



*Double  
Devotion*

SIMA BEN



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**Double Devotion**

**Sima Ben**



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## Chapter 1

It's been months since I have been able to breathe freely and painlessly. My entire protected, familiar world has changed beyond recognition. I was left alone with sadness, shattered dreams, and one huge hole in my heart.

I tried to hold on to my only bliss - my only son, my beloved Roy. Only six years old, and he has already brought so much joy into my life with his kind, pretty face, his heart-melting smile, his scent, and his touch.

"Mommy! Hug me, please! The house looks amazing... and my room is perfect!" He keeps jumping up and down, excited to start this new chapter. Just us two.

It was a two-bedroom apartment with a small balcony overlooking a green forest. I worked hard to make it look like a perfect, welcoming home, clearing away all the boxes, cardboard and clutter before he arrived.

"I'm so happy that you like it," I pressed him to me tightly and felt content. I had managed to create a warm, inviting nest out of that small apartment. At least until we got settled in again.

"I suggest you don't 'raise the dead' and widen the rift between you and him. I strongly advise you not to provoke him too much," Andy, my lawyer, had told me. "Don't let him get to you."

"Of course," I agree, understandingly, and continued to take all the poisonous barbs he throws at me, the wounding words

he uses to try and drag me into more and more bitter arguments. 'Just a little longer and it'll be over' ... I keep repeating to myself.

"Who do you think you are? No wonder you've been divorced before! You have no one in this world aside from me. Without me, you're nothing, a zero!"

His words still echo through my mind, all wrapped up in deep-seated disappointment and sorrow.

I still remember the day I first entered the small flower shop that he owned.

"Good morning. Do you happen to have any daffodils?"

"Sam?" He looked at me surprised. "What are you doing here? I thought you'd moved to England."

"Do we know each other?" I blushed, hoping that my sketchy past wasn't haunting me again. Could he be another one that I don't remember?

"I know you, of course." He chuckled. "You were the main reason that I came to the 'Eagle Club' every Thursday."

"Is that so?" I asked, slightly embarrassed.

"Yes, but you married the club DJ and didn't even notice me."

I snickered. "Well, we're long divorced. His lifestyle and drinking habits weren't my thing."

"So, does that mean you're single now?"

"Apparently so." I looked at him pensively. Back then, I felt so empty and unloved. My fairytale romance with the club scene's rising star ended as quickly as it had begun. He

terrified me, especially when he went into fits of drunken rage.

“Wonderful!” he continued. “I am, too. How about we have dinner together?” He looked at me, smiled, and handed me the most gorgeous daffodil bouquet I had ever seen.

“Okay,” I gave him my number and was swept away into another love affair.

This time, I was more determined to be safe than sorry. That’s why I tried to choose a man who would respect and cherish me. He was wealthy; he owned two small apartments and an automobile repair shop. He was completely different from all the other shady men I had met. He was also loyal, a homebody, and it seemed like he truly loved me. So, I allowed myself to let down my guard and revealed my innermost feelings. I allowed my dormant hopes and dreams to be reawakened.

“Just look at this breathtaking gift you’ve given me,” he said, wiping a tear of joy that had welled up in his big green eyes. “You’re the prettiest and bravest woman I had ever met,” he breathed little Roy in. When I remember those joyful moments, full of hope and love, I can’t help but cry. How did they all fade away? How could it have happened to me? I couldn’t believe, not for one moment, that this sensitive man who, before we were married, would do everything for me and for whom I had been his entire world, would change so much and become so cruel.

“Why do you think you’re so perfect?” He’d berate me. “You think you know everything.”

“That isn’t true, Matthew. I read about it, which is why I



know.” My vast knowledge in various topics, especially when it came to Roy’s parenting, would intimidate him.

“Well, that’s only because you spend the whole day alone,” he’d reply mockingly. “I’m sure that if I had all the time in the world to do nothing but sit around the house all day, he would have been closer to me than he is to you,” he’d taunt me and belittle my organic cosmetics marketing job.

“Matthew, I’m his mother, for goodness’ sake! That’s why he’s so close to me. Could you stop picking on me and being ridiculously jealous?”

“Yes, yes,” he’d snigger and go on with his day.

I tried to hold on to him but the more I tried, the more he pushed me away. Like that time, right after his mother had passed away, when his heart had hardened and had closed off to me entirely. He had become impatient and harsh.

“How much can you talk, for God’s sake? I can’t stand to hear the sound of your voice anymore,” he would say. “All you do is flap your gums, bicker, and demand. Could you leave me alone already? Don’t pretend as if you care about me and stop trying to make me feel better with all your gifts and treats. It’s just a waste of money. I don’t like your taste anyway. And you know what? Please don’t bother to cook for me either. I’d rather eat out.”

I’d often noticed how my image melted away and how I became transparent to him. The two of us would only feed each other’s insecurities, fears, and defense mechanisms. Thus, I was pushed away from his world and was left on my own.

Matthew agreed that Roy and I would live in an apartment he purchased with payment he had received from car accident compensation. It was located in an old and gorgeous neighborhood, surrounded by an evergreen and intoxicatingly beautiful forest. It made things a lot easier for me because I didn't want to pull Roy out of his routine and make it harder for him to adapt. I made a commitment to Matthew that I'd pay half of the rent, even though my income wasn't stable.

When Roy was born, I wanted to find a job that I could do anywhere and in my free time so I wouldn't take away from my quality time with him. And so, I worked as a marketing agent for an international company specializing in producing paramedical cosmetic products made with the wonderful aloe vera plant. My advancement and revenue were determined by how much work I could put in. The more I sold, the more I earned, and then I could recruit more agents worldwide and double my income. My sales tactics were: 'Purchase the product only because you need it; if the product disappoints you, I'll give you a full refund'. I had confidence in the product and my approach.

"You're wonderful!" my mentor said. "You have this ability to connect with people in such an authentic way and you could do well with us! The sky's the limit!" Thus, she'd give me the stage at conferences and I received accolades for my work. I aspired to spread the word about these magical and pain-alleviating products.

At first it went swimmingly and I was earning good money. Once a week I would get myself up and dressed and adopt my strong, confident woman facade to give business presentations

to more potential agents. Success soon came. I gathered a large clientele and I loved the thrill and hope it brought into my life. Those products also eased the suffering of many people, and that also felt good .

But, just as I had taken off like a meteor, my fire started to dwindle. In recent years, I haven't given it my all. Mostly since Matthew didn't like the fact that I stood out, put myself in the 'limelight' when I gave presentations to clients, hosted house parties or recruited new agents. So, he held me back.

"You embarrass me," he would say. "You're behaving as though you're on the bread line! A married woman shouldn't be traipsing around all day; I was looking for a stay-at-home wife, for security, and didn't agree to be wondering where you are", or "Why, for God's sake, do you keep dressing like that? It seems like spend more money on your wardrobe than you earn. I can't help but think that perhaps there's another reason I should know about?"

At first, I fought back. I insisted to keep working as I wanted financial independence, until I finally grew weary and concluded that it wasn't worth the stress. I reduced my activity and took a big step back - I focused only on selling the products. 'As long as we were all happy'. With the pittance I made I paid for all of Roy's and my needs, and for my night school. After all, we lacked for nothing.

Now, things would have to change, irrevocably. I would have to put an effort into advancing my career and making a lot more money. My body tenses when I remember that, right before we decided to split, Matthew threw this sentence at my

face: “So, you think you can raise Roy by yourself? You barely make enough to pay for your clothes. Your nothing without me.”

“Dad, please stop it,” even Roy couldn’t stand to see how he was hurting me. “I’m sure Mommy will always take care of me, right Mom?” he looked at me confidently.

“Of course, my dear boy,” I whispered into his ear and hugged him tightly. “Don’t you listen to your dad right now, he’s hurt and disappointed, as we all are. He doesn’t mean the things he says. But better to go through it now than be sorry about it later. Trust me. Everything will work out in the end.”

The custody battle was not over yet and, at this point, I managed to get temporary joint custody. I saw this as a stroke of luck, as Matthew was stubborn, vindictive, and selfish.

Only yesterday he had been my lover and here, now, he’s my foe. A domestic enemy. Searching for my flaws and using them to play his cards against me.

Divorced, divorced, divorced. Matthew handed me a white piece of paper as I knelt before him in supplication and with soul-crushing tears. This was how it was going to end?

“So, I’ll take him for the next three days. I’ll give you some time to get yourself together.”

“Okay,” I agreed.

“Are you at peace with what we did?” he looks at me solemnly.

I nod. “It’s for the best! Our dear Roy deserves better.”

“Naturally, you’re always right.” Angrily, he said his goodbyes and left me. We went our separate ways and I collapsed onto my bed, weeping and delirious. I was drowning in a strong sense of mourning for the hopes, dreams, and trust I had for us two, which had all gone down in flames.

With eyes puffy with weeping, I looked at the clock. It was past midnight. Sadly, happiness no longer lives here. The house was so empty.

‘He never really loved me,’ I cry. ‘I must face that fact that he’d given up on me and was constantly tried to change me.’ With those thoughts running through my mind, I drift off once again into a stifling sleep.

Dawn has finally risen. I open my eyes. Silence. A gentle smell of fresh fallen leaves, a distant crow’s caw, and then it’s quiet again. I’m suffocating, I’m alone. I don’t want to stay here today. I should leave town for a bit, breathe some fresh air, and gather my thoughts.

I decided I’ll take some time off this week and take advantage of the fact that Roy is with Matthew for the next three days to try to fortify myself and get it together. I have no energy left in me to convince people, over countless phone calls, that their lives would change for the better if they only joined our business or used our wonderful products. This job had served me well throughout the years I had raised Roy, maintained the household, and studied for a degree in psychology in order to inspire him to work hard and never give up on his dreams.

There’s no doubt things would have to change now. I have to expand the circle of those I rely on and get some support or

even paid help. I'll have to work much harder for it. I'm exhausted just thinking about it.

'Those who believe in fairytales wind up alone, without a partner or a purpose,' I tell myself. I quickly slip into a pair of worn-out denim capris. What shirt? Yes, I'll wear the black one. For my feet, a comfortable, black-heeled clog. My world is colorless as it is. Minimal makeup, purse, cigarettes, keys, and bye. I need to get some air. I must.

I look around me; there's no longer someone to check and make sure everything is locked, that I didn't leave the gas on or forget to turn the boiler off. I'm all alone and solely dependent on myself. 'This is what you wanted, isn't it?' I ask the reflection looking at me through the hallway mirror. 'You're crazy and lost. I pity the man who falls in love with you!' I hurl at her.

I decide to go the beach to feel the warmth of the sun's rays on my bare skin. Nature is always so kind to me and fills me with its power. With each gaze I become stronger; each breath of fresh air is like a 'thank you' letter I write in my heart. I'm looking for my own pace. I'm searching to find myself.

Although I own a small car, I prefer to take the bus. I don't feel confident about my driving, certainly not out of town. I sit at the back, rest my eyes, and give in to the silence. No thoughts; just now and then looking at the changing views. Traveling has always soothed me.



Good, I managed to get myself to the beach. I'm filled with real gratitude for the beauty of nature surrounding me and the

way it affects me, physically. I can breathe again. I find a small café at the marina overlooking the sea and sit at one of the outdoor tables.

A few minutes later, a waiter approaches me. “Would you like to order something?”

“A mint lemonade please.”

“Coming right up,” and he disappears into the café.

My table is quite isolated, and right by the sea. I breathe it in, again and again. “There you go,” says the waiter and serves me the cool drink. I thank him, take a cigarette out of my purse and light it. And there I sit, alternately puffing and sipping, trying to stop the tears from rolling. I look around me and see many people sitting in twos, drinking their morning coffees. Now I feel even smaller. The fantasy of sitting at the seaside and relaxing suddenly turns into anxiety, sure that everyone is watching me. I’ve never felt like I was anyone’s equal, always inferior, always looking for my own flaws. Even though people would tell me I was beautiful, deep down I felt very ugly and even destructive. Otherwise, why were people always turning their backs on me and hurting me so?

Therefore, I had always associated any interest from the opposite sex as nothing more than physical attraction. Cute enough, but just for having a good time for a short while. I didn’t want to have serious relationships, and I played games with them before they could play them with me. And yet, through all of that, I still managed to get married twice. Each time around I got sucked into married life with the same hope: for a man to embrace all of my flaws, who would love them as

a part of who I am and would allow me to grow.

Instead, men would fear me. Perhaps because I succeeded to bare all their faults, so they preferred to shut themselves off to me. Unfortunately, men today aren't manly at all. They think that showing vulnerability would shatter their egos. But to me, a self-assured man who chooses to lose himself in love without accounting for ego and other kinds of nonsense is one of the sexiest things. They interpret trivialities such as lack of confidence and escaping reality as alienation, condescension, or aloofness. And so, misperceptions are born and, as time goes by, the gaps grow wider and deeper.

As we know, fairytales are not based on reality, certainly not mine. My rashness and sensitivity, combined with my insistence to always stay true to myself, has battered my heart. On the one hand, I fight fearlessly for myself in the face of others who tried to change me while, on the other, give into these fears and hide behind a mask.

I am so complicated! I gaze again at the comforting sea. That deep blue has so much depth and magic. How many love stories and how many heartbreaks it contains. This city is so beautiful! The marina and the pier create an island of peace, far from the hustle and bustle of the beach and the city. Dozens of gorgeous yachts dock side-by-side and perfectly merge with the coastline and horizon of the open sea.

I inhale the tingly, salty air when, suddenly, an adorable boy about five years old, hurtles into the café with tears in his eyes. I wonder what's wrong with him and immediately approach him with a few paper napkins in my hand.



“What’s the matter, sweetie? Are you alright?” I lean down towards him. His eyes are green, confused, red and weeping.

“I lost my mommy!” he sobs.



## Chapter 2

“It’s alright sweetie, you have nothing to worry about,” I reassure him, “Everything is going to be alright! We’ll find your mommy, I promise!” I wipe away his tears as he blows his nose into the napkin in my hand.

“Are you sure we’re going to find my mommy?” he asks, eyes glistening with tears.

“Yes,” I reply with confidence, and smile. “Don’t worry, I won’t leave you till we find your mommy. What’s your name?”

“Dan.” He catches his breath.

“Dan, now calm down and let’s try to remember where you last saw your mommy,” I smile widely at him, trying to make him feel confident. He snuffles.

“Erm...”

A few minutes go by while Dan tries to relax and think. Suddenly, I hear a distant worried female voice. “Have you seen a little boy walking around?” I turn my head toward the sound and run up to a curly-haired woman with a horrified expression.

“You must be looking for your son?” I ask.

“Yes!” she replies and looks right at me. “I can’t believe it! Dan! It’s very dangerous to run off like that! I’ve explained this to you a million times before: you shouldn’t run away from me. I was going half mad. I looked for you everywhere.

Thank you very much,” she smiles at me, relieved.

“No problem, he just got here,” I wave her words off. “What really matters is that the two of you are back together and everything is fine now.” I smile.

He hugs her tight and whispers to me ‘thank you.’

“Gladly,” I reply and stroke his hair. “You know, I have a son, about your age. At this age it would probably be better to attach a tracking device to them,” I add as I look at his mother and smile at her understandingly.

“Totally,” she concurs and laughs an easy, relieved laugh. “Thanks again!” they smile and walk away, embracing each other.

I return to my seat, breathing heavily. I look at my cell phone screen and am terribly surprised to find that only thirty minutes had gone by since I arrived.

Seriously? For real? Despite all the drama with little Dan, time just stands still. It’s even worse than sitting around the office and counting the minutes till the workday ends. It looks like I would have to pass the time somehow else.

As I ponder my possibilities, I hear the chair across from me moving. I lift my head, surprised, and see the most glorious, bright eyes I’ve ever seen.

“Pleased to meet you. May I have a seat?”

I truly thought he simply wanted to take the empty chair but, when I look around, I saw that there were plenty of vacant seats. What does this glorious man want with me? After all, it would only take one misplaced word for me to burst into tears.

Everything is tender for me now; I have to get out of here.

“Please, take a seat,” I find myself replying, surprised at myself for consenting. Really? Why did I say yes? I take just one more quick look and he appears to be very impressive, wearing a light-colored, designer jacket over a gray t-shirt, jeans and sunglasses. But despite his meticulous look and fashionable clothing, brand names from head to toe, there’s something else about him, something utterly authentic.

“Hello,” he flashes a pearly white set of teeth and a perfect smile.

I’m smitten. I guess I missed the smiles. I think to myself, the only time Matthew would bare his teeth to me was when he growled at me.

“I’m Avi,” he says and reaches out to shake my hand. He sits down in the chair and leans back, comfortably. “I’m here with a friend of mine,” and lifts his head in the direction of his friend.

I reluctantly glance to where he’s indicating and then I see him: Michael! Michael Jones! The perfect singer and actor! Every woman’s wet dream.

“Is that... Michael?” I ask with embarrassment mixed with excitement.

“Yes,” he replies. “So, you know him. You saved me some unnecessary explanations. May I invite him over here to join us?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” I reply, “but...”

“But what?” he asks.

“What is he doing here? I can’t believe it! It’s so surreal!” I look into his eyes, half smirking. Today, of all days, I was ‘lucky’ enough to meet Michael Jones?

He gives me a dashing smile.

“You’re awfully cute,” he replies and lightly bites on his lower lip, “but please don’t say his name so loudly. We’re trying to be incognito for a bit, see?”

“Oh! I’m terribly sorry. You’re right. I wasn’t thinking.”

“We’ve been watching you for the past half hour, you know,” he goes on and I melt completely. Occasionally I glance at my own private Adonis.

“Really? Why?” I reply, struggling to understand what he’s getting at.

He smiles and his eyes shine brightly.

“The way you took care of that lost little boy really moved us. That, on top of the fact that I... he... seem to like you...” He slightly chews on his bottom lip again, making me tremble. “Listen,” he adds, “Michael isn’t usually the type to hit on women, he doesn’t really need to. In short, he asked me to test the waters for him to avoid a big commotion of photographers, rumors and other stuff. Well, you know... so, what do you say? Can I call him over to the table? Or perhaps it’s better if we took a walk?”

“That sounds perfect!” I reply, as excitement spreads throughout my body. It’s Michael Jones, after all. An international movie star, Oscar winning, perfect model in all the current campaigns and, lately, has also been writing and

performing perfect, moving songs.

“But the truth is, I’m not really at my best,” I add bitterly.

‘Damn you, even when you have the chance to be happy for a bit, your emotions take over,’ I berate myself and, as I’m overcome by my sadness, I feel a fat tear running down my cheek. Now I am totally exposed in front of these two men, the depiction of my erotic fantasies.

Oh! How simple things can be when you have confidence and ‘joie de vivre’. I hate myself. How much more could I embarrass myself? This isn’t the time nor place! I try to collect myself, holding the tears back, but...

“What’s the matter, sweetie?” Avi asks as his right-hand thumb makes the uncontrollable tear running down my cheek disappear. “Please, don’t feel embarrassed on my account. I know you don’t know me, and I don’t know you. You probably want to be by yourself for a bit. You certainly don’t need to apologize to me.”

“Are you done with your drink?” he asks after a moment of silence.

“Yes,” I reply. “Sure.”

Avi signals to the waiter for the check and for Michael to come over. I take out a bill and place it on the table. I don’t wait around for the change, I just put the chair back. I grab my purse and put my cigarettes in. I thank him and walk a few steps outside the sitting area.

“Would you like to hang out for a bit? Are you sure you’re alright?” He gets up and lightly touches my shoulder.

Michael stands by his side looking puzzled, trying to figure out what happened to me. Shit! I hate it when people feel sorry for me.

“Yes!” I answer, “but also no. I’m fine, just a bit sensitive at the moment.” I lower my head in shame.

Avi grabs my chin and lifts it gently so that our eyes meet.

“You don’t owe anyone any explanations, and certainly not us. Everything is alright. What’s your name?” he tries to distract me.

“Sam.”

“What a pretty name. where are you from?” he asks.

“I live in Jerusalem. It’s a nickname I’ve taken on over the years, mainly because I work at an international marketing company. I also lived in England for a few years and it made it easier for me to fit in and for people to pronounce.”

“Beautiful name,” Michael states, “it suits you, too.” He smiles. “I’m Michael,” he says and reaches out his perfect hand for me to shake.

“Nice to meet you,” I reply and softly shake his hand, blushing from head to toe. The hairs on my scalp tingle with excitement.

“The truth is, I saw you sitting across from me and you seemed really nice. I thought perhaps we could take a walk on the beach and get to know each other, but if the timing isn’t right, I’ll understand.”

“Unfortunately, I’m going through a serious rough patch.”

“Are you sure that you’re okay?” Avi asks. “Would you care to share with us?”

“Avi, stop badgering her; it’s probably personal,” says Michael and gazes into my eyes.

“No, it’s okay, it’s just that I got my second divorce yesterday,” intentionally attempting and expecting for them to get scared and run off.

“Really?” Avi asks, surprised. “You’re much too young to have accomplished so much.”

“I’m thirty-one. And yes, I certainly agree with you. I sure kept busy.” I spread my arms in resignation and smile. “I’m sorry,” I explain, “sometimes my sense of humor is way too sarcastic.” I was worried I looked ridiculous to them.

“I can see that,” says Avi with a look of surprise on his face. “I hope that one day, you’ll laugh sarcastically at other people and not at yourself. By the way, you don’t look a day over twenty-four, and even that’s a high estimate.”

“How old are you?” I ask Avi with a smile, since I already know every single detail about Michael, my idol. I know, for example, that he celebrated his thirty-first birthday this year on a beautiful, luxurious island in Bali with his latest girlfriend, Dawn Morrison, a beautiful model who got her start on Instagram as a swimsuit and lingerie model. Recently she’s been on the covers of the world’s most important magazines, and acts in movies, too.

‘Hold on! So, what’s he doing here? Hitting on me?’ I wonder.

“Thirty,” Avi answers.



“Got any kids?” Michael asks.

“Yes, a six-year-old boy, the one joy in my life.”

A silence came over us.

“It’s alright, really, guys. I realize you’re out of my league, so, I’ll continue from here on my own,” I say. I think the best thing for me to do would be to stay in my bed and crawl under the covers. I have to heal myself of this crippling sorrow before I even dare to leave the house again. I don’t feel like pretending I’m fine when I’m actually broken. That’s my life now, contrary to my dreams and plans for the future.

I raise my head to the glorious bright sky and pray that it eases the judgement I’m facing, hoping that I’d be able to hold it in without breaking down right here on the stairs.

“Come on, we’ll walk with you.”

We are walk awkwardly down the boardwalk when, suddenly, Michael reaches out his hand and wraps it warmly around mine.

“So, where are walking you to?”

“Erm...” I stammer, embarrassed. Where was I going? “I haven’t decided yet,” I eventually reply. “I thought of going to relax somewhere for a bit, but I haven’t made decided where. I might just go home; all I wanted was to sit by the sea and take in some fresh air.”

“One moment,” Avi mutters as his cellphone rings, “it’s Maya, my assistant, it must be urgent. Please excuse me; I have to take this.” He walks quickly towards one of the nearby benches, as he loudly answers his phone, “Well, now what?”

and sits down.

“Are you alright?” Michael interrupts my staring him. “I feel slightly embarrassed that I’ve bothered you, especially when you’re going through all this. Would you rather go?”

“Yeah, I’d rather get lost.” I reply and wince.

“Really?” he smiles.

“Yes,” I reply, deadly serious. “I wish I had a few days to settle my thoughts and gather some strength.”

“Listen, Sam, I only got here from LA two weeks ago. I, too, went through something that had me down and out.”

“Do you live here?” I ask in amazement.

“My heart lives here but, due to my various commitments, I’m rarely ever here. But, generally, yes - this is my home. The most important people in my life are here. The truth is that, lately, I’ve also been rethinking my steps regarding my career. This life is very demanding, and I want to settle down already.”

“Listen,” I smile proudly, “I’ve been a fan of yours for many years now, you’re so talented and passionate! Like in that movie, ‘Empty Childhood’, when you played Jim, a young boy who’s forced to be dragged around by a single mother, with all of her adventures with men, drugs, and a self-destructive lifestyle. To me, it was a moving, unforgettable role.”

“Yeah, thanks,” he laughs bitterly. “That was a long time ago. Too bad that role later turned into a lifestyle that nearly killed me. I partied quite a bit back then, you know, and I was led

into some pretty dangerous situations.”

I lay my hand on his and look at him warmly.

“Michael, who would we have been without our mistakes? But, with all the pain and heartbreak, I wouldn’t give up the lessons I’ve learned. They’ve helped me become more attuned to myself.”

“I agree.” He smiles again, almost blushing, not showing his teeth this time. “You know what? When I saw you over there, at the café, you looked so beautiful, kind, and warm. And I asked myself, why can’t I be with someone normal, a woman like you.”

“Certainly by now you’ve changed your mind,” I reply in my usual sarcasm, but he simply looks at me and said, “No, not at all. Now I can add honest and funny to the list.”

I shrugged, disinterestedly, as if he were speaking of someone else.

“I have a proposal for you. Listen, since we’re both a bit lost and also looking to get lost for a while, let’s disappear together. Let’s go on a two-day journey, no strings attached, no thinking. Just clear our minds together.”

“A journey?” I ask.

“A journey,” he replies, pointing at the row of yachts. “Let’s put one of those yachts into gear and sail to Greece. We’ll rest and enjoy our ourselves; we’ll get to know each other and...”

“And what?” I ask. “Listen, Michael, you don’t know me and I’m not certain you’d like to. But I’m aware of your glamorous lifestyle, the incredible music you create, the movies you

played in, the commercials and catalogues you've been in. And even so, your proposal, as crazy and irresponsible as it may be, actually sounds right to me. I even have my passport. Good thing that after the divorce, I've been making sure to put all my important personal documents in my purse." I smile a small victorious smile. "But, Michael, are you even sure you want me there, on that yacht, with you?" I ask dubiously.

"Positive! So, are we going?" he asks.

"We're going," I reply. Whatever. What else could happen to me that hasn't already happened? After all, I'm known for my rash decisions.

Avi is waiting for us on a bench facing the sea, talking on his phone and looking at me. Michael and I wait for him to finish his phone call. "Don't forget to change my schedule. Unless they expect you to show up instead of me. I'm not interested in traveling that far. Start being my assistant instead of catering to others," he half-jokingly berates her. "Ok, bye." He says and hangs up, lifting his head up and looking at me sideways. His eyes and bewitching gaze capture mine and I silently stifle my embarrassment.

"So, Michael, what's up?" he asks.

"What's up is that I'll see you in a couple of days. Sam and I are going to clear our heads for a bit and sail to Greece together."

"Really?" Avi asks with a tone of surprise and jumps to his feet.

"Yes," Michael replies. "What's there for me to do here,

anyway? All I do is yap away and lash out at you. I need a breather. Come on, we'll walk you to the car, I have to pick up my stuff. I left my hat there, as well, and I don't feel like being recognized. Pray for me that I'll be left alone, just for today." He smiles a little smile and despairingly rolls his eyes.

"I should be so lucky to have that kind of problem," I snigger.

We walk silently towards the open-air parking lot.

Michael's phone rings. He looks at the screen and sighs heavily.

"Here's another reason for me to get away from it all. Avi," he mutters at him, "I have to take this, it's Michelle. I'll join you in a bit." He takes her call and keeps walking in the same direction but crosses to the other side of the road, talking to her with blatant impatience.

Avi and I walk together, slowly, putting one foot after another. Occasionally, we glance towards him.

"It's his sister,"

"I'm the last person on earth he should make excuses for, we don't even know each other."

"Do you always belittle yourself like that?" he asks in a somewhat annoyed but gentle tone, his face is so beautiful. His gray eyes draw me in and soothe me. He smiles faintly. "You're totally adorable!" he concludes.

I look at him, bemused and baffled by the feeling awakening inside of me when he looks at me. I raise my right shoulder towards my chin, embarrassed. Blushing. What's with you? I berate myself. You just got divorced. Just as we get to the

parking lot, Michael returns to us and clicks the beautiful car's remote. It's a shiny black Porsche with bright seats, the epitome of everyone's envy.

Avi is still looking at me, silently.

Michael takes his belongings, including a small gym bag, out of the trunk, puts on his sunglasses and lowers the visor on his hat in attempt to hide his too-perfect face.

"C'mon, I'm ready," he calls to me.

"See you later, then," I smile at Avi.

"Whatever," he replies, reaching out his hand to me. "Anyway, it's been super nice meeting you, and who knows? Maybe we'll see each other again."

"Maybe, it was really nice to meet you too."

He gives Michael a hug. "Have fun," he adds, gets into his luxurious car and drives away.

"You're really serious about this, aren't you?"

I look at Michael with a smile that reveals the fact that I haven't yet understood why he was making an effort for me.

"C'mon, let's go to the mall first," he replies and places his hand on my shoulder as we walk together.

"Why?" I ask.

He strokes my smooth black hair and the feeling I get is like a naughty little girl being placated. A chill runs through me, from the crown of my head directly and sharply to my stomach, accompanied by feelings of nervousness and excitement and I wonder, 'What's happening to me? I feel

awful!’ All at once, I’m reminded of the feeling I get before having an anxiety attack, fearing that this might ruin our plans.

“You’ve already agreed to go on an overseas two-day yacht voyage with a guy you don’t really know, aside from movies and magazines, so I think you can show a tiny bit more patience.” He smiles broadly.

“Alright,” I reply, hoping he doesn’t think me stupid or overly needy.

At the entrance to the mall, the security guard checks my purse. Michael places his hand at my back, lightly, allowing me to go in ahead of him, a gesture that embodies patience, tenderness, and kindness. Heaps of kindness.

“Which store are we going to?” I ask, looking from side to side.

“Let’s get a few things here. Bathing suits, beachwear, something light, perhaps a few personal items like a toothbrush and stuff like that.”

“Oh! I can’t believe it! How come I didn’t think of that?” I ask, utterly embarrassed. “What exactly did I think I was going to wear for the next couple of days?”

Michael smiles happily. He tugs at my hand and we both quickly vanish into the swimsuit store.

“But let’s make it quick, ok?” He examines his surroundings and adds, “and let’s have as little contact as possible. I’m not in the mood to race back to the yacht to escape a band of hormonal groupies.”

I nod and focus on the task ahead. I choose two bathing suits

for myself, one is a gorgeous white bikini, and the other is black. A few shorts and t-shirts, tank tops and, of course, a change of underwear. I also add to the pile of items growing higher a pair of flip flops, a pair of sandals, a large beach bag to contain everything and also a smaller bag for my personal items.

I hurry as much as I can and, even though the swimsuit store isn't particularly busy and he's trying his best to lay low, he's still approached by a group of jittery girls who recognize him and ask for his autograph. He complies with automatic professionalism and even has his picture taken with them as he conjures up a feigned smile that he has reserved especially for these situations. Even the cashier excitedly abandons her post, has her picture taken with him, and tags him on social media.

Who would have thought? Michael Jones in a women's lingerie store.

That must surely increase their sales, the thought amuses me.

There. I'm done. I signal to him, and he approaches me.

As I stand in line at the cash register, awaiting my turn, he leans over my shoulder and whispers in my ear: "You know money's not an issue for me."

"I can imagine," I reply, stroking my newfound goodies. "But it isn't for me, either." I'll never again forfeit my pride for any man, rich or incredible as he may be. "I mean, it's only a couple hundred," I stress. "Thanks, anyway," I smile.

Michael pins me to him with a smile. "Gosh Sam, you really are a unique woman."



“Thank you, I guess,” I reply and am filled with confidence. It’s about time I cut myself some slack after what I’ve been through. Shopping has always made me feel better.

We leave together as Michael carries the shopping bags.

“Shall we continue?” he asks.

“More?!” I ask. “Why?”

“What will you wear in the evening?” he returns a question.

“In the evening?” All at once, the doubt in my own good judgement for agreeing to this strange adventure rears its ugly head. I suddenly realize what kind of money I would have to spend.

“Michael, I feel really bad about this, but I think it’s best if we call it off. I really wanted to say ‘yes’ and, for a change, to go with the flow without fear, but more and more shopping is going to get me out of the mood.”

“So, you’re not really into shopping, apparently,” he chuckles and hands me the bag.

“On the contrary, I usually love shopping, but not at the moment. I have to be in a certain mood to do it, otherwise it doesn’t really work.” I laugh awkwardly.

“Whatever,” he replies. “I really love shopping, I’m in the mood, and also have the patience. So, you’ll wait for me here, half an hour, tops, and I’ll be right back.”

“What? Michael, where are you going? There’s really no need.” I add in wonder.

“I’m going,” he replies, “see you soon.” He waves and moves

away.

After twenty long minutes of window shopping and worrying about where he could have gone and what he could have meant, he returned.

“That’s it. Let’s split this joint.”

“What’s this?” I ask, feeling very uncomfortable.

“It’s a stunning evening dress and will fit you perfectly!” he replies with a smile. “After all, with the two of us on a yacht, I thought we could restage that scene from Titanic. What do you think?” He raises his eyebrows at me teasingly, and smiles.

“But I feel really uncomfortable. I didn’t ask you to pay for my clothes.” I’m embarrassed.

“All I did was buy you a little gift. After all, I was the one who proposed we escape together, and you agreed to join me. So, really, please just forget about it,” he concludes decisively.

“Alright. You’re very kind. Thank you.” I answer and gently kiss his cheek. He smiles. He seems to really like me. Oh! I really hope he does.

We continue along together, with two full shopping bags, towards the row of yachts. It’s a perfect day. A hot July sun burns my skin, the sky is clear; occasionally, pairs of seagulls look for a juicy fish to satiate their hunger. I walk towards the yacht, about to sail away to Greece for the first time in my life with this amazing man of whom I’ve been a fan for years on end. He’s raked in every possible award and makes an appearance in the gossip and paparazzi columns every other day or so. And I? I’ve been fantasizing about him since

forever, as I apply lotion after taking a shower, running my hands over the contours of my smooth, delicate body to the sound of his music and his warm, caressing voice. Dreaming that one day I'd get to see him in a concert. And here I am, in a completely illogical, random, incomprehensible situation with him. Alone. For two days. Sailing on a yacht to Greece.



“Hello, I’m Max, skipper of the yacht, ‘Silver’. Welcome, and have a pleasant cruise.”

“Thank you very much, Max.” Michael shakes his hand appreciatively. Then, he takes my hand and we get on board, headed for a two-day adventure.

I always reply before I think. Usually, I also act before I think. That’s how I see myself, and that’s what leads to the consequences of my rashness, indecisiveness, anger, shame, and hatred. Hatred of myself.

How can a woman my age, who’s been employed for years at an international cosmetics marketing company and who knows very well how to sell things to everyone else, forget I’m a mother? That I have responsibilities? This is, after all, an impulsive, juvenile, inexplicable decision. Why can’t I just grow up? I scold myself. There have always been thrills, and there always will be. Why am I putting myself at risk? While I do know Michael as a character, it isn’t necessarily his true nature.

And yet, I’m here. For two days. No biggie. With the most attractive, beautiful, and talented man in this entire universe.

I’ve always struggled with acting hastily, and so I’ve done

everything in my power to avoid getting myself into potentially reckless adventures. The truth is that I've also been afraid of living life to its fullest for fear that I would lose the basic feeling of stability in my home and family. Each time I've acted impulsively, I've had to deal with difficult challenges and always paid heavy prices. Matthew has never liked my friends and he would tease me about it. In his eyes, their goal was to break up our home due to their envy and jealousy. That's why I preferred to close myself off and not reveal too much of myself. I was willing to do anything but be dragged into infinite arguments and loud, horrible squabbles.

The harder we fought, the more I used his attraction for me to divert his focus and undo the tension. Sex has always been a refuge, and even a weapon for me. Each time an argument broke out with one of my partners, I would switch to wearing skimpier and skimpier clothes. I was able to seduce strong men without too much effort. My looks and burgeoning femininity have always stood out, and so, slowly but surely, I increasingly counted on my looks and, by doing so, have lost my principles, my desires, and my own identity, which hurt me the most. 'But none of this convinces you, does it?' I take a jab at my inner self, who just wants to be swept of her feet by this delicious god of a man. Mmm.... yummy...

'Listen, what's the worst that could happen? Worst case scenario we'll have amazing sex. You're divorced, a free agent and, just between you and me, it's not like you don't want him. Perhaps it would help you to release some endorphins and really soothe you.' I finally decide it's wise to asked him if he has anything to help me relax and get rid of the annoying

noises pestering at the back of my mind. It is, after all, common knowledge that celebrities usually rely on external fortifications. I could use a little help right now.

“Michael, do you have something that could calm me down a bit? Like some booze, or weed?” I awkwardly ask.

Michael approaches and stands across from me, looking at me with a beautiful, piercing, yet playful gaze.

“So you don’t think I can’t calm you down on my own?” he says, watching my surprised expression at his sly question.

“Psyche! I’m just messing with you,” he pats my nose with his finger. “Follow me.”

Together, we descend to the bottom of the yacht and Michael takes an ornamental box out of his bag. It’s bejeweled, set with yellow and red gems. There are a couple of big fat joints inside. Just what I need to take the stress off. An escape!

“There you go,” he hands one to me and whispers so gently into my ear, moving some strands of hair aside, sending shivers down my spine, “Come, let’s smoke on the deck.”

The yacht’s crew consists of two waiters, household staff, a cook, and a skipper. Occasionally they’d approach to ask how we’re doing, ask if we’re hungry or need anything, ensuring we’re content. My head’s spinning. I’m not used to having people cater to my every whim. But that’s what it’s like for the rich and famous. They have lots of free time and far too much money. All day long they are served, flattered, complimented, as if it were the job of everyone around them to facilitate the lie and lives that they’ve managed to create for themselves. Do

the extremely rich garner so much admiration and praise even when they're not in the limelight? I wonder. Their egos must delude them into believing that those who go to so much trouble for them really care about them and aren't just swayed by interests such as money, inspiration, or power. I, for one, would rather go through an entire lifetime longing for something that only exists in my imagination.

To me, money is very important as it grants security and freedom, especially for women. Of course, I would have enjoyed limitlessly spending and buying what my heart desires, but there's more to life than that. After all, money's just a means to an end, for making life easier. However, economic freedom is the alpha and omega of womanhood, in my opinion. A woman who isn't productive, independent, who doesn't constantly reinvent herself is, unfortunately, left behind. And the thought occurs to me: Just like I am right now.

One must never be dependent on others. Despite the enjoyment, tranquility, wonderful company and effort put in by others, I can't see myself ever feeling at ease with this excessive, smarmy attention.

But, for blowing off some steam and escaping my mundane routine, it really is perfect! I blend into the atmosphere and yield to the barrage of luxuries afforded to me, and all of my attention is solely given to him, my idol, who has in some inexplicable way (perhaps it was even destiny?) emerged into my life.

I happily breathe the fresh sea air into my lungs, and I'm

overtaken by a feeling of gratitude. The sea is so glorious and enchanting, so soothing and kind. Perhaps the Almighty has decided to send Michael to me as a gift, to envelop me in renewed hope and to remind me of the delicious taste of living.

Michael looks into my eyes, as if challenging my mental tribulations.

“Yes, it’s time,” he says and takes a joint out of the decorative box. The waiter pours us some chilled champagne. My self-destructive urges have always been high, I ponder. It’s almost a miracle that I’ve been able to survive thus far without falling into dark places. I experienced everything that came my way, except for one trivial thing: building a home and family and keeping them. But a house without the people you love is not a home. It’s nothing but four faded walls. It seems like I keep insisting to be consumed by my own trauma while Michael tries to figure out who I am and to interact with me. If he only knew he needn’t even try that hard. He had me at ‘I’m Michael’. After all, he’s the ideal man when it comes to looks, talent, and charisma. And, in reality, he’s even more impressive and stunning, yet I still find it difficult to give in to the excitement and delight of being alone here with him.

“Cheers,” we clink glasses of bubbly champagne. I take a few little sips and wait for Michael to light up the joint already. I love smoking weed so much, when will I grow up? When? I take a few hits and immediately realize that this stuff is stronger than what I smoke at home.

I recall how sometimes, after putting Roy to bed, Matthew and

I would sit together, drink wine, cuddle, watch movies or TV shows, smoke, laugh and make love. During those days I couldn't wait for him to come home from work, alert and expectant. I always made an effort with my appearance, prepared dinner, made sure our son greeted him with a smile and, as soon as he'd walk through the door, I'd fly into his arms. The way I used to wait for my own father to come home from work, embrace me and make me feel he would protect me from anything.

'Ok, Sam, I hope you've realized by now that it was wrong to look for a father figure in your partners,' I say to myself, especially considering the fact that mine usually gave me broken hugs. You aimed high and all you got was the pollen off the treetop. But now I just want to forget. Forget the pain, the tears, the guilt, the sorrow, humiliation, and loneliness I feel.

"Listen, Sam," Michael interrupts the thoughts and self-admonition running through my mind.

"Yes?" I reply softly and raise my eyes to meet his. His eyes are like the sea, and they twist my heart with excitement. Undoubtedly, Michael is a perfect man, master of all men, and my sweetest fantasy.

"We're sailing to Kastellorizo, the island closest to us." Michael explains. "It's relatively small and intimate and there are hardly any tourists there. We'll be able to spend a few hours there undisturbed. Luckily our two days only start tomorrow." He smiles. "We have nearly half a day to spend at the beach."



“That sound really lovely.” I’m excited. “It perfectly suits my mood, too,” I think out loud. “Something liberating, but not busy, that doesn’t require any special effort.”

“Besides,” he continues, “we’re here to disconnect, anyway. To escape, breathe in the sea air, get to know each other, and...”

“And...?” I reply. Again, with his ‘and’...

“Michael,” I get up and stand in front of him. “Listen, you have no idea, but you’re really my prince charming and the realization of all my dreams rolled into one.”

Michael, stunned, looks at me with compassion, enjoying the inexplicable one-woman show of the girl who, up until a moment ago, has been as fragile as a leaf in the breeze flying in all directions and is now becoming someone who speaks her mind unapologetically and with confidence.

“Listen, I really appreciate what you’ve done for me. It certainly isn’t taken for granted. My dream has come true,” I clarify. “But I’m scared. Not of you, God forbid, or of what could happen between us. I’m not a five-star kind of girl.” I smile at him bitterly. “I have enough integrity and confidence to stand here in front of you now and tell you that I know you’re out of my league but, if you still want us to go with the flow and then go in separate directions, I have no problem with that because...”

“Stop right there, please!” Michael takes my hand; his eyes are full of sadness mixed with concern. “Listen, Sam, we’re here together now, far from land, and we have no way to escape each other. I’m really not the kind of guy you think I am. I’m

aware of the image people have formed about me over the years, but that's showbiz. And another thing," he continues, full speed ahead, "stop mocking at your own expense! It's not very sexy. Especially given the fact that, when I look at you, I see the ideal woman. Your complexion is a glowing, delicate mocha. Your shiny, flowing hair is incredible," he lightly slides his hand on my hair. "Your body is toned and perfect. You have hourglass curves. Geez, I can't believe you're a mom! You're so petite." He giggles. "Your skin is unbelievably smooth," he strokes my shoulder. "You have a beautiful, exotic face, long lashes, a winning smile, teeth, lips," he says and deepens his gaze, looking at my lips; and I feel naked under his stare. "In short," he concludes, "you're an A-lister. That's what I see just by looking at you, though we don't know each other. So, I ask of you, stop belittling yourself because it really saddens me, especially because I know too well from personal experience about that. Accept the fact that I think you're beautiful and this is the last time," he warns, wagging his finger in cheeky defiance. "Look how great this is. We're on this voyage together, away from it all. Just me, the sea, and the gorgeous woman by my side."

He lays his hand on my shoulder and I'm drawn into his arms. I am happy.

"Thank you so much, Michael," I smile, both content and embarrassed by his compliments. "You're right. I apologize. It's just that I've been through a hard couple of months. I should move on to the next phase and let bygones be bygones, just as we left the land behind us." I look more deeply into the glorious sea. "And thanks for your patience, I really appreciate

it,” I smile coyly.

“Please. May I remind you, I also need this getaway. I haven’t even told you who broke my heart,” Michael smiles bitterly.

“That’s right, you haven’t,” I reply, at a loss for words. He already knows I know everything about him and also about his girlfriend, Dawn. I’m stunned that I feel jealous of her, shocked at myself and at him.

His expression turns grave.

“Dawn and I broke up a couple of weeks ago. She shattered my heart to pieces and that’s why I wanted to get away from everybody. It’s important for me that you understand that I’m a man who takes relationships seriously. I’m way past the one-night stands and that sort of crap. Look, I was born into a very wealthy, well-known, and well-connected family. This world isn’t new to me. I’ve been jaded by it all and, therefore, don’t see what you see when you look at me.”

“No, Michael,” I reply. “After all, we both know you’re so busy and that this won’t last. That’s why I’m asking myself what you are doing here, with me of all people, and why are you trying to impress me? It’s flattering, of course, but there’s no need for that. I’m trying to explain to you, again, that I have no problem joining you on any adventure; but I really am asking you, please be honest with me and don’t try to spin my head with all sorts of big gestures that would make me really happy now but sadden me later.”

We both fall silent. He looks at me compassionately and lightly sighs.

I've exposed too much to him, and it feels totally awkward. As is my wont, I try to divert his attention from what's going on inside me and throw off the blue beach dress I had bought.

"So, what do you say we switch to bathing suits?" I suggest.

"What do you think?" I ask, and jump into the luxurious pool.

It takes just one look at Michael's face to realize he's shocked. Still looking at me with sorrow and compassion, unmoved by my curves or my direct proposition. He takes off the white t-shirt he'd been wearing and stays in his black shorts. His divine body is now fully before me. His abdomen is so beautiful. His skin tone is so perfect, fair but not too fair, his massive arms as if inviting me for a hug, his chest calling me to lay down my head, his scent is perfect, his eyes bewitching. He is a divine man. My idol. And it's just the two of us, wrapped in the deep.



## Chapter 3

Michael keeps telling me jokes, as if his sole purpose is to make me laugh or smile at the very least. I'm high; I smile, laugh, enjoy the music, the sun, the eternal beauty of the sea, this yacht, and Michael. A sense of ethereal bliss takes over and, finally, I begin to feel liberated and happily submit to the sensation.

I slowly swim to the other side of the pool. He smiles a devilish smile as he holds on to my waist.

"Where to?" he laughs and his eyes light up. He also looks more at ease now. I smile.

We goof around like two small children, free of responsibility or burden. Michael tickles me, pulls me closer to him, then pushes me back; completely driving me insane.

I haven't had sex in months and, for almost seven years, I had only been with Matthew. Our sex was rather technical and very satisfying, but passionless and lacked heat. And still, I supposed that, considering the rich and varied sexual experience I had even before I married Matthew, I shouldn't be concerned. I've come to understand that it's nothing more than a muscle and, while it needs flexing every now and then, it's as easy as riding a bike. I believe I can pleasure him and this thought drives me mad.

"Michael, no!" I yell, as he tosses me this way and that. "Please!" I try to adjust my bikini top, making sure it won't expose my breasts. But in truth, I want him to rip it off me,

removing it completely with one swift movement. After all, I was the master of teasing. My chest swells with confidence and I flash a shy and sensual smile.

Michael pulls me closer to him and hugs me with his giant arms. He surprises me, and plants a huge smooch on my cheek.

“Mwah! Such a sweet kiss. You’re so sweet!” he concludes, “and very funny. I like you very much.” He hugs me tightly.

We lean back against the ledge of the pool when he begins to play a playlist he’d prepared on his phone.

“Listen,” he says, then dives into the music, swaying his head with it. The wonderful beat, the lyrics and his enchanting voice uplift my spirits. I feel overwhelmed with light and energy. All I want to do right now is jump, go wild and dance.

Michael swiftly cuts off the urges that have arisen within me.

“Music is the most important thing to me in my career, do you know why?” he asks.

“I can only guess that, undoubtedly, the right music with the right tempo can free the soul and let you into its creator’s emotional world. It allows you to drown into it and lose yourself, get sucked into its energy and, for a brief moment, forget all about your troubles.” I smile, and my upper body leans on Michael’s embracing arm, as he moved with the music.

He nods.

“It’s also the most important thing I have received from my life of privilege. It’s the only place I can express myself and

fully be me. When it comes to everything else, I feel as though all I do is plant an image of myself into a well-planned script. Of course, there's room for interpretation, but here," he says enthusiastically, "with music, it's me and nothing but me. And it thrills me."

"I'm thrilled too," I reply, concluding the track is sheer perfection. "Music is my life too," I confess. "I really love your music. Your voice is so melodious, you always find a way to create fresh and new sounds while keeping a classic line; a unique tone that's just yours."

Michael smiles abashedly.

"Well, apparently, I'm on a date with a fan?"

"A diehard fan," I reply with shy sincerity.

"My number one fan?" he sniggers.

"At the moment, yes," I laugh, stressing the fact that we're alone. "Perhaps we should eat something? Aren't you hungry?" I ask, and gently place my hand on his.

"You're hungry?" He quickly moves away from me. "Wow! That's right. Look at the time, and you must have the munchies. Let's have a quick snack now, then have a good meal later. I've got plans," he explains.

"That sounds lovely!" I smile.

A light meal is served in the yacht's parlor. Everything is simply delicious and perfect. In between bites I lift my gaze to him and say softly: "Michael, I'm so sorry."

He looks at me with a surprised and can't quite follow.

“For not letting you tell me earlier why you’ve arrived from LA and who dared to break your heart,” I explain. “It wasn’t because of a lack of interest or selfishness, I was just very preoccupied with what I’m going through. It’s important for me that you know that.”

“It’s fine,” Michael is surprised and embarrassed. And at once, the good vibes in the air around us for the last couple of hours were completely gone. “My heart was broken and I’m honestly trying to figure out what’s wrong with me.”

“Would you like to share?” I ask.

“Yes, but not right now,” he replies. “Perhaps later. Let’s finish our meal and go diving? What do you say?”

Michael’s flawless body disclosed the fact that extreme sports were his bread and butter, and me? The most extreme thing I had ever done was scuba diving, during which I was also high.

“Listen, Michael, it sounds like so much fun, but I’m scared! Just being at the open sea triggers my fear of sharks; surely you know of that phobia?”

“Is there anyone who hasn’t?” he laughs. “But despite what you may have seen in movies, sharks aren’t attracted to human flesh. In fact, you could say that sharks only eat people in movies,” he smiles. “The more you try, the more confidence you’ll gain and overcome your fear.” He smiles and explains astonishingly well. He’s so smart; a man of the world. I wonder if there’s something he doesn’t know about or hasn’t done.

“Fine. I trust you. But only for a short time,” I ask.



“Alright,” he immediately agrees, “don’t worry, I promise to keep you safe.” He smiles widely.

“Okay, in that case, let’s do it.”

“Looks good,” he replies after he helps me into the diving suit and zips it in one movement.

He smiles his toothy, pearly white smile, takes my hand and attaches the diving gear. He teaches me a couple of basic hand gestures<sup>0</sup> and explains that he is a qualified diving instructor and I have nothing to worry about. That answer satisfies me and I trust him, yet I’m still somewhat concerned.

We’re ready. We’re standing side-by-side and looking beyond the magical horizon.

“The sea looks amazing. Rather calm. It’s perfect for our dive,” he explains. “Are you ready?”

“Ready is a relative term.”

“...one!” I jump with him into the most miraculous adventure I could have ever imagined.

There I am, diving with my idol, hand in hand, moving towards the coral reef, the anemones, and all kinds of sea creatures of various sizes and colors, some even luminescent. Striped and vivacious fish swim past us. An infinite variety of species, each school preserving its own uniqueness, however, all intermingling with harmony, moving towards and away from one another in rhythm with the current, painting my soul with shades of optimism, oblivion and complete and utter bliss.

Michael is so tolerant with me throughout the entire dive. He

makes different gestures with his hands, pointing to draw my attention to the wonderful things around me, and the sensations and richness overwhelms me. He's so gentle, yet, oh so masculine, I muse. I feel like letting everything go and forgetting it all. To cling onto him, explore amazing experiences, and stay enveloped in his arms for my entire life.

Michael gestures with his hands 'time-out' and points up. We rise together, each of us pushing the water downwards and our bodies upwards, again and again, until we can see the sun reflecting on the water, casting hues of distant lights and the familiar reality, so pleasant, silent and magical. Both our heads rise above the water, we remove the snorkel mouthpiece, and take a deep breath. Michael is still holding onto my hand.

"Slowly, slowly," he says, as he drags me to the yacht's ladder. I yield to his demands and follow his orders, but my thoughts are focused now only on his hands that tightly wrap around my waist, supporting me as I climb back up to the yacht.

I sense our mutual shyness and the sexual tension between us growing thicker.

"That's it," he says, pleased, "we're out. Let's go take a shower and look normal again." He gestures at his frog-like feet, then holds onto my hand again and leads me to the shower.

I agree. I remove the diving and bathing suit, happy to be back in my own skin. The water here is great. I feel completely detached. Maybe I'm only dreaming? Hang on, could this even be? I take a shower and everything is quiet around me; all I can hear is the gushing water.

“I finished showering!” I announce out loud and quickly dry myself off. I throw on one of the beach dresses I had bought, light grey with small black heel shoes.

I dry my hair with a blow dryer, apply some body lotion and moisturizer that I’ve found in the washing room. Then, I pull out my makeup bag from my purse. Luckily, I always take it with me. I smile at my reflection in the mirror. I apply some lip gloss, mascara and a touch of blush. Then I hang the small purse I had bought on my shoulder, only big enough to hold my cellphone and cigarettes. Then I climb back on deck and see him preoccupied with his phone, smiling, answering, sending, becoming annoyed, then sighing.

Suddenly, he notices I’ve arrived, and an impressive and toothy smile spreads on his face.

“Oh, you look beautiful.” He’s pleased. “Did you enjoy diving?”

“Did I enjoy it?! It’s the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me, especially recently. Thank you,” I kiss his cheek with true gratitude. The more I think of it, it saddens me. How could it be that in such a short time with Matthew, only eight years, I had managed to lose myself and my identity? How is it that I stopped doing things I had once loved, discovering the world, experimenting and exploring. After all, I was once driven by emotion, spontaneous and easygoing. I used to be a curious woman who found interest in almost in every field. I’ve always believed that a lack of knowledge was a form of ignorance, and people must always strive for self-fulfillment and creativity. I hoped that Roy would ‘catch’ my sense of

curiosity, that he'd always follow his passions. But unfortunately, my misery had dulled his little heart. Damn it! What's left of me? There's no doubt that I've changed a lot. If I would have at least gotten something out of it, some appreciation or respect, from the man who was supposed to love me through good times and bad. However, the good times were always his, and the bad were mine.

"Really?" Michael teases me, bringing me back to the present, "for me too. Thank you," he adds as he warmly kisses me back on the cheek and smiles.

"You're welcome, but what do you mean?" I ask, "what exactly did I give you?"

Michael's expression becomes serious. He grabs my chin and peers into my eyes.

"I told you that I wasn't going to allow you to put yourself down. Not everything we want can happen in our lives; life has its own pace when it comes to handing out gifts, even those that we don't like as much. What's important to remember is that even during the worst of times, there's a shred of good. Otherwise, why bother, don't you think?"

Stunned and sober, I lightly nod.

"Yes, you're absolutely right, I truly hope that someday I'll be able to see life that way."

"Be grateful. At least you have a child."

"Thank goodness," I reply, surprised.

"How long were you married before you got pregnant?" he asks.

“Two months,” I reply victoriously. I sit at his side and sense the significance of this matter to him.

“Why was it so important to you to have children that quickly? Do you regret it?”

“When I found out that I was pregnant, it was the thing I wanted most. I wanted to commit to the marriage in order to start a family; otherwise, I didn’t see the point in having a ring. And no, I don’t regret it one bit,” I clarify. “Becoming a mom is the best thing that has ever happened to me and, as God is my witness, it wasn’t easy and the price was, and still is, heavy. But I’m a believer,” I reply proudly. “I feel that Roy’s spirit was summoned from above and, when we tied ourselves to one another, Matthew and I, I had the greatest miracle of my life.”

“Do you see?” he replies angrily. “Some people look down on that miracle, they look down on love! They only care about their image, their career and money. Their egos only intensify their loneliness. Listen,” he adds, willing to unload his pain to me. “I dated my ex, Dawn, for three years. You must have heard of her.” He smiles bitterly. It was clearly evident that I knew everything about him. I nod embarrassedly and he continues.

“So, everything was great, you know, like in every relationship. She was very dear to me, I love her, I trusted her, I gave her things that every woman could only dream of. And no, I don’t mean things that can be bought with money.”

I smile warmly. I appreciate that so much more; he’s so sensitive.

“I was there for her, I empowered her, I complimented her, I always encouraged and supported any path she chose. We were happy together, or at least, so I thought.

“Dawn is actually a B-list actress who started off as a lingerie and Playboy model,” he goes on. “She really is very beautiful, in every way. She was also very good to me, supportive and loving. We lived in the same worlds and had plenty in common. We managed to find the right balance: having a healthy relationship and sometimes being away from each other due to our demanding careers and lifestyles.

“Anyway,” he continues, “last Valentine’s Day, I bought a ring and proposed. I produced one of grandest and most well-thought-out marriage proposals you could imagine. She immediately said ‘yes’. Three months later, well into our lives and crazy day-to-day commitments, along with our slow preparations for the wedding, her phone rings. I answered it because I saw ‘Dr. Bell’s’ name on the screen, and I thought it might have been important.

‘Hello, Dawn isn’t available right now, would you like her to call you back?’ I asked.

‘No,’ the doctor replied. ‘I just wanted to remind Dawn that she has to take her pills twice a day for three days in a row. In case she has any pain or spikes a fever, she should get to the ER immediately.’

‘A fever?’ I replied. ‘What pills? What’s going on? Can you tell me?’

‘Sorry,’ she replied. ‘There’s doctor-patient confidentiality. If you’d like to, you can ask Dawn.’

Naturally, I was very upset and tried to think of what the hell was going on with her and what she was hiding from me. So, I sat on the couch, trying to retrace our last couple of weeks, like an idiot. Had I noticed something different about her? Was she sadder than usual? Was she ill? Nothing came to mind.

She returned and sat down next to me.

‘Your doctor called,’ I told her straightforward, as if she had told me everything. ‘This is your only chance to tell me what’s been going on with you, and what the hell you’ve been hiding from me.’

“One thing led to the next, and you won’t believe what I’m about to tell you,” he continues telling me, excitedly. “She told me that she was pregnant, seventh week, and that she decided on her own that this wasn’t the right time as she felt she was too young and unprepared to be a mother. She said that she didn’t want to make me go through it.

“Now, just so you get it,” he continues, agitated, “she’s twenty-seven years old. She isn’t a child. In any case, she took the pills to abort the pregnancy. She didn’t share anything with me or ask anyone’s advice. She didn’t ask for my consent and thought she could keep it from me. Let me ask you, Sam, is that a normal thing to do? Especially when she knew very well what I had been through and how badly I wanted to start a family of my own? I was in shock! My entire world collapsed! Everything shattered. I felt that all those years we had been together, everything we felt, it was all a lie. After all, if the person you love won’t share such an important thing with you, what meaning did the relationship have? Then, the pain turned

into rage.

“I yelled at her. How dare she lead me on like that. And why was she wasting my time? See, Sam I’ve been waiting all my life for a child to fill in the void and the vacant space in my life. All I’ve ever wanted was to start a family and a home of my own. The whole package: marriage and children. Is that too much to ask for? But that’s just one classic example of this glamorous life that everyone wants, and I’m revolted by in every possible way.”

“Oh honey,” I wipe a stubborn tear away and softly caress his shoulder. “It sounds so awful; it must have been devastating.”

“Yes,” he looks at me with his sad, deep ocean-blue eyes. “Totally,” he admits sincerely. “No one deserves such a thing.

“Of course, we instantly broke up. I threw her out. While she was packing her things, I asked her again, ‘why’? Guess what she answered.”

“I have no idea,” I replied. “Maybe because she was scared that she’d gain weight? After all, she is a model,” I tried to lighten the mood with humor that didn’t amuse either of us.

“I’m pretty sure she thought of that, too,” he snickered bitterly. “But her official reason was that she got a part that could be important to her career and that she didn’t want to regret it later. Do you see? She had everything a woman could have dreamed of – a loyal man who appreciated and loved her, and even wanted to start a family with her, but she was ears-deep in showbiz, preoccupied with her image, her ego, competing.”

“How could she have done that to you? She’s insane!” I



protest angrily, “I’m so sorry,” I say with sincere compassion, “no one deserves that, especially you.”

I contemplate the chain of events and admit to myself that having a child is a huge responsibility that entails so many sacrifices; no one can ever be truly ready for this important step. You might lose yourself in that new position and give up your dreams and aspirations. Raising children is undoubtedly an important decision, but such vile lies were unacceptable and irrational.

“I would really like hug you now,” I look at him. He gives me a small and warm smile, pulls me closer to him and hugs me tightly.

I breathe him in. Touch him. Stroke his gorgeous auburn hair whose tips reach behind his ear. I smell his intoxicating scent, give him a little peck and brush against his cheek.

“And as if that weren’t enough!” he resumes, “she keeps trying to contact me and won’t leave me alone. She’s begging and humiliating herself everywhere and in front of anyone we know just so I’ll forgive her. I simply can’t, understand? To me, the magic’s gone. There are things that cannot be absolved. She lost me this time, forever. That was the main reason I had decided to leave home and come to Israel. I needed to leave everything and everyone behind.

“But despite it all,” he adds, “I guess I’m kind of relieved that it happened before we got married and before I saw her true face. I guess she doesn’t understand the meaning of love or caring at all, and she just used me, like most other people who came and left. Now all I feel is disgust; I’m revolted by her so

much that I feel that whatever we had between us is in the past,” and he smiles.

Michael tightens his embrace, breathes me in and caresses me. “Let’s put it all aside! Let’s just forget everyone. The future is this very moment,” Michael shouts as he amps up the music on his cellphone. Our little getaway together really paid off. I feel much better now. He looks straight into my eyes and smiles.

I couldn’t agree more. I smile back at him and feel his warmth. A sense of complete freedom and true liberation takes over, freeing my aching soul.

“You know, this is my Achilles’ heel – music, sea, smoking and you,” I laugh dopily.

“Ha, I really like you,” he exclaims.

We keep snuggling together, fluttering against each other’s skin and exchanging smiles. The amazing yacht pierces through the water as it sails on ahead. A wave of euphoria spreads throughout my entire body – I’m in the arms of this Adonis!

Now, the music’s silenced. We’re in each other’s arms, finding comfort in the other’s embrace. His huge and masculine body envelopes me entirely. I’m not afraid of anything. I feel safe. How ironic is it that I had to cross seas, agreeing to disappear without any qualms or guilt, allowing someone else take the lead for the first time in my life, and lose control by choice. I’m enchanted by his body, his voice, and his strength.

“Michael,” I interrupt my stubborn thoughts, “you must spend

more time in the gym than anywhere else,” I say as I point at his rocking body.

“It comes with the territory,” he says with bitter irony. “But truth be told, extreme sports used to be a safe place where I could unload my frustrations. I would do any type of sports you can image, I wasn’t afraid of death or getting injured, I’ve always tempted fate and loved challenges. Especially after the fall I had a couple of years ago. I had a complete nervous breakdown after so many years working nonstop, around the clock. I had another difficult breakup back then. I was so busy and exhausted and I found solace in cocaine, in wild and dangerous driving, and in hazardous attractions. Ever since, Hollywood has been referring me as ‘The Modern Day Jim Morrison’. They keep reminding me of where I used to be, what I’ve done, who I’ve dated and who cheated on me, where I got drunk, what I’ve broken, and so on.”

“Well,” I replied softly, “It’s understandable.” I wasn’t surprised, of course. I’ve heard it all. There was a time when he was really plummeting, then he finally got back to himself after he took a couple of years off, then gradually made a comeback to film and live shows.

“Understandable?” He asks sarcastically.

“Yes,” I reply gently. “You’ve been through quite a lot. It’s hard to shake off these kinds of traumas. You need to find some sort of refuge, to clear your mind and sharpen your thoughts.”

“I know!” Michael says proudly. “Even after years of therapy and two rehabs under the spotlights, I just decided to let things

be. I learned to forgive, to let things go, and accept that there are things that I cannot change or undo.”

“How is it that you didn’t have anyone else special in your life?” I ask. “Someone who would be worthy of your love? You seem like the perfect partner! I don’t get it.”

He smiles shyly.

“I’ve had several women and relationships in my life. Toxic love. Love that disappeared just as it came. And, as I’ve already told you, a love that wasn’t a love, but games and lies.”

“Please, don’t take it to heart,” I declare. “They’re nothing but fools, you really are the idea man, Michael. You follow your passions, you’re self-accomplished and give us all the privilege of having a taste of your craft. You uplift the spirits of millions of people around the world, you dispel their sadness in single instance and let them delve into a different reality. You’re sensitive and kind, compassionate and warm. You’re a real treasure. If there’s one thing that I’ve learned from all those years of unhappiness, it was that those who are unworthy of you are also unworthy of your sorrow.

“In the past, I would avoid passing judgement on others,” I added, “because I believed there’s good in everyone, only waiting to come out. I believed that the right partner would always manage to effortlessly bring out that side in the other person. You see? I believed that the good in people would surface on its own when they felt loved and secure. I used to like to expose that in my previous relationships, that tenderness and vulnerability in my partner. I would enjoy

caressing their wounds. Until, briefly, I would forget...”

“Forget what?” Michael challenges me.

“The great pain and disappointment that you feel, time and time again, when you discover that people you’ve truly trusted and given all your heart to are actually not so good inside; they are sometimes even truly cruel and don’t always have good motives,” I replied seriously, but trying to rein in my sadness.

“There, now I get it! That’s your mistake!” Michael says proudly. “As a person who has been through years of therapy and has some insight, let me tell you that you should draw power from this pain. You must always acknowledge it, the circumstances that caused it, and do everything in your power not to feel it again. There’s a great difference between talking about pain and feeling it or admitting it. After all, pain is nothing but a defense mechanism. It’s supposed to protect you not only when the situation takes place, but also teach you how far to go next time and what to avoid. There’s no point in repeating the same mistake over and over again, and then expecting to get a different result.”

“That’s right,” I’m embarrassed. “Actually,” I continue, “I’ve been conforming myself to others my entire life and, when I was aching, I was left all alone. All the good I’d been offering was swiped out at once.”

“Maybe you should stop believing in others and seeking meaning that doesn’t exist in everything? You need to learn to listen to yourself, be forgiving, mostly to yourself. We’re all human beings, you know. We all make mistakes; we’ve made mistakes and we’ll keep making them. The most important

thing is having someone to kick back with and draw warmth and strength from. You're not responsible for finding kind people."

"Right! You're so right. You can see right through me."

"No, honey," he laughs, "it's just very clear. You're a very sensitive woman. You wear your sense of inferiority on your sleeve. Naturally, I'm not blaming you," he says with a velvety voice. "You must have been hurt so many times that you can't recognize yourself or the person you've become. I know that feeling very well, trust me. In the end, life is indeed a race, but the kind you live minute by minute, second by second. It isn't easy most of the time," he continues to talk in an inspiring way. I adore his wisdom and his sensitivity. Well, he's a creative person and he's been through a lot, I explain to myself. It only makes sense that he'd have a deeper outlook on life.

"You're absolutely right," I confess. "Unfortunately, I've lost myself more and more with each relationship I've been in. It's one of the things I struggle to comprehend - why the hell do I keep doing it to myself?"

"So what you're actually saying is that, if I really want to get to know you better, I should track down all your exes?" he asks with a rolling laughter.

"Probably," I reply and start laughing, too.

"I'm completely happy with all that I have right here, by my side," he gives me another small kiss, this time on my lips, then tightens his grip even further.

“I really want you,” I whisper as he looks into my eyes and strokes my hair warmly.

“Perhaps some other time,” he replies, stands up and tries to distract me. “Are you hungry? Should we go grab a bite?”

“I’m truly fine,” I answer, wondering what that strange rejection was all about. I thought and felt that he really liked me. He even said it a few times. I’m so embarrassed right now... I was ready to lose myself with him completely. Thank God I could always say I was a little bit stoned.

“So, let’s go to the bedroom. Maybe we can watch a movie together? Chill a little, take it easy,” Michael suggests.

“Okay.” I stand up and we walk together towards the luxurious sleeping cabin, covered in oak with a bright parquet floor. “This bed looks so wide and comfortable,” I declare. “I’m sorry but I can’t help myself,” I giggle while I bounce on the bed, excitedly. “It feels so good!” I laugh out loud. Michael is filled with joy when he sees my small burst of madness, and smiles as he keeps taking pictures of me on his phone.

“That’s it, I’m calm now,” I say, looking at him with embarrassment.

“You’re adorable and lovely. I truly like you, Sam,” he says again, smiling and looking at me while his eyes twinkle with laughter. “Let’s lie down a little.”

We hold hands under a cozy, gray blanket and watch a rom-com. He keeps laughing and says that’s why most women are messed up. “You watch too many romantic comedies and think that every little romantic gesture is an expression of honest

and pain-free love.

“What do you want from us?” I ask seriously. “Although we all grow up on fairytales and expect our Prince Charming, it seems the problem is that most of you are only frogs,” I tease him back, and quickly laugh.

“I give up,” Michael replies, “if that’s what you all want,” he lifts his hands in surrender.

“Should we go to sleep?” he asks when the movie ends. “I’m pretty tired and tomorrow Greece awaits. Let’s try to rest a little,” he concludes as he hugs and turns me on my side to spoon me, he cups my back, so his hand is lightly pressed against my buttocks and my head rests on his chest. His head is several inches taller than mine.

“You smell so nice,” he kisses my hair and it feels so good. “I can sleep with you just like this everywhere, anytime,” he declares. He sniffs me and pulls me closer to him again, as he kissed my cheek.

“Good night, sweetie.”

“Good night, Michael, and thank you for everything. I’m having such a good time with you here.”

“With pleasure,” he replies, and dozes off.

I fall asleep quickly, too, as I think about water, fish, colors, and my beloved Roy.





## Chapter 4

I'm frantic and feel like I'm suffocating, as if I've been sucked into a black void. The ground is unstable, making me uncomfortable and anxious. My body is immersed in gushing water and I'm drifting away, fighting to keep my head above water, unable to find myself!

"No!" I abruptly rise from the bed. I'm trying to catch my breath. What? Where am I?

"What's wrong?" Michael wakes up, startled, and holds my hand. "Are you alright?" He asks and embraces me tightly. "It's still the middle of the night, do you need anything? Perhaps some water?" He caresses my hair.

"No, I can't quite grasp what just happened," I reply with bitter surprise.

"It's probably because you're in a different place, and the movement of the waves is affecting your balance," Michael soothes me. "It's alright, you're here, I'm here. Would you like me to sing you a lullaby?" he says with a slim smile.

"No, thank you, I love your voice so much, it'll only keep me awake!" I laugh.

"Is that so?" Michael laughs along, as he strokes my hair and body, "so, sleep already!" he says and kisses my head again.



"Good morning, would you like coffee in bed?"

I open my eyes to find out that Michael is already wide awake

and sweating.

“Good morning! When did you have time to start sweating?” I rub my body against the soft blanket, indulging leisurely, enjoying the warmth and the wonderful scent of the pillow this God had placed his head on.

“It’s part of my routine,” Michael replies, as if trying to explain himself to me.

“Next time,” I add, “I’d like to join you, I like a good workout,” I declare.

Michael furrows his left brow and smiles.

“I don’t want you to strain yourself, I brought you here with me so you’d take a break from it all,” he says, flashing another smile at me.

“Okay,” I reply, lifting my hands over my head, “I give up.”

“So quick?” Michael teases me, and I feel a wave of heat ripple through my groin. What is he doing to me? How can I contain myself? I’m completely mesmerized!

“Besides,” he adds, “I have quite a lot of experience when it comes to working out, you know. So, I can tell who works out and who doesn’t.” Then he places his delicate hand under the linen dress I had slept in, and straight on top of my belly. “It’s crazy! You’re so smooth! Wow! What a beautiful belly. Not even the slightest sign that someone once grew in there.”

“That’s exactly why I’ve made sure to work out at least three times a week,” I giggle shyly. “I wanted to get my figure back as soon as possible so I can look I the mirror and see myself, rather than traces of what I used to be. Taking care of yourself,

in and out, is a daily task.”

“Oh,” he nods, “I see!” He snickers and continues. “So that’s why you look like this, now I get it.”

“What? I don’t understand, why are you laughing again?” It puzzles me, what could I have said now? Ugh, why does he keep correcting me? I ponder.

“Is that what you sound like when you try to impress someone?” Michael asks half-jokingly. “Sweetie, you’re beautiful just as you are. You don’t need anyone’s approval, or any of that other nonsense. Perhaps it makes you feel better, but a couple of pounds here or there won’t make a change. Your proportions are perfect, both your body and your face. I mean, to me, you’re perfect.”

I laugh embarrassedly, and politely thank him. The only thing I want right now is for him to penetrate my body and utterly shatter it.

“Come on, sleepy head, get up!” He draws the blanket away and reaches his hand out to help me out. But then, in an instant, he pulls me in a different direction, as he falls back and lies on his back on the left side of the bed. I uncontrollably pounce him, my dress rising, my hair completely disheveled, frantically losing control, kissing him with burning passion.

“What are you doing?” he asks. “Please, stop.” He grabs me, resisting me.

“Sorry,” I immediately recoil. “I really am sorry,” I mumble, sheepishly. “I must have misunderstood.”

“Misunderstood?” Michal frowns. “Please, let me decide when

we'll move forward, okay? I feel this isn't the right time. You're upset, you're confused, I wouldn't want to find my name crossed out on your blacklist."

Good God! How could anyone cross anything out about him? He's simply perfect! I wonder. Is that what he concluded from my flirting? I must be really rusty.

"I really do apologize, Michael."

"Tell me," he's angry and dead serious this time, "how can you say that and really want us to be together? Look at you! You're neck deep in your self-pity, so far in that you can't see anything around you. Let me tell you again, as clear as I can, and I hope that this time you'll understand, Sam. When I saw you sitting there, by that table, hiding behind that giant lemonade of yours, I saw the ideal woman. Then, when you saw that kid, rushed to help him and spoke to him with such kindness, you really moved me."

"Really?" I stare at him, stunned.

"That fact that you're not in showbiz, makes me want you even more. But, as far as I am concerned, we're on a journey right now to get to know each other. I honestly don't think that you're ready to take the next step, it wouldn't be right. Let's take it easy. When I feel that we're at a right and pure place for both of us, I promise I won't stop you or hold back," he raises his hands dramatically, and makes it quite clear that I'm totally unaware of what would happen once we made love. He places his hand on my buttocks and caresses it with admiration.

"It's smooth, too!" he declares happily.

“You’re right. I’m so sorry, Michael, and I’m glad you’re not mad at me.” I hug him, breathe in the back of his neck, and take in his smoldering masculinity.

“Come! Let’s have some breakfast, spend some time in the pool, and then dock and go to the beach.”

I nod and quickly get ready for breakfast.

After a couple of hours under the bright sun in his luxurious swimming pool, he smiles happily.

“It’s time to go to the beach.”

We disembark together, hand in hand. I carry a straw bag with the towels, swimsuits and beach cloths, and Michael walks ahead of me, leading us to ‘Palm Beach’.

“Come on!” He grabs my hand and drags me to the beach chairs.

“This looks like a great spot,” he smiles as we settle down, looking at each other joyfully. The beach is so intimate and special. It’s surrounded by small village houses. The atmosphere is magical and intoxicating. There are hardly any people. I take off my beach dress and reveal my white pretty bikini that complements my tanned skin. Michael looks at me, pleased. He smiles faintly.

“Come on, let’s go!” he cried out and we run together to the water.

I plunge into the water, allowing the seawater to wash away all the troubles of the past with it. I give in to the soft sun, the

flickering light reflecting off the water. I float on my back, as my soul soaks in the tranquility, the quiet and the sea's mystery. I turn to him slowly, smiling, and then swim towards the breakwater. Michael swims behind me and slows down his natural swimming pace. We both breathe in the bliss sprouting within us. I try to catch my breath and I hold on to a small rock sticking out of the water, covered with algae and seashell shards.

“Are you having a good time?” Michael smiles brightly. “You’re so beautiful when you smile.” He looks into my eyes. His bewitching eyes gorgeously and marvelously blend with the blue of the sea. A sly smile spreads on my face.

“It’s perfect.”

“Come on! Let’s take a picture of you on this rock,” he insists as he pulls his cellphone out of his waterproof pouch.

“Okay,” I smile and start posing in various positions. The pictures will be a lovely souvenir of these days, a souvenir that I could use to reminisce and draw the strength and optimism that my character lacks.

“Should we go back?” Michael asks me when we finish, reaching his hand out.

“Sure,” I smile again, and we swim back to the beach.

“That was a cleansing dip,” I say to him as I come out of the water, panting and trying to catch my breath. “I love the sea so much.”

“Me too,” he smiles as he emerges behind me, turns me around and pulls me into a warm and wet embrace.

We sit together, talk, laugh, drink extravagant cocktails and eat wedges of a seedless watermelon.

“When we get back home, I have to fly off to an important concert, and then I have a couple of insanely busy months. I’m shooting a new film,” he smiles. “But I’ve already decided it’s going to be my last movie. I’m quitting acting and modeling, it’ll take the pressure off. I want to focus on my music and find some stability in Israel. That’s where I feel most at home,” he explains. “Avi and his family are family to me. That’s where I’ll be able to focus on what really makes me happy and relax. I’m completely exhausted,” he concludes. “I’m not as young as I used to be, age takes its toll you know...” he furrows his brows mischievously and smiles.

“Yes,” I agree smilingly, “that cliché is right for a reason.”

His phone rings.

“Excuse me, it’s my sister again. Why the hell does she share with me every little detail of her life at every given moment?” he complains and sighs heavily.

“It’s totally fine,” I smile. While Michael’s busy having a lively conversation with Michelle, I explore the beach, collect some special seashells, sit on the sand and start playing, building castles. It’s just like Roy does. I smile, trace names on the warm, soft sand, give in to the scent of the sea, to the sense of true freedom, and I cherish it.

“Sam, would you like to ride a jet ski together?” he surprises from behind and asks with a burst of excitement. “Come with me, I’ll show you.”

“Really? How fun!” I reply immediately. Michael drags me by the hand, and we approach the sea attractions area.

“Réquin, what’s up, dude?” Michael asks.

“Hey, you’re already back?” Réquin replies with surprise, then hugs him warmly.

“Yes, the other day,” Michael explains. “This time, the circumstances are different,” he says and points in my direction.

“Quite impressive circumstances,” Réquin nods.

Michael smiles and mutely agrees.

“Thanks,” I smile embarrassedly.

“We’re here to get things going. Where’s the jet I like?” Michael asks and cuts the small talk. Réquin points at one of the jet skis.

“There, but don’t you go disappearing like last time, it doesn’t have a lot of gas,” he warns him.

“I’m with a girl, I can’t really disappear.”

They shake hands on it in a friendly gesture, then pat each other’s backs and smile.

“Come on, Sam, let’s go. Put your purse on your shoulder, leave your hat on the chair and pull up your hair. Come on!”  
And so I did.

Michael stands on the jet ski, cranks up the music and cuts through the sea, spins around, jumps up, all while I tightly clutch onto his waist, sit and stand, adjusting to his motions; it’s not just my shark phobia, but I’m also absolutely terrified.



When have I ever allowed myself to let go like this, I ask myself, and if you're going to let go, then he's the person to do it with. I'm on top of the world. I'm starting to regain my sense of self-worth. I feel strong at his side, trusting; I've let all my walls down. I'm ecstatic, surrounded by the sound of the engine and water jets; my adrenaline skyrockets. Then, all at once, he silences the engine and the music, and stops, looks at me and flashes his pearly white smile. Silence.

"Is everything alright?" I ask with surprise, somewhat startled.

"Sam! I just wanted to let you know that I really like you." He turns his head to me and pecks me on the lips.

"I couldn't be luckier!" I declare. "I love it. I have to do this each and every time I visit the beach! I'm so full of adrenalin! I'm absolutely high!"

"Me too," he laughs and restarts the engine.

When we return, Ella, the manager at the nearby restaurant, awaits us.

"Everything is ready," she whispers to Michael and signals with her arm at the isolated table that had been pre-booked, allowing us a couple of precious, quiet and peaceful moments void of camera flashes and screaming fans. Michael pulls the chair out for me, allows me to sit down, then pushes the chair in and sits in his. He's so gentle on the one hand, I think to myself, and then on the other, he's an irresistible man. I want to lose myself with him. I want him inside me, dissipating all the pain and sorrow, and make my anxieties vanish. I simply

want to die and be reborn in his arms.

But then, in an instant, my deviant thoughts are pushed aside when I start thinking about Roy. Oh, how he would have enjoyed being here with me, in this magical place. Does he miss me? What's he doing right now? What would he have thought of me if he knew where I was? And what would happen next? The questions spin through my head.

Michael recognizes my mood shifting because I fall silent and reply laconically to his questions.

"Sam, is everything alright? Is something wrong? I suddenly sense that you're not with me," he asks warmly.

"I'm having such a good time here with you," my voice trembles and breaks. "But I'm still very concerned and miss Roy."

"Is that it?" he snickers. "Then why don't you call your son and check in on him?"

"You won't mind?" He surprises me. "I'm uncomfortable adding him to our journey. I thought I'd talk to him later, in private."

Michael smiles and puts his hand in mine.

"He's already a huge part of our journey, don't you think?"

"Michael, you're right again," I say and smile abashedly.

"It's alright, gorgeous." A smile spreads on his lips.

Gorgeous? Whatever. I just want to make love to him. I'm slobbering.

I quickly dial and he immediately picks up.

“Hello? Roy?” I’m excited. “How are you, my love? Is everything alright? I miss you so much.”

“Mommy!” he’s thrilled. “I love you and miss you a lot.”

“Please, listen to your dad, okay? And do everything he asks, okay my sweet boy? I promise that we’ll see each other soon, spend time together and cuddle.”

“Yes, Mommy,” he says, and abruptly ends the conversation, eager to go back to whatever he was doing.

As I hang up, I sense a tear sneaking into my eye; a tear of joy. I’m overwhelmed with a sense of liberation mixed with relief, as if putting back all the parts in my body that seemed to have shifted.

Michael looks at me and smiles softly.

“How great is it, right?”

“Yes,” I reply, “It’s priceless. It’s pure and unconditional love.”

“True. But unfortunately, I only had it till I was eleven years old. Then, my mom became clinically depressed and killed herself.” he tells me, and coils.

“What?” My heart breaks. “I’m so sorry!” I stand up and reach for him, sit on his lap, and hug him without saying a word. Then I break the silence by saying “I’m very sorry about your mother and for your loss. There’s so much pain in this life.”

“I know!” he concludes. “But let’s put that aside for now,” he asks. “I don’t want to fiddle with that, I want to fiddle with you.”

“Fiddle with me?” I ask with somewhat bitter naivety. After all, he had only recently declared that it wasn’t the right time. Could he possibly be thinking that it’s time to take it to the next level?

“Like a fiddler on the roof?” he winks and jokes.

“I swear, you’re much more Jewish than I am!”

He laughs, “Israel and my Jewish identity have always been important to me. That’s also why I completed my army service. It’s part of my DNA.”

Now I’m not only charmed by him but also respect and appreciate him. It’s not a given to leave a life of luxury and comfort, put it all on hold for three years and then pick up where you’ve left off.

“My Jewish identity is a big part of me,” he places his hand on his chest with pride. “My father’s been involved in American politics ever since he was thirty years old. As you’ve probably understood, our whole image and roots were always important to him; he made sure that we spoke Hebrew at home, celebrated the holidays. Until it was all over,” he gets sad again. “Now we celebrate from afar. Nowadays my family is my sister, Michelle, and my father. The last grandmother I had, on my mother’s side, passed away three years ago. All my mother’s fortune was transferred to my sister and me when we turned eighteen. You see, we never wanted for money. It was other things we lacked,” he clarifies. “Maybe that’s why I’ve always looked for meaningful relationships and not just sex. I’ve always aspired to feel comfortable with a woman without the fear of losing myself. I love this feeling of warmth, mutual

care, the hugs, and erupting passion.”

“So, were you a lone soldier,” I asked with defying slyness.

“Kind of,” he replies. “But ever since I was eighteen, I’ve been living with Avi, the guy you met at the café.”

“Really?” I ask. As if I can forget who Avi is; I become grave.

“Yes. I bought the house we live in today before I started my service so it would be more comfortable, and because I’d planned on settling in Israel in the future, anyway,” he explains. “To make a long story short, I convinced Avi to live with me and we’ve been together ever since.”

“So Avi’s actually a good friend of yours?” I ask.

“No,” he replies. “Avi is my life; he’s the best guy ever. You should see it, all the women I meet fall at his feet. But unfortunately, all he thinks about is sex and business.”

“Well, he’s young, attractive and has no commitments, it’s completely natural for him to enjoy life,” I strangely defend him.

“That’s not exactly it,” he explains. “He acts dangerously a lot and even embarrasses me. He can walk around the house butt-naked all day and fuck like five different women a day, wherever and whenever he wants. He’s never grown up or takes anything into account. It’s really an addiction; he feels completely lost without sex. But he knows me better than I know myself,” he adds. “I think he’s the ideal person. It might sound a bit strange or funny,” he adds, “but he helped me a lot. He’s completely like a mother to me, always there, always keeps me safe, always has a kind word, never imposes. He’s

helped me find out who I am and how much power I have within me ever since I've known him. I started making music, thanks to him. His brother, Dean, is a very significant figure in his life and back, when we met they were touring the US, he was the guitarist and lead singer of a very successful band in the nineties."

"Really?" I'm breathless. "Which band? I know them all. Wait, let me think! Dean? What's Avi's last name?"

"Levi," he smiles.

"Dean Levi?! From 'Light to the Nation'? I can't believe it! I was a huge fan! Look at me, I'm so excited! Positively lit. What a small world."

"I totally agree," he laughs. "I think he's still the most talented guitar player in Israel today."

I nod, "I completely agree," I reply, charmed.

"Anyway," he goes on, "he cured me and supported me through some very difficult and dark times. He helped me deal with all my addictions; in short, he's everything to me. more than just a friend. More than a brother; I don't know how to define it," he apologizes. "I only know I'm here now thanks to him."

"In this case, I should thank him in person," I conclude with a charmed smile.

"No, no, there's no need!" he declares. "Avi's a real man, he's not looking for gratitude, that's just the way he is. He's also been through a lot in life and, somehow, we've both found comfort in one another. He's been with me for years, a true

friend, a brother, a soulmate, however you want to put it.”

“Did you meet in Israel?” I ask.

“No,” Michael replies. “He just came to me out of nowhere. I was at a very low point in my life. I’d just broken up with my mythological ex, Shannon; we had a toxic relationship in every aspect you can imagine. I thought I’d join the army and take a break from all the madness at that time, so I talked to my agent about it at some diner in LA. Avi was also there with his brother, Dean, and they were talking in Hebrew, about the army and other things. He wore a Cookie Monster t-shirt and seemed so confident about it, and I was immediately fascinated by him. I went over to them and introduced myself. I asked them about the army and things kind of went on from there,” he concludes. “But if you’re still looking for someone to thank,” he says defiantly. “You can thank me,” and he kisses me again, this time for longer.

“I really do, wholeheartedly!” I declare. “You’re a real Prince Charming,” I say and warmly kiss his cheek.

“Sweetheart,” Michael laughs. “Everyone has a dark side, certainly so do I. You just need to be around more to see it. It definitely won’t come out in these two days, with me trying to impress you as much as I can so we can keep hanging out together and get to know each other better. I feel something really great can come out of this, don’t you?” and he perfectly winks at me with his right eye.

“Life has its own rhythm,” I conclude. “I’d love it if we keep in touch even after this journey is over. I feel very comfortable and safe with you,” I say and with my words ignore the insane

sex-appeal that's spreading around me. 'I wish we'd have sex,' I say a little prayer to myself. Something unnatural is happening here. I've never been rejected before, especially not for so long. But I remind myself that he's actually just broken up with Dawn. He's probably not ready to move on. Besides, she's a model and an actress; she's amazing, much more than I am. How can I be so selfish and self-absorbed? Look how broken and hurt he is; I get mad at myself, and the rogue thoughts won't stop pounding my head. I think of this incredible man and how much he has done for me, even though he didn't know me and currently has no sexual interest. He just likes me, likes being with me. He's such a good person! I'm really this happy just by the privilege of spending time with him. Why does everything with me always have to do with attraction, with sex?

Honor him and his pace. Give him space! I'm furious with myself. I'm restraining myself for the first time in my life, trying to control my outer limits. I'm trying not to lose my mind and stay level-headed.

Tonight we'll return to Israel and all this will remain the most amazing experience I've ever had in my life. I feel like I'm caving under the adrenalin and anxiety. I really don't know if I could ever thank him for what he's done; he showed me compassion and sensitivity. I could've lost myself and sunk into self-pity, but he wouldn't let me. He was strong and did everything he could, so I'd deal with my demons in peace, without diverting my energy elsewhere. This man is different, he's sensitive and considerate. It's clear to me that underneath our superficial acquaintance lay many more layers I'd love to



discover, if I'd only get the chance.

It's already dawn when we get back to the yacht. I wonder what he has in store next.

"You got super-tanned, you have no idea what you look like," he smiles at me with a devilish smile.

"What?" I'm horrified and react with my typical hysteria. God forbid anyone see me like that, they'd run away. I run to bathroom, where I see myself for the first time since breakfast.

"I'm completely over-tanned!" I scream. "I just can't believe it! How did I let this happen? How do I always manage to embarrass myself?"

"Are you nuts?" Michael is surprised by my extreme reaction.

"Do you know how many people, mostly women, would pay to get so tanned? Even I would," and he laughs out loud.

I give up.

"To each his own," I announce, laughing from my own desperation.

"You," he replies. "You really make me happy," he says and kisses my lips, a long and sensual kiss.

I gladly give in and relish every moment that he touches me; I thank God, as well as my recklessness, for every second I spend with him.



## Chapter 5

“It’s time to go back to Israel. Are you ready?”

“Not really,” I reply faintly, my voice fading. “I’ll miss you!” I say with sincerity, my voice strained. “I can’t believe that two days have passed; two whole days. Since I sat at the café, time seems to have stopped. With every sip that I took from that drink, I could feel the weight of the whole week weighing on me. When I’m with you, time become meaningless. Hours turn into minutes, confusing me, overwhelming me with alertness and excitement.”

“Come here,” Michael collects me in his arms, brings me closer to his chest and kisses the palm of my hand. As we sit there silently, looking at the sea, he surprises me and reaches slowly yet eagerly under my beach dress. He caresses me softly, with passion, and mesmerizing gentleness.

His hand is now between my legs as he plants small kisses brushing up the back of my neck, almost touching my earlobe and sending shivers down my spine. Then he retreats. He’s driving me and my senses mad, one kiss at a time.

“Come,” he says and drags me to the luxurious cabin, pulls my dress off with one swift movement, sensually lays me on the bed, and continues to lightly kiss every part of my body. I shiver. And then – I completely give in to him. I’ve waited for this so long! He turns me on so much that his touch on my skin doesn’t tickle me as it usually does, often making me flinch. Generally, I prefer taking control rather than being

exposed in front of the man I'm with; I fear he'll find flaws in me. But this time, I let him pleasure me as he desires. I don't say a word out of fear he might stop.

"I want you so badly," I struggle to moan.

"I'll use this just to be on the safe side," he says, and pulls a condom out of a brown shiny box. "I want you too, so much." Michael says as he penetrates my body all at once, and we're one. Passionately, he grabs onto my thighs. He moves his hair aside and pants as he leans over me.

"You're so beautiful," he mutters and bites my lips. "It's such a delight being inside of you," he says, as he continues to kiss the back of my neck. He rises, so I can feel his grand chest over my ample bosom.

I place my hands on his ribs and tan body, his smooth and incomprehensibly toned body, and gently move my pelvis in perfect synchronicity with him. I allow him to fully penetrate my body, deepening it as much as I can. I embrace his impressive shoulder blades while he sways up and down, delicate yet determined, relentless and effortless. Each thrust and movement drive my senses wild. I'm surprised and ashamed of the wetness and the intensity of my orgasms. It's as if my body was waiting for him to revive it. His huge body envelopes me and radiates heat that spreads throughout my entire body, empowering me.

Throughout the years, Matthew has kept me satisfied. I've had sex since I was sixteen and I'm not new to orgasms. But with Michael it's so different and so strange. I soar up high. I crash. I rise again. I allow him to enter my body and do with it as he

pleases. However, he's so attentive and gentle, penetrating me over and over again, with small yet deep and uncompromising movement. His tongue seeks mine with a burst of desire. He cups my breasts, marveling in their softness. He kisses and nibbles my hard nipples with his front teeth. My body heat rises. My head spins. I get sucked into his softness as he continues to caress my belly, grab my buttocks and kisses the back of my neck again. He touches me between my legs, causing me to become immensely and embarrassingly wet.

I yowl like a cat in heat with each orgasm that rises, materializing my wettest dream, literally speaking. He gets carried away with me, and climaxes inside of me as he stares into my eyes, breathing heavily.

"Wow," he mumbles at me and falls to his side, placing one hand under his head and caressing my face with the other, as he tucks strands of my hair behind my ear. As he touches me, and I awaken again. New and pleasant shivers spread throughout my body each time he looks at or touches me.

I'm embarrassed by my naughty and lustful thoughts. 'Loosen up,' I mutter to myself. 'You had the best couple of days you've ever had with a man. Now they're over. Now you're going back to reality, to the challenges you'll have to deal with the very moment your foot touches the ground back home. Don't you dare make him nervous,' I berate myself. I smile at him an exhausted and somewhat anxious smile.

As I think of the future, he completely surprises me and climbs on top of me again, kissing every inch of my body with a soft touch and steady persistence.

“It was so good, I want you again,” he whispers into my ear with his rugged charisma, and starts biting and sucking my breasts, slowly moving downwards to the back of my thigh.

“You’re a goddess,” he cries out into the room.

I stretch to reach him. I rise sensually with every touch, big or small. I respond to him and draw him into me.

“Enough, Michael,” I mumble imploringly, “It’s driving me insane, please.”

He’s attentive. Now, he moves on to kiss my lips. He cups my breasts with his large hands. I drift away and break down, just waiting for him to redeem me again and pacify my increasing passion for him.

I hear the sound of another condom wrapper being ripped open mixed with our delighted groans. He’s inside of me again. Once again, my orgasms soar up high, releasing all the pain and fears within me. I completely give into the sweet pain as he penetrates me over and over again. He conquers me; drives me mad. He makes me want to simply die in his arms. It’s no wonder people say that a good orgasm is similar to a temporary death. I feel my soul detaching from my body, and all I want is for this carnal lust to go on forever. ‘But forever is short,’ I mock myself in my mind. ‘Your adventure was amazing, but it’s almost over. Take anything you can from it.’ The pessimistic voice in my head guides me to show Michael that I’m not just another passive girl he’s fucked. I want him to give a little something extra.

I overpower him and, to his complete surprise, turn him over and lean above him.

“Do you want me?” I whisper into his ear as I gently and thoroughly rock my thighs and pelvis.

“Yes,” he replies. “I want you a lot.”

“Good!” I’m satisfied and start to smoothly move my thighs, with a deep and complete gyration, up and down again, deeper and deeper inward. I can sense his arousal and I hold onto the back of his neck, pulling his face closer to me, kissing his lips with a slight bite and pushing my tongue in. We drown in a wild kiss while my pelvis’ movements grow faster. He tenderly grabs my buttocks, giving into my rhythm. This time, I orgasm so hard that I that I ‘forget’ my inhibitions.

“You’re absolutely stunning, a diva!” He mutters at me. I laugh haughtily and with pleasure, shedding off all my layers of insecurity.

“Your turn!” I announce with a wide grin, and sit up straight, reaching my buttocks towards his penis, as if riding him like a prime stallion. I stretch myself backwards and place my hands on his grand chest, pushing myself forwards and back, faster and faster, again and again and again. He grasps onto my thighs tightly, pushing up and down, quickly and persistently. I give him my all. It’s important to me that this memory will be etched to his heart, too.

Now, I lightly nibble on his earlobe and as my moist lips brush the back of his neck, sending an intense shiver down his spine. He moans with delight, allowing himself to let loose at the pace I dictate, again and again, until he climaxes with erupting sounds of gushing passion.

I rest my head on his perfect chest, now covered in droplets of

sweats. Michael keeps quiet. He smells my hair, kissed my head, places his hands on my buttocks and holds me tighter.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, I burst out in tears. Damn it! I can't control these damn tears.

“What's wrong?” Michael asked, startled. “Is everything alright?”

“Yes, I reply after a couple of minutes during which I tried to catch my breath. “I'm sorry. I seem to be emotionally overwhelmed.”

He lifts his knees and forces me to let him pull out. That void pains me. It was so pleasant to have him inside of me. What will I do starting tomorrow morning? A sense of emptiness wells up inside of me and lodges in my throat. He lays me gently against the pillow, and with his thumb he swipes away a tear.

“Everything is all right, it's just a burst of adrenaline. I enjoyed it so much!” he adds, panting and smiling at me.

“Yes,” I agree with him. “It certainly was great, thank you.” I add then, “I needed it, or rather – I needed you.” I immediately correct myself. “I didn't miss the sex as much as I did the immense passion and excitement. I feel a lot stronger now,” I lie as I always do. “Tomorrow, I'll have to return to my old life. I'll have to cope with things, and whenever I'll struggle, I'll have this sweet memory to hold on to,” I confess sincerely as I feign a horribly fake smile.

Michael smiles and is on the verge of laughing out loud. He smooches me.

“I’ve already told you I’m not into casual sex, haven’t I, sweetheart?” He asks and taunts me. I can’t quite understand what he means by that. I smile in silence. Thoughts start running through my mind as I try to figure out his intentions.

“Whatever; let’s go take a shower and get ready. We’ll be back home in about an hour.”

When he re-entered the room, he found me sitting on a chair in front of the vanity table, combing my hair after I’ve already put on the gorgeous dress that he bought me back at the mall. It was a white strapless dress that accentuated my breasts and left my shoulders bare. Its bottom part was so loose that it draped my body just perfectly.

“You’re stunning, Sam. A real beauty,” he whispers behind my ear and kisses my cheeks.

“The dress is beautiful,” I look at him with embarrassment. “Thank you,” enchanted, I smile at him through the mirror. “I feel like a princess,” I whisper at him. “I really don’t know how to make the transition and return to reality.” I declare with sincerity.

“Reality?” Michael asks. “I’m in it, I hope.”

“I don’t understand,” I reply with a certain dash of naivety.

“I want you, Sam!” he declares. “I want us to test this relationship. I really feel like we have something honest, and crazy chemistry. I hope,” he continues, “that you share my feelings. On the other hand, I also think it might be a bit too soon for you to start a new relationship. That being said, sometimes it’s best not to give it too much thought, just go



with it and have a good time together, even if the timing isn't perfect for either of us. I think we have something special; wouldn't you agree?" He sits on the bed, then adds, "it's completely up to you. I'm right here," he declares.

I'm beside myself; I stand up at once, approach him, drop him back on the bed, lift my bare thigh on the mattress, then the other, and give him a blissful and sincere hug, filled with intent and pain. I wish that he would be the one who would save me from myself, I contemplate. I want to love him my whole life, standing at his side.

"See how pretty you are," he's pleased with himself. "Let's go upstairs right now. I want you to dance with me."

He plays a song that I adore – 'I died in your arms tonight'. I look into his blue eyes and smile. "I certainly felt that way in your arms," I blush. We dance, embraced. We enjoy the magic sparking between us and the wonderful atmosphere, staring into each other's eyes with a silence and affection that only seems to grow.

Struggling to contain myself, I kiss him again; however, this time, without any inhibitions, a long and quiet kiss. My hands hold onto the nook between the back of his neck his wide shoulder blades; I feel protected, safe. I kiss him again and again, absolutely charmed by him, as he responds to my every whim, giving in.

"Let's go downstairs, I want you again," he whispers.

"You seem to have a healthy appetite," I joke.

"Appetite is sharpened by the first bites!" he explains with a

sly smile. We eagerly return to the room. Michael flips me over on the mattress without any foreplay, lifts the bottom part of my dress, moves my black thong aside, leans in, kisses my tenderness, licks softly and gently, then increases the intensity of his movements, gradually and cautiously, impatient yet focused.

He tosses yet another condom wrapper by the bed and, once again, he penetrates my world, barges in, shifting all my organs back to their original place, moving with his cruel rhythm. He's deeply focused on his craft, performing it thoroughly and with precision. His passion erupts and he doesn't seem to stop himself one bit. As if trying to quench his thirst, one sip and another, just moments before our adventure ends. I climax again and again, and he groans and moans lightly. I feel him inside of me, picking up the pace, taking pleasure in unloading all of his past and frustration onto me, losing himself inside of me, and adoring every inch of my body.

"Wow! You've completely driven me mad! It's completely unlike me. I can usually control myself. But it's so amazing letting go and losing myself inside of you."

"Yes," I agree with him immediately, "I feel the same."

"Great, so let's get the hell out of her," he says and finishes getting dressed.

I'm almost ready, just putting my panties back in place. After what he just did to them, I plan on framing them, I joke to myself. Amazing! I'm ecstatic. I can feel how my womanhood is restored, I'm in full bloom, overjoyed and happy!





## Chapter 6

We disembark the yacht hand in hand, occasionally glancing at each other, exchanging a joke, a smile, a stroke. This energy of a non-defined infatuation titillates me. I can certainly sense he feels the same as I do, even without him expressing it with words. Especially during those moments when our eyes meet and sends sparks of excitement, optimism, and great passion. A light summer breeze blows my dress up, making me feel very Marilyn Monroe-like. I'm amazed by how fortunate I am.

He signals at the taxi to pull over, opens the door for me, and tells me to step inside. And even though I'm comfortable and at ease, I have no idea where we're headed.

"Michael, where are we going?"

"When do you need to pick up Roy?" he responds with a question.

"Thursday afternoon," I reply dryly, "since we still haven't finished finalizing the custody issues, we're sharing custody for the meantime."

"It's Wednesday morning," he declares. "So in fact, we still have a whole day to spend together."

I keep silent. Luckily enough, my job is flexible and, if necessary, I can attend to my clients from anywhere in the world by simply pressing a button on my phone. I have no other commitments or places I need to be. I have to invest in myself now and to grow stronger in order to start a new life on my own. After he leaves, I'll give my career my all, and

compensate my savings account accordingly. I can do it. I'll free myself from my past and start over. Michael made me realize that better days are coming.

"Michael?" I look straight into his wonderful eyes, "I want you to know that spending time with you gave me a new gust of optimism and hope that the future might not be so terrible after all. I'll find the strength within me to push on every time I stumble. You've reminded me of the power I forgot I had," I confess softly and place my hand on his. "Thank you for everything. You're an absolute angel." I kiss his cheek warmly.

"An angel?" He sniggers, "are you serious? No, honey. I'm no angel! But neither are you!" He teases me mischievously, raising his right brow, disclosing the wild things we have been through these last couple of days we spent together. "Please, stop talking about the future all the time. Let's remember that we also have this day and this moment, okay sweetheart?"

Once again, I feel like a little girl, slightly ashamed of myself.

"So, what are you planning to do right now?"

"Let's go back home and chill for a while," he sits back. We reach an impressive neighborhood of villas, practically mansions. Michael notices my amazed gaze.

"Stop here, please," he softly instructs the taxi driver, and leaps quickly out of the taxi, not before he hands the driver a large bill and turns to get the door for me.

What a gentleman, I think to myself. No one has ever held the door for me like that. This man is treating me differently, as if

he sees in me things I didn't know I had, or at least hadn't remembered I did. It feels so wonderful to have someone caring for me for a change, rather than for himself and his surroundings. I feel worthy and empowered when I'm with him. And yet, I'm still worried and unsure where all of this is leading. This affair might ruin me completely! It's too dangerous for me, I mutter to myself, but I can't suppress the excitement that rises inside of me with every step I take towards the stunning mansion. A guard at the entrance greets us and immediately opens the gate for us. The pathway leading to the house is white and surrounded by black gravel; classic and luxurious. An artificial waterfall spills into a majestic pool. The vast grassy area seems to go on forever.

"Your house is absolutely amazing," I declare, scanning the area here and there, silently mesmerized. "I don't think I've ever seen such a large house before," I lift my gaze up at the massive, gorgeous house in front of me.

The enormous building was gray, its gigantic windows had black wooden frames. Everything was so classy and beautiful, designed with exquisite taste. I look at that man standing beside me and reassure myself that he deserves all the riches and joy this world has to offer. These last two days, he's wiped away all my pain. I found him just as I was standing on the abyss, and now I was here, at his home.

He defiantly rings the bell three times.

"Just a minute!" I hear someone angrily shouting, and the door opens. Avi stands there in front of us, dressed in a black silk robe with a red dragon printed on the back. It's clearly evident

that he got dressed in haste, hurrying to cover up his divine body.

“Why are you walking around the house like that again?!” Michael says, upset. “How many times have we spoken about this bullshit? You need to stop behaving like that and grow up, do you understand? I can’t come back to this,” he points at Avi’s penis, “each time I come back home. Just look at what you’re doing to yourself, man!” He loses his patience.

Avi’s gaze is fixed on me, completely ignoring him, as if he’s waiting for an explanation on what this girl is doing here. He totally surprises me with a naughty smile: “Sam? What do you know, we meet again.”

I’m embarrassed by the situation and try to hide behind Michael.

“Yes, life is unexpected.” He remembers my name? Well, we met only two days ago. I pacify the uncontrollable excitement that bursts inside of me.

“Greece did you good!” he smiles cunningly.

“Absolutely! I’m so grateful!” I look at Michael with sincere appreciation, proud to have him at my side.

“And as for you, Michael, I suggest you calm down already!” he defends himself. “It’s my house! This is where I live and I’ll walk around my house however I like. People should feel at home in their own house, shouldn’t they? I don’t owe anyone a thing and no one can tell me what to do in my own home, you get me?” His finger angrily points at Michael’s chest. “You should be grateful I bothered to wear anything at

all!” he mutters, retreating back into his room.

I look at Michael who tries to lighten up the mood.

“That man, he’ll never grow up,” he declares. “You can never tell in what state he’s going to be.” He places his bag on the island at the kitchen entrance. “Come on, you can leave your bag over here,” he encourages me to feel at home. “Would you like a drink? Maybe something to eat?”

“No, thank you, Michael. I really am fine.”

“Great!” He rejoices and takes my hand. “Now, come see my bedroom. I’ll give you the full tour later on.”

“Is that so?” I tease him and smile slyly.

“I promise!” He gapes my lips with his right thumb. I feel so sensual when I’m in his presence; as if my lips are the prettiest, fullest most luscious in the whole world. He kisses me again and lightly tugs on my upper lip with his teeth.

“It feels so good,” I close my eyes and give in to anything this perfect man does. I respond with a peck on his meaty and stunningly sexy lips.

“Those lips were made to be kissed,” he declares as he softly caresses my cheek with his thumb, making me feel like a little girl once again. I’m embarrassed by the surge of energy pulsing through my body.

“Alright,” I agree, “let’s have the full tour later.”

He lets out a giggle and takes me to his wonderful bedroom: the ceiling is covered with mirrors embellished with bright hexagon-shaped shards, a huge TV protruding from the



luxurious white wooden floor; the entire decor combined expensive black wood and touches of white and silver, and lighting that changed according to his whims. The hexagonal mirrors along with the lights create an intoxication extrasensory sensation. His sheets were manly and opulent; a light blue cover was placed on top of them, and the pillowcases were golden and had bright embroidery.

“Wow, what an amazing room!” I declare. Everything I’ve seen so far was designed with such good taste. So luxurious and classic; not at all tacky or too much.

“This is the most important part of the room,” he points at the huge bed. “Do you mind if I show you the rest later? I miss your perfect body. After all, I haven’t been inside of it for several hours now.”

“You don’t have to ask!” I drop him back on the large bed. He sits down at the edge of the bed while I start to remove his clothes, slowly and sensually, as I gaze at him and passionately lick my lips.

“Michael, you’re so appetizing. Like a little sugary treat,” I giggle.

“Little?” he guffaws. “Whatever you say, gorgeous.”

I throw the dress off of me, as well as the rest of my underwear; after all, I won’t be needing them. I gently hold onto the back of his neck and draw closer to the nook between his ear and his shoulder. My lips flutter softly on that spot, driving him completely mad. Bit by bit, I brush my lips from his to his impressive chest. Every now and then, my tongue pressed against his delicious skin. I continue to move, at a

slow and passionate pace, delighting this marvelous man. I want to give him a remarkable experience that he'll remember during those long days we won't be seeing each other. I really hope he'll miss me. I reach his blissful manhood. My lips are agape. I kiss, lightly suck, and lick, wetting the area. He moans loudly with pleasure and leans back on his palms that are stretched behind him. Men groaning during intercourse always makes me feel like a goddess. It's an addictive sensation. This is especially true since Michael declared that he can usually curb his own enthusiasm. I remember him explaining that he was an expert when it came to rejecting women and groupies who chase him, vying for his attention.

I lean down and slowly rub the tip of my nose against his testicles, gently raising them. He goes wild. "You're driving me insane! I can't control myself!" he moans. At the same time, my demanding, sharp and steady tongue runs up the pulsing vein of his penis. I lick its length several times, then insert his entire member into my mouth, delighting in his succulent flavor; in his hot and smooth body.

"You have to stop right now. I need to feel you too; all of you," he quickly flips me over. I lie there on his bed while he licks my clitoris, up and down, slowly and enthusiastically, then suddenly penetrates me.

"Michael, don't forget a condom!"

He launches on top of me and shatters all barriers of pleasure and delight. "I hope it's ok because I want to feel every bit of you."

"I'd like to feel you too." I whisper to him. I love giving in to

this sensation; boundless and limitless; two people completely losing themselves in one another.

He looks so delighted with every movement, big or small, as if unable to believe how far he could get lost inside of me. I climax and moan so loudly, hoping with all my heart that no one has heard me. He gets carried away with me and finishes soon after. He tries to catch his breath. I move my fingers through his gorgeous hair, damp with blissful sweat. I pull him closed to me and kiss him passionately.

“Michael, I’ve never enjoyed myself as much as I have with you,” I whisper.

He wraps me in his arms in a warm and indulgent embrace. He kisses my hair and then my lips.

“I adore you! I’m going to miss you so much!” He saddens.

“It’s alright, honey,” I lovingly caress his cheek. “It’s only for a couple of days, isn’t it?”

“Please hear me out, gorgeous. I have a couple of busy months. It won’t be easy. But we’ll also enjoy missing one another. I’ll try to come here as much as I can; Israel is my home. Besides, I want you to remember that I’m a one-woman kind of man. In other words, please don’t give into the distance and let your mind go wandering to places I can’t follow. Trust me. Relax. Take these days to calm down and plan your new life ahead. It should take you some time to adjust, and it won’t be easy. Especially for Roy. The distance and time between us can be to our benefit. Are you with me? Do you understand what I mean? I’m here with you, hand in hand. As far as I’m concerned, it’s you and me, together. Do

you feel the same?” he asks.

“Absolutely,” I declare, enchanted by how right he is, and surprised at how dear he is to me.

“If all works well between us, I believe it’s going to be worth it. Once I finish shooting that film and settle back here, I’ll make it up to you. So, you just need to be a little patient,” he waves his finger in front of my face.

“Michael, stop it, please, come back! I already miss you so much,” I leap forward and eagerly hug him.

“I miss you too,” he kisses my head warmly again. “Come on, let’s get dressed now and see what’s going on back on planet Earth.”

I quickly straighten my clothes and finish getting dressed.

“Your room is so lovely. It’s just my taste.”

“Is that so?” he laughs.

“Yes,” I reply embarrassedly. “Of course, it looks much more impressive here than it does in my house,” I add.

“You’ve got great taste,” he smiled and gives me a perfect wink.

As I try to take in all the furniture and my new surroundings, Avi interrupts my thoughts as he storms in with a stack of documents in hand. With an intimidating tone and unquestionable nervousness, he reaches his hand out to Michael and shakes the papers in front of him.

“Some of us get to have fun and others get nothing but headaches. I can’t do this anymore; I’m done with everything

and everyone. I swear, I think I'm going mad!" he states. His face becomes glum and he seems so sad, frustrated and lonely. All I want to do right now is hug him; I don't know why I feel that way, but something about this man completely throws me off. When we sat in front of each other on that day at the café, and he dared wipe away that tear with sheer confidence, I felt deeply unstable in front of him. He must not be aware of it, but when he spoke to me and tried to soothe me, I found myself trusting his voice and his words, and inexplicably doing what he had suggested. I tried to release myself from the ties I had weaved around myself; he unravels them and makes me face them. But now, he seemed so exposed, so hurt, and so desperate; all I want to do is embrace him.

"Is everything alright?" I mustered the courage to utter few words.

"Alright? Are you kidding me? he replied. "Is there anything that could be right in this world?" he says with a bitter voice and turns back to attend to his business.

"Probably not, but I'd still like to know if there's anything I can do to help?"

He apprehends my sincere intentions and smiles at me slyly.

"Of course!" he surprises me. "Come with me!" He reaches his hand out and pulls me to his office. "There! Press on the activation button," he instructs and points at the shredder. As I press the button, he gives me a diabolical laugh and forces himself to laugh.

"Now just watch how much you've helped me!" he states while he feeds the pages into the shredder and looks at me

brightly as the pages are shredded and sliced into strips before my eyes.

“What are you doing? Are you insane? I swear, you’re absolutely unpredictable and insufferable!” Michael, who had followed us, says with an aggravated tone.

“I didn’t do anything wrong...” his expression is coy, and he opens his hands with feigned wonderment. He isn’t expecting any response. “There!” he announces, and disconnects several cables from different devices, pulls the sim card out of his cellphone and throws it to the trash. Then, he takes a black marker and blacks out all the documents on his desk.

“I finished working for the day,” he declares.

“You’re losing it!” Michael states seriously. “What’s wrong with you, bro, pull yourself together, please!”

He becomes withdrawn, shrouded with sadness, stifling his tears. He’s in desperate need of warmth, I think to myself. He quietly leaves the office, approaches the drawer in the kitchen cabinet, and pulls out a black metal box with joints. He takes one, pours himself a glass of whiskey from the bar, adds some ice cubes, stirs with his finger and then heads for the large yard.

“He drives me up the wall! I’m sorry for all that drama,” Michael immediately adds.

“Are you serious?” I answer firmly, “I actually really like Avi. But he seems quite upset. Maybe you should go talk to him. Don’t stop yourself on account of me,” I add, “just go.”

He smiles, grabs my hand and leads me to the yard.

“Boss,” he lets out a deep sigh. “Come on, come here and vent it all,” Michael lightly pats Avi’s shoulder, grabs the back of his neck, pulls his head to his chest and hugs him. “I love you so much, my bro.” He’s completely sincere. I’ve never witnessed such a relationship between two men. Avi is a significant part of Michael’s life. He loves him deeply, which is clearly evident from the hug he’s giving him and his eyes. It’s such a lovely and moving gesture. Avi frees himself from his embrace and his expression becomes grave.

“That’s it, it’s all lost. It’s the end.” He looks at Michael’s face. “What am I supposed to do, Michael? Do you have a solution for me?” He wipes a tear away.

“Avi, my pal,” Michael tries to console him.

Avi continues as if he hadn’t heard him.

“You know, this glass I’m holding in my hand right now, it’s whole, isn’t it?” He lifts it up and holds it under the rays of sun.

Michael rolls his eyes as if he knows what’s going to happen next. Then, he shatters the glass on the ledge of the pool. “Now it isn’t. It’s just, gone. In a mere moment,” he adds bitterly.

“Don’t look so scared,” Avi addresses me. “I’m crazy but harmless,” he lets out a bitter smile, keeps smoking, then passes the cigarette to Michael, then to me. We’re both very happy to join him and he slowly calms down. However, I can still sense his tumultuous and agonized soul.

Michael’s phone rings and breaks the silence.

“That’s the last thing I need! It’s Daniel. I wonder why he’s calling me now. He mutters at us, then takes the call.

“Hi Daniel, what’s wrong again?”

“But why?”

“Are you joking?”

“No! You always say that it sounds perfect and then you call me back again. I explained to you that I don’t have time for this nonsense. You know I love you, but you have to be more professional and accurate.”

“You always drive me mad!” he yells.

“Fine, fine, I know. I’ll be there in a bit.”

“I’ll be there! Just leave me alone already!” He hangs up angrily.

“Sam,” he addresses me reluctantly.

“Yes,” I reply quietly.

“Listen, sweetheart, there are some unexpected issues I need to take care of. It’s pretty urgent. Could I ask you to wait here for me for a couple of hours until I come back? I need to go back to the studio and record this vocal part I’ve been working on for a month. They want me to send them a pilot; now of all times!”

“Sure,” I immediately nod. “Don’t let me stop you, I’m only a guest. Keep doing your thing. Don’t you worry about me.”

“Avi,” Michael addresses him dully, “can you spend some time with Sam until I come back? I feel bad, leaving her here alone.”



“Of course! I have nothing else to do anyway. With pleasure.”  
Avi replies.

“Okay,” Michael faces me, caresses my hair, takes a deep breath, then kisses me.

“I’ll try to finish as fast as I can, okay, honey?” His gaze is fixed on my face.

“Okay,” I reply, feeling like a bashful little girl.

“Avi’s going through a rough patch, that’s why he’s being so weird. Don’t let it get to you,” he adds. “In any case, we’ll continue our ‘journey’ when I get back.”

“Alright,” I smile.

“Alright,” he whispers, kisses my head again, and leaves me with Avi to attend to his business.



## Chapter 7

Avi and I sit side by side on the comfy lawn chair. It's quiet all around, but only for a few moments because one of the other lawn chairs is flung off and falls straight into the pool. Quite unsurprisingly, the water splashes on my pretty dress.

"Wow!" I jump, surprised and upset. "I can't believe it! Like always!" I shrug, annoyed. "Why do things like that happen to me of all people?"

"I'm so sorry," he laughs embarrassedly, "I didn't mean to scare you, or get your dress wet. Don't worry, it's only water. It'll dry off in no time. By the way," he pulls out a black shirt with holes from behind his back. "You can change," he adds.

"Yes, I think I should. I'll go change."

"Here," he points at a small pool cabin.

I rush there and remove my wet dress. I quickly slip into the shirt he had given me. It's so pleasant and fragrant.

"I'm back!" I announce to save both of us the unnecessary embarrassment.

"Come over here, sit down and warm up," he gestures at the seat next to him.

I nod and sit at his side, giving in to the sunrays. Occasionally he takes a deep breath, deeper than the rest, trying to soothe his nerves. Who knows what he's going through, I wonder. He doesn't look happy.

"Sam, I apologize, I hope I haven't frightened you. Lately, I've

been having these outbursts.”

“Who am I judge?” I reply, giving him a sour smile. “After all, we’ve all got baggage.”

His expression becomes sullen and serious; he seems to be stifling a scream within.

“Yes, you’re probably right,” he pants heavily.

“I’d be happy to lend an ear,” I offer with utter seriousness. “If you’d like, of course. I’m a good listener,” I encourage him.

“Has Michael told you anything about me?” He looks at me curiously.

“He told me that you’re one of the most important people in his life, and as far as he’s concerned, you’re his soulmate,” I answer softly.

“Sounds like Brokeback Mountain,” Avi chuckles. “Yes, he’s pretty important to me too,” his expression suddenly becomes glum.

“Usually, I don’t feel like sitting around and talking about myself. But this past year’s events have shaken me to my core.”

“What happened?” I look at him with inviting anticipation.

“My beloved Grandma Lola, who’s actually like a mother to me,” he clarifies, “was diagnosed with advanced Alzheimer’s.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” I can sense the sadness spreading in the air.

“Her condition is deteriorating by the day,” he adds. “All that’s left from that glorious woman, who’s my everything, the most

precious person in my life, is a shadow of a memory. On one hand, she looks exactly the same, but on the other, she's unrecognizable. It's as if there's an invisible wall between us that I'm trying to break through; but I can't." Avi wipes a tear away.

"I've done everything I could to treat her. I've taken her to multiple treatments, medical trials, and we even flew to the States; but nothing. Nothing seems to help. Her mind grows foggier by the day. Each time I say goodbye, I know what I'm leaving behind, but I have no idea what I'll find when I see her next. I'm dying to hug her and burst out in tears, embrace her, but I can't. She's so fragile. I've been witnessing her transform right before my eyes, regressing into her childhood, into her nightmares, her uncertainties, sadness and emptiness. She's been trying to communicate her loneliness, and I've been trying to approach her. However, graceful as always and eyes open wide, she's fading away."

"It's a wretched disease," I wipe away a couple of my own tears. "Such a cruel disease, mostly for the person's loves ones."

He nods. "My grandmother is my whole world. She was like a mother to me ever since my father was murdered when I was nine."

"Murdered?" A lump of sadness lodges in my throat.

He nods quietly. "After his death, my mother couldn't function. She was completely withdrawn and pushed everyone away – especially me, because I'm the youngest of seven children. You see, before he passed away, I was the family's

cute and sweet baby. And, all of a sudden, I became nothing more than a nuisance, wandering around the house and bothering everyone in it. Caring for me was a task she couldn't handle anymore”

“But how was your father killed? If you don't mind telling me, of course,” I look at him as I brush off the tears that keep pouring out.

“Well, my father was a medical officer who joined the attack force on the border with Gaza. He was severely wounded from a shell that was thrown at him. He was evacuated by a military helicopter and passed away later on at the hospital.

“It's hard to imagine how your grandmother coped with such a cruel and brutal loss.”

“Yes, he was her only son and she was completely heartbroken. But since I have always been her favorite grandson, after what happened I became her main reason to move on and live. She lost her entire family in the Holocaust, so losing her one and only son left her devastated. She held on to me with everything she had and wouldn't let me go.

“What do you mean by ‘wouldn't let you go’?”

“As I said earlier, my mother couldn't bear taking care of anyone anymore. She didn't have an inkling of patience. She couldn't, or wouldn't, function as a mother. Her mental state kept worsening, as did ours. You know what it's like,” he blurted. “The saying goes ‘one mother can raise ten children, but 10 children would not be able to take care of one mother’. The irony!” He emphasized the dissonance.

“You’ve been through so much...” I blow my nose. “I’m so sorry.”

He looks at me, then seems to sink even deeper into his sorrow.

“I pitied my mother. I couldn’t bear her sadness. I was torn, and eventually decided to choose what suited everyone best. I preferred to move in with my Grandma Lola on the pretext that she was lonely, that she needed me, and it would make things easier for everyone. And so, the years pass, and time did, too – too much time. The gap between my mother and me is just as it had always been.”

“But she must be grief-stricken over your grandmother too, isn’t she?” I look at him somberly.

“Frankly, I have no idea,” he shares his most sincere thoughts with me. “I’m sure it hurts her as much as it does all of us. But perhaps, deep down, she’s somewhat relieved, and she hopes that my grandmother’s death might bring us closer together again, force us to remedy our past mistakes.”

“And how about you?” I look at him curiously.

“Well, I admit, I think it’s too late now. Naturally, I love my mother a lot. But my sole source of comfort has always been my Grandma Lola. I don’t know how I’ll survive a single day without her. It’s all so cruel. I’m completely lost...” he snuffles and falls silent for a moment.

“And on top of everything,” he adds, raising his voice, “I have to run a company of 300 employees, have business meetings, some abroad, keep to my obligations, and it all rests on my

shoulders. I swear, I'm about to collapse. I feel completely deflated.”

I look into his eyes. I feel so lucky that he's decided to share all of his pain with me. I'm so stunned by the sheer level of his sincerity and introspection. At that very moment, I realize this man is a gem. He wasn't ashamed to cry in my presence. He didn't care what other people thought of him and did whatever he wanted. He was both a strong and approachable man; he moved me so much; strumming the strings of my heart. No wonder Michael had spoken so highly of him and claimed he had managed to heal his wounded soul. I can clearly see now what he meant. Avi is such a charismatic individual, whose charm could win anyone over. You could get sucked into the depths of his soul, swept away in a whirlpool that poked at all your challenges and weaknesses, turning them at once into strengths. My sensitivity and attentiveness offered him a sense of confidence, allowing him a catharsis. My questions led him to speak about the source of his pain. He finds it easy to release his emotions to me, and this empowers me.

I pull myself together and try to calm myself. Only hours ago, I was smitten with Michael and was planning our future together. However, the more time I spend with him, the more anxieties and life-long fears I shed. I'm filled with confidence merely because such a special and impressive man sits at my side and shares his pain with great fortitude. Despite my current unstable mental disposition, he perceives my pessimistic insights as a blessing. As if my shortcomings and disadvantages are a source of strength that can heal his soul. I suddenly start sobbing. I want him so badly. I've always

formed relationships with people who seemingly made me feel that I can have an impact on their lives. I've always been that way and I wouldn't want to change it. I want to stay true to my authentic self. I simply wanted to find a man that wouldn't use it against me during a crisis.

I wonder if I could ever be this meaningful for Michael. After all, he's a man of the world. He's surrounded by such gorgeous and talented women. I'm concerned I might fade into the background, the bright camera flashes overshadowing me and my insecurities. I find it hard to see my role in that relationship. Attraction usually passes with time and wanes. I should know, after years of denying that I wanted to feel intensely loved, passionately and ferociously wanted. After I had settled for so long and for so little.

What would happen to me then? Would I even have the energy left to handle all my doubts and pay the price to keep this relationship afloat? I'm all alone now and have to raise Roy in the best way possible. Passion and stress are about the last things I need right now if I want to balance my life. I admit to myself that this relationship with Michael will never be feasible.

"I know it's a cliché," I finally manage to find the words, "but when the grief and pain subside, you'll be able to see clearer. As much as it pains me to say it, there are some things in life that are out of our control. You know, I've heard a clever phrase once that in order to handle complex situations that make us feel helpless, we need to simply let them be, because things move at their own pace. Unfortunately, things don't happen according to plan. I'm quite sure you've heard it all



before, but your grandmother sounds like a lovely woman. I'm sure she's proud of you and the way that you've shown your love for her. She must know how important she is to you. Embrace those good memories that you've shared and cherish them. Even though, sometimes, meaningful people disappear from our lives, their impact will always stay with us and in our hearts, and they can revive our spirit."

I glance at his face and he once again mesmerizes me with that charm he oozes. I completely forget my previous state, and perhaps even my existence before I had met him.

His hair is dark blonde and reaches his shoulders, his skin is lightly tanned, his body is toned and firm, but he isn't as broad as Michael. His gray eyes are hypnotic, they bewitch and draw me in. There's a certain depth in them and an intriguing twinkle. Long lashes frame his eyes, and his teeth are white and bright, his lips prominent and thick, his cheek bones are high, but not too high. He's so gorgeous that it hurts.

"Wow, Sam!" He appears surprised and excited. "I have no words to describe how I'm feeling right now. I've never shared this much. You're a very special woman," he adds. "Ever since our eyes met, I knew we'd meet again. I really appreciate everything you've just told me. Every word rings true."

"With pleasure," I smile an evasive and confused smile. "May I hug you now, please?" he smiles excitedly and leans in, pressing his body against mine, giving me a very tight and wordless hug.

We sit there in each other's arms, awkwardly sprawled next to each other in the lawn chair, trying to clear our thoughts. I'm

overwhelmed with sadness and a huge burden weighs on my soul. It feels as though my life has reached a cruel intersection. I've never experienced such intense feelings and confusion as I have these past days. And now, I've reached a whole new peak. I find it impossible to believe that this wonderfully impressive man feels so lonely. The world is such a vicious place. I become dispirited.

"The most painful thing possible is when the people you trust and love deny you, hurt you and render your existence redundant." That's exactly what happened to me, I whisper into his ear. "You can be surrounded by people and still feel lonely. You can be all on your own yet still feel loved. It all has to do with the significance of the relationship."

I desperately wanted to kiss him and comfort him; but I have no right to do so. All of a sudden, I realize how my body is shamefully intertwined with his, and I feel serenity in his arms. I'm overwhelmed with mixed feelings of guilt and desire.

'What's with you?' I berate myself angrily. 'Yesterday I was cradled in Michael's arms and everything was whole and perfect. And here I am, with his best friend, wanting with every fiber of my being to remain here with him.'

I slowly free myself from his arms, enraged and frustrated with myself for being carried away, yet again, into a reckless and destructive situation. I'm also infuriated with the universe for the sorrow it had inflicted on this man who had penetrated my heart like a meteor traveling through space. I struggle to breathe.

“Perhaps we should get up to wash our face?” I whisper to him and feign a smile.

“Sure. It’s absolutely fine. I see that your capacity to empathize with me is maxed out for today.” We stand up together and he places his hand on my shoulder. “Once again, thank you for listening and for all the things you’ve said,” he whispers into my ear. “I wish you a good night.” He gently kisses my forehead and starts for his room.

The door closes behind him and I feel so naked, bare, and lonely.



“Sam? I was looking for you,” Michael finds me sitting on the bed in his room. I’m completely enveloped in my own thoughts.

“Oh, you’re back already?” I glance at him, making sure not to make any eye contact.

“I just walked in. You look sad, is everything alright?”

“Everything’s fine,” I smile faintly, but I can sense my expression is sour and sullen. I can’t handle anyone right now. On the other hand, I feel so bad about my irresponsible, cold and distant behavior towards this amazing and good man, who spent two whole days completely devoted to giving me the gift of the sea. For two days he set my soul free, filled my heart with inviting memories of colors and light. And here I was, denying him, pushing him away from me, in order to allow my superego to legitimize my having been emotionally intimate with his best friend. As the minutes pass on by, my desires become clearer. The only thing I would like to do right now is

go to Avi's room, lie at his side and caress his hair. Not just for an hour or for a fleeting moment; but for a lifetime.

What do I and that man have in common? It must be because it's a challenge! I try to convince myself. He's not into relationships and is always chasing the next thrill or the next woman. He's a lone soul, blowing in the wind. He has a woman at every port, waiting for him to show up and knock at their door. You're replacing one headache with another, and you'll be hurt again. Stop it! I'm absolutely angry at myself.

But perhaps he'll change his ways for me? After all, he had chosen to share his pain with me. Although his door is shut, it's still only a step away. I start feeling that familiar surge of adrenalin I'd been having for the past decade before an anxiety attack creeps up. My legs start to tremble and become heavy. My heart races, and I feel nauseous and truly breathless.

He places his hand on my shoulder, "Avi's special, isn't he?"

I try to speak but can't utter even a syllable. Instead, I nod and stifle my tears.

"As you said earlier, he's going through some hard times," I agree with him.

"Actually, I'm very concerned about him. He's been rather lost, he's blocked out of all his friends and prevented them from coming here. He switches off his phone, shuts everyone out, cries; he's constantly upset. My heart breaks when I see him like this. You see, his dear grandmother is dying. She practically raised him ever since he lost his father. She was like a mother to him. It takes me back to those painful moments when I had found out my mother died. It makes me

feel so sad. I wish there was something I could do to ease his pain.” Michael is frustrated, which is clearly evident in his voice. “But unfortunately, I have to leave for Sweden tomorrow. I have a huge concert coming up and the next couple of months are about to be unbelievably hectic.”

“Nothing can make things better,” I conclude and caress his face affectionately. “It’s a process,” I explain. “He needs to get through it, think things over, put his thoughts in order, accept that there are things we cannot change, even though they agonize us.”

“Yes, but I still feel that leaving him this way isn’t right. He doesn’t deserve it. He needs me. He’s always been there for me; saving me from myself,” his expression reveals how guilty he feels. “Ugh, I’m fed up with everything.” He turns back and heads to Avi’s room. He knocks twice, and slowly opens the door.

“Can we talk?” he asks his at the threshold.

“Come in,” he confirms.

“Okay, just a second, I’ll tell Sam that I’m going to sit with you for a while. I feel bad, I’ve left her alone for a couple of hours and I’m flying out tomorrow.”

He quickly comes back to me, while I look at him silently.

“So... have a wonderful flight, sweetheart,” I stand up and hug him tightly. “I’ve had such an amazing time with you, and you might not know this, but you’ve truly touched my soul,” I add, then turn on my heels, return to the room and sit on his bed. He looks at me, pensive, struggling to understand my distant

behavior. He grabs my hand and peers into my eyes.

“Sam? Is everything alright? Did something happen while I was gone? Did Avi say or do something? You look so distant and upset.”

“No! God forbid. We sat together for a couple of hours talking about our lives. Everything is perfectly fine. His situation is quite sad and complex. It’s hard for me to not to empathize with him. In any other scenario, I would have followed him, sat at his side and hugged him. I would have kissed his tears and offered him the affection and warmth that he so desperately craves.

Michael is surprised. “Hang on, what do you mean? Did he share everything with you?”

“I have no idea what you mean by ‘everything’, but we spoke about his relationship with his father, mother and grandmother.”

“Are you serious? He opened up? To you?”

“Yes. But why do you seem so shocked?”

“I’m sorry but I’m truly stunned right now. He doesn’t usually share these things with anyone, let alone someone he’s just met.” He furrows his brow.

Just met?! Those words that come out of his mouth with such ease it physically hurt me. As far as I’m concerned, Avi and I had known each other for longer than a brief moment. I wanted to be a significant part of his world, not simply because I pitied him, but rather because I yearned to love him, to ease and relieve his aching heart.

“Yes,” I conceal my real feelings. “He must have needed to unload, and I was there at the right time. You don’t need to emphasize how meaningless you feel I am!” I’m terribly sensitive at this moment and deeply offended, as if either of them owes me anything. I’m so angry with him and as I wipe away a tear of anger and pain, I defyingly push his hand off my shoulder and continue walking to his room. I intend to pack my things and simply go as far away as I can, first thing in the morning.

‘Why did I even come here?’ I scold myself, and then answer my own question: ‘because you’re stupid, dumb, gullible, so needy and lonely.’

He follows me. “Sam, I swear that I didn’t mean it to sound that way. I’m truly sorry that I offended you, and I’m very happy that you two got closer. Please forgive me.” I shut him out. “Everything’s alright, Michael. But we know how this is going to play out,” I mutter and keep wiping away the uncontrollable tears. Damn it, why am I so sensitive?

“I’ll pack my stuff now.”

He looks at me sadly, holds my hand and pulls me closer to him. He cradles my head, bringing it closer to his toned and broad chest. He takes a deep breath and kisses me.

“Sam, I’m leaving but I’ll be back very soon. I really don’t know why you’re being so dramatic. I’d like us to say goodbye fondly and anticipate the next time we meet.”

“I don’t know about that, Michael,” I muster courage and reply in a way that empowers me. “We’re from two completely different worlds, don’t you think?”

“I don’t understand you or what you mean. We’re both human, aren’t we?” He’s enraged. “We had two amazing days, but they were only two days in a lifetime. Take it slow, take a breath, why are you putting so much pressure on yourself? I’ll call you when I come back, and we’ll see each other as much as possible. I promise, I swear that you mean a lot to me, and I’d like to see where this relationship goes.”

“We’ll see, Michael. No point in making these statements right now. I have a complicated life. I don’t expect you to understand me. Frankly, I don’t think I can handle you travelling all the time and a long-distance relationship.”

“At least give me a fucking chance,” he insists. “It won’t be as hard as you think. Let’s give it a go and see what happens. I’m asking you to consider it, at the very least. Promise me.”

“Ugh, I promise!” I unwittingly repeat the words he’d said. “Okay, please let me continue packing my things.” I faintly smile at him and shut the door behind him. When he leaves, I quickly head to the bathroom and burst out in tears. I wish everything had been different! I wish Avi would have been the one I went to Greece with. Why is everything in my life so God damn complicated?

I had finally found a man who swept me away with his magnetic personality. And the fact that he’s so hot only tips the scales further. I wish he were mine; I hunger for him. ‘Please!’ I speak to my own reflection in the huge mirror in the bathroom. ‘I beg of you, pull yourself together.’ I’m so afraid of giving my heart and soul, only to be hurt again.

‘You mustn’t let your destructive tendencies win. Do you hear



me? You signed your divorce papers only a few days ago, and just look at the situation you're in, for heaven's sake. You'll be destined to remain alone. After everything you've been through, you need to realize that you are not a part of this fairytale. Reality will always hit you in the face. Grow up, God damn it! Stop being so impulsive! You're a single mother! Do you get that? You can't let anyone affect you this way. You must be strong. You cannot give yourself so wholly ever again!' I repeat to myself and then wash my face.

I brush my hair, leave behind the shirt Avi had given me, drenched in his intoxicating masculine scent, turn the lights off, and slip into the huge and luxurious bed. I lie down and close my eyes. My thoughts wander off to the colors and lights that had enthralled my soul when I dived with Michael. I wipe away another tear and turn to my right. I cover myself and shut my eyes, hoping for the fatigue to wash me over and save me from myself and my destructive urges. The incessant thoughts leave me restless. I can't fall asleep. I sit straight up and turn around.

My bag is already packed and ready to go. It's right there, waiting for me on the decadent bed cover. I delight in the touch of the exquisite satin against my bare skin. The satin shifts and changes with every movement my body makes. I'm energetic and disturbed with a certain restlessness, although my body is weary and exhausted.

A light knock on my door distracts me.

"Yes," I say softly, yet tense. The door opens and it's Michael again. He comes in and sits next to me. He caresses a stubborn

strand of my hair, leans in, smells my hair and places his palm on mine.

“Sam, we can do this. Please, don’t give up on us. We both deserve to be happy. These last two days were very important to me. I’m glad I found you at that café. I feel like it was destiny. Please understand, I’ve been looking for a woman like you who’d save me from this fake and lonely life. I’ve been looking for stability and something normal. Truth is, before your outburst, I thought there was something amazing and sincere between us, but I have to make it very clear to you: I’ve had my fair share of tumultuous and destructive relationships. I’m looking for quiet, happiness, joy, a family, and love that would redefine my existence. I’ve been living my entire life according to other people’s expectations. All I want now is to find a life of truth, bliss, peace and comfort. I’ve grown weary of fighting, please don’t push me away.”

“Michael,” I cut him off. “It’s all sounds great, but I have feelings, too. Do you think I enjoyed having that little outburst in front of you? I’m struggling to control my emotions and all this tension in my body. You deserve someone who can be your life-partner. As much as I want to that person, to travel around the world with you, give my heart to you, and share the road with you through all your journeys. But our lives are so different. I won’t be able to keep up with your demands and your pace, and I do not want my son to become an obstacle that will prevent me from having a relationship. I humbly accept the fact that my choices come at a painful price, but I will never again let Roy suffer from my emotional turmoil. Look at me. Do you think it’s normal that I responded the way

I did because of a minor misunderstanding? You have a huge impact on me. I'm afraid to get sucked into a dark pit in your absence." As usual, I blatantly lie. My fickle thoughts aren't about Roy or Michael, but rather about his best friend in the whole world. I wonder what Avi is doing right now.

"Never mind, let's forget about it. This has nothing to do with you or us. It must be because I've been oversensitive lately. I truly apologize for being so dramatic."

He hugs me.

"You're lovely and very dear to me," he wipes my tears away. "You can't scare me off; I want you and will be very happy to meet your sweet son. I promise you nothing will hold me back." He kisses me.

"How's Avi doing?" I dare ask.

"Maybe we can all hang out together? We'll have a smoke, chat a bit and spend the night together? It could help all three of us, relieve some of the tension. What do you say?"

Before he could even finish speaking, I'm already out of bed, leaving the satin cover crumpled. I wear the slippers Michael had lent me and don't even bother to wear any pants under the shirt he had given me. I run around, collecting the cigarettes, my phone and the lighter. Michael grabs my arms, pulls me closer to him, give me another kiss, this time on my cheek, and then we head out to the place where my heart beats like a drum.



## Chapter 8

Avi's bedroom door opens and we enter his room. He's sitting there on an impressive wooden armchair with elaborate carvings, lined in a deep burgundy. He looks like a king of hearts. My thoughts turn toxic and crass by the minute. I immediately start fantasizing about crawling towards him from the very entrance of the room, dressed in minimal clothing. I'd reach him and raise my yearning eyes towards him. He'd gently lift my chin, and peer into my eyes, he'd rise from his chair, hold my hand in his, pull me to him and immediately begin to undress me as he peels off every shred of the anxious and abashed woman that I am, along with my guilt. He gives me a reason to exist. In his arms I feel I can breathe; I'm real, alive, and my heart pounds in my chest.

"Are you still up? I was sure you'd already fallen asleep," Avi says, his eyes filled with depth and feelings. He stands up, reaches a hand to me and leads me to a different sofa. When I sit down, he lights a joint and then pours some whiskey for me into a lowball glass with ice cubes. He hands me both and says 'cheers'.

We all clink our glasses together. The marijuana cigarette passes between us, and when we finish it, we light another one. I have an urge to be close to him, and thanks to the smoke clouding the room, I can sit next to him. Absentmindedly, I find my body close to his; too close. 'I wish he'd fuck me,' my inner voice utters in an uninhibited and immoral manner. He laughs, curses, and tells jokes, and I do the same, pretending to

be focused on what he's saying instead of the sensations that are spreading through my nether regions. I feel waves of heat pulsating throughout my body. I try to curb myself, press my legs together, and try to clench my pelvic floor to prevent myself from sprawling on the sofa, opening my legs wide, start touching myself slowly and whisper to him 'fill me up, demolish me, do with me as you will'. In my mind's eye, I kneel before him, pleading and pining.

"What with you?" Avi's voice interrupts my taboo thoughts. "Are you asleep? First man down," he states, laughing out loud and pointing at Michael.

I join him with a gentle and shy giggle.

He turns his head to me. 'Can he also sense how shamelessly close I am to him,' I think to myself.

"So, Sam?" Avi looks into my eyes.

"What?" I ask quietly. He must be exhausted; so precious. I immediately stand up and cover him. I kiss his head and, as I do so, I can't help myself from thinking whether Avi is looking at my behind. I quickly stretch my body to appear more impressive.

He looks at me and smiles silently.

"Perhaps we should leave the room, so we don't disturb him?" I nod and we both leave the room together. "If you're not too tired, let's sit for a short while in the living room," he suggests, and we quietly head for the living room.

"Avi, you know what, I have a proposition for you," I start saying. "But I'm not so sure you'll go along with it. Should I

tell you anyway?”

“Okay, now I’m curious,” he becomes serious.

“There’s a very famous Kabbalist in Netivot. Unfortunately, my family has suffered many losses over the years,” I explain. “Sadly, we’re well-aware of your grandmother’s fate, but perhaps we can ask him to pray for her, pray to relieve her suffering so that she may return her soul to the Creator with complete peace and acceptance. Personally, it made me feel stronger during those times. What do you say?”

“It’s a wonderful idea! It’s better than giving in to self-destruction,” he nods. “But are you sure you want to schlep all the way there in the middle of the night? Aren’t you tired?” He gives me a deep and charming look. He swallows me with his gaze.

“Of course!” I reply confidently. “It fills me with a sense of meaning, and perhaps you might get some spiritual closure. It could give you strength and hope.”

“So come on, let’s go right now,” he rushes me as he calls a cab, and we get ready to leave.

“Where to?” the cab driver asks.

“Netivot,” I reply, and we head out. During the drive, we talk about religion, and life, how they are both so fickle. We ask ourselves about the meaning of life and the essence of belief. We contemplate the power one can experience when unloading their agony and associating it with some inexplicable force.

“In any case, we’re all here for a limited time. Despite everything I’ve been through, I’ve always believed there has

to be a higher power than us. My grandmother taught me that death has a purpose, too, even though we often don't see it. She would tell me that everyone has a pre-destined path and that every soul has a purpose and a meaning. It's impossible to survive without believing that. In my position in the business world, I've come across many distinguished individuals, some were religious leaders. I've always been very proud of my Jewish identity."

"I completely agree with you," I smile excitedly. "I have a similar perspective on life."

We arrive at the kabbalist's house and knock on his door.

"Sorry for the time," we apologize, "it's an emergency."

The kabbalist let us in, understanding.

"Come in. Sit down here, please, and tell me how I can help you."

"Esteemed Rabbi," I start, "you probably don't remember me, but I've visited you several times in the past, unfortunately under similar circumstances."

Avi looks at me pleased and proud.

The Rabbi tries to refresh his memory. "You seem familiar. You've been here once to ask for a prayer for your mother-in-law, haven't you?"

"Yes," I say softly, "my former mother-in-law."

He looks at the two of us and smiles faintly.

"So, what brings you here tonight?"

"My grandmother is on her deathbed; Alzheimer's," he

summarizes. “I’d be happy if you could bless her, ease her pain, and do anything you can to unburden her.”

“Please,” the kabbalist rabbi asks him for details and dates of birth, his mother’s name, and so on.

Avi provides him with all the details about his Grandma Lola.

The kabbalist makes his calculations and refers to ancient Kabala books. He takes his time, performing his job meticulously and carefully, fully aware of the delicate situation.

“Unfortunately,” the kabbalist says, “as you’ve previously mentioned, it doesn’t seem there’s much left to do. But perhaps we should have a ‘Pidyon Nefesh’, redeem her soul through charity, and ensure that righteous men pray for her day and night. We could make sure her soul has a ‘Tikkun’, and through this atonement she can transcend to the heavens. She’s an extraordinary and precious woman.” Avi wipes a tear and thanks him for his sincerity and directness.

“Yes, sadly, there isn’t much hope left. But we could at least offer her a spiritual closure.” Avi uses my words. I smiled to myself. Have I inspired him? “There are a lot of precious souls up there that she’d be pleased to meet,” he continues. The rabbi warmly shakes his hand.

“Your grandmother must have finished playing her part in this world,” he explains to him with sensitivity. “But her descendants will continue her legacy, if God wills it. I’m here for you,” he adds. “I bless you.”

“Amen!” We both answer together, half smiling at each other.



Avi hands him a stack of bills.

“Hope that’s enough,” he looks at him fondly.

“Thank you,” the kabbalist replies. “May you both be blessed.”

We thank him, leave together and step back into the cab waiting for us outside, and head back home. As we sit in the taxi and start taking deep breaths, he turns to me.

“Sam, I can’t thank you enough,” his bewitching bright eyes stare at mine and he grabs my hand. “I’ve lost the ability to focus on what matters most, and I’ve drowned in my own sorrow. I appreciate everything you’ve done for me.” He tightens his grip on my hand.

“It was my pleasure.” I blush. “Anyone would have done it.”

“Are you serious?” he laughs, “you might be surprised, but most people are self-centered. No one would have gone through the trouble of thinking about ways to make me feel better, let alone someone who’s known me for just a couple of hours,” he emphasizes. “Everyone accepts the way things are and tries to support me as best they can. However, I don’t know anyone who would have done what you’ve done for me tonight.”

I smile. “It comes straight from my heart.”

“I can feel it,” he tightens his grip even further. “You’ve given me hope that when Grandma’s time in the world ends, she’ll rest in peace as she well deserves. I feel that now I’ll be stronger when the time comes. Losing her will be painful to us all, but at least we’ll know that she has lived the best life she

could, considering the cards she was dealt. Just as she had found comfort in me during her time of loss, I'll try to find comfort in all our empowering memories and her meaning in my life when I lose her. At least I'll know that her soul had found redemption, was cleansed and will be happily welcomed in the heavens."

"With pleasure," I smile fondly again.

We step out of the cab, quiet and pensive; we walk into the house and collapse together on the large, opulent sofa.

"Want one?" he offers me another joint.

"Gladly!" I smile at him. "It's getting hot, I think I'll go change into something more comfortable," I explain and quickly head to change into the black shirt that looks like a flattering beach dress on me.

"You're so beautiful!" he surprises me. "Both inside and out." He adds another compliment.

"Thank you, you are, too." I smile pleased.

We sit there and smoke in silence as he holds on to my waist and pulls me closer to him.

"That's what it is," he whispers to me passionately.

"I don't understand," I half-say, half-ask.

"I answered your inner goddess," he mocks me.

"Excuse me?" I ask defensively. "What are we talking about?"

"About your inner goddess," he teases me. "I've heard her trying to reason what's happening between us, excusing it as something other than chemistry and wild attraction. But that's

what it is. Besides, I think we're way past talking anymore." He kisses me passionately, demandingly, possessively, as I feel his tongue curling against mine.

Then he stops, falls silent, brings his cheek to mine and nuzzles his temple against the back of my neck and my ear. He lifts me up, makes me stand in front of him. He peers into my eyes with a ravished and uncompromising look.

My knees are weak, and I might spill all over the floor. I have no idea how I can keep standing in front of him. My legs shake. He pulls me closer to him, gently and decisively pressing against my buttocks. We kiss passionately and silently. In between each kiss and rub, I can sense his truth standing between us, focused, determined, cruel and maddening. I feel like little girl in front of him. I'm only 5'5" and this alpha man is more than 6 feet tall. I can barely reach his chest and yet, I still feel I was made for him. I'm willing to lose it all and let myself be wild in front of him. I place my hand on his gray sweatpants, but he takes my hand and kisses it.

"I'm not sure that's such a good idea. Michael." He explains.

I freeze at once. I feel guilty, humiliated and so painfully rejected, that I turn around and leave him there.

"Have a good night," I mutter at him.

He quickly emerges behind me and seizes my arm.

"Come right here," he pulls me into another room down the hall, locks the door and with one swift movement, he removes the oversized black t-shirt, revealing my white thong.

“My shirt looks so good on you,” he smells the back of my neck.

“You think so?” I play coy. He caresses my back, and his hand slowly moves down my spine.

“Every part gets a special treatment,” he notes as he caresses my buttocks, clutches, releases and caresses. I feel completely powerless and drop my head backwards in a slow and inviting spin, as I let out small and restrained moans of both distress and pleasure. “I would have absolutely wanted to lose myself inside of you,” he whispers at me hoarsely.

“I would, too,” I confess shyly, yet passionately and determinedly.

“You drive me crazy, but you’re Michael’s,” he whispers in my ear as he continues to stroke my buttocks and my back. A sour lump lodges in my throat. I reach out for his hands and stop him. I can tell by his surprised look that he wasn’t used to that kind of reaction.

“So why are you doing this?” I stare at him bitterly and sarcastically.

“Me? I’m just trying to get through this!” he snickers and brings his head closer to me again, kisses my neck and slowly brings his nose to my earlobe. “I want you. You’re driving me insane. But let’s wait until he leaves,” he asks. “He’s busy as it is and is barely here. If I don’t, then someone else will snatch you away,” he smiled at me mischievously.

“Are you serious?” I reply with a question, and immediately disagree with him. “No, I don’t think it’s right. In any case,

this has been a long night. Sleep tight.”

‘He doesn’t want you! You’re just another one of his conquests! He’s at a bad place emotionally!’ I keep tormenting myself in a way that only I know how. ‘Can’t you see you’re humiliating yourself? Who do you think you are? How dare you? You know they’re best friends. This must all end now, before we all pay a steep price.’ Having made that difficult decision, I free myself from his arms, open the door, return to the empty room and collapse on the bed.



## Chapter 9

It's 6:30 am, and the summer sun signals for me to wake up. I find myself lying in Michael's bed, completely naked, clad in a white thong and piled-up pang of conscience, guilt and deep sexual frustration. I step into the adjacent bathroom, brush my teeth and wash my face, brushing my long hair and gathering it into a high ponytail. I put on denim shorts, a tight, blue-collared shirt that compliments my figure quite nicely, and open-toed low grey heels.

I put on lip gloss, mascara and blush, take a deep breath and try to pull myself together. Michael suddenly appears behind me, gripping my hips from behind, looking into the mirror with me. We smile at each other.

"You look so beautiful first thing in the morning!" he chuckles in satisfaction, kissing my hair from behind. "It's such a bummer that I fell asleep like that." He gazes at me warmly. "So what did you do?" He helps me rise up as he sits on the nearby bed, positioning me between his legs, caressing my legs warmly and giving me an enchanted, smiling look.

He absolutely makes me melt.

"We went to see some kabbalist I know and prayed a bit for his grandmother. It loosened up some of his tension and dissipated his feelings of helplessness."

"Wow, what a charming idea! Well done, thank you so much. You're such an amazing woman. Wait for me, Sam, please! I've got a show in two days, but I'll be back. I'm not

disappearing.”

I immediately calm down, enveloped by feelings of happiness and satisfaction. I turn to him, put my palms on his shoulders, approach and let him smell my skin, using my expertise in the arts of seduction.

“We’re alright. What needs to happen will happen, Michael. Everything you’ve given me during these wonderful days will stay with me forever. I’m here, waiting for you.” I lustfully kiss his lips. He’s wonderful. “Please let me know you’ve made it there safely, so I won’t be worried about you.” I give him a long, deep hug.

“I promise.” He looks at me and smiles.

We head to the huge living room in an embrace. Inviting couches and sofas are tastefully scattered across the room and we take a seat on one of the sofas in the center of the room.

“Good morning, boys and girls,” Avi announces that he’s awake. “Coffee?” He looks at me and again devours it all.

“Please,” I whisper, and he holds out a luxurious cup of cappuccino, placing the other mugs on the table. We quietly and gratefully sip from them.

“So when does your flight leave?” Avi breaks the silence.

“I have to leave at eight.” He glances at the Rolex on his wrist.

“So come on! You need to hurry up,” he rushes him. “Have you packed everything?”

Michael lets out a rolling laugh.

“Are you kidding me?” he protests. “Don’t forget I’m the one

who's in charge of shopping and packing in this house," he explains, "which is a good thing since, if it were up to you, we'd just keep buying the same thing over and over. Although, chances are, you'd wear the same thing. Please don't forget who takes care of clothes for you around here," Michael jabs.

Avi nods in full agreement. "What can I say? I probably prefer being naked. That's why those things don't really interest me." He rolls his eyes and we all laugh together.

"Well, Sam, so what'll you be doing today?" Michael asks.

"I'll probably go back home; I hope I'll be able to see Roy today."

"Can I get your phone number?"

"Are you sure?" I answer with my typical sarcasm. "It's customary to ask for a phone number before sex, not after, but given your remarkable performance, I'll make an exception just this once." I try to contribute to the relaxed atmosphere while making sure Avi understands that the relationship between Michael and me has long since escalated. Just so he won't have any doubts about that. Being direct is how I've always conducted myself, with everyone. Everything's always on the table. There's a price to pay for that and most men can't bear it, but that's me, with all my complexities.

Avi almost chokes on his coffee and starts laughing and coughing at the same time.

"Michael, I think this one's going to teach you a lesson or two."

"Oh no!" I say. "I'm focused on Roy's school at the moment



and have no intention of being anyone else's homeroom teacher." Michael grows serious all at once and looks at me with compassion.

Avi seems pleased with himself and keeps joking. "I still think there's something he could learn from you." He winks at me with his perfect eye.

"Whatever," I reply, putting my number into his phone. Avi looks at me and examines what I'm doing, so I approach him.

"So, do you want it, too?" I address him, amused and confident, but he dismisses the matter with a wave of his hand.

I'm rather offended, practically choking down the tremor I feel spreading from my tailbone to the center of my chest. Thunderous silence gives me away. He gazes at me again, and quickly whispers to me so Michael wouldn't hear: "Keep your number. I want much more from you." He pauses for another moment behind me and goes back to the kitchen with the pile of cups, leaving me confused and completely off-balance.

Michael gathers his belongings, making sure he hasn't forgotten anything.

"The van's already waiting for me outside," he announces. "I'm worried about you, Avi, please take care of yourself."

"What can we do? We'll have to live with it. After all, that's how life goes," he replies sourly, glancing at me for a moment and hugging him warmly. Then he leaves the two of us alone, disappearing again into the kitchen.

Michael quietly approaches me, hugs me tightly and kisses me for a long moment.

“I miss you already.” He grows sad.

“Me too,” I smile warmly.

“See you soon!” he declares, waving as he leaves.

The door slams shut.

All at once I feel so small compared to the huge, spacious house, the growing quiet around me and the tension. Avi appears once again, looking right into my eyes.

“Come on, it’s time for us to have a little chat.” We step out into the huge yard together, where he opens his heart to me in front of the infinity pool.

“You know, I had a really great time with you yesterday,” he declares. “You make me laugh,” he clarifies, “you calm me down, you’re fun to talk to. You’re also smart and fascinating.”

“I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship,” I clarify, and mean it.

“You think I’ll let you disappear now that I’ve finally found you?” he taunts me with a jab. “I’ve got as many friendships as there are grains of sand on the beach. Stop making it so hard,” he asks of me. “Come on. Relax. Talk to me freely, no filters. It’s just you and me.”

“Okay, let’s talk,” I agree.

“But I do have one request from you. Promise me you’ll be completely honest. Otherwise, don’t even bother.”

“Okay, I promise,” I agree to his request.

Hours later it turns out that I’m telling him about my life and

everything I'd gone through with Matthew and what led to our divorce.

"It's so disappointing when you trust someone, shed your desires and dreams to please him, give it your all, dedicate yourself to starting a family and, when it finally ends, you instantly become an enemy," I explain. "The person you've shared your bed and life with becomes mean and cruel, using all your weaknesses to hurt you again and again until you break."

"Do you still love him?" he warmly gazes into my eyes.

"No." I wipe away a tear. "On the contrary. I despise him so much for the pleasure he takes in crushing me when I was so weak compared to him. On the other hand, I'll forever be in his debt for giving me the most wonderful gift I could have ever imagined – my Roy. I love him so much, I'm very attached to him. For years I'd work from home so I could always be at his side, available for all his needs. Now I can't even imagine how the days will go by without him. After all those years with Matthew I feel small, unfulfilled. I lost myself a long time ago, I haven't got a clue who I am. I don't have the strength left to stand tall before the world and pretend I'm strong," I cry uncontrollably. "I have no help from anyone nor someone I can lean on for emotional support."

"I know God has given me so many gifts and has watched over me," I continue, "and I am grateful. But at the same time, I've always denied that I'm a passionate woman in so many ways and, as the years passed, my desires faded, disappeared and changed."

“Then why did you actually break up?” He’s completely immersed in me.

“Well, Matthew spent years depriving me of his warmth and attention, because he felt I was outshining him. He always claimed that the honest and direct way I talked about my feelings and wishes in our relationship intimidated him, and sometimes even offended him. He used to say it made him feel like he didn’t deserve me. But, I insisted on holding onto my desires and dreams and that’s mainly why we fought all the time. I always dreamed of being powerful and a role model for my son. But he continued putting me in this mold and distancing me from everyone and everything that made me feel good about myself. It hurt me terribly. I felt strangled and locked in a gilded cage.”

He wipes away my tears and kisses my forehead.

“Tell me,” he softly whispers.

I weep in front of him, so shamefully and honestly. I’ve never opened up like this to anyone. What is he doing to me?

“He didn’t like it when I expressed an opinion,” I continue, “because he claimed I was too dominant. Then he used to say he was sick of living under my shadow, that I was doing everything I could to draw people’s attention and become likeable. That I always wanted to be right and that I’m a know-it-all. He’d also have crazy jealousy attacks. When he’d threaten me, scream and yell, I was afraid for my safety. So, I chose to live in his shadow, to make our home peaceful and quiet. But, at that point, he already felt very strong and powerful over me, which is why he constantly disrespected

me. He completely broke my heart and shattered all my dreams. I tried my best to keep our house in one piece, but it still wasn't enough. I've been feeling so weak and full of guilt for so long."

Avi only listens, envelopes me, wipes away my tears as they continue to pour from my eyes. He kisses my forehead and holds me close, looking at me with a warm and piercing gaze, like someone who truly understands and has known me for much longer. He holds me so close to his heart and caresses my hair spread all over his chest. When I calm down a bit, I shyly raise my gaze to meet his, and I find his gorgeous eyes staring at me in a way I've never experienced before.

"So, what now?" I break the lingering silence.

"You're very lost, huh?" he clarifies for me.

"I guess." I'm about to collapse in front of him.

"That's it. I've heard enough!" he suddenly calls out. "You're an amazing woman. You've been through so much; it almost broke you spirit. But that's all over now. You need to get up and pull yourself together. You're finally free and you're stronger than you think." He lifts me as he straightens my body in front of him. "This conversation's over for now. I've still got much more to tell you, but we both need a break. So, would you like to accompany me to the hospital today? I've got to check on my grandmother."

"Sure thing!" I answer, forgetting everything and everyone and, in no time, we're making our way to the hospital together.

Our drive to the hospital is a quick and peaceful one, perhaps

thanks to my endless talking.

I get out of the cab. He puts his hand on my shoulder, we pass the security guard and enter the building. We take the elevator to the fourth floor and walk into Ward C, private room 12. There I meet the woman who's so precious to him, lying in bed tired yet welcoming. Her eyes are dull and her face is withered.

"Granny!" He enters the room, stands by her bed and caresses her hair. "My darling, how are you today, sweetie?" He raises the palm of her hand and kisses it again and again and again, wiping a tear that has silently slipped out.

Grandma Lala opens her eyes wider, beaming with joy as she sees his face.

"My Avi! My dear, I've missed you," she bolsters his grip on her palm.

"Same here, my queen!" He emphasizes her importance to him.

"So, I see you've finally decided to bring your wife here?" She glances at me.

He falls silent and looks at her with sad eyes.

"My wife?" he whispers as he gazes at me. "Ah! Yes, my wife. She wanted to see you very much." He decides to twist reality to keep her calm. At the same time, he shoots me an apologetic glimpse, which I immediately dismiss with a quick gesture.

I look at this tired, gorgeous woman. She has sea-blue eyes, her skin is pristine white and grey streaks through her hair as

though bringing secrets to the world from forgotten depths. It's clear she's a woman who's seen and experienced it all. I really feel drawn to her with admiration.

I approach and warmly caress her hand.

"Of course I came, dear Grandma," I gently embrace her. Grandma Lala cooperates and squeezes my hand in response.

"Don't you dare make him sad," she further cautions, "this boy means everything to me, everything!"

"I promise," I reply honestly, having no idea what I'm basing that on.

Avi smiles loosely, giving me an appreciative look. Then he pulls her palm to his heart and kisses it again. He sits at her side and breathes her in.

"You know you're the most important person to me in the world, right, sweetheart?"

Grandma Lala smiles.

"So how are they treating you here? Do you need anything?"

"Only you!" she responds and shuts her beautiful eyes.

"Grandma! I love you so much. Be strong, please. I don't want you to suffer anymore. You're my whole world. What would I have been without you?" He falls apart before her.

Moved, I smile and wipe away my tears. About half an hour passes by.

"Visiting hours are over," the nurse calls out as she passes by each room. "We need to do a shift change and doctor updates. Please leave," she continues.

We both bid farewell to Grandma Lala with a hug and a warm kiss.

“Shall we go for drinks?” he suggests.

I agree immediately. “These transitions aren’t easy. Like from Sunday to the weekday,” I add.

“Yeah, I’m here, she’s there. She can’t save me from myself anymore, no one can.”

“No one but you!” I correct him. “Your relationship is so inspiring. Well done,” I continue. “It’s not at all a given, you know. You can learn everything there is to know about someone based on the way they take care of their loved ones.”

Avi is surprised and embarrassed all at once, but he also feels the palatable closeness between us and surrenders to it.

“Your grandmother seems like an amazing woman! You can really see it bursting out of her,” I explain. “Maybe it’ll sound weird to you, but she really got under my skin. I’m so grateful you brought me here; it was a privilege.”

“Thanks,” he nods. “She’s one of a kind. You know my grandmother never talked to me about marriage?” he smiles.

“Maybe it’s because she knows you well enough to know you’re not serious?” I try to lighten the mood for a bit.

“Yeah! I agree. I never was serious.” He again surprises me with his directness and honesty. He’s so self-aware. “It’s hard for me to bond with people, especially women. I never had anyone serious, relationships and things like that. I mean, there are a whole bunch of women I spend time with. I also have some friendships that are a little more important but, as a



whole, I avoid unnecessary closeness. At least I did until today. I always preferred to block my emotions, I was afraid to get too attached and then risk losing the person. I wanted to avoid ever feeling that emptiness again, and that pain you feel after your loved ones have gone.” He speaks to me so frankly, playing on my heartstrings. “But lately I don’t find superficial dating that interesting. I think I’ve reached the end of my quota of women. Now I’m looking for depth. Companionship. Something else. I’m tired of dulling my loneliness with more meaningless sex. I never had an urge to conquer women. It’s just that the older I got, the more powerful I felt. Later it became amusement, an addiction to the adrenaline and the thrill. I wasn’t able to emotionally commit to anyone. Maybe it’s because of my unresolved issues with my mother. Regardless, these days it’s become a tool to numb some pain, filling voids and blowing off steam. But I hate waking up next to a stranger in the morning. That’s why I never stay. I try not to bring them home either, because I keep them as far from my environment as possible. I never make promises and I try never to belittle them. They understand it’s a momentary urge. When the act’s done, good as it might be, our relationship is over. Until today, I never wanted anyone to sabotage the utopian world I’d created for myself. But here I am, my soul so sick and tired that I want to scream, to weep and be held. But I’m not comfortable doing that with the people around me.”

“Have you considered going to therapy?” I softly caress the back of his hand.

“Honey, more therapy?” he laughs. “I’ve been in therapy from

the day I was born. I suffer from some sort of communication issues. It's hard for me to read other people's feelings correctly and fit into their worlds. Usually people come into my life, drawn by the mystery, and surround me until they grow weary, understanding that there'll be no further progress from here, and then they go on their way. There are some very special people in my life, like Michael, Tony, my brother Dean, and the guys from my unit. I'm myself and vulnerable and feel loved by them, but with others it's a totally different story. Except for you." He looks right into my eyes. "You're something else. The energies you brought with you from Jerusalem are additive."

"Additive?" I try to understand.

"Added value," he clarifies. "You've got something that no one else has, you know what it is?"

"No," I respond, dead serious.

"Authenticity!"

"Avi, that's not the best pick-up line I've ever heard," I smile.

"Forget pick-up lines and all that shit." He takes me by the hand. "I've completely run out of patience for those things!" He pulls my hand to him impatiently. "Let's go home already, I'm want to continue this and get to know you better."



The drive back was quiet, we barely spoke. Our thoughts wandered, each to their own.

"We're here," the cab driver informs us as he stops by the mansion's broad front gate.

“Thanks so much.” He holds out a large bill for the driver. “Keep the change,” he clarifies, and we both head out towards the house. He opens the front gate using his digital fingerprint, and we stride towards the front door, gazing at each other.

“Well,” he clarifies, “it’s your turn now. Do me a favor, go get us something to drink.”

“Hot or cold?” I ask.

“Spicy.” He continues walking towards his room.

I immerse myself in preparing the drinks, wondering what will happen next. I return to him and hold out a half-filled glass of whiskey with ice chips, just like he’d prepared for me the night before. He immediately notices that I’m trying to please him.

“Come here.” He pulls me onto his knees, and my legs – exposed up to the knee – rub against his stunning denim jeans.

“Cheers.” We clink our glasses and drink, looking into each other’s eyes. We get closer. Wrapped in an eruption of passion, we taste the remnants of the whiskey on each other’s lips. And in an instant, like in a romantic movie, he picks me up and hurls me onto his bed, knocking aside my shoes, unbuttoning my pants and ripping any remnant of the light blue collared shirt off me, all with skill and insane speed. My head’s spinning.

Now I’m in white cotton panties and a tight strapless undershirt, exposed before him. He scrutinizes my body, thanking God Almighty for the gift he’s been given, looking at me with a naughty half-smile.

“What’s with this perfection?” He expects no answer.

Avi’s bedcover is a kind of delicate grey fur. I’m sprawled on it as he kisses my body starting from the soles of my feet, slowly making his way to my inner thigh. There he pauses with small bites, accompanied by kisses and delicate sucking on the skin. He gently and attentively takes off my panties, sitting me up in front of him, removing my small undershirt while ceaselessly kissing and caressing my back, which is covered in a cruel chill. I hear the sounds of my passion fill the room, and he’s completely immersed in me as though deaf, desecrating my body, doing what he wills. He slides his thumb over my nipple, and uses his tongue to envelope, pull and bite at it with small, piercing bites while it reacts to him, as though stirring back to life. Even I wasn’t aware of the way it could get so shamelessly erect. My body is practically collapsing beneath him. I let him do whatever he wants to me and enjoy every second of it. He moves his head towards my ear, creating friction and an insane chill that spreads from the tips of my scalp down to my pinky toes.

“I’ve never felt this way,” he blurts out, continuing to explore me and letting loose with ceaseless compliments about my body, its scent and the fact that I’m so smooth and tanned. I’m completely ready for him, waiting for him to seal my fate and take me apart. When I’m in his arms I don’t care about anything. I let loose the tremendous sounds of my orgasm into the space of the room while he sucks my clit and slides his tongue over it again and again, slowly and stubbornly.

“Now it’s your turn!” I clarify, and immediately bend down before him, starting to gently kiss his chest, scattering gentle

bites towards his ribs. I slide my mouth down towards the fine hairs around his navel, and the thin stripe descending towards his balls. I gently caress them, one by one, placing my tongue between them, massaging them with my lips, a kiss, friction, and I slowly rise towards the vein decorating his amazingly beautiful manhood. I make an effort there too and lick it, pulling and gently setting my teeth on it, slowly advancing until I reach his head. This time I don't lick delicately but put all of him into my mouth all at once, halfway down my throat, pulling it in and out with shameful gluttony. I keep going, quickly and thoroughly, enjoying every moment, while he lets out groans of true pleasure.

“You're driving me crazy, what is that?” he grunts. “Are you for real?”

And I carry on proudly, soaking up every compliment I'm receiving, until I feel him lose control into my mouth. Satisfied, I'm filled with pride, smiling a small, surprised smile of victory, still wrapped in passion that's bursting forth, my finger sensually wiping away the remnants of his fluid passions.

“Now it's your turn again!” He flips me over at once and starts placing small, delicate kisses from my tailbone to the line of my butt. Slowly, methodically, he goes in. His tongue gradually reaches for my sphincter, while his fingers massage my clit. His tongue is focused on my ass now and he clings to it like a vacuum, allowing me no movement, it's devoured inside and out, being licked while his mouth stays stable and motionless. I moan with extasy.

Now he grips my cheeks with his hands, kneading them and, for the first time in my life I experience powerful anal pleasure with him only using his tongue. Powerful grunts echo throughout the space of the room.

I climax again – so strongly and just from my anus, I honestly don't know what self-respect I'll have left in this house, with this man.

“Wow!” he pants heavily. “I see you're enjoying this, too.” He smiles in satisfaction. As if the wetness around me is somehow lends any doubt. I choke down a great moan and give in to the pain mixed with pleasure that his palms have left on my exposed skin. “Very much!” I smile, my face radiant with delight.

He lies at my side, resting my head on his chest, caressing my hair.

“You're so beautiful,” he whispers to me. “I feel so much better now.”

I give in to his rough, masculine voice, honest and stirring, diving comfortably and with a sense of security, enveloped in the satisfaction I feel and fall deeply asleep.

The dull sound of my cellphone interrupts my sleep and I open my eyes feeling haunted and suffocated, looking for any remnants of my clothing hidden between the bedcover and scattered around the room.

Avi's gone. I think he must've already gotten bored. You found a perfect time to fall asleep, I grind my teeth at my figure reflected in one of the mirrors hanging in the room. I

track down my phone, intending to answer but the call cuts off. A quick glance at the screen and it knocks me back into reality, to which I'm no longer connected.

It's Matthew. What now? I experience some mild anxiety, worried that he somehow knows everything I've done in the last week. It'd be interesting to see how he'd react to the fact that I've managed to move between two beds. Between two friends. Between a magnificent yacht and a spectacular mansion. That I'm sprawled out here on expensive, luxurious sheets, suffused with pleasure after experiencing wild oral sex for the first time in my life.

I lift myself up and lean back on the pillow, returning Matthew's call with a sense of trepidation and butterflies of anxiety fluttering, giving me stomach cramps and nausea spreading, paralyzing me entirely.

"Hello?" Matthew answers on the second ring. "Sam?"

"Yeah," I answer tensely and quietly.

"I know you're supposed to come pick up Roy tomorrow. The guys invited me to go with them to Eilat this week and I think if Roy joins us, it could be really good for him. To let off some steam," he adds. "After all, it's not every day he's torn between two homes," he adds a jab as only he knows how.

"What are you asking?" I try to glean more details. "For me to just give up his days with me?"

"It's just a week," he continues. "I have no intention of raising him full-time. I won't steal your job," he clarifies with bitter disdain.

“Did you ask him if that’s what he wants?” I’m curious.

“Actually, I did, he heard the guys talking and said he wanted to go with us. I promised him I’d try, and that I’d let him know after wrapping things up with you.”

“In that case,” I detach from my emotions, “if that’s what Roy wants, then all I can do is wish you a good time. I certainly won’t stand between you.”

“Ah,” Matthew adds, “by the way, your apartment’s been dark for the past few days, where have you been?”

“You’ve long since lost the right to ask me questions like that. Get yourself out of my life and let me go already. The only thing left between us now is Roy. So, I take it I’ll be seeing him on Sunday?”

“Monday,” Matthew explains.

“Okay,” I conclude. “Go have fun. Give Roy a kiss from me, and please make sure he calls me every day. I want to hear his voice. It’s not easy for me either, I’ve never been away from him for so long.” I grow sad.

“It’ll be fine.” Matthew continues his trademark indifference that has characterized him all these years. “It’s a period of adjustment for all of us, it’ll pass. We’ll find our way.”

“Okay. Have fun, then.” I hang up and wipe away a tear of longing that falls from my eye.

Avi walks in and sits down next to me.

“Everything okay?” He caresses my cheek.

“Yes,” I sigh. “My vacation’s going to last a few more days



because my ex is going down to Eilat with friends and Roy asked to join him. I couldn't say no. He needs to blow off some steam too, and it could be good for him," I share the news with him.

"Yeah, I agree with you, it might actually calm things down a bit. Besides, this way I can enjoy you, exclusively." As he says this, I feel the enormous sexual tension between us reawaken.

I gasp for breath, shut my eyes and hold my body tight. On one hand, I feel real serenity and have no doubt that I'm in the most right place for me in the world. But on the other hand, I feel exposed before him, needy and alone. I tremble in fear of falling in love with this guy, uncontrollably, unrestrained. But just who am I kidding? I already don't know how to go on living without his presence, even though a moment ago I felt completely lightheaded over Michael. What on earth will happen to me?

He peeks at me insolently, trying to track the storm spreading through me, and he lifts up to meet my gaze.

"I think I really like you, Sam," he whispers to me with deep intimacy as our eyes meet.

"I'm glad to hear that," I answer, and sparks of consumption wound me. "I really like you too!" I give him a measured smile. If he only knew what his presence does to me, how his touch affects me. Despite my rich experience with the other sex, I've never felt this way before. The levels of adrenaline coursing through me are the wildest my body had ever felt. Not Matthew, not others, not even Michael has ever made me feel these delirious feelings, between pain and maddening

pleasure. His intensity intoxicates me. His honesty, the way he carries himself. How does he make me lose all proportions on our very first morning together? What'll happen now? What will I do? I'm held captive by his every whim. I'd better acknowledge that, before I lose all good judgment. Avi's the dark side of my urges, he's gotten right into my mind, body and soul. I don't stand a chance against him anymore, I admit to myself.

"You're so gorgeous!" he continues to arouse me. "Are you even aware of that?" He caresses my body. "Your skin's just perfect." He smells my hair and brushes it back. "Perfect hair, perfect breasts." He lustfully massages my right breast, his other hand lies on my aching belly and caresses it, dispelling every bit of discomfort I had just felt. I feel like a happy kitten in his hands, purring, delighting in his touch, his smell and his voice, all of which draw me closer to him.

Of course he isn't aware of this, but my anxieties always pooled in my belly. As far back as I can remember, I've felt a sharp pain every time my adrenaline levels spiked, and anxiety or discomfort welled up within me. This pain weakens me, completely paralyzes me. There are a bunch of unresolved issues in that nexus of my nerves. And here he is, skillfully and unknowingly unraveling all the complicated tangles, and I lose myself before him again.

He brushes his lips against my neck, giving me goosebumps again. In a new burst of passion, he stretches his body towards me, bending over me, completely exposed, so enjoying his touch, letting all my inhibitions loose and defiantly pulling his amazing hair back, lifting up towards him as we share a heated

kiss, as he ceaselessly caresses all of me and looks at me in total admiration. He's losing himself before me, appearing defenseless, and I feel our two souls twining together in a spark of marvelous, stimulating and revivifying connection. I confidently sit upon him, having removed any trace of clothes or boundaries. I breathe in his skin, loosely kissing the dip between his neck and earlobe, driving him wild. I lean over him, touching his entire body with rampant lust. With slow, deep, synchronized motions I move my thighs up and down in tandem, painfully pleasurable. I drive him, and us, into a frenzy, letting out absolutely shameless grunts into the space of the room.

"I'm going to empty myself inside you," he notes with absolute seriousness.

"Don't even think of pulling out!" I hiss at him, shifting gears, becoming more and more demanding. My entire void is filled with his manhood, so perfectly suited to the task. He grunts and breathes heavily, strongly pulling me back and forth, doing with me as he pleases, like I'm not there, hurting me at the exact margin between pleasure and pain, and loudly releases himself into me.

"Wow," he disentangles from me after long minutes of mutual panting, and tries to regulate his breathing.

I slowly get off him, wiping away the remaining fluids we both released, and softly lie down on the bed with my back to him. I relax a bit and my mind is giddy, recounting all that I'd done and my absolutely wanton lust.

"Sam," he interrupts my wayward thoughts. "I think I'm

completely in love with you.”

What? What does he mean? My eyes are rolling up in exhaustion. I’m again gripped by uncontrollable fatigue.

He places one hand on my shoulder and the other on the side of my ass, lying on his side, spooning me as we both collapse into sweet, confused sleep.

“Avi?” A male voice rings out in the room. “Are you here?” The door opens and I immediately leap up, trying and failing to cover myself.

He stretches, drowsy, and pulls me back to him.

“Come back here. Where’re you going?”

“There’s someone in the room!” I mutter at him.

He lifts his gaze and returns it to me.

“It’s just Tony, honey, relax, no pressure.” He pulls me back to him. “Get out of here, now!” he raises his voice at him.

Tony immediately leaves and shuts the door behind him.

“Why so stressed, gorgeous?” His indifference and coolness are driving me nuts. He stretches over me and envelops my naked body.

“Are you crazy?” I shout at him. “He saw me naked, he’s seen us together, what the hell did we do? Imagine if he blurts out something to Michael. It’s all just a game to you, isn’t it?”

I get up at once and demonstratively march to the shower, running the comforting water and wanting the sound of the

stream to drown out the noise raging within me. I pour a generous amount of liquid, scented soap into my palm and massage every part of my body, letting my hair and body be washed away by the pampering water.

With no preparation, he surprises me and walks in, completely naked. He stands behind me, caressing my body as it's now covered in soapy foam and water. He washes himself, too, and we both silently give in to the flow of the water for long, rejuvenating moments.

Then he shuts off the water and wrings my hair dry.

“I think you're clean enough, aren't you?” he deviously whispers to me. I'm just paralyzed by his mesmerizing eyes and his meaty lips flashing over the drops of water on my eyelids.

“You think?” I hiss.

He opens the shower door, guides me out with one hand and reaches out to me with the other, letting me emerge like a really spoiled princess. I pull out a bright, scented towel big enough to wrap my whole soaked body and he stands behind me, naked and dripping water.

He starts rubbing his body behind my towel-clad back, pulling me to him, pressing in and drying himself. He's pleased with himself. Like a child, I smile inwardly. My legs respond at once. I melt before him like jelly, feeling my strength abandon me. Passion erupts directly from my navel and I let out a restrained moan. He's so attentive to my body and immediately identifies my pain centers, embracing and caressing with both hands enveloping my belly, accompanying

me back to the room.

He opens his wardrobe and asks, “what do you want to wear?”

“I don’t know,” I answer, ashamed. “What time is it anyway? Do I have anything to do today?”

“Are you confused?”

“Very,” I admit. “I don’t know what’s been going on with me in the past few days. I’ve lost all judgment and equilibrium.”

“Why not give that confusion of yours a rest and enjoy the here and now?”

“Because I can’t afford to do that! Do you understand?” My voice becomes aggressive. Wrapped in a towel, I angrily turn to and fro, and for the first time I honestly unload all my deliberations and stress onto him.

“Avi, you don’t even know me, you don’t understand what I’ve had to go through recently. Feelings of irresponsibility, guilt and wantonness are overwhelming me. To you it’s just another small thrill,” I continue, unrestrained, “another addition to your collection. For me, what’s happening between us changes my entire meaning as a mother and a woman. Understand, in the past few days I’ve lost the spine I managed to bolster over the past few years. It wasn’t easy for me at all.” I keep going, in a wounded and fragile voice. “Besides Roy and myself, I have no one to rely on. I can’t lose myself, Mr. Levi. Please, I’m sincerely asking – don’t lead me on. Don’t toy with me and make me feel special or important, because the day I return home, that emptiness will be so huge that I’ll break and won’t be able to cope anymore. That’s why we need

to end our little affair right now.”

“Sam,” he pulls me by my hand. “It’s not like that, stop, please. You’re making me sad. It’s not what you think.”

“I need you to step out for a second so I can get dressed. I’m serious.” I add.

He laughs. “Listen, you’re completely insane. But for some reason I really like it. Please calm down and tell me what you’d like to wear.”

“Are you kidding me?” I smile, helpless and wondering.

“Yes,” he replies, completely serious. “That’s exactly what I’m doing. Come on, Princess. Pick out some tracksuit that smells like me.”

How the hell could I resist him? I shut up and obey at once. “Safer to get dressed anyway,” I clarify for both of us. I choose a branded, light grey tracksuit. He unfurls my towel and drops it onto the mattress. Goosebumps. He takes it from me and dresses me in it, pressing the pleasant and warm fabric on my tingling body. The sweatpants reach past my buttocks, tightening its grip there, lifting the flap and saying: “All you’re missing here are panties.” He lightly pats my blushing bottom. “But... I can live with that, too,” he smiles a wicked smile to himself that makes me wildly horny. I’m completely melting and again stifling a moan.

Out of nowhere, he starts tickling me. I roll around in uncontrollable, hysterical laughter, pleading with him to leave me be, that I can’t take it anymore. Then he suddenly stops, grips me, presses me to him and drops us both down to the

bed. He looks into my eyes and I look at him, completely drawn in.

“Miss Sam,” he continues in a wildly sexy and cracked voice, “you have no clue what you do to me.” His voice cracks even more and he continues with his outpouring of emotions. “I have no idea how you’ve come to me, but you’ve shot right into my heart, like a highway. I’ve found tranquility with you, warmth, a sense of home. I’ve enjoyed talking to you, you’ve even made me laugh, which isn’t easy,” he clarifies. “I’ve let you in on a lot of personal things and difficulties I face these days, mainly with my dear grandmother. This kind of sharing isn’t normal for me.”

His thumb rises to my lips, which are parted in shock by his disclosure.

“And on top of everything else, I’m wildly attracted to you!” he declares, unapologetic and resolute. I choke. “We both deserve to enjoy this electricity between us, don’t you agree, babe? It’s not like we owe anyone anything. You’re free, I’m free,” he pauses for a moment and grows serious. “I understand you feel guilt about Michael, and I totally agree with you. But, with all due respect, it’s not something I planned in advance. It’s not something that’s happened to me before with Michael’s other girlfriends. Usually, his women aren’t my type. For years I’ve accompanied him to ceremonies and parties, but I despise the spotlight and I’m disgusted by that lifestyle. And those women of his radiate sex but, in reality, they can’t even sit up straight, their whole bodies are plastic, unnatural, like you’re having sex with a waterbed.” He busts out laughing.



I join in on the spontaneous laughter, even though I don't wholly believe him.

"For years I've begged him to retire and take care of his mental health. To surround himself with an environment worthy of him, and not people secretly awaiting his collapse. Unfortunately, he keeps going back to it, regardless."

"He's too famous. So capable in everything he does, a supernatural talent. A wonderful man and person." I grow sad.

"He is indeed," he smiles, "but too much of anything is never enough. Don't you see? Today he's there, in two days he'll be here. In a month he'll fly out for reshoots, that can take at least half a year. In other words, he's not really here. From what I've gotten to know about you, you need someone who'll love you at all times, not just for a few measured hours. You need to feel secure; you need a lot of attention." He smiles again, happy. "I certainly intend to do all that." His smile turns wicked. "You're here, I'm here. What we have between us is real and right for both of us. Let me explain things to him. I'm sure he'll understand and hold it against us." He tries to calm my conscience, without much success, as we're the only two who know the depths of what we've experienced in the brief but significant time we've shared together.

"Besides, I'm really good with kids," he proudly emphasizes, "so I can't wait to meet your dear Roy. The truth is, when I imagine you as a mom I get really turned on. What a hot mom." He's excited and cups my exposed buttocks. "Sorry," he immediately corrects himself, "you're a beautiful mother." He presses me to his body, closes his eyes and slowly, softly

breathes me in.

“Thanks.” I let out a small, satisfied smile, allowing myself to dive into his warm and enveloping embrace.

“Come on, gorgeous,” he interrupts long moments of silence, “let’s get some food in you. Comb your hair, get organized and we’ll head out.”

“Avi,” I immediately lift myself up and look at him shyly, “is there any chance you can get my bag of clothes from Michael’s room, please? I need underwear,” I try to quietly remind him.

“You think there’s even the slightest chance I’ve forgotten that detail?” He continues heading for his underwear drawer.

“I hope not!” I answer courageously.

“Excellent! Then we’re both on the same page.” He pulls a pair of white underwear out of the closet. “I want you to wear these,” he smiles at me, illuminated.

I’m immediately aroused again.

“I want you to feel it there,” he shamelessly points at his manhood, then at my crotch.

As he says these words, I’m rooted to the floor and all at once I acknowledge the fact that this man can completely control me.

“You’re very dangerous to me!” I snatch the underwear from him and he bursts out laughing. I put them on, comb my hair quickly and follow him out.

We’re both smiling as we walk to the kitchen where we find

Tony, an impressive and elegant man, dark-haired and green-eyed, sitting comfortably on a bar stool next to the enormous ivory-colored kitchen isle streaked with black and silver.

“Good morning, world!” Tony speaks, his gaze immersed in the phone he’s holding in his hand. “So you just disappear on me? No answer, no call. We’re all going crazy with worry and you’re having a good night’s sleep?” he teases.

“I got rid of the phone and slept great!” Avi declares, satisfied, and places his hand on his chest. “How could anyone behave otherwise next to this goddess?”

His words embarrass and empower me all at once.

“That’s it? Are you for real? Are you feeling okay? Maybe you’re running a fever?”

“I’m fine. Thank you for your concern.”

“So why don’t you introduce me to your goddess?” Tony gives me an insolent look.

“Gladly!” He immediately leaps up and takes my hand as he looks at me.

“Sam, this is Tony. A childhood friend of mine, my confidante and lawyer. Tony, this is Sam Rodriguez. The goddess of beauty, sex and love. In other words: Venus,” he exaggerates, running his free hand over my body.

Tony falls silent and looks me over. I’m embarrassed and tense, mainly due to the filthy things he’d whispered to me as I put on his clothes. Feelings of beauty and pride spreading through me make me want to beam. I feel so beautiful through his eyes.

“Pleased to meet you!” He holds his hand out, and as I reach my free hand towards him, he leans down to kiss it.

“Venus, after all,” he taunts and jabs at him.

“As you should be! Sam’s a real princess, so I expect you and everyone around to act accordingly. And I suggest you not test me on that.” He grows serious. “Knocking before you walk into my room isn’t a bad idea either,” he points to the door. “She’s important to me, and she’s also got an adorable kid who’ll be visiting here soon, so I’m warning you in advance, don’t you dare breathe a word of what’s happening here, or God forbid act like a creep, are we clear?” He speaks to him in a disdainful tone.

Tony chuckles and nods. “Sure thing. Good luck to you.”

“Thanks,” he concludes. “Shall we order out?”

“Actually,” I hear my voice for the first time in this room, “I can cook us up something if you want.”

“Excellent!” Avi’s beaming with joy. “She even cooks! I told you she was a goddess.”

Embarrassed by his words, a blush again rises to my cheeks.

“Let’s see what we’ve got here.” He opens the freezer door and I spot a bag of Chinese vegetables for stir-frying. I pull it out quickly. “How about stir-fry noodles?”

“Sounds great!” they both immediately agree.

I get to work while he approaches and ties a small black apron around my waist.

“So you don’t get this shirt dirty, right? I need your scent!” I

swallow silently. I'm determined to fix him a meal that'll be the essence of my feelings for him, the whole sensual current I feel when I'm around him. I prepare the food, chopping, washing, spicing, boiling and straining until everything's ready and smells perfect.

"Time to eat!" I call out into the space of the room. He pulls out some fancy white Japanese-style bowls, and I pour my heart out into his.

"You know," I whisper to him, quietly so only he hears, while softly running my hand across the back of his neck, his body immediately tingling as I smile to myself, "my heart's a lot like this meal. Everything's mixed up, bungled together and unclear. But at the same time – true, right, full of color, beauty and flavor, perfect harmony."

He looks at me, stunned.

"You're the essence of that perfection." A large quantity of spiced and scented noodles rolls onto his fork, and he greedily sticks it all into his mouth. "Wow, that's delicious!" he exaggerates again, licking his lips.

"Bon appétit, darling!" I burst out laughing.

He stops, looking at me.

"Thanks so much, Princess."

I pour them some white wine I found in the fridge and the three of us clink glasses.

"Cheers," we call out, and Avi adds: "Blessed is He who has granted us life, sustained us, and allowed us to arrive at this time." I gaze at him, uncomprehending.

Tony shoots him a skeptical glance as well.

“What do you mean?” I look at him in embarrassment.

“I mean that you’re Venus, a goddess and here, too,” he places my hand on his heart. “I’m very much enjoying the way you’re taking care of me.” He kisses the back of my hand, holding it in his own and adding: “And I’m sure I’ll very much enjoy taking care of you too.”

Tony takes a long look at Avi and examines his actions curiously and, a moment later, he bursts into uncontrollable laughter.

“Avi, I’m really sorry if this isn’t my place, but look how you’re all over this girl. I really don’t know you to be like that. Goo-goo eyes, hugs and caresses. Is everything okay with you? Two days ago, I didn’t even know she existed and now, today...”

“I didn’t know either.” He loses his patience, and his gaze pierces Tony angrily. “Now I do. I think I’m past the age where someone else decides what’s right for me and what isn’t. I suggest you all start getting used to the new situation, and the sooner the better.”

Tony falls silent.

“I’m happy for you, buddy,” he says after a moment of brief amazement, patting his arm strongly and lovingly.

“Thanks, pal!” he replies patiently. “It really feels so good,” he proudly presents me with an empty bowl, a satisfied smile spread across his face.

I say nothing, proudly gazing at this man, loving the way I’m

reflected in his eyes. The things we've shared, rare moments of openness and honesty, make me feel fortunate.

After dinner we decide to head to the beach and talk. We quickly return to the subject that pains him so, and he again tells me about his grandmother.

"My grandmother lost her whole family in the Holocaust, like most of Germany's Jews," he grows sad. "She barely survived the inferno. When she arrived in Israel at the end of the war, she was so broken and tired. And then, miraculously, she met my grandfather, Yitzchak. In a short time, he became her only family, and he gave her a reason to live. She loved him very much." He smiles and wipes away a tear.

"He'd already settled in Israel; he had a small textile factory and was relatively solvent. They met at the kibbutz where she was processed. After they got married, they wanted kids, to continue the line and 'choose life', you surely understand."

"Of course," I nod, softly caressing his face.

"But unfortunately, after my dad was born, she found out she couldn't have any more kids. So she devoted herself to him utterly and blindly. She protected him like he was made of glass. You can't even begin to understand."

"So he was spoiled, too?" I smile.

"Very much so! They gave him everything. Sent him to Switzerland to learn medicine back when it was very expensive. She cancelled herself out completely for him and invested all of herself in him. When he graduated, he met my mom, they fell in love immediately and made a home for

themselves here. They had this crazy love. He worked really hard, he was a doctor after all, but they always kept the fire between them alive. They both really worked at being happy. Their happiness and their family were everything to them. It wasn't coincidence that they had seven kids."

"And you've got good relationships with all of them?" I ask.

"Generally, yes. The younger ones and I have a common language. But I'm crazy about my nephews." His face lights up. "I love kids in general. They have a different kind of truth, a complete innocence of sorts."

"Anyway, after my dad was murdered, my grandmother took on the role as our mother figure, and my big brother, Dean, became an unwilling father. We're very close. He knows about all my brokenness."

"By the way," I interrupt him, "it turns out I know him." I smile.

"How?" he asks, curious.

"I was a huge fan of his in high school. He was so talented and handsome."

He bursts out laughing. "Good thing it's genetic," he says, kissing me warmly. "Michael's that way, too. Say, have you heard the story of how we met?" he wonders.

"Yeah, but I'd love to hear it from your side."

"When I was seventeen, I visited some famous LA diner with Dean. We sat there talking aloud and laughing. We'd just talked about the IDF conscription notice I'd gotten. Michael was sitting there with his agent at the time. He heard our



Hebrew and all the army talk and addressed us. We talked, and that's how I came into his life. Since then, he hasn't let me go," he jokes. "We hung out a few times. Back then he was in very bad shape and pleaded with me to stay with him in America for the rest of summer vacation, and that we'd go to Israel together later when it was his turn to enlist. I took care of him like a child. He was devastated."

"I can imagine," I soften.

"We healed our pain together and balanced each other out. He also supported me financially when I was starting the business and invested millions in it. Since then, he's made lots of money off it, of course," he smiles, "and so have I."

"In other words, he means the world to me. Ugh, I've talked so much! I'm shocked at myself," he blushes. "You just fascinate me so," he pauses and gives me a hot kiss. "Shall we go back?"

"Yeah, I'll admit I'm getting tired."

"Not too tired, I hope," he smiles.

"Don't worry! I'm sure you'll find a way to keep me awake. I've missed your perfect body," I smile naughtily.



## Chapter 10

“Good morning.”

I awake and witness a pair of gray-blue eyes, deep, glimmering, smiling and inviting, followed by a charming smile.

“Good morning!” I stretch.

“Coffee in bed?” I immediately sit up and smile with surprise. He serves me a cup of coffee with a pastry and a purplish rose he had picked from the garden.

“How wonderful! Thank you.” I kiss his cheek. I enthusiastically smell the perfect rose. “I adore flowers!” I was up with a gust of bliss. I take another sniff from the flower’s intoxicating scent.

“Bon appetite, princess.” He smiles warmly. “I have to leave early this morning to visit my grandmother. I also have a couple of urgent things to do at the office. Could you please join me today?” He smiles.

“I’d be happy to,” I reply, relishing in each bite of this amazing halva pastry.

“Great, honey. So, I’ll wait for you in the office while you get ready.”

“Okay,” I quickly put on the jeans I’ve worn on the first day when I had met him and decide to change things up and put on an olive tank top. I apply some light makeup and head to his office.

“Avi, I’m so pleased that you’re sharing your life with me. I enjoy being in your company. These last couple of days were very meaningful to me. You’re meaningful to me. I’ll gladly spend the day with you, and then I’ll return to my home. All my things are there, okay?”

“That’s it? You want to run off?” He looks at me with a smile.

“Not at all!” I exclaim. “It’s just that my choice of clothes is running out,” I explain as I point at the last clean item I’ve got, which is this tank top.

“Sounds good to me,” he approaches me, stands in front of me and pulls on the G-string peeking from my jeans. “The less the better,” he explains, and looks at me hungrily.

Heat spreads up my legs.

“Come on! Let’s take care of that.”

“No, no, absolutely not.” I stand my ground in the face of his stunned expression. “Firstly, I have no patience for it. Second, I’ve got heaps of clothes back home. Trust me, I don’t need any more.”

“Arguing is pointless,” he teases me. “Although I’m not really into shopping, but I’ll make sure you have your own exclusive collection right here, okay, honey? Only things I like, so I can show you how I feel about you and how gorgeous you are to me. Don’t waste our precious time together on collecting unnecessary things.”

“If you insist,” I give in impatiently. I don’t want him thinking I’m ungrateful.

“I insist!” He calls Maya, his personal assistant, and tells her

what type of clothes he'd like and my size. He asks her to cover everything, from A to Z.

“And make sure it's all in good taste. She's a special and stunning woman,” he emphasizes. “I'll send you some pictures. Don't let me down!” He hangs up.

“I'm ready to go,” I announce.

“Me too,” he shuts his laptop at once. We still have a long day ahead of us, I contemplate, as we leave the mansion together. We arrive at the hospital. Grandma Lola isn't doing any better. Her complexion seems to have become more translucent.

“She hasn't opened her eyes since yesterday,” the doctor explains. “Unfortunately, that isn't a good sign. You need to prepare for the worst,” he pats on Avi's shoulder. “I really am sorry.” Avi is devastated.

“My Sultana!” He bursts out in tears. “You're so dear to me. Thank you for every moment I've spent in your presence. You've taught me so much about life, about the power of love and sacrifice. I promise I won't let you down. I promise to open up my heart to the world. I'll cherish all the kind words you've ever told me.”

As I struggle to face his sincerity and vulnerability, I quietly and hesitantly approach him. When he looks at my face, he stands up, and embraces me tightly as he weeps on my shoulder.

“It's time to leave,” the nurse asks. “She needs to rest.” We leave together, completely shaken. On the way back to the car, we barely speak a word. All the words that were previously

said seem to hang in the air.

“Let’s head for the office first. I asked Maya to schedule a brief meeting so I can update the guys in the office about my grandmother.” We drive past a tall and impressive building. It has large orange letters that read: “Avi Levi International Cyber Solutions.”

“Wow, what an impressive building!” I smile at him.

He smiles.

“Avi,” he explains, “which also means father in Hebrew; for me it means ‘my father’ rather than just a nickname for Abraham.”

“I understand,” I embrace him warmly. “It’s perfect.”

He parks the Porsche in his private parking spot. We step out, happy to stretch our legs and walk to the building.

“Hello, everyone!” he cries out as he walks inside.

“Hey Avi,” everyone responds at once.

“I would like to ask everyone to gather in the main conference room,” Maya, his assistant, urges everyone.

“I need to share a couple of things with you,” he adds.

The staff’s preparations and whispers disrupt the silence. We both head to the room and wait for everyone to arrive. “I’ve summoned all of you here today to give you a couple of updates,” he begins. “I’m aware that our company is currently at the height of its success. And yet, sadly, recently I’ve been dealing with a couple of personal issues that prevent me from optimally running the company. Therefore, in other words, I

find myself reconsidering things. Most of you know that my grandmother's condition is deteriorating. Unfortunately, I sense the end is near and I desperately need some time to rest. After years of having neglected my personal affairs and completely dedicating myself to our work and success, I feel that I should make some time to address other concerns in my life. I've already notified Ben, my right-hand man these past couple years, that I would like him to take over for me, for an undetermined period of time. Of course, Tony will keep me posted so, if necessary, I'll be here to support you from afar. I need a break. So, to new beginnings!" He concludes and lifts one of the glasses Maya had prepared beforehand.

"To new beginnings!" Everyone repeats and applauds.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm in a hurry and need to head out," he leaves no time for the wound to heal. "Wishing you all a good day, until we meet again."

He grabs my hand and we both step out, leaving his staff speechless.

"Wow, what a speech!" I exclaim. He keeps marching as he pulls my arm behind him.

"I meant it," he emphasizes and embraces me warmly.

"Where should we go from here?"

"Let's go grab a bite," he pulls my hand and leads me back to the Porsche. The car pulls over at a modern brunch restaurant. There are celebrities, models and businessmen among the diners.

"Is this a place for rich people only?" I joke.

“No, my lovely. It’s a place for hungry people only,” he chuckles as he pulls out the chair for me. I sit down. The owner greets us happily, warmly shakes his hand and pats his shoulder.

“My man! I missed you! Where have you been? I’ve barely seen you lately. And where’s Michael, that stud. His fans still come here every day hoping to see him,” he snickers.

Avi smiles. “Well, Sammy, that really isn’t news. What can I tell you, life isn’t a bed of roses.” He takes a deep breath and stifles his tears. “I’ve been going through some things, as we all are, you know. Thank you for asking. But actually, my girlfriend and I have come here to have a light breakfast and then we’ll be on our way,” he hints, quite unsubtly. I smile. His girlfriend?!

“Yes, yes, of course,” Sammy gets the hint immediately. “What would you like to have?”

“Let’s go off menu; just keep the delicious treats coming. Let’s make an impression on this gorgeous woman of mine.”

“You really don’t need to do that,” I quickly object. “I’m not that hungry. I’m pretty stuffed. Something light will certainly do.”

We both agree and a couple of moments later, they start piling our table with beef carpaccio, sashimi, special tortillas and other appetizers. Our table is packed with exquisite colors, smells and flavors. We start to dig in, savoring the delightful flavors and textures, when we suddenly hear a woman’s voice.

“Avi?” A stunning woman in her early twenties looks at him

with her hazel eyes.

“Lee, what are you doing here?” He instantly stands up and hugs her warmly.

My heart wrenches. I’m physically in pain! Was I just jealous? What’s wrong with me? I only met him yesterday! I immediately berate myself.

“I’m here with Natali, you surely remember she likes eating here. It’s so wonderful to see you! Both of you,” she corrects herself and then looks at me. I’m overwhelmed with embarrassment and anxiety starts creeping up my body.

“This is Sam,” he points at me, and we shake hands.

“I’ve been trying to reach you for more than a week,” she looks straight into his eyes. “Is everything alright? When are we going to see you around?” She licks her lips. “I really miss you.”

“Lee,” his expression immediately turns serious. “Come with me for a second,” he asks, and walks with her to an isolated corner, however, still in sight. They start whispering.

I look at them and sense a pinch of pain as he hugs her, caresses her head and wipes her tear away. He patiently explains to her that hurting her is the last thing he wants. Finally, she falls silent, looks at me, sadly takes the purse she had left back in her seat, and storms out.

“What’s wrong?” I inquire the very moment he returns. “Is she an ex of yours?”

“No,” he replies. “Not an ex; a friend.”



“Really? And how far did you take this ‘friendship’?” I smile sarcastically. “It’s pretty clear the two of you were together,” I make it clear that I don’t buy into his lies.

“Pretty far,” he admits. “I adored her.” Once again, he stuns me with his sincerity. “That girl and her friend, Nataly, were my weakness. I’d start every morning with one of them. Sometimes, with both.” He keeps telling me without an inch of shame or shyness. “It was the only way I could get through the past year,” he explains. “She’s a good girl, I swear she is.”

“I’m sure she is,” I stifle a giggle. An embarrassed grin spreads on his lips. Good! At least I made him a little ashamed of himself. “And what now?”

“Now, she needs to move on with her life, as do I. Life is stronger than everything, even than death,” he becomes sullen again. “I don’t want to lead the superficial life I led before. My grandmother’s illness and the unbelievable pressure I’ve been under have left no room in my life for anyone else. But that’s all over now. I’m out of excuses. I’ll completely turn my life around and fill it with people who are dear to me, who I enjoy spending time with. Like you. You’re my future. I can feel it, Sam. Nothing or no one, as sweet or pretty as they were, managed to break through the walls protecting my heart. I guess that’s what’s it like when you fall in love, isn’t it?” he continues. “Aren’t I right?” He looks it at me as if I were the expert on it.

“While it’s true that I’ve had my fair share of serious or less than serious relationships, unfortunately, I cannot say I’ve met anyone who’s swept me off my feet,” except for Michael, I

confess to myself. “Nowadays, that’s not what I’m looking for,” I clarify. “The next man I get involved with will have to love me for who I am, or simply move on. I am who I am, scars and all. If I don’t accept myself, no one will do it for me.”

“So, you’ve given up on love?”

“Not at all!” I reply sincerely. “As far as I’m concerned, love is the most powerful force. It creates life. Although with age, experience and insight, I see that love comes in many different forms. I’m looking for an accepting, respectful and trusting kind of love, the type that I can confidently rely on, simply rest my head on his shoulder and cherish that person.

“In short, a boring kind of love,” he smiles.

“An intense love. I want someone who’ll completely give themselves to me. Someone with whom I could lose myself because I’ve chosen to, and not because he forced me into disregarding my priorities. Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes, of course,” he says in all seriousness. “You want me. You won’t find anyone more intense and boring than me.”

I guffaw. “Are you serious, Mr. Levi, or are you mocking me?”

“Are you the only one who’s allowed to joke at your own expense?” He furrows his brow with amusement.

“Yes, only I’m allowed.”

“You’re absolutely right,” he apologizes. “Ms. Sam, you’ve completely driven me mad. I want to lose myself with you. Passive, active, however you’ll have me,” he chuckles. “Are

you done?” He points at my plate.

“Yes,” I reply. “I’m stuffed, I don’t know how I’ll walk out of here.”

“Who said anything about walking, if we can roll around?” He bewitches me with his direct approach, as he glares into my eyes.

“Avi, you drive me insane,” I laugh out loud, embarrassed.

“It’s mutual, honey. Let’s go. It’s time to play around a little. After all, I’ve cleared the whole day.”

“What? Did you do all that for me?” I’m embarrassed.

“I did all of that for us.” He looks straight in my eyes as he fondles my buttocks and pulls me closer to him. “It’s too bad we’re here now,” he softly whispers into my ear. “I would have loved to pin you down!” he threatens and bites his lower lip. He gestures at his cheek for me to kiss it. I kiss him warmly, then he gestures at his other cheek. I feel like a little girl who’s just gotten a handful of candy from her grandparents in exchange for a couple of kisses. A childlike and pure feeling. I fondly kiss his other cheek. Now, he’s gesturing me to kiss his lips and instantly kisses me passionately, as everyone stares at us in amazement.

“By tomorrow everyone will know we’re together. It’ll save me a lot of explaining.”

“Are you serious?” I’m in complete shock.

“Do I have anything to hide? On the contrary,” he replies to himself, “I’m marking my territory.”

I'm so empowered by his words and blush. He's the most amazing man in the world! I feel so confident and strong just by being at his side. I'll do anything in my power not to lose him; I'm determined. This time, I'll see things differently. I'll try to have more faith. It might pay off, who knows? Michael is very dear to me, but Avi is my weakness.



## Chapter 11

We return home together. My phone rings. It's a private number.

"Avi, I'll take the call outside, as I have no idea who it is."

"Ok, my sweetheart," he replies, moving me with his choice of words. "I'll be in the office in the meantime, I need to send out a couple of emails," he explains. I quickly kiss his cheek as I turn to the large backyard.

"Hello there, princess!" It's Michael on the other line. "We've landed about an hour ago. I'm at the hotel room, and my bed is very empty without you in it," he says.

"Michael," I swoon, "I miss you too."

"How's Roy doing?"

"Roy?" I mutter. "I didn't end up seeing him. Matthew offered to take him with his friends on a week-long vacation to Eilat, so I couldn't refuse."

"I can't believe it!" he says angrily. "If I would have known that I would have brought you along. I would have given you a private performance!"

I giggle embarrassedly. "I miss you too."

"So, what are you doing now?"

"You won't believe it. But I ended up going with Avi to the hospital and we spent these days together. He asked me to stay here with him for the time being. I hope you don't mind," I

add.

“Are you joking? I’m actually really happy!” he replies. “I’ve noticed you two had a special connection. It makes me very happy. Usually, he dislikes my lady friends. Well, we do know that you’re nothing like all the other women. You’re so special! A real princess.”

“Michael, you’re amazing. So when’s your concert?”

“In two days. We’ll rehearse early tomorrow morning, do some sound checks. After this concert, I’m off to Paris. That way I can visit my sister.”

“Michelle lives in Paris? I had no idea.”

“Yes, she used to be Pierre Cardin’s leading model, so she’s been living there for quite some time. After that, she started designing, too. She’s doing really well over there. She also has a huge haute couture studio, you know.”

“Good for her that she followed her dreams and pursued them, in France, no less!” I am impressed.

“Michelle isn’t what you think she is,” he laughs. “Her destructive streak is just as dominant as mine. Even Avi detests her.”

“Are you serious? It sounds complicated,” I immediately become serious and thank God that he can’t see my expression.

“No, not really complicated. Pretty simple, actually. Ever since she’d met him, she won’t stop doing everything in her power to be with him. She sees Avi as the greatest love of her life, and she can’t seem to shake it off. Unfortunately, he can’t

stand her. He claims that she's dumb and unbelievably shallow. But the more he rejects her, the more she does to seduce him. Never mind. We'll talk about it some other time. I'm sure you'll get to know her. I'm pretty curious to see what you'll think about her."

Wow, could this really be happening? Once again, my fantasy crumbles right in front of my eyes.

"Yes, I'd love to get to know her. Okay, talk to you soon. You should rest, don't spread yourself too thin," I feign lightness, even though I feel a lead lump forming in my belly, pulling it down, weighing on me.

"Okay, princess. Have a wonderful day, and here's a kiss for you! And hug Avi for me."

"Sure, I promise," and then we hang up.

I return back inside with a long face. The plot thickens. How can I plan a future with Avi if Michael's sister is madly in love with him? They'll both never forgive me. I feel so unsure and threatened again. I find it interesting that Avi didn't think to share that 'minor' detail with me that could, potentially, affect our entire relationship. It's not that he could hide that from me for long. What if he finally decides he wants a relationship with her?

I decide to approach him and ask him directly. I have no time for lies and games. I want to get down to the bottom of this. I lightly knock on the half-open office door.

"Are you crazy?" he lifts up his gaze. "Come in already!"

"Avi, it was Michael on the phone. He's landed and arrived at

his hotel.”

“And?” He looks at me, puzzled.

I become glum. He looks at me and realizes that his answer hasn't satisfied me.

“I'm sorry that I'm unimpressed. He flies off every other day. Is everything alright?”

“We had a little conversation. He'll continue from there to Paris, to meet Michelle.” I hope he picks up on the hint and spills out the beans.

“Ugh, her again,” he returns to his computer at once.

“It doesn't seem that you're too fond of her, am I right?”

“Fond? Are you kidding? Very far from it. Very far.” He becomes sullen.

“Why?”

“Because I hate fake people who love themselves more than anything else.”

“She must be stunning, is she?”

“Naturally,” he replies. “But she's an exceptionally shallow person. After their mother killed herself, Michael took care for her like both a mother and father. They're very close. His father was too busy with his political career and abandoned his duties as a father, to say the least.”

“Why did his mother kill herself? If you don't mind telling me, of course.”

“It's alright, it's no secret. His father neglected them. He'd



leave her alone in a huge house with two children, he'd use her for his political agendas, take her money for his advancement. She came from a very wealthy family, an old Jewish family from the States. They were practically an empire. She was looking for love and warmth, and he was probably looking for wealth and status. She was such a gorgeous woman! But it seems that, aside from their mutual attraction and interests, they didn't have much in common. The more the gap between their image and real life grew, the more depressed she became. Finally, she couldn't take it anymore and committed suicide.

“Michael had to grow up overnight. His whole world collapsed. It was important for him to take care of Michelle, attend to her, and be there for her. He'd always protect and speak for her, covering up all her faults.” My heart exploded with compassion for Michael, who was absolutely wonderful.

“In any case, they're extremely close. But sadly, he probably only made things worse. She thinks she's entitled to everything and she's relentless. She manipulates people, refuses to change her ways and never grows up. She'll always be a hypocritical, spoiled and self-absorbed six-year-old.”

“Poor thing! It's hard losing a mother. It's cruel. It must have had a huge impact on her personality.” I take a softer approach.

“She's a ruthless narcissist, an immoral, vindictive liar who manipulates everyone. She's so self-centered, she can't help but be at the center of attention. In short, I don't like her, to put it mildly.”

“But didn't you live with her during the time you stayed with

Michael?”

“Unfortunately,” he nods. “She’d sneak in naked to my bed every night. She’d do everything she could to make me touch her and have sex with her. And I mean everything! I’ve been through so much with her, you have no idea. I feel nothing but anger and contempt for her.”

“So, you didn’t sleep with her because of that, or because she’s his sister?”

“Sam,” he cuts me off. “Could you stop beating around the bush? I can’t read between the lines, and I have no interest in talking about Michelle.”

“He told me that she wants you and has been in love with you forever.”

“And? Do I have to love and fuck every woman who wants me?” He looks at me skeptically. “There were a couple of times that I was tempted; I am a man, after all. But I’d stop myself before anything happened, because I didn’t want to hurt her. I’ve always known she wasn’t for me. I didn’t want to risk it and lose Michael. I explained everything to him. He’s aware of it all and respects the fact that I’m not into her. That’s why he tries to keep her as far away from me as possible.”

“Do you think that this whole affair could have a negative impact on our relationship? Let us not forget that I’ve already betrayed him,” I become sullen. He falls silent and ponders to himself.

“Okay, I might not be speaking clearly enough,” he finally concluded. “So, please go to the bedroom and wait there for

me, completely naked. I'll be right there.”

“Are you crazy? What does that have to do with anything?” I struggle to comprehend.

“Go on,” he shows me the way out.

Confused and annoyed, I leave the office and submissively walk towards the bedroom. I remove my clothes and apply a fragrant body lotion, comb my hair and slip into the huge bed, then hide under the luxurious blanket. He walks into the room right after me, dims the lights, takes off his clothes, gets into bed and lies next to me.

“Sam,” he caresses my body, smells and faintly kisses the nook between my ear and the back of my neck, spreading warm kisses down my ribs and my buttocks. I immediately melt. I completely forget our previous conversation. Damn it, he's so hot, how could I waste our time together and be mad at him?

“Are you enjoying me touching you?” he surprises me, as he suddenly stops and looks at me fondly.

“Of course I am, but why do you ask?”

“Just because. Do I look like someone who can feign intimacy? You must probably think I've reached such a level of openness and intimacy with other women in the past, and that they also enjoyed all these treats. However, what the two of us have – that's pretty rare, my precious one. I'd usually make women do anything I wanted, without breaking a sweat. But now I want to do those things to you, understand? When I'm inside your body, I feel as though we are one, as hard-core

as that may be. Sex to me is just sex. Why would I risk my relationship with Michael for something that isn't real?" He smiles straight into my eyes. "Perhaps now you understand?"

I smile and immediately pounce on him.

"You're so dear to me," I caress his face.

"You're very dear to me, too! That's why I'm willing to make sacrifices for this relationship. Otherwise, trust me, I wouldn't have dared! In any case, it's a good thing that you brought it up. Because she's ruthless; when she's here for a visit, it's an absolute catastrophe. She's capable of walking around the house half-naked and following me everywhere. She lies constantly, find all kinds of men and throws herself at them in front of me, as if I care," he laughs out loud. "I despise those kinds of people. Considering everything she's been through, she should have been a deeper person, with profound insight. But sadly, she's mentally ill. She won't change, unless she realizes she's a helpless narcissist and needs to see a therapist."

"She'll probably come for a visit when he finishes his business in Paris," I wonder out loud.

"You have to understand," he clarifies. "You're the only woman in my life. You need to know that and try to rise above it all. Just like I need to accept your past, I have a past of my own. But what difference does it make? What matters is that we found each other. Don't you think?"

"Avi," I smile warmly. "I'm so happy that I'm here with you. You have no idea. I'm afraid of losing it." I speak with sincerity and look straight into his eyes.

“Are you crazy?! We’ve only just begun, and you’re already seeing it end? I’m in love with you! There’s no chance that I’m letting you go. Especially not because of Michelle! Where else would I find such a gem like you? Affectionate, funny, shrewd, fascinating, loving, generous, sincere, gorgeous, a sex goddess, who’s willing to make sacrifices for me, who cares for me, without any interest in personal gain?”

“I feel exactly the same!” I smile at him, overjoyed.

“I’m glad we had this conversation. Now, I want to sink my teeth deep into you. I’ve waited half a day just for this moment,” he reminds me. “Are you hungry? Thirsty? Need to go to the bathroom?”

“No,” I laugh out loud. “Why?”

“Because from this moment on, this bed is your home,” he leaps at me, and gently bites me everywhere, turning me on as he moves up. He places his fingers on my clit, slowly kneading it, and penetrating me forcefully, again and again. We lose ourselves in each other’s arms, sinking deep into each other with perfect unison. We moan loudly, and our groans ring through the room.



## Chapter 12

Dawn rises. A horrible phone call interrupts the silence.

“No!!!!” Avi screams, writhing with pain, barely able to breathe. He weeps, pants, yells and cries out. “My grandmother is drawing her last breaths. I need to get there ASAP.”

I immediately enter Michael’s room, put on whatever clothes I can get my hands on, put my shoes on, run around the house, I collect a document here, a phone there, a purse and then immediately stand at his side. We eventually step into the cab that Tony has called for us. And we rush to the hospital, both of us very tense.

“Don’t let her leave me, not yet, please,” he mumbles to himself the whole drive. His eyes are red with pain and tension. His palms are cold and sweaty, and his amazing face is shrouded with sadness. The darkness slips into his heart, swallowing him up. We arrive at the hospital and quickly take the elevator to the fourth floor and enter her room. That precious woman lies there, the very same woman who has gotten under my skin from the very first second. Now, she looked dull and gray and was barely moving.

“My Granny,” he takes her hand in his and wails. “My beloved Grandma, I love you so much, what will I do now?” he cries. “Please don’t leave me, too, I beg of you.” His pain shatters my heart to millions of invisible pieces, and I feel out of place.

“I’ll step outside. You need your privacy. Call me if you need

anything.”

He doesn't respond, he's distant, weeps and humbly shuts his eyes.

I leave the room, read psalm verses, and pray that her death won't desecrate this man's soul, scar him; I wipe my tears, imploring: Please God, give him the strength. Show him I'm here for him and I have no intentions of leaving him. If it's his desire, I'll willingly turn this man into my idol, love him, kiss his wounds and envelope him in heat, softness and gentleness. I'd give him everything he has been missing. Please, God, don't let him turn his back on me. Don't let his grief blind him. I won't be able to handle it! God forbid I lose him!

He leaves the room, terrified, and calls the nurse. The monitor flatlines into a void. Loss. Emptiness. Death. A startled commotion sets into motion. Staff, doctors, everyone gathers around her. He stands on the side, frozen, stifling his tears. He was saying his goodbyes to the most meaningful woman in his life.

“I'm sorry for your loss,” the on-call doctor says. “Unfortunately, there's nothing more we can do. May she rest in peace.”

“Amen,” Avi adds. “Now she can finally rest,” he kisses her forehead with great respect.

Friends and family swarm down the hospital corridors. Avi confirms her death, and they schedule her funeral for 4 pm that same day. Everything seems to be happening on its own. Friends and family gather at the cemetery; they eulogize her, one after another. I hear new details about this precious

woman's life. She was a Holocaust survivor, she was a pioneer who built this country, a merciful nurse who sacrificed her life for the people she loved, without fear or hesitation.

Now it's his turn. He stands in front of everybody, weeping and praising her. "You know, when I was a child, we'd walk down the streets together and she was so proud of me. She'd tell anyone we'd meet along the way: 'This is my grandson, Avi Levi. Take a good look at him and remember him.' She's always empowered me; even when I'd drive everyone mad, she'd always lend an ear, show me sympathy, love me, cared for me and protected me," he weeps. "She wasn't just a grandmother to me," he continues. "She was like a mother to me, for all intents and purposes. Now, I feel like an orphan."

I lift my eyes up and see a woman standing at his side, crying her eyes out. She's mournful but seems embarrassed and ashamed. His words wound her hurt. I can see the pain spreading through her body. When he finishes speaking, the woman gives him a long and comforting hug.

"Thanks, Mom," he blurts and frees himself from her arms.

He's surrounded by so many people, and I feel redundant. I wonder if I should be here to witness him crumbling down right in front of my eyes. Would he feel less of a man in front of me? 'I should leave immediately!' I think over and over again. However, the line shortens and it's my turn to hug and console him. He reaches both his arms out, gently takes my hand and pulls me to a deep and warm hug, dissolving all my fears. My man. He knows how to recognize my pain from miles away and envelop me at the right time. Whether it's by



placing his hand on my belly, or by hugging me with all his heart in his most challenging times. He makes sure I won't feel lonely or unnecessary.

After the burial ceremony we head back home.

We barely utter a word on the drive back. Avi is quiet and withdrawn, and I'm also rather moody and upset.

"Where is the Shiva?" I ask.

"There won't be a Shiva," he replies bitterly. "My grandmother was a single child who had lost her only son. We'll all gather at our house. It has open spaces and a lot of fresh air."

"I see," I look at him sadly.

When the cab pulls over, we can already see a large crowd gathering around the house. People are sad, stunned and aching, they hug one another and offer their condolences. There are heaps of plastic chairs delivered to the house, along with folding tables, different types of food, fruits, wine and drinks. I start assisting with whatever I can; I organize something here, put out something there, placing, wiping, slicing, and pouring.

He sits in the center of the room, shrouded in his own silence, disconnected. Every now and then he lets a tear roll down his cheek or smiles bitterly at someone. Kitchen staff, pourers and waiters organize the house to make sure that the mourners are comfortable, making sure the tables spread throughout the living room are bountiful and covered in trays of a variety of steaming hot dishes.

The chief rabbi arrives. He shakes Avi's hand, and it's evident that they have a history. He consoles him and adds a quote from the bible. Avi looks at him respectfully and nods in acceptance. More people arrive.

Among them are many beautiful, young women, and they seem to be on more-than-friendly terms with him, they all hug and kiss him, straighten his shirt, caress his face, try to catch his attention. He, on the other hand, with impeccable savviness, treats them with a cool aloofness, preventing them from invading his personal space. He's simply standing there, uncooperative.

Another group arrives. This time they are suited and elegant businessmen from every field imaginable: politicians, businessmen, many of his employees. They're all there to pay their respect. He's clearly beloved and appreciated by them all. I believe with all my heart that they aren't drawn to him because of his money, but rather because of his charismatic, mysterious and intriguing personality; that's how he captivates them. However, now he's withdrawn and almost apathetic. He dedicates a couple of cold moments to each, calculating and rationing his time with them. If it were up to him, he would have probably lashed out and disappeared into his room or would have stripped down and walked around in his robe. He was always attentive to himself and managed to drown out the background noises. He was so self-confident, and it only added to his insane sex-appeal, and his endless charisma.

Seemingly out of nowhere, Michael barges in and storms into the house.

“Avi!” He hugs him, heartbroken. “I’m so sorry, brother. I can’t even begin to imagine what you’re going through. I’m so sorry I wasn’t here when it happened.”

“It’s alright,” he pats his shoulder. “We all knew it was about to happen. It’s just as painful, but that’s life. What can you do?” Avi doesn’t wait for him to reply and sinks back into his chair and grief.

Everyone addresses him at once, they ask questions, talk with him about his grandmother. He provides them with dry answers, his voice breaks as he occasionally bursts into tears. No one dares approach him to wipe them away.

I sit at his side for a moment, just so I can breathe him in. He suddenly surprises me and, without hesitation, pulls his chair close to me; grief-stricken, he places his head on my shoulder and weeps. I’m so moved that I start sobbing, too.

Michael looks at me, hugs me and wipes the tears off my cheek.

“Gorgeous, how are you? Are you alright? I wasn’t expecting to see you here,” a surprised Michael confesses.

“I just happened to be here,” I reply hoarsely.

“A fortunate coincidence,” Michael adds. “I can see that you two have grown closer.” He points at Avi.

“Yes,” I confess. “Very close.”

Michael smiles and tightens his grip around me, as though he’s proud of his new trophy. He seems to be surprised by the fact that Avi has become attached to me.

All the attendants are curious to find out who I am, and what have I done to have this stunning man lean his head on my shoulder; why has he chosen this unimportant person who had momentarily entered his life, now completely sucked into it without any chances of running away. Their gazes haunt us, people whisper around us, bewildered at the sight of me and his complete obliviousness to the matter. And yet, they all seem to fade away as I'm enveloped in this very moment, the moment he had chosen me above all others.

As I listen to his friends and colleagues, I learn how he had acquired all his wealth and elegance. I hear how he had started his own company at seventeen. It was a unique high-tech company that had later penetrated the international market with the offensive-cyber security software he had been developing for over a decade. He was respected by every sector possible, was regarded as an honorable person in so many important places in the world. Nonetheless, he always stayed grounded and claimed that money wasn't his goal in life. He lived a life of comfort but didn't give in to it. He kept looking for the foundational things in life and tried to hold on to them as hard as he could. He cooked for himself, cleaned, washed his own dishes, refused to use a coffee machine, and was reluctant to eat 'designer food', as he's referred to the pretentious food the higher echelons of society would enjoy. I adore his lifestyle and admire the how he carries himself with poise and grace.

Avi is present, yet absent. His grief is a deep abyss. His mother, Rachel, is a beautiful and impressive woman. Her eyes are deep-sea blue. She tries to reach him. His siblings and

Michael stand around him. He remains polite, coherent, yet unyielding. He refuses to allow himself to break down in others' arms. Occasionally he gives me long and awkward looks, especially when he sees my attempts at taking care of things and making sure everyone has food and drinks. Frankly, I'm exhausted. But I can't help it. I wanted to make things easier for him and his family as much as I could. I try to decipher the meaning of his gaze, anxiously thinking that this tragic event might have changed his feelings for me; praying that he won't suddenly pull back and I'll be on my own, yet again. This time around, my loneliness would be significantly more painful. Sadly enough, I've already seen people sink into a deep depression and push away those dearest to them. Let alone people they had only met a couple of days ago. I keep hurting myself, embracing the grief to shed tears over my own scars, my own angst and anxiety. He's only just entered my life, and he's about to leave. What will I do now? I panic. My stress only intensifies when Michael pops up behind me.

"Let's go outside and talk a little," he suggests.

I swallow a big lump of fear and heavily and reluctantly walk towards the large backyard.

"See?" He embraces me. "I always seem to disappoint someone, and mostly myself. Why am I always busy when he needs me most? He's so important and dear to me."

"I'm sure he knows it, Michael," I turn to my soothing side, swallowing a tsunami of tumultuous feelings. "There's nothing you can do about it. All that matters is that you're here now. He knows he can count on you. Life is stronger than us and we

can't always be there for our loved ones. Just take me for example," I explain. "I'm here, and Roy? Where's Roy? He isn't here. All I can do is hope that he has received enough love, closeness and dedication from me, and that it's imprinted on his heart. The same goes for you two," Michael listens to me, appreciating my every word and holding on to them.

"Thank God you're in my life!" He immediately draws me closer to him. "You're so honest, smart and affectionate." He hugs me tightly, with all his heart. "It's no wonder Avi feels so comfortable around you, you're so special."

"Michael," I slowly take a step back. "I have to tell you something." I'm so embarrassed and ashamed.

Michael's body stiffens. He looks straight into my eyes.

"Perhaps later?" he asks. "I want to spend every moment that I'm here supporting Avi. I also want to apologize to you; I know that I should have been here instead of you, supporting him, running around and helping others. But I cherish what you've just said, and I want you to know that I'm grateful for you, for the way you analyze both complex and simple matters. You know how to be present for others, even if it means giving up part of yourself. Sam, in a matter of no time, you've become extremely important to me. Thank you," he adds with a sincerity that moves me. "I can't wait to come back and pick off from where we left off. I miss you so much," he kisses me passionately.

A smile reaches my lips and I give him a loving hug. I can't ignore this perfect man, how in a mere two days he had entirely erased all the pain that had gathered in my heart and

body over the years, with every hardship or disappointment. I treasure how he had allowed me to see the world through a different lens. I don't take it for granted. However, the memory of my bitter betrayal slowly seeps in and pulls me to reality. I free myself from his arms and hand in hand, we walk back in together.

It's evening time and people keep swarming in. Everyone comes to pay their respects to the large family: there are three sisters and four brothers, in total. Avi is the youngest and there's a clear emotional and age gap.

I continue to learn more about Avi's character. Even though he shied away from social events and liked running the show, coming and going as he wills, he was still there, frozen, seemingly counting the minutes until he could shut his eyes. I miss him already, my heart craves for this man who, in the past few days had become so important to me. My soul yearns to be loved only by him. An obsessive love, all-encompassing, yet enveloping, respectful and cherished. An honest love, wild, boundless, limitless. In my presence he is vulnerable, compassionate, and understanding. He makes me feel like the most beautiful woman in the world. He adores my femininity as well as my tortured soul. He doesn't try to correct me, or improve me; on the contrary, he keeps confronting me with the restrictions and inhibitions I had built up that had grown with each disappointed, hurt or tear. He enables me to understand my own value. I know that under his shadow I can rest, be happy, feel loved as intensely as I need – powerfully, sensually, and amazingly passionately. I hope I won't lose it all before I had even tasted it. The very thought of him missing

from my life deems my existence unessential. I'll become withdrawn and plummet into a deep sadness in one of the armchairs.

Evening had long passed. Michael was pacing to and fro, speaking on his phone, coordinating his affairs.

"Avi," he approached him. "I'm very sorry but I must fly off to Paris. I have a concert that was booked over a year ago, all the tickets are sold out. I tried everything I could to get out of it, but unfortunately, I cannot."

"It's alright," he took his hand into his. "Your presence here won't remedy my grief. My dear brother, I know how important I am to you. You can go back to your life and return when you can. I'll survive, I promise. Besides," he continues. "Sam is here. You're the one who found her and brought her here and into our lives. I should thank you. I find a lot of comfort, warmth and joy with her."

He listens, unsurprised yet pensive. "We're so lucky to have found her," he nods. "She's become very meaningful to me, too. I want to clear the table and come back already. I miss her. And you too."

I keep silent. Embarrassed.

"Okay," he interrupts Michael's burst of optimism. "Right now, I can't focus on anyone else, I'm sure that things will work out. Time to go," he urges him.

Michael glances at his watch, then looks at me. He approaches me and kisses me heartily, hugs me and completely wraps me in his huge arms.



“It’s time for me to go,” Michael said in a broken voice.  
“Although I’m not present in the flesh, my soul is here, I...”

“Honey,” I hug him back and kiss him on the cheek. “I know. Just come back quickly.” I smile faintly, he says his goodbyes and sets off.

Under the cover of darkness, the number of people gradually dwindled. Those who stayed behind help clean up and prepare the house for the next day. The last attendants say their goodbyes, pat some on their shoulders, hug others, and try to comfort the grieving family.

“Finally, some quiet!” Avi sighs when that last person leaves. “It’s just impossible to bear!” he confesses.

“I guess I don’t need to ask how you’re feeling,” I look at him compassionately.

“Sam, I’m completely wiped out. My body’s stiff. I feel numb.”

I give him a long and big hug, slowly lift my head and look at him silently. “Better?”

“Much better. Let’s go to bed, I need this day to be over.”

We head together to the bedroom and flop together, side by side, onto the bed. He shuts his eyes, indulging in the blessed silence. I decide to remove all his clothes, help him unburden his discomfort and unnecessary weight. I kneel at his feet and start with his shoes.

“What are you doing?” he asks me, his eyes still shut.

“I thought I’d help you undress. Make you feel more

comfortable.”

He smiles as he reaches out his long hand and caresses my hair.

“You’re so good to me. I apologize for unloading my burden on you.”

“It’s alright, Avi. I want to be here for you.”

I remove his shoes, peel off his socks, and deeply massage his feet, trying to encourage blood circulation and relieve his stiffness. I remember that numbing sensation I had felt when I lost my dear grandfather, may he rest in peace. I remember the stifling sadness, the agony, the crisis. He was one of the only people in my life who made me feel loved.

I slowly remove his jeans, and then his t-shirt as I lean over him. He quietly cooperates with me, still keeping his eyes shut. He simply gives into me, surrenders. I keep massaging his arms, his shoulders, and then cover him with a soft woolen blanket, wrap him and try to help him feel comfortable.

I smell his hair, affectionately caress him, press against to him, making me taller than him for a change, and slowly lean his head on my breast, trying to cradle him in a motherly and warm embrace. He wordlessly gives in, and then motionlessly falls asleep.

I kiss his head and hug him.

“Good night. I love you, my Avi,” I whisper to him. Then, I fall asleep, too.



## Chapter 13

I awake in his arms. He's asleep, hunched over me, his expression calm. I can't help myself and I kiss his lips. He immediately wakes up. With a half-smile, he kisses my forehead.

"Good morning, princess." As per usual, he's overdoing it.

"Good morning to you too, dear."

"Ah, it's so wonderful sleeping and waking up at your side." He stretches, leaning all his body weight against my body, squashing me.

"I wanted to thank you for everything you've done for me, yesterday and in general. I don't take it for granted. You keep surprising me. Or more accurately, I'm surprised by how much you affect me."

"Ouch," I squeak, crushed under his weight of his body. However, I was careful not to stop him, lest he pull back and shuts me out.

"Ouch?" he chuckles. "I'm only getting started," he surprises me, and lightly bites my buttocks. Then, he sat me between his legs. "There's nothing I want more than to lose myself inside of you. However, it's going to cost a price I'm not sure I'm willing to pay."

"I don't understand," I choke with fear. "Do you need some space?"

"No, Sam," he sniggers. "I don't need any space. I need you,

your body and your scent. I need to unload all my turmoil and pain inside of you so you can understand just how troubled I am. I can't find a way to explain or show you the intensity of the pain I'm experiencing right now. Usually, I don't like being touched intimately. It throws me off because it might reveal something and make me confront feelings I'd rather suppress. That's why I've always preferred having rough sex, that's how I've managed to shake off all those controlling thoughts. But when I'm with you, even that kind of sex feels completely different," he explains, even before I manage to process his words. "You've change all of that for me." He looks at me with appreciation and continues with a broken voice. "The only problem is that I suck at putting it into words, and I need actions and your permission to allow me complete freedom. I want to forget myself inside of you and unload my deep grief."

"In other words, you'd like for me to be your vessel?"

He was amazed with my choice of words.

"Yes, yes. That's exactly what I need right now, for you to understand in how much pain I'm in. I want to be with you right now and be freed forever."

"That's all I ever wanted," I was moved to tears. "Let it hurt as much as it will. I want to take all the pain from you. I'll cherish this moment forever."

"I hope so," he smiles affectionately as he delicately and somewhat ticklishly removes my clothes. He takes some baby oil from the drawer and rubs it patiently and sensually, softly and intensely all over my body. He kisses, smells and

embraces it.

Then, he asks me to stand on all fours. He takes my black thongs, stretches it, then ties my hands up in the front. My behind is protruding upwards. And so, with my body completely oiled up, and absolutely bare, he pleasures me with his amazing fingers, making me dripping wet.

I moan with a surge of pleasure.

“Quiet!” he whispers. “I don’t want anyone coming up here to check on me.” He spanks me. I swallow the surprising pain.

He becomes more and more aggressive with every passing moment. He demands me to perform oral sex on him while my hands are still tied up by my underwear. He asks me to make the effort for him and caresses my hair. I’m so turned on and at ease; I’m completely invested. I do what I’m told, and I do it forcefully, so he can also feel the intensity of the feelings he had awakened in me. He moans. He pulls my ponytail up and down, dunking his stunningly erect and hard manhood into my mouth. Again, and again, and then gently against my gaped teeth. He caresses my buttocks, then cups them. Then, he penetrates me with his fingers, in and out, doing with me as he wills.

Our loud and pleased moaning rings throughout the room. The first rays of sun signal that a new day is about to begin. Gratified, he pulls his penis out of my mouth, erotically slipping out as my swollen, moist and meaty lips envelop him again with juicy delight. I then bring my head to my tied hands, brush my fingers against my lips trying to imagine what they look like.

Of course, he doesn't miss a thing, and he immediately bites my upper lip with sweet force. I relish in it.

Wholeheartedly invested in his master plan, he leans towards my behind, protruding upwards and fully stretched. He strokes my buttocks, that keep rising with his every unapologetic stroke.

I want to tell him that I've never had anal sex. But it's too late. With one swift movement, he penetrates me from behind with extreme ferocity, leaving me totally frozen and petrified. He pulls me to him, then away from him, clutching onto my behind, kneading it like cookie dough. Every now and then, he blurts out incoherent sentences, spanks me roughly, makes me burn with pain. He caresses my buttocks as I climax so fiercely, like never before. He takes advantage of how exposed and vulnerable I am, and grabs both of my butt cheeks, spanking me again lightly to indicate he wants me to dictate the pace. I allow myself to immerse in this carnal lust, pick up the pace, until he's relieved.

"My God!" he exclaims and says with a trembling and broken voice, "you have a llama's ass. You're incredible!" And then, he completely empties himself inside of me, moaning loudly with pleasure.

I breathe heavily and try to soothe my racing heart that had long since lost its natural rhythm. My hands are still tied with the small pieces of fabric. Sweat and passion droplets drip from my tail bone to my buttocks. My body's glistening from the oil, the satisfaction and the pain that keeps pulsing through me as the minutes pass and I regain consciousness. He slowly

and gently pulls out of me. He wipes clean every part of my body with wet-wipes he had prepared on his side table. Then, he quickly removes the underwear ties off my hands; they had left a mark on my wrists. He collects me into his lap and kisses my palms, grateful. He delicately rolls me to my side, we spoon, and he embraces me tightly.

“You’re the best sex I’ve ever had. Even more so, I want to thank you, gorgeous. I imagine that this was pretty unusual for you, but you’ve made a sacrifice for me today and I’ll forever be in your debt. I feel liberated, renewed, powerful and strong. And it’s all thanks to you, my princess. I’m alive thanks to you. I felt dead inside, I swear. You’re my remedy.” He keeps talking and complimenting me. I try not to move too much, so he won’t loosen his grip on me. However, the pain spreads throughout my body, and I need some fresh air.

“I need to take a shower,” I declare and try to slowly get up.

“What?”

“I need to take a shower and get rid of all this oil!” I lie to him.

“Wow!” He’s startled. “Look at your ass! You’re all bruised and aching because of me. I’m so sorry! How could I have gotten so carried away? You’re so gentle.” He’s upset and distressed.

“Avi,” I caress his face. “Please, calm down. I love you so much, which means that I love the entire array of your emotions. It’s quite the opposite. I should thank you for sharing with me the magnitude of your pain and allowing me to be a part of it, and a part of you. It hurts so much because it’s my first time.”

“Your first time? What do you mean?” He looks at me, puzzled.

“It’s the first time I’ve had anal sex,” I explain embarrassedly.

“No! Are you serious?” He’s surprised and ashamed all at once.

“It’s all good, honey,” I keep trying to reassure him. “I really enjoyed it!” I promise him.

Avi lovingly caresses my buttocks.

“So, I’m the first one who’s ever been there?”

“Yes,” I smile at him.

“So your virginal butt got served today,” he kisses it fondly.

“I’m sorry I overdid it. You should have told me.”

“I didn’t manage to tell you,” I confess. “It was quick and unexpected.”

His expression suddenly changes.

“We need to document this monumental event,” he says like an enthusiastic child. I look at his half-amused, half-serious expression, trying to understand what he had meant. He notices my confusion.

“I mean, I own this ass, understand?”

“You do?”

“Yes, so I intend to tattoo my signature on this masterpiece,” he announces, as he lightly pats on my buttocks. “Right here – ‘Avi Levi.’ It’s mine now. Get it?”

“Got it!” I blush. “Let’s go take a shower already.”



He looks at me rather annoyed.

“No! I want this moment to last for at least another week.”

“Avi!” I lose patience, “shower, now.”

“Coming,” he yields, and we both let the warm and comforting water wash us over.

After the shower he insists on applying some aloe vera to soothe my pain.

“Thank you, Sam, for everything.” He softly looks into my eyes.

“Please, don’t mention it,” I ask. “It was my decision to do it, and I stand behind it. Drop it.”

He smiles with satisfaction.

Smelling clean and fresh, we step together out of the room and into the new mournful reality that we’ve been forced into.

“Good morning, Son!” His mother approaches and smothers him. He politely frees himself from her grip and reminds her that he’s uncomfortable with her exaggerated public displays of affection.

“Avi doesn’t like to be hugged at all,” she blurts at me with an apologetic smile.

“Apparently it depends on who’s the hugger,” he snipes at her, offending her as he embraces me tightly. My heart momentarily twinges, but he ignores everyone, including his mother, and leads me to the living room. Someday, I’ll have to try and help rebuild their relationship. She loves him so much and is trying to get closer to him and he’s being cruel to her,

and to himself as a result.

“What day is it today?” he inquires.

“Thursday,” I reply absentmindedly.

“So, tomorrow’s Friday. Since there’s no Shiva I can get out of here. I need some peace and quiet.”

“Get out of here?” I panic a little.

“Get out of here with you,” he emphasizes. “Let me remind you, you’re my savior. I heard you when you said earlier that you love me. I love you too, my gorgeous one. I’m so happy that you’re here with me during such a difficult time. There’s no way I’m letting you go. It’s not every day that you meet someone so special.”

“You love me? Like a man loves a woman? Or like someone who’s dear to you?” I inquire, insisting that he sticks to the details.

“I love you like a thirsty man yearning for water, like a ray of sun piercing through the darkness, like a diseased man searching for a merciful nurse.”

“Like a man,” I conclude.

“Like a man in love! I don’t want to spend even a second away from you. I don’t want to waste a single moment outside your body. In short, I’m booking us a flight for tomorrow. I have to clear my head!”

“Where to?”

“Rome. We’re flying to Rome. We’ll come back Monday morning and then you’ll be back in time for Roy. I’ll take care

of everything. All you need to do is bring your perfect ass along,” he teases me and seductively winks at me.

“Rome? Are you sure this is the right time? You’re upset and in mourning.” I caress his face with concern.

“I’ll be upset and in mourning anyways.” He holds my hand and kisses it. “In the meantime, I need you to remind me of the purpose of living.”

“If you’re sure that’s what you want, then Rome it is. I’m in.”



It’s evening time, marking once again the end of another day. A different type of awakening. The darkness intensifies the glumness of the soul aching to cling onto something that would revive its spirit, move it, give it meaning.

“Sam?” he interrupts my darkest of thoughts. “Shall we go to the room?”

“Yes, sure,” I rise up, and he places his hand on my buttocks, gently caresses it, guilt-ridden.

“Avi, I just remembered I don’t have any clothes suitable for Europe.”

“I promised you I’d take care of everything, remember?”

“Everything?” I smile an overjoyed and pleased smile.

He kisses my temple.

“Let’s rest for a short while. I’ve booked a flight for 5:00 am.”



## Chapter 14

I awake in his arms as I did the other day, but this time, it feels so different. I embrace the renewed sense of hope that has awoken in me, a hope for boundless joy and unconditional love. He immediately stretches over me.

“Good morning, my love. What time is it?”

“It’s almost 2:00 am.”

“We need to get up quickly,” he immediately stands up and tries to fumble for the first task that needs to be done before our flight. “We need to get out of here before sunrise,” he pulls me out of the indulgent bed, kisses my head and walks me towards the bathroom. “Get ready, I’m right behind you.”

After I finish washing my face and return to the bedroom, he hands me a large black square box wrapped in a shiny delicate ribbon.

“This is for you.”

“But what is it? Are you completely insane?” I’m somewhat discomfited.

“You’re insane if you think you can board a flight wearing that!” He waves at his black shirt; the same one I had fallen asleep in last night.

“No, come on,” I giggle. “I’ve told you that I need to stop somewhere and get a couple of things.”

“And I’ve promised you that I’ll take care of everything. That’s why this is for you.”

“Right, it slipped my mind,” I say embarrassedly and slightly confused. I hurry and curiously open the lovely box to find a variety of expensive and exquisite clothes. There are a couple of sweaters, tank tops, two pullovers, both stunning and made of rich and featherlight fabric, two pairs of skinny jeans, a selection of tastefully laced underwear in different colors, and two black laced bras to complete it all. He’d even bought me tall, fuzzy and gorgeous fur boots. And, as if those weren’t enough, he also added a warm cream-colored fur coat.

“Wow!” I’m so excited and start jumping up and down, totally impressed with every item, telling him that he had chosen the most amazing items I could have ever dreamed of. I dash to the bathroom, enthusiastic as a little child, and quickly get dressed, apply a little makeup, brush my hair, and return to him. To my man. My safe haven. That’s precisely what I feel towards this man, who was a completely unknown stranger only a week ago. And now he was embedded deep into my soul. Every breath without him would make me ache.

“I want to love you all of my life,” I wipe away a tear of joy and kiss his lips.

He reciprocates the feeling, overjoyed and kisses me back, thanking God that I’m at his side and in his life.

We quickly pack our things. We can’t wait to disappear into our private adventure together.

The pre-booked taxi awaits us at the mansion’s entrance, and we both quietly step inside. We fly first class and they shower us with treats, however, we’re completely unphased. We sit there, holding hands, looking at each other, talking about our

lives and our world views. Drowning into each other.

The limousine driver welcomes us after border control and baggage collection with a sign reading 'Mr. Levi'. We step into the car.

We finally arrive at the most impressive hotel I've ever seen. It has exceptionally tall ceilings lit with LED lights, and there are statues scattered around the lobby area. We check in and a bellboy takes our suitcases to the grand elevator heading to the tenth floor.

Even though I had never been to Rome, this amazing hotel, or this beautiful city, nothing seems to pique my interest. All I really care about is holding Avi's hand for the rest of my life and never letting go.

The presidential suite is enormous. It's as big as my apartment back home, all crammed into one room. The world seems to be my oyster. But my eyes immediately go to the wide bed, draped with a fairytale tulle.

I quietly stand in front of him, gazing with astonishment. He draws close to me, pushes a strand of hair behind my ear, leans in and whispers softly: "It's all just for you, my princess." He holds me passionately and we both fall onto the bed, laughing out loud. Our shoes just seem to slip off our feet. He kisses me lustily, his tongue eagerly rolling against mine.

His body immerses in my body and soul, erasing all the scars on my heart that had been there for many years. We move in soft, slow motions, he's gentle and tries to avoid hurting me since last night's marks are still visible on my body. He sucks on my neck, kisses it, loses himself inside of me. I feel that we

are one, two halves of the same soul. He still carries his past wounds, as well as the recent heartbreak, all of which define the man he is today; and I, who have been engaging in self-flagellation over my naivete that had shattered into a million pieces with every endeavor or crisis I had. All I ever wished was to feel safe and cherished like a little, sensitive girl, craving to feel my man's love. I find all of that in his arms, live out my most clandestine urges, serve them to him like a sacred gift. I'm overwhelmed by his intimacy, his touch, his smell.

He continues to move slowly though intensively and sweeps me away into yet another climax I had never experienced before, uprooting any trace of the lost girl who had remained hidden inside of me all those years. When I'm with him, I'm alive, burning and fully awake. I comply, getting sucked into him with his every movement, be it big or small. I challenge him, unload in front of him, no longer inhibited by my own shame. I don't think about anyone else. I give in to him and his intoxicating touch as if we were the last two people on this planet, losing ourselves in the other, delightfully dressing our open wounds.

He completely loses himself inside of me.

"I love you, sweetie," he whispers in my ear as he catches his breath.

I hold him tightly and wipe a tear of joy and pleasure.

"I've been waiting for you my entire life," I confess.

He embraces me, kisses my hair and nods in agreement.

“You’re my gift. My grandmother probably went to great lengths up there in heaven to ensure that I’d have someone who’d take care of me. I remember that when you first met her, she thought you were my wife. It was a sign,” he says ecstatically. “Where have you been all these years?” He looks at me sternly, actually waiting for a response.

“I’ve been waiting for you,” I smile back. “It was worth going through everything I did, I assure you.”

“I need you,” he confesses, awakening my slumbering heart, making me feel desired. I’m thrilled. He feels just as I do. I’m overjoyed and secure at his side. “I’ve been aching for you.” He wipes a tear and move me to tears, as well. “You know, Sam, I’ve never made love like that before. Just now, I felt entirely consumed by your body, so much so that I feel I had planted roots inside of you.”

“You have, I can assure you of that,” I wholeheartedly agree with his sentiment. “I love you, Avi Levi.”

“I love you, my princess,” he smiles at me. “You’ll see, nothing can ruin this moment we had. Nothing can take away these inexplicably intense feelings.”

“Like electricity,” I complete his thought.

“More like an electric shock!” He laughs and hugs me even tighter.

—

“How is it that you’ve never had a relationship?” I inquire after yet another long night of or carnal lust and burning passion.



“I’ve tried a couple of times,” he confesses. “I’ve started having a few relationships. But I never fell head over heels, so to speak. I couldn’t trust anyone. I’ve always set very clear boundaries. I’d focus on my business and let those women into my life only when it suited me. Take June, for instance,” he continues, “we dated for about six months, while I was living in Japan for business. I liked her and we were widely attracted to each other. But I could never seem to connect with her on a deeper level, though she tried really hard. Finally, I ended things and ran off. I simply told her that we’re through. I hated it and hated myself for having done it because she was madly in love with me. I couldn’t imagine I’d ever hurt her like that. After all, she knew I was seeing other women. It was all out in the open. As time passed, she felt closer to me, she fell deeper and deeper in love with me. She hid it so well and consented to all my sexual appetites. Only later I had found out that she did it because she was lovesick. However, I didn’t feel the same; I simply enjoyed her company. When I realized, it was already too late. So, I decided to put an end to it before I’d break her heart even more than I had. Since then, I decided that I don’t ‘do’ love. I thought it would be unfair to fool women.”

“So, you’ve never fallen in love? You’ve never been moved by someone?” I look at him inquisitively. “After all, you’ve been with so many women.”

He shakes his head in the negative.

“There were some that I liked and felt comfortable with, but I’ve never had the urge to love someone or totally commit to them. I chose to invest all my time and energy in promoting

my business and my career. It was my mission to honor my father's legacy. I aspired to accomplish something that would be worthy of his name," he falls silent. "Many people know the 'dry facts' behind my story. But no one sees the scars or my challenges. All they see is a successful person and they immediately assume that person is happy. Although I seem glum and distant, I think women are attracted to that," he adds with a smile.

"Yes, you're right," I confess, "I was also smitten with that combination of your brooding expression and your insane sex-appeal, and of course, your undeniable gorgeousness."

"Women just love a challenge," he guffaws. "Maybe I was looking for someone just as broken as I am, someone who can put my pieces back together, who I can unload in front of. She has to be strong, that women of mine. She needs to be able to push back and put me in my place. She needs to know how to go hand-in-hand with me, but also challenge me every day anew. Someone whose trust I can earn, but not blindly," he emphasizes. "But rather because we have mutually respect. Someone I can rest with, take a breath with. Of course, this woman has to be gorgeous, have olive skin, be sexy, shrewd, funny and smart. In short, she has to be you. I hope that now you understand what I see in you. I've opened my heart to you, and I don't feel uneasy, but rather carefree. I'm not looking to run away; I just want to submerge myself in this love. Drown in you."

"Perhaps it's because you're afraid of losing someone again?"

"I need to keep you close, just as I had promised," he kisses

my head.

“When did you make that promise?” I ask with surprise. “I don’t remember that. How could I have missed such a significant thing?”

“You’re mine, aren’t you? People have to protect what belongs to them. Don’t you think?”

“Avi, enough! You keep bombarding me with heaps of compliments and attention. I’m not used to all of this. Can I get it in small doses? You’re embarrassing me.”

“You’d better get used to it, princess. And, by the way, just because no one has said it to you, it doesn’t mean that they hadn’t felt that way.”

“No, no,” I wave him off, “it isn’t that I’ve never heard those things. The actions didn’t match the words. When it comes to you, the words stand for themselves, and I seem to keep gathering more and more of them.”

“You’ll have to get used to it, because my words and actions always match,” he announces, then covers us with the soft blanket and, once again, makes me intoxicatingly orgasm.



I stretch, throw on the robe and tie it around my waist. I head to the corner of the room overlooking the amazing cathedral and call Roy.

“Mom! You won’t believe it,” he says enthusiastically. “I was afraid to scuba dive, but I did it anyway!”

I fawn over him. “That’s wonderful! I’m so proud of you, sweetheart. I miss you very much, Son. I’m so happy that

you're having a good time.”

“I gotta go, mom, there's a pool activity. Bye, love you,” he hangs up.

I return to bed.

“He's happy and having the time of his life,” I tell Avi. “He even went scuba diving.”

“Good for him. He must be amazing. With you for a mother, that's not at all surprising. Do you miss him every moment of the day?”

“Not every moment, you know,” I naughtily furrow my brow at him.

He surprises me and lifts me up.

“You're incredible! You drive me mad. Should we go the bar and get high?”

We head to the bar. A delightful melody rings throughout the bar overlooking the view facing the softly-lit and rain-drenched street. I'm overwhelmed with a magical sensation. The music makes me feel so light-hearted. It has a huge impact on my mood, and my body responds to the waves swaying through the air. He looks at me, enchanted.

I place my hands on his broad shoulders, pull him closer to me and kiss him.

“I feel so liberated with you.”

“That's wonderful!” he states and licks his lips. “Sam,” he addresses me in a serious tone. “Please, listen to me. From what I've learned about you so far, you're a woman who can

stand up for herself, and you're pretty stubborn. But I have to ask you to trust me. I'm well-aware that I come with some complicated baggage, full of traumas. But I need you to completely believe in me, I need for you to count on me in every matter and always share with me, without a shred of fear or concern. I'm very possessive," he confesses. "But not because of what you may think. I mean," he tries to explain, "I'm not jealous or obsessive, but rather overprotective. I think it stems from my fear of losing the people I hold the dearest. Do you understand? When it comes to your femininity, you can do anything you desire as far as I'm concerned. You can walk around naked for all I care. As long as I know that you're mine. I don't mind if the whole world stares and drools, on the contrary, I think it might actually do you some good!"

"What do you mean?" I wonder.

"You're a charismatic and charming, woman, full of substance and grace. I'm confident that our relationship will change your life. Reluctantly, you'll have to live under the spotlight, because the media has been covering my every move these last couple of years. After all, I did start my own empire at a young age. So, I should warn you, it isn't a picnic, and you should always trust me. Always! Do you understand? You shouldn't believe anyone, not the tabloids, the photos or any other nonsense. I want us to be above it all. Do you see? I can imagine us together, soaring over everyone. But first, you have to trust yourself, believe in me, and let everything else go."

"How can I do that when Roy's in the picture?"

"Trust me."

“How?” I lean into him.

“I’ll take care of everything. You love me, don’t you?”

“Yes,” I reply hoarsely, “but if everything is in your control, where does that leave me?”

“You’ll feel loved, protected, pampered and beautiful. I want to take care of you and Roy. I want you to indulge. You’ve been through so much; don’t you think you deserve it? You’re a woman that needs to be loved without end.”

“Are you serious? I can’t agree to that. It isn’t me. It’s not that I don’t want to be with you day and night, but I need to preserve some of my independence.”

“Do you really think that I want you to give up on yourself and be miserable? I just think you should branch out and find more sources that make you shine. I think you should shine at my side.”

“You don’t even know what I do for a living,” I provoke him.

“Does it matter?” he pushes back. “Personally, all I want is freedom, security, love and warmth. Anything else is just a bonus. One day you’re alive, and the next you’re dead. One day you’re married, and the next day divorced. Life is extremely dynamic. Each person has different stepping-stones, and various acquaintances that come and go. You can’t expect to stay in one place and find different people.”

“I’m afraid,” I confess.

“I have a lot of affection and love to give you,” he keeps dazzling me. “I must have kept it all these years just for you. Well, perhaps some naughty things, too,” he winks at me so I

won't accidentally think he might be innocent. "You should learn how to allow yourself to be on the receiving end."

"And receive it from you?" I insist on this detail.

"Of course, above all. As far as I'm concerned, that's the most important thing. I want you to trust me; I will never hurt you. I want you to come to me with everything that concerns you and Roy; you must commit to me. I don't want to have to compete with your exes and start piecing together bits of information. I want full disclosure and confidence. Could you provide that?" He asks in all seriousness and then falls silent.

I bow my head down and stifle the pain that spreads throughout my body and burns my eyes as though I was about to cry.

"I don't know," I confess. "I'm not used to it, you know? I've never been absolutely truthful with my partners. I've always kept things to myself. I denied my own desires and tried to adjust to their needs."

"That's exactly the opposite of what I want," he looks at me angrily. "Be yourself. If you feel broken – break down beside me, we can figure things out together. If you're horny – jump me, even if it's in the middle of the street. If you're attracted to Michael, or in love with him – don't hide it from me. Do you see where I'm going with this?"

"And what about you? How will you handle it? It's a pretty tall order."

"Do I look to you like someone who can't handle it? Trust me, I've been through a thing or two in my life. I want to feel fully

confident with you. I want to be myself in front of you, bare my soul to you,” he caresses my face.

“So, I’m also in love with Michael,” I make my first move.

He smiles and pulls me closer to him.

“I know,” he kisses my forehead. “We’ll handle that too. I’m glad you shared it with me.”

“Can we go back to the room? I’m exhausted,” I confess.

“Certainly,” hand in hand, we headed towards the elevator.

Rome looks amazing through the suite’s window. We didn’t go outside for even a second. We made love, spoke and filled in the gaps for each other. We shared about our past and planned for the future.

“The first thing we need to handle is Michael,” I become serious. “Perhaps I should tell him myself? He keeps flirting with me nonstop, and I can feel he’s becoming more and more relentless. I don’t want to hurt him. He’s very dear to me.”

“It seems you swept him off his feet, too,” he caresses my hair. “But Michael is a sensitive man and, lately, he’s also experienced quite a few disappointments. I promise that when the right time comes, I’ll explain everything to him. I won’t hide, and I’m certainly not afraid. Some things are out of our hands. Right now, he’s completely invested in his tour. In any case, I’m responsible for it. I promised you I’d take care of everything. Just relax and things will work out. I promise. He’ll forgive us.”



“I hope,” I hug him.

“I don’t get those husbands of yours. How could they have let you go? Are they aware that even if they searched for a hundred years, they wouldn’t find a woman like you?”

“I don’t know,” I smile. “Frankly, I don’t really care.” Everything I had known or felt is nothing compared this moment, this feeling and this man! I gleefully pinch his cheek and smooch him like a little girl. He loves how uninhibited I am with him.

“Listen closely, Sam Rodriguez, I intend to make up for all the time I had lived my life without you.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, sarcastic as always.

“Yes,” he announces. “I’ll make all my most secret fantasies come true with you, and I hope you’ll do the same with me. We both have a vivid imagination,” he winks his perfect eye at me. “And a couple of props, too. As long as my woman stays pleased.” He kisses my neck.

“Your woman,” I nod. “I like the sound of that,” I smile.

“It does sound good.”

And then, after exchanging countless words and not one decision, we enter the limousine and head back to the airport.



## Chapter 15

Our flight leaves on time. We sit back in our seats holding hands, eager to start our future together. We close our eyes and give into the quiet, trying to rest for a while.

After a couple of hours, the plane finally lands, and we walk outside with an awkward silence. We both know there's a huge difference between the complicated reality and our short escape. Is there a real chance that we can make it work?

“Avi, I hope that you remember that I'm going to go home now.”

“How could I forget?” He smiles. “I'm having a hard time letting you go. I miss you already. You've become a huge part of me!” He moves me again. “Perhaps I could join you? I'd love to get to know Roy right away.”

“My love,” I hug him. “I feel the same, but I haven't seen Roy in over a week. That's why I should have some alone time with him, I have to dedicate myself to him, he needs me.”

“I agree and completely understand what you're saying, but that's simply impossible. I need you too! That's why I can't stand being away from you. So,” he concludes, “I'll rent a room at the nearest hotel, and come over after he falls asleep.”

“You've got to be kidding, right?” I'm utterly stunned.

He looks overwhelmed as if I had asked the most bizarre question.

“You probably haven't fully comprehended how I feel about

you. Being away from you now would be like saying goodbye to my dear grandmother all over again. I want to be a part of your life at this very moment. Not tomorrow, not in a week from now, but immediately! This very instant! You're mine, don't you get it?" He parts my lips with his thumb.

"I'm very pleased to be yours, but I'm mostly Roy's," I insist with a light tone.

"In short," he completely ignores me. "As I've already said, I'll be waiting for that text message, and then I'll come over there in no time."

I look at him with half a smile, stifling a laugh.

"You're pretty pleased with yourself right now, aren't you? But one minute without me and you'll beg for me to come back right away," he waves his index finger in my face.

I consider what he said and soon realize he's right.

"Actually, it sounds like a great idea," I'll call you the minute Roy falls asleep.

"Good! Let's go." He hails a cab and loads the luggage and bags into the trunk.

"Jerusalem," he instructs the driver.

"But shouldn't you go home first?" I look at him with concern.

"No, I'll freshen up over there, rest for a while and wait," he parts my lips with his thumb yet again. Even his fingers are perfect, clean and masculine. "You probably don't fully get it, but my first concern is to make sure that you're safe and sound."

“Okay, my love,” I concede, fondly and appreciatingly look at his face, then caress his manly chin. “See you soon, then!” I wave at him as I step out the cab.

Finally, some peace and quiet. I smile to myself as the door shuts, and everything becomes silent. I’m no longer surrounded by a blunder of emotion and commotion but have some much-needed privacy in light of my recent shenanigans. I immediately take a long shower. I turn some music on and happily get dressed, feeling liberated like never before. Perhaps since I was a young and carefree girl. I’m so lucky! I think about everything I had been through this last week! Unbelievable! I consider all the ups and downs I’ve had along the way; it was all worth it for this single week. For this man. He’s the greatest love I could have ever imagined. Not in a million years would I have thought that someone so amazing would suddenly emerge into my world and show any interest in me.

“Now it’s time to put your inferiority complex aside,” I tell my reflection in the mirror. “You’ve suffered enough. Try to let it go, allow yourself to experience a different kind of love, immerse yourself in hopeful rays.” I know that seeing me smile is very significant for Roy, so I promise myself that my crying and meltdown days are over. I’ll strengthen myself no matter what. I’ll become the best version of myself. I’ll allow confidence and gratitude into my life and start appreciating how colorful it is. I won’t breakdown or collapse from every misstep. I won’t sob uncontrollably from things that are out of my control. For the first time in my life, I’ll give in to love. All the mantras I’ve been reciting my entire life are no longer

useful to me. Avi is a man of noble qualities. He's duality is apparent in so many ways; gentle yet stern, funny yet sad, pained yet liberated. I'll use his love for me to free myself from my own painful past. I'll respect and embrace him with all my heart, I promise myself. That's how I intend to satisfy my soul's craving for love.

Suddenly, my doorbell rings. "There's a package for you. The delivery boy hands me a small and fancy box.

"Thanks," I sign for the package, shut the door and sit on the sofa. "Who could have sent me a package? I wonder to myself. I curiously open it. No! It can't be. I find there a small and elegant card, framed with small golden leaves. The words "Save the Date" in bold silver letters are imprinted on the card. Under them I read the words "I'll forever cherish our amazing time together." It's from Michael. It's a jewelry box and in it I find an expensive golden necklace with a delicate, flat, heart-shaped pendant, delicately engraved with the letter M and the date we met on the back. I'm ecstatic.

Although I had already decided that Avi is the man I want, Michael is still very dear to me. Everything seems so confusing again. I've never been so pampered, so adored, celebrated with such lavish gifts. On one hand, I'm uncomfortable accepting the gift but, on the other, this gift has a special meaning behind it. He seems completely serious about me, and I'm terrible ashamed for misleading him and having made promises I cannot keep. What will I do now? I don't have a lot of choices. I'll have to ask Avi for some advice. Mostly because he insists on being the one who explains it to him. In the meantime, I text Michael, thanking

him with all my heart. I also told him he was lovely, and I was moved. I add a kiss emoji and I sign it with the letter 'S'.

It was almost 4:00 pm, time to pick Roy up. I hurry and await him outside his school gate.

He approaches me gleefully.

“Mommy, Mommy, my Mommy!” He cries out and hugs me so lovingly. We're both moved to tears.

“I've missed you so much! You're my everything,” I affectionately embrace his small body. “Let's go for a short walk together?” I ask him after we both calm down a little.

“Yes, Mom, it's sounds great,” Roy smiles from ear to ear.

“So, how was your time with Dad?”

“It was perfect, except for the fact that you weren't there,” he says sadly, however keeps his smile on. “At least you're here now; that's all that matters,” he hugs my waist tightly.

“Ah! My love,” I hug him back and lean towards him to smell his hair. “How was your day? Should we go and have some ice cream?”

“Yes, Mommy. Sounds great.”

We sat at a round table and talked about life, as usual, using big words suitable for little children.

“Mom, are you happy now?” Roy tensed up, waiting for my answer.

“My sweetheart, when you're with me, it's needless to ask; you're the essence of my joy. You're the reason for my existence. If it weren't for you, I would have long given up.” I

fall silent. “My Roy, these last couple of days I’ve been trying to heal my soul, regather my thoughts so I can be a better mother to you. I think that everyone deserves to be happy, as does your dear father,” I add. “Although we’ve struggled to keep a peaceful home together, it wasn’t and never will be your fault. The grown-up world isn’t as different as you might think,” I explain. “We also experience quite a lot of uncertainties and quarrels. Imagine you’ve had a fight with your best friend at school. You’re very hurt, perhaps you even cry. Then, after some time, you muster the courage to stop being his friend and find other friends who make you happy. So, the same goes for us, the adults. We can’t force anyone to like us. In order to raise children, parents need to have the right outlook and attitude. The first principle is the principle of joy. If it exists, then the energy flows on its own.”

“Mom, do you have a new friend?” he suddenly asks me. How did he realize it? I stifle my embarrassment.

“I’ve met someone. I know it’s very quick,” I add, “but he makes me happy. Everything is still pretty new between us. Only time will tell. What matters is that you and I are always together, right?”

“That’s all that really matters,” he nods.

We finish eating and resume our daily routine.

It’s 9:00 pm. My beloved Roy is asleep, tucked into bed, happily hugging the same stuffed monkey he’s been sleeping with since he was a baby.

I text him a picture of me waiting for him in bed and write: “Can’t wait.” A few seconds later, I hear someone knocking at the door.

“How did you get here so quickly?” I ask, surprised.

“I was in the area,” he explains and confidently walks in.

“So, you’ve been waiting for me?” I smile and look at him.

“You’re worth waiting for.” He leans in, presses my lips together with his hand and kisses me deeply.

I immediately pounce him and deepen the kiss. He grabs onto me, and places his hands under my ass cheeks, supporting my body and completely turning me on in the process. As he somewhat waddles to the bedroom, I let out uncontrollable pleased moans.

“Shush. Don’t wake Roy up! Behave yourself, okay? Crazy girl!” He lightly spanks my buttocks. Then, he tosses me on the bed, locks the door and removes every piece of clothing off of me.

We’re all over each other, getting carried away in a crazed love-making session. We lie on the very bed I had slept on with Matthew only a few weeks ago; the very same bed I was given when I was cast out from my old home to build my new life in this one. Avi looks so enthusiastic to see me, as if it had been weeks since we saw each other. He cups my breasts, bites them lustfully, then breathes into my ear, driving me completely mad. He sends a chill down my spine. I give in to him, relishing every moment his hands explore and marvel at my body. His penis is so stiff. He penetrates me and breaks



through every possible wall inside of me. He's demanding and uninhibited, and he immerses himself in me. I feel so confident, beautiful and I melt in his hands.

"It's such a pleasure fucking you in your natural environment!" he cries out, unloading his bursting passion inside of me. We both try to catch our breath, completely entangled in each other.

There's a loud knock on the door. This time I panic.

"Who is it?" I try to locate some of my clothes scattered on the floor, just so I could look decent enough to open the door.

"A robe, honey," he mutters at me. "That's all you need. And hurry back. I miss you already."

His suggestion made sense. I pull a robe out of my closet and immediately wrap it around my body.

"I wish I were your robe," he keeps taunting me.

"One minute!" I shout at the door. I try to straighten myself. I push back my disheveled hair and slowly open the door.

"Matthew?" All of the sudden, reality seems to have knocked on my door.

"Sam!" Matthew barges in. "I have to tell you something. Despite everything that happened between us, I hope you know that you'll always be important to me."

"Sure, whatever. Only two months ago you accused me and said I was unable to raise our son appropriately, and suddenly I'm very important to you." I carelessly provoke him.

He approaches me, tries to wrap his arms around my waist.

However, I take a step back, anxious.

“What do you want from me, Matthew?”

“I worry about you. I know that you’re all alone. No one has your back and your parents... well, you know. I wouldn’t count on them.”

“You’ve come all the way here to remind me of all the things I don’t have?” I snipe at him angrily.

Avi storms in from the bedroom, wearing nothing other than his underwear.

“I’m Avi, nice to finally meet you,” he reaches his hand out to Matthew. “I’m Sam’s new boyfriend. I wanted to personally thank you. After all,” he continues to mock him, “if you hadn’t divorced her, I would have never met the love of my life.”

Matthew stares at him in awe. Clearly, he didn’t know how to channel the wrath coursing throughout his body. He cannot process the sight of this man, his underwear, the sex, the audacity, or the realization that this time he has completely lost me and no longer has any impact on my life.

“What’s this all about?” he snaps at him, pointing at his nakedness.

“These are my underwear,” he replies with unapologetic directness. “Personally, I would have preferred wearing nothing at all, but I must show respect. See, Matthew, I’m not just passing by. It’s probably hard for you to let such a gorgeous woman go, but you had your chance and you blew it. That’s why you need to get used to this as quickly as possible. I intend on being a part of your son’s life. Therefore, I suggest

that for everyone's sake, we learn how to get along.”

Matthew becomes enraged, but Avi shuts the door on his anger.

“It can end well or end badly. It's up to you. But I should warn you in advance. If you choose the latter, I'll wear you out. I have endless means. I can make your life a living hell. So, I suggest that you respect what this amazing woman wants. She also happens to be the mother of your child. Just let it go. Don't you dare come here again in the middle of the night, or without any prior notice. I warn you.”

Matthew glares at him, stunned.

“You'll ruin your life. You're insane. It's been only one week! Look at yourself. How could you have done all this in one week?” He gestures at my body. “Did you cheat on me? How long has this been going on? I'm absolutely appalled!”

“How dare you accuse me?” I lash out. “I've been waiting for years for you to love and cherish me, but all you did was become cruel and push me as far away as possible. Day in and day out, I invested all my time and effort in our house and in Roy. So, you have no right to say that shit to me, get it? We met only a couple of days ago, but it was love at first sight.” I explain with sincerity, though I hardly think he'll understand.

“I truly pity you. Sam should have been served like a queen! Don't you think you've done enough damage already?”

“Matthew, please let it go. It's very late, and it would be best if you leave now.” I point at the door.

Matthew turns back and leaves, closing the door behind him

with unsettling silence.

“Wow!” I’m startled. “That was so bad.” I grab my head and feel fear spreading through me. “I’m terrified,” I confess and freeze.

“Why? What’s the problem? I’ve just told him what’s what. Did I lie?”

“That isn’t the point. Don’t you get it? He might try to get back at me. Try to hurt me. He scares me. God forbid Roy pays the price.”

“No one will ever hurt you! I’d like to remind you that you’re supposed to trust me. And when it comes to Roy, I’ll never let him become a bargaining chip. He’ll always be safe and loved.”

“Are you sure you want to get into this mess?”

“You’re mine, aren’t you?” he replies decisively. “It’s all or nothing.”

For some reason, I trust him and surrender. “Let it be. I’m exhausted.”

“Perfect,” he declares, we return to the room, falling into a sweet slumber.



## Chapter 16

“Good morning, gorgeous,” Avi says as he gets dressed. “It’s 6:00 am, I’d better get ready and head out. I need to stop by the office. There are a couple of things I have to attend to. Besides, I don’t want Roy to see me first thing in the morning. We have to be very sensitive about how you introduce him to me.”

“My love, I’m so glad you’ve said that. I didn’t want to hurt your feelings, but I really don’t think he should meet you like this, especially after such a short time.”

“Sam,” he looks at me angrily. “You’ve promised me that you’ll always share your thoughts with me and tell me what you’re feeling.”

“You’re right! But I also trust that you’ll always want to make me happy and not deliberately hurt me, which is much more important,” I sweet-talk him.

“You’re the most mad and maddening woman I have ever met. When I finish, I’ll let you know. I want to talk to you about something.”

“Gladly,” I stretch my body towards him while he kisses me on the lips and then rushes out and leaves.

“Roy, my love, it’s time to get up.” I kiss my Roy’s head. “You look so handsome when you sleep,” I try not to smother him as I give him a warm hug, and breathe in his wonderful smell, straight into my heart.

“Good morning, Mom,” Roy happily gets out of bed and falls into my arms.

Roy looks at me sleepily.

“You look completely different today, Mom.”

“It’s probably because I’m overjoyed, Son.”

“I can’t remember ever seeing you this happy.” He smiles at me. “You’ve always tried to pretend that you’re fine, strong and happy. But your heart bubbled with pain – like a volcano. You used to cry a lot, Mommy,” Roy takes my hand in his.

As usual, his vocabulary and insights move me. He’s only six, and already knows and sees it all.

“Roy, my darling,” I hug him again. “I hope that you know I’ve tried everything. I didn’t mean to tear your home apart. I’m sorry. But I’m trying to turn my life around; especially with regard to our life. The happier I am, the more attentive I can be, dedicating myself to you and showing you all the love I have for you. All the arguments we’ve had at home, all the tears, the shouting and the unpleasant words that were exchanged; all of those have kept me away from you, and mostly from myself. I’ll do everything in my power to make you happy, my love. I’ll never give up on you or the wonderful meaning you brought into my life when you gave me the honor of being the mother of a talented, smart and kind-hearted boy. I promise you, Roy. And this promise cannot be broken by anything or anyone.” I try to dissolve the doubts nesting in his head.

“I trust you, Mommy. I’m sure that I’ll love whoever’s making

you that happy.” He flashes a charming smile at me and makes my heart swell.

“We should get ready for school, so you won’t be late,” I pleasantly urge him. “I love you, my sweetheart. I always have and always will.”

“Forever!” he concludes, smiling.



O.M.G.! Is it really almost 3:00 pm?! I’ve had an exceptionally busy day; I’ve booked meetings and finally completed all my obligations to my clients. It’s time to get some air. I shut my laptop and start getting ready to leave the office that I rent from time to time.

“So, how much longer do you think I’ll have to wait before you notice me standing here?”

“Avi? What are you doing here? What a lovely surprise!” I pounce him, giving him the hug that I’ve been achingly longing for the entire day.

“We said we’d talk today, remember?”

“Actually, it completely slipped my mind,” I confess. “But I remember now,” I smile apologetically. “So, what do we need to talk about?”

“About you, of course.” He winks at me.

“About me? With regards to what?”

“We should talk about your parents and your family. Matthew blurted a couple of things last night that made me realize that I don’t really know much about you. It’s very important for me that we talk about those things.”

“Oh, I understand. But there’s no point in talking about those things since they’re never going to change, my darling,” I hug him needily.

“I need to know everything about you!” he insists.

“Okay, let’s talk,” I point to the chair and sit at the table.

“We can’t talk with you sitting in front of me like that.” He kisses me. “It’ll be better if we go to grab a bite. Are there any good restaurants around here?”

“Actually, there’s a nice Italian restaurant just around the corner. The food is rather good there,” I smile.

“So, let’s go,” he places his arm around my shoulder.

I grab my purse, lock the door, and we head out. We cross the road and sit at a quiet table. The waitress approaches us, we both order a selection of dishes and then wait.

“Shoot. Tell me about yourself, about your family,” he urges me.

“Okay,” I lean back and pour some water into my glass. “So, I’m the eldest and my brother’s name is Owen. He’s six years younger than me. After he was born, my parents completely ignored me, as though I had vanished. They treated me like a doormat, their scapegoat. That’s why I felt lost and homeless for many years even though I had parents and a roof over my head.

“I was very lonely and insecure back then. And that is probably the main reason why I chose to get married so young. I was very naive and anxious, and Joey made me feel I could rely on him. Perhaps my parents got married for the same



reasons. My mom was only seventeen when they married, and they had me immediately after,” I laugh bitterly. “It’s quite common in our family.”

“My parents were quite busy too, you know. Don’t forget I have seven siblings.” He defiantly furrows his perfect brows, stands up and then sits next to me.

“It sounds like it,” I giggle. “Anyway, as I grew up, a rift formed between us, resentments we couldn’t undo. They struggled with the fact that I had become an independent and opinionated woman who has her own desires and aspirations. They’re rather conservative, so they tried to restrict my every movement. Things have been stable for a long time. They love Roy very much, but now, after the divorce they’ve grown distant again. Perhaps they’re afraid I’ll show up at their door, dump my baggage on them and expect them save me.”

“You’re the best thing that could have happen to them!” He’s upset. “I can’t understand it. You’re educated, gorgeous, hardworking, kind, and loving.”

“That’s the way it is. We’re like oil and water,” I’ve already learned to accept it.

“We have to change things, the sooner the better.” He’s determined. “You shouldn’t have to carry this burden by yourself. What would your parents have wanted to see in your future partner?” He’s trying to get to know them better.

“Frankly,” I’m embarrassed telling him. “But I think all they care about is money and honor. I’m not sure they actually understand the meaning of love. I’m pretty sure that they respect and depend on one another, but when it comes to love?

I'm not sure they've ever felt it. I've spent years seeking their approval and trying to please them. However, unfortunately, I was always unsuccessful. As the years passed, and after multiple disappointments, I realized it's never going to happen. So, I decided it was time to be independent and created my own reality. I made sure my identity no longer relied on their perception of it and, nowadays, I try to lead my life without thinking of their expectations. I simply want to learn how to believe in myself and become the woman and mother that I strive to be, regardless of their criticism."

"That's all fine," he explains, "but these things do have an impact on you and on Roy, too. We have to correct this wrong," he continues, insisting on showing me just how serious he is. "Hear me out, when it comes to our relationship, I'm not looking for their approval. Frankly, after hearing everything, I'm pretty angry at them. You don't deserve to be treated that way. I'm sure that you're a wonderful daughter and a terrific mother. Sometimes people have high expectations because they appreciate us more than we do ourselves. Because I care about you, and because I love you so much, I'm convinced that if we don't get to the bottom of this problem, it's going to come back and bite you when things will seem unstable. Trust me, I'm an expert when it comes to these matters."

"So, what do you propose?" I look at him embarrassedly.

"I intend to meet them, impress them, spin their head with plenty of money and respect, just so they can realize how silly they are and how dear and precious you are to others. I plan on confronting them with the truth. And I'll do it with plates

covered in dollars if I have you,” he laughs dismissively.

I also burst out laughing.

“Are you serious? Are you actually going to do it?”

“I’ll call them this very instant.”

“No!” I object. But he won’t relent until I give him the green light to go ahead and do it.

“Hello?” My mother’s voice says on the other side of the line.

“Hello Esther, nice to meet you. My name is Avi Levi. You don’t know me, but your gorgeous daughter has told me so much about you.”

“Sam?” she asks.

How many daughters does she think she has? I think bitterly.

“Yes, your wonderful daughter has become the dearest person to me in the whole wide world,” he smiles and looks straight into my eyes. My heart swells with joy. “I’d like to invite your entire family over for dinner. It’s very important to me that we get to know each other. As you surely understand, I’m calling because the matter is very important to me.”

“When would you like us to come?”

“Tonight,” Avi continues his ‘Carpe Diem’ approach. “Let’s say two and a half hours?” He doesn’t ease off.

“Fine,” my mother agrees.

“Okay, then. I’ll text you the address right away and see you soon.” He finishes the conversation as he always does, leaving no room for any other words.

“See you,” my mother sounds curious and pensive.

“I hope they won’t disappoint you. They can make a very good first impression, but I’m afraid I’ve lost their respect forever. In any case, I need to go and pick up Roy,” I announce.

“When does he finish school?”

“At around 4:30.”

“Okay, how are we going to do it then?” he deliberates.

“Matthew has to go to a wedding tonight, so he asked me to make an exception and let Roy join him. He’ll stay at his place tonight. I’ll pick him up, and we’ll grab a bite together, then I’ll drop him off at Matthew’s.”

“Perfect! The universe is on our side, hun, see?” He looks so excited. “Everything’s working out for us,” smiling from ear to ear. “Let’s go. I’ll wait at your place until you finish up.”

“Alright,” I reply with a wide smile and hand him the keys to my apartment.

At around 5:30 I text him that I’m ready and waiting for him by his car. He comes out of the building, and we head back to his mansion.

“So, when were you planning on telling me about the necklace Michael sent you? I saw it on your bed as I was waiting.”

“I was planning on telling you!” I freak out. “I was so busy that I completely forgot about it. I’m sorry.”

“What for? First, it’s not your doing, and second, he’s right. It’s indeed a date to remember. It’s the day we met, too.”

I calm down and smile at him.



My parents' silver Mazda parks parallel to the sidewalk facing the grand mansion gate. We await them at the entrance, instructing my parents to drive into the house's private garage.

When they step out of their car, they look around, examine their surroundings. They seem both confused and hypnotized.

“Welcome!” he grins at them.

“Indeed,” my mother mutters and keeps meticulously scanning everything. Avi warmly shakes both their hands and walks them into the house. My parents react to the rest of the house just as they did to the huge front yard, the waterfalls, the soft grass, the luxurious cobblestone path, and the grandeur of the gray house. They look every which way, taking in all the sights and beaming luxury.

“They have no idea what I'm doing here,” I sarcastically whisper to him.

He wrinkles my lips joyfully and then kisses the tips of his fingers.

“Please, come in. Make yourself comfortable. Let's get to know each other.”

Silvia, the housekeeper, along with two other young women, serve prepare beverages for us – cold, hot and even alcoholic – as well as trays laden with delicious treats.

Avi dedicates himself to familiarizing himself with my parents who, in the meantime, are trying to take in all the luxury and riches surrounding them.

“Your daughter is very important to me,” he puts the niceties aside and gets down to business. “I invited you over so you can see where I live and, hopefully, where Sam and Roy will soon live.”

“This is your house?” My mom looks dazzled.

“Yes, a house I can afford after a lot of hard work. I wasn’t born with a silver spoon in my mouth,” he tells them laconically. He tells them about how his father had died, where he had grown up, and what he had done. I look at him with immense appreciation, seeing just how hard he’s trying to make a good impression; he’s doing all of this to make me feel comfortable and reassured.

“In the not-so-distant future,” he adds, “I intend to marry your daughter.” I’m surprised, and yet my body tenses up. “I’m well-aware that you and she have had your fair share of misunderstandings and disputes that have surely left their mark. However, some believe that when a new person comes into the picture, they can help to change things for the better. I think it’s time we all put the past behind us and focus on our most important goal, which I’m sure we share; ensuring that your stunning daughter feels loved and safe, along with our precious Roy, of course, both at my side.”

“Has Roy already met you?” My mother sounds surprised. I’m guessing that she’s trying to make sense of things and calculate how long I’ve been divorced.

“When you know you’ve found the one, there’s no point in dragging it out,” Avi puts an end to her calculations. After all, it has only been a week and a couple of days. “A love such as

ours is rare. Those who are lucky enough to have it, cannot ignore it. She brings colors and joy into my life. I've found a home and bliss with her. I hope that you can join us on this marvelous journey."

My mother nods.

"She's been through so much. I regret many of the things that have happened between us, and some of the things I have done in the past," she adds. "I'm sorry for pressuring you into marrying Matthew," she addresses me. The air becomes thick with silence. I notice that Avi's expression has turned serious, fueled by anger and contempt. I immediately try to ease the tension, so he won't lash out.

"Sorry for pushing you away," I apologize, and quite exceptionally, I mean it. "I should have been more patient with you. I've just always felt unworthy."

"What on earth are you talking about, my sweet child?" My father exclaims. He usually lets my mom do all the talking. "You're so important to me. To us. You're my eldest! Thanks to you, I'm a father. We've always wanted to be there for you, and we've never thought you were unworthy. We've wanted the very best for you. I agree that we've meddled one too many times, but we were only trying to protect you. I apologize if we have offended you." Then he adds in protest, "all the riches in the world are worthless if my precious daughter is unhappy."

"We were wrong," my mother concludes. "We need to restart, to let go of the past and begin again with a clean slate. Sam, you're very dear to us. I'll do everything in my power to

amend our mistakes and be there for you when you need me.”

“It’s alright, dearest mother!” I respect her and embrace the warmth and sincerity with which she has spoken to me. And then, of all the stories she could have told him, my mother chooses to tell the ‘cherry story’.

“You won’t believe it,” she laughs uncontrollably. “One morning, this girl just gets up and disappears. She went to the supermarket to buy cherries because she wanted to bake a birthday cake for her best friend. She was five! You have no idea how many hours we searched for her. Can you imagine? Life’s never boring with this one,” she laughs.

“Yes, you’re probably right,” I laugh along.

He looks at me, mesmerized, and keeps caressing my hand.

“You have a charming, amazing, gorgeous and wonderful daughter,” he repeats again and again. “I love her very much.”

Everyone smiles politely.

“Alright, it’s time for us to head out,” my father urges my mother. We hug and kiss goodbye. Avi shakes their hands.

Although the evening started off as tense and somewhat confusing, in the end it gave me a sense of tranquility and peace of mind. After my second divorce, I was sure they’d never look me in the eye again. They struggled to accept the fact that I had decided to get divorced yet again. My first divorce made them ashamed of me, and they wouldn’t stop telling me how embarrassed they were. That was why they encouraged me to marry Matthew; they claimed it would be a wonderful opportunity, and I’d be wrong to give up on it. After



all, I wasn't getting any younger, and I might regret it later. I decided to try and be the daughter they expected me to be. I thought that if I denied my own urges and took the logical route for once, things would work out and I'd be able to break my destructive streak. How ironic.

Now I'm all alone, my head is resting softly on the pillow. I shut my eyes and give into this significant and liberating moment. I'm filled with confidence. Finally, my parents appreciate me for my choices. It's no small thing. It's hard walking around, feeling that my closest and most significant family thinks little of me. Such thoughts can erase every inkling of self-esteem. I remember how whenever Matthew felt helpless, he'd use that against me, to hurt me as much as he could.

"Even your parents hate you. They've rejected you. You're nothing to them."

And I knew when he'd say it, I was nothing to him, too.

Avi immediately realized there was a rift between us. He put in the time and effort to clear the air, emphasize my strengths and how meaningful I am to him, how he regards me as a successful, talented, and blessed woman. I'm sure my mother is over the moon. My heart swells with bliss and relief. A wide smile spreads on my lips when I see him sitting in an armchair in the garden, his eyes peacefully shut.

You're so precious to me, my dear Avi. This time, I'll make no mistakes. I'll give myself entirely to you! I'll leave all my flaws, my past, my pain and tears behind and I'll focus on the good that seems to have suddenly rocked my entire world.





## Chapter 17

“Mom, when am I going to meet the person who’s been making you this happy? I’m well-aware that he’s the one who’s been sending you flowers and all those little treats.”

I smile embarrassedly.

“You’re right. Please, come over here. Let’s sit together, sweetie, and talk for a while,” I sit him on my lap, caress his hair, and breathe in his sweet scent. “I have someone special in my life. He’s very dear to me. His name is Avi. Even though you still haven’t met him, he knows how important you are to me. He’s been asking to meet you, but I wasn’t sure it would be a good idea. After all, it’s been a few weeks since your dad and I broke up. I wasn’t sure you’d be ready for that.”

“But you always say that we should overcome everything together. Dad even told me that he met him.”

“Did he actually say that?” I panic. How could he have done that, for God’s sake? He’ll do anything in his power to hurt and control me. “What did he tell you?”

“He said that you’ll probably get married again,” he looks at me curiously.

That man is so insensitive!

“Please, listen to me, Son. Avi is very important to me. Your dear father can no longer dictate my life. We got divorced so we could each lead a peaceful life and find our bliss. Each of us in our own path. When we were married, I was too sad and

didn't have the energy to nurture you as much as you deserve. In any case, I suggest that you meet him as soon as possible. He's a very good man and I'm quite sure that you'll see it for yourself. In any case, you should know, I'll never do something you're uncomfortable with."

"So, can we meet him tonight?"

"If you feel that this is right time," I gently ease my grip on him.

"I'm sure." He hops off and goes to his room to play with his Legos.

I immediately call Avi and tell him everything that had happened.

"That sounds great," he sounds pleased. "Kids love me! Everything will work out, trust me! I'll be there soon. You have nothing to be anxious about," he promises.

I really hope so. I finish the call and rush to prepare a delicious supper: a heap of small and fragrant hamburger and buns. A treat that both children and grownups would love. Certainly, my boys would, I chuckle to myself.

It's almost time, and Roy and I are waiting in the living room. Avi arrives dressed in a black t-shirt with a winking yellow smiley emoji and dark jeans. He's so handsome, every outfit he wears fits him perfectly. I fawn over him, then give him a quick hug. He comes in and approaches Roy, shakes his hand and introduces himself.

"I'm so glad you asked to meet me. I've heard so much about you, but I wanted to make sure everyone was at ease before I

meet you. I've already met your dad, your grandma and grandpa." He winks at him. "Come here and sit next to me," he gestures at the sofa. "I'm sure you have a lot of questions for me. Please, ask away. I'll be happy to answer anything you want to know."

"I only have one question," he looks him straight in the eyes. "I'd like to know if you're going to leave my mommy, too?"

I look at him, stunned. My eyes well up with tears of pain, regret, sadness, as well as excitement.

"I don't want her heart to break again," he explains to him with impressive sincerity.

"I can assure you that I know what you mean," he smiles. "You should know that I lost my father when I was nine years old. He was killed in battle and my mother couldn't handle the heartache. Just like you, all I wanted was to protect her as much as I could. In any case, frankly speaking, that's why I don't want to make any promises regarding things we cannot control. The only thing that I'm convinced about is that I love your mommy very much and, therefore, I can assure you that I don't have any intentions of hurting her. That's why I'll do everything in my power to make her happy, and that can only happen is if you're happy, too," he hugs him. Roy returns into his hug. Why wouldn't he? Avi's touch and smell are so intoxicating.

"Now that we've cleared the air, I think it'll be best if we get to know each other. Let's put everything aside and watch some cartoons together, let's have some fun," he declares with a big smile, after concluding all the emotional parts of the

conversation. He's well-aware that a young child's attention span tends to be rather short. They sit side by side on the shaggy round rug, snacking and laughing.

"Avi, you're such a perfect man," I whisper to him at night.

"Your love and devotion make me perfect; I love you, babe," he whispers back, and falls asleep in my arms.



During those busy days, my affair with Michael moves full steam ahead. Even though I keep pretending everything between us is normal, the more I learn about him, the more my love for him grows deeper, much more than it should. He calls me anytime he can: when he wakes up in the morning and before he goes to bed. On those long calls, he shares all his life experiences, his bitter disappointments, and asks about me in return. As the days pass by, I become more attached to his beautiful soul. He makes me feel comfortable and valued; I open up to him more than I have to anyone. Avi doesn't know about it. Talking was never our relationship's forte. We're so madly and consumingly attracted to one another that our passion swallows up all the words, leaving us little to no spare time. But with Michael, the distance probably makes us feel less vulnerable and the outer layers seem to disappear. "I really miss you, Sam, I can't wait to see you again. Even though we're so far away right now, I've never felt so close to anyone. I can share with you my deepest secrets and still feel comfortable and happy. My life was never as glamorous as it is in the movies. I've been hurt and taken advantage of so many times. Before I met you, I never thought I could trust anyone again. You're so important to me."

“As you are, to me.” We warmly kiss each other over the phone. What have I done? I can’t stop thinking about him and how much I love and care for him, or about how special and dear he is to me. How could I deceive him and break his heart? He doesn’t deserve any of this! I’ve never had someone who dedicated so much of his time to me. It seems that he’s putting a lot of effort into this relationship. And what am I doing?

I don’t know what to do! I love him, too! He’s so precious to me, and I don’t want to hurt him like that! However, each time I try to talk to him and tell him about Avi, either something happens, or Avi is standing right next to me. I don’t want to drop this bomb on him and completely break his heart. Not only regarding our relationship, but also because, God forbid, he might think Avi has been lying and betraying him, too. He loves him so much. How did we get here, and how did I drag us all into this? I hope that Avi’s insistence on telling him face-to-face when he sees him is the right thing to do. In the meantime, I keep things from him.

As if that isn’t enough, I still have to take care of Roy and work. As I’ve accumulated a large clientele over the years, I start contacting them again, and take my sales and marketing skills up a notch as I sell products for thousands on a daily basis.

Since Avi is so persistent, he comes over every day after work. He spends most of his time with Roy, does puzzles with him on the gray carpet in the hallway. Sometimes, he takes him on bike rides.

When they’re together, Avi barely pays me any attention. It

allows me to freely attend to my business, Roy enjoys it so much and they're both completely dedicated to that world of theirs, a world where they can fly off to distant lands. Oh! He's absolutely perfect. He's everything I could have ever dreamed of. Every moment without him seems like an eternity. His scent is always around me, drenched in my very pores. His presence engulfs me. When he's attends to his business and is far away from me, I feel empty and nervous, I search for him in every corner. He never fails me and keeps treating me like a princess. When I address him, at any time, or situation, he immediately stops everything and devotes himself to me, kissing, caressing, whispering dirty words to me, describing love scenarios to me, and fulfilling all his secret fantasies with me. The more he seems to feed me, the hungrier I become. I'm completely addicted, and give in to him willingly, openly and blissfully.

He makes me feel so confident that I carry myself throughout the day in complete style. I feel comfortable looking directly into people's eyes again. I stand up for myself, unafraid of the consequences.

He surprises us over the weekend and takes us to the fair. He rejoices like a wild child. He's so funny that Roy easily gives in to his playfulness, drawn into his child-like games. We're all very happy.

That's it. My week with Roy is over. I've already dropped him off at Matthew's. I've decided to surprise my dear man tonight. I want to show him just how much he has changed my whole world, and how much I appreciate his actions and thoughtfulness. Tonight I'll loosen up and give him a taste of



my own fantasies.

We schedule to meet at his place. He sends a cab over and makes sure I arrive safe and sound. I walk into his bedroom and await him, wearing nothing but sexy black garters that make me look hot as hell and light makeup, including red lipstick. I turn on the music and choose Prince's "Cream." I crank up the volume, dim the lights and wait. When he walks into the room, I approach him lustily, determinedly. I walk towards him in my black heels, throw him onto the bed and he yields like a man under hypnosis.

I start dancing to the rhythm of the music. I completely lose myself in the deep and sensual sounds. I touch myself, caress my legs up and down, seductively. I sway my hips from side to side. I turn around on my heels. 'I perform like a seasoned stripper,' I playfully think to myself.

He's fascinated, enthralled and captivated, patiently waiting for me to finish.

"You're the fantasy I never knew I had," he looks at me, bewitched. "I'm simply crazy about you!" He kisses me and nibbles on the back of my neck. He peels off all the pieces of fabric still clinging to my body and throws them to the floor.

"You don't need all of that! It's best that you just stay naked," and he means it. The frequency of our love making is impossible and addictive and, when we stop, it's physically painful.

"There are still so many fantasies we need to explore together. Don't you ever think that'll ever get bored of you."

“I wanted to thank you for everything you’ve done for Roy and me this past week,” I whisper gratefully and kiss his cheek.

“My princess, it was my pleasure, too, you know!” He smiles.

“You’re my everything. My everything.

”



## Chapter 18

I was happy to receive a very tempting offer from the company I work at; they offered me to hire additional agents. The more they make, the more I make. Tonight, we're about to begin another recruitment round. I get a rather big bonus for each round and boy do I need it! Not necessarily because I need the money, but more for my self-esteem and the confidence that has been building inside me lately. I want to shed off the past and shine. I have a real opportunity to succeed and finally shatter my own glass ceiling. If I manage to recruit agents from around the world – that's where the big money is – it would help me increase my salary, regardless of the bonuses and annual dividends. Naturally, this requires hard work and dedication. Matthew's words still ring through my mind. "How can you call it work? It's nothing more than a pyramid scheme." I immediately feel a sense of insecurity climbing up my spine; but I quickly push it back; I have to do well tonight and give it my all. But it also means, I need to focus on our huge four-day conference in London. I wonder how Avi will respond to it. I hope he won't disappoint me and support me through it. This could possibly be the first obstacle in our relationship. I'll tell him all about it later. But first, I want him to see me as impressively and seriously as possible.

I rush to my hairdresser and continue from there to my favorite boutique store. I find a small, sexy, and quite impressive black suit that, surprisingly enough, isn't too expensive either. Excited, I start getting ready. I put on my perfect suit,

meticulously apply my makeup and, in the end, armed with my black heels and black leather briefcase, I take a cab to his place.

As I step out the cab, I hear someone calling out my name: “Sam?”

“Hey, Dean, what’s up?” I smile warmly. I adore him!

“Wow, Sam, you look absolutely remarkable,” he reaches his hands out to me. I’m embarrassed. I wonder if Dean is as sex-crazed as his brother, I naughtily consider.

“My brother’s a lucky man.”

“Thanks,” I stifle a shy smile.

“Let’s go inside.”

“Is Avi away? I hope I’m not imposing.”

“Are you serious?” Dean laughs. “You’re more welcome here than all of us put together.”

“I certainly hope so,” we both laugh out loud.

“So, where are you headed to?” He looks at me with a faint smile.

“Headed to?” I ask with surprise. “Oh, because of the suit. I have an important business presentation tonight.”

“You’re a businesswoman?” He’s both surprised and embarrassed.

“Sort of. I’m an agent at an international marketing company. I haven’t been able to dedicate a lot of time to it during the last years because of I had to take care of my son, Roy.” I explain.

“But now, I’m all on my own, and I have to rebuild my entire life to ensure that we both have strong financial security and freedom.”

“Sam, you seem a very motivated woman.” Dean looks at me with sincerity and warmth. “Good for you. I admire women such as yourself. But you know that you’ll never go wanting, after all...” he gestures with his hand at the size of the living room.

“Hasn’t even crossed my mind,” I burst out laughing. “I wouldn’t have had to work at all. But I do have a responsibility as a mother to be a role model for my son, to be strong and to always do my very best for him. That’s why I believe that he’ll learn good work values by witnessing my hard work.”

“You’re also quite clever,” he says, impressed. “Avi really did score a good one. You’re very special.”

“So are you. And you’re such good brother to Avi. You’re very dear to him.”

“As is he to me,” he says excitedly. “He’s always been a special boy. A wonder child, intelligent and very charming. As the years went by, he decided to go punk and dive into the tech and science world. Back then, he drove all of us crazy. That’s why I’ve been taking him everywhere since. At that time, I was playing with a successful band, and he adored my music.”

“Dean, you should know I admired it, too. I’ve been your fan since I was fourteen!” I flatter him. “You’re amazing, talented, and have an uncanny musical touch.”

“Ooh! Thanks, Sam.” He blushes, I wasn’t sure if you even knew who I am. It’s been quite a while ago,” he seems both embarrassed and appreciative. “In any case, we’ve always been together. Throughout everything. After dad died, he seemed to have grown up overnight. Luckily, he managed to channel his destructive streak into doing positive and meaningful things, which eventually led to his success. He’s my weakness, that kid,” he smiles lovingly.

The door opens. Avi walks in and cuts our conversation off.

“Hi what a wonderful surprise,” he kisses me gently. “Why did you gussy up, gorgeous?” He looks at me with a lustful and hypnotized gaze.

“I guess that’s my sign to leave,” Dean chuckles and goes to his room.

“So... Where are you going looking like that?” He plays with a strand of my hair and peers into my eyes.

He’s so sexy, it’s unbelievable!

“I have a business presentation today at 8:00 pm. It’s close by, so I thought I would surprise you.”

“Well, I’m very surprised,” he confesses. “I had no idea; can I join you?”

“Sure,” I smile. “It’s an open presentation.”

“Should we order some sushi?” he snickers.

“Why are you laughing?” I ask coyly.

“Well, probably because the last thing I want to do right now is eat sushi or attend your presentation.”

“I didn’t think otherwise,” I laugh. “But I need to work, I want to be independent, you promised me, remember?”

“Whatever, Sam. But it’s becoming really annoying.”

“Would you be even more annoyed if I tell you that I need to fly to a conference in London?” I look at him, trying to predict what he’ll say next.

“Is this business that important to you?” he asks seriously after a long and somewhat tense silence.

“Not really, Avi Levi. But I need to work somewhere, earn a living.”

“Then, work for me,” he offers. “You can be my personal assistant.”

“And we’ll spend a lot of time together... perhaps even in the elevator?” I say teasingly.

“Plenty!” He says, seemingly smitten. He hugs me tightly and adds, “we can go together to your presentation and, if you’d like, we can fly to London together. But after all these charades, which no doubt plays into my current fantasies,” he gestures at my body, “we can revisit this issue. This work isn’t at your level! Okay, honey?”

“As long as I get paid for my services, I’m pleased,” I say sweetly.

“So, maybe I should start paying you each time we have sex?” He smiles diabolically.

“Are you serious?” I choke with embarrassment.

“I think it’ll turn you on, am I right, babe?” He nuzzles his

nose on my ear and giggles.

“Actually, it doesn’t sound too bad,” I snicker and provoke him. “How much would you pay me? At least a thousand dollars, I hope. I’d like to think I’m at the very top.”

“Trust me, princess, you’re definitely the cream of the crop. You just don’t know it. That might be the secret to your charm.”

“I don’t know, Avi. I’m just being honest here.”

“You’re simply perfect!”



We walk together into a spacious office building. The presentation was held at the building’s lobby. He parked his black Porsche and opened the door for me.

“There you are, my lady.”

“Thank you!” I immediately step into the executive’s shoes, which has always empowered me. I appear self-confident on the outside, but inside, I’m a leaf blowing in the wind. I introduce my new and amazing boyfriend to all my colleagues. He’s impressed with how positive my work environment appears to be. Everyone asks for my opinion and consults with me. I receive praises for my presentation and even manage to recruit five new agents, which is considered a great success.

“You were simply wonderful,” he approaches me when the evening is over. “Even I was convinced!” He hugs me tightly. “In fact, I want to be your agent. I would have loved to have a boss like you.” I guffaw somewhat arrogantly.

“So, how much money did you actually make today?” he



inquires on the way back.

“Sex included?” I taunt him.

He pulls over and firmly grabs my face.

“You have no idea how much I love you, you’re my princess. You make me laugh, you enrich my whole world, you drive me mad. In short, you’re the best thing that has ever happened to me,” he looks at me with a fiery gaze.

“You’re the second-best thing that has ever happened to me!” I wipe a tear away.

“You’re a real princess!” He presses his lips against mine and we get swept away into a passionate kiss.

We spend the next two hours at a hotel downtown. He feeds me chocolate-covered strawberries and licks the leftovers off my lips.

“You’re absolutely spectacular! Let’s take that little suit off of you. Now I regret not having put on a tie,” he thinks out loud, as he undresses me, and throws my blazer aside. He attentively turns me around, unzips my short skirt, and it smoothly slips down. He leaves my lace bra on, but then slides the strap ever so gently. He kisses my shoulders, reaches out for my breasts and slowly pulls them out of the bra’s cups. He rolls the bra’s elastic band all the way down to my ribs. Now, I’m standing in front of him in nothing but my black heels, as he performs mind-blowing oral sex on me. Still standing, his tongue hungrily licks my vulva, over and over again.

I climax so hard on his head and fervently pull on his gorgeous hair. He spares me, and gently lies me down on the bed. He

flips me over on my belly, and softly lifts my pelvis up. Now, I'm on all fours. He's definitely mastered it! I think to myself. When I'm next to him, I feel like a movie star. Everything's so smooth, sensual, and seamless. He sniffs the back of my neck, breathes on my earlobe with an intoxicating softness, caresses my buttocks, kisses it lightly, penetrates it, and pulls out. He spanks me softly, then penetrates me slowly and confidently. And then again. And again. I climax right away. I'm embarrassed. However, he's impressed.

"You're a goddess!" He smiles and continues. He holds my ass in one hand and the strap of my bra in the other. It feels so powerful, so erotic. I crash again and completely lose myself.

"As of this day, Ms. Sam, you're my boss! I'll do anything you want. It's worth it. You're simply wonderful. Even when I'm inside of you, I miss you," he wildly unloads inside of me.

A surprising phone call cuts through the silence that follows the storm. It's Michael.

"Gorgeous, how are you doing? You have no idea how much I miss you."

"We miss you too." I confess.

"I have a proposition for you."

"What is it?" I ask curiously.

"I'm supposed to receive an award at a ceremony in Paris in a couple of days."

"That's wonderful! Congratulations."

"Nonsense, I don't care about those things anymore. But I

wanted to take advantage of this opportunity and invite you over. I want you to be my date. What do you think?"

I gasp. Helpless and guilt-ridden, I stare at Avi.

"Yes! Of course, bro, we'll be happy to be there," he snatches the phone from my hand and tells Michael.

"Avi? What are you doing there?" he wonders.

"We'll get there, and we need to talk."

"Okay," he falls silent.

"Text me the details and we'll be there."

"Fine," Michael concludes and hangs up.

"What are we going to do now?" We've dragged it on too long. I'm overcome with pangs of consciousness. "The last thing I want is to hurt him. He's so important to me. He doesn't deserve this."

"Let us not forget that you're in love with him," he makes sure to remind me. "Don't worry, we'll handle it when we get there," he says determinately. "I'm too tired to handle it right now, let's go to sleep." He hugs me and falls asleep.

The sun rises. My body is completely enveloped by his; it's so pleasant and arousing. I stretch like a cat in heat.

"Ugh, it's morning already," he opens his stunning eyes, and with a swift movement pulls me closer to him. He then points at his penis, which he had nicknamed 'Avatar'.

He orders me to give him a blowjob.

"That's how I want to start every day," he announces. "I

wouldn't even mind waking up with you riding me," he clarifies. "As long as..."

"Avi, I need to..."

"What does my princess need?"

"To buy clothes for Europe. You know, it's a woman thing."

"Don't worry, sweetheart. Your wish is my command. Although I detest shopping malls, I'm sure Michael will take care of it. Trust me."

"Okay, if you're sure. And Avi?"

"Yes, princess?"

"I think that..."

"What does my princess think in that gorgeous head of hers?" He kisses my forehead. "What is it?"

"Will you just agree to anything I ask? You're spoiling me way too much. It's embarrassing."

"Don't you dare be embarrassed! You need to worry about one thing alone: keeping me satisfied; all day, all night; at any time, and in any place," he says. "By the way, there's a party in our office tomorrow and I'd like you to come with me. Wear something tiny and especially sexy. There's another fantasy I'd like to try out with you."

"In your office?" I ask in shock. "At the party?"

"You need to trust me! Remember? Let go!"

"Okay," I surrender. "Whatever." We get up and quickly get ready. Every now and then we sneak in a kiss or a stroke.

Then, we each attend to our own business.

Someone is ringing my doorbell. I open the door and much to my surprise, I see there a delivery boy carrying a fancy box tied with a black ribbon. “Thank you very much.” I walk back in and curiously open the beautiful box. It’s a small stunning black designer dress. It has two slits on the sides, and a silhouette that would make any body look drop-dead-gorgeous. It’s ingenious, its fabric is silky smooth and it flatters my body amazingly.

Inside, I find a note: “Please, wear this dress for our little adventure tonight, my princess! I’ll come to pick you up around 6:00 pm.”

I’m so excited that I scream around the house: “It’s so much fun to be in love!” I jump up and down. Finally, I have some alone time and I can appreciate everything that has happened to me and has changed me beyond recognition. I love him so much! Thank you, God, thank you for everything. I stifle tears of joy. Finally, I’ve found the relationship I’ve been dreaming of, and it’s absolutely stupendous. I knew I shouldn’t have compromised for anything else!

It’s 5:00 pm and I’m ready to go. I hear someone knocking on my door. I open up, quite surprised.

“I couldn’t help myself,” he storms into the house. “You’re so beautiful!” he compliments me, ecstatic. “You’re the mother queen of all femininity and beauty put together.”

“Thank you, my love! As are you!” I fawn over him. “It’s amazing how sexy you are. I’m completely smitten.”

“Are you sure?” he chuckles. “If that’s the case, I’d like you to prove it!” He takes me to the bedroom. He leans me against the bed. Then, he pushes my underwear aside and then sweeps me away into a carnal fest of passion, wild, unrelenting and passionate – just like I have always wanted. I’ve always dreamed of someone who’d completely lose himself inside of me and connect with me on a deeper level.

I know that we’re still going to have bumps down the road. However, when I’m with him, he manages to make every moment unique within my humdrum life, inevitably turning these moments into a string that is life itself. A whole other life. A life with fluctuating intensities. A Sam who’s fully alive. Blossoming. Blissful.

“Avi, I thank you for every single thing you have brought into my life.” I hug him with boundless warmth.

“Sam, you’re my everything!”



His shiny black Porsche pulls over. He opens the door for me and reaches his hand out, leading me like a princess.

“You are most welcome!” he emphasizes just how much he respects me. We walk together as my arm is intertwined with his. Everyone stares at us. We head towards the center of attention. I’m quite nervous, after all, I don’t know anyone here and I want to leave a good first impression. He’s very proud of his new ‘jewel’. He introduces me to everyone as ‘his beauty’.

Jealous eyes pierce through me with every step I take. However, he doesn’t seem to care and ignores them all. I’m

the only woman who exists in his world. Slowly but surely, I manage to have some conversations with people and my confidence is restored. He listens to my every word and occasionally interrupts me. He can't help but compliment me in front of everyone. He comments on my wisdom, empowers me, as if trying to make everyone see what he sees in me. And indeed, everyone is happy to do as he commands and they shower me with attention, pumping adrenalin through my veins. I'm over the moon, I enjoy being in the limelight, but I'm still afraid of getting burned.

“Okay, we've done enough talking, don't you think?” The promises he had made the night before, get my heart racing. All at once, I'm overcome with a new surge of adrenaline. “Follow me,” he instructs, and I wordlessly bid as he commands.

He stands in front of the black-tinted-glass elevator. He pulls a key from his pocket and presses some buttons. The door opens and we walk in. He presses the button for the seventh floor.

“That's my lucky number,” he declares.

“It's mine too,” I smile back at him. When the elevator reaches the 7th floor, he inserts the key into the small lock and the elevator stops midair.

“Now it's just me and you in front of the whole world,” he looks at me with a sly smile.

“Are you joking?” I laugh out loud. “You're impossible! What now?”

“Turn around!” he orders and gestures at the rail. “Lean

against it.” As he stands behind me, he vigorously spreads my legs with his. He leans me forward, softly and lovingly. Then, he lustfully spans my buttocks as it protrudes in front of him. He pulls my black thong aside, and sniffs my ass, caresses it, and kneads it with his hands.

“Ow! Avi, you’re completely insane!”

“I know, that’s what you do to me. You drive me insane.”

He rubs my breasts that have completely burst out of my dress. He skillfully plays with them and shoves his fingers deep inside my vulva. He places his penis on my ass crack and rubs it. He bites my inner thigh with a wild thrill and penetrates me with exploding intensity. Again, and again and again. He makes me lose my head and subdues my consciousness.

I climax at least twice and moan out loud. And Avi? As far as he is concerned, we could keep going on like this till tomorrow.

“Enough, Avi, please! Finish already, this isn’t the right time to go all tantric on me,” I beg him.

He bursts out laughing as he increases the pace of his thrusts in a demanding and uncompromising strength.

“I adore that sharp tongue of yours,” he pulls my mouth towards his penis, where he finishes his masterpiece. “We don’t want to get you dirty, do we?” He smiles smugly.

I try to catch my breath, but it’s a lost cause. A new surge of adrenaline washes over me. I start shedding tears.

“Why are you crying, gorgeous?” he looks at me, concerned. He wipes my tears away with the tip of his blazer’s sleeve. “It



was intense, I'm well aware, but that's what I feel for you. An intense love."

"I love your intensity. I need it more than I thought I did."

He caresses me and straightens my hair.

"It's alright, gorgeous. We can lose ourselves together. Fuck everyone and everything. Except for Roy, of course. And our future children."

"What?" I slightly panic. "There's no way, Avi. I won't be able to get married again. You have to take my word for it; it'll only ruin everything between us and I'll never risk losing you or the magic between us."

"Sam, what the hell are you talking about? I'll marry you and I'll never give you up." He looks at me, quite upset. "We should go back."

"Okay, let's go then." I straighten my dress, making sure that everything is in the right place.

The elevator reaches the bottom floor and leads us straight into the party. The evening is finally over. I'm so exhausted and he looks quite worried and tired, too. Soon we'll have to handle the 'Michael issue'. It's way too late now. I can't take back all the lies and empty promises I made him; he'll never forgive me. But I really hope that Avi is right and that we haven't jeopardized their friendship. If we have, the price that we'll pay will be so bitter and cruel. I'm so anxious and deeply upset. Finally, I fall comfortably asleep.



## Chapter 19

We land in Paris, the city of love. Despite how dazzling it is, I'm having trouble letting go and enjoying it. I'm too anxious and tense. On the other hand, Avi appears to be as calm and focused as always when he handles things. He has that marvelous ability to effortlessly control every situation with his relentless charisma. Everyone does everything he asks exactly according to his demands; although these demands are made firmly, they come off as polite and easygoing.

Michael welcomes us at the excessively opulent hotel. People walk past us and whisper: "It's Michael Jones", "Oh my God, it's Michael Jones", "Oh, he's so hot." My heart seems to skip a beat when I see him, especially after all the long phone conversations we've had. Although I've told Avi everything, I cannot explain just how this man makes me feel. Perhaps because I'm afraid to lose one of them or, perhaps, even both.

I glance at the tall ceiling and my head seems to spin as I turn around and look at the ornamented columns, the majestic luxury, the colors and lights, all merging into an overwhelming sense of lavishness.

He immediately pounces on Avi and gives him a heartfelt hug. I stand at his side, smiling. It's such a pleasant sight to see.

Then, he looks at me lovingly and kisses my lips with great passion as he hugs me tightly. I silently play along, embarrassed to face Avi. It was clear that Michael was very excited to see me.

We need to hurry up; we don't want to be late. "Let's go to my suite," he shows us the way and we follow him. The door opens and the suite is simply unbelievable. The luxury and grandeur are inconceivable.

"I could easily get lost in this room."

"I would rather you lose yourself with me." He winks at me and smiles deviously. I immediately smile shyly back at him. He's my weakness, I think to myself.

"Come on! The ceremony is supposed to start in three hours, and we've got a lot to do." He urges us. "Your hair and makeup team will be here soon, honey," he caresses my shiny hair.

"Thank you," I hug him, both embarrassed and humbled.

"Michael, I think we should talk first," I stifle the pain in my voice. I hope I won't hurt him too much. He's so dear to me and strums all the chords of my heart. How can I possibly be in love with Avi with such an intensity that takes my breath away, yet I also feel so loved, beautiful and protected when I'm with Michael?

"I promise we'll have plenty of time! Come on, Avi, we need to get ready, too," he prompts him.

I feel like Cinderella. Everyone rushes into the suite together. A professional makeup artist arrives and works her magic. Then, a hair stylist dazzles me with his talent. I quickly put on a gorgeous white-grayish dress that he'd bought for me, embroidered with tiny crystals nestled in a graceful, soft, white tulle. I pair the dress with elegant gray high-heels, tastefully

bejeweled. They both smile at me. “You look amazing. Are you ready?” Three, two, one – I look at my reflection and struggle to recognize my own image. There’s no doubt that they brought out the best of me.

“OMG! Is it really me? Thank you, everyone!” I say with great excitement. They’ve definitely brought their A-game. I stare at my own reflection, I look stunning, confident, stylish, classy, and very sexy all at once, just the way I like it.

With perfect timing, they both enter the room and fall head over heels; they compliment me, touch me, turn me around. I feel self-assured and proud.

“You’re both so handsome!” I cut their one-sided enthusiasm. They both smile at me, both slyly lustful. I feel like a little girl in a candy shop.

“Come on. It’s time to go,” Michael urges us as we walk out together to the fancy limousine that drives us straight to the music awards ceremony.

Excitement. Flashes. “Michael! Michael!” from every direction. The red carpet fits him like a glove. I trail behind him as he tries to pull me to his side. We move forward together, all of us, at the slow pace dictated by the crowds and the media. We sit together in the third row. Michael proudly holds my hand.

“By the way, I’ve still got one more surprise for you,” he whispers.

“Another surprise? But what do you mean?” I panic.

“You’ll see later. I’m sure you’ll love it, I promise.” He takes

my hand in his.

The ceremony starts and I sit among dozens of celebrities who love being in the limelight. I effortlessly sit between these two amazing alpha males, feeling very confused and quite helpless.

However, bit by bit, I cool down and focus on the impressively extravagant ceremony, pleased to have received this opportunity.

A wide selection of bands and artists from different genres masterfully perform their number. Then our moment arrives.

“And the winner of this year’s Best Singer Award goes, for the third consecutive year, to...” the host says excitedly, “Michael Jones.”

“Thank you!” He places his hand on his chest and over his heart. He kisses my hand, and confidently walks towards the huge stage. “Thank you, all,” he thanks everyone again. “I’m very grateful for anyone who finds joy in my music. Over the past years, it has become an inseparable part of my life and, although I’ve been doing many other things, this is what still thrills me most. I cherish all my fans.”

A vigorous round of applause erupts again.

“Tonight, I have a special surprise for you. I want to reveal a new song and I dedicate it to all of you .”

“Yes, man, play it!” people cry out and applaud enthusiastically. He holds the golden music-note-shaped award, and excitedly steps off the stage and walks towards us.

All the lights go out as a huge screen rolls down, and the clip is projected on the backdrop with the title ‘Lost Myself in

You'. Shocked and amazed, I see all the bits of our vacation in Greece. I see myself dressed in a black bikini, swimming in the pool and evading Michael as he tried to tickle me. Then, it's me again dressed in a white bikini, lying on my back, soaking up rays of sunlight, and enjoying my newfound sense of freedom in the midst of the wonderful sea. Then, there are some images of me on a breakwater, posing like an experienced model. Next, we were both embraced, lying in each other's arms on the indulgent sofa in the yacht. Then, it's me again, jumping wildly and joyfully bouncing on the wide bed in the luxurious cabin. There's other footage of me sitting on the beach and writing names in the sand. And further scenes of us in the pool, diving, at the café, and even our perfect dance on our last evening together. All those images were interwoven with moving words sung by a hoarse and touching voice; just as it always was.

"How did you do all of this?" I asked in complete shock.

"We kept taking pictures and videos everywhere we went, remember?" he explains. "So, I thought I'd give you this gift, so that you'll know that the days we've spent together were very meaningful to me. I'm completely in love with you." He tells me, then kisses my head.

Everyone is looking at me. The audience applauds all around us. He points at me and shows me off to the entire crowd, kissing my hand. I freeze. I'm unable to move or breathe.

"See? A new princess is born," Avi soothes me, and hugs me tightly from behind.

"I'm astonished! It's amazing!" I'm overcome with pride and

surprise. Even though it was my darkest hour, he still managed to make me look great. “Thank you, Michael.” I cry out, half-panicking, half-excited, and I wrap my arm around him.

“I need to thank you, for inspiring me,” he looks straight into my eyes, as he wipes away tears of joy.

“It’s an awesome song!” Avi says. “I’m quite sure you’ll be here next year, too,” he pats Michael’s shoulder.

The ceremony finally ends. Michael refuses to attend the after-party, claiming that he’s extremely busy and has to fly back to attend to his business. I’m so grateful for it. I’m looking forward to having some stability.

“I hope you’re okay. You look overwhelmed. Did I put a lot of pressure on you today?”

“I wasn’t expecting any of it. I don’t know how to process such an intense experience.”

“You don’t need to,” he says. “It’s just an event that I prepared especially for you. For us. It isn’t a part of our real life.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“I’ve already told you; this world no longer dictates my life. Well, should we talk about the elephant in the room?”

“Not yet!” Avi states. “Let’s change, take a breath. Let’s grab something to smoke, drink, and blow off some steam.” We all immediately agree and, thirty minutes later, we meet again at the center of the room. We sit on the sofa, drink, smoke and slowly lighten the mood.

“So, you two are in love, aren’t you?” Michael suddenly

blurts.

“Right. Michael, listen, we didn’t prepare for this, but Sam has become very important to me. Frankly, ever since we’ve met there has been a spark between us. That day when you left, we sat down and talked. I opened up to her unlike I ever had before. I felt her sympathizing with my pain and embracing me. We bonded. We couldn’t help ourselves. I must admit that this is the first time I’d realized just how deep and meaningful your relationship is. In any case, before we knew it, we were completely swept away. I couldn’t stop it. You know that, for years, I’ve been belittling myself in romantic relationships. I haven’t found the right partner with whom I wanted to spend a couple of months, let alone an entire lifetime. You’ve always teased me and said I acted on my urges, refused to grow up, that I was moody and reckless. I’ve never really wanted to be in a relationship. The last thing we wanted was to cause any drama or break anyone’s heart,” Avi speaks with sincerity. “Everything that has happened, my grandmother passing away and this void in my life, emphasized just how much I needed her. I lost myself in her, exactly like your song said.”

“Wow, I really didn’t expect any of this,” he stifles a tear. “First Dawn betrayed me, and now you too?” He looks at him, stunned.

“Are you serious? I understand how you must be feeling right now, but don’t you dare compare me to Dawn!” Avi says, infuriated. “I’m sitting here, before you, opening my heart to you. I truly understand you. This isn’t easy for either of us. Sam is deeply in love with you. She wasn’t faking any of it. We both missed you, a lot.”



“Sometimes, things are out of our control. I guess you shouldn’t have to pay the price for me being far away from you two.” Michael becomes sullen. “It still pains me, I must say. But I also understand that you were both in a very vulnerable position, and you’ve found true comfort in each other’s arms. I have no right to judge either of you. You’ve been through so much. I should confess, however, I’m somewhat jealous when I see you together. We had a special connection, Sam. I wouldn’t want to lose it. He turns to me and continues; I’ve missed you a lot. That’s why it was so important for me to give you that memory, so that you’d finally understand how important you have become to me, even when I’m far away. I must admit, I did not expect any of this,” he swallows a tear. “But it’ll pass. I truly love Avi, and I’ll get over this,” he concludes.

“Michael, I’m terribly sorry. I wanted to tell you everything at the beginning. But we thought it wasn’t the right thing to do, considering you were so far away and on tour. You must believe me. I love you. I’ve always loved you, but I’m in love with Avi, too. This is impossible, I don’t want to lose you,” I cry. “My bond with both of you is so meaningful to me. I gave in to my inner urges. In an ideal world, I would have wanted to have both of you.”

“I felt that I’ve finally found someone I can trust,” Michael adds. “It isn’t easy for me to leave the past behind and find comfort after what had happened with Dawn, and so soon, nonetheless,” he looks deep into my eyes. “But it did. And I fell head over heels for you. How do you suppose that I move past this?”

“Honestly?” Avi cuts him off. “I actually think that when it comes to matters of the heart, we should go with the flow and not stop to analyze and plan everything. We’re not in any hurry. We’re happy together. I hope you know that I care and love you with all my heart. I feel so at ease in your presence. We’ve been suppressing our desires and passions. We’ve been hiding and listening to others rather than ourselves. How about we leave it all behind and try something different? Let’s just try to have some fun for once. Both of us can love this amazing woman. After all, each of us loves her in a completely different way. So, I think we each have something different to offer her. As long as she consents, I really don’t mind that you’ll keep enjoying each other’s company. So, what do you say? Agreed?” Avi doesn’t leave any room for questions.

“Hang on! Hang on! Do you mean...?” Michael peers into his eyes, awed by his suggestion.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I mean,” he replies with determination.

“And how exactly do you suppose this is going to work?” He furrows his brow. “After all, we’re both attracted to women. I’m not sure I follow.”

“It’s pretty clear, just go with it,” he explains, dead serious. “Our relationship in nothing but a triangle and Sam’s the tip. We’ll each have our special relationship with her and enjoy the ride.”

“Are you crazy?” I exclaim, “I love you both very much, but I can’t even imagine such a scenario. Do you really think I’ll

have what it takes to keep you both happy and satisfied? I can't. Take my word, it won't be an easy thing to do!" I say and giggle.

"It'll be fine," Avi dismisses me. "We're all in this together and we'll help each other adjust. Let's try to make the best out of this situation and our time together and do everything in our power to finally be happy." Then he adds, "but before we conclude this, there's one thing you should realize. Sam belongs to me. Our bond is etched into our flesh and I'll never give her up, no matter the circumstances. Understand?"

"I don't blame you!" He looks at me with loving and tired eyes. "We can try it for a while and see how it goes. I really hope no one gets hurt. Love tends to grow and deepen. In any case, I'm totally in love with her as well. So, if it suits you both, we can give it a go. Worst-case scenario, we'll all stay good friends. I'm beat." He yawns loudly and giggles. "Let's go to bed."

We all agree.

The bed is so comfortable, I seem to drown in its softness. I close my eyes, as they both lie at my sides. Michael spoons me as I lie on top of Avi's chest. And, just like this, we simply fall asleep.



The rays of the sun caress my bare skin, heralding a brand-new era in my life, completely unknown, exciting and lustful. But first, I have to call Roy. I make my way through their perfect bodies and try to stand up as Avi pulls me backwards and sniffs me.

“And where do you think you’re going?”

“I have to call Roy,” I giggle.

“Oh, that’s very important,” he sets me free. “Tell him that I miss him.”

Roy immediately senses the great shift in my voice.

“Mommy, you sound so happy!”

“I’m very happy to hear your voice, my prince. What matters most is that we’re all happy and love you very much.”

“I know that, Mommy, and I’ll always be proud of you, no matter what. I’ll always love you!”

Although I knew that his vocabulary was quite rich for a child of his age, his ability to articulate his feelings has always left me stunned. We love each other immensely, in a way that cannot be expressed with words. Sometimes our love was imperiled by our day-to-day trials. But it always stayed strong.

“Avi says hi.”

“Tell him I miss him,” Roy responds.

“I will,” I promise and kiss him through the phone.

Undoubtedly, kids are immediately affected by their parents’ moods. I’m so lucky, I smile with gratitude and glee.

When I come back, I tell them about my conversation with Roy.

“You’re such a great mother,” Michael says with twinkly eyes.

“Totally,” Avi looks into my eyes and adds, “I can’t wait to have children with you.”

“Oh, Avi. I’ve already told you it’s too soon for me. I’m not even sure I’ll ever want to get married again. It might ruin the magic between us. Please, try to understand. I need some space. This isn’t the right time.”

Avi falls silent, but clearly, he’s unwilling to put the matter to rest. He never let’s go when it comes to me.

“You still don’t get who you’re messing with,” Michael chuckles. “He’ll probably want to have a fivesome.”

“Well, then, he’s clearly insane then,” I roll my eyes.

He pounces on me.

“You’re mine, you don’t seem to get it! Even though I’ve told you several times. You keep saying that you do, but you don’t. You’re never getting away from me, I’ll never leave you. You better get used to it, and quick,” he taps my temple with his finger. “I can’t keep doing ‘this’ anymore.”

“What do you mean by ‘this’, Mr. Levi?” I ask coyly.

“I want us to get married as soon as possible. The sooner the better. Aren’t you tired of moving from one house to the other? What’s even the point? Don’t you think we’re long past that?”

“It’s hard for me too, but that’s just the way things are, and I can’t change it now. I mean, it’s only been two and a half weeks since we’ve met. It’s all been so intense. I need some time. Marriage is off the table as far as I’m concerned. Children, too. We should let time do its thing. Roy needs to process things at his own pace. What will people think? If you would have asked me that when I was younger, I would have

jumped on this wonderful opportunity, trust me, there's nothing I wouldn't have wanted more than to wake up next to you every single morning. But my life is too complicated, please stop pressuring me. You promised you'd let me be independent, remember? I don't want to lose myself in your life. I want to figure out who I am and shine in my own way, you see? I've been married since I was eighteen and my experiences as a married woman weren't so great. My heart beats to a different drum. Try to respect that and stop bringing it up every day."

Avi is shocked and wipes a tear away.

Michael approaches me and holds me tightly.

"You're such an amazing woman," he concludes. "I adore you for your ability to stay true to yourself without hurting others, even if it comes at a price for you."

"Thanks," I lean in and hug him back.

"You're going to be my ultimate project in life," Avi sighs. "When will you understand that doing something good for yourself doesn't mean hurting others? If someone loves you, they'll want the very best for you. I want the very best for you. Please, stop cancelling yourself out. I understand and accept what you've said. But don't think, even for a moment, that I'm about to give up."

I roll my eyes and throw myself at him.

"Mr. Levi, I love you so much that it's practically hard to breathe without you," I kiss him fondly. He's pleased.

All at once the air becomes so tense, we can feel it all around

us. I don't really know what to do. I'm embarrassed from both of them.

Avi leans over me and kisses me. He caresses my skin, softly and sensually and I'm immediately aroused. My nipples harden and I totally forget Michael's there. Then he stops and asks Michael to kiss me. He does, and it's so gently and quiet.

"How did you feel with that?" Avi smiles.

"Wonderful," I reply with sincerity. "And you?"

He doesn't answer, he just flips me over, so that my back faces them both. He keeps caressing and kissing me, sending shivers down my spine. I'm totally addicted to his touch.

Then he stops again and asks Michael to touch and stroke my breasts. They both feel so good. Slowly, we merge into one body of human warmth, love and protection.

We spend a whole hour passionately pleasuring each other. These two alpha males kiss and caress me, constantly sending shivers down my spine. I enjoy pleasuring them both, one at a time. It's so delightfully addictive. I'm immersed in heaps of lust and eroticism, and I'm overcome with confidence as I dictate the pace. I'm alive in front of them, my femininity bursting. The room is filled with dirty words and moans, as we all groan in joy. My body is covered in carnal sweat. I feel like a sex goddess in their arms. I'm blown away by a head-spinning orgasm, that seems endless and keeps erupting, over and over again. I lose all grasp on reality and completely give in to this sensational pleasure, limitless and boundless. And everything feels whole. And it's all so real. I leave all inhibitions behinds. I love them both.

Finally, our little 'vacation' is over and we head back home.

"I'm so exhausted," he winks at me.

"Very funny," I reply. "It's a wonder that I can still walk straight. Look at how promiscuous I've become," I tease them both. Avi laughs out loud.

"You probably always were. Now you're just letting it show. You're a slut, but you're mine slut! Get it?"

"Yes, sir," I reply submissively.

"What have I gotten myself into?" Michael laughs and throws his hands to the sides in wonder.

We all burst out laughing.





## Chapter 20

I feel somewhat burdened throughout the next couple of days. I'm quite anxious and wonder if my unconventional choices might have an affect Roy or our future together and how all these recent developments might put my custody arrangement in peril.

I decide to call Andy, my lawyer, and keep him posted about my recent romantic relationship with Avi.

"Hello?" I hear his voice on the other side of the line.

"Hi, Andy, how are you?"

"Hi Sam, I'm doing fine. I meant to call you and ask how you're doing."

"We're doing great but. I want to keep you posted about a couple of things that pertain to my personal life. I need to know if they might have a negative impact on my shared custody of Roy."

"Okay, then, I'm listening," Andy replies.

"Well, I'm in a new and wonderful relationship. Unfortunately, Matthew surprised me at home the other night and met my new boyfriend in a rather awkward situation. Then things spiraled out of control and there was somewhat of a confrontation between them. When Matthew left, he was furious and upset."

"I see," Andy deliberated. "Is your new boyfriend a normative person?"

I chuckle shortly.

“I wouldn’t call him a normative person. He’s such a unique and wonderful man. He’s also very wealthy.”

“Okay,” Andy sounds pleased. “I don’t think there should be any problem if both of you can offer Roy a warm and supportive environment, especially if you two are serious.”

“He understands that Roy is an inextricable part of the deal, and he’s completely committed to both of us.”

“What matters most is Roy’s sense of stability. If that is the case, I think this could actually work in our favor.” Andy encourages me. “In any case, the court usually favors mothers. One of the main things Matthew claimed in his suit for custody was that you were financially unstable and that you didn’t have any support should you need any. The fact that your partner is a wealthy man strengthens our claim that Roy’s living conditions will stay intact, unlike Matthew has always claimed.”

“We’re even planning a future together,” I add. “Could that help me? There’s nothing that I want more than full custody, with an open-door policy, of course, as well as sharing weekends and holidays. Is that feasible?”

“Absolutely! If that’s indeed where your relationship is headed, it might change the whole picture. The court usually strives to maintain the minor’s sense of stability. You can ask for full custody. Are you sure your boyfriend supports this decision? It would be final. Does he understand the responsibility that it entails?”

“Of course! There’s nothing he would want more than to see me happy, and he certainly understands that Roy is my main priority and that I’d do anything in my power to prove it to him daily.”

“Has he already met Roy?” Andy inquires.

“Yes!” I smile as I recall our time together at the fair. “He likes him a lot,” I add. “It seems that they get along really well. He’s important to him just as I am. He’ll never hurt him intentionally. He understands the magnitude of his responsibility.”

“Great, then we’ve settled that I’ll update your custody demands and we’ll move forward. Undoubtedly, this is all in Roy’s best interest. His natural place is with you.”

“I’m so happy!” I say excitedly. “I hope we succeed.”

“I’ll do everything I can,” Andy sounds alert and determined.

“I’m very happy for you,” he adds.

“Me too!” I thank him for his time and hang up.

It’s hard for me not seeing Roy half of the time. I want him at my side, always. I want to know he’s safe and well-protected.

I text Avi that I’d love to have him for dinner at my place tonight. I have a couple of things to tell him, including some of my concerns.

He texts me back: “I’m absolutely starving for you AND your food. I’ll come around six.”

I smile from ear to ear. It’s perfect.

I cook all day and prepare the perfect meal while swaying to

the sounds of the music in the background. Everything is ready, smells and looks delicious. I smile, pleased with myself.

‘And now, for the artistic part,’ I laugh out loud to myself, take a shower and get ready for my man. I put on a burgundy dress, with a turtleneck and a deep slit on the right side. I go for the sensual yet restrained look. I tie up my hair and leave a couple of strands out. I wear some light makeup and put on heels with two white straps. Everything is ready! The table is set, and I await him.

There’s a knock at the door. I open it and, as I look at him, passion starts coursing through my veins. He swiftly walks in.

“How I’ve missed your pretty face,” he takes me into his arms and embraces me, smells my skin and takes a deep breath. “Gorgeous! You’re stunning! I’m speechless. I’m the luckiest man alive,” he kissed me lovingly.

“Me too,” I grin widely. “I’ve missed you so much!” I declare. “But I want to talk to you tonight. There are a couple of things I’d like us to discuss. We’ll have to wait a little longer,” I hug him, and he faintly smiles back.

“Go ahead.”

“Let’s have dinner first,” I take him to his seat. I serve him my deliciously mouthwatering dishes, pour us both some white wine into crystal flute glasses that I’ve always used for special occasions. We clink our glasses together.

“Bon appétit,” I declare.

He savors my cooking.

“You’re a wonderful cook,” he smiles, pleased. “You’re the

perfect woman,” he winks at me.

“Thank you, my love!” I caress his cheek, then take a deep breath and continue.

“Avi, I have a couple of questions and concerns that I’d like to share with you.”

“I’m all ears,” he looks at me.

I tell him about the full custody, and thankfully, he’s happy about it.

“Of course, it’s only natural. Pups always stay with their mothers.”

“And are you sure you’re okay with it?”

“Listen, Sam,” he replies. “When I met you, I knew you had a kid. When I fell in love with you, I knew you had a kid. I’m doing everything in my power to show both of you that I’m a part of your lives. I don’t understand why you’d even ask! It seems right and natural for him to always be present in our lives. Your happiness depends on it and, therefore, so does ours. After all, I know perfectly well what it means to grow up without a mother present. I’ll never stand between you and him. He’s a part of you, and I love everything about you, warts and all.”

I look at him and feel like a great weight has been lifted off my shoulders.

“And what about Michael?” I peer into his eyes to see what lies beyond his words. “We’ve made quite an unusual choice, as you well know. I know that you’re supposedly okay with it because I fell in love with him before I did you. But would

that work against me? I'm afraid you'll want to do the same and find other women. An open relationship isn't my thing," I explain. "I could never share you with anyone. Do you think that might happen? Do you expect such a thing to happen?"

"An open relationship? Are you joking? Have you lost your mind?" he growls. "Sam, there's no way I'll ever share you with anyone else. This current situation happened on its own; no one asked for it or expected it. I don't want, nor will I ever want, anyone else. My eyes see only you, and my heart beats for you. My mouth speaks solely about you, and my mind thinks of nothing else. I realize this is a complicated situation. But as far as I'm concerned, your relationship with Michael is up to you. When I see the two of you together, all I see are two people I love dearly and unconditionally. I want you two to be happy. I'm the one who came between you. You're so beautiful together; you look like photogenic models on a dating app ad. When he makes you orgasm, I witness your pure joy. I'm happy when you feel good. That's the only indication that matters for our love. I don't feel like I'm giving up on something, you see? And I wouldn't call it an 'open relationship' because there's no chance I would ever share you with anyone else. I've been there, done that. I love you and only you! I've never wanted to say those words to anyone other than you, and no one has ever made me feel like you do. As I've said to Michael: our relationship has nothing to do with your relationship with him. That's the way I see things."

"Are you sure?" I'm moved. He holds my hand and kisses it warmly.

"I'm the luckiest woman in the whole world!" I announce and

walks towards him, then fall into his lap and hug him.

“I can tell that you’re still concerned about me losing interest,” he drags me to the bedroom. He patiently unzips my dress; it falls to the ground as he kisses the back of my neck. “Not a chance. When you’re addicted to something, you only want it more,” he warns me as he throws me onto the bed. He completely succumbs to the mutual passion between us that rekindles anew.

He immerses himself in me and makes love to me in a way that only he knows, dissolving all my concerns.

It’s 8:00 pm. We lie in bed in each other’s arms, marveling in each other’s smell and touch, then my phone rings.

It’s Amy, my travel agent. I pick up. She tells me that she’s finalized all the arrangements for the conference.

“Okay, so you’ve booked my flight? Excellent. Thanks.” I hang up.

“What flight?” He looks surprised.

“To London. I have that conference, remember?”

“Oh, I had a little panic attack.”

I giggle.

How could I forget?” He smiles and furrows his brow naughtily. “Will you be wearing that hot suit again?”

“It seems to me that you like it, don’t you, honey?” I ask coyly.

“I love it, and I adore how it looks on you,” he bites his lower lip.

“The conference is on Thursday, my flight is on Tuesday,” I continue.

“Which means we can come back on Sunday!” he concludes, smiling triumphantly. “We can be there four full days and travel to my favorite city in the world.”

“Mine, too,” I reply blissfully. I briefly send my travel information to Matthew, explain it’s for work and that I’d appreciate it if he could take Roy on those days. He confirms. I smile. It sounds perfect. Avi and me in my beloved London.



The plane lands. I’m practically glowing. I love visiting London, especially with him. Everything looks like a fairytale concocted by a legendary art designer. This invokes a sense of nostalgia in me, a craving for the old, the classic, glamour, luxury, and limitless richness. Hand-in-hand, we both climb into the van that was booked to accommodate all the agents that arrived on the flight with us; ten in total. We arrive at a rather standard, pre-booked hotel in West London. We quickly check in and enter our room, exhausted.

He lies next to me, shuts his eyes, and relaxes.

“So great,” he whispers. “Quiet.”

“Totally!” I agree with him. “Let’s rest for a while.” We undress and lie in bed together, enveloped in each other’s arms, completely disconnected from everything and everyone. We both love sleeping naked. We feel so comfortable with one another, completely shame-free.



Morning rises, and we quickly prepare for breakfast. I'm supposed to meet a couple of leading agents from all over the world followed by the main conference scheduled for noon. I wear my little suit again with a lace tank-top underneath. Then, I complete my look with lovely silver star earrings.

"You're so sexy!" he blurts and puckers his lips. "I'm counting the minutes until I can remove it all." I blush. I recall that night he rode me like a prime mare. Boundless carnal lust. My loins burn as I remember the utter delight.

"Let's go already so we can finish faster," I urge him.

"You become as impatient as me with every passing day," he looks at me appreciatively and we both laugh as we leave the room.

He's very impressed by my confidence and my ability to articulate. Every now and then, he can't help himself, and whispers both naughty and empowering words into my ear.

"From now on, let's talk business. You're so attractive. So impressive!"

I feel at ease in my natural surroundings. I bask in every inch of positive attention directed towards me, enjoying the fact that he'd seen me shining and seemingly gliding. In the afternoon, we get into the van and drive to the huge conference hall. Thousands of agents come pouring in from all over the world. They all look bright, happy and energetic.

We're amused by the gimmicks it entails. I take pictures with leading agents in front of stalls laden with our cosmetics and post those pictures to social media to increase the brand's

popularity. We listen to a series of inspirational speeches, and then watch a show by two successful British singers. We all stand up, sing the popular songs and clap along. Our adrenaline is high.

“Sam Rodriguez! Come over here!” I hear them calling out my name. I’m completely overwhelmed. It seems that I was more than I had thought. I finally receive recognition for my hard work these past years, and I get a promotion along with a grand bouquet and a pampering set of luxury cosmetics.

The crowd applauds all around us. All the while, he takes a video of the event, as excited as a dad filming his little daughter’s performance. It’s funny to see just how authentic he is. He’s simply a moving and charming man. When I’m with him, everyone examines him up and down, but all he sees is me. He never embarrasses me or belittles me; he constantly empowers me.

“See?” he cries out, enthralled. “You’re a princess. You just don’t see it. Everyone adores you! You struggle to accept that you’re so unique and revered. I love you, my beauty,” he kisses the top of my head. “Shall we go back?”

“Yes,” I reply and say goodbye to everyone. “I’m beat,” I blurt an excuse. “I have to go rest.”

We retire back to our hotel. I feel so light, I could practically jump over the moon. I’m living my very own fantasy.

The hotel door shuts behind us and he immediately removes my purse and blazer.

“On your knees!” he orders me. I immediately and wordlessly

obey.

“So, you’ve missed me?” he teases me as I shyly lift my eyes to him, perfectly playing my part in this role-play game.

“Very,” I bite my lower lip.

“What are you willing to do in order for me to fuck you hard?” he continues powerfully.

“Standing on all fours is a start,” I chuckle. “But I’d like you to tie me up,” I dare add.

“Is that so?” He looks a bit surprised.

“With this,” I confidently unbuckle my skirt’s belt.

“Get up, immediately!” he commands me. I stand up in front of him. He unzips my skirt, and it slips down to my feet, then tossed it aside. He inserts two fingers into my vagina.

“You’re all ready to go,” he notes. “Excellent, that’s a good girl.” He caresses my buttocks. “You’re so wet, have you been fantasizing about me all day long?”

“Yes, I have!” I nod, pretending to be sheepish about the fact. “I needed to play with you a little. After all, I’ve missed you so much and we didn’t get a chance to make love last night.” I sexily bite the tip of my fingernail.

“Come to bed!” he declares. I elegantly and sensually lie back, feeling so hot in front of him. He takes the belt, ties both my wrists together and then pulls them to the night light positioned next to the nightstand. I’m all stretched out. Naked. One of my legs is outstretched on the mattress and the other is bent at a 45-degree angle. He licks my breasts, commits to me,

and sends tremendous shivers down my spine.

“Don’t you dare move, or I’ll have to start everything all over again. I have infinite patience when it comes to studying your unbelievable body. Stay stretched the whole time. Keep your hands up and don’t you dare move! I’m warning you.”

I nod silently. I look down and then at him. He sucks and bites my nipples with unrelenting desire, then thrusts his fingers into my vagina and slowly turns them around. I moan.

“Harder! I want to hear you! Now,” he grunts.

I loudly groan in sheer delight, then spill my love juices all over his hands.

“Excellent,” he sits down. “Now, come over here. Sit on me backward and place your arms around my neck. Immediately.”

I do as he commands.

He grabs my belly and massages my breasts slowly and lustfully; his pelvis dictates the pace.

“Come on, work for it! Move that perfect ass of yours. More, more. Don’t stop. I’m warning you,” I completely surrender and give into it, submissive and adhering to his every demand. I don’t relent. I pick up the pace. Then, I press my thighs as strongly as I can against his legs, deepening his penetration inside of me.

He becomes frantic, entirely devoted. I gently encourage him by pulling on the back of his neck, prompting him to let lose a little more. Now he leans over me.

“Move!” he yells at me, then spans my butt. I continuously

moan, challenging him and picking up the pace, again and again. My ass seems to have a life of its own, blossoming and blooming, as if it had waited for this passion to revive it. Sheer sensual pleasure. He finishes on my behind.

“You were wonderful; you deserve a prize.” He smiles as he cleans both of us.

“You’re my prize.”

“No, I’ll take you on a trip tomorrow for your prize. I promise we’ll leave the room for a while and experience the city together.”

“Thank you!” I kiss his chest. My neediness for him turns him on.

“Let’s go to sleep right away, so I don’t change my mind.”

“Alright,” I nod, still in my good-girl character, then collapse exhausted on his miraculous body.

“Good morning, gorgeous,” I wake up to the sound of his loving and soothing voice.

“Good morning, my prince,” I stretch my arms and legs.

“Did you sleep well?” He smiles.

“Are you joking? I always sleep well when I’m with you,” he smiles smugly at me.

“So, are we done with this little adventure of yours?”

“What do you mean?” I ask inquisitively.

“I want you to work at my company, at my side. I won’t take

no for an answer. I'm not joking," he continues, preventing me from getting a word in. He places a finger on my lips and asks me to let him finish speaking. "We'll train you for a position at the PR and sales department. You'll work at my office. I'll set up a desk for you, so you'll have your own spot. I cannot work without you. So, let's give it a go. Worst-case scenario, we'll revisit the matter and decide. You're extremely capable and I want you to invest your talents in my company, regardless of our relationship. This way, no one will snatch you away from me."

"Are you serious?" I tease. "You're filthy rich, deadly handsome, sexy, brilliant and gifted; who could snatch me away from you?"

He hides a huge grin, embarrassed by what I had said. "Perfect!" he concludes. "So, it's settled. Now let's go have some fun in London. You've earned it," he pulls my arm.

Every second at his side fills me with joy. He seems interested in everything I say or do, he challenged me, ask questions about the time I lived in London, about my first marriage to Joey, constantly peeling away more and more layers. I'm so grateful for all of it.

Time flies, and suddenly, evening falls.

"Should we go to a club?" he surprises me. Usually, he prefers to stay in the evening.

"Sure!" I say gleefully. "I love dancing," I add.

"Yes," he nods, "I certainly remember."

I change quickly; I put on a small, hot, silver-black disco

dress. I wear large, square silver earrings. Then, I let my hair down and gently curl it. I attentively apply my makeup, blue eyeliner at the corner of my eye. The color combination is divine; very 80's. I complete the look with black high heels and a black VHS-tape-shaped purse. I look stunning. I gussy up in front of the mirror and he emerges from behind me, peeking at my reflection, and approaching me enthusiastically.

“You're so beautiful. You always look amazing,” he moves his thumb on the nook between the back of my neck and my bare shoulder. It sends shivers down my spine; I blush, slightly embarrassed. Then, we head out.

We walk into a luxurious and hip nightclub, stylishly designed with a hint of London chic. Everything is so inviting, everyone's having the time of their lives. There's upbeat British music playing in the background. Beautiful and happy people are dancing in every corner of the room. Waitresses and dancers circle the room offering an array of alcoholic beverages. I feel so alive. I've somewhat missed being single.

We both let loose and Avi dances perfectly. He's so sexy and has great rhythm. Many women check him out and are impressed by his moves. They all give me the stink-eye. Occasionally, they shamelessly pass him by and shove little notes in his hands. He looks at the notes and immediately throws them into the trash. I swear he's the sexiest and most amazing man in the world.

I become overwhelmed with anxiety that someone might take him away from me. Then, I regain my cool and pull out my best moves. I try to draw his attention to no one but me,

hoping he'll ignore all the rest. He doesn't disappoint me, and looks straight at me, clearing away any doubts I've ever had about him being interested in anyone else. After a couple of drinks, we hit the main stage, dance, and enjoy ourselves. He admires the way I move and teases me, urging me to move freely and dance for him. The UV lights from every corner flicker on my little disco dress and the music makes me look like a professional free-style dancer. The atmosphere is intoxicating and everyone was having a good time.

"Avi, I need to go to the bathroom," I whisper.

"Let's go together," I follow him to the bathroom. "I'll wait for you outside," he says.

After I finish my business, I open the door to leave. However, a man stands before me, he's tall, wide and smug. He's dressed in an impressive linen suit and has a pair of gray shiny sunglasses. He's holding a cigar in his hand and blocks the exit. He addresses me eagerly.

"Hey gorgeous, I've been waiting for you to come outside." Fear wells up in my belly and spreads to the back of my neck. I tense up and try to walk around him, but he won't relent.

"What do you want from me? I'm with someone."

"I thought so," he replies. "I mean, look at you. I want to get to know you anyway." He continues to approach me with a lecherous expression. Then he hands me his business card. "It'll be worth your while!" he continues, "you're a perfect and gorgeous woman. I need you."

"Is that so?" I reply bitterly.



“And the way you move!” He points at the stage where I had danced without a care only a couple of minutes ago. He bites his lower lip; a vile man. I feel lost, nervous and helpless. I can’t think straight. Where has Avi gone?

“I’m Wayne, by the way, and you are?” He grabs my arm, unwilling to let go.

“Take your filthy hands off her right now!” Avi suddenly appears and looks at him with raging eyes. “Go on and find someone else to flirt with,” he warmly places his hands on my shoulders and pulls me closer to him. I happily join him, immensely relieved. All at once, I feel protected and safe; my anxiety is all but gone.

“Come here, beautiful. Let’s get out of here,” he rips the business card that man had given me as I follow him outside.

“I knew you’d get us in trouble. I can’t let you out of my sight. You’ll need a personal bodyguard. It’s best that we stay at home,” he cuts through the silence and the thoughts running through my mind.

“Avi,” I take his hand in mine, stopping him in his place. “I’m so happy you showed up in time!” I needly grasp his hand. “I felt completely helpless and panicked. All my insecurities and traumas just reappeared. I felt so small and lost, so unprotected and exposed. What would I have done without you?”

“My princess! From now on I’ll always be at your side. It doesn’t matter what you’ve been through. I’m here to protect you, and cover your every wound with my love,” he kisses me powerfully. “What you’ve been through is what makes you who you are. I love you with all your complexities, inferiority

complex, and insecurities.” He pauses for a moment and looks at me. “And you keep insisting and thinking that I’ll risk it all for some one-night stand?” he tells me, disclosing that he had noticed my jealousy in the club. “I hadn’t been looking for love, but it found me, and now it’s hard to shake it off, or you. I’ve already told you – I’m hooked. I’ll never leave you. So please, calm down.”

I find comfort and security in his words and allow myself to completely give into his warmth and love.



## Chapter 21

It's our last morning in London. My phone rings. It's Michael. I put him on speaker so we can both hear him.

"Sweetheart," he sounds so excited. "You won't believe it, but I have great news. Our clip just hit 10 million views in less than a week. That's considered an amazing achievement," he explains.

"But why is that so surprising? After all, your song is totally amazing."

"It's all thanks to you, my muse! In any case," he continues. "You should know you've made quite a lot of money from this."

"Me? But how? What do you mean?"

"You get royalties, you know."

"Really? And what kind of money are we talking about?"

"Something like... 100 thousand dollars," he says excitedly.

"What?!" I gasp. "Are you for real? I can't believe it!"

"And that's not all," he continues. "We've also received an offer to shoot a commercial together. It will completely change your financial situation," he explains. "Plus, we can spend some time together, I really miss you."

I struggle to utter a single word, there's a huge lump lodged in my throat.

"Michael, I'm speechless. I can't express how much I love and

cherish you for everything you've done for me!"

"I love you too; you deserve it. You have everything it takes to succeed in anything you do. Because I knew that you don't believe in yourself, I decided to prove it to you and show you just how precious you are and what others see in you, my amazing woman." I'm completely smitten and overwhelmed with his warm love.

"I miss you so much, my love."

"Me too, gorgeous. Promise I'll see you very soon," he sends me a sweet kiss on the other side of the line.

Avi smiles smugly. "And you've earned all that money, without considering our little 'sexual agreement'." We both laugh out loud.

Time passes unnoticed.

Every now and then, Michael comes to visit. We make love and enjoy each other's company. We also have a lot in common. He has such a rich knowledge in almost every subject, which makes every conversation with him sheerly delightful. When he's with me, I try my best to give him my motherly warmth. It's heart-wrenching to think of this fabulous man as a lonely child, always surrounded by nannies and housekeepers in his large and cold mansion, showering his sister with the very same attention he wanted for himself.

"I miss him; I hope he'll come back soon. Do you really think he'll be able to wrap up his business and settle down with us like he said he would?"

“Of course, my love.”

“Michael never hoped to become a star. But his charisma and talent pushed him to stardom. The only reason he gave into it was because he felt it might be his only way to escape his troubled inner-self.

He also paid a high price for his fame.”

“Right,” Avi agrees with me. “The press constantly covers his every move and, by doing so, they’ve completely ruined his life. Besides, I don’t think he wanted to become a sex icon; on the contrary, all he needs is warmth, real acceptance, and love for who he really is,” he concludes.

I give him all that, I suddenly realize. When he’s in my arms, he can feel as free as a child again. He feels at ease, he tells me how people had used him. When he does, I share with him all the scars that were etched into my heart. He rests his head on me and sings love songs to me, constantly reminding me that I’m the only woman in his life and pleads for me to trust him. Our deep relationship gradually sheds all my insecurities. Everything seems to disappear. This fabulous man has captured my heart. I feel free, strong and beautiful, like never before.

He’s also appreciative of the fact I’m a mother. And my beloved Roy adores him. He regards him as a spiritual guide with a strong presence. He teaches him martial arts tactics and empowers him. He treats me like a real princess and takes me to magical and intimate places. He buys me sweet and thoughtful gifts that I’m so happy to accept because they come straight from his heart. Our love is totally pure. I call him

‘Michael’ when we’re with other people, but in the bedroom he’s always Mikey – My key. After all, it’s thanks to him that my heart has become unlocked.

Dean and Tony are the only people who know about our thruple, since they’ve occasionally witnessed our love for each other. Everyone else sees nothing but my unconditional love for my dearest Avi. That way there’s no room for doubt or questions.

These two men are completely different, yet they’re both an inseparable part of my heart. However, Avi is my very essence. I’ve let him own me, by choice. He disappears all my pain, recognizes my weaknesses and defies them all at once, eliminating any doubt I might have in an intentional and almost addictive way.

“Thank you, Almighty God, for all the true blessings Thou hast unexpectedly brought into my life.” I sigh, close my eyes and fall right asleep.



“Good morning, gorgeous,” I hear a warm and familiar voice. I open my eyes and see Michael lovingly leaning over me, looking at me with his bewitching eyes.

“Sweetheart! You’re back?” I pounce on him. “I’ve missed you so much! What a wonderful surprise! Why didn’t you tell me you were coming? I had no idea.”

“I’m back only for a couple of days of and came straight into your loving arms,” he smiles, removes all of his clothes and jumps into bed. He holds me and kisses the back of my neck and my lips.

“My prince, this is the best way to start every day,” I marvel at his exquisite body.

“Honey, listen,” he continues. “I have a huge concert tonight. It’s an end-of-the-summer party. I’ve already told Avi about it,” he adds. “I want you both there. I’ve saved a seat for you in the Golden Ring, and brought a spectacular dress for you, straight from Michelle’s fashion house in Paris,” he smiles widely. “I want to enjoy every moment I have here with you two. I miss you so much, you can’t even imagine.”

“Me too!” I’m completely enamored. “Of course, we’ll be there,” I smile warmly. “Roy’s with Matthew for the next couple of days.”

“Okay, that’s great!” He continues. “And now, I would like to lose myself inside you, please.”

“I’m all yours!” I’m enthralled. He quickly licks my vulva and intensely penetrates me, as he whispers: “Oh, how I’ve missed this body of yours! Being away from you is physically painful. I want to live inside you, my princess.” He keeps moving up and down and I climax again and again. One time after the next. He continues, vigorous, immersing himself in my body. He alleviated his longing for my body, and loudly unloaded inside me.

“It’s so difficult for me!” he declares. “You have Avi! All I have are sweet memories and my right hand,” he laughs. I join him and laugh out loud.

“Come, let’s take a shower together,” he leads us both to his lavish shower. He softly soaps my body, washes my hair, and constantly compliments and caresses my body as he lathers

and soaps me up.

“Michael, I feel so loved by you,” I look into his eyes, enamored, as I wipe the water that welled up around my eyes.

“I feel safe with you. You’re all I ever wanted, Sam. It’s important for me that you know that I mean every word of it. I feel liberated from ego and hypocrisy, everything seems so natural and easy with you. As if we’ve been together forever.”

“I feel exactly the same, my love,” I wrap a large towel around my body and hug him warmly. “I’m the luckiest woman alive, I’m sure of it.” I smile and take his hand in mine, and we step outside the shower. “Are you hungry? Would you like me to make you some breakfast?”

“No, sweetheart,” he kisses my knuckles. “I should get ready because I need to hit the road. I’ve already grabbed a bite on the way.” He quickly dries his hair and dresses. “Could you come as early as possible, gorgeous? I’ll take you to one of my favorite places after the concert.”

“Okay,” I flash him a toothy smile. He kissed my head and approaches the suitcase he had earlier dumped in the corner, then he pulls out a black garment bag.

“Here, you’ll wear this tonight, okay?” He caresses my hair. “Open it up later,” he smiles.

“Okay,” I say willingly. “I’m sure it’s stunning. Thank you so much, my prince.”

“I have to go. Time just flies when I’m with you!” He quickly leaves the room.

At around 8:00 pm, Avi and I start getting ready. The dress is



absolutely stunning. It's a silver knee-length dress, made of delicate gray organza, with a shimmering white-silver corset studded with small crystals around the bust. The thin straps are also adorned with sparkly gems. It is simply perfect and elegant. I slip my feet into fashionable black high heels, pull my hair up and back, and put on long, bejeweled earrings. Then, I apply a pinkish lipstick, some blush and mascara. Finally, I complete the look with a ravishing black faux-fur shawl and a round, black, metallic clutch purse. When I finish, I head towards Avi awaiting me in the living room.

"You're impossible!" he mutters. "What on earth?! Do you want to drive me completely up the wall? You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen!" He kisses the top of my head. "Let's head out quick and be done with it. I hope you're ready for another sleepless night," he declares, all the while pulling on my arm until we reach the black Porsche. I love how eager and insatiable he is when he's with me.

We hit the road. It's 10:00 pm when we park the car, step out hand-in-hand, and head towards the party. He texts Michael that we've arrived. A couple of minutes pass and he comes out to meet us, all smiles and excited.

"You're so beautiful!" He enthusiastically kisses my hand.

The opening act kicks off the concert. Michael takes us to our seats, right in front of the stage, at the golden ring. We're surrounded by celebrities from all over the world, musicians and artists; all enthused, all applauding and loving the music that my talented prince has created.

Their eyes constantly scrutinize me, as do their whispers.

Everyone wonders who I am. Some must recognize me from the video clip, I gather. Michael's concert begins, and I have a blast listening to the music of the artist I've always adored. A stellar concert! Michael is at his peak and gives it his all. The audience sings along, knowing each and every word of the lyrics. Cell phone lights, smoke and cameras flash all around us. The atmosphere is thrilling, lively and intoxicating. "I've saved the best for last," he addresses the entertained audience. "For my new single, 'Lost in You', I'd like to invite my personal muse to come up on the stage. Sam, come over here."

Embarrassed, I swallow the lump in my throat. Avi helps me up to the stage as I shiver with excitement and sheer surprise. I reach Michael on the stage. He fondly holds my hands as the audience cheers. Then, he starts singing to me. When I recover from the initial shock, I give in to the sound of the fabulous music and his charming voice, swaying my body along. I'm so embarrassed, yet so pleased at the same time. I savor the moment.

"That's it for today," he declares at the end of the song. "See you all next summer!" he cries out and whisks me backstage. We can still hear the ecstatic audience and thunderous applause all around us.

"You were amazing!" I hug him tightly.

"So were you, gorgeous," he smiles. We locate Avi and prepare to leave as soon as we can. He thanks his band and all those who've participated and, together, we all step outside to the black Porsche. Michael wants to drive, and we set off. We arrive at an isolated and opulent resort, surrounded by a green

and blooming garden.

We arrive at the cabin and immediately disrobe. We fill the hot tub and jump in. Avi pours us some cool champagne but doesn't enter the hot tub. Clearly, he realizes Michael needs some more space and time with me, to alleviate his loneliness and welt-up adrenaline. We all move to the bed and make love, again and again. I feel so liberated, and uninhibited. I discover the power of my inner femininity and my most clandestine passions, confidently playing them out. Their delighted moans of relief reassure me that they're mine, completely mine. We all fall asleep in one another's arms. Our legs intertwined.

The sun peeking through the window brings on a new day in this gorgeous haven. The air is filled with the scent of blossoming flowers. A sumptuous breakfast was delivered to the cabin with ideal timing, and we eat it all together.

"So, what should we do now?" Michael smiles, reenergized.

"What's with you? Can't we rest for a while? Take a breath? Come on, tell me. What did you have in mind?" Avi asks, annoyed.

"I thought we could go horseback riding down this amazing vista. That's the best way to explore this area," he replies.

"That sounds really great!" Avi snickers. "I came here to chill for a while. That's why I have no intention of joining your morning activities. Sam, if you'd like, you can go together. In any case, I have a couple of things I need to attend to."

"Alright, then I'll go with Michael. We wouldn't want to

bother you,” I say, half-jokingly.

“We’ll be quick!” Michael promises.

“Whatever, have fun!” He kisses me on the lips.

Michael and I walk side by side and arrive at the horseback riding arena behind one of the wonderful cabins. He picks a brown Arabian horse, and I picked a white one called Snow.

“I’ve never ridden a horse before,” I say excitedly.

“Come on, then,” Michael smiles and helps me up onto the saddle. He grabs my horse’s reins, hops on the back of his horse, and slowly leads both horses in synchronicity.

“This is incredible! I’ve always dreamt of doing this!” I exclaim. “Horses are my favorite animals.”

“Certainly! Horses rock. But actually, I love all animals.”

“Except for roaches, I hope,” I laugh out loud.

“Ugh, they repulse me.” We both laugh out loud and ride alongside one another, the warm sun shining down on us, as we slowly discover the breathtaking scenery in front of us. He stops, dismounts the horse, and tethers both animals to a nearby tree trunk. We’re on the mountainside, which is a perfect vantage point. The view is simply mesmerizing.

He steadily helps me off my horse and grabs a small picnic basket we’ve had prepared in advance. We spread the checkered blanket on the grass, which is spotted with purple, blue, red and yellow flowers. We sit down, look around us, and then kiss passionately, invigorated by the magical view.

“I want you!” I whisper and undress him.

“Are you serious? Right here?”

“Yes, I want you this very second. It’s only you and me against this heart-stopping world.”

“Well, I’m not exactly the public-sex type of guy, but it seems I’ve thrown all my principles out the window when it comes to you,” he laughs. “I’m so liberated when I’m with you.” He starts removing my clothes.

We make love audibly on the mountain side; it’s us versus mother nature. We’re both completely loose, and take huge gulps of each other, quenching our thirst after those long days we spent apart.

“I hope that when you miss me, you’ll remember this very moment,” I whisper to him. “You can’t be the only one to give once-in-a-lifetime experiences,” I smile at him as I put on my clothes. “Ever since I’ve met you, my life has become colorful, flavorful and full of meaning. You’ve changed my whole take on life. Thanks to you, I can finally see the beauty in this world.”

“I feel the same, my love. We should get back before Avi grounds both of us,” he burst out laughing.

“Yes,” I agree and join his uncontrollable laughter.

We return to the horses, promising we’ll keep maintaining this relationship, day in and day out.

“I’ll never be able to leave you,” I confess and surprise myself.

“You know, sharing my insecurities with you isn’t easy for me,” I add, “I hope you won’t let me down.”

“Never!” He kisses my head. “I love you, gorgeous.”

We return to the cabin, hand-in-hand, with flaming love in our eyes.

“So, did you have a good time?”

“Yes, very! It was such a wonderful outing,” I smile from ear to ear, look at Michael and wink at him suggestively. Avi’s phone rings.

“It’s Michelle,” he looks at Michael. “What does she want from me now? Hello?” He picks the phone up impatiently.

“I had a dream about you last night,” I can hear her on the other side of the line.

“And...?”

“I really want to see you. I haven’t seen you in a while, and I miss your face, and your presence in my life.”

“And...?” he teases her. “I know you’re used to getting everything you want in life. But as I’ve already told you, and I’ll repeat once more – I wish you all the best, but you’re not the right woman for me. Besides,” he glances at me. “This might come as a surprise to you, but I’m in the most amazing relationship. My girlfriend is the manifestation of all my fantasies put together. I’m overjoyed, and I wish the same for you. How many more years will you be waiting for something to happen between us? Maybe you should accept the fact that this isn’t going to happen and move on already?”

“What? Why didn’t Michael tell me anything? I don’t believe it!” She sounds upset. “How did this happen so quickly? I have to see you! Maybe I can fly over there even for one night, and we’ll talk about it? I beg of you!”

“Bye, Michelle,” he hangs up indifferently. “Come on, let’s pack up, please,” he urges us. “Sam needs to get back home tonight, Roy’s due to arrive soon,” he smiles.

“Right,” I quickly pack my things.

We leave the cabin, and so, yet another week of pampering, travelling, sex and untamed passion had passed by. And then Michael leaves us again, this time to Vienna, Spain and Switzerland, for two long weeks.



## Chapter 22

Nothing could have prepared me for what happened a couple of days later.

It was evening time when I had received the phone call from Michael. I was home alone. The lights were dimmed and everything around me was quiet.

“Sam?” His voice sounded strange on the other side of the line.

“Yes, my prince. Miss me?”

“A lot.” He breathes heavily. “I want you to know that regardless of what I’m about to tell you, you’ll always will be very meaningful to me.”

“What’s the matter?” I ask upset. All the possible catastrophic scenarios start running through my mind. Except for the actual one.

“I’m very ashamed of myself, but it’s Dawn! She totally lost her mind and is currently hospitalized until they can stabilize her.”

“Poor thing!” I blurt. “She must be lost without you.”

“Sam... I promised I’d be there for her when she gets out, get some closure and figure out how we hit rock bottom together. We want to try to make things right again,” he explains. “I’m very sorry.”

What is this? Did he just dump me? Like that? The tears start pouring down my frozen face, and I feel my stomach burning



with sorrow and disappointment.

“I understand,” I reply, all choked up. “I wish you all the best,” I hang up and immediately switch off all my phones. All I need right now is some quiet, but I hear my heart pounding in my chest. I collapse to the ground, devastated.

I couldn't be more stupid. How could I have sacrificed so much of myself and my values for this relationship? And here I am, deeply wounded. How could I ever imagine him loving another?

Love is such a cruel and fragile thing, even when I was sure I had given it my all, it keeps burning and playing tricks on me. Now, my future with Avi also seems more fragile than ever.

I have to end it all before I fall apart. After all, if Michael, that gentle man, had betrayed me and lied, there's no chance that the sex-crazed, unrelenting Avi would stay loyal to me either! There's no real chance for this relationship, it's toxic. Dangerous. Certainly inappropriate for a single mother who still has a lifetime of rearing and caring for her son. So, I'll mourn and be heartbroken for a while, and then it'll pass. There's no other option!

After all, it makes no sense. It was too good to be true. I convince myself that it would be best if we savor the blissful moments we've shared and leave them behind, untainted.

It's right that we end it, right here and now. The intense experiences and sensations I've had with him will stay with me forever. I've never felt so loved and desired in a man's arms. I need to pull myself together and continue to plan my life without him.

I decide to text him:

“Avi, I’d like to thank you for all the love you’ve given me. I’ll always cherish it, but your protection has actually wounded me. I’ve completely thrown out all my principles and, with them, every inch of self-respect. I gave into my urges, and now I’ve fallen into a deep and dark abyss again. It’s all over between us. Please, don’t come looking for me, and leave me be.”

An hour and a half later, my front door opens.

“So, that’s it? This is how you’re ending it?” Avi calmly walks into the apartment.

“What are you doing here?” I ask surprised.

“What does it look like I’m doing here?” he snaps at me. “Is that what our relationship means to you? What happened to all the promises you’ve made?”

“Avi, please, get out. I’m hurt and aching. I don’t want to say things I’ll regret later.”

“You seem upset,” he looks at me with concern. “Would you like to tell me what’s going on?”

“As if you don’t know,” I laugh in his face. His expression stiffens as he wonders what I could possibly mean.

“Michael is back with Dawn.” I sum things up.

“What!?” He’s both bewildered and shocked. After a couple of minutes, he regains his composure and wraps his arms around me.

“Honey, I’m sorry. I had no idea. What an idiot! To think he’d

leave a woman like you, and for Dawn, nonetheless!”

“Could you stop? I can’t handle you too,” I weep.

He sits quietly on the chair next to the wooden dining table, his legs spread apart.

“But is it my fault?” he sighs. “I still don’t understand that part. We both know that you wanted him to love you. I didn’t want to prevent you from being happy. Is that what I’m being punished for?”

“You’re right! I shouldn’t blame you, but right now, I need to be on my own,” I emphasize. “I need time to process everything that has happened these past couple of months. I’m emotionally overwhelmed, and I don’t want to hurt you or get hurt.”

“I respect what you’re saying, but I won’t let you drown in self-pity, come over here,” he holds me tight and kisses my head. “I’m sorry, princess. You don’t deserve any of this. It’s both his choice and his loss. No one has ever given him what you have.”

“Avi, let’s not talk about him anymore, please!” The tears burn as they start to pour.

“Okay, I promise,” he gives me a big hug.

For the next couple of hours, he shares with me every detail about his life. He doesn’t spare people’s names, family stories and his nightmares as a young boy. I hug him so tightly, I practically glue myself to him, and kiss every inch of his body.

He also tells funny stories about women who would try to seduce him while he closed his heart to them. Playing hard to

get. At some point, they were willing to do anything to get him, they begged on all fours, pleading. At those times, he'd worship sex. It was his outlet. And now, he was making rough and uninhibited love to me, having an intimate relationship that heals and, at the same time, is so exciting that it hurts. We're amazingly open with one another.

"I've almost forgotten it all," I look at him, humbly satisfied.

"Sam," his expression becomes serious. "I want to marry you. I already have everything else that I want in life."

"Seriously? Are you sure?" I ask, astonished.

"Are you joking? I'm yours forever. And I promise, I won't give up on you, like some other losers."

"Okay," I reply. "That's much better than losing you."

"Losing me? Never."

"You know, Avi, there are a couple of important issues I want to discuss with you. Your relationship with your mother, for instance. If you want me to become a significant part of your life, there are some things that we need to tend to before they come crashing down in pieces, you know what I mean? We aren't the only two people in the world. We'll have to smooth out the rough parts, too."

"What else would you like to know, gorgeous? I've already told you everything."

"That's true," I clarify. "But we have to do our best to improve things. Your mother is just as important to me as you. After all, she gave birth to you, so I owe her one."

“She’s very important to me, too,” he becomes withdrawn, “but our communication isn’t so great. Everything she says sounds silly or fake. Although she constantly tries to fuss over me and show me that she cares,” he replies with restraint. By the way, it’s her birthday next week.”

“How wonderful!” I’m excited. “This is a great opportunity. We can throw her an exciting surprise party. Perhaps you can say a few words? Move her, just like you do with everybody else? Avi, you have to understand that even though your beloved grandmother is gone, your mother is still here, and she isn’t getting any younger. I’m sure she would have wanted to change certain things that are beyond her control, but at least she’s trying. You should appreciate her for it, not offend her,” I gently encourage him. “Don’t forget the meeting that you insisted we have with my parents,” I remind him. “Turn over a new leaf, forgive her. Try to see her side of it, she lost the love of her life. Give her a real chance to reconnect with you. Motherhood is something that cannot be broken or replaced. I would never want our future children to become estranged from us.”

He listens to me, smiling.

“Yes, you’re right. Parenthood demands responsibility and sacrifice. Now that I already know what love is all about, I’m not sure what I’d do if I’d ever lose you,” he hugs me tightly.

“Can I arrange it, please? It’s going to be perfect. Trust me.”

“We’ll do it together,” he surprises me. “I think that, deep down, I’ve been wanting to thaw the ice for some time, but we only grew more distant and now we’re alienated from one

another. But then you showed up, and you've broken through all my walls."

"When you're loved, you have a sense of confidence," I reaffirm what he had said. "You're an amazing man, and there are so many people who want to be in your presence just because of who you are. Let them. Soften up a little. At least when it comes to people who matter."

"Okay," he concludes the conversation. "Let's start planning tomorrow. All I want to do now is hug you," he falls asleep.



The day of the party arrives. The fancy hall we've booked is already decorated in a classic and refined style. All the guests and family members are seated at the round tables scattered throughout the hall. Avi is excited; he does sound checks and speaks with delivery boys. I'm in charge of the refreshments and decorations. We've both been running around for a week to arrange this event. But we've both thoroughly enjoyed planning it. I felt as though I was untying a knot in the heart of this man who had dismantled the puzzle I was living in only to reassemble it again, now true to myself and with self-esteem and self-respect.

The luxurious white Rolls-Royce pulls up in front of the glass door facing the road. His beautiful mother, Rachel, elegantly and fluidly steps out of the car. She's dressed in the designer gown we had sent in advance. She looks so impressive; I can clearly tell from where Avi got his looks. My heart aches when I realize I had never met his father, Michael. My prince has been through so much. I hope he'll let her in and allow her to become a real part of his world. Moved, she looks at everyone,

and responds gleefully when everyone cries out “Happy birthday, Rachel,” and “cheers”. She hugs and kisses all the guests. Her favorite music plays in the background. People start dancing on the main dance floor, food is served, and the alcohol starts flowing. The atmosphere is blissful, and everyone looks pleased, especially Rachel. Avi is nervous and shies away from everyone.

Then, the highlight of the event: a cake with sixty-eight candles comes rolling in. She blows them out with a few long puffs and then everything turns silent. Avi climbs up to the stage and grabs the mic.

“Thank you everyone for being here and gracing us with your presence,” he starts. “I’d like to tell you a bit about my mother,” his voice trembles. “My mother has always been a dedicated, affable, and lovely woman,” he addresses her. “I know we’ve suffered a lot of pain and sorrow, but now it’s time to leave that all behind and look forward to the future. I thank you, Mother, for everything you’ve done for me. Although today is your birthday, you are, in fact, my gift. I am committed to putting aside whatever disagreements we’ve had in the past. From now on, I promise you’ll know each and every day just how much you mean to me. In addition, I would like to apologize for my long years of estrangement. It’s important for me to explain that the pain I felt was due not to your absence nor, God forbid, your presence. I would be honored if you help me raise my future children.”

He completely surrenders to the moment, hugs her and takes no notice of the guests in the hall. Every single one of the guests had tears in their eyes.

“Okay! We’ve cried enough,” he declares. “Now it’s time for presents.” He surprises her when he gives her a beautiful heart pendant with ‘Avi’ engraved on one side and ‘Rachel’ on the other. She seems elated and beside herself. I’m filled with a sense of pride for having had the opportunity to spread some magic dust over these dear people I love the most.

An hour passes and Rachel addresses me and warmly places her hand on my shoulder.

“You can’t even imagine what you’ve done for me, Sam. I know that Avi wouldn’t have made this step without you; I felt I had lost him forever. Thank you for giving him the courage to forgive me. I have so much love to give him, and he deserves every bit of it.”

Tears of joy keep pouring down my cheeks.

“Thank you, Rachel, for sharing that. You must know that you’ve always been very important to Avi. That is why he wanted to protect you, at any cost.”

She nods, “After I lost Michael, I denied myself anything that would give me joy, including my own child. I was heartbroken, Sam. Now, I’ll never let him go ever again.”

Teary eyed, we both collapse into each other’s arms, relieved and excited about our future together as family. I’m so pleased that my ‘knight in shining armor’ has the opportunity to get past this chapter of his life. I want him to grow stronger, more relaxed and make a fresh start.

We’re all exhausted and gradually the guests begin saying their farewells as they depart.



I walk into our bedroom and find a small jewelry box in the middle of the bed. “What is this?” I ask shyly.

“Open it!”

Excitedly, I open up the impressive box and find a spectacular ring – at its center is a hammered silver heart set with an enormous, singular sparkling diamond.

“Are you serious? You know I don’t like expensive presents. But this is stunning! I love it, thank you so much.”

“This is my heart,” he declares. “No one has ever done for me what you have. Ever since I first saw you, I had a feeling I would meet you again. It’s as if the heavens had destined us to be together,” I nod, and he continues, “it’s as if everything we have been through in life, each on our own path was, in fact, the route we had to take in order to find each other.”

“We’ve been through so much in such a short time! Do you realize it has been barely three months?”

“Three months of crazy love worth more than a lifetime of loneliness and pain,” he states. “Sam, will you marry me?”

“Yes,” I reply softly. “I’ll marry you because my existence is meaningless without you. Before I met you, Roy was my everything. But you give me the strength and fortitude to raise him properly, as he deserves. Your love sends me over the moon,” I say through a choked-up voice and the tears filling my eyes.

“So, we’re getting married?”

“We’re getting married,” I smile.

“And what about kids?”

“Sure, some day, but hold your horses,” I smile. He’s appeased and grins, taking me into his arms, showering me with unconditional love.

I kiss his whole body and lean over him. I savor the taste of his skin. Slowly, erotically, I stand up and gently stretch out to him. My hair brushes over him, and my lips almost flutter down his body, all the way to his manhood. I lick and relish the taste of it as he moans and cries out my name.

“Sam, you’re blowing my mind. I love you so much,” he gives in, and allows me to do with him as I wish.

I sit on top of him, placing my hands on my buttocks and ride him, leisurely moving my thighs, then swaying faster, more intensely. I lean back and my long hair slides down all the way to my ass, now covered in a thin layer of adrenalin sweat. I moan with pleasure, constantly moving up and down, freely taking him in. He groans, kneads and massages my breasts, caresses my belly and flicks my clit, sending us both over the edge into gratifying bliss. We both breathe heavily and laugh with elation.

“You keep amazing me. You’re a sex goddess, you know that, right?”

I smile from ear to ear.

“My one and only desire is to be your goddess and nothing more. That would be more than enough!” I collapse into his arms. He smiles and kisses the top of my head.

“Good night, my goddess,” he smiles.

“You too,” I mumble and fall asleep on top of him.

I’m awakened by rays of sunlight.

“Is it morning yet?” he responds to my movements.

“Probably,” I inhale his scent and sweetly kiss his chest, readjusting my position on his body and slipping off of him.

“Where are you going?” He pulls me closer and instantly penetrates me. “I’ve been keeping it in all night. Do you think I can sleep with you lying on top of me?” He picks up the pace, and occasionally moans.

My leg rises and squeezes the side of his body. He masterfully rubs my clit, erotically kisses the back of my neck, then increases his speed. More, more and more. I join him in orgasm as he unloads himself inside of me and he bites the nook between my shoulders. We pant, trying to catch our breath.

“I still can’t comprehend that I’m about to wake up like this every morning!” He smiles at me mischievously.

“Me too, my prince, you’re my bliss.”

“We have so many things to do, gorgeous,” he continues. “I want our wedding to be perfect, but you already know I suck at planning parties, weddings and events. Michael has always been in charge of those things.”

“Ah, yes,” I’m struck with reality. We have that matter to resolved as well. “Look, Avi, Michael is a huge part of you and your life. I’d never want you two to grow apart. But with

everything that had happened between us, it seems like that's all been ruined," I become saddened.

"Do you know how revenge is best served?" he laughs.

"How?" I ask surprised.

"Cold! I have an idea," he continues, enthusiastically, "I'll call him and tell him we're getting married and need his help in planning the wedding."

"Are you crazy?" I ask angrily. "I'll have to spend every day with him, I don't really want to see him right now. Everything's still pretty fresh," I say defensively.

"It's all right, gorgeous. We organize it together," he pacifies me. "You'll get over it only once you face it," he insists. "Remember? That was your suggestion," he teases me. "Listen, he's the only one who can plan this production, trust me. You and I lack the patience for it."

"As far as I'm concerned, we can just get married at the city hall," I explain. "After all, I've already been married twice. I've had the big weddings, beautiful dresses and fancy parties. I really don't care about those things anymore. What matters to me is the meaning behind the vows we'll take."

"I completely agree with you, I don't care for grandiose weddings, either. Personally, I think that our marriage ceremony should be an intimate moment with the people closest to us. Nonetheless, I'm obligated to throw a big wedding for my mother's sake, as well as in your honor. I want everyone to witness and comprehend just how important you are to me."

“Okay, my prince, do whatever you think is right,” I head to the shower to find some comfort in the warm water and fragrant soap.

“I’ve spoken to Michael,” he tells me as I return to the room. “He’ll be here in a week,” Avi smiles. “Let the festivities begin.”

Whatever, I think to myself. I’m willing to rip the band-aid off and resolve all the painful memories, once and for all.

“Avi, don’t forget that we need to talk to Matthew, too,” I briskly curb his enthusiasm.

“So let’s call him together,” he encourages me.

“Let’s,” I agree and dial.

“Hey, Matthew, how are you?”

“Fine,” he replies curtly.

“I need to talk to you, tell you about some changes. Can I meet you at the café next to our house?”

“Some people work for a living, you know? I can’t just meet up whenever you feel like it!”

“It’s important.”

“Can you be there in two hours?”

“Yes,” I conclude, “see you there, thanks.”

“He seems upset,” I tell Avi.

“How could he not, gorgeous? Don’t you think he realizes what he’s lost and where things are headed between us? He knows you’re a woman to adore. No one in their right mind

would ever just give you up.”

“You’re not very objective, are you?” I laugh. “I only hope that you’ll be saying those things years from now. You’d better!” I add in a whisper.

“You’re kinda scary. You know that, right?” He bites my lip and guffaws. “Let’s go.”

When we enter the café, we find Matthew sitting alone at a table, withdrawn, and pensive. My heart goes out to him.

Avi approaches him, takes a seat and I follow.

“Matthew, how are you?”

“As if you care,” he scours. “I’m fine. So? You’re here to tell me that you’re getting married?”

“Yes,” I say without getting into any details.

“I see, so all that’s left for me to say is congratulation,” his voice quivers.

“Thank you,” we both reply with sincere appreciation.

“Sam, I never wanted to hurt you. You were and still are a very important part of my life. Avi was right. I wasn’t as dedicated to you as I should have been. I’m sorry. I wish you all the best. I know that Roy is fond of Avi; he keeps telling me about how much fun they have together. I appreciate it, man,” Matthew looks directly at Avi.

“With pleasure,” he places his hand on his chest. “Your son is dear to me. I’ll always respect, love and cherish him. He’s amazing. I’ll never try to take your place or cast you aside,” he

adds with sincerity.

“So, good luck to you two.”

“Thank you, Matthew, I really mean it,” I emphasize. “I can imagine this isn’t easy for you, and I certainly didn’t plan things this way. The most important issue is that we’ll always be good and loving parents and respect each other.”

Matthew and Avi nod. We shake hands and leave, relieved.

“This went exceptionally well,” I tell Avi. “I feel much better now. It’s been weighing on me for a long time.

Deep down I felt embarrassed for having found a new relationship so quickly. I knew that Mathew loves me and always has. We’ve lost one another because of our poor communication and silly power plays. I wish him happiness,” I hope in all sincerity.

Avi’s face seems to light up when it witnesses my composed expression.

“We should celebrate; we’ll go that same hotel I had stayed at while waiting for you.”

“My love, you’re my everything.”



## Chapter 23

The days pass and we both bask in our love and hopes for the future. Michael finally returns and shyly, yet excitedly, enters the house.

“Congratulations!” he cries out into the room. “I’m so happy for you both.” He wholeheartedly hugs Avi. “You’ve finally gotten your act together,” and slaps him on the shoulder.

“Yes, bro, all thanks to you,” Avi smiles with gratitude. “My life was so empty before I met her, and now I finally feel alive. That’s why I don’t miss a single thing from my past,” he adds sarcastically.

“Well, that’s probably because you’re the most amazing woman I’ve ever met,” he addresses me. “I’ll forever cherish the moments we’ve shared. I know that I broke your heart, but I’d like to explain a few things.”

“Well, yes, you did break my heart. But I don’t want to talk about it right now,” I leave him standing there and quickly disappear into the kitchen, completely ignoring his bewitchingly marvelous eyes.

After lunch, we have no choice but to start planning the wedding. After all, there’s so much to do and we’re running out of time: lighting operators, singers, dancers, invitations, handling an endless guest list. Although Avi is my prince charming, this ceremony isn’t as meaningful to me. We’re bound to each other in so many other ways. I try my best, but I find it all so pointless and I barely cooperate with him. Avi is



somewhat indifferent to it, too; he lets Michael and me handle everything and spends a lot of time with Roy, as if he had been waiting for someone to play with. Michael often gets angry with him and complains that he isn't the one getting married, and that's it time that we both participate in the planning. The tension between us grows as I become more and more distance. I'm cold to him; I can't seem to be able to look into the same eyes that had once put a spell on me.

"Enough!" at some point I lash out at him and yell. "Do whatever you think is right. I don't care one bit. I trust you to make our wedding perfect. If there's any matter that doesn't have anything to do with me – I don't want to hear about it."

"Why are you yelling at me?" he shouts infuriated. "Do you think this is easy for me? This is no picnic for me either. Do you know how hard it is to plan a wedding for the woman I love, who is marrying my best friend, no less?"

"Ugh," I continue full force. "The woman you love! That's rich! Now you're trying to steal my thunder? No way!" I declare. "This is my moment, get it? I can behave however I'd like. When you love someone, you don't leave them. And if you do, don't be surprised that you miss them!"

He kisses me suddenly and passionately. I immediately pull back and then lash out again.

"You, the whole package," I wave my arms and my forefinger draws a circle around him, "you're too good for me. You have a huge heart, you're so handsome and charismatic – you have it all, don't you?! What could I ever have been to you? Nothing more than a notch in your bedpost."

“Sam, don’t say those things!” he bursts into tears. “I swear that I had no other choice! My hands were tied, my heart is in pieces. Please, hear me out. I was worried for you! She flew off the handle! She was ready to take the gloves off, she wanted to expose everything and humiliate you. You wouldn’t have been able to handle it. I knew how desperate you were to keep our threesome discreet, that you were worried by what people would say and how it would affect your custody battle over Roy. I didn’t want to put you at risk. You have to understand! I’ve made a horrible mistake. We had a terrible argument and I accidentally blurted out that she would never be as good as you. And suddenly, she connected all the dots. She realized that we were together, and so are you and Avi. She threatened me that if I didn’t get back with her, she’d defame and malign your character, and very publicly. I couldn’t let her do that to you. Please, understand, it’s my fault. I had already exposed you and our love to the entire world on that video clip at the award ceremony. So, I was left with no option other than to be with her. I was shattered, restless, and self-destructive. You can’t imagine what I’ve been through.”

I’m choked up as tears mutely pour down my cheeks. I’m stunned.

“And what now?” I compose myself.

“We broke up. A while ago. I was only waiting for her meds to kick in and for her to calm down. After she got it together, I made it understood that she was, for me, a toxic and dangerous woman that I no longer wanted in my life, leaving you out of the equation. I had to hurt you, but I am so sorry for all that

I've put you through. I just needed to bide my time until she got better. I felt pity for her."

"I had no idea," I attack him. "Why weren't you honest with me? I would have understood. You could have prevented my heart from being shattered again, did you even think about that?"

"Please, forgive me," he takes my hand in his. "I felt so threatened by her. You're the most important love I've ever had. Thanks to you I realized what I need in life, and who the people were that I want around me. I trusted that Avi would always be there for you. I know how important you are to him."

I hug him and covering his face with kisses.

"I've missed you so much. How could you have done this to me? You were my first love. The first man who had ever strummed the chords of my heart." I cling on to him and burst into tears. "I've missed your touch so much," I add, tearful.

"Me too," he wipes his own tears away.

"I apologize for everything, my sweet love. We'll make everything right, I promise. But now," he adds with a little smile, "we're running out of time. Let's focus on planning the most magical wedding ever. One that would reflect how much I love you, and the wedding I imagine we would have had."

"Yes," I smile. "It sounds perfect."

"Besides there's another matter we need to address," Michael continues. "The commercial, remember?"

"I completely forgot about it!" I confess.

“Should we do it, leave everything behind us and create a memory that would last for a lifetime? There’s also a financial element to it. I know how important being independent is for you.”

“But is it still appropriate, considering everything we’ve been through?” I wonder out loud.

“Everyone’s been talking about us anyway. I’m done hiding. Let’s have our own type of closure.”

“Okay,” I agree. “Let’s do it.”



The shooting day is finally here. An international team made up from of the best face and body makeup artists and hair stylists follows us throughout the day. Michael, of course, knows everyone. All these professionals respect him and ask for his advice on each and every step. He checks every frame, enriches every image with his ideas. Everyone does as he says without any qualms or questions. Clearly, they appreciate him, both personally and professionally.

The commercial is for a famous sports lingerie company. The set is comprised of a wide, simple wooden bed covered in a white sheet and two pillows. There are wooden carriage wheels and straw scattered on the ground, and the torn sheets strewn on the wooden poles billow from the large fans. The set looks sensual and perfect. We’re both slathered in tanning oil, our skin glistens and shines.

I’m dressed in a white sports bra and stonewash jeans, my white thong peeking out from the back, and killer nude-colored, red-sole high heels. My long hair is drenched in oily

saltwater and my makeup is smokey and purposely untidy. I look like a Hollywood actress in a magazine photo shoot. I'm more than pleased.

A glimpse of the elastic band of Michael's boxers is noticeable under his unzipped blue jeans. His auburn hair is also sleek and smooth. At the photographer and director's orders, I lean over him. We both begin posing.

Although I'm inexperienced, things seem to progress smoothly and I feel wonderful and empowered, so light in his arms. Our pictures reflect our magnetic chemistry. Everyone seems to be ecstatic with the results.

"That was the most beautiful closure we could have had," he says enthusiastically. "This is going to be amazing! Thank you, Sam. Thank you for everything!" He kisses my forehead and hugs me tightly.

"I should thank you, Michael. You gave me another once-in-a-lifetime experience. Just your presence makes me feel at ease," I hug him back. "I hope you know how important you are to me. I hope that you forever stay a part of my life. You're inspirational. I wish you nothing but joy and happiness." I warmly kiss his cheek, and he smiles. We pack our things and prepare to leave.

"I have to ask, what do you really think about everything that's been going on lately?" I inquire.

"Do you mean, how do I feel about the fact that the woman I love is marrying the man I hold dearest in the whole wide world?" He smiles slyly.

“Yes,” I reply.

“I feel lucky to have a place in your heart, to have such pure and innocent love in my life. I know that I’m important to you. I don’t care how you choose to express it; love has different shades. Although Avi and you are tying the knot, I feel that we are all in this together. And now, let’s head out. I have one more surprise for you,” he says, and drives us to a solitary cabin hidden in the woods.

“It’s so beautiful here,” I marvel in the colorful view and intoxicating smells. He retrieves the key to our cabin, and we enter number 10. There’s a large bed in the center of the room. It’s covered in a white sheet scattered with purplish petals, two artistic towel-made swans facing each other, an ice bucket with a bottle of cool champagne, and an exotic fruit tray.

“What’s all this?” I ask, stunned.

He kneels.

“Although I can’t propose, I want to offer you my heart,” he stands up as he opens a jewelry gift box containing a sparkly diamond bracelet with an infinity pendant.

“I want us to make a commitment to each other. I want us to tie a knot, connecting one heart to the other. I want us both to always believe in our love and never forsake it.”

“I accept!” I wipe away a tear of joy. “You’re mine and I’m yours, I promise. Labels don’t mean a thing. I love you, Michael. I always have. I can’t deceive my own heart, I have nowhere to escape.”

“I’m glad to hear it!” He flashes a huge smile. “The way I see

it, you, me, Roy and Avi, we're all one big family." He takes the bracelet out the box and shows me the letters etched on the back S.A.M. "See? Your name is comprised of all our initials. It's fate; we were meant for one another. I finally feel whole. I'm fortunate enough to love and be truthfully and wholeheartedly loved. I've found a home and a family and I'll never disrespect that! I've been waiting for you my entire life. I'm sure it'll take time until we find the right balance, but when there's so much love to go around, we can overcome everything. Thank you for forgiving me and being here, at my side. Thank you for agreeing to board that yacht with me, and for healing my heart after years of pain and disappointments. I promise that I won't ever let you down again."

"Michael, I love you so much!" I kiss him as he puts the bracelet around my wrist.

We clink our champagne glasses and make love for the first time since we broke up.



When we return in the evening, exhausted yet satisfied, I receive a phone call.

"Hi, Sam."

"Yes?"

"It's Tony, how are you?"

"Great, and you?"

"Fine, thanks. I'd like to have a private conversation with you. Is that possible?"

"Sure, but why?" I ask curiously.

“Great! I’ll explain everything later. So, can we talk tomorrow evening? I’ll come over and pick you up.”

“No problem,” I hang up and wonder what this is about. He sounded serious. I head to the shower and thoroughly soap myself after the long day I had. Then I catch my breath and ponder about Tony’s intentions. After thinking about it for a while, I decide to call him back.

“Tony?”

“Hi, Sam, is everything alright?”

“I don’t know. Listen, Tony, I’d like for us to talk right now. Can we do that? Are you busy?”

“No, I’m free right now. But how can we do it?”

“I’ll tell Avi that I want to get to know his friends better, and we’ll go somewhere. That would make sense. I don’t want to lie, but I promise that I’ll keep the content of the conversation to myself,” I emphasize. “Don’t worry.”

“Alright, I’ll pick you up in a half an hour.”

“Great, it’s a date,” I hang up again. Even though I’m completely drained, I want to hear him out. Something’s troubling me and I’d like to sort it out.

Avi isn’t as eager about the idea as I am. He doesn’t like wasting the time we have together on other things. However, in the end, he concedes.

“I’m heading out,” I get into his black executive car.

“Tony, how are you?” I smile at him.

“A little surprised,” he admits. “I didn’t think you’d be so keen



to meet up.”

“Why not? You’re an important part of Avi’s life, both professionally and personally. It’s only natural that I’d want us to be on good terms. In any case, there’s something professional I’d like to talk to you about.”

“What?” Tony asks curiously and squirms in his seat.

“His money and the wedding business. I’m uncomfortable bringing money into our relationship. Because our love is so intense, I’d feel awkward putting him in that position. If there’s a way, I’d like for us to figure it out together. What do you think?”

“I must admit I’m pretty surprised,” Tony says. “This is exactly why I wanted to have this meeting. Listen, Avi won’t let me even mention the subject. Each time I start, he stops me and tells me how he’ll never divorce you and, even if he did, all his money and assets are meant to be used by his family and future children. To make a long story short, he’s wearing me out; like a child would.”

I smile. I’m so proud of my man.

“He’s a real prince,” I say, moved by his sentiment. “But could you please draft up a prenup that clarifies I have no right to any of his assets. My life with him is more than enough. I don’t need or want anything.”

“You really are amazing!” He smiles proudly. “Avi is a lucky guy.”

“Thank you. Please, draft the prenup as soon as possible. I’ll tell him later on, in my own way.”

“It’s a deal,” he looks at me pleased. It seems like a weight was lifted off his shoulders. After all, he is Avi’s lawyer and, as such, he needs to look out for him.

“You look beat, perhaps we should go back?”

“We should. It’s been a long day, and I am really tired,” I shamelessly yawn in front of him.

“Well? How was it?” Avi greets me at the door. “Did you guys get to know each other better?”

“Avi, we only had a little talk.”

“What about?” he asks coyly.

“About love and life.”

“Is that so?” He looks curious.

“Yes,” I continue. And about the fact that money and assets come second to everything else. Especially when one finds such a unique man like you.”

“What did you do?”

“I’ve asked Tony to prepare a prenup stipulating that I have no rights to your assets. It’s one of my conditions before marrying you,” I declare. “You have to understand, handsome, our magical love cannot be tainted by material concerns. Please, respect this. It’s important for me to feel comfortable in this relationship.”

“What will I do with you, Sam Rodriguez? I can’t refuse you anything! You sugarcoat everything to force me into consenting.”

“I trust you. No strings attached.”

“You’re an amazing woman. I’m so proud I’m marrying you. You’re mine. Every part of you!”

“I’m absolutely exhausted. I have to get some sleep.”

He wraps his arms around my shoulders, we get into bed and immediately fall asleep.



## Chapter 24

It's a frantically busy morning.

We're all caught up in our hectic preparations for the imminent wedding when I receive a text from Avi: "I'll meet you outside in twenty minutes. Wear something comfortable. Sensual kiss, your Avi."

I wonder what could be happening now, perhaps we'll grab a bite. After having such a long day, we both need to get some rest.

I rush ahead to my new and lavish walk-in closet and put on a pair of light jeans and a tight black sweater with three buttons on each sleeve. I slip on a pair of black boots with elegant heels, apply minimal makeup, grab my powder-blue purse and rush off to meet him.

He's waiting outside next to a sparkling new white Audi wrapped with a huge black bow.

"Here's your new car! Enjoy, my love," he hands me the keys.

"Avi? What is all this? Have you lost your mind? Best-case scenario I'll dent it, but it's highly likely that I'll completely crash it. Are you still sure you want me to drive this ritzy car?"

"Don't you worry about that; I have no intentions of letting you go anywhere on your own. You can be my personal chauffeur," he smiles. "So? Do you like it?"

"Of course! How could I not? It's gorgeous. Avi, I'm speechless. You've went completely overboard. Thank you,

my prince.” I softly kiss his lips and hug him so tightly that my knuckles pop.

“And that’s not everything. Come on, we’re going for a ride. But I’ll drive this time because I know where we’re headed.” He opens the door for me, “please, Sam.” I step inside. There’s that delicious smell of new car.

“Seatbelt, please,” he requests and shuts the door. The seats in my luxurious brand-new car are so comfortable! We hit the road. We crank up the music; its British pop songs, just the way I like it.

“Where are we going?” I ask enthusiastically, like a little girl.

“Patience, princess. Soon. It’s not that far away.”

I’m overcome with a sense of freedom and embrace it. This is what true bliss feels like. You can practically touch it. The urban landscape out the window gradually transforms into a lush green forest and mountains. He takes a right turn onto a dirt road and suddenly a farm with several hot-air balloons appears before us.

“Hello, Avi,” Nolan, the farm owner, greets us warmly. “Everything’s ready as you’ve requested,” he walks us to the impressive hot-air balloon. The letters A&S are imprinted in lilac on the balloon.

“It’s so wonderful!” I exclaim. “Did you do all this?”

“Yup,” he nods. “Hang on, we’re just getting started,” he whispers. We climb up into the hot-air balloon gondola that has been prepared.

“Ready?” Nolan cried out, enthusiastically.

Avi looks at me and smiles. “Well, what do you say?”

“Yes, yes, we’re ready!” I yelp.

Nolan unties the rope and the hot-air balloon starts levitating. Slowly, and right before our eyes, everything below us grows smaller; the trees, the rocks, the roads, all of it seems tiny, yet charming and captivating. The experience is head-spinning, exhilarating and magical.

We hold hands and take in the mesmerizing view that continues to stretch beneath our feet with every passing moment. When we reach maximum height, he draws me closer to him.

“As you probably know, I’ve known you were going to be my wife ever since our first week together. I wanted to create a special proposal memory we’ll be able to share with our children. I’m so lucky I’m going to spend my life with you. So, after several unofficial proposals, and nowhere to escape,” he kneels in front of me and continues, “Sam, my gorgeous woman, will you marry me?” and he flips opens a black velvet box.

“Absolutely!” I say all choked up. There’s a stunning engagement ring inside the box, and it’s engraved with our initials. The bottom of the lid has a small golden plate with the words: “It doesn’t matter how many times you do it, as long as you do it right.”

“Come here!” I help him to his feet, terribly moved. “How did I manage to find such a prince among a sea full of frogs?” I squeal. “My Avi!” I grab both his hands and look into his eyes, overwhelmed with love and joy. “I’m so grateful for your love

and your trust in my love for you. I'll never take it for granted. You make me shine and experience life in so many different colors. I enjoy devoting myself to you because I strongly believe that you'll never intentionally hurt me . It would be an honor to be your wife, my prince." I kiss him passionately and hug him tightly. My heart races in my chest. You're mine. Mine," I scream with joy.

"Look at me, for crying out loud," he laughs, "I'm a completely changed man. I swear I can't remember who I was before I met you. It all seems so silly right now. I'm sure we can rise to every challenge together."

We land but I'm still gliding, overjoyed, charmed, grateful, barely knowing which way is which. I no longer feel a shred of doubt nor allow any negative thoughts to enter my mind. I've found a partner who's willing to embrace every part of me. Even the parts he doesn't like as much. He never uses my weaknesses against me when I'm down. He's patient, understanding and lovingly committed to me. He's all I ever wanted. All his other positive traits are just a bonus and not at all taken for granted.

As we step off the hot-air balloon's basket, we see a beautiful table with exquisite Italian food: pastas, white wine, hearty breads, exotic fruits and juicy grapes. I'm speechless.

"How could I ever top this? Your big romantic gestures? Mr. Levi, you're insane. I love you so much."

With each surprise he opens my heart and mind to new experiences; to hope. I'm severely lovesick, entranced.

"Bon Appétit!" We clink our glasses and dine with gusto.



It's Thursday, and the sky is clear and bright. Autumn smells permeate the air. I prepare an indulgent breakfast for everyone and call them to the table.

"Wow, what a treat," Michael smiles from ear to ear and takes a call as he sits down at the table. It's Michelle and she's screaming on the other side.

"I'm sorry," he excuses himself and steps out to the backyard.

Avi arrives and is followed by Tony and Dean. Everyone sits down around the table, eager to dig in.

Michael returns, forlorn.

"Is everything alright?" I ask, concerned by his nervous expression.

"It was Michelle. She's furious," he looks frustrated. "She can't believe that you two are getting married and she's upset that I haven't told her. Unfortunately, I have no control over her. She's determined to get here at any cost."

"Let her come then!" Avi laughs in between each bite. "We really miss her. She's impossible and enjoys being humiliated."

"Avi, please, this is hard enough, don't make it worse," Michael says, enraged.

"I'm making it worse? Do you even hear yourself?" Avi lashes out. "This is the happiest time of my life and I need to worry about your conniving sister; doesn't that sound ridiculous to you? What do you think she's looking to get from this?" he provokes us. "Is Sam even important to you?" he accuses him



in a demeaning way. “She’s insisting on coming over to try to ruin everything. But she also knows that she has no hold over me, so who do you think is going to be her next victim? I swear, this time I won’t hold back, whatever the price may be. I won’t be toyed with, and neither will you! Do you get me? There’s a limit to what I’m willing to put up with, even if you think it’s best. So, if Sam means anything to you, you’d better think of a solution. For everyone’s sake.”

“What else can I do? Put her on a leash?” He looks so embarrassed, gripping his head with both hands.

“You know what? Just leave it to me,” Avi continues. “It’s about time I put end to it and sort it out. But I should warn you: if she tries something, or God forbid hurts my future wife, I won’t hold back. Perhaps this whole concept of living together is too much for me. Maybe we should move to a bigger house?” He flashes a wide smile at me.

“Avi, I can’t be a part of this, I’m so sorry, but this just isn’t my place,” I gently get up and clear up the empty plates. “I’m going to get some fresh air outside, okay? Work this out,” I kiss Michael on the cheek, hug Avi and immediately head out.

It’s hard not to overhear their conversation, but I’m proud of myself for rising above the occasion. This isn’t my battle to fight. I need to respect the fact that they have their own separate relationship, too.

A couple of minutes pass by.

“Sam!” Michael cries out. “Please, come inside.” He hugs me tightly and sits me on his lap. “I really am sorry.”

“What for? It’s your sister, you didn’t do anything wrong, Michael. You’re both adults; I would never let my opinion of her reflect on you.”

“I’m afraid that she’ll hurt you,” he confesses. “She’s crazy, she has this insane competitive streak.”

“How could she hurt me, Michael?”

“I don’t know. She might come and humiliate herself even more than she already has.”

“I’d be happy to talk to her, if you’d like. She’s your sister, which means that she’s part of our family, too.”

“Are you serious?” He seems surprised.

“Yes, gladly. If she’d be interested. But I should warn you and her – don’t you dare hurt Roy. She’d better not say something to him about us or upset him to punish me. I’ll always protect him, no matter what the circumstances. That’s where I draw the line!” After all, I have no idea what she’s capable of and it’s important to stay vigilant.

“God forbid! Of course not! She isn’t that cruel, I can assure you,” he looks at me helplessly.

“So, let’s wait and see how it goes. I’m sure she isn’t as bad as you say she is.”

Avi smiles.

“My love, you have been officially anointed a queen. You’re my heart’s desire. I’m confident that you’re the only one who could get through to her!”

“What makes you so sure?” Michael inquires curiously.

“Because good conquers evil, and beauty outshines cruelty,” he gets up dramatically and steps out to the yard.

“Let him be, Michael,” I ask. “It’s pointless. There’s no reason to get into an argument. Just wait for her to arrive; we’ll handle it responsibly and sensitively. If there’s anyone who knows what being in love with Avi means, it’s me.”

“You’re right,” he smiles.

“Trust me, we’ll get through this. I have to work things out with her. We still have our whole life ahead of us, you know.”

“Fine, we’ll wait,” he kisses the tip of my head and hugs me warmly.

Michael’s phone rings a couple of hours later.

“It’s Michelle, she’s here,” he announces.

“Hang on,” Avi cries out. “Where’s the red carpet? Where the hell did I put it?!”

“Avi, come on, stop it! I’m going to pick her up. We’ll be back soon,” Michael leave quietly.

About an hour passes by.

“...yes, but what’s with all the suitcases? How long are you intending to stay? Are you completely cuckoo?” Michael comes inside dragging two huge suitcases.

Michelle follows behind him. She’s dressed in tight leather pants, a white sweater with elbow-length sleeves, and impressive black high heels. Her dark blond hair reaches all the way to her breasts. She looks a lot like Michael, but a female version. She could easily be any man’s muse.

“Welcome!” I announce, “nice to meet you.”

She shakes my hand as she throws her amazing white Birkin on the kitchen island, as well as her sunglasses.

“So, you’re Sam,” she smiles.

“Yes,” I smile warmly back. “You’re very beautiful! You’re a female Michael.”

“Thanks, honey,” she replies. “You’re very pretty, too. But everyone has already seen that on Michael’s video clip.”

“Oh right, I tend to forget,” I giggle. “Would you like to have something to drink? Or eat?”

“No, thanks. But I’ll be happy to have a cigarette outside. Wanna join me?”

“Right, sure. I’ll be right there,” I approach Avi, and tell him that we’re going to talk in the yard.

He pulls me close to him.

“Do me a favor, I beg of you, try your best to handle the situation delicately. I trust you. If you’ve managed to turn me around, you can do it with anyone.”

“Are you serious?” I snicker.

“Absolutely.” he replies. “Good luck, my queen,” he winks with a smile on his face.

“I’ll do my best,” I smile confidently and head out to the large backyard.

I sit next to her and light my cigarette.

“Sam, do you know how important you are to Michael?”

“I should hope so,” I reply. “Because he’s very important to me, too,” I exhale a cloud of thick smoke.

“If my brother’s so in love with you, happy and finally at ease, I should thank you for it. I haven’t seen him this happy in a long time,” she adds. “Frankly, I came over because I was really offended, you know?”

“Because you weren’t invited to the wedding? I’m terribly sorry. I had nothing to do with it.”

“Sam, listen, I’ve been in love with Avi ever since I was sixteen years old. At first, we were very close friends, and then I fell hard. When he found out I was into him, he pushed me away. I was very sensitive, as you must know and probably understand.”

I nod.

“I couldn’t bear it. He was my safe haven. When I was with him, I felt good about myself. Then, I kept bumping into him. I followed him around and did everything in my power to attract him. I was only partially successful. It took time, but slowly we were kissing, making out, and growing closer. I became obsessed with him, but he kept me at bay and said he’d only hurt me, that he had no romantic intentions whatsoever, and that he just enjoyed being in my company.

“I was extremely hurt. It shattered my confidence. Ever since then, I’ve dedicated myself to bringing him back into my life. He’s so precious to me, you’ll never get it,” she wipes her tears away. “I understand that it’ll never happen, and that he’s even repulsed by me. Maybe I tried too hard. But you must already know that he’s an irresistible man,” she smiles.

“I do,” I reply. “It took me about an hour to fall in love with him,” I burst out laughing, realizing just how lucky I am.

“But now, I’m in a completely different space. I’m learning to accept the fact that we’ll never be together. I’m not his type. But he’s still very meaningful to me! There’s no way I wouldn’t be here for him on his special day, see? Clearly, if he’s decided to marry you, and so quick at that, then he’s totally crazy about you. Otherwise, this wedding could have never happened. Trust me! I know him.”

“It seemed absurd to me, too. But it was love at first sight, just like in the movies,” I add, barely able to contain myself but trying my best to restrain my feelings.

She looks at me with bloodshot eyes.

“I’ve only recently found out about your relationship, but I’m happy for you. And mostly for him. I’ve always thought that if he’d fall in love with me, he’d be overjoyed, because my love for him is immense and unconditional. But he couldn’t. On the contrary, he became withdrawn and pulled further and further away,” she says, pensively. “In any case,” she composes herself, “he’s still family, and I’d like to attend the wedding, if you’ll allow me.” She reaches her hand out and places it on mine, squeezing it warmly.

“Michelle, are you being honest? Have you truly given up on him as a lover, or a partner? If so, then I promise that I’ll talk to him and do my utmost to ensure that he warms up to the idea. It’s not your fault that you fell in love. I’m sure that, despite everything, and he’s said this before, he’s very fond of you. In any case, I want to preserve your friendship. Does that

sound reasonable? There's nothing I can do beyond that, and it wouldn't be right for me to interfere, understand?"

"Please, Sam, I need him in my life," her voice quivers. "Ever since we've met, he's been like a cloud, hovering over me, unrelenting. I've grown up with him, and he's a part of me. Please, tell him that I know I've made many mistakes, and wrongfully used my brother to get closer to him, but I'm all grown up. I've matured and have a new love in my life, although Avi will always be in my heart. I could never call him a brother, but he'll always be a close friend, you know?"

"I promise, Michelle," I nod, hug her and thank her for coming. "You should know that I want us to work things out and be respectful of one another. Michael is very important to me. I'd never want to stand between you. You're the only family he has, and I'll do everything in my power to include you in our family. If you want to get close to him again, you'll have to give him some space and loosen your grip on him. He hates it when things are forced on him. Let time do its thing. Let things take their natural course. I'll support you; I promise."

"I love him so much," she says and wipes a couple of tears away, "but, I don't have much of a choice," she smiles bitterly. "Michael," she calls out to him, and he immediately arrives. "Could you help get my things to my room? I want to change and freshen up."

"Come on," he hugs her, and they disappear together.

I go back into the bedroom and Avi's there watching TV.

"Are you done?" He looks at me.

“Sort of,” I let out a faint smile and sit in front of him. “Listen, Avi, if Michael is that important to you, then you should learn to respect his sister. You know that she’s the only family he has and that she means a great deal to him. It isn’t her fault that she fell so hard for you.”

“Sam,” he says angrily. “I’ve suffered quietly for his sake all these years. But I won’t be her toy.”

“Oh, God, no!” I continue. “But can’t you let bygones be bygones, and just be friends?”

“Does she realize that’s all there is?”

“It isn’t easy for her, but she’ll do everything she can not to lose you. Perhaps you should talk to her like you did with Lee?” I dare put in my two cents. My heart truly aches when I remember him hugging her fondly and caressing her hair.

I start moving uncomfortably.

“I could try, but she has to respect my space. And yours, of course.”

“That’s wonderful! I’m so proud of you,” I smile and hug him tightly. “Do it for me,” I say obsequiously, “please, do your best. It’ll make things easier for everyone now and in the future.”

“I’ll do anything for you. But I’ll do it for Michael and for her as well. I have no desire to hurt anyone. I’ll talk to her later, I promise.” He kisses my hand. “I’d like to turn over a new leaf,” he adds.

I smile with great satisfaction.







## Chapter 25

“Avi, I think we should have a dinner with our families. Perhaps we should have them over for our last Friday dinner as single people?” I wink at him. “That way everyone can get to know each other in a more casual setting before the wedding. What do you think?”

“A great idea,” he agrees.

“So, I’ll ask Dean to play his acoustic guitar in the background. He’s so talented. I’m sure his music will set the right mood.”

Much to my delight, not only does he agree, but he also lifts me up, squeezes me to his body and spins around as he cries out: “Sam Rodriguez! You’re the absolute best!”

I’m overjoyed, proud and elated. It’s important to me that our families get along, and his friends and relatives come to know me. I’ve learned how important that can be from my two previous marriages.

I contact the caterer that Avi recommended and make a hearty order. Then, I personally invite everyone over and slave away the entire day, styling the table, placing a colorful tablecloth, polishing the dishes and cutlery, then scattering some fragrant potpourri and setting plates, three dishes for each guest.

“Well?” he looks at me. “Are you pleased now? Our living room looks like a flower shop!” he guffaws.

“Avi, stop it,” I defend myself. “Tell me you love it, please!”

It's important to me. I want to create a pleasant, light, and warm atmosphere."

"I agreed to love you, nothing more," he keeps laughing. "But it really is lovely. I'm just teasing. Besides, you should know that once you become my wife, you'll be the sole person in charge of this household. You'll be the beating heart of this house. As far as I'm concerned, anything you do is wonderful. You don't need my approval. Better yet, if you want to move things around, redesign or remodel the place – you can do as you wish. This is your home as much as it is mine."

"Avi, you're absolutely amazing. I'm a lucky woman! And speechless. I feel so safe with you, you're my everything! Everything!"

"It's mutual, my beauty. I have two more surprises for you. But I'll save them for our Friday dinner."

"More surprises? Have you lost your mind? It's too much. You've completely gone overboard!"

"Nothing's too much when you're in love. When you're head over heels," he pinches my lips. "Everything I've ever achieved in my life, and everything I have, belongs to my family. Now, let's go to bed. Tomorrow's going to be a busy day, and I'd like to relax a bit in your arms."

Morning comes, and the heaps of orders that I've made slowly arrive: hors d'oeuvres, main courses, salads, beverages of every sort, appetizing desserts, cakes, buns, bread rolls and more. I have to make sure everything is perfect. Our loved

ones should know just how important they are to us.

“It’s all perfect and delightful,” Michael and Avi compliment me. I’m content.

I take a shower and get ready, finally choosing a thin, white, tailored but not-revealing dress. I put on a pair of turquoise boots, with wrinkles at the top and add a long necklace with small turquoise gems. I wear some light makeup and leave my hair down. I’m so excited! I step outside, hoping that this dinner will bring us all closer together. Michael sees me and immediately pulls me back into the walk-in closet, where he smooches me passionately.

“Thank you for this evening. I’m sure it has something to do with Michelle and Avi.”

“That’s right,” I confess. “But also for Rachel. I’d love to have more of these family gatherings, bringing her closer both to me and to Avi. By the way, your life as a single man is officially over.” I tease him. “As soon as you finish shooting your movie this is going to be your life, too,” I playfully taunt him, then giggle.

“Are you for real?” He smiles. “It’s everything I’ve ever dreamed of,” he looks into my eyes. “You’re everything I’ve ever dreamed of. Let’s get out. Your guests have started to arrive,” he takes me into his arms, and we head towards the large living room. “Don’t worry, I’ve told Michelle to behave.”

I smile and kiss him on the cheek.

People start coming in, kissing and hugging. There are positive

vibes all around; I'm pleased.

I seat Rachel next to Avi, Michelle next to Michael, Dean at the head of the table and Roy at my side. Avi's brothers and sisters and their children – they all take their places. I've made sure that my parents sit on front of Avi and Rachel, and I've taken every detail into account, making sure that all my guests are comfortable and at ease. Dean blesses the wine and the challah, and we all dig in, relishing the delicious dishes that Silvia and a couple of other waitresses serve us. We're all having a splendid time, laughing and talking.

Rachel is moved. I make a point to include her in every discussion, emphasizing just how important she is to me and to all those present. Avi looks at me all evening with admiration. My parents are also appreciative of the respect we show them, especially Avi, who repeatedly says: "If I had such a wonderful daughter, I would have been the happiest man alive," or "Thank goodness her genes are going to mix up with mine," everyone burst out laughing.

When dinner is over, he clinks his wine glass and want to say a couple of words. We all look at him, awaiting his speech.

"So, apparently, we're all one big family now," he smiles. "I guess, I'm going to have to learn to live with it," he chuckles self-consciously. "First of all, I want to thank my amazing future wife who worked so hard and put so much effort into organizing this beautiful celebration. You're the best, my love," he raises his glass higher. "Now, I have something for you too, my little man!" He looks at Roy and pulls out a silver key. "Come with me."

Roy is excited. We're all curious and follow them.

"This is your room!" He opens a door to a room I hadn't known even existed. It's right next to our main bedroom.

The room is richly, yet neatly designed with everything imaginable: toy trucks, puzzles, a variety of plush animals, an arts and crafts table, Legos, a desk and a laptop. It's everything that Roy loves. I'm so moved, tears of joy fill my eyes.

"Now for the cherry on the cake!" He crouches down and says in a soft voice to an ecstatic Roy, "this is your key, in case you get fed up with seeing us." Roy bursts out laughing.

Roy is over the moon. He gives him a huge hug. Avi steals a couple of kisses from him and then lets him go. Roy storms into his room to check out all the new and enticing toys.

I embrace Avi. "You're the absolute best! You're the most perfect man in the world!"

"No, Sam, I'm not perfect. But I am finally whole," he squeezes me.

Michelle sits on the side and watches us silently. She stifles a couple of tears, but I think she finally realizes that we're both very happy together. I'm dying for her to find true love that would occupy her every moment and remedy her wounds, just as it did for me.

"And this is for you," he leads us to the living room and hands me a white envelope.

"Avi, enough. I beg of you! What is this? I can't handle any more surprises and treats."

“Open it!”

I open it with concern and find an official court letter. Matthew had given up his shared custody and I now have sole custody over Roy.

“Impossible! How did this happen?” I’m bewildered, scratching my head.

He laughs.

“Well, while you were busy arranging all this, I had a little chat with Matthew. I explained to him what it meant growing up without a full-time mom, and told him how it can scar a kid,” he kisses his mother’s hand, lest he offends her. “He got it. He also agreed that this was the right thing to do. He’s sure we’ll do a good job raising Roy. I told him he was always welcome to visit, see Roy and spend time with him. Perhaps, later on, he’ll be able to join these dinners,” he gestures at the table. “What do you think?”

“I don’t know what to say,” I wipe away a tear of joy.

“There’s nothing to say, gorgeous. I’m here for you! Just like you are here for me, too. I want to make you as happy as I can, which is exactly what you do for me, day in and out. I’m so lucky that I’ll be sharing my life with you,” he kisses my hand. All our guests are excited and clap enthusiastically.

“Thank you, Avi, this is the most wonderful surprise you’ve ever done for me,” I fall silent.

Michael hugs both of us warmly.

“Avi, you’re a champ. I love you, man,” he pats him on the back.

Our amazing evening comes to its conclusion and I'm overcome with relief and joy from all the day's events. I'm so terribly exhausted that I immediately fall asleep.





## Chapter 26

The day of the wedding finally arrives. From now on, I can officially wake up to every morning with this amazing man. It's unbelievable considering where I had been only a couple of months ago. Never lose faith! I remind myself. We all deserve precious moments.

Our guests are animated with anticipation. Even my brother has made it all the way from New York. I haven't seen him in two years. He's very excited for me and satisfied with the man I have chosen this time around. I'm delighted. Everything is perfect.

I'm wearing the prettiest wedding dress. It is flowing, delicate, refined, and magical. It makes me look like an elegant mermaid. My hair is up in a bun and I've pulled out a couple of strands, creating a harmoniously messy hairdo. My makeup is minimal and flattering. I have a bouquet of light blue hyacinths, which symbolize sincerity.

I'm wearing the most precious ring, sentimentally and possibly financially, too, I think to myself.

I head towards him with my mother on one side and Roy, clad in a formal boy's dress suit, on the other.

Avi's breath is taken away. He bends over to Roy and smiles at him.

"Will you allow me to marry you mother?" He smiles at him charmingly. "I promise to do everything in my power to make sure that she's happy and comfortable. I love you a lot, little

dude,” he hugs him. “You look perfect. You look even better than I do!” he winks at him.

Roy giggles.

“Yes, I’ll give you my mother. But keep her safe. I’m sure she’ll keep me safe,” he smiles at me.

“I appreciate it, man!” They shake hands, he looks at my mother and smiles.

Then he turns, stands right in front of me, and takes my hands in his.

“Sam, you’re breathtaking. Like a fairy princess from a magical land. Thank you for making me the happiest man alive.”

“I’m speechless! You’re a stunningly handsome man, and I’m marrying you!” I pounce him lovingly. “I’m overjoyed”!

“So come on, Mrs. Levi, let’s get this party started!” And, in a hushed voice meant only for me, “I’d like to get our honeymoon started,” Avi winks, characteristically impatient.

We march down the aisle together, hand-in-hand, beaming with joy. We glance at each other, dizzy from all the outpouring of love. We’re surrounded by all the people we hold dear, who clap and cheer loudly.

My father and brother make their way towards us to congratulate us with hugs and kisses.

“Avi,” I whisper to him as we walk, “do you know, each time I got married, I had insane panic attacks. This time I feel completely different.”

He stops and looks into my eyes.

“You’re different, you’re joyful, free, glowing and loved, as you’ve always deserved to be. You know, no one else could have done what you did. You’ve charmed me with your sincerity, depth, shrewdness, with your whole package, your passion, and your devotion. I would be an idiot not to marry you, trust me,” he kisses my hand and smiles at me with shining eyes.

We make our way further down the aisle and towards the impressive huppah covered in enchanting and fragrant flowers. The gluttonous raven that had previously sat on my old windowsill has metamorphosed into a pair of white doves that have been set free to soar the skies. I’m euphoric! Avi is too, as are all the guests. We’re overwhelmed. I am shivering, not from the cold or anxiety, but with joy and optimism.

My Roy walks towards us clasping our two lovely wedding bands on a lush, white and silver pillow. We exchange vows. He lifts my veil. Avi offers me a sip from the wine cup. He performs the traditional breaking of the glass, symbolizing the hope to spend as many years together in happiness as it would take to collect all the shards of glass and reassemble it, and all the guests cheer and applaud.

“I did it!” I shout at him enthusiastically. “I did it right!” I look at my prince with adoration and love. Our family, friends and relatives rush over to hug and congratulate us.

I spot Michelle out of the corner of my eye. I approach her and embrace her warmly.

“Michelle, thank you so much for coming to the wedding and

thank you for being so happy for us. It's not something I take for granted. You're always welcome in our home."

Michelle wipes a tear away.

"As long as you're both happy," she says. "This is all I've ever wanted for him. I guess Avi belongs with you. I'll learn to accept it, with time. Thank you, Sam, for understanding and for being so mature about it." She hugs me back.

Michael has booked a British singer, one of my favorites. He's playing an acoustic guitar and singing in a broken, raspy voice: "You're so beautiful, that much is true. When I saw your eyes, I immediately knew – this is love! I'll cherish your look, now and forever. In a room full of other looks, I'll always remember yours."

Avi and I look into each other's eyes as if we're the only two people on earth, and we dance as if no one is watching us. We press our lips together in a lengthy kiss. Towards the end of the reception, it's time to toss the bouquet. I stand with my back facing all the single women in the crowd and toss the bouquet over my shoulders.

I glance once again at this man, to whom I had willingly devoted myself, and realize – I have finally found a home!

S.A.M

SAM

AVI

MICHAEL

To be continued...