

Chapter One

The music swelled, and Saskia Hawke moved across the small stage.

Her body flowed and she felt connected to the music. Her muscles knew exactly what to do—thanks to years of training and her passion.

Arabesque, jeté, brisé. Love and joy filled her, lifted her. Her tiny skirt flared around her thighs, and she lifted her arms gracefully above her head.

It didn't matter that the stage and audience were small. This was a tiny, private performance, but for Saskia, dancing was dancing.

It didn't matter if she was performing for one person, or a crowd at the Royal Opera House in London. Dancing was her heart and soul.

She'd danced for royalty and presidents. She'd been the lead in the most famous ballets—*Romeo and Juliet, The Nutcracker, Swan Lake*. She'd shared the stage with some of the world's best dancers.

She always put everything she had into the dance, because it was a compulsion inside her. She leaped into a *grand jeté*.

For that second, she was soaring.

She leaped again, and whirled into another turn.

The music ended, and Saskia bent over, her arms out.

There was a moment of pure silence.

Then applause erupted.

She straightened and smiled. They were in a clear marquee set up in Central Park. The trees outside were a stunning palette of fall colors—orange, reds, and browns. Some were losing their leaves as winter made its approach.

Her heart was beating hard, and she pulled in some breaths and kept her practiced smile in place.

Now that the dance was over, she felt the throb in her sore knee and the ache in her feet, and tiredness wrapped around her like a blanket. It was Monday lunch time—and one of her days off—and she would have preferred to be lazing in bed, reading a book, and drinking hot chocolate. She had a new stash of chocolate from Paris she wanted to test out, not to mention an unopened packet of her favorite truffles. Chocolate was her weakness.

The partygoers rose to their feet, still clapping. Saskia kept her smile in place, but inside she felt...not so much. It had been happening a lot lately. While she loved to dance, performing and her grueling practices didn't give her the same sense of satisfaction anymore.

Yes, she really, really wanted to be home at her apartment with that mug of hot chocolate. Her heart clenched. And maybe a secret phone call later with the man she couldn't stop thinking about.

Other dancers pranced up behind her, bowing.

Her dancer friend, Danielle, caught her gaze and smiled. A pretty blonde dancer beside Danie beamed. She looked extremely pleased, her cheeks glowing.

Saskia managed a real smile. Danie had begged her to come today. Not all dancers made good money like Saskia did. These private performances for wealthy clients paid well. Saskia hadn't wanted to do it, but Danie had said that the patron had requested Saskia personally.

She took another bow. The organizer, Chad—a well-dressed man with a clipped New York accent, blond hair, sharp suit, and an over-wide smile—carried out a bunch of flowers.

He handed out a single rose for each of the other female dancers, then turned and handed

the rest of the bunch to Saskia.

“Mr. Mikhailov was so very happy you danced for him today.” Chad didn’t bother to hide the fact that he was checking out her breasts.

She barely hid her eye roll. She was built like most prima ballerinas—slender, long legs and neck, and not that well-endowed.

“Thank you.” She took the flowers.

“He’d love for to you to join him for a drink.”

“I’m flattered, but I can’t today. Thank you again.”

Back in the tiny change room assigned to the female dancers, Saskia changed back into her jeans and sweater, and topped it with a gray coat and cream scarf. She released her black hair from the confines of the tight bun and brushed it out, then bundled it up loosely so it wouldn’t give her a headache.

Then she set to work cleaning off the heavy makeup. She tipped the makeup remover onto a cloth and leaned toward the mirror.

She couldn’t wait to get home and soak her feet. Her brother had given her an amazing home foot spa for her birthday last year. She smiled. It had been a thoughtful gift, especially since her big brother was the definition of the ultimate badass. She didn’t see a lot of him, since Killian traveled a lot. He owned a private security company specializing in cyber security and a bunch of other no doubt dangerous things he didn’t talk about.

Dangerous. That pretty much described Killian to a T. Before he’d started Sentinel Security, he’d...well, she didn’t actually know what he’d done. Something black ops for the government. He didn’t advertise the fact that they were related. If people looked her up, there was no mention of him.

Anyway, she was just glad that his work now wasn’t as dangerous as it had been before.

She didn’t remember the father who’d abandoned them, and their mother had died when

Saskia was eighteen. She didn't want to lose what she had left of her family.

Thoughts of her deadly brother brought to mind another man.

In the mirror, her lips tilted up.

Camden Morgan.

She'd met him a few months back in San Francisco, at her best friend Savannah's art show.

After terrible trouble involving a crazed stalker, Savannah had fallen in love with sexy police detective Hunter Morgan. Cam was his brother.

He'd recently gotten out of the military. He had newly healed scars on his face, and carried a hard, watchful look. That, combined with his powerful, muscled body, and his obvious love of his family and friends, had entranced her.

Her life in New York was mostly filled with self-absorbed dancers, and men too busy with their careers to put much effort into anything else. Her short-lived stint on a dating app had introduced her to a long line of uninspiring men and bad dates. Cam couldn't be more different.

Even now, she remembered the way every cell in her body had taken notice the moment she'd first laid eyes on him.

"Thanks again for today, Saskia." Danie walked past and squeezed Saskia's arm. "You were awesome, as always."

"Sure thing, Danie. See you tomorrow at rehearsal."

"You know it." She breathed out. "Enjoy the rest of your day."

Face clean, Saskia dabbed on some lip gloss. She planned to enjoy her day. She had a meeting with the dance director at her dance company later, but other than that she was free. She might call on her old dance mentor. Cassie was a former principal dancer who'd since retired and ran a dance school. Saskia loved popping in and seeing the kids. She sometimes

felt the niggles that she'd like to teach. One day.

For now, dancing on stage was her life. Dancing was a touchstone for her, had saved her in the toughest time of her life.

She tucked her lip gloss away. The other thing she hoped for today was that she got a late-night call from Cam.

At Savannah's art show, he'd mostly avoided her, but she'd caught him watching her numerous times.

Hot, intense stares that had made her belly coil.

She'd finally taken matters into her own hands and gotten him onto the dance floor. Being in those strong arms...

She shivered.

Still, he hadn't made a move. She hadn't pushed him. She'd left him her phone number, sadly knowing in her heart that he was unlikely to use it.

But then, a week later, she'd gotten a late-night call.

They'd shared lots of late-night calls since then. She'd realized that he had trouble sleeping. Her heart hurt for him. He was a wounded warrior, who sacrificed so much for his country.

He'd lost a teammate, and had some unresolved survivor's guilt. He never talked about the military, or how he'd been hurt. No, she'd read all that between the lines. They just talked about everyday things. She loved listening to his deep, sexy voice that had just a touch of a gritty edge.

She sighed. If only Cam didn't have defenses a mile wide, and they didn't live on different coasts.

"Ms. Hawke?"

Chad was back. He had a tray full of elegant champagne flutes filled with bubbling gold

liquid.

“Mr. Mikhailov insisted on at least a small celebration of your elegance and grace.” Chad handed her the flute.

She gave a mental sigh. She’d take a few sips, smile, and then get out of there.

One of the other dancers came out of a dressing room and almost bumped into Saskia.

“Oh, sorry.”

It was the pretty blonde. The woman had a sweet, southern accent.

“Come and have a glass,” Saskia said.

The woman bit her bottom lip. “Oh, I shouldn’t.”

Chad handed the woman a flute. “It’s Bollinger.”

“Well, then.” She sipped it. “It tastes like gold.”

Saskia sipped hers. “It sure does. I’m Saskia.”

“Oh, I know who you are. You’re an idol of mine.” The woman blushed. “I’m Adaline Harris. Addie to my friends.”

“A pleasure to meet you, Addie.” They clinked their glasses together. “Where do you dance?”

“Anywhere I can.” She gave a self-conscious giggle. “Right now, I’m off-Broadway. *Very* off Broadway.”

Saskia knew lots of dancers like Addie, who came to New York with dreams in their hearts and stars in their eyes. Things didn’t always turn out like they hoped. A career in dancing was a lot of hard work, sore muscles, and a lot of disappointment and rejection.

As they chatted, she felt Chad watching them steadily. He was a little creepy.

A sudden wave of dizziness hit her. She was more tired than she’d realized. “I need to go.”

“We too. I mean, *me* too.” Addie frowned, her cheeks flushed, and her words slurred. “I feel funny.”

Saskia frowned.

Then Addie staggered and fell. She knocked a stool over.

“Oh, dear, Ms. Harris.” Chad reached for the woman.

Nausea swamped Saskia, and her head spun in a horrible circle. She looked at the flute, and her vision dimmed.

Something was wrong.

Very wrong. She made for the door.

“Oh, you aren’t leaving, Ms. Hawke.” Chad held the now unconscious Addie up against him. “Mr. Mikhailov insisted. And he’s a man who always gets what he wants.”

Saskia grabbed a table to stay upright. She was so dizzy. “What...does he want?”

Chad’s smile turned nasty. “He wants you.” The man tossed Addie over his shoulder.

“And it looks like he’ll be getting a bonus blonde as well. I’ll be right back to get you.” He strode out.

Saskia fumbled in her bag and pulled out her phone. She tripped, and fell on her hands and knees. She scrambled for the phone, trying to unlock it. Her fingers felt like they were double their size. A sob welled in her throat. This couldn’t be happening.

She got the phone open and pressed the screen.

Please, pick up.

“Saskia?”

Cam’s deep voice.

“Cam...” Her throat was so tight. She couldn’t form any words.

“Saskia?” His tone hardened. “Are you there?”

“I—”

The phone was snatched out of her hand. An enraged Chad smashed it against the counter and it shattered.

No.

He hauled her up. “Time to take a little trip.”

The world swam, and blackness swamped her.

Camden Morgan paced his living room, turning his cell phone over and over in his hand.

He’d tried all day to contact Saskia.

Nothing.

The calls wouldn’t connect. She hadn’t called him back.

Cam. She’d said his name, little more than a whisper.

He stopped at the window. The weather had turned bad, and the fog and clouds matched his mood.

Usually, the view of the city was stellar. He was renting a place owned by his friend, Easton Norcross. Cam had saved his money from his time in the military, and Easton used his billion-dollar investment skills to invest for Cam. He could buy even in San Francisco’s market, if he wanted. He just didn’t know what or where, yet.

He still felt...temporary. Nothing felt quite right. Like he was wearing borrowed clothes that were too tight.

Except his job working at Norcross Security for Easton’s brother, Vander. That was the only thing that felt right.

And when he was staring into Saskia’s warm, brown eyes.

Fuck. She was off limits. Totally off-limits.

His hands curled. Saskia was beautiful. Long, slender, willowy, but with an underlying strength that drew him. He was aware that to be a dancer of her caliber, she had to be fit and strong, and put in hours of training and practice.

But most of all, it was her smile when she looked at him. The glint in her eyes, like she

knew all his secrets and they didn't worry her.

That look that dared him to touch her, kiss her.

Cam blew out a sharp breath. Saskia Hawke looked at and spoke to him like she didn't see the scars, the darkness.

I know all about brave warriors, Cam.

She'd said that on one of their calls. He loved listening to her rich voice on the line. He knew she'd been talking about her brother.

I know what you have to give up, to do such an important job. A job that calls to you, but takes pieces of your soul as well. Every day, I'm grateful for men like you, Camden.

Where the hell was she?

He looked at his phone. It still didn't ring.

Something was wrong. He knew in his gut. It was the same damn feeling he'd gotten before a bomb had blown up his team in Afghanistan.

Before a good man had died. A man he'd fought with, laughed with, bled with. Before his best friend had died in his arms.

His jaw tightened. *Fuck this.*

He strode out of his apartment, slamming the door behind him.

It was a short elevator ride down to the garage. A gleaming BMW X6 SUV in black sat in his parking space. He hadn't even bought a car yet. The X6 was a Norcross Security vehicle. He didn't even know what kind of car he wanted.

He slid in, gunned the engine, and pulled out of the parking garage. The Norcross Security office, situated in a converted warehouse near the South Beach Marina, was a short drive away.

As he pulled up, he saw lights on upstairs in Vander's loft. Despite it being Monday, most Norcross staff had the day off, since most of them had spent the last day in and out of the

hospital, waiting for their tech guru Ace and his woman Maggie's baby to arrive.

Cam drove into the lower level of the warehouse and parked beside a row of other X6s. He jogged past the gym and doors to the holding rooms, then took the stairs two at a time to the upper level.

The central part of the warehouse was home to the main offices. Vander had kept the industrial feel, with lots of wood, black metal, and glass. As Cam had guessed, even though it was Monday afternoon, it was empty.

Everyone was celebrating baby Isabel's arrival.

"Cam?"

He turned and saw Vander. Of course, the former Ghost Ops commander hadn't made a sound. Cam could move the same way, and even though Vander had been out for a few years, it hadn't dulled the man's dangerous edge.

Vander eyed him steadily with dark-blue eyes.

He was a tall, muscled man who carried a sense of contained violence. All the Norcross siblings shared dark, Italian-American good looks they'd inherited from their mother. Most of San Francisco was wary of Vander Norcross. They all sensed a predator. Cam was one of the few who knew exactly how dangerous this man could be.

And now Cam needed his help.

"What's wrong?" Vander asked.

Cam swiped a hand through his hair. "It's Saskia Hawke."

Vander's dark brows winged up. "Killian's sister? You have a thing with his sister? Must have balls of steel, Cam."

Cam huffed out a breath. "She lives in New York. We're..." Well, he didn't have the right word to describe it. "Friends. We talk on the phone." Cam shook his head. "I'm not getting involved with any woman."

Vander shoved his hands in his pockets, his gaze steady. “Why?”

Cam felt a spurt of anger. “You know why. I’m...not a good bet. You avoided serious relationships for years, so I know you get it. I have nothing to give a woman but shit.”

“That’s not true. And I guess I proved that, since I’m engaged to your cousin. She’s my world, Cam, and I’d fight anyone who tried to take her from me.”

Cam sliced a hand through the air. Yes, Vander was in love with Brynn, but that didn’t mean Cam could offer that to anyone. “This is not why I came. Saskia’s in trouble. I know it.”

Vander straightened. “I’m listening.”

“At the hospital this morning, she called me. She said my name, but she sounded wrong. Then the call was cut off. I’ve been calling her all day since then, but the calls won’t connect, and she hasn’t called me back.”

“Shit.” Vander pulled out his phone, stabbed at the screen, and put it to his ear. He cursed. “Killian’s voicemail. It’s automated. It means he’s out of the country.”

Cam flexed his hand.

“I’ll call Killian’s second in command at Sentinel Security.” Vander strode to his office at the end of the hall. Cam followed.

The office suited its owner, with sleek, stark lines. Vander strode around the glossy desk and dropped into the chair. He opened his laptop and tapped.

Pulling in a breath, Cam stalked over beside his boss. Tension was gnawing at him. He wanted to know that Saskia was all right. Even if she was out with some guy...

He swallowed a growl. He just wanted her safe.

The video call connected.

“Norcross,” a deep voice said.

“Wolf.”

The man was big and broad-shouldered, and had a rugged face covered by a neat beard. His hair was a deep brown, and he wore a suit that looked way more designer than Cam's. But when the blue-eyed man's gaze met his, Cam didn't mistake this guy for anything but a skilled, dangerous operator.

"Camden Morgan, this is Nick 'Wolf' Garrick," Vander said. "Former SEAL Team Six and SAC, and second in charge at Sentinel Security."

So the guy had been a SEAL, then gone into the CIA's Special Activities Center. Not someone to mess with.

"Wolf, Cam is one of mine and former Ghost Ops. We need to contact Killian."

Wolf folded his hands. "He's out of the country."

Vander bit out a curse. "We suspected as much. Can you reach him?"

"What's wrong, Vander?" Wolf asked.

"Saskia Hawke called Cam today."

Something changed in Wolf's face. "Go on."

Cam leaned in. "The call disconnected, and I can't get in touch with her. The calls won't go through. She's in trouble."

Wolf's rugged face changed, taking on a lethal edge that made Cam think of the animal he was named after.

"I'll look into it."

The screen went black, and Cam fought the need to punch something.