
THE UNKINDNESS

The Billionaire Spy Book Four

AMARYLLIS LANZA



Published by Blushing Books
An Imprint of
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.
A Virginia Corporation
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

©2021
All rights reserved.

No part of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The trademark Blushing Books is pending in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Amaryllis Lanza
The Unkindness

eBook ISBN: 978-1-64563-601-4

Print ISBN: 978-1-64563-596-3

v2

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.

Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Killer Comes to Dinner

Charlie

Charlie Green arrived late to the pre-wedding dinner at the Phoenix Lodge in Connecticut. This should be a nice, relaxing night of celebration for his best friend, William Smith, who had suddenly lost his mind and his cool over some California girl he met in Florida. But, as most things in Charlie and William's life went, there were unexpected complications.

Plus, it was snowing. He hated snow. It got in everything, pretending to be all pure, but soon turned into a dirty gray sludge. Plus, you froze your balls off.

Charlie was born and raised in Connecticut and had seen enough snow to last him several lifetimes. He preferred sand. It got everywhere too. It could burn you, and cut you, but sand didn't lie. It was what it was—sand didn't change. Well, it turned to glass sometimes, but would go right back to being

sand if you pounded it hard enough. Sand didn't give a damn if you did.

Charlie felt grim. His mind wandered to philosophy when he was cranky. He had no patience for philosophy.

Charlie wanted to punch something and drink something, and fuck someone.

He had to shake off this dark mood and put on his clown face, because his killer face would scare the blush right off William's sweet new bride-to-be.

Plus, his suit didn't fit—it was too tight. He handed over his coat to the la-di-da coat clerk at the entrance of the fancy-schmancy place and wrestled with his jacket. He should have bought a new suit, but William gave him no warning that he'd need it. Who the fuck gets married three days after proposing? William Wilson Smith, that's who. The stubborn fuck. Mister Impossible.

Shit.

"I'm sorry," he said, as he rushed to the table, just before he forgot how to speak.

The sight of the blonde goddess sitting at the table with William and Mariana caught him completely by surprise. Hair the color of wheat bleached by sunshine, worked into an elaborate knot, shimmered in the soft light of the restaurant like a halo around her head. Her skin was tan eggshell, shimmery and smooth and taut. Generous breasts pressed the limits of the simple V-neck black sweater she wore, inviting a deeper look into the cavern of that cleavage.

Fuck. He was staring at her tits like a starving baby. That was not cool. It was the only way to avoid those piercing blue eyes, which seemed to have already measured the whole of him as he rushed to the table.

Damn. He needed to stop staring at her tits. That's what Will's face was telling him. Right. Yes. Focus.

"There were pipe problems," Charlie told Will, trying to

recover. Those pipe problems had just moved to his pants. Damn. He needed to sit down. Those eyes were on him again and he felt as hot as if he stood on Al-Dibdibah, in full kit, with a sandstorm blowing him blind.

“Any major damage?” Will asked.

What was Will talking about? Oh, yeah, the pipes. He needed to concentrate on that.

“Mended, for now, but I’ve got people repairing breaches and reinforcing the joints tomorrow.” Charlie tried to smile. *Congratulations on your wedding, man. We’ve just killed a guy to protect you, and interrogations are ongoing.* Will would hear it his way. He always did.

Will was staring at him. So was Mariana. So was the goddess in black. Right. Chair. He needed to sit down—next to her—wedged between Will’s woman and this fresh mystery. Shit. And he needed to act cool. He needed to be the smiling clown who had no blood on his hands and no bad news to deliver tonight. He needed to be chill, which was hard because all he felt was hot.

Charlie needed to stop looking at her goddamned glorious tits. Thank God for menus. You could pretend to read them.

Will rattled on, making recommendations to Mariana and Sandy—Sandy? Of all the names she might have had—Sandy. The soundtrack of *Grease* started playing in his head. God, he hated that movie.

Will knew all the fancy words printed on the card. Charlie didn’t care. As long as the food didn’t run away, he ate it. When the food tried to run away, Charlie chased it down. Sometimes it was fun to chase down a meal. Like the one on his right. He wondered whether Sandy was a runner. She sure was in great shape.

Sandy didn’t seem to care about Will’s French menu either.

She was still measuring *him*, coyly. Those eyes, with those

long painted lashes, focused demurely on the menu, pretending to read, but her irises snuck a peek at Charlie. They were reading him again, like she wanted to confirm something. There was nothing to read. Charlie wasn't Will. He wasn't deep. Charlie was easy to understand. He ate. He fucked. He fixed things. Charlie killed. Sometimes he thought about stuff too, but he tried not to make a habit of it.

Charlie sat up straight, taking up more room on the chair as his chest expanded with a deep breath. Let her read all of him. Shame about the suit. He so rarely needed one. He only owned two, and neither fit, and he had to wear the other one tomorrow. To his best friend's wedding. But first, he had to ruin his best friend's night.

Sandy

Sandy Fine was no fool. She'd suspected her boss, Mariana Stein, had something going on in New York that had nothing to do with business and everything to do with getting down to *business*, but she never imagined this. When she got the call from Mariana telling her she was getting married on the weekend and asking her to be her maid of honor at the wedding, it took a minute for the message to sink in. It sounded preposterous, especially since Mariana had been dating the billionaire Martin Harper, and he was on the hook. He had even chased her all the way to New York. Sandy spent the first part of the week running interference on that fiasco. Suddenly, Mariana was marrying someone else—just like that. Crazy.

Mariana was a good boss, and a good friend. She knew

Mariana didn't make genuine friends easily—Mariana was a private person even though networking was an important part of her job. It meant a lot to Sandy to attend the wedding, and more so to stand by Mariana's side. Mariana had a great heart, but it was fragile. Sandy hoped Mariana was handing her heart over to a man who wouldn't drop it.

She knew nothing about this William Smith who sat at the table, but she could see why Mariana fell for him. William was intelligent, tall, dark and handsome—perfect, if you liked that type. It was a little hard for Sandy to believe he worked as a tree surgeon, as he claimed. He struck Sandy as someone who did other things for a living, though she couldn't say what. She liked him. William was easy to like, but Sandy wasn't sure he was being 100% honest. Her gut told her William Smith kept secrets. She also knew Mariana did. Sandy thought it was best to keep her thoughts to herself. People had to make their own choices in life, especially in love.

Anyway, whatever William was, arborist or not, he sure had good taste. The resort he'd arranged for her to stay in, where they were having dinner, was gorgeous. It felt like a trip back in time, nestled in the forest, with a cozy little complex of colonial residences all impeccably decorated. There were only subtle hints of modern times—like the smartphone stand on the antique night table and the TV and DVD player hidden in the armoire in the bedroom. Sandy had stayed at plenty of fancy places during her world tour with her late aunt Dalia, but this place was something else. It wasn't stuffy, just refined, and the staff were all pleasant, accommodating and professional.

She was enjoying a weekend trip on someone else's dime. She hadn't left California in a while, not since her aunt died, so it was a pleasant adventure. Shame about the snow.

Sandy knew people gushed over snow, particularly in a beautiful setting like this. When she saw the frosted trees and

roofs, with real icicles growing from the edges, Sandy felt transported right into a Christmas card. It was gorgeous, just for a weekend, but Sandy was a Santa Monica girl. She preferred the beach and the sand, even on Christmas. Getting to wear a sweater? Yay! Needing a thick winter coat, just to go on a short walk for dinner? Not so much.

Anyway, she planned to have a good time and to celebrate with Mariana. It would just be a fun weekend out. No biggie. No pressure. Everything was fine for Fine; until the Viking God arrived on the scene.

That was all Sandy saw at first: a brooding warrior, all muscle, with rebellious waves of red hair, like burnt copper, a dark red beard reaching to his cheekbones, and a strong straight nose with a slight upturn at the tip. He suddenly flashed a smile that could melt a thousand winters. And those eyes, those bright blue-green eyes, like circling pools of sea water in the shallows, fixed intently on her. She sat up straight in her chair. It was an instinctual reaction to an unspoken command. She could hear him telling her to be a good girl. To let him have a better look at her. Oh, it was all in her head. She knew that. But it was working on her further down, too.

The warrior soon turned his attention to Will to discuss something about plumbing. Was he a plumber? She could imagine him laying down some pipe, yes. Lord Almighty. And laying down the law too. Heavens.

Time to focus on whatever Will was saying—which was what, exactly? She couldn't hear it because the warrior's eyes were back on her. What had she done? Was she a bad girl? Did she offend? He sat next to her, all of him. His broad chest and brawny arms pressed on the seams of that gray suit as if any minute he might—in a pique—pop right out of it, bare chested and ready to rip off limbs.

He was still looking at her. She couldn't take much more of it, without falling on her knees at his feet and begging him

to forgive her for causing him displeasure. This wasn't the place or the time for that kind of thing.

That was the only downside of this impromptu wedding. Sandy was past-due for a valve release. She had to cancel plans to visit the Thorn Room for a therapeutic session with Master Nicholas. The sudden appearance of this Viking had only added pressure to the bubbling steam in her teapot. She needed to focus on something else. Like the menu.

Yes, that's good—look down at the menu.

Sandy tried, but she kept peeking at the Viking as William recommended dishes they might enjoy. Sure—whatever—she'd eat. She'd do anything she was told by those bright aquamarine eyes. She hoped he would say something to her—soon.

Sandy felt flustered as William gave the server their order in French and the Viking God—Charlie? Surely, that was wrong. He was a Charles. Charlemagne. Charles the Great. He was a warrior, brooding underneath the surface. She could sense this. He was an angry Master. Something was wrong, and he wouldn't say what. Instead, for the sake of the guests, he was smiling. Oh, that smile. It could grace you if you were a good girl and the world would shine bright. That smile would make all the pain of punishment vanish in an instant. It promised comfort, safety and love.

God, she needed another glass of water. Where was the server? She raised a hand to get his attention and drew the attention of her Viking instead. *Stop calling him Charlie, for God's sake!* Sandy wanted to shout at Mariana. *Can't you see what he is? He's a jarl—no—a king. He's only playing the fool to make you comfortable.*

Charles noticed Sandy signaling the server, and he noticed the server not picking up on her signal. He immediately got the server's attention. Soon she had a glass full of water. The server knew what Charles was, no matter what role he played.

Charles smiled at her, approving, as she drank his cool water. *Thank you, Master.*

Anyway. Phew. Time to focus back on the conversation. What was happening? Something about broken pipes and properties in need of repairs and what a good handyman Charlie was. Ugh, could they all please stop pretending? Except for Mariana. She wasn't pretending. She believed the top notes of the conversation and seemed satisfied with that. Denial—that's what Mariana was suffering from right now. She was so in love with her dark knight she couldn't see what was right in front of her nose. These were two dangerous, charming, deadly, possibly very good men. Okay. Enough. Time to play along with the farce, if that's what it took to get through this evening.

Charles passed her the bread basket. Oh, he noticed her again, despite all the chit-chat back and forth, and despite whatever was really worrying the men that they wouldn't say in plain English. Despite all of that, Charles found time to notice she had been looking at the bread. She took the warm, crispy bun he offered her, and gave him a shy smile. Then those eyes looked approvingly on her, and that bright smile shone on her, and the world was delicious. She ripped a corner of the bread and popped it in her mouth. He nodded his approval as she chewed. Good girl.

Ugh. She needed to get a grip. More water, please.

Somehow, she made it through three courses. The food was sublime, but each bite had been a silent conversation with the Viking beside her. He had watched her cut and swallow every morsel—approving. They'd turned it into a silent game—*May I take another bite, Master?* Oh, a yes from those eyes. She would do anything to earn it.

Neither Will nor Mariana seemed to notice. They focused on each other, as was proper for a couple deeply in love. There were moments where William and Charles drifted back to

their coded discussion which had nothing to do with wedding plans, or trees, or pipes. During those moments, Charles' eyes turned dark again. The powerful muscles on his neck went taut under the collar of his blue dress shirt, and she could feel what it might be like to suffer his disapproval. Not good, but so hot, stinging, scalding hot, like the water boiling in her teapot. She felt herself nearly ready to screech and plead for release. Still, he smiled, for the sake of Mariana, but also, Sandy liked to think, for her sake. To ease her pressure. *Have another spoonful of that Grand Marnier soufflé. Slowly. Lick the spoon. Good girl.*

Crisp on a stick. This needed to end. She couldn't just melt at the table. Mariana needed her to be present—not at the silent command of the Viking. *Yes, you may have a sip of that cappuccino. Wipe that sweet foam from your upper lip with the tip of your tongue.*

Thank you, Master Charles. *Focus, Sandy, dammit.*

Then, the two men politely excused themselves from the table. Whatever was really happening needed addressing elsewhere now. The hot tension Sandy sensed radiating from the Viking warrior belied William's effort to play this down as just going for a walk. Charles left her, and suddenly the room felt cold.

She turned her attention back on her boss and friend, assuring Mariana she was happy for her. That's what Mariana needed to hear tonight: she had made an excellent decision, even if it *was* impetuous. Mariana did not need to hear that the two men were not really talking about pipes and trees. Surely Mariana would figure it out in time. She was a very smart woman.

Besides, though Sandy sensed danger in the two men, she didn't sense evil. That's what Sandy went by. Danger is a given—just trying to cross the road can be dangerous—and it has its place. Danger can be exciting. Danger can help you grow. Evil is something else. Sandy knew evil. She had sensed evil in

Martin Harper and would have broken her rule about not interfering, if Mariana had said she was going to marry him. She would have said something to Mariana, if Mariana had continued that relationship. Now, that threat had passed. Mariana was deeply in love with her tree-man, and William worshiped her. All's well that ends well.

When the men didn't return from their walk, Sandy suggested she and Mariana go hang out at the fireplace lounge. It would be warm there. She knew because she had spent the better part of the afternoon at the lounge, avoiding the snow, reading one of her favorite kinky books, and letting her toes get toasty. She had made little progress on the book because she couldn't help overhearing conversations.

It was her superpower: listening between the words people said aloud. Some conversations which took place here were really weird. Plots and schemes were afoot. Intelligence was being shared. She hadn't quite cracked all the code some guests and club members at the Phoenix Lodge spoke, but it rhymed somehow with William and Charles' earlier conversation.

Speaking of those two, funny that they were in the library having an argument with a stranger. Sandy noted that discretely as they passed the library on their way to the fireplace lounge. She had the sense that Charles would strongly disapprove of snoopers. She made sure she only looked in, briefly, and decided against mentioning it to Mariana. Either Mariana noticed or she didn't, but tonight was all about Mariana's wedding.

Sandy had reasons to be happy—not only had Mariana given her a raise she could put to good use, but she had just made her a partner in the firm. Sandy was more than ready for that promotion. She really enjoyed the work, and she had long thought she could do more to ease Mariana's workload. Sandy often worried that Mariana bit off more than she could

chew with her clients. Although, to her credit, Mariana always accomplished what she intended. The problem was that Mariana would push herself, no matter what, sometimes to dangerous levels. When under stress, she often forgot to eat, and she pushed her body to extremes.

She'd noticed that Mariana had eaten well tonight. She wasn't wound as tight as she had been in LA. Will had helped her work out all that stress. Yes, they were perfectly matched. Sandy had told Mariana as much, which made a wide, bright smile spread across Mariana's face and earned Sandy a tight hug.

Sandy enjoyed some light-hearted girly talk with Mariana over Irish coffee, which got raunchy after a while. Between the wine at dinner and the whisky, Sandy and Mariana were both a little tipsy, though neither of them were drunk. Sandy noticed that Mariana didn't include Will in her spicy anecdotes. Whatever went on between them was too precious for sharing. Sandy thought it really said something great about their love.

Besides, Mariana had plenty of material to work with. The stories of Mariana's former trusty stop-over partner, the horny Texas pilot, for example, had Sandy in stitches. Sandy was less comfortable sharing her anecdotes. Her experiences were less vanilla, and she wasn't sure how Mariana might judge her for that.

Mariana asked her whether she had ever been in love, and Sandy had to change the conversation again. She covered the awkwardness by borrowing anecdotes from her aunt's colorful and very open love life. Dalia wasn't around to mind. If she had been there that night, Dalia would have filled any momentary silence with a bawdy joke. Of course Sandy *had* been in love, only for a minute, and she'd had her heart broken a minute after that. But she had buried that hurt deep. She had no intention of digging it up again—ever. She had no

plans to repeat that mistake either. Casual sex and self-reliance was all a woman needed, really. Dalia had taught Sandy well.

Just when they were both running out of fuel for conversation, Charles walked in bringing back the sun.

“We had a bit of an unplanned, bachelor send-off thing.” Charlie’s eyes fixed on hers in challenge. No, she would *not* be a bad girl and say she had seen differently. “We ran into an old friend. You know how it is. Did you ladies have some fun without us?”

Sandy had to bite her tongue to keep herself from responding, *‘Yes, Master.’* She let her eyes speak for her. His eyes probed her more closely. *‘What have you been up to, my naughty minx?’*

Mariana told Will they were drinking Irish coffee when he asked.

“Mmm...” Charles sat next to Sandy, bringing back all that heat and all that menace. She felt herself melting. “Irish coffee sounds good.”

The server asked whether the gentleman wanted an Irish coffee. “I don’t know about the gentleman, but I sure would.” Charles stretched and put his arm on the back of the couch so it was right behind her—not touching her, but still there in case.

Mariana seemed eager to go. Will did too. But Charles wasn’t in a rush. He glanced at her for confirmation that she wanted him to stay. Her eyes answered him. *Yes, please.*