

Chapter One

Lieutenant Coral Ann Keith was looking forward to her position as a JAG at Patrick Space Force Base in Florida. She'd dreamed about joining the Navy for as long as she could remember.

When she was younger, she wanted to be like her aunt who was a computer tech in the Navy. As she grew older and joined the debate team in high school, she fell in love with the law. She never considered she could do both until she saw the movie, *A Few Good Men*, with a group of friends.

Near her graduation date, Coral was approached by a recruiter and her dream was on its way. She gave it her all to hit the top of her class, and excel at basic, passing the General Florida Bar examinations, including the multistate bar exam and the multistate professional responsibility exam.

Working as a law intern in Wisconsin and in Florida helped her tremendously. She was able to get the necessary hands-on experience needed to function as a practicing attorney, paralegal, as well as some legal secretarial work.

She didn't want to let anyone down, and certainly not herself. Coral was a 'cover all your bases' person. She didn't want any question as to whether or not she was qualified for the position she was assigned.

She'd left the cold winters behind. She'd miss her family tremendously, but knowing her parents, they'd come to visit as often as possible.

They joked with her about selling everything, moving down to Florida, and getting out of the cold. Coral was okay with that. They'd enjoy the sunshine along with the multiple activities that go along with the beautiful weather. Most of the time anyway.

People warned her about the hurricanes and tornadoes. She wasn't worried. All Coral did was exchange the cold and blizzards for heat and hurricanes. If she honestly compared the weather, blizzards and snow were much more frequent than hurricanes.

On the coast, she'd have sun, sand, and beaches – and rockets, lots of rockets! Right before she left home, she'd met a fantastic man. Worst timing ever! Even after only knowing him for a couple of weeks, she was completely and utterly drawn to him.

Chase Rand made her heart race. He was an undercover agent with the FBI. He'd chosen an extremely dangerous occupation.

She scratched the inside of her palm. It was a habit Coral had when she was in deep thought or upset.

He was assigned to infiltrate a syndicate in Florida. He could be anywhere. It was a big state.

It didn't stop her from dreaming about him taking her in his arms and kissing her senseless. She'd immediately felt her attraction to him. It was an unmistakable pull.

Coral wanted Chase and she wanted him for a lifetime.

It was something she'd have to be careful with. He wasn't ready. Neither one of them was ready. He wasn't necessarily a player, but he wasn't exactly looking for long term relationship at this time any more than she was.

She'd have to do this slowly, at a pace they both were comfortable with, until he was committed with the death do us part.

Goodness, where did that come from?

She didn't want to settle down yet. But, if she were to settle down, Chase would be perfect.

She inhaled deeply recalling his scent lingering in her memory.

He'd text her occasionally and ask how she was doing. It was obvious he felt the same magnetism. He wanted to keep a long tether to her as well.

She'd watched his dog, Missy, for a week while he 'took care of business'. The dog sat staring out the window or faced the door the whole time she was staying with Coral.

The only time she'd leave her spot was to eat. Once the bowl was empty she'd got back to the door and wait.

Missy was a loyal companion. Animals can sense a good heart in a person. He'd only had Missy for a few weeks and the dog was 100% committed to Chase.

Coral needed to focus on her job, not the tall, handsome, surfer dude who could, mmm. *Stop.*

She looked around the small apartment. Every house she'd put an offer in had been snatched quickly by someone else. The right home will be there for her.

She opened the folder and started working on the research she needed for the next case they were working on. Turning the pages, she could see Chase's smile.

She sighed. "Focus Coral, focus."

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A few weeks later, Chase Young (Rand) was working at a sports bar on A1A. Coral walked in the door with a group of military co-workers. They may not have been in uniform, but by their obvious demeanor, they were all military.

Coral recognized him immediately. She didn't acknowledge him. She'd watch him out of the corner of her eyes. She and her comrades took turns buying pitchers. And she'd look toward him and she could see he was doing the same.

She saw Chase's reaction when Lt. Will Owens was rubbing her back, and leaning in a little closer than everyone else.

Coral found Will to be an interesting companion, not quite as attracted to him as was he was to her. His glaring body language told her he wanted a lot more than a platonic relationship. The way he was leaning in and looking directly into her eyes, touching her arm and back with familiarity was telling.

She wasn't comfortable with the man's advances. She enjoyed his company, but something was holding her back. It wasn't only her feeling toward Chase. There was something in the back of her head that held her back.

Chase will always be in her heart regardless of whether they would be together or not.

She'd texted Chase a few days ago letting him know she'd finally found a house. Chase had promised he'd help her move in. He told her it wasn't far from where he lived, only she'd be living in a much better neighborhood.

She had no idea where he lived and didn't ask.

There was no time to acknowledge she was there. A game was on and the crowd in the bar had gotten rowdy. By the time things had slowed down, she was gone.

He was enjoying himself and Coral could tell he liked working there. He got to know the locals and they'd accepted him quite well.

Chase was definitely an extrovert.

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Time passed quickly, Chase was busy doing what he needed to do, infiltrate the group, meet the people he needed to befriend, and get inside.

He was lazing on the boat, sampling some product with one of his new friends when Coral texted him.

Can I use your muscles on Thursday to help me move into my new house?

Sure, no problem.

Thank you!

What time do you need me?

She responded, **I figured we could start about eight, but, if you're working the night before we can start later.**

Nine would be better.

Meet me at the storage facility, please. You remember the address?

Yup

Great. See you then.

Thursday arrived and Chase met her at the storage facility. He was a few minutes early. She'd already started packing the truck with the smaller items.

Together they filled the truck and headed to her new house. By the end of the day, the storage facility was empty and the house was filled with furniture. Each room had an organized form of disarray and labeled boxes in each room.

The two of them collapsed on the couch. She popped open two beers and sat beside him.

Out of the corner of her eye, she could see a shadow of a man standing in the doorway observing them. Coral turned to see who it was and watched Max enter the room. The person was gone, it was one of those odd shadow people he saw once in a while.

Chase smiled. "I didn't know you had a cat."

"I didn't but she's been around the house ever since I first walked through it with the real estate agent. I guess she's mine now."

"You've got a nice house here. At least, you didn't have to fill it up with bleach like I did, let it sit for a week before they drained it all out."

"What?"

"My house was a much bigger handyman special than any I've ever seen. I had to pay someone big bucks to sanitize the daylights out of it. It was disgusting."

She patted his leg. "Poor baby."

The cat sat in front of Chase.

"Hello, kitty."

"Her name is Max, short for Maxine."

Chase made a clicking sound with his mouth. "Come here, sweetie."

"It was kind of funny. When I first entered the house with the realtor, the cat paced back and forth guarding the house. She watched us through the door. I let her in and she followed us around as I inspected the house and checked out the floorplan. When I came in last night, she stopped at the back door like a little soldier and waited for me."

Chase tilted his head. The cat stared into his eyes and Chase heard the deep voice, ever so slightly whisper...

The guardian awaits no longer...