



Married to Mischief

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Category: Romance

Description: I, Special Agent Serena Cruz have fallen in love with a con man. I've accepted that. And it's surprisingly enjoyable. But agreeing to go on a treasure hunt with the same thief? It's probably a bad idea. Scratch that, it's a terrible idea. How many times can we almost die before our luck runs out?

Married To Mischief is a fun and light-hearted romantic short story following Liam and Serena From Taken With Trouble.

Total Pages (Source): 25

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Prologue

Serena

Location:Phoenix,AZ

The FBI was lenient with Liam.Muchtoo lenient. He got six months of house arrest, then a year of being an informant with none other than Agent Harris as his handler. Though, that's where the leniency came to an abrupt end. Caleb was irate when the director told him and plans to make Liam's life a nightmare.

Liam has much more delusional aspirations for their partnership: friendship.

And I've got a front-row seat for it all. But first, I get to celebrate my boyfriend being a free man.

I pull up outside the ostentatious penthouse Liam bought for himself when he chose to undergo house arrest in Phoenix. He tried to get Grandpa Henry to come with him, but the old manwas stubborn and refused. Liam offered to buy a mansion for the two of us, but I very pointedly declined. I've been alone a long time and still need some space for myself. Of course, when I told him this, he said I could have an entire wing to fill with a shooting range and training area.

I turned that down as well, but now I firmly regret it. It's been a long six months, and I'm ready to be in the same place as my boyfriend all the time... and to be able to go farther than a two-mile radius.

The doorman lets me in with a smile, and I take the elevator to the top floor.

I silently unlock the door, hoping to catch Liam off guard. We consider it a relationship-enhancing game when we both try to get the upper hand on each other. It's not for everyone.

I ease the door shut behind me and press into the nearest wall, waiting, listening.

There's a shuffling near the kitchen, and I spin, going in the opposite direction to catch him when he emerges. I wait for a few more noises and movements.

Footsteps draw near, and I count, having performed this specific takedown many times.

When he hits twelve steps, I jump from my hiding place, swinging an arm around his neck, prepared to get him in a headlock, but Liam is faster and scoops me into his arms instead.

"It's about time, Special Agent Cruz. I've been getting impatient." He grins, marching me straight to the couch and dropping me into the fluffy abyss. He wastes no time peppering me with kisses, scraping his new beard along the hollow of my neck where he learned recently that I'm ticklish.

"Stop!" I wheeze.

"You started it." He pops up, his impatient, hungry eyes on mine. "I intend to finish it." He drops his lips to mine, and I forget all else as I fall into the world that only exists for Liam and me. I wrap my arms around his neck, bringing him closer. I never imagined a life like this was possible. Not just dating a con man... The whole thing. A relationship, happiness, freedom from fear...safety. Well, except for the dangerous job, but a girl's got to take down drug rings and fight criminals sometimes.

The kisses slow, and Liam pulls back. “Did you bring it?”

I slip the small key from my pocket and hold it up. “Let’s see it.”

He stands and props his foot up on the couch beside me.

I run my fingers over the ankle monitor. “I think I’m going to miss this thing.”

“I’m not. It’s wreaking havoc on my sensitive skin.”

“Such a baby,” I tsk, and press the metal key into the monitor. It clicks and releases. I hold it in my hand as Liam rubs his hairless ankle. “I liked knowing where you were at all times.”

“There’s an easy fix for that.” Liam stops rubbing his ankle and drops to his knees in front of me. “I’ll be wherever you are.”

I fight a smile. “That’s true. Caleb is going to hate it.”

“He is,” Liam agrees. “I’m going to flirt with you all day”—he kisses my cheek—“and kiss you at every crime scene.” He goes in for another kiss, but I push him back.

“Not the most romantic of images.”

He grins. “Since my first official day of being an informant starts next week, I figured we have just enough time to take a quick trip to celebrate my freedom.” He jumps up, pulling me with him.

“W-what?” I’m taken aback by the sudden shift. “We can’t go on a trip right now.” Knowing him, he’ll want to fly to South America where he believes the Cillian

Moore treasure to be. He's been talking about it nonstop since he found the coordinates in one of Cillian Moore's books two months ago.

"Yes, we can." He grins, tugging me toward the stairs that lead to the roof, and my grip loosens. I suppose a trip to the roof is appropriate. But when he pushes the door open, a gust of air slaps my face from the propellers of a helicopter. On the roof. There's a helicopter on the roof.

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“Liam!” I pull back. “When did you get a helicopter?”

“I bought it as a graduation-from-house-arrest present. Do you approve?”

“It’s completely unnecessary!”

“It’s absolutely necessary for our trip unless you intend to fly coach.” He narrows his eyes. “To be clear, I will not.”

I shake my head. “Where are we going?”

“I told you I’d take you on a trip. You’ve never been to Hawaii.”

Hawaii? I mentioned that to him once in passing. I don’t actually want to go to Hawaii. And I’m not so much into vacations, considering what happened the last time he surprised me with one.

“Don’t worry; I packed your bags. They’re mostly bikinis, but I don’t think I’ll mind.”

I bite the inside of my cheek. I’ve been looking for the perfect way to get him back, and it just happened.

I follow him onto the helicopter and let him help me with my seatbelt, thoroughly enjoying each precious lingering touch around my waist.

“Ready?” the pilot asks once Liam buckles.

Liam grabs my hand. “Yes, we are.”

My mind spins as we take off over the buildings heading west. I’ll never get used to the life Liam lives. But I sure love living it with him.

“Champagne?” Liam hands me a glass.

I take it, discreetly slipping the sleeping powder from my pocket. Have I had it long? Yes, I have. Petty? For sure. Excellent revenge? Yes.

I pour it into the flute and give it a swirl.

He turns to me and raises his cup in a toast, but I stop him.

“Care to trade?”

His expression turns hurt, but there’s an eager gleam there. “You really think I poisoned it?”

“Prove you didn’t.”

He chuckles and swaps our glasses. “To our next adventure.”

I clink my glass to his, then take a dainty sip.

Liam raises his glass, a challenge in his eyes, and drains the whole thing. I take a few more sips, waiting.

Liam’s eyes drift closed, and he leans against the seat.

I turn on the mic on my headphones. “Can we make a change to the destination?” I

ask the pilot.

His eyes flick to mine. “Where’s that, Miss?”

“South America.”

His brows furrow and he glances at Liam. “You drugged him?”

“No, of course not.”

The pilot laughs. “He told me to watch for that, but I didn’t think he was serious.”

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“He’ll forgive me if you take us to South America.”

The pilot laughs again. “You two really are made for each other. That’s where I was going already.”

Hmm. So drugging him was unnecessary. Yet warranted. Payback is a—

I yawn. One yawn turns to two, and my eyes struggle to stay open.

No.

He drugged me too.

Good thing I love him. I’m still killing him when I wake up.

Chapter 1

Serena

“We’re going to die!” I yell at Liam, my eyes flicking over the small clearing of trees. There are no escape routes. I can literally feel the end drawing near.

“I’ll admit this situation is less than ideal,” he says, far too calm for the circumstances.

I glare at the man I love so much, even though I’ve considered murdering him on more than one occasion.

“We are tied to poles about to be burned alive! What could be less ideal?” I wiggle my hands furiously beneath the rope binding my wrists.

It turns out, Cillian Moore’s treasure is not in South America. What is in South America is an angry tribe ready to murder us for daring to step foot on an ancient burial ground. Twelve of their members are now waving pitchforks and torches at us while screaming words I can’t understand.

“Hey, you brought us here,” Liam says, placing the blame on me.

“It was as much your fault as mine,” I shoot back.

He raises a brow. “At least you can accept it. Though I suggest we put the blame game on pause for the time being.”

He’s right. This line of thinking isn’t helping anyone. What are we doing here, anyway? This was supposed to be the right spot. Liam had been researching the treasure for the last six months, and he’d been so sure he’d found it that I’d gotten excited as well.

When we landed in Peru, we’d been conveniently well-rested after drugging each other, so Liam rented a jeep, and we got to it. That was eight hours ago.

Oh, how things can turn in eight hours.

I twist my hands again, and the rope around my wrist seems to slide. I wiggle them more, desperation making me work faster.

“Don’t worry; I’ll get us out of here, love,” Liam says, more confidently now.

I trust this man with my life, but right now, my hope is dwindling. Except for a

miracle, there doesn't seem to be a positive way out of this.

The man leading the charge yells and brings his torch closer, causing my heart to leap into my throat.

"I think that was Spanish for 'it's time to die', so can you get moving on that escape plan?" My pitch rises with each word, each worry. I should be used to the rush of adrenaline that comes from living life in the danger zone, but surprisingly, I'm not.

"He actually said, 'It's a shame I'll have to kill the beautiful one,' so he could have been talking about either of us," Liam says.

"Now is not the time for jokes," I hiss.

"There's always time for one more joke. Now, on the count of three, I want you to whistle like a bird. Ready?"

I shake my head; I must have heard him wrong. "What are you talkin—"

"One, two—" He doesn't make it to three.

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Something falls from the sky, and in the next moment, the small village erupts in smoke.

The whistle I was preparing forces me to suck in the smoke instead and I cough, gagging on the toxins.

Someone is at my back untying my hands, but I can't see who because my eyes are watering now.

"Let's go," Liam says, grabbing onto my now free arms and dragging me into the trees.

"Liam? What?" The words are merely a raspy whisper as I cough on more smoke.

"Don't talk. Move."

I stumble along after him, dodging tree after tree.

There's noise somewhere behind us, or maybe it's all around us. I'm glad he knows where we are going because I...wait, where are we going?

Not that it matters. Anywhere is better than being burned at the stake.

A buzzing fills my head and I groan. What is happening?

I stumble over the rough forest floor, but Liam keeps me upright. We burst through the trees and there in a clearing is his helicopter. That beautiful thing. Why did I ever

think it was a waste of money?

My legs speed up with renewed energy.

“Wait for me.” Liam chuckles as I pass him.

“Don’t slow me down then,” I yell back.

He helps me up into the helicopter then jumps in beside me just as a group of men burst into the clearing.

“Go!” I screech to the pilot.

The helicopter rises, but not nearly fast enough. One of the men grabs onto the leg, and it feels like a scene out of an unrealistic action movie. “He’s hanging on!”

The pilot wiggles the helicopter back and forth, and the man drops. Then he pulls the gears, turning as we fly high.

“Excellent timing, by the way,” Liam says to the pilot.

“That homing beacon really works,” the pilot hollers. “I thought you were crazy.”

Of course he made a homing beacon to his helicopter. “A crazy genius,” I mutter, pressing my hand to my chest to confirm I’m still breathing. We made it.

I sag into my seat, my limbs going weak.

“Where to?” The pilot asks.

Liam looks at me and I shrug. That was our last lead. Our only lead.

“I’m not visiting your dad in jail to beg for the coordinates if that’s what you were wondering.” After testifying in many depositions, I’ve seen enough of that man to last a lifetime. “The Boss” is still an egotistical, narcissistic sociopath.

“Wait.” Liam shakes his head then pulls out his phone, his brows furrowing. “Remember that bullet you found on the Moore estate?”

“Yeah.” I frown. “What about it?”

“It had numbers on it. I didn’t think about it at the time, but...”

Were there numbers on it? I dropped it in Liam’s apartment that day and never looked at it again. I figured it was nothing. But... “Wait. Are you saying my bullet might be the key to this mystery?” I raise a brow at him, waiting for the opportunity to say “told you so.”

He pinches his eyes closed then opens them again. “It pains me to say this, but possibly. I remember reading something about his love of guns, and then I remembered the bullet had numbers on it.”

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“And you couldn’t have remembered this, I don’t know, two days ago?!”

He winces. “My brain works better under pressure.”

“I should have strangled you sooner.”

“We’ll keep that idea in your back pocket,” he says. “Now, back to the bullet.”

“The one I found.” I smirk, extremely pleased with myself. Liam flips through picture after picture until he gets to one of the bullet. He zooms in, reading the numbers out loud. I write them down on my phone next to the coordinates that led us here.

Coordinates I have memorized. The two strings of numbers are nearly identical. Except...

“Two of the numbers don’t match the original coordinates that led us here,” I say.

Liam taps the coordinates into his phone then looks at me with a grin. “I guess it’s back to the UK. That’s where our treasure is.”

Chapter 2

Liam

It’s been six months since I stepped foot on London soil, and I’m tempted to kiss the ground.

“What are you doing?” Serena asks.

I look down at the asphalt four inches from my face. I guess I was closer to kissing it than I realized. “I dropped a contact.” I hop up.

She raises a brow. “You don’t wear contacts.”

“I just started. Your beauty has burned my irises. Plus, you’re so obsessed with my blue eyes, I couldn’t get anything done.” I wink and pull her in to my side.

“I am slightly obsessed,” she whispers. “Now stop being weird.”

“Maybe I was kissing the ground you walk on.”

“I’m sure.”

“So, where are we headed, love?” I squeeze her waist, reveling in the fact she doesn’t try to push me away or kill me anymore. She hasn’t tried to do that for a long time. Well, okay, there was the time I ordered a real llama to be delivered to her apartment. She didn’t appreciate my gift and made me send poor little Rosie back. Only after she got me in a headlock, of course. Now though, she loves me more than she despises me. Most of the time.

“I thought you had a plan,” Serena says. “Aren’t we following the coordinates?”

“Yes, but since it was your bullet, I figure we should follow your lead with this one,” I say, opening the door of the waiting car and helping my beautiful woman inside.

She buckles up before looking over at me in confusion. “Aren’t we just going to go to the location?”

“The location is the problem. It’s in the middle of...well, I think it would be better if I showed you.” I pull out my phone and look up the location then extend my hand to her.

Her jaw drops, but she quickly snaps it closed. “Is this a joke?”

My lips twitch. “I do find it terribly funny.”

“I’m not going back to that dress store.” She shoves the phone back at me.

I took her dress shopping once, and she’s never forgiven me for it. “Well, that’s too bad. It was a nice treasure hunt until now.” I tease her for the dramatics.

She groans and drops her head to the seat. She has no other choice if she intends to see this treasure hunt through. “Of all the rotten luck.”

“I think it’s pretty lucky. I get to see you in dresses again.” I haven’t seen her in a single dress since that night we were kidnapped, and I’m foaming at the mouth for the chance.

“Why don’t you try on dresses this time?” she asks.

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“That’s a sight no one wants to see.” I kiss the side of her forehead. “So, what’s our play?”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a high-end dress store. We need an appointment just to walk through the door. Luckily, I had the foresight to make one before we left Peru. But what is our occasion?”

“Why do I need an occasion to look at dresses?”

I raise a brow. “Because it’s monumental for you to look at a dress, period.”

“Fine. We’re...going to another gala.”

“Wow. Creative. Remind me to have you come up with our cover story every time.”

She shakes her head with a smile. “You’re a know-it-all.”

“And you love-it-all.”

“Ugh.” She grabs my neck like she wants to strangle me. “The cheese. Stop.” But she presses a kiss to my lips anyway.

“You’re giving off some very mixed signals right now,” I murmur against her lips.

“Let me clear it up then.” She continues to kiss me when the car stops in front of the

boutique. And when the driver opens our door.

And when the driver clears his throat.

I gently push her back. “I know what you’re doing, and it won’t work.” Though I’d love to give in and kiss her for the rest of the night.

Serena scowls as I pull her from the car and escort her inside like the proper gentleman I’ve become in my retirement... Ugh, I still hate that word. But I love the honest man I’ve become who is worthy—okay, that might be too strong. I’ll never be worthy of Serena, but I’ll never stop trying to be the man she deserves.

I give the attendant Serena’s name, and she motions for us to head to the private rooms in the back.

“Wait, if I’m getting fitted for a dress, how are we going to find the treasure?” Serena whispers, dodging around a wedding dress as if it might gain arms and reach out and snatch her up.

I cradle the dip in her waist. “That’s why I need you to try on a few dresses while I snoop around.”

“Are you sure this is the correct place?”

“Only one way to find out.” I push her inside the private room.

Abigail smiles when we walk in. “What are we looking for today?”

“Uh,” Serena’s eyes dart to me. “I need a... dress... for a—”

“Wedding,” I say, grinning. “Ours.”

“A wedding dress?” Abigail claps her hands. “I’ll go pull some and be right back.” She strides quickly from the room.

“What was that?” Serena hisses when she’s gone. “I thought you were letting me take the lead.”

“You were dead in the water, and I find it hard to give up control.” I shrug. “Also, I just really want to see you in a wedding dress. Sue me?”

“Can I?” Her eyes twinkle with mischief. “I could use a new car.”

“You know I’ll get you a car, a house too, if you just ask.”

She shakes her head. “I will try on three dresses, that’s it.”

“That’s all I need.” I press a kiss to her cheek. “I’ll be right back.”

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I slip out the door then wander toward the back of the shop. My location app is already up and running, directing me toward the coordinates.

I take a left, then a right. There's a door and I pick the lock, opening it slowly, ensuring no one is inside. I see a set of steps so old they are crumbling in places. Closing the door quietly behind me, I hurry down the concrete stairs, flashlight out.

Another door with a lock that is incredibly easy to pick leads me to one of the city's many secret underground tunnels. A constant drip and the sound of scurrying rodents are my only companions. I watch my phone as I continue forward. Almost...there.

I stop and shine my flashlight around, highlighting every brick and crack in the tunnel around me. Wait...

There's a crevice the size of my finger in the upper corner of the wall. I aim my flashlight at it and... there's a tiny glass bottle. I use my lock picking tools to get it out, and the second I do, excitement floods my veins. I palm the tiny bottle. The old me would look at this right now. The new and improved me stuffs it in my pocket and races back upstairs for my better half.

"Are you sure you don't want to try another?" Abigail asks as I open the door to the private room they are in.

"No," Serena starts, but whatever she says after that gets lost in the air. It was stupid of me to request to see her in a white dress. I knew my heart wouldn't be able to handle it. And now I'm worried it's going to give right out. This is all it took to do me in.

Serena is in an ivory dress that appears to be glowing as it cascades down each of her curves like a waterfall. The sheer sleeves are both elegant and whimsical, but the deep V is daring. The skirt flows out in an intricate flower design that will be the backdrop for my new painting. I've never seen anything so magnificent. That dress has "wife" written all over it, and I'm ready to make her mine. The back of my eyes sting, and I press a hand to my chest to tamp down the wild, irregular pumping. She's killing me slowly. And I'll die a happy man.

"She doesn't need to try any more dresses." I swallow the lump in my throat. "That's the one."

Abigail claps her hands, but I can't tear my gaze away from Serena.

"I'll go grab a veil."

Abigail disappears from the room, and my feet eat up the distance between me and Serena. "How do I convince you to marry me?"

She bites her bottom lip. "I've heard you can be very persuasive."

I run my fingertips down her arms until I reach her hand, then drag it up to my lips. "Then I shall try my very hardest."

"Did you find it?" Serena whispers.

Did I find my heart? Yes. It's in her hands. Or maybe she means my mind that's wrapped up in her. "I found everything I need."

Chapter 3

Serena

“You didn’t have to buy me the dress,” I insist when the driver pulls the car away from the curb. Though if I’m being honest, I might have cried leaving it behind. Liam may not have asked yet, but he will, and when he does, I want to marry him in that dress. “It was so much money,” I say, barely concealing the emotion in my voice.

Liam grins over at me. “You really don’t know how much money I have, do you?”

I purse my lips. “That reminds me, I’ve been meaning to get a look at your financial records.”

“Nice try.” He slips his hand into his suit coat pocket because the man believes in wearing suits the way most people wear t-shirts and relaxed shorts. He pulls out something and hands it to me. “What is it?” I ask, as he closes my hand around the small cylinder.

“A piece of the puzzle. It was shoved in a crack in the tunnel wall. Open it.”

I raise a brow. “You didn’t?”

“Nope.”

“Okay.” I open my fingers to reveal a tiny glass bottle. It’s the length of my thumb and so dirty it’s no longer transparent. I pull out the cork and find a piece of paper jammed inside.

“Here.” Liam hands me a pair of tweezers.

I fish out the paper, but it’s so old and fragile it rips in half. I hand Liam the first half, then go back for the second. He lays them flat on the seat between us.

LH. My love, where our hearts reside, may our memories and dreams forever abide.

Once in your arms, time stood still. Close in my dreams, now far from me, no path leads back to what we were. I'm a shadow now, a fleeting trace. Till once more I see your face. CM.

Is it a riddle? Or...“It's a love note,” I say. I don't know why I expected more. Like coordinates to the actual treasure this time.

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“It’s a beautiful one,” Liam says, then leans back in his seat and rubs his chin. “Cillian Moore was never married.”

“But he must have been in love once. And this treasure was for her. LH. Do you know who that was?”

Liam shakes his head. And for the rest of the drive to his secret house, we each research the initials on our devices.

Two hours later, sitting in front of the willow tree mural, I find it.

“Lydia Hale.” I sit forward.

Liam jumps over the couch and looks at my phone.

“Who is she?”

“Well, she could have been no one, but they were rumored to be childhood friends. It would make sense he fell for her but could never return to her after all he’d done. He could only love her from afar. The next clue says ‘where our memories and dreams forever abide.’ Do you think he meant where they grew up? Or where they both ended up, able only to dream of one another?”

“We don’t know where he ended up. If we did, this wouldn’t be a treasure hunt.” Liam scrubs a hand through his hair, as exhausted as I am by our travels. “Let’s find her.”

An hour later, we find what we need. Her old family home belongs to someone else

now, but her last known residence is now a jewelry shop. Interesting. What better place to hide treasure than a jewelry shop that's practically one large bank vault? It's too late to go anywhere tonight, but I have a good feeling about what we'll find tomorrow.

Chapter 4

Serena

"Wakeup, sleepyhead." Liam waves a plate of sausage and pancakes over my face. I reach for them, but he pulls them back.

"You're cruel." I groan, stretching the aches out of my back from where I must have fallen asleep on the couch researching last night.

He leans over the back of the couch, his face hovering over mine. "I never said I'd be nice." He presses a kiss to the hollow of my neck, and I shiver and turn my head, exposing more of my neck. But he only nips at my jaw before pulling back.

"Let's go on an adventure, beautiful."

I sit up. "Food first." I snag a piece of sausage and devour it. "Is your grandfather coming?" We FaceTime Henry once a day. He's healed well from his kidnapping, though it might have something to do with the sweet neighbor who promised to look after him. Henry couldn't help himself from flirting with the woman and is determined to wear her down. He informs us of his progress daily.

"He's taking Maria to brunch but will be around later to help us 'uncover the treasure,'" Liam says.

"Good, I can't wait to see him."

Twenty minutes and a plate of food later, I'm in the driver's seat of Liam's Lamborghini. I run my hands over the smooth wheel.

"Will you kill me if I crash it?" I ask.

"It's just a car. And I'd never try to kill you." He smirks.

"That felt very pointed." I turn on the car, revving it up. Liam doesn't even flinch.

"You've tried to kill me fifteen times."

"But I never succeeded. You're welcome." I shoot him a smirk and speed out of the driveway. The world passes by in a blur of color and motion. The London I used to love is coming back to me slowly but surely. I can't stop the grin from covering my face as adrenaline courses through my veins.

"You can slow down," Liam says casually.

"Can't handle it?"

"You know I can. You know I will. Always." Liam grabs my hand, and the warmth in his voice, his touch, eases my foot on the gas. I've gone to therapy, thanks to my boyfriend and my partner conspiring against me—the one and only thing they've ever agreed on. I'll admit, I needed it. I've worked through my past, but sometimes I still can't kick the feeling that I'm running, waiting for someone to catch me. It's a hard habit to break.

Last night we decided we'd first visit the home Lydia Hale grew up in since it was closer.

"What are we going to say? 'Can we dig some holes on your property until we find a

long-lost treasure?”” I ask, my hands growing sweaty against the steering wheel. What if this doesn’t work?

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“That’s not what I was going to start with.” Liam chuckles, looking far too relaxed. I don’t know how he can be. What if the treasure is on that property? Then we have no claim to it. And this whole thing will have been for nothing. Except to say we found it, of course.

“Then what?” I ask.

“Well, I was going to ask their names.”

“Their names? Really? That’s it?”

“That is usually where one begins a conversation.”

We’re screwed.

“Relax.” Liam places a hand on my leg. “I have a good feeling about this.”

“You say that about everything.”

He lifts a shoulder. “And it’s worked so far. Especially about you.” He winks.

“Such a charmer. Now stop it and come up with a real plan.”

“It will be fine.”

“Your optimism is really annoying sometimes,” I mutter as I turn down the private lane. What if these are gun people? Not that I’m judging since I’ve got my Glock on

my hip, but what if they want us off their property? This treasure isn't worth getting shot over.

I pull the car to a stop in front of an old shed thirty feet from the front door of the small cottage.

Liam opens the door and steps out, straightens his suit coat, and looks around.

Then he promptly dives back inside the car.

I narrow my eyes at the man curled up in the passenger seat, panting. "What is wrong with you?"

"They have chickens!"

"Are you kidding me?" I laugh at his seriousness and look outside to confirm three plump chickens strutting around the car. "You're still afraid of them? They are birds, Liam."

"Serena." Liam mirrors my condescending tone. "One does not forget nearly being chicken food as a child."

I drop my head back against the seat, laughing. "They barely pecked your toes."

"Your grandmother's hens were as nasty as her, and they nearly took my pinky toe off! I have a scar."

"You're so dramatic. Be a big boy and get out of the car."

"You can take this lead. I'll wait here." He crosses his arms like a defiant child.

“You’re really willing to risk losing this treasure because of chickens?” He can’t be serious. This treasure is all he’s been talking about—obsessing over—for the last six months. Just wait till we find this treasure, Serena. It’s going to change everything.

Liam looks out the window at the chickens and sighs. “Only for you will I face my greatest fear.”

“When your greatest fear is a chicken, it’s hardly romantic.”

He scoops my hand off the middle console and brings it to his lips. “You already helped me face my father. Nothing else in this world scares me except for losing you.”

I pinch his cheeks. That fear has plagued me on more than one occasion as well. “No losing each other. Got it?”

“Got it.” He grins. “Seal it with a kiss?”

I lean over and press a kiss to his lips, but he captures the back of my neck, keeping me close for more. His kiss is hungry and wild. It tastes like now and forever.

Knock knock.

Liam and I spring apart so fast I ram my head into the headrest. An older woman stands outside my window scowling at the two of us beneath bushy gray brows, and I hesitantly roll the window down.

“This isn’t a make out spot,” she snaps.

“It is quite romantic.” Liam flashes the woman a flirtatious smile and... the woman scoffs. She’s immune! I’ve yet to see it happen, and this brings me so much joy.

“I’m so sorry. My boyfriend got scared of your chickens and needed comforting. I can’t bring him anywhere.” I push open my door and step out next to the woman. I extend my hand. “Serena Cruz.”

The woman stares at me, then my hand, and raises her eyes slowly back to mine. “Betty Powell,” she says, without shaking my hand.

I slowly lower mine. “Nice to meet you. I actually wanted to ask about a woman who lived here many years ago.”

Betty raises an eyebrow. “And who was that?”

“Lydia Hale.”

At the name, the woman’s face softens, and she turns around. “Come on then. You can leave your pansy boyfriend in the car.”

Pansy? I bite back a laugh and glance at Liam, who is fuming. This day keeps getting better and better.

“It’s safer out here, sweetheart.” I talk to him like he’s a baby. “I’ll be back soon.” He narrows his eyes as I hold up the key fob and lock him in the car. “Sucks doesn’t it?” I say, then spin, following Betty to the house.

She doesn’t wait for me and walks straight through the front door. “I’m assuming you’re here for the treasure.”

I stumble over the threshold. “Uh, excuse me?”

“You and everyone else before you.”

I didn’t realize we were that late to the game. “May I ask who they were?”

“Didn’t catch names. Not the most civil. One was a real looker though—tall, broad and tan.”

I swallow. There’s no other way to describe my ex, Sebastian. But he’s in prison, so if he came here, it was at least a year ago.

“The last one that came was the worst. Self confident jerk. Always yapping and trying to flirt with me.”

I swallow. Liam’s dad.

“What did they want to know?”

The woman stops in the library and runs her hands over a row of books.

“Where the treasure was, of course. But I don’t know. As if I’d still be living in this blasted cottage with wealth like that.” She tips a book out of its spot on the shelf and walks over to me. “There are some journal entries written throughout this book. I never could make sense of them though.”

She holds out the book and I reach for the old, worn copy of *Romeo and Juliet*.

“Keep it. I don’t want it in my house anymore.” She releases it and I barely catch it from falling to the floor.

She can’t be serious. “But it’s a limited edition book. This alone is worth a couple thousand.”

“Not with all that blasted writing in the margins.” The woman rolls her eyes. “It’s only been worth thousands in suffering. My grandfather moved into this house when he was a boy. That’s when he learned about the treasure. He became obsessed, but he never found it. Neither will you. But at least I’m done worrying about it.”

I clutch the well-worn and well-loved book to my chest. I worked in a museum for two years. This book is a treasure, and if she truly wants to get rid of it, I’ll take it.

“Are you sure?” I ask, but the words are barely out of my mouth before her lips turn down and her eyes narrow.

“Stop asking questions, girl. And get out of here with that weird boyfriend of yours.”

“Will do.”

Chapter 5

Liam

“So, what did she say?” I ask, the second Serena sits in the driver's seat.

“She gave me this.” She puts a book on the console between us and starts the car.

I pick up the book, caressing the frayed golden edges. “Do you know what this is?”

“Yeah, a second edition,” Serena says.

“And she just gave it to you?” There has to be a catch. Never has someone given me a clue to a mystery for free. “What did she want in return?”

“Nothing.” Serena shrugs. “She said she was sick of it and the treasure. Apparently there are journal entries written throughout.”

Hmm. I flip through the pages until I find the first entry, though it's not dated. It looks like a letter.

“To L.H.” I read it aloud. “May you find assurance in this love, doomed from the start, like ours. But someday the stars will align and we will be together. Until then, hold my words dear. C.M.”

So they are his journal entries. I turn the pages, reading the separate entries from Cillian to Lydia. They are each simple entries, stories or memories of them together. Poetry and love letters.

I read every word of his passionate love notes to Serena while we drive and when we stop at the next destination, my throat is raw and dry.

Serena turns off the car and sniffs.

I glance over at her. “Hold on. Are you emotional?”

“No!” She steels her features. “It’s allergies.”

I give her a look.

She throws a hand in the air. “It was romantic, okay? He was so in love with her, but they couldn’t be together.”

I nod, my jaw clenching. “He was a thief. She wasn’t.”

“It’s more complicated than that. He was on the run. She wanted a stable life.”

I raise a brow. “Is that what all women want?”

Serena looks over at me, seeing right through my little question. “Of course not—only the boring ones.”

“You want a life full of adventure then? Should we make out here too?”

She rolls her eyes. “Come on, scaredy cat. I don’t see any chickens in the jewelry store.”

“Only the men afraid of commitment.” I step out of the car and round it so I can offer her a hand to escort her inside like a real and true gentleman who can commit. I am already committed to this woman at my side. Since the moment I found her again, when I didn’t even know she was Seraphina, I was drawn to her like two star-crossed lovers destined to collide.

I pull open the door, holding it for Serena to enter first. The jewelry store must be expensive because the clientele appears to be in their mid-fifties, and there is a waitress serving champagne to the shoppers.

“I feel a little out of place,” Serena hisses, tugging at her t-shirt.

“You belong everywhere, my love. You command every room you walk into.” As if on cue, several shoppers look over at us and I see a few men not so subtly check out my woman.

That simply won’t do. I drag Serena to my side, pressing a kiss to her cheek. “We just got engaged!”

Cheers greet us, a champagne bottle pops, and a young sales associate rushes up to us. “Let me assist you.”

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“Yes, please assist him; he’s clearly lost his mind,” Serena says, with a smile that seems to throw the young woman.

“She’s kidding,” I say to comfort the poor girl. “After she stopped trying to kill me, she decided she can’t get enough of me.”

The woman’s ankle tips in her heels, and I reach out to steady her. “A-and you want to look at engagement rings now?” She lowers her voice and looks around. “Are you sure that’s wise?”

Serena bites her bottom lip, and I can’t help but laugh. “Possibly not. But we like to see where life takes us.”

“Maybe just a brooch.” Serena jumps in.

I raise a brow. “A brooch. Really? Like that raccoon one you lost?”

Serena swallows. “Earrings then.”

“No ring?” The woman looks between the two of us like she’s desperately trying to understand the situation. She never will.

“We’ll circle back to that.” I wink.

“Okay.” The woman settles us around the display and turns to get a key.

“Now what?” Serena whispers. “How do we find any clues here?”

“I don’t think there are any clues here,” I whisper.

“Why do you say that?”

“I did some research while you were in the cottage. Thank you again for leaving me behind like that.”

Serena’s lips twitch.

“Anyway, this isn’t the original building. The old building burned down in the fifties.”

“So...why are we here?”

I shrug. “I thought it would be fun. There is one room that survived. It’s the back office. I doubt we’ll find anything, but let’s pretend we’re interested in some jewelry, then I’ll distract everyone here while you sneak a peek.”

“Yellow gold or white gold?” The young woman places two velvet cushions on the case in front of us.

“White,” both of us say, turning our attention to the cushion with the white gold earrings. I know exactly which one Serena’s eyes have narrowed in on—the solitaire studs.

“Do you have these with the December birthstone?” I ask.

I can feel Serena’s gaze on the side of my face, but I don’t move my eyes from the sales associate. Of course I’d remember when her birthday is.

“Yes,” the associate says and digs in the case until she finds the light blue studs and

pushes the earrings in front of Serena.

“We’ll take them,” I say to the woman.

“Would you like to see the matching necklace?”

“No. My fiancée doesn't like things that could be used to commit murder.” Serena pinches my thigh so hard I nearly jump. “I mean, yes, we’d love to see it.”

“Why don’t you decide for me, honey?” Serena pinches my leg again before standing up. That spot is going to be sore. “I need to use the restroom. Is it back that way?”

The sales lady nods, and when Serena is gone, I whisper to the lady, “You know what, let's see the matching ring and bracelet too.”

Chapter 6

Serena

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I couldn't get into the back office. It was locked up tight, and I was afraid I'd set off an alarm if I picked the lock. Liam may not have a history of being the most honest man in the room, but I trust him if he thinks this is a dead end. Plus, I'd prefer not to end up in prison with my ex.

I emerge from the back to find Liam holding a green embossed jewelry bag, one that's far too big for a single pair of earrings. That's concerning. What else did he buy? But before I can ask, he grabs my arm and escorts me out the door, and this time to the passenger side of the car.

"Have I been demoted?" I tease.

"No. I just have somewhere special I wanted to take you."

"I thought we were going to finish the journal entries in the book."

He looks over at me, giving me a very concerning grin complete with an eyebrow waggle. "That's where I got the idea."

I raise a brow, waiting for more.

"Cillian never wrote in this book of a treasure but one entry mentioned this spot near the sea that was a 'treasure indeed.' I may have visited a similar spot when I was younger and want to see how it has held up." He opens my door and I slip inside.

Liam hops in the car and pulls out the book. He flips to a page and puts it in front of me. "This is the entry I was talking about."

I skim it. “A cave over the sea, one, two, three. A home for you, a home for me, a treasure indeed.” It seems like nonsense to me.

“My grandfather once took me to a cave like this on the east side of England off a small island,” Liam says. “The cave is wide and has three openings, but is hard to get to so it is relatively unvisited. It’s utterly enchanting.”

“You think the treasure could be buried in a cave?”

“You never know. Regardless, I’d like to take you there.”

“Okay. Let’s do it. But can we stop for food first? I’m starving.”

He glances at his watch and an unidentifiable expression flitters over his features. But before I can dissect it, it’s replaced by his typical grin. “Of course, my love. Of course.”

Liam

“When you said you were hungry, I expected you to eat actual food,” I muse, eyeing Serena over my glass of water. The music and atmosphere at the pub are so lively it’s contagious. Serena did something I’ve never witnessed. She ordered a drink.

“But you said this was a vacation, and I haven’t had a vacation in...ever.” Serena’s words are slightly slurred, but she keeps claiming she’s as lucid as a lieutenant. Apparently, this lieutenant is a lightweight.

I glance at my watch.

“Why do you keep doing that?” she asks, her body lolling to the side.

I sigh and scoot my chair closer to hers. “I was just hoping to take you to the caves soon.” Preferably before it gets dark, and I had things I needed to do first.

“That’s sweet.” She leans her head on my shoulder.

“But of course, you have to go and surprise me.” I chuckle, wrapping an arm around her.

“Says the man full of surprises.” A new song starts up over the speakers, and she looks up at me. “Should we dance?”

“No one else is.”

“Since when has that stopped you?”

“You might be a little too drunk, love.”

“Nope.” She shakes her head. “I’m always in control.”

Yet, she’s not. And it’s only with me she’s letting go of that control and allowing me to care for her. I will never take advantage of that. I press a kiss to the top of her head. “Let’s dance then.”

I help her stand, and her knees buckle, but I hold her up, swaying us to music not meant to be swayed to. It doesn’t matter. Nothing matters more than the woman in my arms.

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“I think I’m dizzy,” she mutters, leaning her head on my chest.

“I’ve got you, love. I’ve got you.”

I hold her through the next five songs until soft snores escape her lips. I should get her home or at least to the car. My plans for the day will have to wait.

I scoop her up into my arms and her head falls against my chest. I drop a couple of hundred pound notes on the table then head for the door.

“I can walk,” Serena mumbles.

“Okay,” I say, but don’t put her down.

“Did you drug that lady?” A man steps in front of me, stopping me with his folded arms and a scowl to match.

“Not this time.” I clamp my lips shut. Why are sarcasm and light deflection always my go-to’s?

A fist flies at my face and I dodge, which is a lot harder to do while carrying an unconscious woman.

I maneuver to the side, putting a table between us. “She drank too much. I’m taking her home.”

“More like to your bed,” the man snarls, grabbing the attention of everyone else in

the pub.

This is just dandy.

“Liam Hawthorne?”

The blood in my veins turns cold.

I don't turn, refusing to acknowledge the man addressing me. If he knows me by my real name, that means the situation is even worse. He wants something from me. What can I say? Everyone wants a piece of me. Literally.

Time to get out of here.

Except the idiot in front of me is still there and still pissed.

“She's my wife,” I sigh. I slip my phone from my hand and show him the screensaver: a photo I doctored to appear like we were married two months ago. Serena never made me change it.

The man looks back and forth between the picture and us then nods and steps to the side.

And then I run.

“Liam!” the voice comes again, but I don't stop.

I get Serena in the car and turn in time to see a furious Howie Garfield, AKA the most annoying treasure hunter on the planet, bursting out of the pub doors.

Blast. What terrible timing to run into someone from my past. I jump in the car and

floor it. Howie isn't alone. I watch in the rearview mirror as a black SUV picks him up and turns down the street after me.

At least I've got speed on my side. I press on the gas, revving the engine, and flying over the country roads like a race car. But the SUV somehow keeps with me, not close enough to shoot but too close for comfort. I've got to switch it up.

I slow down to take a left turn, then a right, purposely keeping to back roads that will lead me to the motorway. Serena's head smacks the door as I take another left.

"Liam," she grumbles. "What's happening?"

"Nothing. Just rest, love."

"Are we being chased?"

"A little bit."

"Why am I not surprised?" she murmurs. Her eyes close again, and I thank the heavens she's out for this next part. I send the car airborne. I put my hand on her head to stabilize it as we crash to the ground, metal scraping in what's sure to be a very expensive fix.

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The SUV takes the same leap behind me.

I slam the steering wheel. Why do I keep trying that move?

I tally my options. Under the sea to Paris, or disappear into the crowd in London?

I turn again and again, attempting to lose them. When I hit the roundabout, I speed up, pretending to take one exit, then taking the next.

There's an SUV too far behind me to confirm it's him, but I don't slow. I'm not about to lead Howie, of all people, back to my home. I need to get rid of this car. I make a call to Rico.

I enter the motorway, diving back and forth between the cars. No one drives quite like the English.

It's too quiet with Serena asleep, so I hit the radio, searching for appropriate car chase tunes. It's safe to say this is not what I had in mind for the day.

Thirty minutes later, Serena is still asleep when I pull into the parking garage of our hotel for the evening.

"Serena." I nudge her leg. "Wake up, sleepyhead."

She mumbles but stays asleep as I transfer everything from the Lamborghini to the Range Rover awaiting me. I hand the keys to Rico.

“What do you want me to do with the Lambo?” Rico asks, his eyes dragging over the body of the car with a grimace. The damage must be worse than I thought.

“Whatever you want. Just get it off the streets for the next couple of weeks.”

“That I can do.” Rico grins and hands me the keys to the Range Rover. I go back for Serena before he can take off with her. I scoop her into my arms and start up the stairs. I get the room unlocked and lay her on the bed closest to the window showcasing Buckingham Palace in the distance.

She’s going to be ticked when she wakes up. She drugged herself this time though, so it’s not entirely my fault.

I leave her in the room and take my laptop to the living room. I have some plans to change.

Chapter 7

Serena

I wake up with a pounding headache. It’s still light out, but I feel like I’ve been asleep for hours. Why was I asleep in the middle of the day? And...where am I?

I glance around the unfamiliar room, unease forming a pit in my stomach.

This is more than déjà vu; this is some cruel joke.

“Liam Arthur Hawthorne!”

His head pops in the doorway. “Bringing out my middle name. I must really be in trouble.”

“Explain!” I yell, waving my hands around the room. This is not his house or his sketchy apartment. “I thought I’d been kidnapped for real.”

“The only one who gets to kidnap you is me.” He grins, but it fades when he sees my scowl. He comes closer and sits on the edge of the bed, rubbing my knee. “You don’t remember anything?”

I don’t. Which can only mean one thing. “You drugged me!”

“No, you got drunk.”

Oof. That would explain the headache. “Agree to disagree.”

He raises an amused brow. “Someone recognized me. We had to get out of there. A car chase ensued. It was all very riveting. I’m surprised you slept through it.”

So I was drunk. Clearly, that can never happen again.

“And why are we here?”

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“The man following us is a treasure hunter I knew from university. If he finds out where I live, he’ll rob me blind.”

“A treasure hunter?” Not a psycho killer or drug lord. A small positive.

He nods. “You’re safe. I promise.”

I drop back against the pillows. This man. Life is an adventure with him for sure.

“Wait, what about that place near the ocean you wanted to take me?”

He purses his lips. “We can go tomorrow.”

That pit in my stomach returns, filling me with guilt. He was so excited to take me there... and then I ruined it. I glance at the time. “It’s only five. We could still make it.”

“Are you sure?” he asks.

“Of course.”

My stomach lets out an unearthly groan and Liam laughs. “Why don’t we get you some real food, and then we will talk?”

“That would be delightful.”

We walk to the café on the bottom floor of the hotel.

I order a sandwich, then find a booth tucked in the corner of the room, far from the bright lights and constant chiming of the door.

“Here.” Liam hands me two aspirin and I down them eagerly.

Our food is served and I dive in like a lion finding its first meal in days.

Liam is motionless beside me.

“What?” I ask, with my mouth full of meat and cheese.

“I just love you.”

I narrow my eyes. “You’re being weird.”

“Can’t a man simply admire his woman?”

Well, that certainly hasn't been the case in my experience. But Liam has rewritten all the rules, all the lies I believed, and shown me a love so real and full I still struggle to comprehend it. My defenses slip and slide away, leaving me a pile of mush for this man.

My cheeks flame, but I play it off with a shrug. “And I too...enjoy your company.”

He laughs and takes a bite of his own sandwich.

Liam pulls out his phone. He sends a message and locks it, only to have it vibrate immediately. He angles it away from me as he continues to type, and the phone continues to buzz.

“Everything okay?” I ask around a mouthful of sandwich.

“What? Oh yeah, just a needy client.”

He doesn't give this number to just anyone. This client must be important. I finish my sandwich while he continues to monitor his phone.

He kept doing that in the pub as well. Then we danced, and he carried me out. And I hit my head in the car when he went over the jump. It's all coming back to me now.

The door to the shop bursts open.

“Liam Hawthorne!”

Liam jumps, flinging his latte at me.

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I scream as warm liquid drips down my front. But Liam ignores me, too focused on the door.

“We have to go.” Liam grabs my arm, yanking me out of my seat.

“What? Why? Look at me.” I gesture to my front.

“Sorry about that,” he says, turning only to glance back at the door. “I don’t know how he found us so fast,” he mutters. “Not as stupid as he looks.”

“What’s going on?” I turn to see who he’s talking about and make eye contact with a balding, middle-aged man. His face is so red, steam must be coming out of his ears. The treasure hunter, I presume. “We should probably run.”

“Way ahead of you, darling.”

“Don’t you dare leave me behind!” I leap over a rogue chair and shove Liam to the side to get in front of him.

“I’ll never leave you behind! That being said, I run faster.”

“Race you.”

I hit the service entrance first and ram right into a server carrying a gigantic tray of food. The air disappears from my lungs as the tray hits my midsection. Sandwiches, salads, and worse—jello—goes flying. All into me. I’m wearing more than the floor.

“Don’t slow down.” Liam yanks me forward, but he loses momentum when he’s jerked backward.

I slip on the jello smeared under my shoes and dive into the mess, barely catching myself on my hands and knees.

“Hawthorne.” The man grabs Liam by the throat. “I’ve been looking for you for a long time.”

“I didn’t realize your eyesight had gotten so bad,” Liam says. This earns him a punch to the gut.

Why did I have to choose the one man intent on pissing everyone off?

I grab onto the wall to pull myself up. “Sorry, I don’t think we’ve met.” I stick my hand out to the man leering over Liam. He looks at my hand but doesn’t reach for it. “Special AgentCruz. Liam Hawthorne is in my custody and turning on some old friends from his past. Who might you be?”

The treasure hunter’s eyes widen a bit. He shakes his head. “I don’t believe you. A little birdy told me you’re looking for the Moore treasure, and I want in.”

“It already belongs to the FBI,” I say.

He pulls a gun out of his belt, and people in the kitchen scream, ducking and hiding. “Wrong. You two will take me there, or I’m putting a bullet in one of you.”

I didn’t think he’d go for that.

“In that case, you should know something.” I step to the side, garnering a better angle for myself. “Liam is a much better target because he’s pretentious and annoying.”

“I resent that. You’re far more irritating than I,” Liam retorts.

The man looks at Liam, confused, and I take that moment to kick the gun free of his hand. It skitters somewhere under the kitchen counter, and Howie lunges at me. I greet him with a fist to the face and a knee to the groin.

He groans and falls to the floor. “As far as sparring partners go, I’ve had better,” I say.

That seems to tick him off, and he swipes at my leg, but Liam beats me to the punch, knocking him out. Liam grins up at me. “Now who's getting cocky?”

He’s rubbing off on me. I’m going to need to fix that. “Whatever.” I brush food out of my hair.

“Don’t ever change. It’s sexy. But we should probably go.”

“Agreed.” We slip out into the back hallway.

Liam leads me down the stairs to the parking garage, right to a Range Rover. He then proceeds to open it.

“What are you doing?! I thought we were working on this!”

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“I didn’t steal it. It’s mine. You were asleep for that too.” He unlocks the car, and it beeps, then he turns back to me. “Wait, it’s brand new. You can’t get in with food all over you like that.”

“Are you kidding me right now? We are running from a man with a gun, and you’re worried about me getting your new car dirty?”

“He’s asleep. We have at least five minutes, and this car was very expensive. Custom seats, trim, paint job, the works,” he says, rounding the back and opening the trunk.

“Says the man who has millions!” I try the car door, but it refuses to open for me. “Let me in.”

“Just wait for me to cover the seat or something,” he says, continuing to dig through the back. “I got it. Put this on.” He hauls out the dress bag.

“You’re kidding.”

“I’ve never been more serious.” He holds it out to me.

“I’m not putting on a wedding dress to enjoy another high-speed chase.”

He shrugs. “It’s this or underwear. Which I’m not opposed to—”

“See. Annoying!” I rip off my clothes right there, wiping my dirty hands on them, and Liam helps me slip into the wedding dress. It’s more beautiful than I remembered and smooth as butter. Liam’s eyes seem to glisten as he takes me in.

“It’s even better on you in the parking garage. And with lettuce in your hair.” He smirks, picking said piece of lettuce out. He presses a kiss to the spot, and a shiver breaks out across my skin.

“Stop right there!” A shout echoes through the parking garage, and Liam rips away from me.

“Time to go!”

Liam sprints to the driver's side and peels out of the parking garage.

When we are a couple blocks from the hotel, a thought strikes me. “Why didn’t we go to the room?”

“Because they found it first. I got an alert from the camera I set up at the same time Howie came inside the restaurant. He has someone else with him.”

“This is bad, right?” I fasten my seat belt as the tires squeal over a bridge.

“It’s not ideal.”

“Stop being so blasé!”

“I find it more reassuring.”

“I find it irritating.”

“I can see that.”

He turns left out of town and takes a back road, heading through a small tunnel.

“Now where are we going?”

“I called Garth to bring the chopper.”

“You’re getting really attached to that thing. I might have to make you send it back.”

Liam gasps. “Garth is a person; I can’t just send him back to the womb.”

I raise an eyebrow. “You know what I meant.”

“Aw,” he pouts. “But Garth said he would teach me how to fly.”

Of course he did. “That is not happening.”

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Ten minutes later, we park in an empty warehouse lot, a helicopter whirring in the middle.

I jump out of the car and immediately trip over the dress I forgot I was wearing. Stinking Liam. I should have kept the food stained clothes.

I pick up the skirt, and Liam rushes to my side, helping me hold all the layers. He's got his leather bag, and together we run toward the helicopter.

It's funny when I think about the times I fell in love with Liam. It wasn't in the simple moments, but in the wild ones like this, when he protected me, cared for me, and brought new energy to my life. When he jumped in front of a gun for me, when he threw us off a bridge. He's larger than life, and so is our time together. Even if it means running away from criminals in a wedding dress.

Liam helps me buckle into the chopper, then steals a kiss before climbing in.

"A beautiful night for a romantic ride, eh?"

"Eh?" I laugh. "Are you Canadian now?"

"I've been lots of things. Pretended to be even more things. Is it a deal breaker?"

"I should say yes...but no." I love every version of Liam I've come to know.

He holds my hand as the helicopter lifts off the ground, and the beautiful city stretches out further beneath us. So maybe I was lying when I told him to get rid of

the helicopter. I kind of love it. It's a thrilling ride.

Liam kisses me as we fly over Buckingham Palace and again when we head east over London.

"You should put these on," Liam says, pulling the box of earrings from his bag. "Complete the look."

Why not? I put in the beautiful blue studs, feeling on top of the world, literally and figuratively. I'm not a girly girl, but even I can admit it's fun to be spoiled sometimes.

I lean into Liam's side as the sun begins its descent in the sky. The farther we fly to the east, the more anxious Liam seems to grow.

"You still worried Howie might be following us?" I ask him, placing my hand on his bouncing knee. No way that incapable man has a helicopter as well.

Liam grins. "Nah, I'm just ready to find my treasure." He presses a kiss to the top of my head, and I watch in awe as the sky turns a brilliant gold.

"Confident, are we?"

"Hopeful." His hold on me loosens, but as we get closer to the destination or what I assume is the destination, I get more concerned. It's a sheer rock face. He said it was hard to get to, not impossible.

"Uh, Liam?"

"Yes, love?"

“How are we supposed to get to the cave?”

He grins. “This is the part you’ll like.”

“Will I?”

“How do you feel about rappelling from the helicopter?”

I can’t fight the smile claiming my lips. Until I remember I’m in a freaking wedding dress.

“I can’t rappel down in this.”

“We’ll make it work. Let’s get you suited.”

I’m a little less sure. What if my train gets caught in the rope and I crash into the caves head first? But Liam bunches up the train in my harness, completely oblivious to my worries. He’s used to doing everything dressed to the nines and after this wildly long day, the dark blue wool and cashmere suit still somehow looks pristine.

It’s utterly unfair.

I glance down to where the sight of the waves crashing against the rocks thirty feet below the caves is enchanting yet terrifying. I can’t wait to see the view from inside.

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“The third cave has the biggest ledge. I’ll drop you off there,” the pilot says.

I attempt to look down at the ledge in question, but it’s directly below us, which means it’s time to go. A thrill shoots through my veins. It’s been a while since I jumped out of something. Never mind. I literally did this last week when we broke into a weapons dealer’s lair.

Liam pulls open the door and I grip the railing, preparing to jump. “Are you sure you don’t want me to go first?” he asks.

“When have I ever wanted you to beat me at something?” I smirk, pressing a kiss to his lips.

“That’s what I thought.” He chuckles. “Ready?”

“I’m always ready.” Usually. Though I find this man takes me off guard more than anything else.

He raises an eyebrow. “That reminds me, I’ve been meaning to ask you something.” He brushes a strand of my wildly whipping hair out of my eyes and gazes at me with a look full of meaning. “I have a very important question to ask you, Serena.”

My heart jumps to my throat, and my knees buckle. “W-what?”

“Will you m—”

My foot slips out from under me and I fall.

Chapter 8

Serena

I barely catch myself and my bearings before smacking into the cliff face. Was Liam about to propose, and I fell out of a freaking helicopter? After we find this treasure, I'm going to make him finish that question.

I look up to find Liam clutching his heart above me in the helicopter. I shoot him a thumbs up then turn my gaze to the cave. The ledge is only a foot wide, but I can make it. I look around and locate a good rock hold before attempting it. I swing in, grabbing hold of the cliff and pulling myself in. The ledge stays, and I walk into the darkened cave a few feet before unhooking the harness. I toss it back into the wind, and it's immediately whipped up. I step back farther from the edge, and the noise of the helicopter fades. I should wait for Liam... or... I bite my bottom lip. I can beat him to his treasure.

It would be rude.

It would also be poetic justice. He stuck me in a coffin after all, and I have yet to achieve the perfect payback.

I hurry deeper into the cave, pulling my phone out of the dress pocket to use the flashlight. If I remember right, the other two caves are toward the south. I'll head that way, but there's no way a treasure would be buried in the open and subject to the elements. It will be somewhere in the shadows.

I choose my steps over the rocky surface carefully, shining my light up and down. For someone to have buried treasure here, they would have had to take a pickax to the wall or floor, make a hole, and then cover it with loose rocks. Or hide it in a crevice or a naturally formed hole.

I kick a rock, and it skitters deeper into the cave, echoing through the emptiness as it goes. The cave falls silent again, and I continue my search.

My eyes snag on something in the bottom corner of the wall. Intricate chisel marks create a picture of an eagle's talon clasping a scroll. The Moore crest! But where is the treasure? I scour the walls and floor, then I find it: a small pile of rocks. I rip them up. I cut my finger on a rock, but I keep going. There it is—a thick canvas sack holding something that feels like a book, eight inches long at most. Mildly disappointing, but Liam was right. There was a treasure. And I found it! Or it's another clue to something bigger and better. My heart pounds harder at the thought as I tug at the strings of the bag.

Then freeze.

I could put it back and let Liam find it. A good girlfriend would do that. But I've never claimed to be one of those. We will open it together.

Decision made, I hold up my flashlight, continuing down the cave with the sack in one hand. Dim light filters into the tunnel, and I head for the opening, needing a respite from the darkness. Excitement rips up and down my skin as I walk faster through the cave. I can't believe we found a treasure, even if it is only a book.

The cave opens up with a large hole in the left wall, but more light comes from ahead of me.

I step around the bend, and the air disappears from my lungs.

Chapter 9

Liam

I stand in the opening of the third cave, waiting. I wanted Serena to find the treasure herself, if there even is a treasure, so I had the pilot drop me off here.

But there may also be another reason.

“Do you think she’s chickening out?” Caleb asks.

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I grin at him and Amelia and my grandfather, all leaning against the inner cave wall, hugging it like they are afraid they will fall off into the ocean. Getting them here wasn't easy. But it will be worth it for the look on Serena's face when she steps around that bend. If she does. Did she find it? I'm dying to run out there and help her look.

"It's hard to back out of a wedding you don't know is happening. Which is why I didn't tell her," I say.

"She might push you into the ocean."

She might.

But just as I think that, the most beautiful woman in the world steps out of the cave opening and into my view.

Her hand flies to her mouth. "Liam?" she squeaks. Her gaze flits between the people gathered around, people who I know love her nearly as much as I do. "What's going on?"

"Oh yeah, you missed my question." I smirk, stalking toward her. "Will you marry me?"

Her eyes widen like a cartoon character. "Now?"

"Yes, now."

“But what about the treasure?” She holds up a dusty rucksack. Old me would be ripping into that bag, but new me couldn't care less what's inside that dirty bag.

“I already found the real thing.”

“What?”

“Six months ago, when you came back into my life. I found the treasure I've been searching for my whole life. My one and only.”

Tears spring to her eyes, and she blinks rapidly, trying and failing to force them back.

I drop to my knee on the rough cave floor. Rocks dig into my skin, but I barely feel them.

“Marry me, Serena,” I whisper, trying to portray the extent of my love and desperation for her. I'll never be able to though.

“You mischievous little...” she shakes her head with a laugh. “Aren't you supposed to let the woman plan the wedding?”

I raise a brow. “Did you want to?”

“Not at all.” She laughs. “This is absolutely insane, but yes, I'll marry you, right here, right now.”

“Well, get on up here then,” Grandpa breaks in with a laugh.

“You got ordained?” Serena asks.

“Sure did. I also got my pilot's license. Liam said I could take the helicopter for a spin

later.”

“I most definitely did not.” I chuckle.

“It was worth a shot.” Grandpa sighs. “Alright, are we ready to begin?”

“Wait!” Amelia speaks up for the first time. I’m honestly surprised she lasted this long. “Serena, can I be your maid of honor?”

Serena fights a smile. “Fine.”

Amelia squeals and hugs her then places herself on Serena’s other side. I turn to Caleb. “What do you say, sport?”

“I’m not even sure I should support this union,” Caleb says. Amelia glares at him and he sighs. “But I’ll admit, you’ve made my partner happy, and that’s all that matters to me.”

I pat his shoulder. “We’ll be best friends before you know it.”

“I could still push you off this cliff.”

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“You need some more time; I get it. We’ll start simple—dinner parties in my penthouse.”

Caleb clenches his jaw and turns his attention to my grandfather, who is smiling so big he has tears in his eyes.

“We are here today to join this man and this woman...” My attention slips away from his words as the feeling of love nearly knocks me off-kilter. Never in my life have I been surrounded by such an overwhelming feeling of completeness. Never in my life did I think I’d find Serena, that I’d get a chance to redeem myself and marry her. But here I am.

“Liam?”

I blink, looking at my grandfather.

“Your vows?”

“Oh, right.” I turn my attention to Serena. “I’ve been planning our wedding for months. When we got to London two days ago, I put Amelia and Caleb on a plane to meet us here. I planned on marrying you beneath that willow tree where you first kissed me. But then I remembered this spot when I read the journal and knew this is where I wanted to surprise you. I texted them all to get here, then plans changed because we like to keep each other on our toes.” I grin at her and a slight blush finds her cheeks.

“You set this all up?” She shakes her head in disbelief. “Was this a fake treasure

hunt?”

“No, the treasure hunt was very much real, as real as the treasure in your hands. It was simply luck our first clue was beneath a dress store. I did lie about the jewelry store though. There was no connection. I just needed to pick up this.” I slip the ring box from my pocket. I open the box to reveal the vintage ring with a large oval diamond surrounded by smaller diamonds, like it’s the sun. She’s my sun, my light, everything. I designed it my first week in Phoenix. Yes, I was bored, but I wanted to be ready for the right time. Which I found.

“Is this stolen?” she whispers.

“Like I’d tell you if it was.” I slip the ring onto her finger. She immediately cradles it to her chest.

Her bottom lip trembles. “You’ve been telling me your vows this whole trip, haven’t you?”

“I have. Because I want you to know I’m not in this for today only, but forever. Every day I’ll repeat my vows. Every day I will prove myself to you. I promise, Serena, I’ll love you more than you have ever been loved before. You’ve made me an honest man, and I will be the man you deserve for the rest of your life. You will always be my greatest treasure.”

She’s crying. I’m crying. I’m pretty sure the only one not crying is Caleb. Does the man even have a heart?

“Serena,” Grandfather says, “your turn for the vows.”

Serena shakes her head, swiping at her tears. “I thought falling for you would be the biggest mistake of my life. But you are the best thing that has happened to me. When

we were kids and now. You bring the color to my life. You make me laugh, make me dream. Sometimes you make me curse,” she grins, “but I only want to curse and dream with you. You showed me true love, and I will show you true love in return for the rest of our lives. I couldn’t imagine a better ending for us.”

“Oh darling. This isn’t the end,” I whisper. We have so much life ahead, filled with the love we both dreamed of.

Grandpa Henry clears his throat. “By the power vested in me, I pronounce you husband and wife.”

“Come here, wife.” I grab my bride and dip her, giving her a kiss I’ve been dreaming about all day. The last six months, I’ve thought of nothing else than this. Of marrying the woman I love. And I show her just how much I love her with every brush of my lips for a very long time.

“We, um, need another picture pose,” Amelia cuts in. “Maybe one where you’re looking at the camera?”

Serena pulls out of my grasp and turns to smile at our guests, but I last all of two seconds smiling toward the phone before my wife steals my attention again. My wife.

Only when Amelia has posed us fifteen different ways and is content with the variety of photos does Serena remember the treasure.

“We need to open it!” she says excitedly.

“You do it.” It could be a potato in that sack and I would still be smiling like a fool.

“Okay.” Serena takes a deep breath, and everyone gathers around as she loosens the ties on the bag.

She pulls a dust-covered book from the bag.

“A book?” Amelia asks, deadpan. “That was anti-climactic.”

Serena turns the book over and reads the title. “The Mysteries of Ireland.”

“It seems the adventure has only begun.” I grin.

“Let me guess. You won’t be starting on Tuesday,” Caleb says.

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“You’re learning quickly, partner. I’ve got to take my wife on a honeymoon now, don’t I?” I grin and slap him on the back. “Also, there’s a treasure hunter named Howie Garfield running around Europe causing problems. Take care of that for me, would you?”

Epilogue

Liam

One week later

“Are you sure you’re ready to move in with me?” I ask Serena on the way up to her terrible—and I can’t emphasize this enough—liability of an apartment. Plus, her neighbor is a total creep who checks her out all the time. The second we landed from our honeymoon, approximately one hour ago, I insisted it was time for her to move in with me. But I want to make sure she’s ready.

“I did marry you.” She chuckles. She did. I have the wedding band and certificate to prove it. And after that honeymoon...well, I’ll just stop there.

“We’ll start house shopping soon,” I say, grabbing her bags so she can unlock the door.

“We don’t need to—” her words die off and she screams. “What is this?”

I peer around her, confirming what I hoped. Rico came through.

“Surprise!”

Her head swivels slowly in my direction. “When I said I wished we could take the treasure home, I didn’t mean literally.”

I purse my lips. “You didn’t?”

That’s right. We found the treasure, hidden under a locked door beneath a lighthouse in Northern Ireland. The key I found at the Cillian Moore cottage was the perfect fit for the lock. We had to move it quickly though because Howie was still on our trail. So I had it shipped back here before we decided which museum would receive it while Howie is safely on the bad side of the law, thanks to some damage he caused to the historic lighthouse.

“You filled my house with stolen goods!” She stomps into the room, and I walk more gently in behind her, closing the door before her creepy neighbor comes out of his rathole.

“I just wanted a chance to inspect the pieces, then I promise we will donate most of it.”

Her chin tilts to the side. “Definemost.”

I throw my hands up. “Okay, all.” Good thing I already got what I really wanted from this hunt—her.

There’s a knock on the door and Serena jumps but makes no move to answer it, so I grab the handle for her.

“We came to help you mov—” Amelia’s voice drops off abruptly when she sees the gold, silver, and diamond antiques covering every square inch of the room. She

rushes inside and shuts the door behind her, eyes wide and worried. “You have to hide that! Caleb’s on his way here with my brother.”

“Ah, it will be lovely to see your brother again. What’s his name? Connor?”

Amelia stares at me. “You’ve seen my brother?”

“Just once in the hospital, though I don’t suppose you remember. It’s all right. I’ll forgive you for not making the introduction.”

Amelia looks around me at Serena. “Does this man want to go to jail?”

“I believe so,” Serena agrees.

There’s another knock on the door and I reach for it, but Amelia plants herself in front of the door like a barricade, and Serena pulls me back.

“Hide it!” Amelia yells. She and Serena get to work shoving priceless artifacts hastily into boxes.

“Whoa, calm down. You two are destroying works of art!” I yell, completely horrified.

“Yeah, well, if it’s not hidden, the next work of art to be destroyed will be your face,” Serena snaps.

“Courtesy of my boyfriend,” Amelia adds.

“Please, Caleb wishes he could take me,” I scoff.

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This is said the second the door opens and Caleb walks in.

I turn to him with a grin. “Terrible timing as always, Harris.”

“What have you done?” he grunts.

“Oh, Amelia and Serena were helping me pack up this stuff to take it to the museum. By the time we get there, it might be worth nothing, but hey, they wanted to help.”

“You’re making them do your dirty work.” He glowers at me.

“Are you jealous? You seem jealous.” He nearly growls, and I step back, my hands raised in a peaceful approach. “I get it. I didn’t give you any of the credit, and that was wrong. So let’s just tell your boss that you found it. Deal?”

“I’m going to kill you.”

The words are barely out of his mouth before I take off. But he doesn’t follow me, so I stop just outside the door in time to hear him laugh. “Working with him is going to be fun.”

It really is.

Epilogue 2:

Serena

Eighteenmonthslater

I'm exhausted. It's been a long shift and I just want to get in the hot tub and relax.

I stow my gun and badge in the safe in the wall and go in search of the man who will be giving me a massage.

"Liam?" I call through the mansion he insisted on buying this month. I told him quaint and homey. He got that, in a size XXL.

"In the living room."

"Which one?" This house is so stinking big, I've gotten lost ten times in the two days we've lived here.

"Your favorite."

So not helpful. I wander a few more halls and then stop short at the unfamiliar and dangerous sight in front of me.

"Liam, put the baby down."

Liam looks up from the chunk of chub he's cuddling on our living room couch—the chunk of chub that doesn't belong to us.

"Whose child did you steal?" I approach the couch slowly, artfully, like I'm negotiating with a terrorist. This might be more dangerous.

"Amelia said I could take him for a bit. She was tired. I was doing her and little Alec here a favor."

I slap a hand to my forehead. “Caleb is going to have you arrested!” Amelia and Caleb got married one year ago and proceeded to have a honeymoon baby. And Liam hasn’t shut up since about wanting one himself. The man is scary baby hungry.

“I promise I’ll give him back.” Liam hugs the baby closer. “Come on, you know you want to cuddle him.”

“Put. The. Baby. Down.”

“Where’s my wife and child?” Caleb comes running into the house, without knocking, though I feel he has a right to with what’s at play.

His eyes go wide when he sees his infant in Liam’s arms. “Give me back my baby.” He reaches for him, but Liam gently maneuvers away.

“Now, now, you’re supposed to say please.”

I step in between the two of them and take the baby from Liam. I turn toward Caleb, but he backs up and crosses his arms, in no hurry to take his son from me, it seems. Probably because I haven’t held this little bundle of joy yet, no matter how many times I’ve been told to. Because I knew exactly what would happen when I did—what Liam is hoping will happen. I brush my thumb over the little one’s chunky cheeks and adorable little nose. He’s heavenly. Dang it, now I want one.

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I look up at the now silent men, who are both smiling eerily at me.

“What?”

“You look good with a baby.” Liam wiggles his eyebrows.

“I rarely agree with your husband, but he’s right. You do,” Caleb adds.

“Stop it.” I try to hand Caleb his baby, but he steps farther away then looks at Liam again.

“Wait. Where’s my wife? And exactly how did you get my son?”

“Relax,” Liam says, walking down the hall. “Amelia came over to see the new house. We only made it as far as the first guest room.” He quietly cracks open the door to the room where Amelia is sprawled out face first on the bed, snoring and drooling. “She’s been out for almost two hours.”

Caleb shakes his head with a chuckle. “Alec doesn't let her get much sleep.”

Liam raises a brow. “I don’t need to remind you to take care of your woman, now do I, Harris?”

Caleb narrows his eyes and takes Alec from me, finally muttering, “You just had to marry the one person I can’t stand, didn’t you?” He carries the baby inside and sits down by Amelia, stroking her hair gently. She startles and wakes. Caleb presses a kiss to her forehead.

I pull the door closed, forcing Liam back to the living room with me. “Admit it; you want a baby now,” he says the second we are alone.

“Maybe.” I sigh, plopping down on the couch. Liam picks up my feet and massages my soles. “But we’ve talked about this. How can I be a mom and be an FBI agent?”

“Easy. I’ll be the stay-at-home dad while you go save the world,” Liam says.

I open an eye that managed to fall closed. “Retirement is killing you, isn’t it?”

“So much.”

I didn’t tell him to retire. He chose it for me, though he does still help a few people on the side, people who have been scammed and taken advantage of financially. He helps right wrongs done to them, crossing lines law enforcement can’t in mostly legal ways. He’s amazing at it, but I can tell he’s antsy for more.

Plus, I’m kind of jealous of my partner because that baby is adorable. I know babies aren’t easy, but my clock is ticking. It’s now or never. I never thought I’d have a chance at my own loving family. But here we are. Who better to share that love with than a child?

“You know you can’t teach children forgery and lock picking,” I tell Liam.

“Says who?”

“Or take them jumping out of helicopters.”

“Agreed. We’ll save that for age four at least.”

I roll my eyes. “And you can’t—”

“Are you going to take all my fun away?”

I bite back a smile. “I was just going to say, you can’t love our child more than I do.”

“Want to make a bet?”

I shake my head. “You’re ridiculous but...okay.”

Liam’s head jerks up. “Wait, really?”

I nod. “Let’s make a baby.”

“Please wait till we leave,” Caleb grunts.

“Make it quick, Harris.” Liam grins, dropping my foot and moving to lean over me. He kisses me. Somewhere in the house, a door shuts. Let’s hope they left.

“We’re going to have a whole slew of beautiful little vigilantes,” Liam murmurs against my lips.

That’s what I’m afraid of. But maybe looking forward to as well. “I can’t wait.”

The End