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Excerpt from

The Bride's Ride

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The wedding march began.

The urgency welled up inside of Krysta.

“NOW,” she told herself. “Now!”

She knew if she didn't run now, fast, she'd never get another chance. Not without a physical fight, one she'd likely lose. So she had planned her escape; detailed every move of it in her mind so nothing could go wrong.

Krysta picked up the heavy folds of the big white satin gown and tore through the side door of the wedding chapel running to the curb where the limo and Sheila waited to help her getaway.

The get away plan: They'd fly to New York, she and Sheila would split, Sheila would back track to her home here in Vegas and Krysta would cut her hair, do up a disguise and get lost for a few days in the Big Apple and then fly to Europe and get lost there working odd jobs and studying architecture. She'd look up her old French teacher from high school and maybe something could be worked out so she could stay in Paris and study there.

Perfect. There was the limo and the chauffeur stood with the door open waiting for her. It looked like he was just about to close it when she gave a little

shriek and dove into the car hollering as she looked over her shoulder at the building, “Hurry to the airport.”

When Krista didn't hear the door shut she said again a little louder, “Hurry up. Get us to the airport we haven't much time. Please get me out of here. Fast. Please.” Krysta kept pulling the big gown into the car at the same time she was trying to get the veil out of her face so she could see.

Above her head Mandel glanced at his employer in the cavern of the black limo and Aaron nodded his approval with an amused grin reflected in his amber eyes. This was going to be an interesting ride to the airport he thought eyeing the shapely back of what was apparently a runaway bride.

The door shut firmly and within moments Krysta felt the car moving. She glanced out the window at the side door of the wedding chapel and sighed a great sigh of relief when she didn't see anyone from Brian's family or her Aunt Miriam appear.

“Shelia, I don't think they've discovered I'm gone yet. Unzip me please.”

With a slow smile Aaron's experienced hands reached out and unhooked the low back gown admiring the golden tint of tanned skin as his fingers skimmed down the girl's smooth back along with the zipper.

While Krysta was being unzipped she began pulling out the few pins holding the veil in her curls beneath the tiara. Once freed she punched the button lowering the window, rolled the veil into a ball and tossed it out the window watching it open like a delicate flower as it drifted and floated gently in the hot desert air of Las Vegas.

With the zipper all the way down she murmured, “Thanks,” and began pulling her arms out of the little cap sleeves and sliding the heavy beaded satin gown down, taking the crinoline underskirt with it. She bunched the wedding gown up and began stuffing it out the half open window.

The satin confection was quite pretty, okay she admitted to herself, expensively beautiful.

She felt a tinge of regret over getting rid of such a gorgeous piece of fashion, after all, it had cost over three thousand dollars of her aunt's money. Too bad it didn't come equipped with love and loyalty and respect and caring and, and, and sexual passion, she mused as she finished stuffing it's softness through the window and watching it drop like a heavy anchor to the hot pavement. Too bad.

But Krysta didn't want the thing. Her aunt Miriam had insisted on the gown, and the wedding and had thoroughly deceived Krysta all along. And so had Brian. She slipped her feet out of the crinoline, rolled it up and stuffed it out of the window. It floated gracefully like a parachute a few moments before it hit the pavement and slowly collapsed.

"Whew." She whispered almost exhausted from the fright of running away.

Krysta put her head down and turned closing her eyes in thought as she reached for the pins holding the tiara in place.

"Sheila help me get this thing off."

She worked at the back and long fingers worked at the front taking the bobby pins out. When it felt loose enough Krysta twisted towards the window and flung the silver and pearl beaded headpiece out the window, punched the window button up, sighed, closed her eyes and leaned back into the seat sighing with relief that she'd gotten this far.

"Sheila, where's my bag?"

When Sheila didn't answer Krysta turned towards her friend.

"Ahht!" She scooted across the limo in fright.

"Who the hell are you and what have you done with Sheila?"

Then it dawned on her. This man, this very good looking man, was probably hired by her family, or Brian's family, to make sure she didn't run or get very far if she did. So they'd taken Sheila out of the picture and had her cloistered somewhere.

"You bastard! What'd you do with Sheila?" She spat out in venom taking off one of her white satin stiletto heels, jumping across the limo striking out at the man.

She was fast.

He was faster.

He grabbed her small wrists in his big hands.

“Whoa. Physical violence isn’t necessary Sugar. For your information you are in MY limo.” He said drawing a dark brow up above his amber eyes. Catlike eyes she decided. Like liquid gold. At another time she would have considered them interesting and friendly and nice warm eyes. Sexy even, but at the moment she was bent on getting information out of him about Sheila.

“It’s MY limo. What did you do with Sheila?”

“Sheila who?”

“My friend, Sheila Martin. Oh God, Brian’s people didn’t hurt her did they? Are you working for Aunt Miriam or for Brian’s dad Paul Cullan? Where is she? Don’t let them hurt her. Please.”

He watched the fright and uncertainty roll across the vivid blue eyes, almost violet in their intensity. With her face only inches from his, he could swear he’d seen this face somewhere in his past. It couldn’t have been a too distant past because she was only about nineteen or twenty years old. Where? He racked his brain. He never forgot a face. Never forgot a name.

She’d mentioned Brian and Paul Cullan in the same sentence. That could only mean she was suppose to be marrying Paul’s son Brian. Brian Cullan. The know-nothing, pompous little daddy’s ass. Sure, Aaron knew the young Cullan. Being in this line of work he knew a lot of shady characters from small time hustlers to big time mafia. The Cullan’s fitted somewhere in the middle of that, using just enough muscle to meet their demands but not so much as to dirty their hands with the law.

He assessed the situation with the girl quickly. It appeared she was to be the sacrificial lamb for her family to tie it with the Cullans. But why? He asked himself giving the girl credit for high-tailing it out of that set of nuptials. Smart move. And, she must have some spunk. But, how the hell did she allow herself to get into this situation to begin with?

Aaron peered into her face again, something on the fringes in the back of his mind told him he knew her, but from where? When?

Dear God, he thought, she's beautiful. What a looker with that pure creamy-gold complexion, the slender neck and her dark golden brown hair piled atop her petite head. One hell of a great body, curvy and soft and golden. And she smelled like baby powder. A nostalgic smell that reminded him of his grandmother and little babies, both of which he'd never hesitate giving his protection too. Just like this little lady was going to get his as soon as he could figure out *WHO* the hell she was and what the hell the Cullans wanted with her.

She glanced out the rear window behind Aaron.

"Oh my God, you've tipped them off! They're after me already."

The horror and fear in her eyes wasn't lost on him. He felt her body shutter from fright.

In a steady low voice he said, "Listen Sugar, this is absolutely MY limo. You must have gotten into the wrong limo at Bellacino's. I don't work for your Aunt or the Cullan's, or anyone else for that matter."

She looked down at him, searched his face and registered what he'd said. He felt some of the fight go out of her as. As soon as he let her wrists go she sank into the seat across him. He watched with interest as the emotions ran across her gorgeous face, figuring any moment she would break down crying and be in hysterics. That might not be all bad, comforting that pretty package would feel damn good he thought and those emotions would naturally lead into something a bit more sexually intimate. He knew women. Knew many women. Knew his sexual powers with them.

Instead she sat calmly studying him.

Krysta was thinking if this was his limo then he definitely wasn't working for the Cullans or her Aunt Miriam, so there might be a possibility that this stranger could help her get to the airport.

The big black hummer came closer to the limo and she realized it was only a matter of moments before the limo would be forced over and she'd be taken back to the wedding chapel and forced to marry Brian.

“Can your driver go faster? Can he loose that hummer? I need to get to the airport. Quickly.”

She watched the amused grin spread across the man's handsome face as he flicked one more gold appraising look over her near naked body then punched a button and spoke.

“Mandel, lose the hummer riding our ass. Take the back service entrance into the airport, they'll never get through the security.”

The limo lurched forward making a hairpin turn to the side, spilling Krysta out of the seat against Aaron's legs, falling in an undignified position on her knees between the man's legs. He didn't even try to catch her. Hell it felt rather good having her almost nude body falling up against him and then to see her land in that position between his legs almost undid him sexually. He was immediately hard with the thought of her soft curves moving in sexual rhythm beneath him as he fucked her.

He cocked a brow and grinned down at her discomfort and it registered he was damn uncomfortable too with the sudden hardon.

“Here.” He reached down and gently plucked her up off the floor and sat her firmly in the seat beside him.

She watched buildings and cars fly by and turned to see the hummer being lost in traffic. The limo sped around a corner, down an alley, up a parking ramp, down a one way the wrong way, across a connector bridge and they exited out the opposite end of a huge parking garage onto a side street. She had grabbed a fist-full of the man's dark business suit and was hanging on white knuckled and wide eyed at the speed and maneuvering of the long limo.

Aaron frowned with the thought that his jacket would probably have permanent creases, but what the hell? He had lots of business suits. Whatever had happened between the Cullan's and this girl had scared the hell out of her, couple

that with his limo driver's racetrack handling of this big limo, Aaron could understand why the girl was clutching at anything within her reach.

One last glance out the back window and she sighed relief. She looked up at her benefactor and down at her white knuckled fingers grasping the sleeve of his big arm. She hurriedly let go and scooted across the limo to the other seat so she could get a better view of him. Besides, sitting that close and touching him had been nearly as upsetting as the wild limo ride. She couldn't understand the sudden sexual awareness of him. The sudden attraction.

"Thank you. And your driver."

He smiled, nodded, punched the button again. "Mandel, the bride says thank you."

"I seen the wedding dress go flying out the window. What's she got on?"

"Hmmm. She's still in white. Just smaller pieces."

The driver chuckled through the intercom.

Krysta didn't bother acknowledging the remarks she was too busy studying him. Expensive was her first impression. He was dressed in a dark blue business suit. Light blue shirt. Cuff links at the wrists sparkled. Few men wore cuff links anymore, so she figured he had a penchant for tradition. He would, she surmised, as there was an air of class about him. Unhurried. Dignified. His red tie was held with a diamond stud tack. His long legs ended with the finest Italian leather footwear available. The man reeked of money and class and cool sophistication. Culture and breeding was written all over him. Yet he didn't have the bored snob look about him.

But at the moment none of these things really mattered to her, except he was her possible means of escape from the dilemma she found herself in. Her benefactor. A white knight. No, blue knight.

He was studying her, intently, still trying to place who the hell she was and where he'd ever met her and with whom she was connected. Oh the Cullan's, that was a given at this juncture, but he felt a past connection to her that didn't touch on the Cullan's.

“Thank you very much.” She whispered breathy from her heightened excitement and the awareness of his maleness.

She smiled at him from across the limo.

The dimples! That’s all it took. He almost purred with the feeling of fitting a major puzzle piece together. He was quite sure he knew exactly who she was now. He hadn’t seen her since her parent’s funerals six years ago. But that smile and those dimples in the center of her cheeks were imprinted upon his mind. He could see her, in his mind’s eye, standing beside the coffin of first her father and then her mother taking a rose out of the spray of flowers covering the top of each of the caskets.

She’d only been, what? Fourteen? Fifteen? God she was anything but fourteen now. She was a beautiful young lady. And she was about to be a very very rich lady and own a powerful gaming company if he was figuring the years correctly.

Michael Monroe’s Gaming Enterprises wasn’t the largest in the world, but it was still the ultimate luxury in custom gaming items and events. The company raked in millions every year.

“My name’s Krista Monroe. And you are?”

Well that confirmed it, he told himself.

She had smiled again, showing those adorable dimples and he was harder and hotter than a rock stuck in the middle of Death Valley on a July afternoon.

He raised a brow and grinned at her trying to remember when the last time a lady had gotten him this sexually aroused this fast.

“Aaron Anderson.”

He pulled his brows together waiting for her recognition. Her family’s company and his family had conducted business together for three generations. He was the third generation. So was she.

He waited for her recognition. Nothing. He didn’t know if that was a good sign of things to come or if it would bode ill. He decided the best way to handle this situation was to draw information out of her a little at a time.

God she was a lovely work of art. Fresh and innocent without a clue what sexual power she could have over a man like him. He eyed the pert round breasts pulled high in the white lacy push up bra, her slender ribcage and the fancy white satin garter belt with the garters running down her slender legs fastening onto the tops of sheer white nylons. The little blue satin leg garter on her upper thigh identified her as a bride with something blue.

Dear God, she had nice shapely legs. Nice feet too, tucked into white satin shoes with high stiletto heels. Weapons, he reminded himself with a knowing grin and thoughtful frown. At least she wasn't a simpleton. Her defenses had come up quick and deadly. She obviously had some brains if she were running from the Cullans and ready to fight for that freedom.

Taking his gaze slowly back up her luscious body he noted just a wisp of white satin covering her twatch with something embroidered on it. He'd read it later, he thought, when he took it off her, for he had no doubt he was going to undress what was left on this little lady and sink himself deliciously deep into her soft warm body. He sat back, enjoyed the heat surging through him, grinning wickedly.