Chapter 1

Cam

Cheating assholes were all the same.

I zoomed the camera in, expertly balancing the telephoto lens. I'd paid a small fortune for top-tier equipment, but thankfully it had been a tax deduction.

The camera clicked as I snapped several photos of Travis Hamilton. The supposedly happily married man and father of two who currently had his tongue stuck down the throat of the woman who'd barely left her teenage years behind. Needless to say, the woman was *not* his wife.

The couple smiled at each other as they exited the Grandview Hotel. I snapped a couple of extra shots as the pair slid into Hamilton's Ford Mustang.

I pulled the memory card out and set the camera on the passenger seat of my RAV4. "Enjoy the moment, Trav."

Soon, I'd be handing over the photos to Jennie, Travis's wife of eight years. My nose wrinkled. As a private investigator, reporting on cheating spouses was my bread and butter, but at the same time, this kind of work was also my least favorite.

I had bills to pay and a family to support, however, so beggars couldn't be choosers.

Reaching into the back seat, I grabbed my small portable printer and slid the camera's memory card inside. I selected a half a dozen of the best shots, printed them out, then slid them into an envelope.

Then I started the engine and turned the radio up. I bopped along to the Bruno Mars song on the radio, and headed toward Summerlin. It was a beautiful afternoon. The sky was a brilliant, cloudless blue and the sun was shining. Springtime in Las Vegas was my favorite time of the year—not too hot, not too cold. Lots of sunshine, but it wasn't hot enough yet to get third-degree burns from the steering wheel.

Maybe I'd find some time to get a hike or two in. I snorted. Or not. I was so busy running Moreno Investigations and taking care of my family, I barely had time to eat. Decent sleep was a distant memory I remembered fondly. Maybe next year, if things evened out a little, I could take some time off.

Right now, we were too tangled up with Oscar's death.

My stomach clenched and grief gripped my throat. God, I missed my cousin. Not the version of him that, for a time, had been lost to drugs, but the goofy, smiling young man he'd once been. He'd loved playing Xbox games with my brothers, loved dancing in the kitchen, and always brought me flowers on my birthday.

I remembered the man he'd been trying to become again before his life had been cruelly taken from him.

My jaw tightened and I flicked on my turn signal to exit the highway.

Whatever it took, I'd find the people responsible for my cousin's death.

Focusing on my current job, I pulled up in front of a neat and tidy home in southern Summerlin. Here, the streets were filled with similar, beige family homes with xeriscaping and

the odd palm tree, all lined up in identical rows. We were far from the ritzy part of the suburb that was home to millionaires. I'd love a few millionaire clients, but most of the people who came to us were simple, hardworking families. We had a reputation for good work and good rates. I had a few business clients and was working hard to build up our clientele.

I slid out of the SUV and the warm sun hit my arms. My usual work uniform was jeans and T-shirts. I had a couple of suits I kept for the odd corporate job, but jeans were my thing. I had a collection. Today, I'd gone classic and worn my Levi's 501 Original Fit jeans. As I walked toward the front door, it opened and a pretty, curvy blonde slipped outside.

"Hi, Camila." Jennie Hamilton smiled at me, her curls piled up in a haphazard bun. It was impossible to miss the signs of stress and fatigue on her face. "The kids are watching a show on TV." Her gaze dropped to the envelope in my hand and her bottom lip wobbled. "So, my suspicions were correct?"

"I'm sorry, Jennie."

She shrugged a shoulder and looked resigned. "I knew. I knew in my heart."

I handed over the envelope, and she pulled out the photos. Then she gasped.

"That asshole! That's Chloe. She was our kids' babysitter a few years back. *God*."

I winced. Travis the cheating asshole was also a predictable cliché. No surprise there.

Just then, a Ford Mustang purred down the street and pulled into the driveway.

Uh-oh. I stiffened. I tried to avoid being around for this part. "Jennie, I should go."

The woman set her shoulders back, resolve filling her face. "I'll transfer you your payment. Thanks, Camila."

I jerked my chin up and took a step back.

"Honey, who's this?" Travis climbed out of his car, an easy smile on his face. He was wearing

workout gear, and pulled out a gym bag, a half-drunk takeout cup of green smoothie in his other hand. Like he'd just left the gym.

"How was your workout, sweetheart?" Jennie asked sweetly.

I winced. Even I could hear the tightly held rage in her voice.

Travis' smile slipped. "It was good."

"You had fun bouncing around on Chloe?"

Travis froze, then his face filled with color. "What—?"

Jennie closed the last few steps and slapped the photos against his chest. They fluttered to the ground, but he grabbed a particularly damning one of him inspecting young Chloe's tonsils. As he stared, his face went from red to a rather unattractive shade of purple.

"This is Camila," Jennie added in an acid tone. "My PI."

His face twisted. "You had me followed?"

"I knew you were cheating, asshole," Jennie screamed. "I could smell her on you. I didn't know you'd gone so low as to bang teenagers."

"She's twenty."

Jennie threw her arms in the air. "Oh, that's so much better. She was our *babysitter*."

I took a few cautious steps back.

Travis' head whipped up and he pinned me with a hot glare. "You! Do you enjoy destroying families?"

Like it was my fault he was cheating on his wife with a younger woman.

The front door opened and two kids poked their heads out.

"What's going on?" the young boy of about eight asked. "Mommy, why are you yelling?"

Jennie dragged in a breath. "Go back inside, sweetie."

A huge dog of undetermined breed bounded out of the house. It was big, with brown fur, and still had that puppy gamboling rambunctiousness, so I guessed it was still young. It loped over to Travis, then Jennie, then me, leaping up.

Travis was ranting again and sending me evil looks. Jennie yelled back.

"I'll just be leaving." I took another backward step, trying to keep the dog from planting his paws on my chest.

"This is all your fault!" Travis yelled.

Then he tossed the smoothie cup at me. The lid flew off and the green liquid splashed all over my white T-shirt.

I froze, the cold, green ooze soaking into the shirt and dripping onto my boots. The dog happily started licking my ankles.

"Oh, so mature, Travis. You're the one caught with your pants down and you attack an innocent woman." Jennie turned. "I'm so sorry, Camila. Please, go."

I gave her a nod, then hustled back to my RAV4. I plucked at my shirt, watching the kids joining the shouting couple and jumping dog in front of the house. Some neighbors had come out to watch as well.

My bra was visible through my now-wet shirt and goosebumps skated over my skin. The scent of celery and ripe banana filled my nostrils. *Just great*. Thankfully, this had been my final job for the day.

Time to head home.

At least Jennie would send through payment. As I drove down the street, I mentally juggled all the bills in my head, working out what to pay first.

I turned east and headed for home.

Twenty-five minutes later, I arrived. Home was an old 1970's motel that my parents had bought after it had gone out of business years ago. The Lone Palms had become home to the Moreno clan. Over the years, we'd turned the building into the offices of Moreno Investigations and a family compound. Growing up, I'd hated living in an old motel—back when I'd wanted to be normal and fit in—but now, I loved it.

I turned into the driveway. The single-story building formed a U shape, and all our vehicles were parked in the center. I pulled my RAV4 to a stop beside my mom's red Mazda3. My Nonna's Buick was parked beside my cousin Sofia's green Mini Cooper. Thankfully, both my teenage brothers were still learning to drive and didn't have cars yet.

God help us when they were turned loose on the roads.

Climbing out, I grabbed my camera and backpack. Ignoring my sticky, smelly shirt, I headed to the office.

Dad had turned the old reception of the hotel into the business office. There was a small waiting room, three offices, and a room with a table for meeting clients. I unlocked the door and made a beeline to my office. My computer sat precisely on my desk, and my filing cabinets were ruthlessly organized. My little collection of cacti sat on top in their pretty, painted pots. I unlocked one of the cabinets and opened a drawer. I set my camera down with all the other lenses and attachments, then locked it up again.

Right. My plan was to shower off the day, then find something to eat. I grabbed my laptop and slid it under my arm. Then I'd snuggle up in my bed with the TV on and work on finding my cousin's killer.

Mom and Dad had converted the motel's old dining room and kitchen into our family dining room. I could see the lights were on, and suspected my family would all be in there, nosily

shouting around the table. Nonna would have cooked something delicious. She mostly cooked Italian food, but when my mom had married my dad, who'd been Mexican-American, Nonna had put a lot of effort into learning some Mexican dishes. So, it was always a toss-up whether we'd get lasagna or enchiladas, pizza or pozole.

The rest of the rooms at the hotel had all been converted into studio apartments for the family. Each room had an updated bathroom and small kitchenette. I headed for my door, hoping no one would notice I was back.

As usual, despite the fact that I had decent stealth skills, the dining room door opened and my mother filled the doorway.

"Camila. How'd the job go?"

Francesca Moreno looked Italian. She was shorter and curvier than me, with dark-brown hair she dyed on schedule. She had no desire to embrace her grays. She wore a stylish pair of dark-framed glasses that emphasized her large, brown eyes, and a pair of flowing, linen pants that she topped with a tunic-style top in a wild pattern of orange, turquoise, and pink.

"I got it done."

Her gaze dropped to my shirt and her nose wrinkled. "What happened?"

"The cheating husband came home early."

She stepped out and closed the distance between us. When she stopped in front of me, she reached out and touched my cheek. I saw smudges of dried paint on her fingertips. Mom was an artist, and I couldn't remember a time when I didn't see paint on her hands, hair, or clothes. "Come in, have something to eat."

"I have work to do."

"You work too much." She sighed. "Ever since your father died."

Because I had to. There was still a mortgage to pay, a family to feed, brothers who needed textbooks and gear for football. Mom did well from her art, but she didn't produce a huge volume, and sales weren't always consistent.

"Nonna made Pasta alla Norma."

My stomach rumbled. I loved my grandmother's eggplant pasta. "Okay, Mom. I'll grab some to take back to my room."

She tucked one of the dark curls that had escaped my ponytail back behind my ear. Like I was seven, not twenty-seven.

"You aren't alone, *tesorina*. Remember that."

"I know, Mom." I leaned into her, avoiding getting any half-dried smoothie on her. I smelled the familiar scent of paint and paint thinner that was the scent of my childhood.

When we stepped inside the dining room, I saw my brothers scarfing down pasta like their lives depended on it at the huge wooden table. They were both a little shy of six feet, gangly, and too handsome for their own good. We'd all gotten lucky with a mix of Italian and Latino genes. All three of us were a perfect blend of our parents. The boys were bronze-skinned, dark haired, dark eyed, with Dad's strong jaw.

Nico was sixteen, a little serious, and determined to get straight As at school. He wanted to get a law degree, then join me in the family business. He sometimes helped me out on cases when he wasn't studying.

Cristino was thirteen, still growing, and a ball of energy. He loved nothing more than pulling a prank, telling a joke, and making people laugh. Cris was all about the drama and playing football.

Nonna sat at the head of the table, watching my brothers eat with a satisfied smile. Teresa

Silvestri was sharp-eyed, her steel-gray hair up in a bun that should have looked grandmotherly, but all she had to do was skewer you with a look, and you knew she was a lady you didn't want to mess with. When I entered, her head lifted and her gaze narrowed on my stained shirt.

My cousin Sofia sat on the other side of the table from the boys. Her father had been my dad's brother, and she was Latina through and through. Her generous figure was poured into her jeans, her hair was long, straight, and black, and she always made the most of her big brown eyes. When she saw me, she raised a dark brow, her fork stopping halfway to her mouth.

Cris made a sound. "Ew, Cam, did you roll around in green vomit?"

I sighed. "No. An irate cheating husband decided to blame me for him sticking his…body parts where they don't belong."

"Asshole," Nico muttered.

"Language," Nonna chided. Despite decades of living in America, she still had an accent. She looked at me. "I'll make you a plate."

"To go, thanks, Nonna. I have work to do."

Her brow creased, but for once, she didn't give me a lecture.

Mom sat back down beside Sofia. Fia was one year younger than me and worked with me when I needed help. The rest of the time, she ran her small landscaping business.

"How'd the surveillance go for that insurance job?" I'd sent Fia to surveil a guy the insurance company was sure hadn't really hurt his back in a workplace accident.

"Fine. It's boring as hell, but I caught him on a ladder painting his house today."

I shook my head. The idiocy of some people never ceased to amaze me.

Fia scooped up some pasta. "I want to get a little more on him then I can present it to the client."

"Good work, Fia."

Nonna returned with a foil covered plate. "Here you go, *piccina*."

"*Grazie*, Nonna." I kissed her cheek.

"Don't work too hard."

I smiled at her. "Someone needs to pay for pasta for you to cook your masterpieces."

She patted my cheek.

I called out goodbyes and headed for the door.

Fia followed me and lowered her voice. "You okay?"

"No one ever died from being doused in green smoothie…that I know of."

Her lips quirked, then her dark eyes turned serious. "Anything new on Oscar's case?"

Oscar had been her older brother. She'd idolized him, and had been heartbroken when he'd slipped into drug addiction.

But Fia had never, ever given up on her brother. They'd had a rough start to life. Her mother had run off when they'd been kids, and my uncle was never going to win father of the year. He'd dragged the two of them around the country, supporting them on poker game wins, until my dad had stepped in and brought them to Vegas.

Oscar had done fine at first, but later, he'd been so angry. At his Mom, his Dad, at the world.

But he'd finally stuck it out in rehab. He'd finally been getting his life on track.

Until six months ago, when he'd gone missing for a few days. We'd all been terrified he'd fallen off the wagon and gone looking for a hit.

Instead, it had been worse.

He'd come home, sick and weak, with a sutured incision on his stomach.

He'd been missing a kidney.

"I'm following leads, Fia. I promise you, I *am* going to find the people who took Oscar from us."

My cousin bit her lip, her gaze moving out to the busy street where cars were driving past. "I know, Cam. I…miss him so much."

I pressed my cheek to hers. "We'll get him justice. I swear it."

That got me a ghost of a smile. "And Camila Teresa Moreno always keeps her promises."

"That's right." My father had taught me that.

Always keep your word, Camila. In what you say, in what you do. That builds trust and is the essence of integrity.

God, I missed him. He'd been gone for four years, and the grief never went away. The sharpest edges had dulled, but I still managed to cut myself on them sometimes. Like now, when I'd give anything to ask him questions, ask for his advice.

"Love you, Fia."

"Love you too, Cam. Go and shower. And get some sleep."

I lifted my chin, but sleep had become a pretty rare commodity of late. I walked past all the rooms: Mom's, Nonna's, the boys, Fia's, Oscar's old room. Mine was in the back corner of the U with several empty rooms between mine and Oscar's. It gave me a tiny little bit of privacy and that way, I didn't wake anyone if I had to leave early or come in late.

After dumping my laptop on the bed, I set my plate on my small, round table and flicked on the lights.

I felt like a weight lifted.

This was my sanctuary.

Mom had helped me decorate. The gray-wash wood floor was a great foil against the buttery

cream walls. The kitchenette had clean, white cabinets, and my cream two-seater settee was small, but cozy. I'd gotten it secondhand for a steal, and Nonna had helped me re-cover it. I loved to curl up there with a book. A sisal rug added warmth to the space, and my small ottoman doubled as a coffee table. My bed was in the corner, covered in a cream linen cover, topped with a sage-green throw blanket. A cheerful string of bistro lights with larger bulbs hung across the wall behind the bed.

One of Mom's paintings graced the far wall. It was a large canvas painted in sage green, beiges, a touch of salmon pink, and some white. At first, it looked abstract, but closer up, you saw the hints of wildflowers.

I headed for my bathroom. It was all bright white, with cute subway tiles. I didn't have a tub, which was a crying shame, but since I didn't have time for leisurely bubble baths anyway, it didn't matter. Wrinkling my nose, I stripped off my shirt and tossed it in the hamper. After a quick, blindingly hot shower, I was in my comfiest pajamas: hot-pink boxer shorts covered in black paw prints, and a black tank top with Meow written on the front.

I grabbed a fork from the kitchen and a soda from the fridge, and sat down to eat. My phone pinged and I saw a notification that Jennie had paid my fee.

Poor woman. Having to deal with a cheating husband she'd thought she should trust. A man she'd had kids with, made a life with. Now she had to pick all that apart and start again. I chewed and swallowed my pasta. Having met the treasure that was Travis, I doubted he'd make separation and divorce easy.

Seriously, I wondered why people married. I knew better than most how easily it fell apart, and how messy it got. People betrayed you or left, and all you had were broken pieces.

Nope, better to keep things simple. I wasn't cynical enough not to believe in love and

relationships. My parents were an example that two people could love each other and have a great marriage.

But depending solely on yourself guaranteed far fewer hassles, and ensured you got exactly what you wanted.

Besides, men and love were more things I didn't have time for.

I finished my pasta and washed up the plate. Then I grabbed the file I kept on my side table, nabbed my laptop, and climbed onto my bed.

Flicking the file open, the photos caught my attention and my chest tightened.

I lifted one.

A glossy shot of a very handsome African-American man.

Landon Bradshaw.

I pulled a face. Seriously, no one should be allowed to be that attractive. He had a jaw that could cut steel, high cheekbones, short, black hair, and dark-brown skin. The neat beard just added to the deliciousness.

But it wasn't just his looks, which included a tall, muscular body. In real life, the man just exuded an aura. A sense of power, a sense that he was a man who'd seen it all and could deal with it without breaking a sweat.

He was a doctor who ran a free clinic in the rougher, poorer part of North Las Vegas.

When I'd gone through my dead cousin's things, after he'd died from complications from having a kidney removed, I'd found a piece of paper containing one thing.

Landon Bradshaw's name.

I set the photo down and opened up the electronic files on my computer. He wasn't just a doctor. I knew that in my bones. Every single instinct I had as a PI said this man was dangerous.

He was hiding something.

He'd popped up in Las Vegas a few years ago, started the Acheron Clinic, and lived at the Avernus Casino. That was it. There wasn't much about him, he kept out of the limelight.

I'd investigated him, and he had a good history. Grew up in Georgia with his parents and a sister, did well at high school, went to medical school in Atlanta…and I knew it was all fake. His family was dead. I couldn't track down a single friend who remembered him from high school. It was all a carefully constructed cover.

Of course, I couldn't prove it. He'd crossed his *T*s and dotted his *I*s.

Landon Bradshaw was something more than a do-gooder doctor out to help people.

The man had the skills and resources needed to remove a kidney. I'd started digging, and spent every night after work here, uncovering horrifying things about the illegal organ trade.

I tasted bile in my mouth. Someone had targeted Oscar so they could steal his kidney and sell it.

Bradshaw knew something.

I'd snuck into his office in his clinic last week, hoping to find evidence. The place was constantly busy, so it had been easy enough. Unfortunately, he'd walked in before I'd found anything.

Luckily, I was a fast runner.

He was either part of the ring, or the ringleader. Getting rich off selling organs from the vulnerable and invisible to whoever had the need and the money to buy.

If he'd killed my cousin, I was going to make him pay.