

TWICE IN A BLUE MOON

Prologue

The French Riviera
New Year's Eve

“Cheer up, my dear. Life can't be as bad as all that.”

Heather gazed pointedly at the dapper dandy in the H. Huntsman dinner jacket sitting next to her at the table. “I'm a Westbrook. I must play the part.” She sighed. “Besides, Jamie, must you be so disgustingly positive all the time? It's tiresome.”

Jamie set his white linen napkin on the table and stood. “Why don't I toddle over to the bar and get us another bottle of champagne?”

His fingers drifted across Heather's shoulders and paused to caress the loose blonde hairs at the nape of her bare neck. Her back stiffened at the uninvited intimacy. “Don't do that.”

He leaned close to whisper softly against her ear. Nudged the diamond stud that pierced her lobe with the tip of his nose. “Why, darling, you know you love it.”

“Don't flatter yourself.” She jerked away, hoping to make him leave, but her sharp glare merely served to urge him further.

He drew a small, plastic bag from his pocket and with possessively gentle fingers, slipped it into the bodice of her dress to rest coolly between her breasts. “Perhaps this will restore your good humor, hmm?”

When Jamie was gone, Heather closed her eyes and casually lay her right hand over her heart. Felt it beat strong against her palm. The man knew her weaknesses. All of them. And no matter how many times she vowed to conquer them, Jamie Hendricks always found a way to

exploit each flaw. He was a gigolo, wanting only her money and the step up the social ladder that a liaison with her family could provide him. He was fun, but that's all there was to it. She had no feelings for him. She had no feelings at all, it seemed.

“You look very down, Heather darling. Lose your best friend?”

Why was she surrounded by these leeches? First Jamie, and now Geraldine Desmond. Flaunting her stupid fur coat like it was winter at St. Moritz instead of New Year's Eve in the south of France. “Of course not, Geri. Jamie has gone off to get another bottle of champagne. Are you making the rounds?”

“Taking in the sights. Look what my Roger gave me for my thirty-fifth birthday. Isn't it stunning?” Geraldine posed, turning front to back, then spun around in a circle before dropping into the chair at Heather's left.

Heather forced a smile to her lips. “Looks a bit warm.”

“It's never too warm for sable, darling.”

“Doesn't it bother you that a lot of cute, furry little animals died so you could strut around in that coat?”

“Not a bit. Besides, it's covering these little beauties.”

Heather closed her eyes. The last thing she wanted to see was Geraldine's cleavage. After announcing her latest plastic surgery on Twitter, the woman had posted several views of her new girls on Facebook, barely keeping within social media's allowable limits.

“What do you think?”

Heather took a cautious peek and gasped. Geraldine wasn't fawning over her recent breast implants. She was displaying diamonds. A glittering array of perfectly matched white and black stones circled the woman's neck, the centerpiece a huge tear-drop shaped black diamond pendant nestling between a pair of artificially enhanced, tan breasts.

It took a moment for Heather to get her breath. “What an extraordinary necklace.”

Geraldine's blood red fingernails stroked the diamonds amorously. “There are thirty-four of these little two carat stones, but the pendant is forty carats.”

“Isn't it . . . heavy?”

“Oh, heavens no. I have the perfect figure for them.” To emphasize that fact, she cupped both breasts and lifted, giving the jewel a wider platform for display. “See? I think it's terribly clever of Roger to mark my birthday with the same number of stones as my age, don't you?”

More like a reminder of his wife's passing years, Heather thought, but kept that nasty little observation to herself. "Oh yes, Geri, such thoughtfulness has cheered me up no end."

Geraldine scowled, her mouth a tight smile. "Really. And here I thought you'd still be down in the dumps over Kieran marrying his little waitress from America."

Good old Geraldine. Always the perfect jab straight to the heart. Six months ago, her ex-husband's horse had won the Irish Derby, and shortly after, he'd married the woman who had made it all possible. Unfortunately, he'd lost his horse farm to Heather's father in the process. Heather had tried to make a marriage bargain with him so he could keep his beloved farm. He'd loved her once, and she'd been so sure he could love her again. But he'd made it painfully clear that she'd never been the love of his life. Merely the lust. Determined to hide that wound to her heart, she'd wished him well, then headed out on the social circuit to drown her sorrows. But it seemed that even an endless round of parties couldn't erase the numbing sting of his rejection.

So, here she was. Spending the evening at a dull party on the French Riviera in the company of a notorious womanizer and several of her so-called girlfriends who were clearly basking in her misery under the guise of cheering her up. Crap. Why couldn't she find someone to love her passionately, the way Kieran so obviously adored his Samantha?

What's wrong with me? Am I really so unlovable? Is there no one who will care about me more than he does my money? Maybe if I could be more like Samantha . . . Oh, Heather, you really are down in the dumps. Snap out of it, girl. Sweet is not in your nature.

She almost let a tear slip through her lashes before she realized that Roger had joined them and was in the process of whisking Geraldine away for a dance. Even nasty, spiteful Geraldine had a man.

"Do watch this while we're gone."

Heather shook off her thoughts in time to see Geraldine remove the necklace and stuff it into her coat pocket as if it were a worthless piece of used tissue. It would serve her right if someone took it. Heather nodded, then watched as they strolled, cuddling arm in arm, onto the dance floor. It was nauseating. She sighed, downright green with envy.

The room was hot and crowded with people, yet Heather had never felt more alone. Her head buzzed, the effect of too many glasses of champagne. *Feeling sorry for yourself? Yes, dammit, and I hate it.* If only she could escape. Forget her miserable, reckless life for a little while. Her fingers drifted to the package between her breasts. *Well, Heather, that's certainly*

one way to do it. She opened it, heedless of her surroundings, and lay out a short line of white powder directly in front of her. Retrieving a straw from an empty glass on a neighboring table, she placed one end to her nose, the other to the powder and inhaled. Within seconds, the world around her seemed delightfully tranquil.

Heather glanced toward the far side of the dance floor where the Desmond's were dancing and giggling like a pair of teenagers. Such a happy couple. She sighed again, this time her mind free, her body relaxed and floating. Good old Geraldine. Lucky woman. She had her Roger and . . . and . . . Heather's gaze, muddled and disoriented, centered on the fur coat still lying on the chair beside her. *Poor little sables. Not fair. Not fair at all.* Reaching casually into the coat pocket, she withdrew the necklace and slipped it into her Gucci purse.