

Chapter 1

Raven awoke from a heavy sleep without opening her eyes. She was slowly allowing feeling back into her limbs when she became aware of the furious pounding in her head. She groaned, bringing her arm up to shield her eyes from the sun that was peering in thru the mostly sheer curtains. She offered an offending glare towards the balcony doors, then promptly winced at the pain even that slight movement caused.

Wait. I don't have a balcony... "Oh, shit!"

Awareness hit her like a ton of bricks, and she flew upright to find herself in an unfamiliar bed. She closed her eyes for a brief moment to stop the sudden dizziness. Her head was swimming, but she pushed it aside. It was the first time in her life that she was thankful for her history of migraines, which she had learned to put at bay when absolutely necessary. She sprung out of the bed, nearly tripping over the blanket that she had become entangled in. She hopped out of the covers on one foot, while her eyes scanned the room for her belongings. What the hell time was it, anyway? She needed her phone. She spied her club bag hanging on the back of the desk chair, and she practically lunged for it, pulling the flap open, and diving her hand inside. Thankfully her fingers wrapped around her phone first thing, and she pulled it out, looking at the clock. "Fuck!" she exclaimed. She tossed her phone back in her bag, and searched frantically for her clothes. Thankfully, there weren't many to search for. Her dress was in a pile on the floor, halfway between the door and the bed. She snatched it up, and pulled it on over her head, spotting one of her shoes near the door as she did so. She grabbed her heel, and hopped around on one foot again as she slipped it on, looking for its mate. Dropping to her knees next to the bed, she threw the covers up with her right hand, her left blindly reaching beneath them as she did so. "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon," she muttered as she went. "Aha!" She jumped up and slid the other heel on. There was only one thing missing now. She stood at the foot of the bed, pulling at the covers that she had just put there. She tossed them this way and that, hearing her phone vibrate in her bag on the desk. "Shit!" she exclaimed under breath. Oh, well, there was no time to find them. She would just have to go without. She stumbled hurriedly across the room, snatching her bag on her way out the door. She stopped at the threshold for a brief moment, and took in the room. Thankfully she had been alone. There was no time to face her mystery man this morning. Her first time in Vegas and not only does she not remember it, but any hope of finding out was going to remain here. With a sigh, she closed the door behind her. *What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas*, she reminded herself.

She spotted the elevator as her phone went off again, this time indicating a voice

mail. She pressed the down button, and pulled out her phone. Four new voice mails. She dialed her vm number and listened as she waited for the elevator to reach whatever floor she was on. The first one was sent at 1:17a.m. "Hey, girl, it's me. Just wondering where you are. I am still at the club. If I don't hear from you in about a half hour or so, I am going to assume you're um, busy, and head back to the hotel. Talk to you later." Raven could hear the smile in Jolanda's voice, and wondered if she could shed any light on what happened last night. The second call came in at 1:53a.m. "Hey, girl, it's me again. Since I haven't heard from you, I am going to catch a cab back to our hotel. Just give me a call when you can and let me know when you'll be back. Hope you're having fun." The next one was slightly nervous. "Hey, you need to call me, please, and let me know you're okay. I'm gettin' worried about you, girl. I haven't heard from you, and it's almost 5 o'clock. Just at least let me know where you are, okay? I love ya, girl. Call me." Jolanda's voice sounded sleepy, and Raven guessed she was falling in and out of sleep waiting for her. The last one was just a couple of minutes ago. "Where the hell are you?" *Good question...* Raven thought, when there was a pause in the message. "Are you okay? Am I going to need to call the police? It's not like you not to call me. So call me. I'm going crazy over here. Call me."

The doors to the elevator opened, and Raven stepped on, pressed the button for the lobby, and attempted to straighten her clothing and hair. She smoothed her dress and finger-combed her hair as best as she could. Thankfully, the elevator walls were mirrored, and she inspected her make-up, or rather what was left of it. She wet the tip of her finger, and wiped at the mascara that had flaked off under her eyes. She pulled out her compact and ran the puff over her t-zone to soak up the excess oil, then applied a light layer of gloss. The elevator slightly jerked when it stopped, and Raven had to lean back against the wall, fighting the sudden urge to vomit. The elevator dinged it's arrival, the doors opened, and she gently pushed herself away from the wall and off the moving contraption. She composed herself as best as she could, and made her way thru the lobby to the guest counter.

The clerk looked up at her and smiled. "Good morning! Can I help you, miss?"

Raven gave him a tight-lipped yet sincere smile. "Yes, do you have the number of the closest cab service?"

"Most certainly. Would you like me to call them for you?"

"That would be great, thanks." She hadn't had a moment to think of herself leaving in the same clothes she arrived in. But her worries would have been unfounded, she was sure. She gazed around, and seeing several people in club

wear, she quickly surmised that there were no walks of shame in Vegas. She glanced at the wall behind the counter, seeing the hotel name for the first time. How the hell did she wind up at the Wynn? Damn, and she didn't even have the time to enjoy it. Well, maybe she did last night, but who the hell knew that, either?

The clerk hung up the phone. "There is actually one pulling up in a couple of minutes."

"Perfect! Thank you, you're awesome," she breathed out in relief, smiling wider this time. She didn't wait for the clerk to respond as she trotted across the marble floor and pushed thru the doors leading outside. She pulled her phone out once again and scrolled thru the contacts. Thankfully, as she always did when she traveled, she had programmed her hotel's information, including her room number. She hit send and waited for the front desk clerk to answer.

"Hilton Grand Vacations Suites on the Las Vegas Strip, this is Tammy speaking, how may I help you?" came the upbeat voice on the other end.

"Room 3120, please." It barely rang half a ring when Jolanda picked up, distress evident in her tone. "Hello?"

"Hey, it's me."

"What the fuck?! Are you okay?!"

"I'm okay." Raven said with a sigh.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Really, I am."

"Good. WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU? OUR FLIGHT LEAVES IN AN HOUR!"

Raven held the phone away from her ear and cringed. "I'm on my way. We will make it. Promise." She crossed her fingers and said a silent prayer that she was telling the truth.

"Fine. I've already packed, for *both* of us. I will have everything in the lobby. Do I need to call a cab?"

"No, no, I'll have one. See you in a bit."

Jolanda sighed heavily on the other end. Raven knew she wasn't really mad, just worried, and now relieved. "Okay, girl, see you."

Raven stepped out from under the awning into the sunlight as she hung up, seeing the cab approach the curb. She slipped her phone in her bag with her right hand, and reached for the cab handle with her left. In that moment, a glint of something caught her eye, and she froze in mid-reach. "Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no." She mumbled, shaking her head. She jerked her hand up close to her face and stared at it.

There on her ring finger was a shiny gold wedding band.