

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LEEANNA  
MORGAN



*Call of Me*

THE BRIDESMAIDS CLUB

ALL OF ME  
THE BRIDESMAIDS CLUB, BOOK 1



LEEANNA MORGAN

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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

*Four friends. Twenty-two bridesmaids' dresses.  
One random act of kindness that will change their lives forever.*

Tess has given up looking for Mr. Right, but that doesn't mean she's given up on love. When she reads a newspaper article about a young couple who've had everything stolen from their home, including four bridesmaids' dresses, she knows she has to help.

But by helping the bride, Tess risks exposing a past she doesn't want anyone to know about. She does everything she can to minimize the danger she's in, but she does the one thing guaranteed to destroy everything—she falls in love with the wrong man.

Logan Allen has spent most of his career reporting on the news from around the world. When a letter arrives from Afghanistan, the trauma he's been living with is about to explode back into his life. He betrayed a small Afghan village and Tess thinks he's betrayed her.

From their first random act of kindness comes an experience Logan and Tess will never forget. And maybe, if they work together, they can create a future that's better than anything they've left behind.

*All of Me* is the first book in The Bridesmaids Club series, but can easily be read as a standalone. All of my series are linked, so if you meet someone you like, you could find them in another book. For news of my latest releases, please visit [leeannamorgan.com](http://leeannamorgan.com) and sign up for my newsletter. Happy reading!

**Other Novels by Leeanna Morgan:**

### **Montana Brides:**

Book 1: Forever Dreams (Gracie and Trent)

Book 2: Forever in Love (Amy and Nathan)

Book 3: Forever After (Nicky and Sam)

Book 4: Forever Wishes (Erin and Jake)

Book 5: Forever Santa (A Montana Brides Christmas Novella)

Book 6: Forever Cowboy (Emily and Alex)

Book 7: Forever Together (Kate and Dan)

Book 8: Forever and a Day (Sarah and Jordan)

Montana Brides Boxed Set: Books 1-3

Montana Brides Boxed Set: Books 4-6

### **The Bridesmaids Club:**

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Book 6: The Gift (Hannah and Brett)

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The Protectors Boxed Set: Books 1-3

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Book 2: Once In A Lifetime (Sam and Caleb)

Book 3: A Christmas Wish (Megan and William)

Book 4: Before Today (Brooke and Levi)

Book 5: The Sweetest Thing (Cassie and Noah)

## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the man who worked in a shoe store in New York City  
twenty-five years ago.

Your random act of kindness helped a lost twenty-one-year-old find her hotel. I  
will be forever grateful to you.



## CHAPTER 1



Jess stared at the cartons of buttermilk she'd left on the counter overnight. By mistake.

She wouldn't panic. She'd strutted down the runways of top fashion houses wearing haute couture masterpieces. She would not cry over a little sour milk.

Except it wasn't a little bit. It was her last four quarts. She'd promised the Groovy Grans Motorcycle Club that she'd have blueberry buttermilk pancakes ready for them at seven o'clock. She checked her watch. In an hour and a half, she'd have fifteen unhappy grans standing in her café, wondering what had happened to their breakfast.

She needed buttermilk and she needed it fast. She took a deep breath and grabbed her jacket. Safeway would be open. She could race across Bozeman, buy the buttermilk and be back in fifteen minutes. She'd make the pancakes. Then she'd start on the muffins, cakes, pies and scones that her other customers would be waiting for.

She opened the front door, raced across to her car, then remembered her wallet. She searched her pockets for the keys to her café. She thought she'd left them in her jacket pocket. She looked on the passenger seat, the back seats. They weren't there. Maybe she'd tossed them in her tote bag.

The one that was sitting inside the café with her wallet.

This couldn't be happening. It really couldn't. She turned the handle on the front door, hoping for a miracle. It was locked. She rested her head against the glass and tried to think like a logical, mature, twenty-nine-year-old instead of the

ditzy blond that needed to break into her own business.

“Everything okay?”

Tess looked sideways and sighed. Logan Allen, local multi-award winning reporter, and the one man guaranteed to make a good day turn bad, stood beside her.

“Tess?”

“I’m fine.” She let go of the door handle and turned to Logan. He’d been running. Sweat trickled down his face, wet his T-shirt until it stuck to his wide chest and bulging biceps. Not that she was looking. Not much anyway.

Tess refused to find his dark hair and deep brown eyes attractive. She’d spent most of her life around male models that were so handsome they took her breath away. But she’d learned the hard way that those looks could hide a heart of steel.

“It doesn’t look as though you’re fine.” His eyes skated over her blond hair and flushed face. “You look...frazzled.”

“That’s a big word for five-thirty in the morning. You could use it in one of your stories,” she said sweetly.

“Yeah. A homicide. Blond café owner found dead in the street after insulting a reporter.”

“There you go. Another Pulitzer Prize winning story in the making.”

Logan crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Now that we’ve gotten over our first insult for the day, do you want to tell me what’s going on?”

“I need buttermilk for pancakes, except I left my wallet in the café.”

“Let me guess. Your front door keys are sitting in the café, too.”

Tess glared at the smile on his face. “I’ll check my car. My keys might have fallen down the side of the seat.” She crossed the sidewalk and open the passenger door of her trusty Toyota. She hunted under the seat, beside the seat, in the glove compartment, anywhere she could think of.

“Have you checked the trunk?”

Tess pulled herself out of her car. “Why would I leave them in the trunk?”

“I don’t know. Maybe you opened it to stash a dead body inside. Or maybe you left your groceries in there like the rest of us mere mortals.”

Tess kept her lips clamped tight. She didn’t have time to bicker with him.

She opened her trunk and dropped her car keys into her pocket. “What is it with you and dead bodies. Has something happened that you’re not telling me about?”

“There’s lots I don’t tell you,” Logan muttered as he started hunting through the mess in her trunk. “You’ve got an entire closet full of clothes in here.”

“I have not. It’s my emergency gear. You know, if I need a change of trousers, a jacket or a sweater.”

He pulled out a slinky evening dress. “This is an emergency item?”

Tess snatched the scrap of pale pink silk out of his hands. “I forgot to take it inside,” she muttered.

“Looks like someone else has things they’d sooner not share.” He moved a pair of sneakers and grinned. “The keys to your café wouldn’t have a coffee cup on the tag would they?”

“You’ve found them?”

He dangled the keys in front of his chest. “What are they worth?”

The smile fell off Tess’ face. “What do you mean?”

“I like your buttermilk pancakes—especially the ones with bacon and maple syrup.”

It must have been the early morning air, but she felt disappointed that the keys were going to be hers so easily. Knowing how Logan’s mind worked she’d expected something more challenging, more daring. “You don’t need to tell me how much you like pancakes. You eat enough of them to sink a ship.”

“I’m flattered you’ve noticed.” He stepped forward, until their noses were almost touching. “I’ll trade the keys for a high stack. Ten pancakes, crispy bacon and a side bowl of syrup.”

Tess lifted the keys out of his fingers. “Fine. But unless I get to the store and back in ten minutes you won’t be eating anything.”

“I could buy what you need.”

“What do you mean?”

He held out his hand. “Give me your car keys. I’ll go to Safeway and bring your groceries back here. You can start the other things you need to bake.”

“I don’t...I mean...” Tess stared at him. She was sure there must have been a

catch in his offer somewhere.

“Say, ‘Yes, Logan. You’re such a wonderful person that I’ll throw in as much coffee as you can drink when you get back.’”

Tess had never said yes to Logan, and his sparkling brown eyes and lopsided grin wouldn’t change her mind. “You need a shave.”

Logan looked down at her mouth. “Say yes.”

She took a step backward and passed him her car keys. “Thank you.”

He frowned and dropped the keys to the café into her outstretched hand. “I’ll be back soon.”

“Wait. I’ll give you some money.”

“You can pay me back later. How much buttermilk do you need?”

“You’d better buy five cartons. Get the organic buttermilk. It’s with the other milk at the back of the store.”

“Organic buttermilk. Five cartons. Anything else?”

Tess was holding the front door keys so tight that they dug into her fingers. “Are you sure you want to do this for me? You’re hot and sweaty. You haven’t warmed down. You’ll get cramps.”

Logan scowled at her. “I’ll be back soon.”

And then he folded all six-foot-five inches of sweaty man into the front seat of her Toyota Corolla. Tess didn’t hang around to watch him. She had things to do, food to bake and a coffee machine that needed to be turned on.



LOGAN ARRIVED BACK at Angel Wings Café not knowing what to expect. Tess could be so stubborn and annoying. She drove him insane with the snippy comments that were never far from her tongue.

But there was something about her, something that made him want to keep coming back. What he didn’t understand was why he seemed to be the only person in Bozeman she didn’t like, but he was going to find out.

He knocked on the front door of the café and waited. Tess hurried across the room and hauled him inside by the arm.

“Thank goodness you’re back. The Groovy Grans will be here in an hour.” She took the grocery bags out of his hands and walked into the kitchen.

“The Groovy Grans?” Logan followed her. The ovens were on and it looked as if a batch of scones were already cooking. She’d been in the middle of making something else. A bowl of creamy butter sat beside a bag of flour and a carton of milk.

“Can you pass me one of the small bowls?” Tess pointed in the general direction of the pantry.

He looked inside and grabbed a bowl.

Tess took it out of his hands. “The Groovy Grans are from Billings. They’re all grandmas who drive motorcycles. They go on weekend tours. On the first and third Saturday of each month, they pass through Bozeman for breakfast.”

“How many are you expecting?”

Tess broke four eggs into the bowl and started whisking them. “Fifteen.” She took a measuring cup off the counter and started pouring buttermilk into it. “How good are you in the kitchen?”

“Depends on what you had in mind.” He tried not to laugh at the scowl she sent his way.

“Do you know how to use a griddle?”

He looked at the stove and frowned at the heavy metal pan. “I’ve been running for forty minutes. I’m not smelling that sweet at the moment.”

“The pancakes won’t care what you smell like. Wash your hands and I’ll show you how to cook a pancake.”

Tess wiped her hands on her apron and took something out of a cupboard. She walked toward him with a determined look in her eyes. “Hold your arms up.”

“What do you... You’ve got to be joking.”

“Up. I’m on a tight time frame.” Tess held her spray deodorant in front of him.

“It’s pink.”

“Don’t be a wuss. The pancakes might not have a nose, but I do. Up.”

He stuck his arms in the air and glared at her. “As long as you know I’m

doing this for humanitarian reasons only. If you tell anyone I wore girls' deodorant I won't help in the kitchen again."

"The chance of you ever being out here with me again is almost zilch, so I guess we're both safe." She sprayed the outside of his T-shirt. "Now you smell pretty."

Logan sniffed the air. "I'm going home for a shower after I've cooked the pancakes."

"I hope so." She pulled open a drawer and took out an apron. "Wear this."

"Have you always been this bossy?"

"Only when I'm desperate," she muttered. "Annie won't be here for another half hour."

Annie was Tess' part-time baker. They'd worked together for as long as Logan had been in Bozeman.

Tess walked across to the long stainless steel counter in the middle of the room. "I've already put the dry ingredients in a bowl for the pancakes. I just need to add the buttermilk, eggs, and melted butter." She picked up a spoon and started mixing everything together. She moved across to the stove, grabbing a stick of butter on the way through. "The griddle's hot, so the pancakes can go straight on it. Add a pat of butter to the pan, then after it's melted, wipe it around the pan with a paper towel."

He pulled a paper towel off the roll and did what she'd said.

"If you've got excess butter in the pan, it will burn and that gives the pancakes a nasty flavor." Tess took a ladle out of a drawer and started spooning pancake batter onto the griddle. "Half a ladle per pancake is enough. Just pour it on, then add another one. You should get four pancakes on the griddle at a time."

Logan looked over Tess' shoulder. "The pancake mixture is lumpy."

"It's supposed to be. Small to medium lumps are your friend. That way the pancakes will be light and fluffy. After the pancakes are on the griddle add a small handful of blueberries to the top of each one, like this." Tess sprinkled fresh blueberries on the pancakes and reached for a spatula. "They'll take about two minutes to cook on the first side and less on the second."

"How do I know when to turn them over?"

“Air bubbles should have risen to the surface and they’ll look a little dry around the edges.”

He watched Tess flip the first batch, then slide them into the oven to keep warm. She handed him the ladle and smiled. “Don’t look so worried. As long as they don’t burn they’ll taste great. You do the next batch and I’ll watch.”

Logan felt as if he was going for a job interview. He poured the batter into the pan, added the blueberries, then watched them carefully while they cooked. He never would have thought cooking pancakes could be so stressful. He slid his first batch into the oven and relaxed.

“Good job,” Tess said. “Let me know when you’re getting low on batter. I’ll make some more for you.”

He nodded and added more pancake mixture to the pan. Tess went back to whatever she was making, working with a quick efficiency that impressed him.

He flipped the pancakes and watched them rise. “You started work late this morning.”

Tess glanced up from the bowl of ingredients she was mixing.

Heat hit Logan’s face and it had nothing to do with the stove. “I run. I notice things.”

Tess grunted and pulled a baking sheet out of a drawer. She started rolling balls of dough in her hands. “Why do you run so early?”

Logan opened the oven and slid the cooked pancakes inside. He didn’t feel comfortable talking about the real reason he ran. Ever since he’d come back from Afghanistan, he couldn’t sleep, couldn’t forget the images that were stamped on his brain. He’d written award-winning stories and nearly killed himself in the process.

Tess was still waiting for a reply, so he did what he normally did. Answered as close to the truth as he dared to go. “I wake up early. It keeps me fit.” He sprinkled blueberries on the next batch of pancake batter and stared at the pan.

The front door banged open. “Sorry I’m late,” Annie yelled from the front of the café. “How’s your head this morning?”

A mini tornado of red sweater and jeans arrived in the kitchen. “Molly didn’t get...” she stopped in the middle of the room. “Logan? What are you doing

here?”

“Tess had an emergency.”

“You’re making pancakes?”

He nodded. “Blueberry.”

Annie looked between them and smiled. “What do you want me to do?”

“Make the apple huckleberry pies,” Tess said. “I’m just about to start the pecan pie Mr. Donaldson ordered.” Logan moved out of her way as she slid a tray of cookies into the oven. “The Groovy Grans will be here soon.”

Annie washed her hands and nodded. She lifted a container of sugar onto the counter and measured flour and baking powder into a bowl.

He watched Annie and Tess move around the kitchen, adding random ingredients to bowls. “Where are your recipe books?”

Annie grinned. “We don’t need them, not for the regular recipes anyway.”

Logan poured another batch of pancake batter onto the griddle. “I’m going to need more pancake mix.”

“Already on it,” Tess said. She left a bowl of batter beside him. “I’ll just check the café.”

She walked out of the room and Logan watched Annie roll out the pie crusts.

Annie smiled. “You must have done something really nice for Tess.”

“Because she’s not growling at me?”

She looked over at the kitchen door. “We had a really late night last night. I’m surprised she made it in here on time.”

“Where did you go?”

“Ennis.” The beeper on the oven went off and Annie took the scones out.

Logan laughed as he flipped the pancakes. “I wouldn’t have thought there’d be a whole lot of action happening in Ennis on a Friday night.”

Annie started peeling a bowl of apples. “You are so wrong. We had a great time. Molly and Tess hadn’t tasted moonshine before. Willie’s Distillery makes the best legal moonshine ever. Just don’t mention their bourbon whiskey to Sally when you next see her.”

“She liked it too much?”

“Enough to buy a few bottles to bring home. Can you pass me two of the



lemons beside you?”

Logan looked along the counter and handed Annie the lemons. He heard the distant roar of motorcycle engines and checked how many pancakes he'd made.

Annie dropped the half-peeled apple in her bowl and raced over to a set of cupboards. “They’re early. They don’t usually arrive for another fifteen minutes.” She started lifting out glasses, putting them on trays and moving into the café.

The kitchen door opened and Tess headed straight across to the fridge. “The Groovy Grans are down the street. Keep those pancakes coming, Logan. I’ll be back soon.” She took two jugs of juice into the café and he looked around the kitchen.

If it had been a calm oasis when he arrived, it wasn’t now. And with the amount of noise coming from the street, it wasn’t about to get any better.



TESS TOOK another sip of orange juice and sighed. The morning rush was over. She could have a break, enjoy some peace and quiet in the café before the lunch crowd descended.

“Do you want to share a pancake? You look as though you need it.” Logan sent a sunny smile her way and she scowled.

“No, thanks.”

He ate another big fork of pancake and shrugged his shoulders. “You don’t know what you’re missing.”

She did know what she was missing and she still didn’t care. Her head felt like it was pounding off her shoulders. She’d swallowed a couple of Tylenol halfway through the Groovy Grans’ breakfast, but it hadn’t made much difference.

“Moonshine can do that to you if you’re not careful.” Logan drizzled more maple syrup on his last pancake.

Tess watched Logan put the cap back on the bottle and pick up his knife and fork. After the Groovy Grans had left on their motorcycles, Logan had gone

home, had a shower and returned to eat his promised pancakes.

“How do you know I was drinking Moonshine?”

Annie left a grilled cheese sandwich in front of Tess. “That would have been me. We were, you know, passing the time of day. I happened to mention our late night.”

Tess looked at the sandwich. She didn’t know if she could eat it.

Annie put the weekend newspaper on the table and patted her shoulder. “I’ll look after the café. Take as long as you need.”

“Thanks, Annie.” Tess watched her friend walk to the front counter.

“You should go for a run. Sweat the alcohol out of your body.”

Tess flicked open the paper and ignored Logan.

“So we’re back to bickering buddies again? I wondered how long our truce would last.”

“We didn’t have a truce and we aren’t buddies. Although I do appreciate your help this morning.”

“Nice to know there’s a heart in there somewhere.”

Logan didn’t seem particularly devastated by Tess’ lack of enthusiasm where he was concerned. And he shouldn’t have been. They weren’t friends, but Tess supposed he could be called an acquaintance. Especially after her one disastrous attempt to find out why he was living in Bozeman. He ate at her café at least three times a week and had a soft spot for pancakes. The only thing they had in common was that Logan was a reporter and she hated reporters. Most days they didn’t have a lot to say to each other.

“Pancakes tasted good.”

Tess looked up. “Thanks.”

“What I don’t understand is how you can be so nice one minute, then in the next breath turn into an ice maiden. Someone must have burned you real bad.”

Tess squinted at Logan. “I believe the correct phrasing is ‘really bad’.”

“So who was he? Some heart-throb who spurned you at the altar? Or maybe you didn’t get that far. Maybe he dumped you for your best friend and you’ve never forgiven him.”

Tess turned over another page in the newspaper. Logan didn’t know how

close he'd gotten to the truth. Except it hadn't been as simple as her boyfriend running off with her best friend. Her best friend had died and Andrew Gibson had walked away a free man.

Logan wiped his mouth on a napkin and took his dirty dishes across to Annie. Before he left the café, he came and stood beside Tess' table.

He leaned down, close enough that she could smell his aftershave and the clean scent that was all man. "Someday you're going to tell me why you don't like me. And when you do, I'm going to show you how wrong you are."

Tess looked him straight in the eyes. "That someday will never come."

Logan smiled. "It almost happened once." His eyes dropped to her mouth and Tess blushed.

"Well, if it's not Mr. Hot and Steamy." Sally, Tess' friend, stood beside Logan, smiling at him as if she'd seen something funny. "Don't worry about, Tess. She doesn't appreciate a good man when she sees one."

"You can say that again," he muttered. "I've got to go. Enjoy your weekend." He smiled at Sally and nodded at Tess.

Tess went back to reading the paper.

"You can be such a witch sometimes." Sally dropped into the seat opposite her. "Logan's a good guy. You don't like reporters, and I guess you've got your reasons. But that's no excuse to treat him like the enemy."

Tess folded the newspaper in half. "Can we talk about something else?"

"As soon as I've bought my lunch. I'll be back in a minute."

Sally walked over to Annie and started looking through the glass cabinets beside the cash register.

Tess imagined that some women might find Logan attractive. He was easily six-foot-five. He had dark brown eyes that turned to amber when he was thinking about...she dragged her brain away from where that thought was going and concentrated on his body. That didn't do her much good either.

Rock hard muscles that could have been sculptured out of granite summed him up perfectly. He would have ticked more than one 'yes' box in a desperate woman's fantasy. But she wasn't desperate. She didn't even care if his smile could melt an iceberg, or an ice maiden. He was a reporter and that meant off-

limits. No way. Ever.

“What have you been arguing about with Logan this time?” Sally returned to the table with a chicken pie and a raspberry muffin.

“We weren’t arguing. He helped cook pancakes this morning.”

“Why would he do that?”

Tess sighed. “It’s a long story. What have you been doing?”

“Recovering from last night.” Sally bit into her pie and smiled. “These are the best chicken pies in Montana. You should start a pie restaurant.”

“It’s hard enough finding the time to run this café. I couldn’t imagine having a restaurant as well.”

“It’s because you’re a control freak. You can’t let someone else take over.”

Tess smiled. “You could be right.”

“I know I’m right. So how come Logan was here?”

“I was desperate. I’d run out of buttermilk.”

Sally blew on the pie. “The old buttermilk excuse. It will get a man every time.”

Tess bit into her cheese sandwich. “It was half-past five in the morning. My options were limited.”

“But what an option,” Sally said with a grin.

Tess looked at her watch. “I’ve got to get moving. Annie needs a break and the lunch customers will be here soon. Molly’s coming by for a coffee after we close. Do you want to join us?”

“Count me in. And try not to be so hard on Logan. He’s a nice guy.”

“Maybe,” Tess said grudgingly as she stood up. But he was a reporter and she had a past no one knew about. And she planned on keeping it that way.



BY FOUR O’CLOCK THAT AFTERNOON, Tess was glad she’d invited her friends over for coffee. She laughed at something Molly said and felt the day’s dramas melting away.

The Irish photographer laughed back. “It’s true. He said he’d had a grand

time on our first date. When he told me he was looking for a wife, I didn't know what to say."

"I hope you said no." Sally reached for her coffee and stopped when Molly didn't reply. "You did say no, didn't you?"

Molly's cheeks turned red. "I married Rowan six months later."

Annie's mouth dropped open.

Molly looked slowly around the table. "He was charming and handsome. He whispered the poetry of Yeats and Moore in my ear." She shrugged her shoulders. "It warmed my heart to be with him."

"What happened?" Tess asked. "He didn't come to Montana with you."

"He ran off with a barmaid from County Kerry a few months after we were married. I was naive and foolish."

"At least you were able to be foolish." Annie bit into her cookie.

"Well don't keep us in suspense," Tess said. "Tell us what happened."

"That's a story for another time." Annie glanced at another table and frowned. "Did anyone see the article in today's paper about the house burglary?"

"You're changing the subject," Molly said.

Annie shook her head. "It's really sad. Wait here..." She walked across the café and picked up a newspaper. She opened it to the first page and handed it to Tess. "The house was burgled while the owners were visiting the bride-to-be's mom in the hospital. They're getting married in two weeks' time and their bridesmaids' dresses were stolen."

Tess skimmed through the article. "No insurance," she muttered. "Why do people do that?"

"Can't afford it or don't think anything will ever happen to them." Sally looked over Tess' shoulder. "They lost everything. That's sad."

"The bride's mom has got breast cancer," Annie added. "They can't delay the wedding in case she doesn't make it."

Tess gave the paper to Sally. "It doesn't sound as though they've got much money." She knew what it felt like to not know where your next meal was coming from. But at least she'd had a roof over her head and grandparents who didn't mind taking in an angry thirteen-year-old.

Tess watched Sally finish the article and pass it to Molly. "A couple of months ago we were talking about always being bridesmaids and never brides."

Sally frowned. "Was that the one where we were also discussing our non-existent love lives?"

Tess nodded. "How many bridesmaids' dresses have we got between the four of us?"

"I know where you're going with this." Sally grinned. "I've got eight." She smiled at Annie's shocked gasp. "What can I say. Cupid keeps missing me with his arrow."

"I've never been a bridesmaid," Molly said. "But I'm sure some of the brides I've photographed would be happy to donate their bridesmaids' dresses."

"I've got two," Annie said.

Tess added up how many weddings she'd been a bridesmaid for. "I've got seven. We could easily help the couple in the paper." She looked around the table waiting to hear what everyone else thought.

Sally frowned. "What if they're the wrong sizes, or the bride wants the same colors and styles? We've got seventeen dresses, but they're all different."

"We could make a catalog," Molly said. "I could take photos of each dress. We could add the sizes and the skirt length. It wouldn't take much to match a bridesmaid up with a dress. If the bride wants the same color, she can dye them."

Tess ran behind the sales counter and picked up a pen and her notebook. "It could work." She sat back down at the table and started making notes. "How many bridesmaids' dresses do we need for the bride in the newspaper?"

Molly looked down at the article. "Four."

"There must be four dresses she'd like," Annie said. "Who is the bride?"

Molly ran her finger over the article. "The bride-to-be is Estelle and her fiancé is Darren. There are no last names."

Tess wrote a question mark beside their names. "We know her mom is in the hospital and that the wedding is in two weeks' time. It shouldn't be that hard to find them." She tapped her pen against her lips. "We should find the person who wrote the article."

Annie smiled. "I believe the reporter's name is Logan Allen."

Tess looked up from the notes she was writing. "You're joking?"

"I kid you not," Annie said. "Aren't you lucky you made him pancakes this morning?"

She might have made him pancakes, but she'd also annoyed him. "I think Sally should talk to him."

Sally shook her head. "I don't think so. You've known Logan a lot longer than I have. He's all yours."

Tess looked at Molly.

"Don't look at me with those big blue eyes," Molly said. "Sometimes a woman needs to live a little dangerously. And he's such a charmer."

Tess knew Logan was charming when he needed to be, ruthless if it suited the occasion. She passed Molly another muffin. "Please, Molly. You like men that are charming. You could talk him into giving you the information we need to find the bride and groom."

"I ended up married to the last man that charmed me. So no, Logan is all yours. But I will have that muffin you're holding under my nose as a bribe."

Tess dropped her head onto the table. "You're all so mean."

Sally laughed. "I bet Logan could be really mean, too. Especially if he's got something you need."

"Exactly. That's why someone else needs to go." Everyone looked at Tess with smiles on their faces.

"Okay," she muttered. "I'll go and see him on Monday."

Molly left the newspaper article in the middle of the table. "Monday will be too late. We have two weeks to find the bride, see if she wants our help and make sure all of the dresses fit the bridesmaids. You need to see Logan by tomorrow at the latest."

"It's Sunday tomorrow," Tess squeaked. She didn't want to see him at his home. It was bad enough having to go into his office.

"Molly's right. We need to do something now." Sally jumped up from her seat and picked up her bag. "Let's check the online phone directory. There can't be that many men called Logan Allen in Bozeman."

Tess hoped he had an unlisted number, but knowing Sally, it wouldn't make

any difference. She seemed to know most people around town, or someone who knew someone else.

Sally balanced her tablet on her knees and tapped the screen. “Bingo. 86 Harry Shaw Lane. Here’s his phone number.”

She passed the tablet across to Tess and she wrote his address and phone number in her notebook. “What if he won’t talk to me?”

“Any man who buys buttermilk at five thirty in the morning and helps make pancakes won’t ignore a bride in distress.” Annie sounded so sure of herself that Tess felt a little better.

“Even if he doesn’t like you, he’ll want to help,” Sally added.

“I don’t know whether you’re trying to make me feel better or worse, but I’ll do it. I’ll go and see him today. After he’s told me the bride’s name, I’ll send everyone a text.”

Sally held her coffee mug in the air. “Here’s to making a bride’s dreams come true.”

Tess clinked her mug against everyone else’s.

She only hoped that making a bride’s dream come true wouldn’t turn into her worst nightmare.



## CHAPTER 2



Tess parked her car outside Logan's home. She hadn't called him, hadn't done any of the things a normal, sane woman would have done. She didn't know whether she was more worried about him not helping, or what she'd do if he said he would.

As soon as everyone had left the café she'd put two muffins in a bag and driven across town. Logan's home was different than what she'd expected. She'd thought he'd live in an apartment, a bachelor pad he could leave at the drop of a hat when he raced off to report on a story somewhere in the world.

The two-story home in front of her didn't look like the sort of home you'd be away from for long. With its wide front porch, steep gabled roof and pretty garden, it looked like a home someone spent time in.

She picked up the muffins and the newspaper article sitting on the passenger seat. If she'd been able to think of an alternative solution, she wouldn't be here. But Logan was the only person who knew who the bride and groom were. The only person that could help them.

She couldn't let Sally, Molly, and Annie down. She couldn't let the bride down.

Her shoes clicked on the stone driveway as she walked toward Logan's home. She recited the words she'd practiced in the car. The ones that would make him realize how important it was that they find the bride.

She walked up the wooden steps, pushed the doorbell and waited.

The door opened and Tess plastered a polite smile on her face. She frowned,

looked down, and tried not to stare. A little girl with short red hair stared up at her.

“You’re tall.”

“Stacey, I don’t think...” Logan looked at her. “Tess? What are you doing here?”

“I...” She couldn’t remember what she’d been going to say. She moved her hands and remembered the muffins. “These are for you. I’m sorry for intruding.” She turned to go.

“You’re not intruding,” Logan said quickly. “My sister and niece have been staying with me for the last week. They’re about to head home.”

“Uncle Logan helped Mom pack the car,” Stacey said. “We’re going to the airport.”

“Logan, have you seen my wallet?” A pretty young woman stood beside Logan. The family resemblance was so strong that Tess would have pegged them as brother and sister even if she didn’t know they were related.

Logan nodded at Tess. “Jacqui, this is Tess. Tess, Jacqui.”

Jacqui held her hand out. “Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, too.” Tess bit her bottom lip and tried to think of a good way of getting out of Logan’s front door. “Have a safe flight home. I’ll come back another day.”

Jacqui looked between her and Logan. “Don’t be silly.” She grabbed Tess’ arm and pulled her inside. “Logan never introduces us to any of his friends. I was beginning to think he didn’t have any.”

“Oh, but I’m not— ”

“Our secret’s safe with Jacqui.” Logan put his arm around her waist and hauled her close.

Tess tried to step away from him, but he was every bit as strong as he looked. “What do you think you’re...” His mouth landed on hers and she almost bit his lip. Until she remembered what she was here for, then she kept her teeth to herself. She turned her head sideways, ignored the zap of electricity that almost made her forget that she didn’t like him, and looked down into the eyes of his niece.

“Uncle Logan kissed you.”

The words were said with such awe that Tess wondered if she'd ever seen her uncle kiss anyone. Tess thought wiping her mouth with the back of her hand was a bit rude under the circumstances, so she pulled a tissue out of her pocket and pretended to blow her nose.

Logan choked back a laugh.

She glared at him.

“I can't believe Logan left it until now to introduce us.” Jacqui looked as though her brother had just announced Christmas was going to be postponed. “Mom will be disappointed she didn't come to Bozeman.”

Tess sensed a chink in the white knight's armor. At least she hoped he was a white knight. After his lip smacking deception, he'd better be something useful. If she said the right thing, Logan might not have a choice but to help them. But she needed to be careful, sneaky. Just like the love-struck reporter staring at her like he'd just made the biggest mistake of his life.

“Logan's such a sweet guy,” Tess cooed. She dredged up everything she'd learned from her years on the catwalk and in front of a camera.

Logan looked as though she'd just run him over with a bulldozer.

Jacqui glowed with happiness. “We think so, too.” She glanced at her watch. “We've got ten minutes before we need to leave. Come into the living room.”

Logan must have sensed he was on the losing end of whatever joke he'd decided was worth playing. “Tess just stopped by to say hello.”

Tess smiled sweetly at him. She stepped toward him and ran her finger along the side of his jaw. “It's okay. I can stay for a few minutes.” Call her perverse, but she got such a kick out of seeing a blush creep along his cheeks that she leaned in even closer. “I'd like to get to know Jacqui better. You've said such lovely things about her and Stacey.”

“I'll get the lemonade,” Stacey shouted as she ran down the hallway.

“We're not going to have time,” Logan shouted back, with a hint of desperation in his voice.

Jacqui rolled her eyes. “Ignore my brother. He's so secretive about his life that it's a wonder he told us he was moving to Montana. Do you live in

Bozeman, Tess?”

“I moved here a few years ago. I own a café in town.” Tess made sure she sat thigh to thigh with Logan. He smiled as he put his arm around her shoulders. He didn’t look embarrassed now. He looked as though he was settling in for a cozy night with the woman of his dreams.

Except Tess didn’t want to be his dream girl. All she wanted was the name and address of the bride who’d been burgled.

Stacey brought two tall glasses of lemonade into the room. Jacqui took them out of her daughter’s hands before they sloshed over the floor. “It’s just as well you enjoy cooking, Tess. Logan is such a dweeb when it comes to food. If the barbecue hadn’t been invented, he’d starve.”

“Tess taught me how to cook blueberry pancakes,” Logan said with pride. “She’s great with her hands.”

Tess nudged him in the ribs. Hard. Logan coughed and pulled her toward him. He seemed to be getting into the boyfriend groove really fast. She didn’t know what had happened to the threat of his mom’s interest in his life, but it was taking second place to getting close to her.

If Jacqui noticed Tess’ attempt to break one or two of Logan’s ribs, she didn’t say a word. But she did give her brother another confused stare. “How long have you been dating each other?”

Tess wasn’t going anywhere near that question. It could lead to disaster, high expectations and a Mom who might have wedding bells on her mind.

“I met Tess when I first moved here. The dating thing is recent.”

Tess smiled. If the man could read her mind, he’d be moving his arm about now.

“I’m just happy he’s found someone special. After what happened in Afghanistan, I never thought he’d be happy again.”

Tess felt Logan retreat long before he moved his arm. Jacqui had touched on something important and her brother had gone into shutdown mode. She put her hand on Logan’s leg and smiled at Jacqui, hoping to take some of the sting out of his sister’s words. “Logan’s a great guy. Bozeman has been good for both of us.”

“We need to leave for the airport,” Logan said. “Otherwise you’re not going

to get home.”

Jacqui stood up and held Tess’ hands. “I wish my brother had introduced us sooner. You’re exactly what he needs.”

Tess knew she was the exact opposite of what he needed. But she returned Jacqui’s hug and even managed a smile. “It’s been nice meeting you.” She turned to Logan and touched his arm. “I’ll see myself out. Bye.”

Before anyone said anything more, she left Logan’s home. After what had just happened she didn’t know how she was going to ask him about the newspaper article. Or how she’d be able to speak to him again.



“HOW DID IT GO WITH LOGAN?” Sally stood in Tess’ doorway with a dog bigger than most Shetland ponies standing beside her. “Sit, Max.”

Max obediently sat beside Sally. His shaggy coat and big floppy ears were kind of cute if you didn’t stand too close to him. Max loved a cuddle, and he’d wiggle his way across to anyone who looked like they might have a soft spot for a giant canine.

“You can come inside.” Tess held the door wider so Sally and her walking buddy could get through.

“I don’t know. Max can be a bit of a problem in close quarters.”

“It’s okay,” Tess assured her. “I don’t have anything incredibly valuable. Why are you walking Max in town? I thought you exercised all of the shelter dogs at the shelter.”

Sally looked down at Max. “I thought a little socializing might do him a favor. No one wants a big dog and he’s such a sweetie.”

“You were hoping someone would see you walking him and want to take him home.”

Sally smiled. “Everyone knows I’m on a crusade to re-home the shelter animals. I need to find a home for Max.”

Sally didn’t need to say what would happen if Max didn’t find somewhere to live. Tess patted his head and looked into his big brown eyes. “I hope it works

out.”

“So do I.” Sally sighed. “Tell me about Logan. You didn’t send us a text.”

Tess walked into the living room and sat on the sofa.

Sally followed her, with Max at her heels. He collapsed on the wooden floor with a big doggy sigh.

Even though she felt as though she’d let everyone down, Tess couldn’t help the smile that slipped across her face. “It sounds as though you’ve been walking Max for most of the day.”

“He’s a big boy. It takes a lot of energy to move all of his weight around.” She scratched behind Max’s ears and earned herself a lick on her hand.

“I didn’t ask him,” Tess said softly.

Sally looked confused. “Why didn’t you ask Logan who the bride and groom were? Wasn’t he home?”

“I visited him after you left. He was home, but his sister and niece were with him.”

“I don’t understand. Why wouldn’t he want to discuss the story in front of them?”

Tess dropped her head onto her chest. “I didn’t ask him,” she muttered. “It got a bit strange. He kissed me.”

Sally’s mouth dropped open. “I didn’t think you knew him that well.”

“I don’t. He was playing a joke on his sister, pretending he was my boyfriend.”

“And you didn’t tell her the truth? That doesn’t sound like you.”

Tess knew it wasn’t like her, which made it so much worse. “I thought if I played along with him, he’d owe me and have to tell me who the bride and groom are. But then Jacqui started talking about Afghanistan and it all got too complicated.”

Max yawned and Sally patted his head. “I didn’t know Logan had been in Afghanistan. Was he in the Military or there as a reporter?”

“I think he was there as a reporter. We didn’t talk about what happened. I left a few minutes later.”

“So where does that leave us?” Sally sat back in her chair.

“With an unknown couple who are getting married in two weeks’ time.”

Sally stood up and walked to the kitchen. Max lifted his head off the floor and followed her with his eyes. “We need coffee and we need cake. Grab your notebook and we’ll see if we’ve missed any clues that could help us.”

“Logan’s still our best bet.”

“And you still might need to see him, but if you do, I’ll go with you. He can’t kiss my friend under duress and get away with it.”

Tess found her notebook in the bottom of her bag. She opened it to the information she’d written down in the café. “I don’t think duress is the right word.”

“What are you talking about?” Sally passed Tess a mug of coffee.

“Logan didn’t kiss me under duress. I was just as bad as he was.”

Sally put her hands on her hips. “Who kissed who first?”

“Logan kissed me, but it was only one kiss. I didn’t kiss him back.”

“Well, there you go,” Sally said. She looked as though all evidence pointed to a guilty verdict for Logan. “He kissed you first and, therefore, all blame can be directly laid at his feet.”

Max looked up expectantly.

Sally sighed. “Sorry, boy. I meant that figuratively, not literally. You’re not going near anyone’s feet except mine.”

Max’s head dropped back to his paws.

Sally patted his enormous shoulders. “If Logan can’t keep his lips to himself, then we need to send you in with a decoy. I quite like kissing tall, dark-haired men who look like they belong in a movie.”

Tess threw a cushion at Sally. “You’re as bad as he is.”

“I can be worse.” Sally grinned. “I can also teach you all I know. Growing up in a house full of brothers can do that to a girl.”

“We’d be safer with my notebook.” Tess looked down at the list and tried to see something they’d missed. But each time she thought about the mystery bride-to-be, she thought about Logan.

And that’s when Tess wondered if being an only child had stunted her emotional development. Especially when it came to dealing with stubborn,

irritating men.



LOGAN SAT OUTSIDE TESS' café for over half an hour. He knew she lived in the apartment above her café. He'd overheard her telling one of her friends about the color she'd painted her living room. He also knew she liked hot chocolate, raspberry muffins and going to the movies. What she didn't like were reporters. Or more specifically, reporters with runaway mouths and limited amounts of common sense.

His sister and niece had gone back to Seattle. He felt like an idiot, making Tess out to be something she wasn't. It had started out as fun, but soon fell into bad joke status.

He should have known better.

Sitting in his truck wasn't going to change what he needed to do. It was getting late and he didn't even know if she was home. He opened his door and walked across the sidewalk. He looked at the wall beside the front door and frowned. No bell.

He stepped off the sidewalk and walked toward his truck; staring at the windows above the café. He might have to find a stone, throw it at one of the glass panes and hope like crazy he didn't break it. But before he did that, he'd try to find another entrance.

Angel Wings Café shared its Main Street location with a craft store, a florist, a bookstore and a women's fashion boutique. Each of the buildings were old, maybe over a hundred years old. They were connected by a pale blue porch and matching hanging baskets full of flowers.

He walked past the fashion boutique and turned right down a narrow driveway. He guessed the owners of the stores used the area behind their businesses for parking, but right now no one was coming and going. There was enough room for about ten vehicles, a delivery truck if they were lucky. But parking space wasn't why he was here.

Along the back wall of each building was a fire escape. Tess' building had a



permanent metal staircase going all the way from ground level to the second floor.

He took a deep breath and headed up the stairs.

Tess answered the door on his second knock. She had her cell phone against her ear, talking to someone on the phone. When she saw him, her cheeks turned red and she frowned.

Yeah, he thought. She wanted him standing at her back door about as much as he wanted to be there.

“I’ll call you back soon.” She disconnected the call and stared at him.

“I want to apologize. I shouldn’t have given my sister the impression you were my girlfriend.”

The frown on Tess’ face didn’t disappear and he couldn’t blame her. She probably had men dropping at her feet every day. At six-foot tall, she wasn’t the type of person you easily overlooked. And with a pretty face, shoulder length blond hair and cornflower-blue eyes, she was a knockout.

She started to say something, then thought better of it. “Apology accepted. I hope you told your sister the truth when you got to the airport.”

“I told her we’re friends.”

Tess’ frown deepened. “You know what she’s going to think, don’t you?”

“That we’re friends?” he said hopefully.

“Only if she doesn’t care one way or the other, and I didn’t get the feeling she was that type of person.”

Tess didn’t know how right she was. Jacqui cared about everyone in their family. Deeply. Sometimes his sister and mom were the only two people who kept him sane.

“If you get a call from your mom, I refuse to wear a tulle wedding dress. It makes my hips look as wide as a bus.”

He looked down at Tess’ hips. He could imagine a lot of things her hips could look like, but a bus didn’t come close. Then his brain caught up with his hormones. “Wedding?”

Tess crossed her arms in front of her chest. “How old are you?”

“Thirty-two.”

“Have you had a serious girlfriend in the last three years?”

He shook his head and tried to figure out where she was going. “I’ve been busy working. But if you think mom’s desperate for me to get married, you’re wrong.”

“You could be right. But don’t be surprised if you get a call from her tonight.”

His mom would call tonight, anyway. But she wouldn’t leap on what his sister might or might not say. He wasn’t ready to share his life with anyone and his mom knew that better than most.

He stuck his hand in his pocket and pulled out a newspaper clipping. “This was sitting with the muffins you dropped off. Has it got anything to do with why you came to see me?”

Tess looked at the clipping and nodded. “I wanted to ask you some questions about the couple in the article. Do you want to come inside?”

He followed Tess into her apartment. It was bigger than he’d imagined it would be. With a high ceiling and peach colored walls, it made the most of the natural light coming in the windows. He sat on a sofa and looked at the kitchen. It was a throwback to the nineteen fifties.

If the red Formica counter and old-fashioned fridge didn’t make him think he’d stepped back in time, the posters would have done it. A framed collection of vintage ice cream posters hung on the wall behind the kitchen.

Tess must have noticed his interest.

“My grandparents owned this building. They had an ice cream parlor here for twenty years.” She sat down opposite him. “Do you want a drink? I could make you a cup of coffee.”

He shook his head. “I’m okay.”

Tess wiped her hands down the legs of her jeans. “Annie read the *Bozeman Chronicle* today. She saw the article you wrote about the young couple who had all of their belongings stolen.”

Logan had interviewed them last week. It was the kind of story his editor called a human interest story. But there was nothing interesting about the empty house they’d come home to. They hadn’t had much to start with and this had

been another blow they didn't need.

"The police still haven't caught the thieves," he said.

"They're getting married in two weeks' time. We thought we could help."

"We?"

"Annie, Molly, Sally, and me. We've got lots of bridesmaids' dresses between us. We could give the bride four dresses for her wedding."

He didn't know what to say. "Why would you do that?"

"Because she needs our help. But we don't know who she is or where she lives. I was hoping you'd be able to..."

"I can't." Logan sat back in his chair. "They asked me not to tell anyone their real names."

Tess' mouth dropped open. "So they aren't Estelle and Darren?"

He shook his head. "Not even close. I wish I could help you, but they didn't want anyone knowing who they were. I guess they were embarrassed."

"If we don't find them soon it will be too late to give them the dresses."

"I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do."

"Can you tell us where they live or where they work?"

"I can't, I'm sorry. They didn't want me to disclose their personal information."

Tess crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Do you know how annoying you are?"

Logan held back his laughter. "I'm sure you're going to enlighten me. But I still can't tell you anything about them."

"There must be something you could tell me. We've only got two weeks before their wedding. It was two weeks, right?"

Logan ran his hand across his mouth. "I supposed I could say yes. But I can't answer any more questions."

Tess stood up and grabbed her bag. "What if you don't say anything? I could ask you some questions and you could say yes or no." She flipped open her notebook and waited for his answer.

With her blue eyes staring at him, he was having trouble saying anything. "Fine. But I'm not answering any questions that are marginal."

Tess took a deep breath. "Okay, that's good. I can work with that." She looked in her notebook. "Question one. Do the bride and groom-to-be live in Bozeman?"

"Yes."

"Are they between twenty and twenty-five years old?"

"Yes."

Tess scribbled down something, then kept going. "Are they getting married in a church?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"I was there to interview them about the burglary, not their wedding."

Tess looked disappointed. "So you've got no idea where they're getting married?"

"No idea."

"Do you know what time they're getting married?"

"No."

"What kind of reporter are you?"

"A good one." He laughed at the growl coming from her throat.

"Can you tell me the mother of the bride's name?"

"Good try, but I'm not telling."

Tess closed her notebook. "This is ridiculous. Is there anything you can say to help us find the couple?"

"Not unless you've got more questions for me." He watched Tess skim through the other notes she'd made.

"There's nothing here that you'll be able to answer. I need a milkshake."

She went to the kitchen and pulled a tub of ice cream out of the freezer. "Do you want one?"

"No, thanks." Logan couldn't remember the last time he'd had a milkshake. He walked to the kitchen and watched Tess. She poured milk into a metal cup, dropped in a couple of scoops of ice cream, then squirted some kind of flavoring on the top.

She looked up and grinned. "I'm a vanilla girl. Grandpa's favorite was lime

and grandma liked peppermint. What's your favorite flavor?"

"Caramel."

"A sweet tooth." She clipped the metal cylinder under the milkshake machine. "This is an original 1950's Hamilton Beach triple-head blender."

She grinned as she increased the speed. It was like watching a little girl open her Christmas presents from Santa. She was totally smitten with the machine.

"Okay. I'll have a milkshake," he yelled over the noise of the blender.

Tess nodded and put another cup under the beaters. Within minutes she had both cups sitting on the counter. She dropped a straw into each one and smiled. "When I came home from school I used to work in the ice cream parlor with grandpa. He always had a thick vanilla milkshake waiting for me."

"Sounds like a great grandpa." Logan watched Tess' face soften.

"He was. He always said he could judge a person by the flavor of the milkshake they ordered."

"What did he say about people who like caramel?"

Tess smiled. "That would be giving away his secrets. Let's just say I take grandpa's personality test very seriously." She sucked a mouthful of milkshake through the straw. "Tell me if you like it."

Logan drank some of his milkshake. It was cold, thick and sweet. Everything a good milkshake should be. "It's great. You should sell them in your café."

"I've got another machine in the kitchen downstairs, but not many people drink milkshakes."

"You could advertise them, start a revival. An old fashioned milkshake in a heritage building."

Tess shrugged her shoulders. "I'll think about it. So how am I going to find Ms. Bride and Mr. Groom?"

Logan pulled a red vinyl stool out from the counter and sat down. "I could go for a drive."

"How's that going to help me?"

He kept drinking his milkshake. "I've always enjoyed going for a Sunday morning drive."

"You're not making much sense. Unless..."

A smile worked its way across her face. He had a feeling the sugar in her milkshake might have contributed to her state of bliss more than his words, but he'd take it anyway.

"If someone followed you, on your Sunday morning drive, it wouldn't break any confidentiality issues."

Logan shrugged. "I'm going for a drive. Anyone can follow me."

"And how many times would you stop?"

"Just once."

Tess sat beside him and rested her chin on her hand. "What time do you like leaving on your Sunday morning drives?"

"I could drive past the café at about ten o'clock."

"Ten would work. But don't get any ideas about where this might be going. I'm using you for information."

"Nice to know you're honest," Logan muttered. "You've got to promise me that the drive will be low key. You can't do anything that will make the bride go running to my editor."

"Of course I won't," Tess said. "I'll be so discreet that no one will ever know I've been near her home."

Logan had a feeling she might be over-exaggerating her super sleuth abilities, but he couldn't do much about it now. He pushed his empty milkshake cup away and stood up. "Tomorrow morning. Ten o'clock."

"Yes, sir." Tess followed him to her back door and held it open. "Thanks, Logan. I appreciate your help."

"Once you know where they live you can do the rest on your own."

"That's all I need."

"I'll see you tomorrow in my rearview mirror." He left Tess' apartment feeling happy. It was so different to how he normally felt that he almost didn't recognize it. But it was there all the same.

Tess Williams, the woman most likely to annoy him, had made him happy. And he was damned if he knew why.



“THIS IS SO EXCITING. I think I’m going to pee my pants.” Sally jumped up and down in the backseat of Tess’ car like an over-excited puppy.

“Just keep low. If Logan sees who’s in the car, he might change his mind.” Tess was beginning to think it wasn’t such a good idea that everyone had come on their Sunday drive. When she’d texted Molly, Sally, and Annie they’d all decided they needed to be here, too. Logan didn’t know her car was packed with Nancy Drew wannabees.

Molly was sitting in the backseat with Sally. She grabbed hold of Sally’s arm and tugged her down. “Once we get moving he won’t notice us.”

“Why did I get the front seat?” Annie moaned. “There’s no room in here. I want to go in the backseat.”

“Too late. Logan just drove past and waved.” Tess turned the ignition on and pulled away from the curb.

Annie poked her head above the dashboard. “I can’t see him.”

“Will you get your head down,” Tess hissed. “If Logan doesn’t catch us the police will. You’re supposed to have a seatbelt on.”

“I feel like one of Charlie’s Angels,” Sally squealed. “I’ll be the one with the blond hair that flicks out at the sides.”

“But you’ve got black hair,” Annie said.

“Don’t burst my bubble,” Sally said. “I dreamed about being Farrah Fawcett for years. I even tried to dye my hair blond once.”

“How did it turn out?” Molly asked.

“Black.”

“You could be Kelly,” Molly said.

“You know their names,” Annie said. “I didn’t know you watched Charlie’s Angels in Ireland.”

“Of course we watched Charlie’s Angels. We’re quite civilized when we need to be.”

“Hold on,” Tess said. “We’re turning left.”

Molly and Sally giggled from the back seat.

Annie groaned. “When can I sit on the seat. My back is killing me.”

Tess glanced down at Annie. “Pull your feet around. You look like one of

those contortionists.”

“Easy for you to say,” Annie mumbled. “I’m five-foot-five and I feel like I’ve been squashed into a rabbit hutch.”

“Alice,” Molly piped up. “You could be Alice in Wonderland.”

“And Tess could be the Mad Hatter,” Sally laughed.

“Enough already,” Tess groaned. “Red light up ahead.” She leaned forward in her seat. “We’re in trouble. There’s a police officer further up the road. He’s stopping cars.”

“What are we going to do?” Sally shrieked.

“Sit up and put on your seat belts,” Tess said. “He’s probably checking drivers’ licenses.”

Annie pulled herself onto the passenger seat. “Why don’t you have a big truck with tinted windows?”

“Doesn’t come in a price range I can afford. Now get your seat belt on and stop moaning. Logan’s gone through the checkpoint and he’s waiting for us further up the road. Okay, everyone look intelligent. We’re going for a nice Sunday drive.”

“Yes, Charlie,” Sally said breathlessly.

Molly and Annie burst out laughing.

Tess stopped for the police officer and rolled down her window. “Good morning, officer.”

“Where are you ladies heading?”

Tess looked up into the officer’s eyes and tried to act as though they weren’t stalking some poor unsuspecting bride. “You know, just going for a drive.”

Sally started giggling from the back seat and the officer took a closer look at them. “You ladies wouldn’t have been drinking would you?”

Everyone shook their heads.

He looked at Tess. “Driver’s license, ma’am.”

Annie passed her bag across and Tess fumbled inside for her wallet. “Here it is.” She handed over her license and waited while he checked her details.

“I’m going to hold this Breathalyzer up to your mouth. I want you to tell me your name and address.”



Tess did as the officer asked.

He looked at the reading. "You did fine, ma'am. Have a good day." He glanced in the back seat at Sally. "You take care, now."

Tess drove slowly away, flicking her lights at Logan to tell him to keep going.

Annie looked behind her, then wiggled off her seat. "I think the police officer liked you, Sally."

"I should have asked him for his phone number," Sally groaned. "I'm not assertive enough."

"You are when you're trying to find homes for your shelter animals," Molly said. "You should think of men as strays. You'd be very assertive then."

Tess ignored Molly's stray animal comment and kept a careful eye on where Logan was heading. "Logan's slowing down. Everyone get down."

There was a fit of giggles from the back seat and Annie grumbled as she folded herself in half.

"He's stopped. This is it." Tess couldn't hide the excitement in her voice. "We're here."

She pulled over and looked around. They were in a neighborhood of nice homes. They weren't the most expensive properties in Bozeman, but everyone's front yards were well kept and tidy. Some teenagers were playing basketball in their driveway and a lady was walking her dog.

She glanced at Logan's truck. "Oh, no. He's walking toward my car."

"Are you sure he's coming this way and not stretching his legs?" Molly asked.

"Of course I'm sure," Tess whispered. "Stay here and don't move." She jumped out of her car and met him halfway between the two vehicles.

Logan looked at her as if he knew what she'd been up to. But that was probably her imagination working overtime. He would have refused to take her anywhere if he'd seen the junior detective team in her car.

She tried to act normal, as if three sets of ears weren't straining to hear what he said. "Good morning."

Logan smiled as she walked toward him. His brown eyes traveled down her

body and stopped at her neon pink sneakers. “Nice shoes.”

Tess looked down. “Thanks. I bought them so I don’t lose them in my closet.” She looked at the houses on either side of the road. “Which house belongs to the couple we’re looking for?”

“Not so fast. I want you to promise that this information stays between the two of us. Once you get permission from the couple, you can tell your friends who they are and where they live.”

Tess stopped herself from glancing back at her car. This could be a tricky promise to make. Especially since her cohorts in crime were sitting thirty feet away. “I don’t see a problem with telling everyone sooner. They’re my friends. They can be discreet.”

“I’m sure they can. But no promise, no location.” Logan crossed his arms in front of his chest.

Tess tried to outstare him, but it didn’t work. “We only want to help. No one will ever know how we found them.”

“Not going to happen.”

Tess stuck her hands in her pockets. There weren’t that many houses in the street. With all four of them walking up and down and knocking on each door, they’d eventually find them.

“What aren’t you telling me?” Logan started to look suspicious. He glanced back at her car and frowned. “Was that...” He started walking toward her car.

“You probably don’t want to do that.”

Logan kept walking. He stopped when he got to the passenger door. He peered inside.

Annie’s head popped into view, then the rest of her body as she clambered out of the car. Even from thirty feet away, Tess could feel his icy stare cut across the mid-morning sunshine.

“You want to tell me what’s going on?” Logan asked.

A giggle sliced through the feeble excuse hovering on Tess’ lips. Logan opened the back door and Molly and Sally joined Annie on the sidewalk. They stopped giggling as soon as they saw him.

“Oh come on, Logan,” Sally said. “It’s not like you’re the FBI or anything. It

was a little deception. The burglary wouldn't even have made the papers in a big city."

"We're not a big city."

"Exactly," Annie said. "We care about each other. We want to help make the bride's wedding amazing. You can't be angry with us for that."

Tess walked back to her car and joined her three friends. Under the circumstances, introductions seemed a little late. But good manners had been drilled into her as a teenager, and good manners Logan would get. She ignored his impersonation of Mr. Frosty and gestured to Molly.

"You've already met Annie and Sally, but I don't think you know Molly. Logan, this is Molly. Molly, Logan."

Molly smiled. Logan didn't. He wasn't impressed with Tess' good manners.

"This isn't what we agreed to," he growled.

"I know, but they wanted to help and I didn't think you'd mind. Too much." Tess had a feeling her confession might have come a bit too late.

"If you didn't think I'd mind, there wouldn't have been three women hiding in your car."

He had a point. A very valid point. "Okay. So I guess you're right. I knew you'd freak out if you saw more than one person sitting in my car. But I can't see what your problem is. We're doing a good deed for someone, not committing treason."

Logan looked at each of them. "Fine. But only Tess and I speak to the couple. The rest of you can...hover."

Molly reached into Tess' car and picked up her camera. "I can hover."

"No photos," Logan warned. "Not until you've got permission."

Sally shook her head. "I never would have believed you were so..."

Tess could have ended Sally's sentence with the words uptight, stubborn, or pigheaded.

"...straight-laced," Sally said.

Logan turned around and started walking down the street.

Tess looked at Molly, Sally, and Annie. She didn't know whether he was leaving them on the side of the road or going to the bride-to-be's house. She

walked quickly along the sidewalk. “Where are you going?”

He kept walking. “I thought that would have been obvious. We’re going to see someone about four bridesmaids’ dresses.”

She turned back to the rest of her friends and waved them forward. There was a bit of a scramble as they grabbed their bags and sweaters out of the car, but within minutes they’d caught up to her and Logan.

“I should have worn my super sleuth shoes,” Sally whispered from behind Tess. “These heels are killing me.”

“But they’re so pretty. Where did you buy them?” Molly asked.

“Macy’s had a sale last month. I couldn’t leave them on the shelf.”

Annie reached into her bag. “I’ve got some Band-Aids if you’ve got blisters.”

Logan stopped. Annie ran into the back of him and bounced back. “Oops, sorry.”

He turned around and stared at Sally’s four inch, bright orange shoes. “We’ve arrived at the house.”

All four women turned to look at the houses around them.

“Over there.” Logan nodded at a house directly across the road from where they were standing.

The single story home had green painted wooden siding, a two-car garage, and a tiled roof. It was a simple family home. Nothing over the top or outrageously amazing.

Logan looked at Tess. “Are you ready?”

She glanced down the road and stepped off the curb. “As ready as I’ll ever be.” She heard the shutter on Molly’s camera click and watched Logan turn around.

“It’s a photo of you and Tess,” Molly said. She sounded annoyed and Logan didn’t look much better.

“What were you thinking,” Logan muttered as they crossed the road.

“We’re a team.”

“So were the Musketeers, but you didn’t see them wearing orange stilts or hiding in the back of cars.”

The strap of Tess' bag fell off her shoulder and she hoisted it back up. "First off, there were only three musketeers and they were men. Secondly, the only transportation they had were horses and carts. And thirdly, any man who wears a fancy tunic and a big fluffy hat would appreciate the skill that went into creating Sally's shoes.

"Only if he had a death wish and was color blind." Logan's mood didn't seem to be getting any better.

Tess reached down to open the front gate. "Put on your happy face. After we've spoken with the bride-to-be, you won't need to talk to any of us again." She ignored the scowl he sent her and walked quickly toward the front door.

She glanced over her shoulder to make sure Logan hadn't disappeared, then knocked on the door.

No one answered, so she knocked again. "It doesn't look as though anyone's home." She looked through a narrow window beside the door and frowned. "The hallway's empty."

"They lost everything in the burglary. They might not have replaced their furniture yet."

Tess walked across the yard and looked inside the windows. "There's nothing here."

"What's going on?" Sally asked from the sidewalk.

"I don't think anyone's living here," Tess said as she looked in another window. She moved down the side of the house and heard the front gate squeak.

"Excuse me," someone said from over the fence. "Yoo-hoo. I'm over here."

Tess walked toward a brown fence and smiled at the elderly lady on the other side. "Hello."

Twinkling blue eyes looked back at her. "If you're here about the house, then I'm afraid you're too late. They rented it last night to a couple from Iowa."

"Oh, no. We're not here to rent it. We're looking for the previous tenants. Do you know where they've gone?"

"I don't know if I should tell you. Who are you?"

"We're..." Tess looked over her shoulder at Logan, Molly, Sally, and Annie. It looked like a mini army had invaded the front yard. "We're with the

newspaper.”

“All of you?”

“We’re working on a follow-up story about the burglary.” At least Molly’s camera gave them some credibility.

“It was such a terrible thing to happen. It scared all of the neighbors, I can tell you. The burglars took everything away in a truck in the middle of the day. We all thought Connie and Dave must have been moving somewhere else.”

“Did the police find the people who broke into their home?”

“Not that I know of. Who did you say you were again?”

“We’re with the *Bozeman Chronicle*.” Tess crossed her fingers below the fence. If Logan heard her less than truthful cover story he wouldn’t help her again. She pulled her trusty notebook and pen out of her bag and flipped the cover open. “Can you tell me what Connie and Dave’s last names are?”

“I’m sure the nice man that wrote the article in yesterday’s newspaper must have that information.”

Logan appeared beside Tess and held his hand out. “I’m Logan Allen. I interviewed Connie and Dave last week.” He passed the lady his business card. “They didn’t tell me their last names.”

Tess had a feeling they hadn’t told him their first names either, but she wasn’t going to split hairs. At least Logan was a real reporter.

The elderly neighbor peered at the card. “I remember Connie talking about you. They left not long after you interviewed them. The poor things didn’t have a lot to steal. I still can’t work out why someone would break into their home.”

“Did Connie say where they were moving to?” Logan asked.

The elderly neighbor frowned. “With Connie’s mom so sick they decided to go back home. It’s such a hard time for them. I’m Geraldine. Geraldine Kennedy. As in John F. Kennedy.”

Logan smiled. “Are you related to the President, Mrs. Kennedy?”

Tess could have sworn Geraldine blushed. Logan was such a smooth operator it was almost frightening.

“Kennedy is my husband’s last name. But I expect there’s some distant link to the Kennedy’s from Massachusetts. It’s such a small world.”

Logan took a step forward and almost flattened a bunch of daffodils growing in the garden. Tess didn't think Mrs. Kennedy would have been impressed if she could have seen where his feet had landed.

Mrs. Kennedy moved closer to the fence. "If you're writing a story about what's happened since the burglary, there isn't a lot to say. Connie and Dave didn't have insurance. They left so soon afterward that no one had a chance to find out if they were all right."

"Can you tell us their last names, Mrs. Kennedy? We'll try and find them and see if the police have found their property."

"It's Thompson and Brown. Connie Thompson and Dave Brown. Connie works in a stationery store and Dave is a mechanic. They're such a nice couple."

Tess moved beside Logan. "Do you know where they're getting married, Mrs. Kennedy?"

"Bogert Park. That's where they met."

Tess made some notes in her book, then looked at Logan.

"You've been very helpful, Mrs. Kennedy. It was a pleasure meeting you."

"It was very nice meeting you, too, Mr. Allen. Please send my regards to Mr. Dougherty. I worked with your editor-in-chief for a number of years myself."

Tess blushed like a beet when Geraldine Kennedy's sharp gaze landed on her.

"I like your walnut, cinnamon, and cherry scones. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to get ready for my ballet class." With a sunny smile, Mrs. Kennedy said goodbye and left them standing in silence at the fence.

"Do you think she wears a leotard?" Tess asked.

Logan blinked a few times. "Being a Kennedy I'd say anything is possible. I'm more worried about the fact that she knows my boss."

Molly, Sally, and Annie came and stood behind them.

"Where to now?" Sally wobbled as one heel disappeared into the ground. She yanked the offending shoe out of the grass and stood on tippy toes.

Tess looked down at her notepad. "My place to go over the information we've got and make a plan."

"And have coffee," Annie said. "I didn't know detective work could be so exhausting."

Molly snapped another photo and grinned. "I could do a photo essay on the life and times of Bozeman's latest girl detective agency."

Logan cleared his throat.

"Present company excluded, of course," Molly said. "Let's go."

Tess took her car keys out of her pocket as they walked across the road. "Did you know the engaged couple's real names?" she asked Logan.

His mouth tilted into a smile as he unlocked his truck. "No. Enjoy your coffee."

"You're not coming with us?"

"I've got to be somewhere else. If you need more help, let me know." He got into his truck, closed the driver's door and drove down the street.

Tess wondered what was so urgent that he couldn't have at least had coffee with them. And then she realized it shouldn't matter. She didn't like reporters.

Not much, anyway.



## CHAPTER 3



Logan walked into Pastor Steven's dining room and nodded at the other guys in the house. He'd never been particularly religious and some days, like today, he felt like a fraud even being here.

"Hi, Logan. Long time no see." Dylan Bayliss stood up and shook his hand.

Logan had met Dylan at his first counseling session in Bozeman. Both of them had been in Afghanistan. Both of them had come home with memories they'd sooner forget.

Dylan had been in combat. Logan had been reporting on the conflict. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was the last thing either of them had expected to get. But it had hit them both, made them different people from the men who'd left America.

They walked into the kitchen and Dylan grabbed a can of Cola for Logan. "Where were you last month?"

"It was my mom's birthday. I flew out to Seattle and stayed for a few days. How's your job?" When Dylan had been discharged from the Army, he didn't know what he was going to do. An Army buddy had started his own security company and called Dylan when he heard he was looking for work.

"Busy. I'm heading to Los Angeles next week to bring an eight-year-old here for a vacation with his dad."

"Rich family."

Dylan shrugged. "It's more common than you'd think. Some parents have high paying jobs and need someone more than a nanny to travel with their kids.

What about you? Found any good stories lately?"

Logan popped the tab on his can. "Mayor Jarvis sacked her Executive Assistant."

"Riveting stuff."

"It is when there's an internal investigation going on for fraud. The story will be in tomorrow's paper."

Pastor Steven came into the kitchen with an empty plate. "If you guys want lunch I'd suggest you move fast. Jeremy and Todd are hungry. Good to see you, Logan."

Logan shook Pastor Steven's hand. "You need help with anything?"

"Never thought you'd ask. Grab one of the dish towels out of the cupboard beside the fridge. There's a plate of mini quiches in the oven that need to go on the table."

Logan opened the oven and stared at the pile of quiches. "Your wife's been busy."

"My daughter's responsible for lunch today. She's here for a few days and decided to try her culinary school recipes on us."

Dylan took one of the quiches off the top of the plate and ate it. "I'd say her college fees are worth every cent. These taste great."

Pastor Steven followed them into the living room. "Remember that when they go on the table. Jeremy and Todd have already tried some and they're waiting for more."

Logan laughed and eyeballed Dylan. "Sounds like I need a bodyguard to keep this food safe."

"You want my advice? Take the plate back into the kitchen and we'll have lunch without them."

"The old avoidance and run tactic. Works every time." Logan left the plate on the table and growled at the hand passing in front of his chest. "Get those fingers away from the quiches, Jeremy."

Jeremy laughed and snatched a quiche out from under Logan's nose. "You got to be quicker than that, old man."

"You're five years younger than me," Logan scoffed. "And living on

dangerous ground if you come back for more food before Dylan and I get our lunch.”

“Let them eat,” Todd said generously from one of the big armchairs in the room. “They’re grumpy without food.”

Dylan flicked him the finger, then remembered where he was. “Sorry, Pastor.”

“Think nothing of it. I’ve been known to want to express myself more creatively at times, too. Once you’ve got something to eat, we’ll start.”

Logan and Dylan grabbed some lunch then sat in one of Pastor Steven’s sofas.

The meeting started with a prayer. Over the last year, Logan had learned that prayers came in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Just like the message in them. Some of the shortest ones could mean the most, especially if they were sent straight from the heart.

Pastor Steven nodded at Logan and Dylan when he’d finished. “Better eat your lunch before it gets cold. William sent his apologies. He’s in Tucson with his wife and kids. Who wants to tell everyone what they’ve been doing?”

Jeremy started the ball rolling, making them all laugh with the latest disaster story from his dating calendar. “Laugh all you want,” he said. “But you didn’t have to fend off her hands for an hour and then figure out how you were going to leave.”

As he kept telling them about his week from hell, Logan thought this must be one of the strangest support networks around. They ate food and talked about everything that didn’t involve what was really on their minds.

But sometimes, when they least expected it, something happened to make them glad they were here. A triggered memory, a time when each of them hadn’t been able to see past the blackness surrounding them. They’d built their trust in each other and themselves and figured out the rest along the way.

Logan waited for his turn, listened to the words that weren’t being said. Jeremy missed his ex-wife. She’d left him not long after he’d returned from his tour of duty, and for three years he hadn’t dated anyone. Now he was, and his courage was tested each time he went on a date.

Then it was Todd's turn. Out of all of them, he suffered the most from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. For a while, he'd been totally lost. Pastor Steven had found him a volunteer job at the local animal shelter. That had led to a part-time job at the veterinary clinic. The animals he worked with gave him some kind of comfort. But for all of the stories he told, the one that mattered the most was how well he was doing. Todd had found somewhere that helped heal the scars he'd hidden for years.

Dylan didn't have a lot to say. He told them about what he'd been doing, where he'd be going next week. "That's it. Nothing much to report."

"You sleeping?" Pastor Steven asked.

"Getting there," was the evasive answer they got.

Logan planned on talking to Dylan after the meeting. They were friends. If Dylan wasn't doing too well, he'd do anything he could to make sure he was okay.

Pastor Steven let Dylan off the hook and moved his focus onto Logan. "What have you been doing?"

"Looking for a missing bride-to-be," he said dryly.

That made Dylan sit taller in his seat. "What are you talking about?"

"I did a story last week about a couple who had everything stolen out of their home. They're getting married in two weeks and the bridesmaids' dresses left with the burglars."

"What happened to the bride?" Jeremy asked.

"Nothing, I hope. We can't find her."

"We?" Even Todd was getting into the swing of Logan's not so exciting life.

"Tess started it. She owns Angel Wings Café on Main Street. Then her friends joined in. They want to donate four dresses to the bride for her bridesmaids."

Pastor Steven steepled his fingers in front of his chin. He was either contemplating the implications of Logan and four women hunting for a bride, or trying not to laugh. "Why can't you find the bride?"

"She's gone 'back home', whatever that means."

Dylan reached for his Cola. "Who told you she'd gone home?"

Logan didn't want to go into too much detail about Connie's helpful neighbor. The fact that she knew his boss wasn't sitting too comfortably on his shoulders. "A neighbor told us this morning."

"You went out with four women and you didn't invite me?" This startling insight came from Jeremy. "Are any of them single?"

"You hate going on dates," Logan said.

"It's not a date when you're looking for something. If you tell me all four are hot single women, I may rethink our friendship."

"I don't want to give you sleepless nights or ruin our friendship."

"I knew it," Jeremy muttered. "Next time take me with you. I can find someone faster than most people can blink."

"Are you still looking for the bride?" Dylan asked.

"Tess and her friends are. They're working on finding her at the moment."

Jeremy grinned. "Do you think they'd like to add a masculine touch to their search?"

"Even if your touch stays on the bride and not on them, I'd say they've got it covered."

Pastor Steven pulled an envelope out of his pocket. "I got this in the mail the other day."

Logan glanced at the envelope. "If it's a hot tip on where the bride has gone, you can deliver it to Tess."

"It's from the orphanage in Afghanistan."

And just like that, Logan's walls came tumbling down.

Pastor Steven gave him the envelope. "I haven't opened it."

No one said a word as Logan held it in his hands. They knew he'd asked Pastor Steven to use his contacts to locate the children he'd left behind in Afghanistan. The chance of finding any of them alive had been so low that Logan never thought he'd hear anything.

He stared at the brown envelope, turned it over and read the return address. "Nau Deh?"

"It's a small town about a hundred and fifty miles from where the bombing took place. UNICEF set up an orphanage there two years ago."

Logan nodded, then stuffed the envelope in his pocket.

“If you want company when you open it, just give me a call,” Pastor Steven said.

In a rare display of affection, Dylan wrapped his arm around Logan’s shoulders. “You can count me in, too. Any time, day or night.”

Logan took a deep breath. He felt the weight of what the envelope represented right down to his bones.

“You going to be all right, buddy?” Todd asked.

“I guess this is what you call learning to live with the pain,” he mumbled.

Pastor Steven walked across to the table and made a cup of coffee. He passed it to Logan and frowned. “We’re here to help.”

Logan nodded. He couldn’t taste the coffee as he drank it, couldn’t have repeated a word that was being said around him.

He waited, staying until everyone was ready to leave. It wasn’t that he was scared to face his worst fears. He was terrified.

As he walked down Pastor Steven’s driveway, Dylan stopped him. “Call me. I’m only in Los Angeles for a couple of days.”

Logan looked at the trucks lining the street, the houses with pretty front yards and the kids riding their bikes. He couldn’t have gotten any further from Afghanistan if he’d tried. And he had. He’d tried so hard that he’d almost forgotten what it felt like to be back there again. The scorching heat, the sand that worked its way into everything. The constant threat of an enemy you didn’t see until it was too late.

He looked at Dylan and frowned. “Is everything okay with you?”

“Same old demons coming out to play. I’ll tell you about it when I get back from Los Angeles.”

Logan waited for Dylan to drive away before getting in his truck. He pulled the envelope out of his pocket. Pastor Steven could have handed him the answer to his nightmares, or a psychological bomb waiting to explode. He left the envelope on the passenger seat and drove toward home.

He didn’t know what was in the envelope and he wasn’t in a hurry to find out.



ANNIE PASSED MOLLY a cup of coffee. “How many stationery stores do we have in town?”

Sally ran her finger down the listings in the phone directory. “Six. That doesn’t include places like Walmart.”

Molly reached for a cookie. “How many are open today?”

“Only three listed their store hours and two are open today. So I guess that’s as good a place as any to start.”

Tess opened her notebook and read from the notes she’d made. “All we need to do is look for someone called Connie Thompson who’s engaged to a mechanic called Dave Brown. It can’t be that hard to find her.”

“If she doesn’t work at either of the two stores that are open, we’ll need to work out when we’re going to visit the others.” Sally looked down at her heels. “Can I use a couple of your Band-Aids, Annie?”

“Sure.” Annie walked across to her bag and rummaged around inside. “What do you think their neighbor meant by ‘gone home’?” She passed Sally a couple of Band-Aids and looked at her feet. “Ouch. You did that this morning?”

“Mostly last night.” Sally winced as she covered her blisters. “Gone home could mean they’re living with their parents. They could have moved out of the area.”

Tess shook her head. “I don’t think they would have moved to another town. They’ve both got jobs in Bozeman. It wouldn’t make sense to leave, especially two weeks before their wedding.”

Sally sat back in her chair. “So we’ve looked in the phone directory and there’s no listing for either the bride or groom-to-be. What about their parents or other family? I could stay here with someone and call all of the Thompsons and Browns in the phone book. Whoever doesn’t want to help me could visit the stationery stores.”

“Sounds good to me,” Annie said. “I’ll stay with Sally. My head’s still a bit fuzzy from last night.”

“Moonshine will do that to a girl,” Molly said with a smile. “So that leaves

Tess and I at the stationery stores. Do you want anything while we're out?"

"A new head," Sally said half-jokingly.

Tess opened a cupboard in the kitchen and left a small container beside Sally. "It's not a new head, but Tylenol might do the trick. We'll be back soon."

"Good luck." Sally pulled her cell phone out of her pocket. "I've got a feeling you'll be back before we've finished."

Tess picked up her car keys. "You could be right. Are you ready to go, Molly?"

"Ready and waiting. I've never been so excited about visiting a stationery store before."

Tess smiled. Neither had she.



AN HOUR LATER, Tess and Molly flopped down on the sofa in Tess' apartment.

"We didn't find her," Tess said. "Did you find anyone in the phone book that knows them?"

Sally leaned her elbows on the table. "Not yet, but I've still got another couple of numbers to try. I can't believe none of the Thompsons or Browns we called know Connie and Dave. It's like they've vanished."

Annie ended the call she was on. "What about the hospital. If Connie's mom is still a patient, we might be able to find her daughter through her."

Molly shook her head. "Hospitals are the worst places to find information about people. Unless you're immediate family, they won't let any details out."

Tess looked at her friends. "Does anyone know someone who works at the hospital?"

Molly and Annie shook their heads.

"Amy, my sister-in-law, is a doctor at the hospital," Sally said. "I'll ask if she can help, but it probably breaks their rules about patient confidentiality."

Tess opened her notebook and looked at the first page. "We'll put a question mark beside the hospital option. I'll stop by the other stationery stores tomorrow afternoon."



“I’ve made a list of the auto repair businesses in Bozeman,” Sally said. “If you do the stationery stores, Molly, Annie and I could split the list of auto repair places between us.”

“Okay. It’s a deal.” Tess walked to the kitchen and poured herself a coffee. “Is it too early to start talking about the dresses and how we’re going to do this?” She opened a cookie jar and left it on the table in front of the sofa.

“It’s probably a good idea to get everything worked out now,” Sally said. “By the time we find the bride and groom we might not have much time before the wedding.”

Tess bit into a cookie and sighed. “These are good. Help yourself.” She brushed oatmeal crumbs off her shirt and thought about what they’d need to make this work. “I’ve got lots of space in my spare bedroom. We could use the closet in there for the dresses.”

“We could drop them off after dinner tomorrow,” Sally said. “I’ll call Emily and see if she wants to keep her bridesmaids’ dresses. If anyone finds our mystery couple, make sure you text everyone else. We can have another meeting tomorrow night when we bring the dresses in.”

“Do you think we’ll find them?” Annie asked.

“I don’t know,” Tess said. “But we’ll try our best to find them before their wedding.”

“Imagine someone stealing everything you own. It must have been heartbreaking.” Sally frowned at the list in front of Tess. “I don’t know why anyone would want four bridesmaids’ dresses. It’s such a nasty thing to do.”

“There are some horrible people out there.” Annie sat quietly in her chair, looking as glum as Tess felt.

“Come on everyone. Cheer up.” Molly pulled Tess’ list toward her. “We’re doing something special for Connie and Dave. There will always be idiots in the world, but we don’t have to let them drag us down. What we need is something to remind us that we’re on a mission for happiness.”

“Like a name for what we’re doing?” Annie said.

Sally frowned. “What do you mean?”

Annie sat on the edge of her seat. “We could call ourselves something. Like a

club or a project name.”

Tess took another bite of her cookie. “But this is a one-off thing. Once we’ve helped Connie and Dave the name won’t matter.”

“It will matter to us,” Molly said. “It’s the feel good factor that will make this a wonderful thing to do.”

“How about the Wedding Angels?” Annie suggested. “Bridesmaids are part of a wedding and we were in Angel Wings Café when we read the newspaper article.”

Sally shook her head. “It’s good, but too much like a business. What about Bridesmaids to the Rescue?”

“Sounds like an emergency response team.” Annie grinned at Sally. “We’d have every single guy in town lining up to be rescued.”

“What about The Bridesmaids Club?” Molly looked at everyone’s faces. “It’s warm and friendly. No guy will ever think we’re a dating agency with that name.”

Sally wrote it down on a piece of paper. “I like it.”

“Sounds good to me,” Annie said. “What are we going to do if another bride wants our help?”

“There can’t be that many people needing bridesmaids’ dresses.” Tess watched everyone’s faces. “Most people have their dresses made well in advance of the wedding.”

Sally picked up Tess’ notebook. “At last count we had seventeen dresses and that’s before we ask anyone for donations. If Connie wants four of the dresses, that leaves us thirteen. We could easily help another two or three brides.”

“It would be fun,” Molly said. “None of us are anywhere near close to getting married. We could enjoy the excitement of a wedding without the drama.”

“We don’t even have boyfriends.” Sally sighed.

“Speak for yourself,” Annie said with a smug smile on her face. “Not that I’d call Carl a boyfriend, but he’s cute and he could be my boyfriend.”

“When did this happen?” Sally asked.

“I met him three weeks ago at ten pin bowling. He got five strikes in a row.”

Annie's face glowed with excitement. "We're competing in a doubles tournament next weekend."

"Good for you," Tess said. "Hopefully by then we've found Connie and Dave." She smiled at her friends. "Here's to The Bridesmaids Club. To happiness, kind hearts and finding a mystery bride and groom."

"I'll drink to that." Molly raised her cup and laughed. "And who knows, a little piece of magic from our happy couple might rub off on us."



LOGAN DUG DEEP, pushing himself hard on his early morning run. He hadn't slept and didn't feel like facing the day. His breath came in short, sharp gasps as he ran along Main Street.

Usually a long run cleared his head, put his life into perspective. But it wasn't working this morning. He felt drained and so damn tired.

He could see the glow of lights from inside Angel Wings Café. He glanced at his watch. Five-fifteen. Tess was on time.

She'd be in the kitchen, mixing cookie dough and making pie crusts. If the café was open, he might have called in and ordered a stack of pancakes. He would even have offered to make them.

He still couldn't believe he'd made blueberry pancakes from scratch. He'd never been much of a cook, but he liked good food. Which was part of the reason he was a regular at Angel Wings Café. The other part wasn't worth thinking about.

He slowed down as he ran past the café, then stopped completely.

Tess had strung a brown paper bag over the door handle. His name had been written across the front in big bold letters. He lifted the bag off the handle and looked inside. Two fresh blueberry muffins were sitting inside. The smell made his stomach rumble, made him remember that he hadn't eaten anything since lunch at Pastor Steven's home yesterday.

He wiped his face on the bottom of his T-shirt and wondered what he should do. He was sweaty and tired, not a good combination this early in the morning.

But he hadn't been much better on Saturday morning and Tess had still hauled him inside the café.

Before he changed his mind, he knocked loudly on the front door. Tess walked out of the kitchen and smiled. He waited for her to unlock the door. He'd say thank you, leave her to her baking and try to get past what was eating him up.

"You got the muffins?"

"Thanks. What are they for?"

Tess' cheeks turned red. She looked too good for this early in the morning. Her blond hair was caught in a ponytail and soft strands had worked their way loose over her shoulders. She leaned against the door and looked up at him with a gleam in her eyes. "I appreciated your help yesterday. Especially after you saw everyone in my car."

"Did you work out what you're going to do next?"

"We've got a plan. Yesterday we visited a couple of stationery stores. Sally and Annie called all of the Thompsons and Browns in the phone directory. I'm going to visit the last few stationery stores this afternoon."

He held back from asking her if she wanted company.

She turned toward a beeping noise coming from the kitchen. "My pies have finished cooking. You can come and talk to me out back for a couple of minutes, if you like?"

Logan looked down at his shirt.

"Yeah, I know. You're hot and sweaty. I don't care if you don't."

"I might have to invest in a can of men's deodorant for your café."

Tess smiled as they walked into the kitchen.

If he thought his stomach had rumbled when he'd smelled the muffins, he was practically drooling on the spot now. Tess pulled the pies out of the oven and they smelled amazing.

"Beef, mushroom, and onion. Do you want one?"

"I didn't bring my wallet."

"I don't want your money." She took a plate out of the pantry and slid one of the pies onto it. "Sit at the counter and tell me why you look as though you

haven't slept in a few days."

He ran his hand over the three-day growth prickling his jaw. He would have disagreed with her, except she left the pie in front of him.

"Eat," she said softly. "Besides, I've got more to do than convince you that my meat pies are amazing." She turned back to the counter and added milk to the bowl in front of her.

He bit into his pie and sighed. It was good, so good that he could imagine coming back at lunchtime for another one. Tess kept mixing ingredients into the bowl, then flipped the dough onto a floured board.

It was quiet inside the kitchen. So quiet that he couldn't imagine how Tess worked here on her own each morning. She grated some cheese and cut sun-dried tomatoes into little pieces. She worked in silence. He ate in silence. It was comfortable, relaxing, and from his perspective, so much better than running.

"Do you like working in a quiet kitchen?" he asked.

"It's not usually this quiet." She smiled as she sprinkled sliced bacon over the rolled out dough. "I've got my trusty boom box on the shelf over there." She nodded at the wall behind him. A red radio, tape, and CD player filled a shelf. "I left it at grandpa's house when I moved away from Bozeman. He never got rid of it, so I play it now. I'm still waiting for you to tell me why you haven't had much sleep."

He would have preferred to ask her why she'd left Bozeman, but she was looking at him as if she expected him to answer her question first. "I had things on my mind."

"Do you want to talk about it? Sometimes it helps."

He'd never been comfortable talking about what had happened in Afghanistan. It brought back too many memories, a guilt so deep and sure that it tore him up each time he thought about what he'd done.

"I'd sooner talk about you."

"I'm sure you would," Tess mumbled.

Logan finished his pie and walked across to the stack of paper napkins in the pantry. He ignored the stubborn tilt to Tess' chin. He'd seen that look too many times to pay it much attention now.

He wiped his mouth and scrunched the napkin in his hand. “Have I done something to make you dislike me, or do you have a problem with all reporters?”

Tess used a knife to cut the rolled dough into thick slices. “Can you pass me a baking sheet for the pinwheel scones?”

He looked behind him and reached for a metal tray. “For the last twelve months I’ve eaten here at least three times a week. Each time you go out of your way to ignore me. When you haven’t got a choice, the best I can hope for is cold indifference. What’s happening now?”

She slid the scones into the oven and set the timer. “You’ve grown on me.”

Logan clutched his sweaty chest. “Be still my beating heart. Does this mean I can look forward to a civilized word here and there.”

Tess’ lips twitched. “It’s only temporary. Don’t get too comfortable.”

“So what did he do? Leave you at the altar for a news story? Print a story about how blueberry muffins weren’t so cool anymore?”

She walked to the fridge and took out a jar of what looked like stewed fruit. “If I told you why I don’t like reporters you’d probably sue the pants off me for defamation.” Tess opened a drawer and pulled out a spray-on deodorant. “It’s blue this time. Arms up.”

Logan made sure he scowled at her as she sprayed deodorant on top of his T-shirt. “How about a trade? You tell me why you don’t like reporters and I’ll answer one question for you.”

Her brow crinkled as she thought about what he’d said. “My answer to your question is complicated.”

“Most important things are.”

She lifted a ball of dough out of the fridge. “If I answer your question, you’ll do the same for me?”

Logan walked across to the sink and helped himself to a glass of water. He had a feeling both of their answers would be complicated. “I’ll truthfully answer any question you throw at me.”

Tess sprinkled flour onto the stainless steel counter and started rolling the dough. “I don’t like reporters because I’ve seen firsthand what they can do to a person’s life.”

She glanced at Logan. He kept his expression neutral.

“Three years ago my best friend died from a drug overdose. I found out her boyfriend was the person supplying her with drugs. I told him I was going to the police. Within days, he’d smeared my name across the newspapers with so many lies that I needed to leave New York. The reporters were like vultures.”

Tess kept her head bent over the pastry. She turned a pie pan upside down and cut around the edge. “Because of who he was everyone thought I was lying. I couldn’t prove anything to the police. Evie’s boyfriend walked away looking like a grieving hero.”

“Is that why you came to Bozeman?”

“My grandparents left me their home and this building when they died. I hadn’t been back since their funeral.” Tess looked at the shelf holding the boom box. “This was my soft place to fall.”

She undid the lid on the glass jar and poured the fruit into the crust. “That’s my dark past out in the open. And the only broken heart was mine.”

Logan waited for her to ask him about why he wasn’t sleeping, but she didn’t. Her hands moved quickly over the pie, adding a lattice top without hesitating once. With the pie in the oven and the pinwheel scones nearly finished, the kitchen smelled incredible.

“What do you want to ask me?” Logan watched her eyes land on his face, on the dark stubble on his jaw and the rings under his eyes.

“I’m not sure. I’ve got a feeling you won’t let me ask another question so easily, so I want to make this one count.” Tess walked across to a whiteboard attached to the wall. Someone had written a daily menu in big black letters. She drew a big smiley face beside the pinwheel scones and apple and blueberry pie. “One day I’m going to forget something, but it won’t be today.” The timer on the oven beeped and Tess took the scones out of the oven.

“When do you stop baking?” Logan watched as Tess started to pour more flour into a bowl.

“When I’ve made everything on my list. I’ll make some extra cookies for the after-school kids, then I’m done until we open.”

Logan glanced at his watch. “I need to leave soon. Otherwise, I’ll be late for

work.”

“Do you want a ride home?”

He shook his head. “I’ll be okay. I just need to stretch again and then I’ll be off.”

Tess poured a cup of sugar into the bowl. “Why did you come to Bozeman?”

For a second Logan froze. Why he’d come here had nothing and everything to do with why he wasn’t sleeping. He didn’t know if he could summarize what had happened in a few short words. But he’d made a promise, so he’d try. “I was a war correspondent in Afghanistan. A suicide bomber destroyed a school in the village I was living in.”

He breathed in the smell of apple and blueberry pie, of bacon and sun-dried tomato. It pushed the smell of death and desperation away, focused him on the here and now and not what had happened half a world away.

He took his empty glass back to the sink and filled it with water. “The Army evacuated as many people as they could, but they couldn’t take everyone. We left behind...” His hand shook as he lifted the glass to his mouth and gulped back the water. “I went home to Seattle and quit my job. When the position at the *Bozeman Chronicle* was advertised, I applied for it and moved here.”

“You won three top awards.”

Logan wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “You did your homework.”

“Hard not to when you eat here so often.”

“That was my old life. I’m not that person anymore.” He left his glass on the counter and walked toward the door. “I’ll see you later.”

He glanced at Tess and saw the worry on her face, the questions buzzing around her brain.

“Wait.” She reached for the brown paper bag he’d left on the end of the counter. “You forgot your muffins.”

He walked back and took them out of her hands. “Thanks.”

She shrugged her shoulders and picked up a spatula. “They’re too good to forget.”

Logan took another deep breath before leaving. He wished all of his



memories were too good to forget.

## CHAPTER 4



Tess looked down at her notebook, then at the sign on the cream brick building in front of her. Jay's Book and Office Supply wasn't far from Angel Wings Café. After shooing the last of the students out of the café, she'd locked the door and headed on foot to look for Connie.

"Wait for me."

Tess turned around. Her heart beat fast when she saw the six-foot-five, seriously toned body heading toward her. But then being in the same room as Logan was enough to make her forget about her aversion to reporters. "You didn't come in at lunchtime."

"Didn't want to make a nuisance of myself."

Tess felt a smile work its way across her face. "That hasn't worried you before."

"It does now. Is this the first stationery store you've looked in?"

"Unfortunately, yes. I was hoping to be finished by now, but a group of teenage boys didn't want to leave the café."

"Could have something to do with the pretty blond behind the counter."

Tess frowned. Kate helped her in the afternoon. But Kate had deep chestnut colored hair. "You mean me?"

"Is there any other pretty blond working with you that I don't know about?"

Tess crossed her arms in front of her chest. "You can't go around calling me pretty."

"Why not?"

“People will talk.”

Logan seemed to consider her words for longer than was strictly necessary.

“My sister thinks you’re pretty. Is that more appropriate?”

“It’s better,” Tess muttered. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

“I’ve come to help. Sally gave me the names of the stores you were visiting.”

Tess was confused. “But you didn’t want to help. Showing us where Connie and Dave lived was as much as you wanted to do.”

“I’ve been thinking about Molly’s idea. The one about documenting what you’re doing. I’d like to do a follow-up story. If Molly’s happy to provide photos, it would make a good weekend article.”

“You’re using us for a story?”

“I’m a reporter.”

Tess was sure the smile he was flashing her had won him more friends than enemies, but she wasn’t fooled. “You’ll have to check with everyone else. They might not want people knowing what we’re doing. And even if Molly, Sally, and Annie don’t mind, your readers might not be interested.”

“Are you kidding? This is one of those random acts of kindness stories that everyone loves.”

“It’s not award-winning journalism.”

The smile on Logan’s face dimmed. “My award days are over.”

Tess clamped her lips together. From her experience, reporters never gave up finding stories that would shock the world. But Logan looked sincere. Maybe she was projecting all of her trust issues on him, and maybe he didn’t deserve that.

“Okay,” she said. “You can come with me.”

Logan walked ahead of her and opened the door to the stationery store.

“After you.”

At any other time, she would have been impressed with his manners. But his manners were attached to a story she didn’t want to share. “I’ll ask the lady at the sales counter if she knows Connie.”

Logan nodded and followed her across the room.

Tess smiled at the sales assistant and held her hand out. “I’m Tess Williams.

Does Connie Thompson work here?”

The woman wasn’t much older than Tess. She frowned and looked at Logan. “Are you with the police or something?”

Logan held his hand out and smiled. The woman behind the counter almost melted on the spot. “I’m Logan Allen. I work for the *Bozeman Chronicle*. We’re trying to find Connie to do a follow-up story about her house burglary.”

The woman behind the desk looked as though she would have given him anything he asked for. Tess hoped that included Connie.

“I’m Jennifer Raynor. My friends call me Jen.” She leaned forward and shook Logan’s hand. “Connie doesn’t work here anymore, but I know where she’s gone. She started a new job last week at the Paper Palace on Lamme Street. Poor thing lost everything in that burglary. Who would do something like that?”

“I don’t know. I’m hoping the Police will have a better idea of who the thieves are.”

“I hope you’re right,” Jen said. “Did you need anything else while you’re here?”

Logan didn’t seem to notice the provocative pause in her sentence. “We’re okay. Thanks for your help.”

“Anytime.” Jen flicked her hair back over her shoulder and looked through her long lashes at Logan. “I’ll see you around.”

Logan smiled and left the stationery store with Tess following closely behind.

“Do you always have that effect on women?”

Logan stopped in the middle of the sidewalk. “What do you mean?”

He looked genuinely puzzled and Tess couldn’t hold back a smile. “You don’t know do you?”

Logan frowned. “I’ve got no idea what you’re talking about, but we need to get to the Paper Palace before they close. Do you want to come with me? My truck’s parked across the street.”

Tess watched him pull his keys out of his pocket. He looked distracted, as though his mind was already working through another set of problems. “We could call the store to see if Connie’s there.”

“Why would you do that?”

“You’ve got something on your mind.” Tess wondered if it had anything to do with why he’d come to Bozeman in the first place.

“It’s an occupational hazard.” He held Tess’ arm as they crossed the street. “If Connie isn’t working today, do you want to give her manager your home number or mine? She can call one of us to find out about the dresses.”

Tess put on her seatbelt. “She already knows you, so maybe your number would be better.”

Logan pulled out of his parking space and drove along Main Street. They stopped at the traffic lights outside the Bozeman Hotel and turned right. With its red brick exterior and arched windows, the hotel was one of the oldest buildings in Bozeman. Tess’ grandparents had taken her there most Sunday nights for their special family dinner. She’d loved being in the building, especially when her grandpa had taken her across to look at the old framed photos on the walls.

Logan didn’t say anything as they drove toward the Paper Palace. Tess had so many happy memories of Bozeman, that she wondered what Logan thought of their small town. His life here had to be the complete opposite of what he’d been used to.

If he was thinking about Afghanistan, she couldn’t blame him for being distracted. “How long did you work in Afghanistan for?”

Logan’s hands tightened on the steering wheel. “About eleven months.”

Tess thought about the impact of working in a war-torn country and what that could do to a person. There was a whole lot more to him than she realized. “Why did you go to Afghanistan? I mean, you could have gone anywhere, but you chose to report on a war.”

“It was one of the most important stories in the world. I wanted to see for myself what was going on. I wanted everyone to know the truth about what was happening.” He glanced across the cab at her. “I was lucky. I could leave whenever I wanted to but, for the most part, the civilians were poor and had to stay.”

“Will you go back again?”

Logan shook his head. “No. I did what I needed to do and it was time to

move on.” He took a deep breath and turned right. “We’re nearly there.” He pulled into a parking space and took his seatbelt off.

“After writing about Afghanistan, aren’t you bored with the stories you work on in Bozeman?”

“It took me a while to adjust, but I wouldn’t say what I write about is boring. If my editor and readers thought that, I wouldn’t have a job. And speaking about stories, I think it’s about time we found a happy ending for yours.” He opened his door and got out of the truck.

Tess followed him into the stationery store. She was still thinking about Afghanistan and what Logan must have seen when he disappeared down an aisle.

“Connie?”

A woman with brown hair stopped restocking the shelves. “Logan? What are you doing here?”

“If I told you I needed some pens and paper would you believe me?”

Connie smiled. “You’ve definitely come to the right store. Is this pure coincidence or did you come to see me?”

“We came to see you and buy stationery.” Logan turned toward Tess. “Connie, this is a friend of mine, Tess Williams.”

Tess shook Connie’s hand. “I’m sorry someone stole everything from your home.”

“So am I.” Connie put the last six folders she was holding on the shelf. “The only good thing was that we weren’t in the house when they broke in.”

Tess glanced at Logan. “I read the article Logan wrote and it said you’re getting married soon.”

“It’s less than two weeks away. I’m worried something else will happen.”

The bell on the front counter rang and Connie smiled at them. “I need to go and help serve. It was nice seeing you.”

Connie walked quickly along the aisle. She’d make a pretty bride, Tess thought as she watched her. She was younger than Tess, probably only twenty-two or twenty-three. She had a beautiful smile and the darkest blue eyes Tess had ever seen.

Logan picked up a box of colored pencils and a large sketch pad. “Do you need anything while we’re here?”

“You actually need stationery?”

“I want to restock my cupboards for when my niece comes to stay again. She loves drawing and cleans me out of supplies each time she visits.”

Connie finished serving one customer and another took their place. “I wonder how busy it gets in here.”

“Not as busy as your café.”

Tess took a closer look at the store. Everything was well stocked. The floors were clean and colorful posters hung on every available wall. The owners took pride in their business and it showed. “Online purchasing is killing stores like this one. People don’t want to come into town to buy an eraser or a pencil sharpener. They can go on the Internet and have it delivered the next day. It would be like someone opening an online café in town.”

“Your food is too good to be replaced by a web-based business. I’d drive twice the distance to sit in your café and smell your home baking.”

Tess felt a blush streak across her cheeks. “You’re biased because I taught you how to make pancakes.”

“And I’m coming back to give you a hand when the Groovy Grans are next in town.” Logan looked at the sales counter. “Looks as though Connie’s available now.”

Tess walked toward Connie. “Cross your fingers that she wants to consider taking the dresses.”

Tess looked around her. No one was waiting to be served so she had a few minutes to ask Connie about the bridesmaids’ dresses. She took Logan’s stationery out of his hands and left it on the counter.

“I’ll take these, please,” Tess said.

“I’m paying for them,” Logan said.

“No, you’re not. Put your wallet away and don’t argue.” Connie smiled at them both, then took the money Tess held out.

“Do you still need four bridesmaids’ dresses for your wedding?” Tess asked.

Connie sighed. “We do. My sister spent most of the day looking at hire

dresses in Great Falls. There are some nice ones in their catalog, but most of them are already booked for the weekend we're getting married. I'm beginning to think we're not going to find anything."

"I might have a solution for you."

Connie raised her eyebrows.

"My friends and I have got a lot of bridesmaids' dresses between us. None of them have been worn more than once and they're all less than five years old. We'd be happy to let you have a look at them and take the ones you like the most."

Connie's face turned red. "That's really nice of you, but Dave and I don't have a lot of money. We weren't insured and I can't afford to buy them from you."

"We don't want anything for them," Tess said. "They'd be yours to keep. For free."

"You're joking?"

"I couldn't be more serious if I tried. Everyone is bringing their dresses to my apartment tonight. You could come and have a look tomorrow."

"I don't know what to say." Connie bit her bottom lip. "Would it be okay if I brought one of my sisters with me? She knows what size dresses we need."

"Sure. If any of them look as though they'd fit, you could take them home for your bridesmaids to try on." Tess pulled a business card out of her wallet. "This is my phone number. I'll be home after four o'clock."

Connie looked down at the card. "I finish work at four o'clock, too. Could I see you soon after that?"

Tess smiled at the excitement on the bride-to-be's face. "Sounds great." She picked up the bag that held Logan's pencils and paper. "It was nice meeting you, Connie."

"It was nice meeting you, too. Thank you so much. I'm going to call my sister. I'll see you tomorrow."

Logan smiled as Connie rushed across the store. "You've made someone happy."

"I just hope she likes the dresses." Tess opened the front door and took one



last look around the store. “She seems like a nice person. They’re lucky to have her working here.”

Logan unlocked his truck and opened Tess’ door. “Are you ready to go home?”

“You bet,” Tess said with a smile. “I’ve got some texts to send. Molly, Sally, and Annie are going to be excited when I tell them we’ve found Connie.”

“I assume there’s going to be a celebration tonight.”

“You’d be assuming right. I might even make a chocolate cake to celebrate.” Tess knew the recipe for her favorite chocolate cake by heart. She’d made the recipe so many times that it almost felt as though it made itself.

“Did I tell you chocolate cake is one of my favorite desserts?”

Tess laughed at the big old eyes staring across the truck at her. “My cake is chocolaty rich, deliciously decadent and sinfully saucy.”

“Sounds exactly like the type of dessert a reporter with an incredible vocabulary might enjoy.”

“As long as you can put up with a lot of giggly females, you can join us.”

Logan started the truck and drove toward the café. “It’ll be hard, but I’m sure I’ll survive. What time are you meeting?”

“Anytime after six-thirty. If you arrive sooner, you’ll have to help dry my dinner dishes.” For some reason, the thought of Logan standing in her kitchen with an apron tied around his waist did funny things to her stomach.

But he was a reporter. She had a past life she was hiding. It didn’t matter what he was wearing because nothing was going to happen.



LOGAN HELD two bottles of wine in his hand and knocked on Tess’ door. He could hear laughter coming from inside her apartment. The sound made him glad he’d come.

He could have done what he wanted to do on the phone. He could have called Molly, asked if she’d be happy to combine her photos with the story he wanted to write. If she’d agreed, it would have taken ten minutes to call

everyone else. But instead he'd decided to come here and talk to Tess and her friends in person. And maybe, if he was lucky, their story would fill his mind instead of the nightmares keeping him awake at night.

Tess opened the door. His eyes traveled slowly down her body, appreciating the figure-hugging bright blue silk dress she was wearing. "I didn't realize it was a black tie event."

He didn't need to look at her feet to know she was wearing high heels. At six-foot-five, he wasn't short. Tess' eyes were almost level with his. She was grinning at him as if he was a slice of the chocolate cake she'd been going to bake.

"We're playing dress-up."

Heat built in parts of his body that hadn't been switched on in years. Tess must have read his mind, or the parts of him that were turned on.

Her smile grew wider and her eyes sparkled. "You'll have to play nurses and doctors with someone else."

Before he could begin to appreciate where that visual could take him, Tess pulled him into the room. Molly had her camera out, snapping photos of Annie as she posed beside the large picture window in the living room.

"Tilt your head a little toward the ceiling," Molly said.

Annie moved her head and waited patiently while Molly got the shot. She turned left, then right, until Molly was happy with what she had. Annie looked good in the pink silk dress she was wearing and he wondered why she didn't get dressed up more often.

Tess laughed when Annie poked her tongue out at Molly. "When Molly suggested taking photos of each of the dresses for a catalog, we didn't think she meant this. She's set up a full blown photo shoot."

He took another look at Annie and noticed the makeup she was wearing. Her hair had been styled in a way that didn't look as though a bird had made a nest on her head. She looked like a model. She moved like a model. This wasn't the over-excited woman that served him coffee and pie in jeans and a T-shirt.

After Molly had finished taking the shots she needed, Annie smiled at him and patted her hair. "Do you like my new hairstyle? Tess convinced me that

shabby chic belongs in a house, not on my head. I went for the Audrey Hepburn look. What do you think?"

She turned around. The swept up hairstyle was a vast improvement on the tumble of hair she normally held together with chopsticks and hair ties. "It looks good. Sophisticated and elegant."

Annie grinned. "Carl won't recognize me when I turn up at the bowling alley looking like a glamour puss. I'll change into the next dress."

Molly glanced at Tess. "You need to do your hair and makeup."

"I don't need makeup. You're not including my face in the photos."

"You wear a pretty dress, you put makeup on. It's an unwritten law of nature."

Tess frowned. "It sounds like an Irish rule of nature. I'm American."

"And I'm the photographer and I'm Irish." Molly ignored the growl coming from Tess and turned to Logan. "Did you bring a suit?"

"Don't trust her," Tess said as she walked across the room. "She's got evil intentions."

"I do not. There's not an evil bone in my body, but I do have a good imagination." Molly looked at the bottles in Logan's hands. "You brought wine? You'd make a fine addition to The Bridesmaids Club."

Logan laughed at the mischievous grin on Molly's face. "I'm not here to be part of your club. I've got something I want you to consider."

"I don't date and I won't marry you. Anything else is a possibility."

Logan smiled as he took the wine across to the kitchen counter and opened a bottle. "I'd like to write a follow-up story about what you're doing for Connie and Dave. Would you supply the photos if I did the writing?"

"Sure. As long as you credit the photos to me, I'd be happy to help." She glanced toward the doorway that Tess had disappeared through. "I don't know about Annie or Sally, but Tess won't want her face or name in the story."

"She's already mentioned that. Do you know why?"

"You'll have to ask her." Molly took the glass of wine he handed her. "Sometimes you have to be careful where you step, and this is one of those times."

“But you’re taking her photograph?”

“She trusts me. I’ll crop and edit my pictures to tell a different story. You’ll need to do the same with your words.”

Annie and Tess walked into the living room. He was glad he wasn’t holding the wine because the bottles would have dropped to the ground. Tess looked incredible. She’d pulled her hair out of the ponytail she’d been wearing. A blond curtain of silky hair fell to her shoulders. She’d done something to her eyes, made them bigger and bluer with a few strokes of eyeliner and shadow. Her cheeks were highlighted in a soft sweep of peach powder and her lips were tilted into a smile.

“I’ll take Tess’ photo first.” Molly picked up her light meter and took a reading. “Stand by the window. That’s it.”

Logan watched Tess twist and turn, stand in profile, then look straight into the lens of the camera. She’d zoned out, left what was happening in the rest of the room alone. She concentrated on Molly’s directions, found what Molly wanted, then worked the mood like a seasoned pro. He was beginning to think there was more to her than what she wanted everyone to believe.

Molly lowered her camera. “Logan, come over here and stand beside Tess.”

He looked at Tess, then back at Molly. “You don’t need me in the photo.”

“Sure we do. If you want to have a story to take to your editor, you’ll need a photo, something to show you’re part of the magic.”

He wasn’t looking for magic. He wanted a story.

“Think of it as an added bonus.” Molly walked toward him and grabbed his hand.

Tess looked as happy about Molly’s decision as he did.

“Stop getting all huffy, you two. It’s a photo. Nothing more, nothing less.” Molly didn’t let go of his hand.

“I’m wearing a T-shirt and jeans.” Even to his own ears he sounded desperate. Molly wasn’t listening.

“Stand beside Tess.”

Logan did as he was told.

“Not like that.” Molly sighed as she turned his shoulders. “Sideways.” She

grabbed his hands and placed them on Tess' hips. He felt her stiffen, pull away from his touch.

Molly looked at Tess and frowned. "These won't be in the catalog. Five shots. That's all I'll need. I'll give you and Logan copies so you can choose which one he uses. I'd like one of them for the book I'm compiling."

He was sure Tess was about to argue, but something held her back. She stepped forward and put his hands back on her hips. "I owe Molly a favor. If we've got to do this, we might as well get it done quickly."

Molly didn't waste any time. "Tess, place your right hand on Logan's shirt, just below his left shoulder. Look into each other's eyes. That's it. Tilt your head down, Tess. Look up through your lashes."

The directions continued for what seemed like ages, but in reality was probably only ten minutes. Logan was sure Molly had snapped more than five shots, but he wasn't going to complain. Tess had moved around him, devoured him with her gaze, made him wonder if she was acting or feeling as turned on as he was.

"Last shot," Molly said from behind her camera. "You're doing great. I'll just check the light."

As soon as Molly turned her back on them Tess leaned forward. "Can you cross your eyes?" Her words whispered in his ear, sent shock waves rippling along his skin.

"Logan?"

He was still stuck in turned-on mode. Crossed eyes didn't feature anywhere in the thoughts racing through his head.

Tess looked at him as though he needed a brain transplant. Which he probably did given the low priority his body was giving his mental agility.

"Can you make a monster face?"

That he could do. He pulled his lips into a snarl and puffed his cheeks out at the same time.

Tess covered up her burst of laughter with a cough. She glanced quickly over her shoulder, then back at him. "When I squeeze your arm, turn to Molly and pull the face."

Before he could agree with her, Molly stepped away from the light umbrella. She lifted her camera to her eyes. "I want this shot soft and sexy."

Tess muttered something under her breath, which wouldn't have worried him, except her mouth was close to his neck and her breath tickled his skin. If Molly wanted sexy, all she needed to do was take the shot now.

"Come on, Tess," Molly cajoled in her soft Irish accent. "Get that dream girl look in your eyes."

Logan looked into Tess' eyes. Molly couldn't see what he did. And what he saw knocked his socks off and left him in no doubt what was running through Tess' mind. Revenge.

Molly took half a step to the left, got ready for the soft and sexy shot she thought she was going to get.

Tess pinched his arm. He looked at Molly and pulled the worst monster face he could.

Annie burst out laughing, Molly spluttered a word a good Irish girl shouldn't know, and Tess turned her cross-eyed scowl into sweetness and light.

Annie hopped off the stool she'd been sitting on and ran across to Molly. "Let me see."

Molly pushed some buttons on the back of the camera. She took one look at the offending image and passed it to Annie. "You both look like wrinkly old prunes."

Tess stepped away from Logan, which in his unbiased opinion was a real shame. He was getting used to having her cuddled up beside him.

"That remark would have been positively cutting five years ago," she said.

"It's a great photo." Annie passed the camera to Tess. "You both look cute."

Logan looked over Tess' shoulder. She didn't move away so he figured she was more comfortable being close to him than what she let on. He took one look at the photo and laughed. His monster face was okay, but Tess' cross-eyed witchy look was better.

Tess' back door burst open. Sally staggered into the apartment holding an armful of dresses. "I need help here."

Annie and Molly rushed across to give her a hand.

“What in the name of Great-Aunt Mary do you have here?” Molly took a pile of dresses out of Sally’s arms.

“Thirteen bridesmaids’ dresses.” Sally dropped the last few dresses on the back of the sofa. “Emily donated four matching dresses and someone who works at the animal shelter gave me hers. I’ve got eight of my own in that bundle, too. What have you been doing?”

Tess seemed to realize she was still pressed against Logan’s chest. She made a funny noise before handing Molly her camera. “Taking photos of the dresses for the catalog.”

Sally looked around the room. “It looks like a professional studio with all of the lights you’ve set up.”

“Some of us have been extremely professional,” Molly said. “Others need a little education.” She stared pointedly at Tess.

“Well whatever you call it, it looks awesome. Do you want me to get changed into any of these dresses?”

“Start with one of Emily’s.” Molly picked up one of the bright red dresses in front of her. “It’s the only dress we’ve got four of. Our bride-to-be might like matching dresses.”

Sally held the dress in front of her. “It looks as though it will fit. I’ll be back soon.”

“If you need a hand with your hair and makeup, let me know,” Tess said.

Molly moved across to the window. “Your turn, Annie. Let’s do that lovely dress proud.”

Annie listened to what Molly said, moved where she was told.

Logan helped himself to a glass of wine while Tess changed into another outfit. When she came out of the spare bedroom with Sally he took a gulp of wine. This time, Tess’ dress was black, simple and so damn sexy it was a wonder the groom hadn’t run off with the bridesmaid wearing it.

“Wow,” Annie said. “I like that one.”

Tess looked down at the dress. “I wore it to Bernadette Kirk’s wedding two years ago.”

Logan was glad the groom hadn’t lived up to his Neanderthal logic. He

looked at Tess. He'd heard Bernadette Kirk's name mentioned somewhere else, but for the life of him he couldn't remember where.

"And you want to include it with the other dresses?" Annie clearly didn't agree with Tess' donation. "You could sell it on eBay and make a fortune."

Tess shrugged her shoulders. "I'd sooner give it away." She sat on the sofa and crossed her legs.

When the split in her skirt fell open, Logan had to force his eyes away from her long legs. He could have handled giggly women, but sexy without-knowing-it women were hard to be around. He should have brought Dylan with him. At least he would have been a distraction from all of the estrogen floating around the room.

Annie checked her watch and bounced to her feet. "I've got to get changed. Carl's expecting me in half an hour." She ran across the room and disappeared down the hallway.

"Would you like a slice of chocolate cake?" Tess asked him.

She was killing him. He cleared his throat and looked at the kitchen. "That would be great. I can get it."

Tess stood up at the same time he lurched to his feet. Their bodies met in front of the coffee table and he forgot about the cake. Tess' eyes opened wide and her gaze dropped to his mouth. He felt his blood pounding through his body. Being around Tess was enough to give a man a heart attack.

A blush filled her cheeks and if he didn't know better, he'd have sworn she ran for the kitchen. The sound of a plate hitting the counter ricocheted through her apartment. Molly lifted her head from under the light umbrella, Sally turned from in front of the window, and Annie rushed into the room.

"Is everything all right?" Annie said as she slipped her foot into a sneaker.

"Fine."

Tess' voice sounded odd. A nice kind of odd that gave Logan hope that she liked him as much as he liked her. He ran his hands through his hair. He hadn't dated anyone in years. He'd forgotten how to start something, how to let a woman know he was interested in her without letting her know how interested he was in her. And even if that made no sense at all, he was sure that somewhere,



someone would commiserate with him.

The dating thing was a minefield and he'd seen enough of those to last a lifetime.

He sat on a stool in front of the kitchen counter and watched Tess. She slid a piece of chocolate cake toward him.

"Does anyone else want some cake?"

Molly and Sally dropped what they were doing and joined Logan at the counter.

"Cut a piece for us, too," Sally said.

"Not me," Annie said. "I'm off to see Carl. Good luck with the other photos. Twenty-two dresses." The smile on Annie's face said it all. "We're going to make lots of people happy with these gowns."

Logan took a deep breath. "How would you all feel if I wrote a follow-up story? I could tell our readers about your club, what you're hoping to achieve."

"Sounds good to me," Sally said. "Some publicity will make it easier to find homes for the bridesmaids' dresses Connie doesn't want."

"I don't mind either," Annie said. "As long as any photos you use show my new hairstyle."

Molly bit into her slice of cake and sighed. "Tess and I have already agreed, so it sounds like you've got yourself a story, Logan Allen."

Sally poured herself a glass of wine. "We'll have to do this more often. I've been having withdrawal symptoms since the last time we ate chocolate cake together."

Logan hoped they didn't get dressed up and eat chocolate cake too often. One night a year was all the strain his heart could take, especially when Tess ran her hands over his chest and looked into his eyes.

He needed to remind himself that it had been for the camera, not him. But it hadn't made any difference to the way his body reacted or the way Tess swayed toward him when she didn't think he was looking.

Annie picked up her bag. "I'll leave you to the cake. Let me know which dresses Connie chooses."

Tess followed her to the back door.

By the time she came back, Molly had finished eating. “I hate to take you away from this delicious dessert, but unless we take more photos, we’re not going to get finished tonight.” Molly slipped off the stool and picked up her camera. “Who’s next?”

Sally took a napkin off her lap and followed Molly across the room. “It must be my turn considering I missed the first hour. Do I have cake in my teeth?”

Molly looked at Sally’s wide smile. “Not that I can see. We might as well take all of the photos in the same spot. Come and stand by the window.”

Molly gave Sally more directions and Tess came and sat next to him.

“Do you think this is going to work?” Tess asked.

For a moment he thought she was talking about them, until he realized nothing was happening with them. Except massive doses of hormones and a few fantasies that Tess featured in.

He glanced at Molly and Sally. “The Bridesmaids Club is a great idea. It’s already working for Connie.”

“But what if she doesn’t like any of the dresses?”

Logan studied Tess’ face. She looked worried and tired. “What time did you wake up this morning?”

“Half-past three,” she said softly. “I couldn’t sleep.”

“Want to tell me what you were worried about?”

Tess shook her head. “Silly things. Things that happened a long time ago and shouldn’t matter now.”

“I know the feeling. You could always call me if you can’t sleep.”

“I’ll wake you up.”

“No, you won’t. I don’t remember the last time I slept through the night.”

Tess pushed the rest of her chocolate cake away. “Do you run because you can’t sleep?”

“It gives me something to do.” He watched Tess think about what he’d said.

She slid off the stool and kissed his cheek. “I’ll leave another muffin on the door for you tomorrow. Just be thankful you don’t have to wear one of these dresses.”

Logan followed Tess with his eyes as she walked toward Molly and Sally.

She moved like a ballerina, posed in front of the camera like she'd been doing it for most of her life.

He had a feeling Tess had more secrets than he did. He just hoped hers weren't as deadly.

## CHAPTER 5



Tess looked at her watch for the tenth time in as many minutes. It was Tuesday evening. After work she'd gone for a long walk. By three o'clock she'd been so tired that she'd come home and started baking. She knew if she sat down she'd fall asleep. But with Connie and her sister arriving soon, she couldn't afford to be caught having a nap.

Molly had finished taking the last photo of the dresses at eight-thirty last night. Within an hour, everyone had gone home. But Tess' mind hadn't stopped working over-time. It had been close to eleven o'clock before she'd finally fallen asleep.

Logan and Molly were coming back this afternoon to capture the moment Connie decided which dresses she'd take. Sally had parent teacher meetings and couldn't make it. Annie was practicing for her bowling tournament.

Tess planned on having a long hot bath after everyone left, then heading straight to bed. She needed a decent night's sleep, otherwise she'd have to do something crazy, like close the café and take a vacation.

She added chocolate chips to the second cookie mixture and rolled the dough into balls. If she didn't bake for a living, it would have been therapeutic, but all she could think about were the other things she needed to do tomorrow. Maybe she needed a vacation more than she thought she did. While her imagination ran over the possibilities of where she'd go, someone knocked on her back door.

Tess wiped her hands on a dishcloth and went to see who it was. Molly stood at the top of the stairs with Logan a few steps below her.

“Look who I found in the parking lot.” Molly smiled at Logan, then looked at Tess. “Are you ready for Connie’s visit?”

Tess moved out of the way so they could come inside. “As ready as I’ll ever be. I was going to make a cup of coffee. Would you like one?”

Logan left a pen and notebook on the kitchen counter. “I can make it. You’re busy baking.”

“It’s okay. I can do it.” Tess was happy to make them a drink, but Logan was already pulling mugs out of the pantry.

“I know how to make coffee. Go back to your cookies.”

“Make a cup for me,” Molly said as she checked her camera.

Tess moved back to her cookie dough, finished rolling the balls, then slid them into the oven. Logan left a hot mug of coffee beside her.

She didn’t know what it was about him, but she could feel his eyes following her around the kitchen. It was as if she had a radar attached to her body whenever he was in the same room as her. It didn’t feel uncomfortable, it just felt strange. She was used to people watching her. Used to people taking notice of what she did and how she did it. But she wasn’t used to Logan.

Today he was wearing a white shirt, black trousers, and black dress shoes. He’d rolled the sleeves on his shirt past his elbows and undone the top two buttons at his neck. He looked rumpled and sexy—two things that were guaranteed to make her heart flutter.

“Hard day at the office?” she asked.

“Long day at the office. Have you heard from Connie?”

Tess sipped her mug of coffee. “She called me at lunchtime to make sure it’s still okay to meet us here.”

Molly checked the time. “She shouldn’t be far away.”

Tess watched Logan closely. He still looked tired, as though he’d had even less sleep than she had.

He ran his hand across his jaw and frowned. “I had a shave.”

“But no sleep,” Tess added. She took her cookie jar out of the pantry and held it out to Logan and Molly. “This is my four o’clock pick-me-up treat. Rolled oats, pumpkin seeds, coconut, cranberries, dates, sliced almonds and

maple syrup.”

Molly looked in the jar and took out one of the nut and fruit bars. “Yummy. Can you email me the recipe?”

“Sure. I can send it to you too, Logan.”

“These taste great, but I’d never get around to baking them. Can I put an order in at the café and freeze them?”

Tess thought about the ingredients. “I can’t see why not. I’ll experiment and let you know.”

Someone knocked on the back door. Molly jumped off the sofa and headed toward the door. “That will be Connie.” She introduced herself to Connie and her sister, and brought them into the living room.

Tess put the lid on her cookie jar and turned to the two women. “Hi. Are you ready to see the dresses?”

Connie nodded. “I’m so excited. I couldn’t sleep last night.” She remembered her sister standing beside her and did some hurried introductions.

Tess smiled. “It’s nice to meet you, Denise.” Connie’s sister sent them all a wide smile. She looked so much like Connie that they could have passed for twins.

“What you’re doing for Connie is amazing,” Denise said. “We don’t know how to thank you.”

“We’re just happy we can do something for you. Did you bring your bridesmaids’ measurements?”

Denise opened her bag and pulled out a piece of paper. “Here they are.”

Molly picked up her camera. “Do you mind if I take a few photographs? Logan and I would like to do a follow-up story for his newspaper.”

Connie looked at her sister. “I don’t mind. I’d like everyone to know what you’re doing for us.”

Denise nodded. “I feel the same.”

“That’s great,” Tess said. “Let’s get started. I’ll take you through to my spare bedroom. If you want to bring anything out to the living room, that’s fine.” She walked into the bedroom and tried to imagine what it must be like for Connie.

Connie had told her she’d spent months with her bridesmaids choosing a

dress design that would suit her three sisters and best friend. She'd started a special savings account with her fiancé and paid for the dresses out of that. They'd wanted their families to enjoy the wedding, but after the burglary they'd needed to scale everything back. Replacing some of the other things the thieves had stolen had been more important.

"Have the police found any of your belongings?" Molly asked.

Connie shook her head. "Not yet. I'm not feeling too positive about them finding anything."

Tess opened the double doors to her spare bedroom closet. Because the rooms inside the apartment were huge, her grandpa had added extra large closets. Little did he know that fifty years after he'd built them, his granddaughter would be filling one of them with bridesmaids' dresses. Her grandma would have been proud.

"*Oh, wow.*" Connie's mouth dropped open and Denise had tears in her eyes.

"They're beautiful," Denise said as she pulled the first dress out. "Are you sure you want to give us four dresses? We could bring them back when we've finished with them."

Tess saw Molly lower her camera. "We've got twenty-two dresses for you to look through. Whatever you choose are yours to keep."

Connie looked at one of the red dresses Sally had picked up yesterday.

"That's the only style there are four of," Tess said as the timer on the oven started beeping. "I need to check the cookies. If you've got any questions, just ask Molly or Logan."

Connie pulled another dress out of the closet and sighed. "They're all so pretty."

Tess smiled as she hurried out of the room. What they were doing for Connie made her feel just as happy as the smell coming from the kitchen. She opened the oven door and pulled the baking sheet out. The cookies were golden brown and filled with gooey chocolate.

"Are they okay?" Logan leaned against the counter and watched her move the cookies onto a plate.

"They're fine. Do you want to try one?"

Logan grinned. "I'm going to be ten pounds heavier by the end of the week if I keep eating your baking." He took a cookie off the plate and took a bite. "Delicious."

Tess laughed. "You don't seem too distraught about gaining weight."

"I'll run an extra mile tomorrow morning."

"You can't run an extra mile. You're already running too much."

Logan looked at her with a thoughtful expression on his face. "Are you worried about me?"

She was, but she wasn't going to let him know that. "I'm worried about me. If you start running any earlier, I'm going to have to start baking at three o'clock in the morning to get your muffins ready."

"You don't have to do that. I mean...I like it when I find the muffins, but you don't need to do it."

"Someone has to look after you."

Logan leaned over the counter and tapped the end of her nose. "That's what moms are for."

Tess supposed he was right. But she'd never had a mom that cared, so the concept was foreign to her. "If I were your mom, Logan Allen, I'd be visiting Montana to keep an eye on you."

"She is."

Tess stared at him. "Your mom's coming to Bozeman? When?"

"Next week."

"This wouldn't have anything to do with your sister's phone call to her, would it?"

Logan shook his head. "I cleared that up. Jacqui and Mom know you're not my girlfriend."

"Good." It was good, Tess thought. Very good. "Are you going to take your mom on a sightseeing tour?"

"She visited me a few months ago, so we've covered most sights around Bozeman. We didn't get to see Old Faithful last time, so I thought we'd head to Yellowstone National Park."

"There are some pretty waterfalls not far from Old Faithful. Your mom might



like to see those as well.”

“I was wondering...you know...if you’d like to meet her. I’ve told her all about The Bridesmaids Club and she thinks it’s a great idea.”

Tess wasn’t sure meeting Logan’s mom was a good idea. “What exactly did you tell your mom about me?”

“I told her you own the best café in town, you feed people who need a helping hand, and take pity on hungry runners. Was that okay?”

“You know about our after-hours café?” Tess thought Pastor Steven, his wife, and Annie were the only people who knew about her other job. She was beginning to appreciate just how hard it was to keep a secret in Bozeman. Which made her even more worried about her past.

“I’ve helped serve dinner once or twice at Pastor Steven’s church. I recognized some of the dishes. You’re not giving them leftovers are you?”

Tess turned the oven off and poured herself a glass of water. “I started giving the Lighthouse Café the food we didn’t sell during the day. And then I saw how much everyone appreciated what I was doing. So I started making extra food. It evolved from there.”

“How many people do you make meals for?”

Tess looked down at the counter. She didn’t like talking about what she did. It wasn’t as if it was such a big deal. She liked helping people.

“How many, Tess?”

“In between serving our customers, Annie and I make enough food for about thirty dinners each night. We freeze what isn’t needed and use it on the nights when the Lighthouse is bursting at the seams.”

“It’s no wonder you’re exhausted,” Logan scowled at her.

“It’s not a big deal.”

“It is to the people you’re helping. What else do you do?”

Tess crossed her arms in front of her chest. “Nothing.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Tess looked around the kitchen. She had enough dough left over for another batch of cookies. She took a baking sheet out of a cupboard and started rolling the dough into balls.

“I’ll find out sooner or later. I’m a reporter, remember. I have my sources.”

“Pastor Steven and his wife won’t talk, so you’ll have to dig a lot deeper to get anywhere near the truth.”

Logan had a gleam in his eyes that didn’t look good for Tess. He saw her as a challenge, a rock to flip over and look under. Except there wasn’t anything remotely interesting under her rock that needed exploring. She’d found what made her happy and that’s all that mattered.

“Why do you do it?” he asked.

Tess wondered if Connie and her sister were done choosing their dresses. She needed to be there, show solidarity toward their cause. “I’ll go and see how Connie’s doing.” She smiled sweetly at Logan and hoped he got the point.

He smiled back. He’d gotten the point all right, and he was going to ignore it. “I’m not leaving until you tell me.”

“You can sleep in the spare bedroom. There’s an extra duvet in the hall closet.” She walked across the living room, ignoring the grin plastered across his face.

“I snore.”

Tess turned around. He still looked as though he had no intention of leaving her apartment. “I’m sure you’ve got worse flaws than a snoring problem.”

“Aren’t you lucky? You’ll be able to experience them first hand.”

Luck had absolutely nothing to do with it. Logan did. She walked into her spare bedroom and saw Connie’s sister. Denise was wearing one of the red dresses.

“You look beautiful,” Tess said. “Do you like it?”

Denise turned in front of the full-length mirror Tess had found in a store in Paris. “It’s elegant and pretty. I’ve checked the sizes of the other dresses and I think they’ll fit.” She glanced at Connie. “What do you think?”

Connie’s eyes filled with tears. “I think it’s incredible. The dress you’re wearing looks even prettier than the ones we bought.”

Molly snapped more pictures. “You’ll be the belle of the bridal season. It’s a fine dress for a bridesmaid.”

“It sounds like we have a winner.” Tess watched Connie’s face.

“We do.” Connie wiped her eyes and blew her nose. “If it’s okay with you, I’d like to use the four red dresses.”

Tess hugged Connie’s shoulders. “Of course it’s okay. I’m glad you found something you like.”

Denise picked up her T-shirt and jeans. “They’re all beautiful. Connie and I were talking on the way over. We’d like you and Molly and your two other friends to come to our wedding. Logan’s invited too.”

“It won’t be as big as we first planned,” Connie said. “But there’ll be lots of music and the barbecue will be fun. I know it’s short notice, but it’s our way of saying thank you.”

Tess looked at Molly and they both nodded.

“We’d like that very much,” Molly said. “We’ll let you know if we can all make it.”

Denise dropped her clothes on the spare bed and gave Tess and Molly a hug. “You’ve made my sister very happy. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Tess said. “You can take the dresses home with you.”

“Thank you,” Connie said. “I can’t wait to show them to the other bridesmaids. They’re going to love them as much as we do.”

Tess didn’t doubt they would. The dresses were beautiful, but Connie’s happiness was even more touching to see. With the dresses all sorted, there was only one thing left to do.

Logan needed to leave with everyone else. Unless she told him about the scholarships she funded, Tess didn’t have a clue how to make that happen.



“YOU CAN’T STAY HERE.” Tess stared at the stubborn frown on Logan’s face. He was paying more attention to his container of Chinese takeout than he was to her.

He sucked a noodle off his chopstick, then hunted for a pork ball in the Chow Mein.

“It’s bad enough that you’re here,” she growled. “It’s even worse that you got the China Inn to deliver takeout. *To my home.*”

“You didn’t offer to make me dinner. I was hungry.”

Tess couldn’t believe he was still sitting in her apartment. It was eight o’clock. She’d planned on having a long soak in a bubble bath. She would have washed her hair, painted her nails, then slept the night away.

“You can’t barge in and stay the night. I’ve got things to do.”

Logan took a sip of water. She refused to offer him anything else.

“I didn’t barge in.” He sounded as though he was having a rational conversation with someone who cared. Except she didn’t feel rational and she didn’t care. She wanted him gone before he poked and prodded into more of her life.

“You invited me in,” he continued in the same modulated tone.

It was beginning to grate on Tess’ nerves.

“I’ll leave as soon as you tell me why you’re working all hours of the day and night to help total strangers.”

Tess glared at him. “Have you ever heard of squatting? It’s when you stay somewhere you’re not welcome.”

Logan shook his head. Max, Sally’s dog from the shelter, had more manners than the man sitting at her kitchen counter.

“You’re being overly dramatic,” he insisted.

Tess crossed her arms. “If you don’t leave my apartment I’m going to tell your mom you overstayed your welcome.”

“You fight dirty.” The smile on Logan’s face told Tess he didn’t care diddly-squat about his mom knowing about his bad manners.

“You’re impossible.” She glanced at the other container of takeout sitting on the counter. Logan had ordered an extra Chicken Chow Mein. It was one of her favorite Chinese meals and the only thing she’d been able to smell for the last fifteen minutes. Her tummy rumbled.

Logan smiled and pushed the container toward her with the end of his chopstick.

She grabbed the box and opened the lid. “I’m only eating because it’s rude to waste good food.”

“Of course it is.” He was having trouble holding back the laughter in his

voice.

Tess decided she'd ignore him while she ate her dinner. He was bad for her digestion and she wanted to enjoy every tasty mouthful.

She settled down on the kitchen stool as Logan pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. He touched a few buttons and the latest Michael Bublé song filled the apartment. All they needed was candlelight and a bottle of wine and they could have called their meal a date. Except this wasn't a date. It was a takeout takeover.

They ate in silence. Michael Bublé continued to croon and Tess continued to simmer. By the end of her meal, she was beginning to feel slightly happier about Logan being in her apartment. But that was only because he had good taste in takeout and she didn't need to do the dishes.

When Logan opened the bag he'd left in the fridge she almost forgave him his inadequacies. He'd ordered chocolate mousse for dessert. While he took two bowls out of the pantry, she found a tub of vanilla ice cream in her freezer.

He raised his eyebrows when she added a generous scoop to each bowl. "Ice cream is full of calcium. You're getting old and need all the help you can get."

"You know how to cut a man to shreds." Logan split the chocolate mousse between the bowls and slid one to Tess.

"You don't look too damaged to me."

Logan focused on his bowl. "Looks can be deceptive," he muttered.

Tess glanced at him. "Are you saying you're damaged?"

"Slightly dented."

Tess thought about what Logan had said. The problem with dents was that you tended to overcompensate so you didn't get hurt again. And that wasn't what life was all about.

She finished her dessert and rinsed her bowl. "I'm going to offer you coffee, but only because I want one."

"Sounds reasonable." Logan joined her at the sink and rinsed his bowl after she'd finished.

Now that they'd had something to eat, Tess was sure Logan wouldn't stay the night. But even if she was wrong, she was getting too tired to care. She really

needed to get some sleep. If he wasn't gone by the time they'd finished coffee, she was going to bed and leaving him to make himself at home.

They sat in the living room, sipping coffee and dealing with whatever thoughts were spinning in their heads.

"Are you going to tell me why you're a compulsive helper?" Logan asked.

"There's nothing compulsive about my behavior." Tess wasn't sure she liked the word 'compulsive'. It went hand in hand with obsessive, and she wasn't like that either. "I help people because I can."

"So do other people. But you don't see them getting up at four thirty each morning to bake for the masses."

"Everyone has different priorities. I know lots of people who get up early. Some write, some plan, some do yoga, and others run." She glanced at Logan to make sure he got the message.

"Yeah, but I've got issues. You don't."

Tess held back the scoffing noise itching to break free.

Logan gave her an odd look. "What issues do you have?"

"If I told you, you'd think I was shallow."

"Try me."

"You're clever, Logan Allen. You lull me into a warm fuzzy glow with Chinese takeout and Michael Bublé. Then you pounce on the information you wanted in the first place. Has anyone ever told you that you'd make a good reporter?"

Logan frowned. "The food was from necessity, the music because I thought you'd enjoy it. I asked the question because I'm worried about you."

"Worried?"

"You look tired, you're not sleeping and you're always busy. When do you make time for yourself?"

Tess sighed. "That was supposed to be tonight. I was going to have a bath and paint my nails before I went to bed."

"You want me to feel guilty?"

"I wanted you to go home."

Logan looked hopeful. "Does speaking in past tense mean you've changed

your mind?”

Tess glanced at his half full mug and smiled. “You can finish your coffee first.”

Logan looked down at his drink. “I can make it last all night.”

Tess always knew he was bone deep stubborn. What she’d completely missed was how single-minded he was. And she was tired. Too tired to dodge his questions. “Do you want the condensed version, or the longer, more twisted tale of woe?”

“I like a good story, so go for the long version.”

Tess frowned. “You can stay for an extra five minutes after I’ve answered your question.”

“What happened to an empty mug of coffee?”

“I changed my mind. It’s five minutes after my story ends, or your time’s up now.” Tess wanted to double check that he knew he was leaving and not making himself at home in her spare bedroom.

“All right. What if I want to ask a question?”

“One question and that’s it. Anything else waits until the next time I see you.”

He nodded and Tess tried to work out where she’d start. “My mom had a few issues.” That had to be the understatement of the year. Tess’ mom had been as reliable as a block of ice on a desert island. “I came to live with grandpa and grandma when I was thirteen. When I was fifteen, I was spotted by a talent agent and for the next ten years traveled around Europe, modeling the latest clothes to hit the catwalk.”

Logan waited for her to say something more. When she didn’t say anything, he frowned. “That’s it?”

Tess frowned right on back. “You wanted to know what issues I’ve got. I told you, so now you can leave.” She didn’t know what Logan’s problem was. She’d given him what he’d asked for and he still looked as though he was ready to stay the night.

“Living with your grandparents and working in Europe don’t seem like issues to me.”

Tess crossed her arms. “They are if you consider everything else that happened. I developed trust and abandonment issues from my mom. I let people tell me what to do because I wanted them to be happy with me. My low self-esteem probably helped in my early modeling days. I’d do just about anything for my agent, including not eating. How’s that for issues?”

“It’s not a competition.”

“No, but they’re a complication. They color what I do and add more importance to things that shouldn’t matter. Angel Wings Café is my way of celebrating food. While I was modeling, I was careful about what I ate. What I looked like became more important than who I was. Providing meals for the Lighthouse Café is my way of helping other people feel special.”

“Where’s your mom now?”

“She died from a drug overdose when I was thirteen.”

Logan stared at her. “And your friend died from a drug overdose three years ago?”

Tess nodded. “I could have done more to help her.” She closed her eyes and remembered the Evie she’d met in New York twelve years ago. It was the first time either of them had been to a big city. Evie had been full of life and ready to take the world by storm.

It was still hard to think about the last time they’d seen each other.

“My psychiatrist would call that survivor’s guilt. You did the best you could. Your friend made choices that ultimately killed her.”

In her heart, Tess knew he was right. But that didn’t change what had happened. Four weeks before Evie died, Tess had known something was really wrong. They’d met in Paris before going to separate modeling contracts. Tess was flying to Milan and Evie to Los Angeles.

Evie had always been hypersensitive about her weight and what she looked like. But this time she’d been neurotic. She’d lost more weight and looked gaunt and hollow-eyed. She’d told Tess she was taking drugs. Her addiction had spiraled out of control. The boyfriend she’d raved about for months was giving her everything she needed, killing her one fix at a time.

Tess had tried to convince her to cancel her contract in Los Angeles and



come to Milan with her. Evie had laughed and told her there was nothing to worry about. When she got back to New York, she was going to check into a drug rehab program.

It hadn't happened. Christmas had come and gone and so had Evie.

Tess looked at her empty coffee mug. "Whether I did the best I could doesn't matter. Evie died." Tess thought about what had come next; the funeral, the police, the lies and the publicity that had changed her life. It had been one of the hardest times of her life.

Logan stretched his legs out and focused on his sneakers. "When I got to Afghanistan it was different than I thought it would be. I went there to tell the real story, to let the rest of the world know what was happening. But it wasn't that easy. Everyone had their own reasons for telling part of the story. When I got home, I had an independent interpreter look at some of the interviews I'd done. One of the official interpreters consistently translated everyone's words into things they hadn't said. I'd been reporting on information that was based on lies."

Tess rested her head against the sofa. "How did that make you feel?"

"As though most of what I'd done had been a waste of time. I blamed myself for not speaking fluent Pashto or Dari."

"Did any of the reporters know how to talk to the Afghan people?"

"No. Most of the contracts were for six months so they didn't see it as a high priority. The official interpreters were supposed to help us."

Tess pulled her feet up beside her and turned to Logan. "What happened at the school you told me about the other day?"

"I don't talk about it very often."

Tess knew whatever had happened must have been traumatic. Logan looked tense and stressed. The knuckles on his hands had turned white around his coffee mug. "That's okay. You don't need to tell me."

He took a deep breath and left his mug on the table. "I started a school with some soldiers not long after I arrived. The children in the village knew a few English words, but not a lot. We didn't think it would do any harm, so we set up a roster and started classes. Three-quarters of the children that came to the

school were girls. It was a big deal for them.”

Logan glanced at Tess. “Abiba was twenty-one years old and knew more English than anyone in the village. She loved coming to school to help the students. One day she arrived late, which was unusual for her. I’d taken some of the older students outside to pick up the supplies that had arrived from the States. Friends and family would send chalk, pens, paper and anything else they could get in boxes.”

He stopped talking and crossed his arms in front of his chest. But not before Tess saw how badly his hands were trembling. What he was about to tell her had shocked him beyond anything he’d known.

“Abiba was a suicide bomber. That morning we lost two soldiers and at least ten children. After the bomb exploded, the Army evacuated the village. The Taliban had targeted the school and everything around it.”

Tess rested her hand on his arm. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“Is that why you’re not sleeping?”

“Some of it.”

Tess didn’t know what to say. “What happened to the people that lived in the village?”

“Most left on their own. Others were taken to a refugee camp. The injured soldiers and children were airlifted to the nearest hospital.”

“And you came home?”

Logan nodded. “I couldn’t go back.”

Tess rubbed his arm. It wasn’t much, but she wanted him to know that she cared. She walked across to the pantry and took out her four o’clock pick-me-up treats.

“Sounds like we could both do with a sugar rush before you go home.” She sat down beside Logan and offered him a cookie.

A grin tugged at the corner of his mouth. “That’s the subtlest way of giving me my marching orders that I’ve ever heard.”

“I aim to please. But not as much as I used to.”

“Good for you,” Logan said as he bit into a bar. “At least one of us is

learning to deal with their issues.”

## CHAPTER 6



*B*efore Tess started her café, she would have told anyone that Wednesdays would have been the quietest day of the week. But that was before she found out about all of the midweek activities in Bozeman. Between the library, the bridge club and the genealogy club she had a steady stream of regular Wednesday customers.

By eleven o'clock that morning they'd sold most of their muffins. She was busy making another batch when Annie handed her the phone.

"I need to keep serving in the café. I think it's Connie. She sounds upset."

Tess took the phone out of Annie's hand. "Connie? Is everything all right?"

"I'm sorry to call you at work, but I didn't know how to get hold of you."

"That's okay. What's happened?"

"Mom's not well. Dave and I are getting married at five o'clock tonight in the hospital chapel. If you can still make it, we'd like you and your friends to be there."

"Oh, Connie. I'm so sorry about your mom. Of course we'll be there. What about your dresses?"

"I haven't really thought that far ahead. I dropped the bridesmaids' dresses off at a friend's house. She was going to do the alterations for us. My best friend can't get here until tomorrow and we don't know..."

Connie didn't need to finish what she was going to say. Tess felt a lump form in her throat. "I can help. Do you have a dress to wear?"

"A bridal store is making my gown. I don't know if they've finished."

Tess grabbed a pen and piece of paper out of a drawer. “Would you like me to sort out the dresses?”

“Could you? Dave and I are busy calling all of our friends and family. I’ll give you my sister’s phone number. Denise will be able to help. Thank you for doing this for us.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll give you a call as soon as I’ve got the dresses.” Tess wrote down Denise’s phone number and said goodbye. The next person she called was Kate, her part-time assistant. Tess knew she’d need Kate to come in early if she was going to help Connie.

Annie poked her head around the kitchen door. “Is everything okay?”

Tess shook her head. “Connie’s mom isn’t doing too well. They’ve brought the wedding forward to tonight. Are you able to come?”

“Sure. We’re not bowling tonight. What do you want me to do?”

“Could you look after the café with Kate until we close? The wedding’s at five o’clock in the chapel of Bozeman Deaconess Hospital.”

“What about the bridesmaids’ dresses? Connie wouldn’t have had a chance to make any alterations.”

Tess slid the uncooked muffins into the oven. “I’m going to give Connie’s sister a call. Between us, we should be able to work something out.” She had one other person to contact before she rang Denise. “I’ll give Logan a call, too.”

“No need,” Annie said. “He’s sitting in the café. I’ll call Molly and Sally.”

“Thanks.” Tess undid her apron and dialed Denise’s phone number. In less than six hours, Connie would be walking down the aisle.

With a little help from her friends, Tess was going to give Connie and Dave something special to remember.



AN HOUR LATER, Tess and two of Connie’s sisters were standing in Emily Green’s boutique. “Where would you like us?”

Emily waved Tess, Denise, and her sister, Kristine up the main staircase. “Come upstairs with me. When is the other bridesmaid arriving?”

Denise looked at her watch. "Joanne will be here in half an hour."

Tess had called Emily out of desperation. Connie hadn't even managed to show her sisters the bridesmaids' dresses before her mom took a turn for the worse. With only six hours left before the wedding, Emily was the only person Tess knew who could use a sewing machine.

But Emily could do so much more than sew clothes. She'd opened an amazing fashion boutique two doors down from Angel Wings Café. The old library building had been transformed into a chic, stylish boutique. Emily had customers who lived around the world. She tutored design classes and filled her life with everything that made her happy. She'd also made the bridesmaids' dresses that Connie had chosen for her wedding. If anyone could pull a miracle out of the bag, it was Emily.

Emily lifted a measuring tape off her sewing table. "Who's going first? You can change into your dresses in Nicky's office. She won't be back for the rest of the day."

Kristine looked through the dresses Denise had hung on a rack. "These are beautiful."

"Our sister's got good taste. I've put my name on the dress." Denise moved across to her sister and pointed to another dress. "I thought this one was the closest to your measurements."

Kristine lifted the dress off the rail. "Better make me first. Denise said her dress doesn't need any alterations." She smiled at her sister and walked into Nicky's office.

Tess looked at the list Denise had made before she'd left the hospital. "Has anyone called the reception venue to cancel?"

"We don't need to," Denise said. "After the burglary Connie and Dave decided to have the reception at Mom and Dad's place. I think Mom was secretly pleased they'd changed the venue. She's got such a pretty garden." Denise's bottom lip trembled. She blew her nose and took a deep breath. "Did Logan mind going to the florist?"

Tess shook her head. "If anyone can convince them to make four bouquets in the next couple of hours, it's Logan. Molly's on her way over here, too."

Kristine came out of Nicky's office. The red dress fitted perfectly across the top, but the skirt needed to be shortened and taken in at the hips.

Emily moved a circular platform on wheels across the room. "Stand on here, Kristine, and we'll get started."

The bell above the front door tinkled as someone walked into the boutique. "Would you like me to go downstairs?" Tess asked.

"That'd be great," Emily said. "It's probably Caitlin. I asked her to come in and look after the boutique while I'm helping you."

Tess walked down the stairs. Molly was heading toward her with a camera hanging over her shoulder. "Am I too late for the fittings?"

"Just in time. Emily's doing Kristine's dress now."

Molly stood at the top of the stairs. "I don't need to ask whether Kristine's one of Connie's sisters. They all look alike."

"Strong gene pool." Tess smiled as Kristine turned on the platform. "Emily is amazing. She didn't hesitate to help us."

Molly snapped a photo. "That's what friends do for each other."

"I'm beginning to understand that," Tess said softly.

Molly moved further into the room. Tess followed her, trying to see what Molly saw when she took a photo.

Molly looked over her shoulder and smiled. "It's a fine mood Emily creates in this room. See how the light falls on the different workspaces. It dances through the panes of glass, softening the edges, highlighting what needs to be seen." Molly knelt down, changed the angle of her camera and took another photo.

"How do you know that the image you see through your lens will look good in the finished photo?"

"That's a tricky question." Molly moved silently across the room and took a photo of Denise. "Sometimes I don't know if it will work. Sometimes I do. And sometimes the best images come from the feeling you get just before the shutter clicks into place. I use what I know, then let the rest take care of itself. How do you know how to move in front of a camera?"

"I don't know. It just happens." Molly was the only person in Bozeman that

knew about Tess' past. They'd worked together in Europe and talked at a few social events.

When she'd first seen Molly in Bozeman, Tess had felt betrayed. She'd thought Molly had come to find her after the drug scandal had rocked the modeling world. But Molly wasn't interested in Tess' past. She'd come to Bozeman to stay with her sister after a grueling European schedule.

Tess was sure there was more to her arrival, but so far, Molly hadn't told anyone why she was here or when she'd be going back to Europe.

Molly lowered her camera. "A little bit of magic happens in everyone's life when they're doing something they love."

Tess didn't say anything.

"You don't agree."

"I enjoyed modeling, but I never felt the magic."

"Maybe you didn't enjoy it enough. How do you feel when you stand in your café at the beginning of each day?"

Tess laughed. "Tired."

Molly shook her head. "The magic hasn't gone. It's hiding until you're ready to see it."

Tess watched Emily move around Kristine. "Do you ever wonder if there's more to life than what we're living?"

Molly sighed. "I know there is, but for now, this is what we have. We're feeling restless and that's a dangerous thing to be."

Tess remembered the last time they'd both felt restless and smiled. "At least we're not in Rome." They'd been at a sponsored gala evening. At the end of the night, they'd gone for a walk. It had been hot and sticky, and the Trevi Fountain had looked so inviting. What had started as a way to cool off had almost ended with a night in a police cell.

Molly moved closer to Emily. "What an evening. I've still got the photo of the man who helped us run away from the police."

"He didn't help us run. He shoved us into his car and drove off into the sunset with us. It could have ended in disaster."

"We were young and foolish," Molly said with a smile on her face. "And he



was too handsome for his own good.”

Tess couldn’t remember anything about the man, except for his eyes. They were the most amazing shade of blue she’d ever seen. He’d dropped them back at their hotel and they’d never seen him again.

The doorbell jingled and Tess looked over her shoulder. “I’ll get it.” She ran downstairs and a young girl with jet black hair and a dimple in her chin smiled shyly at her. Connie’s last sister had arrived. “You must be Joanne?”

“That’s me.” Joanne’s smile became less guarded. “I came as soon as I could.”

“Come upstairs. Kristine and Denise are already here.”

As soon as she walked onto the mezzanine floor, Denise ran across and wrapped her sister in a big hug. “Did you see Mom?”

Joanne nodded. “She’s comfortable. Connie arrived as I was leaving.”

Kristine stepped off the platform and gave her sister another hug. “Watch the pins. How are you?”

Tears filled Joanne’s eyes. “I’m okay. What can I do to help?”

Denise introduced Emily, Molly, and Tess then showed Joanne where to change into her dress.

Tess felt marginally better now that Connie’s sisters were well on the way to having bridesmaids’ dresses. She had two things left to do; check on Logan and see how Annie was going.

She just hoped the surprise wedding cake Annie was decorating would be appreciated as much as the dresses.



LOGAN STEPPED out of the florist’s store with the bridal bouquet clutched in his hands. He felt like an idiot, probably looked like one too. When he saw Dylan walking toward him, he knew he was in trouble.

“Something you forgot to tell me?” Dylan had the same serious expression on his face that he normally wore. But this time his mouth almost tilted into a smile.

“It’s not mine.”

“I was hoping you’d say that. So what’s a single male doing holding a bunch of flowers that belong on a bride?”

“It’s an emergency. Tess’ bride’s mom isn’t well. They’ve brought the wedding forward to this evening. I’m doing a few things for them.”

“Looks like it.”

“What are you doing in town? I thought you were playing nanny.”

Dylan didn’t look the least bit offended. “Justin’s signed, sealed and delivered to his dad. What else do you need to do in the name of love?”

“I don’t love Tess. I’m doing this for the bride.”

Dylan looked at him as if he’d lost his marbles. “I didn’t mean, Tess. What’s going on?”

Logan looked down at the flowers. “There’s three more bouquets in the florist’s store.”

“And you expect me to bring them out here?”

“You scared of real work?”

Dylan shook his head. “Man, you need to get out more. Carrying flowers to your truck is not real work.”

“It beats babysitting.”

“Tell me that next time you have to sit next to a hyperactive eight-year-old for over four hours.”

Logan walked toward his truck. “My heart bleeds for you. If you want to make yourself useful, you can get my keys out of my jacket pocket and unlock the cab.”

Dylan grumbled some more about real work before unlocking the cab. “I’ll help you with the flowers, but only because I feel sorry for you.”

Logan left the bouquet on the back seat. “We’d better hurry. I’m not sure how fast these things wilt.”

“And we can’t have droopy flowers,” Dylan muttered. “So what’s up with your girlfriend?”

Logan locked the truck and headed across the sidewalk. “I’m not falling for your sick jokes again.”

“I’d say Tess deserves a purple heart for putting up with your sorry ass.”

“She’s not my girlfriend.” Logan opened the florist’s door. The sales assistant handed him a box with two bouquets sitting inside. He nodded toward Dylan. “He’s helping with the other bouquet. Don’t worry about a box.”

The sales assistant smiled at Dylan. Her grin grew even wider when she saw the blush creeping up his neck.

“I’d appreciate a box.” Dylan waited while the assistant hunted for something to put the bouquet of roses in.

Logan left his flowers in the truck, then came into the store to see what the hold-up was. “A box won’t protect the macho image you’ve cultivated.”

Dylan snorted. “You say that now because you got caught with a bridal bouquet in your hands. Forward planning will keep my reputation intact for another day.” The sales assistant passed him the box and he smiled. “See. Not one flower in sight.”

Logan followed him out to the truck and supervised where he left the box. “I’ve got to get these across to Emily’s boutique. You want to come?”

“I suppose I’d better. No one will think you’re single and available if you wander into a women’s fashion boutique carrying flowers. But if there’s two of us, they might overlook what we’re holding and focus on us.”

Logan shook his head. “Your new job’s warping your brain.”

“It’s not the job, believe me. I’m parked around the corner. Just give me a few minutes to catch up.” Dylan jogged across the road and disappeared down another street.

Logan checked his cell phone before he started his truck. Tess had sent him a text about another job that needed doing. It was just as well he could put his time down to the follow-up story. He had flexible hours, but his boss might have other ideas if he knew he’d been collecting wedding bouquets.

A big, black beast of a truck pulled up behind Logan and flashed its lights. Dylan might have a few issues to sort out, but he had good taste in vehicles.

As he pulled out into the traffic, Logan thought about Tess’ text. Picking up a cake from Angel Wings Café wasn’t a hardship. Especially if he could convince Dylan to stop for coffee.

They needed to talk and it needed to be today.



LOGAN WALKED into Emily's boutique and nearly plowed into Dylan's back. The bouquet in his arms came dangerously close to being squashed. "Did you need to stop in the middle of the room?"

Dylan was staring at the enormous crystal chandelier hanging over the staircase. "This is a fashion boutique? It looks like something you'd see in Paris."

"Thanks."

Logan looked up and saw Emily leaning over the edge of the railing on the mezzanine floor. "We've got your bouquets."

"Bring them up," she yelled. "We've finished fitting the dresses."

Dylan's eyes widened in surprise. "You mean there were semi-naked women in here and you didn't ask me to help sooner?"

"There's usually semi-naked women in here. Emily designs her own clothes. Women come here for their fittings."

"How do you know so much about what happens in here?"

Emily poked her head over the railing. "What are you two whispering about? Everyone wants to see what the bouquets look like."

Dylan's face broke into a grin. "What are you waiting for? Lead the way."

As Logan walked up the stairs, he glanced back at Dylan. "Behave yourself. If Tess thinks you want to make out with one of the bridesmaids, she'll blame me for bringing you here."

"I can't wait to meet the dragon lady."

At times like this, Logan wondered how Dylan had reached the ripe old age of thirty-three without being beaten over the head with a club.

When they got to the top of the stairs, Logan stopped and stared. Tess was bent over a laptop with Molly. Emily was sitting in front of a sewing machine sewing a red dress and two other women were doing the same thing.

He'd only met one of Connie's sisters the other day and she was here,

helping to wrap little piles of candy in gauzy net. He'd swear the other two women sitting beside Denise had to be her sisters. They had the same jet black hair, the same blue eyes and one of them had the same dimple in her chin.

He felt Dylan's babe radar kick into action and he gave him a hard stare. A lot of good it did him. Dylan was already making his way across to the candy wrapping station.

Emily jumped off her chair and took the box out of Dylan's hands. "And who would you be?"

Dylan looked down at Emily and gave her one of his rare, but charming smiles. The kind that told Logan he was looking for a girlfriend. "Dylan Bayliss, ma'am. I'm a friend of Logan's."

Emily's gaze flicked between Dylan and Logan. "Thanks for getting the bouquets. Let's have a look at them."

She walked across to a long narrow table. Logan put the bridal bouquet down and within seconds he was surrounded by women oohing and aahing over the white roses and green foliage.

"It's going to look beautiful with her dress," Molly said.

Tess poked Logan in the ribs. "I can't see."

He stepped to the side and hauled her in front of him. "Do these meet with your approval?"

Dylan opened the flap on his box and pulled one of the red bouquets out. When he saw Logan's hands sitting on Tess' waist, he frowned.

Logan dropped his hands. "Dylan's been helping me."

Tess glanced across at Dylan and smiled. "Hi, I'm Tess. The short redhead who yelled at you over the railing is Emily. Denise, Joanne, and Kristine are the bride's sisters, and Karen McKenzie and Doris Stanley are here to help with the dress alterations."

Dylan nodded. "Nice to meet y'all."

"I just love your Texan drawl," Denise gushed. "Do you live in Bozeman?"

At least Dylan had the intelligence to leave the last bouquet on the table before he started flirting with the bridesmaid. "Just moved here. Are you a local?"

Before Logan could hear the rest of Dylan's pickup lines, Tess nudged him across to her laptop.

"Did you get my text about the cake?" she asked.

"We're going there next. When did you have the time to bake one?"

"I didn't. Annie and I keep a few cookies and cakes in the freezer for emergencies. We made a fruit cake a couple of weeks ago. As soon as we heard about the wedding we took it out of the freezer. Annie's decorated it and it's ready to go to the chapel." She looked across at Dylan. "Where did you meet your friend?"

"In Bozeman at a group I go to."

Tess' eyebrows rose. "I thought you were going to say in the Army or when you were in Seattle. He doesn't look like a group type of person."

Tess didn't know how close to the truth she was.

"When you pick up the cake, can you take it straight across to the hospital? Father Ritchie has set up a table in the foyer of the chapel. He's assured me that no one will eat the cake before the wedding."

After tasting Tess' baking, Logan knew that might be harder than was humanly possible. "You believe him?"

"Of course I do," she whispered. "He's a priest."

"Priest or not, your cakes are on people's most wanted list. I hope he's got a guard on duty."

"It's a chapel. People don't steal from a church."

Tess looked so sure she was right, that Logan felt sorry for spoiling her delusions of human morality. "I hate to be the one to break the bad news to you, but cake is cake. If you're hungry, it doesn't matter to most people where it's sitting. If someone eats one side of the cake and steals the decorations off the top, it's not going to look good."

"What do you suggest, then?"

"I'll leave it in Connie's mom's room when we get to the hospital. I'll make sure I bring it with me before the ceremony starts." Logan glanced at Dylan and sighed. Connie's sisters had made room for him at their table. At six-foot-five he wasn't one of the smallest men around. Combined with wide shoulders and a

body built like a tank, he was a force to be reckoned with.

The big man who hardly smiled at anyone was putting candy into little tulle circles. It seemed about as foreign as Dylan playing nanny to an eight-year-old boy.

“You about ready to head across to the café?” Logan asked him.

Dylan ate a candy and winked at Connie’s sisters. “I’m all yours.”

Logan didn’t wait for his friend to follow him down the stairs. Dylan was already getting into the wedding spirit. Logan was still waiting for cupid to appear.

Flirty talk wasn’t on the wedding list Tess had given him. It wasn’t on the spreadsheet she’d opened on her laptop. And even if cupid sharpened his arrow, Logan doubted Tess would ever want to hear flirty talk coming out of his mouth.



“YOU DIDN’T TELL me Tess was such a babe.” Dylan left the wedding cake on the floor in the front of Logan’s truck. They’d debated where to put it before settling on the safest place they could think of.

“You didn’t ask.”

“A six-foot blond goddess deserves a mention or two. Or were you worried a more worthy man might whisk her out from under your nose?” Dylan took one of the takeout coffees Logan was holding. He opened the door to the back of the truck and slid into the seat.

Logan stood on the sidewalk and stared at him through the open window. “Does this mean you’re coming with me to the hospital?”

Dylan slicked back his hair and grinned. “I’m coming to the wedding, too. Kristine invited me.”

“You do realize why the wedding’s tonight?”

“Yeah, I know.” The smile fell off Dylan’s face. “It mustn’t be easy for them.”

“At least we can help make it something special.” Logan walked to the driver’s side of the cab and started the truck. Dylan didn’t say anything more

until they were heading toward the hospital.

“So tell me about Tess. I take it she’s single? It goes without saying that she’s drop dead gorgeous. Does she have a sister?”

“Do you have anything on your mind except women?”

“It keeps me from thinking about anything else.”

The truth in Dylan’s words made Logan’s foot slip off the accelerator. The truck lurched forward.

“Is the cake okay?”

“I hope so or one of us will be in trouble.” For a second, Logan imagined all of the frosting splattered across the inside of the box. Tess and Annie would kill him. He glanced down at the cake. It was sitting at an odd angle on the floor. He couldn’t remember what it had looked like before his accelerator slip.

Dylan leaned forward. “And we both know who’ll be in trouble the most.”

Logan looked over his shoulder. Dylan looked smug in the knowledge that it wouldn’t be his head on the chopping block.

Dylan cleared his throat. “So, getting back to Tess. How long have you known her?”

“About a year.”

“You’ve known her a year and haven’t said anything?”

Logan thought he’d better set Dylan straight on where his relationship with Tess sat. A big, fat nowhere was where. “She’s not my girlfriend. She hates reporters, although I think she’s getting used to me. She likes Chinese takeout, but feels guilty eating it when she’s such a good cook. She’s done some modeling, owns Angel Wings café and lived with her grandparents for a few years.”

“You got her shoes size and dental records in there somewhere?”

“At least I pay attention to the important things.”

Dylan laughed. “And Chinese takeout is so important.”

“Don’t laugh too hard, you’ll give yourself a hernia.”

“It’s just as well we’re turning into the hospital parking lot.”

Logan wasn’t going to attempt to divert Dylan’s attention away from where his brain had taken him. At least he could joke about Logan’s miserable attempt



to get to know Tess better. Neither of them had dated in so long that it felt good to laugh about something that involved a woman.

“Does Connie’s mom know we’re leaving the cake with her?” Dylan asked.

“I hope so.” He knew Tess had Connie’s cell phone number. Whether she’d thought to let Connie know they were on their way was another story. “I’ll give Tess a call.”

Dylan jumped out of the truck as soon as Logan found a parking space. “Don’t worry. We’ll go to Connie’s mom’s hospital room. If something has happened, or it’s not going to work, we’ll revert to plan B.”

“Plan B?”

Dylan looked at Logan as though the answer was as plain as the nose on his face. “Hide the cake under a table.”

“I can see why you work in security.” He watched Dylan carefully lift the cake box out of the truck. “Whatever you do, don’t drop it.”

“You wouldn’t be trying to jinx me, would you?”

Logan locked the truck and followed Dylan across the parking lot. The last thing Connie and her family needed was more bad luck. So he walked beside his friend, opened the doors and navigated around anything that could make Dylan drop the box.

## CHAPTER 7



“Are you sure you know what room Connie’s mom is in?” Dylan stopped beside a nurses’ station and looked at the rooms around them.

“Room thirty-five.”

“It doesn’t look as though this ward goes up to room thirty-five. Don’t move from beside the box.” Dylan left the cake on the counter and walked toward a nurse coming out of a room. “Excuse me. Do you know where room thirty-five is?”

The nurse looked at Dylan, then across at Logan. “Who are you looking for?”

Logan hoped Connie’s mom had the same last name as her, otherwise he’d be making a quick call to Tess. “Mrs. Thompson. She’s in the palliative care unit.”

“You’re in the wrong building. You need to go to the Cancer Center. If you turn right at the end of this ward and follow the blue lines, you’ll end up in a big courtyard. The Cancer Center will be straight ahead of you. Have a good day.” The nurse smiled and went into the next room.

Logan looked at the box sitting on the counter. “I hope the frosting hasn’t melted.”

“At least I haven’t tripped on anything,” Dylan muttered. “Let’s get going in case we get lost again.”

They followed the blue line out of the building. Logan opened the doors into

the courtyard and stared at the glass entrance to the Cancer Center. “How did we miss it?”

“We came in the wrong entrance. If we’d parked on this side of the hospital, it would have been right in front of us.”

Logan had traveled through more countries than he could remember. He’d navigated through almost every major airport in the world. He’d never gotten lost. Until he came to Bozeman. There had to be a lesson in there somewhere.

“What are you thinking about?” Dylan asked.

“I’m thinking about the reason I came here.”

“To the hospital?”

Logan shook his head. “To Bozeman. I felt like I was drowning in Seattle. I couldn’t breathe. Everything was too close, too noisy. I was like a frightened jackrabbit.”

“How’s it working out here?”

“I don’t jump as much. If I could get a decent night’s sleep, I’d be the happiest person alive.” Logan looked down at the box in Dylan’s hands. “We’d better get the cake inside. Do you want me to carry it?”

“Not with those puny muscles attached to your arms.” Dylan walked through the automatic doors leading into the Cancer Center.

Logan flexed his arm muscles, pleased to see bulging biceps under his T-shirt. “I don’t have time to work out in the gym for two hours every day.”

“It’s all about priorities.” Dylan grinned. “My next priority is finding a girlfriend.”

A nurse walked past them and glanced at Dylan.

Dylan nodded. “Ma’am.”

Logan could imagine him tipping his cowboy hat if he’d been wearing one. He waited until the nurse left the corridor before continuing their crazy conversation. “You don’t like anyone touching you.”

“I’m working on that, too.”

“How are you working on the touching thing when you travel with your job all the time?”

Dylan frowned. “It’s all theoretical at the moment. I figured there’s got to be

the perfect woman out there somewhere, or why else would I be in Bozeman.”

“For your job?”

“There’s more to it than that.”

Logan studied the map in the foyer. “Is that why you invited yourself to the wedding?”

“I didn’t invite myself. Kristine suggested it and I accepted. It wouldn’t hurt you to find someone special. If Tess isn’t interested, there’s bound to be others that are.”

“I’m not interested in anyone else.” Logan pointed to the red dot on the map that showed where they were. “We need to take the elevator up to the first floor. Mrs. Thompson’s room should be at the end of the corridor.” They walked toward the elevators and Logan pushed the button.

“Does Tess know you’re interested in her?”

“No, and she’s not going to find out from you.”

Dylan leaned the cake box against a handrail that ran around the wall. “You’ve got to tell her sometime. Does she know about what happened in Afghanistan?”

“Some of it.”

The elevator doors opened and Dylan stepped inside. “Have you read the letter?”

Logan didn’t need to ask which letter he was talking about. The envelope Pastor Steven had given him was sitting on the coffee table in his living room. Every time he walked past the table he felt a cold dread work its way along his spine.

“I take it your moody silence means you haven’t opened the envelope?”

“It’s on my coffee table.”

“Dude, you need to read the letter.”

Logan glared at the green number above the elevator buttons. The doors opened and he stepped into the corridor. “It’s not that easy.”

“It never is. If I can flirt a little and work on my touchy-feely issues, you can open the envelope. If you want company when you open it, just call me.”

Logan knew that once he read the letter there was no going back. It might tell

him what had happened after the explosion. But he didn't know if he was ready to find out, or even if what was written would be the truth.

He didn't want to get his hopes up, to read that more children than he thought had survived. And he didn't want to know who had died. The soldiers and the children at the school had become his friends. They'd trusted each other, laughed with each other and a year ago, most of them had died together.

Logan walked to the end of the corridor and stopped outside room thirty-five. A pale blue curtain had been pulled around the bed, shielding whoever was behind it from the rest of the ward. He hoped Mrs. Thompson was behind the curtain. If she wasn't, they'd have to admit defeat and ask another nurse for directions.

Dylan stared at the open doorway. "There's something you need to know."

Logan didn't like the panicked expression on Dylan's face. "What's wrong?"

"My mom died of cancer."

Dylan's voice was so quiet that Logan had to lean forward to hear him. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"I thought I'd be okay."

"And you're not?"

Dylan looked down the corridor. "It's the smell. It was the same on mom's ward. If I need to leave, I'll meet you back at the truck."

Logan looked at the box in Dylan's arms. "Would it help if I took the cake to Mrs. Thompson? It won't take long."

Dylan looked at the room. "I can do this."

Logan didn't know which of them Dylan was trying to convince, but either way he had a determined scowl on his face. Logan stepped into what he hoped was Mrs. Thompson's room and made sure Dylan was behind him.

Connie was sitting in an armchair by the window. She looked up from the magazine she was reading. "Hi. Tess said you'd be arriving soon with the cake."

Dylan left the box on a table at the end of the bed.

Mrs. Thompson's eyes were closed. She'd wrapped a bright orange scarf around her head and knotted it at the side. It added a layer of color to her pale, almost transparent skin.

“Mom’s been asleep for most of the day.”

“But I’m not now.” Mrs. Thompson slowly opened her eyes and smiled. “Who are these lovely men?”

“Mom, this is Logan Allen, the reporter I was telling you about.” Connie looked blankly at Dylan.

“I’m Dylan. Logan’s friend. I’m helping.”

Mrs. Thompson smiled. “If you got the cake to us in one piece I’d say you’re doing a great job. Are we able to open the box?” She looked at Dylan and tilted her head to the side. “Are you okay, honey?”

Dylan swallowed. “I’m fine, Mrs. Thompson.”

Logan knew he wasn’t fine, not by a long shot.

“Lift the lid a little. I just want a peek.”

Connie put down her magazine and walked across to the table. “I’ll open it, Mom.” She ran her fingers along the edge of the box and undid the flap. Her eyes widened when she looked at the cake. “It’s beautiful.”

She pushed a button to raise the angle of her mom’s bed, then moved the table closer. Logan caught a brief glance of white frosting, red roses and a bride and groom.”

“Oh, it’s lovely,” Mrs. Thompson said. “How did they make it so quickly?”

“Tess had already baked the cake and Annie decorated it.” Logan stepped forward to take a closer look in the box. He expected to see an ordinary wedding cake, but what Annie had created was really nice.

She’d swished the white frosting into peaks, like the waves on a beach, and added a ring of red roses around the edge. Red rose petals, made of the same fondant as the roses, were scattered over the white frosting. In the center of the cake, a mini groom was kneeling on one knee in front of the bride. He had a single rose in his hands, holding it toward her.

If Logan was being poetic, he would have said the groom was offering the bride his heart, his love and everything in between. But poetry seemed out of place in a palliative care unit.

Logan glanced at Connie. Her eyes shone with tears as she looked at her mom. This was a lot harder than he’d thought it would be. It was all very well

knowing Connie had brought the wedding forward because her mom was dying. It was different being here, feeling the sense of loss they were both trying to hide.

Dylan stuck his hands in his pockets and looked at Connie and her mom. “It was nice meeting you both. I’ve got something to do. I’ll see you later.” Before anyone could reply, he left.

Mrs. Thompson looked worried. “Is he okay?”

Logan looked at where Dylan had been standing. He didn’t know much about Dylan’s life apart from his time in Afghanistan and the basic family stuff that slipped into a conversation. He knew he had a brother and three sisters. Apart from what he’d learned today, Dylan never talked about his past.

“He’ll be fine.”

Mrs. Thompson sighed. “Knowing someone’s going to die isn’t an easy thing to deal with.” She reached for Connie’s hand. “But we’ve all got to begin our next journey at some point. I’m just thankful I got to see my girls become such wonderful women. I’m very proud of them.”

The look that passed between Connie and her mom was enough to bring tears to Logan’s eyes.

Mrs. Thompson squeezed Connie’s hand, then looked at Logan. “Tell me what my girls have been doing this morning?”

He watched Mrs. Thompson smile. She’d pushed aside whatever grief she was feeling and focused on the here and now.

“We can tell you ourselves.” Denise pushed back the blue curtain and smiled at her mom. “Joanne’s dress isn’t finished yet, but Kristine and I couldn’t wait to show you what we look like.”

Mrs. Thompson waved them forward. “Come closer so I can see.”

Logan wasn’t much of an expert about bridesmaids’ dresses, but they looked good to him. With simple bodices and skirts that hugged their hips, Kristine and Denise’s red dresses were elegant and sophisticated.

“Don’t you look pretty,” Mrs. Thompson said. “And you’ve curled your hair, Kristine. It’s lovely.”

Kristine shot a quick glance at Connie and grinned. “Tess did our makeup for

us. I feel like a new person.”

Logan took a closer look at their faces. The bright red dresses could have easily overpowered the women wearing them. Tess had balanced the dresses with soft, understated makeup that made their skin look as though it was glowing.

“Look what we brought with us...” Kristine pulled a big white bag out from behind the blue curtain.

Connie gasped. “It’s ready?”

Denise nodded. “The bridal store couldn’t finish it in time, so one of Emily’s friends picked it up and worked on it all afternoon. She sewed the last thread in place just before we left. Tess was worried you wouldn’t have time to get ready if we left it at the boutique.”

Connie looked around for somewhere to put the dress.

Logan pointed at the curtain rail above them. “If you’ve got a hanger I could leave it on the rail.”

Kristine reached for the top of the bag and smiled. “It’s just as well someone thought to include one.” She passed him the dress and turned to Connie. “Tess said to give her a call if you’d like her to do your hair and makeup.”

Connie looked at her mom and sisters. “I’ll do that now. Do you think she’ll do mom’s makeup, too?”

“We’ve already asked her,” Kristine said with a smile at her mom. “She’ll be here in twenty minutes, but you still need to call her. She’ll need to bring her curling iron and heated rollers.”

“Lord knows I don’t need those things now,” Mrs. Thompson said with a smile. “Show me your wedding dress, Connie. I can’t wait to see it.”

Logan decided it was time to leave. “I’ll see you soon.”

Connie walked over to him and gave him a hug. “Thank you. We couldn’t have done this without you.”

“It’s a team effort. I’m just following orders.”

Mrs. Thompson smiled. “Connie told me about Tess and The Bridesmaids Club. I’m looking forward to meeting them after the wedding.”

“They’re looking forward to meeting you too, Mrs. Thompson. I’ll see you



later.” He nodded at Connie and her sisters and left the room.

They had a happy bridal party and an even happier mom. Now he just needed to make sure Dylan hadn’t totally freaked out and left the hospital without him.



TESS LISTENED to the quiet music playing over the sound system in the chapel. She’d been rushing around Bozeman for the last few hours, getting all of the last minute wedding things sorted.

Annie was sitting beside her and smiled when Dave arrived with his groomsmen. “He looks nervous.”

Tess couldn’t blame him. Getting married was a big deal, bigger than anything she’d ever done.

Molly walked down the aisle and stood beside her. “Do you mind if I sit in the aisle seat? I can’t get good photos otherwise.”

“No problem.” Tess nudged Annie and they shuffled along the row of wooden seats.

Molly sat down and took some photos of Dave. “Connie’s nervous, but I got some fine shots of everyone.”

Annie leaned forward. “Have you seen Sally?” she whispered.

“She texted me five minutes ago,” Molly said. “She isn’t far away.”

Everyone sat back in their seats and listened to the music.

“Where’s Logan?” Tess hadn’t seen him since he’d dropped the bouquets off at the hospital.

“He’ll be here soon,” Molly whispered. She lifted her camera and took a few shots of the beautiful stained glass windows.

There were no images of saints or crosses on the windows anywhere. What replaced the traditional stained glass was incredible. From rivers and trees, to mountains and waterfalls, the stained glass told a story about Bozeman and the beauty that surrounded them. Tess could only imagine how many people had found comfort and peace as they’d sat in the chapel and admired the windows.

“Sorry I’m late.” Sally sidestepped past Molly and Tess. Annie moved down a seat and Sally sat beside her. “We had a last minute emergency at the school.”

“What happened?” Annie asked.

“One of the students fell off the roof of the administration building. The paramedic thinks he’s broken his leg and shoulder.”

“What was he doing on the roof?” Tess asked.

“Getting a football down. He could have killed himself.” Sally opened her bag and took out her camera. “I saw Connie and her sisters in the foyer. They look beautiful.”

“We finished Connie’s dress an hour ago. The last minute rush was worth it.” Tess was really proud of what they’d done today. Without everyone’s help, they wouldn’t have been able to get everything ready in time for the wedding.

She glanced at the front of the room and smiled at the groom-to-be. Dave still looked nervous and she wondered if he’d be able to make it through the ceremony. It didn’t look as though he could figure out what to do with his hands. One minute they were in his pockets and the next minute they were fiddling with his jacket.

“Do you mind if I sit with you?”

Tess and Molly looked up at Dylan. He’d changed into a dark charcoal suit and white shirt. Tess thought a suit would have taken some of the dangerous edge off him, but it made it worse. All he needed was a pair of dark sunglasses and he could have passed for an FBI agent.

Molly leaned forward and whispered to Annie, “Move down another seat.”

They all shuffled along. The bridal march started playing on the sound system and everyone stood up. Molly quickly changed seats with Dylan so she could take more photos.

Tess smiled as Molly snapped a picture of Dylan before turning toward the back of the chapel. She took photos of the bridesmaids and stood in the aisle as Connie walked toward her.

With the number of photos Molly was taking, Connie and Dave would have a lifetime’s worth of memories. Knowing how good her photos were, each of them would be treasured.

Tess sighed when Connie walked past their seats. She looked like Cinderella in the beautiful tulle and satin dress they'd worked on all afternoon. The sweetheart neckline and beaded skirt shimmered as she walked down the aisle. The veil she'd chosen fell softly around her shoulders, ending in a delicate swirl below her waist.

Connie's mom was beside her, being pushed down the aisle in a wheelchair. Tess hadn't been able to hide all of the shadows under Mrs. Thompson's eyes with makeup, but she still looked radiant and so proud of her daughters.

But it wasn't Connie or her mom that made Tess' eyes widen. Logan was standing behind Connie's mom, pushing her wheelchair down the aisle. He'd changed into a dark navy suit. He looked so handsome that Tess was sure everyone could hear her heart pounding.

Molly sighed. "Don't you love a man wearing a suit," she said.

Dylan cleared his throat and straightened the edge of his jacket.

Molly grinned at him. "You're a fine man to be standing beside. Would you happen to know how to cook?"

"I could make tacos by the time I was seven years old, ma'am." Dylan's voice was a slow seductive purr.

Tess laughed at the half in love expression on Molly's face. "You'd be safer taking photos," Tess whispered in Molly's ear. "Dylan's too tall, dark and dangerous."

"I can be anything you want me to be," Dylan purred back with a gleam in his eyes.

It was Tess' turn to smile. She looked at the front of the chapel and watched Logan step away from Connie and her mom.

"Dave and Connie look so happy together," Sally whispered.

Tess nodded and followed Logan with her eyes. He wheeled Mrs. Thompson to a space in the front row and sat beside her.

None of this would have happened if he hadn't written the newspaper article about Connie and Dave's burglary. It wasn't an award winning story and it definitely wouldn't change the world. But his kindness had changed Connie and Dave's life. It had given Mrs. Thompson something to look forward to and a

memory they would all hold in their hearts.

Molly knelt down and hunted inside her camera bag.

“What are you looking for?” Tess asked.

“My light meter. I don’t think there’s enough light to get the shots I need from back here. I’m going to have to get closer.”

“You can’t walk down the aisle.” Sally glanced at the front of the chapel. “They’ll be saying their wedding vows soon.”

Dylan tapped Molly on the shoulder. “Go that way.” He pointed to the side of the chapel. “There’s a clear path to the front.”

“Thanks.” She picked up her camera and wiggled past Tess, Sally, and Annie. She stopped when she got beside Annie and patted her pockets.

“What’s wrong?” Annie whispered.

Molly tried to look as inconspicuous as a five foot eight woman dressed completely in black could. “I left my wide angle lens under the seat.”

Annie whispered something in Sally’s ear. Sally said something in Tess’ ear. Dylan looked altogether too intrigued to do anything but wait for his ear whispering turn.

“Don’t get your hopes up, Romeo,” Tess said with a smile. “Molly left her spare camera lens under the seat.”

Dylan looked down beside him and grinned. “It would be my pleasure to deliver it.”

Tess looked at the people around them. Dylan would block their view, annoy them more than they already were with all of the whispering going on. Before Tess could stop him, he’d walked past her and was heading toward Molly.

She didn’t know how it happened. Either Annie didn’t see Dylan tip-toeing toward her, or she realized too late what was going to happen. She moved her legs and Dylan tripped over her feet. He lost his balance, landing on the ground with a heavy thud.

Tess could have sworn the ground shook. If the look on Dylan’s face was anything to go by, he’d felt the same sharp jolt. Annie was trying to help him, but he didn’t want anything to do with the hands trying to get him off the floor.

Tess bit her lip, Sally started giggling and Annie looked confused.

Molly reached for the lens and walked quickly to the front of the chapel. She was probably too embarrassed to be seen interacting with the riffraff in the third to last pew.

Dylan managed to sit in a seat before Annie grabbed him again.

"I'm really sorry," Annie said. "I didn't mean to trip you."

Dylan took a deep breath. "It's no problem." He stared straight ahead, watching the wedding in front of them.

Dave slid Connie's wedding ring on her finger. Laughter filled the chapel when he kissed her on the lips. And then it was Connie's turn. Even from the back of the chapel, Tess could hear the emotion in Connie's voice as she repeated her wedding vows.

Tess wondered what it felt like to know you'd met the man you wanted to spend the rest of your life with. To know that whatever happened, he'd be beside you, encouraging you and helping you.

She'd always thought that kind of love belonged in fairy tales, but looking at Connie and Dave, she wasn't so sure anymore.

Sally pulled a tissue out of her pocket and blew her nose. "Even though I can't see much of the wedding it sounds romantic."

Tess grinned at her friend. "Molly's taking lots of photos so you won't miss out." She glanced down the row of seats. Annie kept looking at Dylan and he kept ignoring her.

She looked at Connie and Dave and smiled. They were happy and in love. Their bridesmaids looked amazing and Mrs. Thompson was here to watch her daughter marry the man of her dreams.

It was a good day. The best day Tess had shared with her friends in a long time.



TESS OPENED one eye and closed it again. She pulled her arm out from under her duvet and slapped the top of her cell phone. The alarm kept ringing. To her sleep-deprived, slightly woozy brain, it sounded like a chicken being strangled.

She pulled herself upright and rubbed her eyes. It was four-thirty. Normal people didn't get out of bed at this time of the morning. Normal people stayed in bed until sunrise. But not her. She had a list of food to bake, a café to get ready and a headache the size of Mount Rushmore pounding in her head.

She picked up her phone and slid the red circle across the screen. Wonderful silence filled her bedroom and she was tempted to fall back onto her pillow. If she was really fast in the kitchen, she could have another thirty minutes in bed. It would be like a real sleep in. She could dream about Connie's wedding, the lovely dinner they'd enjoyed at Angel Wings Café and the dance floor that had appeared out of nowhere.

Just as her head hit her pillow, her cell phone rang. She couldn't believe someone would call this early in the morning. Didn't they know she'd had a late night, that yesterday she'd been part of an amazing day. And that maybe she might want to help someone else, to do it all over again.

She frowned at her phone and tried to work out who would be calling at this time of the morning. If it was telemarketers from India, she was hanging up. She let the phone ring for another few seconds before answering it.

"You're not in your café."

Tess pulled the phone away from her ear and looked at the screen. Logan's number was blocked. "Do you know what time it is?"

"That's why I've been knocking on your door for the last five minutes."

Tess couldn't figure out what he was talking about. "Why are you standing on my stairs?"

Logan sighed. "Just open the door."

That, Tess could understand. She stumbled out of her bedroom and unlocked the door. A cold blast of air followed Logan into her apartment. She rubbed her eyes and stared at his damp T-shirt and running shorts. "Do you ever sleep?"

"Forget my sleeping habits. Aren't you opening the café today?"

Tess ignored his lazy appraisal of her soft cotton pajama bottoms and tank top. She headed to her kitchen and turned the coffee machine on. If she couldn't go back to bed, she'd wake herself up with enough caffeine to kick-start her brain. "I've got plenty of time thanks to your chronic insomnia." She yawned. It

was the type of yawn that was telling her to go back to bed.

She focused on the amused grin on Logan's face. "You didn't leave here until after midnight. Why are you looking so normal?"

"Guess I'm used to less sleep than you are. You do know what the time is, don't you?"

"It's four thirty." She pulled a couple of mugs out of the pantry and leaned against the kitchen counter.

Logan walked toward her holding out his wrist. "Wrong. It's five forty-five. That's quarter to six for those of us who've slept in."

Tess grabbed his wrist and stared at his watch. She blinked once before panic set in. "*Oh, no.* I'm going to be late."

She forgot about her lack of sleep. A surge of adrenaline replaced the caffeine she'd been looking forward to. Annie would be arriving in an hour. She didn't have anything ready for her breakfast customers. The oven wasn't even turned on.

"What can I do to help?" Logan stepped back as she raced past him.

"Call Annie. Ask her to come in early." She made a detour to the coffee table, picked up the keys to her café and ran back to Logan. "I'm going to jump in the shower. Unlock the front door and turn the oven onto one hundred and eighty degrees. I'll be there in five minutes."

She ran back to her room, grabbed some clean clothes, her hairbrush and a couple of Tylenol.

While the shower was warming up, she brushed her teeth. The sink put her directly in front of the bathroom mirror. Her face was in after-party mode and it wasn't a pretty sight.



LOGAN ADDED another egg to the pancake mixture, stirred it, then poured more buttermilk into the bowl. The microwave pinged and he tipped the melted butter into the batter.

He found a bag of fresh blueberries sitting in the fridge, so he took those

across to the griddle and started cooking breakfast.

Tess flew into the kitchen just as the first pancakes had finished cooking.

“You’re cooking?” Her mouth dropped open as he lifted the pancakes onto a plate and slid them into the warmer tray of the oven.

“I might have made pancakes once or twice since you showed me how.” He’d made them more than once or twice. Pancakes had become his specialty. When Dylan started calling in for breakfast, Logan had experimented with different additions to the recipe. Some had worked, some hadn’t. But Dylan and Logan weren’t fussy. They’d eaten the lot then washed everything down with thick black coffee.

“You could have kept your PJs on.” Logan didn’t miss the blush that streaked along Tess’ face. She’d looked so cute in her cotton pajamas that he’d regretted having to tell her the time.

“I’d better start baking.” Tess walked across to the pantry and pulled out containers of sugar and flour. “Thanks for waking me up.”

He turned back to the stove and smiled. “If you hadn’t answered your phone I was going to break in.”

Tess opened the fridge and took out the butter. “I’m a deep sleeper.” She quickly mixed some flour, sugar, and baking powder together. “I didn’t think you’d go for a run this morning.”

Logan sprinkled some blueberries on the next batch of pancakes. “I woke up early. Did you enjoy yourself last night?”

Tess grinned. “I had a great time. Dylan seemed to enjoy himself.”

“I’ve never seen him smile so much.” Logan figured it must have been part of his new dating strategy. He flipped the pancakes and took two plates out of the pantry. “Do you realize how much Connie and Dave appreciated your surprise?”

Tess shrugged her shoulders. “It wasn’t a big deal. They hadn’t planned anything after the wedding, so I thought we could have dinner together. Can you open the oven door?”

He opened the door and moved out of her way. She slid a baking sheet of scones into the oven and walked across the room.



“I’ll make the mini fruit tarts now. Did Annie say what time she’d be here?”

“She should be here soon.”

Tess opened the fridge and looked along the shelves. She moved a few things around, then started pulling food out and leaving it on the counter. “I know it’s in here. Annie bought yogurt yesterday.”

Logan slid two pancakes onto a plate and tapped Tess on the shoulder. “You haven’t had breakfast. It’s time to stop.”

Tess smiled at him. She was standing so close that he could smell the peppermint tang of her toothpaste. “I’ve got too much baking to do.”

He reached for her hand and pulled her across to one of the kitchen stools. “You’ll get more done on a full stomach. Sit.”

Tess looked at the pancakes in his hand, then up into his eyes. “They *are* mighty fine pancakes.”

“The best in Montana.” He could drown in Tess’ blue eyes. He hadn’t stood this close to her since Molly had taken their photos in her apartment. And he still remembered the taste and feel of her when he’d kissed her in front of his sister. His heart rate had spun out of control then, and it was doing the same thing now.

Tess’ eyes drifted to his mouth and he moved closer. He imagined her body pressed against his, the way his mouth would slip along her skin as they slowly devoured each other.

She ran her hand across his chest and down his arm. With a cheeky grin, she took the plate of pancakes out of his hand. “You’ll make someone a wonderful husband.” She kissed his cheek and sat on the kitchen stool, filling her mouth with fresh blueberry pancake instead of him.

It was enough to make a grown man cry.

Tess pointed her fork at another stack of pancakes sitting on a plate. “Are you going to eat your breakfast or watch me?”

He’d vote for watching, but he had a feeling Tess would have something to say about that. He pulled another stool out and sat beside her. “How did you get everything ready in time for last night’s dinner?”

“We called in a favor a friend owed us. Christopher provided the roast meat and vegetables. The rest was all Annie’s doing. She’s amazing.”

“What about the decorations?”

“We had a small wedding reception here a few months ago. The bride and groom left most of the decorations with us. Annie stored them in boxes.” Tess slid off her stool and walked across to the fridge. “Do you want a glass of juice?” she asked.

“Sure.”

She poured a glass of juice for each of them and left him beside his plate. “You make good pancakes.”

“I learned from the best.”

Tess ate quickly, glancing at the clock on the wall more than once.

The kitchen door opened and Annie stumbled into the room. “Someone left the front door unlocked.” She looked at Logan. “Did you go home last night?”

Tess choked on her last mouthful of pancake and went as red as a beet.

Logan, at least, had been in the process of lifting his glass of juice to his mouth. “I went home and now I’m here.”

Annie grinned. “That’s what they all say.”

He turned to Tess. She’d gone even redder and was staring daggers at Annie. “All? How many boyfriends do you have?”

“You’re not my boyfriend,” she muttered. “And you,” she pointed at Annie, “will not be my friend for much longer if you tell Logan all of my secrets.”

He imagined Tess with a string of men following her around. She was pretty. She was tall. She owned her own business. She was everything most men wanted.

Annie put Tess’ empty plate in the dishwasher and rubbed her hands together. “I’ll get started on the paninis and wraps.”

Tess washed her hands and put a cup of butter in the microwave. “I’ll make the shortbread crust for the tarts.”

Annie watched Logan carry the empty glasses to the dishwasher. “Tess hasn’t had a boyfriend since she arrived in Bozeman.”

A metal pan dropped to the floor. Logan turned around and watched Tess pick it up and leave it in the sink.

“I’ll have one less friend before the day’s out, too.”

Annie breezed past the counter and took the cover off a stack of plastic trays. “It’s not for the lack of offers. She’s just incredibly picky.” She lifted the top tray off the stack and left it on the counter. “Mr. Kussack sent us extra pastries this morning.”

Tess didn’t seem concerned. “Thank goodness for that. Work out how many there are and we’ll add them to the invoice.”

“Who’s Mr. Kussack?” Logan asked.

“He owns, *The Heavenly Bake House*. He makes the best croissants and specialty breads in Montana.” Annie put a tray of paninis on the stainless steel counter. “He delivers our order fresh each morning. We don’t have time to bake everything from scratch. Did you want to help with the fillings?”

Logan glanced at his watch. “I can help you for another thirty minutes.”

Annie pointed to the sink. “Wash your hands and we’ll get started. You can do the ham, bacon, cheese, tomato and onion filling.”

It sounded like a mouth-watering combination to Logan. And if Annie decided to share more of Tess’ secrets as they worked, he wasn’t going to complain.

The phone rang and Tess looked up from the buttery dough she was rolling out. “Could you get that, Annie?”

“Sure.” She reached for the phone and smiled into the handset. “Good morning. It’s Annie speaking from Angel Wings Café. How can I help you?”

Logan smiled as he took what he thought he’d need out of the fridge. Annie sounded as though it was ten o’clock in the morning instead of when most people were getting out of bed.

“Oh, Connie. I’m so sorry.”

Logan quickly glanced at Annie. She had tears in her eyes and looked so sad that it could only be one thing. Tess left her rolling pin on the counter and moved closer to Annie.

“Yes, I’ll tell her. Logan’s here, too. Thanks for letting us know. We’ll see you in a couple of days.” Annie put the phone down and took a deep breath. “Connie’s mom passed away at three o’clock this morning.”

## CHAPTER 8



The doorbell jingled as someone walked into Angel Wings Café. Logan looked up and watched a family of six rearrange tables and chairs so everyone could sit together.

“I get why you moved here. But what I don’t understand is why you’ve stayed so long.” Jilly glanced at him with the same wide-eyed look she used when she couldn’t figure him out.

Logan bit into his toasted sandwich. It was easier than having to answer her question right away. He’d dated Jilly for two months when she’d first started working at the Seattle Times. It hadn’t taken them long to realize they were better friends than anything else. So they’d broken up and lived their own lives.

Over the last four years, Jilly had worked her way through different departments at the paper. Last year she’d become the lifestyle reporter. No minor achievement when other reporters were nipping at her heels to get their foot in the door.

“I’ve only been here for a year,” he said.

“More than a year. You weren’t in Seattle for my last birthday either.”

Logan smiled. “I heard all about your thirtieth birthday. From the sound of it, you didn’t miss me.”

Jilly flicked her long brown hair over her shoulder. She didn’t look impressed. “It’s the principle that counts. You said you’d be there.”

Logan knew that no matter how annoyed Jilly might seem on the outside she didn’t stay angry for long. “I wasn’t fit for human company.”

Jilly lost the arrogant tilt to her head. “How are you feeling now?”

“Better. I’m not writing about earth-shattering events, but I like what I’m doing. Doris Stanley brought me one of her award winning pies last week. I’d written an article about the little league team her grandson plays in.”

Jilly’s internal radar pricked to attention. “Award winning?”

“Wildflower Festival blue ribbon award. Three times in a row.”

Jilly groaned. “I thought you were going to tell me the name of some big culinary award.”

Annie walked toward them. She gave him a questioning look as she took the dirty dishes off the table beside theirs. “Jilly, this is Annie. She works at Angel Wings Café in the morning, and for a lawyer’s office in the afternoon.”

Jilly smiled at Annie. “Hi. Lunch was delicious.”

Annie frowned. “I’m glad you liked it.”

“Annie is part of The Bridesmaids Club.”

Jilly’s smile grew wider. “I read Logan’s story about what you did. I think it’s amazing.”

Annie’s frown didn’t leave her face. “We did it to help someone. Can I have a quick word with you, Logan?”

He glanced at Jilly.

“You go. I’ve got to catch up on my emails anyway. It was nice meeting you, Annie.”

Logan pushed his chair out and followed Annie to the other side of the room.

“What are you doing bringing another woman in here? I thought you liked Tess?”

Annie had dropped her voice to a hushed whisper. She looked annoyed. He wouldn’t have minded if he’d done something wrong, but he couldn’t work out what her problem was. “Jilly’s a friend. I wanted to introduce her to everyone.”

“You’re going to get yourself into trouble. You don’t introduce a female friend to another female friend. Especially if the second female friend has feelings for you.”

Logan took a few minutes to work out what Annie had said. “Are you telling me that Tess likes me?”

“Of course she likes you. She makes you muffins and leaves them on the door handle. She never left your side at Mrs. Thompson’s funeral.”

The funeral had been four days ago. Connie and her family had been devastated. During the service he’d thought about his own mom, about how he’d feel if it had been her that had died. He thought about the children and soldiers that had died in Afghanistan.

Just when everything became too much, he felt Tess’ hand slide into his. She’d held his hand for the rest of the service, until the hearse had left the church and everyone had said goodbye. “Tess was being kind.”

Annie rolled her eyes. “She doesn’t date anyone. She’s forgotten how to tell a man she’s interested.”

Logan could sympathize with Tess’ lack of practice. His social life was worse than hers. Which would account for why he kept turning up at the café instead of asking her out on a date.

“Oh, no.” Annie looked across the room. “Tess is at your table. She’s talking to your friend.”

Logan watched Tess’ face as she refilled their coffee mugs. She frowned, then looked across the café at him.

Annie pushed his arm. “You’d better sort out the mess you’ve created.”

He couldn’t work out what mess he’d created, but then he wasn’t much of an expert. Especially when it came to relationship messes. Apart from the frown on Tess’ face, she looked fine. He didn’t know what Annie was worried about.

He walked back to his table and smiled at Tess. “Hi, Tess. This is Jilly. She’s a friend from Seattle.”

Tess looked between him and Jilly. “We’ve met. Nice to meet you, Jilly.”

If Logan hadn’t known Tess for as long as he had, he could have been forgiven for mistaking her greeting as a friendly hello. But he knew better. The smile on Tess’ face was about as genuine as the Van Gogh sunflower painting on the wall.

He held his coffee mug toward Tess so she could refill it. “Jilly was asking me about The Bridesmaids Club. She read the second article I wrote and wanted to come and meet you.”

Hot coffee sloshed over the edge of his mug and onto the floor. Tess looked horrified. "Sorry, Logan. I'll go and get a cloth and wipe up the mess." She disappeared out the back of the café in two seconds flat.

Jilly stared at the kitchen door. "What's Tess' last name?"

"Williams. Why?" Logan left his coffee mug on the table and grabbed a couple of paper napkins to start mopping up the mess.

"I've seen her face before, but I can't place her. Where did she live before she came to Bozeman?"

"I don't know where she lived. Her grandparents owned this building and left it to her after they died."

Tess came back holding a damp cloth and started cleaning the floor. "You don't need to clean up the mess, Logan. I can do it. I'm sure you've got other things you need to do."

Logan frowned at Tess' bent head. It wasn't like her to want to get him out of the café.

"Tess is right," Jilly said. "I promised my editor I'd check in with her before one o'clock. It was nice meeting you, Tess."

Tess stopped wiping the floor. She sat as still as a sniper in the middle of a war zone. Her head slowly lifted and for or a split second Logan saw nothing but panic in her eyes. Then she blinked and the panic disappeared.

"You're a reporter?" Tess' face had gone white.

"For the Seattle Times. How long have you lived in Bozeman?"

Tess looked confused. "I don't understand."

"Your accent," Jilly said. "It's not from around here."

"I've lived in lots of different places." Tess looked at the dishcloth in her hand. "I don't want to keep you from your editor. Have a nice day." And before Logan knew what she was going to do, Tess left.

Jilly picked up her bag and slipped her cell phone into the side pocket. "I'd better get going, too. Are we still meeting for dinner tonight?"

Logan stood up. "Seven o'clock in the restaurant at your hotel." He followed Jilly out of the café. "Try not to work too hard this afternoon."

She smiled and waved her hand at the street in front of them. "I hate to be the

bearer of bad news, but there isn't a lot happening here."

"I guess you'll have to dig below the surface, then. There must be a billionaire's ranch you could write about?"

Jilly tilted her head to the side. "Billionaires are over-rated. I'm looking for something real. I'll see you at seven."

Logan watched her throw her bag on the back seat of her rental and drive down Main Street. He needed to get back to work, but before he met Jilly tonight he needed to see Tess. He wanted to explain, tell her that Jilly was his friend and nothing more.

And if she asked him why he was telling her that, he didn't know what he'd say. Because saying anything would let Tess know that he cared about her. And caring about anyone was a dangerous thing to do.



TESS SAT on a wooden seat in Bogert Park. A group of children were kicking a ball, yelling and rolling around on the grass as if they didn't have a care in the world.

"They look like they're enjoying themselves."

Tess looked up at Molly and smiled. "Thanks for coming."

Molly sat down beside her. "I'm sorry I couldn't make it sooner. I was in the middle of a photo shoot when you called."

"What were you taking photos of?"

"Cowboys."

The wistful note in Molly's voice made Tess stare a little closer at her. "Is everything all right?"

"I used to think it was. My sister told me Montana would be good for me. The big blue sky and wide open spaces would give me a place to heal. But some days I feel so alone that I want to cry."

"Have you told Becky how you feel?"

"Becky has her own life," Molly said. "Being a florist keeps her busy. When she's not buying flowers at auction or putting together bouquets, she's working



on her accounts.”

“What can I do to help?”

“There’s nothing anyone can do,” Molly sighed. “What’s happening is coming from inside me. I need to do something, but I don’t know what.” She looked across the park, then smiled at Tess. “But that’s enough about my worries. What do you want to talk about?”

“Logan brought a friend into the café today.”

“From the look on your face I’d say the friend was female and not male.”

Tess nodded. “She’s a reporter with the Seattle Times.”

“Oh, dear.” Molly squeezed her hand. “Do you think she knows?”

“I don’t think so. But what if she finds out? I don’t want anyone thinking I’m a drug dealer or a murderer.”

“Anyone who knows you won’t think that. It was a long time ago. People forget things.”

Tess stared miserably across the park. “They don’t when the man at the center of the story is a senator and it’s an election year.”

“I don’t know what you can do. Have you spoken to Logan about what happened?”

“He’s a reporter. I told him a little bit, but not who was involved.”

Molly sighed. “Do you trust him?”

Two months ago that would have been an easy question for Tess to answer. Now she felt as though an honest answer would betray everything she’d been so angry about.

“Tess?”

She dropped her head to her chest. “I trust him.”

“Talk to him. Tell him what happened. If his friend finds out about your past, he might be able to stop her from publishing a story.”

“It won’t help. Evie’s death hit the headlines around the world. People who didn’t have an opinion about anything suddenly wanted to know who killed the supermodel.”

Molly passed Tess a tissue. “You don’t have a choice. Logan’s the only person that might be able to help.”

“I don’t think he even realizes I was a supermodel. He sees my baggy T-shirts and worn jeans and doesn’t look any further.”

“That’s a good thing, isn’t it? He likes you, not some photo-shopped woman with silicone breasts and no wrinkles.”

Tess smiled. “I’m glad you didn’t say boobs.”

Molly laughed. “I’m making an effort to be more articulate. I’ve been hanging around cowboys for too long.”

“How’s the book going?” Molly was putting together an illustrated book about cowboys. Tess had been with her on a few of the photo shoots, except they weren’t your normal studio portraits. They were real shots of real men and women who lived their life on the land.

“I finished taking the last images today. I’ve formatted some of the photos and they look grand. I just hope I find a publisher who’s interested in buying the book.”

Molly’s last book had been a huge success. It had raised thousands of dollars for an eight-year-old girl’s bone marrow transplant.

Tess was worried about the frown on her friend’s face. “You could always try self-publishing.”

“That’s true. There’s always another way to reach your end goal. Now, what are we going to do about you? What would your end goal be?”

Tess looked up at the sky and remembered a time, not so long ago, when she’d asked herself the same question. Her end goal then had been to turn a run-down ice cream parlor into an amazing café. But beneath her noble end goal there’d been something far bigger than anyone had known.

She’d bought herself time, hidden herself away where she didn’t think anyone would find her. From the moment they started The Bridesmaids Club, Tess’ time had been running out. And she didn’t have anywhere else to hide.

“My end goal is to stay in Bozeman.” Tess sat taller in her seat as she watched more children running around. “I did nothing wrong. Evie’s life ended because she made bad choices and I won’t do the same thing. I’ll do everything I can to keep the story out of the papers. If Mr. Big Shot Senator wants to pick a fight, he’d better be prepared to lose.”

“Good for you,” Molly said. “Let’s go back to the café and work out how we’re going to win your battle.”

Tess held Molly’s arm as they marched across the park. If there was one thing she was good at, it was making plans and sticking to them. And this time, she’d make sure she had an alternative plan for everything that could go wrong.



TESS KNOCKED on Logan’s front door. She was about to put into action steps one and two of her plan with Molly. Step one was to tell Logan about her past. Everything.

Step two was slightly more complicated. Molly said that knowing your enemy was more important than knowing your friends. They didn’t talk about how she knew this, but Tess was happy to go along with Molly’s superior knowledge.

So as well as telling Logan who she used to be, she was supposed to be finding out about his friend, the reporter from Seattle.

Logan opened the door. Tess stared at the casual trousers and cotton shirt he had on. He’d had a shave, maybe a shower. He didn’t look like a man settling in for a relaxing evening at home. He looked like a man about to go on a date.

“I didn’t mean...” Tess closed her mouth and tried again. “I hope you didn’t change your plans for me.”

Logan frowned, then looked down at his clothes. “I’m going out later. I’m glad you called. I wanted to see you.”

“You did?”

Logan held the door wider. “Yeah. Come in. Make yourself at home.”

Tess looked around the living room. Nothing had changed since she’d last been here and met his sister. It was only a few weeks ago, but it felt like a lifetime.

“Have a seat on the sofa.” He glanced at her laptop and her backpack. “It looks like you’ve come here to study.”

Tess left the laptop on his coffee table and her backpack on the floor. “It’s

not studying, exactly. More like background research.” She wiped her hands down her jeans; then started to undo the zipper on her pack.

“Do you want a drink? I’ve got coffee and hot chocolate. Or tea. Mom’s arriving tomorrow and she likes a cup of tea.”

Tess shook her head. “I’m okay.”

Logan sat on the edge of one of the chairs. “What did you want to see me about?”

Tess took a deep breath and pulled the magazines out. She left them face down on the table. She’d thought about what she was going to tell him for most of the afternoon. She should have written it down, made notes or something.

“I wanted to tell you about me. About what I was doing before I came to Bozeman.”

Logan looked confused. “You weren’t a model?”

Tess turned her laptop on. Her hands were shaking so much that she had to type her password in twice before she could log in. “I was a model. Do you know what type of model I was?”

Logan’s eyes widened.

“No,” Tess squeaked. “I wasn’t that type of model.”

“What types of models are there?”

This was going to be harder than Tess thought. “I earned a lot of money. I worked in Milan, Tokyo, New York, and Paris. I met Molly when I was on assignment in Greece and again in Ireland.”

He still didn’t look as though he appreciated just how much money she’d earned. “I brought you some pictures.”

Logan’s eyebrows shot up. “I get that you were a model. You don’t need to prove...” He looked at the cover of the magazine that Tess had left on his knees. “That’s you?”

Tess nodded. Logan was holding the most successful Vogue cover shot she’d ever done. Combined with the images inside, it had propelled the designer of the clothes she’d been wearing into super stardom.

She opened the magazine to the other shots and watched Logan’s face as he slowly turned the pages. He looked up at her, then back down at the photos.

She wasn't going to make excuses for the woman in the magazine or the real woman in front of him. She'd gained a little weight. Okay, maybe a lot, but the photo had been taken nearly six years ago and all she'd eaten was salad. And she might have a few more wrinkles, but she used cleanser, toner, and moisturizer morning and night, and she wouldn't do plastic surgery.

He smiled at her. "You look better now."

Tess' mouth dropped open.

"What else have you got?"

Logan looked as though he was enjoying her show and tell, as if it didn't come as a surprise to him at all. She pulled out the rest of the magazines. He flicked through the pages of Marie Claire, Elle, and Harper's Bazaar as if they were children's picture books. She was almost looking forward to seeing his face when he saw her Victoria's Secret runway clip.

"I spent ten years modeling."

"Looks like it."

Tess felt like jabbing him in the ribs. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"No need to get all defensive. I'm just saying."

"Well, you can quit talking and look at this." Tess opened a file and set the laptop on the table.

The Victoria's Secret show started and Logan coughed. "Are you doing this to torture me or prove a point?" His eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw the designer collection she was modeling. There was more material in the angel wings attached to her back than the lace demi bra and v-string panty she was wearing.

Logan closed the lid on her laptop. He looked hot and bothered and so cute that Tess nearly smiled. Until she remembered what else she had to tell him.

"What do you think about what I've shown you so far?" she asked.

"Do you still have any of that lingerie?"

Tess threw a cushion at his head. "I'm trying to make a point."

"I wish you'd hurry up. You're torturing me."

"I was a model. People recognized me." She opened the laptop again and Logan closed his eyes.

“I’m not watching the Victoria’s Secret show unless you tell me why you’re here.”

“You can be so weird, sometimes. This has got nothing to do with lingerie. I want to show you a picture of my friend, Evie.”

Logan opened his eyes. “Has she got clothes on?”

Tess opened another folder and double clicked on a photo she’d taken of Evie. “This is my friend. We were in Italy.”

Evie was standing on the beach, laughing at the camera. She had a pair of sandals in one hand and a huge sun hat in the other. She looked carefree and happy, so different to the person she was to become.

“We’d been modeling for about three years when I took this photo. She met Andrew Gibson about two years later. He’d been newly elected as a senator. She thought it was amazing. The girl who’d grown up in Michigan moving in the same circle as the President of the United States. Except he was married, and when she saw him in public he pretended he didn’t know her.”

“Not good.”

“It got worse.” Tess opened another photo. It was still hard to look at it without reliving the last time she’d seen her friend. “This was Evie a month before she died.”

Logan didn’t say anything. He didn’t need to. The incredibly thin woman staring at the camera hardly looked like the same young girl in the previous photo.

“She died of a drug overdose?”

Tess nodded. She opened another photo. “Meet Senator Gibson. I can’t prove anything, but he supplied Evie with cocaine. He killed her and there wasn’t a thing I could do about it.”

“How did you know it was him?”

“Evie told me. She didn’t want to get him into trouble. She thought he loved her, but he loved his wife and children more.”

“Did you tell the police?”

Tess nodded. She’d told them more than once, pleaded with them to at least investigate what she was saying. But they wanted more evidence. As soon as

Senator Gibson's New York lawyers found out about her, they'd shut her story down. His public relations firm had done the rest.

She opened her backpack and pulled out a folder. "These are the newspaper clippings after Evie died. I don't look at them anymore."

Logan opened the folder and read some of the stories. "You made the New York Times."

He sounded impressed. "It wasn't all it was cracked up to be." That particular article had lost her a lucrative cosmetic contract. "I stopped modeling not long after that article came out."

"Why are you showing me this now?"

"You don't you look surprised."

Logan sat back in his chair.

"You knew, didn't you?"

"Not all of it. After I saw you wearing the bridesmaids' dresses in your apartment, I went online and did some research of my own. I couldn't find a model called Tess Williams, but I did find Evie. After more checking, I found a photo of Evie standing beside another model called Theresa Daniels. She looked remarkably like you."

"Daniels was my mom's maiden name."

"You had a high-profile career and an even higher fall from grace. I'm sorry."

"What for?" Tess took the folder out of his hands and slid it into her backpack.

"For Evie. It must have been hard losing her. And for you. It can't have been easy going through what happened after she died."

"I didn't know she'd died until I got back from Milan. I missed her funeral." She zipped her backpack together and put her laptop in its case. An unopened envelope fell off the table and landed on the floor. She picked it up and handed it to Logan. "I was angry with her for taking drugs. She'd put so much faith in her slimeball boyfriend that she couldn't see what was happening. It didn't matter what I said. He always twisted everything so he looked squeaky-clean."

Logan stared at the envelope before putting it back on the table. "So that's

why you don't want your face in any of the photos Molly took. You're worried the senator will start another smear campaign."

"I know he will. He told me if I ever mentioned Evie's name again he'd destroy me. Which kind of leads me to the other reason I'm here tonight."

"Jilly?"

"Is there anything you don't know?"

Logan's gaze sharpened. "It was a guess. I wanted to talk to you about her."

Tess didn't know if she wanted to hear about Logan's relationship with the journalist. But she'd promised Molly she'd find out as much information as she could. It wouldn't have been so bad if Logan and his friend had looked as though they were having a meeting. But they hadn't. They'd looked as though they were catching up on old times.

Logan watched her carefully. "I dated Jilly for a couple of months a few years ago. It didn't work out."

Tess let his words sink in. They weren't dating. They were friends. Friendship was good. "What type of reporter is she?"

"Lifestyle. Home decor, celebrities, fashion."

Tess bit her bottom lip.

"Exactly."

"Did she recognize me?"

Logan sighed. "Not right away, but I'm pretty sure she would have uncovered some information by the time we have dinner tonight."

"What are you going to tell her when she asks about me?"

"What do you want me to tell her?"

Tess didn't want them discussing her at all. After Evie died, nothing had been the same. She'd missed her friend, her career had ended and she'd had to reinvent herself. If it hadn't been for some careful investments she'd made, she could have easily walked away with nothing.

Logan tapped his fingers on the arm of his chair. "Would it help if I told you what else I found out?"

"What do you mean?"

"Senator Gibson's wife left him six months ago. It was a messy divorce. She



claimed he'd been having affairs for years, he claimed she was psycho. I gave his ex-wife a call a couple of days ago."

"You did what?" Tess couldn't believe what she was hearing. Not only did Logan know about her past, but he'd been digging into the dirt surrounding everyone else's.

"His ex-wife was very forthcoming. Senator Gibson's lawyers have bailed him out of other drug-related issues with his girlfriends. Most of the women he dated were models, and most of them were no older than twenty."

"Where are they now?" Tess was horrified to think other people had gone through the same thing Evie had. The sooner Senator Gibson was arrested, the better off everyone would be.

"I don't know. I didn't look that far."

Tess sent him a disbelieving stare.

"Okay, so I tried, but I hit a brick wall." Logan looked uncomfortable under her scrutiny. "The women aren't easy to find. It looks as though they've all done the same thing you did."

Tess couldn't blame them. It had been intimidating enough for her and she wasn't directly involved. "Did his ex-wife have proof that he'd been supplying his girlfriends with drugs?"

Logan smiled. Except it wasn't a friendly smile. His smile belonged on a rattlesnake just before it struck its next victim. "She did an external backup of his computer files. He doesn't know she's got the information."

"Did she go to the police?"

Logan shook his head. "Not yet. She wants some of the women to come forward and tell their stories. It would add impact to the information she's got and create a political nightmare."

"She doesn't want him in prison?"

"She wants to destroy his career. The way she can do that is to discredit him. If it lands him in prison, it's a bonus. She knows who a couple of the women are, but no one wants to talk."

Tess sighed. "Sounds familiar."

"Too familiar. And that's where he made his first mistake."

She didn't like where Logan was going with his reasoning. "First mistake?"

"He kept following the same pattern. We need to stop him from destroying someone else's life."

"No we don't. If his ex-wife has got information about him, she needs to go to the police. I'm not going to have anything to do with him again."

"No one's asking you to get involved. All we need to do is use Evie's story."

Tess shook her head. "Evie's dead. There's no way her family will say anything. It will bring back too many memories."

"Memories or not, it's the only way we can stop him."

A few years ago, Tess would have jumped at the chance of making Senator Gibson accountable for Evie's death. But not now. She didn't have fame and fortune to lose, she had a new life. No one in Bozeman cared what she looked like or what she earned. They cared about who she was.

She didn't want to give that up. What Logan was suggesting could end everything she'd worked hard for. "Evie died three years ago. I'm not getting involved again. I don't want you saying anything to your reporter friend."

Logan looked at her without any expression on his face.

"Logan?"

"Fine. I won't tell her anything. But how do you think the senator's ever going to be punished if everyone refuses to talk?"

Tess picked up her backpack. "Sometimes what you have is more important than where you've been. Nothing will bring Evie back. I lost everything I thought was important when I told the truth. I'm not going there again. I've got to go."

"Are you sure you won't change your mind?"

"Positive."

Logan followed her to the front door. "You know this could be a big story, don't you?"

Tess felt a heavy weight press down on her shoulders. "I know. Enjoy your dinner date."

Logan opened the door and Tess stepped out into the cool night air. Whatever happened from this point forward was in his hands.

Tess trusted him to do what was right. Whether he lived up to her trust was another story entirely.



JILLY FOLDED her napkin on her lap. “I’ve been doing some background research on Tess, the woman I met in the café.”

Logan had been waiting for Jilly to say something all night. “From The Bridesmaids Club?”

She nodded. “When she was modeling her name was Theresa Daniels. I knew I’d seen her face before. She’s been on every major fashion magazine cover in the world.”

Logan kept eating his apple crumble. He wondered what else Jilly had found out.

“Has she ever said anything about her career?”

“Not that I can remember.”

Jilly watched him dip his spoon into the ball of half-melted vanilla ice cream on the side of his plate. “If I tell you something, you’ve got to promise you’ll keep it to yourself.”

Logan had already promised Tess the same thing, so he didn’t have a problem with Jilly’s request. “I won’t say a word.”

Jilly looked over her shoulder. She moved closer when the conversation at the table behind them petered out. “A friend of Theresa’s died of a drug overdose. There were no formal charges laid, but it sounds as though Theresa was involved in what happened.”

He couldn’t blame Jilly for jumping to conclusions. She hadn’t had much time to look at what else had been happening when Tess’ friend had died. But a part of him was disappointed that she’d been so quick to accept what someone else said. He’d expected more from her.

“Have you spoken to anyone? Verified what you’ve heard?”

Jilly reached for her bag and pulled out a notebook. Not the electronic variety, but the old-fashioned paper and pen variety. She flicked through the

pages and settled on a particular section. “I called the modeling agency Theresa worked with. They haven’t spoken to her since she left three years ago. They gave me her old address in New York.”

“Are you going to fly out there?”

“Not on this vacation. Besides, there’s no point. The building she lived in has been converted into high-end apartments. Nothing like the shoe boxes someone at the agency told me she lived in. But that’s small beans compared to the other person I’ve been speaking to.”

Logan dreaded to think about what Jilly had been up to. He just hoped she hadn’t contacted the senator’s ex-wife. Marcie Gibson was looking for anything that would prove, beyond a doubt, that her ex-husband was a drug dealer and cheat. Three years ago, Tess didn’t have any evidence to back up her complaint to the police. Marcie had the evidence, but Tess didn’t want her name connected with the senator.

If Jilly talked to Marcie Gibson, Tess’ cover would be blown and everyone would know what had happened. As soon as the story hit the headlines it would be picked up by every newspaper in the country. Tess’ life wouldn’t be the same again.

Jilly leaned forward. “Have you heard of Senator Andrew Gibson?”

Logan was glad a waitress came across and asked if they’d like coffee. It distracted Jilly, gave him time to think. If the senator knew a reporter was digging into his past, he’d use every trick he knew to shut her down.

He hoped like crazy Jilly hadn’t spoken to the man himself. “Doesn’t he represent California?”

“You know your politicians.” Jilly sounded impressed.

“His name’s been in the paper once or twice.”

Jilly leaned forward. “I spoke with his previous press secretary. She resigned suddenly three years ago. The word going around town was that she didn’t like how the senator responded to allegations of drug use and improper behavior. The person I spoke to said she got a massive confidential payout.”

“Did she sign a non-disclosure form?”

Jilly shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t need her to back up my story or give

me names.” She looked over her shoulder again. The other couple had left. “The senator has been having affairs for years. Some people think his wife knew about them, but I’m not so sure. Anyway, about three years ago he hit the headlines with a story about his involvement in the death of a model. She died from a drug overdose. A friend of the dead woman said Senator Gibson was giving the model cocaine. Guess who the friend was?”

The waitress reappeared with their coffee. Logan waited until she’d left. “I’ve got no idea.”

Jilly sent him a sharp look. “You think I’m making this up?”

“No. But I think you could be in over your head if you write the story.”

“Theresa Daniels, also known as Tess Williams, is the person who went to the police.”

Logan picked up his coffee cup. “What happened to Tess after the story broke?”

“She lost major contracts and disappeared from the modeling scene. Until now, no one knew where she’d gone.”

“Does that set warning bells off in your head?”

Jilly frowned. “I’m a reporter. I hear a bell and I know I’m heading in the right direction.”

“I want you to listen carefully to me, Jilly. You’ve been writing for the lifestyle section of the paper. I can’t imagine there are many stories that have the potential to destroy someone’s life. Tess and the senator’s press secretary left their careers after the drug story broke. Do you honestly think Senator Gibson will let you bury him in mud in an election year?”

“I’m not interested in what Senator Gibson will do. If he had anything to do with the model’s death, he needs to be held accountable.”

“Before you do anything, you need to have a really hard think about the consequences of going any further.”

Jilly’s lips clamped together. She wasn’t impressed with his advice. Five years ago, he probably would have been the same. But time and a whole lot more experience had taught him a valuable lesson. The truth wasn’t always what it seemed. And sometimes, telling the truth had more lethal consequences than

keeping quiet.

“Something tells me, Logan Allen, that you know more than you’re saying.”

“What I know or don’t know isn’t important. Forget about Tess for a minute. What do you think this story will mean for your career?”

“Professional recognition. A promotion, maybe a new job in a bigger city.”

“It could also get you fired, or at the very least, demoted. The police couldn’t prove anything last time. You need to have water-tight evidence before you even consider taking a story to your editor and the paper’s legal team.”

Jilly tilted her chin. “I’m not scared of a story.”

“Maybe you should be.”

“I can’t believe you just said that. You’ve won three awards. A Pulitzer Prize. Your columns are syndicated to newspapers across the country. You don’t get that type of recognition by writing about the ten most popular paint colors of the year. You’re lying to yourself if you think you wouldn’t follow this story.”

“I’m not following the story because it could hurt far more people than the senator. Leave the people that are involved to come up with the evidence and go to the police.”

“What have you found out?”

Logan sat back in his chair. He felt far too old and jaded to be having this conversation with Jilly. She still had high ideals and an ambitious streak that could take her to the top of her career or sink her like a stone.

He’d promised Tess he wouldn’t say anything, and he’d keep his promise. But if Jilly wrote a story, Tess would have to do something fast.

“Leave the story alone, Jilly.”

“Are you giving me that advice as a friend or a colleague?”

In the past, Logan had treated the line between friendship and work with a blurry grayness when it suited him. But he wasn’t that person anymore. “My worry about your safety comes as a friend. As a colleague, I’m telling you to be very careful. Senator Gibson won’t take your accusations lightly. He’ll come after you and won’t leave you alone until you’re either gone from the paper or charged with defamation.”

Jilly picked up her bag. “I’m willing to take that risk. I’ll pay for dinner on

my way out.”

Logan watched her walk toward the reception desk. He didn't like what Senator Gibson had done any more than Jilly did. The only person with enough evidence to put him away was his ex-wife. Until she was ready to go to the police, Jilly didn't have enough information to force a conviction. And with no conviction, her career and the life Tess had built were in danger of being destroyed.

He turned his cell phone on. He needed advice from someone who knew how to keep people safe. And Dylan was the only person he knew that could help.

## CHAPTER 9



“*Y*ou do know what the time is, don’t you?” Dylan stood in his living room, scratching his head.

“I know, but I couldn’t leave it until the morning.” Logan walked across to the kitchen and turned the coffee machine on. “You don’t mind, do you?”

“I could have had a woman in here,” Dylan grumbled. “We could have been having wild monkey sex. What would you have done then?”

“Made myself at home while you died from exhaustion.”

Dylan grunted, then flopped down on the sofa. “You can make coffee for me, too. What’s so important that it couldn’t wait until the morning?”

Logan pulled a couple of coffee mugs out of the pantry and told Dylan about Tess, Jilly, and the senator.

“You’ve got yourself more than a handful of problems.”

“You could say that. What do you think I should do?”

Dylan stretched his legs out in front of him and looked at the pink curtains hanging from the window. The house he was living in was a rental. Logan knew he’d taken it sight unseen from a realtor when he’d first moved to Bozeman. It was supposed to have been an in-between step until he decided whether he wanted to rent or buy. But apart from the pink curtains, it had suited Dylan, so he’d stayed.

Until recently, Dylan had appreciated the solitude that living out of town gave him. But solitude didn’t work too well when you were looking for a



girlfriend. So he'd started looking for a house closer to town, somewhere he could bring his dream date back to. Logan had no idea what would happen once she got there, but that was up to Dylan.

Dylan took the mug Logan held out to him. "Sit down and tell me more about the senator's ex-wife. She's the one with the power to blow this story right through to the White House."

Logan sat down and told Dylan what he knew about Marcie Gibson. "She's ambitious. Senator Gibson's lawyers tied her into a prenup she wasn't happy about. She wants revenge, but she wants his money as well. She's fighting their divorce settlement with everything she's got."

"Where's the copy of the senator's hard drive?"

Logan frowned. "I don't know. She said it's somewhere safe."

"She'd better hope it is. If her ex-husband finds out she's got it, he's not going to be happy. What does she look like?"

"Tall, brunette, big green eyes. She won the Miss Virginia contest six years ago."

"Photogenic?"

Logan nodded. "She's stunning, if you like that sort of woman."

Dylan drank his coffee. "I've got an idea, but you might not like it."

"Try me."

"Talk to Marcie before Jilly finds her. Convince her to let you write a story. Get professional photos taken of her looking sad and unhappy, real tear-jerker stuff. Publish the story, then make sure she goes to the police. Once the story hits the headlines, the police won't be able to ignore her allegations, especially with the evidence she's got."

"What about, Tess?"

"If Tess gets caught up in the fiasco, Mrs. Ex-Senator will be lucky to get a mention. From what you've said, that will be the last thing Marcie wants."

"It's the last thing Tess wants, too."

"Keep Tess out of it. Don't mention her name. It might be good if she goes on vacation when the story's about to break."

"Jilly and Tess are going to hate me."

Dylan stared at him. “Who are you most worried about?”

“Tess.”

“Look out for her, then. Jilly will eventually forgive you.”

“Yeah. In about fifty years’ time.”

Dylan didn’t look remotely concerned. “It’s better than Tess hating you.”

“She’ll do that, anyway.” Logan knew that whatever happened, Tess wouldn’t be talking to him. If he didn’t get to Marcie Gibson tomorrow, Jilly would be publishing a story that would land Tess in the spotlight.

He had to decide what to do, and it had to be tonight.

Dylan walked out of the room and came back a few minutes later. He had a pillow and a duvet in his arms. “Here...” He threw the whole lot on the sofa beside Logan. “If you’re not going to get much sleep you might as well stay here. At least I’ll know you haven’t crashed on the way home.”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t worry about it. You might need to repay the favor one day. If you wake up with a pillow over your head, it’s because you’re snoring like a train.”

“Nice to be appreciated.”

Dylan snorted and left him on the sofa. “I’m going to bed. Don’t wake me up when you leave.”

They both knew that wouldn’t happen. Dylan slept for about as many hours a night as Logan did. Between them, they were almost normal. He could guarantee that four-thirty would roll around and they’d both be up, drowning their sorrows in the biggest mug of coffee they could find.

And right at the moment, that thought was more comforting than what he had to tell Tess in the morning.



TESS KEPT an eye on the clock as she made another vegetarian quiche. Logan hadn’t been in all morning and she wanted to know what his reporter friend had said.

She added garlic and mixed herbs to the egg and milk she’d already mixed

together. She'd half expected him to call last night, but he hadn't.

The kitchen door opened and she jumped. She had to blink to make sure she wasn't imagining Logan standing in front of her.

"Sorry I didn't call. I stayed the night at Dylan's, then went into work early."

"How did you end up at Dylan's house?"

"I went there after Jilly left the restaurant."

"Does that mean it was a good or not so good dinner?"

He took a glass out of the pantry and filled it with water. "Dinner was good, but she wants to write an article about Senator Gibson."

Tess sat on a kitchen stool and stared at him. "She can't."

"She can and she's going to."

"Does she have any evidence that he was supplying drugs to Evie?"

"She's spoken to a few people, but she hasn't got anything concrete."

Tess felt like her whole world was collapsing. "Does she know about me?"

He nodded. "She knows about your modeling career, about Evie, and about the senator. She wants him to face criminal charges for what he did."

"I want that too. But doesn't she realize he's dangerous? He has friends who know how to bury a story. He'll destroy her career, then come after me."

"I have a plan."

Tess dropped her head into her arms. She'd had a plan, too. A plan that involved running a café in Bozeman, having a happy life. "Jilly can't write her article without solid evidence that will stand up in court. I need to call her and tell her what happened last time."

"She knows what happened last time. She's going to write her story regardless of what you say."

The timer on the oven beeped and Tess took out a tray of chicken pot pies. "What's your plan?"

"Do you want to put the other pie in the oven?" Logan looked at the vegetarian quiche she'd been making.

As soon as he'd mentioned Jilly's article she'd forgotten all about the quiche. She looked down at the half made mixture and poured the filling into the pastry shell. She added sliced tomatoes and Parmesan cheese to the top. There were

five different vegetables in the quiche, but right at the moment she didn't care how healthy or good it would taste. All she cared about was the article Jilly wanted to write.

While she'd been daydreaming, Logan had finished his glass of water and washed his hands.

He lifted the quiche off the counter and slid it in the oven "How long?"

"Forty minutes." Tess watched him move around the kitchen with the ease of someone who'd been working here a long time. Except he hadn't been working, not officially anyway. Sometimes he made breakfast for her and Annie. He'd helped make salads and put together more panini and toasted sandwich combinations than most people knew how to make.

She enjoyed his company. Most of the time. Today, she wasn't so sure. Especially when he had a determined frown on his face. "Tell me about your plan."

"I need to write a story about Senator Gibson before Jilly does." Logan held his hand up when she started to interrupt. "Hear me out first. Senator Gibson's ex-wife has all of the evidence a court needs to make a conviction."

After everything that had happened, Tess wasn't trusting anyone's word on what they might or might not have. "How do you know she's telling the truth?"

"I called her this morning and she sent me the files she copied. The senator was meticulous when it came to his finances and business transactions. The documents show the dates he bought drugs, supplier details, the works. I had the information checked by a lawyer and there's enough evidence to send him and his suppliers away for years."

"Does Jilly know you've talked to the senator's ex-wife?"

"No, and she won't get the chance. The story will be with my editor by one o'clock today and published tomorrow morning."

Tess felt sick. "You can't do it."

"I'm focusing on Marcie Gibson's story about her husband. He supplied other models with drugs. I won't mention your name or Evie's."

"But other reporters could look into what happened and do exactly what Jilly did. They might connect the stories from three years ago and find me. What if

Senator Gibson does the same thing? He doesn't know I'm here, but if he found out I could be in trouble."

"I've thought about that, too. Mom's arriving this afternoon from Seattle. You can go to Yellowstone National Park tomorrow with her and Dylan."

Tess didn't move. She wouldn't run away and do what she'd done last time. "Annie doesn't start work until seven o'clock. I've got to get everything ready. After the café is sorted, I need to make the meals for Pastor Steven. I can't take tomorrow off."

"Dylan isn't leaving until eight o'clock, so you could still bake in the morning. Annie will be here to help you and Kate arrives in the afternoon. They'll be fine. I'm sure Molly or Emily would give them a hand for a few hours."

Tess knew it would take more time than any of her friends had to help in the café. She did have two other people she could ask to work, but that was beside the point. She wasn't running away.

"I'm not going anywhere and you can't write a story about Senator Gibson. I can't hide for one day and expect everything will be back to normal after that. I've got the rest of my life to think about."

Logan walked across to the plastic trays Mr. Kussack had left in the café that morning. He separated the trays until the last custard and raspberry bread knots were in front of him.

Tess watched him inhale the sweet smell of the glazing. "Are you even listening to me?"

"I am, but I'm also admiring these buns."

Tess glared at him. "You don't normally have a sweet tooth."

"It was a long night. Can I have one? I'll leave the money beside the cash register."

"You don't need to worry about leaving any money. You do enough around here."

Logan chose one of the buns and bit into it.

Tess waited until it was half eaten before trying to talk some sense into him. "Why aren't you going with your mom to the park?"

Logan swallowed the mouthful of bun he was chewing. “I’ll be deflecting the calls I get from other reporters. If I encourage their interest in Marcie, it will keep them away from you. I asked Dylan if he wanted to go. He can look after you and Mom better than I could. He hasn’t been to Yellowstone—you could be their tour guide.”

“I’m not going.”

Logan finished his bun and licked his fingers clean. “I’ve got a story to write. I’ll see you after work.”

“I’m not going, so don’t think you can talk me into doing what you want me to do.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” he said dryly. “Talk to Annie. See what she thinks.”

“I don’t need to talk to Annie and you’re not going to write a story. Your plan won’t work.” Tess glared at his back as he walked out of her kitchen. Not only wasn’t he listening to her, he wanted her to take his mom on a sightseeing tour. And then there was Dylan. The man positively screamed danger. How anyone could go anywhere with him and not attract attention was beyond her. He probably carried a gun and knew how to use it.

She definitely wasn’t going anywhere tomorrow.



THE NEXT MORNING, Tess looked up when the kitchen door opened.

“Are you ready to be our tour guide?” Dylan stood in the doorway looking all outdoorsy in his khaki pants, white T-shirt, and cotton shirt.

“Logan must have forgotten to tell you that I’m not going.” Tess flicked her gaze to the clock on the wall. “I thought you would have left by now.”

“I’ve been waiting in the truck with Logan’s mom. He must have forgotten to tell you we’d be waiting out front.”

The gleam in Dylan’s eyes told her he found her stubbornness amusing. The rest of his face hadn’t moved from commando cool. It was scary to think she was getting used to his non-existent body language.

Tess frowned. “Logan didn’t forget to tell me you’d be out front. I chose to

ignore it. Annie went outside ten minutes ago and told you to go without me.”

“So she did.” Dylan didn’t move. “Seems like we’re at one of those impasses.”

Tess threw a handful of mixed herbs in the pie filling she was making. “No, we’re not. I know exactly what I’m going to do. I’m staying here.”

“Logan asked me to look after you, so that’s what I’m going to do.”

“I’d suggest you get Logan’s mom out of the truck then. I can make you a cup of coffee and you can enjoy the ambiance of the café for the rest of the day.”

Dylan shook his head. At least she thought he had, but that could have been her imagination. “Not happening. You’re coming with us.”

Tess lifted her brow. She could be equally as expressive as Dylan.

He didn’t look impressed. “I want to see Yellowstone National Park. If I have to look after you, I can at least get a free tour out of the deal.”

Annie pushed past Dylan. “Sorry, but I need to get the mop. Oliver Tanner just spilled his chocolate milkshake all over his little sister.”

As soon as Annie’s body connected with Dylan, he did the unthinkable. He actually moved. Fast. He looked so befuddled that Tess wouldn’t have believed it unless she’d seen it with her own eyes.

Annie hadn’t noticed that something out of the ordinary had just happened. She zoomed into their storage room and came out wheeling their cleaning cart.

Dylan made sure he was out of harm’s way when she ran back into the café.

A woman with short black hair and worried blue eyes joined Dylan in the kitchen. “Do you have another cloth you could give me? The chocolate milkshake has gone everywhere.” She glanced at Tess and smiled. “You must be my son’s almost girlfriend.”

Tess forced herself to smile. It wasn’t Logan’s mom’s fault that her son was an idiot.

“Almost?” Dylan had suddenly decided to become interested in the conversation going on around him. “I thought Logan told you it was all a misunderstanding.”

Mrs. Allen sent a dazzling smile toward Dylan. “I live in hope.” She glanced around the kitchen and saw the paper towels on the wall. “These will do.” She

dribbled water on them, then headed into the café.

Tess washed the scone dough off her hands and followed Mrs. Allen. It was bad enough that her son helped out in the kitchen. Mrs. Allen didn't need to clean up spilled milkshake as well. When she saw the mess Oliver had made she understood Annie and Mrs. Allen's need to get things clean.

Oliver Tanner's little sister was sitting in a highchair licking chocolate milkshake off her arm. Oliver's dad was using every napkin he could find to wipe the milkshake off the rest of her. The floor and checkered tablecloth were coated in the same sticky mess.

Tess found another highchair and placed it beside Mr. Tanner. "Do you want to move Maddy into here?"

He looked at the highchair, then at Maddy's dress. "I didn't bring a spare change of clothes with me." He looked so upset that Tess knew something else was going on.

Brian Tanner's wife had left him six months ago. From what Tess had seen and heard, he was doing a great job of raising his children on his own.

Tess looked more closely at Maddy. "Wait here." She walked into the kitchen and took a couple of clean tablecloths off a shelf. By the time she made it back into the cafe, Annie and Mrs. Allen had the table and floor clean. Dylan was holding a giggling Maddy in the air while her dad wiped her dress down.

Tess flicked one of the tablecloths open and folded it in half. "I helped Sally at their last school Christmas play. We made shepherd costumes out of sheets. If you're happy for Maddy to wear a tablecloth toga style, we can get her cleaned up in no time.

Brian looked so grateful that Tess felt embarrassed. "Thank you. It hasn't been a good morning."

"It's no problem. Do you want to change her in the kitchen?"

Brian nodded and Dylan put Maddy on the floor beside her father.

Maddy wobbled across to Dylan and held out her hand. She wasn't the least bit intimidated by the big man with the frowning face.

To Tess' surprise, Dylan let Maddy clutch one of his fingers and they slowly made their way into the kitchen.



Annie had a soft smile on her face. “How cute is that.”

Dylan looked over his shoulder at Annie and blushed. *Blushed*. The man of steel had a heart made of gooey marshmallow.

Annie and Mrs. Allen stayed in the café while everyone else traipsed through to the kitchen. It was just as well there weren’t too many people in the café.

Oliver stood quietly beside his dad while Maddy got changed.

“I’m really sorry about all of this,” Brian Tanner said. “I don’t know how it happened. One minute we were having a nice family breakfast and the next minute, Oliver’s milkshake was everywhere.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Tess said. She tied the last knot on Maddy’s shoulder. “That should stay there until you get home. Would Oliver like another milkshake?”

Oliver’s little face lit up like a lightbulb. Brian looked down at his son. “That’s very kind of you. We’ll have a small vanilla milkshake this time.”

Oliver nodded so hard that Tess smiled. He loved milkshakes. Each time Oliver’s family came into the café for their Saturday morning treat, Annie or Tess made him a special milkshake. They whizzed a tiny scoop of ice cream with a glass of milk in her grandpa’s milkshake machine. Every now and then, Oliver was allowed chocolate flavoring. After this morning, Tess hoped the chocolate option hadn’t been banished.

The kitchen door opened and Mrs. Allen poked her head around the doorframe. “The café’s nice and clean. I’ll stay out here and help Annie.”

Tess looked at the door, then at Dylan. Her life had been taken over by the Allen family and their friends.

Dylan stuck his hands on his hips. “I’ve already filled a cooler with enough lunch for three people.”

Tess wasn’t going to let him boss her around. She was six-foot tall and cranky, a lethal combination for anyone wanting her to do something that didn’t make sense. “I hope you’re hungry.” She smiled sweetly.

She washed her hands and went back to her scones. Dylan stood on the other side of the counter, watching her every move. She set the timer on the oven, slid the scones in, then walked into the café. Annie would have a smile on her face

and something nice to say. Unlike the silent sentinel in the kitchen.

Annie was serving a customer. Oliver Tanner and his dad and sister looked as though they were nearly finished. Maddy looked cute in her tablecloth dress. The milkshake spill was long forgotten and everyone looked happy. It would have been a perfect morning, except for Mrs. Allen clearing the tables.

Tess walked across to her. "I can do that."

"Nonsense. I can lend a hand." She bustled past Tess with an armful of dirty dishes.

"I tried to tell her I was okay," Annie said. "But she wouldn't listen."

Tess sighed. "It runs in their family."

Annie pointed to three big boxes she'd stacked at the side of the room. "More bridesmaids' dresses have arrived."

Tess walked across to the boxes. "They're from San Francisco." After Logan's follow-up story about Connie's wedding, people from all over the country were sending them their dresses. So far they had forty-six gowns and nowhere to put them. "We're going to have to do something. Otherwise, we'll end up with hundreds of bridesmaids' dresses and no bridesmaids to wear them."

"I don't think that's going to be a problem. Someone recognized Molly from the photo in Logan's post-wedding article. They asked if we're going to help other women."

Tess glanced at the boxes. "I hope she said yes?"

Annie nodded. "Molly told the lady to write to the café and we'd be in touch."

"That's fine." Tess looked around the room and frowned. "Have you seen the weekend newspaper?"

Annie's cheeks flushed bright red. "Logan said to hide it until you left."

"He said what?"

"To hide it. And there's no point going to the stores beside us. They've all hidden their newspapers too."

"I've got one in the truck."

Tess jumped a mile. Dylan had snuck up behind her and quietly inserted himself into the conversation. "I don't want your paper," she growled. "I'll find

my own.”

Molly came bustling into the café. “I’m sorry I’m late. I slept in.” She walked past the boxes and stopped. “More dresses?”

Annie nodded.

“Oh, my. We’re being over-run with people’s kindness. I’ll move them into the storage room once I’ve put my bag away.”

Tess and Dylan followed Molly into the kitchen. One of them had a subtle grin on their face and it wasn’t Tess.

“What are you doing here?” Tess’ question seemed irrelevant given that Molly was busy putting a clean apron on.

“Logan called me last night. You should have told me you needed a day off. I waitressed for three years while I was at college.” She washed her hands and looked through the glass door of the oven. “Scones look as though they’re nearly done. I’ll go and get those boxes.”

“You don’t need to be here. I’m not...”

Molly shook her head. “I don’t want to hear any of your excuses for not having a fine day in the sunshine. Go with Dylan and Mrs. Allen. It will do you good.”

Molly glanced at the timer on the oven. “I’ll be back in five minutes. Sally’s coming in at twelve for the afternoon shift.”

“I can’t ask you to help. It’s Saturday.”

“You didn’t ask, Logan did. Now leave the café before his mom thinks you don’t want to go.” Molly opened a cupboard and took out Tess’ jacket and bag. “Enjoy Old Faithful.”

Dylan held the kitchen door open.

Tess looked at her bag. “Are you sure you’ll be all right?”

“Of course I’m sure.” Molly nudged her out the door. “Take plenty of photos. I want to see them when you get back.”

Mrs. Allen was wiping down the glass food cabinets. She looked at Tess and smiled. “Are you ready to go?”

Dylan put on a pair of dark sunglasses and Tess sighed. Instead of a babysitter he looked like a bodyguard. “I’m ready to go.”

“I like your café, Tess.” Mrs. Allen handed Annie the spray bottle and cloth she’d been using. “I can see why Logan likes eating here. Your food looks very tempting.”

“It tastes even better than it looks,” Molly said. She picked up one of the boxes and Dylan took it out of her hands.

“Show me where you want it. I’ll get the other boxes too.”

Molly didn’t hesitate. “Follow me.”

Dylan moved quickly, coming back for the last two boxes while Logan’s mom straightened the salt and pepper shakers.

Tess tried to distract Logan’s mom. “We’re really okay, Mrs. Allen. Molly’s here now.”

“There’s always a speck or two that needs to be taken care of. Especially in such a busy café. You can call me Kathy, Tess. Mrs. Allen sounds far too old.”

Dylan cleared his throat. “Can we continue this conversation in my truck?”

Logan’s mom smiled. “Lead the way, Dylan.” She waited for Tess, then walked beside her to the black truck parked in front of the café.

If Tess was being paranoid, she might have thought Kathy and Dylan were on presidential security. Kathy stayed on her left-hand side and Dylan on her right.

Dylan waited until they were both in his truck before moving quickly around to the driver’s seat. He looked at Tess and smiled. “Okay, Ms. Tourist Guide. Tell us about the history of Bozeman.”

Tess adjusted her seatbelt and looked out of the windshield. “I’ve only been living here for three years. I might be a bit fuzzy when it comes to an accurate history of the town.”

“Just tell us what you know,” Kathy said from behind Dylan’s seat. “Anything is better than nothing.”

Tess glanced at Kathy’s excited face. She could have asked Dylan for his copy of the newspaper, but she didn’t. What was published could never be taken back, so she might as well enjoy her day before reality set in. “I’ll do my best. Let’s see...there are about 40,000 people living in Bozeman. The city is named after a man called John Bozeman. I think a branch of the Oregon Trail used to

run through here.”

Images of the Wild West suited the mood Tess was in. She could imagine wagon trains hauling new settlers across the plains of Montana. They were heading for what they thought was a better life, a chance to make something of themselves.

She'd left Bozeman for the same reason ten years ago. But here she was, back where it all began, waiting to see if everything she'd worked hard for was about to come crashing down around her ears.



DYLAN OPENED the cooler and left three wrapped sandwiches on the blanket he'd pulled out of the truck. Next came juice, pie, muffins and a sweet apricot bar. “I’ve got bottled water if anyone wants it?”

Logan’s mom looked at the food. “Were you planning on staying for the week?”

Tess had learned very quickly that Kathy Allen had a great sense of humor. Their tour of Yellowstone National Park had been more fun than hard work. After checking at the visitor center to see when Old Faithful was next due to erupt, they’d hiked to the top of Observation Point to get a birds-eye view of the geyser.

They’d seen elk and bison along the trail, taken more than one photo of each other enjoying the scenery, and laughed with other tourists doing the same thing.

Old Faithful’s eruption hadn’t been as spectacular as the last time Tess had been in the Park, but she still enjoyed watching the steam and water shoot out of the ground.

Dylan picked up a sandwich and started reading the brochure they’d been given at the Yellowstone Lodge. “Eat up, ladies. Once we’ve finished lunch we’re going to walk around the Geyser Basin. There’s a hot spring in there that I’ve heard about.”

Tess picked up a slice of vegetarian pie. “You can’t go skinny dipping.”

Dylan almost smiled. “I’d scare everyone away if they saw me rising buck

naked out of a hot spring.”

Kathy and Tess looked at each other, trying hard not to laugh.

“You’d start a social media stampede,” Kathy said. “Every woman under the age of ninety would be clicking on your link to see you.”

Dylan didn’t look impressed with the thought. “I’ll keep my clothes on, then.”

Tess smiled. “Wise man.”

Kathy opened a bottle of water and glanced at Tess. “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to, but I was wondering what happened today? You didn’t seem all that happy to come with us.”

Tess finished what she was eating and wiped her mouth. “Logan didn’t tell you?”

Kathy shook her head. “All he said was that a big story was about to hit the papers and he wanted you away from Bozeman for the day. What’s happened?”

Tess looked at Dylan. He wasn’t giving anything away about what he knew. “I was a model for about ten years. Just before I retired three years ago, a friend of mine died from a drug overdose. A senator was supplying her with cocaine. I tried to do something about it, but no one believed me. Logan found evidence that could put the senator in prison. He wrote a story about it and it’s in today’s paper.”

Kathy’s bottle of water landed on the blanket. “What the heck does Logan think he’s doing?”

Tess hadn’t expected such an angry response from Logan’s mom. She thought she’d be supportive of Logan’s story, even a little confused that Tess wasn’t feeling as positive.

“He’s going to get himself killed on American soil this time.”

Dylan watched them both with steady eyes. “It’s okay, Mrs. Allen. Logan’s being careful. He knows the risks.”

Kathy wasn’t buying any of Dylan’s reassuring words. “I watched my son go off to Afghanistan full of high ideals. He came back broken. What he saw over there nearly destroyed him. I don’t want him getting tied up in political games and drug rings over here.”

“It’s not a drug ring, ma’am. Least we don’t know if it is. Logan’s planned his story with military precision. He’s been speaking with a team of lawyers and PR people. He knows what he’s doing.”

“He told me the same thing before he went to Afghanistan.” Kathy looked at Tess. “Have you seen the story Logan wrote?”

Tess shook her head. “I haven’t seen the story. I’ve got a feeling it might spoil my day so I’m not going to read it until tonight.”

“Would you mind if I bought a copy and read it now?”

Tess glanced at Dylan. “You don’t need to buy one. Dylan’s got a copy in his truck.”

Dylan sighed and pulled his keys out of his pocket. “I’ll go and get it now.”

While Dylan was gone, Kathy put her hand on Tess’ arm. “I’m sorry you’ve been put in this situation. How do you feel?”

“I’m worried and angry.” Tess’ voice shook and Kathy gave her a hug. “I want the senator put in prison for what he did to my friend, but he’s as slippery as a snake. He knows how to use the media and make himself look like a victim.”

“I hate to admit this, but Logan knows what he’s doing. I think that’s why what happened in Afghanistan was harder to understand. He’d always been so careful. He keeps his professional and personal life completely separate.” Kathy paused, then looked more closely at Tess. “Are you still Logan’s almost girlfriend?”

“He was my friend, but I’m not so sure anymore.” Tess looked across the Park. Logan had known about her past long before she’d told him. He’d worked his way into her life, learned things from her that she shouldn’t have told him. She’d thought he was different. She’d been wrong.

She turned to Kathy. “You said Logan normally kept his professional and personal life separate. What happened in Afghanistan to change that?”

“Has he told you what happened?”

“A suicide bomber destroyed the school he’d started.”

Kathy waited for her to say something more. “Did he tell you about Abiba?”

Tess thought back over what Logan had told her. “She was the suicide

bomber. She spoke more English than anyone else in the village. That's why she helped at the school."

"That's all?"

Tess nodded.

"You need to ask Logan about her. It might put what's happening into perspective."

Dylan arrived back and handed Kathy the paper. "Front page."

It was worse than Tess imagined. If it had made the front page of the Chronicle, it would have made the front page of at least one major newspaper. She glanced down at the paper and her mouth dropped open. "That's not the Chronicle."

Dylan looked confused. "Why would it be?"

"Logan works for the *Bozeman Chronicle*, not the *Los Angeles Times*."

Kathy looked up at Tess. "He works on contract with the Chronicle, but still does freelance work."

Tess bit her bottom lip. This was worse than she imagined. "Are you saying the story might be in other major newspapers?"

"I don't know," Kathy said. "Unless he sold the story to other corporations it might only be in this paper."

"It's not."

Tess and Kathy stared at Dylan.

"What do you mean?" Tess asked.

"The story was picked up by all major newspapers."

Tess dropped her head to her chest.

Dylan moved closer to her. "Are you okay?"

"No."

Kathy moved the newspaper into the center of the blanket. "I think we'd better read this story together. What do you think?"

Tess looked down and saw a picture of a pretty woman with big green eyes staring straight at her. Whoever had taken the photo knew what they were doing. Then she looked at the rest of the page. Logan's story hadn't only made the front page, it was the *only* story on the front page.



Kathy squeezed Tess' hand. "Are you ready?"

Tess nodded. Senator Gibson represented California. Logan had struck into the heart of where his re-election votes would come from. The fall-out would be huge.

She'd sooner read the story with Dylan and Kathy. If she left it until tonight, she'd be on her own, terrified the senator would be sending his henchmen to kill her.

And that would be much worse than sitting in the middle of Yellowstone National Park, reading the story and working out what to do next.

## CHAPTER 10



Dylan parked his truck at the back of Tess' café. He frowned at the staircase leading up to her apartment. "I'm not happy about leaving you here alone."

"I'm used to being alone," Tess growled. They'd been having the same argument since they'd left the Park nearly two hours ago.

"I could stay with you for the night?" Kathy offered.

"I'll be okay. I'll call if I need you."

"There's someone in your apartment." Dylan's voice dropped to an urgent whisper. "Wait here." He slipped out of the truck, all six-foot-five of him, and walked carefully up the stairs.

"I'm going in," Tess said to Kathy. "If I scream call 911."

"You should stay here. Dylan can take care of whoever is in your apartment."

Tess opened her door. "That's what I'm afraid of." She followed Dylan up the stairs, stopping when he turned and glared at her. He pointed at the truck and she shook her head. For the first time since she'd known him, Dylan looked angry. Dead-pan, no holds barred, angry.

She stuck her nose in the air and kept moving toward him.

He waited until she was behind him. "Stay glued to my back," he hissed.

She wasn't going to push her luck by explaining just what a disaster that would be. She wasn't tiny, petite, or in need of a white knight in shining armor. If Tess stuck to his back, they'd end up falling over each other. Given the personal space issues she'd watched Dylan struggle with, a full body contact

incident would leave him in a complete panic.

He put his hand on the door handle and turned the knob. The lock clicked open. Before Tess could move a low growl filled the air. It sounded like a big, mean dog was standing on the other side of the door, waiting to take an enormous bite out of their retreating bottoms. Dylan's instructions to stay glued to his back finally made sense.

"Max, down."

Dylan turned to Tess. "What the..."

The door opened and Sally stood in front of them holding a grinning Max. At least that's what Tess thought Max was doing.

"I thought you'd be home later. I've made dinner for everyone." Sally smiled at Dylan. "Sorry about that. Max thinks he's Rambo sometimes, but he wouldn't hurt a fly."

Max, the dog that was as big as a pony, gave a short, sharp bark to reinforce what Sally had said.

Tess patted Max's head. "What are you doing here?"

"I read the article. Did you get my text?"

Tess pulled her cell phone out of her jacket and looked at the caller display. "It didn't come through." She scrolled through a couple of pages. "It's on silent mode. You'll be at my place from five o'clock and staying the night. You're making dinner. Bring wine."

The frown hadn't dropped off Dylan's face. "How did you get in?"

"Tess keeps her spare key above her door, up here." Sally reached above the wide timber bead surrounding the door. She pulled a magnetic key box out of its hiding place. "See...easy."

"We need to talk security," Dylan muttered. He looked at Sally. "Don't tell me you keep your house key in the same place."

"Of course not," Sally said with a superior smile. "I keep mine under a pot of daisies."

Dylan huffed then gave Max a hard stare. Max wagged his tail and jumped on Dylan, licking his face with all of the exuberance of a dog that didn't realize his days of freedom might be numbered.

Sally gasped. "Max. Down."

Dylan managed to untangle Max's tongue from his face before wiping the slobbery mess away.

Sally pulled Max back to her side. "You don't want a dog to take home with you by any chance, do you?"

"Max isn't yours?"

"He belongs to the animal shelter. I've got one more week to find him a home. You look so good together."

Dylan looked more closely at Max. "I can't have dogs in my rental, but I know someone who might be interested."

"Don't let what just happened put you off. Max is a great dog. He just needs someone who's got the size and time to teach him how to be a good boy. Isn't that right, Max?" Max woofed and Sally smiled at Dylan. "Give me a call any time of the day or night. I'll deliver Max to his new home myself."

Tess heard a door slam and looked down at Dylan's truck. Kathy was closing each of their doors.

She walked up the stairs and smiled at Tess. "You haven't screamed so I thought it must be safe."

Tess pointed to Sally. "This is my friend, Sally Gray. Sally, this is Kathy, Logan's mom from Seattle."

Sally stuck her hand out. "Nice to meet you. And this big dog is Max. He's an Irish Wolfhound mixed with lots of different things. Come inside and enjoy Tess' home."

Kathy smiled at Sally and patted Max's head. "He's a very big dog."

"He needs someone that's got a big backyard or a ranch. Living in an apartment is too stressful. One wag of his tail and everything disappears off the table."

Max, sensing impending doom if he wagged his tail, went over to the far side of the room and flopped down on a blanket.

Sally opened the fridge and pulled out a bottle of white wine. "Who wants a glass of wine?"

"Not for me, thanks," Dylan said. "If Tess isn't going to listen to me, I'll

head home if Kathy is ready to go. I'm working tomorrow."

"That's fine by me," Kathy said. "I want to speak to my son, anyway."

Tess had a feeling Logan was in for a grilling. Dylan still looked worried, in his normal understated way. "Everything will be okay. Logan didn't mention my name once in his story. No one's camped outside the café with murder on their mind and there's no graffiti on the building."

"Max and I are staying the night," Sally added. "He might be a bit of a softy, but if someone Tess doesn't know comes to the door, they won't get past him."

Dylan glanced at Max and Max's ears pointed to attention.

"No, Max," Sally warned.

Max flopped back down. He rested his head on his paws and looked up at Dylan through his long lashes.

Kathy laughed. "If I had room at my house in Seattle I'd be tempted to take Max home with me. He has a lovely personality."

Dylan took his keys out of his pocket and glanced at Sally. "I'll let you know tomorrow what my friend says. And you..." He handed Tess a business card. "Don't open your door to anyone you don't know. If you feel unsafe, call me or the police."

"Yes, sir."

Dylan sighed. "We'd better get going, Kathy. I don't want to say or do something I'll regret."

Tess didn't think that was possible. Dylan was cool, calm and collected. Even when more than one hundred pounds of happy dog landed on his chest.

Kathy gave Tess a hug. "I've had a great day. Don't let that son of mine give you a hard time. From what you told me and what I read in the paper, the senator deserves to be behind bars." She gave Sally a quick hug. "It was nice meeting you, too."

Tess opened her back door and watched Dylan and Kathy drive away.

Sally handed her a glass of wine. "Drink this. Then you can tell me why you've never talked about what happened when you were a model. It must have been heartbreaking."

"It was. But first I'm going to give Annie and Molly a call. Do we have

enough food for all of us?”

“Are you kidding? I’ve cooked enough meatloaf for a family of ten. Tell them to bring wine.”

Tess picked up the phone and called Annie. It had been a long, tiring and emotional day. She’d hardly had any sleep for the last two nights, but she needed to see her friends. She wanted to explain why she hadn’t been completely honest when she’d told them about her life. Why she’d hidden away from the world and been so paranoid about being photographed.

And more than anything she wanted to talk about Evie, and finally put to rest the shadow that followed her around.



LOGAN KNOCKED on Dylan’s front door. He wasn’t home.

For most of the day, he’d been answering phone calls from journalists from around the country. Over the years, Senator Gibson’s name had been linked to many high-profile charities and organizations. After his story hit the headlines, everyone wanted more information. They wanted to reconcile the good looking senator with the drug dealing opportunist they’d read about.

Logan sat in his truck and answered another call. This one was from a reporter in Paris. They wanted to know whether Senator Gibson was linked to any French nationals. The only connection to France Logan had found, was to a property in Aquitaine. According to the senator’s ex-wife, he’d taken his girlfriends to the rustic mansion for romantic weekends away.

It was no wonder Marcie was making every cent she could out of her life with her ex-husband. She’d already sold her story to a high-profile magazine and agreed to be interviewed on the biggest talk show in America. She was on track to make a fortune from her husband’s drug dealing life.

Marcie didn’t have any regrets about going public, but Logan wasn’t so lucky. He regretted his friendship with Tess being the catalyst to writing the story. He regretted knowing she must think he’d used her for his own gain. And he regretted what could happen next with Jilly.

Someone tapped on his passenger window. “You going to sit there all night or come inside?”

Logan had never been happier to see Dylan. He turned his phone off and jumped out of his truck. “How’s Tess?”

“She’s okay. I dropped your mom off at your house.”

“Did Mom see the story?”

“She read it with Tess.”

Logan didn’t like the sound of that. “What did they say?”

“Your mom thought it was well written, balanced and thought provoking. By the end of it, she wanted to strangle the senator and put him behind bars for what he’d done.”

“What about Tess?”

Dylan hesitated. “She didn’t say much. Did you consider showing her the article before it was published?”

“Yes, but I didn’t want her to worry about it.”

“She wouldn’t have been half as worried if you’d shown her what you’d written.”

Logan followed Dylan onto his front porch. “It’s not my story I’m worried about. Jilly isn’t happy.”

“I don’t expect she is. You took what she thought was her story and published it first.”

“She’s writing another story.”

“Do you know what she wrote?”

“No.” Logan stepped inside Dylan’s home and looked around. “You still haven’t unpacked everything?” About eight boxes lined one wall of the living room. They’d been sitting there for the last six months. Logan didn’t know if Dylan hadn’t unpacked them because he didn’t have the time or if he wasn’t sure he wanted to stay.

Dylan glanced at the boxes on his way through to the kitchen. “I emptied another one last weekend. I’m not in a hurry, especially if I find somewhere to live in Bozeman.”

“A snail moves faster than you when it comes to unpacking. Even if you

move, it would be good to get everything out of their boxes. Do you want me to give you a hand?”

“Does it look as though I need help?”

Logan sat on a kitchen stool and leaned against the counter. “Everyone needs help now and then.”

“If you want to be useful you can get some cans of soda out of the refrigerator. I’ll start the barbecue. You look as though you could do with a decent meal.”

“Do I look hungry?”

Dylan frowned. “You look like death warmed over. What’s going on?”

“Life.”

“Been there, done that. Care to elaborate?”

Logan hadn’t slept much over the last few days and had eaten even less. “I may have destroyed the most important thing in my life.”

“I hope you’re referring to Tess and not the beaten up truck parked outside?”

“You know I am,” Logan muttered.

“Just checking.” Dylan took two huge steaks off the counter. “When the drinks are ready, bring them outside. If I don’t get these on, we’re never going to eat.”

Dylan walked across the room and opened a set of French doors.

The best part of his home was the view. A wraparound deck overlooked the Bridger Range. They’d spent hours outside with their feet propped up against the railing and the sun setting over the mountains. Watching what nature did best was the best therapy either of them had ever had.

Logan looked in the fridge. Dylan might be a little slow at unpacking boxes, but he always had plenty of fresh food. Within a few minutes, he’d put together a huge salad.

He grabbed two cans of soda and put them on a tray with the salad. When he opened the door to the deck, he nearly choked on the smoke coming off the barbecue. “You trying to get the fire department out here?”

“Any complaints and I’m eating half your steak.” Dylan glanced at the bowl of salad in Logan’s hands. “You made that out of what’s in my fridge?”



Logan's mouth tilted into a smile. "I've been helping in the café."

"Looks like it."

"Do you have any avocado oil? It makes a great dressing with lemon juice and black pepper."

Dylan flipped the steaks. "You sure you're feeling all right? You sound like Martha Stewart."

"Scoff all you like, but the dressing will make the salad taste incredible."

"I can't believe I just heard you say that. Come with me." Dylan turned the barbecue down and walked back inside. "One of my sisters sent me a fancy food basket when I moved in. There's lots of stuff in there I've never used."

"Where do your sisters live?"

"Two are in Los Angeles and one lives in San Francisco. The Army was a piece of cake after dealing with their issues. Being a big brother isn't all it's cracked up to be." He opened a cupboard door and reached inside. "Here it is. Help yourself to whatever you need. I'll check the steak."

Logan started working his way through the bottles. He found avocado oil, red wine vinaigrette and a jar of lemon-garlic salad dressing. He left the avocado oil on the counter and put the rest of the dressings in Dylan's pantry.

He squeezed the juice of a lemon into a jar, tipped in some oil, then added ground black pepper. After a quick whisk with a fork, he had the tasty dressing ready.

He balanced the dressing on top of a couple of plates with the knives and forks, and headed onto the deck. "You want to eat out here?" he asked Dylan.

"Might as well. It's good to get some fresh air after being cooped up inside my truck for two hours with your mom and Tess."

"It couldn't have been that bad."

"Not really," Dylan admitted. "Once Tess got over the fact that she was coming with us she wasn't so bad. Things got a little heated after they read your story."

"Where's Tess now?"

"In her apartment."

Logan stared at Dylan. He was supposed to have looked after her, not let her

fend for herself.

Dylan picked up one of the plates and put a huge steak on it. “Before you get all high and mighty about Tess, you should know that Sally’s with her. She brought an Irish Wolfhound to stand guard. The dog’s built like the Great Wall of China. Nothing is going to get past him.”

“Are you sure?”

“As sure as I can be from the other side of town. Why don’t you go and see for yourself?”

Logan wasn’t sure that was a good idea. “She hates me.”

“Okay, so maybe I understand her reluctance to talk to you. You almost blew her new life to shreds. Not bad for someone who eats at her café all of the time. Didn’t you say you were her friend as well?”

“I am her friend.”

Dylan snorted.

“Whose side are you on, anyway?”

“Don’t know. I’m still trying to figure out if your idiot tendencies stem from a mental deficiency or plain stupidity.” Dylan passed Logan the second steak. “Put some of that fancy salad on your plate. It might help your brain cells to multiply.”

If Tess thought today was a nightmare, Monday could be worse. “The Chronicle’s publishing the story Jilly wrote in Monday’s paper.”

“Wasn’t she your friend, too?”

Logan attacked his steak with his knife. “I didn’t steal her story. I’d already been investigating the senator and I’d spoken to his ex-wife. Jilly had no idea what would have happened if she’d gone in half prepared to fight the senator.”

“And you enlightened her?”

“Has anyone ever told you you’re a pain in the ass?”

Dylan smirked. “All the time, that’s why I’m your friend. You make me look good.”

With how he felt at the moment, Logan would make anyone look good.

Dylan opened another deck chair and sat down. “I don’t imagine Jilly took the news of your story very well.”

Logan sighed. “She screamed down the phone at me, then came into the office and tried the same thing. Security evicted her.”

Dylan, the man who never showed any emotion, burst out laughing.

“It’s not funny. She won’t tell me what’s in her story. If she says anything about Tess things could get bad around here. I’m going to be in so much trouble with Tess that she’ll never speak to me again.”

“Here’s a news flash for you. You’re in trouble now. Tess, on the other hand, doesn’t deserve any of this. You’d better hope Jilly has some kind of conscience tucked up her sleeve.”

“I’m not counting on it.” Logan didn’t know what Jilly might or might not say in her story. He was planning for the worst, and that involved suggesting Tess go back to Seattle with his mom. Tess wouldn’t listen to him, but she might listen to her friends.

“Have you seen Molly and Annie since you got back?”

Dylan narrowed his eyes. “Why?”

“I want Tess to go home with Mom for a few days. She won’t go if she thinks it’s my idea. I thought Molly and Annie might be able to help.”

“You sure you’re not taking your neurotic tendencies too far?”

Logan knew he wasn’t. Dylan would do the same thing if he knew what Tess had gone through three years ago. “If Jilly’s story isn’t as bad as I think it’s going to be, Tess should be okay. Otherwise, the easiest thing for her to do would be to leave town for a while.”

“Tess doesn’t strike me as wanting to take too many easy options.”

“That’s why I need Molly and Annie to help.”

Dylan shook his head. “If you want my opinion, I think you’re underestimating Tess. She’ll be okay.”

Logan went back to eating his dinner.

“You’re not going to change your mind, are you?”

“Nope.”

Dylan picked up his soda. “Sounds like you’ve got some fast talking to do. You’d better hope Molly and Annie are in a receptive mood.”

Logan hoped more than that. He hoped Tess actually listened to them and his

mom didn't mind a house guest. That was a lot of people to convince, but he'd been up against worst odds before.



TESS LOOKED at the stubborn frown on Logan's face. "I'm not going anywhere," she growled. "And I don't appreciate you going behind my back and organizing what you think is best for me."

"I know what I'm talking about."

"So do I. It's my life, so butt out." Tess was so angry she couldn't sit still. She paced backward and forward across Logan's living room, wondering what she'd ever seen in him. Molly and Annie had woken her out of a perfect Sunday sleep-in to ask her what she thought about going to Seattle. They had everything planned out, too planned out.

"You could be in danger. I don't know who supplied Senator Gibson with drugs. They might not like one of their high profile clients being investigated."

"I don't care about any of that. I'm not running away to Seattle with your mom."

She could see Logan reining in his temper, trying to plaster an understanding expression on his face. "I know you don't want to go with Mom, but it makes more sense than staying in Bozeman."

Tess threw her hands in the air. "Only to you. You've got no right to tell me what to do. You knew what would happen before you wrote your story. Now you tell me your friend is publishing another story tomorrow. You're ruining my life and you want to tell me what I should do? Forget it. I'm not listening." She turned to stomp out of the door. If she stayed a minute more, she'd say something she'd really regret.

"I'm only doing this because I care about you."

"Care? You care about me?" Tess turned around and glared at Logan. "I can't believe you even mentioned that word. You pushed yourself into my life, made out you were a nice person. All the time you were digging into my past, writing a story that would put you on the front page of every newspaper in the country. I

bet you even took notes after you left the café. I was stupid to think you were different from other reporters.”

“I am different,” he bellowed. “I wrote the story because I wanted to stop the senator doing the same thing to someone else.”

“As if I really believe that. You wrote the story because Jilly was going to beat you to the front page.”

“I had to print the story before she made a mess of everything.”

Tess planted her hands on her hips. “How do you think that made her feel? She’s your friend and you still wrote your story. What kind of person does that make you?”

“A person who cares about you.” Logan turned his back on her and stared out of the window. “I couldn’t let her write the first story.”

Tess took a deep breath. She knew better than to trust anything Logan said. He was a low-life reporter who’d stumbled onto a story. A front page story that could win him another award. “I don’t believe you. You could have gone straight to the police, but you chose to write your story. You’re no better than Jilly. You just had more facts to back your story up.”

She picked up her jacket and keys.

Logan turned around. “Where are you going?”

“Home.”

“You can’t go. We haven’t finished discussing this.”

“Yes, we have. I’m not going to Seattle and I’m not talking to you again.” She walked out of the living room and headed toward the front door.

“Tess, wait.”

She wasn’t waiting for anything Logan Allen might or might not say. She closed the front door and walked out of his life. Forever.



“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” Annie stood beside Tess, staring down the same stretch of sidewalk Tess had been looking at.

“I’m waiting for the newspaper to be delivered.”

Annie looked at her watch. "It's usually here by now."

"That's what I thought. Did Logan tell you to hide it again?"

"Not this morning. Why are you so annoyed with him? He's only trying to help."

Tess stalked back into the kitchen. "He's not helping. He's created a huge mess, all because he wanted his story on the front page of the newspaper. He doesn't care about who he steps on to get there."

"That's not true. He wouldn't have sent you to Yellowstone with his mom and Dylan if he was like that. He didn't even mention your name in Saturday's story."

"I don't care, not anymore. I just want today to be over so that we can go back to everything being normal."

Annie washed her hands in the sink. "Depending on what's in today's newspaper, I don't think your life will ever go back to what it used to be."

Tess looked at the bowl in front of her. "I thought I'd left all of this behind three years ago."

"Life has a funny way of catching up with you." Annie glanced at her watch again. "Why don't you ask Becky or Emily if their newspapers have arrived?"

"I'll go and see Becky in a few minutes. I don't think Emily will be at work yet."

Annie tied her apron around her waist and frowned at the list on the wall. "What time did you arrive this morning?"

A column of green smiley faces sat beside most of their usual Monday morning dishes. "I turned on the ovens at four-thirty. I couldn't sleep."

"No kidding. Did Logan stop by the café?"

"I told him I didn't want to see him again."

Annie shook her head. "I love you lots, Tess, but sometimes you're so stubborn that you can't see what's in front of your nose."

"I see plenty." Tess added another cup of flour to the scone mixture on the counter.

"Only when you want to."

Tess reached for the sugar, then changed her mind. "I never used to stand up

for myself. I didn't want to hurt people's feelings or make them feel bad. Maybe I have been overcompensating. But I'm so angry with Logan that I don't know what else to do."

"What are you so angry about?" Annie asked softly.

"He used me. All this time I thought he liked spending time with me, but all he wanted was a story."

"You don't really believe that, do you?"

"I'll tell you after today." Tess' head shot up when someone knocked on the front door of the café. She looked at Annie and started moving quickly out of the kitchen.

Molly stood in the doorway waving a newspaper in the air. "I'd normally say good morning, but I know you're looking forward to reading this as much as I like going to the dentist. It was sitting beside your front door." She handed Tess the Monday edition of the *Bozeman Chronicle*.

Annie joined them at the front door. "I've got two questions for you. What are you doing up so early and do you want a cup of coffee?"

"I'd love a cup of coffee and I'm up early because my sister needs help. The Hillcrest Community have planned some special events this week. They want a dozen flower arrangements delivered by ten o'clock this morning."

"I didn't know you knew how to arrange flowers."

Molly grinned at Annie. "When we were teenagers, Becky and I helped our nan in her florist store. We made bouquets and boutonnieres by the dozen each weekend."

A horn tooted from the street and Molly turned around. "I have to go. Harry's arrived with the flower delivery. I hope the article's not too bad."

Annie looked at the newspaper in Tess' hands. "So do we. I'll bring a couple of cups of coffee across for you and Becky in a few minutes."

"That would be grand. I'll see you soon." Molly left the café and met Harry, the delivery man, at the back of his truck.

Tess carried the newspaper to the front counter and carefully laid it flat.

Annie watched her. "Are you going to turn it over and look at the lead story, or read the sports section for the rest of the morning?"

Tess straightened the paper, glancing at a picture of the Bobcats rodeo team. “Do I have a choice?”

“Of course you have a choice. If you don’t want to read the article you don’t have to. But don’t ask me to give you clues about what Logan’s friend wrote.”

“You’re no fun,” Tess muttered.

Annie glanced up and frowned at something on the street. “What do you think they’re doing here?” She pointed to a group of four adults crossing Main Street. Two of them had what looked like cameras slung over their shoulders.

“They could be tourists.”

Annie shook her head. “It’s too early in the morning for tourists. These people know where they’re going. Tourists usually wander around a bit, stare at the scenery.”

Annie had a point. These people looked determined, and it didn’t look as though they were after an early breakfast. “You don’t think...”

“We haven’t got time to think.” Annie grabbed hold of Tess’ arm. “Your choices have boiled down to one. Get in the kitchen, fast.”

Tess glanced back at the street. She felt her blood pressure drop as Annie pulled her through the kitchen door. The group of people were about to knock on their front door. “Who do you think they are?”

“I don’t know, and to be honest, I don’t care. Where did you leave Dylan’s business card?”

“By the phone.”

Annie walked quickly across the room and took Dylan’s card off a clip on their message board. She dialed the phone number and waited. “Hi, Dylan. It’s Annie. Can you get to the café quickly?”

Annie nodded once, then looked at Tess. “Four people are knocking on our front door. They don’t look like tourists or locals.” She listened to Dylan say something. “Okay, bye.”

She turned back to Tess. “Dylan said to stay in the kitchen and don’t answer the door. He’ll be here soon.”

Tess tried to ignore the tapping on her glass windows. “They would have seen us.”



“If you want to mess with Dylan, go ahead and answer the door.”

Tess listened to the knocking get louder. “I don’t think they got the hint.”

“Dylan will set them straight.”

Annie seemed so sure of Dylan’s ability to vanquish the unwanted people that Tess decided to listen to her. Instead of thinking about what was happening outside, she flipped the newspaper to the front page. The headline was enough to give her a headache for the rest of the day. And then there was the photo.

“Are you all right?” Annie asked.

Tess slid the newspaper across the counter.

Annie ran her finger along the headline. “*Beauty and the Beast—how one supermodel stood up to Senator Gibson.* What was Logan’s friend thinking?” She kept reading, shaking her head every now and then.

Tess couldn’t stand the suspense. “Am I better not reading it?”

“It’s not too bad. She’s blown your cover. Even though she uses your modeling name, anyone with half a brain can tell it’s you in the photo. If you look beyond the fact that she shouldn’t have written anything, it’s not too bad a story. Oh, no.”

Tess looked at Annie. “What’s wrong?”

“She’s told everyone about The Bridesmaids Club. We’re going to get buried under hundreds of bridesmaids’ dresses.” Annie turned to the next page and froze. “I don’t believe it. How did she get those photos?”

Tess leaned across the counter. “What photos?” She glanced down at the newspaper, then looked again, just in case she was hallucinating. The photos had been taken on the night they’d worn the bridesmaids’ dresses for the catalog.

There was a photo of Annie and Sally together, laughing at something going on behind the camera. There was a photo of Molly, just before they’d finished taking photos for the night. And then there were the last two. The ones that made Tess drop her head in her hands and groan. They were of her. There was no way anyone could miss the resemblance between Theresa Daniels, supermodel, and Tess Williams, café owner.

Annie took a closer look at the photos. “At least none of us have lettuce stuck in our teeth.”

That wasn't much of a consolation to Tess. She was still trying to figure out how Logan's friend had gotten hold of the photos. "Where did the paper get the photos from? Molly wouldn't have given them to the reporter. She promised she'd edit my photos so no one recognized me."

"There's only one way to find out." Annie picked up Tess' phone and dialed a number. "Hi, Molly. It's me. We've just looked at the newspaper article. Do you know how the reporter got copies of the photos you took in Tess' apartment?"

Annie waited for a few minutes, then replied to the one-sided conversation Tess could hear.

"Okay. See you soon." Annie hung up and stared at the picture in the newspaper. "Molly's coming across. She hasn't seen the paper yet."

A few minutes later a loud bang sounded on the back door and Tess went to answer it.

Annie ran in front of her. "Wait a minute. It could be someone else."

"Who would it be?"

Annie looked over her shoulder. "It could be one of the people that were standing in front of the café."

"How do we know they weren't potential customers?"

"They didn't look hungry."

Tess didn't know how someone was supposed to look if they were hungry. The same loud knock filled the kitchen.

"This is stupid," Tess hissed. "I'm answering the door."

"Ask who it is first," Annie squeaked.

Tess dropped her hand off the lock. "Who is it?"

"Me," Molly yelled. "What are you doing in there?"

Tess opened the door and pulled Molly inside. "Preparing for war if you listen to Annie."

"I'm only following the instructions Dylan gave us. You know what he's like."

Molly smiled. "Brooding good looks and enough charm to soften the hardest of women?"

Annie snorted. "I was thinking more like over the top stubborn, bossy and dangerous. Have you ever seen him smile?"

"A man like Dylan doesn't need to smile. Now show me those photos..."

Tess grabbed the newspaper and pointed to the images. "How would the newspaper have gotten these?"

Molly shook her head. "I haven't given anyone copies of the photos I took."

"No one else was in the room except us and...Logan." Tess looked at Annie and Molly. "He took the photos and gave them to his friend."

Molly frowned. "He wouldn't have done that."

"Someone took the photos. It wasn't you, and it wasn't us, so it has to be Logan. He must have used his cell phone and snapped the photos when we weren't looking."

Annie didn't look so sure. "That's a pretty big accusation. Why would he take the photos then give them to his friend?"

"Guilt," Tess said. "It makes perfect sense. He felt bad for beating her to the papers with his story, so he gave her these photos as payback."

"I still don't believe it." Molly walked across to the coffee pot and poured herself a drink. "He's a fine man."

"You've been sucked in by his charm." Tess closed the paper. "Remember what happened last time that happened."

"I'm not marrying him. Besides, he's got more integrity in his little finger than my ex-husband had in his entire body."

"I'm with Molly," Annie said. "Logan's a good guy."

Tess shook her head. "You're both wrong. Logan Allen just sold us out for a story."

Someone knocked on the back door and Annie looked at Tess. "If that's who I think it is, you can ask him yourself. Dylan's bringing Logan with him."

## CHAPTER 11



Jess watched Dylan and Logan make themselves at home in her café kitchen. They'd made sure the reporters stayed outside, which was just as well considering Logan had been part of the reason they were there in the first place.

She now had a fan club of about twenty people sitting in the café, waiting to see one of the women involved in the Senator Gibson scandal. The fact that her grandparents had lived in Bozeman for more than seventy years gave her story more local appeal. But it didn't make her any less of an idiot for trusting Logan. He'd sucked her into his life, made her think he wasn't so bad after all. She might even have thought he was pretty amazing.

She'd been blinded by his brown eyes and lethal smile, hoodwinked by his sense of humor and kind heart. It was just a pity he had the instincts of a shark and the morals of an alley cat. She felt mildly disturbed that she'd discredited alley cats by comparing them to Logan. They couldn't help the circumstances of their existence, but he could.

She tried getting rid of the frustration simmering inside of her by beating a bowl of butter and sugar to within an inch of its life. While she struggled to find the good in anything that had happened, Logan flipped pancakes and Dylan ate a bowl of Annie's homemade granola.

A couple of pancakes slid toward her on a plate. "You're going to wear a hole in that bowl." Logan's voice might have been slightly amused, but his face was wary.

At least he wasn't stupid. He'd point blank denied taking the photos that had appeared in the paper. After everything that had happened, Tess didn't believe him, and he knew it.

"It's better than using the spoon on you," she said sweetly.

Dylan made a sound that could have been a snort of amusement or a dry cough. He walked across the kitchen and left his breakfast bowl in the dishwasher. "I need to go to work. Call me if you need anything." He sent Logan a pointed look before leaving.

Tess didn't know what the look meant and she wasn't about to ask. Logan had already annoyed her more than once. She wasn't about to prolong his presence in her café.

He'd insisted she call her two part-time staff to help with the early morning rush. She'd come up with every excuse she could think of to keep them at home. But as soon as she'd mentioned reporters, media and scandal in the same sentence to Lizzie and Samantha, there'd been no stopping them. They'd practically flown through the back door, checking their lipstick and hair before descending on the circus out the front of the café.

It was the type of day no one expected to see in Bozeman. But if you were going to be part of it, a solid coat of lipstick, a tight, but not slutty dress and the perfect hairstyle were essential.

Lizzie and Samantha, like the people around them, hadn't come to Angel Wings Café for the coffee they were drinking or the good food they were eating. They had come for two reasons—to see Tess and try and get their faces in front of a television camera.

Annie pushed open the kitchen door. "We need three short stacks of pancakes. One stack of blueberry, one plain, and one with lemon and ginger syrup."

Logan ladled pancake mixture onto the hot griddle. "Coming right up."

"Do you need more toasted sandwiches?" Tess asked as she added flour to her cake mixture.

"Cheese and tomato are running low."

"I'll get more out to you in a couple of minutes."

Annie nodded and looked around the kitchen. “Where’s Dylan?”

“Left for work,” Logan answered. “How’s everything going out there?”

“Busy. A couple of the regulars have gone home. Said it was too noisy for them and they’d see us tomorrow.”

Logan flipped the pancakes and took three plates out of the warmer tray. “Pancakes will be ready in one minute.”

Tess watched him stack the light, fluffy pancakes on each plate. He drizzled syrup on two of the stacks and slid them across to Annie. “Watch the plates. They’re hot.”

Before Annie left the kitchen, he had another batch cooking. “You’re still angry.”

Tess cut a tomato into thin slices, then walked across to the fridge for a block of cheese. Logan watched her with a quiet calm that annoyed her. “I’ve got a café full of movie star wannabees, reporters camping on the sidewalk, and the person who started all of this making pancakes in my kitchen. You could say this hasn’t been one of the best days of my life.”

Lizzie stuck her head around the kitchen door. “Two tall stacks of pancakes with maple syrup.”

Logan opened the oven door. “They’re ready now.”

Lizzie smiled as he plated the pancakes. “You should work here more often. Each time we take an order of pancakes into the café someone else wants some.”

“Not going to happen,” Tess muttered. She’d had breakfast with Logan practically every morning for the last few weeks. He’d helped in the kitchen, expanded his cooking skills to include omelets and French toast. And stabbed her in the back as fast as his fingers could fly across his keyboard.

Annie ran into the kitchen. “Turn the TV on. Mad Mitch is outside. It looks as though he’s live on air.”

Mad Mitch was their nickname for Mitchell Maderson. He was a local television legend. Tess guessed hosting the breakfast show for twenty years did that to a man. Combined with a solid background in practical jokes and the ability to try anything once, Mad Mitch had scaled the undeniable heights of media stardom. He’d even appeared on the Tonight Show once, rocketing his

appeal even further into Montana's history books.

A year ago, after Annie had practically twisted her arm, she'd installed a small TV on the kitchen wall. Tess hardly ever turned it on, but Annie insisted they needed it for emergencies and the lunchtime edition of Fashion Central.

Sure enough, Mad Mitch was standing outside, summarizing the main highlights of the worst couple of days of Tess' life.

"Is that...?" Tess turned to Annie.

"Oh my God. It's Lizzie. How did she get out there?"

Tess turned toward the kitchen door and would have run into the café, except an arm wrapped itself around her waist, hauling her against a rock hard body.

"No you don't," Logan growled. "Lizzie can look after herself."

Tess tried pulling his arm off her. "Let me go. Mad Mitch will make her say things she'll regret."

"Sshh." Annie put her finger against her lips. "I'm trying to listen." She turned the volume up and concentrated on the screen.

Logan kept hold of Tess' waist. "You might as well sidestep to the right so you can see the interview." He hauled her close and moved his feet to the right.

If Tess didn't want to end up on her bottom, she had no choice but to follow his lead. She almost managed to ignore Logan's body pressed against hers and the way his breath tickled the side of her face. Being up close and cuddly with Logan made it hard to stay annoyed with him, so she tried to break free.

"Not going to happen." Logan sounded happy about the predicament she was in. "Now quit wriggling around like a worm on the end of a line and listen to the TV."

Tess did what he said, but only because she wanted to hear the interview. Mad Mitch was living up to his reputation, telling his listeners about Senator Gibson's not so glorious fall from grace. Lizzie stood patiently beside him, looking like a domestic goddess in her pale pink dress and frilly white apron.

"Where did she get the flowers in her hair?" Tess asked.

"Becky's store," Annie said. "I saw her go outside and grab some roses on the way through. They look pretty threaded through her braid."

"Did she pay for them?"

Annie shrugged her shoulders. "She'll sort it out later."

When the camera moved across to Lizzie, Tess forgot about her hair accessories and focused on what she was saying. Mad Mitch must have asked her about working in the café. Lizzie grinned and told everyone at home what a great place Angel Wings Café was.

When the questions became more focused on Tess' character, Logan's arm tightened around Tess' waist. "You're like a giant boa constrictor." She whacked Logan's arm for extra emphasis, but he didn't even flinch. "Let me go," she hissed.

"I'm not letting you go until Mitch has finished his interview. You'll try and do him bodily harm before it's over and he's too nice a guy for that."

Tess wiggled sideways. "You know Mad Mitch?"

For the first time all morning, Logan actually laughed. "That about sums him up. But never underestimate Mitch. He's got a good business brain under all of that personality."

Tess turned back to the television when she heard Evie's name mentioned. Lizzie told Mitch she didn't know anything about Evie's death three years ago. When he pushed further, she ended the interview by asking him out on a date."

Tess' mouth dropped open. "Did Lizzie just say what I thought she said?"

Annie looked equally confused. "He comes in here once a week for lunch. She's never said she's attracted to the guy."

"It looks like she is now." Tess watched Lizzie grin when Mitch told her he'd go on a date with her. She would have smiled too if she hadn't been locked in Logan's arms.

As soon as the camera cut back to the studio, Annie groaned. "How does Lizzie do that? She meets a man she likes and asks him on a date. I couldn't do that on national TV if I tried. I'm doomed to a life of singleness."

"Just because Lizzie's got a date with Mad Mitch, it doesn't mean everyone's found their perfect man. Look at me."

Annie did look. Closely.

Tess blushed bright red when she realized what Annie was seeing. Logan still had his arm plastered around her waist and a goofy smile on his face. "For Pete's



sake,” she growled. “Would you get your hands off me?”

Logan obligingly removed his arm and stepped away. Tess decided that life had a funny, twisted way of working out. Because as soon as Logan stepped away, she missed him being close.

So she did what always made her feel better. She pulled a container of flour out of the pantry and started making cheese scones. “Don’t you need to go to work?”

Logan sent her one of his, I-know-what-you’re-trying-to-do stares. “I took a vacation day, so I’m all yours.”

Annie sighed. “While you two are sorting out what’s going on, I have customers to serve. We’ll probably be inundated now that Lizzie is famous as well.”

Tess waited until Annie left before trying to get Logan out of her kitchen. “You can’t stay here all day.”

He started unpacking the dishwasher, stacking clean cups and saucers in the cupboards. “Someone has to make sure you’re not harassed. It might as well be me.”

“I don’t need you to look after me.”

Logan didn’t bother replying.

“If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t be in this mess,” she muttered. “My life was perfect until you did the follow-up story about Connie’s wedding.”

“Perfect?” That got Logan’s attention. “By perfect you mean hiding in a café, working all hours of the day and night and hoping no one caught up with your past?”

“I wasn’t hiding. Not much anyway.” Tess stuck her nose defiantly in the air.

Logan crossed his arms in front of his chest. “I imagine a supermodel earns a fair bit of money. And if that supermodel was as careful as you are with your finances, I’d imagine it could add up to a significant amount by the end of a ten-year career.”

“What I have or don’t have isn’t any business of yours.”

“I don’t suppose it is,” Logan said. “But I’m making a point. You didn’t need to come back here. You could have made your home in thousands of places,

anywhere in the world. But you chose Bozeman because of your grandparents.”

“So?”

Logan stared at her. “You’re a softy. Your heart’s bigger than most people could fit inside their chest. You care about people and want to give something back. The least I can do is make sure you don’t get hurt.”

Tess looked down at the scone dough she’d been pummeling. She’d kneaded the mixture so much that the scones would end up being as flat as the pancakes Logan had perfected.

Tears filled her eyes when she thought about what he’d said. “It’s too late. You’ve already hurt me worse than anyone could. You need to leave.”

“I didn’t give Jilly the photos.”

“I don’t care anymore. Go back to work, Logan. I’m sure there are other stories waiting to be told.”

He watched her throw the scone dough in the trash and wash her hands.

“We need to talk about this, Tess.”

“No, we don’t. I’m sick of hiding, sick of pretending I’m a different person to the woman in the magazines. It’s time to do what I should have done when I first arrived.” Before Logan could begin to imagine what she was going to do, she unlocked the back door. The small crowd of reporters moved out of her way as she walked up to her apartment. She was about to transform herself into the supermodel she’d once been and face her worst critic.

Herself.



TESS PASSED MOLLY a bowl of Chinese takeout and sat on the sofa. They’d just watched the six o’clock evening news. Senator Gibson had made national headlines for two nights in a row. His thirty seconds of fame had evolved into forty-eight hours of political hell and interest was still running high.

Tess’ hour-long interview with Mitch Maderson on the local station had been sliced to twenty seconds in the editing room at NBC. But the message had been clear. Senator Gibson was a predator and needed to be held accountable for his

actions.

“I did the right thing,” Tess said.

“Of course you did.”

“I couldn’t hide in my café forever. I had to tell everyone what happened to Evie.”

Molly speared a slice of chicken with her chopstick. “You did a good job. Mitch’s interview with you was great. Even the edited version on NBC had a powerful message.”

When Molly called Tess, she’d been watching Marcie Gibson being interviewed on CBS. According to the report, Marcie had been swamped with reporters and television crews all trying to get a sound bite from the pretty socialite. The senator’s ex-wife had known exactly how to use the media. She carefully avoided the questions she didn’t want to answer and focused on her ex-husband’s drug dealing habits. Pictures of the women he’d had affairs with had flicked across the screen.

Tess felt sick thinking her friend Evie had been part of the senator’s life. Evie believed the lies he’d told her because she didn’t have a choice. The senator had fed her addiction in the same way he’d fed everyone else’s. Carefully.

“I want to show you something.” Molly left her bowl on the table and unzipped her laptop from its case. “I had another look at the photos in the newspaper. Someone’s carefully edited them.”

“What do you mean?”

“They’re my photos.”

Tess looked at Molly. “You mean Logan didn’t take them with his cell phone?”

Molly shook her head. “Whoever gave the images to the newspaper knew what they were doing. Just to check, I called the Chronicle and asked to see the original files.”

“And they let you?”

“I know someone who works there.” Molly opened two documents and put them side by side on her laptop screen. “Look at this. The one on the left is the image of Annie and Sally that appeared in the newspaper. The one on the right is

the one sitting on my computer at home.”

Tess compared the photos. Someone had cropped the newspaper photo, changed the lighting and added some kind of filter over the image. Instead of being as clear as Molly’s copy, it was slightly grainy, as if a lower quality camera had taken the shot.

Molly glanced at the screen. “I couldn’t figure out how someone had copied them. They’re still sitting on my computer, waiting for me to finish the catalog. Then I re-read the story that appeared in the Chronicle. What does the reporter, Jilly Cresswell, look like?”

Tess frowned. “Short with dark brown, shoulder length hair and blue eyes.”

“Has she got a dimple in her cheek when she smiles?”

Tess thought back to when she’d seen her. She’d been so shocked that Logan had brought her into the café, that it was hard to remember exactly what she looked like. “I think so.”

Molly pushed her laptop away and picked up her dinner. “The morning after Logan’s big story came out, I had a phone call from someone. She’d read the article about Connie’s wedding and wanted to know if we could help her friend. I didn’t have anything booked for that morning so I invited her around to my apartment. I didn’t think anyone would mind.”

“Was it Jilly?”

“I think so,” Molly said. “She was in her late twenties. Pretty in an understated way. She asked if she could see the bridesmaids’ dresses. I told her I didn’t have the dresses, but I did have the photos I took in your apartment. She looked through them and saw some she thought would look beautiful.”

“How did she copy the photos?”

“That’s what was worrying me. I’m really careful about not leaving images on my camera, so that wouldn’t have helped her. I was standing beside my computer the whole time we were talking. Except when I went to the kitchen to answer the phone.”

Tess put her chopsticks down. “She copied your files?”

“I can’t explain it any other way.”

“What are you going to do?”

Molly shrugged. "That's why I'm here. What do you want me to do? You're the one that had the most to lose."

"Don't worry about me. They were your photos. What do *you* want to do?"

Molly chewed her noodles and focused on her laptop. "At the very least I want to speak with her editor. What she did was illegal." She glanced across at Tess. "Don't worry about her. She was the one who did wrong."

"It's not Jilly I'm worried about. I didn't treat Logan very well. I thought he'd lied to me about taking the photos." Tess' phone rang and she let her answering machine take the call.

"The phone's rung at least a dozen times while I've been here. Are you ignoring someone?"

Tess sighed. "It's not Logan, if that's what you mean. Every reporter who saw my interview with Mitch Maderson is trying to get hold of me. Then there are the weirdos who want to marry me. I even had a message from someone who wanted me to star in a movie, and it wasn't a Disney film. That guy freaked me out big time."

"You shouldn't be here alone. What if someone tries to break in?"

"I'll be okay. I'll keep my cell phone beside my bed."

"It's not safe," Molly insisted. "You can come back to my apartment. Becky won't mind."

"I can't stay with you. You don't have any spare room."

"You can have my bed and I'll sleep on the sofa."

Tess picked up her bowl of takeout and frowned. "I'll be fine. Now tell me how the catalog of bridesmaids' dresses is looking."

"I've nearly finished. I just have to drop the last image in and then we're done. Sally came around today and modeled the dresses we got the other day." She looked up when someone knocked on the back door. "Were you expecting anyone?"

Tess walked across to the door. "Not tonight, unless one of the men who wanted to marry me won't take no for an answer."

"That's not funny," Molly growled. "You have to be careful."

The person on the other side of her door knocked again. "Tess? It's Logan."

Open the door.”

She flicked the lock and pulled the door open. “You don’t have to be so impatient. We heard you the first time.”

Logan raised his eyebrows. “We?”

“Molly and I. We’re having dinner.”

“Oh.” He looked happy about something. “Mind if I join you?”

He didn’t wait to be invited in. Within minutes, he was standing behind the kitchen counter with an empty bowl in his hands.

Tess decided she’d been grumpy enough for one day. Besides, she owed him an apology. A big apology. “We’re already onto our second bowl of Chinese takeout. Help yourself.”

The phone rang and Tess ignored it.

Logan glanced at her as he slid green pepper beef into his bowl. “You want to tell me why you’re ignoring your phone? I tried calling at least four times tonight.”

“She’s getting propositioned by freaks,” Molly said. “I want her to come home with me, but she won’t budge.”

Tess turned to Molly. “Your apartment is cute, but small. It’s barely big enough for you and your sister. I won’t sleep in your bed and your sofa is a two-seater.”

“It might be small, but it’s comfortable.”

Tess pointed to her knees. “Most of my legs would dangle over the edge of the sofa.”

Logan’s eyes traveled down the length of the legs in question. A prickly white hot heat shot along Tess’ nerve endings. It left her feeling super aware of the way his cotton shirt hugged his chest, the way he froze as her eyes traveled over what she could see of his body.

“You can stay with me.”

Tess blinked. She must have imagined what he’d said. He couldn’t have asked her to stay, not when her body was imagining what she could do with more white hot heat.

Logan reached for a fork and started eating.

His eyes never left Tess' face. She didn't know where to look, what to do with the surge of adrenaline screaming through her body.

"That's a fine idea." Molly finished her takeout and put her laptop away. "I'll help you pack a bag, Tess."

The phone rang again and Tess groaned when Molly and Logan looked at her. "I'm okay. No one's going to do anything strange."

"You're right, because they're not going to get the chance. You either pack a bag with Molly or I take you back to my home without one. My pajamas should fit you."

Tess felt mildly insulted that he thought his pajamas would fit her petite six-foot frame. "You're enormous. I'd swim in your PJs."

Logan smiled. "All the more reason for you to pack your own bag. Just imagine how embarrassed you'd feel if I proved you wrong."

Tess glanced at Molly. She was busy tidying up their dinner dishes. At least Logan's mom was still in Bozeman. She hadn't seen Kathy since their visit to Yellowstone. She could ask her about Logan when he was growing up. Her stories would keep Logan away from their conversation and away from her.

"Okay. I'll go with you. But I'm taking my own car. I need to be back at the café by five thirty tomorrow morning."

Logan shook his head. "There's still at least six reporters sitting outside. You're coming in my truck in case we need to play cat and mouse to get them off our tail."

Tess dimmed the lights and flicked one of the curtains aside that overlooked Main Street.

Logan stood beside her. "There's a black SUV about twenty feet north of your café on the opposite side of the street. A red Ford is parked behind it, and a white SUV is parked outside Emily's boutique."

Tess saw two of the vehicles, but the third was hidden by the front porch. "If I go with you, can you drop me back here in the morning?"

Logan nodded. "I'll even cook French toast for breakfast."

Tess pulled a face. "You don't have to do that. I'm having trouble getting into my jeans now. French toast would kill me."

“You look good to me.”

Tess felt a blush work its way across her face.

Molly picked up her laptop. “That was easier than I thought it would be. You must have the luck of the Irish, Logan.”

“There was nothing lucky about it,” Tess said as she headed toward her bedroom. “By tomorrow morning, he’ll be regretting his offer.”

“Don’t tell me you sleepwalk. Do I need to hide all of the kitchen knives?”

Tess looked over her shoulder and grinned. “I don’t sleepwalk, I sleep-talk. All of the time. Why do you think I’m still single?”

“Because you have a thing against men who are shorter than you?”

Tess sent him a withering glare.

“As long as you don’t scream in your sleep we’ll get along fine.”

Tess smiled at her unsuspecting roommate. He didn’t know what he’d let himself in for.



IT HADN’T TAKEN MUCH for Logan to get Tess away unseen from her apartment. When he’d arrived, he’d parked his truck on the next street over. Tess hadn’t been too thrilled about climbing a fence to get to his truck, but she’d done it anyway.

On the way home, she’d insisted they take a detour to a drugstore. Anyone looking at her wouldn’t have thought she was being hunted by the local media. With her blond hair bunched under a baseball cap and baggy jeans and a sweater on, she looked like any other late night shopper cruising the drugstore aisles.

He didn’t have the heart to tell her that wearing baggy clothes and no makeup wouldn’t make people notice her less. It was near on impossible to fade into the background when you were six-foot tall. Add in a personality that sparkled even in suburban Bozeman, and you had a sure-fire way to get noticed.

As they pulled into his garage, she leaned back in her seat and smiled. “That wasn’t so bad.”

“Were you expecting lights and sirens with a car chase or two?”



Tess opened her door and lifted her suitcase off the back seat. "I thought one of the reporters might have wondered where we'd gone."

"I'm sure they did."

Tess looked at him suspiciously. "What did you do?"

"Molly might have used some pillows and cushions in her car to make it look as though someone was sitting beside her."

"She did?" Instead of being concerned, Tess seemed grateful. "I'll give her a call when we get inside to make sure she got home safely."

Logan took Tess' case out of her hand and carried it inside. "You can sleep upstairs in the main bedroom. It's got its own bathroom and walk-in closet."

"Where will you sleep?"

Logan nodded to a corridor beside the main staircase. "When I bought the house there was a big guest suite downstairs. I sleep in there."

Tess followed him upstairs. He stopped beside each room, giving her a guided tour. "One day I'll repaint the rooms, but for now they're okay."

"I like the rooms. They're not overdone with chintz and satin."

Logan smiled. "I take it you've lived with chintz and satin and didn't like it."

"You could say that."

He stepped inside the last bedroom. "This is the main bedroom. It's got a great view of the mountains and gets all of the morning sun." He left Tess' case on the bed and looked around the room. "There's a walk-in closet behind that door, and in here..." He opened another door. "Is the bathroom. I'll get you some towels."

When he got back to the room, Tess was pulling her cell phone out of her pocket.

"I'll call Molly and let her know we're okay."

He hung the towels up and left an extra one on the end of Tess' bed. By the time he'd grabbed an extra blanket out of the hall closet, Tess was off the phone. "Did Molly get home safely?"

Tess snapped her phone shut and smiled. "The black SUV followed her so she drove to the police department. The reporters won't be bothering her again."

"I should have called Dylan."

“Molly’s okay. Her sister was home when she got there. She promised to call the police if anything strange happens.”

Logan ran his hands through his hair. “I shouldn’t have written the follow-up story about Connie’s wedding. If Jilly hadn’t read about The Bridesmaids Club, none of this would have happened. Connie and Dave...”

“Wouldn’t have had a beautiful wedding. Do you know how much Mrs. Thompson enjoyed seeing her daughter get married? You made Connie’s wedding day special because you were willing to help us. You helped create memories Mrs. Thompson’s family will never forget. What came next wasn’t your fault.” Tess looked at her suitcase and frowned. “I’ve got an apology to make. I’m sorry for thinking you gave Jilly the photos she printed in the paper. I should have trusted you more.”

Logan stared at the uncertainty on Tess’ face. They’d both been testing the limits of whatever was happening between them. He didn’t know what it meant or where they were heading, but coffee sounded like a good place to start. “Apology accepted. I could do with a cup of coffee about now. Do you want to join me?”

Tess smiled and a jolt of longing shot through him. He wanted her to know, beyond any doubt, that he wasn’t the bad guy she thought he was. He cared about what happened to people and he cared about her.

Tess linked her arm through his. “Coffee sounds great. We’d better get out of here before your mom wonders where we are. I might tarnish your reputation.”

The grin on Tess’ face almost distracted him from what she’d said. “Mom?”

Tess walked with him toward the stairs. “The woman who gave birth to you and made sure you knew how to tie your shoelaces.”

Logan still didn’t understand what his mom had to do with Tess staying in his home. “Mom isn’t here.”

Tess froze on the stairs. “But she’s staying with you. We went to Yellowstone National Park together. She came to Bozeman for a vacation.”

“Mom’s spending a couple of days in Great Falls. A friend of hers moved there last Spring. She left this morning.”

“So it’s just us?”

“Is that a problem?” From the look on Tess’ face, it was a big problem he hadn’t thought about. “As long as you promise not to make any moves on me, I’ll still respect you in the morning.”

Tess looked down at their interlinked arms and frowned. “I won’t make any moves on you.” She let go of his arm and started walking down the stairs.

“There’s nothing to worry about then?”

Tess didn’t look back.

He followed her down the stairs. “It’s a big house. If I start snoring, you won’t hear me.” She must have remembered where his kitchen was from her last visit. She turned right at the bottom of the stairs and waited for him in the living room.

He looked at the pictures his niece had tacked to the walls so he wouldn’t forget her, then at Tess. She still looked worried about something. “Forget what I said back at your apartment. I can’t make you stay, but I’d like you to. I need to know you’re safe and not being harassed by unwanted phone calls and determined reporters.”

He saw the laughter in her eyes before he saw her smile. “Determined reporters like you?”

“Maybe not quite as determined as I am. What do you say?”

Tess pulled a small paper bag out of her pocket. It was the bag the sales assistant had given her in the drugstore. “Before I tell you my answer, there’s something I need to give you. Happy birthday.”

“It’s not my birthday for another six months.”

“You’ll appreciate my forward thinking when you can’t hear me talking in my sleep.”

He opened the bag and saw four different sized sets of earplugs staring back at him. “Does this mean you’re staying?”

Tess nodded. “But only for tonight. By tomorrow morning, no one will care about an ex-model running a café in downtown Bozeman.” She linked her hand back through his arm. “You can make me a cup of coffee and tell me why I’m wrong.”

Logan smiled. “Are you trying to make me feel better?”

“Is it working?”

“I’m smiling, so I suppose it is.”

Tess laughed. “Mission accomplished, then.”

Logan hoped so. He walked into the kitchen and took two mugs out of the pantry. “Cream and one sugar?”

“Cream, but no sugar.”

“You thinking about your jeans again?”

Tess sat on a kitchen stool. “I’m thinking about sleep. Caffeine and sugar will keep me awake half the night. If I don’t get a good night’s sleep, I end up giving people weird combinations in their sandwiches.”

He made two cups of coffee and passed Tess hers. “Come into the living room. It’s more comfortable than the kitchen.” Logan sat on a sofa opposite Tess, just in case she thought he was about to test her ‘no moves’ promise. “Have The Bridesmaids Club found another bride yet?”

“We’re meeting in two days. Annie’s putting all of the letters in a box for us to go through.”

“How many letters do you have?”

“Too many. At least they’re easier to store than the dresses. At last count, there were seventeen letters and fifty-two dresses, and that’s after Connie took her four.”

Logan sipped his coffee. “Sounds like you’ve created a monster.”

Tess laughed. “Covered in satin, silk, and tulle. We might have to ask you to write another story asking people not to send us more dresses.”

Logan shook his head. “No way. I’m staying away from any story to do with The Bridesmaids Club.”

“Probably a wise move.” Tess leaned forward and picked up an envelope sitting on the coffee table. “You haven’t opened your letter yet.”

Logan frowned. “It’s nothing important. How did Annie’s bowling competition go?”

Tess looked at the letter, then at him. “The competition went well, but Carl didn’t last the distance. Their bowling partnership broke up almost before it started. Why don’t you want to open the letter?”

“It’s not the right time.”

“The postmark’s dated two months ago. That’s a lot of wrong times.”

Sweat trickled down Logan’s spine.

“It’s from Afghanistan.”

He looked quickly at Tess. “You should have been a reporter.”

She didn’t look impressed. “Forget I mentioned anything.” She put the letter back on the table and picked up her coffee mug. “Did I tell you the Hospital is planning a fundraiser for their transplant center? Stan Lewis wants to know if Annie and I would provide the food.”

Logan pulled his attention away from the letter. “Big job.”

“It is, but I’ve got an idea. Pastor Steven has started a return to work program for the adults that go to the Lighthouse Café. One of the challenges is not having enough work opportunities for the people doing the course. Annie and I thought we could employ his students to waitress at the fundraiser. And if some of the students are good cooks, they could help in the kitchen. What do you think?”

He stared at the envelope.

“Logan?”

“Hmm?”

Tess frowned. “What do you think about the fundraiser?”

“The students will be lucky to work with you.” Logan could feel Tess’ gaze on his face. He wiped his hands down his jeans and picked up the envelope. “Pastor Steven knows someone who works in Afghanistan not far from where I was based. He asked them to find any information they could about families who may have stayed in the orphanage after the Taliban attack. He gave me the letter a few weeks ago.”

“And you haven’t opened it?”

“No.” But every time he saw the envelope it sat like a noose around his neck.

“Why don’t you want to open it?”

Tess’ voice drifted across the open space between them and settled on his shoulders. The weight of her words dug into a part of him he wanted to forget. He picked up the envelope with shaky hands and gave it to her. “Would you read

it to me?”

Her eyes widened. “Me?”

Logan nodded. “When I came back from Afghanistan I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Not being able to sleep is my main problem. I can’t sleep because I’m having a hard time working through what happened.”

“You think this will help?”

“I hope so.”

Tess looked down at the envelope. “Will you be okay?”

He took a deep breath. “I’ll tell you if you need to stop.”

Tess frowned as she opened the envelope. She pulled two sheets of paper out and carefully unfolded them. “Do you want me to read the letter word for word?”

Logan nodded. It was the best he could do. His heart was beating fast and he had to remember to take deep breaths.

Tess moved beside him. “Okay.” She glanced at him once more before looking down at the letter.

*“Dear Mr. Allen. My name is Elizabeth Connor. I have been working at an orphanage in Nau Deh for the past eighteen months. It is my understanding that you are looking for any children or families that may have arrived at our orphanage fourteen months ago? I was able to find eight children that may have been living in the village at the time of the attack Pastor Steven described.”*

Tess stopped reading. “Are you okay? I can get you a glass of water.”

Logan shook his head. “I’m okay. Keep reading.” Sweat stung his eyes. He focused on Tess. Only Tess.

*“I have enclosed the names of the children on a separate piece of paper, with as much additional information that I could find.”*

She separated the two sheets of paper and looked at the names. “Do you want to read the names now or later?”

“Later.” Logan’s voice cracked. His throat felt dry and raw.

“I’m getting you a glass of water. Wait here.” She jumped off the sofa and headed toward the kitchen.

He looked for the letter, but she’d wisely taken it with her. He’d made friends

with many people in Afghanistan, but there was one family he wanted to find more than anyone else.

“Here you go.” Tess handed him a glass of water and he gulped it down in seconds.

She took the empty glass out of his hand and opened the letter.

*“I have also checked the orphanage’s records and there were a number of families that arrived about the time you are interested in. These families have since moved to other villages and we have no record of where they have gone. I have also made a note of the families that stayed here while they rested and received medical treatment. I am sorry that I don’t have more news for you, but I hope this information is of some help. Kind regards, Elizabeth.”*

Tess turned the letter over, then left it on top of the coffee table. “Do you want to see the names now?”

Logan nodded. Tess handed him the second page of the letter. Some of the names he didn’t recognize, others could have been people he knew, or simply people with the same names as the one’s he had befriended.

When his eyes read the second to last line, he nearly cried. Imzaa and Kushan Khan were listed with their children, Khaaky, Mallalai, and Chinar. Kushan and one of his daughters had been injured and had stayed in the hospital at the orphanage for two weeks. According to the list Elizabeth Connor had provided, they were still in Nau Deh.

“They’re there,” he whispered.

“Who’s there?”

“Kushan and his family. Abiba was their daughter.”

“Abiba?”

“The suicide bomber.” Logan dropped his head into his hands and closed his eyes. “Abiba was employed by the Army as an official interpreter. I worked with her for nearly a year. She was bright and happy. We were trying to organize a scholarship so she could study at an American university.”

“She was the interpreter that lied to you?”

“No. She was one of the few people I thought I could trust.”

Tess frowned. “She killed the soldiers and children at the school?”

Logan looked at the sheet of paper and sighed. "I'll write to Elizabeth, find out where Kushan and his family are living."

"Why did Abiba do it?"

"I've been trying to work that out for the last year. It didn't make sense then and it makes even less sense now. She had so much to look forward to." For the first few months after the bombing, he'd gone through everything he could remember about Abiba. She hadn't said or done anything out of the ordinary. Nothing to make anyone believe she was anything other than a young woman wanting to make a difference.

"Do you want to go for a walk?" Tess asked gently.

Logan looked through the living room windows. "It's pitch black outside."

"All the better to not be seen by super sleuth reporters. It will help shake some of the adrenaline out of your system."

"You noticed?"

Tess picked his hands up and held them between hers. He was still shaking.

"There's a store not far from here. They might sell chocolate."

Logan dropped his voice to match the teasing note in hers. "Not good for your jeans."

"I don't care," she whispered back.

Tess was still holding his hands. Her face was inches from his. The worry in her eyes brought him back to the here and now. "Thank you."

She put her hands either side of his face. "You're a good man, Logan Allen. If chocolate doesn't help, we'll find something that will."

Logan was too much of a gentleman to mention some of the cures working their way through his brain. At least he hoped he hadn't said what was on his mind. Tess had blushed beet red and looked as flustered as a rabbit in spring.

"Tess? Are you okay?"

She let go of his face and pushed her hair behind her ears. "I'll go and get my sweatshirt."

Logan watched her leave the room and wondered what had happened. Tess didn't get flustered. She didn't race out of a room and almost trip over her own feet.



He needed to talk to her, find out what was happening. But it took more courage than he had at the moment, especially if he didn't want to be disappointed.

## CHAPTER 12



Later that night, Tess turned over in bed. She flipped her pillow, pulled the duvet high around her shoulders. She'd tried counting sheep, imagined a lake glistening under a full moon. She'd even visualized all of her troubles going into a big vase and putting a lid on the whole lot. Except her six-foot-five trouble wouldn't fit in any vase she had stored in her imagination.

It didn't matter how hard she tried. Logan jumped free of any container she found, grinning at her feeble attempts to get him out of her head. At least she was trying to get him out of her head and not her bed.

Oh-my-God. She was at it again, putting Logan where he so obviously didn't want to go. She kicked the duvet off and walked across to the big picture window. She looked at the streetlights for a few minutes before she needed to use the bathroom.

It wasn't Logan that was the problem, it was her and the king size bar of chocolate she'd demolished. Logan had been a perfect gentleman. He hadn't done anything wrong. He hadn't held her hands, or her face, or whispered sweet nothings in her ear.

And he most definitely hadn't kissed her.

She turned the light on in the walk-in closet and opened her suitcase. She'd brought a book with her, a horror story that was bound to scare her witless and give her something to really keep her awake. She turned to the first page and settled in for the fright of her life.

Halfway through chapter four she knew she was in trouble. She was bored. The latest blockbuster horror wasn't scary at all. It made her laugh at the worst possible moments and groan at the sheer stupidity of the characters.

She closed her book down and glanced at her alarm clock. It was after midnight. In five hours she needed to be at the café, mixing dough and making sandwiches. Instead of feeling the rush of pride she normally did when she thought about Angel Wings Café, she felt depressed.

She worked long hours and didn't know what she was going to do with the rest of her life. She'd spent the last three years hiding inside more than one pair of faded jeans, telling herself she was better off leaving her modeling days behind.

What she hadn't realized until now, was that no one in Bozeman cared that she'd been a model. They didn't treat her any differently because she had a few extra zeroes on the end of her bank account balance. The only people in the whole town that cared either way were the reporters that had staked out her apartment. And they probably weren't even local.

After wallowing in self-pity for another few minutes, she decided she needed to do something other than look at the ceiling. If she was having a pity party, she could at least follow a Williams' family tradition. Her grandma had always told her that warm milk with a sprinkle of chocolate could cure most heartaches and long nights. Up until she started living with her grandparents, Tess didn't have much in the way of family traditions. So what she had learned she tended to cherish.

She picked up her laptop and tiptoed downstairs. She hadn't heard a peep out of Logan, so she could only guess that he was sound asleep, enjoying whatever dreams were flitting through his head.

Tess closed the kitchen door and scrunched her eyes tight before she flicked the light switch on.

"Do you want to make me blind?"

Tess jumped a mile. Forget her horror novel. Logan Allen had managed to scare the bejeebers out of her without it costing her a cent. She clutched her laptop to her chest and turned around. He was sitting at the kitchen table with his

arm over his eyes and a hot drink steaming in front of him.

Tess dimmed the lights and frowned. "What are you doing here?"

"It's my house."

"Ha ha, very funny." She walked across to the counter and pulled a clean mug out of the dishwasher. "Are you okay?"

"Fine." Logan stared moodily into his cup.

Tess ignored him and heated a cup of milk in the microwave. "Do you have any hot chocolate?"

"Middle shelf in the pantry."

She sprinkled a teaspoon of chocolate on her drink and smiled as she took her first sip.

"You do know it's after midnight, don't you?"

Tess didn't bother looking at Logan. She'd seen plenty when she turned the lights on and she wasn't going back for another peek. Especially when she hadn't been able to get him out of her head or into an imaginary vase.

"I couldn't sleep." Tess tried not to wince at the obvious answer to his question. Of course she couldn't sleep. She wouldn't be in the kitchen if she could sleep. She'd be upstairs, dreaming sweet dreams and looking forward to seeing the morning view of the mountains.

"You're not wearing a lacy bodysuit."

Tess' eyes flew to Logan's face. The heat in her cup of milk was nothing compared to the blush screaming through her body. Logan, on the other hand, didn't look as though he'd said anything out of the ordinary.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You look cute, but spotty pink pajamas don't look anywhere as good as the lacy things you wore on the catwalk."

Tess thought back to the movie clips she'd shown him. "Those lacy things cost more than twenty pairs of pajamas."

"I thought you had a lot of money."

Logan Allen was beginning to annoy her. "I do, but it's nice to have someone to wear sexy lingerie for. That's why I'm wearing pajamas."

Logan's eyebrows shot up. "What if you knew someone who appreciated

lacy lingerie. Would you wear it then?”

Tess didn't know whether it was her grandma's cure-all for everything under the sun, or the way Logan was staring at her. Either way she was getting hot and bothered, not winding down for a good night's sleep.

“The only time you're going to see me in sexy lingerie, Logan Allen, is in your dreams. Good night.”

“Wait...” He jumped up from his chair and it thumped to the ground. “I'm sorry. I couldn't sleep so thought I'd make myself a drink. Ignore what I said. Do you want to have your hot milk with me?”

Tess tossed up between the heartthrob standing in front of her and a horror novel going nowhere. Logan narrowly won. “I'll stay, but only if you keep the conversation away from what I wear to bed.” And that brought her nicely to what Logan was wearing. A light gray T-shirt and pajama bottoms didn't normally make her look twice, but on Logan they looked incredible.

To cover up the hormonal meltdown going on inside her, Tess opened her laptop. Molly had sent her the draft copy of The Bridesmaids Club catalog, but with everything that had happened, she hadn't had a chance to look at it.

Logan picked his chair up and sat down. “I've got wireless wifi. Do you want the password?”

Tess shook her head. “I've already got the file on my laptop. I just need to look at it.” She opened the catalog and smiled. “Look at this...” She moved seats and sat beside Logan.

Molly had chosen one of the photos she'd taken at Connie's wedding as the cover image. She'd cropped the image of the red bridesmaids' dress until all you could see was the dress and the beautiful bouquet. It was simple, stunning and made Tess remember why they'd started The Bridesmaids Club.

She looked at the image, tilting her head left and right to make sure it looked good from every angle. “I wonder how Connie and her family are doing.”

“They've got each other. That's a lot more than some people have. Molly did a great job with the cover.”

“Do you want to see more photos?”

“Are there any lingerie shots?”

He grinned when Tess' gaze shot to his. She rolled her eyes and clicked to the next image. "It's not that kind of catalog."

He gave a dramatic sigh before picking his hot drink up. "Show me the dresses, then."

Tess leaned forward and sniffed the air around his cup. "What are you drinking?"

"Lemon Balm and Chamomile tea."

"What happened to strong black coffee?"

"Keeps me awake."

Given that it was now closer to one o'clock than midnight, Tess could understand why he didn't need the extra caffeine.

Logan pointed at the screen. "Nice photo."

Molly had wanted a casual photo of everyone at the beginning of the catalog. Tess didn't know how she'd done it, but Molly managed to get everyone in the same room, at the same time. It had been the funniest photo session Tess had ever been involved in. Molly had started by setting the timer on the camera and running back for the group photos. When that started going haywire, she'd used a remote shutter button and done the best she could.

And her best was incredible. The black and white image on the laptop showed four women smiling at each other. In that one shot, Molly had captured the essence of their friendship. Love, happiness and a whole lot of fun bounced off the page and straight into Tess' heart.

Logan put his arm around her shoulders and hugged her. "That's family," he said softly.

Tess stared at the image. He was so right that it brought tears to her eyes. She wasn't alone in the world. She might not have any blood relatives still living, but she was blessed with a family that loved her. She smiled and wiped her eyes. "Are you ready for the next page?"

Logan pulled his chair closer and draped his arm around her waist. "I am now. Let's see what other magic Molly has created."

Tess tried to ignore the heat of his arm against her skin. It didn't mean anything. They were friends. She flicked through the catalog and was stunned at

how beautiful each of the shots were. “I didn’t know it would look this good.”

“It’s more than good. You could sell any of those images and make a fortune.”

Tess opened the next page. “Wow, look at that.” Sally was wearing a gold brocade gown that glowed in the light coming through the window. “It’s beautiful.”

“I agree.”

Tess turned her head and looked straight into Logan’s eyes. He wasn’t talking about the photo. She could have leaned sideways, opened her mouth and kissed him senseless. But she didn’t. She had so much going on in her life that it would be a mistake. A big mistake with a big man. A man who looked as though he wouldn’t mind being nibbled on.

She turned back to her laptop and clicked on the last page. Molly had added one of the photos of Tess and Logan to the catalog. They were standing close to each other, so close that their noses were almost touching. Tess had her hand on his chest and her body pressed against his.

The photo was so soft and sexy that Tess could hardly breathe. Especially at one o’clock in the morning, with the man in question sitting beside her, with his arm around her waist.

She cleared her throat. “The end.”

Logan slowly leaned forward and rubbed his nose along the side of her face. His lips barely touched her skin, but she felt the jolt as if a thousand volts of electricity had crashed through her body.

“It doesn’t have to be,” he whispered.

Tess lifted her chin when his lips wandered down her throat. She groaned as his mouth opened, exploring the sensitive skin under her ear. He licked and sucked and nibbled until she was ready to burst into a ball of desperate lust.

Logan almost fell off his chair when she turned and started devouring his mouth. She could feel his heart beating fast beneath her hands, heard a sigh as it worked its way between their lips.

His hands moved in slow, deliberate strokes down her back, moved to her sides then teased her breasts. It was more than Tess could take. Her body was on

fire.

She pushed out of her chair and sat on his lap, straddling his hips and giving them both more pleasure than they knew what to do with.

Logan held her hips. "It's been a long time. I want to know what your intentions are because I'm not going to last much longer."

Tess smiled against his throat. "How long?"

"About thirty seconds," he groaned.

"No...how long since you've slept with someone?" Tess wiggled her hips and Logan groaned some more.

"I can't count very well at the moment." His voice was gravelly rough, and oh so sexy.

Tess nibbled his earlobe. "Try."

"Three years," he panted, "give or take a few months."

Logan lifted her hips and moved her forward. Hot need exploded inside of her as he pushed her down on the one spot guaranteed to make her crazy.

"What about you?"

He moved her again and Tess could barely think.

"Tess?"

"Four," she said on a shaky breath.

"Years?"

She unbuttoned her pajama top and threw it on the floor. "Give or take a few months."

Logan's hands caressed her breasts while his mouth worked their magic on her neck. "Are we officially making love?"

"I hope so." Tess laughed.

"Thank God," he groaned.



A FEW HOURS LATER, Tess was baking in the café's kitchen when Annie threw open the back door and raced over to the sink.

"Sorry I'm late. I had a bowling competition last night. I got five strikes in a



row. *Five*. And that doesn't count the doubles and triples in my other games. Coach thinks I'm his Golden Girl, but you know, I do what I can." She looked across the room and frowned. "What happened to you?"

Tess ran her knife around the edge of the apricot and coconut cake she'd taken out of the oven. "What do you mean?"

"You look terrible. Like you didn't get any sleep last night. It wasn't the reporters was it? I told Coach they'd been hanging around and he said to tell him if they came back. He knows a few muscley men that could show them..."

"Tables are nearly ready. I'll refill two of your sugar bowls and some salt shakers. Hi, Annie." Logan walked across the room, dropped the empty containers on the counter, then headed for the pantry.

While Logan looked for the sugar, Tess kept her head bent over the cake. Annie had a sixth sense when it came to people. She could read someone's body language quicker than a hummingbird could fly. This was one time Tess didn't need Annie's voodoo magic telling her what had happened in the early hours of the morning. More than once.

It would be safe to say that Logan Allen had lived up to all of the fantasies Tess' over-active imagination had created.

The man at the center of everyone's attention looked over his shoulder. "Did I interrupt something?"

Annie's eyes widened. She looked between Tess and Logan, then back again. "You had sex."

Tess' whole body felt as though it was on fire. A blush burned her skin, sending smoke signals to anyone in a fifty-foot radius, telling them she was guilty as charged.

Logan smiled, a slow sexy smile that gave Tess goose bumps. She wasn't going to cuddle up to him, wrap her arms around his middle and tell Annie what an amazing man he was. He knew that, she'd already told him, and then he'd shown her there was always room for improvement.

Logan's brown eyes practically glowed with laughter. "I'm going to be late for work."

Tess glanced at the clock on the wall. "It's only seven-thirty."

“What can I say? I’m an overachiever.”

Unlike Tess, he had no worries about sharing his lips in front of Annie. He leaned over the counter, kissed her like there’d be no tomorrow, and grabbed two chocolate chip cookies off a cooling rack.

After he’d left, Annie sighed. “I could almost forgive you for not saying anything after seeing that kiss. All I can say is that it took you long enough.”

Tess caught herself smiling at nothing in particular. “What do you mean?”

“Logan. You. The man has practically lived here for the past year. For most of that time, you’ve given him the cold shoulder. Now look at you. Kissing over the kitchen counter. It’s enough to make a recently single woman weep.”

“But you were never officially dating Carl.”

Annie held her hand to her forehead in a dramatic pose. “I can dream can’t I?” She reverted back to the normal Annie and sighed. “Carl wasn’t the man for me. There’s got to be someone out there who’ll love me for my food.”

“They’ll love you for a lot more than that, believe me.”

“I hope so.” Annie looked around the room. “Did Logan make all of the toasted sandwich fillings?”

Tess smiled. “I trained him well.”

Annie made a gagging sound. “I’m choking on all of the love hormones in the air.” She took a clean apron off a shelf and tied it around her waist. “Mrs. Donaldson will be in for her usual stack of pancakes in half an hour. I’ll fill the salt shakers Logan left on the counter and get a head start on Mrs. Donaldson. Did Sally tell you about Max, the dog from the shelter?”

Tess’ brain was still concentrating on love hormones. When she finally caught up with what Annie was talking about, she frowned. “Did he eat another pair of her boots?”

“I don’t think so. He nearly ended up on death row after he ate the last pair. She might have found a permanent home for him.”

“Really?”

“Yep.” Annie screwed the lid on the last salt shaker and put it to one side. “Dylan’s got a friend who’s thinking about adopting him. He lives on a ranch somewhere between here and Sally’s parents’ place. He’s gone on vacation, but

when he gets back, he's going to look after Max for a few days and see how it goes."

"I hope Dylan's friend knows what he's doing."

"So do I. Max can be a handful at the best of times." Annie took a mixing bowl out of a drawer and emptied four cups of flour into it. "Now tell me about Logan. I expect he can be more than a handful too."

Tess took a bowl of frosting out of the fridge and scooped it into a piping bag. She ignored the curious smile on Annie's face and started swirling chocolate squiggles over a cake she'd made yesterday.

Annie added buttermilk to the pancake mixture in front of her. "Some people might find your silence endearing. I'm more of a tell-it-like-it-really-is kind of girl."

Tess laughed. "If I told you what Logan is like, you'd never speak to me again. I think he's the one."

Annie stopped stirring the pancake batter. "You mean '*The One*.' The man that makes your heart go fluttery and your brain cells malfunction?"

Tess nodded.

"I think you need to take a leaf out of Dylan's friend's book. Don't leap into anything with Logan until you've seen how it works out."

"I thought you were an incurable romantic with an exceptional bowling point average? "

"Romance is over-rated," Annie said. "Bowling is so much more rewarding, especially when I annihilate my competition."

"You've turned into a bowling monster." Tess laughed at the monsterish growl coming from Annie's throat. "Just think happy thoughts when you serve our customers or they might run a mile."

"Yes, boss," Annie said demurely. "And when I'm feeling particularly growly you can let me loose on the reporters that come in here today. They won't know what's hit them."

"Hopefully another story has made the headlines."

"And if not we've always got Dylan's phone number," Annie said. "Do you know if he's got a girlfriend?"

“And you tell me to be careful. Dylan’s a cross between James Bond and Rambo. He’s scary with a capital S.”

Annie smiled. “Only when he thinks people are watching. I bet you he’s a pussy cat under all of that indignant fur.”

Tess turned the cake around and frowned. “Be careful.”

But Annie wasn’t listening, and Tess couldn’t blame her.



“I HEAR the birds and the bees have been buzzing?”

Logan ignored the grin on Dylan’s face and retied his shoelace. They’d been running for the last twenty minutes, alternating between a fast jog and full throttle power. Dylan called it endurance training, Logan called it torture.

He stood up and stretched his back. “I know why you wanted to do an Ironman Competition, but why did you have to rope me into being your training buddy?”

Dylan’s lips twitched. “You’re the only person I know who’s mad enough to run forty miles a week for fun.”

“How’s the rest of your training going?”

“Biking is okay. Swimming is on hold while the indoor pool’s being resurfaced. I’ll be back to normal next week. You wouldn’t be changing the subject would you?”

Logan took a water bottle out of his backpack. “Of course not. Do you want to keep running or are you more interested in talking?”

Dylan laughed. “Running could be safer.”

Logan finished his drink then followed Dylan. Sypes Canyon was one of the most popular running and hiking tracks in Bozeman. The wooded canyon was on the west side of the Bridger Range. Two miles into their run they’d stopped at the lookout, enjoying incredible views of Bozeman and the surrounding valley. They were up to the next part of their run, the track that would take them further into the canyon.

Logan wiped the sweat out of his eyes and got back into an easy rhythm,

catching up with Dylan in no time at all.

“How long have you been seeing Tess? And before you make some wise ass comment, I don’t mean in the café.”

Logan ignored Dylan. He kept moving, dodging tree roots and stones on the trail. “How come you’re not out of breath?”

“Must be getting fit.”

Logan huffed out a burst of laughter. He’d never known a time when Dylan wasn’t fit. The man was a machine, ready for anything life could throw at him. Well, almost anything. What Dylan had gone through in Afghanistan was horrific. He’d been on the receiving end of some of the cruelest treatment Logan had heard about, and he was still recovering.

Dylan also happened to be the most stubborn person Logan knew. If he didn’t tell Dylan something about Tess, he’d never stop bugging him. “Tess has been staying with me for five days. Mom gets back tomorrow.”

“Damn.”

That’s what Logan thought too. He loved his mom, but he loved Tess more. He was still getting used to it, the loving thing. Tess didn’t know how he felt about her. He didn’t know how to say the words, but he’d been trying damn hard to show her in other ways.

He’d never loved another person quite like he loved Tess. She made him laugh, made him content. Five years ago, if anyone had told him being content was important he would have laughed in their face. But just lately that feeling had become important. He wasn’t the same adrenaline junkie that used to leap off tall buildings and throw themselves under burning bridges. He’d put himself and others in danger and he wouldn’t do it again.

A tree branch snapped back and whacked him in the face. “Hey, watch what you’re doing.”

Dylan laughed. “Don’t run so close. So where’s this thing with Tess going?”

“What is this? Twenty questions?”

“If I could get one straight answer out of you I’d be happy. Twenty is pushing it.”

Logan picked up a stick and poked Dylan in the back. “It’s going nowhere

while I'm running with you."

"It's a Saturday morning tradition. You can't mess with tradition."

"Some of us might have other traditions we want to work on."

Dylan groaned. "That's right. Remind me I'm not getting any."

"Any what?"

Dylan veered to the right of the track and Logan nearly ran straight into a woman walking her dog.

"You want to warn me when there are other people up ahead?"

"You're whining again," Dylan said. "What do you have that I don't?"

"Tess?"

"The man's an A-grade genius." Dylan slowed down. "Have the reporters backed off?"

"Mostly. The police have caught up with the senator."

"About time," Dylan huffed. "What's Tess going to do now?"

"What do you mean?"

Dylan stopped at a bend in the track and grabbed a drink out of his pack. "Is she going to stay in Bozeman?"

Logan didn't understand why she wouldn't. "It's her home."

"For now. She's lived all over the world. Why would she stay when the senator is behind bars?"

"Because she likes it."

"Would you live here if you had a choice?"

Logan looked at the trees and wildflowers surrounding them. It was peaceful. You couldn't hear any traffic, just the buzz of insects and the squawk of a few birds.

He kicked the edge of a stone and flipped it off the track. "When I came to Montana I'd run out of options. What happened in Afghanistan screwed me up. I couldn't think straight and I didn't know what I wanted to do. Now I know."

"And?"

"I'm staying. This place is good for me. Tess is good for me."

Dylan stuck his hands on his hips. "Sounds like you've got everything sorted."

“Not quite. I’ve read the letter from the nurse in Afghanistan.”

“The one Pastor Steven gave you?”

“Yeah. Abiba’s family didn’t die. They’re staying near an orphanage in Nau Deh. Other children made it out of the village alive, too. And that’s not all.”

“You’ve been asking people questions again, haven’t you?”

Logan started jogging. When he’d first arrived in Bozeman, Dylan thought he was crazy. Not in a paranoid, psychotic sense, but in a general what-do-you-think-you’re doing sense. Logan wasn’t convinced Abiba had been a suicide bomber. It was easier to blame the whole tragic morning on her and not look any further. For more than six months after the bombing, he’d tried to find answers to questions no one wanted to talk about. He’d almost given up, but the letter from Afghanistan had changed everything.

He turned around and made sure Dylan was following him. “I contacted one of my buddies from the counseling sessions I went to in Seattle. Jerry saw Abiba just before the explosion. She was carrying a box when she walked into the school. Suicide bombers don’t usually carry boxes.”

“Nice try, but you’re wrong,” Dylan said. “Boxes hide bombs. Suicide bombers carry bombs.”

“But she was a good kid. We were waiting to hear if she’d been granted an American student visa. Why the hell would she get mixed up with the Taliban?”

“You tell me.”

“I don’t know.” Logan stopped running. “She knew the statistics as well as we did. She was an official government interpreter. She had a ninety percent chance of being killed as soon as the Army left. It wouldn’t have mattered how much she helped her village. She had a target on her back and she knew it.”

Dylan started stretching his calf muscles. “Maybe she’d been blackmailed. Who knows what makes some people do things they don’t want to. We’ve been there, we know what it’s like. She didn’t stand a chance once the school was a target.”

“I need answers. I need to be able to tell her family that she was a good person.”

“Even if it’s not the truth?”

Logan shoved his hands on his hips. "It is the truth. She was a good person."

"Looks to me like you've got to find people who can answer your questions."

"At the rate I'm going I'll be an old man before I find out what really happened." Logan took a deep breath and pushed the tragedy of what happened in Afghanistan to one side.

He needed to focus on what he was doing now. As he looked at the trees surrounding him, he thought about Tess and how he felt about her. He thought about the good things she'd brought into his life, and he thought about what he'd miss if she wasn't there.

Dylan stretched his other leg. "Your face gets wrinkly when you're thinking too much. Makes you look twenty years older."

"Smart ass." Logan puffed his chest out. "Age makes no difference. I have it on good authority from Tess that I'm a stud."

Dylan lost his balance and landed on his butt. "That's too much information."

"How's the hunt for the perfect woman going?"

Dylan rolled to his feet. "It'd be fine if I didn't mind touching people. Makes kissing a challenge."

Even though he had a small smile on his face, Logan knew his friend didn't find anything funny in what he'd just said. Dylan's parting gift from Afghanistan had pretty much stuffed his ability to tolerate the slightest touch from anyone. Even around Logan, he was hypersensitive to any form of affection. But Dylan did feel things, maybe deeper than most.

Logan looked closely at his friend. "I take it you're still single then?"

"You could say that."

"You need help finding someone?"

Dylan got a wary look in his eyes. "It depends who you've got in mind."

Logan smiled. "I might know three single women who'd be perfect for you."

"I'm not greedy. One would do." He glanced at Logan, then frowned. "You've got to be kidding? You want to fix me up with someone in The Bridesmaids Club?"



“What’s wrong with that? They’re all hot, single women. The only person that’s off limits is Tess.”

“Forget it,” Dylan muttered. “They’re not my type.”

Logan had a feeling they were, but Dylan was too unsure of himself to try. “Okay, Romeo. What do you say we finish our run then have brunch at the café?”

“You sound like a city slicker. Last one back to the truck pays.” Dylan tore down the track with Logan hot on his heels.

They might not have cured the world’s troubles, but their run had made Logan even more determined to find out what had happened to Abiba. And after he’d given that some thought he’d concentrate on Dylan and Tess.

His friend was lonely and Logan knew from personal experience how soul destroying that could be. And then there was Tess...she took the darkness in Logan’s life away and made him appreciate each day. He loved her and he wasn’t sure what he was going to do about it.



TESS LEANED on the handle of the mop and frowned at the sparkling floors. There must be something wrong with her when she got a kick out of seeing the café looking so good. It didn’t matter how tired she was, she always helped make the floors clean and tidy for the next day.

“You missed a spot.” Logan was leaning against the doorframe, smiling across the room at her.

“I’ve missed a big spot.” Tess left the mop in the bucket and walked toward Logan. She grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him close. “When did you get home?”

“Twenty minutes ago,” he murmured against her lips. “Flight was delayed.”

Tess wrapped her arms around his shoulders and brushed her mouth against his lips. “I’ve missed you.”

“Missed you, too.”

Tess leaned into his body and kissed him long and hard. For the last six days,

Logan had been in Arlington and Las Vegas, searching for information about Abiba and the bomb that had destroyed so many people's lives. He'd visited soldiers that had been with him in Afghanistan, met with explosive experts and people who specialized in terrorism.

She'd missed his early morning visits, the sound of his voice after a day at work. And she missed the feel of his body when he pulled her close, wrapping her in a cocoon of heat. It had been a long six days.

Logan kissed her nose. "How's everything in your world?"

"Annie's got a cold, Sally has gone on camp with her students and Molly's busy working on her new book. Oh, and Senator Gibson is now behind bars awaiting trial."

"An eventful week."

"You could say that. Did you find what you were looking for?"

Logan looked away and for a split second Tess dreaded what he was about to say. Then she told herself not to be silly. He'd gone looking for answers and had come back. Everything he needed was here in Bozeman, including her, if he wanted to be part of her life.

Logan held her hand and took her through to the kitchen. "I talked to someone who works for the Department of Defense. The Army completed their investigation of the bombing of our school eight months ago. Abiba wasn't a suicide bomber."

Logan's eyes filled with tears and Tess gave him a hug. "How did it happen?"

"Someone gave Abiba a box before she came into the school. One of the Sergeants who was helping that day, stopped her before she walked through the door. She said it was part of the shipment that had come from the States. We'd been waiting for more reading books and it was so heavy that she thought it must be them. The Sergeant offered to carry it for her, but she laughed. She wanted to be the first person to see the books. He left to help with the rest of the boxes. By the time he got to the truck the bomb had exploded."

Tess could only imagine what it must have been like after the explosion. Horrific wouldn't come near to describing what the families and soldiers must

have gone through. “Has anyone told Abiba’s family she wasn’t a suicide bomber?”

“I don’t know.”

Tess looked into Logan’s eyes and she knew what was coming next. “You’re going back to Afghanistan, aren’t you?”

Logan nodded. “I need to. I feel responsible for what happened that day. I became friends with Abiba’s family. They’re good people. I need them to know that she didn’t betray them. She thought she was helping.”

Tess tried to think logically, to be supportive and understand why Logan needed to go to Afghanistan. But she couldn’t. “It’s too dangerous. You could get killed.”

Logan cupped her face in his hands. “I have to go. When I was in Afghanistan, I learned something that changed the way I thought about war. We were all there because we were fighting for what matters. I used words and pictures, the soldiers used weapons. Finding out the truth about Abiba matters. Telling her family and making sure the other children are okay matters as well.”

“What if you can’t find her family,” Tess said softly. “What will you do then?”

“I’ve talked to Elizabeth Connor, the nurse who’s working at the Orphanage in Nau Deh. Abiba’s family and some of the other children are still there.” Logan wiped the tears off Tess’ face. “I need to do this. It’s important.”

Tess took a deep, shuddery breath. She shouldn’t have been surprised by what Logan wanted to do. His deep sense of loyalty was part of what she loved about him. But the reality of that loyalty was taking him back to a country that was still at war. He could be killed or injured, or worse still, choose not to come back.

“I’ll be careful.”

“I know you will.” Tess kissed him and held him close. It didn’t matter how careful he was, someone could take his life in the blink of an eye. She didn’t want him risking his life, but she knew he had to go.

Logan’s arms tightened around her.

She kissed the side of his neck and sighed. “When are you leaving?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

And just like that, Tess’ world tilted on its side and she felt as though nothing would ever be the same again.

## CHAPTER 13



A week later, Tess and Sally were busy unpacking bridesmaids' dresses from another big box that had arrived that afternoon.

"Look at this one." Sally held a gorgeous silk gown against her waist.

It was the most amazing aqua blue color Tess had ever seen. "It looks wonderful with your hair and eyes."

"It's a pity no one's getting married, otherwise I'd be tempted to borrow it for the wedding. That's if I get asked to be a bridesmaid again."

Annie's head appeared from under the table. She'd been looking for a button that had popped off a dress. "Tess is closer than any of us to saying, 'I do.' Just don't mention Logan's name. He's not in her good books at the moment."

"Why not?" Sally asked.

Annie wiggled out from under the table. "He hasn't called her for four days," she whispered. "She's worried about him."

Tess pulled another dress out of the box. This one was the same color as the dress in Sally's hands, but a different style. "He's gone back to the village where Abiba and the children and soldiers died." She tried to sound as though it wasn't a big deal, but it was. Logan had been told that the Taliban had left the village. Some people had moved back home, others hadn't.

What worried her the most was what the Taliban might have left behind. She'd read terrible stories on the Internet about crudely constructed bombs they planted in the ground. They'd killed and badly injured a lot of people and Tess didn't want Logan to be one of them.

Sally hung her dress on a hanger and put it on the metal bar Dylan had rigged in Tess' living room. "You're running out of space."

Tess stared at the dresses hanging in color-coordinated groups in the room. If it wasn't her living room, it would have been a pretty sight. The rainbow of silk and satin glistened in the sunlight streaming through the big picture windows. It was theatrical, exotic and so much of everything they'd wanted to do for Connie and other brides.

Over the last few nights when she couldn't sleep, Tess had sat in her living room, surrounded by the dresses. Each one represented someone's hopes and dreams for a wonderful future. A future two people had chosen to live together. She imagined all of the happy vibes, the love and excitement that had gone into making each of their weddings special.

It made her feel proud of what she'd achieved with Sally, Annie, and Molly. It made the absence of Logan easier to bear. But this week, with no phone calls from him, it had been impossible to find comfort in anything.

She'd been grumpy and moody and so worried that she didn't know how she was going to get through the next few days.

Annie gave her a hug. "Logan will be okay."

"I hope so," she sighed.

Sally opened the next box and smiled. "We'll be able to diversify. Look at this..." she pulled a white organza and satin dress out of the box. The skirt puffed out like the kind of dress a princess might wear. With its beaded bodice and short, lacy sleeves, it was super cute and way too big for the space they had available.

"How many brides' dresses does that make?" Sally asked.

Annie looked at the inventory list she had in her hands. "Six. We've got ten veils and eleven tiaras as well."

Sally laid the dress over the back of the sofa. "That's another eight dresses that Molly has to photograph."

Annie lifted a box of letters onto the coffee table. "It's time to make a lot of brides' dreams come true."

"How are we going to do this?" Tess asked.

Sally looked at the envelopes. "We need to give a lot of dresses away. What if we randomly pick one letter each? When Molly arrives, she can choose one too. That will be four potential bridal parties taken care of in one go."

Annie nodded. "Sounds like a good idea to me. What do you think, Tess?"

"Makes sense to me. Who's going first?"

All three girls looked at each other. Sally was the first to step forward. "I'll do it. There's got to be some perks to being the shortest in the room." She looked in the box and moved the envelopes around.

"Don't take all night," Annie groaned. "Just pick one."

Sally frowned at the envelopes. "This is serious business. Some of the people have taken a lot of time to make their letters look pretty. Look at this one." She pulled a big red envelope out of the box. Someone had stuck little pink love hearts on the outside. Glittery jewels had been clumped together like flowers and a picture of a big yellow sun sat behind fluffy white clouds. "Isn't this sweet. I bet you a little girl sent this. Look at the handwriting. She's got to be no more than eight years old."

"And you thought being a school teacher wouldn't be an advantage in The Bridesmaids Club." Annie moved across to the box. "So that's your choice?"

Sally shook her head. "I was just pointing out the pretty envelope." She bit her bottom lip and ran her hand over the other letters.

Annie sat down on the sofa. "This is going to be a long night."

Sally dipped her hand into the box and spent another few minutes looking at the envelopes.

"This is painful to watch," Annie muttered. "Can't you go any faster? I've got bowling practice in half an hour."

Sally rolled her eyes. "Impulsive and impatient. You've got all of the 'i' words covered nicely."

"I'd prefer to be irresistible and awesome."

"Awesome doesn't start with the letter 'i'." Sally kept dipping her hand in the pile of letters.

"You're stalling," Annie said. "And just for the record I know awesome starts with 'a'. I was making sure you hadn't gone to sleep."

Sally laughed and pulled an envelope from the box. "We have a winner."

"Hallelujah," Annie cried. "My turn." She jumped off the sofa and searched through the envelopes.

"Look who's taking their time now." Sally laughed. "You're as bad as I am."

"Not quite," Annie said with a smile. She pulled her hand out of the box and held up the red envelope Sally had discarded. "I've got a good feeling about this one. Your turn, Tess."

Tess put her hand in the box and pulled out the first envelope she touched. "Done."

"Open yours first," Annie said to Tess.

She looked down at the envelope and smiled. "Definitely an adult's handwriting. Practical, down to earth and a perfectionist."

"You can tell all of that from the outside of the envelope?" Sally laughed.

Tess turned the envelope around. "Not one frilly letter in sight. The text is straight up and down. They took their time to write the address in neat straight lines. And then there's the stamp."

Annie leaned forward. "What's wrong with the stamp?"

"It's perfectly lined up with the top and side of the envelope. It's been stuck down as straight as an arrow. Only someone who appreciates perfection could have mailed this envelope."

"So if they're looking for perfection, why do they want secondhand dresses?"

Tess picked up the knife they'd been using to open the boxes. "Let's find out." She slid the blade along the top of the envelope and pulled the letter out. "The dresses aren't for Sophie, the letter writer, they're for her sister. The wedding is in four weeks' time and they don't have a lot of money. There are two bridesmaids, perfectionist sister included."

"What are their names?" Annie asked.

"The bride is Julie. Her sister Sophie and friend Margaret are the bridesmaids."

Sally picked up the knife. "So we can make Julie's wish come true?"

"I don't see why not," Tess said. "I'll call them tomorrow."



Sally took the letter out of her envelope and smiled. "This is from a seventeen-year-old bride-to-be. Her name is Holly. She's getting married in two months' time." Sally kept reading. "She sounds like a nice kid. She's put a photo of her and her sisters in the envelope." She handed Tess the photo.

"Wow. No wonder she needs our help." Tess counted the number of young women. "Which one is Holly?"

Sally re-read the letter. "First on the left."

Annie leaned over Tess' shoulder. "Wow. Who has six sisters nowadays?"

"They even look alike." Tess focused on the smiling faces. Holly's sisters looked as though they were between twenty and thirty years old. "She must be the youngest daughter. Imagine trying to use the bathroom in the morning. It would be a nightmare."

"You can say that again." Sally put the letter back in the envelope. "Are we happy to make Holly's dreams come true?"

"Definitely," Annie said. "Anyone with that many sisters deserves all the help they can get. I wonder if she needs a wedding dress?"

Sally took the photo that Tess held out to her. "I'll ask her."

Tess nodded. "Good idea. We need to make some room in here otherwise I'm not going to be able to move. What about your envelope, Annie. Are you still sticking with the child theory?"

Annie waved the envelope in the air. "Of course. This one is going to be special." Sally passed her the knife and Annie carefully split the envelope open and pulled out a card. "What did I tell you?"

She held the card up so that Tess and Sally could see the picture on the outside. "Who could resist a crayon drawing of a bride?"

"Not you." Tess moved closer to Annie. "What does it say?"

Annie opened the card and frowned. "Dear Bridesmaids Club. Can you please help my daddy find a bride?"

Tess looked down at the card. "It's from someone called Bella."

Annie turned the envelope over. "There's no return address or last name."

"What about the postmark?" Sally asked. "Do they still mention the name of the city the letter was mailed from?"

Annie peered at the front of the envelope. "It looks as though it came from Bozeman. That narrows our search down to forty thousand people."

"Less if we limit the search to girls under the age of ten," Tess added.

"That's if Bella is less than ten years old. She might have handwriting that looks younger than she is." Sally looked at the card again. "Although I don't think she would be older than ten. The picture could have been drawn by any of the girls in my class."

Annie left the card on the coffee table. "Bella can be our mystery person. I'll see if I can limit the search for her somehow."

"I wonder who her daddy is?" Tess walked across to the kitchen. "Does anyone want something hot to drink?"

"Not for me," Annie said as she grabbed her bag off the floor. "I'm late for bowling. I'll see you tomorrow at the café. Bye, Sally."

"Don't forget to bring your bowling ball to school tomorrow. My class is looking forward to your show and tell time."

"I couldn't forget it if I tried. You've reminded me every day for the last week." Annie glanced quickly at Tess, then pulled Sally across to the back door with her. "I'll let you know how Tess is tomorrow," she whispered. "Maybe we could go to the movies if she still hasn't heard from Logan?"

"Okay, but I get to choose the movie. I'm not going to one of your foreign arty ones again."

Annie laughed. "It's a deal. I'll see you at school tomorrow. Two o'clock sharp. Bye."

Tess turned and smiled at Sally. "I've got coffee, hot chocolate, or herbal tea. What would you like?"

"A glass of cold water suits me fine. Now tell me what's really going on between you and Logan?"

Tess got a glass out of the pantry and turned the faucet on. "Not a lot. I can't get hold of him and I don't know when he's coming home."

"How long did he say he'd be gone for?"

Tess left a glass of water in front of Sally. "A couple of weeks. He's going to visit some friends in London before he comes home."

“Sounds like you’ll have a lot to talk about when he gets back.”

“I hope so.” Tess looked around the room. “Molly will be here soon. What if we finish unpacking the boxes, then see which ones we can photograph tonight?”

Sally walked across to the first dress she’d unpacked. “This one will be okay after we use your steamer on it. There’s hardly a wrinkle in the silk.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to put it aside for yourself?” Tess asked.

Sally looked at her with a cheeky grin on her face. “Only if you’re planning on getting married?”

Tess shook her head. “I can’t see that happening. I’ll be lucky if Logan wants to keep living in Bozeman when he gets back. He might decide it’s too quiet here.”

“Or he might decide it’s perfect,” Sally added. “Now go and get your steamer. I’m really looking forward to being photographed in this dress.”

Tess didn’t share Sally’s optimism about Logan. He’d come to Montana to get away from what had happened in Afghanistan. Now that he knew the truth about Abiba, he’d be gone again. Bozeman wasn’t exactly action central and Logan would want more than Montana could offer.

More than she could give.



TESS COULDN’T for the life of her remember why she’d agreed to go to the bowling alley with Annie. The weekend competition was in full swing. People were cheering from every available seat, bowling balls were flying down the lanes and pins were scattering everywhere.

And Tess was sitting at the back of the room feeling miserable.

“Cheer up. You’re supposed to be enjoying your day off work.” Molly sat beside her and passed her a bucket of popcorn. “There’s no better way to drown your sorrows than to munch your way through this lot of yummys.”

Tess started eating the buttery popcorn and decided Molly might have found the cure for a broken heart. “When did you get to be so wise?”

“About a year after my ex-husband left me. Popcorn’s much more forgiving than ice cream. Have you heard from Logan?”

“He texted me from London. At least he’s alive.”

“A text? What was the man thinking?”

Tess had thought the same thing. “All he’d said was that he’d arrived safely and not to worry.”

“Well that’s charming,” Molly huffed. “When is he coming home?”

“I don’t know.” Tess went back to feeling miserable. The last twelve days hadn’t been great. She’d spoken to Logan twice and received a text from him two days ago.

Molly nudged her arm. “It’s Annie’s turn.”

They both watched Annie line up the next bowl, take five steps backward, then stalk toward the beginning of the lane, letting go of her bowling ball as gracefully as a ballerina. The ball shot along the wooden floor and knocked all of the pins down.

Molly jumped in the air. “*Another strike.* She’s on a roll.”

Tess put the bucket of popcorn on the floor and stood up and cheered. Annie was hoping to do well today so she could try out for the State Bowling Team. So far she was doing better than okay. Annie’s coach beamed from the sidelines, high-fiving Annie when she walked back to her seat.

“Are you ladies willing to share that popcorn?”

“Dylan? What are you doing here?” Molly sounded as surprised as Tess to see Dylan standing beside their seats.

“Someone mentioned there was a bowling competition on this weekend. I thought I might come and have a look.”

Molly shuffled along a seat and patted the chair she’d left. “Come and sit between us. You’ll get prime position on the bucket of popcorn.”

Dylan looked gratefully at Molly. He didn’t mind being in a room full of noisy, excited people. But he did mind if anyone got too excited and decided to slap him on the back or hug him.

He grabbed a handful of popcorn and looked down at Annie. “Who’s the guy talking to Annie?”

Tess looked at the seats in front of the lane and smiled. "That's Annie's coach. I thought he'd be on the crusty side of seventy, but he's about our age."

Dylan took his sunglasses off and stared at the intense conversation going on below them.

"His name is Brad Johnson," Molly said. "He's a very nice man. Works at the local High School when he's not representing Montana in bowling competitions around the country."

Dylan frowned and quickly glanced at Molly. "You've met him?"

"Of course," Molly said. "He brought some books into the café for Annie and I just happened to be there. We had a nice chat while Annie finished serving the last customers of the day."

If there'd been any hint of restfulness about Dylan before he'd seen Annie, there wasn't now. He was watching Annie and her coach like a lion stalking its prey.

Tess looked at Molly and they both looked at Dylan.

"Is everything okay?" Molly asked.

"Couldn't be better."

Molly raised her eyebrows and Dylan avoided looking at her.

"She's getting ready for another turn." Tess watched Annie collect her ball from the machine beside her. She lined her shot up and swung her arm back.

"If she gets this she'll win the game," Molly whispered.

Tess crossed her fingers. "She'll get it. She's done so well."

The ball shot down the lane and struck the front pin dead center.

Molly started jumping up and down. "She did it," she squealed. "Annie did it."

Tess yelled and clapped, waving frantically when Annie looked up at them. Coach Johnson tapped Annie on the shoulder then swung her in a circle.

Dylan stayed where he was, watching what was going on with a cool detachment that was almost scary.

Molly picked up her bag. "That's her last game of the day. Annie's in the finals. We'll have to do something special for her tonight."

"We could have pizza at Antonio's?" Tess said. "They don't take too long

and their food is out of this world.”

Dylan held the popcorn bucket while Tess put on her jacket. “Before you go to dinner, I’ve got something I want to show you.”

Molly hunted for her car keys. “You can come to dinner, too. It’ll be fun.”

If Tess read Dylan’s expression correctly, he’d sooner have his teeth pulled out than go with them. Interesting.

“Thanks, but I can’t make it. I heard you’re running out of room for the bridesmaids’ dresses.”

“You can say that again,” Tess said. “If it wasn’t for the temporary rack you made for my living room we’d be stuck by now.”

Dylan glanced down at Annie. Her coach had put her down and the rest of her bowling buddies were congratulating her. “I’ve found a solution to your storage problems.”

“You have?” Tess had been looking for somewhere to store the dresses for the last week. But it had to be the right place. Women would be coming to look at the dresses and try them on. It had to be clean and tidy and not expensive.

“I can show you now if you’ve got the time? Annie’s nearly done.”

Tess looked down at Annie. Dylan was right. She was packing her ball into its bag and saying goodbye to her friends.

“Let me call Sally,” Molly said. “She can meet us there. What’s the address?”

Dylan glanced at Molly. “I talked to her a few hours ago. She’s going to meet us there.”

Something odd was going on. First off, Dylan never looked unsure of anything, and secondly, it seemed weird that he’d turned up out of nowhere at the bowling alley.

“What did you think?” Annie stopped on the step below them, beaming like she’d just won an Olympic gold medal.

“You were awesome.” Molly stepped down and hugged Annie tight. “Well done.”

Tess joined in the fun. “I’ve never seen anyone knock so many pins over in a row. Congratulations.”

Annie looked at Dylan. He hadn't moved from his seat, but Annie didn't seem to mind. She grinned at him as if he'd just told her she was the best bowler in the world. "You can carry my bowling bag, if you like."

Dylan, with all his issues, blushed beet red and shyly picked up the bag.

Molly and Tess looked at each other again. They'd been doing a lot of that today.

"Well..." Molly said with a smile. "I'd say it was time Dylan showed us the mystery storage area he's found for our bridesmaids' dresses."

Annie looked at Dylan. "You have?"

Dylan nodded and walked toward the exit.

"I guess we follow the man holding the pink and silver bowling bag," Tess said. "Does anyone know what's going on here?"

Molly shook her head. "Haven't got a clue, but we're about to find out."

Ten minutes later, two cars were following Dylan's big black beast of a truck around the streets of Bozeman. And only one driver knew where he was going.



TESS LOOKED through the windshield of Molly's car. "This is Logan's house."

"I wonder what we're doing here?" Molly stopped behind Dylan's truck and took her seat belt off. "Sally's already arrived."

Tess got out of the car and headed across to Dylan. "Logan's not here. He's in London."

"He wanted you to look at the space above his triple garage."

"When were you talking to him?"

Dylan started walking toward Logan's front door. "He had the room painted in case you like it and want to move in right away."

Molly looked at the outside of Logan's home. "What a beautiful house. How long has he lived here?"

Dylan put a key in the front door and let them in. "Since he moved here from Seattle. There's a separate entrance to the loft on the outside of the building. If you decide to move your dresses here, you could use that door."

Molly and Annie followed Dylan. Tess hung back and put her hand on Sally's arm. "Do you know what's going on?"

"Haven't got a clue," Sally whispered. "Dylan called me this morning and asked if I could meet you all here this afternoon. He called me fifteen minutes ago and said you were on your way."

"Are you two ladies coming?"

Tess frowned at the sound Dylan's voice coming down the hallway. "I don't know why Logan didn't say anything before he left."

"Maybe because we didn't have so many dresses. Let's go, otherwise Dylan will think we're running off with the family silver."

Tess smiled as they walked into the garage. Her smile fell off her face when she saw the three cars parked inside. "Is that a..."

"Porsche?" Sally said with awe. She walked across to the driver's door of the first car and grinned. "Forget the family silver. This is what I want."

"So does everyone else," Dylan said from the bottom of the stairs. "Logan will give you a ride once he's home. For now you're stuck with me. Upstairs."

Tess grabbed hold of Sally's hand before she decided to try out the driver's seat. "We're right behind you."

Sally sighed. "You're so cruel."

"Only when I need to be. Come on, let's see if the room will work."

They followed Dylan up a narrow staircase and stopped and stared.

"Oh, my," Tess said. The room was perfect. The high chapel ceiling gave the space a lightness and grandeur that wouldn't have been there with a normal height ceiling. Logan had painted the entire room white. It would highlight the bridesmaids' dresses and make choosing colors and designs so much easier.

Sally walked over to a small kitchen area. It was big enough to make a drink, store food in the mini fridge, or wash your hands in the sink. "Where did Molly and Annie go?"

Dylan pointed to a door they hadn't noticed. "Through there."

"There's more?" Tess couldn't believe it. This room was perfect. More space would make it almost too perfect. She opened the door and couldn't hide the astonishment on her face.



Sally nudged her from behind. "Would your six-foot self please move out of the doorway. I can't see around you."

Tess stepped inside the large bedroom and nearly cried. "It's amazing."

Molly and Annie came out of what must have been the bathroom.

"You've got to see this," Annie said. "The apartment's got its own spa bath and triple head shower. If you don't want to use it for The Bridesmaids Club, I'm moving in tomorrow."

"You can't," Molly said. "You've got a bowling tournament to go to. I, on the other hand, am squashed into a small apartment with my sister. This would be perfect for me."

"Sounds like Logan could start his own harem," Dylan said dryly from the doorway.

If Tess didn't know better, she'd swear Dylan had just joked with them. But his face was as deadpan as ever.

"What does everyone think?" Sally asked. "Will this work?"

Everyone yelled 'yes' at the same time.

Tess turned to Dylan. "When can we move in?"

Dylan cleared his throat and looked at his watch. "There's some paperwork you need to sign first. Wait here."

Before Tess could ask him what he was talking about, he disappeared.

"What's all that about?" Annie asked.

"I don't care. I'm going to look at the view from the living room windows." Sally walked out of the bedroom, then came back a couple of minutes later. "Logan owns three expensive cars, a house that screams fall in love with me, and an apartment that I'd die for. I'd marry him tomorrow if he asked me."

"You might have to stand in line," Logan whispered from behind Sally.

Tess' mouth dropped open. "Logan? What are you doing here? When did you..." Logan walked across the room. His mouth landed on Tess' lips and she gave up thinking. It felt so good to have him in her arms that she forgot about everyone else in the room. She held his head, ran her hands over his back. He was alive. He was safe. But later on he'd be in serious trouble for not calling her.

Dylan cleared his throat. "Excuse me? Hello? We're not in Amsterdam now

folks.”

Tess felt Logan’s lips tilt into a smile beneath her mouth.

“Leave them be,” Molly said gently. “It’s a love story in the making. I wish I’d brought my camera.”

Tess buried her head in Logan’s neck. “You smell too nice to be fresh off an international flight. Where have you been?”

Logan wrapped his arms around her waist and held on tight. “I arrived in Bozeman two hours ago.”

“And he didn’t smell too sweet,” Dylan added.

Logan groaned when Tess’ lips nuzzled his neck.

Dylan made a half-strangled sound and pulled them apart. “You can do that later. Tell Logan what you think of the apartment for The Bridesmaids Club.”

“It’s perfect,” Tess said. “Sally wants to marry you, but if that’s not an option, Molly’s prepared to move in without a ring.”

“And what about you?” Logan asked.

The smile fell off Tess’ face. “What do you mean?”

Everyone was so quiet that you could have heard a pin drop.

Logan swallowed. A blush spread along his cheeks and he looked so unsure of himself that Tess nearly cried. “Would you move in here with or without a ring?”

“I don’t...I mean, I don’t know...”

“For Pete’s sake,” Dylan growled. “Ask her properly.”

Logan kept his eyes focused on Tess. He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a small white box.

Molly sighed, Annie started crying and Sally’s legs wobbled so much that she sat on the floor.

Logan took a deep breath. “I love you, Tess. I can’t remember the first time I knew I loved you because it’s been inside of me for so long. I can’t imagine you not being in my life, not being beside me. I want to be part of your life, to share all of the good and not so good times. I want to love you like no other woman has ever been loved.”

Logan got down on one knee and opened the box in his hands. A beautiful

solitaire diamond sparkled from the center of the satin lining. “Tess Williams, would you do me the honor of being my wife?”

Tess gazed into Logan’s eyes. The sincerity, honesty, and love shining back at her nearly broke her heart. She loved him so much that she didn’t know how to say what she felt.

“I love you too, Logan. I love you so much that I...” Tears fell down Tess’ face.

“Tell him you’ll marry him,” Molly whispered as she dabbed her eyes. “Or I will.”

Tess smiled and pulled Logan to his feet. “Yes, I’ll marry you. And yes, I want to spend the rest of my life showing you how much I love you. And yes, we’ll use this apartment for The Bridesmaids Club.” She turned to her friends and smiled. “Does that cover everything?”

“What about a ride in the Porsche?” Sally asked. “Do potential, unasked bridesmaids get to ride with the groom-to-be?”

“Only after the bride-to-be is wearing her ring,” Logan said quietly.

Tess held her hand out and Logan slipped the diamond ring on her finger. “It fits.”

“I had a little help from an Irish Fairy,” Logan said.

Tess turned to Molly. “You knew?”

“I’ve known for a long time. You just needed to look between the layers of what was and what could be.”

“And find what is,” Logan said as he kissed Tess gently. “And what will always be. I love you, Tess.”

“I love you, too.” And she knew she always would.

**THE END**

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*Loving You*  
*The Bridesmaids Club, Book 2*

*If making a bride's dream come true is easy...why is falling in love so hard?*

Annie O'Leary's life ended the day her baby died. But then she moved to

Montana and found a purpose, a reason for waking up each morning. There's something about Bozeman, something about the friends she's made that keeps her feet firmly anchored to the ground and her heart in one piece.

Dylan Bayliss is an Army veteran and security specialist. He's lived his life on the edge and paid a higher price than most. He's about to face his biggest fear and Annie is the only woman he trusts enough to help him.

Annie will do just about anything for anyone, but she doesn't know if she has the courage to do the one thing that could change her life forever.

Keep reading for a preview of *Loving You*, Dylan and Annie's story in The Bridesmaids Club!

## CHAPTER 1



If you asked Annie O’Leary to choose between a red hot male and a quiet night with her friends, she’d take her friends every time. Life had a funny way of working out and sometimes it wasn’t all that funny.

Four years ago, she’d arrived in Bozeman with a heavy heart and no hope of ever being happy again. Now here she was, part-time baker, part-time receptionist, and part-time fairy godmother to brides in distress.

She stared through the window of Angel Wings Café, only half listening to the conversation going on around her. Six weeks ago, Annie and three of her friends had started The Bridesmaids Club. They’d read a newspaper article about a bride who’d had all of her bridesmaids’ dresses stolen from her home. Within a couple of days, they’d gathered all of their old bridesmaids’ dresses together and offered four of them to the bride. With more twists and turns than should have been possible, their first bride and groom had enjoyed a beautiful wedding.

After the publicity their story generated, they’d ended up with over fifty donated bridesmaids’ dresses, a dozen bridal gowns and a box full of letters from other women asking for help.

“Are you listening, Annie?” Tess Williams, the owner of Angel Wings Café, and one of her best friends, nudged her leg under the table.

Molly and Sally, her other two best friends, looked through the window to see what she was staring at.

“It’s Dylan.” Sally sighed. “Does he even know how drop dead gorgeous he is?”

The first time Annie had met Dylan Bayliss she hadn't known what to make of him. He rarely smiled, almost never touched another person, and had a way of filling up a room without knowing it. She had to admit that six and a half feet of pure male testosterone would have an impact on any room. Add in wide shoulders, a chiseled jaw, and sapphire blue eyes, and you had the makings of a man who would turn a woman's head every time.

"Can we get back to what we need to sort out? Annie and I have to get the next tray of meals ready for the Lighthouse Café." Tess stuck her head around the edge of the window and smiled at Dylan. "Okay. We've all had our hormone fix for the day. Back to work."

"It's all right for you," Sally moaned. "Your fiancé has been keeping your toes warm at night. We're not all fortunate enough to have a man like Logan Allen in our lives."

"And some of us don't want one," Molly stated. Her Irish accent softened the words, gave them a lyrical quality that covered the hurt behind them. Molly's marriage had lasted a grand total of six months. The charming, romantic man she'd married had shared his charm with someone else, and Molly was still recovering.

Sally gave Molly a quick hug. "Where are we up to?" she asked.

Tess looked at her notes. "Julie is arriving with her two bridesmaids tomorrow. She's looked in the catalog and I've put the dresses she liked to one side."

When they'd first started The Bridesmaids Club, the biggest challenge they could see was having some way of showing the bridesmaids what the dresses looked like. So Molly, a professional photographer, had designed a catalog of the dresses they'd been given. So far it was working better than they'd planned.

"I talked to my bride," Sally said. "Holly is coming to see us next Saturday with her sisters."

Annie stopped sipping her milkshake. "All six of them?"

"Yep. I just hope they don't bring any extra people." Sally leaned her elbows on the table and glanced out of the window again. "What do you think Dylan's perfect woman would be like?"



Annie had been wondering the same thing, which scared the living daylights out of her. Unless you counted a disastrous ten pin bowling incident, she hadn't dated anyone in over six years. She hadn't been interested in seeing anyone or getting to know another man. Until she'd met Dylan. He intrigued her, left her wondering what was behind the super-cool exterior he showed the world.

Dylan didn't seem to date much either, but that could have been because of his touching issue. He'd told Tess he was working on it, whatever that meant.

Annie grinned at the serious expression on Sally's face. "I'd say Dylan's perfect woman would be a five-foot-eight brunette. She'd have sparkling green eyes and a fondness for animals."

Sally blushed. "I'm the worst person for Dylan. He's too..."

"Perfect?" Molly said.

"Complicated," Annie added.

All four heads around the table nodded.

Dylan must have sensed the female interest on the other side of the window. He turned and looked at each of them in turn. Annie scrunched down in her seat, too embarrassed to smile back like everyone else.

He held his wrist out and tapped his watch. Annie knew they were running late, but some things were worth a few extra minutes. Especially if they involved girly talk about the man in front of them.

"Is there anything else we've forgotten?" Tess asked.

Everyone shook their heads.

"Okay, so I guess that's the end of our meeting." Tess flipped her notebook closed. "We only went off topic four times. It's got to be a record for us."

Molly laughed as they stood up. "We'll have to come more prepared next time."

Dylan must have realized their meeting was over. He walked into the café and met Tess at the front counter. "Are you ready for me to load the meals into my truck?"

His Texan drawl sent goose bumps down Annie's spine. Not that she'd let Dylan know that. Since the first time she'd met him, he'd carefully avoided her. They'd barely spoken, never touched, except when he'd tripped over her feet in

the middle of a chapel.

“I’ve got half of the meals ready to go,” Tess said as she disappeared behind the kitchen door.

Annie walked toward the counter. They’d already put twenty meals in aluminum trays and packed them in boxes. The people that ate at the Lighthouse Café appreciated the food they made. For some of them, it was the only meal they could count on each day.

Dylan cleared his throat as Annie opened the kitchen door. “Do you want to ride with me?”

She frowned, then looked over her shoulder. No one was there. “You’re talking to me?”

Dylan shrugged. “I was just wondering.”

“I can’t...leave, I mean. I’m looking after Angel Wings Café. And then I’ve got bowling practice.”

Dylan nodded. “Maybe next time, then.”

Annie hurried into the kitchen and called herself every fool under the sun. She’d gotten tongue-tied around Dylan. He was a man. A perfectly normal, over-the-top gorgeous male, but a man nonetheless. And she was a confident, single woman, whose excuse for not going with him had been bowling practice.

And that told her, beyond any reasonable doubt, that there was something seriously wrong with her priorities.



DYLAN PARKED outside Pastor Steven’s church and tried to figure out what he’d done wrong. Annie had looked as though she’d rather throw up than come with him to deliver the meals. He’d gone out on a limb, pushed his comfort zone and come up with zilch.

“You going to sit there all day or help unload the boxes?” Logan stood on the sidewalk, hands on hips and looking too annoyed for a Saturday afternoon.

Ever since Dylan moved to Bozeman, he’d been friends with Logan. They’d met eight months ago at a group session Pastor Steven organized for people with

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. His first meeting had been a strange combination of sound advice and good natured ribbing. The guys he'd met kept coming back and so did he.

Dylan pushed open his door. "What are you? The food police?"

"You wouldn't say that if you knew what I'd been through today. The Bozeman Police Department has two officers in the World Police and Fire Games. I've spent the last four hours writing a story about their training routine."

Apart from being the closest friend Dylan had, Logan was a reporter for the Bozeman Chronicle. Before that he'd been a war correspondent, syndicated to more newspapers than Dylan had heard about.

He opened the back door of his truck and passed Logan a box. "Take these inside. Tess said Pastor Steven called. They're going to have a full house tonight."

"What else did my fiancée say?"

"You'd better ask her that. She seemed a bit put out that you were working today."

"It's better than unpacking more bridesmaids' dresses." Logan used his elbow to close the passenger door. "It's like a disease. They find homes for half a dozen dresses and another ten arrive."

Dylan didn't bother locking his truck. They'd be back soon enough. If anyone was desperate enough to help themselves to the rest of the meals, they must need the food.

Logan followed a red brick path around the side of the church. "What have you been doing today?"

"I picked up a rare collection of Faberge eggs and delivered them to an auction house in Denver."

"Riveting stuff."

Dylan choked back a laugh. "It is when they're worth millions. They were pretty enough, but you've got to wonder about people's sanity. I wouldn't pay what the catalog said they're worth."

Logan used his hip to push open the back door. "That's why you weren't

invited to the auction.”

Pastor Steven looked up from the kitchen counter, his wide smile welcoming them into the room. “I could smell Tess and Annie’s cooking from a mile away. Roast beef?”

Dylan left his box beside Pastor Steven. “You guessed right. Annie packed some dessert in a separate box. She said to tell you that the cheesecakes should go straight in the fridge.”

Logan started emptying the foil-wrapped plates out of his box. “How many are you expecting tonight?” he asked Pastor Steven.

“We’ve already got twenty people in the dining room. I wouldn’t be surprised if another twenty arrive in the next half hour.”

A young boy with bright red hair and neon freckles walked through the kitchen door.

He stopped and frowned when he saw Dylan. “You haven’t been here for ages. Dad thought you must have gone somewhere else to work.”

Dylan held his hand out and the boy raced across the room. They did the same secret handshake they’d done for the last six months. “I’m not going anywhere, squirt. Do you want to help me set the tables?”

“Dad’s already got me on knife and fork duty,” the little boy said.

“You’ll need spoons, too. Annie and Tess made cheesecake.” Dylan watched a smile shoot across Franky’s face.

“You should come back for dinner more often.”

Before Dylan said another word, Franky grabbed a handful of utensils and went back into the dining room.

“How’s Franky’s dad doing?” Dylan asked.

“He got a job pumping gas at the station on Gallatin Road. It’s helping with a few of their bills, but they’ve got a way to go.”

“Did Franky get the Little League uniform?”

Pastor Steven smiled. “I gave it to him last week. He was so excited that he didn’t know what to do with himself. It was thoughtful of you to do that for him.”

Dylan shrugged his shoulders. “He shouldn’t have to pull out of baseball

because his dad can't afford a new uniform."

Logan put another box on the counter and glanced at Dylan. "There's a disturbing pattern emerging here. You're talking and I'm doing all the work."

"It's called working smarter not harder," Dylan said. "Besides, writing a story about sweaty police officers isn't exactly body breaking work."

Logan emptied the box and put some of the dinners in the large commercial oven. "Beats hauling eggs to Denver."

Pastor Steven looked around the kitchen. "We'll need the rest of the boxes brought inside. Dinner should be ready in ten minutes."

Logan held the door open for Dylan. "After you."

"You trying to impress me with your manners?"

"I'm making sure you go to your truck and don't disappear into the dining room. Franky won't let you out of his sight when you get in there." Logan shut the door and walked down the path. "You want to tell me why you were staring into space when you arrived?"

"Not particularly."

Logan grinned. "The strong silent type doesn't impress me. You'll have to leave that for the ladies."

Dylan felt a blush work its way up his neck and kept walking.

"Wait a minute. Are you telling me a woman had you contemplating the meaning of life?"

He opened the canopy on the back of his truck. "We probably should have taken the cheesecakes out first. If they've melted everywhere, I'll tell Tess it was your fault."

Logan didn't seem worried about the cheesecake issue. He seemed more worried about Dylan, and that was something Dylan didn't need.

"Who is she?"

He put the biggest box in Logan's arms. "No one you know."

"You wanna bet? I know most people in Bozeman, or someone who knows someone else. Tell me a name and I'll let you know if their dossier has passed across my desk at the Chronicle."

"You sound like James Bond," he grumbled.

“Not going to work. I won’t be distracted by frivolous complements. Who is she?”

He was saved from answering by the toot of a car horn.

Logan gave him an evil glare. “You’ve bought yourself time.”

Dylan would take whatever was on offer.

Tess, Logan’s fiancée, parked her car and walked toward them. “Have you taken the cheesecakes inside?” She looked at the box in Logan’s hands. “I hope that’s not what I think it is?”

Dylan watched Logan plaster a besotted smile on his face. It usually worked its magic on Tess, but it wasn’t working today.

She looked inside the canopy and tutted. “The only thing in here are the cheesecakes. What were you thinking?”

“About how good they’re going to taste,” Dylan said as he took another box out of his truck.

Tess lifted the last box into her arms and followed Logan along the path. “Lock your truck, Dylan. There are lots of people waiting for their dinner.”

He did as he was told. It didn’t pay to mess with his best friend’s fiancée, especially when that same woman was Annie’s boss and friend.

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[Montana Brides Boxed Set: Books 4-6](#)

**The Bridesmaids Club:**

[Book 1: All of Me](#) (Tess and Logan)

[Book 2: Loving You](#) (Annie and Dylan)

[Book 3: Head Over Heels](#) (Sally and Todd)

[Book 4: Sweet on You](#) (Molly and Jacob)

**Emerald Lake Billionaires:**

[Book 1: Sealed with a Kiss](#) (Rachel and John)

[Book 2: Playing for Keeps](#) (Sophie and Ryan)

[Book 3: Crazy Love](#) (Holly and Daniel)

[Book 4: One And Only](#) (Elizabeth and Blake)

**The Protectors:**

[Book 1: Safe Haven](#) (Hayley and Tank)

[Book 2: Just Breathe](#) (Kelly and Tanner)

[Book 3: Always](#) (Mallory and Grant)

[Book 4: The Promise](#) (Ashley and Matthew)



Book 5: Coming Home (Mia and Stan)

Book 6: The Gift (Hannah and Brett)

Book 7: The Wish (Claire and Jason)

The Protectors Boxed Set: Books 1-3

**Sapphire Bay:**

Book 1: Falling For You (Natalie and Gabe)

Book 2: Once In A Lifetime (Sam and Caleb)

Book 3: A Christmas Wish (Megan and William)

Book 4: Before Today (Brooke and Levi)

Book 5: The Sweetest Thing (Cassie and Noah)

## BONUS RECIPE - BLUEBERRY BUTTERMILK PANCAKES



*Enjoy Tess' special pancakes from Angel*

*Wings Cafe!*

*(From Martha Stewart Living, March 2013)*

### ***Ingredients***

2 cups all-purpose flour  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 teaspoon coarse salt  
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1 tablespoon sugar  
1 cup fresh or thawed frozen blueberries  
2 cups buttermilk  
2 large eggs  
Grated zest of 1 lemon  
Vegetable oil, for cooking  
Unsalted butter and pure maple syrup for serving

### **DIRECTIONS**

Whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and sugar in a large bowl until thoroughly combined.

Toss blueberries with 2 tablespoons flour mixture in a medium bowl and set aside.

Make a well in the center of remaining flour mixture and add buttermilk, eggs, and lemon zest. Whisk together, gradually incorporating flour mixture, mixing just until combined; some small lumps should remain in the batter.

Fold in blueberries. Let batter stand 10 minutes.

Preheat a double-burner griddle or a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat.

Brush griddle with oil and ladle 1/3 cup batter per pancake onto griddle. When small bubbles appear across surface of pancakes and the edges lift from griddle, flip and continue cooking until pancakes are golden brown on the second side and are springy to the touch, about 3 minutes total. This recipe makes 12 pancakes.

Serve with butter and maple syrup. Enjoy!