



REUNITED FOR THE
Billionaire's
LEGACY

MODERN
TM



JENNIFER HAYWARD

Amanda Cinelli Jennifer Hayward Reunited For The Billionaire's Legacy

Аннотация

Petition for divorce...denied!Diana Taylor's marriage to playboy Coburn Grant was short and passionate, and it blazed brightly until the reality of their different worlds set in. Now, years later, Coburn has finally agreed to a divorce. Except one last pleasurable night together seals their fate—with a baby!Diana knows Coburn will never sign the papers now—he will have his wife and child. And when he whisks her away to a tropical island paradise, it's increasingly difficult to ignore their primal hunger for one another. With his legacy growing inside her, can Diana deny the one man she could never resist?Jennifer Hayward introduces her thrilling duet... The Tenacious TycoonsTwo billionaire brothers to be reckoned with!The rules of love are nothing like those of business—and when it comes to the game of passion, securing the deal is never as easy as it first seems....Book 1: Tempted by Her Billionaire BossBook 2: Reunited for the Billionaire's LegacyPraise for Jennifer HaywardTempted by Her Billionaire Boss 4.5* RT Book ReviewThe personable, at times frustrating characters, and the Big Apple wheeling and dealing make Hayward's off-limits office romance unforgettable. Her flowing narrative effectively brings

believability to this wonderful must-read. **The Italian's Deal** For I Do 4.5* RT Book Review Hayward's fabulous dialogue gives readers a look at the drama of the fashion industry. The explosive heat, sweet ending and epic battles, plus the couple's complementing personalities, are standouts. **The Magnate's Manifesto** 4.5* RT Book Review TOP PICK GOLD Hayward's must-read romance is a heart-stopping page-turner with an intriguing, jaw-dropping twist. The glitzy locales are over-the-top perfect and intensely explosive intimacies are mind blowing.

“Coburn.” The name came out half-croak, half-word as her eyes moved over his tall, lean body, clad in black jeans and a black T-shirt. **“What are you doing here?”**

He stepped fully into the light, moving lithely, cat-like, toward her, until he was so close she could see the ominous glitter in his beautiful blue eyes. A shiver went down her spine. *She was in trouble. So much trouble.*

His gaze locked onto hers. “When were you going to tell me, Diana? How long did you deem it acceptable to keep from me that I’m going to be a father?”

Her heart leapt into her mouth. *He knew.*

The Tenacious Tycoons

Two billionaire brothers to be reckoned with!

Brothers Harrison and Coburn, heirs to the great American Grant dynasty, have everything they could desire—the money, the power and the tenacity to take whatever they want. Yet money can’t buy everything, and if these brothers hope to live up to their family legacy they’ll each need a very special woman by their side.

But the rules of love are nothing like those of business—and when it comes to the game of passion, securing the deal is never as easy as it first seems ...

Read Harrison’s story in

Tempted by Her Billionaire Boss June 2015

And read Coburn’s story,

Reunited for the Billionaire’s Legacy October 2015

Reunited for the
Billionaire's Legacy
Jennifer Hayward



www.millsandboon.co.uk

JENNIFER HAYWARD has been a fan of romance since filching her sister's novels to escape her teenage angst. Her career in journalism and PR—including years of working alongside powerful, charismatic CEOs and travelling the world—has provided her with perfect fodder for the fast-paced, sexy stories she likes to write—always with a touch of humour. A native of Canada's east coast, Jennifer lives in Toronto with her Viking husband and young Viking-in-training.

For my father, a brilliant orthopaedic surgeon, who inspired me to write *Diana*. You are a real-life hero who has taught me to always aspire to be the best I can be. I will carry that with me always.

And for Rob—thank you for lending your sailing expertise to this story. Much appreciated!

[Contents](#)

[Cover](#)

[Excerpt](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Title Page](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Dedication](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FIFTEEN](#)

[Extract](#)

[Copyright](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

FOR A MAN who thought life was wrapped in a sea of irony,

this had to take the cake.

Coburn Grant, heir to an automotive fortune and the newly minted CEO of Grant Industries, gave his silk tie a tug so it didn't feel as if he was choking on his own cynicism. Attending his best friend Tony's engagement party on the eve of his own divorce was impeccable timing that only he could manage. Having to give a speech to the happy couple in thirty minutes that spoke of hope and rainbows? The icing on that exceedingly unpalatable cake.

He could do this. He could. He just needed one more stiff Scotch in his hand. That and a big set of rose-colored glasses.

"You okay, Grant?" Rory Delaney, the big, brawny Australian who had been a close friend since they'd attended Yale together, lifted an amused brow. "You look a bit green."

Coburn adopted one of his patented entertained-by-life expressions, the only mask he ever let the world see. "Never better."

And why wouldn't he be? He was the leader of the Fortune 500 company he'd helped rebuild after his father's death, his brother, Harrison, was campaigning for the White House, which was only adding to Grant Industries' global appeal, and he had a particularly beautiful, slightly wild blonde warming his bed every night—convenient when she lived only two doors down.

Heaven was what he called it.

Rory, a tall, handsome pro basketball player who was immensely popular with the ladies himself, gave a reassured shake of his head. "So glad to hear that, Grant. Right at this

particular moment, in fact.”

Rory’s tone was a blend of sarcasm and warning. He was worrying Coburn was still hung up over his soon-to-be ex, who had left him a year ago. Which was so entirely wrong. His marriage to Diana had been a foolish, rash endeavor to numb the pain he’d been in over his father’s death, a passionate, all-consuming obsession with which to direct his emotions. Exactly what he’d needed at the time. Exactly what he needed to get rid of now.

He lifted a shoulder. “I’m not twenty-five anymore, Ror. An amazing body and a smart mouth don’t do it for me any longer.”

Rory’s face tightened in warning as his friend’s definitive elocution carried throughout the room. “Coburn—”

He waved him off. “I don’t know what you’re getting yourself so worked up about. I’ve got this speech in my back pocket.”

Rory gave a spot behind him a pointed look. “Diana is behind you. Three o’clock.”

He felt the color drain from his face. “My soon-to-be *ex-wife* Diana?”

“Bingo.”

His heart stuttered in his chest, his fingers gripping tighter around the tumbler of whiskey. He’d been ready for this confrontation to happen tomorrow when they had the divorce papers in front of them. When he was prepared to see the woman who had walked out on him without a backward glance twelve months ago, not to be seen since because she’d ensured their

schedules never overlapped. Which wasn't a mean feat in a city like Manhattan, where social circles tended to remain with like social circles.

But then again, Diana didn't socialize. She worked *all the time*. Which made it all the more surprising she was here tonight...

Rage surged through him, swift and all encompassing. It moved upward, through his chest, erupting into his brain to turn it a hazy gray until he thought his head might blow off his shoulders. *How dare she show up here?* How dare she spoil this night for him? These were his friends, not hers.

He drew in a breath through his nose, exhaling slowly as Rory watched him as if he was an overly antagonized bull ready to charge. His turn when he moved was unhurried and deliberate. *Unfazed*. The stricken ebony eyes that stared back at him revealed she'd heard what he'd said. His gaze moved past his outrageously beautiful wife to the group of people standing beside her. They'd *all* heard what he'd said. Well, too bad. He wasn't taking the words back. He'd meant them from the bottom of his heart.

The only thing he *did* regret was showing his hand like that. He'd intended on approaching tomorrow with a calm detachment Diana would have found unnerving. To demonstrate the man she was now dealing with wasn't anything like the one she'd married. That he wasn't a fool for her anymore.

He shifted his attention back to his wife. Her eyes had lost that vulnerable edge now, hardening into the dark, bottomless pools

it had once been his life's mission to get to the bottom of. He never had. She was angry. Furious. Too bloody bad. It had been her decision to come.

The entire party was staring at them now, waiting for a reaction from one of them. Mouth tightening, he turned his back on them, but not before cataloging the fact that his soon-to-be ex was even more strikingly beautiful than he remembered her to be. As if life away from him had enhanced her devastating appeal.

He set his glass down on a table, cocked his head toward the bar and he and Rory headed for liquid sustenance. Diana had taken so much from him. But she wasn't ruining tonight.

Not happening.

* * *

Diana wobbled in her high-heeled shoes as Coburn shut her out as easily as if she was one of his big-breasted floozies he was long done with. Except he would have been more charming with them. He'd always saved his tough love for her.

Love. An aching knot formed in her throat. The emotion burning in his striking blue eyes just now had been crystal clear. He hated her for what she'd done to him. Still hated her. She wanted to say she hated him back, but that would have been a lie. Her feelings for Coburn had always been far more complex than that. Which was exactly why she needed him to sign the divorce papers tomorrow so she could get on that plane to Africa and forget their marriage had ever existed.

Her hand shook slightly as she averted her gaze from the crowd and lifted her wineglass to her mouth. She knew Coburn had been talking about her. Everyone at the party knew he'd been talking about her. They'd been eating it up like vultures, waiting for the drama to ensue. It was why she hated these damn affairs so much. People with too much time on their hands to speculate and provide yet more salacious tidbits to the gossip mill tomorrow. She'd come only because Annabelle had begged her to.

An amazing body and a smart mouth don't do it for me any longer...

Coburn's words reverberated in her head. She bit back the tremble that wobbled her lower lip and took a sip of the wine. What a bastard he was. She wanted to walk over there and slap his face with the anger that had been festering for twelve months. But that would be letting him win.

She was a surgeon—she put people back together. She would not let Coburn pull her apart. *Again.* Ever.

She made an attempt to circulate, to say polite things to people she hadn't seen in a while and really didn't care to now, but when Coburn was in a room, he was impossible to ignore. He was too beautiful in the male definition of the term. Too tall, with muscles honed by his predilection for daredevil sports, too stunning with his dark hair and arresting blue eyes and too charismatic, with that wicked, effortless charm a woman didn't stand a chance against.

She removed her gaze from the muscles rippling under his

shirt, his jacket long ago discarded per usual. Her husband wasn't even that aware of his physical perfection. He traded on his charm, on his ability to get people to do the things he wanted them to do—to make them *beg* to do the things he wanted them to do, without even knowing they were doing it.

Her mouth twisted. She'd never really stood a chance. Her time spent with her nose buried in medical school textbooks, then sequestered in the hospital as a young resident working 24/7 had meant zero time for relationships. When Coburn had swept her off her feet on a rare night out at another Chelsea party very much like this one, he'd just *taken*.

How many people had told her to watch her heart? To use her head. She hadn't listened to any of them. She'd married him despite her father's advice to the contrary.

A dull ache throbbed inside her. She shouldn't have come. She really shouldn't have. She comforted herself knowing soon none of it would matter. Soon she would be on that plane to another continent. She would escape her claustrophobic life with her claustrophobic parents and her claustrophobic job, which was more politics than the Hippocratic oath she'd taken to heal the sick. The suffocating feeling she got every time she remembered Coburn was still sharing this city with her...

Her mouth twisted. If she thought she might be slightly crazy giving up her job at one of New York's most prestigious hospitals to go work in a war-torn territory where the only certainty was complete uncertainty, she wasn't alone. She'd been getting

that sentiment a lot lately, particularly from her father, who'd forbidden her to go.

Her gaze drifted to her husband instead of focusing on the conversation happening in the group she'd joined. It hadn't always been bad between her and Coburn. One particular night stuck in her head, in the early days of their marriage. She'd been a rising star as a resident, demonstrating surgical skills way beyond her years. But that night, she'd lost her first patient, a sixteen-year-old boy who'd been in a horrific car accident. His parents had sat in the waiting room for almost eight hours as she and the other specialists had attempted to save him, but the hemorrhaging from his internal injuries had eventually defeated them. She'd arrived home at 7:00 a.m. bruised and battered, her face telling the whole story. Coburn had held her in his arms and rocked her until she'd fallen asleep, then put her to bed. He'd been late for his board meeting that morning, but he hadn't cared. *Then*, they had been the most important thing in each other's orbit.

Her eyes burned at the memory. When they had been good, they had been very, very good. And when they had been bad, it had been unbearable.

Coburn raked a scathing gaze over her from where he stood, talking to Rory. She squared her shoulders, turned her back to him and did what the proud, perhaps foolish Taylor women had perfected as a family art. She turned a blind eye to the humiliation blanketing her and moved on.

To be among such happiness when her heart was so bleak was torturous. The only thing that made it bearable was the thought that in three weeks she'd be following her heart for the first time. Just her. Just Diana.

She wondered what she was going to find when she discovered who she really was.

* * *

Coburn's third Scotch had his blood humming through his veins in a heated pull that tempted him to engage with the long-legged thing of beauty who'd once convinced him he needed no other. It was almost irresistible the force that drew him to her, that had always drawn him to her, despite the bitter recrimination he knew she could dish out with that stiff, superior manner of hers. But he resisted. His speech was happening in minutes and he needed all his composure to do it.

He watched Diana circulate through the crowd, her exquisite manners easing every interaction into the perfect sixty seconds of social repartee no matter what the partygoer's background. Diana always knew what to say, even when bent on sticking a dagger into his back.

She was tall for a woman, five foot nine, downplaying her height as usual with a lower heel than most of the females in the room. Her slim boyish figure was the same lithe silhouette, her sensual, exotic features still utterly arresting, but the hair she used to wear well past her shoulders was shorter now, skimming her collarbone. He'd never let her cut it. He'd loved the feel of

it sliding against his skin when she'd leaned down to kiss him as she'd taken him inside the tight sheath of her body, always in tune with him at that moment when he filled her completely and wiped any barriers from between them.

As far as makeup sex had gone, and there'd been a lot of it, he and Diana had perfected the art. Hot and filled with a dozen unspoken emotions, it had been a ride he'd become addicted to, until it had destroyed them.

His body reacted to the memory with a tightening his anger could not prevent. Every man at that party in Chelsea the night they'd met had pinpointed his wife as the ultimate conquest. The ice princess who had swept them all with a disdainful look that had said, "Don't bother."

It had been like waving a red flag in front of a bull. He hadn't been able to resist. Diana's quick comebacks and complete lack of awe when it came to him had entranced him. She'd known she was deserving. She'd been *born* deserving. And he'd been up to the challenge. What he wasn't to know at the time was the extent to which her innocence would enslave him with a far greater power than his sexual prowess had claimed her. He hadn't been able to bear the thought of her with another man after he'd taken her, and had put a ring big enough to sink a ship on her finger shortly thereafter to make sure it never happened.

How foolish to think a ring could ever command her complete attention. He hadn't been enough for her. He suspected no man ever would be.

“You ready?” Tony appeared at his side.

He nodded. *A lifetime of happiness.* He was going to wish his friends the best, then shut his mouth. It wasn’t that hard.

He waited with Rory and Tony at the front of the room while Annabelle’s maid of honor made sure everyone had a glass of Veuve in their hands, courtesy of the Grants. Then he strolled to the center of the room at Tony’s nod. The crowd stood gathered around him, a festive cheer in the air at an occasion full of such promise. His eyes picked out Diana in the second row, her gaze carefully averted from his. His blood fizzled in his veins, his prepared speech flying out the window.

“I’m sure you’ve all heard the joke that love is temporary insanity, cured by marriage.” He paused as scattered laughter filled the room. “While I think that is hardly the case with Tony and Annabelle, who are two of the most perfectly matched people I have ever encountered, make no mistake about it,” he underscored harshly, “marriage is hard.”

The room went so silent you could hear the clinking of swizzle sticks as the bartenders mixed drinks. “Marriage isn’t just about finding a person you love,” he continued, oblivious to the agitated stare Rory was throwing him, “because I think that *does* happen. I do think falling in love is possible. What’s far harder is *staying* in love. Finding someone you can live with. Finding someone whose hopes and dreams, whose ideologies, mirror yours so when the going gets tough, when the inevitable realities of life intrude, that bond has the strength to support you both past the

attraction that drew you together.”

He paused, the voices in his head warning him to stop, but his heart wouldn't let him. Rory looked panic-stricken now, his gaze imploring him to rein it in. Annabelle was chewing on her lip, staring at him. Tony was frowning with that deliberate calm of his.

Coburn shrugged. “Someone neglected to tell me that you can love a person madly, blindly, but it still isn't going to work if you can't accept each other's flaws and imperfections. That,” he added deliberately, looking at Diana, “sometimes love isn't enough.”

Diana's dark eyes shone almost black in her chalk-white face. Every party, every social function, every night he'd come home to an empty house flashed through his head in rapid-fire succession to counter the stab of pain that lanced through him.

He removed his gaze from his wife and pinned it on Tony and Annabelle. Tony had an arm around his fiancée's waist now, his expression furious. Coburn dipped his chin. “All of this to say, sometimes one of those once-in-a-lifetime unions comes along you know will never suffer the fate of others. That you know is the deep and everlasting variety. Tony and Annabelle, I know that you will thrive and prosper together because you are one of those unions. I am so looking forward to watching you grow old together.”

The look on Tony's face said their friendship might not last the next ten minutes. He ignored it and lifted his glass. “Here's

to Tony and Annabelle, one of the special ones... A lifetime of happiness to you both.”

The crowd lifted their glasses in stunned silence. Coburn drank deeply, moved to embrace Tony, who muttered an expletive in his ear, then dropped a kiss on the cheek of a bemused Annabelle, who looked as if she wanted to kill him only slightly less than Tony did. “You might want to address some of those repressed feelings,” she suggested drily.

Or not. He stepped back as the couple was surrounded by well-wishers, ignored Rory’s scowl and headed for the terrace and some much-needed fresh air. In fact, he thought, perhaps the whole disaster of an evening might lie in breathing the same air as his erstwhile wife.

The crisp, cool late-August night wrapped itself around him like an embrace, a slight breeze teasing the hair at the base of his neck. He yanked his tie looser and undid the top couple of buttons of his shirt. He had been way out of line in there, but some inexplicable force had insisted he tell the truth. And why the *hell* had she chosen tonight to resurface?

High-heeled shoes clicked on the concrete. He didn’t have to turn around to know it was Diana. He knew her tread, her gait, how those long legs of hers ate up the distance.

“How *could* you?”

He wheeled to face her. “How could *you*? These are *my* friends.”

She came to a halt in front of him. A flush spread across her

perfect alabaster skin, staining her cheeks a soft pink. “They’re my friends, too. Annabelle asked me to come.”

“Then, you should have declined,” he said harshly. “You’ve spent twelve months avoiding me, avoiding anything about us, and you choose *tonight* to resurface?” He shook his head. “Usually your social etiquette is dead-on Diana, but tonight it’s been left sorely wanting.”

Her eyes darkened into furious black orbs, her fingers clutching her evening bag tight. “I would say *your* social etiquette is what’s lacking tonight, Coburn. First your insulting throwaway comment everyone heard, then your telling speech about how much you hated being married to me.”

“What?” he drawled mockingly. “You didn’t like the joke? I thought it particularly apt given our present situation, because it certainly was insanity what we shared. Or perhaps you didn’t like me suggesting you have flaws? Letting the world in on your dirty little secret?”

“No,” she said slowly, the flush in her cheeks descending to stain her chest with a matching rosy hue. “Your poor taste in the speech I can take, although I’m sure Tony and Annabelle won’t be thanking you later. It was your inappropriate comment to Rory I thought excessively juvenile.”

“You mean the one about being over a smart mouth and a great body?” His mouth twisted. “Really, Di, that could have been about anyone. Although,” he conceded, raking his gaze over her lithe body and small, high breasts, “it certainly does ring true

in your case.”

His bald-faced lie had her clenching her free hand at her side. “You’re still a bastard, Coburn Grant. That hasn’t changed, either.”

“Sorry, no.” He watched as his perusal elicited the agitated response it always did in her, turning the rosy hue in her skin a dark red and sending the pulse at the base of her neck fluttering. “You could have avoided it by showing up at our meeting tomorrow and not among my closest circle of friends.”

She exhaled on a long sigh. “You won’t have to worry about me being around much longer. You can have New York all to yourself.”

His gaze sharpened on her face. “What does that mean?”

“I’m leaving in three and a half weeks to join Doctors Without Borders in Africa.”

“*Africa*? What about the job you are so in love with you couldn’t find time for me?”

“I left.” Her chin rose, gaze tangling with his. “I decided our divorce was the perfect opportunity to wipe the slate clean.”

He studied the mutinous set of her full mouth. “*You* left your job?”

“Yes.”

He was unprepared for the searing pain that sliced through him. *Now* when they were about to end their marriage with two signatures on a piece of paper she’d done the one thing that might have saved them. “Why?” he bit out, his hand clenching tight

around his champagne glass. “Don’t tell me...you needed to *find* yourself.”

Her chin lifted another notch. “Something like that.”

He was at a true loss as to where to go with that information. All he’d ever wanted was for them to have time to devote to each other. For her to act like his true partner. But she’d never allowed it. She had refused to pull back on her grueling schedule, which had once seen her home only two days in a month as a resident, claiming it would impact her career.

“Forgive me,” he said finally, “if the whole idea of this confounds me at this particular moment.”

Her long lashes fanned over her pale cheeks. “It’s time one of us grew up, Coburn. And since that clearly isn’t going to be you with your floozy-a-week love life, I guess it has to be me.”

He absorbed the insult like a boxer taking a misguided, poorly aimed punch. “You never could get past them could you, Di? What was history never was for you.”

She opened her eyes, an amber glint firing amid a mahogany canvas. “Hard when it was thrown in my face every second minute. Why do you think I stopped attending parties with you? Who could stomach knowing that half the women in the room had had my husband?”

“You mentioned that before,” he countered, enjoying the fact he was getting to her. “A complete exaggeration I’ll tell you once again. You made me a mythological figure in your head, Di. None of it bore anything close to reality.”

“It’s hard to separate the fool’s gold from the real thing,” she scoffed. “I suppose you will have to tone it down now that you are lording it as CEO. Are you sure your ego can handle all the power?”

“It’s in fine shape,” he murmured on a low warning as he bent his head to her. “And thank you for the sincere congratulations on my promotion.”

She moistened her lips as he impaled her with his gaze. His satisfaction at how he still got to her knew no bounds. “Perhaps we should continue this discussion somewhere else? Rather than hijacking the happy occasion any more than we already have?”

“I—I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Her gaze dropped to the skin exposed by his unbuttoned shirt. “I should go anyway. I have a ton of things to do before I leave.”

He closed his hand around her slim wrist. “I disagree,” he countered in a silky-soft tone. “This is a discussion we should have had twelve months ago. Why not have it now before you run off to prove to your father you have a mind of your own?”

“And you.” The words tumbled out of her mouth before she censored herself.

He watched dismay cloud them. “Yes, Di,” he bit out. “*Exactly that.*”

Ebony eyes bound to blue. Emotion, something he couldn’t remember seeing in her for the last interminably painful year they’d spent together, flared in the eyes staring back at him. It made something elemental fire inside him. This was his chance

to scratch beneath the surface of his wife. And although that was the last thing he should be doing the night before they ended their relationship with a resoundingly civilized divorce settlement, it was a temptation his white-hot curiosity couldn't resist.

"We're leaving," he muttered, wrapping his fingers firmer around her wrist and pulling her toward the French doors.

She tugged on his arm. "You're making a scene."

"Not as much as we've made already." He directed her toward their hosts and the happy couple to say their goodbyes. Eyes followed them as they went, sending regret lancing through him. Tonight had once again proved his wife brought out the worst in him. It was time to put an end to it once and for all—an end that had nothing to do with paperwork.

CHAPTER TWO

DIANA TOOK THE glass of water her husband handed to her, closing her shaky fingers tight around the tumbler so he wouldn't see how nervous she was. The tension that had been screaming through her ever since she'd entered Coburn's beautifully decorated bachelor pad just a couple of blocks from the party was threatening to annihilate her composure.

She walked out onto the glazed concrete terrace while Coburn found a bottle of wine. The large open space with its comfortable lounge furniture scattered throughout was easily as big as the square footage of his trendy penthouse apartment on the top floor of the Chelsea low-rise—casual elegance that reflected her husband's free-spirited need to be outdoors as much as possible.

Moving to the edge of the terrace that overlooked the tree-lined street, elegant with its neat little brick buildings and wrought iron fences, she rested her forearms on the railing. The hip neighborhood fit her husband's persona to a T—notable, relaxed while still possessing enough individuality that he wouldn't feel stifled as he had in their impossibly expensive, old-money East Side co-op.

A party was in full swing on the rooftop terrace of the building opposite, the loud dance music carrying on the air to where she stood. She set the glass down on the ledge before the water sloshed over the side. Why had she let her husband railroad her into coming here? Hadn't they said all they needed to say in that final blowout that had put any of the ones before it to shame? Hadn't she walked out on him because that night it had become crystal clear they weren't going to make it together? That what they'd had had died and all they were doing was torturing each other?

She closed her eyes. She could still feel the force of her husband's anger blanketing her even now. He had walked in from a party just as she had returned home from a shift at the hospital, the blood staining her wrists she'd missed in her final scrub a testament to her exhaustion. Coburn had been out for a fight from the minute he'd tossed his jacket on a chair and she'd known it, known she should just retreat into the shower and let him cool off. But his furious tirade had been off and running by then. People were starting to talk about her continued absence at social

functions, he'd told her. Rumors were circulating about the state of their marriage. Questioning whether they would last... *I've had enough of it, Di. Enough of this half-life with you.*

She'd somehow found the energy to fight back because none of what he was saying was fair. Just because her husband enjoyed giving his older brother fits by taking off for a last-minute bicycle race in the French Riviera didn't mean she had the same lack of loyalty to *her* job. People's lives depended on her. She didn't get to choose when and how long she was on duty. But Coburn in his stubborn arrogance had stated there were other doctors in the city of Manhattan, and *he* needed her by his side. Which had devolved into him suggesting she was using her work to avoid him and their issues. Which might have had some truth to it. But she had been too mad, too hurt to rein in her arsenal of similar complaints about his irresponsible behavior. Where had he been the night of the Taylor holiday party when she'd needed him by *her* side? Partying in Cannes with friends...

They'd traded barbs until she literally couldn't stand on two feet anymore, then she'd showered and spent the night in the spare bedroom. The next day she'd moved into her parents' guest room until she could find an apartment of her own. Coburn had been too angry to come after her. Maybe all there was to be said had been said.

Her father had gleefully offered an "I told you so" and beat Coburn's shortcomings into her head until she was sufficiently brainwashed she knew she would never go back. But in the spirit

of her newfound brutally honest outlook on life, as painful as it might be, she knew her father couldn't be blamed for her and Coburn's split. They had needed no assistance wrecking the good that they'd had.

The fact that Coburn had been with other women months after they'd parted had been the final nail in the coffin. The part of her that had held out hope they might work things out had died then.

The only mystery was why neither of them had filed the divorce papers sooner. It had been she, after signing her contract to work abroad, who had started the proceedings.

A chorus of excited giggles floated across the air to her as a group of girls horsed around with two attractive males. *You aren't fun anymore.* Coburn's words echoed through her head from that last night. *What happened to you?*

She thought about it. Had she ever been fun? Being a resident was not meant to be a joyride. It had been the most grueling five years of her life, meant to separate the weak from the strong. Why couldn't her husband have accepted the early years were going to be like that? That it *would* change.

He joined her on the terrace then, as if she'd conjured him up to ask just that question. But of course she hadn't. Not now when they were about to make their relationship history.

She eyed the bottle of champagne in his hands. "What are we celebrating?"

His sensuous mouth curved in a humorless smile. "How about our incredibly civilized divorce?"

Her mouth twisted. “Because the lawyers hashed out every clause for us.”

“Your decision.” His electric blue eyes lanced through her. “I was willing to sit down and act like two reasonable human beings for an hour. *You* for some reason were not. I’m very curious as to why that might be.”

She hadn’t let herself wonder that. Perhaps because she didn’t want to know the answer.

She watched the play of muscles in his forearms as he worked the cork out of the bottle. Exposed by his rolled-up sleeves, they were one of her favorite parts of him. Lean and muscular, he was all sinewy power without an excess centimeter of flesh on him. Potently strong enough to brace himself with as he flipped her from one sexual position to the next...

The cork flew into the air with a decisive pop. It jerked her back to reality. She couldn’t be thinking things like that. Thoughts like that had always gotten her into trouble when it came to Coburn. Because they inevitably led to sex and their erotic, spectacular love life that had become a crutch for their utterly dismal relationship skills.

Coburn filled two glasses and handed one to her, his gaze resting on her heated cheeks. “Disconcerting, isn’t it, probing at the real reasons why we do the things we do? Maybe you were scared that one hour in a boardroom would end up the way it always does with us... You would call me a selfish son of a bitch and I would make you eat your words, one orgasm at a time.”

The heat in her cheeks darkened into a full-out fire. "Perhaps my choice was the wiser one, then?"

"Or the coward's way out."

Her chin lifted. "There's nothing wrong with a bit of self-realization. In not repeating the same mistakes we've made in the past..."

"If you call that part of our relationship a mistake, yes." The glitter in his gaze made her shift her weight to the other foot. *Damn* but this had been a colossal mistake.

He lifted his glass, his gaze holding hers. "To self-realization, then. *And* the dissolution of our hasty, ill-thought-out vows."

A throb dug itself deep into her flesh, somewhere in the region of her heart. To hear him sum up their union like that without acknowledging the intense highs only they had offered each other didn't seem right. "To greater self-realization," she echoed, lifting the glass to her lips.

"What?" he murmured after he'd taken a sip. "You don't agree we were a hasty, ill-thought-out union?"

She turned her head to look at the revelers. "I think we were much more than that."

A silence fell between them. She felt his eyes on her, coolly assessing. When she thought he might say something, she cut him off at the pass. "I'm happy for Harrison. He'll make a fine president if he wins."

"The country couldn't do any better."

"And Frankie. She's very beautiful." A cynical note entered

her voice as she referenced her husband's PA, who was married to his older brother. "How did you let that one get away? She is so your type, Coburn. Young and impressionable."

"And about to give up her career for her and Harrison's new addition to the family." His mouth curled with a sardonic twist. "What a lucky man he is... He married a woman who doesn't need to prove herself to the world."

The dagger cut through her as cleanly as her own surgeon's scalpel. "You never seemed to want babies, Coburn. If that was high on your list, you should have mentioned it when you were cataloging my potential as your wife. You knew with my residency it would be years."

A frown furrowed his brow. "There was no *cataloging*. We married before we had any idea who the other one was."

Her stomach knotted. "And you found me sorely lacking in any capacity other than the bedroom."

His gaze narrowed. "You liked to think that was the reason. Because then you didn't have to work at it at all. You could just run off like the spoiled little rich girl you were and cry to Daddy. There were no repercussions."

No repercussions? She'd spent the past year trying to bury herself in her work because it was too painful to go home to an apartment that didn't have Coburn in it. He really had no clue.

"You think I'm the only one who's unknowable?" she offered quietly. "I could do an entire emotional autopsy on you, Coburn, and I would still never get to the bottom of you. You play like

you're so open and there, but none of it is the real you."

His eyes glittered. "You have to give some to get some, Di."

Right. Here they were at the same old discussion. A waste of time.

"Why didn't you file for divorce? You were certainly anxious to move on and avail yourself of other female company."

He lifted a shoulder. "I don't plan to marry again so there was so rush. And as for my sexual partners? My prerogative when you ended our marriage. You know I have a high level of *need*."

A need that had apparently overwhelmed him within months of their marriage ending...

She lifted her gaze and watched the midnight blue sky streaked with a swath of purple swallow up a lone star. Her insides hurt, like the delicate, shaky aftermath of a horrible flu.

"How long will you be gone?"

Coburn was watching her with that all-seeing gaze of his. "Three months, maybe more. The need for surgeons is critical."

"What happened to your dream of working with Moritz?"

"I couldn't handle the politics." Swiss surgeon Frank Moritz was one of the most revered pediatric surgeons in the world, a specialty she wanted to make her own, but as Diana had found out, he was also one of the biggest egos in the profession. She had impressed him enough to put herself in line for the fellowship he was offering, but she hadn't been able to force herself to do the schmoozing being Moritz's choice entailed. It went against every belief she had that talent should prevail.

He lifted a brow. "You knew that was going to be part of it."

"I didn't know it was going to color *every aspect* of it. The man is a megalomaniac."

"So you're just giving up your career?"

"No. I'm going to Africa to practice."

He waved his glass at her. "You know what I mean. You will be out of the loop. You'll have to start all over again."

"So be it." A wry smile curved her lips. "It's done, Coburn. I've sold my apartment and my car. I need to find my way."

He studied her as if she was a creature from a different species he'd come into contact with. And maybe she was. She wasn't the same Diana who'd walked away from him, that was for sure. She'd done far too much soul-searching to be that.

"Don't you think it's a bit drastic to put yourself in the middle of a war-torn country to find yourself? If it's me you're trying to avoid, then move to another state. Move to another country, for God's sake. Not a *war zone*."

She straightened her shoulders, her lips flattening into a stubborn line. "This isn't about you, Coburn. Things aren't always about you, although you like to think they are. This is about *me* and my need to help other people with the skills I have."

His gaze narrowed on her. "You forget you admitted to me earlier part of this is you thumbing your nose at me."

Damn her loose mouth. She sunk her teeth into her lower lip. "That was a knee-jerk reaction to an old wound. Nothing you say or do affects me anymore."

“Then, why do you avoid me? You’ve been systematically ensuring our paths don’t cross for the past year.” He lifted a brow. “How do I know this? Because every time I’m unable to make something, I hear afterward you were miraculously able to attend. That’s a lot of trouble to go to to avoid someone whose presence doesn’t *affect* you.”

She swallowed hard, studying the play of light over his aching familiar face. She had been avoiding him, of course, but it wasn’t something she was ever going to admit.

“So I ask again,” he demanded roughly, “why show up tonight? What purpose did this serve?”

Standing this close to him, inhaling his spicy aftershave mixed with a fresh citrus lime that had always made her weak in the knees, she suffered the horrifying realization that maybe it was closure she had wanted. One more chance to see him before she signed those papers. One more chance to put this demon to rest before she put her life behind her for a future that was a complete unknown. To convince herself she was doing the right thing by walking away from him. Instead, all she could think about was his horrible, hurtful comment to Rory.

I’m not twenty-five anymore. An amazing body and a smart mouth don’t do it for me any longer.

Was that all she’d ever been to him?

She tilted her head back and looked up at him. “You didn’t mean what you said to Rory.”

His mouth compressed into a straight line. “Oh, but I did,

Diana. I may still *want* you because you have an undeniably sweet body I could spend my life sinking myself into. But as for any emotion beyond that? History, sweetheart. You made sure of that.”

The hollow feeling that consumed her then was frightening in its intensity. She could not sign those papers tomorrow, could not step on that plane knowing that was what he thought of her. That she wasn’t any different from all of his other women. That what they had had meant nothing.

She moved closer until the tips of her breasts brushed against the fine material of his shirt and her hips were cradled in the wide breadth of his. His heat moved through her, reminding her just how good it felt to be held against him.

“What were those women to you?” she asked, tracing a finger over the groove at the side of his mouth that seemed to have grown deeper. “A salve for your embittered soul? A way to prove I meant so little to you?”

He captured her hand in his. “I just told you, Di, I’m over you. Don’t give yourself so much credit.”

But she could feel his arousal stirring to life against her. Feel the rigidity of his powerful body with every contact point it shared with hers. Sex had never just been about the physical between them—it had transcended that, branded them with a truth they couldn’t deny. And she wanted it. *Now*. Then she could walk away.

She ran her free hand up the hard muscles of his thigh until

she found the essence of his virility. His rough intake of breath sent a surge of satisfaction through her.

“What the hell are you doing?”

She lifted her gaze to his. “Maybe I came tonight for this. Maybe we should finish it like we started...”

Hot color stained his cheeks, the cords of his muscular neck standing out in stark definition. “I think that’s a bad idea.”

Her fingers traced the hard ridge of him along the zipper of his pants. His response was instantaneous, his flesh swelling beneath her touch. It set her blood on fire to prove she could still affect him like this.

He arched his hips to press himself into her hand. “This is just sex.”

She closed her fingers more firmly around him. “Whatever you say.”

“*Diana.*” His fingers captured her jaw, tilting her face up to his. “This means *nothing*. Know that if I take you now.”

But she saw the emotion raging in his eyes. Knew it from their navy blue color so dark now his pupils blended with their inky depths. He was lying.

She reached for his belt buckle. His big body tensed beneath her fingers and for a long excruciating moment, she thought he would reject her. Then he dropped his hands, his gaze sinking into hers.

“You want one more night, Di? I can do that.”

A wave of adrenaline rolled through her, so strong, so

powerful she was incapable of resisting it. It was so wrong but so right to be with him like this, but the right was, oh, so much stronger. Her hands worked his belt out of the buckle and yanked it free. His zipper accommodated her downward movement with a sharp hiss that made her stomach clench. Then there was only his hard, hot flesh to rediscover. He was silk over iron power, thick and unforgiving, and he knew exactly how to use it.

His groan split the night air. "There is a party going on thirty feet away."

She squeezed her fingers around his burgeoning flesh. "I thought you liked to walk on the wild side..."

"Not with people I pass on the street every day."

But his protest was halfhearted. His back was to the railing, shielding him from the revelers. His body was tense, expectant beneath her fingers, his flesh responding to her touch, pulsing, growing under her caress until he lay erect against his abdomen.

If he didn't touch her soon, she was going to scream.

A hand clamped over hers. His face when she looked up at him was full of such heated intent it stopped her heart in her chest. "You know I'm not a taker like that."

She did. She knew what a thorough, giving, wildly erotic lover he was, and maybe that had been half the problem tonight. She wanted that—soul destroying or otherwise.

She dropped her hands to her sides as he peeled the straps of her dress from her shoulders and cupped her naked flesh. It felt so good to have his hands on her after so long, she let

out a low moan and arched into him. He bent and closed his mouth over a taut peak and sucked hard, his sudden assault on her body thrilling. His lips and teeth were insistent, unrelenting, demanding a response from the very core of her. “You like that,” he muttered against her flesh. “You always liked that.”

She moaned something like a response. He worked the nipple between his fingers as he transferred his attention to the other, sucking and pulling at her until the ache in her abdomen was so acute she thought he might bring her to orgasm with this alone. Her hips moved restlessly against him, demanding more. He moved his palm to her buttock, cupped her and held her in place against his arousal. For a long moment, she was suspended in a starry corridor that promised heaven. Then he gave it to her, the rhythmic pull of his mouth on her nipple sending a sweet surge of pleasure through her limbs that pulled a cry from her lips.

This, this was why it had only ever been Coburn.

* * *

Coburn watched his wife come down from her orgasm, her delicate face flushed with pleasure. The fact that he could make her come with just his mouth and the right amount of friction satisfied him on a level he couldn't even begin to understand. This was when his wife was *his*. When they were perfect together.

He ran his hands up the inside of her filmy party dress and found her thong. The thin side ripped easily, pulling away from her skin like the unwanted impediment it was. Diana's eyes

rounded.

“That’s right, wife,” he growled. “You have me in a particular kind of mood.”

She didn’t resist as he turned her around so her back was against the railing, her body shielding him from the partygoers. His mouth settled against the shell of her ear. “Spread your legs.”

She resisted for a moment at the authoritative tone behind the command. Then her muscles relaxed beneath his hands as he moved her thighs apart and found what he was looking for. Hot responsive silk that had the ability to make him forget every rational thought he’d ever had.

She went rigid beneath his touch but not to stop him. She threw her head back, exposing her irresistible long, slim neck, and reveled in it. He buried his lips in her floral scent and moved his fingers against her in a slow, languid caress.

“Oh, God.”

His wife had always been responsive, but this time he savored every sigh, every moan, every delicate whimper as he brushed his thumb against the nub at the center of her. Worked it slowly, deliberately until she was moving against his hand, his name a whispered plea that did something to his battered soul.

“You have always been mine. *Always.*”

She didn’t respond. She didn’t have to. He knew the truth, knew the power they held over each other. It pushed him forward, goaded him on as he slid a finger inside her in a caress he knew she loved. Her eyes closed; her hips worked against his hand.

Her breathing was fractured, hitched in the night air, her body trembling beneath his hands as she stood poised to shatter into another release. But he wasn't going to give it to her that way.

He withdrew his fingers from her. Her eyes flew open. "There will be no audience," he said roughly.

He slid his arms under her knees, picked her up and strode through the apartment to his bedroom. It was a big mistake to take her there, he knew. If he did, he would never get her out of his head. It was *his* bed, *his* space he'd created when she'd left him hollow and broken. To let her violate it again was surely unwise, but he wasn't thinking with his head—he was thinking with another body part entirely.

The play of the moonlight through the skylight was all he needed to absorb his wife's jaw-dropping beauty as he deposited her on the bed. She was everything he'd ever wanted, everything he could no longer let himself want. Not after this.

He stripped off his pants, shirt and tie and slid on a condom. Diana was staring at him as if he was a beast on the prowl, and he liked that. Liked when she was at his mercy. He straddled her, pinning her to the bed with his heavier weight. She looked brazen with her dress half-off and her eyes full of desire. He ran a hand from her throat to the heat between her legs, pushing her dress up to her waist. Her lips parted in an unspoken message. The urge to kiss her, to take possession of her sultry full mouth, was so strong it nearly consumed him. He swallowed it back, clamped his jaw down hard on the need. If he did that, this bedroom would never

be his own.

“Coburn?” Diana lifted her hand to curve around his nape. Her dark eyes were confused, questioning. He closed his against the emotion he saw there because now it was too much for him. Now it threatened to singe him beyond repair. He allowed her fingers to bring his head down toward her parted lips, but at the last minute he turned his head and buried his mouth in her throat. She went rigid beneath him. He captured her nipple in his mouth to distract her, his hand moving down her stomach to ready her silken flesh for him. The stiffness left her on a low, reluctant moan.

That was when he took her with a powerful, driving thrust. She accommodated him easily. She had been built to take him. He had to close his eyes to hang on to the moment, to focus on the pleasure drawing the act out would bring both of them, or he would have been lost, she felt that exquisitely good. Like returning to heaven.

That last thought in particular drove him forward, a mixture of anger and need behind his powerful thrusts. He slid his palms under her hips to take it deeper, until she squeezed her eyes shut and he knew it was so good for her it was almost too much. He slowed it down then, gentled his movements despite the emotion raging in his blood. When she relaxed beneath him, he angled her hips with his palms and stroked to that place inside her that gave her the deepest, most satisfying release. Her body clenched around him, reaching for it.

“Please.”

“Look at me.”

She opened her eyes. They were glazed, drunk with the promise of ecstasy. He gripped her hips more firmly with his hands and moved inside her with deliberate, pleasure-inducing strokes designed to give her release. When she came, he saw the whole thing happen in her ebony eyes.

He waited until her breathing slowed, her eyes cleared and she was fully with him before he sought his release. He wanted her to remember every minute, every second of this when she was with someone else, when some other man claimed her beautiful body and he was relegated to a footnote in her life.

He wanted it to be so good he'd ruin her for anyone else. Wanted her to know the agony of wanting something you couldn't have.

Her eyes fluttered open to stare into his. He wrapped one of her long, elegant legs around his waist and took her with deliberate, deep insistent strokes that dismantled any last bit of composure he saw on her beautiful face. When it became too good, too exquisite to take, he arched his back and let the release consume him. His brain faded to black. Nothing but the pleasure raging through him could touch him.

He lay there, supporting part of his weight on his palms until he recovered himself. Diana's satiny limbs were wrapped around him, her scent filling his nostrils. Long moments later, when his breath had come back, he registered her stillness beneath him.

Levering himself off her, he studied her stricken face. She had expected this to change everything as it always had. She had expected to crack his shell.

He rolled off her and swung his legs over the side of the bed. Fury sizzled through his blood as he stood up and stared down at her. "Was that a good enough performance for the memory book? Or should we do it again?"

Her face lost all its color. She sat up and pulled her dress down to cover her. "No," she said slowly, "that was perfect."

"Good." He waved a hand at the shower. "I'm going to clean up. Feel free to join me."

But she didn't. He knew she wouldn't. When he emerged from the shower ten minutes later, she was gone, just as she'd been gone the last time. He took one look at the bed, threw on some clothes and walked out into the dark, quiet night. If he'd thought it would feel good, this victory over her, it didn't. It felt as if he'd just impaled himself on his own sword.

* * *

Diana wasn't sure how she got to Beth's house. Didn't even know she was crying until she'd pulled her keys out on her friend's doorstep and was fumbling while trying to get them into the lock, her gaze too blurred to see. Her palm pressed against the door as she jammed the key in harder. The door opened from the inside, sending her tumbling across the jamb.

"Sweetheart." Beth caught her forearms and steadied her. "What's wrong?"

The tears turned into a torrent, sliding down her cheeks unchecked. “I am s-so s-stupid.”

Beth pulled the door shut, retrieved her keys and guided her into the cozy little living room. “You saw him, I take it?”

She choked back a sob at that vast understatement of what had just happened. She had just had steamy, intensely uninhibited sex with her soon-to-be ex, who’d tossed her aside afterward as if she meant nothing to him.

Beth’s lips tightened. “I’m getting us some tea, then we talk.”

Diana kicked off her shoes, curled up on the sofa and grabbed the box of tissues sitting on the coffee table. Images from the night flew at her like jagged pieces of a puzzle that didn’t make any sense in her head. She hadn’t consciously gone to that party tonight to have that showdown with Coburn, but it was clear now that unconsciously she had. Her heart hadn’t mended since that night she’d walked out on him. She still wasn’t over him, and worse, she’d been holding out some hope he might still love her.

A sitcom Beth had been watching blared from the TV. She sat watching it with unseeing eyes. Had she been hoping Coburn would confess he felt the same way? That that was the real reason he hadn’t initiated a divorce?

She swallowed hard. What a stupid, blind woman she was. She had set herself up for that tonight. Set herself up for Coburn’s masterful demonstration of just how little he cared. Because after what he’d just done to her? Those flashes of emotion she’d thought she’d seen in his eyes must have been figments of her

imagination. Evidence she'd used to justify the need to be in his arms again. Because being without him had been as if a part of her was missing and she couldn't seem to get it back.

Was that a good enough performance for the memory book? Or should we do it again?

His brutal words ripped at her insides. Bile rose in her throat. She might have been sick if she'd had anything more than a couple of hors d'oeuvres in her stomach. She swallowed the nausea down, pushing it away. How had she let herself do that after a whole year of telling herself she couldn't be anywhere near him? Where had the measured rationality she was known for in her work been when she needed it most?

Beth came back, handing her a steaming mug of her favorite peppermint tea. Her best friend since med school sat down on the other end of the sofa with her own mug of tea. "Tell me what happened."

Diana pushed her disheveled hair out of her face and gave her nose one last swipe. "I saw him and I was so ready to be cool and composed, and then I just—I mean—" She let out a long sigh. "I'm still in love with him."

Her friend grimaced. "And there's a newsflash."

She pressed her hands to her temples. "He gave this toast to Annabelle and Tony that ended up being all about us and, God, it was awful. Everyone was staring at us."

Beth's eyes rounded. "He did *not*."

She nodded. "Then he insisted on going back to his apartment

and talking.”

“What is there to talk about? You two are getting divorced tomorrow.”

“He was angry. He accused me of running away from our problems. He said I was a spoiled little rich girl who’d run back to Daddy when the going got tough.” She threw her friend a despairing look. “But honestly, how many more times could we argue about the same things? It was getting toxic.”

“You tried, Di.” Beth’s gaze softened. “I watched you try, I watched you suffer, but you are just two very different people with very different ideas of what you want out of life.”

And *that* was the crux of it. It was why she’d left. Her husband’s brutal summation of their marriage echoed in her ears, the matter-of-fact, cynical tone he’d uttered it in making her cringe all over again. “In his speech,” she said huskily, “he said that someone forgot to tell him that sometimes love isn’t enough. That you can love someone madly, blindly, but it still isn’t going to work if you can’t accept each other’s flaws and imperfections.”

Beth leaned forward and clasped her hands. “He’s right. Sometimes love isn’t enough. Sometimes the passionate, intense affairs like you and he have had are the hardest to sustain. They just don’t lend themselves to ordinary life.”

A fresh wave of tears pooled at the back of her eyes. A part of her didn’t want to accept that that could be possible with her and Coburn. But the rational, self-preservative side of her said she must.

Beth squeezed her hands tighter. “I was in the room the night you and Coburn met. I remember what it was like watching you two... It was *electric*. But that kind of passion? It can blind you to reality.”

A reality she had to accept now. Coburn didn’t love her anymore and she had to move on. If it had been closure she’d been looking for as she walked away from everything she knew, tonight he’d given it to her. As brutal as it had been, Coburn had actually done her a favor.

“You’re right,” she said, grabbing another tissue and blowing her nose. Pushing her shoulders back, she gave her best friend a decisive look. “This was the eye-opener I needed to walk into that meeting tomorrow and do what I need to do.”

Maybe when she was thousands of miles away from Coburn she might somehow be able to banish the shame she’d felt tonight when he’d looked at her as if he’d just finished servicing another of his bimbos. Because if she didn’t, she might hate him forever.

CHAPTER THREE

“WELL, THAT WAS REFRESHING.”

Coburn ignored the sarcasm in his older brother’s voice and kept walking toward the elevators. The board meeting had run long and he was late for his meeting with Diana and the lawyers.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Harrison continued, keeping step with him, “I love how progressive you’re being. God knows we need a more flexible vacation policy, but how do you think it’s going to work when all our employees decide to take the same day off?”

We have critical processes on the supply-chain side.”

“That won’t happen.” Coburn threw him an annoyed glance. “Employment experts have done studies on it, and it’s clear in most workforces self-ownership of deadlines will regulate all that.”

“And self-regulation will be top of mind when the Christmas holidays hit?” Harrison frowned. “You saw the board in there. You’re pushing hard and fast to make changes here, Coburn. You have a different vision, a different style of leadership. But you need to let them catch up with you.”

“They will.” He jabbed the call button for the elevator. “And they’ll be thanking me when our employee satisfaction and productivity numbers are up.”

“If they don’t revolt first.”

He gave his brother a quelling look. “I thought you were going to let me run this company my way.”

“That was before you started spouting nonsense about no formal vacation policy and the need for badge levels to incent employees. This isn’t a video game we’re playing. It’s a Fortune 500 company our family has spent a hundred years building.”

“I get that.” He stepped on the empty arriving elevator and Harrison followed. He got the pressure that was on him. He got that he was following his godlike brother in the analysts’ eyes. He got all of it until he was sick to death of it.

Harrison shook his head at him. “You make me nervous.”

“Don’t be.” He pushed the button for the executive floor.

“Focus on your campaign. Shake people’s hands, pretend their babies are cute. I’ve got this.”

The elevator swished upward, revealing a panoramic view of New York. A long silence followed. “Are you sure,” Harrison ventured carefully when he eventually broke it, “your emotions aren’t a little...*off* with this divorce on your plate?”

Coburn glanced at his watch. “Happening in minutes. In fact, I’m fifteen of them late.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.” His brother exhaled on a long sigh. “She’d kill me if she knew I was saying this, but Frankie says you haven’t been yourself lately.”

“I have a lot on my mind.”

Harrison fixed him with that trademark deadly stare of his. “Do you still care for her?”

And wasn’t that the question of the day? He’d told himself he didn’t, had convinced himself he was long over his marital fling. But last night had proved him an exemplarity liar. To hijack his toast to Tony and Annabelle with that speech that had come out of nowhere? To sleep with the woman he was intent on wiping from his memory to bring some closure to that part of his life? *Insanity.*

“I am over her,” he told his brother, hoping that saying it out loud would make it so. “Making this divorce official is exactly what I need to move on.”

His brother’s gaze raked his face. “Good. I hope it gives you some perspective.”

“To what?” He and his brother were gradually restoring the close relationship that had defined their younger years after a decade of being at odds with each other following their father’s death. But lately Harrison’s preachiness was rankling him. “Do you think I should settle down like you and have the beautiful little nuclear family? You know how much that appeals to me.”

“Actually,” his brother drawled, “I was thinking more along the lines of what will make *you* happy. I don’t think you have been for a long time, Coburn, and I’m not just talking professionally. Climbing an avalanche-prone mountain is not thrill-seeking—it’s self-destructive.”

Yes, but on those truly brutal parts of the climb when his limbs felt as if they were going to fall off and he was so cold he thought he might expire, his head had felt devoid of anything, numb to the pure satisfaction of what he’d accomplished. It was addictive.

He lifted a shoulder. “My mountain-climbing days are over if the board has anything to say about it, so your worries are null and void there.”

His wife’s walk on the dangerous side? Not so much. He’d be lying if he said he hadn’t come home and done an internet search on the African country she was going to be working in after his hour-and-a-half-long walk through the streets of Chelsea last night. What he’d found he hadn’t liked. Diana was putting herself well within the reach of the rebels who were causing havoc for the government. Who were known to use kidnapping as a bargaining tactic. He hadn’t slept a wink.

Harrison turned to face him as they stepped off the elevator. "Use this time to figure out what you want out of your life. We only do this once. You have a fresh start to work with."

He lifted his chin and met his brother's stare. "Since when did you get so philosophic?"

"Since my wife got hold of me," Harrison admitted with a rueful smile. "I like it, actually..."

Coburn watched him walk away. Now that the aliens had taken his older brother and replaced him with *that* man, he thought maybe he'd consider his point as he strode toward Frankie, who gave the conference room Diana and the lawyers occupied a pointed nod. It was true. A fresh start was exactly what he wanted out of this divorce, and it was exactly what he was going to get. *Now.*

"So sorry," he murmured, striding into the glass-and-chrome conference room with its magnificent views of New York. He kept his gaze firmly away from his soon-to-be ex-wife and on the stiff, expensively suited lawyers who were five hundred an hour apiece.

Chance Hamilton, his lawyer, made an awkward joke about this divorce not going anywhere. Jerry Simmons, Diana's very proper, blue-blooded Harvard grad, stood and shook his hand. His wife remained seated, her eyes fixed on the windows. His guts twisted. She wouldn't even look at him.

"So," Jerry began as Coburn sat down beside Chance, across from Diana, "shall we do a final review of the terms, starting with

property?” Diana, who looked like something out of Madame Tussauds wax museum, moved her lips in what he assumed was agreement.

“Fine.” He added his assent as he continued to study his wife, despite his better instincts. Only Diana could look her most beautiful in a simple white shirt, slim dark jeans and a floral scarf. Her dramatic dark features and hair made adornment unnecessary, something he’d always found vastly appealing versus the made-up showpieces he came across at most of the social functions he attended.

Her beautiful hair was caught up in a knot today as opposed to last night’s wavy curls, her makeup minimal, designed to cover the shadows beneath her eyes, but it hadn’t quite worked. Hands that lay in her lap, constantly clenching and unclenching, were the only sign that she felt anything at all.

Last night she had felt a whole hell of a lot. The half-moons dug into his biceps he’d noticed when he’d put on his shirt this morning bore testament to that. The sensation of her body tightening around his as he’d driven her to the brink was burned into his brain, taunting him, reminding him of just how good it was between them.

“The Key West house,” Jerry prompted.

Coburn gave him a distracted look. “Sorry?”

“The Key West house. Diana keeps it.”

He nodded.

“The East Side apartment closes this week. Half of those

proceeds will go to each of you when that happens.”

He nodded. He'd hated that apartment from the first day they'd moved in. It had been a stuffy, cliquey building with a tiny terrace that had made him feel like a caged animal. He'd been thrilled to get out of it.

Jerry wrapped up the remainder of their properties and moved on to the incidentals.

“The season tickets to the ballet and the opera will go to Diana, while the basketball tickets go to you, Coburn.”

“Fine.” Did she really think he wanted to attend a brutally boring opera now that they were through? The only reason he'd ever agreed to go was because watching the joy it put in his wife's eyes when she finally took a night off had been worth it and ten times more.

He nodded. Waved for him to continue.

Jerry started listing off such minor, inconsequential stuff his mind faded to black. What the hell did he care if he had the country club membership? He'd never have time to golf. He also had no interest in the artwork Diana had walked off with.

“I only want the painting of the Pyrenees,” he broke in. “She can have the rest.”

He'd cycled a race there. It had sentimental value to him.

Jerry nodded and resumed the exhaustive list. Coburn couldn't believe he and Diana had accumulated so much *stuff* in two years. The free spirit in him thought it utterly ridiculous. He waved a hand at Jerry. “She can have it all. Whatever's on the list, let her

take it.”

He needed to get out of this room *now*.

Jerry looked thrown. “Okay—just give me a moment. I’ll move on with the life insurance policies and retirement savings.” He started flipping pages. Coburn blew out a breath, stood up and walked to the windows. This whole thing was ridiculous, *insane*. He and Diana both had enough money individually to never have to worry about their financials. He was seriously thinking of making his will out to a nature organization for when he eventually left this world.

He turned and leaned back against the windowsill, his gaze moving to his wife. She was still sitting there frozen, as if she was on another planet. He had the vicious urge to do something to shake her out of it.

“We’ll start with the life insurance policies. You—”

“*Enough*.” He waved a hand at Jerry. The lawyer set the paper down with a slow movement, both of the legal experts absorbing his aggressive tone and stance. He pinned his gaze on his wife’s face. “Diana, are you all right?”

She lifted her chin, her dark eyes flaring with emotion for the first time. “Perfect.”

Exactly what she’d said to him last night after he’d taken her apart with his despicable behavior.

Jerry eyed him. “Should we continue?”

“No.” He kept his gaze trained on Diana. “The agreement is fine, all of it. I, however, am not ready to sign.”

Diana bolted upright in her chair. He registered the movement with intense satisfaction. His wife was awake. "What do you mean," she demanded slowly, "*not ready?*"

"I mean I'm not ready to sign."

"Why not?"

He lifted a shoulder, sloughing off the incredulous part of his mind that questioned his sanity. "I want more time."

Diana's eyes spit fire at him. "For what? You know I'm leaving the country in three weeks, Coburn. I want this done before that happens, and I'm sure you do, too."

He wasn't sure what he wanted anymore. But he was going to take his brother's advice and figure it out.

"So sorry to disturb your plans," he murmured in a voice as smooth as churned butter, "but that's just the way it is."

"Coburn." Jerry jumped in when it appeared his client might go loco. "It's highly unusual for a party to back out at this point when we have all the fine print agreed upon. Once Diana leaves the country, it's doubtful we can facilitate anything, given the spotty communications she might have where she is staying."

He gave the lawyer a withering look. "It took my wife twelve months to come out of hiding and face me. She can damn well wait for another few."

Jerry's jaw dropped. Chase gave Coburn a wary look as if appealing for direction. Diana flicked a look at the two lawyers, her eyes ice-cold and full of purpose. "Could you give us a second?"

The two men looked relieved to be leaving the room. Coburn closed the door with his foot behind them and stood watching his wife, arms folded over his chest. Diana got to her feet, crossed to him and stood mere inches away, her stony face not hiding for one moment what he could read in her eyes. “Don’t you think last night was payback enough, Coburn? Why are you doing this?”

He narrowed his gaze on her. “You were the one to instigate the hot breakup sex this time, sweetheart. I only went along with it.”

Fury wiped the composure from her face. “Do *not* do this to me. Do not play games with something so important.”

“Why not?” He moved close enough to her that he could inhale her distinctive floral scent. Her fear. “How important was this to you when you ignored my phone calls for weeks? When you refused to talk it out like a rational human being?”

Her eyes flickered. “I did that because it was over. To end the vicious circle that happened between us time and time again... To *save* us.”

“No.” He caught her jaw in his fingers and commanded her attention. “You did it to save yourself. And to hell with how I felt.”

“Coburn—”

“Save it.” His razor-sharp words cut through the air like a knife. “Learn what it’s like to wait and wonder, Diana. Learn what it’s like to be stuck in purgatory like I was. I can tell you from experience it isn’t pretty.”

He turned and yanked open the door. Diana set a hand on his shoulder. "I am going. Jerry will find another way to make this happen, and it will be done. Do it the easy way without dragging us all through that."

He turned around, never feeling so cold and emotionless in his entire life. "Enjoy your self-exploration, Diana. I hope you get your answers."

He walked out of the conference room and away from the closure he'd wanted so desperately. If it added another complication to his already convoluted life? So be it. That had been far, far more satisfying than what he'd walked in there to do.

CHAPTER FOUR

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, he wouldn't sign?"

Her father's enraged voice boomed in Diana's ear, intensifying the dull throb in her temples. She put down her spoon and pushed her half-eaten bowl of soup away as the ache in her head mixed with the uneasy sensation in her stomach to inspire a distinctly *unwell* feeling.

"He said he needed more time." She fixed her gaze on Wilbur Taylor's flinty, gray-eyed one and the expression he reserved solely for conversations about her ex-husband.

"More time for what?" her father huffed. "So he can add another socialite to his list of fame?"

Her mouth tightened. "I have no idea, and frankly I'm over it. I'm leaving on Friday. It can wait until he sees reason."

Her father waved a hand at her. "Never mind. I'll sic David

Price on it.”

She put her spoon down, her blood pressure rising. “Jerry is perfectly capable of taking care of it. It’s my business, Father. Stay out of it.”

“Jerry Simmons is a fine lawyer, but he isn’t a pit bull like David. David will have you divorced in minutes.”

“No.” She cut the idea off at the pass. Although she couldn’t say she didn’t have her doubts about Jerry’s ability to handle Coburn after her husband had walked all over him two weeks ago in that conference room, this was her decision to make, and she didn’t want her father anywhere near it.

“Fine.” Her father shrugged his broad shoulders. “But I don’t think you’re handling this very well. You shouldn’t be giving him any choice.”

Diana picked up her wine and took a sip. What *did* he think she handled well, beyond her patients? She’d spent her life trying to live up to her world-renowned orthopedic surgeon of a father, who overshadowed everything in his wake with his big personality and impossible standards. But measuring up had become a fruitless pursuit she’d finally abandoned for her own sanity.

“Your father is only considering what’s best for you, Diana.” Her mother, ever the peacekeeper, attempted to smooth the waters.

And pursuing his own witch hunt of her husband... Her father had never liked Coburn from the minute he’d laid eyes on him.

She'd always wondered if it was because he saw too much of himself in Coburn—a man who viewed the world as his oyster and took his pick of it as if it was his divine right. That was what her father had done in marrying her mother, his secretary at the time, then carrying on a five-year-long affair with a brilliant fellow doctor whose brain apparently turned him on more than his society wife.

At least Coburn had never cheated on her. She sat back as the maid came to clear her soup bowl. He'd waited until they'd ended their marriage to drink his fill. Which satisfied his code of honor. As long as he was in a relationship, he never strayed, even if, as Rory had joked to her about his friend's philandering ways when they'd first met, it was only one night. Not once during their turbulent union had he ever indicated interest in another woman, despite the way they'd shamelessly thrown themselves at him.

It should have quieted her insecurities, but they'd been far too deeply ingrained to elude.

Her mother scrunched up her angularly attractive face. "I don't like the idea of you over there in that *wild* country, Diana. Anything could happen to you and we are so far away. I wish you'd reconsider."

"I am needed there." She gave her mother a pained look. "We've been over this."

"The situation was never this bad," her father broke in, a bullish look on his face. "Yes, the city is more stable now, but the rebels have still been conducting raids, and conditions could

deteriorate overnight.”

Diana was well aware of the situation she was walking into. She'd come to terms with the danger when she'd made the decision to commit. And although her nerves were growing every day at the thought of what she was about to face—a mental and physical challenge that would surely change her life—she was determined to follow through.

“I'm not changing my mind.”

“I rather thought so.” Her father grimaced at her from across the solid, ornately carved mahogany table. “So I reached out to a contact of mine there and arranged for you to stay in the Lione Hotel instead of the usual accommodations. It's minutes to the hospital and has the best security you can hope for right now. Someone will walk you back and forth each day.”

Diana stared at him in disbelief as the maid set the steaming main course down in front of her. “*Dammit*, Father, this is my life. You can't just do things like that.”

“I wouldn't have to if you weren't being so foolhardy.”

“Part of this experience is bonding with the other doctors I'm working with. I want to stay with them.”

“There is another doctor staying at the Lione. Bond with him.”

She gave him an exasperated look. “You have to stop interfering in my life.”

Her father picked up his fork and pointed it at her. “Do you know how many foreign-aid workers have been kidnapped from that area in the past six months? It is *staggering*, Diana. If you

won't do this for yourself, do it for your mother and me so we don't spend every day and night worrying about you."

Worrying about your half-a-million-dollar investment in your only child, she corrected flippantly to herself. But the real hint of concern in her father's voice made her soften. It wasn't fair to make them worry.

"Fine." She picked up her fork and matched his aggressive joust with one of her own. "But *do not* make *one* more phone call, *one* more inquiry on my behalf to anyone, or I will stay with the others."

"Fine." Her father dug into his beef with a satisfied nod. Diana looked down at hers, her stomach doing a slow roll at the smell of the spicy dish. She cut a piece of the meat. A wave of perspiration swept over her, blanketing her forehead in a thin layer of sweat.

Oh, no. Bile rose in her throat. She swallowed it back down, pushed her chair out and ran for the bathroom. She barely made it inside and to the toilet before she was brutally, gut-wrenchingly sick. Her insides heaving until there was nothing left inside her, she remained kneeling on the bathroom floor draped over the toilet until finally, her head stopped spinning and she could sit up.

What bloody bad timing. She grabbed some toilet paper and wiped it over her brow. She never got sick, never got the flu. Coburn used to call her stomach cast-iron, which made it all the more ironic her succumbing to it now with days to go before she had to get on a plane for a multiday trip.

Deciding she was in the safe zone, she got to her feet and

washed her hands. The fact that this was the third day in a row she'd suffered a low-grade and now acute nausea penetrated her consciousness. Her uninhibited encounter with Coburn filled her head.

They'd used a condom. They'd always used condoms because she couldn't tolerate the birth control pill and the last thing she and Coburn had needed was a baby at this point in their careers. To complicate their marriage.

It must be the flu.

She went back to the dining room, where her parents insisted she stay the night. But a sixth sense told her she couldn't be here right now. She asked them to call her a cab instead and went home, where Beth fussed over her and made her a cup of tea, then put her to bed.

She tried to sleep but her head was spinning as if a circus was going on inside it. What if it wasn't the flu? What if she was pregnant?

A giant knot formed in her stomach. She stared out the window at the big oak tree swaying back and forth in the darkness, high winds signaling the imminent arrival of a classic East Coast electrical storm. If she'd thought what had happened upon seeing her ex again had been a disaster, that was nothing compared with the possibilities raging through her head. *Nothing.*

She spent two days in denial. On the third, she had a scheduled appointment with her doctor to receive a final shot she needed for her trip. Joanne Gibson, her GP and a former colleague, gave

her a frown as she entered the examining room.

“You look thin. Have you been ill?”

Diana sat down in a chair, the tiny room seeming to close in on her at the question. “Could you add a—” she could barely get the words out “—pregnancy test to the list?”

Joanne’s face lit up. “Really? Are you and Coburn back to—?” The look on Diana’s face stopped her cold. “What a stupid thing to say,” her doctor mumbled. “Of course we can do that.”

They did the pregnancy test first because Joanne wanted to make sure the shot she was giving her was fine if she was pregnant. Diana stared at the wall, examining the cracks in the plaster until she’d memorized every last one. She could not be pregnant. This could not be happening to her now, not when she was about to walk away from everything she knew. It could not.

Joanne came back a short while later, a studied blank look on her face. Diana’s heart seized in her chest. She knew that look. It was the one she used when she had tricky news to give to a patient.

“You are pregnant,” her doctor confirmed quietly. “I take it this was unexpected?”

Disastrous. *Untenable* was more like it. She wanted to be happy. She wanted to be a mother. Hell, she wanted to be a pediatric surgeon. Of course she wanted kids. *But now? With Coburn?* A haze of unreality spread over her that was so thick, so un navigable, she couldn’t claw her way through it.

“There are options, you know.”

"No." She barked the word out. *That* was not an option. Ever.

"Okay. I'd like to examine you, then. Just to make sure everything is okay. And since you have a rare blood condition in your family, I'd like to take some tests for that."

Diana nodded. She somehow made her way through the next half hour without screaming, without losing her composure as Joanne examined her, because she was too numb to feel anything. This was supposed to be *her* time. *Her* chance at a new life. And she had messed it up royally over her lust for a man who had already wreaked havoc on her life for long enough.

Oh. My. God.

Joanne sent her off with a promise to deliver the test results in a few days. Diana found herself in the park across the street with a cup of peppermint tea in her hand, sitting on a bench while she watched the dark crimson and orange leaves fall off the trees as fall set in. It was just enough normalcy to convince her she hadn't entered some alternate universe where condoms failed on the one night you had sex with your ex whom you were now tied to for at least the next two decades.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.