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**Fearless**  
**Chapter 1 Preview**

## Chapter One

"Kane! Pick up on Route 5. Lady needs a tow," Kane Harmon's father, Joe, called out from the office in Harmon's Garage.

Kane wiped his greasy hands on a rag and pushed himself out from beneath the jacked-up car he'd been working on. He rose to his feet and glanced around the empty shop, taking stock of his situation. Jackson Traynor, who usually handled the runs with the tow, was out. He'd gone to the city to pick up an emergency part, meaning Kane and his dad, Joe, were the only ones here. Joe, who Kane had no desire to leave by himself.

Temptation was always too great for Kane's father. If he could pocket something to pawn, trade, or sell for extra cash, he'd do it to fuel his gambling addiction. Unfortunately Kane couldn't send his dad out on the run because the older man was no longer allowed to drive. Too many accidents and he'd had his license revoked.

But Kane wasn't going to leave a woman stranded on the highway, so he'd have to go take care of the tow himself. He headed for the office and found his father sitting behind the desk, writing on a scrap pad. Kane hoped it wasn't notes on horses or ball games.

"Hey," Kane said, striding around to the back of the desk, coming up behind his father. "I'm going to go do the pickup since Jackson's out." While he spoke, he pulled a key out of his pocket and opened the cash drawer, removing the bills that were in there.

At a glance, there were hundreds, fifties and smaller denominations separated in the till. He didn't leave anything behind to provide his father the least little bit of temptation.

"You've got to be shitting me." His father's eyes were on the money Kane shoved into his front pockets. "You don't trust me," he said sullenly.

"No, Dad, I don't. Why should I?"

There'd been holiday money he'd gambled away when they were kids, and when things were bad, his dad's motto was, *If it isn't nailed down, it's fair game*. Kane didn't feel the least bit guilty doing what he had to do to make sure he could provide for the family when his father couldn't. Joe wouldn't steal while Kane was in the shop. Kane knew that. It was only when nobody was around to see or answer to that the demon on his shoulder got the best of him and temptation took over.

His dad muttered something under his breath, undecipherable but obviously mean, and Kane chose to ignore him.

"I shouldn't be gone long. Hold down the fort?" Kane asked.

"Oh. You'll trust me to talk to customers?" Sarcasm dripped from his dad's words. "Last time I looked, it was my name on the signage," he muttered.

And last time Kane checked, he was the one running the business. True, the building was in his father's name, but the old man wouldn't budge on adding Kane or his older sister to the deed. The only salvation was the fact that Joe knew his limitations. He'd given Kane ownership of the business when he turned twenty-two, after a bad run with some loan sharks. Kane

stepped in and paid off the debt, and in exchange, the business was in Kane's name. Just not the land. Kane wanted it divided between himself and Andi, but his father's pride demanded he hold on to it until he passed on. Which, thank God, didn't look like it would be any time soon.

His father drove Kane mad but he loved his old man. Joe had raised them since his mom died from ovarian cancer when Kane was fifteen and had done the best he could with the limited skill set he had. His heart was in the right place even if his vices weren't.

Kane palmed the truck keys in his hands. "Don't forget Nicky's coming by after day camp," he reminded his dad.

His sister Andrea's seven-year-old son spent afternoons at the garage with his uncle and grandfather while his mom worked. With Nicky's father out of his life – and good riddance – it was important for Nicky to spend time with the men in his family. Not to mention it freed his sister up to work and not worry about her kid after school or summer camp, which saved her from having to hire a sitter. And Kane liked having his nephew around. Even if he was under a car, Nicky did his homework or played games on his cell phone in the office and chatted up his grandpa. It was good.

Kane stepped into the blazing, late-afternoon sunshine, appreciating the summer heat on his face. Once he was outside, he forgot about the aggravation with his dad and instead inhaled the fresh air after being cooped under a car for the better part of the day.

He slid his aviators on his face and climbed into the flatbed, starting up the engine. He drove out of town and onto the highway, music blasting on the radio, until he caught sight of the gleaming, bright red Ford SUV on the side of the road.

The influx of summer visitors into Rosewood Bay, his ocean-side town in New England, usually meant expensive foreign cars littering the side of the main street and taking up the prime parking near the beach. This little beauty didn't strike him as one of those, but he didn't recognize it as one of his regulars, either.

He pulled in behind the SUV onto the shoulder of the road and parked. After hopping out, he strode to the front of his vehicle and saw a woman in a flirty dress bent over the open hatch as she draped what looked like a sheet over something in the far back.

He shoved his hands into the front pockets of his jeans and looked his fill of the sweet ass aimed in the air and long legs leaning against the edge of the back, his dick perking up and taking notice. Which was a refreshing change, since he no longer partook of the women who came to Rosewood during the summers, willing to indulge in a fun fling with a mechanic but never, ever deigning to consider him good enough for anything more. Once burned, and all that. Actually, it'd been too damn long since he'd been with any woman and even longer since one had truly interested him.

Before he could make his presence known, though she had to have heard his truck's arrival, she turned around and met his

gaze.

Recognition slammed into him, raw and real. "Halley Ward," he muttered. "Well, I'll be damned." The girl he knew not at all but had protected from bullying back in high school stood before him, all grown up.

"Hi, Kane," she said softly, shading her eyes from the sun with her hands. Eyes he knew were a light blue.

She'd been quiet and withdrawn back then, head almost always hidden inside a hooded sweatshirt, only her two long braids hanging out from her protective armor. But he knew her story.

Everyone did.

This town thrived on gossip, and the Wards provided much of it over the years. In Halley's case, everyone knew she'd been rescued from foster care at thirteen by her aunt but never seemed to adjust to life back home with her wealthy family. She didn't reach out to other girls or make friends at school or in town. Or maybe they didn't welcome her. He hadn't been sure.

He'd only known that, at the time, he had recently lost his mom and pulled back from the world, so he recognized that same sense of sadness and loss in Halley and had stepped in when the kids gave her a rough time because of her past. They'd never talked or bonded, but he knew she appreciated his efforts. Could tell by the lingering, sad but grateful looks she passed him in the hall that his actions meant something to her.

Despite living in the same town, he hadn't seen her in years. That damned gossip indicated she was more reclusive and

damned more solitary than he was. She didn't hang out at the Blue Wall, the main bar in Rosewood, on Friday or Saturday nights, at least not when he'd been there. Had he wondered more about her through the years? Sure. But life went on.

"So. Dead SUV?" he asked, gesturing to her ride.

"Dead SUV," she said, sounding pissed off. "What kind of car just... dies? It's not new but it isn't ancient, either." She braced her hands on her slender hips and frowned at her vehicle.

He shrugged. "Won't know until I get it jacked up and take a look." He met her gaze. "How've you been?" he asked.

"Good." She toyed with a strand of hair.

With the sun streaming down, he took in those brown locks with sun-kissed streaks of blonde closer to the ends that hung just past her shoulders. And he immediately noticed that the face she'd hidden as a kid was all the more striking now.

Seriously.

She was fucking beautiful. And still fragile at least in appearance, her skin like porcelain, her features delicate, with a hint of freckles over the bridge of her nose. And there was still that whisper of sadness that fell over her features, there whether she was aware of it or not.

"You?" she asked. "How are you? Still working at the garage, I see?"

He'd had a job there from the time he was a kid, hanging out from a young age, just as Nicky did now.

Kane nodded. "I own the place." He wasn't sure why he felt compelled to let her know.

"That's good." She ran her hands up and down her arms.

"Let me get your truck on the flatbed and we'll go back to the garage. I'll take a quick look and see if I can tell you what we're dealing with."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome to hang out in the front of the cab while I work," he said.

She smiled. "And thanks again." She spun on her low-heeled sandals, and her floral dress, which clung to her curves, spun out around her thighs.

Flirty. Cute. Sexy as fuck.

He did his thing and soon they were on their way back to the garage. "So what's covered in the back of your truck?" he asked, having seen the sheet for himself.

"Paintings. I paint. My work is in the gallery in town. I was taking a few pieces over when my car died and I didn't want the sun beating down and fading them."

"An artist? Damn. I'll have to stop by the place and see your work." He was impressed with that little bit of knowledge about her.

His hands on the wheel, he glanced over. A blush stained her cheeks. "I'm not sure my work is your style."

"Doesn't mean I don't want to see it anyway. Besides, how would you know what my style is?"

"You're right. I don't," she murmured. She curled her hands around her purse on her lap and he refocused on the road.

"Maybe we could change that." Now where had that suggestion



come from?

Her gaze swung to his. Startled. "What are you saying?"

"Go out with me sometime." No, he hadn't planned it, but Halley Ward intrigued him. She always had. And now that they were adults, she fascinated him even more.

"I don't date." That surprised him... but it shouldn't, now that he gave it some thought.

It wasn't like he saw her out and about anyway, and she did like to keep to herself. But not to even date? What was that all about?

"Then call it two old friends catching up," he said, now even more determined to find out.

He glanced over to find her lips twitching in amusement she was obviously trying not to show. She might not want to be interested in going out with him... but she was.

"We weren't friends," she reminded him gently.

"Do friends stand up for each other?" he asked.

She nodded. "They do."

"Then I'd consider us friends." He looked at her and winked. "Just think about it," he said as he pulled into the garage lot.

Because he was definitely interested in her. Maybe it was fate that her car broke down and he'd been the one to answer the call, bringing them together again after all these years. They were adults now, and he wanted to get to know what secrets she held behind those blue eyes.

Because he sensed, then and now, that her layers ran deep.

And he wanted to peel them back and learn what lay beneath.

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Halley jumped from the truck and walked around to where Kane stood. She hadn't seen him since high school, and his impact on her hadn't lessened, merely grown.

He'd been a brooder, much like her in male form, except people liked him, unlike her. She hadn't transitioned well from foster care to living in this small coastal town with her aunt. She hadn't wanted any part of it or the kids here, and they hadn't welcomed her in return. But Kane had been her protector, her silent hero, and she'd always been grateful.

She never knew why he'd decided to look after her when the others made her a target with name calling, stuffing her locker with trash... and they'd never talked about it... or anything else, for that matter. They hadn't been friends, as she'd said to him earlier. Oddly they hadn't not been friends, either. They'd just gone their own way.

And yet here they were. He was working on her car and asking her out.

"Listen, if you want to go wait in the office, I'll take a look at your truck. See if I can get you a quick, easy answer or if it's something that's going to take more time," Kane said.

She met his stare, that deep brown gaze staring back at her. Dark hair, grown out, fell over his eyes, giving him an edgy, sexy look. Then there was his body. Muscles showing thanks to his tight black tee shirt, faded jeans molding to strong thighs and a tight ass she'd noticed before.

She sighed. If she dated, she'd go out with him. But she didn't date because it led to relationships, and relationships led to sharing and men asking questions about her past. And she didn't like to go there, to think about foster care or the things that had happened there.

She walked into the office he'd pointed out earlier and came to an abrupt halt. A young boy sat at the desk doing something on his phone, and that was a sight she hadn't expected to find.

"Hi there," she said to the top of his brown hair.

"Hey." He looked up, pencil in hand.

"I'm Halley," she said. "Who are you?"

"Nicky."

Oh. That wasn't at all enlightening. She sat down on the chair near the desk. "I'm just waiting for Kane to check out my car," she said to the boy.

"Cool. Uncle Kane knows cars."

"I'll bet he does," she murmured. She bet Kane knew a lot of things. Like how to make a girl burn with those calloused, grease-stained hands of his. She definitely had visions of him running them over her body, her breasts, her hips and— She shook her head and guided her mind to more appropriate topics.

She realized Nicky had just given her some more information, an inkling to whom he belonged. She recalled Kane having a sister and they'd all been fairly close in age. If he was Uncle Kane, Nicky was Andrea's child.

"Nicky, your mom's here," a male voice called. A second

later, an older gentleman walked into the room.

From the look of him, he was definitely Kane's father, the similarity in their features unmistakable. And if this was what Kane would look like when he aged, he'd continue to be extremely good-looking, she mused. The Harmons had excellent genes.

"Hello there," he said to Halley.

She rose to her feet. "Hi. Halley Ward," she said, extending her hand.

"Joe Harmon," he said, shaking it in greeting. "Nice to meet you. You must be the tow Kane just brought in."

She nodded. "That would be me."

"Well, we'll get you sorted and out of here quickly. In the meantime, feel free to relax. There's a soda machine right inside the garage if you're so inclined," he said.

"Thank you."

"Nicky? Let me walk you out to your mom. She's in a rush and can't come in today."

"Okay, Grandpa." The boy gathered his camp bag and shoved his phone into a gray backpack. Then he came out from behind the desk, all long limbs and the Harmon family dark hair.

Joe Harmon walked his grandson out front, and through the window, Halley watched him climb into an SUV. She couldn't see the woman in the front seat because of the glare of the sun. With a shrug, she turned back.

She picked up her purse from the floor and dug through it for some dollar bills before heading into the garage for a cold soda. She returned and settled back into the chair, popping the

top on the can and taking a long sip.

She tapped her foot, waiting, hoping for good news about her car. Her Aunt Joy had bought her the SUV, used because she'd known Halley wouldn't want to accept something extravagant. She'd already bought her the beach house. Because Aunt Joy was trying to buy Halley. Not in a bad way, either. It was just the only way someone with money, who wanted things to be good, easy, normal between them, knew how to act. And what was Halley supposed to do but graciously accept and try to be what Joy wanted?

But Halley didn't feel normal. She didn't feel like everyone else. Life had been hard for her, and she hung on to the pain because it was all she'd known, at least until she was thirteen and Aunt Joy had shown up and saved her from her last foster home, where she'd landed after the trauma with the Smiths. There, the worst hadn't happened, but bad things had. And though Halley knew she ought to be grateful to her aunt and she was, the child in her just wished Joy had found her and Phoebe sooner.

She didn't mean to make Aunt Joy pay for something out of her control. She just didn't know how to be any way but what she was. She was a loner by nature. And Aunt Joy and Halley's older sister, Phoebe, weren't. Halley didn't want to think about this anymore.

She looked around the garage, the beat-up beige walls, the toy cars and trucks on the shelves, a half-dead plant on another. Joe hadn't returned, she realized. And she continued to

tap her foot.

The trill of her phone rang from her bag, giving her something to do. She dug it out and saw Phoebe was calling. She answered, wondering what her sister, who was usually busy showing houses as a Realtor to the wealthy, wanted.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Halley! Guess what?" Phoebe asked.

"What?" she asked because she really had no idea.

"I sold the old Callahan Estate!" she said of the massive mansion on the outskirts of town that had been empty since its owner, an elderly woman, passed away five years ago. The heirs had been ridiculous in their demands on price, at least according to Phoebe, and so the place had sat vacant.

"That's fantastic!" Halley said, happy for her sister.

"That's a huge coup!" Not only a financial windfall, but Phoebe had managed something her competitive fellow agents hadn't been able to do.

"Thank you. We're going out to celebrate. Dinner and drinks at the Blue Wall. Aunt Joy said she'd watch Jamie," she said of her son, who was eleven years old.

"Wait. What?" Her mind flew back to what her sister had just said. *We're going out.* "I'm not going. Surely you want to celebrate with Nate and the people from your office." She mentioned Phoebe's friend, and anyone else Halley could think of to keep her sister company so she didn't have to join in.

Halley did not want to go out tonight. She never wanted to go out. Especially to the Blue Wall, where, yes, they could have

a private dinner on the restaurant side of the establishment, but where they'd inevitably end up on the bar side afterwards. And Halley didn't like big crowds and guys trying too hard to pick her up.

"I'm not—"

"You are. I'll be at your place at seven. I'll drive," her sister said, and Halley recognized that tone in her voice. They might not have grown up together, having been sent to separate foster homes, but they'd been reunited long enough for Halley to realize Phoebe wouldn't take no for an answer.

Halley pushed down the anxiety that followed and said, "Okay. Only because you deserve a celebration." She'd just try and find an excuse to leave right after dinner.

"Good. Dress up," her sister ordered. "Have to go. Love you, bye."

"Love you, too," Halley muttered to the dial tone.

Despite being pushed into something she didn't want, Halley smiled, happy for her sister.

"Good news?" Kane asked, as she realized he'd walked into the office and had been waiting for her to finish her call.

"My sister sold a house she's excited about."

He grinned and that was a good look on him. "Good for her," he said as he wiped his hands on a rag.

How could a man look so sexy doing something so simple? She wondered, taking in his strong forearms and masculine hands, drinking him in and hoping he didn't notice she just might be ogling him.

"What's up with my car?" she asked, her voice a little rough. She hoped for some positive news of her own.

"The fuel pump is out. I need to order a new one. I called, and unfortunately it's going to take a few days, probably through the weekend." He shot her a regret-filled look.

She sighed. "Okay, well, thanks for taking care of it. I'll call my sister for a ride home."

"I can take you," he said, catching her off guard.

She shook her head. "You really don't have to go out of your way."

He lifted a shoulder in a lazy shrug. "I don't mind. Let me just go upstairs, wash up, and we can get going."

"Upstairs?"

"I live in the apartment over the garage," he explained. "I'll be right back."

"Umm, okay," she said, agreeing to something she didn't think she wanted for the second time in a few minutes.

But that was a lie. Because as she watched Kane stride out of the office, his muscular yet lean body a sight she couldn't ignore, she realized, for the first time in forever, she desired something.

She desired Kane Harmon.