

## Chapter 7

"There's one other favor I need to ask of you. If anyone from Fredericks Design calls you over the next few days to check on the progress of our meetings, please have your staff simply state things are going well, and that we are currently doing a site inspection and are unreachable." I asked this as I know Adam has a habit of checking up on me while I am away.

I had always thought he was being very conscientious about the progress of any potential business deal, but now I realize it is to simply make sure I am not going to show up at home unannounced. Like I did this morning. In order for my plan to be successful Adam and the other three have to remain in the dark about what I saw today. Thankfully, I am the only one with access to the security footage. Very smart move on my part, I must say.

"Red, I already instructed my staff to do just that. As I said earlier, I knew what you were going to walk in on. And I wanted to make sure you were protected." His words carried the ring of truth, and concern. "When I heard what Adam and Fiona were planning, I promised myself that I would do everything in my power to find out why they would do such a thing. After our first meeting, getting to know the grownup Anna, and the person you have become, well, I decided I would do whatever I could to help and protect you. To keep you. Safe, to keep you safe."

Wow. Just wow. Other than my mother and grandparents, no one has ever said they wanted to protect me. Especially not Adam, even though you would think that would be a priority when it concerns the person you plan on marrying. Of course, now I know why he never expressed that sentiment. He had no intention of protecting me. Quite the opposite, in fact.

When Bradley lifted his hand and gently brushed my cheek with his fingers I felt a thrill of excitement, and I am sure my heart uttered with it. He leaned forward and with his lips barely a breath away, he whispered, "I think we need to seal our new partnership with a kiss."

His lips, warm and firm, brushed against mine. He pulled back slightly to gauge my reaction. Seeing no resistance, his lips claimed mine with a gentle pressure. I swear, I felt the earth shift. It was as though the fuzzy outlines of my life suddenly came into sharp focus. I eagerly returned his kiss, parting my lips and allowing his tongue access to mine.

He tasted just like I thought he would. The rich flavor of the Crown Royal blending with his own unique taste. I could easily get lost in his kiss. But reluctantly, I pulled away, ending the most erotic kiss I had ever received in my life. Merciful heavens, all I wanted to do was to kiss him again, strip him down, and taste every inch of his skin. Instinctively I kissed him again. This time it wasn't a soft gentle kiss. I put everything I had into it, allowing all my pent-up desire for this man to be conveyed through the meeting of our lips and tongues. Bradley didn't hesitate to respond in kind.

Minutes later we had to stop to draw breath. I wanted this man. I wanted to take him to bed, let him ravish me, teach me everything there is to know about s\*x and the pleasures it can bring. My thoughts must have shown clearly on my face, as I met his darkly hooded gaze with my eyes shining with lust and desire. "Don't tempt me, Red," he breathed out. "Much as I want to, and I do want you, but you need to formally end things with Adam before we go any further." He ran his hand through his thick chestnut-colored hair in frustration.

I cleared my throat before speaking. "You're right. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...," Before I could finish my sentence, Bradley placed a finger on my lips silencing me.

"Red, please don't apologize for kissing me. You have no idea how much I've wanted to do that for the past three days. But we, as in you and I, can't move forward, until you put Adam in your past. I won't be that kind of man. The kind that takes what isn't his. And you're not mine. YET. But you will be."

The way he said "YET" curled my toes, and sent heat directly to my core. Dear heavens, but I want this man. But he is right. I need to shed Adam like the skin of a snake. Get him out of my life for good. Send him, Fiona, Alan and Lydia to the hell they so richly deserve. And if that involves a jail cell for them, all the better.

I leaned forward and gave Bradley a very soft, chaste kiss on his lips, then looked him in the eye. "I agree. I need to end things with Adam as soon as possible, allowing me to move on with my life. So I had better get to work and get things started."

I stood up and moved to the kitchen. "Would you like to stay for supper? I have the ingredients for chicken alfredo and garlic bread if you care to join me. I might even have some snickerdoodles in the freezer." I winked at him as I said this. I had to lighten the mood. I had spent most of last week here since Adam had been away on a business trip. And just like my grandmother, Fridays were spent in the kitchen baking.

Bradley stood up and followed me to the kitchen, taking a seat on a bar stool by the kitchen island. "You made snickerdoodles? Really?"

I couldn't help but grin at his boyish enthusiasm. "Sure did." I opened the freezer and pulled out the square plastic container that held over two dozen cookies. I placed it on the island in front of Bradley. "I can thaw one in the microwave for you if you like. It's going to take me a few minutes to get the meal ready. And one cookie shouldn't spoil your appetite, right?"

As I was speaking I opened the container, took out a couple of cookies and placed them on a paper towel, then popped them in the microwave for fifteen seconds. At the beep, I took them out and placed them in front of Bradley. I burst out laughing as he grabbed one and took a huge bite. Do boys never really grow up?

"Oh, my, goodness! They taste just like the ones your grandmother used to bake. Delicious!" He then nished off that cookie before immediately grabbing the other one and devouring it.

We continued to chat about anything and everything as I prepared the meal. It really didn't take long before I plated the pasta and took our food to the dining table. "Lee, could you grab the garlic bread and cutlery for me?" I didn't even realize I had called him by the nickname my grandmother had given him. That's just how comfortable I felt in his presence. He just smiled at me and did as I asked.

Over the meal the two of us solidified our action plan for setting up the new company. One of the first things we had to do was meet with the lawyers of Graystone International. I had called them earlier today and scheduled an appointment for tomorrow afternoon. That necessitated a flight back to Toronto early tomorrow morning. I had already arranged for the company jet to be ready and waiting at the Halifax International Airport for eight in the morning.

I suggested Bradley fly back with me, to which he agreed. "Have you already checked into your hotel?" I asked.

"Honestly, I haven't had a chance to. My overnight bag is still in my rental car. I suppose I should call and see if I can get a room." was his response, though I could tell that was not what he wanted to do.

I thought for a moment before making a suggestion. "I have a spare bedroom with its own ensuite bath, if you want to stay here tonight. We can travel together to the airport in the rental. That way we leave no trace of either of us being in Halifax today. Just in case anyone goes looking."

Bradley returned my look with a thoughtful one of his own. "Well, Red. I think that's a grand idea. We can spend the rest of the evening planning our next few steps. Maybe even research those two cruises, get everything set up for them. What do you think?"

"Like you said, I think it's a grand idea. Why don't you go get your bag while I clean up the dishes? And this is the code to get back into the building and my apartment." I hastily wrote the six-digit code on a sticky note and handed it to him.

It was only after he left my apartment to get his bag that I allowed a bit of doubt to creep in. Was I trusting him to quickly? Like my grandfather I am an astute judge of character. But I am now questioning that, seeing as I fell for Adam's game so easily. I finished cleaning up, all the while wondering if I was doing the right thing.

Trust was a precious commodity, and for some strange reason, I trusted Bradley Gray.