

Undeniable Fate

MIA LONDON

Chapter One

Lily fidgeted with her tablet cover from her first class seat, chewing the lipstick off her lips. She wasn't afraid of flying, but feared this would be her last trip to Rome. Once the assignment was complete, she'd return to LA and a pink slip, and there wasn't a damn thing she could do about it.

Her company, ALK, had recently been taken over by a larger company—a company known for bringing in their own people and eliminating duplication. Her sadness only grew because she loved her job. Really *loved* her job.

Dammit!

She'd need to remember what her best friend, Courtney, told her. *There are no good ways to be fired, only better ways to accept it. You are smart and good at what you do. Handle it all with grace. You will rock your next job.*

The plane pushed off from the gate, and Lily was secretly thankful that the seat next to her remained vacant.

She ate an egg white omelet and fruit with a cup of black coffee. When the flight attendant offered her a Danish, she declined. Carbs were not her friend.

The plane had a scheduled stop in Dallas for those not going through to Rome, so Lily checked her email and waited for passengers to deplane and board.

A tall man dressed in a tailor-made dark suit and blue silk tie boarded. She couldn't determine exactly how tall, but he had a few inches over Kirk, her ex. She crossed her fingers that he'd take the seat next to her. He was likely married, knowing her luck, but he'd be good eye candy for the long flight.

Her stomach tumbled over when he smiled and made his way through first class to her aisle.

“Hi.”

“Hi.”

He slipped off his suit jacket and hoisted his carry-on suitcase into the overhead compartment. Then, he shoved his leather laptop bag beneath the seat in front of him. His moves were sure and strong, and Lily became captivated watching him.

Although first class gave more space, when Lily inhaled, she was rewarded with a tantalizing musky, masculine scent. Simply divine. If she knew for certain it would go unnoticed, she'd lean in closer.

The man offered polite small talk, and seemed to be in work mode. That's what she called it when her father came home from work, but still had things processing in his brain.

She watched his intense eyes and his sculptured lips when he asked if she had enough leg room. He had a rich, soothing voice she could listen to all day. Her heart beat faster than normal just being close to him.

When the tall, blonde flight attendant wearing a perfect smile came back to take drink orders, she asked him first. Lily was floored when the man next to her turned and said, “What would you like to drink?”

“Um, a glass of unsweetened tea.” The flight attendant blushed at her misstep, but smiled an apology, and then looked at him.

“Ice water with a slice of lime, please.”

The attendant returned shortly and set the drinks on the tray tables. The moment he had permission to use his laptop, he opened a rather impressive machine. He focused on his work, typing fast, with an occasional grunt or sigh.

Lily leaned forward to retrieve a book from her bag, and discreetly glanced at his left hand to see he wasn't wearing a ring. Surely someone this handsome and intriguing is married, she thought. Probably engaged.

She sighed and opened her book. After reading for a while, Lily thought about what she needed to accomplish while in Rome, and stewed over her ex. Kirk had wooed her and she'd foolishly fallen for it. She knew his manipulating type, and should have been on guard. She mentally shook her head. *Lessons learned.*

Lily dozed off for about an hour of the twelve-hour flight, and when she awoke the man next to her was sleeping. He'd put his computer away and loosened his tie. She took in his striking features—chiseled jawline, his refined cheekbones, not to mention the tailored cut of his pants.

As if sensing her attention, he opened his eyes and found her looking at him. Her face heated with embarrassment when he grinned at her.

"Good evening," he said, sounding as cultured and polished as he looked.

"Evening. Sorry about that." She turned to face front.

"It's okay. I'm glad I wasn't drooling."

She couldn't hold back her smile.

The flight attendant came to their aisle this time asking them both, "Can I get you anything to eat or drink?"

Lily ordered a glass of white wine, and he asked for a light beer and some nuts. He faced her and introduced himself. "I'm Brandon Morgan."

She shook his hand, noticing how firm yet smooth it felt. "Lily Bennett."

Brandon watched Lily as he gave her his name but it didn't seem to mean anything to her. And for that, he was thankful. Sometimes it was nice to be known as the president and CEO of a Fortune 1000 company, and other times he appreciated the anonymity. Like his two sisters, Brandon had been an Executive Vice President for his father's company, Laurel Medical Incorporated. When his father had a heart attack and triple bypass surgery two years prior, they were forced to take over—earlier than he had expected.

Lily's shoulder-length brunette hair moved slightly when she spoke, and her smile showed in her blue eyes. He instantly appreciated the glimpses of her figure hiding under her suit jacket.

“So, what brings you to Rome, business or pleasure?”

“Business. I'm a project manager for a skincare company based in LA, so this is strictly a business trip,” she said without much of a smile.

Didn't she like her job?

“What brings you to Rome?” she parroted.

“Business as well. My company is thinking of buying another company based there.”

“Oh wow. So, you're in mergers and acquisitions?”

“Yes, something like that.” *And many other things.*

“Exciting. What's the name of the company—”

“This is not the same chardonnay I had earlier.” The raised voice from the man in front of them carried throughout the triple-seven’s first class.

The flight attendant’s eyes widened and she replied in calm tones, though Brandon couldn’t make out her words.

“Well, then let me see what else you have,” he demanded.

She nodded, giving him a sugary-sweet smile, and flipped her over-dyed hair as she returned to the front of the plane.

Brandon glanced at Lily who had an exaggerated look of surprise on her face.

She giggled softly, and he smiled back.

“Do you go to Rome often?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes, about twice a year. We grow the ingredients for our skincare a few miles outside of the city.”

What is the cost for such a venture? “You can’t grow them in the US?”

“The owner has sensitive skin and insisted every product from day one be *uber* organic, you might say. From the seed to the shelf, every process is organic and uncontaminated, and European countries are better equipped to meet our strict requirements.”

Interesting. He nodded slowly, recalling she was a product manager, he asked, “And you check up on these farms?”

“Yes, plus I need to oversee the process for a new oil-control face lotion we are about to introduce.” She gestures with her hands.

Brandon was drawn to Lily’s enthusiasm. That kind of zest and intelligence wasn’t often present in employees who’d been doing a job for a long time. “Fascinating.”

“It is. It’s a great company, and I like my job a lot.” He noticed the slight furrow in her brow.

In an obvious subject change, she asked, “Can you talk about your big merger?”

He smiled at the tone in her voice, like she might be privy to a big secret. “Sure. We manufacture medical devices. And this is a friendly buyout. It’s a mid-size company that not only gives us instant entry into Europe, but they have a successful product we want to market as well.”

The flight attendant returned to take their dinner orders. The frequency of her visits, although he knew it was her protocol, was becoming annoying. He’d much rather talk with Lily than order fish or chicken.

Brandon couldn’t have asked for better company. He actually thought he’d use the time to get a chunk of work done.

Lily seemed quiet at times, yet animated and engaging at others. For the remainder of the flight, they talked about their families, Italy, other European countries, latest medical news, nutrition, just about anything and everything. He could laugh because it felt very much like a date.

When they arrived in Italy, he was slightly disappointed to say goodbye to Lily Bennett.

“Nice chatting with you, Brandon.” She held out her hand and smiled.

He squeezed her hand and returned the smile. “You too, Lily. Take care of yourself.” Then she navigated her rolling suitcase past baggage claim, and he watched her spellbinding curves walk out to a waiting taxi.

Chapter Two

Lily dropped her toiletry bag on the sleek vanity, and glanced at the image in the mirror. Her makeup had faded some, and her brown waves settled too.

Finding a new job equal to what she had at ALK would be hard, she knew. She'd fought to hide her anxiety from the perceptive man beside her. Complaining about getting laid-off was, well, . . . made it somehow real. She didn't want to give up hope that maybe she'd get to keep her job. Despite that, their conversation had been one of the best she'd had with a stranger on her many flights to Rome.

And Brandon was delicious. Oh yes. He stirred something deep inside her, something she hadn't been aware of in quite some time. Even with Kirk. *Especially* with Kirk.

After she showered and smoothed lotion over her skin, she slid on her favorite silky white robe, hoping to relax and clear her jet-lagged, foggy brain. She fluffed the pillows and settled into the hotel's comfy bed. She opened her book, thinking reading would make her drowsy, but her mind continued to stray to Brandon, to his deep voice and intense chocolate eyes. And those perfect lips. The fantasy of those lips on her body brought a flood of heat to her skin and lower parts.

Brandon was as handsome as a European model—smoldering eyes and strong jaw, but it was those lustful thoughts that kept her awake when she needed to rest. She had a facility tour and several meetings the next day, so quality sleep was paramount.

She exhaled, fighting a losing battle. There was only one solution. Release the excess hormones so she could get to sleep, and forget about Brandon.

Lily eased open the dresser drawer, and buried beneath folded clothes, she claimed her vibrator. She laid her white robe on the bed and climbed back in between the sheets. She reminded herself to keep the moaning to a minimal for the walls in the old, fully-renovated hotel seemed rather thin.

She switched off the bedside light and let her hotel room go dark. She started her vibrator on low and let the hum work its magic. Her heartrate increased as she pictured Brandon holding her vibrator for her, doing delectable things to her. In fact, he would be better. He would kiss her and whisper compliments in her ear that Kirk could never seem to appreciate.

Stop! Stop thinking about the asshole.

She brought her mind back to Brandon, and how his mouth and hands would wander her naked body as he easily brought her to climax.

She was close to the edge, when she heard the person next door try and use the key to open the hotel room door. God, it was a little loud, but no worries. Her trusted vibrator never let her down.

Another click. She stopped when it occurred to her that the sound was so loud because it was *her* hotel door opening. *Holy shit!*

She leapt from the bed and whipped her robe around her just as the overhead light went on. She vaguely heard the vibrator roll on the floor but her heart thumped in her chest so hard, she feared she'd go into cardiac arrest.

How loud can I scream?

Brandon yanked his suitcase across the threshold, raised his head, and froze in place.

“Ohmigod. It’s you.”

“Oh.” He scanned the room. “Sorry. Crap.” His brow furrowed as he glanced down at his key card. “I’m . . . I think they put me in the wrong room.”

Seriously. She gripped the neck of her robe tighter. Her heartrate slowed as her brain processed that someone hadn’t just broken in to rape or rob her.

Breathe. “Yes, it would appear so.”

His gaze traveled down the length of her.

Shit! Her nipples probably poked against the white satin fabric. He appeared to be having a hard time processing this mix up as much as she because he said nothing. Nothing. He just looked at her.

She wrapped her arms across her chest. “Um, maybe you should go down to the front desk, Brandon, and let them know that you need another room.”

“Yes. Definitely.” He subtly shook his head. “Yes. I’m sorry about this. I’ve scared you and interrupted your sleep. I apologize.”

“No need. It’s not your fault.” She took a step closer—to show him to the door or to breathe in his scent, she couldn’t be sure.

Brandon stared down at the keycard. “How did this happen?” he asked the universe. He looked up and his lips lifted into a funny grin. “It’s weird that I walked into your room. Of all places.” He chuckled softly.

She smirked. It was true. Of all the *wrong* rooms to walk into, he’d walked into hers.

His eyes darkened as he scanned her body again. A blush filled her cheeks. She wore nothing beneath that robe. Could he tell she’d been thinking about him?

“Well, it was nice to see you again, Lily.”

“You too, Brandon.”

He twisted his body and gripped the handle on his carry-on suitcase, but stopped quickly to look her way. “Would you like to have dinner with me tomorrow night? I feel bad about this.”

“Um—”

“Please let me make it up to you. You know they have some of the world’s best pasta in Rome,” he said with a broad smile.

She guffawed because an image of Kirk, eyeing her as she scooped extra parmesan over a plate of spaghetti was the first image that popped in her head. “I’ll take you up on dinner, but I’ll stick with a salad.”

His eyebrows pinched together. “You don’t like pasta?”

“I love pasta. My ex said I should stay away from it.” The words came out before she could block them. Brandon did not need to hear the sordid details of what her ex thought about her and her eating habits. She bit her lips between her teeth.

He tipped his head. “Okay. Why?”

“Never mind.”

“Is it a gluten thing?”

Crap! Her head drooped for a split second. No good way to get out of this. “He said I put on weight too easily.”

Brandon’s eyes went wide. “He said that to you?” His voice pitched on the last word.

“Yes,” she mumbled. *Could this be any more embarrassing?*

She wouldn’t consider herself overweight, but definitely curvy. Slightly obsessed, Lily worked out regularly and had strong muscles. Regardless, she couldn’t rectify the number she saw every morning on the scale.

“No wonder you dumped the bastard.”

Lily let the corner of her lips curve upward. She didn't have the guts to tell Brandon that Kirk had dumped *her*.

His eyes narrowed. “Did he say you were fat?”

Shit! Really? She unknowingly sucked in her stomach. The most handsome man she'd ever met was standing six feet in front of her, wearing his suit with his shirt and tie loosened, and a five o'clock shadow that made her want to run her fingertips along his jawline. She stood naked in just a thin silky robe, and he wanted to have a psychology session?

She couldn't answer so she glanced away. Kirk had said that once, but thankfully never again. He'd made her feel *more* self-consciousness of her weight with his pointed stare at almost every meal.

Brandon let go of his luggage and took two steps closer. “From what I saw, your body is pretty amazing. I think your ex needs to have his head examined. That and be exiled to a deserted island with only rice cakes and raw broccoli to eat.”

Lily's chuckle turned into a laugh. She actually loved that idea.

He smiled and took another step closer, never breaking eye contact. He stood so close to her now, he could effortlessly reach out and touch her.

She licked her lips, her mouth suddenly dry, and tipped her head up to meet his gaze. His eyes appeared darker than she remembered, like rich espresso.

He offer his hand, palm up, and she hesitated . . . not scared, as much as unsure what he wanted. She released the death-grip on the lapels of her robe and rested her left hand in his. He slowly brought it to his mouth and kissed her knuckles, not once, but twice.

The warmth of his hand and the sensation of his kiss shot low-level electric waves throughout her body. Her lower belly clenched and she nearly moaned.

He stretched his right hand forward, as if he wanted to touch her.

“May I see for myself?” His rich, soothing voice felt like a caress over her.

What! He wanted to see her naked body? The wetness that had threatened to escape at the apex of her thighs with his kiss, no longer held back. Her heart jackhammered in her chest, and she licked her lips.

“I promise not to touch you.”

This man she'd only just met, the object of her fantasies, wanted to see her naked. He promised not to touch, and she wanted to say *I don't mind if you do*.

Was she crazy? Had she lost her mind, to even consider his request?

Maybe so, but how often does a man like this even give a girl like me a second look?

Slowly, so slowly, she released her right hand and slid the tips of her fingers down to the sash holding the robe together. Brandon's breath spiked. She watched him as he watched her, his eyes deep pools of chocolate. She untied the sash and let the robe fall apart. Her nipples peaked as she dragged each half of the fabric to the side of her body, fully revealing herself. Her breasts grew heavy.

Brandon inhaled sharply. “Geezus. You're beautiful. Your ex is a fucking idiot.”

She averted her eyes. “Please don't say that if you don't mean it.”

“Lily.” His finger lifted her chin, his thumb brushed her lower lip. “I'm not lying. I mean every word. Your body is perfect.”

She shook her head and tugged at her robe with her free hand. “My hips are wide, and my breasts are too big, they're starting to sag.”

His eyebrows shot up. “These are the breasts and hips of a woman.” He traced a finger over the fabric at her hip, igniting her skin. “A beautiful, curvy woman. Gee-zus.”

She bit on her upper lip as he lifted her hand to kiss the back. Then he lowered her hand to her waist and hooked her fingers around the robe’s edge, his body heat radiating against her.

“Would you please?”

Holy crap! This may be the most erotic thing she’d ever done. And his obvious desire only fueled her own. Her heavy breasts ached to be caressed.

With his hand over hers, she peeled back the fabric of the robe, slowly revealing her backside. He took several steps to walk behind her, gaining a better view. Her lungs worked for air. She forced her focus to the art on the wall and the brass handles on the dresser.

“Fuck! You have the most amazing heart-shaped ass, Lily.”

She blushed for the thousandth time, and peeked over shoulder. “Thank you,” she whispered.

His eyes traveled back down the length of her body, before lowering her robe. He glanced in the direction of the bed. His eyes darkened and his face read serious as he looked back at her.

“What is it?” Her head turned and there it was, laying in front of the nightstand—her pink vibrator, the perfect replica of a male penis. She gasped, certain the blood had drained from her face.