
Chapter 1

Karia Daly stepped off the plane with her two friends, Colleen and Rhiannon, and looked around. It was good to be back, surprisingly.

Even though she had initially balked when her parents had told her that she would not be attending the university with her friends but would be going to a small, private school in the Avalon Mountains, her sophomore year was looking promising to her. After surviving that rough first year, this one should be a breeze. Or so she thought.

She'd made two wonderful friends in Colleen, who had been her roommate, and Rhiannon, who was entering her junior year. Colleen studied art, while Rhiannon was enrolled in the school of dance. Of course, the only thing Karia had ever wanted to do was become a journalist like her esteemed father, Gordon Daly. She'd learned soon after she had arrived last year that not only was he an alumnus of the academy, but he had also taught here for a while. He was very well thought of and was mentor to the frightening but darkly handsome Master Oliver Armstrong. Master Armstrong was the main disciplinarian for the academy,

and she had found herself bent over his desk more times than she cared to remember. He was also one of her professors.

She had met Prince Henry last year, too. He had become the heir to the throne after the untimely death of his older brother, Alexander. A mystery had evolved around that, which Karia had been a part of. Her assignment for the term had been to write an article about the prince, in order to repair his image. His father, King George, had sent him to the academy for a year to sharpen his appreciation for the arts.

Henry was six years her senior, but a friendship between the two had evolved into a relationship that was no longer a secret. Her parents and Master Armstrong were against it, fearing her future as a journalist was about to be compromised. She'd already suffered at the hands of the paparazzi as a result.

She and Henry were taking their time, however. After all, she had school, and he had to learn the ropes of the monarchy.

"Well, doesn't look like anything has changed except for the fresh paint in the main lobby," Colleen said as the girls made their way to stand with the rest of the sophomores. It was time for the welcome speech, and then they would go to their dorm rooms to get settled before dinner. As second year students, Colleen and Karia had the option of choosing their roommate. Of course, they had chosen each other.

"Yep, it's still the same old academy, complete with the same professors and dean," Rhiannon answered.

"Nice to know some things never change," Karia said sarcastically.

"Let's hope one thing does," Colleen said with a grin.

"What's that?" Rhiannon asked.

"That Karia's ass doesn't stay red this year."

Both girls laughed while Karia rolled her eyes at them. How could they know that the spankings the master gave her turned her on, even though she was involved with the prince? She was confused to say the least. Oliver was dark and dangerous, where

Henry was sexy and fun loving. If she were honest with herself, she would have to admit that she was attracted to both of them, but the master wasn't interested, and anyway, he couldn't have a relationship with her while she was his student. The prince, on the other hand, was very interested, and surprisingly, they had the blessings of the royal family on their side.

"Welcome, students," Dean Knightson was saying, bringing Karia back to the present.

She straightened to attention and listened to the speech, which was similar to the one he'd given last year. Yep, some things never changed.

When the dean was finished speaking, a girl named Gloria introduced herself as the new dorm leader. The previous one, Cinda, had graduated last year.

"I see that you two want to be roomies again. You'll be on the third floor this year, in room 301. You can go on up; here are your keys."

"Thank you," both girls said.

On the way to the elevator, Colleen commented, "I guess they only escort the frosh to their rooms. Some things may be different this year at least."

"Yeah, maybe the rooms will be bigger."

"I doubt that, but let's find out."

Karia unlocked the door to their room when they found it and opened the door. She walked in, followed by Colleen, and they immediately set their bags down.

"Well, it's pretty much the same. Two beds, two dressers, two closets, two desks, chairs, and the bath and kitchenette. It'll do," Karia said. "Which bed do you want?"

"I'll take the one by the window, I guess. Unless you want it?"

"Nah, go ahead." Karia picked up her bags and threw them on her bed then started to unpack.

"So, what did you pack this year?" Colleen asked.

"Same old stuff. I brought leggings, sweaters, sweatshirts,

some jeans, the dreaded dress, my uniform, and some shirts and blouses.”

“Same here. It was nice to wear nice clothes over the summer, wasn’t it?”

“Sure was. I worked in Dad’s office, so I got to dress up some.”

“What will you do when you visit Henry?”

“His sister, Princess Emma, provides me with clothes while I’m there. She is a real sweetheart, but she graduates this year. She’ll begin her royal duties after that.”

“The folks accepted it yet?”

“Well, the king invited my parents and me to visit them at their vacation estate over the summer. Mom and Dad agreed that we could go. It was very nice, but I still think they’d rather I was not involved with him.”

“It would be a huge responsibility to marry into the royal family, I suppose.”

“Yes, that’s their main concern; that, and the fact that I’d eventually have to give up my dreams of being a journalist.”

“Well, you’ve got years to decide, so let’s just enjoy our sophomore year. When we finish unpacking, we should meet Rhiannon before dinner.”

“Yes, we have to catch up on all our news,” Karia agreed. “I missed you guys.”

“Me too.”

They hurriedly finished and went in search of their friend. They found her waiting for them in the main lobby.

“Finally,” Rhiannon said when they approached her.

“So, how is your roommate this year?” Karia asked.

“Same girl from last year, Calista, a music student. She’s very quiet. I invited her to join us, but she said she had plans already.”

“Let’s walk down to the lake so we can sit and catch up,” Colleen suggested.

They strolled leisurely, and when they got to the lake, they chose a bench under a shade tree.

“This is good,” Karia said. “Now, who wants to start?”

“I will,” Rhiannon said. “I’m sure your summer adventures are far more exciting than mine, so we’ll save you for last.” She giggled.

“Okay, but I’m not so sure of that. I worked all summer. Go ahead,” Karia replied.

“Well, I danced in a production in the city. It was all very professional, even though I didn’t have a main part. I was a backup dancer, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Other than that, I practiced daily and had a few dates, went out with friends, but nothing major.”

“Sounds like a great summer. Work mixed with some fun. Did you make contacts in the dance world?” Colleen asked.

“Yes, a few, I think.”

“Tell us about the dates. Anyone special?” Karia asked.

“No, not really. I went out with a guy I’ve known a while. We only went out a few times; neither of us wants anything exclusive. It was fun, though.”

“Colleen, how about you?” Karia asked. “How was your summer?”

“Well, I spent a lot of time at the beach near our home, painting. My family vacationed in Scotland for a few weeks. And I met a guy there.”

“Do tell,” Rhiannon said.

“His name is Peter, and he’s just absolutely gorgeous and perfect,” Colleen gushed.

“Tell us more,” Karia encouraged.

“His family owns a home near where we stayed. He graduated from the university last year and is working with his father in the family business. He has the nicest car, and his family is super sweet.”

“Oh, so you met the family?” Rhiannon asked. “Is this serious?”

“I’m hoping it might be. He promised to stay in touch.”

“What kind of business does his father own?” Karia asked.

“The family owns a chain of hotels,” Colleen supplied.

“Wow, that’s exciting.”

“Yes, he took me to dinner at one of them. They are very nice.”

“So, Karia, did you get to spend any time at all with Henry?” Rhiannon asked.

“As a matter of fact, I did. My family and I joined his family at their vacation estate for a few weeks. Other than that, I worked with my dad all summer. I enjoyed the work, even though my days were quite busy.”

“Sounds like your family has accepted the two of you then.”

“Well, they still have some reservations, but they aren’t forbidding me to see him any longer. I think they’re hoping I’ll get it out of my system or realize the royal life isn’t for me.”

“Will you be able to visit the palace?”

“Hopefully, I’ll be able to go for fall break. Henry is doing an awful lot of traveling this year as he is taking on more duties. He is hoping to schedule himself for a break when I have one.”

“We should head back to dress for dinner,” Colleen said as she looked at her watch.

“And so it begins,” Karia replied as she stood up.

“Yes, another year in the mountains. I can hardly wait,” Rhiannon said when they started walking back.

They agreed to meet in the dining room when they parted ways in the dorm. Colleen chose a blue and green floral skirt and topped it with a blue blouse, while Karia picked a simple black skirt and pink and black striped top. Clothing was simple at the academy, much to the dismay of the girls.

They made their way back down and waited for their friend near the entrance. When Rhiannon joined them, her roommate

was with her. She introduced Calista to the other two girls, and the four of them went inside and found a table. They waved and spoke when familiar faces began to enter the room and walk by their table.

When the dining room was full, the dean again stepped up to welcome the students back and to instruct the incoming freshman about the system for getting their food.

When their table was called, the girls went to the buffet and were delighted with the Italian style buffet for their first night back.

Karia chose a salad and the lasagna with Italian bread, while the other girls opted for the spaghetti and meatballs. They returned to their table and chatted over dinner with each other and some of the other students until it was time to return to their rooms. They all wanted to get a good night's sleep before classes began in the morning.

When Rhiannon and Calista got off on the second floor, they said goodnight and made plans to meet for dinner the next night to compare notes on their first day.

“Good luck,” Karia said as the other two got off on their floor.

“Sleep well,” Calista said with a smile.

Karia and Colleen took turns in the bathroom and then lay awake in their beds talking for a while before turning out the lights. Karia was apprehensive about meeting with her professors after the summer break, especially Master Armstrong.

Morning came much too soon, and after both girls had dressed in their hated school uniforms and enjoyed a cup of tea in their room, they grabbed their bags and headed down for breakfast.

Karia had a meeting with Professor Evelyn to get her class schedule and her assignment for the year. When she was finished eating, she said goodbye to her friends and headed that way, promising to catch up with them at lunchtime.

“Karia, my dear, come on in,” the professor said when she knocked lightly on her door. “It’s so good to see you.”

“Good morning, Professor,” Karia said as she sat down in the chair across from Professor Evelyn.

“I trust you had a good break.”

“Yes, ma’am. I worked in my father’s office over the summer. We did take a family vacation too, though.”

“I hope you gained some valuable experience then. It should help with your assignment.”

“I hope so, too. May I ask what my article will be about this year?”

“Certainly, my dear.” The professor handed her a printout that explained.

Karia was puzzled when she read it. She looked at the professor questioningly. “How—”

“How are you going to accomplish this, what with being stuck up here in the mountains? That’s what you were going to say, wasn’t it?” the professor interrupted.

“Well, yes,” Karia replied, still confused as to how she could possibly complete the assignment before her.

“Don’t worry, my dear. You will be given a weekend pass each month in order for you to go into the city to do your research. You will leave on Friday morning and return on Sunday evening. The other four days of the week, your schedule will look like this.” The woman handed her another printout. “The weeks you do not have a pass, you will spend Friday working on your assignment, either in the library or in your room.”

After her morning meeting with Professor Evelyn each day, she had a class with Professor Clarice, followed by Master Armstrong’s class. After lunch, she had a study period and another class with Master Armstrong, followed by a meeting with the master.

“All right, thank you,” Karia said, still wondering how she

was going to do justice to an article about this year's current fashion trend, given the fact that her own wardrobe was now very limited.

"You will be allowed to purchase some suitable clothing for your trips to the city. They will not be worn while you're here at the school, of course." It was as if Professor Evelyn could read her mind.

"Thank you, ma'am. I appreciate that."

"On your first trip into the city, you will shop. I assume you've brought a credit card with you. If not, there is time to request that your parents send one."

"I-I have one, thank you."

"Where will you stay? That's your next question, isn't it? We will arrange for you to stay in a hotel near the fashion district."

"All right. Will I be alone?" Karia asked.

"No, one of our other students will also be allowed to leave in order to complete her assignment, so the two of you will travel together and share a hotel room. One of our security personnel will drive you to the hotel and stay there in case you should need anything."

"And if I wish to visit friends in the city while I am there?" she asked.

"As long as you complete your work, you may do so, with the assistance of security. It is the weekend after all."

"Thank you, Professor," Karia said as she stood.

"You are quite welcome, Miss Daly. Please ask the next student to come in when you leave."

Her class with Professor Clarice went by quickly. They discussed the goals for the coming year and the professor gave them an assignment to turn in the next day.

Now, it was time to see Master Armstrong. Karia was looking forward to it, and she wasn't. A part of her was anxious to see him again, but another part dreaded his dark, harsh ways. He was hard to read. At times, he seemed fond of her, but on other

occasions, she could swear he hated her very existence. She knew he looked up to her father, and because of that, he expected a lot from her.

She crept into his classroom quietly and slid into a seat in the middle of the room, hoping he wouldn't notice her.

He appeared to be busy with something at his desk and didn't look up until it was time to begin. Then he stood and looked around the room at his students.

"Welcome back, class. This year, we will delve more deeply into the journalism field, studying more about ethics and investigative reporting. I trust you all had a productive but relaxing summer. Today, I think we'll discuss that before jumping into our studies tomorrow. Who would like to begin by telling us about your work over the summer? I trust that most of you did have a job of some sort and did not spend your days by a pool."

One of the boys volunteered to go first. He stood and said, "I worked at the local newspaper office for most of the summer. It was interesting to see how a small press was run."

"Very good. Anyone else?" the master asked.

A girl whom Karia remembered from the year before spoke next. "My aunt was able to get me a job in the offices of the book publisher she works for. I spent my time editing. I was able to get away for a week with friends, though."

"Excellent experience. Karia, how about you? I believe you worked for your father. Am I right?"

She stood and said, "Yes, sir. I worked Monday through Friday for his publication. I wrote a few articles and spent some time proofreading. We were fortunate to be able to take a family trip before the summer was over."

Another boy had spent his days in a local printing press. It seemed all the students had worked over the summer, most in some sort of journalism establishment.

It was almost time to break for lunch when the master said, "I'm pleased to know that you all had an experience filled break.

Be ready to put your noses to the grindstone tomorrow as we will begin by discussing ethics in writing. Have a good afternoon. Dismissed.”

As they filed out of the room, he added, “I will see you later, Karia. Do not be late.”

“Of course not, sir,” she replied.

Grr. He would have to remind her of her tardiness on her first day last year, which had resulted in the most humiliating punishment.

She quickly walked to the dining room and joined her friends when she saw that they had saved her a place at the table.

“So, did your ass get smacked yet?” Colleen teased as she sat down.

Karia stuck her tongue out at her. “No, it did not!”

Lunch was a simple buffet with soup, salad and sandwiches. They discussed their morning then went their separate ways again to face the afternoon.

She spent her study hour completing the work for Professor Clarice’s class and making some notes for her term assignment. Next, it was back to Master Armstrong for her creative writing class and then her meeting with him. She had him on her schedule three times a day this year. Ye gods, how would she survive that? At least, it was only four days a week and not five. Thank God for small favors.

She walked in and found a seat again. Most of the class was already there, but a few students trickled in after she did. When it was time to begin, he initiated a discussion about story writing, after which he assigned each of them to write a short story to be turned in on Thursday. Karia waited at her desk until all the others had gone. Then she looked up at him expectantly. What would they discuss at this end of the day meeting? Was she to endure a punishment from him? A lecture? What, exactly, would this meeting consist of?

He forced her to wait, which only made her anxiety ten times

worse. Finally, he got up and walked over to her desk. He leaned over her and said, “I understand your family vacationed with the royal family, Miss Daly. I’m sure that pleased you very much.”

“W-we had a nice time, sir.”

“So, am I to understand that you are still insistent on seeing Prince Henry, against the wishes of your father?”

“H-he is all right with our friendship, as long as it doesn’t interfere with school, sir. The prince and I are both very busy, so there isn’t much time to get together.”

“I realize it is not my business what you do with your personal life, Miss Daly. As I have told you before, I respect your father very much and I know what his hopes for you are. I felt I had to remind you that your schooling must come first right now. Hopefully, there will be none of the nonsense we were all forced to endure last year with the royal bodyguards and that business with the paparazzi. I am only looking out for your best interests as a close friend of your father.”

“That shouldn’t be an issue, sir. The prince is no longer here at the academy. He will be traveling most of the time.”

“Very well then. Now, that we have that unpleasantness out of the way, tell me about your term assignment and how you plan to go about researching it.”

They spent the next forty minutes talking about the plans for her assignment, with him surprisingly giving her a few pointers. He looked at the clock then and said, “You may go, Karia. One more word, though, if I may. Do not think for one moment that because you are in your second year at the academy, you are immune to punishments. I’m sure, before too long, you will have earned one. Dismissed.”

“Yes, sir. Have a nice evening,” she said as she gathered her things and rushed for the door. Damn that man, anyway! What was his deal?

She unlocked the door to her room a few minutes later and collapsed on the bed. It was strange not running into Henry in

the halls or at breakfast. And there was no guard outside her door or following her around all day. There would be no visits to the tower for stolen kisses this year. But, she could see him in the city during her weekend stays if he was in town. How cool was that? It couldn't have worked out any better, in her opinion. She couldn't wait to tell him. He had promised to send her a text the first evening he was free. Right now, he was in France, attending some sort of royal event there. He would have meetings during the day and dinners in the evenings. But she knew he would get in touch with her when he could. And when he did, she would let him know her good news.

And then, on the other end of the spectrum, there was Master Armstrong, already threatening to spank her. Why had she felt that twinge of excitement and slight flood between her legs when he'd said those words to her? It wasn't right. She loved Henry, so how could Oliver incite such feelings? What was happening to her, and why was she so confused all the time?