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LUCK  
BE DELANIE

CHANCES  
ARE

SHELLI STEVENS

*He's lured her to paradise...and she's about to discover the price.*

*A Chances Are story.*

Long ago, Delanie made one gigantic mistake. Or committed one small felony, depending on how you look at it. Stealing a coin from a sexy stranger was just a prank to help a sorority sister get revenge. The sleeping with him part was totally unplanned. Yet she holds the memory of that one intense, passionate connection close to her heart—like the coin she still wears around her neck.

Six years later, she's invited to a beautiful resort in the San Juan Islands to not only accept a donation for an abused women's shelter, but to consider a job opportunity as well. Instead, she finds herself face-to-face with her past.

Grant has always suspected Delanie stole his rare, lucky coin. He just never knew why—or why she disappeared the morning after their hot night together. After spending years looking for her, he's lured her right where he wants her. He'll have his answers, come hell or high water.

And, if things go his way, he'll have Delanie, too.

Warning: This book contains lost lovers reunited, male masturbation, "You could have died" sex, and overall hot lovin'.

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# Luck be Delanie

*Shelli Stevens*

## Dedication

Thank you to Melissa at DAWN for your help and information on domestic violence. Thanks to my family and friends for your continued support, and thank you to my editor Laurie for making my books shine!

# Chapter One

“I like your tattoo,” a deep voice came from behind her. “The last time I saw it I was taking you from behind.”

Delanie choked on the wine she’d just taken a sip of, her fingers almost crushing the stem of the glass.

*No. It wasn’t possible.* Goosebumps broke out over her body even as quick heat spread inside her. She could feel the owl tattoo on her shoulder blade tingle under his gaze.

What was more shocking? His words or the man who had just spoken them? God, it was a toss-up.

She drew in a slow breath, afraid to turn around. Her heart pounded furiously beneath her breasts and her palms dampened.

The coin she’d stolen from him six years ago hung on a pendant around her neck like a beacon. Thank God it was beneath the neckline of her sundress and well out of his view.

“Do you remember that night?” His warm breath tickled her ear.

Hot shivers raced down her spine as his words evoked images of the night they’d spent together. The air locked in her throat and she bit her lip, trying to halt the bombardment of erotic images.

Of course she remembered. That night was a firebrand on her mind. But admitting she hadn’t forgotten could only bring trouble. *It couldn’t possibly be him standing behind me*, the silly voice of denial screamed in her head.

Without turning around, she could sense the tall, hardness of his body just inches from her. Could feel his blue eyes burning a trail over her.

Another tremble wracked her body.

*Get yourself together, Delanie. You’re not a silly co-ed anymore. And he has no idea what you did the morning after your night together.*

She focused hard on the sparkling blue water that lay beyond the trees. She’d always heard Washington State was beautiful, and this island and resort in the San Juan Islands was a genuine paradise.

Funny how she’d considered herself a lucky woman getting invited to such a posh resort. How wonderful that not only was she here to accept a donation to the Second Chances shelter, but to also consider an offer as the resort’s marketing director.

Her lips twisted. She should have known. Paradise always had a price.

“Still thinking about that night?”

Annoyance pricked at his mocking tone. Knowing she couldn't very well keep her back to him forever, she forced a bland expression onto her face and turned around.

Her bravado slipped a notch the moment she saw him, but she forced it back by lifting her chin higher. "I think you have me mistaken with someone else."

"Do I?" He lifted an eyebrow, his mouth twitching with obvious amusement.

She swallowed hard.

Grant Thompson looked just as good now as he had six years ago. Scratch that, he looked better. The tall, lean, college athlete had turned into a sexy grown man. His face was harder now, more angular with the loss of the boyish roundness.

His hair, once more red than blond, had settled into something in between. But those eyes...those eyes were just as blue and piercing as they had been all those years ago. On that night she'd been stupid enough to bounce the bed springs with him.

She felt the warming of a blush and bit her cheek.

"Excuse me." She stepped past him, but he reached out and caught her elbow, swinging her back around. Hot tingles raced up her arm where his fingers touched.

"Wait, Lanie—"

"Well at least you got my name right this time." Her voice shook as she tugged herself free from his grip. She stumbled backward and eyed him warily.

That heart-crushing moment would remain engraved in her mind forever. Right after bringing her to a sweet morning-after orgasm, the jerk had called her Janie. *Janie!* And then to add insult to injury, he'd fallen back asleep before they could even finish making love. Wait, sex. Of course a guy like Grant wouldn't consider it *making love*.

"I'm sorry about that." Grant's jaw hardened, all amusement vanishing. "That mistake caused a helluva delay in finding you."

"Sorry? As if that—" She broke off and narrowed her eyes. "In finding me?"

He tilted his head and gave her a considering look. "Is that why you left so suddenly that morning?"

Guilt stabbed low in her gut, and she reached to touch the pendant under her dress. Before her fingers connected, she jerked her hand away and tucked a strand of short blonde hair behind her ear instead.

*Careful, girl. You're on dangerous grounds right now.*

"Look." She let her gaze slip away from his. "I don't know what kind of twist of fate brought us together, but I'll catch the first ferry back to Anacortes."

"It was me." He stepped closer, blocking her path back into the building.

Her heart almost stopped at the three words. "Excuse me?"

"I'm the twist of fate." His mouth tightened. "Finding you was the first piece of good luck I've had in years."

She almost dwelled on the luck comment, but the fact that he was claiming to be the twist of fate resonated louder.

The urge to flee increased and she shook her head, glancing around the patio. Her stomach clenched as she realized they were alone now.

"Grant..." She ran her tongue over suddenly dry lips and his gaze darkened as he observed the small movement.

"Lanie." He stepped forward and she took a step back, her pulse jumping.

"Delanie," she muttered without thinking. "I haven't been called Lanie since college."

"Fine. Delanie."

The waves crashed against the rocks below as he backed her up against the guard railing.

"When does the next boat leave?" she queried, her heart fluttering harder in her chest. "I can arrange to be on it."

"You don't understand. I don't want you to leave." His hands curled around the rail on each side of her body.

The faint smell of soap and cologne tickled her nostrils and the heat of his hard body mingled with hers.

"It took me six years to find you."

Six years faded to nothing with him standing so close. A tremble rocked her body, and her nipples tightened, chafing against the lace of her bra.

She bit back a groan. "Please..."

"The last thing I'm going to do is put you on a boat home, Delanie. We have a lot to talk about."

Her stomach dropped and her mouth went dry. Oh. God. He *knew*.

His lips hovered just inches above hers and he used the tip of his thumb to trace the seam of her lips. The blood pounded through her veins and it became a struggle just to drag air into her lungs.

All outside noise disappeared and their gazes locked. The vision of that night so many years ago ran through her head, trapping her in a vortex of memories and sensation.

Her gaze moved to his mouth. She wanted him to kiss her. Wanted him to eliminate those few inches between them and cover her mouth with his. But that would be crazy. Ridiculous.

Her eyelids drifted shut.

"Ms. Williams, we can check you in now."

The heat of his body disappeared. She blinked her eyes open again and Grant had stepped away from her, annoyance clear on his face.

"Thank you, Burton." He shifted his attention from her to the approaching employee.



Smoothing her hand down the front of her dress, Delanie tried to regain some of the composure she'd lost in the past few minutes. She had to be completely insane. Talk about a close call. She'd been fully prepared to let him kiss her.

"Please remember that Ms. Williams is to be placed in room two in the north building."

Her gaze jerked back to Grant in surprise. Why was he ordering around the employee like he owned the place?

The blood drained from her head and she gripped the railing to steady herself. Oh God. He probably *did* own the resort. Was Grant the sponsor who had seemed too good to be true? Was he the one offering her this job?

Her stomach dropped and all her hopes and expectations disappeared.

"Of course, the room is already prepared." The employee gave a quick nod. "If you would just follow me, Ms. Williams."

Eager to put as much as distance as possible between herself and Grant, she hurried after the employee.

"Delanie."

Her name spoken softly on his lips had her stumbling to a halt again.

"Yes?" She drew her bottom lip between her teeth, glad her back was to him once again.

"Have dinner with me tonight."

"This is supposed to be business—"

"I know." Footsteps sounded on the patio and then he walked past her. "I'll come by your room at six."

She stared at his retreating back, her eyes widening when he suddenly tripped and stumbled into one of the patio chairs.

"God damn bad luck," he mumbled before disappearing inside.

Why did he keep bringing up luck? She shook her head and dragged in a deep breath, clenching her fists at her side.

"Ms. Williams?"

"Yes. Sorry, I'm coming."

Delanie stared out the open French doors of her suite. The cool breeze from the straits swept into her room, lifting the gauzy white curtains around her.

The décor of the room ranged from white wicker furniture to a plush bed set high on the far side of the room.

The resort was the ultimate paradise. It had also just become her personal nightmare.

Grant Thompson. Just thinking his name made her knees a bit weak again. And she was not a weak in the knees type of woman. But nothing could have prepared her for the emotional punch she'd taken when she'd turned around to find him standing there.

He wasn't supposed to show up in her life again. Ever. Fate didn't have that perverse a sense of humor. She groaned. *Obviously it did.*

It had been one night. One night when she'd been young, stupid, and horny as any sorority girl in lust could be.

She picked up her cell phone and debated who to call. She'd been spending more time with Franklin lately, but the idea of calling him made her stomach churn. Besides, it'd be a little weird to discuss her old lover with her current almost lover.

Biting her lip, she called Second Chances, the battered women's shelter where she worked. She pushed aside the immediate guilt over the fact that she hadn't mentioned to her friend that she'd considered taking a new job. Not that it mattered now...there was no way she'd accept a job at a resort Grant owned.

"Second Chances, how can I help you?"

"Phoebe? Hey, it's Delanie. Is it at all possible to get me on a flight back to San Francisco tonight?"

"Tonight?" Phoebe asked sharply. "What do you mean? You just got there. I thought the invitation was for one week to relax, enjoy the resort, and discuss details."

"It was." Delanie nibbled on her bottom lip and went to sit down on the plush bed.

"Then what happened? This is the chance to mix business with pleasure. I would have killed for that opportunity. I mean the owner of the resort comped your entire trip and specifically requested we send you."

Yes, and now she knew why. It wasn't just about a job and a check. She touched the pendant around her neck and exhaled heavily. It couldn't be a coincidence. It just wasn't possible. In fact, Grant had pretty much said so himself.

*Admit it, Delanie. He hasn't forgotten that night any more than you have.*

"Delanie? Are you still there?"

"I'm here." She sighed, hesitating whether to bring up the situation.

"Is the place just trashy or something? I mean the pictures looked great..."

"It's beautiful." She closed her eyes. "The resort itself is absolutely stunning."

"Okay. Look, whatever it is, can't you work through it? I mean they're offering to—"

"It's Grant."

Heavy silence met her statement. She could almost hear the wheels spinning in her friend's mind.

"Wait a minute, *the* Grant? The one you told me about?"

"Yes. *The* Grant. He owns Athena's Oasis."

"Well," Phoebe's voice sounded a little too bright. "That certainly makes things interesting."

“Umm, yeah, just a little.”

“Does he know you took his coin?”

“I have no idea,” she admitted and pushed a shaking hand through her hair. “But I have to admit I’m freaking out a bit, Phoebe.”

“As well you should be. I mean if he found out and pressed charges, it could be considered a felony.”

“Okay, not exactly what I wanted to hear right now,” Lanie grumbled. “And besides, that’s only if the coin is real...”

“Exactly. And the guy at the antique shop said it wasn’t. So nothing to worry about, right?”

“Right.”

“Plus, it was so long ago, he probably couldn’t press charges anyway.”

“Of course.” There was another pause. “So what’s going on? Has he been mean to you?”

Mean? No. Made her want to rip off her clothes and have sex like she was in college again? Yes.

“He hasn’t been mean. I just have to question his motives for bringing me up here.”

“Wait a minute, it wasn’t a coincidence?”

“No. He pretty much told me that he’s been searching for me for the past six years.”

Silence. Then, “Okay. Well, then it’s simple. Get an earlier flight home, because the man is obviously nuts.”

“But, Phoebe, what about Second Chances? We—”

“Unless...” Phoebe’s tone shifted, turned more thoughtful. “Unless he’s just nuts *about you*. You did say you guys had this incredible connection that one night together.”

“We did. But it was just one night,” she protested.

Who was she trying to convince though? Her one night with Grant had emotionally linked her to him in a way she’d never been able to equal with another man.

It had taken her years to accept that fact. Her stomach clenched and she gripped the phone tighter.

“Well, maybe one night simply wasn’t enough for him.”

Lanie snorted, more than prepared to shoot down Phoebe’s ridiculous theory. “Or maybe he knows I stole the coin.”

“Maybe,” Phoebe agreed mildly, though she didn’t sound convinced. “But the only way you’ll find out is if you stay.”

Lanie sighed, shaking her head. “That’s a pretty big risk.”

“Okay, well forget about the whole *we screwed* bit. Think about the shelter. I mean, he’s offering to donate a pretty big sum to the shelter annually. That’s huge. Way more than we ever could have hoped for.”

Guilt knotted in her gut. Jesus, she was a selfish witch. She closed her eyes and shoved her bangs away from her eyes. This wasn't about her. This was about Second Chances and what Grant was offering could go so far for the shelter and the women there.

"Delanie?"

Realizing she'd been quiet for too long, she cleared her throat. "I'm here. You're right, Phoebe. You're always right. Of course I'll stay. Forget I even called. I overreacted. You know me."

"Yeah, I do. And you're not the overreacting type. You're the overanalyzing type. Which is why I'm not really surprised to be having this conversation."

Delanie gave a soft laugh. "You're too good to me."

"Ditto. Oh, and by the way, Franklin called the office looking for you. Said you weren't answering your cell."

"Right," Delanie's lips twitched and some of the tension eased from her body. "Reception is terrible out here."

"I'm sure." Phoebe giggled. "That's why you're calling me right now with no trouble."

Earlier she'd turned off her phone to avoid his calls. It was another reason she'd been eager to take this trip.

She suspected he wanted their relationship to be quite a bit more serious than she did. The part she couldn't figure out was whether or not Franklin just thought she was the perfect arm candy for a senator.

As Phoebe had pointed out more than once, she was an attractive young woman from a respected family, who worked tirelessly for a battered women's shelter.

"All right. I need to unpack and get settled." She tightened her grip on the phone. "And thanks again, Phoebe."

"For?"

"For talking me down from the ledge."

"You'd do the same for me. Have a good night and keep me posted on everything. And I do mean *everything*."

"Will do. Say hi to Gabby for me."

"I will. She's been asking about you. Should I tell her you're miserable?" Phoebe teased.

"No. Tell her all is bliss. Why weigh her down with my drama." Delanie laughed. "Good night, hon."

She shut her phone and set it on the bed then leaned back against the pillow and let her head sink into the feathery softness.

She closed her eyes, hoping it would erase the image of Grant from her mind. If anything, it only heightened it.

Her fingers brushed over the faded coin around her neck. And just like every other time she touched it, the vision of that one night with Grant flickered through her mind.

A cold night, it had been snowing outside. While two hot, naked bodies joined in passion and moved together on flannel sheets.

*It was a night that should never have happened.*

The plan had seemed so simple. Stage an *accidental* meeting with Grant at the bar and get him to bring her back to his place. Then she'd steal the coin and sneak out.

"But being an overachiever, I just had to go for extra credit," she muttered to herself with a bittersweet smile. "I just had to go ahead and sleep with him too."

Delanie sat up on the bed and glanced outside her room to where the wind had picked up. The water beyond the resort was whipping into a frenzy of whitecaps and swells.

She lifted the coin closer to her face to stare at it. Even six years later she couldn't explain why she'd kept it for herself. That certainly hadn't been part of the plan. But when she'd untied the leather cord on the pouch and dumped the coin into her hand, the plan had gotten ditched.

The first thing she'd noticed about the coin was that it seemed old—many centuries at least. The second thing that had caught her attention was the owl on it. A weird twist of fate, since she'd just gotten an owl tattoo on her shoulder blade the week before. And maybe that's why she'd made the decision she had.

Her choices had been simple. Throw it into a lake as she'd promised the person she'd stolen it for, or keep it for herself.

The decision had been a no brainer. Not only had she kept it, but she'd had it turned into a necklace. Though she'd made sure the tiny prongs that held the coin ensured no damage would come to it.

*You should've just thrown it into the lake.*

She let go of the coin, the cool weight of it between her breasts calming her. No. That was another decision she wouldn't regret, no matter how much it came back to bite her in the butt.

Sliding off the bed, she reached behind her to untie the back of her halter dress. Looking over her shoulder, she caught sight of the small tattoo on her shoulder blade.

Grant's words flitted through her head again. *The last time I saw it I was taking you from behind.*

Heat spread through her body and she closed her eyes. More images assailed her. She on her hands and knees, his strong hands biting into her hips as fucked her.

She swallowed hard and shimmied out of the dress, letting it pool at her feet.

She glanced at the clock. Grant said he'd come for her at six. Two hours.

That meant she had two hours to make herself look good. Not good—great. When she pulled out all the stops with her appearance, she felt confident, ready to take on the world. She could hold her own in any situation.

Which seemed all too appropriate for the dinner she was going to attend tonight. Uneasy now, she headed to the bathroom to shower.

## Chapter Two

Grant stood in his office and swirled the glass of melting ice left over from his gin and tonic.

With his gaze narrowed on the choppy waters off the island, he tilted the glass, emptying the rest of the ice into his mouth. Half made it into his mouth, the rest of it spilled down the front of his freshly pressed shirt.

He sighed and set down the glass. Of course he'd dumped half the contents on himself.

He brushed the ice off his shirt and glanced back out the window.

Thank God she was here. It had been surprisingly easy to lure Delanie Williams to Lopez Island. She hadn't even seen it coming. But then, why would she have?

She'd walked out of his life on that snowy morning six years ago and probably didn't have a clue of the chaos she'd left in her wake.

B.D.—before Delanie, he liked to call it—life had been good. The girls had loved him and he'd had no problem with his life as a serial dater. A.D.—after Delanie—he'd been lucky to make it past two dates with a woman without getting bored.

Every woman he dated, went to bed with, inevitably got compared to the one woman he'd spent less than twenty-four hours with.

It was annoying as hell, and he hated himself for doing it. Couldn't understand why he did it. He barely knew Delanie, so why should every other woman on the planet have to measure up to her?

And it wasn't just his love life that had gone kaput after that night. Things had just started to fall apart in general. His cat died, his truck got stolen, and he'd lost his job.

And those had just been the first handful of things that had gone wrong. Six years of bad luck had ensued after the coin disappeared.

He'd kept that coin in the same place day in and day out. There was no way in hell it had been misplaced. It had been taken, plain and simple. Possibly by his roommate—who'd denied ever taking it—and Grant leaned towards believing the guy. Which left only one other likely person. Delanie.

He shook his head. The idea still seemed far-fetched that she was the one who took it. What could possibly have been her motive?

The only way to find out would be to ask her face-to-face. He'd always prided himself on being able to read a person's first reaction. And tonight he'd read Delanie's.

That coin had accompanied him everywhere, it was his lucky charm. It'd been a part of him—a part of the Thompson family—for centuries.

He rubbed the back of his neck, and closed his eyes.

“This is about more than the coin,” he muttered to himself. “And you’d better stop trying to convince yourself otherwise.”

Seeing Delanie again was like fitting that last piece of the puzzle where it had been missing for so long.

The image of how he'd first seen her today flashed behind his closed eyes. She'd been facing away from him. Her back and shoulders bared around the thin straps of her sundress. The small tattoo of a white owl had drawn his gaze like a beacon. Then, when she'd finally turned around...

His chest tightened and he drew in an unsteady breath.

Delanie had been a pretty sorority girl, slender, with long brown hair, and brown eyes full of mischief.

But six years later she was stunning. Her slender body had softened with the curves of a woman. Her breasts were fuller, her hips more rounded, but it was her hair that had undergone the biggest transformation.

She wore it shorter now, so it just hit her shoulders. And it was lighter, almost blonde. The style made her more impish and sexy.

And he still wanted her. As much today as he had that night they'd tumbled into his bed.

Grant drew in a deep breath and winced. The smell of gin now lingered on his shirt. It was probably time for that shower.

He unfastened the buttons on his shirt and headed to the bathroom to get ready for his dinner with Delanie.

An hour later he left his room. Clean, changed, and cologned. He walked to her room, drawing in a slow breath before he lifted his hand and knocked.

His mouth twitched as he waited for her to open the door. She probably had no idea he'd had her placed in the room right next door to his.

Half a minute passed and he frowned then knocked again. Maybe she hadn't been thrilled by the idea of dinner with him, but would she deliberately avoid him? Not answer the door?

The tension eased from his shoulders when footsteps sounded inside the room. A few seconds later, the door swung open.

Grant drew in a sharp breath, letting his gaze move over her as the blood stirred in his cock.

If this was how she dressed when she didn't want to go to dinner, he'd love to see what she looked like when she did. Sweet Jesus, she looked sexy.

The black dress cut low on her breasts, showing plenty of cleavage before falling all the way down to her red-painted toenails.

He jerked his gaze back up to her face and his hand gripped the doorframe as he made a serious mental effort not to get a hard-on.

Her brown eyes appeared brighter, her expression tentative. "Sorry, I was drying my hair."

"No problem." He cleared his throat. "Are you hungry?"

She gave a quick nod, her hands twisting together in front of her. "A little. The last thing I ate was some God-awful crackers on the plane."

"God-awful crackers make for a terrible meal." He gave her a slight smile, hoping to put her more at ease.

She was nervous. Then again, he wasn't exactly Mr. Composure either after seeing her again. No matter that he'd mentally geared up for their reunion, it was still a shock.

"Ready?" He released the doorframe and stepped back, giving her room to step out.

She ran her hands over the waist of her dress and then gave a quick nod. "Yes. I'm ready." She stepped past him and closed the door behind her.

When she took those few steps past him, his gaze immediately moved over her back. The dress was cut low on the backside as well, the slinky fabric clinging to the curve of her ass.

He balled his fists against his sides and ground his teeth together. *This isn't about getting laid, buddy.* Though it would be a nice bonus.

"So, where are we going?" she called over her shoulder, not looking back as she strode down the hallway.

"I've arranged dinner in a private room on the second floor of the main house. Here."

This time she did glance sharply behind her.

"It has a great view. You'll love it," he promised and increased his stride so they walked beside each other.

He led her up the spiral staircase to the second floor. A small table had already been laid out with plates, wine glasses, and a candle burning in the middle.

Christ. He'd asked for a quiet dinner to be set up, not something you'd find on an episode of *The Bachelor*. But then, that was Roberta. The older cook was a die-hard romantic.

Delanie gasped and hurried over to the large windows that overlooked the San Juan Islands. "Look at that view!"

He smiled, thrusting his hands into his pockets. It was the reason he'd requested the dinner be held up here. The room was generally off limits. This view rarely seen by anyone, outside himself and the occasional employee.

She seemed to hesitate before moving toward the chair he pulled out for her. She sat down, her back rigid and her hands folded in her lap as she eyed the table wearily.

"Can I get you some wine?" he offered as he sat.



“I’d rather you tell me how I ended up at your resort.”

Delanie bit her tongue the moment the words were out. Her stomach flipped as he lifted an eyebrow and gave a low, sexy laugh.

She hadn’t planned on going straight for the attack, but seeing the tender scene he’d set up had rattled her nerves.

“Perhaps some wine first?”

He went to work filling both glasses and her gaze dropped to his hands, which were wrapped around the wine bottle.

Those hands had given her more orgasms in one night than her last two boyfriends combined.

“Here you are.”

She took the glass he held out to her, annoyed to find her own hand trembling. Perhaps a little wine first would be good.

She lifted the glass to her lips and took a sip of the sweet chardonnay.

“Was I just a one night stand to you?”

His sudden question made her choke on the wine. Jeez. How the heck did she answer that question? She set the glass back down, and cleared her throat.

“How could it be anything but? Technically, we did only have sex that one night.”

She lifted her gaze, not sure what she’d see. His expression was both curious and strangely intense, which unsettled her.

“That could have been remedied had you stuck around in the morning.” He sighed and took a drink of his own wine.

“Look.” She drew in a deep breath before plunging on. “If you brought me out here to get me into bed again, it’s not going to happen.”

“I didn’t.”

“Because I’m—you didn’t?” She blinked, her stomach sinking with a disappointment she didn’t want to acknowledge. *You’re being an idiot, Delanie.*

He shook his head and then winced. “Well, it wasn’t my initial plan. Although I admit after seeing you again...”

Something occurred to her, something she hadn’t even considered. “Oh my God. Was it all a ruse? The job offer? Getting me out here with the offer to make donations to our shelter?”

“No.” His mouth thinned. “Of course not, Delanie. I’m not a complete asshole.”

Her smile turned a little bitchy. “But you do admit to being a partial one? I won’t take it you know.”

“The job?”

She nodded.

“We’ll see.”

Irritation flared at his cockiness.

A woman carrying two plates walked into the room and set them down in front of them.

“Here you are, kids. Enjoy.”

Kids? Delanie’s mouth twitched as she watched the older lady hurry back out of the room.

She looked down at the food before her and her mouth watered. A salmon filet rested on a bed of rice, next to it a skewer of shrimp and steamed broccoli.

“This looks amazing.” She picked up her fork and speared a chunk of salmon, lifting it to her mouth. “Mmm.” She chewed the bite and swallowed. “Wow. That is so much better than crackers.”

He wasn’t eating. When she lifted her gaze, she found him watching her, a pensive look on his face.

“What did I do to you?” he asked softly, shaking his head. “To make you get up in the morning, walk out of my house, and then basically disappear off the face of the planet?”

Her hunger diminished with the sudden question, and she set her fork down, considering her response.

“Besides call me Janie?” she asked with the only defense she had. And it was rather paltry.

“We met in a bar. It was loud when you introduced yourself to me. So I got the first letter wrong.” He reached across the table and pulled her hand into his. The contact radiated warmth up her arm and throughout her body.

“I know it must have made you feel terrible. But I have a hard time believing you would throw away that night we had together over my small fuck up.”

It *had* hurt. And fortunately that hurt had been the spark to ignite her into action. Meeting him that night in the bar all those years ago had never been an accidental occasion. It had been the first step in a hastily laid plan.

She’d been on a mission that night. A mission spontaneously suggested by her sorority sister. What was her name...Bridget?

Liking him was an inconvenience she couldn’t have predicted. God knows what would have happened if he hadn’t called her the wrong name. She might have stayed in bed all day and confessed her real reason for being there.

“Delanie.” His thumb traced circles over her palm, and her breath hitched. “Did that night really mean so little to you?”

Her pulse pounded, her chest twisting tight as it grew hard to swallow.

If he only knew. That night had meant everything to her. It was why she wore the damn coin she’d stolen from him on a chain around her neck. It reminded her of the deepest connection she’d ever had with a man. The same man who’d had no qualms about breaking Bridget’s heart.

She jerked her hand back from his, almost afraid he could read her thoughts. She had no illusions about what she'd done that morning. When she'd stolen his coin, she'd flat out committed a crime. A small one, but a crime nonetheless.

Being here, on this island with Grant, put everything at risk. Her status as a respected woman in her community. But even more so, her heart.

"Why did you bring me here, Grant?" She shook her head, her mouth pulled tight. "Because I'll be real honest, I'm close to catching the first ferry off this island in the morning."

He stared at her for a moment, his gaze intense on her face. "All right. You want to know why I brought you here? I'll tell you. I want it back."

The blood drained from her face. Not even trying to convince herself she didn't know what he meant, she picked up her wine glass with hands she forced to remain steady.

*She* might know exactly what he wanted back, but she didn't have to let him know she knew.

"I'm sorry? You want what back?"

"The coin."

Confessing she took it was way too dicey. Not to mention she'd grown awfully attached to the necklace.

She set her glass back down on the table and lifted her gaze to his. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

His nostrils flared. "The hell you don't, Lanie."

The first bit of unease settled in her gut at his unwavering accusation.

"Why would I take your coin?"

"That's what I'd like to know." His jaw hardened and he shook his head. "The only thing I do know is that I've had the worst goddamn luck since my coin disappeared."

She blinked. "Bad luck? You think that because you lost your coin you've had bad luck?"

"I did not *lose* my coin, Delanie."

She dropped her gaze, unable to handle the intensity of his stare. It was clear that he knew she took it. He just had no proof.

Thank God she'd had the sense to take off the necklace before dinner. She made a mental note to hide the thing in her luggage until she got home.

"Delanie—"

She pushed back her chair and stood up from the table. "Look, if this is any indication of how this week is going to go, I'd rather not deal with it."

"Wait." He stood, his mouth tightening. "Please, sit. I'm sorry. The last thing I want to do is have Second Chances suffer because we're having issues."

"There is no *we*."

"You know what I mean."

She stared at him for a few seconds, the blood pounding through her veins.

"I didn't take it." It was really amazing how easily the lie fell from her lips.

At first he didn't answer, then he just gave a terse jerk of his head towards the chair. "Okay. If you say you didn't take it, I won't force the issue."

Still she hesitated, torn between the burning guilt of her blatant lie and the unwillingness to sit through what was sure to be an awkward dinner.

"Please, Delanie. Roberta probably spent half the day in the kitchen prepping for this dinner."

With a brisk nod, she sank back into the chair and picked up her fork. "It's good. She's a wonderful cook."

But the food, which had looked so appetizing just moments ago, now might as well have been wood chips.

One thing he said still rang in her mind, puzzling her.

"So this bad luck," she began, lifting the shrimp skewer and pulling off a piece. "I'm sure it had nothing to do with the coin."

"I thought you didn't want to talk about it."

She bit into the shrimp and chewed it slowly. After swallowing the seasoned bite, she licked her lips. "Okay, well certain points I'd rather not. But you've piqued my curiosity. I mean, bad luck for six years? I'm sure it's just a coincidence—"

"My cat died the day after the coin disappeared."

"Okay." She grabbed another piece of shrimp, still not convinced. "Was it old? Did it get hit by a car?"

"No. She ran across the room and jumped into a glass door."

Sounded like the result of a stupid cat to her, but she bit her tongue. "I'm sorry."

"Then my ice cream truck got stolen while I ran inside a convenience store for some nachos."

Delanie tried not to giggle, but it came out anyway. She picked up her wine. "You drove an ice cream truck?"

"It was a summer job."

"Ah. I thought it might have been your chick mobile."

"And that's another thing." He scowled and picked up his own skewer of shrimp.

"What is?"

"Women. I haven't had a relationship that lasted longer than two weeks since..." He held her gaze, his irritation obvious. "Since the coin disappeared."

"You can't expect me to believe that you haven't had sex in six years."

His gaze jerked back to hers, blue eyes alight with amusement. "I never said anything about sex."

“Of course.” She rolled her eyes and turned back to the salmon. “Men never seem to have a problem with that.”

“And you?”

“What about me?”

“I’m assuming you haven’t exactly been abstinent since that night.”

The salmon in her mouth grew heavy against her tongue. She swallowed quickly and grabbed the wine.

No, not abstinent. But damn close. The few occasions she’d taken a lover had left her so bitterly disappointed, she’d pretty much given up trying.

Franklin had been pressuring her to become intimate for months. And, truth be told, she’d been getting close to caving. As it was, she’d just hit the two-year mark without sex.

“Delanie?”

Her name sounded husky on his lips. It sent heat through her body, finally coming to rest heavily between her legs.

She closed her eyes, not wanting to admit to herself that every man who touched her ended up being compared to the man across the table.

“I’ve had lovers,” she finally admitted.

When he didn’t respond, she lifted her gaze. Surprise rippled through her. His jaw had hardened, even as his eyes burned a path over her face.

He couldn’t possibly be jealous, could he? That would be...ridiculous. They’d only had one night together.

She lowered her gaze, pushing her plate away. Although, when he’d casually stated that he’d had lovers, something had clenched deep in her gut.

She sighed and glanced out over the view. The sun had only half set, casting a reddish-orange glow over the trees and water.

As if seeing Grant after six years weren’t enough, now she was sitting across from him at a dinner that, for all intents and purposes, should be considered romantic.

It brought out all kinds of emotions inside her. Made her want to do stupid things and reflect on the stupider things she’d done in her past. *Get out of here before you start a repeat performance.*

“Thank you for the dinner, Grant.” She set her napkin down and pushed back her chair. “Today’s travel has caught up with me and I’m a little tired.”

“Of course.” He stood up. “Let me walk you back to your room.”

“Really, there’s no need,” she protested. “I can find my way back.”

“I’m sure. But I’d rather see you there myself.” He gave a slight smile. “I was raised with good manners.”

Walking back to her room she had to agree with him. Even with just that one night together, it was the first thing she'd picked up on. He'd held doors, paid for her bill at the bar...made sure she'd come five times before screwing her silly.

She bit back a groan and closed her eyes for a second. When she opened them again, they had arrived outside her room.

On impulse, she turned around to face him. He was so close, the top of her head almost brushed his chin.

Her gaze latched onto the few curls that peeked out from the neckline of his buttoned-up shirt. She breathed in deeply and could smell the mix of soap and spicy cologne.

Six years and it still seemed so fresh in her head. The way his big hands had moved over her body so knowingly. How his thumbs had strummed her nipples until she'd begged him to suck on them. The weight of his body on top of hers as he'd settled himself between her thighs. And finally, that one incredible moment when he'd thrust inside her.

Heat stirred low in her belly and her breasts ached under her dress. She wanted him to touch her again. The thought should have alarmed her more, and yet it didn't.

It was almost a relief to admit it to herself. She needed to feel his mouth on hers. It had been much too long.

She lifted her head, her tongue running over her lips.

His gaze darkened and his jaw went rigid. "Delanie..."

Without giving herself the time to reconsider, she reached up and slid her hand around his neck. Spearing her fingers upward into his soft hair, she tugged his head downward.

## Chapter Three

Needing no further encouragement, his lips came down hard on hers. All the years apart melted away as his tongue pressed deep into her mouth. She was back in the bar, the taste of beer still fresh when he'd pressed his lips to hers in a first kiss.

As sweet as that kiss had been, this was sweeter. And far less innocent.

Fire raced through her blood, setting every nerve aflame as moisture gathered heavily between her legs.

He backed her hard against the door, his hands grasping her hips and squeezing her flesh. He angled his mouth and his tongue stroked deeper. His body pressed harder against her and his cock ground into her lower belly.

One of his hands moved up her hip, over her waist, and then stopped as it came along side her breast.

A tremble wracked her body and she tightened her hand in his hair, her taut nipples brushed against his chest.

His thumb stroked the swell from the side, but didn't move inward. Each brush across her flesh sent a stabbing ache straight to her pussy.

His mouth slid off hers, grazing her cheek before he caught the lobe of her ear between his teeth. A gasp ripped from her throat and her panties grew damper.

"What if someone sees us?" she whispered raggedly.

"No guests are allowed in this building. I prefer to keep some areas private. I made an exception for you." His words rode on a hot breath into her ear and she squirmed between him and the wall.

The hand at the side of her breast finally slid inward. He slipped his palm into the neckline of her dress, cupped her fully and caught the nipple between two fingers.

"*Oh.*" She arched her back, pushing her breast harder against his palm.

His tongue flicked over her ear and then he kissed a slow trail down to the fluttering pulse in her neck. He continued to roll her nipple between skilled fingers while thrusting his hips against hers.

His cock, which had grown considerably since the kiss had started, pressed harder into her belly.

"Maybe we should take this into my room." The words barely left her mouth before she froze in shock.

She hadn't just said that. *Oh please God, don't let me have just said that.* What on earth was she thinking?

Grant lifted his head, his expression unreadable as he looked down at her. His fingers tightened around her nipple.

“We have an early morning,” he murmured eventually and released her breast. He pulled his hand free from the dress and tugged the fabric back up to cover her again. “We should probably call it a night.”

Humiliation and relief combined to send a flush through her body.

“Oh...of course,” she stammered.

Yes, she’d regretted inviting him in the minute she’d made the offer, but the fact that he’d turned her down still kind of sucked.

*This is a good thing.* The last thing she wanted to do was go to bed with Grant again. Her mouth tightened. Why make the same mistake twice?

“Tomorrow we can discuss the money for the shelter when I give you a tour around the resort and island. You may even want to consider that job offer still.”

The hot desire in her blood rapidly subsided at his blatant rejection. He’d become all business while she’d gone strolling down memory lane, otherwise known as Orgasm Boulevard.

“Okay.” Her head bobbed up and down. That would still be a no to the job offer. She just wanted this conversation to end and for him to leave. “That sounds good.”

“Can you be ready by nine?”

“Sure.” She nodded again, starting to get a surreal feeling about this whole night.

“Great. Dress comfortably.” He seemed to hesitate, but then spun on his heel and walked back the way they’d come.

Delanie leaned against the door and closed her eyes with a groan. How the hell was she going to survive a week of this?

Grant shut the door to his room and lay his forehead against the wooden frame.

Was he a complete idiot? Why the hell had he turned down her invitation to continue things in her room? Especially when she’d glanced up at him with *that look* in her eyes.

The look that meant she would have allowed him to do just about anything he wanted to her at that moment. And yet he hadn’t. His hand had been filled with her soft breast—the tight little nipple grazing his palm—and he’d turned her down.

“You’re a fucking idiot.” He tapped his forehead against the doorframe. “You could have been balls deep into her right now.”

Sending her to bed alone had seemed like a good idea at the time. He’d made the split second decision not to go there with her just yet. But why?

Even though he’d told himself he hadn’t brought her to Lopez Island with the intention of fucking her again, he could now acknowledge the fact he’d been delusional.



He'd originally had three purposes for bringing her out—getting the coin back, making the offer to donate to the shelter, and offering her the job as the resort's marketing director. Though the last one had been more of the dangling carrot to ensure she actually flew out. He'd known the minute she saw him she'd reject the job.

And now it appeared there would be a fourth purpose. He would have Lanie back in his bed again. But unfortunately not tonight.

Sleeping with her the first day she arrived at Athena's Oasis would have just been stupid. Pretty fucking amazing, but still, stupid as all hell.

He straightened from the door and unfastened the buttons on his shirt. Pulling it off, he dropped it on the floor then stripped down to his boxers and went to brush his teeth.

Unscrewing the lid from the toothpaste, he stilled.

*What the hell was that noise?*

He set down the toothpaste and stepped closer to the sink, where, on the other side of the wall, was Delanie's bathroom. The walls were paper thin—one of the reasons he never let guests stay in here.

The sound of water sloshing in the tub came again, followed by a long and high-pitched whimper.

*Jesus.*

Grant gripped the edge of the sink as his cock went rock hard. Again. It didn't take much imagination to realize Delanie was doing more than bathing in there.

Another long, female moan sounded and he hardened his jaw to avoid the answering groan building up in his chest.

He reached blindly for his cock, pulling it through the slit in his boxers and stroking the thick length from base to tip.

There was no way he was going to last until morning without some release. Especially after knowing Delanie was on the other side of the wall, getting herself off.

Closing his eyes, he listened to the sexy little sounds she made and pumped his erection. Envisioning her breasts covered with water as she lay in the tub fingering herself. So hot. God, what he wouldn't give to see her right now.

She'd been so hot when he'd taken her that night in college. So tight and wet. How wet was she now? Was that pretty pink pussy of hers still bare?

God, he could have spent hours going down on her. She'd been so succulent and sweet. Her cries of pleasure had rid him of the ability to think. Just to give her that pleasure, watching her face and listening to her sexy little moans.

When her cries grew more frequent on the other side of the wall, he moved his fist faster.

And then she climaxed.

*"Oh."* Her strangled cry of release was followed by a splash, and then silence.

Grant's sac tightened and he ground his teeth together, reaching for a small towel on the counter just a second before he came.

He emptied himself over and over into the white terrycloth. Until his mind whirled back to life and he was staring at himself in the mirror.

Dragging in a ragged breath, he shook his head. Damn. Talk about losing complete control.

The sound of the tub draining through the wall meant Delanie was finished in the tub.

He tossed the towel into the laundry bin in the corner, washed his hands and picked up the toothpaste again. His body sated from its release, his thoughts turned back to other matters.

Like the coin.

There was no doubt about it. She'd taken it. He picked up his toothbrush and shook his head, squeezing some mint toothpaste onto the brush.

The question was, did she still have it?

Twelve hours later, Grant was back outside her door. Drinking in the sight of the woman who'd kept him awake all night. The woman whose face he'd pictured while jerking himself off in the shower an hour ago.

"Good morning."

"Don't be so sure about that." Delanie yawned and stepped out of her room, shutting the door behind her.

In jeans and a faded pink T-shirt, she looked nothing like the sex kitten he'd had dinner with last night. Or a woman who had no inhibitions about masturbating in his bathtub.

Yet, in a way, he almost preferred her like this. Fresh-faced with little makeup on, casual and relaxed. It reminded him of the girl he'd met in the bar six years ago.

"So, where are we off to? I assume you're serving me breakfast first?" She lifted an eyebrow and followed him down the hall.

"Breakfast is taken care of." He winked and lifted the brown paper sack. "Roberta packed us a couple of her famous blackberry scones, and I'm having coffee brewed at this very moment."

She groaned. "Thank God. I'm going to need a little help waking up."

"Not a morning person?"

"I've gotten better over the years." She glanced over at him, her gaze suspicious. "When did you become one?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean..." she drifted off and he was surprised to see her cheeks fill with color. "Well, after that night together. You...we..."

“Yes?” he prodded.

After all these years, that morning still seemed a bit hazy. One moment she’d been in his arms, her sweet body trembling through an orgasm. The next he’d woken to find her—and the coin—gone.

“You just didn’t seem to wake up easily.” She bit her lip. “I mean you did...fall back asleep.”

His brows drew together. Fall back asleep? What was she...? It snapped into place and he gave a slow nod.

“Ah-ha. Yes, I guess I did fall back asleep.” He gave her a closer look. “And that upset you?”

She opened her mouth and then shut it. Her cheeks turning adorably pink.

“Lanie?” She didn’t even correct him when he slipped and called her by her nickname.

“Well, come on, Grant. How would you feel?” she grumbled, tucking a strand of hair behind the curve of her ear. “I mean we’d just...you’d just.” She sighed. “And then I look over and you’re snoring away.”

“I don’t snore.”

She met his gaze and lifted an eyebrow. Her eyes danced with mischief, the challenge in her gaze bordered on flirting. “Oh, yes. You sure as hell do.”

An honest laugh rose from his chest and he grinned. Yeah, he probably did snore a little. And how funny that she’d just called him on it—cursing while she did so.

He remembered that side of her from that night in the bar. He’d begun to wonder where that girl was, but apparently she still existed. She was just buried beneath the carefully composed woman she’d become.

“So I take it we’re doing breakfast on the road then?”

“We’ll eat at one of the lookouts on the island. That way I can give you a tour afterward, before coming back to see the rest of the resort.”

“Sounds like a busy morning. I’m up for it.” She gave a soft laugh. “Just as long as you have to-go cups for that coffee.”

“I wouldn’t have offered if we didn’t.” He led her into the kitchen and found the travel cups full of coffee Roberta had left them.

“Cream or sugar?” he asked.

“Black.”

He raised an eyebrow, but didn’t comment. Just handed her the cup of steaming coffee.

“Are you ready?”

She gave a quick nod and took a sip of the coffee.

“All right. Let’s go.” He picked the bag of scones up again and led her out of the kitchen.

The website and pictures she’d seen of the resort hadn’t done it justice. And now, though she hated to admit it, she was half in love with the resort. It didn’t take much effort to imagine spending her days working up here on Lopez Island. Being close to Grant...

Delanie's feet ached from the amount of walking they'd already done today. They'd been all over the island, before returning for the grand tour of the resort.

Athena's Oasis consisted of twelve guest cabins, an indoor pool, a saltwater pool near the cliffs, a tennis court, and the main building that housed the restaurant, lounge, and a few extra rooms.

She'd been surprised when he told her that her room was one of the extras in the main building. Then again, maybe he was saving the cabins for all the tourists, with it being summer and all.

"So, where do you live?" she asked as they entered one of the empty cabins. "Do you stay on the resort somewhere, or live offsite?"

"I live at the resort." The lazy smile he gave had her stomach doing all kinds of acrobatics. "This place is my baby."

She glanced around the inside of the small wooden cabin. The décor had a simplistic feel. The double bed was decorated with a lovely quilt, while lace curtains covered the window next to it. There was also a cherry wood dresser, and small round table in the corner with a chessboard on top.

"I love this. It's so sweet and private. Do you live in one of the cabins?"

"Off and on, although I haven't been using it the past couple of weeks."

"No? Where have you been staying?"

"In the main building." The look he gave her spoke volumes.

He was in the room next to hers. How had she not realized that until now? Heat moved through her body as the memory of last night flickered through her head.

Jeez, she'd pretty much thrown herself at him and still he'd turned her down. And yet the entire time he'd been sleeping with just a wall between them.

Yikes. He hadn't been able to hear her last night, had he? She pushed away the memory of her taking her arousal into her own hands.

She looked out over the view, inhaling the crisp salty air.

"Delanie," he said her name softly. The calloused hand that lightly touched the back of her neck sent shivers down her spine.

She turned towards him, the air locked in her lungs.

"You have a very beautiful resort, Grant."

"Thank you." The flicker of pride in his gaze was a clear indication that her words meant a lot to him.

"Are you sure about the donation? It's a lot of money—not that we aren't grateful to have it..."

"I wouldn't have offered if I didn't intend to follow through. What you ladies do for those women...it's outstanding. I want to help in any way I can." His fingers traced around to her collarbone. "I've had papers drawn up that you will need to look over and sign."

She swallowed, though it took some effort. "Thank you."

"What made you do it?"

Her stomach dropped. He was right back to questioning her about the coin.

“What made you decide to work at a shelter for abused women?”

Or not. The tension eased from her body and she gave a faint smile.

“It was never part of my plan—I actually have a degree in marketing. Which you obviously discovered somehow.” She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I did my last year of college back in California, and that’s where I met Phoebe.”

“And Phoebe is...?”

“She works with me at Second Chances. It was her idea to start working there after college. I followed her there. I...”

He gave a slight nod and brushed his thumb over the pulse in her neck.

“I didn’t see it when we first met—or maybe I was just too absorbed with school, trying to get that four-point GPA.” She closed her eyes, regret making her throat tight. “But for some reason I failed to notice that Phoebe was in an abusive relationship.”

Grant made a soft sound of sympathy, his thumb stroking her jawline.

“Sometimes they don’t want you to see it and keep it well hidden.”

She nodded. “I know, and she confessed later that she’d done exactly that. By the time I suspected something wasn’t right, Phoebe had left him.”

“How long did she stay?”

“Two years,” she said quietly. “But when she left him, she left for good. She had other friends who’d survived abusive relationships and they really helped her through it. Talked her out of ever going back to him, helped her keep a low profile and disappear from him completely.”

“She was lucky.”

“She was. Like I said, working for the shelter was Phoebe’s idea, but once I realized her intentions and got to know the place, I had to get on board.”

“That’s a lot of giving you both do.”

“It’s gratifying. To be able to help women who’ve been in the same or worse situation as Phoebe.” She lifted her gaze, running her tongue over her lips. “What you’re offering us is unselfish. That’s one heck of a donation.”

“I have the money, and I’ve been looking into a cause like this to donate to.”

Her stomach warmed, even felt a bit fluttery. The sincerity of his expression wiped away any lingering doubts about his intentions.

“You’re amazing, Grant. I can’t thank you enough. We can’t. Everyone at the shelter has been on cloud nine since I told them about the offer. Especially Phoebe.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” He paused. “After the bad relationship, does she ever date anymore?”

She shook her head and sighed. “Not at all. I’ve tried to get her out, but she’s still a bit leery.”

“Understandable. She will when she’s ready.”

“I hope so.” She licked her lips.

His gaze dropped to her mouth. “You know... I think we’re done with the tour now.”

“Are we?” Her pulse quickened at the sudden change of conversation and mood.

Heat flowed between them like an electrical current. His thumb swept up to her bottom lip and she sighed, moving her gaze from his mouth to the cleft in his chin.

“Yes.” He lowered his head, blocking out the light from the window, before his lips brushed oh-so lightly across hers.

Delanie sighed and leaned into him, ignoring the voice inside her that screamed she was not only turned on right now, but stupid.

The heat in her belly expanded to an ache between her thighs. Why was he kissing her again? When he’d turned her away last night?

*Why do you care?* No man had even stirred such a heated instant response like Grant.

His hand slid down her back until it came to rest on the curve of her ass. He squeezed the flesh and pulled her snug against him, grinding his cock into her belly.

She moaned, moisture gathered in between her legs and the ache intensified.

His tongue delved, passing her teeth to rub against hers and explore deeply.

He urged her backwards, not breaking the kiss as he walked her towards the bed. The back of her knees connected with the mattress just before he eased her onto it, and then the weight of his body covered hers.

Cool air brushed the bare skin of her stomach when his fingers slid under her shirt. He traced a finger around her navel, moving his knee between her legs and snug against her pussy.

She tore her mouth away to issue a strangled gasp.

“Mmm.” He tugged her shirt up and off her body then lowered his head to her breast.

He nuzzled her nipple through the lace, before catching the tip between his lips and sucking. Tingles of pleasure spread to every inch of her body and she drove her fingers into his hair, holding him to her.

Grant tugged the cup of the bra down, baring her breast before he drew the nipple deep into his mouth. Sucking and flicking the tip with his tongue.

“*Oh God.*” Her hips jackknifed off the bed, but he pushed them back down, unsnapping the button on her pants.

She heard the rasp of the zipper, then his hand slipped under the waistband of her jeans. A ragged groan ripped from her throat when he worked his fingers into her panties and cupped her mound.

“God, Delanie,” he muttered against her breast. “You’re so hot and wet.”

He slid one long finger inside her and the air rushed from her lungs, her body clenching around the sensual intrusion.

Her nipples tightened further and her pussy grew heavy with moisture. Grant grazed his teeth across the tip of her breast and she squirmed, crying out with pleasure.

“And you’re so responsive. Just like I remember.” He pulled his finger from her channel and moved it in a slow circle around her clitoris.

“*Mmm.*” She moved against his hand, rotating her hips in a slow dance to match what his finger was doing.

“I want you to come,” he whispered, switching his mouth to her other breast. His tongue flicked over the tip.

The pleasure built higher, growing more intense with each move of his finger against her sensitive flesh.

“*Grant.*” Her nails dug into his shoulder, nearly piercing the fabric.

“Let go, baby. Just—”

“*You’re so vain. You probably—*” Delanie shoved her hand into her pocket, silencing the song.

Grant lifted his head, his gaze bewildered. “What the hell was that?”

## Chapter Four

“My phone,” Delanie muttered, the pleasure that had been building slipping away as shock and annoyance rolled over her.

He gave a rough laugh. “Nice ringtone.”

“Thanks.” She shifted uneasily beneath him.

It was the ringtone she’d assigned to Franklin, simply because it fit him so well. The man had an ego the size of the state of which he was senator.

Fortunately her relationship with Franklin was still fairly casual—she’d never allowed anything more than a few heavy kisses. Otherwise, she probably would be feeling a bit guilty right now.

*“You’re so vain—”*

She silenced the call again. Shoot. Franklin obviously wasn’t going to give up.

“I should get this,” she said huskily, and slid out from beneath Grant, tugging her bra back on.

Irritation flickered in his gaze, but she did her best not to acknowledge it.

Snatching her phone from her pocket, she flipped it open.

“Hello?”

“Delanie, darling, I’ve been trying to reach you since you arrived yesterday. Is everything all right?”

“Everything is fine. Yes.” She watched Grant climb off the bed, casting an irritated gaze her way. She turned her back to him and pushed aside a twinge of guilt. “Was there something you needed?”

“Just making sure my girl arrived safely. I actually have a meeting up in Seattle tomorrow and was checking into the possibility of chartering a flight to Lopez Island—”

“Oh. You know, I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” she protested quickly, alarm sweeping through her. “In fact, I’m kind of in the middle of something. Can I call you back in a bit?”

“I suppose. Though I’m not pleased that it took you this long to even answer your phone—”

“I’ve been a little busy. Look, I’ll call you later.” And when she did, they’d probably have the *this isn’t working* talk. “We have some things to discuss.”

“Really?” His voice warmed. “I was actually thinking the same. I’ll—”

“Look, I’m sorry, but I need to go. I’ll call you later.” She shut the phone, her stomach twisting. That call had already gone on about one minute longer than she’d wanted.

“Important call?”

Delanie bit her lip and forced a bright smile on her face before turning around.



“Yes, somewhat. Sorry, but I really had to take that.” Her gaze drifted to the bed and disappointment clogged in her throat.

Her body still hummed from his touch, still ached to sink back onto the mattress and pull him on top of her. When she looked back at Grant, she knew that wasn’t about to happen. He’d become all business—was even glancing at his watch.

“We should probably head out. We still have one more thing to do.”

“We do?” His words sent another stab of sharp disappointment through her. “But haven’t we toured the entire resort?”

“For the most part.” His mouth curved. “There’s one other place I still need to show you.”

“Oh yeah?” She grabbed her shirt off the floor and pulled it back on. Glancing back at him she asked, “Will I like it?”

He closed the distance between them and traced his thumb over her bottom lip. “I think you will. I hope you will.”

Her stomach fluttered again and she bit back a groan, pulling away. She fastened her jeans again, her fingers unsteady.

“Did you bring a hat? More summer-like clothes?” he asked.

“Yes.” She gave him a curious glance. “Why?”

His smile widened. “You may want to wear something cooler today.”

“Mmm. It sounds fun.”

“It *will* be fun, I promise. We need to go pack up some more stuff before we head out.”

She pushed her bangs out of her eyes, and gave a quick nod, already eager to see what he had planned.

Delanie slipped on her bikini to wear beneath her clothes, her body still buzzing from that moment in the cabin. She found her shorts and pulled them on just as her phone rang.

She glanced at it lying on the bed. Fortunately, it wasn’t Franklin’s ringtone.

Zippering up her shorts, she grabbed it and flipped it open. “Hello?”

“Hey, it’s Gabby.”

“Gabby!” Delanie gave a squeal of excitement. “Hey, how’s it going?”

“Good. I only have a few minutes before Phoebe gets back from the safe house. But I wanted to check. How’s that job prospect going?”

Delanie bit back a sigh. She hadn’t told Phoebe about the job offer, but had confided in Gabby. Gabby had been so encouraging and had been the one to recommend holding off telling Phoebe until she’d decided whether to accept the job or not.

But where Gabby knew about the job, she didn’t know about Grant. Only Phoebe had the scoop on that, and unfortunately she didn’t have time to give Gabby the full scoop.

"The job prospect..." she hesitated. She had no idea if Grant had ever seriously intended to give it to her or if it was just a ruse to get her out here. She decided to be ambiguous. "I'm totally on the fence. We'll see."

"Cool. Keep me posted. Is it pretty out there?"

"Gorgeous. You would not believe it." She sighed. "Hey, how's your mom?"

"She's doing so good. Went to live with her cousin in Nevada. Hasn't spoken with my dad since she left him that night." Gabby's voice softened. "I'm so proud of her."

"That's awesome, Gabby." Delanie smiled.

And it was. Gabby's mother had been abused by her husband for years before finally leaving a few weeks ago with Gabby's help.

"Oh, hey, Justin just showed up to take me to lunch. I should go. We miss you, Delanie."

"I miss you too. Say hi to Justin for me."

"Will do. Bye, hon."

Delanie closed her phone and pulled on her tank top, then glanced around for her straw hat. Her stomach fluttered with anticipation of what Grant had planned for them next.

One thing for certain was that the next time Grant touched her, she'd ensure there were no interruptions. Reaching for the phone, she turned the ringer to silent.

Grant pushed aside the bottles of water in the cooler to make room for the sandwiches Roberta made for them.

"You are too good to me." He walked past Roberta, giving her a quick squeeze on the shoulder.

"Oh, I'm just doing my job," she scoffed, but her wrinkled cheeks went pink with delight. "Where's that young lady, anyway? You know, I have yet to get an introduction."

"You'll get your introduction," he promised and shook his head. "She's in her room packing a bag right now. We're going to take the boat out."

"Oh, wonderful. Don't forget your life vests. It gets mighty choppy out there..."

Roberta broke off and her gaze lifted to something behind him.

He turned around and found Delanie standing in the doorway. She'd changed into a pair of shorts, tank top, and had on a big, ugly, straw hat, and a massive overstuffed tote bag slung over her shoulder.

He bit back an amused chuckle. She'd certainly taken to heart the warning that they'd be in the sun the rest of the day.

"I'm set," she announced unnecessarily.

"I see that."

Knowing Roberta was itching for an introduction, and her curiosity wouldn't be appeased until she got one, he turned to the older woman.

“Roberta, this is Delanie Williams. She works for Second Chances, the battered women’s shelter outside of San Francisco that we’ll be donating to. Delanie, this is Roberta Smith, my chef and woman of all trades.”

He went to the fridge to pick their fruit, and waited for the preening to begin.

“Oh, Ms. Williams, aren’t you a lovely thing? It’s so wonderful what you do for those poor women.” Roberta hurried across the floor to grasp Delanie’s hands. Continuing on after a quick breath. “I was just thrilled when Grant told me he was going to sponsor the shelter.”

“Please, call me Delanie.” Delanie gave the older woman a warm smile and then glanced over at him. “And yes, the offer Mr. Thompson has made is rather remarkable.”

Their gazes locked and he winked, before slipping into the pantry to grab a couple of extra scones.

“And you’re just so pretty,” he heard Roberta say. “Say, are you married, Delanie?”

Delanie’s responding laugh was quiet, her answer even quieter. But he still heard it. “No, just dating someone.”

Grant’s hand clenched around one of the scones and crumbs squeezed out the edge of the plastic wrap. She was seeing someone? His chest tightened and the sudden jealousy left a sour taste in his mouth.

“Oh, what a pity.” Roberta sighed. “I was hoping—”

“Thank you again for the lunch,” he interrupted, returning from the pantry. The effort it took to keep his expression placid was monstrous. “We should be back late this evening.”

“The weather might take a turn tonight. They’re saying possible rain, so don’t head back too late,” Roberta warned, wagging her finger.

Delanie laughed. “I don’t mind getting a little wet.”

Grant jerked his gaze towards her. Her face flamed red and she bit down on her lip. Obviously she’d just realized the double entendre in her words. “I mean, from the rain,” she added in a rush.

Roberta was oblivious to any of her apparent embarrassment and went about wiping down the counter.

“All right, well, you two kids have fun, and be careful out there.”

“Thanks for the lunch, Roberta.”

Grant placed a hand on Delanie’s back, turning her out of the kitchen before Roberta could call her back to ask her how serious the relationship was with the man she was seeing. Then again, it was something he wouldn’t have minded finding out himself.

How the hell could he have been stupid enough to assume that she was single? Though, she’d certainly acted like she was last night, and then again today in the cabin. If her phone hadn’t rung, they’d probably still be in the cabin right now.

The fire that raced through his blood took on a new motive as his anger grew. How could she possibly be seeing someone else and yet let him touch her the way he had?

Delanie cleared her throat as they stepped outside and moved towards his Jeep.

“Roberta seems sweet. And...chipper.”

Grant gave a tight smile. “Roberta is a gem. She’s been with the resort since I took it over from my grandfather five years ago.”

“Five years?” she repeated as he held open the passenger door to the Jeep and let her climb in. “Wow, you sure didn’t waste time getting started after graduation.”

“When I want something, I go after it.” He met her gaze. “Always.”

Her eyes widened. Without waiting for her to reply, he shut her door and went around to the driver’s side of the Jeep.

He climbed in and started the engine.

“The resort belonged to my grandfather and he left it to me when he passed away.”

“That’s a pretty incredible inheritance.”

“Yes. It is.” He went silent again, not really in the mood for chitchat. Jealousy still burned hot in his gut.

“Roberta certainly packed us a lot of food.”

He grunted in response and hit the gas, flooring the Jeep out of the resort.

Delanie’s loud gasp filled the car. “Do you always drive so fast?”

*Do you always fuck two men at once?* His jaw clenched in an effort to avoid snarling the question at her.

“So where are we going anyway?” she asked, sounding a little more uncertain now.

“We’re going on a little trip.”

“A trip?” She glanced over at him. “Are we leaving the island?”

“Yes.”

“Oh. But isn’t the ferry the other way?”

“We’re not taking the ferry.”

She went silent, obviously trying to figure out what that meant. Or maybe she just picked up on the fact he wasn’t in the mood to talk.

He pulled up to the private boat launch a few minutes later and parked the Jeep.

“You have your own boat?”

“It’s small, but it works until I get around to buying a nicer one.” He climbed down from the Jeep and opened her door.

She tried to meet his gaze, but he turned away to grab the stuff out of the back, his irritation with her still too fresh.

“Grab your bag and head on down to the dock, I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Okay.” She hesitated a second and then walked away.

Grant closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Maybe this wasn't a good idea. The minute they got on that boat and headed to the island, they'd be stuck together for at least a couple of hours.

His initial hope that she'd come clean about the coin—maybe even return it—was dying a slow, painful death. But it wasn't even about the coin anymore. It was about Delanie.

How every time he looked at her, his chest tightened a bit. And when she gave that flirty little smirk, he just wanted to kiss her until that smile went slack with passion.

*When I want something, I go after it.* He'd meant the words when he'd said them, and whether or not she believed them yet, she soon would. He wanted Delanie and he sure as hell intended to have her.

He scooped up the cooler and blankets and slammed the door to his Jeep.

Delanie folded her arms across her chest and stared at Grant as he strode down the incline towards the dock. He was angry about something, but what? Things had been near perfect between them all morning. He had no right to get pissy with her.

*Unless he heard that part where you said you were dating someone.*

She hadn't meant to let that slip. It had just come out when Roberta had started the *are you single?* conversation. It had been a natural response, and she'd been thankful Grant had been in the other room when she'd blurted it.

He arrived on the dock, still not looking at her as he set the blankets and cooler into the boat.

"You can climb on in," he told her briskly, and went back up the hill towards the Jeep.

Delanie made a face at him and then glanced down at the boat. It was tied to the dock and rocking back and forth on the waves.

Jeez, had she ever been in a boat this little? Sure she'd traveled on ferries and spent more than a few hours on Franklin's yacht, but this...this was like all wood and probably no bigger than a bed. Not to mention it looked...old.

*Go on, you nitwit.* Taking a deep breath, she crouched and lowered one foot into the boat. It immediately started rocking under her weight and she went still, gripping the edge of the dock.

"Just climb in. It's safe." Grant's leather sandals slapped against the dock as he walked back towards the boat.

Not wanting to look like a complete wimp, she swung her other leg into the boat and then gripped each side. It took a second to get her sea legs and then she sat on the bench seat in the middle.

Grant stepped easily into the boat without holding onto anything. He untied them from the dock, and then walked to the back, sitting on the seat next to the motor.

"There's a life jacket under your seat, why don't you go ahead and put it on."

Not even about to argue, she reached under the bench and pulled up a black and yellow life vest.

She fumbled to put it on, trying to make sure the straps went around her body.

"Here, let me." He stepped forward and knelt beside her.

Delanie froze, closing her eyes as his warm breath feathered across her face. He adjusted the belts and then clicked them into place.

"There, you're set."

She opened her eyes and found his face just inches away from hers.

Heat flickered in his gaze, but was instantly replaced with irritation.

"Where's your life jacket?" she asked when he finally pulled away and went back to his seat.

He grunted and pulled on some cord that immediately had the motor sputtering to life. "I have a floatation cushion if I need it."

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. *He was such a guy.* And that's probably why she liked him. He was nothing like Franklin.

Franklin followed all the rules, wore two-thousand-dollar suits, and got manicures. She knew this because his nails always looked better than hers, and she'd bugged him until he'd finally confessed to getting them done. And then she'd promptly switched to his manicurist.

She lowered her gaze to Grant's hands. Large and calloused, tanned from the sun. A real man's hands. And no expensive suits or brand names on this man—though he could obviously afford them. Unless he was dressing up, like at dinner last night, Grant appeared to be a jeans and old T-shirt kind of guy. Like today, his broad shoulders filled out a plain gray shirt, the muscles bulging on his forearm.

"Okay, hang on." He twisted a lever that connected to the motor, and the boat jolted forward.

Delanie took off her hat before it could fly off her head and then gripped the seat. She glanced over her shoulder to see where they were going. She could've turned around in the seat to sit the other way, her back to Grant, but somehow the view was so much better when he was in it.

"So, where are we going?" she asked, twisting back so she stared off the back of the boat again. The shores off Lopez Island grew farther away with every passing second.

Grant didn't answer right away, but seemed to check something on the motor. "To a smaller island nearby."

"Oh. What's over there?"

"Nothing yet, really. I own it."

The air stranded in her lungs and she blinked. He *owned* an island? Was it even possible for someone to own an island?

"How do you afford all this? A nice resort? An entire island? The San Juans aren't exactly bargain realty."

His gaze met hers. "Like I said, the resort was initially owned by my grandfather. My family and I do rather well financially."

"So why did you buy...an island?"

“The island is small. It’s not even on most maps. I’m building an expansion of the resort there. What will eventually become the ultimate retreat for those who come to stay at Athena’s Oasis.”

He twisted the handle on the motor again and the boat picked up speed.

“I see.” But she didn’t really. Athena’s Oasis was already an impressive upscale resort as it was. People traveled from all over the world to stay there.

And yet he’d bought an entire island to extend the resort? *The ultimate retreat*. Possibilities of what that could mean filled her head.

The wooden boat slapped against the waves as they sliced through the water. The sound alone sent shivers of unease through her. She half expected the old boat to split in half each time it connected with the surface.

She gripped the edge of her seat, holding on for all she was worth. Lopez Island had become just a blur of trees and rock, they were too far out to even see the resort anymore.

“How far away is the island?”

“About another fifteen minutes. The motor’s small on this boat, so it takes a little while.”

She closed her eyes, letting her body move with the up and down motion. The cool salty air of the Pacific coated her lungs and filled her chest, energizing her more than any cup of coffee could.

She drew in a couple of deep breaths, feeling the tension in her body ease. The wind teased at her bangs, whipping them around her forehead.

When she opened her eyes again, Grant was watching her. His blue eyes had darkened and she didn’t miss the heat flickering in his intense gaze.

Her cheeks warmed under his scrutiny and she ran her tongue over her lips, tasting the salt from the air. With what happened between them at the cabin still fresh in her head, a heavy ache started between her legs and her nipples tightened under the thin tank top.

Maybe he was taking her out to this island for a little bit of romance. Did Grant think like that? Was he plotting this big, romantic, back-in-bed-together reunion? The idea did seem—

“So, who’s the boyfriend?”

His words made her stomach drop and all her ridiculous notions evaporate. So he *had* overheard her and Roberta back at the resort.

“You don’t know him,” she murmured. Chances were he’d probably heard of him, but having the *my boyfriend is a senator* talk wasn’t one she wanted to delve into right now.

“No, I probably don’t.” She wasn’t deceived by his casual shrug. “But speaking as another guy, I know he wouldn’t be too happy if he found out you were screwing around with someone else.”

He slowed the boat and she looked over the edge to see several groups of rocks protruding under the water.

“If he found out?” she repeated, annoyance pricking. “Is that some kind of threat?”

“No.” He met her gaze, his expression not so heated anymore. “The only accountability you have is to your own conscience. I have no guilt for what happened between us, though I’m not sure you can say the same.”

Her nostrils flared. “What gives you the right to judge me? You have no idea what kind of relationship I have with him.”

The boat jolted as he put them ashore. He stood up and killed the motor, stepping towards her.

“No. I don’t. So why don’t you enlighten me?”

She opened her mouth to reply, but he stepped past her. He grabbed the blankets and cooler, and climbed out of the boat.

Scrambling up from the bench seat, she put her hat back on and jumped out of the boat after him. The rocky beach crunched under her sandaled feet as she ran to catch up.

“Why don’t you stick around for a second so I can?” she yelled. “Besides, it’s not like we actually had sex. We just fooled around.”

She winced. Now there was an illogical teenager defense if she’d ever heard one. She didn’t blame Grant one bit when he turned around with a look of complete disbelief.

“I could have had you in the cabin, Lanie. You would have been getting your brains fucked out and liking it right about now if your phone hadn’t rung.”

Her jaw tightened. “That’s a little crude, but then I guess I should’ve expected that coming from y—”

“Was that him?” he asked suddenly, cocking his head as he walked back towards her, his eyes lit with anger and frustration. “Was that him calling?”

She folded her arms across her chest. Why lie? “Yes.”

His body went rigid and his mouth became a tight, straight line.

“You know, you seemed so damn innocent that night we met at the bar.” He shook his head.

“Why do you keep bringing up that night?” she muttered and turned away, staring back out at the water.

“Because I’m trying to merge the girl I knew that night and the woman you are now. You were so genuine that night.” His voice softened. “You laughed at my jokes and acted as if I were the only guy in the bar. We had so much in common. We went to the same university, had some of the same teachers...”

His voice trailed off abruptly and he didn’t speak for a moment. Then, “It wasn’t random, was it? You meeting me at the bar that night? You were looking for me.”

She clenched her teeth, refusing to answer. Her stomach rolled with the shock that he’d put it together.

“Was it part of your plan? Flirt with me at the bar. Go to bed with me. And then steal the coin in the morning?”

She spun around and snapped harshly, “Going to bed with you was *never* part of the plan!”



Grant's head jerked back like he'd been slapped, his eyes widening.

The color drained from her face. *How easily he'd maneuvered that confession.*

"But stealing the coin was." His words were low and icy. "You were a good fuck, but you weren't that good. I want it back."

## Chapter Five

She flinched. “I don’t have it.”

“Like hell you don’t—”

“I sold it years ago,” she lied. *You were a good fuck, but you weren’t that good?* God that had hurt. Her gut twisted and her throat grew tight.

She heard the air leave his lungs. The anger in his gaze still remained, but now mixed with disappointment.

“You sold it. Well...to sell such a rare coin you must have really needed the money.” He gave a bitter smile. “Congratulations on earning it on your back.”

He turned and walked back up the beach, away from her. Her mouth gaped as she tried to blink away the tears in her eyes.

If she weren’t so adverse to any form of violence, she would have slapped him. Her hand had even started to rise instinctively, before she’d realized what she was about to do and jerked it back.

Screw this. She was not going to spend another minute on this island with him, or the resort. She turned and ran back toward the boat.

It was all too clear. He’d only invited her out here, made the job offer and donations to her shelter to get the coin back.

She gave the boat a hard push off the beach so it bobbed farther out into the water, then climbed into it. Walking to the back, she tried to remember how Grant had started it.

“Lanie? Lanie!”

His voice resonated down the beach. She glanced up and saw him running back towards her.

Tears blurring her vision, she pushed the button she’d watched him push and then tugged on the cord on the motor.

The boat started to rock wildly and she glanced up to see Grant splashing out towards her.

“Lanie, what the hell are you—?”

The motor roared to life, drowning out his question. The boat jerked forward and put more distance between them.

“Jesus Christ, Lanie!” he screamed and slapped his palm against the water. “Do you know how to drive a boat?”

“I’ll figure it out.”

“There’re huge rocks underwater that you could hit—”

Wood cracked as the boat slammed into one such rock. The blades on the motor ground against it next and the engine sputtered one last time before dying.

“That didn’t sound good,” Grant called from shore. “Enough already, Lanie. Start the boat and come back to shore.”

“I don’t know how I started it the first time,” she snapped, but went to work pushing buttons and pulling on the cord.

Cool water slapped against her foot and she looked down and her stomach dropped.

Water seeped into the boat, rapidly coating the floor of the boat.

*Shit. Shit. And shit!*

“Lanie? Did you hit something?”

She nodded dumbly, unable to tear her gaze from incoming water.

The tone of Grant’s voice changed from irritation to alarm. “Is there water in the boat?”

She nodded again, her stomach churning with the realization she was in a boat that could very well sink. And she’d brought this on herself. Why had she thought it a good idea to try to drive a boat back to the resort when she had zero experience? *Idiot.*

“Listen to me, Lanie. I need you to grab the oars and row the boat back toward shore,” he said, his voice calm and coaxing, as if he were talking to a child. But then, her behavior pretty much warranted it.

“Oars?” She looked around, not quite sure what kind of oar would fit in such a small boat, but pretty sure there were none here. “I don’t see any oars.”

“They’re the long wooden things on the floor. I...” He trailed off. “Forgot to put them in the boat, didn’t I?”

“It kind of looks like it.”

Water swirled around her now numb feet and the boat seemed to be lower in the water.

“*Of course I did.*” Grant cursed, pacing back and forth on shore, his fists clenched. “This damn bad luck streak will never end.”

“Umm, can we deal with the bad luck part later?” she yelled, her voice shaking. “Because I’m starting to have Titanic visions here, and not the fun ones with Leonardo drawing me naked.”

“Okay. How fast is the water coming in?”

“I think pretty fast. I mean there’s an awful lot of water in here. It’s above my ankles.”

“Shit.”

*To say the least.* Panic clawed her belly as she noticed the shoreline grow farther away with each passing second.

“Grant, what should I do?”

“Okay.” Grant waded out into the water. “Lanie, I want you to jump from the boat and swim back to shore. You’ve still got your life jacket on.”

“Swim?” she croaked.

“You can swim, can’t you?”

“Yes, but—”

“The longer you wait, the farther away from the beach you’re getting. You’re almost in the current and then it’s going to be damn hard to swim,” he shouted. “I’ll meet you halfway. Jump in now, Lanie!”

She dove off the boat, the fear of God instilled in her.

The icy water ripped the air from her lungs, incapacitating her as she sank an inch lower in the water. Her hat floated off her head and got swept up into the current.

*Shit. It had sure looked pretty, but this was so not the same temperature as the California coast.*

“Swim, for God’s sake, swim, Lanie!” he yelled again.

With a shake of her head, she forced herself into a crawl stroke. Every inch of her body burned from the frigid water as she swam against the current back toward the beach.

Something began to buzz nonstop against her thigh. Her cell phone! Oh God, her phone was in her pocket!

*There are more important things than your phone, you fool, now swim for Pete’s sake!* She pushed harder, digging deeper with each stroke.

When she looked up toward the beach again, Grant was wading out to her. He dove under the waves and brisk strokes brought him right up to her.

*He makes it look so damn easy.*

Strong arms wrapped around her waist, offering support. It took all her power not to just go weak against him and let him carry all her weight.

“Almost there, baby.” His voice was rough and warm against her ear. A beautiful contrast to the numbness that spread through her body.

She couldn’t feel the cold water anymore. She couldn’t really feel her hands either, but that was beside the point.

“You made it, Lanie.” He staggered up the drop off and into the shallow water. “Come on, walk with me, baby.”

Her legs wobbled right before her knees buckled.

“I gotcha.” Grant scooped her up, carrying her tight against his chest.

His heart pounded in his chest; his throat raw with emotion. The panic had hit him like a truck when she’d told him the boat was filling with water. And again when she hadn’t been able to start the engine and the boat had visibly sunk a few inches down into the water.

The fear had been instantaneous. Thank God he'd been able to keep a clear enough head to convince her to jump in and swim to shore.

Even soaked to the bone, she was light in his arms. Her arms wrapped around his neck as her body pressed snug against chest.

"Y-y-your boat," she muttered through chattering teeth.

Would be at the bottom of the strait in no time, but he didn't have the heart to tell her that yet. He alternated between being pissed off that she'd been so impulsive to try to steal his boat in the first place, and feeling guilty that it had been his words that had made her run.

He shook his head. "Don't think about the boat right now. Let's just get you up to the cabin where we can get warm."

"Th-there's a c-cabin here?"

"Well, a half cabin." He adjusted her in his arms. "It's not all the way built."

He stepped into the trees, moving deeper onto the island—which, in reality, was not very big at all. It was only four acres.

The frame of the cabin lay just beyond the trees. He inwardly cursed himself, wishing like hell he'd gotten back here sooner to complete the small building.

He stepped up onto the floorboards, thankful that there were at least walls up, even if there still wasn't a roof. It would at least shield them from the wind.

"Here we go, baby. Just sit here for a second while I run back to the beach to grab the blankets and the cooler."

Lanie scooted back against the wall the minute he set her down. Her full lips had a faint blue tint to them and still shook, her expression a bit vacant.

He leaned down and gave her hand a quick squeeze. Damn. She was like ice. His body was pretty damn cold, but he hadn't been in the water nearly as long as she had.

Turning, he sprinted back toward the beach. He needed to get them under the blankets and warming up. He glanced up at the sky. The sun had disappeared between a block of gray clouds.

Roberta might have been right about that rain, though the last thing they needed was for the sky to open up on them right now.

He grabbed the blankets and the cooler, which he'd dropped on the beach when they'd first arrived.

Lord, he'd really screwed things up. If he hadn't spit out those poisonous words, she wouldn't have fled in the boat. Now it looked like they were stuck on the island together until someone figured out they were missing.

He returned to the half cabin to find Lanie clutching her cell phone. Relief spread through him. They had a way to call for help.

He dropped the items to the floor and hurried over to her. His stomach sank. Or maybe not. Water dripped from the cell phone and the screen remained black, no matter how many buttons she pushed.

“Was it in your pocket?” he asked, taking it from her cold fingers.

“Y-yes.”

“It’s all right. They’ll find us.” He gave a brisk nod and set it down on the floor. “Come on, you need to get out of those clothes.”

“N-no. Too cold.”

“Lanie.”

She shook her head again, and he sighed, reaching for her top. He tugged it up and over her head, grateful when she didn’t protest.

*Don’t look at her breasts.* He averted his gaze from the pink bikini top and reached behind her to untie it. Once undone, he tugged the scrap from her body and tossed it aside.

This time, averting his gaze was impossible. The slope of her breasts shone with salt water, her nipples were dark pink and puckered tight from the cold.

His cock jumped against his wet jeans, but he resisted touching her. Instead he unsnapped her denim shorts and tugged down the zipper.

“Lift your hips,” he ordered gruffly.

She didn’t argue, just lifted her hips off the floor, her bare feet planted on the ground. She must have lost her sandals in the water.

He grasped the shorts and her bikini bottoms and tugged them off her body in one smooth pull.

Already reaching for the blanket, he tried and failed not to look down. His gaze lowered, over the slight rise of her stomach and then below. The plump mound of her sex appeared smooth and bare below a strip of light brown curls.

His chest grew tight, the blood in his body pounded toward his dick. He tucked the blanket over her body, wrapping it around her almost twice before lifting his gaze back to her face.

Her full lips were parted, now holding a healthy pink color instead of the worrisome blue they had been a few minutes ago.

Dragging his gaze higher, he stared into her eyes. The hesitant desire there was almost his undoing.

“I’m so sorry about your boat, Grant,” she said, her words husky. “I should never have gotten into it. I didn’t think about what I was doing. I just...” She lowered her gazes, her lips trembled. “Of course I’ll pay you back.”

“The boat needed to be replaced anyway. That thing was a relic.” His stomach clenched with regret, and he rubbed his thumb across her bottom lip. “I’m sorry I said what I did. I didn’t mean it.”

She lifted her gaze again. “I kind of deserved it.”

“No, you didn’t.” He stood up and jerked his T-shirt over his head. Cool air brushed his naked chest as he unsnapped his jeans and pushed them down and off his body. “That comment was undeserved no matter what you did.”

He grabbed the second blanket and threw it around his body, holding it closed at the neck since it barely covered him.

When he sat down, he noticed Lanie’s gaze locked on his crotch, her eyes round and her teeth worrying her bottom lip.

He watched the muscles work in her throat as she swallowed hard. Apparently she wasn’t immune to seeing him naked any more than he was to her.

Her body still shivered visibly beneath the blanket. Just a couple of inches separated them, but all of a sudden it was too much.

His jaw clenched. Before he could analyze whether it was a good idea or not, he reached for her.

Opening his blanket, he pulled her unresisting body onto his lap and then wrapped it back around them. He adjusted her blanket to also surround them, creating a soft shield of warmth. Naked, skin to skin, their body heat merged.

“Grant.” Her body curled against his and she pressed her cheek to his chest.

An unexpected surge of protectiveness rushed through him, and he tightened the arm he had around her waist, fanning his fingers across the slight curve of her stomach.

She sighed and snuggled closer, her hot breath rushed across his chest in a soft tease.

His abdomen clenched and his cock jerked against her hip. As if she’d just realized his state of arousal, she tensed, lifting her head to stare at him.

Meeting her gaze, he ran his thumb down the curve of her neck, massaging out the tension he found there.

Her breathing grew uneven and she turned in his lap, until she straddled him.

The tips of her breasts brushed against his chest, the heat of her pussy left a brand of her desire for him against his thigh. The knowledge that she wanted him, even after he’d spouted off such hateful words, sent a rush of regret and relief through him.

“Lanie...” He trailed his thumb from her neck down her back, following the trail of her spine until he reached the cleft of her ass.

Her back arched, thrusting her chest up toward his mouth. “Touch me, Grant.”

He slid his hands down to grab her ass and pulled her hard against him. Her legs wrapped around his waist and a tight nipple brushed across his lips.

With a growl, he opened his mouth and drew the tip inside. Silky and textured, she tasted of woman and salt from the water.

Lanie's fingers delved into his hair, pulling at the strands when he sucked harder. He drew his teeth over the tip, her answering whimper setting his blood on fire.

So sweet and responsive to his touch. She felt so damn perfect in his arms.

He released her with a groan and buried his face between her breasts, dragging his tongue up between them. His nails dug into her ass cheeks, squeezing the soft flesh as he drew the opposite nipple into his mouth.

"*Oh God,*" she gasped, squirming against him.

Her pussy brushed against his abdomen, slicker now and so damn hot. His cock rose in response, pressing against the softness of her ass.

"Kiss me," she whispered, lowering her mouth to his.

With his hands already occupied, he let her take control.

Her lips brushed his in a light caress. Once and twice, entirely too lightly. Then she pressed her mouth harder against his, and her tongue ran along the seam of his lips before plunging inside.

Dear God, the taste of her. So lush and sweet. This woman drove him mad like none had before. His tongue rubbed against hers in a slow, sensual stroke.

He rose to his knees and slid his hands up to her waist. Not breaking the kiss, he eased her onto her back, with the blanket still beneath her.

With her body now supine beneath his, he tugged the oversized blanket up to cover them, leaving them in a hot, intimate cocoon.

He angled his mouth against hers to deepen the kiss, bracing his weight with one arm. He explored every crevice of her mouth, always returning to tease her silken tongue.

Her fingers, so soft and delicate, wrapped around his cock, drawing a choked groan from him. Her hand tightened around him, up to the head of his cock in an obvious maneuver to test his length and thickness.

Her thumb stroked over the tip, catching the bit of pre-come that had escaped, before moving back down his length. Her soft sigh against his mouth indicated her approval.

She pulled her mouth away and he lifted his head. Breathing hard, she met his gaze. Her eyes took on a mischievous light, and then she lifted her thumb to her mouth and licked it clean.

Any self-control he'd maintained up until this point disappeared. With a growl, he pinned her wrists to her side and slid down to kiss her belly.

He circled his tongue around the crater of her navel, before finally dipping in.

"Mmm." She tugged at her wrists, but he tightened his grip, adjusting himself so he lay between her thighs.

The spicy scent of her arousal drifted up to tease him.



Unable to resist any longer, he moved his mouth lower. After nuzzling the small strip of curls above the juncture of her thighs, he moved the last inch and opened his mouth over the top of her mound.

He sank his tongue into the hot, moist folds of her pussy to find her swollen clit.

“*Oh.*” Her breathless cry tightened his sac and sent a rush of confidence through him.

He released her wrists to cup her ass and lift the cleft of her sex snug against his mouth. Drawing his tongue back to her entrance, he plunged inside to taste her musky sweetness.

She groaned, her ass clenching in his hands as her fingernails bit into his shoulders.

He made his tongue rigid, thrusting it inside her multiple times, before drawing it up to flick over her clit. Faster and harder, he tormented the taut little nub, her high-pitched cries smothered in the makeshift tent of blankets.

“Please.” She whimpered, her hips lifting against his mouth. “Please, Grant.”

He lifted his mouth away just enough to ask, “What do you want, baby? This?” He drew her clit into his mouth and sucked hard, then released it with a popping noise. “Or maybe you want my fingers inside you?”

She whimpered, but didn’t reply.

He released one ass cheek and slid his fingers around to her front. Without hesitation, he pushed two fingers into her tight, wet pussy.

She gave a choked gasp, her body clenched around his digits.

He gave a husky laugh, adjusting his body to ease the discomfort of his hard-on against the floorboards.

“Mmm, I think you like that.” He captured her clit in his mouth again and alternately sucked on it and flicked it with his tongue.

She rode his mouth and fingers, her cries growing louder and more desperate.

“*Grant.*” Her thighs gripped his head, the walls of her sheath clenching around his fingers.

He followed her through the orgasm, circling her clit with his tongue while slowing the torment with his hand. Only after she went limp beneath him, her belly trembling as her breasts rose and fell, did he lift his head.

“This is why I never forgot you,” she muttered, covering her forehead with her palm.

He sat up and stared down at her, taking her wrist to pull her hand away from her face.

Her eyes were still bright from the orgasm, her cheeks flushed. But beyond the obvious physical response, there was vulnerability in her gaze.

“That’s not the only reason,” he argued quietly and circled one of her rigid nipples with the tip of his finger.

Her chest rose with her quick indrawn breath. She made no effort to look away from his stare.

“You’re right. It’s not,” she admitted softly.

Something in his chest twisted at her confession.

She covered his hand with her own, urging him to cup her. The softness of her breast contrasted with the hard, velvet nipple poking against his palm.

“Make love to me, Grant.”

## Chapter Six

He drew in a ragged breath, the disappointment almost painful in his gut.

“Lanie, I don’t have a condom.”

She lowered her gaze, her fingers twirling in the hair on his chest.

“I started birth control a few months ago.” Her teeth nibbled on her bottom lip. “And you have nothing to worry about in the other department.”

He struggled to breathe, his throat suddenly tight, shocked that she trusted him enough to give him the go ahead without a condom.

She lifted her head, her gaze uncertain. “Unless you...”

“You have nothing to worry about with me,” he reassured her huskily. “Are you sure about this?”

She gave a slow nod. “I’m sure, Grant. Six years of living off a memory can leave you a little empty inside.”

“Ah, sweet, Lanie.” He brushed his mouth across hers. “Sweet, sweet, Lanie.”

Her arms wound around his neck and he eased his body onto hers, flattening her breasts against his chest.

He traced her bottom lip with his tongue, soothing the swollenness she’d created from nibbling on it. A nervous habit he’d noticed she did often.

The soft sigh she made parted her lips enough for him to slowly sink his tongue into her mouth. Brushing past her teeth to tease hers.

Had he ever wanted a woman more? Would he ever? Since that first night together, it had always been about Lanie.

There was soft friction as their tongues rubbed together, then retreated, and then came back to meet again with more urgency.

He slid his knee between her legs, parting her thighs wide enough for him to lie between them. The warmth of her pussy nudged his cock and he groaned against her mouth.

Her tongue swept against his again, curling around and then sucking. Her hips lifted, lining his erection up perfectly with her entrance.

Poised on the edge of repeating the most emotionally intense sex of his life, he didn’t even hesitate. Gripping his cock, he pushed past her swollen folds and then buried himself in her hot, wet center.

Lanie gasped, tearing her mouth away and twisting her head to the side.

He groaned, unable to even move. Oh God, she felt incredible. He remained embedded in her, overcome by the sensation of her slick warmth squeezing his dick. Jesus, she felt good.

“Too long, Lanie. It’s been too damn long.”

She gave an unsteady laugh that sounded more like a groan. “I know.”

She lifted her hips again, driving him deeper into her core.

He closed his eyes, grinding his hips against hers until he was wedged deep against her cervix.

“Oh God,” she whispered, her nails digging into his forearms and her nipples pressed tight against his chest.

He pulled out of her just a bit and then sank back in, repeating the process. Slow and steady at first, as every nerve in his body focused on the silken grip her body had on him.

She lifted her hips to meet his thrusts, rotating them every so often and causing his cock to stroke the sides of her channel.

“Christ, you feel amazing,” he said through clenched teeth.

He lowered his head, licking one of her tight nipples. She let out a mewl of pleasure and he buried his cock deep into her again. Moving faster now. Deeper.

She matched the increased pace he set, wrapping her legs around his waist as her cries grew louder by the second.

His sac tightened and he drew in a ragged breath. He reached between them and skimmed his thumb across her clit, making sure she went over the edge with him.

Her scream of pleasure mingled with his hoarse groan. He thrust to the hilt, finding his release deep inside her.

His mind went to mush. It was all he could do to remember to breathe.

“Mmmpph.”

Grant blinked, his vision returning to normal as he looked down at Lanie.

Her eyes were shut and her body lay limp beneath him.

“You okay, baby?”

“Mmmph.”

“Is that a yes?”

Her eyes flickered open, capturing him with a languid brown stare.

“That’s most definitely a yes.” She stretched beneath him, moving all the right parts against his body. Her foot moved up and down his calf.

He bit back a groan, feeling himself hardening again.

“Grant, that was...” she trailed off and sighed. “I needed that. You have no idea how much.”

He pushed a damp strand of hair off her forehead, his mouth curving downward a bit. She needed that? But she was in a relationship with another guy. Shouldn't that mean her sex life was active? Hell, she was on birth control.

The thought of her with another man left an acidic taste in his mouth. Curdled the jealousy in his gut.

She dropped a kiss on his shoulder, her gaze still heated. It was clear that the last thing on her mind was another man.

Their makeshift tent had grown darker; a sure sign the sun had set.

"I think we're going to end up spending the night," he said quietly. "Roberta's so damn romantic, she'll probably assume we just spent the night before she gets worried."

"Well," she looked up at him through lowered lashes "I'm not so sure I'm going to complain about that. In fact, I kind of like the idea."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah." She moved her foot up to his ass and pressed down.

Still inside her, his cock grew rock hard again.

"Well then." He smiled and grasped her hips, rolling onto his back and setting her astride him. "Why don't you show me how much you like it?"

Lanie stared down at him, her heart pounding in her chest and desire flowing heavy through her veins. He shifted, sending his cock deeper inside her.

"Oh wow," she whispered, her eyes closing.

With her on top of him, the blanket lifted, letting in a cool breeze and amplifying the sound of waves on the beach.

His hands settled on her hips, lightly holding her, but it was clear he'd given her the reins.

She lifted herself up just a bit and then sank back down. The friction and depth of the stroke made the breath lock in her throat.

Her nipples tightened as she rocked down on him again. She leaned forward, placing her hands on his chest and rotating her hips. Lifting herself up and pressing back down onto him.

"You're going to kill me, Lanie," he said hoarsely.

She gave a soft laugh, the power of the position giving her more confidence.

"You like that?" she murmured and leaned forward, smoothing her fingers up to rub his nipples.

"Hell, yeah." He slid his hand from her hip to the middle of her back, pulling her forward until her breasts dangled above his mouth. "I also like this."

He captured one puckered tip between strong lips. Sucking and licking it until she writhed on his cock.

She moved faster and harder, the air escaping her lungs in choked gasps.

He switched his mouth to her other breast, thrusting up into her as she rode him.

When he reached between them to rub her clit, she exploded. Lights flashed behind her closed lids, her body clamped around him and milked his cock as he came inside her a moment later.

She collapsed on top of him, falling forward and burying her face against his neck. She kissed his rapidly-beating pulse, savoring the salty male taste of him.

"Lanie," he sighed, moving his hand up and down her back. "I don't think I'll be able to walk anytime soon."

"You don't need to," she murmured drowsily and slid off him. She moved to lie next to him, snuggling against his side.

Grant slipped an arm around her back with one hand, and urged her head to his chest with another. His lips grazed across her forehead.

"You're amazing," he said.

Her mouth curved into a smile and her eyes drifted shut. "I try."

His chest rose and fell beneath her cheek, gradually slowing until she knew he'd fallen asleep.

Tonight had changed everything. The realization was just a passing thought in her over-stimulated mind.

Closing off all analytical thoughts, she breathed in the scent of him and let herself fall asleep.

Waves smashed onto the beach and the wind lifted the blanket around them.

Lanie stirred, snuggling closer to Grant with a sigh. She didn't know how early it was, but there was a hint of daylight peeking through the edges of the blanket.

"Are you awake?" His chest rumbled under her cheek with the question.

Her mouth curved into a half smile. "No."

"Liar." He stroked a hand down her back. "You know what woke me?"

"Hmm."

"Your stomach growling."

"It did not." She nudged him in the ribs with her elbow.

"All right, I was already awake, but your stomach did growl a couple times in the past half hour."

"You've been awake that long? Why didn't you wake me?"

"Because I enjoyed having you asleep in my arms." He brushed a kiss across her forehead.

Her stomach flipped and warmth spread through her body. She bit her lip, knowing her cheeks were turning pink with pleasure. God, she was so easy.

"Do you have any idea what time it is?" she asked to change the subject.

"Mmm. A little after six, I'd guess."

"Ouch. That's pretty early."

“Yes, it is.” He sat up and the blanket lifted off them, letting in a rush of cool air.

“Cold!” she yelped and tugged the blanket off him and wrapped it around herself, leaving Grant sitting up naked.

“Did you say you brought extra clothes?” he asked glancing toward the beach. “Or are they—?”

“In the boat.”

“Right.” He gave a nod. “I figured. Tell you what, just use one of the blankets toga style until the wet stuff dries.”

“Not a problem.”

“I’m going to run down to the beach and grab that cooler. At least we have some food.” He leaned over and rubbed his thumb across her lower lip. “I’ll be back in a few.”

She nipped at his thumb and then gave him an impish grin. “Okay.”

Delanie watched him wrap one of the blankets around his waist and then walk back down to the beach.

She stood up and stretched, easing out all the newly acquired aches in her body. Was this the part where she was supposed to regret what had just happened between them last night? Because she didn’t. Not in the least.

It had felt right. All of it. Making love to Grant and being held in his arms. In fact she kind of had the itch to do it again. Soon.

She pulled the blanket around her, fastening it in true toga fashion before walking down the trail after him.

He stood on the beach, collecting the few items he’d brought out of the boat earlier.

“I don’t suppose *you* have a cell phone?” she called out. “You know, since I went swimming with mine and all.”

He turned around, his amused gaze running over her. “I don’t. Mine was in the boat under my seat.”

She winced, guilt making her stomach twist. “Right. I’m sorry.”

He waved his hand and shook his head. “Stop apologizing. I can easily buy a new one. I’m just glad you’re okay.” He closed the distance between them and touched the curve of her breast peeking out of the blanket. “So, you’ve done this toga thing before, huh?”

“Hey, I was in a sorority.” She grinned and glanced down at herself and the fleece blanket. “I went to my share of toga parties.”

“I bet. You look beautiful, like a Greek goddess.”

“Thank you.” She lowered her gaze, her smile widening.

It couldn’t get much better than being called a goddess. Speaking of Goddesses, where had the name of the resort come from? Athena’s Oasis.

She glanced out at the water, looking for any sign of a passing boat in the early morning light. Nothing.

“They’ll find us,” he assured her, obviously having read her thoughts. “And we’ve got plenty of food to get us through another night if we need to.”

She knew she could trust him to keep her safe. And, ultimately, get her off this island, even if he had to cut down a tree and make a canoe. Not that it would ever come to that.

She bit her cheek to avoid grinning. She cleared her throat. “So why did your grandfather name the resort what he did?”

“Athena’s Oasis?” He looked at her for a moment, his gaze clouding a bit, and then sat down on the beach. “It all goes back to the coin.”

“The coin?” she repeated, her stomach sinking. Of course. It always went back to the coin.

He gave a slow nod. “Well, as you know, the coin was a silver tetradrachm of Athens, minted in 454-415 BC.”

*Minted in 454-415 BC? Her mind spun. Shit. Oh dear God in heaven. The coin was real!*

“On one side is the Athens owl and on the other the Goddess Athena.”

What the hell kind of crackhead antique dealer had she spoken to that day? A knock-off. He’d told her it was a *knock-off*. The jerk had offered her two hundred dollars for it, which he’d assured her was a great deal for a fake. Fortunately, she’d turned him down because of the emotional attachment she’d developed to the coin.

Sweat broke out on her brow. No wonder Grant had tracked her down. Good lord. A coin that was thousands of years old.

“...was passed down through my family.”

“Wait what?” she shook her head to pull herself back to the conversation.

He gave her a strange look, probably wondering why she had a total look of horror on her face.

“The coin was a family heirloom passed down to the first son of each generation of my family.” He shrugged and tossed a rock into the water. “Like I said, it was also my good-luck charm. That’s why I’m not really surprised the boat sank,” he admitted with a wry grin. “It’s all part of the bad luck.”

She blinked, her jaw half open in amazement. Why hadn’t Grant called the police? Or, heck, just hired a hit man to come after her?

The magnitude of what she’d taken from him that morning hit her hard. Her hands shook as she grabbed a rock and mimicked him, tossing it into the water. Had she known what she was stealing that morning, she never would’ve agreed to Bridget’s plan.

She drew in an unsteady breath, wrapping her fingers around another rock. There was no doubt in her mind what she had to do. Return the coin to him when they got back to the resort and hope he forgave her for taking it. And for lying about selling it.



Thinking about his reaction when he saw it eased some of the tension that had weaved through her muscles.

“One thing I just hope you’ll eventually tell me, Lanie,” he said quietly, “is why you took it in the first place.”

## Chapter Seven

She closed her eyes. Wasn't that the question of the decade? The least she could give him right now was an honest answer.

"Bridget Hanson."

Her confession was met with silence. She opened her eyes, looking at him hesitantly.

His brows were drawn together in confusion, his head tilted to one side.

"Do you mean Brittney Hanson?"

Her cheeks filled with color. Jeez. She hadn't even remembered the girl's name right.

"Oh. Yes, I guess her name was Brittney. Wasn't it?"

His scowl grew even more intense. "What does she have to do with anything?"

"Umm." She licked her lips, her hands clammy. "I sort of...umm...okay, I'm not defending what I did. It was a bad idea I just didn't think through—"

"*Lanie.*"

"Right. Sorry. Brittney was my sorority sister. I guess you two had dated for a while—"

"Two weeks."

She blinked. "What?"

"We were together for two weeks."

"I, umm..." She cleared her throat. Oh God. Please don't let Brittney have been some kind of nutbag pathological liar. "She'd said two months in college."

"She lied." He held her gaze. "But go on."

Her pulse quickened. Okay. One little lie. Brittney probably had her reasons.

"Okay. When she had that whole pregnancy scare, she said you were unsupportive."

"Excuse me?" Grant stood up, his gaze narrowed now. "Pregnancy scare?"

"Yes. She said you told her you weren't ready to be a dad and she should just have an abortion. And then you dumped her."

"If that little brat had a pregnancy scare..." his words dripped ice, "...it was with another man. I never touched her."

"Never touched her?" she repeated dumbly. "You mean you guys..."

"I kissed her once. Once, Lanie. And it was a complete turn off." He shoved a hand through his hair. "We grew up in the same town and ended up at the same college. I'd never had any interest in her, and yet for some stupid reason I took her up on an offer to see a movie one day. Two weeks together. One kiss."

Her stomach rolled and she suddenly felt a bit lightheaded. "You never had sex?"

"Let's put it this way. I'm probably the only guy on campus who *didn't* sleep with her. Brittney was pretty liberal with her lovers."

Lanie stood up, walking the opposite way down the beach.

"Where are you going?" he called after her.

"I think I'm going to be sick."

"Hey, hold on a second." He ran after her. "You haven't told me why you stole the coin and what Brittney has to do with it."

"You don't want to know," she muttered. "Trust me."

He grabbed her elbow, swinging her back around. "Lanie. I want to know."

"No, you don't." She shook her head and moaned. "It's absolutely horrible."

"Tell me." He didn't release her, his mouth tightening. "What did Brittney have to do with this?"

She closed her eyes and took a slow breath in. "We were in the bar together the night I met you. We'd had a few drinks. When she spotted you, she told me what you'd done to her."

"What I'd allegedly done. She lied," he ground out. "Go on."

Opening her eyes again, she tried to gauge how he'd react to her next words.

"I got pretty upset with what she told me, partly because I'd been drinking. She told me about this coin you loved, and how funny it would be if someone took it from you."

"Yeah. Real funny. She'd had her eye on the coin since I brought it to show-and-tell in second grade," he said tersely. "And she convinced you to steal it?"

"Yes," she whispered. "It was just another challenge for me. I was never one to back down from a dare, and I think she knew it. That's why she picked me."

There was an audible click as his teeth snapped together. He released her arm and fisted his hands.

"I'm sorry."

"It never occurred to you she might have been lying?"

"She was my sorority sister. I gave her the benefit of the doubt."

His jaw tightened. "And yet you couldn't even remember her name."

"I made a bad decision that night, Grant." Guilt brought another heated flush to her face. "I'm not going to deny it."

"It'd be kind of hard to," he replied with a bitter laugh. "And then you rolled out of bed with me and sold the coin for a couple grand."

Nausea rolled through her as she stared at the myriad of emotions flashing across his face. Anger, frustration, disgust. Not even a hint of the tenderness or caring he'd shown her last night.

"Grant," she drew in a deep breath, ready to tell him the truth about the coin. "I didn't se—"

The whine of a motor cut off her words, and they both turned toward the water to see a Coast Guard boat approaching the island.

"Looks like we've been found," he said wearily. "I'll go grab the rest of the stuff back at the cabin."

She started after him. "Wait, Grant—"

He lifted his hand and shook his head. "Later. Let's just get back to the resort first."

Disappointment stabbed deep. The need to tell him she'd kept the coin had been so profound.

Maybe it would be better just to hand it to him anyway. With a heavy sigh, she turned back to wave down the boat.

After the Coast Guard dropped them off on Lopez Island, Grant drove them back to the resort.

"We were lucky Roberta called the Coast Guard," Lanie murmured, looking over at him.

He grunted in response, not trusting himself to speak, with his emotions all over the map.

He'd known all along she'd taken the coin—had even come to a point where he'd forgiven her. Then she'd told him the reason why she'd taken it, and he'd lost it. All the goddamn warm and fuzzies had flown out the window. Her motivation had been so absurd and selfish.

*Six years ago. It's in the past.* The voice of reason argued in his head. After that amazing night they'd had, could he really justify throwing it all away? He drew in a long breath, already knowing the answer.

Turning down the road to the resort, his eyebrows shot up at the three media vans outside.

"What the hell?" he scowled and parked the Jeep.

He glanced over at Lanie, who'd gone quiet, and saw the look of trepidation on her face. She didn't seem the least bit surprised by their presence.

He barely had time to ponder the thought before all hell broke loose. A wall of noise hit them as reporters burst through the doors of the resort, shoving microphones and cameras in their faces.

Grant climbed out of the car, trying to squeeze past the crowd to open Lanie's door. He arrived at the other side of the Jeep to find someone else had done it for him.

At first he figured the older man to be her father. Tall, graying hair and distinguished-looking. But then, right after he pulled her from the vehicle, he dropped a very un-fatherly kiss on her mouth.

Grant pressed his hand against the Jeep, his jaw clenching as his stomach threatened to toss up the apple he'd eaten on the boat ride back.

The reporters clapped and gave cheers of approval, barely waiting for the couple to pull apart, before thrusting a microphone in the man's face.

“Senator Adams, how does it feel knowing your fiancée is safe?”

*Senator? He was a fucking senator? And had they just said fiancée?*

“Wonderful.” He slipped his arm around Lanie’s waist. “The moment I learned Delanie had gone missing, I cancelled all re-election appearances to come help in the search. Which I’m sure the voters of California will understand.”

“Ms. Williams, do you plan on suing the resort for putting your life at risk with such a dangerous boat?”

Grant’s teeth snapped together. That was it. He would not stick around and listen to this bullshit for one second longer. He spun on his heel, pushing past the crowd to stride back inside the resort.

Roberta stood inside the doorway, her eyes filled with tears.

“We were so worried. When you didn’t come back or answer your cell phones, and then we found Delanie’s hat floating in the strait, we assumed the worst. I—”

“Don’t let any of those reporters back into the main building. And tell Ms. Williams to sign the sponsorship papers and then I’ll have copies overnighted to her in a few days.”

“But, what about—”

“I don’t want to see her again.” He spun around, the pain of knowing she’d lied again shredding him apart inside. “I’m going away for a couple of days. And I want her gone before I return.”

Roberta didn’t even ask to whom he referred. Compassion and understanding flickered in her gaze. She gave a quick nod and bit her lip.

“I’m so sorry, Grant.”

Her soft words further twisted the knot in his gut. He went to the kitchen window and looked outside, just in time to see Lanie leading the senator into one of the cabins. She yelled something at the bodyguard who tried to follow them. The man scowled, but with obvious reluctance, let them go inside alone.

Grant closed his eyes, not even wanting to consider what they were doing in there. Pain and rage mixed a potent combination in his blood. He clenched his fists and struggled to breathe. He needed to get the hell away from there. Before he did something stupid—like beat the shit out of a senator.

“Hold down the fort for a bit, Roberta, and I’ll give you an extra week’s vacation time.” He forced a smile. “I’ll see you in a few days.”

The blood pounded in Lanie’s veins. She pried Franklin’s arm from around her waist and stood on her tiptoes, trying to see where Grant had run off to.

Oh God, he must surely be thinking the worst right now. And after their conversation on the island... Jeez.

“Excuse me,” she raised her voice above the flurry of questions being hurled at them. “I need a moment with the senator.”

Not waiting for a response, she grabbed his arm and dragged him away. Somewhere they could talk—or where she could rip him a new one to be exact—and not be photographed and recorded.

Spotting the cabin Grant had taken her into yesterday, she tugged him into it. His bodyguard made to follow them in and she glared at him.

“Don’t even try it. I need a moment alone.”

Franklin sighed and then gave the guard a quick nod. “We’ll be fine.”

The moment he stepped inside, she swung the door shut.

“How dare you?” she snarled. “How dare you turn this into a P.R. event?”

Franklin sighed and gave her a wary look. “Delanie, I apologize. Of course I was worried about you, and, as I mentioned, I was already in Seattle. But with the upcoming elections, it just seemed—”

“And you told them I was your fiancée. What the heck were you thinking? We’re not engaged.”

He waved his hand. “A technicality. I brought the ring with me and had hoped to discuss it with you.”

“Discuss it with me?” her voice rose. “Discuss it with me? You are so...argh! I don’t have time for this. I don’t. You can just march your ass back out there and tell those reporters the engagement is off. Or hell, try honesty for once and admit there never was one.”

“Delanie—”

“Either you do it, or I will.” She met his gaze and then swung open the door to the cabin, running back to the resort.

The reporters seemed pre-occupied with something else now. Her stomach dropped as she realized what was happening. She broke into a run.

“Grant!”

But the Jeep peeled out of the driveway, past the reporters and away from the resort.

“Oh God.” She wrapped her arms around her waist, her eyes filling with tears.

“Miss Williams. There is speculation that this might be a campaign stunt, and that you were never on a boat that sank. Would you care to comment on that?”

The reporters swarmed toward her again, hurling questions left and right.

“No comment.” She shook her head, lifting her hand to cover her face and hurried back into the resort.

Roberta ushered her in and shut the door behind her, locking it immediately.

“Are you all right, dear?”

She shook her head, struggling to swallow against the lump in her throat.

“Where did he go?”

Roberta sighed. “He left, said he’d be gone for a few days. He was terribly upset.”

“Oh jeez,” she whispered. “What a mess.”

“It certainly is.” Roberta clucked her tongue and sighed. Her face grew red. “I’m so sorry...but he left instructions for you to leave the resort immediately and that he’d overnight the paperwork to you.”

Lanie flinched as if she'd been hit, her stomach rolling hard. "That final, huh?"

"I'm afraid so. Perhaps you could stay at a nearby hotel and try to work things out when he returns?" she suggested hopefully.

She shook her head, forcing a smile. Wondering if she might get sick. "I'll go pack my things."

Roberta's expression fell and she heaved a sigh. "All right. I'll arrange transportation to the ferry. Unless you're leaving with the senator."

"No. I won't be leaving with the senator."

She glanced out the window and watched Franklin try to win over the reporters again. She didn't believe for a second he'd tell them they weren't engaged. Which was fine, she'd make an official statement when she returned to San Francisco.

"Thank you, Roberta." She turned back to the older woman and touched her shoulder. "For everything."

Seeing the disappointment in the other woman's gaze was almost her undoing. Before she started crying like an idiot, she turned and went to her room to pack.

## Chapter Eight

Grant pulled the Jeep up to the resort and put it in park. He leaned back against the headrest and sighed, staring at the main house. He reached up and ran his hand over the three-day growth on his chin. Damn, he needed to shave. Either that or, at this rate, just grow it out into a beard.

Regret rested heavy in his gut; despondency had hung thick over him the past few days. All because he knew she was gone.

With a sigh, he climbed out of the car and walked up the steps to the front door. A couple a few feet away were dragging luggage out of a cabin, obviously checking out.

It was second nature to give a friendly wave, and the couple responded with an enthusiastic wave of their own.

He turned to open the front door and found it already open.

Roberta stood in the doorway, flour on her apron and a relieved smile on her face. "You're back."

"Of course." He smiled and stepped through the door, giving her shoulder a squeeze. "You knew I'd be back."

His gaze drifted around the interior of the building.

"She's gone, Grant."

Tension coiled in his muscles and he gave a stiff nod. "I assumed as much."

Hell, he'd ordered her gone. Of course, there was that part of him that wanted her to ignore his request, to stubbornly stick around and explain to him that it had all been a mistake.

"How have things been?" he asked.

"Business as usual." Roberta paused. "She left you a letter."

He turned abruptly to face her, his pulse quickening. "Did she now?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"Maybe it's a letter saying she wants to sue us."

Roberta clucked her tongue at him. "I somehow doubt that."

"Did you read it?"

She waved a towel at him and scowled. "I'm nosey, Grant. But really, I have my limits."

"It's sealed, huh?"

She laughed softly. "Yes. And I just don't trust that steaming it open trick."

"Thanks. I'll go look it over in a few."



He turned down the hall to his room. The hell with a few, he wanted to rip it open now.

Grabbing the handle to his door, he twisted it and pushed into the room.

The letter lay on his bed like the day of reckoning put inside an envelope. He sat down on the edge of the mattress, eyeing the plain white rectangle with apprehension. Almost afraid to open it and see what she'd written inside.

He finally reached over and picked it up. It was heavier than he expected, with a lump on one side.

His brows came together as he drew his index finger beneath the seam and tugged open the seal. Turning the envelope upside down, he shook it until a necklace fell out into his palm.

The blood pounded through his veins and his mouth fell open. Not just any necklace.

He lifted the chain until the pendant swung in front of his face. The silver tetradrachm of Athens was held by tiny prongs that secured it into a pendant.

He brushed his thumb over the raised owl, the hairs on the back of his neck lifting. Was he actually holding *his* coin? Or was it a replica?

Reaching for the envelope, he tugged out the letter.

*Grant,*

*I wish you hadn't left so suddenly, without giving me the chance to explain. I know that in your eyes I'm probably just a liar and a thief, and in reality, I guess I am.*

*I never intended to keep the coin. I promised Brittney I'd throw it into the lake, but I couldn't do it. And neither did I sell it. The coin was the only reminder I had of the best night of my life. The night where I screwed up and gave both my body and my heart to the man I'd gone to steal from. I know there is no defense for my selfish actions. I don't expect you to understand or forgive me, but I thought you deserved to know my motives.*

*With the return of this coin, I hope your good luck returns and you find all the happiness you deserve in life.*

*With love,*

*Lanie*

Grant reread the letter for the third time, his head spinning and his mouth going dry.

She hadn't sold the coin, that realization alone was mind boggling enough. But the coin became the secondary focus. One line in her letter spun wildly inside his head. *The night where I screwed up and gave both my body and my heart to the man I'd gone to steal from.*

Her heart. Was she saying...? Was it possible...? His chest tightened and he dropped the letter, picking up the coin again.

How long had he wanted this back? Had he blamed all his bad luck on its disappearance?

The pendant lay heavy in his hand, a tangible reminder of all he'd thought was important to him. And yet, even with the return of the coin, he'd been dealt the biggest stroke of bad luck yet.

He'd just lost Lanie for the second time.

"You need to stop freaking out," Phoebe said, handing her a brownie on a paper plate. "I'm sure he'll send the paperwork like he promised. It's only been four days since you left."

"I know he will," Delanie said softly. "I'm not worried about that."

"Oh yeah? Then what's this about?" Phoebe lifted an eyebrow and tossed her black curls over her shoulder.

Delanie scooted over on the couch in their office, making room for Phoebe to sit down.

"I don't know." She tore off a piece of brownie and sighed. "I guess I just expected to hear *something*."

"Huh? Oh." Phoebe's eyebrows rose and she gave a slow nod. "*Oh*, I see. This is about that letter you left him, huh?"

Delanie popped the bite of brownie in her mouth and nodded, not lifting her gaze. The rich chocolate treat melted against her tongue and she sighed.

"This is excellent," she said after swallowing the bite. "Who made it?"

"Gabby baked them and brought them in."

"She's fabulous. How are things with her and Justin?"

"They're ridiculously happy. You should have seen them this week when—" Her eyes narrowed. "Hey, you changed the subject. We were discussing Grant."

Delanie winced at his name, and the fact that Phoebe was so quick to go back to the subject of him.

"Look, I thought you said you were glad to be off the island," Phoebe pointed out, nibbling at the edge of her own brownie.

"I was. I am," she corrected herself. "It's just—"

"Well, thank God you're out of the denial stage." Phoebe nodded. "I mean, I could tell the minute you stepped off the plane."

"You could tell what?" Delanie touched her neck. Had he left some kind of giant-sized hickie or something?

"That you're completely in love with the man."

Delanie's eyes widened, her mouth flapping as she tried to form a response.

"It's true, don't even deny it." Phoebe gave her a sidelong look while polishing off her brownie.

"Deny what?"

Gabby strode into the room, looking extra young with her strawberry-blond braids peeking out from beneath a San Francisco Giant's baseball cap.

At twenty-four, she was already considered the baby employee at the Second Chances office. But, despite her young age, she worked her butt off and there wasn't a thing she wouldn't do for the shelter.

"Nothing. I'm denying nothing," Delanie muttered. "These are fabulous by the way." She lifted the small bit of brownie she had left and then popped it into her mouth.

"Glad you like them." She turned to Phoebe. "So what's she denying?"

"That she's in love."

"I'm not in love."

"You're in love?" Gabby squealed and leaned forward to pat her leg. "That's so great! Who's the man?"

"I'm not in—"

"The owner of Athena's Oasis," Phoebe went on. "They met six years ago and apparently he never forgot her. And she shows up at the resort and they end up having mind-blowing sex all week. Well, until she left early."

"Oh. My. God. It was just a fling." Delanie threw up her hands, biting back a scream of frustration. "When did my life become a movie on some women's network? This is completely—"

"Romantic. That's what it is. I'm so glad I'm not the only one getting hit by Cupid's freaking arrow." Gabby sighed and twisted the end of her braid around a finger. "So when are you going to see him again?"

*Never.* The question was the final straw. Her eyes flooded with tears and her throat grew tight.

"Oh, no. Oh God. I'm sorry, I totally said the wrong thing," Gabby said quickly. "I was just teasing you. I mean, flings are great. I used to have them before Justin and I got together." She broke off, her cheeks bright pink. "So not what you wanted to hear... Umm, you know, I think I hear someone buzzing at that door. I'll go check that out."

She shot out of the room before Phoebe had even handed Delanie the box of tissues.

"Sorry, we probably overdid it a bit," Phoebe said quietly.

Delanie grabbed a tissue and dabbed her eyes, shaking her head. "It doesn't matter. I mean, it never would have worked between me and Grant anyway."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one, I committed a felony against him."

"Hush. If he was going to press charges he would have done so by now." Phoebe stood up and folded her arms across her chest. "You're going to have to do better than that."

"Okay..." Delanie swallowed against the lump in her throat. "Then there's the biggest problem. He lives in Washington State."

Phoebe stared at her for a moment and then shrugged. "And?"

Delanie blinked. Didn't her friend see the problem here? "And I live in California."

"What, you don't want to move to Washington?"

"Move to..." she trailed off, her stomach in knots over the tempting idea. "Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. I have my life here. We helped this shelter get where it is today—"

"Delanie, sweetie, you know I love you. But let's be real." Phoebe sighed. "Working for an abused women's shelter was my dream, and sometimes I feel like I suckered you into it. You helped me get up the nerve to get so involved and for that I'll always be grateful."

"But I love Second Chances, Phoebe," Delanie protested, surprised at her friend's words.

"I know you do. And I've selfishly kept you here for years." Phoebe hesitated. "What I'm trying to say is that if you wanted to move to Washington for a guy you're in love with, the shelter would be fine. Besides, didn't you just tell me yesterday he'd offered you that job as marketing director for Athena's Oasis?"

Just the idea of it sent a spark of excitement through her. The spark was quickly snuffed out with guilt. "I don't know if he'd still give it to me. Besides, I'd hate leaving you here alone. Especially since you keep thinking you're seeing your ex all over the place."

"Completely my imagination. It's nothing, I'm sure. Besides, I wouldn't be alone," Phoebe replied softly. "I have lots of friends here at Second Chances, and with Gabby getting promoted last month I've been spending more time with her."

Delanie dropped her gaze, knowing her friend was right. She closed her eyes. Not that it mattered. There was still one part of the equation that made it impossible.

"You should go, Delanie."

"Phoebe, I left him that letter. I made my feelings for him clear..."

"He loves you too."

"Really?" The ache in her chest increased. Her lips twisted downward in disappointment. "If that's so true, why didn't he call me? Or come after me? He got everything he wanted from me, and that was the coin."

"I don't care about the coin."

The blood drained from her head and she gripped the armrest of the couch. When she opened her eyes Grant stood in the doorway, his gaze locked on her.

"Okay. Wow," Phoebe said. "That was weird. You must be Grant. Hi, I'm Phoebe, I work here at Second Chances with Delanie. I just have to say thank you for all you've done for us, and now I'm going to walk out the door and leave you two alone."

Grant stepped to the side, letting Phoebe scoot past him through the door. Before she left, she turned around and grinned, giving a big thumbs up.

He shut the door the minute Phoebe disappeared down the hall.

Lanie blinked, half convinced she was dreaming. Her heart pounded in her chest and her hands began to tremble.

“Did you mean it?”

“Did I mean what?” Her pulse doubled.

“What you said in the letter.” He reached the couch and sat down beside her, his gaze searching her face.

She knew to which part he was referring. The part where she’d said she’d given him her heart.

“Look, you have your coin back.” Emotion became a heavy lump in her throat and she stood up. “Your good luck charm—”

“I don’t care about the damn coin.” He caught her wrist, halting her from walking away. “And I’ll keep saying it until you believe me.”

She stared down at him, heat spreading through her body where his fingers touched. “Grant...”

“If I had been honest with myself in the first place, I could have admitted the truth.”

“And what’s that?”

“That my searching for you for six years had nothing to do with the coin, and everything to do with you.” He held her gaze and his thumb brushed over the inside of her wrist.

“What are you saying?” she whispered, her breath catching as hope flared in her heart.

“I’m saying that losing you six years ago hurt,” he said with naked vulnerability in his eyes. “But losing you now would kill me.”

Relief raged through her, weakening her knees. She bit her lip, which began to tremble.

“Lanie.” He slid his arms around her waist and pulled her close, pressing his cheek just under her breasts. “You’re the only woman for me. I suspected it back then, and I sure as hell know it now.”

Delanie closed her eyes against the tears of relief and joy. She threaded her fingers into his hair and tugged his head against her breasts.

“Oh, Grant...”

“I love you.” He sighed. “And I shouldn’t have taken off for three days the minute I saw that jackass senator show up at the resort.”

“He was out of line,” she agreed, toying with a strand of his hair. “It was all just P.R. to him. I gave my official response to the media when I got home.”

“I saw that.” He pulled her down onto his lap. “So, how do I persuade you to move up to Lopez Island and become my wife?”

Delanie’s pulse skipped, her future aligning quite nicely in her head.

“You could add a slash to it.”

“Slash?”

“I’m kind of holding out for wife slash marketing director of the resort.”

“Done. You know I wanted you to have that job.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a chain, the coin pendant following. “I didn’t have a chance to grab a ring, but I brought this. I want you to have it.”

Her mouth parted, her started gaze locking on his. “But I just gave it back to you. It’s your good-luck coin.”

He fastened the chain around her neck and let the pendant drop against her breasts.

He touched her cheek. “If ever I had a good-luck charm in my life, you were it. And I don’t intend to let you go.”

Her stomach flipped and her knees weakened. “Good, because I’m head over heels for you, buddy. I love you.”

“I love you too,” His mouth curved into a mischievous smile. “Janie.”

Her eyes widened. Had he just called her—? She squealed as his hands shot out to tickle her sides.

“Gotcha,” he whispered and then his mouth closed over hers.

## About the Author

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*If you can't stand the heat...don't let go!*

## Anybody but Justin

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*A Chances Are story.*

Gabby is serious about her search for Mr. Right, but no one can say she hasn't had a good time looking. She enjoys her numerous dates and the sex that comes with them. Until she finds herself falling for the one man she vows to never love. Her best friend and roommate, Justin. A player in every sense of the word—and a reminder of her awful past.

One night, with the help of a bottle of tequila, things get a little too hot for comfort. She moves out, intent on removing him from the line of temptation.

Justin has different plans. The tequila did more than just change how he sees his good friend. It made him realize he doesn't want to be just friends any more. He's ready for something more intimate, and he'll do whatever it takes to find out why she's running. And convince her to stay.

*Warning: This book has hot sweet lovin' between friends who become lovers.*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Anybody but Justin:*

Justin's heart thundered in his chest as the almost crippling desire he had for Gabby consumed him. She was going to let him make love to her. She'd given him the green light.

He slid his hands down to her ass, lifting her, and she immediately wrapped her legs around his hips.

His tongue plunged deep into the warmth of her mouth to explore the hot and moist interior.

The rub of her breasts against his chest had his cock hardening further, nestling snug against the softness of her bottom.

He moved them toward the bedroom, groaning when she sucked his tongue into her mouth and squeezed her thighs tighter around him. He kicked open the half-closed door to his bedroom, then kicked it shut again. He moved them toward his bed, stumbling over his work boots.

He fell onto the bed, rolling to take the brunt of the fall, which brought Gabby on top of him.

Straddling him, she tore her mouth off him and sat up. She reached for the hem of her shirt, jerking it above her head.

The V of her black satin bra pushed her breasts together to display an impressive amount of cleavage. His mouth watered and he lifted his hands to tug away the cups of the bra.

Her pert breasts fell free, the light pink tips already textured and hard for his mouth. She was so damn pretty, sensual in a subtle way. A way most men probably wouldn't discover until they had her naked.

He opened his mouth, needing to tell her how sexy she was.

"What about Steven?" How the hell had he allowed himself to ask that instead?

She gave a soft laugh as she reached up to pinch her nipples lightly. His cock twitched and he drew in a harsh breath at the sight.

“I broke up with him.”

“You did? When? Why didn’t you say something?” he choked out.

“Last night.” She lowered her body downward, until her breasts were just above his face. “At dinner—”

He captured one pink tip between his lips, causing her to break off as he suckled her deep. Christ, she tasted sweet. He smiled, loving the way she gasped and writhed above him.

“At dinner,” she continued breathily. “*Oh...told me why...oh God...oral sex could never be part of our relationship. He has a clitoris phobia.*”

Her nipple popped from his mouth with a loud suctioning sound. He stared at her for a moment, astounded by her statement.

“Are you shitting me?”

She sighed and drew a finger down the center of his chest. “You think someone can make this stuff up?”

“What an idiot,” he growled and grasped her hips, rolling her again until she was beneath him.

Her green eyes narrowed slightly as she stared up at him and her tongue swept across swollen lips. “My sentiments exactly. So I immediately ended it.”

Justin drew in an unsteady breath, his chest tightening at the playfulness and desire in her gaze.

He ran the palm of his hand over her stomach, taking a moment to dip his finger into her navel.

“You should know that I’m nothing like The Suit, and am actually quite fond of the clitoris.” He skimmed his hand across the waistband of the jeans riding low on her hips.

Her stomach rose as she sucked in a breath, her lips curling into a challenging smile. “I know you are.”

“You do?” He dipped a finger below the waistband, smoothing it back and forth against her silky skin.

Her hips lifted slightly against his light touch. Further aroused and amused by her response, he moved his hand to cup her pussy through her jeans.

“Mmm. You told me.” Her lashes lowered, veiling her gaze. “And I heard you once or twice...with other women. It certainly sounded like you knew what you were doing.”

She’d heard him. The idea of it both intrigued him, and yet sent a rush of regret through him.

“Yeah? You didn’t get weirded out?”

“No. I got horny,” she admitted bluntly with a soft laugh. Her lashes fluttered upward again. “And then later I got jealous.”

*Give a SEAL an inch, and he'll take your heart.*

## Heat of the Storm

© 2009 Elle Kennedy

*An Out of Uniform story*

Lieutenant Will Charleston has waited fifteen long years to show up as anything other than a one-pixel blip on Mackenzie Wade's romantic radar. If a powerful storm is what he needs to send her into his arms, he'll take it. Once the hot sex is over, though, she seems determined to kick him right back into the friend zone.

Not this time. This time, he's going to teach her the meaning of tenacious.

Mackenzie has always had feelings for Will, feelings she fights with all her strength. He's her best friend, her safety net. The one man who's not scared of her accursed psychic gift. No doubt he drives her wild in bed, but their night of passion was more than a mistake. It generated a tragic vision of the future, one that leaves her more confused—and afraid—than ever.

Problem is, Will knows her too well. Plus he's a SEAL to the bone. And they don't like to lose...

*Warning: This book contains a Navy SEAL who knows exactly what he wants—ridiculously hot and dirty sex with the woman he's been fantasizing about for years. Stormy sex and graphic language await you.*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Heat of the Storm:*

"Either we talk about what you saw, or we talk about the kiss." Will's brows were drawn together in a frown. "Your choice, Mac."

Neither. She wanted to talk about neither.

She edged toward the oversized leather sofa, hoping he'd take her silence and attempt at creating distance between them as a sign to back off. But the words *back off* were not part of his vocabulary and he only stepped closer, so that she was trapped between his big, hard body and the arm of the couch.

"Why did you kiss me?" he asked roughly.

She found the courage to meet his gaze. "I was upset about the break-up with Dan. And drunk. Very, very drunk. I...wasn't thinking."

He didn't answer for a long while. So long that she didn't think he would even reply. And she was right. He *didn't* reply. Instead, he grasped her chin with his hands and then his mouth covered hers.

The kiss was scarier than the vision. The kiss was *real*.

She was helpless to fight it, though the relentless ache between her legs wouldn't have let her fight anyway. Will's hot mouth rubbed over hers in a slow kiss, his lips firm but deliciously soft, his fingers

warm against her cheeks. He deepened the kiss, thrusting his tongue between her lips. He sought out her tongue and swirled over it, the taste of him assaulting her senses and making her knees wobble.

He immediately slid one hand to her waist to hold her steady, curling his fingers over her hip, his touch searing through the cotton material of her nightshirt and scorching her skin.

She couldn't move. Couldn't think. All she was capable of doing was sagging into his hard chest and drowning in those intoxicating lips of his.

The kiss grew harder, greedy, almost frantic. He licked her bottom lip then sucked it hard into his mouth, eliciting a whimper from deep in her chest. And his tongue...it was too demanding, too precise as it flicked over hers, thrust in and out of her mouth, mimicking what she knew he wanted to do to her with his cock.

Fire consumed her body, growing hotter and stronger when he shoved one hard thigh between her legs and ground against her throbbing core. The long ridge of his cock pressed into her mound. She could feel him pulsing, swelling, and the thought of having all that hard, male flesh deep inside her made her gasp with pleasure.

"I want you, Mackenzie," he murmured against her trembling lips. "Now. Always."

The words swiftly jolted her back to reality. She stumbled back, nearly tripping over the couch before regaining her equilibrium. She blinked wildly, trying not to look at his flushed face, the wild lust glimmering in his black eyes. This was Will. Her best friend since she was fifteen years old. For God's sake, she couldn't fall into bed with him, no matter how incredible a kisser he was, no matter how much her body shouted for her to do it.

"We can't," she managed, her voice sounding too desperate to her ears.

"We can," he corrected.

Before she could move farther away, he pulled her against him again and cupped her ass, pushing his pelvis into her so she could feel his unmistakable erection. He dipped his head, his lips hovering over her ear, his hot breath fanning over her skin. "You've been doing this to me from the moment I met you, Mac."

"Will—"

"Don't." His breath tickled her earlobe. "Don't make excuses, or give me reasons why we can't do this. I've stood patiently on the sidelines for fifteen years, watched you date other men, waited for you to see what's in front of you. But I'm tired of waiting."

She swallowed back a moan as he took her earlobe into his mouth and suckled on it. Heart thudding against her ribcage, she wondered how it would feel having Will suckle other parts of her body. Her nipples instantly hardened. Her clit swelled.

“You opened the door to this when you kissed me,” he continued huskily. “And if I didn’t think you wanted it, I’d turn around and walk out the door right now. But you want it, Mac. You want it very, very badly.”

She lifted her head and looked into his eyes. She’d never seen him like this, so damn sure of himself, so cocky. God help her, but she liked it. And from the look on his sexy face, he knew it. She’d spilled so many secrets to this man. She didn’t have many girlfriends, and sharing her deepest darkest fantasies with Will, her closest friend, hadn’t seemed wrong at the time. Now it unnerved her, the knowledge that he knew precisely what she wanted from a lover.

He dragged his index finger along the seam of her lips and rotated his hips, his erection rubbing over the thin boxer shorts she’d worn to bed.

“You’re turned on, aren’t you?” he whispered.

The word “yes” slipped out before she could stop it.

A faint smile tugged at his sensual mouth. “Maybe we should do something about that.”

“You’re my best friend,” she squeaked.

“Not tonight.” He gave a decisive nod, punctuated by another thrust of his groin. “Tonight I’m not your friend, Mac. Tonight I’m the man who’s going to fuck you senseless.”

*Once burned, twice shy...until the passion reignites.*

## Jealous Lover

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Three years ago, heiress Crystal Moran gave her heart to a man, only to have it crushed by his accusations of infidelity. Miserable, she picked up the pieces and returned to the United States to run her family's non-profit corporation. Now, just as she's got her life in order, he shows up at her big fundraiser. He thinks making a sizeable donation will win back her good graces.

As if.

Greek millionaire Demetrius Vartolas knows his money can't turn back the clock, but it just might buy him enough time to convince Crystal she belongs in his life. And his bed.

The reunion of bodies leaves them both begging for more. Rebuilding lost trust won't be so easy—unless she can prove her innocence to him once and for all...

*Warning: Steamy hot. Prepare to sweat. © Explicit sex and language!*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Jealous Lover:*

"*Ela 'tho*. Come here," he commanded, determined to move the conversation into a more intimate direction. "Are you wearing anything under that pretty gown?"

His question took her by surprise. Her eyes widened and her breath hitched, making her chest heave slightly.

"Not much," she finally replied.

"I would very much like to see you without it."

A slight smile tipped her lips and she relaxed a little. He knew she found his formal speech amusing, but he didn't care. Right now, he wanted her to relax so that he could drive her crazy with desire. One step at a time.

Crystal surprised him by nudging herself away from the door and reaching to unzip her dress. He held his breath as the fabric went slack and began to slide from her body. First her shoulders were bared and then the gown dropped below a sexy black bra. Next her waist and belly were exposed and then the tiny triangle of black panties.

Demetri swallowed hard as the gown fell to the floor, baring her shapely thighs and legs. She stepped over the pooled fabric. His chest constricted and he began to fear he might come in his pants. He wanted her that desperately. His thighs trembled, his cock pulsed, his balls bunching and burning.

"Your body is even more exquisite than I remember," he told her in a tone hoarse with craving. She had gained weight and he liked her fuller, more rounded figure.

She didn't reply, nor did she move closer. He was shaking with the need to touch her, yet feared he might truly embarrass himself.

"I'd like to see your body, too," she whispered huskily.

Demetri was happy to oblige. It gave him something to do, something to burn off a little of this wild frustration. He ripped the shirt off his back and tossed it aside. In another minute, he'd shed his pants and briefs. His cock stood rigid and trembling. Moisture glistened at its tip. He saw Crystal lick her lips and forced himself to take long, deep breaths.

"If you keep looking at me like that, I am sure to explode," he grumbled in warning.

She locked gazes with him. Her eyes widened and he could tell his confession intrigued her.

"I think I would like that," she admitted.

"You want to see me humiliate myself? Want to watch me lose control? This turns you over?"

"Turns me on," she corrected, her smile finally reaching her eyes. "And yes, it does."

"It would not take much," he said, his erection jerking as blood pulsed hotly through it. He wrapped his fingers around the thick shaft and gripped it tightly.

Surprising himself as well as her, he said, "Take off the rest of your clothes for me and I'll try my best to oblige you."

He watched in fascination as Crystal did a slow striptease. Part of him wondered where she'd learned such a seductive dance, but an even bigger part of him was thrilled. He wanted her to forget all the inhibitions of her youth and boldly declare her sexuality. She didn't disappoint him.

Her bra fell to the floor and her breasts stood firm and round, the areolas dark against her pale skin. As he watched, her nipples hardened more and distended. He swallowed thickly and trembled with the need to suck them. His hand tightened reflexively on his cock, squeezing like he wanted to squeeze her breasts, kneading and rubbing with nervous, jerky movements. She shimmied a little and stepped closer, dropping her tiny panties beside her bra.

Demetri groaned at the sight of her blond curls at the juncture of her thighs and clutched his cock so hard it hurt. Damn, but she was beautiful, more beautiful than he remembered. He let his gaze roam over her body from breasts to toes and then back up to her face. Dressed only in pearls and spiked heels, she was every man's fantasy. The vision sent a rush of fire through his veins.

He could see the tension and building excitement on her flushed features. She watched, mesmerized, as he slowly pumped his own turgid flesh.

"You want me to jerk off for you?" he ground out hoarsely. "To perform like an exhibitionist?"

She moved closer still, not speaking, but nodding, with her gaze fixed on his hand. When he could smell her and feel the heat of her body near his, a shudder ripped through him.

"Touch yourself," he commanded in a low, rasping voice.

She glanced up at him, looking confused. Then understanding dawned, but modesty or shyness prevented her from complying. He wanted to destroy all her inhibitions. He would teach her how to reveal the passionate nature she had been raised to repress.

“You can do it,” he encouraged gruffly. “Am I not totally exposed for you?”





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