



Lorenzo's  
CHRISTMAS BABY

MODERN™



KATE HEWITT

Kate Hewitt

**Lorenzo's Christmas Baby**

«HarperCollins»

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‘This night, Emma. That’s all it can ever be.’But Lorenzo Cavelli lied. One blissful night in his bed changed Emma Leighton’s life for ever. By dawn she knew two things: Lorenzo would spend the rest of his life behind bars, and he would never see the baby their union had made. Two years later Lorenzo’s name is cleared – and he will get his life back...starting with Emma. It was deception that imprisoned this self-made Sicilian, so what will he do when he discovers Emma has a secret he might never be able to forgive...?One Night With ConsequencesWhen one night... leads to pregnancy!Discover more at [www.millsandboon.co.uk/katehewitt](http://www.millsandboon.co.uk/katehewitt)

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## **‘What are you hiding from me, Emma?’**

‘Nothing ...’ But it sounded feeble.

Lorenzo took another step towards her. ‘Tell me the truth. You’re hiding something. I don’t know what it could be, but—’

‘What do you *think* I’m hiding from you?’ She cut him off scornfully. She nodded towards the stairs. ‘A *baby*?’

The words hung there, seeming to echo through the sudden silence of the room. Lorenzo stared at her, saw how bloodless her lips were as they parted soundlessly. The thought hadn’t fully formed in his mind until she’d said the words. He’d sensed she was hiding something, had felt her panic and fear, had heard a baby cry ... And yet it hadn’t all come together for him.

But it did now, crystallising with shocking clarity, and without a word for her he turned from the room and bounded up the stairs.

‘Lorenzo—’ She hurried after him, one arm flung towards him in desperate supplication. ‘Lorenzo, please, don’t—’

He could hear the child crying, the voice pitiful and plaintive.

‘Mama. Mama.’

He threw open the door and came to a complete and stunned halt as he saw the baby standing in her cot, chubby fists gripping the rail, cherubic face screwed up and wet with tears.

And Lorenzo knew. He would have known just by looking at the child, with her ink-dark hair and large grey eyes, the cleft in her chin. He turned to Emma, who was gazing at him with undisguised panic.

‘When,’ he asked in a low, deadly voice, ‘were you going to tell me about my child?’

## *One Night With Consequences*

*When one night ... leads to pregnancy!*

When succumbing to a night of unbridled desire it's impossible to think past the morning after!

But, with the sheets barely settled, that little blue line appears on the pregnancy test and it doesn't take long to realise that one night of white-hot passion has turned into a lifetime of consequences!

Only one question remains:

How do you tell a man you've just met that you're about to share more than just his bed?

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Lorenzo's

Christmas Baby

Kate Hewitt



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After spending three years as a die-hard New Yorker, **KATE HEWITT** now lives in a small village in the English Lake District with her husband, their five children and a golden retriever. In addition to writing intensely emotional stories she loves reading, baking, and playing chess with her son—she has yet to win against him, but she continues to try.

Learn more about Kate at [www.kate-hewitt.com](http://www.kate-hewitt.com).

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[CHAPTER ONE](#)

THE SOUND OF the car door slamming echoed through the still night. Emma Leighton looked up from the book she'd been reading in surprise; as housekeeper of Lorenzo Cavelli's isolated retreat in the mountains of Sicily, she hadn't been expecting anyone. Lorenzo was in Rome on business, and no one came to the villa perched high above Sicily's dusty hill towns and villages. Her employer liked his privacy.

She heard brisk footsteps on the stone path that led to the villa's front door, an enormous thing of solid oak banded with iron. She tensed, waiting for a knock; the villa had an elaborate security system with a numbered code that was only known by her and Lorenzo, and the door was locked, as Lorenzo always insisted.

She held her breath as she heard the creak of the door opening and then the beep of buttons being pressed, followed by a longer beeping indicating the security system had been deactivated. As her heart did a queasy little flip, Emma tossed her book aside and rose from her chair. Lorenzo never came back early or unexpectedly. He always texted her, to make sure she had everything ready for his arrival: his bed made with freshly ironed sheets, the fridge stocked, the pool heated. But if it *wasn't* him...who was it?

She heard footsteps coming closer, a heavy, deliberate tread, and then a figure, tall and rangy, appeared in the doorway.

*'Lorenzo—'* Emma pressed one hand to her chest as she let out a shaky laugh of relief. *'You scared me. I wasn't expecting you.'*

*'I wasn't expecting to come here.'* He stepped into the spacious sitting room of the villa, and as the lamplight washed over his face Emma sucked in a shocked breath. Lorenzo's skin looked grey, and there were deep shadows under his eyes. His hair was ruffled, as if he'd driven his hand through the ink-dark strands.

*'Are you—are you all right?'*

His mouth twisted in a grim smile. *'Why, do I not look all right?'*

*'No, not really.'* She tried to lighten her words with a smile, but she really was alarmed. In the nine months she'd been Lorenzo's housekeeper, she'd never seen him look like this, not just tired or haggard, but as if the life force that was so much a part of who he was, that restless, rangy energy and charisma, had drained away.

*'Are you ill?'* she asked. *'I can get you something...'*

*'No. Not ill.'* He let out a hollow laugh. *'But clearly I must look terrible.'*

*'Well, as a matter of fact, yes, you do.'*

*'Thank you for your honesty.'*

*'Sorry—'*

‘Don’t be. I can’t bear lies.’ A sudden, savage note had entered his voice, making Emma blink. Lorenzo crossed the room to the liquor cabinet in the corner. ‘I need a drink.’

She watched as he poured himself a large measure of whisky and then tossed it back in one burning swallow. His back was to her, the silk of his suit jacket straining against his shoulders and sinewy back. He was an attractive man, a beautiful man even, with his blue-black hair and piercing grey eyes, his tall, powerful body always encased in three-thousand-euro suits.

Emma had admired his form the way you admired Michelangelo’s *David*, as a work of art. She had decided when she’d taken this job that she wasn’t going to make the mistake of developing some schoolgirl crush on her boss. Lorenzo Cavelli was out of her league. Way, way out of her league. And, if the tabloids were true, he had a different woman on his arm and in his bed every week.

‘I wasn’t expecting you until the end of the month,’ she said.

‘I had a change of plans.’ He took out the stopper in the crystal decanter of whisky and poured himself another healthy measure. ‘Obviously.’

She didn’t press the point, because, while they’d developed a fairly amicable working relationship over the last nine months, he was still her boss. She couldn’t actually say she *knew* Lorenzo Cavelli. Since she’d taken the job as housekeeper he’d come to the villa only three times, never more than for a couple of days. He mostly lived in Rome, where he kept an apartment, or travelled for work as CEO of Cavelli Enterprises.

‘Very well,’ she finally said. ‘Will you be staying long?’

He drained his glass for a second time. ‘Probably not.’

‘Well, the night at least,’ she answered briskly. She didn’t know what was going on with Lorenzo, whether it was a business deal gone bust or a love affair gone bad, or something else entirely, but she could still do her job. ‘The sheets on your bed are clean. I’ll go switch the heating on for the pool.’

‘Don’t bother,’ Lorenzo answered. He put his empty glass on the table with a clink. ‘There’s no need.’

‘It’s no trouble,’ Emma protested, and Lorenzo shrugged, his back to her.

‘Fine. Maybe I’ll have one last swim.’

His words replayed through her mind as she left him and walked through the spacious, silent rooms of the villa to the back door that led to a brick terrace overlooking the mountains, a teardrop-shaped pool as its impressive centrepiece. *One last swim*. Was he planning on leaving, on selling the villa?

Emma gazed out at the Nebrodi mountains and shivered slightly, for the air still held a pine-scented chill.

All was quiet save for the rustling of the wind high up in the trees. Lorenzo’s villa was remote, miles from the nearest market town, Troina; in the daylight Emma could see its terracotta-tiled houses and shops nestled in the valley below. She went there several times a week to shop and socialise; she had a couple of friends amidst the Sicilian shopkeepers and matrons.

If Lorenzo was planning on selling the villa, she’d miss living here. She never stayed anywhere long, and she would have probably started feeling restless in a few months anyway, but... She glanced once more at the night-cloaked hills and valleys, the mellow stone of the villa perched on its hill gleaming in the moonlight. She liked living here. It was peaceful, with plenty of subjects to photograph. She’d be sad to leave, if it came to that.

But maybe Lorenzo just meant a swim before he left for Rome again. She switched on the heating and then turned to go inside; as she turned a shadowy form loomed up in front of her and her breath came out in a short gasp. She must have swayed or stumbled a little, for Lorenzo put his hands on her shoulders to steady her.

They stood like that for a moment in the doorway, his strong hands curling around her shoulders so she could feel the warmth of his palms through the thin cotton of her T-shirt, and how her heart pounded beneath it. She didn’t think he’d ever actually touched her before.

She moved one way, and he moved another, so it was almost as if they were engaged in a struggle or an awkward dance. Then Lorenzo dropped his hands from her shoulders and stepped back.

*'Scusi.'*

'My fault,' she murmured, her heart still thudding, and moved quickly through the kitchen to flick on the lights. Bathed in a bright electric glow, things felt more normal, even if she could still feel the imprint of his hands on her shoulders, so warm and strong. 'So.' She turned to him with a quick smile, a brisk look. 'Have you eaten? I can make you something.'

He looked as if he was about to refuse, and then he shrugged. 'Why not? I'll go change while you cook.'

'What would you like to eat?'

Another shrug as he turned away. 'Whatever you make will be fine.'

She watched him disappear down the hallway, her lips pursed in an uncertain frown. She'd never seen Lorenzo like this. Not that they'd actually had that much conversation, beyond discussing pool maintenance and house repairs. But even when talking about such mundane matters, Lorenzo Cavelli had exuded a compelling charisma and energy, a life force. He was a man who, when entering a room, made everyone turn and take notice. Men tried to suppress their envy, and women undressed him with their eyes. Emma counted herself as wilfully immune to the man's magnetic vitality, but its absence now made her uneasy.

Her frown deepening, Emma opened the fridge and stared at the few items inside. She always did a big shop right before Lorenzo arrived; she bought all the ingredients for gourmet meals for one and made them for him to eat alone, usually out on the terrace overlooking the mountains.

Now she glanced askance at the half-dozen eggs, a few slices of pancetta and the end of a wedge of cheese that comprised the entire contents of the fridge. With a sigh she took it all out. A bacon and cheese omelette it was.

She was just sliding it onto a plate when Lorenzo came downstairs, dressed now in faded jeans and a grey T-shirt, his hair damp and spiky from a shower. She'd seen him casually dressed before, many times, but for some reason now, perhaps because of how different Lorenzo seemed, her heart gave a weird little flip and she felt awareness shiver over her skin. Clearly he still possessed some of that charisma and vitality, for she felt the force of it now.

'Sorry it's just an omelette,' she said. 'I'll do a big shop tomorrow.'

'That won't be necessary.'

'But—'

'Aren't you going to join me?' He arched an eyebrow, nodding towards the single plate she'd laid out, a challenge simmering in his eyes.

In the handful of times he'd been at the villa, Lorenzo had never asked her to eat with him. The two of them alone on the terrace would have been awkward, intimate, and Emma happily ate leftovers in the kitchen, one of her photography books propped against the salt and pepper shakers.

'Um...I've already eaten,' she said after a second's pause. It had to be past ten o'clock at night.

'Come have a glass of wine. I don't feel like being alone.'

Was that a command? Emma shrugged her assent; she wouldn't mind a glass of wine, and perhaps Lorenzo would tell her what was going on.

'Okay,' she said, and she fetched two glasses while Lorenzo selected a bottle of red wine from the rack above the sink.

While Lorenzo took his plate of eggs out to the terrace, Emma retrieved her sweater from the sitting room, slipping her arms through the sleeves as she stepped outside. The moon was high and full above the pine-blanketed hills, the Nebrodi range's highest peak, Mount Soro, piercing the night sky. Lorenzo was already seated at a table overlooking the pool, the water glimmering in the moonlight, but he rose as Emma came forward with the two glasses and proffered the bottle of wine. She nodded her assent and sat down while he poured.

'This is very civilised,' she said as she accepted the glass.

'Yes, isn't it?' Lorenzo answered. 'Well, let's enjoy it while we can.' He raised his glass in a toast and Emma lifted hers as well before taking a sip. The wine was rich and velvety-smooth, clearly expensive, but she put her glass down after one sip and gave her boss as direct a look as she could.

'You're sure everything is all right?'

'As right as it can be,' Lorenzo answered, taking a sip of wine.

'What does that mean?'

He set his glass down and stretched his legs out in front of him. 'Exactly that. But I don't want to talk about myself, not tonight. For a few hours I'd just like to forget.'

*Forget what?* Emma wondered, but clearly Lorenzo didn't want her to ask.

'You've been my housekeeper for nearly a year and I don't really know the first thing about you,' he continued, and Emma stared at him in surprise.

'You want to talk about *me*?'

'Why not?'

'Because...well, because you've never expressed an interest in knowing anything about me before. And actually, I'm quite a boring person.'

He smiled, his teeth gleaming in the darkness. 'Let me be the judge of that.'

Emma shook her head slowly. This evening was becoming almost surreal. 'What do you want to know?'

'Where did you grow up?'

An innocuous enough question, she supposed. 'Everywhere, really. I was a diplomat's kid.'

'I think I remember you mentioning that in your interview.' He'd interviewed her in Rome, where she'd been working as a chambermaid in a hotel, just one in a string of jobs she'd had as she moved from city to city, exploring the world and taking photographs.

'And you haven't minded being stuck up here in the hills of Sicily?' he asked, his wine glass raised to his lips. 'All by yourself?'

She shrugged. 'I'm used to being on my own.' And she preferred it that way. No ties, no obligations, no disappointments. The occasional bout of loneliness was not too high a price to pay for that kind of freedom.

'Even so.'

'You obviously like it,' she pointed out. 'Since you own this place.'

'Yes, but I travel and spend time in cities. I'm not up here all the time.'

'Well, as I said, I like it.' For now, anyway. She never remained anywhere for too long, always preferring to move on, to find new experiences, and from the sceptical look on Lorenzo's face he seemed to guess a bit of her natural wanderlust.

'Have you met anyone up here?' he asked. 'Made friends?'

'A few people down in Troina.'

'That's something, I suppose. What do you do for fun up here?'

Emma shrugged. 'Walk. Swim. Read. I'm easily entertained, fortunately.'

'Yes.' He gazed out at the mountains and Emma had the sense he was thinking about something else, something painful.

'But it's not the kind of job you'd stay in for ever,' he said at last.

'Are you trying to get rid of me?' she asked lightly. She'd meant it as a joke but Lorenzo took the question seriously.

'No, definitely not. But if something were to happen...' He trailed off, his gaze still on the hills, and Emma set down her wine glass.

'Lorenzo, are you thinking of selling this place?'

'Not selling it, no.'

‘But something,’ she pressed. ‘What’s going on, really? Do I need to start looking for another job?’

He let out a long, low breath and raked his hands through his hair. ‘Whatever happens, I’ll make sure to give you a good reference.’

‘What are you talking about, whatever happens?’ Emma shook her head. ‘I don’t understand you.’

‘I know, and I don’t want to explain it now. It will all become clear soon enough.’ He nodded towards the pool. ‘How about a swim?’

‘A *swim*?’ Emma glanced at the pool, the water glimmering in the moonlight. ‘It’s a bit cold for me.’

‘Not for me,’ he said, and she watched in amazement as he stripped off his shirt and jeans and, clad only in his boxer shorts, dived into the pool.

The splash echoed through the still air and Emma watched, shivering slightly, as Lorenzo swam the length of the pool before surfacing and slicking back the wet hair from his face.

‘Come in,’ he called. ‘The water’s lovely.’

Emma shook her head. ‘I only just turned the heating on. It’s got to be freezing.’

‘Even so.’ He arched an eyebrow, his mouth curling in a smile that was pure temptation. Emma’s gaze was inexorably drawn to his bare chest, all lean, rippling muscle, his bronzed skin beaded with water. ‘Dare you.’

Emma hadn’t thought this evening could get any more surreal. But swimming with her boss in a freezing pool?

‘Come on, Emma.’ He held out his hand. ‘Just jump in.’ Heat simmered in his eyes and she felt an answering stab of lust through her middle.

This was so foolish, so dangerous, and yet...the sight of Lorenzo in the pool, nearly naked with moonlight streaming over his body and droplets of water twinkling like diamonds on his bronzed skin, was hard to resist. And already this evening felt separate from reality, a time apart.

‘Chicken?’ he taunted, his eyes and teeth glinting in the darkness, and Emma laughed.

‘You really want to get me in that pool.’

‘I want someone to swim with.’

Excitement licked through her veins. She didn’t think Lorenzo was coming on to her; he never had before. And yet...

‘Fine,’ she said, and, shrugging off her sweater, she dived fully clothed into the deep end.

She surfaced, sucking in a hard breath, because the water really was cold. ‘And now I’m getting out,’ she told him as she trod water. ‘It’s as freezing as I thought it would be.’

‘I didn’t think you’d do it,’ he said, laughter threading his voice, and Emma was glad that she’d managed to distract him from whatever had been bothering him, even if she got hypothermia in the process.

‘You thought wrong,’ she said, and swam towards the edge of the pool. With her wet clothes weighing her down it was hard to haul herself up on the pool’s edge.

And then she felt Lorenzo behind her, his hands on her shoulders, the strength and heat of him just inches from her back. She sucked in a shocked breath as he slid his hands to her waist and helped her up.

She flopped inelegantly on the side of the pool and then scrambled to her knees, amazed at how much that one little touch had affected her. She shivered, for with her soaked clothes the night air now felt icy.

‘Here.’ Lorenzo hauled himself up and went to the heated cupboard for several towels. ‘Wrap yourself up.’

'I should really change,' she said. She glanced down at herself and saw that her T-shirt was sticking to her skin, revealing even the floral pattern on her bra, her nipples peaked from the cold. 'Thanks,' she muttered, and clutched the towel to her chest.

Lorenzo's gaze hadn't dropped to her chest, but his mouth curved all the same and again Emma felt another kick of excitement. She retreated back to the table, the towel still clutched to her chest.

'I should go to bed.'

'Don't go quite yet,' Lorenzo answered. He slung the towel over his shoulders and sat down across from her, pouring them both more wine. Emma eyed the full glass and Lorenzo's bare chest, his perfectly formed pecs flexing as he moved, and felt as if she'd just jumped into the deep end of an entirely different kind of pool.

'I'm freezing—' she began and he nodded towards the cupboard.

'There are towelling robes in there. Change out of your wet things. I don't want you catching cold.'

'Lorenzo...' Emma began, although she didn't know what she was going to say. Why was she protesting so much, anyway? Chatting in the moonlight with a devastatingly attractive man was no hardship. And it wasn't as if Lorenzo was going to make a move. He might have dared her to jump in the pool, but she was pretty sure her boss didn't mix business with pleasure.

*Even if she wanted him to...*

'Fine,' she said, and retreated to the towelling cupboard. With the door serving as a screen between her and Lorenzo, she tugged off her wet clothes and wrapped herself in the heated dressing gown. The sleeves hung past her hands and the sash trailed the ground, but at least she was warm again. She doubted she'd provide any sort of temptation to Lorenzo now.

'Tell me your favourite place you lived in as a child,' Lorenzo commanded as she sat down across from him and picked up her wine glass—he'd filled it again, while she'd been changing.

Emma considered for a moment. Answering questions, at least, kept her from gawping at Lorenzo's chest. Why on earth she was feeling this unwelcome attraction for him now, she had no idea. Perhaps it was simply the strangeness of the evening, his unexpected arrival, his demand for her company. 'Krakow, I suppose,' she said finally. 'I spent two years there when I was ten. It's a beautiful city.' And those years had been the last ones where she'd felt part of a family, before her mother had announced her decision to leave. But she didn't want to think, much less talk, about that. 'Where did you grow up?' she asked, and Lorenzo swirled the wine in his glass, his expression hardening slightly as he gazed down into its ruby depths.

'Palermo.'

'Hence the villa in Sicily, I suppose.'

'It is my home.'

'But you live most of the time in Rome.'

'Cavelli Enterprises is headquartered there.' He paused, his shuttered gaze on the darkened mountains, the moon casting a lambent glow over the wooded hills. 'In any case, I never much liked Palermo.'

'Why not?'

He pressed his lips together. 'Too many hard memories.'

He didn't seem inclined to say anything more, and Emma eyed him curiously, wondering at this enigmatic man who clearly had secrets she'd never even guessed at before.

Lorenzo gazed round the terrace, the patio furniture now no more than shadowy shapes in the darkness, and then turned to look once more at the mountains. 'I'll miss it here,' he said, so quietly Emma almost didn't hear him.

'So you are thinking of leaving,' she said, and Lorenzo didn't answer for a long moment.

‘Not thinking of it, no,’ he said, and then seemed to shake off his weary mood, his gaze snapping back to her. ‘Thank you, Emma, for the food and also for your company. You’ve done more for me than you could possibly know.’

Emma stared at him helplessly. ‘If there’s anything else I can do...’

To her shock he touched her cheek with his hand, his fingers cool against her flushed face. *Bellissima*, he whispered, and the endearment stole right through her. ‘No,’ he said, and dropped his hand from her face. ‘You’ve done enough. Thank you.’ And then, taking his plate and his glass, he rose from his chair and left her sitting on the terrace alone.

Emma sat there for a few moments, shivering a little in the chilly air despite the dressing gown. She wished she could have comforted Lorenzo somehow, but she had no idea what was going on, and she wasn’t sure he’d welcome her sympathy anyway. He was a proud, hard man, caught in a moment of weakness. He’d probably regret their whole conversation tomorrow.

Sighing, she took the wine bottle and glasses from the table and headed inside. Lorenzo had already gone upstairs; the lights were off, the house locked up. After rinsing out the dishes and switching on the dishwasher Emma went upstairs as well.

She paused for a moment on the landing; Lorenzo’s master bedroom was to the right, her own smaller room the last on the left. She heard nothing but the wind high up in the trees, and she couldn’t see any light underneath Lorenzo’s doorway. Even so she had a mad urge to knock on his door, to say something. But what? They didn’t have that kind of relationship, not remotely, and knocking on Lorenzo’s bedroom door, seeing him answer it with his hair ruffled and damp, his chest still bare...

No. That was taking this strange evening a step too far.

Still she hesitated, glancing towards his doorway, and then with a sigh she turned and went to her own bedroom, closing the door behind her.

## CHAPTER TWO

HE COULDN’T SLEEP. Hardly a surprise, considering all that had happened in the last few days. Lorenzo stared gritty-eyed at the ceiling before, with a sigh, he sat up and swung his legs over the side of his bed.

All around him the house was still and silent. It was nearly two in the morning, and he wondered how long he had left. Would they come for him at dawn, or would they wait for the more civilised hour of eight or nine o’clock in the morning? Either way, it wouldn’t be long. Bertrano had made sure of that.

Letting out another sigh at the thought of the man he’d considered as good as a father, Lorenzo slipped from the bedroom and walked downstairs. The rooms of the villa were silent, dark, and empty, and he was loath to turn on a light and disturb the peacefulness. He could have stayed in Rome, but he’d hated the thought of simply waiting for the end, and he’d wanted to have a final farewell for the only place he could call a home. Bertrano would tell them where to find him; the police in Palermo had most likely already been alerted. He had a few hours at most.

And for those few hours he wanted simply to savour what he had. What Bertrano Raguso had given him, although Lorenzo had worked hard for it. Ironic, really, that the man who had saved him would also destroy him. Fitting, perhaps.

He ran his hand along the silky-smooth ebony of the grand piano in the music room; he’d bought it because he loved music, but he’d never found the time to learn to play. Now he never would. He played a few discordant notes, the sound echoing through the silent villa, before he moved onto the sitting room, stopping in front of the chessboard on a table by the window, its marble pieces set up for a game he would never play.

He picked up the king, fingering the smooth marble before he laid it down again. Bertrano had taught him how to play chess, and Lorenzo had savoured the evenings they’d spent together, heads bent over a chessboard. Why had the man who had treated him like a son turned on him so suddenly? Betrayed him? Had it been a moment’s panicked weakness? But no, it had gone on longer than that,

perhaps even months, for Bertrano to lay the paper trail. How had Lorenzo not known? Not even guessed?

He glanced at the pawns neatly lined up. In the end he'd served no more purpose than they did. With a sudden burst of helpless rage he struck the pawns, scattering them across the board with a clatter.

The realisation of all he was about to lose hit him then, with sickening force, and he dropped his face in his hands, driving his fingers through his hair, as a single sob racked his body.

*Bertrano, how could you do this to me? I loved you. I thought of you as my father.*

'Lorenzo?'

He stiffened at the sound of Emma's uncertain voice, and then he lifted his face from his hands, turning to see her standing in the doorway of the sitting room. She was in her pyjamas, nothing more than boy shorts and a very thin T-shirt; Lorenzo could see the outline of her small breasts and he felt an entirely inappropriate stab of lust, just as he had when he'd seen her soaked and dripping in the pool. He hadn't spared much thought for his housekeeper before tonight, but now he envied her freedom, her ease.

'Couldn't you sleep?' she asked as she came into the room. She glanced at the scattered chess pieces, a silent question in her eyes.

'No, I couldn't.' He turned to the fireplace, where the kindling and logs were already laid for a fire. 'It's cold in here,' he said, and reached for a match to start the blaze. From behind him he could hear Emma righting the chess pieces.

When the fire was cheerily crackling in the hearth he turned to face her; she was touching the pawns he'd knocked over, her head bent, her hair swinging down to hide her face.

'Fancy a game?'

She looked up in surprise. 'What?'

He nodded towards the chessboard. 'Do you play?'

'I know the rules.'

'Well, then. It appears neither of us can sleep. Shall we play?'

'All right,' she said after a pause, and she sat down in one of the chairs as Lorenzo sat in the other.

'White goes first,' he told her and she bit her lip, studying the board with a concentration so intense he found it endearing. Again he felt the powerful thrust of attraction. These few hours of enjoyment would be the last pleasure he had for a long while.

Finally she moved her piece, her slender fingers curling around the figure. She glanced up at him, a smile lurking in her eyes, playing with her lips. 'Why do I have a feeling you're going to crush me?'

'You can always live in hope,' he answered lightly, and moved his pawn.

She laughed, shaking her head. 'That would be foolish in the extreme.'

'Perhaps.' He liked watching her, seeing the way the firelight played over her golden skin, how humour lit her golden-green eyes. He stretched out his legs and his foot brushed her ankle, sending another throb of desire through him.

He thought she felt something too, for her eyes widened and her body tensed briefly before she moved another piece on the board.

They played in silence for a few minutes, the tension spooling out between them. Lorenzo brushed her foot again with his own, enjoying the silky slide of her skin. She sucked in a quick breath, her fingers trembling as she moved her rook.

'I'm four moves away from checkmate,' he told her, and she let out a shaky laugh.

'I knew this was going to happen.' She glanced up at him wryly and he held her gaze, felt the force of the attraction between them. He'd never considered his housekeeper as an object of desire before; employees had always been off limits, and he'd seen her so rarely. But tonight he craved that

human connection, the last one that might ever be offered to him. To touch a woman, to give and receive pleasure...

Setting his jaw, Lorenzo turned back towards the board. Making love with Emma tonight would be an entirely selfish act. He couldn't drag her down with him. It was bad enough that he was here at all.

He moved his bishop, and then stilled as he felt Emma's hand on his own, her skin cool and soft.

'Lorenzo, I wish you'd tell me what's wrong.' He didn't answer, simply stared at her fingers on his. He stroked her palm with his thumb and she shivered in response but did not remove her hand.

'It doesn't matter,' he said in a low voice, and stroked her palm again. 'There's nothing you can do about it, and it's my own fault anyway.' For trusting someone he'd loved. For believing someone could have pure motives. For being so bloody naive. So damn *stupid*.

'Are you sure I can't help?' Emma asked softly. She squeezed his fingers and Lorenzo closed his eyes. Her touch was the sweetest torture he'd ever known. He thought of telling her the one way she could help, the one way she could make him forget what dawn would bring. He resisted. He could not be that selfish, not even on the threshold of his own destruction.

'No, I'm afraid not. No one can.'

Her gaze searched his face and then she rose from her chair. 'Perhaps I should leave you alone, then.'

'Wait.' The single word was wrenched from him. 'Don't go.'

He felt her surprise as the silence stretched on. She didn't move, either backwards or forwards. He bowed his head.

'I don't want to be alone tonight,' he confessed, his voice low, and then she took a step forward, laid her hand on his shoulder once more.

'You aren't,' she said simply.

\* \* \*

Emma didn't know whether it was Lorenzo's obvious pain or the attraction that had snapped through the air that had compelled her to stay. Perhaps both. She wanted to comfort him, but she couldn't deny the yearning she had felt uncoil through her body when Lorenzo had looked at her with such blatant desire in his eyes. No man had ever looked at her like that before, and it had thrilled her to her core.

The moment stretched on between them as she stood there with her hand still on his shoulder, his head bowed. His skin was warm and smooth underneath her palm, and slowly Lorenzo reached up and covered her hand with his own, his fingers twining with hers. The intimacy of the gesture rocked her, sent heat and need and something even deeper and more important spiralling through her. They were simply holding hands, and yet it felt like a pure form of communication, the most intimate thing she'd ever done.

Finally Lorenzo broke the moment. He took his hand from hers and turned. Emma could feel the heat rolling off him, inhaled the tangy scent of his aftershave, and desire crashed through her once more. This man was more than a work of art. He was a living, breathing, virile male, and he was close enough for her to touch him. To kiss him. Which she wanted to do, very much.

'Do you have family, Emma?' he asked, startling her out of her haze of desire.

'Y-y-y-yes.'

'Are you close to them?' He gazed at her, his silvery eyes searching her, looking for answers. 'You must not see them very often, living here.'

'I...' How to answer that seemingly innocent question? 'I see my father sometimes. He's currently posted in Budapest, and we've met up occasionally.'

'And your mother?'

Why was he asking her all these questions? She didn't want to talk about her family, and certainly not her mother, yet in the darkened intimacy of the room, of the moment, she knew she

would answer. 'No, I'm not close to my mother. My parents divorced when I was twelve, and I didn't see her much after that.'

'That must have been hard.'

A small shrug was all she'd allow on that subject, but Lorenzo nodded as if she'd said something important and revealing. 'And siblings? Do you have any sisters or brothers?'

'One sister, Meghan. She lives in New Jersey, does the whole stay-at-home-mom thing.' The kind of life she'd deliberately chosen not to pursue or want. 'We're close. We Skype.' She shook her head in confusion. 'Why are you asking me all this, Lorenzo?'

'Because I never had a real family of my own, and I wondered.' He turned, his back to her as he gazed at the fire. 'I wondered how families are. How they're meant to be.'

'What happened to your family?'

'I don't know. My mother left me to fend for myself when I was young, maybe two or three. An orphanage took me in, run by a convent. Not the nicest place. I ran away when I was eleven. Spent the next few years on the street.'

He recited these facts dispassionately, without any self-pity at all, and somehow that made it all the more terrible. 'That's awful. I'm sorry.' Emma would never have guessed such a past for this man, with his wealth and power and magnetism. 'Was this in Palermo?'

'Yes.'

'Those are hard memories.'

'Yes.' He let out a long, low sigh. 'But let's not talk about that tonight.'

'What do you want to talk about?'

'Anything.' He sat down on the sheepskin rug in front of the fire, and patted the floor next to him. Emma came to sit across from him, folding her legs underneath her, conscious of the strangeness of this situation: both of them in their pyjamas, the firelight casting pools of light over their skin, and yet of the ease of it too. It felt weirdly natural to sit there with Lorenzo, in the dark, with the fire. Surreal and yet somehow right.

'What do you want to do with your life, Emma?' he asked as he tossed another log on the fire. 'I assume you don't want to be a housekeeper for ever.'

'Would there be something wrong with that?'

He gave a faint, bemused smile. 'No, there's nothing wrong with that. But you are a beautiful, capable young woman, and I imagine you want to see more of the world than a remote Sicilian hilltop.'

'I like to travel,' she admitted. 'I've moved around a lot already.'

'As a diplomat's kid.'

'Yes, and since I finished school. Itchy feet, I suppose.'

'What did you study at school?'

'I did a photography course just for a year, and then I got a backpack and a rail pass and went to see the world.' Determined to enjoy everything life had to offer, never to be tied down, never to be hurt.

'Sounds fun.' He turned to her, an eyebrow arched. 'I think I've seen you with a camera round the place. Have you taken photos here?'

'Yes...'

'May I see them?'

She hesitated, because no one had ever seen her photographs. No one had ever asked. And showing them now to Lorenzo felt even more intimate than when they'd held hands. She'd be showing him a part of her soul. 'Okay,' she finally said. 'I'll go get them.' She hurried up to her bedroom, and then leafed through several folders of photos before selecting a few of her favourites. She brought them back to Lorenzo, handing them to him silently.

He studied each one carefully, a slight frown puckering his forehead as Emma waited, nibbling her lip. She realised she wanted him to like them, to understand them, and she held her breath as she waited for his verdict.

‘They’re not holiday snaps,’ he said finally and she let out a little laugh.

‘No.’ She preferred to take candid shots of people, strangers and sometimes friends caught in an unexpected moment, held in thrall by an emotion, whether it was happiness or sorrow or something else.

‘This one.’ He gestured to a portrait of Rosaria, one of the shopkeepers in Troina. She was sitting on a stool in the back of her bakery, her hands on her thighs, her head thrown back, her face a mass of wrinkles as she let out a deep, belly laugh. ‘That’s joy,’ Lorenzo said quietly, and Emma’s heart swelled with the knowledge that he did understand, that he’d seen what she’d been trying to capture.

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t think I’ve ever felt that.’ He turned to give her a swift, dark glance. ‘Have you?’

Shock rippled through her at the question, and the answer that slipped from her lips without her even realising she was going to say it. ‘No,’ Emma whispered. ‘I don’t think I have.’ She’d travelled the world, climbed mountains, scuba-dived, done a million and one adventurous and amazing things, had always considered herself a happy person...and yet joy? That kind of deep, abiding, *real* joy?

It had remained beguilingly elusive. And she hadn’t realised it until Lorenzo had asked her the question.

‘You have a skill,’ Lorenzo said as he turned back to the photographs. ‘A true talent. You shouldn’t squander it.’

‘I’m not—’

‘I mean you should exhibit these.’ He glanced at her, his eyebrows raised. ‘Have you shown them to anyone, to a professional?’

‘You’re the first person who has seen them.’

He held her gaze, his own darkening. ‘Thank you,’ he said quietly, and wordlessly Emma nodded.

The moment spun out, stretching and shifting into something else as their gazes remained locked and Emma’s breath shortened. A log popped in the fireplace and embers scattered across the hearth, but neither of them so much as twitched.

The desire Emma had felt before now crashed over her in an overpowering wave, obliterating rational thought, obscuring everything but this moment. She wanted this man more than she’d ever wanted anything or anyone before, and as she saw the heat blaze in his eyes she realised with a thrill he felt the same.

Slowly, deliberately, Lorenzo reached one hand out towards her, his fingers first skimming her cheek and then his palm cradling her face. The warmth of his palm against her cheek felt electric, every nerve ending she had tingling and quivering with awareness. Lorenzo’s thumb brushed her mouth, and her lips parted in expectation as a tiny gasp escaped. If he kissed her, she’d be lost. And she knew she wanted to be lost.

His hand tensed briefly against her cheek, and for a terrible second she thought he was going to drop it and move away. This glorious moment would be over. Then he brought his other hand up to frame her face, cradling her between his palms before pulling her inexorably towards him, his lips coming down on hers, soft and hard, cold and hot, everything all at once as a thousand new sensations blazed through her and her mouth opened to his kiss.

Lorenzo hauled her towards him, her legs sliding across his as she straddled him, felt the hard press of his arousal against the juncture of her thighs and excitement pulsed hard inside her.

He was kissing her deeply now, with a hungry urgency that Emma felt in herself as she drove her fingers through his hair and pressed even more closely against him, her body arching instinctively as Lorenzo pressed back.

After an endless moment that still didn't seem long enough, Lorenzo broke off the kiss, his breath coming out in a rush.

'I wasn't going to do that.'

'I wanted you to do it,' she whispered. She couldn't bear it if he stopped now.

He leaned his forehead against hers, their bodies still pressed together, both of their hearts thudding. 'I want you, Emma. I think I want you more than I've ever wanted anyone before.'

A thrill ran through her at this simply stated fact. 'I want you too.'

'But I can't offer you anything other than this night.' He closed his eyes briefly. 'A few hours at most. That's all. That's all it could ever be.'

'I know,' she said softly. When he'd kissed her, she hadn't thought of anything but the moment, yet she acknowledged now that she'd never have expected some kind of commitment from a man like Lorenzo. 'I don't want more than this night,' she told him. 'I'm not looking for some kind of relationship, Lorenzo, trust me. I just want you, tonight.'

He leaned back a little so he could look into her face. 'If you're sure...?'

She nodded, amazed at just how sure she was. Everything about this night had been surreal, even magical. This felt, bizarrely and yet completely, like the logical and necessary conclusion. 'I'm sure.'

'Then come with me.' He untangled himself from her and rose from the rug in one fluid movement, holding his hand down to help her up. With their fingers linked he led her silently upstairs to his bedroom.

Emma gazed at the king-sized bed with its navy silk sheets she'd changed herself and felt a tremor of—what? Not fear. Anticipation. And a little nervousness, because, while she *was* sure, this was still a new experience. An entirely new experience, and she didn't want to admit to Lorenzo just how new it was, how unlike her this decision had been.

He glanced back at her, his fingers still twined with hers. 'Having second thoughts?' he asked quietly, his gaze sweeping over her. 'Cold feet? I wouldn't mind.' He let out a ragged laugh. 'Well, I'd mind, but I'd understand.'

'I'm not having second thoughts.' She swallowed, lifted her chin. She wouldn't tell him about her inexperience. It didn't matter to her, and she didn't want it to matter to him, or put him off. 'Are you?' she challenged, and he let out a soft huff of laughter.

'Definitely not.' He tugged her towards him. 'Come here, Emma.'

And she came willingly, her breasts pressing against his bare chest as his mouth came down on hers once more and for a few blissful, buzzing seconds she forgot everything but the hunger and need for this, for him.

Lorenzo reached down and with one swift tug he had her T-shirt up and over her head; the feel of her breasts brushing the crisp hair on his chest was so intense it almost hurt. She'd never felt so much, felt so alive, not when she'd been on top of a mountain or deep in the ocean. All her adventures paled in light of this.

She let out a gasp that he muffled with his mouth, his hands sliding down her back and then cupping her bottom as he settled her against his arousal.

He moved his mouth from her lips to the curve of her neck, the touch of his tongue against her sensitive skin making her shiver.

Then he drew her to the bed, laying her down on top of the silken sheets and covering her body with his own.

She twined her arms around his neck and arched up towards him, craving the connection of their bodies fused in every place. Of being that close to another person...even if it was just for a single night. A few hours. And she knew Lorenzo needed it too, craved it as much as she did. She was giving him herself, the only comfort she could offer him now.

Lorenzo slid a hand between her thighs, slipping her pyjama shorts down her legs and then tossing them on the floor. The feel of his fingers against her most sensitive flesh had Emma arching upwards again, her head thrown back as sensations fizzed and popped inside her.

And then they exploded and her breath rushed out on a ragged cry as Lorenzo worked magic with his fingers and left her boneless in his arms.

‘Oh...’

‘That’s just to start,’ he promised with a soft laugh, and then he tossed his own pyjama bottoms aside before he slid seamlessly inside her—and then stopped. ‘Emma...’

She saw the confusion on his face, the uncertainty, and knew he’d guessed her inexperience. ‘You haven’t...’ he began slowly and she answered by tilting her hips up.

‘It doesn’t matter,’ she said fiercely, and as her body found its instinctive rhythm Lorenzo matched it, burying his head in the curve of her shoulder as his body surged into hers.

If she’d felt any pain or discomfort, it was long gone as the exquisite friction of Lorenzo’s body created a pleasure deeper and fiercer than what she’d already felt at his experienced hands.

She let out another long, ragged cry as the sensations exploded inside her again and with a shudder Lorenzo emptied himself into her and then was still.

They lay like that for a few seconds before he wrapped his arms around her and rolled onto his back.

‘Why didn’t you tell me you were a virgin?’ he asked quietly.

Emma could still feel him inside her, still feel the bone-melting ripples of pleasure that had utterly rocked her moments before. ‘Because like I said, it didn’t matter.’

‘I might have done things differently...’

‘I liked the way you did things.’

He laughed softly then, his arms tightening around her. ‘Thank you, Emma,’ he said quietly, and she wasn’t quite sure what he was thanking her for. She propped herself on her elbows to gaze down at him, and saw the ravages of both grief and pleasure on his face. She had no regrets, and yet she still wished she could smooth the furrows of worry from his forehead. She brushed his hair from his eyes instead, savouring the feel of him.

‘I should be thanking you,’ she said, and Lorenzo smiled faintly before glancing out at the night sky; the moon was on the wane, dawn only an hour or two away. ‘You should sleep.’

Did he want her to leave? Uncertainly Emma started to roll off him, but Lorenzo clasped her to him once more.

‘Stay,’ he said, his voice rough with emotion. ‘Stay until morning.’

And so she did.

### CHAPTER THREE

THEY CAME AT DAWN. Lorenzo heard the first car drive up, the crunch of gravel, the sound of a car door shutting quietly, as if they were trying to hide their presence. As if they could.

He stilled, every muscle tensing, Emma still in his arms. *Emma*. He would spare her an ugly scene. She deserved so much more than that, but that was all he could give her now.

Slowly he slipped from the bed, doing his best not to disturb her. She sighed in her sleep and turned, her tousled hair falling across one cheek, a tendril lying across her breast.

He gazed at her for a moment, drinking her in: the golden, freckled skin, the wavy golden-brown hair, her lashes fanned out on her cheeks, although he knew if she opened her eyes, they would be golden-green. His golden girl for a night, gone in the morning.

At least he would be gone.

Quickly Lorenzo turned, reaching for his jeans. He pulled on a rugby shirt and ran his hands through his hair, took a deep breath. And looked one last time at Emma, at freedom and happiness, pleasure and peace. He’d known them all with her last night, and now they were nothing but memories. Resolutely he turned from her and left the room.

\* \* \*

Emma awoke to the thud of boots on the stairs, the sound of stomping down the hall. She was still blinking the sleep from her eyes, one hand reaching for the sheet to cover herself, her mind barely processing what she'd heard, when the door was thrown open and three men crowded there, all of them glaring at her. Her heart seemed to still in her chest, everything in her going numb with horror as she stared at these strange men.

'What—?'

They spoke in rapid Italian, too fast for her to understand, although during her two years in Sicily she'd become fairly conversant in the language. Still, she understood their tone. Their derision and contempt.

She clutched the sheet to her breasts, her whole body trembling with indignation and fear. *'Chi sei? Cosa stai facendo?'* Who are you, and what are you doing? They didn't answer.

One man, clearly the leader of the pack, ripped the sheet away from her naked body. Emma gasped in shock. *'Puttana.'* He spat the single word. Whore.

Emma shook her head, her mouth dry, her body still trembling. She felt as if she'd awakened to an alternate reality, a horrible nightmare, and she had no idea how to make it stop. *'Where was Lorenzo?'*

One of the men grabbed her by the arm and yanked her upwards. She came, stumbling, trying futilely to cover herself. He reached for her T-shirt and shorts discarded on the floor and threw them at her.

'You are English?' he asked, his voice clipped, and she nodded.

'American. And my consulate will hear—'

He cut her off with a hard laugh. 'Get dressed. You're coming with us.'

Quickly, clumsily, Emma yanked on her clothes. Dressed, even if only in flimsy pyjamas, she felt a little braver. 'Where is Signor Cavelli?' she asked in Italian.

The man eyed her scornfully. 'Downstairs, at the moment. But he'll spend the rest of his life in prison.'

Emma's mouth dropped open. *'Prison?'* What on earth was he talking about? Were these awful men police?

'Come on,' the man commanded her tersely, and with her mind spinning she followed the men downstairs.

Lorenzo stood in the centre of the sitting room, his eyes blazing silver fire as he caught sight of her.

'You are all right? They didn't hurt you?'

'Shut up!' The words were like the crack of a gunshot as one of the men slapped Lorenzo across the face. He didn't even blink, although Emma could see the red imprint of the man's hand on Lorenzo's cheek.

'They didn't hurt me,' she said quietly and the man turned on her.

'Enough. Neither of you are to speak to one another. Who knows what you might try to communicate?'

'She has nothing to do with any of it,' Lorenzo said, and he sounded scornful, as if he were actually in control of the situation. With an icy ripple of shock Emma saw that he was handcuffed. 'Do you actually think I'd tell a woman, my housekeeper no less, anything of value?'

The words, spoken so derisively, shouldn't have hurt. She knew, intellectually at least, that he was trying to protect her, although from what she had no idea. Even so they did hurt, just as the look Lorenzo gave her, a look as derisive as those of the *carabinieri*, did.

'She's nothing to me.'

'Even so, she'll be taken in for questioning,' the man replied shortly and Lorenzo's eyes blazed once more.

'She knows nothing. She's American. Do you want the consulate all over this?'

'This,' the man snapped, poking a finger into Lorenzo's chest, 'is the biggest sting we've had in Sicily for twenty years. I don't give a damn about the consulate.'

They'd been speaking Italian, and, while Emma had caught the gist of it, she still didn't understand what was going on.

'Please, let me get dressed properly,' she said, her voice coming out croaky as she stumbled over the Italian. 'And then I'll go with you and answer any questions you might have.'

The man turned to glare at her with narrowed eyes. Then he gave a brief nod, and, with another policeman accompanying her, Emma went upstairs to her bedroom. The man waited outside the room while she pulled on underwear, jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt, and a fleece. She brushed her teeth and hair, grabbed her purse and her passport, and then, just in case, she took her backpack and put a change of clothes, her camera, and her folder of photographs in it. Who knew when she'd be able to return? Just the realisation sent another icy wave of terror crashing through her.

Taking a deep, steadying breath, she left the room. The man accompanied her downstairs; the front door was open and she saw several cars outside. Lorenzo was being shoved into one. She turned to the man.

'Where are we going?'

'Palermo.'

'Palermo? But that's nearly three hours away—'

The man smiled coldly. 'So it is. I'm afraid you'll have to be so inconvenienced.'

Three hours later Emma sat in an interrogation room at the anti-Mafia headquarters of Palermo's police department. She'd been given a paper cup of cold coffee and made to wait until finally the man who had made the arrest back at Lorenzo's villa came and sat down across from her, putting his elbows on the chipped tabletop.

'You know your boyfriend is in a lot of trouble.'

Emma closed her eyes briefly. She was aching with exhaustion, numb with confusion and fear, and she missed Lorenzo desperately even as she forced herself to remember she hadn't actually known him all that well. *Until last night. Until he held me in his arms and made me feel cherished and important.* 'He's not my boyfriend.'

'Whoever he is. He's going to prison, probably for the rest of his life.'

Emma licked her dry lips. 'What...what has he done?'

'You don't know?'

'I have no idea. All I know is he was—is—CEO of Cavelli Enterprises.' And that when he kissed her her mind emptied of thoughts. He made her body both buzz and sing. But then words began to ricochet through her, words Lorenzo had spoken to her last night. *It's my own fault.* What had he done?

The man must have seen something of this in her face for he leaned forward. 'You know something.'

'No.'

'I've been doing this for a long time.' He sounded almost kind. 'I can tell, *signorina*. I can tell when someone is lying.'

'I'm not lying. I don't know anything. I don't even know what Cavelli Enterprises did.'

'And if I told you Lorenzo Cavelli was involved with the Mafia? You wouldn't know anything about that?'

Bile rose in her throat and she swallowed hard. 'No, I certainly wouldn't.'

'It didn't concern you, the amount of security he had for that villa?'

She thought of his insistence on locking the doors, the elaborate security system. 'No.'

'Don't play dumb with me, *signorina*.'

‘Look, maybe I was dumb, but I really didn’t know.’ Emma’s voice rose in agitation. ‘Plenty of people have detailed security systems.’

‘Cavelli never said anything to you?’

Again his words raced through her mind. The grief on his face, the resignation she’d heard in his voice, the sense that everything was over, that this was his last night. He must have known they were coming to arrest him. He must have realised his activities had been discovered. Even so she couldn’t reconcile the man she’d known, however briefly, with the Mafia. And yet as tender a lover as Lorenzo had been, he was still virtually a stranger. She had no idea what he’d got up to when he’d been away from the villa. No idea at all.

*‘Signorina?’*

‘Please,’ Emma said wearily. ‘I was his housekeeper. I barely saw him. I don’t know anything.’

Eight endless hours later she was finally released from the police. When she asked about returning to the villa, the man at the desk shook his head.

‘The villa is being searched by the police. Everything there is potential evidence. You won’t be able to go back for some time.’

And so Emma headed out into the busy streets of Palermo, mopeds and sports cars speeding by, her mind spinning as she tried to think what to do now. She had no real reason to go all the way back to the villa. She had nothing of value there but a few clothes and photography books.

But where could she go?

She ended up at a cheap hotel near the train station; she sat on the single bed, her backpack at her feet, her whole life in tatters.

She told herself she was used to moving on, and it would be easy enough to look for a new job. She could spend some time with her father in Budapest while she decided where she wanted to go, what she wanted to do.

And yet that prospect seemed bleak rather than hopeful; she might be used to moving on, but she hadn’t been ready this time. She’d liked her life in Sicily. The villa had been the closest thing she’d ever known to a home.

*And as for Lorenzo...*

She’d known, of course she’d known, that their one night together wasn’t going anywhere. But it had still *meant* something. She’d felt a deep connection to him last night, an understanding and a tenderness... Had it all been false? According to the police, he was a Mafioso. The inspector had told her they had incontrovertible evidence, had said there were photos, witnesses, files. Everything to convict Lorenzo Cavelli of too many horrible crimes. Extortion, the police had said. Theft. Assault. Organised delinquency, which was the legal term for involvement in the Mafia.

Faced with all of it, Emma knew she had no choice but to believe. Lorenzo Cavelli was a criminal.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, Emma went to an Internet café to arrange her passage to Budapest. Yet as she clicked on a website for cheap airfares, she realised she didn’t want to go there. She didn’t want to traipse around Europe, taking odd jobs, at least not yet. She wanted to go somewhere safe, somewhere far away from all this, to recover and heal. She wanted to see her sister. Quickly Emma took out her mobile and scrolled through for Meghan’s number.

‘Emma?’ Concern sharpened her sister’s voice as she answered the call. ‘You sound...’

‘I’m tired. And a bit overwhelmed.’ She didn’t want to go into the details of what had happened on the phone; they were too recent, too raw, and she was afraid she might burst into tears right in the middle of the Internet café. ‘My job in Sicily has ended suddenly, and I thought I’d come for a visit, if you don’t mind having me.’

‘Of course I don’t mind having you,’ Meghan exclaimed. ‘Ryan will be delighted to see you.’

Emma pictured her tousle-haired three-year-old nephew with a tired smile. It had been too long since she’d seen him or her sister. ‘Great. I’m going to book a flight for tomorrow if I can.’

‘Let me know the time and we’ll pick you up from the airport.’

Twenty-four hours later Emma touched down in New York and, after clearing immigration, she walked straight into her sister’s arms.

‘Is everything okay?’ Meghan asked as she hugged her tightly. Emma nodded wordlessly. Nothing felt right at that moment, but she hoped it would soon. All she needed was a little time to get over this, and then she’d be back on the road, taking photographs, looking for adventure, as footloose as ever. The prospect didn’t fill her with anything except a weary desolation.

She spent the next week mainly sleeping and spending time with Ryan and Meghan; she wanted to shut the world out, but she couldn’t quite do it, and especially not when her sister looked up from *The New York Times* one morning, her eyes narrowed.

‘I’m just reading an article about how business CEO Lorenzo Cavelli was arrested for being involved in the Mafia.’ Emma felt the colour drain from her face but said nothing. ‘Wasn’t that your boss, Emma?’

‘Yes.’

‘That’s why your job ended?’

Emma nodded jerkily as she poured some orange juice. ‘Yes.’

‘You were working for someone in the *Mafia*?’

‘I didn’t know, Meghan!’

Meghan sat back in her chair, her eyes wide. ‘Of course you didn’t know. But good gracious, Emma. I’m so glad you’re here, and you’re safe.’

Emma closed her eyes briefly. She could picture Lorenzo as he braced himself above her, his face suffused with tenderness as he gave her more pleasure than she’d ever known or thought possible. And then just hours later, when she’d heard the thud of the boots in the hall, the men glaring at her as they ripped the sheet away from her body...

‘So am I,’ she said quietly. ‘So am I.’

After that she couldn’t shut out the world any more. She read in the newspaper that Lorenzo had confessed to everything, and there would be no trial. Within a month of her arrival he’d been sentenced to life in prison.

Two days after that, Emma realised she hadn’t got her period that month. One three-minute test later, she discovered the truth. She was pregnant with Lorenzo Cavelli’s child.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

Eighteen months later

‘LOOK AT ME, Aunt Emma!’

Emma waved to her nephew as he clambered to the top of the climbing frame at the playground near her sister’s house. It was late October, and the leaves of the maple trees in the little park were scarlet, the sky above a cloudless blue. It was a beautiful, crisp day, and yet even so she couldn’t keep herself from picturing the mountains of Sicily, and remembering how clear and pure the air was up there at this time of year.

Shivering slightly in the chill wind, Emma told herself to stop thinking about Sicily. She would never go back there. Never see the Nebrodi mountains again. *Never see Lorenzo Cavelli again.*

Which was just as well, considering the man was a criminal.

Instinctively her gaze moved to the stroller a few feet away, where her daughter Ava was sleeping peacefully. She was ten months old, born on Christmas Eve, and Emma still marvelled at her. Still marvelled at the way her own life had changed so drastically.

When she’d discovered she was pregnant, she’d been shocked and numb for days, as well as embarrassed that she hadn’t even *thought* about birth control when she’d been with Lorenzo. That was how much he’d affected her. How much she’d wanted him in that moment.

Meghan, as eagle-eyed as ever, had guessed she was pregnant within a matter of days, and Emma had ended up telling her sister everything.

‘What do you want to do?’ Meghan had asked in her direct way as they’d sat at her kitchen table, Emma shredding tissues while Meghan got up to make tea. ‘I love babies,’ she continued as she switched on the kettle, ‘and I think each one is a blessing, but I’ll support you no matter what.’

‘Thank you,’ Emma had answered, sniffing. ‘Truthfully, I don’t know what to do. I never planned on marrying or having a family...not that marriage is a possibility in this case.’

‘Why haven’t you?’ Meghan asked, one hip braced against the counter as she fixed Emma with a thoughtful stare. ‘Most people think about being with someone, at least.’

‘I don’t know.’ Emma shredded another tissue, avoiding her sister’s perceptive gaze. ‘You know me. I like to be on the move. See new things. I don’t want to be held down.’

‘And a baby is the ultimate in being held down,’ Meghan answered with a sigh.

‘Yes...’ Which made it seem simple, but Emma felt as if nothing was.

‘I know Mom leaving affected you badly, Em,’ Meghan said quietly. ‘More than it did me. I was at college. I was already out of the way.’

‘She was your mother too,’ Emma answered, still not looking at her sister. By silent agreement she and Meghan had never really talked about their mother. Emma hadn’t even seen her in at least five years. Louise Leighton had moved to Arizona with her second husband when Emma was still in high school; Emma had spent a wretched few months out in Arizona with her, but it had been awkward and stilted and just generally awful, and she’d left pretty quickly, after one blazing argument. Her mother hadn’t protested.

Since then, beyond a few pithy emails, her mother had never made any attempt to contact her. She didn’t know if Meghan was in touch with her or not; she’d never asked, told herself she didn’t care.

‘Anyway,’ Meghan resumed, ‘what I’m trying to say is, I understand if motherhood scares you. You didn’t have the best example.’

‘I’m not scared,’ Emma answered. She pressed a hand against her middle, almost as if she could feel the tiny life moving inside her. ‘I just feel like my whole life has been upended. Everything that happened in Sicily...’ She trailed off, fighting against the memories that continued to swamp her, and Meghan came over to give her a hug.

‘It’s hard,’ she said. ‘And you have some time.’

As the days slipped by Emma had come to accept this new life inside her, and realise that, to her amazement, she actually welcomed it. She watched her sister with Ryan and knew she wanted that same kind of bond, that closeness with another person. Already she felt a surprising and unshakeable love for this person who was a part of her.

Once she had pictured her life unspooling like a rainbow-coloured thread as she traipsed about the world, having adventure after adventure. But perhaps motherhood would be the greatest adventure of all.

It had been that, she thought now as she gazed at her sleeping daughter. From the moment she’d been born, dark-haired and grey-eyed, Ava had possessed the Cavelli charisma. Whether she was screaming to be fed or simply demanding to be heard, the force of her personality could not be denied. She was her father’s daughter.

And her father was serving life in prison.

Emma had had a year and a half to become accustomed to the fact that Lorenzo was a Mafioso, and yet the knowledge still had the power to stun her. She couldn’t look back on their one night together without experiencing a shaft of bittersweet longing, as well as a sense of bewilderment that the man she’d thought she’d known, at least a little, was someone else entirely.

‘Are you almost ready to go?’ Meghan asked as she walked up to her in the park. Her cheeks were red with cold and she cradled a thermos of coffee. ‘Ryan will want his lunch before playgroup, and, if I’m not mistaken, your little madam is going to wake up soon and want hers.’

‘Undoubtedly.’ With a wry look for her sleeping daughter, Emma reached for the handles of the pram.

‘Emma...’ Meghan began, and Emma tensed instinctively. She’d known a conversation was coming; she’d been living with Meghan and her husband, Pete, for over eighteen months now. They’d been happy to support her through her pregnancy and she’d taken a few odd cleaning jobs until she’d been too ungainly to manage it, in order to contribute to the household expenses.

Then Ava had been born, and her life had become a sleepless whirlwind; she’d stood in its centre, dazed and helpless to do much other than care for this baby that still managed to startle her with her existence.

But her daughter would be a year soon and Emma knew she needed to find her own way. Make her own life, for her own sake as well as her sister’s.

‘I know,’ she said quietly, her gaze on Ava sleeping in the pram, the pink blanket pulled up to her chin, which had a cleft the same as Lorenzo’s. ‘I need to get a move on.’

‘No.’ Meghan put a hand on Emma’s arm. ‘I wasn’t going to say that. I’d never say that, Emma. You’re welcome to stay with us as long as you like. Always.’

Emma shook her head. She knew her sister meant well, but she also knew that she couldn’t stay. She hadn’t contributed anything to the household finances since Ava’s birth, and she and Ava had taken up the spare bedroom for far too long. Meghan and Pete wanted more children, and they needed the space.

‘I’ve been meaning to get my act together for months now,’ she told her sister. ‘I’ve just—’ she let out a long, low breath ‘—felt frozen, I suppose. And keeping Ava fed and changed has taken more energy than I care to admit.’ She let out a shaky laugh. ‘I don’t know how you do it.’

‘Motherhood is never easy, and Ava is a demanding baby,’ Meghan answered. ‘But this isn’t about me or Pete, Emma. It’s about you. What’s best for you. I want you to have your own life. Maybe meet someone...’

Emma shook her head. She couldn’t even *think* about meeting someone. She might not have loved Lorenzo Cavelli or had her heart broken, but even so something in her felt a little dented. A bit bruised. And she’d never been interested in a serious relationship anyway. She was even less so now, with a bad experience and a baby in tow.

‘I know I need to get a job.’

‘It’s not about money—’

‘But it is, Meghan, at least in part. As wonderful as you are, you can’t support me for ever. I’m twenty-seven years old, and I chose to have a child. I need to step up.’ She took a deep breath. ‘I know I seem like a sleep-deprived zombie most of the time, but I have been thinking about possibilities. Maybe moving to New York and getting a job there, something to do with photography.’

As far as a plan went, it wasn’t very sensible, and Emma could tell her sister thought so from the look on her face. ‘New York? But it’s so expensive. And I’m not sure there are too many jobs in photography going...’

‘I know, but...’ The other option was staying in New Jersey, finding some poky apartment she could afford on the salary she’d get as a waitress or cleaner, the only kind of job for which she was qualified. ‘I like to dream,’ she admitted with a wry sigh, and Meghan nodded in understanding.

‘What about another job as a housekeeper? A live-in position, so you could have Ava with you?’

‘I’m not sure there are many of those going around.’

‘You only need one.’

‘True.’ Emma glanced down at her daughter, who was starting to stir, her little face turning red as she screwed her features up in preparation for one of her ear-splitting howls. ‘We’d better get going,’ she told Meghan. ‘Princess Ava needs her lunch.’

Back at the house she and Meghan fed Ava and Ryan, and then ate their own lunch while the two children played nearby.

‘All right, let’s do this,’ Meghan said, ever practical, and resolutely Emma nodded as her sister pulled her laptop towards her and brought up the webpage for an agency that supplied jobs in the cleaning and hospitality industries.

Emma suppressed a groan as some of the available jobs scrolled by: night-time cleaning at a business park in Newark, janitorial work in a local elementary school.

‘I don’t...’ she began, but Meghan cut her off with a quick shake of her head.

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