

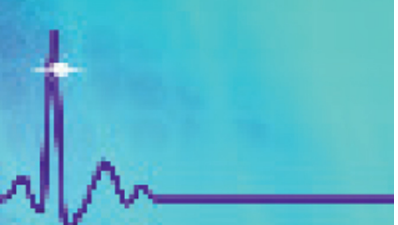


ROBIN GIANNA

Baby Surprise for the
Doctor Prince



**MEDICAL
ROMANCE.**



Robin Gianna

Baby Surprise For The Doctor Prince

«HarperCollins»

Gianna R.

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«HarperCollins»,

Two months after her breath-taking night with Prince Enzo Affini, nurse Aubrey Henderson arrives in Venice to discover he's her new boss. And even more shocking? The news she's carrying his royal baby! Guarded doctor Enzo has long protected his legacy—and his heart. He's determined not to trust his attraction to irresistible, spirited Aubrey. But as their baby grows, so too does their undeniable connection...and a longing for a happy-ever-after that neither can deny!

Their royal bundle of joy!

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[Dear Reader,](#)

Deciding to set this book in Venice, Italy, was easy—such a magical place! Then my editor Laura asked if I'd like to have the book be part of a duet with the wonderful Amy Ruttan. Brainstorming the story with Amy was a lot of fun—as was figuring out the last details with Amy and Laura poolside in San Diego at the RWA conference. A writer's life is rough! ;-)

In the story Aubrey thinks she's going to Italy to nurse there, and to support her pregnant friend Shay ... Until Aubrey meets a gorgeous Italian man, Enzo Affini, and can't resist a hot one-night fling. Except when she returns to Venice two months later she learns he's the doctor she has to work for!

Enzo is suspicious of Shay showing up in his brother's life, and then when Aubrey comes to work for him he wonders about her, too! Until a shocking event forces him to rethink his life and what's most important to him.

This story is about trust and betrayal and learning that the things we may believe about ourselves aren't always true. I hope you enjoy it!

Robin xoxo

Baby Surprise for the Doctor Prince

Robin Gianna



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After completing a degree in journalism, then working in advertising and mothering her kids, **ROBIN GIANNA** had what she calls her 'awakening'. She decided she wanted to write the romance novels she'd loved since her teens, and now enjoys pushing her characters towards their own happily-ever-afters. When she's not writing, Robin's life is filled with a happily messy kitchen, a needy garden, a wonderful husband, three great kids, a drooling bulldog and one grouchy Siamese cat.

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Visit the Author Profile page at millsandboon.co.uk for more titles.

I'd like to thank my duet partner, Amy Ruttan, for being so great to work with. Let's do it again, sometime, Amy!

Also, another huge shout-out to my wonderful friend Meta Carroll for helping me with the medical scenes in the story—thanks and smooches!

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[CHAPTER ONE](#)

AUBREY HENDERSON LIFTED her face to the lagoon breeze and smiled, soaking in the incredible history, vivid colors, and sheer amazement that was Venice, Italy. How lucky was she to have snagged a temporary job here? She might have spent only two days in Venice before leaving for her two-month nursing job in Rome, but every detail of those hours felt etched in her brain.

Which included every detail of her illicit, probably ill-advised, and beyond wonderful fling with Enzo Affini. That one night felt burned into her mind—and body, as well—and just the thought of him made her silly heart both skip a beat and burn with annoyance.

Maybe they'd left it a little vague, but hadn't he implied he'd be in touch? What exactly they'd said to one another when they'd parted in the wee hours of the morning didn't seem too clear anymore, but still. She'd expected he'd at least call her while she was in Rome, since he knew she was coming back to Venice around now.

Knowing she might run into him in the flesh had her feeling nervous and excited and ticked off all over again for making her wonder if she'd ever hear from him. Then ticked off at herself for wondering at all.

Then annoyed even more when she realized that when the phrase in the flesh had come to mind, an instant all-too-sexy vision of the man's glorious body made her feel a little breathless.

Ridiculous. Time to concentrate on why she'd come to Venice, which had nothing to do with a handsome Italian prince who was obviously the love-'em-and-leave-'em type. Which was okay. She didn't care if she saw him or not. In fact, she had no desire at all to see the guy, since he clearly didn't want to see her.

No, she'd come here before to support her friend Shay, who'd recently married Enzo's brother, Dante. Now she was here to work in the clinic, enjoy that adventure, and meet with the art and architecture preservation society she'd donated more money to in her mother's memory.

Her mom had always been fascinated with Venice and its incredible history, and it had only been her fear of travel and crowds that had kept her from coming to explore it. Seeing the fresco

she and her mom had “adopted,” paying for its restoration before her mother had died, would be sad but wonderful, too. Her mother’s legacy as a preservationist in New England had now been expanded across the ocean, and that thought brought her smile back and her thoughts completely away from Enzo Affini.

Really. She wasn’t going to think about him again. Period.

A renewed pep in her step took her down narrow stone passageways in front of colorful homes, over numerous charming footbridges, then across the piazza toward the well-marked clinic she’d be working in for the next four months. When she opened the wide glass door, a bell chimed. Inside, a friendly-looking, middle-aged woman sat at a rather spartan desk. Aubrey had been told most of the people here could speak English, but wouldn’t they appreciate it if she tried a few of the Italian phrases she’d learned?

“Buongiorno. Mio nome e Aubrey Henderson. Um...sono qui...per lavorare.”

She struggled to remember more, then abandoned the effort when she saw the quizzical and amused expression on the poor woman’s face. Doubtless she was completely butchering the pronunciation.

“I’m a nurse with the UWWHA, assigned to the clinic here starting today.”

“Welcome. We’ve been expecting you. And let’s speak English, shall we?” said the woman, her smile widening.

“That sounds good.” Aubrey smiled back. “I’m working on the language, but I’m not too good at it yet, obviously! I’m hoping by the end of the time I’m here, I’ll be practically fluent.”

“Learning a language takes time, but working with patients will teach you much. I am Nora, and you can ask me for anything as you need it, sì? Come with me.” She stood and gestured to the door behind her. “I’ll show you where you can put your things. We have a small staff here—you may already know we have just one doctor and nurse working each day, which sometimes gets very hectic. The doctor who is director of the clinic is here today, and he will be the one to show you around. A patient is here right now, though, so the doctor may not be available for me to introduce you at the moment. When you see him, can you introduce yourself? I must greet patients as they arrive, you see.”

“Of course. And I confess I don’t really know much about how the clinic runs,” Aubrey said as she followed Nora down a brightly lit hallway. “I saw the opening in Venice and jumped at the chance to work and explore here.” Had jumped at the chance to explore a certain unbelievably sexy prince, too. Except she wasn’t thinking about him ever again.

The place was very modern and scrupulously clean. Aubrey glanced into a few rooms to see each had a blue and white examination table, along with the usual medical necessities that you’d see in the United States. Not exactly plush and comfy-looking, but they’d do the job.

Nora opened a tall cupboard door made of the same white material as the rest of the built-in furniture in the space. “Here is a locker for your things, with your uniform inside. I don’t see the doctor, so make yourself comfortable and he will be with you soon. Okay?”

“Okay.” Nora left her alone and Aubrey was about to put her purse inside the locker until she wondered if maybe she was supposed to change into her uniform right then. Probably yes, since she assumed she would be working with patients right away? Why hadn’t she asked Nora those things while she was still here?

Aubrey nearly went back out to the reception area but decided that was silly. If she got into uniform and it turned out to be just an introductory day, it was no big deal. At least she’d be ready, right?

Finding a bathroom, she changed into the crisp white dress, smiling at how it was oddly old-fashioned compared with what nurses wore in the US today, and yet the whole place felt ultramodern. She dropped her clothes and purse into the locker, then hovered around, not sure what to do next. The various drawers and cupboards tempted her to open them up and poke around on her own, but she figured it would be more polite to wait until she was invited to do that.

She stood there for a good ten minutes, and each minute that dragged on felt more awkward. And didn't it make sense to acquaint herself with where things were, in case she needed to take care of a patient sooner rather than later? But luck being the way it was, just as she opened one of the cupboards above the long countertop a deep voice spoke from behind her.

“Buongiorno. You must be the new nurse from the US.”

Jumping guiltily, she nearly slammed the cupboard shut and turned with a bright smile. Then her heart completely stopped when she saw who stood there.

Enzo Affini. The man who'd unfortunately kept coming to mind since she'd returned to Venice. The man whose hands and mouth had been all over her two months ago. The man who hadn't bothered to call her again after that very intimate night together.

Aubrey felt a little as if she might just fall over, as though she'd been physically struck at the surprise of seeing him right there in front of her. She barely noticed the elderly man standing next to him as Enzo's dark eyes met hers for several breathless heartbeats. He recovered from the shock more quickly than she did, moving next to her to get something from the cupboard she'd just been snooping in, then turning to the elderly man with instructions. Aubrey didn't hear a word he said, feeling utterly frozen as she watched Enzo and the patient move down the hallway, with Enzo opening the door to the reception area for him, then following behind.

Aubrey sagged against the countertop, her hand to her chest, trying to breathe. Did she have any chance of slipping out the back door before he came back? Though if she did, what would that accomplish? She'd come to Venice to work. Was it her fault that he, incredibly, worked at this clinic, too? Gulping down the jittery nerves making her feel numb from head to toe, she forced herself to stand as tall as possible and stared at the door, willing herself to look calm and confident.

Proud that she managed to be standing there in a normal way when the door opened again...assuming he couldn't see her knees shaking...she met his gaze. The look on his face was completely different than the last time she'd seen him, which was the night they'd parted in the wee hours of the morning. Then, his eyes had been filled with warmth, his sensuous lips smiling and soft.

These lips could have belonged to someone else. Hard and firmly pressed together. His silky eyebrows formed a deep V over his nose as he stared at her.

“Aubrey. To say this is a surprise is an understatement. How did you know I work here?” His voice was a little hard, too. Ultra-chilly. She'd have to be dense as one of the posts sunk into the silt of the lagoon if she couldn't read loud and clear that he was not pleased to see her at all.

Something painful stabbed in the region of her heart, but the nervousness and, yes, hurt filling her gut slowly made way for a growing anger at the strange suspicion in his eyes. As if she'd come here on purpose to stalk him or something. “I didn't. I didn't even know you were a doctor. Something you conveniently forgot to mention.”

“You knew Dante is a doctor.”

“So that meant you had to be one, too? From the way you talked about the restoration of the old homes here, I thought you were an architect or in the construction business or something. You at least knew I was a nurse traveling with Shay.” She wasn't about to add that her attraction to him and excitement about deciding to let herself enjoy a little carnal pleasure on the trip had been foremost in her mind, not the thought of what he did for a living, since right now he clearly had other things on his mind. Like being ticked off that she was there.

Well, he wasn't the only one feeling beyond annoyed right then. It was painfully obvious that he'd never planned to contact her when she was back in Venice, and she wasn't sure if she was angrier at him for that, or at herself for wishing he'd wanted to.

“I assumed you were working at the hospital with Shay.”

“Well, you assumed wrong, the same way I did.” She tipped her chin and stared him down, her chest pinching tightly at the way he was looking at her. As if she were some black rat that had scurried out of the sewer into his clinic.

A long slow breath left his lips as he stuck his hands in the dress pants that fitted him as impeccably as the ones he'd taken off as fast as possible the last time she'd seen him. His white lab coat was swept back against his hips, and even through his dress shirt his strong physique was obvious. The body she'd gotten to see in all its glorious detail.

The jerk.

“Our time together before was...nice, Aubrey. But this is a problem.”

Nice? The most incredible sexual experience of her life had been nice for him? “Why?” she challenged, beyond embarrassed and steaming now. “You’re obviously a man who enjoys women. I enjoyed our night together, too. But that’s long behind us. Now we move into a professional relationship, which won’t be a problem for me at all.”

Liar, liar, pants on fire, her inner self mocked. Though maybe it was true. Right now, if he tried to kiss her, she just might punch him in the nose.

“Listen.” He shoved his hand through his hair. “I think it’s better if we look at other options.”

Other options? The rise of panic in her chest shoved aside her anger with him. Nora had said he was director of the clinic. Did that mean he could toss her out if he wanted? She knew there weren’t any positions available at the hospital. What if there wasn’t a single other place to work in all of Venice?

“Enzo, there’s no reason we can’t work through this. I—”

“Dr. Affini.” Nora rushed into the hallway with a boy who looked to be about seven trailing behind. Blood stained his torn pants and dripped onto the floor with every step he took. “Benedetto Rossi is here. He fell off his bike. I tried to call his father and his nonna but haven’t reached either of them. I’ll keep trying.”

“All right.” Instantly, the frown on Enzo’s face disappeared, replaced by a calm, warm smile directed at the boy. “Were you taking the corners too fast again?” he asked in English.

The boy responded in quick Italian, gesturing wildly and looking panicked. Enzo placed his hand on the boy’s shoulder and led him to an examination room as the boy talked, his head tipped toward the child as he listened. Aubrey hurried to follow. Enzo might not want her here, but maybe she could prove he needed her anyway.

The boy stopped talking to take a breath, and Enzo took advantage of the brief break in his recitation. “Sit up here.” He swung the child up onto the exam table. “And speak English, please. I know your papà likes you to practice, and the nice nurse here is American. I’m going to take a look, okay?”

Benedetto nodded and sucked in a breath as Enzo leaned over to carefully roll back the boy’s ripped pants. The skin beneath sported a wide, bleeding abrasion. It was a nasty one, to be sure, but at first glance it didn’t look to be deep enough to require stitches. Not that his leg couldn’t still be fractured in some way.

Time to show how competent and vital to this clinic she could be, right? Before Enzo booted her out the door for having nice sex with him?

Aubrey shoved down the anger and worry and stab of hurt still burning in her chest and opened a few drawers. Pulled out the supplies she’d need to stop the bleeding, washed her hands, and snapped on gloves. “That’s an impressive scrape you’ve got there,” she said to the child, smiling to relax him. And herself, if she was honest. She was glad Enzo had asked the boy to speak English, because she hadn’t been able to understand a single word he’d said. “You’re obviously a very tough guy. Is your bike okay?”

“No.” The panicked look came back. “The wheel is bent, and the tire is flat. Papà is going to be angry.”

“Oh, surely he won’t be angry when he sees you were hurt,” Aubrey said.

“Yes, he will.” He licked his lips and turned his wide-eyed attention back to Enzo. “Nonna will be, too. I was supposed to be getting bread and seppioline, but I went to play with Lucio first. And then I fell off my bike near his house.”

“Let’s worry about that later.” Enzo straightened to send the boy another wide smile he should patent to relax a patient. Or kindle some other reaction, depending on the circumstances and who he was sending it to. “First, we’re going to stop the bleeding. Then we’ll take an X-ray to look inside your leg. Luckily your papà signed papers allowing me to treat you the last time you were here.”

“X-ray?” Tears sprang into the boy’s eyes. “You think my leg might be broken?”

“I don’t think so, no. But we’ll check just to be sure.” Enzo patted the child’s shoulder and glanced at Aubrey as she cleaned the wound. “Looks like you have that under control. I’m going to get the portable X-ray.”

“Yes, Doctor,” she said, oh, so coolly and professionally, staring at the boy’s leg because she didn’t want to look at Enzo’s wickedly handsome face. Be distracted by all his undeniable beauty, and get mad at him all over again.

He returned just minutes later, rolling the cart to the table. “Between the blood and rips, I’m afraid these pants are ruined, Benedetto. I’m going to cut them off so we don’t have to slide them down over your leg.”

“What? How will I get home without pants?”

“We keep spare clothes here for things just like this. No worries, okay? Nurse Aubrey here will find you something. Now, this won’t hurt at all, and you’ll get to see a picture of your bones afterward, which I think you’ll like.”

Enzo was so incredibly gentle as he lifted the child’s leg to place the X-ray plate under his calf, her vexation with the man softened slightly. The steady stream of calm, amusing conversation he kept up with the boy actually had the child laughing, which was a dramatic difference from the scared tears of earlier. She had to grudgingly admit that the man had a wonderful bedside manner. In more ways than one, darn it.

Enzo straightened, and his dark eyes lifted to hers. “This will take just a short time to develop.”

“I’ll wait to dress the wound until you’ve taken a look. Then find those pants you talked about. Unless you want to wear the ones I brought, Benedetto? They have little flowers on them—quite pretty.”

“Eww, no!” He obviously knew she was kidding, because he laughed, and the impish smile she’d so enjoyed on Enzo’s face the first moment she’d met him returned as he winked at her.

“Benedetto wearing flowered pants to the fish market just might make the fishermen’s day, don’t you think, Aubrey?”

“I don’t want to wear them, but I want to see you in them, Nurse Aubrey! I like flowers on girls’ clothes.”

A laugh left Enzo’s annoyingly sexy lips, and the eyes that met hers held a hint of the amused look she remembered too well. “You’re smart for being so young. Very, very smart. I’ll be right back.”

Hopefully this proved they could take care of patients and interact just fine, and the weight in Aubrey’s chest lifted a little. She absolutely did not want to have to leave Venice before she’d learned more about how her mother’s foundation could help restoration projects there. Before she’d barely had a chance to explore this unique city. Enzo Affini might be superficially charming and very irksome, but she was confident she could look past all that and think about him in a strictly professional way while she worked here.

She could and she would.

Aubrey chatted with the child until Enzo returned, and she quickly looked away from him, because every time she let her gaze run over his dress shirt and doctor coat she remembered the strong body, smooth, tanned skin, and soft dark hair on the muscular chest beneath it all. Which

made her feel a little warm, and while she wanted to think it was her anger bubbling up again, she knew the ridiculous truth.

Mad at him and hurt by him and needing to keep her distance from him didn't seem to affect being attracted to him one bit. What in the world was wrong with her?

"Good news, Benedetto. No fracture." Enzo's voice warmed the whole sparse room. "So Nurse Aubrey is going to get you bandaged up while I go take a look at your bike. See if I can fix it so it's good as new. Is it outside?"

"Sì." The boy's eyes lit in surprised excitement. "Can you do that?"

"I'm going to give it a try. Aubrey, when you're done, please get a tube of topical antibiotic from the drawer for his papà to pick up later when he comes back for us to change the dressing. And will you look in the cupboard next to yours to see if there are any pants that would work for him?"

"Of course." She watched his tall frame leave the room, completely failing in her determination to not admire that beautiful dark hair and his broad shoulders and the elegant way he moved.

Ugh. She quickly turned back to Benedetto. Being sweet to this child and fixing his bike didn't erase the reality that the man had virtually accused her of hunting him down just moments ago. A Jekyll and Hyde type, to be sure.

When she had the boy's leg securely bandaged, she stood and smiled. "I'm going to look for those pants. Be right back."

The first cupboard had a neatly stacked pile of all kinds of clothes, but after fishing through them she couldn't find a single pair of pants. The one next to it had what looked like running shorts and a few T-shirts, and a lone pair of gray sweatpants. More searching proved there was nothing else around, so she took the sweatpants back to the exam room, dug into her purse for her sewing kit, and showed the child the pants. "This is the best I can do, I'm afraid. They're way too big for you, but I'm going to make them fit as best I can. Okay?"

"Okay." He eyed them doubtfully. "How can you make them fit? They are huge."

"Ah, I have many talents, young man. You just wait. Can you stand up without it hurting too much?"

She helped him from the table and held the pants up to his waist. They draped a good foot and a half onto the floor, and she made a pencil mark. Then she took scissors from the drawer, cut off the bottom half of the legs, then cut into the elastic waistband. Removing a big chunk of fabric, she then stitched it back together as the boy patiently watched.

"Eccoli!" she said, feeling pretty satisfied with her work and her ability to come up with a good Italian word to boot. "Step into them and see if they'll stay on you now."

Once he'd pulled them on, he stared down at the pants, then up at her with a big smile. "They are okay! I didn't think you could. Thank you very much."

"You're welcome. Here's that tube of antibiotic Dr. Affini wants put at the front desk for your dad or your nonna to pick up. Now, let's go see how he's doing with your bike."

She tried hard to ratchet back the way her heart squished as they stepped out to the piazza, trying to shore up her negative feelings about the man currently crouched on the stone pavement. His head was bent over the bicycle wheel as he used some kind of wrench on it. He'd taken off his lab coat, and his necktie was askew and tucked inside the buttons of his shirt. Midmorning sunshine gleamed in his hair, and his eyes were narrowed as he concentrated on his task.

"Can you fix it, Dr. Affini?" Benedetto sounded both worried and hopeful.

"Good...as...new. You're going to ride like the wind." One last turn of the wrench, then he stood to pump a little more air into the tire. Obviously pleased, he brushed his hands together, beaming a smile at the boy. "How's your leg feel?"

"Okay. Thank you so much. I'm going to get the things my nonna wanted, then go straight home."

“Here are the instructions for your nonna and papà on when to come back, and later, for changing the bandage again and using the antibiotic ointment.” He pulled a folded paper from his pocket, and his eyes met Aubrey’s. “You did put the ointment at the desk?”

“I gave it to Nora after we set him up with new pants.”

“Bene. They—” He stopped short as he looked at the child’s pants, then, after a long pause, laughed out loud.

“What?” she asked, bristling that he obviously thought her sewing job was amusing. Or bad. Or something. “There wasn’t anything that would fit, so I made a bigger pair fit at least a little.”

“I see that. They look very good on you, Benedetto. Very good.” He reached to give the child a quick hug. “Now you go run your errands. Come back tomorrow to let us take another look and change the dressing, and ask your nonna or papà to call me before that if they have questions.”

“Okay. I don’t think Papà will be as mad now that my bike is fixed. Thank you again!”

Aubrey watched the boy mount the bike and ride it slowly and carefully away, and she smiled. “He’s being very cautious now, I see.”

“Not for long, I’m sure.” Enzo’s amused gaze met hers. “Good thing you made the pants fit so the legs wouldn’t get caught in the chain and make him fall again.”

“Yes, good thing. So why were you laughing at my sewing job?”

“I wasn’t laughing at your sewing job. I was laughing because those are—were—my pants.”

Her mouth fell open. “What? They were in the cupboard you told me to look in! With some shorts and T-shirts and...and...” The vision of the neatly folded shorts and manly T-shirts in that cupboard made her voice fade away. Why hadn’t she realized those items were all the same size, when the ones in the other cupboard had been a total mishmash? Heat washed into her face. So much for showing she was indispensable around here. “I’m so sorry. Really sorry. I thought—”

“Aubrey.” He pressed his fingertip to her lips. “It’s fine. Sometimes I run when the clinic’s slow, and I keep clothes here for that. Obviously, they served Benedetto well. Between you and me, his father is very old-school and can be hard on him when he makes mistakes. Not having to show up in bloody, torn pants with a broken bike is a good thing.”

“What about his mother?”

“She died a few years ago.”

Her heart squeezed for the little boy who had lost his mother far too soon. Having her own mother for twenty-seven years hadn’t been nearly long enough. She looked into Enzo’s eyes and could see they’d shadowed with sadness for the boy, too. Probably for the child’s whole family, since he obviously knew them fairly well, and seeing how much he cared melted her heart. Just a little, though. “Poor little thing,” she said softly. “It’s good that you fixed his bike for him, then.”

“And I thank you for making the pants work. We Venetians take care of our own.”

Not being a Venetian, she knew he wasn’t talking about her, but somehow it felt absurdly nice to be included in the thought. Which reminded her how much she wanted to stay here for the next few months, and how Enzo Affini had implied just a bit ago that he didn’t want to work with her in the clinic at all.

“So.” She squared her shoulders and looked him in the eye. “We were having an important conversation about my job and future here, and you need to know I’m not leaving.”

“No?” His lips quirked at the same time that suspicious frown dipped between his eyes again. “And if the director of the clinic, who would be me, says you have to? That he’ll find you employment somewhere else in Italy?”

“I’ve already worked two months in Rome. And I’ve come to Venice now because this is where I want to be. Didn’t taking care of Benedetto prove we can work together just fine?”

“Aubrey, I cannot promise that I wouldn’t allow myself to be seduced by you again.”

Her mouth fell open. “I didn’t seduce you! I believe it was you who seduced me. And I can promise that it won’t happen again. I don’t even find you attractive anymore.” Which was kind of

true. For good reason. And yes, her nose was growing a little, but she'd stick with that half-truth if it killed her.

A slight smile softened the hard lines on his face. "That I know is a lie. Shall we agree that the seduction was on both sides? And that's the problem, because I can't have an affair with someone who works at the clinic."

"Listen. I know we only got together at first that night because you wanted to ask me questions about Shay." Knowing that hadn't kept her from jumping into bed with him, though, had it? "It was just a one-night thing. I have zero desire to...to co-seduce you again."

"And if I can't say the same thing?"

She wondered if he knew he spoke the words in the same low, sexy rumble he'd used when they'd kissed and made love, and she sucked in a breath as memories of all that shimmered between them. "Then that's your problem, not mine. Though you clearly didn't want to anyway, since you never called me in Rome."

Oh, hell. Did those words really fall out of her mouth? Implying she'd wanted him to, and wondered if he would, and hadn't liked that he hadn't? Lord, that was the last thing she'd wanted to admit.

"Aubrey. It wasn't—"

"Skip it." She held up her hand, desperate to stop him from giving her some lame excuse he didn't really mean. "We'll just have to figure out how to work together. I have no doubt we can act like mere acquaintances and pretend that night never happened."

"That would be extremely difficult. For me, at least."

"Uh-huh. And since we're going to have a professional relationship, please stop with that tone of voice and...and those kinds of comments."

"I thought you no longer find me attractive, so why is that a problem?"

The way her heart fluttered and her breath caught at his physical beauty and sexiness and utter male appeal, she knew it would be tough going to learn to be immune to it.

"It's not. Now, I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a tour of the facility, so I'll know where everything is when a patient arrives, Dr. Affini." She moved past him to the clinic door and paused there. "Shall we?"

CHAPTER TWO

ENZO STUDIED THE woman standing there by the door, looking expectantly at him. Coolly, her pretty chin tipped up as her eyes challenged him. Those eyes had seduced him the second he'd met her two months ago, at the same time he'd wondered what her story was, and her friend Shay's, too, who'd shown up in his brother's life pregnant.

He still had no idea if the two women had an agenda that included snagging two doctors who also happened to be princes, and whose problems with their inheritance had been well-documented in the press. He'd planned to just talk with Aubrey the night they'd spent together, but talking and laughing had led to kissing, then touching, which had led to other, more than pleasurable and memorable things he hadn't been able to stop thinking about ever since.

But getting involved with a woman—a woman he wasn't sure he could trust—at the same time he was trying to save his heritage had seemed like a bad idea.

And now here she was, in his clinic, in all her beautiful glory. Stunned would be the only word that could describe how he'd felt when he'd seen her standing there, looking sexier than anyone should be able to look in a nurse's uniform. How coincidental was it that she'd just happened to be signed up for employment there?

Too coincidental, as far as he was concerned.

"You working somewhere else makes more sense. I'll make a few phone calls to the hospital and the other clinic. I can't promise to find you a position there but can also look at Verona or Padua for temporary nursing opportunities."

“This is ridiculous.” She folded her arms across her chest and stared him down with such laser intensity, a lesser man might have caved right then and there. “You need a nurse here, obviously, or I wouldn’t have been hired. I want the job, I’m qualified for the job, and I’m here now ready to work. Did I do well helping with Benedetto?”

“Yes. But that’s irrelevant to the problem.”

“Are you saying that you’re so chauvinistic and weak around women that you wouldn’t be able to behave professionally around me?”

“What? Of course not.” He couldn’t decide whether to laugh, or be irritated, or both. And admit that their night together had happened because he’d been unable to resist being with her then, so yeah, maybe he was weak. “You’re pretty sassy for a woman who wants her boss to keep her around.”

“And you’re pretty insulting, implying I hunted you down in coming to work here.” She stepped closer and poked her finger into his chest, her eyes flashing blue-gray fire. “I can show you the letter from the UWWHA confirming my employment here, which is dated long before we met. And I’m not going to let a mistake from two months ago keep me from having this job now. So you’re stuck with me, and I’m stuck with you.”

He grasped her hand in his, planning to move her finger from his sternum, but found himself curling it against his chest instead. “A mistake, was it? You didn’t seem to think so that night.”

“That night, I didn’t know what I know now.” She yanked her hand from his. “And neither did you. So we act like adults and work together like adults. Professional relationship, pure and simple. Now, let’s get on with you showing me around here, before more patients show up.”

He felt his lips curve, despite knowing that if he agreed to keep her here, it might well be a disaster waiting to happen. He’d been attracted to her smarts and beauty and sense of humor before. Add to that her spunk and tough attitude?

Irresistible.

Dio. He sighed and stepped around her to open the door. “I have a bad feeling the next few months are going to challenge me at a time I have too many challenges already,” he said. “Lead on, Aubrey Henderson. I’ll show you the ropes if you promise not to hang me with them.”

“I never make promises I’m not sure I can keep,” she said in the sweetest of tones, smiling up at him, her eyes filled with victory, flashes of exasperation, and a touch of the teasing look he’d fallen for before. “But I’ll do my best, Dr. Affini. That I can promise.”

* * *

Several days working at the clinic hadn’t dimmed Aubrey’s enthusiasm for the job, it had made her even more excited about it. Seeing the clinic sign up ahead had her stepping up her pace the same way it had the first day she was there. She was so glad she’d embarked on this adventure, in spite of Enzo Affini’s insulting attitude and the uncomfortable tension between them.

Why in the world had she decided to sleep with him that first night she’d met him? What a mistake that had turned out to be! It was so obvious now that she never should have gotten involved with him, especially since she’d known all along that the main reason he’d offered to show her around Venice was because he’d wanted to pick her brain about Shay.

Except she just hadn’t been able to resist, fool that she was.

Now, though, she was going to concentrate on work and only work. Thank goodness Enzo hadn’t made her go somewhere else, since taking care of mostly tourists was so interesting. In some ways completely different than what she’d done back at home, and in other ways it was exactly the same. And the locals she’d seen so far in the clinic had been a fascinating mix of characters, from charming and sweet to gruff to downright cranky. Though she supposed that would describe all the people in the world—when it came down to it, everyone was much more alike than they were different, weren’t they?

She changed into her crisp white dress and glanced in the locker-room mirror. Caught herself thinking about how surprisingly well it fit and how flattering it was and how Enzo just might think

so, too, and why did even her simple uniform make her think about the man? Pathetic. What was wrong with her that she still caught herself feeling doe-eyed over a guy who'd wondered if she was trying to trap him or something?

Cool, professional relationship only. No fighting or kissing allowed. They'd done pretty well with that the past couple days. Surely after a few more it would feel as if their time together before had never happened?

Yeah, right. Whenever they were alone in a room, the low sizzle humming between them was very hard to ignore.

Nora poked her head into the locker room. "I have a British couple here to see the doctor. A Mr. and Mrs. Conway. You want to get started with them first?"

"Of course." She ushered the middle-aged couple to one of the exam rooms. "Hello, I'm Aubrey Henderson, the nurse on staff today. Can you tell me what you're here for?"

"I've been pecked by a bird," the woman exclaimed. "By an awful dirty bird, and it hurts!"

"All right. Let's have a look." Aubrey was about to shut the door for privacy when Enzo appeared, filling the doorway with his big, irritating, masculine presence.

"Mind if I stay?" he asked. His face was impassive, but she could see a glint of amusement in the depths of his dark eyes at the woman's dramatic statement. "I need to evaluate how our American nurse is doing."

"Of course," Aubrey said before the patient could answer. And was that what he really wanted, or was he there to just rattle her again, knowing this was probably not a serious situation? "This is Dr. Affini."

"I'd like to see what the doctor thinks about this!" the woman exclaimed. "I've probably got some disgusting disease."

"Mrs. Conway, why don't you sit on the table here and show me where it hurts? Sir, you can sit in one of these chairs."

"Right on the top of my head, that's where it hurts! Bleeding, too." She held up a tissue with some specks of blood on it, waving it first at Aubrey, then Enzo. "What if I've been exposed to some terrible bird infection?"

Aubrey donned gloves and gently pushed the woman's hair aside to find a small, reddened indentation. "I can see this probably hurts. But I don't think it's too serious. Let me get some antiseptic to clean it with."

"Not too serious? You'll change your mind when I tell you the story." The woman sat straighter and waved her hands. "I'm minding my own business on a park bench in that big main square where the basilica is. Pigeons were walking around, and I pulled a little treat from my purse to give to one. Then this great, giant black bird dive-bombs me from the sky and grabs the treat from the pigeon!"

Aubrey pulled the cotton and antiseptic from the cupboard, and, when she turned, saw Enzo's eyes dancing and his lips obviously working to not smile at the dramatic recitation. Feeling her own mouth dangerously quiver, she quickly turned back to her patient to keep from looking at him. "And then? How did your head get pecked?"

"So I pull another treat from my purse, and the nasty black bird takes it, drops it, then scares me to death when he suddenly flies up, flapping his great wings in my face as he does. Lands there, right on my head! I shrieked, of course, and jumped up, and it pecked me. Hard! Why, I'm lucky it wasn't my eye he put out."

Aubrey glanced at Enzo. Fatal mistake, as his expression clearly showed he wanted to laugh, and a chuckle bubbled in her own chest when she saw how he was struggling.

Turn away. Do. Not. Look. At. Him.

She quickly turned to the woman's husband, who appeared more weary than worried. "Did you see what kind of bird it was?"

“Some black bird. Don’t know what kind, I’m not a birdman. Especially Italian birds. Medium sized. Yellow beak, I think.” He turned to his wife. “You brought it on yourself, you know. Who gives a pigeon mints to eat? The bird that pecked you was probably so shocked and ticked off, it felt it had a right to attack.”

“Well, I never!” The woman looked beyond insulted as she flung her hand toward her husband. “And this is the kind of support I get after giving him thirty years of my life!”

Oh, Lord. Aubrey held her breath. Dang it, she would have been fine if not for Enzo’s unholy grin. She would.

“I...I think I’ve cleaned it well, Mrs. Conway,” she said.

“What do you think, Doctor? Don’t you think I may get some nasty infection or disease? A filthy bird in a filthy square full of filthy people is bound to have given me something awful. Don’t I need an antibiotic or something?”

Aubrey was impressed at how carefully he looked at the tiny wound, since he knew as well as she did that it was nothing. “Nurse Henderson has done a good job of cleaning it, Mrs. Conway. I’m sure you’ll be fine, but if you have any problems with it, be sure to stop back and we’ll take another look.”

“We’re leaving tomorrow anyway. Thank heavens for that. And what a waste of time to come here for help.” Looking miffed and completely unsatisfied, she slid off the table, and Aubrey led her back out to the lobby, making sure to not look at Enzo as they passed. The woman’s parting words before she walked out the door had Aubrey holding her breath hard again when she went back to the room to be sure it was clean for the next patient.

Enzo appeared again in the doorway. “Ah, she’s the kind of patient that makes this job worthwhile. A pick-me-up from the more serious stuff we deal with, don’t you think?”

Aubrey couldn’t hold it in another second, and she pressed her hands against her mouth to subdue the laugh that spilled out. “That’s for sure. You know what she said when she left?”

He folded his arms across his chest. “What?”

“She said, ‘What does that doctor know about birds? He’s obviously a quack.’”

His sexy laughter joined hers, and she quickly pulled him into the room and shut the door behind them. “Shh! They might have come back for something! What if they hear us?”

“Hear us what?”

She looked up into his eyes, still filled with mirth, but something else, too. That dangerous glint that made her heart flutter and her skin tingle.

She drew in a deep breath. “What is it with you? One minute you’re unpleasant, and the next you’re throwing out sexual innuendos. Didn’t we agree we had to be professional with one another? I think I’m holding up my end here.”

“I also said I didn’t think we should work together because I knew I’d have problems with that.”

Oh, my gosh. Why did he keep saying things he shouldn’t in that deep, rumbly voice that sent a warm flush across her skin, reminding her of their first day and night together?

“Enzo.” After his name, words seemed to dry up on her tongue and she just stared at him.

“Yes?” He took a step closer. He smelled wonderful, and his body heat seemed to envelop her. He obviously knew what unwelcome thoughts had suddenly crowded her brain, because his gaze settled on her lips.

Which parted involuntarily, and her own small movement toward him that brought her nearly against his chest was completely involuntary, too, and when his arms wrapped around her and his head lowered toward hers all protest and common sense left her mind as her eyes drifted closed in breathless anticipation.

“Dr. Affini? Aubrey?”

Her eyes snapped open to see his, dark and dangerous and full of heat, staring right back at her. Time seemed to halt for several heartbeats until they both managed to gather their wits at the same time. She stepped back as he let her go, his chest lifting in a deep breath.

“Saved by Nora.” He stared at her for one more second before turning to open the door.

She watched him disappear into the hallway, and the air she’d been holding in her lungs whooshed out. She was in so much trouble here. No matter how many times she remembered his suspicions, no matter how often she reminded herself they had to keep a professional distance, she just kept forgetting.

And it clearly wasn’t her imagination that he kept forgetting, too.

CHAPTER THREE

ENZO WAS MORE than glad the Restore Venice Association meeting was about to start. That people were finally wandering off to find seats instead of asking him endless questions about the house that was no longer his, talking about how it was going to be ruined if he didn’t get it back, and grilling him on what he was going to do to save it.

He sat toward the back of the room, resisting the urge to slouch in his seat to become semi-invisible. And yes, that probably made him a coward. But since he had no real answers yet, having endless conversations about the house that represented the past seven hundred years of his mother’s family history, and his own, and how he had to keep it from going under the wrecking ball, made his gut churn.

He pulled the program from the pocket of his jacket and just as he was about to look at the meeting schedule, a flash of something bright blue or green in the aisle near him caught his eye. He looked up to see that the flash of color was a dress on what looked to be a very attractive body, at least from the back. The fabric skimmed the curves of a sexy feminine derriere that swayed slightly as she walked.

Who was she? He knew most of the people who attended these meetings and definitely would have remembered that body. The woman turned her head to smile at the person standing to let her sit next to him, and Enzo’s lungs froze in his chest.

Aubrey.

What the hell was she doing here?

Her silky golden-brown hair skimmed her cheek as she sat, and a slender hand shoved it behind one ear as she dug into her purse for something, coming up with the same program he held in his hand.

He and Aubrey had managed to work together without fighting, or, worse, kissing, if he didn’t count that one near miss yesterday. But now the suspicions about her that had stayed on a low simmer—along with the sexual attraction between them—came bubbling into full boil. First she showed up at his clinic to work, and now she’d decided to come to an art and architecture meeting attended only by Venetians and academics from universities in other countries?

Tourists never came. Neither did many Italians from other areas, because they had their own preservation concerns. And yet here she was, and how was he to believe it was about anything other than her ingratiating herself into his life even more? Doubtless knowing all about his family’s problems and the house he loved that she happened to be currently living in.

Did she know he’d owned it before and had rented it out to the UWWHA as he’d planned its renovation? Know that his father had sold it out from under him, and it was about to be resold at a profit? Was renting it from the UWWHA part of her plan somehow?

Enzo’s blood ran cold. If Aubrey was trying to charmingly, spunkily wiggle her way into his life, did that mean Shay had done the same thing with his brother? Was there any way this could be another big coincidence?

Seemed incredibly unlikely, but suspicion without proof just festered, and Enzo had enough to worry about right then. So the only solution was to be brutally frank with Aubrey. To ask her some hard questions, and hopefully be able to figure out if she was being honest with him or not. Which might be very difficult, considering he’d had to consciously fight being attracted to her seeming sweetness and smarts and beauty every hour they’d worked together the past few days, but he had to give it a try.

Barely paying attention to the speakers and conversation, Enzo sat through the first half of the meeting trying to decide if he should tackle Aubrey during the break, or wait until it was over. Feeling on edge, he was still pondering that question during the break when the decision was made for him.

A flash of color had him turning from the coffee stand in the front hallway to see her marching right up to him, a militant expression on her beautiful face.

“Just so you know, I had no idea you’d be here today.”

“No?” The woman must be a mind reader. “Then why are you here?”

“Because I’m interested in Venice’s future. In the restoration of its buildings and artwork.”

“So you know nothing about my current situation.” He said it mockingly, and she frowned at his tone.

“What situation? Unless you’re referring to having to work with me, which you’ve made more than clear is something you’d rather not do.”

“I’ve seen you’re a woman who says what she thinks. So I’m just going to come right out and tell you what I’m thinking. Which is that it’s really bizarre that Shay shows up announcing she’s pregnant with Dante’s baby, and within days she’s married to my brother. Then you and I get together, and two months later you magically show up at my clinic to work.” He set his coffee down and folded his arms across his chest. “And now you claim to have an interest in the restoration of Venice’s buildings, which...shockingly...is my passion, too.”

She stared at him, an even deeper frown creasing her brow. “I’m not following.”

“Then let me be clearer.” He stepped closer, hoping to intimidate her and make her come clean. “What I’m saying is that I can’t help but wonder if you and Shay researched Dante and me, and decided two doctor princes would be a nice catch, then figured out how to weasel your way into our lives.”

“What?” Her mouth fell open in a gasp. “You have an ego the size of Mount Vesuvius, you know that? I’m not even going to dignify that accusation with an answer. You can believe what you want to believe. But if you think insulting me is going to get me to leave the clinic, you’ve got another think coming. I’m staying until my contract is over, so just deal with it. And you’re going to feel pretty ridiculous when you realize your fantasies of me wanting to trap you into something were all in your own small mind.”

She spun away and stalked off, and he stood there long seconds just watching that sexy behind of hers until she went through the doorway to the meeting room again.

He let out a long breath. Maybe his strategy had backfired this time. But if she and Shay weren’t what they seemed, he had to believe that, sooner or later, one of them would tip their hand and the truth would come out.

The president of the association spoke in English as he opened the second half of the meeting. The back of Enzo’s brain absently noted that there must be university guests from other countries for this portion of the presentation and discussion. Then his focus snapped big-time to the speaker when the next words out of the man’s mouth were a name.

Aubrey Henderson.

What the...? He sat up straighter to watch her stand and make her way to the lectern, noticing that plenty of the men in the room seemed to be admiring her swaying walk as much as he had been earlier. Until he’d been shocked to see whose enticing body was wearing that dress.

“Two years ago, Ms. Henderson graciously adopted the renovation of the large fresco depicting angels and warriors in one of the churches at San Sebastiano. The twenty-five thousand dollars she donated have brought this art treasure back to life, and we encourage all of you to visit and admire it. In recognition of this gift, we present this plaque to show our appreciation.”

Applause greeted Aubrey as she accepted the plaque, then stood with the president as photos were snapped. If he’d been surprised before, this time Enzo could barely wrap his brain around what he was witnessing.

Aubrey had donated money to a restoration project in Venice? Two years ago? And not just a little money, but a very nice chunk—enough to completely pay for that project, which was one of so many beautiful old masterpieces in Venice that needed repairs.

Her smile seemed to light the whole room as she leaned toward the microphone, holding the plaque to her breasts. “Thank you. I appreciate this recognition, but it was our privilege to be able to adopt the fresco project. My late mother, Lydia Henderson, lived her life working to save old buildings from being demolished instead of renovated. She led numerous architectural review boards in Massachusetts and elsewhere in New England. During her illness, we decided to donate to this project because she was fascinated with the history of Venice and had always been drawn to images of angels and warriors. She often said that all of us had a chance to be both in our lives. I’m proud to say that she truly was an angel and a warrior, and I hope to live my life at least a little bit like she did.”

Even from the back of the room, Enzo could see her blinking back tears as she said one more thank you, then headed back to her seat. It seemed she’d taken only a few steps before her gaze lifted to his. Her eyes narrowed and her graceful gait seemed to falter for a moment before she turned her attention to finding her seat again.

Dio. What was he supposed to think now?

He stared at the back of her silky head and had no idea of the answer to that question. But one thing he did know?

He owed her an apology.

Obviously, she had good reason to be at the meeting that had nothing to do with him, and, yeah, she’d been right. He did feel ridiculous that he’d assumed otherwise.

He huffed out a breath, not wanting to have to give her that mea culpa, but knew he had no choice. The meeting seemed to drag on forever, his eyes on the back of her head instead of the speaker for most of it. Finally, the crowd stood and he jostled his way through the throng until he was able to catch her just as she was walking out the door.

“Aubrey. Wait. I need to talk to you.”

She stared straight ahead across the piazza, walking faster. “You’ve already said plenty, Dr. Affini.”

“I want to apologize.”

“For what?” She finally turned to look at him, and if the daggers she was sending from her furious gaze had been real, he’d be lying dead on the pavement. “Accusing me of showing up at your clinic to trap you? Of stalking you at the architecture meeting? Of faking an interest in restoration? You overestimate yourself.”

“I know. And I’m sorry. I am. Truly.”

“Hmmp.” The sound she made wasn’t exactly an acceptance of his apology, but at least she slowed down a little, instead of surging through the crowd as if she were in a sprint race.

He reached for her arm to slow her even more and was glad but a little surprised that she didn’t yank it loose. “Aubrey. Things are...difficult right now. Which maybe is making me think and act in a way I shouldn’t.”

“Now, isn’t that an understatement.”

“So can we put this behind us?” He tugged on her arm to force her to look at him. He wanted to see her soften and forgive him, and why that felt so important, he had no idea, since he still wasn’t sure what to think about her.

“I’ll do my best.” She finally turned to him, and the blaze in her eyes had thankfully cooled. “But only because I love being here and enjoy working at the clinic. And I’m not going to let you ruin either one of those things for me.”

This time, she did pull her arm loose, and without another word she took off at a fast pace again. He slowed and decided to let her go. Time to think up a new strategy on how to handle beautiful and mysterious Aubrey Henderson.

* * *

“Stop being negative. We still have time,” Enzo said to his accountant and fellow preservationist, Leonardo. Not sure if he was trying to convince Leonardo or himself, he paced the upper floor of the one home he had left in his possession in Venice, staring unseeingly at the finely woven antique carpet covering the terrazzo floor. “I’m working on raising more money for the purchase and have also liquidated some assets, which you’ll see transferred to the account in a few days. Almost all our vineyards had a good harvest, with more grapes sold this year to other wineries than last, and our own vintages are selling well. Dante gave me the numbers a few days ago. It’s coming together.”

At least, he hoped it was. His gut tightened at how much money he still needed to buy back the childhood home he loved, but he was determined to make it happen.

“But the new owner told me he expected the sale to the hotel chain to go through within the next three weeks,” Leonardo said.

“Which gives us two and a half to beat them to it.”

“I was looking through all the photos of the house you gave me. Whether the sale goes through or not, I’ll need more of the exterior, the internal courtyard, and the bedrooms to provide to the commission proactively, so they’ll agree to a six-month delay of the interior demolition the hotel is planning. Buy us some time to convince the commission to refuse to allow it. If the sale ends up going through to the hotel, maybe they’d end up selling it back to you if they can’t remodel it the way they want to. So can you get those for me?”

“Yes.” Or at least, he hoped he could. He might not be the one who owned and rented the property to the UWWHA anymore, but he did know a certain beautiful, questionable tenant living there. If she wasn’t so angry she refused to talk to him anymore, let alone allow him in the house. “I’ll get them to you as soon as possible. Arrivederci.”

Familiar burning anger swelled in Enzo’s chest as he hung up, but he fought it down. Holding close the bitterness and fury he felt was a distraction he couldn’t afford. Despising his father and his selfish actions didn’t change a damn thing.

No, Enzo just had to work harder and outbid the hotel chain. That was all there was to it.

Thinking of the house had his thoughts turning to Aubrey again. He could picture her sleeping in one of the run-down but still beautiful bedrooms, her shining hair spread across the pillow. Curled up reading a book in a chair in front of one of the massive stone fireplaces. Wandering the halls admiring the amazing rooms and artwork and antiques.

He dropped into a chair to stare out over the Grand Canal. Confused was probably the best word to describe how he felt about her. Along with suspicious and extremely attracted.

Were she and Dante’s lover—no, wife, now—two women with an agenda? So many things pointed to yes, maybe. Then again, there was something so appealing, so seemingly genuine about Aubrey, something that drew him to her in a way that he couldn’t quite remember happening with another woman. He’d seen it when she’d cared for Benedetto, then fixed up Enzo’s pants for the child, which made him chuckle all over again. And a number of other times as they’d taken care of patients together.

Yet there were all those coincidences that made it hard to believe she was for real.

So where did that leave him?

The same place he’d always been. Still planning to save his inheritance here and in Arezzo a different way. Through hard work. Still planning to never marry, regardless of what that meant to the future of the properties that should be his.

Except Aubrey didn’t know that.

Feeling oddly unsettled, he decided to give Dante a call. Between his brother’s new wife and his always busy job as a trauma surgeon, Enzo hadn’t seen the man in weeks. He hoped that meant everything was reasonably fine, but he wanted to hear that for himself. With any luck he’d be available to talk, and not in the middle of surgery, and Enzo was glad Dante picked up after only two rings.

“To what do I owe the honor of hearing from my brother, since you haven’t called me for weeks?” Dante said in his ear.

“The phone works both ways, you know. I figured you were busy with Shay and didn’t want to bother you.”

“You’ve been bothering me your whole life, so why change things now?”

“Point taken.” The smile in his brother’s voice made Enzo smile, too. “How’s work?”

“Busy. So busy that we haven’t been able to get back to Arezzo for a while, but we plan to soon. How about you?”

Hearing his brother say “we” when it came to his life and travels sounded so strange, but, with a baby on the way, he’d be saying that for the rest of his life, wouldn’t he? Something everyone would have to get used to. “Busy, too. Always is during the heavy tourist season, as you know. How’s Shay? Feeling all right?”

“She’s well. Getting more round, but feeling good.”

Why the conversation felt so awkward to him, Enzo wasn’t sure, but he sensed that his brother wasn’t feeling awkward at all. He sounded happy, maybe? Excited? Enzo hoped so, and also hoped his brother’s heart wasn’t going to get mashed up over all of it. “Glad to hear it. Well, I just wanted—”

“What’s the situation with the house?” his brother interrupted. “Last time we talked you were having trouble raising enough funds.”

“Still working on it.” No point in adding to his brother’s concerns, since they’d already collaborated to borrow as much as possible against their wineries.

“I heard that Aubrey Henderson is back in Venice with the UWWHA and living at your house now.”

“It’s not my house anymore, remember?”

“It will always be your house.” Dante’s voice was fierce. “I’m still exploring a few other possibilities for raising money, and I know you’re going to find some way to buy it back. No one is as determined as you when you set a goal for yourself.”

“Thanks. And I am determined.” Somehow, his brother’s vote of confidence eased the tightness in his chest a little, even if they were just words and not money in the bank.

“So how’s it going with Aubrey working at the clinic, or shouldn’t I ask?”

“How did you hear about that?”

“You know how women like to talk,” his brother said drily. “I heard it from Shay. But she didn’t have to tell me you went out with Aubrey. I had a gut feeling you’d end up in bed with her when you told me you were going to introduce yourself to ask questions about Shay. Despite my telling you I knew the child was mine.”

His brother’s voice was chiding, but he didn’t sound annoyed with him anymore. But who wouldn’t have wanted to find out more about the woman his brother wanted to marry? “Maybe your gut feeling was just indigestion.”

“Or not. Aubrey’s a beautiful, smart woman and I knew you wouldn’t be able to resist. And neither would she. If there’s one thing the Affini men are good at, it’s charming women, right?”

“I hope we have more going for us than that, since it’s one of the many things about our father that we both despise.”

“Yeah.” Dante’s joking tone disappeared. “Listen, I just got a surgery consult. Thanks for calling, and I’ll talk to you soon.”

Enzo stood to shove his phone in his pocket, sling his camera around his neck, and grab the keys to his boat. He jogged down the curved stone staircase of one of the several homes that had been in the Affini royal family for centuries.

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