

A PLACE TO REST

by
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CHAPTER ONE

Sawyer Drake rolled over and squinted at the bedside clock through eyes that weren't quite sharp enough without the correction of her black square-framed glasses. *Seven a.m.*? Who the hell was calling her at seven a.m.? She snatched up the receiver, pressed the button to end the offending noise, and growled into the phone.

“What?”

The voice that greeted her was far too cheery for the time of day. “Is that how you answer your phone? Really, Sawyer, I raised you to be more personable than that.”

“Morning, Mom. I'm not usually personable until at least nine.”

“I know, dear. That's why I called at seven. I was hoping to catch you off guard.”

Sawyer laughed at her mother's candor. Tia Drake was nothing if not honest, and when she wanted something she made it clear. “What do you want, Mom?”

“I need a favor, Sawyer.”

Sawyer pushed aside the covers and crawled out of bed, then padded down the short hallway of the two-bedroom apartment she shared with her best friend. In the kitchen, she moved from carpet to cool tile and grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge.

“Of course you do.” Sawyer sipped from the bottle, letting the cold water soothe her dry throat. “Ever since you and Dad moved to Florida, you only call when you want something.”

“Yes, I know,” Tia said sarcastically. “Next you’ll tell me I call your brother and sister more than I call you.”

Sawyer cringed. Though she’d been teasing and knew her mother was doing the same, Tia had touched a nerve in talking about Sawyer’s siblings. At thirty-two, Sawyer was four years older than her brother and sister, fraternal twins. She supposed it was normal for one child to think another got preferential treatment. And over the years she probably should have gotten used to her siblings getting more attention, especially when they were younger. People tended to coo over twin babies.

Tia interrupted her musings about her family dynamics. “Sawyer, I need you to do something for me. Have you found a new job yet?”

“Not yet.” She’d been unemployed for two weeks since she left her job at the zoo. Although, in her defense, how long could they expect her to sit in a bamboo shack and sell tickets before she got bored?

“I want you to consider going to work with your sister.” When a health scare had encouraged their father to consider early retirement, her parents had finally decided to leave Nashville and make that move south they had been talking about for years. Sawyer’s sister, Erica, had reluctantly taken the reins of the family restaurant, Drake’s.

“Mom—”

“Hear me out, Sawyer,” Tia said in a tone she knew better than to interrupt. “I know you’ve never been interested in working at the restaurant. But Erica needs your help.”

“She didn’t say—”

“When was the last time you talked to her?”

Sawyer took a deep breath and mentally counted to ten. Her mother had a habit of not letting her finish a sentence. “I don’t know. A few weeks ago, I guess.”

“She says you haven’t been by Drake’s in months.”

“I haven’t had time.” Sawyer regretted the white lie the moment it passed her lips. She wandered into the sparsely decorated living room and settled on one end of the sofa. Beige sofa, neutral carpet, and white walls. She kept promising herself that she would decorate the apartment, but it just never seemed to take priority. Her friend and roommate, Matthew, had added the few personal touches, such as the large burgundy vase and the colorful abstract painting.

“So then, daughter of mine, how have you been whiling away your hours of unemployment?”

“Ah—well—I—”

“Exactly as I thought. Erica’s pregnant, Sawyer. You could at least go by there and check on her once in a while.”

Her sister was nearly seven months along and planning to have the baby on her own. Every time Sawyer talked to her mother she had to listen to a monologue about how it must be so hard for Erica to be going through this all alone and how Sawyer should check on her more often. She would endure as long as she could before making an excuse to get off the phone.

“Mom, she works with Brady every day. It’s not like she’s by herself,” she argued in vain, knowing her mother wouldn’t see her brother’s presence as a fitting substitute. From the time Sawyer was old enough, Tia had often left her in charge of her younger siblings while she and their father spent long hours at the restaurant.

“That’s no excuse for you to not care about her.”

“It’s not that I don’t care about her, you know that.” It took some effort for her to keep from raising her voice. Her mother could be exasperating when she wanted to. It was how she wore a person down, and no doubt she knew Sawyer would give in. “Jesus, Mom. Okay. I’ll go over there.”

“And you’ll work with her?”

“Now you’re pushing your luck,” she muttered, resting her feet on the oak coffee table in front of her.

“Try it for a few weeks. If you give it a fair shot, I won’t bother you about it anymore.”

Sawyer sighed. Well, what else was she going to do for the next few weeks? She hadn’t found anything else yet, and a cushy job at her family’s restaurant would be as good as any. She could just go in a few days a week and hang out with her brother and sister, and as an added bonus, her mother would think she was making an effort. This was a good opportunity to eliminate one of their arguing points. “If I do this and it doesn’t work out, I’ll never hear another word about working at the restaurant. Right?”

“Right,” Tia agreed after a moment of silence.

“Okay, Mom. I’ll try.”

Minutes later she hung up and went back into the bathroom. She brushed her teeth and wondered, as she did every morning, if she should consider tinted contact lenses. Her brown eyes were very ordinary, so she thought about trying something in green or hazel. She’d considered contacts several times, mostly out of vanity, thinking her glasses made her look like a nerd. But as the years went by, she’d grown accustomed to them, even hiding behind them at times.

After a quick shower she ran a brush through her chin-length light brown hair and decided to let it air dry. She pulled a pair of khakis and a button-down blue striped shirt from the closet. *I should iron this shirt. But why bother?* Who did she need to impress? Erica? This would be the easiest job interview she’d ever had.



“It’s not too late to leave,” Sawyer muttered to herself that afternoon as she shifted in a chair in her sister’s office. “Erica hasn’t even seen me yet.”

She’d left word with the hostess on the way in that she would be waiting for Erica. So she tried to get comfortable in one of the expensive-looking chairs decorating the small office. Sawyer

remembered many afternoons spent curled up in her father's old, comfortable furniture after school doing homework while he worked at the desk. Erica had redecorated earlier in the year after she had taken over and had obviously chosen the muted olive green-and-beige-patterned chairs for aesthetics rather than comfort. She seemingly hadn't wanted anything to compete with the bold artistic photos featuring some of their specialties that she'd had blown up and displayed on the walls. And she had replaced the scarred wooden desk that once held her father's old adding machine with a more modern-looking glass-and-chrome desk that now boasted a sleek desktop computer.

Sawyer was still considering her chances of escaping unnoticed when the office door opened and Erica hurried inside. She spared Sawyer only a quick glance as she moved behind the desk. Sawyer appraised her, thinking she looked tired. Her normally bright blue eyes had lost some of their sparkle, and her blond hair was pulled into a sloppy updo. Her stomach had rounded considerably since the last time Sawyer had seen her. Erica sighed as she lowered herself into her chair.

"How are you feeling?"

"I'm very busy today. What do you need, Sawyer?" she asked shortly.

"Well, I might be able to help you out." She leaned back and folded her arms over her chest. "I'm here for a job."

Erica stared at her. She'd been having a bad day already. Her vegetable delivery was late, one of her servers had quit, and her feet were swollen. Perhaps it wasn't fair, but right now she just wanted to slap that condescending smile right off Sawyer's face. She was quite used to that expression, having seen it when they were growing up every time Sawyer excelled where she faltered. School had been easy for Sawyer; she seemed to get good grades without putting in the hours of studying that Erica required. And she never seemed to tire of basking in their father's praise at report-card time.

Erica wondered what had motivated Sawyer to come in

today. She'd never had trouble finding a job before, but perhaps this time was different. It was just like Sawyer to sweep in and act like she was doing her a favor. She probably expected to be thanked effusively for bailing her out. She was tempted to refuse the offer, out of pride. Then she smiled as an idea began to form that would solve one problem and also put Sawyer in her place.

“Okay.”

“Okay?” It was clear from Sawyer's expression that she'd been expecting an argument. “Great. When do you want me to start?”

“Tonight. Follow me.” Without waiting to see if Sawyer was behind her, Erica stood and walked out of the office. She stopped at a linen closet in the hallway outside of the kitchen. “The entire dining room has been booked tonight for a fund-raiser for the mayor, and I'm down a server.”

“Okay, cool. So—what? You want me to help out, hang around the dining room and make sure everyone's happy?” Though she wasn't really into politics, she thought she could handle an evening of socializing. She could throw on her best suit and glad-hand the guests, putting up a good front for Drake's.

“No.” Erica held out a uniform. “I need another server.”

“Are you forgetting I've been a waitress?” she said, remembering the summer she'd spent on the Cape waiting tables. “I didn't like it.”

“If you want to come to work at Drake's, you have to start at the bottom. Learn the business from the ground up. Brady and I both did.”

“You were sixteen when you were a server. I'm thirty-two years old and I have a business degree.”

“Which you haven't used in ten years,” Erica added, still holding out the black vest, tie, and apron.

Sawyer debated refusing but remembered her conversation with her mother. If she thought she'd gotten a guilt trip that morning, it would be nothing compared to their next phone

conversation. She snatched the uniform from Erica. “I hope you’re enjoying this little power trip.”

“Wear black slacks and a white shirt with that, please,” Erica responded, ignoring Sawyer’s snide comment. “And be here at five,” she called as Sawyer stalked away.



“I should have figured she’d be late. She acted like she wanted to help, but that doesn’t mean she’s changed,” Erica muttered as she walked through the kitchen.

“Erica, are you talking to yourself?” her twin brother, Brady, asked from across the room. She glanced at features so like her own and felt some of her irritation ease. Brady calmed her; she could rely on him in ways she’d never relied on Sawyer.

“Your sister came by this morning asking for a job, and she’s twenty minutes late for her first shift.”

Brady smiled. “She’s always *my* sister when you’re mad at her.”

Erica crossed to the counter where her pastry chef was prepping. Jori Diamantina had been at Drake’s for only six months, but she’d proved to be hardworking and creative. In just a few short weeks her dessert menu had begun to receive rave reviews. Erica had never regretted hiring her.

“Jori, have I ever told you about *Brady’s* sister?” She heard Brady laugh as she turned her back on him.

“I think I’ve heard a thing or two.” Jori regarded her with eyes that sometimes resonated with sadness, but today sparkled. Many times she had seen how Jori transformed when she stepped in the kitchen. Normally reserved in both public and private, she worked with sharp confidence.

“I’m sure you have. Don’t get me wrong, I love Sawyer. But she’s a bit flighty. She hops from job to job and never settles down. And don’t get me started on her relationships. I mean, I

don't think she's stayed with the same woman for more than a week since she was in the tenth grade."

"Maybe she simply hasn't found what she's looking for."

Erica appreciated Jori's attempt at diplomacy. "Well, that may be. But while she's out there searching, the rest of us are left to be the responsible ones and handle things around here."

"Geez, Erica, Sawyer has some good qualities, too. Don't just list her bad ones," Brady called.

"Oh, yeah," Erica continued. "Sawyer can be very charming when she wants to be. Believe me, Jori, within a few minutes she'll have you wondering why I'm complaining."

Jori nodded, uncertain how to respond to the obvious bitterness in Erica's voice. This was exactly the type of situation that made her uncomfortable. She enjoyed her job, and usually there was an easy dynamic between Erica and Brady. But tension surrounded any conversation about Sawyer. From what she'd heard, she didn't know why Erica wasted her time worrying about her sister when it seemed clear that the woman thought of no one but herself.

"I swear, if she doesn't get here soon she's going to make me regret hiring her."

"And that would ruin your perfect record, wouldn't it?" Brady grinned at Jori. "Erica takes all the credit for hiring you, even though I was the one who found you working at that dive on Fourth Avenue."

Jori laughed. "Granted, it was no Drake's, but that place wasn't a dive."

"Of course not." Erica lifted a freshly washed strawberry from the bowl in front of Jori. "But it was merely a stepping stone to this point in your career."

Erica remembered the day Brady had come to her raving about an assistant pastry chef he'd met. They'd just lost their own head pastry chef and invited Jori to interview. She won Erica over with the box of Key lime tarts she'd brought along. Erica went

through with the interview mostly for show, already knowing she would offer Jori the job.

“You’re a good fit for Drake’s, Jori. And I hope we can convince you to stay with us for a very long time.”



Sawyer drove down West End Avenue in her white Toyota Solara convertible with the top down. A warm spring breeze feathered strands of hair across her face. She shoved them behind her ears and smothered a curse as the driver in front of her stopped quickly when the light turned yellow. She could already tell she wouldn’t like working downtown. Traffic tested her notoriously short patience, and it would only get worse as summer progressed and country-music fans flocked to Nashville. Seeing a break in the lane to her left, she sped around the delivery van she’d nearly rear-ended twice already. During the summer Tia had taught her to drive, she’d also passed on her aggressive maneuvers and her irritation with traffic.

Since her meeting with Erica, she’d had time to think about the way Erica was flaunting her power, and it made her angry. As Sawyer’s little sister, Erica had never been in a position of authority over her. Trying to please her mother was upsetting the balance of their relationship, and it wasn’t in Sawyer’s favor. She was convinced Erica’s power play was unreasonable. After all, Sawyer was a Drake. How would it look for her to be toting trays?

West End turned into Broadway as she entered downtown. Crowds of people carrying cameras wandered along the sidewalks and paused at the open doors to several bars, no doubt hoping to glimpse the next big star. As she reached Fourth Avenue, the sounds of live music spilled out of a bar famous for its lavender exterior and for discovering new talent. Three blocks later, she took a left on First Avenue and slammed on her brakes, growling

when a group of people decided to cross despite the Don't Walk signal. One of the men had the nerve to shoot her an offended look as he passed in front of her car. *Of course, that's nothing compared to the nerve he has wearing that shirt.* Sawyer didn't follow fashion too closely, but surely the old-fashioned cowboy-cut shirt with the pearl snaps and three-inch fringe running the length of the arms wasn't back in style.

When she was able to move again, she quickly covered the two blocks to the back of Drake's. She pulled up to the loading dock next to Erica's Land Rover and put the top up. Before getting out of the car, she grabbed the tie from the passenger seat and looped it around her neck.

As she walked through the back door into the kitchen, she paused. Brady, the executive chef, moved between the counters calling out instructions. The rest of the room's occupants, a sous chef and three line cooks, responded in kind. Erica had once told Sawyer that she loved the energy of a well-run kitchen, the sights and sounds mingling with quick, efficient movement. She said there was a choreography involved, each player gracefully playing their part. Sawyer knew she missed being the orchestrator in the kitchen now that she'd taken on a more administrative role.

Brady looked up from the lamb he was seasoning. A shock of blond hair just a shade darker than Erica's fell across his forehead. Though they were fraternal twins they shared the same soft features, and while they lent Erica a feminine beauty, they made Brady appear younger than his twenty-eight years. The baby face he had complained about as a teenager didn't offend him quite so much anymore. They were carbon copies of their mother, and Sawyer resembled their father with looks that she considered mousy.

"Erica's looking for you," Brady said.

Sawyer glanced at her watch. "No doubt. Is she mad?"

"She's always cranky these days," he joked.

“You wouldn’t say that if she was standing here.” Sawyer figured he knew as well as she did that Erica wouldn’t like the reference to her pregnancy hormones.

Brady laughed. “Probably not. Paige said to invite you over this weekend. We’re barbequing.”

“Cool. Remind me later this week.”

Brady’s wife was quite possibly the sweetest woman Sawyer had ever met. Fortunately for them, both of their sons apparently took after her. During Paige’s pregnancies Sawyer had tormented her with talk about them inheriting Brady’s temper, another trait he’d inherited from their mother. “I guess I better get this over with. Where’s Erica?”

“In the dining room,” he answered, lifting his chin in that direction.

With a sigh, Sawyer headed that way. As she stepped into the dining room a feeling of warm familiarity engulfed her. The decor remained as it had been for many years. Subdued lighting cast pale circles of light on the tables peppered around the room. The far wall boasted a huge stone fireplace, and the large windows along the opposite side faced Second Avenue, bathing the room in natural light. The remaining wall space was covered with textured ivory wallpaper.

Erica intercepted her as she was passing the mahogany bar.

“It’s five thirty.” She flipped up Sawyer’s collar, grabbed the ends of the tie slung around her neck, and deftly tied it. “I said five o’clock.”

“Sorry.”

“No, you’re not. But you would be if I docked your paycheck.”

“Slave driver,” Sawyer muttered, pushing Erica’s hands away and folding her collar back down. Between her mother and Erica, Sawyer was already thinking this was a bad idea. “I really don’t need this aggravation. I can get a stress-free job tomorrow.”

“Tonight is a big deal, Sawyer. A lot of important people will

be here. Please don't let me down." Erica made the request softly as she drew the front of Sawyer's vest closed and buttoned it.

"I can dress myself." Sawyer stepped out of reach. "I'm already here, I may as well work. But after tonight I'm done."