



He had everything under control until he met her.

Bound TO THE
BOUNTY HUNTER
BOUND SERIES

HAYSON MANNING

He had everything under control until he met her.

Harlan Franco, Colorado's busiest bounty hunter, and security expert, lives by his rules: be in control, be detached, and never touch the asset. These rules are tested when the asset he's being paid to secretly guard is none other than his rival, sexy, unpredictable, pain in the butt, Sophie Callaghan—a woman determined to stay away from him. If she finds out he's in her life on an assignment, he'll never get the info he needs. But those lips, those curves, that attitude, he bets he'll have her for one night where she'll play by his rules.

He didn't expect his heart to have an opinion.

Freedom loving private investigator Sophie Callaghan is on a mission. The daughter of a con-artist is not going to be used by a man again. What she doesn't need is hot, broody and controlling Harlan barging into her life and digging into her past. Her brain may say no, but her body craves this bad boy. After a night where both live their darkest desires, Sophie must fight their explosive chemistry because one wrong move could destroy her. She bets he has to stay far, far away.

As the stakes ramp up and secrets explode around them, both are determined to win the bet.

But there can only ever be one winner.

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To Ben
It had to be you

Chapter Two

Harlan Franco jogged to where he'd left Sophie and turned a tight circle.

No dark hair. No curvy, warm body. No cuffs required.
Fuck.

He pulled his hand through his hair.

A group to his left was working on building a pyramid, naked.

He scanned the crowd a second time.

No Sophie.

He'd been on the phone way longer than he'd intended, but he didn't miss calls. Especially this call.

Talking to your client while the asset you're supposedly guarding with your life has been looking at you with come-fuck-me-now eyes *should* have deflated his cock in a second.

What had started as a game had quickly been spiraling out of control, again. Tough as sailors' balls, Sophie Callaghan was as hard as they come. He'd been intrigued when she'd

flashed her sub bracelet, because nothing about her hinted at submission. Part of him, the cock part of him, wanted to spell out how she'd be soft and compliant under him. The gray matter in his head told him he was on a job.

Cock won.

Go figure.

He'd been playing with her tonight, trying to work out why she was here. His job was to learn everything about Sophie and report back to his client. That game had taken a dangerous turn when she'd looked up at him with lust swimming in her eyes, the scent of her slamming into him.

His mouth *still* throbbed from her kiss. Her moan had soaked into his blood. Her body melting into his had nearly brought him to his knees.

He closed his eyes.

Number one rule of being on a guard and intel job:

Be detached.

Rule number two:

Be professional at all times.

Rule number three:

Don't fuck the asset.

Frustration and disappointment in himself slithered through his gut like a bad burrito.

When Sophie had fallen into him at a bar eighteen months ago, his body had reacted like it had tonight, like it had found its mate. Dressed in her uniform of jeans, no makeup, hair back, hiding every feminine trait. With nothing on his mind except telling her to back away from his clients, he'd booked a room to have a private conversation, but her scent, her hair, her everything had wiped logic from his brain. They were going at each other until he'd found just

enough strength to pull back, when he'd heard the ping from his phone, alerting him that the jumper they were tailing was on the move.

He scratched the back of his neck.

Not my finest hour, leaving her locked in a hotel bathroom.

Was this payback for that night? Leaving him with blue balls and walking away?

He deserved it.

Tonight, like that other twisted night, he couldn't rip his eyes away from her; his dick had sprung to attention like a teen who'd discovered Porn Hub.

Everything about her was the opposite of what he wanted in a woman. Small and blond? Nope. She'd have to be about five foot eight or taller. Legs that went on for freaking ever. Her olive skin stretched over angular cheekbones, full lips, almond-shaped dark brown eyes framed by thick inky lashes. Gym-toned and disciplined? Hell no. Sophie came with curves he was desperate to lick. Her butt filled her jeans in all the right places. Her legs he wanted wrapped around his hips twice while she gave in to him totally. A submissive who wanted only a physical relationship? He hoped like fuck she wasn't playing.

When Sophie had tied the knot in the cherry stem, the intensity in her face, the way her tongue had worked? He'd fought to not grab her hips and grind into her.

Apart from the physical attraction, which he could control, Sophie Callaghan had always been a giant pain in his ass, which was going to make guarding his newest assignment *interesting*.

His phone pinged with an incoming message from Zeb, his second in command stationed by the front door: Babic

was on the move as was Sophie.

He stilled. Is that why she'd left?

A blond woman broke away from a group and walked to him flashing her gold wristband. He shook his head and headed to where a waitress cleaned Babic's table, still littered with whips.

Babic liked his pain delivered hard.

He slipped the waitress a sizeable tip and sat in the booth, ignoring the bottle of lube and the leather harness. He made a slow and methodical search of the top of the table.

Nothing.

Probing the underside, he paused over something clinging to the smooth surface, then carefully detached it. Modeling clay. He turned it over in his hand. Crude, but effective.

Shit. Sophie's here tailing Babic who works for Petrov, and I'm on retainer to Petrov here tailing Sophie.

Even saying that sentence hurt his head.

He walked into an empty room at the back of the club. A cream comforter covered an enormous bed. Leather, chains, and hard-plastic ties dangled from the padded black headboard. Shelves were lined with sex toys of every description. He sent a text and waited.

"What up?" Zeb Carmichael sauntered in, nodding. "Pain and Gain room, brother, I approve."

The pounding of the music dulled to a throb when Zeb closed the door.

"We could have a problem."

"A chat about the birds and bees?" Zeb indicated toward the toy cabinet, grinning.

He held out his hand and dropped the clay into Zeb's palm. "I think Sophie left this under Babic's table."

Wide eyes hit him. "I saw her at Babic's table for a beat before she shot out the door. Babic left a few minutes after her with a couple of blondes. She's here following him? What's the deal?"

Harlan sucked air through his teeth. "I didn't know Babic would be here tonight, but I think *she* did, and I'm interested in why she's trailing him and what went down with him and his meet."

Zeb's penetrating gaze hit him. "Do you have reason to be concerned?"

"Not that I know of." But Harlan had seen Babic's startled face. It had been fleeting, but it had been there. Babic had spotted Harlan and been surprised by his presence.

There were too many scenarios playing out in Harlan's head. None of them came with a happy ever after. If Petrov was right, and he and Sophie shared a connection and any of Petrov's rivals and restless business associates found out, Sophie could be used in ways that chilled Harlan's marrow.

Zeb blew out a long breath, which pulled Harlan back into the room. "If she and Petrov are related, why doesn't Petrov take a meet? Clear it all up. Why all this cloak-and-dagger shit?"

Harlan shrugged, trying to loosen the tension in his shoulders. "Petrov lost his daughter, Seraphina, twenty-two years ago. His wife was at a religious retreat in Southern California when the kid was snatched—the child was around two at the time. She wasn't his biological daughter, but the way he tells it, he loved her like she was his own. His wife killed herself two years later, blaming Petrov's business for

their daughter going missing. That's when he started to go legit. Now, he wants to leave his empire to his daughter, but he wants to be sure. There've been times over the years he was sure he'd found her, only to find out he'd been played." Harlan pushed his hands deep into his pockets. "He's had a likeness of her drawn every year. Babic saw her and thought there was enough of a similarity to mention it. Petrov wants us to watch her and report back. Make sure she's the real deal before he gets any closer, which is where I come in."

Zeb's shrewd eyes took in the room and came back to rest on Harlan. "So this is a bodyguard and intel job, right?"

"Yep and the reason we're guarding her is on a need-to-know basis. At the moment we're the only ones who have the intel." He pushed his hands into his pockets. "I'll be reporting back to Petrov until he's ready to make his move either way."

Zeb crossed his arms, his gaze penetrating. "You want me to take this? Give up your need to control every case, brother?"

Harlan hired the best people around, but his name was on the door, and he had to have his finger on the pulse at all times. "Next time."

Zeb stared at him hard. "Looks like you lost focus tonight. If there's anything between you and Sophie it has to end now. You know the rules."

Yeah, he did. They were chiseled in stone with his chisel.

He nodded. "Yeah, I'm good."

Harlan rubbed the back of his neck. The need to drive Sophie from his brain was paramount. "Can you speed up the report on everything there is to know about Sophie Callaghan? I'll stay close and work my angle."

“I’ll get back to you.” Zeb headed out the door where he stopped and turned. “You got this?”

A slow, steady pounding started at the back of Harlan’s skull, in time to his sluggish heartbeat. “Yeah, I got this.”

The door closed with a click.

Tonight he’d started to lose control, and he *never* lost control.

He’d kept people at a distance his whole life. After his mom’s death and a quick detour to an aunt who’d decided she couldn’t cope with a grieving, angry seven-year-old, he’d been delivered to the system.

He’d learned how to survive fast.

An older kid had taken him under his wing, only to turn on him a week later, beating the shit out of him, delivering the lesson, blow-by-blow, that would keep him alive.

Never let your guard down.

Always stay detached.

Never lose control.

Lessons he lived by.

Tonight he’d come close to losing everything he stood for, and he couldn’t. There was too much at stake. Little head was firmly in his pants and big head was in the game.

• • •

Sophie pulled her car keys from her bag as she walked, her fingers slipping on the cool metal.

Damn.

Her hands still trembled, along with the rest of her body. She wasn’t going to analyze whether it was because of how close she’d come to losing her sanity along with her

underwear.

And part of me liked it.

She increased her pace.

Shoot me now.

Groups of people spilled from bars, laughing from the high of alcohol and what the night promised. Homeless picked through bins. A man in a bathrobe walked a ferret.

The timer on her phone pinged, alerting her that her shift started in twenty minutes. She managed to unlock the car door and sat in the driver's seat. She forced long breaths until her heart calmed, then started the car and set the GPS. She pulled into traffic, noting a vehicle three cars back that had done the same. With one eye on the road and the other on the rearview mirror, she deviated from the route. The soothing alto voice of Never-Stressed Nancy on her GPS told her to calmly make a legal U-turn when she could.

Sophie changed lanes, and her shadow mirrored her move. Cold sweat slithered across her body. At the next set of lights, gripping the wheel, she sent a silent prayer to her ailing car and when the light changed, gunned the accelerator, made a sharp left, and apologized with a wave to the line of traffic.

While she drove, she ran scenarios in her scrambling mind.

Was Babic onto her? Had he noted her interest in him at the club over the past weeks? If Babic's men were following her and they found the recording in her bag, she had no idea what they'd do.

The map on the GPS showed a park ahead. She pulled into a side street and navigated her way to the park, avoiding major roads. She killed the car engine and lights.

She grabbed the recorder from her bag and jogged the circumference of the park. Lilac scented the tepid night air. The moon played chase, dipping in and out of silvery clouds.

Streetlights hung shadows across the park but gave her enough light to navigate. She discounted the play equipment—small hands could find the expensive electronics and if swallowed would cause harm.

A band rotunda rose out of the night, silent and empty as it loomed over the playground like the captain of a ship, guarding its charges.

Perfect.

With peeling paint and a general air of neglect, it mustn't be high on the council's maintenance list.

She swung her head to the left, then right, holding still.

A flash of light in her peripheral vision snapped her head left. She dropped into a crouch. Another sweep of light carved through the darkness. Dog walker or someone looking for her? Either way, she wasn't hanging around to find out.

With her calves cramping, she crouch-walked up the stairs of the rotunda. She counted the number of spindles and, still crouching in order to keep under the height of the railing, made her way across from the entrance.

I hope I have enough clay.

She pressed the recorder against the bottom of the hand railing—the thick wood cut with ornamental designs—and prayed there was enough clay to hold it in place until she could come back tomorrow.

Her thighs now joining her protesting calves, she retraced her steps.

Another sweep of light to her right pierced the inky

night.

Damn.

Scurrying to her car as the wandering beams approached the rotunda, she thumped the check engine light.

I swear the next time I can afford to get you fixed I will.

She flew out of the parking lot, narrowly missing a sedan entering.

Her mouth dried, and fear pressed against her rapidly beating heart when the car did a quick U-turn and exited the lot.