

Chapter 1 - You're Gonna Do This Only Once

“Cassie Lynn, I won’t take no for an answer. We need to plan your engagement announcement, and we want to hear all about your trip. We’ll see you and Kade on Saturday at six.”

Cissy hung up before her daughter could find any more objections. She simply didn’t understand why Cassie was dragging her feet on all this. You’d think she’d be excited. She’d just returned from a trip to Scotland engaged to her boyfriend, who was also her boss, but she acted as if life was just going to continue in the same way—no engagement parties, no newspaper announcement, nothing out of the ordinary. Well, as usual, *she*, Cissy Davidson, socialite *par excellence*, would have to be the one to make sure things were done correctly.

It wasn’t like it was just any old engagement. Her daughter’s fiancé, Hamish Kade MacPherson, had Scottish titles on both sides of his family—a marquess and his marchioness, two earls and their countess wives, a viscount, and several more she couldn’t remember off the top of her head. It certainly wasn’t your everyday engagement, at least not in Dallas, and she intended for every one of her friends and acquaintances to know exactly what kind of prize her daughter had caught for herself! She probably wouldn’t mention that none of the titles belonged to Kade himself.

“Was that your mother?” asked Kade as he saw Cassie making a face at her phone. He liked her mother, but he also recognized her tendency to focus too much on what other people in her social circle thought.

“Who else? We have a command performance on Saturday.” She rolled her eyes.

“She means well, and she loves you.”

“Yes, she does, and she loves me even more now that I can deliver wedding guests with titles.”

“I hope she knows they’ll look just like any of the other guests. No one will look like he’s just stepped out of a Hollywood movie.”

They’d been back from their Scotland trip for three days now, and life was beginning to return to normal. During the day they worked together in the office in Las Colinas where Kade oversaw his mother’s inherited business interests in America, mostly oil and ranching, and then they split their free time between Cassie’s apartment in Deep Ellum, an artsy district east of downtown Dallas, and Kade’s high-end Las Colinas apartment. Lately, it seemed like they were in Las Colinas more often.

Cassie’s somewhat bohemian Deep Ellum building was deceiving, for, when her father, real-estate magnate Harper Bellingworth, had found out his ‘sugah plum’ was going to live in such an ‘interesting’ area, he’d bought the building and installed latest-technology security throughout. He was also highly selective in who he allowed to live there, and Cassie sometimes suspected she was being watched when she went out and about in the neighborhood.

It was the end of the business day, and they’d been closing up when her mother had called, so now Kade shut down his computer and turned back to Cassie.

“Do you want to cook at home or stop somewhere?”

“I could really use some barbecue. How about Meat U Anywhere?”

Kade chuckled. “Aren’t we a little overdressed?”

“Well, if you can’t eat barbecue without getting it on your tie, we can change first.” She threw him a mocking look as she picked up her purse.

“I see Cassie’s back. I’d been wondering where she’d gone.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means you were reasonably well behaved in Scotland, so I’d almost forgotten how sassy your little mouth can be.”

“Since when is the truth sassy?”

“Cassie, my dear, you could make the Bible sound sassy.”

An hour later, dressed casually and seated on red metal folding chairs, they relaxed over barbecue and sides.

“I think I’ll tell Mama I want barbecue for my wedding reception.” She laughed. “This might be Texas, but that would be a surefire cardiac event for her.”

He frowned slightly. “And that would be good?”

“When you see the production she’s going to make out of this wedding, you’ll be lining up right behind me.”

“You keep mentioning that. Is there something I should know about her plans?”

“We haven’t talked specifics yet, but I’ve known the woman my whole life, and I’m betting she’ll be stiff competition for the Rose Bowl Parade.”

“It’s your wedding, Cassie. If you don’t want it that way, tell her.”

“I don’t really know what I want,” she admitted. “I haven’t given it a lot of thought.”

Kade looked at her strangely. “I thought it was something all little girls dreamed of.”

“It is, but those are little girl dreams and almost always involve Cinderella-type dresses and a Prince Charming, but most adult women move on to other ideas. It’s the adult thoughts I haven’t given much time to.”

“I thought *I* was your Prince Charming.”

Cassie laughed. “How can you be Prince Charming when you don’t have any titles? You’re not even Baron Charming.”

Kade smiled wryly. “And now I know for sure Cassie’s back.”

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“I wonder if we really need two apartments,” asked Kade as they sat on his balcony later that evening.

“Yes, we do.”

“Now that we’re engaged, living together is pretty much a given, so why not just live in one place?”

“Because I’m betting you’re thinking of *this* place, and I don’t want to give up Deep Ellum.”

Kade was silent for a minute. “I can understand that,” he admitted finally. “It’s an interesting neighborhood. It just seems silly to keep up both places, and we don’t sleep over there very often anymore.”

“But I *have* it, and that’s important to me. After all the arguing my family did about my moving there, I’d hate to just throw in the towel. Anyway, this way, if I get mad at you, I can always go stay there.”

Kade looked thoughtful. “Then I’d have to come bring you back again.”

“Daddy’s security people would keep you out,” she reminded him with a smug look.

“All the more reason to not have the place, then. I don’t expect my fiancée to lock herself up in an untouchable tower the minute she gets angry with me.”

Cassie looked at him with an impudent smile. “There are many things you may not expect, Mr. MacPherson, but that doesn’t mean they won’t happen.”

“Do I need to make the gold-star-black-circle chart after all?”

Cassie rolled her eyes. “Why don’t you stop worrying about labeling things and just enjoy the ride?”

“Because not all rides are equally enjoyable.”

Cassie’s tendency to be outrageous had finally caused Kade one evening to threaten a chart with gold stars or black circles, depending on her behavior, and with appropriate consequences for each. The chart had stayed an idea only, but the terms ‘gold star’ and ‘black circle’ had entered their vocabularies.

“You’re wrong, Kade. If I’m along, any ride can be enjoyable.”

“I agree it *can* be, but it isn’t always.”

Cassie jumped up. “I’m tired of this discussion. Let’s go do something fun.”

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Kade smiled as he studied Cassie’s face, which was still flushed from two intense orgasms that had left her breathless. “Was that more fun?”

“Definitely!”

“Do I get to be your Prince Charming now?”

“That performance might knock you up to *King* Charming.”

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“Do you think we should discuss our plans before we go to your mother’s tonight?” asked Kade. It was Saturday morning, and they were sitting on the pergola-and-vine-shaded patio of Trevi’s Restaurant in the Omni Hotel enjoying the breakfast buffet.

“Which ones exactly?”

“Any of them. If your mother’s going to want to talk plans, it seems like we should already be on the same page.”

“Hmm. How about this: Whatever she suggests, we’ll say we want the opposite.” She laughed briefly at her own humor.

“That should make for a productive evening.” In fact, he was somewhat bothered by her lack of interest in wedding plans. He knew she loved him, but she didn’t seem to be in any hurry to be formally married. Maybe that’s where they should start.

“What are your thoughts on a date?” he asked.

“I don’t know. What do you think?”

“The sooner, the better, but I realize wedding planning takes time. Are you all right for a wedding as soon as your mother can plan it?”

“I guess.”

Kade frowned. “You don’t sound very enthusiastic.”

“I’m sorry. It has nothing to do with you. It’s just that I’ve been in so many weddings, and it’s always such a big production. It might be fun just to have a tiny wedding—a few immediate family members, tiny chapel—that type of thing, with no one worrying about wedding planners and orchestras. I want to be married to you, but it’s the getting there that’s the problem.”

“It’s your wedding, Cassie, and it should be exactly what you want.”

“I thought it was *our* wedding.”

“It is, but you and I both know it’s the woman who makes most of the wedding decisions, and if you want a micro-wedding, that’s what you should tell your mother.”

“What about your family? Do you think they’ll really come to a wedding in Dallas?”

“My immediate family certainly will, but beyond that, I’m not sure. My grandparents might come, but I don’t know about my grandmother who lives in Nice, although she might just tag along with Matt. It won’t be a large group, though.” Matt was his younger brother.

“We could elope.”

“And deprive your father of the chance to walk his little sugar plum down the aisle? I think not. Your tiny pink gun might not be the only Texas weapon I come in contact with.”

Cassie laughed at the memory. A few months earlier, Kade had taken her on a business trip to his mother’s ranch in the Texas Panhandle, and, when they’d encountered a snake while riding, she’d whipped out a tiny pink-and-black Beretta Nano she had tucked into her boot and shot it while Kade was getting ready to use his rifle on it. To say Kade had been shocked would be a huge understatement. He was from Scotland, and the idea that the petite woman at his side was packing heat had never crossed his mind.

“Let’s go to Deep Ellum when we’re finished here. I have a few things I want to pick up.”

Half an hour later they were entering the small parking area for Cassie’s building when Kade spotted a familiar vehicle. “Isn’t that your father’s car?”

Cassie looked where he was pointing and saw a shiny midnight blue Mercedes S-600. “Yes. He must be here,” she replied happily. “Let me call him and see where he is.”

“Hey, Daddy,” she said when he answered. “We’re in the parking garage. Where are you?” She listened a minute and then said, “Okay, we’ll see you in a few minutes.”

“He’s going to meet us at the apartment,” she said happily as they headed for the elevator.

“There’s my sugah plum,” came a booming voice as they got off the elevator. A large silver-haired man moved towards them, the picture of a successful Texan.

“Hey, Daddy,” Cassie said for the second time in five minutes. She ran into his arms and gave him a big hug. “What are you doing here?”

“There were a few things that needed checking.”

“Can’t one of your managers do it?”

“Ah take a personal interest in *this* building, darlin’,” he said, winking at her and grinning broadly at Kade. Then he put out his hand. “How are you doing, son?”

“Just fine, sir,” replied Kade, taking his hand.

“Well, congratulations to my favorite couple. When’s the date going to be?”

“We don’t know yet, Daddy. We’re having dinner with Mama and Miles tonight, so I’m sure she’ll have input.”

“I’m sure she will, sugah plum, but you make sure you get what *you* want.” He and Cissy had been married for almost twenty years, so he knew well Cissy’s love of social show and fanfare.

“Do you want to come in, Daddy?” asked Cassie as she rummaged for her keys.

“Ah can’t stay, sugah plum. Ah’ve got a lunch date in Fort Worth.” He put his big arms around Cassie and gave her another hug. “You tell your mama that if she doesn’t give you what you want, Ah will.”

Cassie giggled. “That should go down well.”

“Ah’m serious. You’re not gonna be like your mama and me. You’re gonna do this only once, but you’re gonna do it right. Whatever you want, you’ve got it, you hear me?”

Cassie stood on her tiptoes to kiss him goodbye. “I love you,” she whispered.

Kade shook hands with Harper once more and then watched as he disappeared into the elevator. Once they were in the apartment, Kade turned to Cassie with a straight face and took her right hand in his own.

“I only have one question,” he said, taking hold of her little finger and holding it up. “How does such a large man wrap himself around such a tiny thing?”