

Chapter 1  
Graham

Monsoon season. Of all the times to come home again.

If I even make it home again, that is. Las Vegas drivers have no idea how to drive in these infrequent downpours but I must give this taxi driver some credit. We're not dead yet.

"Sir? Sir?"

The taxi lurches to a stop and the driver mutters something vulgar under his breath before moving on. I watch out my window as the car behind us blares their horn and flips an angry hand gesture in our direction.

"*Graham.*"

I blink away from the window to find my assistant gawking at me over her blue-rimmed glasses on the seat beside me.

"What is it, Paige?" I ask her.

She tilts her head. "I asked if I could have the night off so I can go see my mother and then your eyes went dead. Are you okay?"

I chuckle. "Right. Yes. Of course. Take the weekend, actually."

"Sweet," she says, pitching her voice. She turns back to her phone and texts away. "Not gonna argue against a weekend in Vegas."

"Just be back at the hotel first thing Monday morning," I say. "We'll be in and out of meetings all week and I—"

"Need me?" she says, batting her young eyes. "Can't live without me?"

I nod. "Something like that, yes."

"I will have my inevitable hangover slept off and my business heels strapped on. You can count on me, boss."

"Good to hear."

I turn my head, scanning the wet, slippery roads again as we take a sharp corner, passing the Las Vegas strip. The sun is setting and the lights are just starting to flicker on, signaling the beginning of your standard weekend Vegas adventure.

"And..." Paige nudges me with her elbow. "How will you be spending your weekend?"

"Preparing for a week of meetings," I answer.

She scoffs. "Oh, come on. That's it? This is Las Vegas."

"I grew up here," I say, amused. "I've already done it all."

"You've done it all?" she asks, doubtful. "You've done all the Vegas?"

"Yes."

"Have you been to the top of Stratosphere Tower?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen Celine?"

"Yes."

Her face screws up in disbelief. "*Oh. No, you have not.*"

"*Yes, I have,*" I say, raising a finger. "Took my mother for her fiftieth birthday two years ago."

Paige hums and sits back in her chair. "Well, have you had a quickie, drunken wedding?"

I bite my tongue. "Paige..."

She throws up her hands. “All right. Fine. Spend the weekend in your room watching pay-per-view po—”

I glare at her.

“*Nature documentaries*,” she says instead. “While you’re doing that, I will be out on the streets, living it up, and gambling away my life savings just like any other self-respecting youth.”

“Have fun,” I tell her with a laugh. “Just be back—”

“—*at the hotel Monday morning*,” she says with me. “I got it, boss.”

The taxi driver takes another turn and I peek out my window again as the car slowly comes to a stop in front of the hotel in the guest drop-off zone.

“Botsford Plaza,” he mutters as he turns around in his seat. “Need help with your bags?”

I shake my head as I pass him cash to cover the fare, plus a little extra for not killing us. “No, we’ll manage. Thank you, sir.”

He smiles at his fistful of money. “Enjoy your stay.”

Paige and I climb out and walk around to the trunk. Rain pours over the awning, splashing the concrete several feet behind us. The trunk pops open and I grab Paige’s bright blue suitcase from inside and set it down beside her.

“Thanks,” she says as she slides the handle out.

I nod and grab my own plain black suitcase before closing the trunk. I tap it twice and the driver bolts off toward the street, eager to catch his next fare. If this rain picks up, I imagine he’ll make bank tonight carting tourists from one end of the strip to the other and back again.

Paige rushes toward the entrance and bows to the doorman. He smiles as he holds the door open, his gaze purposefully lingering on the back of her pencil skirt as she passes by him.

I take a moment to look up. My eyes glide over all thirty stories, silently counting until I reach the gigantic, golden B at the top. By some miracle of timing, the light turns on as I stare at it, illuminating the darkening sky. The Botsford Plaza Hotel. Luxury at its finest.

I walk to the entrance, rolling my suitcase slowly behind me. The doorman flashes a smile and admires my suit as I draw near.

“Welcome home, Mr. Botsford,” he says, opening the door wide-open.

I bow my head. “Fred,” I greet him as I keep walking inside.

*Home*. Not exactly. But I can understand why he said it.

I’ve spent over half of my life here at the Las Vegas branch. We all have; myself and my little brothers, Hayden, Ira, and Jonah.

GHIJ. Yes, that was on purpose.

If there’s anything our father, Kingston, wanting to instill upon his four sons, it was the importance of a work ethic. We shadowed him from a young age, coming straight here after school to learn the family business, but we weren’t exactly sitting in on business meetings or bossing around his numerous secretaries.

We started from the bottom.

First, it was janitorial. And the maintenance crew. Then, once he was satisfied with the callouses on our hands, we moved up to valet drivers and doormen and housekeeping. Strangely, my personal favorite was the latter. At least there, I could sneak off with a handful of pillow chocolates at the end of my shift.

Finally, once we knew the ins and outs of every aspect involved with maintaining his strict hotel standards, he put us at the front desk and we started our slow tutelage toward his office. Toward becoming *him*.

In the end, only two of us stuck around as active players in the family business; myself and Ira. Hayden, my Catholic twin born just ten months after I was, was drafted into the MLB just before he graduated from high school and my baby brother, Jonah, hit it big with his band.

I walk across the gold-decorated lobby, my eyes casually roaming the faces in the crowd. You see the same types of people in every lobby of every Botsford Plaza, from Los Angeles to New York and even Paris to Rome. Rich. Privileged. Often famous. My great-grandfather started this business with one goal in mind: to be *the* place to stay for the aforementioned rich and privileged.

He succeeded. As did my grandfather. And my father.

I suppose I will, too.

I pause in line behind Paige to patiently wait for the woman at the counter to finish before we can check-in. The woman is dripping wet from her shoulder-length, black hair down, leaving a light puddle beneath her shiny, red heels.

"I don't understand," I overhear. "These reservations were made six months ago."

My ears perk to the familiar voice.

Rian, the young man behind the counter, doesn't blink but manages a decent sympathy face. "I'm sorry, ma'am," he says, gesturing at his screen. "The party reservations *were* booked when you say they were but they've all been claimed as of this morning."

She heaves a thick sigh. "Okay, fine. Just... book me in a new room, then."

"We're fully-booked this weekend, ma'am."

"*Of course, you are...* Can you please look one more time? I'm having a day here..."

I ease forward, slinking around Paige to get a little closer. My pulse thumps faster but I can't know for sure it's her until I see her face.

Rian taps the keyboard, refreshing the page but if he says it's gone, then it's gone. And if I know this woman in front of me, this tepid frustration is about to get a little more...

"I'm sorry," Rian says again, visibly bracing himself for what's obviously going to be a rough few minutes. "It's not—"

"*Are you fucking with me right now?*"

*A little more vulgar.*

My breath catches. It's definitely her.

She hasn't changed at all.

Rian hesitates. "Uh, no. I'm not."

"Did you double-check the hard logs? If you can't find the reservation on the system, then it should be in the logs. Everybody knows that."

"Well, actually—"

"Look, I know what I'm talking about, all right? I used to have your job."

He frowns. "Okay, but we—"

"I want to talk to somebody about this," she says, glancing over his shoulder. "Oliver! Is Oli in? He's still the building manager, right?"

I step forward and Rian breathes a noticeable sigh of relief as he sees me.

“Sir, I have a customer here who would like some assistance,” he says to me.

She spins toward me and her face falls as she sees mine. Those sharp, green eyes. Bright, pink cheeks. Even I pause for a moment as another chapter begins in our long, sordid history.

*Jennifer Parker.*

“Ah, *shit*,” she says under her breath.

“What Rian is trying to say...” I begin, holding a straight face, “is that we no longer keep hard logs for reservations. That information is stored on a secondary server, so if your reservation is gone, then that would mean that you didn’t confirm it properly, ... *ma’am*.”

She bites down. Hard.

I look over the desk. “Rian, please put the lady in my room and—”

Her mouth opens to object.

“—and I will share with Hayden down the hall,” I say quickly before she can speak again. “He won’t mind.”

She snaps her jaw shut and clears her throat. “Okay, I guess that’ll work.”

Rian nods, offering me a silent thank you. “Right away, sir,” he says as he focuses on getting this woman away from him as quickly as possible.

I gaze at her but her eyes are locked on the wooden desk instead. Random strands of black hair cling to her wet cheeks. Her skin is just as bright and clear as it always was but several lines have started to take over her forehead, no doubt due to her signature scowl.

“Hey, Jenny,” I say.

Finally, she looks up. “Graham,” she merely says.

I wait for her to say something else but she stays quiet. I wait for me to say something else... but if we haven’t said it before now, then what’s the point?

Rian returns and sets a room key down in front of her. “You’re all set, *ma’am*. Room 2505.”

Jen swipes it off the desk and bends down to grab her suitcase. “Thank you,” she says, noticeably more stiff and polite.

I step to the side, giving her ample space to leave. She looks at me once more as she passes, her bright, green eyes hitting me even harder in the gut than I expect them to.

“Here you go, Mr. Botsford,” Rian says as he passes me my room key. “Would you like me to call up and let your brother know you’ll be crashing?”

“No,” I answer with a smile. “I’ll surprise him.”

Rian nods and gestures Paige forward, already tapping his way into the system for her reservation, too.

“Who was that?” Paige asks me, sensing tension.

“That...” I exhale hard, my eyes straying toward the golden elevator doors across the lobby as they close on Jen’s downturn face. “That is my ex-wife.”

Her jaw drops. “*You were married?*”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Oh, about ten years ago.”

She does the math in her head. “You got married at *nineteen?*”

I pause. “Yes.”

“How long were you married?”

“Twenty-three days,” I answer.

Paige gawks at me in disbelief.

“Like I said...” I say as I pick up my suitcase. “I’ve already done Vegas.”