



# Wicked

Sweet Temptation  
Lily Graison



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## Wicked: Sweet Temptation

Lily Graison

Mick Sheppard, drummer for the band Wicked, has sworn off women after his whirlwind romance with a fan cost him thousands in legal fees and a years worth of gossip in every trash magazine known to man. So, imagine his surprise when he wakes from an alcohol induced haze in Vegas, hung over, and married to a woman he knows next to nothing about.

Faith Weston is your typical good girl. Or so her father thinks. The daughter of a minister, she's lived her life on the straight and narrow. A trip to Sin City brings reality to a screeching halt when she discovers her week of reckless abandon has left her married to a rock star. One of the bad boys her father warned her about.

Will Mick and Faith find a way out of their drunk-induced marriage or will they both discover some things were just meant to be? When love is the last thing you're looking for, how do you turn your back on it when it finally finds you?

## **Wicked: Sweet Temptation**

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Edited by Meg Richman

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## **Chapter 1**

Faith Weston was going to hell. She knew it with every new breath as her gaze feasted on the one man who was an immoral danger to her soul. In one week he'd completely ruined her. She lusted for him until her body burned with need, was green with envy when another woman even looked his way and thought of at least a dozen ways to exact her revenge on those brave enough to speak to him in her presence. She'd greedily kept him locked in his room, feeding her gluttonous appetite on his body and spent hours doing nothing but laying about letting him have his way with her. Only her pride kept her from letting anyone know about it.

One perfect week playing consort to a rock star and she couldn't tell a single soul.

She watched him talk with a group of women on the other side of the pool and plotted ways to expose the bimbos for the fake tarts they were. Of course, they would probably think the exact same thing about her and they wouldn't be far off. She had barely given a token protest the first time Mick tried to kiss her four days ago and once the alcohol came out, her clothes fell off. He'd sent her screaming toward ecstasy in a matter of minutes and he'd become a drug she couldn't get enough of. Mick Sheppard, drummer for the band Wicked, was the one her daddy had warned her about. The kind of man that sinks his claws into you and nothing you do will break his hold. She believed her daddy now. Mick Sheppard was a dangerous man.

But damn her soul if she still didn't want him.

He looked across the pool at her, the tip of his tongue sliding past his lips enough to flash the silver stud pierced through it and her knees went weak. He grinned and she knew her panties would be soaked clean through before the night was over.

"Did he just ... wiggle his tongue at you?"

Faith jumped, startled, when someone touched her arm and spoke. She glanced up, smiling at Joan, the woman responsible for her even being in Vegas to begin with.

"That's the drummer for the band, isn't it?" Joan asked.

"Yes. That's Mick."

"Well, he hasn't taken his eyes off of you for the last fifteen minutes."

Faith tore her gaze from Mick and looked over at her friend. Why Joan was even at the band's party was a mystery. The woman hadn't been married six hours yet but instead of being locked inside her room with her bridegroom, she was partying with rock stars. "He likes to shock people," she said. "And nothing shocks you more than a sexual overture."

"I think it's more than that," Joan said, grinning. "He's still watching you."

Faith glanced back at him, biting her cheek to keep from smiling. There were no less than six women surrounding him, all talking at once, and he was just standing there nursing a beer while his gaze bore into her. She shivered just thinking about what was going through his mind. "He's just trying to get a reaction out of me."

"If the look on your face is any indication, he's succeeding."

Faith grinned. "Don't you have a honeymoon to go to?"

"Yes. I just came to tell you bye and to thank you again for coming out here to share my wedding day with me."

"I wouldn't have been anywhere else," Faith said. "You and Jessi are the best girlfriends I could have ever asked for."

"Ah, don't make me cry," Joan said. "I've done enough of that today as it is."

"You're supposed to cry at your wedding."

"Yes, but Michael is starting to get worried. He thinks I regret marrying him now."

Faith laughed. "Well, don't keep standing here talking to me. Take that new husband of yours up to your room and show him exactly how wrong he is."

"Will do, hon." Joan hugged her and Faith smiled as she watched her walk away before turning her head, searching out Mick. He was halfway across the pool deck, headed straight for her.

Her stomach clenched delightfully and her skin heated at the look in his eyes. She knew exactly what he wanted and lord help her, she was going to give it to him.

"Meet me in my room," he said, not missing a step as he walked past her. She watched him saunter into the main building and round the corner before disappearing out of sight. Since the day she left Georgia the week before, she knew this trip would change her life and boy had it ever. The bright lights and dazzling lifestyle was such a far cry from the tiny blip on the map that she came from. It was every bit as



mesmerizing as she thought it would be and hooking up with a rock star had just been a bonus. She hated to give it all up. Especially Mick. Since meeting him the day she arrived in Vegas, she hadn't been able to think of anything else. Her best friend, Jessi, after introducing Mick to her had told her to watch herself. That Mick wasn't her type. How wrong her friend was. Mick was exactly her type. What girl could pass up a bad boy, especially one as wicked as Mick Sheppard?

She glanced around the pool, looking for Jessi and Christian, the band's bass player. She didn't see either of them and took a step backwards, making her way to the building before darting inside and hurrying down the hall. Mick's cottage was only a few steps away from where she'd been standing but if anyone saw her enter, they'd have no doubt why she did. Sneaking around all week was now an everyday occurrence.

Existing through the back door, she hid behind the bushes lining the building, checking to see if anyone was looking her way before making a run for the back entrance of Mick's cottage.

He grabbed her the moment she opened the door.

"It's about damn time," he said, slamming the door behind her. He lifted her, bracing her against the wall before kissing her breathless.

His hands slid under her shirt, deft fingers unhooking her bra before he cupped her breasts in his palm. "It's our last night, Tinker Bell. You going to grant me a wish?"

"Depends on what the wish is," she said, lowering her head to take his lips in a kiss. His tongue ring clinked against

her teeth and she moaned as the kiss heated and turned the blood rushing through her veins to liquid fire.

"I want to go where no man has gone before," he whispered against her mouth. His hand cupped her bottom and he ground himself against her. "I want to pop the only cherry you have left."

"Oh god." Faith moaned as Mick's fingers dug into her ass through her jeans and she knew exactly what he wanted.

"Give me my wish, Tink, and I promise you, this will be a night you'll never forget."

\* \* \* \*

Mick was momentarily blinded when he opened his eyes, the pain causing his stomach to heave. The rays from the sun reflecting off the pool shined through the edge of the curtains and pierced through his skull in bright flashes of light. He raised a hand and shielded his face, groaning when the small action caused his body to ache in places he hadn't realized could ache.

Slowly sitting up, he threw his legs over the side of the bed. It took a few minutes for his eyes to adjust to the light. He stared at the carpet, the blurry images littered around his feet coming into focus bit by bit. Empty tequila bottles and condom wrappers were scattered across the floor. A pair of lacy panties caught his attention and he smiled, leaning down to pick them up and letting them dangle from one finger. They were tiny and he grinned when he remembered sliding them off the little vixen he'd spent half the night making scream as she hurdled toward orgasm.

Faith's face materialized in his mind's eye and he could still hear her screaming his name inside his head. Every inch of her petal white skin was branded into his memory. The delicious curve of her round bottom that filled his hands like ripe little melons was still felt and the way her eyes had glazed over with desire as she stared at him between her legs made his entire body ache.

He was going to miss her.

Tucking the memories of her into that tiny part of his brain very few women stayed, he tossed the panties to the bed and stood, wavering slightly as his head started spinning. The urge to throw up hit him moments later and grew with each passing second. A few deep breaths eased the unwanted reflex and he sighed when it passed.

Stumbling over liquor bottles and empty Ben & Jerry ice cream tubs he searched the floor for a pair of pants. Finding a crumpled pair by the dresser, he leaned down to grab them, holding his head when he stood back up.

The bathroom door opened suddenly and he looked up, startled. The object of his morning musings stumbled out into the room and he smiled. He dropped his pants and stared at her. "I was beginning to think you were a figment of my imagination. This is the first time all week you were still here when the sun came up."

She grinned and walked across the room, picking her shoes up. "I've always been here when the sun comes up," she said. "You've just been too wasted to notice."

"Well, I'm noticing now." He crossed the floor, stopping in front of her. "Since we're both awake, you want to scream for me one last time?"

She shook her head. "I have a flight to catch."

"Not for another two hours," he said, taking her shoes from her hand and tossing them over his shoulder. "Do you know how many times I can make you come in that length of time?"

A small shudder rippled through her body and he smiled. Reaching down, he ran his hand over her breast, cupping it through the material of her shirt. "Come on, Tinker Bell. I know you want me."

She stared up at him, her large green eyes mesmerizing him to the point he felt possessed. He'd had her every way under the sun and still, he wanted more. She was a tiny, warm burst of sunlight he'd lived too long without and giving her up was going to be hard. Not that he'd tell anyone. The less anyone knew about how he felt, the better off he was, particularly the little wisp of a girl standing in front of him.

"I have to go before someone sees me."

He sighed and shook his head. "I still don't know why you don't want anyone to know you've been sleeping with me. Am I that much of an embarrassment?"

"No," she said, reaching out to grab his hand. "I'm not ashamed to be seen with you anywhere. I just don't want Jessi to catch me sneaking out of your room, is all."

"Like she hasn't been sneaking out of Christian's all week?"

"That's different."

"Why?"

She looked away. "It just is," she said. "I don't have time to explain it. It would just be better if no one knew."

"Fine. I don't want to argue. I'd rather just get you naked and not talk about anything."

She laughed. "Although the offer is more tempting than anything I can think of, I can't. I have to go."

The top of her head barely reached his chest. She stood only inches over five feet tall and was the shortest woman he'd ever been with. Making love to her was a challenge, him being six-one, but he'd taken the task to heart without a moments thought. He loved the fact she was so tiny and doll-like.

When she started to walk away, he reached for her, hooking his hands under her arms and lifting her from the ground so she would be eye-level with him. "Come on, Tink. One for the road, eh?"

She laughed. "Put me down and stop calling me Tinker Bell. I told you it was degrading."

"No its not. It suits you perfectly. You're small enough to fit into my pocket but at the moment, I'd rather you be down the front of my pants."

She glanced down and raised one eyebrow at him. "You aren't wearing any pants."

"Then you'll have no problem filling that pretty mouth of yours with my dick."

"You, are an immoral human being, Mick Sheppard. I'm going to pray for your soul."

"You do that," he said, turning and walking to the bed. He laid her down and covered her with his body. "Right after I here you scream to God for mercy."

He kissed her, forcing his tongue past her lips. His hand slipped under her shirt, cupping her breast, and deft fingers pinched her nipple into a hard peak. She moaned and sank into the bed, her legs wrapping around his hips.

"I knew you wanted me," he whispered against her lips. "That little pussy is probably already drenched waiting for me."

"Mick, I don't have time," she said, trying to sound convincing while running her fingers through his hair. "I have to pack and I have a hangover like you wouldn't believe."

"It can't be any worse than mine," he said, lifting her shirt and pulling her breast from her bra. He licked her nipple before sucking it between his lips. "I specifically asked for a wish last night and I don't remember getting it."

She forced a chuckle past her lips. "The way my ass feels this morning, I can tell you without a doubt that yes, you did get it."

"Mmm," he said, "I'll take your word for it." He unsnapped her jeans, his hand crawling under the material and she gasped as his fingers slid between her folds. "Wet, just as I suspected."

"Mick..." Her protests were useless. He wasn't listening and neither was the rational side of her brain. She had to pack and catch her flight but one feel of his talented fingers and she was putty in his hands. He had her naked moments

later, his cock sliding into her wet heat with enough force to cause a small gasp to rip from her throat.

"Faith, why do you feel so damn good?" he asked, panting for breath. "I could fuck you everyday for a year and never get enough."

He set a relentless pace, his hips driving into her without mercy and she gasped with every intrusion of her body. He loomed over her; her face was buried against his chest as she held on to him and she tried not to come. She could already feel spasms wracking her womb and knew it wouldn't take much longer.

"Oh my god," she whispered, her legs clamping around his hips, her fingers digging into his back and she groaned when he suddenly stopped.

"Not this time, sweetheart," he said, pulling out of her and flipping over onto his back. He reached for her, dragging her on top of him. "You're not going to come until I say so. Now, ride me. I want to memorize every inch of you while you milk my cock."

Faith braced her hands on his chest and stared down at him as she lifted her hips and slowly slid back down. He was staring up at her, his lips parted while his hands mapped out every inch of skin he could touch.

He wasn't the type of man her daddy would approve of. His appearance alone would earn strikes against him. He was covered with tattoos, some as ruthlessly sexual as he was. He had a piercing in his eyebrow, one in his tongue and one cleverly placed on his cock that did things to her she couldn't even describe. He cursed like a sailor, said the most salacious

things she'd ever heard but he made her purr like a kitten with warm milk. She didn't think there was anything she wouldn't do for him, or let him do to her, and lord knows he'd damn near done it all.

She couldn't remember how many times she'd let him have her but one thing she did know ... she'd miss him when she went back home.

He grabbed her suddenly, holding her still while he lifted his hips, forcing his cock into her as far as it would go. She gasped, bracing herself against his chest as he pounded into her from underneath. The look on his face was fierce, his eyes locked with her own and she could do nothing but stare back at him and wait for what she knew was coming.

She felt it minutes later, her stomach clenched as his fingers dug into her hips and he grew thicker inside of her.

"Faith..."

That one whispered word uttered past his lips as he ravaged her soft flesh and she was undone. The tension uncoiled in a blinding shower of heat that crawled from her core and lashed out at every pore on her body until she screamed with the force of it. She heard him grunt under her, his hold on her tightening until he threw his head back, his mouth opening in a silent scream as he fucked her near stupid.

When he stilled, she collapsed against him, panting for breath while his hands spanned her back and his fingers danced in random patterns across her skin.

The voices of people outside filtered into the room and Faith wondered if they'd heard her screams. Her head



pounded as her blood rushed through her veins and the heat coursing through her limbs left her feeling groggy and sated. A week with this man wasn't enough. The hours they'd spent together were only brief flashes of time she'd never get again. After today, he'd be gone forever.

He kissed the top of her head, holding his lips to her and mumbled, "I'm going to miss you, Tink."

She smiled and hugged him to her. "I'm going to miss you, too, Mick."

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## Chapter 2

Mick opened his eyes and stared at the clock before sighing. Faith had been gone for hours and he still hadn't bothered to get up off the bed. He'd reluctantly let her go after spending less time than he wanted tasting every inch of her skin and couldn't take his eyes off of her as she gave him one last smile and left his room ... and his life forever. The cottage still hung heavy with the musky odor of sex. His sheets smelled like her, his skin was covered in her scent, and he was loathed to wash it off. He knew he'd never see her again and that fact alone left him feeling empty for the first time in years.

Since the day he realized his ex-wife, Jennifer, had only married him for his money, he'd locked the part of himself that actually cared about women away and had no intentions of ever bringing it back out but one week with Faith and it demanded to be set free. He guarded his heart the best he could but the loss he was feeling now let him know he hadn't done enough.

He hadn't lied when he told her he'd miss her. He already did.

Sitting up, he stared around the room and snorted a laugh. The room was trashed. Housekeeping was going to charge them a fortune to clean the mess up. An array of assorted liquor bottles littered the room. Various pieces of trash and take-out containers, empty tubes of lube and an assortment of used condoms were tossed haphazardly near the trashcan.

He tried counting how many were there but just looking at them made him think of her and thinking of her made his chest ache.

Standing up, he searched the room for the pants he'd dropped earlier. Finding them near the dresser, he tried shaking the wrinkles out. A piece of paper fell from one of the pockets and he reached down and picked it up, unfolding it before reading what it said.

His vision was blurry due to the massive headache from his morning activities and the hangover. The words were distorted but squinting, and holding the paper close to his face, brought them slowly into focus. His eyes widened as he read what appeared to be a legal document. His pulse started to race when he read it a second time to make sure he hadn't misunderstood what he was seeing. The room started to spin suddenly, his heart clenching in fear as the words screeched through his head before he started to scream.

\* \* \* \*

"No, no, no. This can't be happening. Please let this be a joke." Faith shoved the newspaper between her leg and the seat of the plane and stared out the small window, watching the clouds rush by. They were half an hour from Atlanta and the flight from Vegas had been spent recalling the past week and wondering if anyone back home would ever find out what she'd been doing. She'd reassured herself no one would know and had finally convinced herself that her daddy would never find out what a sinful little heathen she was.

Now this.

Reaching for the paper, she straightened it out, smoothing her hand over the crinkled paper and once again looked at the picture on the front. She cringed and a pitiful moan eased past her throat.

"You are so dead, Faith Weston. The Reverend is going to kill you." She moaned again and stared down at the picture. The low cut blouse she was wearing in the photo was enough to make her daddy preach her ears off but the way she was straddling Mick, and the fact he had two handfuls of her ass and his face half buried in her breasts would cause him to send her straight to the nearest convent ... and they weren't even Catholic!

What had she been thinking? *You weren't apparently.* She frowned before sighing heavily. *This is bad. This is beyond bad.*

The only thing she could hope for now was that no one at home ever saw the photo. Giving Mick a lap dance in a crowded hotel bar for every man and woman within viewing distance to see hadn't seemed like a bad idea at the time but someone had photographed it! Sure the picture was in a local Vegas paper but she wasn't stupid enough to believe that the photo wouldn't eventually get sold to some magazine.

And then her real troubles would begin.

Everyone at home would know she'd spent her week in Vegas partying with a rock star. Mick Sheppard to be exact. The baddest of the bad. So much trash had been written about him, he made everyone else look like saints. It was all lies, according to Mick, but the people living in the small town she called home would believe every word they read.

And this article painted her in a very disturbing light.

And why shouldn't it? she asked herself, sighing as she stared at the picture. She barely even remembered the night they'd spent partying in that bar, something she wished they hadn't done now. Sneaking around to meet in private was one thing, going out in public was something completely different. She should have known better.

Of course, it was hard to tell what she had been thinking at the time. She was experiencing a total blackout for most of the night. She remembered Mick calling her and asking her to meet him at the bar and she'd practically run the whole way. When she woke the next morning she had a hang over so bad she could barely see straight. She'd tried to wake Mick for half an hour to tell him she had to leave before giving one last look to him laid out naked on the sheets and left his room to sleep off her hangover.

And here she was. A week of blurry memories later and photographic evidence that she hadn't been the good girl her daddy thought she was.

The seat belt sign came on moments before the pilot said they were approaching the airport. Her stomach tightened into knots thick enough to cause cramps and she swallowed the lump trying to choke her. Shaking her head, she crammed the paper into her bag and hoped no one she knew ever saw it. It wasn't like Mick would tell. She'd never see him again and it took more energy than she wished to ignore the pain that thought caused.

The plane landed with only a few bumps and the fight through the crowd in the airport didn't help calm her nerves.

By the time she'd reached the baggage claim, sweat was rolling down her back. When she saw the Reverend, she nearly choked on her tongue.

"How's my baby girl?"

"I'm fine, daddy," Faith said, forcing a smile onto her face when he hugged her.

"You don't look fine," he said, pulling away from her and holding her at arms length. "You look a bit pale. Was the flight bumpy?"

"Aren't they always?" she said.

He grinned. "Most of the time. Come on, we'll find your luggage and get you home. Mabel has been at the house all morning cooking up a storm. No matter how hard I've tried, I can't get that woman out of our kitchen."

"That's cause she's sweet on you," Faith said, grinning as they walked toward the baggage carousel.

"Pftt. Now don't go spreading that rumor around," he said. "Half the congregation has been trying to get me to court her. I don't have the time or inclination for such things at my age."

Faith laughed. "Daddy, you're not too old to date and Mabel is a lovely woman."

He raised an eyebrow at her and grinned.

"Okay," Faith said. "So she's ten years older than you and has more chins than you and me combined, but she's sweet. And she can cook."

"Having a sweet cook isn't enough to make me want to marry a woman. Especially Mabel. She's too bossy and tries too hard and no, before you even say it, her weight doesn't

bother me. It's what is in a person's heart that matters, not the exterior, but I'm not interested in remarrying."

"The fact you just said that makes me believe you're trying to convince yourself you aren't sweet on her, too."

"Don't even start young lady." He found her bags and lifted them from the carrousel, groaning at their weight. "What do you have in here?" he asked. "An Elvis impersonator?"

She laughed. "No. He wouldn't fit. I brought you a showgirl instead."

"Oh, I can see me explaining to the church come Sunday what I'm doing with a Vegas showgirl on the front pew."

"Just tell them what you always do. 'Brothers and sisters, pray with me and help this child find her way from the sin that's corrupted her life!'"

He stopped and turned to look at her, giving her that look that said she was getting too sassy for her own good. "I can already tell that trip has ruined you. I should have sent Jacob along to chaperone."

Faith ducked her head and hoped he didn't see how red her face was. She knew without being told her cheeks were glowing. She could feel them burning. "There wasn't a reason for me to be chaperoned, daddy. I was a perfect angel."

"And now I know you're lying," he said, grinning. "You'll have to spend a week praying for your soul."

A week? More like years, she thought with a grin. The things she'd done with Mick alone would buy her an express ticket to hell. She looped her arm through her father's and laid her head on his arm as they walked out of the airport.

"Don't worry about me, daddy. My soul is perfectly safe," she lied.

\* \* \* \*

He was having a heart attack. He knew it as sure as the nose on his face. The pain in his chest grew, constricting until he felt dizzy and the room spun out of control. Someone was screaming and strong fingers were biting into his arm.

"Mick! Calm down, man. Look at me!"

Luke's voice sounded miles away but the pressure on his arms increased until he finally looked down. The screaming stopped and he realized then it had been him making the noise.

The look on Luke's face was one he'd never forget. He looked terrified. A glance around the room showed the same look on everyone's face. They were all staring at him with a look of horrified fascination and curiosity. How long had he been screaming? How long since he'd seen...

"Breathe man. Nice even breaths."

"His color doesn't look so good," Christian said. "He's purple."

"He'll be fine if he just breathes," Luke said, giving him a few shakes. "Come on, Mick. Take a breath."

Mick did as told, the vice-like band of terror wrapping around his chest fading little by little. His breaths evened out and the room stopped spinning.

Christian and Devin were standing just behind Luke and he could see the girls by the bed. Curt and several security guards rushed into the room and he saw Roxy walk over to



them, speaking in hushed tones before the room became deathly still.

"Sit down," Luke said. "Devin, find something to cover him up with."

He slid to the floor, his naked backside skipping along the wall until the carpet formed a solid cushion under him. A blanket was tossed over his lap and he wrapped it around his waist to hide his nudity from the girls.

"Here. Drink this."

Mick looked up and took the glass from Christian. Water. *Figures*. What he needed was a bottle of whiskey. Maybe two. Getting real good and drunk was the only cure for the gut wrenching agony he felt.

"Better?" Luke asked.

He laughed. It was a small chuckle at first but grew until tears leaked from his eyes and he once again couldn't breathe.

"Is he high?" Curt asked.

"No, he's not," Luke said, heatedly. "He doesn't do that shit anymore."

"Are you sure?"

"Man, if you aren't here to help then get out."

Luke turned back to Mick when Christian tried to get Curt out of the room and took the now empty glass from him.

"Better?" he asked before saying, "What happened?"

*What happened?* Mick laughed again and said, "What the fuck didn't happen?"

"Meaning?"

He sighed and leaned his head back against the wall and closed his eyes. Flashes of memories came back to him in disjointed pictures. Meeting her for the first time in the hotel lobby, talking to her in the limo after the concert, fucking her damn near silly hours later and night after night of sneaking around. Only one night was a blur. Wednesday. He remembered asking her to meet him in the bar and her showing up looking sexy as hell. He remembered the casino and pushing her behind a tall potted plant in one of the lobbies and fucking her to a whimpering mess before....

He couldn't remember. It was all a fuzzy haze after that.

"Mick? Come on man, talk to me."

He opened his eyes and looked Luke dead in the face. "Kill me. If you're my friend then just kill me. Do it quick. I'm so numb I'll never feel it."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Luke asked. "I'm not going to kill you. Now what happened?"

"I know," Devin said.

Everyone turned to look at Devin. He was standing in the middle of the room reading the piece of paper in his hands. When he lifted his head, a smile so bright crossed his face, Mick wanted to slap him down.

"Someone has been a busy boy," Devin said, looking down and waving the paper in his hands toward Mick's face. "I hope like hell you took precautions this time, my friend."

"I don't even remember doing it," Mick said, knowing what Devin held in his hand. "How the hell am I supposed to know if I took precautions?"

Devin laughed. "Then you're screwed. You're only hope now is that she isn't a gold digger like the last one."

"Who?" Luke said. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"This," Devin said, holding the paper out to Luke. "Seems like Mick didn't get enough of married life the first time. He's gone and married another groupie."

\* \* \* \*

"The front desk says she checked out hours ago," Jessi said.

"Does she have a cell phone?" Roxy asked.

Jessi shook her head. "No, not that I'm aware of."

"Okay," Roxy said, looking over at Mick. "Tell me everything. From the beginning."

Mick looked at Roxy over the top of his sunglasses and sighed. The sun wasn't helping his hangover but the table on the pool deck was the only one large enough to sit them all and gave him the luxury of smoking, which he'd been doing non-stop since his paralyzing fear had released his muscles and left him only slightly numb.

"Did you sleep with her?"

"I don't remember ever sleeping with her," he said, sarcastically. "I did a lot of other things though."

"Was that night the only time you've been with her?"

He glanced at Faith's best friend, Jessi. "No."

"When was the first time?"

"The night of the concert."

"You were sleeping with her all week?" Jessi asked, her eyes widening with shock.

He nodded and leaned back in his chair. "Every night this week," he said. "I lost count after the first few days."

"She didn't say anything," Jessi said. "Why didn't she tell me?"

"Well, you weren't exactly around for her to tell, now were you?" Mick said, giving a pointed look to Christian. "And she didn't want me to say anything for some reason, so I didn't."

Jessi blushed and looked away.

"It doesn't matter when or where," Roxy said. "Do you remember actually marrying her?"

"No."

"How can you not remember getting married?" Luke said.

"If you didn't noticed," Mick said. "I haven't been exactly sober this week." That fact alone should have been his warning bell. Past experience should have told him his luck was about to give out but like always, he never paid much attention to that little voice in the back of his head. No, he listened to the other. The head that pointed to the nearest wet hole that would let him close enough to sink into its warmth. Not remembering marrying Faith made the whole ordeal seem like a dream. Sure the girl was cute and sassy and he'd spent every minute of the past week either fucking her or thinking about fucking her but how had he gotten so blind drunk that he'd married her?

"Do you think she planned it?"

"No, she did not," Jessi said, flashing a heated glare at Devin.

Devin held up his hands in mock surrender. "I'm just asking," he said. "No one here knows Faith but you."

"She's not like that," Jessi said. "She wouldn't deliberately trap a man into marrying her. If anything, she'd fight it for as long as she could."

"Why is that?"

Jessi snorted a laugh. "If you ever met her family, you'd know why." Her eyes widened a moment later before she turned to look at Mick. "Oh man. Your death wish will be granted once they find out."

Mick raised an eyebrow and leaned his head to one side. "Why is that?" he said. "They're not like the Manson family, are they?"

"Oh no," Jessi said. "They're the perfect, God fearing kind."

"God fearing?" Roxy said.

Jessi nodded her head. "Faith's father is a minister."

The chorus of laughter that followed her statement grated on Mick's already fragile nerves. A minister? His new father-in-law was a minister? "This is just great," he said. "Like things weren't bad enough."

"Oh, that isn't even the half of it," Jessi said.

"What could be worse than that?"

Jessi grinned. "Her five, over protective, brothers?"

"You are so screwed," Devin grinned. "If that isn't enough for you to lay off the booze, I don't know what is. I can recommend a nice little mountain retreat if you need a place to dry out."

Mick sighed and rubbed a hand over the top of his head. How had his life gotten so fucked up? He'd done his best to stay away from women ever since Jennifer took him for a ride and stripped his bank account in the divorce. Two years later

and he was finally getting his life back in order. Now this. Married to a woman he knew next to nothing about. No matter how much he liked Faith, he couldn't go through that pain again. "How do I get out of this, Roxy, without the rest of the world finding out what an idiot I am?" he said, lifting his head to look at her.

Roxy sighed and leaned back in her seat. "Well, I can have divorce papers drawn up and sent to her. All she has to do is sign them and send them back. I know a few judges that will expedite the proceedings ... for a price."

Mick snorted a laugh. "Oh, for a price. I'm screwed either way, aren't I? Either I pay a judge off or give what little I have left to Faith. Why don't I just sign over my assets now and save us all a headache."

"She'll sign the papers, Mick," Jessi said. "But you'll have better luck getting her to sign them if you take them to her, especially if she doesn't even know you're married."

Luke shook his head at Jessi. "He can't do that," he said. "We have non-stop tour dates for the next two months."

"A small token of your gratitude might not hurt your case any," Roxy said. "It may even persuade her to sign. Unless you were smart enough to ask for a pre-nup."

"He doesn't even remember getting married," Luke said. "I'm sure he didn't remember to get her to sign her rights away."

"I figured as much," Roxy said. She shook her head and gave him a grim look. "You're best bet is to hope she's a decent girl and doesn't take you for half. And she can."

"She won't," Jessi said.

"How can you be so sure?" Roxy asked, turning her head to look over her shoulder.

"I've known Faith my whole life. She isn't a gold digger. Chances are she isn't even aware she's married."

"What makes you think that?" Mick asked.

Jessi smiled. "Because her plane left early this morning," she said, glancing down at her watch. "She's been home for hours now and she hasn't called me. If she were aware she was married, she would have called me already, out of her freaking mind. You think you have it bad? Wait until she has to tell the Reverend she married a rock star in Vegas."

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## Chapter 3

*One month later*

"Oh no. No, no, no." Faith's knees gave out and she sat down hard, missing the bed, and ended up sprawled on the floor. She stared in horror at the photos in her hand and felt her breakfast work its way back up as she flipped through every picture. "This can't be happening," she said as tears clouded her vision. "I can't have been this stupid."

A noise in the hall caused her to jerk her head up before she jumped from the floor and ran to her bedroom door, flipping the lock. The pictures were still in her hand and she glanced at them again before the tears came, spilling over her lashes and sliding down her cheeks.

When her brother, Jacob, had handed her the package that arrived in the mail, with a Vegas post mark, he'd almost opened it, teasing her about her *wild trip* to Sin City. Looking at the photographs that had been in the package, she was glad he hadn't. She wished *she* hadn't looked.

"Faith Weston, this is God speaking," she said quietly to herself. "Do you need any more proof that you need to change your wicked ways?"

She laughed only to cry moments later when the reality of it hit her. What she had thought for the past month was some alcohol-induced dream in Vegas was real. She really had dressed up as a Vegas showgirl while Mick pranced around in a sparkling Elvis jumpsuit while some no-name minister married them. Her conversation with Jessi on the night she



got home from her trip made more sense now. She hadn't told Jessi a thing about her and Mick and she'd felt bad for keeping her friend in the dark. The minute she decided to come clean left her so stunned and grief-stricken, she'd hung up on her friend, laid the phone off the hook, and hadn't called her back since.

The nauseating pain she'd felt when she asked Jessi how Mick was and having her friend laugh and say he was married had burned through her limbs like hot pokers to her flesh. The words had hurtled through her head and an accusing symphony of "you slept with a married man," caused her heart to nearly break through her ribcage. She was immediately sick, and ashamed, and since that day she'd refused to take a single call from Jessi. Her family hadn't asked questions and she hadn't provided them with an explanation.

She was sure though, if she had waited, Jessi would have told her Mick had married *her*.

"What am I going to do?" she whispered. She looked up, raising a hand to wipe the tears from her eyes and sighed. Someone rang the doorbell and she turned her head, listening to her father speak to someone before the tears started again. She was going to have to tell him. There was no way around it. Dread and fear crawled up her throat until she felt ill. She was going to break her daddy's heart and there wasn't anything she could do to prevent it.

Unless I can get a divorce without him finding out, she thought, grimly. *I need a lawyer first*. She raised her hand, chewing on her thumbnail while trying to think of who to call.

*Ted Pritchard could do it but his busybody wife-slash-secretary would tell every person in town and that is the last thing I need.* "I'll have to go to the next town," she said to herself. "There's no way to avoid it."

"Faith?"

Faith jumped several inches when her father knocked on her door and said her name. She reached for her chest, trying to calm her racing heart and took a deep breath.

"Faith, come out here a minute. I need to talk to you."

"And I need to talk to you," she whispered before looking at the pictures in her hand. She shook her head at them and stuffed them back into the envelope before stashing them under her mattress and walking to the door. A quick scrub of her face with the edge of her shirt and she opened the door. Her father wasn't in the hall.

Walking into the living room she saw him by the fireplace. His back was to her. She could tell by his posture something was bothering him. His shoulders were near his ears. A sure sign of tension. "You wanted to talk to me," she said, weakly.

He turned and the look on his face was a combination of disappointment, anger and total disbelief. "Sit down, Faith."

Her stomach clenched painfully as she walked around the sofa and sat down. "What's wrong, daddy?"

He sighed heavily while looking at her and it was then she noticed the papers in his hand. When he lifted them and walked to her, her heart skipped a beat.

"You know you can tell me anything, Faith," he said when he stopped in front of her. "Why didn't you tell me about

this?" He handed her the papers and the air in her lungs left in an audible whoosh when she scanned the document.

Divorce papers.

The lunch that had threatened to come up all day decided then to make an appearance and she dropped the papers and ran to the bathroom. When her stomach was empty, she felt a cold cloth on the back of her neck.

"It's all right, baby. Talk to me."

Faith looked up at her father and did the only thing she had energy to do at the moment. She cried.

\* \* \* \*

"What do you mean she refused!"

Roxy sat down in the chair opposite him. "That's what her lawyer said."

"She can't refuse to sign them," Mick said. "She has to give me a divorce."

"Actually she can refuse until you meet her conditions."

"Which are?"

Roxy laughed but there wasn't any humor in the sound. "Well, that's the funny part," she said, looking up at him. "She hasn't asked for anything."

"Then why the hell didn't she sign them?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Your guess is as good as mine, Mick."

Mick leaned back on the sofa and closed his eyes, willing the pain drumming inside his head away. The past month had been a living hell. He'd smoked more than he ever had and the temptation to drink himself into a stupor was only a liquor

store away but every time he made an attempt to walk into the store, he remembered drinking was what got him in this situation in the first place.

Then there was Faith.

If it weren't for what Jennifer had done, he wouldn't even be worried. His current *wife* hadn't made any outrageous demands on him or his time. She wasn't depleting his bank account or demanding anything from him. So far, his marriage to Faith was perfect. He was free to do as he wished and he got to keep every penny of his money. The only downside he saw was the fact he wasn't getting laid. A month and he hadn't even kissed a girl. It wasn't like the opportunity hadn't presented itself. It had. Daily. But every time he seriously thought about taking someone to his bed, he thought of Faith and found himself making up some lame excuse before hiding inside his room, alone. He realized then that Faith had ruined him and he spent a week trying to bed the first girl he saw but found the task nearly impossible. He turned down every woman he saw. They were too tall, or too blonde, wore too much make-up or had blue eyes. The minute he decided to just close his eyes and go for it, out of nowhere, a little voice in the back of his head asked—would his little bundle of sunshine hate him for fucking someone else when he was married to her? Probably. The thoughts of *her* with someone else left him feeling edgy and ready to lash out at the first thing he came into contact with so why wouldn't she feel the same way?

*Maybe she isn't as hung up on you as you are her?*

He scowled at his thoughts. Four weeks since he'd seen her and he still could not stop thinking about her. She haunted his dreams and every morning he woke with a hard-on and her name on his lips. He felt anxious most days and every night left him in restless fits of sleep. How the hell could she have wormed her way into his heart so quickly? Hell, he didn't even know her! But damn him if he didn't want her. Question was, did she want him? There was nothing to tell him she wanted him for the long run other than her not signing those papers and that gave him a little hope, but hope for what? What did he really want? Not to stay married, that was for sure. How could he? The only taste of married life he'd had still left a bitter tang in his mouth. Marriage didn't agree with him but a few conjugal visits or ten did. He smiled. That idea was worth exploring.

Maybe he could go visit her, slake his raging hormones on her luscious little body and get her to sign the papers ... or stay married to her.

He sighed.

Why did that crazy notion always pop up? What was he even thinking? He didn't even know the girl. How could he even entertain the thoughts of staying married to her? He shouldn't be. But he was.

*You need to see her while you're sober. When you see first hand that she isn't the tiny little goddess you remember her being, the desire to stay married will go away.*

"I need to go see her," he said, opening his eyes. "Find out what she wants." And spending a few days working off the tension from the tour wouldn't hurt anything, either. He could

have his fun, get her completely out of his system, and then get her to sign the divorce papers. Easy enough.

"You may have no other choice," Roxy said. "Since she hasn't asked for anything, there's nothing I can do. Have you tried calling her?"

"Yeah," he said. "The number Jessi gave me isn't working and there's no other listing for her or her family."

"Well, I suggest you plan a trip to Georgia, then. We have a break before we head to Europe. It's the only time you have to convince her to sign those papers."

He nodded his head, already playing out their meeting inside his head. He'd show up and Faith would be so excited to see him, she'd jump him right where he stood. He hid a smile and grabbed his cell phone. "Any idea where Christian and Jessi are?" he asked.

"Locked up in their room last I heard."

Mick grinned and dialed Christian's number anyway. "That boy is going to break something off he'll need later in life if he doesn't slow down."

Roxy laughed and stood up. "Well, you're the one who created the little sex fiend. If his junk falls off, it'll be on your conscience."

To his surprise, Christian answered on the third ring. "Yeah."

"I'm headed to Georgia to talk to Faith. Ask Jessi if she could help me find somewhere to stay while I'm there." He waited and heard Jessi's voice faintly in the background.

"She wants to know why you're going."

Mick rolled his eyes and took a deep breath. "Because I'm going to go see why Faith didn't sign the divorce papers," he said. "I'll need somewhere to stay while I'm there. I'm not going to assume it'll be as simple as asking her to sign them and her doing it. We already did that once and she refused."

"She refused?"

"Yeah. Roxy got a call from Faith's lawyer this morning. Faith refuses to sign the papers." Christian and Jessi carried on a quiet conversation for several minutes and Mick's frustration level grew by the second. Why Jessi still thought he was going to hurt Faith was beyond him. The girl had barely wanted to give him Faith's phone number and now him going to see her was apparently going to be a problem.

The fragmented conversation he could hear through the phone continued for several minutes and Mick was clenching his teeth until Christian spoke again.

"Jessi said the only place she knows of is a Bed and Breakfast in town, if its still there."

"Can she find out?"

"Yeah. She's looking it up now."

"Great. Call me the minute you find something out." He hung up and called Curt, asking for the exact date of their break. When at last he knew when he'd see Faith again, he breathed a sigh of relief. Five more weeks and he would see her. Five more weeks until he got laid.

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## Chapter 4

"This is it?" Mick asked, shocked. He walked to the front of the SUV and peered at what was supposed to be a town. A row of old buildings ran down the left hand side of the road they stood on, a train track on the other. A few people milled on the sidewalks in front of the stores and only a handful of cars littered the roads. The air was dry, dust covered everything in sight and he was almost positive he smelled cow shit.

"This is it," Jessi said, grinning. "Welcome to the town of Barton. Population, 198."

"This is where you grew up?" Christian asked, glancing down Main Street.

"Yes," she said. "It's the epitome of small town USA."

"Where's the rest of it?" Roxy asked.

"There isn't any more," Jessi said. "Well, not of town, that is."

"You're shitting me," Mick laughed. "Hell, I can spit further than this stretch of road."

Jessi grinned and pulled her hair back, pulling it up into a ponytail to get it off her neck. "It's mostly farmland and I wasn't joking when I said I lived in a small town."

"I believe you now," Devin said.

Mick shook his head and looked down the road in both directions. Somewhere in this little piss-hole town was his girl. He held back a smile and said, "All right, enough of the tour. Where's the place we're staying?"



"Just down the street," Jessi said. "Fifth house down." She pointed down the road to the houses that lined the street beyond where they stood. "It's the three-story blue one. You can't miss it."

Mick nodded his head and turned, looking behind him. The town wasn't even marked on the map they'd used to navigate the roads from the airport a hundred miles away. The wide-open expanse of land he'd seen rolling in an ocean of green hills and valleys was so far from what he'd ever seen he couldn't do anything but stare dumbly at it as they made their way here. Jessi had pointed out landmarks on the drive over but the others had sat in silence, watching the scenery with stunned silence. The homes dotted along the road were in poor condition, the fields looked hearty and the land was green and every person they passed on the road had a warm smile for them.

The residents of Barton were beginning to notice them and had started to stop and gape at them as they stood by the SUV. Mick could tell by their curious looks they hadn't seen anyone like them before. The whole band came with him for various reasons and the large black SUV they pulled up in looked out of place in a town so dull and covered with dust. He was sure their appearance didn't help matters either. Rock stars didn't exactly blend in with their surroundings. They stood out no matter where they went.

"The diner is the last building if anyone is hungry," Jessi said. "They have the best food in town and I'm not sure what time supper will be served at the Inn."

"The diner is the only food, you mean," Devin said, looking up and down the street. "This place is a ghost town."

"It's not the only restaurant. The Jody Burger is out by the highway but Helen's is where most everyone goes unless you're under the age of twenty."

"Well, as hungry as I am, I just want to lay down," Luke said. "I can eat later. Let's head to the Inn and come back later for food."

"Go on ahead," Mick said. "I'm going to take a look around." *And see if I can find Faith.* He left them on the street and started across the road, the people standing on the sidewalk watching him as he walked toward them.

The others left, telling him to come to the Inn when he was finished exploring. The stores in town were old, the facades resembling much of what he thought they did when built. Colorful awnings hung over the cracked sidewalk and every storefront was lined with benches, most of which were occupied with elderly men who stopped talking to stare at him as he passed by.

He held back a smile as he clomped past them. He was sure his bare tattooed arms and clunky boots would cause more than a few debates, not to mention the eyebrow piercing. He was sure they'd thought the devil had come to Mayberry, USA and wouldn't be surprised if the townsfolk came after him with pitchforks drawn by dusk.

An elderly woman smiled at him as he approached and he slowed his steps, tilting his head to her as he passed. He stopped when a thought came to him and turned back to face her. "Excuse me, but do you know Faith Weston?"

She gasped softly and her eyes widened. "What do you want with our Faith?"

"So you know her then?"

"Of course," she said, straightening her shoulders and clutching her purse to her stomach. "Everyone in town knows the Weston's."

"Do you know where I can find her?" he asked.

"I do, but I don't think I'll be telling ya. I'm not sure the Reverend would like that too much."

"I see," he said. He smiled and glanced at the other residents of Barton who were trying hard not to look like they were listening to his conversation. "If you see her, or the Reverend, could you tell her I was looking for her?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I'm not sure the Reverend—"

"Yes, I'm sure he won't," Mick said, interrupting. "But it's important that I speak to her."

"I'll do what I can, then," she finally said.

He nodded his head to her and turned, continuing back down the street. He asked two other women if they knew Faith and the conversation ended much like the first had. Everyone knew Faith but no one wanted to tell him anything beyond that. Seeing a young man at the end of the street, he wondered if he weren't just asking the wrong person. Hurrying past the people on the sidewalk, he made his way toward the end of the street and slowed his steps as he approached.

The man turned and Mick was surprised when he looked at him. His size was misleading. He was nearly as tall as he was

but his face held the youthful appearance of someone not much older than twenty. Mick smiled before saying, "Hey man. I'm looking for Faith Weston. Do you know her?"

The guy raised one eyebrow and gave Mick a look that rivaled the scathing glances the old woman had given him.

"Maybe," the guy said. "Who wants to know?"

"I do."

"And who are you?"

"Not really any of your business," Mick said. He knew the answer was the worst possible one he could have given when the young man in front of him smiled and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Well, seeing how I don't know ya, you're going to have to answer better than that," he said. "I don't go giving the whereabouts of people I care about to complete strangers."

*People he cared about?* Mick studied the guy and wondered just how well he knew Faith. He could tell by his sudden defensive manner that he knew her better than the people he'd already asked. Was this guy an old boyfriend? A current one? A tight clenching in his chest squeezed the air from his lungs before he pushed the feeling away and gritted his teeth against the thought of Faith with someone other than him. "Mick Sheppard," he finally said. "And I've traveled a damn long way to talk to her. If you know where I can find her, I'd appreciate you telling me."

The smug look on the guy's face melted away and Mick watched as his face turned red an instant before he uncrossed his arms and took two steps toward him.

"Mick Sheppard?" he said. "You're Mick Sheppard? Drummer for that band?"

"Yes," Mick said, raising one eyebrow. "Heard of me then?"

Mick felt damn near violated the way this total stranger looked him over. Not an inch of his body was spared and the look on the guys face twisted in disgust with every passing second. When the guy looked back up, unabashed hatred showed on his face. "Oh, I've heard about you all right and it looks like today is my lucky day."

Mick didn't have time to brace himself when the guy's fist came crashing into the side of his head. He stumbled back, tripping on the edge of a bench and slammed into the wall of the building behind him. A startled scream was heard before the beefy fist once again connected with his face. He lifted his own fist, returning a powerful blow and had just drawn back for another go when Faith suddenly appeared in front of him.

"Stop!" she yelled, reaching out to grab his hand before turning her back to him and pointing a finger at the man who'd punched him. "Jacob, stop it! Daddy will have your head if he knows what you're doing!"

"Get out of the way, Faith," Jacob said, wiping his lip while looking over her head at Mick.

Mick straightened and looked between Faith and the guy who'd sucker-punched him. Seeing them side-by-side, he noticed a resemblance. It wasn't much but they favored each other enough for him to wonder if this was one of her five brothers. It would explain the punch to the side of his head. What other reason did the dude have to assault him?

He was still too stunned to do much more than listen to them as the people on the sidewalk gathered around, their hushed whispers mingling with the ringing inside his head. He watched the scene in front of him and ran his tongue over his lip, tasting blood.

"Go home, Faith."

"Don't tell me what to do, Jacob. Go back to the diner. I'll be there in a minute."

Jacob laughed and shook his head. "I'm not leaving you alone with ... that."

Faith's shoulders sagged as she sighed. "Jacob, I'm not having this conversation right now. Go tell Lucy I'll be there as soon as I can." She turned; leveling her gaze on him. Mick bit his tongue to keep from smiling at her.

He was completely sober now and she looked exactly as he remembered her. A tiny wisp of a girl with large emerald eyes and curves that made parts of his anatomy stand up and take notice. Her dark, shoulder length hair was blowing in the slight breeze and the splattering of freckles on her nose reminded him of the night he'd tried to count every one he found on her body. He wanted her instantly. He grinned when she looked up at him. "Miss me, Tinker Bell?"

She scowled and grabbed his arm, turning to drag him down the street. He followed with a wide grin on his face. When they reached the far end of the sidewalk, Faith stopped and turned to him. "What the hell are you doing here?" she hissed.

"I came to see *my wife*," he said, leaning down to be eye level with her. "Seems she's forgotten about me in the three months since I married her."

Her face turned red and she glanced away. Mick used her distraction to grab her under the arms, lifting her off the ground and walking around the side of the building. He braced her against the wall and took advantage of her shocked gasp by kissing her.

The wiggle of protest she gave him only lasted a few seconds before her fingers climbed into his hair, her legs wrapping around his hips. She moaned against his mouth, her tongue pushing past his teeth as her hold on him tightened. She was mewling like a kitten by the time he broke the kiss. "God, I've missed you," he said, peppering kisses across her cheek to her neck. "I get hard just thinking about you."

"Mick..."

"Tell me there's somewhere to go or I'm going to fuck you right here in front of every hick in town."

Faith inhaled sharply when Mick's hand snuck under the edge of her shirt. She opened her eyes, looking to her right to see if anyone was looking. There was, of course. She dropped her legs from around his waist, struggled against him and grabbed his hand, trying to dislodge it while trying to get him to drop her. "Mick, let go!" she hissed in his ear. "People are watching."

His hand stilled and he lifted his head, glancing at her face before turning his head.

"Mrs. Pritchard!" Faith said, breathlessly. "This isn't what it looks like."

Mrs. Pritchard pursed her lips and crossed her arms over her chest. "And what exactly is it then, missy?"

Faith laughed nervously and squirmed in Mick's arms, hoping he'd get the hint. He didn't. "Put me down," she whispered. His hold on her stayed and she was left to dangle between the wall and his body.

"Faith Weston if your father saw you right now—"

"I know," Faith said, blushing. "But it isn't what you think—"

"Oh, I think it's exactly what I think..."

Mick leaned toward her, his lips caressing her ear as he whispered, "Tell her to go away or she's going to get an eye full."

"Where is Jacob?" Mrs. Pritchard asked. "I saw him not ten minutes ago."

"He's down at the diner," Faith said. "He knows where I am."

Mrs. Pritchard shook her head. "He might know where you are, dear, but I'm almost positive he doesn't know you're over here with..." She paused and gave Mick a disgruntled look before shaking her head again. "I think I'm going to go find Adam."

"No!" Faith yelled. "Please don't do that." It was useless. Mrs. Pritchard rounded the corner and was gone before Faith could say another word. "Great," she said. "You probably should put me down, Mick, before Adam gets here."

"Who the hell is Adam?"

"My brother."

"And who's the kid who punched me in the face?"



"Uh, also my brother."

Mick grinned, his hand once again crawling under her shirt.  
"Jessi said you have five."

"I do and I can already tell you none of them are going to be happy to see you right now so please, put me down before Adam gets here."

"Can't do," he said. "I've been celibate for three damn months now and I need you to do your wifely duty and see to my needs."

Faith stared at the top of his head as he peeked down the front of her blouse. His fingers skimmed the underside of her left breast and she sucked in a breath when his fingers wormed under the material of her bra and brushed her nipple. She could feel his cock against her thigh, hard and needy. Had he really been celibate since Vegas? "Are you lying?" she asked.

He kissed her throat, his tongue working against her skin as those talented fingers tweaked her nipple and sent sparks shooting straight to her core. "Lying about what?"

"About being celibate."

His fingers stilled and he lifted his head, looking up at her before smiling. "No," he said, softly. "I may not have known I married you until the day you left but I do know what marriage is, and I'm almost positive there's a vow in there about forsaking all others and keeping only to your wife."

She nodded her head. "There is," she said.

"And what about you?"

"What about me?"

He tilted his head slightly and locked eyes with her. "Have you kept your vows to me?"

His hold on her tightened and Faith saw his throat work as he swallowed. She smiled and lifted her hand, laying it on his cheek. "I have."

He smiled and leaned in to kiss her only to stop when someone rounded the corner.

"What the hell is going on?"

Mick nearly growled as they were interrupted again and turned his head to see who this new person was. His eyes widened when a uniformed police officer stood on the sidewalk staring at him. "That old bat called the cops?" he whispered to Faith.

Faith groaned and struggled in his grasp again. "Put me down, Mick."

As much as he loathed doing so, the look on the cops face left no room for argument. He sighed and eased Faith to her feet. He turned and faced the officer as Faith straightened her blouse.

"Faith, you have five seconds to explain."

"What did Mrs. Pritchard say?"

"She said you were getting raped by some tattooed hoodlum but I can tell by that tender moment I just witnessed that isn't the case."

Mick raised an eyebrow and glanced between the officer and Faith. Less than fifteen minutes in this town and he'd been assaulted and had the cops called on him. He could already tell his trip to Nowhere, Georgia was going to be one for the record books.

"This is Mick," Faith said, taking a step back and closer to him. She smiled hesitantly before looking up at him. "Mick, this is Adam. My oldest brother."

Mick's eyes widened as he looked back over at the officer. "Your brother is a cop?"

"Uh, Sheriff, actually."

Mick laughed. He couldn't help it. His new father-in-law was a Minister and his brother-in-law the Sheriff. What other surprises was he in store for?

Adam crossed his arms over his chest and stared at him. His eyes narrowed while his gaze bore into him. Mick cut his laughter off with a chuckle and shook his head. "Faith, I'm beginning to think you were sent to me as payment for all the bad shit I've ever done in my life."

She snorted a laugh and said, "You're probably not too far from the truth."

"What's that supposed to mean? What other surprises do you have for me?"

"This is the man you married?" Adam asked, interrupting their conversation.

Faith sighed and nodded her head. "Yes."

Adam stared at Mick, his gaze lingering over the tattoos and the facial piercing. "Has dad seen him yet?"

"No," Faith whined.

Adam stood silently for long minutes before he grinned and started laughing. He looked between the two of them and was bent over double, hands on his knees when Faith looked away. Mick saw her eyes tear up and his chest ached at the

sight of it. When Adam continued to laugh, he bent and leaned close to Faith's ear. "Can I punch him out?"

She grinned but shook her head. "No. He'll lock you up."

"For how long?"

"Long enough for your dick to fall off waiting to be released."

Mick straightened and waited, along with Faith, for Adam to stop laughing. By the time he had, the sidewalk behind him was packed with people.

Adam swiped a hand over his eyes and shook his head. "Faith, please don't tell dad until I'm there to witness it. I'll tear up all your parking tickets if you do."

"You'll go to hell for lying, Sheriff Weston."

He grinned. "I'm not lying. I swear. They'll disappear if you let me sit in on it."

"No," she said. "If you're there then the others will want to be too."

"So?" Adam said, grinning. "Mick here is our brother-in-law now. It's only fair he meets the whole family."

"Forget it," Faith said. "I'm not letting you anywhere near daddy until I can talk to him first."

Jacob stepped around the corner and stopped beside Adam. He grinned before saying, "I already called dad. He's waiting for you both at the house."

"Need a lift, sis?" Adam said. "I can take you in the squad car. With the lights on I can have us there in less than ten minutes."

Faith lifted her hands, covering her face and groaned. Mick's irritation level was near breaking point at the whole

scene and as the laughter and taunts from Faith's brothers continued, and he saw the obvious distress Faith was under, he snapped. He let go of her shoulder and stepped in front of her, bending at the knees and hoisting her up over his shoulder fireman style. He turned to startled gasps and leveled his gaze on her brothers. "Nice meeting you," he said, "but Faith and I have things to talk about before anymore family reunions so, catch you later."

He walked around the people on the sidewalk and started down the street toward the Bed and Breakfast they were staying at. He listened to the crowd behind him, all of them shouting for him to put her down but he ignored them and kept walking. Faith gasped and tried to straighten up before saying, "Mick! Put me down."

"Can't do, Tink. I've had enough talk for one day. The only thing I want to hear out of you is you screaming my name."

"Mick, please!"

"That was real close but I want you naked when you say it, now, stop squirming before I drop you," he said, nearly doing it anyway when someone grabbed his arm.

"Put her down," Jacob yelled, his face red.

"Go to hell," Mick said.

Someone gasped in shock and Mick turned to see nearly everyone who had been watching the little scene by the sidewalk was now behind him. The old woman, Mrs. Pritchard, had a hand to her chest, her face nearly white. Mick shook his head and sighed.

"Put her down," Jacob said again.

"No."

Jacob's face turned crimson, his hands clenching into fists. Mick raised a pierced eyebrow and watched him. "What? You're going to hit me again? I'll surely drop her then."

"Mick, put me down."

"Make them go away, Faith," he said, tightening his hold on her legs.

Faith's brothers had to be the dumbest men he'd ever met. They both grabbed at his arms, trying to wrestle Faith from him and Mick was shocked at their persistence. When Mrs. Pritchard stepped into his line of sight, he almost rolled his eyes until she yelled, "Stop! If you make him drop her how do you think the baby is going to like that!"

Everything froze, even the blood rushing through Mick's veins. His lungs seized and he suddenly couldn't breathe. *Baby? Did she just say baby?*

*"Put me down, Mick," Faith said, softly. "Please."*

Mick stared at Mrs. Pritchard and didn't fight Adam when he lifted Faith from his arms. When she was on her feet, he looked down at her. Her complexion had turned pasty white and the look on her face answered every question rattling through his head. He swallowed the lump in his throat and took a shaky breath. "You're pregnant?"

She gave him a sad smile and nodded her head before saying, "yes." It was the last thing he heard. The world went black as he passed out.

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## Chapter 5

He saw a bird chirping from its perch in the tree above him when he opened his eyes. The branches were swaying in the breeze and soft voices were heard somewhere off to his right. Mick blinked and turned his head, Faith's face coming into his line of sight.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

He stared at her, seeing in her eyes a foreign look. They were glassy still, and the same sadness he'd seen earlier was there, but something he couldn't identify dulled her emerald eyes. He sighed, sinking into the grass. "The baby ... is it mine?"

She nodded her head again and looked away. He stared at her profile for long minutes until the voices grew louder. Turning his head, he saw Adam, Jacob and another man near a row of hedge bushes arguing. The new stranger was tall and looked a lot like Adam. It had to be another brother.

He watched them for long moments before turning away and sitting up. The voices stopped and he didn't have the strength to look at Faith's brothers to see why. He stared across the street, looking at nothing in particular with one thought running on repeat through his head. Faith was pregnant. The girl he'd married while so drunk he couldn't even remember it, was having his baby.

He raised his hand and ran it through his hair, pulling the strands to feel something other than the numbing sensation that had taken over his limbs. What was he going to do now?

He'd come to Georgia to get Faith to sign the divorce papers and now this. Is this why she didn't sign them?

Turning his head to her, he watched her stare down at the ground and saw a tear slip down her cheek. His heart clenched in his chest and felt his own eyes mist while looking at her. "Faith..." She looked up and his heart broke at the look on her face. He knew what that foreign look was now. It was fear. He reached for her, wrapping his arms around her and pulling her into his lap. She buried her face in his chest and cried.

"Shhh, don't cry, Tinker Bell," he said, raising his hand to her head. He stroked her hair and tightened his arms around her, hugging her to his chest. "It's going to be okay."

He held her as she cried and glanced over at the men still by the hedges. They were watching them with blank faces. Jacob turned and walked to the sidewalk and headed back to town while Adam and the other man remained. When Faith's sobs turned to small sniffles and she lifted her head, he turned his attention back to her.

She wiped her face with the back of her hand and sighed while looking at her brother. "Daddy said since I was pregnant that I shouldn't sign the divorce papers."

Mick's blood ran cold at her words. His vision clouded and everything around him went fuzzy white. He saw his ex, Jennifer, in the haze, her mocking laughter while she screamed that he got off easy only giving her half of his money. If her attempts to get pregnant had been successful, she'd own his ass for years.



His throat tightened until he found it hard to breathe past the lump forming. His heart was racing and a dull ringing sounded in his ears. Wrapping his arms around Faith, he lifted her off his lap and stood up, taking a few steps away from her before stopping when she said his name.

"Where are you going?"

He shook his head and stared across the road. "Not sure," he said. "Away."

He left her sitting under the tree in someone's lawn and each step away from her left him feeling a little bit colder, his heart aching a little bit more.

Faith stood up, her shaky legs barely holding her, and watched him leave. The tears returned and she wiped angrily at them. "Damn hormones," she hissed, ignoring the clenching pain in her chest. She watched Mick walk down the sidewalk, away from town. He looked beaten, like he held the weight of the world on his shoulders and she knew she was the reason. His joy in seeing her again washed away in an instant with the news that their irresponsible behavior had more serious consequences than a hasty marriage. Her elation at seeing him again tarnished at his obvious disappointment at hearing the news of the baby.

She turned, looking over at Adam and Seth. They were watching her, the look on their faces she knew matched her own. When they started toward her, she turned her head and looked back down the sidewalk to Mick.

"He'll be back," Adam said.

Faith sighed. "I'm not so sure."

"He will," Seth said. "He'll do it on his own or we'll hunt him down and drag him back kickin' and screamin'."

She grinned despite her mood and looked up at him. "You're going to force him to be a man and make him own up to his mistake?"

"Of course," Seth said, grinning. "What are brothers for if not to make sure the man who stole our sisters heart treats her with respect."

She laughed and leaned her head on his arm. "By the time he meets all of my brothers he'll be running for the state line."

"He should have thought about that before marrying you without our permission."

"And knocking up our baby sister," Adam added.

"Oh lord, you make it sound so sordid," she laughed.

"It is. You ran off to Vegas and married a rock star while drunk and ended up with a reminder that will be with you until the day you die. How sleazy can you get?"

She smacked him on the arm and shook her head. "Take me home," she said. "I think my lunch is going to come back up."

They laughed as they walked to the sidewalk, and Faith resisted the urge to look back at Mick one last time. Her heart screamed to run after him but the rational part of her brain told her he just needed time to sort it all out in his head. Lord knew she'd needed it when she found out and thankfully, her family had been there to help her through. She just hoped the guys were there for Mick when he needed them.

\* \* \* \*

It was dark by the time Mick made it back to the Bed and Breakfast Inn. He climbed the steps of the three-story home and opened the front door, wincing when the door hinges squeaked. Christian peeked around the corner of the first room when the door shut behind him.

"Damn man, where the hell have you been? Roxy was ready to call the police."

Mick laughed and shook his head, turning the corner and walking into a large sitting room. "Don't," he said. "The good Sheriff Weston is the last person I want to talk to tonight."

"Weston?" Christian said, shocked.

"What? Jessi didn't tell you Faith's brother was the sheriff?"

"The sheriff?" Jessi said, surprise showing on her face. "Which one?"

"Adam."

Jessi grinned. "Figures," she said. "He always was the bossy one."

He snorted a laugh. "You could say that again."

"Did he do that to your face?" Roxy asked.

Mick raised his hand to the side of his face, feeling the raised skin near his temple. He hadn't seen it but knew a bruise was there by how sore it was. "No," he said. "That would have been Jacob."

"So you got into a fight with one of Faith's brothers and her other brother locked you up?"

He shot a glance at Devin and threw himself in a vacant chair. "He didn't lock me up," he said. "But I'm kind of wishing he would have now."

"Why's that?"

"Because I'd have something to worry about other than what I do now."

"Which is?"

Running a hand over his face, Mick leaned back in the chair and looked toward the hallway.

"No one is up but us," Christian said. "At least, I don't think anyone else is. I haven't seen a soul in two hours."

"Did you see Faith?" Roxy asked.

"Oh yeah, I saw her all right and I'm in deep shit."

She raised an eyebrow at him and leaned forward in her chair. "How so."

He looked at her before glancing at the others in the room. Everyone was there, his best friends for the last five years and the women they'd claimed as their own. How had the life he used to think was so normal get so screwed up? He sighed before focusing his gaze back on Roxy. "She's pregnant."

The silence was deafening. The only sound to be heard was the chirp of crickets outside. He watched their faces, seeing the shock turn to placid calm. He wished he'd had the ability for the same thing before he walked off and left Faith standing. If she didn't hate him before then, she probably did now.

Roxy was the first to move. She blew out a long breath and leaned back in her seat. "I guess we know why she didn't sign those divorce papers now."

Mick nodded his head. "She said her father told her not to."

"Smart man," Roxy said.

"If you say so."

"I do. If she had signed those papers and the divorce was finalized, you'd be in court for years to come when she petitioned you for child support."

The dull throbbing behind his eyes intensified at her words and Mick stared up at the ceiling and sighed. "I'll be there anyway."

"Maybe but we can get everything in writing before the baby is born and move on from there."

The baby. Mick's stomach clenched at the thought. He was going to be a father. What the hell did he know about being a father? Hell, his own hadn't bothered staying around once he found out he had a kid on the way. He'd only met the man once and barely even remembered what he looked like. Would his own kid think he was just a worthless sperm donor like he thought about his own old man? The thought made him sick.

"Tell me what to do, Roxy."

"Well, that depends," she said.

He lifted his head and looked at her. "On what?"

"On what you want to do?"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, do you want this baby to have your name? Have you thought about what it'll mean to divorce Faith and move on knowing you've left a part of yourself here? Can you walk

away from your child and possibly let another man raise it as his own?"

His head was pounding as each question she asked thundered through his skull. He'd asked himself those very same questions half a dozen times each on his walk through this miserable little town and he didn't have an answer for any of them. The only thing he knew without a doubt was, every time he thought of Faith, his gut twisted and his chest felt like it would crush under the weight of his need to see her.

He stood and shook his head. "I don't have the answers for that right now."

"You don't have to answer them now," Roxy said. "My suggestion would be to get some sleep, go talk to Faith tomorrow and figure out what you want to do when the time comes."

He nodded and walked out of the room, stopping when he stepped out into the foyer. "Which room is mine?"

"Second floor," Christian said. "Room four."

He headed for the stairs, his steps heavy. He'd wondered most of the day what to do and he wasn't anywhere close to an answer. The only thing he did know was that he had to talk to Faith. The sooner the better.

\* \* \* \*

Mick read the numbers off the side of the house and compared them to the piece of paper in his hand Jessi had written Faith's address on. They matched. He took a deep breath and tossed the paper to the passenger seat and killed

the engine of the SUV. He stared out the windshield, trying to get his nerve up to actually walk to the house.

He'd laid awake most of the night wondering what he should do. The baby complicated everything. It wasn't just a simple divorce that mattered anymore. It was a life. A life he'd help create and regardless of how useless his own father had been, he didn't want his kid to grow up hating the man who'd given him life.

Of course, all of that was months down the road. Now, his problem lay inside the four walls of the small white house on the other side of the street. He turned his head, looking at the house again. Trees shaded the lawn and flowers sprang in a rainbow of color in a sea of green grass.

He opened the car door and stepped out onto the street, hurrying across the road before he lost his nerve. The thought of seeing Faith again caused his pulse to leap. Meeting her father, the good Reverend, made his stomach cramp and his breakfast threaten to come back up. What do you say to the man whose daughter you married while stone ass drunk and then knocked up?

Climbing the steps to the porch, he approached the door and lifted his hand to knock. The door opened before he got a chance. The unknown man from the day before, the one he'd seen talking to Adam and Jacob stood just inside the door. He was broad shouldered, with a thick mane of black hair. His eyes were the same shade of green as Faith's. This had to be another brother. He looked too much like Faith not to be.

"You're brave. I'll give you that."

Mick raised an eyebrow and gave him a slight nod of his head. "I think the word you're looking for here is stupid, not brave."

The man grinned. "I was trying to be nice." He opened the screen door and held it open. "Come on in. I'll let Faith know you're here."

He entered the house, stopping just inside the door. The living room was brown. The carpet, the walls, the furniture, even the brick on the fireplace. It was like walking into a cave. The only light in the room came from the windows and the open front door.

The man who'd open the door shut it and took a few steps in front of him. "I'm Seth," he said. "Brother #4."

"Mick Sheppard."

Seth grinned and looked over his shoulder. "The Reverend is out back. I'll go grab Faith. You'll need someone you know with you for emotional support."

Mick swallowed his nervousness and looked around the darkened living room while he waited for Faith. Pictures hung on the walls, covering almost every square inch of space. The picture closest to him showed a group of young boys surrounding one tiny little girl with large doe eyes. He smiled while looking at it.

Pictures of Faith graced every wall, all of them surrounded by pictures of her brothers. Taking them all in he noticed what all the memories lacked. The presence of a mother. Not one picture showed anyone close to resembling Faith's mother. He'd have to remember to ask her about that. He realized then that he knew next to nothing about Faith. Hell,



he didn't even know how old she was. Over 21, that much he knew. They'd carded her at the bar in Vegas but other than her having five brothers and her father being a minister, the girl was a complete mystery.

A commotion from the hall drew his attention and he turned his head. He grinned when he saw Faith.

"Where is the fire," she said, grumpily. "You know the smell of breakfast makes me hack."

"It's not breakfast," Seth said. "You have a visitor." Faith looked up and froze, her eyes widening.

"Morning, Tinker Bell." Mick had only seen her once in the morning and she'd been dressed then, now, it looked as if she'd just crawled out of bed. Her hair was sticking up at odd angles, one side plastered to the side of her head. An oversized t-shirt hung past her knees and a pair of fuzzy slippers was on her feet. She looked adorable.

She blinked and raised a hand to her hair, trying to smooth the strands. "What are you doing here?"

"Came to talk to you."

Seth walked around her and headed through the living room toward the kitchen. "You want me to tell dad he's here?"

"No!" Faith yelled, her eyes widening.

A chuckle from Seth was all he heard as he turned and left the room. Mick stared at Faith, watching her shift from foot to foot. She wasn't looking at him and her cheeks were tinted pink. "Did I make a mistake in coming this morning?"

She shook her head. "No. Daddy knows you're in town so showing up here is probably the only thing that's going to save you from his wrath."

"That bad, huh?"

She laughed. "You have no idea," she mumbled before finally looking up at him. "I have to get dressed. I'll be right back."

He waited until she turned before following her. When she tried to shut her bedroom door, he extended his arm and held it open.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going to help you change," he said, grinning, walking into her room and shutting the door behind him.

"Mick, you can't be in here," she said, staring at the door.

"Sure I can. We're married, remember?"

She stared at him, her mouth a perfect "O". He grinned and leaned back against the door. "You look too damn cute for your own good, Faith. I suggest you change quickly before I take advantage of the closed door and have my way with you."

That snapped her out of her stupor. She spun on her heel and walked to the dresser, pulling out a pair of cut-off jean shorts and a t-shirt. She laid them on top of the dresser and glanced at him over her shoulder before turning her back to him and kicking off her fuzzy slippers.

Mick watched her and wondered what she had on under that nightshirt. He looked down at the doorknob by his hip and turned the lock on the door before looking back up at her. When the material of her shirt revealed her plain, white

panties and nothing else, he pushed off the door and crossed the room. He reached her as the shirt slid over her head.

"Turn around."

She jumped when he spoke and whirled around, stumbling. He reached for her, his hands closing around her waist as he stared down at her.

"Mick! My daddy will kill us both if he finds you in here and me practically naked."

"We're married," he said, sliding his hands up her ribs and cupping her breasts. "Not a whole lot he can say about it."

Faith laughed and tried batting his hands away. "That's what you think."

"Then I suggest you be very quiet." He bent at the waist and lifted the breast in his right hand to his mouth, his lips closing over her nipple. He flicked his tongue over the hardening bud, sucking it until she gasped and leaned back against the dresser, her fingers digging into his hair.

"Mick..."

He straightened at the soft moan of his name and lifted her, carrying her to the bed and laying her down. He followed her, taking her lips in a kiss that said he wasn't taking no for an answer. His fingers skimmed her breasts and tickled the soft skin of her belly before diving inside the thin cotton of her panties. She moaned when he parted her wet folds, his fingers sliding easily between her legs. He worked her with his fingers, listening to her moans and gasps and thought his dick would explode with every sound she made. When her body stiffened suddenly, he latched onto her breast, sucking

the puckered tip until she shuddered under him, her body convulsing as spasms wracked her small frame.

When she lay limply under him, he kissed each of her breasts and lifted his head. Her eyes were closed, her mouth open as she panted for breath. He smiled while looking at her and let his gaze drink in the sight of her.

The dusky pink areolas on her breast were darker than he remembered and small blue veins now ran just under the thin skin of her full breasts. A small, barely-there bulge curved her once flat belly and his hand covered the small mound instinctively. He stared at his hand, his fingers splayed across her stomach and his pulse raced with the knowledge of the tiny life now growing there. A baby. His baby. He looked up to find her staring at him. He smiled and leaned down, placing a soft kiss on her lips. "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For leaving you alone yesterday. I shouldn't have done that."

She looked away briefly before looking back up at him. "It's all right," she said. "It's pretty shocking news. Been there and had the nervous breakdown myself."

"Sorry for that too." He stared at her, watching her blink up at him until the sound of multiple voices from the other room caught his attention. He moved off the bed, helping her to her feet. "Get dressed before your old man comes in here and kills me where I stand."

When she was dressed and had run a brush through her hair, he unlocked the door and pulled it open, waiting for her. Mick walked into the hall with her and rounded the corner of

the living room to find five men sitting in the room. He recognized Adam, Jacob and Seth immediately. The other two stared at him with wide eyes before they both grinned. He looked down at Faith and nodded to them. "I suppose these are your other two brothers?"

"Yep," she said, looking displeased at seeing them. "That's Paul on the sofa and Matthew over by the fireplace."

The five Weston men were staring openly and Mick almost shrank under their inspection. Paul, like Seth and Faith was dark haired with green eyes. Matthew resembled Adam and Jacob, light brown hair with brown eyes. They were all tall and Mick looked down at Faith and shook his head. How the hell had she ended up so short?

"Faith," Paul said. "Are you not going to introduce us to your ... friend?"

"You know very well who he is, Paul. You wouldn't even be here if you didn't."

"Maybe, but it's rude otherwise."

"Then I'll just be rude, then. Where's daddy?"

"Out back."

Mick saw her take a deep breath before nodding her head and looking up at him. She motioned to the doorway leading into the kitchen before turning and leading him through the house. His heart was racing by the time they stepped out the door.

She led him across the backyard to a small greenhouse at the back of the property. The door was open and Mick could hear someone singing softly. He sucked in a nervous breath as they neared. Why the hell was he so nervous? Was it

because Faith's father was a minister or because he'd married the man's only daughter while intoxicated? Or the fact he'd knocked her up?

He stopped just outside the door when Faith did.

"Daddy? Do you have a minute?"

"I always have a minute for you, Faith," the Reverend said without looking up from what he was doing. "What do you need?"

"Um, Mick's here."

The Reverend's hands stilled and Mick felt a lump form in his throat as the man slowly looked up and turned his head to the door. Faith's father appraised him from head to toe, his gaze lingering on the piercings and tattoos. His lips thinned and turned white in apparent disapproval. When he raised his eyes, their gazes locking, Mick knew he was in deep shit. He should have brought one of the guys with him. With those five brothers still in the house, he should have brought every damn person he knew.

Faith's father was tall like his son's, his brown hair was peppered heavily with gray and his eyes were as green as Faith's were. He was older than Mick had imagined. He looked near sixty but what did he know? He knew so little about Faith, or her family, so he wasn't about to start guessing now.

The Reverend wiped his hands on a towel by his arm and turned his whole body to face them before looking at Faith. "Go grab us a pitcher of lemonade, Faith. It's a bit hot out here this morning."

Faith glanced at Mick before turning and starting back to the house. He watched her as she climbed the steps, turning

back to glance at him once, before disappearing inside the house.

"So, Mick, is it?"

Mick turned back around and looked into the greenhouse.

"Yes, Sir. Mick Sheppard."

The Reverend nodded his head and looked back down at the potted plant in front of him. He picked up a small hand shovel, scooping dirt from a bag with it before adding it to the plant. He didn't speak again until he was finished. "I don't guess I have to tell you how I feel about this whole situation, do I?"

"No, Sir. I can imagine," Mick said, leaning his shoulder against the greenhouse doorframe. "It isn't something I'm particularly proud of myself."

The Reverend nodded his head again. "This isn't what I wanted for my daughter," he said, turning to look at him. "I certainly never entertained the thought of her marrying some man she barely knows, let alone end up pregnant. I won't lie and say I'm happy about any of this but what's done is done. Nothing we do now will change it. All we can do is deal with it the best way we can and move on."

Mick didn't say anything to that. What could he say? The fact the man hadn't thrown anything at him yet gave him hope he'd still be able to walk away, preferably without a permanent limp. The Reverend continued to stare at him, his gaze hard and penetrating. Mick felt uncomfortable under his scrutiny. He shifted on his feet and hoped like hell Faith would hurry back. How long did it take to grab a pitcher of lemonade, anyway?

The Reverend continued. "I don't want my daughter's life to be ruined by this. She's young. Too young to be dealing with so much at her age. I only told her not to sign those divorce papers because of the baby. Once we've seen to its welfare, you're free to go about your business. The more distance between you, Faith, and my grandchild, the better."

The old man could have punched him and he didn't think it would have stunned him any more. He straightened and looked him in the eye. "And if distance isn't what I want?"

"I don't really care what you want," the Reverend said.

Mick snorted a laugh and crossed his arms over his chest. "Well, I'll give you credit for being honest," he said.

"Complete honesty is all you'll ever get from me, Mick. I don't know you but from what I can see, you're not the type of man I envisioned for my daughter."

"So, I'm not good enough for Faith. Is that what you're saying?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying. Any man who would so carelessly seduce a young girl with alcohol and wild parties and marry her on a whim isn't the kind of man I want around her or my grandchildren. You've done enough damage as it is."

The man's face had gone beet red and Mick knew nothing he said would improve the Reverend's view of him. He'd already passed judgment on his character with a glance. He wanted him out of Faith's life. He wanted him to pay for the damage he'd caused and move on like it never happened. Dusting the whole dirty ordeal under the rug so the neighbors



wouldn't be subjected to the tarnished soul that had seduced and corrupted his only daughter.

"That it then?" he asked. "You just want me to pay up and move along like it never happened?"

"Sounds about right to me."

Mick stared at him and felt his blood heat in his veins. He'd imagined the meeting with Faith's father would result in a beating he'd barely live through. Maybe a public humiliation or two but to be looked at like he was something foul on the man's shoe hurt a little bit more. So, he wasn't good enough for the good Reverend's daughter. He could live with that. Hell, if he thought about it hard enough, he'd probably see that Faith's father was one hundred percent right. He wasn't good enough. He was a bastard who drank too much and acted without thinking. He lived his life hard and didn't think about anything other than the moment in front of him. What good would he ever be to Faith? To his child? What good would ever come from him being a part of their lives?

None that he could see.

"I'll have my lawyer contact you. You can work out a settlement with her. I'll leave you and your family to your lily-white lives. I'll not tarnish it any further." With that, he turned and walked out of the greenhouse, stopping when he saw Faith coming toward him. She smiled at him while crossing the backyard.

"You're not bleeding," she said, softly, glancing into the greenhouse. "Daddy isn't, is he?"

"No," Mick said, looking at anything but her. "Listen, Faith, I'll have Roxy call you. You can settle things with her."

Whatever it is you want, just ask. If I have it to give, I will."  
He glanced at her before walking away. As he rounded the side of the house, he clenched his jaw when he heard her call his name. He ignored her and kept walking.

"Mick! Where are you going?" Faith watched him disappear and turned to her father. "Daddy? What happened?"

"Let him go, Faith," the Reverend said. "It's better this way."

Faith sat the tray with the lemonade and glasses down with a clink. "Better? What's better?"

"Him leaving. Now, pour us something to drink." He smiled but Faith could tell it was forced. Whatever had happened while she was in the house hadn't been good. She could only imagine what her father had said and was running across the yard and around the house while her father yelled her name.

Mick was shutting the door on the SUV when she made it to the street. "Mick! Wait." She was panting for breath by the time she reached the side of the vehicle and opened the driver's side door. "Where are you going?"

"Go back in the house, Faith," Mick said, starting the engine.

"What? Why?" His face was red, she noticed, his breaths taken harshly. Whatever her father said had pissed him off thoroughly. She stepped closer, reaching up to grab his arm. "Mick?"

He sighed and glanced down at her. "Answer one question for me, Faith."

"What?" she said.

"If you hadn't found out you were pregnant, would you have signed those papers?"

Faith inhaled a breath and held it. Did he want the truth or the lie she'd told herself repeatedly?

The truth was easy. She'd spent weeks thinking about him, wondering what her life would be like being a proper wife to him. Endless hours were wasted secretly writing *Faith Sheppard, Mrs. Mick Sheppard, Mrs. Faith Sheppard* repeatedly in a notebook like some lovesick high school girl with her first crush. She went to bed every night wondering where he was, if he was alone or if he'd found someone else. Lonely nights wishing she could just hear his voice. To ask him if he missed her. If he still wanted her. So many days spent hoping he'd call and say he wanted her more than anything in the world. That he wanted her as much as she wanted him.

The lie, however, left her feeling hollow and empty. She'd told herself repeatedly that they were wrong for each other. That she didn't belong in his world and he would never fit into hers. They were too different, that they wanted different things out of life and once they'd sated their hunger for each other, there wouldn't be anything left. But that's all they were. Lies. She almost convinced herself to believe them. Until he came barreling back into her life.

She swallowed the sudden lump forming in her throat. There wasn't any way to know the answers to the questions she asked herself daily unless she asked him and she didn't have enough nerve to even dare.

"Would you," he asked again.

The answer to that was simple. She looked up at him and knew it was now or never. "I don't think you're asking the right question, Mick," she said.

He raised an eyebrow and lowered his arm, taking her hand. "And what is the right question?"

It felt as if her insides were going to shake loose any moment now. Her stomach ached and it felt harder to breathe suddenly. *What if he doesn't want me back?* "The question," she said, trying to keep her voice steady, "is did I *want* to sign the papers."

He stared down at her, his hand tightening around hers until her fingers were pinched together. "Did you want to sign the papers?"

She answered without hesitating. "No." His grip tightened to this side of pain before he reached down, lifting her from the ground and pulling her into the vehicle to sit her on his lap. His mouth covered hers an instant later, his tongue pushing past her lips. His hold on her tightened, his kiss bordering on ravenous. When he raised his head to look at her, she knew. He did want her.

"Does your father know you want to stay married to a heathen like me?"

She grinned. "No. He'd perform an exorcism on me if he did."

He laughed. After meeting the Reverend he could see the old man doing that and worse. He glanced down, his hand pressing lightly against her stomach and said, "And what of the evil spawn you're carrying around?"

"Oh, well its not the baby's fault his father is the devil incarnate. I'm guessing daddy's thinking raising him without your constant interference will rid him of your hellish ways."

"An what about you?"

"What about me?"

"Do you think the baby will be better off without me?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "I've lived my whole life without my mother and there isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about her. Her leaving us was beyond anyone's control but I still wonder about her. I don't want my child, one who actually has a living father, to ever wonder why he wasn't wanted."

"What if I don't know how to be a good father?"

"No one knows how, Mick. You think I have all the answers? I'm just as clueless as you are." She glanced toward the house when she caught movement out of the corner of her eye and felt her pulse start to race. "Unless you're ready to fight your way past one angry minister and five equally moody brothers, I suggest you put this monster vehicle in gear."

Mick glanced toward the house and saw the Reverend standing at the front door, Adam and Seth right behind him. He picked Faith up, sliding her over to the passenger seat before shutting his door. "Buckle up," he said. "It might get bumpy."

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## Chapter 6

"Do you even know where you're going?"

"No, but it looks quiet and there isn't a Weston in sight." He glanced over at her and grinned. "Well, other than you."

They'd been driving for over an hour, barely escaping Adam in town before heading out of Barton and toward the loneliest stretch of road he could find. He'd picked the right one, apparently. A dusty, abandoned farmhouse, dried up fields, and a fallen down barn were the only thing they'd seen. Well, other than this little piece of paradise, he thought, as he slowed down and pulled off the side of the road. There wasn't a house for miles and for the first time since arriving in this hovel of a town, they were finally alone.

Faith grinned as he killed the engine before opening her door and sliding out of the SUV. Mick watched her walk toward the pond, smiling as she kicked off her shoes and waded into the water. The pond was nestled between large shade trees and surrounded by waist high grass. The sun glistened on one corner of it, the rest hidden in shadow. Dragonflies hovered in the air above the water and tiny ripples scattered across the surface.

"Are you just goin' to sit there all day?"

He focused his gaze on Faith and smiled before getting out of the SUV and walking toward the pond. "I was just enjoying the view," he said, stopping when he reached her.

"The view looks better up close." She grinned and grabbed the hem of her shirt, lifting it over her head and tossing it to the ground. "Ever been skinny dippin', city boy?"

His cock twitched at her words, all the blood in his brain rushing south as she squirmed out of her cut-off shorts. Her plain cotton panties and white bra gleamed bright in the sun and he watched with baited breath as she slowly peeled the material from her body. She now stood completely naked before him and he didn't think he'd ever seen anything so beautiful in his life.

"Well, are you just going to gawk or join me?"

"Gawk," he said.

"Suit yourself." She turned, her heart-shaped ass wiggling delightfully as she ran toward the water, splashing into the shallow end with a tiny squeal of "shit it's cold" before diving in. When she emerged and turned to look at him, raising a hand before beckoning him to her with the crook of one finger, he reached for his shirt and pulled it over his head. When his bare feet hit the water moments later, he gasped at the temperature as she grinned and swam away from him.

He waded in to his knees and stopped as goose bumps pimply his skin. "How in the hell do you swim in water this damn cold?"

"Don't be such a baby, Mick."

"I'm not being a baby," he said. "This feels like ice water."

She giggled and raised one eyebrow at him. "I can tell," she said, nodding to him with her head.

He glanced down. The frigid water caused his dick to nearly disappear. Her giggles only made it worse. He looked

back up at her, watching her bob in and out of the water and knew he had to do something and standing there while she watched him shrivel up to only a nub wasn't it. He sucked in a breath and dove in, screaming as he came back up. "Fuck!" He took several sharp breaths, swimming toward her before stopping. "I can't feel anything from the neck down."

"Come here," she said, laughing. "I'll warm you up."

They met in the middle of the pond, her arms wrapping around his neck, her legs circling his hips. Her body was as cold as his was but just the feel of her naked limbs around him was enough for his circulation to start working properly again. Of course, all his blood was traveling south. She gave him a knowing look, tightening her legs around him and rubbing herself against his growing erection.

"It feels as if parts of you are warming," she said, kissing him lightly on the lips.

"You keep doing that and you'll find out exactly how warm it can get."

Trying to tread water with her added weight, slight as it was, was dragging him under. The second time his head sank below the surface, she let go of him and swam away. "I thought you were going to warm me up, Faith?"

"What good will it do you if I drown you in the process?"

He swam toward her, grinning when she turned and dove in, her pert little ass shining in the bright noonday sun before disappearing under the water. He followed her, watching her emerge near the bank. When he reached her, and his feet finally hit the silky bottom of the pond, she swam back to him.



"Feet on the bottom now?" she asked.

He nodded his head, reaching for her when she neared him. "Come here," he said. "I think you've tortured me long enough."

"Torture?" she said. "I don't know what you're talking about."

He laughed and guided her legs back around his waist and moaned when she ground her hips against him. He palmed her ass, holding her to him with his cock nestled between them. "That kind of torture," he said, pushing his hips forward into her. "I haven't been with a woman in three months, Faith. Not since the day you left me in Vegas and here you are, stripping in front of me, then taunting me with those perky tits and firm, round ass." He leaned down to kiss her, his tongue sliding into her mouth. Her nails bit into his shoulders before crawling into his hair. "Rubbing that sweet little pussy all over me. You're driving me crazy."

Her arms tightened around his neck, her lips peppering kisses across his face. "Then what are you waiting for?" she whispered, her tongue tracing his lips. "Shut up and fuck me already."

He couldn't get out of the water fast enough. The muddy bottom of the pond seemed to drag him back two steps for every one he took. When the cool grass was under his feet, he carried her toward their clothes before dropping to his knees.

The kiss she gave him sucked nearly every ounce of air from his lungs. His chest felt ready to explode by the time she pulled back, gasping for air as her greedy little fingers

caressed every inch of skin she could reach. He lowered her to the ground, his lips sliding across her skin before latching around her nipple. She arched her back, her fingers tugging at his hair and her hips rising, that hot little treasure between her legs teasing the head of his cock.

"Faith, I won't last if you don't sit still," he said, grabbing her hip and trying to stop her from moving. "It's been too long."

"It's been just as long for me," she whimpered, grabbing his head with both hands and kissing him. "Please, Mick. I need you. I want you inside me."

His dick throbbed painfully at her words. He lifted her, sitting up and forcing her legs across his lap. One quick push and he was inside. She gasped at the intrusion, her fingers tightening on his shoulders and when she opened her eyes and looked at him, grinding her hips against him, he knew he'd do whatever it took to keep her. Drunk induced marriage or not, he wanted her. She was his and he intended on keeping her.

He wrapped his arm around her waist, holding her up slightly before lifting his hips, penetrating her completely before lowering himself. He grunted as he filled her, feeling her muscles tighten around his cock as he drove up into her faster, harder, listening to her breath catch. He palmed her breast, rolling her nipple between his fingers before sucking it into his mouth. The audible smack of wet flesh the only sound other than their mingled harsh breaths. Her hips moved faster, her nails biting into his flesh until he looked up at her. She was staring down at him and with every silky slide into

her body, she consumed him, wrapped him in a cocoon of sensual pleasure he didn't want to spend a day without. She lowered her head, kissed him and bit his lip as his fingers dug into the soft flesh of her ass.

He felt his balls draw up, his veins filled with liquid fire. "Faith, I can't..."

"Don't," she whispered against his mouth. "Don't hold back."

He lowered her to the ground, clamping his teeth together as he drove into her without mercy. He fucked her till stars flashed behind his eyelids and her body clenched around him, her screams echoing in his head as he emptied his balls into her. His shout mingled with her own, his lungs burning as he expelled the last of the air they held as wave upon wave of spasms ate his strength. He fell to his elbows, keeping his full weight off of her, and sucked in large amounts of air, gasping in lungs full that nearly choked him. His entire body trembled, his legs weak and shaky.

Mick grabbed her leg, unwrapping it from his waist before collapsing beside her on the ground. He stared into the sky, watching the clouds while his pulse pounded in his ears. Three months was too damn long to go without that.

Without her.

He turned his head and looked over at her. Her eyes were closed, cheeks rosy red from exertion and those full lips parted as she tried to catch her breath. Her chest rose quickly, her breasts swaying with every pull of air into her lungs. She'd never looked more beautiful.

When she opened her eyes and turned her head to look at him, she grinned. "I really hope it was me that caused you to lose it like that and not just the fact it's been so long."

He laughed and slid closer to her, rubbing a hand across her stomach as he peppered kisses along her breasts. "You mostly," he mumbled against her skin. "But I don't think I've ever gone that long without sexual gratification."

"What?" she said. "You can't tell me you haven't even beat off since Vegas."

"Ah, masturbation. What would a man do without his hand?"

"Fuck anything that moved?"

"Probably."

"And?"

"And what?" he asked.

"You haven't even masturbated since then?"

He snorted and bit her nipple. "I jerked off twice a day thinking about you. Thinking about shooting come all over these pretty little titties of yours."

"Lord, you're so nasty, Mick."

He leaned up on his elbow and grinned. "And you love it. Admit it."

She raised her arms, wrapping them around his neck. "Yes. I love it." *I love you*, she thought, but kept the words to herself.

"Good," he said. "Now, what do you say we sneak back to your house, grab you some clothes and get the hell out of this town? I have three weeks before we head to Europe. Sounds

like just enough time for a proper Honeymoon. What do you think?"

Faith stared up at him not entirely sure she could answer him. The lump in her throat grew with every passing second and she had to take several deep breaths just to try and slow her pulse down. A Honeymoon? He wanted to take her on a Honeymoon? Like ... a real married couple? The tears started to burn her eyes the second she thought it and she kissed him to keep from blubbering like a fool with one thought running through her mind. He did want her.

\* \* \* \*

They arrived back at the house after stopping by the Inn to tell the others to pack it up and be ready to go in an hour. Mick wanted to be gone by nightfall and Faith couldn't wait to start her new life. Of course, she had to squeeze out of the old one first and to do that, she had to actually get out of the SUV and go inside. For some reason, facing her father had her scared shitless. She glanced over at Mick who was staring at her. His face showed nothing so if he was nervous he hid it like a pro.

"I guess we should get out, huh?" she said.

"Probably." He looked toward the house, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. "Guess we could always buy what you needed and just avoid this all together."

Faith nodded her head. "We could do that."

Neither of them moved.

She sighed heavily and finally reached for the door handle. "Are you coming in or playing it safe?"

He grinned. "I'd love to play it safe, Tink, but I'm sure that would just give your father more reasons to hate me." He opened his door and said, "Let's go."

They made it to the front door before Faith felt her stomach roll in on itself. If she could do this without throwing up, she'd treat herself to an entire chocolate crème pie, using Mick's abs as a serving dish. She took a deep breath before opening the door and walking inside.

She stopped when she saw her father sitting in his chair by the fireplace. He didn't say anything but the look on his face made her feel like an eight year old that'd been caught being naughty.

"Daddy," she said, taking a step further into the room. "I'm..." her throat closed off and she found it hard to breathe all of a sudden. She heard the door close behind her and wondered if Mick was on this side of it or if he'd chickened out and stayed on the porch. She got her answer when she felt his hand on her back.

"Let me guess. You're leaving," the Reverend said, glancing past her to Mick. "With him."

Faith glanced at the floor. His tone of voice told her how disappointed he was.

"You don't have to answer, Faith. I can tell by the way you can't even look at me."

She sighed heavily and looked up, forcing eye contact with him. Tears burnt her eyes as she did. The look on his face was her undoing. She'd broken his heart ... again. He stood, taking them both in before shaking his head.

"I raised you the best I could, Faith. I can see now I failed in some respect." He crossed the room, stopping at the end of the sofa and looking past her to Mick. "Never in all my life did I think you'd turn out so rebellious. None of your brothers were."

"They're not the angels you think they are," Faith said. "Their souls are just as stained as mine."

"Maybe," he said. "But the stain isn't visible for every person who looks upon them to see. I'm not so naive as to believe my children have all walked the path I set them on but I do believe they've all tried. Well, the boys have. You, I'm not so sure about. I'm beginning to believe you purposely defied me just to see if you could get away with it."

"I've never purposely tried to do anything to hurt you, daddy. Why would you even think such a thing?"

He laughed but there was nothing amusing about the sound. He stared at her for long minutes; the only sound in the room the soft ticking of the clock on the fireplace mantel. When the silence became deafening, Faith took a step toward him. "Daddy, you always said all you ever wanted for any of us was for us to be happy."

"And you are?" he asked. "You're happy with him? You're happy about this baby? Happy that every person in town thinks of you not as the sweet girl you were but of a wanton young woman who has disgraced her father."

"I'm sorry, daddy." She hung her head. "I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you."

"You're not a disappointment, Faith, but your actions have disappointed me. I raised you better than this. I trusted you

to behave yourself in a respectable manner and put you on that plane to Vegas knowing you would still be the proper young lady I raised, but I was wrong." He shook his head and the look of disgust on his face tore at her heart. "Drinking. Partying. Having sex with a man you know next to nothing about. A man I'm almost positive will tire of you once the reality of his situation sinks in or the next pretty girl who crosses his path jumps into his bed."

"You know nothing about me, or how I feel, Mr. Weston," Mick said, speaking for the first time.

"And how do you feel, Mick?" the Reverend asked. "Let me guess. You took a girls virginity, soiled her and now you feel like a man. Is that it? Is that how you rock stars get your kicks nowadays?"

"I don't need a woman to make me feel like a man," Mick said. "And her virginity was the farthest thing from my mind. It wasn't there anyway."

If the floor had opened up in that moment, Faith would have vaulted over anything in her path to be the first one in it. The look on her father's face froze her lungs and caused her heart to leap in her chest. When he turned his gaze on her, she wanted to crawl into the deepest, blackest hole she could find.

"You weren't a virgin when you went to Vegas?"

Faith's tongue felt like it grew three sizes and the inside of her mouth felt as if sawdust coated every inch. She couldn't speak and was finding it hard to breathe. When her father took a step toward her, she took a step back, bumping into Mick.



"Is the baby even his?" the Reverend asked, looking past her to Mick. "Or do you even know?"

The comforting wall of Mick's body behind her was suddenly gone and she stumbled to gain her balance. A glance over her shoulder confirmed what she thought. The doubt now shining in Mick's eyes tore at her heart and she just wanted to start this entire day over again.

"I can tell by the look on your face that thought never entered your mind," the Reverend said, looking at Mick. "I guess Faith's actions are now a mystery to us both. I hope you're both happy with the lives you've created for yourself."

When her father turned and walked out of the room, she swallowed the lump in her throat. "The baby is yours, Mick."

"Is it?"

The fact he even questioned it broke her heart. "I wouldn't lie to you about that."

"So you'd lie to me about something else instead?"

"No," she said. "That's not what I meant."

"What did you mean, then?"

Faith raised her hand, pushing her hair out of her eyes. How had things gone from bliss to a total disaster so quickly? "Mick—"

"The day I met you in Vegas, you said you knew who I was."

"Yes," she said. "A person would have to have been living under a rock not to know who you were."

"The fact I was a member of Wicked didn't have anything to do with you jumping into my bed so quick? Were you just

out to make it with a rock star or did you have bigger plans, Faith?"

Faith gaped at him and tried to speak three times before getting her tongue to work properly. "What are you implying, Mick? That I planned this? That I purposely threw myself at you, poured liquor down your throat and dragged you by the hair to the nearest wedding chapel and married you before you sobered up? Oh, and I just happened to get knocked up in the process? Is that what you're saying?"

His face had turned red, fire shined in his eyes and a mask of inconsolable hatred so noticeable on his face nothing would have penetrated the barrier he put up. "I think you spelled it out quite nicely, Faith. Thanks for the history lesson. Not only am I a fool but I'm an idiot as well. Your real name wouldn't happen to be Jennifer, would it?"

She gasped. How dare he even imply she was anything like his ex! There wasn't a magazine in the world that hadn't plastered his nasty divorce from that woman on every cover for over a year. To even be put in the same category with her left Faith feeling as if he'd punched her square in the face. Her blood boiled. She felt it racing through her veins, heating her limbs before rushing past her ears. "How can you even stand there and accuse me of playing you, Mick?"

"Well, other than a very brief family history, and that you're a wildcat in the sack, I don't know a damn thing about you," he said. "For all I know you were in league with Jessi from the minute we stepped foot in Vegas. Our tour schedule is plastered in every available medium there is. Did you two

follow us just to sink your claws into a couple of rich, rock stars?"

"So, you're saying Jessi trapped Christian as well? Are you insane?" She stared up at him and laughed until tears leaked from her eyes. She turned and walked across the room, staring at nothing. How had this gone so wrong? How did they go from running away together to nasty accusations being slung at each other? Why did he let the first hint of doubt cloud all judgment and cause him to believe the worst of her?

*If he loved me, he'd have no reason to doubt anything I said.*

She turned back to face him, watching him stare at her. The look on his face ripped a sob from her throat before she sucked it up and straightened her spine. She wouldn't cry in front of him. She wouldn't let him know the mere fact he doubted her broke her heart. That she was foolish enough to think he loved her and now knew differently. "You know what, Mick," she said, clearing her throat when it cracked. "Just ... forget it. Go back to your glitzy lifestyle, and your loose women, and leave me alone."

The tears were unstoppable now and she bit her tongue to keep from bawling in front of him. When he just stood there staring at her, she turned her back to him.

The divorce papers were on the coffee table.

Crossing the floor, she snatched them up and walked to the desk in the corner, grabbing a pen and signing them without even reading them. "There," she said, turning and walking to where he stood. "It's over. Here's your fucking

divorce papers." She shoved them into his hand and turned, walking to her bedroom. When the door was shut, and locked, her knees gave out. She slid to the floor, her heart breaking into a million pieces. When she heard the front door slam shut, the first sob broke from her chest.

She knew without looking Mick was gone.

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## Chapter 7

"Aren't you missing something?" Devin asked.

Mick ignored him, throwing his bag into the back of the SUV before walking to the side door. "Let's go. I want to get out of this shit-hole town."

They all stood staring at each other and Mick wanted to scream, or punch something. He'd left Faith's, the tires on the SUV burning as he peeled out of her driveway, his head feeling as if it would explode at any moment. He'd made it back to the Inn, walked straight to his room, grabbed his bag and told them to head out. He was ready to go and thankfully, so were they.

"Are we picking up Faith on the way out of town?" Jessi asked.

Mick shot her a glance that caused her to take a step back. Christian raised an eyebrow at him before wrapping an arm around her waist. "What's going on, man?"

"Faith isn't coming," he said. "Now, let's get going. I want to get out of here."

He climbed into the front passenger seat, slamming the door and sat waiting. They'd either get in or he'd slide behind the wheel and leave them all standing on the side of the road. He was done with this town. Done with Faith, and done with women, period. They weren't anything but lying, manipulating cunts as far as he was concerned.

The sound of doors opening and the others getting inside was the only thing that kept him from crying like a bitch.

When Luke started the SUV and pulled away from the curb, Mick stared out the window and had to close his eyes to stop them burning. His heart felt heavy, his chest aching until he found it difficult to breathe. How had this happened? Why? Had Faith set out to trap him like Jennifer had? Was he so gullible, and controlled by his dick, that he would fall for any scheme perpetrated by any manipulative woman that crossed his path?

Apparently.

When they hit the highway, he leaned back and kept his eyes closed. The sound of whispered voices penetrated the space inside the vehicle and he tuned them out. Them and the visions of Faith that danced in his mind's eye.

How could he have been so stupid? Had he not learned his lesson with Jennifer? Had she not done the exact same thing? She lured him in and sunk her claws in before he had time to even think.

*Faith didn't do that.*

He scowled at his own thoughts because they were true. He'd been the one to pursue her. He'd wanted her ten seconds after laying eyes on her and the minute he got her alone, he laid on the moves and was genuinely happy she'd reciprocated. Those sweet little lips of hers tasted like pure nectar and once he got her into his bed, he couldn't get enough. She was so tiny and gorgeous and made his heart skip a beat when she flashed those pretty eyes at him and smiled. She wanted him and spent hours proving it. His cock twitched just thinking about her. How many times had he fucked her that week in Vegas? How many times had he

thought about doing it the weeks they were apart? Every day? Every hour? Every time he lay his head down at night and longed to feel her there with him. Ached to feel her skin next to his. To bury himself in her heat and hear her whisper his name while he loved her.

The ache in his chest intensified, his eyes burning to the point he had to lift a hand and rub them to keep the tears he knew were just under his eyelids from spilling out. He'd given her everything he had and this is how she repaid him? By lies and deceit?

*Who said she lied?*

He shifted in his seat and he heard the divorce papers in his back pocket crunch. He reached for them, unfolding it and flipping through the pages. Seeing her signature scrawled at the bottom was like a blow to the head. The look on her face when she'd shoved them at him tearing at his heart. She'd looked crushed, broken. He'd done that. He'd caused that look with his fear and doubt. Fear that she was just after his money. Doubt that the baby was even his. But why? He didn't doubt her for a second when she told him. Not once had he thought, "Maybe it isn't mine." He'd just accepted it, accepted her word as truth and thought nothing more of it other than what would they do. The answer had seemed so simple. They'd stay married and raise their kid but one tiny flick of doubt from her father had ruined it all. It destroyed his faith in her, clouded his judgment until nothing remained but suspicions he had no way of finding out. Not now. Not after leaving her ... again.

He opened his eyes and turned his head, looking over at Luke. His friend glanced at him but didn't say anything. Of all the guys in the band, Luke was the one he shared the most with. He was the brother he never had. The one he knew he could tell anything to and it wouldn't go any further. The one who always helped him out when shit went bad and right now, he knew he needed to sort this out.

"Pull over."

Luke looked at him and raised an eyebrow. "You sure?"

Mick nodded. "Yeah." When the SUV came to a stop on the side of the road, he opened his door and got out, walking down a road a ways and he knew without looking Luke was right behind him. When he stopped and turned, his friend just stared at him. "Her father thought she was a virgin when she went to Vegas."

"Okay," Luke said.

"She wasn't."

Luke nodded and waited and Mick found it hard to say what he'd been thinking. It was on the tip of his tongue but he couldn't get the words out. Luckily he didn't have to.

"You think the baby isn't yours?"

He sighed and looked out across the highway. "It never even entered my mind until her father asked."

"Why?"

Mick looked back at Luke and said, "Why what?"

"Why didn't it ever enter your mind?"

"She told me it was mine."

"And you believed her?"

"Of course I believed her! Why wouldn't I?"



"So what's the problem?" Luke stared at him, his arms crossed over his chest, and didn't say another word. What was the problem? The problem was what if the baby wasn't his? What if Faith knew she was pregnant when she went to Vegas and deliberately trapped him? The problem was he'd be raising another man's kid.

*And if the baby is yours, another man will raise it. And spend his life with your girl.*

"Mick, what were your intentions when you came down here?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Luke said, "Did you come down here to get those divorce papers signed."

"Yes."

"And did you?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"And what?"

Luke laughed and ran a hand through his hair. "Man, you are so fucked up in the head right now."

"And this is exactly why we're standing in the middle of fucking nowhere having this conversation!"

"All right," Luke said. "Let me ask you this. When you came to the Inn to tell us to get ready, what were your intentions?"

"We were leaving."

"With Faith?"

"Yes."

"So, you were willing to burn the divorce papers and stay married to her?"

"That's what I just said."

Luke grinned and shook his head. "Are you in love with her?"

Mick stared at him like he'd been slapped. *In love with her?*

"It's a simple question, man."

"I know."

"And?"

"I care about her. I don't want to see her hurt." *Especially when it's me causing it.*

"Caring about someone and being in love with them are two different things."

"I know that." He caught movement out of the corner of his eye and turned to look back at the SUV. Jessi and Christian were now standing beside the vehicle and he watched them as they stretched their legs. They were smiling and looked happy. As happy as he had felt two hours ago. Watching them now, he knew his accusation against Jessi was unfounded. She hadn't chased after Christian and trapped him. You can't force someone to fall in love with you. Christian had fallen for the girl the minute he saw her ... the same way he'd fallen for Faith.

He looked back over at Luke. "She asked me if I was insane."

Luke laughed. "Hate to tell you man, but you're acting a bit insane. You spent weeks being the most neurotic I've ever seen you and acted like a kid the minute we hit this town."

You've gone from one end of the scale to another in the short time we've been here and one innocent remark from Faith's father and you're throwing it all away? Yeah. I'm beginning to understand why she asked."

"So what do you think I should do?"

"It's not my girl I left behind," Luke said. "You'll have to make that decision on your own but I will tell you this. If I were standing in your shoes right now, I don't think I could leave Roxy just because I had some doubts. I'd find out the truth before I did something I might spend the rest of my life regretting."

Mick looked back across the highway. He wasn't any closer to an answer than he was when he got out of the car. The only thing he did know was, the further they got from Barton Georgia, the more he felt like he'd left something behind.

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## Chapter 8

Faith felt every eye in the church on her as she made her way down the center aisle to her seat on the first pew. Her father sat in the pulpit, staring down at his notes on the sermon and the hushed whispers echoing across the sanctuary increased as she moved closer to the front of the building. When she reached her seat, she forced a smile on her face when Jacob looked up at her. She took her place beside him and tried to not look as miserable as she felt.

For two days she'd done nothing but sit in her room while her heart bled out. To be left and unwanted was the worst feeling in the world. Knowing Mick thought she'd lied and tried to trap him hurt more than him leaving. She could understand his reluctance. She hadn't at first but after analyzing everything from every angle, she could see things from where he was standing. What hurt the most was him not trusting her. That he thought she would purposely manipulate him.

Her father stood, walking to the podium, and smiled out at the congregation. His words were lost as he spoke, everything around her still a dull buzzing inside her head.

The regular hymns were sung and she mouthed the words hoping no one would know she wasn't participating. When her father started his sermon, she stared down at her lap and knew every word he said was directed at her. She listened for over ten minutes before tuning him out.

Faint whispers started at the back of the sanctuary and her father's words slowed, the volume in which he was speaking lowering until he stopped completely. When the whispers grew in volume and people started shifting in their seats, Faith looked up. Her father was staring at the back of the church and like everyone else in the room, she turned to see what he was looking at.

Her heart nearly stopped when she did.

"I'm in the middle of a sermon," her father said.

"I can wait," Mick said. "I've got time."

"There's nothing for you here, Mick."

Mick smiled. "My wife is here," he said. "And I'm not leaving without her. I can take her now or when you're finished. Doesn't really make a difference to me."

Faith glanced back at her father. His face was red, his breaths panted out. He was livid and she knew her normally soft-spoken father was about to show a side of himself to the congregation that he never wanted them to see. She stood, hoping to diffuse the situation and didn't know where to direct her attention ... at her father or at Mick.

Her father chose for her. "Sit down, Faith."

"Daddy—"

"Faith," he said. "I said sit down."

She glanced to the back of the church, her gaze finding Mick's. He smiled at her and started down the aisle, her pulse racing with every step he took. The whispers grew louder, every person in the room watching him as he advanced and by the time he reached her, she wasn't sure her knees would hold her up much longer.

He stopped in front of her, smiling before saying, "I'm sorry. I act before I think and I should have never left." He reached behind him, pulling something from his pocket before handing it to her. It was the divorce papers. "I was going to burn them but I wanted to make sure you still wanted to do that first."

Faith stared down at the document, the pages wrinkled, the edges torn. Her hands were shaking as she stared at it knowing what happened next was all up to her. She looked up, staring at Mick and wondered why he'd changed his mind. *Does it matter?*

Her father walked to the edge of the pulpit and she turned her head to look at him. She held her breath, wondering if she left with Mick, if her daddy would ever forgive her.

"For those of you who haven't figured it out yet, this is the young man who married my daughter." Audible gasps were heard through the sanctuary and Faith glanced around the room, noticing the wide eyes and whispered murmurs. "As you can see," the Reverend said, "He not only disrupts our lives but also our Sunday worship service. For what, I'd like to know."

Mick turned and faced her father, leveling his gaze on him. "I came for my wife. Told you that already."

"Your wife? The young woman you married while so drunk you don't even remember it?"

Mick clenched his jaw and Faith hoped he didn't say something they'd both live to regret. When he smiled instead she feared the worst. "I might not remember marrying her," Mick said, "but it doesn't make the fact that she is my wife

any less true. Like it or not, Reverend, I'm not going anywhere unless Faith asks me to."

Her father turned his gaze on her and lifted one eyebrow. "Looks like it's all on you, Faith. What's it going to be? Are you ready to throw away everything you know and run off with this man because some no-name person in Vegas had you recite some vows, in which neither of you remember taking, and pronounced you married? Are you willing to sacrifice your happiness on the chance that this might all work out?"

Mick turned and smiled at her before closing the small distance between them. "I love you, Faith. I don't know anything about you other than your name and you tend to snore but that's enough and I'll spend the rest of my life doing whatever it takes to see that you're happy. Just say the word, Tink, and we're out of here."

Faith grinned at him, fully intending on correcting the snoring business and glanced at her father. He was still watching them but the look on his face had changed. He didn't seem as mad as before and she wondered if Mick's softly spoken declaration had anything to do with it.

When she saw Mick move out of the corner of her eye she looked back at him, her eyes widening when he held his hand out to her. "I think we skipped this part the first time around," he said, holding out a ring box. The lid was open and two wedding bands sat nestled in blue silk. She stared at the rings, her vision becoming blurry as tears filled her eyes.

"Mr. Weston," Mick said. "I don't remember marrying your daughter but I'll do it again if that's what it takes for you to

accept this. She's still my wife whether you approve or not but I'd rather leave knowing you're okay with it."

"Make him marry her before God!"

Faith turned to see who shouted but couldn't tell. Every person in the room was staring at them, the looks of curiosity overwhelming. Her father took the two steps down from the pulpit and walked to where they stood. She looked up at him and held her breath.

"Is this what you want, Faith?" he asked, quietly.

Faith looked back at Mick and said, "Yes."

Reverend Weston leaned toward Mick and whispered, "And what about the baby, Mick?"

"Doesn't matter," he said. "If she says the baby is mine, then I believe her. Even if its not it won't change how I feel about her."

For the first time in days, Faith saw her father smile. He stared at Mick, studying him before clapping a hand on his back and nodding his head. "That's all I need to know," he said. He reached out and took the ring box from Mick's hand and looked down at the rings. "What do you say we end all the rumors and gossip and get you two married properly?"

She looked at Mick, wondering what he'd say. When he grabbed her hand and said, "Will you marry me ... again?" she had her answer.

Laughing, she said, "Yes."

"All right then!" He turned and walked to the center of the aisle, turning to face her before glancing at her father. "Let's do this, Reverend. We have a plane to catch." He stepped



closer to her and smiled before whispering, "and a honeymoon to get started on."

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## **Epilogue**

Mick remembered facing the Reverend the first time and had imagined the worst. Now as he looked at him and saw the pinched look on his face, and the looks on the faces of Faith's five brothers he wondered why he was even standing in the same state with them.

The ear-piercing scream that came from the other side of the door reminded him.

He turned and walked back to the door, reaching for the handle. She'd kicked him out five times now, replacing him as her Lamaze coach with Jessi, and going back in to get yelled at wasn't at the top of his list of sane things to do but standing in the hall and being glared at by the Weston clan didn't seem like a smart idea either. Another scream, this one sending gut wrenching spasms up his spine nearly brought him to his knees. He should have insisted on the drugs but she'd refused them repeatedly. It was torture listening to her in so much pain while he could do nothing but stand there and wait. Maybe he should have asked if they had anything for him instead.

The wail of a crying baby split the air the next instant and Mick's heart skipped a beat. He spun on his heel, looking at everyone waiting and couldn't find his voice. He stared at them, seeing the wide eyes and smiles before he jerked the door open.

Faith was the only thing he saw. The doctors and nurses, Jessi, all the equipment ... it vanished as he stared at her.

She was smiling at him. For the first time in hours she looked happy to see him.

"Go on in," Holly said from behind him. "I think its safe this time."

He walked in, letting the door shut behind him. A nurse with a tiny bundle haphazardly wrapped was looking at him, smiling. "Would you like to see your son?" she said.

*My son?*

He grinned and nodded his head, walking across the room and looking down at *his* son. He knew without a doubt the baby was his the moment he looked at his tiny face. He was a funny color and still needed a bath but there wasn't any denying who this kid belonged to. He looked like his dad.

"He's tiny," the nurse said, "but he appears to be perfectly healthy." The nurse gestured to a bassinet in the corner and said, "Let's get him cleaned up and you can go show him off."

He started to follow her but stopped, looking back over at Faith. She was still staring at him and he crossed the room to her with three long strides. He leaned down and kissed her sweaty forehead, her eyes and cheeks, then her lips before saying, "I love you, Tink."

"Love you too, Mick."

He smiled down at her, straightening when her eyes widened all of a sudden and she gasped. He glanced to the doctor, watching as she stepped back between Faith's parted legs.

"Faith, you were right," she said, looking up briefly. "You were too big to only have one tiny baby in there."

Mick's eyes widened and he had to force himself to take a breath.

"I see the head," the doctor said. "Give us a big push, Faith."

When Faith grabbed his hand, Mick nearly collapsed. *Twins?* Jessi laughed and stepped closer to the bed. "Mick? You did know Faith and Jacob were twins, didn't you?"

He looked up and shook his head. Jessi's laughter grew, Faith's moans got louder and the room slowly dimmed. The doctor saying, "It's a girl!" was the last thing he heard before his eyes rolled back and he hit the floor.

*The End*

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### **About the Author:**

LILY GRAISON resides in North Carolina, a stones throw away from the Blue Ridge Mountains and a few hours from the Outer Banks. First published in 2005, her debut novel won a Reviewers Choice Award. Writing mainly in the contemporary romance genre, Lily also dabbles in erotica, paranormals and occasionally in a fantasy realm of her own making. Her love of adventure, and a very active imagination, take Lily to worlds she can only imagine.

Visit Lily at: [www.lilygraison.com](http://www.lilygraison.com)

Lily's other Novels:

*Destined Hearts*

A love that transcends time. A Passion that couldn't be denied.

Caitlyn Edwards has always lived her life between two worlds. One ... in the hustle and bustle of modern day Boston, where she spends her days taking care of her widowed father and helping him run their small auto repair shop. The other ... in the arms of a man she only sees in her dreams. Her nights are filled with promises of a love so passionate, she's spent the last fifteen years trying to find out who he is.

William Davenport is a man torn between duty and what he wants. He's led a life only the privileged and very rich can afford, but his controlling father still feels the need to dictate his every move. A chance encounter with Caitlyn triggers

dreams of a life he can't remember living and soon a woman he can't seem to forget, starts to invade his every day world.

Will Caitlyn and William discover their past in time to change their future? Will the mistakes of years gone by repeat themselves? Or will a love once denied be reunited?

### *That First Christmas*

Meredith Gunter has always been Daddy's little girl. Spoiled all her life, she's never had to ask for anything and expects to get exactly what she wants. When she wrecks her car on the way home from college for Christmas break, she finds herself stranded on the mountain in the middle of a snowstorm, in a one-room cabin with a man she can't help but want.

Travis Gregory has lived alone on the mountain for the last four years. He has little contact with the outside world and prefers it that way. When he spots a girl on the side of the road, his conscience won't let him abandon her. The redhead captivates him instantly.

Worlds collide when Travis and Meredith try to co-exist in his one room cabin. Can they fight their growing attraction when the nights get longer and the storm isolates them from the rest of the world? Can two people, from such different worlds, ever truly be happy together?

### *Wicked: Tempt Me Not (Book 1)*

Devin Shaw, front man for the band, Wicked, is forced into seclusion by his manager after his destructive behavior almost destroys the band. Sent to a remote cabin alone isn't Devin's idea of fun, but to save his career, he'll do what it takes.

Holly Baker, escaping the hassles of her big city life, arrives in the mountains of Tennessee and awaits the arrival of her friend, Roxy, to start their two-week vacation. Their plans change drastically when Roxy is called away at the last minute, leaving Holly to fend for herself.

Devin and Holly's worlds collide when a mix up strands them in the same cabin. Alone with nothing but each other for companionship, how will Holly react when she realizes she's trapped with none other than the hottest lead singer the country has seen in years? Will Devin be able to work with a constant distraction the pretty brunette offers? Or will the two discover that sometimes temptation is a wicked dessert best served hot.

*Wicked: Leather and Lace (Book 2)*

Roxy Carlisle is on a mission. She's been in lust with Luke Harris, lead guitarist for the band Wicked, for two years. When her best friend, Holly, hooks up with the band's lead singer, and asks her to tag along to New York with her to meet the band, Roxy couldn't pack her bags fast enough. The chance to meet Luke in person was a dream come true. Even better if her ultimate fantasy of finding herself in his bed were to happen. One way or another, she was determined to have him. That is, if Holly's hair-brained idea of playing hard to get doesn't backfire in her face.

Luke Harris loves women and they love him. All he ever has to do is speak to them and they fall all over themselves to be the lucky lady of the night. That all changes though when a feisty brunette comes barreling into his life and

changes all the rules. She's immune to his usual charm, or so it seems, but something in her eyes tells him otherwise.

Has Luke finally met a woman he can't seduce? Can Roxy follow her plan and not give in when Luke sets his sights on her? When sex is all you're after, can you walk away when your heart demands more?

*Wicked: Jade Butterfly (Book 3)*

Christian Palmer, bass player for the band Wicked, isn't your typical rocker. Much to his band mate's amusement, he's quiet, shy and looks like your average boy next door-but that's all about to change. An encounter with a girl he can't seem to forget calls for drastic measures and with the help of his friends, Christian goes from dud to stud in hopes to wow the girl of his dreams.

Jessi McClure has led a fairytale life. She has a job she loves, friends she can count on and couldn't want for anything else. Until she meets, and photographs, an unlikely rock star. Running into him again was just dumb luck, but when their paths keep crossing, she can't help but notice the change this shy, gorgeous guy has taken on and is drawn to him even more.

When fate keeps stepping in and hands you something you didn't realize you wanted, do you throw the chance away or hold on with both hands? Will Jessi get more than she bargained for when the man she thought she knew turns out to be so much more? And can Christian hold on to the girl of his dreams when a misunderstanding threatens to tear them apart?



Wicked: Sweet Temptation [Wicked Series Book 4]  
*by Lily Graison*

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