



# *ADAM'S FALL*

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S A N D R A  
B R O W N



*BANTAM BOOKS*

*NEW YORK TORONTO LONDON SYDNEY AUCKLAND*

# *ADAM'S FALL*

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A Bantam Book

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BANTAM BOOKS BY SANDRA BROWN

*ADAM'S FALL*

*FANTA C*

*A WHOLE NEW LIGHT*

*TEXAS! SAGE*

*22 INDIGO PLACE*

*TEXAS! CHASE*

*TEXAS! LUCKY*

*Dear Reader,*

*You have my wholehearted thanks for the interest and enthusiasm you've shown for my Loveswept romances over the past decade. I'm enormously pleased that the enjoyment I derived from writing them was contagious. Obviously you share my fondness for love stories which always end happily and leave us with a warm, inner glow.*

*Nothing quite equals the excitement one experiences when falling in love. In each romance, I tried to capture that excitement. The settings and characters and plots changed, but that was the recurring theme.*

*Something in all of us delights in lovers and their uneven pursuit for mutual fulfillment and happiness. Indeed, the pursuit is half the fun! I became deeply involved with each pair of lovers and their unique story. As though paying a visit to old friends for whom I played matchmaker, I often re-read their stories myself.*

*I hope you enjoy this encore edition of one of my personal favorites.*

SANDRA BROWN

## *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

**S***ANDRA BROWN* is a former television personality and model who is married to her college sweetheart, Michael, a video producer. They have two children and live in Arlington, Texas.

A decorative border at the top of the page features a repeating pattern of stylized hibiscus flowers and leaves, rendered in a detailed, engraved style.

## *PROLOGUE*

*IT MADE THE EVENING NEWS.*

The accident occurred on a mountain in northern Italy. As mountains went, it wasn't that majestic. But it was sufficient. Sufficiently high and rugged to win the respect of even expert climbers. A fall into a chasm of rock thirty feet deep was sufficient to seriously damage Adam Cavanaugh's spine, warrant headlines, and pitch hundreds of his employees around the globe into a panic.

Thad Randolph didn't panic. But the news report certainly gave him pause. He stopped repairing a Transformer for his son, Matt, and brusquely demanded quiet from him and his sister, Megan. Thad reached for the volume knob of the portable TV on the kitchen counter and turned it up.

“ . . . the only survivor. He has just been flown here to Rome, where the extent of his injuries will hopefully be-



come known later this evening. Other members of the mountain climbing expedition party were French race car driver Pierre Gautier and English banking magnate Alexander Arrington. Both men were reported dead at the scene. Mr. Cavanaugh, an internationally renowned tycoon, is owner of the Hotel Cavanaugh chain. He is—”

“Hey, that’s where Mom works,” Matt said.

“Are they talking about the Adam we know?” Megan asked.

“Yes,” Thad said grimly. “Shh.”

The report was being broadcast live at the scene in Rome. The anchorman in New York asked the field reporter, “Are doctors speculating on Mr. Cavanaugh’s condition at all?”

“No, they’re not. Hospital officials refuse to release any information until Mr. Cavanaugh has undergone a thorough examination and his condition is fully ascertained. All we are being told at present is that his injury, or injuries, involve the spinal column and appear to be serious.”

“Was he conscious when he arrived?”

“We’ve had no official confirmation of that, although he appeared not to be. As soon as the helicopter arrived, he was rushed inside. We’ll have more information—”

Abruptly Thad reached for the sound knob and turned it all the way down. He said a word that his two children had been commissioned to ignore and forbidden to repeat. They never repeated it for fear of reprisal—which didn’t seem quite fair since their mom never punished Thad for saying it—but they couldn’t ignore it. Not when it practi-





cally sizzled off their dad's narrowed lips. "The damn fool."

"Who is?" Elizabeth Randolph entered the kitchen through the back door and dropped her briefcase and handbag on the table. The three of them swung around.

"Mom! Guess who the man on TV was talking about?"

"Matt, Megan, scoot," Thad said quickly. He made an arrow of his arm and pointed toward the door leading to the central rooms of the house.

"But, Dad—"

"Out. Let me talk to your mother alone."

"But she—"

The objections died on their lips when his eyebrows fashioned a steep V. He meant business. In the year since Thad Randolph had married Elizabeth Burke, her children had come to adore and respect him. He had adjusted to their rambunctiousness and they to his moods. They were affectionate with each other; the children had readily agreed to become his by adoption. But he was now wearing his no-nonsense face, which meant arguing would not only be ineffectual, but imprudent. They shuffled out.

"Thad? What is it?"

He moved toward Elizabeth and placed his hands on her shoulders. "I don't want you to get upset."

"The look on your face has already upset me. What's going on? What is it? What's happened? Something terrible, I know. Mom? Dad? Lilah?"

Elizabeth had lost her first husband to a dreadful free-way accident. She knew what it felt like to unexpectedly



receive the worst of bad news. She felt again a sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach, just as she had the morning she'd opened her door to two policemen, holding their hats in their hands and wearing funereal expressions. Fearfully, she gripped the front of Thad's shirt.

"Tell me."

"It's Adam."

"Adam?" She wet her lips quickly. Her face turned pale.

Elizabeth was personally involved with Adam Cavanaugh. Originally it had been strictly a business arrangement. But their professional relationship had grown in proportion to the expansion of her Fantasy shops in the lobbies of Cavanaugh's hotels. The shops now totaled five with plans for more. Elizabeth and Adam shared a close personal friendship that at one time might have made Thad jealous. But since he was convinced that the handsome, young millionaire was no longer his rival for Elizabeth's love, Thad considered Adam his friend as well.

"Something's happened to Adam?" Elizabeth asked in a voice made thin by anxiety.

"He slipped and fell while mountain climbing in Italy."

"Oh, God." She pressed her fingers against her lips.

"He's dead?"

"No. But he's seriously injured. They've taken him to Rome."

"'Seriously injured'? How?"

"They're not sure of the extent of—"

"Thad."

He sighed with resignation. "Spinal injury."

Tears filled Elizabeth's eyes. "Was the spinal cord severed?"

"I don't know." When she looked dubious, he emphasized, "I swear, I don't know. The reports are sketchy." He told her everything the reporter had said. "It doesn't look good."

Elizabeth slumped against her husband. He embraced her tightly. "Adam was so looking forward to this trip," she said against the front of Thad's shirt. "When he told me he was going to climb that mountain, I said I thought he was crazy to risk life and limb on a silly sport." She sniffed back tears. "But I was only joking." She raised her head suddenly. "Two friends of his were going with him. What about them?"

Thad slid his fingers up into her hair and pressed her head back into place. He massaged her scalp. "They died in the accident, Elizabeth."

"Oh," she groaned, "how awful for Adam."

"According to the report, one of them slipped into an icy chasm and dragged the others down with him."

"Knowing Adam, whether it was his fault or not, he'll take full responsibility." After a moment she pushed herself away and looked up at Thad. "What should we do?"

"There's nothing we can do at this point."

"I've got to do something, Thad."

"You've got to think about yourself. And the baby." He laid his open hand against her lower abdomen, which was firmly rounded with pregnancy. She was in her last trimester. "Adam wouldn't want you to endanger his godchild."

“I could ask Mrs. Alder to come stay with the children. We could get a flight out of Chicago to Rome tonight.”

“Uh-uh,” he said, sternly shaking his head. “You’re not flying to Rome.”

“I can’t just sit here and do nothing,” she cried in frustration.

“You’ll have plenty to do in the next few days. There’ll be a million and one details to be taken care of. Everything will be in a state of chaos until Adam’s prognosis is officially handed down. He would rely on your levelheadedness in such a crisis. You’re far more valuable to him here, taking calls, staving off the curious, than you would be pacing the corridors of a Roman hospital, worrying about something you have no control over and wearing yourself out in the process.”

She slumped dejectedly. “I guess you’re right. I *know* you’re right. It’s just that I feel so useless.”

Thad didn’t say so, but he was thinking how much more useless Adam Cavanaugh was going to feel when he regained consciousness—God forbid that he wouldn’t—and learned that he had suffered a debilitating spinal injury.

“The poor bastard,” he muttered where Elizabeth couldn’t hear, as he pulled her back into his reassuring embrace.



## ONE

***B**AD IDEA. OF ALL IDEAS EVER CONCEIVED BY man, this is the baddest.”*

Lilah Mason, standing in bare feet, skintight jeans, and a faded red T-shirt, looked like a commune mama straight out of the sixties. She'd been a mere child during that decade, but her expression personified the rebellious spirit of the bygone era. Vexed, she tossed her thick, curly hair over her shoulder. Wisps of blond bangs were held off her face by a bandanna sweatband tied around her forehead, but she made a reflexive swipe at them too.

“You haven't even heard us out yet,” Elizabeth chided her younger sister.

“I heard enough. Adam Cavanaugh. That name is all I needed to hear to turn me against any plan you two have hatched.” She eyed her sister and brother-in-law with open

hostility. "Let's forget you ever mentioned it and go out for ice cream, okay? No hard feelings."

Thad and Elizabeth stared back at her with unspoken reproach. Seeing that they weren't yet willing to throw in the towel, Lilah flopped down on the sofa in the living room of her small apartment and drew one threadbare knee up in front of her like a shield. "Well, let's hear it. Give me the sermon quick so we can get it over with."

"He's not doing well, Lilah."

"Most patients with spinal injuries don't," she replied sarcastically. "Especially not at first. And most don't have the financial means to help themselves the way your Mr. Cavanaugh does. Thanks to his checkbook, he's got more doctors and nurses and physical therapists at his disposal than most patients in his condition could count. He doesn't need me."

"That's reverse snobbery, isn't it?" Thad asked her reasonably.

"How much money Cavanaugh does or does not have is irrelevant."

"Then why won't you agree to be his therapist?" Elizabeth demanded.

"Because I don't like him," Lilah shot back. She held up both hands to ward off the objections she saw rising from them. "No, let me rephrase that. I loathe and detest and despise him. And vice versa."

"That shouldn't have anything to do with it."

"Oh-ho, but it does!" Lilah bolted off the sofa and began pacing. "Guys like him who need physical therapy are

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the *worst*. I mean the absolute worst of patients. Children love and adore you for your attention. Elderly people are tearfully grateful to you for your kindness. Even young women are pathetically thankful. But men in Cavanaugh's age group," she said, shaking her head adamantly, "uh-uh. No way. We at the hospital draw straws to see who gets stuck with them."

"But Lilah—"

"Why is that?" Thad's voice overrode that of his wife. Elizabeth had a tendency to become emotional in situations such as this. His approach was more pragmatic, especially with his volatile sister-in-law, whose mood swings were drastic and unpredictable.

"Because for the most part they had been in great physical condition prior to the cause of their spinal trauma. Most are injured when participating in a dangerous sport. They're thrill-seekers. Active and adventurous. Motorcyclists, surfers, skiers, divers, that sort. They're athletically inclined. More so than the majority of the population. When one gets hurt and suffers paralysis, even temporarily, he goes a little wacko. He can't deal with going from superjock-superstud to helpless invalid. His psyche goes off the deep end. No matter how congenial he was before his accident, he becomes embittered by it and wants to punish everybody in the world for his misfortune. In short, he becomes a pain in the . . . neck."

"Adam won't be like that."

"Right," Lilah agreed drolly. "He'll be much worse. He had more to lose."

“He’ll know you’re there to help him.”

“He’ll resent everything I do.”

“He’ll thank you.”

“He’ll fight me.”

“You’ll be his ray of hope.”

“I’ll be his scapegoat.” Lilah drew a long breath. “I would bear the brunt of his foul temper and his recalcitrance. *If* I subjected myself to that kind of abuse, which I won’t. So, end of discussion. How about Häagen-Dazs?”

Elizabeth turned to Thad and looked at him in appeal. “Do something.”

He laughed shortly and shrugged. “What do you want me to do? She’s a grown woman. She makes up her own mind.”

“Thank you, Thad,” Lilah said righteously.

“But you saw Adam. I didn’t.” Thad had stood firm in his decision not to let Elizabeth fly abroad, but at her insistence he had gone to see Adam and had returned with a firsthand report on his condition. “Tell Lilah what the doctors said.”

Sighing heavily, Lilah returned to her seat on the sofa. When she was settled, Thad told her, “I went to Hawaii to see him.”

“I thought he was in Rome.”

“He was. At his request he was transferred to a hospital in Honolulu after the surgery.”

“He had surgery?” Thad nodded. “From what I understood, the spinal cord wasn’t severed in the fall.” Lilah’s





professional interest was piqued in spite of her personal aversion to the entrepreneur.

“Thank God it wasn’t. But several bones in his back were broken or cracked. The surgeons repaired them. I don’t know the medical jargon, but he suffered a spinal contusion. He had sustained a real blow to the spine that caused a lot of swelling.”

“A contusion is a bruise. The tissue swells and puts pressure on the nerves. Until the swelling goes down, the doctors won’t know for sure the extent of his paralysis or whether or not it’s permanent.”

“Exactly,” Thad said, nodding at her knowledgeable summary, which agreed with what the experts had told him.

“And the surgery prolonged the time there would be swelling around the vertebrae,” Lilah added.

“Yes, but that was two weeks ago. He should be showing improvement and he’s not.”

“He’s still in a state of diaschisis?” At Thad’s puzzled look she clarified, “Spinal shock. Paralysis.”

“Yes.”

“He doesn’t feel any sensation below his waist?”

“None.”

“He should have started therapy already.” Thad looked away guiltily. “He has,” Lilah said perceptively. “Hasn’t he?”

“Yes,” Thad mumbled grudgingly, “but he hasn’t responded well.”

