

Storm of Desire

CHAPTER ONE

Samantha Greco yanked her wet suitcase through the bedroom doorway, dropped it on the floor, turned on the lamp and slammed the door. The sound reverberated through the empty house. She hadn't meant to take her frustrations out on the door, but her white-knuckled drive up the coast from Richmond, Virginia, to Fenwick Island, Delaware, had plucked her last nerve.

Lightning flashed, illuminating the shadowed corners of the room. The fierceness of the January storm had turned the early afternoon to dusk. A sudden crack of thunder made her jump. Damn nor'easter!

Shivering, she set her handbag on the night table, then shrugged off her jacket and threw it on the bed. The soaking rain had dampened her jeans. She sat on the bed and tugged off her boots, then her jeans and the sweater she'd worn since early morning. She unzipped her suitcase and rummaged for fresh jeans and a sweater. Straightening, the clean clothes in one hand, she loosened her hair from its clasp to let the damp tendrils swing about her shoulders and down her back.

She started when she caught a glimpse of another person in her peripheral vision. With a nervous laugh, she realized she'd seen her reflection in the full-length mirror. She studied herself and shrugged. Clad only in a red thong and matching lace bra, her black hair falling loose and undone, she looked worlds removed from the conservative corporate lawyer she presented to her colleagues.

The lamp flickered, then went out, plunging the room into semi-darkness. Samantha dropped the clothes onto the bed and let her eyes adjust. The wind picked up, howling an angry song. Scrub trees scraped the side of the house, a macabre accompaniment to the wind. Anxiety snaked through her. "I should have stayed in Richmond this weekend."

Above the wail of the wind, she heard a door open and close. Samantha froze. She must have imagined the sound. Or maybe the cats were into something, or perhaps it was only a loose shutter.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway.

Definitely not the cats. Not a shutter either.

Her heart raced. *Oh, God.*

She groped for the sweater she'd thrown down. Sweater in hand, she looked frantically around for something to use as a weapon.

Her bedroom door flew open and hit the wall with a loud bang. She screamed. A tall man, brandishing a baseball bat, stood silhouetted in the doorway.

She threw the only thing she had in her hand at him--her sweater. He smacked it to the ground with the bat. The light suddenly came back on. She

blinked as recognition dawned.

“Who the hell...?” he shouted above the thunder and the wind. His dark blue eyes widened and he sucked in a breath. Frowning, he lowered the bat. “Sam? I saw the car and wondered. But you? Why are you here?”

She couldn't breathe as his hot gaze raked her. She'd never forgotten those eyes or that thick brown hair, or the dimple in his cheek when he smiled. She'd never forgotten that night five years ago either, that incredible night. Almost naked, feeling vulnerable, she folded her arms across her chest as if she could protect herself from the memories.

“Aiden.” Her voice shook. Warmth curled in her stomach and wound lower, leaving her breathless from fright and remembered heat.

He set the bat against the wall and glared at her, making her wonder if she'd imagined the desire in his eyes a second ago. “Sam, what the hell are you doing here?”

No one but Aiden called her Sam.

The unexpected harshness of his voice brought her to the present. She scowled back at him. “What are *you* doing here? In my mother's house?”

He pushed fingers through his hair, sending droplets of water flying, and studied her with eyes that sparked blue fire. This time there was no mistaking his desire. His gaze made another leisurely sweep of her body. “My God, you're beautiful,” he whispered. “And still sexy as hell.”

Despite the embarrassment of her near-nakedness, her nipples pebbled under his scrutiny. He was smokin' hot, and impressions flashed through her mind, as quick as the lightning outside--the feel of his lips on hers, the rough skin of his palms against her breasts.

She should tell him to leave; she should get dressed. But caught in the sensual heat of her memories, she couldn't move.

He broke the contact and looked away. When he turned back to her, his eyes were cool. “Get some clothes on, Sam. I'm a man, not a saint.”

“Maybe if you hadn't charged in here scaring me half to death, I would have had time to dress.”

She glanced down and saw her short terry robe hanging out of her suitcase. She grabbed it and pulled it on, tying the belt around her waist. Feeling armored, she propped a hand on her hip. “You didn't answer my question. What are you doing here?”

“I promised your mom I'd take care of things while she's away. I drove over from Rehoboth to check the house and get the cats. I would have been here sooner but the storm's made driving a mess.” He gave her a pointed look. “As you know.”

She ignored his jab. “You're the friend who's watching the cats?” At his nod, she said, “Well I'm here now. I'll take care of them. You can leave.”

A muscle twitched in his jaw and he moved into the room. “Yeah. Right. You’re here now. Get dressed, Sam. We need to leave. All of us.”

At the seriousness in his eyes and voice, apprehension dashed up her spine. She pulled on the ties of her robe again, fighting her unease. “What are you talking about?”

“The storm. We don’t have time to argue. Let’s find the cats and get the hell out of here.”

“Are you nuts?”

“You’re the one who’s nuts if you stay here.” He jutted his chin toward the windows. “Do you hear that? The storm of the decade and it’s only going to get worse. The Coastal Highway is taking on water. They’re evacuating everyone inland. Didn’t you notice cars going out but none coming in?”

“It’s January. There’s never much traffic here in January. Besides, I’ve been through plenty of nor’easters.”

“Then you know what happens when the highway floods.”

A clap of thunder shook the house, as if to punctuate his statement.

Aiden reached out and turned her toward her suitcase. “We don’t have much time. Have you seen the cats? I don’t want to leave them alone. We don’t know when the authorities will allow us back in.”

She stepped away from him, then rubbed her arm as if she could erase the heat of his touch. “The cats ran past me into Mom’s room a little while ago.”

“I’ll get the carriers. Get dressed, then we’ll get the cats.”

“Don’t order me around.”

He moved closer, invading her senses with his heat. His hair had begun to dry and curled softly over the collar of his black leather jacket. The dim light from the lamp touched his sharp cheekbones and full lips.

“Listen, princess, if we don’t get out now, we might be stuck here for days.”

Remembering the pleasure he’d given her with that mouth, she licked her suddenly dry lips. “Stuck here? With you?”

His eyes darkened and his gaze lingered on her mouth. “The two of us. Here. All alone.”