

A Love Worth Saving

A *Worth It* Series Novel

Book Two

By

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Chapter 1

It doesn't take much to cause a train wreck, Sophie Kingman mused as her fingernail traced a gouge in the scarred wooden table. A broken rail here, a bad weld there, some obstruction on the track. But it's a fact that once the train is off the rails, there's no easy way back.

Such was her life.

She downed the last of her beer and plunked the bottle on the table. "I should get home."

"Oh no you don't. We just got here." Her friend Jade nudged their shared plate of nachos toward her. "I know class was tough tonight, but it could've gone worse, you know."

Sophie raised an eyebrow. "You say that every week. What possessed me to follow you into massage therapy school, I'll never know."

"I say it every week and I mean it every week. We're almost halfway through. You're going to make it."

One thing Sophie had learned in the months she'd known Jade was that it did no good to argue with her, so she took another drink instead.

Jade flicked her straight black hair over her shoulder and her lips edged up at one corner. "Nadine Reynolds is just a jerk who likes to torment people. You in particular."

“She isn’t going to pass me.” Sophie sighed as she glanced around the dimly lit restaurant. “Probably should’ve withdrawn instead of missing those three weeks of class. I just wasn’t thinking right at the time.”

Jade’s eyes narrowed. “Everyone understood, believe me. Well, everyone except Reynolds. That just proves she has no heart.” Before the shadows of sadness could creep into their conversation, Jade tipped her bottle toward Sophie with a cheeky grin. “On the plus side, the rest of us appreciate you taking the heat. Keeps her off our backs for the most part.”

“Yeah, you’re welcome. Maybe I should start charging for the service, recoup some of my investment.”

Jade cringed. “This isn’t an I-told-you-so or anything, but as I recall I tried to talk you out of making such a quick decision.”

“I know.” For the hundredth time, Sophie wished she’d listened.

With a shrug, Jade soldiered on. “So, you shot first and aimed second. Might as well try to make the best of it.”

There wasn’t a *best of* anything in her life right now, but Sophie appreciated Jade’s effort to shift the conversation to the latest gossip about the tattoo artists at the shop where they’d met. By the time they finished a second round, Sophie almost believed her life wasn’t a complete shit show. At least not compared to Carlos and Scooter.

After they paid their bills, Jade stood and slung her backpack onto her shoulder. “See you Monday.” She nudged Sophie’s shoulder. “At least there’s no test next week. Real guinea pigs – I mean clients – starting on Monday.”

“You just had to remind me.” Sophie tightened her ponytail then grabbed her bag and followed Jade out the door into the heat of the early summer night.

It wasn't that she couldn't learn the material or do the work on clients. She just didn't want to. It had all sounded so fun and new and interesting when Jade explained her plans back in January. Sophie assumed she could find a passion for it. One more in a long string of bad decisions.

With a defeated sigh, Sophie rounded the corner of the building and headed to her aging Civic. A few feet from the car she slowed, her gaze riveted to the red rose tucked under her windshield wiper. She scanned the dimly lit lot as a shiver slid down her spine.

Three weeks.

It had been three weeks exactly since the last one, three weeks since she'd felt the urge to strangle Tony for freaking her out. Again.

Her ex hadn't taken their breakup well, but this was some next level bullshit. She ripped the flower from beneath her wiper and tossed it to the ground. After scanning her car's interior for anything out of the ordinary, she hopped in then quickly locked the door. Her heavy breathing filled the silence as she searched the lot again.

No movement. No people.

Despite Tony's abject denial, she wanted to believe this was his doing. In the months they dated, he'd gone from loose and fun to suspicious and controlling. And while she hadn't been thinking clearly when the roses started showing up, nothing else made sense then or now. That logic didn't stop the nagging question in the back of her mind.

What if he'd told her the truth?

With a shaking hand, she started the car then sped out of the parking lot. Once she was safely away, she cranked up the radio on the drive home to drown out her worries, but the anxiety lingered. A soft laugh escaped. She used to make fun of her cousin Hadley for being the worrier of the family.

Fifteen minutes later, Sophie pulled into her mom's driveway.

Her driveway now.

She stared at the simple ranch house, swallowing past the tightness in her throat. Almost fourteen weeks later, it still didn't seem real that her mother was gone. She shook her head to push those thoughts away. She couldn't go there right now.

The motion-activated porch light she'd installed blinked on as she approached the front door. Her gaze alert, she made quick work of the lock then shut the door behind her.

In the quiet, dark living room she leaned against the wooden door and breathed deeply to calm her racing heart. After hitting the lights, Sophie flipped the deadbolt then kicked off her tennis shoes and sank onto the sofa.

A year ago, when she'd traipsed the San Juan mountains with her cousin, Sophie had dared to believe that, maybe, finally, she might be finding her way. Yet here she sat.

Creeped out. Alone. Orphaned. And failing. Again.

Silence, broken by the soft ticking of the clock hanging on the wall, was the only solace the old house could offer. Sophie scrubbed her face with her hands then stretched out on the sofa and covered herself with a tattered crocheted blanket, tired to her soul.

A single tear leaked down her temple and into her hair. She swiped it away, refusing the torrent that threatened. It was hard to believe she had any tears left.