



*Bonus Scene*

THE WEDDING

**FOREVER**  
*Us*

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
**SCARLETT AVERY**

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***Scarlett Avery***

## Nikolaj And Martin Bonding Right Before the Wedding

*Knock, knock, knock.*

I lift my eyes from my iPad. *Who is it?*

“Room service for Mr. von Henningsen.” I smile.

I drop the tablet on the coffee table in front of me, get up from the sofa, walk to the door, and open it. “You wanker.”

Martin is standing next to one of the hotel’s staff. The woman is gripping a rolling tray loaded with food while my best friend is sporting a huge grin.

“Breakfast is served, sir,” he says with a pointed Irish accent. “And just for good measure, I brought my tux along with me.” He holds up a black and gray checkered Louis Vuitton garment bag.

“Are you serious?”

“From the dozens of texts you sent me since five o’clock this morning, I’m as serious as a heart attack.”

“Shit.”

“Exactly,” he says. “It’s obvious, you need a shoulder to cry on, and at this ridiculous time of the day considering how little sleep I got, there’s no way I’m doing that on an empty stomach.” He strolls into the nuptial suite and waves at the woman to do the same. “Nik, meet Eglantine. She worked with the kitchen when I called for a quick turnaround.” He passes in front of me,

heading to the patio. “Eglantine, this is Mr. von Henningsen.”

“Eglantine,” I say.

“*Monsieur.*” She nods and trails right behind Martin.

Martin has already mapped out the first few hours of the most important day of my life.

Without much choice, I follow them both with a smile pulling up at the sides of my lips.

“Eglantine, Mr. von Henningsen is getting married in a few hours,” he says. “Beware, he’s not having a good morning. All this pre-wedding stuff is getting to him, I’m afraid.”

“Remind me again why you’re my best friend?”

“Since it’s such a gorgeous morning, I thought we’d have breakfast together right here.” He stands in the middle of the patio and opens his arms wide. “It’s a lot more private than us eating at the restaurant or in the open courtyard.” He takes a few steps towards me. “Something tells me there’s a lot on your mind since most of the texts were fairly cryptic for such an eloquent man as yourself.”

*Fucker.*

“I figured I’d just come over and get the full story.”

Eglantine doesn’t wait to be told. She’s already placing dishes on the dining table.

*I can’t believe the spread.*

After so many years, I shouldn’t be surprised Martin knows me so well. I’m starved. “We haven’t had

a chance to connect since you got here a couple of days ago... with the family dinner and all.”

“Right.” He nods.

“*Monsieur* Gallagher.” Eglantine pronounces Martin’s name with a strong French accent. “For *de* lattes, *Monsieur* von Henningsen’s kitchen has espresso machine. Me wait for to prepare *de* coffee?”

Martin opens his mouth to answer, but I precede him. “*Merci beaucoup, Eglantine.*” Thank you very much, might be the only combination of words I can pronounce correctly in French. “It’s okay. No need for that.”

She bows and scurries off.

I turn to Martin. “You didn’t have to do this.”

“Yes, I did, Nik. I ditched the comfort of my wife’s warm body to come to your rescue before you murder someone. Ciara would never forgive me if I allowed you to spend your wedding day in prison.”

*Okay, I might be on edge.*

“I couldn’t sleep without Ciara.” I sigh. “I had a shitty night tossing and turning. I desperately missed being close to her body through the night. It’s one thing when I’m traveling and I know that she can’t be with me, but when she’s only a few doors away, it drives me stir crazy.”

“How can you possibly love a woman this much, von Henningsen?”

I cock my head to the side and lift a mocking eyebrow. “Says the Irishman who’s been walking around with hearts in his eyes since he met the love of his life.”

“Point well taken. I know you’re suffering, mate. That’s why I’m here. Let’s eat something because I’m famished.”

“That’s a great idea. Perhaps if my stomach is full, I won’t be as irritable.”

We sit down.

I stare down at the feast—a pile of French toasted baguettes, creamy butter, a variety of jam flavors, a basket of breakfast pastries including plain croissants, pistachio, and chocolate ones. I also spot a few raisin Danish swirls—Martin’s favorites. There’s a glass jug full of juice, a large bowl of fresh fruit salad, and plain yoghurt. There’s also a bowl of hard-boiled eggs and a tray of cheese.

“It’s your wedding day. What did you expect? There’s a shit load of people who are going to wake up clamoring for food soon. We’re getting an early start.” He waves a hand over the table. “Come on, dig in.” He pours us both a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice.

We load up our plates with food and devour it as if we hadn’t spent half of last night eating one scrumptious dish after the other.

When my parents returned safely, Kayla ordered the kitchen to prepare a feast to celebrate the joyous occasion. Once we had pretty much licked our plates clean, we all indulged in a little too much wine. With the day we had, it was well justified.

“This definitely hits the spot,” I say.

“I couldn’t have said it better.” Martin cuts two pieces of Camembert cheese. I steal one.

“Thanks for doing this, Mart.”

“Don’t mention it.”

“I’m glad this day has finally arrived, but yesterday—although it had a happy ending—nearly wiped me out. That’s not how I envisioned my last day as a single man. When you combine that with the fact that I foolishly agreed to my mother’s ridiculous and outdated request...” I shake my head.

“Yesterday was a brutal and punishing day.”

“It was the most horrible day of my life,” I say. “And it just so happens that it was also the best day of my life.” Yesterday could’ve ended in a tragedy. It’s still quite unsettling to me. “I don’t know what I would’ve done if something had happened to my parents and the thought of not being able to marry Ciara was more than I could bear.”

“It’s over now. It’s not the first family drama that’s threatened your relationship, but somehow, the two of you always seem able to rise above anything that’s thrown at you. No matter how thorny.”

“You come through for me every time. Without you, I doubt I would’ve have been able to win Ciara back after Jakob’s royal fuckup. And yesterday, you prevented me from murdering my own sister in front of a crowd of witnesses.”

“Katrine can be hardcore.”

I twist my lips. “You mean stubborn, tenacious, obstinate and incredibly inflexible?”

“Those describe her well,” he says. “I think it’s the middle child syndrome.”

“That makes absolutely no sense, Mart. I concede Clara is the eldest daughter so she’s in a different league. But Emma is as much of a middle child as Katrine is and she doesn’t make it a point to ruin everyone’s life with her annoying attitude.”

“You’re the baby. You’re like the king they had been waiting for their entire lives. Jakob was—well, still is—the terror your mom needed to save, and your father ignored him as much as possible. Clara is the brilliant one and first-born female. Emma is the sweet, bubbly, and creative one. And then there’s Katrine—the one who’s always tried to find her place in the family dynamic.”

“Interesting analysis, but I still think my sister derives an insane amount of pleasure from being a thorn in my side. I think it has more to do with her personality than where she fits in the family. This is even more so the case when it comes to Ciara.”

Martin drops his unfinished Danish and frowns at me. “I thought all of your sisters loved Ciara.”

“Yesterday was a turning point for my sister and my soon-to-be wife.”

“What do you mean?” Martin pops the last bite of his Danish in his mouth.

“A few days after I brought Ciara to Copenhagen to meet my parents, Katrine cornered me in the kitchen and made one of her infamous backhanded compliments.”

Martin is already shaking his head. “What the hell did she say this time?” He’s been on the receiving end of her snarky remarks.

“She thought Ciara was a lovely, beautiful, charming, and smart woman, but Katrine couldn’t understand why Ciara was the first woman I brought home to meet the family. In her opinion, I should’ve focused my energy on finding a Danish girl or at least a European one instead of an American woman whose values are so different from *ours*. As if she’d know since she’s traveled to America only on a few rare occasions. She even gave you as an example since you’re marrying an Irish girl.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“I thought I was going to strangle her there and then.”

“Your sister is a piece of work.”

“We’ve known this forever, Mart. Her only saving grace is the fact that her husband waltzed in the kitchen looking for her. After that incident, I avoided her like the plague and of course I never said anything to Ciara.”

“Katrine can be a real—”

“Bitch.”

“Yes.” I nod. “When she puts her mind to it, she’s really damn good at it.”

“That’s not the end of it.” Martin raises his eyebrows. “When Ciara ran back to America after the Jakob fiasco, Katrine was desperately trying to convince me this might be a great opportunity to open myself up to the possibilities of meeting someone who’s local. Perhaps it just wasn’t meant to be. Maybe God was sending me a message.”

“Did you fucking lose it on her? And why is this the first time I’ve heard about this?”

“I was so out of it and so miserable at the time. I didn’t even have the energy to respond, but it so happened that when she blurted out her venom, my dad was walking into the kitchen to grab some cookies. In all of my years on this planet, I’ve never seen him so angry. He went ballistic on her. He was yelling at the top of his lungs—something I’ve rarely seen him do, even with Jakob. He chewed Katrine up so good, she never brought up the topic ever again. The only other time I saw my dad that enraged was a few days later as the truth came out about how much of a rascal and a no-good-thief Jakob was. When Katrine ran out of the kitchen with her tail between her legs, Dad turned to me and told me I shouldn’t allow anyone to stand between me and the woman I love.”

“Bless your dad.” Martin grabs a chocolate croissant. “Wait a minute.” He frowns. “Is this story with Katrine why the two of you were at it like cats and dogs yesterday? I’ve seen you butt heads many times before, but it’s never been quite as acrimonious. We barely avoided a nuclear explosion in the garden. There was steam coming out of your nostrils and your ears, mate.”

“Absolutely,” I say. “Since I knew of her matchmaking aspirations, in my view, her comments were just a way for her to dig the knife deeper. She’s good at cutting you at the knees when you’re at your lowest. It’s as if she was saying to me, *‘Told you so. This was doomed from the beginning. Ditch the American. Move on’*. The difference this time, is that it wasn’t in private.

It was in front of family, friends, and all of our guests. It's one thing to humiliate me, it's a whole other when you attempt to belittle the woman I love. That's when it stops being fun and games and I no longer care if we're related by blood. You will go down."

"I would've been as ferocious if someone had attacked my Eloise the way your sister did yesterday. She was out of line. She preyed on Ciara's vulnerability. I doubt she ever expected you to go off on her like that."

"Katrine is smart. She knows how we were raised. We wash our dirty laundry behind closed doors. Always. She bet on the wrong hand. As long as she's learned her lesson, we'll be fine. Yesterday was the last straw."

"Let's hope she mellows out and hangs her bitch crown once you marry Ciara."

We both laugh.

A wave of fatigue hits me, a reminder of my sleepless night.

I check my watch. If I could will the minutes to tick by faster, I would. "I'm in this deep, Mart. I can't even sleep without her anymore. Can you believe that?"

"You knew about your mother's tradition for a long time since two of your sisters are already married."

"That still doesn't make the pill easier to swallow."

"Nik, I think you're feeling this way because you're you."

"What does that mean?"

“You’re Nikolaj von Henningsen. Indomitable. Unshakable. Unbreakable. I’ve known you since we were teenage boys, and in that time, I’ve never seen you as much as fluster when faced with a challenge—no matter how big. Bloody hell, even when the shit hits the fan, you remain calm and collected. You laugh in the face of adversity. You’re always in control. You never question anything. You’re always so certain. I’ve always admired this quality in you.” He shakes his head. “I’ve never been quite able to master your steadfastness.”

His confession surprises me.

“God knows I’ve tried, but I’ve never been able to get even close.” Martin looks me straight in the eyes. “There’s only one person on earth that makes you waver. Ciara. Getting her back after Jakob’s was a challenge. You weren’t sure if you were going to be able to win her back.”

“You’re right. I thought I’d lost her forever.”

Martin laughs.

“What’s so funny?”

“I’m thinking of the first time I ever heard you question anything. It was right after that steamy weekend you spent with Ciara. Bloody hell, you woke me up at an ungodly hour considering I had just flown in. You were in Tokyo and I was in Copenhagen, but you ignored the time difference because you needed to *talk* about this fling. That was unfathomable. You never talked about a woman you fucked.”

I chuckle. “God, you were so pissed off at me.”

“With good reason. I nearly didn’t call you back. I wanted to roll over and fall back asleep, but something kept bugging me. If you were calling me at six o’clock in the morning—when you of all people knew exactly what the time difference was between Asia and Europe—this woman had you by the balls.”

“Did she ever.” A huge grin forms on my face as a few saucy images flash in front of me.

“You waited a long time to find her, but boy, did you ever win big at the lottery, mate.”

“We both did. Your wife is a gem.”

Martin shakes his head. “It’s not the same thing. Don’t get me wrong, I’m head over heels in love with Eloise and I can’t imagine my life without her. She’s a prize, and every day I’m in awe that she’s chosen me. I cherish our love with all my heart. But I’ve had other long-term relationships before. I’ve even fallen in love. Not you. You bypassed all of the messiness associated with bad relationships. Most of us test the waters to figure out who we’re meant to be with. You went straight for gold. Lucky bastard.”

I chuckle.

“I haven’t got a clue how you managed to keep your heart under lock and key all these years. You’ve never allowed a woman to climb the insurmountable walls of your fortress, but God, when you did fall, you fell fucking hard. And you know what?” He doesn’t wait for my answer. “I knew exactly when you were going to marry her.”

I roll my eyes at him. “Do you have psychic abilities you’ve never told me about?”

“I’m being serious.” He looks vexed.

“This I have to hear,” I say to indulge him.

“At your father’s big bash. The way you were holding her, looking at her and embracing her. I distinctly remember the gentleness in the way you kissed her throughout the night. I knew it was way more than *just* love. It was the kind of intoxicating emotion that changes a man—even one as stubborn as you.”

“Sod off.” He’s right, but I have no intention of giving him the satisfaction of confirming his hunch.

“I love you too, my brother,” he says. We chuckle. “That necklace was a pre-engagement ring as far as I’m concerned. You’ve been generous in the past with women you’ve fucked, but you usually get your assistant to send them a little parting gift. You flew to Paris and spent days visiting the most expensive jewelry shops until you found the right statement piece. Nik, you haven’t stepped into a shop in years. Other than your tailor in London and your bespoke shoemaker in Milan—and that’s because you can’t send someone else. For everything else, you either get your team of personal shoppers to scour stores in search of the perfect items on your behalf or you buy it online.”

“I—”

“Don’t deny it, von Henningsen. You could’ve hired a reputable personal shopper in Paris and that person would’ve done a fabulous job, but you didn’t. Ciara is far

too precious for that kind of impersonal touch. It had to come from you.”

“Okay, you’ve made your point.”

“Not quite.”

“There’s more?” I cock a brow. “You’re not done chastising me yet? What kind of best friend does that to a guy on his wedding day?”

“I didn’t get out of bed and leave Eloise behind because you were annoying me with your texts. I could’ve turned off my phone. You’re a big boy, I’m sure you would’ve found a way to sort out your emotions. I’m here because your devotion for this woman is unapologetic and unwavering. The two of you will have the kind of passionate long-lasting relationship that can navigate through any stormy weather. I’m proud I’m the bastard who gets to stand by your side when you make her your wife.”

“You sound like a bloody relationship coach. Where is all this coming from?”

“If I don’t tell you this shit now, when am I supposed to?”

“You’re absolutely right on one point. There’s no question whatsoever about my love for Ciara. She’s my everything. What we share will last indefinitely. That much I know for sure. The next time I walk down the aisle, it’ll be as the father of the bride to one of my beautiful *eight* daughters.”

Martin bursts out laughing. “You’re still trying to convince Ciara to give you that many kids?”

I nod. “It’s an ongoing process, my friend, but we’re having a heck of a lot of fun trying. In fact, I predict we’ll be practicing just a few hours after I marry her.”

\* \* \*

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