



Chapter One

The drone buzzed overhead.

Looking at the screen on her controller, Maggie Lopez finessed the controls. The footage of the forest looked great. She grinned. She had several clients who'd potentially be interested in it, or she could upload it to her stock video site. She flew the drone higher, swiveling the camera.

She was standing in a clearing of the Muir Woods National Monument in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, north of the Golden Gate Bridge. *There*. That was the money shot.

The view down to the coast and the beaches was beautiful.

She flew the drone back and whizzed over some people below—hikers, tourists, perhaps the three scientists she'd brought here in her helicopter. She was lucky to have the special permits to fly her drone here.

The three men were a grumpy lot and didn't say much, but they'd paid upfront so they could spend several hours looking at redwoods. It was no skin off her nose.

She brought a drone into a smooth landing on the grass in front of her. Time to pack up. She glanced at her chunky Hugo Boss watch. The scientists would be back soon.

She pulled the drone apart and packed it into the large case she'd left out. Once everything was in place, she closed the lid and lifted the box. She slid it into the cargo area at the back of the

Bell 407 helicopter that was her baby. She'd risked everything to buy Hetty, short for Henrietta.

Then Maggie hesitated. *Shit*. Should she be lifting boxes?

She closed her eyes and slid her hand into the pocket of her jeans. She pulled out the small piece of plastic she'd been carrying around for the last week.

Her stomach did a tap dance and her mouth went dry.

She stared at the two lines.

Yep, still pregnant.

She rubbed her cheek. One month ago, she'd made a big mistake. Okay, it'd also been a thrilling, sexy, multi-orgasmic mistake, but a mistake all the same.

She'd slept with a hot, sexy man who she'd secretly been crushing on forever. A man who was smart, funny, loyal...but who also loved women. A great variety of women.

Ace Oliveira.

Even now, Maggie felt her blood heat. He worked for Norcross Security as their tech guru. A former NSA operative, the man could do things with computers that most people didn't even know were possible.

She was on retainer to Norcross as their pilot when they needed a helo ride. She blew out a breath. The boss man, Vander Norcross, had lured her out of the Navy. They'd met a few years back, when she'd flown a Seahawk from her aircraft carrier to rescue his Ghost Ops team from a mission that had gone fubar. They'd been under fire, and she'd done some fancy flying to get them all out of there alive.

Now, she had her own budding business in Dragonfly Aerial—and the debt to prove it. Plus, she got to keep her flying skills sharp when the Norcross badasses had a job.

It also looked like she was going to have a baby in less than nine months.

Dios. She leaned against the side of her helicopter. What the hell was she going to do? She hadn't told her parents yet. Hell, she hadn't told Ace yet. Her belly tried to turn itself inside out.

She hadn't seen him since that night. She bit her lip and slid both her hands into her pockets, tucking the plastic away at the same time.

Even now, she remembered every second in brilliant, spine-tingling detail.

They'd been at a fancy event—a big jewelry gala. Norcross' main bodyguard, Rome Nash, had been guarding the sponsor of the event: Princess Sofia of Caldova.

Maggie had dressed up for the first time in forever—in a long column of sexy gold. The color had looked great with her short, black hair. It had been a nice change from her usual jeans and shirt with her company dragonfly logo on it.

Ace had looked mouthwatering in his tuxedo. He'd lit up all her girly parts, and she'd had a few champagnes. She'd been dancing with some guy when Ace had swooped in, all dark and intense. That handsome, sharp face, the scruff on his jaw that drove her nuts, and dark hair long enough to tie back in a tiny ponytail.

He'd dragged her into a dark corner, all angry about her dancing with a stranger. He'd yelled, she'd yelled.

Then she'd had the startling realization that he was jealous.

Before she could process that, he'd kissed her.

Maggie pulled in a shuddering breath. Even now, she felt the tingles, the flush of heat.

She'd kissed him back. She'd let him drag her into a dark, private alcove at the gala and let him fuck her against the wall. It had been followed by a full night spent in his bed, doing more sexy, naughty things.

“Ms. Lopez?”

She jerked, yanked out of her thoughts by one of the scientists. She spotted the other two coming out of the trees, backpacks on, walking back toward the helo.

“Sorry. All done?” She dredged up a smile for Dr. Spiner.

“Yes,” he clipped. “Let’s go.” He brushed past her.

Asshole. He’d been rude when they’d met this morning, too.

Shrugging, Maggie climbed into her helo and got Hetty prepped for the flight back to San Francisco.

The black Bell 407 LongRanger was her pride and joy. Hetty wasn’t the latest model—there was no way Maggie could afford that—but Hetty got the job done. Maggie had a *long* way to go to get Hetty paid off, but Vander had helped her to secure the loan. Her business was growing, slowly but surely. There was also work doing aerial tours of San Francisco and the Bay, ferrying corporate bigwigs around, and doing aerial photography.

Her throat closed. How the hell could she make it all work with a baby?

She blew out a breath, then pulled her headset on. That was a worry for later.

Dr. Spiner sat in the back and roughly fastened his harness. He had a stony face, and well-cut, dark-brown hair. He’d probably be good-looking if he smiled. The other two climbed in—one tall with sandy-blond hair, the other shorter and stocky with black hair. As the men settled, she noticed the blond man’s ass as he bent over. Weird. He’d struck her as a little overweight when they’d boarded this morning.

She looked up and saw Dr. Spiner eyeing her coldly.

Righto. She shook it off and spoke into her headset. “Everyone strap in, we’ll be back in the city shortly.”

She checked the instrument panel. Her gaze snagged on a small chain with a pretty dragonfly

pendant hanging off it. She touched it. Ace had given it to her when she'd first started Dragonfly Aerial.

Letting the pendant go, she focused on the controls. Moments later, she talked to air traffic control and took off. As they moved over the water, she looked at the view. It always made her blood pressure drop and a sense of wonder fill her. She loved San Francisco.

She'd grown up here. Her parents had since retired south to Monterey, but San Francisco would always be home.

They crossed just north of the Golden Gate Bridge, then over Alcatraz Island. Soon, the yacht marina and small pier beside it came into view. The pier was home to the landing pad where Dragonfly Aerial had its office and small hangar.

She swept in, hovered, and landed. She went through shutting down and saw her employee, Gus—a former Navy man—lumber out wearing his usual grease-stained coveralls. Gus kept his gray hair cut military short. She gave him a wave through the window. He'd take care of Hetty.

As she climbed out of the helicopter, she suddenly felt starving. She really wanted a doughnut with sprinkles.

"I hope you got everything you needed," she said to the scientists. They were all pulling their backpacks on.

"We did," Dr. Spiner clipped.

The other two men headed toward their car, parked on the other side of the chain-link fence. The blond guy was in way better shape than she'd realized. He reminded her of Ace's long, rangy body.

Looking back at Dr. Spiner's cold face, she tried for some professional courtesy. "Great. I got some excellent drone photography footage as well. So, it's a win-win."

The man stilled. “Drone photography?”

“Yes. Dragonfly Aerial specializes in both helicopter and drone photography, if you’re ever interested.”

He stepped closer, right into her personal space. “What did you take footage of?”

Maggie frowned and straightened. She was more than equipped to deal with assholes. “The scenery—”

He stepped even closer.

“Hey.” She pressed a hand to his chest.

The man’s blue eyes glittered. “I think you—”

Whatever he was going to say was lost in the throaty roar of a motorcycle.

They both looked up and watched a sleek, black bike sweep in. The suit and the helmet did nothing to hide the rider’s muscular body.

The motorcycle stopped nearby, and the man set the kickstand down, then pulled his helmet off.

Vander Norcross’s rugged face was easy to look at. His Italian-American heritage was obvious in his dark hair and good looks. But the scary, alert way he watched everything added an edge to the handsome man, and made people shiver.

As his dark gaze glanced at Maggie, then moved to Dr. Spiner, the scientist stepped back.

Maggie let out a breath. With a sharp nod, the man strode off.

“Hey, Vander.” Maggie walked over to him.

The head of Norcross Security swung off his bike. “Was passing by. I wanted to check and make sure you were coming to the company party tonight at the Alchemist.”

Damn, she’d been planning to avoid it, although she loved the dim, trendy vibe at the bar. She

wanted to avoid questions over why she wasn't drinking for a bit longer, and the slim possibility that she'd run into Ace. But as far as she knew, he was still in New Orleans working a cyber-security job.

She had to face him sooner or later. He had the right to know.

Her belly did a slow tumble. "Well, I—"

"It's compulsory." Vander raised a brow. "I know you've been working hard these last few weeks."

"I have loans to pay."

"You still deserve a night off, Lopez."

She blew out a breath. "Fine." She suspected no one ever said no to Vander.

He reached out and touched her cheek. "You okay, Maggie?"

He was former Ghost Ops—the top-secret, special forces team made up of the military's best of the best. It meant he saw too much.

She pasted on the bright smile. "Yep."

"Okay, see you tonight." He paused. "Oh, and Ace is back from the job in New Orleans. I'm sure he'll want to catch up with you, too."

Now her smile felt brittle. "Great. Sure. See you tonight."

Ace Oliveira sipped his beer, his gaze aimed at the door.

The Norcross Security party was in full swing. Vander put on a couple of these shindigs each year. The Alchemist Bar wasn't far from the Norcross Security office in South Beach, with an industrial, steampunk décor, and good drinks. He liked the exposed-brick wall, the old-fashioned, leather armchairs, and all the brass accents.

Ace sipped again, and scanned the room. It was filled with Norcross Security employees and contractors, clients, and people's partners. Everyone was laughing and having a good time.

He wasn't. He felt edgy.

He'd been in New Orleans on a cyber-security job for almost two weeks, and before that, in New York for a few days to help Vander's friends—Maverick Rivera, Zane Roth, and Liam Kensington.

And before that, a certain leggy, smart-mouthed brunette had been dodging him. Maggie had been ignoring his calls, and conveniently missing him by a few minutes when he'd tried to track her down.

He took another sip, his fingers clenching on the glass bottle.

For the last few weeks, he'd had the taste of her in his mouth, he'd dreamed of those long legs wrapped tight around his hips, and his cock deep inside her. He knew just how tight she was. Knew the hungry sounds she made.

A part of him knew he should never have touched her, but he hadn't thought about that at the jewelry gala. That night, he hadn't been able to think through his need for her. That dress, that looked like liquid gold on her slim curves, had short-circuited his brain. Her short, dark hair had showed off her slim neck—the one vulnerable point on the feisty pilot who never showed any vulnerabilities. He'd wanted to kiss and bite it.

After the drama of the gala—where Rome had saved his princess from a stalker—Ace had taken Maggie home.

They hadn't slept. They'd fucked, again and again, until his bed was a shambles.

Every time he'd sunk inside her, he'd kept hoping the need for her would lessen.

He released a slow breath.

When he'd woken after that night, she'd been gone. Like a damn dream, except that her smell had still been on his sheets.

Even now, he felt a spurt of hot anger. He'd tried to call, track her down, but she'd avoided him. Then work had kept him away.

He was done.

He was not letting her fucking avoid him anymore.

Vander had told him that she was coming tonight, so Ace was going to pin her down and...

Fuck. He still wanted her. Under his hands. On his cock. In his bed.

Shit. Maggie was young, and his friend, and she worked for Norcross. It had messy written all over it. And Ace didn't do messy.

He looked up. He saw Rhys nuzzling his woman, Haven. Vander's younger brother was cross-eyed in love. Nearby, their sister Gia was arguing with her man, Saxon. Saxon worked for Norcross as well, and his arms were crossed over his chest as she waved hers around. Suddenly, Saxon yanked her into his arms and ended the argument with a deep kiss.

"Hi, Ace."

He looked down at the curvaceous blonde in a form-fitting green dress. Harlow Carlson smiled up at him.

"Hey, Harlow." He didn't see Easton, but the oldest Norcross wouldn't be very far from his fiancée.

"How was New Orleans?" she asked.

"Steamy." He'd worked his ass off to get the job done a few days early and get home. He hadn't even been tempted to explore the nightlife.

"I bet that your brother missed you," Harlow said.

Ace smiled. “Yeah. I saw Rodrigo this morning.” His younger brother had suffered a drug overdose the first time he’d tried drugs as a teenager, and it had left him with an acquired brain injury. He lived in a great care facility, and Ace visited him every week.

“How are you?” Ace asked Harlow.

She smiled. “Great. Easton is awesome, even when he drives me crazy.”

The pair were living together, and she’d been his assistant. “Still working with him?”

“I’m back with my regular boss.” Harlow smiled. “Easton seems to find a lot more reasons to visit Meredith these days.” Harlow looked across the room. “And my parents are doing well.”

Ace eyed the older couple. Harlow’s father had gotten into debt with some bad people, and Harlow had been dragged into the mess until Easton had intervened.

Harlow made an annoyed sound and he followed her gaze. A young boy, about eleven or so, was tugging on Vander’s sleeve.

“I need to extract Daniel before he stomps on Vander’s last nerve.”

Ace grinned. Daniel was a street kid that Harlow’s parents had taken in. He’d decided he wanted to work for Vander and took every opportunity to convince Vander to hire him. Harlow hurried off.

A sweet laugh filled the air, and Ace turned his head. Sofie didn’t look much like a princess when she was snort-laughing over a cocktail. Rome sat on a curved bench seat beside her, his big body sprawled out, although Ace highly doubted that Rome was as relaxed as he looked. The man was always aware of the room, the people in it, the entrances and exits. It made him a damn good bodyguard. He was smiling at his woman as he reached out to toy with a strand of her strawberry-blonde hair.

“Hi, there.”

Ace dragged his gaze away. A small, curvy blonde beamed up at him, wearing a clingy, blue top and tight jeans.

“Hi,” he said.

“I’m friends with Amy. She’s mentioned you. Said you’re Brazilian.”

Amy was an assistant who worked at the Norcross office.

“Yeah, I’m Ace.”

“Jessica. It’s a great party.” She leaned into him and her flirty, floral perfume hit him. “Amy said you work with computers?”

“Yeah.”

“I work in software implementation for finance.” Her smile widened. “Probably *far* less interesting than security.” She rested her hand on his forearm, the invitation obvious.

Something made him look up. He saw Maggie standing just inside the door of the bar, staring at him.

A jolt went through him. She wore wide-legged, black pants and a strapless red top that hugged her slim torso tightly. She had beautiful toned shoulders and arms.

Then her gaze dropped to Jessica pressing against his side.

Maggie’s face hardened, then she swiveled and walked out.

Fuck.

He pushed away from Jessica and shoved through the crowd. He stormed out the door.

Maggie was walking down the sidewalk, past the outside tables packed with more customers, her long legs moving quickly.

“*Maggie.*”

She sped up.

Cursing, Ace ran after her. Catching her, he grabbed her arm and spun her around.

“Lopez, what the hell? You’ve been avoiding me for weeks. Why won’t you even talk to me?”

Her chin jutted out. “It looked like you were busy.”

“I was just being friendly.”

She made a sound. “Friendly, right.”

He leaned in. “Maggie, we need to talk.”

God, this close, her spicy scent hit him—something that made him think of vanilla and berries. It made him remember having her naked under him. His mouth traveling over all those places she’d dabbed with that scent.

A bus rumbled past and he heard loud laughter from the tables nearby, but he focused on Maggie’s face. There was a watery gleam in her dark eyes. They were shades darker than his own brown eyes.

Shit. “Are you crying?”

“No.” She pressed a hand to her mouth. “Fuck, I shouldn’t have come.”

Ace felt something close to panic. “Maggie, I don’t want what we did to change anything. You’re my friend.”

Unreadable emotions flitted over her face. “*Friend.*” She gave a harsh laugh.

“Maggie?” He gripped her smooth shoulders. Crap. He wanted to stroke her skin, kiss the back of her neck.

“Things have already changed, Ace. We can’t go back.”

His gut clenched. “Maggie—”

She lifted her chin. “I’m pregnant.”