

Chapter Two



Tessa pushed a breath out of her nose. *Wren, what've you done to me? Get away from everything, you said. You'll have time to get your life back on track, you said. Help rescue my beach house, you said.*

"A quick call will clear up any confusion and prove my right to be here." Mr. Henry tapped his phone.

"Exactly what I was thinking." She swiped her phone to place a call to Wren.

"Hold up." The officer shook her head. "We'll need more than a phone call, I'm afraid."

"We both know the owners and have permission to be here. What else is there?" He lay his head back on the cushion behind him, closing his eyes, but his hand choked the arm of the love seat.

"Yeah, I mean, I don't like that he's here, but he's friends with Pete and Wren."

"Neither of you has a rental agreement, so legally neither of you is allowed to be here. As far as I know, you could be working together."

"I called you here. Why would I call the police if—"

"Mr. Henry, I don't make the laws. I just enforce them." The

officer had the decency to look sheepish. “Look. You both have direct lines to the owners. Ask them to fax a rental agreement or at least a paragraph granting permission, then all of you can sign it. I’ll give you the station’s fax number to pass along. It’ll be official in no time.”

Wyatt grunted. “I just completed a five-hour journey in seven. Could we sign documents tomorrow?”

A warning bell pinged in Tessa’s mind. “Hang on. You’re planning to stay?”

“You’re surprised?”

“Of course. ’Cause I’m not leaving.” She spread her arms wide. “I’ve got all my stuff here. I’m supposed to be—”

“This situation isn’t kosher. At all.” The officer studied both of them for a beat, then shook her head. Glancing at Wyatt’s boot, she worked her jaw. “Have your friends fax the documents I need. With my name in the attention line. Be in the office tomorrow by nine to sign them.” Closing her notebook, she handed business cards to both and made her way to the front door. She nodded. “Don’t make me regret this.”

The sound of the closing door moved Tessa into action. Standing, she stretched to her full height, hoping to convey authority. “What is your plan?”

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Wyatt closed his eyes. “I’m sitting here with my foot propped for the next hour or so.” He hoped his sigh would indicate his heading to nap-land.

Take pity and leave me alone.

“Then what?”

Grand. She doesn’t pick up on social clues. “Then I guess it’ll be time for dinner.”

She squeaked. Like the sound a cartoon mouse might make. “So you’re staying here?”

“Didn’t I make that evident a few minutes ago?”

“But we both can’t stay here.”

“From what Petey told me, this place has four bedrooms plus pullout couches. I don’t see a problem.” The throbbing in his foot had sent emissaries up to his head. Now both ends of his body pounded in stereo.

“Of course, there’s enough room for two people, but we can’t stay here *together*.”

Realization hit him between pulsations in his head. “Okay, Miss 1935. I hear what you’re saying, but I still don’t see a problem *today*. You’re not interested in me. I’m not interested in you. We both have jobs to do for our friends.” He shrugged. “We’ll just stay out of each other’s way.”

“Oh, that’s so condescending. I care about what people think—”

“There’s your first problem. I’m assuming nobody in this town knows you, but”—he arched an eyebrow—“the ones who’ve seen you may already have an opinion about you based on your ... eclectic style.”

Another squeak.

He opened his eyes. Yep. Exactly the way he remembered—loose overshirt with paint splotches, paint smudges dotting her hands, and art supplies strewn all over the kitchen table and countertop. Stacks of bracelets on both arms. A creative, as Margie would say. No, thank you. Although her coal-black hair and almond-shaped eyes might woo some men into her orbit, he had enough of the artsy world to serve him forever.

“You don’t know me at all. You can’t make assumptions—”

“I can base impressions on what I see.” He flicked his glance over her shirt, then on to the table. “You can’t control what others think. Why be worried about it?”

She clamped her mouth, then cocked her head. “You must not have ever had to deal with people’s opinions.”

He snorted. *Only all my life, lady*. “Look. I’ll stay out of your

way, and I promise your virtue will remain intact. We'll make this situation at least tolerable. I just need to rest now, please." Letting his lids drop again, he hoped she'd leave him alone for at least the next hour.