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VICTORIA PARKER

The Woman Sent to Tame Him



# **Victoria Parker**

## **The Woman Sent to Tame Him**

### **Аннотация**

Resistance is futile! Serena Scott knows that Finn St George is trouble with a capital 'T'. Gorgeous? Yes. World-class racing driver? Yes. Shameless Lothario bent on self-destruction? Definitely! But Finn has finally caused one scandal too many – and Serena is charged with getting him back on track! Finn loves his playboy lifestyle – after all, immersing yourself in beautiful women is much more pleasurable than raking over the bitter truths of the past. Serena's unheard-of and infuriating resistance to his charms begins a battle of wills. Can she tame this bad-boy? Or will Serena become entangled in the sensual power of his hedonistic temptation? 'Feisty and fantastic! Full of sass and sexiness, I loved this book!' – Dawn, 43, Littleton Discover more at [www.millsandboon.co.uk/victoriaparker](http://www.millsandboon.co.uk/victoriaparker)

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## **‘Let me be the first to tell you the good news.’**

Crossing one bare foot over the other, Finn leaned back with more of the insolence he'd doubtless been born with. ‘Somehow I don't believe you mean *good* in the literal sense.’

‘Oh, I don't know. We could learn a lot from each other, you and I.’

The true meaning of that statement lay between them, gathering momentum with every passing second. It would take time, of course. To get him to talk. To unearth his secrets. To make him crack. Thankfully Serena had all the time in the world.

‘I doubt that.’

The lack of innuendo suffused her with pleasure and a heady sense of power. It seemed she was finally getting somewhere.

‘Why don't you enlighten me, Miss Scott? Your excitement is palpable and I find I can barely stand the suspense.’

She deflected that sarcasm with a breezy flick of her hair off her shoulder. ‘I would *love* to enlighten you, Mr St George. Me and you? We're about to be stuck like glue.’

A shadow of trepidation passed over his face before he cocked an arrogant brow. ‘And the punchline is ...?’

Musing that the word *babysitter* didn't quite have the right ring to it, she let her impetuous mouth stretch the truth, not really

giving a stuff.

‘You’re looking at your new boss.’

**VICTORIA PARKER**’s first love was a dashing, heroic fox named Robin Hood. Then came the powerful, suave Mr Darcy, Lady Chatterley’s rugged Lover—the list goes on. Thinking she must be an unfaithful sort of girl, but ever the optimist, she relentlessly pursued her Mr Literary Right, eventually found him lying between the cool, crisp sheets of a Mills & Boon<sup>®</sup> and her obsession was born.

If only real life was just as easy ...

Alas, against the advice of her beloved English teacher to cultivate her writer’s muse, she chased the corporate dream and acquired various uninspiring job titles *and* a flesh-and-blood hero before she surrendered to that persistent voice and penned her first Mills & Boon<sup>®</sup> romance. Turns out creating havoc for feisty heroines and devilish heroes truly *is* the best job in the world.

Victoria now lives out her own happy-ever-after in the north-east of England, with her alpha exec and their two children—a masterly charmer in the making and, apparently, the next Disney Princess. Believing sleep is highly overrated, she often writes until three a.m., ignores the housework (much to her husband’s dismay) and still loves nothing more than getting cosy with a romance novel. In her spare time she enjoys dabbling with interior design, discovering far-flung destinations and getting into mischief with her rather wonderful extended family.

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# The Woman Sent to Tame Him

## Victoria Parker



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For my Dad.

Always my anchor in the storm. I love you.

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## EXCERPT

### CHAPTER ONE

Monte Carlo, May

Hold on to your hearts, ladies, because racing driver Lothario Finn St George is back in the playground of the rich and famous.

After sailing into the Port of Monaco with a bevy of beauties only last eve, the man titled Most Beautiful in the World donned a custom-fit tux and his signature crooked smile and swaggered into the Casino Grand with all the flair of James Bond. Armed with his loaded arsenal of charismatic charm, the six-times World Champion then proceeded to beguile his way through the enamoured throng—despite the owner of Scott Lansing advising the playboy to ‘calm his wild partying and tone down adverse publicity’.

Seems Michael Scott is still battling with threats from sponsors, who are considering pulling out of over forty million pounds’ worth of support for the team.

True, Finn St George has always danced on the devilish side of life, but of late he seems to be pushing some of the more family-orientated sponsors a fraction too far. Indeed, only last week he was pictured living it up with not one but four women in a club in Barcelona—apparently variety really is the spice of his life!

Though, with only two days to go until the Prince of Monaco launches this year’s race, we suspect Finn’s wicked social life is

the least of Scott Lansing's worries, because clearly our favourite racer is off his game.

While Australia was a washout, earning him third place, St George barely managed to scrape a win in Malaysia and Bahrain, leaving Scott Lansing standing neck and neck with fierce rivals Nemesis Hart. But when he crashed spectacularly in Spain last month, and failed to finish, racing enthusiasts not only dubbed him 'the death-defyer', but he slipped back several points, leaving Nemesis Hart the leader for the first time in years.

Has St George really lost his edge? Or has the tragic boating accident of last September, involving his teammate Tom Scott, affected him so severely?

Usually dominating the grid, it appears our much-loved philanderer needs to up his game and clean up his act, or Scott Lansing may just find themselves in serious financial straits. One thing is certain: while Monaco waits with bated breath for the big race tomorrow Michael Scott is sure to be pacing the floors, hoping for a miracle.

\* \* \*

### A MIRACLE...

With a flick of her wrist, Serena Scott tossed the crumpled newspaper across her father's desk. 'Well, she was wrong about one thing. You're not pacing the floors.'

On a slow spin the black and white blur landed in front of him, hitting the glass with a soft smack. Then the only sound in the luxurious office on the Scott Lansing yacht was Serena's choppy

breathing and the foreboding thump of her heart.

‘No pacing. Yet,’ he grated, dipping his chin to lock his sharp graphite eyes on hers.

Well, now... She had the uncanny notion that after hours of musing over the true genesis of her three a.m. wake-up call she was about to discover exactly why she’d been dragged from her warm bed in London to globetrot to the Côte d’Azur. And if the suspicion snaking up her spine was anything to go by she wasn’t going to like it.

‘I have no idea what you’re worried about,’ she said, perfectly amiable as she folded her arms across the creased apple-green T shrouding her chest. ‘Finn is performing to his usual sybaritic standards, if you ask me. Fraternising with God-knows-who while he parties the night away, drinks, gambles, beds a few starlets and crashes a car for the grand finale. Nothing out of the ordinary. You knew this two years ago, when you signed him.’

‘Back then he wasn’t this bad,’ came the wry reply. ‘It’s not only that. He’s...’

That familiar brow furrowed and Serena’s followed suit.

‘He’s what?’

‘I can’t even explain it. He goes on like nothing’s happened but it’s like he’s got a death wish.’

She coughed out an incredulous laugh. ‘He hasn’t got a death wish. He’s just so supremely arrogant he thinks he’s indestructible.’

‘It’s more than that. There’s something...dark about him all of

a sudden.'

Dark? A sinister shiver crept over her skin as the past scratched at her psyche, picking at the scab of a raw wound. Until she realised just who they were talking about.

'Maybe he's been overdoing it on the sun deck.'

'You're being deliberately obtuse,' he ground out.

Yes, well, unfortunately Finn St George brought out the worst in her—had done since the first moment she'd locked eyes with him four years ago...

Serena flung her brain into neutral before it hit reverse and kicked up the dirt on one of the most humiliating experiences of her life. Best to say lesson learned. After that, what with her engineering degree, working alongside the team's world-famous car designer in London and Finn's thirst for media scintillation—which she avoided like the bubonic plague—face-to-face contact between them had been gratifyingly rare.

Until—just her rotten luck—their formal 'welcome to the team' introduction, when he'd struck at every self-preservation instinct she possessed, oozing sexual gravitas, with challenge and mockery stamped all over his face. Hateful man. She didn't need reminding she was no femme fatale—especially by a Casanova as shallow as a puddle.

Add in the fact that his morals, or lack thereof, turned her stomach to ice, from the outset they'd snarled and sparked and butted heads—and that had been before he'd stolen the most precious thing in the world from her.

A fierce rush of grief flooded through her, drenching her bones with sorrow, and she swayed on her feet.

‘Look,’ her father began, tugging at the cuff of his high-neck white team shirt. ‘I know you two don’t really get along...’

Wow, wasn’t that an understatement?

‘But I need your help here, Serena.’

With an incredulous huff she narrowed her eyes on the whipcord figure of Michael Scott, also known as Slick Mick to the ladies and Dad when in private, or when she was feeling particularly daughterly, as he rocked back in his black leather chair.

Nearing fifty, the former racing champion reminded her of a movie icon, with his unkempt salt and pepper hair, surrounding a chiselled face even more handsome than it had been at the peak of his career. The guy was seriously good-looking. Not exactly a father figure, but they were friends of the best kind. At least they usually were.

‘This is your idea of a joke, right?’ It was hard to sound teasing and only mildly put out when there was such a great lump in her throat. ‘Because, let me tell you, I have more of a chance to be Finn St George’s worst nightmare than his supposed...saviour.’

The idea was ridiculous!

Visibly deflating, he shook his head tiredly. ‘I know. But I find myself wondering if you have a better chance of getting through to him. Because, honestly, I’m running out of ideas. And drivers. And cars.’ Up came his arm in a wave of exasperation and the pen

in his hand soared over the toppling towers of paperwork. ‘Did you watch that crash last month? Zero self-preservation. The guy is going to get himself killed.’

‘Let him.’ The words flew out of her mouth Serena-style—that was before she could think better of it or lessen the blow. One of her not-so-good traits that landed her in trouble more often than not...

‘You don’t mean that,’ he said, with the curt ring of a reprimand.

Closing her eyes, she breathed through the maelstrom of emotions warring in her chest. No, she didn’t mean that. She might not like the man, but she didn’t want anything bad to happen to him. Much.

‘What’s more, I refuse to lose another boy in this lifetime.’

The hot air circling behind her ribs gushed past her lips and her shoulders slumped. Then, for the first time since she’d barged in here twenty minutes ago, she took a good look at Michael Scott—a real look. Her dad might be all kinds of a playboy himself, but she’d missed him terribly.

Inspecting the grey shadows beneath his eyes, Serena almost asked how he was coping with the loss of his only son. Almost asked if he’d missed her while she’d been gone. But Serena and her father didn’t go deep. Never had, never would. So she stuffed the love and the hurt right back down, behind the invisible walls she’d designed and built with the fierce power of a youthful mind.

Yeah, she was the tough cookie in the brood. She didn’t grieve

from her sleeve or wail at the world for the unfairness of it all. Truly, what was the point? She was this man's daughter, raised as one of the pack. No room for mushy emotions or feminine sentimentality spilling all over the place.

So, even though she now had a Tom-sized hole in her heart, she had to deal with it like a man—get up, get busy, move on.

It was a pity that plan wasn't working out so well. Some days her heart ached so badly she was barely holding it together. Don't be ridiculous, Serena, you can hold up the world with one hand. Snap out of it!

'Anyway, you can't stay in London all season, fiddling with the prototype. I thought it was ready.'

'It is. We're just running through the final testing this week.'

'Good, because I need you here. The design team can finish the trials.'

I need you. Wily—that was what he was. He knew exactly what to say and when.

'No. You need me to try and control your wild boy. Problem is I have absolutely no wish to ever set eyes on him again.'

'It wasn't his fault, Serena,' he said wearily.

'So you keep saying.'

But exactly which part of Finn taking Tom to Singapore on a bender and Finn coming back first-class on his twenty-million-pound jet whilst her brother returned in a box wasn't his fault? Which part of Finn taking him out on a boat when Tom couldn't swim and subsequently drowned wasn't his fault? He hadn't even

had the decency to attend the funeral!

But she didn't bother to rehash old arguments that only led her down the rocky road to nowhere.

'So you want me to...what? Forgive him? Not a chance in hell. Make him feel better? I don't. So why should he?'

'Because this team is going down. Do you really want that?'

She let loose a sigh. 'You know I don't.' Team Scott Lansing was her family. Her entire life. A colourful, vibrant rabble of friends and adoptive uncles and she'd missed them all. But the entire scene just brought back too many memories she was ill-equipped to handle right now.

'So think of the bigger picture. Read my lips when I say, for the final time, it wasn't Finn's fault. It was an accident. Let it go. You are doing no one any favours quibbling about it—least of all me.'

He pinched the bridge of his nose as if to stem one of his killer migraines and guilt fisted her heart.

He was suffering. They were all suffering. In silence. Let it go...

But why was it every time they spoke of that tragic day, when the phone had shrilled ominously through their trailer, she was slapped with the perfidious feeling she was being kept in the dark? And she loathed the dark.

It didn't matter how many times she asked her father to elucidate he was forever cutting her off.

'Tom wouldn't want to see you like this,' he said, irritation



inching his volume a decibel higher. ‘Blaming Finn. Doing your moonlit flit routine. Holing up in London. Burying your head in work. You’ve done all you can at base—now it’s time to get back in the field. Quit running and stop hiding.’

‘I haven’t been hiding!’

He snorted in disbelief.

Okay, maybe she’d been hiding. Licking her wounds was best attempted in peace, as far as she was concerned. But honestly...? How far was solitude getting her on the heart-healing scale?

Serena’s heavy lids shuttered. God, she was tired.

She’d lost her brother, her best friend, and she kept forgetting she was supposed to carry on regardless. This was tough love and she’d been reared on it. Admittedly the vast majority of the time she’d appreciated Michael Scott’s particular method of parentage. You needed skin as thick as cowhide to trail the world for ten months of the year in the company of men. Not the best way to raise two children, but she’d genuinely loved her life. Honest.

If she’d often stared at other children with their mothers, wondering what it would be like to have one of her own, to live in a normal house and walk to an actual brick-built, other-children-present school every morning, she’d just reminded herself that her life was exciting. And if she’d prayed for a mum all those years ago when her adolescence had been shattered, leaving her broken and torn, she’d comforted herself that she had Tom. Tom had been her rock.

But now he was gone. Nothing was exciting any more and there was no one to hold her hand in the dead of night when the shadows loomed. You don't need your hand held. You're stronger than that. Snap out of it!

She swallowed around the lump in her throat, forcing the overwhelming knot of grief to plunge into her chest. Buried so deep her stomach ached.

'If what you say is true and there is a problem,' she said dubiously, 'how can I possibly help?'

'Get him to take an interest in the prototype or work on your latest designs... I don't know—just get him to focus on something other than women or the bottom of a bottle.'

Impossible.

'I'm a woman.'

'Only in the technical sense.'

'Gee, thanks.' As if she needed reminding.

Then again, the last thing she wanted was to be like one of Finn's regulars. They were the skirt to Serena's jeans. The buxom bombshells to Serena's boyish figure. The strappy sandals to Serena's biker boots. The super-soft, twice-conditioned spiralling blonde locks to Serena's wild mane of a hue so bizarre it defied all colour charts.

Which was wonderful. Inordinately satisfying. Exactly the way she liked it.

'The last thing he needs is another bedmate,' he muttered wryly. 'He needs a kick up the backside. A challenge. And,

let's face it, you two create enough spark to fire a twin-stroke. Therefore I am asking—no, you know what...? I am telling you to help. You're on my payroll. You move back in here and you chip in.'

Tough love.

Then his graphite gaze turned speculative. Calculating. An expression she didn't care for that nailed her to the wall.

'Or you can kiss the Silverstone launch of your prototype goodbye.'

A gasp of air hit the back of her throat. 'You wouldn't dare.'

'Wouldn't I?'

Yeah, he probably would. He didn't believe the racing car she'd designed would be anything special and she'd do anything to prove him wrong.

That prototype was her baby. Three years of hard work. Her and Tom's inspiration. Launching at Silverstone had been their dream. The only tangible thing she had left of him.

'Low, Dad,' she choked out. 'Really low.'

Averting his eyes, he scrubbed a palm over his face. 'More like desperate.'

Serena sighed. Nailed. Every. Time.

'Fine. I'll try...something.'

Unease began to hammer at her heart—she had no idea how to handle the man. None.

'But I know Finn will make it up. He had a slow start last year. The sponsors will forgive and forget once he starts playing to his

fans. Monaco is in the bag. He always wins here. What happened in qualifying sessions today? He's in pole position, right?"

Her father's expression turned thunderous—one that boded only ill. 'He screwed the engine.'

He blew the engine? 'So he's at the back tomorrow? In one of the slowest and hardest circuits in the world?'

'Yep.'

Pop! Up came a vision in her mind's eye—the scene she'd bypassed as she'd hauled her motorbike along the harbour—and her stomach fired, anger swirling like a tornado. Sparking, ready to ignite.

Raising her arm, she pointed one trembling finger in the general direction of Finn's floating brothel. 'And he's along there, in that...that yacht of his. Engaging in some kind of...drunken debauched sex-fest to celebrate his latest cock-up?'

One weary hitch of those broad shoulders was all it took to light the fireball raging in the pit of her stomach.

'What in the blue blazes is he doing? Doesn't he care at all? In fact, don't answer that. I already know.'

The man cared for no one but himself! And this was a newsflash? Obligation and decency had clearly been disowned in that gene pool.

'I've had it with him.'

Bullet-like, Serena shot out through the door, her biker boots a clomp-clomp on the polished wooden floors as she raced through the galley. 'I'm gonna kill him. With my bare hands.'

‘Serena! Watch your temper. I need him.’

Yeah, well, she needed her brother back—and that was about as impossible as keeping her mitts off Finn St George’s pretty-boy face. She’d had enough of that man messing with her family. Her team. Her life. Her brother was dead, the championship was heading for the toilet, and her dad was aging by the second as Finn continued to yank at his fraying tether!

How selfish could one man be?

Well, she was stopping it all. She was taking control.

Right now.

## CHAPTER TWO

SERENA DUCKED AND dived around the loved-up couples milling on the harbour, her sole focus on the Extasea, rising from the water, formidable and majestic.

Even moored among some of the finest vessels in the world, Finn’s super-yacht was in a class of her own—a one-hundred-and-sixty-foot, three-decker palace—reminding Serena of the resplendent seven-star hotels he favoured in Dubai and certainly more regal ocean liner than bordello.

Still, opulence aside, she had the acumen to know that appearances were deceptive, and the fact that she’d been lowered to this chafed her pride raw. But there was no backing out now. She was going to say her piece and he was going to listen.

The bravado felt wonderful. Freeing. Cleansing. She should have done this months ago, she realised—had it out with him instead of letting everyone sweep her under the carpet like some

bothersome gnat, as if her feelings were of no importance. Her grief had been so all-consuming that she'd allowed it to happen. Well, not any more.

Closer to the yacht now, she felt the balmy air cling to her skin and the thud of her boots become drenched by the evocative beat of sultry music. As she marched up the gangway the splash of water from the hot tub on the sun deck followed by intimate squeals of sexual delight made her trip over her size fives.

Flailing, she gripped the rail on both sides. Then a tidal wave of apprehension crashed over her and she stood soaked with a keen embarrassment. She was about as comfortable with this scene as she would be treading water in the company of killer sharks.

You don't belong here, Serena. Surrounded by sex and women who exuded femininity. Don't think about it. Just get in there, find Finn, and make him clean the decks himself!

Hovering a few feet from the top, she inhaled a deep wave of saltwater air to reel back her bravado.

In every direction—whether it was left, towards the luxurious seating area abounding with plush gold chairs, or right, towards the outer dining suites—there were bodies, bodies and more bodies. Wearing as little clothing as possible.

She shivered, chilly just looking at them.

One step further and still no one seemed to notice the impromptu arrival of an uninvited guest. No ravaging lips ceased to kiss. No fervent hands slowed their bold caresses of sun-

kissed flesh. No flutes of champagne paused on their way to open mouths and the laughter rolled on in barks of joyful humour that only served to remind her of the last time she'd laughed—which made a scream itch to peal up her throat.

Why should Finn and his entourage be laughing when she was still unable to cry? Unable to shed one solitary tear? Because boys don't cry...

Indignation launched her the final few feet and out of nowhere a sinister-looking figure loomed and grabbed her wrist in a manacled grip.

'Ow!' Pain shot up her arm and she flipped her hand in an attempt to dislodge the hold—even as she was flung back in time and any lingering panic was ramped up into bone-shattering fear. 'Get off me!'

Except the more she struggled, the tighter the hold became—until the knife-edge of terror scored her heart and her vision swam in the blackest waters...

A rough yet familiar voice shattered the obsidian glaze. 'Hey, let her go. She's okay.'

Mr Manacle released her so fast she stumbled backwards. Her only conscious thought was that she was taking up self-defence classes again. Pronto.

Righting her footing, she glanced at the owner of that masculine rumble.

'Thanks,' she murmured, her voice disgustingly fragile as she rubbed at her wrist to ease the throb of muscle and friction burn.

‘You okay, Serena?’

Vision clearing, she focused on the handsome, boyish face of one uneasy chocolate-haired Jake Morgan. Scott Lansing protégé and an apparent star in the making. She’d never watched him drive. For some reason he always got a bit tongue-tied around her, and the fact that he was Tom’s replacement gave her heart a pang every time she looked at him. Not his fault, Serena. Let it go.

‘Peachy. Since when does Finn have security?’

‘Had them on and off all season. Mainly for parties when there’s a big crowd.’

Translation: when he needed to fend off gatecrashing bombshells.

‘Where is your dissolute host?’ she asked, somewhat surly and unable to care. She was shaking so hard she had to cross her arms over her chest to stop her bones rattling.

‘Not sure.’ Jake’s Adam’s apple bobbed and his eyes jerked to a door leading to what she guessed was the main salon. ‘I haven’t seen him for a while.’

Oh, wonderful. He was covering for Finn. ‘Forget it. I’ll find him myself.’

The sensation of copious eyes poring over her wild mane and crumpled clothing made her flesh crawl and she had to fight the instinct to race across the polished deck. Ironically, the door to the devil’s lair suddenly seemed very appealing and she slipped inside with a bizarre sense of relief.



The lavishness of the place was staggering, and way too gold-filigree-and-fussy for her. She might have a DNA glitch but it didn't even suit Finn. Granted, he'd purchased the mega-yacht from some billionaire, but at least a year had passed since.

After ten minutes of being creeped out by cherub wall sconces she was standing in a corridor surrounded by more doors. It was all like a bad dream...

Moaning, purring, steamy and impassioned noises drifted from the room at the far end of the panelled hallway, licking her stomach into a slow, laborious roll.

Pound-pound went her heart as she edged further towards the sounds, her gaze locked on the source as if drawn by some powerful magnetic force.

Her hand to the handle now, a wisp of a thought passed through her brain: did she really want to catch Finn the notorious womaniser in flagrante with his recent squeeze? She had enough nightmares to contend with at the best of times. Except...she could hardly roam around here all night, could she? If he was in a drunken stupor she only had sixteen hours to clean him up, and she was not leaving this place without some answers!

Astounded at what she was about to do, she pressed her ear up against the door panel in an effort to decipher voices.

Rustle went the sheets and creak went the muffled bounce of springs, as if bodies were interlocked and undulating in an amorous embrace. Cries of rapturous passion bloomed in the air and her blood flushed hotly, madly, deeply, in an odd concoction

of mortification, inquisitiveness and warmth.

Jeepers, what was wrong with her?

Focus.

Ignoring the anxious thump in her chest warning that exposure was imminent, she leaned further in and relished the cool brush of wood against her fevered flesh.

The woman, whoever she was, was clearly glorifying in what was being done to her. No subdued cries or awkward silences while she wished it were over. Just murmurs of encouragement in a deep velvet voice that made the damp softness between Serena's legs tighten.

Not Finn. She would recognise that seductive rasp of perfect Etonian English laced with the smattering of an American drawl any day. A distinct flavour from the time he spent in the off season, presenting a hugely popular car show in the States.

Not that she liked his testosterone-and-sex-drenched tone—not at all.

Edgy, she licked her arid lips and told herself to back away before she was nabbed. So why couldn't she move? Why did she strive to imagine what was happening behind this door? Wonder how, precisely, Mr Velvet Voice adored his lover's body for her to reach such hedonistic heights that she became paralysed, unable to do anything but scream in wanton pleasure and abandon—?

'Has she come yet?'

A voice, richly amused and lathered with sin, curled around her nape.

A squeak burst from her throat.

Her head shot upright.

Boom! Her heart vaulted from her chest and she pivoted clumsily, then spread herself against the door panel like strawberry jam on toast.

One look...

Oh. My. God. No!

Squeezing her eyes shut she began to pray. This is not happening. Not again. I am not the unluckiest woman alive!

‘Good evening, Miss Seraphina Scott. Come to join the party?’ he asked, with such unholy glee that she was fuelled with the urge to smack her head off the door. ‘There’s always room for one more.’

‘When...’ Oh, great—she couldn’t even breathe. And her heart—God, her heart was still on the floor. ‘When hell freezes.’

She wanted out of here. Now. Except the idea that she was acting like a pansy made her root her feet to the floor like pesky weeds and she prised her eyes wide. Only to decide being a sissy wasn’t so bad.

Leaning insolently against the polished panels, no more than two feet away, Finn St George smouldered like a banked fire and the heat spiralling through her veins burst into flames, seared through her blood. All she could think was that she must have done something atrocious in another life to deserve this.

After what he’d done, had it truly been too much to hope his mere presence would have stopped affecting her?

She hated him. Hated him! He hadn't changed one iota. Still the most debauched, moral-less creature on two legs. And clearly he intended to go on as if he hadn't taken a crowbar to her life and smashed it to smithereens. What had her father said? 'He goes on like nothing's happened...'

Over her dead body.

Seraphina. No one was allowed to call her that. No one!

'This isn't a social call, I assure you,' she said, proud of her don't-mess-with-me voice as she restrained the urge to shiver before him. 'Any other time it would take an apocalypse to get me into this den of iniquity.'

His mouth—the very one that had been known to cause swooning and fever-pitch hysteria—kicked up into a crooked smile and one solitary indentation kissed his cheek. 'And yet here you are.'

Here she was. It was a pity, that for a moment, she couldn't remember why. All she could think was that that mouth of his was a loaded weapon.

'I do seem to find you in the most...deliciously compromising situations, Seraphina.' His prurient grin made his extraordinary eyes gleam in the dim light. 'Listening at doors? Bad, bad girl. I ought to take you over my knee.'

Thanking her lucky stars that she wasn't prone to blushing like a girl—because, let's face it, she'd never been one, and the fact that this man made her feel like one was probably the greatest insult on earth—she weighed up the intelligence of answering

that symphony of innuendo. Meanwhile she returned his visual full-body inspection just as blatantly. Why he insisted on going through this rigmarole every time they met was a mystery. With one arching golden brow he arrogantly put her in her place—ensuring she understood that she was a duck among swans.

Unluckily for him intimidation didn't work on her. Not any more.

As she soaked up every inch of him she decided she didn't understand the man's appeal.

Obviously there had to be some basis for his being named the world's greatest lover, an erotic legend in the racing world. But, come on, plenty of men must be good in bed—right? Plenty had sexy dimples in lean jaws. Plenty had a mouth made for sin, lips that moved sensually and invitingly and downright suggestively, and eyes the colour of—

Ohhh, who was she kidding?

Finn St George was flat-out, drop-dead insanely gorgeous—an abundance of angelic male beauty.

Thick dirty-blond hair; cut short at the back and longer at the front to fall in a tousled tumble over his brow, gave him a sexy, roguish air. And that face...

Not only did he defy nature, he literally bent the laws of physics with his intriguingly wicked mouth and that downright depraved gleam in his cerulean eyes. Eyes that had catapulted him into the hearts and fantasies of women the world over.

Between his leading-man looks and his celebrated body—

currently dressed in low-slung board shorts and an unbuttoned crisp white linen shirt, showcasing his magnificent torso—he was mouth-watering, picture-perfect in every single way.

It was a good thing she knew how well a polished chassis could hide an engine riddled with innumerable flaws.

‘What do you think you’re playing at, Lothario? Don’t you think drinking and partying the night away before a race is dangerous, even for you?’

‘I have to find some way to work off the residual adrenaline rush from the qualifying session, Seraphina. Unless you’re offering to relieve some of my more...physical tensions.’

Her lower abdomen clenched in reaction to that catastrophically sensual drawl, and as if he could sense it his lips twitched.

‘I’d be quite happy to knock you out—would that help?’

There it was again. That smile. A dangerous and destructive weapon known to bring women to their knees. And the fact that it turned her own to hot rubber made her madder still. ‘Then again,’ she sniped, ‘we wouldn’t want to mar that pretty-boy face, would we?’

A trick of the light, maybe, but she’d swear he flinched, paled...before something dark and malevolent tightened the hard lines of his body until he positively seethed.

Whoa...

Her mind screaming, Danger! Danger! Run!, she backed up a step and nudged the door. She wanted to snarl and bite at him. It

was as if her body knew he was the enemy and she was gearing up for a fight. The fight she'd once been incapable of.

Not any more.

Her blunt nails dug into her palms, but in the next breath he pursed that delectable mouth in suppressed amusement, as if it had all been some huge joke, and the change in him was so swift, so absolute, she floundered.

'There's something dark about him all of a sudden.' Or she could be hallucinating from an overdose of his pheromones.

'If you don't mind,' he drawled, 'I'd appreciate it if we kept my face out of it. After all, I wouldn't want to distress the ladies with some unsightly bruising.'

'Like you need any more ladies! Looks to me like you've had your fair share already this evening.'

He looked well-sexed, to be sure. Hair damp, with his glorious fresh water-mint scent flirting with her senses, she guessed he'd just stepped from beneath the assault of a shower.

'On the contrary, I was just about to indulge in a good workout.'

Disgust drove her tone wild. 'Yes, well, bedding the latest starlet or pit-lane queen is one thing—partying the night away before racing on the most dangerous circuit on the calendar is downright risky and inappropriate!'

He gave an elaborate sigh. 'Where is the fun in being appropriate? Even the word sounds dull, don't you agree?'

'No, I don't—and nor do our sponsors.' She rubbed her brow

to pacify its exasperated throb. ‘I swear to God, if you don’t start pulling through for this team I will make you wish you’d never been born.’

‘You know, I believe you would.’

‘Good.’

He brushed the pad of his thumb from the corner of his mouth down over the soft flesh of his bottom lip. ‘So if you haven’t come to indulge in some heavy petting why are you here, beautiful?’

His voice, disturbingly low and smooth as cognac, was so potent she swayed, nigh on intoxicated.

For an infinitesimal moment his cerulean-blue eyes held hers and a riot of sensations tumbled down the length of her spine. Pooled. Pulled. Primal and magnetic. And she hated it. Hated it! Beautiful?

‘Don’t mock me, Finn. I’m not in the mood for your games. I want this place cleared and you sober. How dare you party it up and put the team at risk while everyone sits around feeling sorry for your little soul?’

‘You know as well as I do that sympathy is wasted on me. Especially when there is a profusion of far more...enjoyable sensations to be experienced at my hands.’

Ugh.

Temper rising, implosion imminent, she felt her breasts begin to heave. ‘For someone who blew up an engine this morning—and, hey, this is a wild idea—how about you start thinking of how to salvage the situation instead of screwing around? Have you



been drinking? You could get banned from the race altogether!’  
With a shake of his head he tsked at her. ‘No drinking.’  
‘You swear?’

One blunt finger scraped over his honed left pec. ‘Cross my heart.’

Time stilled as she walked headlong into another wall of grief and memories slammed into every corner of her mind. The games of two children. One voice: ‘Cross my heart.’ The other: ‘Hope to die.’

There it was. The elephant in the room.

Tom.

Cold. Suddenly she was so very, very cold. Only wanting to leave. To get as far away from this man as she could before the emotion she’d balled up in her chest for months punched free and she screamed and railed and lashed out in a burst of feminine pique.

She’d tell her dad he was barking up the wrong tree. No way could she work with Finn. She felt unhinged, her body vibrating with conflicting emotions, all of them revving, striving for pole position. And that was nothing compared to the hot whirlpool of desire swirling like a dark storm inside of her. How was that even possible? How was that even fair?

Life isn’t fair, Serena. You know that. But what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. Makes your heart beat harder and your will indestructible.

So before she left she was getting the answers she wanted if

it was the last thing she did.

\* \* \*

In all the times over the last eight months when Finn had imagined coming face-to-face with Seraphina Scott, he'd never once envisaged the tough, prickly and somewhat prissy tomboy with her ear smashed against a door panel, listening for the orgasmic finale sure to come.

How very...intriguing.

It had certainly made up his mind on how to handle her impromptu arrival. With one look his heart had paused and he'd stared at the sweet, subtle curve of her waist, battling with innumerable choices.

Apologise? Not here, not now. Wrong place, wrong time. The risk that his defences would splinter equalled the prospect that she wouldn't believe him.

Wrap her tight in his arms because for a fleeting moment he'd sensed a keen vulnerability in her? Far too risky. If he buried his face in that heavenly fall of fire he might never come up to breathe again.

Act the polite English gentleman? Despite popular opinion he was more than capable of executing that particular role. He could be anyone or anything any woman wanted, as long as it wasn't himself. The problem was that kind of outlandish behaviour would only make her suspicious and no doubt she'd hang around.

He might be responsible for the words delectable, fickle and playboy appearing in the dictionary, but he was far from stupid.

Soon she'd start asking questions about her brother's death, and he had to ensure they never came to pass those gloriously full raspberry lips. Lips he'd become riveted upon. Lips he'd do anything to smother and crush. To make love to with every pent-up breath in his taut body until she yielded beneath his command.

Never.

So in the end he'd settled for their habitual sparring. The usual back and forth banter that was sure to spark her every nerve and induce the usual colourful dazzling firework display. Make her hate him even more. Followed by her departure, of course.

While a vast proportion of him had rebelled at the notion, some minuscule sensible part had won out. After all, if there were fairness and justice in the world he would be the man six feet under and not an innocent kid who'd always looked at him as if he were some kind of hero.

What a joke.

But death eluded him. No matter how many of life's obstacles he faced, and no matter how many cars he crashed. He was Finn St George—dashing, death-defying racing driver extraordinaire. Death took the good and left the bad to fester—he'd seen that time and time again. Not that he deserved any kind of peace. When it finally came and he met his maker he doubted he'd hear the sweet song of angels or bask in the pearly glow of heaven. No. What waited for him was far darker, far hotter. Far more suited to the true him.

Was he worried? Hell, no. Rather, he looked forward to

heading down into fire and brimstone. It couldn't be much worse than what he'd lived with all day, every day, for the last eight months.

Ah, great. There he went again. Becoming ridiculously maudlin. Entirely too tedious. A crime in itself when faced with the delectable Miss Seraphina Scott, who never failed to coerce a rush of blood to speed past his ears.

Clink. The door behind her opened and a bikini-clad blonde shimmied past, trailing one French-tipped talon down Finn's bare forearm. A soap opera star, if he remembered correctly, and a welcome distraction that twisted his torso as he watched her saunter down the hall with a practised sway of her voluptuous hips.

What he couldn't quite discern was why his eyes were on one thing while his mind, his entire body, was attuned to another, riding another wavelength—one set on Seraphina's ultra-high frequency.

Typical. Because—come on—if there was ever a more desirable time to regain some kind of sexual enthusiasm for his usual coterie of fanatics it was the precipitous return of Miss Scott.

‘One of yours, I presume?’

Derision drizzled over that strawberry and cream voice making every word a tart, sweet bite.

‘I don't believe I've had the pleasure.’ Turning back to her, he licked his decadent mouth in a blatant taunt. ‘Yet...’

Shunning her sneer of scorn, Finn gave an unconcerned shrug. Women had been flinging themselves in his direction since he'd hit puberty. What kind of man would he be to deny their every sensual wish? Anyway, he loved women—in all their soft, scented glory. Almost as much as he loved cars. It was a shame the current state of his healing body continued to deny him full access.

Not that he was concerned. It would fix itself. He just had to make sure he was a million miles away from this woman when it happened.

‘Do you think you could refrain from thinking with your second head for one solitary minute?’

He pretended to think about that and in the silence of the hallway almost heard himself grin. ‘I could. If you made it worth my while.’

Three. Two. One. Snap.

‘You’re a selfish bastard—you know that? Anyone else would try and focus on the good of the team after we lost Tom. Or should I say after you took Tom from us?’

Strike one. Straight to his heart.

‘But not the consummate indestructible Finn St George. No, no. You think only of yourself and what slice of havoc you can cause next. If it isn’t women, it’s barely being able to keep a car horizontal.’

‘While horizontal is one of my preferred positions, I admit it doesn’t always work out that way.’

Grimacing, she moaned as if in pain. ‘Don’t you take anything seriously? You crashed a multimillion-pound car last month. One I doubt will ever see the light of day again.’

He scrubbed a palm over a jaw that was in desperate need of a shave. ‘That was unfortunate,’ he drawled. ‘I agree.’

‘Is everything a joke to you?’

‘Not in the least. I just find it tedious to focus on the depressing side of life. I’m more a cup half full kind of guy.’

‘Unfortunately that cup of yours is going to run on vapour if you don’t start winning some races.’

Yeah, well, he was having a teeny-tiny problem getting any shut-eye, thanks to the flashbacks visiting him far too often for his peace of mind. And, while his driving had always controlled the restless predator that lived and breathed inside him, of late that wildness had overtaken all else. Until even behind the wheel he felt outside of his own body. Detached. His famed control obliterated. Even as he wiped his mind he could still feel the tight scarred skin of his back rubbing against his driving suit—and then... Hello, flashback.

Luckily his body was healing. The memories would pass and he had all season to make it up to Michael Scott. Thirteen races to land the championship. Piece of cake.

‘Don’t worry about a thing, baby, the team is in safe hands with me.’

It was, of course, entirely possible Michael didn’t think him capable of pulling them out of the quagmire. Hence this visit

from Little Miss Spitfire.

‘Now, why does that fail to ease my mind? Oh, yes— because these days, unlike Midas, everything you touch meets a rather gruelling end.’

Strike two, sending his heart crashing into the well of his stomach even as he managed to hide his wince with another kick of his lips. ‘You need to trust me, baby.’

She snorted. ‘When sheep fly and pigs bleat. I’m pretty sure the first step to trust is actually liking the person.’

He let his debauched mouth fire into a full-blown grin.

Finally—someone who loathed him instead of walking on eggshells and spouting blatant lies to his face that it wasn’t his fault. Michael Scott had a tendency to do just that. But Finn wasn’t blind to the turmoil in the other man’s eyes. The reality was his boss had a team to run and they were locked in a multimillion-pound contract, so Mick had no choice but to keep him around until the end of the season. The fact the man had to look at him every day left a bitter taste in Finn’s mouth. Mick was a good guy. He deserved better.

After years of driving with the best teams in the world, constantly restless, his itchy feet begging to move on, he’d hoped he could settle with Scott Lansing for a while. It was more family than moneymaking machine, and respect ran both ways. Little chance of that now, but he’d win this season if it were the last thing he did.

As long as this woman stayed out of his way.

‘Also, do me a favour, would you? Quit the baby thing. It suggests an intimacy I would rather die than pursue.’

Then again, he couldn’t see close proximity being a problem, because—oh, yeah—she wanted to stamp on his foot good and proper. He could see it in those incredible eyes. Eyes that were a sensual feast of impossibly long dark lashes acting like a decadent frame around a mesmerising blend of the calmest grey with striations of yellow-gold as if to forewarn that there was no black and white with this woman—only mystifying shades of the unknown. Ensuring he was continually intrigued by her. Bewitched by her secrets. Yet at the same time they promised peace, true tranquillity—a stark, stunning contrast to that hair.

Her hair...

A shudder ripped through his body just from looking at it, inciting pure want to move through his bloodstream like a narcotic. Because that spectacular mane of fire told him she’d been burned and lived to tell the tale. A survivor.

Shameful, reprehensible; his eyes took a long, leisurely stroll down her lithe little body, soaking up her quirky ensemble.

Clumpy biker boots which, more often than not, made him instantly hard. Skin-tight denims and an apple-green T with the words ‘It’s All Good Under the Hood’ stroking across her perfect C’s.

Ohhh, yeah, she was delicious. Lickable. Biteable.

She leaned towards a serious tomboy bent and after multiple seasons of being faced with silicone inflation, Botoxed lips and



an abundance of flesh on show, looking at Seraphina Scott was dangerous to say the least. Intrigue gave way to intoxication every time. Unfortunately he'd just have to suffer the side effects—because she was the one woman he could never, ever touch.

Not only was she the boss's daughter, and not only did that tough outer shell conceal an uncontrollable fiery response that lured the predator inside him to prowl to the surface and claw down those walls, but he'd also made a promise to her brother—and he'd stand by it even if it killed him...

'If I don't get out of this alive, Finn, promise me something?'

'Don't talk like that, kid. I'll get us out of here.'

'Whatever you do, don't tell Serena about this place. She's been through enough. She'll go looking for blood. You have to keep her safe. Promise me...'

His lungs drew up tight, crowding his chest until he could barely breathe. He would keep her safe. By getting her away from him.

Shuttering his eyes for a brief spell, he blocked her mesmeric pull. He'd dreaded this moment for months, he realised. Knowing she would come out fighting even as grief oozed from her very pores.

Where once she'd been a little bit curvy, now she was a little bit too thin. A stunning force of anger and sadness, beautiful and desolate. As if heartbreak had pulled the life force out of her and every morsel was tasteless.

Finn had done that to her.

Tom Scott...

Guilt lay like crude oil in the base of his stomach and every time he looked at her it churned violently, threatening to catch fire, making him ache. Ache. God, did she make him ache. Make the mourning suffocate his soul. As if it wasn't enough that the kid was still his constant companion even in death.

He didn't want her here. In fact he wanted her as far away from him as he could get her. Which begged the question: why was she back?

She who now eyed him expectantly and for the life of him he couldn't remember what she'd said.

Shifting gears, he asked, 'How's London?'

'Cold.'

'How's work?'

'Great. Thank you for asking,' she said, with such a guileless expression he didn't even see the freight train barrelling down the hallway. 'Why didn't you come to Tom's funeral? He worshipped you.'

His stomach gave a sickening twist.

'Sick.' He needed off this topic. Right. Now. 'How's the prototype?'

'Spectacular. Sick how?'

'Boring story. Is it finished?'

Say no.

Fuming at his attempt at derailing the conversation, she breathed slow and deep. 'Maybe. Did you know he couldn't

swim?’

Crap. ‘No.’ Not at the time. ‘Are you staying?’

‘Possibly.’

Dammit. This was getting too close for comfort. ‘I think you could do with more time off,’ he said. ‘Take a holiday.’

Suspicion narrowed her glare. ‘Is that right?’

‘Sure. How about a nice sojourn round the Caribbean? All that sun, sea and sex would do you good. Loosen you up a little.’

She raised one delicate dark brow. ‘Why, Finn, I didn’t know you cared.’

‘There’s a lot you don’t know about me.’

‘Funny, I was just thinking the exact same thing.’

Now he remembered why he couldn’t stand the woman. ‘Anyway, I was saying. A holiday is just what you need.’

‘Are you saying I don’t look so good?’

‘Well, now you come to mention it you are a little on the thin side.’ True, most women would consider that a compliment, but Miss Scott wasn’t like other women.

As predicted, she prickled like a porcupine. But at least she wasn’t musing about funerals and swimming any more.

‘Trading insults, Finn? I wouldn’t advise it. You’ve buried yourself in so much dirt over the years I’ll always come out on top.’

A growl ripped up his throat. ‘Mmm... You on top. Now, that is something I would love to see,’ he said, sending his voice into a silken lazy caress, frankly astonished at how much effort he was

expending to keep this up. For the first time in history one of their sparring sessions was stealing great chunks of his sanity.

‘Liar. Furthermore, I’m not one of your fans or bits of fluff, so do me a favour and keep those blues above neck level. If you’re trying to intimidate me you’ll have to do a better job than feigning interest and eying me up.’

‘But it’s so much fun watching you prickle.’

‘Some of us have a deeper meaning in life than having fun, and fickle playboys don’t bring out the best in me.’

‘Oh, I’m not so sure about that.’

Fired up, she was a whole lot of beautiful. Which he supposed was why he’d always tumbled into the thrust and parry of verbal swords with her. Sparks truly did fly when he was duelling with Miss Scott.

Now she was breathing in short, aggravated bursts, her breasts pushing against her rumpled T, and his fingers itched to climb beneath the hem. She’d be sooo lusciously soft, one hundred per cent organic and berry-like delicious against his tongue as he sucked her nipple between his lips...

Heat scrambled up his legs, heading straight for his groin... Until she crossed her arms over her chest, jerking his attention to the red blotches that marred her delicate wrist.

‘What are those marks?’ Closing the gap, he leaned in for a better look. ‘What is that?’

‘That is a gift from your security detail, keeping the hordes at bay.’

Hordes at bay? ‘Let me see.’

‘No!’ Tucking her hands tighter into the creases of her underarms, she regarded him as if he were ten kinds of crazy.

‘Come on. Stop being a girl. It doesn’t suit you.’

‘You know, that’s the first truth you’ve uttered since I got here.’

As he gently tugged her hand free his knuckles brushed over her soft breast. Holy... More heat raced south, pleasure and pain moving through him at full throttle.

Oh, man, the last thing he needed was his first hard-on in almost a year to be for this woman. It was an inconceivable prospect that was swiftly overtaken by the dark bruising marring her wrist, and his insides shook with anger as he remembered the sight and sensation of torn wrists, shredded skin, blood dripping from shackles.

‘Finn?’ she breathed. ‘What are you...?’

With deliberate and infinite care he brushed the backs of his fingers down one side of her forearm and up the other. ‘I...’ I’m sorry he hurt you. I’ll make him pay. I swear it.

‘Finn?’

Tilting her head, she frowned. Cutely. The action softened the often harsh yet no less cataclysmic impact of her beauty.

Seraphina Scott wasn’t pretty in the normal sense of the word. She was no delicate English rose. No, no. She was a wild flower. Tempestuous and striking. Made in technicolour. Hardy, tough. Weathering every storm, only to survive more beautiful than ever before.

And she was clearly waiting for him to expand. Trying to work him out.

Such a small thing, that softening. It made her appear vulnerable. From nowhere more words sped through his brain. I'm sorry...I'm sorry. So very sorry I took Tom away from you. I would do anything. Anything to bring him back.

How he wished he could tell everyone the truth. Let the world know what had truly gone down in Singapore. But with an ongoing investigation and a sense that he'd meet his adversary again one day it was impossible. Business hadn't been settled. Too many men roamed free. So if there was to be a next time he was going in alone.

As if she knew the direction of his thoughts, she shaped her lips for speech—no doubt to ask more questions he would never answer, couldn't even bear to hear. Tension throbbed like a living force, so heavy he could taste it, feel the weight of it pressing on his shoulders.

What was it going to take for him to get rid of her? He didn't want Serena near him. Hell, he felt dangerous at the best of times. Around her he felt positively deadly. The need to charge upstairs and throttle the security guy's neck roiled inside him, toxic and deadly, and surely he had enough blood on his hands.

Speaking of hands... For some reason he couldn't let hers go. She was trembling. It couldn't possibly be him. Finn required a large hit of G-force to feel moved.

Holding her wrist in the cradle of his palm, he reached up

with his other hand to touch the wild mass of her hair. Hair the deepest darkest red, reminding him of ripe black cherries.

How long had he resisted the temptation of her? It felt like a thousand years.

Almost there and her eyes caught the movement, flared before she jerked backwards.

‘Finn. Let go of me. Right now.’

Distantly he heard the words, the quiver in her command, and knew they held no heat. Control slipped from his grasp and he fingered the stray lock tumbling over her shoulder.

Pure silk. Hot enough to singe. Fire burning on a dangerous scale.

Ignoring her sharp gasp, he corkscrewed the thick wave and tugged. Hard. Being rough. Too rough. But that was what she did to him. Severed his control. Fed his wildness. Even as the thought of hurting her fisted his heart.

‘Fiiiiinn...’ she warned, as her chest rose and fell in rapid, mesmerising waves.

Familiarity rattled her. Always had. After the last time he’d touched her, however innocently, she’d avoided him for four years. Clever girl, she was.

Not once had he seen her embrace her father and he’d never noticed her with a lover. It couldn’t possibly be through lack of interest. Whether they would admit it or not, every guy on every team wanted a piece of her, Jake Morgan in particular carried a huge crush. But they always kept their distance. Prewarned? he

wondered. Or did none of them have the courage to take her on?

There was a story there. One he'd pay any price to discover. One he would never know.

And that, he realised, was his answer. Or at least he told himself it was.

The charm he'd been born with, the charismatic beauty he'd wielded like a golden gun since he'd been old enough to deduce the fact that it got him out of many a sticky situation, would be the one thing—the only thing—to drive her away. Back to London. Out of sight. Out of mind. Free from the claws of temptation.

It wasn't as if he could do any harm. Despite every word that fell from her delectable pout, she felt the same exquisite thrill of attraction he did. Hated it just as much as he did.

Decision made. It was bye-bye, Miss Seraphina Scott.

May the gods forgive him for what he was about to do.

He unleashed his desire and went in for the kill.

### CHAPTER THREE

LIKE A RABBIT caught in the headlights, Serena's heart seized, and her eyes flared as the world's most beautiful man brushed the back of his knuckles up the curve of her jawline.

Weakness spread through her limbs and she started to shake as if she'd been injected with something deadly. And when he skimmed the super-sensitive skin beneath her ear and sank his fingers into the fall of her hair to anchor her head in place dark spots danced behind her eyes.

'Don't you dare,' she barked. Or at least she intended to.



Bizarrely, it came out as more of a panting plea.

‘You should know better than to challenge me, Miss Scott. Especially in that gorgeous husky voice of yours.’

‘Honestly, Finn, will you stop that for just one minute?’

‘What?’

‘The lies.’ She loathed them. Not only did they torment the girl beneath, desperate to believe him, they also whispered of a long-ago web of deceit, a dark betrayal that haunted her soul.

‘I’m not lying, baby,’ he murmured.

The crackle of energy sizzling between them turned sharper—a sense of anticipation much like the coiled silence before the boom of thunder.

Surely he wasn’t going to...? He’d be crazy even to contemplate...

His body came up flush against hers—all hard lines, latent strength and super-hot heat—sending shock waves straight through her. Then his free hand splayed over her waist, swept around the small of her back and tugged her closer still, until every inch of their bodies—her soft curves and his hard-muscled form—were fused together with need and sweat and fire.

Need? No, no, no. Impossible.

‘Wow, you really do have a death wish, don’t you? You’re on a collision course for total bodily destruction here, Finn.’ Bending her knee, she aimed it to jerk upwards into his groin. Or maybe from this angle she could hook her foot around his ankle and send him off balance...

Kiss.

His lips pressed against the corner of her mouth, then brushed across the seam of her lips.

Ohhh, not good—not good at all. Especially when he moaned low in his throat and started to...well, to nuzzle his way over her cheek, then flick the tip of her nose with his to coerce her head back. And whatever had taken over her body answered his every command.

A heated ache bloomed between her legs, and when he nibbled on her lips to prise them apart the electric touch of his tongue was like a shot of high-octane fuel surging through her.

Don't respond. Don't you dare kiss him back.

'No...' she breathed, hating him. Hating herself even more for wanting. Flailing...

Serena reached up to push him away but ended up grabbing fistfuls of his shirt, holding on for dear life, powerless to sever the warm, moist crush of his mouth against hers as he moved with a consummate and inexorable seductive ease to find the perfect slick fit for their mouths.

Oh, my life. His kiss was slow and lazy, not meant to enflame but to enrapture, and before she knew it she was whirling in the epicentre of the fiercest storm, bringing her own force of nature into play.

She shivered and arched into him. Never had she felt anything like it. That warm, damp place between her legs throbbed together with her heartbeat and she wriggled closer, pushing her

breasts into his chest to relieve the heavy, needy ache.

Tender and fiercely intimate, he didn't take her will, he invited. He didn't invade her body, he lured. He didn't punish her for her internal struggle, he tempted and teased with an amorous touch.

The pure sensual pleasure of it all was enthralling, making her feel feminine in a way she'd never dreamed possible. A way no man had made her feel before.

He deepened the kiss—the languorous thrust of his tongue a velvet lash of tormenting pleasure. It poured through her veins, heated her bones and weakened her limbs. It blasted all thought from her head until her most basic sexual instincts screamed for him to be inside her. Instincts she'd never known she possessed...

There were reasons for that, of course. She—

Whether it was the rush of unwanted memories or the gentle touch of his hand deviating on a feral bent to roughly fist and yank at the hem of her T, she wasn't sure, but—oh, God—he might as well have dunked her in an ice bath.

Emotion was a burning ball at the base of her ribs—embarrassment, humiliation and a heart-rending vulnerability that brought tears to her eyes. No! No tears. But all of it, all at once, was so overpowering that her mind began to shrill.

Flattening her palms, she shoved at his chest. Finn instantly let go and took a large pace backwards, that awesome chest heaving as he held both hands in the air in a show of surrender.

Intelligent guy.

The walls of the hallway began to close in on her as she gulped hot air. ‘What the blazes are you doing?’

Taut silence pulsed off every surface as Finn blinked dazedly and scrubbed his palms down his face, playing the role of slightly rattled, wholly astonished, guiltless gent! He belonged on the stage—he really did.

He gave his head a good shake. ‘Seeing if your lips taste as good as they look.’

‘What?’

He must think her dense. A fool. She was so far removed from his usual entourage she might as well derive from another planet, and for months he’d poked and prodded at her blatant lack of femininity. Now he expected her to believe his impetuous come-on was legitimate?

He was messing with her and she knew it.

And how could she have forgotten Tom? The part this man had played in her brother’s death?

Guilt climbed into her chest and sat behind her ribs like a heavy weight. It crushed her lungs, making her breath shallow, her voice high-pitched. ‘Answer me, Finn! What was that about?’

His lips parting to speak, he faltered yet again.

Why did she feel as if he wanted to tell her something? Something vital. Something she desperately wanted to hear. Nothing but the truth.

Rightly or wrongly—more than the next race, more than his success or the victory of Team Scott Lansing—the promise of

that truth was the only thing tempting her to hover in his orbit.

Hold on...

‘Are you trying to get rid of me? Is that your game?’

Wow, it seemed the heights of her humiliation knew no bounds.

Finn blinked several times in rapid succession and with every flutter of those ridiculously gorgeous thick lashes his expression smoothed into unreadable impassivity, until once more she was looking at Lothario.

‘Is it working?’ he drawled.

‘Yes!’

‘Good,’ he said, those legendary dimples winking at her. ‘Then you’ll be pleased to know the door is that way.’

With a swift finger towards said exit, he pushed open a panel to her left. One he strolled through before it closed behind him, leaving her standing there, jaw slack, twitching in temper. The nerve of the man!

Fury grounded her flight instinct.

He wanted rid of her? He could go to the devil! This was her family, her life, and she was staying put. Her team was in trouble because of him and he needed to pay his dues. Not forgetting the fact he was hiding something and she wanted to know exactly what. Maybe then she could start to repair her broken heart and let Tom go. Move on. Find some peace. Remember what it was like to enjoy life—although she often wondered if she ever had.

Two steps forward, she pushed at the panel of what appeared

to be a secret doorway. If it hadn't budged an inch and then rebounded back with a slam she would have thought it locked. Was he leaning on the other side, trying to regulate his breathing like she was? Don't be a gullible fool, Serena. He'd be grinning like the feckless charmer he was, delighted that he'd got the better of her.

The second time she put all her weight behind the oak, pushed and stumbled into a room, tripping over her feet with as much elegance as a battering ram.

A zillion things hit her at once—mainly gratitude for the fact that her ungainly entrance was witnessed only by Finn's back as he swaggered towards the bed and the sheer extravagance of the room.

'Wow.'

Infinite shades of midnight blue, the decor was a pulse-revving epitome of dark sensuality and masculine drama, and about the only thing on this floating bordello that fitted the man himself. As if, after purchasing the mega-yacht, Finn had only stamped ownership on this one room.

'Did you run out of money before the renovations were complete?' she asked, tongue in cheek, knowing full well he was one of the highest earning sportsmen in the world.

For a beat he paused at the side of the bed. 'Let's just say I decided the yacht didn't suit. She's on the market.'

'Now, that is a shame.' If he restored the rest of the yacht in the same vein it promised to be spectacular.

‘Do you like my bedroom, Seraphina?’

His voice was a pleased, suggestive moan as he flung himself atop a gargantuan carved bed covered in black silk sheets and propped his back against a huge mound of textured pillows.

‘I love it,’ she said, unable to hide her awe and trying her hardest to look anywhere but at him. ‘Present company excluded.’

Black wood furniture lined walls of the deepest red, with the spaces in between splashed with priceless evocative art to create a picture of virile potency and sophisticated class. It was visually breathtaking. Until the intimacy of the dim lighting set her right back on edge.

Searching the darkened shadows behind her, she cleared her throat, ‘Lights?’ she said, and hoped she didn’t sound as jittery as she felt.

Bending at the waist, he leaned sideways to press a button on the tall glass nightstand and the opaque ceiling flickered for one, two, three beats of her thundering heart before the night sky shone down upon the room, ablaze with a million twinkling stars.

The sheer magnificence pulled her eyes wide. ‘Seriously?’

He plucked a large red apple from the colourful mound of ripe delicacies toppling from a crystal bowl, then straightened up and raised one of his heart-stopping smiles.

Just like that her unease drifted, melted like a chilled snowflake on a new spring breeze.

Moonlight frosted his body, from the open white linen draping his sides to the wide bronzed strip of naked torso in between,

taking his powerful beauty from angelic to supernatural. Otherworldly. Dazzling, magical and utterly surreal.

And she forgot all about not looking at him, suddenly entranced.

He tucked one hand beneath his head, tossed the glistening red fruit up into the air with the other and his honed six-pack flexed and bunched—the sight bringing a mist of perspiration to her skin.

‘So. Come back for more, Miss Scott?’

His sinful rasp shattered the spell he wove so effortlessly and she gave herself a good shake. The man was lethal.

‘I have heard my mouth is highly addictive.’

Serena raised a brow and hoped she looked suitably unimpressed. She had no desire to stroke his ego or any other part of him ever again. ‘Such a...tempting offer, Mr St George, but I think I’ll pass. Your reputation has been highly exaggerated.’

Apple to his lips, he sank his teeth into the crisp flesh with a loud crunch and she dredged the taste of tart flesh from her memory banks, making her mouth water.

‘Ah. Must have been the champagne, then.’

‘What must have been the champagne?’ she murmured, distracted by the rhythmic working of his lean jaw. It truly was not good form to be so sexy even when eating. ‘The champagne, incidentally, that I did not drink.’

‘The weakening of your knees,’ he drawled, with a wicked satisfaction that rolled over her in hot waves before he let loose



an irrepressible grin that seared her nerves.

One day... She thought. One day she was going to wipe that smirk off his face once and for all. The thought that today was as good a day as any made her let loose a smile of her very own.

Strangely, he froze mid-bite. As if her smile affected him just as much as his did her. The mere notion that he had the power to make her believe such a thing made her temper spike.

‘Speaking of knees—I’m going to bring you down on yours, pretty boy.’

A curious tension drew the magnificent lines of his body taut, precisely as before, and she racked her brain to figure out the trigger. All she could think was that there was more to this man than met the eye.

In the next instant he relaxed. ‘I do hope that’s a promise, Seraphina. I’d be more than happy to oblige.’

Blowing out a pent-up breath, she deliberated over how long she could ride this roller coaster of emotion with Finn at the helm before she plunged to her doom.

Especially when he licked his lips hungrily and dropped his feral blue eyes to the seam of her jeans, to the zipper leading down to the tight curve of her femininity. From nowhere an image of Finn on his knees before her as she stood bathed in moonlight slammed into her mind’s eye. Oh, God.

Ribbons of heat spun in her veins, moving through her blood in an erotic dance. Her skin was suddenly super-sensitive, and her nipples chafed seductively against the soft fabric of her plain

white bra. The shockingly carnal expression on his face made her wonder if he'd visualised the very same.

As if. He's just trying to distract you again and you're letting him!

She stiffened her spine and ordered her voice to sweet. 'Oh, I'm so glad. In that case, let me be the first to tell you the good news.'

Crossing one bare foot over the other, he leaned back with more of the insolence he'd doubtless been born with. 'Somehow I don't believe you mean good in the literal sense.'

'Oh, I don't know. We could learn a lot from each other, you and I.'

The true meaning of that statement lay between them, gathering momentum with every passing second. It would take time, of course. To get him to talk. To unearth his secrets. To make him crack. Thankfully she had all the time in the world.

Another flash of perfect teeth sinking into white flesh. Another lazy crunch. Another sexy swallow gliding down his throat. 'I doubt that.'

The lack of innuendo suffused her with pleasure and a heady sense of power. It seemed she was finally getting somewhere.

'Why don't you enlighten me, Miss Scott? Your excitement is palpable and I find I can barely stand the suspense.'

She deflected that sarcasm with a breezy flick of her hair off her shoulder. 'I would love to enlighten you, Mr St. George. Me and you? We're about to be stuck like glue.'

A shadow of trepidation passed over his face before he cocked an arrogant brow. ‘And the punchline is...?’

Musing that the word babysitter didn’t quite have the right ring to it, she let her impetuous mouth stretch the truth, not really giving a stuff.

‘You’re looking at your new boss.’

## CHAPTER FOUR

FANS DESCENDED ON Monaco in their droves and celebrities flocked to the world’s most glamorous sporting event of the year for the exhilarating rush of lethal speed and intoxicating danger. So it didn’t bode well that Finn stood in the shade of the Scott Lansing garage, his temples thudding with a messy blend of sleep-deprivation and toxic emotional clatter.

He had to get it together. Get that little minx out of his head.

Hauling in air, he rolled his neck, searching for the equilibrium he needed, knowing full well the smallest of errors in these narrow streets were fatal. Overtaking almost impossible... And didn’t that just make him smile? Feel infinitely better as a fuel injection of hazardous adrenaline shot through his bloodstream?

Monaco was hands down his favourite circuit in the world: the greatest challenge on the racing calendar. It never failed to feed his wildness and remind him that life was for living. A master at shutting off fear and anxiety, he was a man who existed in the moment. Life was too short.

Seize the day.

Finn closed his eyes, tried to block the memory those words always evoked. But of late, since he'd touched hell itself, his past refused to stay buried.

Thirteen years old and he'd watched his Glimma—the woman who'd been a second mother to him—die a slow, agonising death. 'Glimma, because I'm far too young and vivacious to be Gran,' the award-winning actress would declare.

Even when she'd been sick and he'd sworn his heart was breaking—'Carpe diem, Finn, seize the day,' she'd say theatrically, with a glint in her eye that had never failed to make him smile. 'That's better. Always remember: frown and you frown alone, smile and the whole world smiles with you.'

Yeah, he remembered. How could he possibly forget a legend who had been far too young and vibrant for her passage to the heavens. Then, when the cancer had seeped into the next generation and his mother's time had come—spreading more grief and heartache through his family, much like the stain of her disease, destroying her beauty, her vitality, her life—he'd vowed to live every day as if it were his last. And, considering the way Finn had handled her demise, he owed his mother nothing less.

His heart achingly heavy, he left the technical chatter of the engineers behind and stepped towards the slash of sunlight cutting across the tarmac, shoving the pain and guilt back down inside him.

Enthusiasts spilled over balconies and crammed rooftops as far as the eye could reach. The grandstands were chock-full, the

area where the die-hard fans had camped from the night before roared with impatience, and huge TV screens placed for optimal viewing flickered to life. It was a scene that usually enthralled him, excited his blood. And it would. Any second now. It had to.

His attention veered to the starting grid, cluttered with pit crew and paddock girls flaunting their wares, and then muttered a curse when not one of them managed to catch his eye. No, no. The only woman who monopolised his thoughts was his ruby red-headed boss!

Talk about a simple meeting of mouths backfiring with stunning ferocity. Instead of pushing her away, he'd stoked her curiosity—and how the devil he'd managed to step away, not to devour her, he'd never know.

Good thing he was an expert at disposing of the opposite sex. He'd just have to try harder, wouldn't he? With a touch of St George luck, Serena would make herself scarce today.

He snorted in self-irritation. Now he was lying to himself. He might need her at the far ends of the earth but he wanted her here, didn't he? Why was that? She was sarcastic, she had a sharp, spiky temper, and she was beautiful but not that beautiful—he'd dated catwalk models, for God's sake. Yeah, and found them dull as dishwater. And on top of all that just looking at her made him feel guilty.

Self-castigation, he decided. Penitence dictating that he had to make himself suffer by hanging around with a woman who wanted him dead.

He rubbed at his temple and thrust the same hand through his damp hair. Where on earth was she? Some boss she was turning out to be—

He chuffed out a breath. Boss? Doubtful. Babysitter, more like. She had spunk—he'd give her that.

Suddenly the crowd erupted and in the nick of time he realised he'd stepped into the blazing sunlight. Up came his arm in the customary St George wave as the pandemonium reached fever pitch. On cue, he whipped out his legendary smile, even as the movement of his torso pulled his driver's suit to chafe against his scarred back and black despair churned in his stomach with a sickening revolt.

Keep it together, Finn.

'There you are. Playing to your adoring audience, I see.'

Whoa—instantaneous body meltdown. The woman held more firepower than the midday sun.

'How nice of you to turn up, Miss Scott,' he drawled, keeping his focus on the crowd for a few seconds longer. Let her think he was inflating his ego—the worse she thought of him the better—but Finn knew how far his fans had travelled, the huge expense. He'd spoken to hundreds of them over time after all.

'I would've been here sooner if I hadn't detoured to that floating bordello of yours, looking for you. I much prefer today's security man, by the way. New shift?'

He shrugged. Made it indolent, couldn't-care-less. 'Probably.'

Alternatively Finn might have shown the other man the error

of his ways the minute Miss Scott had stepped off his... What did she call it? Oh, yes—his floating bordello. Naturally Finn would have used his most amiable, charming voice. The one he used to express how tedious a situation had become, how boredom had set in. The very one which ensured that people made the terrible mistake of underestimating him. Shame, that.

If that had happened the man in question might have been escorted from the premises in a not so dignified manner, with a reference that not so subtly informed the world that he'd never work in the industry again. Together with the unequivocal, downright irrefutable notion that to meet Finn in a dark alley any time soon would be a very, very bad idea.

Would he tell her any of this highly amusing tale? God, no.

Why ruin a perfectly good reputation as a callous, no-good heartbreaker when it was security money couldn't buy. Women had more sense than to expect more than he could give, so there was no fear of broken hearts or letting anyone down. What you saw was what you got.

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