

You're
Invited
An Eve & Lainey Event

By Jourdyn Kelly

“Holy crap!”

“*Mo!*” Patty hushed her wife with a stern look. The beauty of the home she stood in front of had her not wanting to raise her voice above a whisper.

“What? This place is huge! How the hell much money does this woman have?”

“That is none of our business. Now will you please be quiet before you embarrass me to death?”

“You gotta admit,” Hunter began, her head tilted back to take in the colossal place. She’d been here before, but it still had the same effect on her as it did the first time. And the second time. Hell, if she lived here she would probably always come home with that sense of awe. “We’re all wondering the same thing.”

“We don’t have to say everything we’re thinking out loud, honey.” Ellie chuckled softly when her wife hip-checked her lightly.

“Is it at all possible to act like we’re all equal adults here?” Rebecca asked with mirth.

“We could try,” Cass said with a cheeky grin. “But that doesn’t mean it’ll be true. Does Eve even have an equal?” She realized what she just said. “Uh, I mean besides you, baby.”

“Mmhmm. You’re lucky you’re sexy.”

Cass leaned down to whisper in her fiancée’s ear. “*You can punish me later.*”

Rebecca shook her head. Sometimes she wondered if Cassidy said things just to get punished. Then she remembered that Cassidy often spoke before she thought which rendered her filter useless most of the time. Which, coincidentally, was *very* fun for Mistress.

“Are we going to stand out here while Mo gawks or are we going in?” Blaise pushed past the bevy of women, straight to the door, and knocked. “You’d think none of you have seen a house before.”

“Not all of us are heiresses, dear,” Ellie chimed in receiving an exaggerated eye-roll from her best friend. Despite all this chatter, none of the women asked the one question they all wanted the answer to. Why were they invited?

Eve Sumptor and Lainey Stanton were new additions. New to Los Angeles, to their group, to the “sisterhood.” The day the two of them walked into Ellie’s Diner hand in hand, Ellie couldn’t help thinking *finally*. With the new couple’s permission, she called the others so they could celebrate together. Rebecca had been particularly happy about the turn of events. She had been rooting for the couple much longer than the others had even known them. When it was suggested that they bring Eve and Lainey into the small, yet tight-knit group, Ellie readily agreed. She was even willing to bend the rules for girls’ night, allowing both women to be there together. Eve declined, however, preferring to play poker with the “guys.” Hunter whined every other Sunday about losing to someone who clearly didn’t need the lunch money. Ellie found it adorable.

Speaking of adorable, Bella Sumptor answered the door flanked by two young men who were dressed casually in white board shorts and tank tops. Bella was similarly dressed but chose a bit of color with her frilly blue top.

“Well, hello!” Blaise bent down to Bella’s level. She wished now she had brought Ezra. Though, with Piper and Jessie off on a group vacation, she thought it was wiser to leave the baby with Greyson. She still didn’t know what kind of get-together this was. Or if there was drinking involved. *Better safe than sorry*, she thought with amusement.

“Hi! Momma says to come in!” Bella took Blaise’s hand, nearly toppling the crouching woman, and pulled her inside.

Kevin laughed as he helped Blaise right herself. “Sorry about that. She’s pretty enthusiastic.”

Blaise straightened her shirt and smiled at the teenager. “It’s quite all right. My little one is just as rambunctious, so I’m used to it.”

Kevin nodded and gestured for the others to come in. “Thanks for coming.”

“Thank you for inviting us. How are you doing, kiddo?” Rebecca tweaked Darren’s nose causing the younger boy to blush profusely.

“Uh, good. I’m good. I, uh, I’m supposed to . . .” Darren looked to his older brother for help.

“So, yeah. Our moms have requested that half of you come with me and the other half with Darren,” Kevin announced with authority. “I’m to take you, you, and you,” he pointed at Hunter, Cass, and Mo.

“And, uh, I get you, you, you, and you,” Darren said shyly pointing at Ellie, Rebecca, Blaise, and Patty.

“May I ask what this is all about and where we’re going?” Ellie spoke up.

“Nope.” It was the one word that came out of Darren’s mouth with any kind of confidence. “Ready, Bells?”

“Yeah!” Bella ran towards one side of the house not even waiting for the others.

“Uh . . .” Darren gestured for the others to follow him as he took off after Bella.

The four women who were tasked with following the two youngest looked at each other, looked at their significant others (if they were present), shrugged, and followed.

“Dude, what is going on?” Cass piped up.

“We’re going this way,” Kevin said by way of an answer.

“Not moving.” Cass crossed her arms defiantly. “Your brother and sister took my girl and I want to know why.”

“Same here,” Hunter said.

“What they said,” Mo offered without much zeal. She was still busy taking in the gargantuan place they were in. There was art *everywhere*. And not like the cheap art she was used to. This stuff looked like the real deal. She didn’t know squat about art, but she did spy a piece from Cass on one of the massive walls above a crisp white leather sofa. Shit, the furniture in this place probably cost more than — well, anything Mo had ever owned put together times, like, a thousand. It surprised her a bit that it was mostly white since there were kids in the house. Patty always told her they couldn’t have white furniture because it was too hard to keep clean. Didn’t seem like Eve and Lainey had any problems with that. It was then Mo figured out that Patty meant *Mo* was too messy. She snorted, then cleared her throat when the others looked at her.

Kevin mirrored their stance. They were tall — well, except Mo — and a bit intimidating, but nowhere near as intimidating as Eve. “You know, I live with Eve Sumptor right? So, this,” he waved his hand at them, “is nothing. Now, if you want to know what’s going on, then follow me.”

Hunter raised a brow. “He’s got us there.”

“Yep.” Cass shrugged and did as she was told. Something she was used to with Rebecca, though with much more pleasurable results. “Mo, come on!”

“Did you see they had one of your paintings?” Mo said, walking backward so she could still scope out the place. “You haven’t even given *me* a painting.”

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Lainey looked at her watch. “*Right on time,*” she murmured and took a calming breath. “Come in!”

Ellie was first through the door and for some reason that calmed Lainey even more. Since her and Eve’s move here to LA, she and Ellie had gotten closer. It was nice having someone she could talk to about Eve and all the changes she had been going through. Of course, Blaise, Rebecca, and Patty had also been a huge help, but Lainey found herself seeking out Ellie’s advice more. She wondered if it was because Ellie herself had just recently come out and dealt with everything that entailed. Or if it was just because of the type of person Ellie was. The diner owner was incredibly sweet, off-the-charts intelligent, and had a wealth of advice for someone more than ten-years-younger than Lainey.

“Hi, thank you for coming.” Lainey hugged Ellie, then moved to the others. She bent to kiss Bella and Darren on their cheeks. “Good job. Were there any problems?”

“Nope!” Bella giggled.

“I think they’re confused,” Darren laughed. “Come on, Bells. Let’s go find Lexie.” He let the little girl grab his hand and ran to keep up with her.

“He’s right about that,” Ellie said. “We’re all a bit confused. The invitation just said to show up in beach attire and don’t worry about anything else.”

“Were those hard instructions?” Lainey teased.

“No, but it’s not often someone gets summoned to the Sumptor-Stanton retreat,” Rebecca answered.

“That’s not true,” Lainey laughed. “We had you here for our housewarming party and Bella’s third birthday. Albeit, that was a little awkward with Adam here.”

She shuddered at the thought. It was supposed to have been such a happy occasion. Bella was extremely excited to see her daddy *and* to turn three. Unfortunately, Adam notice the ring Lainey had given Eve and was livid. He stuck around long enough to have a piece of cake but made it miserable for Lainey. He had cornered her at one point, blaming her for every single wrong thing that had happened in his life, yelling at her for “stealing” his wife. Fortunately, Eve walked in and rescued her. Lainey would never admit that it turned her on to see Eve put Adam in his place. At least not out loud.

Blaise snickered. “True. We’ve all been here twice under circumstances that were very forthcoming. This time, however, the occasion is shrouded in secrecy. And you’ve separated these ladies from their *lovers*. Which is fine with me, by the way, since I’m flying solo.”

“Greyson was welcome to come,” Lainey said with a grin.

“Yeah, well, he’s on kid duty since I had no idea whether this was a “get drunk and vent” party or not.”

“I thought we only did that every other Sunday?” Lainey winked at Blaise and the others laughed.

Patty, being the motherly figure she was, calmed everyone down. “Okay, child, enough with all the mystery. What’s going on?”

Lainey smiled warmly at Patty. “Eve and I are getting married today.” She paused for the gasps, then continued. “We wanted it to be small and intimate with the people who encouraged us to be together even when Eve and I thought it was impossible. *That’s* why you’re here.”

“Oh my god!” Ellie exclaimed. She couldn’t resist going in for another enthusiastic hug. “That is the best news I’ve heard since. . .well, since Rebecca and Cass *finally* told me they were engaged!”

“There was a good reason for the delay,” Rebecca muttered good-naturedly, pushing Ellie aside playfully as she got in her hug. There really *had* been a good reason. It hadn’t seemed right to talk about their happiness when Ellie’s accident nearly cost her the use of her legs. Not to mention her life. “However, I am quite pissed that you and Eve are getting married before me and Cassidy.” She gave Lainey a grin and a wink to show she was joking. The reality was, Rebecca was completely happy with her and Cassidy’s long engagement, knowing all too well what it was like to rush into things. Luckily for her, Cassidy was very understanding. As long as they lived together and got to “play” whenever they wanted or needed it, Cassidy was content.

“If you think about it, Eve and I have waited much longer than you and Cass,” Lainey quipped. She leaned in conspiratorially. “*It also took us much longer than one hour of knowing each other to sleep together.*”

“Touché,” Rebecca laughed. “Congratulations, babe.”

“Thank you.”

Lainey accepted hugs and congrats from the other two women, then took a deep breath. “Now, I need your help. Eve and I *do* want something simple and intimate, but I also want to knock her socks off.”

“Just her socks?” Rebecca teased.

“Listen, *Mistress*, you’ve helped enough with the advice in that area.” Lainey blushed just thinking about the advice Rebecca had given. Being a dominatrix, Rebecca’s suggestions leaned towards toys and other. . .equipment. All *very* fun. And all very unhelpful right now.

“You’re welcome,” Rebecca responded smugly, knowing very well what that blush meant.

“Ladies,” Patty clapped her hands. “The poor child called us here to help, so let’s help. Lord have mercy on Eve who only has those three knuckleheads.”

Lainey laughed heartily. “She sacrificed for me. Though, Rebecca? She’d like to see you before the ceremony.”

“Sure! I’ll go after we’ve finished with you. First things first. Where is your lingerie? The sluttier the better.”

“This freakin’ place is like a maze. Do you have, like, an intercom system for when you want someone to pass the salt?”

Hunter cringed, Kevin shook his head, and Cass snorted with laughter. Cass was well aware that her filter sometimes didn’t work. But Mo’s was permanently disconnected. The woman said whatever popped in her head at any given moment. You could either be embarrassed, as Hunter

was, or laugh about it. Cass learned from Rebecca that there were worse things in this world than a tiny bit of embarrassment. So, she chose to laugh at the things in life that wouldn't hurt her.

Kevin knocked lightly on the door and waited for Eve's answer. When he heard her low voice calling for them to enter, he ushered in the others with a "have fun" and left.

Mo let out a low whistle. "I think this *room* is bigger than my entire house."

"Doubtful." Eve came around the corner, a smile plastered on her beautiful face. "This is the smallest room in the house. Thank you for coming." Eve Sumptor wasn't a hugger. Fortunately, for her, neither were the women she had in the room with her. It was one of the reasons she chose to have them help her. That and the fact that she played poker with them every other Sunday. She knew them better, with the exception of Rebecca, and they owed her from the last game. Not that that was a factor. Eve genuinely liked Hunter and Cass. Mo was growing on her.

"When you're invited to Eve Sumptor's house, you don't refuse," Hunter said with a chuckle. "Even if you don't know why you're here."

"I'm here because I had to work every other time I was invited. I wanted to check this place out."

"At least you're honest." Eve gave Mo a wink and smiled lightly at the blush and shyness Mo suddenly had.

"All I want to know is, are we getting food? Cuz I haven't eaten since breakfast." Cass patted her flat tummy to accentuate her dire situation.

“Breakfast was an hour ago, Cass.” Hunter rolled her eyes. “Sorry about that,” she said to Eve. “We’re obviously here, and separated from the others, for a reason. By the looks of your attire, it’s something pretty important.”

Eve looked at her crisp white midi wrap dress, down to her bare feet. She wiggled her tanned toes. Yes, Eve spent enough time outside with her family for her toes to be tanned.

“You’re right.” She brought her attention back to her audience. “Lainey and I are getting married today,” she said bluntly. “We wanted a very small ceremony. You’re it.”

“Because you don’t know anyone else here?” Mo asked dumbly. She was still stunned that *she* was invited to Eve Sumptor and Lainey Stanton’s wedding. Will it be Eve Stanton now? Or Lainey Sumptor?

Eve chuckled. It was slow as molasses, but Mo was definitely growing on her. “I know plenty of people in LA, Mo. Some I even call friends. But there’s no one I’d rather have here to celebrate the beginning of my life with Lainey than the people in this house right now.”

“Well, hot damn!” Cass clapped her hands together. “Rebecca has been shipping you two forever. I bet she’s happy! Uh, I mean, congratulations! I’m happy for you, too.”

“That’s incredible!” Hunter gave her signature crooked grin. “Now Ellie will stop wondering if it’ll ever happen.”

“Me, too,” Eve chuckled. “Thank you.”

Even the awkwardness of her new friends couldn’t put a damper on this day. She didn’t know it before, but it was a day she had been waiting for her whole life. She was about to marry the woman she loved with every fiber of her being. After all the shit she had been through in her

life, Eve Sumptor finally felt as though she could breathe. Lainey had lifted the burden from her shoulders merely by loving her for *who* she was.

“I asked Kevin to bring you three here to me so I could ask you if you would stand up for me. To be my groom’s women, so to speak.”

“We’d be honored,” Hunter said with sincerity. “Getting married to the person that holds your soul is the most incredible thing you will ever experience.”

“Yeah, it doesn’t hurt like childbirth.” Mo laughed at her own joke, not giving one iota of shit that no one else did.

“You all know my situation,” Eve said, ignoring Mo. It wasn’t like the woman was wrong. Eve gave birth to Bella and swore she’d never do it again. She had a feeling she would marry Lainey every day if she could. “I married Adam for all the wrong reasons. But I got Bella out of it, so maybe that was the one right reason.” She shrugged. “Today, I’m marrying Lainey for *all* the right reasons. I wanted you to stand with me was because I know you understand how I feel. I’m also aware of the bet you three had going on whether Lainey and I would leave our husbands and get together.”

“Wh-?”

“How. . .?”

“Huh?”

All three women stammered and stuttered until Eve began to laugh. “I don’t miss much,” she said, then sobered. “You’d be smart to remember that.” She laughed again when the sputtering began anew. She couldn’t help but wonder if *everyone* thought she was a mobster. If they did, she may as well have fun with it.

Ellie stood back, scrutinizing their work. They had put Lainey’s hair in a french braid, letting it fall softly on her bare back. The dress Lainey chose was a beautiful white crocheted lace, backless maxi dress that showed off her brilliant tan. Rebecca chose what Lainey wore underneath, which was nothing but a tiny swatch of silk. She had suggested that Lainey wear absolutely nothing under the dress, but Patty reminded her that a white dress in the sunlight could be see-through. Not that the itsy-bitsy piece of cloth hid much.

As for the makeup, the ladies decided that less was more. Lainey was a natural beauty and they wanted to accentuate that by going with lightly tinted blush and lipstick and letting the sun provide the glow. Ellie loved how Lainey’s hair had lightened up from the sun. The woman might be in her forties, but right now she looked young and in love. Most importantly, she looked unbelievably happy.

“Oh my.” Ellie sniffled slightly. “You look. . .”

“Stunning,” Blaise finished. Now that the work was done, they were all a bit misty-eyed, knowing what a huge step this was.

“Please don’t make me cry!” Lainey begged with a watery laugh. “I want to try to make it through this without becoming a blubbering mess.”

“You chose the wrong people for that, child. We’re all going to be blubbering messes!”

Lainey rubbed Patty’s shoulder. “I definitely chose the right people. Now, let’s get this thing going! Rebecca, will you go to Eve now?”

“Absolutely.”

“Oh, and could you ask Cass to stop by and see me?”

Though Rebecca had a questioning look, she merely nodded and went on her way.

“I want to thank you all again for being here. I don’t want to choose just one of you to stand with me as I marry the woman I love, so I’m asking all of you.”

And with that, the tears began to flow. They were going to have to retouch Lainey’s makeup at this rate.

“Hey, baby.” Cass grinned at Rebecca who looked good enough to eat in short cut-off jeans and one of Cass’s button-up shirts with her black bikini peeking out. “I guess you know why we’re here now, huh?”

“I do.” Rebecca chuckled lightly at her choice of words. “Everything go okay with Eve?”

“Yep! I think she wants to see you, though.”

“That’s why I’m here.” Rebecca raised herself onto her tippy-toes and gave Cassidy a quick kiss. “By the way, Lainey would like to see you.”

Cass’s eyebrows jumped. “Me? Huh. Okay.” She snaked her arms around Rebecca’s waist. “What do you think of a beach wedding?”

“I think this one is going to be beautiful. And if you could promise me that you won’t do anything that would cause sand to get in my very private nooks and crannies, we can put that on our short list.”

Cass gave her a toothy grin. “I can’t promise things like that.”

Rebecca shook her head at her goofy fiancée. There wasn’t a soul on the planet she’d rather be marrying. “I wish Aunt Wills was here. She would love to see Eve finally be able to be happy.”

“Yeah.” Cass kissed Rebecca on the tip of the nose. “No matter what, we won’t get married without her with us. She deserves to see *you* happy.”

“I love you. You know that, right?”

“I do. Ha! Does that mean we’re officially married since we both said it?”

Rebecca chuckled. “I don’t think it works that way, baby. Besides, Aunt Wills isn’t here. Now, get your cute ass over to Lainey. I’m going to go see what Eve needs.”

“Cute ass,” Cass muttered with amusement. “I’ll show you cute ass.”

“You bet you will. I’ll be spanking it later.”

Cass stumbled, nearly smacking right into a wall when she looked back just as Rebecca disappeared behind the door of Eve’s room.

“God, I love that woman!”

“Well, aren’t you a vision,” Rebecca purred playfully.

“Don’t start with me, Mistress.”

Rebecca laughed. "I told you, you're not allowed to call me that unless you're in my room." She gave Eve another once over. "Seriously, though, you look happy, Eve. And *that* looks good on you."

"I am happy. More than I deserve to be."

"That's bullshit. You deserve *all* of this and more. You're done carrying everyone else's burden's, babe. It's *your* time now. Let Lainey have *all* of you."

"She does," Eve promised. "No one has ever looked past this façade of mine. Except her. Though, you're a close second. That's why I wanted to ask you to be my best woman."

Rebecca was poised to argue further if Eve tried denying herself again. Every word died on her lips with the request. "What?"

Eve smiled. It wasn't easy to fluster Mistress. Or the unflappable Rebecca Cuinn. *Point for me.* "Which word didn't you understand? You believed in me and Lainey from the beginning. When I couldn't see a happy ending, you could. And when I doubt myself, you fight for me. You're the perfect person to have standing beside me as I give my heart and soul away."

"And you're a bitch for making me cry." Rebecca sniffled. "I'm so glad you're getting married here in LA, Eve. You're one of my best friends and being embraced by the others will lift you more than you can imagine. I think you've seen the effect it has had on Lainey already. Being surrounded by people who love and believe in you is something I never thought I deserved either. But I do. *We* do. So, I'm honored to be your best woman. To stand with you the way you have for this group and everyone else you care about."

“Now who’s the bitch?” Eve wiped a tear from her cheek. When they hugged, there was no awkwardness. Only a genuine feeling of belonging.

“Uh, Lainey?”

Lainey turned from the window to see Cass standing stiffly at the door. She was shuffling from foot to foot, rubbing her hands together — if they weren’t tugging at her long bangs.

“Cass, come in.”

“You, uh, look. . .wow.”

“That’s what I was going for.” Lainey smiled as she waited for Cass to join her by the window. “It’s a beautiful day, isn’t it?”

“Perfect for a wedding,” Cass offered sincerely. “I’m happy for you, by the way.”

“Thank you, so am I. May I ask you a question?”

“Of course.”

“Why are you nervous around me?”

Cass’s eyebrows shot up. “Um. . .”

“You’re under contract with Eve Sumptor and you’re under Rebecca Cuinn, literally. They’re way more intimidating than I am.”

“Not really. I mean, you kinda expect Eve Sumptor to be a hardass, so there aren’t any surprises there. And with Rebecca, well, um. . .” Cass shrugged. It was hard to be intimidated by

the woman who rocked your world every night. “With you, though, I don’t know. I don’t think it’s intimidation as much as it is admiration.”

It was Lainey’s turn to be surprised. She had felt weak and uninspiring for most of her life. “Admiration,” she repeated, though it came out as more of a question.

“Yeah. You have spent half of your life being with a man, having his kids, and from what I hear he wasn’t the greatest. Please don’t get mad at Rebecca for telling me that.”

“Nothing to get mad at. Jack was a dick. I still don’t understand why that would be admirable.”

“What is admirable, Lainey, is that you had the strength to get out of that and live the life of the real you. Listen, Eve and Rebecca have been through some shit. It was live or die for them. As brave as that was — and believe me, I don’t know if I could have survived what they did — there was no other choice for them. You could have chosen the easy road. Yet, you chose the path that could have created a lot of heartache for you. You chose to live your true self. *That* is admirable. And kinda why I’m a bit of a dork with you and Ellie.”

“No wonder Rebecca loves you.”

Cass grinned and blushed. “It’s definitely mutual. But I gotta admit, I was a little confused when Rebecca told me you wanted to see *me*.”

Lainey sat gingerly on the windowsill. “I hope that one day we can become closer so that when I ask to see you it won’t be confusing.”

Cass joined her on the sill. “I think we’re on the right track since I just embarrassed myself by spilling my guts.”

Lainey leaned closer, her shoulder bumping Cass's. "I'm glad you did. I was beginning to think you didn't like me much."

"Total opposite. So, soon to be Mrs. Sumptor, what can I do for you?"

"Mrs. Sumptor. I like that." Lainey took a moment to let that sink in. She and Eve hadn't talked about either of them changing their names. But Lainey Sumptor sounded much better to her than keeping Jack's name. "What you can do for me, Ms. Giles, is walk me down the aisle."

There was a full ten seconds of complete silence. Lainey began to wonder if she said the words out loud.

"What now?" Cass finally asked causing Lainey to laugh.

"Will you walk me down the aisle? Eve is with Rebecca right now asking her to be her best woman. I've asked the others to stand with me, but I wanted *you* to walk with me as I take this big step into my new life."

"Seriously?" Lainey nodded. "Well, shit! I mean, yes! Oh man, it would be my pleasure!" Cass popped up off the sill and began to pace excitedly. "Should I go ask what Eve's intentions are with you?"

Lainey chuckled. "I think we all know what her intentions are, Cass."

"Oh. Right. Okay! Let's get this party started!"

Lainey loved Cass's enthusiasm. Getting to know her better was going to be a hoot.

“I don’t know much about tradition, but the brides aren’t supposed to see each other until they’re at the altar, right?” Cass was doing her best to make herself bigger in order to hide Lainey from Eve’s eyesight.

Lainey tapped Cass on the back. “Eve should be halfway there by now. I think we’re safe.”

“Yeah, yeah. Maybe. But she’s sneaky.”

Eve tried looking back towards the house, but Rebecca kept blocking her view.

“Keep moving, woman.”

“I just wanted to see if Lainey . . .”

“Lainey is fine. And seeing her before the ceremony is a no-no. Now, go.” Rebecca slapped Eve smartly on the ass.

“Calm down, *Mistress*. Don’t make me tell Lainey you got frisky with me.”

“You wish. I have a whip in the trunk if you don’t start cooperating.”

Eve stopped in her tracks. “Why do you have a whip in your trunk?”

“Because you never know when you’re going to need one.”

Eve nodded and continued to the altar. Once there, she turned towards the house once again to see if she could catch a glimpse of Lainey. Unfortunately, *someone* had drawn the curtains. If she were a mobster, that would be a punishable offense. Since she couldn’t see what she wanted to see, she addressed her guests.

“Thank you all for being here. This is going to be very informal — except for this one asinine tradition it seems. As you see, there are no seats. We wanted you all to be a part of this. That’s why you’ll be up here with us. The “aisle” is courtesy of little Miss Bella. She insisted on having flowers, half of which have blown away with the wind.”

The others laughed when another gust of wind picked up a handful of petals and began scattering them. Bella giggled as she ran after them with Lexie following close behind calling out for Bella not to go too far.

“I have a question,” Hunter piped up. “Who’s going to perform the ceremony?”

“That would be me.” Willamena Woodrow seemed to have appeared out of nowhere.

“Aunt Wills!” Rebecca looked from Eve — who merely grinned at her — to her aunt. Hadn’t she just been wishing Aunt Wills was here? Rebecca was surprised that her aunt kept this a secret from her. She was also surprised to find out she was qualified to officiate a wedding.

“Hello, my sweet girl.” Willamena gave Rebecca a heartfelt hug. “I know you have questions, but I think Eve is ready to get this thing started.” She cast Eve a look.

“Yes, I am. Kevin?”

“I’m on it!” Kevin ran towards the house to get his mom.

Eve took her spot in front of Willamena, once again turning towards the house. She didn’t want to miss a moment of watching Lainey walking towards her.

“Mom?”

Lainey peeked around Cass and smiled at her oldest son. “Hey, sweetie. Are we ready?”

“Yep! Darren and Bella are in their place, I have the rings, and Eve is waiting somewhat patiently.”

Cass cleared her throat. “Um, you know, if you want Kevin to walk you down the aisle, I’d totally understand.”

“No!” Kevin laughed a bit awkwardly. “I have my job. Besides, I think it’s weird to “give” my mom away. I love Eve and I’m glad she and my mom are getting married, but I’d rather watch with my brother and sister.”

Cass shrugged. It wasn’t her place to question the decisions others make.

“Do you have the rings?”

Kevin rolled his eyes jokingly. “Yes, mom. Everything is ready to go!” He gave her a kiss on the cheek. “You look great. I’ll see you up there!”

Lainey took a deep breath. “Ready?”

“The question is, are you?” Cass watched as a beautiful smile blossomed on Lainey’s face. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Absolutely.”

“Seeing you this happy makes me anxious to marry Rebecca.”

Lainey looked up at Cass as she took her arm. “Have you been planning?”

“Nah. Honestly, I don’t care when or where we get married as long as she loves me for the rest of our lives.”

“You’re a good woman, Cass.”

Once again, Cass blushed. “C’mon. Let’s get you to Eve before she sends out her goons.”

“Rebecca told you about the mafia thing, huh?”

Cass chuckled. “Yeah. It’s funny because it could totally be true. . . Aunt Wills?”

Lainey barely registered Cass’s pause and confusion. All she could see at this point was Eve. She looked radiant with the blue of the ocean behind her, the breeze blowing her blonde hair, and the sun glowing around her. Lainey had never felt this kind of love before. She certainly didn’t feel this way about Jack when he stood at the altar and waited for her. On that day, she had wanted to run the other way. Today, she wanted to run *towards* Eve until she felt those arms tightly around her.

“*Beautiful.*” The word was barely a whisper from Eve’s lips. It wasn’t nearly enough to describe how Lainey looked. The white dress flowing around her sun-kissed skin had Eve itching to put her arms around the woman she loved and hold her tight.

Beside her, Rebecca was watching Cassidy. Her reaction to seeing Aunt Wills was on par with her own, but then their eyes met. There was something different about watching the woman you loved walk slowly towards you in a romantic setting. Of course, they had been together that morning. Rebecca knew how Cassidy had been dressed, yet it was as though a filter was being used. The simple black boardshorts paired with a light gray sleeveless hoodie was even sexier than before. Which is saying something since Rebecca nearly ripped the clothes off Cassidy before they even got out of their bedroom. She had to drag her eyes to Lainey in order to not have a repeat of

that situation. *This is Eve and Lainey's day.* That became her mantra to keep her hormones in check.

“*Finally,*” Eve whispered in Lainey’s ear. “*You look incredible. I can’t wait to be married to you.*”

“*I love you.*” God, Lainey hoped her brain came up with something more profound than that when she said her vows. However, judging by the look on Eve’s face, no other words were needed.

“Friends,” Willamena began, pride and emotion tinging her voice. “Eve and Lainey have invited us here today to witness their union as a married couple. I was honored to be asked to officiate the wedding. It never ceases to amaze me what you can get on the internet. Too bad it wasn’t that easy to get my PhD.” She paused for the spattering of laughter. “I have gotten to know Eve and Lainey very well over the past couple of years. When I received the call that they were getting married, I was delighted, but unsurprised. They’ve both been through traditional weddings which is why they’ve chosen something different today. Vows will be said, and rings will be exchanged, but they have also requested that this day be about more than just them. Eve?”

Eve nodded. “Love thrives when it is shared with those who believe in you. I have spent most of my life being closed off to everyone around me. I thought that was what I needed to do to survive. But that’s all I was doing. Surviving. I wasn’t living. In fact, I didn’t start living until the day I met Lainey.” She took Lainey’s hands in hers. “You taught me how to open my heart. It hurt like hell, but the outcome is beyond anything I could have ever dreamed of. When I came to you with my idea for today, you didn’t hesitate to say yes because *that’s* the kind of person you are.

You are a giving, loving, incredible human being who is more than willing to share your happiness with others.”

When Eve paused, Lainey wiped tears from her eyes and took her cue. Neither of them discussed what they wanted to say today but were so attuned with one another that continuing Eve’s thought was second nature for her.

“You often credit me with bringing heart and soul to your life, but it was you who brought breath to my life. I never knew how strong I could be until you showed me. I never knew the capacity of love I had in my heart until I found someone who loved me enough to allow me to open myself up. And it’s because of you, Eve, that I’m now surrounded by people who support and care about me. It’s for that reason that when you came to me with your idea of how you wanted this day to be, I was more than happy to say yes.” She reluctantly let go of Eve’s hands and reached for both Rebecca and Cass.

“Rebecca and Cass. At a time when you should have been basking in the joy of your engagement, you unselfishly postponed your celebration when those around you were hurting. When there were those of us who doubted we could ever find happiness, you held onto hope and encouraged us to keep fighting. You helped guide Hunter and Ellie, are loyal to Patty and Mo, and advocated for me and Eve. This day is as much yours as it is ours. That’s why we asked Willamena to be here. Not only so she could officiate for us, but for you two as well.”

Rebecca’s jaw dropped. “What?” She looked up at Cass who was rendered speechless.

“For months we’ve been asking you about your wedding,” Eve said. “And for months you would begin to plan only to be distracted by other people’s issues.”

“Or a demanding gallery owner,” Lainey teased.

“Or that,” Eve agreed with delight. “What you’ve always said, however, is you wanted it to be intimate.” She spread her arms to indicate their surroundings. “You wanted your closest friends there.” She gestured to their friends who were just as shocked and emotional as Rebecca and Cass. “And you wanted your aunt there.” Eve pointed towards Willamena who gave them a watery smile. “So, if you agree, Lainey and I would love to share this moment with the two of you.”

“Yes!” Cass blurted out. “Uh, I mean, if Rebecca is okay with it, too.”

Rebecca brought her misty eyes up to Cassidy’s. “I want nothing more than to marry you, Cassidy. We have everything we need right here.” She looked at Eve and Lainey. “Thank you so much for being so generous. We would love to share this moment with you.”

The group clapped and whooped enthusiastically. When Eve and Lainey said they didn’t want a traditional wedding, no one thought they meant this. However, it went along with how considerate they were.

“Rebecca?” Cass spoke up before anyone else could move on. “I tell you every day how I feel. I show you when I think you need more than just words. We may have met in unconventional ways, but that never diminished the strength of my love for you. I asked you once to let me be the risk you take. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your life. Thank you for loving me.”

“Oh, Cassidy. I’m the one who should be thanking you. You showed me that the only thing that matters in a relationship is true love. I fought what I felt for you because I didn’t feel whole. I fought because of how much older I am than you. In the end, I fought *for* us because I can’t imagine not having you in my life. I love you with everything I am and I am so proud that I will be your wife.”

“Well.” Willamena cleared her throat and wiped away tears. “I believe the four of you have possibly given the most beautiful vows I’ve ever heard. Is there more, or would you like to continue?”

“Continue,” the four said together.

Willamena smiled. She asked for the “I dos” and the exchange of rings. There was a moment of panic for Cass when she realized she and Rebecca didn’t have rings. Willamena surprised them with the bands that Rebecca’s parents used at their wedding. Rebecca’s father’s ring was a little too large for Cass’s finger, but that could be easily remedied. The sentimentality of the rings meant the world to them.

“The only thing left to say is, by the power vested in me, and as witnessed by friends and family, I know pronounce you wife and wife. And wife and wife,” Willamena laughed. “Kiss!”

Rebecca and Cass had no problem showing their affection towards each other. PDA, however, was new to Eve and Lainey. Though, they buried their hesitancies and kissed deeply. Their guests cheered loudly. None as loud as little Bella. She whooped and giggled and launched herself into *both* her mothers’ arms. Kevin and Darren did little happy dances and began hugging everyone in sight.

“Cake!” Bella yelled. With that loud announcement — or demand — she took off towards the house.

“I guess it’s time for cake,” Eve laughed.

“And mimosas!” Lainey announced. “It’s time to celebrate!”

“Hear, hear!” the others agreed jovially.

“Eve, Lainey?”

“Thank you for agreeing to do this,” Lainey said before Rebecca could continue. “We wanted to do something to show our appreciation for your continued support. Plus, you two needed a little kick in the ass.”

Eve laughed and hugged Lainey to her. “God, I love you, woman.”

“She’s not wrong,” Cass laughed, then sobered when she saw Rebecca’s stern face.

Rebecca’s fierceness lasted all of two seconds before the laughter began. “Leave it to you, Lainey, to be the one to give me a kick in the ass. Now that that’s settled, let’s go drink!”

. . . to new beginnings