

A Rumored Affair

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Chapter One

Sitting behind his desk, Graham Winter stared at his assistant, not sure if he should be insulted or flattered by the unexpected gift. He lifted the unopened envelope with suspicion. As soon as Graham had sat at his desk, Jillian had shoved the square parchment into his hand. He'd rather it had been a cup of coffee. Not that Jillian would ever serve him. He'd learned that early on when a single-serve machine showed up on the buffet table.

"Just accept it, okay?" she said with exasperation. "You need a vacation, and I'm going to make sure you get one. Don't even think of refusing. You're going, or I'm handing in my resignation."

"You're not serious." Jillian was as dedicated and married to her job as he was, and he hated the thought of having to train a new assistant. He'd be lost without her organizing his life.

"When I walk into your office on tiptoes, yeah, I'm serious."

Sure, he'd been irritable lately. Most of his staff avoided him unless it was necessary, and knowing how they tiptoed around him depressed him. He couldn't quite put his finger on what was bugging him.

Graham straightened back into his chair. Winter Media had been his lover of late. This devotion to a company was never a good sign when trying for a relationship. His last partner had lasted a mere three months before he'd kicked out the freeloader. The bane of being filthy rich was that most guys he dated were dazzled by his net worth.

Sighing loudly for effect, he motioned to Jillian. "You better tell me more about this" – he read the hotel name listed on the card – "resort."

Sitting on the sofa, Jillian adjusted her short red skirt. Long legged and trim, she wore suits that emphasized her thin waist. She was smart and beautiful, and the male employees stumbled over their words when dealing with her.

"Secretus is an all-gay resort," she said, sporting a devilish grin.

Ah shit. What the hell was she thinking?

"No way can I risk that. Freedom Press is a key contributor to the Tea Party. If they find out that I'm gay, that's the end of the deal."

Jillian's nose wrinkled. "You know my feeling about FP. They stink."

"I don't like their political agenda any more than you do, but this is a business decision, not a personal one. I've worked my ass off just to get us back into the black. Freedom Press will help shore up our bottom line."

And it did stink, but no matter his personal beliefs, his family came first. The board was his aunt and uncles, his mother a silent member, choosing her charities over the concerns of the business.

Jillian ran her finger over her arched brow. "You don't need them."

"Look. I don't like hiding my sexuality, but I need to be quiet about it. At least until I secure the deal."

"Your sexuality will be safe at Secretus."

Jillian sounded so sure.

"That can't be guaranteed."

"The resort has a fascinating history. The owner doesn't advertise. People find out about it through word of mouth. And the best part, it has a private beach and natural mineral springs. It's one of the very first gay-exclusive resorts established during the dark ages."

Graham smiled at Jillian's millennial perspective. "You mean the '60s?"

"No, 1974."

He picked up the reservation card and read the address again. Big Sur, California. Wasn't that area a hippy haven? He was an East Coaster, through and through, and wasn't too keen for the West Coast lifestyle.

"Why do I have to fly across the US?" he asked. "There're plenty of places to chill on this side of the Rockies."

Jillian rolled her baby blues. "You fly all over the world, and you're complaining about a trip across the States? Didn't you hear me? It's an all-gay resort. *Very private*. No one will know you."

"Are you trying to get me laid?" Annoyed at his assistant's insight into his nonexistent love life, Graham frowned.

"Would it be so bad if you met someone nice for a change? How much did the last asshole take you for?"

"He needed my help." The young model was a beauty but had a terrible habit of spending more money than what he earned.

Jillian sighed. "Like I said, Mr. Fix It. That's not loving. That's codependency. And he dumped your ass as soon as you bailed him out."

"I didn't love him." This excuse sounded feeble even to Graham.

"Yeah, he had a pretty face but nothing between his eyes."

A red flag should have been flying when he'd met Robin. Graham liked his men pretty and slender and young. Usually, this meant immature.

Graham lewdly grinned. "That's not all that was pretty."

"Ew. Stop. You're going, and that's final." Jillian's lips spread into a sly grin. "And the resort assigns a private valet."

"You are trying to get me laid!"

"You're pathetic." She went to the coffee machine and popped in a cartridge. "It's a private concierge, not a call boy for your pleasure." Her snicker echoed over the hiss

of the coffee. "I asked. If you want any romance, you'll have to work at it. And God knows the last time you've been charming."

Jillian was right about his life consisting of work and not much else. For some time now, he had lost interest in socializing, and his friends had all but disappeared. Acquaintances used him for his position. Power and money spoke volumes, a give and take where both parties benefitted. He couldn't think of the last time he dated because he liked a guy.

Maybe a vacation was what he needed to clear his head. He never signed up for this life. "Okay, okay. Stop your whining. When do I leave?"

"In three weeks. It's all arranged." She set a demitasse cup of espresso on his desk. "I'll tell the staff."

"Keep your celebrating down. I wouldn't want to feel like I'm not wanted."

Jillian had pushed the right buttons to get him to reconsider his decision. She could be serious about leaving the company. He'd have to figure out a way to keep her at all cost. Bringing back a nice present might help. She'd been instrumental in aiding him as he struggled to get the company healthy again. Once the deal went through, he would see to giving her a hefty increase in pay.

Graham looked at the invitation again. Secretus sounded like a gay brothel rather than a resort. He sighed as he tossed the card on his desk. The last time he'd taken a vacation was right before he took over the reins of the company. This was also when he'd stepped back into the closet. This subterfuge depressed him, but the freedom to be his gay self demanded a high price. Once out, if only for a couple of weeks, he wasn't sure if he could stuff himself back into the closet a second time around.

Chapter Two

The tires of Graham's rental car kicked up gravel as he steered into a parking place in front of Secretus's lobby. The drive from the San Francisco airport had been exhilarating. The road hugged breathtaking cliffs that buffered the furious waves breaking on the craggy rocks several feet below.

Graham unfolded from the driver's seat and eased the kinks in his neck. Within seconds, a bellhop dressed in khaki shorts and shirt greeted him with a warm smile, loaded his luggage on the cart, and rolled it through the double doors. Graham inhaled the scent of the redwoods and salty air. It sure beat the noxious car fumes of the city.

When he entered the lobby, he paused and took in the spacious common area. The stunning view of the ocean sparkled through the floor-to-ceiling windows. The coast was impressive, as was the modern décor, simple elegance, and light-wood furniture placed strategically, encouraging the guests to sit and mingle. Several men sat by the fireplace, chatting it up. A few couples were sipping cocktails from tables placed along the windows for the best viewing.

Not a bad-looking group of guests. He'd return later and see if anyone caught his interest.

By the time he reached the reservation desk, his agitation at being corralled into coming here had all but vanished. Why not enjoy a few days without the pressure of work? Two weeks with limited Internet and contact with the outside world might do him good. His plan was to cut his vacation short by a week. That should be enough time to meet someone and get good and fucked before he went bat shit with boredom.

The hotel clerk behind the counter smiled. "May I be of service?"

Graham's smile widened. Yeah, he wouldn't mind being serviced by... He peered at the nametag. Josh. Josh was quite a looker with eyes not quite gray or green. Fresh boyish face, a boy next door – not that Graham ever had neighbors this attractive.

He handed over his reservation card. "I'm Graham Winter."

Josh typed the information into the terminal, and his smile disappeared. "One moment, please." He entered in the information again.

Graham looked around the lobby. For being "exclusive," the resort certainly wasn't stuffy. No chandeliers or high-back brocade chairs. The resort had that laid-back California look that cost millions. And the eye candy wasn't bad either. By the fireplace stood a man who looked familiar. Some singer Graham couldn't quite place.

The clerk was now frantically shuffling through a file, his charming smile all but gone. Minutes ticked by.

Graham propped his elbows on the counter and leaned in. A quizzical look on a clerk's face was never a good sign. "Is there a problem? That card got me through the gates."

"Could you have registered under another name?"

"I only have the one. So what's the issue?"

Josh gave Graham what had to be his apologetic smile. "It appears there isn't a reservation under your name or this number."

"That's impossible. My assistant doesn't make mistakes. And this confirmation was sent to my office after she made the reservation."

"Yes, sir. Let me check again." Josh picked up a cell phone and moved out of earshot from Graham.

Graham drummed his fingers on the counter as he waited. His jaw ticked as his pulse revved into high gear. What a fuck-up. He'd already wasted a day getting here, and if they didn't have a room, they'd hear about it all the way to the East Coast.

Josh turned to Graham, and his smile was back on. "Ah, sir?"

"Yes..." he grumbled, not bothering to hide his frustration.

To his credit, Josh didn't flinch but faced him eye-to-eye with that damn smile.

"I'm afraid there was a glitch in the system. I'm so sorry, but we're completely booked. I can call another resort for you. We'll have availability within a few days. Of course, we'll pick up the room charge for the two weeks."

Cute as the clerk was, Graham would challenge him. In his younger years, he'd avoided confrontation, preferring his friends all got along. When Graham had taken over the reins of Winter Media, that sentiment had to be ditched. Not even his first day in California, and he had to play the asshole. Forget about chilling out.

"I didn't come three thousand miles to be told you have no rooms. Let me talk to your manager." Hotels always had a room tucked away for unexpected guests.

"I am the manager."

"Then I'll talk with your boss."

"Yes, of course. I understand how upsetting this must be." Josh picked up the phone again. "Just one moment, please."

Josh kept his cool, not a roll of the eyes or a twitch of his upper lip... Impressive. While Graham waited, a bartender carrying a tray with a cocktail showed up by his side.

"For you, sir, compliments of the house. Brandy Manhattan."

How the hell did they know that was his preferred drink of choice?

"Ah, thanks."

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