

Chapter 3

I was now very thankful Bradley Gray had rescheduled our meetings. But to make sure neither Adam nor Fiona found out, I decided to call Bradley. I pulled his card out of my purse, noticing he had written his personal cell phone number on it with a note to call him. Beside the number he had drawn a little smiley face. I couldn't help but grin.

The smiley face reminded me of the boy who had lived next door to my grandparents when I first went to live with them. He used to call me Red, because of my deep red hair color. My grandmother used to call him Lee. Sadly, his family had moved soon after, and I never saw him again.

But for a boy six years older than an eight-year-old, lonely little girl, he had been a kind, funny, shining light. My eight-year-old heart had fallen head over heels in love with the fourteen-year-old boy. Silly, I know. But when your whole world has been turned upside down, you tend to gravitate towards kindness and comfort. And that boy had been truly kind.

I entered the number and hit send. It only rang a couple of times before the call was picked up.

Bradley's voice, smooth as aged whiskey, sent shivers down my spine. "Anna, I am so glad you called. I have been thinking about you, a lot. To what do I owe the pleasure of your call?"

His slightly husky voice, and words once more caused my breath to hitch. Made me wish he was here, with me. I actually ached for his company. "I know we just met two days ago, but I need to ask you a huge favor." I spoke clearly, my voice lled with a silent plea.

"A favor? This sounds interesting." He chuckled while responding. "I would be more than happy to grant you a favor. Grant you anything you wanted, in fact."

Maybe I was crazy to draw him into this, but I had felt a real connection with this man. I hadn't felt this level of comfort with any man, except my grandfather, and my mother's brother, Uncle Caleb. And the boy from long ago.

What the hell? I decided to plunge in and let him know what I needed, and why I needed it. "Here's the thing. I need your help," I began.

"Oh? Tell me what you need me to do for you," the suggestive response sent shivers of excitement up my spine.

"It's complicated. Do you have time to listen to a story so you will understand the favor I'm asking? If you're busy, I understand." I wanted to make sure that he was fully aware of everything before I asked the favor. But this way, I was giving him a way out if he didn't want to get involved.

"As a matter of fact, I do have time. There's nothing I like better than a good story." I could imagine a seductive wink as he continued in a voice as sensuous and silky smooth as warm melted chocolate. "Especially if it's a bedtime story told by a beautiful sexy woman."

Oh my gawd. I was now ready for bed, with him. Though I don't imagine much sleeping would be going on. I was thankful he couldn't see through the phone as I knew I blushed like a virgin. Well, I guess that's fair. I am a virgin. I actually had to clench my thighs together as his words sent a thrill directly to my core. Lord, for the first time ever, I experienced the true feeling of lust and desire.

Yep, even without knowing what a lying, cheating, piece of crap Adam really is, I would be breaking up with him. Not once in all the time I had dated him had I ever felt this intense physical need. 'Focus, Anna, focus.' I thought to myself.

Okay, here goes nothing, I thought. "You may not know this, but I am the sole owner of Frederick's Design Co. I inherited it when my mother passed away four years ago. My parents had been divorced for years and I hadn't seen my father from the time I was eight until I was twenty. That's because, when I was eight, my mother discovered that my father had been having a long-term affair with his mistress, and had a ten-year-old child by said mistress. After the divorce, he immediately married that woman.

My father is on the Board of Directors. Though why we have or need a board of directors is beyond me since I am the one and only owner. My half-sister, Fiona, works at the company. Adam was, and still is, the head of the marketing department. I met him when I took over managing the company."

Over the next hour, I told Bradley everything. Right down to arriving home early and ending my affair with Adam and my half-sister in my house, in my bed, having s*x. And planning to kill me.

Bradley gave a sharply indrawn breath, and muttered, "What the f**k!"

I think it was that one heartfelt statement of shock that finally broke through my wall of calm. Without meaning to, I began to cry. Deep, soul-wracking sobs shook my body as the realization that my family, my father, wanted me dead. And for what? Money!

I wasn't grief-stricken about losing Adam. Good riddance. It just hurt like hell to know my own father, my half-sister, my only remaining blood relatives, would want to do me harm. Though after what I heard earlier today, I don't know why it would surprise me. I mean, if what Fiona said was true, my father had killed my mother. God, but I hated him. Hated them!

My mother, and her lawyers, were brilliant. They knew that Alan Fredericks wouldn't risk a guaranteed income on the off-chance he could successfully contest the will. Especially since he and my mother had been divorced for twelve years at the time of her death. But it seems that they are no longer satisfied with the status quo. They were allowing their greed to take over.

Bradley's soothing voice, lled with concern, penetrated my brain. "Anna, honey, give me your address. Tell me where you are right now."

I didn't think. I just gave him my address, though I wasn't sure what good that would do. I mean, I met him in Toronto at his main office. I am now in Halifax, Nova Scotia. What could he do?

"Anna, I'll be there shortly. Let me in when I buzz you from the lobby of your building." Then he ended the call.

I cried out with frustration and pain. Pain at knowing I was truly alone in this world. My mother and grandparents were dead. Uncle Caleb had disappeared just after my mother died, and I had no idea if he was alive or dead. And it was now obvious that the man I called my father was really nothing more than a sperm donor. My half-sister was a mean, vindictive, entitled brat. So yeah, me.

But it was better to be alone than surrounded by toxic, evil people. This thought helped me calm down and regain my composure. I went to the bathroom, blew my stuffy nose, washed my face, and gathered my thoughts. I would be damned if I let those pieces of trash get me down, or allowed them to defeat me.

No, I was stronger than that. Stronger and smarter than them. Knowing what I now know, I can get ahead of them. I have been thinking a lot lately about changing the business model of Fredericks Design Co.

Perhaps, rather than changing the business model of the existing company, I will just establish a brand-new company. One that will be innovative in how it's run. One that will be more profitable for employees, giving them more autonomy in their careers.

I poured myself a glass of wine, then went back to my office, and pulled up the detailed business plan I had already prepared. I changed the title to GRAYSTONE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION, then printed the entire document. I know that focusing my energies on this is just my way of dealing with the emotional pain I feel. But I had to do this, or go crazy overthinking everything. I couldn't allow that, so instead, I'll plan my future.

I always find it easier to review documents in their printed form. Then, I could make note of any revisions directly on the pages before transcribing those changes to the digital document. This was something my grandfather taught me. The process never failed him, nor had it proven detrimental to me.

My grandparents taught me from a young age how to manage their conglomerate. I took my MBA at Dalhousie University, while at the same time taking an online masters' degree in Interior Design through the Boston Architectural College. It was challenging, juggling both course loads, but it was worth the time and effort.

Those degrees, and the knowledge gained from them, were now going to be put to use in building a whole new company. I need a challenge. My other companies run like well-oiled machines. The management was loyal to a fault, and extremely competent. Management of each company reported to their Board of Directors, who made sure the companies remained profitable, and were run with ethics and integrity.

I continued to review the business plan, making notes in the margins, only to be interrupted by the intercom notification. I engaged the intercom video screen. To my surprise, Bradley Gray was in the lobby, asking for me to let him in.

I'm no fool. I mean, look at him. I'm not saying no, that's for sure.