

CHAPTER ONE

Roseanne Meadows stood on the busy Las Vegas sidewalk, watching the limo disappear with the newlyweds inside. Beside her, she could feel Scott Ramsey's gaze boring into her. He knew something was going on in her brain, but, to his credit, he'd said nothing during the wedding. If she knew anything about the man, it was that he wouldn't do anything to ruin his best friend's wedding. Just as she would have cut off her right arm rather than do anything to upset *her* best friend's wedding.

But Becky and Ford were married now, and all bets were off.

"What's wrong, Roseanne? And don't tell me it's nothing because I know you better than that." He should. They'd been sleeping together for months. She'd let him get closer to her, emotionally and physically than anyone else—ever.

"Can we go home now? I think I've had enough of Vegas." Truth. She was finished. Done. Over it. But not over him. Not by a long shot. Maybe she never would be. That hurt more than anything else—knowing he didn't give two hoots about her when every cell in her body ached for him not to be the person she suspected him of being.

"You want to go home tonight? Don't you have a spa date with Becky tomorrow?"

She gave the man the evil eye. That date had been planned before Becky and Ford had decided on their hasty Vegas wedding chapel nuptials. "Seriously? Becky just got married. Do you really think she's going to want to hang out with me tomorrow?"

"Is that it? Are you worried that you've lost your best friend?"

She'd certainly lost something, but not Becky. Married or not, her childhood friend would never desert her. Roseanne shook her head. "No. I didn't want to say anything to Becks, but I think I might be coming down with something."

"You're sick? Geez, why didn't you say so?" When he wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her close, it was all she could do not to flinch. Twenty-four hours ago, she would have welcomed his embrace, but that was before. Now, everything he said or did felt false. "Do you need to see a doctor? I'm sure the hotel has one on call."

“I’d rather just go home, if you don’t mind?” Home, where she could put this latest failure behind her. Or, at least bury herself in work and pretend Scott Ramsey hadn’t ripped her heart out with his bare hands.

“Not at all. Our business here is done.” He waved his arm, and the limo that had been waiting for them inched up to the curb. He handed her inside then joined her. After giving instructions to the driver, he made a phone call. “All set. The plane will be ready to go when we get there.”

Must be nice. Had it only been a couple of days ago that they’d flown from Dallas to Las Vegas in Scott’s private jet to help Ford and Becky at the sex toy trade show? It seemed like years had gone by, or maybe she was just feeling older. And wiser. Scott put his cell phone away and reached for her hand. Roseanne’s stomach clenched at the contact, and a groan passed her lips.

“Are you all right? Can I get you anything? We can stop at a pharmacy if you want.”

His voice held genuine concern, and, for the millionth time since his sister had cornered her at the convention center and given her an earful, she wondered if she was making the right decision to end her months-long relationship with the Yankee billionaire. Maybe Veronica was wrong. Maybe he just hadn’t gotten around to asking her to attend his parents’ anniversary party in New York next week. According to his sister, Scott had promised to attend.

In the face of his solicitude tonight, she could give him a few more days. If he didn’t ask her to go with him, then she would know everything his sister had said was true. She was nothing more than a distraction for him while he attended to business in Butte Plains. As soon as he could, he’d hand the reins over to a manager and go back home to his high-society parties and glamorous women.

“No. I just think I need to rest. You have to admit, the last few days have been hectic.”

“I thought we’d be here for moral support. I had no idea we’d get roped into manning the booth for hours each day.”

“I don’t think Ford and Becky anticipated how popular their booth would be. I’m sure they thought the interns they’d brought along would be able to handle the flow.”

“Agreed. But I’ll have a word with Ford if you’re ill because of it.”

As far as she knew, broken hearts weren’t contagious or caused by spending a few hours standing on a concrete floor. “Don’t. Please? I’m sure I’ll be okay in a few days. I just need to rest.” According to Veronica, Scott needed to be in New York by Friday night, which meant if he was going to ask her to go along, he would have to do it in the next few days. Heck, he hadn’t even

mentioned that *he* had a trip planned, which led her to believe he didn't want her to know about the party. Which meant everything his sister had said was true. Her stomach clenched again. This time, she barely managed to hold in the accompanying groan.

The limo crept along in the heavy traffic crowding the strip. Scott continued to hold her hand, and, rather than argue with him, she let it stay. This was all so stupid. She should just come right out and ask him about the party, but, deep down inside, she needed him to bring the subject up first. If he left for New York without telling her about the family event, she'd know the feelings she had for him weren't returned. They'd been sleeping together for several months. Not exactly living as a couple, but still, their relationship was intimate, and exclusive. Or so she thought.

That was the other bombshell Veronica Ramsey had dropped on her. Scott had a girlfriend, or, to hear her tell it, a fiancé in all but the formal sense of the word. Solange. No last name. None needed. Everyone in the world knew the supermodel with the smile as bright as her name. According to his sister, Scott's family loved Solange and expected the couple to make it official as soon as Scott wrapped up his business in Texas.

At last, they made it to the hotel, packed up their things in the shared suite, and were on their way to the airport and the waiting Gulfstream aircraft.

As soon as they were wheels up, Roseanne disappeared to the bedroom in the rear of the cabin. No invitation to join her was given, and nothing about her demeanor or posture indicated he'd be welcome, so Scott remained in his seat, a drink in hand, and contemplated where their mini-vacation had gone wrong.

The woman who had occupied the seat next to him on the flight from Dallas to Las Vegas a few days ago was not the same one accompanying him home tonight. He would allow her some leeway for being ill, but that couldn't account for the deep chasm he sensed opening up between them. He was so out of his league with this woman. She was unlike any he'd ever dated. That alone had him wondering what the hell he was doing. None of the others had even come close to making him feel the way this one did—like he would never get enough of her and *afraid* he'd never get enough of her at the same time.

Fuck. I'm so screwed.

He'd known about his parents' anniversary party for months and gone back and forth in his mind whether he should invite Roseanne to accompany him to the milestone event. In Vegas, his

sister had brought up the subject, asking to share the limo ride out to Long Island with him on the big day. He'd agreed, mentioning he might be bringing someone. That's when she'd reminded him of the time he'd made the mistake of taking a date to another such family gathering a few years ago. Before the last good-bye had been said, his mother had been contemplating which set of his grandmother's china she should give them as a wedding gift. He should have expected as much. The woman he'd taken had been just the kind of person his parents expected him to marry—born to wealth, well-educated, and runway model beautiful.

She'd been nothing but arm candy to him. It had taken him months to convince his mother one date didn't equal a marriage proposal.

He couldn't imagine what she would do if he showed up with Roseanne on his arm. She wasn't anything his parents wanted for him. June and Gerald Ramsey would never be impolite to a guest in their house, but there was a big difference between rude and welcoming. He couldn't bear the thought of Roseanne feeling out of place. As genuine and wholesome as homespun cloth, she was ten times better than most of the people who would be at the party, and far above the rest in every way that counted. Which led him to his other fear. His mother was so focused on her kids—particularly him—settling down and producing babies for her to spoil, she might jump to the wrong conclusion and start talking about china patterns again. Lord help him if that happened. No matter what, he wouldn't be railroaded into marrying. One of these days, he'd take the plunge, but not before he was good and ready.

Then there was the very real possibility his parents would inform her about what a screw-up he was. No one could say the word entrepreneur quite the way his father could. For Christ's sake, you'd think Scott had become a criminal or something. They were better now than they were when he was a teenager and talked of going to MIT to become an engineer, but not by much. He could count on one hand the number of kids he'd grown up with who had gone on to finish college. As far as he knew, he was the only one to actually use the degree he'd earned. And *gasp*, made money! He'd never understood how that made him the screw-up in the family. You'd think his family was fucking royalty or something—too good to get their hands dirty.

Either way it turned out, he'd be screwed. Which was why he hadn't mentioned the party to Roseanne yet, and most likely wouldn't mention it. This was plainly one of those situations where what she didn't know wouldn't hurt her.

The Yankee Billionaire's Bride

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