



UNTIL

NOW

A LOVE STORY

CARMEN ROSALES

*Until Now*

*Until Duet Book. 2*



*Carmen Rosales*



*Erotic Quill Publishing*



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To my daughters,

Your first love is great, your last is even better.

## *Blurb*

Still reeling from the death of both of her parents, 17-year-old Aura Rayne is out of options. Moving in with another family for room and board, Aura becomes the family's new housekeeper in the richest part of town. Attending Elite Spencer Academy as a senior changes everything for her.

Football star Kalum St. Claire plans to sail through his senior year as an exceptional athlete with the hottest girl on his arm. But when a new girl moves into his house, his school, and his life, Kalum is determined to not let her presence dim his spotlight.

But when Aura and Kalum grow closer, neither one can resist the attraction. Now, it's up to them to deny the pull or succumb to their wildest desires. With his future on the line and her past haunting her, can the two lovers from different worlds find a life together that works for both of them?

*Please note this is book two and concludes Until Her. You will need to read Until Her before you read Until now.*



*Chapter 1*



# *Aura*

## *Five Yers Later*

I'm sitting in an office in New York City overlooking the skyline staring into the sky, motionless, speechless, heartbroken, and so lost. The pain in my soul is gutting me.

“Mommy? We are really high up, aren't we? I can see the cars from up here.”

“Yes, baby,” I croak. A lump so big in my throat I can hardly speak, but I can't cry in front of Lane Jr.

The door to the room opens, and a man in a suit walks in with armed security and a police officer. They bring in a large box with an electronic lock and place it in front of me.

“My sincere condolences, Mrs. Turner. Your husband was a great man.”

I look up and tears blur my vision.

Lane died a month ago on the track. A rear tire that was too hot blew, causing him to lose control, and he crashed into the wall.

He was pronounced dead at the scene. He told me he would be home later that day, but he never made it home.

Lane Jr. makes engine noises as he races his cars on the floor while the officers smile. He reminds me so much of his father. I miss him so much it hurts. Everyone I love dies like a curse. A nightmare that haunts me.

The man motions for everyone to turn around, and I enter the code Lane gave me. It was the day I met him for the first time. The beeping noise makes a sound with a loud click, and the top opens. Inside is Lane's journal and flash drive with all his builds. A large yellow envelope is sealed, only to be opened upon his death.

I leave the journal and the flash drive inside because they are valuable. He made sure to secure it with armed security to make sure it didn't get in the wrong hands. I leave it and close the box, letting it secure the lock in place. Lane always warned me to be careful that the information he had inside was worth a lot of money to certain people. They could harm Lane Jr. or me to get to it.

I take a shaky breath and open the envelope. I pull out a handwritten letter and begin to read.

*To my wife,*

*I still love addressing you as my wife. I feel honored calling you that. You have given me more than I could have ever asked for. You have given me love, a beautiful son, and my legacy. You have made me the happiest man on earth. To have a gorgeous wife to call my own and come home to every day.*

*Every day I work and build the next car and the next. All for our future. I told you once that my greatest love was building the next car and making it the fastest. I lied. My greatest love is you. It was always you. I fell in love with you the first time I laid eyes on you. I couldn't get you out of my head. When you walked past my shop that night, I knew it was fate. I knew something bigger than all of us brought me you, and I promised myself to never let you go. Now for the hard part.*

*If you are reading this, it means I'm no longer with you or with Lane, and for that, I'm sorry, Aura. The day I disappeared was the same day you told me you were pregnant with Lane, and it was the same day I had a scare and almost died on the track. It scared me. I thought if I had died that day, you would have been struggling with our son and alone. I couldn't let that happen. So, I left, and I planned. I made sure to leave you my legacy. My dream to live on through you and through my son. All my hard work couldn't be for nothing. It couldn't end like that. All the nights away from you and Lane Jr. were to build a future for us. If I didn't make it, at least you and Lane would be taken care of. I'm sorry for leaving you so soon, but I knew it was a possibility.*

*I left you everything, Aura. All the money, my cars, my legacy is in your hands to pass down to our son. He will continue what I have built. There will be people who will offer you the world for it. Don't. It is worth more than you can imagine. I did it. I help build the fastest car in the world, and you own it. What does that mean? It means you have the*

*blueprint inside the box. The foundation. The other cars I left you and built are one of a kind, and there is nothing like it.*

*I love you, my angel. I love you so much. I couldn't have done it without you. You are the lightning to my tidal wave. The spark I needed to make it work. You were the key to everything I have ever dreamed of. It was you, and it will always be you. By the time you are almost finished reading this letter. There will be a knock on the door and there will be armed men coming inside the room to take you. Do not be afraid. I sent them. They will protect you, and there is only one person I trust to protect you and our son. This was all arranged the day I left, and you thought I didn't love you. I couldn't tell you this because I hoped to God it would never happen.*

*I know I wasn't your first love, but I was glad to be your second. You gave me my dream, Aura, and now it's my turn to make sure you have your happiness if I'm gone. Goodbye, my love. I will always love you and watch down from heaven.*

*Till death do us part,*

*Lane Turner*

Tears are running down my cheeks, and sobs wreak havoc through my body. As promised, a knock sounds on the door, and six men walk into the room with guns and bulletproof vests. Lane Jr. is too busy racing his cars on the carpet and doesn't notice. They are quiet when they move inside the room.



Another man enters, and I lift my head, even though I'm crying and my makeup must be running.

He waves his hand to the men standing against the wall.

“There is someone who will escort you along with these men to an undisclosed destination. There is a lot of paparazzi, and it's for your safety as well as your son's safety,” the police officer says.

I sniff and fresh tears keep coming, and I can't stop. My lip quivers and I'm so scared. A tall shadow of a man towering over the lawyer and the police officer enters the room like a Goliath when he steps farther inside and my heart drops.

Kalum.

He walks farther into the room and his eyes scan my face. My head turns away from the sensation of wetness pooling where my hands are placed in my lap. I look at Lane Jr. kneeling on the carpet, his face concentrating on getting a closer look at his cars, oblivious to the scene unfolding.

Kalum's eyes follow the path of my vision. His face is hard and unreadable. While his attention is focused on Lane, I wipe my face with my fingers and I notice he has changed. No longer does he have the face of a young teenage boy but of a man with a dangerous air of authority. He is tall with his tailored suit perfected over his massive build. When he glances back at me, his dark hair is coiffed with a clean-shaved sharp angular jaw, the same straight nose, and lips that are so perfect they could have been used to mold the perfect man's face from stone. Kalum's demeanor is also different from

when I last saw him. No longer a teenager, but a ruthless CEO. A man I no longer recognize.

My instinct is to protect my son. Kalum tries to make eye contact with me but I refuse and the only thing that feels right is to hold my son.

“Lane,” I call out.

Lane tilts his head up at the sound of my voice and his forehead pinches into a frown when he notices the men standing like soldiers silently watching.

I open my arms slightly in comfort. “Come to Mommy. Bring your cars, sweetheart.”

He looks down and scoops the cars in his arms as fast as he can and hurriedly runs into my arms, shielding his face in my embrace.

My hands soothe him by making lazy circles on his back so he won't feel frightened. He is incredibly shy and doesn't like talking to strangers. His head snaps up and his little face, the spitting image of his father, peers at me.

I nod and smile, assuring him that everything is okay.

“We need to get going,” Kalum says dryly.

I don't look at him to acknowledge him. He isn't my friend but was sent here by my husband for whatever reason. Whatever feelings I held in my heart for Kalum died that night his parents wanted me gone. When I was forced into his life, Kalum found me to be an inconvenience, and even though he tried to be nice because we did have an attraction to one

another, he was also heartless. All I could do was thank his family and wish him the best of luck and hope one day he would find someone that could love him the way I knew that I was, in fact, falling in love with him. It made what his parents did hurt the most.

That was the past and now my heart is broken from the death of my husband, and my heart only has room left for my son. I have to be strong for him and protect him. Lane warned me that I was a target for information only I have access to if something ever happened to him and that includes our son. His family wants to destroy what he built. I always thought it was impossible.

That nothing could happen to him.

That he wouldn't let it.

But accidents happen and it is something we have no control over.

Lane is gone and now I'm so lost. All that is left is a pain that is numbing, unforgiving, and unfeeling.

The armed guards are escorting me and Lane Jr. with Kalum trailing behind us like we are celebrities walking out of the building in the middle of New York City. There are many people with cameras taking pictures and shouting about my late husband's legacy and asking who is going to manage his company, but to me, it is all white noise. Lane Jr. grips the black fitted dress I'm wearing, hiding his face on my side, gripping his little toy cars.

A driver opens the rear passenger door of a sleek black Maybach. I hesitate, not sure where they are taking me.

“It is all right. It’s safe,” Kalum assures me from behind.

I lower my head and guide Lane inside the luxurious vehicle. Little Lane sits in the middle, and I sit on the far side.

To my surprise, the right passenger door opens and my head snaps up as Kalum slides inside. The smell of his cologne permeates the air in the confined car mixed with expensive leather, making me even more aware of him.

Kalum sits looking straight ahead and says, “We need to talk.”

“I have nothing to say to you. If you could, please drop me off at my hotel.”

“I’m afraid that is not possible. The media knows you are here, and they want answers that you are not ready to give them. His parents are not happy with his decision regarding his will. You and Lane Jr. will stay with me at my penthouse.”

My gaze lands on the profile of his face and I keep my tone as even and controlled as possible because of Lane sitting between us, sliding his cars over the leather, making imprints on them with the wheels.

“I don’t need to stay at your penthouse. I prefer my hotel where my things are and I will take the next flight out of here.”

He shakes his head like I’m a child, making my insides boil in anger. “As I said, you will stay with me at my penthouse

until we make arrangements for you. It is not safe for you or Lane. They want access to what you have hidden and what only you have access to, and people would do anything to get it. You must know by now that your in-laws are not happy with your husband's decision to leave everything to you. They will do anything to destroy it or make you sell his company and his patents.”

“I know, I am fully aware,” I snap.

His head turns to me and the expression on his face is hard and unreadable. There is a tic in his jaw but then his eyes soften. He looks down at Lane sitting between us while he digs the cars into the leather like it's the pavement on a track.

Kalum looks up. “You and Lane Jr. are my responsibility. Get used to the idea of me being around because there is no other person Lane trusted except me.”

“Why would he trust you with me? Why would you care what happens to me or to my son?”

He avoids answering the question and it pisses me off. Why? Why would Lane do this? My happiness is with Lane, not this nightmare where I'm sitting in a car with a man I don't want to look at and have no wish to be in his presence.

“I am really sorry about Lane.”

Little Lane's head pops up at the mention of his father. “Mommy says Daddy is in heaven. Right, Mommy?”

The back of my eyes sting with tears that don't seem to want to ever stop but I keep them at bay.

I give Lane a watery smile. “Yes, baby. He is in heaven watching over you.”

“He is watching you, too. Daddy told me to take care of you when he is gone. He said he loves you sooo much that he wanted to always make sure someone looked over you.”

“I do too, baby. I will always love both of you very much.” I say in a shaky breath.

My head turns and I look out the window trying to compose myself and not let Lane Jr. see me cry so much. He understands that his father is no longer with us but Lane expressed his love for us when he was home and made sure our son always knew that he loved us both. When he reminds me, the loss of not having Lane with me is so great, sometimes I don't think I'm going to be able to survive it.

“I'm sorry, Aura,” Kalum says quietly.

I can feel his gaze on the side of my face but I won't look at him. I can't. He reminds me of old memories that I buried a long time ago. We are both two different people now and I'm mourning the loss of my husband. The man that took care of me when no one was there. He took me in and showed me love and gave me a home. A family.

Little Lane keeps making noises, digging the car toy in the leather.

“Lane, honey, please don't do that to the seat with the car.”

He looks up with a worried expression and then looks at Kalum, realizing this is not our car, then he looks back down,

discovering he is making a dent in the soft leather. His lip begins to tremble.

“It’s okay, Aura. He can do whatever he wants.”

“He could ruin your car.”

“I’ll have it replaced if something happens. It is no issue. I want him to feel comfortable when he is with me. I want you to feel comfortable with me.”

“I don’t want to be with you or around you,” I quip.

“I’m sorry, but there is no choice. It is for you and your son’s safety. This isn’t a choice. This is the only option right now. It is done.”

I know Lane informed me in the letter I have in my lap about men escorting me somewhere safe once the news is out that I’m finally meeting lawyers but I never thought it would be Kalum of all people. The safe is in an armed vehicle traveling behind us and I wonder where he is taking us. He said his penthouse but then what? I have to think about Lane and his safety until everything dies down. The media have been in a frenzy since Lane’s death but all I can think about is how to move forward without him. How can I be strong enough for Lane Jr.? How could this have happened? The man I love is dead. He was everything. He was my savior, my protector, my love, and the father to the most precious gift in the world, our perfect son, Lane.

A faint, light-colored floral pattern is visible in the upper portion of the page, featuring various flower shapes and leaf-like motifs. The text "Chapter 2" is centered over this pattern.

## Chapter 2





## Aura

We arrive in front of an elegant building and I notice the doorman is waiting by the entrance for us to exit the car. Kalum does not let the driver open the door for us and opens the side closest to the entrance to the building. We are shown up to the top floor, and the elevator opens directly inside what I assume is Kalum's penthouse.

Lane and I both exit the elevator with Kalum right behind us, but being in an unfamiliar place, Lane and I both pause and survey the apartment.

Scanning the opulent apartment, I notice the white marble floors and gray carpet with chrome and glass furniture. A sense of coldness instantly envelops me. Lane must sense the same because he looks up at me and then his forehead furrows just like his father does when they feel uncomfortable with their surroundings. The apartment feels impersonal, cold, and nothing like we are used to. Our home has life and a coziness to it that screams love and a family that spends countless nights together watching movies, having dinner, and spending

time with one another. This place screams emptiness and lack of feeling.

Kalum drops his keys and turns around in his impeccable suit when he notices that we are frozen in place and have no interest in walking farther into his space.

“Is there something wrong?” Kalum asks.

My gaze lands on Lane when he grabs his cars in his fingers harder than necessary and I know he is nervous and then my head lifts and my eyes meet Kalum’s worried frown.

Taking a deep sigh, I say, “everything.” My eyes scan the living room and open kitchen. “Is it possible you can take us back to the hotel?”

Kalum walks toward us, his size is intimidating, and instinctively Lane tenses, and we take a step back. I don’t know why but I feel the same way Lane does. Kalum looks nothing like the eighteen-year-old man I remember back in Spencer. The man before me looks ruthless and cutthroat. His arm stretches every possible inch of his suit that looks intimidating. His expression is hard and lacks warmth and the way he moves around the room is robotic. Like he has been molded this way with an edge of coldness to his demeanor. There is no denying that he is attractive. Kalum, the man, looks like a Greek god with a body straight from Sparta, like the men in the movie *300*.

Memories come back and remind me that Kalum was not nice to me most of the time when I stayed in his family’s home and the times he was, he was passionate, but it was all a lie. He

never cared about me and I expected he would have married a girl like Sarah or found someone to share his similar interests and social status by now.

Looking around his home, there is no question that this is a bachelor pad. There are no pictures that adorn the walls and the furniture is meant to look good but not to sit on and watch TV with a cozy blanket and eat popcorn. The dining table is glass with chrome and has no place for a five-year-old to sit and have dinner. The better option is to sit on the floor.

Kalum walks closer. “What’s wrong, Aura?” he asks, his voice laced with worry. His gaze lands on Lane and then back at me. “Tell me.”

“I appreciate your concern for us but it really is unnecessary.” I look down at Lane and then back at Kalum. “We feel uncomfortable here. This is no place for me to stay with Lane. It is generous of you to allow us inside your home but like I said, unnecessary to inconvenience you. You must have a wife or girlfriend and it would probably make her uncomfortable for us to be in your space.”

Kalum glances around his penthouse, and he slides his hand inside his pocket.

Lane squeezes my dress at my waist. “Mommy, can we go now?” he whispers.

“I’m trying, baby,” I mutter.

Kalum looks nervous but then his features turn serious and hard. Almost lifeless. Just like this apartment.

“There is someone that I want you to meet. You two could catch up and maybe she can help you with Lane.”

The change of subject is unnerving, being that Lane and I want to get the heck out of this cold, lifeless apartment. My curiosity is piqued about meeting someone from my past, wondering who could possibly help me with Lane. Not that I need help with Lane. I take care of him and never needed a babysitter. Lane goes with me everywhere because I don't trust anyone that isn't his father. Which now only leaves me. I'm all he has left besides Exie. Lane never allowed his parents to spend too much time with Lane. Lane told me his relationship with his parents was always strained because they wanted him to take over Turner industries and Lane's passion was street racing and engines. His family didn't agree but he didn't care. Turner Racing Automotive was Lane's passion and his life.

The elevator behind opens and when I turn around, an older lady with gray hair and tan skin greets me with a smile. “Aura.”

I embrace her in a tight hug, and tears stream down my cheeks. “Oh, Camila. How I've missed you.” She steps back, tears streaming down her plump cheeks. She looks down and her eyes soften.

“Oh, Aura. He's beautiful.” She leans down and Lane's expressive eyes give her a once-over, and he gives her a hint of a smile.

“Hello, I'm Lane Turner Jr.,” Lane says in his soft voice.

“Oh, my. You are a very well-spoken little boy. My name is Camila and I have known your mom since she was your age.”

Lane’s eyes light up. “Really?”

“Yes.”

Camila straightens and gives me a sad smile. “I’m sorry for your loss, Aura,” she says softly.

The back of my eyes burn like wildfire but I have to be strong. I cannot break down in front of Lane every second.

“Thank you. He was... everything,” I tell her with a watery smile.

“I can tell,” she says.

Kalum’s voice reaches my ears as it echoes inside the apartment while he walks down a hallway to the left. “I’ll be in my office.”

“How did you end up here?” I ask her.

“When Kalum left for college, he rented a place off campus and took me with him. His parents protested, but he didn’t speak to them unless it was about the family business since—”

She looks at Lane as he crouches down on the floor and plays with his cars using the almost invisible grout lines on the marble tile as a track.

“Since I left,” I finish for her.

“Yes. Since that night, Kalum has been—different.”

I nod and figure it was because he felt guilty for some reason. He called me nonstop the next day but I thought it best

I didn't answer. Because I was never going back. I promised myself I would never set foot inside that house. I don't regret anything because it brought me to Lane.

I try to feel sympathy for Kalum but in all honesty, I was just a nuisance for him since I entered his life and left just as fast. During the months I stayed with Lane, I thought I was deeply in love with Kalum, and maybe I was, but it was nothing compared to the love Lane showed me. Lane cared about me. He loved me and he gave me everything. For months, I thought he'd left me when I told him I fell pregnant because I thought he didn't want me or the baby. I was a mess, but he showed me how wrong I was to ever doubt his love for me. He showed me just how much he loved me ever since. He never left me alone except when he was in his shop building a car or making it faster.

“He says you will be staying with him for a while. The media are going crazy asking questions about how you will run the company and who will be at the track. They expect you to sell and will do whatever it takes to offer you anything for Lane's builds and his car.”

“I know, but I won't sell it. It will be passed down to Lane Jr. when it is time. I'll make sure of it. Lane trusted me and only me with his legacy.”

“That is why you have to stay with Kalum for a little while.” She rubs her forehead. “I'll help you with Lane Jr. if you need me. It will be no trouble. This is New York and there

are times when it is not feasible for you to take Lane everywhere.”

I smile and I know she is being kind but I have a life in North Carolina. We have a home. All of our things and memories are there.

“I know, but we can’t stay here. This is not—” I look around once more to make sure Kalum is still in his office. “A place for Lane and me to stay. It is not a place for a child.”

“Did you tell him that?”

“I tried, but then you arrived, he sauntered off. I know Lane sent him but I’m still trying to figure out why. It doesn’t make sense.”

Camila gives me a soft smile. “Why don’t I watch Lane for a minute and you talk to Kalum and tell him how you feel.”

I glance down at Lane and see he is focusing on playing with his cars and decide to have a talk with Kalum. I trust Camila and have known her almost my whole life since my parents bought their house in Spencer. Camila was our neighbor, and she would watch me when my parents couldn’t. She would never let anything happen to Lane Jr.

I take a deep breath. “Okay. Where is his office?”

“Third door to your right.”

“Lane?”

He looks up. “I’ll be right back. I’m going to talk to Kalum and be right back. Don’t give Camila a hard time, alright?”

“Yes, Mommy.”





## *Chapter 3*



## Kalum

The way she looked when I walked into the boardroom at the lawyer's office, where I was instructed to meet her by Lane's lawyer, broke me. The way she tried to hold back the tears in front of everyone, so she could be strong for her son. Their son. When I looked at him up close, it was unmistakable. He looks just like his late father. They even have the same hair, face, and eyes. He looks at his mother like she is the center of everything. And she is.

Letting her go was the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life. To know that another man I respected and admired had everything. Because he had her.

I knew it deep down the day at the fair when he approached her, and she looked at him like he was her savior because he was. Lane was her savior when my parents practically tossed her out. I cried like a pussy for months and when I stopped crying, the hate replaced the hurt. Not for her or for Lane but the hatred for my parents. They took what I wanted most in the world and I lost it in the arms of another man. I'm not sure what his purpose was for me to watch over her and his son in

the event of his death. I don't understand it. It makes sense that she needs protection for a while against lawyers, family, and people in high places trying to take advantage of a woman that just lost her husband, and according to her, the love of her life. They know she is vulnerable and doesn't have other family members to help her.

The way she talks about him makes my gut clench because deep down, I'd hoped when I was eighteen that it would've been me. That her son out there in my foyer would have been mine. She is still as beautiful as I can remember her and even more so. She is stunning. The fact that she is a mother draws more to her appeal. She must have looked beautiful pregnant.

A knock sounds from the door interrupting my thoughts and I look up. "Come in."

I straighten in my chair when the door swings open, and she is standing in the doorway looking beautiful with her black dress molded in all the right places. The armed guards kept glancing her way admiring her beauty and I almost lost it. Even when she is crying, it doesn't diminish how stunning she is. It brings out a protective instinct inside you and all you want to do is kill the bastard that caused it. My fist clenched and I made sure I followed directly behind her. Men will be like hound dogs in heat looking for a bone knowing she is vulnerable and wealthy.

Her husband made sure she was very wealthy. She would want for nothing and neither will his son. As I said, the man was hard to dislike when it came to Aura. He did everything

right except make sure he stayed alive. Now, she is alone, heartbroken, and if I'm not mistaken, she looks lost.

“What is it?” I ask.

She stands in the doorway and makes no move to enter farther.

“We need to talk.”

I wave my hand to the modern leather chair. “Please have a seat.”

She nods and takes a seat but I notice she leaves the door open. It is either because her son is outside and she wants to make sure she hears him, or she doesn't trust me.

Pulling up the security camera on my screen that gives me a direct view of Lane, I turn the screen toward her and her eyes widen, and then she glances at me.

“Close the door,” I demand.

She does as I ask and closes the door without protest and returns to sit in the chair across from my desk with her gaze locked on mine. I'm testing her and she knows it. She knows that I want to know if she is afraid of me. Afraid to be alone with me.

I remove my cuff links and roll up my sleeves on my dress shirt, and she watches me. I'm not doing it to intimidate her but I want her to see that I'm comfortable around her. That I don't need to be businesslike around her or her son. My goal is for her to feel comfortable around me. She has gone through a lot already with the loss of her husband. The last thing she

needs to worry about is her safety and being around someone that makes her or her son feel awkward.

It pained me to see that she and Lane looked unwelcome in my apartment. She looked around like the apartment was an institution. Like a prison. And I didn't know what to do or say to make them feel more welcome, and I was glad I had instructed Camila to meet me here when she arrived. She looked relieved when she saw her get off the elevator. They both did.

“What do you want to talk about?”

She looks at the monitor and watches her son with the softest expression, full of love. I could imagine her looking at me the same way and my stomach clenches at the thought and so does my... cock.

I shake my head in bewilderment at the notion of us together. I have sworn off marriage. Aura was the only woman I could ever see marrying but I let her go when news broke that she married Lane. She didn't have a wedding or grand affair. It was just released by the racing world that the great Lane Turner married the love of his life. It was then I knew I never stood a chance. When it was announced they were waiting for the birth of their first child, I saw my chances evaporate into thin air and decided that it was best to completely let her go. It didn't thwart my plans on getting back at my parents for what they had done to her.

To me.

To us.

In part, it was their fault for kicking her out of my life. I was eighteen and dependent on my inheritance and thrust into my family's expectations. I was willing to give it all up for her, but I was still in high school and when I graduated, Aura's best friend Exie told me that Aura was fine and in love with her brother. It was a blow I never expected. Aura never returned my calls or sent a text. I knew there was no way I could get her back or offer her the life Lane could at the time. Even if her happiness wasn't with me, I loved her enough to let her go and be happy with him. She deserved to be happy and be loved by a man that would do anything for her after the loss of her beloved parents. She deserved to be loved and cared for properly and he could.

She takes a deep breath. "I know that you feel I need to stay with you and I get it, but we can't stay with you here."

"Why?" I ask.

I know they feel uncomfortable but I want details, so I can rectify them. I want them to feel relaxed for a little while until things die down, and she can go back and raise her son. She is grieving. She needs time to think about what she wants out of life and what she wants to do in the future and I have a company to run, business deals to make, and money to be made. I have way more than I need but my purpose is to make even more. It is selfish to want more money but I have my reasons.

She scans my office and looks around before her eyes meet mine and I try to not make it obvious she still has the ability to

make me aware of her sexually. If the circumstances were different, I would swipe everything off this desk and lay her on it just so my face would be between her thighs, reminding me of how she tasted when she came on my lips the first time. It thrilled me that I was the first to at least taste her sweet pussy. There has never been a woman that has ever tasted as good as Aura and believe me, I have tried to find one, but nada.

“Your apartment is nice but not a place for Lane. He loves to play with his toys which are basically cars with tracks. Toys would damage your pristine floors and the furniture is definitely not the type to have a five-year-old sit on. I would basically have to tell him to stick to playing and eating on the floor.”

“You would do no such thing. I won’t allow it. He isn’t a dog but a child.”

She gives me a small grin. “I’m glad you agree with me and understand. I will call an Uber, and we will be on our way.”

She moves to stand. I frown and panic begins to filter inside of me. She’s leaving?

“Wait. You can’t leave and I understand.”

Her brows rise and I glance at the monitor, watching her son slide the cars on the marble. Looking through their eyes, I’m sure their home is equipped for children to play with and a kitchen to make cupcakes and popcorn. I get it. She wants to feel comfortable and, more importantly, for her son to feel comfortable under the circumstances.

“I have an idea.”

I don't but I will. I can't watch her leave. Lane wanted me to watch over her upon his death and make sure she was okay and taken care of. His lawyer gave the rundown that there will be a letter to be delivered to me after a certain amount of time before the year is out. Why? I have no clue, but Lane was a strategic son of a bitch. We were friends in high school and after, but not best friends like Cason or Brian, with whom I still keep in touch. We respected each other and that is one reason why I knew he would be good for Aura.

“What idea is that?”

“You could stay in my house and it would be better than staying here. A good place for Lane and for you. No one can bother you there and you will have security at all times and you won't even know that they are there.” I take a deep breath. “If they know you are not at your main home they won't go looking for you there.”

She nods. “How long? I'm not thinking about myself but of what is best for Lane. He doesn't need to be frightened by all the media and cameras or his grandparents imposing and making demands. Lane never had us in the limelight, and we preferred to keep our personal lives as private as possible. I know it is more because the media is locked on the Turner name and their business dealings.”

“I know.”

I do know. Aura was never at public events, which sparked controversy as to why Lane Turner always hid his family and



never took them to any races or public events involving his builds. Now she is at the forefront and on every page and social media news as the woman who inherited everything from her late husband. Car manufacturers and racing companies will be hounding her to sell her rights to his builds and, more importantly, his cars to include his patents on certain tech for imported cars. His cars are probably worth more than his company, and she owns them all. Lane's family has connections and will do anything to take them from her.

“Until it all dies down, and they all back off. I will be there to guide you and protect you and Lane. Nothing will happen to you and no one will pressure you to do anything you don't want.”

“Okay. I just need to get my things in order and a car to be brought up to your house. Lane needs to be with all the things he is familiar with.”

“I took the liberty of bringing your things from the hotel.”

“How?” she asks.

“I own the hotel you are staying in.”

She rolls her eyes. “Naturally,” she quips.

“I'm sorry but I wanted to save you the hassle.” I smirk.

I lie back in my chair and familiarize myself with the beauty of her face. The curve of her breast under her simple black dress. Her pretty thighs up to the indent of her waist and flare of her hips that I notice make her sexier since giving birth to a

child. Aura is still breathtaking and I have had beautiful women in my bed but none compare to her.

She smiles. “So where is Mrs. St. Claire or maybe a girlfriend I should meet?”

“I’m not married and I don’t have a steady girlfriend at the moment. I do date but no one serious enough for you to meet.”

“Oh. I thought maybe you would have found someone special by now.”

I shake my head. “I’m not interested in settling down or getting married and having children. I’m focused on my company and running it.”

The light in her eyes dims for a split second and then she gives me a sad smile, tilting her head. “I understand. You were never the type to settle down but I still have faith in you finding her and I know she will be amazing.”

I chuckle. “You were always trying to find the good in people. There is no need to bring your car or anything like that. I can arrange a car for you to use. It will be no trouble.”

Great. I have to get a house and a car, and fast. I grab my cell phone and send my personal assistant Janine a text.

*Kalum: I need a house fit for a five-year-old and his mother as well as a suitable car.*

Janine: Who’s the lucky lady? Please tell me you are ready to settle down with someone.

Kalum: Nothing like that. I'm helping an old friend that passed away.

Janine: This friend wouldn't be Lane Turner, would it?

Kalum: Yes it would.

Janine: His wife is gorgeous, Kalum. I would love to meet her.

Kalum: No.

Janine: Come on. Everyone is talking about her. She is so pretty. No wonder her husband kept her hidden.

Kalum: Get me the house and the car, Janine.

Janine: You suck. Fine. What house and what car? What is the budget?

I should give her a budget because she can go overboard but I look at Aura seated in front of me and then at the monitor where her son is making motions with his mouth imitating engine noises. I figure what the heck.

*Kalum: No budget. I just need it fast.*

“Is everything okay?” Aura asks.

I look up from texting on my phone. “Yeah, everything is fine. I was just letting my personal assistant know that I will be needing the house and to arrange the car. I will get with my lawyer to get with yours and settle your house and all your belongings in the meantime.”

I hate lying to her right now about me already having a house somewhere, but I can't risk the chance of her denying

my help.



*Chapter 4*



*Aura*

*Six Months Later*

We are taken by helicopter to the Southampton area. The houses down below are right on the water, some with swimming pools, and I'm not surprised Kalum has a house here. His family was always extravagant and extra. Kalum was the same way with his flashy car.

Lane was different. He built his cars even if they are probably worth more than the average Ferrari or Lamborghini. He wasn't flashy but a car enthusiast would know what was under a hood and how much a car built by Lane Turner would cost.

We land, the propeller making noise, picking up wind as the trees blow in disarray. Lane is looking around in awe with his headphones on. His eyes are shining with excitement because of the helicopter ride. Kalum said he would be here when we arrived at his home. It took me six months in total to get everything sorted with our main home in North Carolina. Kalum was right. There were always weird cars parked on the road leading up to the house and I felt like I was constantly being watched. Exie told me her parents were upset about the

situation involving Lane leaving me everything to his name. The only thing I didn't want was whatever his family left him. I refused to touch anything that was his parents' for our son.

Now with his parents spitting their vitriol every chance they get and their constant threats of me taking advantage of Lane, I haven't touched a dime of Lane's money. Everything I have saved through the years, making bracelets, I have been using for my necessities. I instructed Lane's lawyer to place everything in trust for Lane Jr. I never want anyone to think I married Lane because of his money or because of his family. His family assumes I knew he had money because I was best friends with Exie and I took advantage of him. If they only knew I never asked Lane for anything. He would tell Exie to buy me clothing because I refused unless it was for our son. My parents taught me growing up, that you spend what you earn and if you didn't earn it then it is not yours to spend. The only thing I earned was what I made with my hands. My bracelets. Sometimes, I still try to figure out how I sell out every time I list a new collection, but I shrug it off and feel blessed I could make money on my own. It is something I earned and no one can take it from me.

The copilot opens the door and waits patiently for me to get Lane settled to exit. He nods at me when it's safe and I step down, holding Lane as close as possible.

There is a black Rolls waiting and it gives me goose bumps reminding me of when I was seventeen and a similar car picked me up to take me to St. Claires in Spencer. The driver opens and steps out and my eyes almost bulge out of my head.

“Henry?”

Henry gives me a grin and a nod.

I smile and run up to him with Lane in tow. “How are you, old man?” I give him a hug, and he gives it right back.

“Aura,” he whispers.

He pulls back and surveys Lane. “Is this your son?”

“Yes,” I say breathlessly. “This is Lane Jr.”

Lane gives him a once-over and smiles at the old man. “Hi, my name is Lane Turner Jr.”

Henry leans closer. “I’m Henry and it is nice to meet you, sir. You are very lucky to have a mommy like her. She is very kind and I can tell she takes very good care of you.”

Lane beams at Henry. “I have the best mommy in the whole world. She loves me lots.”

“I bet she does. If you want to go anywhere with your mommy, you can count on me to make sure you get there.”

Lane surveys the car with a keen eye and frowns. “This car doesn’t go very fast. I can tell. I like to hear it rumble.” Lane makes a rumble with his voice like the sound he has heard in his father’s shop.

“I’m so sorry, Henry. He is used to—”

I trail off. “I understand. Does Kalum?”

“Does he what?” I question.



“Does he understand that Lane feels more comfortable listening to the sound of cars like that?”

I tilt my head. “I don’t need to worry Kalum about Lane and what his needs are. It is a shock that Lane reached out to him at all. I didn’t know they even knew each other all that well.”

“Oh yeah. They knew each other before you came along. They would race out on the back roads. All the kids into cars like that did.”

“Daddy would race with Kalum?” Lane chimes in.

Henry’s eyes widen, and he looks at me and then back at Lane. “When they were kids. They went to the same school is all.”

“That is so cool. My daddy was the greatest. He can make a car faster and faster. I want to be just like him when I grow up.” Lane looks up at me and my eyes soften. “Right, Mommy?”

I ruffle his hair. “Yes, baby. Just like Daddy.”

“Well, let’s get going. Kalum will be arriving shortly. He wants you and Lane settled.”

Henry drives us into an iron gate after fifteen minutes and we arrive at a sprawling mansion that must have cost a fortune.

“Wow,” Lane says in awe, watching the house that looks more like a retreat than a home.

“Yeah,” I say, matching Lane’s enthusiasm.

The house is white and massive. It is a wonder how Kalum owns such an impressive piece of real estate. This house is for a huge family and from the few conversations I have had with him, he has not spoken about his parents. Why would Kalum own this impressive home? It is enormous. Something straight out of a magazine. The type of home they make an article about in *Better Homes & Gardens*.

The house has this modern cottage feel and the wind whips my hair with the taste of the salty sea air as we make our way up the pathway leading to the white wooden front door. The door opens as we approach and Camila is smiling warmly.

“How was the helicopter ride? Did Lane like it?” she asks excitedly.

“Oh, yeah. He loved it,” I tell her.

She moves to the side to let us inside the warm home with wood floors and white walls.

She beams. “I hope you like it. Kalum is waiting for you in the kitchen.”

When we walk farther inside, Lane spots the white fluffy couches and smiles as he tests how soft and comfortable they are. The home has a cozy feel and is so much better than Kalum’s New York City apartment.

The kitchen comes into view and Kalum is set up with his laptop on the island and appears to be on the phone, speaking in a hushed voice. His suit jacket is draped over the stool and his white dress shirt is rolled, giving me a glimpse of tattoos

and corded muscle. His dress shirt fits perfectly over his broad shoulders and his dark hair is swept over to the side. He is sporting a five o'clock shadow. Jesus, the man is still gorgeous. If I thought he was good-looking when he was in high school, Kalum St. Claire the businessman, is sinfully hot. All alpha male, tall and handsome with a face to die for. He always reminded me of those GQ models on the cover of magazines I would see in the grocery store back in Spencer.

He spots me walking toward the island with my hands crossed over my stomach. He disconnects the call immediately and stands while he shuts the laptop closed. He looks over at Lane and sees him testing all the seating areas in the living room, and he grins.

He nudges his chin toward the living area. "I guess that means he likes it here."

"Yeah. Your house is beautiful," I say, looking around and admiring the chef's kitchen and wooden accents. The windows filter the twilight of the sky as the sun sets, giving the house an ethereal feel.

"I'm glad you like it."

He walks over and walks down a hallway but I frown because he is looking for the light switch and it seems he can't find it.

"It has to be somewhere," he mutters to himself.

I walk over and there is a switch on the wall on the opposite side. I switch it on and the light turns on.

He walks farther down the hallway and begins to open every single door.

“Kalum?”

He stops and turns his head. “Yes, Aura.”

“Is this really your home?”

“It is now. Why?”

I give him a smirk. “You seem to not know where anything is.”

He takes a deep sigh and faces me. My head tilts up because I’m five feet to his six-four. His eyes rake slowly down my simple white T-shirt and skinny jeans, back up and land on my face. I unconsciously swipe my long hair over one shoulder and his gaze lingers on my hair for a second longer than necessary.

“Your hair is longer.”

I swallow nervously because I don’t know why but my skin tingles when he is near. The mention of him being aware that my hair is longer than before gives me a fluttering feeling in my stomach. It sounds crazy because I just lost my husband. The minute my gaze lingers on his chest a second longer than necessary, guilt slowly creeps in and I look away.

What the hell is wrong with me? Shame instantly courses through my body at the reaction my body has when I’m near Kalum. I should feel absolutely nothing around him whatsoever.

“Yeah.”

“It looks good,” he says huskily. Then he clears his throat. “I asked my assistant to purchase a house because my apartment is clearly not suitable for Lane.”

My hand covers my face. “Please tell me you didn’t buy a house just so we can stay in it for a short while.”

“I did.”

“Why? It was not necessary. It would have been better at a hotel.”

“Not in New York and it is not suitable for Lane either. He clearly needs his space and a place to play with his cars and other toys. This house has a pool, a yard, living area, a generous kitchen, and is on the water.”

My hand slides down my face. “You didn’t have to go to so much trouble. This place must cost a fortune, Kalum.” I shake my head. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“I did and it is my pleasure. I want you and Lane to feel comfortable while you stay with me. My lawyer informed me that your lawyer says there is a lot of media presence at the front gates of your home. Companies will harass you and come after you to buy you out or threaten you. That is a lot to handle alone when you just lost a husband and Lane just lost his father.”

My eyes well with unshed tears at the reminder of losing Lane. Kalum must see the hurt and pain in my expression that I have been trying to hide to be strong for Lane Jr.

“I know it hurts, Aura. I see the love you have for him. The way you take care of Lane Jr. It is plain as day you both loved each other. I’m trying to wrap my head around the fact that he asked me to watch over you. Of all the people, it should have been Exie.”

“Exie took over the family business and Lane wasn’t on speaking terms with his mother or father because of his choices. Those choices also include me. They weren’t very happy when we married because of the way we did it and—”

He interrupts and finishes what I was about to say. “Because you don’t come from a predominant family and have no money.”

I shake my head. “Yeah. I guess he thought it would put Exie and me in a bad spot with his family. It wouldn’t be good for Lane Jr. and what his plans were for his son for the future.”

“I guess Lane and I both agree on one thing. We don’t give a shit about what our parents think and don’t let them dictate what we want for our future. It makes sense. But there is one thing I don’t understand, Aura.”

“What is that?”

“What do you want for your future? What do you want to do? I understand Lane Jr.’s future is secure as it should be, but what about you?”

My head lowers and I avert my gaze because, for the first time, someone has asked what I wanted. All my time with Lane, I just waited for him. He was quiet and reserved but his

focus was on Turner Racing and his builds. He showed me his work and taught me things I never thought I would learn about cars and how fast they could go. Lane loved me and took care of me. He made sure my needs were met and when he was vocal, he would tell me he loved me and that everything he was doing was for us. Then I fell pregnant and my life revolved around raising our son but not once did he ask me what my dreams were or what I wanted to do.

“I-I don’t know. I guess having Lane, I never had time to think about it. There weren’t many options for someone like me.”

He knows I’m referring to when his parents washed their hands of me the year I lost my parents. I had no money. I was alone and I had no one. Not even him.

He doesn’t press me further, and I’m relieved when he changes the subject.

“Let’s find the master bedroom so you can get situated. Camila chose a room right next to Lane so you wouldn’t have to worry if the master bedroom was too far.”

“I could have taken the room next to his. The master should be your room.”

He snorts. “I’m not staying.”

I pull up short and almost run into him. “Oh. I thought.”

“I’m staying in my apartment in the city. It’s convenient. I’m not—”

I finish for him. “Domesticated.”

He flinches and it lets me know I hit the mark. I get it. He sent me and Lane away to live in a house. I should be relieved, but the fact that we are being sent here to hide away like a secret annoys me for some reason.

Suddenly, the house seems like a trap, like we are in a witness protection program. Kalum wouldn't want to be seen with us anyway. He has a life and I'm sure a slew of women he entertains. This is just a request from someone he knew and maybe he feels doing this would help him with his guilt about what happened in the past.

"I live a fast-paced life and I'm always on the go. I have business meetings and—"

I raise my hand to stop him, and we are still standing in the middle of the hallway.

"You don't have to explain anything to me. You have a life and honestly, you don't have to do this. I appreciate it and so does Lane, even if he is no longer with us. I already feel bad for imposing on you. I could go back and I'll figure it out. It really is no big deal. I can handle it on my own."

"No," he says in a hard tone. "If I agree to something, I'll go through with it. I agreed and I wasn't only Lane's friend back in high school, but I was also yours. Lane and I weren't that close, but we were friends. He was older, and he had his plans and so did I."

I scoff. "Fine. One thing I want to make clear about this crazy arrangement is that you are doing this for Lane. We were never friends. We were never anything. You hated the fact that



your parents agreed to have me stay in your home.” I laugh sarcastically. “My presence was a nuisance and an inconvenience.”

He walks up to me. He is so close I can smell the hint of his expensive cologne. My breathing picks up.

“Was it?”

My head tilts up. “Was what?” I challenge.

“Was it an inconvenience when I tasted you?”

Oh, shit. I never thought he would bring it up. I thought he forgot about it and probably wouldn't even remember what I looked like without my clothes on. How many women has Kalum had since then? He is rich, gorgeous, and can have any woman he wants. Compared to the type of women Kalum is used to, I just don't compare to any of them. Lane was the only man to ever make me feel pretty. He would always tell me I was pretty and that he loved me. For a girl like me, that was enough. I'm a nobody. I'm only somebody now that my husband is dead because of his legacy in the racing world. I'm known as Lane Turner's wife. Not even Aura Turner. Now, I'm just a widow. The only two people I have left in this world are my son and my best friend/sister-in-law Exie.

I wonder what Kalum's aim is with his statement. What is he trying to prove by bringing up the past? We are no longer in high school. He chose to follow the path his parents laid out for him, and they made sure I was nowhere near his family. Memories flood my mind of how easily they all cast me aside and threw me out because I was an inconvenience. His

mentioning an intimate moment we shared when I was vulnerable and obviously meant nothing to him has me furious with him. The need to leave increases with every breath I take in his presence.

When he leaves, I'm taking my son and I'm getting as far away as I can. This is not my home and I don't want my son subjected to Kalum or his family. This isn't about what I want but what is best for Lane Jr. I have no idea what Lane's point was to involve Kalum but I don't agree with this.

“Don't bring up things that are not important.”

He walks closer with less than an inch between us, the heat of his body mixed with his scent permeating all around me. Every breath I take is mixed with the heat and scent of his.

“Look at me.”

“I am,” I snap.

My chin is raised, and he must see the anger reflected in my gaze. His nostrils flare and his lips are set in a hard line. The energy is crackling and I'm glad that at this moment Lane is with Camila. I can hear their voices coming from behind me as Kalum and I stand toe to toe staring at each other in a battle. Our pasts trying to seek answers to things left unsaid.



## *Chapter 5*



## Kalum

Her anger makes my cock harder than steel and all I feel like doing is taking her to the master bedroom in this enormous house and showing her how much I want her. How much I crave her. I thought being away from her all these years would change the way she affects me, but I was wrong. It's worse. If anything, I want her more than the air I breathe but I can't touch her. It is wrong in so many ways.

She is mourning the death of the man she loves. She gave him a beautiful son. For one split second, I wish that little boy was mine. Imagining he was ours, that he looked like me or maybe both of us, but then I come to my senses. I don't want a wife and I don't want children. Not right now. When the time comes, and it has to happen because my family's legacy is dependent on it, then fine, I'll take a wife. But for now, I'll have meaningless sex when I want and how I want.

Aura is not the type of woman I can take to bed and tell her to leave when I'm done. She is the type of woman you marry. She wants forever. There was a time I wanted that with her but

it wasn't the time. And time is a fickle bitch. It comes knocking and if you are not ready for things to happen, it will destroy you and leave you with emptiness. It doesn't care about your wants or dreams. It passes by and you would think time heals all wounds. It doesn't. All it does is put those feelings you had in the past away, like an old file you can purge.

All my feelings for the woman in front of me, I had no choice but to purge. She belongs to another man. A man that trusted me to make sure she is safe physically and financially from those who would want his fortune to be passed on to whom they see fit, and that does not include a woman that came from a poor family from Spencer. Lane Turner's family wants to take his legacy from her and sell it to the highest bidder. Whatever is left to be placed into a trust for his son, but at the same time, making sure she doesn't see a dime. They want her penniless. Except Exie. Exie has tried to keep them at bay but her control is slipping.

People from my world are ruthless and when they want something they will destroy whoever and whatever to take it. In this case, they will make her sell it, or they will destroy it. It is her against the world.

She is looking at me like I'm her enemy and if she only knew, I'm the only one that can save her. My eyes travel down her shirt. Her nipples are straining against the soft fabric of her bra and I know I affect her. That she is aware of me.

Her eyes follow the path of my gaze, and she smiles sarcastically but she plays it off. “Some things never change, do they?”

“The fact is that I want nothing more than to slide my tongue between your legs and reacquaint myself with the taste of you. I’m a man and I like to fuck. That will never change.”

“I’m not your woman and I’m not the same girl you had cleaning your room when she had no other choice. I’m not the girl you can sweet-talk with your charm and good looks to get her to lose her head and fall for your lies.”

I chuckle. “You had a choice to say no when I was making you come on my tongue. You sure as hell didn’t say no then.” I lean closer. “I bet you wouldn’t say no now.”

Thwack! A hot stinging sensation runs up my cheek. My hand instinctively wraps around her wrist in a solid grip but not hard enough to hurt her. She slapped me. She slapped me hard. My eye twitches from the sting but it’s nothing I can’t handle.

Her eyes flash in anger. “Fuck you.”

“That can be arranged. Tell me when and how you want it. I will oblige.”

I prefer her to be mad at me. It is better than having her want me for any other reason than what I can offer her. Safety.

“Never,” she spits.

I snort. “Good. I can never offer you more than a quick lay anyway.” I lower my voice. “Besides, I prefer a woman with a

little more experience. You were never my type anyway.” I tilt my head and scrutinize her with my gaze. “Pretty but plain.”

She flinches. I know I’m being an asshole but it’s better to put this barrier between us. Nothing more than my help will she be getting from me.

No one should take away what her husband wanted her to have. His family shouldn’t have a choice but that is not the way they see it. My lawyer informed me that Lane Turner’s lawyer received documents that Aura is to remove the last name Turner from her name. Some shit about her using it to capitalize from it now that she is a widow.

“I want to leave,” she snaps. “I don’t want to stay with you or have anything to do with anything that belongs to you or your family. I hate you.”

“Trust me. I would prefer not to get involved in your late husband’s battle, but he asked me for this one favor upon his death and I will honor it, Aura. Come to think of it, I’m not doing this for you. I’m doing it for Lane and his son.”

*Keep telling yourself that, asshole.*

The mention of Lane and her son has tears filling up in her eyes and my chest clenches at the sight. I didn’t want to make her cry. I always hated when she cried. It breaks me inside but I’m trying to make the best of this. This is a nightmare. I need to calm down and convince her to stay but I have to stay away from her. Being near her stirs up old memories and wants that were never supposed to happen. That is what I keep telling myself.



*Chapter 6*





## *Aura*

### *Six Months Later*

It has been months that Lane and I have been staying at Kalum's house in Southampton. Sometimes I feel we should go back to North Carolina but messages from Kalum tell me I'm not out of the woods regarding Lane's parents' lawsuits claiming that I falsified his will to take everything away from Lane upon his death. I've cried most nights because why would I do that? Why would they think I would take advantage of Lane like that?

"I'm sorry, Aura, but it is best you remove the Turner name. It will help calm things down. It will help prove that you never intended to capitalize on the family's influence."

"Mr. Schwartz, it is unfair. I have never touched a single dime of Lane's money."

"I know, Aura. I know, but they don't know that. I did what you told me to and let their lawyer know that you placed everything in trust for Lane Jr. and you are just managing it until he turns of age. That will make them back off and avoid pursuing the investigation of forgery."

The lawyer Lane trusted to handle anything in case something happened to him has been nice and has helped me as much as he could. Lane's family has threatened me with everything. They have tried to paint me out as a gold digger. I don't even live in my house for Christ's sake. Everything is managed by a trust and I have to talk to Camila and ask her how much she would charge me to watch Lane so I can get a job. Lane's mother has even threatened to take Lane away from me. I had to stop going to the doctor when I couldn't sleep from crying.

I miss Lane and the pressure his family and everyone are causing me makes me want to go insane. Mr. Schwartz advised me to try not to go to the doctor, so they wouldn't have anything to use against me. At first, I didn't understand it, but they would say that I'm not stable to take care of Lane by myself. They still haven't figured out where I'm staying and I have Kalum to thank. He has kept me and Lane here safe with Camila. I have no choice but to agree to sign the papers for my name change.

"Fine. I'll sign them. Change my last name to Rayne. I need it to get a job anyway."

"You know you don't have to work, Aura."

"I do," I say.

"He never wanted to ever see you working because you needed money, Aura. He felt strongly about that."

I take a deep sigh. "Yeah, but he didn't realize what lengths his family would go to destroy what he built. Come to think of

it. This was his dream and what he wanted. All I wanted was him. And now he is gone.”

“Don’t do this, Aura. I will feel like I failed him. Where would you work?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll figure it out. You have a nice day, Mr. Schwartz, and thank you for everything,” I say before hanging up.

The following week, Mr. Schwartz sent me my updated driver’s license with my name changed. It hurts having a name I was used to being called for so long taken away. I felt like I belonged to the man I loved when he honored me with it. But now, I belong to no one. I’m back to square one on borrowed time.

My phone rings while I sit on the bed in the master bedroom in Kalum’s home in Southampton. The sunlight filters through the windows of the sheer curtains. I’m looking at the phone as it rings, with Dex’s name flashing.

“Hey.”

“Hey, how are you and the little man?”

“He’s good. He is with Camila, eating lunch in the kitchen. The woman is a godsend. She helps me a lot with him.”

“I’m glad. Kalum is not such a bad guy after all.”

“Yeah, so far. He has kept his end with regard to what Lane asked of him.”

“I’m sorry, Aura. I don’t think Lane knew the extent of his parents’ wrath when he left you everything he worked for.”

“He left it to his son,” I correct.

“You know that is bullshit, right? He loved you so much, Aura. I have never seen Lane so happy. He loved you. You meant everything to him.”

My throat tightens but I have to be strong and learn to accept that he is gone and move on with finding myself.

“I know, Dex. But he’s gone.” I decided to change the subject. “How’s the shop going?”

“Business is great. We have so many customers coming in. I had to make a waiting list to work on cars and accept deposits. Blaze, who’s handling the shop in Spencer, is swamped. Every street racer wants a build from Turner’s shop.”

“That is great, Dex. Have you heard from Exie?”

Dex and Exie have been dating but I’m not sure if there is more going on with the way Lane’s family is. I’m not sure if anything can come out of their relationship.

“She’s been good. She wants to go and see you but has been waiting for the right time. Anyway, I called you because we need to take Lane’s car on the track to get a time. I have to install his last modification on it.”

Lane was supposed to install some modifications to his car, but he was never able to do it. It was supposed to be a game changer for the GT-R. He didn’t come home to finish it but Dex knows how to install it.

I shrug my shoulders even if he can't see me. "Okay. Do it. Get it done."

"It is done, boss lady. I need you to drive it on the track, Mrs. Turner."

I swallow. Me? Why me?

"Why can't you do it?"

"Only you and Lane Jr. are allowed to drive that car. I think he is too young at the moment. Ten years is too long to have it sitting there by the time Lane Jr. will be able to at least get behind a wheel."

"No way, Dex."

"It has to be you, Mrs. Turner," he says playfully.

Shit. Lane taught me how to drive, but it was for fun, and I was always on his lap. I think he liked me there for other reasons. I have to do it for my son but Dex needs to stop calling me Mrs. Turner.

"Fine, I'll do it," I tell him.

"Yes," I hear him whisper.

"But one thing, Dex. You can't call me Mrs. Turner."

"What? Why?" he asks.

"His family threatened to sue me because they say I'm using their name as a brand to capitalize on it outside of Lane."

"You have got to be shitting me! Those motherfuckers."

“Yeah, I’m not Mrs. Turner. They have strong influences with good lawyers and I can’t argue with them or plead my case. I’ll lose, Dex. I’m Aura Rayne and I’m OK with that.”

“Fuck, Aura. I’m so sorry.”

“Me too, Dex. Let me know when you need me and I’ll make plans to head to the track.”

“Okay, bye, Aura. I’ll call you to let you know,” he says, sounding deflated.

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## Chapter 7



## Kalum

“So how’s Aura?” Cason asks, sitting in front of my desk in my New York office.

“She’s okay, I guess. The security you have on detail has reported no issues.”

Cason pinches his brows together and raises a finger. “Wait. Are you telling me you don’t see her? When was the last time you physically saw her?”

“The day I showed her the house she is staying in,” I mock.

He wipes his hand over his face. “You’re telling me her husband basically gave you the green light to her and you haven’t spent a day with her? The girl you let go because one of our friends fell in love with her. The girl you were going to throw everything away for and you left her in a house you bought for her and her son, by the way, for twenty million, and you sit here and tell me you haven’t tried to at least tell her how you feel about her?”

“Felt about her as in I don’t anymore.”

Cason scoffs. “You are such a liar.”



The door opens and Janine walks in. “Who is such a liar?”

“Your boss.”

“About what?” Janine asks.

“Aura,” Cason says.

Janine shakes her head as she stands next to me and hands me a folder with the status of a new building I’m constructing in New York.

“He has her hidden in a twenty-million-dollar house and refuses to even visit her. If you could see the way his expression changes when you mention her,” Janine says.

Cason laughs. “Janine, you should see the way he looks at her. It will give you hope that he could actually love someone.”

“Stop putting things in Janine’s head. I’m not in love with her. The poor woman lost her husband and has a son to raise all on her own, with said husband’s family trying to destroy her because he shunned them until the day he died. Any feelings I had for Aura, which was more of the teenage sexual variety, is in the past where it belongs.”

“Then you wouldn’t mind if I see her then?” Cason taunts.

My knuckles turn white when I look down as I grip the desk. Cason has always liked Aura since high school and imagining him making her smile makes me want to reach over my modern glass desk and rip his throat out.

“Leave her alone, Cason,” I warn.

“Well, at least it will be nice for her to know who has been providing all her security. She will feel... safer.”

Cason started his own protective service company, branching out from his family’s worldwide protection services for the superrich and elite. Cason has made a name for himself in the states when powerful leaders travel worldwide needing the best of the best, sparing no expense. Cason’s company, Zenith, is the most sought-after private security company in the world. Like me, he is also single and doesn’t like relationships or commitments. We usually hang out and shoot the shit from time to time.

“No. Is the security detail ready for tonight?”

He leans forward. “You’re seriously still contemplating on taking out Meredith when you have a gorgeous young woman all alone that I would chop off my right arm to spend one night with?”

“What is wrong with Meredith?”

“She is not Aura. That’s what is wrong with her.”

“You’re right. She isn’t. She doesn’t expect anything but a good time and that is what tonight is all about. A good time.”

Cason rolls his eyes. “Whatever, brother. I sure hope you know what you are doing because—”

“Because what?” I interrupt him, getting annoyed.

“Nothing. You’re right. She just lost her husband,” he says.



“Yes, right there. Don’t stop,” Meredith screams as I thrust into her from behind. After our night out with some business associates I had to entertain, we went dancing and then headed to her apartment in Manhattan. I never take a woman to my apartment because they get clingy or read more into what I can offer.

The headboard on her iron bed bangs against the wall and I slow down, knowing I’m making a dent in the wall but when I look closely, I’m not the first. I look down and pull out slowly to make sure the condom is secured.

Yep. All good. I'll need to make this quick because this is the last time I'll see Meredith. Her time has run out. One month is long enough. I never last more than a month with anyone I'm dating. I lose interest and the appeal fizzles out.

“Yes, Kalum. Faster.”

I pump into her, but I can't come. I've tried, but her scent just doesn't do it for me anymore. What Cason said about Aura messed with my head. I was fine, damn it. The more I'm away from her, the better it is for my sanity. I close my eyes and imagine it's her, and my cock comes to life like it's on fire. I pump four more times and finally the sensation on the base of my spine has my balls drawing up, and finally, I come spilling inside the condom.

“Yes, Kalum. Oh, my God. I'm coming.”

*Thank God.* I tell myself. She moans and comes, and I pull out quickly, disposing of the condom and get dressed.

“You don't want to stay the night?” she purrs, walking around seductively without an inch of clothing on.

Meredith has a voluptuous body that guys go crazy for. Her father owns a lucrative import/export business, which makes her an heiress. She is nice arm candy but isn't smart and loves daddy's money. It is all she talks about. My father this and my father that. Good luck trying to fill those shoes. I'm glad I'll never be one of them.

Sliding my arms through the sleeves of my white dress shirt, I answer, “No.”

She walks up to me with her red manicured nails sliding the tip of her nail up my chest. I stand still and watch her finger trace the indent of my chest muscles.

“Is there any way I can change your mind?”

“I’m sorry, but I have to go.”

I don’t mean to be a dick but I can’t be one more minute in her presence. I want to head into my apartment and take a hot shower and scrub myself with strong body wash, taking her scent off my skin and never set foot inside her apartment again.

“I understand. When do you want to do this again?”

I step back and quickly dress, grabbing my wallet and keys off the dresser.

“I’ll call you,” I tell her without looking back and exit her apartment.

What the hell is wrong with me? This can’t be happening to me again. Damn Cason and his stupid mouth.



*Chapter 8*



## Aura

“Are you sure, Camila?” I ask.

“Of course. I can watch Lane, but why do you need to get a job, Aura? I don’t understand.”

I’m in the kitchen making Lane pancakes while he watches TV.

“I need the money. I refuse to touch the money Lane left. It was for our son, not for me.”

“That can’t be right, Aura. You were married. He left everything to you.”

“It is not my money, Camila. It was money he earned to be left for our son. I’ve had enough of his family claiming I married him for his money. I put everything in trust for Lane Jr.”

Camila frowns and looks at me while I mix the batter. “But you’re a Turner.”

“Was,” I counter.

“What do you mean was?”

I look up and meet her gaze. “They threatened to sue me if I didn’t remove Turner as my last name. I’m not Aura Turner. Apparently they can sue me if I ever use it to capitalize when I sell my bracelets online, so there’s that. Even if it’s a few thousand bucks, they can use it against me.”

“That is stupid and preposterous, Aura.”

“I know, but they have more money than God, and I won’t risk pissing them off. They already think I can’t take care of him on my own.”

“Are they crazy? You are the best mother I have ever seen. Just like your parents were to you. Lane Jr. loves you and is very lucky to have a mother as gentle and caring as you.”

I give her a warm smile. “Thank you, Camila. It means a lot coming from you.”

“Has Mr. St. Claire called you?”

“Nope. I don’t expect him to either.”

She frowns. “Do you really have to work?”

I shake my head. “Yeah, I do. I have used whatever I had saved these past six months and I can’t wait any longer. Have you found out how much the light bill is here for the winter months?”

“Yes, I will leave it on your nightstand. I don’t think Kalum will be happy about you paying him for all the utilities. I’m surprised he hasn’t noticed.”



“I haven’t paid rent since we have been staying here. I think the utilities and the fact that I haven’t touched the card he left to buy groceries will do for now. It is the least I could do. I found a job at a local diner not far from here. In a way, having my name back to Aura Rayne wasn’t such a bad idea. They won’t know who I am and all I have said is that my son and I are staying with friends for a while until I can move.”

“You’re not serious, are you?” she asks.

“About?”

“Moving.”

“I have to, Camila. I can’t stay here forever. I can’t go back to my house either. The less I stay out of the limelight, the better. Out of sight. Out of mind.”



After I made pancakes and made sure Lane was fed, I headed out in an Uber to the diner. I know I could have used the Merc parked in the garage, but I refuse to drive it. It is enough that I'm staying in another St. Claire home. The last thing I need is for anyone to say I'm taking advantage.

After months of thinking, crying, and feeling sorry for myself. I have learned one thing, I need to move forward. It means getting a job and making a living to support Lane and myself. My son's future is secure, and all I need is to save enough money to move to a house I can afford. Lane is

homeschooled with the help of Camila until we can find a more permanent place to live.

Mr. Schwartz will handle the sale of our home in North Carolina and place the funds in a trust for Lane. Lane's family will not find me there and it is for the best. Dex and Blaze have all the cars secured and all our belongings are placed in storage until I can find a home.

I enter the diner and the bell chimes as I enter. "How can I help you?" a woman that looks to be in her early sixties asks.

"My name is Aura Rayne. I'm the one you called about the waitress position for a new hire."

She motions outside to the two men in black suits. "Are they with you?"

I look outside. Shit. I forgot about the security Kalum has placed on me. I don't know why but I think it is more to track my whereabouts than anything else.

I raise my finger. "O-one second," I tell her breathlessly and exit the diner.

"Excuse me?" I motion to get one of the guys' attention.

The blond one stands tall and puffs his chest out. "Yes, Mrs. Turner. Is everything alright?"

I roll my eyes. "Yes. Everything is fine but do you have to follow me everywhere?"

"Yes, Mrs. Turner."

"I'm not Mrs. Turner." He frowns.

I avert my gaze. “Not anymore. I had to change it.”

Why am I telling this man my personal business? I shake my head.

“Look. I’m trying to get a job, and it is very weird to have two guys in suits following me. Is it possible for you to find something else to do while I’m at work? Take a break. Go for a walk.”

“I’m afraid I can’t—”

“Please,” I plead. “I need this job. I know it seems weird and you don’t understand, but I really need this job.”

His eyes soften, and he looks at the other big guy in the suit with brown hair and brown eyes. “You really need this job?” he repeats.

I look over at the entrance of the diner, and the lady is talking with someone. I turn my head back and look at the bodyguard. “Yes. I really need the money. I know it looks weird. Why would Lane Turner’s widow need money, but you don’t understand. I don’t come from money and people like my late husband’s family want to take whatever he left me if they think I can benefit from it. And that’s okay. I have no family except for my son and until he is of age, I have nothing to offer him in the meantime. They will not stop until they destroy what his father was trying to leave him. He wanted nothing to do with them, and I know why, but right now, this is the best I can do for us.”

Both men look at each other with a hard scowl. Not at me but from what I'm telling them.

“Are you fucking shitting me right now?”

I shake my head. “No. Trust me. These are powerful people, and they have money and connections in places you'd never think it was possible to have. They will find a loophole and all they need is a reason. They don't want their name associated with me.”

The blond one nods. “My name is John, and this is Milo. We will still keep watch but far enough away so they don't question you here.”

I give a relieved sigh. “Thank you,” I say with a smile.

John smiles nervously and Milo elbows him. “Your welcome, Mrs.—”

I interrupt him. “Aura. Aura Rayne.”

“Okay, Aura. I'm sorry you are going through this.”

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## *Chapter 9*



## Aura

I am glad I was given the best shift at the diner five days a week during the day and it is not far from Kalum's house. It has been three months and still, he hasn't called me directly but leaves messages with Camila. She gives him an update but doesn't tell him about my job at the diner and neither do the bodyguards. They drive to work every day instead of me paying for an Uber and having to follow it.

The generous tips I have received so far have been great, so I save to move. I haven't decided yet where but I know it will be soon. Things have died down after Lane's death. I can't believe how much time has gone by, it seems like it was yesterday, and the ache in my chest was still there when Dex gave me the news while I watched the TV in horror as the flames were being extinguished. Lane's body was burned to ashes. The lump lodges in my throat and it is difficult to swallow when I think of that moment.

"Hey, are you okay?"

I snap out of my thoughts, my mind drifting off.

"Yeah. I'm so sorry. What can I get you?" I ask.

There is a young guy seated in the booth of the diner. He keeps staring at me. It doesn't make me uncomfortable. Other girls in the diner get appreciative male glances from time to time. It happens. We all just ignore it and keep working, paying no mind to it.

"I would like the special, and if it is possible, your number."

My gaze lands on his face after the last part. "The special. Coming right up."

I move to place his order in the kitchen and take a deep breath.

"That's Bradley. His father is a whale," Nancy says as she saunters up to me.

"A what?" I ask.

"A whale. Rich. Bradley is a nice guy, not stuck up like the usual trust fund kids. He is twenty-six and single. He keeps staring at you." She lowers her voice. "All the guys that come in here stare at you, but you don't notice. Do you?"

"No. I'm not interested in anyone. I have a son to think about."

"I know your husband passed, but sometimes we need someone to talk to. Friends. You are far too young to alienate yourself because of your husband's passing. It is not as if you are disrespecting his memory but you can't be alone all the time, sweetie. Judy wants to hang out on Saturday. If I babysit, maybe you girls can hang out." She bumps into me playfully.



“Maybe you all can meet up as friends,” she says, giving me a wink.

The bell rings, signaling that the food is ready. Judy smiles at me and pulls the ticket and hands me the plate.

Judy has asked me for a girls’ night out, but I always decline. Camila also had tried to get me to go out for a day, but in the same fashion, I declined, not wanting to leave Lane more than I had to. She even refused the money I offered to watch Lane while I go to work.

I head over and place the plate in front of Bradley. Another guy enters the diner with light-brown hair and eyes the color of green emeralds and takes a seat in front of Bradley.

I notice Bradley has dirty-blond hair and blue eyes with a Ralph Lauren polo knit sweater fitted over his broad frame as he straightens in the booth.

“Is there anything else you need?” I ask.

He looks down at the plate of hot food with the steam swirling up and then looks up with a smirk. “Yeah, your number. You forgot to give me your number.”

He looks so sure of himself. Thinking I would happily provide him my number like I’m a desperate schoolgirl needing his attention.

“I’m sorry, but I’m not interested.”

He raises his eyebrows and his friend chuckles. I look at his friend, who is laughing at him. He looks embarrassed, but I’m

honestly not interested in going out with anyone. Probably ever. My focus is on Lane and his needs.

I feel bad for Bradley, so I tell him what would scare off any guy his age.

“I have a son, and he is all I’m interested in right now.”

They both stare at me with surprised expressions. Not what every guy likes to hear. A woman with a child working in a diner. That should scare him off. I turn to leave the table and take the next customer seated in the next booth.

“Is that the only reason?”

I turn back around. “Excuse me?”

“Is that the only reason you won’t give me your number? Because you have a son? I know you don’t have a husband or boyfriend. No guy in their right mind will ever let a girl as pretty as you work at a diner where every guy that walks in can try to take you away from him.” He pauses when I cross my arms over the chest of my light-pink retro uniform. “I know I wouldn’t.”

Judy smiles, and so does Nancy standing behind him, serving other customers when they look my way. There is that word pretty. Why does every guy I meet tell me that I look pretty? Not gorgeous or beautiful. Just pretty.

Kalum’s words came back to me when I last saw him. “*I prefer experienced girls. You’re pretty but plain.*”

Lane called me pretty all the time. Even in bed, he said my pussy was pretty. Everything he said about me was pretty. I

thought I loved when he said it but now I hate being called pretty. It is like I'm this delicate flower that could break any second. Weak. Fragile. It's like calling a guy cute.

I raise my chin. "You're right, he wouldn't. Not much he can do about it since he's dead."

Bradley looks down, avoiding my gaze. Not how I wanted this conversation to go but I think it hit home for him to leave me the hell alone. Not only do I have a son but my husband is not here to fight my battles for me. That I will have to do all on my own.



“Mommy!” Lane races toward me as I enter the house with the TV on.

“Hi, sweetie. How was your day?”

“Super-duper fun. Camila and I made cupcakes.”

“That is awesome,” I tell him, ruffling his straight black hair.

The TV is on the gossip news. Camila is sitting on the living room couch and a flash of cameras from paparazzi can be seen in front of a fancy club in New York. A door opens from the back passenger of a black Rolls and Kalum can be seen exiting with a tall, statuesque woman on his arm. My stomach clenches, but I take a deep breath, calming myself. She is wearing a cream color gown with a daring *V* in the front that looks gorgeous against her deep-red hair.

The headline reads, St. Claire is still a month strong with the heiress. I can only be happy for him. They look great together. He is tall, but so is she, and they do make a great couple.

Camila looks at me warily and then back at the TV.

“They look great together,” I tell her.

Camila frowns. “She is awful.”

“Really. Then why would he still be with her?” I can see him place his hand on her lower back possessively. His words about his taste in women repeating in my head like a mantra. I wonder why his words bother me, but it does.

“I have no idea.”

“She must be great to have his attention. She is very beautiful.”

“No, she is not. You’re beautiful.” She points at the screen. “She has makeup.”

I snort. “The most I have been told is that I’m pretty. Certainly not beautiful. That woman is beautiful, and she looks great on his arm. I could never pull that dress off, I’m too short.”

“I’ll be the judge of that. If you ever wear something like that.”

“I have no place to go that would require me to wear anything like that.” I wave down at my diner’s uniform. “This is what I need to wear. I don’t belong in that world. I never did. I prefer a hot dog from that stand down the street than to sit and eat an overpriced meal that tastes like crap.”

Camila giggles. “You have a point.”

“I’d rather be sitting here eating a cupcake with you and Lane than being caught eating at some uptight place where everyone is judging you.”

“Are you ever going to go out on a Saturday? It’s tomorrow, you know.”

“I have no one to go with and I have no idea where to go.”

“A movie with a friend sounds nice. I’ll watch Lane for a few hours.”

I look down to where Lane is stuffing his mouth full of a chocolate cupcake and playing with his cars. “I’ll think about it.”

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## *Chapter 10*



## Kalum

“Quick question.” Janine strides into my office.

“What is it?”

“I know I’m being nosy, but I was looking over your credit card statements.”

Janine is my personal secretary but also my personal assistant. She handles all my personal bills with the added bonus that she loves women and is not attracted to me whatsoever. Which makes my life go a lot smoother.

“And? What is wrong?”

“Who is paying for the utilities and the food in the Southampton house?”

I frown. “What do you mean? I am.”

Janine shakes her head. “No, you are not. The bills are being paid, but nothing has been charged to your card.”

I straighten in my chair. “Since when?”

“Since you bought the place. Nothing has been charged. No food, light, gas, or water.”



I snatch my cell phone and call Mr. Schwartz, Aura's lawyer, and place it on speaker.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Schwartz, this is Mr. St. Claire."

"What can I do for you? If this is about Aura and her staying with you. I spoke to my wife, and we will gladly have her and Lane stay with us. It is no problem. You have done enough, Mr. St. Claire."

"What? No. What are you talking about? That is not why I'm calling. Why would you suggest that?"

He sighs. "Then what can I do for you?"

"I'm calling to ask why the utilities and food are being covered. I strictly said I would cover Aura and Lane's expenses."

"I didn't," he says.

"Then who is?"

"She is."

"How?"

"It's called working, Mr. St. Claire. She hasn't touched a dime of Lane's money since he died. She sold everything except the cars and two shops and placed it in a trust for her son when he is of age."

"Why?" I snap. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Janine backs up. She knows I'm pissed but not at her. I'm mad at myself. Of course, she wouldn't. She would die before

taking a dime from me. The things I said to her.

“She asked me not to say anything, and she is my client after all.” He pauses but doesn’t hang up.

“There is more. Tell me.”

“Lane Turner’s parents threaten to sue her for using the Turner name in any way since it is a brand in the business globally. I’m sure you were already aware of their intention. They wanted her to remove it from her last name, or they would sue her for damages. She wants to keep her son’s future the way his father wanted him to have it. He left her money, Mr. St. Claire, but you know how Aura is. With all the threats she was receiving from his family, knowing they have people in very high places, she agreed and signed the papers, removing Turner from her name. She is using her maiden name. Aura Rayne.”

Fuck.

“Where is she working?”

“I don’t know. Somewhere locally. I’m sure she has kept it a secret from everyone. She is a very independent girl. I love the fire in her spirit. It is a shame that the young man died and she was left to deal with this. I don’t think he realized what lengths his family would go to destroy what he built. He loved Aura, but she didn’t deserve this. Like I said, if it is too much trouble, my wife and I, we’ll look after them. It’s no trouble at all.”

“No. She has me,” I snap.

I hang up and look at Janine and notice she has a murderous look in her eye.

“I have never wanted to dig up someone dead before and strangle them.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because, if you know you have powerful asshole parents from the get-go, what makes you think leaving a fortune you built that your parents did not agree on would stop them from destroying it? Give the girl a break. Threatening to sue the poor girl like she’s a thief,” Janine says, shaking her head in disbelief.

“Send some of my stuff from my apartment to Southampton.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Stay with them,” I quip.

Janine gives me a smirk. “Domestication. I like it.”

“Don’t get your hopes up.”

“Don’t worry, boss, I have them all the way up. I get to meet her.”

“Don’t get any ideas. She is off-limits.”

“Ha! You are interested in her. I knew it. The way you protect her like a savage. I love it! That is exactly what she needs.”

“What is that?”

“A ruthless motherfucker like you. I have the feeling you will go to war for her. That woman means more to you than anyone, doesn't she?”

I stay silent, not answering her because I'm not sure what I feel for Aura right now. I just know that I have to protect her. I have to be there for her, and I haven't because I'm afraid. I'm afraid of falling for her all over again and her not choosing me.



*Chapter 11*



## Aura

I'm in the kitchen getting Lane a snack before he washes up and heads to bed.

"Chocolate milk, please."

"One chocolate milk coming right up."

"Yes," he says excitedly. "Chocolate milk is the best."

I smile because I loved chocolate milk when I was a kid. At least I can say he got that from me.

I'm trying to reach over and grab the chocolate powder from the cabinet when I hear the door open and the sound of the beeping alarm being turned off. I look down and realize I'm wearing boy shorts and a tank top. Shit. Not the clothes I should be wearing in case I have company. The only person that would have the code is either the security guys Kalum has on detail or Kalum himself. Camila is fast asleep in her room. She heads to bed early and is an early riser.

Walking over to Lane, I can see his forehead wrinkle when we hear footsteps and Kalum's massive body comes into view.

"Kalum."

“Jeez, the guy is huge,” Lane whispers.

I grin. He is huge. My eyes wander appreciatively over his tall frame with his bulging biceps straining from his soft cotton T-shirt. He is wearing sweats that are slung low on his hips with sneakers giving me a flashback of when we were back in high school. The man is breathtaking and can still pull off the athletic look.

“Hi,” he says, but his gaze is on Lane.

It feels like he needs his approval, and it’s kinda cute.

“Hi, Mr. St. Claire,” Lane says in his little voice.

“Please, call me Kalum.”

“Okay, Kalum.” Lane’s eyes travel up to Kalum’s face. “How did you get to be so tall?”

“I don’t know. I just grew,” he says with a smile.

“I want to be tall, but I’m not sure if I will because Mommy is really short and Daddy was not tall like you.”

“He was tall enough,” Kalum says.

“Yeah, but not like you. I want to be real tall so I can help Mommy grab the chocolate powder from the cabinet.”

I blush because I’m short and always have to get a stool or mini ladder to reach for things.

“She’s having trouble, huh?”

“Yep.”

“I can fix that.”

Kalum watches me from across the island and looks behind me with the cabinet door open and the chocolate powder on the top shelf. I quickly look down and then at the couch and see the blanket we leave there when we watch movies. I quickly move over to the other side to grab it and wrap it around my body for modesty. I never thought he would stop by since Camila is asleep during this time, and no one is around watching Lane and me at night.

I can feel his gaze on me because my skin reacts with goose bumps rising on the back of my thighs where I feel exposed at how short my boy shorts are. My ass cheeks are practically hanging out. I wrap myself, shielding myself from his lingering gaze on my backside, but when I turn around, he looks away.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know you would be stopping by,” I tell him.

He clears his throat. “I’m staying.”

I quirk a brow. “Staying? Don’t you have work? A girlfriend?”

“I’m staying, I have work which I can get to every day by helicopter and no, I do not have a girlfriend. I was seeing someone, but I ended it.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” I point to the TV. “I thought you did. I saw you on TV and she almost made the one-month mark, but I guess not.”

“She couldn’t hold my attention for long.”



“Not enough experience?” I volley back.

He grins. “She had enough. She was just too clingy.”

“What does clingy mean?” Lane asks.

I laugh. “When someone wants to be around you all the time.”

“Then I’m clingy with you, Mommy. I love to be around you all the time.”

“Me too, handsome. How about that chocolate milk?”

I walk over to the kitchen when Kalum reaches for it and sets it on the granite countertop, preparing it for both of us. I look over at Kalum, and he is watching me.

“Would you like some?” I ask softly.

“Yes.”

I make three cups of chocolate milk, and the three of us drink it silently. Once Lane is done, he jumps off to go brush his teeth and head for bed.

“Do you need me to tuck you in?”

“Nope, I got my headphones,” he says and runs off.

Kalum raises a brow. “Headphones.”

I smile. “When I was pregnant with Lane. His father drove me to the house he bought for us after I got off work.”

“You worked while you were pregnant with Lane?”

I avert my gaze. “Long story. Anyway, he picked me up in his car, and the exhaust and engine were very loud but would

vibrate with a deep hum inside the cabin. He was opening the gate, and when the car moved forward in first gear, the engine rumbled loud, and it was the first time I felt Lane move. It was the best feeling to feel him for the first time, and it was the sound of the engine that did it. Now, every time he has trouble sleeping or winding down, he needs to hear it.”

“Hear it?” Kalum questions.

“The engine. The sound of the exhaust, he imagines feeling the car. It makes him go to sleep. It calms him. Like his father. I don’t have the car, so I recorded Lane’s car, and he listens to it on his iPad.”

“Wow. That is crazy, but I get it.”

I wash the cups and he stays silent, watching my movements.

“I can sleep in the other room, and you can have the master bedroom.” I offer.

It is his house after all, and he has been generous and kind. It is the least I can do.

“That is unnecessary. I need to talk to you, Aura.”

I stiffen. “About?”

Does he want us to leave? Shit, I have to see how much I have saved already. I need to start looking, I know it was only a matter of time before we would need to go. I have calmed the situation down by putting everything in a trust and removing my married name so his parents would stop threatening me.

“I can start looking and move out. It is no trouble, Kalum.”

His face turns into a scowl. “I didn’t come here to tell you to move. I want you to stay. You and Lane don’t have to move anywhere. This is your home.”

“I appreciate your help with my situation, but this isn’t my home. It is your home or your family’s home.”

“I bought it for you, Aura. For you and Lane.”

I sit on the pristine couch and look around the house like it is the first time I’m seeing it. My eyes take in the grandeur of the home. A home I have felt comfortable in.

“Why?” I ask.

“Because you and Lane didn’t like the apartment. You were right. My apartment sucks if you think about it.” He looks over at the kitchen and grins. “Not a place to make good-tasting chocolate milk at night.”

I grab my hair and twist it up in a messy bun. “Why? You didn’t have to do that for us. You have no obligation to us whatsoever.”

“I wanted to, and it’s my money and if I want to spend my money buying you a house so you and Lane can feel comfortable, then it is what I want to do. I don’t want to fight with you. I want to help you and I’m sorry if I hurt you in any way.”

He looks at me with a look of sincerity in his eyes and his sexy mouth gives me a grin.

“Okay.”

“Now, what is this that you are working on? Why haven’t you used the card I left you?”

I lower my gaze. “I felt bad that you were paying for everything. It was the least I could do.”

“You don’t have to work. You have enough—”

I interrupt him. “It is not my money. He left it for his son. All he wanted was for his son to keep his legacy alive based on what he created. His vision. The name he built for himself. I was just the sacrificial lamb.”

I hate that people keep telling me that. The money Lane left me was for his son, and it’s not mine. Nothing he left is mine but for his son. He made it seem that way but that was his dream to leave it for his child. I was just the host. The keeper he entrusted to carry out his dying wish.

“You know that is not true. He loved you, Aura.”

“He loved his dream more. He can write me a letter telling me otherwise but I know the truth. I was just there to help him carry it out. Now I’m left to pick up the pieces. I’m a fucking target for his family now. They want to prove a point and I know they want to make it through me.”

He leans forward, his elbows resting on his thighs as he sits on the couch. When I look down at his wrist, that is when I see it. The bracelet I made him all those years ago. He is wearing it. You almost can’t see it with the tattoos inked all over his

skin. It almost hides it but it's there. His head is hanging low as he thinks.

I reach my hand out and place a finger over the braided thread of the bracelet. A surge of electricity shoots up my arm, and I'm not sure if he feels it, but his head tilts to the side and he turns his wrist, letting me touch it by sliding my finger over it, letting me touch him. He laces his fingers through mine and looks at me.

"I won't let them take anything away from you, Aura. It's not theirs to take. If you don't want to touch the money he left then let me help you."

"How is it any different if I take money from you? You can't save me, Kalum. It is best I live on my own terms. I have no problem working and paying bills like a normal single mother."

He shakes his head. "Let me help you, Aura. Please. I can help you. I can make them go away and they will never bother you again."

"How?"

How is he going to do that? They will come at me with everything they have. His parents are worse than the Turners. They will do whatever it takes to make sure I disappear.

"You let me worry about that."

"Your parents aren't any better, Kalum. I will not just have his family but yours against me."

His jaw tics in annoyance, and he levels me with a hard stare. “My parents are the least of your worries. I’ll take care of the rest but you have to trust me, Aura. You think you can do that?”

What choice do I have? Exie is my best friend, but she can only do so much. She is a Turner, and she is taking over the family business. Her hands are tied.

“I can.”

“Good. Now let’s try to get some sleep.”

We don’t get much sleep. We sat up all night catching up on all the things he did since I left. How he played football in college but refused to go pro. How did he have tattoos when he was seventeen. Him telling me he got them when he vacationed in Hawaii with his parents. Cason’s decision to branch out and build his empire in the private security world. It was like seeing Kalum in a new light. A friendly light. No animosity. No judgment. It was like we were best friends and were catching up on old times. But in reality, we were trying to get to know each other. It makes it harder not to like him more than a friend. It makes it hard not to remember how he made me feel in his arms.



*Chapter 12*



## Kalum

“How was your night in your new home?” Janine says after I walk out of the boardroom.

I had a meeting with the developers, and they are in town, and they want to have dinner.

“Good. I need you to get Aura on the phone in my office.”

I miss her voice and the fact that I need to ask her to go out with me tonight has me a bit on edge. I don’t want to take anyone else but her. I’m just hoping she will agree to go out with me.

“I’m curious. This doesn’t have to do with you needing a date for tonight’s dinner, does it?”

I walk inside my modern office with floor-to-ceiling windows on the sixty-eighth floor. “It does.”

“Are you going to ask her out on a date?”

“It is not a date. I just need someone to go with and you annoy me enough at work and I can’t deal with you at dinner too. It will raise questions and then people will start to think there is more going on between us,” I tease.



“In that case, I’m on your side and will do whatever is necessary to get her to agree.”

She sets the phone on speaker and dials Aura’s number. It begins to ring, and I look at Janine with a sarcastic expression.

“What?” she asks.

“You can go now.” I make a motion with my hands to get her to leave my office.

“Alright. Alright, I’ll leave but tell me if she says yes.”

“Hello.” Aura’s voice fills the room, and my cock strains inside my pants.

Fuck. Everything about that woman just does it for me.

“Hi,” I greet her.

“Hi.”

I’m nervous as fuck. For the first time in my life, I’m worried that a woman will turn me down when asking her on a date.

I clear my throat. “Hey, how is Lane doing?”

“He is fine. He is finishing up having lunch. How is your day going so far?”

“Good. I wanted to ask if you are doing anything later tonight.”

She pauses and my hands begin to shake, waiting for her to answer. “No, just making some bracelets that I have to get done to fulfill orders that need to go out while Lane watches TV.”

I slide the mouse on my computer and open the window to Aura's website. I have bought all her bracelets since high school. All of them. I know it makes me a creep or a stalker or maybe even a weirdo, but they sell out pretty fast, and I started buying them all up when I could. I have cases of them. They are all made by hand. Her hand.

"I wanted to ask if you would go to dinner with me. I have a business dinner to go to tonight and I was wondering if you would go with me."

Silence.

More silence.

"Aura?"

"Yes, I'm here. I would love to, Kalum, but I don't have anything to wear."

"That is not a problem. I can have someone pick you up and take you to pick something out and it will be on me."

"I can't let you spend money on buying me clothes."

"Aura."

"Yes, Kalum."

"Please do this for me."

She takes a deep sigh. I tap my fingers on the desk and realize my brow is beginning to sweat. I'm almost to the point of begging. The anticipation of getting her to agree is killing me.

"Okay. I'll go."

I fist-pump the air like a five-year-old that was just told he would get the latest game when it comes out.

“I’ll have my assistant pick you up within the hour, and don’t worry about Lane. I’ll have Camila watch him and send over new toys he can play with. We will be back late.”

“Okay.”



*Chapter 13*



## Aura

He wants to take me out to a business dinner? Holy crap. I decide to call Exie because I have no one else I can talk to about this. I feel excited, guilty, all at the same time.

“Yes, sis.”

“I have a problem.”

“What is it, and who do I need to get rid of?”

I laugh. “Nothing like that. I have enough trouble with your parents.”

“I’m sorry, Aura. My brother didn’t think things through. They have calmed down since you put everything he left in a trust but I know it has been hard and I don’t agree with them and if you need anything, you can always ask me. I will send you whatever you need.”

“I know you are stuck in a bad place. I appreciate the offer to help me, but it’s all good.”

“How is the Kalum situation going? Is he still hiding you away in the Hamptons?”

“I’m still here. I got a job,” I say.

“Fuck. Why?”

“Independence.”

“My brother would kill me if he knew I allowed this shit. Come on, Aura. You know he would be upset about you getting a job while taking care of Lane.”

“I like it, Exie, but that is not why I’m calling. Kalum asked me to go with him to dinner with some of his associates, and I agreed, but have no idea what to wear. He is sending his assistant to come and get me.”

She snorts. “It took him long enough.”

“What do you mean?”

“Come on, Aura. You know how Kalum has felt about you since you left.”

I frown. “That was a long time ago, Exie. He is doing this for Lane for whatever reason.”

“Yeah, right. Keep telling yourself that, but be careful, Aura. I don’t want you getting hurt or confused. Sometimes I think my brother is crazy in asking Kalum for his help, but I get it.”

“Get what?”

I don’t know what she means. I’m confused about the whole situation regarding Kalum and Lane. This whole crazy notion about Kalum watching out for me.

“It was his way of making sure you were taken care of by the man that would do anything to make sure nothing would ever happen to you or to my nephew. That would be Kalum. It is no secret Kalum was heartbroken when you left. He was not himself after that. He was closed off, and if anyone mentioned your name, he would lose his shit.”

“Why? He hated the fact that his parents brought me to his home and to his school.”

She lets out a puff of air through her mouth, making me pull the phone slightly away from my ear. “Do you remember when you were a little girl in school and you saw a little kid in elementary school that picked on a certain girl all the time? Pulled their hair, tripped them, and stuck gum in her hair when her back was turned so everyone would laugh at her? What would our mothers tell us when we would ask why?”

“Because he secretly liked the girl he was tormenting.”

“Exactly. Kalum liked you since the first day he laid eyes on you. I kind of think he fell for you.”

“That is not possible. He would have said something. He always told me he didn’t want a relationship and that he was a no-strings type of guy. That I wasn’t his type.”

“Look, I know it has been only a year since Lane died, but I want you to have an open mind here. You deserve to be happy and you need to find out what you want out of life and not be stuck behind someone else’s dreams. You stood by Lane and supported him with everything.”

My eyes fill with tears because it is hard to let go of someone who was there when no one cared. When you gave them your heart and soul. “I love him, Exie. I love Lane,” I choke.

“I know. Trust me, it is hard for me to tell you this. As his sister, I want to tell you hell no, but as your best friend, I need to tell you yes. You will always love Lane, and you gave him the best part of you already, but he is gone, Aura. He isn’t here to help you pick up the pieces. You need Kalum to be the barrier against my family and their righteous shit. He is willing, and I think my brother was right.”

“Right about what?” I sniff.

“He knew, Aura.” She takes a deep sigh. “He knew that Kalum was in love with you before you fell for him and I guess if something happened to him, he would trust Kalum to do the right thing. They were friends from before, Aura. Before you. That day in the cafeteria. Do you remember when he came up and kissed you and I gave him shit about it?”

“Yes,” I croak.

“Kalum was in love with you. Everyone knew it. The way that boy looked at you. Anyone could see it. Even me. But I was on my brother’s side. My brother fell for you too.”

“And you made sure to make Kalum out to be the villain. The one that was just using me because Lane was your brother.”



My heart is beating wildly inside of my chest. “How could I have missed it? Why didn’t he say anything and keep his feelings hidden? The phone calls make sense. The bears he left in my room that I would look at with longing from the fair. The memory of his kiss and his touch and then his parents forcing me to leave.”

“His parents made sure to get rid of you because they knew, Aura. They knew that he would choose you and he would always choose you.”

“Unless I chose differently. I chose Lane.”

“Yes, you chose Lane, but now things are different. I don’t know what will happen or how Kalum feels now but what you need to focus on is you and what you want. What is best for Lane Jr., and I know you will do what feels right. I can’t make my parents do anything, but I can tell my best friend and mother to my nephew to be happy and fuck what everyone else thinks.”

I know what she is trying to say. Take Kalum’s offer for help. Find myself and don’t feel guilty. The most he can offer me is friendship after everything. There is no way he feels the same way he felt back then. I got married, fell in love, and had a child. I chose Lane, and I don’t regret it. Lane gave me a family and a home when I had no one. His dying wish was for me to be happy, and that is what I’m going to do.

I tell Exie we should meet up in New York later in the week so she can see Lane Jr. A knock is coming from the front door

and it must be Kalum's assistant because the security let her through.

I open the door to see a tall brunette with the most expressive green eyes staring back at me. Her mouth curves in a grin as she sweeps me from head to toe with her eyes.

"You must be Aura. I'm Janine. Mr. St. Claire's personal assistant and secretary."

I give her a smile. "Yes. Kalum said I should be expecting you to take me to pick up a dress."

"Not just any dress. The dress."

"I hope it's not too expensive."

She walks in and smiles. "Honey, that man wants to buy you whatever you want. He has never given me a limit when it comes to you and I can blow money like the wind. He gives me a limit on everything. Until you."

Camila comes from the patio area with Lane and beams when she sees Janine.

"Hello, dear. Have you come to whisk Aura away to make her beautiful for her date tonight with Kalum?"

I shake my head. "Oh, it's not a date. I'm just doing Kalum a favor and going with him as friends."

Janine acts like she doesn't hear me. "It's a date," she says to Camila, ignoring my last comment.

Camila gives me a warm smile. "We will be fine while you're gone. I have a whole night planned with Lane and he

will be just fine with you gone. Kalum told me you guys would be out until late, but Lane will be fine. Right, sweetie?"

"Yep, we have a whole day planned and Mommy can go out and have some fun." He frowns. "She is always working and I never see her have any fun."

I bend over at my waist to caress his handsome little face. "Oh honey, I'm just trying to save money."

Janine raises her brows and shakes her head. "You don't have to, you know. He wants you to not worry about a thing."

I stand up straight and cross my arms over my simple black T-shirt. "I know, but I don't like to take advantage of his hospitality."

She snorts and waves her hand toward the front door. "Come on before my mouth gets the best of me in front of little Lane."



We head out to the city with Henry and security trailing us from behind in the black Maybach.

“So, is there a particular designer you like?”

I shake my head. “I’m not familiar with too many, except the ones my best friend would get me. I hate overspending. My husband never cared, but I did. I guess I felt guilty.”

“You are entirely too good for Kalum. I can see why he cares for you so much. You’re so genuine.”

I stay silent. Cares for me? I think he just feels sorry for my situation and the fact that his friend Lane died and he was

asked to watch over his wife. This is just a small favor I agreed to do for Kalum. There is no way Kalum harbors any type of feelings for me anymore. I am not going to lie and say I didn't fall for him because, crying in the diner when Lane picked me up off the street, I poured my heart out to him. How much it hurt to be kicked out and how confused I felt about Kalum. I think Kalum was really my first true love compared to Marcus. With Kalum, I felt heartbroken that he let them do that to me. It was my birthday. None of what Exie says makes sense. I get he called me after, but it was to talk to me, and I refused. I refused because what was the point? I could never fit in his world. Not even Lane's. I'm the outcast. The leech Lane's mother once referred to me when I overheard him speaking on the phone to his mother one night. She said I was a parasite. That I was just after his money and name. I will never forget his father's words when he got on the phone. "*She is not worthy of the Turner name, Lane. All she did was trap you by getting pregnant.*" His father's words sliced into me like a knife but I acted like I didn't hear them on the phone.

I remember Lane was quick to end the call, but the damage was done. I vowed to be discreet and try to make my own money from knitting my bracelets. I never asked for anything or went shopping. I felt ashamed. I only bought things for our son and that was it. When he asked me if I wanted something, I declined. I always said no. Maybe he sensed it or maybe he didn't, but I would never know because he would never say anything. He just left every morning and would return later in the evening. Every. Single. Day.

I never complained or told him he was spending too much time at the shop. When I asked for him to go to the park or zoo with Lane, he always said he was busy. I understood. He was working and providing for us and what I made selling my paltry bracelets would never amount to what Lane made money-wise.

I sit back and feel the air of the air conditioner and look out the window of the car as it makes its way into the city for the two-hour drive.

“Are you okay?” Janine asks.

I look at Janine and give her a smile. “I’m sorry. I was just thinking. Do we really have to buy a designer dress? It can’t be from a secondhand store or maybe a department store? They really have nice things if you look.”

Janine looks at me like I grew a second head. “Um, I don’t think—” She pauses. “Look, there is nothing wrong with buying something from those places but where Kalum goes to take his high-profile clients, it is a little more upscale. I’m thinking Balmain would look great on you since you are so petite.”

The car stops in front of a designer boutique shop near Fifth Avenue and Manhattan. Security opens the door and we are escorted inside where there is a lady already waiting for us to head inside.

“Janine.” The older woman walks up and kisses each of her cheeks.

“Hey, doll. I have come at Mr. St. Claire’s request for his lady.”

“Oh, I’m no—”

The older lady looks at me and smiles but interrupts me. “So you are Kalum’s lady.” Her eyes focus on my face then down to my simple black T-shirt and jeans. “Yes, she is definitely his. I can see it. You are breathtaking, my dear.”

“I was thinking Balmain for tonight. Black knitted monogram, short, high-neck with a double strap sandal, black and gold.”

“Oh, yes, I have the new collection and it will look perfect on her. Chic, classy but very sexy. It will make her legs look like they go on forever.”

“I have to be careful with you, Janine, you might take my job,” she teases.

“And give up my good job with Mr. Sensitive and Condescending? Never,” Janine says sarcastically.

“He’s that bad, huh?” I chime in.

“Yes, but he is nice and reasonable when it comes to you for some reason. It is like he can’t say no.”

“We’re just old friends.”

“I think he wants to be more than friends but I don’t want to pry into your personal relationship.” She stops at the foot of the carpeted staircase to the second floor and raises her head.

“Oh, wait. Maybe I do. I love a good love story. Even if I like women myself but either way, love is love.”

I like Janine and her craziness. I think she is a great assistant to Kalum. She has a way of making sense but keeping you on your toes.



A faint, light-colored floral pattern is visible in the upper portion of the page, featuring stylized flowers and leaves. The text "Chapter 14" is centered over this pattern.

*Chapter 14*



## Kalum

I wait for the car to bring her to the front of the restaurant where she will be dropped off and then she will leave with me. My clients are already inside, seated at the table but I'm dying to see her first. To finally have her by my side. To have the chance to take her to dinner. My hands are shaking slightly and I mumble under my breath, releasing a few curse words. The Rolls pulls up next with Cason's men trailing behind. I wave them off as I want to be the one to open her door and be the first to witness what she is wearing.

Janine texted me a few minutes ago with two words. "*You're welcome.*" Whatever that means. When the black car stops in front of the five-star restaurant, there are cameras flashing when I open the door, and one long slender leg with golden skin pokes out. My breath catches in my throat as Aura, with her brown hair silky straight with a hint of red, stands and slides her slender hand into mine. Her makeup is in nude shades, and I swear I stopped breathing.

I ignore the flashes of the cameras behind me as my eyes rake over the sexiness of her knitted dress to the delicate nail

polish on her pretty toes. Jesus, she looks like a model on the cover of Vogue.

She steps closer to me when I pull her to my chest. I close my eyes briefly so I can smell the flowery scent of her perfume. I almost ditch the dinner and place her back in the car because what I want to do is take her back to my apartment and peel that dress off while I taste every inch of her skin. I don't want anyone to see her but me. I want her all to myself.

“Do I look okay?” she whispers.

I look down and I smile. “You look perfect. You look gorgeous, Aura. Thank you for coming with me.”

She gives me a white-toothed smile. Her straight white teeth against her lips make men go weak in the knees. I give her my arm and she slides hers through and we walk inside the restaurant.

Once we make it to the table with both men seated, they stand when they see me approach with Aura.

“Hello, gentlemen. Aura, these are my business associates. I have an upcoming project with them. They are building a tall skyscraper here in New York that I am funding. This is Mike Ryder and Frank Ipstein.”

“Hello,” she says in a soft voice.

Mike looks at her a little too hard for my taste, but I let it slide. This time. I give him a hard stare when I catch his gaze. He lifts his finger and wipes his brow nervously. Frank smiles at us both but looks away and takes his seat.

I assist Aura to her chair beside me. When Mike takes his seat, he glances at Aura once again when she is looking at the menu. I decide to talk about our business to avoid reaching over and strangling Mike for his wandering eyes. I don't know why, but anyone that looks at her like they are fucking her with their eyes, I want to commit murder.

After we agree on the date when construction will commence, Mike clears his throat. "So, Aura. How is it that you know Kalum?"

She lowers the menu. "Oh, we are old friends."

Mike's eyes light up at her answer. He licks his lips like she's a steak and I clench my teeth so hard I think they are about to snap off. I can't get mad at her answer. We are old friends, so why am I mad about her reference to us? *Because it means she is available. She isn't your girl. Her husband is dead and she can talk to or date whoever she wants. Eventually.*

She looks at the menu for a while longer and sets it down and gives me a wry smile. She bites her lip, and Mike's eyes follow the movement, his eyes lower, lingering on her chest and when he looks up at her, she looks away, trying to avoid his gaze. Fucking hell. Then I ask myself. How much do I care about this deal? I wipe my mouth with my hand like I have something on my face watching Mike.

Frank looks nervously at Mike and then back at me. He must read my expression because he motions for the waiter.

The waiter quickly approaches. “How can I help you? Are you ready to place an order?” the waiter asks when he reaches our table.

“I will have the Chilean sea bass,” Mike says.

“I’ll have the filet with scallops,” Frank says next when the waiter looks at him.

The waiter looks at Aura next and she says, “I’ll have a house salad with water, please.”

I frown and notice it is the cheapest item on the menu. Her hands are clasped on her lap and she is looking around the table at other people as they walk by when Mike gives her a predatory smile.

He leans closer, and my fists clench. “You know, you can order whatever you like. I will be more than happy to pay the bill. Maybe we could go somewhere after dinner?” he asks, giving her a wink.

Fuck it. I dismiss the waiter and I look Mike dead in the eyes. He leans back in his chair with a nervous expression.

“Look at her one more time, and I swear I will take this fork and stab your eyes out. If you ever so much as look at her or talk to her, I will end you.” I reach over the table like a madman in a movie and grip him by the throat and squeeze his pathetic excuse of a neck. The utensils and empty glasses rattle on the table, and people seated at the other tables begin to gasp next to us, but I don’t care. I’m seeing red. He makes a noise trying to get air inside his lungs.

“Please, Kalum. Let him go,” Frank pleads.

I release him, and Mike’s hands grip his neck as he tries to take deep breaths in a coughing fit.

“Are you insane?” he chokes out, gasping for breath like a fish out of water.

“For the record, she’s mine. Whatever deal we had is off.” I point at Mike with a fork in my hand. My voice lowers and my lip snarls. “Look at her again, and I’ll fork your fucking eyes out. Do you understand me?” I seethe.

“Yes. I’m sorry,” he croaks.

“Fuck you. The deal is off,” I repeat, making sure he is aware that I will never do business with him.

“Please, Kalum. He’s sorry,” Frank pleads.

“No,” I snap.

I look at Aura, and she is looking down, wringing her hands. “Let’s go, sweetheart. I don’t want you in this filthy creep’s presence a second longer.”

We make it outside, and the car is waiting. I’m sure I’ll be on the news, but I don’t care. I would never let anyone disrespect her like that. Ever. Not her.

“I’m sorry,” she says once we are in the car. She shakes her head. “I shouldn’t have come.”

“I wanted you to come.”

“But your deal.”

“There will be other ones. I have other deals lined up, and you are more important to me than any deal, Aura. That man was wrong and disrespectful. He made you feel uncomfortable, and I will not allow it. Fuck him.” I look over and her legs are crossed, her dress is so short when she sits that I can see a hint of her black lace thong. “Are you hungry?”

“Yes.”

“What would you like to eat?”

She tilts her head to the side and smiles. “I would like a hot dog.”

I chuckle. “A hot dog?”

“Yes, please. With mustard and ketchup.”

The thought of a hot dog shaped like a penis going inside her mouth has me wanting to bust out of my pants. I want to be that hot dog. I motion for Henry to stop at the hot dog stand on the corner and I jump out of the car and buy her one. Her eyes light up and it makes me want to get her all the hot dogs she wants just to see her expression like that.

I return to the car with our hot dogs and Cokes. “You’re the best,” she says.

I give her a grin at her praise and hand her the food. I nod at Henry, already instructing him to head toward my apartment.

“I hope you don’t mind finishing the rest of our evening at my place.”

She shrugs, eating her hot dog. Her tongue licks her lips and I squirm in my seat. I'm trying to adjust my raging hard-on without freaking her out or ruining the moment. I find a comfortable spot for my cock in my pants and sit while Henry drives us to my apartment.





*Chapter 15*



## Aura

The elevator doors open to Kalum's apartment just like the first time I arrived here with Lane. I'm still a little nervous about what happened at the restaurant with Mike and Frank. It isn't the first time a man has looked at me like I'm cattle, but the way Kalum grabbed him at the table startled me into silence. I know Kalum would never hurt me but the way he looked at Mike like he was going to kill him and for a moment, I thought he would. I felt horrible for Kalum and his position. He was defending me, but at the same time, his business deal was ruined, and it was because of me.

"I'm sorry about tonight," I say again.

He waves his hand. "It's nothing."

"It is something. You lost money because of me."

He turns to me. "Nothing is worth more than someone disrespecting you like that. Not to me."

His scent is all around me, and I chew the corner of my lip. My heart beats faster with every breath. With every second, he looks down at me. My body is suddenly aware of him.

Everywhere. I should feel shame for the heat between my legs. For the thoughts of his hands all over my body. I want him to peel my dress off so I can feel his hands on my skin. To feel what it is like to have him inside me.

What is wrong with me? This is wrong, but my body is saying it is right, my mind is confused.

“Aura?”

“Yes, Kalum.”

“Can I kiss you?”

My head tilts up and the confusion I am feeling melts away when I see the look of lust on his face, my nipples straining against the soft knitted fabric of the dress he bought me.

His black dress shirt is open at the throat, the swirl of colors of his tattoos peeking out, taunting me to reach out and touch them.

“I want to kiss you. I need to kiss you, Aura. Just a kiss.”

I close my eyes and nod my head, yes, thanking myself that I was able to throw away the hot dog wrapper and can of Coke before entering the elevator.

He moves forward in a rush, lifting me. My legs wrap around his waist, and he walks me to the huge window overlooking the city below. My back feels the smooth glass, and my ass feels the cold surface underneath. His lips caress mine softly, taking the time to feel our lips making contact. The firmness of his to the hint of lipstick still left on mine.

Oh, God. Please forgive me. I'm wet everywhere. I want him to touch me everywhere. I have felt so lonely. The memory of him kissing me the first time floods my thoughts and the way he is brushing his lips over mine as I melt into his arms reminds me of the first time in the bed all those years ago. Our first real kiss.

I whimper when he slides his tongue inside my mouth. His hands are spread wide on my outer thighs, holding me to him. He slides them higher, and the hem of my dress slides up to my waist, leaving the thin lace of my thong as the only barrier between the hard ridge of his cock stretching his pants and the lips of my pussy.

My hands slide into his hair, and he deepens the kiss. Our tongues seek and search, memorizing the taste of our mouths as they are fused together. The way our lips move over each other's, releasing and fusing together, sends a jolt of electricity through my body down to my core. Kalum rubs the top of his erection through his pants over my slit and I answer him by rubbing myself shamelessly over the ridge of his cock.

"Kalum," I say breathlessly.

"Yes, baby."

"Don't stop."

"I won't."

"Please."

He carries me to his bedroom and lays me on his bed. I want him. I want to know what it would have been like to be with

him. He was almost my first everything and I know deep down I was in love with Kalum. If he would have uttered one word that told me he wanted me, I would have given my heart and soul to him on a platter.

My legs are wrapped around his waist. He looks down at my black lace panties and slides his fingers into the sides by my hips and pulls them down my thighs over my heels. He slides his hand under me and slides the zipper down of the black minidress releasing the fabric from my chest down my arms.

When he peels it down my legs, I'm left in nothing but my heels. He raises himself on his elbows and lowers his gaze down my body, lingering between my open thighs, making a wet spot on his white sheets.

“Beautiful,” he whispers.

My heart soars at his praise. He didn't say I was pretty but beautiful. He lowers his head between my thighs and slides his tongue from the bottom of my slit over my clit, trailing his way with his tongue on my torso until he sucks each nipple inside his mouth.

The sensation of how savage it feels to have him lick me like I was candy makes me whimper.

“Oh, God,” I breathe.

“Do you know how beautiful you are, Aura?” he whispers.

He kisses his way up my neck until he reaches my mouth in a scorching kiss. My legs are over his hips with my heels still

on and it's so erotic to have him fully clothed and I'm naked in just my heels.

His arms are straining against the fabric of his dress shirt. I reach out and rip his shirt open. The buttons of his dress shirt scatter like tiny beads, hitting the pristine marble on the floor. The windows of his bedroom are open and anyone in the building across can see us. I turn my head and look over. He follows the path of my gaze and reaches to grab a remote on his bed. He presses a button on the screen of a high-tech remote and the glass tints, and then "Dusk Till Dawn" by ZAYN begins to play.

"They can't see," he whispers. "I'm going to make you mine. All mine. Everyone will know and everyone will see how much you belong to me."

The room charges at the sound of his words. My heart beats like a drum. Like a mantra before a ritual. You can feel the meaning behind his words. The meaning is pure. Plain as day. Only one word can describe what is taking place in this very room. Possession.

He removes his shirt, and my hands slide over every inch of his hot skin down to the rippling of his ab muscles. The ink of his tattoos on his skin under my fingers where new ink mixes with the old. I lean forward and place small kisses on his chest up and up his neck, breathing him in. Loving the scent of him.

He slides his pants off with his boxers and fists his cock. I look down and his cock is big with angry veins. He brushes the tip over my clit, and I moan at the contact. I'm so wet with

my arousal that you can hear wet noises when he rubs himself over me.

The sight of him, his beautiful body hovering over mine, and his brows pinching in concentration. He is holding himself back as his arms shake.

“Fuck,” he mutters. “You’re like a fantasy come true.”

My heart soars with his words. His breaths come out faster with each stroke of his cock over my slit. I arch my back, seeking more. I want him inside me. I crave it.

I say his name on a plea. “Kalum, please.”

He chuckles. “Patience. You have to know I have wanted you like this for a very, very long time.”

After the last word leaves his lips, he slides the thick head of his cock inside me, and a hiss escapes his lips. The feeling of him stretching me inch by inch has a moan escaping my lips as he fills me. I feel so full as his thick cock stretches me.

“Fuck. You feel so good, baby.”

He waits until I adjust because it feels tight, and I wonder how he can fit inside me. Kalum is massive everywhere; the man’s size reminds me of the Hulk. His muscles flex as he hovers over me as he begins to thrust inside me with deep, measured strokes like he is savoring every time he slides in and out.

His gaze catches mine as he moves inside me, and each time he slides out. “I love the way your pussy grips my cock, Aura. It is beautiful how wet you are for me right now, it feels like

heaven between your thighs. I'm going to fill you, to mark you as you have never been marked before." He leans closer to my ear, and I swear my heart is about to pop out of my chest. The feeling of his sinful words and how his cock is grinding in and out of me, making music with my arousal in the room mixed with the soft ballad of music playing in the background.

The wet sounds of his cock sliding in and out of me so slow is something I have never experienced, not even with Lane. Sex with Lane was soft, and he made me feel good and was never selfish but sex with Kalum is explosive. The soul-gripping kind. The unforgettable kind that you read in erotic novels when the man you have had fantasies about finally fills the burning need between your legs, making you forget where you are and where you came from. The kind of sex your mind goes to when you imagine someone making love to you when you slide your fingers, needing to pleasure yourself.

He slides out of me and slides me effortlessly to the edge of the bed, flipping me over. He turns his head to the side where there is an enormous mirror on the left wall. I steady myself since I still have my heels on and he grips my waist firmly in his hands.

I can see the reflection of us in the mirror and see his face but feel the tip of his cock from behind at my entrance. "Look at how beautiful you are when I take you from behind, Aura. Look at how you look when I take your wet pussy from behind. I'm going to come so deep inside you. So deep."



His lips are close to my ear when he slides inside of me, deep. I gasp at how deep he is inside of me, his cock stretching me. The slapping of our skin as he thrusts inside of me has my core clenching him. The sensation is making my nipples strain like I'm in a cold room but all I feel is hot and wet.

I moan when he angles his body slightly to the side, hitting me at just the right angle that has my climax building inside of me.

"I love the way your pussy grips me, milking my cock inside of you. Do you know what you do to me, Aura?"

"More, Kalum. I want more."

"I'll give you whatever you want. I want you, Aura. I want you so bad."

He thrusts inside of me faster and I can't take it.

I scream. "I'm coming! Oh, God. I'm coming!"

His hands grip my hips in a vise and I know I wear the marks on my skin. He pumps into me as I'm riding the wave of my orgasm. His skin is slapping against mine.

"Fuck. This is mine. All mine," he says on a groan when I feel my walls spasm around his thick cock and the heat of his cum is hot, spilling deep inside of me.

We stay like that for a minute. Neither of us moving. His cock seated deep inside of me, twitching. He pulls out slowly and I place my hands on the mattress. He pulls the blanket down and turns me around, dipping his head as he removes my heels.

When his eyes find mine, there are no words to describe the feelings that have surfaced. Like a giant wave in the middle of the dark sea, you can only see if you happen to be there in the middle of the dark ocean.

The crackle of energy inside the walls and windows of his bedroom has the small hairs on my skin standing up. He lifts me from the bed and places my head on his pillow. He raises my hands above my head and opens my thighs with his other hand. When he releases my hands, he slides it under my ass to raise me as he slides into me again and we both groan.

I'm wet and slick with our cum dripping between my thighs.

"I'm making a mess," I say as the trickle of our cum drips down my thighs.

He smirks. "We are both making a mess and it's the good kind. I won't tell the cleaning lady it was you that did it. She will think I'm a dirty little boy that jerks off. It will be our little secret, being that you're the only woman I have ever had in my bed in this apartment."

My chest clenches at the thought of me being the one he chose to have sex inside his house on his bed. To be the only woman that he finds worthy enough to be inside his room where no other has been making a mess of his sheets.

I bite my lip. "Keep doing that, Miss Rayne, and I'll have to bite the other side of that sexy lip of yours," he teases as he lowers his head toward my neck, biting it gently. "I'm just going to have to mark you here," he rasps against my skin, kissing every spot he bites. "And here."

Oh my God. I'm so screwed. He is so hot, and he feels amazing as he slides deep inside me, making me come for the second time and then a third. He makes love to me for hours until we are both spent. I don't think I have ever come so much in my entire life. He kisses and caresses every inch of me. I don't think there is a spot left on my body he hasn't explored. A spot he hasn't touched but the part of me that he has stolen, is my soul. He's taken it and I'm afraid he will never give it back.



*Chapter 16*



## Kalum

“Like this?” I ask Lane.

“Yep. The pancakes bubble and then it gets crispy on the edges and then, you flip it.” His little voice is adorable as he instructs me on the way his mom makes him pancakes in the morning.

I flip the pancake and then, voilà. It flops without breaking.

“Got it.”

“You see? You did it. You just have to make sure it isn’t mushy, it will taste horrible.” He grimaces, making a face with his forehead scrunching up.

“How did you get so smart?” I ask him.

Lane Jr. is really smart for his age, and he explains things in detail. He analyzes things in a way that makes a grown-up understand them better.

“That’s easy. I pay attention to my mommy. She is very smart and very pretty. Do you think my mommy is smart and pretty?”

“I do.”

“My grandma and grandpa don’t like my mom very much. They said mean things about her, and when my daddy wasn’t paying attention, she would cry. They are not very nice, but my auntie Exie is the best.”

I lean on the counter after I place the pancake on the plate and slide it over to him after shutting off the burner on the stove.

“Don’t worry. I’ll make sure your mommy never cries again unless it’s because she is happy.”

Lane takes a piece of pancake inside his mouth with gusto. He chews and scrunches his forehead in thought.

“Promise?”

“You have my word.”

“Okay, Kalum. I trust you.”

I laugh and then I hear the doorbell ring and my phone go off in a text from security I have outside.

*Security: You have a visitor. A Miss Turner. She says she is related to Miss Rayne.*

*Me: It is fine.*

I walk over to open the front door and Exie moves inside the house.

“Well, hello to you too. Welcome,” I say sarcastically.

Exie is rambunctious and always gives me a hard time when it comes to Aura. I realized it when Lane made it known to me

that he was into Aura when I visited him the day after the fair and I saw him with Aura and his friends.

“Where is she?”

“Aunt Exie!” Lane shouts, jumping off the chair and running into her arms.

“There’s my little man! Where’s your momma?”

“Sleeping, but Kalum made me breakfast.”

“He did?”

“Yep. It’s good too. He’s a good listener.”

“It was my first time making pancakes.”

Exie rolls her eyes. “Oh please, it’s not that hard.”

“Actually, I couldn’t have done it without Lane’s help. Right, buddy?”

“Right.” He beams.

“Where’s my best friend? “

“In the master bedroom, last door on the right,” I instruct her.

She saunters off in the direction of the bedroom.



*Chapter 17*





## Aura

The sound of the bedroom door opening and closing wakes me, and my eyes flutter, but I squint against the bright light of the sun from the windows.

The sound of Exie's voice filters through my foggy brain. "Don't you look all well rested."

I sit up on the bed and grip the cream color sheet over my naked breasts. I look down and then up at my best friend, rubbing my eyes, and the memory of last night comes flooding back, guilt slowly creeping up my neck from the throbbing soreness between my legs.

"What time is it?" I say in a sleepy voice.

"Noon."

My hands brush my hair from my face. "Shit."

"Relax." She sits on the bed with a knowing smile. "You rode the magic train, didn't you?"

My eyes widen as I fall back down on the bed. "Is it obvious?"

She snickers. “The man is shirtless, dressed in sweats in all his tatted goodness, making pancakes for your son, my nephew, when I knocked on the door and he let me inside. Looks like he liked the magic train just as much as you did.”

“I’m such a harlot.”

“Was he as good as they say he is?”

“Oh my God, Exie. Please? Are you crazy? How can you ask me that?”

“I’m just curious.” She taps me over the comforter I’m currently hiding under. “Remember what I told you. It was bound to happen. It should have happened a long time ago, but it didn’t and now it did. Stop feeling bad about it.”

“How can I not feel bad about it? My husband was his friend and I have a child.”

“My brother is dead and left you with a big mess to clean up, I might add, and you have mourned and cried. It is time you stop crying and feeling bad for everyone else because of what they think, and yes, they were friends, but as much as I hate to say it, and he does get on my nerves”—she points toward the closed bedroom door—“that man out there has suffered in giving you up. He loved you first, Aura. This is his second chance and I have a gut feeling he wants you to give him that chance.”

I place my hands over my eyes to stop the stinging from my eyes. I feel guilty because of Lane. This is wrong but my heart

tells me deep down it isn't. It was sex. That is all it was. Kalum doesn't want marriage or children. I'm fine. I'm good.

*Liar.*

Closing my eyes, the feeling inside my chest that squeezes and flutters tells me one thing I'm afraid to admit, even to myself. I'm in love with him all over again. I'm in love with Kalum St. Claire and there is no way he will ever love me back the same way.

I tilt my head and look at Exie. "You are aware that his parents hate me just as much as your parents do? His parents kicked me out of their house and tried to pay me off so I'd leave quietly."

She snorts. "Yeah, I know, but he obviously gives zero fucks about what they think. To prove a point, he bought a house in the Hamptons for like twenty million for you and my nephew to live so no one fucks with you. He also has a driver, security, and someone you trust to help you out with Lane. I'm sorry, but if that isn't a sign that he cares for you or has some deep feelings swirling in that black heart of his, then I don't know what is, but what I do know is he's been on your side through it all."

I get changed into simple leggings and a knitted cropped sweater and head out to the kitchen with Exie trailing behind me. I stop short when I see Kalum on the couch watching cartoons on the TV with Lane. My stomach flutters at the sight of both of them sprawled on the couch with Lane lying on Kalum's side like they have been doing this every day.

“Jesus, I hate to say it, but he is every single mother’s dream,” Exie whispers. “And you know how I feel about the way he goes through women, but with you, he was always different. What he is doing with Lane right now, I can’t hate him even if I wanted to.”

“I know, that is what makes it so hard,” I whisper back.

I can’t read too much into this. He is doing it because he was good friends with his father and it has nothing to do with me. I need to get a grip and get over these feelings I have for Kalum. Old feelings that I thought were long buried in heartbreak and sorrow. Feelings that should have never resurfaced because I moved on with a man that was there for me when I had no one. He died and now I’m all alone raising his son among the wolves that want to destroy his reason for choosing his career path and for choosing me. The young girl with no parents, no money, and no education. I’m no one and they will do whatever it takes to remind me and everyone that I’m nothing.

“Hey,” I manage to say.

Kalum and Lane turn their heads at the same time and both give me a smile that has my heart conflicted. One was my first real love, and the other, the spitting image of his father.

“Hi, Mommy. Did you sleep good?”

“Hey, gorgeous,” Kalum greets me with a husky voice.

“Yes, baby. Mommy slept good. Have you been a good boy and been nice to Kalum for watching over you this morning?”

His eyes light up. “Yep, I even showed Kalum how you make pancakes, and he did a great job. Now when you sleep in, he can make them for me.”

Exie clears her throat. “Come on, kiddo. Let’s get you cleaned up.”

He gets up, fist-bumps Kalum and follows Exie after giving me a morning hug.

“Thank you for watching him and making him breakfast. You didn’t have to do that.”

Kalum sits up and my eyes trail over his ripped chest and torso with all his ink. My legs clench, reminding me how his skin felt under my fingers. Every ridge and curve of his muscles under the taut, smooth skin brings back to life the memory of him inside me.

“It was my pleasure. I wanted to spend some time with him so he can feel safe and comfortable around me if you aren’t around or... if you’re tired.”

The way he says his last words makes heat creep up my neck to my cheeks at the hidden meaning. The delicious soreness between my legs is a reminder of why I’m so tired this morning.

I make my way into the kitchen to make coffee and clean up any mess they have made. He gets up and stands right behind me while I prepare the Keurig and I can feel his heat. The heat of his body behind me when he bends down, he places a soft kiss to my neck, making my body come alive. Goose bumps

snake over my skin, igniting my nipples under my soft cotton bra. His fingers graze my waist to pull me back slightly and I can feel his hard erection on my lower back. My head tilts back against his chest.

“Every chance I get, I want to be inside you. Making you mine over and over,” he says softly. “Despite the thoughts that must be creeping inside your beautiful head, just remember, you were mine first.”

I think my heart just skipped a beat, or it stopped beating because he took it right out of my chest. It means I never imagined it. The feelings I had for him. The ones I refused to acknowledge in the past, in his bed, while he was tasting me, prepping me and then I wonder why he let me go. Why would he let me think he never wanted me in any way except to play with me because I was forced into his life, and he didn't want me? It doesn't make sense. He doesn't make sense.

Before I can voice my inner thoughts and unanswered questions, the front door opens and closes with the chime of the alarm that indicates someone has walked in. I can hear the tap of heels clicking against the wood. I can feel the loss of heat as Kalum steps back.

“Well, well. It all makes sense now. I can't blame you. You could have done it without an audience, but hey, looking at both of you together, I get it,” Janine's voice drawls.

“What the fuck are you talking about and what brings you here, Janine?” Kalum chides.

My head turns, and she gives me a wink. Obviously used to Kalum's sarcasm and condescending attitude.

“Did you really have to grab him by the neck and threaten to scoop his eyes out with a fork? I mean, you could have kicked his ass in an alley somewhere where no one was watching and made your point. The guy is threatening to sue you for assault. The only reason I have to believe you terminated the deal and threatened to basically kill the guy is because of her, you know, with the scoop the eyes out part.”

“He disrespected her and was a total douchebag creep. He kept fucking her with his eyes, and I wasn't going to sit there and take it.”

“Well. He is threatening to sue you unless you move forward with funding the project.”

“Fuck No! I will never do business with him again. He can go fuck himself and if he wants to sue me, fine. He will have to build his fucking building in Alaska because when I'm done with the bastard, the only thing he will build will be using a box of Legos because no one is going to fund him for shit. He sat there and offered to pay for her dinner and asked her out after dinner to basically fuck her.”

My eyes go wide with the anger that is seeping from his body. Kalum is seething from last night. I didn't realize how upset he was about that creep trying to make a pass at me in front of Kalum at a business dinner.

Janine holds up her hands. “Fine. I will handle it with the lawyer.”

“What happened?” Exie waltzes in with Lane.

Lane has his car and goes to the living room to play with his new track set that Kalum must have sent over yesterday.

Janine gives Exie the details about what happened last night. Exie looks at me with a smirk.

“Stop looking at me like that,” I tell her while the sound of the machine making coffee filters the room with the smell of freshly brewed coffee.

Janine smiles. “You are Exie Turner.”

Exie smiles at Janine. “In the flesh. I wonder.” She points at Kalum with her thumb. “How do you put up with him? I mean, I would have stabbed him by now.”

“Trust me, you get used to him after a while and since I’m not into men and he loves the fact. It works out.”

“Why are you two talking about me like I’m not here?”

Exie tilts her head and says sarcastically, “Because we can. I don’t work for you and run my own family business. The woman you have been head over heels for since high school is my best friend, and you need her because no one, and I mean no one, will put up with your work attitude.”

Kalum rolls his eyes and shakes his head, brushing off whatever Exie says. The part that gets me is the part that he doesn’t acknowledge what we shared last night. Like it was a dream and what we shared never took place. Finally giving in to each other. His next words don’t calm my raging soul that screams inside of me like a warning.



“I did what anyone would have done in that situation. It was wrong and if you ever ask someone to go with you to a business dinner and those people treat them like they are a piece of meat and embarrass you, you would have done the same thing I did for a friend. It was wrong, and he deserved it.”

A friend? That is how he sees me? A friend? I grip the handle of the fridge and close it more forcefully than I should have when I put back the creamer for my coffee. No one notices except Exie, and the look she gives me tells me she understands my doubts about Kalum and his true intentions.

Regret instantly floods my veins, mixed with guilt. Regret for giving in to Kalum and sleeping with him when I should have known better and guilt for feelings I should not be having for someone from my past that was friends with my husband. My eyes sting because of the shame I'm feeling. How could I have been so stupid to think I meant anything more to Kalum than any other woman he has been with. There is no way Kalum will ever see me as more than a friend. It was fear that I felt deep inside, and I should have listened to it, and now I need to stick to the plan I had more than ever.

Save money and start my life on my own terms. I probably will not be able to give Lane Jr. the material things his father could provide until he is of age and he can inherit everything his father left him, but where I grew up and how my parents raised me taught me one thing, and that was love. It is the most important thing that will matter. Fancy things are nice, but love is priceless. There is no money that can amount to the

love of a mother that would sacrifice everything for their child  
and that is what I vow to give to Lane Jr. My love and support.



*Chapter 18*



## Kalum

It has been two weeks since that night with Aura. I have been avoiding her because I don't know what to say or how to act. She has been distant ever since that day Janine scolded me about what happened with the dinner. That asshole has backed off, but I'm more nervous about what I'm about to do. A step I'm about to take with my parents. Something monumental that has to take place for my sanity, or everything I have sacrificed would have been for nothing. My ultimate sacrifice was... her. I had to let her go because of them.

The door to my office opens and Janine strolls in. "Your parents are in the conference room with the..." She clears her throat. "Colorful bears, and the screen is on with the rest of the board members. I wanted to ask..."

"What, Janine?" I ask impatiently.

I lean back in my office chair, looking at her with her short hair and impeccable suit as she stands there with her hands clasped together and I'm sporting a grin.

"Bears, sir? Why would you have ten bears, one seated in every chair and two envelopes?"

“You will understand because you are coming with me to share the news.”

“What news?”

I get up from the chair and straighten my suit jacket. “You will see. Everything has a purpose, and they will soon understand mine.”

“Whatever,” she mutters, shaking her head, waiting for me to head out of my office.

We enter the boardroom, and my father is the first one to call out. “Kalum. What is the meaning of this meeting? And why are you still keeping these bears? If I have to look at these bears a second longer—”

I raise my hand to stop him from rambling on. “You will see. Please.” I wave to the other two vacant seats at the table so they can take a seat and I can explain the purpose for calling this meeting with the board.

“Have a seat, Mother.” I nod in her direction. “Father.” I nod in his direction.

Once they are seated, I unmute the screen where all the board members are in attendance to give them the news of an upcoming decision before it is released to the press.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I am ready to begin this meeting so we can make our announcement.”

“Yes,” they all say in unison.

I look at both of my parents while I hold both envelopes made out in their names.

“I have called this meeting because of an important decision that has been made by all board members regarding both of your futures with the company. You have been active members and founders of this organization but as silent holders, we have come to the conclusion that you are no longer needed as active members.”

“What is the meaning of this, Kalum? Have you lost your mind?” my mother says, her face red with rage.

“Actually. I haven’t lost my mind. You see, I have sacrificed my life for this company, and the other board members agree. I have quadrupled what both of you have generated in profits as the current CEO of this company, and apparently, I have the majority share joined with the rest of the board members. We outvote you. We have come to the decision that you will no longer be on the board of this company, and I am prepared to give you your remaining share, plus a bonus. You have more than enough put away for the rest of your lives and this will not affect you financially.”

“What is the point of this, Kalum? You cannot take the company away from us. We built it!” My father roars.

My voice is hard and laced with steel. “Like I said, I am freeing you of any obligation from the St. Claire conglomerate. Both of you are no longer needed.”

I slide the white envelopes across the table. They both open them and my mother is the first to look like she will faint. She

places her hand on her chest and blurts. “One hundred thousand dollars! Are you out of your mind?”

I chuckle sarcastically. “You see these bears?” I point and everyone looks at them. The board from the camera, my parents, and Janine. “I am going to share a story with you all about the meaning of these bears and why they are a reminder for me and why I am reluctant to part with them. My senior year of high school, there was this girl I met in my own house, of all places. She had nowhere to go after her parents were killed in a car accident. My parents wanted me to be nice and make sure she fit in and be nice to her because she was just seventeen and would make a great housekeeper once she turned eighteen in three months. You know how rich people are, they take advantage of the less fortunate, but one thing that never crossed their minds was that their beloved son and heir to their company and fortune would fall in love with her. She was beautiful and had a heart made of gold. She was kind, and all she wanted was love and a normal opportunity. The only option she was given was to be a housekeeper to a rich family and had no choice but to agree. A teenage girl who was the top five in her class but had no money to go to college because her parents were tragically killed and weren’t wealthy enough to leave her money. So, my parents struck a deal with a judge to make her our housekeeper when she turned eighteen. She was alone, had no one and no family. Once my parents found out how I really felt about her and what I had planned on the day of her birthday, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Their son could not possibly

want the girl that was destined to be their housekeeper. It was not allowed in their book and they sure as hell did not care how I felt about it. She was good enough to clean toilets but not for their son. I tried to hide my feelings for her the best I could so no one would notice because I had the gut feeling they would make her suffer. I really tried but then there was a good friend of mine that fell for her the same way I did. You would think the girl had a special spell she would cast on any guy that she would smile at but that wasn't the case. She was just genuine and beautiful. Wholesome. When she would look at me, she would see the real me. What no one could see, she saw it. She didn't care what my last name was or if I had money.”

The room falls silent, listening, waiting for what I say next. I look at the bears and the memories come flooding back to the night she left. The night I knew she would never come back to me. The night that I lost the girl I was in love with and she didn't even know it.

“I left for a football game that night before she turned eighteen. I had a surprise, you see. I rented a cabin for the whole weekend, beginning the day she turned eighteen. The night before that, I spent hours winning her these bears you see seated in every chair in this boardroom. It wasn't the bear she was happy to see when she woke that morning. It was the fact that I had won her the bears. I was the happiest guy alive. I was finally able to impress the girl I loved. When I came home that night of the football game, I didn't think anything of it and didn't want to wake her. I had no idea what my parents



had done. The next morning, I found a note with these bears on her bed. My parents offered her one hundred thousand dollars to leave and never come back. They lied to her and told her rumors in the community that they took advantage of her and her situation caused them to make the decision.”

My tone lowers, and I hear Janine’s intake of breath. “They told her I would be heading away with my friends and that it was a good offer for her to go since she was eighteen and had no family and no money. What they didn’t tell her was that they didn’t want the community to know that their son was in love with the housekeeper. That he would do anything to be with her. She left that night alone with only a suitcase to her name. She left the money and a note wishing me well. Saying that she was thankful for my parents’ hospitality and that all she wished was for me to find someone to love.”

My loss and my pain are pouring out of me in front of everyone, but I don’t care. They need to know why. So, I continue.

“The guy I was afraid to lose her to found her waiting in the strip mall she would go to get groceries for my parents every week. He took her in and gave her a place to stay. I looked for her everywhere that day and her best friend was his sister. She told me not to worry, that she would be safe and her brother would look after her. She never returned to school and finished her degree online, and I never saw her again. She must have thought the worst of me, and I tried calling her to explain. To tell her that my parents didn’t understand, but she never answered my calls.”

“What happened?” Janine asks from behind me.

I don't tell them the time I spoke with Lane about Aura and how I felt about her and what my plan was. I have never told a soul the conversation I had with him. Man to man. Friend to friend, about a girl we both loved.

I just tell them the part that ended up wrecking me and forcing me to let go because I was too late. I never stood a chance with what they did. I had nothing to offer her. I was barely graduating high school, but Lane was older than me and he was an outcast in his parents' eyes and was already well-off. He could do for her what I couldn't.

“She fell in love with him and ended up getting married and having a child.”

I point to my parents with their checks in hand, with both of their mouths agape.

“You took something from me. Now, I'm going to take something from you. You took what was the most important thing to me. Her. Now I want you to feel what it's like for someone to take something from you.”

“You can't be serious, Kalum,” my father says in disbelief. “We are your parents.”

“And she was the love of my life, and you took that away from me. You wanted me to be the CEO. I'm the CEO like both of you wanted but on my terms, not yours.”

“You have to get over it, son. She married Lane Turner.”

“Because of you!” I roar.

I sit down, trying to calm down and wipe my face. “Now you know why I can’t stand to look at both of you. You kicked her out like she was nothing because she didn’t have the right last name or a significant bank balance. You are no different than her late husband’s parents but there is something none of you counted on. And that was how much I cared for her. Now, you all understand.”

I get up and the room falls silent with Janine hot on my heels. I look up at the screen with everyone’s look of shock but an expression of understanding. “Thank you all for attending.”

“Yes, sir,” they all say.

“For the record, sir,” Timothy says, leaning forward on his camera. “I hope you find her, and you have all of our support.”

A faint, light-colored floral pattern is visible in the upper portion of the page, featuring stylized flowers and leaves. The text "Chapter 19" is centered over this pattern.

## *Chapter 19*



## Aura

The sun finishes setting, and the darkness begins to take over as I gaze out, looking at the ocean. I'm seated in a chair out by the shoreline behind the house. It is beginning to get cooler, but I need to make peace. When Lane died, his request was for his ashes to be spread in the sea. He wanted me to be able to talk to him from anywhere I was with Lane Jr. I understand it now. He never wanted to be buried in a cemetery. Lane had this inner free spirit.

I feel guilty about my feelings for Kalum and my love for Lane. I'm so confused right now, but I need to let go. I need to find myself. The waves begin to pound the shoreline and it is like a calling. Like he is listening even if I feel lost. He said I was the lightning to his tidal wave, but the shallow waters never met what I needed. I had no choice but to let go. All that is left is the silence of the eternal sea.

"I have to let you go," I whisper. "I will always love you, Lane. I will never forget you and promise to take care of our son with everything that I am, but I confess that I love him. I

think you knew I always did and always will. It doesn't mean I have to choose. I just wanted to let you know."

I talk to the wind, to the sea, and hope wherever he is, that he can listen and understand my bleeding heart. I get up and touch the cool water of the sea and turn to find Camila standing a few feet away with a blanket in her arms, waiting for me.

"He will understand, my love," Camila says softly.

"I hope so."

She knows me well enough to know what I'm doing out here. She must see it in the expression on my face, basking in the twilight.

"You're in love with him all over again, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am, but he could never love me. He never said the words and I understand that I am not part of his world and would never fit in his world. I am not good enough, just like I was never good enough for Lane."

"Oh, honey. That is not true. The problem is you are too good for any of them. You must believe that."

Tears slide down my face because all I feel is sadness and the only light in my life is Lane Jr. "I don't. I keep trying to do the right thing, but it comes at a price. I can't keep paying that price because I'm losing myself, Camila. I will do right by my son and what his father wanted for him, but I need to leave here. I can't stay here."

Camila walks up to me and wraps the blanket around my shoulders. “If that is what you feel right now, then go, but I’m coming with you. It is what your mother would have wanted. I promised that if anything happened to her, I would look after you, and I finally have you back. I am not leaving you and Lane Jr. I will help you with him. You are not alone, Aura. I have faith in Kalum, but I understand you cannot force someone or something.”



“Are you ready?” Dex says as I grab my helmet and look at Lane’s prized modified GT-R.

“I hope so. Are you sure I can do this, Dex?”

“He showed you how to drive the thing and he wanted you to be the only one to drive it besides Lane. I can’t possibly go against what he wanted. They want to speak on behalf of Turner Automotive before you take it to the track to clock in the lap time zero to sixty and the quarter mile and we should be good.”

He means Lane and his ideas for what he wanted for his modifications in the Japanese street racing world. NASCAR tried to recruit Lane, but he wasn’t interested. He loved Japanese imports and modifying them in a way that felt like a production vehicle. Major manufacturers took notice and offered Lane millions for his built engines and how he was able to tune the vehicle to flawlessly be fast. Anyone can make a car go fast, but can the car withstand the test of time without having issues? That is what Lane did. He built engines that were flawless and every street racer enthusiast wanted their car built by Lane Turner.

“You got my music, Dex?”

“It’s up on the speaker on the track, Aura. The media are televising this on the air. I wanted you to know.”

I take a deep breath. *I’m doing this for Lane Jr.*, I tell myself. This is for our son and his future.

I walk up to the podium with flashes of cameras and some representatives from car manufacturers that are present. What makes me more nervous is the fact that Lane’s parents are here, and they are watching with hard expressions. They are



not happy with the amount of spotlight being shown on me driving Lane's car on the track with one of the last modifications tuned by Lane.

"Mrs. Turner? Please tell us what is expected of your husband's latest build. Everyone is dying to see how fast it is. We all know his record has been beaten in different circuits but there is nothing quite like a car built by Lane Turner. He builds truly impressive machines. Is it true he can modify Lamborghinis and not just Japanese imports?" A major reporter from ESPN starts rambling off a series of questions.

I'm nervous about all the questions and how I respond, but first and foremost, I have to address my name before Lane's parents threaten me again with their lawyers.

"Thank you for all being here. My name is Aura Rayne, not Mrs. Turner. I know that sounds confusing, but according to my husband's parents and his inheritance from the Turner legacy, apart from my husband's company in the racing world, I was told that I could not use it to capitalize in any way."

Voices begin to rise as people begin to look at his parents in shock and dismay.

"Please, I am not saying this to attack them in any way, but legally, I must not be addressed as Mrs. Turner. My name is Aura Rayne. To some, that doesn't mean much because my parents were not wealthy or famous. They passed away three months before I was eighteen. I have no family except for my son and my best friend Exie and a handful of friends that really know me. The only thing I'm known for is the bracelets

I sell online.” I shrug my shoulders. “I’m no one special, but my late husband always made me feel like I was. He taught me to drive his cars and to answer most of your questions, he left his legacy to his only son Lane Jr. Dex and Blaze”—I point in their direction—“are the backbone of Tuner automotive and with my help and the instructions Lane left, will carry out what Lane wanted.”

Dex has Lane Jr. on his shoulders, cheering. Blaze is smiling and Exie is giving me a thumbs-up.

I smile and wave to Lane Jr., whose face is lit up with a smile. “I will take Lane’s car to the track and give you his latest time as he taught me and I know deep in my heart it will be the best and fastest because it was built by him with his heart and soul. Thank you.”

I leave the podium and everyone screams and shouts. “Aura, where can we buy your bracelets?”

“Aura, is it true the Turners disowned you?”

“Aura, do you think his son will be just as great as his father?”

I close my eyes and head to the track where the imposing car is waiting for me in all its glory.

Dex is smiling with the car door open. “Just like he taught you, Aura. You are quite the famous widow. Social media is going apeshit with you right now. Everyone is watching.”

“Yeah, I guess. I’m going to do this for Lane Jr. and what Lane wanted.”

“He couldn’t have married a better woman. He loved you, and you were everything to him. He wanted me to always remind you.”

I place the helmet over my head and secure it. Then slide my fingers in the leather gloves before sliding in the cockpit of the car. “Thanks, Dex.”

I rev the car just like I was taught by Lane and prepare the launch mode. The car must have the fire blazing from the exhaust of the car behind like I have seen so many times. The engine roars with the sound of the exhaust like a deafening roar. My heart is galloping like wild horses at the over three thousand horsepower that is under the hood. The screen on the car mapping is on and in place to record the lap time. It will be quick and scary, but the cooler temperatures are what is best for the engine and tires.

I grip the steering wheel and tell myself like a mantra. *I can do this. I can do this.* I repeat in my head. “Unstoppable” by Sia plays loudly from the speakers. The sound of the car mixing with the sound of Sia’s voice spurring me on.

The flag is down, and the car roars forward, almost jumping from the line. The adrenaline courses through my veins as tunnel vision takes over my eyesight.



*Chapter 20*



## Kalum

The GT-R is on the jumbotron in New York. People are in awe as the most gorgeous woman is behind the wheel of the impressive car as it takes the track by storm, roaring with fire igniting in flashes from the exhaust of the powerful beast of a car. People are cheering and going crazy.

“If that isn’t woman empowerment, I don’t know what is,” Janine says from behind me.

I smile and turn my head toward her. “It is, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, I think I’m in love,” she says with a sigh.

I snort. “Good luck with that.”

“I’m kidding. I know how you feel about her. What I want to know is, what are you going to do about it?”

I scratch my brow. “I’ll give her time. I think she needs some time.”

“Why? I know it’s none of my business, but... why?”

I turn to face her completely. “Because I would die if she still chose him. Even if he is no longer with us. I don’t know

how I would handle that.”

I don't tell her, but I don't think I would survive it.

“You won't know if you don't tell her or show her how you feel, St. Claire. It's time you show her. It is time you showed her what she has always meant to you.”

I'm in my office when I see an envelope with my name scrawled over it on my desk like it is a bomb waiting to detonate. I saw an envelope like this when Lane passed.

I turn it over and open it, wondering what my good friend wanted to tell me when he thought the time was right.

*Kalum,*

*If you have received this letter. It has been a year I've been gone. Knowing Aura, she would have waited this long before venturing out on her own, not caring if my wish was for you to look after her. Knowing her, she would have placed every dime in a trust fund like I figured she would for our son and not touch a dime. She was always like that. She must have thought I didn't notice how she would avoid buying anything for herself, but I did. I noticed. I should have tried harder, but I was so wrapped up in my selfish ways with my cars that I neglected her in a way. The purpose of this letter is the hope you can look out for her either way. If you haven't found love, or maybe you have, but if you haven't and you still love her the way I know deep down, you still do and always will.*

*Do what I should have done and put her first. Love her like I should have loved her. You're my boy, and if anyone deserves*

*Aura, it is you. It was always you. Like you said to me that night you bought the jeep for her, if you love someone enough, you let them go even if they don't come back to you. If that is not love, brother, then I don't know what is. That jeep brought her to me and hopefully it will bring her back to you in some way. I may have had her past, but you have her present and now you have her future. I trust you with my son, and I trust you with the girl we both fell in love with and promised to take care of. The same way you trusted me to care for her, I trust you to do the same if I am gone. We both knew it would happen. A guy can only escape death on the track by pushing the limit so many times. My time is up, and now it's your time. Make the most of it, Kalum. Don't ever doubt the love she had for you, Kalum. I saw it that night in the diner when she poured her heart out to me. It was her love for you that was in her heart. I wanted you to know that.*

*PS: Don't let her pick the least expensive item on the menu.*

*Your friend always.*

*Lane Turner.*

I place the letter on my desk and look down, not believing what I just read. The fucker was always a strategist. It is creepy how he knew that he would die earlier than he expected. He was a loner and an introvert but fell in love with the same girl I did.

The door from my office opens and Janine enters. She is the only one that enters without knocking since she knows my

work habits and my schedule. Now, she knows the girl that has me fucked up mentally and emotionally. My weakness.

“So are you still going to stay in the house and try to win your girl back? Woo her?”

“Woo her?” I volley back. “Who the hell says that word anymore?”

“Well, you need to do something and not let her go this time around. She will be back after some dinner Camila told me about.”

I frown. “Dinner? What dinner?”

She waves her hand as she picks up the file that has my next project and prospectus. “Some family dinner they want Aura and Lane Jr. to attend at some country club in Spencer. She is staying with Exie, and they will drive up there.”

Why? So they can make her feel like an outsider and remind her how she doesn't fit in their world of snobby, rich people? Not on my fucking watch.

“Get my plane ready to go to Spencer.”

Her eyes widen. “You're just going to show up there?”

“Get me the flight, Janine.”

I don't need to tell her what is obvious. I'm going to be there for her. For them. It is not just Aura. It is Lane Jr., too. They're a package deal. I need to be there for them. That is what matters right now. The Turners are like vultures circling around, waiting for their next meal so they can feel



empowered. They are just upset they couldn't control him the same way my parents tried to control me and my life. That is what Lane and I had in common. We knew what and who our family was and what they were capable of. He had his way, and I had mine of dealing with our families.



*Chapter 21*



## Aura

“Are you sure this looks okay?” I ask Exie.

I’m looking at myself in the floor-length mirror wearing a white pantsuit with nude high heels Exie recommended I wear.

“You look hot, and that outfit gives you an air of confidence. That is the look we are going for to deal with my parents and their country club dinner. They want Lane Jr. to be a part of some family functions.”

“Funny how Christmas and birthdays don’t count. It is not like I’m desperate for an invite, but you know what I mean.”

“I know what you mean. I can’t even show up with Dex. They will have a fit. They want me to marry some wealthy, rich prick from the right family. That is how Lane felt and why he left as soon as he graduated and didn’t take a dime of their money.” She sighs. “They hate the fact that he did the opposite of what they wanted.”

I swipe the brush over my hair one last time before we leave. “That includes marrying me and me having Lane Jr. I’m not who they wanted for your brother.”

“They will get over it, and that’s why you need to just show up, say hi, and then bye. End of story. They can’t say you didn’t show up and tried to keep Lane Jr. from them.”

It is easy for her to say because she is their only living daughter and the only one to inherit and run the family company. I don’t tell her that, so she doesn’t feel bad for taking me there to the dinner their family requested Lane Jr. and I attend. To me, it is like I’m going to meet the executioner.

Camila is going along with Dex. It was the only way we could get Dex to go without causing a fuss with the Turners. They will go apeshit if they find out that Exie and Dex are actually together. They make a great couple and are so in love. I can’t wait to head back to the Hamptons. I have found living in Kalum’s home to be a hidden sanctuary. It is like our own hideaway where no one can attack us or show up and demand anything from me because I was Lane’s sole beneficiary.

We arrive at the over-the-top country club in Spencer. My hands shake slightly as I hold Lane Jr.’s hand.

“Are you okay, Mommy? Your hand is cold and your hand is shaking a bit,” he whispers.

I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding as I walk behind Exie and Camila. “I’m okay. Just a little nervous, sweetie.”

“It’s okay, Mommy. I won’t let them get to us. I’ll protect you. We’re a team. If they say or do anything, I’ll tell our friend Kalum. He will help us.”

My chest tightens at how he refers to Kalum like he is our savior. They have gotten close since that day he stayed and made Lane breakfast. The way Kalum was with him, so patient. It made me fall for him even more. Kalum has been a force that has come and swept us away into this sanctuary. A sanctuary I'm reluctant to leave but know that eventually we will have to.

"I know, baby, but we got this. You and me. We have to stick together. We're a family."

The country club is like those you see on TV, with the marble floors and traditional wall paneling and jazz music playing softly in the background as we are greeted by the hostess.

Exie lets the hostess know that we are with the Turners and that they are waiting for our arrival. We are escorted to a long table with white chairs and candelabras lighted with candles that give a soft glow. It is a refined restaurant that caters to the superrich. Waiters are passing by in their black and white uniforms making sure wine and water are topped off for each guest.

"There they are!" Lane's mother says in her fake voice.

Like she misses us and we are the most important part of her family that hadn't yet arrived. All fake and all lies. I notice other people are seated at the table that I don't recognize.

"Hello, Mrs. Turner." I give her my best smile. I turn and glance at Mr. Turner. "Hello, Mr. Turner."

He gives me a smile, but it doesn't reach his eyes. "Hello, Aura."

His cold eyes land on Lane Jr., and his expression softens a fraction but then hardens. It is like he wants to accept his grandson, but something inside holds him back. It is sad really to not want to embrace your own grandson when he is the spitting image of your dead son. A son you had a strained relationship with.

I take a seat in the far corner with Lane, Camila, and Dex. Exie greets her parents with a curt hello and their eyes follow Camila and Dex like we are the outcasts and are not worthy to sit with them but, under certain circumstances, are granted the privilege.

"So, I am glad you all could make it. We haven't spent much time with Lane Jr.," Lane's mother chimes in and everyone stops midsentence and turns their head to look our way.

My face heats, but I maintain my composure. They could have made the effort to attend Lane's birthday. We had a small cake and gifts at Kalum's house. It was the first birthday he had without his father present and it was hard on all of us. Christmas wasn't any better and you would think his parents would have a soft spot for their only grandson, but all they did was send an email from their personal assistant. What type of monsters do that? The Turners apparently.

"We have been spending time in New York. You are all more than welcome to visit," I answer.

“Oh, yes. I heard Exie mentioning something like that. Where are you staying exactly? The Bronx? East Harlem? It must be hard since you are working but at least you did the right thing and placed Lane Jr.’s inheritance in a trust that his father left him.”

My teeth grind together. She always thinks I’m poor, and she knows I put everything in the trust and would not touch a dime. She means Lane left our son money and always has to make a point that I wasn’t entitled to a dime of anything Lane left me.

I’m about to answer, but a voice like a thunderbolt of lightning vibrates in a hard timbre. Like a knight in shining armor.

“Actually. If you would excuse me and pardon my interruption. Aura and Lane Jr., along with Camila, are staying in an exquisite estate in the Hamptons right on the water. Truly a gorgeous home. You should stop by and spend some time there with Lane.” Kalum’s voice drips with a lethal dose of *watch what the fuck you say next*, bitch.

My head tilts up, and he looks so handsome in a tailored blue suit that takes my breath away. His hair is swept back and his dress shirt is open at the base of his throat and the ink of his tattoos gives a glimpse of hard muscle. His suit jacket stretches across his broad shoulders, making my panties soak right where I’m sitting. His gaze finds mine, and a look of molten lust lingers in the dark depths as they caress my face

down to my chest and slowly rise, making a point that he is undressing me with his eyes.

Lane grins and whispers, “Told ya, Mommy. He’s here to save us from the evil witch.”

Mr. and Mrs. Turner have their mouths slightly open, and Camila coughs, trying to hold back a laugh.

Kalum gives Lane a grin. “Hey kiddo.”

“Hi, Kalum,” he says with a beaming white tooth grin. His dimple making an appearance.

My heart lurches in my chest at how cute he is and how much he trusts Kalum. Kalum grabs a chair and lifts it like it weighs nothing and places it between Lane and me.

“And how can she afford such extravagance, Mr. St. Claire? Please do tell since you have invited yourself to our family dinner.”

“Mother. Stop it and leave her alone,” Exie chides.

What a bitch. I want to claw her eyes out, but that is what she wants. She wants me to make a scene. Not a chance. I can’t wait to leave.

Kalum chuckles. “Why are you so worried about Aura’s finances and where she is living instead of how she is actually doing, even though she is caring for your only grandchild after your son’s death? It has been more than a year, and you haven’t visited her or made an attempt. I know this because I was the one who gifted her the estate.”



Holy shit. No, he didn't just say that. He didn't. My mind is going a hundred miles an hour, like one of Lane's cars. What is he doing? My head whips in his direction, and I can see his side profile, he is calm and collected, but I know this side of Kalum. The lethal side I have witnessed living with him at his family's home when he strikes with his words.

Everyone's eyebrows rise at his admission of the gift. Who gifts an estate to a woman unless they are... together? Friends? No, not friends. Lovers?

"Are you trying to say what I think you are saying, young man?" Lane's father retorts.

Exie looks at me with a smirk, and so does Dex. Camila smiles at Kalum like he hung the moon.

"I'm taking responsibility for Aura and Lane Jr.," he says as he gets up from the table.

"What would your mother say?" Lane's mother asks.

"What can she say? She was voted out of the company, along with my father. Early retirement. I own it all."

The Turners and everyone, including me, have shock written all over our faces.

"If you'll excuse me. Lane and Aura have a flight to catch. This has been fun, but under the circumstances, you understand that New York is getting cooler, and Aura and Lane Jr. need to stay warm, and my plane is already awaiting our arrival."

Relieved, I stand, and we say our farewells.

Exie gives me a hug and whispers, “Get the hell out of here. I’m sorry my parents are such assholes but I need you to give that man right there a chance.”

My eyes lower because I’m not sure I can. I’m afraid it is too good to be true. What if it is because of his friendship with Lane he is doing all of this? I’m not dumb enough to not realize Lane would’ve written to him stating his dying wish for him to take care of me in some way, and then, of course, I gave in and slept with him only to fall in love with him.



*Chapter 22*



## Aura

I wake up in my bed with the sound of little feet running on the hardwood floors to the master bedroom. Kalum is staying in one of the guest rooms at his own request and I'm relieved because I don't want to confuse Lane. It is still dark outside but it means Lane is having trouble sleeping.

"Mommy. It died," Lane says, sniffing as he jumps on the bed.

Tears are streaming down his face to his car pajamas.

"What died?" I ask worriedly. My heart is pounding with dread.

"My iPad with the sound of the engine. I forgot to charge it on the plane and I can't sleep. I need to hear it." He makes a motion to his ears.

His body shakes with a sob and my heart breaks.

"Let's charge it."

"No, it takes too long, and the battery will not hold for me to hear it, Mommy. I'm sorry for crying and waking you up. I'm so sorry."

My eyes sting as a single tear slides down my cheek. I don't have one of Lane's cars here in New York. They are locked up in the garage in Lane's shop.

"What's wrong?" Kalum's voice filters from the open doorway.

"Um. His iPad died and he can't hear the recording. I think the dinner and his grandmother stirred up some feelings and he just needed to calm down and get to sleep. It happens. The track and the car. The dinner and everything that was said. I think it was too much for him."

Kalum walks farther into the room with his sweatpants slung low on his hips and his shirtless body on display.

I'm hugging Lane to my chest and his face is buried in my neck. Kalum gently slides his hand in soothing strokes over his back.

"Hey, kiddo."

"Hey," Lane chokes out.

"I have an idea, but do you promise to keep this a secret? What if I said I could let you hear the real thing?"

Lane's head snaps up. "How?" he asks, his voice breaking.

My gaze lands on Kalum's and my heart melts. He is so good with him. How Lane is drawn to him when Kalum has a solution to everything. He would make a great father someday.

Kalum sits down on the bed. His biceps bulging with the movement. He gives me a wink and my heart skips a beat.

“Remember when I told you that your daddy and I were very good friends?”

Lane sniffs and wipes his face with a tissue I hand him from the nightstand.

“Yeah.”

“He built something for me a while back, and I would like to show you. No one knows he built the engine for me, so it is a secret. You want to see it?”

Lane looks up at me. “Can we, Momma?”

“Yeah, baby.”

We dress warm and follow Kalum to the detached garage located on the side of the house. It is a garage I haven’t opened since staying here. The house has four garages but this one is detached. My curiosity is piqued, wondering what he has inside there.

Kalum presses the button on a fob and the garage door opens, revealing a Lamborghini SVJ. Lane looks at me with a bewildered look on his face. His forehead creases just like his father’s when he is unsure about something.

Lane points at the car. “My father built the inside motor of that car?”

“Yep. I like Lamborghinis even though he doesn’t, but he said he could make it fast and I believed him.” Kalum walks to the back and shows him Lane’s signature tag mark on the back of the engine. “*Built by Turner.*”

Lane smiles, his eyes lighting up like the Fourth of July. “He did! Mom, look, Daddy worked on this one.”

“Told you,” Kalum says, giving him a grin.

“Lane modified this?” I ask as I rub my hands together over my gloves. The smoke of my breath swirling in the air.

“He did. I asked him one night, and he said he would work on it for me and only me. You know he preferred Japanese imports, but this one”—he points—“he modified it for me. It is one of a kind.”

He unlocks it and opens the door upward. “I can’t go above a certain speed since you have to hold Lane in the front, but I can figure out a safe way so he can fall asleep by listening to it. There is a road right out here that is quiet. I won’t go past second gear and will rev it slowly so he can feel the engine and the sound.”

“Is it loud?” Lane asks with excitement.

“Very.”

Kalum buckles us in tight and makes sure we are secure, and slides in the driver’s side.

“Ready, kiddo?”

Lane nods and he snuggles closer to me, strapped snugly in the red leather seat. Kalum starts the massive car and the engine purrs to life. The exhaust rumbles and my head turns slightly, and it’s a sense of déjà vu of when I’d done this with Lane. My eyes close and I feel the vibration of the engine behind us and my heart constricts.

Kalum plays “Faded” by ZHU as he rolls the car slowly without giving it too much speed but roars the engine so Lane can feel it. After fifteen minutes, Lane slowly drifts to sleep, and Kalum waits until he is completely sound asleep, driving slowly on the driveway to make sure it is safe.

Once the car idles, Kalum slides the back of his fingers over the side of my face. “I just wanted you to know that I’ll do anything for you both. I’m here, Aura and I’ll never leave you two alone. If you need me, I’m here.”

“Thank you.”

If he sees what his words are doing to my heart and soul, he doesn’t say it. He just studies me, and we stay there for a while. I’m not sure how long we sit there staring at each other with Lane sound asleep in my arms in the driveway.





*Chapter 23*



## Aura

The sun is streaming through the massive window of the master bedroom. It is Saturday, but I feel that the bed is occupied, and then last night comes flooding back, but I don't remember coming to bed. I remember Lane was upset about his iPad, and then Kalum came to the rescue and shared his car with Lane.

My head turns and my breath catches in my throat and then my eyes widen when I notice Camila standing at the door of the bedroom. My eyes wander back to Lane curled up against Kalum's side, both of them sound asleep.

"Rough night?" Camila asks softly.

"Yeah."

I tell her about Lane and his iPad issue and how Kalum came to the rescue.

"There is only one word I have for you, sweetheart. Fall."

She means don't resist and fall in love with Kalum. I have fallen in love with him. All over again. This time it is different

because of Lane Jr. The way they are sleeping together takes my breath away. He treats Lane as if he was his own son.

“It’s okay to feel joy, Aura. Just let it happen,” she whispers.

“It already has. I have.”

My eyes find hers, and she smiles. “Good. Now give him a chance.”

Easier said than done. I have enough on my plate with Lane’s parents and now Kalum’s parents. They would never approve of Lane and me being part of their son’s life. It is like going through the same drama all over again but then that wouldn’t be fair to Kalum. If he wants to be here for us, then I will let him. I’ll let things be and the pieces fall where they may.



“Will that be all for you today?” I ask the lady seated in the booth before I set the bill down on the table.

“Yes, dear. Thank you.” I give her a smile and move to the next booth but my steps slow down when I notice it’s Bradley sitting down, his head looking down at the menu.

“Hello. Let me know when you’re ready, but for now, what can I get you to drink?”

His head pops up and his eyes soften. “Hey there, gorgeous. A Coke would be good.”

“I’ll be right back.”

It seems pointless to work at the diner to some when they find out I was married to Lane Turner. They must think I have all this money, but in truth, I didn't touch it and if I did, I would have the Turner's breathing down my neck.

When I get back to the booth, Bradley clears his throat. "I saw you on TV," he utters.

My teeth snag my bottom lip because I know he is going to mention Lane and that I was married to him. How is it that I'm working in a diner when I'm most likely rich? That must be what is on everyone's mind, but some will voice it and others will mind their own business.

"Yeah."

"I know it is none of my business, but why are you working here?"

And here it goes. The annoying million-dollar question.

I make little circles on the notepad with the pen in my hand as I concentrate on the lines and take a deep breath. Judy walks up next to me and replaces the ketchup bottles. Bradley is waiting for me to answer him but I'm at a loss for words and what I should say. I don't owe him an explanation or anyone.

"You come from a rich family, don't you, Bradley?" Judy asks.

My head whips in her direction as she gives him a grin.

His chest puffs up, "Yes."

She nods but we all already know that. I stay silent while she makes her point in my defense. Working at the diner with Judy has been fun. She is always asking me to the movies or to hang out and now I might take her up on her offer. I would have never thought she would come to my rescue to keep me from having to answer a tough question. A question I really don't want to answer. I want to put to rest the fact that I was married to a wealthy man with a shitty family that wants to see me eat dirt because I was married to their son without their approval.

Judy juts her hip out as she addresses Bradley. "Yeah, well, some rich families don't agree or like it when their sons marry poor people with no money. They think because they are poor, they are taking advantage of them. They don't believe in something as simple as maybe their son fell in love and vice versa. They look at relationships like a transaction or a partnership. They see a girl that doesn't come from a predominant family as a threat. I'm sure you're a smart guy and can figure out her in-laws weren't sold on the idea and want to take away what her husband left for his family."

Bradley swallows nervously and looks down at the menu like the words are going to change or give him the right words to say.

"I'm sorry, but not all families are like that."

Judy snickers and then lowers her voice. "Yeah, right."

He leans back and watches her walk away with a scowl on his face. When his gaze lands on me, I give him a dry smile.

“So, what can I getcha?”

Poor Bradley doesn't realize how people from his side of the tracks think about the regular people who work regular jobs and don't have chauffeurs. They are good enough to work for their sons or daughters but not be—with their sons or daughters.

“Is that what they did to you?”

“Did what?” I counter, averting my gaze.

“Threaten you with their lawyers, treat you like you're less than worthy. I never stood a chance with you, did I?”

“No, and it's not because of any of that. It's because I'm in love.”

“He's a lucky man. I hope he realizes that but if you need a friend or someone to talk to.” He points toward his chest. “I'm your guy.”

I laugh and shrug. “For the record, working gives me purpose, and I don't mind.”

“He doesn't know, does he?” Bradley blurts out.

“It doesn't matter. We are just friends. Now what can I get you, handsome?”

Bradley's eyes light up. “Keep talking to me like that and I might make it a mission and whisk you away.”

He knows I'm easing the tension by teasing him. Bradley is a good-looking guy and doesn't come off as creepy or

anything but I think Judy would be more of a challenge for him.

“Why don’t you ask Judy out?”

He nudges his chin toward Judy, wiping the table. “Judy doesn’t like me very much.”

“Why?”

“Because a good friend of mine broke her heart. He left her for a girl he knew from way back. She moved back, their parents set them up, and he just broke it off with her for no reason. She’s had a chip on her shoulder ever since. She doesn’t go out like she used to and apparently hates my guts, too.”

It never occurred to me that Judy is nursing a heartbreak. That must suck to fall for someone and then they just ditch you like you didn’t mean anything to them. Now I feel bad for turning her down when she asked me to hang out after.

I saunter up to her while she is picking up an order from the kitchen.

“Hey, I’m free tomorrow night. How about that movie? It’s a Tuesday and there won’t be that many people.”

She turns to me and smiles. “Really?”

“Sure, why not? We can get to know each other. I really haven’t made any friends. The only friend I have is my sister-in-law Exie, but now she is more like my best friend since my husband passed.”



Her eyes dim, and she says, “I’m really sorry about your husband, Aura. That must have been really hard.”

“I’m no stranger to loss and heartbreak. I lost my parents before the start of my senior year in high school.”

“And I thought I had it bad.”

I make it home and Camila is thrilled to hear that I have a night out with Judy to the movies.

“I won’t take long. It’s just a movie, and I really think she needs a friend, and so do I. Exie has been busy with taking over her family’s company and she lives in Spencer, so I guess it would be a good thing to talk and socialize with someone,” I tell Camila.

“I think it’s a great idea.”

My phone vibrates and an incoming text comes through.

*Janine: The boss wants you to come to the office for a meeting. Can you come now?*

I look at the time and it’s four. I pinch my brows, wondering why Kalum wouldn’t ask me himself.

*Me: Is everything ok?*

*Janine: Everything is peachy. He is in a meeting and couldn’t get out in time and asked me to call you before it got later.*

*Me: Ok. I’ll head out and meet you at the office.*

*Janine: Awesome. :)*

I shower and get ready. I dress in a wool form-fitted dress and long coat. It has gotten notably cooler in the evening and I don't want to freeze to death. The driver is already waiting out front, and Camila is making dinner for Lane, so I give them both a kiss and head out toward Kalum's office building in the city.



*Chapter 24*



## Kalum

“Is she coming?” I ask Janine when I walk out of the board meeting for a new project and the store I want to open in Manhattan for Aura and her designs.

“Yep. Henry is on his way with her now.”

I smile because I’m dying to see her. Every night I sleep in the next room. I just want to walk into the room and make her mine over and over but because of Lane, I don’t want to confuse him or make him feel uncomfortable. We haven’t been affectionate in front of him either. Baby steps.

I walk in my office and freeze. Meredith is leaning on my desk in a seductive pose with a long coat, and I’m assuming there is nothing underneath except for some lacy lingerie she usually wears when she tries to seduce me. Before, I would have welcomed the intrusion, but now my stomach bottoms out in dread.

I clench my teeth. “What are you doing here, Meredith?”

“I’ve missed you, Kalum. I haven’t heard from you in a while. You have never minded me waiting for you in your

office before,” she purrs.

I keep her at arm’s length. “I need you to leave right now.”

The last thing I need right now is for Aura to walk in here and think the worst.

“Leave,” I tell her.

I hate to be an asshole, but I didn’t invite her and I figured she would’ve gotten the hint when I didn’t call her or answer her calls since that night I left her apartment.

She walks slowly, opening her coat, revealing exactly what I assumed. She’s clad in a lacy number that does nothing for my cock. I’m not even hard. She places her hands on my chest, and I grip her wrists to get her to stop so I can make her leave. But luck isn’t on my side and what I feared would happen does in the next second when the door to my office opens, and Janine stops, her eyes widening with Aura right behind her.

My gaze lands on the most important person in the room, and the look on her face breaks me. Her smile dies a quick death and her eyes lower to the ground. Her eyes glass over, and Meredith’s words make it ten times worse, I wish I could strangle her. I have never laid my hands on a woman, but right now, my mind is imagining squeezing the life out of her.

Meredith looks at me with her eyes full of lust. “Excuse me. We will just be a second. Right, baby?” she coos. “It’s been a while.”

I have never heard Janine’s voice laced with malice. Her voice is deadly when she turns her head after shielding Aura

from the scene in front of her.

“Sorry to have interrupted. I thought we were having a meeting. I guess I misread the message earlier,” Janine says in a tight voice.

Fuck. What the fuck just happened? I shove Meredith away.

“Get out,” I say in a voice that drips with venom. “If you come to my building unannounced, I will have you thrown out. We are done. I didn’t call or plan to call you.”

“It’s because of her,” she seethes, closing her coat and raising her chin.

I know she means Aura. You could tell from her expression and the way Janine was shielding Aura from watching Meredith’s hands pawing all over my dress shirt on my chest.

“It will always be because of her. Now get out and don’t ever come back.”

She lowers her head in defeat. She knows the shit she pulled just backfired. If I had known she was capable of showing up like she just did and throwing herself at me, I would have made my point sooner.

I open the door and call out to the secretary in front of the elevator.

“Call security and make sure she is shown out and is not allowed back in. Where are Janine and Aura?”

The girl scrambles on the desk and picks up the phone and follows my instruction. “Yes, sir. I think Janine and Miss Aura

are in the boardroom.”

“Let’s see how long she lasts,” Meredith spits her vitriol as she enters the elevator.

“Get the fuck out,” I quip.

My patience is wearing thin, and this bitch is pushing me to my limit. I look down the hallway on my floor and see the brown wooden door, and I know there is only one way I can show her.

I hurriedly walk down the hallway and open the door. Aura quickly averts her gaze and looks out the window. My chest aches because she must think I’m a piece of shit.

Janine quirks a brow. “Finished?”

I moved to close the electric shades on the windows by the double doors.

“Leave us, Janine. Make sure no one knocks on the door, lock it on your way out.”

“Sure thing,” she says as she walks out and does as she’s asked.

I walk over to where Aura is seated, and she stiffens when I approach her.

“It’s not what you think.”

Her head tips up, and the look on her face is hard and emotionless. Her lips compress into a thin line.

“It’s fine.” She gets up, and panic surges through my veins. “Doesn’t matter what I think. You don’t have to explain

yourself, Kalum. I understand.”

“What do you understand?”

“That we are just friends and whatever intimacy we shared meant nothing, like it always did and always will. I would like to leave now.”

I swallow and the tightness in my chest increases with every breath. “I don’t want you to leave,” I manage to say.

“There is nothing to say. This was a mistake. I’m not sure why you brought me here, but right now, I really have no interest in anything you have to say or anything to do with you. What we shared was a mistake and it shouldn’t have happened.”

I walk her back against the wall. “What we shared was never a mistake.”

“You have proved to me that it was, and I fell for it. Please, let me go. I won’t bother you, and I thank you for all you have done for me but please, if you can find it in your heart, please leave me alone.”

She goes to move, but I can’t let her leave. I refuse to lose her again. I cage her in with my hands. “Look at me, Aura.”

She looks up, and our eyes meet. “I don’t want her. She showed up, and I was trying to get her to leave. What you saw was not what it looked like. I haven’t been with anyone since you. I don’t want to be with anyone but you.”

My head lowers and my lips brush hers. I swipe her coat off her shoulders and it slides to the carpeted floor. Her form



fitting dress molds to her soft curves with her flared hips from having Lane and my cock stiffens, remembering how those hips look when I grip them from behind.

“Do you know what you do to me, Aura? How much I have wanted to sneak into your bedroom at night and wanting to be inside you every night? I have held back because of Lane. I don’t want him to ever think I’m replacing his father and it scares me to think that he would hate me if he saw me kiss you.”

“He likes you, Kalum. You are so good with him. He would never think that of you,” she says softly against my lips.

“Get on the table, Aura,” I rasp.

She walks over and unzips her dress and lets it fall down her shoulders. She is in her lace bra and panties with her heels on, and she sits with her legs slightly parted on the wooden boardroom table.

The sun is setting in the New York skyline, giving the room a glow. I undo my pants and pull my raging hard-on out of my boxers and fist my cock from top to shaft.

“Tell me you want me between your thighs, Aura. Tell me you want me to fuck you right here.”

Her nipples harden under the lace cups of her bra, and I know she is aroused. My eyes trail down her taut stomach to the glistening wetness sliding between her thighs to the table.

“I want you between my thighs, Kalum.”

The way she says my name is my undoing. I grip her thighs while she removes my dress shirt and slides her fingers down my chest over my stomach. My cock bobs between us and she opens her legs wider. My fingers find the sides of her lace panties and I rip the fabric to shreds.

“You don’t need these when you are around me or when you come and visit me. I want you to come into my office and sit on my desk while I feast on your pussy for lunch.”

She whimpers when I brush the head of my cock over the lips of her pussy. “Do you want me to eat that sweet pussy, Aura?”

“Yes,” she says breathlessly. “I want you inside me, Kalum.”

I nudge her lips open and she takes me like a ripe flower. The head of my cock slides inside, gripping my head in a tight vise. I push in slightly, and she arches her hips forward. Her hands lean back to hold herself up while I’m between her legs, sliding my cock inch by inch and spreading her open for me like a gift.

I close my eyes and grunt as I fuck her in deep, hard thrusts. My cock swells so much inside her tight cunt that she is moaning.

“Kalum,” she says on a moan. “More.”

I give her more. So much more. I fuck her like a madman that has been dying to get his next fix. Our bodies begin to slap inside the room and I swear if I could have her like this

after every board meeting, I would never miss a day of work in my life.

“I want this pussy wrapped around my dick.” Thrust. “I’m going to come inside you so deep, baby.” Thrust. “Every chance I get, I’m going to come inside you. Don’t you ever doubt me, Aura. I want you.”

I thrust inside her, and her legs grip my hips hard and she lies down on her back on the table. The straps of her bra sliding down her shoulders.

“You’re so beautiful, Aura. Tell me you’ll be mine.”

“I’m yours,” she says. Her pussy clenches and I know she is close.

I slide her down slightly so I can go deeper inside her. I begin to pound into her, my muscles clenching as I grip her thighs and I fuck her. I fuck her hard. I fuck any doubt she had that I didn’t want her. I vow to show her how much she means to me. How much I need her.

“I’m coming,” she says on a breathless pant. She is panting and writhing on the table. “Please, Kalum.”

She pleads, and I answer by giving her what she wants. My balls tighten, and we both groan as we come at the same time. Her pretty pink nipples bouncing as I thrust into her, emptying inside of her. Weeks of holding myself back while she sleeps in the next room coming in full force. My want for her exploding through my body and soul. If she only knew I could never let her go. She is mine, and I am hers. Always.





*Chapter 25*



## Aura

He pulls out of me slowly and I wince slightly. Kalum has a huge cock and when he pounds into me, it most certainly leaves his mark. I look down at my swollen pussy as it leaks his cum down my thighs onto the table. When I look up at him, he is staring at the mess he made.

He places his fingers on my soft, swollen flesh and my face heats at the intimate contact.

“You have a beautiful pussy. It is even more beautiful when I have tended to it like I just did.”

My nipples react like two traitors when the words leave his lips. Lips I love when they are on mine. Both the ones on my face and the ones between my thighs.

“Don’t ever doubt how much I want you. Ever,” he says.

I shake my head, telling him I understand, but I’m at a loss for words. What do I say? My love for him is in every kiss and every breath I take when he is inside me. Filling me, making me forget where I am or even how to breathe.

He moves over to where napkins are on a credenza inside his office and wipes me gently after he pours water, moistening the napkin like a wet nap.

“I’m sorry I was a little rough. I can see you’re swollen. Are you OK to stand?”

Is it that noticeable? My legs throb with a delicious soreness. He is so gentle, even more so than the first time we had sex in his bed. I look around and notice he ripped my underwear into shreds, and I bite the corner of my lip when I bend slightly to dress.

“I’m okay.” I finally admit but my mind is still wondering why he wanted me here. I’m glad that he cleared up the redhead situation in his office. My heart dropped, breaking into a million pieces when I saw how she touched him. Making a point that they are intimate, and she had every right to be here alone with him. It reminded me of where I come from and that I could never be what he wanted but he made sure to show me that what I saw was her putting him in a bad situation.

At first, I thought he was backpedaling, but then it wouldn’t make sense for him to request me to be here if he wanted to fuck the redhead. I recognized her from watching the latest gossip news on TV when it was announced that she had been the longest at his side by the media. When he is getting dressed, I watch the smoothness of his inked skin sliding into his dress shirt, then he turns and catches me ogling him and gives me the sexiest wink.

“I’m all yours, beautiful. I can dress slower if you want,” he teases.

I look away with a smile, and a giggle escapes my lips. I want to crawl under the table and hide from embarrassment. He knows I find him attractive, and his air of confidence makes it hard not to melt under his gaze.

He goes to slide his boxers up, but I’m quicker and fall to my knees. His eyes widen when I grip the length of his semihard cock from tip to shaft and feel the sticky wetness of our arousals.

Giving him a sultry smile, I lick the tip and he sucks in a breath. He thinks I’m shy and wants to make me blush. I will make sure I won’t be the only one blushing when I’m done with him. I lick his shaft, tasting us on my tongue and moan.

“Holy. Fuck,” he whispers.

I take him in my mouth and give him a soft suck on his sensitive tip. I may have gone all the way with only one man in my life, but I made sure I pleased him. What I didn’t know, I read about it and watched porn in secret. I wanted to please the man that was mine and make sure he had his release as much as he wanted.

I suck him and take him inside my mouth deep until he hits the back of my throat. His cock stretches my mouth in both length and girth, and tasting us makes my core throb with want. It’s amazing how my body reacts to him like it has been deprived for so long, the touch of his skin and the taste of his cum on my tongue.



“We taste so good together, Kalum,” I rasp against his cock. I take him with measured strokes, and he begins to put more force in fucking my mouth, and I can’t get enough, I grip his hips as I relax my throat and let him fuck my mouth.

“Jesus, you are fucking perfect. So perfect taking my cock in that sexy mouth made just for me.”

He pulls out, and I suck his balls gently and wrap my hands around him and he slides in again. A moan escapes my throat, and he groans.

His fingers slide in my hair and my eyes look up and the lust I see has me sliding my hand under my dress to play with my clit.

“Play with that swollen pussy. I want to come down that pretty throat, then I’m going to drink your cum from that pussy.”

He fucks my mouth until I feel him stiffen, and then he continues, his balls hitting my chin. spurts of hot cum slide down my throat, and I drink all of him.

He lifts me and gently sucks my clit until I cry out, and he makes me come. His head between my thighs as he peppers kisses on my swollen pussy and then to my thighs, licking his way until I’m clean.

He slides my dress down and the smirk on his lips is wet from my cum. “See, panties are pointless.”

“Why did you want me to come?”

“You gave me more than I deserved, but I initially wanted you to come because I had a business proposition for you.”

That gets my attention as he finishes dressing. He makes sure we are presentable. I pick up my coat and drape it over the chair. I move to clean the table, my cheeks turning bright red.

“Leave it. It is where I sit, and now I have the best memory in this very room.”

He opens the door and undoes the blinds. After ten minutes, he sends a message on his phone and it must have been Janine because she opens the door with a file in her hands.

She narrows her eyes at Kalum, and then she gives me a knowing smirk.

“I’m not going to give you shit because that woman was escorted out of the building and asked to not return, and the breathy moans that could be heard by the elevator had Melissa biting her lower lip.”

Kalum gives her a grin. “We were talking, and I was making sure Aura was aware that she is the woman I’m seeing and no other.”

He moves the chair back to the spot I was spreadeagled, and he gives me a wink. Butterflies swarm my stomach. Is he making us official? Are we dating?

Janine slides the folder to him and takes a seat on the far right. He opens it and takes out a bunch of documents.

“This is a proposition I have for you. I know you are overwhelmed with making your jewelry by hand, but since you have so much demand, it would be good to try out a pop-up store for you to sell them here in New York. I have found the best spot, and Janine will help market it.”

I nod and look at the address and it's an exclusive part where there are boutique shops, but I don't have the money or enough supply to sell them. There is no way I could pull it off.

“I love the idea, Kalum, but I don't have the money or supply”

He interrupts me. “Money is no problem. I will give you all the money you need. I want you to have this. You have been doing it for years and there is so much demand.”

“I don't have the supply for a store.”

“I do,” he quips.

“What? How?”

He scratches his brow and then looks at Janine. His gaze lands on mine again. “I bought most of them.”

I shake my head, not quite getting what he is saying. Did he just say he bought most of them? How? When?

“How?”

“Since high school. I bought most of them. Every time you put them up on that craft website. It was me. I have boxes of them all made by you.”

I frown. All this time, it was him. All the money I made, it was him.

“Why?”

“Because I needed to feel close to you in some way and it was the only way I could have something you made. Something that came from your hands and I hoped that maybe in the time you were making each and every one of them, you would think about me. In a way, maybe I thought one of them could have been for me. I only had one you made me, and it was the only piece that I wore that mattered.”

“Oh,” I whisper softly.

I don't know if I should swoon or cry. Not from sadness but from the sweetest thing I have ever witnessed. A man like Kalum, who wanted something that was so special to me that I made to belong to him.

Janine fans herself with the manilla folder. “I'm about to cry. This is some *The Notebook*-type shit right there. Who would have thought you were such a romantic? Jesus, you're making me want to go straight and I like women.”

“Um, you want to sell them?”

“Only certain ones. They will be exclusive ones, and we will market ‘*Made by Aura*’ as a brand. Your brand and your identity. This is who you are.”

He moves closer and points to the paper like the CEO he is, the power coming off him is why he is so successful in business. It takes my breath away at how smart he is.

“How would I pay you back?”

“Trust me. The speech you made at the track has made you quite the girl next door who was taken advantage of, and the demand for your bracelets under your name is quite the trend right now.”

“Look at the comments on social media.”

Janine opens the comment section after my speech and the videos on IG of me speaking and everyone wondering where they can buy my bracelets and other jewelry to support me. Requests have been pouring into my website, requests I can't quite fill with working at the diner. I never thought I could make a living making jewelry by hand.

“Fine. I'll do it as long as you get your money back in full.”

“Done. Miss Rayne. I will get it all in writing. Everything is done in your name only. I will just be the bank in a way to make you feel better, not because I want the money.”

“Yes. Mr. St. Claire.”

“Kalum. You will always address me as Kalum. You don't work for me, Aura. We just have a business agreement, and you are the owner of your brand. Now look this over and take your time and sign them. You can look it over with Mr. Schwartz, and I will cover his fee.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you, Aura.”



“So, you’re like a business owner,” Judy says with excitement.

I gave my notice to Nancy at the diner since Mr. Schwartz assured me that the agreement Kalum drew up was all in my favor. No interest and is basically just helping me. He said it was the most generous contract he had ever seen. It is like an interest-free loan with no risks.

Exie was excited and so happy for me. Even Lane was jumping up and down because he loves to wear the bracelets with his name stitched inside them with his favorite colors. I have managed to add little beads with accessories that have different stones I have found at a local supply store. When

Kalum grips me, I notice he never takes his off. He is always wearing one. At first, I thought it was the same one I made, but now I notice he changes them.

“Yep. My boyfriend...” I trail off.

“It’s okay, Aura. He is your boyfriend.”

“I know, but he really hasn’t labeled us, but I’m assuming it is what he meant. I have learned to forgive myself for the shame I felt for falling for him thinking it was too soon to have these feelings.”

“Thinking about how you two met in the first place, I think there is more behind it all. I mean, how do two guys that obviously have some feelings for you besides the fact that your husband loved you not hate each other over the same girl?” She places a strand of her brown hair behind her ear and sits down as we wait until it is time for the theater to open the door and we take our seats. “I mean, that is crazy. He sent the guy you cried about when his parents were a bunch of assholes and kicked you out on your eighteenth birthday to watch over you in case he died. That shit is like fate.”

“Fate?” I ask, tilting my head toward her, pinching my brows. “What do you mean, fate?”

She sticks popcorn inside her mouth. “Fate. Events beyond someone’s control. Things that were supposed to happen when you’re fated to be with someone. I believe you were destined to be with Lane and have his child but also destined to be with Kalum. It’s probably why you feel for both of them. You love

them both, but you were always meant to end up with Kalum. It just wasn't the right time. It was Lane's."

It makes sense in a creepy kind of way, but I'm not superstitious. I do believe things are meant to happen, but I also believe in free will.

"I guess."

"I know this is messed up, but what if Kalum told you he loved you before his parents did what they did? Would you have been with Lane and married him?"

Deep down, I'm scared to admit it, but I know the answer.

"No. I would have chosen Kalum. I would have never been able to fall for Lane because I would have never left Kalum's side, but if Lane was alive now and Kalum told me he loved me after all this time, I would choose Lane and my son because I wouldn't abandon my family and deep down, I love them both but would do right by them."

"I don't know, but all I know is there is something hidden about the whole thing. It all revolves around you though. It was always about you in the end. It doesn't matter who would get you. Love is a big emotion and is the center of all things we do in life. It is what we take with us in the end, Aura."

"My mom used to say that. She used to say without love, nothing matters. It is all we have in the end. Love or hate." I take a sip of soda and clear my throat. "How about you and Bradley's friend?"



“Who? Nick. He just wasn’t in love with me. He lied to me when he said it, and he used me. I was just a girl with no money. My parents are divorced, and my mother is a manager at a restaurant in town. We barely made it, and the second month I started at the diner, he came in with Bradley. He was a sweet talker. We went out for six months before his family, I guess, found out and his childhood sweetheart moved back, and it went all downhill from there.”

“What an ass. What happened?”

She laughs sarcastically and flicks a threat of her jeans. Judy is really pretty with brown hair and brown eyes with two tiny dimples. She is twenty-four and is going to college online for her hospitality degree. She wants to land a good job and help her mother out. I admire her for her hard work and passion.

“He would make excuses when I asked why he hadn’t called. Then I saw him with her one day. I was walking home on my way to pick up my mother from her shift at the restaurant when I saw them together heading inside. They were out on a date. I was heartbroken and when I confronted him, he denied it at first. I kept pushing when I asked why I couldn’t meet his parents or why I wasn’t invited to his birthday party. He was annoyed, but I wanted the truth. I think I needed to hear it from him, and he snapped.”

Her voice shakes with sadness. “He said I wasn’t the type of girl he could bring home. I was just a girl he was dating, and he liked me a lot, but he wasn’t serious about me. I wouldn’t be accepted because I was a waitress in a diner, and his parents

would not approve. When I asked him why he told me he loved me, he said he didn't know and that it was a mistake. That he loved Veronica, and that is who he should be with, not someone like me. Veronica, the woman he is currently seeing, that is everything I'm not."

"What a complete asshole. It makes sense to think Bradley is the same way even if he swears he isn't."

"He is friends with the guy, and they hang out, so he knew. He comes to the diner all the time and he never gave me a heads-up. He could have at least said, 'Hey, don't take dating my friend seriously, his family has a big influence on who he dates and he will break your heart' or something."

I place my hand on hers. "You know what? He doesn't deserve you and it's better to know now than battle a rich family. They can make your life hell."

"That must suck, Aura. His parents suck."

I nod. "Yeah. Some people just suck. Rich and poor."



*Chapter 26*



## Kalum

Cason walks into my office as I make my way out. “Hey, I got your text. Where did she go?”

He means Aura. I was losing my shit a while ago when I got an update from the security detail at the house that Aura was out to the movies with a friend. A friend I have not heard about. Jealousy filtered into the pit of my stomach for the first time in a while. I have never felt jealousy like this since... since I found out Aura married Lane and then when she fell pregnant with his child.

I wanted to ask her who she was with, but I wanted to see for myself. They said she left for the movie theater. I called Cason to let him know that his security detail did not go with Aura and they reported back that she had requested to go alone. Apparently, they have become quite fond of Aura. Who knows what else they have let her get away with.

“I’m sorry, brother. You know how Aura has that effect on people. I’m sure it’s just a friend.”

He must see the scowl on my face because he is trying to calm me down from going over there and kidnapping her. I

wouldn't kidnap her, but I think she needs a reminder that safety is a major concern. She is by herself and what if something happened to her? What would happen to Lane?

"Let's get to the theater. The chopper is standing by," I tell Cason.

"I'm coming with you. Who knows what you'll do when you get there? I can see that look on your face that tells me that you will snatch up anyone right now that is male and near your girl."

"You know me so well, Cason," I drawl.

"When it comes to Aura. There is no telling what you will do."



The helicopter touches the helipad, and we wait until it is safe to exit. The blacked-out Ghost Phantom is already waiting for me to take it with Cason in tow to the theater to pick up Aura.

When we arrive, I park the car in the front. I look at the time and the movie is about to finish based on the times on the screen. Camila told me it was some chick flick. If she wanted to go to the movies. I would have taken her. I would take her anywhere.



*Chapter 27*



## Aura

We made it out of the theater after watching a movie about love and loss.

Judy pushed the door so we both could exit the theater. “The movie was okay. She could have given the guy a second chance, but he was kind of a douche to her, so I guess it was a good thing she chose to stay single and hoped to find the right one someday.”

“I guess, but he was kind of hot,” I say with a laugh when I throw out the empty popcorn. I still have my pack of gummy bears.

I open one and pick a red one and pop one in my mouth.

“Look who we found.” A voice I don’t recognize comes from behind us.

Judy turns around, and she stiffens. I follow her gaze and I figure this is Nick next to Bradley.

“Hey, gorgeous,” Bradley chimes in with a smile.

I glance at Nick and notice the stress on Judy’s expression.



“Hey,” I say dryly.

Bradley glances at Nick and then at Judy. “Hey, Judy.”

“Hey yourself.”

“Look, we gotta get going.”

“Ah, come on now. Why don’t we hang out? Bradley has been telling me all about the sweet piece of ass that works in the diner. He can’t stop talking about you. Maybe we should all hang out.” He looks at Judy. “How about it, babe? I know you miss me.”

Asshole. My nostrils flare in annoyance. “Why don’t both of you fuck off.”

I move to turn around and Bradley grips my wrist. “Let go.”

“Look, Nick is harmless. He doesn’t know how to act sometimes.”

I try to move my hand out of his grasp, but it won’t budge and now I wish I had the security Kalum had assigned to us at the house with me. I didn’t want to look out of place with Judy and make her feel weird and uncomfortable with two guys following us around. I thought Bradley was an okay guy, but Judy was right, they are both self-entitled pricks.

“Let me go,” I say through clenched teeth.

His head lifts, and he looks up, his eyes widening when a shadow looms, and then Bradley flinches when a fist flies and punches his head back. Bradley falls back, hitting his side on the carpeted floor really hard.

My eyes widen when I see Kalum charging him. Nick looks behind Judy and Cason comes into view with a menacing look on his face.

“Leave, or I’ll make you. If you or your bitch-ass friend comes near them again, I’ll make it my mission to not only kick your ass, but I’ll destroy you and whatever hole you crawled out from as well.”

“Y-yeah. What are you, her man or something?”

He looks at Judy and then back at Nick. “Maybe.”

Kalum has Bradley by the throat and is lifting him off the floor. My hands cover my mouth in shock.

“Kalum,” I call out.

Kalum looks at me but doesn’t release his hold on Bradley. Bradley’s lip is split open and blood is dripping on his shirt.

“He wouldn’t let you go. He better not have hurt you, Aura, because right now, the way I’m feeling, I am going to break his fucking face.”

“He didn’t hurt me, he just wouldn’t let me go. Let him go, Kalum, he isn’t worth it.”

Bradley looks at me and then at him. “I’m sorry. I would never hurt her. She loves you. She told me that she loved you.”

Kalum releases him and I can’t believe Bradley told him that I loved him before I did. Bradley and Nick quickly leave the theater before we draw any attention. Kalum looks at me, but he doesn’t say anything.

I glance at Cason, and he gives me a grin. “Hey, stranger.”

“Hey.”

I look at Judy, and she looks at Kalum and then at Cason. “I’m Judy. Aura’s friend. We appreciate you guys coming when you did. I’m sorry to meet you all like this.”

Kalum holds out his hand. “I’m Kalum. Aura’s boyfriend.”

Judy shakes his hand. “I’m Judy. I work with Aura. She gave her notice, and we have been meaning to hang out.”

My heartbeats thudding inside my chest. He introduced himself as my boyfriend. Judy gives me a knowing grin and then looks at Cason. I feel bad that I didn’t tell him about Judy, but I was planning to. So many things happened yesterday, and I was excited to hang out and talk with Judy after hearing about Nick. I wanted to be a friend that she felt she could count on.

“Thank you. Nick’s been an ass since we broke up. I didn’t realize how much of an ass until now. He has a girlfriend, so I don’t know what his problem is.”

“He won’t be bothering you anymore,” Cason bites out.

I don’t think he liked hearing that Nick and Judy used to date. I think Cason finds Judy hot. He keeps glancing at her while she isn’t looking.

Henry pulls up, and Cason decides to ride in the back with Judy to see her home safely.

Kalum opens the door for me, and I slide into the cab. The smell of leather hitting my senses when I take a deep breath.

He opens the door and slides inside the driver's seat.

“Are you sure you are okay, Aura?”

I shrug off my coat and place it in the back seat. “Yeah, I'm okay. Is your hand hurt?”

I see his knuckles are red with the light filtering through the windshield from the parking lot. His strong hands are gripping the steering wheel and he looks at them and opens and closes his hands.

“Nothing I can't deal with. It doesn't hurt.”

He drives down the road but in the opposite direction of the house. He parks at a hotel and marina.

“Why are we here?” I ask.

The lights from the dock are reflecting off the water and the boats as they sway slightly. He doesn't answer and jumps out of the car, walks around, and opens the door.

I grab my jacket and exit the car. I follow him, and he heads inside and waits for me to enter the hotel.

I send a quick text to Camila and tell her where I'm at and that I'm with Kalum. She sends me a quick update that Lane is fast asleep and not to worry. I made him dinner before I left for the theater with Judy and left him in his pj's watching TV. He has been doing well with being homeschooled with Camila. I have managed to get him some online classes that

help him with reading and math. He is doing well and is happy that Kalum is staying with us at the house. They play and watch movies together. Kalum always makes time to give an hour or two each night dedicated to Lane. It is so hard not to fall in love with a man that cares so much about you and how your son feels.

He murmurs something to the lady at the front desk and she hands him a key card. The lady gives me a warm smile as Kalum slides his fingers through mine and guides me farther into the hotel.

He opens the door to the room and closes it with a thud. He opens the French doors leading to the harbor and the view is breathtaking.

“Kalum.”

“Take off your clothes, Aura.”

He gets close, and his dress shirt is stretched across his tight chest. He walks me back to the bed and he looks down at me as I have no choice but to sit.

“I want to be inside you, Aura. I need to show you how much I love you.”

He said it! He loves me. I begin to remove all my clothes, throwing my jacket and then my long-sleeve T-shirt until I'm completely naked. He does the same and we are both... naked.

He leans over me and slides his big hands up the length of my arms over my head. The cool air sends a breeze into the

room and my nipples harden instantly. From the cold and from the heat that is pooling between my thighs.

He begins to kiss my neck and down my chest until he reaches between my legs and begins sliding his tongue inside my pussy.

I moan. “Kalum. Yes. Fuck. Yes.”

The wicked things he is doing with his tongue, then sucking my clit.

“You taste so fucking good. Taste like honey. So sweet. You always tasted sweet. I never thought I could taste pussy this sweet,” he rasps against my clit.

“Kalum,” I moan, running my hands through the strands of his dark hair. “I love when you eat my pussy and I love it when you’re inside me.”

He looks up, and he raises his body over mine. “Me too, baby. I brought you here because what I have to say I need to tell you alone and I can’t go tonight without you.”

I’m nervous. My core is throbbing for him, but at the same time, what he has to say is important because, in my heart, I know things are shifting. My feelings for him are way past normal. He is becoming the air I breathe, and slowly, he is becoming everything I need in my life, and I can’t picture it without him in it.

“I have never stopped loving you, Aura. I loved you the first time I kissed you. I fell in love with you, but I was too scared to admit it. I needed to protect you because there was no way

my parents would accept us. I was right. I was broken the day you left. The letter you left me broke me. I never got the chance to tell you how much I love you.”

I snuggle into his chest and he holds me as I listen to his words. I close my eyes and remember the way he held me when I cried because of the death of my parents. He was the only one that held me and kissed me. The same way we are holding each other right now, this second.

“I had a whole weekend planned for us, baby. The weekend of your eighteenth birthday, I wanted to tell you how I felt and hoped you’d accept my love. I wanted to make you mine in every sense. My heart has always been yours, Aura. I thought I could let you go, but deep in my heart, I never did. I had to watch you fall in love with my friend, marry a man that wasn’t me and give him the most beautiful son I have ever had the pleasure to meet. I loved you so much that I made a pact with a friend to love you when I couldn’t be there to love you because there was nothing I could offer you. My parents threatened to disown me and to make sure to ruin you.”

Tears are streaming down my face because I thought he didn’t want me or that I imagined the connection between us. A connection I had never felt with someone. Except Lane. He made a pact with Lane. Why? I would have waited but then I would have never had our son.

“It’s okay, baby, don’t cry. Time just wasn’t ready for us. Things happen for a reason, and we both loved you. No matter who you ended up with, me or Lane, there was no wrong

choice because we both were in love with you at the same time. He was ready to give you what I couldn't, and I loved you enough to let you be happy and safe from anyone who would hurt you. It was all planned. I have letters, too, the same way he did, in case I passed. I always wanted to let you know that I loved you. He was okay with that, and so was I. What mattered the most was you. Now what matters the most is you and Lane Jr. I didn't tell you this because you were mourning your husband and it was wrong to put this on you. I want to be honest and tell you I'm scared."

I wipe my cheeks with the back of my hand and slide up and look into his eyes. "Scared of what?" I whisper.

What would he be scared of? He is brave for what he did and what he just admitted. He could have moved on and forgotten about me. I thought him helping me and Lane was because he was doing right by a friend, but this is different. This is crazy.

"That after everything, you would always choose him over me. It is wrong and I feel ashamed to say it, but you loved him just as much, if not more, and I can't compete with that."

"Shh." I place small tender kisses on his perfectly shaped lips. "If I had known how you felt, I would have never left. If I had never left, I wouldn't have fallen in love with Lane, but you did what you felt was right, and there is no right answer or regrets. We meet people in our lives, and it's their time with you. It was his, and I loved Lane. I don't regret a minute of it because it brought me Lane Jr. and he is everything to me.



Lane was my second love . You were my first love, Kalum, but now you are my last. I love you.”

His nostrils flare and he crushes his mouth to mine. We make love for hours in the dark with only the moonlight filtering the open doors on the balcony of the room. We leave the room and make it home before Lane wakes up.

Kalum sleeps with me alone for the first time and I smile when the sun rises but know he is gone to work when I feel the side of the bed and can smell the scent of his cologne mixed with his scent.

I make my way to the kitchen and see an envelope with my name on it.

It is addressed to me, but I recognize the envelope. It is a similar one I received when Lane died in New York.

I take it and walk outside with the blanket over my shoulders. I sit down under the cool breeze with the sun rising on the horizon.

*What do you have to tell me?* I ask Lane inside my head.

I open the letter and read the simple, curt message scrawled in Lane’s handwriting.

*Aura,*

*If he told you, I am going to tell you the words you need to hear. You have my blessing. It was always about you.*

*We both love you,*

*Lane Turner.*

I hold the letter tight in the palm of my hand. I look out to the sea. The salty sea air blowing my hair. “I love you, too,” I whisper in the wind. But there is a man I need to give my love to and the chance he deserves.

I walk inside the house and watch as Lane runs up with a smile.

“Mommy,” he says, running into my arms.

“Hey, sweetheart.”

“Where’s Kalum?” he asks with hopeful eyes.

“He’s at work, sweetie.”

He frowns. “Bummer,” he mutters.

“He will be back from work later.”

He grins. “Is he your boyfriend, Momma?”

I don’t want to lie or keep anything from Lane.

I sit on the couch, and he sits beside me, and I take his hand. “Would you be okay if he was?”

He looks down at our hands linked together. “I would like for him to be with us. So, I’m saying yes. I want him to be there for me like Daddy was,” he says with a sniff.

“Oh, honey. I think Kalum would be honored. He likes to be there for you, and what you think about him matters a lot to him.”

He tightens his grip on my hand. “I miss Daddy, Mommy. I know he is gone, but Kalum is here, and I don’t want him to leave. Ever.”

My chest aches and I take deep breaths and try not to cry in front of Lane. He feels conflicted the same way I do. It's like he feels what is deep down in my heart. Conflicted with the love and loss of his father and now Kalum sweeping into our lives like a storm wreaking havoc with our hearts.



*Chapter 28*



## Kalum

I walk into my office and sit at my desk and pick up the phone. “Please send Janine in,” I tell Melissa over the receiver.

“Yes, sir. Right away.”

Five minutes later, Janine waltzes in with her knee-length pencil skirt, looking like Mary Poppins.

She takes a seat in the chair in front of my desk as I type away on my schedule. She has her notepad in hand with a pen, ready to take notes of what I need.

“I need flowers sent to Aura, and please inform security and everyone in this building that she has full access to the building and my office at any time.” I can see Janine smirk as she makes notes. “Did you catch her size when you took her shopping the first time?”

“Yes, I did,” she quips.

“Good, I need the latest collection of everything she would like sent to the house in the Hamptons, and I need another wardrobe for the penthouse in the city.”

“What would you like the card to say?”

I stop typing, and I look at her while she is tapping her pen on her notepad. Shit. I didn't think about that part. I have never sent a woman flowers before. I've only ever taken them out to eat, fucked them at their place and left. I lean back in my chair and loosen my tie, lost in thought.

“Write this down.” I make a motion with my finger toward her notepad. “What is the worst part of your day? That is what I want you to write on that card when you have them deliver the flowers.”

Janine grimaces. “Really? That is what you want to tell her? A normal man that is crazy about a woman would write, I'm thinking of you or miss you. You tasted great last night.”

I chuckle. “I'm going with what I told you. I want to know what the worst part of her day is to make it my mission to make it better. I don't want her to have a bad part of her day.” I lean my forearms on the table. “I want to make her day better.”

Janine's eyebrows shoot up. “I never thought about it like that. You really care about her.”

“Janine, Aura is the love of my life. My first and only love. Everything in her life matters the most to me and so does her son Lane Jr.”

“Her pop-up shop is almost ready. We just need the merchandise, so I can announce the location with marketing.”



*Chapter 29*



## Aura

There is a knock on the door and one of Cason's security guys enters the house with a beautiful bouquet of bloodred roses. Then another guy brings in two more in white and pink. Flutters swarm in my stomach.

"Oh, my goodness," Camila exclaims.

"They're beautiful," I whisper.

Camila grabs one, and I grab another one to place on the dining table and one of the islands in the center of the kitchen.

"He really wants to make an impression, doesn't he?" Camila says.

"Wow, Momma. Those are really nice," Lane says in awe, looking at all the different roses, running over to each one and smelling them over the table.

I sigh and grab the single card in the red roses bouquet. "Yes, they are, sweetie."

I open the small envelope and it reads:

*"What is the worst part of your day?"*



This is so Kalum to ask this type of question. I fish out my cell phone from the back pocket of my jeans and tell him.

*Me: The worst part of my day is not waking up in your arms. The second is when Lane asks me with sadness if you have left already. That is the worst part of my day. When you are not with us. The best part is when you are. Thank you for the flowers.*

My phone vibrates instantly with an incoming message.

*Kalum: You both are everything to me.*

I smile and place my phone back inside my pocket, but it begins to ring. Camila pinches her brows when she sees the look on my face when I see who is calling me. It is Lane's mother, Mrs. Turner.

I touch the green button to answer the call. "Hello."

"This is Caroline, Lane's mother. I need to talk to you about Lane Jr."

She rambles on the phone and my stomach bottoms out when her threats spill through the phone as I look at Lane writing in his workbook. After she hangs up, a ringing sound assaults my ears. She can't. She wouldn't. Why can't I be happy? Why are they so evil?

I hang up the phone and drop it on the dining table with a thud.

"What is wrong, Aura? What happened? Who was that?"

I place my hands over my face. “It was Caroline. She wants Lane Jr. She says I can’t take care of him properly as a single mother. He is a Turner, and she can provide better for him than I can.”

“But that is not true. Look at where we live and you have the pop-up store and everything going. ”

I close my eyes and slide my hands down my face. “Yeah, all that is great, but I haven’t received a dime until the funds clear after sales, and everything is in a trust. She pushed me to do that to set me up, Camila. On paper and in front of a judge, the Turners will make it seem he is better off living with them based on the life they could provide. They will twist things around to make it look like I’m struggling, and they could force me to sell Lane’s cars, shop, builds, maybe even his company. It is their endgame. I doubt they care about Lane Jr. When they ask for my financial statements, I look like I can’t afford where I live and would need to sell assets to create liquid cash flow and in the end, they get what they want, to destroy what Lane built under their name to make a point.”

Camila’s mouth opens like a fish when she sees how I painted it all out. How it will go through lawyers, judges, and the court. The well-being of Lane Turner Jr.

“You have to tell Kalum, Aura.”

I shake my head. “All I have been is trouble for that man. Maybe his parents were right in getting rid of me. There is nothing he can do.”

“Don’t underestimate him, Aura. You need to tell him.”

I lower my head and slide my fingers through my hair. “You know I’m not. I already have to pay him back for the pop-up store and this is not his fight but my own with my dead husband’s family. This is not his problem. He is better off being with some heiress.”

“You know that is not true. It will all work out, Aura.”

I get up and walk toward the bedroom. “I’m not sure anymore, Camila.”



*Chapter 30*



## Kalum

It has been a week, and I have moved my schedule around to have Aura wake up in my arms, but she is distant. Something is wrong, but she won't tell me. The pop-up store was a success on the first day. She almost sold out of every design, but her smiles don't reach her eyes and I'm confused. I thought she would be happy. I have asked her if she is okay, she says everything is fine, but the spark in her is gone. Something is very wrong. Is she not happy? Does she miss Lane?

I'm looking out the floor-to-ceiling windows of my office. It is getting cooler, and people are wearing their long coats in New York and even in the warmth of my office, my veins feel like the weather down below. Cool with dread. Something is going on with Aura, but she won't tell me. She won't open up to me.

My phone rings and it's from Melissa out front. "Yes."

"There is a Miss Exie Turner wanting to see you, sir. Do I let her in?"

I roll my eyes. Great. What does she want? “Let her in,” I reply.

The door opens, and Exie Turner enters wearing a blue pantsuit. The epitome poster child of the female CEO. She made the cover of Forbes as one of the most influential businesswomen to own a billion-dollar fortune, the Turner fortune. She has almost as much money as me. Almost but not quite. I beat her profit margin by a couple billion.

“What can I do for you, Exie?”

She crosses her arms over her coat in her hand. “We need to talk, and it’s about Aura.”

My head snaps to attention. “What is it?”

She sits and levels her stare on me. Her expression hard and serious. Whatever she is going to tell me, I’m not going to like.

“My parents are gearing up with lawyers.” She blows out a breath and her left leg is shaking.

“Tell me, Exie. What is going on?”

“That means she hasn’t told you.”

“Told me what?” I snap.

The fucking suspense is killing me. I want to reach over my desk and shake it out of her.

“They are threatening to take Lane Jr. away from Aura. She put everything in a trust that Lane can only access when he is of age, and he is still too young to make any decisions. My

parents are expressing their concerns over her ability to provide adequately for Lane in the same capacity as they could. My parents are going to get a court order from a judge to have Lane Jr. stay with them because they can provide a more stable environment than Aura. They will want to see financial statements that we both know only show Lane's assets, cars, and his company."

"They want her to sell it. This is not about Lane Jr. and his lifestyle."

"Exactly," Exie deadpans.

I lean back in my chair but then get up and walk over to pour a scotch. I turn my head. "Want one?"

She sighs and places her coat on the chair next to her. "Yeah."

I pour her a glass and hand it to her. "What are you willing to do?"

She looks up. "Honestly, she is my best friend, my brother's only love, and the mother to my nephew. Anything."

"How much of the company do you own?"

"Majority share, and I placed some in Aura and Lane's names. She doesn't know."

"How is your parents' retirement? Do they have enough?"

"Of course, they wouldn't threaten her if they didn't feel a sense of financial empowerment. They have more money than

they know what to do with. Since my brother's death, I'm the sole beneficiary. What are you proposing?"

I level her with a hard expression, taking a sip of my scotch. The cubes inside the glass moving with the amber liquid. "Retire them like I did mine and outvote them with the board. Take away their power, and in return, it will give you your freedom with Dex."

Her face softens, and I can tell she is in love with him. Dex was Lane's right-hand man. He runs Turner Automotive and takes care of the shops and sends reports to Aura on a weekly basis. The guy is loyal but has the same issue Aura has with her in-laws. He doesn't come from a privileged family, so their relationship is hidden.

"That would piss them off, but they would move forward. They still have enough money to get even with Aura. Even in the sense of dismantling what Lane built. They were never happy Lane had deviated from the family business and built cars to race. He moved out when he turned eighteen and never went back. It was against their wishes, and let's not even talk about his marriage to Aura and the fact he had a child with her. My parents don't believe their children should marry for love but for convenience and money."

"We share a similar issue with our beloved parents, but I see things differently. I'm sure you do too."

She takes a long sip of the scotch that makes her eyes water. "I do," Exie croaks.

"Slow down there, slugger."



She starts to cough and her eyes water. “What is this?” She holds up the glass like it’s nuclear.

I chuckle. “Macallan Fine and Rare, aged scotch.”

“It’s smooth, but shit, it’s strong,” she declares.

“I opened it for the occasion.”

She coughs and clears her throat. “What occasion is that?”

“I have decided it’s time to propose to Aura and make her my wife. She will be untouchable as a St. Claire.”

She snickers. “You really love her, don’t you?”

“With everything that I am, Exie. She and Lane Jr. because he is a part of her and my best friend’s son.”

I tell her the pact I made with her brother, and for the first time, Exie Turner sees me for who I really am and not the monster she thought I was. How much I love her best friend.

Tears stream down her face when I tell her the story of two young guys falling in love with the same girl. What lengths they would go to to protect the one girl they both loved forever. One living and one in heaven, all the same, our love for her knows no bounds, and we would walk to the ends of the earth just to see her smile and feel the love she has for both of us in her heart. There is no one like Aura Rayne. No one.



*Chapter 31*



## *Aura*

I look at the test in my hand in disbelief. I'm pregnant. I missed one pill, and now I'm pregnant. One pill. I lie down on my bed and stare up at the ceiling. No wonder I can't stand the smell of eggs. They smell rotten and I just feel like sleeping and puking. Camila made me eggs with toast this morning when I was so tired from working the store. All the customers walking in placed orders for more handmade designs, but my stomach wasn't having it. I figured I had eaten something that didn't agree with me, but then I remembered the feeling when I fell pregnant with Lane, and it hit me. I went to the grocery store nearby and was relieved to find they had pregnancy tests on hand.

After drinking a ton of water, I thought I would float. I took three tests, and they all came out with the same result. I'm pregnant. My periods were off sometimes, and I switched contraceptive brands and only missed one pill switching over, and bam, now I'm pregnant with Kalum's baby. Now I don't just have Lane, but now I'm pregnant with Kalum's baby. I look down at my still flat stomach and I feel flutters in my

stomach and now know there is a baby growing inside of me. Our baby.

I walk out of the bathroom, and Camila is standing in the hallway watching me. I look down at my scroungy socks over my gray leggings.

“How far along are you?”

My head snaps up, and her expression softens. I decide to tell her. Why hide it? “About two months along, give or take.”

“Does he know?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know how to tell him, not with everything going on with Lane’s grandparents.”

I received the documents from their lawyer with dread. I haven’t even sent it to Mr. Schwartz yet. The walls are closing in on me fast, and I need to relax.

“Tell him, Aura. You need to be honest with him about everything. He will be there for you. He loves you, and I know the news will make him happy.”

I give her a hug. “You think so?” I whisper.

“I know it.”

“Tell Henry to wait for me out front.”

She nods. “I’ll stay with Lane.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I think you need to tell him first and then together, you guys will tell Lane together.”



I make my way inside the St. Claire building, and security greets me.

“How can I help you?”

I look down at my simple long coat and sneakers, looking out of place in the beautiful building with black marble floors.

“My name is Aura Rayne, and I’m here to see Ka—Mr. St. Claire.”

His eyes widen when he hears my name. He grabs his security badge so fast he practically rips it off his suit jacket.

“Right this way, Miss Rayne.” He guides me toward the elevator without question or asking me what business I have with his boss. I look over, and Cason’s men nod and take a seat in the expansive lobby.

Once the elevator opens, I stride toward the young woman with designer glasses seated at her desk. She smiles at me warmly.

“Hello, I’m Melissa. I hope you remember me from... last time.”

Oh God. I tighten my hold on the letter-size envelope I’m holding, slightly embarrassed from the last time I was here on this floor when Kalum and I were fucking in the boardroom.

“Yes,” I say shyly.

“You are more than welcome to go right in. He already knows you’re here.”

“A-are you sure he isn’t busy? I don’t want to interrupt,” I stammer.

I’m hesitant to just walk in like I own the place. I didn’t call first. I should have called him.

“Mr. St. Claire gave everyone strict instructions that you are not to wait when you are here to see him. You can come whenever you wish.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. I wasn’t aware I could just—”

She waves her hand like it’s no big deal. “Please. You don’t have to explain. Go right ahead.”

I give her a nervous smile and walk toward the imposing door of Kalum's office. I turn the knob slowly and the door swings open. His head lifts up from whatever document he is reading, and my breath catches in my throat. He is so handsome, with his gray dress shirt fitted to his frame to perfection. It is tailored to his large frame, only accentuating his muscled chest, bulging biceps, and trim waist. There is a strip of hair that has slid forward over his forehead, and he looks like a model for an executive commercial. His hard, angular jaw and perfect lips, and brows that are shaped over expressive dark eyes.

When he smiles, I feel all the way to my toes inside my brown boots. My legs clench slightly before taking slow steps toward his desk after letting the door close behind me.

He stands, and I hold my hand out. "Please, I'm sorry to have interrupted you. I came because I needed to talk to you, and maybe it could have waited until you came home." The concept of home being where we all have been living. Time goes by so fast, and I've realized we have all been living together like a family for months.

He sits back down and gestures for me to take a seat. "You can come and visit me whenever you want, Aura. I like it." He grins. "Is everything okay? Do you need something? Are you hungry?"

"I need to talk to you about something very important, and I didn't want to discuss it over the phone."

"What is it, Aura? Tell me."

I sit up straight in the chair in front of his desk and place the papers from Lane's parents about Lane Jr. on my lap. I even took the pregnancy tests as proof. My fear is rejection for me falling pregnant. He told me he didn't want kids or marriage, and I'm petrified of his reaction. It's not fair to keep it from him, and he should know.

"If it's about Lane's parents and their threats, I already know about it and I'm going to take care of it."

I frown. "How did you know?"

"Exie," he quips.

"Exie?"

He nods and gives me a smirk. "She came to see me and told me. I'm not upset that you didn't tell me sooner, and I already know why. I know you don't want to burden me with it, but everything that concerns you and Lane Jr. concerns me."

I lick my lips, and his eyes darken. My nipples harden at the reaction and my core throbs between my thighs. We had sex early this morning, but with Kalum, it isn't enough. It feels like the first time, every time, with Kalum. The memory of him between my thighs with a trail of delicious soreness. A reminder of what takes place besides the love of his name on my lips every time he gives me my release.

"It will be taken care of. Exie and I are on it. No one is taking Lane Jr. away from you, and you sure as hell will not have to sell anything."



I trust him, and I trust Exie. A wave of relief that they are doing this for Lane Jr. and for me gives me the courage to spill the news that he is going to be a father.

“Is there anything else you need to tell me before I ask you for a kiss and your thighs wrapped around my waist?” he says huskily.

I bite my lip, slide my hand inside the envelope and pull out the test in my hand, covering them. He looks at my hand and tilts his head curiously.

“What is that?” he asks.

I give him a nervous laugh and lift my head up, looking at the tall ceiling in his office until my gaze lands on his. “I’m pregnant,” I blurt.

His eyes widen, and his gaze falls to my stomach and then to my face. I slide the test over to him on his desk.

“I took three of them. They are all positive. I switched contraceptives, and there was a day from switching and I guess that was all it took. I’m so sorry, Kalum.”

He just stares at me and doesn’t say a word, and his expression is totally blank. Maybe from the shock.

“Kalum?”

“Kalum?” I repeat.

He doesn’t move a muscle or say anything. He is just staring into space. His office door opens and Janine walks in.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I hear her behind me. “I’ll come back.”

“That won’t be necessary,” I tell her. “I-I was just leaving,” I stammer, looking back to Kalum, who still hasn’t uttered a single word.

He looks at Janine but doesn’t notice me walk out of his office, and I repeatedly press the button on the elevator. “Stupid thing,” I mutter.

I ignore the curious look from Melissa when I turn and see the exit sign to the stairs. I walk hurriedly to the door and open it and make my way down the stairwell. My heart is in my throat as I try to go down the flights of stairs.

I make it to another floor and press the elevator button. There are so many stairs to keep going and all I can think about is leaving. The elevator opens and some random people are exiting, but I make it before the doors are about to close.

Relieved I’m the only one inside the car, I take a deep breath and let it out slowly through my mouth. My phone vibrates. I pull it out of my coat pocket and notice it’s Janine.

Great. He sent his secretary to tell me to fuck off or maybe to schedule a doctor’s appointment to confirm it’s true. He sends his secretary to buy me clothes and let me guess, the flowers were from his secretary. I know I’m being petty and a brat right now, but he didn’t say anything. I called his name, and it was like he checked out mentally. I’m grateful for his help and all of that, but shit, he could have said something or told me to give him time to think. I’m scared shitless, and I don’t know what to say, but all I know is that I’m keeping it.

He can tell me he doesn't want children, but I'm keeping our baby.

The elevator doors open, and the security detail is already waiting. I nod and walk briskly with them trailing behind me. My phone keeps going off when I'm inside the car with Henry, but I ignore the call. It's Janine.



*Chapter 32*



## Kalum

“She isn’t answering, Kalum. I have called her like ten times,” Janine states.

“Fuck. She wasn’t on the elevator, and when I went after her down the stairs, I didn’t catch her.”

“What happened?”

I gesture to the pregnancy tests on my desk. I’m out of breath, but I manage to swallow. “She’s pregnant.”

Janine’s eyes widen. “And you let her walk out?”

“I tried to catch her, genius.” I wipe sweat off my brow from going down the stairs. That woman is fast for her small frame.

“What did you say when she told you that had her running like the building was on fire?”

“Nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing? Be a little more specific.”

“I froze.” I snap. Slamming my hand on my desk. “I fucking froze, Janine. I didn’t know what to say. I wanted to ask her to

marry me eventually, but I wanted to do it right, not because she is having my child. I want to marry her because I love her.”

“Then prove it to her and ask her like a normal man in love. Be creative.”



*Chapter 33*



## Aura

“It’s been three days, Judy. He hasn’t come home. Lane Jr. is wondering where he is, and I told him he is busy with work,” I tell her, taking a sip of my chocolate shake, seated at the booth in the diner.

“Give him time, love. He will come around. Maybe he is wrapping his heart around the idea. That man loves you. He almost killed Bradley for touching you. The man has been head over heels in love with you since he was a teenager. Has he called?”

“His personal assistant has called me, but I ignored it. I feel bad telling Exie my problems and that I fell pregnant. I was married to her brother.” I shiver. “Feels weird.”

Judy leans over the booth and gives me a friendly shove. “She will be happy for you both. She is even siding with you over her evil parents, and she went to him for help. That is love, honey. Not everyone gets a second chance at love.”

I trust Judy and tell her everything that is going on with Lane’s parents. She even agreed to help me out with my jewelry business. She needs the extra money and has agreed to



help me out with making more jewelry for the next pop-up store and orders that need to be fulfilled. I have been making them by hand, but my fingers are starting to hurt.

I get a message from Camila that Lane is ready for his lunch. He was working on a virtual project with other kids on the computer, and I decided to head over to the diner to catch up with Judy and say hi to Nancy.

“I’ve got to go.” I grab Lane and Camila’s takeout and head out to the house.

I get in the back seat, and Henry closes the car door, and a text comes through.

I look at my phone, and it’s from Janine.

*Janine: He doesn’t know I’m sending you this text. I know you are upset with Kalum and his reaction but there is something waiting for you at the house. Please give him a chance.*

*Me: I’m sorry for ignoring you. I just miss him.*

*Janine: I know.*

Henry parks in front of the house, and he heads inside with the food, and I stop when I see it. The sun is high in the sky and the blur of tears makes the light around me look like a kaleidoscope of colors.

The jeep.

The jeep I wanted to buy from Lane all those years ago is fully restored to its full glory with big mud tires and the

convertible soft top. Memories from my mother telling me about her adventures in her jeep come flooding back. Lane never told me what he did with it, and I never asked since we moved from Spencer. My fingers grip the black handle of the door, and I open it. The smell of refurbished leather hits me, and I look at the note and the football jersey inside it.

I notice it's a Spencer football jersey, and I pick it up and inhale the smell. Kalum's cologne and his scent. I take the old notebook paper and read it.

*Even through loss, there are still amazing and beautiful things in this life. The best part of mine was meeting and falling in love with you. I hope you love your gift and would love to be part of your journey. I love you, Aura. Happy eighteenth birthday.*

*Love,*

*# 68 Kalum St. Claire*

I choke on a sob as his words from the other night in the hotel room by the harbor come back to me. He bought it. He kept it all this time. I take my coat, thankful for the glimpse of the sun even if the clouds are covering it and pull his jersey over my head and run into the house.

I gasp. Tears are streaming down my face, and my two favorite boys are waiting for me, both of them down on one knee. Lane Jr. with flowers and Kalum with a black velvet box. There is a huge sign made out of construction paper colored with crayons that reads.

WILL YOU MARRY ME?

“Yes! Oh God. Yes!”

I run and kneel down on the floor and hug them both, giving them kisses on both their faces.

Camila comes forward from the kitchen with happy tears streaming down her face. “The box.” She motions toward the black box Kalum is holding out in his hand.

“It’s okay, Momma. It’s really pretty.”

Kalum opens the box, and the most beautiful ring I have ever laid eyes on sparkles in the light. It is big but delicate, with three giant stones.

“One is your past, one is your present, and one is for your future. The two woven diamond bands on the ring are for our children.” He looks at Lane and then at my stomach. “Lane, are you ready to be a big brother?”

“I’m going to be the best,” Lane says. “I promise, Momma.”

“You are already the best. Both of you,” I say softly.

I stand with them and Kalum hugs us both. The meaning of the ring so profound with so much love and understanding. How could I be so lucky to have fallen in love with two boys who would do anything for me?

# *Epilogue*

## *Aura*

I watch my husband with both one-year-old Kalum Jr. and Lane Jr. as they play in the pool at our home in Spencer. We bought a new home to spend time closer to Exie and Dex. Camila is still like a mother to me, watching over our sons as if they were her own grandchildren. I treat her not like a babysitter or housekeeper, but like a mother. She helps me, and I help her, and if it wasn't for her, I would have never met the most wonderful men in my life. Kalum and Lane. Since marrying Kalum and becoming Mrs. St. Claire, Lane's parents dismissed the case against me. Exie had the board outvote them to be removed from the company, leaving Exie as CEO, and they quietly retired. My business has taken off online, and I am happy to be married to Kalum.

You can't help falling in love. I know I couldn't. I happened to fall in love with the love of my life and then my second. Kalum was my first love, and then Lane became my second. Now Kalum will be my last love. How is that possible? Sometimes, time isn't ready when you meet the one you are destined to spend the rest of your life with. We move on, and if that person is your true love and destined to be your last, their

love for you is so great, that they will love you no matter what happens this year or the next. They will even let you go because your happiness means more to them than their own. I will always love Lane and will fulfill his dream. He will always be part of me, and the best part is that his legacy will live on through Lane Jr.

“Are you ready, Mrs. St. Claire?” Kalum asks, the water sluicing down his sexy, tatted frame.

“Yes, my love.”

I hold a towel and grab our beautiful baby boy as his chubby arms reach out for me. He is wet with his swim trunks.

Lane Jr. comes out of the pool and dries himself with a towel. “Are you ready?” Lane says with his face lit up with excitement.

“Yes, baby,” I say with a smile.

Today is Lane Jr.’s birthday, and all of our family and friends are ready to wish him a happy seventh birthday with his first track built for Lane to practice with his Kid Karts in the back of our property. His great love is to race cars, just like his father, and Kalum caters to Lane Jr.’s every whim in both love and understanding of his best friend. Two boys fell in love with me at the same time when I was just a girl and I’m the luckiest woman to have felt it because some people can live their whole life and never find it. There are no mistakes or regrets. There is a moment in time for everything, happiness, memories and I have them both. Now and forever.

The End.

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Carmen Rosales is an emerging Latinx author of Steamy, and Dark Romance. Writing Alphas. Like never before. Join her VIP list- [www.carmenrosales.com](http://www.carmenrosales.com)

She loves spending time with her family. When she is not writing, she is reading. She is an Army veteran and is currently completing her Doctorate Degree in Business and has the love and support of her husband and five children. She loves to see a review and interact with her readers.

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