

## Disruption

Wednesday morning Presley was sitting at a cute little table for two overlooking the beach, listening to the surf pound the shore and the laughs of people enjoying the sunshine. Nice was turning out to be everything she dreamed it would be and more. When her editor told her to book time off and recharge herself after back-to-back novels, she'd initially balked but then when the countdown to her ight to France and this beautiful resort in Nice drew to a close, her excitement ramped up. Now, she was grateful her friends and family pushed her to follow the editor's direction.

She picked at a piece of a croissant and sipped her coffee, content in the rst relaxing day she'd spent in months. Her book release was set. The initial pre-ordered copies would be available online for ordering on Friday with the new cover. The mass orders which would go to the bookstores would start being lled after. Her hopes for the book were for it to surpass the others she'd written.

Her phone rang on the small table, and she frowned. It was only after seven in Nice, so it was after ten pm back home. Since leaving at two in the morning on Tuesday, and losing nine hours, she'd spent most of her rst day in France sleeping off the jet lag. Today however she was up bright and early, but she wasn't expecting any phone calls at all today.

When she didn't recognize the number back home, she hesitated to answer it. "Hello?"

"You blocked my number you, lying, conniving, witch!"

She groaned internally. She shouldn't have answered.

"Hi Cruz. What can I do for you?"

"We were supposed to meet for lunch today. I had a PR team ready to capture us meeting for lunch. You stood me up."

"Actually, I never agreed to lunch yesterday."

"You said Tuesday."

"I didn't specify which Tuesday. You presumed yesterday but I never gave you a date or time. You sent me a text message, but I didn't respond to your request."

"What do you mean yesterday? It was today. Today! Not Monday. Tuesday."

"Tuesday is yesterday where I am."

"Where you are?"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"Vacation."

She could almost hear the blood rushing through his gargantuan neck to his brain ready to explode.

"When are you due back?"

"July."

"It's only the beginning of June!" he cursed furiously. "You're gone for a month!"

"Yes. My parents mentioned the vacation at brunch Sunday."

"I'm going to strangle you."

"Good luck with strangling me over the phone lines, dork. I'm not even in the country."

"You need to get your ass home now. We made a deal."

"Which I intend fully on complying with. I'll even sign the four-date contract, no balls, but it will have to start when I get back," she paused for added dramatic effect, "in July."

"This is not what we agreed upon."

"When did I agree I would start before I went away? My vacation has been booked six months. I never like to be around when the book gets released. It makes me nervous."

She could hear him hung.

"Where are you?"

"Vacation. At a nice resort." She liked the play on words there and grinned to herself. Nice versus nice.

"I don't think you understand the ramifications of your bullshit."

"I don't think you understand how much I don't care. You do know the pranks you, Odin and Anderson have played on me over the years caused me to require extensive psychotherapy, right? Damn Cruz, you humiliated me at every turn. You ruined my rst kiss. You ruined me getting my driver's license. You ruined prom. You ruined my graduation ceremony. God, Cruz, you, and Odin bursting into my dorm room on Halloween with the intent to cover me in black paint with the orange confetti caused me to fall off Noah mid-stroke and I broke his d\*\*k! Do you get that? I broke his p\*\*s, and it took us four months before we were able to have s\*x again. Not to mention the tear I suffered with made peeing hurt like a b\*\*\*\*h for weeks. We were eighteen and terried to death of having s\*x again in case of the pain."

He snickered, "it broke his d\*\*k?"

"It's not funny! You ruined so many things of my life."

"You wrecked my bike."

"Not even remotely comparable." She sniffed angrily. "Look. I woke up this morning content and feeling peaceful. You're ruining it for me."

"It's already morning where you are?"

"Yes. I'm at a beach resort. The sun is up. Families are already at the water. I'm enjoying breakfast and watching the people as they walk by."

"It's a month-long vacation?"

"Yes."

"Cut it in half."

"I will not. Do you know how much I paid for this vacation?"

"Fifty million?"

"Okay, you need to get over the fty-million thing. I stand by my statement you should have been making business deals in the boardroom and not with your c\*\*k. If you really needed to bed the daughter of the person you wanted to work with in order to get the deal, you're a shitty businessman."

"I am not a shitty businessman."

"It sure sounds like it."

He sighed, "listen. I need your help. Please. Can you come back? Reschedule your vacation and then take it from July to August."

"My vacation cost me fteen grand. I'm not a billionaire like you, Cruz. I can't simply throw away a big vacation because you want me to come hold your hand a few times. Be a big boy and gure it out on your own."

"You accused me of abuse, Presley. Someone recorded it. You accused me of using drugs. Someone recorded it. You accused me of forcing you to have an abortion and then leaving you there alone. Someone recorded it. I work in the health service industry. Do you know the impact this has on my business? I have spent the last ten years, working my ass off to be where I am. The last six years I have put my blood, sweat and tears into it. I haven't taken a vacation in over ve years, and you are basking on a beach while my entire reputation is in the shitter. I need you to x this. Please."

She hated herself for the guilt she was feeling at his words.

"Ladybird," he whined her name. "Come on."

"Why do you hate me?" she asked suddenly. "Don't give me the s\*\*t about being Odin's best friend. Why do you hate me specically? You were old enough to make up your own mind by the time you were thirteen or fourteen. Why did you keep doing this until you were in your mid-twenties? Why?"

"I don't know." He said quietly.

"You hated me for no reason."

"You went too far this time, Presley."

"You brought it on yourself. You made me your enemy. You can't even explain why you did it. I know why I dislike you, Cruz. You ruined so many of my rsts and humiliated me at every turn. It would take a miracle the likes the world has never seen for me to forgive you for all the pain you caused me. You caused me all this grief, all this trauma, all this pain and for a reason you cannot even dene other than my brother asked you to do it." She looked out to the crystalline waters and sighed, "your date was ruined because of me and my prank Cruz but I'm not taking responsibility for you losing the business deal you were trying to secure via a woman's v\*\*\*a. As for your reputation, if it can't handle just over four weeks of quiet, then it's on you. Not me."

"Look. I don't even pretend to understand your mind, but you were the one who accused me of abuse."

"Because you abused me!" She screeched the words out and then noted people at a nearby table turning to look at her and she dropped her head into her hand. "What you and Odin and Anderson did to me was abuse, Cruz. God why can't you see it?"

"You think our pranks were abuse?"

"I don't think it, Cruz. I believe it to the bottom of my soul. My mother believes it. My father believes it. My therapist, my best friends, hell a stranger on the street would believe it."

"Your father?"

"He tolerates you Cruz because your father has been one of his close friends for decades and you were Odin's best friend but the things you did to me, he doesn't like you very much as a person. You can ask him yourself in you don't believe me."

"Honestly, Presley, most of the s\*\*t we did was to make Odin laugh, not to make you cry. You know he was suicidal half the time, talking about killing himself because your father liked you better than him."

"What a load of bullshit," she propped her head on her palm. "You put spiders in my bed when I was kid to keep Odin from ong himself?"

"Yes or least distracting him from nishing out what he threatened to do. Messing with you was a sure way to get him to refocus his thoughts. Look, I never thought it was abuse."

"Well, you need to reevaluate your behavior. You were a twenty-ve-year-old man, not a child, a man, when you broke into my college dorm. Which part do you not comprehend? You are seven years older than me. I was a little girl, and you were torturing me with ridicule, mean pranks and cruel bullying. I hated you. I hated you so much."

"I'm sorry, Presley."

"You're only apologizing because you want something from me."

"No. I do want something from you but I'm apologizing because it's the right thing to do. Spending the time away from Odin made me grow up, Presley. I'm not the person I used to be. Please. Hear me out."

"I'm on vacation, Cruz. I'll be back in July. If you want to do the four dates when I'm back, I will do as I agreed to do. Until then, you'll have to wait for my f\*\*\*\*d up reputation, one I believe from the bottom of my soul you've earned, all on your own."

"Ladybird."

"Bye Cruz."

Ending the call, she ung the phone to the table and stared out over the beach wondering how one ten-minute phone call could ruin everything in front of her so easily.

One more thing the big jerk ruined for her.

With a frustrated sigh, she collected her belongings and went back to her room.