



January

Calendar Girl

AUDREY CARLAN

January: Calendar Girl

Book 1

By Audrey Carlan

Text copyright © 2015 Audrey Carlan

ISBN Electronic

ISBN-10: 0-9909143-5-6

ISBN-13: 978-0-9909143-5-8

All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned or distributed in any printed or electronic format without expressed permission by the author.

Dedication

Ginelle Blanch

*You have been with me since the very beginning...
Your beta reads have saved me a hundred times over.
Thank you for believing in me, my stories,
and loving them as I love you and all your pieces.*

Namaste my friend.

Chapter 1

True love doesn't exist. For years I thought it did. As a matter of fact, I thought I'd found it. Four times to be exact. Let's see, there was:

Taylor. My high-school sweetheart. We were together all through high school. He was an all-star baseball player. Best the school had ever seen. Big, more muscles than brains, and a wink the size of a circus peanut. Probably because of all the steroids he was taking behind my back. He dumped me graduation night. Ran off with my virginity and the head cheerleader. I heard he was a college dropout working as a mechanic in some no-name town with two kids and a wife that no longer cheers for him.

Then there was the teacher's assistant from my first psychology class in the Las Vegas Community College. Maxwell was his name. I thought that young boy walked on water. Turns out, he walked all over my heart by screwing a girl from every class he TA'd for. In his case, the TA stood for Tits and Ass, and he made sure he had plenty of it. That's okay. He ended up getting two of the girls pregnant at the same time, then was kicked out of the college for misconduct. At nineteen, he already had two different baby mamas hounding him for child support. There was something ultimately poetic about that. Thank God I always required he wrap it before he stuck it in me.

In my twentieth year, I took a break. Spent all year waiting tables at the MGM Grand on the Las Vegas Strip. That's where I met lucky number three, Benny. Only I wasn't lucky and neither was he. He was a card counter. At the time, he said he was in sales, worked the casinos, and loved to play poker. We had a whirlwind romance, which wasn't all that romantic. I think I spent most of the time drunk and underneath him, but alas, I believed he loved me. He told me all the time. For two months we drank; we swam in the hotel pool, and fucked all night in one of the rooms I was able to score from my buddy in housekeeping. I served him and his friends free drinks at the bar, and he'd give me a room key most nights. It worked. Until it didn't. Benny got caught counting cards and disappeared. For the first year of his disappearance, I was frantic. Then I found out he'd been beaten to within an inch of his life. He spent time in the hospital and skipped out of town, ditching me completely without even a word.

The last mistake was the one you could say was the straw that broke the camel's back. The same reason I was certain true love is something crafted by greeting card companies and people who write romance novels and romantic comedies. Blaine was his name, but it should have been Lucifer. He was a smooth-talking business man. I use the term businessman loosely. In actuality, he was a loan shark. The same loan shark that loaned my dad more money than he could possibly ever pay back. First he turned on me, then he turned on him. Back then I thought our love was the stuff of fairytales. Blaine promised me the world and delivered me hell on earth.

"That's why I think you should just take this job from your auntie and call it a day." My best friend, Ginelle, smacked her gum loudly into the receiver. I pulled the phone away from my ear. "It's really the only way, Mia. How else are you going to get your dad out of this bind with Blaine and his goons?"

I sucked down the crisp water as the California sun split the drops into shards of speckled light across the rippled bottle. "I don't know what to do, Gin. I don't have that kind of money lying around.

I don't have any money lying around." I sighed, and it sounded loud and overly dramatic even to my own ears.

"Look, you've always been in love with love—"

"Not anymore!" I reminded my lifelong best friend.

Through the phone, I could hear the noise of Vegas. People thought the desert was a quiet place. Not on the Strip. Slot machines tinkled and bells rang in a monotonous drone no matter where you were. You really couldn't escape it. "I know, I know." She shuffled the phone making it crackle in my ear. "But you like sex, right?"

"I'm not like Barbie, Gin. Math isn't hard. Please don't ask me stupid questions. I'm dying here." Or rather, if I didn't find a way to come up with one million dollars, my father would be the one dying.

Ginelle groaned and smacked her gum. "I mean, if you take the job as an escort, all you have to do is look pretty and fuck a lot, right? You haven't been laid in months. Might as well enjoy the ride, eh?"

Leave it to Ginelle to find a way to make being a highly paid call girl sound like a dream job. "This is not *Pretty Woman*, and I am no Julia Roberts."

I made my way over to my bike, a Suzuki GSXR 600, which I simply referred to as Suzi. She was the only thing of value I owned. Slinging a leg over the seat, I situated my phone and put it on speaker. I pulled the heavy weight of my long black tresses into three chunks and deftly braided them into one thick rope. "Look, I know you mean well, and I honestly don't know what I'm going to do. I'm not a whore. At least, I don't want to be a whore." The mere thought sent rivers of dread barreling through my chest. "But I've got to figure something out. Make some serious cash and fast."

"Yeah, I hear ya. Let me know how the meeting with Exquisite Escorts goes. Call me tonight if you can. Shit, I'm going to be late for rehearsal, and I still have to get dressed." Her voice turned labored, and I could picture her running through the casino to beat-feet it to work, cell phone plastered to her ear, not giving a shit who watched her or thought she was a lunatic. That's what made her so special. She told it like it was...always. Just like me.

Ginelle worked for Dainty Dolls Burlesque Show in Vegas. Like the name, my best friend was short and sweet and knew exactly how to best shake her ass. Men from around the world came to watch the risqué show on the Strip. Still, she didn't make enough to bail me or my old man out, not that I'd ever ask.

"Okay, love ya, bitch," I said sweetly as I shoved my braid into the neck of my leather jacket so it fell down between my shoulder blades.

"Love ya more, skank."

I turned the key on my bike, revved it up, and pushed on my helmet. Slipping the phone into my inside coat pocket, I hit the gas and sped off towards a future I didn't want, but one I had no way to avoid.

“Mia! My sweet baby girl,” said my aunt as she wrapped her bone-thin arms around me, crushing me to her chest. She was strong for such a slight woman. Her black hair was pinned up into an elegant French twist. She had on a white blouse that was soft as silk, probably because it was silk. It was tucked into a fierce black leather pencil skirt, paired with sky-high stilettos that sported that red sole I’d heard so much about when randomly flipping through the latest Vogue. She looked beautiful. More than that, she looked *expensive*.

“Aunt Millie, it’s so good to see you,” I started to say when two fingers with long nails capped in blood red nail polish shushed me.

She tsked her tongue, “Ah ah, here you will call me Ms. Milan.” I rolled my eyes for dramatic effect. She narrowed hers in return. “Doll-face, first off, don’t roll your eyes. It’s rude and unladylike.” Her lips pinched into a tight line. “Second of all...” She walked around my form assessing me as if I was a piece of art, a statue. Something cold and impenetrable. Maybe I was. In her hand, she held a black lace fan that she opened and closed then flicked against her open palm during her perusal. “...never call me Millie. That woman is long gone, died when the first man I ever trusted fried up my heart and fed it to his dogs.” Such a vile image, but Aunt Millie was nothing if not honest.

“Chin up.” She smacked the underside of my chin forcing an immediate adjustment. Then she did the same to the bare patch of sensitive skin at the base of my spine where my tight concert t-shirt didn’t quite meet the painted-on jeans I adored. Instantly, I straightened my spine, thrusting my chest out. Her red-lipped smile widened showing perfectly bleached, straight teeth. The teeth were the nicest money could buy and a regular expense for the rich girls here in Los Angeles. I couldn’t spit five feet without hitting someone who sees their dentist more than is medically necessary, but just barely less than they see their dermatologist for their monthly Botox injections. Aunt Millie was obviously a regular paying customer at veneers-R-us. Still, as she kissed the edge of fifty, she definitely had it going on.

“Well, you’re definitely gorgeous. More so once we get you into something presentable and take your test shots.” Her face twitched into a grimace as she took in my very biker-on-the-go threads.

I stepped back and banged into a leather chair not far behind me. “I haven’t agreed to anything.”

Millie’s eyes narrowed into a point. “Did you not say that you needed a lot of money and fast? Something about my no good brother-in-law being in the hospital? In trouble?” She sat down slowly, crossed her legs, and laid both arms delicately on the white leather arms of the chair. Aunt Millie never liked my father. Which was unfortunate because he did the best he could as a single dad, especially when her sister, my mother, abandoned her two daughters. I was ten years old at the time. Madison was five and, to this day, doesn’t have even one tiny memory of our mother to hold onto to.

I bit my lip and looked into her pale green eyes. We looked so much alike. Aside from all the little nips and tucks she’d had, it was like looking into a mirror twenty-five years from now. Her eyes were the same light green, almost yellow, that I’d had people rave about my entire life. Green amethyst they’d say. Like looking into a rare green diamond. Our hair was exactly the same shade of jet black, so much so, that when the light hit it, you’d swear it was midnight blue.

Adjusting my shoulders against the uncomfortable chair, I took a breath. "Yeah, Dad's got himself in big this time with Blaine." Millie closed her eyes and shook her head. I bit my lip, the memory of my father pale and gaunt, bruises covering every inch of his body as he lay lifeless in the hospital. "He's in a coma right now. Four weeks ago they beat him pretty bad. He still hasn't woken up. The doctors think it could be the trauma in his brain, but we won't know for a while. A lot of his bones were broken. He's still in a body cast," I finished.

"Jesus Christ. Savages," she whispered and slid a hand up to her hair sweeping back a strand around her ear silently composing herself. I'd seen her do this before. Millie was a master manipulator and could control her emotions better than anyone I'd ever known. I coveted that talent. Needed it.

"Yeah. And last week when I was holding vigil at Dad's bed, one of Blaine's goons came to see me. Said, this was it for Dad. If they didn't get their money *with* interest, they were going to kill him. Then they'd come after me and Maddy for the money. They called it "survivor's debt." Whatever that is. Either way, I have to come up with a million dollars and fast."

Aunt Millie pinched her lips together and flicked her first nail against her thumb over and over again. The incessant ticking almost made me lose my shit. How could she be so calm, so callous? A man's life, my life, and the life of my baby sister hung in the balance. She didn't care for Dad, but she'd always had a soft spot for me and my sister.

Millie's eyes shot to mine, fierce and sparkling with an unknown excitement. "It can be done, in a year. Do you think they'd give you a year if you made payments?" Her eyebrow came into a point as she focused her full attention on me.

The hairs on my arms started to rise, and I jutted my shoulders back in defense. I shook my head. "I don't know. I'm sure Blaine wants his money, and since we had a thing a while ago, I could probably plead. That sick, sadistic fucker always liked me down on my knees begging."

"Keep your sexual escapades to yourself, doll-face," she grinned wickedly. "Looks like we'll just have to put you to work right away. Top dollar accounts only. We need to move up everything. I'm going to need you here first thing tomorrow morning for the photo shoot. It will be an all-day event. We'll shoot stills, some video, etc. I'll have my guys get them up on the secure site by the following day."

It was all happening so fast. The words "*It can be done*" rang through my ears like a life line, a raft out in open water surrounded by sharks, but still afloat.

"But do I have to sleep with them? I mean I know there's different kinds of escorts." I closed my eyes waiting until I felt something warm clasp my hand. She had covered both of mine with hers.

"Doll-face, you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. But in order to make that kind of money, you ought to consider it. My clients and I have an unwritten agreement, if you will. My girls sleep with them, and they add twenty percent to their fee. That twenty percent is left in cash, in an envelope in my girl's room. None of that is exchanged with me or my service, as prostitution is illegal in California." Millie touched her chin with her index finger. "But my girls should get more for the convenience, don't you think?" She winked. I nodded lamely, not knowing what to think but going along with it anyway.

“I’m going to book you by the month. It’s the only way to make a six figure paycheck each month.” Her pale green eyes looked bright. So much so that I almost believed this could be easy if I just had an open mind. “You’ll be flown wherever the man is, and be whatever he needs for that month. However, I do not sell sex. If you sleep with them, it’s because you want to, although when you see some of the men I have on a waiting list, you’ll think twice about not hopping into the sack, not to mention the extra payout.” She grinned and then stood. She walked around her glass desk, sat down, then turned to her computer silently dismissing me. I felt stuck to the leather seat incapable of moving. Thoughts of how the hell I’d make this work swirled like vicious vultures through my mind, hunting and pecking at my morals one by one as if they were living prey available for the taking.

“I’ll do it,” I heard myself whisper.

“Of course you will.” She looked at me over her computer. Her lips turned into a crooked grin. “You haven’t any other option if you want to save your father.”

The next day was a whirlwind of activity. I felt like Sandra Bullock’s character in *Miss Congeniality*. I’d been prodded at, scrubbed, plucked, and waxed to within an inch of my life. I felt like a human pin cushion and almost ended up punching out the beauty consultant Millie hired to “fix” me. Her words, not mine. I couldn’t deny the proof was in the pudding. When I looked in the mirror, I barely recognized the woman staring back. My long black hair was shinier than ever, falling into perfect waves down my back and over my shoulders. Everywhere the light touched my skin, a shimmer effect twinkled back. The normal sun-kissed tanned look that I’d worked on for weeks in the California sun now shone like a fine honey, really highlighting all of my best features. The dress she had me in was lavender, comfortable and slinky. Fitting perfectly along each rounded curve and toned edge giving it the desired effect. Sexy and sleek. I looked like a dark angel as the photographer set me on a cold white marble bench. He moved me this way and that, and before long, I actually got the hang of pouting prettily and staring blankly off into the distance devoid of emotion. That’s what I had to be now. Emotionless.

Once we were finished, and I’d redressed into my street clothes, which always consisted of jeans and a tight tee, I made my way back to Millie, or *Ms. Milan’s*, office.

“Doll-face, these shots are magnificent! I always knew you’d be perfect for modeling.” She clicked at her computer as I walked around and glanced at what she was seeing. All the air left my lungs as I took in the image of myself the photographer had taken.

“Amazing.” I lost my words for a moment. “I can’t believe that’s me.” I shook my head as one image after another loaded up to the Exquisite Escorts website. If I didn’t know for a fact that was me, I’d never believe it.

A slow smile slipped across my aunt’s lips. “You’re very beautiful.” Her light-eyed gaze caught mine. “You look so much like...”

“Whatever.” I shook my head and leaned a hip on her glass desk not wanting to hear how much

she thought I looked like mother. “What next?” I asked while crossing my arms over my chest feeling a strange desire to protect myself against whatever was going to happen next.

She leaned back into her black leather chair, her eyes twinkling. “Want to see your first assignment?”

A slow sense of dread crept up my spine, but I stiffened my shoulders and looked at her with a bland expression. “Game on.”

Millie chuckled then clicked a few times into her internet browser bringing up an image of one of the most excruciatingly gorgeous men I’d ever seen. There was nothing that could take away from this man’s stunning good looks. Even in the overtly corporate headshot his dirty blond hair, green eyes, and chiseled jaw were something to write home about. His hair was long, layered, and had that messy, yet perfectly styled, appearance that was all the rage right now. Something didn’t add up. The man couldn’t be more than thirty. Plus, he was not the type of guy who would need to hire a date. He looked like the type of man women fell all over themselves and became brainless husks of lust for.

“I don’t get it. Why would he”—I pointed at the smiling good looking man in the picture—“need a date?”

My aunt leaned back, clasped her hands over her lap and smiled. “He chose you.”

I know I must have looked confused because she hurriedly continued. “I personally sent the first few test shots over to him and his mother. I work a lot with his mother. Anyway, he agreed to the match. He’ll send a car for you tomorrow morning. He’s in the area, but you still have to stay at his residence for the next twenty-four days.”

It’s possible my head had been hit by an imaginary baseball bat it shot back so fast. “Twenty-four days! Are you insane? How the hell am I going to take jobs or show up for auditions?” My acting career wasn’t much, but I did have a low-rent agent that sent me out on a few jobs here and there. And there was the restaurant I worked at in the evening.

Millie looked at me as if I had dared to grow a second head. Her lips compressed into a thin line, and her nose crunched up unattractively. “Mia, you will quit all your jobs for at least a year. You are now a paid employee of Exquisite Escorts. Your assignments will run from one to twenty-four days depending on the client’s needs. Since *you* need to make a lot of cash in a short amount of time, you need to take the bigger jobs. After the twenty-four days, you will have the remaining days in the month at home to relax, recoup, and repair any beauty needs. At the turn of each month on the calendar, you will be reassigned a new date.”

“I can’t believe this!” I started pacing her office, suddenly feeling like a caged animal needing to break free. It just dawned on me that my life as I knew it was over. There was no more going out on normal dates—not that I’d had any recently. No more auditions, making my fledgling acting career a distant memory, and there would be little to no time to see Dad, Maddy, or Ginelle.

“Believe it little girl. This is not a joke. What your father, what your ex-boyfriend is doing has made this decision. You’re lucky I’m even making room for you. Don’t be an ingrate. Now sit down and shut up!” Her voice was completely devoid of its usual warmth having morphed into the cold, formal tone of a determined businesswoman.

“I’m sorry.” She was trying to help me, but this was all so...sudden. Unbelievable. I slumped into the chair in front of her desk and let my head fall into my hands. Shaking it repeatedly did not change the outcome. I was now a girl for hire. Each month I’d be assigned a new man, and if I slept with them, I’d make twenty percent more in cash.

I shook my head and laughed. The kind that proved I was bat-shit crazy. I leaned my head back onto the cool leather and looked up at the white ceiling. After a moment, a creeping resolve calmed me. This is what I had to do. So I let a sexy guy take me to boring business dinners and whatever else he had in mind. I didn’t have to sleep with them and, most importantly, there was no way I would fall in love. A new man each month wasn’t enough time to fall head over heels like I had in the past. Who says I have to give up my acting career? What better way to perfect my acting skill than by being whatever these men wanted me to be? Then, after the month was up, I’d be someone else and my dad would be safe. As long as I could get Blaine to agree to monthly payments, this could work.

With a deep breath I stood and put out my hand to my aunt. Her smile was wicked, yet still sexy. She was very good at her job. “Alright, *Ms. Milan*,” I emphasized her fake name so she’d understand my commitment. “Looks like I’m your new Calendar Girl.”

Chapter 2

Weston Charles Channing, III. I stared at the name wondering why anyone would want to have a Roman numeral behind their name. I'd just bet he was a pretentious rich boy whose mommy didn't want to be embarrassed by the Hollywood harlots he trotted to posh events. At least, in my head that's the only possible reason that worked as to why someone so devastatingly handsome would need to hire an escort. Shuffling through the pages, I finally found the list of *rules* "Ms. Milan" sent home with me last night.

1. Always look your best. *Never let the client see you unprepared. Makeup should be done, hair styled, nails polished, and clothes unwrinkled at all times. The client will provide you with a wardrobe of their choosing. Your sizes and preferences have been given to their personal stylist.*

I rolled my eyes and looked longingly at the fat stack of jeans I had in my closet organizer. A personal stylist? Jeez, these people had far too much money. How hard was it to pick out your own clothes? My sizes had been sent over? Awesome. Now the guy knows I had a few pounds to lose. Being five nine gave me the advantage of looking thinner than I was, but I knew my aunt preferred her girls around a size zero. Whereas, I was a curvy size eight, sometimes even a ten, if I was being honest. Probably considered plus size in the modeling world.

He picked you. I reminded myself while filling a small backpack full of essentials. Lotion, makeup, perfume, my Kindle, a small bag of my favorite jewelry. There wasn't anything of value, but they were mine and, at the very least, I needed to be *me* in some small way. I also grabbed a brand new journal and my personalized stationary. Figured since this was a yearlong experience, might as well try to learn something from it. Hell, maybe I could even write it into my own movie one day.

Tossing the bag into my overstuffed chair in the studio apartment I rented for cheap, I looked at the rest of the list.

2. Smile constantly. *Never appear to be angry, sad, or emotional in any way. Men don't hire women so they can deal with your emotional problems. They hire a woman so they don't have to.*

Emotionless. Way ahead on that one. I'd given myself a strong talking to after meeting with Millie and agreeing to the job.

3. Don't speak unless spoken to. *You are there to be pretty and charming when called for. Discuss the needs with the client before any social or professional events so you are in agreement on your position.*

What are we? Five? Be a Barbie doll. Got it. That's easy enough.

4. Make yourself available at all times. *If the client wants to stay in, you will stay in with them. Be respectful, mind your manners, and follow the client's lead. If he is looking for companionship, offering to cuddle is acceptable. Sex is not required.*

She wants me to *cuddle* with the client when he wants to fuck? I laughed out loud. That's going to be an interesting transition. "Hey there fella, wanna cuddle with me?" A snicker left my lips as I continued to read.

5. Sex with clients is not included in the contract. *If you choose to offer sexual companionship, that is of your choosing and is not the responsibility of Exquisite Escorts. We do, however, require all of our escorts to be on some form of birth control that can be proven at any given time. A blood test may be requested.*

Where does she come up with this shit? I mean, really? Who would want to get pregnant by a man they've just met and didn't love? Oh yeah, rich men, dumb women. A cocktail for disaster. Well, I'm not one of those women. Once my dad is safe and his debt paid off, it's back to my life. Whatever that is.

Glancing at the clock I realized it was time to go. Even though Millie wanted me to arrive in one of her limos, I assured her I'd meet the client. That was my one term. If this first go around worked out, then I'd be more willing to have her clients pick me up. For now, I was leery as hell and would take my bike, even though I promised her I'd take a cab. Like she'd find out anyway.

Donning my sexiest black jeans and a black tight mesh top, I added my cropped leather jacket and tall suede knee-high boots. I knew Millie would kill me if she saw this getup, but I needed the element of surprise to check out this Weston Charles Channing, the *third*, before I willingly agreed to be his companion for the next four weeks.

Finally the text arrived. It was from an unknown number.

To: Mia Saunders

From: Unknown Number

Looking forward to meeting you. El Matador Beach. Find the concrete stairway down to the beach. I'll see you soon.

Cryptic. He's having me meet him at the beach at eight in the morning? Quickly, I pick up my iPhone and ask Siri for directions, noting it's seven now. The computer-automated voice brought up the beach and showed it was six miles northwest of Malibu. Must be close to his home because it was a solid hour on my bike to the beach from my studio apartment in downtown Los Angeles. My apartment wasn't much, just a few hundred square feet of space where the futon I bought for fifty bucks in a yard sale doubled as my couch and bed, but it's what I could afford. Looking around, I noted that I'd made it as homey as I could. The walls were a soft beige, and though the furniture was hodgepodge and mismatched, it somehow worked.

It's the first place I could ever call my own. And I had to leave it. I grabbed the bottle of water on the counter and poured its remains into the one potted bamboo plant I had on the tiny kitchen counter. It was a sad attempt at being green, but it was supposed to be a lucky plant. Hopefully, the plant would survive. As I walked out the door, backpack slung over my shoulder and helmet in hand, I realized just how much the plant and I had in common. I sure hoped I survived this absence too.

Loose gravel and rocks shot across the earth as Suzi, skidded to a stop before hitting the metal girder that ended just before a rocky cliff. The concrete staircase I'd been searching up and down the beach for was clearly visible from this parking area. This section of the beach was small and seemed secluded. Only one car sat in the parking lot on the chilly Monday morning. Probably because normal people were at work at eight a.m. on a weekday. I didn't know what to think about meeting my date here, but I wasn't altogether upset about it. The view was incredible, the beach breathtaking. The blue waves rushed against the beach in white clouds that burst into nothing as the waves hit the sand. This was actually one of the few times I'd been to the beach since I moved here six months ago. Most of my time has been spent trying to break into the acting world. The location didn't matter. I just needed to get the hell out of the desert. The ocean reminded me of the opposite of the dry Vegas heat and was comforting in its own way because of the contrast.

A lone figure was out in the water surfing. I watched the person take on each wave like a professional, dipping the long yellow board to match the waves. I scanned the beach but didn't see anyone else. No other cars dotted the parking lot aside from the one Jeep and my bike. *Maybe he wasn't here yet?*

I watched the surfer for a few more moments as he rode a wave all the way to the edge of the sand. He hopped off as if the board delicately drove him to the shore. Must have been surfing for a long time with that level of balance and strength. Maybe he even instructed here at this beach, although I didn't see a building of any kind on the bare expanse of land. The man shook his hair and detached a strap connected to the board from his ankle. I couldn't see his features from this distance. As if in slow motion, the surfer looked over in my direction. He couldn't see me because I was still wearing my helmet. I flipped up the visor to get a better look and watched as he unzipped his wetsuit and revealed a massive amount of very wet, thick, tanned muscles. He pulled out each arm and let the wetsuit hang from his waist as he lifted his board in one arm and made his way up the beach at a trot.

In complete and utter fascination, I watched his body move up the landscape. The surfer was a feast for the eyes. Brought a whole new meaning to the phrase "eye candy." He continued to come closer, each square pec and toned ab more visible as he got closer. The sexy swath of skin that dipped in making a delectable V had dots of sand and ocean water mingling together. Made me wonder what it would taste like. Salty from the ocean with hints of his natural flavor.

Warmth filled my body as he made his way up the stairs to the landing. My ears started to pound and it felt as if the sound of the ocean was making a roaring, wobbling noise inside the confined space of my helmet. It was like when you have all the windows in a car closed and someone opens one. You are instantly flooded with that warped sound that permeates your ear like a physical thing, pounding against your eardrum.

Slowly, I tugged my helmet off, flung my neck back allowing my hair to whip and tumble out, free from the tight confines. I sucked in a deep breath as the man I'd been waiting for stopped at the top of the steps and stared. His stare was...intense, lustful. Fat drops of water from his hair dripped onto his broad shoulders and down over a chest that could have been chiseled by the gods.

He eyed me from my boots up my legs to my chest before finally meeting my gaze. "How pleasantly unexpected," he grinned.

"Yeah, unexpected." I licked suddenly dry lips and bit down. He moved gracefully as he walked over to the grey 4 x 4 Jeep Wrangler. It wasn't an expensive car though it looked to be in good enough condition. It didn't have a top, which, I imagined, was why the owner could toss a giant surfboard in the back without any trouble. *Were those things light?* I didn't think so, but he made it look like it weighed nothing. The muscles in his arms tensed and tugged as he positioned the board just so, sending a flurry of excitement tingling along my pores.

"You're Mia?" he asked as I dismounted the bike and strode over, making sure to give an extra sway to my hips as I did. His eyes seemed to twinkle in appreciation as he caressed my form with his gaze.

"That's me. You Weston Charles Channing, the Third?" I held up three fingers and cocked a hand on one hip.

He chuckled and leaned against the side of his Jeep giving me an even better view of his bare chest. Damn, he was beautiful. His green eyes were dark when they met mine. "Third," he mimicked my gesture. "My friends call me Wes," he said causally.

"Am I your friend?" I said coyly.

"One can only hope, Ms. Mia." He winked then turned and rustled around in the back of his Jeep. He pulled out a white t-shirt and quickly pulled it over his head covering that beautiful body. I almost thanked him for the distraction. Immediately dumb Barbie left the building and intelligent Mia made her appearance once more. "You ready to go?"

"Your dollar, you say where and when," I offered.

Wes licked his lips, looked me over again, smiled and shook his head. "I'd offer you a ride, but

it looks like you've got one."

"That I do. I'll follow you."

By the time we made it back to his home in Malibu, my libido was back in check though I didn't think it would take much for me to get worked up again. The gates of his home opened, and I followed him up a small winding driveway until he stopped in front of a home that looked more like something you'd see in the mountains. It wasn't quite a log cabin, but the house was made from giant stones intermingled with wood. Lush greenery surrounded it in all directions making it feel like it was nestled into a secret garden hideaway.

I pulled my helmet off and held onto my backpack while following him up the stone steps. The door wasn't even locked when he opened it. I guess if you lived in Malibu and had high gates with fencing surrounding your property, you didn't worry too much about security. Perhaps he had security somewhere.

We walked into a giant cavernous room with dark wooden exposed beams meeting at the center. The floors were a rich cherry wood and spanned the entire palatial space. Area rugs in dark rustic colors dotted the floors alongside deep burgundy plush couches that look puffy enough to run and leap into. The room was bright and airy, surrounded by windows. The entertainment center was enormous and took up an entire fifty foot wall. Scattered in all the shelves and cubby holes were books and a wide array of DVDs. Tapestries in vibrant hues filled the walls. Plants and art were everywhere the eye could see. It's nothing like I expected from a man in his late twenties or early thirties. I made a mental note to find out his age at some point along with what he did for a living. You had to be pretty smart or independently wealthy to own such digs.

"This place is incredible," I said and walked over to the open French doors stepping onto the wooden balcony with a wrought iron railing. The view was of the rolling mountains and open vistas that seemed to go on with no end until the horizon. Living in downtown Los Angeles didn't give me a lot of opportunity to appreciate Southern California the way one would looking out that view.

We smiled and clasped my hand. His was warm and soft. Comfortable. "Come here. I'll show you what drew me to this place." He tugged me along to follow the balcony around to the other side of the large home.

The sight stole my breath when we finally made it to the other side of the wraparound porch. “Oh, my God,” I whispered in complete awe. His hand tightened on mine, sending a bolt of electricity to tingle at the back of my neck. In front of me was an unobstructed view of the Pacific Ocean. It spanned the entire half of the house. Wes leaned closer to me and whispered in my ear as he pointed over to a sandy area nestled against a rocky terrain.

“That’s El Matador Beach,” he said close enough for me to feel his breath kiss the skin of my cheek. I could almost see where he was surfing from here.

“It’s...” I lost the words.

“Amazing. I know,” he said, but not in a smug way. No, he seemed to take in the view with his own sense of wonder, which surprised me. A man who lives here, sees this every day and is still taken by the gift before him. I realized then that I might have been remiss in thinking he was a young, hotshot, rich kid. His eyes reflected something older, well beyond his years. He gripped my hand and pulled me toward the house. “Let me show you to your room.”

I followed him through the several thousand square foot home. Room after room flew by before I could catch much of a glimpse. I thought it odd that he continued to hold my hand, but I didn’t say anything for fear he’d stop. It was nice feeling the warm, large hand in mine. Made me feel safe and protected in a way I hadn’t experienced in years.

Wes led me to a set of double doors. He finally dropped my hand and opened both doors at once. “This will be your home for the next twenty-four days,” he smiled as I entered.

The room was white on white. Everything. The furniture, the bedding, even the artwork was varying shades of white with only the barest hints of color. It was such a dramatic contrast to the rich, thick colors of the living room. Without realizing it, I frowned.

“You don’t like it?” His hands fell down to his sides. He moved over and opened another set of double doors. Within were enough clothes to choke a horse, all in wild arrays of colors, textures, and fabrics. Now this was more like it. I could move into the closet. It certainly looked big enough. I ran my fingers over the hanging clothes, all with the tags still dangling from them.

“It’s beautiful, thank you. So why don’t you tell me a little bit about why I’m here,” I asked as I exited the closet and sat on the bed. Wes was a tall, large man but not beefy. He was over six feet and trim. Had the body of a strong swimmer who definitely spent some serious time in the gym lifting

weights.

He took a breath and brought his hand up to his chin resting his elbow on the arm of the chair. “My mother,” he said, as if that explained all the secrets of the universe. I crooked an eyebrow, and he shook his head. “I have these events I need to attend professionally and personally over the next few weeks. Having a woman on my arm would help ward off the socialites and gold-diggers that often vie for my attention, preventing me from getting the networking I need to do completed.”

“So you need a buffer to ward off the vultures?” I chuckled, crossed my legs then pulled off one long boot, stretched out my other leg and repeated the process. Wes nodded then watched with rapt attention as I pointed and wiggled my socked toes. I looked down and realized why he was holding his hand over his mouth, a veiled attempt to hold back his laughter.

I had on my Christmas socks under my boots. Tall to the knee green and red striped socks stared back at me proving I’d just committed fashion suicide. Not to mention, I was certain I’d just broken one of Millie’s escort rules by wearing the hideously ugly socks. I bit my lip and chanced a glance at Wes, but he just continued to smile the cat-that-ate-the-canary type grin.

Rolling my eyes, I huffed, “I got ready in the dark.”

“Obviously,” he laughed. “I think it’s cute.”

“Cute? That’s like the kiss of death.” I narrowed my eyes at him. “You think I’m cute? Well, no refunds, buddy. You said yourself, I’m here for twenty-four days. No take-backs!” I stood and put my hands on my hips.

He leaned back and crossed his bare feet at the ankle. Oh, I hadn’t noticed his feet before. They were long, lean and perfectly groomed. Tiny bits of sand stuck to the tops of the upper arch at the top of his foot. That libido I’d kicked to the curb and stuck in a hidey-hole peeked out and was paying close attention to the finer details of the man before me. It wasn’t fair. Even his feet were sexy.

“Relax, Ms. Mia. I said your socks were cute, not you. You are quite possibly one of the most devastatingly beautiful women I’ve ever had the pleasure of laying my eyes on. I can’t wait to see you naked.” His lips twitched into a sultry grin, and his eyes smoldered.

I took a slow breath and stared as he stood up. Our gazes held, and it seemed like minutes

passed by as we catalogued the others' nuances. "Um, well, I'm glad you think I'm pretty enough to be here. Like I said, you've got me for the month and...wait..." Something he said just clicked. "Excuse me? You can't wait to see me naked?" The words left my lips in a loose jumble. "That's not included in the contract..."

"Oh, I'm well aware of what's in the contract," Wes said as he came over to me, slid a hand around my waist and plastered me against his body. I gasped as the steely ridge of a very large erection pressed into my belly. His gaze scanned my face, and he leaned closer, so close I could feel his breath puff against my heated lips. "If I get you naked, it will not be because I'm paying for it." Wes's lips touched the skin just behind my ear where he placed a gentle, whisper-light kiss. I stayed perfectly still, pleasure rocketing through every limb, each nerve focused, waiting for his next touch. The rough edge of his stubbly chin slid along my smooth one sending shivers down my spine and a wave of heat to settle between my thighs. "You'll drop your clothes for me when you're ready. I won't even have to ask," he whispered before pressing a small kiss to just the edge of my lips.

He pulled back, his green eyes swirling with restrained lust. "I have work to do in my office. Feel free to look around, sunbathe, use the pool. I'll need you ready and wearing a cocktail dress at five sharp. We have a business dinner to attend," and with one last squeeze to my hip, he turned and left. The skin of my hip still felt the phantom imprint of his touch.

"Damn," I said, lightheaded after holding my breath for so long. Once his lips touched down behind my ear, I'd lost the ability to breathe. "He's going to be trouble."

Chapter 3

The pool was heated and refreshing. I used the time I had to work on my tan and get some exercise by way of laps in the pool. Weston, or “Wes” as he likes to be called, had not made an appearance. I imagined him behind one of the many closed doors I passed on my way to the patio.

While I was drip-drying, a petite, though quite round woman, dressed in a pair of khakis and a sweater holding a tray, entered the patio. Instantly, I reached for a towel that was not there and looked around. She smiled wide and walked over to a basket in the corner by the door, lifted the lid and pulled out a huge, multicolored beach towel. “Here you are, love,” she said in a British accent handing me the towel. Her salt-and-pepper-colored hair and soft brown eyes reminded me of an older Mary Poppins.

“Hi, I’m Mia.” I pulled the towel completely around my body hiding the miniscule red bikini I’d found in the wardrobe. There were several others, but they were all tiny, so I chose one at random.

‘Mary Poppins’ smiled and held out her small hand. “Ms. Croft. I keep the house in order, provide Mr. Channing with his meals, tidy up, and the lot.” I nodded and wrung the excess water out of my hair and pulled it up into a ponytail. “I wanted to bring you a little nosh, introduce myself, and let you know that if you need anything, you can buzz me by pressing the *Aid* button on the mounted intercom in each room.” She pointed to the panel of buttons on the wall outside. “I’ll be sure to provide you with a daily schedule of yours and Mr. Channing’s activities so you are prepared. How about I push it under your door in the mornings?”

I shrugged. Like her, I was a hired hand, only I was meant to look pretty and scare off rich girls. We all had our crosses to bear. “Whatever works. I’m easy.”

Ms. Croft looked me up and down and then tilted her head. A smirk adorned her thin lips. “I’m getting the feeling you’re anything but easy, poppet,” she winked. “This should be interesting,” she said vaguely before she turned on her heel and re-entered the house.

Whatever *that* meant. Scanning the awesome view one more time I thought, *this is going to be easy money*. Hot guy, I’m *not* going to fall in love with, a killer pad with a view, and enough new clothes to choke a horse. So far, seemed like a pretty killer gig. Through the open patio doors, I saw the clock hanging over the stove in the kitchen and noted I had an hour and half before Hot Surfer Rich Guy needed his new “companion” for my first day on the job.

I decided as with everything, I was going to knock his socks off, even if they weren’t Christmas red and green.

Mr. Channing arrived at my door with a brisk knock then strutted right in without waiting for an invitation. *Note to self: Don’t get dressed out in the open, or you’re liable to give the Lord of the Manor a peep show*. Though something tells me he wouldn’t mind at all, if the way his eyes were passing over my form from top to bottom—not once, but twice—was any indication The view on this side of the room wasn’t bad either. He was de-lish-ious in a finely tailored black suit. He had on a

crisp white shirt with the collar open showing a sexy slash of male throat. He held up three ties as he took in my attire.

I was wearing a deep eggplant purple cocktail dress. It had beading at the halter neck, which flowed into two swaths of fabric over my breasts leaving the center open for maximum cleavage, then crossed over at the ribs, again with the jewels, leaving enticing cutouts at the dips in my waist. I'd never worn anything so sexy, elegant, or expensive. I felt like Elizabeth Taylor in one of her diamond commercials. The rest of the dress fell into an A-line ending demurely at the knee. Even though I was on the busty side—this dress left no room for a bra with its open back—it held the girls up nicely with the inside shaping. I looked and, better yet, *felt* beautiful for the first time in a long time.

“Wow,” was all Wes said as he stood with a look of awe over his handsomely rugged face. He held out the three ties and presented them to me. “Which one?” he said on a swallow before clearing his throat. I grinned, loving every second of taking this wild card by surprise. I might be a bad ass biker babe but I knew I cleaned up well.

The ties were nice, and one did go better with my dress than the rest, but instead of taking the ties from him, I placed both my hands at his collar, pulled it out and laid it over the collar and lapels of his suit. “I like it without. You look hot.” No reason not to be honest. He did look hot.

His lips crooked up into a too-hot-to-handle grin and I bit my lip, feeling the lace of my panties go damp. Shit, if he didn't stop, I was going to jump him. Like Ginelle so crudely reminded me this morning, it had been months since I'd felt a man's touch. And honestly, it was more like a year. I'd had it with men after Blaine and spent the year telling myself I could live the life of a nun as long as I had a vibrator and plenty of cookie dough at the ready. Faced with the man in front of me, I wasn't so sure celibacy was the smart decision. For right now, I was primed to take down Hot Surfer guy.

“Mother won't like that,” he whispered before clasping my wrist and tugging me to him. I wobbled on the sickeningly high stiletto heels his personal shopper bought and tumbled into him, chest-to-chest. My hands landed on the hard wall of muscle that could still be felt through his suit and shirt.

He looked down at me as I looked up. “You always do what your mama says?” I challenged.

He laughed and his eyes went a beautiful shamrock green. I found I could stare into those leafy eyes for days on end and feel like I'd won a prize. “No, but it is Mother's event. I do like to be a good boy when it suits.” He leaned in close and inhaled at the base of my neck. “Christ, you smell like sunshine and a cool breeze in the summer,” he said dragging his lips along my chin. Shivers of excitement ran through me from the roots of my curled hair to the soles of my feet. “And you look beyond beautiful.” He kissed the side of my lip again. No full lip contact. I almost harrumphed, but I figured it was part of his game, and he was good at it. The art of seduction was obviously something he enjoyed. At this moment in time, I was all for it.

“We better go,” I warned.

Wes smiled and tugged on my hand turning and leading me out of the room. I barely had a moment to grab the matching handbag that had my phone, lipstick, and ID in it. As we reached the door to leave, Ms. Croft was standing there. She had a handful of pocket squares. She looked at my dress, picked the matching one and made a fuss over putting it into the breast pocket of his suit jacket.

“There,” she smoothed her hands over his suit coat. “You look perfect, Sonny.” Her eyes were bright and glistened as if she was preparing her own son for his senior prom. Weird. I declined to mention it. He put the ties into her capable hands.

“Thanks, Judi,” He leaned forward and kissed her wrinkled cheek. He looked over to me, sized me up again and turned back to his maid-slash-cook-slash-housekeeper. Not really sure what she was. “The dress is perfect.” He thanked her and led me out to the limo waiting out front.

Judi bought the clothes? Any further thoughts were obliterated, and my mouth dropped open at the size of the limo. It was long, stretched beyond anything I’d ever seen. I’d never been in a limo, but as we approached, Wes tilted his head to the side and looked at me with a funny smile. “You ever been in a limo?” he asked, clearly amused.

I straightened my shoulders and walked up to the limo as if I’d been in one a million times. “Of course.” I pulled open the door. He put a hand over his mouth, clasp one arm at the elbow and laughed. I cringed, apparently not in on the joke.

“Then why are you trying to get in on the passenger side?” He gestured to the door I held open. I looked inside and saw the driver’s wheel. When I adjusted my stance, there was a gentleman in what had to be a black chauffeur’s uniform holding open the back door.

“I knew that. I was just going to ask the driver where we were headed.” I sauntered over to the door, cheeks burning hot.

“Of course you were.” He placed a hand low on my back and ushered me inside with a chuckle.

Once we were settled, he offered me a glass of champagne, which I readily accepted.

“Thank you.”

He smiled and poured one for himself as well. We clinked glasses.

“What are we toasting to?” I asked.

“How about to being friends?” He grinned then set a warm hand high on my thigh, much higher than a ‘friend’ would. It felt good there. “Good friends.” His eyes dropped to my mouth as I bit my bottom lip.

“Friends with benefits?” I inquired, lifting an eyebrow for maximum effect and crossing my legs. That hand of his went a few inches higher until it brushed along bare thigh.

His gaze focused on mine and made me feel warm, positively hot, under his heated look. “God, I hope so,” he whispered and leaned closer.

To foil his plans and keep my sanity in check, I immediately lifted my champagne flute and placed it against my lips and took a hearty sip of the bubbly concoction.

Wes leaned back and groaned, adjusting his crotch—less than subtle. I giggled, and he shot a few daggers my way but ended with a head shake and a grin. Yeah, I was going to enjoy this game of cat and mouse. Although at the moment, I wasn’t sure who was the cat and who was the mouse. In the end, I was having far too much fun to care.

We arrived at a swank mansion in the Malibu Hills not far from where Wes lived. As we walked up the steps, I could see people milling about through the windows. Everyone was dressed to the nines and holding a drink. Most of the women in attendance seemed to be my age, which I found strange since the men were not.

“What do you do anyway?” I whispered as he led me to the bar. I realized when we walked in that I had very little information about what I was to do, besides keep the Hollywood harlots at bay.

“I write scripts,” he said casually as we waited for the bartender to approach us. It seemed odd to have a full length bar in someone’s house, but the room was huge, the size of a ballroom, so maybe it wasn’t so strange. Chandeliers dotted the ceiling and a wall of windows led out into an open view of the ocean just like at Wes’s house, only on a much grander scale. This person was über rich. Unlike Wes, who was just beaucoup rich.

He handed me another glass of champagne. “Like for plays?” I asked while scanning the area. Instantly, I spotted a pack of girls dolled up and ready to strike in the corner. They were focused on Wes, and had lusty dollar signs in their eyes.

“More like movies.”

“Huh. Would I know any?” I turned to him and he smiled.

“Probably,” he snickered and took a sip of something amber-colored in a cocktail tumbler. I could smell whiskey a mile away, and it didn’t bring fond memories. I cringed and turned back to the vultures.

Wes put a hand on my bare shoulder, eyes narrowed and uncertain. “What’s the matter?”

I took a deep breath and pressed down the frustration I had with my father and his drinking and the gambling habit that had gotten me into this mess in the first place. I shook my head. “Nothing.”

He tipped up my chin and looked into my eyes. “It’s not nothing. I won’t ask again,” he warned.

Nonchalantly I shrugged. “I hate the smell of whiskey; no biggie.” Curving outward I loosened his hold. He set down the drink and gestured to the bartender.

“Changed my mind. Gin and tonic,” he said and the man nodded.

“You didn’t have to do that,” I started, but he cut me off by lifting a hand to my cheek. He cupped it and swiped just his thumb against my bottom lip tenderly.

He held my lip, and I wanted so badly to press my tongue to the digit and steal a small taste. I didn’t though, fearing what he’d think or do.

“I wanted to. Now, let’s go introduce you to Mother.”

With mammoth effort, I followed him, wanting nothing more than to rush out those double doors, down to the beach until I reached the ocean, where I’d promptly drown myself. What the hell was I doing at a fancy-dancy party, on the arm of a man who wrote movies and had more money than I’d see in my lifetime? I was the daughter of a Vegas gambler, abandoned by my mother at a young age, worked mostly waitressing jobs, and only recently was trying to hack it as a small time actress.

Wes led me through the throngs of people. Snippets of conversations about exotic vacations, the latest new action movie, who was who in Hollywood, and what major corporation was doing what flooded my mind as we passed each small group. The men looked appreciatively at me as we passed, their women—not so much. Pouty lips and anorexia were obviously the latest trends, both of which I didn't have, and in this dress, *nothing* was left to the imagination.

We made our way through the crowd to the back of the room where a cropping of high back chairs and bookcases were. An older woman, perhaps in her fifties, stood near a man who looked suspiciously like Wes. He also was tall with blond hair, except this distinguished gentleman in a dark grey suit that complimented his wife's pale pink dress was built like a linebacker, unlike Wes who had the leaner build of a regular swimmer-slash-surfer.

"Mother, Father," Wes approached the couple. The older woman had pale blond hair, almost white, and startling blue eyes. Her lips were full like her son's and coated with a mauve lipstick that paired well with her skin tone and coloring. Her hair was pulled into a severe French twist and pearls hung from her neck and ears. Her look was classic elegance.

The elder Channing clapped his son on the back. "Son," he said with a note of pride. His mother promptly air kissed both cheeks, which normally would seem really pretentious, but then she held his cheeks in both hands and smiled warmly at her son.

"I see you went with my pick," I heard her whisper and turn towards me. The nerves I had prior to meeting up with Wes were back—with a vengeance. *The mother picked me out?* I mean, I knew that she and Aunt Millie were acquaintances, but that's kind of strange for a mother to pick out an escort for her son. It kind of gave me the heebie-jeebies.

Wes turned to me and brought a hand to my back. The skin-on-skin contact sent a jolt through me. I'd forgotten the entire back of the dress was open aside from the crisscrossing two-inch beaded straps at my shoulder blades. The rest was completely open to the waist. His hand burned white-hot where his fingertips traced small circles. I shivered and stood closer to him without even being asked.

"Mother, Father, this is Mia Saunders, my date," he grinned and I held out my hand. "Mia, this is Weston Channing, the Second, and my mother, Claire."

"Lovely to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Channing."

Wes's mother crossed her arms over her chest and put her hand up to her cheek. She was blushing prettily and smiling so wide I felt as though she was internally laughing at a private joke. His mom leaned into his father's side. "Isn't she breathtaking?" She winked at me and shook her head.

"Um, thank you?" I offered and his father laughed.

"It's good to meet you, Ms. Saunders."

"Oh, Mia's fine." He tipped his head and chin.

Apparently, the conversation was over because he turned away and grabbed Wes's arm. "Now Son, tell me about this latest project you've got going. I hear they want to offer you three percent of the budget. That would net you only three million when they're bringing in several hundred million on

your last *Honor* series. You've got to up the ante," his voice boomed with a heavy timber.

The *Honor Series*. Weston Channing, the Third wrote the flipping *Honor Series*! Holy fuckballs! His movies have been the biggest hits—*huge*—since the first one, *Jeremiah's Honor*, released three years ago. There's been one each year. His inventive way of mixing a soldier pursuing the love of their life with copious amounts of blood, violence, explosions, patriotism, and some wicked hot love scenes have made for epic movies with record-breaking box office numbers.

"...they're going to give me ten percent of the overall budget and directing opportunities," Wes's deep rumbling voice broke through my haze. Right when I cleared the cobwebs after realizing I'd been contracted for the month with movie royalty, a couple of women came up behind Wes.

The two vultures were waiting patiently for him to notice them. One was twirling a lock of her bottle-blond hair and wearing a god-awful gold, strapless dress with her plastic boobs pushed up to maximum capacity. I scanned her outfit and cringed. She was so skinny, every one of her ribs was visible. The brunette standing next to her wasn't much better. Fake boobs—one actually looked bigger than the other—because I could see almost every inch of them through the whisper thin fabric of her glued on dress. Her nipples had hardened, and I wanted to let her know that she needed to rub her tips and warm em' up before she embarrassed herself, but something told me that she wanted them that way.

Show time. Gotta earn that hundred thousand dollar payout. Even the thought of that much money going to Blaine every month made me want to hurl. Once my father was better, I was totally going to kick his ass for getting into a situation once again!

"Hey honey, I think there are some people over there," I pointed randomly to the other side of the room, but gestured with my eyes to look behind him. Wes caught my less-than-covert eye movement and looked over his shoulder. Bimbette one and bimbette two promptly pushed out their fake ta-tas in greeting then puckered their fat, collagen-infused lips.

Wes simply hooked an arm around my waist. "Always keeping me in line, thanks." He nuzzled my cheek, and I grinned.

"It's a tough job, but someone has to do it!" I practically bounced with glee, my tone so fake and put-on.

Wes leaned forward and placed a warm kiss on my neck, then inhaled. "Mmm, thank you," he whispered just under my ear. He was so close I could feel the warmth from his lips graze my neck before he pulled away.

"Mia and I will see you at the charity ball next week," he said.

His mother surprisingly got right into our space, as in, barely a foot away. "No, no, no, that just won't do. I want to spend more time getting to know Mia, dear." She smiled one of those mom-smiles that actually make you feel like there's nothing more precious in the world than you standing in front of them. Of course, I never really had that, but if I did, I'm sure it would look just like Claire Channing.

Wes stiffened next to me. "Mother..." he warned.

She smoothed her hand down his lapels and buttoned one of the buttons on his shirt. I giggled under my breath as she fretted over him. “Oh honey, relax. I know Mia’s just a *friend*. So no harm in bringing her over for Sunday brunch, now is there?” she asked using a tone that I knew carried a whopping dose of guilt trip. Momentarily, I wondered if she was Catholic. My grandmother used to have that same tone and it was usually followed up by a phrase taken directly from the Bible.

Wes sighed and shook his head. “We’ll be there. Same time?” he queried.

“That’s my good boy.” She air kissed both of his cheeks then turned to me and did the same.

We walked toward the bar once more. “I need a drink,” he said leading the way.

I couldn’t help it. I started laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

“You do always do what your mom says!” I laughed. Once we got to the bar, I moved over close. “Mama’s boy!” I shot into his ear.

“Oh shut up. I’m seriously questioning the sanity of agreeing to this. I could have gone with a brainless Barbie doll, you know.” One eyebrow rose sharply, his lips in a mock scowl, but his eyes gave him away. They were filled with humor and were sparkling green.

I moved to take another pot shot at him, but I wobbled on my spikey heels. He caught me against his body. I rested my hand on his shoulders as he placed his arm around my waist.

His eyes went from a normal Crayola green to a bright forest green in an instant. He licked his lips, and I couldn’t help but lick mine in return. The warmth of his hands at my bare back seeped into my skin. It’s as if the entire room melted away when I was in his arms. I could feel his heart beating against my chest.

Thump thump**, **thump thump**, **thump thump

“You’re trouble,” he pinched his lips together and leaned closer. We were less than six inches apart, right in the middle of a business cocktail party standing directly in front of the bar where everyone could see us.

“And you’re a mama’s boy!” I went with deflecting the situation and backed up and out of his embrace as quickly as my new shoes would take me and shuffled onto a stool.

“So that’s how you’re going to play it, huh?” he grinned and brought a long-fingered hand up to his chin where he stroked his thumb and forefinger along his jaw. “Game on, Ms. Mia.”

Chapter 4

When we got back to the house later that evening, I feigned being tired and practically ran to my room, shutting and locking the door. I'd waited by the door, straining to hear through the wood if he was going to follow me. As much as I wanted to be with him, as in between the sheets, I really should keep distance between us. I hadn't had enough time to talk myself out of becoming emotionally attached to Wes. He was so nice, down to Earth, made a point to include me in business related conversations even if they were pretty casual. It would be wise for me to remember my place. I was nothing more than the hired help.

Then again, why couldn't I have fun? I was an adult, he was an incredibly hot, willing man. We were young and had the better part of a month to be around one another. If tonight's sexual chemistry was anything to go by, I'd bet my bike that he was stellar in the bedroom. It would do me well to get a good rogering, loosen me up. It had been a year since I'd had sex and my vibrator wasn't cutting it anymore. I needed that physical connection. A warm, male body.

I stood in the center of the room looking around at all varying shades of white. The bed looked like a white fluffy cloud. I bet it was comfortable, too. Wes didn't seem like the type of guy to skimp on the luxury fabrics for his guests. No, he'd make sure everything was just so. Walking around the room I debated my next move. He was out there somewhere. According to the clock on the nightstand, it was very late. One o'clock in the morning. We'd had a great time. I made a game of counting how many times a gold digger approached him, and how many times I'd gotten the stink eye. *Twenty-four*. He had twenty-four admirers in one evening. It made complete sense why he needed to hire a buffer. If he actually spent any length of time talking to those women, he wouldn't have made contact with any of the producers, directors, or actors he had gone to the event to see.

And Wes was perfectly in his element. He moved around the room like oil swirling through water, slinky, liquid, and never co-mingling longer with one person than another. I was pretty sure there was a method to his madness, but I didn't ask. I just followed along and played buffer. When a stick with boobs approached, I'd turn, introduce myself and make it a point to touch and lean on Wes enough that the woman would scowl and slither away like the snake she was. They all were. Aside from Wes's mother, Claire, I did not meet one decent woman. And very few over the age of twenty-five. It seemed as though older men in the business liked to have a piece of eye candy attached to them. The women just stood by their side with vapid eyes staring out the windows as they teetered on spiked heels and sipped absurdly expensive champagne. Probably to the point where they spent the evening completely stoned off the booze but not so much that they were shitty.

I guess if you thought about it, I wasn't much different. Technically, I was by Wes's side for the same reason they all were. Money. I needed it, and whether or not they *needed it* or *wanted it*, it really didn't make a difference. Having put those thoughts together, I felt a sourness hit my gut, twitching uncomfortably. That high from the evening left me in a rush of disgust.

Before I knew what I was doing, I was walking through the darkened house. When I reached the living room, I moved to a hallway I hadn't seen before. There were a single set of double doors at the end. Pressing my ear to the door I could hear the sound of a television. Surprising even myself, I knocked.

“Come in,” I heard Wes say.

On a deep inhale, I opened the door. He sat leaning against the headboard of a massive sleigh bed. The room was dark, cave-like with a lit fireplace on one side of the room and on the other a wall of glass windows with what I suspected was an ocean view, knowing which side of the house that window faced. The curtains were mostly closed. Manly, heavy looking wood furniture dotted the walls. I looked over at the TV, and it was paused on what looked like a soccer game.

Wes didn't say anything when my gaze finally made it to his. He hadn't moved an inch, either. The skin of his bare chest glowed a golden brown from the light of the fireplace as he reclined in only a pair of pajama bottoms. Christ, he was a work of art. The firelight flickered off the hills and valleys of his muscled abdomen, and defined pecs making me salivate. My heart started pumping so hard in my chest I was sure he could hear it, too. Instead of going back to my room, pretending I had to ask him something or feigning I was lost, I lifted my hand up to the halter clasp on my dress and tugged.

In one swift movement, the dress fell to the floor in a heap of purple silk. Wes gasped as I moved the hair that had fallen down the front of my body and shifted it behind my back. I stood perfectly still in nothing but a black lace thong and the stilettos.

“Come here,” Wes's voice was deep and strained. The easygoing tone he'd had earlier when we met and throughout the evening was long gone. In its place was control, desire, and lust. My three favorite things.

With effort, I walked cat-like to the side of the bed stopping two feet in front of him. I could feel the heat of the fireplace lick across my skin, warming it. As Wes's gaze traced every inch of me, my nipples tightened painfully while the space between my legs softened. With every tiny flick of his eyes over a curve, a naked edge, my clit throbbed, ached, *begged* to be touched.

“Turn around,” was only the second thing he'd said to me since I'd walked in. I said nothing. Still in my heels, I pivoted on the balls of my feet, presenting him my backside. He growled low in his throat at seeing my bare ass.

The fire's heat warmed my naked front and just when I thought I would die from anticipation, a feather-light caress started at the nape of my neck and moved slowly down my spine, touching each bump and ridge. I gasped when I felt the same heat from the front hit my back, only it wasn't the fireplace. The smell of ocean and man permeated the air around me, and I closed my eyes. Soon that light touch got harder. Wes's hand held my biceps and pressed me back into him. Skin-to-skin.

I could feel his breath on my neck as he pushed my hair to one side. His other arm wrapped around my body with one strong hand clasping over a bare breast just as his lips touched the sensitive column of my neck. I couldn't help it. I whimpered the moment his thumb and forefinger plucked at the erect tip, sending ribbons of excitement scuttling through every nerve ending.

“Sweetheart, we need to set some ground rules.” His voice was a grumble against my skin. He swirled his tongue over the ball of one shoulder and bit down.

I moaned. “Ground rules?” I barely made out the words, while enjoying his talented fingers as they tugged and elongated each peak. My body was on hyperalert, his hands massaging and cupping each globe while those relentless fingers gave each nipple the most beautiful torture.

“Rule one: We’re going to have an insane amount of sex this month.” He pressed hard on each tip simultaneously. I cried out in bliss, the heat between my legs soaking the wisp of fabric I was wearing.

“And that’s a rule?” I said breathlessly leaning further back into him, grinding my ass into his thick erection. Sounded like a damn good rule to me.

Wes groaned and then retaliated by twisting each nip, perfectly adding just the right amount of pleasure and pain.

“Rule two is when we’re together like this, it’s only me and you. The entire month we’re monogamous.”

I bit down on my lip and focused on swiveling my hips pressing against what I could feel to be a pretty impressive package. “Agreed.”

Both hands moved off my breast for a moment then they were back, though somehow wetted. They slid smoothly around each areola and I melted, barely able to stay in a standing position.

He must have sensed the instability and moved to lock an arm around my waist but kept up his sweet seduction of my breasts. Jesus, the man was my new hero. If he kept this up, I’d come without ever being penetrated. I leaned an arm back and clasped him behind the neck, arching into his hand, wanting so badly to kiss him, but his lock on my waist and the firm pressure of his front against my back prevented it.

“Rule three: We *never* sleep in the same bed. We do not want to confuse this with something it’s not. I like you, Mia. A lot. I wouldn’t want to hurt you by making you believe I was in a position for a relationship. Understand?”

The hand that was around my waist shifted and crept low, very low, until he was there, right *there* where I wanted him most.

“Oh, fuck yeah, I understand,” I said and pushed my hips into his twirling finger. And I did understand. We wanted exactly the same thing. Friendship and physical release.

He chuckled against my neck, the puffs of air stirring my hair. Out of nowhere he flipped my body around, sank to his knees, and yanked down my panties. They were stuck at the ankles where I had neglected to remove my heels. As I locked eyes with his, he opened me with his thumbs, flattened his tongue, and went to town on my clit.

“Oh, oh, oh.” I was relegated to monosyllables and nothing more.

Between licks I could swear he started talking. My brain was having a really hard time paying close attention, but finally he pulled away and I zeroed in, gripping his hair and trying to push him towards my aching cleft. “Rule three:”—his eyes twinkled and he inhaled my scent then licked his lips like he was enjoying the finest delicacy and was about to feast. “Never fall in love,” he said with a grin then sucked the throbbing nub into his mouth and flicked his tongue against the tip.

I almost fell over. I leaned back, and he helped me into a position where I was lying on the bed, legs dangling over the edge, and opened wide, him in between them. “That might be impossible…” I

whispered as his tongue drove into my sex. I was right on the edge when he stopped in the middle of a perfect combination of tongue and finger action. I groaned loudly.

“Excuse me,” he said, voice tight with a razor’s edge.

I gripped his hair and did an ab curl up to my elbows. “Relax, Wes. I’m in love with your fucking tongue. Now stick it in me and make me come so I can return the favor.”

The sexiest grin I’d ever seen slipped across his face. “Best decision I ever made, hiring you.” He licked his lips and leaned down to blow across the wet flesh.

I lifted my hips, “Prove it!” I taunted and he did, again and again.

“So why are we having dinner with this guy again?” I asked while Wes led me into an elevator that would take us to a restaurant at the top of a skyscraper. I’d lived in Los Angeles half a year, and I didn’t think I’d been to a ‘dress up’ dinner once. Reminded me how sad my dating life was. At least with this job, I’d get to experience the finer things...at least I hoped that was a pleasant side effect. Guess it would depend on the client. Right now though, I was holding the hand of what I’d definitely consider the sexiest man alive and thoroughly enjoying myself.

Last night after he took care of me multiple times with his mouth, I returned the favor by giving him what I would consider a top notch blow job. When he was done, we showered together and talked while we cleaned up. When I noticed him get hard, I promptly got on my knees and took care of it, to then have him finger me into another state of sated bliss. It was odd, but I realized this morning that we never had actual intercourse. On top of that, we’d never even kissed. It was by far the best sexual experience I’d had and yet, the emotional side was left to the wayside. Maybe that was in fact the trick? What my best friend, Ginelle, and all my other girlfriends had already figured out.

Fucking...with no strings attached.

It seemed to go against the grain for me. Even though I considered myself a badass, half attitude, eyes always-on-my-goals type of girl, I had still fallen in love with every man I’d ever slept with.

Every single last one of them.

But after last night, I felt better with Wes than I ever had with any of them, and it was all based on mutual respect, friendship, and a heaping dose of pleasurable orgasms. After I had finished showering, he stayed in, and I made my way down the hall, through the living room and face-planted into a cloud. I vaguely remember Wes covering me up and kissing me on my temple with a “Goodnight, sweetheart.” Then I woke to my schedule slipped under the door and bacon and eggs at the breakfast bar. Ms. Croft served both Wes and me as I went over the schedule for the week. Wes explained the finer points, such as whether an event was casual or not, and I’d made notes about clothing, timelines, and the goal for each outing.

It actually seemed like a real job. As if I was a personal assistant to Weston Charles Channing,

the Third, and not a hired hooker. Technically, I wasn't a hooker, even though I did have sexual relations with him on the first date. But, that was because I was horny, lonely, and he was hot, and I felt down about myself. Wes definitely fixed that problem and set the rules. I was perfectly happy with those rules and planned to stick to them. No screwing around with anyone else, no sleeping together, as in going to *sleep*, and no falling in love. Easy peasy.

Wes pressed the button for the top floor and leaned against the elevator wall. "It's a meeting with the primary director on *Honor* number four that I've named *Honor Code*. It's about a soldier who writes secret messages and codes to his officers while hiding undercover with the enemy. He sends messages to his girl with those same codes, but she doesn't know what they say until he leads her on a journey toward finding out how to decipher the letters."

I smiled at him, watching while his eyes lit up explaining his story. "Sounds really romantic."

He grinned and waggled his eyebrows. "That's the idea. It gets the women hooked on movies that are typically geared towards men. Blood, violence, things blowing up, the military, espionage, things a man's man can really wrap his head around."

I nodded and followed him as he led me to a quaint table for four. A man in a suit and a petite blonde were already sitting.

"Mr. Underwood, Mrs. Underwood," Wes held out a hand to shake each of their hands. "Good to see you. This is my date, Mia Saunders."

I shook both their hands, and Wes held out my chair. I beamed up at him and his eyes softened momentarily before turning back to his business persona. The pretty blonde to my left said her name was Jennifer, and complimented me on my dress. It was actually a pretty tame cocktail dress. Royal blue jersey with a deep V to offer a nice dose of cleavage, but other than that, it wrapped at the front, tied at the side, and didn't have any other embellishments. I wore my hair down and had flat ironed it leaving it a shiny black sheet of ebony down my back. The best part of the outfit was the shoes.

Ms. Croft might look like Mary Poppins, but she must have had a gold card membership at Prada, Gucci, and Louis Vuitton, and scoured over the latest trends because she was right on point with these LV ankle booties.

If I didn't make it a year with this gig, at the very least I'd have some serious cash in designer shoes and clothes I could hock if I had to. These shoes alone were listed as twelve hundred and fifty dollars online. It may sound gold-diggerish, but I had to check.

"The dress is nothing, check out the shoes!" I leaned out a foot and we instantly started gabbing about her outfit, the designer, and what she did all day. Basically, not a whole lot. She was official arm candy and spent her days making sure Mr. Underwood's needs were met. I figured that meant she did what she wanted all day, made sure his cook made what he wanted, his maid ironed his clothes and kept his house clean and kept herself, his sparkly piece of ass, waxed, buffed, and primed to go when he got home from work all day.

"It's true; I don't know what to do with myself," Jen whispered. Yep, in twenty minutes we were already on a first name basis, and she was telling me her problems. I had that kind of face. Turned out she originally met her husband, whom she married only a year ago at the tender age of twenty-three—

he's thirty-eight—when she was cast as an extra in one of his movies. Apparently, it was love at first sight or lust at first sight. I laughed internally at my own joke.

Twisting my lips to the side, I leaned closer. “Why don't you volunteer or something. Got any hobbies?”

Her big blue doe eyes blinked happily. “I love to swim. I swim every day!” and it looked like it too. Her body was svelte but not in the anorexic way that seemed to be the theme in Hollywood. She definitely had the fake ta-tas, but they looked good on her size fourish frame.

“You could volunteer at a local ‘Y’?” I offered, but she scrunched up her face and shook her head.

“I don't think Jay would be okay with that.”

I mulled it over for a minute. “Do you like kids?”

Again, eyes lit up like the candles on a fifty year old's birthday cake. “I love children! Believe it or not, I used to teach preschool before I met Jay.” She looked over at her husband, and her smile widened. I caught his gaze when it slid to her, and he winked then continued nonstop in his conversation with Wes. She turned to me happy as could be. It was almost infectious how cheerful she was.

“Why can't you work with kids, or better yet, have some of your own?”

Her head slammed back as if struck, then she looked at Jay and then back at me. “We've only been married a year, and we only dated a few months before that. Don't you think it's too soon?” she said, though I could tell her wheels were turning.

I shrugged and took a hefty sip of my wine. “Doesn't matter what I think. It only matters what the two of you think and want. If you want kids, you're young, have at it. Besides, he's fifteen years older than you. That's got to slow down some swimmers. Could take a while.” I leaned back nonchalantly.

As Jen thought about it she became physically excited with her enthusiasm. Her back went straight, her knees started bouncing, and she couldn't stop fidgeting, or smiling for that matter. Her eyes were locked on her husband. Again he turned, looked at her, but this time he held up a finger to Wes to pause whatever they were talking about. I'd started tuning them out when I realized that Jennifer wasn't a soulless bimbo.

“What is it, darling?” Jay asked his wife.

She smiled wide and I swear, that smile could bring peace to the Middle East. “Just happy. And, I can't wait to talk to you when we get home,” she leaned a hand over and placed it over his on the table. He leaned forward and pecked her lips then nuzzled her nose.

“Is it anything that can't wait?” he asked with concern, all eyes on her, his focus redirected completely.

She kissed him softly and shook her head. “Nope, it's good. Very good.”

Wes leaned over and slid an arm around me. “Anything I should know about?” he asked

conspiratorially.

“I’ll totally give up the goods later,” I whispered in his ear referring to the gossip.

“I’m counting on it,” he nuzzled my neck. “And I want to know what was up with that, too,” he gestured with a head tilt to the happy couple mooning over one another. I laughed at his blatant innuendo.

Dinner continued without a hitch. Apparently, I’d helped keep Jen busy which allowed Jay to feel at ease with discussing the upcoming movie. Turned out, he was going to let Wes direct a lot of the heavier dialogue scenes between the couple and possibly even the bedroom romantic scenes. I found that hysterical and laughed when he made his announcement.

Wes’s eyes shot to mine and narrowed. “Sorry, I remembered something funny from earlier, don’t mind me,” I covered, but I could tell by the way Wes tucked me into his side when dessert was delivered that I was going to get an earful.

“What was so funny?” he asked when Jay went out for a cigarette and Jennifer went with him.

Twiddling with my napkin, I leaned closer to him. “I’m sorry. I just thought it was funny that Mr. I’m-Not-In-A-Position-To-Have-A-Relationship is going to be directing romantic scenes. It just seemed out of your wheelhouse is all,” I giggled.

He looked as though I’d ruffled his feathers when he brought up a hand to cup my neck. “You weren’t complaining last night.” His voice lowered to that sultry timber I recalled him having when he was issuing the rules. So much so it sent fire shooting through me to warm and soften the space between my legs.

I leaned very close, so close my lips were only an inch or two from his. Definitely close enough he could feel my breath against his lips as I spoke.

“Last night was fucking...” He inhaled and licked his lips. They looked good enough to eat, and I wanted a taste so bad. “...except,” I added, “we didn’t fuck.” I let the word ‘fuck’ roll off my lips with a hard ‘k’ sound. “We had sex, not romance.”

Wes’s hand came up to clasp my neck while a thumb caressed my cheekbone as his lips came impossibly close but still didn’t touch mine. I could practically taste the coffee on his breath from the after-dinner drink. “Is that what you want? Romance?” he asked, his lips barely hovering against mine.

“No, I wanna fuck...” I barely got the word out before a heavy hand landed on my shoulder.

“You two love birds!” Jay Underwood broke the moment, and we both slumped back into our chairs. I was beginning to think I’d never feel the lush taste of his mouth, the pressure of his lips against mine, and I wanted it...dammit! I was getting very impatient for it, but damned if I was going to make the first move.

Wes covered his mouth with his hand. I’m pretty sure it was to conceal silent laughter.

“Later sweetheart; we’ve got all night,” he promised.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve heard that before,” I fake yawned and lifted my tea and took a sip. Lukewarm. Blech.

His mouth dropped open and he shook his head, green eyes dazzling in the candlelight. “Challenge accepted.”

Chapter 5

We barely made it through the door when Wes twirled me around and used his body to press me into the wall. His lips went instantly to the sensitive skin of my neck. He licked a long trail from my clavicle up to behind my ear. The hair on the back of my neck stood up, goose bumps rising on my flesh as I closed my eyes. Wes's hands went under my skirt and over my bare ass, as he lifted one leg and then the other with no trouble at all, wrapping my legs around him. He hoisted my tall, curvy frame against his and pressed me harder into the wall at my back.

"I'm going to be so deep inside you, you'll feel me in your throat," he promised.

"Fuck," slipped from my lips as he carried me toward my room.

"Exactly." He bit down on my neck, trailing his teeth along the slender column.

Every nerve, every pore, every molecule was focused on merging with this man.

Without preamble, he dropped me onto the bed and stood staring down. "Take off your dress," he demanded. His eyes were black, filled to the brim with lust. I could tell he was taking a moment because he clenched and unclenched his hands into fists, the tendons in his neck bulged with his desire.

I whipped the dress over my head and stood up on my knees in a matching deep midnight blue bra and thong. At seeing me exposed, he sucked in a harsh breath and let it out with a hiss.

"Your turn. Lose the suit," I said while trailing my hands down to cup each breast. His jaw clenched as he made quick work of dropping the jacket and tie, and opening the dress shirt to reveal that sun-kissed chest I love so much. I bit down on my lip. "All of it. I want it gone." My voice sounded raspy and needy.

Wes grinned and slowly removed his belt and loosened his pants. He took a condom out of his pocket, ripped it with his teeth, and placed it on his straining erection, all without ever losing eye contact. I lifted my hand behind my back and undid the clasp of my bra. Just as his pants fell to the floor, so did my bra.

"Christ, I can hardly look at you," his voice held awe. "So fucking gorgeous." He ground his teeth loud enough I could hear it.

My eyebrow rose and I gazed at all that was his naked glory. Tall, tan, muscles for days, and a thick hard cock ready to please. "You're not so bad yourself," I offered while enjoying the view.

"Prove it," he taunted with a grin. My words from last night coming back to me proved he paid very close attention to our interactions. That made me happy, giddy in a way I didn't want to think too much about.

Crawling to the edge of bed, I placed my hands on his hard chest. I leaned down and licked the flat disc of his nipple. He moaned, then hissed low in his throat when I bit down on the bit of flesh. His hands tunneled into my hair. I brought my face close to his and hovered around his lips, close enough he could feel my breath against his lips. He licked his own, preparing for that first touch. I

didn't give it to him. Instead I kissed just the edge of his mouth.

"Are you toying with me?" he asked, a hint of playfulness in his tone.

I moved to the side of his cheek, running my chin along it, then licked and nibbled on his earlobe. "Whatever do you mean?" I whispered, making sure to blow enough air against the sensitive spot so he'd understand my intention.

His fingers gripped my hips and looped into my panties, tugging them down unceremoniously. I gasped when the air hit my wet center.

"I think you are," he countered then pushed me back onto the bed. I fell in a whoosh against the comfy cloud of blankets.

Just as I opened my eyes, his hands were on my knees. He opened me wide, saw my aching moist sex and groaned. He trailed one finger through the wetness. A whimper slipped past my lips when he twirled one finger against the tight, aching knot of nerves. "I'm going to devour you." His eyes flashed to mine. "But first, I need to be inside you."

He centered himself over my cleft and pushed just the tip inside. I arched wanting more, needing more. Using the strength of his upper body, he hovered over me. "Watch me take you the first time," he said, his voice a sexy, possessive growl. And I did. Watched, as he took me inch by torturous inch. The lips of my sex were stretched wide over his girth, his thickness making me feel full, stretched to capacity, more so than any lover before.

I groaned, my head tipping back, no longer able to watch while he pushed that last inch inside. He was already so deep. "Mia," he whispered, his voice tight. My eyes snapped open and stared at his lust-filled gaze. He braced himself on his elbows and his hands cupped my cheeks. He reared his hips back and slammed home as his lips took mine. United in that moment as one body, there was no Mia or Wes. There was just us.

The kiss was fiery hot, wet, and overwhelming. He plunged his tongue into my mouth the same way his cock rammed into my body. With precision, depth, and so much pleasure, everything that I was, quaked with the effort.

I wrapped my legs and arms around him, holding onto him as he drilled into me, his cock reaching places inside me I didn't even know I had. He'd triggered feelings so intense I cried out and clung to him as the first orgasm raced through my body.

"Fuck yeah, Mia. You squeeze me so good. Again, sweetheart." Wes rode me through the orgasm but still didn't find his own release. Shit, the man was a stallion in the sack. I swear I drew all the aces in the deck when my aunt lined me up with him.

Wes sucked on my lips then pulled himself out of me. Before I could protest, he turned me around and yanked my hips up. "Perfect fucking ass. Damn, Mia." He smacked one cheek then plowed back into the heat between my legs, even before the sting of his slap left my skin.

"Jesus, fuck, you know what you're doing," I moaned and let my upper body fall onto my forearms.

He gripped my hips and set up a punishing rhythm. I could hear the sounds of our flesh smacking against one another. “Need that squeeze on my dick,” Wes growled as he leaned over my body and reached a hand between my legs. His fingers zeroed in on my ‘O-trigger’ and I was gone. Bucking wildly, the walls of my sex clamped down on his rock hard cock until he roared. Three swift plunges more and his entire body stilled, nestled flat against my ass as he pulsed inside me.

Wes collapsed over me, his breath coming in fast pants against the hair of my neck. We were both winded, lost in our combined pleasure. He rolled off then tugged me to his chest. We spent the next few minutes making out like teenagers. The room smelled of the ocean, sex, and the faint remnants of my perfume, Tresor. Pretty much, perfection. If you could bottle the scent, I’d wear it every day.

Lying together, I curved into his chest. “So, tell me something...”

Wes chuckled. “Could you be more specific?”

I shrugged. “Tell me anything, something about you.” With one finger, I traced circles over his abdomen and pecs.

He sighed. “Huh, well, you know I love to write movies.” I nodded. “And surf.” He winked and I grinned. “You met my parents, and my nanny. Well, she was my nanny when I was a boy, now she runs the house.”

“Ms. Croft?”

He nodded. “What else is there?”

I looked at him with narrowed eyes. “Uh, a lot. Do you have any siblings?”

“A sister. Older than me. Married, no kids yet. She’s a grade school teacher. Husband’s the principal at the school.”

“That pretty much answers how they met.” I wagged my eyebrows, and he winked. “What’s her name?”

“Jeananna. How about you? Any sibs?”

I laughed at his slang term. “Yeah, Maddy, well, Madison. Younger by five years. She’s nineteen and attending school in Las Vegas.”

“So why’d you move out here?”

I snuggled in closer to him. “Needed a change. And I thought acting was my calling. Still do, but...” I didn’t want to go into my life story.

“But?” he prompted and I shook my head. “If you wanted to be an actress, how did you end up an escort?”

“Money.” I shrugged. “You’re my first, you know,” I confided. He turned towards me so we were facing one another. His face filled with confusion. “My first client,” I finished.

“Ah, and how’s it going so far?” he smiled.

I feigned nonchalance. “Eh, ‘bout a seven out of ten, I’d say.”

He rolled over on top of me, pinning my arms to the side. “Hey!” I chided with a big smile plastered across my face.

“A seven! You give me a seven even though you have nothing to compare it to?” He laid a messy kiss against my lips. His hands stroked down my ribs and started wriggling. Instantly, I howled with laughter. Once he saw how ticklish I was, he went for gold, digging into my ribs, waist, and thighs until I was thrashing around, screaming for him to stop, laughter contorting my vision.

“Admit it? I’m a big, fat ten!” He slowed then stopped his torture.

“Okay, okay,” I took deep breaths of blessed air into my lungs. “I’ll say you’re a solid eight.” He wiggled his fingers again. “Okay a nine!” I screamed, and he continued his assault. “Nine point five!” He stopped.

“Nine point five, room for improvement...” His eyes sparkled with mirth. “I’ll take it and turn it into a ten before the month is over!”

For the next few days, I was left alone because Wes was working in his studio on *Honor Code*. He still came home each night. We’d share dinner together, watch a movie, or he’d read a book. Then later he’d ravish me before one of us had to get up and go to our own room. The routine worked better than I’d imagined it would. I had a lot of fun, and an even more phenomenal sex, without the risk of pesky emotions getting in the way. This escort business kicked ass.

I flopped over to the side of the bed after giving Wes one helluva ride.

“Now that, sweetheart, that was a fucking ten!” he praised. Laughing, I pinched his nipple playfully. “Ouch! Hellcat!”

“You’re crazy, you know that?” He leaned over and kissed me, a hand sliding into my hair pulling me on top of him. “Again?”

“Can’t help it, you make my dick harder than a surfboard,” He licked into my mouth and squeezed the fleshy handle at my hip.

“Did you seriously just compare your dick to a surfboard?”

He stopped kissing me and looked at me, a serious set to his gaze. “I did, didn’t I?”

I nod, my eyebrows rising toward my hairline.

“Your body makes me stupid. I forget how to string two words together,” he offered as an excuse.

“Whatever! I’m sore and need sleep. So get up, and mosey your sexy ass back to your bedroom.” I slid off him once more and face planted into the pillow, snuggling into the comforter.

Wes’s hand slid up and down my back. “Did you forget something, sweetheart?” he said, humor

coating every word. I opened one eye as he stared down at me. “You’re in my bed,” he finished with a smirk.

“Damn it all to hell in a handbasket,” I huffed, throwing the covers back and hopping out of bed as he got comfortable.

Stomping out of his room completely bare-ass naked, I heard him call out. “Tomorrow is brunch with my folks. Be ready at ten!”

“Bite me!” I yelled over my shoulder. Just as I turned the corner toward my room, I ran right into Judi.

Her eyes went wide as she took in my naked form. “Blimey, dearest me!” she gasped then covered her eyes. The surprise brought out her accent in spades.

I cringed then rushed around her. “Sorry Ms. Croft, didn’t mean to scare you like that,” I offered. Down the hall I could hear Wes, the rat bastard, laughing his ass off. He must have heard me get caught by Judi. Great. She already thinks I’m a hired whore, now I’ve proven it.

“You’re looking lovely this afternoon, Mia,” Wes’s mother praised, pulling me into a hug. It was an odd sensation having a motherly type hug me as if she genuinely wanted to give her affection.

“Thank you, Mrs. Channing. Your home is very beautiful.” She smiled and I looked around the sunroom that was set up for Sunday brunch. A steward offered me a mimosa in a crystal champagne flute.

I took a look around at the room. It was decorated with elegance and luxury in mind. Rich golds and cream tones were paired with burgundy and navy throughout the décor. The table was set with pristine white china, a lace pattern crafted into the edge. More silverware than needed for three courses flanked each plate. A lush bouquet of roses sat in the center of the table giving it a summery feel even though it was January. I guess it didn’t really matter, LA wasn’t the Midwest. Like back home in Vegas, we didn’t have crazy cold days where the temperature dropped below zero. I’m pretty sure it’s never been below thirty degrees. At least it hasn’t in my twenty-four years of life. Hell, I’ve only seen snow a couple of times myself.

“There you are!” A smiling blonde rushed in. A tall, very slim man with tortoiseshell glasses trailed behind her.

“Hey, sis,” Wes greeted her, then pulled the pretty woman into his arms. She drew back and clasped his jaw.

“Lookin’ good, Wes.”

Wes smiled wide. Wider than I’d seen other than when he was tickling me. “Sis, I’d like you to meet my *friend*, Mia.” He placed a hand low on my back.

I held out my hand. “Hi, Jeananna, right?”

She nodded and shook my hand. “So...” she drew out the word looking at her brother then at me. “Friend, eh?”

Wes chuckled. “Yes, Sis, *friend*.” He emphasized the word ‘friend’.

She rolled her eyes. “Whatever,” she said as her blonde hair bobbed and her green eyes sparkled with happiness.

After full introductions were done and we were at the table, that’s where the fun really began.

“So Mia, what is it that you do?” Jeananna asked me. “Did you two meet on the job?”

I looked over at Wes and could see he was at a loss for words. “You could say that,” I hedged shoveling in a bite of quiche.

Without preamble, Claire Channing butted in. “Oh please. Of course you met on the job. Mia’s an escort. I picked her out myself. Don’t I have the best taste, Wes?” Claire’s tone was nonchalant, unbothered by the fact that in normal circumstances, it was unusual to pick out an escort for your son. Definitely high on the bizarre-meter. .

Jeananna’s eyes widened in shock. “You’re a call girl?”

Both Wes and I spoke at the same time. “What did you say?” I said as Wes scolded, “No she’s not!”

I blanched. That quiche suddenly felt heavy in my gut. “So you’re not sleeping with my brother?” she asked not a hint of malice to her tone. She could’ve been asking about the weather.

“Um...” I started to respond.

“That’s none of your business.” Wes stood and threw his napkin on the table. Redness colored his cheeks and neck. “I will not have you insinuate such hateful things about Mia.”

Jeananna stood up and ran around the table. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. It wasn’t intentional! I just heard the word escort and you know, came to the wrong conclusion. I didn’t mean anything by it.” She worried her lip.

Claire stood up, “Now, now, Jeananna didn’t mean any harm. It was a simple mistake,” she placated but Wes wasn’t having it.

“Not simple,” he grated. “Mia is my friend, and she may have been hired to help me get through a month’s worth of tedious lunches, dinners, and events, but she’s not a lady of the night.” His eyes snapped to mine. “Sorry, sweetheart,” his eyes shone bright with remorse. I knew then I had to make it right.

I took a deep breath in. “Look, it was a simple mistake. I thought the same thing when my Aunt Millie broached the subject. But I decided to give it a shot, and I’m glad I did. Meeting Wes, and now you all has been quite the highlight of the experience for me.” Claire’s eyes warmed and she took her seat, as did Jeananna after she hugged her brother. “Besides, have you seen the shoes I scored?” Right then I turned in my seat and put my leg out to the sky like my dance teacher taught me to do back in

high school. “Hot as hell!”

Claire’s hand went over her mouth, covering her laughter. Jeananna looked at my heels with a hint of envy. Her husband didn’t say anything but stared at my leg as if it held the answers to the universe, and Wes’s dad clapped him on the shoulder with a “Well done, Son!”

“Anyway, I want to know more about you guys.” I changed the subject and took a sip of my champagne and OJ. “Wes here tells me you’re a teacher, and you’re a principal. How does that work out?”

The rest of the afternoon went off without a hitch. Claire and Weston, *the Second*, along with Jeananna and her husband, Peter, shared story after story of Wes as a baby and growing up in the Channing family. I laughed more in that afternoon than I had in the last year. The lighthearted vibe was almost too much to bear for someone like me who never had a real family unit myself. It had always been my drunk father, and my baby sister, Maddy, who I spent most of my childhood and teen years raising. Even though I knew Daddy loved us more than anything, he could never stop his gambling or drinking away the memories of what our life had been when Mom was around.

When we left, Claire made Wes promise to bring me back next Sunday. He agreed. As we made our way to his Jeep, he hugged me to his side and planted a sweet kiss on my lips. “That was fun, you know?”

I smiled back, warmth filled my heart to bursting. “It was. One of the best days I’ve had in a long time. Thank you for bringing me.”

He grinned and winked. “Anytime, sweetheart. They liked you.”

I buckled up and looked out the window as he drove out the gates back down the winding road out of their posh neighborhood.

“I liked them. Very much. You have a cool family. You’re lucky.”

His lips turned down into a frown. “What’s your family like?” he asked so softly I could barely hear him over the sound of the wind whipping my hair around.

Leaning back, I watched the beach in the distance and the waves crashing over the shore. “My sister Maddy is amazing. She’s brilliant. Going to be a scientist. I spent most of my time growing up taking care of her.”

“Where were your parents?”

“Parent,” I corrected. His eyes shot to mine briefly. Within them I could see remorse and sadness. Not for himself, but for me. I turned away. “My mom was a showgirl in Vegas. Left my Dad and us girls when I was ten, Maddy only five.”

Wes worried his thumb nail but kept his eyes on the road. “She never came back?”

“Nope,” I shook my head. “And because of that, my dad started drinking. A lot. Gambling, even more.”

He grabbed my hand and twined our fingers together before pulling it against his lips kissing the

top of my hand. “Is that why you’re doing what you’re doing?”

I could’ve lied and told him some made up bullshit story, but that would’ve ruined what we had—the complete and perfect honesty we’d come to rely on in order to make this situation work for us both. Instead of responding, I just nodded.

“Want to tell me about it?” His tone was soft and pleading.

It was too soon. I wasn’t ready to share my burden with someone. He was such a good guy he’d just want to fix it. Pay off the debt or something crazy. It’s my problem. My father and my own constant desire to save him. I have to be the one to do this.

“Will you tell me someday?”

“Yes,” and that was as much as I could promise for now.

Chapter 6

“Wake up, sweetheart,” I heard right before the tingling burn of Wes’s hand met the bare skin of my ass.

“Jesus, Christ,” I jumped up grabbing at the comforter to cover my unmentionables. “What the hell is wrong with you?” I yelled.

I was greeted with a grin instead of an apology. “Come on, get your suit on and some comfy clothes. We’re hitting the beach!” Wes exclaimed, clearly thrilled with the prospect of a new day and visiting the coast.

He’d been working his ass off the past week. I only saw him late in the evening, excluding one unbearably boring business dinner. Though in the meantime, I’ve had lunch with Jennifer Underwood, the director’s wife on his current movie, and Wes’s mother, Claire. Everyone seems to be taking things in stride. Wes didn’t have a problem with it either. Said it was great I was making new friends while he was busy. He seemed to be more concerned with me being bored all day rather than the potential blurring of any emotional lines by me hanging out with his family and getting close to his coworker’s wife.

“What do you mean we’re going to the beach? You realize it’s January and cold as hell?” I pulled the comforter over my head and slouched back into the cozy hidey hole it offered.

I felt the mattress dip, caging me in. Wes pulled the blankets off my head and did a ninja-like maneuver getting both of my hands locked over my head with one hand. He leaned down and kissed me, slow, wet, and so deep my toes curled. The space between my thighs started to heat and throb. Jesus, the man could kiss. He pulled the blanket further down and nudged at my nipples, first with his nose, then pulling one tip into his mouth, drawing from it.

“Now, this is how you wake a girl,” I said through a low moan.

He rewarded me with deep, penetrating suction from his mouth against my breast. “I’ll remember that next time. If I get you off, will you be in a better mood?” His tongue came out and flicked just the tip of my nipple while playing with it. The fingers of his other hand plucked and twisted my breast’s twin.

I nodded dumbly, too lost in the sensation that was building, a slow burn that made me weak and incapable of speech.

He chuckled against my breast. “If I put my mouth on you, give you the relief you seek, will you do what I say?”

It was impossible to deny him. With his mouth and fingers worshipping my tits, I couldn’t help but give him anything he asked. “Yes, God yes!” I moaned. His head moved from my breast down my ribs where he bit and nibbled, along the center of my abdomen, until he was *there*. Right there, giving me all that I wanted and more. Wes could have been a gold medalist in the art of cunnilingus. He knew exactly when to give, when to bite, nip, suck, lick. And he did it with finesse. .

Bite.

Nip.

Suck.

Lick.

Followed by a swirl and flattening his tongue as he rubbed around the center of my pleasure over and over until I broke. My body arched, hands flying into his hair to hold him against my wet flesh. He growled as he ate, lost in the moment as much as I was. Possibly even more by the way he plunged his cock into me.

We didn't make it to the beach for another hour.

When we arrived, we were met by another man, a surf instructor named Amil.

"You brought me here so I could watch you guys surf?" I asked immediately after shaking the hand of Mr. Surftastic. My tone was not pleasant.

Wes looked at Amil, then at me, and grinned. His smirk was mischievous, and I knew in that moment that I was in for it.

"No, as a matter of fact, I brought you here because *we* are going to surf. Amil is going to help me show you the ropes. He also has all the equipment and ladies' wetsuits. He runs the Surf Shack farther down the beach." He pointed to a spot far off on the horizon.

I looked at Wes, his blond hair blowing in the chilly morning air. A sparkle in his green eyes made them look almost emerald in the early light of day. He was as sweet on the eyes as the heavenly waves hitting the beach.

"You're serious then?"

He nodded and gestured to Amil. The instructor turned around, giving me an amazing view of his tanned muscled back, and pulled out a wetsuit that looked to be about my size. "Should fit. You're what, five ten, a hundred and forty pounds?"

"Five nine, and didn't your mother teach you that you don't ever discuss weight with a woman?"

Amil shook his head and laughed. "Can't say that she did."

"She fell down on her job," I said deadpan. "It's rude, and women hate it. You married?" He shook his head. "Girlfriend?" He shook his head again, still grinning. "Case in point." I clapped my hands together as if I'd just proven Einstein's theory of relativity.

Wes laughed out loud beside me. "She's right, dude," Wes said. I was a little taken aback by his use of the very Californian word. Not that Wes wasn't a cool guy, he was. Very much so. It's just, he's always had a bit of formality.

"Sorry Mia. My deepest apologies, but I wanted to make sure the suit would fit." He handed me a black wetsuit.

After repeated attempts at getting myself into the impossibly tight wetsuit, which I dubbed my Cat Woman suit, we finally got the sucker on and in place. My boobs were smashed against my chest and the neoprene fabric. I wanted nothing more than to unzip the top and let those babies loose! Looking down at myself, I couldn't help but snicker. The suit reminded me of catwoman from *Batman Returns*. I felt ridiculous even though Wes's heated gaze told me I did *not* 'in fact' look ridiculous. More like he was ready to rip the sucker right off me. Amil however didn't appreciate the lack of attention we were giving to his surf instruction. I just wanted to get out there and try this damn thing already!

Finally Amil was done with his "art of surfing" instruction and Wes led me down the beach. He held his surfboard and mine as we trudged through the sand. "I can carry my own board, you know?"

His eyes twinkled as the sun caught them. "I'm certain there's a lot of things you can do, sweetheart. But, I wouldn't feel like a man if I didn't help my girl. Besides, you're being a really good sport."

His girl?

Did he just say that?

"My girl?" I asked before the thought could turn into something wickedly emotional.

He grinned. "Yeah, you know what I mean." He shrugged.

Um, no, I fucking didn't know what he meant. Just as I was about to dig further into this landmine, Amil interrupted us.

"Okay, we're going to do some paddling and practical lessons out there on the calmer section of water."

"Come on, don't be a scairdy cat," he said, adding a mutilated meow sound for effect. Men just can't make kitty noises. They end up sounding more like an animal dying than a cute little furball.

As I was about to protest, Wes smacked my ass hard and pushed me forward towards the ocean. He was a perfect gentleman in the ocean, though. He helped lead me to the appropriate area in the water as well as worked with me on the positions, poses, and the balancing I was attempting. We decided I should attempt to get up on my knees first and get the hang of it before attempting to stand.

Once the newness and nerves wore off, I found I could actually ride small waves when on my belly. It took over an hour to get up on my knees, but I couldn't have been more proud of myself. As I was on my knees riding a wave, I could hear Wes hooting and hollering. I'd never felt more pride in myself than in that moment. Usually, I was cheering on my sister, Maddy, or my best friend, Ginelle, and her dancing. Even when I was in contemporary dance and had kickass performances I still didn't feel this sense of accomplishment. Maybe now it was because of the tall six-foot plus hunk waiting on the shore as I paddled in. His surfboard was sticking straight out of the ground. I shuffled towards him, dropping my board on the sand as I ran further up the shore.

"Did you see it?" I screamed with glee as I ran toward him.

"Of course I did! It was awesome! You're a natural, sweetheart," he said with open arms. I

barreled into his chest knocking us both to the ground. Instantly, his lips were on mine, his hands in my wet hair holding me to him. He tasted of salt and the sea. Magical. We continued making out for a few minutes before we were interrupted by a deep, throat-clearing cough. Wes's hands had moved from my head and were firmly gripping my ass, his erection pressing right where I wanted it most. We pulled apart slowly, both of us panting and smiling like loons to see the laughing face of Amil.

Wes helped me up and pulled me close, our wetsuits mashed together. "You were great," he said with pride, sliding a thumb along my cheek before giving me a soft peck on the lips.

"Thank you for teaching me. Can we come back?" I asked, excited at the prospect of battling the waves again.

"For you, anything. My sweet Mia."

Week three of my stay was filled with more boring business dinners and another swanky event. I didn't mind the events so much. It was nice moseying around, eating delectable treats and drinking expensive champagne and wine, but it wasn't exactly fun. Wes spent those evenings deep in conversation, working the room like the businessman he was.

He wasn't kidding when he said he didn't have time for a real relationship. The woman who commits to him is going to spend a lot of time alone. He'll need a woman who has a full life and career and is also happy to be his midnight girl—mostly available when he gets home, for a late night fuck and cuddle before falling into dreamland to then start all over again in the morning. A swift pang pierced my gut at the thought of Wes with another woman. Falling in love, getting married, having children, living happily ever after while I continued doing what? Being an escort?

I set down the puff pastry I picked up, and instead, chugged the entire rest of my glass of champagne.

"Wow, easy there, speed racer," Wes said as he hooked an arm around my waist and pulled me to his side. "You trying to get drunk?" His eyes narrowed but the hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth confirmed the playful intent.

"Why? You gonna take advantage of me if I am?" I asked with a saucy lilt and firm press of my tits into his chest.

He sucked in a breath, clasped me fully to his chest, then looked down. "Abso-fucking-lutely," he said with no humor whatsoever. Just the insinuation of him taking me dampened my panties.

"Don't turn me on. It's not fair when you have business to attend to." I pouted and kissed the side of his neck making sure to drag my lips along the column.

He groaned low in his throat and pressed his hips against me so that I could feel the heat and strength of his desire. "How the hell am I going to let you go in eight short days?" His eyes and the firm set of his jaw emphasized the serious nature of his statement.

I sucked in a sharp breath and looked intently into his eyes. The ones I had come to adore beyond all others. “It is what it is. What it has to be,” I reminded him.

He leaned forward and touched our foreheads together. “But what if I don’t want it to be?” He said the one thing that both of us agreed should remain unspoken. The thought, the mere suggesting of more, went against everything we’d negotiated when I signed the contract. It also had the potential for breaking the rules he’d set up that very first time we slept together over two weeks ago.

“Don’t,” I whispered, and he took in a slow breath then let it out. I could feel the moist warmth against the wetness of my lips.

“Okay, I won’t,” he said with a finality that spoke of his renewed commitment to keep this as it was meant to be. As it *had* to be.

There was no other option for me. Even if I wanted more, which I couldn’t wrap my head around right now, it wasn’t possible. I still needed a million dollars, and my dad still needed saving. There wasn’t anyone else but me to make that happen. I wouldn’t risk his life for the whisper of a chance at happiness. I’d never be able to forgive myself if I chose my own happiness over the life of my father. Regardless of the fact that he’s a drunk, that he spent too much of his time gambling and drinking away our financial stability, he was still one of the only people who truly loved me. And I’d never forsake it. Not even for Wes, as much as the thought filled my mind, heart, and soul with hope, it was not meant to be. I had a job to do, and I’d do it, or die trying.

“Come on, let’s dance,” Wes offered, letting the heavy moment slowly dissipate as he led me to the open floor. The event this evening was an introduction party for the future staff, crew, investors, and actors confirmed for the new movie Wes had been working his ass off on, *Honor Code*. This was the first night he could celebrate that achievement, and I was determined to make sure he did.

As he held me close, I thought about our time together. The last two plus weeks had been truly a dream come true. When my Aunt Millie offered me the job, I honestly believed I was selling a bit of my soul. Now that I’d had over two weeks to get used to the idea, and how I wanted things to go with future clients, I thought I’d be able to breeze through the next year. Possibly even make some contacts in the industry that I’d planned to break into once my year of servitude was up. Unless I loved it, then I’d just keep working, making the big bucks. Not that I’d see any of those dollars this year. I’d only kept a little to send off to Maddy for school necessities and enough in my bank account to keep my rent paid on my tiny apartment.

I figured if I got paid a hundred thousand over the next twelve months I would be ahead of the million dollar debt by two hundred thousand dollars. That meant I could pay Maddy’s school tuition of a hundred thousand completely and have another hundred thousand to work with. That would give me enough to send my sister three thousand a month for living expenses for her and dad, pay my thousand dollar rent, and still have a few thousand in the bank each month to sit on.

Of course, my time would not be my own, which would eventually grate along every nerve I have, but I hoped the rest of my clients would be like Wes. Work a lot, need me very little. Then I could spend my time chilling in their swank homes.

Leaving Wes was going to be difficult though. I wondered if it would be that way with all my clients. I’d come to appreciate the time Wes and I had together, and the sex, which was off the charts

hot. The thought of what he'd done to me just this morning made my cheeks heat. The way he took me up against the tiled wall of the shower...Jesus, that man could fuck.

"Hey, you look flushed; you feeling okay?" He stopped dancing, and I pulled away from his intense gaze before leaning my head on his chest. His heartbeat lulled me back into a contemplative state. I shimmied my hips telling him I wasn't done with our dance. I wanted to feel his arms around me. He made me feel like I was the only girl in the entire world who could hold his attention.

"I'm fine. It's warm. You make me warmer." I leaned my chin on his breastbone and looked up just as he looked down.

Wes's gaze locked on my face, his eyes taking in the features of my face. "You know, you're probably the most precious woman I've ever known besides my mom and sister?"

"Precious?" I giggled.

"Yeah. In other words..." He leaned down and slid his cheek alongside mine until his lips settled against my ear, "...you matter to me."

I hugged him tight, *so* tight. I wanted him to know just how much he mattered to me too, but, I couldn't find the words. They were clogged in my throat as I clung to his back, nails digging in through his suit jacket. He pulled back dislodging my extreme hold.

"Hey, hey. We don't have to go there, but Mia, you have to know." I shook my head not wanting to hear him profess any feelings that I couldn't reciprocate. Wes cupped both of my cheeks in his warm hands. "Mia, listen to me..." I sucked in a breath and waited for him to say what he needed to say. "Just because we won't be together as a couple when you leave here, doesn't mean we can't stay in touch. Continue to be friends." I could tell by the tone in his voice that he meant every word.

A sense of relief swirled in the air around me forcing a huge smile to spread across my face. "Really?"

He nodded. "Yes, really, sweetheart," he promised. "Now, let's get a drink and enjoy the rest of the evening. They're going to announce the cast assignments for *Honor Code* even though most of us already know. It's part of the fun," he winked, and I nodded.

Once we reached the bar, I ran smack dab into Jennifer Underwood. "Mia, oh my God, I've been looking all over for you," she said hurriedly then pulled me over to the side. Wes's eyes met mine, concern evident in his narrowed gaze. I shook my head with a 'don't worry' gesture.

"What's going on, Jen?"

Jennifer leaned forward conspiratorially then looked around to make sure no one heard what she was about to tell me. "I'm late," she said then bit her lip.

"I'm sorry?" I offered not knowing what she was talking about.

She sucked in a resigned sigh, then leaned forward again to whisper. "No, I'm *late* late. As in my cycle," she finished.

Then it clicked. Oh shit! She's *late*! When we met for lunch a week after the dinner we'd had

where we first met, she thanked me profusely for changing her life. Apparently, when she went home and told her husband, Jay, that she wanted to try for a baby, he was beyond thrilled. She said he'd wanted to start trying on their wedding night, but since they'd gotten married so quickly, he figured she wanted to wait. Now as far as I knew, they were going at it like bunny rabbits trying to make a baby.

I gripped Jen's hands tight and brought her close. "How many days? You just started trying."

"I know!" her voice rose over the sound of other conversations, and a few men in suits looked our way. I dragged her further over into a corner. "I'm five days late now, and I've never been even one day late before!"

"Holy shit!" I let out.

"I know!"

"Oh, my God!"

"I know!" she squealed and we both started jumping up and down like small children, our heels clacking against the tile floor. I hugged her close. I'd never really been affectionate with many women, just Ginelle and Maddy for the most part, but I felt a connection to Jennifer. She was good people, and I considered her very much a friend.

"You're going to have to keep me updated when I leave." She nodded. That was one of the things I kept from Wes. I didn't tell him I'd told Jennifer what I was to him, but I swore her to secrecy; so far, she'd been trustworthy. "This is awesome. What did Jay say?"

"He wants to tell everyone I'm already pregnant, even though we don't know for sure." She rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Men are stupid," I offered and she agreed. "So if you got prego right away, my guess is you're only two weeks, so a home test might not give accurate results for another couple weeks. Your best bet if you're dying to know is get bloodwork done and see the doctor. I'd imagine that's the most conclusive test."

"That's what I figured. I made an appointment for next Friday. Then I'll know a few days after that for sure. Unless, of course, my period comes." Her face fell into a frown.

I hugged her close and then started walking back over to the guys. "Well, let's just be positive and hope for the best, okay?" She nodded, instantly happy again.

We made it back to the men just as a horde of people were gathering around the small stage set up in the giant ballroom. The quartet stopped playing. Wes grabbed my bicep and handed me another glass of champagne. "Everything okay?"

"More than okay."

"Anything I should know about?" An eyebrow rose into his hairline.

I shook my head. "Nope. Stay tuned."

He chuckled then led me over to the stage as the emcee started announcing roles in Wes's movie.

“Are you excited?” I asked.

“I already know who’s been cast,” he grinned.

“So what? Now everyone else will know, and everyone will talk about it for months! I’m excited, and I only know the premise of the story.”

Wes’s hand slid to my shoulder where he cupped it, easing me into his side as we watched people head up to the stage. Each took a bow when their name and assigned character were announced.

“I can’t wait to find out who’s going to be the soldier, Will, the one who sends his true love, Alison, the letters. Oh, who’s going to play Allison?” I turned to look up as he looked down.

“No one’s going to play Allison,” he responded.

“Huh? But I thought that was the love of his life?” I’m certain my expression was confused as my eyes narrowed in on Wes’s handsome face. He grinned and gestured to the stage.

“Watch.” He lifted his chin just as a beautiful raven-haired vixen approached the stage. I knew that actress! Gina DeLuca. She was tall and thin yet still had some curves that wouldn’t quit. Every man loved her, and every woman wanted to be her. What made her even better was that she had a heart of gold and represented herself to young women in a positive light.

Then I was shocked from my hardcore clapping when the emcee introduced the actress. “Gina DeLuca to play the female lead, Mia Culvers!”

My mouth dropped open. “No way!” I turned to Wes.

“Surprise!” His corresponding smile was absolutely stunning. Something I’d never forget, ever.

“You changed the main character’s name to Mia?”

“I did,” he said not adding anything else to make me understand why.

I blinked a few times, moisture filling my eyes as I looked at Wes. “Why?”

“Because you matter.”

Chapter 7

Holy fucking shit. I mattered. My heart filled with happiness as I thought back to a few nights ago when Wes admitted that he named the main character of his movie after me. He even changed what she looked like. She was supposed to be a slight pixie of a woman named Allison, who was blonde and blue-eyed. Most certainly not a busty, raven-haired Rubinesque beauty, like Gina DeLuca...or me.

I wasn't sure what to think or how to take that information. We agreed to not getting attached. Although if I was honest, I couldn't say I wasn't attached to Wes. I definitely was. Did I love him? I didn't think so. This whole time I'd been so focused on not falling in love that the option of opening my heart to him never presented itself.

The buzz of my phone broke me out of the constant loop of "what ifs" I'd been contemplating about Wes and me becoming a real couple. When it came right down to it that was not an option. He knew it, and so did I. That needed to be enough.

"Hello," I answered noting my Aunt Millie's name on the screen.

"Hi doll-face. How's life dipped in gold treating you?" My Aunt Millie's voice was filled with humor but only reminded me of my true station in life. I had been hired to do a job. That job bought me a life of luxury...for a one-month stay. It was not my own, nor would it ever be. I sighed loudly into the phone. "That good, huh?"

"No, it's fine. What's up?" I pulled a lock of hair and inspected the ends looking for splits. Time for a cut.

"I'm calling to tell you about your next client, dear." I could hear paper shuffling and the clacking of nails on a keyboard as she clucked her tongue.

"You will be heading to Seattle!" Never been there, could be fun, I thought, while she continued on. "This one is going to be interesting. "Alec Dubois is the client. Thirty-five, tall, dark, and handsome, fits the bill, but he's odd."

I refrained from commenting. I thought the whole process was strange until I met Wes. Then I realized it was possible for good, kind, normal men to need a companion for one reason or another, and in this particular circumstance, I was glad. Without it, I'd never have met Wes, and he was definitely someone I'd consider significant. He mattered to me too, though I hadn't mentioned it to him yet.

"...picked you off the website the day after I sent you to Mr. Channing. Made me promise he'd get the next month with you."

Cringing, I turned and grabbed a blanket off the chair and wrapped myself in it. "Is he a creeper?"

Millie laughed so loudly into the receiver, I had to pull it away from my ear. "No, baby girl, he's an artist! You're going to be his muse. One look at you and he said he must have you for his new

series “*Love on Canvas.*” I could hear her clicking, and then my phone beeped that I had a message.

I put her on speaker then looked at the email she’d sent. “Holy, Mother of God.” All the air left my chest.

“He is a looker. Just like Mr. Channing, in reverse? Dark hair, dark eyes, average size.” I nodded staring numbly at a picture of Mr. Alex Dubois, artist, on the screen. There was nothing average about this dude. He was a dead ringer for Ben Affleck. Only he had long hair that was pulled into a small bun at the top of his head and a mustache-beard combo. I couldn’t wait to see just how long that hair was. The man in a word? *Fine!*

I sucked in a sharp breath and released it slowly to relieve some of the heat that filled my body. “So, uh, what does he want me to do as his muse?”

“Not sure. I know he makes unusual art pieces. All one of a kind. They go for hundreds of thousands a piece. However, if you take your clothes off, he’s paying more. Period. If you have sex with him—and by God, what woman wouldn’t want to—” She laughed. “—he is supposed to give you the additional twenty grand separately.”

“Can he demand that I take my clothes off?” I asked, suddenly feeling dirty. Immediately, I racked my brain trying to remember what I signed off on in the contract.

“No, no, no, that is most certainly *not* part of it. However, he did mention it when he booked you. I explained that it would cost him another twenty-five percent on top of his fee, and that was only if you agreed to it, and technically, he’s not to touch you sexually.”

Twenty-five percent was twenty-five thousand dollars. “Seriously? I’ll get another twenty-five thousand dollars if I let him paint nudes of me?”

“No doll-face, you’ll get twenty thousand. Exquisite Escorts gets twenty percent on top of your fee. That means five thousand goes to us and twenty to you.” I shrugged not really caring. I planned on taking my clothes off. That extra twenty thousand would help get me closer to my ultimate goal. At the very least, it would pay Maddy’s unpaid school loans for her first year in school.

“Sign me up! As long as I don’t have to sleep with him, I’ll pose nude.” Even saying it out loud lacked sincerity. Boy, was I in trouble. I hadn’t even left Wes yet, and I was already drooling over the next guy in line. I’m a whore.

“You got it. Your flight will leave promptly on the first. Make sure you’re on that plane. Your last day officially with Mr. Channing should be January twenty-sixth. That will give you a few days to get yourself to the beautician, get your hair done, your body parts waxed, and all your unmentionables seen to.” That time I laughed out loud. “If that’s it, I’ll let you go...”

“Um, Aunt Millie?”

“Ms. Milan, remember?” she warned.

“Sorry. You realize I’m never going to call you that unless we’re in front of clients, right?” I said dead serious.

“What is it, Mia?” her tone lacked the love of a doting family member that time.

“Is it possible for one of the escorts to see their clients again? Personally?”

“Oh please, no. Please don’t tell me you’ve fallen for Mr. Channing?”

“No! No, that’s not it.” Not really, I told myself. It’s not, it’s really not. Probably. “It’s just that we’ve become friends, and I’d like to be able to continue that friendship without breaking any rules.”

Aunt Millie sighed loudly. “There are no rules per se, but you need to be careful, Mia. Men like that can promise a girl the world and never live up to that promise. Believe me, I’ve heard it all before. Too many times, in fact.”

“So there isn’t a rule?”

“No, just,” she let out a long breath, “protect your heart. This business isn’t for everyone, and you’ve had a hard road already. Take this time for yourself to have fun, let loose, and experience all that life has to offer. It’s probably one of the only times in your life that you’ll get the chance.” I choked down the rising emotional tide sitting just underneath the surface of my strong façade. “Call me when you meet up with Mr. Dubois. I’ll send everything via email.” That was the last thing she said before hanging up.

My aunt was right. I couldn’t let Wes convince me that this was something more than what it was. I had to go to Seattle. I would go to Seattle. I looked down at the phone. And Mr. Hot Artist Man was going to be my next experience.

“Honey, I’m home!” Wes’s voice boomed through the house and trickled outside where I was chilling in the heated pool. He entered the patio area in a suit and a smile. Christ, the guy was sexy. He was always good-looking, but there was something about the act of playing dress-up that I enjoyed. Maybe it was undressing him that I enjoyed more.

“You’re home early.” It was only two-thirty. I pulled myself up and out of the pool, and sat on the edge.

Wes stopped advancing toward me and stood still right at the edge of the pool. His gaze was on me but not on my eyes. He scanned my form with those emerald gems, the look so heated I could practically feel where they landed along my breasts, belly, thighs. I watched as he toed off his shoes then allowed his blazer to drop to the deck. As if cued, I leaned onto my hands arching my back suggestively, pressing my breasts out towards the sky and allowing my head to tip back. My legs opened a bit to balance me. The wisp of a bathing suit left nothing to the imagination, and when I lifted my head to see if my little show was working, I heard a heavy splash. Fully clothed, Wes’s form sluiced through the water. He was like a dark shark swimming toward its prey.

He made it to the edge of the pool in one go. His body shot out of the water looking all kinds of water godish. I leaned forward and gripped his wet tie and tugged him between my legs. His hands went to my knees and slid them wide apart.

“That was impulsive,” I said against his lips not yet kissing him, just allowing the water from the pool to drip between our mouths.

“Think so? Then you’re going to love this.” His mouth crashed over mine, his tongue seeking entrance. Wes kissed me as if he’d never get another chance, as though he was starving for the taste of my lips. I knew I was starving for a taste of him. “Been thinking of your taste all damned day,” he growled before dragging his tongue down my torso and between my breasts. He slipped his fingers into the skimpy triangles of the bikini and pushed the fabric aside, baring my breasts. My nipples promptly puckered tight at the change in temperature. “I dream of these beauties,” he said flicking the tip with his tongue before drawing it into the heat of his mouth. I cried out as my hands went to his head to hold him against me.

The sucking continued until I was squeezing his body against my form, trying to find some friction. When he had me on the edge of orgasm just from playing with my tits, something he loved doing, he pushed me back. I laid on the cold concrete, the chill reaching my bones until his clever fingers found the ties at the side of my bottoms and pulled. Oh, shit. He was going to do this right here, out in the open light of day.

“Wes,” I warned, but the warning didn’t carry much weight. I was too far gone in a haze of lust to put up much resistance. If Ms. Croft came upon us, she’d just keep on walking. She was pure class. Me, not so much. Wes nipped at the fleshy part of my thighs as he lifted each leg out of the water and set my feet on the pool’s edge bending my legs at a ninety degree angle. Then he clasped each knee and spread me open just like a bird’s wings opening to fly. And I did fly, the second his tongue touched down on that sensitive bundle of nerves. My hands flew to his head to hold him in place. He grabbed both of them and set them on the concrete and pushed them under my ass.

“Sit on ‘em, no touching,” he scolded. Ah, so that was how this was going to play out. He wanted full control. Shit, that meant he was going to take me beyond my limits and push me over the edge, over and over again. He’d done it once before. He’d given me so many orgasms that I passed out riding his cock. It was the most sensual, carnal experience of my life, until now.

With the tip of his fingers, he spread me open and used the flat of his tongue to send me into orbit. After one orgasm, he buckled down, holding my legs open, growling into my wet flesh. His next words were a dirty chant.

“Fucking you.”

“Tasting you.”

“Sucking you.”

“More. More.”

He growled low in his throat. “God, Mia, I could eat you all day,” he gritted through his teeth before sucking my clit into his mouth, hard. I soared into a second orgasm. My body was shaking until Wes gripped my waist and lifted my limp body up and pulled me back into the water.

The shock jolted my system. Nerves were firing off everywhere as the tingles from my orgasm started to dissipate. Before I could fully come back, he had my legs around his waist with my back against the edge of the pool.

“Going to take you so good, baby. I’m going to make sure you feel me, even when you’re gone.” He thrust into me hard. I don’t know when he did it, but his pants were floating somewhere in the pool, reminding me of a stingray on the ocean floor. Wes’s upper body was still completely clothed in dress shirt and tie. I clung to the wet fabric as he pounded into me. The chanting started again. I don’t think he even knew he was speaking. But I did, and I held onto every word, letting each clipped phrase sing into my memory so I could revisit this moment again and again when I needed him... missed him.

“I was here.” thrust

“Together.” thrust

“Fuck” thrust

“Love this” thrust

“Remember me.” thrust

“Remember me,” he said again, louder as he slammed into me, hitting that spot within that sent me reeling into the hardest, longest, release of my life. I screamed. My body no longer my own. My voice no longer my own. I came to with his mouth on mine and his tongue sweeping in and out. We were still connected as he walked me soaking wet into his room and laid me on the bed. He left me only long enough to remove his tie and shirt, and then crawled over me. He widened my legs and slipped into the oversensitive swollen tissue between my legs once more. Connected.

He didn’t fuck me then. He made slow, agonizingly sweet love to me.

“Hello, skank! Long time no talk,” my best friend, Ginelle’s, voice came through the phone not only harsh but with a hint of genuine upset.

“Hooker, I’ve been working,” I tried but failed.

“Yeah, uh huh, riding Wes’s cock could be called work, I suppose,” she retorted, a tiny note of humor in her tone. My girl was forgiving me.

“Not all of us have talent and can dance like a goddess,” I countered.

“True...” she drew out the word making it a few syllables longer.

“I miss you,” my voice shook, and I wanted to bitch-slap myself for letting the emotion out.

A deep sigh came through the line. “I miss your ugly face too. I get hit on a lot more when you’re around. You know, since I’m the pretty one.” And...we’re back to BFF status again.

“How’s my dad?” I asked, scared to hear her reply.

“Better physically. Still hasn’t woken up. They’ve moved him out of intensive care, so that’s a

good sign.”

That was a good sign. It meant he'd live, but he wasn't out of the woods yet. “Did they say anything about why he hasn't come out of the coma?”

“They don't tell me much, Mia. I'm not technically family. You know that.”

Now I sighed. Ginelle was more my family than the extended family I had on both sides. She was the only friend I trusted. “Thanks for keeping an eye on him for me. How about Maddy? I've only talked to her once, and that was for a few minutes when she was between classes. Seems like the full class load is kicking her ass.”

“Yeah, it is. She's stressed about money, too. The bills are piling up. Need me to give her some cash?”

“No, no! I have money. Well I'm going to have a lot of money in a week. Enough to send her some to pay the bills and buy food. Soon though, I'm going to have a lot more! Just need to get on an airplane next week, and that hundred thousand goes into my account. Then I have an opportunity to get paid another twenty thousand, and that would be just mine.”

“How you going to make an extra twenty thou?” I could hear her suck in a drag off her cigarette. Must be finishing up her lunch break with a smoke.

I chewed on my thumbnail and looked down at the ragged edge. “Next client is an artist. I'm going to be his muse or some shit. Wants me to pose nude. If I do it, it's an extra twenty large.”

You could hear Gin blow out a breath into the phone. “Fuck! I take off my clothes every fucking day and don't get paid no twenty grand! Get me hooked up with Auntie Millie. I'm due some fat cash!” she harrumphed into the phone, and I laughed. She'd never leave Vegas. God, it's good to talk to my girl. She reminds me of everything I am, where my roots are laid, and that I'm still me. Even if I'm dressed up like a Barbie doll and playing the part of a trophy date, I'm still Mia Saunders. The girl who raised her sister from age five, took care of herself, and is going to save her dad's ass... again. Hopefully, for the last time. I could only hope that once he woke up and realized what he'd done, what had happened due to his choices, he might actually learn from it. Get some help with the drink. See a counselor. I'd given him information on tons of free programs along with the flyers and pamphlets for the local AA. Maybe, just maybe, this time he'd see the error in his ways.

“You coming home at all?” Gin asked as I pulled out the dress I was going to wear to this evening's social event. Wes was taking me to some movie shindig with the new cast. It looked like fun. I'd get to meet some famous people. Ones I hoped to work with someday. That career path was nowhere in sight for the time being. Funny how things had come around full circle. I finally knew someone in the industry, and there was no way I could even commit to anything or go on any auditions. That part of my life was on an indefinite hold until I got my dad out of hock.

“I wish. Heading straight to Seattle three days after I leave Malibu. Auntie has me set up on a horde of beauty appointments between that day and the day I head out. I'll try next month though,” I offered weakly.

“Hey, I know you want to come home as much as I want to see your fat ass, but it's okay. Things are going to be fine here while you clean up your dad's mess. But shit, Mia, he's gotta learn from this

go 'round. You can't keep upending your life for him."

"I have no choice," I whined. "If I don't, they'll kill him. And he's in a coma, Gin. It's not like he can defend himself."

This conversation was getting old. I loved Ginelle more than anything, but she spent an ungodly amount of time nailing me over my dad's bullshit and how I continued to save him. It's not like I wanted to. But I couldn't just let him be hurt or killed. Blaine and his goons are serious motherfuckers. Blaine is a coldhearted snake. He wouldn't think twice about killing Dad. Hell, he'd be more concerned about getting blood on his expensive suit than he would about taking my dad's life. People are collateral damage to him, and I had been one of his victims. Cheating, lying piece of trash!

Through the phone, I could hear rustling around then the ever present clinking and pinging of the slot machines as she made her way back through the casino. "Just promise me you'll find a way to have a life?"

"I will, I will. Besides, I've been having some fun here in Malibu. Wes taught me how to surf!"

"Okay, that is pretty cool. I've never even seen the ocean," she groaned. "When you become rich from escorting, will you take me to the ocean?"

I laughed. "And see your skanky ass in a bikini?" I pretended to gag and choke.

"You're messed up. I'm revoking best friend status."

"You can't revoke best friend status. It just is. Like the commandments written in stone. It just is," I said again lamely.

"Did you just compare our friendship to God's Ten Commandments? For real?"

"Um...yeah?"

"You're going to hell," she stated flatly.

"If I do, you're skanky ass better be there to pick me up!"

She giggled, and I smiled holding the phone tight. "You know I will."

"I love you, ho."

"I love you more, slut."

Chapter 8

Nobu Restaurant in Malibu was swanky. Like entering into your own private posh world. The *Honor Code* actors, directors, and writers were all in attendance. There wasn't a huge crowd, maybe forty people. When we arrived, the hostess led us to a private outside area. The patio had a natural knotty wood flooring that spanned a huge veranda with wicker-cushioned furniture and hardwood tables. The entire expanse opened out onto a hundred and eighty degree view of the beach. The sun was just setting, and the colors of the sky bouncing off the water were breathtaking. Wes pulled me into his arms as I grabbed the rail. He hugged me against his front.

"Beautiful," he said into my ear before trailing his nose down the column of my neck.

"It is pretty," I agreed.

"Not the view, you." He bit down on that place where neck meets shoulder sending shivers of burgeoning excitement to swell and ache delightfully within me.

"Smooth talker." I pinched the side of his thigh where my hand rested.

"Ouch, see if I ever give the lady a compliment again," he said with mock agitation.

I turned around and clasped my hands around his neck, and kissed him. Nothing indecent, just a coming together of lips. I'd missed him throughout the day while he was at work, and this was the first chance I had to be close to him.

He groaned into my mouth and then pulled back and just stared. After a moment, he shook his head and smiled. I knew there was something he wanted to say to me, but right then, I knew it wasn't going to be something I could handle.

"Let's get a drink and a bite?"

His shoulders slumped, the moment broken. "Sure," he finished, grabbing my hand and leading me over to the bar. We got drinks and then a waiter came by and offered us some Asian style nibbles. While we were talking and snacking, the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen made her way through the crowd. She was wearing a deep crimson, strapless cocktail dress that accentuated her large breasts perfectly. The hemline came up just above the knee on her incredibly long legs. She had black, thick hair that looked a lot like mine, but hers was curled in perfect loose spirals that wisped along her pearly skin perfectly. Bright red lips and smoky eye makeup completed her look. The woman was every man's wet dream and every woman's nightmare. Except mine. I wanted to be her!

"Gina," Wes held out a hand towards the stunning woman. "I'd like you to meet my friend, Mia Saunders." Her eyes widened and her lips curved into a smirk at the way he said 'friend'.

She placed a small hand on Wes's shoulder, looked up at him, and batted her eyelashes prettily before turning to me. Wes was completely enchanted by her. Hell, I was too. True beauty like hers didn't come around too often.

"Gina DeLuca." She offered her hand and I shook it. "Any friend of Wes's is a friend of mine." Her voice sounded as if she was singing a melody, only with a sultry female crooner type vibe. Once

she shook my hand, she stood in front of me and brazenly pressed her chest against Wes's. "I'm really looking forward to getting started on your story. It's a fascinating premise." Her hand came up and stroked his lapel. He stood there speechless staring down into the sexy woman's eyes.

I almost felt like I was intruding on a private moment. I most certainly was not needed for this conversation. And in spite of what I'd promised myself, I was getting jealous. No, I didn't have a claim on Wes officially, but I was his date for the next few days, dammit! I tried clearing my throat. It did nothing to break the spell she had over Wes.

"Maybe we could run some of the lines at my place sometime, you know, so I get a really good feel for the character." She licked her lips and the core of heat within my gut turned white hot with rage. Who did this chick think she was?!

"Um, sure, yeah, that sounds uh..." Wes tried and that was it. I shoved her out of the way, politely interrupting.

"Sweetie, I'm starving. You ready to sit and eat?" I batted my own lashes, but I was pretty sure they didn't have the same affect. Wes looked down at me, shook his head, and then a smile slipped across his lips. His eyes twinkled, and he pulled me to his side with a hand around my waist.

"Anything for Ms. Mia," he said kissing my forehead. "Sorry, Gina, will you excuse us?"

I looked over at the pretty, black-haired vixen. Her mouth was gaping open like she couldn't believe I'd butted in on her play when, really, she butted in on mine.

"Mia? Like in the movie?" she queried.

Wes looked over at me with that panty-dropping grin. "Wanted something to remember my girl by," he said never looking at Gina. That gesture right there filled my heart with joy and sadness, knowing I would be leaving soon.

"Remember her? Where are you going?" she asked me directly, crossing her arms over her ample bosom.

I sucked in a breath and closed my eyes. "Seattle," I said and caught it when Wes winced.

"Oh yeah, for what?"

"Work." I had nothing better to say. It was the truth, but I wasn't about to tell this chick that I was the hired help or that Wes was technically a free agent who might appreciate her blatant come-ons.

Gina rolled her eyes. "What type of work are you in?"

"Well, for this job I'll be modeling for an artist over the next month while he paints me."

Gina plastered on a fake smile. "And will you be wearing any clothing during these paintings?" She hit the nail right on the head.

"I think that's enough, Gina. I'll see you on set in a week. Come on Mia, let's get some food and find a place to settle." He gripped my hip and turned me around walking in the opposite direction of the pretty actress.

We got to a table way in the corner that had an even better view of the ocean at night. A server brought us new drinks and laid a plate of noshes between us. Once I took a bite and let the puffy pastry bite melt in my mouth, Wes pounced.

“So, Seattle?” I nodded not wanting to really get into it with him. “And was Gina right in her assumption?”

I shoved another bite of fishy goodness in my mouth and had to cut off a moan. Damn, this place was amazing.

“Was she, Mia? Are you going to be naked in front of this artist while he paints you?” Instead of responding, I shrugged. “It’s a simple question,” he said through clenched teeth.

“Maybe. He does some nudes, so it’s a possibility,” I said thinking that might be better than the absolute truth or outright lying.

Wes shook his head and took a long pull of his beer. “I need a real fucking drink.” He got up and stormed over to the bar. I sat back and thought about how this night was turning out. I was jealous of him, now he was jealous of some guy neither of us had even met. What the hell was happening?

When he came back, he had a tumbler full of amber colored liquid that made my stomach turn. Ever since that first night, he’d made an effort not to drink whiskey, and I appreciated him for it. Now though, he was drinking it like it was water.

“Why are you mad?”

He shook his head. “Not mad.” he clenched his teeth, a muscle in his jaw ticking away. “I think I know when you’re mad. We’ve been living together for the better part of a month.”

“Do you even want to do this?” he asked finally.

“It’s not a matter of whether I want to. I have to!” I whispered loudly leaning forward. He looked around.

“You don’t have to do shit. Everyone has a choice. You could stay.” And there it was. He definitely wanted me to stay even though he knew I couldn’t.

“Don’t...”

“Why not! Because it will make you feel something?” he sneered.

I stood up and walked away. Wes didn’t follow me.

The sound of glass shattering woke me from a dead sleep. I got up and tiptoed along the hallway keeping myself dead silent until I found Wes laughing with half his jacket on, the other half twisted around his hand as if he’d been trying to get it off.

I walked over to him and tugged on the jacket. That was a bad idea. Once he was free, he steamrolled me into the opposite wall, lips on my neck. He bit down hard, and I cried out trying to

push him off me. “Mia, Mia, Mia, I want you so bad. Don’t want to lose you...please,” he begged but I had no idea what his slurred, drunken words really meant.

“Come on. Let’s get you to bed,” I said trying to adjust him. He walked a few steps then stopped and grabbed me to him. My back hit another wall. This time his hand cupped my breast, and he tweaked the nipple with expert fingers. I moaned.

“Fuck yeah, I love those little noises you make. Almost between a moan and a whimper. Makes my dick so hard.” And he wasn’t kidding as evidenced by his rock hard erection thrusting against my hip. Before I could move, he had one of my legs slung up and over one hip. Even in a drunken state, he knew exactly what he was doing, only his movements were a little bit sloppier, less coordinated.

“Wes, not here., We need to get you in bed.”

“You’ll come with me?” he pleaded, licking and biting along the column of my neck. “Stay with me in my bed.”

“Yeah sure, we’ll fuck in your bed this time,” I said leading him to his room. Once we got there, he turned around, gripped me by the hips and kissed me. Even tinged with whiskey, the one liquor I couldn’t stand, he tasted great.

“No, I want you to sleep with me. All night long. I want to wake up to you one time,” he begged leading me over to the bed. He sat, pulled down my panties, and I lifted up my camisole standing before him naked as the day I was born.

“I love this body.” His hand traced down from my clavicle, over my breast where he gave a little squeeze, down the curve of my waist, over my hip bone, and down my thigh. I shivered when he completed the journey on the other side.

“Just this once, stay all night. Let me wake to you,” he leaned forward and took a nipple into his mouth. Bolts of electricity roared through my limbs, pleasure being the first to light up, and quickly followed by lust and need.

“Just this once,” I repeated.

That night we made love for the second time. Desperate, clawing love. Somewhere in the middle of the night, Wes woke up sober and took me again. He told me he wanted to reenact everything we did so he’d be certain to remember it. I knew I’d never forget it.

I woke to Wes watching me sleep. His blond, shaggy hair fell over his eyes, and I pushed it to the side, wanting to see all of him in the beautiful morning light.

“Why are you an escort?” he asked. There was no judgment, no harshness to his words. Just the simple question as if it was something he’d been dying to know since day one. He probably had.

It was time. He deserved to know why I couldn’t give him more. I know he wanted me to stay,

possibly live with him to see how being together for *real* could turn out. He knew it didn't bother me that he was so busy, which was the reason he claimed he didn't do relationships. I could take care of myself and had proven it. I wasn't a clingy chick like most trophy bitches. But that was just it. I didn't want to be a trophy wife, or girlfriend, for that matter. It was important that I find my own way, be my own person. And right now, I couldn't do that because I had to help my dad.

Instead of skimming the truth or making up something plausible, I laid it out for him.

"My dad owes some really bad guys some money. A lot of money."

"I have a lot of money," he said quietly. Tears pricked at the corners of my eyes at his admission. I turned towards him, put my hands in prayer pose, and tucked them under my cheek. He mimicked my pose.

"Yes, you do, but it's your money. My dad got in bad with some loan sharks for gambling. I'm working to pay off that debt."

"How much?"

"A million."

He let out a slow breath. "I have a lot of expendable money, Mia. I could help you."

I shook my head. Knowing the type of man Wes Channing was, I knew once he found out that my family was in trouble, he'd want to help. Only this was my problem, not his.

"I know you could, but I haven't asked for your help." It was imperative that I make it perfectly clear that this was my decision. I wasn't a damsel in distress and he wasn't a white knight, charging in to save the day. Fairytales don't exist, especially for chicks from Vegas with a truckload of baggage.

"But what if I wanted to help?"

"You're very kind, Wes."

He shook his head and leaned onto his back. "No Mia, I'm not. I'm selfish. I don't want you to go. I don't want you to go pose nude for some rich artist in Seattle. I want you here with me, in my house, and in my bed. I'll pay whatever price it takes to get that."

All of the air left my lungs in a whoosh. "Do you love me, Wes?"

His gaze shot to mine. "Um," he licked his lips and bit down on the plump flesh. Made me want to kiss it better. "I know I like you. I like you a lot."

I smiled wide and traced his nose from the bridge down to the tip with one finger. "I like you too, Wes. A lot. But this is something I have to do. Not only for my dad, though that is the driving force, but for me, too. And you need no distractions. Your movie starts filming next week. You're going to be directing for the first time..."

Wes ran a hand through his hair. "I know all those things. That doesn't change that I want you here."

“I know it doesn’t. And if I’m being honest, I don’t want to go, but I am going to leave. And you and me? We’re going to stay friends. Right?”

He sighed then pulled my body up and over his. I rested my arms on his chest then leaned my chin on his sternum. “Of course we are. If nothing else, you’re the best girlfriend I’ve ever had.”

My eyebrows shot up into my hairline. “I mean, you know. Best friend that’s a girl.”

“I understand,” I pecked him on the lips.

“So you’re leaving in two days, and there’s nothing I can do or say to make you stay?”

I shook my head and rested against his heart, letting the heavy thump lull me into a place that was half awake, half asleep. I knew in my heart of hearts that the only reason I’d stay, could stay, even consider staying, would be if he loved me. There was no denying that I was falling for him, but I held a part of me back, knowing that love was never supposed to be on the table. Not after falling in love with every man I’d ever slept with. This time with Wes, I’d guarded my heart so fiercely that he’d only gotten small bits and pieces of it along the way. The whole enchilada was still safe with me in full control.

“Where does that leave us then?” He slid his hands down to cup my ass cheeks, and he gave them a tight squeeze. It reminded me of how much I was going to miss his bedroom skills. Going back to a battery-operated boyfriend was not high on my list of things I wanted to do in Seattle. Like see the phallic space needle. That was high on the list.

“How about we leave it as friends?”

He grimaced. “Best friends?” I tried.

He lifted me up by the waist, centered his hard cock between my thighs, and I sank down onto it, pierced by the steely girth and length of him. Jesus, the man was well hung, and even better, he knew exactly how to use it.

“Benefits,” I whispered on a hard thrust, and he grinned.

“Best friends, with benefits,” I said then tipped my head back, anchored my hands on his muscled pecs and squeezed from within.

Wes’s body went tight. “Now you’re talking.” He pulled me up and slammed me down. We both cried out. “Now ride me.”

Chapter 9

“What do you want to do today?” Wes asked when I entered the breakfast area. To my surprise, he was cooking, flipping pancakes to be exact. I looked around scanning the area for Ms. Croft.

“Where’s Judi?”

“Gave her the day off. Since it’s your last day, I wanted the entire day alone with you.” He grinned then winked.

I sat on the barstool in front of the island where he was finishing up our breakfast. The pancakes weren’t burnt and smelled delicious. I stared in awe at the short stack. Butter dripped down the sides enticingly mixing in with the thick syrup. Then he squirted a can of whipped cream making some type of design on the top. With a flick of his wrist, he slid the plate in front of me. On the very top of the stack was a happy face.

“Happy cakes.” He waggled his eyebrows, and I laughed. This man was such a dichotomy. Work-a-holic, surfer, escort-hiring, Jeep-driving, rich man, who made pancakes with smiley faces on them. “What?” He leaned his elbows on the counter and tilted his head. His face had the morning stubble I had gotten used to seeing, and adored. I used the tips of my fingers to skip across the prickly surface.

I shook my head and cut into the small stack of five perfectly round cakes. “You just surprise me. Every time I think I have you figured out, you sideswipe me with something else.”

Wes shrugged and dug into his own breakfast. “What can I say? I like to keep you guessing.” He smiled and I swore all those sappy chick flicks I tried to avoid were right. A good man could light up a room and make the world smaller, like something that could fit into the space where your entire focus lives.

“Back to your initial question,” I said around a mouth full of the best pancakes I’d ever eaten—including my own—in my entire life. “I’d like to take a ride on my bike,” I said, and he nodded.

“I’m game. Where we going?”

I grinned and flicked my unruly, morning bedhead hair over my shoulder. “Wherever the bike takes us. It’s not where we go. It’s the journey that counts.”

Wes came around, sat down, and then turned toward me. I faced him, thinking he was going to kiss me. He usually did first thing in the morning, but today was different. Everything about my last day felt so heavy, weighed down by the finality of it. Instead of a kiss, I got a dollop of whipped cream on my nose. “That was deep,” he said deadpan.

I shoved him. “Shut the fuck up!” He laughed.

“Come on, Mia. It’s not the ride, it’s the journey? Where did you come up with that shit? Tell me the truth. It was on the sticker when you bought the bike, right?”

“It’s true though!” I shook my head, and we commenced eating breakfast. Every so often he’d tag

my side with his elbow. Not enough to hurt, just enough to let me know he was there and messing with me. If I was being honest with myself, I was going to miss Wes. More than I wanted to admit. A lot more.

“Jesus Christ,” Wes said as I entered the garage where my bike had been stored. His gaze was all over me. From the black leather jacket I wore over my Radiohead concert tank top, down my ass-hugging skinny jeans to my knee-high biker boots.

“You like?” I cocked a hip to the side, knowing it accentuated my hourglass shape that he appreciated very much. He’d told me enough times how infatuated he was with my body. Wes liked a woman with a little meat on her. Stick-thin girls were not his gig. At least that’s what he said. He could have fed me a line, but if the look on his face right at that moment was any indication, he liked what he saw.

He threw his leather jacket over the seat of the bike, made his way around his Jeep, and in two seconds flat, his mouth was on mine. Kissing for Wes was more than foreplay. It was a brand, something he seared into my skin and stayed with me all day. Hell, I’d never forget any of his kisses. They were that good. Light nips at times, simple swipes of his tongue at other moments, followed by full, deep, drugging movements the next. And his hands, oh, his hands were magnificent. He knew exactly where to caress, pinch, tickle, which is what he was doing to my ass and breast. One on each. No one could ever say Wes wasn’t good with hands.

I sucked on Wes’s tongue then bit his lip until he moaned. He pulled back and laid his head against my forehead. “I thought we were going to ride,” I breathed against his lips then licked the rim.

“Yeah, until I saw you like that. Now my dick has other plans.” He pressed his hips against mine. I could feel the hardness through his jeans.

With great effort, I pulled back, cupped his cheeks and stared into his beautiful green eyes. “Later. The wait makes the anticipation sweeter.” I finished off by nipping his lips once more. He tried to chase after them, but I pulled away.

Giving him an extra sway of my hips so he got a nice hard look at my ass, I flung a leg over my bike. “Hey girl.” I petted the tank and handle bars. “You ready to show Wes what you can do, sweet thing?” I spoke softly to Suzi.

“Um, I think you need to scoot back so I can get on.” Wes gestured that I move back to ride bitch.

“I must not have heard you. Did you insinuate that I was going to ride bitch?” My eyebrows rose up into my hairline, and I narrowed my gaze.

Wes put one hand on the handlebar and one down by his side. “If that means your legs are squeezing me, and I can feel your heat all up my back, then yeah, that’s exactly what I’m suggesting.” He licked his lips and scanned my body with his gaze once more. Again, it was not lost on me that those eyes might as well have been hands because I could feel them running up and down me every

time he looked my way.

“Well, I believe we have a predicament then. Suzi’s my girl, and I’m the only one that drives her. You, my friend, need to wrap those thick thighs around me.” I pushed forward and made room on the back. “Unless you’re worried about your masculinity.”

Wes surprised me. He put on his leather jacket and flung a long leg over the bike. Then before I could even turn Suzi on, Wes turned me on. He molded his form to my back, slid a hand up and under my tank in front, shoving my bra up and out of the way so his hand could get at naked skin. Then his fingers pulled and plucked at the hardening tip. I moaned as his mouth came down against my neck, sucking and nipping at the sensitive skin. I arched backward, leaning my head against his shoulder and pushing back into his hardness. Just as I craned my neck around toward him, the button on my jeans was opened and the zipper pulled down.

“Oh God,” I whispered when his hands made contact going straight into my jeans. Those talented fingers zeroed in finding my heat. He pushed two deep inside while swirling his thumb around the tight knot of nerves throbbing for his touch. Wes didn’t disappoint. With powerful arms, he arched my body back using my pussy and breast as his anchor. Those fingers of his going impossibly deep until I cried out, squeezing my eyes tight as the spasms signaling my release closed in.

Wes’s teeth grated down my neck, and I thrust my hips up, using the heel spikes as my fulcrum. I knew he’d keep the bike up with his own powerful legs, so I pushed up hard, wrestling to reach that beautiful crest, the pinnacle of pleasure.

“Ride me, baby,” Wes whispered against my hairline. That growly timber sent me even further into the bliss. I did what he said. Like a wanton hussy, I bent back over him, thrust my hips, forcing his fingers to fuck me harder. His hand was nothing but a blur between my legs as he worked me. Then he pinched my nipple with one hand, bit down on my neck, and drove deep with his other, hooking those fingers up and yanking down, crushing my clit with his palm.

Gone.

Sweet blessed oblivion.

“That’s it, sweetheart, come back to me,” Wes said into my ear, his thumb still twirling around my clit sending sweet tremors to scatter in every direction while I made my descent back to Earth. “I take it back,” he whispered into my ear before turning my neck and kissing me.

“Take what back?” I asked still in my happy place.

“The ride was nice, but it was all about the journey. Watching you come apart in my arms, on this bike, that’s something I’ll never forget.”

Me either.

We rode up and down Highway One taking in the views between Malibu Canyon Road and Point

Magu Rock. Wes pointed to a turn-off near a worn down sign for a public beach. The entrance was off the beaten path, but Wes knew where we were going. I stopped the bike at the tiny turnout with a dirt path that led down to a small cove. When we got there, Wes pulled off his backpack and pulled out a thin blanket. We spread it across the sand and settled looking out at the open expanse of ocean. The place was public yet completely deserted. There wasn't a house or person for miles. Wes dug into the pack again and brought out some sandwiches.

"You made lunch, too? A girl could get used to this. Amazing pancakes and now this? Let me guess, a gourmet turkey made with hummus and the freshest veggies?" I cocked a brow, and he covered his mouth while he snickered.

"Think again, princess." He handed me half a sandwich.

"Peanut butter and jelly?" I looked down and shook my head then took a bite of the creamy sandwich. It had the perfect ratio of peanut butter to berry jelly. He grinned and handed me a thermos. I expected water, but it ended up being ice cold milk. Perfection. "Milk?"

"Only the best for you, Ms. Mia." He took a big bite then grabbed for the milk.

"You know, PB & J is actually my favorite sandwich." His eyes widened. "It is. Seriously. I love it. And you know what, I love this. Sitting here with you after a long ride. It's...well, I'll remember this, Wes. Being here with you. This month has been the best of my life. And not just the sex." His eyebrows rose. "Okay, maybe the sex." We both laughed.

He took another swallow of milk then responded. "I know what you mean. Being with you is easy." I cocked my head to the side and he grinned. "Not *easy* easy. Just...it feels good. You don't make me work for it. Your needs are simple, and you're not a drama queen. I didn't think a relationship could be like that."

"Never was easy for me, either. Always something in the way," I admitted. Wes looked off into the distance as I stared at his profile. As far as beautiful men go, Weston Channing was tops. He didn't even have to try to look good. He was naturally good looking. Casual, professional, even when he'd just woken up and sleep crust was in his eyes, he was still heart-stoppingly gorgeous. But right now, sharing this private span of beach with me, sharing a bit of himself, that made him irresistible. "Have you ever been in love?"

His eyes shot to mine, a hint of a smile on his lips. He leaned back onto his elbows and shook his head. "No, I don't think so. A couple times I thought maybe, but like I said, it was never easy. I think when you love someone it should be easy. Things should just fall into place, you know?"

I nodded. "The planets, moons, and stars align and everything just works right?"

He laughed. "Something like that. You?"

"Me what?"

"Have you been in love?" I thought long and hard about his question. So much so, that his hand came up to my shoulder and gripped tenderly. "You don't have to tell me."

"No, it's not that. It's just it would be easier to ask me if I haven't fallen in love. In some way,

I've fallen in love with every last man I've ever been with. Unfortunately, now, sitting here with you, I'm questioning whether I was actually in love, lust, or maybe just overwhelmed by them."

"Why do you think that is?"

I laughed, brought my legs up into my chest and tucked my chin onto my knees. "Not sure. It feels different with you."

"So you've been with me a month. Admitted that the sex has been the best of your entire life." I rolled my eyes at him but he kept on. "Agreed that it's different with me. Does that mean you love me?"

"Maybe," I said honestly not really knowing how else to respond.

"Well, fuck me."

"We're going to do that later, remember. Anticipation?" I reminded him.

Wes laughed and then turned on his side and propped his head on his hand. "What if I said I was falling in love with you?"

"Wes," I warned. He knew better than to go that route.

"No, let's just talk this out for a minute." He forced me to lean back and mimic his pose so we were lying on our sides looking into one another's eyes. "If you maybe love me and I'm falling in love with you, shouldn't we do something about it?"

I smiled. "We are. We're going to stay friends. You're going to go to work and direct your film. We'll stay in contact, and when my debt is paid..." I looked deeply into his eyes and stopped.

"When your debt is paid then what?"

"I come back home to LA where you are," I offered.

"But you're still going to leave tomorrow." The sadness in his green eyes stole my breath. It was long moments before I could respond.

"Yes. I'm leaving tomorrow."

He nodded and looked down. "So, then when you come back..." This time his words trailed off.

"I don't want you waiting for me, Wes. If you find something good with someone, you take advantage of it. Have fun. A man like you, who looks the way you do, is not going to have a hard time finding someone to warm your bed."

"Is that what you're going to do? Let your clients warm your bed?" His tone was hard, harsher than I expected, but I knew what we were talking about was dangerous territory. It had the power to ruin everything we'd come to have over the past month and could ever have in the future. It was time to tread lightly.

"I'm just saying that for this year, we're going to go our separate ways. We're going to do whatever we want."

He let out a long, slow breath and sat up. “That means you’re not going to wait for me.” A quick burst of air left his nose, like he was holding back a huff.

I shook my head. “No. I’m going to do what feels right at the time, for me. And I want you to do the same. But I don’t want to lose you in my life.”

He licked his lips then grabbed my hand, bringing it up to his mouth for a kiss. “I don’t want to lose you either. It’s just, I’m trying to find a place where letting you go is okay. Because it doesn’t feel right.”

I gripped his hand tight then brought it to my lips for a return kiss. “It doesn’t for me either, but it’s what’s going to happen. Please respect that. Can you do that for me? And in the future, we’ll just see where we’re at. That has to be enough.”

“It’s nowhere near enough, Mia. If it’s all I’ve got, it will have to do for now.” He pulled me into his side and hugged me tight. I held on knowing that soon, I’d be letting go.

All my stuff was loaded into the SUV, and I watched as it pulled out of Wes’s driveway headed towards my apartment. The driver had the key to my tiny box and would put the clothing in and leave the key with the super.

Wes was expecting me to be here when he got home so we could have one last meal together. Unfortunately, I knew that doing so would break me. More than that, it would ruin me. After our time on the beach yesterday, we went back to his home and spent the entire afternoon into the evening making love. That’s what it was. It wasn’t fucking or having sex. We made love, over and over again until we were exhausted and passed out, snuggled together in his giant bed. Then he got a call that forced him to go into the studio this morning. He said he’d be home at six to take me out for our last dinner. Except I wouldn’t be there. It would be too hard to say goodbye like that after everything we’ve been through.

Instead, I decided to share my thoughts with him on paper, writing him a cliché, but heartfelt, Dear John letter. Basically, I was a coward.

Weston Charles Channing, III,

Writing your name out like that cracks me up. Have you ever said your name out loud? Do it. For me. It’s funny. You’ll laugh. I did.

In all seriousness, I want to thank you for this month. I was expecting to hate every second of this job and instead, it ended up being the most exciting thing I’ve ever done in my life. Meeting you has been a gift. You’re a gift, Wes. I know that sounds cheesy and I almost scratched it out, but you need to hear it from someone who cares. And I do care. A lot. More than I should.

Being with you, spending time together, has changed me, for the better I think. I now feel as though I can get through this year and learn something from it, aside from just saving my dad. I

think I'm going to be saving myself. It's time for me to live for me. If I stayed and let you take care of my problems, pay off my dad's debt, I would regret it every day of my life. It would always hang over my head and our relationship. Leaving this way, I'm leaving on my terms. And I'm leaving us still good friends. The best of friends. Friends with benefits? <wink>

Am I sad leaving? Yes. I don't want to leave, but you already knew that. I know what I'm doing sucks for the both of us, but I also know it's the only way I can truly be free. What's that saying? 'If you love someone set it free and if it doesn't come back it wasn't meant to be?'

I hope to come back one day. If it's meant to be, it will be, right? If it's not, we will always have a friend we can count on. I truly hope you understand that and where these words are coming from. I wish you the best. Your movie is going to blow everyone away because you wrote it, and your words are beautiful.

This morning when you thought I was asleep and you kissed me goodbye you said softly, "Remember me." Wes, I promise, I'll never forget our time together but most importantly, I'll never forget you.

With everything that I am,

~Mia

Then I kissed the letter right next to my name leaving a set of fat pink lips. One last kiss for Wes.

The next couple of days were a nightmare of appointments my Aunt Millie scheduled for me prior to meeting hot artist guy, Alec Dubois. The hair and nail appointments were pleasant, if not boring as hell. I dig pretty things as much as the next girl, but spending four fucking hours getting your hair done, and another two for your feet and nails is ridiculous. After that, Millie had me with the aesthetician.

An aesthetician is another name for torture mistress. They start with a relaxing facial where they fill your senses with these beautiful scents, calming music, and a facial massage. Then they bust out the bright spotlight. Your choices at that point are close your eyes or lose a retina. The eye closing is designed to help you when they bring forth the excavator, I mean the "extractor." Otherwise known as a pimple popping, blackhead digging shovel that removes every pore on your face of the nasty gunk your daily makeup leaves behind. It's serious business, but I will say, my face never looked better. Bright, flawless skin that felt like a baby's ass. It was so smooth to the touch.

Then my day turned to complete and utter shit. I had to get waxed. Everywhere. The artist had very specific requirements. If I was going to drop my clothes, and he was going to drop an additional twenty -five thousand, I needed to be hairless everywhere but my head. The peach fuzz on my arms was okayed thankfully. My nether regions, not so much. If you've never had the pleasure of getting a Brazilian wax, consider yourself lucky. First, your assailant, I mean aesthetician, covers every inch of your lady bits with hot wax barely this side of scalding. Once that cools and hardens into a hard surface, the skin is held down while they proceed to rip a layer of skin and every single hair out leaving your bits hairless, smooth and looking less like a woman and more like a little girl.

It's demoralizing, and I can't imagine why women would willingly go through this if they weren't getting paid the big bucks. At least I know I'm getting a payout at the end of my suffering. What's their excuse?

My phone beeped from my back pocket. I'd received a text. People were still getting settled before take-off, so I could check the message and maybe even have time for a reply.

From: Wes Channing

To: Mia Saunders

Got your letter. Sorry I didn't contact sooner. I thought it would be better if I gave it time. Want to wish you safe travels. There's something in your bag in the front pocket. I'll call you soon. Remember me.

I smiled and pulled the pack from under the seat in front of me. Inside the front pocket was a small black box about three inches wide by an inch tall. Once I opened it, the item inside made me smile so wide I thought my cheeks might burst. Inside the box was a brass key dangling from a small yellow and pink surfboard. It was the key I used while I lived with Wes. My key. Only this time, the keychain had a small addition. A sparkly red heart dangled alongside the surfboard.

A note sat jammed at the bottom of the box. I opened it.

Mia,

You forgot your key. It opens a lot more than a door. One day I hope you'll use it.

~Wes

With purpose, I pulled out my keys to Suzi and my apartment and attached the surfboard and key to Wes's house. His intention couldn't be any clearer. If I wanted to come back to him, I would need to be ready to give him my heart because I already had his.

Mia's journey is continued in **Calendar Girl: February**. Keep reading for an excerpt.

Excerpt from February: Calendar Girl (Book 2)

The twisted and rusted iron gates clanged loudly together as the driver pulled them down, locking them in place. He hadn't uttered a word other than, "You Mia?" when I came down the escalator at Portland International Airport baggage claim. I figured it was safe to follow him since he had a sign with my full name on it and Aunt Millie told me to expect a giant lumberjack of a man to drive me to my next client. The giant part was no joke and it wasn't his height. Guy stood only a couple inches taller than me but what he made up for in length he made up for in width. Reminded me of a pro wrestler or one of those beefy body builders.

Once the elevator made it to floor ten it came to a screeching, grinding halt, jolting me into Paul Bunion's baby brother. He was a solid wall, didn't even flinch when I bumped into him, just grunted like an animal. The giant doors opened and Bunion pulled open the gates and ushered me into what seemed to be an open warehouse. The rafters and piping were visible and no less than fifty feet above the concrete floor. People were milling around everywhere, half of them naked.

What the fuck did I get myself into?

Cameras were clicking, lighting units were being moved around on wheeled carts as I stood in the entryway attempting to take it all in. Bunion set my bag off to a side wall and pointed to a man crouched down, a camera glued to his face. "Mr. Dubois," he grumbled then abruptly turned around and entered the elevator we just exited leaving me to fend for myself.

"Man of few words," I let a slow breath leave my too full lungs. I didn't know what to do. Should I sit off to the side and wait for someone to approach me, hopefully not the naked men and women scattered around, or should I bug the guy busily taking pictures of something I couldn't quite see.

Instead of waiting I decided to take a better stock of my surroundings and walked around. The room was an open loft, but not a home. Rickety windows lined the walls on the right, some opened from the bottom out, others closed tight. Looked like it took a crank to open them, which I found incredible cool and retro. Naked and half naked women passed by me, sizing me up as they moved in front of giant white canvases. They weren't really modeling they were just standing next to them, loosely holding a pose attendants were perfecting with subtle shifts of an elbow here, moving a foot there. Then the attendant would back up and take a single photo and start over again. Tiny movements again, then another picture. It was downright weird.

I moved over to another area where there was a couple, naked laying on a huge white canvas. Had to be at least ten by ten feet in size. Then an attendant again, all wearing black, which was incredibly clichéd, climbed up a small ladder that had a platform directly over their bodies. Then he methodically poured what looked to be bright blue paint over every inch of their bodies.

"Don't move!" he screamed. "We'll have to start all over and Mr. Dubois won't be pleased," he said tightly. The couple stayed in a naked clinch. The female models hands were wrapped around the males head as if she were about to kiss him. His arms were around her, one on her ass holding a leg over his hip, the other cupping the back of her head.

Paint dripped down their legs and fell into globs on the canvas. “Still,” the man warned. I was so fascinated by the inner workings of the odd scene in front of me I didn’t hear a person walk up behind me until my hair was swept off my neck.

“Perfection,” I heard whispered against my ear before a soft kiss hit the bare skin of where my shoulder and neck meet.

I shuffled back, not realizing where I was going, just trying to get away from the stranger touching me when I bumped into something behind me. Before I could turn, my boot caught the edge of the canvas and I went toppling into the platform which held the irritated guy with the paint. Then, utter chaos ensued. The man holding the bucket whet tumbling forward, blue sticky paint flew out of the can into a fan of color before splashing down to the canvas and tarp protecting the concrete.

The couple beneath must of saw the fall coming because the man rolled hot naked chick, as if he’d been trained in combat services with the armed forces, avoiding the attendant, being doused with more paint, and the platform narrowly missed falling on top of them. Me on the other hand, I wasn’t so lucky.

When I fell backward, my other heel went through the thick canvas and stuck, whereas my body curved around the opposite direction. I screamed out as my ankle twisted painfully and I landed ass over tit into blue paint and torn canvas.

“Sweet Jesus,” the man I tried to get away from stepped into the mess and pulled me up by the armpits. His yellow brown eyes were mesmerizing and worried. Small lines fell at the edges of each eye proving he was a good decade older. Sandy brown hair with twinges of russet gold and red streaked through in natural highlights along his scalp was pulled tight into a small bun at the back of his head. A sculpted jaw and full lips were rimmed with perfectly trimmed facial hair. I’d never dated a man with a beard, but standing in front of this man, strong arms holding me close to a very tall and muscular frame, I couldn’t fathom why I never had. He was drop dead gorgeous. Reminded me Ben Affleck only way hotter.

“I didn’t mean to frighten you. I just, saw you standing there and your beauty was far beyond the likes of any mere model. I had to press my lips against your golden skin. You must be *My Mia*.”

Purchase February: Calendar Girl (Book 2) today!

Books and Coming Soon by Audrey Carlan

The Falling Series

Angel Falling

London Falling

Justice Falling

Trinity Trilogy

Body (Book 1)

Mind (Book 2)

Soul (Book 3 - Estimated Release 3/2015)

Calendar Girl Serial

(A twelve month serial. New installments will be released every month throughout 2015)

January (Book 1)

February (Book 2 - Estimated Release 2/2015)

March (Book 3 - Estimated Release 3/2015)

April (Book 4 - Estimated Release 4/2015)

May (Book 5 - Estimated Release 5/2015)

June (Book 6 - Estimated Release 6/2015)

July (Book 7 - Estimated Release 7/2015)

August (Book 8 - Estimated Release 8/2015)

September (Book 9 - Estimated Release 9/2015)

October (Book 10 - Estimated Release 10/2015)

November (Book 11 - Estimated Release 11/2015)

December (Book 12 - Estimated Release 12/2015)

Acknowledgements

To my critique partner, **Sarah Saunders**, for giving Mia her name and helping me make her a bad ass! There's a lot of you in our girl and I love it!

To my editor **Ekatarina Sayanova** with Red Quill Editing, LLC, you rocked this just as I expected you would. Thank you for making me a better writer. You need reliable, professional edits without worrying about the editor changing your voice, contact Red Quill. (www.redquillediting.net)

Any author knows they aren't worth their weight unless their story is backed by badass betas. I have the best!

Ginelle Blanch - This book is dedicated to you because you've been with me since the beginning, never complained, always shared your support and busted out your betas efficiently and blown my mind every time with the crazy screw up you find. You have an incredible eye for detail. Thank you.

Jeananna Goodall - The woman who reads everything I write *before* I've even given it a second read through. I adore you. You make me want to write and believe that I will make it in this industry. Thank you for always giving me hope.

Anita Shofner - My present and past tense QUEEN...you prevent my characters from traveling time. Thank you, Angel.

To **Give Me Books** and **Kylie McDermott** for spreading this book far and wide into the virtual stratosphere...I owe you! Thank you to you and all your girls but especially my dream team Beth Cranford, Missy Borucki, and Devlynn Ihlenfeld. You ladies read my books and share your honest opinions and always find beauty in them. BESOS ladies!

About Audrey Carlan

Audrey Carlan lives in the sunny California Valley two hours away from the city, the beach, the mountains and the precious ... the vineyards. She has been married to the love of her life for over a decade and has two young children that live up to their title of “Monster Madness” on daily basis. When she’s not writing wickedly hot romances, doing yoga, or sipping wine with her “soul sisters”, three incredibly different and unique voices in her life, she can be found with her nose stuck in book or her Kindle. A hot, smutty, romantic book to be exact!

Any and all feedback is greatly appreciated and feeds the soul. You can contact Audrey below:

Email: carlan.audrey@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/AuthorAudreyCarlan

Website: www.audreycarlan.com

Twitter: @AudreyCarlan

Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7831156.Audrey_Carlan

Table of Contents

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Excerpt from February: Calendar Girl \(Book 2\)](#)

[Books and Coming Soon by Audrey Carlan](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[About Audrey Carlan](#)