



*DIAMOND,*  
A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER ~ 2

*PEGGY HUNTER*

**Whiskey Creek Press**

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Diamond, A Girl's Best Friend [Diamonds Are Forever Book 2]  
*by Peggy Hunter*

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER BOOK 2:

DIAMOND, A

GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

by

Peggy Hunter

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## **Dedication**

For Kathie.

You are and will always be my dear friend.

Thank you for being you.

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## Chapter 1

Brianna O'Ryan grabbed a towel and wiped perspiration from her brow before she sat down. "Are you serious?"

"Yes, I am," Zachary Diamond replied as he plunked his ass on the bench beside her. "I want you to attend my brother's wedding with me."

"Come on, Zach," she said as her green eyes darkened. He knew the wheels in her head were turning. "Just admit it."

He stared at her. "Admit what?"

"You couldn't talk one of the women you screw on a daily basis to go with you."

Zach grinned. "You think you know me so well," he said as he wiped his face with a towel.

Bri laughed. "Of course I do. I just beat your ass at squash because I could anticipate your every move."

Okay, so he had to give her that much. She was a formidable opponent on the court. But that didn't mean she knew everything about him. He curled the towel around his neck and looked at his best friend. "The fact is I'm taking a break."

Brianna chuckled. "Oh really?"

Zach tensed. He didn't like being put on the defensive ... not with anyone, and that included Bri, best friend or not. As CEO of Diamond Industries, Zach was not used to defending his decisions. And he sure as hell never felt the need to defend himself in personal relationships. "Yeah, really," he said, his jaw tense.

"So you figure I'm safe." It wasn't a question.

"Sure you are," Zach replied with conviction.

Bri placed her towel on the bench beside her and leaned back against the concrete wall. "Why should I go with you?"

Zach gazed at her. He'd met Bri almost a year ago when, after a particularly bad day at the office, he'd wandered into O'Ryan's Bar and Grill. Although the bar was located just a block from the Diamond Industries building, Zach had never been there before. Bri was tending bar.

Zach was instantly attracted to her. Long auburn hair always tied back in a ponytail or some sort of knot, her petite body was perfect in every way ... or at least it was from what he could see of it. Zach witnessed right off that she was feisty. When a burly drunken man came into the bar and insisted upon being served, Bri didn't bat an eye when she refused. And when he threatened to get physical, Bri's sea green eyes darkened. No matter how big they were, she wasn't going to take shit off them. The drunken guy eventually agreed to let her call a cab to take him home.

He'd left the bar that night bent on finding out just who she was. His sources quickly returned with a report ... the only child of Thomas O'Ryan, whose great-grandfather came from Ireland and opened an inn in downtown Toronto, which down the years became O'Ryan's Bar and Grill. Her mother, Mary, died of cancer when Bri was seven years old. She was pretty much raised in the bar her father owned ever since.

Though Bri's stature was small, some might even say delicate, her personality was as large as life. Zach admired everything about her. Unfortunately, his sources revealed

something that would keep a sexual relationship from ever happening. Brianna O'Ryan was a lesbian.

"Because that's what best friends do," he replied simply. "They help each other during times of need." The fact Bri was off-limits for any man made a difference too.

Brianna got up from the bench. Turning her back to him, she tore the band from her hair, letting the riot of auburn tresses free. Zach loved her long out-of-control hair, and had often wished he could run his fingers through it.

As she ran her fingers through her long tresses, she replied very simply, "No."

"No?"

Brianna whirled around. Her eyes speared him. "No, I won't go to your brother's wedding with you."

"Why?"

"Because, if you weren't taking a so-called break, you wouldn't even consider asking me."

She was right. Zach couldn't deny it. They'd been friends for only for a year but Brianna seemed to have a sixth sense ... an ability to see through him. Too bad she hadn't had her sixth sense in play when it came to her latest relationship.

"So what?" he said. "Maybe taking off for Manitoba for a long weekend will get your mind off Dawn."

Bri's face fell and she turned away from him again. "Why did you have to bring that up?"

Zach felt guilty. He knew he'd mentioned her broken relationship for his own gain. But he'd never intended to hurt her. She didn't protest when his hands gently cupped her shoulders and turned her to face him.

When she looked up at him, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, it took everything within Zach to keep himself in check. He wanted to pull her against him and tell her she'd never be hurt again if only she gave herself to him. Damn it! He wanted her in his bed.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "You know I'd never intentionally hurt you."

"I know," Bri replied. "It's just that my feelings are still pretty raw..." her voice trailed off.

"You really loved Dawn, didn't you?"

Bri sniffled. "I thought I did. I thought we were soul mates."

And therein lay the problem. Zach knew there was no such thing as a soul mate. He'd tried to tell Bri so many times within the past year, but she was convinced Dawn was meant to be her life partner.

He knew he shouldn't feel sorry for her. She'd had her head stuck in the clouds for a long time in spite of his frequent warnings. He often thought if Bri were one of his male friends, he'd have ripped into her more. But he simply could not laugh at her fallen dreams. Even though he knew Bri was off-limits, he wanted to find a way to comfort her, to assure her that life would indeed go on.

"Look," Zach said, "I can't fix your broken heart. But I can whisk you away for a few days. Maybe a change of scenery will help you get over that shithead."

Bri's eyes brightened. "You know, when you put it that way, it makes sense."

Zach grinned widely. "Good!"

"When I look at you, I realize you're much worse off than I am."

Zach's grin fell. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, you have sex with any woman who appeals to you but you have no idea what it's like to be in love."

Zach wasn't about to discuss his relationships. His eyes narrowed. "Are you coming with me or not?"

"You're paying?"

Zach nodded.

Bri shrugged. "In that case, why not?"

\* \* \* \*

"Let me get this straight," Julie Thorton said as she watched her friend pack her bags. "Zachary Diamond, CEO of Diamond Industries, the sexiest man alive, the guy every woman wants in her bed, asked you to attend his brother's wedding with him."

Bri cast a frown at her friend. "Stop drooling," she said. "My relationship with Zach isn't like that."

"Not by your choice," Julie pointed out.

No. Not by her choice. The moment Zach walked up to the bar a year ago and ordered a Martini, Bri was smitten. Tall and muscular with jet-black hair and dark brown eyes that seemed to penetrate her soul, he was everything a woman might dream about. When she learned who he was, the fact he was a gazillionaire added to the fantasy. If she hadn't been madly in love at the time, she'd have gladly taken Zach to her bed.

Not that Zach would have considered her as a lover. In fact, she was surprised someone like the great Zachary Diamond would take any kind of interest in her at all.

Yet they'd developed a friendship. As manager of O'Ryan's Bar and Grill, Bri tended bar and generally kept watch over the goings-on every night. Zach was always a pleasant change of scenery when he came in. And he seemed to like her from the start. Soon they were having coffee and spending an afternoon on the squash court at the local gym.

While Bri was sure she'd seen desire in Zach's eyes from time to time, he never once made a move toward a sexual liaison between them. Though it was disappointing at first, Bri came to accept the fact she wasn't his type. Besides, the friendship they'd developed was much better than any relationship she'd ever had.

"I'm very content with my relationship with Zach," she said as she dumped another armload of clothes into her suitcase. "At least I have a relationship with him. That's a lot more than what you have going with his younger brother."

"Hey!" Julie said scornfully. "I'm sorry I ever told you about my crush on Maxwell Diamond."

"Relax," Bri said, waving a hand in the air before she wrestled with the zipper on her overstuffed suitcase. "You've been hiding in the mail room at Diamond Industries for two years. Your secret crush is safe with me."

Truth be told, even if she mentioned Julie's name to Zach, she was sure he'd have no clue who she was. And while Julie secretly admired Zach's youngest brother from afar, Bri

thought the woman had little chance of ever getting his attention.

The Diamond men seemed completely oblivious to women ... unless they wanted to get laid. Even the old man, Edward Diamond, had gone through three failed marriages before he married a woman a quarter of his age. If the old man thought he'd found his happily ever after, he was sadly mistaken. Like his previous wives, Samantha Diamond was soon crying about her need for his money to maintain the life she'd grown accustomed to while sleeping with the old man. And Edward, like the fool he was, accepted it and paid the bitch handsomely.

It was truly no wonder Zach, the son of Edward's second marriage, didn't believe in love or happily ever after. Considering what he'd witnessed over the years, it was amazing Zach would even consider a woman as a friend.

As attracted as she was to Zach, Bri knew he was a broken toy. And she needed to believe she'd finally meet the right man who would make all her dreams come true. She'd decided not to focus her energy on Zach soon after they became friends.

When Don White walked into the bar one night and chatted with Bri, she thought he was too good to be true too. But he was everything ... well, almost everything ... she'd wanted in a man. Several months later, Bri discovered he wasn't her knight in shining armor after all and ended the relationship. She wasn't sure why she broke it off. All she knew was she needed something more ... something Don wasn't able to give. Having no idea what that certain something was, Bri

decided to continue looking. Surely she'd recognize it when she finally found it.

"Thanks," Julie said. She flopped down on Bri's bed, her long blond hair fanning against the pillows. Julie's stunning violet eyes stared at the ceiling as she took a deep breath and let out a long sigh. "If only Maxwell asked me to go to his brother's wedding. Sometimes I ache all over for him."

Bri suppressed a chuckle as she lifted her suitcase off the bed and set it on the floor. Max Diamond was way more out of Julie's league than Zach was of hers. Yet Julie was young, just twenty-four. She had so much to learn about life and, unfortunately, the learning wouldn't begin until she'd had a few hard knocks.

"Maybe it's time for you to make your feelings known," Bri said as she lugged her suitcase to the bedroom door.

Julie sprang upright on the bed. "Do you think I should?"

Bri stifled her true opinion. The kid had no idea what she was up against. But telling the truth wouldn't stop her anyway. "Sure, the sooner the better. At least then you'll know if Maxwell has an interest in you."

Julie flew off Bri's bed and ran through the bedroom door ahead of her. "You're right," she said. "I need a plan." Julie raced to the apartment door and opened it. Then she breathlessly turned to Bri. "Will you help me plan something?"

Bri frowned. She wasn't so sure helping Julie attract Maxwell Diamond was the best way to go. If anything, she should be encouraging the girl to meet other men. "Oh, I don't know—"



Julie's blue eyes glistened with tears. "Oh, Bri, please help me. I love Maxwell Diamond so much!"

Bri wanted to laugh. How on earth could Julie love a man she'd never even met face to face? Still, she liked Julie and had taken her under her wing the first time she walked into her father's bar and grill two years ago. Fresh from the country and, at twenty-one, ten years Bri's junior, Julie had an innocent nature Bri felt compelled to protect. "Sure," she said finally. "I'll help in any way I can."

Julie smiled widely just before she ran out of the apartment. Bri's reassuring smile faded the moment her friend left. Hell. Bri hadn't been able to draw more from Zach than a friendship. How in the heck could she help Julie attract his youngest brother?

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## Chapter 2

Dust billowed behind the limousine as it made its way toward Alexander Diamond's ranch. Three hours after they'd left the airport in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the sleek black limo hit dirt roads. The trip seemed endless, especially since Bri had to pee in the worst way. She should have turned down the second glass of mineral water offered on the Diamond family jet. Served over ice with a twist of lemon, it had been presented to her like she was the Queen of Sheba. Bri simply could not resist asking for a second glass.

Zach sat far away from her, against the other door of the limo. Since they'd landed, he'd either had his laptop open or was talking on his cell phone. He offered an occasional smile when their eyes happened to meet. Bri wasn't sure she liked this Zach, the one who was comfortable in a stretch limo as he managed Diamond Industries via his cell phone and laptop. He was nothing like the man she'd befriended. He was stoic, tense and, she had to admit, a bit of a prick. She felt for the last person he'd talked to ... someone named Kevin ... who'd taken a tongue lashing when something, somewhere, didn't go as well as Zach expected it would.

When the limo hit another pothole, Bri was drawn from her concerns about Zach to a much bigger concern ... her bladder felt like it was going to explode.

"Just when will we get there?" Bri moaned.

Zach gazed at her blankly ... his mind clearly on Diamond Industries. "What?"

Bri gritted her teeth against the pain of her overloaded bladder. "How much farther to your brother's ranch?"

"No idea." Zach leaned forward and touched a finger to the intercom. "When will we arrive at our destination?"

"Approximately thirty minutes," the chauffeur replied.

Zach looked at Bri and nodded lightly. Her question had been answered.

When Zach nonchalantly opened his cell phone to make another call, Bri darted across the seat and closed her hand over his. "I can't wait another half-hour."

Zach's eyes darkened as he frowned. "I don't think we have much of a choice."

Bri rolled her eyes. "I have to pee," she said.

"Well, we aren't far from the ranch—"

"You don't understand," Bri said desperately. "I have to go now!"

"But you'd have to go along the side of the road," Zach said.

Yes, she supposed any woman in his life would never pee on a gravel road. But at this point, Bri didn't care what he thought. "Tell the driver to stop."

Seconds after Zach made the request, the limo pulled onto the shoulder of the road. Before the chauffeur opened the back door, Bri shot out and looked around for a place to go. She moaned inwardly when she didn't see one tree or even a shrub to hide behind. When Zach got out of the limo, she looked at him in desperation.

"Doesn't seem like there's much cover here," Zach said.

She hadn't noticed that the chauffeur had gotten out until he said, "These roads aren't traveled much. I'm sure the lady can get away with hiding behind the limo."

"You think I should pee on a public road?" Bri was mortified.

"I trust the driver knows what he's talking about," Zach replied. "We'll get back into the limo while you go."

Without another word, both Zach and the driver got back into the limo, leaving Bri standing on the side of the dirt road. She'd have gotten into the limo herself if her bladder hadn't been protesting so much.

Bri knew the only relief would come from emptying her bladder. And so, with both men back inside, she walked to the rear end of the limo, undid her jeans and pulled them and her panties down. She squatted behind the limo, using the bumper as a backrest and willed her bladder to relax enough so she could pee.

Relaxing hadn't come easy but once her bladder released, the urine flowed easily. Relieved, Bri gathered her panties and jeans and started to rise. As she stood, something snagged her panties. Her eyes darted to the gravel road. In the distance, she could see a plume of dust. A vehicle was heading their way. Bri tugged on her pants in another attempt to draw them up but the damned things wouldn't budge.

As the vehicle on the road drew closer, Bri tugged harder but could not get free. Her heart pounded as she considered merely abandoning her jeans and leaping into the limo as the dust plume grew larger and the car approached.

Bri was about to cry out when Zach suddenly appeared and dislodged her panties. She peered up at him and was struck by the calm look on his handsome face. "It was hooked on the license plate," he said. "Now, pull your pants up and get that sweet ass into the limo."

\* \* \* \*

Zach's cock was on full alert the moment he'd gotten a glimpse of Bri's ass. Soft, rounded and pink, it was all he could do not to run his hands over it. Instead, he dislodged her panties and saved her the embarrassment of having a passerby see her with her pants down.

Bri was clearly embarrassed. Her cheeks were flushed as she kept her eyes trained on the passing landscape for the rest of the trip. Zach wanted to say something but couldn't think of anything that didn't involve telling her just how sweet her ass was. Best friends didn't say stuff like that to each other. He'd fielded questions from women many times, mostly questions like, does my butt look big in this? But those kinds of questions came from women he was fucking and certainly did not call for an honest answer.

Bri had never been that sort though. Since they'd met, she never once mentioned issues she might have with her body. It was what made her different. She ate what she wanted and never made excuses for her healthy appetite. And then she'd take him on on the squash or tennis court. She made no bones about the fact she fully intended to best him and yet, heartily congratulated him if he won. Bri was the perfect

woman for Zach. Or at least she would have been if she hadn't been more attracted to women than men.

When the limo came to a stop and the driver announced they'd arrived, Zach swallowed his thoughts. "We're here."

Though Bri had yet to look at him directly, at least her lovely face wasn't flushed anymore.

The door Bri had been leaning on ripped open so quickly she almost fell out of the limo. She gasped as the wrinkled man peered past her to Zach.

"Hey, Zachary!" Edward Diamond's raspy voice filled the confines of the limo. "Was wondering when you'd get here. We've been partying since I arrived yesterday."

"Hi, Dad," he said. "I had things to finish up at the office."

"Yeah," Edward replied with a knowing grin. "Running the business can take over your life. I just hope you won't make the same mistakes I made. Life's too damn short for that." The smell of whiskey filled the limo as the old man turned his attention to Bri. His dark brown eyes examined her from head to toe before his gaze went back to Zach. "Hey," he said, tilting his head to indicate Bri, "she's a sexy thing."

Zach was about to reply when Bri's hand splayed on his father's chest and firmly pushed him back. "Excuse me," she said in a no-nonsense voice, much the way she'd talk to a drunken patron in her father's bar. "You're in my way."

Edward stepped back and gave Bri room to step out. When Zach got out, his father's eyes gleamed at him over the top of the limo. "She's a feisty bitch," he said. "I like that."

Bri glared at his father as she walked to the trunk of the limo and waited for the driver to unload their bags. "I can be

a hell of a lot feistier." While Bri said the words calmly, Zach knew the tone. She wasn't about to take any shit off the old man.

Edward's old eyes blazed. When she was out of earshot, he turned to Zach, giving an approving nod. "Bet she's a wild ride in the sack," he said as he winked.

Zach wasn't about to explain his relationship with Bri. Edward could never begin to understand how a man could be best friends with a woman. The fact Bri was gay wouldn't make a difference. As far as Edward was concerned, women were put on earth to please him. He'd never understand why Bri preferred the company of women.

"Dad," Zach said, not quite sure what words would come next. "How about letting Bri and I settle in and we'll catch up with you later."

The old man shook his head. "Not just yet. I want you to meet someone." His father twisted and called toward the ranch house. "Hey, Elaine!" he bellowed. "Come meet my middle son."

Zach moaned inwardly. His father's fifth divorce had only just been finalized and, even though the old man had retired, the settlement cost Diamond Industries millions. Surely his father hadn't already found a fifth wife.

"Don't howl at me!"

Zach looked toward the ranch house to see a silver-haired woman carefully walking down the porch steps. Her brilliant white short hair, cropped close to her pale round face, glinted in the sun as she leaned on her cane and slowly made her way toward them.

"I wasn't howling," Edward said with a respect Zach had never heard from his father before.

"Sure sounded like howling to me," Elaine said, her voice tight with anger.

"I just wanted you to meet my middle boy, Zachary."

Elaine's frown deepened. "And so you had to scream at me to come," she said as she limped toward them. "Not like I wouldn't have met them tonight at the party."

For the first time in his life, Zach watched his father cower. "I just thought you'd want to meet my son and his girlfriend."

Elaine's eyes impaled Zach from a distance. "Nice to meet you," she said and then turned back to the house.

As Zach watched the old woman limp back up the porch steps, Bri sidled up beside him. "Who was that?"

Zach shook his head. "Apparently her name is Elaine."

"She's my fiancée," Edward proclaimed with a measure of pride.

Zach bit back a snort. He glanced at Bri, whose brilliant eyes watched as the elderly woman struggled to get back into the house. Her gaze fell back to Zach's father.

"Congratulations," she said sincerely. "I wish you and Elaine all the very best."

Edward's bushy grey eyebrows rose. He seemed surprised by Bri's kind gesture. "Thank you."

While Bri knew Zach's father had been married several times, she had no clue about his family. The fact Edward had chosen an older woman to be his sixth wife shocked Zach.



The chauffeur cleared his throat, drawing Zach's attention. "I've been instructed to take your luggage to the Orchard Cottage."

"That's fine," Zach replied. "Go ahead." He turned back to his father. He was about to ask his father why he'd chosen Elaine for his next wife when the chauffeur spoke up again.

"The cottage reserved for you and your lady is a good distance away from the ranch house," he said. "Shall I—"

"Yes, yes," Zach said as he waved a dismissing hand. "Do what you have to do."

"Very well, sir. I'll take Ms. O'Ryan to the cottage so she can settle in and trust you'll find your way there."

Zach nodded absently as he continued to stare at his father.

Edward's brows fell low over his eyes. "Do you know where the Orchard Cottage is?"

"I'll find it," Zach replied. "What I want to know is what the fuck you're thinking! You've only just crawled out from under Samantha's claws and you want to get married again?"

Edward's steely brown eyes pegged Zach. "I don't have to explain myself to you."

"Yes, you fucking well do!" Zach replied. "When you settled the divorce with Samantha, Diamond Industries was stuck paying her a lump sum. As CEO, I had to explain the expense to the shareholders."

"That was the last time you'll ever have to explain anything to the shareholders on my behalf."

"I'd like to think so," Zach replied. "But you're getting married again."

"She doesn't care about my money."

Zach rolled his eyes. "Yeah, right."

Edward's bushy grey brows furrowed as his steely eyes glared at Zach. "Elaine is different," he said through clenched teeth. "She was my high school sweetheart. My father didn't approve of her because her family was Catholic. I had to let her go." Edward tore his gaze away and looked to the ranch house. His voice deepened with emotion. "I may be an old man, but the second she came back into my life, I felt like I was sixteen again."

Zach stared at his father. Had he seen tears in his old eyes the moment before he averted his gaze? "Dad?"

When Edward turned back to look at him, any sign of emotion was gone. His eyes blazed with anger as he pointed a feeble finger at Zach. "If it weren't for me, you and Max wouldn't be where you are today. I built Diamond Industries from the ground up and you landed in it because God made you my son. Don't ever think I'll allow you to judge my decisions."

Zach raised his hands in mock surrender. "Hey, I'm not judging you."

Edward's frown deepened. "Of course you are," he said. "The only difference between you and your older brother is that Alex had the balls to walk away."

Zach's heart thundered. He'd dedicated his life to Diamond Industries more so in spite of the old man than for his benefit. Words failed him as his father continued.

"I made you," he said, his voice low and ominous, "and I can break you. Don't ever forget that."

\* \* \* \*

Bri sprang off the overstuffed antique sleigh bed when Zach walked into the cottage.

"Can you believe this place?" she said enthusiastically. "It has everything."

"Does it?" Zach asked flatly.

Bri ignored his lack of interest. After all, Zach was used to the finest hotels when he wasn't languishing in his penthouse suite. Perhaps he'd see the cottage as roughing it. Yet she couldn't curb her enthusiasm. "And it's furnished in the most beautiful antiques," she went on as she approached the oak dresser with a beveled glass mirror. "Isn't this dresser beautiful? Your brother has an eye for antiques."

Zach sat down on the bed. When he gazed at her, she knew instantly there was more wrong than he'd ever want to admit. She sank down on the bed beside him and sighed. "Your father got to you again," she said knowingly. "Tell me."

Zach let out a long breath as he placed his elbows on his knees. He bowed his head and covered his eyes with his hands. "He's getting married again."

Bri's shoulders sagged. After having learned a lot about Zach's family in the past year, she wasn't sure why he cared what happened. But she knew Zach. "His getting married again shouldn't have too much impact on Diamond Industries."

Zach bolted up from the bed. He paced up and down the room before his blazing eyes fell on Bri. "Is that what you think?" he said, his handsome face flushed with anger. His

hands thumped his chest. "You think I'm worried about losing money to my father's latest conquest?"

Bri shrugged. "Aren't you? When your father's last marriage broke up, all you ever talked about was how much the divorce cost Diamond Industries. Considering your father's track record, no one would blame you for thinking another marriage will end up in another costly divorce."

Zach's chest deflated. "I wish the old horndog would just pay for sex."

He sat back down on the bed beside her but this time he was closer. His shoulder brushed hers and Bri felt her body ignite with electricity. She moved away slightly, just enough to break contact.

Yet the move drew Zach's attention. He looked at her. "Do I stink or something?"

Bri laughed nervously. "No, of course not," she replied. "I just like my space."

Zach's eyes widened. "Hell, was I in your space?" His eyes glistened with mischief as he shoved toward her.

"Yes, you were," she said as his thigh touched hers again. "And now you've done it again." She moved aside again, leaving an inch between them.

Zach quickly closed the distance. "What's wrong with my being close to you?"

"Nothing." But she moved a bit more to break contact yet again.

"Are you afraid of being manhandled?" Zach asked teasingly as he again closed the distance between them.

"I'm not afraid of anything," Bri replied as she moved away again. "And I'm certainly not afraid of you..."

Suddenly, Bri's butt slid off the edge of the bed. As her hands grappled in midair, Zach made an attempt to save her from the fall. Her fingers curled into his shirt and he tumbled after her, landing on top of her on the plush rug beside the bed.

"Are you okay?" they said in unison.

Bri closed her eyes and then slowly opened them. "I'm okay."

"Me too," Zach replied as his body splayed over hers.

He felt so good as his body rested on hers on the floor. She wasn't sure when she'd ever wanted a man more than she wanted Zach at that moment. She raised her hips and pressed against his groin. Zach placed his hands on either side of her head and pulled up slightly. He gazed down at her face, his eyes gleaming. He slowly lowered his face to hers and she parted her lips in anticipation.

Suddenly, the door burst open. "Zach!" Edward's booming voice echoed through the room.

"Damn!"

Bri wasn't sure which one of them said the word but Zach quickly rolled off her.

When Edward saw them on the floor, he snickered wickedly. "You can't fuck her on the bed?"

"I wasn't—"

"We're friends," Bri said, cutting Zach off, as she got up. "We just fell."

Edward's bushy grey eyebrows rose as he snorted. "Yeah, right." He turned to Zach. "Like you'd spend one night in close quarters with a woman like that," he pointed to Bri, "and not fuck her senseless."

Bri bristled. "What do you mean by a woman like that?"

Zach sighed heavily. "Never mind, Bri."

Oh, but she did mind. The old man had all but called her a slut. "If it's any of your business," she said stiffly, "Zach and I happen to be friends. Best friends."

Edward's dark brown eyes stabbed her. "Is that right?" he asked, his head bowing in mock respect. "No Diamond would spend a night with a woman in a cozy cottage like this and not have sex. So you'll have to pardon me for misunderstanding your relationship with Zach."

"Well," Bri replied, placing her hands on her hips, "maybe you don't know your sons as well as you think you do."

The old man's eyes roved over her from head to toe and then came back up to rest on her breasts. Bri fought the urge to raise her arms to cover them.

She shot a horrified look at Zach but he was already on the move. He stepped in front of her, his large frame blotting the old man out. "What do you want, Dad?"

"Max just arrived. He wants to talk to you about Alex's stag party tomorrow night."

When the old man left, Zach turned and looked down at Bri. "I'm sorry," he said. "My father has no manners."

"And no respect for women," she added.

Zach nodded in agreement. He braced his hands on her shoulders. "But you already know I'm nothing like him."

No, he wasn't. But his father brought up something she hadn't considered before. The Orchard Cottage was aptly named. It was situated in an apple orchard a long way from the ranch house.

And, as Edward said, it really was cozy. While the cottage had a fully appointed bathroom and a small kitchenette, the rest of it seemed to be built around the antique sleigh bed.

Exactly how would Bri manage to keep her hands off Zach for the next three nights?

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## Chapter 3

Max Diamond's eyes darkened as he peered through the den door to the kitchen. "Hell, bro, she's one gorgeous woman."

Zach followed his gaze to see Bri holding a glass of wine as she chatted amicably with the women in the kitchen. She'd chosen to wear a formfitting black t-shirt dress. Her long auburn hair was pulled back in a French braid. When someone said something that amused her, she tossed her head back and laughed, showing her long creamy-white throat.

Zach's cock tightened again. He'd been so damn close to making her his just a couple hours before. If it hadn't been for Edward's sudden intrusion, it might have happened.

"Yeah," Zach replied. "She is a beautiful woman."

"How long have you been with her?" Max asked.

As if sensing Zach's gaze, Bri turned her head and smiled at him. She raised her glass in a mock toast and tipped it to her full red lips. Zach's heart thundered in his chest. His mind filled with imagines of Bri naked, her legs wrapped around his waist as he drove his cock into her.

"Zach!"

He tore his eyes away from Bri and looked at his brother. Max was grinning from ear to ear. "I take it she's new to your life."

"Bri?" Zach said as he leaned back in the chair. "Naw. I've known her for a year or so."



Max's eyes widened. "You've been with that beauty for a year and I've never met her?"

Zach took a sip of his Jack Daniels. He let the fiery liquid scorch a path down his throat before he replied. "We're not sleeping together."

Max tipped his mug of beer to his lips. "Why in hell not?"  
"She's gay."

It took a few seconds for the words to sink in. Max took a long swig of his beer. When the two simple words settled into his brain, his cheeks puffed and his face reddened. His hands went to his throat in an effort to ease the ale down. When it cleared, he stared at his brother. "Are you serious?"

Zach nodded as he peered around at the other men in the den, hoping no one had overheard. "When I met her, she was involved with a woman named Dawn. It was a very ugly breakup. She's still recovering."

"So why the hell did you bring her with you for Alex's wedding?"

"Because I'm sick of the women who are so determined to get a piece of me. I'm taking a break."

"Yeah, right," Max said sarcastically.

Zach didn't expect Max to understand so he ignored the comment and went on. "Bri just wants friendship with me. She doesn't expect me to buy her expensive gifts or soothe her ego if she thinks she's getting fat. She's a formidable opponent at squash and tennis and she never puts on airs. She fully intends to win." Zach grinned. "And she often does."

"So you aren't tempted to bring her back to our side?"

Of course he was. He'd thought of little else since he'd first met Bri. But his younger brother didn't need to know that. "I have too much respect for her," he replied, averting his gaze so his brother couldn't see the lie in his eyes. "Bri's my best friend," Zach said evenly. "I wouldn't do anything to change her."

Max was about to reply when Edward called out over the chattering crowd of men in the den. "It's been decided to have Alex's stag party right here tomorrow night. Since most of us are staying here on the ranch, either in the ranch house or in the cottages available, it seems like the best thing to do since everyone can have a few drinks and not worry about driving."

Zach looked across the room. Alex was sitting by his father's side. His face looked pinched, like he wasn't so crazy about his father's plans. But when the men in the room all agreed, Alex offered a strained smile and nodded.

Zach shook his head. He barely knew his oldest brother. Alex was Edward's oldest son, born of his first marriage and, it seemed, largely forgotten as Edward quickly moved to his second marriage. While Edward was annoyed his first son didn't want a part in Diamond Industries, Zach had secretly admired his older brother for having the guts to strike out on his own. And he'd done well with his ranch and even better when he found love with Leigh-Ann Percival, Edward's former administrative assistant.

Zach's gaze went back to the kitchen. Bri was smiling broadly as she tipped a glass of wine to her lips. As if sensing

his gaze, she turned her head to look back at him. She lifted her glass in a silent toast. Zach smiled and nodded lightly.

When the doorbell rang, Zach saw his future sister-in-law run to the door. "John!" And then he heard Leigh squeal. Moments later, a burly man, dressed like Zach imagined a cowboy would, complete with a worn Stetson, walked into the room, with Leigh splayed over his shoulder. "Corralled a heifer for ya," he said as he gently placed Leigh on Alex's lap.

Laughter ensued as someone handed the mammoth a beer. He tipped his Stetson back over his brow and grinned before he tipped the bottle to his lips. In true cowboy fashion, he wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "How in hell is the party going?"

Alex's hands wrapped around Leigh as he looked up at the man. "It was fine until you arrived, you big oaf."

"Well, I am your best man," he replied. He turned his attention to everyone in the room. "Hey, I'm John Barker. Folks in these parts call me B.J."

Zach rolled his eyes. The guy can't be for real.

"Shouldn't that be J.B.?" Much to Zach's amazement, Bri had asked the question.

"No, ma'am," he replied. "Guess I should have explained that most folks call me Big John."

Bri chuckled softly. "I can see why."

Zach set his beer on the table in front of him and watched the exchange between Bri and Alex's best man. His fingers curled into the arms of the chair as Big John walked toward Bri, his eyes dark, his voice low. He placed his huge paws on

her shoulders and bent to whisper something in her ear. She flushed and giggled.

She giggled!

In all the time Zach had known Bri, she never once giggled in his presence. And he'd have loved to hear her giggle ... just for him. He'd imagined her doing so after a long lovemaking session, when he'd pull her against him before they'd fall asleep, depleted and exhausted.

But Zach knew something about Bri that Big John didn't and it irked him to no end that this monstrosity of a man could make her giggle like a schoolgirl.

Zach shot up from the chair. "Time to turn in," he announced.

Edward frowned as he checked his watch. "It's only ten," he said.

"It's been a long day," Zach said. He took Bri's hand and pried her out of the mammoth's grip. "Bri needs her rest."

"I do?"

"Yes," he said between clenched teeth, "you do."

\* \* \* \*

Bri struggled to stay in step with Zach as they walked back to the cabin. "What the hell was that all about?" she asked.

Zach didn't look at her as he replied. "It's late," he said, his tone clipped.

"It's not that late," Bri said. "I didn't want to leave."

Zach shook his head. "Yeah, everyone knew why too."

Bri stopped in mid-stride. What the hell is wrong with him?  
"Excuse me?"

Zach quickly turned and moved toward her. He took a tissue from his pocket and reached out to her. "Let me wipe some of Big John's drool off your face."

Bri brushed his hand away and took a step back. She gazed at him, not sure if she could wrap her mind around the situation. Is Zach jealous?

"I don't know what your problem is," she said, "but your behavior tonight was very unbecoming."

Zach took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He turned and began to walk again, this time slowly. "I don't want you to do something you'll regret for the rest of your life," he said.

Bri's heart sank. He wasn't jealous. He was concerned ... like a brother might be concerned for his little sister. After breaking up with Don, she had no intention of ever putting herself out there again ... at least not for just anyone. If only Zach knew she was willing to take a chance with him.

Bri sighed as she followed him into the cabin. Fat chance of it ever happening if Zach continued to see her as his little sister.

She watched as Zach rounded the massive bed and walked into the tiny kitchenette. When he opened the countertop refrigerator, he pulled out two bottles of imported beer and quickly opened them. He set one on the counter while he took a long swig from the other. Knowing he'd opened the beer for her, Bri approached. She took the bottle and leaned her back against the counter as she took a small sip.

They stood in silence for a short time before she spoke. "I really appreciate the fact you're concerned about me," Bri

said. Unable to meet his eyes, she stared ahead of her. "But I'm a big girl and the last thing I need is someone deciding who I can and can't talk to."

"You were asking for trouble."

Bri bit back an angry retort. "He's your brother's best man," she said through clenched teeth.

"Sure," Zach said. "But that doesn't mean he's right for you. I saved you from making a mistake you'd regret for the rest of your life."

Bri's head began to swim. "You saved me?" she repeated his words, more so they would sink into her head than for Zach's benefit. She turned and glared at him. "I never asked you to save me from anything—"

"What side of the bed do you want?" he asked as he pushed off the counter and walked toward the bedroom.

Bri gasped angrily. "Don't change the subject!" She followed him with every intention of taking him on. But when she looked at the large sleigh bed, she gulped. "Isn't there another bedroom?"

"Nope," Zach said, gesturing to the bed with his bottle of beer. "This is it."

"So we have to sleep in the same bed?" Bri wasn't sure the voice she heard was her own because she'd never squeaked like that before.

Zach's dark eyes settled on her. Her heart jumped, her body sizzled. "You have a problem with it?"

Bri swallowed a lump in her throat. "No, of course not." She smiled up at Zach, trying not to let her gaze falter. "We're best friends," she said. "Why shouldn't we share a

bed?" She turned to retrieve her bags. "I get the bathroom first," she said as she ran into the room and closed the door. As she washed up and changed into her nightgown, Bri knew she had to get a grip. Sleeping in the same bed as Zach shouldn't bother her as much as it did. And yet...

With her robe cinched tightly around her waist, she walked out of the bathroom and made a beeline for the bed. She pushed back the covers before she took her robe off and quickly hopped in, pulling them up to her chin before she gazed at Zach.

He drained the last of the beer from the bottle and placed it on the antique dresser. "I sleep in the nude," he said. "But I guess I can keep my briefs on for one night."

Bri's throat went dry. "Whatever," she said as she rolled onto her side, showing him her back.

She heard Zach go into the bathroom, heard the rush of water and then, soon after, heard him come out. Her fingers dug into her pillow when she felt the mattress give way to his weight. His spicy scent filled her senses as he sighed softly. Within seconds, his breathing slowed into long, rhythmic breaths.

He was asleep already? Bri wanted to grab her pillow and pummel him. How could he be so comfortable with her when every fiber of her being ached for him?

Bri struggled to relax. She was certain she'd never fall asleep. When sleep finally overtook her, she felt as though she was sinking into a deep, black hole. She was terrified, grappling to save herself. And then Zach was there, pulling

her to safety, holding her close, telling her nothing bad would ever happen to her again.

At first, she took comfort in his touch but she wanted more. Her hands ran over his sinewy body, pulling him closer to her. She sighed when she felt the length of his body against her. His mouth closed over hers, drawing her into an explosive kiss. As her hands slid over his back, gently exploring every muscle, she kissed him back.

Bri gasped when Zach cupped her breast, his fingers pinching her sensitive nipple. His mouth ripped from her lips and scorched a path to her throat as his hand slid down her body. When it stopped at her core, Bri opened her legs and arched her back, encouraging him to touch her.

Zach chuckled softly as he nuzzled her ear. "Impatient, aren't you?"

"When have you known me to be patient?" she asked through clenched teeth.

"Never," he replied. "And for the first time since I met you, I'm glad."

Bri would have replied but the air whooshed from her lungs as Zach's fingers opened her and slid over her moist core. He stroked softly at first, grazing over her engorged clit with a featherlike touch. And then his strokes grew stronger. He planted a kiss on her lips before he rose and crawled between her thighs. He knelt there, staring down at her as his fingers continued to stroke over her moist clit.

His other hand slid over one thigh until it met her core. As she felt one finger press against her slit, she gasped. Her hips



bucked up, encouraging him to explore further but Zach pulled away. "Don't rush me," he scolded her.

Bri's hips settled back on the bed and Zach's finger returned to her slit. Her mind was reeling with the pressure on her clit so when she felt him open her slightly, she cried out.

Zach shook his head. "You just can't wait, can you?"

Before Bri could reply, Zach shoved two fingers inside her. He immediately began to pump, pushing in as far as he could before he'd pull his fingers all the way out of her.

Bri quickly found the rhythm and moved with it, lifting her hips to meet the thrust of his fingers, lowering them when he pulled out. With each stroke, her body tightened that much more. And when he leaned over and closed his lips over one ripe nipple, her body gave way to a climax to end all climaxes. She screamed as her body shuddered and reeled against him. Her fingers dug into his back, pulling him down over her, holding him close, gasping for air ... loving him with all her heart.

With daylight came reality. Bri was reluctant to let go of the sweet dream she'd had the night before as she slowly woke. She wished for the day to be over so she could go back to bed and have more dreams about Zach making love to her.

"Wake up, sleepyhead," Zach said as he stood over her.

She opened one eye and then the other. "Why should I?" she asked. "I was having the most delightful dream."

Zach grinned. "I made a pot of coffee," he said as he leaned down and held a mug under her nose.

Bri blindly reached for the mug but he held it above her head. "You have to get up first."

She moaned and sat up, pushing her back against the headboard. "Okay, I'm up," she said as she reached out. "Give me the mug or I'll rip you limb from limb."

Zach laughed as he handed the mug to her and sat on the side of the bed. She took a sip of coffee and looked up at him. "Did you sleep well?"

He grinned. "Like a baby. You?"

Bri's eyes hooded as she looked into the mug. "Yeah," she said as lightly as she could manage. "I slept well too."

"No bad dreams?"

Bri's eyes shot to his. "No."

"Good dreams then?"

Lord, had she made noises through the night? Did he know she was dreaming about him? "Why would you think I had any dreams at all?"

Zach shrugged nonchalantly. "No reason." He drained his mug and got up. "Get your butt in gear," he said. "We're expected at the ranch house for breakfast in half an hour."

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## Chapter 4

Dressed in a simple white sundress, Bri looked like a goddess. In her rush to shower, she didn't take the time to do anything with her hair and let the long auburn tresses flow wildly around her shoulders. When they entered the ranch house, everyone, men and women alike, stopped to stare at the beauty at Zach's side.

Zach beamed with pride. Bri was a natural beauty. Better than that, her beauty went deep down into her soul. Any man would be proud to have her by his side.

Add to that, how giving she'd been the night before. Sure, she thought she was dreaming. But Zach had touched her in ways he never thought possible. She melted under his touch and gave herself to him so freely. The experience left him feeling there was hope they'd make a sexual connection. Perhaps Bri wasn't turned off by a man's touch if she felt he was the right man. Maybe he, Zachary Diamond, could change her ... make her leave lesbianism behind for the love of a good man.

"Bri!" Leigh said as she approached them. "So glad you're here. We need your expertise in the kitchen."

"Why?" Bri asked. "What's up?"

"I've never had to make breakfast for so many people before," Leigh said in exasperation. "I'm overwhelmed."

"It's not nearly as hard as you think," Bri said. "Let me show you."

Zach watched the sway of Bri's hips as she followed his future sister-in-law into the kitchen.

A slap on his shoulder drew Zach's attention. "She's hot," Edward said.

Zach nodded absently. "Yeah, she is."

"Why haven't you brought her back to fight for our team?"

Jolted into reality, Zach stared at his father. "What?"

"Max told me about Bri," Edward said, grinning like the Cheshire cat.

Zach's eyes searched the room until he located his younger brother. Max returned his gaze with a sorrowful shake of his head. No doubt Edward suspected Max knew something and eventually got it out of him. Max was known as the pushover of the family. He always wore his heart on his sleeve. Edward would have taken advantage of that fact and pumped him for information.

Zach should have been angry at his brother, but he took pity on him and gave a nod ... a silent message that all was well. Things could be worse. At least Bri wasn't there to hear his father.

"What did Max tell you?"

Shit!

Zach's heart almost stopped when he heard Bri's voice. He turned to find her standing in the living room doorway, holding a carafe of coffee. A wisp of auburn hair fell over her forehead as her brows knit low over her eyes. She walked into the room and carefully put the carafe on the coffee table. When she turned to Zach, the air around them crackled with tension.

Zach searched his brain for something to say ... something other than what she'd asked about. He came up with nothing and continued to stare at Bri like the idiot he was.

She turned her attention to Edward. "What did Max tell you?"

Zach shot his father a withering gaze. Surely the old man knew enough to keep his mouth shut.

"You're a lesbian," Edward said easily.

Zach stood corrected. He closed his eyes as his father's words fell on the crowd in the living room. When he reopened them, Bri had gone completely white. Her hands went to her throat and her green eyes glistened.

"Oh," she replied. "Well..." She gazed at the people around her. "I don't know what to say. I guess all of you are as surprised as I am."

Zach took a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to calm himself while his kid brother sheepishly left the room. Damn you, Max!

"Bri," he said as he took a step toward her. "Don't be angry."

She put her hand up, halting him as she took a step back. "I'm not sure I want to hear from you right now." She looked around at the people in the room. "In fact, I think I'm going to leave."

Alex spoke up for the first time. "No one cares, Bri. Don't walk out on our account."

"I care," she said vehemently. She looked at Zach, her eyes blazing with anger and pain. "I care," she repeated softly.

Zach winced and looked at the floor as Bri brushed passed him. When he felt a finger poked in his chest, he looked up to find Leigh staring up at him, her brows knit together, her eyes fiery.

"If you don't go after her and make things right, I'm going to kick your ass!"

Make things right? Bri had just been outed. Just how was he supposed to fix that?

"What do you expect me to do?"

Everyone in the room had an opinion, all speaking at once. Alex grabbed his arm and led him out of the room. "I don't have the answer," he said as he pushed Zach toward the door. "All I know is I'm getting married in a couple days and I'll be damned if you're going to cast a shadow over the wedding."

"Just how would I do that?"

Alex opened the door and rested his hands on Zach's shoulders. "Leigh likes Bri. If Bri's unhappy, Leigh's unhappy. I don't want my bride unhappy on our wedding day." Alex pushed Zach out the door. "Don't care how you do it but I expect you to fix the fucking problem!"

\* \* \* \*

Bri wiped steam off the bathroom mirror and gazed at her reflection. Even a long, hot shower couldn't wash away the memory of everyone at the ranch house staring at her. And what she couldn't understand was why Zach thought she was gay in the first place.

And what of their friendship? Had Zach based it upon the fact he thought she was gay? Did he see her as safe because he thought he'd never be expected to sleep with her?

Worse than that, all these months, she'd been hoping he'd take an interest in her. She'd been waiting for him to finally realize they could have more than just friendship.

When the mirror steamed up again, Bri grabbed a towel and wiped it away. She took a step back and looked at her naked reflection in the mirror. She was short and her breasts were tiny mounds. Her love for sports kept her body trim and well muscled. But when she looked at herself with a critical eye, she could see why Zach wasn't attracted to her. His women were always tall, willowy and perfect in every way.

Bri's eyes focused on a tiny mole just below her navel. Men like Zach didn't want to see moles or any other imperfections.

She wrapped a towel around her body and padded out to the bedroom. Don had wanted perfection. He wanted her to be so much more than she was. A real estate developer, he often entertained rich clients. She tried to be the woman he wanted her to be. But when she overheard that he was embarrassed she was a simple bartender, she faced him with it. He couldn't deny it and she knew she could no longer play the game.

Bri sighed. Everything changes and everything stays the same. She thought her relationship with Zach was safe. She'd never acted on her impulse to draw him into her bed. Their friendship was a good thing. Or so she thought.

She pulled a brush out of her luggage and sat on the side of the bed. As she brushed her damp hair, she pondered her next move.

What now?

And then she had an epiphany. She had to push her anger aside ... not to mention all the questions that came to mind. What mattered the most was their friendship had been based on his misconception. He thought she was a safe bet. A female friend who wouldn't expect anything from him.

So what if she suddenly did want something from him?

Bri snickered as she put her brush back into her bag. It wasn't like their friendship could be saved. Once he knew for sure she wasn't a lesbian, he would probably end their relationship and never see her again. So why not take what she could get this weekend? She could put Zach through his paces and then, when they got back to Toronto, put him out to pasture.

\* \* \* \*

It was almost noon when Zach walked into the cottage. He had to admit, he put off facing Bri for as long as he possibly could. He'd gone for a long walk, trying to come up with some way to apologize to her.

But he knew he had to face her ... sooner rather than later.

When he walked into the cottage, all the shades were drawn. His hand fumbled in the darkness for a light switch.

"Don't turn the light on," Bri said, her voice dark and dusky.



Zach froze for a moment, unsure. Eventually, his hand fell to his side as he closed the door behind him. "I can't see where I'm going."

"Lock the door and follow my voice," she said.

Zach's hand flicked the deadbolt on the door before he took a careful step forward. "I don't blame you for being angry," he said, hands splayed ahead of him in the dark. "In fact, if I were you, I'd kill me."

"Would you?" Bri asked, before chortling. She was clearly amused by his statement. Then her voice went low again. "Murder is too good for you."

Zach took a few more steps before his shins hit the side of the bed.

"Stop there!"

He did. This was crazy. No matter how much she'd been humiliated, he didn't like being treated this way. "Now what?" he said through clenched teeth, unsure of how much longer he'd entertain Bri's demands.

"Drop your pants."

Zach laughed out loud. "I'm sorry," he said. "I thought you said—"

"I did," Bri replied. "Do it!"

Zach sighed. Okay. All right. He supposed he had it coming. He'd drop his pants, the lights would suddenly come on and several women would point and laugh. If this is what Bri had to do to get past her anger, so be it.

His fingers undid the belt buckle and slid the zipper down before he pushed his pants and briefs to his ankles. He closed his eyes as the cool air in the room circled his sleeping cock.

He sensed, rather than heard, Bri approach.

Any minute now the lights would go on and he'd have to face humiliation...

His body lurched when he felt a soft finger touch the tip of his cock.

"Bri," he said softly, "don't toy with me."

"I wouldn't dream of it," she replied as her fingers curled around his cock and gently massaged.

He struggled to hold his stance as her warm breath fanned him. Okay, if this was a set up, the lights had to go on now ... they'd all have a good laugh at his expense, maybe have a few drinks ... and then he'd take a cold shower.

But the game didn't end. Bri wasn't ready to let him off the hook just yet. In fact, she seemed far from it as her tongue touched the tip of his ripe cock.

Damn!

Bri wrapped her fingers around the base of his cock as she closed her mouth over the tip. Zach winced as her teeth teased the tip before she opened her mouth and took him inside. Her hand massaged his balls and played against the base of his shaft as her tongue laved his cock, sucking, pulling and sucking again.

Zach's curled his fingers into her hair. Her long tresses felt cool between his fingers while his cock heated to the boiling point. When her mouth moved over him, his fingers tightened on her head and he bucked against her lips, forcing her to take every bit of his engorged cock.

Bri made a muffled sound and he felt her hands press against his thighs. When he released her head, she quickly

pulled off him and fell back on the bed. By now, his eyes had adjusted to the low light in the cottage. He stood over Bri as she pressed both her hands over her eyes.

"Bri," he said softly. He stepped out of his jeans and briefs and lay down beside her on the bed. He laid on his side, sinking his elbow into the soft bedding as he rested his head on his hand. "Don't cry. Everything will be all right."

Bri's hands fell away from her face. Her eyes gleamed like emeralds as she stared up at him. "I'm not crying, you idiot." She rose and pushed him back onto the bed. Her fingers curled around the hem of his shirt. As she yanked the shirt over his head and tossed it aside, her breasts were a mere inch away from his lips. "Your cock just about choked me," she said through clenched teeth.

"I'm sorry," he said. He wasn't sincere and he expected she knew it. He loved how his cock felt against the velvet touch of her tongue. No one would blame him for wanting ... needing ... more.

"I don't care," she said as she crawled on top of him, bracing her knees on either side of his hips. She poised herself over his cock before she bent over and touched her mouth to his. It was a slow kiss, filled with the promise of what was to come.

When Zach's impatience got the better of him, he braced his hands on her hips. He wanted to pull her down against him so his cock could finally sink into her pussy. But Bri quickly pushed his hands away.

"No! I'm calling the shots," she said vehemently. "I haven't even decided if I want you to fuck me."

Zach bit back a retort. It would be so easy to simply overpower her, push her beneath him and fill her pussy with his hungry cock. But Zach had never forced a woman in his life and he wasn't about to start now, no matter how much his cock ached to fill her.

Zach reluctantly let his arms fall to his sides.

Bri moved carefully over him. "Good," she said. "I'm glad you understand."

Did he? Zach wasn't so sure. But he wasn't about to mess things up now. Not if it meant he would finally know Bri intimately.

Bri adjusted herself, letting her thighs sink lower over his ripe cock. Her hands roved over his chest, her fingers curling in the smattering of hair. She rocked her hips over his cock as her fingers pinched and kneaded his nipples. She lowered her body slightly, just enough for his cock to slide into the moisture of her pussy but not enough to allow him to penetrate.

Zach grimaced. He wasn't sure how much more he could take.

But then Bri lowered a little more, this time letting his cock touch her slit. Her body quivered over him. She was just as affected as he was. His hunger for her grew but he reined himself in, knowing that owning her, body and soul, was only a matter of time.

"Do you like that?" she asked, her voice barely audible.

His hands went to her hips and held her firmly. He was done with her teasing. When she lowered over him again, he

fully intended to fill her. "Yes," he said through clenched teeth. "You know I do."

Bri leaned forward, bracing her hands on either side of his head. Her tiny breasts dangled just over his face. "What about my breasts?" she asked. "Do you like them?"

"Yes," he said as he attempted to lick one of her nipples.

She pulled back. "Liar," she said. "I've seen the women you go out with. You like big boobs. Mine are not the kind you like."

Zach gazed up at the perfect white orbs. Small, yes, but perky with dark, erect nipples that begged for his touch. When he reached up and gently stroked one nipple, Bri closed her eyes and tossed her head back. Her hips faltered, falling closer to his need as she enjoyed his touch. The moment his cock felt her hot slit, his hips bucked upward. Bri cried out when his cock opened her slightly. She tried to move off him but his hands fell to her hips and held her firmly in place.

Zach could sense her fear. His hands slowly slid up her back, gently massaging. "Don't be afraid, Bri. You know I'd never do anything to hurt you."

Her body went still. She pushed up, her thighs on either side of his hips the only contact they had. As she sank down over his cock, she raised her arms over her head. She was tight, almost too tight but Bri pressed down over him anyway. She threw her head back, wincing as his cock stretched her inner folds to accommodate him.

When a low moan escaped her lips, Zach reached up to assure her. But her eyes opened, blazing down at him as she brushed his hands away. She started to move over him,

slowly raising her hips until his cock was almost out of her and then settling back down over him. With each move, she moaned again and her body shivered. Zach wasn't sure how much more he could take.

She leaned forward, bracing her hands on either side of his head as her hips undulated over him. His hands went to her hips and this time she didn't protest. His fingers dug into her flesh, slamming her against him with every stroke.

When she screamed her release, his cock gave way and pumped his white-hot juice into her. She collapsed over him as her core squeezed every last bit he had to give.

His arms wrapped around her, holding her against him as their bodies trembled with aftershocks.

When she finally caught her breath, she pressed her lips against his ear. "I hate you."

"No, you don't."

Bri rolled off him. She snuggled against his side. "Yes, I do."

Zach curled an arm around her and held her close. "Shut up."

She did. In fact, she promptly fell asleep.

Zach sighed as he looked at the sleeping woman beside him. Bri had never been more beautiful than she was at that moment. Naked, her tiny breasts pressed against his side, the riot of auburn hair cascading over her face and shoulders. Her cheeks were pink, her lips ruby red ... the picture of a woman who'd been thoroughly loved.

Zach leaned forward to touch his lips to her forehead. He grinned when she sleepily waved her hand, as though he was a pesky fly.

Best to let her be for now. She needed her rest. And so did he. His body felt depleted after loving Bri. As his eyes closed, he promised himself he wouldn't sleep long.

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## Chapter 5

"Wake up."

No. She didn't want to wake up. She was having the most delightful dream.

"Bri, it's almost seven o'clock."

Bri struggled to open her eyes. She gazed up at Zach as he leaned over her. "A.m. or p.m.?"

"P.m.," he replied. "I'm going to Alex's stag party."

Bri yawned. "Okay," she said. "Have fun."

When she rolled onto her side, Zach's hands closed over her hips and gently shook her. "But Elaine is having a party for Leigh."

Bri didn't care. Who the fuck is Elaine anyway?

"Elaine is my father's fiancée."

Bri's eyes opened wide. She hadn't realized she asked the question out loud. And now that she was fully awake, there was something else she needed to deal with. She jumped out of bed and glared at Zach, who was fully clothed and ready to leave. "I'm still angry at you for telling Max that I'm gay."

"I know and you have every right to be angry. If I'd known Max would tell my father, I never would have confided in him."

"That's not the point," she said. "You need to know—"

When someone knocked on the door ... or rather, pounded on the door ... Bri grabbed the sheet off the bed and held it in front of her.

"That'll be Max," Zach said. "Run into the bathroom."



Bri did, the sheet dragging behind her. She grimaced when the bathroom door would not close tightly and then discovered part of the sheet was caught in it. The door suddenly opened just a crack as Zach's hand pushed the sheet inside before it slammed closed.

Bri gathered the sheet around her and sat on the toilet. Her heart ached. Even if Zach had finally figured out she wasn't gay, he had no intention of sharing it with his family. She knew she should be angry.

And shit, she was.

But right now, at this very moment, as she sat in the bathroom listening to the muffled voices on the other side of the door, she felt heartsick. She realized in the year she'd been friends with Zach, she had never once met anyone in his family. Was there a reason for it? Did Zach feel she didn't measure up to the Diamond standard?

After a few minutes of silence, Bri opened the door slightly and peeked out. Zach had left with his brother. She let the sheet fall off her as she walked out of the bathroom. She caught a corner as it fell away from her. Gathering the sheet into a ball, she threw it onto the bed. Anger replaced the inadequacy she'd felt earlier.

She was Brianna O'Ryan! She'd never let any man treat her as a castoff. If Zach thought he could fuck her and then discard her without consequences, he had another think coming.

Bri sat on the side of the bed. She had to come up with a way to show Zach just how little she cared about him. Her

heart lurched. Just how could she do that when she loved him with every fiber of her being?

Bri pushed that thought aside. She had to move beyond her feelings and show Zach that he could not treat her like he treated all the other women in his life.

But how?

When the phone rang, she sighed heavily. She needed to think, damn it! The last thing she needed right now was to talk to any of Zach's family. Since no one she knew had the cottage number, she realized damn well it had to be one of Zach's family.

Bri broke down and picked it up on the sixth or seventh obnoxious ring. "Yes, what?" she said impatiently.

"You sound like a woman scorned," Elaine said.

Bri stamped down her anger and tried very hard to make her voice sound light. "No," she said cheerfully. "Not at all. I was just in the middle of something."

"I hope it's not so important that you can't attend Leigh's bachelorette party tonight."

"To be honest, I'm not sure I'm up for it."

"Oh, but you have to," Elaine said. "When I discovered Edward hired a stripper for Alex's party, I hired a male stripper for Leigh's. What's good for the goose is good for the gander."

Bri chuckled. "Does Edward have any idea what he's getting into when he marries you?"

"Of course not," Elaine replied. "But you didn't answer my question. Are you coming to Leigh's party?"

Bri thought for a moment and then, a wonderfully wicked idea occurred to her.

"No," Bri said before she had time to really consider it. "I think I'll take a pass on the party."

When she got off the phone, Bri flew into action. First she checked her purse and counted the money in her wallet. And then she rummaged through her luggage. She chuckled to herself. If Zach wouldn't listen to her, she'd make him take notice of her once and for all.

She paused briefly, wondering if her plan was too far over the top. What if Zach still wouldn't take her seriously?

Bri dismissed her concerns. She might make a fool of herself but there wouldn't be anyone she'd ever run into again after this weekend.

\* \* \* \*

Bri shivered as she waited in the shadows by the ranch house for what seemed like hours. Inside, Alex's stag party was in full swing. The house was rocking with loud music and raunchy laughter. The one time she got up the nerve to peek into a window, she'd seen Alex, his face drawn, as the men around him laughed heartily, everyone drinking beer.

Bri felt a pang of guilt. Alex was clearly not enjoying the stag party. And here she was, about to make it a lot more interesting than it already was.

When she saw headlights on the road, she watched as the car slowed to turn into the lane. The softly glowing light on the top of the car confirmed it was a taxi ... just what she'd been waiting for.

When the cab pulled up to the ranch house, Bri scurried out of the shadows to meet it. She watched as a woman wearing a long trench coat stepped out of the cab. She cursed when the heels of her bright red stilettos sank into the gravel. "I hate this fucking place!" she said as her brightly painted lips reflected in the dim light from the house.

"Then you have no reason to stay," Bri said as she stepped forward.

"Yeah, right," the woman replied.

"I mean it," Bri said as she pulled a wad of money from her pocket. "I've got three hundred dollars here. Take it and go home."

The woman snorted, though, Bri noticed, she held up a finger to the taxi driver. "I'm supposed to get five hundred for this gig tonight."

Bri took a step closer and examined the woman. In spite of a heavy layer of makeup, she didn't look a day older than eighteen. Suddenly Bri understood.

"You're a small-town girl trying to escape, aren't you?"

"Why the fuck would you care?" she said, confirming Bri's suspicions.

"Look," she said, pointing to the ranch house, "if you go in there, you'll be subject to a lot of older men leering at you as you take your clothes off. They don't care about you, they just want to see you naked and then, they'll laugh and make dirty jokes about which one is more worthy of you."

The young woman looked stricken. "This is my first gig. I just want to make enough money to get the fuck out of the small town I'm living in."

"Trust me," Bri said. "Stripping isn't the answer. You've heard of Diamond Industries, haven't you?"

When the girl nodded, Bri went on. "I happen to be a friend of Zachary Diamond. If you can get enough money together to get to Toronto, I'll hook you up with a job."

Okay, she was stretching it a little. If nothing else, Bri would make sure this girl had a job at O'Ryan's Pub and a place to live.

"You don't even know me."

Bri nodded. "I know. What's your name?"

"Bambi."

How was it Bri hadn't seen this one coming? "No, I mean your real name."

"It really is Bambi," she insisted. "Bambi Van der Wagersmit."

"All right then," Bri said. She opened the passenger side door of the taxi and asked the driver for a pen and paper. She quickly wrote her name and phone number down and handed it to Bambi. "Call me when you're ready to live in Toronto. I'll help you get settled."

"Are you serious?" Bambi asked when she looked at the scrap of paper.

"I am." She held the money out to Bambi again. "Take the three hundred dollars and go home."

This time, Bambi didn't hesitate. She took the money. As she turned to get back into the cab, Bri spoke up again.

"Hey, Bambi."

The girl looked back. "Yes?"

"Can I have your trench coat?"

Bambi's eyes narrowed. "You got another hundred bucks?"

"No," Bri replied. "I'm tapped out."

Bambi hesitated for only a second before you took the coat off. "Oh, what the heck," she said as she tossed the coat to Bri.

Bri bit back a chuckle when the would-be stripper revealed a cheesy French maid outfit, complete with black fishnet stockings.

Bambi looked down at herself, realizing how ridiculous she looked. She shrugged. "I was told what to wear by the guy who hired me."

Bri nodded as the young woman crawled into the cab. That would be Edward ... the dirty old man.

As the cab sped away, Bri ran to back into the shadows.

\* \* \* \*

"Believe me," Max said, holding his beer bottle up as he gestured, "I wouldn't have said word one to Dad if I thought he'd repeat it in front of everyone."

Zach's eyes focused on the glass of whiskey and water he held on his lap while men around them talked and laughed. As the youngest in the Diamond family, Max was a shining example of a spoiled child. Case in point, he didn't want to take responsibility for the embarrassment Bri had suffered even though he knew well and good telling his father anything was a risk.

Then again, who was really to blame? Zach lifted the glass to his lips and took a small sip before he replied. "I never should have told you about Bri."

As the stag party went into full swing, Zach sat quietly, thinking of Bri. His cock hardened just thinking about the sex they'd shared. How she'd come to him and given him all she had. Yes, she was angry about being outed in front of his family and she had every right to be. But if what happened last night was a prime example of how she exacted revenge, Zach was looking forward to pissing her off again ... and again ... and again.

A pang of guilt settled in his gut. He knew Bri wanted to talk to him before he left for the stag party. But he needed time to let what had happened between them settle. He was sure she'd have regrets and swear it would never happen again. That was the last thing Zach wanted to hear. He hoped, by giving her some time to think about it, she'd decide differently.

Zach snapped to attention when Max grabbed his arm. "Holy hell!" Max yelled. "Is that the stripper Dad hired?"

Zach looked over his shoulder and located the subject of his brother's exclamation. Dressed in a bulky trench coat, the stripper's face was covered with what looked like the kind of sheer fabric one might put over a window ... perhaps even the window of his cottage.

Zach's eyes narrowed as a few of the men escorted her to the living room. He didn't have to see the woman's gait, the certain sway of her hips, to know it was Bri.

But why? What the fuck was she trying to prove?

Edward jumped up and grabbed the stripper's arm. "About time you got here," he said as he pulled her toward his eldest son. Alex was sitting on a bar stool on the far side of the

living room. Zach shook his head as his father grinned widely. "This is my wedding gift to you, my boy," the old man said. Edward lifted his thumb in the air, a signal to someone to start the music. "Show us what you've got, girl!" Edward said as he backed away, his hands arms held wide open as the music blared.

She stood still for a moment ... as though she wasn't quite sure what to do. Zach grinned as he settled back in his chair. The upbeat music finally seemed to settle over her and she began to move slowly. With her back to Zach, he could only see her arms moving over the front of her. When the trench coat fell off her shoulders, he gulped. Wearing bikini underwear and, from the back, what looked like just a bit of a bra, Zach wasn't so sure he'd let Bri go through with the charade. Every fiber of his being wanted to leap from the chair and drag her out of the ranch house.

Still, something inside him insisted he wait. Bri twirled around, suddenly showing Alex her rear end but facing Zach. Through the makeshift veil, Zach caught her gaze. Her body gyrated to the music as she looked at him. The men in the room whopped and whistled as she ran her hands up her torso and cupped her breasts.

Zach's cock hardened as she watched her. It was almost as if she preformed this dance for him alone. And yet, he was aware of the other men in the room.

How far should he let her go?

Her eyes challenged him, as if daring him to let her continue.



All right. Let's see just how far she'll go. He turned away from her and reached for his drink. His eyes hooded as he took a sip and then he kept his focus on his glass as he replaced it on the small table beside him.

When he looked back, Bri's eyes darkened. She accepted his challenge and took it up another notch. She turned back to Alex and moved toward him. Zach watched as her arms reached behind her and her fingers settled over the hooks of her bra.

Zach held out, his body taunt as she slowly released one of the hooks. She boldly walked up to Alex and splayed her legs on either side of him as her fingers undid the second hook of her bra.

Zach felt for Alex. He had no interest in a stripper and averted his gaze, frowning deeply, while Bri stood over him.

Thankfully, Bri sensed Alex's discomfort and pulled away from him. Her body moved to the beat of the music as she made her way toward Zach. Everyone in the room hollered and whistled as she stopped in front of him. "Take it off! Take it off!"

Zach had had enough and he knew by the look in Bri's eyes that she had too. He got up and grabbed her arm. He pulled her away with him as the men in the room jeered and hissed. She fought him every step of the way. When he pulled her outside, he reached for the ridiculous veil over her face and tore it away from her face.

"When we get back to the cottage, you'll have to put that back up in the window."

"Screw you!" Bri cried. The cold night air caused her nearly naked body to shiver, and, Zach noticed, her nipples to pebble delectably.

When Bri stalked away from him, Zach grabbed her arm and pulled her back. "What the fuck was that all about?" he asked through clenched teeth. "I've never known you to be so fucking irrational."

"I'm irrational?" Bri cried angrily. "You tell your family I'm gay and you think I'm irrational?"

Zach frowned. "Look, I didn't intend for my family to find out about you. But don't you think it's par for the course? People are going to eventually figure it out. You shouldn't try to hide who you are."

Bri's green eyes shimmered as she stared at him. Her head fell back and her teeth gnashed. She stepped forward and slapped his chest. "I am not gay." She smacked him again. "I have never been gay." And again she hit him, this time harder, almost knocking him over. "You are one fucking idiot!" She didn't wait for him to reply before she turned and ran. It was just as well. Zach had no idea how to respond.

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## Chapter 6

Bri moaned when the sunlight glinted on her eyes, waking her from what had been a restless sleep.

When she got back to the cottage the night before, she locked the deadbolt in an effort to keep Zach from coming inside. She lay in bed for hours after, waiting for him to pound on the door, insisting she let him in. While she should have been relieved he hadn't come after her, she lay awake all night, wanting, needing his touch.

Bri threw back the covers and got out of bed. As she stumbled toward the bathroom, a soft rap sounded on the door. Bri changed directions, heading to the door.

Her hands braced on the door as she steadied herself. She leaned her forehead on it. "Who is it?"

"It's Leigh."

Damn!

"I'm not feeling very well right now," Bri called through the door. "Can you come back a little later?"

"No," Leigh replied. "I'm getting married tomorrow so I'm a little busy."

Cold fingers of guilt wrapped around Bri's heart. How could she have forgotten the reason Zach asked her to be here?

Bri quickly opened the deadbolt and stepped back as Leigh walked into the cottage. "I'm sorry."

Leigh ignored the apology as she wandered to the armchair and sat down. She crossed her legs, bracing her

hands over her knee. And then she smiled. "You really threw Zach for a loop last night."

Bri's hand went over her eyes. "I know," she said, wincing at the memory. "I don't know why I did it—"

Leigh cut her off in mid-sentence. "I don't mean by replacing the stripper Edward hired." She hesitated and then went on. "Though I must admit that took a lot more guts than I'd ever be able to muster."

Bri's hand fell away from her face and frowned. "What else could have thrown him for a loop?"

Leigh's grin widened. "You told him you're not gay."

Anger rose in Bri's chest again. The dumbass. "We had sex just yesterday afternoon for crying out loud!" she exclaimed.

Leigh laughed out loud as Bri realized what she'd just said and felt her face flush. "I guessed that," she said. "I expect Zach thought he was so irresistible that even a lesbian couldn't resist him."

Bri blinked, the humor of her friend's statement took a moment to sink in. "Good point." Her anger slowly slipped away as she and Leigh laughed.

When their laughter subsided, Bri sighed heavily. "Zach and I have been friends for a year," she said. "I had no idea he thought I was gay. I just thought he liked my company as a friend. You know?"

Leigh shook her head. "No, I don't know. What I do know is he came back to the ranch house last night shortly after I got back from Elaine's party. He looked completely stunned. Alex and Max took him into the den. Wasn't until Alex came to bed that he told me why Zach was so stunned."

"Is it a surprise to you?" Bri asked.

"That you're heterosexual?" Leigh didn't wait for her reply. She shrugged as she replied, "No, I guess not. But then, I don't care one way or another."

"I just can't understand what I've done to lead Zach to believe I was gay," Bri lamented.

"I don't know either," Leigh replied. "But knowing you're not has Zach's head spinning. Since all the bedrooms in the house are taken up with wedding guests, Alex encouraged him to go back to the cottage. When he refused, Alex gave him a pillow and blanket and let him sleep on the sofa in the den."

Bri's heart sank. Was the discovery so momentous that Zach could not share the cottage with her last night? They'd had sex already, damn it. Why would knowing the truth make such an impact on him now?

Leigh rose from the arm chair. "I can understand this is awkward for you but I'm here to make a plea. The house is crazy enough with the guestrooms filled to capacity. But now I have my future brother-in-law taking up space in the den."

"I'm sorry," Bri said.

"I'd claimed the den for my own," Leigh said. "I need my space."

Bri sighed. "And now you've lost it to Zach."

Leigh nodded, clearly glad Bri understood. "Please ask Zach to move out of my den. I know you don't want him here but, Bri, I really need a place I can call my own."

"Zach won't spend another night in the ranch house," Bri said with calm certainty. "Tend to your wedding and forget the outside problems. I'll take care of Zach."

Leigh chuckled as she walked to the cottage door and pulled it open. "I think that's what he's afraid of." She stopped and turned back to look at Bri. "I expect you know how to deal with him. I'll leave it to you to sort it out."

When Leigh pulled the door closed behind her, Bri fell back on the bed. Did she know how to deal with Zach? Bri wasn't so sure she did.

\* \* \* \*

"You can't ignore Bri forever."

Zach looked over the work he and the crew had done in the backyard. It was picture perfect, or at least, Zach hoped it was. He'd followed the wedding planner's every demand, right down to placing and then carefully repositioning pots of roses near the altar.

"I'm not ignoring Bri," Zach said as he looked around in hope of finding something more he could do. Damn! The wedding planner and her workers had left. Now what?

Alex chuckled lightly as he inspected the backyard. He tossed his brother a lazy gaze. "Not sure if it'll matter to you," he said offhandedly, "but Bri left with Leigh to do some last-minute shopping this morning."

Zach glared at his brother. "It's well after noon now," he said. "Just when did you intend to tell me they were gone?"

Alex grinned as he looked at his watch. "Oh, right about now, I expect."

Zach gave himself a mental slap. He felt like a complete dunce for asking the question. But then, since Bri's announcement, he wasn't sure about anything anymore.

Sure, over the past year, he'd lusted for her and when she gave herself to him, he felt like he'd had the world by the tail. But all that had been based on the fact he thought she was gay. When she announced she wasn't, everything changed.

He wished he understood why. In fact, he'd thought of little else since last night. All he knew was the friendship he once had with Bri was shattered. And he wanted to hold off telling her so for as long as he could.

Zach glared at his brother. "Very nice," he said through clenched teeth. "Thanks for your support, big brother."

Alex's eyes flashed. "When the fuck did I ever play the role of your big brother?" he asked vehemently. "You and Max have always been strangers to me. If I'd had my way, none of you would be here for my wedding. Leigh wanted you here and I agreed because I love her." He took a step closer to Zach. "I will tell you this," he said through clenched teeth. "I let you stay in the ranch house one night while you were grappling with the fact Bri isn't gay. But I don't give a sweet shit how you deal with Bri. If you do anything to fuck up my wedding tomorrow, I'll tear you limb from limb."

Zach stared at his brother as he took a step closer. Alex pointed his finger in Zach's face, almost touching his nose. "Am I clear?"

Zach leaned back as he looked at Alex's finger. "Crystal clear."

"Good," Alex said, letting his hand fall to his side. "I'm glad we understand each other."

Zach went to the cottage. The moment he walked inside, his senses were filled with Bri. The rumpled bed where she'd slept last night, alone. Her bag on the floor, open and rummaged through, no doubt she'd been in a rush to get the hell out of here. And her scent, the unique mixture of sweet and sassy, he'd grown to adore over the past year.

Zach realized he wasn't being fair to Bri. He had to talk to her, had put it off too long already.

\* \* \* \*

The moment Bri walked into the cottage, she knew Zach was there. Her skin tingled, her body quaked. She'd been distracted all day, both anticipating and dreading seeing him again.

When he walked out of the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his hips and still damp from the shower, Bri's throat tightened. Her eyes caught the sinews of his chest and arms before she quickly turned away, making a point of carefully finding a place to put her purse. "Hi," she said softly.

Zach took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Bri kept her gaze averted. She grabbed her brush off the dresser and carefully ran it through her hair. "Tell you what?"

Zach stepped forward and tore the brush from her hand. She twisted to look at him, gasping when she saw the spark of anger in his eyes. "You know damn well what," he said. "Why didn't you tell me you weren't gay?"



Anger coursed through Bri's veins as she reached for her brush and tore it away from him. "I didn't think I had a reason to," she said through clenched teeth.

"You didn't?" Zach said as though his mind struggled to comprehend her words. "Our entire friendship was based on a lie."

Bri's heart thundered in her chest. "What lie? I've never lied to you." In fact she'd been too honest with him. He was the only one she'd allowed to see her pain when her relationship with Don ended.

"You led me to believe you were gay!" Zach yelled. "All this time I thought I was free to—" He stopped mid-sentence, almost as if he was ashamed of what he would have said.

"Free to what?" Bri asked, her heart pulsing in her throat.

"Forget it," Zach said. "I've got to get dressed for the rehearsal party."

When Zach turned toward the bathroom, Bri ran up behind him and curled her fingers around the towel cinched around his waist. When she yanked it off his hips, she stood back, holding the towel behind her. When Zach faced her, she tried to keep her eyes focused on his face. "What did you think you were free to do?" she asked.

Zach cocked his head to one side as his eyes settled on her. "If you think you'll force me to talk because I'm naked, you're sadly mistaken."

The air whooshed out of Bri's lungs, depleting her, making her feel weak. She tossed the towel on the floor and sank onto the bed. "You're right," she said when she finally got her

breath. "I give up trying to understand you. Go get ready for the rehearsal party."

Zach hesitated at the bathroom door. "You'll get ready too, right?"

Bri sighed. "No. I think I'll take a pass on this one." She leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees and covering her eyes with her hands. How could she have gotten herself into such a mess?

It wasn't until she felt the mattress give under Zach's weight that she realized he was there. He wrapped an arm around her and pulled her against him.

When she would have said something, he shook her gently. "Let me talk."

His spicy scent filled her senses and she was keenly aware he was still naked when he pulled her head against his rock-hard chest. When she opened her eyes, she stared down at his wide-spread legs and his sleeping cock.

His chest vibrated when he spoke. "You know I've had a lot of affairs over the years."

Bri nodded.

"Well, when I met you, I thought you'd be the first woman I could actually be friends with. You struck me as feisty ... kind of butchy."

Butchy? What the hell? She would have moved away from Zach to say something but he continued to hold her close.

"The first time I met you at the bar, you were willing to take on a drunken asshole by yourself. And then, when we got to know each other, you mentioned your relationship."

This time, when Bri pulled away from his chest, he didn't stop her. "I thought I was in love."

Zach nodded as he released his hold on her and let himself fall back on the bed. "I know. And she ripped your heart out. If she had been a guy, I'd have ripped him limb from limb."

"She..." Bri grimaced. "He was a guy."

Zach rolled his head to one side, his eyes gazing at her. "What do you mean? You called her Dawn."

Bri sighed. "His name was Don. D-O-N."

Zach winced as he pressed his hand over his eyes. "There were other things."

"Like what?"

"I couldn't beat you on the squash and tennis courts."

Bri sighed. "So, of course I must be a lesbian. Any other woman would let you win so you could feel like a big man."

Zach tore his hand away from his eyes and gave her a scornful look. "Hey, that's..." his voice trailed off. And then he added. "Yeah, I guess so."

Bri sighed. "I treasured our friendship," she said softly. "But you're right. Even though I didn't know it until now, our relationship has been based on a misconception." Bri moved to get off the bed. "Since you thought I was gay, I suppose you thought I'd never ask anything of you ... not even after we'd had sex."

"That's not true."

Bri ducked his reach and landed on the floor. When she got up, she glared at him. "You dumbass!" she yelled. "I think you chose to believe I was gay to suit your own needs. You

wanted me as a friend but if I wasn't gay, you'd feel pressure to screw me."

Zach leapt up from the bed. "That's not true at all."

"Oh really?"

"Yes, really," he replied smugly. "I'd thought of fucking you many times but kept myself in check."

Bri gaffawed. "Did you just hear yourself? And, by the way, you failed at keeping yourself in check last night."

"Don't blame me. The second I touched you, you squatted like a bitch in heat."

Bri blinked as the words settled over her. And then every fiber of her being fired up. She lunged at Zach, wanting to rip him apart. Her movements seemed to happen in slow motion ... her hands wrapped around his neck, her torso pressed against him and her legs wrapped around his waist. The force drove them down on the bed. She wrapped her fingers around his throat as she glared down at him.

"I hate you!" she cried.

"I hate you too," Zach replied. Yet his hands tore at her clothes. He pulled her blouse open and ripped her bra apart. She gasped when his mouth settled over one of her ripe nipples. He sucked hard as his hands pushed her jeans and panties off her hips. He wasted no time before his fingers settled between her thighs, stroking her clit, drawing her into his realm.

Bri wanted to fight him, she wanted to say no. But her body wanted him more than she ever had before. When he worked her jeans and panties over her hips, she quickly

bucked them off. She wanted to feel him.... all of him ... against her skin.

When she braced her feet and opened her knees, Zach leaned over her and chuckled. "You're assuming a lot."

Reality slammed into Bri at his statement. Her body went cold. "Damn you!" she cried.

But when she would have gotten off the bed, Zach pinned her down. "Whoa, stop," he said softly against her ear. "I was teasing. My bad."

Bri didn't want to give in to him. Her brain told her to run for the hills. But her body, her weak body, enjoyed his touch and wanted so much more.

Just once more. Just one more time and she'd be done with him.

She turned to him and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pulling him close to her as she drank from his lips. Her body ignited as the length of him stretched against her. His ripe cock pressed against her thigh. When she reached down and stroked a finger over his length, Zach groaned. He wanted her touch as much as she wanted his. The knowledge gave her the freedom she needed to explore his body.

Zach let out a long breath when she suddenly moved over him. She braced her knees on either side of his hips and gazed down at him. He returned her gaze with blazing eyes ... inviting her to do what she wanted.

Bri had never felt this kind of control over a man before. She bit her lower lip as she tried to decide what to do next.

As of sensing her hesitation, Zach ran took her hand and drew it against his lips. "Don't be afraid to make demands, Bri. I'm yours."

Unable to voice her wishes, she braced her hands on either side of his head and leaned over him, letting her breasts hover just over his face.

Zach knew what to do. In fact, he moved so quickly Bri found herself breathless. His hand cupped her breast as his mouth closed over the ripe nipple. His tongue laved and then sucked and then laved again before he turned his attention to her other breast. As his hands slowly slid down her back and cupped her butt, Bri cried out. He pulled her down against his rock-hard penis. Her body rocked against him but held his cock at bay.

Zach bit back an oath in sheer frustration. His cock was ripe and ready and wanted to sink into her. Bri bit back a chuckle when he pushed against her. It was too easy to pull away in spite of the fact his hands were on her ass.

And then his hands tightened, felt like steel bands over her ass. Bri blinked down at him. His eyes were blazing, his jaw set tight.

"Laugh at me, will you?" he said through clenched teeth.

Before Bri could reply, his fingers dug into the flesh of her hips and rammed her down over him. She cried out as his angry cock filled her. While she grappled to escape, his hungry cock devoured her, sucking all her energy, making it impossible. And so it began. With his hands holding her hips steady, he moved against her. Slow at first but then picking

up speed. With every thrust, her body jolted over him, her breasts bounced just above his mouth and her mind reeled.

She didn't want this. She didn't want to feel so helpless in his arms. And yet, his cock made her his prisoner. She'd never know another man like him, never know another man's touch without thinking of Zach.

Breathless, she collapsed against him. But Zach was still very much in the game. He rolled over on top of her and pulled her legs over his shoulders. When his cock thrust into her again, he pressed his fingers over their connection. His thumb stroked her clit as his cock pounded into her.

Bri struggled, trying to curb the sensations wracking her body. But Zach's touch was too strong. He demanded her release and she felt powerless to stop the tide washing over her. When the climax overtook her, her body convulsed against him. And then he moaned as he succumbed to his own release.

When he collapsed over her, she held him close and struggled to keep her tears at bay. He would never know ... she could never tell him ... but she loved him with all her heart.

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## Chapter 7

When Zach woke, he knew he was alone. Bri had left.  
Damn!

He tossed the covers off his hips and shoved his legs into his jeans. Maybe he wasn't too late, maybe she hadn't left the ranch yet. He grabbed his shirt and ran out the door.

When he pounded on the ranch house door, it seemed to take forever for someone to answer. He impatiently tried the door. Locked. He pounded again.

The door suddenly swung open and Zach took a step back as he saw his oldest brother filling the frame of the door. "What the fuck is your problem now?" he said through clenched teeth.

"I'm looking for Bri," Zach replied.

Leigh showed up at Alex's side. "She left," she said. "She asked me to call a taxi for her at seven this morning."

Zach frowned. "What time is it now?"

Alex growled. "It's eight. She left an hour ago."

Zach ignored his older brother's angry scowl and focused on Leigh. "I take it she was heading to the airport in Winnipeg."

Leigh nodded. And then a slow smile crept over her lips. "If you hurry, you can still get her back here in time for our wedding."

Alex's brows knitted low on his brow. He looked at Leigh and then back to Zach. While his gaze was thunderous, he nodded toward his SUV. "I'll get the key."



When Alex returned, he pressed the key into Zach's hand and glared at him. "Fuck this up and you know what'll happen."

Yeah, he'd be ripped limb from limb. But it wouldn't matter if he couldn't make Bri listen to him.

As he fired up the engine of his brother's SUV and headed out, he wasn't sure what he'd say to her. He wasn't sure what he was feeling at all. He just knew he wasn't ready to let her go. Surely she'd give him time to figure things out.

\* \* \* \*

Frustrated, Bri sat on a bench in the airport. The earliest flight she could get to Toronto was at eight that evening ... a four-hour wait. After the bumpy ride from the ranch to the Winnipeg airport, Bri was fit to be tied. And now she had to put in hours before she could board a plane to go home.

Her heart ached. Sooner or later, she'd probably have to face Zach. She supposed it would only be by chance. It was unlikely he'd ever show up at her bar again. She'd give up her membership to the gym they'd frequented, stop going to the places they went for lunch and dinner and basically hide away in her apartment for as long as it took to wash Zachary Diamond out of her life for good.

Bri sighed. She wasn't so sure she could ever wash him out of her life. But she had to try. He'd based their friendship on a misconception. She'd been too blind to see it. Still, she knew one thing for sure, the love she felt for Zach was lost on him. He'd never feel the same way she did. The explosive sex they'd had over the weekend was as big a lark as their

friendship ... he thought he was stealing forbidden fruit. He thought he'd be able to walk away from it unscathed. After all, why would a lesbian expect anything from him?

Bri thought of Leigh and her impending wedding. Her heart ached knowing she would not be there to share Leigh's joy. How lucky she was to have found someone who truly loved her. The fact he was a Diamond made it even more remarkable.

"Ms. O'Ryan?"

Bri shook herself into the present and gazed up at a pimply faced young man. "Yes?"

"You're in luck. We have a cancellation on Flight 2051."

Bri continued to look at him. "And this means what?"

"If you want the seat, your flight will leave in twenty minutes."

Bri bounded up from the bench. "I'll take it!" she said, raising her hand to give pimple-boy a high five. When the kid winced and stepped back, Bri grinned awkwardly and let her hand fall. "Sorry."

"Whatever." He rolled his eyes. "If you want the flight, get to gate seven right now."

Bri quickly gathered her bag and made her way to the gate. Soon she'd be able to put this entire weekend behind her. Soon she'd embark on a new life. Her heart sank ... a life that didn't include Zachary Diamond.

Just as Bri got to the gate, the nasally voice of the intercom system announced that Flight 2051, from Winnipeg to Toronto, was boarding.

Just as Bri handed her luggage over, another announcement sounded. "Brianna O'Ryan, please come to the courtesy desk."

Bri hesitated. Why on earth would she be called to the courtesy desk?

"Your ticket, ma'am," the attendant said as he held out his hand.

"Yes," Bri said as she held it out. The attendant nodded as he checked her ticket.

When the attendant nodded for her to pass, another announcement sounded. "Brianna O'Ryan. Come to the courtesy desk for an important message."

The attendant glared at her. He tsked impatiently. "You're holding everyone up. Please follow the others onto the plane."

Bri's eyes glazed as she looked up at him. "Yes, this is me going right now."

When Bri took a step forward, another announcement sounded.

"Brianna O'Ryan, please come to the..."

The nasally voice cut off, static ensued before another voice, an all-too-familiar male voice, sounded on the system. "Bri, get that pretty ass of yours over here right now!"

Zach! He'd come after her. Tears sprung into her eyes as she looked up at the attendant. "Sorry to hold you up," she said as she turned into the crowd behind her and made her way out of the line.

When she got out of the congested line, she realized she'd left her bag behind. But it didn't matter. Let it go back to Toronto without her.

As Bri approached the courtesy desk, she tried to stamp down her hopes. Just because Zach came after her didn't mean he wanted a future with her. Wasn't it possible he just wanted her in his bed again? That he'd only want her for a short time ... like he did all the women he'd taken to his bed?

Her heart pounded in her chest when she caught sight of him leaning against the courtesy desk. Dressed in a tight white t-shirt and jeans, he looked sexier than she'd ever seen him before. The woman at the desk beamed under his attention. But he seemed to sense her approach and when he turned to look at her, Bri's heart almost stopped.

His grin reached into her soul as he walked toward her. His hands cupped her shoulders and then pulled her against him. "I should turn you over my knee for this stunt," he whispered into her ear. "How could you leave me like that?"

Bri wrapped her arms around him. "I thought we agreed our friendship was shattered. I needed to get away."

"When I woke up without you this morning, I realized something very important."

"What was that?"

"I can't imagine my life without you in it. If you're willing to take the chance, I think we can be best friends and lovers at the same time."

Bri hesitated. She pulled herself out of his arms and turned away from him. "After everything that's happened, I don't know if that's possible," she said.

"Bri," Zach's voice was low, pleading.

Bri whisked around and ran to him. He laughed when she landed in his arms. "Okay, let's give it a shot!"

Zach's mouth closed on hers as he kissed her long and hard. When he pulled away, he smiled down at her. "If I don't get you back to the ranch soon, we'll miss the wedding."

"I don't care," Bri said. "Let's find the closest hotel room—"

"No," Zach cut her off. "If we miss the wedding, Leigh will be upset and if Leigh's upset, my brother is going to rip me limb from limb."

Bri giggled. "Oh, come on," she said. "I can't imagine Alex would do something like that."

Zach's hand circled her waist as he escorted her out of the airport. "I'd rather not take the chance."

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## **About the Author**

The Diamonds Are Forever Series has been a labor of love for Peggy Hunter. She's enjoyed writing the second of the series and hopes her fans love reading it.

When Peggy's not writing, you'll find her enjoying her recently rekindled love, quilting. She lives in midwestern Ontario with her husband, son and the various animals that make her life complete.

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Diamond, A Girl's Best Friend [Diamonds Are Forever Book 2]  
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