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DO NO HARM

Written by **Lucy V. Hay**

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Do No Harm

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Two

Shit, shit, shit. This was so typical of Maxwell. Why couldn't he just leave them alone?

Sebastian parted the curtains on the hotel landing as he went down the stairs. He'd patrolled the landing every twenty minutes for the last two hours and, sure enough, Maxwell's boy-toy car was still below. He'd parked at the back of the large car park at first, but had crept forwards every half hour or so. It couldn't be coincidence. Lily's ex knew they were getting married today; he was supposed to be picking Denny up after the reception.

Irritated now on top of being nervous, Sebastian tramped down the stairs towards reception. His stomach lurched. He'd not been able to eat a thing at breakfast, sipping on stewed black coffee instead. Was it normal to feel so nervous before one's wedding? He had no clue – he'd never done it before. And he'd never really thought about it either. He'd not been against it, it was just that, until nine months ago – and Lily – marriage had been something other people did.

Sebastian arrived in reception. The space around the large desk was deserted but for a black silhouette in the window. Despite the sound of his footsteps on the marble floor, she did not look his way.

'Mum.'

Sebastian's mother turned and smiled. There was a faux look of surprise on her face, as if she'd chanced upon him here, rather than received an actual invitation to her only child's nuptials. As she rose from her chair, Sebastian was shocked momentarily at how long it took her to rise, how frail she seemed.

'Darling.' Fran air-kissed both his cheeks then grabbed him by the shoulders, holding him at arm's length. 'Let's take a look at you.'

Sebastian waited, impatient, as she adjusted his tie and his jacket collar. She nodded at last; he passed muster, it seemed.

'Handsome, as ever!' she said.

Sebastian cast his own eyes over his mother's outfit. She was dressed almost head to toe in black, the only colour the red of her lips, nails and handbag.

Sebastian's uncharitable side rose up – his frustrations with Maxwell showing as he spoke. 'You look like you're going to a funeral.'

Fran's smile faltered. 'Don't, darling. This is a happy occasion.'

Shame flooded through Sebastian. He was being an arse. It wasn't his mother's fault Maxwell was loitering outside. 'Sorry, Mum. Just feeling a bit stressed.'

'Is everything okay?'

'Why wouldn't it be?'

'Just asking, darling. I have done this myself, you know. A million years ago now, but I do remember.' Fran sighed, and as she did so, a sharp cough exploded from her mouth, seeming to take her by surprise. She put an embroidered handkerchief to her mouth. A volley of three or four more coughs followed, her shoulders shaking.

Sebastian guided Fran to a leather settee. 'That's a nasty cough, Mum.'

'Oh, just a touch of summer flu.' Fran smiled, patting him on the arm. 'I bet Lily looks lovely in her dress. But then, she'd know how to make the best of herself, I expect … having done this before.'

Sebastian felt irritation wash over him again. He didn't need this right now. 'Yes Mum, Lily is divorced. I don't need reminding.'

'Well I should hope not, since you'll be taking the boy on.' Fran's eyes twinkled. 'I am proud of you, darling. There aren't many men who would take on another man's child.'

Sebastian almost shook his head in bemusement. Stepfamilies were not unusual in this day and age, but his mother appeared to have been frozen somewhere in the early eighties. He knew she meant nothing by it, though; it was just her way.

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'He's a good lad.' Sebastian puffed up his chest, as if responsible for Denny already.

Fran grinned indulgently, then lowered her voice. 'I saw the … ex. In the car park. Do you think he might … try anything?'

'He'd better not.' Sebastian's words sounded tougher than he felt.

Fran nodded. 'It's not too late, you know.'

'Too late for what?' Sebastian said, frowning.

Fran raised her hands. A bemused smile shimmered across her face. 'Goodness me, aren't we a little defensive? I'm just saying, you wouldn't be the first groom to get cold feet.'

Sebastian sighed. He was being unreasonable. His mother had not been unsupportive of his marriage to Lily. And any misgivings she had were to be expected; after all, his and Lily's relationship had been the textbook whirlwind romance. He'd had many girlfriends over the years and loved every single one of them … for a short while, at least. So why wouldn't his mother wonder what was different about this one? It was probably his own stupid fault – he should have brought the two women together more in the nine months he'd been seeing Lily.

'I saw that young woman Lily's so close to – Triss, is it? – sitting outside in her car, too,' said Fran. 'Cutting it a bit fine, isn't she? I thought she was supposed to be the maid of honour.'

'She's with Lily now, Mum, no need to worry,' said Sebastian.

'Anyhow, darling, shall we go in?' Fran offered him the crook of her arm.

But Sebastian's gaze had wandered back towards the window. He'd caught sight of Maxwell's car again. Had he moved the vehicle closer still?

Sebastian thought he had. A Lexus with all the finishing touches, it looked grossly out of place among the saloon cars and people carriers. Even Fran's one-year-old BMW, almost fresh off the forecourt, looked shabby in comparison.

'Sebastian?' Fran prompted.

Through the window, he could see Maxwell sitting in the driver's seat, one hand on the steering wheel. He was as impeccably turned

out as his Lexus. Shiny teeth, high cheekbones, close-cropped hair. The cuffs of his expensive-looking shirt were undone and flapping around his wrists in clearly contrived rebelliousness. Even dressed to the nines for his own wedding, Sebastian felt inferior.

Maxwell looked from the windscreen back towards the hotel, and the two men's eyes locked.

'You go in ahead, Mum…'

Sebastian didn't look back as he rushed towards the revolving doors. But before he'd even made it outside, he heard Maxwell gun the Lexus's engine. He arrived on the steps just in time to see Maxwell's penis extension roar out of the car park.

A smile passed over Sebastian's features. That was more like it. He knew it was ludicrous, but he felt the bigger man; he'd seen his rival off, even though he had not technically done anything.

Relieved, he allowed the tension of the morning to dissipate through his limbs, and strode back into the hotel.

He was getting married.