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## Chapter 1

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“**M**iss Hanson has exited the plane and is being escorted to Immigration, my lord.”  
“Thank you.”

Reade Ramsay, Marquess of Catherwood, was seated in a small private area of the Edinburgh airport accompanied by the airport employee who had just updated him. The young marquess’ fiancée was on the flight that had just landed, and airport personnel were smoothing her way through entry formalities.

Reade stood up and paced the area for a few minutes. God, he’d be glad to see Jenny again! She’d been back in Houston for three weeks shopping for a wedding dress with her mother, and while Reade was happy the trip had been a success, he’d missed her like crazy. It was the first time they’d been apart since getting engaged, and he hoped it wouldn’t happen again very soon. She was the center of his life now, and three weeks without her bubbly personality and mischievous smile had been a stark reminder to him of how staid and predictable his life had been before her.

It was more than a year ago now that they’d met quite by

accident. He'd been riding his horse through the woods on the enormous Catherwood estate when he'd suddenly come upon Jenny sitting on a log. She and a friend she was visiting had come to his sister's weekend house party, and when she'd gotten herself turned around in the woods, she'd simply sat down and waited to be found. After a brief exchange with her, Reade had put her on the back of his horse and returned her to the other ladies.

The outspoken young blonde from Texas had been unlike any woman he'd ever met—not only unaware of who he was but, once informed, completely unimpressed by his titles and wealth. Her irreverent nonchalance had fascinated him, and he'd followed her back to Houston where, in spite of the vast difference in their backgrounds, a serious attraction had quickly developed. He'd convinced her to return to Scotland with him, and an engagement had soon followed.

“Miss Hanson is clearing customs now, my lord,” said the employee. “If you want to meet her when she exits, we should go now.”

“Yes, thank you,” replied Reade as he headed for the room's door. The employee scurried ahead to open it for him, and the two walked briskly down the airport corridor, arriving scant seconds before Jenny appeared through the double doors.

“Reade!” she cried, her face breaking into that contagious smile Reade had so missed these last few weeks.

She ran to him, leaving the employee accompanying her to follow with a luggage cart piled high with bags. In defiance of everything about public behavior Reade had ever been taught, he openly swept her into his arms and held her close.

“God, I missed you,” he murmured into her ear. “I plan to welcome you properly once we get home.”

“Don't I even get a kiss now?” she asked with that fascinating combination of smile and pout that she did so well.

“You can have as many as you want once we get home, little one.” Then, looking at the loaded luggage cart the employee was

pushing, he added, "I see you and your mother made full use of the time."

"You told me to!"

"I know I did, but you rarely follow my wishes so completely."

Jenny giggled, reminding him again of what he'd missed in her absence.

"Let's go home," he said as he took her hand and turned towards the exit.

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"WHEN DO I get to see the wedding dress?" asked Reade as he lay propped against the antique headboard of their large bed. He'd been true to his word and had been welcoming her properly for the last couple hours. Now they were lying there peacefully and somewhat exhausted, simply enjoying being together again.

"Why do you keep asking me that? You know you're not supposed to see it before the wedding."

Reade shook his head. "That's some long-outdated old wives' belief that has nothing to do with modern life. I'm quite sure the sky won't fall if I see the dress. Where is it anyway?"

"It's in the really big bag that's locked, and if you look at it, I'll have to go buy another one."

Reade frowned. "Are you telling me that if I see the dress, you'll go back to Houston?"

"Yes."

"You just got your wish, little one," he replied quickly, shaking his head. "You need to keep that dress completely out of my sight, because there's no way in hell I'm going to do anything that makes you leave again. It was torture having you gone." He pulled her close and kissed the top of her head.

Jenny giggled. "I thought it was torture when I'm here.

You're always lecturing me about safety and curiosity and attitude and stuff like that."

"That's true, but your absence was even worse."

"Just remember that the next time you get all earl-ish on me."

When Jenny first met Reade, he hadn't yet inherited the title of marquess and so was still an earl, with the result that Jenny considered the sterner side of his personality to be earl-related and often made reference to his earl face or earl voice. When his father died and Reade became the new marquess, the description didn't change in Jenny's mind, so she still thought of his more commanding side as being either earl-ish or earl-y, depending on her mood.

"It's been very dull around here with no one needing rescuing," Reade commented with a little chuckle.

"It doesn't happen *that* much," she replied indignantly. "You just make it seem like that."

"Need I remind you that we met while you needed rescuing, and that was only the beginning?"

Jenny giggled again. "That one doesn't count because we didn't know each other yet."

Rather than get engaged in one of Jenny's long debates, Reade simply rolled over on top of her and covered her mouth with his own before starting once again to work his way down. He'd missed her soft little body so much these last three weeks.

"I'm hungry," announced Jenny. "If we're going to do this for the rest of the day, I need some energy."

"And now I know for sure that things are back to normal," Reade answered, his eyes twinkling. He could always count on Jenny to want a 'little something'.

Reade called the kitchen and asked that a selection of small sandwiches and savories be served in half an hour, and then the two of them took a quick shower and dressed. As soon as they settled on the leather sofa in the lounge, a small King Charles Spaniel came bounding in and headed directly for Jenny.

“Darby!” she cried. “Mommy missed you so much.”

Darby was a rescue who had been abused as a young puppy and then returned repeatedly to the shelter by potential adopters, further breaking her spirit. Jenny had cried when she’d read the sad story in a magazine, so Reade had taken her to Glasgow to bring the young dog back to Catherwood with them. Darby had immediately run under a bed, shaking in fear at yet again being in a new place, but Jenny had spent long hours patiently winning Darby’s trust and convincing her that she was now both safe and loved. Her efforts had been hugely successful, with Darby now a happy member of the family and Reade very impressed with the dedication and patience Jenny had shown. It was a side of her he hadn’t seen before, and he liked it.

The spaniel put her paws up on Jenny’s legs, and Jenny enthusiastically hugged and kissed her.

“Mommy will give you some little nibbles in just a minute,” she promised.

As if on cue, a maid entered carrying a large tray and set it on the coffee table.

“Shall I bring a pot of tea, my lord, or would you prefer something cold?”

“What would you like?” Reade asked, looking at Jenny, but her face was buried in Darby’s neck.

“I’ll have mineral water,” came the muffled answer.

“And I’ll have an ale, please, Marie,” added Reade.

“Very well, my lord.”

“Hm-m, those Bridies smell really good,” said Jenny, turning around to look at the plate of snacks with a big smile of anticipation on her face. Bridies were a meat-filled pastry similar to Cornish pasties, and ever since she’d arrived in Scotland, it had been one of Jenny’s favorite snacks. She immediately took one, peeled back the top crust, and scooped the filling onto a plate that she set on the floor for Darby.

Reade frowned slightly. “Dogs don’t need to eat in the lounge,” he said with a small shake of his head.

“This isn’t just any dog, though, Reade. Remember, I promised Mr. Haverford at the shelter that Darby would be the most spoiled dog ever.” Then, fixing Reade with a small look of triumph, she added, “And you believe people should always keep their word. You always say it’s part of being honorable.”

Reade sighed. “We’re not going to argue about it the first day you return, but I’m going on record for the future as saying I don’t like feeding dogs in the lounge.”

“Fine, you’re on record,” she answered, but the tone of her voice and the laughing look on her face made it clear that being on record wasn’t remotely the same as settling the matter. Reade shook his head again and reminded himself that this was all part of the Jenny he loved so much—the Jenny who hadn’t grown up thinking every word out of a marquess’ mouth was the final one. It was one of the things that kept his life with her interesting.

“Did your brother decide to come to the wedding?” he asked, changing the subject. Jenny’s brother, Noah, was two years older than her and lived with his wife and baby in Japan, where he taught English and studied Japanese.

“Yes, but I’m not sure about Danielle. Their baby is just past one, so they don’t want to bring him to the wedding, and they can hardly bring along a babysitter.”

Reade looked at her strangely. At times like this he realized how little she still understood Catherwood life—a life with no shortage of help when needed.

“We can look after him here, Jenny. We can bring in a couple of nurses for him, so if that’s their only concern, you need to assure them the baby will be well taken care of.”

“Oh. That would be really good, although it’s still a long trip with a baby.”

“People do it all the time.”

“I know.” She paused while she put several more little

goodies on her plate but then continued. “What should I tell them will be here for the baby?”

“Whatever they want. He can have round-the-clock care, and I’m sure there’s a cot and pram in storage somewhere.”

Jenny frowned. “He’s too young for a cot.”

Reade looked at her blankly for a couple seconds and then laughed. “Cot is the British term for crib, little one.”

“Oh. So what do you call a folding bed?”

“Probably a camp bed.”

Jenny laughed. “It’s weird how the same language is so different.” Then she got a serious look on her face again. “You won’t stick him in that enormous playroom you showed me that time, will you?”

“I thought you liked that room.”

“I do for older kids who want to run around, but for a baby, it’s not exactly cozy.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll provide whatever your brother and his wife want.”

“Okay. I’ll tell them.”

“What’s the baby’s name? I don’t remember your ever saying.”

“David, but mostly they call him Davey. They named him after my father.”

Reade nodded. “That’s nice. I’m looking forward to meeting your brother and hearing all the dirt from your childhood.”

“Then you’ll be sadly disappointed,” she replied, trying to look disdainful but totally failing, so instead she giggled. “He was a very nice brother,” she admitted. “After my parents got divorced, he got a little bossy, but I think that’s just a natural flaw in the Y chromosome.”

Reade chuckled. “And what are the natural flaws in the X chromosome?”

“There aren’t any. That’s why Y’s spend so much of their time chasing after X’s.”

She giggled again and then set her plate down on the coffee table, scooted over to be right next to him, and announced, “I need to sit on your lap.”

Reade set his plate aside and then pulled her onto his legs.

“Now what?” he asked.

“Now you can be deliriously happy because I’m back.”