

Chapter One

Eden's POV

'I'm married!'

My spoonful of cereal that I was about to place in my mouth, stills mere millimetres from my lips. I slowly raise my eyes from the book I'm currently reading at the kitchen table to meet the gaze of my mother who is almost bouncing with excitement as she stares at me expectantly.

'S . s . . s . . sorry?' I manage to stammer out, pretty sure I must have misheard what she said because there is no way she said what I think she just said.

'I'm married' my mother says again, and she pulls out her hand from her pocket and wiggles her fingers at me, showing off the huge diamond that sits above her knuckle, turning it in the light so the polished stone sparkles iridescently.

'What? . . when? . . how?' I scramble, dropping my spoon and focusing solely on the woman in front of me whose face has fallen slightly at my less than ecstatic response to her outburst.

She sits down in the chair across the table from me, biting her bottom lip nervously as she twists the ring on her finger round and round anxiously. 'You don't seem very happy for me' she murmurs worriedly, a crestfallen look clouding her eyes and that one expression making me feel terrible.

Ok, I need to explain something here, so you can understand why I'm sitting in my chair unable to speak.

My mum is not one of those ighty women who have spent most of their lives looking for mister right in all the wrong places, more in love with the idea of being in love than with the man that shares their bed. I have not had a revolving door of stepfathers who come and go from my life after my own father died when I was six. In fact, my mother took years just to think about dipping her toe back into the dating pool, I was just about to start my first year of high school before she nally went out for coffee with a guy for the first time! Since that point, and please understand that I am now nineteen and in college, I can count how many men she's been on a date with on one hand. Hell, I can count the number of men she's gotten serious with, using just my pinky finger, one! Literally, one man has made it past a peck on the cheek and a thank you I had a lovely time area of dating with my mother.

Sue me for being a little side swiped by the fact that my mother, the woman who won't give her email address to store clerks as you can never be too careful, is suddenly married and didn't even tell me it was going to happen, let alone invited me to the event.

'Ummm, it's not that' I stumble reluctantly, trying to force some sort of excitement into my voice, to give my mother the reaction she wants. 'I'm just wondering how this all happened, it's a little surprising, I didn't even know you were serious with anyone.'

Mum's lips tilt up slightly as she nally meets my gaze again, 'you remember Henry?' she asks and I nod instinctively.

Henry is a man that Mum started talking to about four months ago on an online dating app she joined on a whim. Our next-door neighbour, Olive, came over for their monthly gossip night, and it seems that at some point between the two bottles of red wine they consumed, and a giggle fest over her at number sixteen whose husband was storming in the front door whilst a twenty-something in just his boxer shorts climbed out the bedroom window, the conversation turned to mum's love life or lack of. Well, somehow their fits of laughter ended with my mother signing up for a phone app called Flirty for the over Thirties. You put in your age, interests, and basic information, and it connects you with people of a similar age with interests that match your own.

Well, Mum started talking to some guy called Henry and the two of them really hit it off. He lives in Maine which is a fair distance from our sunny town in Miami, but the two of them had a lot in common and I'd often go to bed, leaving my Mum curled up on the couch, a glass of wine on the coffee table, texting with her new friend. It only took a couple of months before Henry invited Mum to visit him, and he even paid the airfare for Mum to fly out and visit him for a weekend, which she did a few times.

Her last visit was this weekend, and she landed back in Miami late last night. I was already asleep by the time her taxi pulled up, so it seems she has waited until I am about to leave for college, to let me know about my new stepdad.

'It was so romantic Eden' my mother sighs, placing her left hand over her heart, a small sigh leaving her lips as she relives the memory. 'We were just watching a film in the hotel room you know, cuddled up under a blanket together, sipping a glass of wine. It was a romance film, and even though Henry doesn't care for them, he knows I do so he always watches them with me. Anyway, the female lead had to return home to help her family's failing business and she met a guy who helped her parents while she was away living the big life in the city. They fall in love and just in the middle of the street, the guy drops to one knee and asks her to marry him. I got all teary and Henry asked if I dreamed of a proposal like that, and, well, of course I do, what girl doesn't like spontaneity? Next thing I know, Henry has climbed off the sofa, dropped to one knee, and is asking me to marry him.'

My mother's eyes are alight with how happy she is as she reaches out to clasp my hands tightly in her own. 'We went and got a marriage license the next day, and three days later we were standing together in front of a Judge with two people we asked to witness the ceremony, that Henry just grabbed off the street outside. It was like a fairy tale sweetie, just a whirlwind of emotions that has bound me to a man I love.'

Her eyes sadden as she looks at me, 'I'm sorry you weren't there baby' she whispers, 'I just got so caught up and it felt so right. You know, your dad has been gone a long time, I know how short life can be . . . are you mad?'

I lace my fingers with hers, smiling as I shake my head emphatically, 'of course I'm not mad' I tell her. 'I just wish I could have seen you in your dress, been a part of your big day, but if this is what makes you happy Mum, then I'm happy for you.'

My mother half laughs half sobs as she throws herself at me across the table, almost sending my bowl into my lap as her arms wrap around me and hug me ercely.

'How did I get so lucky' she mumbles into my shoulder, 'I don't deserve a daughter as amazing as you.'

Disentangling myself from my mother's embrace, I laugh, picking up my spoon to hastily shovel the now mushy cereal into my mouth before wiping my lips with the back of my hand, and standing up, placing the now empty bowl in the dishwasher and shutting the door.

Turning back to my mum, I walk over to her, crouching down as she cups my cheek gently.

'I'm glad you found someone who makes you smile like this' I whisper softly. 'I haven't seen you shine this way in . . . well I can't remember the last time you smiled this brightly.'

Mum laughs, her eyes turning glassy as tears start to swell, blinking them away as she nods, 'do you think . . .' her lips twist uncertainly as she hesitates, seemingly choosing her words carefully before she leans a little closer to me.

'Do you think your dad would be upset? That I moved on? Found someone else?'

I grab her hand, holding it tightly as I shake my head vehemently. 'Dad loved you' I say sternly, 'he would want you to be happy. He's been gone for thirteen years mum, he wouldn't want you to be alone for the rest of your life.'

She nods, still looking unsure, 'I know but our vows . . .' she continues.

I let go of her hand only so I can grab her face and make her look at me, and see how serious I am. 'If it was the other way around if you were gone and Dad was still here with me, would you want him to spend the rest of his life alone?' I demand.

Mum's eyes widen as she immediately shakes her head, a ash of horror on her face, 'no!' she gasps, 'your dad was a reball of energy and love! He couldn't be alone, it would have destroyed him! Loving someone else doesn't mean that he loved me any less. He had so much love to give, I would hate for him to waste it by being alone.'

I grin at her, 'so why would he feel any different?' I ask with a cheeky wink.

'Oh you!' Mum giggles, swatting at me, 'you always have an answer to everything don't you!'

I laugh as I stand up, grabbing my bag from beside my chair and swinging it over my shoulder. 'That's why you made me go to college' I quip, 'all of these brains need to be put to good use somehow.'

Heading toward the door, I snag an apple out of the fruit bowl as I pass, before I pull my backpack around to my side so that I can shove it inside for later.

'Oh, when does Henry get here?' I ask idly, my mind already on getting my keys and heading to class. 'Does he have a lot of stuff? The house is kinda small, but I can help you to move things around to make more room if you guys let me know when you need me. I'm pretty sure I can make some room in my closet if you need a bit of extra storage space.'

I feel the tension thicken in the room behind me, and I slowly turn around again to face my mum who is nibbling on her bottom lip as she gives me an apologetic look.

'He's not going to be moving here with us' she whispers reluctantly as I feel the room start to spin around me and I grab hold of the wall beside me to remain upright, forcing myself to concentrate on my mother's words. 'His business is not really something that he can upend and move across the country, so . . . he asked me if I would move to Maine to be with him.'