



Gambling with Destiny

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Description: Destiny Drake had a magical night with a guy she met in a bar in Las Vegas. Their OTT wedding ceremony and night of passion was like a fantasy but she pushed it to the back of her mind because of that old saying about what happens in Vegas...

Mason King met the love of his life in Las Vegas but she ghosted him the morning after their wedding. When Destiny turns up a month later at his parents resort in the small Aussie town of Hartwood Bay, he knew it was no coincidence. She was his Destiny.

In the city of high stakes and even higher heels, love can sometimes be a roll of the dice. But after a wild night of adventures, unexpected is just the beginning for our newlyweds.

In 'Viva Las... oh, sh!' our accidental couples find themselves hitched. They say Vegas never sleeps. But these lovebirds might never wake from their nightmare.

Can one big oops turn into ever-lasting love?

Total Pages (Source): 12

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Destiny

Crossing the gaming floor, my shoulders tensed. The number of people around me putting me on edge. I'd been in Las Vegas for three days and I could've happily gone home on day one. Everything about this city just screamed everything I wasn't. It was all shiny and bright, and I longed to set my bare feet on the earth and ground myself again.

The stench of desperation lingered in the air. It was 9:00 p.m. Vegas time, but to be honest, the place felt no different than it had at midday. Our first stop of what seemed to be the longest day in existence was a cocktail bar in our hotel that my sister, Jade, had dragged me to. With its plush lounges and the way it felt hidden away from the neon and glitter, I felt like it had pulled me back. There was also a cocktail on their list that I felt like it needed to be revisited, especially after a day of wrangling my drunk sister and the rest of the bridesmaids.

I weaved past a drunk patron and ducked behind the modular room divider. Even with the lights flashing through the gaps in the pattern, I'd already felt safer. Tugging on the too small dress my sister had talked me into wearing, I lifted my head and strutted toward the bar. I'd learned long ago that appearing confident made you less of a target, and I always felt like a massive target. These days I just didn't apologise for it.

Sitting on the black, velvet cushioned stool at the bar, I breathed a sigh of relief. I loved my sister, I really did, but there was only so much toxic positivity I could take

from her and her fellow fitness influencer bridesmaids. They meant well. I knew they did and I think they were genuinely concerned about my health and welfare when they gave me diet tips. But I was healthy and strong, just not slim. Plus, at least I could drink more than a glass and a half of wine before I passed out.

That was where my sister was, not quite passed out but less than two drinks and she was sloppy drunk and telling me that this could be me too if only I lost a little weight. I could be that happy bride to be. It was something I used to believe her too, that all I needed to do was drop some kilos and my newly svelte body would attract my soulmate. I'd seen the woman my father left my mum for and ironically, the woman he left his second wife for as well.

It took me a lot of work to accept that I deserved love just as I was, but that didn't mean that I didn't sometimes feel like I took up too much space. My personality was big, I tended to be outspoken and after a few too many drinks, my filter dropped and I was way too honest for my own good.

My level of intoxication was at that point when I left my sister and her bridesmaid in the suite we were sharing for her hen's weekend. One more diet tip or sly look if I dared to take another slice of cheese and I was about to unleash. Instead, I took the option of sitting in a bar in a foreign country by myself.

With a friendly smile, the bartender asked for my order, and I requested the fruity concoction I'd been craving when I sat down. I watched as he deftly measured, poured and shook the cocktail before presenting it to me. Sipping the liquid heaven, my shoulders relaxed, I placed the drink on a coaster and sat back on the stool, intent on enjoying this time to myself.

"Is this seat taken?" A smooth, deep voice sounded to my right. He sounded faintly Australian, although that could just be my homesick head making things up. I was close to giving him the brush off. I was sick of fending off the advances of sleazebags

after a night wearing a dress that highlighted each of my curves.

Turning my head was all I needed to stop me in my tracks. I was not someone who stopped talking, ever really, but one look at this stranger and I was speechless. The man standing next to me was the most beautiful man I'd ever seen in real life. He had dark hair that hung over thick brows, framing bright blue eyes. Tall and broad, he stood with his hand on the back of the stool next to me, a smirk forming on his lips. The kind of smirk that said he knew how hot he was and he was amused by my reaction to him.

"It is now," I smiled back. A little Vegas fling might be just what I needed to get through this hen's weekend with a little more sanity. In just over 24 hours, I was jumping on a plane to head to Hawaii for my sister's wedding and I'd had just about enough of my fellow bridesmaids.

"Aussie?" he asked, tipping his head to the side.

"Yes, you?" I turned my stool to face him.

"Yeah...been a while since I've been home, though." He waved down the bar attendant and ordered a high-end scotch. Tipping well, he thanked the server before turning back to me. "It's a big place, though. Where are you from?"

"Sydney." I gave him a vague reply. He didn't need to know my life story. It's not like I was going to meet the love of my life in a bar in Las Vegas. I played along with the small talk though, if it could get me what I wanted with him.

"I lived in Sydney for a while before I...uh, moved to the US. So where in Sydney do you call home?" He probed.

"2-7-7-0 baby!" I quoted the postcode of the suburb I grew up in, notorious for being

full of public housing and all the problems associated with the poverty cycle. To me, it was a tightknit community of hard-working people who always had each others back. It was my litmus test. If a man was turned off by the neighbourhood that raised me, well, he was too much of a wanker for me, anyway. I had a good job and was financially secure, but some people didn't look past the post code.

“Ahhh, Mt Druitt girl! I'm a fellow westie. I lived near Penrith when I was in Sydney.” He referred to a suburb twenty minutes west of where I lived. “My name is Mason. What's yours?”

“Destiny.” I held my hand out to shake his and he honest to god, brought it to his lips and kissed it lightly. Who does that shit these days?

A little taken aback by his old-fashioned gesture, I took a sip of my drink to recompose myself. I needed to get back into the femme fatale energy I was trying to express and not the spellbound awkward dork I felt like I'd turned into. There was a thought niggling at the back of my head that said that Mason looked a little like a singer I'd had a crush on as a teenager.

“So, Mason, what brings a boy from the Riff to the US?” I asked, trying to take back control of the conversation.

“Ummm, work.” He muttered, his eyes not meeting mine. I took a sip of my drink, assessing him. He was definitely hiding something, but as long as it wasn't a spouse at home, it was something I could overlook for the night. Especially when a man looked as good as he did in a suit.

The goddess before me was breaking my brain. It was mush. My whole life, my parents had told me their love story and how love at first sight ran in our family. It was something I'd never really thought much of until this moment, but my heart raced, my cock stirred and that my normal, charming, flirty self had flown out the window.

I'd seen her walk into the room, gold dress clinging to her curves, barely covering her long legs. Like one of those cartoon characters, I felt like I'd gone bug-eyed with my tongue rolling out, heart visibly beating out of my chest. I made excuses with the friends I'd travelled to Vegas with to go sit beside her. The minute I heard her Aussie accent, I knew it was fate, my heart calling me home.

After living in the US for more than a decade, I'd finally decided to go home for good, back to the little town of Hartwood Bay. I missed my family and the laid-back lifestyle. My friends, though, thought I needed a last hurrah. They thought that for a former rock star; I lead a very boring life. My need for a quiet life while I continued to write music was half the reason I still had a fairly hefty bank account while my ex-andmates were doing celebrity reality shows to boost their profile and income.

High-flyer, I wasn't, but I didn't mind a big night out every now and then. I was thankful that my friends had pushed me into one last big night and for their insistence that it had to be in Las Vegas. Without that, I would never have been in this bar and would have never run into this intriguing woman. I would never have met my Destiny.

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I could already hear my mum retelling the story, organising a wedding at the luxury resort owned by my family. One just like the celebration she was organising for my sister and her fiancé in just a few weeks.

Destiny sipped her fruity drink, wrapping her lush lips around the straw. Looking at me with those sharp, dark brown eyes waiting for me to elaborate on my flimsy story.

“I had a job opportunity pop up when I was at uni, it was too good not to take so I packed up and moved to LA.” That wasn’t quite a lie, it was a truth that I’d told countless times when I didn’t want someone to realise who I was.

From the minute I’d sat down, she had given me that look, the one I received less these days. It was the one where she thought I looked familiar, but she wasn’t quite sure where from. Since my days in The Monarchists, I’d filled out and gotten a grown up haircut. My dark locks were still a little long on top, but rather than hiding behind it, I now wore it in deliberately dishevelled style.

This time, though, with this woman, I didn’t mind if she had recognised me. I almost wanted her to know I was Mason King from The Monarchists. I felt like I wanted to impress her and I would take any advantage I could gain.

Well, perhaps I wanted her to know me as Mason, but probably not the BS that came with being associated with being the lead singer of a band that was touted as the next big thing for about a hot minute. I definitely wanted her to associate me with the young heartthrob that was marketed as a playboy and I may have played in to for a while. What was a guy to do when beautiful women threw themselves at me?

“What brings you to Vegas?” I focused our conversation back on her.

“Ughh.” Destiny rolled her eyes. “My sister and her friends decided it would be epic to have a Vegas hen's weekend before her wedding in Hawaii. So she fluttered her eyelashes and her fiance flashed his cash.”

“You say that like you don't approve?” I questioned.

“I love my sister, I do,” she put her hand to her heart. “But she has always been a pretty, little blonde who just needs to smile sweetly, and she got exactly what she wanted. She did that with our dad, now she does it with her future husband.”

I took in her voluptuous figure, smooth light brown skin, her carefully curled dark blonde hair and her perfectly painted lips. All she had to do was smile sweetly and I would give her the world. I was already tempted to offer it to her, anyway. Toying with a lone of those curls, I said, “You're telling me you couldn't do the same thing?”

The laugh that poured out of her mouth was loud and addictive. It was no artful or girlish giggle.

“Yeah, NO,” she pursed her lips. “Everything I have, I've worked for. It may not be the lavish lifestyle my sister enjoys, but it's mine.”

My impression of Destiny escalated. I was raised by a hardworking and strong-minded woman. I couldn't imagine being with someone who didn't challenge me. A future with this woman was something I could easily imagine. “So, how long are you in Vegas for?”

“We fly out in about 24 hours and to be honest, it couldn't come quickly enough...” she sighed.

“Not enjoying my company?” I smiled at her over my drink, then pretended to stand.

“Oh, no,” she reached out and wrapped her hand around my arm. “You’re definitely a highlight of this trip.”

I settled back into the seat, already enamoured by this woman. “No other highlights other than some guy hitting on you in a bar?”

“Nope.” She popped the “p” for emphasis. “I can now say I’ve ticked Vegas off my bucket list and be done with it.”

“Are you sure you can tick that box? Have you truly had the Vegas experience?” I didn’t know what I was aiming for here, but maybe I could find something I could do with her to extend my time with her. I mean, other than the thing my body wanted to do with her the minute I saw her. Failing that, I would just drag her to my room and ravish her for every minute she had left in this city.

“I’ve seen the lights, been to shows, dabbled in some gaming, watched the fountain, gone to nightclubs and walked the strip,” she rattled off typical tourist things. “Underneath all the lights and music, it just feels a little seedy.”

“I get what you’re saying. It’s hard to walk around and not have your senses assaulted.” I agreed. “But what I haven’t heard is if you’ve done the ultimate Vegas experience?”

Destiny eyed me with suspicion, her elbow resting on the bar beside her. “And what would that be?”

“Have you had a Vegas Wedding?” I gave her that winning smile, the one that was once plastered on magazine covers and all over social media.

For the second time, I enjoyed her full, hearty laugh. Amusement playing in her eyes. “No, I haven’t experienced a Vegas wedding.”

Sucking in a breath and putting on my former stage persona, I stood up and did something so ridiculous that there were only two possible outcomes. One, she would laugh her ass off or two, she would go with the flow and this would be the beginning of the rest of my life.

I bent down on one knee, looked up into the gorgeous face of the woman I was certain was my future. “Destiny, would you do me the honour of accompanying me to the altar tonight? Will you marry me?”

Destiny looked like she was holding back a laugh, and I was quickly losing some of my bravado. Standing from her stool, she took my hand, and it was like music to my ears when she said, “Why not?”

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Destiny

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I didn't know what I was thinking, but when the hottest man you've ever seen in real life proposes a touristy gimmick wedding, you say yes! If I played my cards right, we might be able to consummate this so-called wedding, so why not go with the flow? It was better than calorie tracking my glasses of wine with Jade and the other bridesmaids.

Mason quickly stood and grabbed my hand. Shivers shot up my arm from his touch and his blue eyes sparkled with mischief. His thumb brushed lightly over the back of my hand, his eyes darkening. I wasn't sure if it was me who leaned in first, but before I knew it, his lips were brushing against mine, oh so briefly. The kiss, although chaste, was almost like a promise of the passion he barely held at bay. That one moment of contact was like a premonition of the heat that awaited us later that evening.

He pressed his forehead against mine and with a sigh he said, "Let's get married, future Mrs King." Stepping back from me slightly but without releasing my hand, he gave me one last, assessing look. "Are you ready for this?"

"I'm game for anything you have in mind tonight." I replied, giving him no doubt of my intentions.

Mason led me back through the gaming floor and to the hotel lobby, walking right up to the concierge. "Mr King! I hope you're enjoying your evening?" The young man asked.

For a moment I questioned why the concierge knew him by name in such a large hotel, but as soon as he wrapped a hand around my waist, pulling me to him, those

thought flew straight from my mind. The citrusy scent of his cologne was a refreshing change from the overwhelming spice of the stronger fragrances worn by other men.

“We’re getting married,” he happily announced. “Can you help us make arrangements for tonight? Elvis ceremony, neon lights, the whole cliché!”

“Of course, I’ll get it done,” the concierge asked us for an alarming amount of details, but with Mason’s arms still secured around me and my curves resting against his hard planes, I wasn’t thinking. Well, I was, but my thoughts were definitely busy picturing what he would look like naked.

We made our way outside the hotel and into a stretch limousine. The last few days, I’d walked everywhere, so the transport was a welcome luxury. I held the cold glass of champagne he handed to me and sipped it as he pointed out the lights of the casinos from the window as we cruised along the strip. Sitting in the limo, away from the seediness of the street, the lights really were dazzling.

Mason’s eyes were fixed on me as I placed the glass in a holder to the side of my seat. “Still not a fan of Vegas?” He asked as he placed his glass next to his seat.

“It’s much prettier from a distance.” I replied.

“And you’re much prettier up close,” he said as his face moved toward mine.

“Oh, that’s a bit corny,” I couldn’t help but snicker, and his returning smile was magnificent. He shook his head.

“You make me nervous,” he said under his breath. “I don’t know what to say because I don’t think my usual lines would work.”

“In that case, why don’t you just shut up and kiss me?” I placed my hand at the nape

of his neck, pulling his face forward, and brushed my lips against his. He needed no further encouragement. His tongue teased me, begging me to open up to him. Our kiss was slow and languorous, each of us taking our time to taste each other.

“Your destination.” I heard a voice announce in the background.

Untangling myself from Mason’s arms, I adjusted the hem of my dress and exited the limo. We’d arrived at The Little Blue Suede Chapel, the sign blinking open in bright pink neon.

Walking inside, I saw another couple waiting nervously. A young man wearing a suit that swamped his lean frame was holding the hand of his fiancé. Both looked wide-eyed and way too young to be getting married, even if this was a novelty chapel. All this from the woman who was 32 with one too many lacklustre relationships in my past to settle. Settle for a man who didn’t understand me, settle for a life that was about just keeping my head above water, settle for bad sex. That wasn’t me.

I wasn’t saying that an amazing man who would meet my needs in everyway didn’t exist. He might’ve existed, but there was no way he was around when I was this couple’s age. I was happy living on my terms and taking my fun where the opportunities popped up, like a gimmick wedding to a hot guy in a foreign city. In just over a week, I would be back home in my unit in Sydney, back at the job I love and preparing for yet another wedding.

Maybe that was the reason I jumped at this OTT Vegas moment. Months of being involved with plans for my sister’s wedding in a few days, for my best friend’s wedding only weeks later. I had been inundated with love at its sappiest and most pure. My entire world had been saturated with romance, to the point where I had the choice of crawling into a FOMO ball of misery or I could celebrate the life I had.

An Elvis impersonator performing a wedding to a hot guy? It was the perfect way to

make the most of being single and fabulous. Why not indeed. Mason put his hand on the centre of my back and lead me toward a bored-looking woman as the concierge from the hotel came running through the door.

“Here is your paperwork, Mr King,” he said as he handed over an envelope. “And the rings.”

I took the box and looked inside to see a fairly simple gold ring and assumed that the corresponding box in Mason’s hand held something similar. Turning back to the woman sitting at the chapel reception desk, she acknowledged us and said that she had our booking, but asked us to confirm our names and provide our ID.

“Destiny Drake,” I stated as I handed over my passport.

To my right, Mason fumbled over his wallet as he pulled out his driver’s licence. “Mason King,” he mumbled as he dropped his ID in the receptionist’s hand. Then, like ice water pouring over me, it hit me. I took in his dark hair, shorter than in my memories, ice-blue eyes and that cheeky grin.

“THE Mason King...” I almost whispered.

“No one has referred to me that way for over a decade,” he laughed nervously. The receptionist handed back our IDs, and Mason led me back to a lounge to await our ceremony. Holding my hand in his, he looked at me sheepishly. “Are you okay with this?”

I took in a breath and let out a giggle. “19-year-old me would be more than okay with this, but 32-year-old me is going with ‘what happens in Vegas’”.

“So, you really don’t mind that I didn’t tell you who I was before we got here?” he asked.

“Please, we’re in a Vegas wedding chapel, about to walk down the aisle only hours after we met,” I dismissed his concerns. “Besides, my dad is Dougie Drake. I grew up hanging out at the Channel 8 studio meeting celebrities.”

4

Mason

I stood with my mouth wide open. I'd grown up watching her father play football for Australia and then transition into TV stardom. Here I was worried about being famous for a couple of years, and I was standing with the daughter of Dougie Drake. Aussie icon, well at least in the states that watch rugby league.

Raking my eyes over this gorgeous woman, I couldn't see any resemblance to her father, from her bronzed caramel skin and deep, chocolate brown eyes to her deliciously thick, curvy body. Nope, this voluptuous beauty looked nothing like her lanky, blue-eyed, bleached blonde, TV host, dad.

"Are YOU okay with this?" she smirked at me and I laughed.

"I'd marry you if your dad was the King of England," I replied and meant it. I craved her for real, not just this farce of a ceremony, but a small, intimate one on the sand at Valentine Cove.

I shook the image from my mind and focused on the present moment. I wanted to enjoy every moment with this woman. "So Destiny Drake, daughter of Dougie Drake, you mentioned a sister. Are there only the two of you?"

"Just one sister," she replied. "But five, almost six brothers."

"Almost six? How does that happen?" I tilted my head to the side as I listened for her

answer.

“Oh, Dad’s latest fiancé is six months pregnant,” she dismissed my question. It wasn’t hard to tell that she wasn’t a fan of her father’s turnstile of lovers. I remembered seeing pics of him in the trashy gossip magazines my mum used to devour.

“Wouldn’t that make him a half-brother?” The logic of a man who grew up in a nuclear family.

“Technically, yes, but I was always raised that math doesn’t belong in family or culture.” She explained. “Scientifically, we get half our genes from one parent and half from the other, but family and culture are more than biology. My sister is my sister because we treat each other as sisters, yes we have different mothers, but I don’t see her as any less family than my older brother Jye who shares both parents with me.”

I nodded at her explanation. It made sense in a way I’d never thought about.

“It’s like culture,” she continued. “I’m a proud Blak woman, but some people ask me what half because my skin isn’t that dark. What am I supposed to say? My left side? I am Aboriginal AND I am Anglo-Aussie. One doesn’t exclude me from the other.”

“I’ve never thought of it like that,” I admitted.

“So what about you, Mason King, Mr Rock Star? Do you have any siblings?” She asked, a smirk on those brightly painted lips.

“One sister and one brother, both younger.” I answered with a smile. I missed my siblings, and I was happy that I would see them both again soon.

“Are you close?” Her dark eyes examined me, like the question was a test.

“We used to be, but then I moved to the US, my brother moved to the UK, then Thailand. I think he’s in Perth right now?” I shook my head, unsure where Hayden had landed lately. “But my sister still lives in the town we grew up in, works in the family business. Now that I’m older, I don’t blame her. I miss the place. I miss my family.”

“Mr King and Ms Drake?” our names were called, and the receptionist escorted us through a door painted with a mural of intertwined wedding rings. Inside, the chapel was decked out with walls draped in blue suede. There were white chairs lined up on either side and I guessed they would be used by some people who actually planned to get married there, not just a couple of people indulging in a Vegas cliché.

At the end of the aisle, wearing a lemon yellow suit jacket with a black shirt and pants, stood an Elvis impersonator. Destiny and I walked up, hand in hand. I silently thanked my friends for insisting I wear a suit because Destiny looked like a goddess in her sparkly gold dress.

We faced the celebrant, still hand in hand as he welcomed us to The Little Blue Chapel of Love, his Elvis voice fluctuating but filled with grunts. To his side stood a woman with ginger red hair, wearing a 1960s style shift dress in the same shade of yellow as the celebrants jacket. I’d sat through enough Elvis movies as a kid to recognise that she was dressed as the actress Ann Margaret from Viva Las Vegas.

“This is Rusty. She’ll be your witness tonight,” Elvis introduced his assistant. “Now, can I ask you lovebirds to face each other, both hands holding each other.”

The man with the terrible Tennessee accent uttered some more words, which faded into white noise. I pictured us on the beach at Valentine Cove, the place where my parents were married over 30 years ago, surrounded by our loved ones. Myeyes roved

over this woman in front of me. She was radiant, every inch more beautiful than the last.

Destiny was looking up at me, her eyes full of amusement, her face glowing. The idea of committing to this woman just felt right. We spoke our vows, exchanged our rings and when we were announced man and wife, I didn't hesitate to kiss my bride.

I kissed her with a passion that I'd never felt before. It was pulsing in my veins, taking on a life of its own.

I kissed her until she pulled away from me, putting only enough space between us for her to say, "Let's go consummate this union."

I let her lead me out of the chapel, past the other couples waiting to say their vows and toward the kerb where our car was waiting. I had a feeling I would let this woman lead me anywhere and I would, without hesitation, follow her. This woman was my Destiny.

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Destiny

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Like it had been waiting for us. The car pulled up to the kerb. Mason held open the door, and I slid onto the seat, then he eased in next to me and pulled me closer to him, lifting my leg so that I was straddling his lap. He caressed each thigh, sliding the hem of my dress slightly higher with each stroke. Looking up at me, his eyes dark with desire, he growled, “you are so fucking beautiful” before slamming his lips back onto mine.

My body gravitated to his like a magnet, his hands guiding me to grind against his hardness. Like a couple of teenagers, we explored each other’s bodies, skirting around the fabric of our clothes. Not wanting to start something, we’d be unable to finish on the short ride back to the hotel.

The driver announced our arrival before either of us were ready for it and we quickly exited the car. Mason cornered me in the lift as we ascended up to his hotel room. Planting kisses along my neck and collarbone, his hands gripping my hips possessively. With my heels on, we were almost the same height and the thought of what pleasures could be brought from our bodies aligning was heady.

We stumbled out of the lift and Mason fumbled to unlock the door, but when he pulled me into the room, there was no caging me against the wall, no heading straight for the bed. Mason gently took my hand and led me toward the sliding door that opened onto a balcony. He placed my hand on the rail and stood behind me, placing a kiss on the sensitive skin under my earlobe.

“As much as I want to strip you bare and ravage you on my bed,” his breath on my neck sent shivers down my spine. “Tonight is all about giving you the full Vegas experience.”

“No offence, Mason, but I’ve seen the lights of the Strip already.” I pushed my ass back and felt his hard dick straining against his pants. “I want to get to the ‘spend the night with a handsome stranger’ part of this experience.”

“This is not about the Strip, starlight, this about you getting bent over this balcony and calling out my name as you come.” Mason splayed his hands on my hips. “Would you like that? Do you want me to pump my hard cock inside you while you’re out here on display?”

I whimpered. I’d had enough sex in cars to know that I liked that possibility of being caught, being watched. The anonymity of being in this city escalating it.

“Let’s see how ready you are for me.” Mason lifted the hem of my dress, inch by agonising inch, exposing my white lace panties, thankful I’d refused to wear the shapewear my sister had suggested. “Did you wear those pretty little panties just for me? Did you know this was your fate, Destiny?”

My breath hitched as I gave into the fantasy, allowing myself to believe that yes, I dressed myself solely so he could meet me and fuck me senseless.

Mason traced the edge of my underwear, gliding a finger over my seam. “You’re already soaked through. Do you like the idea of me filling this sweet pussy?”

“Yes.” My voice was rough. “I want to feel you deep inside me.”

I felt his hands peel my panties off, gliding them slowly down my legs, my legs faltering as I stepped out of them. He had me worked up, and he’d hardly even touched me. A slight breeze whipped over the balcony, emphasising how exposed I was. Anticipation was high as I waited for his next move. Each sound was amplified.

The single finger gently swirling over my clit was not the move I’d expected, but my

pelvis moved of its own accord, pushing against his digit, needing more friction. He slid the finger away from my swollen nub in search of my wet entrance, circling it at an agonising pace.

“Do you want me to plunge my finger inside you?”

I nod. My need had risen to the point that I was almost unable to form words.

“I need to hear you say it, Destiny. Do you want my finger to claim your pussy now?”

“Yes. But I want more than just your finger,” I replied, frustrated by his tease.

“You’ll get it, starlight,” he whispered in my ear, tingles radiating from my neck to the rest of my body. “I need you ready for me and I need to feel you come on my fingers before you milk my cock.”

I didn’t reply, his words amplifying my need.

“Now, I’ll ask you again, starlight, do you want my finger to claim your pussy now?”

“Yes,” I whimpered, and he thrust his finger inside. “YES!” I moaned as he filled me, pumping in a steady rhythm, the heel of his palm rubbing against my clit. He added a second finger, curling them to make contact with my g-spot.

“So responsive, I think this pussy was made for me,” Mason groaned as he peppered kisses along my neck, his pumps increasing in speed. He was driving me wild. “I want you to scream my name when you come, starlight, I want anyone watching us to know you’re mine.”

With a force I’d never experienced, I convulsed around his fingers, my release

spreading through my body like a bushfire. I moaned his name as I climaxed, unsure of the volume as my body melted. His movements inside me slowed, his kisses gentle as he whispered, “that’s my girl.”

I wasn’t usually into a man being possessive in bed, but for this one night, this fantasy, I was all for him claiming me.

As his fingers receded, I whimpered again, already feeling empty.

“Shhhh, I need both hands so I can get the condom out.” He reassured me. “Do you want me to fuck you now, starlight?”

I nodded, then said “yes” knowing that he wanted my words, my consent. Over my shoulder, I watched him pull the wallet out of his pants and grab a condom before placing the wallet back in his pockets. He then unbuckled his belt. Each movement seemed agonisingly slow to my empty channel. He pulled his dress pants and briefs down to his knees in one movement, his thick, hard cock standing to attention.

Mason quickly sheathed himself, then ran his tip along my slit, coating his cock with my juices. “I’m sorry. I don’t think I will last very long this time, but we have all night for me to make it up to you.”

“I’ve already come harder than I have with any other man.”

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“Then I still have room for improvement,” he grunted. “I need you to forget any man who came before me.”

“Just fuck me, Mason,” I begged. I just needed to be filled, to lose myself with this man for the night.

He pushed his cock deep inside me with one thrust, the intrusion already working me up again. Mason kept to his word, his movements were hard and fast, one hand on my waist, his other slid around to my front, where he placed a finger against my clit but kept it still, his thrusts pushing me against his digit, giving me the friction I needed.

Mason mumbled behind me, incoherent words pouring out of his mouth. In my blissed out haze, I barely recognised “perfect” and “made for me” but I was gone. Mindless, moments from tipping over the edge for the second time that night.

“Come for me, wife.” Mason commanded, and my body obeyed. He cried out behind me, his release filling the condom. Pulling me back against him, he crashed his lips to mine in a claiming kiss.

“Let’s take this into the room. I have so many things I want to do to you on this bed, and that starts with exploring your body.”

I sighed. I wasn’t sure if my body could cope with his plans. Two orgasms in and I was already mush. I was determined, though, to wring out every bit of pleasure I could from my last hours in Vegas.

Mason

One month later

I shuffled my feet as I scooted around the sparsely furnished bedroom of my beachfront house just outside Hartwood Bay. I'd packed up and moved out of my condo in Santa Monica in time to settle into my old investment property just before my sister Chelsea's wedding. Logan, my sister's fiancé, seemed like a decent enough guy and he treated Chelsea like the queen that she was, which was the most important thing.

I was grateful that I'd written the wedding song I was singing for Chelsea and Logan long before my weekend in Las Vegas. As much as I wanted to be happy for the loved up couple, there was a void in my heart left by a curvy goddess by the name of Destiny.

I had told no one about that night, but I wore the ring that we exchanged on my right hand. The ring finger on my left hand itched to slip it on there, but I didn't want the questions. Besides, what was I going to say? I married a woman I met in a bar and she ghosted me the next morning? Most people would think I was an idiot. My mum, however, she'd send out a search party.

Destiny wouldn't be hard to find. Her Dad might've been a celebrity, even if it were only in certain parts of Australia, but Destiny was not and she had public social media accounts. Did I cyber-stalk her? You bet your ass I did. She didn't post often, but I'd seen photos of her looking radiant at her sister's wedding in Hawaii.

One day soon, I would search for her. We had unfinished business. But first, I needed to be here for my sister's wedding.

I looked inside my wardrobe for a jacket. I'd moved from the heat of a Californian

summer to the chill of winter on the south coast of New South Wales. To most people, the winter in my hometown would seem mild, but I liked the sun soaking into my skin and since I'd moved back, the sun had been hiding. Kinda metaphorical, really, when I thought about my mood lately. Yep, I'd been a grumpy asshole for weeks.

Chelsea and Logan were hosting a dinner at our parents' resort on the outskirts of town for their families. AND I was running late. Most of Logan's family and his best friend had arrived in the Bay earlier that day, according to my mum, and were settling into their cabins.

I ran through the interior door for my garage and jumped into my SUV, waiting impatiently for the garage door to open. The ride to the former caravan park my parents had turned into a luxury holiday destination took less than ten minutes. I'd left the town when I was 18, but the only thing that had changed was that there was a new set of traffic lights near the turnoff for the high school.

Chelsea greeted me as I walked into the resort's restaurant, which had been reserved for the occasion. I followed the voicesthrough the large room to the banquet table that had been set up for the night.

I was expecting a small army of people when I turned the corner. What I wasn't expecting was a familiar laugh to grasp at my soul. Surely I was delusional because even though I'd only heard it the one night, it was a sound that would never leave me.

I blinked my eyes, but from the curve of her ass encased in tight jeans to the caramel coloured waves flowing over her shoulder, there was no mistaking her. Looking at the figure mirrored in the windows, I saw a reflection that either confirmed my thoughts or amplified my delusion.

As if my body was being controlled by an external force, I was propelled forward

until I was just behind her, my voice almost foreign to me as I asked, “Destiny?”

Spinning around, I saw her smile fall. Emotions warred on her beautiful face as she took in my presence.

“What...” she struggled to form words. “Mason, what are you doing here?”

“Chelsea’s my sister,” I replied with a smile. Seeing Destiny appear before me was like seeing an oasis in the desert.

“Mason, have you met Destiny before?” my sister asked from over my shoulder.

“Oh, we met in a bar in Vegas last month when I was there for Jade’s hen’s weekend.” Destiny dismissed Chelsea’s question with a wave of her hand. Then added for good measure, “you know what Aussies are like overseas, as soon as you hear the accent it’s like you’re long-lost friends...”

Chelsea looked between us, uncertainty in her eyes, then deciding it was too much to think about with her wedding only days away, she looped her arms in both of ours. “Destiny is Logan’s best friend. She’s like a sister to him,” Chelsea explained. “Mason is my musician brother. You’ll meet Hayden, the chef when he flies in on Friday.”

“I thought the musician was Sonny?” Destiny asked, looking a little lost.

“Pfft, nope, that’s just what Mum calls him, Hayden get’s Denny, and she hasn’t dared call me CC since I was 17 and let her know what I thought of that nickname,” my sister was not to be messed with. “Since Mason obviously knows you, though, for some reason I don’t want to think about right now, I’m going to snaffle him to introduce him around.”

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My head was a blur as Chelsea introduced me to Logan's family. Each new person she presented to me seemed like a perfectly decent individual, but I wouldn't be able to tell you one from the other. I was a little awestruck when I met Logan's dad, Steve, the former rugby league star and one half of the legendary Lovric brothers who both represented Australia when I was a kid. Steve's husband, Greg, was a fan of The Monarchists, so we had a good chat about how he'd seen us perform pub gigs before we signed our big record deal.

Logan's mum, Angie, was warm and embraced me like we were already family. She appeared to have formed a close bond with my mum and it occurred to me how much I'd missed living overseas for so long. Destiny's mum, Melinda, was also in the small group with Angie and although she greeted me politely, she gave me an assessing glare from dark eyes that were a mirror image of her daughters.

Despite how many people I was introduced to, Destiny was always in my periphery and it looked like she was just as ruffled by my appearance. She worked the room like a pro, floating from one group to the next, laughing at private jokes and hugging everyone like they were her family. Which I guess they were, since she was Logan's best friend. Every now and then, she would avert her eyes from her companions in search of me.

We sat through several courses of food with wine glasses that seemed bottomless. At some point during the night, Mum had slipped my car keys into her pocket and reminded me I could stay in my old bedroom in their onsite residence. Logan's family was lovely. His mum, dad and stepdads were down-to-earth and easy to get along with. His cousins were warm and funny.

That brother of his, though, Jordan, I was just about ready to punch him. He'd spent the night whispering in Destiny's ear, his arm resting on the back of her chair. She laughed at his jokes and swatted him affectionately when he'd said something she disagreed with. There was a level of comfort there that I found decidedly uncomfortable.

As the night wore on and more than one person had started to yawn, Mum directed everyone to their cabins. The conversations continued as everyone stood up, my eyes were trained on Destiny. My insides were boiling as I watched Jordan help Destiny with her jacket. Then, as they started walking, he placed his hand on the small of her back and that was it. I saw red.

"Get your hands off my wife!" The room grew silent. All eyes were on me, but the set that was most important to me. They showed a moment of pain before she focused all of her attention on me for the first time since Chelsea had reintroduced us.

"No, Mason, stop." Her face was fierce. "You don't get to sit there all night looking broody and sexy and possessive. It was one night, I am not your wife, now go sober up before we create even more of a scene in front of your family." Destiny turned and stormed out the door, leaving me with our loved ones to deal with the aftermath of my stupid outburst.

7

Mason

I was a wanker. I was very much aware of it when I went to bed in my childhood bedroom alone. I was even more aware of it when I woke up with a screaming hangover. But when Mum came in to tear me a new one, I was neck deep in my awareness of my level of wanker-dom.

“We love Destiny,” she’d said as she walked into the bedroom, two take-away coffees from the onsite restaurant in her hands. “She deserves more than you acting like a caveman. That woman is a breath of fresh air and she has enough to deal with between her man-child father and keeping those two best friends of hers in line.”

“Wait...two best friends?” I winced as I sat up against the headboard. The two single beds that had been in the room when I’d shared it with Hayden were long gone and replaced by this much more comfortable queen size bed. There was not a trace of the band posters or sports equipment that had littered the room the last time I’d lived with my parents.

“Yes, Logan and Jordan are like brothers to her. She might be closer to Logan, but they are both protective of her, especially since her brother, Jye, moved to the UK to play in the Superleague.” Mum placed my coffee on the bedside table next to me. “Destiny deserves a man who will talk to her, not growl like a dog protecting his territory.”

“I know Mum. I was in shock.” My reply was weak, taking the coffee she handed me. I threw my head back and sighed. “She’s amazing. Everything I ever wanted in a woman, but she ghosted me and I wasn’t expecting to see her here, of all places.”

Not only had I not expected to see her, but she looked radiant, at ease and in her element, with so many loved ones around her. It was a punch to the gut how easily she fit in with my family in a way that I felt like I hadn’t quite adjusted to. Fate had dropped her into my world and it was like a sign that I’d finally made the right choice. It was the ultimate homecoming.

Mum stared at me, her face expressionless for what seemed like a year. “Oh, my Sonny. She’s your one, isn’t she?”

“Yeah,” I nodded. There was no fooling Mum. She could read me like a book and if I

were honest, I was relieved to talk about it with someone who wouldn't look at me like I was crazy. "It was just like Dad described it. She walked into the room and everything just faded into the background. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. Then she opened her mouth, and she's smart and funny and strong."

Words were running out of my mouth at a rapid pace. I wasn't playing it cool; I knew it. This woman had blown my world apart, and I wanted to jump up and down and declare it to the universe. Mum looked at me indulgently. She was a sucker for romance and has been impatient for my sibling and me to settle down. The main reason she kept organising the resort's charity bachelor auction every summer.

"It warms my heart to hear this. All I've ever wanted for my babies is for them to find a love like the one I have with your father. I knew it would happen one day. The Kings fall in love at first sight." Mum's eyes misted over, no doubt remembering the day she met my father.

"But I've fucked up big time," I admitted. "She probably won't talk to me again since I made an ass out of both of us in front of everyone."

"If I'm being honest, you're the only one who looked like an ass last night." Mum gave me a pointed glare. "Destiny is amazing. I would love to have her as a daughter-in-law. You need to fix this."

"Yes, Mum." I agreed. It was a moot point. Of course I had to fix this, but how? There was no way I was letting Destiny leave town without smoothing things over. If I had my way, she would only leave town long enough to pack up her place and move in with me. If it was good enough for her boss to live in Hartwood Bay, I couldn't see a reason for her to stay in Sydney.

"So, what's your game plan?" Mum was ready to develop a military operation. She opened a draw in the bedside table, took out a notepad and put on her game face. If

anyone understood the importance of not losing my chance with Destiny, it was my romance obsessed, blissfully in love Mum. She believed in happily ever afters because she was living hers.

I grew up in a home filled with love and I found myself sitting in that home, with my mum, as we conspired and caffeinated. We discussed various grand gestures, each one more elaborate than the last. Then I remembered the Destiny I'd met in the bar, the woman who just wanted to get out of the city that was all bright lights and big shows. That woman was down to earth, and I thought she would probably appreciate a frank conversation and a genuine apology over anything too convoluted.

As she left, Mum handed me the car keys that she'd confiscated the night before and I made my way back to my house to start my grand plan. The one that involved total honesty from me and I was afraid that she wouldn't take my apology well, especially when she learned the truth about our wedding that I hadn't realised until long after I'd left Las Vegas and had received something in the mail. The truth that the ceremony the concierge had planned wasn't a touristy gimmick, it was a legal marriage. A marriage that neither of us had consented to but were too distracted to realise. A marriage that we could probably get annulled, but one that I hoped she would be willing to give a chance.

8

Destiny

My head didn't just ache. It pounded. I hadn't experienced a hangover this bad since I was at university drinking Passion Pop out of the bottle. The wine I'd been drinking was definitely a better vintage, but at the rate I'd consumed it, I was hoping that I could've blacked out. I didn't want to remember that dinner.

Don't get me wrong, I loved Chelsea and her parents. I'd been unofficially adopted

by the Lovrics when my parents split up, so seeing Logan happy and in love was amazing. Chelsea and Logan were couple goals for me.

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What I wanted to forget, though, was the deep, brooding stare of Mason King. The man who'd given me the most memorable night of my life, the one I'd skulked away from because I was afraid that it would taint the memories if I'd stayed and we had to do that awkward morning after dance. That one where you talked politely around the fact that you'd just woken up with some stranger and all you really wanted to do was run home and brush your teeth.

I couldn't stand to have that moment with Mason. After the night we'd shared, I was afraid to see the boredom in his eyes once the fun was over. So I ran. It was easy to justify. I did have a flight to Hawaii to pack for, a wedding to get to and family waiting for me. I knew it was gutless and something that was out of character for me, but I couldn't help myself.

When I ran, I thought Mason would be relieved by my absence, but the man that was at the resort, he looked at me like he'd just found a long-lost treasure instead of just a former one-night stand. The man who was present at the end of the night, though, he was hungry and desperate. That was the only explanation I could think of for his outburst as we were all leaving.

There was no way I was staying in that room to be bombarded with the inevitable questions, though. What was Mason thinking, announcing our fake marriage to his family like that? It's not even a marriage. It was a night of fun. Sure, it was a night of fun that I hadn't been able to stop thinking about, but it wasn't anything more, it couldn't be anything more. I had to remind myself of that too often to count, but especially when I fidgeted with the diamond ring that I'd started wearing on a necklace around my neck, underneath my clothes, where I could hide it from everyone. I didn't want to attract the inevitable questions, but I couldn't lock it in a

box and try to forget about it either.

As much as I wanted to hide in my cabin all day, hell, every day until the wedding, I couldn't do that to Logan. My best friend had never been the most social person, so I couldn't have been happier when he met Chelsea. I'd quickly warmed to her and had loved the way her family, especially her mum, had just embraced me like family, too.

Logan and his brother, Jordan, were like brothers to me. Their mum had met my mum when our fathers played for Australia together. When Dad left Mum, it was Angie who brought over food and arranged play dates. She didn't want us to feel abandoned.

That was why I found myself in the backseat of Chelsea's car with Logan's cousins, Lily and Sofia, as the bride to be drove us to her best friend's salon. Apparently, she'd closed the business for the day so she could host us. Not only were we getting a cut and colour to prepare for the big day, the salon owner had organised a local nail tech to give us mani/pedi's.

Guilt gripped my throat as I walked into Steele Cut Hair. Janelle, Chelsea, and Mason's mum were already sitting at a station in between my mum and Angie. All three women laughed and chatted with each other as their stylists applied colour to their locks. I briefly entertained the thought that Janelle had formed a little clique of her own, one with her kid's mother-in-laws then I instantly dismissed it. I wasn't married to Mason and any thought of that would be a fantasy because no real marriage starts like mine did. A fake wedding, conducted within hours of meeting someone.

"It's wonderful to see you again," Bella said as she pulled me in to a hug. It was ridiculous how welcome I felt in this town. Hartwood Bay felt like home the minute I set foot here. It was beautiful. For months before my first visit, I'd been gushing over images I'd seen on social media, but that wasn't what made this place feel like home.

From the minute I took my first lungful of air, when I first placed my bare feet into the sand, this town called to me.

On my first visit to the Valentine Cove Resort, I went for a hike in the surrounding National Park. With each step I could feel the ancestors welcoming me to Country. The sighting of a blackcockatoo cementing that I'd reached a significant period in my life, that change was coming.

I mumbled a pleasant greeting back at Bella and headed toward a chair. A gown was wrapped around me by a stylist named Quinn who looked around my age. We discussed my hair colour; she suggested adding a few lowlights and highlights that would add depth to my hair without dramatically altering the overall tone. I relaxed back into the chair while Quinn got to work and Bella took coffee orders.

No more than fifteen minutes had passed when the door to the salon flew open and two women entered with trays of take away coffees and paper bags in their hands. Both of the newcomers exchanged looks with Janelle, who subtly nodded her head in my direction.

The coffees were distributed and both women, who I learned, were Bella's mum, Donna, and her best friend, Debbie, who ran the cafe around the corner from the salon. They also happened to be good friends with Janelle.

In a move as discreet as a sledgehammer, Donna sidled up to me and said, "So, I've heard that you're the reason that Mason King has been such a grumpy ass since he moved back home?"

I almost choked on the lemon myrtle scone at her words. The finger lime glaze that I'd just been savouring felt like a sticky mess on my fingers as I struggled to find words.

“Maybe Mason King can put on his big boy pants and realise just because my daughter gave him one night doesn’t entitle him to forever.” Mum quipped from the other side of the salon. “No offence, Janelle,” she quickly added.

“None taken, Mel, I agree. That was a dick move he pulled last night.” Janelle concurred. “I told him so this morning. My eldest son is cocky as hell. He’s very talented and good looking, combine that with his natural charm and confidence, he’s not used to hearing the word no. It’s a tough job keeping him grounded sometimes.”

I groaned. The last thing I needed was for this to become more complicated. “Look, as much as I appreciate all of this, it’s not that complicated. Mason and I met in Vegas and had a little fun. I left for Jade’s wedding. Then last night we ran into each other again. End of story.”

“I hope that fun included multiple orgasms?” Donna raised her eyebrows in expectation.

“I, uhhh...” I looked at Janelle with trepidation. Surely she didn’t want to know about her son’s sex life?

“It’s okay, hun, this is what Donna does. You should’ve seen her when her daughter finally got together with Debbie’s son.” Janelle rolled her eyes at her friend’s forthrightness. “I’ve already assumed that some of the fun you had was in a hotel room and if he’s anything like his father, he performed quite well.”

I wasn’t sure what to say to that. Yes, Mason performed very well, but there was no way I was revealing any of those details to his mum and her friends.

“What I want to know,” Mum interrupted my thoughts. “Is why did he refer to you as his wife?”

My heart stuck in my throat as every eye in the salon fixed on me. Janelle, her friends, Mum, Angie, plus Chelsea, Lily, Sofia, and everyone who worked in the salon. Every single one of them looked at me expectantly.

I swallowed around the lump and tried to dismiss the question. “Oh, we just did one of those fake, gimmicky tourist wedding chapel things. You know those ones with the Elvis impersonator as the celebrant.” I rolled my eyes like it was something everyone did in Las Vegas.

“Ummmm, no, we don’t know the ones.” Sofia replied with her eyes wide. “We know they have those chapels where people go for quickie weddings, but I’ve never heard of them being fake.”

I huffed. Of course, the most starry-eyed of the Lovric family would say that. I told them all about how I met Mason in a bar and how he agreed to give me the most clichéd Vegas experience ever. Minus the orgasms. No one needed to hear about how one night with him ruined me for all other men.

9

Mason

The winter sun had broken through the clouds and was warming my back as I sat outside Destiny’s cabin with a bunch of flowers in my hand. The gloom of the past few weeks was slowly fading away, and I took it as a sign that I might be able to convince Destiny to give me a chance. Most importantly, it meant that the weather improving for my sister’s wedding, but Mum was superstitious and it had rubbed off on me.

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“Mason?” Destiny gasped. “I, ummm, didn’t think you’d still be around here.”

“I wanted to apologise.” My voice was soft as I handed her the bunch of flowers I’d grabbed in town. “These are for you.”

“Thank you,” she said, as she took the blooms out of my hands.

“Feel like a bit of a walk?” I nodded my head toward the path that lead to the resort’s private beach. She placed the flowers on the bench I’d been sitting on and she followed me toward the entrance. A light breeze flowed through the tall grass that lined the path, making it dance as we strolled toward the sand. My hand tentatively reached out for hers, fingers grazing her soft skin. Destiny intertwined her long fingers in mine and my heart leapt.

I led us along the sand to a spot at the edge of the cove where a large log laid on the ground. Sitting down, I wasn’t sure where to start with my apology. To be honest, it wasn’t something I usually did.

“Destiny, I don’t know how to say this, but I wanted to say I’m really sorry for making a scene last night.” I took a breath, hoping that she would jump in with some quick words of acceptance. When the silence between us drew out, I continued. “I don’t have any excuse really, but I do want to say that seeing you last night, in my home, with my family, it hit me in a way I didn’t know how to deal with.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Your inability to regulate your emotions as an adult is not my problem.” She looked into the distance, at the water crashing on the rocks.

“I get that but Destiny, when I woke up in that hotel room, alone, I thought I’d lost you.” I cringed at my desperate tone.

“Mason, it was a one-night stand in Las Vegas. You make it sound like we were in a relationship.” Destiny shook her head.

“That night, it was the best night of my life.” I ran my hand through my hair. “To me, it was never just a one-night stand. To me, it was a beginning. ”

“You say that, like our visit to the wedding chapel, was more than just a bit of fun, like your proposal was real.” Her voice faltered at that last part, like she didn’t believe her words.

“I think I wanted it to be real.” I admitted. “There’s something else I need to tell you, though.”

Destiny grew silent, like she didn’t know how to reply to me. I steamrolled ahead with my news, unsure how to say it. “Do you remember that on the night we had all that paperwork we needed to sign?”

“Barely. I wasn’t paying much attention to anything other than the man I wanted to drag back to the nearest hotel room,” Destiny laughed. “Just spit it out Mason, I have a feeling I won’t want to hear this.”

“We’re married. Legally.” I pulled out the marriage certificate.

“What? How?” The shock poured off Destiny as she grabbed at the paper in my hand.

“The concierge at the hotel. I think he heard ‘married’ and thought we meant a real wedding.” My heart clenched at the idea I was losing her again. “We can get it annulled, we’d both been drinking...”

“I was not drunk, and neither were you,” Destiny defended herself. “But I guess it would be best to-”

“We don’t have to get it annulled if you don’t want to.” I interrupted, my heart full of hope. “Or at least we can wait...get to know each other a little?”

We sat there in silence while Destiny thought about what I’d just said. Watching the rhythm of the waves as they gently rolled toward the shore.

“My parents named the resort after this beach.” I began the story to fill the stillness of the moment. “Back when my great grandparents owned this place, it was a traditional caravan park. When Dad inherited it, there were a few old vans, but it was mostly powered sites. It used to be called ‘Kings Holiday Park’.”

“The origin story on the website was one of the reasons I was obsessed with this place...” Destiny said softly.

“Growing up onsite, this place was like my own private paradise. Fishing, swimming, hiking. Mum taught us all to play guitar and piano. I had my first gig at the restaurant when I was 13.” I smiled at the memory. “Don’t get me wrong, we were all cleaning cabins and checking in guests way before it was legal for us to be on the payroll.”

A laugh peeled from her. “So you weren’t always an entitled jerk?”

“I’m sorry, Destiny. Genuinely, for embarrassing you last night. Until you, I’ve never wanted anything more than a casual hook up with anyone and before you tell me how selfish that sounds, let me explain. My whole life I’ve been taught that King’s fall in love at first sight. If the story is to be believed, I was conceived on this beach the same night my parents met.”

“So what you’re saying is that you believe you can meet a woman in a bar, propose to

her, marry her that night and live happily ever after?" Destiny looked skeptical.

"No." I took her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm. "What I'm saying is that I can be awestruck by a beautiful woman walking into a bar, that I can walk up to her and talk to her and I can recognise the potential of the moment. That it could easily be the beginning of something more, something monumental."

"I don't know if you're delusional or just narcissistic." I would've been hurt by what she said if she hadn't hinted in Vegas that her dad's multiple marriages had heavily coloured her ideas of love. "But I have to say that running into each other again had me questioning if maybe we were meant to be something more than a one-night stand."

The hope blooming inside me must've been written on my face.

"Let's just get one thing straight. I'm not your wife. Even if the paperwork says otherwise." The look Destiny gave me made no secret that she was to be believed. "But I will agree that maybe this is an opportunity and that maybe this could lead to something more. That maybe we need to explore it. There could be some things I might like to revisit from our night in Vegas, too."

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“What did you have in mind?” I couldn’t stop the smirk from appearing on my face.

“There’s a lot about that night I wouldn’t mind re-enacting.” Destiny’s returning smile was playful.

I stood, pulling Destiny to me, nibbling on her nape of her neck before whispering into her ear, “How about we start with what we did on that balcony?”

“I might consider it. Let’s get going.”

“Nope, we’re staying here.” Destiny’s eyes heated as my hand grazed over her ass.

“But someone might see us...”

“I don’t remember that being a problem on the balcony. Besides, our jackets will cover most of what I’m doing. You’re safe with me, starlight.” I leaned in for a kiss and she melted against me. I felt the ache in my soul easing.

As I deepened the kiss, my hand slipped under her top, exploring her smooth skin. I toyed with the edge of her yoga pants, thankful that she was wearing something that would allow me such easy access. My hand slipped under the pants and directly to her seam, already wet and waiting for me.

I circled her clit with my finger, and she moaned into the kiss. I was impatient for more though and my finger explored her entrance, diving into her wet heat. Her moans became louder as I stroked her inner walls and I inserted a second finger. Destiny pulled her head away as her body tensed. She was close, and I was in awe. I

let the palm of my hand rock against her clit as I stroked her g-spot. Her breath became erratic, and I watched the way her face lit up as her release exploded on my finger. I was a goner for this woman.

The wind took that moment to sweep in, carrying some of the winter chill the sun had held at bay all day. I took Destiny by the hand and started walking back to the resort. “Let’s get you back to that cabin. It seems I have some work to do to convince you of the potential of this relationship.”

10

Destiny

Afew weeks ago, if anyone told me I would again be in a resort with Mason King, I would’ve laughed. If they said he would tell me we were legally married, I would’ve said someone was dreaming. But here I was, walking hand in hand with him back to my cabin. As his wife. Legally, at least, anything more than that was too much for me to wrap my head around and in that moment, all I wanted to was wrap my legs around him again.

No stumbling and heated kisses on this journey back to my accommodation, just me walking on unsteady legs after he’d given me another explosive orgasm. Walking into the cabin knowing that this was potentially not a one time hook up and it scared me. Mason was so certain that we were meant to be together and while I agreed we had chemistry, I didn’t know if that was enough.

I walked into the room, bringing the flowers in with me and found a small gift bag on the bed with a box of condoms inside and a note that said:

Showing them to Mason, he laughed, “I see you met my mum’s crazy friends.”

“I don’t know how she had the time-”

“Don’t question the evil genius that is Donna Steele. Let’s just be thankful and put her present to some use.” Mason’s hands pushed my jacket over my shoulders, letting it fall to the floor, only to get frustrated with the additional layers I’d put on that morning.

“I need to see you, all of you.” He growled. I took matters into my own hands, stripping off each layer until I was standing in front of him in my bra and panties. He’d stripped himself quickly, and I stared in awe at his broad-shouldered frame. This man was sculpted and I couldn’t wait to get my hands on him.

Mason kissed my shoulder, shivers racing along my spine with every touch of his lips on my skin. He worked his way down over my collarbone with open mouth kisses until he reached the lace edge of my bra. His tongue traced the thin fabric, delving inside as he reached around to unhook me, my breasts spilled free of the lace. Mason groaned, both hands reaching forward to cup me.

I gave in to the sensation, to the feel of this man worshipping my body, to the idea that maybe there was potential for this to be something more, something long lasting. As his tongue circled my hardened nipple, all thoughts flew from my mind, all thoughts except for how right it felt to be in his arms.

He pushed me back onto the bed, pulling my panties down before climbing up alongside me, cupping my face and kissing me long and deep. Scooping an arm behind my neck, we rolled until I was straddling him, my core pressed against his hardness. I sat back, grabbing a condom and sheathing him. Lining up his cock with my wet entrance, I was aching to have him inside me.

With each movement, his blue eyes were fixed on mine, looking into my soul as I slowly sunk down onto him. I moaned at the feeling of fullness as I bottomed out.

Mason's hands travelled up my thighs, grabbing my ass, encouraging me to move.

I leaned forward, sealing my lips over his as I began to ride him, needing greater contact with him. My hands rested on his chest as I rocked, arching my back to build a rhythm that had us both panting, my clit rubbing against the base of his cock. Tension built rapidly as we moved together, bodies like magnets. We touched in every way we could.

Mason hunched forward, sucking a nipple into his mouth, licking, sucking, nibbling. The extra contact was all I needed as I spiralled into pleasure with this man. He drove his cock up into me, dragging out my climax. His firm hands steadying me as he bucked up into me, chasing his own release.

With a grunt and unintelligible murmurs of pleasure, he pulled me into him as he spilled into me. He kissed me and I felt all that he didn't want to express with words. I was his; he was mine, and this was not a fling.

Mason rolled us to the side, pulling out and taking off the condom before tying it off and throwing it in the bin under the bedside table. Turning back to me, we kissed slowly and sweetly, running his hands up and over my thigh and hip. Kissing this man was like a drug, and I was certain that I was becoming addicted to it.

"Let's get you cleaned up, starlight." Mason sat up, encouraging me to do the same.

"Why do you call me that?" I asked. It was something I'd remember him saying in Las Vegas as well. I faced him, curious about this little nickname.

"The night we met, I was feeling a bit lacklustre. My friends had dragged me to Las Vegas for a last hurrah, despite knowing that my party days were long over. It was a small group of guys who I'd met in the years long after The Monarchists had broken up. All ordinary guys, ones who'd never experienced the emptiness that comes with

fame, as fleeting as mine was. They were having fun, living like they thought a rockstar should, but I was feeling numb.”

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Mason brushed a lock of hair off my face, hooking it over my ear, then tracing a single finger along my jaw. I swallowed, raising my eyes to meet his, and the look of adoration left me speechless.

“When you walked into that bar, you lit up my world. My starlight.” He pulled me into another kiss, this one filled with longing and promise. When he was temporarily sated, we walked into the bathroom and he started filling the large tub with steamy water, where he found more things to explore with me as we waited.

11

Mason

The morning after I apologised to Destiny, I woke up with her naked body pressed to me. Despite knowing that this time, we’d been in her cabin and that she was an integral part of the upcoming wedding, I had the irrational fear that she would ghost me again.

We’d spent the night worshipping each other’s bodies, but I knew that if I was going to make this work, I had to do more than get her lust drunk on orgasms. This was where my grand plan came into effect.

After supplying Destiny with enough dopamine to maintain the starry look in her eyes, I loaded her into my car, wanting to avoid running into our families at the onsite restaurant. I held her hand as we walked into the Bean and Bushell cafe to grab a takeaway coffee and some breakfast, already so addicted that I couldn’t help but touch her.

The smug look on the face of the cafe owner told me more about how the gossip mill hadn't stopped churning after I last left Hartwood Bay. It didn't help that she was such close friends with my parents that she was more like an aunt.

"Nice to see you again, Destiny. Mason, nice to see a smile on your face again." Debbie said as we walked up to the counter. "What can we get you guys?"

We both ordered bacon and egg rolls as well as our takeaway coffee, then Debbie sent us on our way with two pieces of her Tim Tam cheesecake. "To keep up our strength," she'd joked.

With Destiny back in my car, I drove her out of town, along the road that winds inland along the river. Streets full of houses lined the opposite side of the water. On this side, there was still a fair bit of bush bordering the side of the road. I took a quick turn along a less frequently used road and wound our way up the rough track on the side of what we locals referred to as the mountain. The lookout was a little out of the way and not something a lot of tourists knew about.

I pulled up on the gravel and dashed around to open Destiny's door before grabbing the paper bag with our food from the backseat and directing her to the bench that sat behind the safety fence. Placing our food on the bench, I wrapped my arm around her waist and with the hand that held my coffee I pointed toward the National Park and the U-shaped patch in the middle where the Valentine Cove Resort sat. I showed her the main part of town where we'd just grabbed our food, the pub where my mum played her last gig was with her old band, my old high school. Then I pulled her close to me and pointed in the general direction of where my house was on the outskirts of Hartwood Bay, in the opposite direction that the resort sat.

With reluctance, I let her go, and we sat back on the bench and started eating our food. The view was breathtaking at this time of day, with the winter sun warming our skin.

“I’ve never been here before,” Destiny said quietly. “I can’t believe how much I can see from up here.”

“I wanted to show you my world, the one I’ve come back to, not the one we met in.” I felt truly at home for the first time in years. “The one I’d like to share with you.”

Destiny ate in silence, soaking in the panoramic outlook.

“What are we doing?” She asked.

“Having breakfast.” I answered cheekily.

“Not what I mean, and you know it.” She gave me a half smile. “I mean, how do we make this work? I live in Sydney and you live down here.”

“I can live anywhere. Besides, this isn’t too far from Sydney.” I shrugged. After being left in Vegas, a couple of hundred kilometres between Sydney and Hartwood Bay felt like nothing.

“You just moved back from the US. I doubt your family would be okay with you being in Sydney all the time.” Destiny eyed me sceptically, making the four-hour drive seem longer than it would be.

“They would understand. Besides, you could spend time down here, too.” I offered, not wanting to push her.

“I have a job in Sydney, Mason. We don’t all get to be people of leisure.” That last part felt like a dig and I was very aware she was trying to lash out and hurt me before I hurt her.

“I’m not a ‘person of leisure’. Besides, doesn’t your boss live in Hartwood Bay

now?” I dropped the last bit, hoping that she could work as flexibly as Logan.

“Former rock star is not a full-time job, Mason, and Logan might live in Hartwood Bay, but Love Rich head office is in Bella Vista.” I bit my tongue. It was not the time to tell her I was a music therapist, waiting to have my accreditation formalised in Australia.

“Do you always have to be in the office?” I asked gently. She was already too skittish for me to push any further.

“Do you even know what I do?” Destiny’s anger escalated. It was the voice of someone who had spent years overlooked and underestimated. “I’m the Manager of Business Administration. I have a team of a dozen administrative and executive support staff to look after. They’re used to seeing me in person in the office when they need me. Most of them work flexibly, depending on which team or manager they support, but I’m always there.”

I got that. Her job was her constant, her stability. I would not mess with that. “So I’ll move to Sydney.”

“Surely it can’t be that simple?” Destiny looked more deflated at my answer than relieved.

“It doesn’t have to be that hard either,” I pulled her to me, holding her close so she could feel that I wasn’t going anywhere. “We’ll take it one day at a time.”

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Destiny relaxed into me and we spent the morning soaking up the sun, talking about our lives, ignoring the future that was so full of anxiety for her but that I was certain was nothing but full of love and possibilities.

12

Destiny

The days leading up to Chelsea and Logan's wedding were filled with more family dinners, wedding prep and orgasms. Oh, so many orgasms. We'd spent the days getting to know each other and the nights learning each other's body. I'd learned that Mason was a music therapist who worked with special needs kids when he was in the US and he was in the middle of converting his accreditation with the Australian Music Therapy Association. On the side, he still wrote music and occasionally sold his work through his agent.

Despite the badly orchestrated intervention at Bella's salon, once Mason and I walked into the restaurant at Valentine Cove Resort the night after his outburst, hand in hand, we didn't turn any heads and no one peppered us with questions. There were a few sly looks, but no questions.

Janelle and Scott hadn't technically closed the restaurant to the public following that notorious dinner, but with almost all the cabins filled with wedding guests, it was almost like a private function again each night. Mason and I would dine with our families, spending some nights at his beachfront house and the night before Chelsea and Logan's wedding in my cabin at the resort.

I'd calmed down from our breakfast at the lookout. At no point had Mason demanded that I move to Hartwood Bay, but when he said he wanted to share his world with me, I instantly wanted to give up everything in Sydney and move here.

And that was scary.

I was a fiercely independent woman, raised by an independent woman, and maybe we were both a little shy about depending on a man after the way my dad had left when I was still so young. The hackles on my back had raised at the idea that Mason would tear apart my world and deposit me in his. I'd worked too hard for the stability I had built, but what good was stability if I wasn't living my life to the fullest?

For years, I built my fort, living frugally so that I could afford to buy my own place in the skyrocketing Sydney real estate market, where even in the lower income western suburbs I grew up in, many people struggled to buy. I planted my roots, adamant that I would not settle for a lacklustre life and Mason wanting to share his world with me shook those roots, but most trees could be transplanted in the right environment and I was certain that Mason could provide me with those conditions.

Stubborn could easily be my middle name. Mum always complained about it when I was growing up, but it definitely helped me remain focused in life. It was also something that made it hard for me to admit that perhaps, I could let someone in and trust that maybe forever with someone who made my life brighter in every way was not only possible, but something that was a strong probability with Mason in my life.

I talked to Logan and Jordan, who assured me they would support any decision I made and that my job was something that could be performed flexibly. Most of the people in my team worked flexibly, except for our receptionists, Mason had said that until his music therapist accreditation is certified in Australia, that he would travel to Sydney with me on the weeks I headed into the office. He even said that he would help me find somewhere to live in Hartwood Bay initially if I needed to have a place that was mine while we navigated the waters of this relationship. I wasn't ready to

call it a marriage, even if we had decided to not annul the Vegas ceremony.

Lily, Logan's cousin, introduced me to her brother's girlfriend, Bailey, who lived on the outskirts of Hartwood Bay. She told me she had a granny flat I could use if I just wanted a landing pad, and it sounded like exactly what I needed. I wouldn't deny that when I was in Hartwood Bay, most of that time would be spent with Mason, but knowing I would have somewhere to escape to helped ease the anxiety I had about depending too entirely on a man.

That man, though, the one who made my heart race each time I looked at him. He quietly took the stage in the Valentine Cove Resort function centre, guitar in hand, to perform for the newly wedded Chelsea and Logan. He'd told me he'd spent some time revising his lyrics in the last few days but wouldn't say anymore than that.

"Good evening everyone," he spoke into the microphone. "When Chelsea told me a couple of months ago that she was getting married. I congratulated her. She then grew quiet before asking me why I was one of only a few people who didn't question her about how quickly they were moving. All I did in reply was laugh. In our family, things move fast because when you meet that person, the one who brings light to your world, the one who is your starlight, you don't question it, you run toward it. Why wait to start the rest of your life?"

Mason looked over at me as he said those last few sentences. He then sat on the chair that had been set up on stage, adjusted the microphone again. "I told Chelsea that I would write them a song for their first dance, to celebrate their love for each other and the beginning of their happily ever after."

Chelsea and Logan walked hand in hand into the middle of the dancefloor, he held her close to him as the first strums of Mason's song began. Then Mason's eyes fixed on mine again. He sang about love taking you by surprise, taking hold of your heart and tying you to that person. He sang about life feeling monotonous until that person came into your life, bringing lightness and meaning to your life. He sang about love

being his starlight, guiding him through the night.

As Mason sang each word, I could feel my world shifting. Sure, I would keep my safety nets in place, but my gut said this was my forever, Mason was my forever. Our marriage might have started on a whim in Las Vegas, but it was going to be a happily ever after in Hartwood Bay.

The end.

Epilogue

Six Months Later

My mum stood to the left of me, my dad to the right as we hovered near the wooden planked path that led to Valentine Cove, the beach at Mason's parents resort where he had told me that our wedding in Vegas had led to a legal marriage certificate. I took a deep breath and walked forward.

When we reached the end of the path, I could see Mason standing near a simple wooden arch, with our family, both biological and found family, sitting on chairs on either side of an aisle. Jye had retired from football and was back in Australia. Jade was heavily pregnant, looking radiant as her husband doted on her. Throughout the crowd, I found our other brothers sprinkled in the crowd, sitting with members of the Lovric family or the found family that Mason and his parents had formed in Hartwood Bay.

The sun was still high, the late summer weather kissing our skin with warmth, glistening off the gentle waves of Valentine Cove. I could feel the love of all the people in attendance, the ones who wanted to share our happiness. Janelle stood under the arch. She was our celebrant and I couldn't think of anyone more suitable to help us celebrate our union.

I exhaled because, of course, Mason was right. Our Vegas wedding had been all neon lights and Elvis. It was fun, and it was perfect for the moment. This ceremony, although not the legal one, it was perfect for us.

I felt the warm sand beneath my feet, grounding me in the moment, I felt the reassurance of a light breeze and I felt the support of both my parents either side of me as I walked up to the love of my life, not to commit to him for the rest of my life, because we'd already done that and continue to choose our commitment for each other every day. This ceremony wasn't for legalities or to tick something off a bucket list, this ceremony was to share our love for each other with the people we love because this was our happily ever after and we wanted all of our loved ones to be as happy as us, forever.