

Chapter One

Anna

Everything about this wedding reminded Anna of her own, and she hadn't yet stepped inside. The lilies lining the stone steps of the chapel entrance, the smell of an approaching afternoon shower, the guests slowly filing inside—because in a small town, guest lists changed very little from wedding to wedding.

Anna's stomach twisted the minute she saw those same stupid pink lilies resting in an identical spot to the rainy September day five years ago when she became Mrs. Mason Chambers. The status of divorcée as she neared her thirtieth birthday settled heavy in her chest, the weight screaming *failure*. It had been seven months, one week, and four days since she signed Mason's papers, and it still felt like a cut that would never stop bleeding. Some days the resentment and sadness consumed her until it ripped her apart. Lately, it was anger winning the battle.

Her one-year-old niece, Charlotte, snuggled her tiny face deeper into Anna's neck. It was well past naptime,

and she'd fallen asleep on the five-minute drive to the chapel. She breathed in Charlotte's sweet baby scent in an attempt to calm her racing mind.

"Why am I here instead of on the couch watching football in my comfy pants?" Anna grumbled to her sister, Beth. "Charlotte and I could've had a nice nap cuddled up at home. Couldn't we, sweetheart?"

She squeezed the little girl tighter, steeling herself from the memories sure to assault her when she walked in that place.

"You can't hide out the entire time you're home. It's not healthy," Beth said.

"Part of the reason I'm home is so I *won't* be reminded of Mason everywhere I go," Anna mumbled.

Beth simply shrugged and followed their mother up the steps. A silent Beth was never good. She likely had a plan brewing, and Anna wanted nowhere near that.

Walking through those large wooden doors to the sounds of chatter and wedding cheer, Anna let her gaze drift toward the dark mahogany pews near the front.

The Stevens.

She knew every face, every name. They were a second family to her growing up. Her heart caught in her throat as she scanned the group she'd missed for so long.

The apprehension of being in this chapel for the first time since her marriage fell apart consumed Anna the moment her mother and sister insisted she come today. She hadn't even considered how hard it would be to see them again.

To see *Drew*...

Anna's pounding heart grew wilder every second, and her feet froze to the wooden chapel floor. For a

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split second, she was that eighteen-year-old girl lying in Drew's arms by the river, planning a life with the boy she was sure she'd marry. The house they would live in, the family they would create, the quarterback and the homecoming queen living happily ever after. They had every detail planned.

Then he walked away.

Anna spun to escape the memories and slammed right into her mother. The uneasy look she exchanged with Beth all but confirmed their scheme to get her here.

Anna glared, whispering out of earshot of the arriving guests. "Why did you bring me here?"

"Let's just sit down, dear. The wedding will be over soon, and the reception will be a blast. I'm sure Drew would love to have a dance..." The hope in her mother's eyes sent Anna's temper into overdrive. She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from cursing in church.

"A dance with Drew?" she seethed. "How could you possibly think that's a good idea?"

Her insides burned with fury at her family for convincing her to be in this place, anger at Mason for his betrayal, and anger at Drew for not believing in them all those years ago. Anger at both the men who'd claimed to love her then ultimately decided she wasn't enough.

But with her mother's words, Anna could almost feel Drew's arms around her as they danced in the moonlight beside their spot on the water. Warm moisture filled her eyes, and she focused her attention on her shoes to stop the tears from falling.

"I can't be here," Anna whispered. She had to get

out of there before she actually saw Drew and caused what little hold she had on her emotions to spill over in front of everyone in Sage Hill.

With purpose in her step, Anna darted down a hall between the sanctuary and Sunday School classrooms toward escape from the side entrance. She turned to make sure her mother hadn't followed and in her rush bumped into a hard chest, nearly falling to the ground.

Strong hands steadied her, and she realized she still held Charlotte in her arms, clutching her like a life preserver as Anna sank deeper into the raging storm inside her.

Her eyes level with a yellow tie, she made the mistake of breathing in the too-familiar cologne she'd bought him every year on his birthday.

“Anna?”

The feel of Drew's hands on her combined with the rich timbre of his voice sent every nerve ending in her body into overdrive. Though she knew it would be torture on her already destroyed heart, Anna lifted her gaze to his.

Her first kiss, her first love, her first heartbreak had grown into the man whose startling chocolate brown eyes now locked onto hers. The tightness clutched Anna's chest begging her to look away, but she couldn't force herself to actually do it.

She'd forgotten how incredible it felt every time he smiled at her that way. Like she was the only girl in the world and gave him a kind of happiness only she ever could. It caused a spark in her heart that had been dead for months, and she hated that reckless part of her body for its reaction.

“You look beautiful.” Drew's whispered words

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came out in a rush, and his brow narrowed as if he hadn't meant to voice them aloud. But his thumbs now caressed where they still held her arms.

"Drew...I..."

Words. She couldn't find any. She'd seen him only a few times in the last ten years, but today, the intensity of his stare magnified to a level that had her struggling to breathe.

Light from the windows beside them shone on his handsome face where he'd added an irresistible amount of scruff since their time together. The navy blue suit sharpened those tiny golden flecks in his eyes that she once got lost in for hours. His mouth slowly changed from a look of utter shock into his heart-stopping crooked grin.

And with that smile, there was still part of her disloyal body that wanted to lift on her toes and kiss him or maybe punch him for leaving her.

She couldn't take another second of being that close.

Without another word, she stumbled through the chapel door and fell onto a bench that sat outside, the sound of the rushing river attempting to calm her nerves.

Even the bench held traitorous memories, and she willed herself not to look down for *D loves A forever* that Drew carved in the wood so many years ago. If only she could carve out her heart so she'd be numb to the pain of watching every man she fell in love with leave.

Eyes closed, she pulled in a deep breath.

In with the good.

Out with the bad.

Time to focus on pulling out of this perpetually

wounded state and get her life back together.

It had been two weeks since Anna moved back in with her parents. She was staying for only six months while managing the Yoakum Ridge construction project just twenty minutes outside her tiny hometown of Sage Hill. Her boss at Green & Russell Building Group, a fellow divorcée, proclaimed that a change of scenery and time away from the city would be good for her. That being at home with her family would help to heal. So she'd offered Anna the biggest opportunity of her career to assist in the design of Yoakum Ridge Resort, as well as managing the onsite progress.

Being the youngest vice president in the history of the company was in Anna's sights, and she would give it every bit of her focus. People went through divorce, got their crap together, and functioned. She would do the same. She'd earn that promotion, get out of this town and back to her life in Mobile as quickly as possible. Maybe she'd even find some closure for both the failed relationships in her life.

Drew's smile and that stupid dimple flashed in her mind. She couldn't completely avoid him while at home but had vastly underestimated the hold her first love still had on her after so many years.

• *Pull it together.*

Anna squeezed the still-sleeping Charlotte in her arms as a tear broke through and flowed silently down her cheek.

Tomorrow.

She'd start working on her new life goals tomorrow.

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Drew

“What just happened?” Drew whispered to the empty hallway.

He blinked several times, wondering if he’d imagined her before she disappeared through the chapel door. Anna had consumed his thoughts since he heard about her divorce, though he’d shoved the images away every time.

But hell, if he was honest, there wasn’t a day he hadn’t thought about her since they were five years old.

Those emerald green eyes had stunned Drew, transporting him back to a time when she was his whole world. His gaze met hers for only a split second, but he recognized the pain there.

He recognized it because he’d put it there before. She was the love of his life, and he’d stomped on both their hearts when he let fear rip them to shreds.

“Almost ready for you out there.” His parents smiled as they walked past him toward the room where his sister and her bridesmaids waited for the wedding to begin. An arm wrapped protectively around his mother’s waist, his dad placed a kiss on her temple. He admired how they fought through the challenges and repaired their marriage, though not all things broken during that time were capable of repair.

Drew had his dream job, he signed the papers earlier in the week officially taking over his father and grandfather’s family practice clinic. He’d spend the rest of his days serving the quirky residents of his hometown. He couldn’t remember a day he didn’t want to be this town’s doctor, and that life had become a reality.

By some miracle, Mr. and Mrs. Collins were selling their farm when he'd moved back home last year. So not only did he have his dream job, he'd also bought his dream home—the one he and Anna once planned to live in together.

He had the love of his parents, three annoying sisters, and a best friend who was more like a brother, but there was a hole in his heart he'd never fill. A hole left behind by the incredibly smart, always optimistic, compassionate, and fiercely loyal girl he'd pushed away and watched build a life with another man.

His fingers tingled with the memory of exactly how it felt to hold Anna in his arms, to touch her smooth creamy skin, to kiss every single freckle along her shoulders. She was the only woman who could look in his eyes and give him the strength and courage to conquer the world. She'd loved him with a fierceness that couldn't be matched, which was why he'd never tried. He'd dated, had relationships, but none of them lasted. He accepted a long time ago that he'd never love anyone the way he'd loved her.

An overwhelming need to be near her pushed Drew toward the door she'd exited. He didn't make it one step before a hand grabbed and yanked him back.

“What the hell are you doing?” Drew asked, glaring down at his best friend Luke Worley's hand still on his arm.

Luke laughed. “No, what the hell are *you* doing? I witnessed that little moment you two just had, not sure how everyone in a five-mile radius isn't a little turned on by it, but you can't go out there. This thing is about to pop off in t-minus two minutes, and your sister will kill you if you aren't in here.”

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Luke kept talking, but Drew stared out the window he'd been dragged in front of, mesmerized by the woman sitting before him. Anna's long blonde hair blew across her face as she stared down at the sleeping baby in her arms. The river behind her rushed from yesterday's heavy rain as she leaned her head back slowly, soaking in the clear blue sky and bright sunshine.

"You'll always be my Sunshine," Drew whispered to the window.

Luke stepped in front of Drew to block his view. "And now you're talking to yourself. You clearly need some liquor. Let's go have a shot with the other groomsmen."

Drew peeked around him out the window, examining every single angle of her face, every movement of her body. Damn, she was more beautiful than he remembered. And he'd done a lot of remembering over the last decade. His hand landed with a smack in the middle of his chest, attempting to rub away the pressure there as he watched the girl who'd always owned his heart.

Even if she'd never know it.

"I don't need booze, Luke. I need..."

With that, Drew darted out of the chapel, chasing memories from so long ago.