

## **One**

### Wedding Unbliss

Amie

*This is the happiest day of my life.* I allow that thought to roll around in my head, trying to figure out why it doesn't seem to resonate the way it should. This *should* be the happiest day of my life. So I'm not exactly certain why the uneasy feeling I associate with cold feet is getting worse rather than dissipating. I've already done the hard part; walked down the aisle and said "I do."

My husband excused himself to go to the bathroom several minutes ago and, based on Armstrong's itinerary for the day, speeches are supposed to begin promptly at eight-thirty. According to my phone, that's less than two minutes from now, and he's not here. The emcee for the evening is awaiting Armstrong's return before he begins. And then the real party can start. The one where we get to celebrate our commitment to each other as partners for life. As in the rest of my breathing days. Dear God, why does that make my stomach twist?

I sip my white wine. Armstrong pointed out that red is not a good idea with my dress, even though it's my preference. Besides, I don't want it to stain my teeth. That would make for bad pictures.

I glance around the hall and see my parents, who are probably celebrating the fact that I didn't walk down the aisle with a convicted felon. And frankly, so am I. My dating history pre-Armstrong wasn't fabulous.

The sheer number of people in attendance spikes my anxiety. Speaking in front of all of these people makes me want to drink more, which is a bad idea. Tipsy speeches

could lead to saying the wrong thing. I check my phone under the table again. It's after eight-thirty. The longer Armstrong takes to return, the further behind we'll get. The music playlist, devised by Armstrong with painstaking efficiency, leaves no room for tardiness. If we don't start on time I'll have to take out a song, or possibly two, to compensate for his delay and he's selected the order in such a way as to make that difficult and that will annoy him. I just want today to be perfect. I want it to be reflective of my decision to marry Armstrong. That I, Amalie Whitfield, can make good choices and am not a disgrace to my family.

"Where the hell is he?" I scan the room and take another small sip of my wine. I should switch to water soon so I don't end up drunk, especially later, when all of this is over and we can celebrate our lifelong commitment to each other without clothes on. I'm hopeful it will last more than five minutes.

Ruby, my maid of honor and best friend for the past decade, puts a hand on my shoulder. "Would you like Bancroft to find Armstrong?"

Bancroft, or Bane for short, is Ruby's boyfriend who she's been living with for several months. Recently I find myself getting a little jealous of how affectionate they still are with each other, even after all this time. Cohabitation hasn't slowed them down on the sex or their PDA. I have hope that Armstrong and I will be more like Bane and Ruby now that we'll be sharing the same bed every night.

I'm about to tell Ruby to give him another minute when a low buzz suddenly fills the hall. It sounds like a school PA system. I start to panic—they can't start the speeches without Armstrong at my side. What's the point of speeches if the groom isn't present?

I'm halfway out of my seat, ready to tell the deejay, or whoever is behind the mic, he needs to wait, when a very loud moan echoes through the room. The acoustics are phenomenal in here, it's why we chose this venue.

I glance at Ruby to make sure I'm not hearing things. Her eyes are wide. The kind of wide associated with shock. The same shock I'm feeling.

Another moan reverberates through the sound system, followed by the words, "Oh, fuuuck."

A collective gasp ripples through the now-silent crowd. While the words themselves are scandalous among these guests, it's the voice groaning them that makes me sit up straighter, and simultaneously consider hiding under the table.

"Fuck yeah. Ah, suck it. That's it. Deep throat it like a good little slut. Fuuuuuuccckkkkk."

My mouth drops and I look to Ruby to ensure I have not completely lost my mind. "Is that—" I don't finish the sentence. I already know the answer to the question, so it's pointless to ask. Besides, I'm cut off by yet another loud groan. I clap a hand over my mouth because I'm not sure I'm able to close it, my disbelief is as vast as the ocean.

Ruby's expression mirrors mine, except hers is incredibly animated since she's an actress. "Oh my God. Is that Armstrong?" Her words are no more than a whisper, but they sound very much like a scream. Oh no, wait, that's just Armstrong on the verge of an orgasm. But these sounds are nothing like the ones he makes when he's in the throes of passion with me.

I clutch Ruby's hand. The next sound that comes from him is a hybrid between a hyena laugh and a wolf baying at the moon. And every guest at our wedding is hearing

the same thing I am. *Our wedding*. Someone other than me is blowing my husband at my own wedding. My mortification knows no end.

I grab the closest bottle of wine and dump the contents into my glass. Some of it sloshes over the edge and onto the crisp white tablecloth. It doesn't matter. There's plenty more where it came from. I chug the glass, then grab Ruby's.

People lean in and whisper to each other, eyes lift to the speakers. A few people, the ones who are probably just here for the social-ladder-climbing potential, question who it is.

"Is the deejay watching porn?" That comment comes from a table full of mostly drunk singles in their early twenties.

Several eyes shift my way as I carelessly down Ruby's wine and someone asks where the groom has disappeared to.

The grunts and groans grow terrifyingly louder. This is *nothing* like what I'm used to in bed with Armstrong. The dirty words aren't something he ever uses with me, mostly it's just noises and sometimes a "Right there" or "I'm close," but that's about it. He's never talked to me like he is to the woman currently providing oral pleasure. And I'm very adept at oral. Although with Armstrong it's very polite, neat oral, with no sounds other than the occasional hum. Slurping is uncivilized and a definite no-no.

I reach past Ruby for the bottle of red since I don't really give a flying fuck about purple teeth right now. As I sink low in my seat I pour another glass of wine, surveying the people in the ballroom from behind the cover of the centerpiece. The centerpieces are huge and excessive and I don't like them at all, but at least provides a protective barrier between the guests and my disgust, which I'm certain they must share. He sounds like a

wild animal rutting. It is entirely unsexy. I have no idea who he's getting intimate with, but I'm suddenly very glad it's not me.

And doesn't that tell me more about our relationship than it should.

It's only been about thirty seconds—the most humiliating thirty seconds of my life—before Armstrong comes. How do I know this? Because he says, very clearly, “Keep sucking, baby, I'm coming.”

And “baby,” whoever she is, makes these horrific gurgling noises. It sounds like some form of alien communication. It's way over the top, and apparently Armstrong is loving it, based on the string of vile profanity that spews from his asshole mouth.

“Holy crap. Is this for real? That was really fast,” Ruby mutters.

I guzzle my glass of wine. Then decide the glass is unnecessary and take a long swig from the bottle before Ruby snatches it away. Wine dribbles down my chin and onto my chest, staining the white satin purple. My dress is ruined. I should be freaking out. But I really don't care.

“Come on,” Ruby tugs on my hand. “We need to get you out of here while people are still distracted.”

My older brother Pierce and the emcee are standing in the middle of the hall, gesturing wildly to the speakers above us. My other brother, Lawson, is on his way toward the podium in an attempt to do something. I don't think there's anything he can do to stop this train wreck from there.

Ruby tugs again, but I'm frozen, still trying to figure out what exactly just happened. Well, I know what's happened. I just can't believe it.

The sound of a zipper and the rustle of clothes follows. “Thanks for that, now I’ll be able to last later tonight,” Armstrong says.

“What about me?” A female asks. Her voice is nasally and whiny.

“What about you?”

“Well I helped you, aren’t you going to help me?”

“Didn’t you come with a date?”

“Well, yes, but—” God her voice is familiar. I just can’t figure out where I know it from.

“My cousin, right? He loves my sloppy seconds. Speeches are starting. I gotta get back to my ball and chain.”

Gasps of horror ripple through the room, followed by a few giggles. These people really are assholes.

I think I’m going to throw up. I can’t believe he’s going to come out here and pretend nothing just happened. Like some other woman didn’t just have her lips around his cock. His distinctly average cock. Maybe even slightly below average in length, if I’m being one hundred percent honest.

A door opens and closes.

Lawson turns on the mic behind the podium and taps it, sending screeching feedback through the room, making people cringe. Too bad no one did that a minute ago.

Murmuring grows louder and glances flicker to the head table and then away as Brittany Thorton, a seriously skanky debutante, comes strutting through the doors, using a compact to check her lipstick. She’s made it her mission to attempt to get into the pants

of half the eligible men in this room. She's followed, not five seconds later, by a very smug-looking Armstrong.

"I'm going to kill him." I grab the closest steak knife, but it appears my hasty, and possibly felonious, plan is unnecessary. My brothers leave their respective posts and stalk toward him. Across the room my mother is gripping my father's arm, whispering furiously in his ear. Great. Just what I need, additional family drama.

"Oh shit," Ruby gasps.

I follow her gaze to find Bane converging on Armstrong with my brothers. Bancroft is a tank and he used to play professional rugby. I've seen him with his shirt off, he's built like a superhero and he'll probably crush Armstrong, or at least break something. Possibly multiple somethings.

For a second I consider that Ruby should probably stop Bane from destroying Armstrong's pretty, regal face, but then I realize I don't actually care. In fact, the possibility that he might break Armstrong's perfectly straight nose fills me with glee. Armstrong's wellbeing is no longer my concern, it's more about Bane ending up in prison for murder.

"I hope Armstrong has a good plastic surgeon, he's going to need it once Bane is done with him." Ruby echoes my internal hopes and her chair tips as she jumps up.

"Come on, let's get you out of here." She nods to the right.

I notice my mother and father engaged in a heated discussion with Armstrong's parents. I really don't need this right now. Not the drama. Not the humiliation. All I wanted was a nice wedding. Instead I end up with a husband who gets a blow job during our reception—and it's broadcast to everyone attending.

Ruby urges me into action. “Don’t worry about them. Get your stuff and we’ll get you the hell out of here. I’ll have the limo meet you by the entrance near your bridal suite as soon as I can.”

I nod and stumble unsteadily to my feet, thanks to having consumed the better part of a bottle of wine in the last minute and a half. It’s amazing how ninety seconds can change a person’s entire life.

All hell breaks loose as more men jump in to either pummel or extract Armstrong from the pummeling. I grab my clutch and phone from the table, gather up my stupid, too puffy gown, and head for the bridal suite, where I had prepared for what was supposed to be the most amazing day of my life. And now it’s likely the worst, at least I hope the mortification level I’m experiencing can’t exceed this. I feel like the foulest version of Cinderella ever.

I rush down the empty hall and grab the doorknob as I fumble around in my clutch for the key. I’m surprised when it turns. I thought I’d locked it before we left for the ceremony. Regardless, I need to get away from everyone before I either lose it or commit a felony. Maybe both. Murder in the first. Armstrong will be my victim. And maybe that horrible skank, Brittany.

I thrust the door open and slam it closed behind me, locking it from the inside. Tears threaten to spill over and ruin my makeup. Not that it matters since there’s no way I’m going out there again. I can’t believe my forever lasted less than twelve hours. I can’t believe the man I’m supposed to spend the rest of my life loving couldn’t be faithful to me for even one day. What the hell is wrong with me? With him? I’m as devastated as I

am angry and embarrassed. Once I annul this farce of a marriage I'll become a spinster. I should probably go ahead and adopt six or seven cats tonight.

"I need to get out of this dress," I say to myself. I reach behind me and pull the bow at the base of my spine. Instead of unfurling, it knots and I only succeed in pulling it tighter. Of course my dress has to be difficult. I growl my annoyance and rush over to my dressing table where my makeup and perfume are scattered from earlier today. Half a mimosa sits unconsumed beside the vase of red roses Armstrong had delivered.

The card read: *I can't wait to spend forever loving you.*

What a load of bullshit. I drain the contents of the champagne flute, not caring that the drink is warm and flat. Then I throw the glass, because it feels good and the sound of shattering crystal is satisfying. Next I heave the vase of roses, which explodes impressively against the wall, splattering water and shards of glass across the floor.

I yank out a couple of the drawers and find a pair of scissors. They actually look more like gardening shears and seem rather out of place, but I don't question it. Instead I reach behind me with my back to the mirror and awkwardly try to cut myself free. It's not easy with the way I have to crane my neck.

"Goddammit! I need to get out of this stupid dress!" I yell at my reflection. I think I might actually be losing it just a touch now. I stop messing around with the laces in the back and shove the scissors down the front. I nearly nick myself with the blade—they're a lot sharper than I realized—but that doesn't slow me down. I start hacking my way through the bodice; layers of satin, lace, and intricate beading sliced apart with every vicious snip.

I just want out of this nightmare.

