

Chapter 9

I turned around to face the source of that voice. Bradley stood before me, his hair a touselled mess, his pajama pants hanging low on his hips, his chest bare, revealing a toned six-pack and a deep v-line. My gaze drifted lower, taking in the area covered by his pajamas. My jaw almost dropped to the oor with the realization that his male 'equipment' was huge. I swallowed hard. This man was built like a god. And at this very moment, I was ready to worship him, body and soul.

'Get a grip, Anna.' I scolded myself in my mind. 'Don't be swayed by all that male perfection.' Yeah, that little pep talk didn't help. I wanted to reach out and run my hand over his pecs, trail it down his body, and follow the path of his v-line, right under the waistband of his pajama pants.

"Anna? Are you okay?" Bradley's voice penetrated my brain fog, snapping me back to reality. "You seem just a tad bit distracted. Do you like what you see?" That slow sexy smirk, and the hardening bulge, let me know he was very aware of my scrutiny, And as affected by it, as I was of my view.

"Coffee. Yes, denitely, coffee." I stammered. "Let me show you where the mugs are. Cream is in the fridge, and sugar is on the counter. I'll be right back." Before he could respond, I escaped to my oce, closing the door behind me.

Good heavens. What was I thinking? I barely know this man, and here I am lusting after him like a female dog in heat. I forced myself to calm down by thinking about everything I had to accomplish in the next few days. I gathered up the documents I would need for the next few days and put them in my briefcase. I made sure to bring the company stamp for Fredericks Design Co. as well as the one for Graystone International. I would be using them a lot over the next while.

Half an hour later, with everything I needed arranged neatly in my briefcase, I left the oce and went back to the living room. Bradley was dressed in a suit, looking every inch the businessman he is. He was nishing up a phone call, and I caught the end of it.

"We should be landing just before ten your time. That's right. No, don't meet me at the airport, I'll see you this afternoon. Okay, you too. Bye."

It was a normal type of conversation, I thought until he turned around and saw me. His face turned a bit pale before regaining its color. He looked from me to his phone. That action itself gave me pause. Why did he seem uncomfortable with the possibility of me hearing his conversation? Did he have something to hide? Please tell me he wasn't talking to a girlfriend, or worse yet, a wife. Just thinking about either one of those caused feelings of hurt and disappointment.

That thought brought back all the doubts and questions I had yesterday. Made me realize that I couldn't allow his very real s*x appeal to distract me. He was a businessman, and I was a businesswoman. At the moment, we had a verbal agreement for a business deal. Right then and there, I decided I had to maintain my emotional distance. I had already allowed one man to get past my barriers, with horrible results. I couldn't allow that to happen again.

I smiled politely at Bradley, glancing at my watch. "We need to leave for the airport. Are you just about ready?" I kept my voice even, not giving any hint of my inner turmoil.

He looked at me closely and then answered in a matching tone of voice. "Yes, I just have to grab my overnight bag. I'll be right out." He then walked to the guest room to retrieve his belongings.

I made sure the coffee maker was turned off and placed the mugs and spoons in the dishwasher. I had already emailed my housekeeper and let her know I needed her to come in and change the beds, do some laundry, and just do a quick cleanup. I knew she would look after the dishes. I also let her know that I would need her to come in on a daily basis as I was moving back into the penthouse full time.

The other email I sent was to my realtor, advising her I would be putting the house on the market effective Monday as I would have everything moved out of the house on the weekend. There wasn't much there as yet, and after what I saw yesterday, I didn't want anything other than my personal belongings. I would have everything donated to a local charity that worked with the local women's shelters. They were always in need of household goods and furnishings. A lot of women forced to start over had very little in the way of nancial support in setting up a new household. This would help some, I hoped.

I made a mental note to myself to message Adam late tomorrow letting him know that I had caught a bug of some sort, was under the weather, and wouldn't be able to see him this weekend. That will keep him away from me, and let me do what I need to do regarding the house. I would have to remember to change the code on the entrance keypad, and I would also change all the keyed locks for good measure.

Bradley's voice startled me out of my thoughts. "I'm ready when you are, Anna."

I nodded and led the way out of the apartment, making sure to close and lock the door after us. The elevator was already waiting for us and took us to the main oor. "The car is in the car park across the street. Do you want to wait here, and I'll get it?" Bradley asked me, his voice and eyes lled with other unasked questions.

"No, it's just a hop, skip, and a jump. We shouldn't have any problem crossing the street. Trac is light right now." I replied as I walked briskly to the crosswalk and pressed the button for the light. We were soon in the car, with our luggage stowed in the trunk.

Bradley skillfully maneuvered the car into morning trac and onto the quickest route out of the city towards the airport. Forty minutes later, he took the exit to the airport, following the signs to take him to his car rental return area. We unloaded our luggage, and I made sure I had my purse, briefcase, and overnight bag ready to roll. Inside the airport building, we made our way to the designated area for private jet passangers where we found our pilot and ight steward waiting for us. We were soon boarded and taxing down the runway, ready for takeoff.

I kept the conversation light and somewhat impersonal. We had a light breakfast, then discussed our proposed partnership a bit more. I even decided to give him a chance to back out now before we got into the contract signing stage. "You know, Bradley. I realized this morning that I may have just assumed you would be willing to help me. That was very presumptuous of me. If you have any doubts about this, please let me know. I won't be hurt or offended if you decide you don't want to get involved with this."

He again gave me a puzzled look before answering. "Have you changed your mind about setting up a new company?"

"No. I am going to do this. I'm meeting with the lawyers of Graystone International early this afternoon. They have already started the paperwork to set up Graystone Design and Construction. But honestly, I don't want you to feel pressured into joining me with this venture. I just feel that I railroaded you into it. And I don't want to have a reluctant partner."

"Reluctant partner? Do you think that I'm reluctant to be your partner?" he asked, his eyebrow raised in question. "I'm not reluctant in the least. I thought I showed you yesterday just how excited I am to become your partner."

"You did, yes. But I fear the heat of the moment may have swayed you to do something you may regret. I mean, think about it. I'm a woman bent on seeking revenge and retribution. Are you sure you want to have any part of that? It could get messy. I don't want you to do something that could reect badly on you if everything goes to hell in a hurry. I don't want to draw you into my messy life. It's not really fair to you, is it?"

"Anna, you are not forcing me to do anything I don't want to do. In fact, I will take great pleasure in bringing down those two 'vipers' as you call them. As I told you yesterday, I will do whatever I can to help you. Protect you. I am excited about your business concept and look forward to being your partner."

I studied him intently. Why was I backtracking? Was it just a reaction to everything that had happened the last day or so? Or was my gut instinct on high alert? Or was I just acting on the feelings of jealousy at the possibility of him having a wife or girlfriend? I didn't know. I could tell Bradley was a bit confused, especially considering how I had responded to him yesterday.

But something told me I had to protect my heart. If I let myself fall for Bradley, and my feelings weren't returned, it would break me in a way that there was no coming back from.