

## CHAPTER 1

# WHAT HAVE I GOTTEN MYSELF INTO?

### WREN

I slip onto the empty bar stool beside the lumberjack mountain man who looks like he tried to squeeze himself into a suit two sizes too small. He's intimidatingly broad and thick, with long dark hair that's been pulled up into a haphazard man bun thing. His beard is a hipster's wet dream. His scowl, however, makes him about as approachable as a rabid porcupine. And yet, here I am, sidling up next to him.

He glances at me, eyes bleary and not really tracking. He quickly focuses on his half-empty glass again. Based on the slump of his shoulders and the uncoordinated way he picks up his glass and tips it toward his mouth, I'm guessing he's pretty hammered. I order a sparkling water with a dash of cranberry juice and a lime.

What I could really use is a cup of lavender-mint tea and my bed, but instead, I'm sitting next to a drunk man in his thirties. My life is extra glamorous, obviously. And no, I'm not an escort, but at the moment I feel like my morals are on the same kind of slippery slope.

"Rough day?" I ask, nodding to the bottle that's missing more than half its contents. It was full when he sat down at the bar an hour ago. Yes, I've been watching him the entire time, waiting for an opportunity to make my move. While he's been sitting here, he's turned down two women, one in a dress that could've doubled as a disco ball and the other in a top so low-cut, I could almost see her navel.

"You could say that," he slurs. He props his cheek on his fist, eyes almost slits. I can still make out the vibrant blue hue despite them almost being closed. They move over me, assessing. I'm wearing a conservative black dress with a high neckline and a hem that falls below my knees. Definitely not nearly as provocative as Disco Ball or Navel Lady.

"That solving your problems?" I give him a wry grin and tip my chin in

the direction of his bottle of Johnnie.

His gaze swings slowly to the bottle. It gives me a chance to really look at him. Or what I can see of his face under his beard, anyway. [L] [SEP]

“Nah, but it helps quiet down all the noise up here.” He taps his temple and blurts, “My dad died.” [L] [SEP]

I put a hand on his forearm. It feels awkward, and creepy on my part since its half-genuine, half-contrived comfort. “I’m so sorry.”

[L] [SEP] He glances at my hand, which I quickly remove, and refocuses on his drink. “I should be sorry too, but I think he was mostly an asshole, so the world might be better off without him.” He attempts to fill his glass again, but his aim is off, and he pours it on the bar instead. I rush to lift my purse and grab a handful of napkins to mop up the mess.

“I’m drunk,” he mumbles. [L] [SEP]

“Well, I’m thinking that might’ve been the plan, considering the way you’re sucking that bottle back. I’m actually surprised you didn’t ask for a straw in the first place. Might be a good idea to throw a spacer in there if you want tomorrow morning to suck less.” I push my drink toward him, hoping he doesn’t send me packing like he did the other women who approached him earlier.

He narrows his eyes at my glass, suspicious, maybe. “What is that?”

“Cranberry and soda.” [L] [SEP]

“No booze?” [L] [SEP]

“No booze. Go ahead. You’ll thank me in the morning.”

[L] [SEP] He picks up the glass and pauses when it’s an inch from his mouth. His eyes crinkle, telling me he’s smiling under that beard. “Does that mean Imma wake up with you beside me?”

I cock a brow. “Are you propositioning me?”

“Shit, sorry.” He chugs the contents of my glass. “I was joking. Besides,

I'm so wasted, I can barely remember my name. Pretty sure I'd be useless in bed tonight. I should stop talkin'." He scrubs a hand over his face and then motions to me. "I wouldn't proposition you."

I'm not sure how to respond. I go with semi-affronted, since it seems like somewhat of an insult. "Good to know."

"Dammit. I mean, I think you might be hot. You look hot. I mean attractive. I think you're pretty." He tips his head to the side and blinks a few times. "You have nice eyes, all four of them are lovely."

This time I laugh—for real—and point to the bottle. "I think you might want to tell your date you're done for the night."

He blows out a breath and nods. "You might be right."

He makes an attempt to stand, but as soon as his feet hit the floor, he stumbles into me and grabs my shoulders to steady himself. "Whoa. Sorry. Yup, I'm definitely drunk." His face is inches from mine, breath smelling strongly of alcohol. Beyond that, I get a whiff of fresh soap and a hint of aftershave. He lets go of my shoulders and takes an unsteady step back. "I don't usually do this." He motions sloppily to the bottle. "Mostly I'm a three drink max guy."

"I think losing your father makes this condonable." I slide off my stool. Despite being tall for a woman, and wearing heels, he still manages to be close to a head taller than me.

"Yeah, maybe, but I still think I might regret it tomorrow." He's incredibly unsteady, swaying while standing in place. I take the opportunity for what it is and thread my arm through his, leading him away from the bar. "Come on, let's get you to the elevator before you pass out right here."

He nods, then wobbles a bit, like moving his head has set him off balance. "That's probably a good idea."

He leans into me as we weave through the bar and stumbles on the two stairs leading to the foyer. There's no way I'll be able to stop him if he goes down, but I drape one of his huge arms over my shoulder anyway,

and slip my own around his waist, guiding him in a mostly straight line to the elevators.

“Which floor are you on?” I ask.

“Penthouse.” He drops his arm from my shoulder and flings it out, pointing to the black doors at the end of the hall. “Jesus, I feel like I’m on a boat.”

“It’s probably all the alcohol sloshing around in your brain.” I take his elbow again, helping him stagger the last twenty feet to the dedicated penthouse elevator.

He stares at the keypad for a few seconds, brow pulling into a furrow. “I can’t remember the code. It’s thumbprint activated though too.” He stumbles forward and presses his forehead against the wall, then tries to line up his thumb with the sensor, but his aim is horrendous and he keeps missing.

I settle a hand on his very firm forearm. This man is built like a tank. Or a superhero. For a moment, I reconsider what I’m about to do, but he seems pretty harmless and ridiculously hammered, so he *shouldn’t* pose a threat. I’m also trained in self-defense, which would fall under the *by any means necessary* umbrella. “Can I help?”

He rolls his head, eyes slits as they bounce around my face. “Please.”

I take his hand between mine. The first thing I notice is how clammy it is. But beyond that, his knuckles are rough, littered with tiny scars and a few scabs, and his nails are jagged.

“Your hands are small,” he observes as I line his thumb up with the sensor pad and press down.

“Maybe yours are abnormally big,” I reply. They are rather large. Like basketball player hands.

“You know what they say about big hands.”

I fight not to roll my eyes, but for a brief moment, I wonder if what’s in his pants actually matches the rest of him. And if he’s unkempt

everywhere, not just on his face. I cut that visual quickly because it makes me want to gag. “And what do they say?”

His eyes crinkle again, and he slaps his own chest. “Something about big hands, big heart.”

I bite back my own smile. “Pretty sure you’re mixing that up with cold hands, warm heart.”

His brow furrows. “There’s a good chance.”

The elevator doors slide open. He pushes off the wall with some effort and practically tumbles inside. He catches himself on the rail and sags against the wall as I follow him in. I honestly can’t believe I’m doing this right now.

He doesn’t have to press a button since the elevator only goes to the penthouse floor. As soon as we start moving, he groans and his shoulders curl in. “I don’t feel so good.”

*Please don’t let him be sick in here.* If there’s one thing I can’t deal with, it’s vomit. “You should sit.”

He slides down the wall, massive shoulders rolling forward as he rests his forehead on his knees. “Tomorrow is going to suck.”

I stay on the other side of the elevator, in case he tosses his cookies. “Probably.”

It’s the longest elevator ride in the history of the world. Or at least it feels that way, mostly because I’m terrified he’s going to yak. Thankfully, we make it to the penthouse floor incident-free. On the down side, now that he’s in a sitting position, getting him to stand again is a challenge. I have to press the open door button three times before I can finally coax him to his feet.

In the time between leaving the bar and making it to the penthouse floor, the effects of the alcohol seems to have compounded. He’s beyond sloppy, using the wall and me for support as we make our way to his door. There are two penthouse apartments up here. One on either side of the foyer.

He leans against the doorjamb, once again fighting to find the coordination to get his thumb to the sensor pad. I don't ask if he needs my assistance this time since it's quite clear he does. Once again I take his clammy hand in mine.

"Your hands are really soft," he mumbles.

"Thanks."

The pad ashes green, and I turn the handle. "Okay, here we go. Home sweet home."

"This isn't my home," he slurs. "My cousin's family owns this building. I'm crashing here until I can get the fuck out of New York."

I scan the penthouse. It an eclectic combination of odd art and modern furniture, like two different tastes crashed together and this is the result. Aside from that, it's clean to the point of looking almost like a show home.

The only sign that someone is staying here is the lone coffee cup on the table in the living room and the blanket lolling like a tongue over the edge of the couch. I'm still standing in the doorway while he sways unsteadily.

He tries to shove his hand in his pants pocket, but all he succeeds in doing is setting himself off-balance. He nearly stumbles into the wall.

"Thanks for your help," he says.

He's back in his penthouse, which means my job is technically done. However, I'm worried he's going to hurt himself, or worse, asphyxiate on his own vomit in the middle of the night, and I'll be the one catching heat if that happens. I'll also feel bad if something happens to him. I blow out a breath, annoyed that this is how my night is ending.

I heave his arm over my shoulder and slip mine around his waist again, leading him through the living room toward what seems to be the kitchen. There's a sheet of paper on the island, but otherwise it's spotless.

"What're you doing?" he asks.

We pause when we reach the threshold. “Which way is your bedroom?”

He looks slowly from right to left. “Not that way.” He points to the kitchen. It’s very state of the art.

I guide him in the opposite direction down the hall, until he stumbles through a doorway, into a large but simply furnished bedroom. Once we reach the edge of the bed, he drops his arm, spins around—it’s drunkenly graceful—and falls back on the bed, arms spread wide as if he’s planning on making snow angels. “The room is spinning.”

“Would you like me to get you a glass of water and possibly a painkiller for the headache you’ll likely have in the morning?” I’m already heading for the bathroom.

“Might be a good idea,” he mumbles.

I find a glass on the edge of bathroom vanity—which is clean, apart from a brand new toothbrush and tube of toothpaste. I run the tap, wishing I had a plastic tumbler, because I’m not sure he’s in any state to deal with breakable objects. I check the medicine cabinet, find the pills I need, shake out two tablets, and return to the bedroom.

He’s right where I left him; sprawled out faceup on a massive king-size bed, legs hanging off the end, one shoe on the floor beside him. I cross over and set the water and the pills on the nightstand.

I make a quick trip back to the bathroom and grab the empty wastebasket from beside the toilet in case his night is a lot rougher than he expects.

I tap his knee, crossing my fingers he’ll be easy to rouse. “Hey, I have painkillers for you.”

He makes a noise, but doesn’t move otherwise.

I tap his knee again. “Lincoln, you need to wake up long enough to take these.” I cringe. I called him by name, and he didn’t offer it to me while we were down at the bar. Here’s hoping he’s too drunk to notice or remember. His name is Lincoln Moorehead, heir to the Moorehead Media fortune and all the crap that comes with it. And there’s a lot of it.

One eye becomes a slit. “Every time I open my eyes, the room starts spinning again.”

“If you drink this and take these, it might help.” I hold up the glass of water and the pills.

“Kay.” It takes three tries for him to sit up. He tries to pick the pills up out of my palm, but keeps missing my hand.

“Just open your mouth.”

He lifts his head. “How do I know you’re not trying to roofie me?”

I hold up the tablet in front of his face. “They don’t say roofie, so you’re safe.”

He tries to focus on the pill and then my face. I have my doubts he’s successful at either.

His tongue peeks out to drag across his bottom lip. “The cameras in the hall will catch you if you steal my wallet.”

I laugh at that. “I’m not going to steal your wallet, I’m going to put you to bed.”

“Hmm.” He nods slowly and opens his mouth.

I drop the pills on his tongue and hand him the glass, which he drains in three long swallows. “Would you like me to refill that?”

“That’d be nice.” He holds out the glass, but when I try to pull away, he covers my hands with his. His shockingly blue eyes meet mine, and for a moment they’re clear and compelling. Despite how out of it he is, and how much he resembles a mountain man, or maybe because of it, I have a hard time looking away. “I really wish I wasn’t this messed up. You smell nice. I bet your hair is pretty when it’s not pulled up like that.” He flops a hand toward my bun. “Not that it’s not pretty like that, but I bet if you took it down, it would be wavy and soft. The kind of hair you want to bury your face in and run your fingers through.” He exhales a long breath. “I haven’t had sex in a really long time, but I feel like I would have zero finesse if I tried right now.”



I smile and turn away. In the time it takes for me to refill his glass, he's managed to get one arm out of his suit jacket. He's made it most of the way onto the bed, feet still hanging off the end, but he's on his back, which is not ideal.

I set the glass on his nightstand, along with a second set of painkillers, which I'm assuming he'll need in the morning, and give him another nudge. "Hey."

This time I get nothing in the way of a response. I poke him twice more, but still nothing. He can't sleep on his back with how drunk he is. He needs to be on his side or his stomach with a wastebasket close by.

I can't in good conscience leave him like this. My options are limited. I shake my head as I kick off my shoes and climb up onto the bed with him. This is not at all what I expected to be doing when I brought him back up here.

I stare down at his sleeping form. His lips are parted, they're nice lips, full and plump, even though they're mostly obscured by his overgrown beard. His hair has started to unravel from its man bun, wisps hanging in his face. He has long lashes, really long actually, and they're thick and dark, the kind women pay a lot of money for. His nose is straight and his cheekbones—what I can see of them—are high. With a haircut, a beard trim or complete shave, and a new suit that actually fits, I can imagine how refined he'll look. More like a Moorehead than a mountain man lumberjack. I shake my head. "I need you to roll onto your side, please," I say loudly.

Nothing. Not even a grunt.

I pull on his shoulder, but he's dead weight. Leaning over him, I make a fist and give him a light jab approximately where his kidney is. "Lincoln, roll over."

And roll he does, knocking me down and turning over so he's right on top of me. We're face-to-face. Good God, he's heavy. His bones must be made of lead. He shifts, one leg coming over both of mine. I push at his knee, but his arm swings out and he wraps himself around me on a low groan, pinning my arm to my side. He's like a giant human blanket.

“How did this become my life?” I say to the ceiling, because the man lying on top of me is apparently out cold.

I try to wriggle free, I even yell his name a bunch of time before I give up and wait for him to roll off me. And while I wait for that to happen, I replay the conversation with his mother, Gwendolyn Moorehead, that took place forty-eight hours ago and put me in this awkward position underneath her drunk son.

I’d been standing in Fredrick’s office, still digesting the fact that he was dead. It was shocking that a massive heart attack had taken him, since he was always so healthy and full of life.

Gwendolyn, his wife—now a widow—stood stoic behind his desk, papers stacked neatly in the center.

“I’m so very for your loss, Gwendolyn. If there’s anything I can do. Whatever you need.” The words poured out, typical condolences, but sincerely meant because I couldn’t imagine how my mother and I would feel if we lost my father.

Gwendolyn’s fingers danced at her throat as she cleared it. “Thank you,” she whispered brokenly and dabbed at her eyes. “I appreciate your kindness, Wren.”

“Let me know what you want me to handle, and I’ll take care of it.”

She took a deep breath, composing herself before she lifted her gaze to mine. “I need your help.”

“Of course, what can I do?”

“My oldest son, Lincoln, will be returning to New York for the funeral, and he’ll be staying to help run the company.”

A hot feeling crept up my spine. I’d heard very little about Lincoln. Everything from Armstrong’s mouth was scathing, Fredrick’s passing references had been with fondness, and my interactions with Gwendolyn had been minimal as it was Fredrick himself who hired me, so this was first I’ve heard of Lincoln through her. “I see. And how can I help with that?” I could only imagine how difficult Armstrong would be if he had to

share the attention with someone else, particularly his brother.

“Transitioning Lincoln.” Gwendolyn rounded her desk. “You’ve managed to turn around Armstrong’s reputation in the media during the time you’ve been here. I know it hasn’t been easy, and Armstrong can be difficult to manage.”

*Difficult to manage* is the understatement of the entire century where Armstrong is concerned. He’s a cocksucker of epic proportions. He’s also a misogynistic, narcissistic bastard that I’ve had to deal with for the past eight months on a nearly daily basis—sometimes even on weekends.

My job as his “handler” has been to reshape his horrendous reputation after his involvement in several scandalous events became very public. It wasn’t a job I necessarily wanted, and I was prepared to politely reject the offer, but my mother asked me to take the position as a favor to her since she’s a friend of Gwendolyn.

Beyond that, my relationship with my mother has been strained for the past decade. When I was a teenager, I discovered information that changed our relationship forever. Taking the job at Moorehead was in part, my way of trying to help repair our fractured bond. The financial compensation, which was ridiculously high, also didn’t hurt. Besides, Gwendolyn is on nearly every single charitable foundation committee in the city, and since that’s where my interests lie, it seemed like a smart career move.

“Since you’re already working with Armstrong and things seem to be settled there for the most part, I felt it would make sense to keep you on here at Moorehead to work with Lincoln. He’s been away from civilized society for several years. He’s nothing like his brother, very altruistic and focused on his job, rather than recreational pursuits, so he should be easier to manage.”

I fought a scoff at the last bit, since “recreational pursuits” was a reference to the fact that Armstrong couldn’t seem to keep his pants zipped when it came to women.

Gwendolyn pushed a set of papers toward me. “It would only be for another six months. And of course, your salary would reflect the double

work load, since you'll still have to maintain Armstrong in some capacity while you assist Lincoln in transitioning into his role here."

"I'm sorry, what—"

Gwendolyn pulled me into an awkward hug, holding onto my shoulders when she stepped back. Her eyes were glassy and red-rimmed. "You have no idea how much I appreciate your willingness to take this on. As soon as your contract is fulfilled, you have my word that I'll give you a glowing recommendation to whichever organization you'd like. Your mother told me you're interested in starting your own foundation. I'll certainly help you in any way I'm able if you'll stay on a little longer for me." She dabbed at her corner of her eyes and sniffed, then tapped the papers on the desk. "I already have an agreement ready and an NDA, of course. Everything is tabbed for signing."

I'm pulled back into the present when Lincoln shifts and one of his huge hands slides up my side and lands on my breast. At the same time, he pushes his nose against my neck, beard tickling my collarbone. He mutters something unintelligible against my skin.

I'm momentarily frozen in shock. Under any other circumstances, I would knee him in the balls. However, he's not conscious or even semi-aware that he's fondling me. Thankfully, now that he's moved, I have some wiggle room.

I elbow him in the ribs, which probably hurts me more than it does him. At least it gets him to move away enough that I can slip out from under him. I roll off the bed and pop back up, smoothing out my now-wrinkled dress. My stupid nipples are perky, thanks to the attention the right one just got. Probably because it's the most action I've seen since I started working for the Mooreheads eight months ago.

I hit the lights on the way out of the bedroom, pause in the kitchen to grab a glass of water and check out the sheet of paper on the counter. It's a list of important details regarding the penthouse, including the entry code. I nab my purse, snap a pic, and head for the elevators.

I have a feeling this is going to be a long six months.

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