

## CLOSE TO PERFECT

“Hey beautiful, do you come here often?” the deep raspy voice asked from behind Libby Wilson.

Seated at the black jack table in the Bellagio hotel, she tapped the cards in front of her, signaling the dealer she’d like another card.

He laid a card face-up over her two face-down cards. A five of hearts. She signaled she’d hold.

With a smile she turned to watch the long lean form of Deacon Reynolds, dressed in a dark suit, crisp blue shirt and black-and-blue striped tie, slide into the unoccupied seat beside her. “Do you always approach women with that lame line?”

“Only those I’m sure won’t slap my face,” he said with a half grin, stacking a pile of chips in front of him.

She laughed. “So you think you’ll get lucky with me?”

The laughter in Deke’s coffee-brown eyes deepened to something more seductive. He lifted her free hand and kissed her knuckles just below the diamond engagement ring. “You are the luckiest thing to ever happen to me.”

A throat clearing across the table.

Heat filled Libby’s face as she looked over at the dealer, who had a patient, but knowing smile on his face.

“Your turn, ma’am. The house is holding at nineteen.” He pointed to the ten and nine cards turned face up in front of him.

Deke laid his hand over hers, stopping her from flipping her other cards over. “Let’s make a side bet.”

Lifting her brows, she tipped her head to the side, a smile playing on her lips. She always did love a challenge. “What did you have in mind?”

“If the house wins, you become mine for the rest of the weekend.” The heat in his eyes deepened and she knew whatever he had in mind would be devastatingly sexy.

“And if I win?” she asked, although his proposal had her hoping to lose.

“If you win, you get your heart’s desire, no matter the cost.”

They’d flown to Vegas yesterday, arriving to the most luxurious suites she’d ever been in, complete with marble floors, whirlpool tub and a view of the outdoor fountain. Then he’d taken her shopping for this white silk sheath dress she was wearing and the lace shawl she’d draped across her shoulders. To start their holiday weekend they’d enjoyed Thanksgiving Turkey dinner al fresco to watch the fountain show at night. Today he’d scheduled her for all kinds of pampering—manicure, pedicure, couple’s massage and a salon day for her hair and makeup. The man had made her feel like a princess already. What more could her heart desire?

*Only one thing.*

Slowly she smiled. "I'll take your bet."

Without looking she flipped over her other two cards. Another five, this time of diamonds and an Ace of spades.

"The lady wins with twenty-one," the dealer said, shoving more chips her way.

Libby smiled at the dealer, gathered her chips into the silk and rhinestone clutch she'd purchased with her dress yesterday, then handed him a twenty-dollar chip as a thank you. "No. The lady already won years ago," she said, slipping her arm through Deke's.

The other players at the table applauded them as they strolled toward the exit.

"Did you get everything arranged?" she asked, squeezing her arm beneath her hand.

"I think you'll be very happy," he said with a sly smile.

While they'd decided a private wedding in Las Vegas over the Thanksgiving weekend was what they both wanted—after all they'd waited ten years, lost a pregnancy and both nearly died during that time—Deke had asked her to let him plan the details of their ceremony. At first she wanted to refuse, saying she was only getting married once and wanted it to be perfect. Then she'd seen the need in his eyes to please her and she agreed, on one condition. No Elvis impersonators. He'd laughed and said he'd be disappointed, but would refrain.

They stopped at the doors to the Terrazza di Sogno, the venue he'd reserved for their wedding. As they stepped out onto the winding stairs, the strains of *Claire de Lune* by Claude Debussy, one of her favorite classical pieces, began. The stairs were decorated with autumn mums, dahlias and lilies in bright hues of yellow, orange and deep red. The lighted Bellagio fountain could be seen in the background of the terrace behind the silver-haired man dressed in a suit and tie waiting for them at the bottom of the stairs.

Her legs trembling slightly in the high heels, she gripped Deke's arm tightly as they descended the stairs. How awful would it be to fall flat on her face trying to get married?

At the bottom of the stairs was a table with a bouquet of red roses and gerbera daisies, again in bold autumnal colors. Deke stopped and handed it to her.

"You remembered my favorite flowers," she said, tears filling her eyes.

"The autumn flowers for beauty, the roses for love, the daisies for laughter," he said, repeating her words from years ago back to her. Then he led her over to stand before the preacher.

Stars twinkled above them in the clear night sky as they exchanged their vows to love, honor and respect each other for the rest of their days. The strains of Chopin's *Nocturne*, another of her favorites, played softly in the background. They gave each other rings they'd picked out back in Ohio, etched with flames in them to remind them of all they'd been through to be together. Finally, the preacher said, "You may kiss your bride."

Deke cupped her face in his big, calloused hands and stared into her eyes for a moment, all the love and desire inside him there in his dark eyes for her to see, then he slowly lowered his mouth to claim hers. It was a slow kiss, one of passion and promise. He pulled away, smiling down at her. "Mrs. Reynolds."

"Mr. Reynolds," she said, kissing him once more, quickly.

They thanked the preacher, signed the necessary papers and headed back up the stairs. Happy in the newness of their married status, they strolled to the elevator banks hand-in-hand, no words necessary between them.

At their floor, Deke paused outside the elevator. Libby tilted her head at him in question. He placed a finger on her lips and they waited silently for the door to close.

Without warning, he scooped her up in his arms.

“Deke!” she squealed, but not too loudly, wrapping her arms around his neck, her clutch in one hand the bouquet in the other. With a grin and a twinkle in his eye, he carried her to their room, managed to swipe the room key and took her inside. “Did you like our wedding, love?”

She smiled at him. “It was close to perfect.”

With a puzzled look he set her on her feet. “What was missing?”

“My heart’s desire,” she said, leaning up to whisper in his ear. “A baby.”

He broke out in a grin. “Your wish is my command.”

And he swept her up again to give her what she desired most.