



INVITATION

LED *to* DEN

QUEEN'S KNIGHT

SARA
FAWKES

New York Times & USA Today Bestselling Author

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Evan McQueen had his entire life planned out. Poised to potentially take over a multi-billion dollar corporation, this trip to the island resort of Eden is Evan's chance to make a good impression on the billionaire CEO. He thought he knew where his life was going...until a blonde vision stomping across the hotel lobby wearing dirt bike boots shattered all his preconceived notions.

~*~

Serving temporarily as the island's tour guide and resident mechanic, Dani has seen countless guests come and go from Eden. She should be focusing on her upcoming 'round-the-world journey and the day-to-day life of the island, not the man who sets her heart on fire. As much as she knows it's temporary—they both have their own lives to lead—Dani can't get Evan out of her head...or her heart.

~*~

Dani Knight is unlike anybody Evan's ever encountered, a woman unafraid to defy convention. She immediately fascinates Evan, and he can't seem to get enough of her. The more he reveals, the more she sees a kindred spirit in need of guidance, but she can't make his decisions for him. She's seen the island work miracles before, but can it bring together two souls going down vastly different paths?

Queen's Knight: An Invitation to Eden story

By Sara Fawkes

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CHAPTER ONE

Evan tugged on his tie, rubbing the material through his fingers. He peered around the cabin of the plane at the other occupants, then back at the tablet in his hand. Showing nervousness wouldn't do, most definitely not now in the confines of the private plane. They'd been in the air for only an hour; there was no reason for him to fidget.

Easier said than done.

Logging into the satellite wifi available on the company plane, Evan quickly checked his emails, the newest being a short note from his father.

Don't screw up this opportunity.—Dad

The corner of Evan's mouth turned down. Gee, no pressure right?

"Ooh, I see the island!"

The blonde woman's voice across from Evan jarred him from his reverie and he glanced at her before looking out the window. Sure enough, a lone island broke the endless ocean they'd been flying over. While the plane wasn't close enough to make out features, the castle and its grounds were visible from even this distance.

Evan leaned into the glass, impressed. *Wow.* The island rose behind the castle, as if providing a backdrop only to further showcase the man-made areas. He could see the landing strip right next to the jungle, and felt the plane bank toward it. The line of trees on one side looked as though they were ready to engulf the roadway and take back their island.

It really was spectacular, and Evan wondered how it would look from the ground.

"I think I see a golf course down there." A spectacled face peeked around the chair in front of Evan. "Are you a golfer, Mr. Hamilton?"

"I am," the large man replied simply. Evan had found out quickly that the CEO of Hamilton Industries was not prone to socializing, or talking. Or smiling.

"Perfect!" Preston Maas gave the billionaire a wide smile, undeterred. "We'll have to tee off sometime this week." His eyes slid to Evan and, though the smile didn't waver, he thought he saw a hint of a smirk on the other man's face before it disappeared around the chair.

The condescension he saw there was a stark reminder of why he was here. He finally stopped fiddling with his tie and sat up straighter in the chair. He had been given a chance at the opportunity of a lifetime, and he'd be damned if he let it slip through his fingers.

Housed inside the plane were the final three candidates for CEO of Hamilton Industries, a multi-billion dollar firm whose current leader was stepping down. Evan's eyes travelled to the blonde woman still staring out the window. Lucy Delacourt was the fiancé of Jeremiah Hamilton, and the two couldn't be more dissimilar. However, it was obvious to anyone who had eyes that they loved one another; Jeremiah kept a possessive hand on her thigh, which she covered with hers.

Evan didn't know their story; their private lives had been very hush-hush. He'd done his homework however, as well as listened. She had accompanied her fiancé to scout out the location as a wedding venue, both of them having received individual invitations.

Speaking of invites... Evan turned over the square card in his lap, then lifted the tab to peek inside. The gold leaf reflected in the midday sun, briefly dazzling Evan.

He hadn't known what to think when he'd received the invitation. In fact, he'd almost thrown it away, thinking it was junk mail, before deciding to research it first. Thank goodness he'd kept it, because the next day at work he'd received a call from Jeremiah Hamilton's office.

Apparently, the invitation was worth a whole lot, and also meant that he was one of the final candidates for the position of CEO. The invite hadn't come from Jeremiah however—Evan had no idea how it worked, but the island's owner had issued the invite personally.

He'd tried to find out about the man but hadn't managed to get much, other than that he was secretive and rich as Midas. Evan slanted a glance at Jeremiah. He had a feeling the two billionaires knew one another, although he wasn't sure how.

With a snort, the older man across from him came awake. A thick hand smoothed over his bald head as Griffin Sinclair peeked out the window, blinking slowly. "Ah, we're almost there," he said cheerfully, sitting up straighter in the chair. One hand clinked the half-dozen or so tiny single-serve bottles of liquor on the table next to him.

He gave Evan a grin, his red nose shining. "You might not want to walk in front of me when we exit."

Evan turned toward the window again, grinning to himself. While Preston annoyed him, Griffin was actually pretty amusing. The man honestly didn't care what others thought of him. The first thing he'd done upon entering the plane was raid the liquor cabinet, then settle himself in surrounded by the tiny bottles. He and Jeremiah had bantered back and forth, the CEO's demeanor as close to humorous as Evan had ever seen.

Part of him envied the man, but Evan couldn't afford at that moment to slip up and say the wrong thing. So he stayed silent as the island grew to encompass the windows, and the plane touched down.

Griffin was the first to stand, although he swayed in place for a moment. "Unless you're willing to catch me, kid," he said to Evan, giving him a wink, "you might want to give me wide berth."

Ahead of them, Preston gave a derisive snort and jockeyed into position right behind Jeremiah. Evan glared at the other man's head. *What an asshole.*

Maashole.

The name fit almost too perfectly, and Evan grinned.

When he stepped off the plane, the first thing to hit him was the heat and humidity, a reminder that they were in the Caribbean. Truthfully, it wasn't as bad as Evan had feared, but he still saw Griffin pull out a handkerchief and dab at his forehead.

A large cart was positioned nearby the steps to take them up to the castle itself. Two men in white uniforms waited patiently for their luggage, and loaded up the bags as the plane's inhabitants found seats. Griffin was already looking red, as if the heat didn't agree with him.

"Water, sir?" one of the drivers said to Evan, holding out a bottle that was already growing dew-soaked in the humidity. Evan shook his head, then gave a short jerk of the chin toward Griffin, who happily accepted it.

"Serves me right for commandeering all that booze," the older man lamented, but Evan didn't think he sounded all that apologetic.

The island was incredible. Thick-leaved trees and fern lined the runway, right up to the edge of the tarmac. While Evan had been in the Caribbean before, he'd never seen it quite as wild as this. A line of brilliantly colored birds flew across their path, their calls dancing on the wind.

If the castle had seemed majestic from a distance, it was utterly breathtaking up close. The architecture was decidedly European, as if somebody had transplanted a medieval kingdom to the middle of the Caribbean. All else however was definitely the island, from the palm and banana trees to the ferns and bright tropical flowers.

Evan's stress melted away as he gazed at the surroundings. It was difficult to think of this as a business trip and not a vacation. He had no idea what the week would bring, but maybe it wouldn't be as bad as he feared.

That's when she walked through the door.

The clomp of heavy boots were what caught Evan's attention, and then he couldn't take his eyes off her. She carried a motorcycle helmet and wore brightly colored clothing with thick bulges around her knees and elbows. Strawberry blonde hair was all akimbo, her face red from either the sun or the wind.

The woman walked right up to the lobby clerk and spoke quietly to him, then laughed. The sound flowed to him, echoing around the large room. Evan felt as if it flowed right through him, and his heart beat faster.

He couldn't take his eyes away. She was magnificent.

She said something else then turned away, and paused when she caught sight of him. His heartbeat quickened as they stared at one another across the room.

"Evan?"

The familiar voice jarred him back to the present. It felt like tearing himself away from something precious to look away and into the face of the expectant Jeremiah. "Yes, sir."

The CEO's eyes narrowed and he followed where Evan's gaze had been. When the younger man looked again, he saw a fleeting glimpse of red-blond hair disappear out the side door, then the telltale sound of a motorcycle engine. Disappointment arced through him.

Jeremiah gave Evan a bemused glance. "For this week at least, you don't need to refer to me as *sir*."

"Yes..." Evan choked on the word. For a moment, he thought he saw amusement flit through Jeremiah's eyes although the other man's mouth didn't twitch. When the larger man turned away, Evan felt himself deflate.

So much for impressing the CEO.

"Cheer up, buddy." Preston smacked Evan hard across the shoulders, a big grin on his face. "Not everyone's cut out for the business life. Why don't you go enjoy the spa and let the big dogs play?"

The condescending smirk on the other man's face made Evan's blood boil. He watched Preston trail after Jeremiah, carrying on a conversation with the CEO and his fiancé.

Evan sighed. All he wanted to do was find his room, unpack, and figure out how he was going to do this week.

Or, go find the motorcycle-riding vision that had started this whole mess. If he was honest with himself, that was higher on his current list of priorities.

But for now, he took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and marched inside.

CHAPTER TWO

Hello everyone!! Sorry I've been away for so long, it's been an amazing two months!

First off, I need to thank everyone who's donated so far to the crowd-funding kicker – YOU GUYS ROCK!! I've also made a ton of contacts, and picked up a few more sponsors. The more the merrier!

Currently, I'm sitting in my hotel room, overlooking the most beautiful ocean view I've ever seen. I've already told you about how I got here, but I still can't quite believe it myself. I mean, I even got it all on video, but it feels like it happened to someone else.

I've been working as a guide here on the island, mostly chaperoning the folks around on their various adventures. Eden is awesome, and you get such a wide variety of folks. Since I've been here, we've had rock stars, CEOs, and everything in between. We got another bunch of suits today, one of whom wouldn't stop looking at me.

It was like he'd never seen a girl in motocross boots. Go figure, right?!

A knock on the door startled Dani. She looked up from the blog post she was writing on her computer, then pushed back the chair and stood up. The marble floors felt deliciously cool beneath her bare feet as she padded across the room and peeked around the door.

"Oh good, you haven't left already!"

Rose had never been one to recognize personal space. The older woman slipped past Dani, peering around the room. "I always worry that one of these days, you'll get on that bike of yours, tear off into the wilds and not look back."

"Hey, I'd at least say goodbye to you first," Dani protested, aiming a mock kick at her friend's backside, which Rose easily eluded.

"Ah yes, the perks of working HR. I'd hold your last paycheck hostage forever if you didn't let me send you off right."

Dani just grinned. Rose Primm wasn't exactly the most tactful of personalities, but she and Dani got along well. A person always knew where they stood with Rose. She looked matronly, and had a great way with the guests, but there was a reason she usually stayed in the office: she wasn't afraid to say if she didn't like someone, even to their face.

"So, are you just here to bug me, or do you have someone looking for adventure tours?"

"As a matter of fact, I might have a bite for you." She grabbed an open bag of trail mix from the desk and plopped down on Dani's couch. "Mostly though, I'm here to bug you."

"I figured as much." Blog post momentarily forgotten, Dani plopped down beside her friend, taking a handful of mix from the proffered bag. "Don't you have work to do?"

"Girl, this is Eden. Things always get done eventually." She shoveled another handful of trail mix into her mouth. "And anyway, most of us *employees* are as much guests here as everyone else, as you well know."

"Yeah," Dani mused, looking around her room, "it's gonna suck to leave here."

"You know you don't have to."

Dani looked over at her friend, but Rose wouldn't meet her eyes. One corner of Dani's mouth tipped up. She didn't say anything but laid her head on the other lady's shoulder.

Rose didn't have too many friends, mainly because she had little to no brain-to-mouth filters. The trait that Dani appreciated in her friend tended to turn off most other people. "You can still come with me, you know. I'd love some company."

But Rose snorted and shook her head. "This place would go to pot if I left. Besides, why the hell would I give up the perfect job to get Malaria in some foreign country?"

"Technically, they have pills that help prevent that."

"You're living proof they don't always work."

Dani winced, remembering her time in Mexico. "Yeah, that part of the trip kind of sucked. I thought it was Montezuma's revenge until an African backpacker made me go to the doctor. Ended up being laid up in the hostel for two weeks because of it."

"And you really want me to come along with you?"

"Oh, it's not so bad most of the time." But travelling like that wasn't for everyone, and Dani knew it. True, it got lonely sometimes, and having a companion would make certain aspects easier.

"So when do you leave?" Rose asked after a moment of silence.

Dani shrugged a shoulder. "I was thinking in four to five weeks. The crowd-funding campaign is going well and I've gotten quite a few sponsors."

"I still think you're an idiot," Rose said bluntly, but there was affection in her tone. The older lady bumped Dani with her shoulder. "Want to go down by the pool? Payroll's done for the day and I need a drink."

Dani looked back at her computer wistfully. She needed to update her blog, let folks know plans. For many friends and family she'd left behind, her blog and email was their only connection to her life. She'd been having such a blast lately that she'd fallen behind on updates.

But one look at Rose's sardonic expression reminded her she had a friend here. "Yeah, sure. Let me grab my bathing suit."

*

Calling the water feature toward the rear of the castle a "pool" was an understatement, but there was no single word to describe it. Maybe "lake", or a large pond, but it was all man made and one of the most gorgeous parts of an already phenomenal location. Sunlight danced across the top of the clear water, bright lines dancing around the ripples. Palm trees and cabanas lined the edges, giving shade from the warm Caribbean sun.

Rose quickly ditched her sarong on a nearby bench and moved to the water eagerly. The curvier woman never seemed self-conscious about her body, a trait Dani envied. She'd been given one of the long wraps early on by Rose but didn't get to use it much. For a while, Dani had been busy running adventure tours for the island until the weather grew too warm. Nowadays, she more enjoyed soaking up the indoor air conditioning and planned her trip.

There weren't too many people out at the pools, which made her feel a bit more open. Untying the red sarong from her shoulder, she slid it off her body, revealing a white bikini bathing suit she'd rarely worn. It felt strange to reveal so much skin; she'd never been a bikini kind of girl before Eden.

She laid the thin cloth and towel next to Rose's green sarong on a nearby chair. The other lady was already in the water, floating on her back and staring up at the bright sky. Dani dipped one foot in the pool, and found it pleasantly cool. She could count on one hand the number of

times she'd actually been in the pool. There was no reason why she wasn't enjoying this place more, except that she felt like someone had made a mistake, that she didn't belong here.

"Ah, this is the life," Rose murmured, taking a few backstrokes through the water. "A nice breeze, cool water, and the thrill of knowing I'm done for the day. All that's missing is a drink in my hand."

"Perhaps I can help with that."

A large man with a big smile had materialized near Rose, holding a drink in each hand. Rose gave him a sharp glance and rolled her eyes. "Buzz off weirdo, she's too young for you."

"I can only see the vision before me." Indeed, the newcomer's attention seemed focused on Rose. He was a larger man, balding on top and with a paunch to rival Santa Claus and a red nose that belied his current sobriety. He did, however, seem fascinated by the prickly woman. "My name's Griffin," he said, sounding fairly sober at least, "and I'd *really* like to buy you a drink."

Rose threw Dani a bemused look, then her eyes narrowed as she addressed the other man. "What the hell have you been smoking?" she demanded, and Dani winced.

If anything, however, her reply only made the man's grin grow larger. "If I can buy you a drink," he said, winking, "maybe I'll even share."

This made Rose's eyebrows rise, momentarily rendering her speechless. "Well," she said after a moment, shooting looks between Griffin and Dani, "I won't say no to a free drink."

Dani managed to hold her giggles in somehow, then caught sight of another person watching her from across the pool.

The suit from the lobby. He was sitting under the shaded awning at the nearby cafe, but she could tell he was watching her. In the same way prey knows it was being hunted, she felt his gaze on her body.

Well, honey, she thought, blatantly zeroing in on him as well, *two can play at that game.*

Even from a distance, she could tell he was handsome. The contrast in light from the dark cafe and the sunny pool area made it so she couldn't tell his coloring, but she remembered the brown hair from the lobby. He was wearing a suit and tie again, an older look that made her wonder again at his age. She'd seen an almost yearning in his eye in the lobby, but they were too far apart now to tell what he was thinking.

"Dani, you coming?"

She looked back at Rose, who was standing suspiciously close to Griffin. The man's hand was on the other woman's lower back almost possessively, but the real miracle was that Rose didn't seem to mind. "I'll follow you in a minute."

She let the water buoy her up, skipping along the bottom of the pool. The couple swam for the bar that sat in the center of the pool as Dani hung back. A sneaking glance at the man nearby told her he was still watching her, although a bit more surreptitiously this time.

Dani stopped, then openly turned and stared. She was being a wuss, flaking out on adventure. What had happened to YOLO, trying out new and different things?

She swam sideways, straight toward the cafe. Behind her, Rose called her name but, for the moment, Dani ignored her. The other woman would want a full report of all that happened, so might as well make it interesting.

He'd looked away when she first approached, as if realizing he'd been caught staring. Up close like this, he was even more handsome, with blond hair and tanned skin. He was younger than she thought, given his attire, and as she got to the edge of the pool, she cocked her head to the side.

“Why would someone under thirty in today’s day and age want to wear a tie, unless they were Christian Grey?”

CHAPTER THREE

It was the white bikini, Evan decided. He'd always been a sucker for white bikinis.

There was no getting away from it now; he'd been caught. Ignoring her question was unthinkable, so he just grinned and shrugged. "Maybe I'm here for the Christian Grey convention?"

That got a laugh out of her, the same infectious chuckle he'd heard in the lobby. Her breasts bobbed with her laughter, and he had to work hard not to let his gaze slip south. The water hid most of her curves but he'd watched her get into the water, watched her slip off that yellow cover.

God, he felt like a pervert who'd been caught snooping. But she was smiling up at him, and he couldn't help but return the expression. The stress of the last few days—really, since he'd gotten word he'd been chosen as one of Jeremiah Hamilton's candidates for replacement—melted under that look.

"So, what are you here for?" she asked, crossing her arms on the edge of the pool and resting her chin on them.

"Job interview."

Her brow furrowed. "For here?"

He shook his head. "No, this job is far, far away from here, although working in a place like this would be less stressful."

"Gotta admit, it's pretty stinking awesome here. I run the island tours, at least the kind you can do on the ground. Most folks just do the hikes but we do ATVs and dirt bike tours too."

"Yeah, I saw you in your motorcycle getup."

She cocked her head at him. "Do you ride?"

"I did as a kid. Mostly dirt bikes around my grandfather's property in Pennsylvania." He stood up and walked over, squatting next to the pool and holding out his hand. "Evan McQueen."

"Dani Knight. Pleased to meet you."

She had gorgeous eyes, a light brown that looked hazel in the sun. The small line of freckles peppered across her nose charmed him. There wasn't a bit of makeup on her face, and for someone used to such things in every woman he'd met, the lack of artifice was refreshing.

From this angle, Evan was getting an eyeful, but he was enraptured by the whole package. "So," he asked, shifting his weight to sit on his heels, "how did you manage to get a job in paradise?"

"Now, *there's* a story. It involves a broken down bike, a Costa Rican hellhole, and what I'm guessing are hacked spy satellites to find me." Her eyes danced with humor. "You have a few minutes?"

Right as Evan was about to say *Hell yeah*, out of the corner of his eye he saw a large man enter the cafe area and sit down alone. Evan shut his mouth with an audible click, quickly assessing the situation. The Maashole was nowhere to be found, nor was Jeremiah's fiancé. It

was the perfect opportunity to have some one-on-one face time with the billionaire, and hopefully make a good impression.

“I take it that’s your boss?”

Dani’s voice brought him back to the present. She’d followed his gaze, and Evan could hear the disappointment in her tone. It was on the tip of his tongue to lie, to say no he had all the time in the world to listen to her stories of Central American hellholes and adventure.

Don’t screw up this opportunity. His father’s advice rolled through his mind like a cleansing tide. “Yeah,” he finally answered, as disappointed by the opportunity as she seemed.

“Well, I don’t want to screw things up for you.” She pushed off from the edge, floating in the water. “Maybe I’ll see you around?”

Evan desperately wanted her to stay and talk to him more, but forced himself to stand upright. “I’d really like that.”

She turned away first, swimming toward the bar that sat in the middle of the giant pool. Evan watched her go, his heart growing heavier with the increasing distance, then took a deep breath and turned toward Jeremiah’s location.

The CEO acknowledged Evan almost immediately. “How are you enjoying the island?”

“It’s fantastic.” Dani’s face immediately flashed through Evan’s mind. “Full of pleasant surprises. If you’re not busy, I’d…”

“Jeremiah, so sorry I’m late!”

The boisterous, over-loud voice of Preston Maas filled the small space. Evan winced as the volume of the other man’s voice boomed around the covered patio. His interruption was unobtrusive and as transparent as the over-bright, false smile plastered across his face.

Even Jeremiah’s lips thinned at the intrusion, but he still acknowledged the new arrival. “Mr. Maas here and I were set to play some golf. Care to join us?”

Behind Jeremiah, the smile disappeared from Preston’s face. Evan was sorely tempted to take up the offer just to annoy the other man. Unfortunately, Preston’s stormy expression promised that the annoyances would be all on Evan’s end. He wasn’t in the mood to put up with an afternoon full of snide digs and passive aggressive putdowns. He got enough of that at home.

“You two have fun,” he said instead, and then added as an aside to Jeremiah, “hopefully we can meet up and speak privately in the next few days.”

“Our tee time is in fifteen minutes,” Preston interjected before Jeremiah could respond. “Maybe you can find Griffin and hang out with him. He said something about using the spa today, probably getting a massage or pedicure by now.”

The derision in Preston’s voice was evidence in more his tone than the words, but it was the disappointed expression in Jeremiah’s eyes that hit home. As the two men walked off, Evan sat down heavily on a nearby chair. Line by line, he went over the entire conversation in his mind and came up with answers far better than the nothing that had left his lips.

Why couldn’t he come up with those quips on the spot? Why only after the fact?

He ran a hand over his face, suddenly tired, and glanced back toward the pool. The bar in the middle of the water had several people, but he didn’t see the woman in the white bikini.

Regret tore through him. *Dammit.* He’d made the wrong choice.

Evan’s phone buzzed with another email, and he checked it absently. He deflated when he saw it was from his father, and pocketed the phone without reading the note. Gideon McQueen likely wanted a detailed update on how things were going, and wouldn’t be pleased with his son’s apparent lack of progress.

He wasn't in the mood to deal with his father. Flagging down a waiter in khaki shorts, he asked, "Where would I inquire about the island tours?"

CHAPTER FOUR

Dani hated removing stripped bolts, ones that wouldn't come out with any kind of tool but a drill. They always made the supposedly simple jobs like changing a leaky gasket much harder than they should have been.

The handheld impact driver should be turning the bolt, but no matter how much she whaled on the tool it wouldn't budge. She'd already drained the oil, removed the plastics and carburetor, but she couldn't get the rusted bolts loose from the frame. The four-wheeler wasn't giving up its engine without a fight, and Dani was ready to take a hacksaw to the whole thing. Stubbornly resisting the impulse, she almost cried in relief when she finally succeeded in turning the offending bolt a fraction.

Only to pull the tool away and find she'd instead twisted off the entire head of the bolt.

The urge to throw the impact driver across the shop overwhelmed her, but at that moment her cell phone rang. She knew it was a probably a bad idea to talk to anyone right then, but Dani grabbed the phone out of her pocket and answered with a flat, "What."

Silence rang on the other end for a moment. "Baby, did I catch you at a bad time?"

Dani's shoulder slumped, and she stared up at the metal roof of the shop. "Hi mom," she said, plopping down on a nearby work stool. Of all the people to call at that moment, why did it have to be the one Dani needed to be the most careful with?

"You haven't called in a while." Her mother's voice sounded brittle, hurt, and Dani's heart squeezed. "If you're busy, maybe I can call back at a better time."

"No, mama, you just caught me at a bad time." If Dani had known the caller was her mother, she wouldn't have answered. As much as she loved her mother, Ava Knight didn't always see eye to eye with her daughter. Dani wasn't in the mood for lectures, but having answered the phone like that guaranteed at least a few minutes of regular conversation. Yay, the power of guilt. "So, what's new with you?"

"Well, yesterday I got a wedding invitation in the mail from David. I guess he's finally getting married to that girlfriend of his."

Silence fell over the line as Ava awaited her daughter's response, but Dani didn't know what to say, let alone feel. She took a ragged breath as her mother continued. "They've been together almost two years, probably met not long after you...well, afterwards. They look really happy in the pictures." Another pause. "I'm sorry, baby."

Ah, there it was. The old familiar pain. "I'm happy for him," she murmured, but the words rang hollow. David Blake had been Dani's friend for as far back as she could remember, the son of family friends. They'd grown up together, dated all through middle and high school. He'd been her brother James' best friend; everyone had assumed that the two of them would get married.

Then that dream had shattered in a million pieces and everything had gone to pot.

"Your father's out working on the boat," Ava continued quickly, as if only just realizing she probably shouldn't have opened with that tidbit of news. "I can go get him if you'd like, he'd

love to talk to you.”

“No, I, I need to get back to work.” She swallowed thickly, and then took a deep breath. “If you see David, can you please tell him I’m happy for him? Really, I am.”

“You know, it’s not too late for college.”

Dani’s shoulders slumped. “Mom...” she started, already knowing where the conversation was going.

“Plenty of folks start later these days. I know you missed out on the whole college experience...”

“Mom, you do remember I did almost two years of college. Believe me, I didn’t miss out on anything.”

“I’m just saying that, baby, you’re not too old to go back to school.”

Dani blinked. “I’m twenty-four years old, ma,” she said, frowning at the phone. Had her own mother just called her old? “And I’ve already decided college isn’t for me, you know this.”

“Oh honey, I just wish you lived closer. I miss seeing you, and your grandmother is getting older.”

From somewhere behind her mother’s words, Dani heard an older voice squawk, “I’m fit as a fiddle, and you can tell her I said that too.”

Dani grinned, recognizing her grandmother’s voice, but Ava wasn’t finished. “I just worry about you. All those dangerous countries on that motorcycle of yours.” Her voice grew more distressed with each word. “I don’t hear from you for weeks at a time, and I worry that, that...”

“Mom.” Dani readied herself for a battle, but surprisingly her mother immediately subsided. Dani thought a moment about what to say, then sighed. “I love you.”

Silence fell on the other end, and Dani knew her mother had finally gotten the hint. “I love you too, honey. Please, please stay safe.”

“I will, promise.”

Dani knew her mother never believed those promises, but they were all she could give. She hung up the phone, and looked around the garage.

Ten years ago—heck, even just five—she never would have believed she’d be here. This kind of scene had been James’ territory; he’d been the mechanic in the family, the daredevil, the adventurous one. Dani had been the good girl, the one who did what was expected, the one who’d hung on her brother’s every word when he recounted his adventures. She wondered again what he would think of her now.

He’d probably want to give me a high-five. That thought of her brother made her smile.

Sighing, Dani took a step backwards...

...right into the container of oil she’d drained only moments before.

Rose stuck her head in through the door right then before Dani could even get a curse out. “Hey, looks like we’ve got company.”

Kicking and screaming were out then, but she was so not in the mood to entertain guests. She hadn’t even realized Rose was in the other room. The other woman sometimes liked to come down here to do her work, said it gave her a change of pace.

“Give me a minute,” Dani called, pushing back the errant strands of hair with the back of her hand and hopping on one foot, trying to keep her now-oily boot over the container.

Conceding defeat for the moment, she grabbed a nearby shop towel and wiped off her boot, then quickly began putting tools in their rightful places. She’d learned the hard way years ago that tools had a way of disappearing if they weren’t put away immediately.

Oil and grime coated her fingers, and she didn't think customers would appreciate her getting their hands dirty. Usually Eugene, the concierge, sent word ahead of time if anyone wanted to take a ride or hike, so they didn't have many unexpected visitors to the garage.

"Need a hand with anything?"

Dani's head shot up at the familiar voice. Evan stood at the entrance, watched her in bemusement. "Oh, hey," she said, fighting to keep the silly grin that threatened to burst forth off her face. "Well, unless you can magically remove a sheered bolt from this cylinder head, I think we're both SOL."

"If you have a decent power tool with the right sized bits, maybe I can drill and tap you a new threaded hole."

Dani blinked at him. "Whoa." Talk about underestimating someone. "Where'd you learn how to do that?"

"My grandfather used to be a mechanic, did most of the work on his old cars and motorcycles." He walked into the garage and looked around the garage, his face tinged with almost nostalgia. "He taught me a few things the summers I spent down there with him."

"Huh. You may come in handy after all." She continued wiping her hands, studying him as he looked around the small shop. "Decided to take one of the island tours?"

"What can I say?" He grinned, flashing perfect teeth, and Dani's heart skipped a beat. "You made a compelling case at the pool. Although, I'm not quite dressed for the occasion."

God, he's handsome when he smiles. Even in the low light of the garage, his blue eyes sparkled, and she could tell he was excited.

She blew out a breath, trying to keep her response to him hidden. *Business, Dani, this is all business.* "We have gear you can rent, ranging from gloves to full-body armor." She looked him over, liking what she saw. He was over six feet tall, which, as a tall girl herself, suited her just fine.

Stop it. He's a customer, not a date. Get your head on straight.

"What were you thinking about then? The hike is gorgeous, and I know a few ATV trails that are pretty easy."

"What about dirt bikes?"

She tried and failed to keep the answering grin off her face. "Ah, a man after my own heart. You're going to need full body armor then, mainly for safety reasons."

"Whatever the lady decides."

The way he said that made her belly clench, and she turned quickly to hide her reaction. "We have a full assortment of gear," she said, suddenly breathless, "I know something will fit."

Geez Dani, get a grip. Apparently, it'd been too long since she'd had any interest in the opposite sex. Dani couldn't tell if he was being polite or was similarly interested, and she didn't want to know. The nature of the resort was that customers came, enjoyed themselves, and left.

That was her plan too. She didn't intend on staying here much longer, and any romance certainly wasn't in the books for her.

The equipment room was small and cluttered. Evan toed a large container of kitty litter. "Do you have a cat?"

"No, we have a mechanic," Rose piped up from the adjacent office, and Dani grinned.

"We use the litter to help clean up oil spills." She picked up the container and, taking off the lid, sprinkled it liberally over the oil she'd spilled. "Helps wick up the oil and other fluids that are water resistant, making it easier to clean up."

Bending down, she quickly sought to put a few things back where they belonged, muttering about her lack of domestic skills. Most folks who asked for her services wanted to do hikes or the ATVs. “What size shoe do you wear?” she called over her shoulder. He looked like he’d fit a medium pant and jacket, although his broad shoulders might require a large.

“European size or American?”

She started at his voice so close and spun around. Evan stood right behind her, head cocked to one side just studying her. He was standing close but not obscenely so, but Dani could almost feel his presence on her skin. Her heart rate sped up and rational thought fled her mind. *He’s even more gorgeous up close.*

He stepped forward and leaned in, as if to kiss her. Dani trembled, swallowing hard.

“I think these will fit me.”

Dani blinked as he straightened back up, then realized that he was holding a hanger of clothes. Flustered, she cleared her throat and grabbed a set of nearby boots. “Try these and see if they’ll work.”

She hadn’t meant to shove the boots into his chest quite so hard, but his grin just widened. Dani realized he’d likely seen and understood her reaction to him. *Bastard*, she thought, but couldn’t resist an answering grin. He was going to regret that, he just didn’t know it yet.

“Get dressed, and I’ll show you what bikes we’ve got.” Head high, she squeezed past him, ignoring how her skin heated up anywhere it touched him. He smelled divine too, which made her hate him more.

“Yes ma’am,” he called after her, but she didn’t look back. She had the perfect trail for him, one guaranteed to wipe that knowing grin off his face.

Oh yeah. This afternoon was gonna be *fun*.

CHAPTER FIVE

He'd been thrown straight into the deep end and he knew it, but Evan was having a blast.

The motorcycle he'd been given had no lights of any kind, just a plate where the headlight would go, and was much taller than anything he remembered from his youth. It'd been a good while since last he'd ridden a dirt bike but he picked it up again quickly. Which was good, because Dani, his guide, wasn't going easy on him.

Maybe you shouldn't have teased her like that.

Nah, it was all worth it. He'd seen her wide eyes, the way she'd responded to his presence. Kissing her in that closet had more than crossed his mind, but he'd enjoyed it when she saw the jacket and pants in his hand. Normally, he didn't tease ladies but, in this instance at least, it had been fun.

It made him want to do it again. Unfortunately, he was having trouble keeping up with her.

But, oh, what a view.

"I take it you go this way often?" he remarked through the headset. He'd been surprised to find that the helmets had their own set of communications so that the riders could talk to one another. Dani had been quiet for the most part once she'd explained the basics of riding off road and seeing how he was with the bike.

He'd give his right eye to know what she was thinking right then.

"Not really, no," she replied after a brief hesitation. "Although it wouldn't really matter here anyway."

"What do you mean?"

This time the pause was longer, and he thought maybe she was ignoring his question before she finally replied. "The island is strange. I can take a trail I've been down a dozen times before, and every time I go I see something new. It's like the island wants to show itself off and isn't afraid to bend reality a bit."

"Seriously?"

Ahead of him, Dani rolled to a stop, and Evan pulled up beside her. If he thought his bike felt tall to him, Dani's was just as tall if not more so. She actually had to scoot her butt sideways off the seat to get one foot onto the ground, but she didn't seem to have a problem with it.

The jungle around them was alive with sounds that seemed amplified when he shut off the motorcycle. The trail they were following, while rugged, seemed almost grown into the earth, as if it had been planted that way. There were rocks and roots over sections, but that only served to make things more interesting. Even though he hadn't been on a bike in nearly a decade, Evan was surprised to find he hadn't fallen yet.

Not that he would say that aloud. No need to press his luck with fate.

She pulled off her helmet and looked around, a wistful smile on her face. "It's beautiful here, isn't it?"

Despite the beauty around him, Evan couldn't take his eyes away from her. Dani's blonde hair was like a halo around her head, fanning out in the light breeze that swept through the trees.

Her cheeks were flushed, and she looked so goddamn beautiful that he wanted to kiss her right then and there. Instead, he took off his helmet as well, enjoying the cool air on his own skin.

She gestured back the way they came. “The last time I was down this way, the road curved down toward the water, to a beach with a small house on it. The time before that, it led to this cave that had incredible geodes growing out of the walls. When you shone even a penlight in there, the whole place glowed.”

“And where is it leading us today?”

Dani grinned at him. “Want to find out?”

*

The trail ran into a dead end right across from one of the most beautiful waterfalls Evan could remember seeing. Through the helmet, he heard Dani gasp as they parked the bikes. “Well, that’s new,” she murmured, but he could hear the wonder in her voice.

She was already off the bike and heading straight for the water’s edge as Evan dismounted, laying his gloves and jacket across the bike. The waterfall threw clouds of mist into the air, the wind swirling it into little whorls and eddies. Sunlight flared through the trees, giving the air a shimmering quality as various colors played across the area.

Dani knelt down beside the pool, submerging her hand into the water. “Feels great,” she said to Evan, and then began unbuckling her boots.

“What are you doing?” Evan asked, although it was immediately obvious. Dani stepped out of her boots and socks, then the pants she’d worn with her leg armor attached. Evan blinked when she also unzipped the jeans she’d been wearing beneath the over-pants and pulled them down to reveal the white bikini bottoms.

Evan’s breath hitched in his throat. Dani didn’t seem to notice him as she stepped into the pool, giving him an eyeful of beautiful legs and an ass that wouldn’t quit. She still wore the t-shirt, but she looked back and gave him a wink before pulling that over her head and tossing it aside.

“Come on, it feels fantastic.”

But Evan was rooted to the spot. His dick was at full attention, straining against the extra layers he wore. It didn’t matter that she still wore the white bikini; her little strip show had turned him on, and if he took off his clothes there’d be no hiding it.

“Oh come on. Unless you’re chicken?”

Well, damn. He couldn’t stay there with that taunting smile coaxing him on. “I didn’t bring my bathing suit along,” he called, grinning as he unclasped the boots.

“Excuses, excuses.”

The water, he found out only a moment later, did indeed feel incredible. Wearing only his plaid boxers, he settled into the wild pool and swam out toward the center, where Dani was standing on a large boulder partially exposed above the water line.

“See,” she teased, “that wasn’t so hard. Come here, let me show you something.”

She dove off the side of the rock and Evan swam after her toward the waterfall. It was even louder this close, but Dani bypassed the large torrent of water and headed to one side. A smaller channel of water ran down the stone, only a little wider than a person.

“It’s like the perfect slide,” Dani exclaimed, swimming to a straight rock wall just beside it. To Evan’s amazement, she began scaling the dark lava rock, moving easily up its face. Evan found, to his surprise, that the rock was surprisingly dry to the touch compared to the rest of the area, but hesitated in following her up.

She made it look easy, but didn't climb far. There was a ledge Evan hadn't noticed from his position halfway up the wall. Dani stood carefully and made her way toward the falls, with Evan following her sideways down in the water. He wasn't sure what he'd do if she slipped, but he stayed with her.

"Hang on," she called down, then disappeared for a brief instant. The next thing he heard was a howl of laughter, and she slid down the waterway straight for Evan. He had no time to get out of the way, and he got a brief glimpse of her grinning face before she was launched into his arms.

Dani's laughter filled his ears, and instinctively Evan wrapped his arms around her. He managed to find some rock beneath his feet and didn't topple over or go under. Even in the tepid tropical water, her skin was warm against him and soft in all the right places. His hard-on that had been momentarily flagging came roaring back, and he stiffened as she wound her arms around his neck.

She leaned in, brushing his cheek with hers. "Do you want to go next?" she murmured softly against the roar of the falls.

Going down a rock slide was definitely not on the top of his list of things to do at that moment. Dani grinned down at him, her breasts so close to his face, and Evan had to resist the urge to bury his face between them. His hands slid lower to cup her backside, his thumbs playing with the edge of the bikini bottom, and it was her turn to take a ragged breath. The look in her eyes changed, grew suddenly hotter, and her legs tightened around him.

Evan's eyes dropped to her mouth, to the beautiful lips there. She settled against him, her breasts against his chest, and Evan gripped her hips and ground her down against himself. Her mouth formed a perfect circle, nails clinging into his back, but before he could repeat the action or kiss her she hissed suddenly.

"Ow! What the hell?"

Her exclamation startled Evan. "What's wrong?" he demanded, disappointment coursing through him as she suddenly pushed away.

Dani winced, reaching down under the water to rub her leg. "I think something bit me!"

Right as she said it, something cold brushed against Evan's leg too, and he jumped sideways and cursed. "I felt something too."

They exchanged looks, then immediately started swimming toward where they'd left the motorcycles. Evan thought he felt something nibble on him too and swatted beneath the water. As soon as there was land beneath their feet they ran up onto the small beach, then stared back over the water as if waiting for whatever it was to follow them out.

"They don't have, um, piranhas here, do they?" Evan ventured.

"No idea," Dani murmured, breathless. She peered down at her leg, rubbing a spot on the side of her calf. "It just startled me, I wasn't expecting anything else to be here but us."

"Want me to look?"

She shook her head. "No, it's nothing." A sudden giggle escaped her. "Got another story to talk folks at home now. Found a rock slide, then got attacked by killer fish."

Evan chuckled, then looked around. "So, where do you think the island will take us next?"

"Why don't we find out?" She grinned, then motioned down toward his groin. "You're gonna have a hard time riding with that."

"Well, if you hadn't thrown yourself into my arms like that..."

"Oh, yeah, blame the girl." She stuck her tongue out at him, pulling her shirt on over damp skin. "I don't normally jump guys, but you should have moved out of the way."

Evan's grin widened. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had this much fun. To that point, his life had been all about the work.

Dani was dressed and on her bike first, kick-starting the tall motorcycle on. "See if you can catch up," she called before leaning the bike over and twisting the throttle. The bike spun itself around, and Dani took off back down the way they came.

God, what a woman. Evan jammed the helmet on his head, started up his bike, and took off in hot pursuit. The dirt tires bit into the ground as he followed the meandering trail through the jungle, listening for the sound of her bike. "Is this any way to treat a guest?" he said over the intercom.

"Hey, I took it easy on you before. Now the fun part begins."

Evan grinned, noting that the reception was good so they weren't too far apart. A moment later, he spotted her white bike through the trees ahead, and picked up his pace a bit. The rugged trail through the jungle was smoothing out, the trees growing thinner and sparser. Green grass lined the wider section of the road now, and he recognized the spires of the island's castle off in the distance.

Dani was just ahead of him, standing upright on the bike, her knees absorbing the bumps in the road. Evan was steadily gaining on her as the road widened out and flattened more, obviously used more often. He twisted the throttle as they hit a straightaway, and shot past her.

"So, what do I get for catching you?"

"How about a swift kick to the... Oh *shit*."

Evan's rear tire hit a rock he hadn't seen until too late, and the back of the bike slid to the side. For a moment he thought he'd get off easy and just fall down on the inside of his lean.

Then the tires hit the edge of the embankment and caught, ending the slide abruptly. Evan went sailing through the air over the bike, straight toward the mess of vines and greenery beside the road.

Oh damn, this is gonna hurt.

*

Some time later, Evan managed to limp the bike into the garage, with Dani hovering close behind.

"I'm so sorry," she said for what felt like the millionth time, biting her lip as Evan carefully extricated himself from the bike. His shoulder throbbed like crazy, and his hip and right side hurt.

The accident hadn't damaged the bike much beyond cosmetics, and despite Dani's protests he'd insisted on riding it the rest of the way back. They'd still stopped for almost twenty minutes to let Evan get his bearings, but he'd insisted on getting right back on the proverbial horse.

Getting off now, however, hurt worse.

"I can call the doctor," Dani started, then trailed off as Evan waved his hand at her.

"No, I'll be fine."

"Okay then," she said, folding her arms stubbornly, "lift your right arm above your head."

Just thinking about doing that made him wince. "I'll go see him if there's any major problems," he said and then, at Dani's dubious look, added, "I promise."

She helped him out of his gear and made him sit while she put everything away. "You did really good out there. I wasn't going light on you and you kept up."

He grinned at that. "So you think I ride well?"

She looked up at him, saw the smile, and snorted. “Well enough for someone who hasn’t been on two wheels in, what, a decade?”

He hadn’t told her the specifics but she was pretty close. “Hell of a way to ease back into it,” he muttered, flexing his shoulder, and immediately regretted his words when her face fell. “I do know one thing you can do for me though.”

“Anything.”

“Let me take you to dinner.”

Dani’s eyebrows shot up. “Really?” she said, looking perplexed

Despite his aching bones Evan chuckled at her response. “You seem surprised.”

“Yeah. Well, no, not really. I mean, at the pool...” She trailed off, and Evan was amused to see her cheeks go red. “We’re completely different. What would we even talk about?”

“I want to hear your story,” he said. “I know you have one, everybody does. Someone like you, a girl who can out-ride and out-wrench most men, probably has some doozies.”

She just frowned at him, as if she didn’t believe he wasn’t patronizing her. Evan sighed. “You did say ‘anything’,” he reminded her.

“I did, didn’t I?” Her mouth twisted in thought, then tipped up into a smile. “And I do have some good stories.”

“Perfect, then it’s a date.” He stood up, body stiff. “Maybe tomorrow night? I may be poor company tonight.”

She winced in sympathy, but before she could speak Evan held up a hand. “And no more apologies, I’ll count us even.”

She grinned at this. “Fine, tomorrow night.”

He was whistling by the time he made it back to the lobby when he spotted Jeremiah and Preston nearby at the bar. Evan thought about leaving them alone, but he was in a good mood that even the Maashole couldn’t ruin. “How did your day go?” he said, pulling up a stool beside Jeremiah.

Preston didn’t look pleased to see Evan, but Jeremiah spoke up. “We had an aerial tour of the island. Fascinating place.”

“Yes, it is. I got to see a bit of it myself as well.” He flagged down the bartender. “Drinks for my friends here,” he said, then winced as his shoulder cramped.

“You all right?”

Evan flashed his boss a pained smile. “Rode dirt bikes through the jungle today. Had a bit of a get-off that I’m still feeling.”

“You don’t look like the dirt bike type to me,” Preston said in a snide voice, his gaze burning holes in Evan’s direction.

“I’m a man of many talents, what can I say.” He ignored the Maashole, focusing his satisfied grin on Jeremiah. “I can’t complain really, it got me a date with the lady I rode with, so I count it as a win.”

Jeremiah returned the grin, an expression from the stoic man that surprised Evan. “Impressive.”

“If it’s all the same with you, gentlemen, I’ll leave you to your business.” Evan’s eyes bored into Preston. “I’m going to go see what massage packages are at the spa.”

“They’re well worth the visit.”

Evan looked at Jeremiah’s satisfied face. “You and the missus have already gone, I take it?”

“Perhaps we should all go,” Preston said, and Evan just stared at him. *Seriously?*

“I don’t think so,” Jeremiah said in a suddenly chill voice.

Preston blinked, clearly nonplussed by the sudden about face in attitude from the CEO. Evan just smiled inwardly before excusing himself from that suddenly awkward conversation. Maybe Jeremiah wasn't as fooled by the Maashole's blatant sucking up as Evan had feared.

CHAPTER SIX

“Son, you need to make your move at some point this week if you don’t want to be left in the dust.”

Evan gave the older man a sharp look. Griffin’s cheeks were already rosy, a sure sign Evan had found that the other man’s drinks were starting to affect him. The blue eyes that stared at him however were as sober as ever, and Evan sighed. “I thought we were in competition here.”

Griffin snorted, taking the seat at the bar beside Evan. “I already know I have no chance for the position. My selection was clearly meant to placate the board, although I was personally as surprised as anyone to get that invitation.” He wagged his eyebrows and held up the drinks in each hand. “I’m not above taking full advantage of the situation though.”

Evan shook his head, grinning. Griffin leaned against the bar. “Let me give you some advice. If you can’t go directly at your target, sometimes it’s best to take an indirect route.”

The older man was staring at something across the room. Evan followed his gaze to see Jeremiah’s fiancé-slash-assistant sitting alone at the other end of the bar. “Ah,” he said, immediately understand what the other man meant.

“Just don’t get too talkative, if you know what I mean. Rarely seen a man quite so into his lady, so it surprises me he’s left her alone even this long.”

The advice sounded like something his father would suggest, and Evan sighed. He drank the rest of his glass, and then stood up. “Here goes nothing,” he muttered to nobody in particular, crossing the space between he and the other woman.

Before he could even sit, however, Lucy held up a hand to stop him. “If you’re striking up a conversation with me to earn brownie points with Jeremiah, I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed. Our relationship doesn’t extend to his work.”

It was almost a relief to be called out. “That obvious, was I?”

Lucy eyed him, and he got the feeling she was sizing him up. The smile she gave him, however, was sincere. “At least you have a subtlety that’s borderline charming. Unlike your friend Preston.”

Evan shook his head. “He’s not my friend.” It felt very important at that moment to make that clear.

“I would hope not.” She quirked an eyebrow, looking past Evan and out toward the veranda where the two men talked. Her mouth twisted. “If I’d had any say in the matter, Mr. Maas never would have boarded that plane.”

Her flat statement gave Evan hope, but he tried not to read too far into her statement. “He’s a businessman,” Evan said simply, as if that summed it up. “He’s not afraid to wheel and deal to get what he wants.”

“Hmm.” Her tone said she didn’t agree with his assessment, but she turned her gaze back to Evan. “He likes you, you know.”

It was on the tip of Evan’s tongue to ask which “he” she meant, but the realization was as startling as it was puzzling. “I’ve barely gotten a moment alone with him this entire trip,” he

confessed.

“You and me both.” One corner of her mouth turned down ever so slightly and she sighed. “I came along to maybe scout a location for our wedding. It really is a beautiful spot.”

There was a wistful tone in her voice. “Yeah,” Evan agreed looking around. “It’s pretty incredible.”

Lucy sighed. “But this place is by invitation only and some of the people I’d have at the wedding...” She trailed off, wincing. “I highly doubt they’d ever get selected to come here.”

“I’m surprised Preston was selected,” Evan muttered, and was rewarded when Lucy laughed.

“To be honest, so was Jeremiah.” She nudged Evan’s arm good-naturedly. “Maybe it was to highlight who was the better candidate.”

“Maybe...” Evan trailed off as a blonde vision in a blue dress suddenly entered the waiting area. His mouth hung open as, spellbound, he watched Dani step into the restaurant area, looking nervous. He’d thought she was stunning in her dirt bike gear.

His heart was about to explode at the way she filled out that dress.

Lucy followed his gaze. “Ah, that’s your motorcycle girl?” At Evan’s look, she grinned. “Yes, my fiancé does tell me some of his stories.”

“If you’ll excuse me,” Evan mumbled, thankful when Lucy shooed him away.

He hurried over to Dani, letting his eyes take everything in. His dick hardened almost immediately, but it was his chest that threatened to explode when she saw him and a smile lit her face.

Holy shit.

It was then that Evan knew he was done for, and he didn’t mind in the slightest.

*

The blue sundress was too tight, but Rose had insisted it was fine. Dani tugged at it, nervous suddenly. So far, nobody had recognized her; heck, she hadn’t even recognized herself in the mirror. Her normally frizzy hair was straight, with barely a wave to it. Rose had made her scrub under her fingernails, then taken Dani to get both a manicure and a pedicure.

The flawless nails would be a lost cause the minute she tried to get back into that engine, but for now it felt *nice* to be a little girly.

She wondered if hell had frozen over yet.

Evan had told her to meet him down here, but she didn’t see him at the entrance. Outside, the sun was about to set, bathing the room in a rich orange glow. Her belly rumbled, reminding her she’d only had breakfast that morning, and prompting her to step inside a little more.

A movement out of the corner of her eye caught her attention, and then there was Evan. Relief surged through her, and she gave him a wide smile.

“My god,” he breathed, taking her hand, “you look stunning.”

“Blame Rose for it,” she blurted out, suddenly nervous. He’d seen her already in far less thanks to that bikini, but she felt her skin tingle every time he looked at her. “She insisted that, if I was going on a real date, I had to dress the part.”

“I’ll make sure to kiss the woman the next time I see her,” Evan said, grinning when Dani giggled. “Come on, I have something to show you.”

Dani followed behind him, the low heels making her wobble. She was used to boots with a great deal more support than the strappy heels. The entire outfit belonged to Maria, one of Rose’s coworkers. She’d been more than happy to help make over the tomboyish Dani, and wore roughly the same size.

She tugged again at the dress. *Roughly* sometimes meant making concessions to proper fit. Evan, however, didn't seem to mind.

He led her outside onto the patio overlooking the water. Far below them, the water seemed to lap against the sandy beach, and off to the left a group was finishing up their golf game. The pier looked so tiny from this distance, the ferryboat docked for the evening.

The table to which he led her was set for a date, with a long candle and red rose in the center. Dani bit her lip to hide a smile at the romantic gesture, and sat down as Evan held her chair for her.

Well, hell. If the date kept on going like this, he might ruin her to the crummy dates she'd grown used to all those years.

"I hope you don't mind," Evan said, taking his seat, "but when I asked the chef here what dish you liked, he said he already knew what to do, so I went with his recommendations."

Chef James was one of the best cooks Dani had ever met, and she nodded, her mouth starting to water. "If he has a plan for a meal, it's going to be incredible." She fidgeted with her dress, pulling the napkin free and settling it on her lap. "So, um, what did you want to talk about?"

The waiter chose then to bring the wine, pouring it into their glasses. Not too surprisingly, it tasted wonderful, but she'd yet to have anything less than fantastic from the island.

"I'd like to hear the stories you teased me about," he said, leaning forward.

"Oh man," Dani groaned, "where do I even start? I've been travelling on and off for nearly four years now, most of the time I'm super boring."

"Somehow, I doubt that."

Dani cocked her head to the side and studied the man before her. She'd seen that yearning before, that eagerness for her stories. Years ago, Dani herself had been the avid listener, wishing she'd inherited the adventurous gene in her family. Up until she'd left home, she had always believed that belonged solely to her brother James.

"All right," she said slowly, wracking her brains for a good story. Then she grinned. "Let me tell you about the dolphins of Ometepe Island."

*

An hour later, Dani was still talking, and Evan couldn't remember the last time he'd had so much fun.

"Suddenly Nick came around the corner and almost ran into this llama with his bike. I heard him over the intercoms cursing but I didn't understand what about because he was speaking Russian." She giggled at the memory. "By the time I get there, the llama had already spat on the face shield of his helmet and trotted away to find the rest of its herd."

"I thought you did most of your riding solo."

Dani shrugged. "Sometimes over the more treacherous bits, it's nice to partner up with folks who are going the same way as you. I stay in a lot of hostels when I can afford it, and you meet a lot of interesting folks there too. Anyway, enough with my stories—your turn."

"Me?" Evan frowned, disappointed. "My life's been fairly boring up until meeting you."

"Come on, you live in the big city, work for some billionaire I should probably know about, and flew here on some expensive jet." She leaned forward and rested her chin on one hand. "There's no way you don't have a story too. What's the most interesting thing you've ever done?"

Evan frowned and looked away, trying to decide where to start. "Well," he said slowly, "probably the most interesting thing I've ever done is go to Egypt to see the pyramids."

Dani's eyes went wide. "Really?"

"I told you my grandfather was the adventurous one in the family. The summer after my senior year, he convinced my father to let me tag along on a Middle Eastern business trip. It was supposed to be a one-week thing but ended up lasting nearly two months. We went everywhere, from Cairo to Dubai to Bombay. Made my father furious, he'd had plans for my summer internship."

"Sounds like your father is trying to live his life through you," Dani mused.

Evan shrugged, and then his smile dimmed. "The next year, my grandfather passed away in his sleep. By then, I was in college and already set on the career path that led me here. There never seemed to be time for travel, it was all work, work, work."

Evan's eyes had a melancholy look about them that tugged at Dani's heart. She reached out and took his hand, and his attention focused on her. "If you hadn't gone that way though," she reminded him softly, "we wouldn't have met. So it's not all bad, right?"

He stared at her for a moment, then without breaking eye contact brought her hand to his lips. Dani's body tensed as his lips touched her hand, and her heart sped up. His eyes held a sensual promise, but he said nothing, as if waiting for her to make a decision.

"Ms. Knight?"

The man's voice saying her name broke Dani from her reverie. "Yes?" she asked, looking away and up into the concerned face of their waiter.

"I've been told that your friend Rose had an accident down by the docks. Doc is with her, but they're taking her back to the mainland now."

Dani's breath lodged in her throat. "Excuse me," she whispered, pulling her hand free and standing quickly to her feet. Immediately shedding her shoes, she half-walked, half-ran out of the restaurant and down toward the docks, Evan trailing right behind her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The plane was ready to go, but Rose continued her protests. "I'm okay. Seriously, you don't have to do this."

Dani held up her hand. "Honey, how many fingers do I have up?"

Rose squinted, blinking hard, then rubbed her head. "Owie. What happened?"

"Honey, you hit your head on the pier." It was the third time the doctor had told her what happened, but Rose didn't seem capable of retaining the memory. "We're taking you back to Miami to make absolutely certain you're all right."

"Well, that explains the headache," Rose quipped, also for the third time, and Dani bit her lip with worry.

"Is she going to be okay?" Griffin stood beside Rose, hovering over her protectively."

"Oh, shut up you big lout," Rose muttered, grabbing for Griffin's hand. "It's not your fault I'm clumsy when I drink."

But Griffin continued to look worried, smoothing his hand down Rose's face. "If I hadn't kissed you, none of this would have happened. But you looked so beautiful there in the moonlight, I couldn't resist."

Rose gaped at him. "You think I'm beautiful?" she murmured in a breathless voice. "And we *kissed*?" All at once, outrage flooded her face. "Oh, *dammit*. Of all the bloody memories to lose, why does it have to be that one?"

The drone of the plane's engines grew louder as they drew near, and Dani helped her friend up the narrow steps. Griffin pulled himself up into the plane first, and as he disappeared inside Rose shared an incredulous look with Dani. "I kissed him?" she hissed, eyes wide.

Laughter bubbled up. "No accounting for taste," Dani teased, and Rose stuck out her tongue. She was going to be all right. "Why don't you go in and find out?" She moved to follow her friend into the plane, but Rose placed a hand on Dani's chest.

"Nuh-uh. If I gotta go through romantic problems, so do you."

Dani glanced back at Evan, standing on the edge of the crowd. He was watching her, and Dani realized he hadn't left her side at all since their date ended abruptly. "He's nice," she said, curiously unable to take her eyes off him. God, he looked so good in that get-up. "But right now I really can't..."

"Nope. I want to hear all about it when I get back." She blinked, then winced and grabbed her head. "Where am I going again?"

Dani pushed Rose inside the plane. "Go, get in."

Rose gave an awkward wave, then the door was shut. Dani stepped back, worry gnawing in her gut, as Rose waved from the small windows.

"Are you okay?"

Dani turned at Evan's voice, and gave him a reassuring smile she knew didn't reach her eyes. "It's probably just a slight concussion. I'm sure she'll be fine." But she still stared worriedly at the departing plane.

He bent down to make sure they were eye to eye. "Are *you* okay?" he repeated.

She started to nod, paused, then sighed. "I'm worried about her, but I'm certain she'll be fine."

Evan nodded and they watched in silence as the plane took off. Only when it was well on its way did he offer his arm to her. "Let's head back inside."

Dani took his arm, giving him a smile as they turned back toward the large castle. The sun had already set, but the faint blues and purples of twilight made the Caribbean waters blend with the skyline. "It's so gorgeous here," she murmured, and didn't realize she'd spoken aloud until Evan nodded.

"I've been to a lot of places, but never one quite like this."

His gaze was out on the water, and when Dani looked at his face she saw a wistful quality. The sad look tugged at Dani's heart. "Well," she said, giving him a bump with her shoulder, "if you do become CEO, you'll be able to go anywhere you want."

That was apparently the wrong thing to say, as his expression grew more melancholy. "No," he murmured, shaking his head. "I might be traveling more, but there'd likely be less leisure time. I would go places, but never quite experience them like you do." He finally looked down at her. "I envy you your freedom. I wish I had your courage."

Dani's breath caught at the intense look in his eyes. She wasn't sure what to say to that, but couldn't make herself look away. Her lips curled into a tremulous smile. "I've seen you ride, you'd be good at this."

He didn't answer, just kept watching her. When the back of his fingers caressed her temple, brushing back an errant strand of hair, she gave a small sigh. Her eyes fell to his lips, and the sudden longing to see what they tasted like filled her.

"Well, hello. I see you've been busy!"

*

The Maashole's snide voice shattered the moment.

Jeremiah stood not far behind the Maashole, his expression as inscrutable as ever. Evan wasn't quite sure how to read the CEO, but there was an air of disapproval to the man. Whether it was for Evan or the Maashole, he couldn't be sure, but Evan hoped it was the latter. He'd lose all respect for the other man if it were the former.

Dani stepped back. "I'll leave you three alone," she said softly, slanting the barest hints of a glare at the Maashole.

"Dani..."

Chin up, she turned around and marched back toward the castle, with Evan staring forlornly after her.

"Huh. She walks like a man. Such a waste of a pretty face."

One of Evan's hands curled into a fist, but Jeremiah chose that moment to step forward. "Have you had dinner yet?" he asked, addressing Evan.

It was difficult, but Evan managed to tamp down his sudden anger. "I've already eaten, thank you," he said in a tight voice. "Now, if you'll excuse me..."

"You see what I'm talking about?" The Maashole waved his hand toward Evan. "It's like we talked about, Jeremiah, this boy isn't interested in getting to know you or the company. He's more interested in a piece of tail."

Jeremiah blinked slowly, and Evan just stared. Did Preston realize how he sounded? Evan wondered if the Maashole had been drinking. Even Jeremiah looked as though he'd had enough

of the bullshit, but Evan found he didn't care.

"Mr. Hamilton, you brought me along on this trip to evaluate my potential for the position of CEO in your company. With all due respect, sir, if my performance on the job, not the golf course, hasn't always proven to you my credentials, then I'd like to know now."

"There's more to this kind of position than office work," the Maashole cut in, but neither man so much as glanced his way.

"Let him talk, Preston."

"Sir," Evan continued, not bothering to see how Preston had taken that order, "I received my MBA at twenty-two, have helped found and run several businesses since high school that I sold for a substantial profit. I've worked at Hamilton Industries for six years, working my way quickly up the ladder, and receiving glowing recommendations from my bosses. I understand today's business world and see where the future is going. You need a new direction to keep aloft in today's market, a younger face to move forward, and I'm it.

"Like you, I grew up in a family that placed business first. While my father was tough, he taught me how to succeed. I won't beg for the job, I won't try to bribe or wine and dine you. I will tell you however that if you choose the Maashole here over me, your empire will be declaring bankruptcy within a matter of years."

Preston colored angrily. "Why you little..."

Evan swore Jeremiah's lips twitched at the word "Maashole" but otherwise his face didn't betray anything. "Are you telling me how to run my business?"

"I'm suggesting ways it could run better, yes." Some of his earlier anxiety crept in, but Evan shoved it aside. "Perhaps tomorrow we can talk more. I heard one of the employees here mention there's a shooting range a few miles away from the castle, I booked a time tomorrow and you're welcome to join me."

He saw the immediate interest in Jeremiah's eyes this time. "Sounds like a plan."

Evan cleared his throat and raised his chin, tugging his shirt straight. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a lady to go find."

The Maashole, who'd miraculously stayed silent the entire conversation, snorted. "I didn't see a *lady* earlier," he muttered to no one in particular, curling one lip.

Evan didn't think, he just balled up a fist and let it fly. The sudden billow of pain in his knuckles was more than worth seeing Preston Maas the third stumble back and fall down on his butt, out cold.

Jeremiah stared down coolly at the prone man. "I was hoping someone would do that before I felt the need." At Evan's quizzical look, the CEO just shook his head. "Go, find your lady. I think it's about time I find mine."

Carefully stepping over Preston's prone figure, Evan took off in the direction Dani had disappeared down, hoping he hadn't screwed everything up.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The evening had gone well, if one didn't count Rose's fall or the fact her date ditched her to impress the boss. Again.

Seriously. I even shaved my legs.

Dani wanted to be madder about it, she really did, but practicality kept intruding. Evan's whole reason for being here was work related; yes, they'd had fun, but he had a life to go back to once he was gone. Truthfully, so did she, one radically different than his.

Maybe it was better this way.

Behind her came the rising sound of shoes slapping the pavement. Someone was running up to her, and Dani considered ignoring it. She wasn't in the mood for any more surprises today. "Look, I'm not..." she started, half-turning toward the sound.

All she got was a blink and an instant recognition of Evan's intense look. Then he wrapped her up into his arms and laid the most glorious kiss on her lips she'd ever felt, and Dani felt her mind go blank. He wound his fingers through her hair, holding her close as he pushed her up against a nearby pillar.

Dani gave a small sigh, a needy sound that got an answering growl from Evan. Her body lit on fire at his touch, and when he ground his hips into hers, she felt his desire. She tipped her head back as his lips trailed down her throat, unable to think beyond his touch.

"Stay with me tonight," he murmured against her ear, and Dani's stomach fluttered as he grasped her lobe with his teeth. "Just say yes."

Reality threatened to intrude, and she pushed it away. The way his lips were blazing trails of fire across her neck made rational thought difficult. *You'll only ever have tonight*, her mind whispered, a cold splash of water to her soul. *Can you give him more and still walk away?*

"Please," he whispered, leaning his head against hers. "I've let too many chances in life slip through my fingers because they weren't in my plans. If I do that with you, I'll never forgive myself."

She looked into his eyes, the desperate yearning there burning through her. Dani felt an answering desire coil deep inside her, burning away all traces of any other option.

Her motto was YOLO, right? You only lived once.

"Yes," she whispered, and felt the relief in his body as her took her mouth again.

*

Whatever misgivings Dani may have had on the way up to her room, they disappeared again the moment Evan's lips touched hers. She'd held his hand through the castle, practically dragging him to her room because it was closer, paying no mind to any looks they received. She'd seen what went on here at Eden—hooking up with a guest wasn't frowned on, and often ended happily for the pair.

Somehow, Dani couldn't see that happening here, but she didn't care.

They'd barely gotten through the door when he tugged at her dress, ripping it up and off her body. "Damn, I need you so bad," he murmured against her mouth, pushing her up against the wall beside the entrance. His hand closed over Dani's breast and she gasped, but had barely the presence of mind to shut the door behind them.

Evan reached around, grabbing her ass and lifting her up off her feet. Instinctively, she wrapped her legs around his hips and he surged forward, grinding against her core. Dani's body came alive, nerve ending sparking with pleasure, and she moaned loudly.

"God, I want to hear you scream."

Her nails raked his back as he ground against her, and then it was her turn to insist on nakedness. She tugged at his shirt and he quickly shed it, pressing against her for a deeper kiss.

There was no art in their touches, no desire to draw anything out. Dani fumbled between their bodies for the clasp of Evan's pants and managed to work it open. She pushed her hand inside, wrapping her fingers around his hard length, and Evan's breath hissed through his teeth.

His mouth went to her neck, sucking and tugging at the skin there. When Dani put a hand on his chest, giving a firm push, he set her back onto her feet and stepped back. It gave her just enough room to slither down between the wall and his body, and a curse exploded out of Evan's mouth as Dani took him deep inside hers.

She ran her tongue along the ribbed tip of his cock, sucking on the head, and Evan's hand tangled in her hair. "Fuck, baby," he murmured, breathless. Grinning, Dani pulled him deep, bobbing her head up and down, listening to him pant above her. She ran the tip of her tongue down his hard length, digging her nails into the back of his thighs, and his fingers tightened in her hair.

"The bed," he finally managed to bite out, releasing her and helping her to her feet. They didn't make it that far however; as they passed the couch, Evan unexpectedly flung Dani against it, bending her forward over the back. "Stay like that," he growled, kicking her feet apart, then knelt down between her legs and set his mouth on her burning core.

Dani cried out, the sensations rocketing through her entire body. Teeth, tongue, fingers—Evan used them all, leaving Dani a quivering mess. She grabbed one of the pillows, pushing her face onto it to muffle her cries. Against her, she heard Evan chuckle, but he didn't let off on the sensations his mouth wrought. She clung to the pillow as her pleasure built, until her whole body was quivering in abject need.

She gave a distressed cry when Evan pulled his mouth away. Her legs felt incapable of holding herself aloft, but Evan picked her up in his arms and carried her to the bed. He laid her across the sheets and Dani didn't release her possessive hold on his arm as he hastily put on a condom, then followed her down. She pulled him back into a kiss as he positioned himself above her. When he began probing her entrance however, Dani put a hand on his shoulder and pushed.

Evan rolled over, taking her with him so she was straddling his chest. Dani raked her nails softly down his torso and Evan's body rolled, following her touch. "You're beautiful," she breathed, and felt his dick jump against her backside. He was laid out before her, need and longing on his face as he stared up at her, and it made her heart clench.

He's mine.

Leaning down over him, she rocked backwards with her hips, running her wet folds over him as her lips locked around his nipple. Evan's fingers dug into her hips, pressing her down against him as she dragged her tongue against his chest to the other nipple. A low rumble came from his chest and Dani grinned. His hands wrapped around to clench her backside, kneading and pressing her harder against him.

Evan reared up, following Dani's lead and took one nipple into his mouth. It was her turn to gasp as he toyed at it with his tongue, giving her breast a small bite before moving to the next. She wrapped her arms around his neck, barely even noticing when he maneuvered her over him and pressed inside.

Dani shut her eyes, whimpering in need as he oh-so-slowly filled her. Once he was inside, Evan's hands left her hips, palming her breasts and thumbing the nipples there. Leaning down over him again, Dani rocked her hips expectantly, and his breath hitched. Grinning, she took his mouth in another scorching kiss as she moved above him, taking him deep inside her then clenching her inner muscles and pulling slowly off him.

Evan groaned. "You'll kill a man like this," he rasped.

"You can deal," Dani purred, repeating the move, and Evan groaned again. She tilted her hips over him, riding him hard as the sensations built deep inside her. She shut her eyes, desperation kicking in as she moved faster, then Evan began thrusting his hips with her and she cried out.

Evan's hand dragged up her sides until they cupped her breasts. He thumbed her nipples, and the sensation shot through Dani's body. Evan pushed up deep inside her again, causing her to gasp, then the world tilted as they rolled sideways. He grinned down at her, his lips widening as he surged hard inside her and Dani gasped.

"My turn."

Dani was already so close from riding him, but this was deeper, harder. Evan held nothing back, and the orgasm Dani had felt hovering roared over her, lighting up all her nerve endings. She cried out, raking her nails over Evan's shoulders. He captured her lips but didn't let up on his thrusts, and the waves of pleasure kept rolling over her.

He leaned down and bit her neck, sucking at the skin there, then all of a sudden pulled out. His hands were rough as he forced her over onto her belly, but Dani didn't mind in the slightest. Her body was still humming when he looped an arm under her hips, raised her backside into the air, and pushed himself between her legs again.

The angle here felt even deeper, as if he were reaching to find her core. His thrusts lit her body up all over again, and Dani cried out in time with his thrusts. Evan's hard breaths filled her senses, his fingers reaching around to tweak her nipples, and inexplicably another burst of pleasure built up inside her.

"Oh god," he murmured, laying his forehead against the back of her shoulder, and Dani knew he was close. She tilted her hips up more, bearing down, and felt her own orgasm take her just as Evan gave a stuttered cry. His teeth closed over her shoulder, and she felt him pulse inside her as he came.

Without disengaging, he wrapped his arms around her chest and pulled them sideways so they were spooning. Neither was inclined to move, but Dani shifted. "You want to clean up?"

"Give me a minute," Evan murmured, nuzzling her neck. Dani subsided, enjoying the feel of his arms around her too much to care. She hugged his arms to her chest, laying a soft kiss against one knuckle of his hand, and Evan tightened his hold on her body.

I could stay like this forever, she thought, and tried not to delve too deeply into whether that would be a problem or not.

CHAPTER NINE

“So, how did you get to be working on the island?”

Evan lay beside Dani, staring down at her naked form. His free hand was making slow circles around her belly button, tracing the dips and curves of her stomach and hip bones. Dani’s eyes fluttered closed and she gave a small sigh. “Would you believe that it fell into my lap?”

“Seriously?”

She nodded, folding her arms under her head. Evan was content, for now at least, just touching her, and she seemed to be enjoying it. Already he wanted...“So my bike had broken down in a Costa Rican monsoon. I’d only just managed to find someone with a truck willing to take me to the nearest village...”

Evan’s hand stopped in surprise, and Dani gave a mewl of dismay. He hadn’t been expecting anything like *that*. “Hang on, rewind that story a bit and start again.”

Dani gave him an impish grin. “I had just finished with Carnival down in Guatemala, which has one of the most insane celebrations I’ve ever seen. Carnival is basically what Mardi Gras is to the southern states here in the US, except that all of Central America celebrates it. I’d been told that Mazatenango, Guatemala is the place to go, so I arranged to be there in time for Carnival.”

“What was it like?”

“Crazy!” She laughed at the memory. “I’ve been to Mardi Gras down in New Orleans before and that’s its own kind of insanity, but this was...incredible. The colors, the parades, the dancing. There’s always something to do, especially at night. There’s an air of pure fun and folks just want to have a good time.”

Dani trailed off, smiling, and Evan swallowed. She was so beautiful like that, laid out before him, but he wanted to hear more of her stories. “So, afterwards?”

She snorted. “Ever been in a tropical rainstorm? I’d timed my trip to coincide with the Central America dry season in the hopes of having good riding weather. I’d arranged passage on a ship in Panama and needed to be there by a specific date, but I thought I was fine. Just as I was leaving Mazatenango though, unseasonal rains moved in.

“The way out is through hilly terrain, and even with my knobby tires I had problems. Still, I managed to make it to the border with time to spare, only to have my chain break on me. So imagine me on the side of the road in the rain, trying to fix my chain while buses carrying folks from Carnival passed, spraying me with more muddy water.”

Evan’s lips turned up in a smile at the image, and Dani slapped his arm. Undaunted, Evan scooted himself back and lay beside her on the bed, folding his arms across her belly and laying his chin atop them. “Keep going, this is just getting interesting.”

She shot him a narrow-eyed look but continued. “Anyway, I managed to get it fixed enough to get me into Costa Rica three days later. I’d hoped to get a new chain and sprockets in San Jose since the one I had was borked, but it broke again on me right after the border.

“So there I was, having to push my bike down a muddy road, soak to the bone with rain and mud. I’d finally found a ride to the largest town and was waiting for the truck to show up when out of nowhere this helicopter appears. Mind you, it’s pouring rain outside, but this thing touches down in this tiny area and out jumps a man in a suit. Comes straight up to me and hands me a letter without a word.”

“What was it?” Evan asked.

“My invite here to the island.” She was staring at the ceiling, lost in the wonder of the memory. “At first I thought they had the wrong person, but as he held a large umbrella over me, I saw it really was my name on the envelope. I opened it and inside was a gold invitation, made out to me, inviting me to spend time at someplace called Eden.”

Dani trailed off, and Evan nudged her. “I’m assuming you got a lift from something other than that truck,” he teased, and she glared at him.

“There comes a time in a girl’s life when she needs more than tents and sleeping bags. I was tempted to say no simply because it sounded too good to be true, but...what if it wasn’t? What sort of adventure would I be missing? And seriously,” she added with a snort, “what could be worse than that muddy little patch of rainforest?”

“Damn.” Evan squinted at her. “You’re not having me on, are you?”

She grinned. “Got the whole thing on video at my website, if you wanna check it out sometime.” She nudged him. “How did your invite come?”

“In the mail.” Evan deflated. When had his life ever had that kind of adventure? “I guess I’m pretty boring compared to you.”

“If you’d met me five years ago, you’d be singing a different tune.”

“Oh?” Evan asked, intrigued again, but this time she shook her head.

“If we’re opening up and spilling secrets, it’s your turn. What made you want to become a businessman?”

An interesting question. Evan shrugged. “It was always expected. My father was a businessman, and his father before that. Our family owns a lot of commercial businesses and deals in real estate, much like Hamilton Industries. As the only child, I’m set to inherit that, but my father wanted more.”

“And you?”

“I do too.” *At least, I thought so.* “He encouraged me to pursue my own businesses, forge my own path. When I got an internship with HI that turned into a job offer, I worked my way up the ranks. It was easy for me; I’d been brought up in that world, knew the games, had already had several lucrative businesses of my own. I was fast-tracked to the top but wanted more, then heard that the CEO was stepping down and looking for a successor.”

“So you applied?”

“It wasn’t quite that simple, but I let it be known I was interested. There were interviews of course, background checks, even a psychologist’s screening. Word came that I was one of the top candidates, which pleased my father. I think he’d like the thought of his family empire merging with HI, even though we never quite achieved the prestige of the Hamilton’s.”

“And that’s what you want then? Prestige and wealth?”

Something in Dani’s voice made Evan look at her. She was gazing at him sadly, and her hand reached out to run through his hair. He trapped her hand with his and kissed the palm, and beneath him felt her belly flutter. “I don’t know,” he murmured. “How did you know what you wanted?”

“I didn’t always. When my brother died...” Her throat worked for a moment before she continued. “I’d always dreamed of seeing the world, but never got bit by the travel bug. My family didn’t travel much, and I grew up a bit of a homebody in the same town. Grew up, dated the son of a family friend, figured I’d get married and settle down close by my parents. My brother, James, on the other hand...”

She trailed off, and her eyes grew wistful. “My mom always said he was full of piss and vinegar, but we loved him so. The boy couldn’t stand still; he always had to be doing something, anything. Whereas I was the good girl, he kept getting into trouble, and drove our parents nuts. I loved listening to his stories, always envied his adventures; it seemed like he discovered something new every day.

“He loved motorcycles though. Adored them. My father gave him a tiny dirt bike at eight and he took to the dirt trails any time he could. By fifteen, he was racing locally, and his first official “car” was a Honda sport bike. But his first love was always the dirt.”

Dani broke off and looked down at her hands, fidgeting with the sheet. “I’d just gotten engaged to my high school sweetheart David and Christmas was around the corner. James was off in Utah enjoying the desert on bikes with friends, but had promised he’d be home in time.”

“But he never made it back,” Evan finished a moment later when Dani trailed off.

“It was so stupid too. He and his buddy had stopped to help a motorist on the side of the road, and it turned into a botched robbery. My brother was shot first thing, as if to prove they meant business. Afterwards, they got him to a hospital, but it was too late. That was the worst Christmas ever.”

Evan crawled up the bed and laid down beside Dani, gathering her into his arms. She laid her head on his shoulder, staring straight at the wall as she continued. “He didn’t have much stuff, and hadn’t gotten around to writing a will. My parents wanted to sell his bikes, but I couldn’t let them.

“About a month after he’d died, I was cleaning out his room when I found a journal filled with places to visit. He’d labeled it his bucket list, and it included monuments, festivals, and landmarks all around the world. It broke my heart, that he’d never get to see these places, but then I found the picture.”

She pointed over to her night stand, and Evan reached out and blindly picked it up. A young boy beside a motorcycle beamed at the camera, holding a little girl no more than three astride the bike. Dani sniffled, a watery smile on her face. “He’d taught me how to ride years before, although I hadn’t really pursued it like he had. His journal had annotations beside a few of the locations listed, notes that included me. I think he wanted to take me with him, or at least had places he knew I’d like to see.

“So one night, I loaded up the bags, let a note for my parents and fiancé on the kitchen table, and early the next morning I took off down the road, determined to see what I’d missed.” She gave a small laugh. “I didn’t come home for nearly two years, but by then, everything had changed.”

“And you’ve been going ever since.”

Dani nodded, turning to look at Evan. She wound her arms around his neck, smiling down at him. “Coming up on four years on the road, and I’m still seeing new things every day. Along the way I gained sponsors and friends, who gave me gear and tools and encouraged me to share my travels. The blog I started gets hits from all around the globe, and I have readers who constantly give me new ideas on where to go. I’ve got a financial campaign going now that, if I reach it, I’ll be able to afford to do a true round-the-world trip instead of just the Americas.”

“You could come to New York.”

Evan hadn't meant to blurt it out like that, but continued anyway. “It doesn't have to be immediately, but I could show you around Manhattan, let you see what an urban jungle looks like.”

Her eyes grew troubled, then she shook her head as if to clear it. Sitting up, she put one hand on Evan's chest and rolled him sideways, straddling his waist. “I just want to focus on right now,” she murmured, bending down to lay a soft kiss to his lips. “Right here, right now, with you.”

Evan kissed her eagerly, gripping her hips and pushing her lower down his body. She chuckled at his needy demand, reaching between their bodies to grasp his throbbing member and guide it slowly inside her, inch by inch. “I just want you,” she murmured, her breath hitching as he surged up inside her, desperate to feel more.

Evan dug his fingers into her hips, their moans mingling as they danced, and tried to imagine they were in a Costa Rican rain forest.

CHAPTER TEN

Over the next three days, when Dani wasn't conducting tours for guests, she stayed in bed. Normally this wouldn't be too out of place, except now she had a guest. An insatiable one.

Not that she minded in the least.

Evan alternated between dominating and tender, and Dani couldn't get enough. The lightest touch of his fingertips could set her body ablaze, and he wasn't shy about taking advantage. Not that she always let him; she gave as good as she got, leaving him as wrung out and boneless as he'd left her.

Turnabout was fair play.

She had several groups inquire about guided hiking tours, so it wasn't all play. While she was out showing them the island, Evan often accompanied the tour, a silent participant as interested in her as in the land around them. A few times however, he stayed behind to entertain his boss Jeremiah, and Dani found she missed him.

She wasn't sure how to feel about that.

Her blog had been getting more hits lately too, as well as the threads she ran concurrently on various forums. People were clamoring for more pictures, more ride report. Her crowd-funding project was almost at goal too; all it would take was a few more people and her dream could become a reality.

So why did that thought make her so sad?

Evan's group would be leaving the next day, and she tried not to think about it. Not thinking was easy right now, what with the teasing pleasure Evan was creating with his mouth and fingers. Dani's hands knotted in the covers as Evan's tongue followed the rim of her opening, moaning as his fingers rubbed pleurably inside her. She reached for him, hands tugging at his hair. "Evan, please..."

He finally obliged, moving up her body and taking her mouth. He grabbed one ankle, moving her leg to his shoulder as he slid effortlessly inside her, and Dani gasped. He seemed intent on taking it slow and casual, but when she clamped down around him it was his turn to groan and his pace sped up.

Dani grabbed the headboard, breathy moans pushed out of her by Evan's thrusts. It didn't take her long at all to orgasm, but Evan kept going, lifting her leg until her hips were almost sideways and continuing. The new position felt deeper, more intimate, and her cries mingled with his as he finally came, shuddering against her.

They collapsed bonelessly onto the bed, a tangled mess of limbs. "So," Dani managed to get out between pants, "you're in a good mood."

"Yeah," Evan replied eventually, breathing hard as well. "The Maashole was pissed off all day while Jeremiah and I played golf. Was awesome to watch."

Dani rolled herself over and propped herself up on her elbow, giving Evan a befuddled look. "And that made you horny?"

“Hell no, that made me happy. Seeing you in that oversized t-shirt and nothing else made me horny.”

She laughed softly as Evan twisted a strand of her blonde hair around his finger. “You’re so beautiful,” he murmured, tracing his fingertip over one breast and across her nipple. Dani smoothed his hair from his brow, caressing his forehead with her thumb.

“Come back to New York with me.”

Dani’s hand stilled, pain squeezing around her heart.

Evan continued, not sensing her inner turmoil. “You can stay until you’re ready to leave, or I can help pay for the rest of the funding. It’s down to just a couple thousand, right?”

Annoyance bubbled up at his words. “I can take care of myself, thank you,” she said coldly, rolling out of bed and reaching for a robe.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Evan called after her, but she kept walking, sitting down at the table next to the window. The serenity this view usually gave eluded her, especially when Evan followed and sat next to her. “It would only be temporary...”

“No,” she said, shaking her head. The idea of being with this man, of *staying* with him...god, how could she explain to him how tempting that was? To give the traveling up and be with him, even if only for a while. When she looked at his beautiful face, she could see a future there, one that might make her happy for a while but would change all her plans.

But Dani couldn’t tell him that; it would give him hope for something she just couldn’t allow. She wasn’t ready to stop, not yet, no matter how much she might be in... Oh, no.

God, was she really going to even consider the L-word?

“I don’t understand what the difference is between what I’m offering and what you have here,” he continued, frustration breaking through in his voice too. He reached for her hand and Dani snatched it away, too confused suddenly by her own emotions. Immediately she regretted her reaction when she saw the dismay and hurt warring on his face.

“This isn’t going to work,” she whispered, then jumped as his hand smacked down on the table in front of her.

“Like hell it won’t!”

Dani stared miserably at Evan’s angry face. She saw the same desperation in his eyes that she felt, but how could she tell him the truth? That she desperately wanted to go with him, to see his city, to spend every morning waking up beside him. They’d been with each other for less than a week, and already she was dreaming of giving up her life for him.

How could she tell him how much that temptation scared her?

*

“Well then,” she muttered, “why don’t you quit, give it all up, and come riding with me.”

Evan stopped and gave her a frustrated look, which she returned. *See how it feels*, she thought silently as they stared down one another. *Not so nice when the shoe’s on the other foot, is it?*

Raking a hand through his hair, Evan tried again. “Look, I’m not asking you to stay with me, I just...”

I’m not asking you to stay. That phrase hurt more than she thought, and when she stepped away from him she knew Evan realized his mistake. “You don’t even know what you want,” she said dully. “All you’ve mentioned is what your father wants, what your family had you working towards. What do *you* want to do with your life?”

It was his turn to flinch away, and Dani's heart sank as she saw anger rise up on his face. God, she wanted to apologize, make him happy again, but what she'd said was the truth. He was leaving the island in the morning, going back to his life, and she... Dani wasn't sure what she was going to do, but she had a plan and would stick with it.

That realization hurt.

"Fine," he muttered, looking like he wanted to say more. Dani stiffened, readying herself for the angry onslaught of words, but Evan's jaw clenched as if he was keeping them inside. "Fine," he spat again, and without another word finished dressing and left the bedroom.

Dani fell back on the bed, covering her eyes as if that would keep the tears inside, as she heard him rustling in the small living room. When the front door slammed, however, her breath hitched, and wetness pricked the edges of her eyes.

I'm not going to cry, I'm not.

He'd looked so hurt at her comments, she wanted to run after him and apologize, ask him to spend his last few hours with her. Instead, she rolled over in the bed, burying her face in the pillow to hide her tears.

*

His feet felt heavier with every step away from the castle, but Evan followed after the trio of businessmen in front of him. Jeremiah's plane was ready to take off, the pilot and crew in place, it just needed passengers. Their time was up, they'd all checked out, but Evan wasn't ready to leave the island.

He wasn't ready to leave her.

Ahead of him, Griffin had his arm around the woman who was friends with Dani, talking softly to her. She was subdued, hanging onto the rotund older man, her head on his shoulder. Rose, that was her name. Watching the two of them made Evan's chest hurt.

For the third time, Evan looked back, hoping to see familiar blonde hair seeing him off. The castle rose against the island, lit softly by the rising sun. The sight was magnificent, but not what he wanted. Nobody had followed them onto the tarmac; no familiar blonde-haired women ran to him crying their goodbyes.

I'm an idiot. He should go back and, if not drag her to New York with him, at least give her a proper goodbye. Yet, he kept walking, the plane growing larger until he was at the foot of the steps.

Jeremiah and the others had already disappeared inside; apparently, Evan had lagged further behind than he realized. Beside him, the woman Rose crossed her arms and glared silently at Evan.

He very obviously didn't have one fan, at least.

Sighing, Evan started up the steps as the workers put the few suitcases into the bottom of the plane, then closed it up. He took his seat, looking out toward the castle.

"God, I can't wait to get out of here," Preston muttered, but everyone ignored him. His nose was still swollen from his last *conversation* with Evan, and a dark ring sat beneath one eye.

"I could have stayed a while longer," Griffin said a moment later, staring out the window. His voice was wistful as he waved again to Rose. "What a woman."

The plane pulled out and began taxiing down the runway. Jungle lined one side of the asphalt, as wild and beautiful as anything they'd seen on the island. He remembered her words, that the island was alive and constantly showing new sides of itself.

Then, from somewhere over the roar of the small plane's engines, he heard the familiar sound of a two-stroke engine.

A dirt bike appeared out of the jungle and made a beeline for the plane. Blonde hair streamed out from under the helmet, and a white flag with black writing was duct taped to the rear subframe of the motorcycle. The red bike curved slightly, accelerating until it was racing parallel with the aircraft and Evan's window. The rider stood up on the pegs, twisting her upper body and raising one hand in a farewell salute.

Evan's heartbeat grew almost too hard for his chest. The flag billowed in the wind, the wind whipping it to and fro, making words difficult to read. His breath caught in his throat however when he finally got the message.

You're still invited, Prince Charming.

Why don't you quit and come riding with me. Her words echoed in his head, and Evan flattened his hand beside the window.

Dani never got very far ahead of Evan's window and the pilot probably didn't see her, because he continued to accelerate. He watched her throttle hand twist down, and the nose of the bike shot into the air. She held that wheelie, one hand raised in the air, and Evan returned her wave.

Then the plane pulled forward, wheels leaving the tarmac, and the bike and flag disappeared from sight.

His heart in his throat, Evan gripped the arms of his chair, wondering if he'd made a huge mistake. Across from him, he saw Lucy watching him. Her seat was on the same side of the plane as his and, from the sympathy Evan saw in her eyes, she'd noticed the bike. She reached out and took Jeremiah's hand, and the CEO, without looking, hugged her hand to his chest, staring out the opposite window. If he'd seen the motorcycle, he never acknowledged it.

"Hell of a goodbye you got there," Griffin said from beside him, and Evan looked at the older man.

"Yeah," he replied softly, and then turned back to the window. "Yeah, it was."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

When had the spacious board room at Hamilton Industries ever seemed so...confining?

The men seated around the table murmured, their low voices a low din inside the room, but Evan sat apart. He hadn't been among them long enough to form any bonds with the men around him, and wasn't interested in joining today.

The chair at the end of the table was empty, still awaiting the arrival of the CEO. Since their arrival back on the mainland, Jeremiah had kept himself secluded, saying he'd make his final decision soon. Then today he'd called a surprise meeting of the board members, including Evan, Griffin and Preston.

It didn't take a genius to figure out what was coming.

All he could do was think about the post he'd read earlier on Facebook, the one that left sent him reeling. It had been two weeks since he'd left the island, said goodbye to the blonde woman who'd set his soul on fire, however briefly. He pulled it up again, scrolling through the messages to find hers.

"Fully funded and ready to go! World, here I come! And to Prince Charming, wherever you are now, that offer's still open."

Evan set the phone onto the tabletop with a clatter that drew a few raised eyebrows, but he couldn't bring himself to care, let alone think straight. He ran a hand across his face, breath suddenly tight in his throat. What was his problem? He missed her, wanted to see her again? Or was it more than that?

His father's voice rang through his head, the same words he'd heard all his life: *Don't screw this up*. Only that morning, the older man had repeated the phrase to his son, albeit in a less firm tone than normal. Whether or not he had information Evan didn't was irrelevant; there had been pride in the man's voice but no affirmation in his words. Even thinking about it made him tense more.

You can be whoever you want.

That sweet voice echoed through his mind like a balm. He closed his eyes, laying his head back on the chair. God, he could almost smell her, feel her against his skin. His cock twitched, and he drew in a shaky breath.

Why the hell was he here?

Because years had gone into this journey, countless hours of careful planning and strategy to get where he was at that moment. Every move he'd made had led Evan here, to this point. Even though Evan was sure he'd failed Jeremiah's test on the island, even though Preston had monopolized the other man's attention, Evan still had a chance. All the planning of practically the last decade had come to this.

But whose planning, whose dreams? Who the hell was he anymore, anyway? The boy who'd enjoyed living on the edge, riding bikes on his grandfather's property and across unknown trails with a wild blonde woman? Or the businessman for whom the pursuit of money was everything?

Chairs scraped across the floor as the murmuring subsided, and Evan opened his eyes to see Jeremiah enter the room. Behind him was his lawyer David, as well as his assistant-slash-fiancé Lucy.

“I’ll get right down to it, gentleman,” the CEO started before even reaching his chair. “It’s no surprise that I am looking to hand off Hamilton Industries. The hardest part, for me at least,” he shared a look with his lawyer, “has been trying to decide to whom will I leave it.”

Why am I here?

A rushing in Evan’s ears drowned out the rest of the man’s words. He balled his fists, the nails digging into his palms.

“So, I’ve decided...”

“Mr. Hamilton!”

Jeremiah stopped mid-sentence and stared at Evan. The younger man hadn’t even realized he’d stood, but looked down as the other faces on the board turned to look at him. Expressions ranged from mild disdain to incredulity for interrupting the notoriously touchy Jeremiah.

Evan’s mouth worked silently for several seconds. His mind was blank; he had no idea what to say. Then, it was as though peace settled over him, and he breathed out the words.

“I quit. Respectfully sir, I...quit.”

Immediately, the table broke out into louder murmuring, but Evan didn’t care. With those simple words, he’d sealed his fate. It didn’t matter if he took them back, played this off as a joke. There was no way he could go back to where he was before, no way he’d be believed or trusted to quite the same degree again.

Then again, there was no way in *hell* he was going to take them back.

Shoving his seat back, Evan bypassed all the other men on his way to the door, jerking it open and stepping outside. Away from the stares of the other men, he felt a final weight fall from his shoulders. Nobody even noticed him out here; phones rang and people bustled through their busy lives, not taking notice of the lone man standing outside the board room door.

It was incredibly freeing.

Pursing his lips to keep from grinning like a loon, he hurried across the offices to the elevator, which sprang open immediately. The ride down to the ground floor wasn’t nearly as immediate, but he hurried out of the elevator and through the lobby.

Taxis lined the front street, and he quickly hopped inside one. The driver set aside the newspaper he’d been reading and turned to look backwards. “Where ya headed, kid?”

Evan’s phone went off in his pocket, and without thinking he pulled it out to see his father’s stern face blazoned across the front.

His brain went blank. *Oh, FUCK.* Whether or not Gideon McQueen had heard yet what his son had done, he’d want to know what happened in the meeting. More than likely, word had gotten out already. Someone in the office could have texted, or any other myriad of options Evan didn’t know about.

It didn’t matter.

“Kid?”

“Just drive for a bit?”

Shrugging, the cabbie pulled out into traffic and Evan sat back, his mind roiling. What had he done? The buoyancy he’d felt only moment ago came crashing down around him. He’d really given up his entire life for this; there was no going back.

First thought: *My father’s going to kill me.*

Second thought: *...but I can do anything I want now.*

God, what did he want though? Everything Evan thought he'd wanted for *years* was upstairs in that boardroom, and forever out of reach now. Walking out of there had, at the time, felt like one of the easiest decisions he'd ever made.

Living with the consequences though? That was gonna be the kicker.

"You doing okay back there?"

Evan snapped to attention at the cabbie's voice, then looked outside. They'd gone further than he thought, even with the Manhattan mid-day traffic. He needed to make a decision soon on what to do next. Home? Not yet, he felt the drive to do something to, if not celebrate, at least commemorate this decision. *What do you want?*

Her.

The stress melted away. *That offer's still open*, her message had said. Could he really do this?

"Is there a motorcycle dealer around here?"

The cabbie gave Evan an incredulous look, but shrugged. "Harley Davidson's about six blocks away."

Evan shook his head. He'd seen Dani's bike, there was no cruiser designed that could withstand the roads she took. "Anything you can think of that's more..." He struggled for a word. "Adventurous?"

A knowing smile lit the old cabbie's face. "I know just what you need."

*

"Dammit."

Back in the board room, the hubbub died down at Jeremiah's soft exclamation. The CEO was gripping the back of his chair, staring fixedly at a point on the table before him. People in the room looked at one another nervously, unsure what had just happened.

"Mr. Hamilton," a familiar voice rang out, "you were about to announce who you'd chosen to take over for you?"

Jeremiah looked up to see Preston Maas watching him expectantly. The swelling in his nose had gone down considerably from his brief fight with Evan on the island, but there were still lingering dark circles beneath his eyes. That triumphant look that Jeremiah had learned to hate, albeit tolerate, was back;

What had Evan called the man? *Maashole?*

Even that memory wasn't enough to make the CEO smile. Not now.

When the silence stretched again, people cleared their throats. Then, from Jeremiah's left, Griffin chuckled. "His getaway from this job seems to have been a bit easier than yours."

Across the table, Preston scowled. "You said there'd be a choice today," he said, a petulant note in his whiny voice.

Jeremiah growled again. Heedless of the men around him, he dropped down into his chair, muttering under his breath. Beside him, Lucy put her hand on his shoulder, and he covered it with his own.

Griffin coughed. "This probably isn't a good time to tell you that I'm retiring and moving to the Caribbean, is it?"

Jeremiah's scowl deepened. "Dammit."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Three weeks later

“Oh my god, you’re really doing it.”

“Well, duh.” Dani rolled her eyes. “It’s what I’ve been building towards for over four months and today’s the day.”

“You’re finally leaving,” Rose repeated, biting her lip. Then Dani rocked backwards as Rose threw her arms around her friend, hugging her close. “Is it horrible that I’d hoped you would stay here permanently?” she murmured into Dani’s ear.

Dani hugged her friend back for a long moment. “No, it’s not horrible at all,” she said softly, meaning it. “If there was any place here I’d like to stay permanently, it’d be Eden. But there’s so much more out there I want to see.”

“Yeah,” Rose said, sniffing and letting go, “I guess.”

Dani turned to check on her luggage, making sure all the straps were still snug. Her cheeks had grown moist again, and she dashed at them with her gloved hands.

The folks at the resort had already given her a going away party long before, showing her with blessings and well wishes. Most had respected her wish not to be given gifts due to limited luggage space, but several had given hefty donations to her “beer fund” as well as small things like camping knives and pocket-sized flashlights. Rose had presented her with a brand new GPS, much better than the older version she had, and promised to pay for the service as long as Dani stayed safe.

Oh, how she loved her friends!

Rose had insisted on accompanying Dani on the ferry ride back to the mainland this morning, just to see her off. Dani had thought it impractical, but in hindsight she was glad the stubborn woman had insisted. A wave of homesickness for her island had threatened to overwhelm Dani the moment the ferry had pushed off the pier.

It was silly: she’d been there only a handful of months, but she’d fallen in love with the island and its inhabitants. Without thinking about it, she turned around and engulfed Rose into another big hug, one which the other lady happily reciprocated.

“Now, you’ll keep me up to date on everywhere you go, right?” Rose said thickly when they finally parted. “Be careful about those border crossings, you know things can get interesting. And check tire pressure every day, as well as your oil level...”

Dani laughed at hearing her own advice repeated back to her. “I got it. But you have to promise to keep me updated on everything that happens here.”

Rose gave her a watery smile and a big thumbs up. “Got it.”

Dani double checked her bags, adjusted her mirrors, then paused and looked up the road. Nothing.

“You still miss him, don’t you?”

Dani rolled her head sideways. “Is it so obvious?”

Rose snorted. “As obvious as a Mack truck to the face.”

“Good grief, where do you come up with these sayings?” She sighed, laying her forehead against the duffle strapped across her passenger seat. “I’m being an idiot, aren’t I?”

“Girl, I hate to say it, but you haven’t heard from him since he left. He’s probably off in LaLa Land right now aboard some overpriced jet, flying to meet some bigwig who’ll give him fistfuls of money.”

“Probably.” Dani’s arms felt heavy as she picked up the helmet, fingering the latches. The Caribbean sun was high in the sky, and if she wanted to get some miles in today she’d have to hurry. Her mesh riding gear, while it helped circulate the air better than her cold-weather gear, was shit-all protection from the heat radiating off the asphalt. “Okay, fine, but I want one more hug.”

Rose grinned. “I’ll always have more for you,” she said, wrapping her arms tightly around her friend.

From somewhere in the distance came the subtle drone of another motorcycle. At first, Dani refused to look, not wanting to be disappointed, but as it grew louder Rose turned in that direction and shielded her eyes. “Well, I’ll be damned.”

Dani followed her gaze as a bike and rider carrying way too much gear on the back pulled into the parking lot and made a beeline for them. She immediately recognized the make and model of the bike, a brand new BMW GS Adventure, and her heart sped up.

Don’t get your hopes up. It was impossible to tell through the layers of riding gear much about the newcomer, and she couldn’t make out his face in the helmet. *Just a little bit closer...*

The rider meandered through the cars until it reached the curb, then the engine shut off and they coasted to a stop. The awkward dismount made Dani cover her smile—there was too much gear on that bike for the rider to kick their leg over it all. She bit her lip as the rider unclasped the helmet and pulled it off...

“So I hear there’s a lady around here who’s doing this round the world trip.”

Dani’s face didn’t feel sufficiently wide enough to encompass her grin. She tried to hold back her happiness but it was impossible. Setting the helmet atop her bike, she took only a few steps toward him before he picked her up in his arms and held her tightly.

“I should have stayed with you.”

“No, you jackass, you should have called her sometime in the last few weeks,” Rose snapped behind them. “God, Dani, tell me you’re not going to let him get away with that shit.”

Dani however didn’t release her grip on Evan even an ounce, holding tight to the man of her dreams. Evan flinched at Rose’s words, and whispered in her ear, “I’m sorry.”

“Shut up,” she murmured back, then captured his mouth with hers in a scorching kiss. Beside her, she heard Rose huff, but couldn’t find it in her heart to care. Evan was more than eager to reciprocate, crushing Dani to him as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Ten to one you two get a room tonight instead of camping out,” Rose muttered behind them, and Dani grinned against Evan’s lips.

Evan severed the kiss and laid his head against Dani’s, kissing the bridge of her nose. “Sorry I’m late.”

“What took you so long?”

“Hey, it’s not an overnight ride down to Florida from New York. Plus Ernesto, this cab driver I met, made sure I was ready and wouldn’t let me out the door a day sooner. Did you know he followed your blog, even before he met me? Apparently, you’re famous in the traveling community. He’s another motorcycle traveller and when I told him your planned route and that I needed a bike, he’s the one that recommended this—”

Dani shut him up again with a kiss, smiling against his mouth. Behind them, Rose snorted. “Okay, so I’m, uh, gonna go wait for the return ferry before I start gagging,” she said loudly,

sounding as though she'd already started.

"I missed you," Evan murmured against Dani's neck as she waved goodbye to her friend. "I was so busy preparing to come down and meet you, and I wanted it to be a surprise."

"It's a surprise all right," she murmured. God, he felt so good. Smelled good, too. "You've been staying in hotels every night coming down here, haven't you?" she asked suspiciously, finally letting Evan go to see his face.

He had the grace to look sheepish. "Guilty, but I do have camping stuff and know how to use it. Ernesto made me practice, even took me out into the country in upstate New York and made sure I understood what roughing it was like." A small smile crept over Evan's face. "He and my grandfather would have gotten along well, I think." He gazed down at her, tracing the side of her face. "I gave up everything for this, and being with you makes me forget any regrets I might have ever had."

Dani stiffened at his words, but Evan shook his head as if reading her mind. "I'm happier, you have no idea how much happier. Until I did it, I didn't quite realize just how unhappy I'd become in my life. Until I met you, I didn't understand what happy even felt like. Yes, my family is angry with me but I have a healthy bank account and great work experience. Hell of a way to take a sabbatical, but if necessary I can get back on my feet."

He tucked an errant strand of blonde hair behind her ear. "And I have you." He grinned. "You should keep me in line better than anything."

"Speaking of which," Dani stated, poking his chest with one finger, "I do have an issue with your packing habits."

Evan looked back at his bike, then the woman in his arms. "Seriously? I only brought what I thought I'd be needing."

"If you're going to take a nearly six-hundred pound bike onto dirt roads, you definitely need to pack lighter than that." She went up onto her tiptoes as far as the stiff boots she wore would allow and kissed his nose. "Come on, do you have communications in your helmet?"

"Same brand you used on the island equipment."

"Let's link them up and get out of here, we're wasting daylight." She gave him a sideways glance. "I need to put you through your paces anyway."

She let him take that however he wanted, but could tell exactly where his mind went from the answering grin. "Yes, ma'am."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Sometimes books come from the heart, and “Queen’s Knight” is just such a story.

You may have read my bio and know I love riding motorcycles. Several of my heroes are women riders, ladies who’ve been around the world on the back of bikes, sometimes several times over. They’ve been in, and gotten themselves out of, some really grueling situations, all while riding solo. From Lois Price (“[Lois On The Loose](#)”) to [Tiffany Coates](#), to all those in between, these women are role models and, well, just plain incredible.

One of my avid dreams is to someday get the chance to follow in their footsteps, to see the Salar de Uyuni, ride through the Gobi desert, stay inside a Mongolian yurt. In the meantime, I write, I dream, and I keep jumping on my motorcycle.

If you want to read more of the real thing, people (men and women) riding off into the wilderness or around the world, check out the following websites and follow along on the ride reports there:

ADV Rider: <http://www.advrider.com>

Horizons Unlimited: <http://www.horizonsunlimited.com>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sara Fawkes has always loved spinning tales, but her romantic roots come from sneaking her mother's old Johanna Lindsay books from the dresser drawer. She's been writing stories since she was a little girl (and has the home made books from preschool to prove it), and loves creating stories and characters and interesting messes for them to get into. An avid traveler and adventure motorcyclist, her dream job includes selling everything off and leaving civilization to see the world on two wheels, writing in cafes in each country she visits, and living off her writing. In the meantime however, she lives in California with her menagerie of pets and, when not writing, loves to rebuild old motorcycles/cars with her Dude and plays with the characters in her head.

You can find her online talking about whatever strikes her fancy at:

<http://www.sara-fawkes.com>

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Like what you just read? Make sure to check out the rest of the “Invitation to Eden” series. Sign up for our [mailing list](#) to receive new release alerts!

For more information about the island of Eden, [check out our website!](#)

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March

Master of the Island by Lauren Hawkeye

*

April

Random Acts of Fantasy by Julia Kent

Yours Truly, Taddy by Avery Aster

Escape From Reality by Adriana Hunter

*

May

Hydrotherapy by Suzanne Rock

Fight For Me by Sharon Page

*

June

Breaking Free by Cathryn Fox

Hold Me Close by Eliza Gayle

Queen’s Knight by Sara Fawkes

*

July

How To Tempt A Tycoon by Daire St. Denis

Dare to Surrender by Carly Phillips

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*

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December

Delicious and Deadly by C.C. MacKenzie

Pleasure Games by Jessica Clare

*

Have you read Invitations to Eden's other June releases?

Breaking Free by Cathryn Fox

Spring Break at college is supposed to be a time of fun and parties, but Alaska Rossi, AKA Jane Smith, is on lockdown thanks to her father's mafia dealings. She wants only to party down with the rest of her classmates. At least her hot, darkly mysterious bodyguard— deep undercover as her dorm's resident assistant—gives her something to fantasize about during her boring nights in confinement. When she wins a campus radio contest, and is gifted with a special invitation to an exclusive island, she knows it's her chance to break free. After all, it's a place where no one knows her name, so what danger could possibly come to her? But when danger appears in the form of a masked man who takes control of all her pleasures, tapping into her darkest fantasies, she begins to wonder if her undercover lover, and the mysterious bodyguard who's deep undercover, are one in the same...

*

Hold Me Close by Eliza Gayle (Purgatory Club, Book 6)

Sometimes you need to cut and run and sometimes the ties run too deep to abandon. Bonnie's job at Purgatory keeps her on edge in more ways than one. Every day the pain of her grief over losing her Dom threatens to consume her. Her only escape comes at the hands of the resident tattooed bad boy who likes to keep things light and loose with a variety of women. He may not be the Dom of her dreams, but he chases away the darkness if only for one night... Dex is used to unattached submissives coming to him for a chance to feel the kiss of his flogger or the sting of his whip until they find their own Doms. With his busy life of ink and kink he likes keeping his

women at arm's length. Except one night a month when Bonnie shreds him every time she asks him to hold her close.

When a secret invitation to an island resort arrives, is it the answer to their problems? Or their worst nightmare?