief. I needed it, the more I thought about it now.

I went through the kitchen and into the hallway as Seth directed, and noticed a big wooden door to my left under the stairs. I pulled it nervously, wondering if I got the directions right and to my delight, it was.

Once I was finished, I felt instantly relieved and happy to be making my way back to Seth. I closed the bathroom door behind me and was turning to make my way back out, when I noticed Melissa standing there. To my horror it looked as though she had purposely followed me and waited outside until I had finished.

“Oh, my apologies. I didn’t see you standing there.” I tried to move a little, but she wasn’t budging. She had me right where she wanted.

“You’re not getting his money you know, so you can get that out of your pretty little head. You may have fooled Seth, and even my entire family, but you’re not fooling me.”

My instincts were obviously bang on with her, and I knew I couldn’t let her get away with it. “Excuse me?”

She folded her arms. “You heard me. How much?”

“What?” I was anxious for her to get to the point already.

“How much will it take to get rid of you? Walk out of my son’s life before it’s too late. I’m not having you hurt my boy. Girls like you are a dime a dozen. I’m sure you have a price. Name it.”

I was livid. I couldn’t believe the gall of this woman. “How dare you accuse me of only going after your son for money.” She flicked her hair in disgust, like she didn’t believe me. I knew I wouldn’t be able to convince her otherwise, but I’d be damned if I was going to just stand there and take abuse from her.

“I don’t want anything from your son other than the love he gives me. He’s the most kindest, caring, loving man I have ever had the pleasure of meeting and I love him more than words can say—no matter what you think. I don’t know why you have this inept notion that I’m only after him for his money, but I really don’t give two hoots. He loves me and I love him. Deal with it.”

For good measure I pointed my finger in her direction, and then walked away. I wasn’t going to stand her much longer. If she opened her mouth I think I would be afraid of what came out next. Always best to walk away from a situation you think might escalate.

I walked back through the kitchen and jumped at what I found in the corner of my eye. It was Joey, hiding behind the door. Now I just felt ten times worse. How much of that had he heard?

“I’m sorry you had to deal with that,” he said, looking sympathetic.

It would seem he heard everything.

“Please don’t tell Seth about this, Joey. I don’t want to upset him with any of this.”

His face was a picture of confusion. “Why not? He deserves to know that our mum venomously spat at you like that. I knew she could be cruel at times, but that was harsh. I just want you to know that none of the others feel that way about you. Seth made his choice and he made it for a reason. Everyone needs to trust that reason and let him be happy. Lord knows he deserves that.”

Placing my hand on Joey’s shoulder, I looked up into his big brown eyes. “I know he does, Joey. That’s why I don’t want to tell him. It would upset him and that would upset me. Hopefully your mum will come to like me soon and all will be forgotten, but for now, let’s just say that conversation never took place. *Please.*” I looked into his eyes, searching for

some hint of surrender. He smiled and placed his bear arms around me, squashing me again.

“You know, I think I’m gonna really like you,” he said, squeezing that little bit more.

I started gasping for air. “You know, I don’t think there’s going to be anything left to like, if you squeeze me any harder,” I whispered.

“Oh sorry,” he said, letting go. “I guess I do get carried away.”

We both laughed and I suddenly felt a little calmer. The anger was still simmering on the surface, but being around the nicer side of the Jacobs’ helped to ease it somewhat.

With a link in his arm, we both walked out toward the marquee. I took an instant liking to Joey for some reason. It was like having my little brother beside me.

Once we walked back in, Seth immediately spotted Joey and me. “There you are. I was about to send out a search party. Did my brother try to kidnap you?” He looked toward Joey and raised an amused eyebrow at him.

“She’s a good girl you got here, Seth. You look after her,” he said handing me back to Seth.

Seth looked a little taken aback, and so was I somewhat. “Don’t worry, my dear little brother, I fully intend to.” He turned away from Joey and looked in my direction. His eyes glistened, given me that come-to-bed look that always had me weak at the knees. I had gone from angry to serene, to fully turned on in the matter of minutes. My hormones were playing the dirtiest tricks on me, and it so wasn’t fair.

“You don’t know how much I want you right now,” he said, whispering in my ear.

I shuddered, tugging at his shirt. “Funnily enough, I was just thinking the same thing... *Seth*.” I made sure I said his name as seductively as possible. It wasn’t fair that I was the

only one suffering here, and I knew just how much it turned him on.

“If there weren’t so many people here, I would find a quiet spot, put you over my knee and spank you, Little Miss Naughty. I think I may have died a little inside.”

He nibbled my earlobe a little and it made me shiver all over. I was very close to telling him to quit this assemblage and get going. I wanted him now more than ever.

“Get a room will ya. Can’t stand the sight of yers putting the feelers on each other. You wouldn’t Adam and Eve it if I hadn’t seen it with my own Mince Pies.”

“Don’t you just love my auntie, Belinda?” Seth sighed.

I thought it was funny and made it obviously so. “I think she does well,” I said, sticking up for Belinda. “She certainly had me fooled.” I laughed in Belinda’s direction and she winked at me.

“It gets me through the day,” she said. “Some estate agents are so boring. Present company excluded of course.”

“No, no, I agree. Sometimes they can be a little stuck up. In fact, I can think of two people right now who are very much up their own...” I very nearly said it, until I realised where I was.

“Arses, dear girl. Don’t be afraid to spit it out. It might seem like your surrounded by royalty here, but our family is far from it.”

“I know, I just don’t like to be rude. Especially when I know Seth’s mum and dad are so close.”

“Hmmm,” she said looking over in Melissa’s direction. “The wicked witch of the west is far from regal in any sense of the word.”

“Belinda!” Seth shouted. “That’s my mum you’re talking about.”

I looked at Belinda and smiled. It was a knowing smile. She caught on pretty quick. It would seem everyone knew what she was like apart from Seth.

Belinda rolled her eyes at him and leaned into me. “If that old battle-axe gives you anymore trouble, you just let me know.” She squeezed my arm and nodded. I nodded back and smiled. It would seem Belinda and Melissa—although were sisters—were worlds apart. There also seemed to be quite a bit of an age gap between them. Once Belinda was gone I raised that with Seth.

“Your auntie seems a lot younger than your mum. What gives? Everyone’s younger than everyone else who they shouldn’t be younger than.”

“Okay,” he said, looking at me completely confused. “That made a lot of sense, but here goes. They share the same dad. My grandparents split up when my mum was about sixteen, seventeen. My granddad found someone twenty years younger than him, and the rest is history.”

I shook my head. “Your family are completely confusing. I can’t possibly keep up.”

“Well, I think you know by now that my family gets around a lot. Despite what I was like when you met me, it was never something I was happy with. I suppose, I just wasn’t happy. Period.”

I looked at his solemn features and my heart reached out to him. I caressed his face and smiled, turning our bodies to face each other. “You know how much I love you right? I want nothing more than to make you happy. You mean the world to me. You’ve taught me just how good love could be.”

He took my hand and kissed me gently on the lips. “I only wanted to be happy. My dear Cookie, you’ve made me delirious.” He smiled showing that sexy dimple of his.

“When can you take me back so you can show me more of your massaging techniques? I have this sudden urge to have you all to myself right now.”

Seth gently bit the bottom of my lip. “You know, I was just thinking the same thing.”

“Can I interrupt you two lovebirds for a moment,” Thomas asked.

We both turned around and I instantly blushed. Melissa was standing there with her arm through Thomas—and she still looked like she was chewing a wasp.

“You two look positively giddy with each other. It’s nice,” Thomas said, smiling. “Now, I know you probably want to get going soon. I remember what it was like when I first met your mother. We couldn’t keep our hands off each other.”

Thomas laughed, Melissa cooed in his direction, and Seth looked away in mild disgust.

“Dad, that’s not something I want to picture right now, so moving on please.”

“Okay, very well,” he said, chuckling. “I just thought it would be nice to go inside for a little while and have a little chat here with Angelina. She’s important to you, so I would like to get to know her a little bit more. It’s too noisy out here and I’m sure our guests could spare us for a few minutes.”

I was nervous as I didn’t know what to expect. I was wrong to feel that way as Thomas just wanted to know a little more about me. I told him about living in Cornwall and being offered this job in London. I told him about how persistent Seth was when we first met, and that he wore me down with his charm.

“Good job, son. I’m proud of you, buddy.” He looked over at Seth, smiling. We were both sat together on one sofa whilst Thomas and Melissa sat on the other. Luckily for me, Thomas asked all the questions, Melissa just sat there, smiling falsely.

“Thanks, Dad. She was worth it.”

The rest of the conversation was about the Jacobs’ and how they found their fortune. It would seem they weren’t from entirely poor families, but Thomas made a huge amount on the



stock market. Due to some very wise choice investments and great timing, he made an absolute killing. It would seem that the Jacobs' had a winning streak, considering Seth seemed to have carried the luck with him also.

I got the feeling though that Melissa wasn't entirely comfortable with Thomas sharing his story of wealth with me. I never once felt it was because he was bragging in anyway. It just seemed like a nice success story. Melissa, on the other hand, didn't want me to know a thing—for obvious reasons. Little did she know I just didn't care whether he had money or not. If only she knew just how much he really meant to me.

We all shared a bottle of the finest scotch after that, and things were very pleasant and relaxing. I could tell Melissa wanted to throw me some more daggers, but she was being very cautious with when and how she did it. She wasn't giving into me anytime soon—that was for sure.

We left a little after that, and it was already starting to get really dark. It took a while to get going considering the amount of people we had to say goodbye to.

Once in the car, I took a great big sigh and closed my eyes a little. I didn't realise just how exhausted I was until now. Did meeting parents always feel this draining?

“Are you okay?” Seth asked. “I'm sorry I put you straight into the lion's den like that. I hope it wasn't too much for you?”

“No, of course not,” I said, shaking my head. “They're all lovely, Seth. Very welcoming and kind. Thank you for bringing me.”

“You're welcome. As you can tell, you have been mentioned more than once or twice in that house.”

“Yes, about that. How come they knew all about me even before we got together?”

He shook his head smiling. “Paul. He told them all about you and the way I was with you. At first, I must admit, I just thought you were different to all the other girls only because

you said no. I very quickly realised that wasn't the case after not being able to get you out of my head. You were like a drug to me. You still are."

"Well," I said, hitching up my skirt a little for him. "I'm the kind of drug that's very good for you. You can take me as often as you want and I promise I won't make you sick."

He briefly looked from the road towards my bare legs. "Woman, the sooner I get you home the better."

We both started laughing, but I had to admit, I couldn't have agreed with him more.

## CHAPTER 16

Another four months had gone by and we were getting to the end of the summer. I had moved in with Seth pretty much straight away. I was practically living round there as it was, so it just made sense. It helped knowing that the flat above the shop would always be there if I needed it, so I would always have a place to stay.

Jerry moved in with me of course. I think he was quite happy with his new surroundings. There was so much space for him to explore, but it miffed me a little how much he seemed to favour Seth over me somewhat. I had nursed him since he was a baby. Sounds about typical really.

Seth felt a little sorry for him here on his own during the day, so he brought back a little lady cockatiel we called Lucy. Luckily, they hit it off, and Jerry was singing to her more than he ever sang to me. It was quite adorable to watch. We bought a much bigger cage for them to get away from each other when needed, so life for the two lovebirds was great. What wasn't so great was the first day Seth and Jerry properly met. Jerry called him STD, so I had to explain the reason why he was saying it. It was funny at the time, but now highly embarrassing. I must have been calling him that around the flat more often than I thought.

Seth thought it was funny, but he said I deserved a tickling session, which resulted in me running around like a mad person trying to get away from him again. Not that I ever did. I wanted him to catch me more than anything. I just liked it when he chased me. I guess some things never change.

It was coming to the end of August, and Seth and I were getting ready to take a trip up to my mum and dad's house for a long weekend. I was looking forward to it as we hadn't seen them in a while. Seth was all smiles and I kept asking him why he was so happy. He told me that he was just pleased to be seeing my parents. I didn't buy that somehow. Something fishy was going on.

We took my car again—as again—we couldn't fit all the luggage in the boot of the Jag. The drive was nice as I was

with Seth. He always made the journeys entertaining. Especially when he drove and I could sit back and ogle at him as much as I could. He was wearing that baseball cap again. Damn him. I think a nice walk and a romp in the field maybe in order later.

We parked outside the house to an over-excited mum and dad flying down the stairs to meet us. They just about squeezed Seth and I to death before they let us in.

“We’re having a barbecue out back later. The weather today’s a scorcher. Don’t get many of those these days. Julia and Jack are coming over later, and so is David.” My dad looked over at Seth and winked at him. I couldn’t help feeling something was going on that I wasn’t aware of.

Seth and I got settled in my room. I kind of thought there was no denying the fact that we were a couple now, so it seemed pointless having him next door. I had gotten so used to having him near to me every night now. I would sometimes wake up slightly in the middle of the night and my body would instantly seek him out. I would never be able to go back to sleep until I knew he was still there. It was a comfort to always feel him close by.

When I walked downstairs, I could hear voices coming from out back. I was shocked beyond belief when I walked outside into the garden. My parents had obviously gone to town a little decorating the outside. There was a long, elegant table with eight chairs lined up. Plates and glasses spread neatly along the way. My dad was busying himself getting the barbecue cleaned up and ready for later, and my mum was folding intricate napkins, and placing them by the plates. There were ribbons and flowers tied around the three seater swing seat and a small beautiful gazebo—that certainly wasn’t there when we last visited.

“Mum, when did you get that?” I asked, pointing towards it.

“Oh, that,” she said, blushing. “We bought it last week. It looks beautiful, doesn’t it? It’s nice to sit in when the weather

gets a bit too hot.”

I walked closer, so I could inspect it a little bit more. It had a bench wrapped around the whole of the inside. It was white, but had black wrought iron on the outside, with what looked like branches and leaves. It was really rather stunning.

I was so engrossed at looking at it that I didn't even realise Seth was behind me until he wrapped his arms around me from the back. I leaned my head back towards him and closed my eyes.

“You smell good enough to eat,” he whispered in my ear. “It's been a long time since I had my breakfast off you.”

My heart immediately began racing, remembering that time in the kitchen. That was one breakfast I will never forget.

“Don't you be getting me all hot and heavy when my parents are just behind us. It's not fair.”

“So I get you hot and heavy then, do I?”

“Hmm, standing in this Gazebo, you can do just about anything to me. It's stunning.”

“It is,” he whispered in my ear. “But not as stunning as you.”

Turning around, I gave Seth a long lingering kiss. I will never tire of his kisses. They still amaze me, even to this day. He always knows exactly what to do with those lips that make me go cuckoo. And not to mention his tongue. Oh God, don't think about his tongue... not now!

I reluctantly pulled away only to find my mother staring at us from the corner of my eye. I turned to look at her and she had this gooey smile on her face.

“Can I help you, Mum?” I asked. “There must be something I could do—help with the food or drinks perhaps?”

“Actually, yes. Do you think you could pop over to the store and get some fizzy drinks and some juices? I thought we had plenty, but it seems we don't. With Julia pregnant she

can't be drinking any alcohol, so it's best we stock up for her." She smiled across at Seth and he winked back at her.

There's definitely something weird happening here. "What's going on? Are you two conspiring something against me, or what?"

"Nothing dear," my mum said, sounding offended. "You don't have to get the drinks, I'm sure your father won't mind going."

I shook my head in frustration. "Of course not, I'll go. I just think there's something dodgy going on around here." I stormed off toward the front of the house with Seth following behind me.

Grabbing my bag, I got into the driver's seat of my car. "Are you going to tell me what's going on?" I asked Seth as he climbed into the passenger seat.

"Cookie, I think you're getting a little too worked up over nothing. Relax. No one's out to get you. Everyone's perfectly normal."

My eyes widened in disbelief. "God, you sounded weird when you said that. Have I visited the Stepford family this weekend? Who are you, and what have you done with my Seth?"

He patted my knee. "Your Seth is right here with you, Angel," he said, laughing. "Come on; let's go get these drinks, shall we?"

I started the car and went a little bit down the road, when Seth leisurely trailed his fingers along the bottom of my skirt, and pulled up. His touch made me shiver a little. "Seth, you can't do this, I'll have an accident."

"Sorry, baby, I just can't help myself at times." He pulled that devilish grin on me, but he stopped and did as he was told.

It was later in the supermarket when I noticed Seth playing about with his phone. It looked like he was texting someone, concentration etched into his beautiful features.

“Everything okay?” I asked.

“Oh yes,” he said, smiling brightly. “Everything’s just peachy.”

We were on our way back from the store when he did it again, but this time he went higher until he reached my clit. Luckily we were on a very quiet road as I suddenly had to break really hard, causing us both to fly forward.

“Fuck, Seth, are you trying to get us killed?”

His breathing was harsh. “I want you.”

“No shit, Sherlock,” I said with a sarcastic laugh. “Could you at least wait until I’ve stopped first before you grope me again?”

“Oh, say that again. It was sexy.”

I frowned. “What, no shit, Sherlock?”

“No, the other thing, about me groping you. Can I grope you now, Miss Bradshaw?”

“No you bloody well can’t you sex maniac. I’m driving.”

We said nothing more the rest of the way, until I pulled up outside the house and Seth grabbed me. “What are you doing, Seth?”

“Taking you for a walk. I need to be with you for a while.” He bent down, pulled me over his shoulder and then stood up. I squealed as he led the way towards the country roads.

“You’re coming with me, wench. Back to my cave where you’ll cook me dinner, and have lots of my babies.”

“Seth!” I cried, giggling like an idiot. “Put me down.”

Eventually he did, and I found us near to the path we took all that time ago when I was still trying to run away from him. How things have changed since then.

He led me through the field and took me into some bushes. “Seth, my mum is expecting us back. What in the hell are you

up to?”

“I already told you. I want you, woman. Take your clothes off and be as one with me and nature.”

I frowned and shook my head. “There’s something seriously wrong with you, Seth. What are you playing at?”

He strolled very purposefully towards me, showing those come-to-bed eyes as strong as ever. Immediately, as always, my breathing hitched that little bit as he stood in front of me and trailed his fingers down from my neck towards my nipple.

I gasped. It was only this morning that we made love, but I could quite happily have him take me again.

He moved in and kissed me tenderly. For a moment we were lost in each other and the way our mouths felt together. It was like nothing else.

“We can go back now if you want?” he breathed into my mouth.

“Don’t you fucking dare. You started this, STD, now you finish it.”

He pulled away a little and frowned at me. “STD?”

“Yes, STD. You call me pet names, so why can’t I?”

He started chuckling a little. “Yes, but I call you Angel and Cookie. STD is Seth the Dickhead. I think there’s a huge difference between the three.”

“That’s true, but the circumstances outweigh the differences.”

“Oh really, how’s that?” he asked, pulling me closer.

“Because at the moment, you’re acting like one. You’re being very strange. You feel me up and drag me to some bushes, then you kiss me—getting me all hot and ready for you—and ask if I want to go back home. You’re an STD.”

He pulled my waist closer to his crotch and I could feel how hard he was. He kissed my neck lightly and whispered in



my ear, “If that was the case, you wouldn’t want me doing all the things I plan on doing to you right now.”

He kissed his all the way down from my neck to my nipple and showed me all the things he was planning to do. And boy was it worth a tumble in the grass for.

Once we got back to the house it was starting to get dark. Seth was all smiles and I was all flushed from our encounter in the bushes. My mum came and answered the door, smiling brightly with our three extra guests behind her. I hugged Jack and David, and kissed and hugged an ever growing Julia. She was six months pregnant now and looking as radiant as ever.

“Julia, you look great. Pregnancy obviously suits you.” Julia looked across at Jack and smiled. He pulled his hands from behind her and cradled her stomach. It looked rather sweet.

“She’s beautiful being pregnant. She can’t keep her hands off me,” Jack said with a cheeky grin.

“Hey, that’s enough sex talk, thank you very much,” my mum warned.

“Talking of which,” Julia said, walking towards me. “What have you been up to?”

She looked up at my hair and plucked out what looked like grass or a piece of straw.

I blushed a bright red and everyone smiled knowingly. Seth seemed to hardly contain his excitement for some reason. It was all very weird.

“We have a little surprise for you,” Seth said, grinning. “Close your eyes for a moment and let me lead the way.”

“Surprise? It’s not my birthday,” I protested.

“This was something I wanted to do for you. Your mum and dad have very kindly offered to help.”

I let him lead the way as I was eager as he was to get on with my surprise. He gently led me towards the garden, and when I felt I was at the back door; Seth leaned in and whispered in my ear, “This is for you, my angel.”

I opened my eyes, and to my delightful surprise there were candles just about everywhere. The lights and flowers were crawling around the Gazebo making it look simply magical.

I gasped at the sight. My mum and dad’s garden was always kept in great shape, but this was stunning beyond words. It looked like I had crawled into a fairytale.

“It’s beautiful,” I said, unable to close my mouth. “But why go to all this trouble for me?”

Seth smiled down lovingly into my eyes. “Nothing is ever trouble when it comes to you, Cookie. Come, let’s sit. Your mum and dad have put a lot of effort into this.”

“Thank you,” I said, hugging my mum and dad.

“You’re more than welcome, Angel,” my dad replied. “That boy loves you very much.”

I looked up at Seth, smiling. “I know he does.”

We all walked towards the table and sat down. My dad brought over some meats and Seth poured everyone some wine and juice for Julia.

I was smiling from ear to ear. I didn’t know what I had done to deserve this, but I certainly wasn’t complaining. It was only then I remembered Seth’s strange behaviour. “So this is why you dragged me to the bushes?” I asked a little too loudly. Everyone chuckled; even my mum had a grin on her face. Luckily my dad was out of earshot getting some more meats.

“I have to blame this one on your mother, Angel. I had to do something to keep you away from the house.”

Jack did an almighty belter of a laugh, as my mum playfully scowled in Seth’s direction. “Well, if it bares me a grandchild in nine months time, I won’t complain.”

“Mum!” I shouted, burying my head in my hands. Why did I look forward to coming here, again?

Mindy showed up about five minutes later, which was nice. Everyone sat at the table, couple by couple. It was lovely just to sit there chewing the fat and enjoying the beautiful warm evening. The food was perfect and the wine was flowing. It was one evening that I would never fail to remember—in more ways than one.

We got to the end of the meal, when everyone was smiling at Seth and me. “What’s going on?” I asked suspiciously.

“Angel, I have a confession to make,” Seth began. “This wasn’t just the surprise.” Getting up from his seat, he offered me his hand. I took it, wondering what on earth he has up his sleeve.

He walked me towards the Gazebo and we took the two steps onto the landing. Everyone was standing by watching, all with smiles brightly lighting their faces. It was only when Seth faced me and got down on one knee that my brain kicked into gear.

I covered my mouth in shock as everyone around us laughed. “You all knew about this?” I asked, turning my attention back to Seth. The look he was giving me was one of complete adoration. I immediately melted. I knew exactly what my answer would be, even before he asked me. I have never been sure of anything before in my life. There’s just no escaping this anymore. Angelina is finally in love—finally met a man who she wants to spend forever with.

“Angel,” Seth began, taking my hand. “When I first met you and you were really quite rude to me...” He stopped as everyone laughed, and I rolled my eyes.

“I knew I would never be able to let you go. Your laugh, your smile, and the way you twiddle your hair when you say you’re bored—they’re just tiny examples of the things that made me fall in love with you. Your kind heart, the love you

have for your family, and the way you make me feel treasured beyond belief, are just a few big examples of why I fell head over heels. The list could go on, but my knee is starting to hurt a little.”

He showed me that big cheeky grin of his again and I couldn't help chuckling. Everyone was either laughing or crying—or both—by now, as he motioned for Jack to hand over something. He diligently complied as I spied the red velvet box Seth now had in his hands.

“I know I've made a few wise choices about things in the past and I know I've been certain of those choices. But I've never been more certain of anything more than I am right now. I never want to be without you, Angelina. I now realise just how insignificant it all was without you in it. The day I met you was the day Seth Jacobs breathed life into the world. Please say you'll make me the happiest man in the universe. Angel, will you marry me?”

He opened the box up in front of me and I gasped at the beautiful twinkling diamond staring back at me. I could hear my mum sniffing in the background, and in the corner of my eye, my dad wrapped his arm around her in comfort.

Gazing down at my beautiful Seth, I could see his eyes dancing in the candlelight. There was really only one way to answer the most important question of a man's life.

“I don't have to answer that,” I said, giving him the best cheeky grin I could muster. He grinned just as devilishly at me with a slight hint of water in his eyes.

“Angelina!” my mother scorned.

“It's okay,” Seth said to my mother. “That means yes.” He looked at me a minute, his eyebrow raised. “It does, doesn't it?” he asked with a look of worry for a moment.

“Of course it does, now get that bloody ring on me, Seth,” I demanded. “I want to kiss and hug my fiancée.” He did as he was told and everyone clapped and cheered.

“That was the most bizarre proposal I have ever witnessed in my entire life,” my mother sighed.

Everyone laughed as I helped Seth up to place those gorgeous rosebud lips of his on mine. We stayed like that cuddling and kissing one another—my face starting to ache from the constant smile wedged on my face. “I love you,” I mumbled into Seth’s mouth.

“I love you, too, Angel. More than you’ll ever know.”

“Right!” my dad yelled, pulling us away from one other. “This is cause for celebration. Rachel, I think it’s time to get the champagne out, don’t you think?”

“I do,” she replied, running over to give us both a hug and a kiss. “Thank you, Seth,” she said hugging him. “Thank you for bringing my daughter back to life.”

I had to look away then as I could feel the tears welling. I knew my mum constantly worried about me. She knew I was only like the way I was because of Jaden. I was so convinced that love was nothing but heartache and pain, that I crawled into a shell I never wanted to get out of. Seth has cracked more than my cookie since we met. He’s made me see possibilities I always thought were never an option. Getting married, maybe even having children.

*No, wait a minute. That is going a little too far!*

“Here,” my dad said, handing me a glass of champagne. By this time everyone was hugging everyone else, and life seemed pretty great.

“To the happy couple,” my dad, said. “Angelina, you’ve given me a son-in-law I can be proud of. I know he will do his best to make you the happiest woman in the world.”

We all raised our glasses and I was trying my utmost to keep my emotions in check. Right now they were all over the place.

Once we drank the champagne and I thought we were settling in for the evening, Seth surprised me again.

“This is not it, Angel. I have something else I have to show you.”

“What?” I asked, noticing his cheeky grin.

My whole family and friends got up again, and I noticed my dad rubbing his hands together. He was excited about something. I looked around them all, and it would seem everyone knew exactly what the hell was going on before me this evening.

Seth led me towards the garage door and told me to close my eyes again. I did as I was told as I heard the garage door opening.

“You can open your eyes now, Angel. This is my engagement gift to you. A small token of how much I love you.”

I opened my eyes and I nearly fainted at the sight. It was more than just a little token; it was a hundred and forty odd thousand pound token. This was a silver Aston Martin DB9 with a lovely red bow on the front. The car I said was my favourite when we first met.

“I can’t,” I said, turning to Seth.

“Don’t you dare,” he warned me. “Accept the gift graciously and take me for a spin,” he said, dangling the key in front of my face.

I didn’t will it, but I squealed and jumped in for a hug. Seth grabbed me, laughing as I jumped up and down, and went a little crazy. “You remembered,” I said.

“Of course I did. How could I forget that day? It was the day I realised I had to have you in my life. No matter what it takes.”

“Angelina, you’re such a bitch. I hate you. Seth, will you marry me instead?” Mindy laughed, earning her a glare from David.

“That’s very, erm, nice of you to ask, Mindy, but there is only room for one angel in my life.”

“Yeah, sorry, Mindy. This one’s all mine,” I said, stroking Seth’s cheek.

He smiled back at me as we headed over to get in the car. It was immaculate inside, with a red leather interior. “Where did you get this?” I asked.

“Your father helped,” he said, looking in my dad’s direction.

“I always knew you had good taste in cars, Angel. Now, you kids go have some fun.” Dad tapped the roof of the car and opened the garage door for us. I only wanted to take it for a quick spin as I had some alcohol running through my system. I hadn’t had much, but it still wasn’t a good idea in a brand new car worth a house!

Seth pressed a button which pulled the roof down as we headed outside in the hot night air. I only took her for about a mile or so down the road and made sure I kept to the quiet country lanes, but the thrill of it was immense. I was on cloud nine with joy. I was getting married to the best man a woman could ask for and I was riding him in my new DB9. Life couldn’t get much better than this!

## CHAPTER 17

I woke up in the morning bright and early. I turned over to find Seth was still sound asleep. I felt restless and wanted up and out. I decided the best course of action was a walk. It was only six o'clock and I should imagine that everyone would be in bed still after last night's celebrations.

Getting up, I stretched a little and rubbed my sleepy eyes. It was then I really remembered last night, after the beautiful diamond ring nearly threatened to scratch my face. Pulling my hand away, I inspected the ring. A giddy, school-girl smile must have been plastered all over my face at that point.

I looked over at Seth one more time and sighed contentedly. He could still make me feel as light-headed and silly as the first day I met him. He was always going to be in



my life now and it felt absolutely brilliant. Nothing could taint my happiness now. Nothing could take away this feeling. I wouldn't let it.

I scooted off the edge of the bed as gently as possible so I didn't disturb Seth. He moved and then moaned a little once I was off, causing me to hesitate slightly. Once I knew he must be back in his normal pattern of sleep, I pulled on a pair of tracksuit bottoms and a t-shirt. I snuck out of the room and down the stairs as quickly and quietly as possible. Everything was so calm; you could hear a pin drop.

I opened the door to the already warm morning sun and set about a leisurely stroll down the road. Everything was so peaceful. All I could hear were the birds chirping and the occasional crow squawking. I inhaled the fresh, clean, Cornwall air and closed my eyes. I felt so happy to be alive at this point. So full of hope for the future. I was going to become Mrs Angelina Jacobs and it felt good. Really good. I never thought in a million years that I would contemplate being Mrs anybody—never mind feeling over the moon about the prospect. I was on cloud nine, or even cloud one hundred and nine, if there was one. Where does being on cloud nine come from anyway?

I shook my head and kept on walking, just smiling and letting myself be wrapped up by the love I felt.

I took a walk down the familiar country path and gazed across the horizon. The sun was invading my face, but it felt great. I welcomed the feeling by closing my eyes and tilting my head back to feel the pleasant heat on my skin.

My jaw still ached from the constant smiling I did last night. I was still smiling now, and I so didn't care. It was one of the happiest moments of my life and for the first time in forever, it felt like I deserved to feel this way. Angelina Bradshaw deserves to be happy. It was strange telling myself that, but it felt good. For once I wasn't shying away from feeling this way. Everything Seth does brings the best out of me.

It was then I realised just how perfect he was for me. He has managed to do the one thing no man I have ever encountered has done. He taught me to love. He also taught me that it was okay to be loved—that I should welcome it with open arms and realise that I had the right to have someone special in my life. Someone whole. He was like the missing jigsaw to my puzzle. The better half of me. He was the one I could see us growing old together with, holding hands when we're still in our seventies, eighties. It was not something that frightened me, or made me feel the need to run away as fast as I could. Six months ago, maybe, but not now. I wasn't hiding anymore. I wasn't going to be that hard as nails on the outside, but vulnerable and timid on the inside little girl anymore. Those days were gone now. Replaced by a confident, happy-go-lucky, Angelina. Someone who accepts with open arms, a man who truly adores her.

And I knew he did. I trusted that the feelings he showed me were genuine. I knew he loved me and I knew he would do his utmost to make me happy. Hell, I was more than happy. I was heart stopping, spine tingling, melt in the mouth, euphoric. I don't know where that came from, but I'll take it. I'll take any words that described just how happy I was right now.

Walking that little bit further, I kicked up my feet. I was actually kicking my feet!! I hadn't done that since I was a child.

I gazed in the distance and could see an elderly couple out, walking their dog. It looked a happy sight, and one that immediately made me think of Seth and me again. I didn't think I could look at anything ever again, without thinking of Seth and me. I was obsessed, crazy in love—you name it.

The gentleman tipped his hat and the lady smiled at me. She had the same silly smile I must have plastered on my face. Our delirium seemed to bounce off each other like a tennis ball. It was actually rather infectious.

I said good morning and went on my way. I was enjoying being by myself for a while, dizzy with excitement if I wanted to. I hadn't even realised I had walked a little too far until I was in unfamiliar territory. I decided to halt in my tracks and retrace my steps back home. It was time to be with my beloved. I was kind of hoping he would still be asleep so I could crawl back into bed with him, and cuddle until we couldn't possibly lay there any further. The thought had me quickening my pace a little until I was back to knowing exactly where I was. I was practically skipping all the way home, so wrapped up in my own delirium that I didn't realise my spidey senses were picking up on something wrong until it was too late.

“Angelina,” a voice whispered from the trees.

My feet froze as the face appeared to me from nowhere. A face I immediately recognised as one of my attackers from that night.

“Brandon,” I said, shocked.

*Please, not another one.*

He sensed my fear and immediately put his hands up. “Please, don't run. I'm not here to hurt you. I wanted to see you. I heard about what happened with Jaden and I want you to know, you're safe. We don't all feel that way. Trent thought me coming here was a bad idea. But I wanted you to know, and I wanted to apologise.”

Realising just how pathetic he looked made my blood boil. I was no longer frightened anymore, I was livid. “What, for almost raping me, or not getting the chance to?” I seethed.

I saw him cringe and he backed away slightly. “You don't understand,” he began. “We were all so high on drink and drugs that we weren't ourselves that night. It all just seemed like a dream to me now.”

I suddenly wanted him to stop talking. Every time he opened his mouth I wanted to shut it back down again. “Well, I'm glad it feels that way to you, because I've been in hell

since that day. I can tell you now that it wasn't a dream; it was my worst living nightmare. I can prove it to you, Brandon, if you like? I know which one you were. I remember like it was yesterday. You were the third one to cut me. Do you want to see the nice shiny scar you have marked me with for the rest of my life? Well, do you?"

I walked a little bit closer to him, feeling my adrenaline kicking in. I wanted to hurt him, and I wanted it more than anything in my life right now.

"Please, no, no," he said, putting his hands up again. "I'm so sorry for everything. I wish I could take back that night, wish I never took so many drugs. I'm so sorry, Angelina, and I'm sorry for Jack and David, too."

That was it, I was off. I ran towards him, kicking and punching him with all my might. Anger was at boiling point at the mention of the fact he was one of the ones who helped put my best friends in hospital. Right now I wanted to hurt him because of them, wanted some kind of morbid justice for the two men in my life who were like brothers to me.

"You dirty, rotten bastard!" I began screaming. "How dare you come here and apologise to me for what you and your scumbag friends did to me and my friends. How dare you think that everything will be okay. It's not okay. You ruined my life, you fucking asshole!"

I was beating and beating him until I thought the sob would come. The one that I held onto for years. The one I was determined not to escape me now. It angered me that he could reduce me to this—so much so, I just kept going.

Brandon just cowered in the corner, taking every kick and every punch I had to offer. I was screaming blue murder at him and I didn't care who heard me. What was supposed to be a nice peaceful stroll had now resurfaced my nightmares. I hated him with all my might for that. Hated that he came along and spoiled my tranquillity. Hated that he made me spoil the peacefulness of this day, with only the birds singing and the crow's squawking. I hated him for every painful day I

have had to endure since that horrible night. Hated him for just about everything.

I was so engrossed in my terror that I didn't even realise a pair of arms were now invading me. I tried to struggle out of them, tried to charge at the now, sobbing, pathetic little creature who was crying his eyes out on the floor.

"I can't, I can't!" I started shouting. "He won't make me cry, I won't let him see me cry!"

"Shh, Angelina. It's okay. I'm here."

His words soothed me instantly as I relaxed into his arms. He pulled me further away and cradled me, stroking my hair.

"It's okay, you're safe," he whispered.

I buried my head into his shoulder and took some slow deep breaths. I could feel it rising, feel it burning my throat, but I was determined not to let the sob escape—determined not to give that to him.

Turning my head to look at Seth, I could see the murderous look he was giving Brandon. Brandon tried to get up, but stumbled and fell. Blood was dripping from his nose and he was still crying. All of a sudden the anger subsided and all I felt was pity. I pitied the man who attacked me all those years ago. Pitied him, even after all those years of dealing with my pain. I realised then he was not someone I could be frightened of anymore. He was just a pathetic shell of a man. Someone who I couldn't understand had once haunted me in my nightmares.

Eventually he got up, stumbled a little bit more and looked towards us. His face was smeared with blood and tears, his eyes all puffy and red. He tried to wipe his nose, but winced. He looked up, sobbed again, and was about to say something when Seth beat him to it.

"You better run, pal, before I finish off what she started."

It was then I felt that the tight grip Seth had around me wasn't to try and keep me in check. It was to keep himself in

check.

Brandon did what he was told and found his feet quickly after that. It was one thing having me set upon him, but another thing entirely to have Seth beating the living shit out of him. After seeing him with Jaden, I knew full well what he was capable of. Brandon had a lucky escape with just me.

Once we knew he was gone, Seth inspected my hands and I winced when he touched them. I had never beaten someone like that before, so it was a strange pain for me. My hands hurt like hell. I didn't feel it at the time, but now they were throbbing like a bugger.

"I think I need to take you to hospital. You may have broken your hand," he said, caressing it as gently as possible.

"Thank you," I said, gazing lovingly into his eyes.

"What for?" he asked.

"For holding me back, and for you holding back for me. I know it took a lot for you to not charge at him."

He squeezed me in tighter to him and smiled. "It was hard—really hard. But I didn't want you to lose something of me I hope you have."

"What's that?" I asked, searching his beautiful face.

"Your respect. I knew that if I did start on him, I wouldn't have been able to stop. If I had killed him—which I truly wanted to—I would be no good a husband to you locked behind bars now, would I?"

"What you say is true, Seth, but I could never lose respect for you. Not in a million years."

I don't know why, but I suddenly started laughing. The euphoria was back because Seth was here, but this time it was added by the fact I had just kicked the living shit out of Brandon. Something I had replayed over and over again in the past. Something I always wished I could have done.

Seth's worried, angry baby blues were replaced quickly with a glint of humour at my sudden outburst. "Are you okay?" he asked.

"I'm more than okay, Seth. You made sure of that last night. I can't wait to be your wife and no one, not even that scumbag, can take that away from me. I'm not going to let him. I kicked his butt!" I shouted, laughing again.

"You sure did, Angel. You sure did. You never cease to amaze me. Have I ever told you that before?" he asked, cupping my face in his hands.

"I think you may have once or twice," I said, giggling this time.

He kissed me gently and all thoughts of Brandon were quickly erased from my mind. I tried grabbing at his t-shirt, completely forgetting about what just happened. I was quickly reminded when my hand cried out in protest. "Oh my fucking God, this hurts!"

"Come on, Angelina. We have to go now and see to that hand."

We got back to the house where my mum and dad could tell straight away that something was up. I told them about the whole story and my dad nearly hit the roof. It looked like he was about to go running after Brandon, until I told him I was fine and just needed to get my hand fixed. As soon as I told him this, he relaxed a bit and took a look at it. He confirmed too what Seth already thought, so we quickly climbed into my dad's Jag and headed off to hospital.

I didn't really want to go, but I knew it was fruitless. The only times I have ever been in a hospital was because of those arseholes. It was starting to become a regular pattern.

Once at the hospital, my hand was x-rayed, after waiting for nearly two hours to be seen. It was once we were outside waiting for the results that a couple of policemen walked by. I thought they were here for something else, but then they walked up to me and asked me if I was Angelina Bradshaw.

“That’s me,” I said, confused.

“We’ve just interviewed a very shaken Brandon Thorpes. He was found by a passerby who saw him unconscious on the floor of Tregye Road. He has slight concussion, but other than that he’s fine. You’re lucky he doesn’t want to press charges.”

“You what?” Seth said, standing to attention.

The two police officers immediately stood guard, ready to pounce if Seth kicked off.

“Seth, please. It’s okay,” I said, trying to calm him.

“No, it’s not okay, Angelina. It’s very far from okay. You listen here officers, you’re lucky he didn’t get more than just a bit of concussion. Do you have any idea what he did to her when she was only fifteen? A child for fucks sake! And you have the gall to come over here and say that Angelina is lucky she’s not being charged. He was following her, did you know that? He was waiting in the shadows so he could corner her. Surely he’s the one that should be locked up. Surely he’s the one who is in the wrong.”

“Sir, I would suggest you calm down. Brandon Thorpe served his time for what he did. He is able to come and go as he pleases, as long as he doesn’t break the law.”

Seth snorted. “Yeah, so following and frightening the life out of the very victim he was put in jail for is perfectly okay, I take it?”

“It would seem that Miss Bradshaw here was far from frightened after witnessing the state Mr Thorpe is in.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” my dad shouted. Both he and Seth were now squaring up to the officers and I could tell they didn’t like it one bit.

“I suggest you two calm down before I arrest you both under the Public Order Act.”

Seth was about to shout at them again, but I pulled him with my good hand to try and stop him. My mum was crying



at this point and I knew things would very quickly get out of hand if I didn't try and do something soon.

“Please, Seth, Dad. He's not worth it. If you get yourself arrested over that man, I would never forgive myself. Mum's getting upset and I really don't want to see the two most important men in my life get carted off to a police station.”

What I said seemed to sink in. My dad immediately sat down with Seth, and my dad placed his arm around my mother. I nodded my thanks to Seth and turned my attention back to the policemen. “Unless you're arresting me for something, I think we're about done here. But I will say something before you leave. I was out this morning minding my own business when Brandon suddenly appeared. I haven't seen that guy in eleven years, and he just turned up, trying to talk to me about that night he attacked me. I was frightened, yes, but I was also thinking about my own survival. Also thinking about what he had done. I don't know if any of you two have children of your own, but you think just for a second about how it would make you feel if your daughter had been attacked as a child, and the attacker suddenly turned up out of nowhere. Just think for a second what it would feel like to be helpless when a policeman turns around to you and tells you that you're lucky your daughter wasn't charged for attacking her attacker. Just for a moment, put yourselves in our shoes. You know—human beings? People who actually think and feel normal emotions that obviously seem to have been lost on the two of you.” I sighed and shook my head.

“I don't envy men like you. In fact I pity you. Just like I pity that pathetic excuse for a man hiding away somewhere in one of these hospital rooms. I don't know, maybe once you felt empathy for victims of crime and you've been doing it for so many years now that it's frazzled your heart. Maybe, put it simply, you just don't have one. But if it's my first assumption, I would suggest you find another job, before it's too late.”

I looked away from the now subdued police officers who had their head dipped in what could have been shame. Seth

was practically beaming with pride, and my mum's sobbing had immediately been replaced by an open wide mouth of shock.

The policemen went by without another word, leaving us all alone again to wait on my results. Seth grabbed my mother's hand and apologised profusely for swearing in front of her.

"I more than forgive you, Seth. You know that," she said, squeezing his hand back. "I couldn't be more proud of you now than I am at this moment. I'm so happy you're going to be my son-in-law."

She immediately started crying again and my dad was there offering her the comfort she needed.

"Angel," my dad began. "That was just about awesome my girl. You definitely showed those two what for. I can be proud that I've brought up such a wise little egg like you."

"I didn't know eggs could be wise," I said, chuckling back.

"They know when to hatch, dear Angelina." He winked over at Seth and me, and we all seemed to relax that little bit more.

I went in to see the doctor, and sure enough I had broken knuckle connecting my little finger on my right hand. I had to have it bandaged together with the finger next to it, so it would heal correctly. I was given medication to help with the pain and sent on my way with a promise I would go to my local hospital in approximately four weeks time.

Despite what had happened, and the pain I felt, I was feeling better about it all. It was almost as if I had been given the therapy I needed to finally move on with my life. Instead of seeing it as a bad sign—like I normally do—I took it as a sign to be thankful for what I have, and get on with my life. Allow myself to be happy for once.

The rest of our stay there was uneventful. Well, almost uneventful. When Seth and I went shopping once I ventured off to get some drinks, when I bumped into Brian. It was very awkward at first as I hadn't seen him since that time with Veronica. He spotted my ring and asked me about it just as Seth turned up to put a possessive arm around my shoulder. I thought Brian was going to be nasty, or demand to know why. I thought it was only right of him, after turning him down the way I did, with promises that I'll never marry anybody. Instead he wished us both luck and told Seth he was one lucky man. Seth took it on the chin, thanking him gracefully and telling him he had no doubt himself just how lucky he was.

I felt a new found respect for Brian now and I genuinely wished him all the happiness in the world, with most affectionate hug I had ever given him. I felt he at least deserved that from me.

Apart from that the rest of the stay was pleasant and uneventful. It was just how I wanted it to be after the last couple of days. I was travelling back to London with my fiancée. I never thought I'd ever say that in a million years!

## CHAPTER 18

A couple of weeks went by and I was as delirious now as I was two weeks back. My hand was healing well and Seth and I were more in love than ever. We still couldn't keep our hands off each other, which everyone around us noticed, but we just didn't care.

We went out for a meal with Shelly and her new beau one evening when she made a comment about us being at it like rabbits. Seth and I exploded with laughter at what she said, and we were laughing so hard she couldn't understand why that was so funny. It was the irony of the whole thing.

Seth told his family about our engagement and they wanted to throw us a huge engagement party, one where my family and friends would be invited. I didn't relish seeing Melissa again as we had met a couple of times since that first meeting. To say they weren't as fraught with tension as the first one was an understatement. I knew this planned party wasn't something she was organising by a long shot. If it was a 'Getting rid of Angelina,' party, then she'd be all for it.

I accepted, as there was really no other choice. I had my family there for support and they promised it would be a low-key affair. Family and very close friends only.

We scheduled it for Saturday, and all that morning I was fidgeting and playing with my hair. Seth noticed I was on edge and asked me why, but I just made an excuse saying that I was nervous about our parents meeting each other for the first time. He tried to calm me the best way he knew how by distracting me. He told me the hair playing thing turned him on and proceeded to feel me up. All of a sudden, my hair playing and nerves didn't seem so appealing anymore.

We took Seth's Jag as I said I was feeling too nervous to drive the DB9. Truth be told, I didn't want to rub my present in Melissa's face. I could have done it just to be spiteful, but that's not the person I am. Besides, the present means more to me than just a car.

Once we got close to the house, we received a call from my mum telling me that they were close by. She told us what street they were in and Seth knew exactly where to go to meet them. Once we all spotted one another, I saw my mum and Julia waving like a mad thing towards us, as my dad and Jack just sat there, smiling.

We got to the gate and someone quickly opened it up to let us in. There was an eagerly awaiting Paul, Joey, and Belinda standing at the foot of the steps. We gave each other hugs and kisses and introduced them all to one another. Joey was there with his big bear arms engulfing me as usual. He was still always bugging me about his mum and how rude she is. She actually classed me as 'only an estate agent' once when Seth was out of earshot. Joey heard her, and I knew he had a go at her after. Joey was right, she really was quite venomous.

"Where's mum and dad?" Seth asked Joey.

"They're out back, getting everything set up. Looks like it's going to be another nice autumn day today. Dad thought it would be nice to eat outside."

I went over to my mum and put my arm around her. She was cooing like anything over the house. I guess her face was the exact same as my reaction when I first saw it.

"It's beautiful, Angelina. I know you said it was grand, but I didn't think it was this grand."

I looked over at Seth and he placed his arm round me, squeezing me in tight to him. I glanced up to his baby blues and smiled. We had secretly set a date and were going to announce it today at dinner. We spoke in detail about what we wanted once we got back from Cornwall. Seth knew me by now and although he would be more than willing to give me

the wedding of the century, he knew I didn't want a lot of fuss. I would get married in a black bin liner, in a garbage dump, with a tea cosy on my head if it meant I had Seth for the rest of my life. I told him that much when we were talking about it. He said the thought of me with a bin liner and a tea cosy on my head turned him on no end. I held that thought for him as I went and did just that. After his incessant laughter at how ridiculous I must have looked, he peeled it all off me and showed me just how much it turned him on. Point taken.

After all that was said and done, we decided that a small affair in Cornwall would be best. Seth knew that if we had it in Kent, there would be hundreds upon hundreds of people there that we didn't know, and the whole scene would be completely over the top. At least this way my mum would be happy and I knew I would get the smaller, intimate affair I was after.

The only problem being was, we didn't have long. We were planning on getting married in a month's time. This I knew would send my mother into hyperactive mode. No doubt she will have a pop at me for not giving her enough time. Not that she needs to do anything. Seth and I were planning on getting most of the work done ourselves, so our families didn't have to worry too much.

We got up to the door and past through the hall, where I could see them all gaping at their surroundings. Even Jack was having a hard time not looking at everything. He gestured a thumbs up at me and smiled, but I quickly waved my hand at him to shut up. Seth's mother already thinks I'm after his money. I didn't need my best friend to go rubbing it in even further.

We made our way out to the gardens, where there was an intimate long table situated by some elegant trees. I had to sigh my relief when I saw that.

As we got closer, I could see my mother squinting to see Thomas and Melissa, who were both standing there staring back. The closer we got the stranger all their expressions

became—until my mother was practically rooted in shock on the grass.

“Mum, what’s wrong?” I asked. I looked across at my dad to offer some guidance, but he, too is looking at them in surprise. Seth squeezed my hand, complete confusion written all over his face. Thomas and Melissa had their mouths pretty much on the floor in shock also.

“Mum, dad, what’s going on?” Seth asked.

I stared at my mother and finally she looked at me. Tears were welling in her eyes as she started shaking her head.

“I’m sorry, Angelina. I’m so sorry.”

“Mum, you’re frightening me, what’s going on?” I implored.

“You can’t marry this boy,” she finally said, storming off in floods of tears.

“What?” I asked. “Dad, please explain, I don’t understand.” I wanted him to explain, but he was too busy staring across at Thomas now, hatred written all over his features. He took a few steps toward him and punched him square across the face.

Everyone erupted with gasps wondering what the hell was going on.

“You bastard!” my dad yelled. “I thought I had gotten shot of you, years ago.”

“Clive, please calm down,” Thomas replied rubbing his face.

“You all know each other?” Seth asked, his mouth wide open.

Everyone was still in shock, and everyone was still wondering what the hell was happening, but after what my mum said, realisation of what this all could mean kicks in.

“Angel, are you okay?” Seth asked, noticing how pale I must have become all of a sudden.

I couldn't answer though. Instead I moved over towards Thomas without saying a word to anyone. Everyone noticed me at that instant, but I seemed to be running on pure instinct. I knew I had to see it for myself. Knew I had to find the reason why I always felt comfortable around Seth's dad. Why it almost felt like I was coming home.

It was the first time I looked—and I mean really looked. I gazed up into Thomas' shocked expression and searched his eyes. He was the only one there with brown eyes and green specks.

Just like me.

Gasping, I held a hand over my mouth. Thomas seemed to see the same thing as me as he tried to reach out to me. I pulled away, shaking my head as Seth was shouting at someone to explain what the hell was going on.

“It would seem you were nearly about to marry the lovechild of your very own father,” Melissa said, angrily.

I looked over at Seth, pain etched into our faces. Seth was more to me than just the love of my life.

He was my brother.

Just then, I turned away and ran. I could hear Seth shouting at his mum and dad to explain to him what exactly was happening. I knew all too well and so did Seth, but I think the shock was just too overwhelming.

My dad followed me out of the house and I asked him to please take me as far away as possible. I didn't want to be around any of them at the moment. I needed to get away and clear my head. My dad happily obliged and drove me away to a café about three miles away. He parked his old Jaguar XJ6 up and we walked in to grab a coffee. My dad had his arm around me the whole time, trying to offer what little comfort he could. I just wanted an explanation, if he had one.

I got myself a black coffee and my dad a Cappuccino as we sat down at a small table in the corner of the café.



“I know you must be shocked and I know you must have a lot of questions.” My dad placed his hand on mine and I dipped my head, wishing it would all just go away.

“Please, Dad, tell me it isn’t true?” I implored. I wanted to wake up. I must be having a bad dream, surely?

I could hear “Angels” start to play from my bag and I knew it was Seth trying to call me. I knew he must be hurting, and I knew he must want to talk to me, but I haven’t got the courage right now. Instead I ignored it and looked towards my dad.

“As you know, long before you were born, we lived in Kent. We were all happy there and thought we were going to raise a family. We met Thomas and Melissa at a party one night and we all just hit it off. Your mum and Melissa became best friends and Thomas and I used to shoot pool and watch some matches together. We were all pretty inseparable. The problem being was, your mum and Thomas became a little too inseparable. I started to notice something was wrong when she would disappear for hours on end and tell me she was in places I knew very well she wasn’t.

“To cut a long story short, Melissa and I found out about the affair and we cut our friendship and moved to Cornwall, never to see them again. I could have left, but I loved your mother too much. It killed me for a while, but we got counselling, and very soon after we moved, we found out we were having you. We both knew that you may not be my daughter, but it wasn’t until that night in hospital when you lost all that blood, that we realised you couldn’t have been.

“At the end of the day, we got on with it, and life seemed to get better after we moved. We soon forgot all about the Delaney’s and what had happened. I assume they’re now called Jacobs because of what happened all those years ago?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said solemnly. Of course he knew about that. They must have seen it on the news when it all happened.

My dad shook his head and closed his eyes. “Oh, God, that means Seth was the little brother who—”

“Yes,” I interrupted. “This is all such a mess. How could Mum do this? I was so happy. I had finally found someone, Dad, only for it to get ripped away from me. Is this really something she wanted? I was fine until I met Seth. Now I’ll never be able to recover from this.” I buried my head in my hands just wishing and willing for it to all go away.

“Angel, please. You can’t blame your mother for this. It’s just the most extreme coincidence I have ever known. She wasn’t to know you would fall in love with—”

He hesitated, causing my head to snap up with the pain of almost hearing that word. “Go on, say it—my brother.” I stood up, not wanting to hear anymore. I wasn’t angry at my dad, how could I be? He was just as much a victim in all of this as I was. I just needed to get away as fast as possible. I needed to be alone.

I ran out of the café and just kept running. I could still here Robbie Williams singing to me from my bag, but I couldn’t stop. I couldn’t hear his voice. If I did, I knew I would break down and I didn’t know whether I would be able to get back up.

I must of ran a mile until I spotted my saviour from across the road—a taxi firm. I ran across and asked them to get me a taxi back to London as soon as possible. I needed away from here and fast.

The journey was long and my mind was a flurry of exhaustive activity. Once I was back, I was relieved to find that Seth wasn’t at the Penthouse yet, so I went to work, packing some things. I was being cruel to Seth and I knew I was, but I had to rip this like a band aid. We can’t be together, not now. What’s the point in prolonging the agony? I was doing it more for my own selfish reasons. My heart was breaking and the thought of seeing the same in Seth, would break me even further. My self-preservation was kicking in big time. I knew I had to get away.

I packed as much as I could and fled. I was scared that Seth would be back at any moment and wouldn't let me leave. If he asked me to stay, I wasn't sure whether I would have the strength to say no. How sick is that?

I said my goodbyes to Jerry and Lucy and ran for the lift as fast as my feet could carry me. Luckily for me the lift was still up on Seth's floor. It would seem not a lot of people had moved in as yet, so Seth had the building virtually to himself.

I ran like the wind down the King's Road, seeking my little flat for shelter. It was the one place I knew I could feel safe. It always was my little sanctuary and I was hoping that it would be that for me now.

I rushed into the flat and threw my suitcase onto the bed. I lay in the darkness wanting it to swallow me whole. I daren't put on the lights as I knew this would be the first place Seth would look for me after he realised I wasn't at home.

About an hour or so later that's exactly what he did. I could hear the buzzer downstairs and my phone was constantly ringing. He was desperate and I was abandoning him.

My despair grew deeper as the sound of the door grew silent and so did the calls. Now started a life of complete torture.

A life without Seth.

## CHAPTER 19

It was four weeks later and I was still no better off. The week that I was back at the flat I called in sick and stayed in bed the whole time. I hardly ate, I hardly did anything. Everything was meaningless to me now.

Seth did try to call back several times after, until I plucked up the courage to send him a text to ask him to stop. That's if you could call that courage. More like a coward's way out. I knew what I was doing was wrong and hurtful. I just couldn't help myself.

I told Jonathan the whole sordid story and he was shocked beyond belief. He has been my only rock throughout this whole fiasco. I really hoped that Seth had that, too.

My mum tried calling me several times also, but I wouldn't pick up. They had to resort to getting Jonathan to call round and beg me to answer the phone. I told him I wasn't ready for that yet, and I needed more time. Trouble was, I didn't know if time would ever help my situation.

It was a Friday night now and I was shutting up shop. Shelly asked me to come with her for a drink. She said she hated seeing me so upset all the time and wanted to try and cheer me up. I was going to say no and just retreat back to my little sanctuary and hide as normal, but something told me that I should go. I agreed and off we went to Antonio's—the bar I met Seth in the second time. I'm not trying to torture myself at all!

Getting in there wasn't torture so much. It was what I found when we entered the bar. Seth was sitting in the corner with a drink, brooding. What didn't help the scene was the fact that a hungry Tania was pawing all over him. It was sick to watch. He looked up as I entered, and I saw his eyes bulging slightly. Tania, noticing his reaction, looked up too. Her smile was the most evil, conniving smile I had ever seen. I thought Melissa's were bad, but this woman took the biscuit.

Turning to Shelly, I apologised. I had to get out of there. I couldn't stomach seeing him with that woman any longer. She knew what was happening when she spied Seth in the corner. She nodded her head, understanding that I had to leave, and I fled. I was about half way down the road when I felt an arm grab me from behind.

“Angelina, please.”

I don't know why, but I felt anger towards him. Full-blown, pent up anger. I turned around and saw his pained expression. I saw the darkness under his eyes, and his blues—instead of looking a sparkling blue—had turned a sudden dull grey.

“I see you didn’t waste any time,” I seethed.

“She means nothing to me, Angel. I went in for a drink and she was there.”

Hearing him trying to explain it all just made me even angrier. “And she just happened to park her butt virtually on your lap? Yeah, I get that.”

“I can’t help it if she just turned up and sat next to me now, can I? You’ve not been there, Angelina. You haven’t answered any of my calls, nothing. Why won’t you talk to me?”

Looking up to his eyes, I felt the anger fading away. How messed up was this whole thing? If he wanted to have a woman paw all over him all night, then who was I to tell him that was wrong? Seth and I were wrong. This whole thing was just... wrong.

“Please,” he begged. “I don’t want to discuss this here with you. Come back to our home and let’s talk. This isn’t the place.”

He was right about that, this wasn’t the place. I nodded my head as I owed him that much. Some time had passed since that horrible day, and I felt I could possibly face this now. At least that’s what I was trying to tell myself.

We made our short journey back to his place and I felt a pang when we exited the lift. I had really missed this place and didn’t realise how much until now. I rushed over to Jerry, who was squawking his appreciation when he saw me.

“He’s really missed you,” Seth sighed.

I turned around, feeling as guilty as ever, and apologised.

“What for?” he asked.

“For everything. For leaving you and not speaking with you first. For not taking Jerry with me and leaving you to look after him. For being a coward and running away like I always do when I can’t handle a situation. For having a fucked up family who has made sure we can never be. For being so

fucked up myself that I couldn't even handle seeing you after what happened. For all the days, weeks, and years we'll miss together because we can't be as one. For being your—”

He whipped his hand up stopping me. “Please don't say it,” he begged. “Please, if you say it, then it's real.”

I looked up into his lifeless eyes and the pain that gripped me was as hard as that day a few weeks back. This is what I was protecting myself from. I'm right back to where I was—not that I had ever left. I had managed to keep a lid on the pain. It was there on the surface, but I was managing it. Now it threatened to engulf me again. I was trapped in a body filled with endless agony. It seared right through, cutting piece by piece until there's nothing left of me but a shell. The shell I had always used to protect myself.

“I won't say it, Seth, but we can't hide away from it. It's always there in my mind. Drumming and drumming it in, until my head cries out with the pain.” I took a deep breath. I could feel myself losing it and I didn't want Seth to witness that. He was going through enough as it is without me breaking down.

Sensing my pain, Seth rushed towards me and stroked my cheek. I immediately gave in to his touch. Closing my eyes, I briefly let myself wander to a happy place. A place where we weren't bound by parents. A place we could just be.

He leaned his forehead on mine, and I saw his eyes grip tight in frustration. I knew I shouldn't touch him, but I couldn't help it. I caressed his stubbled cheek and for a brief second I giggled inside remembering how much I loved to touch it.

Seth closed his eyes, but this time it's more in relief at the feeling my touch. He grabbed my hand and kissed it, just like the way he used to. Always the perfect gentleman—just always perfect.

He leaned his mouth down towards my lips, and for a fleeting moment I forgot where I was, and why I was here.

I gave in. I let his soft lips linger on mine for the briefest of seconds. Let the feel of having him close to me wash over me like I'm riding a glorious wave.

But all too soon I remembered—all too soon that wave was threatening to drown me.

I pulled away. "We can't, you know we can't. It's not right. We can't be together—not like that anymore."

Seth cupped my face in his hand and closed his eyes. "But it hurts," he complained.

"I know, Seth. I know. But we can't. You know it as well as I do."

"I don't think I can see you every day—be with you—knowing that I can't touch you... I can't kiss you like I used to."

I knew what he was saying was true. I knew because I felt exactly the same way, too. There was only one way to deal with this situation. Only one way to deal with the pain.

"Then we have to say goodbye."

Sheer panic raced across his eyes. "No, please no, Angelina. This is killing me, but knowing I can never see your face again is pure torture."

"I can't do this anymore, Seth. I can't... please, you have to let me go."

He threw his arms around me in a tight grip. I didn't want him to let go. I didn't want to live without him... but I had to get away. We couldn't go on like this anymore.

"Please, no. Don't do this to us. Angelina, I can't live without you. I love you, baby. Please don't do this."

I tried releasing the tight arms now invading my waist. I knew that if I didn't get away I would break down. I don't cry, and I haven't cried since that horrible day. I didn't want that to change. "Please let me go," I said pulling at his arms. He was sobbing now and it broke my heart to hear him in such



agony. My body wanted to hold him—wanted to comfort him—but my mind was screaming at me to get away. My survival instincts were kicking in like never before.

“I can’t let you go. Please Angelina, hold me. You’re my angel. My life was nothing until I met you.”

A lump was forming and I knew if he said anymore, that would be it. I’d be broken again. “I have to go. Please let me go.”

He gripped me tighter. “I can’t.”

I knew I had to think of something drastic—knew I had to think of good reason why he had to let go. “You’re hurting me.”

That was all it took. He let go of me, shock in his watery eyes. “I’m sorry.”

For a fleeting moment, I stared at him and he looked like a lost little boy. His eyes were full of pain—full of sorrow.

“I can’t do this. I have to go.”

Right at that moment, I ran. I ran as fast as my feet could carry me. Luckily for me the lift was still at Seth’s floor, so I was able to quickly get away. I punched the ground floor button about a million times before my legs would give way.

I could still see Seth on the floor, fear burning a whole into my heart. My mind was racing and my body wanted to give out. The panic rising through me was palpable. How could I get this one chance to love, and that one chance has been ripped apart from me at the seams?

I gripped onto my heart as the pain ripping through it was like nothing I had ever experienced.

The doors eventually opened and my feet were finding movement for me. I ran and ran until I thought I couldn’t run any faster. People were looking at me from all sides as I pushed past them in an endless panic. I wanted to get home. I needed to be away from all the noise, all the pressure of a

hundred eyes bearing down upon me, witnessing my anguish as my soul was being ripped apart into little pieces.

I could see my door in the distance. Only a few more metres now and I'll be there, locked up away from the outside world—from the torture that life had to offer. I was almost there, virtually there, within arm's reach, but I was nearly knocked off my feet by my silver-haired boss.

“Jesus, Angelina. Are you okay?”

The look in his eyes of pure concern was all it took. I collapsed in his arms.

In that moment I felt it building—felt the burn rising in the back of my throat. My eyes were stinging, and my stomach was crying out in agony.

It was then I realised. I couldn't hold on any longer. There was no way I could possibly keep it in.

With a grip of Jonathan's coat, I let it all out. All these years I have kept the pain in, kept my heart away from the pain of being in love. Now the pain was flooding. The dam was broken and all the water was pouring out, almost drowning me in its path. The agony was all too consuming.

Jonathan wrapped his arms around me, letting me sob into his shoulder. He held me tight, not once faltering. He led me to my door and opened it for me. Once inside by the stairs, he picked me up and carried me up towards my living room, and set me down on his lap. He never spoke, never tried to pull away. He just let me cry and cry until my body dried up of tears, and all that was left were little breathless sobs escaping my lips.

“Angelina, I'm so sorry. I wish there was something that I could do. I hate seeing you like this.”

I shook my head. I was tired with it all. “Why of all the people in the world, did I have to fall in love with him? Why was I given this chance, only to have it torn away from me?”

He set me down on the sofa and quickly got up. “I’ll be back in a sec. I’ll get you a drink. It should help a bit.”

He walked towards the cabinets at the bottom of the kitchen and pulled out another bottle of rum—which I had replaced after that night with Shelly and Brad. He pulled two glasses out and poured a very large helping each. He placed the bottle down on the table, then went back to get the two glasses.

“Here, that should help a little.”

I took the glass from him and virtually downed the lot. The feel of the first taste burnt my throat, but it was a welcome one. Better than feeling the constant burning pain in my stomach. That was excruciating.

“I know this is hard now, sweetheart, but you will move on and find someone else.”

I shook my head vehemently. “No way. If this had taught me anything, Jonathan, it was the fact I was always right to not let anyone in. I was fine up until I met Seth, then he changed everything. I’m not letting myself go back there again. Ever. My walls are up, and nothing will ever penetrate me again. I refuse to live life like this.”

“But that’s exactly what it is, Angelina. Life. You can’t go through yours thinking that no one matters. I know you better than that. You knew how good it felt to love Seth, didn’t you?” I nodded my head, feeling more tears sting my eyes.

“Well, how can you stop yourself from feeling that kind of pure emotion? How can you deprive yourself of something that can be so wonderful? You can have that, Angelina. You deserve that—and one day, you will have it again. Just with the right person next time.”

“But I found the right person,” I said shaking my head.

“Angelina, you and I know that’s not true. Your parent’s have made sure of that. Talking of which, have you spoken with your mother yet?”

I shook my head again. “No, I don’t think I can at the moment. She’s tried calling, but I just can’t speak with her so soon after having this bomb dropped from a hundred thousand feet above me. I know I have to speak with her at some point. I just can’t do it now.”

“Okay, but she is still your mother.”

“I know, I know. I just need time.” He pulled me into his arms and we stayed like that for a while just chatting. He was a great source of comfort for me at the moment. It made me wonder for a little while if Seth had that kind of comfort, too. It killed me to think that maybe he was at that big penthouse on his own, feeling just like I was feeling. No matter what he is to me, I will always care. That can never stop or change.

“Maybe I should go. It’s getting late and I’m being a bad influence plying you with drink.”

He made a move to get up but I stopped him. “Please don’t go, Jonathan. I want you to stay.” I looked into his deep brown eyes and I knew what I could see—a man conflicted. I felt a slight panic and unease at making him feel this way. I don’t know why I did it, but I leant in to kiss him. He was receptive at first and it was warm and inviting—just like Seth.

But he wasn’t Seth.

Horried with myself, I pulled away. “I’m so sorry,” I said, feeling the tears rise again. I haven’t cried in years and yet tonight, they were on a free for all.

“No, I’m sorry,” he said, making me feel ten times worse. “I shouldn’t have let you... I know you’re hurting and it feels like I’m taking advantage.”

“But I’m the one that kissed you,” I said, shocked.

“Yes, but I didn’t stop it, you did. I should have known better. I think you know how much I like you, Angelina—that has never changed for me—but I know that we would never have a future together. I think we both know that, no matter how much I don’t like it.”

“Why are you so sensible?” I asked, trying to lighten the mood.

Jonathan chuckled. “Because that’s just me. I don’t know. Maybe one day I’ll say screw sensible.”

I didn’t know whether he meant with me, or in general. The insinuation was there, but I didn’t want to analyse it. Not now. I was hurting too much over Seth and now feeling incredibly guilty for kissing Jonathan. My whole life seemed a mess.

“Listen, I can stay if you really want me to. Just give me a blanket and I’ll sleep on the sofa.” He tugged me into his shoulder with a smile.

“Okay, thank you, Jonathan. You’re a true friend. I really mean that.”

Jonathan slept on the sofa and it was a comfort knowing he was there. In the morning we made breakfast together, but I knew Jonathan would have to go at some point. I just didn’t relish the thought of me being on my own again.

It wasn’t long after he left that I heard the door knocking. It must have been Jonathan as it was coming from my door upstairs, not downstairs. I was right about one thing, but wasn’t expecting to see Seth right behind him.

“What the hell was he doing leaving your flat first thing in the morning?”

He was angry, but I could also see the hurt in his eyes. They were just as red and puffy as mine. He sensed it of course, and his face quickly softened.

“Have you been crying?” He rushed forward to be with me, but I backed away. I couldn’t have him this close. It would tear me apart. The tears were already stinging my eyes again.

“Seth, this is not what it looks like. Angelina was distraught when I bumped into her last night—”

“Hold up a minute, he stayed the whole night?” He clenched his fists together and I could see he was trying to stay under control. He was a ticking time bomb.

“Seth, that’s enough!” I shouted. I felt the tears burn now and I didn’t fight it. I let them flow—what should I care anymore?

Seth looked at my tears and winced. This was the first time he had ever seen me cry, and it was harder than I thought to let him witness it.

All of a sudden, I felt faint. The room seemed to be caving in on me. “Jonathan stayed on the sofa—look, you can see the blanket and pillows still there. I was a mess and he comforted me that’s all. I... I...”

Everything seemed to happen at once. Seth and Jonathan were there, and were staring at my feet. “Angel, you’re bleeding.”

I looked down, feeling dizzy than ever. I saw the blood, felt how strange it all was, and then my world turned black.

## CHAPTER 20

I woke up to the sound of shouting. I didn't know where I was. All I knew was I was lying down and could feel people prodding me.

“Let me help Angelina, son.”

“Don't you ever call me son again. Not after what you did. And why can't I help her? Take the blood from me.”

“Seth!” I cried, trying to prise my eyes open. It was no use. I was falling again. Back into the darkness.

I didn't know how long I was out for. I still wasn't sure what the hell was happening. I managed to open my eyes and could see I was in a hospital. The light was shining through, so it must have been morning.

Looking across from my bed, I could see Seth asleep in the chair. He looked so peaceful that I didn't want to disturb him.

I lay silent for a while, just enjoying the peace from watching him sleep. I could see his hands resting on his lap and the desperation I felt to touch one of them was immense.

He stirred a little, turning, but then he shot up. “Angelina!” he shouted.

He snapped his head to mine, and I saw the panic fade from seeing me awake now. He grabbed my hand and asked me if I felt okay. I nodded my head, but I was still none the wiser as to what had happened.

“What am I doing here, Seth?” The look on his face made me wish I never asked.

“You were three months pregnant,” he began, tears rolling down his face. “You haemorrhaged so much that you lost the baby.”

I bit my lip and looked away. I was trying to hold in the sob I knew was going to come at any moment. I released it and the minute I did, Seth was there, holding me.

“I’m sorry, baby,” he cried into my shoulder. “You needed blood, I wanted to give you some, but I don’t have the same blood type as you. Unfortunately Dad does,” he said, looking at the drip.

Looking up, I could see a near empty bag hanging above me. I buried my head in my hands. I couldn’t believe the almighty mess I had got myself in. I didn’t even know I was pregnant—and now it felt as though I had been punished for loving Seth. It screamed at me how wrong this whole situation was, that my baby was rejected because of it. He or she wasn’t meant to come into this world—all because, genetically—it wasn’t right.

Seth held my hands, and no matter how wrong I thought it was, I needed the comfort. He needed the comfort. This was his baby, too.

It was then I had this sudden realisation. “I can’t understand it, Seth. I was on the pill.”

Seth smiled and kissed my hand. “It doesn’t matter, Angel. If circumstances were different, I would have been over the moon with the news.” He looked away for a moment. “I punched my dad,” he said with a sarcastic laugh.

“What?” I asked, shocked.



“I punched him and he let me. He didn’t even fight back. It wasn’t even worth it. I just hated him so much. I saw you here and felt helpless and then I saw my dad and blamed him for putting you here. It’s all one big fucking mess. I hate him. I can’t believe he did this.” He shook his head, squeezed my hand and tried in vain to smile.

“He wants to see you, but he knew I wouldn’t leave you alone, so he’s staying clear for now. I just never know what to do, Angelina. I don’t know what’s for the best.”

I squeezed his hand back, knowing exactly what he was trying to say. We were in love still and nothing could take that away. It wasn’t our fault that we fell in love, but we also knew that we couldn’t be together again like that anymore.

He climbed on the bed and held me. We stayed like that for an age, just holding each other—comforting each other with our loss. I never wanted a child—but now that I knew he or she had been here—had existed—I couldn’t help but feel the pain. The baby was ours, the baby was something real, and that’s what really counts. A soul destined never to be born is now lost from my grip. A grip I didn’t even know I had.

A doctor came to check all my vitals. He told me that I had to have a D & C operation and that he wanted me in for one more day, because of the amount of blood I lost. He said everything looked fine, but felt the need to express his condolences. I doubt very much that the doctors knew of our situation—and I didn’t want them to. I felt ashamed enough as it was.

Jonathan later came with some flowers, expressing his deepest sympathy. That opened the floodgates for a millionth time since the day before. I went from strong and tough, to a blubbering baby in the blink of an eye. But pain like this was hard to take.

Thomas came to see me and Seth was reluctant to let him in. I told him it was okay as I had to face him sometime. He was—after all—my father.

“Angelina, how are you feeling?”

He came in and sat down in the chair opposite me. I could see a bit of a shiner developing on his right eye. “I’m okay. I just wanted to thank you for the donation.” I looked up at the bag of blood as he smiled.

“You’re more than welcome. You are my daughter after all.”

I winced at the sound of him calling me his daughter. I didn’t want any of this. I wish I could wake up from this really bad dream. I wish all of it would go away.

“I have something for you.” He produced a jewellery box. Once he opened it, it revealed an intricate diamond necklace in a tear drop form. It also had cluster of tiny diamonds around the main diamond.

I shook my head in disbelief. “What is this?” I asked, enraged. “You think you can make up for lost time? Daddies little girl who never got all the expensive things he could have given her as a child. I never needed it, I never wanted it, and I don’t want it now. I only asked you here to thank you. I don’t want anything from you.”

He looked at me with pain in his eyes. I didn’t want to falter. Knowing him was too painful for words because it just reminded me of what I had lost.

“But it wasn’t my fault, Angelina. I didn’t even know you existed.”

I sighed. “I know you didn’t and I appreciate that, but you never at the time thought about your actions, did you? Did you ever consider how torn apart Melissa would be over what you did? I know she doesn’t like me very much, but no one deserves to have her husband sleep with her best friend—no matter what the circumstances. I would suggest you give this to Melissa—and I would suggest you grovel on your hands and knees for the rest of your life until she forgives you—that’s if she ever does.” I turned my head away from him as I

could feel the tears sting again. “Please leave,” I said with a trembling lip.

I felt a hand on my shoulder and I immediately flinched. “I’m so sorry, Angelina. For everything.”

I heard him leave and I immediately released a breath I didn’t realise I was holding. With it came a sob. The tears came endlessly, mourning the loss of Seth, mourning the loss of our baby.

Seth came rushing in and saw the state I was in. He was by my side in a flash, holding me in his arms. “I knew it was a bad idea letting him see you.”

I took a few deep breaths, trying hard to get the words out. “It’s okay. I told him what I needed him to hear. That’s it now.”

Seth later told me that my mother had been calling him. I think she felt more relaxed talking to Seth. They have always gotten along and he still talks kindly to her despite what has happened since. He just blames his dad for what’s happened. I blame both of them. They both knew what they were getting themselves into. I can’t excuse any of them for that.

The good thing is, he told her I was fine, but I still wasn’t quite ready to talk to her just yet. My dad called and I had plenty of time for him. Even he was trying to get me to forgive her.

“Angel,” he said. “Your mum is in turmoil here. Why can’t you find it in your heart to forgive her?”

“How can you defend her after what she did?”

“What happened was twenty-seven years ago now. We have always led a healthy, happy marriage since. I’m not going to break that up now.”

I knew he loved my mother, but I still couldn’t find it in my heart to forgive the betrayal. “But it still happened, Dad. She was still unfaithful to you.”

“I know, sweetheart, but it’s in the past and I want to keep it there.”

“I can’t believe you’re not my biological father.”

“I know, Angel, but you will always be my daughter and I will always be your father, you got that? That has, and will never, change. Please don’t lose that thought. I was the one who held you when you were born, who got up during the night to help feed you and change your nappies. I taught you to ride your first bike and nursed your cuts when you fell. I am your father, Angelina—because that’s what real fathers do. I love you so much and nothing—or no one—will ever be able to get in the way of that.”

I pulled my hand over my mouth, trying hard to hold the sob about to escape, but it was no use. In between sobs, I managed to tell him just how much I loved him too.

At the end of the conversation, I promised him that I wouldn’t leave it too long before calling my mum. That was the best I could offer right now.

The very next day, Seth came in with what distinctly looked like my suitcase. I looked at the case and then at him.

“I know you’ll probably say no, but I want you with me at the penthouse for a couple of days. I spoke to the doctor yesterday and he said you’ll need another couple of days to rest. I want to be the one to look after you. However long it takes.”

He looked away, probably because he didn’t want to look at me when I said no. The problem being was, I didn’t think I could cope being on my own at the moment. Finding out about Seth and I was one thing, but finding out we had now lost a baby was another. He had lost this baby, too. He probably needed me as much as I needed him. No matter what the circumstances were.

“Okay,” I said softly.

He looked up from the floor and smiled. It was a hint of a smile I thought I had lost forever—a smile of hope.

He placed the suitcase down and gave me a big hug. I couldn't help but inhale his scent. It had always made me feel safe—made me feel content.

It was very soon after that the doctor came in to let me know I could leave. I was given some leaflets and told to rest for a couple of days.

The closer Seth and I got to his penthouse, the better I felt. I felt I was going to be locked away in the highest room, in the tallest tower—and that was completely fine by me. I really couldn't handle seeing anyone right now.

Once inside, Seth set my case down and put the kettle on for a cup of tea. "I'm going to sleep in the spare bed for now. I want you to be as comfortable as possible."

I shook my head with a smile. "Seth, I'm fine in any of the other beds. They're all just as luxurious. I don't need special treatment."

"But you do. What you've been through—" he paused a moment and looked away—tears welling in his eyes. "With everything that's happened, I want to try and give you as much as I can—because you deserve the world. I'd give that to you if I could."

I walked towards him and took his hand. I pulled him towards me and we stood there for a while, just savouring the warmth of each other's arms.

"Seth, you've been through it all, too. It's not just me that's lost—" I couldn't seem to get the words out. Seth looked at me and nodded. He knew what I was trying to convey and that was enough for me.

For two days I was with Seth, and for two days all we did was laugh, cry, watch movies and ate popcorn until our stomachs hurt. I thought it would be hard to stay here with

Seth, knowing that I couldn't touch him and kiss him like I used to—but I found that having him with me was a great source of comfort. It may have been the fact that what we had lost, we lost together. That was one thing that couldn't be taken away.

Mid-morning on the third day at Seth's penthouse, we had a surprise visitor. Melissa exited the lift and immediately my back was up. I thought she was here to shout at me, but Seth made sure she was going to be nice before he let her in. He had found out since from Joey how badly she had treated me all this time. He knew I couldn't deal with that right now.

She wanted in as she said she had something very important to tell us that couldn't possibly wait any longer. I had to admit—I was intrigued.

When she saw me she actually smiled, and for the first time, it seemed genuine. She even asked me how I was.

I made us all a coffee and once we sat down, she took a deep breath. "I've been debating in my mind for the last three days what I should do. I heard you that day at the hospital," she said, looking at me. "I heard what you said to Thomas, and you had no reason to say all of that to him after the way I treated you. All I can say now is how sorry I am."

I nodded my head towards her and smiled my acceptance. She had been through a lot these past few days—we all had.

"I can see that you love my son very much—and because of that—I want to be given the chance to confess something to you. Something that will change both your circumstances."

I looked over at Seth, confusion mirroring my own. I couldn't possibly fathom what it was she was about to say.

"You see, I knew about your father, Seth. I knew he was having an affair with Rachel. It cut me up pretty bad when I found out. I was so upset, I went to see someone who I thought could help me through the pain—offer some sort of solution. The problem being was—in our grief—we took

things further than we should have. I didn't know then, but I definitely know now.

“Seth, Thomas is not your father. I know this because of what blood group you are. You can't possibly be Thomas's son.”

Seth shot up out of his seat and ran his fingers through the little bit of hair that he had now grown. “I don't understand this,” he said pacing the floor. “If I'm not Thomas's son, then whose son am I?”

Melissa took another deep breath and looked at me. “Clive's.”

Now it was my turn to stand to attention. I couldn't believe my ears. “Clive... you mean, my father, Clive?” I asked in shock.

“Yes, you are the daughter of Thomas, and Seth is the son of Clive.”

Seth's pacing became more pronounced. “I can't deal with this,” he said with gritted teeth. “I have to get out of here. I need some space to think.”

Seth rushed off at this point, leaving Melissa and me together alone. I was still in shock. I still couldn't quite believe my ears. They were all best friends and all screwing each other. It was sick beyond belief. How could they have done this to one another?

“I can imagine what you must think of me,” she said sheepishly. “It only really dawned on me at the hospital that Seth was definitely Clive's son. Both you and Thomas are AB negative, and Seth is O positive. It's impossible for Seth to be O positive with a father who is AB negative.

“I really didn't want to believe it at first. It was only that one time, and Thomas and I were still... well, you know.”

I looked away, only noticing then that I had my hand over my mouth. Shock can do that to you.

Melissa and my dad. It was only then that I realised the reason why my dad was more than keen to get me and my mum talking. He was just as guilty as the rest of them.

“I don’t hate you, you know,” Melissa whispered.

I swung my head back round to meet her. I really didn’t know whether I wanted to hear this.

“I was jealous. Seth was always such a happy-go-lucky child. He was full of beans when he was little. He always had a smile for his mum and dad—always had a way of making us melt, even when he was being naughty. But then that terrible night happened and I not only lost my daughter to a terrible nightmare that will haunt her for the rest of her life—I had also lost a son. He has never been the same again since that night—that is of course—until he met you. I could see a spark in his eyes I thought was lost forever. I was jealous of the fact that we had been trying for years to get him to find that spark again. You come along and within days—weeks—he’s Seth, my happy, jumping little boy. I resented you for it. I admit that now—but I can’t hate you. In fact, I want to thank you.”

My eyes bulged slightly as she took my hand. I was finding the whole thing completely overwhelming. I didn’t say anything. I think my mouth was wired shut through the shock still.

“I realise now that I let my own selfish jealousy get in the way of Seth finally finding the happiness he deserves. I know that’s with you, and I know how much you love him, too.

“I knew I had to tell you both. I knew I had to confess. Seth was back to where he used to be all those years when he witnessed something no little boy should ever witness. I couldn’t do that to him. I couldn’t do it to both of you. I owe you that much.”

It took a while, but after a few seconds her words started to sink in. Seth was not my brother. He never had been. There was no blood linking us now. We could be together. No one could stop us now.



“I want to thank you for coming,” I said rising in a panic. “But I really must ask if you wouldn’t mind leaving now. I have somewhere I need to be.”

She smiled at me, knowing exactly what I meant, and she turned towards the lift to leave. I grabbed my coat and phone and headed that way also. We rode down the lift together, my heart racing like a drum.

“I know I don’t have to ask this of you, Angelina—but please take care of him.”

She placed her hand on my arm, and looked so sincere that I couldn’t help but smile. Placing my hand on Melissa’s, I patted her tenderly. “Don’t worry, Melissa, I fully intend to.” I gave her a big beaming smile, which she matched quite nicely.

Once the lift was on the ground floor, I nodded to Melissa and she nodded back. I was on a mission and couldn’t wait another second.

As soon as I was out the doors, I was calling him. I was desperate. I needed to be with him, and didn’t want to wait another second.

After only one ring, he answered. “Seth!” I shouted in his ear. “Where are you?” I could hear heavy breathing like he’d been running.

“I’m at the top of King’s Road. I have to see you, Angel. I have to be with you now.” The excitement in his voice was unmistakable.

“I know, I know!” I shouted. “I’m outside your apartment block. I’m running to you now.”

“Angel, please. No running. You’re supposed to be resting.”

“Oh, you just try and stop me!” I ended the call and belted like a mad woman towards the end of the King’s Road. I had to see him—had to be near him, touch him, caress him. There

was no one stopping me this time—and I wasn't going to let anyone stop me.

I ran and ran like a woman possessed. If anyone from that horrible day from before could see me now, they would think I was a complete nut job. “Oh look, there goes the mad running woman of the King's Road.” I wouldn't blame them, but I just didn't care. This time I wasn't crying. This time I was smiling. I had the biggest goddamned smile ever, and it was all because of Seth.

I was out of breath, but I didn't care. I was a little more tired than normal, but I put that down to the trauma I had been through. I was running more on adrenaline than anything. Seth was mine, and I was never letting him go again.

Through the maze of people, I suddenly spotted him. He was running just as crazy as I was—a smile to match just how silly mine was. Once he saw me though, the smile disappeared. I knew he wasn't happy about me running, but the less time we were apart, the better. I wanted to close as much of the distance between us as possible. I couldn't wait to be in his arms—and for real this time.

“Angel, stop running!” he shouted, breathlessly.

“No!” I shouted back, grinning.

Soon, we were there and the first thing Seth did was pick me up and spin me around until we were both dizzy. We kissed over and over and over again, crying and laughing all at the same time. I was safe in his arms and life was beautiful again.

“Angel, we can be together.”

“I know,” I said kissing him all over. “I love you, Seth.”

“I love you, too, baby. Can I take you home now?”

“Yes please,” I said, laughing.

“Hold up. There's something I have to do first. Where's your ring?”

I smiled and pulled a chain from around my neck. Although I had to take it off after what we found out, I always wanted it close to me. I unhooked the chain and handed Seth the sparkling diamond ring.

He got down on one knee making me blush a scarlet red. “Angel, my little cookie monster. I want to ask you again. Will you marry me?”

I shook my head laughing. “Of course I will, you big Jessie,” I said, pulling him up.

“What, not ‘I don’t have to answer that’ this time?” His crooked grin was back again and it warmed my heart to see.

“I’m not wasting anytime with funny answers, Seth. I’m too bloody happy at this point in time—and I can’t wait to be your wife.”

He placed the ring back on my finger and kissed me longer this time. Our breaths calmer after the run we both just endured.

“I can’t wait to be your husband my beautiful angel—but I must say one thing.”

“Okay, what’s that?” I asked linking my arm in his.

“You will have to start learning to obey me from now on. We are—after all—getting married. When I tell you not to run, you shouldn’t run. You’re a very naughty girl.”

I nudged my arm into his and gave him a ‘Don’t you dare’ look. He started laughing and I couldn’t help but laugh back.

We were back together—and it just felt better than ever.



## EPILOGUE

It was six months later, and although we were blissfully happy, things had been tough. After the euphoria of realising that Seth and I could be together, we were left with the heartache from the loss our baby. Anger quickly formed with Seth. He blamed our parents for a while, for putting us under so much stress that it could have been a contributing factor in the loss. To say that didn't cross my mind would be a lie, but no one could ever really know for sure. For some reason, it wasn't meant to be. I had to hold onto that as any other thought would have sent me spiralling.

Aside from any blame and what could have caused the miscarriage, I still grieved like any other normal person would. It made me think finally about what it would be like to have children of our own. Seth and I discussed it, and I couldn't believe that I admitted the fact that having children could be an option for us, but not right now. I needed us to be married for a while and needed us to be in a better place.

I couldn't believe we did this, but we ran away and got married. A few days after we were back together, we took a plane to Anguilla and got married on the beach. It was just the two of us and a British couple who were holidaying there as witnesses. It was the most magnificent day of my life. We stayed in luxury the whole time, soaking each other up—no distractions, no one getting in our way. It was heaven.

When we got back though, it wasn't pretty. Once we told our parents, they were upset that they were never told, or invited. Once we explained that we just wanted to be together and that a wedding back at home was also on the table, they calmed down. It was going to be a while for us all to be in a better place. And a while before we can have both sets of parents—in the same venue—on what's supposed to be the happiest day of our lives. I just didn't want that kind of stress.

Building a relationship back up with our parents was going to be hard. The fallout from this extra bit of news about Melissa and my dad was going to take some time to adjust to. They were all hurt with one another and my mum didn't talk to my dad for a number of days. Once she calmed down and thought about it, she realised that she didn't want to let it get in their way of a happy marriage they had built for so many years. They were all to blame for what happened. Saying that I did this because you did that was fruitless. They all had choices to make, and unfortunately they all chose badly. There could have been other avenues to take instead of the ones they picked, but saying that would have meant Seth and I would never have existed. At least one great thing happened out of all this mess. We found each other.

I finally spoke to my mum about two days after returning from Anguilla. I said I wanted us to talk, but I still wasn't quite ready to see her and be one big happy family again. Of course I wanted this more than anything, but you don't get over something as huge as this quickly.

Julia and Jack called regularly. They even came to stay with us for a few days in the penthouse, which was nice. Of course, I did suspect that they had a hidden agenda for the visit, but I didn't mind too much. I was just happy to see them both.

After only a few hours of being there the subject of my mum and dad came up. Seth wasn't happy, but then Seth was still in a bad place as far as our parents were concerned. He was still trying to adjust to the fact that Clive was his father. Someone I always thought was my biological father. It couldn't get more complicated than that.

Julia brought over my new niece of course, which I was ecstatic about. Both Jack and Julia were worried that by having my niece, Louisa close by, might upset me after what had happened. I was more than eager to put their minds at rest and concentrate on their happiness at the birth of their beautiful daughter. And she was beautiful. I told them that much.

Seth doted on her. It actually made me a little bit tearful—and I must admit—broody when I saw how wonderful a dad he could be. He was more than willing to take her when she cried and walk her around the penthouse so we could talk. I caught him talking to her one evening when he was holding her by the patio doors. They both looked like they were staring out onto the buildings of London, soaking everything in. Seth was telling Louisa just how much he loved his precious angel. That he hoped one day—when she was all grown up—she could find that someone special in her life. That the whole world was just waiting for her.

I stood there in the shadows and watched with a tear in my eye. I never hid the tears now when they came. I accepted them as a way of letting go of pain—or in this case—even joy.

I was already at that stage where I knew forgiving and forgetting was something that had to be addressed soon, but Seth wasn't quite there yet. I certainly wasn't going to push him. It was the most bizarre, complicated, fucked up family situation any of us had ever heard of, and it was going to take time—lots of time.

Eventually, after a couple of months, we were both at that place. We visited my mum and dad first for a couple of days, then ventured off to Kent to see Thomas and Melissa. It was hard and a few tears were shed, but I was glad that we had finally done it. We were still miles away from playing happy families, but it was a start.

Work was going great and I was finally left on my own when Jonathan decided to go on holiday for a couple of weeks. The thought of running the business on my own scared the shit out of me, but Jonathan thought he was leaving it in capable hands. He said he needed the break. He had been working non-stop for too many years and it was finally his time for a holiday. That put things into perspective for me. Jonathan needed this and he counted on me not to fuck it up. I was determined not to let him down, despite the fact I was scared shitless.

I also found out something huge.

Things were a little different at work for me, and it made me feel a little better being left on my own with the evil twins. Let's just say I have one thing over them both—one major thing.

It was a couple of days after Seth and I got back from our wedding/honeymoon. I was on my way back home, when I remembered that I had left my purse on my desk. I really didn't want to leave it there overnight just in case, so I ventured on back. I had a set of keys so it was no problem getting in if the place was locked up. The evil twins were the last to leave so I thought they would still be there. To my surprise, it was dark and the door was locked. I opened up and had retrieved my purse when I heard noises coming from Jonathan's office. I panicked a minute and thought about calling the police, but then I heard a distinct moan, and knew it wasn't someone who was hurt. I carefully ventured toward Jonathan's office and put my ear to the door. I heard "Oh God" echo from inside, and I instantly knew whose voice it was.

My heart was thumping from the excitement of catching that bitch doing something she shouldn't have been. When I opened the door though, I certainly didn't expect her to be doing something very naughty with Timothy. I gasped very loudly when I saw them, and Daniela screamed. It was the funniest, most awkward moment I had been put in. I shut the door and ran as fast as I could out of there, giggling as I went. I must admit, I did have a little evil thought run through my mind to tell Jonathan. But then I knew he would dismiss them. No matter what my feelings are for the two, I didn't want to be the one responsible in getting them fired. Instead, I used it to my advantage. Daniela and Timothy were as nice as pie to me after they realised I hadn't blabbed. Working with them was going to be a lot easier around there now.

Shelly and Brad were still going strong—just as friends. Shelly was actually dating another Estate Agent she crossed paths with on a viewing a couple of months ago. She was smitten because he was "hot" as she put it. Now they were seeing each other fairly regularly, and Shelly seemed happy—which is good. Happy is always good.



I was sent an unwelcome letter through the post to tell me a court date had been set for Jaden's hearing. He was being charged with Grievous Bodily Harm and Attempted Murder for the second time in his life. I was nervous as hell with the prospect of seeing him again and reliving yet another nightmare he had caused, but I was determined more than ever to make sure he was put away—and for a very long time this time. He obviously had it in for me and I couldn't help but think that he would do it all over again, and keep doing it until he made sure I was dead. I was his one and only vengeance that had never been sought. As far as I was concerned, my nightmare was well and truly over. I had someone in my life that made sure that happened for me.

And talking of Seth, happy didn't even come close to describing it. I knew he was the one just as much as I knew it the first day I met him—despite the fact I fought him at every turn. I'm so glad he was as tenacious as he was because things could have been a little different otherwise. Seth said I was worth every second of it and would do it all over again if he had to. We had gone through some battles together and fought off our demons as one. We were placed in a world where we didn't know what the hell was going to happen next—something which would have scared the hell out of me a few months ago.

I was always the predictable Angelina; never needing a man and always knowing her path in life. I thought I knew what I wanted and had it all planned out. I thought I was happy, but I was just running away from myself. Running away from the chance of finding the happiness I have now accepted with open arms. Now I go with the flow. Accept what life has to throw at me. I take each day as it comes because I now have someone to hold my hand when the going gets tough. This was me, Angelina Jacobs—Angel to Seth, cookie monster extraordinaire.

Come on, life, let me have it. Just you give it your best shot!



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This isn't it!! I have plenty more to offer where that came from. I always seem to have a story in my head, and I'm always keen to get it down. I have a paranormal romance trilogy in the making. The first book should be released in September 2014, with the second book released roundabout Christmas time.

If you loved *Until I Met You*, please do not hesitate to stop by my Facebook author page and let me know. I'm always keen to hear from readers.

Thanks again, and no doubt you'll be seeing a book coming your way from me again pretty soon.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jaimie Roberts was born in London, but moved to Gibraltar back in 2001. She is married with two sons, and in her spare time from work, she writes.

In June 2013, Jaimie published her first book *Take a Breath*, with the second released in November 2013. With the reviews from her first and second book, Jaimie took time out to read and learn how to become a better writer. Jaimie gets huge enjoyment out of writing, and even more so from the feedback she receives.

If you would like to send Jaimie a message, please do so by visiting her Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/JaimieRobertsTakeABreath>.