Tall, Dark… Westmoreland!

Brenda Jackson

The Moretti Seduction

Katherine Garbera



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Brenda Jackson

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Tall, Dark...Westmoreland! / The Moretti Seduction: Tall, Dark...Westmoreland! / The Moretti Seduction / B. Jackson — «HarperCollins»,

Tall, Dark… Westmoreland!Brenda Jackson She longed for a taste of the wild and reckless. And Olivia Jeffries got her chance when she met a handsome stranger at a masquerade ball. The electricity, the attraction was instant. But later she discovered her lover was none other than her father's rival. She vowed to resist this Westmoreland man…The Moretti Seduction Katherine GarberaTo seal the deal that would put his firm back on top, Antonio Moretti would do whatever it took – even seduce attorney Nathalie Vallerio. Yet Antonio wasn't prepared for a vixen in a business suit…and neither of them was used to losing. Still, he'd have Nathalie, one way or another.

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Tall, Dark…Westmoreland! by Brenda Jackson
“I need to leave,” she said softly.

Reggie turned his head towards her on the pillow. He doubted he could move. He could barely breathe. It was close to morning. As soon as they had ended one session they’d been quick and eager to start another. Where in the hell did all that energy come from?

He knew she had to leave. So did he. But he didn’t want their one and only night together to end. “You do know there is no reason why we can’t –”

She quickly turned towards him and placed a finger on his lips. “Yes, there is. I can’t tell you my true identity. It could hurt someone.”

He frowned. As if reading his mind, she said, “I don’t have a husband. I don’t even have a boyfriend.”

“Then who?” he asked. He probably had more to lose than her since his campaign for Senate officially began that day.

“I can’t say. This has to be goodbye.”

The Moretti Seduction by Katherine Garbera
It was the only way to keep her mind off Antonio.

Work twenty-four hours a day.

When she was at home, she imagined him there with her. When she slept, he haunted her dreams, making love to her and speaking to her in that beautiful Italian voice of his. When she worked out in the gym, she heard his footfalls on the treadmill next to hers.

He was haunting her. Damn him.

As if she conjured him, he called her. “Nathalie, why haven’t you returned my calls?” he asked.

“I’m not sure. I’ve been busy.” Excuses. She knew better than that. “I guess I wanted a chance to get you out of my head.”

“Did it work?”

No, she had to admit. *Not at all.*

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Mini-series – Irresistible

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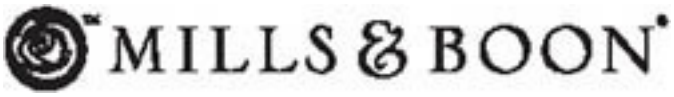
Tall, Dark…Westmoreland!

by

Brenda Jackson
The Moretti Seduction

by

Katherine Garbera



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Tall, Dark…Westmoreland!

by

Brenda Jackson

Dear Reader,

I am pleased to present to you Reginald Westmoreland's story. At long last!

Reggie was introduced in my very first Westmoreland book, *Delaney's Desert Sheikh,* as Delaney's partner in crime. By the end of the story, he had earned a special place in readers' hearts because he helped Delaney outsmart her overprotective brothers. Now, fifteen books later, it is time for his story to be told. I knew he would be the one to wrap up my books on the Atlanta-based Westmorelands.

I also knew he would be the one who would eventually become the Westmoreland to enter politics. And considering everything, doing so would not be an easy task. Especially if the woman your heart desires the most is the daughter of the man you're running against.

Neither Reggie nor Olivia Jeffries expect the explosive desire their initial meeting brings, and together they face many challenges. But they discover that no matter what, true love conquers all.

I've received a lot of letters and e-mails asking if Reggie's book is the end of the Westmorelands. My response is a resounding "No." There are more Westmorelands to come, and I look forward to introducing you to all the Denver-based Westmorelands. They are men you will continue to fall in love with.

Thank you for making the Westmorelands a very special family. I look forward to bringing you more books of searing desire and endless love and passion.

Happy reading!

Brenda Jackson

Brenda Jackson is a die "heart" romantic who married her childhood sweetheart and still proudly wears the "going steady" ring he gave her when she was fifteen years old. Because she's always believed in the power of love, Brenda's stories all have happy endings. In her real-life love story, Brenda and her husband of thirty-six years live in Jacksonville, Florida, and have two sons.

A *New York Times* bestselling author of more than fifty romance titles, Brenda is a recent retiree who worked thirty-seven years in management at a major insurance company. She divides her time between family, writing and travelling with Gerald. You may write to Brenda at PO Box 28267, Jacksonville, Florida 32226, USA, by e-mail at WriterBJackson@aol.com or visit her website at www.brendajackson.net.

To the love of my life, Gerald Jackson, Sr, and to everyone who has ever sent me a letter or e-mail to let me know how much you've enjoyed the Westmorelands. This book is for you!

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

—Proverbs 3:27

THE WESTMORELAND FAMILY
Scott and Delane Westmoreland
James (Sarah)
Corey (Abbie)
John (Evelyn)
② ③ ④ ⑤ ⑦ ①
Dare (Shelly) AJ, Allison
Thorn (Tara) Trace
Stone (Madison) Rock
Storm (Jayla) Shanna, Johanna
Chase (Jessica)
Delaney (Jamal) Ari, Arielle
⑥ ⑪ ⑧ ⑨ ⑭ ⑮
Jared (Dana)
Spencer (Chardonnay) Russell
Durango (Savannah) Sarah
Ian (Brooke) Pierce, Price
Quade (Cheyenne) Venus, Athena, Troy
Reggie
⑫ ⑬ ⑩
Clint (Alyssa) Cain
Cole (Patrina) Emilie, Emery
Casey (McKinnon) Corey
① Dekaney's Desert Sheikh
② A Little Dare
③ Thorn's Challenge
④ Stone Cold Surrender
⑤ Riding the Storm
⑥ Jared's Counterfeit Fiancée
⑦ The Chase is On
⑧ The Durango Affair
⑨ Ian's Ultimate Gamble
⑩ Seduction, Westmoreland Style
⑪ Spencer's Forbidden Passion
⑫ Taming Clint Westmoreland
⑬ Cole's Red-Hot Pursuit
⑭ Quade's Babies
⑮ Tall, Dark...Westmoreland!

One

There has to be another way for a woman to have fun, Olivia Jeffries thought as she glanced around at everyone attending the Firemen's Masquerade Ball, an annual charity event held in downtown Atlanta. Already she was gearing up for a boring evening.

It wouldn't have been so bad if she hadn't arrived from Paris just yesterday, after being summoned home by her father. That meant she had to drop everything, including plans to drive through the countryside of the Seine Valley to complete the painting she had started months ago.

Returning to Atlanta had required her to take a leave of absence from her job as an art curator at the Louvre. But when Orin Jeffries called, she hadn't hesitated to drop everything. After all, he was only the greatest dad in the entire world.

He had wanted her home after making the decision to run for public office, saying it was important that she was there not only for his first fund-raiser but also for the duration of his campaign. There would be a number of functions he would need to attend, and he preferred not to go with any particular woman on a regular basis. He didn't want any of his female friends to get the wrong idea.

Olivia could only shake her head and smile. Her divorced father had taken himself off the marriage block years ago. In fact, she doubted he'd ever allowed himself to be there in the first place. He dated on occasion, but he'd never gotten serious about any woman, which was a pity. At fifty-six, Orin Jeffries was without a doubt a very good-looking man. His ex-wife, who was Olivia's mom in genes only, had left a bad taste in Orin's mouth. A taste that the past twenty-four years hadn't erased.

Her two older brothers, Duan, who was thirty-six, and Terrence, who was thirty-four, had taken after her father in their good looks. And as in the case of their father, the thought of marriage was the last thing on their minds. In a way, she followed in her dad's footsteps as well. Finding a husband was the last thing on hers.

So there you had it. They were the swinging single Jeffries, although for the moment, nothing was swinging for her, Olivia thought. There were a few people at this ball who seemed to be having fun, but most, like her, were looking at their watches and wondering when proper etiquette dictated it would be okay to leave.

Whoever had come up with the idea of everyone wearing masks had really been off their rocker. It made her feel like she was part of the Lone Ranger's posse. And because all the money raised tonight was for the new wing at the children's hospital, in addition to the mask, everyone was required to wear a name badge on which was printed the name of a nursery rhyme character, a color of a crayon or a well-known cartoon or comic-book character. How creative.

At least the food was good. The first words out of her father's mouth when he'd seen her at the airport the day before had been, "You look too thin." She figured the least she could do was mosey on over to the buffet table and get herself something to eat. Hopefully, in a little while she could split.

Reginald Westmoreland watched the woman as she crossed the room, making her way over to the buffet table. He had been watching her for over twenty minutes now, racking his brain as to who she was. Mask or no mask, he recognized most of the women at the ball tonight. He knew almost every one of them because for years he had been immersed in the science of "lip-tology." In other words, the first thing he noticed about a woman was her lips.

He could recognize a woman by her lips alone, without even looking at any other facial feature. Most people wouldn't agree, but no two pairs of lips were the same. His brothers and cousins had denounced his claim and had quickly put him to the test. He had just as quickly proven them wrong. Whether you considered it a blessing or a curse, the bottom line was that he had the gift.

And there were other things besides her lips that caught his attention, like her height. She had to be almost six feet tall. And then he was struck by the way she fit into her elegantly designed black and silver beaded dress, the way the material clung to her shapely curves. He had noticed several men

approach her, but she had yet to dance with any of them. In fact, it seemed that she was brushing them off. Reginald smelled a challenge.

"So, how is the campaign going, Reggie?"

Reginald, known to all his family as Reggie, turned to look at his older brother, divorce attorney extraordinaire, Jared Westmoreland. Just last week Jared had made the national news owing to a high-profile settlement he'd won in favor of a well-known Hollywood actor.

"It officially kicks off Monday. But now that Jeffries has decided to throw his hat into the ring, things should be rather interesting," he said, referring to the older man who would be his opponent. "With Brent, I have a good campaign manager, but I still feel it might be a tight race. Jeffries is well-known and well-liked."

"Well, if you need any help, let me know, although I'm not sure how much time I can spare now that Dana's expecting and all."

Reggie rolled his eyes. Just last month Jared had found out he was going to be a father. "Dana is going to be carrying the baby, Jared, not you."

"I know, but I'm the one who's been getting sick in the morning, and now I'm getting cravings. I never liked pickles until now."

Reggie couldn't help but smile over his wineglass. "Sounds like a personal problem to me." At the moment, his attention strayed from whatever Jared was saying. Instead, his gaze focused on the other side of the room. He noticed the woman whom he'd been watching sit down at a table. He had yet to see a man by her side, which meant she had come to the party alone.

"Umm, I wonder who she is?" he asked.

Jared followed Reggie's gaze and chuckled. "What's wrong? Don't you recognize the lips?"

Reggie shifted his gaze from the woman to his brother and frowned. "No, she's someone new. I definitely haven't met her before. Her lips don't give her away."

"Then I guess the only thing left for you to do is go over there and introduce yourself."

Reggie grinned. "I know they don't call you the sharpest attorney in Atlanta for nothing."

"Don't you know sitting alone at a party isn't good for you?"

Olivia swung her head around at the sound of the deep, throaty masculine voice to find a tall, handsome man standing beside her. Like everyone else, he was wearing a mask, but even with it covering half of his face, she knew he had to be extremely good-looking. In the dim lighting, her artist eye was able to capture all his striking features that were exposed.

First of all, there was his skin, flawlessly smooth and a shade of color that reminded her of rich, dark maple syrup. Then there was the angular plane of a jaw that supported a pair of sexy lips. The same ones that bestowed a slow smile on her. Apparently, he realized she was checking him out.

"In that case, I guess you need to join me," she replied, trying to remember the last time she'd been so outrageously forward with a guy and quickly deciding never. But the way the evening was going, she would have to stir up her own excitement. And now was as good a time as any to start. Maybe it was the fact that the party was so unrelentingly boring that made her long for a taste of the wild and reckless. The other men who had approached her hadn't even piqued her curiosity. She had no desire to get to know them better. But this man was different.

"I don't mind if I do," he said, easily sliding into the chair beside her while his eyes remained locked with hers. Her nose immediately picked up the scent of his cologne. Expensive. She quickly checked out his left hand. Ringless. Her gaze automatically went back to his face. Beautiful. Now he was smiling in earnest and showing beautiful white teeth.

"You're amused," she said, taking a sip of her punch but wishing she had something a little stronger.

Whoever he was, he was certainly someone worth getting to know, even if she was returning to Paris in a few months. That made it all the more plausible. It had taken her two years to get on full-time at the Louvre, and the hard work was just beginning. Once she returned, she would be working

long hours, with little time to get her painting done. That was why she had brought her paints to Atlanta with her. She was determined to capture something worthwhile on canvas while she was here. The man sitting beside her would be the perfect subject.

"Flattered more than amused," he said, his voice reaching out and actually touching her, although she barely registered his words in her mind, because she was too busy watching the way his mouth moved. Sensuously slow.

She couldn't help wondering who he was. She had been gone from Atlanta a long time. After high school she had attended Pratt Institute in New York before doing her graduate work at the Art Institute of Boston. From there she had made the move to Paris, after landing a job as a tour professional, a glorified name for a tour guide.

He had to be around her brother Terrence's age, or maybe a year or so younger. She wondered if he would give her his real name, or if he would stick to the rules and play this silly little game the coordinators of the ball had come up with. His name badge said Jack Sprat. No wonder he was in such fine shape, she thought. Even in the tuxedo he was wearing, she saw broad, muscular shoulders and a nice solid chest. All muscles. Definitely no fat.

"So, Jack," she said, smiling at him the same way he was smiling at her. "What is such a nice guy like you doing at a boring party like this?"

He chuckled, and the sound sent goose bumps over her body. "Waiting to meet you so we can start having some fun." He glanced at her name badge. "Wonder Woman."

The smile that touched the corners of her mouth widened. She liked him already. "Well, trust me when I say, it's a *wonder* that I'm here at all. I really want to be someplace else, but I promised the person who paid for this ticket that I'd come in his place. And since it's all for charity, and for such a good cause, I decided to at least make an appearance."

"I'm glad you did."

And Reggie meant it. He'd thought she had a beautiful pair of lips from afar, but now he had a chance to really study them up close. They were a pair he would never forget. They were full, shapely, and had luscious-looking dips at the corners. She had them covered in light lip gloss, which was perfect; any color would detract from their modish structure.

"We've exchanged names, and I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Jack," she said, presenting her hand to him.

He grinned. "Likewise, Wonder."

The moment their hands touched, he felt it and knew that she did, too. Her fingers quivered on his, and for some reason, he could not release her hand. That realization unnerved him. No woman had ever had this kind of effect on him before, not in all his thirty-two years.

"Are you from Atlanta?"

Her voice, soft and filled with Southern charm, reclaimed his attention.

"Yes, born and raised right here," he said, reluctantly releasing her hand. "What about you?"

"Same here," she said, looking at him as if she could see through his mask. "Why haven't we met before?"

He smiled. "How do you know that we haven't?"

Her chuckle came easily. "Trust me. I would remember if we had. You're the type of man a woman couldn't easily forget."

"Hey, that's my line. You stole it," he said jokingly.

"I'll give it back to you if you take me away from here."

He didn't say anything for a minute but just sat there studying her face. And then he asked, "Are you sure you want to go off with me?"

She managed another smile. "Are you sure you want to take me?" she challenged.

Reggie couldn't help but laugh loudly, so loudly, in fact, that when he glanced across the room, his brother Jared caught his gaze and gave him a raised brow. He had five brothers in all. He and

Jared were the only ones still living in Atlanta. He also had a bunch of cousins in the city. It seemed Westmorelands were everywhere, but he and Jared were the only ones who were here tonight. The rest had other engagements or were off traveling someplace.

A part of Reggie was grateful for that. He was the youngest of the Atlanta-based Westmorelands, and his brothers and cousins still liked to consider him the baby of the family, although he stood six-seven and was the tallest of the clan.

"Yes, I would take you in a heartbeat, sweetheart. I would take you anywhere you wanted to go."

And he meant it.

She nodded politely, but he knew she was thinking, trying to figure out a way she could go off with him and not take any careless risks with her safety. A woman couldn't be too trusting these days, and he understood that.

"I have an idea," he said finally, when she hadn't responded and several moments had passed.

"What?"

He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out his cell phone. "Text someone you know and trust, and tell them to save my number. Tell them you will call them in the morning. When you call, they can erase the number."

Olivia thought about what he'd suggested and then wondered whom she could call. Any girlfriends she'd had while living here years ago were no longer around. Of course, she couldn't text her father, so she thought about her brothers. Duan was presently out of the city, since his job as a private investigator took him all over the country, and Terrence was living in the Florida Keys. She and her brothers were close, but it was Terrence who usually let her get away with things. Duan enjoyed playing the role of older brother. He would ask questions. Terrence would ask questions, too, but he was more easygoing.

Perhaps it was Duan's inquisitive mind that made him such a stickler for the rules. It had to be all those years he'd worked first as a patrolman and then as a detective for Atlanta's police department. Terrence, a former pro football player for the Miami Dolphins, knew how to have fun. He was actually the real swinging single Jeffries. He owned a nice club in the Florida Keys that really embodied the term *nightlife.*

Her safest bet would be to go with Terrence.

"Okay," she said, taking the phone. She sent Terrence a quick text message, asking that he delete the phone number from which the message was sent after hearing from her in the morning. She handed the phone back to him.

"Feel better about this?" he asked her.

She met his gaze. "Yes."

"Good. Is there any particular place you want to go?"

The safest location would be her place, Olivia thought, but she knew she couldn't do that. Her father was home, going over a campaign speech he would be giving at a luncheon on Monday. "No, but I haven't been out to Stone Mountain in a while."

He smiled. "Then Stone Mountain it is."

"And we'll need to go in separate cars," she said quickly. She had begun to feel nervous because she had never done anything like this in her life. What was she thinking? She got a quick answer when she met his gaze again. She was thinking how it would probably feel to be in this man's arms, to rub her hand across that strong, angular jaw, to taste those kissable lips and to breathe in more of his masculine scent.

"That's fine," he said in a husky voice. "You lead and I'll follow."

"And we keep on our masks and use these names," she said, pointing to her name badge.

He studied her intently for a moment before nodding his head. "All right."

She let out a silent breath. Her father was well-known in the city, and with the election just a couple of months away, she didn't want to do anything to jeopardize his chances of winning. Anything

like having her name smeared in the paper in some scandal. Scandals were hard to live down, and she didn't want do anything that would be a nice addition to *the Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* gossip column.

"Okay, let's go," she said, rising to her feet. She hoped she wasn't making a mistake, but when he accidentally brushed up against her when they headed for the exit, she had a feeling anything that happened between them tonight could only be right.

Reggie, as a rule, didn't do one-night stands. However, he would definitely make tonight and this woman an exception. The car he was following close behind was a rental, so that didn't give him any clues as to her identity. All he did know was that she was someone who wanted to enjoy tonight, and he was going to make sure she wasn't disappointed.

She'd indicated that she wanted to go someplace in Stone Mountain, and she was heading in that direction. He wondered if they would go directly to a place where they could be alone, or if they would work up to that over a few drinks in a club. If she wanted a night on the town first, there were a number of nightclubs to choose from, but that would mean removing their masks, and he had a feeling she intended for these to stay in place. Why? Was she as well-known around the city as he was? At least after Monday he would be. Brent Fairgate, his campaign manager and the main person who had talked him into running for the Senate, had arranged for campaign posters with his picture to be plastered on just about every free space in Atlanta.

Returning his attention to the car in front of him, he braked when they came to a traffic light. Just then his cell phone rang. He worked it out of his pocket. "Hello?"

"Where are you?"

He gave a short laugh. "Don't worry about me, Jared. However, I do apologize for not letting you know I was leaving."

"That woman you were with earlier isn't here, either. Is that a coincidence?"

Reggie shook his head, grinning. "I don't know. You tell me."

There was a pause on the other end. "You sure about what you're doing, Reggie?"

"Positive. And no lectures please."

"Whatever," came his brother's gruff reply. And then the call was disconnected.

The traffic began moving again, and Reggie couldn't help but think about how his life would change once the campaigning began. There would be speeches to deliver, interviews to do, television appearances to make, babies to kiss and so on and so forth. He would be the first Westmoreland to enter politics, and for him, the decision hadn't been an easy one to make. But Atlanta was growing by leaps and bounds, and he wanted to give back to the city that had given him so much.

Unlike his brothers, who had left town to attend college, he had remained here and had gone to Morehouse. And he had never regretted doing so. He smiled, thinking that the good old days were when he got out of college and, a few years later, when he opened his own accounting firm. At the time, his best buddy had been his cousin Delaney. They were only a few months apart in age and had always been close. In fact, he was the one who had helped Delaney outsmart her five overprotective brothers right after she finished med school and needed to get some private time. He had let her use his cabin in the mountains for a little rest and relaxation, without telling Dare, Thorn, Stone, Chase or Storm where she was. Lucky for him, his cousins hadn't broken his bones, as they had threatened to do, when they discovered his involvement. The good thing was that Delaney had met her desert sheikh and fallen in love at his cabin.

Reggie's attention was pulled back to the car in front of him when Wonder Woman put on her blinker to turn into the parking lot of the luxurious Saxon Hotel. He smiled. He liked her taste, but given that they were wearing masks, he wondered how this would work. And then he got an idea and immediately pulled his cell phone out of his jacket pocket to punch in a few numbers.

"Hello?"

Reggie could hear babies crying in the background. “This is Reggie. What are you doing to my nieces and nephew?”

He heard his brother Quade’s laugh. “It’s bath time, and nobody wants to play in the water tonight. What’s up? And I understand congratulations are in order. Mom told me you’ve decided to run for the Senate. Good luck.”

“Thanks.” And then, without missing a beat, he said, “I need a favor, Quade.”

“What kind of favor?”

“I need a private room at the Saxon Hotel here in Atlanta tonight, and I know Dominic Saxon is your brother-in-law.”

“So?”

“So make it happen for me tonight, as soon as possible. And I need things kept discreet and billed to me.”

There was a pause on the other end. “You sure about this, Reggie?”

He shook his head. It was the same question Jared had asked him moments ago. “Yes, Quade, I’m sure. And I don’t expect any lectures from you, considering when and how my nieces and nephew were conceived.”

“Go to hell, Reggie.”

He smiled. “Not in front of the babies, Quade. And as far as going to hell, I’ll go, but only after I get a night of heaven. So make it happen for me, Quade. I’ll owe you. I’ll even volunteer to fly in one day and babysit.”

“Damn, she must be some woman.”

Reggie thought about those lips he wanted so desperately to taste. “She is.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” And then the call was disconnected.

Smiling and feeling pretty certain that Quade would come through for him, he watched as Wonder Woman parked her car, and then eased his car into the parking spot next to hers. As soon as she turned off the engine, he got out of his car and glanced around, making sure there weren’t a lot of people about. She had parked in an area that was pretty empty, and he was grateful for that.

When he got to her side of the car, she rolled down the window and looked a little flushed. “Sorry. I guess I didn’t think this far ahead.”

He bent down and leaned forward against her door and propped his arms on the car’s window frame and smiled at her. She smelled good, and she looked good. His gaze shifted from her eyes to her lips and then back to her eyes again. He couldn’t wait to taste her lips.

“Don’t worry. Tonight will end the way we want,” he said, with certainty in his voice and all the while thinking that if Quade didn’t come through for him tonight, he was liable to kill him. At her confused expression, he said, “I’ve made a call, and it will only be a few moments. I’ll get a call back when things get set up.”

Olivia eyed the man staring at her and tried to ignore the stirring in the pit of her stomach. She couldn’t help wondering just who was he and what kind of connections he had. They had to be big ones if he was able to get them a room at the Saxon from the parking lot. Would they have to do the normal check-in?

One part of her brain was screaming at her, telling her that what she was contemplating doing was downright foolish and irresponsible. No good girl, certainly not one who’d been raised to be a proper young lady, would think about having a one-night stand with a stranger.

But then the other part of her brain, the one that was daring, as well as wild and reckless, urged her on. Go ahead, Libby. Have some fun. Live a little. You haven’t been seriously involved with a man for almost two years. You’ve been too busy. You deserve some fun. What will it hurt as long as you’ve taken every precaution to make sure you’re safe?

And at the moment she was safe. Terrence had this man's phone number, and the hotel was definitely a respectable one. And it was one she had selected, not him. But she had to admit, she felt a little silly with the two of them still wearing their masks. At least she had taken off her name badge.

"So, Wonder Woman, what's your favorite color?"

She couldn't help but smile. He evidently felt the tension and was making an attempt to ease it. "Lavender. What's yours?"

"Flesh tone."

She grinned. "Flesh tone isn't a color."

"Depends on who's wearing it," he said softly, and then his eyes flickered to her lips. She felt the intensity of his gaze just as if it was a soft caress. Suddenly, she felt the need to moisten her lips with her tongue.

"I wish you hadn't done that," he whispered huskily, leaning his body forward to the point where more of his face was in the window, just inches from her face.

A breathless sigh escaped from her lips. "What?" she asked in a strained voice.

"Tasted your own lips. That's what I want to do. What I'm dying to do."

"What's stopping you?"

Reggie thought that was a dare if ever he'd heard one. Deciding to take her up on it, he leaned his body in closer. She was tilting her head toward his face when suddenly his cell phone rang.

Damn. He reluctantly pulled back and pulled the cell phone from his jacket.

Olivia took that time to take a deep breath, and then she listened to his phone conversation.

"Yes?" he said into the phone.

She watched a huge smile brighten his face, and at the same time, she felt intense heat gather at the junction of her thighs.

"Thanks, man. I owe you one," he said. She then watched as he clicked off the phone and put it in his pocket. He glanced over at her. "Okay, Wonder Woman. Everything is set. We're on the sixteenth floor. Room sixteen thirty-two. Ready?"

She exhaled slowly. A part of her wanted to tell him that, no, she wasn't ready. She wanted to know how he'd arranged everything from a parking lot. Another part of her needed to know how he was capable of making her feel things that no other man had ever made her feel before. How was he able to get her to take risks when she was the least impulsive person that had ever lived? At least she had been risk averse until she'd seen him at the party tonight.

She met his gaze, knowing this would be it. Once she got out of the car and walked into that hotel with him, their night together would begin. Was that what she really wanted? He was staring at her, and his gaze seemed to be asking her that same question.

She drew in a deep breath and nodded her head and said, "Yes, I'm ready."

He then opened the car door for her. "You go on ahead, and I'll follow within five minutes. The bank of elevators you should use is the one to the right of the check-in desk," he said.

"Okay."

He watched as she placed the strap of her purse on her shoulder before walking away. He smiled as she gracefully crossed the parking lot and headed toward the entrance to the hotel. He couldn't help but admire the way she looked in her dress, a silky number that swished around her legs whenever she made a movement. And she had the legs for it. Long, shapely legs that he could imagine wrapped around him, holding him inside her body during the heat of passion.

He was so into his thoughts that when she suddenly stopped walking, his heart nearly stopped beating. Had she changed her mind? Moments later he gave a deep sigh of relief when he realized she had stopped to remove her mask. He wondered if she would take the risk and turn around to let him see her face, voluntarily revealing her identity. He got his answer when she began walking again without looking back. He had a feeling that that was how the entire night would go. Identities and names would not be shared. Only passion.

He would respect her wishes, and when he joined her in the hotel room, his mask, too, would be back in place.

There was no doubt in his mind that this would be a night he would always remember.

Two

Olivia was grateful that no one seemed to pay her any attention when she walked into the huge lobby of the Saxon. It had always been her dream to spend a night in what had to be one of the most elegant hotels ever built. It was more stylish and extravagant than she had expected. There were only a few Saxons scattered about the country, in the major cities, and all had a reputation of providing top-quality service.

When she stepped onto the elevator that would carry her to the sixteenth floor, she couldn't help but again wonder about the man behind the mask and the connections he seemed to have. Reservations were hard to get because the hotel was booked far in advance, even as much as a year.

As she stepped out of the elevator and walked down the spacious hall, she studied the decor. Everything had a touch of elegance and class. With an artist's eye, she absorbed every fine detail of not only the rich and luxurious-looking carpet on the floor but also of the beautiful framed portraits that lined the walls. She would bet a month of her salary at the Louvre that those were original Audubon prints. If they devoted this much time and attention to the hallways, she could only imagine what one of the rooms would look like.

She wondered what Jack Sprat thought of her taste, since she was the one who'd guided him here. Of course, she would pay tonight's bill, since coming here was her idea. Connections or no connections, this place was her choice and not his, so it would only be fair. The last thing she wanted to do was come off as a thoughtless, high-maintenance woman.

Moments later she stood in front of room 1632. She didn't have a key and could only assume the door was unlocked. There was only one way to find out. She turned the handle and smiled when it gave way without a problem. She slowly opened the door and stepped into the room. Quickly closing the door, she glanced around, her eyes widening. This had to be a penthouse suite. She hadn't expected this, wasn't even sure she would be able to pay for it. She had figured on a regular room, which, though costly, would have been within her budget.

She was paid well, and loved Paris, but eventually she intended to return to the United States. She planned to open an art gallery in a few years, and that took money. Every penny she earned went into her special savings. Her father and brothers had promised to invest in the venture, but she felt that it was her responsibility to come up with the majority of the capital for her gallery. This little tryst was going to cost her. She would have to dip into her savings to pay for this suite. She wondered if just one night with a stranger could possibly be worth the sacrifice.

She crossed the room, drawn to the stately furnishings. She had stayed in nice hotels before, but there was something about a Saxon that took your breath away. Besides the elegant luxury that surrounded you, there was also the personalized service, culinary excellence and other amenities, which she had often heard about, but had yet to experience.

She walked through the sitting area to the bedroom. Her gaze moved from the plush love seat in the room to the bed. The bed was humongous and stately; the covering was soft to the touch. It felt as if you could actually lose yourself under it. The bedcoverings and curtains were done in an elegant red and a single red rose had been placed in the middle of the bed. Very romantic.

The connecting bath was just as stunning, with a huge Jacuzzi tub that sat in the middle of the floor, surrounded by a wall-to-wall vanity the likes of which she'd never seen in a hotel. Everything was his and hers, and the bathroom was roomy, spacious.

Nervously, she walked out of the bathroom and back into the bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed.

When she was growing up, people had often said she was spoiled and pampered, and in a way, she had been. Being the only girl in the house had had its advantages. She had been only three years old when her mother left her father, ran off with a married man and destroyed not one, but two

families. She would always admire her father for doing what had to be done to hold their family together. He'd worked long and hard hours as a corporate attorney and still had been there for her piano recitals and art shows and her brothers' Little League games. And one year he had even gotten elected president of the PTA. It hadn't been easy, and everyone had had to pitch in and help. And she could now admit that her brothers had made it easier for her.

Leaving home for college had been good for her. Against her father's and brothers' wishes, she had worked her way through college, refusing the money they would send her. She'd needed to encounter the real world and sink or swim on her own while doing so.

She'd learned how to swim.

She glanced at her watch. Chances were that Jack Sprat was on his way up, so now was not the time to get nervous. She had come on to him at the party, and he had come on to her. They were here because a night together was what they both wanted. So why was she thinking about hightailing it all of a sudden? Why were butterflies flying around her stomach? And what was with the darn goose bumps covering her arms?

She stood and began pacing. He would be here at any moment, so she stopped and took the time to put her mask back on. In a way she felt silly, but at the same time mysterious.

Olivia glanced at her watch again. She felt her body heating up just thinking about what would happen when he did arrive. To say she was fascinated by a complete stranger would be an understatement. If anyone had told her that within less than forty-eight hours of returning to Atlanta, she, Olivia Jeffries, would be involved in an affair to nowhere, she would not have believed them. Usually she was very conservative, but not tonight.

She caught her breath when she thought she heard footsteps coming down the hall. An anticipatory shiver ran down her spine, and she knew that in just a minute he would be there.

Reggie walked down the hallway, deep in thought. Some people engaged in casual affairs to pass the time or to feel needed. He was not one of them, and for some reason, he knew that the woman waiting on him in the hotel room wasn't, either. He would admit that there had been a few one-night stands in his history, back in the day at Morehouse, when he hadn't had a care in the world other than studying, making the grade and getting an easy lay. But now as a professional who owned a very prestigious accounting firm and as a political candidate, he picked his bed partners carefully. He hadn't been involved in any long-term affairs since right after college—and that disastrous time with Kayla Martin a few years ago, which he preferred to forget. He'd pretty much stuck to short-term affairs.

His family constantly reminded him he was the last Westmoreland bachelor living in Atlanta, but that was fine with him. Settling down and getting married were the furthest things from his mind. He was glad it wouldn't be an issue in his campaign, because his opponent, Orin Jeffries, was a long-term divorcé, and from what he'd heard, the man had no plans of ever remarrying.

Finally, he stood in front of room 1632. Only pausing for a brief second, he reached out to open the door and then stopped when he remembered his mask. Glancing up and down the hall to make sure it was empty, he pulled the mask out of his pocket and put it on. Then, after drawing a deep breath, he opened the door.

The moment he opened the door, his eyes, that is, the portion of them that Olivia could see through his mask, met hers. They felt possessive, as if he was stamping ownership on her, when there was no way he could do that. He didn't know her true identity. He knew nothing about her other than that it seemed her need for him was just as elemental and strong as his need for her. It was a tangible thing, and she could feel it, all the way to her toes.

Yet there was something in the way he entered the room, not taking his eyes off her as he pushed the door closed behind him. And then giving the room only a cursory glance. Without a single word spoken between them, he swiftly crossed the room and drew her into his arms.

And kissed her.

There was nothing to be gained by any further talking, and they both knew it. And the moment his mouth touched hers, lightly at first, before devouring it with a hunger she felt deep in her belly, she moaned a silent acceptance of him and their night together.

This was sexual chemistry at its most potent. He was all passion, and she responded in kind. She kissed him, not with the same skill and experience he was leveling on her, but with a hunger that needed to be appeased, satisfied and explored.

The kiss intensified, and they both knew it wouldn't be enough to quench the desire waiting to be unleashed within them. Sensations were spreading through her, seeping deep into her bones and her senses. Urges that she had tried desperately to control were now threatening to consume her.

He reluctantly pulled his mouth away, and she watched as a sensuous smile touched his lips. "Tonight is worth everything," he whispered softly against her moist lips. "Not in my wildest imagination would I have thought of this happening."

Neither would I, Olivia thought. The masks were silly, but they had a profound purpose. So were the pretend names. With them, they were free to do what they pleased, without inhibitions or thought of consequences. If their paths were to cross again, after tonight, there would be no recognition, no recrimination and no need for denials. What happened in this hotel room tonight would stay in this hotel room tonight.

Reggie's gaze studied Olivia as he fought to catch his breath while doing the same for his senses. Kissing her, tasting her lips, had been like an obsession since the moment he'd laid eyes on her. The shape, texture and outline of her lips had a provocative effect on him. Some men were into the shape and size of a woman's breasts; others into her backside. He was definitely a lips man. The fullness of a pair, covered in lipstick or not, could induce a state of arousal in him. Just thinking of all the things he could do with them was enough to push him over the edge.

And then, losing control, he leaned down and kissed her again, and while his tongue dominated and played havoc with hers, he felt her loosen up, begin to relax in his arms. She wrapped her arms around his neck while her feminine curves so effortlessly pressed against him in a seamless melding of bodies. They fit together perfectly, naturally. There was nothing like having soft female limbs and a beautiful set of lips within reach, he thought.

The hand around her waist dipped, and he felt the curve of her backside through the gown she was wearing. A firm yet soft behind. He needed to get her out of her gown.

Pulling his mouth away, he swept her into his arms. At her startled gasp and with a swift glance, he met the eyes staring at him through the mask, and then his lips eased into a smile. So did hers. And with nothing left to be said, he walked to the bedroom.

Instead of placing her on the bed, he held her firmly in his arms and sat down on the love seat, adjusting her in his lap. She pulled in a deep breath and caught hold of the front of his jacket.

He smiled down at her. "Trust me. I'm not going to let you fall." She loosened her hold on him yet continued looking into his eyes, studying his features so intently that he couldn't help asking, "Like the part you can see?"

She smiled. "Yes. You have such an angular jaw. It speaks of strength and honesty. It also speaks of determination."

He raised a brow, wondering how Wonder Woman could tell those things about him from just studying his jaw. He stopped wondering when she reached out and her finger traced that same jaw that seemed to fascinate her.

"It's rigid, but not overbearing. Firm, but not domineering." She then smiled. "Yet I do see a few arrogant lines," she said, tapping the center of his jaw.

He had sat down with her in his arms, instead of placing her on the bed, so as not to rush things with her, to give her time to collect herself after their kisses. He refused to rush their lovemaking. For some reason, he wanted more, felt they deserved more. He was never one for small talk, but he figured he would take a stab at it. But now her touch was making it almost impossible not to touch.

Not to undress her and give her the pleasure they both wanted. And then it came to him that the reason he was here with her had nothing to do with lust. He'd gone months without a woman warming his bed before. What was driving him more than anything was her appeal, her sexiness and his desire to mate with her in an intimate way. Only her.

He stood while cradling her tightly in his arms and moved toward the bed and gently placed her in the middle of it, handed her the rose and then he took a step back so she could be in the center of his vision. He wanted the full view of her.

Her shoulder-length hair was tousled around her face, at least the part of her face he could see. Her dress had risen when he'd placed her on the bed. She had to know it was in disarray and showing a great deal of flesh, but she didn't make a move to pull anything down, and he had no intention of suggesting she do so. So he looked, got his fill, saw the firmness of her thighs and the shapeliness of her knees. And he couldn't help but notice how the front of the dress was cut low, showing the top portion of her full and firm breasts. He was a lips man first and a breasts man second. As far as he was concerned, he had hit the jackpot.

Olivia wondered how long he would stand there and stare. But in a way, it reassured her that he liked what he saw. No man had taken the time to analyze her this way. She might as well make it worth his while. She placed the rose to one side and reached down and unclasped her shoes before slipping them off her feet. She tossed one and then the other to him. He caught them perfectly, and instead of dropping them to the floor, he tossed them onto the love seat they had just vacated.

She was surprised. He had recognized a pair of stilettos by Zanotti. They had been another whim of hers. Shoes were her passion, and she appreciated a man who knew quality and fine workmanship in a woman's shoes when he saw it. He moved up another notch in her book.

Now it was time to take off the rest. Because she never wore panties with panty hose, that would be easy. Instead of removing her panty hose last, she decided to take them off first. He wouldn't be expecting it, and the thought of catching him off guard stirred something inside of her. With his eyes still on her, she lifted her bottom off the bed slightly to ease down her panty hose, deliberately giving him a flash to let him know that once they were gone, there would not be any covering left. After she'd removed them, she rolled the hose up in a ball and tossed them to him. As with her shoes, he made a perfect catch, and then, while she watched him, he brought the balled-up nylon to his nose and took a whiff of her scent before placing it in the pocket of his jacket.

Her gaze had followed his hands, and now it moved back to his face. She saw the flaring of his nostrils and the tightening of his fists by his sides, and she saw something else. Something she had noted earlier, when he had walked across the room to her, but that now had grown larger. His erection. There was no doubt in her mind, unclothed and properly revealed, it would put Michelangelo's *David* to shame. Her artistic eye could even make out the shape of it through his pants. It was huge, totally developed, long and thick. And at the moment, totally aroused. That was evident by the way the erection was straining against the fly of his pants.

He shifted his stance. Evidently, he'd seen where her gaze had traveled, and she watched as his fingers went to the zipper of his tuxedo pants and slowly eased it down. She could only stare when, after bending to remove his shoes and socks, he stepped out of his pants, leaving his lower body clad only in a pair of sexy black briefs. She knew they were a designer pair; their shape, fit and support said it all. The man had thighs that were firm, hard and muscular. She didn't have to see his buns to know they were probably as tight as the rest of him. There was no need to ask if he worked out on occasion. The physical fitness of his body said it all.

And he looked sexy standing there, with a tux jacket and white shirt on top and a pair of sexy briefs covering his lower half. She figured he had decided to remove the clothes from the same part of his anatomy as she had. They were both undressing from the bottom up.

She held her breath, literally stopped breathing, when his hands then went to the waistband of his briefs. And while her gaze was glued to him, he slowly pulled the briefs down his legs.

Damn.

The man, thankfully, had no qualms about exposing himself, and for that she was grateful, because what her eyes were feasting on was definitely worth seeing. He was truly a work of art. And while her focus was contained, he went about removing the rest of his clothes. She wasn't aware of it until he stood before her, totally naked in all his glorious form.

Her gaze traveled the full length of his body once, twice, a total of three times before coming back to settle on his face. He was a naked, masked man, and she would love to have him pose for her as such. On canvas she would capture each and every detail of him. He was pure, one hundred percent male.

"It's your turn to take off the rest of your clothes, Wonder."

His words, deep and husky, floated around the already sexually charged room.

She forced her gaze from his thick shaft and moved it to his face as, on her knees, she reached behind herself and undid the hooks of her dress before pulling it over her head. It was simple, and she was naked, since she hadn't worn a bra.

Now he saw it all. And like she had earlier, his gaze moved to her lower part, zeroing in on the junction of her thighs. Suddenly she felt awkward. She wondered what he was thinking. She kept her body in great shape, and her Brazilian wax was obvious.

She met his gaze when he returned it to her face. She smiled. "I'm done."

"No, baby," he said in a tight and strained voice. "You haven't even got started."

Reggie pulled in a deep breath, meaning every word he'd just spoken. Never in his life had he been so hard and hot for a woman. Never had he wanted to eat one alive. As far as he was concerned, there would not be enough time tonight to do everything he wanted to do. So there was none to be wasted. But first…

"Is there anything you have an aversion to doing?" he felt the need to ask.

He watched how she lifted her gaze a moment, and then she said in a soft voice, "Yes. I'm not into bondage."

He chuckled. "Then it's a good thing I left my handcuffs at home." And because he saw the slight widening of her eyes, he smiled and said, "Hey, I'm just teasing. I would be crazy to tie your hands since I prefer you putting them all over me."

As far as Olivia was concerned, that was the perfect invitation. She scooted close to the edge of the bed and reached out and splayed her hands across his chest. She smiled when she heard his sharp intake of breath. And she was fascinated by the way his muscles flexed beneath her hands and by the warmth of his skin beneath her fingers.

"You're into torture?" he asked huskily, his tone sounding somewhat strained.

"Why? Do you feel like you're being tortured?" she asked innocently, shifting one of her hands lower to his stomach.

"Yes." His answer was short and precise. His breathing seemingly impaired.

"You haven't seen anything yet, Jack Sprat."

And then her hand dropped to that part of him she'd become fascinated with from the moment she'd seen it. It was large, heavy and, for tonight, it was hers. Her hand closed up, contracted and then closed up again, liking the feel of holding it, stroking it.

Breathing at full capacity, Reggie could no longer handle what his mystery woman was doing to him and pulled back and reached down for his pants to retrieve a condom packet from his wallet. Ripping the packet with his teeth, he proceeded to put the condom on.

He glanced up to see her lying back on the bed, smiling at him, fully aware of the state she'd pushed him to. He moved so quickly, it caught her off guard, and then he was there with her in the bed, pinning her beneath him on the coverlet and immediately taking her mouth captive, devouring it like he intended to devour her. And when he pulled back, he moved down to her breasts, taking

the nipples in his mouth, doing all kinds of things to them with his tongue until she cried out. She pleaded with him to stop, because she couldn't take any more.

But he definitely wasn't through with her yet. Intent on proving that she wasn't the only one with hands that could torture, he used his knee to spread her legs. He then settled between them, determined to fit his erection in the place where it was supposed to be.

There was so much more he wanted to do—devour her breasts, lick her skin all over—but at that moment, the one thing he had to do before his brain exploded with need was get inside of her.

He pulled his mouth away from her breasts, and breathing hard, he stared down at her, determined to see what he could of her eyes through the mask. "This is crazy," he said, almost choking for both breath and control of the words.

"Might be," she said, just as short of breath. "But it's the best craziness I've ever experienced. Let's not stop now."

He stared at her. "You sure?"

She stared back. "Positive."

And with their gazes locked, he entered her.

He felt her small spasms before he even got into the hilt, and when her inner muscles clenched him, he pressed deeper inside of her. She was tight, but he could feel her opening wider for him, like a bloom. "That's it. Relax, let go and let me in," he said.

And as if her body was his to command, it continued to open, adjust, until it was a perfect fit and curved around him like a glove. And at that moment, while buried deep inside of her, he just had to taste her lips again. He leaned forward, took her mouth and began swallowing every deep, wrenching moan that she made.

And then he began moving back and forth inside of her, thrusting, then retreating, then repeating the process all over again, each thrust aimed with perfect accuracy at her erogenous zone. He lifted her hips, and she dug her fingertips deep into his shoulders and cried out with each stroke he took.

It was at that moment that he actually felt her body explode. Then the sensations that had rippled through her slammed through him as well. He threw his head back; and he felt the muscles in his neck pop; and he breathed in deep, pulling in her scent, which filled the air.

Shudders rammed through him, and he squeezed his eyes shut as his body exploded. His orgasm came with the force of a tidal wave, and he continued to thrust inside her as his groans mingled with her cries of pleasure. And with their bodies fully engaged, their minds unerringly connected, together they left Earth and soared into the clouds as unadulterated pleasure consumed them.

"I need to leave," she said softly.

Reggie turned his head on the pillow and looked over at Wonder. He doubted he could move. He could barely breathe. It was close to morning. They'd made love all night long. As soon as they had ended one session, they'd been quick and eager to start another.

He knew she had to leave. So did he. But he didn't want their one and only night together to end. "You do know there is no reason why we can't—"

She quickly turned toward him and placed a finger on his lips. "Yes, there is. I can't tell you my true identity. It could hurt someone."

He frowned. She wasn't wearing a ring, so quite naturally, he had assumed she wasn't married. What if she…

As if reading his mind, she said, "I don't have a husband. I don't even have a boyfriend."

"Then who?" he asked quickly, trying to understand why they couldn't bring their masquerade to an end. He probably had more to lose than she, because his campaign for the Senate officially began Monday.

"I can't say. This has to be goodbye—"

Before the words were completely out of her mouth, he reached out and pulled her into his arms, knowing this would be the last time he would kiss the lips he had grown so attached to.

Moments later he released her mouth, refusing to say goodbye. She wiggled out of his arms and began re-dressing. He watched her do so, getting turned on all over again.

"I'm getting money out of the ATM to pay for the room," she informed him.

He frowned at her words. "No, you're not."

"I must. It was my idea for us to come here," she said.

"Doesn't matter. Everything has been taken care of, so they won't take any money from you at the front desk. Last night is on me, and I don't regret one minute of spending it with you."

Olivia slipped back into her shoes and gazed across the room at him. He was lying in bed, on top of the covers. Naked. So immensely male. "And I don't regret anything, either," she said, meaning every word. She was tempted to do as he wanted—cross the room, remove his mask and remove hers as well—but she couldn't. She couldn't even trust herself to kiss him goodbye. It had to be a clean break for both of them. "And you sure you don't want me to pay for the room?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm sure."

"At least let me give you something toward it and—"

"No," he said, declining her offer.

She didn't know how much time passed while they just stared at each other. But she knew she had to leave. "I have to go now," she said, as if convincing herself of that.

He shifted on the bed to take the rose, and offered it to her. She closed the short distance between them to retrieve it. "At least let me walk you to the door," he said.

She shook her head. "No. I'll see myself out."

And then she quickly walked out of the bedroom.

Reggie pulled himself up in the bed when he heard the sound of the hotel door closing. He sat on the edge of the bed, suddenly feeling a sense of loss that touched his very soul and not understanding how such a thing was possible.

He stood up to put on his clothes, and it was then that he snatched off the mask. It had served its purpose. He reached for his shirt and tie and noticed something glittering on the carpet. He reached down and picked it up. It was one of the diamond earrings that she had been wearing.

He folded the earring in the palm of his hand. He knew at that very moment that if he had to turn Atlanta upside down, he would find his Wonder Woman.

He would find her, and he would keep her.

Three

"So, Libby, how was the party?"

Olivia, who had been so entrenched in the memories of the night before, hadn't noticed her father standing at the bottom of the stairs. She glanced down at him and smiled. "It was simply wonderful." He didn't need to know that she was speaking not of the party per se but of the intimate party she'd gone to at the Saxon Hotel, with her mystery man.

It had been just before six in the morning when she slipped into her father's home, and knowing he was an early riser, she had dashed up the stairs and showered. She had also put in a call to Terrence, leaving a message on his cell phone that it was okay to delete the text message she had sent to him the night before. And then she had climbed into bed. By the time her head had hit the pillow in her own bed, she had heard her father moving around.

She had enjoyed the best sleep in years. She had awakened to a hungry stomach, and the last person she had expected to meet when she took the stairs to go pillaging in the kitchen was her father. Typically, after early morning church services on Sunday, he hit the country club with his buddies for a game of golf. So why was he still here?

Orin met his daughter on the bottom stair and gave her a hug. "I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. I felt kind of bad that I couldn't attend the ball with you, but I did have to work on that speech."

She looked up at him and, not for the first time, thought that he was definitely a good-looking man, and she was glad he took care of himself by eating right and staying active. "No problem, Dad."

Not wanting him to ask for details about the party, she quickly asked a question of her own. "So why are you home and not out on the golf course?"

He smiled as he tucked her arm in his and escorted her to the kitchen. "Cathy threatened me with dire consequences today if I left before she got the chance to come over and go over my speech."

Olivia smiled but didn't say anything for a moment. Cathy Bristol had been her father's private secretary for almost fifteen years, and Olivia couldn't help but wonder when her father would wake up and realize the woman was in love with him. Olivia had figured it out when she was in her teens, and when she'd gotten older had asked her brothers about it. Like her dad, they'd been clueless. But at least Duan and Terrence had opened their eyes even if her father hadn't. Cathy was a forty-eight-year-old widow who had lost her husband over eighteen years ago, when he died in a car accident, leaving her with two sons to raise.

"So when is Cathy coming? I'd love to see her."

Her father smiled. "Around noon. I'm treating her to lunch here first before I put her to work."

"To review your speech?"

"Yes," he said when they reached the kitchen and he sat down at the table. "She's good at editing things and giving her opinion. As this is my first speech, I want to impress those who hear it. It will be one of those forums in which all the candidates speak."

Olivia nodded as she grabbed an apple out of the fruit bowl on the table and sat down across from him.

Orin frowned. "Surely that's not all you're having for breakfast."

"Afraid so," she said before biting into her apple.

"You're so thin," he pointed out. "You should eat more."

Olivia could only smile. There was no way she could tell her father that she had eaten quite a lot last night. After making love several times, they had ordered room service, eaten until their stomachs were full and then gone back to bed to make love some more.

Deciding to get her father off the subject of her weight, she said, "So, tell me something about this guy who has the audacity to run against my father."

Orin leaned back in his chair. “He’s one of those Westmorelands. Prominent family here in Atlanta. He’s young, in his early thirties, and owns an accounting firm.”

Olivia nodded. She recalled the name, and if she wasn’t mistaken, Duan and Terrence had gone to school with some of them. They were a huge family. “So what’s his platform? How do the two of you differ?”

“On a number of issues, we’re in agreement. The main thing we differ on is whether or not Georgia can support another state-financed university. He thinks we can, and I don’t. We have a number of fine colleges and universities in this area. Why on earth would we need another one? Besides, he’s inexperienced.”

Olivia couldn’t help but smile at that, because her father didn’t have any political experience, either. In fact, she and her brothers had been shocked when he’d announced he was running for a political office. The only thing they could come up with as to the reason was that his good friend and golfing buddy Senator Albert Reed was retiring and wanted someone to replace him whom he knew and could possibly influence. Not that her father was easily influenced, but he was known to give in under a good argument, without fully standing his ground.

“And young Westmoreland will run on his name recognition since he has a couple of celebrities in the family. One of his cousins is a motorcycle racer, and another is an author.”

And your son just happens to be a very well-known former NFL player, she wanted to say. Who you have called upon to appear at a couple of rallies. So you are just as bad.

Olivia said nothing but listened as she took another bite of her apple. At least she tried to listen. More than once her mind took a sharp turn, and she found her thoughts drifting to breath-stopping memories of the tall, dark and handsome man she had met and spent a wonderful night with. She could vividly recall his kisses and the way he had been methodically slow and extremely thorough each time he’d taken her mouth in his, eating away at her lips, unrestrained, unhurried and not distracted.

And there were the times his mouth had touched her everywhere, blazing a trail from her nape to her spine, then all over her chest, tasting her nipples and making her intensely aware of all her hidden passion—passion he’d been able to wrench from her.

The only bad thing about last night was the fact that she had lost one of the diamond earrings she had purchased a year ago in Paris. The earrings had been a gift to herself when she landed her dream job. She would love to get it back, but knew that wouldn’t be happening. But she would be the first to admit that the night spent in her one-time lover’s arms had been worth the loss.

The ringing of the doorbell claimed her attention and brought her back to the present.

“That must be Cathy,” Orin said. He quickly rose from the table and headed to the front door.

Olivia studied her father and couldn’t do anything but shake her head. He seemed awfully excited about Cathy’s arrival. Olivia couldn’t help wondering if perhaps her father had finally awakened and smelled the coffee and just wasn’t aware he’d been sniffing the aroma. She had been around her brothers long enough to know that when it came to matters of the heart, men had a tendency to be slow.

She turned in her seat when she heard a feminine voice, Cathy’s voice. Olivia smiled when she saw the one woman she felt would be good for her father and again wondered why her father hadn’t asked Cathy to be his escort for some of these functions. Cathy was very pretty, and Olivia thought, as she glanced at the two of them walking into the kitchen, that they complemented each other well.

Brent Fairgate waved his hand back and forth in front of Reggie’s face. “Hey, man, are you with us, or are you somewhere in la-la land?”

Reggie blinked, and then his gaze focused on the man standing in front of him, before shifting to the woman standing beside him, Pam Wells. Brent had hired Pam as a strategist on a consulting basis.

“Sorry,” he said, since there was no use denying they hadn’t had his attention. “My mind drifted elsewhere for a moment.” There was no way he was going to tell Brent that he was reliving the

memories of the prior night. Brent was the most focused man that Reggie knew. Reggie was well aware that Brent wanted him to be just as focused.

"Okay. Then let's go back over the layout for tomorrow," Brent said, handing him a folder filled with papers. "The luncheon is at the Civic Center, and both you and Jeffries will be speaking. The order will be determined by a flip of a coin. You got the speech down pat. Just make sure you turn on your charm. Jeffries will be doing likewise. Without coming right out and saying it, you will have to make everyone see you as the voice of change. You will have to portray Jeffries as more of the same, someone who represents the status quo."

"Okay. Give me some personal info on Jeffries, other than he's the Holy Terror's father," Reggie said.

Early in his professional football career, Terrence Jeffries had been nicknamed the "Holy Terror" by sportscasters. Reggie understood that Terrence was now a very successful businessman living in the Florida Keys.

"He also has another son, who's a couple years older than the Holy Terror," Pam replied. "He used to be on the Atlanta police force, but now he owns a private investigation company. He's low-key and definitely not in the public eye like Terrence."

Reggie nodded. "That's it? Two sons?"

Pam shook her head. "There's also a daughter, the youngest. She's twenty-seven. An artist who lives in Paris. I understand she's returned home for the campaign."

Reggie lifted a brow. "Why?"

Pam smiled. "To act as her father's escort for all the fund-raisers he'll be expected to attend. From what I understand, he hasn't dated a lot since his wife up and left him."

Reggie frowned. "And when was that?"

"Over twenty-something years ago. He raised his kids as a single father," said Pam.

Reggie nodded, immediately admiring the man for taking on such a task. He was blessed to have both of his parents still living and still married to each other. He couldn't imagine otherwise. He had heard his siblings and cousins talk about the hard work that went into parenting, so he admired any person who did it solo.

"As you know, Orin Jeffries is a corporate attorney at Nettleton Industries. He's worked for them for over thirty years. And he's almost twenty-five years older than you. He'll likely flaunt the age difference and his greater experience," Brent added.

Reggie smiled. "I'm sure that he will."

"Do you need me to look over your speech for tomorrow?" Brent asked.

Reggie met his friend's gaze. "I haven't written it yet." Concern touched Brent's features, and not for the first time, Reggie thought his best friend worried too much.

"But I thought you were going to do it last night, right after you came home from the Firemen's Masquerade Ball," Brent said.

Reggie sighed. There was no way he was going to mention that he hadn't made it home from the ball until this morning, because he had made a pit stop at the Saxon Hotel. Actually, it had been more than a pit stop. The word *quickie* in no way described what he and Wonder Woman had done practically all through the night. They had refused to be rushed.

Before Brent could chew him out, Reggie said, "I'll do it as soon as the two of you leave. If you want to drop by later and look it over, then feel free to do so."

A stern look appeared on Brent's face. "And don't think that I won't."

Reggie rolled his eyes. "Just don't return before six this evening."

Brent raised a brow. "Why?"

"Because I need to take a nap."

Brent chuckled. "You never take naps."

Determined not to explain anything, Reggie said, "I know, but today I definitely need one."

As soon as Pam and Brent left, Reggie called and checked in with his parents. Usually on Sunday he would drop by for dinner, and he didn't want his mother to worry when he didn't make an appearance.

After convincing Sarah Westmoreland that he was not coming down with a flu bug and that he just needed to rest, he was ready to end the call, but she kept him on the phone longer than he'd planned to give him a soup recipe…like he would actually take the time to make it. Not that she figured he would. She was just hoping he had a lady friend available to do his bidding.

He couldn't help but smile as he climbed the stairs to his bedroom. His mother's one wish in life was to live to see her six sons all married and herself and his father surrounded by grandchildren. A bout with breast cancer a few years ago had made her even more determined to see each one of her sons happily married.

Her dream had come true—almost. Jared's recent announcement that he and his wife, Dana, would become parents in the fall meant that all of James and Sarah Westmoreland's sons—with the exception of him—were married and either had kids or were expecting them. Quade had blown everyone away with his triplets. But then multiple births ran in the Westmoreland family.

When he reached his bedroom, he began stripping off his clothes, remembering when he had stripped for an audience of one the night before. He had been aware that Wonder Woman's eyes had been directed on him while he'd taken off each piece…the same way his eyes had been on her.

As he slid between the covers, he promised himself that once he woke up, he would have slept off the memories and would be focused on the present again. That morning he'd thought about trying to find his mystery woman, and he still intended to do that, but he owed it to Brent and his campaign staff to stay focused and put all his time and energy into winning this election.

But still…

He thought about the lone earring he had in his dresser drawer. On the way into the office, he would stop by Jared's favorite jewelry store, Garbella Jewelers, to see if they could possibly tell him anything about the earring, like who had made it and, possibly, from which store it had been purchased. Checking on something like that shouldn't take too long and wouldn't make him lose focus.

As he felt himself drifting off to sleep, his mind was flooded with more memories. He wondered how long this fascination, this mind-reeling, gut-wrenching obsession with his mystery woman, would last.

He wasn't sure, but he intended to enjoy it while it did.

Olivia sat in the chair across the room, and her observant eye zeroed in on her father and Cathy. She tried not to chuckle when she noticed how they would look at each other when the other one wasn't watching. Boy, they had it bad, but in a way, she was glad. Sooner or later, her father would realize that Cathy was the best thing to ever happen to him. Even now, after working as his secretary for over fifteen years, their relationship was still professional. She knew in time that would change, and she would do her part to help it along.

"Dad?"

Orin looked up from his seat behind his desk and glanced over at her. Cathy was standing next to his chair. They'd had their heads together while Cathy critiqued his speech. "Yes, sweetheart?"

"Why did you send for me to be your escort for all these fund-raising events when you had Cathy right here?"

As if on cue, Cathy blushed, and her father's jaw dropped as if he was surprised she would ask something like that. Before he could pick up his jaw to respond, Cathy spoke, stammering through her explanation.

"T-there's no way Orin can do something like that. I'm his secretary."

Olivia smiled. "Oh." What she was tempted to say was that secretary or no secretary, Cathy was also the woman her father couldn't keep his eyes off. She couldn't wait until she talked to Duan and Terrence.

And then, as if by luck or fate, since it also seemed to be on cue, her cell phone rang, and when she stood and pulled it out of her back jeans pocket, she saw the call was from Terrence.

Knowing it was best to take the call privately, she said, “Excuse me a moment while I take this.” She quickly walked out of the room and closed the office door behind her.

“Yes, Terrence?”

“What the hell is going on with you, Libby? Why did you text me from an unknown number and then call this morning and ask that the text be deleted?”

Olivia nervously licked her lips. One thing about Terrence was that he would ask questions, but if she gave him a reason that sounded remotely plausible, he would let it go, whereas Duan would continue to ask questions.

“Last night I went to this charity party in Dad’s place and met a guy. He asked me to follow him to a nightclub in Stone Mountain, and I did, but I felt I should take precautions.”

“That was a good idea. Smart girl. So how was the club?”

“Umm, nice, but it didn’t compare to Club Hurricane,” she said, knowing he would like to hear that she thought the nightclub he owned in the Keys was at the top of the list.

“You’re even smarter than I thought. So how’s Dad? He hasn’t dropped out of this Senate race yet?”

Olivia smiled. Terrence and Duan were taking bets that sooner or later, when Orin Jeffries got a taste of what real politics were like, he would call it quits. At first she had agreed with them, but now she wasn’t so sure. “I don’t know, Terrence. I think he’s going all the way with this one.”

“Umm, that’s interesting. I still think Reed pushed Dad into running for his own benefit. I’m going to give Duan a call. We might need to talk to Dad about this.”

“You might be too late. The first forum is tomorrow, and he’s giving a speech. He’s been working on it for two days. The only good thing coming out of all this is that he and Cathy are working together,” she said.

“Libby, they always work closely together. She’s his secretary.”

“Yes, but they are working closely together in a different way, on issues other than Nettleton Industries business. In fact, she’s over here now.”

She could hear her brother chuckle. “Still determined to play Cupid, are you?”

“I might as well while I’m here, since I have nothing else to do.” She thought of Jack Sprat. She had been tempted earlier to pull out her art pad and do some sketches to pass the time. She had thought about drawing her mystery man with the mask and then playing around to see if she could draw sketches of how she imagined he might look without the mask. She had eventually talked herself out of it.

“Well, I’ll be coming home in a couple of weeks, so stay out of trouble until then, sport.”

She laughed. “I can’t make you any promises, but I’ll try.”

Four

Brent had given his speech a thumbs-up, so Reggie felt confident it would go over well. He walked around the luncheon reception, greeting all those who had arrived to attend the forum. This would be the first of several gatherings designed to give voters a chance to learn each candidate's agenda. He had met Orin Jeffries when he'd first arrived and thought the older man was a likable guy.

A number of his family members were present and a number of his friends as well. These were people who believed in him, supported him and were counting on him to make changes to some of the present policies.

A career in politics had been the last thing on his mind and had never been his heart's desire, until recently. He'd become outraged at the present senators' refusal to recognize the state's need for an additional college. More and more young people were making the decision to acquire higher learning, and the lower tuition costs of state universities compared to private universities were a key factor in the process. It was hard enough for students to get the funds they needed to go to college, but when they were refused entrance into schools because of campus overcrowding, that was unacceptable. Anyone who wanted a college education should be able to get one. Georgia needed another state-run college, and he was willing to fight for it.

The University of Georgia was the oldest public university in the state and had been established by an act of the Georgia General Assembly over two centuries ago. Just as there had been a need for greater educational opportunities then, there was a need now. In fact, land had been donated for that very purpose ten years ago. Now some lawmakers were trying to use a loophole in the land grant to appropriate the land to build a recreation area—a park that would be largely composed of a golf course.

Reggie was aware that getting elected would only be the first hurdle. Once he got in the Senate, he would then have the job of convincing his fellow lawmakers of the need for an additional state university as well.

He glanced at his watch. In less than ten minutes, lunch would be served, and then halfway through lunch, each person seeking office would get an opportunity to speak. There were about eight candidates in attendance.

Deciding he needed to switch his focus for a moment, he thought about his visit to Garbella Jewelers that morning. Mr. Garbella's assessment of the earring was that it was a fine piece of craftsmanship. The diamonds were real and of good quality. He doubted the piece had been purchased in this country. He thought the way the diamonds were set was indicative of European jewelry making. Mr. Garbella had gone on to say that the pair had cost a lot of money. After visiting with the jeweler, Reggie was more determined than ever to find his Wonder Woman and return the missing earring to her.

Quade and his cousin Cole, who'd both recently retired—Quade from a top security job with the government and Cole from the Texas Rangers—had joined forces to start a network of security companies, some of which would include private investigation. He wondered if they would be interested in taking him on as their first client.

He looked at his watch again before glancing across the room and meeting Brent's eye. He had less than ten minutes to mingle, and then everyone would be seated for lunch. He hated admitting it, but he felt in his element. Maybe a political career was his calling, after all.

Olivia waited until just moments before the luncheon was to begin to make an entrance and join her father. According to his campaign manager, Marc Norris, her entrance was part of a coordinated strategy. He wanted her to ease into the room and work one side of it while her father worked the other. Subtle yet thorough.

When he had mentioned his strategy that morning while joining Olivia and her father for breakfast, she had gotten annoyed that the man assumed she didn't have any common sense. Evidently, Norris doubted she could hold her own during any discussion. But not to cause any problems, she had decided to keep her opinions to herself.

She saw noticeable interest in her from the moment she stepped into the room. Most people knew that Orin Jeffries had a daughter, but a number of them had forgotten or shoved the fact to the back of their mind in the wake of his two well-known sons. Practically everybody in the country knew of the Holy Terror, whether they were football enthusiasts or not. Since retiring from football, Terrence had been known for his work in a number of high-profile charities. He also commentated on a popular radio talk show, *Sports Talk,* in South Florida, which might go into syndication the next year. Duan had made the national headlines a few years before, when his undercover work as a detective had resulted in the exposure of a couple of unsavory individuals who'd been intent on bringing organized crime to Georgia.

But it didn't bother her in the least that her brothers' good deeds had somehow made people forget about her. Besides, she hadn't lived in this country in four years, returning only on occasion to visit, mainly around the holidays.

She began mingling, introducing herself as Orin Jeffries's daughter, and actually got a kick out of seeing first surprise and then acknowledgment on many faces. One such incident was taking place now.

"Why, Olivia, how good it is to see you again. It's been a while since you've been back home. But I do remember you now. You must be extremely proud of your father and brothers."

"Yes, I am, Mrs. Hancock, and how is Beau? I understand he's doing extremely well. You must be proud of him."

She watched the older woman's eyes light up as she went into a spiel about her son. She was a proud mother. Olivia knew Beau from school. Unless he had changed over the years, Beau Hancock was an irrefutable jerk. He'd thought he was the gift to every girl at Collinshill High School.

She glanced down at her watch. She had ten minutes left before everyone would take their seats for lunch. She had called the Saxon Hotel on the off chance that someone from housekeeping had come across her diamond earring and turned it in. That hadn't been the case. A part of her was disappointed that it had not been.

There was still one section of the room she needed to cover. Mrs. Hancock, in singing Beau's praises, had taken up quite a bit of her time. Now she was again making her way through the crowds, speaking to everyone, as Norris had suggested.

"You're doing a marvelous job working the room," Senator Reed whispered. The older man had suddenly appeared by her side.

She forced a smile. For some reason, she'd never cared for him. "Thanks."

She had already met several of the candidates since entering the room, but she had yet to meet the man who would be her father's real competition, Reggie Westmoreland.

As she continued mingling and heading to the area where Reggie Westmoreland was supposedly rubbing elbows with the crowd, her curiosity about the man who opposed her father couldn't help but be piqued. She started to ask Senator Reed about him but changed her mind. The senator's opinion wouldn't be the most valuable.

"You look nice, Olivia."

She glanced up at the senator, who seemed determined to remain by her side. He was a few years older than her father, and for some reason, he had always made her feel uncomfortable.

"Thanks, Senator." She refrained from saying that he also looked nice, which he did. Like her father, he was a good-looking man for his age, but Senator Reed always had an air of snobbery about him, like he was born with too low expectations of others.

"It was my suggestion that your father send for you." When she stopped walking and glanced at him, with a raised brow, he added, "He was in a dilemma, and I thought bringing you home to be his escort was the perfect answer."

She bit back a retort, that bringing her home had not been the perfect answer. Being in that dilemma might have prompted her dad to ask Cathy to attend some of those functions with him. No telling how things would have taken off from there if the senator hadn't butted in.

She was about to open her mouth, to tell Senator Reed that her father was old enough to think for himself, when, all of a sudden, for no reason at all, she pulled in a quick breath. She glanced up ahead, and no more than four feet in front of her, there stood a man with his back to her.

The first thing she noticed about him was his height. He was taller then the men he was talking to. And there was something about his particular height, and the way his head tilted at an angle as he listened to what one of the men was saying, that held her spellbound.

He was dressed in a suit, and she could only admire how it fit him. The broadness of his shoulders and the tapering of his waist sent a feeling of familiarity through her. She stopped walking momentarily and composed herself, not understanding what was happening to her.

"Is anything wrong, Olivia?"

She glanced up at Senator Reed and saw concern in his eyes. She knew she couldn't tell him what she was thinking. There was no way she could voice her suspicions to anyone.

She needed to go somewhere to pull herself together, to consider the strong possibility that the man standing not far away was her Jack Sprat. Or could it be that she was so wrapped up in the memories of that night that she was quick to assume that any man of a tall stature who possessed broad shoulders had to be her mystery man?

"Olivia?"

Instead of saying anything, she shifted her gaze from the senator to look again at the man, whose back was still to her. It was at that precise moment that he slowly turned around, and his gaze settled on her. In a quick second, she pulled in a sharp breath as she scanned his face, and her gaze settled on a firm jaw that had an angular plane. Her artist's eye also picked up other things, and they were things others would probably not notice—the stark symmetry of his face, which was clear with or without a mask, the shape of his head and the alignment of his ears from his cheeks. These were things she recognized.

Things she remembered.

And she knew, without a doubt, that she was staring into the face of the man whom she had spent the night with on Saturday. The man whose body had given her hours upon hours of immeasurable pleasure. And impossible as it seemed—because they'd kept their masks in place the entire time—she had a feeling from the way he was staring back at her just as intently as she was staring at him that he had recognized her, too.

"Olivia?"

She broke eye contact with the stranger to gaze up at the senator. The man was becoming annoying, but at the moment, he was the one person who could tell her exactly what she needed to know. "Senator Reed, that guy up there, the one who turned around to look at me. Who is he?"

The senator followed her gaze and frowned deeply. "The two of you had to meet eventually. That man, young lady, is the enemy."

She swallowed deeply before saying, "The enemy?"

"Yes, the enemy. He's the man that's opposing your father in his bid for the Senate."

Olivia's head began spinning before the senator could speak his next words.

"That, my dear," the senator went on to say, "is Reggie Westmoreland."

It was her.

Reggie knew it with every breath he took. Her lips were giving her away. And he wasn't sure what part of him was recognizable to her, but he knew just as sure as they were standing there, staring at each other, that they were as intimately familiar to each other as any two people could be.

It was strange. He'd been standing here with Brent, his brother Jared, his cousins Dare and Thorn, and Thorn's wife, Tara. They'd all been listening to Thorn, a nationally known motorcycle builder and racer, who was telling them about an order he'd received to build a bike for actor Matt Damon. Then, all of a sudden, he'd felt a strange sensation, followed by a stirring in the lower part of his gut.

He had turned around, and he'd looked straight into her face. His Wonder Woman.

He couldn't lay claim to recognizing any of her other facial features, but her lips were a dead giveaway. Blatantly sensual, he had kissed them, tongued them, licked them and tasted them to his heart's content. He knew the shape of them in his sleep, knew their texture, knew what part of them was so sensitive that when he'd touched her there, she had moaned.

She looked totally stunning in the stylish skirt and blouse she was wearing. The outfit complemented her figure. Even if he hadn't met her before, he would be trying his best to do so now. Out of his peripheral vision, he noted a number of men looking at her, and he understood why. She was gorgeous.

He lost control, and his feet began moving toward her.

"Reggie, where are you going?" Brent asked.

He didn't respond, because he truly didn't know what he could say. He continued walking until he came to a stop directly in front of the senator and the woman. The senator, he noted, was frowning. The woman's gaze hadn't left his. She seemed as entranced as he was.

He found his voice to say, "Good afternoon, Senator Reed. It's good seeing you again."

It was a lie, and he realized the senator knew it, but he didn't care. Approaching him would force the man to make introductions, and if it took a lie, then so be it.

"Westmoreland, I see you've decided to go through with it," replied the senator.

Reggie gave the man a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Of course." He then shifted his gaze back to the woman. The senator would be outright rude not to make an introduction, and one thing Reggie did know about the senator was that he believed in following proper decorum.

"And let me introduce you to Olivia Jeffries. Olivia, this is Reggie Westmoreland," the senator said.

At the mention of her name, Reggie's mind went into a tailspin. "Jeffries?" he replied.

"Yes," the senator said as a huge, smug smile touched his lips. "Jeffries. She's Orin Jeffries's daughter, who is visiting from Paris and will remain here during the duration of the campaign."

Reggie nodded as his eyes once again settled on Olivia. He then reached out his hand. "Olivia, it's nice meeting you. I'm sure your father is excited about having you home."

"Thank you," replied Olivia.

They both felt it the moment their hands touched, and they both knew it. It was those same feelings that had driven them to leave the party on Saturday night and to go somewhere to be alone, with the sole purpose of getting intimately connected. Reggie opened his mouth to say something, and then a voice from the microphone stopped him.

"Everyone is asked to take a seat so lunch can be served. Your table number is located on your ticket."

"It was nice meeting you, Mr. Westmoreland," Olivia said, not sure what else to say at the moment.

She honestly had thought she would not see him again, not this soon, not ever. And now that he knew their predicament—that she was the daughter of the man who was his opponent in this political race—she hoped that he would accept the inevitable. Nothing had changed. Even with their identities exposed, there could never be anything between them beyond what had happened Saturday night.

"It was nice meeting you as well, Ms. Jeffries," said Reggie. And then he did something that was common among Frenchmen but rare with Americans. Bending slightly, he lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it before turning and walking away.

Five

Olivia found that every time she lifted her fork to her mouth, her gaze would automatically drift to the next table, the one where Reggie Westmoreland was sitting. And each time, unerringly, their gazes would meet.

After their introduction, she had excused herself to the senator, smiling and saying she needed to go to the ladies' room. Once there she had taken a deep breath. It was a wonder she hadn't passed out. With his mask in place, Reggie Westmoreland had been handsome. Without his mask, he took her breath away. While standing in front of him, she'd had to tamp down her emotions and the sensations flowing through her.

His eyes were very dark, almost chocolate, and their shape, which she had been denied seeing on Saturday night, was almond, beneath thick brows. It had taken everything in her power to force her muscles to relax. And when he had taken her hand and kissed the back of it before walking off, she'd thought she would swoon right then and there.

"Libby, are you okay? You've barely touched your meal," her father said, interrupting her thoughts.

She glanced over to him and smiled. "Yes, Daddy, I'm fine."

"Westmoreland is the cause of it," said Senator Reed, jumping in. "She met him right before we took our seats. He probably gave her an upset stomach."

Her father frowned. "Was he rude to you, sweetheart?" he asked, with deep concern tinged with anger.

She was opening her mouth to assure her father that Reggie hadn't been rude when Senator Reed said, "He was quite taken with her, Orin."

She ignored the senator's comment, thinking that he didn't know the half of it. Instead, she answered her father. "No, he wasn't rude, Dad. In fact, although we spoke only briefly, I thought he was rather nice." She smiled. "Quite the charmer."

"The enemy is never nice or charming, Olivia. Remember that," the senator said, speaking to her like she was a child. "I strongly suggest that during this campaign, you stay away from him."

She was opening her mouth to tell the senator that she truly didn't give a royal damn about what he would strongly suggest when her father spoke.

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