



Chapter 1

“I can’t tell you how pleased I am with the way everything’s turned out, Devin. Your design far exceeded my expectations.”

Devin Simms glanced over at the building referenced, then back to the man in front of him. “Thank you. I’m glad to hear you say that.” When Mr. Olsen had approached the architectural firm Devin worked for and asked for an energy-efficient, hexagon-shaped, low-cost space, Devin had jumped at the chance. He’d welcomed the distraction of working long hours. The modern office building had been one of Devin’s most challenging projects and kept him from thinking about his personal life. The strategically placed solar panels and use of metal were aesthetically pleasing, as well as functional, and the metal composite panels resisted the elements and increased its property value for the long term. The project had taken almost two years to complete and he couldn’t be happier with the results. But he was also exhausted.

Mr. Olsen stuck out his hand. “If I ever need anything else, you’ll be my first choice. Again, thank you,” he added.

Devin shook the proffered hand. “I appreciate your confidence.” They spoke for another moment before he excused himself. After making his rounds in the sweltering July heat to say goodbye to everyone at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, he climbed into his rental car, turned on the air full blast and called his sister, Janae, to let her know he was on his way to her house. He had driven from San Jose to Los Angeles yesterday for the ceremony and would fly out tomorrow morning to Jamaica where he would serve as the best man in his high school friend’s wedding. He followed the directions on the GPS and, forty-five minutes later pulled up to a gated property. Two years ago, his sister, Janae had married R&B singer and producer, Terrence Campbell, who went by the stage name Monte. He hadn’t been too keen on the relationship at first and worried about Terrence being a player, but Terrence had proven Devin wrong.

He pressed a button on the panel and spoke into the intercom. Seconds later, the gate swung open. Terrence had purchased the gated property initially to protect his grandparents from paparazzi and fans, but now those gates protected Janae and their growing family. Devin parked in front one of the three garage doors and got out. A smile creased his face when his sister emerged from the house. Since she had relocated to Los Angeles from San Jose after the marriage, Devin didn’t get to see her often and he missed her. As the only girl in a family with three boys, he and his two older brothers were very protective.

“Devin!” Janae moved toward him as fast as her very pregnant body allowed.

He wrapped her in a big hug and gently lifted her off her feet for a kiss on the cheek before setting her down again. “Hey, baby girl. You look good.”

“Thanks. I’m so glad to see you. Come in.”

Devin followed her inside to the family room and stretched out on the sofa.

“How did the opening go?”

“Good.” He handed her his phone. “You can look at the pictures.”

She took a seat on the chair across from him and scrolled through the photos. “This is absolutely amazing, Devin. You outdid yourself this time. You know, you could probably start your own firm now.”

“Yeah, probably,” he mumbled and closed his eyes. “But, I hate paperwork.”

Janae laughed. “So did I when I was teaching. But you need to be rewarded for all your hard work.”

“Does making junior partner qualify?”

“*What?*” she squealed. “Partner as young as you are? Are you serious?”

“Yep,” he answered without opening his eyes.

“I’m so happy for you. Did you call Mom and Dad?”

“Not yet. You’re the first to know. I’ll call everybody when I get back.”

“You’re going to love Jamaica. Too bad you’re not taking a date. Lots of romantic stuff to do.”

Devin opened one eye and angled his head in her direction. “And that’s why you’re in the condition you’re in now.”

She smiled and rubbed her belly. “Probably.”

“How’ve you been feeling?”

“Good. Six weeks to go. I’m excited.”

“How’s Terrence handling the prospect of fatherhood?”

“He’s driving me crazy,” she answered with a chuckle. “Doesn’t want me to do anything. His grandmother had to tell him that women have carried babies for centuries, and have led more active lives, but he doesn’t get it. However, I have agreed to stop painting because of the fumes.”

“Well, I agree with Terrence on that one.”

“You would. Anyway, is Tony ready for the wedding? What day is it, again?”

“He says he is, and it’s on Friday. He and Samantha wanted everyone to arrive a couple of days early for some pre-wedding activities.”

“What about you? Is there anyone special I should know about? You aren’t getting any younger, you know. You’re closer to forty than not.”

“I’m thirty-four, Janae. That doesn’t qualify me for a retirement home. And if I find a woman to pull me back from the brink of life on social security, I’ll let you know.”

“If you need help finding one, Grandma Ellie would be more than happy to offer her services. I think she’s trying to set Donovan up with the granddaughter of one of her yoga classmates.” Donovan Wright was Terrence’s best friend, manager and booking agent.

Devin sat up abruptly. “Oh, hell no. I don’t need any matchmaking. I’m quite content with my life, thank you.” Terrence’s grandmother, or Miss Ellie as she was affectionately known, had a habit of inviting single women to all the family and friend gatherings. Devin and Donovan had made a practice of steering clear of Miss Ellie and her “special guests”.

“Whatever happened to the woman you brought to the concert when Terrence proposed to me? I thought you two were pretty close.”

“We broke up. Is Terrence touring?” he asked, changing the subject. He had no desire to revisit the past or talk about the woman who broke things off without an explanation.

“Nope. He should be home soon. With the baby coming, he’s not going out on tour again until fall. And don’t try to change the subject.”

Devin groaned and leaned his head back against the sofa. True, his love life was pretty much non-existent these days, but he hadn't had time to think about it. Perhaps two weeks in Jamaica would be the perfect opportunity for a short affair and to get back in the game.

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“Girl, I still can't believe we're going to spend ten days in Jamaica, all expenses paid at an all-inclusive resort. It doesn't get any better than that.”

Vivian Michaels gestured to some open seats in the crowded airport terminal and smiled at her best friend, Mariah Gilbert. “Don't forget we're paying for half of those days, and we'll be working a wedding for the first three. Well, *you'll* be doing most of the work.” The two friends had opened Beautiful Bouquets and Blossoms floral shop three years ago. Vivian handled more of the business side, and could make simple corsages and boutonnieres, but left the complex bouquets and sprays to Mariah. The bride's mother had attended another wedding where Mariah provided flowers and immediately contracted Mariah for her daughter's wedding. The wedding was originally scheduled at a local church in their San Jose, CA hometown. But, a cancellation had afforded the bride the destination wedding she'd always wanted. When the venue moved, Mrs. Green remained adamant that Beautiful Bouquets and Blossoms provide the flowers, no matter what.

“True, but what a work environment. And after the wedding on Friday, it's fun, fun and more fun.”

Vivian laughed. “I guess you're a little excited.”

“What? You're not? We haven't had a minute to breath since we opened the shop and I'm personally looking forward to a little down time.”

“You’re right. We’d better take full advantage because when we return it’s back-to-back weddings for the next two months.”

Mariah groaned. “Don’t remind me.”

Vivian glanced around. “Where’s Dawn?” Dawn Caldwell was third member of the friends that had been together since freshman year of high school. Their eighteen-year friendship had help Vivian get through many crazy days and she loved them like sisters.

“I knew we should have made her spend the night with us. She’d better not be late. They’re starting to board.”

“I’m here!”

Vivian and Mariah turned at the sound of the familiar voice rushing toward them.

“What took you so long?” Mariah asked.

“You know I had to get some *real* coffee for this 5:15 a.m. flight.” Dawn had always been the most outgoing and, when she found out about the trip, decided she had to come. She knew nothing about flowers, but worked in real estate and could sell anything—including herself an invitation on their work trip. “Thanks for letting me tag along, girls. We haven’t taken a trip together in years and I can’t wait to get this party started. I’m ready to find me an island hunk.”

They were still laughing when they boarded. Vivian led the way, but froze when she stepped onto the plane. She stopped so abruptly that Mariah plowed into her, causing Vivian to land face first into the lap of a man sitting in first class.

“It’s been a long time since you were in my arms, Princess.” His low, husky voice close to her ear sent a warm sensation through her body, and memories flooded her mind.

“Is there a problem?” one of the flight attendants asked.

Vivian felt her face flush and scrambled off his lap.

A slight smile curved his mouth. “No problem at all. I rather enjoyed having Ms. Michaels in my arms again.”

Vivian ignored the flight attendant’s questioning look, composed herself and hurried down the aisle to her seat. What in the *world* was Devin doing on her flight? Was he on his way to a job? She remembered him telling her he sometimes traveled to meet with potential clients for his architectural firm.

Mariah placed her duffle in the overhead bin and dropped down into the seat next to Vivian. “Oh, my goodness. Was that Devin?”

Vivian could only nod. Her heart still pounded in her chest and she struggled to draw in a normal breath. She only hoped to lose him when they changed planes in Texas or Florida.

Dawn leaned across the aisle between the people boarding. “Devin sure didn’t look bothered by your face plant in his lap, Viv. And why can’t I remember him being that fine? You must have done something really bad for him to relegate you to the ex files. I’d have done everything I could to keep a man who looks like him.”

“I noticed the same thing,” Mariah said. “I’d think he’d ignore you or something after having broken things off with you.”

Vivian didn’t answer. No, Devin hadn’t ignored her at all. In fact, if that subtle hand skimming across her hip didn’t tell her, the tone of his voice certainly left no doubt that *ignoring* her was the last thing on his mind. She had done a good job of avoiding him over the last year and a half, and now she was going to be in a confined space with him for the next three and a half hours. The saving grace was that once they took off, a curtain would separate coach and first class and if she were lucky, he would stay on his side. She was a nervous wreck the whole time

they were in the air and her nervousness increased tenfold when she noticed he boarded their second flight. *Miami. They have lots of buildings. Yeah. He'll get off there. No worries.*

Vivian never liked takeoff and landing, but hours later, the butterflies fluttering in her belly had nothing to do with the bumpy landing. As soon as the aircraft taxied to the gate and came to a stop, passengers were out of their seats, removing bags from bins and crowding the aisles. She didn't move, hoping to give Devin time to get to wherever he had to go.

"You can't stay on the plane forever, Viv," Mariah said, gesturing around the now empty cabin. "We only have forty-five minutes to get to our gate, and this is a huge airport. We almost missed the last connection waiting on you."

"I know. I'm coming." She slung her tote on her shoulder, took a deep breath and followed her friends out. Vivian took tentative steps into the airport and searched for Devin. A sigh of release escaped her. An airport employee stood at the end of the walkway with a sheet of paper listing gates and flight times. The three women stopped for information and found out their gate was in another terminal. They rushed to take the train and made it fifteen minutes before boarding.

"Good," Dawn said with a sigh. "I need to hit the bathroom."

Vivian nodded. "Me, too." She had been too afraid to get up and go to the bathroom on the plane.

Mariah shook her head. "Y'all wouldn't have this problem if you went while we were on the plane. I'll wait for you two at the gate and try to make sure we don't leave without you."

Thankfully, there wasn't a line and they were in and done quickly.

Dawn chuckled. "Don't look now, but I think your ex is on our flight."

Vivian's head snapped around. *No, no, no*, she wailed inwardly. Devin glanced up from the book he was reading as if sensing her presence and their eyes held. The corner of his mouth inched up in that devastating smile that always made her knees weak. She cursed her traitorous body. It still made her weak.

“Guess he’s going to Jamaica, too.”

“It’s a big island.” But first, she had to ignore his presence in first class once again. Maybe this time she’d actually make it to her seat without landing in his lap. She kept her eyes facing forward as she boarded and thought she was home free until he reached out and grabbed her hand.

“I hope I get a chance to see you in Jamaica, Princess. We have some unfinished business.”

Vivian really wished he’d stop calling her that. Even though it’s how he had always made her feel when they were dating. “It’s a big island and I’m sure our paths probably won’t cross. But, I hope you have a good vacation.” She tried to free her hand, but he held it for a moment longer before letting go.

Mariah sat down with a huff. “I don’t understand men. They rip your heart out then have the nerve to try to act like they’ve done nothing.”

Faint stirrings of remorse filled Vivian. She stared out of the window and didn’t comment. She only prayed the island was as big as she needed it to be. There was no way she could take being in Devin’s presence for any length of time. It only reminded her of what she’d left behind.