



MAN OF
THE MONTH

January

Banned to

THE BEARD

CANDY  CANE KEY

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

EVE LONDON

BOUND TO THE BEARD

Man of the Month Club - Candy Cane Key

EVE LONDON

Contents

[Preface](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Man of the Month Club 2023](#)

[Also by Eve London](#)

[About the Author](#)

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Preface

Bound to the Beard

What happens in Vegas doesn't always stay in Vegas.

Coral

When my bestie whisks me away to Vegas for a girlfriend getaway to get my mind off the business I'm trying to buy, I expect to ring in the new year, not wake up with a ring on my finger. Despite my attraction to the red-hot bearded ginger in my bed, I hop a plane home to Candy Cane Key. A one-night stand wedding can't possibly be the start to something that will last forever... can it?

Flynn

The first time I see Coral, I know she's the one. So when I get the chance to check an item off her visiting Vegas bucket list, I go all in. But what happens in Vegas doesn't always stay in Vegas. I've got nothing to lose by following her home and convincing her to give us a chance for real. And maybe everything to gain.

Chapter 1



Flynn

“Viva Las Vegas!” My buddy Josh handed me one of the three-foot-long vodka slushies he’d just bought from a woman dressed in nothing but feathers. “Can you believe this place? Come on, Flynn, it’s time to party.”

So much for taking him outside to get some fresh air so he could sober up. “You’d better slow down on the vodka or you won’t make it to your own wedding.”

“Don’t be such a party pooper.” Josh shoved the straw in his mouth and sucked down a quarter of his drink. His fiancée was going to hog tie us and leave us on the side of the highway somewhere between Nevada and my home state of Texas if he showed up at the wedding chapel wasted.

I’d been on the fence about making the trip to Vegas so soon after the holidays, but our other friends guilted me into it. I could afford to take a long weekend off since Josh had just bought out my half of our construction business. But babysitting the groom hadn’t been part of my plans.

“Give me that.” I yanked the huge drink out of his hand. The rest of the guys were still racking up chips at the craps table inside. I seemed to be the only one worried about sobering up the groom so he could say, “I do.”

“Walk with me.” He slung an arm over my shoulder. We made slow progress down the sidewalk since he wasn’t doing a very good job of walking in a straight line. “Do you believe in love at first sight?”

Josh was one of those guys who got way too philosophical when he drank. I ought to know since we met our freshman year of college and had shared a lot of beers over the years. “What the hell are you talking about?”

I stopped next to the railing overlooking the front of the Bellagio. Based on the size of the crowd, it was probably time for the fountains to start again.

“That’s how it was with me and Georgeanne.” Josh wedged himself between

two groups of tourists and motioned for me to come closer. “She was standing next to me at the bar. We bumped elbows, and I spilled my drink on her jacket.”

“I know, asshole. I was there.” They’d met senior year of college, and she’d been making his life a living hell ever since. Witnessing the ups and mostly downs of their rocky ten-year relationship had been more than enough to convince me that falling in love was a horrible idea.

“Get over here. The fountains are about to start.” He scooted to the left to make room for me.

We still had a few hours before we had to meet Bridezilla and crew at the chapel. Hoping his buzz would fade by then, I stepped closer.

The woman on my right turned just as I approached. Full pink lips curled up in a contagious smile. I couldn’t help but offer a dopey grin in return. She laughed at something the woman next to her said. The sound did something funky to my insides. What the fuck was wrong with me? I felt like I was in a bad rom-com movie, but I couldn’t look away.

Dark brown eyes stared up at me as my elbow bumped into hers. My grip on the giant plastic tube shifted, and the huge drink in my hand tilted toward her.

Everything from that moment on happened in extreme slo-mo.

Her eyes widened and her lips formed a perfectly shaped “O” as half of my slushie splashed down the front of her low-cut white top. Having her cleavage doused in a frozen cocktail must have caught her off guard because she jumped, bumping the top of her head under my chin.

My teeth knocked together, which wouldn’t have been too painful except my tongue got caught between them. I dropped the tall plastic cup when my hand flew to my mouth, accidentally sending whatever had been sitting on the railing in front of her over the edge.

“No, no, no!” She looked like was ready to hurl herself after whatever had gone sailing into the water below. I reached out to grab the back of her shirt. The thin fabric ripped.

“Oh, shit!” Josh yelled and knocked her back from the edge.

She tumbled into me, and we both went down. The rest of the boozy, fruity slushie splashed over both of us.

Time sped up again.

She lifted her head from where she'd landed on my chest. "What just happened?"

"Are you okay?" I tried to sit up, but her body still sprawled across me.

"Duuuuuude." Josh's skin had taken on a weird shade of grayish-green. It was the same color as the inside of an over-ripe avocado. "I don't feel so well."

"Sit down and put your head between your knees." The woman staggered to her feet. Her shirt hung in pieces, doing nothing to cover up her lacy beige bra.

Josh did what she said. "Are you a nurse?"

"No, I just hang out with a lot of drunk people." Her dark brows drew together.

I stared at her as I sat up and took an inventory of my body parts. Except for the painful spot where I'd bitten my tongue, I didn't appear to be injured.

"Are you okay?" My fingers still clutched the fabric from her shirt. I held it out to her. Maybe she could pin it back together, or...

"No, I'm not okay. You just dumped two liters of sticky strawberry shit down my front and ruined my favorite shirt. Not to mention my purse is now sitting at the bottom of the... what is this? A swamp? A pond?" She turned toward the water.

"It's an eight-and-a-half acre man-made lake." I cursed myself for reading the "Facts about Vegas" cards that Josh's fiancée forced everyone to look over on the plane.

"Really? Eight and a half acres?" She glared at me, her lips turned down in a frown that did nothing to take away from her beauty. "Any chance when you're done rattling off useless facts you might be willing to give me your shirt since you're the reason mine is in pieces?"

“Give her your shirt, Flynn,” Josh called out from where he rested with his back against the railing and his head between his knees.

“Sorry about that.” I whipped the dark gray tee over my head and handed it to her. Thanks to my height, I always ordered my shirts in extra-tall. When she pulled it over her head and let it settle on her shoulders, it hung down past the point where her tight jeans encased her full, round ass.

“Thanks to you, I just lost the entire contents of my purse. What are you planning on doing about that?” Her hand clamped to her hip, and she studied me with a look that reminded me of the ones I used to get from my middle school teachers when I’d done something to cause trouble. Only my teachers had never been as pretty as the gorgeous woman standing in front of me.

“I’m going to get everything back for you.” The only thing that mattered in that moment was coming through for the curvy brunette.

“And how exactly do you plan on doing that?”

I shot a glance at Josh. He’d be okay for a few minutes. “Hold my phone?”

“Where are you going?” She reached for the phone I handed her. Our fingers brushed. Maybe it was the music blaring through the speakers while the fountains danced, but I could have sworn I heard angels sing as I stared deep into her eyes.

“I’ll be right back.” Then I turned toward the fountains shooting water four-hundred feet into the air and hopped the railing.

Chapter 2



Coral

“Are you out of your mind?” I couldn’t catch my breath from running halfway down the strip after the guy who’d jumped into the fountain.

“Probably.” He’d stopped in a doorway a few feet ahead. “Is that cop still coming?”

I glanced over my shoulder. The only people following us were my friend Gwen and the guy with the grayish-green skin who still looked like he was going to puke. “I think you lost him.”

“Good. Here’s your bag.” He handed me my purse he’d recovered from the fountain. “I tried to get all the stuff that fell out of it, but I’m sure I left a few things on the bottom.”

The lipstick I’d just bought at the pricey shop in Caesars was ruined, but at least the wad of cash I’d stuffed into my wallet was still there. And my driver’s license, thank goodness. I didn’t want to get stuck in Vegas because the airline wouldn’t let me get on the plane home without ID. The card key to my hotel room was gone, but it would be easy enough to get a replacement for that.

“I suppose I should thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” He held out his hand.

I slid my palm against his. A tiny zip of awareness traveled up my arm.

“Um, you still have my phone, right?” His brow wrinkled while his eyes crinkled at the edges.

“Yeah, right here.” Heat flooded my cheeks. Leave it to me to pick up the wrong signals. I jerked my hand away and pulled his phone from my pocket.

“Thanks.” He made a move like he was going to tuck it into his pants, then thought better of it. His jeans were soaked. It was difficult not to notice since

they clung to his legs like plastic wrap. I could see the ridge of every muscle. Yes, *every* muscle. “I probably ought to head back to the hotel to change.”

“Right. Me too.” I pulled the front of his t-shirt away from my skin. Mid-January temps were pretty mild in Vegas, but I was suddenly feeling a little heated.

“There you are.” Gwen caught up to us. “What a way to start our weekend in Vegas. Did you get your stuff back?”

“Most of it,” I said.

She fake punched the bearded redhead in the arm. “You’re certifiable. Do you know people have drowned in that fountain?”

“Yeah.” His smile faded. “I guess I’m a good swimmer.”

“Flynn, that was fucking awesome.” The other guy reached us and immediately sank down to lean his back against the building. “I still don’t feel so well.”

“Flynn, is it?” Gwen eyed the ginger like he was sex on a stick. “I’m Gwen and this is Coral. Are you guys just in town for the weekend, or what?”

“Yeah, I’m Flynn, and this is Josh. We’re actually in town for Josh’s wedding that’s supposed to be happening in a couple of hours.”

“Congratulations. Coral and I are here for a girls’ weekend.” Gwen linked her arm with mine and pulled me into her side. “Hey Coral, isn’t visiting a Vegas wedding chapel on your bucket list?”

I recognized the tone in her voice. It was the I’m-about-to-get-the-party-started attitude she shrugged on when she sensed an opportunity for fun. “Oh, we don’t have to talk about that right now.”

“What bucket list?” Flynn asked.

“It’s a fun little thing we did on the plane. Since this is Coral’s first time in Vegas, I had her come up with a list of five things she wants to do while we’re here.” Gwen looked so proud of herself. She didn’t mention she came up with the idea to distract me. Even though there wasn’t anything I could do while I waited to find out if my business loan would come through, being

away from the shop had me teetering on the edge of a massive panic attack. Now that she mentioned the bucket list in front of two complete strangers, I felt a little childish.

“That sounds like fun. What’s on your list?” Flynn eyed me with a bit of a twinkle in his dark green eyes. There was something about him that warmed my belly from the inside out. Looking at him was like taking a sip of the proprietary peppermint hot cocoa we served during the holidays at the gift shop where I worked—sweet and comforting, with a hint of heat.

I shook my head. “It’s silly.”

“Come on. I jumped in a fountain for you. Doesn’t that earn me some amount of trust?” he teased.

My cheeks warmed under his attention. I crossed my arms over my belly to ward off the butterflies threatening to invade.

“Do you want me to tell him?” Gwen asked.

Knowing her, she’d make up something naughty that would give Flynn the wrong idea. “No, I’ve got it. They’re just little things I want to do while I’m here. Ride in a gondola at the Venetian, get my picture taken by the million dollars in cash. Stuff like that.”

“Well, seeing as I owe you one, let me take you on the gondola ride. We’re staying at the Wynn, so we have to head back that direction to get to our hotel, anyway.”

“Don’t you want to get out of those wet clothes first?” As soon as the words left my mouth, I wanted to suck them right back in. Yeah, he was hotter than most of the lifeguards I’d seen on the beach back home in Candy Cane Key, but I didn’t want to give him the wrong impression. I was in Vegas for a weekend of forced girlfriend fun and wasn’t looking for anything else. If it had been up to me, I wouldn’t have left Florida, but Gwen turned in all of her travel miles to treat me to a weekend away and was the queen of guilt trips. “I mean, do you want to change first?”

Flynn nodded toward the door of the souvenir shop. “I’ll just pop in there and grab a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. Want to help me pick something out?”

“Of course she does.” Gwen grabbed my hand and tugged me toward the door. “Come on, Coral. Shopping is right up your alley.”

“What does that mean?” Flynn reached for the door.

My arm brushed his as I passed by. The same shiver I’d felt before rolled over my skin. “I work at a gift shop down in Florida.”

“A souvenir shop like this?” He was so tall he had to duck slightly to enter.

“No, Coral’s store is much classier,” Gwen said.

“It’s not my store.” Not yet. Though I’d been doing everything in my power to get my loan to go through so I could buy the holiday gift shop by the beach. The bank should have gotten back to me a week ago, but the holidays had set them back. Gwen made me promise I wouldn’t think about work for the next three days, but the walls of my chest tightened as I fought the urge to check my phone for an update.

“It’ll be yours soon.” Gwen picked up a tie dye shirt with a tacky leopard print that read *Las Vegas is for Lovers*. “How about this one?”

Flynn took the shirt from her. “I never thought of tie dye as being my color, but I like it. What do you think, Coral?”

I took in a deep breath through my nose to calm my nerves and focused on Flynn. “Absolutely. That color combination looks great with your hair.”

“They say red goes with everything,” he joked. “Want to pick out a pair of shorts to match?”

“These.” I handed him a pair of neon purple shorts from the rack, fully aware that despite the offensive mash up of bright colors on the shirt he was holding, purple was completely absent.

“You sure this is a match?” His brows arched over those gorgeous green eyes.

“Definitely. I’m for sure feeling it. I mean, go bold or go home, right?”

He laughed—a deep chuckle that sent a delicious wave of tingles down my spine. “I’m not ready to go home yet, so I guess I’d better go bold.”

Gwen gave me a nod of approval. I rolled my eyes in response. No doubt she thought her plan to keep my mind off the shop was working.

Flynn paid for his shirt and shorts, then disappeared into the restroom to change into his new clothes. I took the opportunity to head into the ladies' room to try to wipe some of the strawberry slush residue off my skin.

“Why the hell did you have to tell them about the bucket list?” I rounded on Gwen as soon as the bathroom door closed. “We’re supposed to be doing girl stuff this weekend, not trolling for guys.”

“Mmm,”—she wagged her pointer finger back and forth in front of my face—“I said my plan for this weekend was to keep your mind off of work. I never agreed to not trolling for guys. Besides, when’s the last time you actually talked to a man?”

“I talk to plenty of men,” I argued.

Gwen shook her head. “Name one man you’ve talked to in the past month—”

“Mr. Akerson, for—”

“Let me finish. One man who isn’t a customer or a relative and who’s between the ages of twenty-five and fifty.”

I opened my mouth and waited for the names to start rolling out. And waited. And waited.

“You can’t!” Gwen shook her finger at me again. “You can’t because you haven’t spoken to a dateable man in months.”

“So that’s what this weekend is about? Finding me a dateable man thousands of miles from home?”

“No, sweetie. This weekend is about getting your mind off that store. All you ever do is work, and it’s killing you.”

Gwen, of all people, should know how important it was for me to become self-sufficient. I didn’t just want to buy Coastal Christmas from Mrs. Ellis. I wanted to expand the store. Maybe even open multiple locations. I’d even toyed with the idea of trying to franchise someday. “I’m trying to build a business. Something that’s going to be able to support me.”

She reached for my hand. “I know you’ve got good intentions. I’m just worried about what’s going to happen when you finally ease up years down the road and realize everything you missed out on.”

I tugged my hand away. “There’s going to be time for all that stuff. Once I’ve established—”

“A baseline,” Gwen finished for me. “Yeah, I know. You’ve been saying the same thing since eighth grade. Just try to have fun this weekend. The store’s going to be there when you get back next week. You can’t do anything else until you get the final decision on the loan, so let’s try to enjoy the few days we have in Vegas.”

“I’m not buying that whole line about what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.” I pulled my bestie in for a hug. Her heart was in the right place, even if she didn’t quite understand the extent of my ambition.

“We’ll just focus on your bucket list. Starting with a gondola ride with Mr. Tall Bearded and Handsome.” Gwen got me with that contagious grin of hers. I couldn’t help but smile back.

“He is kind of cute,” I admitted.

“Kind of cute?” Gwen sandwiched my cheeks between her palms. “The man’s a fifteen on a scale of one to ten. Did you see those abs?”

“Fine, he’s hot.” So freaking hot. There was something more to him, though. Beyond the gorgeous green eyes and perfect physique, he had a great sense of humor and seemed like a really nice guy. It was a rare—and potentially dangerous—combination.

Flynn and Josh waited for us outside. He had on the obnoxious t-shirt and clashing purple shorts. On anyone else, I probably would have cringed, but somehow, he made it work.

“Ready for that boat ride?” he asked.

Josh pushed off the side of the building, looking a little less green. “Hey, I was thinking about it, and the two of you should come to the wedding later. Georgeanne and I are getting hitched at one of those little white chapels, and that’s on your list.”

My pulse spiked. “Oh, I’m not sure—”

“We’d love to,” Gwen said.

I wished I was the kind of woman who was capable of smothering her best friend. Instead, I forced a smile and tightened my grip on my bestie’s hand.

She didn’t even wince, just lifted our joined hands and nudged her chin toward Flynn. “I tend to get seasick, so I’m going to sit out on the boat ride. Flynn, you don’t mind taking Coral alone, do you?”

Chapter 3



Flynn

Despite having to strut down the strip in the tackiest t-shirt I'd ever seen in my life, I felt like I'd already won a million bucks. I knew there was something special about the curvy brunette the second I saw her. And now an entire evening of getting to hang out with her stretched ahead. I didn't know who to thank for the bucket list, but when I figured out who was responsible, I planned on making my appreciation known.

With Coral's hand secured in mine, I led the way inside the Venetian to find the spot where we could get on a gondola. There wasn't much of a line, so it only took a few minutes before I was following her into one of the narrow boats.

"Have you ever ridden in a real gondola?" I asked her as a man with a pointy black moustache pushed us away from the edge of the canal.

"You mean this isn't a real gondola?" Her eyes widened in mock shock.

"Of course it is." I couldn't figure out how someone I'd just met could make me feel the way I did around her. I was nervous, but calm at the same time. We just vibed. I didn't believe in all that woo woo crap like some of my brothers did, but with Coral, it seemed like we'd known each other before or something. Whatever it was, I liked it.

"Thank goodness." She shifted on the seat next to me, causing the boat to rock just a bit.

"You seem pretty comfortable on the water."

"Yeah, well, I grew up in Candy Cane Key on the coast of Florida. I think I learned how to swim before I learned how to walk. How about you? Where are you from?"

She had such an easy way about her. I might be inclined to divulge my entire personal history during the short boat ride. "I grew up in Texas in a tiny town you've probably never heard of."

“Try me.”

“Broken Bend. It’s about an hour outside of Austin. Ring a bell?”

Her lips quirked up in the cutest smile. “Nope, sorry. I’ve never been to Texas. Do you like it?”

“Yeah, I suppose I do.” I’d never given much thought to whether I liked it. “I’ve never lived anywhere else, so I guess I don’t know any different.”

“Have you ever wanted to live somewhere else?” She tilted her head back and looked up at the bright blue sky painted on the ceiling. It gave me a chance to stare at her without being noticed. I tried to put my finger on what it was about her that I found so appealing. Was it her heart-shaped face? Her deep, throaty laugh? The way she made eye contact briefly before her mouth turned up at the corners and she glanced away? There wasn’t just one thing. It was the combination that drew me to her.

“I guess I’ve never had a reason to consider it.” Until now. There was something between us that made me want to grab hold of her and follow wherever she might lead. “What do you like about Florida?”

“What’s not to like? I’ve got year-round sunshine and the beach right outside my door.”

“Sounds pretty amazing.” I stopped myself from picturing Coral in a swimsuit. One that showed off the curves I ached to get my hands on. Her bronzed skin already looked like it had been permanently kissed by the sun. I wondered if she even had tan lines.

The man navigating our boat through the canal started singing in Italian, and I relaxed against the back of the bench seat. With my bulk and her sweet, thick hips, there wasn’t a spare inch of space between us. I liked feeling her thigh pressed next to mine. Liked breathing in the scent of her perfume, even with a little strawberry mixed in from the drink I’d spilled on her earlier.

Before I was ready for our ride to be over, we reached the end. I tipped our guide, then hopped out first so I could help Coral up from her seat.

“Thanks for the ride.” She didn’t let go of my hand, even after we’d walked a few feet away from the gondola exit.

I squeezed her hand. “You’re welcome. It’s the least I could do after knocking your stuff into the fountain. You’re coming to the wedding, aren’t you?”

“Don’t you think you should focus on your friends? I don’t want to get in the way.”

My throat tightened at the thought I might not see her again. I wasn’t ready to say goodbye. “You wouldn’t be in the way at all, and it’s on your bucket list, isn’t it?”

She rolled her eyes and bit down on her bottom lip. “The list was Gwen’s idea.”

“What else did you put on there?” Maybe I could find a way to help her cross a few more items off her list. There wasn’t much I wouldn’t do for a chance to spend more time with her.

“I told you, it’s just silly stuff.”

“Silly stuff such as?” I prompted.

“Fine.” She stopped and leaned against the railing. “Here’s the rest of it.”

I took the wrinkled piece of paper she pulled out of her purse. It was still damp from swimming in the fountain, but I managed to unfold it. “Picture with the million dollars. We could do that after the wedding if you want. Oh, and watching the sunset from the Eiffel Tower at Paris. How about tomorrow night?”

She stayed quiet. Maybe I’d come on too strong. Hell, until she shot me down, I’d keep pressing my luck with Coral. She was the first woman I’d met in a damn long time that made me want to lean toward something instead of turning away.

“You don’t think you’ll get tired of me by then?” She looked up at me, her brows knit together in concern.

“Me get tired of you?” I dropped her hand so I could wrap my arm around her shoulders and pull her into my side. “I think there’s a better chance of the desert around her flooding.”

“You shouldn’t say stuff like that.” Her palm lightly pressed against my side—maybe a feeble attempt to keep me at a distance.

“Why not?”

“Because...” Her teeth worried at her bottom lip again.

“Because, why?” I cupped her chin with my palm and tipped her head up until she met my gaze.

“Because it’s only going to make me like you.”

Damn, the way she looked at me would have sealed the deal if I hadn’t already made up my mind about where I wanted things to go with Coral. I needed to get rid of the doubt crowding out the light that had shone in her eyes just minutes before.

“Would liking me be that bad?” I clasped my hands together behind her, circling her in my arms. She was mine to protect and mine to hold, at least for the moment. I didn’t want to let go.

“You seem like a great guy, Flynn, but I’ve got too many other things on my plate right now. Things I’ve been working on for way too long to let myself get distracted.” With my arms around her, she didn’t have anywhere to go. Not that she looked like she wanted to go somewhere, anyway.

“When do you fly home?”

“Monday.”

“Me, too. What if we let ourselves be distracted until then?”

“Just until Monday?” She said it like she was actually considering the idea.

“Yeah. After Monday, I’ll go back to Texas, and you’ll go back to Florida. What happens in Vegas—”

“Don’t say it. That’s got to be the most overused advertising slogan I’ve ever heard.”

I laughed as I tightened my arms around her and lifted her off her feet. “Is that a yes, Coral?”

“Will I regret it?”

“Nah.” I set her down gently, eager to get started being a distraction. With one hand on her waist, I slid the other behind her neck.

She tilted her head back and looked up at me. “Are you sure about that?”

I answered her with a kiss, a barely there brush of my lips against hers.

She sucked in a breath and stared up at me, her eyes wide. My pulse pounded. The only thing I could think about was doing it again. Before I had the chance, she rose up on her tiptoes and pulled my head down to hers. Our lips smashed together, and she pushed her body into me. My arm tightened around her back, and I grabbed the railing with my free hand to keep both of us from falling over.

“Okay, then,” she mumbled against my lips. “Until Monday.”

We had one weekend together, and the countdown was on. I needed to figure out how to make the most of it.

Chapter 4



Coral

“**T**hen he kissed me and literally swept me off my feet.” I took another sip of the cocktail Gwen handed me. Somehow, I’d let Flynn talk me into attending his friend’s wedding, and he’d be picking us up in front of the hotel any minute.

“I’ve got a good feeling about the two of you.” She clinked her plastic cup against mine. “I told you we were going to have fun this weekend.”

“What about you? I’m not going to hang out with Flynn and leave you all alone.” That was rule number one of the girlfriend code. Leave no ladies behind.

“Don’t worry about me. I’m sure I’ll find a way to keep myself busy.” She gave me a sassy wink.

At that moment, a huge pink stretch limo pulled into the circular drive. Before the driver could come around to open the back door, Flynn stepped out.

I was worried the attraction I’d felt for him earlier would fade, but I should have known better. If I thought he was drop-dead gorgeous in a tie dye shirt and clashing neon shorts, he was absolutely irresistible in a black tux. He looked like a younger, bearded, red-headed version of a sexy James Bond. My ovaries even shimmied when his eyes met mine.

“Coral,”—he reached out to take my hand—“you look ravishing.”

My entire body glowed at the compliment. “Thanks. You look pretty edible yourself.”

His lips slid into a crooked grin as he pulled me to the side to let Gwen get into the limo first. “No second thoughts about going all-in on our weekend?”

Shaking my head, I pressed the entire length of my body against him. “All in.”

“You don’t know how happy I am to hear you say that.” His hand slid down my back and stopped right before he reached my ass.

“Maybe you can show me later.” I bumped him with my hip before I followed Gwen into the limo. I didn’t recognize this flirty version of myself. I might have met her once or twice in college, but I thought I’d left her in the past along with my bad fashion choices and preference for wine coolers.

Flynn laughed and climbed in behind me. He sat down on the bench seat along the back and pulled me onto his lap. My eyes adjusted to the low-lit interior. Gwen was already holding court across from us. She had a blond surfer-looking guy on one side and a guy wearing a cowboy hat on the other. The cowboy was in trouble. I happened to know she had a major thing for a man in boots.

“Next stop, the little white chapel of love,” the cowboy said. “Hey, I’m Gil and this is Tyson.”

Everyone introduced themselves and made small talk while the limo rolled down the middle of the Las Vegas strip. We pulled up in front of an adorable building. It looked like a miniature church and was about the size of the Cocoa Corner chocolate shop down in Candy Cane Key.

“End of the line, Josh. Are you sure you’re ready?” Flynn reached over to clasp his friend’s shoulder.

“Absolutely,” Josh said. He’d lost the greenish-gray tinge and looked calm and cool in his dark tux. “I just hope Georgeanne feels the same. She’s been having cold feet all day.”

Everyone piled out of the limo. We stood under a metal canopy that had been painted with smiling cherubs holding pink and red hearts. A woman in tall red heels and a tight white mini dress came out of the building and introduced herself as the wedding director. She pulled Josh to the side while Gwen and I looked on.

Flynn leaned down and brushed his lips against my ear. “Does this check off the box for visiting a wedding chapel?”

“The only thing that would make it better would be if Elvis showed up to perform the ceremony,” I teased.

“Oh, they’ve got a package for that.” His arm resting across my shoulders staved off the cool evening breeze.

“I bet they’ve got a package for everything.”

“They do. Hey, I’m going to check in with Josh and see what’s happening. I’ll be back in a minute.”

I tipped my cheek up to meet his kiss, then watched him take long strides to where Josh and the wedding director stood at the door to the building.

“What do you think the bride is like?” Gwen asked.

“I don’t know. Josh seems nice, so he’s probably got good taste in women.”

“Do you think she’s a no-show?”

My heart squeezed tight. “I sure hope not. That would be awful.”

“Awful, but looking pretty likely.” Gwen nudged her chin toward the guys.

Josh funneled his hands through his hair while Flynn nodded and said something to the woman.

“Oh, no.” My heart went out to Josh. He looked worse than he had this afternoon at the fountain. The woman disappeared inside, and the two men headed toward us.

“Looks like Georgeanne isn’t going to make it.” Flynn glanced around the group. “What do you want to do, Josh?”

I looked at Gwen, feeling uncomfortably out of place. We should go. The guys needed to rally around their friend at a time like this. She nodded like she’d picked up on the same vibe.

“Dammit. I knew she was going to pull something like this.” Josh shook his head. “I paid for a wedding, and I’m not leaving until I see one. Tell the people booked after us to go ahead. Somebody ought to get hitched tonight.”

“You’re the last wedding for tonight. Georgeanne wanted to make sure you’d have plenty of time for pictures, so she booked the place from now until they close.” Flynn put his hand on Josh’s shoulder. “Come on, let’s go change out of these tuxes and we’ll hit up that bar with the whiskey flights you like.”

Josh shrugged off Flynn's hand. "No. I'm not leaving."

The other guys circled around Josh while Flynn came over to me and Gwen.

"I don't know what's going to happen with him. If the two of you want to head out—"

"You two." Josh pointed to me and Flynn. "You get married. We've got the whole party planned. There's cake, champagne, even a ride down the strip in a '57 Chevy driven by Elvis. Come on, humor me."

Gwen immediately lit up like someone had plugged her smile into a super-sized battery pack. "That's a great idea. We'll have a fake wedding, and Coral can check the wedding chapel off her bucket list. If everything's already paid for, why not have the party?"

Flynn arched his brows and held out his hand. "What do you say, Coral? Is a fake wedding worth getting that checkmark?"

"Only if Elvis officiates," I joked. Where was the harm in waltzing down the aisle at the little chapel of love? I slid my hand into his. "I'm assuming you'll be able to find a ring on short notice?"

He stepped next to me. "I'll figure out something. Thanks for doing this. Josh can be as stubborn as a tree stump. He's going to need to face his fiancée at some point, but I'd rather let him have his way tonight and just try to take his mind off of things."

"My pleasure. Now, who do we see about faking it down the aisle?" This was working out better than I could have hoped. I hadn't told Gwen, but the only reason I added visiting a wedding chapel to my list was to do some research. I'd fielded a few calls at the shop from couples wanting to find a place to get married in Candy Cane Key. Once I owned the store, I planned on adding a Christmas-themed wedding chapel. Faking it down the aisle with the good-looking ginger would provide firsthand knowledge of how the wedding capital of the world handled things.

I followed Flynn into the office, where a woman handed him a sheet of paper with instructions on how to get a marriage license. Flynn tried to explain we were only going to go through the motions.

“We don’t do fake weddings,” the wedding director said. “It’ll take you ten minutes to run downtown, show ID, and come back for the wedding.”

“A real wedding?” I looked up at Flynn, who didn’t seem nearly as unnerved by the idea.

He shrugged. “We can get it annulled tomorrow, and you could go home with a hell of a good story.”

“It’s that easy to get annulled?”

“Yeah. It’s just a matter of paperwork. I looked it up when Josh said he was getting married in Vegas.”

When he put it like that, a little bit of paperwork seemed like a small price to pay to for firsthand research. I didn’t plan on getting married for real until my dream of running a successful business had been realized. That could take years, even decades. What harm would there be in spending a weekend as Mrs... hmm... I didn’t even know Flynn’s last name.

“Hey, what’s your last name?”

“Sincero.”

Coral Sincero. It didn’t quite roll off the tongue, but I didn’t plan on being Mrs. Sincero for more than a day or two at most.

“Are you getting married tonight or can we take you off the books and open up the time slot for walk-ins?” the wedding director asked.

“What do you say, Coral? Want to get hitched for the next forty-eight hours?” Flynn held out his hand like he was expecting a high five.

“Why not?” I’d get that insider’s view of the wedding chapel, plus I’d earn some bonus points with Gwen for going through with a “fake” wedding and being spontaneous. I’d never done anything so impulsive, but Flynn made me want to loosen my iron grip of control, at least for a very brief period of time.

“Great.” He tucked my hand into his elbow. “Let’s open up the bar so everyone can grab a drink while we run downtown and get that piece of paper.”

With him smiling at me like I'd hung the moon by saying yes, how could I refuse?



The wedding lasted all of five minutes. Maybe ten if I counted the ride around the block the Elvis impersonator gave us in the vintage Chevy. An hour later, we left the chapel with a few cheesy photos of the wedding, a bouquet of plastic orange roses, and two engraved wine tumblers commemorating our wedding.

Josh didn't look like a man who'd been jilted at the altar. He was all smiles as he ushered everyone back into the limo and asked the driver to take us to the casino, where we could snap a photo with the million bucks.

The rest of the night turned into one big blur of alcohol-infused moments. I vaguely remembered Flynn and me dancing cheek-to-cheek at a swanky nightclub. And I'm pretty sure Gwen and Gil went skinny dipping at the hotel pool.

When I'd had all the fun I could take for one day, I threw my arms around Flynn's neck. "Will you take me back to the hotel now?"

"My pleasure, Mrs. Sincero. Are we going back to your room, or mine?"

Chapter 5



Flynn

I rolled over in bed, hoping Coral's hangover wouldn't be as ugly as I feared. Instead of my fingers brushing along her soft skin, I felt the slippery microfiber sheet. My eyelids cracked open. She was gone.

I'd expected to see her long, brown hair fanning out over the pillowcase next to me, but there was a piece of paper instead. I reached for it with a shaky hand.

Dear Flynn,

Thanks for a very memorable time. An emergency came up at work, and I had to fly home. I'll start the paperwork for the annulment when I have a chance to catch my breath.

XO,

Coral

I crumpled the sheet in my hand and tossed it to the floor. The first woman I'd felt anything for in years just walked out on me. We'd agreed to enjoy each other's company for the weekend, but she'd only given me half a day. I wanted more.

Pulling her pillow close to my face, I breathed in the smell of her shampoo. The faint scent of strawberries lingered. Dammit. Memories of the night before flashed back. Coral looking up at me as she smiled and said, "I do." Spinning her around the dance floor while she laughed. Tucking her in next to me and falling asleep with her in my arms.

Josh bought so many rounds of celebratory shots for everyone, Coral and I

had both passed out as soon as our heads hit the pillow. Hell, we hadn't even done more than kiss.

And now we never would.

I fumbled for my phone on the nightstand and pulled up my texts. It was already after ten. Tyson had sent out a group text for everyone to meet for brunch in half an hour. I wasn't sure they'd be expecting me since they thought I was sequestered with my fake bride, but maybe they could help me figure out what to do about Coral. With a heavy heart, I dragged myself out of bed and into the shower.

A half hour later, I slid into the booth where Tyson, Josh, and Gil were plowing through a carafe of coffee.

"Didn't think we'd see you this morning." Josh glanced up and offered a grin.

"Where's the bride?" Tyson asked.

"She flew home." I grabbed the closest mug and downed the scalding brew.

"Hey, that was mine," Gil said.

"The man just got dumped. Let him have your coffee." Tyson reached for the carafe to refill the mug in my hand. "What happened?"

"She left me a note saying she had a work emergency and had to go home." I sighed, eager for the caffeine to kick in.

"Gwen said she's a workaholic." Gil motioned for the server to bring another cup. "You must not have impressed her very much on your fake wedding night if she chose work over your fake honeymoon."

"Brutal crowd." Josh wrapped his hands around his mug. "I'm through with women."

"Until Georgeanne crooks her finger at you again." Tyson shook his head. "We've got to stop giving them all the power."

"Or stop picking the wrong women," Gil joked.

That might be what went wrong in Josh's case, but every fiber in my being told me Coral and I belonged together. I wasn't the kind of guy who'd ever

latched onto a woman, so I didn't know what to do with that amount of certainty.

"What if Coral's the right woman?" I asked.

"Right woman, wrong timing." Gil shrugged. "It could happen."

"Yeah, I don't think there's anything right about Georgeanne, though. Sorry, man." Tyson held his fist out for Josh to bump.

Any one of us could have told Josh that over the years. Actually, we all did. Multiple times. I had to give him credit for trying. Hopefully, he was ready to call it quits and stop letting her break his heart.

"You and Coral..." Gil nodded. "The two of you looked good together."

I downed another big gulp of coffee. We felt good together, too, but I wasn't going to kiss and tell. She was everything I could possibly want in a woman: gorgeous, smart, and funny, with a drive inside that seemed to match my own. We might have only known each other for a day, but I'd always been a good judge of character, and there weren't any warning bells with Coral.

"What are you going to do?" Josh eyed me from across the table. Out of all the guys, he knew me the best. Tyson, Gil and I grew up together as foster brothers, but Josh and I had been roommates in college and owned a business together. He'd seen me at my best and at my worst.

"I guess I've got a couple of choices," I said.

"Yeah, like enjoying the rest of the weekend knowing you dodged a bullet from your fake fiancée," Tyson added.

I still hadn't told the guys the "fake" wedding had been real. Under the influence of a few shots, it hadn't seemed like a big deal to get the paperwork done. Vegas made it so damn easy. And Coral looked so happy when the Elvis impersonator sang our vows to the tune of "Blue Suede Shoes."

"Maybe I'll fly down to Florida and see what's up." I tossed the idea out there to see how they'd react.

"May as well. Take the vacation from Vegas to Florida. I like it." Gil leaned back in his chair. "You've got the time and the cash."

“Fuck. The business.” Josh clasped his hands behind his neck and leaned forward. “I’m sorry I forced you out. Georgeanne wanted us to own it free and clear. If you want back in—”

“I’m fine about the business.” His offer to buy me out came at a good time. I was getting a little bored with building the same small office buildings over and over. “I do have a certain degree of flexibility right now since I haven’t decided what I want to do next.”

“Is she the one?” Josh stared at me, his jaw clenched tight.

“I don’t know, but I think she could be.” That was the most honest answer I could give.

“Then you’ve got to go after her.” Josh pulled out his phone. “Where does she live? Somewhere Christmassy, right?”

“Candy Cane Key.” I’d burned it into my memory when she told me she lived in a tiny ocean-side town where it was Christmas all year long.

“There’s a flight at one that will get you to Miami. From there, you’ll have to take a puddle jumper, but you can be there tonight if you leave soon.” He slid his phone across the table to me.

My stomach churned as I skimmed the details. I could be holding Coral in my arms again before midnight if I acted ASAP.

“I’m booking it.” As far as I was concerned, I didn’t have anything to lose, but might have so much to gain.

Chapter 6



Coral

I hadn't been able to concentrate since I walked out on Flynn this morning. When Mrs. Ellis called to let me know the bank needed an updated inventory sheet before they could consider my loan application, I didn't have a choice but to walk away. Sure, I could have waited to dive into the inventory when I got back to town, but I didn't want to waste another week counting ornaments when I could get it done this weekend and have an updated sheet to them before their meeting on Wednesday.

"Are you okay, Coral?" Mrs. Ellis tucked her pencil into the big silver bun on top of her head. "You look like you could use a bit of fresh air."

"I'm fine." I just needed to push through the anxiety swirling around in my gut. In a few more days, all the sacrifices I'd made over the past several months would be worth it. I'd get the loan, and the store would be mine. For some reason, the idea that it would be over soon sent a wave of panic through my veins. I put my hand on my chest to try to slow down my breathing.

"Why don't you step outside for a moment?" Mrs. Ellis suggested. "I'll finish counting this section."

I wanted to tell her I had everything under control, but the tightness in my chest refused to cooperate. "I'll be back in just a minute."

She nodded and took the clipboard from me. "Take your time."

I wandered through the store to the back entrance, where one of the part-time cashiers was heating up a mug of tea.

"Oh, hey, Coral. There's some guy up front looking for you. I told him I thought you left for the day."

"What guy?" I leaned against the doorframe and looked toward the front counter. Maybe my dad had stopped by to offer some help. He knew I came back from Vegas early and needed to get inventory done.

"Mmm. Tall, fit, gorgeous dark red beard." She grabbed her tea from the

microwave.

My pulse pounded. The last thing I needed was Flynn Sincero walking around Candy Cane Key asking about me. I glanced at my right hand where I wore the peace-sign shaped mood ring he'd picked up for me to use as a wedding band. The color had changed from blue to black. I'd memorized all the color meanings on the way home on the plane and black meant stressed. I didn't need a piece of cheap jewelry to tell me that.

This couldn't be happening. Maybe he didn't see my note. That must be it. He was probably worried that I wasn't going to send in the annulment papers. But still, if he knew the name of the shop, he could have called rather than travel all the way across the country.

"You want me to send him back here?"

"No!" I dug my nails into my palm and tried to force a breath through my lungs. "I'll come out."

"Okay." She shrugged and smiled before heading back up front.

I followed her, one baby step at a time, until I caught a glimpse of the back of his head. He was standing in front of the white tinsel tree where I'd hung all the Elvis ornaments. Seeing as how Mrs. Ellis was a huge fan, we had a pretty big collection.

"Flynn. What are you doing here?"

He turned around and my insides warmed as a smile spread across his lips. Elvis might have perfected the lip curl, but not even the King could match the way Flynn pulled it off.

"Hey, Coral."

I grabbed him by the arm and dragged him to the back room. As soon as I shut the door behind us, he swept me into his arms and planted a toe-curling, panty-melting kiss on me. I nestled into him, eager for his touch.

"How's it possible for me to miss you so much when we just met?" He pulled back and tapped his forehead to mine.

"What are you doing here?" The tightness in my chest eased. Now I was

breathless from his kiss. It was odd how he seemed to be able to hold my panic attacks at bay.

“You promised me a weekend. I didn’t even get twenty-four hours with you.” His fingers skimmed my shoulder as he brushed my hair from my shoulder.

“I’m sorry. You shouldn’t be here. What happened in Vegas...” I stopped myself from saying it.

“Didn’t stay in Vegas,” he finished. “When I woke up this morning, and you were gone—”

“I left you a note. Didn’t you see it?” I didn’t want to run out on him, but I wasn’t about to give up on the goal I’d been working toward for years. Thinking about the shop made my pulse spike again. I had hours’ worth of work ahead of me.

“Yeah, I saw it. I’m here to help. Whatever you need, count me in. You still owe me at least twenty-four hours, and I plan on collecting.”

“I thought you were nuts when you jumped into the fountain. Now I see it’s a pattern with you.”

“What is?”

“Pulling these impulsive stunts.” I couldn’t believe he was here, standing in front of me, his arms circling my waist, his big hands splaying over the curve of my ass.

“You must bring it out in me. Ask the guys. I’ve never done anything like this before.”

“I can’t ask the guys. You left them in Vegas to follow a complete stranger all the way to Florida.” I shook my head, more shocked than anything else. I’d never had a guy interested enough to follow me down the aisle at the grocery store, much less all the way across the country.

“What’s your emergency?” He loosened his grip and spread his arms wide. “I’m at your service, Mrs. Sincero.”

Immediately, I clapped my hand over his mouth. “Let’s keep that news to ourselves, shall we?”

“You don’t want to introduce me around town as your husband?” He nibbled on my palm.

“No. My parents would kill me. I’ve got to finish inventorying the whole store as soon as possible. The bank needs an updated version before they’ll consider my loan application. If you mean it about helping, I’d appreciate it. But you don’t have to...”

“I’m here to help. Let’s get this done. Then maybe we’ll have time for a little fun before I head back to Texas.” He held out his hand so we could shake on it.

“I can’t believe you’re here.” My palm slid against his. The tension seeped from my shoulders.

“You couldn’t expect me to let you go right after I found you.”

“Actually, that’s exactly what I expected.” I tried to make some sort of sense of everything. He was really here. In the flesh.

“Well, maybe you’ve been setting the wrong type of expectations.” His hand wrapped around mine as he twined our fingers together. “Now put me to work so we can get that out of the way and start having fun.”

Chapter 7



Flynn

My wife was a go-getter. I figured that out within the first fifteen minutes of finding her in the cute beachy Christmas store. She'd obviously already been well on her way to getting her inventory done. The handful of helpers hung on her every word and looked to her for direction every time they finished counting a section.

She sent them all home around eleven, but I could tell she wouldn't be ready to go until we'd counted every last piece of sparkly tinsel in the place.

"You don't have to stay." She came up behind me while I was halfway through counting a huge box of pickle ornaments. Her hands smoothed over my shoulders, then she leaned against me.

I jotted down the number I was on, so I didn't lose track. "I'm not going to leave you here all alone."

"You're not afraid I'll run out on you again, are you? I don't have anywhere else to go." She let out a soft laugh.

"There are worse things I could be doing than counting pickles." I set down my pencil and turned to face her. "Though I'm wondering why you have so many pickle ornaments. Is it a fetish?"

She tossed her head back and laughed. "No. Haven't you heard the legend of hiding a pickle on the Christmas tree?"

"Enlighten me, please."

"You're supposed to hide the pickle ornament on your tree each year. Whoever finds it gets an extra present from Santa." She reached out and picked up one of the pickles. "Here. You can take one home to hang on your tree next year. It's my gift to you. See? No pickle fetish."

"That's too bad. I wouldn't mind if you were into pickles." My fingers closed around hers, and I set the ornament back on the shelf.

“All pickles?” Her hips nudged into mine.

I shook my head. “How about just my pickle?”

She slid her hands up my chest and clasped them together behind my neck. “Tell you what. You get your pickles counted, and maybe we can play a round of hide the pickle later.”

“What if I want you to play with my pickle now?” I cupped my hands under her ass and lifted her so her butt rested on the table. There was no denying my wife was smoking hot. Seeing her in her element only added to her appeal.

“No pickle play until inventory’s done.” She playfully nipped at my bottom lip.

I tightened my grip on her ass, pulling her snug against me, leaving no doubt how ready and willing my pickle was to engage.

“You’re a bad influence on me, Flynn.” She angled her hips, grinding against my crotch.

“Sounds like somebody needs to be. You work too hard. Everyone deserves to take a break every once in a while, even the big boss.” I dipped my chin to press kisses along her neck. I’d never get tired of nudging my nose into her hair or feeling her pulse flutter under my tongue.

“Is that what this is, a break?” Her fingers tangled in the hair at the nape of my neck. She had a way of scraping her nails over my skin so lightly that it made goosebumps pop up all over my arms. Drove me fucking nuts, but I loved it.

“A quick break.” I kissed my way down her neck, across her collarbone to the v-neck of her tee. There wasn’t an inch of her body I hadn’t fantasized about exploring. I wanted to cover her in kisses, run my palms over her curves, fill her with my cock, and hear her scream my name.

“A very quick break.” She reached for the hem of my shirt.

I jerked it over my head and tossed it to the floor. My hands immediately went to the waistband of her leggings. “These need to go.”

She slid off the table and kicked them off. “We can’t do this out here. Someone might see from the street. Come with me.”

I followed her through the store to a door in the back. She pushed through and led me up a narrow set of stairs. I didn’t know where we were going, and I didn’t care. All I wanted was Coral.

Twinkle lights stretched across the ceiling, making it feel like a winter wonderland. Coral led me past a small kitchen area to a huge bed on the other side of the room. I flopped down on the fluffy comforter and tugged her down next to me.

My hand slid up her thigh, past the waistband of her panties, and over the soft roundness of her tummy. Her skin was so smooth, so soft. The scent of vanilla drifted off the sheets and I recognized it as the same smell that clung to her skin. This must be her place.

Knowing she let me into her home made me fall even harder for her than I had already. I didn’t just want her for forty-eight hours. I wanted her for forever. Logic told me it was too soon for me to feel that way, but I couldn’t deny what I knew deep down in my soul. Something had pushed us together in Vegas. Now it was up to me to make sure nothing pulled us apart.

I wanted her naked. Wanted to see her bare and needy. Wanted unfettered access to every inch of her. So, I slid her shirt up over her head with one hand and pushed her panties down her legs with the other. While she worked her panties all the way off, I reached behind her and unclasped her bra. Her nipples peaked, a tasty treat I couldn’t ignore. I bent down and sucked one into my mouth. Swirled my tongue around it. Scraped my teeth gently over the sensitive bud.

Coral arched her back under me while her fingers worked the button of my jeans free. Then her hand slid along my shaft. She worked my jeans past my hips. I hadn’t even had her yet, but I sensed I’d never get my fill.

I felt around for where my jeans ended up and found the condom in my pocket. While I shifted my mouth back and forth between her breasts, I unrolled the condom onto my cock. She sat up, pushed me back, and straddled my hips. The look in her eyes told me she wanted to take control. I’d let her have it... for a little while. Seeing the confidence in her eyes was

the ultimate turn-on. My cock lengthened and hardened as she lifted her hips and started to sink down onto me.

Her hand gripped the top of the headboard. I thrust upward and sent it banging into the wall.

“Shh.” Coral giggled.

“I thought you said we were alone in here.” Her apartment was barely bigger than a shoebox. Surely, she didn’t have a roommate.

“We are, but you’re going to break my bed.”

I moved my hands to her hips. “If the bed breaks, I’ll buy you a new one.”

She laughed out loud. The sound morphed into an adorable snort. “I’ve been wanting to upgrade to a king.”

“Challenge accepted.” I flipped her over, so I hovered above her.

She wrapped her legs around my hips and clasped her ankles just over my ass. “You probably ought to know, I rent this place so don’t cause any permanent damage.”

I eased into her, desperately fighting the urge to drive into her hard, like I wanted to. She was tight. Fuck, I wanted to feel her with nothing between us.

She ran her nails down my chest, then settled her hands on my pecs. Her back arched, and she angled her hips, taking me deeper.

I wanted to tell her how good she made me feel, but I kept quiet. She was the one who needed to scream. So, I pulled almost all the way out before I pumped into her again.

“More, Flynn. Give me more.” Her grip tightened.

If my girl wanted more, hell, that’s exactly what I’d deliver. I twined my fingers with hers and stretched her arms over her head. Lowering myself to my elbows, I pumped into her. Slow and gentle gave way to fast and furious as the deep need inside me grew. The headboard sailed into the wall. The bed creaked.

Coral moaned. A low keening sound came from the back of her throat. She

worked a hand free and reached up to snake it around my neck. Her lips mashed against mine, her hips stilled. She fell back against the pillow while her walls clenched around me.

“That’s it, Coral. You’re so fucking beautiful when you come.”

She opened her eyes and gave me a soft, sweet smile. Then she clenched around me, milking my cock until I couldn’t take another moment. My release shot into the condom, and I desperately wished I’d pumped her full of my seed instead. Every base instinct urged me to claim this woman as my own. To breed her and mark her like a fucking wild animal would. She brought out something primal in me, and I didn’t hate it.

The bed gave a final sigh, then two of the legs collapsed. We rolled to the left, right off the bed and onto the hard floor. I landed on my back with Coral on top of me.

She gasped, then started to crack up. “Oh, my gosh. You broke my bed, Flynn. You literally broke my bed.”

I reached up and brushed the hair away from her face. “It was worth it, babe.”

“Yeah, it was.” She lowered her head and caught my lips in a kiss.

I kissed her back as my cock rallied. It might be a while before we made it back downstairs to finish that inventory.

Chapter 8



Coral

I'd learned two things about my new husband in the past twenty-four hours. Number one, he slept like he was dead. Number two, he had the stamina of a breeding bull. I planned to take advantage of both while he was in Florida. Thanks to number one, he didn't wake up when I climbed off him to head to the shower. I even made coffee, dried my hair, and scrambled some eggs without him making a peep. Then I headed down to finish taking inventory.

It was almost noon when I climbed the stairs to my apartment over the store again. Thanks to a few part-time employees coming in to help, we'd wrapped up in record time. Now all I had to do was send over the current spreadsheet and wait until sometime on Wednesday when the management team would look over my loan application for the final time.

"You're up." I couldn't help the broad grin that spread over my lips when I saw him.

Flynn dwarfed the small dinette set I'd picked up at a discount store. He held a cup of coffee in one hand and set down his phone when he saw me coming up the stairs. "I didn't want to come down and force you to explain to your co-workers why I'd spent the night upstairs."

He patted his thigh. I wrapped my arms around his neck and settled onto his lap.

"Good call. I haven't figured out what to tell people about you yet." When we were in Vegas, he was my personal little secret. Now that he'd shown up in Candy Cane Key, the cat was out of the bag, and I wasn't sure how to stuff it back in.

"I hope I didn't cause a problem by showing up down here." He cocked his head like he wanted reassurance. "I don't really have much in the way of family, so I didn't think about how yours might react to finding out you have a brand-new husband."

“Well, I wasn’t planning on telling anyone we’re married, since we’ll probably have that annulled before anyone has the chance to get used to the idea.”

“About that.” Flynn rubbed his beard against my neck.

“That tickles.” I smoothed my hand over the whiskers. I’d been surprised at how soft his beard felt the first time he kissed me. Now I couldn’t get enough. “What were you saying?”

“About the annulment.” He tipped his chin down and leveled me with a serious stare. “What if we stayed married?”

“Good one.” I rolled my eyes and pressed a kiss to his cheek. “Next, you’ll be asking me to come to Texas to meet your family.”

“Mama Mae would love to meet you.” His arms tightened around me. “As for my brothers, I think I’d rather keep you all to myself.”

“You’re not serious.” I studied him, waiting for him to crack. He had to be joking.

“Why not? I like you, Coral. A lot.”

“Well, I like pickles, but you don’t see me wanting to marry one.”

“Do you really want to revisit the pickle conversation?” One side of his mouth quirked up in a grin, but the humor didn’t make it all the way to his eyes.

I pushed up from his lap. “Look, Flynn, I like you too. But marriage... it’s a serious thing.”

“Yet you married a complete stranger.” He got up too. His head brushed the dormer ceiling, and he had to move to the middle of the room so he could stand up straight.

“That’s different. It was a stunt to get your friend to smile.” And to do a little research on a wedding chapel. I’d jotted down some ideas on the plane ride home, but hadn’t come up with a plan yet.

“Who’s smiling now?” He pointed back and forth between us. “You are. And

I am. I never smile this much. Josh will tell you. I'm usually a grumpy asshole. I haven't been able to stop smiling since I met you."

I sat down on the edge of the faded loveseat I'd set up in front of my TV. "I don't have time to be married. My loan's about to go through, and I've got big plans for this store."

"Let me help." He sat down next to me. "I just sold my share of my construction business and haven't figured out what I want to do next. I've got enough cash set aside to buy me some time. Let me stay for a couple of weeks. If you decide you don't want me here after that, I'll leave. But at least then neither of us will wonder what would have happened if we'd given things a shot."

I should shut the idea down before I let myself entertain it. Because as much as I'd love to bury my head against Flynn's chest and pretend the rest of the world didn't exist, I couldn't. Not when I was on the verge of finally making progress on my goals. "I'm not in a good place for that right now."

"Based on what Gwen said, you'll never be in a good place to think about anything but work." Flynn eyed me over the rim of his coffee cup. It had a picture of a donkey on it and read "Kick ass today." Gwen was the one who'd given it to me for our college graduation.

I hadn't spoken to my bestie since I called her on my way to the airport in Vegas. She'd been pissed at me for leaving early, but what choice did I have? If I wanted the loan, I had to get the paperwork in.

"I should find out about my loan on Wednesday. The bank has a meeting once a week to review applications. Once I get the go ahead, I'm going to be swamped."

"So give me until Wednesday." He rolled one of his big, broad shoulders. "I promise I can be a really good distraction."

Patience was a virtue I didn't possess. Waiting for news on my loan felt like trying to breathe underwater. The only time I didn't feel like I was suffocating was when I was with Flynn. Having him around might make the wait bearable.

"We can cross a few more things off your bucket list. I saw there's a place

just north of here where we can get our picture taken with a flamingo. What do you say, Coral?" He gave me his best puppy dog eyes. Eyes that were impossible to resist.

"What did you do, memorize my list?" I asked. He was such a goof. A large, muscled, gorgeous, funny, goof.

"I've got a photographic memory. It's a curse." He bounced his palm off his forehead. "I can't take you to the top of the Paris hotel to watch the sunset, but I also noticed you had something on there about trying a new restaurant. What do you say?"

"Until Wednesday." I held out my hand.

"At least until Wednesday." He gripped it and pulled me close.

I rubbed against him like a freaking cat in heat. Being around Flynn was addictive. It was getting harder and harder to say no to him. More and more difficult to hold him at bay.

"So you'll show me around Candy Cane Key today?" he asked.

"Sure." I tilted my head back, ready for a kiss.

Chapter 9



Flynn

The only time I'd ever been to Florida it was to pitch in on a job in Tallahassee and no offense to the rest of the state, but I hadn't been terribly impressed. Within the first ten minutes of being outside, I could see why Candy Cane Key was a top spot for vacationers, especially those who wanted to experience the holidays all year long.

We started off at Tranquili-tea, a cute little tea shop overlooking the water. Coral treated me to a cup of her favorite chai, then we stopped in at Cocoa Corner to sample the handmade chocolates. It was odd seeing red and white candy cane stripes against a backdrop of palm trees and sand, but it seemed to work. Even with the holidays a few weeks behind us, the sidewalks were busy with visitors wearing every shade of red and green.

"Do you ever get tired of Christmas carols?" I asked. We were nibbling on ice cream cones from the Candy Cane Key Creamery as we walked along the beach.

"I don't even really hear them anymore." She squinted against the sun at my back as she glanced over at me. "Does that seem strange?"

"No." I swept my tongue over the double scoop of peppermint bon bon ice cream, trying to catch the drips before they reached my hand. We were headed toward a spot where the flamingos liked to hang out so we could cross another item off her bucket list.

"You know, I've lived in Candy Cane Key almost all my life, and I've never thought about what it would be like to visit as a tourist." Coral had opted for homemade strawberry. I couldn't wait to taste it on her lips.

"Well, we've got a couple of days to do that before you hear back from the bank, right?" I had plans of my own on how we could occupy ourselves, but it wouldn't be fair to keep her in bed the entire time. Besides, I'd made it my personal mission to make sure she had fun. Based on the conversations we'd had in Vegas and what her friend said, Coral needed to be reminded there was more to life than work, work, work.

“You want to do all the touristy things while you’re here?”

“Yeah. Why not?”

“Okay. After we visit the flamingos, we’ll head straight to the center of town.”

“Are you going to give me an idea of what I can expect?”

“Nope.”

“Meanie,” I teased.

“No, I’d be a meanie if I did this.” She dabbed her ice cream cone against my cheek. Then dropped my hand and took off down the beach.

“That’s it.” I raced after her, catching up to her in just a few steps. With one arm wrapped around her waist, I spread my dripping ice cream cone over her shoulder.

“Hey, that’s cold.” She laughed while struggling to get free. “I hope you’re planning on cleaning up the mess you’re making.”

“With pleasure.” I dipped my head and ran my tongue over her salty skin. She dropped her ice cream in the sand and circled her arms around my neck.

I could have stood there for hours, my feet half-buried in the sugar-fine sand, my lips locked with the woman of my dreams. Then a boat honked from a few yards off the beach. Coral and I broke apart.

“I’m still all sticky.” The wide smile she gave me made me think she didn’t mind.

I bent down to pick up the abandoned cones, then followed her up the beach to toss them into a trash can. “You’d better be more careful about the kind of games you start, babe.”

“Is that a threat?” She flipped her hair over her shoulder before gathering it up in an elastic band.

“I’d say more of a promise.” With her neck bare, I couldn’t resist nuzzling my beard against her skin.

“Hey, I promised you touristy stuff. Look, there are the local flamingos.” She pointed to a dozen birds up ahead. A few of them balanced on a single leg with their heads tucked under their wings, while others strutted around the shallow water.

“How close do you want to get for a picture?” I pulled my phone out to snap a shot.

“Not close at all. They might look pretty, but they can be mean. Gwen and I had an unintentional run in during a kayaking trip. I’d give them plenty of space.”

I stepped behind Coral and angled the camera to capture a selfie of the two of us with the flamingos in the background. “Mark that off the list. What’s next?”

“I can’t believe how committed you are to working on my bucket list.” She unfolded the worn piece of paper. “I’ve only got two things left. Try an exotic food at a restaurant where I’ve never eaten and watch the sunset at the top of the Eiffel Tower at the Paris hotel.”

“Paris isn’t an option, but how about I treat you to dinner somewhere you’ve never been?”

She nodded. “I need to stop in at the shop when we get back to town, then you’ll have my undivided attention for the rest of the evening.”

“I’m going to hold you to that.” I pressed a kiss to her forehead, already looking forward to the evening ahead.

The walk back into town only took about fifteen minutes. We passed JB’s Bar, and I almost suggested we try that for dinner, but Coral said she’d been there too many times to count. When we reached the store, she headed straight to the counter to check in with the manager on duty while I retreated to her apartment to get cleaned up.

I was down to my last pair of clean jeans, so hopefully wherever we ended up would be casual. When Coral hadn’t come upstairs by the time I got out of the shower, I got dressed and went down to look for her. I found her in the back room, up to her hips in packing peanuts and bubble wrap.

“Hey, everything okay?” I leaned against the doorway to the back room.

She didn’t look up, just kept rummaging through the box in front of her. “While we were out searching for flamingos, the shop got a last-minute call about hosting a holiday-themed wedding here next weekend.”

“That’s great.”

“Yeah, but there’s no way I’ll be able to pull it off. I knew it was a possibility. That’s why I wanted to check out the wedding chapel in Vegas. I should have worked on ideas this afternoon, not taken off to look for birds on the beach with you.” She lifted her head and the guilt in her eyes nearly slayed me.

“You can’t be expected to anticipate every call that might come through. If you’re not set up to handle a wedding, just tell them no.”

“You don’t get it.” She shook her head. “I’ve got to make this business a success. Once the paperwork goes through and I own Coastal Christmas, everything will be up to me.”

Convincing her there was more to life than work might be a bigger undertaking than I’d anticipated. “How can I help?”

“I hate to say it, Flynn, but I think the best thing you could do for me right now is to go back to Texas.” Her lower lids filled with tears. “The past couple of days have been fun. More fun than I’ve had in a really long time. But I can’t work with you around.”

“Coral.” I wanted to shake some sense into her. She had her priorities so far out of whack, it wasn’t even funny. “I’ve been a business owner. If you let it, your work will consume you. Trust me, I’ve seen it happen.”

“No pain, no gain. I’m more than willing to put in the work now to build something that’s going to support me for years to come.”

“You don’t have to choose one or the other. You can have both.” I put my hands on her shoulders.

“No. Not yet, I can’t. It’s been fun, but we both know it has to end. I’ve got to go figure out how to build a winter wonderland wedding backdrop in the

next three days. The best way you can help me is by just going home.” She held my gaze for a long beat, then turned her back and walked away.

I knew better than to stay somewhere I wasn’t wanted. Even though I was willing to put everything else in my life aside to see what might happen, she clearly didn’t feel the same. With a heaviness in my heart, I reached for the pad of paper she’d left on the table, intending to leave her a note.

I was about to flip to a blank page when I caught a glimpse of the ideas she’d jotted down for her winter wonderland backdrop. She’d sketched out the front of a rustic barn with tall pine trees on either side. My fingers itched for a pencil. It would be so easy to make a few accommodations and give her a backdrop she could use for all kinds of holiday themes.

I had everything I’d need in my garage at home. And it wouldn’t take more than a day or two to put it together, assuming Josh would be up for helping me. Hell, maybe I could even get him to bring it to me here. He was supposed to be taking off on his honeymoon for the next ten days. Though without a bride, he probably didn’t have much interest in going.

Knowing there was only one way to find out, I picked up my phone and dialed his number.

Chapter 10



Coral

It had been three days since I sent Flynn away. Two days of resisting the urge to call him back. Three days of wanting to tell him I'd been wrong.

Every time I picked up my phone, I talked myself out of calling him. He deserved to be with someone who didn't second guess herself every waking moment of every single day.

Gwen had forgiven me for leaving her in Vegas and arrived home just in time to help me put together a last-minute winter wedding backdrop. The bride and groom would be stopping by later on this afternoon to take a quick peek before the rest of the wedding party arrived.

"I still don't understand how you got yourself into this situation." Gwen tucked another sprig of flocked pine needles into the archway I'd made out of PVC pipe.

"I told you, they were planning on going to Key West, but there was a double booking. Sounds like there's a big market for holiday-themed weddings. I think it could become a side hustle."

"Because you're not busy enough owning the biggest Christmas gift shop in Florida?" Gwen teased.

I still couldn't believe I actually owned Coastal Christmas. At least I would as soon as the bank had the final loan documents for me to sign. My application had been approved. Somehow, I thought I'd feel different when I heard the news. More successful, more accomplished, maybe. All I felt was more stressed and overwhelmed.

"I've got to keep my options open. Who knows when there might be a downturn in the gift sector?" I stepped back to study the rustic arch we'd built. It would do for this weekend, but I'd need to find someone who could build me something much sturdier if I wanted it to last.

"Is that what you're doing, keeping your options open?" Gwen gave me some major stink eye from the other side of the room. She was still bitter about me

leaving her in Vegas and royally pissed when she found out I'd sent Flynn home for good.

"It never would have worked out. He said it himself, he was good at being a distraction. I need to be able to focus on work."

Gwen's phone pinged. "Oooh, I've got a delivery I need to go grab. Be back in a sec."

"Well, hurry. They're going to be here any minute." I needed to stop messing with the archway before I made it worse. If only I'd had more time. I should have been paying attention to my business instead of playing newlyweds with Flynn Sincero.

"I think we should put it right over here." Gwen came through the doorway to the space at the back of the shop, where I'd cleared out enough space to host a small, intimate wedding party.

"What are you doing?" I couldn't see past the tall structure a man was pushing into the room. "Gwen, you can't set anything up in here. The bride and groom are going to be here any second."

"You need to see this, Coral." Gwen thanked the delivery man, then pulled me over to stand in front of whatever was hiding under the big canvas tarp.

"What is it?"

"Look." She pulled the tarp away to reveal a huge rustic backdrop. Twinkle lights stretched along the edges, and it looked like the rustic barn doors I'd sketched on that notepad I hadn't been able to find.

"Where did that come from?" I sputtered. It was exactly what I'd pictured, right down to the flocked pine branches that flanked the sides.

"Somebody is pretty talented with his hands." Gwen clamped her hand to her hip and gave me her best I-told-you-so look.

In my heart, I already knew who was responsible, but I wanted to hear her say it out loud. "Tell me. It was Flynn, wasn't it? Is he here?"

Hope bloomed around my heart. I'd been too quick to shut him down. Maybe I could balance a business and a boyfriend at the same time.

“No, sweetie. He and Josh worked on it in my parents’ garage all week, but they went back to Texas this morning.”

“Why didn’t you tell me he was still here? You can’t keep stuff like that from me.” I buried my face in my hands. “I was so mean to him, Gwen.”

“Hey, Coral. Your three o’clock is here.” One of the part-time helpers knocked on the doorway.

My head snapped up. I needed to pull myself together and get through my appointment with the bride and groom. Then I’d let myself melt down or freak out or whatever it was my body seemed to want to do at the news that Flynn was behind the surprise.

“Great. We’re ready for them right here.” I spent the next thirty minutes answering questions and walking the happy couple through how we’d structure their intimate wedding. The bride fell in love with the backdrop. Next to it, my arch looked like a toddler had gone a little overboard with a glue gun. By the time they left, I was ready to explode.

“That went well,” Gwen commented. She had her hands wrapped around a mug of peppermint cocoa. “What are you going to do about Flynn?”

“I don’t know. He probably hates me right now.”

“Do you seriously think a man who hates you would spend three days listening to my dad’s 8-tracks of The Beach Boys?” Gwen cocked her hip and nibbled on a gingersnap.

“What do I do? Follow him to Texas and beg him to come back? I don’t even know where he lives.”

“I can’t help you there.”

I paced the short distance back and forth, trying to think of a way to win Flynn back. Then it came to me. “I’ve got it.”

“What do you have in mind?” Gwen narrowed her eyes at me as she crunched on another gingersnap. “I don’t like that look in your eyes.”

“It’s the only way. I’m going to tell him he needs to meet me in Vegas because there’s a problem with our annulment paperwork.”

“What annulment? You two just walked down the aisle for fun, didn’t you?”
Gwen’s hand paused halfway to her mouth. “You can’t mean you’re actually married to the man?”

I nodded. “Yeah.”

“Oh, sweetie. You’re in more of a pickle than I thought.”

Tears streamed down my cheeks. My idea had to work. I didn’t know where to find him in Texas, and I wasn’t about to ask him to come back to Florida. We had to go back to where it all started. I just hoped he’d be willing to meet me. To give me another chance.

Chapter 11



Flynn

The elevator reached the observation deck, and I exited onto the platform along with a handful of other guests. When I received Coral's text asking me to meet her back in Vegas, I got on the first flight I could. She said there was an issue with our annulment papers, and we needed to sign them in person.

A small part of my heart held out hope that she wouldn't go through with ending our short marriage, but I'd done everything I could to show her how I felt. I wouldn't force her to stay married to me if she didn't want to. Not even when I knew with one-hundred percent certainty her heart was supposed to be mine.

We'd meet outside the courthouse tomorrow morning, but I didn't want to leave Vegas without checking off the last item on her bucket list, even if I'd be watching the sunset alone. I stopped to look out over the fountain at the Bellagio. It hadn't even been a week since I first saw her standing there.

Long brown hair cascaded over her shoulders. She'd looked up at me as I bumped into her. Even smiled before she realized my slushie was about to end up down the front of her shirt. I stood there, lost in the past. The music floated up from below as the show started.

People pressed close as the fountains swayed to the music. I was about to step back and give up my spot when someone bumped my elbow.

"Excuse me, do you mind if I squeeze in to watch the show?" Coral glanced up at me, and my heart stopped beating. "I was hoping I'd find you here."

"I don't get it. What are you doing?"

"Waiting for you." She offered me a shy smile, then looked away. "I've been here all day, hoping you'd show up."

"Why?" I tried to get a read on her, but all I could pick up was nervous energy.

She rubbed her hands over her arms like she was trying to warm up. I immediately pulled her against my chest to shield her from the breeze.

“I made a mistake, Flynn.” Her hands reached around my waist, and she rested her cheek against my chest. “Is it too late to give us a try?”

“Too late? Hell, no, it’s not too late. Why would you think that?” I smoothed my palm over her back. She relaxed into me, and I started to think that maybe we’d get that happily ever after Elvis referred to at the little white wedding chapel.

She tilted her head back and gazed up at me through watery eyes. “I’m so sorry. I thought I had to go all-in with the shop. That if I let myself get distracted by you or anything else, I’d fail.”

“I know, baby.”

“But it’s not true. Being around you makes me happy. I’d rather be poor and full of love than super successful without you.” She pressed her palms to my cheeks.

“Well, you’re in luck, Coral. Today just happens to be Kiss a Ginger Day, and I know the perfect way to celebrate.”

“Kiss a Ginger Day? Are you making that up?” The tiny wrinkle between her eyebrows faded, and she gazed up at me with nothing but love in her eyes.

“I wouldn’t make something like that up. If you don’t believe me, we should head over to the little white wedding chapel. I hear they’ve got free vow renewals if you have red hair.”

“For Kiss a Ginger day?” Coral teased.

“I’m not sure why you don’t believe me.”

“Are you asking me to marry you for the first time, Flynn Sincero?”

“For the first time?” I grabbed her hand and held it up between us. “Looks to me like there’s already a ring on this finger.”

“I don’t remember you officially asking me the first time we got married. Plus, I might need to get a different ring.” She twisted the adjustable band

and pulled it off. The skin underneath was a nice shade of green.

“I might have skimped a little the first time around, but I’m going to make up for it this time.” I reached into my pocket and pulled out a small velvet box. Then I held onto her hand and got down on one knee. “Coral, we haven’t known each other very long, but it’s been long enough for me to know you’re the only woman for me. Will you marry me? Again? Tonight?”

She opened the box and revealed the one-carat diamond set in a platinum band that I’d picked out the day I landed in Florida.

“Where did you get this?” She picked up the ring and slid it onto her finger.

“I bought it at the jewelry store in Candy Cane Key on my way to find you.”

“You had this with you the whole time we were together?” She put her hand over her heart. The diamond sparkled under the neon lights of the hotel sign high above us.

“Are you going to say yes? People are starting to look,” I mumbled. The fountains were dying down and the small crowd that had gathered on the observation deck had noticed me on one knee.

“Yes, of course, yes.” She tugged me to my feet and a small smattering of applause broke out around us.

“I do have a few conditions,” I added.

Her eyes went wide. “You have conditions?”

“Yeah. Want me to run through the list?”

“Wow, there’s a whole list? How many of them are there?”

“Just a couple. Are you ready?”

“Sure, lay them on me.” She gripped my hands in hers and stared up at me as I cleared my throat.

“First. No matter how busy you are at work, I get at least one date night a week with you away from the shop. Do we have a deal?”

“Yes.”

“And every year we have to renew our vows at a little white wedding chapel. Got it?”

“You drive a hard bargain, Mr. Sincero.” She backed me up against the railing. “Is that all?”

“That’s all. We can figure out the rest on the way.”

“I love it.” She rose onto her tiptoes. “And I love you, Flynn. Thanks for not letting me scare you off. Thanks for believing in me and believing in us, even when I doubted everything.”

“I love you, too. You’re stuck with me now, gorgeous.” I picked her up and cradled her in my arms.

“We’re stuck with each other,” she mumbled against my chest.

Epilogue



Coral

I'd waited a year to renew my vows with Flynn in a little white wedding chapel. The only thing this one had in common with the one we got married in the first two times was the shade of paint called "bridal white" on the walls. Everything else was different. Flynn designed it himself and spent the entire summer and half of the fall putting it together. He said it gave him something to do, but I think he preferred spending his days with power tools and working with his hands to stocking flamingo ornaments and counting pickles.

With the completion of our little white wedding chapel, we could offer couples the chance to get married in Candy Cane Key, where it was Christmas all year long. But before we opened it up to others, we were going to be the first couple down the aisle. My mother insisted since she'd missed our first two weddings.

"Are you ready?" Gwen asked. She looked like a winter fairy in her light blue dress with iridescent sparkles.

"Why am I so nervous? I've already married the man twice. You'd think I'd be over the butterflies and cold feet by now." I ran a hand over my hair. Flynn asked me to wear it up, so I had it piled on top of my head with glittery snowflakes sticking out of the sides.

"Maybe the first two times you married him, you were just taking him on a test run," Gwen teased. "Now, with a bun in the oven, you might be taking it a bit more seriously."

"I'm not showing yet, am I?" I twisted to the side, trying to decide if I saw a baby bump or just my regular curves at my waistline.

"No, you're not showing. But something's causing that rosy glow on your cheeks." Gwen put her hands on my shoulders and smiled.

"I don't want to tell anyone until we get past the first trimester. Flynn keeps saying everything will be fine, but you know how I worry."

“Yeah, I know.” She rolled her eyes. “I swapped out the sparkling wine for sparkling cider, so you don’t have to skip the toast.”

“You’re the best.” I leaned in to air kiss her on the cheek. “You know who thinks so, too? I caught Gil checking you out earlier. Flynn says he’s been asking about you. Think there might be a spark there?”

“He’s got his boots on with his tux, doesn’t he?” Gwen asked.

“Probably. I’ll make sure they play something you can two-step to at the reception. Sure would be fun to have my bestie married to one of my hubby’s brothers.”

“Slow down. Just because you own a wedding chapel now doesn’t mean you have to get all your friends hitched.” She handed me my bouquet, then fluffed the back of my dress. “Remember not to walk too quickly down the aisle.”

“Got it.” I watched from the back of the chapel as she made her way down the short aisle. Then the music started to swell, and I took my first step toward the man I’d already married.

Twice.

He said the third time was the one that really counted, so I held my bouquet and took slow steps toward the front of the room. The first time we got married, the only person I knew at my own wedding was Gwen. The second time we got married, the only person I knew was the man I’d been married to for less than a week.

This time, I knew every single person in the chapel. My mom and dad stood in the first row of guests, both of them smiling through happy tears. Friends from grade school through college filled the seats, along with people I knew from town, past and current employees, and longtime customers from the store.

Flynn’s side was just as full. Several of his foster brothers had made the trip to Candy Cane Key and I couldn’t get enough of Mama Mae. She’d promised to come back for a nice, long visit before it got too hot out to enjoy the beach.

I reached the front of the room, my eyes locked with Flynn’s.

“You ready for your final surprise?” he asked.

“What final surprise?” There wasn’t anything we could have done differently to make our big day more special. “What more could a girl possibly want?”

The officiant stepped out from behind the backdrop. His jet-black hair had been teased into a pompadour. I recognized that look. Instead of a gold and white sparkly jumpsuit, he had on a red and white Santa suit with gold accents.

“Flynn, what did you do?” I whispered.

“Y’all ready to tie the knot again, Santa Elvis style?” the officiant asked.

Mrs. Ellis swooned in the third row.

“We can’t have a little white wedding chapel without Elvis,” Flynn said. His upper lip curled into a King-inspired grin.

“I suppose I can’t argue with that.”

So, in front of a crowd of friends and family, presided over by the only Santa Elvis I’d ever seen, I married my husband for the third time.

Flynn might have said the third time was a charm, but something told me we’d had it right all along. Thanks to his persistence and me finally letting loose a little, we were well on our way to our own happily ever after. And now we’d get to share a little piece of how everything started in Vegas with Candy Kane Key.

Want a sneak peek into Coral and Flynn’s future? Grab a bonus scene [here!](#)



Candy Cane Key



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[Romancing the Quarterback* - Galentine's Getaway Series](#)

[Dating the Cowboy* - Matchmakers, Inc. Series](#)

[Kiss Off Countdown* - Midnight Kisses Series](#)

[Codename: Wolf* - Soldiers for Christmas Series](#)

[Room Twenty-Four - Club Sin Series](#)

[Dangerous Curves* - Curvy Soulmates Series](#)

[Trick or Tequila** - Halloween Steam Series](#)

[Single Dad Dilemma - Starlight Bay Series](#)

* Features one of Mama Mae's boys as the hero

** Ties to one of Mama Mae's boys

About the Author

When Eve London was a girl she wanted to be a trapeze artist. Instead, she grew up to be like most women—a juggler—trying to keep bunches of balls in the air.

Now she spends her days writing about the kind of men she likes – sexy, shameless, and just a little bit sarcastic.

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