

Chapter 1

*Shelly*

I was completely speechless and couldn't think of anything to say in response to the news I had just received. I nearly dropped the phone, catching it just in time before it slipped completely from my grasp. My chest filled with air and I could almost hear my heart breaking once again. It hurt so badly. The physical pain was unbearable. Wind circulated violently throughout my chest, traveling from my lungs, escaping through my flared nostrils in a rush. I held my hand to my breast, wanting desperately to calm the turmoil whirling through my upper body. Brian Turner, *my* Brian Turner was getting married to another woman.

"Shelly, are you there? Answer me, will you!"

*You stupid bitch! How could this happen? I thought you were supposed to keep me posted on every move he made. How could you let things go this far without informing me?* I screamed at the wretched caller. Still verbally speechless, I realized that what I said was only in my head. Audible words hadn't found their way past my trembling lips.

"HELLO! Earth to Shelly! Did you hear me? Answer me. Good Lord. Knock the phone one time if you heard me, twice if you didn't. Can you answer me, please?" said the bearer of the horrible news.

"When is the shower?" I asked slowly. Every syllable robbed me of much needed energy. That simple sentence left me drained.

"Whew! It's about time. I thought I lost you. It's this Saturday," the caller replied. "Now what are you going to do?"

That would be none of her business, now wouldn't it. Damn if I was going to share my game plan with her. She wasn't even a good informant. Had she been working with the police, they probably would have locked her up for being an unreliable source of information as well as an idiot. Unfortunately I needed to maintain a delicate balance with this woman. After all, if it weren't for her, I wouldn't have been able to keep up with all of Brian Turner's whereabouts and actions this past year and a half. I wanted to tell her to kiss my broken-hearted ass, but that wouldn't help me get the rest of the information I needed.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized I needed her even more. She was my only connection to Brian, my son's father. At least the only one that would supply me with the information I consistently sought.

"I need time to think," I finally said. This time the words weren't so hard to push out. My breathing had begun to return to a normal pace and my chest stopped heaving like an asthmatic about to have a deadly attack. "Where is this bridal shower?"

"I'm still working on that bit of info. Actually I'm trying to get invited."

"Call me back when you get more information. How is it that he's getting married and I...you knew nothing about it?"

"I haven't spoken to him personally in a long time. I finally got his new number and called him today. That's when he told me about the wedding and mentioned that her shower was coming up this weekend."

Again I was speechless. My eye sockets hurt from bulging.

"I have to do something. This has gone much too far." I paused because of the thoughts racing through my mind. My voice began to crack and I didn't want to fall apart on the telephone. I had to be careful about how much I revealed to this woman. I didn't completely trust her. "I'll call you back later."

I often wondered what she'd gotten out of telling me all of Brian and Lexie Mitchell's business, but refused to ask. I didn't want her to stop feeding me the goods. I intended to find out, but I'd have to focus on her another time.

I took my time hanging up the phone—so much time that the annoying repetitious buzz from the phone line rudely upset the stillness in my bedroom. I quickly jabbed the END button silencing the obnoxious noise.

"Think, think, think! Ouch!" My head ached from the pain of me banging the handset against my temple as I chanted, "think, think, think."

The tears clouding my vision had nothing to do with that pain, but everything to do with the fact that I was facing the possibility of losing the love of my life forever. In a matter of days, Lexie, along with her family and friends would gather to celebrate the bride-to-be and the upcoming nuptials. Lexie and Brian would be married in a few short weeks.

My breath had become short once again and tears flowed like torrential rains. Unstable knees buckled below me, threatening to send me crashing to the floor. I held my hand out to feel for the bedroom wall, in need of the guidance they provided to make my way to my adjoining master bath. Blinding, stinging tears made it hard for me to see clearly. Screaming didn't help purge the pain inside so I tried banging my fists on the marble vanity top. When my fists hurt too badly

to continue, I looked for something to squeeze or throw. In the midst of my ranting I caught a glimpse of my pitiful state in the medicine cabinet mirror. My once, smooth, fair complexion was colored with red blotches. Smearred mascara created sadistic puddles under my swollen eyes. Black streaks crawled down my face and leapt from my chin to my off-the-shoulder shirt, staining the pure white cotton fabric with dark, moist spots. My hand reached toward my dejected reflection. I couldn't take my eyes off of what starred back at me in that awful mirror.

CRACK! The mirror separated my miserable image into smaller more disoriented pieces. The culprit, a glass soap dispenser remained in my hand, leaking thick vanilla-scented antibacterial liquid all over the stainless steel vessel sink. I released my hold and the dispenser crashed to the floor in slow motion, mixing among shards of broken mirror. Soap oozed into a dense puddle on the floor along with more broken glass.

I was disfigured inside and out

"See what you've done, Brian?" Why did you do this to me?"

BJ began to whine.

"Coming sweetie," I yelled as I jogged through my bedroom, down the hall towards my son's room. Brice Jordan Turner Cabrini, my one and a half year old son, stood inside the crib on his chubby little toes as he held the railing of his custom made sleeping quarters. His lower lip turned under as he cried. His large brown eyes stretched wide when he saw me coming. Brice cried harder. I realized I still looked a mess. I picked BJ up, jogged back to my room, and placed him in the center of the king-sized bed I shared with my gullible husband, Brandon Cabrini. By the time I retrieved my facial cleanser from the broken medicine cabinet, little BJ was nearing the bathroom door.

"No, honey! You can't come in here. It's too dangerous."

I closed the bathroom door and refreshed my face in the massive teak-framed mirror leaning against my bedroom wall. BJ had settled down and watched me in awe. My heart softened when I looked into his angelic face. His favorable features were compliments of his dad's DNA. BJ, short for Brice Jordan, and secretly stood for Brian Junior, was beautiful a replica of the man who fathered him.

Regardless of what anyone said or did, I had a piece of Brian that would stay with me forever. But I was tired of just having a piece. All of him is what I desired more and more each day. There was no way I could let him marry that damn, Lexie. She couldn't love him the way I did. The wedding had to be stopped. My own marriage was a joke that was far from funny. I should have never let Daddy talk me into marrying Brandon. Daddy possessed a ridiculous need to preserve his so called polished image. What did it matter that I was single and pregnant. Lots of women, even rich and successful women, became single parents. Daddy was just too worried about impressing his peers, neighbors, and pretentious friends.

I glanced at my precious baby boy as he watched me with his beautiful brown eyes. BJ was the key. It was time for me to do what I should have done nearly two years ago, fight for what's mine. Leaving just after I had BJ was premature. Brian desperately wanted to be a part of his son's life. He had even gone as far as having me tracked down to make sure BJ was his. He wouldn't have done that if he didn't want me. I warned him, all or nothing—me and the baby or neither of us. Brian came after me, so he must have wanted it all too. Besides, he was my man first. In fact, he'll always be mine. Lexie will just have to move out of the way.

"Come on, BJ. Let's get you cleaned up, sweetie. It's time to pay your real daddy a long overdue visit."