

AFTER I WAS HIS

EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT

AMELIA WILDE

THE BEST MAN IS MISSING.

Not *missing persons report* missing, I hope, but he's not here in Houston Hall. I've gathered as much from the mother of the bride, one Linda Sullivan. The bride is my best friend and former roommate Summer. It is *her day*.

Which is why Linda grabbed me by the elbow five minutes ago and pulled me into a little alcove, hiding us from the caterers with a potted plant. "My son is missing," she said urgently. "He's not here."

I wanted to make a joke about where men *usually* are when things get serious, but weddings, as I've learned from life experience, are not the place for jokes until the reception gets to that boozy point in the evening when nobody can remember what you say or if you were even there. I nodded solemnly and asked the obvious question. "Any idea where he might be?"

"No. Dayton went to his room at the hotel and there was no answer."

“Did he check the hotel bar?”

“Of course he checked—why would Wes be at the hotel bar? This is his sister’s wedding day. He wouldn’t be *drinking*.”

“No, of course not,” I’d said.

“We have to tell Summer.”

“Do we *have* to tell her? As the bride, she should probably be sheltered from such pedestrian troubles as—”

“We’re telling Summer,” Linda said fiercely. “If we have to delay the pictures, she deserves an explanation.”

“Aren’t the pictures happening at, like, any moment?”

“Yes,” she said slowly, as if I was mildly stupid. “That’s why we have to tell her now.”

“Go ahead. I’ll be right behind you.”

Linda Sullivan gave me a look colder than ice. Down the hall, Hazel, Summer’s bridesmaid, floats toward the bridal suite, looking every bit a red headed supermodel. Linda turned her head and waved frantically to her. “Hazel,” she hissed. “Hazel, we’ve got a problem.”

Now that Hazel has been brought up to speed, it’s time to approach the bride.

We enter the bridal suite *en masse*, the both of us flanking Mrs. Sullivan, who actually looks quite stately in a shimmering silver mother-of-the-bride gown that doesn’t make her look old as hell. Hazel and I are in matching sage green numbers. Summer stands up at the sight of us, her too-cute baby January squirming in her arms. They’re both disgustingly beautiful even if January is *way* underdressed for the

occasion. She's only wearing a diaper. "Thank god, Mom. We've got to get me in this dress." Summer's dress hangs by the window, framed by her shoes and jewelry. It was a whole thing for the photographer.

"Are you sure about this?" I mumble out of the corner of my mouth. All three of us in the bridal party look at each other.

Linda doesn't answer.

"Oh, no," Summer says. "What's the look for?"

More silence from stately Linda, who looks at her daughter with tears filling her eyes. I'd get choked up myself if I hadn't already been over every detail of Summer's wedding ensemble with her every day for the last month. Her blonde hair tumbles down over her shoulders, brought back and pinned with antique hair pieces, tiny pearls glinting off the edges. She looks like a princess in yoga pants. With the dress on, she'll be a total stunner.

"Mom? Did something happen?"

I will Linda to get this over with so we can move on to solving the problem and back to the joyous, festive atmosphere that is everyone's wedding day.

"You—" Linda presses her fingertips to her lips. "You look absolutely gorgeous, Sunny."

All this, and she doesn't even have the dress on yet. I shove down an ugly curl of jealousy at the pit of my gut.

"Thanks, Mom. Really."

This has gone on too long. Now that we're here, about to pull the trigger, Linda is losing her nerve. It's my turn to step in.

“There’s a slight issue,” I say, trying to make my face look both light-hearted and comforting. I have no idea if I’m pulling it off. Summer’s eyebrows rise. This is code for *tell me what’s wrong immediately, and why have you phrased it like this? Maximum suspense? You’re an asshole, Whitney*. “With your brother.”

“With Wes?” Summer’s eyebrows draw closer together, her entire forehead wrinkling. “What’s wrong with Wes?”

January reaches up and tugs at one of Summer’s curls. Summer cups her tiny hand in her own and gives it a kiss. The gesture is so habitual, so natural, that it tugs a bit at my heart.

I started this, and I’m going to finish it. “We can’t find him.”

“What do you mean you can’t find him?”

Linda finally finds her voice. “He’s...not in the hotel,” she says. Is she relishing this? The way we’re all hanging on every word? “Dayton went up to his room, and—”

“Day’s not here, is he?” Summer cranes her neck to look behind us. “He’s not supposed to see me until the first look. Tell me he’s not here.”

“Heeyyyyy,” says January, interrupting us with a gummy smile. Shit, she’s cute. I give her a little wave. Then I snap out of it.

“He’s not here,” I say confidently, though the man could be striding into the room right now. “We just wanted to...update you on the situation.”

“We’re working on finding him, Sunny, so don’t worry about it.”

Summer gives her mother a pleading look. “You’re going to find him, right?”

“Right. Of course.”

Summer closes her eyes and takes in a deep breath, then opens them again. “Any other disasters are on a need-to-know basis, okay? Whit?”

“It wasn’t my idea,” I tell her, which earns me a sloppily disguised side-eye from Linda. “But that’s totally irrelevant. I’m going to find Wes right now.”

“Yes. Whitney is going to find Wes. Don’t fret another moment about it.”

“I wanted you to be here for the dress,” Summer says to me. She means the pictures. There are always pictures of the best friend buttoning one of a thousand buttons on the back of the dress. Summer’s dress has twenty.

“I’m the right one for the job, bestie. Give me twenty minutes and I’ll be back.”

“I’m timing it,” Summer says.

“Ba bo,” January tells me, waving her pudgy hand in the air.

“Be right back.”

I’d better hustle.



FIRST ITEM ON MY AGENDA: check the bars.

I don’t think Linda’s a liar. I think she did, in fact, scan her eyes briefly over the bar in the lobby of the hotel, probably

from the center, by the entrance. You can't see the whole bar from there. Most of it is tucked behind a corner. Me? I go all the way in. It's coming up on noon and the bartender looks like he's just waking up. At least his shirt is nicely pressed.

"Something to drink?"

"I'm looking for an Army veteran." I've seen Wes in pictures. He wasn't at the rehearsal yesterday, or the rehearsal dinner, so we haven't officially met yet, but I bet he stands up tall. Most ex-military guys do. I've met a few of them around the city. They're *not* my type. Regardless, I mimic Wes's probably posture for the bartender. "Sandy hair. Green eyes, I think."

He takes a slow look around. "Nobody like that in here now."

I match his sarcastic tone with my best bitch smile. "I can see that. Was he in here *before*?"

"Don't know. I didn't work the night shift."

"Do you know how to make a Dandy Cocktail?"

He makes a face. "No, but—"

"You, good sir, are of no use to me." I turn on one heel and stride toward the door. I can't waste any more time on this man. But I do pause before I'm all the way out and turn back. "Now, anyway. I'll probably need several drinks later. I'm going to a wedding."

He cracks a confused smile. "Okay. I won't be here by then. I'm—"

"Warn your replacement."

Next stop: the bars on the block. No time for a coat. Not that

I really need one. It's the first truly warm day in April and the sun falls lightly on my shoulders as I step outside the hotel. There's one bar next door, and two across the street.

The one next door has two tourists in it who look like they haven't slept. One of them across the street doesn't open until three. And the third...

"Wes?" I call his name as soon as I'm inside. I have to hurry this up. My gorgeous ex-roommate Summre is standing in the bridal suite right now in her bridal yoga getup, waiting for me to begin the donning of the dress.

"I'm Freddie," says the guy behind the bar. He looks me up and down. "I can be who you're looking for."

I snap my fingers and point at him. "Maybe later." Maybe never.

I rush back into the hotel. Time is running out. Where the hell is Wes? Not in the lobby. Not in the bars. Not anywhere.

His mother gave me his room number. 331. But she said that Dayton went up there and he wasn't there.

Dayton.

I give a heavy sigh and race for the elevator.

Dayton—sexy, muscled, one-leg-and-you'd-never-know-it Dayton—is the weak link in this scenario. He probably didn't bang on the door long enough. With some men, you have to be persistent.

There's an eerie silence on the third floor. My heels are muffled by the carpet. Good. He won't hear me coming.

336. 333. 331.

I pause outside the door and listen.

No sound.

Shit.

Maybe he's really not in here. What am I supposed to tell Linda? What am I supposed to tell *Summer*? Is there a jewelry store down the block where I could pick up some hasty wedding bands? That would soften the blow, I imagine.

I raise my hand to the door and pause.

Here goes nothing.

I rap confidently on the door with my knuckles, as if I'm definitely not starting to worry that Wes is well and truly gone, perhaps even out of the city. "Room service," I call out in my sexiest voice.

A moment of silence.

Then—

A soft shuffling from inside the room.

The door cracks open, and in the light from the hallway, I see the man who must be Wes.

Holy *shit*, he's hot.

The pictures of him don't do justice to the hard curve of his jaw. To the electric green eyes shot through with honey. To the shirtless, muscled body—

Shirtless? Yes, shirtless. He's got jeans on and nothing else.

"You're not room service," he says, and his voice resonates

with something at the back of my spine, at the base of my core, something hot and reckless.

“I’m here to take you forcibly to a wedding,” I tell him.

“Good luck with that.” He puts his hand on the door and shuts it in my face.

LETTER TO THE READER

Dearest reader,

First, endless thanks for reading the first chapter of *After I Was His*. I am so excited to get this book into your hands in April 2018.

But you and I both know that's not enough to keep you entertained until then.

Luckily, I have a *very* special box set out right now. It contains four of my series starters and one standalone novel, and it's available at an amazing discount.

You'll fall in love over and over when you read the books in Wilde Love. Don't wait—pick up your copy today!

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<3 Amelia

P.S. If you want more from me, including my free bad boy

romance *Hate Loving You*, [click here](#) to join my regular mailing list.

