

PROLOGUE TAKEOUT (2) LOVE ME IF YOU CAN

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One way or another, there'd be hell to pay. Scott eased from the warm bed. Somehow he had to get some studying done before class and before Lana was hot and heavy for another session of mattress mambo.

"Andrew Scott Holt, get your butt back in this bed." Lana patted the spot he'd just left.

He shook his head and kept heading to his desk. "Can't, babe. I've a Torts exam tomorrow."

His fiancée pulled her lush lips into a familiar pout. "I'll be so glad when you get out of law school. I'm sick of your nose being stuck in a book all the time. Makes me feel downright insignificant."

"Not gonna work. I'm on to your tricks...this time," he added with a grin. When Lana put her mind to it, she could be damned distracting—which was most of the time.

"I thought when we moved in together we'd spend all our time in bed."

"If that's the case, we should've waited 'til I'm out of law school."

"But that's another year and a half," she whined.

*Another year and a half.* He gave a mental groan.

"What was that?"

"What?" Had he groaned aloud?

"I thought I heard you moan."

"Guys don't moan." Still focused on his purpose, he sat down and opened the text book. "Spring break's not that far away. We'll go to Florida and spend the week in bed." Maybe that would distract her.

She rose to her knees. “We can spend our time in bed now. We don’t have to go to Florida. Spring Break is for partying.”

Scott gritted his teeth, stood and calmly collected his laptop and textbooks.

“Where’re you going? I thought you had to *study*.”

“I do. Heading to the library...for some peace and quiet.”

“Fine. And maybe when you get back I won’t be here.”

He could only hope. “Suit yourself.”

“No. No. No. Wait a minute.” Lana hopped from the bed and thrust her arms around his waist. “I’m sorry. I know I’m a little bitchy. You forgive me, don’t you? I’ve a better idea. Why don’t we get *married* during Spring Break?” She gazed up at him, lips parted.

“That’s not the plan. *After* law school. That way I’ll support you the way a husband should.”

“I don’t want to wait. I can quit grad school now and support *you*. We’re a modern couple...equals.”

Scott shook his head. “That’s not the plan.”

“You and your *plans*.”

Jaw clenched, he bit back a heated reply. Marriage after law school was supposed to be *their* plan. Reality check. Life with Lana wasn’t hitting a home run. The plan needed revisions.

The phone rang. Lana scowled and flounced over to the bedside table, then snatched up the phone. “Hello?”

Good. She was occupied. Time to make his escape.

“Scott, wait.”

The tremulous quiver in her tone stopped him. He turned. Her eyes were wide as

she held out the telephone with her trembling hand.

A rush of panic swept over him. He took the phone. “Yes?”

“Andrew Holt?” an unfamiliar voice asked.

“Yes. Who’s this?”

“Detective Ferguson, Metro. There’s been an accident.”

“Who? How bad?”

“Your father and step-mother. I’m sorry. They were hit head-on.”

The voice on the phone continued, but grew hollow...as hollow as Scott suddenly felt. He staggered back and sat on the edge of the bed. His stomach knotted. Tried to process the bare statement. “Both of them? Are you sure?”

“I’m sorry. It was—uh, instantaneous.”

“I see.” No, he didn’t—not really.

“We need you to come down and—”

“Yes, I understand.” He dropped the phone.

“Your parents?”

A bleakness, stark as a winter landscape without a tree in sight invaded his soul.

“Gone. Both of them.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I have to identify...” His throat closed. He couldn’t say the words...their bodies.

“I mean who will take care of all your brothers and sisters?”

“I will. Who else?” What the hell *was* he going to do? He shook his head. “Later. Gotta go.”