

Hate Games

Book 1 in the Reckless Enemies series

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This one's for my Dark Knight

The second I met him, I knew he would shatter my heart into a million pieces. Not only once, but again and again. And he would do it for no other reason than taking pleasure from it.

Love was a game to him, and I, like so many other girls, was a pauper to the king. Even so, I couldn't help myself from being drawn to him. Like a moth to a flame, I was mesmerized... obsessed, a slave to the dark light and ever willing to be consumed by the burning blaze of the ocean of hell he spawned for me.... Whenever I let him be the wind in my sails... I soon found myself shipwrecked without a safe harbor.

Even so, I eagerly drowned in his attention, obsessed with the next time he'd grace me... choke me... snuff me out with his darkness.

My dad, a prominent doctor, once told me that there are three types of men: The Beggars, the Dark Knights, and the Gentlemen. He said I'd encounter all three in my life, and that I'd only meet and marry a Gentlemen after I'd encountered the first two and had my heart royally broken by the Dark Knight. I honestly thought he was joking... But my life proved otherwise.

I thought I was over him, that I had moved on and was ready to find my Gentleman. But when I saw him again, with one look, there was nothing I could do to escape his thrall.

And in an instant, I yearned to drown in his abyss of his darkness, silently begged to let him take me back to hell with him, so he could scorch me to ashes, body, heart and soul.

CHAPTER 1

Five Years Earlier

Princess Harbor in Arizona, a 5-star luxury resort, and the go-to vacation haven for the wealthy, was our family's regular summer place.

I had stayed here with my younger sister, Rose, and parents for three weeks every summer for as long as I could remember, soaking in the gigantic pool for hours a day, eating at the buffet until my stomach felt like it would explode, and sleeping in until noon. It was a sun paradise compared to our hometown, Woodinville, a small town thirty minutes northeast of Seattle.

It was the summer when I turned sixteen when I officially met Spencer King, the son of the resort owner, the heir to the multi-multi-million-dollar family empire.

Rose and I were playing hide and seek in the hallways. I really felt too old to continue on with these games with my sister who was five years my junior, but what else was there to do? The snooty rich kids kept to themselves and the other guests were retired folks who liked to play golf and sit in the shade with layers of sunblock on every part of their wrinkled skin.

I'd pulled my sun-kissed chestnut hair up into a high bun that morning, the easiest hair-do I could think of and one that would hold all day. Summers were awesome that way—easy breezy. I didn't have to dress in my private school uniform or have perfectly groomed hair. I could just roam around carefree without a worry in the world. In short, Princess Harbor was a heaven on earth, giving me all the freedom I'd ever dreamed of.

While running through the corridors and passing indoor water fountains and shops, I thought, like so many times before, that this place seemed like a castle. Everything about this resort was designed to dazzle. The interior designer must have been instructed to create the ideal place for the rich and wealthy. Everything was perfectly placed, color-coordinated, and made one feel as if one had stepped into a world where no expense had been spared. It had the best amenities money could buy, tennis courts, spas, pools, waterfalls, and hot tubs.

Trying to hide from Rose, I snuck into one of the offices,

deliberately ignoring the 'employees only' sign, and squeezed behind the door. Not long after, I heard footsteps. Thinking it was my sister, and not wanting to be found, I moved further into the room and hid behind the thick green velour drape. My heart was beating with excitement as I silenced my giggles. Would she find me? As the footsteps came closer, I realized they couldn't be Rose's. They were too heavy to be coming from her dainty little nymph-like figure.

Suddenly, the door slammed shut and the mood in the room became dangerous. I held my breath, feeling something sinister was about to happen. I didn't realize that I was about to officially meet my Dark Knight, and that he'd be the one who crushed my heart to smithereens.

"Stay away from the girls," a deep, angry voice growled. Someone slammed a fist onto the desk. "I can't afford losing more customers because my eighteen-year-old son can't keep his dick in his pants."

"You have no fucking idea what I'm doing," said another deep voice, but younger.

"You think I don't know?" said the older man. "I've had two complaints this week alone and they are threatening to involve the authorities."

The young man chuckled, a hint of pride in his

contemptuous laugh.

“Is this funny to you, Spencer? Perhaps I should make your sister heir to my entire empire instead of you!” The older man was close to yelling now.

“Then be a man and fucking do it,” the younger man sneered.

Slap.

“Don’t you use that type of language around me, son!” The older man’s voice had become threatening now and the hairs at the back of my neck stood up. “Your mother would have been ashamed of you,” he snarled. “It’s a good thing she’s no longer here so she can’t see what a pathetic disappointment you’ve become.”

“And you think she would have been proud of you?” the younger man asked. “After mom died, all you do is drink and work and bring whatever whore you want back home.”

“If you don’t watch your mouth, I’ll beat the shit out of you!” The older man was yelling at the top of his lungs.

“I’m glad she died so that she didn’t have to learn what a cunt you are,” the younger man bit out. “How you just forgave the man who murdered her and lived on like she never existed.”

I gasped, too afraid of what was happening on the other side of the all-too thin curtain. I wished I could run. Wished I could just somehow vanish into the floor. This conversation obviously wasn’t meant for anyone to hear. Instead, I squeezed my eyes shut,

remained as still as I could, and tried not to breathe.

I heard a growl, sounds of straining, then a loud blow. Someone fell to the ground with a thud. The door swung open and someone left in a huff, slamming the door shut behind him. It was quiet for a long while and I dared hardly move a muscle.

“Screw him,” the young man muttered. Then he sniffled. Was he crying?

Cautiously, I glanced from behind the curtain and saw the young man on the floor. He was looking down and blood was coming from his nose. His face was red with anger, his eyes dark and sinister. I recalled having seen him around the resort through the years and thought he was handsome. Very handsome. The young man probably didn't even know I existed but the pull he had on me every time I looked at him was so powerful and so confusing. I feared him as much as I was drawn to him.

As the son of the resort owner, Spencer was always around. He drove the nicest cars, always had the prettiest girls on his arms, and wore expensive clothes. He was looked upon as royalty by everyone here, me included. Even though he wasn't more than a couple years my senior, he commanded attention as if he were a full-grown man. He also had a best friend, Mike, I think his name was, who smiled at me often. I didn't like the way Mike ogled me with his pale blue puppy dog eyes, so I didn't smile back, only

ignored him as best I could. My dad and the resort owner were friends, and they'd sometimes eat dinner or have a drink at the bar in the restaurant. Spencer, however, was never around his dad, which I found odd.

"What the hell are you doing here?" The young man's dark brown eyes narrowed, and he looked at me as if wanted to murder me.

I pulled the curtain in front of my face and my cheeks burned. I knew this was a dangerous situation, but I didn't know how to get out of it.

"How the hell did you get in here?" He stood, walked over to me, and yanked the curtain aside, dark eyes ablaze angrily drilling into me.

"I'm sorry," was all I could manage to choke out. "I didn't mean to be here. I was just..." I couldn't finish the sentence, my throat too dry. I'd never been one to be intimidated by men. My dad was a kind, calm man, my grandfather a gentle giant. This kind of behavior from men was foreign to me.

Threateningly, the young man inched closer. He was taller than I had figured him to be at a distance. More muscular, too. His glare was hard, possessive, and there was a storm brewing behind them, a storm that had me equally intrigued and terrified.

He's the Dark Knight that's going to crush my heart to

smithereens.

I felt it deep inside just by looking at him. I knew it, too, like an omen from the future. And now I realized exactly what my dad was talking about when he told me about the three types of men I'd meet. I'd never felt this aroused by a man, the blackness of his eyes, the blackness of his messy hair tilting my entire reality on an axis.

Is this what falling in love feels like?

I sure hoped not.

I sure hoped so.

"What's your name, girl?" he asked.

I hated how he called me 'girl.' At sixteen, wasn't I considered a young woman now?

"Ellie," I squeaked.

"You're that daughter of Doctor Goldstein," he said.

The second I nodded, his jaw clenched, and his expression changed from one of anger to pure hatred.

"Didn't you read the sign on the door?" he snapped.

"I did." My voice trembled.

"What did it say?" he seethed, red-faced now.

"Employees only." My voice had gone so low I could barely even hear it.

"And are you an employee?" he demanded.

"No. I'm sorry," I muttered as I twisted my hands into knots.

“Sorry? Sorry doesn’t cut it. If I ever catch you snooping around like this again, I’ll destroy your life. Do you understand, bitch?”

I stood there just staring at him, unable to move, his words so shocking, so angry, that I had no idea how to react to them. And was I even breathing?

“Do you understand?” he demanded again.

I nodded once, and he turned on his heel and stormed out of the office.

When I was certain that he was gone, I finally regained movement of my limbs again. My heart in my throat, my body numb, I darted out of the office and ran as fast as I could. No one had ever talked to me the way he had. No one had called me a bitch. No one had made me feel so small. So angry.

As I ran, it was as if Princess Resort had suddenly changed. Instead of it being a happy, free, fun vacation resort, it had become a dark and sinister prison. It was as if I finally saw it for what it was: an ominous dwelling that held a deep, dark secret. Now I realized that something about this place just didn’t feel right. It felt empty. Sad.

Hopeless.

And like I was in enemy territory.

I ran all the way back to Rose’s and my room, feeling as if I

shouldn't be here. When I got back into the room, I lost it and threw myself on my bed, sobbing. Tears stung my eyes and I cried as I punched my pillow, Spencer's angry, hateful eyes branded into my memory.

I spent the rest of the day inside. My dad asked me time and again what had happened, but I brushed it off as me just not feeling well.

"I'm coming down with something," I said. I rarely lied to my dad but I just didn't want to tell him about Spencer. I was ashamed of how he had treated me, and somehow, I came to believe it was my fault. I did trespass, so he was in the right to be angry at me, right?

By the next morning, I was done feeling sorry for myself and from hiding from some stupid dude who had no manners and didn't know how to talk to a girl... er... young woman. I was never one to be afraid of others, and I wasn't going to start now after a ridiculous fluke incident with an asshole rich boy who believed he was the king of the world.

Late morning, I headed back to the pool with my sister, Rose, holding my head high, as if I were taking my power back and claiming my freedom and right to be here. However, approaching the pool area, I felt like I was back at school, trying to avoid Sara, one of the mean girls in my class. She'd tried to bully me into submission, would constantly seek me out and make some scene. I

never understood why she picked on me. I mean, I had heard rumors that the guy she liked had a crush on me, but why did it matter to her? I had never even talked to the guy and I was so not interested in him. Around every turn, I made it a point to try to avoid her. Not because I was scared. But because our interactions were so pointless and took way too much of my time and energy.

Arriving at the pool, my eyes skimmed the surroundings, and I was relieved to find that Spencer was nowhere in sight. I sat in one of the lounge chairs and took off my yellow sun dress. I was rather happy with the tiny red bikini I'd bought this year. It showed off my slender waist and accentuated my curvy hips and firm bust.

Feeling happy about the fact that Spencer was gone, I started to lather sunscreen onto Rose's back.

"Could you hold your hair up?" I asked. Rose's hair was a dark auburn and I'd always envied her that she'd inherited our mom's colors. Why did mine just have to be a boring brown like my dad's? Well, at least it turned a sun-kissed chestnut in the summertime, I'd always console myself. I envied Rose's and my mom's eye color, too: irises as bright as emeralds. Mine were, well, boring brown.

Just then, Spencer walked through the gate with a young woman on his arm. A pang of pain hit my right in the solar plexus and I immediately hated her. The young woman was probably no more than my age and she was smiling, laughing. She had a distinct

blush in her cheeks, a look I'd later recognize as being the way a woman looks after she has had an orgasm. Her long blonde hair was wavy and reached to the middle of her back. She had gorgeous breasts that looked more fake than real, and lips that were so full that even I could imagine myself enjoying kissing them. Had they been surgically altered?

My anger and hostility toward her didn't make any sense. Even so, every cell in my body wanted to do terrible things to her... treat her the way the bully Sara treated me. His arm was wrapped around her tiny waist and he whispered something into her ear. She giggled and smiled.

I looked away and trained my eyes to Rose's back, putting every ounce of energy into lathering that damn sunscreen onto her pale skin.

"Not so hard!" Rose chastised as she shot me an angry glare. "Sheesh."

"Sorry." We had come to Princess resort every summer for as long as I remembered, but now, with what happened yesterday, and seeing how I was feeling in Spencer's presence, I knew I never wanted to visit here again. My parents could find another resort to take us to. Or I'd just stay home alone and make do with the rainy Washington summers. I mean, I was old enough to be by myself, especially now that I'd soon have my driver's license. Either way, I

decided that I'd never return here again and that was my final decision.

The girl giggled so loudly that my head automatically turned in their direction again. He was tickling her now and nipping at her ear as they walked.

His gaze locked with mine across the divide. His eyes narrowed into slivers. I wanted to hide, but other than jumping into the pool and submerging myself forever, there was no escape.

He set his direction toward me, eyes like a hawk, as if he was hunting me down. What in the world could he possibly want with me? Nothing good. He stared at me with such intensity that I lost my ability to breathe.

But no! He wasn't going to intimidate me back into my room. I wasn't going to allow him to make me feel unwelcome here when my parents were paying guests. I deserved to be treated as good as anyone else!

I shot to my feet and stared back at him, my fists clenched at my sides. His black eyes remained trained to mine as he pulled the girl by his side in for a passionate kiss. I kept my expression as impassive as I could, showing him that I didn't care in the least what he did with that girl and what he did with his mouth.

My belly tightened with need, reminding me very much that for whatever reason, I did care. I clenched my fists harder. And

harder. And harder... until I thought I might puncture the skin with my fingernails.

He released her and whispered something into her ear, all the while still maintaining eye contact with me.

The young woman skipped off to the bar and leaned her petite body over the counter, to order a drink, it looked like. Spencer approached me, walking slowly, and very deliberately in my direction. His tan skin glistened in the sun, and as he neared me, his delicious scent, something manly, something rich and overwhelming, drifted into my nostrils.

He stopped a mere two feet away and looked me up and down with a lazy gaze, as if he didn't care for what he saw. Right. I was just an average girl with natural everything, and from the looks of the girls he chose to hang around with, I wasn't his type.

"You're still here, bitch?" he asked.

An elderly woman sitting next to us gasped. "Watch your language, young man," she said.

"My name is Ellie," I said. "E-L-L-I-E," I spelled it out.

"From now on, you're going to go by *bitch*," he said.

He claimed me with his eyes, as if he were imagining something dark and vicious, some animalistic energy radiating from his eyes.

I felt my entire body buzzing at his closeness, and there was

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