

Chapter 1

In times of stress, Layne adhered to a strict diet of the four major food groups—wine, chocolate, cheese and more wine. This definitely qualified as one of those times. With dried mud covering her clothes, and hair matted to the side of her face, she lurked behind a potted palm, longing for a gigantic glass of buttery chardonnay. Hell, even Strawberry Boone's Farm straight from the bottle sounded good after her train wreck of a day. She glanced down at what had once been white jeans. Damned taxis. How could a single tire and one small pothole create so much sludge? Then she heard someone call out her name, and through spear-shaped leaves she scanned the hotel lobby, dreading what awaited her.

Layne adored her fans, but somehow they always managed to find her at the worst possible times. She steadied herself, took in a deep breath, slid from behind the decorative foliage, and plunged into the crowd. No one commented on her disarray as she smiled and mingled, uttered her thanks, and shook sweaty palms. In fact, they all seemed thrilled to see her. That is, all but one man, who caught her eye with a chilling glare.

She felt a tug at the hem of her tee shirt and shifted her gaze down to an older man, of shorter stature, pointing a black marker at the bald spot on top of his head. She chuckled as she signed the glistening patch of hairless skin. That was a new one, even for her. When she looked up, the chilly eyed man was gone, and she continued her expedition through the pack, autographing everything from crumpled tissues to bare biceps, with her sights set on the vintage style lift that would carry her to the sanctuary of her room.

Finally reaching the lift, the door closed, separating her from the chaos, and she collapsed against the far wall, letting her knees buckle beneath her and planting her exhausted behind on the glossy gray subway tile floor. But before making its ascent, the elevator door re-opened, and a well-appointed older couple joined her. No words were spoken, but Layne noted an echo of her mother's disapproval in the woman's stare—clearly, nice girls never sat on dirty elevator floors. Layne let out a sigh. Compared to her ass, the floor was pristine.