**BAD BOY**

**MILLIONAIRE**

**ROMANCE**

**SYNOPSIS**

*Dan chuckled. "I wouldn't steal from you, Christie. I'd rather spoil you with expensive gifts."*

*After the shocking robbery at the Gilded Heron casino, Christie has decided to live a quiet life working as a single twenty-something in a second-hand bookstore. She had been too affected by the event at the casino to continue her previous profession.*

*Just as she has settled into a routine, be it a bit of a lonely lifestyle, a handsome and mysterious English stranger appears out of the blue. Christie immediately recognizes him as the leader of the criminal gang who had robbed the casino vault one year ago.*

*Dan is a dashingly charming man in his thirties with piercing gray eyes and terribly good looks. He’s taken an interest in Christie and before she knows it she’s been swept off her feet and driven across country on the back of a powerful, shiny black motorcycle. His intensions seem good and his infatuation with her appears real.*

*But...Can she trust this crook? She knows so little about him. There was a deeper reason why Dan robbed the casino; one with meaning. Christie is conflicted. She knows he committed a crime but also discovers that Dan’s tough, dominant exterior is not all he seems to be.*

*Christie’s body was hot with desire. Her heart pounded, and a growing want had flooded her center.*

*Is he really the wonderfully kind gentleman that Christie discovers under Dan’s many layers, or is he just finding a way to use her in his terrible schemes for another robbery?*

***A standalone new adult contemporary bad boy romance.***

***Around 15,450 words. No cliffhangers.***

***KEYWORDS:***

*bad boy romance, new adult, bad boy romance, millionaire alpha male romance, quickie romance, alpha male, contemporary romance, new adult college romance.*

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# Chapter 1

The cash vault door of the Gilded Heron stood wide open, held by a man of medium build with a black ski mask over his face. Dark figures hurried into the tiny open room, lugging with them large empty bags.

In front of the vault was a tall individual. He was obviously the leader. He had coffee brown hair shown only slightly under the black hat he wore. Dark sunglasses kept his eyes from view.

The lower half of his face was not concealed, and he almost seemed eager to show off a conniving grin that sent chills into the air around him. Ending at the fingertips of the man was a shiny black handgun with several scuffs along one side as if it had been used as a blunt melee weapon in previous heists.

The chaos of the moment was engulfing to Christie, nearly overwhelming. She stood in utter shock with five other employees and two security guards, held still by the aim of the man’s gun.

“Forty-five seconds,” the leader spoke over his shoulder to the men rushing into the vault. He had a casual lilt of an English accent. His eyes never left the employees. It would have been hard to tell with those sunglasses, but Christie was sure that he was smart enough to never take his eyes off the enemy.

In the bizarre state of suspense, as Christie had her arms raised to the back of her head like the rest of her coworkers, she wondered how she’d ended up in this mess to start with.

She watched the man with the gun, still as a statue, directing his aim toward a security officer who had been ready to turn on the radio on his belt and call for backup. “I wouldn’t do that, friend,” the robber announced.

Despite the inopportune moment and her bewilderment at the unjust act that this man and his crew were in the middle of doing, Christie had to commend his timing. The casino had been closed for the past six hours for maintenance checks on security, and somehow this crook had known about the incident before even sneaking in with his men.

As if the man had read her mind, he looked directly at her. She couldn’t see his eyes, but his head turned somewhat, and she found his gaze anyway. A quick upward smirk marked the corner of his lips, like he’d known exactly what she was thinking and was flattered by her respect.

The smile lingered for only a few seconds, though, before he turned his attention to his men rushing out of the open vault with sloppily filled cotton bags. The lumpy exterior of the objects proved to Christie that they’d somehow found the stashed away money and had gorged their fancy pillow cases with it all.

*There go every customer’s physical dollar bills from the last week,* she thought sadly. The buffet, the restaurant, the steakhouse, the gift shop, the café towards the front… Christie had overseen most of the conveniences within the Heron, and worried to think about how all of the employees would feel knowing that all of that money they collected had all gone into the hands of this greedy gunman and his posse of dark-clothed thieves.

*Would I really be able to be there for them, though?* She wondered silently. Her own heart beat painfully fast against her ribs, reminding her that she was not completely calm in this moment. The man did have a gun after all, and who was to say it wasn’t loaded? Even if this guy was harmless, Christie would still feel a nervous about the situation.

The leader glanced at a watch on his wrist for a brief moment before turning his head to let his voice carry into the vault. “Ten seconds.”

There was no possible way that this man could get away with something like this without the Wendover Police Department finding out. The station was just down the street. Chances were that cops were on their way, and this man and his gang had exactly ten seconds to get out successfully before the cop cars showed up.

Once the last man was out with his filled sack, the leader swung his handgun toward Christie and the others, gesturing for them to get inside the tiny cash vault.

“C’mon now, quickly,” he urged.

The first to walk inside were the two security guards. Christie had always thought it ridiculous that Mr. Bazzoli, the owner of all of the casinos in Wendover, didn’t want his own security guards walking around with defensive weapons. *“It’ll scare the customers,”* had been his argument in a news review a couple of years ago.

Typically when there was an out of control drunkard on the casino floor, one of the officers just picked the person up and carried them out unarmed. Robberies never really happened, and especially not ones of this magnitude.

Christie walked in sullenly with the rest of the employees, still with her arms raised to the back of her head as ordered. She really wanted one of the security guards to take this man out, but whether that gun was loaded or not, it still probably wasn’t a smart idea.

These thieves knew well what they were doing, and their leader would probably have some trick up his sleeve to stop them. The guards may have had a knack at seeming intimidating when they wanted to be, but they still didn’t know a thing about fighting.

The gunman shut the vault door, and a faint *beep* rang from the automatic lock, signaling that Christie and the other innocents were shut in. For a brief moment the gunman’s face appeared in view through the tiny slotted window in the heavy metal door. He stung Christie’s ego with another twisted smirk at the corner of his mouth, and then he turned and disappeared from sight.

“Christie!” one of the employees finally exclaimed, hurrying over to her. “What are we supposed to do now?”

Two of the workers at the casino were the TV techs, two custodians, and one baker in early to prep pastries for that afternoon reopening, and then the two security officers. Christie was the only one in the casino who didn’t need to be at the time. She’d just come in to get her paycheck for the week, and become mixed up in the chaos.

“It’s fine, Judie. Just stay calm, okay? It’s over now. They took off,” Christie reassured.

“I’ve seen it in movies,” spoke one of the custodians. “They lock the employees in the vaults and leave them there until the police find them.”

Christie sighed and leaned against the corner beside a teller machine and a stack of receipts. “Yeah, who knows when that will be. The police always take twenty minutes to travel a fourth of a mile down the street.”

The other coworkers were quiet after this, avoiding each other’s eyes. The two security guards sat in the teller chairs and stared shamefully at the floor.

# Chapter 2

Christie slipped the last book into the shelf with a heavy sigh. The frayed edges caught against the other spines of the books and made it difficult to slide in, but she managed. Up above her head the florescent light flickered, threatening death.

The ambient lounge and chill mix of early 2000s music had long since been shut off since Christie had closed up for the night, but the last song that had played still ran through her head as a ghostly afterthought.

Trying not to sigh once again, now conscious of her weary state of being after realize what a long day it had been, Christie picked up her purse from behind the cashier counter and strode out the door into the dumping rain.

It was peculiar to her. Wendover never received much rain, as it was in a desert, and right beside the famous salt flats. When it rained out this way, a lot of the locals said it was a bad omen. That, alongside the drinking water, which according to everyone who had worked in the Gilded Heron, was poisonous.

She almost shook her head at the silly superstitions, but the wry little quirk of a smile at the corner of her lips faded the moment she recalled the harrowing events that led up to her reason to quit her job at the casino. Christie would have loved to have worked at the place longer, but after the robbery one year ago, she just couldn’t look at the building the same.

Christie kept mostly under the awnings of the street shops as she walked a couple of yards to the late night café just beside the second hand bookstore. She pushed open the door and stepped in, hearing the familiar jingle of a bell announcing her entrance.

The barista at the front looked up from a cluster of chocolate covered coffee beans in her hand. She was just in the process of sticking one into her mouth when she saw Christie.

“Christie!” she exclaimed with delight before fitting the rest of the beans into her mouth to chew them swiftly.

“Please tell me you didn’t eat more than what was just in your hand,” Christie greeted while walking in and setting her purse down on one of the small tables.

“I had about twelve before you came in,” the barista admitted. The nametag on the lapel of her uniform read *Samantha*. She was a good friend of Christie’s and had been there to support her after the troubling events of the robbery.

“Oh dear… You’re going to be bouncing off the walls before the night is over,” Christie uttered.

Christie knew Samantha as Sammy. She was a sprightly girl in her early twenties with long, wavy auburn curls and big, bright blue eyes that could have belonged to an innocent woodland creature; Sammy was a light in Christie’s life. She was outgoing and slightly bizarre, and also as skinny as a twig.

At one point Christie had been jealous of Sammy’s tiny frame, as Christie was highly curvaceous. Back in high school their class photos had always been awkward to Christie, with her voluptuous bosom and wide hips, and Sammy’s toothpick stature and nonexistent chest.

Nowadays, Christie found the old photos comical and cute. She didn’t worry about her weight anymore. She’d discovered that she actually preferred shopping in the plus size section. *They have cuter clothes,* she remembered telling Sammy one day.

“I only had seventeen of those beans,” Sammy tried to excuse herself. “It’s not like I ate the whole jar.”

“Seventeen… Yeah. Which equals to what? Five cups of coffee?” Christie replied with a grin.

Sammy took off her apron and draped it on a hook beside the wall before walking over and taking a seat at the table where Christie had placed her purse.

“I’ll be fine. How was work today?”

Christie dropped into her seat and rested her head in her hands, her elbows propped up on the table surface. “It was a day,” she uttered blandly. “Nothing good or bad. Just the same as usual.”

“See any cute guys come in?” Sammy wondered.

Christie scoffed and raised her brow at her friend’s question. “Cute guys? In the tiny town of Wendover? That would be the day, wouldn’t it?”

“Whatever happened to that one guy you were crushing on? You know, the poker dealer back at the Gilded Heron? Fredrico?”

“He’s married and has two kids, Sammy.”

Sammy lowered her gaze. “Oh.” She quickly changed the subject to avoid it lingering in the air for too long. “So what are your plans for tonight?”

Christie glanced over at the quiet coffee maker tucked near the refrigerator behind the café counter. “The usual. Go home, turn on the news or a sitcom for an hour, and then probably go to bed early.”

Sammy tilted her head and looked at Christie in a concerned light. “I worry about you sometimes. What would you think of going to the concert hall with me tomorrow night? I hear there’s a really good band playing, and they’re running a fun special. Everyone’s first margarita is on the house.”

Although it did sound like fun, Christie didn’t know if she could do it. Sometimes the noise of the concert hall was just too much to take in. That and the front entrance always smelled like someone had spilled their beer on the carpet. Those were petty things to be weighing her decision on, but Christie just didn’t know if she could handle the commotion.

“I don’t know, Sammy. I’ve been really depressed lately. The loneliness, I guess, is eating at me.”

“All the more reason to go with me,” Sammy insisted with a shrug of her shoulders. "Why don’t you think about it and then text me when you’ve made up your mind?”

The entry door jingled in announcement as someone stepped into the café.

Sammy looked up from the table and over at the new visitor. “Oh, I’m sorry, we’re closed.”

“Oh, are you? I apologize. I didn’t see a closed sign out front.” The voice was masculine and dark. It carried the elegant roundness of an Englishman's. Christie looked toward the sound and at the newcomer curiously.

“Oh, my…” Sammy began as she took in the man’s appearance. He was tall with dark brown hair the color of black coffee. His eyes were a light gray hue, sharp and piercing even in the dim lights of the building. The man’s appearance spoke of mid to late thirties. He was remarkably handsome, and with his fitted leather jacket, dark wash jeans, and heavy black boots, his appearance spoke of charisma and good taste.

“I must have forgotten to switch the sign again. I’m sorry,” Sammy continued. “Give me just a second, and I’ll get up and get the machines going again for you.”

“Oh, don’t bother then,” said the man. “You don’t need to go through all that trouble. I can come back another time.”

Something about the man struck a chord in Christie. She recognized him. At first her thoughts flew back to that fateful day at the casino, with the gunman pointing that deadly weapon at hers and the rest of the employee’s faces. *Him? No way. He can’t be,* she thought. There was no possible way that this stranger could be the same guy. Sure, it was the same hair color, and he was probably the same height, but there were plenty of people in Wendover with dark brown hair.

There wasn’t any other way to tell, anyway. The gunman had worn a hat and sunglasses, and Christie remembered how frustrated the cops had been after the whole scene when she had told them that there wasn’t much she could describe about his appearance.

Still, she knew that she recognized him, and she knew that her brain would not be satisfied until she figured out from just where.

The man had been on his way back out the door, but Christie stood from the table. “Hang on a second, sir.”

He paused with a hand on the door, ready to push it open. He glanced back at her. “Yes?”

“Have we…? Have we met somewhere?”

The man’s face was blank for a couple of long seconds as his eyes stared deeply at Christie. His gaze felt like being pricked with a pin. It was cool and stabbing. Then slowly, a creeping grin tipped the corners of his lips, and his look turned smug.

“I don’t believe we have,” he replied.

Sammy looked from Christie to the man and then back in curiosity, but she said nothing.

Christie knew that smile. That was the grin that had imprinted itself in her mind for the entire past year. There was no mistaking it. Not only that, but it wasn't often that someone with English origin came here. At least no one famous. This was indeed the robber who had terrorized the Gilded Heron.

What did she say? Did she flat out accuse him right there? Christie at first wanted to shout it to the world that she had found the guy, and that he wouldn't get away with the old crime any longer. Her hand flew to her phone in her pocket instead. *I need to call the cops the minute he walks out the door,* she thought.

"You...You're the guy who robbed us a year ago!"

She had her finger pointed his direction before she could even realize what she was doing. The sentence flew out of her mouth faster than she would have liked. In fact, she hadn't even planned on letting it be spoken. She'd wanted to call the cops! Why had she just opened her mouth and let it run?

The man hesitated a little longer. He didn't take his hand off the door. "...Excuse me?"

Sammy glanced at Christie in utter confusion. "Christie? You sure?"

"I know that smile, Sammy," Christie said. "That's the same way he smiled at me before leaving me locked in the vault with all the other employees. I told you the story."

"I know, Christie. But also don't forget that you were frayed at the ends about the whole thing. You could have been a little stressed and saw a completely different looking guy than what you think," Sammy mentioned.

"There's no need to call your friend a liar," the man spoke up, turning away from the door. "For all you know, she could be right."

Christie's heart began to beat swifter at his statement. It was too ambiguous to decide if he was admitting to the crime or not, but his sudden interest in Christie's outburst had her feeling like she was on to something.

"Well?" she began. "Are you the guy? Or not?"

He paused and tilted his head slightly, glancing up at the ceiling as if thinking hard on something. Finally, he spoke up again. "Remind me. Which place do you think I robbed?"

Christie didn't understand. Wouldn't he know right away if he were the criminal or not? She was ninety percent certain this was the same man, but he was acting rather wishy-washy.

"The Gilded Heron. A year ago," she answered flatly.

His face was scrunched in serious deliberation for several more seconds. "The Gilded Heron," he uttered thoughtfully. "Not ringing a bell. Are you sure you weren't at the Nevada State Bank heist?"

Christie blinked. "What?" Was he admitting that he'd robbed more than one place? *But why wouldn't he rob more than just the casino?* She thought. *He's obviously talented and professional enough to continue what he's good at.*

"Was that just a confession?" Sammy wondered.

"It's not a confession unless he actually confesses to what I'm asking him," Christie muttered. "And if you really are a robber, then there's no doubt you know what I'm talking about, and you're just messing with me. One year ago, you and a bunch of your lackeys came into the Gilded Heron and managed to rig security and get into the cash vault. You stole everything and then locked us all in the room without our key cards so we couldn't get out."

That signature grin twitched at the corner of his mouth again. "Oh, *that* robbery. That's right. How could I forget your beautiful face? You were that manager woman lined up with the rest of the employees."

Christie was both flattered and distressed by his comment at the same time.

"So you caught me red-handed," said the man. He kept his arms to his sides and opened up his hands as if stating that he was unarmed. "What are you girls going to do? Call the cops on me?"

Christie was very much tempted. In fact her hand had already slipped around the phone in her left pants pocket.

"Well, we don't really have any proof," Sammy breathed, looking uncertain.

"I do." Christie stated. "I've got his face right here in front of me."

"But Christie, that's not enough for the cops," Sammy protested. "They'd probably need the physical money in order to pin the guy."

Christie looked at Sammy in disbelief. "He's right here in front of us, Sammy! He just confessed! What more would the cops need?"

The sound of the bell on the door jingled through the cafe, and Christie looked back at the man, only to realize that he'd just walked out. She raced across the cafe and caught the door before it could swing shut.

"Christie! What are you doing?" Sammy called, but Christie was already out the door and rushing down the drenched sidewalk to catch up to the man.

A waft of cigarette smoke struck her senses as she caught up to him. He heard her footsteps slapping against the rainwater puddles and turned to glance back at her. The smoke he held in one hand, having just inhaled. He let it out in wispy curls as Christie caught her breath.

"Yes?" he wondered.

"Don't think I'm just going to let you go like that," Christie gasped. She'd bent somewhat to place her hands to her knees, but she straightened once she had regained enough air. "You're the reason I had to quit my job at the Gilded Heron."

The man raised his eyebrows at her words, but Christie couldn't understand if his expression was one of surprise or pity. "And how is that?" he wondered.

"You had a gun pointed at my face," Christie snapped. "Every time I looked over at the cash vault after that day, I couldn't handle it. I didn't see the casino the same."

The stranger turned fully toward her and then gave her a humored grin. "You quit... because I traumatized you?"

"You could say that. I wanted to work someplace that wouldn't get robbed so easily."

He let out a barking laugh after removing the cigarette from his mouth. "First of all, that gun wasn't loaded. In fact my gun is *never* loaded. I'd never shoot an innocent person. Secondly, you were lucky it was a group like mine that came in and robbed the place blind. Any other group of thieves wouldn't be nearly as good, or nearly as clean. No one was hurt, no one was killed. Everyone got off the hook smoothly. Don't you agree that's pretty lucky on your part?"

Christie frowned at him. "I don't understand. Why are you telling me all this? Isn't it the criminal's job to stay incognito?"

"I don't have any reason or anything to hide," he admitted. "Besides, you were so insistent to know the truth, so I thought I'd confess it to you."

Christie's puzzled frown turned to an irritated scowl. "If you're so full of yourself then, why did you rob the Gilded Heron? If you're answering my questions, you can also tell me that much."

The man eyed her intricately for a handful of seconds at first. His icy gaze moved up and down along her body, as if soaking in every little detail. Christie was afraid that if he continued, he would easily strip away her defenses with a stare that penetrating.

"Why do you work?" he asked instead of answering her question.

Christie's expression changed back to confusion. "Huh?"

"Why do you work?" he repeated. "Just answer the question."

"I work because I need money to live comfortably," Christie replied, humoring him.

"So why do you think I work?" His stance and grown more casual over the minute. He had one hand in a pocket of his jeans. His cigarette was halfway burned down.

"I wouldn't call robbing places 'working,'" Christie retorted. "But I see where you're going. You work for money, too. Just in a different way. But it's not the same. I work legally. You break the law and steal people's hard-earned money."

"'Hard-earned,' you say?" He glanced down past the main street, looking toward the cluster of casino buildings one mile away. The Gilded Heron stood out brightly along with the rest, its yellow neon-lined, golden bird sign looking garish and inviting in the desert night.

"'Hard-earned' is what you can call a man who's worked manual labor for eight hours only to collect minimum wage pay. 'Hard-earned' is when you work until you drop to gain enough money to buy your kid that Christmas gift he's been begging you for, for a year. That's hard-earned money. Mr. Bazzoli doesn't deserve 'hard-earned' cash. He's nothing but a cheap, greedy, angry little man with no respect and no life," the man ranted.

The sheer disgust in the stranger's voice struck Christie with sympathetic curiosity. She knew that Mr. Bazzoli wasn't the greatest casino owner around, but she had no idea someone could be so angry with him like this.

"Your hatred toward him sounds personal," Christie remarked. "Did he wrong you in some way?"

The glazed reminiscence that had spread over the man's eyes as he vented dissipated when Christie took note of it. "There're a lot of wrong people out there. And a lot they've wronged. You get me now, though? The man had it coming to him."

As much as Christie was against revenge, she did believe in karmic justice. She wanted to know more, but she had a feeling it was dangerous to even consider affiliating herself with this guy. She had a lot of questions for him, but did she dare herself enough to have them answered?

"Look, hun, sorry for traumatizing you, but I promise that you were completely safe. So now that I've revealed that secret to you, would you let me be?"

*But the police,* her thoughts urged. *Call the police on him!* She idly touched the raised lump the phone created in her tight pants pocket, but it just didn't feel right to do it anymore. Now that she knew the reason behind the man's thievery, or at least... kind of knew the reason, she just couldn't bring herself up to turning him in without knowing just what, exactly, Mr. Bazzoli had done to anger this guy so much.

"I'm curious," Christie admitted. "I want to know what Mr. Bazzoli did to offend you so badly that you had to go and rob him."

The man's usual cool and calculated look darkened to a severe degree. The cigarette in his mouth bent slightly as he gritted his teeth around it. "As much as I like your thirst for knowledge, you don't need to know that much."

"So you'll tell me all about your apparently justified heists, but you won't tell me about the man who wronged you?" Christie was trying her best to comprehend this guy. "Fine, you don't have to tell me about Mr. Bazzoli, but I won't be satisfied until you tell me what kind of lesson you're trying to teach, here, with your revenge robbery. What is it, not to cross you?"

Finally the man broke through with another smile. It was a signature crooked grin that brought Christie right back to that fated day at the casino one year ago. "It's much more than that, hun, but sure. Why don't we go with that for now?"

She bit her lip, wanting to question him some more, but the man was already turning to walk back down the street.

"Wait," she called.

He glanced back at her only for a moment.

"Who are you, even?"

He smirked once again, those eyes glinting like the edges of a blade. "Call me Dan."

"Christie!" Sammy's voice carried down the street from the cafe. "You forgot your purse!"

Christie looked over her shoulder to answer Sammy, but when she turned back, the man named Dan was already turning a corner up ahead. She'd lost any other chances to talk to the guy.

# Chapter 3

The next day was no longer a blessing from the heavens. Although it had dumped rain the previous night, the morning sun had evaporated anything from the ground before it had a chance to soak into the parched earth. Wendover was a black hole for water. It was no wonder that the Salt Lake, which used to stretch for miles upon miles, had dried up to nearly nothing compared to its original size.

With the glaring hot sun destroying Christie's hopes of spending her day off outside, she stayed in and decided to catch up on house work she hadn't had time for, for the past week.

Her home was not necessarily small, but it wasn't the biggest in town for sure. It was a long, single-level home with a very spacious living room, a master bedroom with double doors leading inside, and a short hallway on the other end holding two extra bedrooms and one bathroom. The kitchen was up near the entryway, and a little small for Christie's liking, as she enjoyed having space where she could cook.

The entire house was set in bronze hues, with dark wooden paneling along the walls and mottled brown carpet. Christie had never been a fan of the carpet choice. If she ever ate anything over on the couch in the living room, she didn't notice the crumbs on the floor until she stepped on them.

Today she decided the best option would be to take care of the laundry and file bills. *Thrilling schedule,* she thought to herself sarcastically as she dressed for the day and walked out to make herself breakfast.

Christie was against ready-made meals and things like cereal or breakfast bars. Even though she made almost half of what she did at the Gilded Heron and used most of her paycheck to take care of mortgage, she refused to give in to the easily obtainable fried foods and junk. Christie may have been voluptuous, but it didn't come from eating unhealthy.

She began her morning with a stir-fry of eggs and pieces of ham, knowing she would need some serious protein in order to get through the chores she had mentally listed for the day. Only five minutes after she had finished her meal, a loud motor from a bike filtered in through the thin walls from outside. The motor revved loudly beside her house, and she looked up from cleaning her dish, frowning.

*Just who do they think they are, blaring their obnoxious engine noises while I'm trying to have a peaceful day at home?* She wondered irritably. Sometimes the neighbors did annoying things, like blasting their unpleasant rap music or weird mariachi-style RnB during the evening time well after sunset, but she didn't know of any of them that owned a motorcycle.

Dreadfully curious, Christie left her plate half-cleaned in the sink and walked over to the entry door, unlocking it and cracking it open to see what was going on. A gust of heat struck her pleasantly air-conditioned skin, and she was tempted to close the door again out of distaste for the temperature, but she only hesitated for a moment more before opening the door a little wider and peering out into the bright sun.

A sleek black motorcycle stood on the curb, slanted slightly on its stand and still running. Next to it was a tall man in a leather jacket that Christie would only imagine had to be as hot as Hades to wear. It looked familiar.

*Oh great... What is he doing here?* After last night, Christie had attempted to forget all about her contact with Dan. He didn't strike fear or worry in her like he had before, not after the declaration he had given her about his life practice, but she still worried about being too close to a guy like him. What if they became closer and he pulled her into one of his schemes?

No... that was silly. Christie would never get that close to Dan. They just happened to bump into each other yesterday, so why was she suddenly thinking about future plans with him? Was it his good looks?

Before she could conclude anything, Dan set his motorcycle helmet down on the bike's leather seat and turned around to approach Christie.

"Morning," he greeted. Even though he squinted, those sharp gray eyes remained striking and clear.

"What are you doing here? And how do you know where I live?" Christie demanded.

Dan smiled in a secretive fashion and stopped a couple of feet from Christie's doorstep, remaining in the shade of her house. "You greatly underestimate what I'm capable of, Christie."

She balked for a moment, mouth agape. *And he even knows my name? How? Why?* And then it struck her. Sammy had said her name numerous times the night before. Dan had probably just picked up on it like any normal person would.

"Nice day out, isn't it?" said Dan innocently.

"Hold on a second," Christie began, pointing a finger toward his chest. "Answer my question, or I'm going to slam this door in your face. What are you doing here?"

Dan's shoulders drooped to a degree. "I came to kidnap you."

"What?" Christie nearly exclaimed, a sudden flood of that residual fear rising up in her stomach.

Dan burst out laughing. "My God, you should see the look on your face! I wasn't meaning for real, hun! Look, I liked your avid determination to get to know who I am. Most people who identify me call the cops, and you didn't."

"I didn't because I was genuinely curious about who you were and why you do what you do. Aren't most robbers specifically focused on the thing they're stealing, and not whoever it is who owns the place?"

"Typically," Dan replied. "Which makes me unlike most. I couldn't really care less about the money, although it is a nice touch. Listen, Christie, it's been a long while since I've met a girl even remotely close to you."

"You don't even know me. How can you start making judgments like that already?" Although Christie was indeed flattered by how much interest Dan had in her, she couldn't shake that nervous feeling or the thought that maybe this guy was just as much a conman as he was a thief. What if he was dragging her in with all this sudden interest because she was his next target?

"That's why I'm here," said Dan, lifting his arms up just a little to express his position on the doorstep. "You and I are going out on a date."

"Oh, like hell we are!"

Dan dropped his arms, his animated stance fizzling out. "Let's make a deal. You go out with me today so I can get to know you better, and in turn I'll answer every question you might have about me, my life, and Mr. Bazzoli. How does that sound?"

The burning urge to know more really did make it seem like a good idea, but what didn't sound like a good idea was jumping on the back of a motorcycle with this strange man. Christie glanced back into her living room briefly, thinking about the bills she needed to sort and the laundry that needed to be done. *It can wait another day,* she thought with only the slightest hint of guilt.

Goodness, what was wrong with her? Christie was never the type to make rash decisions. It was something about Dan. His quirking smile, glinting eyes, and beautiful figure spoke to Christie on a level that she had not reached for a handful of years. Not to mention his delicious accent. She craved his presence.

"Fine," she replied after several seconds. "I'll humor you. But only for the afternoon. I'd like to be back in the evening."

"Fair enough," he responded. "Come on out and we'll get you suited up."

Christie slipped on her shoes after grabbing her purse and stepped out of the house, shutting the door tightly behind her before pulling out a key and locking it. She couldn't trust the neighbors enough to keep it unlocked for the day, unfortunately.

"What do you mean, exactly, by 'suited up’?” Christie wondered as she followed Dan over to the steadily purring bike.

"I mean this." He walked around the side of the bike and opened up one of the saddle bags, tugging out a spare riding jacket. There was an extra helmet on the back of the motorcycle that he also removed and handed over to her. The jacket was thick and heavy and smelled like new vinyl.

"Where did you find something like this in my size?" she wondered. "Did you just happen to have a plus size lady friend?"

Dan chuckled. "No, I bought those. Today. For you." He grinned when he saw her disbelieving look. He swung his leg over the bike and kicked up its stand. "Now put those on and climb on behind me."

Christie slipped on the jacket and then fitted the helmet over her head. It was snug and squeezed her jaw from the thick cheek pads, but she would sacrifice a little comfort for some durable protection. After fumbling with the buckle and chin strap, Dan glanced to the side to watch her.

"You need help?" he wondered after he'd placed his own helmet back on and fixed up the straps.

"I just might. I've never ridden a bike before."

Dan's eyebrows were obscured by the low-set visor, but the look in his eyes said "are you kidding me?"

"Come here. I'll get your straps for you."

Christie leaned in toward Dan as he reached out and took a hold of the straps, working them neatly in through the buckles and snapping them in place. His fingers were surprisingly cool as they brushed against her chin, and his actions were done with care. She gazed at his stormy eyes, growing increasingly more attracted to them the longer she was able to stare. He didn't notice her admiration. He finished with her straps a moment later.

"There. That should do it. If your helmet feels loose at all, let me know."

Christie swallowed and steered her thoughts back to the bike. "I think it's stuck on my head too tightly to come off without a shoe horn or a crowbar."

Dan chuckled before offering her a set of gloves and sliding a pair on for himself. "You'd be surprised what a crash can do, hun."

Christie climbed onto the bike behind him and slipped the gloves on. "Have you crashed before?"

"Oh yes," was the short answer. "And I messed up my arm badly because of it. I wasn't wearing a jacket, so you can probably safely assume I learned my lesson after that."

The motorcycle jerked forward. Christie wrapped her arms tightly around Dan's waste with a small yelp of surprise.

"Oh yeah, you might want to hold on, by the way," he chuckled over the sound of the steadily roaring motor.

Christie scowled toward his back. "Where are we going, anyway?"

Dan slowed the bike at a stop light, turning on his signal to steer right onto the main street. "Out of town a little ways," he answered once the motor's blaring noise died down somewhat.

"There's nothing out of town a little ways," Christie retorted. "Just the salt flats."

"Exactly."

Bewildered, she could only hold onto him again as he turned and rushed down the road heading west. Christie turned her head to watch the buildings breeze by, catching sight of her second hand bookstore and the coffee shop just one block away. They passed the town park which was almost always devoid of children. The swing sets and various stationed toys were paint-chipped and warped from nearly a decade of rotting in the hot sun.

Soon the playground vanished behind the police station, and then the police station disappeared behind the massive edifices of noise and bright lights marking Wendover's casinos. The Gilded Heron stood proud and stately amongst the jumble of filtering music coming from the nearby concert hall and the mess of cars trying to find parking spaces in the spacious lots.

She and Dan crossed the state line, passing into Utah. Wendover extended about another mile and a half past the state divider before all the diversity and excitement of the buildings disappeared from view.

Dan took a ramp onto the highway and sped up his bike. The snarling engine was nearly deafening in Christie's ears, and without any other noise distracting her, she was left to stew in her own thoughts while gazing out at the bleach white "sands" of the desert around them.

The Bonneville Salt Flats had always fascinated her. When Christie had been little, her family used to take road trips to Utah and had always taken the direction out through the salt. Because the road trip into Salt Lake from Wyoming was always so long, she used to mark the salt flats as the last leg of their journey before they arrived at their long awaited destination.

Several minutes after getting onto the highway, Dan slowed and exited by driving off and onto the salt. Christie had worried a little that it wouldn't be safe right after rain, but it appeared that the blazing sun had evaporated any moisture still there. The salt crunched underneath the wheels of the bike.

"Ready for some fun?" Dan asked.

Before she could respond, he revved the motor again and tore off across the flat ground. Christie seized onto his jacket tightly with her leather gloves, terrified of falling off from the amount of force that slammed against her body from the thrust of the vehicle. Dan sped up even faster, charging along the flats like a shiny black devil stranded in a white sea.

"Dan!" Christie shouted, although she wasn't sure why she was calling to him.

"What is it, hun?" He'd raised his own voice so that she could hear him over the growling engine. "Scared?"

"No!" she exclaimed back to him. "This is... *awesome*!" Never in her life had she imagined herself riding across the salt flats with a stranger on the back of a motorcycle, but she absolutely loved it. The exhilaration of the hot wind against her body... the sleekness of the bike... She wondered why she hadn't thought of trying it out herself.

*Oh yeah, none of those bozos in the motorcycle licensing group would take me seriously,* she recollected. Christie didn't see herself fitting in with the biker type. *No, this is more my thing. Sitting on the back of a sexy ride with a hot guy. That's where I would prefer to be.*

Dan twisted the bike, dipping from side to side in a wavy pattern. Christie shrieked in delight and held onto his waist tighter as the wheels slanted. The world tilted and Christie watched white salt meet blue sky in a loud and crazy dance.

Dan's bike sounded like a perpetually snarling tiger, and the manner in which he crouched over the handlebars and increased the speed made him seem like a predator on the hunt, chasing phantom prey. Christie gazed at his shiny helmet and the lean body under that black leather. She admired him. Somehow Dan had won her over, just with one wild ride out on the salt, but she never wanted it to end.

"How are you holding up, Christie?" Dan called to her over his shoulder.

"Great!" she replied, beaming from ear to ear.

"Excellent!" was his reply. "Just keep holding on, okay?"

Christie did as she was instructed. Dan angled the bike to the left once they were a fourth of a mile from the highway. She vaguely wondered where they were going, but it wasn't the biggest thing on her mind at the time. There were so many sensations that she adored, and was too busy basking in them all to really care about anything else.

West Wendover passed by them two miles or so away in the distance. The salt flats didn't go on for too long toward the east on the other side of the highway. Christie wondered why Dan had picked this side of the flats to ride across instead of the other side, which looked as if it went on forever.

Just as she was about to let her curiosity overtake her, compelling her to ask him where they were going, Dan turned left and began heading north. Christie kept her gaze on the east, watching the distant purple mountains.

Ten more minutes into their travel and Christie finally let the wonder of where they were going set in.

"Dan," she called.

"Yeah?"

"Where are you taking me?"

There was a pause as he tipped his head back to glance at her. She just barely caught that signature grin of his underneath the dark visor of his helmet. "You'll see. Just relax."

Christie frowned a little but turned her attention back to the salt flats. Off toward the North West were bizarre scenes of half mountains. Mirages. Christie remembered first seeing what seemed to be the floating hills when she was a child. In reality it was just a duplicated image of part of a mountain range further west, but there was still a bizarre type of fascination that Christie felt when she saw it. Other mountain mirages hung around the north, closer toward the highway.

Christie's phone buzzed in her pocket. She couldn't hear the jingling ringtone over the growl of the bike motor, but she could only think of one person it may have been who would be calling her this morning.

*It's probably Sammy wanting to ask if I'm busy today, so she can drag me down to one of the casino espresso bars for a donut.* It was what Sammy typically tried to do when Christie had a day off from work that synced up with one of her own.

*Can't take your call right now. I'm on a date with a criminal!* The thought was hilarious and exciting at the same time, although Christie was sure that was mainly from the high that the motorcycle ride was giving her.

Dan finally slowed the bike when he reached the edge of the salt flats northwest of the highway. There was a stretch of desert before the mountain range on the horizon. They traveled across the dusty earth for a short time before he stopped the bike thirty feet from the foot hills and turned it off.

"What are we doing?" Christie wondered as she swung her leg off the bike and stood. Her legs felt a little raw and stiff from the ride, so she stretched them.

Dan kicked down the bike stand and stood from it as well.

"We're taking a short break," he replied as he unbuckled his helmet and removed it with a sigh.

Christie fumbled with the buckle on her own helmet, and so Dan stepped over and helped her. He braced his fingers underneath the helmet and stretched it to the sides, widening it enough that the cheek pads didn't dig into Christie's head when he pulled it off of her. Her head felt so much lighter, although the ends of her hair were a ratty, tangled mess from the wind. She should have brought a hair tie, but she hadn't thought of it at the time.

"Right here? In the hot sun?" she wondered. "We're going to roast, Dan."

Dan shook his head and then nodded to the foot hills. A deep set cave entrance rested about five yards away. Some boulders rested around the dark entry, and it had a bit of a jagged overhang.

"You're kidding me. You took me spelunking?" Christie questioned. "Is that what this is all about?"

"Nah, not really," he answered. "This is about you and me. I just thought perhaps you'd like to get out of the sun and get in someplace a little cooler."

"Well, I certainly wouldn't mind."

He smiled charmingly and set their helmets on the back of the bike. "Good then. Let's go."

Christie walked with him toward the cave, keeping close to his side. He lagged behind just a little to fall into step with her, and then he snaked his arm around her waist to hold her close. Christie didn't know if she was entirely comfortable with it, although she did like Dan a lot. Was the closeness okay, or was it better if she kept her distance? And there was no proof that Dan wasn't some horrible trickster dragging her out of sight to molest or murder her.

*Preposterous,* she automatically rallied at the idea. *Dan doesn't even carry a weapon on him.* Or did he? She hadn't actually thought about checking, but looking at his pockets, it appeared the only things he did carry were his wallet and a phone. *Oh God, what if he is one of those psychos that kills with his bare hands?*

Christie told her mind to shut up.

Dan caught her looking at his pockets. For a brief moment there was a bout of confusion in his eyes, but then he gave that upward, smug little smirk again. "Something interesting you down there, Christie?"

There was amusement mixed with his accent, and Christie's face flamed with heat. "Oh, don't flatter yourself, mister," she snapped. "I was just making sure you didn't have a hidden weapon somewhere that you planned to attack me with." She hoped her comment would reveal whatever hidden wishes Dan may have had. She also hoped she sounded innocent enough mentioning it.

"Oh, indeed," Dan joked. "Right now I've got the world's smallest gun hidden in my pants pocket. So tiny that you can't even see the handle."

Christie refused to smile at his sarcasm, though she wanted to. "Well how am I supposed to know? You just plucked me up off my street and drove me twenty miles away from my home. Now you're leading me to a cave. Anything could happen."

"You're right, anything *could* happen." Dan's tone turned challenging and somewhat dangerous. As they reached the shade of the cave, he took his arm from her waist and stepped in front of her, placing both hands on her shoulders.

"D-Dan, what--?"

He pressed her up against the cave wall and then pinned her with his hips, grinning darkly. He looked sinister and predatory in the shadows. "We'll get to the real reason behind this journey, Christie." He was close enough for her to smell his exotic cologne. It was warm and intoxicating. And before she knew it, he had dropped his head down, and his lips were an inch away from hers.

She wanted to kiss him. Badly, she wanted to give in to the sweet temptation and make that contact with him. Dan was attractive, charming, and mysterious. They were the qualities she'd always dreamed a guy would have. But... was this even right? She barely knew him. The most she knew was that he was a shameless thief, and not just any thief, but a professional one.

Who knew how many people he'd held at gunpoint in order to create a successful robbery? It didn't matter if the gun was loaded or not. Christie had honestly felt like her life had been in danger the day that Dan had robbed the Gilded Heron, and it had damaged her perception of the casino since then. He had ruined a small part of her life, and with that thought, Christie realized how terrifying this situation really was. It may have only been a tiny portion of her that he had smeared a black mark on, but she didn't want him to ruin anything bigger.

His lips brushed across hers, but Christie quickly turned her head from him and pressed her hands to his chest to push him off.

"Stop it," she ordered.

"Christie, what's the matter?" Dan questioned. He leaned back from her to give her face some space, but he didn't unpin her from the wall. "It's obvious that you like me as much as I like you."

"It's not about that," Christie argued, still trying to get him away from her by pressing her hands on his chest. "Please, get off me."

Dan backed away, and Christie left the cave to start back toward the bike. "Just take me back, please."

"But Christie, why?" Dan wondered. He followed her in haste. "I thought you wanted this."

"You don't know me enough to know what I want, Dan," Christie replied, trying to keep her voice distant.

"I'll take you home, but at least tell me why you won't let me kiss you."

Christie stopped and turned to face him. "I don't know you, Dan. I have your name, which is probably fake to conceal your identity. I have the information that you like to steal from people to get them back for things they've done to you. That's it. And the only other thing that I can assume is that you're from England because of your accent. I know nothing about you, Dan, and you don't know a single thing about me. I'm not about to just give in to carnal desire without first making sure that I'm safe. And right now, I don't feel safe with you."

Dan's shoulders were down, showing his disappointment. "Well then I suppose before I take you home, I should at least tell you about Mr. Bazzoli."

"We did make a deal," Christie commented.

Dan sighed and folded his arms, looking off toward the northwest. "A couple years ago, Mr. Bazzoli had contacted me asking about setting up a fundraiser to aid the homeless here in Wendover. I thought it was very generous of him, as we all know he's extremely wealthy. I came to America to help. I spent quite a bit of funds to just start up the fundraiser. I purchased cars to be auctioned off, hosted parties, set up concerts... And while I was doing all those things, Mr. Bazzoli had put himself in charge of collecting the money raised. We reached the goal that he had in mind, and so I took my leave and went back home. Two weeks later, I received word that all the money I had raised, which could have easily built multiple houses and bought food for the homeless for weeks, had disappeared. When I researched what happened, I discovered Mr. Bazzoli had taken every penny and used it all to spend a month-long vacation in Venice with his wife."

This news shocked Christie. The man whom everyone looked up to in the casinos had really been that greedy and selfish?

"So he used you?" she concluded.

"He used me," Dan answered with a nod.

"And so you got back at him by stealing all the money he had gained from the events and conveniences in the casinos."

"Absolutely."

"But the money you stole from the vault was only a week's worth of gain. That was probably barely even a fraction of the amount that Mr. Bazzoli cheated you out of."

Dan smiled a little, but it was a morbid one this time. "Yes, which is why I set up connections inside the Gilded Heron to slowly leak funds to me over time. That's why I'm still in Nevada. I've been here a year, slowly earning my share back from the greedy weasel."

This all sounded accurate to Christie. The Gilded Heron had been going downhill ever since the heist. "That makes sense as to why the Heron is now the lowest rated casino in Wendover."

"I owed you some information, so there you go," Dan finished. He picked up his helmet and fitted it back over his head. "Let's head back."

"Hold on, so what about the Nevada State Bank? You mentioned something about that, too. Did the owner cheat you out of money there as well?"

Dan grinned and fixed the straps of his helmet before helping her slip hers back over her own head. "That's a story for another day, Christie."

"If there *is* another day," Christie replied. She moved away from him to buckle up her own straps before he could help. "I still don't feel comfortable because of what you tried to do."

Dan's smile faded. "Right."

After climbing back on behind him, Dan started the bike back up and turned it around, heading back across the salt flats toward town. Christie held onto the back seat this time instead of Dan's waist. The more distance she put between her and him, the better she felt.

At least she thought so at the time.

# Chapter 4

"He tried to kiss you?"

Sammy sat beside Christie at their favorite bar in the Nile, a themed casino adjacent to the Gilded Heron.

"Yes. He moved within an inch from my face. No--closer. I was so tempted," Christie admitted. She had ordered a strawberry daiquiri, but only idly played with the straw and really had no desire to drink it. Sammy was on her fifth, and hopefully last, wine cooler. She was also looking moderately drunk.

"Why didn't you?" she wondered before taking a swig of her bottle.

"Because it would have been dangerous and stupid of me," Christie uttered. "I have no idea who this guy is, other than he's a wanted suspect and he has a really nice bike."

"Sounds good enough for me," Sammy muttered.

Christie sighed. "It's barely five o'clock. Did you really have to get smashed so early in the evening?"

Sammy swished the remaining drink around in her bottle by twisting it in a circular pattern with one hand. "I'm not smashed--I'm slightly squished." She had been staring at her drink, but she looked back at Christie. "I'm also serious. Everything you've told me tonight, Christie, makes this guy seem like a great one. It isn't often you find out about a man who will stand up to Mr. Bazzoli."

"But what he did was still wrong," Christie argued. "You don't get revenge on people. It's just not right."

"But was that what it was?" asked Sammy as she set her bottle down. "Was he seeking out revenge on him, or acting as an advocate for justice?"

"I'm not sure stealing casino money is justified in any way. Doesn't matter who wronged you."

Sammy shrugged one shoulder and then finished off the last of her drink. "It's all relative in the end if you really like him."

Christie rolled her eyes. "You're clearly drunk, because that is the worst advice you could ever give me. Besides, Sammy, the casino isn't the only place he robbed. You recall him mentioning something about the state bank, too? He won't tell me about that one."

"Relax!" Sammy laughed. "You're paranoid about what's moral when what you should really be focusing on is whatever else you can learn from him the next time you see him. He took you out on a date, Christie. He's *interested* in you. He's not going to use you."

"But you don't know that for sure," Christie breathed.

Sammy opened her mouth, but her eyes skirted to the right across the casino floor. Christie followed her gaze and then froze, her heart dropping into her stomach. Dan had tracked her down yet again, and this time carried with him a sizeable bouquet of various colored roses.

He wore a burgundy shirt with a black tie, matching a pair of slacks and dark dress shoes. His coffee brown hair had been neatly groomed, and his grey eyes shone brightly with interest.

"Speak of the devil and he shall appear," Sammy muttered with a small smile.

Christie didn't return the grin. She gazed at the cluster of flowers in disbelief. Just what was the occasion? All the men Christie had dated in the past had rarely gotten her flowers for any occasion. Valentine's Day was usually gifted with "Baby, let's make out." And none of her relationships had lasted long enough to see an anniversary. Let alone a gift of any kind.

Dan stopped a few feet from them. He looked at Sammy first, nodding in greeting, and then turned to Christie. "I wanted to apologize for nearly taking advantage of you earlier. That was brash and distasteful of me. Christie... Would you accept my apology?" He offered her the bouquet, and Christie stared at it, unsure of how to answer him.

Of course she wanted to say yes and that she would forgive him, but her mind was clouded with the uncertainty that still hung thick like a fog in the air surrounding the two of them. Still, she supposed it was only decent of her to accept his flowers and forget about the kiss that almost happened.

*Even though I now badly want it. No man has ever done this sort of thing while saying sorry. It shows that he really cares about how I feel.* Conflicted but staying civil, Christie nodded and slowly took the flowers from Dan's hand.

"Yes, I'll accept your apology, Dan. Thank you. The roses are beautiful."

Dan smiled softly, looking satisfied.

"Pardon my butting in, but what's with the getup?" Sammy questioned, indicating Dan's nice clothes with a sweep of her hand.

"Ah, yes, that was going to be my next question," said Dan, and he turned back to Christie. "Christie, would you consider coming to dinner with me? At the Nile steakhouse?"

Sammy's eyes grew wide as she glanced at Christie, on the edge of her stool and waiting for an answer. She probably knew that Christie had never eaten there, as the prices were through the roof expensive. Christie barely made enough money to pay for meat and vegetables to have for dinner every night. Even when she had been working as a staff manager at the casino a year ago, she still had trouble eating at any seriously fancy places.

"The steakhouse?" Christie repeated. "You've got to be kidding me. I know you make a lot of money the cheater's way, but I never thought you would be so willing to waste it on overpriced food."

"I wouldn't be wasting it," Dan replied quietly, his sharp eyes never leaving Christie's. "Getting to know you is worth so much more, Christie."

The words were sweet and gentle, and Christie felt her heart slowly slip back up into her chest, as it beat a bit faster from the sound of his voice. She was silent for several seconds. Sammy gazed at her like she was crazy. Her eyes pleaded for Christie to accept the invitation.

Finally, she sighed and looked back at Dan. "Alright. I'll go."

Dan smiled. "Fantastic, because I already bought you a nice dress to wear tonight."

Sammy squealed with glee, and Christie frowned. "You did that for me? You don't even know my size."

Dan shrugged. "I guessed, but I'm hoping it was a good guess. It's neatly folded in my saddle bag right now. I didn't want to bring it in in case you said no."

Christie sighed, and before she realized it, she smiled back at him. Dan was clearly trying his hardest to show her that he cared. To her it was touching and kind of him. Maybe she was being too harsh on Dan because of his career choice. It was difficult for her to look past the profession, but Christie didn't want to be hooked on that and ruin her chances to really get to know who Dan was. He definitely had a sweet side to him, and Christie liked that very much.

"I'll meet you at the bike, okay?" said Dan. "It's just parked out front."

He turned from the bar and began his walk back toward the entrance of the casino.

Sammy pushed lightly against Christie's shoulder. "Go have fun!" she urged.

Christie stood from the stool but then hesitated. "I don't know, Sammy. What if I'm wrong about this choice? What if I regret doing this?"

"What are you talking about?" Sammy wondered, raising an eyebrow. "Are you afraid of falling in love with him?"

The bluntness of her words were sharp on Christie's ears. She enjoyed the idea of falling in love with a man, but with Dan? She had no idea how she felt toward him, other than those smiles he gave her, and the caring gaze of his eyes sent her heart fluttering like an excited bird. It was a crush, although his shadiness made her feel in danger.

"I don't think you have anything to worry about, Christie. And I'm sure you'll know if and when to run if he does something to scare you. He's been nothing but sweet to you since you met him yesterday. Maybe it's time for you to stop dwelling on the scare from a year ago and see Dan as the man he is today. Besides, didn't you tell me that he worked his ass off to make a successful fundraiser for homeless people? Doesn't that sound like he cares at least a little bit about others?"

Sammy had a point. Christie hadn't dwelled too heavily on the thought that Dan had bent over backwards to support a good cause, even if that cause ended up never happening.

"You're right," she sighed after a moment's deliberation.

"Of course I'm right. Now go have some fun," Sammy said again, pushing at her even more.

Christie smiled thinly at Sammy, grateful for her input and support. If it weren't for her barista friend, Christie probably would have been holed up in her house with the doors locked, trying to avoid Dan as much as possible.

"I suppose I've got a dress to try on," she stated.

Sammy beamed at her words and waved to her. "I'll see you later, Christie."

As Christie walked across the casino floor back toward the entrance, she glanced over her shoulder to see Sammy tugging the untouched daiquiri closer to sip it.

# Chapter 5

Christie gazed at herself in the bathroom mirror, running her fingers along the cream dress's soft fabric. It had a goddess-style shape, with a low V-neck and wrapping along the waist to accentuate the bust and hips. It did well to flatter her figure. She looked like Greek royalty in it, and so to add another touch of regalness, Christie gathered up her hair and tied it in a bun in the back, leaving a couple wavy strands to frame her cheeks.

*I look pretty,* she thought as she twisted and turned, watching the soft fabric of the dress float around her legs. *No, scratch that. I look damn sexy.* She smiled to herself, feeling like a giddy, love-struck teen again. Christie never would have seen herself trying on a dress like this, and yet Dan seemed to know exactly what she would look good in.

Christie stepped out of the bathroom where Dan waited for her. His eyes scanned over her figure, and a slow smile spread across his lips. "Christie, you are absolutely breathtaking," he complimented.

Christie blushed as he extended his arm to take her street clothes. "I'll take those back to the bike. Do you want to meet me at the entrance of the steakhouse?"

She nodded and gave him her clothes. "Thank you, Dan."

He nodded back to her, keeping his smile. "I'll be right back."

As he walked away, Christie flounced toward the steakhouse on the other side of the casino. She felt beautiful, and was actually learning to let go of her worries surrounding Dan. A man wanting to use her or abuse her wouldn't go to this extent, would he?

Once she'd reached the entrance of the steakhouse, she waited patiently for Dan to return. Two other couples were in front of her waiting in line to be seated. One was a younger couple, and the man caught a glimpse of Christie and did a double take to admire her.

Christie tried to avoid his gaze or smile, but inside she was glowing. She'd been called pretty in the past, but had never caught men staring at her like this. The man received a glare and an elbow in the side from his girl beside him, and so he looked away, but Christie couldn't have felt happier.

Dan approached the line to meet back up with her, and he offered his arm for her to take. Christie linked hers with his, grinning in greeting, and they walked to the front together to be seated.

The young man who had been in line was not the only person to gaze at Christie as they entered the dimly lit steakhouse. A handful of other men and some of the women stared as she passed. Christie felt like a queen.

The waiter stopped at a booth and offered for them to sit down. Christie took a seat across from Dan before they were handed their menus.

"So, my mission tonight is to start over," Dan announced.

Christie raised an eyebrow in question.

"You and I getting to know each other," Dan clarified. "I'm afraid your first impression of me was less than likeable."

"But I think I'm learning that first impressions don't mean much," Christie replied.

"Still, I insist. May we start over?"

Christie sighed but smiled to him. "Yes, I suppose we can."

Once they had ordered, Dan sat back in his seat. "So you know about how I feel when someone wrongs me," he began.

She nodded. "And remind me to never do it to you, although I don't believe I would ever have enough money worth stealing."

Dan chuckled. "I wouldn't steal from you, Christie. I'd rather spoil you with expensive gifts."

"But why?" Christie asked. "I'm--"

"Before you say you're nothing special, Christie, let me tell you that you are special to me. In just about twenty-four hours, I've found myself so much happier when I'm around you. It's like all the worries about what's going on around me fade away, and all I see is your sweet face and I hear your lovely voice."

Christie blushed. "Do you really mean that, Dan?"

Dan opened his mouth, but a faint jingling erupted from his pocket. He tugged his phone out, frowned severely, and then looked at Christie. "I'm sorry, Christie. Excuse me for a moment." He answered and placed it to his ear. "Yes," he uttered in response after several seconds. And then, "Are you sure?" After another pause, Dan lowered the phone and uttered a breathy curse.

"What's wrong?" Christie wondered.

"The cops are on my tail," Dan answered quietly so as not to stir up any attention. "I'm going to have to head back home."

"Where's your home?"

"Not in the US," he replied sorely. "A buddy of mine has already set up a flight for me that leaves early in the morning." He sounded disappointed.

Christie's heart sank. She had found herself reaching a new stage in her life by falling fast for this guy, and she should have expected something unfortunate to come out of it.

"So... I won't see you again," she uttered. "This will be the last time."

Dan hesitated for a lengthy moment, his eyes moving to stare at the gaudy casino carpet as he deliberated something.

"Unless… you wanted to come with me."

Christie sat back in surprise. "Come with you? To where? England?"

Dan didn't answer her, glancing over at a couple of people who had taken note of her raised voice and were looking their way.

"I-I... I have no idea, Dan. I mean, I still don't feel like we've been acquainted enough."

Dan sighed and nodded. "I realize this, and I'm sad that our dating had to be cut short. It is too much to ask of you, and I understand your concern. I'm sorry that I said anything."

Christie didn't know what to say. She really didn't have any attachments here in Wendover. Not anymore, anyway. She had her work, and there was Sammy, but really there was nothing else. Christie had been depressed for quite some time, and she hadn't once thought about her depression since Dan had come around. But to jump on a plane with him without a second's thought?

"Can the decision wait until morning?" Christie asked.

Dan's eyes lit up slightly at her question, and he nodded. "Of course. But please... Don't think that I'm forcing you into anything. This is entirely up to you."

"I know, Dan. Is there a way that I can contact you before you take off in the morning? Like a phone number or something?"

He glanced down at his glass of water resting in front of him. "Unfortunately no. I wouldn’t want to risk giving you a number in case the police found it, should you decide to stay here in Wendover. I'll come by your place in the morning, discretely, to hear your answer. Does that sound reasonable?"

Christie nodded to him.

Dan extended his arms across the table, leaving his palms open in an invitation. Christie took his hands with her own and he closed his fingers around hers. Dan looked her in the eyes. "Christie, no matter the decision you make, I have thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent with each other."

Before Christie knew it, moisture brimmed her lower eyelids. She tried to blink it away. "You've made me feel like a queen tonight, Dan."

He smiled, the worry lines in his face receding. "That warms my heart to hear."

Their hands broke away from each other as their meals arrived. For the rest of the time, Christie relished Dan's company, and they spoke about small things. There was no talk about robbing vaults, or greedy Mr. Bazzoli, or flying to England.

Instead Christie learned of Dan's favorite activities outside of his shady career, such as bike racing, clay pigeon shooting, and trying out new restaurants. There was nothing terrifying about Dan's background that he had told her, and at this point Christie felt like if she asked, Dan could tell her anything, given the right setting, and probably when police weren't chasing him.

At the end of the night, Christie’s perspective of Dan had warmed considerably. They said goodbye and went their separate ways. Christie glanced at the regular bar where Sammy had sat an hour and a half before with her, but of course she was gone. Still, she felt like she needed a third party opinion about the plane flight before she made any more brash decisions with Dan.

“Sammy?” Christie spoke on the phone as she drove home five minutes later. “I’d like to talk to you about something if it’s not too late. It’s really important, and I’d like your input.”

*“Sure thing,*” Sammy answered, sounding quite a bit more sober than she had a little while ago. “*I’ll come over to your place. I’m at the park anyway.*”

Christie only lived one block from there. “What are you doing at the park at this hour?” she wondered.

“*Oh… Nothing in particular.*” It sounded like a lie. “*Just shoot me a text when you get home, alright?*”

“Sure thing.”

Christie hung up not long after and drove the rest of the way to her home.

The thought of leaving Wendover for good was both stressful and dreamlike to her. She remembered what people at the Gilded Heron used to say whenever someone declared they were moving.

*“They’re moving? Just watch. It will never happen. A week from now they will still be here.”*

Christie and Sammy used to joke that they lived in the Wendover Triangle, a play on the Bermuda Triangle. Most people who moved to Wendover had a rough time moving away, as they spent all their house payment funds and gas money on slots and poker games.

She stopped outside her house and got out of the car, walking to the entrance and unlocking it before stepping in. It had been a long day, and Christie was exhausted. As much as she wanted to sleep, though, she knew that she had a big decision to make before she could even think about going into her room and lying down in bed.

She sent a short text to Sammy once she had taken off her shoes and set her purse down. All the while she couldn’t stop fantasizing what it would be like to just leave Wendover after several years and go someplace where she had never been before… with a courteous man that she hadn’t known for longer than a day. It seemed rather ludicrous when she thought of it that way, but Christie couldn’t help the butterflies that flurried in her stomach at the thought.

“Rainy England,” she uttered to herself as she settled the house down for the night, opening up the windows and turning off the air conditioning to let in the cooling air from outside instead.

Christie was in the middle of turning on a fan in her bedroom when a knock sounded on her door, so she walked out and opened it. Sammy stood on her step, looking tiny and frazzled in the moonlight.

Christie raised an eyebrow. “Sammy? Are you okay?”

“I’m great!” Sammy replied as she bounced inside. Christie shut the door while Sammy turned around to face her, a wide smile on her face. “Met the hottest, nicest guy in the park tonight, and we have a date set up for tomorrow. I’m taking the day off to go out with him. Isn’t that crazy?”

Christie smiled faintly. “And let me guess… You two made out hardcore in the park before deciding on a time to go out.”

Sammy giggled. “Is that a little nuts to you?”

“Maybe, but I’m used to you being a complete loon.”

Sammy twirled into the living room, obviously in a love-struck high, and dropped heavily on Christie’s couch before sighing. “So… What was it you needed to talk to me about?”

“Tomorrow morning I may be getting on a plane flight to England with Dan,” Christie announced darkly.

Sammy sat up and peered at her in absolute surprise. “Really?”

“I… I don’t know. That’s why I need your rational input. Do you think it’s too brash of me?”

Sammy took a couple of moments to think about it, and then she leaned forward and clasped her hands in her lap, looking over at Christie standing by the kitchen. “Let me ask you this, Christie. What are the factors that are holding you back from making the choice?”

Christie walked over to her and sat down beside her. “Well, for one I’ve only known Dan for a day or so. Another reason is that he’s a wanted criminal. The whole reason he has to leave is because apparently the cops are on his trail. He also invited me to go with him back to his home, which I’m assuming is England..”

Sammy smiled to her, patting her knee. “Christie… Go for it. Don’t let me or your work hold you back from doing what you want to do in your heart. Just promise me you’ll keep in touch, okay?”

Christie smiled to her friend. “Of course I’ll keep in touch with you, Sammy. You’re my life saver.”

With Sammy’s approval, Christie felt much better about the situation. She said goodbye to her friend some time later and got ready for bed. Christie lay down on her mattress and closed her eyes, hoping that all would go well in the morning.

# Chapter 6

Christie awoke from a knock on her back door. Startled out of her sleep, she jumped out of bed to go see what was going on. She stepped out of her master bedroom and opened up the screen door before checking through the tiny window at who it could be.

Dan stood in her back yard, his gaze flitting around the vicinity as if to make sure no one had followed him. Startled that he was already here, Christie checked the clock on the wall while opening up the back door. It was just a little past four in the morning.

“Dan?” she wondered. “What are you doing here so early?”

Dan stepped inside her house before she had a chance to offer to let him in. “Good morning, Christie. I’m sorry to wake you up. I thought now would be the best time to come and see you. My plane leaves in just a little over two hours.”

Before Christie could comprehend what she was doing, she embraced him. Dan hugged her back in slight surprise. “Is everything okay?” she asked as she pulled away from him.

“Yes, everything is fine. I just wanted to spend a bit of time with you before leaving.”

“Stop making it sound like I’m not coming with you, Dan,” Christie ordered.

“Wait… Do you…? You mean you would like to come home with me?” Dan questioned, his eyes wide and hopeful.

Christie nodded. “I had a talk with Sammy last night, and decided that there’s nothing for me here in Wendover that’s really worth staying for. I like you, Dan, and I want to get to know you more.”

Dan smiled at this as the door slowly closed behind him. “That’s fantastic news.”

“How am I going to get a plane ticket though?” she asked as Dan took her hand and walked further into the house. They entered the living room.

“Oh, you won’t need one. A buddy of mine has prepared a private jet that we’ll be taking. One that I own.”

Christie blinked. “You own a private jet?”

He chuckled. “As well as much more than that, Christie. I have a mansion in England. I also am founder of three separate charities for orphans and homeless adults. Things I wanted to tell you earlier, but hadn’t gotten a chance to. You seemed too stressed to hear about England at dinner.”

“Dan… you do that for people in need? You’re…” Christie was blown away. This changed her views about Dan completely. She wasn’t even concerned about why Dan had stolen from a bank now, and in fact didn’t really care to know the reason.

“I’m sorry for being so secretive with you, Christie.”

“Dan…” Christie stepped closer to him, smiling up at his eyes. He leaned down, and their lips met in a sweet kiss. This time Christie wasn’t scared of Dan’s affection. She pressed herself against his hard body and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. He drew her in closer with his own arms around her waist and deepened the kiss. Their lips molded perfectly with each other’s, and their fingers brushed sensual traces along their bodies. Christie had never felt so eager to be close to a man before, and she loved the feeling.

Dan’s tongue tangled and danced with her own and he braced the back of her head with one hand. Finally, they broke apart, both their gasps of want feeling hot and sounding heavy.

“Christie,” Dan began. “I have never wanted a girl so badly, but I think now isn’t the time. I need to be careful of where I am.”

“Please,” Christie pleaded, gripping the collar of his nice dress shirt he still wore. “Stay here, Dan. I’ve grown so fond of you lately. I just don’t want to see you go again.”

“Christie, we’re leaving in just a couple of hours. I’m not disappearing forever,” Dan chuckled, but he grew serious when he sat Christie’s expression. He touched her face softly. “I won’t leave. I promise.”

Christie lifted her face, and so Dan met her lips with another sweet kiss. They made contact for several seconds, and soon the kisses became fervent, and their touches even more desirous.

Dan stepped backward, and Christie followed him, tangled in his arms. Before she knew it they had entered her bedroom. Dan turned her around, and her legs met the bed frame. She stumbled and fell backward on the bed, and Dan rose over her, pressing kisses down her jaw and then her throat. His touches were delicate and loving, and not once did Christie feel uncomfortable with the actions.

Her heart beat swiftly from his gentle behavior. Christie brushed her fingers over his chest, and then helped him remove his tie and begin unbuttoning his dress shirt. As she did this, he lifted up her nighttime blouse and caressed his fingers over her hips.

“I’ve never been more infatuated with a girl,” he uttered as she finished undoing his shirt and tugged it over his shoulders. His chest and midsection were defined with firm pectorals and perfectly sculpted abs. Christie had not noticed this as he had been wearing long sleeves since yesterday, but Dan’s arms consisted of corded biceps that looked like he’d been working out for a long time. He was strong, and it matched the beautiful severity of his face to the point of perfection. Christie melted inside at the absolute wonder of his model-worthy body.

She pressed kisses to his chest and abs before Dan worked the blouse off from her. Christie hadn’t been wearing much to bed beside the night shirt and a pair of loose pajama pants. Her milky-white breasts were exposed in the dim light of the bedroom, and Dan’s eyes feasted on them.

“God, you are beautiful, Christie,” he whispered, and his hands cupped her breasts to massage them. His thumbs passed over her nipples, and Christie enjoyed every moment of it. She touched the hem of his slacks, popping open the button and tugging them down his hips. He removed one hand from her body to inch down his underwear.

“Are you sure you are comfortable with this, Christie? I don’t want to seem like I’m taking advantage of you,” Dan breathed.

Christie’s body was hot with desire. Her heart pounded, and a growing want had flooded her center. “I’m sure,” she answered, touching his hand that was still on her breast. “I want to be yours, Dan.”

Dan’s piercing eyes softened just a little at her words, and he drew his pants and undergarments down further to expose his manhood. He was large and already fully erect. Christie gazed at his curved tool, already panting with the apprehension of what he was going to do to her with it.

“Lie down, Christie,” Dan urged. Christie listened and rested on her back as Dan gripped her pants and tugged them off of her legs. She hadn’t worn panties to bed, as sometimes it was more comfortable not to. Dan noticed this, and he smiled pleasantly. “It’s almost as if you expected us to do this tonight,” he joked, but his voice was sultry, and it made Christie blush.

He lowered his head down to kiss along her stomach and to her hips, and soon his mouth was over her sweetness. Christie gasped and spread her legs wider for him. She basked in the sensation as he suckled her clit and gripped onto her thighs firmly.

“Oh, Dan,” she sighed.

Dan pressed his tongue to her feminine folds and licked across her sensitive areas with skill. She touched his head with one hand, not wishing for him to stop. The feeling was exquisite, and unlike anything he had felt before. His breath was hot against her supple flesh, and his actions were fervent and almost carnal. He tasted her hungrily and teased her delicate nub more with his lips and tongue, causing her to buck involuntarily.

A couple of minutes later, Dan lifted his head and brushed his fingers across her womanhood, collecting a thin sheen of her nectar across them. “I think you’re ready for me, sweet Christie.”

Christie couldn’t slow her pounding heartbeat. Her head buzzed with excitement as she watched Dan trail some of the dew across the tip of his shaft. He repeated the process, until his masculine head was brimmed with a shine of moisture.

“I am ready, Dan,” Christie replied after he moved closer to her. “Take me.”

Dan’s look turned from a soft desire to a sharp fierceness, and he leaned in to lift Christie up into a slanted sit. “Good. I want you to watch this, Christie. I want to see your eyes glossed over with pleasure.”

Christie took hold of his arms as he held hers, and he moved his hips forward, sliding his wetted tip into her dripping flower. Christie bit her lip and whimpered as his thickness stretched her opening, but Dan took his time, resting there for just a moment before pushing in deeper. He moved inch by inch, until he was fully cloaked in her femininity.

“You are so tight, sweet Christie,” he whispered, his words thick with lust.

Christie had never felt so full. Her center squeezed and closed around his sex, and before she could get too accustomed to it, Dan dragged his hips backward, and then moved forward again, rocking against her own hips until he moved at a steady, slow rhythm. She watched their act, feeling drunk with desire as his shaft slipped back and forth easily in and out of her. The sight was hypnotic and filthy, and she then knew why Dan wanted her to watch. She wanted more and more of it.

“Faster, Dan, please,” she begged. “I want it deeper.”

Dan smirked that sexy, smug way that Christie had grown so used to. “As you wish.” He pushed her down until she was on her back again, and then curled his arms around her legs and lifted her somewhat to fit a couple of her pillows underneath her hips, all the while keeping his tool buried inside her. With this new position, Christie hooked her legs around his hips, and Dan worked faster. Because of their temporary pause, Christie’s center had closed significantly around him, and she felt even tighter, as well as swollen from all of the attention.

“Oh, Dan, yes!” she cried as he pounded her fiercely. She screamed his name more as he thrust with force, and she closed her eyes and tilted her head back as she felt an orgasm approaching. “Yes! *Yes*!”

Dan slammed against her, nearly growling with an animalistic hunger. Before Christie was ready, she met the peak and her mind exploding with the overwhelming pleasure and satisfied bliss that followed. Her legs dropped from Dan’s hips and she collapsed against the bed as he removed himself from her.

She sighed while he rested down beside her and pulled her into his arms. She rested her head on his chest, listening to his slowing heartbeat and running her fingers along the hard definitions of his body.

“Did I take away your worry, Christie?” Dan asked quietly as he combed his fingers through her hair.

Christie nuzzled his chest and kept her eyes closed. “Yes. I feel like I can trust you.”

“Excellent,” he replied. “I’m thrilled that you have agreed to come with me. I think you will like England.”

Christie smiled faintly. “I think I will like wherever I am, so long as I’m next to you, Dan.”

He pressed a gentle kiss to her head, and she fell into a light doze, dreaming about her new life on the horizon, and knowing that she would never feel her depression again.

**THE END**