

## Chapter Five

"How about this one?" Aubrey suggested holding up a colorful top.

Sarah considered it before shaking her head. She liked the color but she wasn't feeling the color pattern. Aubrey frowned but put it back. Most of Sarah's choices had been sensible and mostly blue or gray, which were not even second or third in her list of favorite colors. Aubrey wasn't certain if Sarah was still in the mindspace of living in her husband's shadow or if she was simply depressed.

When Sarah turned down another brightly-colored top Aubrey tossed it into the cart anyway. She reached for another and added it without consulting her at all.

"Aubrey, what are you doing?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Aubrey declared. "Look at this. Beige! Gray! Black! You planning to attend a funeral every day you are here?"

Sarah bit her lip.

"You want to tell me what's going on or are we going to play this game all day?"

Sarah remained silent mulling over her own thoughts.

"You are a warm, caring person, full of love and life and laughter. Has that changed? Or have you buried it so deep you can't remember?"

Sarah hesitated.

"Now, we are going to start over," Aubrey declared picking up the pile of clothes and setting them aside with a silent apology to the clerks, "and, girl, if you put one more brown or blue thing in this cart so help me..."

Sarah snorted back a laugh shaking her head. She had missed this woman so much.

"Okay so...how about this?" Aubrey pulled a burgundy shirt from the racks knowing it was one of her favorite colors.

Sarah hesitated. Finally she nodded. Aubrey smiled and dropped it into the cart with a satisfied sigh. Their shopping spree continued with a few more hiccups but that was to be expected when one was buying a whole new wardrobe.

Loading up the station wagon they took a break at one of Aubrey's favorite cafés, Café Beignet. It wasn't quite warm enough for Aubrey's liking to eat outside but they sat at a table near the large windows for a similar effect. They ordered and sat in communal silence until their orders arrived.

Very quickly their server returned setting a latte and a ham and cheddar sandwich on a toasted croissant in front of Aubrey. Sarah received a cup of tea and a croissant sandwich with tuna salad, bacon and cheddar. They enjoyed their sandwiches in silence before Aubrey decided to bring up he who should not be named.

"So you going to tell me what happened?"

Sarah chewed her bottom lip.

"You don't have to but...it'll help if you talk about it. You can't let it eat you up from the inside out. Trust me. I know."

Sarah winced. Aubrey was never one to shy away from her past. She was open and honest when it came to hurt and past mistakes. There were many times she bent Sarah's ear. Perhaps it wouldn't hurt to share a little in return.

"Well he nally...you know...touched me."

Aubrey raised an eyebrow.

"He kissed me and...you know..."

Realization dawned on Aubrey's expression, "And? How was it?"

Sarah dgeted and blushed. How was she supposed to describe it? She hesitated, "...it was...not what I expected."

Aubrey grew pensive. Though Sarah was well-traveled she was surprisingly naïve in many things. s\*x denitely was a topic she never discussed. Like many she harbored a deeply romantic idea about what her rst time would be like and the connection she would feel with the one she chose to wait for. Maybe that worked for some but many others ended up with a very different experience.

"I'm sorry, honey. Did he at least take care of you?"

"He was drunk...and very forceful."

Aubrey frowned. Rough s\*x could be pleasurable if done correctly with the right partner but it wasn't the best choice for a woman's rst time when everything was sensitive and easily torn.

"Did it..."

"It hurt," Sarah nodded. "But that almost didn't matter after he..."

"After he what?"

"Right as he nished...he called me Maddie."

"Who's Maddie?"

"...His mistress."

"That son of a b\*\*\*h," Aubrey cursed. Though her voice was calm her eyes burned with rage. "I'm gonna cut off his balls. Let's go. When's the next ight to New York?"

"Aubrey!" Sarah grasped her hand as she reached for her cell phone. "Stop."

"Like hell! I'm gonna Lorena Bobbitt his ass and feed his fuckin' d\*\*k to the crows."

"Aubrey!" Sarah exclaimed quickly looking around to see if any of the others in the dining area heard her.

"How long did you know?" Aubrey asked staring at her as if she could read her mind.

"Since the beginning. She and his sister have been texting me all about their love affair."

"f\*\*\*\*g bitches," Aubrey shook her head. "Give me one good reason not to hop the next ight and castrate them with a red-hot poker."

"It's over," Sarah said having no doubt Aubrey would do as promised. "I led for divorce. Uncle Tailor is taking care of it. So...it's done."

"Girl, you are too damn nice," Aubrey said. "Fine. But if he dares to show his face around here he better have a bodyguard...or ten."

Sarah chuckled. She had no doubt. Between Aubrey and Ya-Ya he would never be safe especially on their home turf.

"You know what, let's go crazy tonight," Aubrey said. "We can hang out at the bar, pick up a few guys and just let it all hang out."

"No."

"Come on, one big blow out."

"No, Aubrey. I...can't. I just...can't."

"All right, quiet night. Cajun popcorn, a little bourbon, and a movie with a lot of explosions."

Sarah's face ticked with a smile and nodded. That she could do.

Aubrey watched her with a worried expression. Sarah was a strong woman, full of life. At least she was. Right now she was barely a shadow of her former self and it hurt to see her like that.

Aubrey burned with the desire to hunt down her ex and castrate him twenty different ways for doing this to Sarah. She took a deep breath to calm herself. Right now the important thing was helping Sarah recover. There would be time enough to skewer that man later.

Sarah hesitated wanting to change the subject, "So what about Jamie's father? Have you told him?"

"I don't even know his name," Aubrey sighed.

"Really?" Sarah asked. "But you two looked like you were getting along at the bar."

"We were. We just didn't do a lot of talking," Aubrey held a straight face for a beat before they both broke out into laughter.

"So you know nothing about him?" Sarah asked. "He could be married with ve kids for all you know."

"Oh, no," Aubrey shook her head. "That man was denitely not married and denitely had no kids unless they were by Immaculate Conception."

Sarah raised a brow at her conviction, "How do you know?"

"Because he was one hundred percent a virgin."

"You can tell?"

"He was...painfully obvious," Aubrey said, "lovably awkward but a damn fast learner."

Aubrey slowly stirred her coffee thinking back to that night. She had several partners over the years and none of them had been half as memorable as that one night. Aubrey was never one to believe in love-at-rst-sight but there had been something about that man... some connection she had never felt before, not even with her ex. He had been equal parts firm and soft, gentle and strong. She wouldn't have minded waking up in his arms every morning.

"What about in the morning?"

"He was still asleep when I left," Aubrey shook her head.

"You didn't leave him your number? Nothing?"

"I woke up late. I had to rush out of there to get to my hotel, pack and get to my plane."

Sarah bowed her head struggling not to laugh at her friend's hopelessness. It was a constant running joke that Aubrey would be late for her own funeral. Throughout college she slept late which led to her rushing across campus in her pajamas to make it to her classes on more than one occasion.

"So you don't know anything about him?" Sarah asked.

Aubrey shook her head.

"What happens now?"

Aubrey shrugged, "Not much I can do. I live here. He lives, I assume, there. He's probably forgotten all about me. Now let's forget about all this depressing talk. We have more shopping to do. Retail Therapy! Let's do this!"