

## Chapter One

Jill sighed as she watched the tan Jaguar pull up her driveway and park behind the moving van.

*Crap.*

She rolled her head backward, to the left, then the right, slowly trying to ease the tension from her body. It didn't work.

*Are you kidding me?*

Jill didn't bother to approach the car. If Jake insisted on coming today after Jill had told him not to, he could damn well get out of the car and come to her. Another sigh escaped Jill's lips as Jake opened the car door and did just that.

"What are you doing here, Jake? I told you not to come," Jill said. She continued to watch the movers as they carried out the larger pieces of furniture. Most of the furniture would go into storage since her grandparents' home, which she would be living in temporarily, was already furnished. Only her photography equipment, her clothes and a few personal items were going to Westbrook with her.

"I thought I should be here. Just in case you need me," Jake answered in his smug little way.

It irked the hell out of Jill that she still had feelings for her ex. That even though Jake treated her like a two-year-old, and even though he'd left her for his mistress after seven years of marriage, and even though he was an obnoxious jerk who just couldn't leave her alone, a part of her still wanted to rewind the clock and go back to the way things were before Jake told her he wanted a divorce.

Jill didn't answer Jake. It was a waste of breath. Clearly, if he had listened to her, he wouldn't be here right now.

"Miss, you said there were some things upstairs that you're setting aside for Goodwill? Do you want to show us what to leave for them?" asked one of the movers.

"What? She's not giving anything away," said Jake. He stepped between Jill and the mover.

Jill gritted her teeth, her breath bursting out as she stepped around Jake.

"Yes, Jake. I am. I'm giving some things to Goodwill." Jill turned to address the moving man who now looked uneasily back and forth between Jill and Jake.

"All of the furniture in the master bedroom is going to charity. Can you move it downstairs, please? They're going to come take it after we finish up here," Jill said.

"What? Jill, why are you giving the furniture away? It's perfectly good. I gave you all the furniture in the house so you wouldn't need to get anything. I'm trying to take care of you and you're giving furniture away?" Jake loved to sound like he'd given her all kinds of favors in the divorce settlement. A big man, taking care of poor little Jill.

Jill closed her eyes and began to count. *One...two...three... Oh to hell with it.*

"Yes, Jake. I'm giving away the damn furniture," Jill said, rounding on Jake as the movers retreated back into the house. "Do you honestly think I want the bedroom furniture? That I would sleep in the bed? The bed we shared." Jill swallowed hard as she tried to finish the sentence that stuck in her throat. "The

bed that you slept with *her* in when you cheated on me?”

Jake didn't look the least bit chagrined. “It's perfectly good furniture, Jill.”

“You're unbelievable, Jake.” For what felt like the tenth time since Jake arrived only a few short minutes before, Jill closed her eyes, took a deep breath and tried to center herself. Tried to let the feelings wash off her. Tried to release the tension.

“I'd like you to leave, Jake. I asked you not to come here and I'd like you to leave,” Jill said, her eyes still closed.

“I just want to help you, Jill,” Jake said. He was indignant, as if Jill were being insensitive to *his* needs.

Jill opened her eyes and leveled a shuttered stare at Jake. “I need you to leave. I need a clean break, Jake. I need you to leave me alone and let me move on. You've clearly moved on with...Missy.” The name felt like acid coming out of Jill's mouth. “Let me move on.”

Jill wrapped her arms around her body, hugging herself tight and turned back to watch the movers bring the last few boxes out of the house she'd shared with Jake. When the sale of the house had gone through yesterday, she had finally been rid of the last piece of communal property. She now needed to be rid of him, rid of the memories and the heartache. Distance herself from her failed marriage.

It was several more minutes before Jill felt Jake move away. She really didn't understand what he wanted. Why come around if he didn't want to be married to her anymore? Was it guilt? Control? Was he trying to keep her waiting in the wings in case he changed his mind? Jill didn't understand Jake's motives and she didn't care at this point. In the beginning, his continual presence had given Jill hope. Now, she didn't want hope. She wanted this over. She wanted it over and done with.

A moment later, Jill heard Jake's car start, listened to it as it pulled down the driveway. She began her neck rolls again. Slowly rolling back, left, right.

*Breathe, Jill.* Back, left, right.

*Nope, didn't help a damn bit.*

## Chapter Two

Andrew Weston walked into the coffee shop in the lobby of the offices of Sutton Capital where he had been Chief Financial Officer for the past five years. He didn't look like your average corporate officer, dressed as he was in jeans and a polo shirt.

He grabbed a paper cup and lid from the stack on the counter and smiled at the two women next to him as he poured much-needed caffeine into his cup.

"Morning, Margie, Donna." Margie and Donna worked in the mailroom at Sutton. They were always together, like two halves of a whole. And they hit on Andrew any chance they got.

"Andrew, when are you gonna stop leading us on and just choose one of us? It's not fair to keep us waiting for a decision," Margie said with a cheeky smile.

"Yeah, just pick one, Andrew. We've been fighting over you long enough. Put us out of our misery," Donna said.

Andrew laughed. The two of them knew as well as any woman that Andrew never dated anyone in the office. Ever. But they teased him just the same. "Sorry, ladies. How can I possibly choose between two such gorgeous women? And, if I did choose, one of you would be heartbroken and I'd feel guilty. It might keep me up at night and then I'd lose my beauty sleep. Can't do it, ladies." Andrew laughed as he walked to the counter.

He smiled at the balding man behind the cash register. "Hi, Pete. Put the ladies' coffee on my bill. And, I'll take a bagel, too, please," Andrew said. He put cash on the counter, grabbed his bagel and coffee and took off for the elevators.

When he stepped off on the twenty-sixth floor of the building, it took a split second to realize something wasn't right. His assistant, Debbie, rushed down the hall toward him with an anxious look on her face that put him instantly on high alert.

"Andrew," Debbie called out to him from a good ten feet away. "Lydia just called. Your grandmother fell on some ice on her front walk and they're taking her over to Yale-New Haven Hospital in an ambulance. They think she's broken her hip."

Lydia was the housekeeper and cook who had lived with his grandmother since Andrew could remember. She was as much a part of his family as his grandmother herself. Lydia was in her sixties now and his grandmother was rounding eighty this year.

Andrew turned back toward the elevator without waiting for Debbie to tell him what he already knew. She didn't need direction. Debbie anticipated Andrew's needs before he figured them out himself. Andrew said she was responsible for at least seventy percent of his success. He knew Debbie would have already cancelled his appointments for the day. She also would have told Lydia that Andrew would be there as fast as he could.

Andrew raised his hand to his ear. "I'll call you," he said to Debbie as the elevator doors shut. Andrew stared at the numbers as the elevator counted down to the garage. Andrew ran back to his car

with no other thought in his mind than he needed to get to his grandmother, Nora.

As soon as his car cleared the garage, he spoke.

“Dial Debbie.”

The car’s Bluetooth system answered in its stilted computer generated voice, “Dialing Debbie.”

“I’m here,” said Debbie, picking up on the first ring.

“Let Jack know I’ll be taking two weeks off,” Andrew began.

“Already done,” Debbie said. “I’ve got Paul and Katelyn taking over most of your meetings. I cancelled everything they couldn’t cover.”

Andrew’s breath came out with a large whoosh as relief washed over him. He had the support he needed to care for his grandmother. Nora Weston was not your typical grandmother. She was spunky and eccentric and didn’t take crap from anyone, but she was also warm and caring and the most loving person in Andrew’s life. She had always been there for him and Andrew would now be there for her.

“Can you look into nursing care and rehab specialists that will come to the house? As soon as I know the extent of her injuries, I’ll let you know the exact care she’ll need, but for now, let’s just see where we can get the best care. It needs to be in-home though. Nora wouldn’t handle going to a rehab center or nursing home,” Andrew said.

“Got it. I think Jill Shaver’s mom needed some nursing care recently. I’ll see who she used,” Debbie said.

“There’s a carriage house on Nora’s property. I’ll move in there temporarily. Can you arrange to have some things from my condo packed and sent over? The carriage house is furnished so I just need clothes, toiletries, that kind of thing. My bike. Have them bring my bike over.” Andrew liked to ride on the days he didn’t go to the gym or play basketball with Chad and Jack, his two closest friends.

“Done.”

Andrew paused.

“Still there, Boss?” Debbie asked when the pause grew.

“I should have taken better care of her, Debbie.” Andrew’s voice was thick and heavy with regret. “I should have realized Nora and Lydia were both getting older. Taking care of that house alone is too much for them. I should have had a groundskeeper to be sure the walkway was shoveled and de-iced. I should have—”

“Nonsense,” Debbie said, her tone sharp enough to cut off Andrew’s pity party. “None of us ever knows when these things will happen. Nora hides any needs she has quite well and she wouldn’t have let you dote on her. You had the sidewalks shoveled and driveway plowed by a service. Nora wouldn’t have accepted more than that. She would have scoffed at a full time groundskeeper. We’ll just set things up differently now that we know she needs more help. That’s all we can do.”

“Okay,” Andrew said, but he still felt the guilt.

Andrew’s parents didn’t believe in hugs and kisses or giving encouragement. Growing up, no one other

than Nora had told Andrew she was proud of him. No one other than Nora told Andrew to follow his dreams. Andrew's parents were concerned only for their reputation and accumulating wealth. And when his parents didn't like the way things were going in Andrew's life, they paid people to change things.

The last payoff, almost eight years ago, had resulted in Andrew cutting all ties to his mother and father. But luckily he had Nora. She had always been there for him as Andrew grew up and he thought of her more as a parent than he did his mother or father.

"I'll call you when I know something," Andrew said.

"I'll start arranging things from this end," Debbie said. Andrew knew Debbie likely had half of the items on her list completed as they spoke.

As Andrew navigated the quick ride through downtown New Haven to the hospital he thought of all his grandmother had done for him over the years. When his parents didn't bother to stay in the States for Christmas or summer breaks, Nora sent for him. She brought him home from boarding school to her estate in Westbrook so often Andrew thought of her estate as his home. Nora was the one who stood up to his parents when Andrew wanted to go to sports camp instead of the academic camp his parents had lined up.

Nora went to his graduation from high school, then college, and finally Yale Business School. Andrew's parents did not. Nora backed Andrew when he decided to go to Yale instead of working at his father's marketing firm. And when his mother and father had finally breached all reasonable boundaries, trying to control his life by paying the woman he loved to abort his child and leave Andrew's life for good, Nora cut ties with Andrew's parents at the same time Andrew did.

Andrew's parents wouldn't be at the hospital for Nora today. In fact, they wouldn't even be called and informed Nora was injured.

Andrew pulled into the parking lot at Yale-New Haven Hospital and jogged across the covered walkway that connected the parking lot with the hospital building. He spotted Lydia at the front desk in the Emergency Room filling out paperwork.

"Lydia, where is she?" Strain and worry lined Lydia's face.

"They took Nora upstairs to x-ray, sweetheart, but the doctor is already fairly sure she'll need surgery. If you sign here, I'll finish her paperwork, and you can go on up and be with her."

Andrew signed the paperwork, kissed Lydia on the cheek, then went to find the elevators to take him up to radiology. Lydia joined him twenty minutes later when he moved to the surgical waiting room. They settled in for a long wait while Nora's hip was pinned back together.

By the time Andrew left the hospital four hours later, Debbie had already researched the type of surgery Nora was undergoing and the aftercare that would be needed. She'd arranged for more help at the house to be sure coNora and Lydia wouldn't want for anything. For once in his life, the ridiculous amounts of money sitting in Andrew's bank accounts would be put to good use.

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A week later, Andrew had Nora settled back home with around-the-clock nursing care and a physical

therapist scheduled every second day to help with Nora's rehabilitation. The clean nature of the break in her hip and the fact that Andrew was able to provide in-home care meant that Nora avoided a stay in a rehabilitation center. She'd been happy to come straight home instead.

Andrew hired a full time groundskeeper/maintenance man. And he hired a cleaning service to take over the house cleaning and another service to deliver groceries twice a week. Lydia drew the line at letting him bring in someone else to cook.

"No one's taking over my kitchen," she had said firmly and Andrew decided the fight probably wasn't worth having. Besides, he had a soft spot for Lydia's cooking. Andrew wasn't sure he could give up the meals Lydia stocked in his freezer on a regular basis.

Andrew had a hospital bed set up in a downstairs sitting room so Nora wouldn't have to go up and down the stairs. He had tried to install a lift on the staircase, but Nora wouldn't hear of it. She told him flat out this was a temporary health setback and she wouldn't stand for permanent changes to her home. Especially not something as ugly as a lift. Andrew grudgingly gave in. For the time being.

Andrew had already had to fight to get Nora to accept his money for these things.

"I've got plenty of my own damn money. I can pay for things myself," she'd said.

Andrew knew that stubborn tone in her voice, but he also knew if Nora was the one to hire the extra staff, she'd eventually just let them all go when she thought she no longer needed them. If he hired the staff, he could decide how long they stayed.

Controlling? Yes. But, Andrew wasn't taking any more chances on Nora's safety. Nora had capitulated only when Andrew told her he needed some way to alleviate his guilt. He laid it on thick, telling Nora she needed to let him do these things for her so he could live with himself after what he'd let happen to her.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," she had finally said, literally throwing her hands up in the air. "If you must." And they'd left it at that.

Andrew and Lydia had taken to eating dinner sitting on the couch in Nora's temporary bedroom to keep Nora company. One evening, as Lydia brought in her peach cobbler for dessert, Nora piped up with news that jolted Andrew back into his teen years.

"Jillie Walsh just moved back in next door, Andrew. Do you remember Jill?" Nora knew damn well that Andrew remembered Jill. When Andrew was fifteen, he had the biggest crush of his life on the next door neighbor's granddaughter, Jill.

Andrew hadn't been very good at hiding his crush when Jill was eighteen and he'd only been fifteen. Jill Walsh had come to visit her grandparents many times. But the summer that Andrew was fifteen, Jill spent two months here before she went off to college. Andrew spent most of the summer at his upstairs window watching Jill swim in the Walsh's pool. Jill may have been oblivious to Andrew's attention but Nora had certainly caught on to the reason for his sudden attachment to the upstairs window. Luckily for Jill, her bedroom was on the other side of the house or Andrew would likely have watched a lot more than Jill in her bathing suit by the pool.

“Really? I didn’t think the Walshes lived next door anymore,” Andrew said.

Andrew’s years in the corporate world had at least honed his skill at hiding his feelings so Andrew was able to act a lot more casual about Jill this time around. But Andrew wasn’t feeling as nonchalant on the inside as he was acting on the outside.

The mention of Jill’s name began a slow burn in Andrew’s body. He thought back to her long blond hair and captivating hazel eyes. Andrew hadn’t seen eyes like that on another woman in all these years. And no woman Andrew had been with lived up to his fantasies about Jill. Not even Blair, the woman Andrew had once loved.

Andrew wondered briefly if even Jill herself could live up to his fantasies but he had a disturbing feeling an older, more mature Jill would live up to them and then some.

“They moved to South Carolina to live near their son two years ago but they kept the house. It’s been empty until now, but Jillie was divorced in September and she wanted to relocate. She’s moved into their house while she figures out what she wants to do.”

It didn’t surprise Andrew that Nora already had the whole story behind Jill’s reappearance. He was always amazed at how quickly Nora and Lydia had the scoop on everyone in the neighborhood.

“Wow,” said Andrew, “I didn’t even know she was married. Where has she been all these years?”

“She and her husband lived in Hartford for the past few years. Mrs. Berlinger down the street spoke to her the other day but Jill didn’t tell her much about the divorce. No kids, so it was a clean break,” Nora said.

“Jill’s a photographer. Nature pictures, I think.” Lydia added that tidbit to the story as she cleared the peach cobbler dishes.

“Mrs. Berlinger said Jillie will be staying in her grandparents’ house until she figures out where she wants to buy something of her own,” Nora said. “You should go over and say hello tomorrow. I’m sure she’d be happy to see a friendly face now that she’s back.”

Andrew helped Nora back into her bed and raised the safety rails on the side. Nora scowled and Andrew knew she would make Lydia lower them after he left.

“Maybe I’ll run over and say hello in the morning.” Andrew tried to sound casual even as his body tensed at the thought of seeing Jill again. It was stupid, but he had thought of Jill on occasion over the years and sometimes, when he saw a blond woman in a crowd, he would even crane his neck to see if she was Jill. None of them had been Jill, so the thought that she was once again just next door caused fantasies to race through his mind.

## Chapter Three

It was no surprise that an hour later Andrew found himself standing at the upstairs window in the carriage house. He looked out onto the Walsh's property, thinking about Jill. He didn't actually expect to see her, but when he thought about what he was doing, he kicked himself for acting like such an adolescent jerk. Andrew was just about to turn away when a light spilled out onto the backyard. Jill's back door opened and a large brown dog ran out into the yard, barking and jumping in the snow. Jill followed, wrapped in a blanket. Andrew stepped back a few inches to avoid being seen but he couldn't help watching just a moment longer when Jill looked up at the stars.

Jill was more beautiful than ever. Looking down on her, Andrew could see she was still incredibly sexy. If she was even half as sweet and kind-hearted as he remembered, Andrew couldn't imagine how her husband let her get away. Her ex must be a first class idiot.

There were a few small snowflakes falling and when Jill raised her chin to catch the snowflakes on her tongue, Andrew let out a low groan. Shaking his head at himself, he walked into his bathroom, turned on the shower, stripped down, and doused himself with cold water. He had a feeling it wouldn't work, but he had to try to wash away the sight of snowflakes melting on Jill Walsh's tongue.

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Jill was content to be back in her grandparents' home. Since the morning ten months ago when Jake announced he loved someone else and wanted a divorce, she'd felt lost and anchorless. It was good to be in a place filled with happy memories. Jill didn't have many friends in the area since she had only visited her grandparents during the summers and hadn't been here in years, but she figured she'd get out and meet people. She'd make friends eventually and feel more settled.

Girlfriends. Only girlfriends. Jill didn't need any men in her life at this point. She'd been completely blindsided when Jake said he wasn't happy. She had believed in their love, their marriage, and their commitment to one another. At this point, Jill couldn't imagine letting herself trust that way again. After all, even if she thought she was in love, how could Jill trust in another person's feelings, in the strength of their commitment to one another after the colossal mess of her marriage?

She couldn't. It was just that simple. Jill couldn't trust like that ever again. What she was feeling right now hurt too much to risk going through again.

Jill frowned, knowing it would be sad to live without love in her life, but she just didn't see any way to let herself take that kind of chance. Okay, so maybe she'd have to let up on the girlfriends-only thing. She'd just keep anything that did happen with a guy completely casual. Yeah. A good no-strings-attached fling every once in a while wouldn't hurt. But that would be it.

She opened the back door and stepped out into the backyard. Jill watched Rev, her chocolate Labradoodle race off to chase snowflakes. That dog was always happy, no matter what he was doing, and his happiness managed to bring a smile to Jill's face.

Jill looked up at the night sky. She was probably ready for a good fling to help erase the sting of her



husband's betrayal. It was odd, really, the way she felt after the divorce. Jill was still confident in so many ways. She knew she was smart, and for the most part, still felt attractive. She knew she was a good friend, had a good sense of humor and that she was a talented photographer. She knew and believed all those things.

But even knowing all that, there was still a nagging sense of...inadequacy. A feeling that maybe she should have been able to keep her husband from straying.

Jill's parents had been together for fifty-two years and were still happily married. They'd built a strong and loving marriage that lasted. Why couldn't Jill? Jill wondered what was wrong with her that her marriage didn't last. She even wondered if her inexperience in the bedroom before she married Jake had left her ill equipped to please him and keep him satisfied. Her head told her that was foolish. Jake was the one at fault for his behavior. In her head, she knew that. Her heart just had trouble believing it.

Jill sat down on the rocker on the back porch and watched the snowfall. She found herself thinking about the boy who used to visit his grandmother next door. She wondered where Andrew Weston had ended up. Though Andrew had been three years younger than her the last summer she'd spent here, his attention had been hard to miss.

It had been flattering, but his fifteen years to her eighteen stopped the adulation from going any further. Despite that, even then, Jill knew Andrew would grow up to be more than just good looking someday.

Jill felt a shiver of excitement rush through her as she tried to imagine a grown up Andrew Weston paying that kind of attention to her. What had only been flattering in a cute, kid-next-door kind of way back then might be downright exciting now.

With a shiver that had nothing to do with the cold, Jill called Rev, smiling as she watched her dog race back to her. She'd give anything to be as happy as that big, dumb dog. They walked back in the house together where Jill headed off for a restless night's sleep. Her dreams that night were heated and racy, filled with a grown up version of the boy next door, doing more than watching her as she lay by the swimming pool.

## Chapter Four

Andrew poured his coffee and walked over to the window to see how much snow had stuck to the ground the night before. He scratched his face as he went. He was sleeping in later while on leave from the office and had let the scruff on his chin grow longer.

The snow had just dusted the ground and was already melting away in the mid-morning sun. But, Andrew was treated to another sight that was more welcoming than snow. Jill Walsh was back in her grandparents' backyard. Andrew watched as she stretched up toward a tree limb. She hung what looked like a saltlick in a small metal frame mounted on the tree. Jill's dog ran in circles around her as she walked across the huge backyard toward another tree. Andrew could make out one of the metal frames on that tree as well.

Andrew laughed to himself as he watched her. Most people thought of the deer as pests that ate the flowers and shrubs. Jill was encouraging them to come visit her.

*What the hell? Might as well go say hey to pretty Jillie Walsh.*

Andrew drew a pair of threadbare jeans up over his hips and tossed a well-worn Yale sweatshirt over his t-shirt. He threw his feet into a pair of duck boots and trotted downstairs without bothering to tie the laces of the boots. His grandmother's yard connected with the Walsh's by a fence in the main areas but toward the back, where the yards became more wooded, the fence ended and the two yards were open to one another. Andrew trotted around the back end of the fence and headed toward Jill.

Before he reached her, Andrew was greeted by Jill's dog, who ran up to Andrew as if the two of them were old friends. The dog jumped up with both paws on Andrew's chest to land kisses on Andrew's face.

"Hey, boy," Andrew said. He buried his hands in the curly fur to give the dog a good scratch before heading toward Jill.

Jill was headed back toward the house so Andrew called out to her as he fell into an easy jog. "Jill! Welcome back."

Andrew watched as Jill turned toward him and squinted against the glare of the morning sun. She hesitated before returning his greeting. The dog ran back and forth between Jill and Andrew, bouncing as if he couldn't wait for them to meet up in the middle.

"Andrew? Wow, is that really you?" Jill asked.

"Yeah. I heard you were back in town. Saw you out here and thought I'd say hi before breakfast," Andrew explained as he approached her.

Jill let out a laugh. "Breakfast? It's almost ten thirty. You're just having breakfast?"

Andrew shrugged. "I've been sleeping in lately."

Andrew had no problem getting up at six o'clock on days he went to the office, but easily reverted to sleeping later on weekends and vacations when he felt like it.

Jill tilted her head and studied him. "You're living at your grandmother's?"

"Uh, just for a while," Andrew said vaguely, not sure if Nora would want him to mention her hip. Nora