



a
Kind
Wedding

Nathan

Sofia

New York Times, USA Today & Wall Street Journal Bestselling Author

SANDI LYNN

A KIND WEDDING:
NATHAN & SOFIA

KIND BROTHERS SERIES, BOOK THIRTEEN



SANDI LYNN

SANDI LYNN ROMANCE, LLC

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A KIND WEDDING: NATHAN
& SOFIA

KIND BROTHERS SERIES, BOOK THIRTEEN

New York Times, USA Today & Wall Street Journal Bestselling
Author


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A Kind Wedding: Nathan & Sofia

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away
to another world and from the daily grind of life – one book at
a time.

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CHAPTER 1



Nathan

Jackson and I ran over to Henry and noticed two bullet wounds in his left leg.

“You shot him twice?” Jackson glanced at Aunt Barb.

“Once wasn’t keeping him down.” Her brow arched.

“Conner, get over here,” I said. “There are no exits wounds, and I’m pretty sure the bullet shattered his femur. I’ll go take a look at Aunt Barb.”

“What did he do to you?” Simon shouted.

I walked over to Aunt Barb, where she sat on the couch, holding a cloth on her forehead that Christian ran and got for her. Removing the cloth, I examined her cut.

“How did this happen?”

“He pushed me into the coffee table,” she said.

“What?!” Simon shouted and tried to run over to Henry before Sam and Shaun grabbed hold of him.

“Everyone just needs to calm down,” Sebastian said.

“You need stitches, Aunt Barb,” I said as I made her hold the cloth over her wound.

Simon pulled out his phone.

“What are you doing?” Aunt Barb asked.

“What does it look like? I’m calling this in. We need an ambulance. You’re most likely going to jail, Mom. I hope you

realize that.”

“It was self-defense. I have the bruises and the cut to prove it.” She lifted the sleeve of her arm, which was already bruised, along with the bruises on her neck. “He tried to kill me.”

“She’s lying!” Henry shouted.

“You shut the fuck up!” Simon pointed at him.

“We need to get him for an MRI and into surgery,” Conner said. “Like now.”

“Well, Henry,” Aunt Barb said. “What do you want to do? You know how it will end if you choose to press charges against me. If you’re willing to spend the rest of your life in prison, be my guest.” She held out her wrists to Simon. “Go ahead. Arrest me, son. Take me down to the station so I can tell my side of the story and have an investigation launched on that lying asshole.”

Grace walked into the living room.

“Babe, what are you doing here?” Simon asked.

“Your mother called me right after she called you and asked me to do something for her. I’ll tell you later.”

“Excuse me? We need to get him to the hospital,” Conner said.

“Will he die if we don’t?” Simon asked.

“Well, no, but—”

“Then he can wait a while longer,” Simon said. “You are going to tell me what the hell is going on. Right now!” he shouted at Aunt Barb.

“I need to get her head stitched up, Simon,” I spoke.

“Can you boys fix his leg at the medical center?” Aunt Barb asked.

“Aunt Barb?” Christian spoke.

“No, we can’t,” Jackson said. “He needs to go to the O.R. at the hospital where there’s blood in case he needs it.”

“Yeah, Aunt Barb. I don’t feel comfortable fixing him up at the medical center,” Conner said.

“Fine. Simon, call your police friends and an ambulance.”

“Barb, wait!” Henry shouted. “Just call an ambulance, and I’ll tell them I was playing around with the gun and shot myself.”

“Smart man,” Grace said. “You better start thinking about how the gun went off twice. I brought the medical kit from the house for Barb. Simon, we were never here and must leave before the ambulance arrives,” she said as she wiped down the gun and placed it in Henry’s hand. “This is your gun, right?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Make sure your fingerprints are all over it. Sam. Shaun. Help me clean up this room so it doesn’t look like there was a struggle. Christian, Conner & Jackson, you three stay since you’re doctors. He called you because you’re surgeons, and he panicked. Got it? The rest of you need to get in your car and meet us at our house. Henry, Barb was never here. She’s been out shopping and having dinner with me. Got it?”

“Yeah, I got it,” Henry moaned in pain.

“Where’s your phone?” Grace asked him.

“I don’t know,” Henry said.

“It’s in the kitchen,” Aunt Barb said as I stitched her head.

Grace entered the kitchen, grabbed Henry’s phone, and set it beside him.

“How much longer until you’re done, Nathan?”

“Give me five minutes,” I said.

“Okay. As soon as you’re done, take Barb’s car and drive the two of you to our house. Everyone will meet there.”

“Okay. I’m done,” I said. “Come on, Aunt Barb.” I helped her up from the couch.

“We are going to have a serious discussion!” Simon pointed at her.

“Jackson, call an ambulance now,” Grace said.

“You do know that I have to report this,” Conner said. “Especially if I’m the one treating him.”

“I know, and don’t worry. Simon and I will write up the report.”

“You’ll write up the report, Grace!” Simon spoke with irritation.

“I’ll write up the report. Just come on. Call us when he’s out of surgery, and we’ll head to the hospital,” she said to Conner.

I helped Aunt Barb into her car and drove her to Simon and Grace’s house.

“What the hell is going on?” I asked her.

“I’ll explain everything when we’re all together.”

“You could have killed him, Aunt Barb.”

“I could have.” She glanced at me. “But I didn’t.” A smirk crossed her lips. “I really should have, but death would have been too easy for that bastard.”

When I pulled into Simon’s driveway, I helped Aunt Barb into the house, stepped onto the patio, and called Sofia.

“Nathan, what is going on?” she answered.

“I’m down at Simon’s. Aunt Barb shot Henry.”

“What!”

“I’ll explain everything later. How are Ella and Nicholas?”

“They’re fine. Ella wants to know where you are.”

“Tell her I’m out with her uncles and cousins. Don’t let her know I’m down at Simon’s.”

“I won’t. I love you.”

“I love you too, babe. I’ll be home as soon as I can.”

I walked back into the house, where Simon poured himself and Aunt Barb a scotch. Slamming it down on the table, his face was mere inches from hers.

“Talk!” he said.

“For God’s sake, Simon. Get out of my face,” Aunt Barb said.

“Sit down, bro,” Sam told him. “Mom, tell us what happened.”

“Henry isn’t who he says he is.” She picked up her drink. “He goes by many different names, charms rich women into falling in love with him, marries them, and then inherits their money and collects their life insurance after he murders them.”

“How do you know all this?” Simon asked. “I checked the guy out myself, and he’s squeaky clean!”

“Of course he is. ‘Henry Thorne’ hasn’t done anything bad yet. But if you check into his alias names, you’ll find four deceased rich wives. I was to be number five.”

“Again. How do you know all this?” Simon asked.

“Well, first of all, you know I have trust issues thanks to your father. He wanted to move our relationship very fast. While we were in Cabo, we were passing by a jeweler, and he stopped and looked at the wedding rings in the window, asking me what I liked. He told me that he already knew he wanted to marry me and hadn’t felt like this with anyone since his wife passed. Then he went on to say how he didn’t believe in soulmates, but since meeting me, he became a believer. He was smooth, charming, and frankly, too good to be true. That’s when my woman’s intuition kicked in. So, I went along with it because I wanted to see what his motives were. We had just had sex at his place shortly after returning from our trip.”

“For fuck’s sake.” Simon shook his head.

“We don’t need those details, Mom,” Sam said.

She rolled her eyes and sighed.

“Anyway, I went into the bathroom to wash my face, leaving the door open halfway so I could see him through the mirror. He climbed out of bed and walked over to a picture that hung on the wall directly across from the bathroom. He moved it, and behind it was a safe. He asked me how much

longer I was going to be. So, I told him a few more minutes. Grabbing my phone, I zoomed in and took a video of him opening the safe, getting the combination. When I told him that I was done and coming back into the room, he quickly shut the safe and replaced the picture. I asked him why he was out of bed, and he said he was going to get us some wine. The following morning when he went out for a run, I opened the safe and found his gun and a few passports with different names. I also found the paperwork from a life insurance company based in Florida with a woman's name on it—a name he had never mentioned before. So, I did some digging. That printer shop he supposedly owned and sold wasn't his. It was the business his deceased wife inherited when her husband died. So, I went to Florida.”

“Why didn't you come to me with all of this?” Simon asked.

“Because I didn't need your gloating. Besides, I can handle things myself. Where do you think your detective instincts came from?” Her brow arched. “When I was in Florida, I tracked down where he and his wife lived, spoke to the neighbors, and showed them Henry's picture. They knew him as James Frankel. He and his wife, Deanna, were married for one year before she died from a massive heart attack. Which by the way, he told me his wife's name was Laura, and she passed away from cancer. After she died, he inherited her estate, the printing shop, and the life insurance in the sum of two million dollars.”

“Did you tell him you were going to Florida?” Stefan asked.

“No. I told him I was going to see my best friend in North Carolina because she wasn't feeling well.”

“You don't have a best friend in North Carolina, Mom,” Sebastian said.

“He doesn't know that. After discovering the truth in Florida, I hired a private investigator to check out the other names on the passports. After all of his wives died within a year of marriage, all from massive heart attacks, he would

leave the state after playing the wounded widower and collecting the life insurance money. He'd been doing this for years."

"I still can't believe you didn't come to us with this!" Simon shouted as he pushed himself up from the table.

"Calm down. You know what, Simon? You really remind me of your father."

He turned and looked at her with a scowl on his face.

"How dare you!" He pointed at her.

"Bro." Shaun gripped his shoulders. "Calm down, sit down, and shut the fuck up. Let her talk. Go ahead, Barb."

"Leonard, my investigator, found out the wealthy women he was married to all had one thing in common: they all died of massive heart attacks. Coincidence? I think not. I knew I was his next target, so I played along until I could get enough evidence to nail that son of a bitch. Then I made a mistake."

"Which was?" I asked her.

"I spent the night at his place last night, and this morning, while he was in the shower, I opened the safe to take some more pictures of what he had in there. I then told him that I needed to get home because I had forgotten that I asked Stefan to come over and fix something for me."

"Huh?" Stefan's brows furrowed.

"It was an excuse, darling. Anyway, one of his passports fell onto the floor, and I didn't know because I was in such a hurry to get out of there. That's when he became suspicious and came to my house unannounced. Things escalated from there. I told him I knew everything about what he'd done and about his ex-wives. He grabbed me from behind and tried to strangle me. I fought, got out of his grip, and threw a vase at him. He grabbed me again, and I fell and hit my head on the table. I pretended that I was knocked out. That's when he pulled his gun on me and said, 'You made it too easy to look like a robbery, Barb.' I kicked the gun out of his hand, and then I kicked him in the balls, just like Grace had taught me. While he was down, I grabbed the gun and shot him once in

the leg. He wouldn't stay down, so I shot him again. That's when I called you, Simon."

"That son-of-a-bitch." Simon shook his head. "Why didn't you just kill him?"

"As I told Nathan on the way here, death would have been too easy for him. He will pay for what he's done to those other women. Grace, did you get it?"

"I did." Grace reached into her purse and pulled out an amber color vial."

"What the fuck is that?" Simon asked.

"After Barb called you, she called me, gave me the combination to his safe, and asked me to go there and get the vial. I suspect this is what he used to induce the fatal heart attacks of his ex-wives." She reached inside her purse and held up the vial.

"This is why you need to stop dating these random men!" Simon shouted as he pointed at his mother. "I'm going to the hospital and killing that son of a bitch myself."

"No, you're not," Grace spoke. "He's going to prison for the rest of his life, and we're going to ensure that happens."

CHAPTER 2



Nathan

“I’m happy you’re okay, Aunt Barb.” I walked over to where she sat and kissed her cheek. “I need to get home to my fiancée and children.”

“Thank you for everything, Nathan.” She placed her hand on my arm. “Give those beautiful children of yours a big kiss from me.”

“Will do, Aunt Barb.”

I walked out of Simon’s house and went back to mine. Sofia ran down the stairs and threw her arms around me when she heard the sliding door open.

“What the hell happened?” she asked as I hugged her tight.

“Where are the kids?”

“We’re right here,” Ella said as she walked down the stairs with Nicholas. “Where were you?” She handed me her brother.

“I was out with your uncles and cousins. Hi, little man.” I smiled as I kissed his head.

“I’m going to see Uncle Conner before I have to take a bath and get ready for bed,” Ella said as she approached the sliding door.

“He’s not home, Ella. The hospital called, and he needed to go in and do surgery.”

“Oh. Okay. Then I guess I’ll go take a bath now.” She ran up the stairs.

I handed Nicholas to Sofia, walked over to the bar, and poured us each a drink.

“You’re going to need this.” I smirked as she set our son on the floor and took the glass from me.

We sat on the couch while Nicholas played with his toys on the floor, and I told her everything that had happened.

“I can’t believe any of this.” She shook her head.

“I know. I can’t either.” I brought the glass to my lips.

“So now what?”

“I don’t know. Simon and Grace are going to take care of it.”

“Overall, how is Aunt Barb?” she asked.

“She’s tough, but I think this really rattled her.”

“What are you two doing?” Ella asked as she walked into the living room and climbed on my lap.

“Talking.” I kissed the side of her head.

“About the wedding?” she asked.”

“Yes.” Sofia smiled. “We’re setting a date.”

“Yay! When is it?”

Sofia and I looked at each other.

“We’re still discussing it, sweetheart,” I said.

“Hurry up. I think it’s ridiculous that you’re taking this long to decide.” She jumped off my lap. “It’s not hard to pick a date.” Her eye narrowed at us. “I’m going to my room to study before I go to sleep.”

“You sound like your Uncle Conner!” I shouted as she ran up the stairs.

“The whole family thinks it, Dad!”

I chuckled as I picked up Nicholas.

“Wouldn’t any date be the perfect date?” I asked Sofia.

“Yes, and we need to pick one. I know we talked about waiting until things with the family settled down, but I think there will always be something with this family.” She smirked.

“I agree, babe.” I sighed as I leaned over and kissed her beautiful lips. “The studio is closed tomorrow, right?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Let’s go to the Beverly Hills Hotel and see their first available date after meeting with Ella’s principal. Whatever date it is, is the day we get married.”

“Sounds like a plan.” She grinned. “Let me just confirm with Charleigh first.”

“Why?” His brows furrowed.

“Tomorrow is her day off, and she offered to watch Nicholas while we meet with Ella’s principal.”

“You mean we could potentially have a day with just the two of us? No kids?”

“Maybe.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Then perhaps I should get us a room at the hotel for a few hours.” My brow arched.

“I would love that.” Her lips brushed against mine. “I’ll go call her right now.” She stood up from the couch.

“And I’ll get this little guy ready for bed.”

I took Nicholas upstairs and pulled his pajamas from the drawer and a diaper. He smiled and kicked his legs as I lay him down on the changing table.

“You are going to make a brilliant plastic surgeon, little guy.”

“Pfft. He’ll be an orthopedic surgeon like his great Uncle Conner.” Conner walked into the room. “Sofia told me you were up here.” He walked over and took the diaper from my hand. “Let me. I need the practice.”

“You’ll have your own kid to mold into an orthopedic surgeon. Leave mine to me. How did Henry’s surgery go?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

“Okay. Then, are you excited about the ultrasound in a couple of days?” I asked.

“Yeah.” He turned and smiled. “I just wish Charlotte would let us know what the gender is right then and there. But the girls got in her head, and they’re making us wait for the gender reveal.

“You can wait.” I placed my hand on his shoulder. “The party is that night. You can wait a few more hours, just like Sebastian can.”

“Yeah. I guess.” He sighed as he put Nicholas in his pajamas and picked him up. “By the way. What is the meeting about tomorrow with Ella’s principal?”

“I don’t know. Her principal said we’d discuss it at the meeting.”

“Did you ask Ella about it?” he asked.

“Yeah, and she just shrugged and said she didn’t know.”

“Uncle Conner!” Ella walked into the room and ran over to him. “Will you tuck me in bed?” she asked as he handed Nicholas to me and picked her up.

“You bet!”

“We need to do more TikTok videos.” She smiled as he carried her out of the room, and I followed behind.

“Definitely.” He set her down on her bed. “I have a question for you.”

“What?” She climbed under the covers.

“Are you misbehaving in school? Is that why your principal wants to meet with your parents?” He tickled her.

“No.” She giggled. “I don’t know why. I’m not worried. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Good girl.” He kissed her forehead. “Good night, my favorite niece.”

“Good night, Uncle Conner.”

I handed Nicholas over to Conner and sat on the edge of Ella's bed.

“Good night, sweetheart. Sweet dreams.”

“Night, Dad. Will you tell Mom that I want to say good night to her?”

“You bet. She'll be up in a minute.” I kissed her forehead.

Conner and I headed downstairs with Nicholas, and he handed him over to Sofia.

“Ella is tucked in. She's asking for you.”

“I'll put this little one to bed after I say good night to Ella.” She kissed my lips.

CHAPTER 3



Nathan

I walked over to the refrigerator, pulled out two bottles of beer, and handed one to my brother.

“Thanks, bro.” He twisted off the cap and set it on the island.

“So? What happened with Henry?” I asked.

“I removed the bullets and put in a couple of plates and several screws for his shattered femur.”

“Hold on. Do we need to call our brothers over?” I asked.

“Nah. I already told them before I came over here. When I got out of surgery, Grace and Simon were already there waiting. They told me what happened with Aunt Barb. That’s pretty fucked up.”

“Yeah. I know.” I brought the bottle to my lips as I shook my head. “So, what’s going to happen now? Did Simon or Grace say?”

“No. They didn’t. I’m sure we’ll hear all about it tomorrow. Listen, bro, I have to get home to my wife.” He grinned. “God, I love saying that.” He walked over to the sliding door. “By the way, why the fuck haven’t you and Sofia set a wedding date yet?”

I chuckled. “You sound like Ella. We’re going to the Beverly Hills Hotel tomorrow after we meet with Ella’s principal.”

“Awesome.” He smiled. “So, do you have a date in mind?”

“We don’t know yet. We’re seeing what they have available.”

“Okay. I’ll see you tomorrow.” He walked out.

I locked up the house, turned off the lights, and headed upstairs. Carefully opening Ella’s door, I saw she was sound asleep. Walking to Nicholas’s room, I stepped in and stared at him as he slept peacefully in his crib. When I entered our bedroom, Sofia was in the bathroom taking her makeup off. Walking up behind her, I wrapped my arms around her waist and kissed the side of her head.

“Hello, there, Dr. Kind.” She smiled through the mirror. “What was that for?”

“Just letting you know that I love you.”

“I love you too.” She turned around and sat up on the counter while wrapping her arms around my neck and her legs around my waist. “It’s been quite a day.”

“I know. I’m exhausted.” I kissed her. “What did Charleigh say about tomorrow?”

“She said not to worry about Nicholas and go sex it up for as long as we want to.” A grin crossed her beautiful lips.

“Then we’re taking advantage of that.” I leaned my forehead against hers.

“I’m looking forward to it. I’m happy you took the day off tomorrow. We can spend the whole day together, kid-free, until we have to pick up Ella.”

“Then we better head to bed and get some sleep.” I winked with a smile as I lifted her from the counter and carried her to our bed.



“Thank you for coming. Please have a seat,” Ella’s principal spoke as she sat behind her desk.

“What is this about?” I asked.

“Ella is a very gifted child, Dr. Kind.”

“Yes. We know that already.”

“She’s one of the most gifted students I’ve ever come across in my life. Her mind can’t absorb all the information it wants and needs fast enough at the level of education we can provide her. I’ve spoken to the headmaster at Oak Crest Academy, and he would happily accept Ella into their high school program.”

“High school? She’s only seven.” My voice raised. “I just can’t throw my seven-year-old daughter into a new school with older kids. Teenage kids at that.”

“Then how about college, Dr. Kind? Because honestly, that’s where Ella belongs. The high school students at Oak Crest have brilliant minds and are well-behaved.”

“They’re teenagers, and just because they have brilliant minds doesn’t mean they’re exempt from all the teenage stuff normal teens do and go through.”

Sofia reached over and placed her hand on my arm.

“The fact is, Dr. Kind, that Ella will most likely graduate high school by the time she’s ten, if not sooner. She will attend college very young, whether you like it or not. I’m surprised she hasn’t mentioned college courses to you already.”

I looked down for a moment and sighed. “She has.”

“I know this is difficult, but you must do what’s best for your daughter. Attending school here isn’t what’s best for her at this stage. She’s already outgrown us, and it’s time for her to move on.”

“She’s made friends here,” I said.

“She can continue to see her friends and make new friends at Oak Crest.”

“Friends who are twice her age? I don’t think so.”

“If you feel strongly about Oak Crest, hiring someone to homeschool Ella is the other option. But I don’t think that’s a

good idea. She needs to interact with other kids who are at her level. Listen. Talk with Ella about this and schedule an appointment to tour Oak Crest. Let her sit in on some of the classes and see what she thinks.”

“We’ll do that,” Sofia said as she stood up. “Thank you for speaking to us about this. Nathan?”

“Yes. Thank you.” I extended my hand. “We’ll talk to Ella and let you know.”

Sofia and I walked out of the office and headed to my car. I was silent because I was still absorbing everything.

“We have to do what’s best for her, Nathan.”

“I know. It’s just—I don’t know, babe. I’m scared. How can I send my little girl into a teenage war zone?”

“I think you’re overthinking this, Nathan. We’ll talk to Ella later and get her thoughts. Let’s go to the Beverly Hills Hotel, get our wedding date situated, and then I’ll take your stress away.” A beautiful smile graced her face as I pulled out of the school’s parking lot.



“*D*r. Kind.” Mr. Russo smiled as he extended his hand. “Miss Finnegan, it’s nice to see you again.” He shook Sofia’s hand. “Please, have a seat. I assume you want to book our Crystal Gardens and Ballroom for your wedding?”

“Yes, Mr. Russo,” I said.

“Excellent. Let me ask you something. How many more of you will be getting married?”

“There’s only one more in our family: my brother Christian.”

“How exciting. We are truly honored to host all of the Kind weddings here. So, tell me. What date have you picked?”

“That’s the thing,” Sofia spoke. “We’re just winging it and seeing your available dates.”

“Okay. Let’s see.” He typed away on his computer. “Next year, correct?”

“Yes,” Nathan said. “The earlier in the year, the better.” I glanced at Sofia and winked.

“Oh, dear. We are booking out for next September.”

“That’s a whole year,” I said.

“Well, couples normally plan their weddings a year or two in advance, Dr. Kind. In fact, I had a couple in here last week that booked us for 2026.”

“That’s ridiculous,” I said.

His office door opened, and an older woman stepped in.

“Excuse me, Mr. Russo. I don’t mean to interrupt, but I can’t get into the calendar since you’re in it. We had a cancellation, so can you make sure to cancel the date while you’re in there?” She handed him a post-it note.

“Why did they cancel? Do they realize they aren’t getting their deposit back?”

“They broke up. That’s all the former bride said.”

“Very well.” He sighed. “You don’t happen to want to get married on November 18th, do you?”

“Of this year?” I asked.

“Yes, Dr. Kind. This year.”

“That’s in two months.” Sofia looked at me.

I reached over and took hold of her hand. “I don’t want to wait until next September to make you my wife. But I also don’t want you to be stressed out either. So, let’s pick a date for next year.”

Her beautiful eyes stared into mine as a smile crossed her lips.

“Put us down for November 18th, Mr. Russo,” she said.

“Babe, are you sure?” I squeezed her hand.

“Yes. The sooner, the better. I don’t want to wait either, and I want us to get married here like the rest of the family. We can do this, Nathan.”

“You heard my fiancée, Mr. Russo. Put us down for November 18th.” I smiled.

“Excellent! You’re in. All I need is a deposit to hold the venue.”

I pulled my credit card from my wallet and handed it to him. After thanking him, we exited his office and entered the hotel’s lobby, where I walked up to the desk to reserve a room.

“Hello, Dr. Kind. How can I help you?”

“I would like to reserve a room, please.”

“For how many nights?”

“Just one. I also need to reserve a block of suites for November 18th. Also, is your Presidential Bungalow available for November 17th and 18th?”

“Yes. Would you like to reserve that as well?”

“Yes. That is where my beautiful fiancée will be staying the night before our wedding and where we will spend our wedding night.” I winked at Sofia.

“Okay. I’ve reserved one of our superior rooms for you today, a block of suites for November 18th and the Presidential Bungalow for two nights. I’ll need your credit card.”

I handed her my card and took hold of Sofia’s hand.

“You’re all set. Here’s the key to your room. Enjoy your stay.”

“We definitely will.” I smiled.

CHAPTER 4



Sofia

My nails dug into the flesh of his back as he slowly thrust in and out of me.

“God, you feel so good,” Nathan spoke breathlessly.

Being in this hotel room with just the two of us was bliss, even if only for a few hours. Several moans escaped my lips as his thrusting increased, and my body reciprocated with a fierce orgasm. Nathan moaned as his thrusting slowed, and he halted, burying himself deep inside me while he exploded.

“Oh, my God,” he moaned.

His body dropped on mine as he buried his face into the side of my neck while waiting for our heart rates to return to normal.

“Are you hungry?” He smiled as he lifted his head, and his eyes stared into mine.

“Starving.” I grinned.

“Let’s order room service.” His lips met mine before rolling off me. “Here’s the menu. I’ll be right back.” He went into the bathroom.

I glanced over the menu, grabbed my phone, and texted Charleigh.

“How’s everything going? I hope Nicholas isn’t too much trouble.”

“Everything is great. That sweet little man isn’t any trouble at all. We’re just hanging out, dancing, and having a good time. Did you and Nathan set a date?”

“We did.” I sent the smiling emoji. *“We’ll let everyone know later. In fact, I’ll send out a family text right now.”*

“I’m so excited!”

“Are you texting Charleigh to see how our son is?” Nathan asked as he reached into the closet and pulled out two white robes.

“How did you know?” I smiled.

“Because I know you.” He smirked as he handed me one of the robes.

“I’m going to send a family text right now for a bonfire tonight so we can announce our wedding date.”

“Good idea. Do you know what you want to eat?”

“Yeah. Order me the turkey club pita and fries.” I typed away on my phone.

Nathan placed our order and climbed on the bed.

“Do you hear that, babe?” he asked. “Just listen.”

“I do.” I grinned. “The sweet sounds of silence.”

“And it’s all ours.” He hooked his arm around me and kissed the side of my head.

“There’s so much to do, Nathan, and we need to get moving on the wedding plans fast.”

“We’ll do it, sweetheart. If Conner can basically do it alone, the two of us can handle it. You have no idea how happy I am to make you Mrs. Sofia Kind in two months.”

“I can’t wait.” I kissed his sexy lips.

There was a knock at the door, and our lunch had arrived. After Nathan tipped the server, we brought the plates to the bed and ate.

“Oh, my God,” I said as I had a thought.

“What’s wrong?”

“Jenni’s babies are due next month. There’s no way she’ll have time to make a wedding dress for me, let alone all the bridesmaid dresses.”

“She has plenty of staff, babe. Trust me. She’ll make sure it happens. But you’ll have to tell her what you want very quickly. Like tonight.”

“Well.” My lips formed a smile. “She already has it designed. She’s had it designed for months.”

“Before I proposed to you?” His brow arched.

“Yes. But she didn’t show it to me until after you proposed.”

“I’ll bet she has one for Charleigh as well.”

“She does.” I grinned. “Do you think Christian will ask her to marry him?”

“Definitely. He was looking at rings when I went and bought yours.”

“Oh!” I grabbed my phone and opened my notes app. “Nathan’s ring.” I typed. “I’m going to pick it out myself if that’s okay.”

“I’ll wear anything you pick out.” He shoved a fry in my mouth. “Now, let’s burn some calories.” He grinned as he took our empty plates and set them on the nightstand.

It was time to leave our hotel room and pick up Ella from school. Walking down to the lobby, Nathan checked us out and had the valet bring our car around. We arrived at Ella’s school just as the bell rang. I climbed out of the car and called Ella’s name as I waved to alert her that we were here.

“Hey, you.” I smiled as I kissed her head and took her backpack from her.

“Hey, sweetheart.” Nathan smiled as she climbed into the backseat.

“Hey, Dad. I love the two of you picking me up together.”

“How was school?” Nathan asked.

“Boring.”

Nathan glanced at me, and I could see the fear across his face.

“What did my principal want to talk to you about?” she asked.

“We’ll discuss it when we get home,” Nathan said.

“Am I in trouble? I didn’t do anything.”

“No, sweet girl.” I smiled. “You’re not in trouble. We’ll be home soon, and then we’ll tell you.”

“Okay. Did you finally set a wedding date?”

“We did.” I grinned as I looked back at her.

“When is it?”

“November 18th,” Nathan spoke. “But don’t mention it to the family. We’re telling them tonight.”

“That sucks. I don’t want you guys to wait until next year to get married. You couldn’t get a date sooner?” she whined.

“Is two months soon enough for you?” Nathan glanced at her through the rearview mirror.

“You mean November 18th of this year?” she asked excitedly.

“Yes, Ella. This year,” I spoke.

“And how are you going to pull that off?”

“Honestly, sweetheart. We have no clue.” Nathan chuckled.

CHAPTER 5



Nathan

When we arrived home, Ella grabbed a bowl of grapes from the refrigerator and sat at the table.

“Okay, I’m ready to hear what my principal wanted to talk to you about,” she said.

Sofia and I sat at the table across from her.

“Are you bored at school?” I asked.

“Yeah. I mean, I like everyone there. It’s just that I feel like I could be learning more.”

“Your principal told us that she thinks it’s time for you to attend high school at Oak Crest Academy.”

“Thank God.” She popped a grape in her mouth.

“Is that something you want to do?” Sofia asked.

“Yeah. But I’m sure you have a problem with that, Dad.” She stared at me.

“That’s not true,” I lied.

“Yeah, it is. I know you. But you don’t have to worry. I’ll be fine.”

“You’re seven, sweetheart.”

“But you have to do what’s best for me, right?”

“Yes.” I narrowed my eye at her.

“My education is what’s best for me. I can still see my friends from my other school. I’m not worried or scared to go to a new school.”

“Would you rather I hire someone to homeschool you?” I asked.

“Are you trying to make me anti-social?” Her little brow arched, and Sofia let out a light laugh.

“Of course not. I love you and only want the best for you.”

“Dad.” She reached over and placed her small hand on mine. “I love you too, but now isn’t the time to be an overprotective father. I know you’re scared to send me somewhere new, but don’t be. I want to do this. I need this. It’s who I am, and you can’t change that.”

I glanced at Sofia as a tender smile crossed her lips.

“Your principal said that you could potentially graduate high school when you’re ten,” Sofia told her.

“I know, and then I’ll go off to college. You think you’re freaked out now, Dad. Just wait.” She grinned.

I ran my hand down my face as Sofia reached over and softly rubbed the back of my neck.

“I’ll set up an appointment for us to go and take a look at Oak Crest Academy.”

“Thanks, Dad! I love you.” She jumped up from her seat and hugged me.

“I love you too, sweetheart.”

“Can I borrow your credit card?”

“For what?” My brows furrowed.

“I want to sign up for a Human Design course online.”

“A what?”

“It teaches one how to live according to their design. Actually, I think the whole family should take the course.”

“Ella, I have no idea what you’re talking about,” I said.

“I think Sasha mentioned that before,” Sofia said.

“I’ll send you the link, Dad.” She kissed my cheek and ran upstairs.

“Breathe, Nathan. Everything will be okay,” Sofia rubbed my back and kissed my cheek. “I’m going to Charleigh’s to get our son.”

“Okay, babe.” I sighed as I rubbed my forehead.



I walked down to the beach, lit the bonfire, and returned to the house to grab a few beers from the refrigerator.

“Are you ready to head down to the beach?” I asked Sofia.

“I’ll meet you down there. I’m going to change Nicholas into his pajamas first.”

“Okay.” I kissed her.

Walking out the sliding door, I noticed that most of my family was already around the bonfire.

“What’s up?” Sam grinned. “I hope this family meeting is to tell us that you and Sofia set a wedding date?”

“We did.” I smiled as I sat down in one of the loungers. “Sofia will be down soon. She’s changing Nicholas. Where’s Aunt Barb?”

“We sent her far, far away to another dimension.” Simon smirked, and Grace slapped him.

“Be nice,” Grace said. “She went up to the cabin for a few days.”

“What happened with Henry?” Stefan asked.

“Grace and I interviewed him and took his statement. He thought we would let him get away with it if he didn’t press charges against our mom.” Simon laughed. “Surprise, douchebag. You’re going to prison for a long time.” He grinned.

“We called Roman over at the FBI, and they’re handling it now,” Grace said.

“How can you be sure he won’t tell Roman that Aunt Barb was the one who shot him?” Conner asked.

“I know he won’t because he already told us he shot himself, and if he changes his story now, that’s another offense. Besides, Grace is holding his vial hostage and will turn it over if he says anything. Then he’ll be facing murder charges along with all the fraud charges.”

“You’re going to let him get away with murder?” Shaun asked.

“No.” Simon tipped his beer bottle to his lips.

“I may or may not have told Roman that all of his ex-wives died of massive heart attacks, and he needs to investigate that coincidence,” Grace said. “He’s a smart cookie. He’ll figure it out.”

Sofia walked over with Henry and Ella. She handed Henry over to Jackson and sat down on my lap while Ella climbed on Conner’s.

“Where’s Lily?” I asked as I looked around and didn’t see her.

“She’s studying at her friend’s house,” Alex said. “She has a big test tomorrow.”

“Okay. Enough. Spill it,” Shaun said. “When are the two of you getting married?”

“Babe?” I smiled at Sofia. “Do you want to do the honor?”

“Nathan and I will marry in the Crystal Gardens on November 18th!” She beamed with excitement.

“Damn. A whole year still?” Jackson asked.

“No. This November 18th.” I smiled.

“Hold up!” Conner exclaimed. “As in two months from now?”

“Yep.” Sofia grinned.

“Shit.” He chuckled.

Everyone congratulated us, and the girls took Sofia back to Georgia & Jackson’s house to discuss the wedding.

“Dad?” Ella stuck out her hand.

“I haven’t had a chance to look it over yet, sweetheart. Give me some more time.”

“Hurry up. Registration is closing in a couple of days.” She jumped off Conner’s lap. “I’m going back to the house to work on my painting.”

“What does she want?” Conner asked.

I sighed as I took a sip of my beer.

“She wants to use my credit card to sign up for some Human Design course.”

“A what?” Christian asked.

“That’s exactly what I asked her. I don’t know what it is.” I pulled my phone from my pocket and sent the link to my brothers and cousins in our group chat. “Now we can all check it out together.”

“Hmm. I think Grace knows about this stuff. I swear she mentioned this before. Hold on,” Simon said as texted Grace.

A moment later, she walked over and wrapped her arms around Simon’s neck.

“This better be important. We’re discussing wedding plans and don’t have a lot of time,” she said.

“Ella wants to sign up for this.” Simon showed her his phone.

“Oh! That’s wonderful. And?”

“Nathan has a problem with it,” Simon said.

“I didn’t say that, douchebag. I don’t know what it is or why she wants to take this course.”

“Did you ask her why?” Grace asked.

“Well, no.”

“I think it’s great. Sign her up. In fact, I think all of you should learn about your human design. I’m signing Simon up. You all can do it as a family.”

“Thanks a lot, douchebag,” Simon scowled at me. “If she’s making me do it, you’re all doing it! We do everything as a family, and this is no exception.”

“I’m in,” Shaun said.

“Me too.” Christian smiled.

“I’ll think about it.” I sighed.

CHAPTER 6



Nathan

“You haven’t told us yet how the meeting with Ella’s principal went,” Conner spoke.

“Yeah, bro. What did she want to meet with you and Sofia about?” Jackson asked.

“Ella can’t attend their school any longer.” I tipped the beer bottle to my lips.

“What? Why?” Christian’s brows furrowed.

“Because she’s too advanced and at a high school level. So, they think it’s best for her to attend Oak Crest Academy.”

“With high school kids?” Sam asked.

“Yep.” I finished my beer and set the bottle down. “They said she’ll most likely graduate high school before she’s ten.”

“Damn.” Conner grinned. “That’s my girl.”

I shot him a look as I grabbed another beer.

“You obviously need some guidance on this situation, so talk to Charlotte.”

“I really want to hire someone to homeschool her, and when I mentioned it, she accused me of trying to make her anti-social.”

My brothers and cousins chuckled.

“What are Sofia’s thoughts?” Christian asked.

“She seems okay with it. Ella told me that now isn’t the time to be an overprotective father. I mean, come on. How can I not be? She’s seven years old and going to high school with kids way older than her. Teenagers. You all remember what we were like as teenagers and all the bad shit we did.”

“Ella isn’t like us, bro,” Jackson said. “She’s different.”

“She doesn’t need to be exposed to any of that type of teenage behavior.”

“Take it from someone who has a teenager,” Stefan said. “I know exactly how you feel, cousin. But there’s nothing you can do to stop it. You can’t stop her from learning at the level she’s on. She’s only going to school there. It’s not like she’s hanging out with those kids.”

“If she’s going to graduate high school before the age of ten, that means college is next,” Sam said. “How the fuck are you going to handle that?”

“It makes me sick just thinking about it,” I said as I sipped my beer. “Fuck. Don’t get me wrong. I’m so proud of her, but I want her to be a kid.”

“She’s still going to be a kid,” Shaun said. “She’ll just be an extraordinary seven-year-old kid who attends high school.”

“Talk to Charlotte.” Conner placed his hand on my shoulder. “She can offer some advice. Just so you know, we had sex in her office today, so you might want to stay off the couch.” He grinned.

“For fuck’s sake, bro.” Jackson shook his head.

“Thanks for the warning.” I rolled my eyes. “I have to get back to the house and tuck Ella in. I’ll see you, douchebags, tomorrow. And I’ll see the two of you at the office.” I smiled as I pointed at Sebastian and Conner.

When I stepped through the sliding door, I sent a text message to Sofia.

“Hi, babe. I’m back at the house.”

“Okay. I’ll be home soon. Kiss Ella good night for me.”

“Will do. I miss you, so hurry up.”

“I miss you too. Be home soon. Lots of wedding talk happening.”

I smiled but also couldn't stop the anxiety that resided inside me. I wasn't sure how to handle everything between Ella and the wedding. It was already taking a toll on me.

I went up to Ella's room, pulled my credit card from my wallet, and sat on the edge of her bed.

“Pull up the site, and I'll put in my credit card information.”

“Thanks, Dad.” She smiled as she turned her laptop to me.

“Why do you want to take this course, sweetheart?”

“Because I think it's interesting. I've been thinking a lot lately about myself, my intellectual gift, and how everything in my life is shades of gray. What you might see as black and white, I don't. I have this need to understand myself and what makes me who I am.

I could feel the stinging in my eyes as I stared at her. Reaching over, I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her into me while my lips pressed against the top of her head.

“You know who you are? You're my daughter. I love you so much and am so proud of you.”

“I love you too, Dad. Can you please finish putting in your credit card information so I can get registered?”

“Of course, sweetheart. Your uncles and cousins are going to sign up for the course too.”

“Yay! And you?” She cocked her head.

“With the wedding in two months, I won't have time.”

“Dad, you can take the course at your own pace. Please, do it. Please,” she whined.

“I'll think about it.” I kissed her forehead. “Go to sleep. It's late. Arthur is already sound asleep.” I winked.

“Good night, Dad.”

“Good night, baby girl. I’ll see you in the morning.”

As I left her room, I saw Sofia walking up the stairs with Nicholas, who was sound asleep in her arms.

“Shh,” she whispered.

I followed her to the nursery, where she laid him down in his crib. Walking over, I smiled as I lightly ran my finger across his forehead.

“Sweet dreams, little man,” I whispered.

Hooking my arm around Sofia, we went to our bedroom.

“How was everything with the girls?” I asked as I pulled my shirt over my head.

“It was great. I made a list of everything we need to do. Jenni told me not to worry about my wedding or bridesmaids’ dresses. She has it covered. We need to order the invitations tomorrow, and I picked out a few I really like, but I want your opinion before we order them.”

“I can’t wait to see them.” I kissed her forehead as I walked past her.

“I’ll start making the calls tomorrow for the cake, flowers, DJ, photographer, etc.”

I could hear the anxiety in her voice.

“Babe, you don’t have to do everything yourself. I will help you. Just tell me what you want and need me to do.”

She walked over to me and wrapped her arms around my neck.

“You’re in charge of the honeymoon. I don’t care where we go as long as it’s just the two of us.” Her lips pressed against mine.

Swooping down, I picked her up and held her tight.

“I’ll give you a honeymoon you’ll never forget.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.



“Bro, I’m nervous,” Conner said as he entered my office.

“About what?”

“Seeing my baby. I know I’m gonna lose it.”

“I won’t lie to you, bro. I was pretty choked up at our first ultrasound. I’ll be here for you.” I smiled.

“Can I confess something?”

“What?” I narrowed my eye.

“I’m hoping the baby is a girl. As much as I’d love a son, I really want a daughter.”

“I have one of each, so it can go either way. You’ll find out tonight.” I smiled.

“Nope. You know what. I only want a healthy baby. I don’t care the gender.” He looked at his watch. “I have to go get Charlotte. It’s time.”

“Good luck, bro. Jackson and I are here for you.” I smiled as he left my office.

I leaned back in my chair and thought about last night. I could tell something was bothering Sofia, and I knew it had something to do with her mother. She hadn’t heard from her at all since she moved to California. Rose had no idea that her daughter had a child and that she was a grandmother. Now that we were getting married, I knew somewhere deep inside her that she was bothered by not having her mother involved, no matter how bad things were between them.

After seeing a couple of patients, Jackson came into my office. While we were talking, the door opened, and Conner walked in. I could see the tears in his eyes.

“Well?” I smiled.

“The baby is perfect,” he started to cry.

“Ah, shit,” Jackson said as we both stood up and hooked our arms around our brother.

“Sorry.” Conner wiped his eyes. “It’s just such a miracle, especially with everything Charlotte and I have been through.”

“It’s okay.” I patted his back. “Let it out.”

“I’m good now. Thanks.” He dried his eyes.

“Have you seen Sebastian?” Jackson asked.

“Yeah. He and Emilia went in right after us.”

“Why don’t you go wait for him, and you both can cry together.” I smirked.

“Shut up, douchebag. I had a moment. I’m good now.”

“Oh, before I forget,” Jackson spoke. “Giuseppe is coming this afternoon for a checkup. I figured you could ask him about the flowers for the wedding. Maybe see if he’s available.”

“What time?” I asked.

“Four o’clock.”

“Perfect. Let me know when he’s here, and I’ll talk with him.”

“Will do, bro.”

Walking back to my desk, I picked up my phone and texted Sofia.

“Hey, beautiful. Giuseppe, the flower guy, has an appointment this afternoon with Jackson. I’ll ask him if he’s available for the wedding.”

“Oh, good. I just got off the phone with Gwen, the cake lady, and she will make our wedding cake. I was just about to call Giuseppe. He was next on my list. Thanks, babe. I love you.”

“I love you too. I’ll talk to you later. I have a patient to see.”

CHAPTER 7



Sofia

I dropped Nicholas off at Alex's and headed to the dance studio.

"There you are," Kendall said when I stepped inside.

"Sorry, I'm late. I had some wedding calls to make." I set my purse down behind the reception desk.

"I still can't believe you and Nathan decided to get married in two months."

"I know. Crazy, right?" I smiled. "But I didn't want to wait, and neither did he. I mean, we already have a kid together. It'll be okay. We can pull it off between myself, Nathan, you, Sasha, and all the girls."

"You bet. We're here for you, and it'll be magical."

"I had a dream last night about Rose," I said as I sat in the chair next to her.

"Again?" Kendall's brows furrowed.

"Yeah. I'm really getting sick of it."

"Listen, Sofia, you really need to tell her about Nicholas and that you're getting married."

"She lost that right when I called and left her a voice message, and she never reached out."

"I know." She sighed. "But I think subconsciously it's really bothering you. She is your mom regardless of how shitty

of a person she is.”

“I don’t want to talk about it or her. She made the decision to cut me out of her life completely.” I quickly brought my hand up to my eye. “I have to get ready for class.” I walked away.

I still had some time before my students showed up, so I put on my pointe shoes, turned on the music, and danced, letting myself slip away into another world and let all thoughts of Rose Finnegan leave my mind. I wouldn’t lie and say the hurt wasn’t there because it was. I’d just done a good job of hiding it. I was in the middle of doing pirouettes across the floor faster than I should have been when I felt my knee buckle, and I fell to the floor.

“Fuck!” I shouted as I grabbed my knee and held it.

Kendall ran into the room.

“Sofia, are you okay?”

“I’ll be fine.” She grabbed my arm and helped me up. “Shit.” I gritted.

“I can’t believe you haven’t had that knee fixed yet,” she said.

“I was going to, but then I got pregnant with Nicholas. I don’t have time to be down with knee surgery.”

Kendall helped me over to the chair and helped me take my pointe shoes off.

“Well, you have to do something. You can’t go on like this.”

After my class, I looked at my knee, and it was swollen. Limping my way out of the studio, it was time to pick Ella up from school. My phone rang as I pulled into the parking lot, and it was the school calling.

“Hello.”

“Hello, Miss Finnegan. Can you come to the principal’s office for a moment when you get to the school? Ella said you were picking her up today.”

“I just pulled into the parking lot. I’ll be in there in a few minutes.

“Thank you.”

Sighing, I parked the car and slowly climbed out. My knee was on fire, and it wasn’t easy to walk. Limping into the school, I went down to the principal’s office, and when I opened the door, I saw Ella sitting in a chair.

“What’s wrong?” Ella asked. “Is it your knee again?”

“Yeah. I’ll be okay.” I smiled as I patted her head. “Why are we here?” I whispered.

She shrugged.

“Miss Finnegan, it’s good to see you again. Please, come into my office.”

Ella took hold of my hand as we stepped inside.

“Please, have a seat.” Her principal gestured.

I knew if I sat down, I wouldn’t be able to get up.

“It’s okay. I’d rather stand.” I smiled.

“Oh, okay. I called the headmaster over at Oak Crest, and he said that tomorrow at noon would be an excellent time for you and Dr. Kind to stop by with Ella and take a look around. I told him you’d be there.”

“I’ll have to check with Nathan. I’m not sure that will work for him with his schedule.”

“Well, the sooner, the better. We, as parents, need to put our child’s education as a top priority.”

I was in a lot of pain, and this woman was irritating me.

“Listen, people work and just can’t drop everything,” I spoke sternly. “Dr. Kind is a very busy man with patients who come to him for help. If his schedule allows it, we’ll be there. If not, we’ll have to reschedule for another time.”

“I don’t think you understand, Miss—”

“Oh, I understand. I understand that you think you can schedule people’s lives for them.

“I’m sorry. Perhaps you should have Dr. Kind call me.”

“For what? He’ll tell you the same thing. As I said, we’ll go to Oak Crest tomorrow if he’s available. Thank you.” I grabbed Ella’s hand and began to walk out of the office.

“Miss Finnegan?”

I stopped and turned around.

“There’s no need for Ella to attend school tomorrow. She already knows the lesson plans for tomorrow and says she’ll be bored while the rest of the class learns.”

“Fine. Come on, Ella.”

“You’re not okay,” Ella said as we walked to the car.

“We need to stop at the medical center before we head home,” I said.

“Yay! I get to see my dad, aunts, and uncles!” Ella grinned. “Do you want a wheelchair?” she asked as I pulled into the medical center.

“No, sweetheart. I can walk.”

“I can push you.”

“I’ll be okay. Come on.” I grabbed her hand.

We took the elevator up to the second floor, and when we reached Nathan’s practice, Ella ran to June and hugged her.

“Ella, darling. How are you?” June squeezed her tight.

“I’m good. How are you, June?”

“I’m fabulous now that you’re here.”

The door opened, and Conner walked in.

“Sofia?”

“Uncle Conner!” Ella jumped up from the chair behind the reception desk and ran over and hugged him.

“Hey, baby girl.” He picked her up. “Are you here to meet Giuseppe?” He looked at me.

“Mom is hurt real bad,” Ella spoke. “It’s her knee again.”

Thanks, Ella.

“Sofia?” Conner shot me a look as he put Ella down. “I told you before—”

“You listen to me, Conner,” I spoke through gritted teeth. “I haven’t had time for the damn surgery. I’m getting married in two months, and I have a shitload of shit to do! Just give me the damn injection so I can get on with my day!” I shouted.

“Sofia?” Nathan walked over.

“Daddy!” Ella ran to him, and he picked her up.

“Hi, princess. What’s going on?”

“Mom hurt her knee really bad. She can barely walk, and Uncle Conner won’t help her.”

“I did not say that!” He pointed at Ella.

Nathan put Ella down, picked me up, and carried me to one of the exam rooms.

“Come on, bro.” He gestured to Conner.

He laid me on the exam table, and Conner looked at my knee.

“Tell me what happened,” Conner said.

“I was doing pirouettes, my knee buckled, and I fell.”

“Were you doing them too fast?” His eye narrowed.

“Maybe. I have a lot on my mind.”

Conner looked at Nathan.

“She yelled at my principal,” Ella said.

“What? Why?” Nathan stared at me.

“Because she took it upon herself to schedule an appointment for the three of us to go to Oak Crest tomorrow at noon.”

“She told her that she just can’t take it upon herself to schedule people’s lives. Then my principal asked Mom to have you call her, which made her madder.”

“I’m in a lot of pain, okay?” I loudly voiced. “And that woman was irritating me.”

“I’ll give you the injection this last time,” Conner said. “And I’m putting you in a brace for two weeks.”

“Conner—”

He put his finger up. “Sofia, don’t. You need it so that your knee can calm down. And after the wedding, you’re having surgery.”

“But—”

“No buts, babe.” Nathan squeezed my hand. “You have to listen to your doctor.”

I narrowed my eye at Conner.

“Don’t give me that look. You know I love you. Knowing that I can fix you and you won’t let me is killing me inside.” He smirked. “I’ll be right back. I’ll go get Lindsey and have her grab the brace.”

“Ella, why don’t you go see if June needs any help,” Nathan spoke.

“Okay. I love you, Mom.”

“I love you too, baby.” I smiled.

CHAPTER 8



Nathan

“I’m worried about you.” I sat on the edge of the exam table and held her hand.

“I’ll be fine. There’s no need to worry about me.”

“Well, I can’t help it. It’s not like you to yell at people like that. You really let my brother have it. I can only imagine how you let Ella’s principal have it.” My lips formed a smirk.

“I’m in a lot of pain, Nathan.”

“I know.” I leaned over and kissed her forehead. “You’re having that surgery as soon as we get back from our honeymoon. Understand me?”

“Yes. I understand.” She sighed.

“Is the wedding planning too much for you? Is that why you were not being careful at the studio?”

“No. Not at all.”

“Then what is it?”

The door opened, and Conner and Giuseppe stepped in.

“Look who I found in the hallway.” Conner grinned.

“Miss Sofia, it’s good to see you again.” Giuseppe walked over and grabbed her hand. “Dr. Conner told me you injured yourself.”

“It’s not a big deal, Giuseppe,” Sofia spoke.

“Yes, it is,” Conner said.

“Dr. Nathan, it’s also good to see you.” We shook hands. “Dr. Jackson told me about your wedding, and I am looking forward to making it as special as possible for you.”

“You’re available for our date?” I asked him.

“I will always be available for my favorite family.” He grinned.

“See, isn’t he awesome?” Conner patted Giuseppe’s back.

He pulled his phone from his pocket and looked at it.

“I’m available next Tuesday at five o’clock if you want to come into the shop and get everything picked out.”

“That’ll be fine,” I said. “Thank you, Giuseppe. We appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome. I need to run and get back to the shop. Sofia, feel better, love. I’ll see you both next week.” He walked out of the room.

After Conner gave Sofia the injection, Lindsey securely put on her brace.

“It needs to stay locked for two weeks,” she said. “You can take it off while you sleep and take a shower. But if you do any walking, it must go back on.”

“Thanks, Lindsey,” I said.

“Yeah. Thank you, Lindsey.”

“You’re welcome.” She walked out of the room.

“How the fuck am I supposed to drive?” Sofia snapped.

“You’re not,” Conner said. “It’s only for two weeks.”

“I have a studio to run in case you’ve forgotten.” Sofia narrowed her eye at Conner. “And I have wedding errands to run.”

“The family will help you, or Nathan can hire you a driver.” He grinned. “Shaun uses drivers all the time. Ask him if you can use one of his.”

“Not a bad idea, bro. Sweetheart, don’t worry about a thing. We’ll get it figured out.” I helped her up.

“I’m sorry for how I spoke to you, Conner,” Sofia said.

“Aw, I know you are.” He hugged her. “I know you’re in pain, and I get it. But it’s your own fault.”

“So now what?” Sofia looked at me. “How am I getting home?”

I glanced at my watch. “I have a patient in five minutes, and then I’m done for the day.”

“What about my car?”

“Don’t worry about that,” Conner said. “Charlotte and I drove in together. I’ll drive your car home. In fact, I’m going to head out now, so I’ll need your key.”

I reached into Sofia’s purse, grabbed the key fob, and handed it to Conner.

“I’ll see you two at the party tonight.” He grinned.

“Oh, my God. I was supposed to go to the brewhouse after I picked Ella up and help Julia and Alex decorate for the party.”

“They’ll understand, babe. And by the way, we can go to Oak Crest tomorrow at noon.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yes. Let’s get it over with.” I sighed.

Sofia went to the kitchen area for a bottle of water, and I went down to Charlotte’s office quickly before seeing my patient.

“You have a minute?” I asked as I walked into her office.

“Of course, Nathan. What’s up?”

“Sofia is here. She fell at the studio and hurt her knee.”

“Oh no. Is she okay?”

“She will be. Conner gave her an injection and put her in a brace for two weeks. She’s unhappy, but she knows she has no choice. I’m worried about her and was hoping you could talk with her. I think she’s having issues with the fact that her mom

still won't talk to her. I don't know for sure, but I suspect it. Especially now with the planning of the wedding."

"Okay. I'll talk with her and see what's going on."

"Thanks, Charlotte. Please don't tell her that I came to you with this."

"I won't. I promise."

"Thank you. I'll see you at the party." I smiled. "It's a big night." I winked.



I went upstairs to change for the party and saw Sofia touching up her makeup in the bathroom.

"What's going on with you?" I wrapped my arms around her from behind and kissed the side of her neck.

"Besides the fact that I'm stuck in this stupid brace. Nothing."

"I don't believe you. Talk to me, babe."

"I don't know, Nathan." She set her makeup brush down and turned around in my arms. "I've been thinking about my narcissistic bitch mother. I had a dream about her last night. I thought I had put all that to rest, but I guess not."

"It's understandable, sweetheart. You never had closure with her, and you need that."

"How can I get closure when she refuses to talk to me? There's something I never told you."

"What?" I furrowed my brows.

"I called to tell her she had a grandson after Nicholas was born. I told myself before I called that if she didn't answer, I wouldn't leave a message. She didn't answer, and I didn't leave a message. My missed call would show up on her phone, so she knew I had called."

I pulled her into me. "Why didn't you ever tell me?"

“Because we were dealing with a new baby, and I just wanted to forget about her. You know what?” She broke our embrace. “I’m done. I refuse to think about that woman anymore.”

“Easier said than done. You need to talk to Charlotte, babe. She can help you deal with it.”

“Charlotte told me I had to put closure on it by calling her the first time, remember? So, I did, left a message, and she never called me back.”

“I understand that. But now you need help with moving on from it.”

“Are you two ready to go yet?” Ella walked into the bathroom, holding Nicholas.

“We are, kiddo.” I took the baby from her.

“You three go downstairs. I’ll be down in a minute,” Sofia said.

CHAPTER 9



Nathan

When we stepped inside the brewhouse, I went over to the bar where my brothers and cousins gathered.

“It’s about time, bro.” Christian placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Sofia is a little slow right now.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“Beer?” Sebastian asked as he stood behind the bar.

“Scotch?” My brow raised.

“One scotch coming up.” He grinned.

Sebastian handed me my scotch, and I took it to where Shaun and Simon sat.

“Hey, cousin,” Simon said, holding up his beer bottle.

“Hey, Nathan.” Shaun smiled. “I heard about Sofia. How is she?”

“Pissed.” I chuckled.

“I bet. Poor girl. If you need a driver for her, let me know.”

“Thanks, Shaun. I appreciate it, but Sofia talked to Kendall, and she’s going to help out.”

“Okay. Just let me know if anything changes.”

“Hello, boys.” I heard Aunt Barb from behind.

“Mom.” Simon nodded.

“Hi, Aunt Barb. You’re back.” I smiled as I kissed her cheek.

“Congratulations on setting a wedding date, darling.”

“Thank you.”

“Grandma Barb!” Ella ran up to her.

“Hello, my sweet girl.” She hugged her.

“Where’s Henry?”

Simon, Shaun, and I looked at each other.

“Henry and I aren’t seeing each other anymore, darling. He moved back to Florida.”

“Why?” Ella pouted.

“Well, he decided that he liked Florida better.”

“Oh. Okay. I’m sorry, Grandma Barb.”

“It’s okay. I wasn’t really into him anyway.” She gave her a wink.

“He’s back in Florida?” I asked Simon.

“Yeah. He was transferred out this morning. That’s why she’s back.”

“Shaun, darling,” Barb said. “About those houses you’re building next to—”

“Nope, Mom,” Simon said. “They’re already sold. Grayson and Gabriel bought them.” He pulled his phone from his pocket and began typing away.

“Grandma, come here!” Lily ran over and grabbed her hand. “Ella and I want to show you the dance we made up. Come on!” She began pulling her.

“We’ll talk later,” Barb said to us.

“You put me in a bad position, bro,” Shaun said. “Grayson and Gabriel didn’t buy those houses.”

“No shit. But there is no way in hell she’s moving on our beach.”

“Who are you texting?” I asked.

“Our cousins. I have to tell them to play along in case she asks them.”

“Come on, you three. It’s time to eat,” Sebastian said.

“It’s about time, bro. I’m starving,” Simon said as he stood up from the stool.

I walked over to the table, sat down next to Sofia, and hooked my arm around her.

“How’s your knee, babe?”

“It hurts a little bit, but I’m fine.”

“Where’s our son?”

“Aunt Barb has him with her down at the other end of the table.”

After we finished dinner, it was time to do the gender reveals. The entire family gathered around the two decorated rectangular tables where two large crème-colored boxes that said ‘Boy or Girl’ across them. Emilia and Sebastian stood behind table number one, and Charlotte and Conner stood behind table number two.

“Emilia and Sebastian, when we all count to three, open your box!” Georgia exclaimed.

We all counted to three, and when they opened their box, several blue balloons flew up with “It’s a boy” written across them.

“That’s my brother!” Simon grinned as he pointed at Sebastian.

We all clapped and shouted as we hugged and congratulated them.

“It’s Charlotte and Conner’s turn!” Georgia exclaimed.

We counted to three, and when they opened their box, several pink balloons flew up with “It’s a girl” written across them. Conner shouted and dropped to his knees, holding his arms in the air.

“Yes!” he shouted as we could see the tears in his eyes.

“You okay, bro?” I chuckled as I hugged him.

“I’m good.” He hugged me tight.

“Congrats, Charlotte.” I kissed her cheek and pulled her into an embrace. “You’re going to have your hands full with a little girl and Conner.”

“I know. He is going to spoil her so badly.” She laughed.

I went up to the bar with my brothers and cousins for one last drink before the party ended.

“So, let me think for a second,” Simon said. “There will be seven girls and three boys in this family. Three of us don’t have kids yet.”

“Speaking of which, bro.” Sam placed his hand on Simon’s shoulder. “When are you and Grace having kids? Have you even talked about it?”

“Yeah. We’ve talked, and we’re not taking precautions anymore.” The corners of his mouth curved upward as he winked at us.

While we were gathered around the bar, Aunt Barb walked over.

“How was your time at the cabin?” Christian asked her.

“It was good. I did a lot of thinking, and I wanted to let you boys know I’m going on a trip in a few days.”

“Alone?” Simon asked.

“Yes, son, alone. I’m going to a wellness retreat in Sedona, and when I return, I will see Charlotte weekly to work on my issues. I’ve also decided that I’m going to sell the house when I return.”

“Why?” Sam’s brows furrowed.

“Yeah, Mom, why? You’re selling our childhood home?” Stefan asked.

“If I want to start a new and fresh life, I need to let go of things in my past. That’s the house I lived in with your father

and with Curtis. Don't forget, I also shot a man in my living room. The house no longer serves me, and it's time to move on and start the next chapter in my life."

"So, are you moving out of state?" Simon asked, and Sebastian slapped the back of his head.

"Ouch, bro. Damn."

"No. I will never move away from you boys and my grandchildren. But don't you worry." She placed her hand on Simon's cheek. "I'll be even closer. I'll talk to you boys when I return from my trip." She walked away.

"Did she say she'll be even closer?" Simon asked. "Was she serious? Shaun, I swear to God." He pointed at him.

"I know nothing about her plans, bro."

"I think it's great that she's getting help and starting fresh," I said.

"I bet this was Charlotte's doing," Simon said. "Hey, Charlotte, come over here," he shouted.

"Yes?" She walked over with a smile.

"Did you tell our mom to sell our childhood home?" he asked.

"I suggested it. As many good memories as the house holds, it also holds a lot of bad ones. For her to heal herself, she needs a new start which includes getting out of a bad environment where she's constantly reminded of two failed marriages and a shooting. Do you have a problem with her selling? Do you want to stop by my office and talk about it?" She cocked her head.

"Umm, no. I think it's a good idea." He tipped the beer bottle to his lips.

"Okay. My door is always open if you want to talk." She smiled as she placed her hand on his shoulder before walking away.

"You're such a chicken shit," I chuckled.

“Are you ready to leave, babe?” Sofia hobbled over to us. “I’m tired, and Nicholas is getting cranky.”

“I’m ready, babe.” I took my son from her arms. “I’ll see you, douchebags, tomorrow. Simon, behave yourself.” I pointed at him.

“Come on, man. I always behave.” A smirk crossed his lips.

CHAPTER 10



Nathan

My stomach was in a knot when I pulled into the Oak Crest Academy parking lot. I pulled up to the curb to let Sofia and Ella out while I parked. Climbing out, I inhaled a deep breath and slowly breathed it out as I took Nicholas from his car seat and grabbed the diaper bag.

“It’ll be okay, Nathan,” Sofia whispered in my ear as we entered the school.

“How can I help you?” A young woman asked as we entered the office.

“I’m Dr. Kind, and we have an appointment with Headmaster Walters.”

“Welcome to Oak Crest. And you must be Ella.” She smiled.

“I am.” Ella giggled.

“And who is this handsome little guy?” She reached over and touched Nicholas’s hand.

“My brother Nicholas.”

“Headmaster Walters is just finishing up on a call. I’ll let him know you’re here.”

“Dr. Kind,” a man who looked to be mid-forties with jet-black hair approached us and extended his hand. “I’m Headmaster Walters.”

“It’s nice to meet you. This is my fiancée, Sofia Finnegan, our son Nicholas, and our daughter, Ella.”

“Oh my gosh, Miss Finnegan. It is an honor to meet you. My daughter just joined the American Ballet Company. You were always her inspiration. We’ve seen you perform several times in New York.”

“Thank you, Headmaster Walters.”

“Would you mind if I took a quick selfie of us? My daughter won’t believe me.”

“Not at all.” Sofia smiled as he held up his phone and snapped a picture of the two of them.

“Thank you.” He knelt in front of Ella. “I hear you are a very gifted child.” He smiled.

“I am,” Ella said.

“Let’s go into my office, shall we?” He gestured.

We talked for a bit, and he took us on a tour. It didn’t make me feel any easier about sending my seven-year-old daughter to a school with high school kids. When we returned to his office, he told us to have a seat while he took Ella into another room and gave her a test to complete.

“Okay. While Ella is taking her test, do you have any questions for me?” Headmaster Walters asked as he sat behind his desk.

“I’d like to make a statement,” I spoke.

“Okay, Dr. Kind. Go ahead.” He folded his hands on his desk.

“I’m uncomfortable sending Ella here with kids who are more than double her age.”

“That is totally understandable, but the high school students here at Oak Crest aren’t your typical high school students.”

“They’re still teenagers with the same hormones running through them as any other teenager,” I spoke.

The office door opened, and Ella walked in.

“I’m finished,” she said, handing him the paper.

He blankly stared at her for a moment.

“How did you finish this so quickly?”

“It was easy.” Ella shrugged.

He picked up the phone on his desk and called his secretary in.

“Can you take Ella and let her pick out a snack from the snack basket?”

“Of course. Come on, Ella.”

“Please just give me a moment,” Headmaster Walters spoke as he studied Ella’s paper and shook his head.

“Is something wrong?” Sofia asked as she pulled a bottle out of the diaper bag.

“No.” He sighed. “There has only been one student who could figure out this problem since our school opened. “Hell, even my high school students can’t figure it out. But your daughter figured it out in less than ten minutes.”

“And?” I cocked my head. “You already know she’s a genius.”

“Three days a week at this school,” he said.

“Excuse me?” Sofia asked.

“She’ll attend Oak Crest three days a week and then attend virtual school the other two days from home via Zoom. The virtual classes are upper college-level classes. It’s not offered to just any student, and only a handful attending Oak Crest do it. I promise you, Dr. Kind, that Ella will be protected here. You don’t have to worry.”

I leaned back in my chair and stared at him.

“Listen, Dr. Kind. I know it’s scary, but you have to do what’s in your daughter’s best interest. Believe me, I’m just as much of an overprotective father. But Ella’s brain needs constant stimulation, or you’ll have future issues with her.”

“Fine. When can she start?”

“She’ll start Monday morning. That will give me enough time to get all the paperwork ready, her classes assigned, and her enrollment in the virtual classes. You’ve made the right decision.”

“Thank you for your time, Headmaster Walters.” I extended my hand.

Grabbing the diaper bag, I took Nicholas from Sofia. I placed my hand on the door handle, and Headmaster Walters called me. Turning around, I looked at him.

“Raising children is one of the hardest jobs we face as parents. But raising an extraordinary child is even harder.”

“Yeah. It is.” I gave him a small smile as we left his office.

When I pulled into the driveway to drop Sofia and the kids off before heading to the medical center, we saw a large box sitting on the porch.

“Oh, my God. I think those are the wedding invitations.” Sofia smiled.

“Already?” My brows furrowed as we climbed out of the car.

“Well, you did pay a \$150 rush printing and shipping fee.”

I took Nicholas from his car seat, grabbed the diaper bag, and unlocked the door.

“I’ll grab the box. You go sit down and rest.”

“Thanks, babe. Just set it on the island.”

Taking the box from the porch, I set it in the kitchen and kissed Sofia goodbye.

“You don’t want to see our invitations?”

“Babe, I have to get to the medical center. I’ll look at them when I get home.”

“Okay.” She looked down.

I felt bad because I knew how excited she was.

“Let’s open them so I can have a quick look.” I smiled.

“Okay.” She beamed excitedly as she took the scissors from the drawer and handed them to me.

“Wow. They look great.” I kissed the side of her head.

“They’re beautiful. Go to work.” She smirked. “I love you, and I’ll see you later. Don’t forget Gwen is coming tonight at six to discuss the wedding cake.”

“I would never forget that. I hope she brings plenty of samples.” I kissed the tip of her nose.

Walking over to where my son was lying on the floor under his activity gym, I leaned down and kissed him.

“I love you, buddy. See you later.”

“Bye, Dad,” Ella said as she flew down the stairs and to the sliding door.

“Where are you going?”

“To Lily’s. She had a half day of school. Bye. Love you.”

“Open that sliding door without giving me a hug and kiss goodbye, and you’re grounded.”

She rolled her eyes as she walked over and hugged me.

“Good girl.” I kissed her forehead. “I’ll see you later.”

“Bye, Dad.”

My phone rang as I drove to the medical center. A smile crossed my face when I saw who was calling.

“Dr. Charlie Trent. How are you?”

“Dr. Nathan Kind. It’s been a while, my friend. How are you?”

“No complaints. Just living my best life.”

“Excellent news. In the medical journal, I saw your published article about soft tissue reconstruction in burn victims. Would you be interested in coming to New York and speaking to a group of my medical students at Columbia? I feel they could benefit from your lecture.”

“Wow, Charlie. Thank you. I’d love to speak to your medical students. When are you thinking?”

“We’re covering soft tissue reconstruction next Thursday.”

“I’m headed to my practice now. Let me see if I can rearrange my schedule, and I’ll get back to you.”

“Sounds good, Nathan. I hope to hear good news. It’ll be wonderful to catch up.”

“Thanks, Charlie. I’ll be in touch soon.”

Dr. Charlie Trent was a good friend of my father’s and a good friend to us over the years. He was also one of my professors at USF. He moved back to New York a few years ago when his wife was offered a professor of design management position at Parsons.

I entered the practice and saw Jackson talking to June at the reception desk.

“You’re here.” He smiled. “How did it go?”

“She starts next Monday. I’ll tell you about it later. June, I don’t have any surgeries scheduled for next Friday, right?”

“I don’t think so. Let me double-check. No, but you do have a few patients coming in.”

“Do me a favor and reschedule my patients for Thursday and Friday. I’m going out of town.”

“Will do, Nathan.”

“And where are you going?” Jackson asked as he followed me to my office.

“Charlie called me. He asked if I’d come and give a lecture about tissue reconstruction in burn victims to his medical students. Apparently, he saw my article in the medical journal.”

“Maybe take Sofia and the kids with you. Ella can visit Mrs. Schwartz. The lecture is on Thursday?”

“Yeah,” I replied.

“Turn it into a long weekend, and the four of you can explore New York.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll ask her. Thanks, bro.” I placed my hand on his shoulder. “By the way, Gwen is coming to the house tonight at six o’clock if you want to sample some cake.” My lips formed a smirk.

“You know I’ll be there.” He pointed at me before walking out of my office.

I was reviewing one of my patient’s notes when my office door flew open, and Conner stepped in.

“What kind of brother are you?” he asked.

“A damn good one.” I smirked.

“No, Nathan, you’re not.”

“I was going to tell you, but you were in with a patient.” I sighed.

“I’m not now.” His brow arched.

“Gwen is coming over with cake samples. Be at my house at six.”

“Okay.” He grinned. “Do you think she’ll have the key lime coconut?”

“I’m sure she will. Will you cry if she doesn’t?”

“Probably. Anyway, how did it go at Oak Crest?”

“Ella starts on Monday. I’ll tell you guys about it later when we’re all together.”

CHAPTER 11



Sofia

I had just finished typing all the addresses into the computer and printing the labels for the wedding invites when I heard the doorbell ring. Hopping to the door, I opened it and saw Aunt Barb standing there.

“Hello, darling.” She kissed my cheek and stepped inside. “I wanted to see if you need help with anything.”

“That’s sweet of you, but I’m fine.”

“Well, you’ll need someone to pick Ella up from school. I can do that.”

“Ella isn’t at school today. Nathan and I took her to Oak Crest. She starts on Monday.”

“Excellent.” She smiled. “But honestly, I think Oak Crest will be too easy for her.”

“She’ll be at Oak Crest three days a week and taking accelerated college classes online the other two.”

“Oh. Good for her. She’s such a smart girl. Where is she?”

“She’s at Lily’s. Lily had a half day today.”

“And the baby?”

“He’s upstairs taking a nap. I just printed the address labels for the wedding invitations. I was going to try and get some done before he wakes up.”

“Perfect timing then. I’ll help.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Are you sure? Don’t you have to pack for your trip to Sedona?”

“I’m already packed. Go sit down and rest that knee. I’ll make us a cup of coffee, and we can get started.”

I hobbled over to the table and sat down. After Aunt Barb set our coffees down, she sat across from me.

“I bet you’re looking forward to Sedona,” I said as we began stuffing the invitations into the envelopes.

“I am looking forward to it. Maybe one day all of us girls can go together and have a nice girls’ trip.”

“That would be fun.” My lips formed a small smile. “Nathan told me that you’re selling your house.”

“I am. It’s time to start over. Wipe the slate clean, so to speak. I can’t do that as long as I’m in that house. Too many men have come and gone over the years.” A smirk crossed her lips.

The sliding door opened, and Ella and Lily walked in.

“Grandma Barb!” Ella exclaimed as she ran over and hugged her.

“Hello, my precious.”

“Hi, Grandma.” Lily smiled as she walked over and hugged her.

“Hello, darling.” Aunt Barb smiled. “I have an idea. Let’s go shopping—just the three of us. Then, we can go have a nice dinner.”

“Can I, Mom?” Ella asked.

“Of course.” I smiled.

Aunt Barb stood up from her seat and took hold of both girls’ hands. “Let’s go tell your mom you’re coming with me,” she said to Lily. “Are you going to be okay here by yourself?” Barb asked me.

“I’m totally fine. Have fun shopping.” I grinned.

“I love you.” Ella ran over and kissed my cheek.

“I love you too, baby. Have fun.” I hugged her.

After they left, I heard Nicholas waking up. I sat and listened briefly to see if he’d go back to sleep. He began to cry, so I stood and hobbled up the stairs. Smiling, I took him from his crib and held him up.

“Did you have a nice nap?”

I took him over to the changing table and changed his diaper. Picking him up, I felt this overwhelming sadness wash over me as I thought about my mother. I sat in the rocking chair with him and held his head firmly against my chest as I slowly rocked back and forth.

“I will always love you unconditionally, my sweet boy. Nothing in this world you could do would ever make me love you any less. I will always be here for you and never abandon you. I will always support whatever choices you make in life.”



*N*athan

I arrived home early and didn’t see Sofia downstairs, so I walked up the stairs and quietly listened to her talk with our son. My heart broke for her because I knew all too well what it felt like to be abandoned by your mother and not feel loved.

“Hey.” I smiled as I walked over and kissed the top of her head.

“Hi. You’re home early.”

“My last patient canceled at the last minute.”

I took Nicholas from her and held him up.

“How is my little man?” I grinned, and he smiled at me. “I saw all the invitations and two cups of coffee on the table. Was someone over?”

“Aunt Barb.” She stood up from the rocking chair.

“Really?” My brows furrowed. “Why?”

“Checking up on me and to see if I needed any help.”

We walked out of the nursery and headed downstairs.

“That was nice of her. Did she help with the invitations?”

“For a while, until Ella and Lily walked in, and she decided to take the two of them shopping.”

“Isn’t she leaving for Sedona tomorrow?” I asked as I set Nicholas in his activity chair.

“Yeah, and she said she’s all packed.”

“I researched the wellness center she’s staying at, and I think it’ll be really good for her.”

“I think so too. She seems excited.” She sat on the couch and put her leg on the coffee table.

“There’s something I want to talk to you about.” I sat down next to her. “I received a call today from Dr. Charlie Trent, and he asked me to come and give a lecture to his medical students at Columbia. It’s next Thursday. I thought you and the kids could come with me and turn it into a long weekend in New York. We could shop, go to Central Park, maybe some museums.”

“Two things.” She looked at me. “One, I can’t do all that walking with my leg in this fucking brace, and two, I don’t ever want to step foot in New York again. Besides, the clock is ticking with the wedding coming up, and there’s still a lot to be done. I just can’t fly off to New York.”

Shit.

“Is it really about the wedding, Sofia?”

“A small part of it.” She cupped my chin in her hand and softly kissed my lips. “You go, do your lecture, and get back home.”

“Babe, I really wish—”

“No, Nathan. End of discussion.”

“I don’t feel comfortable leaving you here alone with that brace on your leg. You can barely get around as it is.”

“We have a village.” She held out her arms. “The family will help out. And we have our genius daughter. So don’t worry.” She kissed my lips and stood up. “Besides, Ella can’t miss school. It’ll be her first week at Oak Crest.”

I sighed as I leaned back on the couch and placed my hands behind my head.



After picking out our cake flavors and design, I walked Gwen to the door.

“Thank you again, Gwen.”

“You’re welcome, Dr. Kind. It is my pleasure to make another wedding cake for your family.” She smiled.

“Thanks, Gwen. You know I love you!” Conner grinned as he held up his fork and the plate with the coconut lime cake on it.

“You’re welcome, Conner.”

“The girls are coming over for a couple of hours to help with the wedding invitations,” Sofia said.

“I can help, babe.”

“You’re sweet, but we’re having girl time. Take your brothers and go down to the beach for a while.” She reached up and kissed my lips.

“You heard the boss.” Conner grinned. “Let’s go.”

“When is Ella coming home?” I asked.

“Aunt Barb just texted me and said they’re at dinner, and she’ll bring her home soon.”

“Okay. Do you want me to take Nicholas with me?” I asked.

“No. He can stay here.”

Conner walked to the refrigerator and grabbed a few beers.

“Really? Don’t you have your own beer at home?” I asked.

“Yeah, but yours is closer.” A smirk crossed his lips as he handed me a bottle.

CHAPTER 12



Nathan

“Now, can you tell us how it went at Oak Crest today?” Jackson asked as my brothers, cousins, and I sat around the bonfire.

“She starts Monday and will attend three days a week. She’ll be doing virtual accelerated college courses for the other two days.”

“That’s my girl.” Conner grinned as he tipped his beer bottle against mine.

“Three days a week with the teenagers isn’t so bad.” Sam grinned.

“We’ll see how it works out.” I sighed as I brought the bottle to my lips. “Shaun, is there a chance I can use the plane? I have to go to New York for a couple of days.”

“Really? When?” he asked.

“I’ll have to fly out next Wednesday night. I’m giving a lecture to some medical students at Columbia University on Thursday. I’d fly back first thing Friday morning.”

“That’s awesome, man.” Stefan smiled. “Congrats.”

“Sure. You can catch a ride with me.” Shaun grinned. “I’m already flying there for a meeting on Thursday and flying back Friday morning.”

“Wow. Okay.” I smiled.

“We can fly out Wednesday night around eight o’clock,” Shaun spoke.

“Should you be leaving home with the babies coming?” Simon asked.

“Jenni said it’s fine, and she’s not due for another month. It’s a quick trip. But this is the last one I’ll be going on until after the twins are born.”

“Did you propose your plan to Sofia about going with you?” Jackson asked.

“I did, and she flat-out refused. She said Ella couldn’t miss school, there are wedding plans to be made, she can’t do all that walking in the brace, and there’s no way in hell she’ll ever step foot in New York again.” I tipped the beer bottle to my lips.

“Damn,” Christian said.

“Well, in her defense, she really shouldn’t be doing all that walking with the brace. I’m trying to calm that knee down,” Conner said.

“I understand that.” I glanced at him. “But I think it has to do with her mother.”

“Do you blame her?” Shaun asked.

“I need to talk to Rose while we’re there,” I said.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Sebastian said.

“Yeah, bro. I’d leave it alone,” Jackson spoke.

“Nah. I can’t do that. This whole thing between them is hurting Sofia deep down to her core. And if it hurts my future wife, it hurts me. I need to give that woman a piece of my mind. You in?” I glanced at Shaun.

“Do I have a choice?” He smirked.

“No.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Fine. I’m in. She won’t be happy to see me, though. I’m pretty sure she knows I’m the one who got Sofia out of New York.”

“Are you going to tell Sofia?” Conner asked.

“No.” I finished my beer.

“Secret, cousin. Secrets.” Simon shook his head. “You know damn well you shouldn’t keep that from her.”

“Dad!” Ella ran down the beach and over to us.

“Hey, sweetheart.” I hugged her. “How were shopping and dinner?”

“Hi, Dad.” Lily walked over to Stefan.

“Hey, Lils. What do you have there?”

“Grandma bought me new soccer shoes!” she exclaimed, taking them out of the box.

“I just bought you brand new soccer shoes last month,” Stefan said.

“Not these.” She grinned as she held them up. “Aren’t they the coolest?”

“Super cool, kiddo.” Simon grinned. “You’re going to kill the other team in those.” He winked.

“They’re awesome, Lily.” Stefan kissed the side of her head.

“Thanks, Dad. I’m going to take them home. I’ll see you tomorrow, Ella!” Lily said as she ran up to the house.

“Grandma Barb bought me new shoes too. They’re for my new school. I’ll show you when you tuck me into bed.”

“Hey, Ella, did Grandma Barb say anything?” Simon asked.

“About what?” Ella asked.

“Anything?”

“Just that she’ll be moving closer to us soon, and we’ll get to see her more than ever!” She ran away and up to the house.

“Ella!” Simon shouted. “Get back here! What do you mean?!”

We all sat there and laughed.

“Seriously, what did she mean? Where the hell is she moving to?” He glared at Shaun.

“Bro, shut the fuck up. I already told you that I don’t know anything. Look down the beach. Do you even see houses there yet? I’m still drawing up the plans with Sam and Stefan.”

“I just don’t want any surprises like we had when Dad bought Emilia’s house.”



“Are you okay?” I moaned as I thrust in and out of her.

“Yes. Oh, God, yes.” Sofia’s nails dug into the flesh of my back as an orgasm tore through her.

I picked up the pace, and within seconds, my hard cock exploded inside her.

“Fuck.” I moaned as I lowered my body to hers and held her tightly.

“I love you, but you have to get off me. I need to adjust my leg,” she softly spoke.

I chuckled as I rolled off her and onto my back.

“You know this really sucks,” she said.

“Nah. We’ll get creative with our positions.” I winked at her, rolled on my side, and hooked my arm around her. “I love you, future Mrs. Kind.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“And I love you, my future husband.”

As I lay there holding Sofia tight, I thought about what Simon said about keeping the fact that I wouldn’t tell her about my plans to see her mother when I was in New York. I already knew she would disapprove, but if there was a slight chance that I could get through to Rose, Sofia could have the closure she needed to put the past behind her, or perhaps, the two of them could work things out. I hoped, for her sake, it would be the latter.

Since Ella was done with school until Monday, I brought her and Nicholas to the medical center with me for the day to let Sofia rest.

“Everything you need is in the diaper bag,” Sofia said as she placed it on my shoulder.”

“You are to rest today. Do you understand me?” My brow arched.

“Yes.” She reached up and kissed my lips. “Have fun with your daddy.” She kissed Nicholas on his head. “Bye, sweet girl.” She hugged and kissed Ella. “Have fun today.”

“Bye, Mom. Come on, Dad!” Ella grabbed my hand and started pulling me toward the door.

I put Nicholas in his car seat and made sure Ella was buckled.

“Did she seem a little too happy?” I asked her.

“Yeah.” She giggled. “She’s kid free for the day.”

“You brought your laptop, right?” I asked.

“Got it right here.” She patted her bag, sitting next to her.

Pulling into the medical center, I grabbed the baby’s car seat from the back, and we walked into the medical center. Before heading to my practice, we stopped in the kitchen so I could grab a cup of coffee.

“There she is!” Conner grinned as Ella ran to him.

“Good morning, Uncle Conner. Can I see some patients with you today?”

“Of course, you can. And in between patients, maybe we can make some TikTok videos.”

“Yes!” Ella said.

I rolled my eyes as I set the car seat on the island.

“Don’t forget our new receptionist is starting today,” Jackson spoke as he walked in.

“Crap. I forgot,” Conner said. “Who is she?”

“She is a he, and his name is Brandon.”

“We hired a guy?” Conner’s brows furrowed.

“Yep. June said he’s delightfully pleasant, has amazing skills, and wants to be an orthopedic doctor.”

“Ah, I love him already.” Conner grinned. “I’m not going to lie. I’m kind of happy Angela quit.”

“Yeah. She was good, but her obsession with you was nauseating,” I said as I grabbed my coffee. “But I will miss the snarky way Charlotte used to talk to her.” I smirked. “Come on, kiddo.” I grabbed the car seat.

CHAPTER 13



Sofia

Alex made us a picnic lunch, and we took it down to the beach and set a blanket by the shoreline. I took off my brace and set it next to me.

“Are you allowed to take that off?” Alex asked as she watched the kids while they played in the sand.

“Yes. I only need it when I walk. Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“Do you ever think about reaching out to your dad?” I asked as I took a bite of my sandwich.

“Honestly, no. I suffered too much trauma at the hands of him, and I want nothing to do with him. Why?”

“I was just wondering.” I shrugged.

“Are you thinking about your mom?”

“Kind of. But I only seem to think about her during pivotal moments in my life, like after I had Nicholas. And now, with the wedding plans, I’m having these dreams about her. I just don’t get it. I really hate that woman.”

“You have a love/hate relationship with her, Sof. She’s your mom, so you naturally love her. You hate how she is and the things she’s done.”

“I called her after I had Nicholas because she has the right to know she has a grandchild. She didn’t answer, and she

never called back.”

“Did you leave her a message?” Alex asked.

“No, because I did once before and never heard a word from her. I figured if she couldn’t be bothered to answer or call me back when she saw the missed call, then she lost the right to know anything about me. But it hurts, you know?”

“Have you talked to Charlotte?”

“I’m going to. We briefly talked about it at the gender reveal party. I’m going to see her tomorrow night after she gets home, and we’re going to have sessions in her home office.”

“Good. I’m happy to hear that. It’s natural to want your mom involved in your wedding, regardless of what she’s done or how she’s behaved.”

We looked over and saw Julia heading toward us.

“Hey.” I smiled.

“Hey, Julia.” Alex grinned. “Come sit with us. I have extra sandwiches if you’re hungry.”

The moment she sat down, we could tell something was wrong.

“What’s wrong? Did you and Sam get into a fight?” Alex asked.

She shook her head as tears filled her eyes.

“Julia, what’s wrong?” I placed my hand on her arm.

“I’m pregnant.”

My eyes widened, as did Alex’s, and we looked at each other.

“That’s impossible,” I said. “Sam got a vasectomy.”

“Yeah, Julia. How did this happen?” Alex asked with panic.

“I don’t know.” The tears fell. “He’s going to accuse me of cheating on him.”

“No,” I softly spoke. “Sam would never do that.”

“Think about it,” she said. “A man gets a vasectomy. The man goes to the doctor weeks after to make sure it worked. The doctor says, ‘You’re good to go. No sperm left.’ Then the wife gets pregnant a couple of years later. What do you think the man’s first thought is?”

“Shit. Yeah. I can see your point,” Alex said. “Did you just find out?”

“Yeah. I had a feeling, so I left the coffee shop, ran to the store, bought a test, and just took it. Within seconds, the big fat PREGNANT word showed up.”

“Why would you feel it if you knew it wasn’t possible?” Alex said.

“Because I have all the same symptoms I had when I was pregnant with the twins. I honestly thought I was being paranoid until a really good customer came into the coffee shop the other day. We all know her coffee order, so when she came in, I started making it. Then she stopped me and ordered a decaf. She said she had just found out she was pregnant.”

“I’m confused?” Alex furrowed her brows.

“She’s fifty-two, and her doctor told her she was post-menopausal.”

“Oh shit.” My eyes widened.

“F...u...c...k,” Alex said.

“I couldn’t stop thinking about it or her for the past couple of days, and it was eating me alive. So, I bought the test to ease my mind because my husband had a vasectomy, and there was no way I could get pregnant again.” More tears began to fall.

“Aw, Julia.” Alex and I hugged her.

“I’m so scared to tell Sam. Just the thought of him thinking that I could have cheated on him is sending me right into a panic attack. Oh, my God. I can’t tell him.”

“Calm down,” I said as I gripped her shoulders. “You cannot stress over this. It’s not good for the baby.”

“Or babies,” she cried. “What if it’s twins again?”

“Then it’s meant to be,” Alex said. “You know everything happens for a reason.”

“You wouldn’t be saying that if it were you!”

“I know. I’m just trying to make you feel better,” Alex said.

“You haven’t told Jenni?” I asked.

“No. As I said, I just found out, and when I looked out the window, I saw the both of you out here, and I needed to talk to someone.”

“You will be just fine,” Alex said.

“If you need an easy way to tell Sam, do it in front of all of us. That way, if he gets out of line, the guys will set him straight.”

“Maybe I will. Lucas is watching the girls, so I’ll go now and see Georgia and ask her to do a blood test. Thank you. I love you girls so much.” She hugged us.

“Keep us posted!” I shouted as she ran back to the house.

“Okay, now I’m panicking,” Alex said. “I thought once a guy had a vasectomy, the woman would be set for life without worry. Isn’t that the whole fucking point?”

My phone rang, and Nathan’s sexy face appeared on my screen.

“I have to answer this, or he won’t stop calling. Hey, handsome.”

“Hey, beautiful. I’m between patients and wanted to call to make sure you’re resting.”

“I’m sitting on a blanket on the beach, having a picnic lunch with Alex.”

“Henry, let your sister use the bucket!” Alex yelled.

“Sounds relaxing,” Nathan chuckled.

“I have a question for you. I was talking to Sasha earlier. She works with this woman who just found out she’s pregnant, and her husband had a vasectomy a couple of years ago.”

“Did she cheat on him?” he asked.

“No, she didn’t cheat on him.” I shook my head as I stared at Alex. “I guess this woman is in total shock.”

“Well, it is possible that the vas deferens could have recanalized.”

“Re what?” I asked.

“Reconnected, babe. It’s rare, but it does happen.”

“Oh. How are the kids?”

“Ella made a new best friend today. His name is Brandon, and he’s our new receptionist. Nicholas is in heaven from all the attention from everyone. He’s been great.”

“Glad to hear it. I was worried.”

“No, you weren’t.” He chuckled. “My next patient is here. I’ll see you later. I love you.”

“I love you too, Nathan.”

“Great story you came up with.” Alex smiled.

“Thanks.” I grinned. “Nathan said the vas deferens could have reconnected. He said it’s rare, but it does happen.”

“Oh, fuck me! What if that happens to Stefan?”

“It’s rare, Alex. I don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

“You mean like Julia?” She cocked her head.

“Point taken. You’ll have to tell him to get checked.”

“I can’t do that until Julia tells Sam she’s pregnant. Until then, I will have to withhold sex from Stefan.”

“Then she better hurry up.” I laughed.

“Julia was right,” Alex said.

“About?”

“The first thing Sam will think is that she cheated on him. You heard Nathan. That was the first thing he asked.”

Henry and Rori started fighting, and Rori was screaming her head off.

“I have to go and put these two down for their naps. No sex is looking really good right now.” She sighed.

“Thanks for the picnic. I’ll see you later. Love you.”

“Love you too. Come on, kids. It’s nap time.” Alex said as she took them and went back to the house.

I put my brace back on and hobbled my way through the sand. When I stepped through the sliding door, I sat down on the couch and opened TikTok. A wide grin crossed my lips when the first video that appeared was of Conner and Ella dancing in the medical center’s kitchen area and then another one of him and Ella dancing with a woman who appeared to be in her eighties. Closing out of TikTok, I sent Conner a text.

“Great videos. Do you not work?”

“Very funny, my wounded ballerina. Thanks. I’m happy you liked the videos. Your douchebag fiancé wouldn’t join us. But don’t worry, I’ll break him. You better be wearing that brace.”

I took a picture and sent it to him.

“Living my best life thanks to you.”

“Good girl. I’ll see you later.”

I set my phone down, placed my leg on the coffee table, and took in the peacefulness of the house for a moment before picking up my laptop and looking at wedding inspo on Pinterest. A couple of hours later, the front door opened, and my family was home.

“Mom!” Ella ran over and hugged me.

“Hi, sweetheart. Did you have a good day?”

“Best day ever! Dad said we could order Thai for dinner. Is that okay?”

“Thai sounds great.” I smiled.

“Hey, babe.” Nathan walked over, kissed me, and handed me our son.

“There’s my, sweet boy.” I held Nicholas up and then planted tiny kisses all over his face. “Mommy missed you so much.”

“And did Mommy miss me?” Nathan smirked as he sat down next to me.

“You know I did.” I smiled and kissed him.

“I’m going over to Lily’s. We’re going to kick the soccer ball around. Let me know when the food gets here.” Ella flew out the sliding door.

“When did Nicholas have a bottle?” I asked Nathan.

“Just before we left the medical center. June fed him while she ordered Brandon around.”

I let out a laugh.

“So, tell me something.” Nathan played with my hair.

“Tell you what?”

“Julia’s pregnant, isn’t she?” His brow arched.

“What? Why would you say that?”

“I put two and two together. First, your questions about vasectomies, and second, I saw her leaving Georgia’s office, and it looked like she’d been crying.”

“Oh, God. Please don’t say anything. She hasn’t told Sam yet, and she’s scared.”

“Scared of what?” His brows furrowed.

“That Sam is going to think she cheated on him.”

“Sam would never—”

“Really?” I cocked my head. “What was the first question you asked when you thought it was about Sasha’s coworker?”

“But Sam would—”

“Let’s say you got a vasectomy, and a few years later, I got pregnant. You’re going to sit there and tell me that your first thought wouldn’t be that I cheated on you?”

“Shit.” He ran his hand down his face.

“So, when she tells him, you need to be right there in his face and tell him what you told me. Now, order dinner. I’m hungry.”

CHAPTER 14



Nathan

After we finished eating, I cleaned up, grabbed a beer from the fridge, and headed down to the beach.

“Hey, Sammy.” I placed my hand on his shoulder before sitting in the lounge beside him.

“Hey, Nate.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“Lorelei, you little princess.” I smiled as I ran my hand down the back of her head.

“She’s been extra clingy since I got home from work.”

“Douchebags.” Simon grinned as he sat down. “Where are the rest of the douchebags?”

Sebastian walked up behind him and smacked the back of his head.

“Ouch. What the fuck, bro?”

“That’s for the douchebag remark.” Sebastian smiled as he sat down.

Shortly after, the rest of my brothers and cousins joined us, along with the girls. I felt bad for Julia because she looked like she was a nervous wreck. She took Lorelei from him and put her on the blanket with the other kids. Ella walked over and climbed on my lap.

“Hi, Dad.”

“Hi, sweetheart.” I kissed her forehead.

“Sam, I found out some news today,” Julia sat on his lap and placed her arms around his neck.

“Oh, yeah?” He smiled. “What did you find out?” He softly ran his hand up and down her back.

Julia hesitated and couldn't seem to find the words to tell him.

“Oh, for God's sake,” Jenni said. “Julia is pregnant, and if you even dare think that she cheated on you, I'm getting up from this chair, and my babies and I are kicking your ass!”

Everyone who was taking a sip of their beer spit it out.

“What?” Simon said.

Sam stared at Julia for a moment and didn't say a word.

“That's impossible, Julia. You know it's impossible,” he spoke in a stern voice. “And why the hell would you tell me this in front of my family?” His voice raised. “I had a vasectomy, and it isn't possible!”

“Sure, it is,” Ella chimed in. “It probably reversed itself. It's called recanalization, and it's when the vas deferens grows back and creates a new connection. If that happens, the sperm now has pathways to the seminal vesicles. It's rare, but it does happen. So, it probably happened to you, Sam. Yay! I'm going to have another cousin.” She grinned.

I stared at my daughter momentarily in disbelief and looked over at Sam.

“What she said.”

“Stop it!” Stefan said. “Oh, my God.”

“I already called the doctor and made you an appointment to get checked,” Alex told him.

“We're having another baby?” Sam pulled Julia into him.

“Or two.” Simon laughed.

We all congratulated them, and Sam asked if we could keep an eye on the girls while he and Julia went back to the house to talk privately.

“Gotta love this family.” Simon grinned. “It just shows you how strong we are when even vasectomies don’t work.” He held up his beer bottle.

“Ella, how do you know all of that?” I asked.

“Dad, science is my thing. You know that.”

“Yeah, Nate.” Conner grinned. “Science is her thing.”

“Hey, Ella? Do you want to hang out with me and my research team tomorrow at the hospital?” Christian asked.

“Yeah!” She exclaimed. “Can I, Dad?”

“Sofia?” I glanced at her.

“Sure.” Sofia smiled.

“Come on, Ella. Let’s go back to my house and get some ice cream.” Lily took hold of Ella’s hand.

“I can’t even believe any of this,” Stefan said as he tipped the beer bottle to his lips.

“No sex until you get checked.” Alex kissed his cheek.

“No argument from me.” He finished his beer in one gulp, and we all laughed.

After talking for a while, I picked up Lorelei, and Simon picked up Lena. We stepped through Sam’s sliding door and saw the two of them hugging in the kitchen.

“All good in here?” Simon asked as he set Lena down.

“All good.” Sam smiled.

“Thanks for keeping an eye on the girls. I’ll take them upstairs and put them in the bathtub,” Julia said.

“I’ll be up in a few minutes, babe.”

“So, how are you feeling, bro?” Simon placed his hand on Sam’s shoulder.

“Shocked. Very shocked.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“We’re all happy for you and Julia,” I said. “But you better get your ass to the doctor.”

“Julia already made the appointment. I go in next week,” Sam spoke. “I honestly thought I wouldn’t have to deal with this again.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

“Yeah. Stefan is freaking out.” Simon chuckled. “Did you see the look on his face?”

“Well, my cousin. It’s meant to be that you have three children.” I smiled.

“Or four.” Simon laughed, and the color drained from Sam’s face.

“It’ll be okay.” I patted his back.

“Yeah, bro. It takes a village, and we sure as hell have our own.” Simon winked.



It was Saturday morning. Quietly climbing out of bed, I slipped on my boardshorts, brushed my teeth, and softly kissed Sofia’s forehead. Grabbing my surfboard, I placed it under my arm and ran down to the beach.

“There you are,” Christian said. “We didn’t think you were coming.”

“Nicholas was up all night crying with a fever, and he kept grabbing his ear.”

“Emilia is up if you want her to go over and take a look at him,” Sebastian said.

“Sofia is going to call her as soon as Nicholas wakes up. See what you three have to look forward to.” I smirked at Conner, Sebastian, and Shaun.

“The plane is set to leave at six p.m. on Wednesday,” Shaun said.

“I thought we were leaving at eight?” We put our boards in the water.

“Change of plans. I hope that’s okay.”

“Yeah. It’s fine.”

“By the way, don’t bother booking a hotel room. I got a two-bedroom suite at The St. Regis.”

“Excellent.” I smiled. “Thanks, cousin.”

“And don’t eat dinner. We’ll eat on the plane.”

“Sounds good.”

“Are you still planning on visiting Sofia’s mother while you’re there?” Christian asked.

“Yeah. Damn right, I am.” We all paddled out.

“And you’re still not telling Sofia, are you?” Simon asked.

“Damn right, I’m not.” My lips formed a smirk.

“And what’s going to happen if something comes of it and Sofia finds out you had something to do with it?” Conner asked.

“I’ll deal with it then. But I don’t think anything will come of it,” I spoke.

“I don’t either,” Shaun said. “You all don’t know Rose.”

CHAPTER 15



Sofia

“Dr. Kind. Sofia.” Giuseppe smiled brightly when we stepped inside his shop. “Oh my gosh, give me that baby!” He took Nicholas from Nathan. “Where is that darling genius daughter of yours?”

“She’s at my brother’s house,” Nathan said.

“Dr. Jackson, Christian, or Conner?” he asked.

“Conner,” I replied.

“How fun. I bet they’re making TikTok videos.” He grinned.

“God, I hope not.” Nathan rolled his eyes.

“Come over here and have a seat. Let’s talk flowers.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

We spent over two hours reviewing designs and picking exactly what I wanted. Now, I could mark flowers off my checklist.

“That was fun.” I smiled as we walked to the car.

“It was fun.” Nathan winked.

“Liar.” I playfully smacked his arm.

He put Nicholas in his car seat, and we headed home. When we stepped through the sliding door at Conner’s house to pick up Ella, Charlotte was making some tea in the kitchen.

“Just in time.” She grinned as she held up the box of tea bags. “Cup?”

“As much as I would love some, I have to get this little guy to bed.”

“I’ll take him and Ella home. Stay and have a cup of tea,” Nathan said.

“Well, Dr. Kind. If you insist.” I grinned.

“So, how did it go with Giuseppe?” Charlotte asked.

“Excellent. Everything is all set floral-wise for the wedding.”

“That’s great.”

“Hi, Mom. Bye, Mom,” Ella said as she walked past me.

“I’ll be home soon to tuck you in,” I said.

“Okay. Bye, Aunt Charlotte. Bye, Uncle Conner.”

“I’ll see you soon, babe.” Nathan leaned over and kissed my lips.

“Sofia Finnegan, soon to be Sofia Kind. Have a seat, please, so I can check out that knee,” Conner said.

“Now?” I arched my brow.

“Yes.” He pulled out a chair at the table. “Sit.”

I sat in the chair, and Conner removed my brace.

“How’s it feeling?” he asked as he examined it.

“It feels pretty good.”

“The swelling is way down. Do me a favor and walk on it.”

I stood up and walked across the kitchen.

“Any pain?”

“Nope.” I shook my head. “You know the injection already kicked in.”

“Would you love me even more than you already do if I told you to ditch the brace?” The corners of his mouth curved

upward.

“Are you playing with me, Conner?” I narrowed my eye. “You said two weeks. It’s only been one.”

“I said two weeks to teach you a lesson. Ditch the brace. But no more pointe shoes until after you have surgery.” He pointed at me. “No matter how good your knee feels.”

“I promise.” I smiled as I walked over and hugged him.

After Charlotte and I drank our tea, I went home. Nathan turned around and stared at me when I stepped through the sliding door.

“Conner said to ditch the brace.” I smiled as I held the brace up.

“That’s great, babe.” He walked over and wrapped his arms around me. “Now, I won’t worry so much while I’m gone.”

“You’ll be gone for two nights, Nathan.”

“Two nights too long as far as I’m concerned. It’s not too late to change your mind and come with me.” His lips softly brushed against mine. “Especially now that you don’t have to wear the brace anymore.”

“It’s still a lot of walking, and I’m just not ready to go back there yet. But I’m sure Ella would love to go with you.” I smirked. “She can probably give the lecture to the medical students for you.”

“No shit. She probably could.” He chuckled.

“Is she in bed?” I asked.

“Yeah, but she’s still up. She’s working on that Human Design thing. I told her it was lights out when you got home.”

“I’ll go up and kiss her good night now. Did you give Nicholas his medicine?”

“Yes, and he took it like a champ.”

“Really?” I narrowed my eye. “He didn’t spit any of it out?”

“Nope.”

“He always spits it out for me,” I said.

“We had a little chat before I gave it to him.” Nathan winked. “I’m going to go down to the beach for a few. I won’t be long.”

“Okay. I’ll meet you in bed.” I grinned as I grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled his lips to mine.

CHAPTER 16



Nathan

“What’s up, fam,” I said as I sat down next to Jackson.

“Hey, brother.” Christian smiled.

“Hey, bro. So, Sammy, what did the doctor say?” I smirked.

“Everything Ella said.” He tipped his glass of scotch to his lips.

“Sorry, I’m late to the party.” Simon grinned. “Here you go, bro.” He handed Stefan a wrapped box.

“What’s this for?” Stefan asked.

“I’m just looking out for my bro.” The corners of Simon’s mouth curved upward as he winked at him.

Stefan tore the wrapping off and stared at the box.

“Really?” He cocked his head at Simon.

“What is it?” Jackson asked.

“What the fuck!” Sebastian laughed as he grabbed the box from Stefan’s hand and held it up. “It’s a sperm check home test.”

“Now, you don’t have to worry. You can do periodical sperm checks at home.” Simon grinned.

“Thanks, bro.” Stefan shook his head.

“No problem. Just make sure that when you’re jacking off, the semen hits the hole in the test strip. Hope you have good aim, bro.” Simon laughed, and we all laughed with him.

“You’re a fucking douchebag.” Stefan pointed at him.

“But you still love me.” Simon grinned.

“Have you told your mom yet about the baby?” I asked Sam.

“No. The wellness center doesn’t allow phones,” he said. “We’ll tell her when she gets back.”

“As fun as this has been, I have to get home and spend time with my fiancée since I won’t see her for a couple of days.” I stood up from my chair.

“I’ll pick you up around five p.m. tomorrow,” Shaun spoke.

“Sounds good, cousin. I’ll see the rest of you douchebags when I get back.”

“Nathan, hold on,” Sam said. “I forgot to ask you. How is Ella liking Oak Crest?”

“Unfortunately, she loves it.” I sighed.

“She dating yet?” Simon shouted as I walked away.

I stuck up both middle fingers to him and headed to the house. Laughter could be heard down the beach.



“*I* love you, sweetheart.” I kissed Ella’s cheek and hugged her tight.”

“I love you too, Dad. Have a safe flight. If you get a chance, go visit Mrs. Schwartz.”

“I’ll try, but I don’t think I’ll have time.” Walking over to where Sofia stood holding our son, I took him from her and hugged him tight. “Be a good boy for your mom. I love you to

the moon and back.” I set him in his activity chair and gripped Sofia’s hips.

“I’ve saved the best for last.” I softly brushed my lips against hers.

“I’m going to miss you.” Her lips pouted as she wrapped her arms around my neck.

“I’ll miss you more, baby.” I kissed her again and then pulled her into me.

“You better text me when you land,” she said.

“I will.” I grabbed my bag and walked out the door.

Climbing into Shaun’s limo, I shut the door and looked at him.

“You ready?” He grinned.

“I’m ready. Are you sure you feel comfortable leaving Jenni?” I asked.

“Not at all.” He sighed. “She’s staying the night at Simon’s. I didn’t want her home alone at night.”

“That’s a great idea. Those babies will be here before you know it.”

“I know. I’m scared, Nathan. Don’t tell my brothers I said that either.”

“It’s okay, cousin.” I patted his shoulder. “It’s natural. Do you remember how scared I was when Ella came to live with me? And when Nicholas was born?”

“Yeah, I remember.” He smirked.

“Your dad instincts will kick in, and you’ll be fine. Wait. Let’s hope you didn’t inherit Uncle Henry’s instincts.” I smiled.

“I can promise you I didn’t.”

“You haven’t mentioned any names yet,” I said.

“That’s because Jenni and I officially decided last night.”

“And?”

“You promise you won’t tell anyone?” His brow arched. “Because Jenni wants to announce the names this weekend at our get-together.”

“My lips are sealed.”

“Stella and Sawyer.” He grinned.

“Stella and Sawyer Kind. I love it.”



It was great to lecture the young minds of future doctors. They were a great group who took notes and had plenty of questions. After catching up with Charlie, I pulled my phone from my pocket and saw I had a text message from Shaun.

“On my way to you. Be there in ten.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

I felt bad that I didn’t have time to visit Mrs. Schwartz. I knew she would have been happy to see me and to talk about Ella. I’d have to arrange a trip for us to come and visit. But for now, meeting and talking to Rose was more important.

“Are you still sure you want to do this?” Shaun asked as I climbed into the back seat of the limo.

“As sure as ever.”

“Look out your window,” Shaun said. “That’s the ABT.” He smiled. “And Sofia lived around the block.”

“Wow.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “So that’s where she practically lived her life.”

“Yep. Rose lives about ten minutes from here. What are you going to do if she’s not home?”

“Then we’ll scour the streets of New York until we find her.”

“I was afraid you were going to say that.” Shaun let out a long sigh.

My phone rang, and Sofia was calling.

“Hello, beautiful.”

“Hi, handsome. How are you?”

“I’m great now that I’m talking to you. How are the kids?”

“They’re good.”

“Hi, Sofia.”

“Hi, Shaun. What are you two up to?” she asked.

“We’re grabbing an early dinner and then just kicking back and relaxing for the rest of the night before we fly out in the morning. What are you doing tonight?”

“The girls and I are getting together and doing wedding stuff.”

“Sounds like fun. I’m sorry I’ll miss it.”

“Liar.” She laughed.

I could hear Nicholas screaming in the background.

“I have to hang up, babe. Your son wants to eat. Facetime me later when you get back to the hotel.”

“I will. I love you, Sof.”

“I love you too.” She kissed the screen.

The driver pulled up to the white townhome on East 74th Street. Shaun and I climbed out and walked up the steps to the door. After he rang the doorbell, a woman with short blonde hair answered.

“Mr. Sterling.” She smiled.

“Hello, Kelly. Actually, it’s Kind now. You’re still working for Rose, eh?”

“Yeah. How can I help you?” she asked.

“Is Rose home?”

“Uh, yeah. She’s here.”

“We need to see her. This is my cousin, Dr. Nathan Kind.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Dr. Kind. Please come in. You may have a seat in the living room, and I’ll go get Ms. Finnegan.”

“Nice place. Is this where Sofia grew up?”

“Yep. We have about twenty seconds to turn around and head out the door,” Shaun said.

“Nope. I’m doing this.”

“Well, well. If it isn’t Shaun Sterling, or should I say Kind?” A tall woman with short dark hair walked into the room.

“Rose.” Shaun nodded. “This is Dr. Nathan Kind.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Dr. Kind.” She extended her slender hand. “So, gentlemen, what can I do for you?”

“I’m here to talk to you about Sofia,” I said.

She looked at Shaun and then back at me.

“You know my daughter?” she asked as she walked over to the bar. “Scotch, gentlemen?”

“Thanks, Rose,” Shaun spoke.

“No, thank you. Yes, I know your daughter very well. She’s my fiancée.”

She stopped pouring the scotch momentarily, looked up at me, and then filled the glass.

“What exactly do you want, Dr. Kind?”

CHAPTER 17



Nathan

“First, you have the right to know you have a grandson. His name is Nicholas.” I pulled my phone from my pocket and brought up a picture of him and Sofia.

She studied the photo, and I could see the sadness in her eyes.

“He looks a lot like Sofia. My daughter looks happy.”

“She is. She’s also a mother to my seven-year-old daughter, Ella. This thing between the two of you needs to end.”

“Sofia chose to run away.” She shot Shaun a look.

“Oh, come on, Rose. She only ran because your grip was so tight, and you wouldn’t listen to her,” Shaun said. “You gave her no choice.”

“She’s a child who threw a temper tantrum. She had a good life here and the best of both worlds. She had a loving boyfriend whom she kicked to the curb for no reason and a bright future at the ABT. She is an incredibly gifted prima ballerina who gave it all up. She gave up her life, and to me, that is inexcusable.”

“She gave it up because she was suffocating,” I raised my voice as my finger pointed to the floor. “You were suffocating her to death. You were making her live your dream. Your dream, Rose!”

“Who the hell do you think you are coming into my home and speaking to me that way?”

“The man who loves your daughter so much and who would die protecting her. She told me all about you and the things you’ve done.”

“And I’m sure she exaggerated to make it fit her narrative.”

“Nah, Rose. She told it like it was,” Shaun said. “I was there for some of it, remember?”

“I told Sofia that every action has consequences, and she would suffer greatly if she left. She made her choice, and now she can suffer the consequences of her decisions.”

“Wow.” I shook my head. “Is that why you never returned Sofia’s call after she reached out to you?”

“As I said, she will suffer the consequences of her decisions. I honestly don’t know why you’re here, Dr. Kind. A reconciliation between Sofia and I will never be possible. Did she send you here?”

“No. She doesn’t even know I’m here talking to you. I had to come to New York to give a lecture to medical students at Columbia.”

“And you brought him?” She looked Shaun up and down.

“He’s here on business. And just so you know, Shaun is my cousin. He’s my blood, and I don’t take too kindly to those who talk negatively about him. Who do you have in your life, Rose?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Let me take a guess. No one. You have no one. Your mother passed away, as did your husband, and now your daughter left you. No wonder it felt so empty when I stepped into your home. You resent Sofia because she wanted out. She was all you had left, and you wanted to keep a tight rope around her so she couldn’t leave you. Because you knew if she did, you’d be left all alone.”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“See, where I come from, family is everything. Family is life, and life is family. We’d do anything to protect one another. And now, your daughter is a part of my family. We all love her to death. It’s too bad you can’t find love in your heart for your family. Because no matter how badly a family member hurts us, we still love them unconditionally. This isn’t about Sofia quitting the ABT. This is about her abandoning you and leaving you here all alone. You wouldn’t let her be her own person because you knew if she was, she’d leave you one day. And look where that got you. She’s gone and happy living the life she always wanted. She’s happy, Rose. I wish I could say the same for you, but I can’t. You still have a family. It’s just too bad that you choose to live your life alone because you can’t truly see the best gifts in life. And it’s not the ABT or ballet.”

“You will leave my house immediately!” she shouted.

“With pleasure, Rose. Shaun, come on. Let’s get out of here.”

“You are a horrible, horrible man, Dr. Kind.”

I stopped and turned around.

“No, Rose. I’m not. I’m whom you choose to see through the dark-colored lenses you wear. Try taking them off, and then you’ll see who the horrible person really is. It is amazing how Sofia turned out to be such a beautiful, sweet, kind-hearted, selfless, and loving person being raised by the likes of you.”

“How dare you!” Rose shouted.

“Oh, by the way. I can’t leave before I thank you. So, thank you very much, Rose.”

“For what?” She snapped.

“For making things so bad for Sofia that she had no choice but to leave. If you hadn’t, I never would have met and fallen madly in love with her. I know an amazing therapist who can help you with your narcissistic personality. Look me up if you want her name.” I walked out of the room and out the front door.

Shaun and I climbed into the back of the limo.

“What?” I asked as he wouldn’t stop staring at me.

“Fuck, man. I honestly didn’t know you had that in you. You were fucking brilliant.” He hooked his arm around me and kissed the side of my head. “Fucking brilliant!”



S ofia

“Why the hell isn’t Shaun texting me back,” Jenni said as we all gathered in my living room.

“He and Nathan are probably drunk as fuck and passed out in their suite.” Grace smiled.

“Let’s see where they’re at,” Jenni said. “It looks like they’re at a residence on East 74th Street.” Her brows furrowed.

Suddenly, a sick feeling filled my belly.

“Let me see that.” I grabbed Jenni’s phone from her hand and stared at it. “Oh, my God!” I placed my hand over my mouth.

“What is it, Sof?” Julia asked.

“Sof, what’s wrong?” Alex asked.

My heart raced out of my chest. “They’re at my mother’s house.”

“Oh shit,” Georgia spoke. “Are you sure?”

“I swear to God. I’m going to kill Nathan. Why would they go there?” I looked at the girls.

“Maybe Shaun wanted to say hi.” Jenni chewed her bottom lip.

“Really, Jen? I can’t believe Nathan would do that and not tell me.”

“Calm down,” Grace gripped my shoulders. “You don’t know what’s going on. Nathan is going to tell you. I’ll bet any

money that when he Facetimes you, he'll tell you all about it and why he and Shaun were there. Let's wait and see how this plays out. Jenni, don't tell Shaun that you know he was there. Because if Nathan is keeping it a secret, Shaun will tell him that you know, and he knows that you'd tell Sofia."

"Right. I won't tell him that I know."

"And how the hell am I supposed to act when he calls, knowing that he saw my mother?"

"You act casually as if you don't know," Emilia spoke.

"Chances are he might wait to tell you when he gets home. He knows it's a sensitive topic and may not want to do it over the phone," Charlotte said.

"I'm going to kill him!"

My phone rang, and when I looked down at it, Nathan was Facetimeing me.

"Come on, girls. Let's go home," Grace said. "You got this, Sof. Text or call if you need any of us."

"I'll be over in a flash," Charlotte said.

I picked up my phone, took a deep breath, and answered his call.

"Hey." My lips gave way to a fake smile.

"Hi, gorgeous. What took you so long to answer?"

"I was upstairs, and my phone was in the kitchen. How was your evening?"

"Good. Shaun and I had a nice dinner, and then we came back to the suite and kicked back a few drinks.

Liar.

"Sounds fun."

"Were the girls over?" he asked.

"Yeah. They left a while ago."

"How are my children?"

"They're good."

“What’s wrong? You seem off,” he said.

“I do? I’m sorry. It’s been a long day, and I’m tired.”

“Go to bed, babe, and get some rest. I’ll see you tomorrow. I love you and miss you so much.”

“I miss and love you too, Nathan. See you tomorrow.”

I ended the call and held my phone against my chest as I let out a breath. He lied to me. I called Jenni.

“Hey,” she answered.

“Did Shaun Facetime you?” I asked.

“Yeah. All he said was that he and Nathan went to dinner, then returned to the hotel and kicked back a few drinks. That man lied to me, and it pisses me off.”

“He only chose not to tell you they went and saw my mother because he knew you’d tell me. Please don’t be mad at him. Nathan told me the same story.”

“He’ll tell you when he gets home. I know he will.”

“We’ll see. I’m heading to bed. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Love you.”

“Love you too, sister.”

I tossed and turned all night. It was bad enough that I had a hard time sleeping without Nathan next to me, but knowing that he went and saw my mother had me seeing red.

CHAPTER 18



Sofia

“Are you okay, Mom?” Ella asked as I made her eggs.

“I’m fine, sweetie. Why?”

“I don’t know. You seem upset today.”

“I’m just tired.” I smiled as I set the plate in front of her and kissed the top of her head.

“I can’t wait for Dad to come home today. I miss him.”

“He’ll be home in a few hours.”

I heard Nicholas stirring in his crib and cooing.

“Your brother is up. I’ll be right back.”

After changing the baby’s diaper, I brought him downstairs. Setting him in his high chair, I gave him some toys to keep him occupied while I made his baby cereal.

“I’m going into Dad’s office for my virtual class,” Ella said as she stood up and set her plate in the sink.

“Okay. Have fun.” I smiled.

I grabbed a jar of bananas from the pantry and took it along with the cereal to the table.

“Who’s a hungry boy.” I grinned as I shoved the baby spoon in his mouth.

My phone rang, and Nathan was Facetiming me.

“Look, it’s your lying daddy.” I smiled as I held the phone up to Nicholas. “Hi.” I swiped, and Nathan’s face appeared.

“Good morning, beautiful.” A bright smile graced his face. “We just got on the plane, and we’re getting ready to take off.”

“Say hi to Daddy.” I turned the phone so Nathan could see his son.

“Hey, buddy. Daddy will be home soon. Is Ella there?” he asked as I turned the phone back to me.

“She’s in class in your office.”

“Damn. I was hoping to see her before her class started. Babe, I have to go. We’re taking off. I love you and can’t wait to come home to you.”

“I love you too. Have a safe flight.”

I ended the call and set my phone on the table. Mixed emotions filled my mind as I didn’t know how I’d react when he came home. If he told me right away when he walked through the door, I would still be angry, but not as angry if he chose not to tell me at all.

I had just put Nicholas down for his nap when Ella walked out of Nathan’s office.

“How’s class going?” I asked.

“Good. It’s lunch break.”

“What would you like for lunch?” I placed my hand on the top of her head as we walked into the kitchen.

“Ham and cheese sandwich and fruit, please.” She grinned. “When is Dad coming home?”

“He should be landing shortly.”

After Ella finished her lunch, she returned to Nathan’s office and shut the door. As I was walking past it, I overheard her questioning her professor. I couldn’t help but smile. I was halfway up the stairs when I heard the front door open. Stopping, I turned around and saw Nathan walk in.

“Hello there, gorgeous.” A bright smile crossed his face as he stared at me.

“Welcome home, Dr. Kind.”

I set the laundry basket on the steps, walked down to him, and wrapped my arms around his neck. He instantly pulled me into him and hugged me tight. I prayed he would tell me why he went and saw my mother. Because if he didn't, we would have problems.

“I missed you.” He broke our embrace and brushed his lips against mine.

“I missed you too. Let me take the laundry basket upstairs, and then you can tell me all about your trip and lecture.”

“I'll follow you up. I want to unpack my bag.”

He followed me up the stairs and into the bedroom, setting his bag on the bed.

“How did your lecture go?” I asked as I began putting the laundry away.

“It went really well. The students had so many questions, and you could see their minds absorbing everything I said. It was really great to see Charlie again. We had a good talk.”

“That's good. And what else did you do?” I smiled.

“Well,” he walked over and gripped my hips, “I saw the ABT.”

“You did?”

“Yeah. Shaun's driver was driving down Broadway, and Shaun pointed it out. He also said that you lived in the apartments around the block.”

“Yeah, I did. What else did you see?”

“That was it. We went to dinner and then back to the hotel.” He kissed my lips and then finished unpacking his bag. “Is Nick sleeping?”

“Yeah. He should be waking up soon. Ella is still in class, and I overheard her questioning her professor about

something.”

“Oh boy. Which class is she in right now?” he asked.

“Quantum physics.”

“Jesus.” He shook his head. “What was she questioning her professor about?”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t hear that well. I can’t believe you and Shaun just ate dinner and went back to the hotel. It’s New York. You should have hit up some clubs or something.”

“We were tired.”

“I’m surprised Shaun didn’t want to go see some of his friends there, like Everly and Asher.”

“Babe, it was a very short trip. There was no time for anything but dinner and bed.”

We heard Nicholas cry through the monitor.

“I’ll go get him.” Nathan smiled.

I sighed as I sat on the edge of the bed. He lied to me last night and continued the lie when he got home. The possibility that he would never tell me crossed my mind. The more I sat and thought about it, the angrier I became. I needed Charlotte, so I sent her a text.

“Nathan is home and still lying about last night. He insists that all he and Shaun did was go to dinner and then back to the hotel.”

“Okay. Come over tonight around six, and we’ll talk.”

“Thanks, Charlotte.”

“Hang in there, and don’t start a fight until after we talk.”
She sent the wink emoji.

“I think this little guy missed me.” Nathan smiled as he entered the room.

“He did, and so did Ella.”

“What’s wrong, babe? You seem off again.”

“I do? Well, I did start my period.” I lied.

“Really?” His brows furrowed. “I thought you weren’t due until next week.”

“I guess it decided to come early.” I stood up from the bed. “You know it’s been kind of messed up since I had the baby.” I walked out of the room.

CHAPTER 19



Nathan

Sofia didn't feel like cooking, and Ella was going to Lily's soccer game with Alex and Stefan, so we ordered a pizza for dinner. Sofia was in a mood, so I tried to say as little as possible to her. It seemed that since I returned home, everything I said bothered her.

"I'm going over to Charlotte's," Sofia said. "Since you were gone for a couple of nights, you can take care of Nicholas."

"Yeah, of course, babe. I'll bring him down to the beach with me."

She walked out the sliding door without saying a word or giving me a kiss. I sighed as I held my son in my arms and looked at him.

"Just a tip from your dad, little man. Say as little as possible when the woman you love is on her period because anything you say or do will agitate her more."

I grabbed a blanket and went out the sliding door. Christian, Jackson, Sam, Simon, and Shaun were already down there with the bonfire lit.

"Welcome back, bro." Jackson smiled.

"Thanks."

Christian held his arms out, and I handed Nicholas over to him.

“Baby duty tonight?” he asked.

“Yeah. Sofia went over to Charlotte’s. Where’s Sebastian?”

“He’s shorthanded at the restaurant tonight, so he’s staying,” Simon said.

“And Conner?” I glanced at Christian and Jackson.

“I don’t know. I’m sure he’ll be down soon,” Christian said.

“So, cousin, did you have a chat with Sofia’s mother?” Simon asked before tipping his beer bottle to his lips.

“Unfortunately. That woman is a piece of work.”

“You should have seen him.” Shaun grinned. “He really let Rose have it. She kicked us out.” Shaun chuckled.

“I take it you haven’t mentioned it to Sofia?” Simon asked.

“No, and I won’t. The things her mother said were awful for a parent to say about their child. I knew she was bad from what Sofia told me, but she was on another level last night. Sofia is already hurting, and if she knew the things her mother said, it would hurt her even more. I’m not about to put her through that. It’s done and over. Her mother said a reconciliation will never happen.”

“Damn.” Jackson shook his head. “You tried, bro.” He placed his hand on my shoulder.

Conner walked over and sat down.

“Where the hell were you?” Simon said.

“On a call with the hospital about a patient.” He twisted the cap off his beer bottle. “How was New York?” He looked at me.

“It was good.”

“And Charlie?” Conner asked.

“He’s great and living his best life. We got to chat for a while after class. He and his wife are coming to Los Angeles next month and wants us to get together.”

“Sounds good,” Jackson said. “It’ll be nice to see him again.”

“I told him about Christian, and he couldn’t believe it. He can’t wait to meet you.” I smiled as I glanced at him.

“Tell us more about Sofia’s mother and what you said to her,” Sam spoke.

“She’s just a bitch. It just boggles my mind how perfect Sofia turned out being raised by that wretched woman.”

“Kind of like how the four of us turned out being raised by Mom and Dad?” Simon smirked.

“Touché, bro.” Shaun grinned as he tipped his beer bottle to him. “But our father or your mother didn’t raise me, and I can confidently say that I’m a tiny bit better than all of you.”

“Agreed.” Simon tipped his bottle to Shaun’s.

“Anyway, back to Rose,” Shaun said. “Nathan told her he knows a good therapist who can help with her narcissistic personality.”

“Shit, bro. You sound like Charlotte.” Conner laughed.

“She called him, and I quote, ‘You are a horrible, horrible man, Dr. Kind.’”

“Tell me you didn’t let her get away with that?” Sam looked at me.

“No. I told her—”

“Shh. Here come the girls,” Simon said, and we all went silent.

“Why are you all so quiet?” Sofia asked.

“We’re not, sweetheart,” I said.

“Yeah, you are. We could hear you guys laughing, and then suddenly, we walked over, and you went dead silent. What were you laughing about?”

“Babe, nothing.”

“Did something funny happen on the trip that you chose to share with your brothers and cousins and not me?”

“Yeah, Shaun?” Jenni placed her hands on her hips and stared at him.

Sofia gripped the arms of the lounge and leaned over until her face was mere inches from mine.

“Are you lying to me, Nathan?” The look on her face was serious. “Did you or did you not go and see my mother last night?”

“Ah, shit.” Simon shook his head.

“How the hell do you know that?” I stared into her eyes.

“I swear to God I didn’t say a word,” Shaun said.

“No. No, you didn’t, Mr. Kind, and we’re going to talk about that later,” Jenni spoke sternly.

“How did you find out, Sofia?”

“Jenni must have seen my location on her phone,” Shaun said.

“Damn right, I did.”

“Ha!” Simon laughed.

“Shut up, Simon.” Grace pointed at him.

“How could you do that to me?” Tears filled Sofia’s eyes. “Not only did you go see her, but you kept it from me. I gave you all day to tell me, and you didn’t. Were you never going to tell me, Nathan?” She pushed back from the chair and folded her arms. “You can sit here and tell your brothers and cousins about it, but not me, your future wife? The person you should have told!” she shouted.

“I didn’t want to upset you,” I said.

“It doesn’t matter, Nathan! We don’t keep secrets from each other!” she yelled.

“I wasn’t about to tell you because then I would have to tell you what she said, and I’m not hurting you!” I yelled back.

“What don’t you understand?! There is nothing you can tell me that would hurt me anymore! That woman has spent

her life hurting me! And you!” She whipped around and pointed at Shaun. “How could you take him there?”

“Yeah, Shaun!” Jenni shouted.

“Save it. One of you three better have your guest room ready because your brother will be staying with you tonight.” She pointed at Jackson, Conner, & Christian.

“Excuse me? That is my house!” I shouted.

“Wrong choice of words, Nathan,” Simon said.

“Oh really? I thought it was our house! It doesn’t matter. I’m taking my son and going to Kendall’s.”

“The hell you are.” I stood up. “You’re not going anywhere. We’re talking about this.” I grabbed her and threw her over my shoulder, gripping her tight. “Watch Nicholas for us, please, and watch for Ella. Don’t let her come home,” I told everyone.

She beat my back with her fists and yelled at me to put her down.

“Be careful of her knee, bro!” Conner shouted.

I carried her into the house and set her on the couch.

“You are going to calm the fuck down and listen to me!” I shouted at her like I never shouted before.

She crossed her arms and clenched her jaw.

CHAPTER 20



Sofia

“Your mother is a horrible woman, and it’s a miracle you turned out the way you did.”

“You think?” I cocked my head.

He knelt in front of me and grabbed my hands. “Listen to me. I don’t want to hurt you, babe. That’s why I didn’t tell you I went to see her. You have to believe me.”

“Just tell me why you went there,” I calmly spoke.

He sighed as he stood up, walked over to the bar, and poured himself a scotch.

“Do you want one?” he asked.

“Yes, please.”

He poured me a glass and handed it to me.

“I know it’s bothering you that she’s not around to help with the wedding. Just like I know it bothers you that she doesn’t know about our son. This entire situation between the two of you is out of control, and she has no right to do what she is to you. I wanted to tell her that because when you’re hurting, I’m hurting. You know I would do anything to protect you, and this was my way of protecting you.”

“You lying to me is protecting me?”

“I didn’t want to lie to you, but she gave me no choice. Fuck.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

The sliding door opened, and Shaun stepped inside.

“I know I’m entering a war zone, but you’re going to want to hear this, Sofia.” Shaun pulled out his phone.

“What is it?” I asked.

“I recorded the conversation between Nathan and your mother.”

“What the fuck, man? You didn’t tell me that,” Nathan said.

“I only did it because I knew you would eventually need it.”

“Shaun, don’t,” Nathan said.

“Nothing on here can hurt her any more than she already is. But she needs to hear what you said.”

“Play it, Shaun,” I spoke.

He pressed play, and I sat there and listened to every word Nathan and my mother spoke to each other. When the conversation was over, Shaun placed his phone in his pocket.

“We all have your back, Sof,” he said.

“Thanks, Shaun.”

“I’m out of here. I have to go and deal with my very angry, pregnant wife.” He smirked before walking out the sliding door.

I looked up at Nathan as he stood in the middle of the room.

“Are you going to sit down or what?” I patted the couch.

The second he sat down, I grabbed his arm, hooked it around me, and laid my head on his chest.

“I never thought in a million years I could love you any more than I already do,” I said. “You were brilliant.” I began to laugh.

“Why are you laughing?”

I lifted my head and stared at him. “Because of what you said to her. You totally nailed it. And telling her you know an amazing therapist who can help with her narcissistic personality.” I continued to laugh. “Along with thanking her for making me leave.”

“I only speak the truth, babe.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “But seriously, are you okay?”

“I am now. Hearing the things she said was the closure I needed. I’m sorry I yelled at you the way I did. I was just so angry that you lied to me.”

“I know.” His arms tightened around me. “I’m sorry for saying this was my house. I didn’t mean it, babe. This is as much your home as it is mine.”

“I know you didn’t mean it. You were angry with me. Let’s just put this behind us and move on. I don’t want to ever talk about Rose Finnegan again.”

“Either do I,” he said.

“I guess I should come clean about something,” I said.

“About what?” His eye narrowed.

“I’m not on my period. I lied to you because you lied to me, and I was going to withhold sex.”

“Thank God. That was your one-time lying pass.” His lips formed a smirk.

“Is that so? Well, you already used yours.” I smiled.

“I love you so damn much, Sofia.” His lips brushed against mine.

“I love you so much too, Nathan.” We passionately kissed. “We better go out there and let the villagers know we’re okay.”

“I think we have a few moments to spare,” he said.

“Nah. Let’s wait until we go to bed. We have some making up to do to each other, and I want to take our time.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“I like the way you think.” He winked.

We stood up from the couch, and Nathan grabbed my hand. As we walked down to the beach, everyone started shouting and clapping.

“Okay. That’s enough.” Nathan smiled. “Ella isn’t back yet?”

“Stefan probably sent you a text. Lily’s team won, so they’re all going for ice cream. They’ll be home soon.”

I took Nicholas from Conner, and Charlotte ran over and grabbed my hand.

“We’re stealing your fiancée.” She smiled at Nathan and led me to Julia and Sam’s house.



*N*athan

I sat down in the lounge, and Conner handed me a beer.

“I think you need this.” He grinned.

“Thanks, bro.” I twisted off the cap.

“Is everything back to rainbows and unicorns at Casa Kind again?” Simon asked.

“Yeah. Everything is good. Thank God.”

“I warned you, cousin.” Simon pointed at me. “If this family has learned anything, secrets aren’t good. They always come back to haunt you. And those women.” He shook his finger. “They find out everything. Lesson learned, man. Lesson learned.” He shook his head, and we all laughed.

“I think Stefan and Alex just pulled up,” Sam said.

A few moments later, Lily and Ella ran down to us.

“There she is. Our little soccer star.” Simon grinned. “Congratulations on your win, Lily.”

“Thanks, Uncle Simon. I scored the winning goal.”

“Of course, you did. You’re a Kind, and we Kinds always win.”

“Hey, baby.” I smiled as Ella climbed on my lap.

“Hey, Dad. Where’s Mom?”

“She’s with the girls at Julia’s.”

“Oh, okay.”

She said something to me, and my brows furrowed.

“Are you speaking in Mandarin?”

“Yes.” She giggled.

Suddenly, Shaun started speaking in Mandarin, and the two of them carried on a brief conversation.

“What the actual fu—heck,” Simon said. “I didn’t know you spoke Mandarin.” He stared at Shaun.

Then Christian chimed in, and he, Shaun, and Ella spoke to each other.

“What the hell.” Conner slapped Christian’s arm. “You never told us you spoke Mandarin.”

“I took it in college.” He laughed.

“Me too,” Shaun said.

“Come on, Ella. Let’s go to Aunt Julia’s and play with the kids.”

“Okay. Bye, Dad.”

“See ya, sweetheart.”

She said goodbye in Mandarin to Shaun and Christian, and she and Lily ran to the house.

“Okay. That shit is going to stop,” Simon said. “You two are making the rest of us feel like idiots.”

“Yeah. No shit.” Jackson laughed.

“What the fuck? I’m gone for two nights, and I come back, and my kid speaks Mandarin?”

“So, what did I miss?” Stefan asked as he sat down, and Sam handed him a beer.

“Let’s see,” Simon said. “Did you know that Shaun and Christian speak Mandarin?”

“Oh, cool. Ella was speaking it to us in the car. When did she learn that?” Stefan glanced at me.

“I have no clue.” I tipped the beer bottle to my lips.

“Sofia found out that Nathan went and visited her mother while he was in New York,” Simon told him. “All hell broke loose, and she kicked him out of the house for a hot second.”

“Shit. You two okay?” Stefan asked.

“Yeah. We’re good now.” I smiled.

“That’s good. But damn, I miss everything. Are we playing some music or what?”

“Damn right, we are.” Simon grinned as he picked up his guitar and started strumming some tunes.

“Shaun!” Julia yelled as she ran over to us. “Jenni’s water just broke.”

“What?” He jumped up from his chair. “She’s not due for another three weeks.”

“Doesn’t matter. Your babies want to be born now. Go grab her hospital bag and the car. Oh, and be prepared. She’s having contractions, and she’s cussing Georgia out.”

“Shit. The whole point of her scheduled C-section was so she didn’t have to experience labor.” Shaun sighed.

“I better go grab my keys and get Georgia to the hospital,” Jackson said. “Come on, fam. Let’s go welcome two new additions to the Kind family.”

CHAPTER 21



TWO WEEKS LATER

Sofia

Stella and Sawyer are absolutely beautiful.” I smiled as I held each of them in my arms. “Are you okay, Shaun?” I asked as he walked down the stairs.

“Sure. I’ve slept a total of maybe eight hours in the last two weeks. I’m good.” He grabbed a cup from the cabinet and took it to the coffee machine.

“Don’t listen to him,” Jenni said. “My parents have been a huge help.”

“When is your nanny starting?” I asked.

“In a couple of days. I couldn’t tell her she couldn’t go on her vacation because the twins came early. Shaun is such a good daddy. Isn’t that right, baby?” She kissed his cheek when he sat down next to her.

“Yes. I’m a great Dad.” He brought the cup to his lips, and I laughed.

“They are so precious.” I couldn’t stop staring at them.

“Are you getting baby fever?” Jenni smirked.

“Oh, God, no. I have my hands full with Nicholas right now. But, maybe in a couple of years.”

There was a knock at the door, so Shaun got up and answered it.

“I’m here.” Barb strolled in. “Where are my precious grandchildren? Jenni, you’re glowing.” She smiled as she

kissed her cheek.

“Aunt Barb, when did you get back?” I asked as I handed her Stella.

“Late last night. The second I got Shaun’s message, I was elated. Oh my gosh, these babies are gorgeous and perfect in every way.”

“How was your trip?” Shaun asked.

“It was amazing and well worth the money.”

“I’m happy to hear that. Can I make you a cup of coffee?” he asked.

“That would be great, darling. Thank you.”

The sliding door opened, and Simon walked in.

“Mom, when did you get back?”

“Late last night. And hello to you too.”

“Sorry. I was just surprised to see you.” He walked over and kissed her cheek. “Welcome back. Anyway, I just wanted to check in before I head to the station.”

“Where’s Grace?” I asked.

“She had to take her car in for an oil change first thing this morning. All good here? Do you need anything?”

“Thanks, bro. We’re good.” Shaun patted his back.

“How is Ella liking her new school?” Aunt Barb asked.

“She loves it.”

“And how is Nathan adjusting?”

“He’s adjusting.” I smirked. “We both picked her up the other day, and she walked out talking to one of the older high school girls. When she got into the car, Nathan grilled her.” I shook my head. “He wanted to know who she was, what her parents did for a living, and why she was talking to her.”

“Poor Nathan. Where is Nicholas?”

“Nathan took him to work with him today. I have so many errands to run for the wedding, and I’m teaching a class at one

o'clock. He offered, so who was I to turn him down." I grinned.

"Well, I'm free all day, so I can stay here and help with the twins so Jenni and Shaun can get some rest."

"Oh, no, Barb. You don't have to do that," Jenni said as she looked at me with widened eyes. "I'm sure you have a lot to do since you've been away. Right, Shaun?"

"Well, if she wants to help out. I have work to do, and you should try to catch up on some sleep. Besides, she handled four babies at the same time. Two will be a piece of cake."

Jenni's eyes shot daggers at him, and I couldn't help but laugh. My phone rang, and I saw Kendall was calling.

"Hey, what's up?" Suddenly, my heart started racing, and sickness washed over me. "Oh, my God! I'm on my way now." Tears filled my eyes.

"Sofia, what's wrong?" Jenni asked.

"Sofia?" Shaun ran over to me as the color drained from my face.

"That—that was Kendall. The dance studio is on fire." I began to shake.

"What?!" Shaun and Jenni both yelled at the same time.

"Oh no!" Barb exclaimed.

"I have to go." I stood up and handed Sawyer to Jenni.

"I'll drive you," Shaun said as he grabbed his keys from the counter.

We climbed into Shaun's car, and I pulled out my phone to call Nathan. He didn't answer, so I called the office number.

"Good morning, Kind Medical Practice, specializing in neurology, orthopedics, and plastic surgery. How can I help you?"

"June, it's Sofia. Is Nathan in with a patient?"

"Hi, Sofia. Yes, he is."

“I need to talk to him now. It’s an emergency. Can you please go get him?”

“Yes. Of course. Hold on a second.”

“Sofia, what’s wrong?” Nathan asked.

“My dance studio is on fire, Nathan. Shaun and I are on our way there now.”

“Oh, my God. How?”

“I don’t know.” Tears fell from my eyes. “Kendall called and said the firefighters are trying to put it out now.”

“I’ll meet you there, babe. I’m on my way now.”

Shaun had to park a block over because the streets were blocked off and filled with fire trucks. I climbed out of the car and ran to where my studio was. Placing my hands over my mouth, I stood there and stared at it as the firemen put the fire out.

“This is my building,” Shaun said to one of the firefighters.

“And my dance studio!”

“What happened?” Shaun asked.

“There was an explosion from the building next door.”

“When did this happen?” I asked.

“We got the call at five a.m.”

“Sofia!” Kendall ran over and hugged me. “I can’t believe this.”

“Contractors were working on that building yesterday,” I told the fireman.

“Sofia!” I heard Nathan’s voice from behind. “Jesus.” He shook his head. “How the hell did this happen?”

“They think the building next door exploded.” I buried my face in his chest as the tears fell.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. No one was hurt, and that’s what’s important.” He held me tight.

“Miss, I’m going to need your name and number.”

“I’ll give you mine since I own the building,” Shaun said. “Listen.” He placed his hand on my back. “I will take care of everything, and we’ll rebuild your studio in no time.”

“Oh, my God, I have to call all the parents and let them know.”

“Do you have their numbers?” Nathan asked.

“Yes. On my computer at home.”

“I’ll come over and help you,” Kendall said.

“Thanks, Kendall. You better get back to the medical center,” I told Nathan. “Wait. Where’s Nicholas?”

“He fine. He’s at the medical center in good hands. I can take you home.”

“It’s okay, Nathan. I’ll take her. We have a lot to do,” Kendall said.

“Thanks, Kendall. Babe, everything will be okay.” He pressed his lips against my forehead.

CHAPTER 22



Nathan

“Thanks for driving Sofia here,” I said to Shaun. “She’s really shaken up.”

“No problem. She was at my house when Kendall called.”

“Maybe I should go get the baby and go straight home.”

“That’s the last thing Sofia would want you to do. Besides, she and Kendall have a lot of calls to make. You’d just be in the way.” He smirked.

“True.” I sighed. “How are the twins?”

“Exhausting, but good.”

“Yeah? I was going to tell you that you look like shit.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I placed my hand on Shaun’s shoulder.

“Thanks, cousin.” He chuckled. “Barb is back. She’s hanging out at my house with the babies so I can get some work done, and Jenni can rest.”

“Jenni’s okay with that?” My brow arched.

“No. But I didn’t give her a choice. I better get back home and start making some calls. I’ll see you later. Sofia, don’t worry about any of this.” He hugged her.

I drove back to the medical center, and when I stepped inside the practice, Jackson and Conner were standing behind the reception desk, playing with Nicholas.

“Bro, what the fuck happened?” Jackson asked. “June said something about Sofia’s dance studio was on fire.”

“Yep. It’s practically destroyed.” I sighed. “I guess there was an explosion in the building next to hers.”

“Was anyone hurt?” Jackson asked.

“No. Thank God.”

“Bro, take your kid, go home, and be with Sofia. I know she’s devastated,” Conner said.

“She is, and I feel horrible. Kendall is taking her home. They have to call all the parents of the kids to let them know what happened.”

“Shit. I can’t believe this.” Jackson shook his head. “This is the last thing she needs while planning the wedding.”

“June, what time is my last appointment?”

“Three-thirty.”

“Do me a favor and call the patient to see if they can come in now. If not, reschedule. I’ll pick Ella up from school so Sofia can do what she needs to. I don’t want her worrying about that.”

“I’ll make the call right now.”

“Thanks, June.”

I picked Ella up from school and told her the devastating news. She was upset and told me her heart hurt for Sofia, as did all of ours. Ella ran to Sofia and threw her arms around her when we stepped into the house.

“I’m sorry, Mom.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. But everything is going to be okay.” She hugged her tight.

“Hi, babe.” I brushed my lips against hers.

“Hi.” She smiled and took Nicholas from me. “Mommy missed you, little guy.”

“Did you get all your calls made?” I asked her.

“Yes. Everyone is devastated. I promised to keep them all updated through email.”

“Good idea.”

The sliding door opened, and Shaun walked in. The moment Ella saw him, she started speaking in Mandarin. They carried on a brief conversation, and then she went up to her room.

“God, I love that kid.” Shaun smiled. “I contacted the insurance company and told them what happened. You have pictures of the studio, right?” he asked Sofia.

“Yes. I have photos and videos.”

“Good. Email them to me, and I’ll forward them to the company. I also found out the company that owns that building next door. I’ve arranged a meeting with them tomorrow to buy the property.”

“Why?” Sofia asked.

“I’m happy you asked that.” He smirked. “Do you remember when you first came to Los Angeles and told me you were moving here and opening a studio?”

“Yeah. I remember,” Sofia said.

“Do you remember what I told you after I showed you the building and you told me you wanted it?” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“You said it was fine for now, but once my ballet school became a huge success, I’d need a bigger studio.”

“Exactly. How long is your waitlist?”

“Right now, it’s about a year.”

“Then I think it’s time for Sofia’s School of Ballet to expand.” He grinned. “I’m going to get the other company to sell me their property, and we’ll rebuild a bigger and even better ballet school.”

“I love that idea.” I smiled. “What do you think, babe?” I hooked my arm around her.

“Yeah.” She beamed with excitement. “Oh, my God. I love it.” She handed Nicholas to me and walked over to Shaun, wrapping her arms around him. “Thank you, Shaun. Thank you so much.”

“Don’t mention it. You are not only my friend, but you’re also my family, and family takes care of each other. I’ll keep you both updated. I have to get back to Jenni and the twins.”

“Is Aunt Barb still over there?” I asked.

“Yep. But I think she’s coming down here to see you and the kids. She’s making the rounds.” He winked before walking out the sliding door.

“How about we go to Four Kinds for dinner tonight?” I smiled.

“I’d love that. After today, I need some of Sebastian’s food.”

CHAPTER 23



ONE WEEK LATER

Nathan

I grabbed a couple of beers from the refrigerator and my guitar and walked over to Conner's house. When I stepped through the sliding door, I stood and watched as Ella, Conner, and Charlotte danced in the living room.

"Perfect timing, bro. We just finished." Conner grinned.

"And that makes how many this week?" I asked.

"Seven, Dad." Ella grinned. "It's fun. I want you to dance with me." She pouted.

"I dance with you all the time, sweetheart."

"Not for TikTok."

"That's because your dad doesn't know how to have fun." Conner picked her up and spun her around.

"That is not true, douchebag."

"It is, Dad. Going to Lily's. Bye."

"Don't tell my kid I don't know how to have fun." I pointed at my brother.

"Relax." Conner hooked his arm around me. "It's nothing she doesn't already know."

"Shut the fuck up and grab your beer. I'll meet you down at the beach."

"Hey, fam." I smiled as I sat in one of the loungers and twisted the cap off my beer bottle. "Anything new?"

“I spoke with Roman today, and he told me they found more evidence that’ll put Henry away for a long time. With any luck, he’ll die in there. I don’t mean like someone will kill him. I mean of old age,” Simon said.

“Mom alert,” Stefan quietly spoke.

I turned around and saw Aunt Barb walking toward us.

“Hello, boys.” She smiled. “I just love seeing all of you together like this. It warms my heart, and your fathers would be so proud of all of you.”

“And when Grayson and Gabriel move into those houses Shaun is building, our family circle will be complete.” Simon grinned.

“You look really good, Mom.” Sam smiled as she sat down next to him.

“Thank you, darling.” She kissed his cheek.

“Hey, Ma? The girls are at Shaun’s house.”

“That’s nice, Simon. I’m here to talk to you boys about something. I’ve sold the house.”

“Congratulations, Aunt Barb.” I smiled.

“Thank you.”

“So now what?” Sebastian asked.

“I bought a house.” She brightly grinned.

“Oh yeah? Where?” Simon asked as he took a sip of his beer.

“The Tomlin’s house.”

Beer flew out of Simon’s mouth when he heard the news.

“As in right down the freaking street?” he asked.

“That’s the one, Simon.”

“I didn’t know it was up for sale?” Shaun said.

“Well, it sort of wasn’t.”

“Mom?” Stefan’s brow arched.

“You didn’t know that Mr. Tomlin recently passed?” she asked.

“No!” We all exclaimed.

“It was very sudden. Anyway, I ran into Gretchen at the hair salon the other day. I gave her my sincere condolences, and we grabbed some lunch after our appointments. She was going on about her financial difficulties, and since Gregory took his own life, the insurance company will only give her a percentage of the life insurance policy.”

“Wait. What?” Sam asked. “Mr. Tomlin committed suicide?”

“Unfortunately. Poor man. He had been battling demons for years. At least, that’s what Gretchen said. Their finances are in chaos due to his gambling issues, and apparently, he had a drug problem. Anyway, she only has one payment left until the house is paid for. I told her that she should sell it and she could pay off what debt she has and buy a nice condo.”

“Let me guess, Mother,” Simon said. “You swooped in and offered her cash for her house.”

“I did.” Aunt Barb grinned. “We close in a few days, and she’ll be out in thirty days. Isn’t that wonderful news? I’ll be right down the street and get to see my grandchildren every day.”

“So great, Mom,” Stefan spoke with a hint of sarcasm.

“When do you need to be out of your house?” Sebastian asked.

“Two weeks. It was a cash offer, and the buyers wanted in immediately. As far as I’m concerned, the sooner the better. So, Simon, I will stay with you and Grace for two weeks until Gretchen moves out.”

“Why me?” he asked.

“Because I birthed you.” Her brow arched.

“You can stay with Charleigh and me, Aunt Barb,” Christian spoke.

“Thank you, Christian darling, but I’ll be staying with Simon.” She smiled.

“Speaking of birth, Mom,” Sam said. “There’s something I need to tell you.”

“What is it, darling?”

“Julia is pregnant.”

She blankly stared at him for a moment. “Oh. A failed vasectomy?”

“Yep.” He brought the bottle to his lips.

“Same thing happened to Linda and Ronnie Smith. Except Mr. Smith got his assistant pregnant instead of his wife.” Her lips formed a smirk. “Stefan, you two had it done on the same day by the same doctor.”

“Yes, Mom. I’m aware.”

“You don’t need to worry about him. Simon bought him a sperm check test kit. He’s good.” Sebastian chuckled.

“What the fuck, douchebag?” Stefan reached over and slapped his arm.

“Congratulations, Sam.” Aunt Barb kissed his cheek. “I know it wasn’t planned, but sometimes the greatest gifts in life aren’t. After all, the four of you certainly weren’t.” She patted his cheek. “I’m going to Shaun’s to congratulate Julia, tell the girls my good news, and see my grandchildren.” She stood up and headed toward Shaun’s house.”

“You okay, cousin?” I smiled at Simon.

“Do I look okay?” He finished his beer, threw the bottle in the sand, and grabbed another.

“Shit. I can’t believe she’s moving down the street.” Conner laughed.

“She birthed me? What the fuck?” He shook his head. “This is Dad all over again.” Simon pointed at all of us.

“Dad was actually right here,” Sebastian said. “At least she’ll be down the street.”

“Yeah, and if something happens to her, we can be there in a flash,” Jackson said.

“She’s constantly going to be in our business,” Stefan said. “She already is now, but it’ll get worse with her living so close.”

“She’s making a fresh start,” I said. “Look at it this way. We can ship the kids over to her at any time. All of them.” I smiled.

“Good point,” Sam said. “Really good point.”

“Two full weeks, bro.” Stefan grinned as he patted Simon’s shoulder.

“Shut up, douchebag,” he grumbled.

“Okay. Let’s play some music,” I said as I grabbed my guitar and strummed the chords.



Sofia and I took the kids home and put them to bed. I climbed into bed and scrolled through TikTok while Sofia washed her face and got ready for bed. I couldn’t help but shake my head when a video of Conner and Ella popped up. Then another of Conner, Ella, and Charlotte. And another of Conner, Ella, and Lily.

“Watching TikTok?” Sofia smiled as she climbed into bed and snuggled against me.

“Look at this one.”

“Your feed will be filled with Conner and his daughter in a few months.”

“He’s going to be an amazing father.” I smiled as I set my phone on the nightstand and wrapped my arms around her.

“He has a good role model.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“You think so?”

“I know so.” Her lips brushed against mine.

“Have I told you today how beautiful you are?”

“Let me think.” She looked up at the ceiling. “No. I don’t think you have.”

“Shame on me.” I smirked. “You’re beautiful, Sofia Finnegan.” I ran my hand down the back of her head, feeling her soft and silky hair. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too.” Our lips collided.

My phone pinged, so I broke our kiss and grabbed it. My brows furrowed as I stared at the message I received.

“What’s wrong?” Sofia asked.

“It’s an alert from my credit card company. Six-thousand dollars at the Tomoko Spa in Beverly Hills?” His brow arched.

“I’m giving the girls a spa day as their bridesmaid present. We’re getting massages, facials, and total relaxation, Japanese style. You can’t be mad. You insisted that I use your credit card to buy their gift. Just so you know, that doesn’t include the necklaces I bought them to wear with their dresses for the wedding.”

“And how much were the necklaces?” I asked.

“Umm, I don’t really remember. Maybe a little over two thousand dollars. You need to remember there are a lot of girls, including Lily, Ella, Lena, Lorelei, and Nora. Do you still love me?” Her lips formed a pout.

“Yeah. I still love you. But I think you need to work off some of that debt.” I grinned as I pulled her on top of me.

“I’ll be more than happy to work it all off, Dr. Kind.” Her lips traveled across my chest and down my torso until she reached my hard cock.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. “Mom? Dad?”

“Shit,” Sofia whispered as she quickly climbed off me.

“What is it, Ella?” I asked.

“Can I come in?” she whined.

“Fuck.” I mouthed. “Yes, sweetheart.”

The door opened, and she stepped inside.

“I don’t feel good. Can I sleep with you?”

Sofia and I stared at each other for a moment. She never asked to sleep with us, so I knew something was wrong with her.

“Come here, sweetheart.” I held out my arm.

She climbed on the bed and snuggled in between Sofia and me.

“She feels warm. I’ll go get the thermometer,” Sofia said as she climbed out of bed.

“Dad, I don’t feel so good.”

“I know, sweetheart.”

“No, Dad—” She vomited all over the bed and me.

CHAPTER 24



Sofia

Over the past four days, we took turns having the flu that kept us down for a full twenty-four hours. Unfortunately, we weren't the only ones in the family who got it. Sam, Julia, the kids, and Stefan's entire family had it. But everyone was better, and life was going on as usual.

After dropping Ella off at school, I had some errands to run. The first stop was at Kind Design & Architecture to go over the final plans for the new dance studio.

"Good morning." I smiled, walking into Sam's office with Nicholas in my arms.

"Good morning. Hey, buddy." He took him from me.

We walked over to the large table where Sam laid out the design.

"Here's the final design. All we need is your approval, and we can start rebuilding." Sam grinned.

I stared at the design of the two-story modern building that would become my ballet school. It had everything. Six ballet rooms, a large lobby, a reception area, a kitchen area, two locker rooms with a bathroom and showers, two offices, and a grand circular staircase occupied the space.

"It's beautiful, Sam. This is everything I've ever wanted." Tears filled my eyes. "I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize. This is your dream." He smiled.

“I loved my other dance studio, but I only saw the small picture at the time because I was so desperate to get out of New York. It just sucks that I’m doing this now because it burnt down.”

“I know. It’s terrible, but you need to put that behind you and look at this.” He pointed to the new building. “Your other studio was just the start of something bigger. This is your future, Sofia.”

“Hey, you.” Stefan smiled as he walked in and kissed my cheek. “Come here, little guy.” He took Nicholas from Sam. “So, are we all set?” He asked me.

“We’re all set.” I grinned.

After leaving Sam’s office, I went down and saw Shaun before heading out of the building.

“Hey, you.” Shaun smiled when I stepped inside his office. “Did you approve the final design?”

“I did, and it’s fabulous.” I grinned. “There’s so much to do. I have to pick out colors and all of that stuff.”

“Let me give you some advice. “Get married first, then worry about all that stuff later. You don’t have to think about any of that right now. Plus, you know Jenni will help you out and give all of her input.” He smirked.

“I know. We’ve already been talking about it. I have to run to the grocery store before heading home. I’ll see you later, yeah?”

“Definitely. Enjoy the rest of your day.”

“You too, Shaun.”

I walked out of his office and headed to the parking garage. After doing some grocery shopping, I went home, fed Nicholas his lunch, and put him down for a nap. My phone rang as I was putting the rest of the groceries away.

“Hey, handsome,” I answered and put Nathan on speaker.

“Hi, beautiful. How’s your day so far?”

“It’s great. I just put Nick down for a nap and put the rest of the groceries away. How about yours?”

“No complaints. My three o’clock patient canceled, which was my last one for the day, so I’ll pick Ella up from school so you don’t have to.”

“Thanks, babe. I appreciate it.”

“I love you, and I’ll see you later,” he said.

“I love you too.”

I set my phone on the island and opened the dishwasher to unload it so I could fill it with the dirty dishes from breakfast. I was waiting for a package to be delivered that needed my signature, so when the doorbell rang, I didn’t think twice about answering it. I stood there in shock, my heart beating out of my chest, when I opened the door and saw who was standing there.

“Hello, Sofia.”

“Mom?” My brows furrowed.

“May I come in?”

“What are you doing here? And how do you know where I live?”

“It’s not that hard to find out people’s addresses. May I please come in?”

“Sure.” I moved out of the way so she could step inside.

“I think it’s time we talked,” she said as she looked around my home. “This is a very nice home you have.”

“Uh, thanks.” I couldn’t calm my racing heart for the life of me. “Can I make you some tea?”

“Tea would be lovely. Thank you. If you don’t already know, Nathan paid me a visit.”

“He told me.” I grabbed a tea bag from the canister.

“That man really cares about you,” she said.

“I hope so since I’m marrying him in a month.”

“Where is my grandson?”

“Nicholas is down for a nap. We’ve been out all morning.” I poured some water from the tea kettle into a cup and handed it to my mother.

“Thank you.”

I felt agitated as anger brewed inside me.

“Do you think you can just show up here?” I asked with irritation.

The sliding door opened, and Alex stepped inside.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you had visitors. I can come back.”

“It’s fine, Alex.”

“I was just going to ask if I could borrow a stick of butter. I only have one, and I need two.”

“Yeah. Of course.” I walked to the refrigerator and grabbed it for her. “Alex, this is my mother, Rose. Mom, this is Alex. One of my best friends, neighbor, and future cousin-in-law.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Alex.” Rose extended her hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Rose. Thanks for the stick of butter,” Alex spoke as her eyes widened at me in disbelief before she walked out the sliding door.

“Oh, shit. I forgot to ask her something,” I said to my mother as I opened the sliding door, and she stopped when I yelled her name.

I ran over to her. “Text Nathan.”

“Are you okay?”

“I don’t know.”



*N*athan

I was in with a patient when I heard my phone ping. After finishing up, I pulled it from my pocket and saw I had a text from Alex.

“I was just at your house, and Sofia’s mother is there. Sofia wanted me to text you to let you know.”

I stared at her text with furrowed brows.

“Oh shit.”

“Bro, what’s wrong?” Jackson asked as he walked past me.

“Alex just texted me and said that Sofia’s mother is at the house.”

I responded to Alex. *“Unbelievable. Thank you for telling me. I’ll text Sofia now.”*

“Seriously?” Jackson asked.

“I have to text Sofia. I’ll talk to you later.” I walked away and went into my office.

“Babe, are you okay? Do you need me to come home right now?”

A few moments later, a text from her came through.

“I’m fine. I’ll see you after you pick Ella up from school.”

“Okay. Try not to kill her.”

“I can’t make any promises.”

I breathed out a laugh. My office door opened, and Conner stepped inside.

“Jackson just told me. I can’t believe she showed up.”

“I know. I can’t, either. I’m worried.”

“Then go home, bro,” Conner said.

“Sofia said she’ll see me after I pick up Ella. Is Shaun home?” I asked him.

“He told me earlier when I spoke to him that he was only working at the office a half day and then going home to work from there.”

I dialed his number.

“What’s up, cousin?” Shaun answered.

“Are you home?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“Rose is at my house right now.”

“Ah, shit. I’m heading down there now.”

“Thanks, Shaun.”

“No problem. What the fuck is she doing here?”

“I have no idea. It could be good or bad,” I said.



S ofia

“That was Nathan. He said he’s going to pick Ella up from school.”

“Ella is his daughter?”

“Yes. I’ll ask you again, Mother. Do you think you can just show up here after all this time?”

The sliding door opened, and Shaun stepped in.

“Rose.”

“Shaun.” Her brow arched. “Where did you come from?”

“I live on the beach.”

“Shaun, thank you for coming, but I’m fine,” I placed my hand on his arm.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes.” My lips gave way to a small smile. “Go home to your wife and babies.”

“You’re married now? With children?” my mother asked.

“Yeah, I am. Family is life, Rose, and life is family.”

She sighed as she rolled her eyes.

“I’ll see you later,” I said, practically pushing him out the sliding door. “Now, answer my question.” I turned and stared at her.

“No, but I did anyway because I felt it was time we talked.”

“Ah, I see. So, because you feel ready, it’s okay? Well, guess what? I don’t want to talk to you. Every action has consequences, Mother. You don’t get to talk to me anymore. That is your consequence. I reached out to you, and you ignored me.”

“Because I hated you for leaving me, Sofia. I know I’ve dealt with this situation in the worst possible manner, and I’m sorry.”

“You’re sorry?” I breathed out a laugh. “You’ve never been sorry for a damn thing in your life!” I shouted as I pointed my finger at her. I heard Nicholas cry through the monitor, and he wouldn’t go back to sleep. “Great.” I shook my head and went upstairs.

When I returned, I saw my mother in the living room, staring at the pictures I had sitting on the sofa table.

“You have a beautiful family, Sofia.”

“Yeah, I do. I have a beautiful, supportive family.”

She turned around and swallowed hard when she saw Nicholas.

“May I?” She held out her arms.

Reluctantly, I handed her my son. She took him over to the couch and sat down.

“He looks a lot like you,” she said. “But I see a lot of Nathan in him as well.”

The front door opened, and Nathan and Ella walked in.

CHAPTER 25



Sofia

“Babe.” Nathan kissed me. “Rose.”

“Hello, Nathan.” She pursed her lips.

“Hi. You must be my Grandma Rose,” Ella walked over to her and extended her hand. “I’m Ella.”

“It’s nice to meet you, darling, but I am not your grandmother.”

“Yeah, you are. Sofia is my mom. Well, not my biological mom because she died in a car accident. But I met Sofia not too long after I was sent here to live with my dad, and she takes care of me like a mother, and I love her very much. So, if you’re her mom, that makes you my grandma.” She grinned.

“How old are you, little girl?”

“Seven.”

“Do you like ballet?” My mother’s brow raised.

“Are you kidding?” Ella spoke with excitement. “I love ballet. I saw Sofia perform in Swan Lake when I lived in New York.”

“You lived in New York?” my mother asked.

“Yeah. That’s where I’m originally from. Now, I live here with my dad, mom, brother, cousins, and uncles. We’re one big, gigantic family. Sofia teaches me ballet. Or she did until her studio burnt down.” Ella lowered her head.

“What?” My mother turned and looked at me.

The sliding door opened, and Conner walked in.

“Uncle Conner! Ella ran to him. “Look, my Grandma Rose is here.”

“Grandma Rose, it’s nice to meet you.” Conner walked over and extended his hand. “I’m Nathan’s brother, Conner.”

“Hello, Conner.”

“Do you mind?” He pointed to Nicholas. “I’m going to take this little guy and Ella to my house for a while.”

“But I haven’t had my snack yet,” Ella whined.

“Okay. I guess I’ll have to eat that cheeseburger happy meal I picked up on the way home.”

“You got a happy meal?” Ella’s face lit up. “Wait. I’m coming!”

“Ella, grab a bottle from the refrigerator and the diaper bag for your brother,” I shouted.

“Okay, Mom.”

“She’s an adorable child. She seems smart for her age.”

“You have no idea,” Nathan said.

“Your studio burnt down?” My mother stared at me.

“Yes. There was an explosion at the building next to mine.”

“I’m sorry that happened.”

“As sad as it is, I’m rebuilding a bigger and better school,” I said.

“I’m happy to hear that, Sofia. Nathan, let me get this out of the way. I want to apologize for what I said to you in New York. You are not a horrible man.”

“Thank you, Rose. I appreciate it. But I am not sorry for what I said to you.”

“Nor do I expect you to be. You only spoke the truth.”

“If you’ll excuse me, I’m going upstairs to change. I’ll be right back.” Nathan kissed the side of my head.

“There is a lot I need to say to you, Sofia,” my mother spoke.

“It’s all I ever wanted, Mom. For years, I wanted you to talk and listen to me. But now, I don’t give a damn, and I don’t want to hear what you have to say.”

The sliding door opened, and Charlotte walked in.

“Good lord. It’s like Grand Central Station here,” my mother spoke.

“Hi.” Charlotte walked over and hugged me.

“Hi.”

“Charlotte.” Nathan smiled. “Rose, this is the amazing therapist I told you about.”

“I’m here to help,” Charlotte spoke. “The two of you will sit down and tell each other how you feel. So, come on. Let’s go sit down.”

“Charlotte, I—”

“Sit, Sofia.” She pointed to the couch.

Nathan wrapped his arms around me and pulled me into an embrace.

“I’m going over to Conner’s,” he whispered in my ear.

“Don’t leave me.”

“You’re in good hands with Charlotte, babe. I love you.” His lips brushed against mine.

“I love you too.”

My mother and I sat on the couch while Charlotte sat in one of the chairs across from us.

“Rose, why did you come to Los Angeles?” Charlotte asked.

“Because I want to mend my relationship with my daughter.”

“Ha.” I breathed out a laugh.

“It’s the truth, Sofia. Regardless if you believe me or not, I do love you. I’ve always loved you and only wanted the best for you.”

“You mean for you. You wanted the best for you, Mom. You have controlled every aspect of my life since you put me in ballet shoes. You never cared about what I wanted.”

“You love ballet. You wanted to be a ballerina. It’s in your blood. That’s what you were born to do.”

“You’re right. I do love ballet. It’s a huge part of me, but I wanted more. I wanted a life—my own life. But you wouldn’t hear of it and dismissed my feelings.”

“How does that make you feel hearing Sofia say that?” Charlotte asked her.

“It hurts because she’s right. When I couldn’t dance anymore, I felt empty inside. The ballet was my entire life, and I wanted it to be Sofia’s life. I wanted her to be everything I wasn’t, and the only way I could cope with the emptiness was to live through her. She’s such a brilliant and beautiful dancer.” My mother softly smiled as she looked at me.

“Really, Mom? Because all you ever did was criticize me and tell me how to be better when I was at my best. You have no idea how much I resent you for that. And another thing, do you even understand how badly it hurt me when you took Donovan’s side? You have no idea the things he said to me and the names he called me. He was just as unsupportive as you were.”

“I’m sorry, Sofia.” She looked away.

“You were such an amazing ballerina, Mom. You lived your dream. So, I don’t understand.”

“You’re right. I did live my dream. But once I stopped dancing, I felt like a stranger to myself. I didn’t know who I was outside of the ballet world and had difficulty coping. Perhaps that’s why I kept you so close.”

“I don’t understand,” I said.

“I was so angry when you left because you were seeking something I never had the guts to do. People knew me as the great Rose Finnegan, a world prima ballerina. If I’d left that world behind, I’d be forgotten, and I wouldn’t know who I was. Then I was Rose Finnegan, prima ballerina and mother to the great Sofia Finnegan. I was still me and wanted to hold onto that forever. I’m sorry I’ve ruined your life. I know I have issues, and I will seek help for them. Nathan and Shaun are right. Family is life, and life is family. I want to rebuild our relationship, Sofia.” Tears filled her eyes. “I have a daughter, a grandson, a future son-in-law, and a granddaughter. I want to get to know them and be a part of their lives as much as yours.”

I brought my hand up to my face and wiped away the tears that fell down my cheeks.

“Sofia, how does that make you feel?” Charlotte asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Charlotte, Nathan told me you’re the best. I would like to start seeing you as my therapist.”

“I would like that, Rose.” Charlotte smiled. “Since you’re in New York, we can do weekly sessions over Zoom.”

“That won’t be necessary. I’m moving to Los Angeles.”

“What?” I exclaimed. “What about the ABT? New York is your life, Mom.”

“It was my life, darling. Now, it’s time to start a new one.”

Fuck. I wasn’t sure how I felt about her moving to Los Angeles. I looked at Charlotte, and the expression on her face told me that everything would be okay.

“I promise to give you space and all the time you need, darling. After everything I’ve done, I know it won’t be easy for you. But I’m hoping that you can find it in your heart to forgive me.” She reached over and placed her hand on mine.”

“When are you moving?” I asked.

“Hopefully soon. I’m going to start looking for a house while I’m here.”

CHAPTER 26



Nathan

“How do you think it’s going over there?” Conner whispered so Ella couldn’t hear him.

“I don’t know. It could go either way.”

The sliding door opened, and Charlotte walked in.

“Well?” I asked.

“I think they’ll be okay.” She smiled.

I took Nicholas from Conner. “Ella, come on. We’re going home,” I said as she sat in the living room on Conner’s laptop.

“Okay, Dad.”

Sofia’s eyes locked on mine when we stepped through the sliding door, and I could tell something was wrong.

“Grandma Rose, come on. I want to show you my bedroom!” Ella ran to her, grabbed her hand, and led her upstairs.

I set Nicholas in his activity chair and walked over to where Sofia stood, leaning against the island.

“How did it go?” I planted my hands on her hips.

“She’s moving to Los Angeles.”

“Wait. What?” My brows furrowed. “You can’t be serious.”

“Oh, I am. I’m dead serious. She wants to mend our relationship and get to know you and the kids. This is all your

fault,” she spoke through gritted teeth.

“How is it my fault?” I calmly spoke.

“You had to go to New York and tell her that family is life and life is family. Well, guess what, Nathan? You just got a new family member.”

“I take it you don’t want to reconnect with your mother, even though you reached out to her a couple of times?” My brow arched. “You weren’t feeling sad that she wasn’t around to help you plan the wedding or that she wouldn’t be at our wedding?”

“I wanted to reconnect with her in New York and me here in California. Long distance, Nathan. Over the phone, Facetime, whatever.”

“Come here.” I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her into me. “You get to start over,” I softly spoke in her ear. “I never got the chance to do that with my mother. Everything will be okay, babe. Just wait and see.”

Sofia broke our embrace as the sliding door opened, and Aunt Barb walked in.

“Hello, you two.” She smiled. “Sofia, I was just at Sam’s house, and he mentioned that you have a color book with paint samples in it.”

“I do, Aunt Barb.”

“Would you mind if I borrowed it?” She walked over and picked up Nicholas. “I’ll return it to you tomorrow.”

“Of course. I’ll go grab it.”

“Colors for the new house?” I asked.

“Yes. Some of the colors Gretchen picked are not my taste.”

“Grandma Barb!” Ella flew down the stairs and ran to her.

“Hello, sweetheart.”

“Grandma Barb, this is my Grandma Rose. Grandma Rose, this is my Grandma Barb.”

“Rose Finnegan. It’s nice to meet you, Barb.” She extended her hand.

“Oh, my goodness. You’re Sofia’s mother. What a pleasure to meet you.”

Sofia returned to the kitchen. “Here’s the color book, Aunt Barb.” She set it down on the table.

“Sofia, you didn’t mention that your mother was in town?”

“She didn’t know. I surprised her,” Rose said.

“Mom, Barb is Nathan’s aunt and his cousin’s mother.”

“Are you looking at paint colors?” Rose pointed to the color book.

“I am. I just purchased a house down the street, and it desperately needs some new colors, if you know what I mean.”

“Trust me. I know. Colors can either make a home or completely ruin it.”

“Exactly.” Barb smiled. “I’m actually heading down to the house now with the color book. If you’d like to see it, you’re more than welcome.”

“That’s a great idea. My mom just told me today that she’s moving to Los Angeles.”

“That’s fabulous, Rose. Welcome to California.”

“Can I come with you?” Ella asked.

“Of course, darling.” Aunt Barb handed Nicholas to Sofia and grabbed the color book from the table.

When they walked out the front door, I looked at Sofia.

“I think we just witnessed a new friendship blossoming.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“What the hell am I supposed to do, Nathan? I honestly don’t think I can handle her living here.”

“You’re going to take it one day at a time, babe. I have an idea. Let’s have a big barbecue this Saturday and introduce her to the family.”

“You are certifiably crazy, Dr. Kind.”

“Maybe just a little.” I winked at her. “It’ll be fun.”

The front door opened, and we could hear laughter coming from Aunt Barb and Rose.

“You should see Grandma’s new house. It’s so nice!” Ella exclaimed. “I’m so excited she’s moving down the street!”

“I better head home,” Aunt Barb said. “I’ll be by the hotel in the morning to pick you up, Rose.”

Sofia and I looked at each other.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Barb,” Rose said. “What a fabulous woman.” She smiled when Aunt Barb left.

“Why is she picking you up tomorrow?” Sofia asked.

“We’re going house hunting. You’re more than welcome to join us, darling. I would like your opinion.”

“If you find something you really like, then I’ll go take a look at it,” Sofia said.

“Where are you staying, Rose?” I asked.

“The Four Seasons.”

“Nice. Just so you know, I’m taking you and Sofia to dinner tomorrow night.”

“You are?” Sofia shot me a look.

“Yes. Just the three of us. It’ll be fun.” I grinned.

“That sounds lovely, Nathan. I look forward to getting to know you better.”

“Excellent. We can have dinner at Four Kinds. You’ll love the food. My cousin Sebastian owns it. I’ll call him now and reserve us a table.”

“I want to go, Dad,” Ella whined.

“Sorry, sweetheart. Adults only. But I know you’d rather have Uncle Conner babysit you so you can make more TikTok videos.”

“Nah. I’d rather play Call of Duty. I’ll run over there and ask him if he can watch Nicholas and me.” She flew out the sliding door.

“She has the potential to become a prima ballerina.” Rose smiled.

“She’s very good at ballet,” Sofia said. “But her interests lie in the field of Science.”

“I know. She told me. She also told me she’s in high school and taking online college classes. She’s quite the little genius. From what I can see, Nathan, you and Sofia are doing an excellent job of raising her.”

“Thanks, Rose.”

“Thanks, Mom,” Sofia spoke.

“I’m going to head back to the hotel. I’ll see you both tomorrow evening.”

As she started to walk out the door, Sofia called out to her.

“Mom?”

“Yes, darling?” Rose turned and looked at her.

“I’ll look at houses with you and Aunt Barb tomorrow.”

“I’m happy to hear that. I’ll see you in the morning.” She smiled and walked out the door.

I stared at Sofia with a grin on my face.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing.” I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her into me.

CHAPTER 27



Sofia

It was the day of the barbecue, and I took my mom and introduced her to the entire family. Shaun walked over and hooked his arm around me.

“So, I hear that Rose made an offer on a house.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“Yep.” I popped my lips.

“Don’t you think two streets over is a little too close?”

“I certainly do. We can thank Barb for finding it for her.”

He let out a sigh. “Rose and Barb living so close to us. Who would have ever thought?”

“Right? It’s crazy. I know it’s only been a few days since she’s been here, but she’s a different person and really trying. So am I.”

“I’m happy to hear that, Sof.” His grip around me tightened. “She’s your mom, and life’s too short. “I wish I had my mom here with me.”

“Aw, Shaun. I’m sorry.”

The corners of his mouth curved upward. “Could you imagine if she were here? Imagine the tension between her and Barb.”

“That would be something to see.” I grinned.

“Bro, grab your surfboard. We’re surfing,” Stefan shouted as he ran past us with his surfboard.

“Go on.” I patted Shaun’s chest.

“You good, babe?” Nathan asked as he and Ella ran by with their surfboards under their arms.

“I’m good.” I smiled.

My mother walked over with Nicholas as I stared out at the water.

“This little guy has completely stolen my heart,” she said.

“Yeah. He’s going to be a little heartbreaker one day.” I smiled.

“I’m very proud of you, Sofia. You wanted more out of life, and you found it. This family of yours is truly a gift. They all seem like very loving people.”

“They are, Mom. And the more you get to know them, the more you’ll love them too. Why don’t you spend the night tonight?” I asked her.

“Really?”

“Yeah. You’re leaving the day after tomorrow, and I thought we could have breakfast together, and I’ll show you the plans for the new ballet school.”

“I’d like that, darling. Thank you.” She leaned in closer to me. “Barb introduced me to Shaun’s sister, Nora. She also filled me in about her and the boy’s father, Henry.” Her brow arched.

“I guess he was quite the ladies’ man.” I smirked.

“She’s an adorable child, and Celeste seems very nice. Barb wants the three of us to go to lunch when I come back.”

“Celeste is super nice. You’ll like her.”



N “Dad, I’m done surfing. I want to go kick the soccer ball around with Lily.”

“Go on, sweetheart.”

“Sofia and Rose seem to be getting along well,” Sam said.

“They are. They’ve spent every day together since she’s been here.”

“What the hell,” Sebastian said. “Is that—” He pointed.

“Don’t you douchebags have anything better to do than surf?” Grayson shouted from the shoreline.

We all paddled back to shore, took our boards out of the water, and hugged our cousin.

“What are you doing here?” I grinned.

“Gabriel and I were bored, so we decided to visit our family.” The corners of Grayson’s mouth curved upward.

“Damn. It’s great to see you,” Simon spoke.

“Where’s your twin?” Conner asked.

“He’s talking to Jenni and Grace. What’s with the party?”

“Sofia’s mom is in town, so we decided to have a barbecue to introduce her to everyone,” I said as we walked back to the house.

“See what you and Gabriel are missing?” Simon said. “You two living in Boston isn’t working for us.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“Yeah. Yeah.” Grayson chuckled.

We walked over to where Gabriel stood talking to the girls and hugged him.

“It’s good to see you.” I patted his back.

“It’s good to see you all, too, and to be here.” He smiled. “Shaun, the twins are adorable.”

“Thanks. They’re a handful, but I’m enjoying every minute of it.”

Night had fallen. The girls were off doing their own thing while we men gathered around the bonfire with our beer and guitars.

“This is great. I could get so used to this,” Grayson said as he brought the beer bottle to his lips.

“Me too, Gabriel spoke. “Shaun, does the offer still stand for the houses?”

“Fuck yes, it does.” Shaun grinned.

“We’ve been holding out on filling the space on the third floor of the medical center for you.” Jackson grinned.

“Grayson, you’d be a great asset to Cedars. Just say the word.” Christian smiled.

Grayson and Gabriel looked at each other for a moment.

“Looks like we’re moving to Cali!” Grayson shouted.

We all shouted and whistled at the news.

“What’s going on over here?” Aunt Barb walked over.

“Grayson and Gabriel are moving to Cali,” Sam said.

“Yes, I know that. They bought the houses that Shaun is building. At least that’s what Simon told me.” Her brow arched as she stared at him.

“We did, Aunt Barb. We’re just so happy to be here that we’re making an even bigger deal about it.” Grayson grinned. “Shaun, we need to look over the house plans again. I might want to make some changes.”

“Of course. We’ll go over them tomorrow.”

“I’m happy you two are moving here. This is what your father would have wanted,” Aunt Barb said. “I’m heading home. After tonight, I’ll be moving in with Simon for a couple of weeks and then to my new home down the street.” She smiled.

“Can’t wait.” Simon put on a fake grin.

“See you tomorrow, Mom,” Stefan said.

“Bye, Aunt Barb,” Conner, Jackson, Christian, and I spoke.

The second she walked away, the grin on Simon’s face fell flat.

“Thanks for having my back,” he said to Grayson.

“No problem, cousin. We’re family.” A grin crossed his lips as he held up his beer bottle.

“On second thought. Maybe we don’t want to move here,” Gabriel said.

“And why the fuck not?” Stefan asked.

“We love you guys, but you told us you were all single and as anti-relationship as we are.”

“My brother is trying to say that we love you and all, but we don’t want what you have. You have a happy life with your wives and kids, and we have a single and carefree life,” Grayson said.

“And that’s how we want it to stay,” Gabriel said. “You’re like a virus, and we aren’t getting infected.”

We all laughed.

“Yeah. Yeah, you miserable pricks. You think you’re happy, but the reality is you don’t know how unhappy you really are,” Simon said. “Been there, done that, blah, blah, blah. But it’s all good. We got your backs. And when Cupid comes around, I’ll get my gun and make sure to shoot that fucker right out of the way for you.”

“You promise?” Grayson grinned.

“Yeah. We all got you. Right, fam?” Simon looked at all of us.

“Yeah. We got you.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

CHAPTER 28



TWO WEEKS LATER

Nathan

I was washing my and Ella's paintbrushes in the laundry room sink when Sofia walked in and sat on the washer.

"Hey, babe." I smiled.

"Hi. I am looking so forward to our honeymoon. I'll miss the kids terribly, but I can't wait to spend alone time with you."

"I can't wait either." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

"It's going to be magical, Nathan. Just the two of us, white sandy beaches, and beautiful aquamarine water that's crystal clear on a bright sunny day."

My brows furrowed as I glanced at her.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Our honeymoon in Turks and Caicos." She grinned.

"We aren't going to Turks and Caicos."

"What do you mean?" She cocked her head.

"You told me that I was in charge of the honeymoon, babe."

"I know, but I told you I wanted to go to Turks and Caicos."

"No, you didn't. You never once mentioned that."

“Are you being serious right now?” she asked.

“Yes. I would remember if you told me you wanted to go there.”

“Unless you weren’t listening to me.” Her brow arched.

“I always listen to you.” I turned the water off and dried my hands.

“Maybe you just didn’t want to go there, and that’s why you’re telling me that I never mentioned it,” she said.

I was getting irritated and not sure what was going on with her.

“Listen, babe. I want to go anywhere in the world you want to go. If you had said you wanted to honeymoon in Turks and Caicos, I would have planned it. But you never said a word. You only said that I was in charge of the honeymoon. You never mentioned a destination and left it up to me,” I spoke with irritation and walked out of the laundry room.

I could hear her laughing, so I walked back into the room and stared at her.

“What the hell is so funny?”

“You’re getting so mad at me.” She laughed. “I was just playing with you, babe. I can’t wait to go to Paris for our honeymoon.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Who told you?” I narrowed my eye as I walked over to the washer and gripped her hips. “Which one of my brothers told you?”

“No one told me. I grabbed a pen from your office the other day and saw the confirmation email you had on your computer.”

“It was supposed to be a surprise,” I said.

“Then you shouldn’t leave your emails open.” A smirk crossed her lips.

“So, you don’t want to go to Turks and Caicos?” I asked her as my grip on her hips tightened.

“I do one day.” Her arms wrapped around my neck while her legs secured themselves around my waist. “Paris is the perfect honeymoon destination.”

“We’re not just staying in Paris. We’re also going to the Amalfi Coast.”

“Even better.” Her lips pressed against mine.

“Yeah?” I nipped her bottom lip. “Do you like it when I’m mad at you?”

“I love it. Maybe I need to be punished for making you so mad.”

“I think you do.” I lifted her and carried her to our bedroom.



“Okay. Let’s get this TV on the wall. One, two, three,” Stefan said as we lifted Aunt Barb’s TV and hung it.

“Good job.” Simon grinned as he stood there holding his beer.

“Thanks for the help, douchebag,” Stefan said.

“Please. I had to endure the last two weeks with her living with me. I helped enough.”

I chuckled.

“I better run upstairs and see if Conner, Sam, and Sebastian need help hanging the one in the bedroom,” Stefan said.

“Yeah, you go do that, bro,” Simon said.

Simon and I stood there as the movers moved in the rest of the furniture.

“You must be happy.” I smirked.

“You have no idea. I love my mother, but I don’t want to see or talk to her first thing in the morning. And she kept

moving my shit, so when I'd go to look for something, I couldn't find it."

I let out a chuckle. "What did Grace say?"

"She just kept telling me to breathe and that it would be over with soon."

"Well," I patted his back, "your torment has ended." I smiled.

"Has it, Nathan? Has it really?"

I couldn't help but laugh just as Aunt Barb walked down the stairs and into the living room.

"What is so funny, Nathan?"

"Uh, Simon was just telling me about this guy he arrested the other day," I lied. "The house looks great, Aunt Barb. It'll feel like home in no time."

"It already does feel like home—like a breath of fresh air. Knowing that I can walk down the street to see my grandchildren and family anytime I want warms my heart." She placed her hand over her heart.

"Yeah, Mom, but there's this thing called boundaries," Simon said. "Perhaps you've heard of it?"

"Shush up, Simon. Nathan, I spoke to Rose last night, and she told me she'll be moving here next week."

"Yeah. Her townhome sold, and the homeowners she bought the house from here have already moved out."

"It'll be great to see her again."

"So, are you two like best friends now?" Simon asked.

"I consider her a very close friend. We have a lot in common."

"Yeah, you're both seeing Charlotte." He smiled. "Which, by the way, have you been sitting on her couch in the office?"

"Of course. Why would you even ask that?"

"No reason." He grinned.

“Sometimes I wonder about you.” She shook her head and walked away.

“Same,” Simon mumbled before tipping the beer bottle to his lips.

My phone rang, and when I pulled it from my pocket, I saw Sofia was calling.

“Hey, babe.” I could hear Ella crying in the background.

“Nathan, get home! Ella fell off her bike. I think her arm is broken!”

“I’m coming.” I hung up.

“What happened?” Simon asked.

“Ella fell off her bike. Conner!” I shouted up the stairs. “Ella fell off her bike.”

He flew down the stairs, and we all ran out of the house and down to mine, where my family gathered around Ella.

“Sweetheart.” I ran over to her.

“It hurts so bad, Dad!” she screamed.

“Let Uncle Conner take a look,” he said as he knelt on the ground.

“OUCH!”

“Okay, sweetheart. We need to get you to the hospital,” Conner said. “Charlotte, I need—”

“Already on it.” She ran to their house.

A few seconds later, she returned with a sling.

“You keep slings at your house?” Jackson asked him.

“Yeah, and it’s a good thing I do. Okay, you brave girl. I’m going to put this on your arm carefully. You need to stay really still.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” I said as the tears poured from her eyes.

“I’ll put her in the back seat of your car, bro, and I’ll follow you to Cedars,” Conner said as he carefully picked Ella

up.

“I’ll look after the baby,” Charlotte said to Sofia. “Go, and don’t worry.”

Ella wanted me to sit in the back with her, so Sofia drove us to the ER. We immediately took her back to an open room, where Conner ordered a CT scan.

“Why a CT and not a regular X-ray?” I asked him.

“Because I want to check the tendons and the soft tissue.”

We moved Ella into CT, entered the control room, and waited for the images to appear on the screen. The door opened, and Jackson and Christian walked in.

“Nothing yet?” Christian asked.

“The images should be coming right about—shit,” Conner said.

“Damn,” Jackson said.

“She broke it in three places?” I glanced at Conner.

“Yeah, and look at this.” He pointed to the screen. “I’ll have to go in and realign this piece and secure it with some screws for it to heal properly.”

“Shit.” I ran my hand down my face. “She’ll be in a cast for the wedding, won’t she?”

“Yeah. The very minimum will be eight weeks.”

“We better go tell her,” I said.

“I’ll go get an O.R. booked for you,” Christian walked out of the room.

“How bad is it? I want to see,” Ella spoke when we stepped inside the CT room.

“We’ll show you when we get you back down to the ER, sweetheart,” I spoke.

Conner brought up the images of Ella’s arm on the monitor in the room.

“Wow,” she said. “You’re going to have to realign the bones and put in some screws, Uncle Conner.”

“That’s right, my little genius.” He gave her a sympathetic smile.

“Okay. I’m ready. Do what you have to do.”

“You are so brave.” Sofia kissed the top of her head.

Christian walked into the room. “O.R. three is ready. How are you doing, darling?” He walked over to Ella and placed his hand on her.

“It hurts really bad, Uncle Christian,” she whined.

“I know it does.” His lips formed a pout. “Uncle Conner will get you all fixed up.”

“Dad, will you be in the O.R. with me? Please.”

“Of course, sweetheart. You don’t think I’d let your Uncle Conner perform surgery on you unsupervised, do you?”

“Let’s get this little genius prepped,” Conner said.

CHAPTER 29



Nathan

“Okay, baby. It’s time to go to sleep.” I smiled as she lay on the operating table.

“Sweet dreams, Ella.” Conner winked at her and gestured to the anesthesiologist to push the medication.

“She’s out,” Dave said.

“Okay, team. Let’s get this arm fixed.”

“How’s it going?” Christian and Jackson walked into the O.R.

“Almost finished,” Conner spoke.

“Looks good,” Jackson said as he leaned over and examined his work.

“Excuse me? It looks perfect,” Conner said.

“How long until a cast?” I asked him.

“When the swelling subsides. I’ll want to cast her in about five days. She’ll be in a sling and immobilizer until then. I know I’m perfect at closing, but you’re the plastics guy. Do you want to close up your daughter’s arm?”

“Don’t mind if I do.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as Conner stepped out of the way. “Carol, go get Sofia and take her to recovery for when we bring Ella there.”

“Will do, Dr. Kind.”

Once I finished, we took Ella to recovery.

“How did it go?” Sofia hugged me.

“It went great,” My grip tightened around her.

“Now we wait for her to wake up,” Conner spoke.



“Well, how did it go?” I smiled as I found Sam and Julia in the kitchen area, talking to Jackson.

“There’s only one baby.” Sam grinned.

“Are you sure?” My brow arched. “Remember, that’s what Georgia told Jenni and Shaun at first.”

“I heard that, Dr. Kind.” Georgia walked in. “I did an ultrasound, and there’s only one baby in that belly.”

“Congratulations.” I smiled as I patted Sam’s back.

“You have no idea how relieved we are,” Julia said.

“We’re off to lunch,” Sam said. “I’ll see you guys tonight at the brewhouse.”

“Hey, Dad!” Ella walked into the kitchen area and over to the refrigerator.

“Hi, sweetheart. Are you ready to get your cast?”

“Yeah, but I want an apple first.”

“Hi.” I smiled as Sofia walked over to me. Hooking my arm around her, I kissed her lips.

“Hi, handsome.”

“Where’s Nick?” I asked.

“With June and Brandon. We went to your office first. We didn’t know you were in here. I saw Sam and Julia in the hallway. She was glowing with the news.” A smirk crossed her lips.

“Yeah. They’re pretty happy it’s not twins this time. Come on, kiddo. Uncle Conner is waiting for you.”

I went to take Nicholas from June, and she backed away.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Taking my son into the room with us.” My brow arched.

“He’s happy right where he’s at, Nathan. Brandon and I will watch him while Ella gets her cast.”

“Okay.” I chuckled. “Thank you.”

“What color do you want, your highness?” Conner asked Ella as he held a box full of rolled cast tape before her.

“I want this one!”

“Pink Camouflage. Excellent choice. Very stylish for a royal princess.” He winked.

“What do you think, Mom? Dad?” Ella held out her arm.

“I love it, sweet girl.” Sofia smiled.

“You look so cool, sweetheart.” I picked her up from the table and set her down.

“I’m going to go show June and Brandon.” She ran out of the room.

“I’m going to collect our son and daughter and head home. I’ll see you later.” Sofia kissed my lips. “Thank you, Conner.” Her lips pressed against his cheek.

“Anytime, my prima ballerina.”

“Let’s finish seeing our patients and get the hell out of here. We have a bachelor party to attend tonight.” Conner patted my back as we walked out of the room.



“*T*here better not be any strippers tonight.” Sofia smirked as her arms wrapped around my neck.

“Oh, there will be.” I grinned. “And she’ll be ready and waiting for me when I get home.”

“Uh, this stripper will be sound asleep.”

“I’ll forgive you if you’re naked under the sheet.” My lips brushed against hers.

“I’ll think about it. Go on. Get out of here and enjoy your bachelor party. I love you.”

“I love you too, babe.”

Shaun had hired a couple of drivers to drive all of us to the brewhouse. I smiled at all of the poker, blackjack, and craps tables when we stepped inside.

“Damn. Look at this place. I can’t believe you did this,” I said to Sebastian.

“It’s your bachelor party.” He handed me a scotch. “We’re doing it up right.”

“That’s right. No women, no kids, no worries. Just a night of bro fun and bonding.” Stefan grinned.

I walked around and spoke to some of my friends from the hospital.

“I wish Grayson and Gabriel could have come.” I walked over to my cousins.

“I know. But soon enough, they’ll be here and joining us for everything,” Shaun said.

I walked over to where the food was. Chicken wings, sliders, pizza, subs, and different types of salads filled the table. On the other side were nacho and chili bars with three different types of chilies.

We ate, drank, smoked some fine cigars, played poker, blackjack, craps, and had great conversations. By the time my bachelor party wrapped up, it was three a.m. I stumbled into the house and up the stairs. I wouldn’t lie and say I didn’t drink much because I did. Too much, and I was feeling it. Stripping out of my clothes, I climbed into bed and groped Sofia.

“I’m home,” I whispered as my tongue traveled along the side of her neck.

“You smell like a brewery, and you reek like cigars.” She turned and faced me. “Go to sleep, babe.”

“I really want to fuck you, but I don’t think I can.” I rolled on my back.

“That’s okay, big guy. Sleep it off.” She patted my chest.

CHAPTER 30



Sofia

The following day was spa day. All the guys knew it, and none of us girls felt bad leaving at nine a.m.

“Nathan, you have to get up,” I said. “I’m leaving in an hour, and you need to shower.”

He moaned and rolled over.

“I don’t feel bad for you because you knew today was spa day and what time we were leaving.”

“Sofia, shush,” he moaned.

I was left with no choice. I went downstairs, where Ella was eating breakfast.

“I need you to go upstairs and get your dad up.”

“On it.” She grinned.

I followed her up the stairs and held Nicholas in the doorway.

“It smells in here.” She wrinkled her nose as she climbed onto the bed and started jumping and singing as loud as she could.

Nathan’s eyes flew open. “Damn it, Ella. Knock it off, or you’re grounded.”

“Nope, Dad. You had fun last night; now it’s Mom’s turn. Don’t be rude, and don’t make her mad. She might not marry you.” She continued to jump.

“I’m up. I’m up.” He sat up and ran his hand down his face. “Really, Sof?” He glared at me.

“I tried to do it the nice way.” I shrugged.

“Dad, you smell. Go take a shower and clean yourself up.” Ella jumped off the bed and walked out of the room.

“That was unacceptable.” He pointed at me.

I smiled and went down to the kitchen. After Nathan had showered and dressed, he walked into the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of electrolytes from the refrigerator without saying a word to us. After taking a few sips, he looked at me.

“I’m mad at both of you,” he said.

“You’ll get over it,” Ella and I said at the same time.

“You chose to party hard last night, Dad. You knew you had to be up early because Mom has her spa day.”

“It was my bachelor party, Ella.”

“But you’re not a bachelor, Dad.” She cocked her head at him. “You and Mom have a baby, and you live together. Your bachelor days flew out the window the second she moved in and got pregnant, not to mention the day you proposed to her. The whole thing is stupid, in my opinion, because once you’re in a relationship and propose, you’re no longer single. Being single is when you’re not in a relationship with someone.”

“Okay, Ella.” Nathan sighed. “Point taken.”

I smiled as I grabbed Nathan’s cheek and pinched it.

“Isn’t she so adorable? I’m heading out. I’ll see you later. Hopefully, you won’t still be mad at me.” I walked away.

“Stop right there!” Nathan commanded. “You’re actually leaving without giving me a kiss?”

“You’re mad at me for something that is entirely your fault. Why would I kiss a mad man?” I turned and looked at him. Ella snickered.

“You, shush up.” He pointed at Ella as he walked over to where I stood. “I love you. Have a wonderful day with the

girls.” His lips brushed against mine.

“I love you too, grumpy.” I smirked. “I’ll see you later.”

“Bye, Mom,” Ella shouted.

“Bye, sweetheart. Keep your dad in line for me.”

“I will. Don’t worry.”

I heard Nathan let out a sigh as I walked out the door. Climbing onto the party bus, I saw my girls and smiled.

“So, who had trouble getting their man out of bed?” I asked.

“Sam was not happy,” Julia said.

“Neither was Stefan. He’s a big old grumpy bear.”

“Shaun knew better.” Jenni grinned.

“This is the first time he’s alone with the twins since they were born, right?” Grace asked.

“Yep.” She grinned. “All day, by himself, with his two children.”

“You’re not worried?” Julia asked. “I remember how worried I was when I left the twins with Sam for the first time.”

“Nah. I hope they cry all day.” She smirked, and we all laughed.

“Nathan was very grumpy. I had to send Ella to wake him because he wouldn’t get up.”

“How did she wake him up?” Emilia asked.

“By jumping on the bed and singing at the top of her lungs.” I grinned. “Then she lectured him about how it was his fault.”

“I love that kid.” Charlotte smiled. “Conner is still sleeping.”

“So is Sebastian,” Emilia said.

“Simon was moaning in bed when I left.”

“Jackson was passed out cold.” Georgia laughed.

“I hooked Christian up to a banana bag before I left. He didn’t even feel me do it,” Charleigh said.

“You know why they partied so hard, right?” Grace said. “They knew they didn’t have to drive home.”

“But they knew they had to take care of their children,” I said.

“When is Rose officially moving?” Emilia asked.

“She’ll be here next week. Speaking of, there’s something I’m thinking about,” I said. “We’ve been getting along so well, and we’ve talked every day since she went back to New York. I’m thinking about asking her if she would walk me down the aisle. There really isn’t anything she can help with for the wedding, so I thought it would be a nice gesture.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea.” Charlotte smiled. “I know that would mean a lot to her.”

“I think it’s great,” Grace said. “Have you talked to Nathan about it?”

“No. Not yet. I will later.”



One Week Later

Sofia

“Grandma Rose!” Ella ran into the house.

“Ella, come here, darling.” She held out her arms. “You poor thing. How is your arm feeling?”

“It’s fine. Can I look around your new house?”

“Of course. Go right ahead. Hello, Nathan.” My mother smiled as he kissed her cheek.

“Hi, Rose. Welcome to California. It’s official now.”

“Thank you. I can’t believe it.” She took Nicholas from him. “Hello, my sweet grandson. I missed you so much.” She

kissed his cheek and he smiled.

I glanced over at Nathan, and he gave me a wink.

“Hey, Mom? There’s something I want to ask you.”

“What is it, darling?”

“I was wondering if you’d like to walk me down the aisle and give me away to Nathan.”

Instantly, tears filled her eyes as she handed Nicholas to Nathan and grabbed hold of my hands.

“I would be honored, Sofia.” She hugged me. “If only your father were here. He’d be so proud of you.”

“Thanks, Mom. Is there anything else you need help with?”

“Hello, hello.” We heard Aunt Barb’s voice. “There you are. Welcome to the neighborhood, Rose.” She handed my mother a beautiful plant.

“This is gorgeous, Barb. Thank you.”

“I am so happy you’re here. I don’t know about you, but I still have to go shopping for shoes to match my dress for the wedding,” Aunt Barb spoke.

“So do I.”

“Excellent. We can go together. How’s tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow would be perfect.” My mother smiled.

“I’m going to take Nicholas home and put him down for a nap. Ella, come on,” I shouted.

“Let her stay,” my mother said. “I’ll bring her home later.”

“Sounds good.” Nathan grinned. “Come on, little man. It’s nap time.”

We walked out of my mother’s house, put Nicholas in his stroller, and walked home.

“What was that grin for when my mother said Ella could stay?” I asked.

“I think you know because you’re thinking the same thing —no Ella, plus nap time, equals sexy time with my beautiful fiancée.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Ah, I see. I wasn’t thinking about that.”

His brows furrowed. “Why not? How could you not think about that when we’re practically kid free?”

“Because we’re getting married next week, and I think we should stop having sex until our wedding night.”

“Yeah. Okay.” He chuckled.

“Nathan, I’m serious.”

“Okay, babe. You’re right. It’ll be more special if we wait.” His lips formed a warm smile. “I’ll put the baby down for his nap.” He kissed me.

CHAPTER 31



Nathan

There was no way I was holding out until our wedding night. I could understand two or three nights before, but not seven. Laying Nicholas in his crib, I kissed his head, turned on his sound machine, and went to our bedroom. I grabbed the bottle of cologne that Sofia loved so much and dabbed some on. She couldn't keep her hands off me every time I wore it. Taking my watch off, I placed it behind the dresser. Removing my phone from my pocket, I texted her because I didn't want to yell down the stairs and wake the baby.

"Can you come up here for a second, please? My watch fell behind the dresser, and I need your small hands."

She walked into the bedroom. "How did your watch fall behind the dresser?"

"I took it off and set it down, and it fell behind it."

She knelt on the floor and stuck her hand in the small gap between the dresser and the wall. I knelt next to her, and she looked at me.

"What?" I smiled.

"Nothing." She handed me my watch.

"Thank you, babe." I kissed her lips.

"You're welcome." She stared at me momentarily, stood up, and walked out of the bedroom.

Silently, I counted. One, two—before I could get to three, she walked back in, pushed me onto the bed, and hovered over me.

“You’re an asshole.”

“Why?” I chuckled.

“You put that cologne on, knowing damn well I can’t resist you.” She fumbled with my pants.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” I grinned.



“Where the hell is Christian?” I glanced at my watch.

“He’s on his way,” Conner spoke as he tried on his tux.

The door to the tuxedo shop opened, and Christian walked in.

“Bro, what took you so long?” I asked.

“Sorry. I had to make a quick stop on my way, and then traffic was all backed up.”

“Where did you have to stop?” Jackson asked.

“To get this.” He smiled as he pulled a blue velvet ring box from his pocket and flipped open the lid.

“Is that the one you were looking at when I went to buy Sofia’s ring?” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Yep.”

“Come here.” My brothers and I hugged him. “When are you asking her?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“You’re more than welcome to do it Conner style at my wedding.” I smiled.

“Thanks, bro. I’ll think about it.” He chuckled.

The four of us tried on our tuxedos, making sure they were a perfect fit.

“Did the rest of the guys pick theirs up already?” Jackson asked.

“Yeah. They were in here yesterday.”

“One week, and you’ll be a married man.” Conner patted my back. “Three down and one to go.” He pointed at Christian.

When I arrived home, I looked out the sliding door and saw Sofia down by the water with our son.

“Hi.” I smiled as I walked up to her, kissed her cheek, and took Nicholas from her.

“Hi.” She hooked her arm around me.

“How did it go at Jenni’s studio?” I asked.

“It went great. My dress is a perfect fit.”

“I can’t wait to see you in it. Christian bought a ring for Charleigh today.”

“Oh, my God! Did he? When is he asking her?”

“He doesn’t know yet. But he better ask her before we leave for our honeymoon. Where’s our daughter?”

“She and Lily are down at Aunt Barb’s. Will you run over to my mom’s with me? I picked her up some things at the store today.”

“Yeah. Let’s go now.”



Sofia

We sat Nicholas in his car seat and drove to my mother’s house. When we pulled into her driveway, Nathan grabbed the two bags while I grabbed the baby. Walking into the house, Nathan set the bags down on the island.

“Where is she?” Nathan asked.

“I don’t know. Mom?” I shouted. “Mom?”

Suddenly, she appeared on the stairs in her black silk robe.

“Sofia. Nathan. What are you doing here?” A panicked look crossed her face.

“I picked you up a few things at the store. Wait a second. Are you sick?” I furrowed my brows.

“Umm, no. Why do you ask that?”

“Then why are you in your robe in the middle of the afternoon.”

A man walked down the stairs and stood behind her.

“Is everything okay, Rose?”

My eyes widened as I looked at Nathan.

“Mark, this is my daughter, Sofia, her fiancé Nathan, and my grandson, Nicholas.” She sighed. “This is Mark.”

“This is quite awkward,” he said. “It’s nice to meet you. I’ll go get dressed and head home.” He turned, walked back up the stairs, and my mother followed him.

“I’ll be down in a second,” she said.

I handed Nicholas to Nathan, placed my hand on my forehead, walked into the kitchen, and poured myself a glass of wine.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?” I snapped at Nathan.

“What do you want me to say?” He laughed. “She’s your mom and a grown woman. Besides, I have my hands full with Aunt Barb.” He continued to laugh.

“Again, it was nice to meet you,” Mark said before leaving the house.

“You too, Mark.” Nathan smiled, and I slapped his arm.

“What is going on?” I asked my mother. “Who is that guy?”

“His name is Mark, and he lives a few houses down. I love you, Sofia, but you should have called first.”

“I shouldn’t have to. You shouldn’t be shacking up with your neighbor in the middle of the afternoon. Actually, not ever!”

“Relax, darling.”

“Relax? What if Ella was with us?”

“But she isn’t. You know, Sofia. I have needs just like you do.”

“Stop.” I placed my hands over my ears. “You don’t even know that guy.”

“And how long or well did you know Nathan before the two of you slept together?” Her brow raised.

“This isn’t about Nathan and me.”

“I can tell you this. I love California.” She smiled. “Anyway, thank you for picking some things up for me. That was very sweet of you. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to shower and get ready. Mark and I are going to dinner tonight.” She kissed Nicholas on his head and went back upstairs.

“Come on, babe. Let’s go home.” Nathan grinned.

“Grin like that again, and that’s the last thing you’ll ever do.” I pointed at him and walked out the door.

“Sof, what is really going on here?” he asked as we climbed into the car.

“She doesn’t even know the guy, Nathan.”

“How do you know that? You’re not with her 24/7. He lives a few houses down. I’m sure they talk every day.”

“I want his last name so Simon can check him out.”

“Babe.” Nathan chuckled. “Stop worrying.”

“Like you all did with Henry?” I cocked my head.

Nathan sighed and drove us home.

CHAPTER 32



Nathan

“I’m heading down to the beach. Are you coming?” I asked Sofia.

“I’ll join you later. The girls and I are going over to Jenni’s for a while.”

“Okay. Have fun.” I smiled as I kissed her lips.

I took my beer and guitar down to the beach and sat in the lounge next to Christian.

“What a day.” I sighed as I twisted the cap off the bottle.

“Why?” Jackson asked. “Was picking up the tuxedos too much for you?” He chuckled.

“Very funny.” I flung the cap at him. “We had to stop at Rose’s house to drop off a few things that Sofia picked up for her.” I brought the bottle to my lips.

“And?” Simon asked.

“She came walking down the stairs in her robe, and some guy named Mark was behind her. Obviously, we interrupted something.”

“Oh shit.” They all laughed.

“It was embarrassing, and Sofia wasn’t having it.”

“I bet.” Shaun chuckled.

“Where did she meet this guy?” Conner asked.

“He lives a few houses down from her.”

“Wait a second,” Sam said. “Are you talking about Mark Lucano?”

“I don’t know his last name,” I said.

“Six feet tall, dark hair, kind of balding in the front?”

“Yeah. That’s him.”

“Isn’t his house the one we remodeled a couple of years ago?” Stefan asked Sam.

“Yeah. He’s a great guy. He’s an Art History professor at UCLA,” Sam said. “He had just gotten divorced when he contacted us about remodeling his house. Apparently, his wife cheated on him with one of her co-workers. He’s a really nice guy. Tell Sofia she has nothing to worry about.”

“I have nothing to worry about what?” Sofia walked over.

“About Mark Lucano,” Stefan said.

“Who?” Her brows furrowed.

“The man we caught your mother with.” I smirked.

“Oh. Why don’t I have to worry?”

“Stefan and I remodeled his house a couple of years ago. He’s a really nice guy.”

“What does he do?” Sofia asked.

“He’s an Art History professor at UCLA,” Stefan said. “Isn’t he also the head of the department?” He glanced at Sam.

“Yeah. I think so.”

“Why isn’t he married if he’s so nice?” Sofia’s eyes narrowed.

“He’s divorced. His wife cheated on him with one of her co-workers,” Sam said.

“Feel better, babe?” I asked.

“No. She shouldn’t be doing that.”

“I feel you, Sof,” Simon said. “Welcome to our world. We’ve been dealing with this shit our whole lives with both of

our parents. Let's just hope that if something comes of it, this Mark guy is decent, and Rose doesn't end up shooting him."



One Week Later

"Goodbye, sweetheart." I hugged Ella tightly. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Bye, Dad. I can't wait for you to see me in my dress." A bright grin crossed her face.

"I know you're going to look absolutely beautiful in it." I kissed her forehead.

"Are you going to be okay here with Nicholas?" Sofia asked me.

"Babe, I am more than capable of caring for our son. Besides, Grayson and Gabriel are staying here tonight." I gripped her hips and kissed her lips. "I love you, and I'll miss you like crazy."

"I love you too, Nathan."

"Mom, come on!" Ella said. "I'm excited to stay at the hotel."

"I'll see you tomorrow in the gardens." The corners of my mouth curved upward as I leaned in and kissed her one last time before she became my wife.

The sliding door opened, and Grayson walked in.

"Hey, cousin," he said as he walked over to the refrigerator and grabbed a beer.

"Hey. How did the meeting go with George Sutherland?" I asked as I set Nicholas in his high chair.

"It went great. He told me to come and see him when we move here, and he'll have a position for me."

"Excellent. Did Sam or Stefan say how long until the houses are done?"

“At least a couple of months if everything goes smoothly.”

“Don’t forget, you and Gabriel can stay with anyone of us until they’re ready. You’re more than welcome.”

“Thanks, Nathan. We appreciate it.”

“Speaking of Gabriel, where is he?” I asked.

“He’s over at Christian’s house talking about hearts.” He smirked.

“Ah, Ella would be very jealous that she’s not in on that conversation.” I sat in front of Nicholas and began feeding him.

As Grayson and I talked, his phone kept dinging with text messages.

“Aren’t you going to respond to any of those?” A smirk crossed my lips.

“No. She’s annoying.”

“She?” I smiled. “Who is she?”

“Her name is Darcy, and we went out a few times.”

“Is she hot?” I asked.

“She’s pretty, but it’s just meaningless sex.”

“Judging by the number of text messages she’s sent in the last ten minutes, I think she thinks it’s not meaningless.”

“I’ve already told her that I’m too busy and not looking to get into anything. She can’t seem to grasp that.”

“Been there, done that. You’ll have to block her number, or it’ll only get worse.”

“I know.” He sighed. “Blocking her ass right now.”

I chuckled. “One day, cousin. One day.”

CHAPTER 33



Sofia

“Have you seen my bracelet?” I asked the girls as I looked around the suite.

“No. Are you sure you packed it?” Georgia asked.

“Yes. I took the box from my suitcase last night and put it on the dresser. I swear I did. Ella, have you seen it?”

“No. Sorry, Mom.”

“Stop panicking,” Georgia said. “We’ll find it.”

There was a knock on the door, so Charleigh went and answered it.

“Sofia, someone is here to see you.”

I walked out into the living area and saw a man dressed in a black suit.

“Miss Finnegan, this is for you.” He handed me a long blue velvet box with a small card attached to it.

“Thank you.”

I removed the card from the envelope and read it.

A gift for my future wife.

I am so in love with you, and you deserve only the best.

I can't wait to marry you.

Love forever,

Nathan

I opened the box to find a stunning white gold Versailles diamond tennis bracelet.

“Oh, my gosh.” Tears filled my eyes.

“Do you love it, Mom?” Ella asked.

“Yes. I love it so much.” I removed the bracelet, and Georgia placed it on my wrist.

“Sorry, Sof.” Jenni smiled as she stood across the room, holding up the box with my other bracelet in it. “I had to swipe it so you wouldn’t put it on.”

Picking up my phone, I sent Nathan a text message.

“Thank you for the bracelet. It’s perfect. I love you so much.”

“You’re welcome, sweetheart. I can’t wait to marry you. I’ll see you soon. I love you.”

“Did you all know about this?” I asked the girls.

“Of course, we knew.” Charlotte smiled.

There was another knock at the door, and when Grace answered it, my mother walked in with Nicholas.

“Oh, boy.” She fanned her eyes when she saw me. “You look so beautiful, darling.”

“Thanks, Mom.” I took Nicholas from her and hugged him tight. “I’ve missed you, my sweet boy.”



*N*athan

I stood at the altar with my hands folded as my brothers and cousins stood beside me. I looked around the gardens where many Kind weddings had taken place, and it was just as beautiful each time. When I attended the weddings of my Uncle Henry and my cousins, I never thought in a million years I’d be the one standing up here waiting for my bride to walk down the aisle. I had the same thoughts that

Grayson and Gabriel were feeling now. But I knew deep down and that in time, they'd be standing up here waiting for the love of their lives, whether they believed it or not.

“You nervous?” Conner placed his hand on my back.

“Not at all.” I smirked.

“Liar.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

The minister walked over, shook my hand, and took his place, which meant it was time for the ceremony to start. I inhaled a deep breath as the music began to play, and the girls began walking down one by one, looking as stunning as ever. A tear sprung to my eye when I saw my beautiful daughter walking down with a smile on her face. She walked up to me, and I knelt down as she kissed my cheek.

“You got this. I love you, Dad.”

“I love you too, sweetheart.”

Emilia took her place at the piano, and Georgia lifted her violin from the case. They began beautifully playing the wedding march as my bride slowly walked down the aisle. Bringing my thumb up to my eye, I wiped the tears that wanted to fall.

“Who gives this woman's hand in marriage?” the minister asked.

“I do,” Rose spoke as she placed Sofia's hand in mine.

“Hi.” I smiled.

“Hi.” The corners of Sofia's mouth curved upward.

The ceremony lasted approximately twenty minutes, and after we said our vows and exchanged rings, the minister pronounced us husband and wife.

“The wait is over, Nathan. You may kiss your bride.” The minister smiled.

Wrapping my arms around her, she brought her hands up to my face, and we shared our first kiss as a married couple. Everyone clapped, shouted, and whistled as our lips stayed locked.

“We did it!” I grinned as I grabbed Sofia’s hand and held it up with mine.

“We sure did.” She laughed.

After taking numerous wedding photos, I took Sofia’s hand and led her to a private spot.

“You have made me the happiest man in the world.” I smiled as I softly stroked her cheek. “You are the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen, and I’m so proud to call you my wife.”

“Every day spent with you is the happiest day of my life.” She smiled. “I love you so much, my incredibly sexy husband.” Her lips brushed against mine.

“Okay, you two,” Jackson said as he walked over. “You have the rest of your lives to gush over each other. But right now, your guests are waiting to celebrate you.”

I chuckled. “We’re coming. Let’s go show them how we party.” I winked at her.

“Let’s do it.” She grinned.

We spent the evening talking to our guests, eating incredible food, and drinking fine alcohol. While Sofia was off talking with her friends, I stood with my brothers and cousins, except Simon.

“One more to go.” Conner grinned as he patted Christian’s back. “You nervous?”

“A little.”

“Don’t be,” I said. “Charleigh loves you, and she’ll say yes.”

“What are you, douchebags, talking about over here?” Simon walked over, holding Nora.

“I was asking Christian if he’s nervous,” Conner spoke.

“Nah. He’s got this. He’s one of us, and we Kinds don’t get nervous. Isn’t that right, Nora?”

“Yeah.” She nodded.

“See, even our sister knows better.”

Sofia walked over and wrapped her arm around my waist. “It’s time to cut the cake.”

“YES!” Conner shouted. “It’s about time. Let’s go.” He grinned.

After we cut the cake, the DJ announced it was time for the bridal dance. Sofia and I made our way to the dancefloor and shared our first dance as husband and wife to the song Amazed by Lonestar. The smiles never left our faces as we stared into each other’s eyes.

“I love you, Mrs. Kind.”

“I love you, Dr. Kind. Can you believe we pulled this off in two months?”

“Yes, I can. You’re an extraordinary woman who does extraordinary things.” I winked.

After the song ended, another played for my daughter and me. Picking her up, I swayed back and forth as her cast rested on my shoulder.

“One day, we’ll be doing this at my wedding.” She smiled.

“I’m the only man you need in your life, sweetheart.”

“You sound like Stefan, Dad.” She giggled. “But you don’t have to worry. I won’t settle for just anyone. I’ll make sure he’s just like you, and you’ll love him as much as I do.”

I held her against me as I kissed the side of her head, and tears filled my eyes. I had no idea what I’d done in my life to deserve the two most special girls in the world. Sofia walked over with our son, and the four of us danced together as a family until the end of the song.

“It’s time.” Sofia smiled as we walked off the dance floor.

CHAPTER 34



Sofia

“You know what to do.” I winked at Ella.

“On it.” She grinned.

“Aunt Charleigh, come on.” She grabbed her hand.

“Where are we going?” Charleigh asked.

“To the dancefloor.”

“There’s no music, Ella.”

“There will be.” She smiled. “Come on.”

Christian grabbed his guitar and went up to the stage.

“Charleigh, this song is for you.” The corners of his mouth curved upward as he strummed the chords and sang, *Marry You* by Bruno Mars.

We all gathered around in a circle on the dancefloor while Christian played and sang his heart out to her. Charleigh stood there staring at him with her hand covering her mouth in disbelief. He set his guitar down and spoke into the microphone when he finished the song.

“Charleigh, I was blown away when I opened my eyes and saw you for the first time sitting on the edge of the coffee table. My first thought was who is this gorgeous woman pelting me in the face with popcorn.”

We all laughed.

“From that moment on, I have never taken my eyes off you. You are a beautiful woman with a beautiful heart and soul, and I love you more than life. I never believed in fate until I met you. The universe threw us together at a time when life didn’t make sense to me anymore. Charleigh, you are my world, and I could never love anyone the way I love you. I want us to make beautiful memories for eternity. Will you marry me, baby?”

“Yes!” Charleigh screamed. “Yes, I will marry you, Christian!”

He jumped off the stage, pulled her ring from his pocket, and slipped it on her finger. Everyone shouted and whistled as we congratulated the newly engaged couple with hugs and kisses.

“Did you all know about this?” Charleigh asked all of us.

“Fuck yeah, we knew.” Simon hugged her.

“I’m so happy for them.” My mother walked over and hooked her arm around me.

“Me too, Mom. By the way, how’s Professor Mark?” I smirked.

“He’s fine. He’s taking me out tomorrow on his boat.”

“He has a boat?” My brow arched.

“Yes.” She smiled.

“When Nathan and I return from our honeymoon, the four of us will go to dinner.”

“I’d love that. You’ll like him, Sofia. I know you will.”

“I think I will too, Mom.”



*N*athan

The hardest part about leaving our wedding was saying goodbye to our children. Sofia and I decided to spend

our wedding night on the plane to Paris to get a head start on our honeymoon.

“You be a good girl for Uncle Conner and Aunt Charlotte.” I hugged Ella tightly.

“You know I will be. Uncle Conner set up an office for me next to Uncle Jackson’s for the days I have my online classes.”

“He did?”

“Yeah. I’m so excited.” She grinned.

“Doesn’t sound like you’re going to miss me very much.” My brows furrowed.

“I’ll miss you and Mom a lot. Just do me a favor, and don’t worry about Nicholas and me. We’re in great hands. The villagers will watch over us.”

I chuckled as I pulled her into me for one last hug. “I love you, baby girl.”

“I love you too, Dad.”

While Sofia was saying goodbye to Ella, I took my son and hugged him tight.

“I’m going to miss you, my son. Be a good boy and try not to give the villagers a hard time.” I kissed him. “I love you so much.”

“Hand over your kid and get the hell out of here,” Conner said.

“Don’t worry, bro. Your children are safe with us.” Jackson hugged me.

“Bye, bro. Have a great honeymoon.” Christian hugged me. “We’ll see you when you get back. Make sure to send lots of pics and videos.”

“We will.” I patted his back.

Sofia and I climbed into the limo that was waiting for us outside the hotel. After settling in, I took hold of her hand and brought it up to my lips.

“Are you ready, Mrs. Kind?”

“So ready, Dr. Kind.” She leaned over and brushed her lips against mine.



We spent the next ten days soaking up the sights and having more sex than I’d ever thought possible. Even being on birth control, it wouldn’t surprise me if I got Sofia pregnant. Neither of us wanted another child right now, but if it happened, all would be good. We Facetimed the kids and the rest of the family quite often, but we had to be careful of the time difference. As much fun as we had on our honeymoon, we were happy to go home to our family. We missed Thanksgiving, but Sebastian told us not to worry and that he’d host it at the restaurant for us when we returned.

“Bonjour!” Sofia smiled as we walked through the sliding door at Conner’s house.

“Mom! Dad!” Ella ran to us.

“Hey, you.” I picked her up and hugged her tight. “I missed you so much.”

“I missed you too. Did you bring me back presents?” She grinned.

“Of course, we did. We’ll give them to you when we get home.”

Conner brought Nicholas to us and handed him over to Sofia.

“Welcome home, bro.” He hugged me. “We all missed your dumbass around here.”

“I missed you too.” I chuckled. “Thank you for taking care of the kids.”

“You’re welcome. They were great. We had a lot of fun. Didn’t we, Ella?”

“Yeah, we did. Did you see our TikTok videos?” Ella asked.

“We saw them.” I smirked. “You’re putting my son in your videos now?” My brow arched at my brother.

“What kind of uncle would I be if I left him out?” He grinned.



One Week Later

“Did you set a wedding date yet?” I asked Christian as we gathered around the fire pit.

“Not yet. We’ll let you know when we do.” He flung his bottle cap at me.

I stared at Ella and Lily, who were teaching Nora, Lorelei, and Lena how to build sandcastles.

“How long do you guys have Nora for?” I asked.

“She’s staying the week while Celeste and Howie are in Colorado skiing,” Sebastian said. “She’s such a good kid.”

“She’s got our blood running through her veins. Of course, she’s good,” Simon said.

“We weren’t always good, bro.” Sam chuckled.

“We lashed out because of our parents. Celeste is a good woman, and Dad isn’t around. Our sister isn’t tainted.”

“I heard that, Simon!” Aunt Barb walked over to us.

“Boundaries, Mom. We talked about this.”

“Shush up, darling. Stefan, the toilet in the bathroom upstairs is leaking. Can you come over tomorrow morning and fix it?”

“Yeah, Mom. I’ll be there.”

“Thank you.” She pressed her lips against the top of his head.

“You look very nice, Aunt Barb. Are you going out?”

“Thank you, Nathan. Yes, I am going out.” She smiled.

“With whom?” Simon narrowed his eye.

“That is none of your business. I’ll see you tomorrow, Stefan. Good night boys.”

“You could have just sent Stefan a text message!” Simon shouted as she walked away.

“And miss the opportunity to irritate you? Never.” She turned her head and smiled.

We all laughed.

“Shut up, douchebags,” Simon said as he pulled his phone from his pocket. “Hey, Roy. I need you to put a tail on my mother. I want to know where she’s going and who she’s with. Thanks, buddy.”

“Really, bro?” Sam asked. “It seems like you’re the one with no boundaries. Maybe she’s going out with Rose tonight.”

“Nah,” I said. “Rose and Mark are going to see some play tonight.”

“She probably has a date,” Conner said.

“We’ll find out, won’t we?” Simon smirked.

CHAPTER 35



ONE WEEK LATER

Christian

“And that should do it. Let’s close him up,” I said.

“Excellent work, Dr. Kind.”

“Thank you, Dr. Lovett. Great work today, team. If you’ll excuse me, I have a dinner date with my beautiful fiancée.” I smiled.

I removed my gown, gloves, surgical cap, and mask as I headed out of the O.R. When I stepped out the door, I saw Charleigh at the nurse’s station talking to a few nurses.

“Hey, beautiful.” I hooked my arm around her.

“Hey, handsome. Are you hungry?”

“Starving. Let’s go have some of that delicious cafeteria food.”

“We aren’t eating in the cafeteria tonight. We’re eating in your office. I called Sebastian, and he just happened to be working at Emilia’s tonight, so he sent over some delicious food for us.”

“Have I told you how much I love you?” I grinned.

“All the time. But never stop telling me.”

“You never have to worry about that, babe.” My grip tightened around her.

When we entered my office, I looked over at the round table by the window and smiled when I saw it was set with

plates, silverware, and napkins.”

“Did you do all of this?” I asked Charleigh.

“I did. Clarissa caught me sneaking out of the cafeteria with her plates and silverware. She wasn’t happy, but I promised to return them the second we’re done eating.”

“You are my superstar.” I winked at her.

“Did you know Jackson is here?” she asked.

“He is?”

“Yeah. He got called in for an emergency craniotomy.”

“Maybe I’ll go and see how his surgery is going after we eat.”

“Oh, and Georgia is here too. One of her patients is in labor.”

“She’s been here almost every night this week,” I spoke.

“I know. It’s like one big baby boom.” A bright smile crossed her lips.

My pager went off.

“Shit. I have to go, babe. 911 in the ER.” I stood up and kissed her. “Thanks for dinner. I love you.” I ran out of my office and down to the ER.

“What’s going on?” I ran into trauma room four and looked at the man lying on the table. “Jesus Christ. I know him.”

“Car vs. semi on the expressway. He has broken ribs, a broken pelvis, internal bleeding, and a collapsed lung. His blood pressure is rapidly dropping, Dr. Kind.”

“Where’s trauma?” I yelled.

“He’s in with the girlfriend.”

“I need the ultrasound machine now!” I yelled. “God damn it. He’s got an aortic rupture. We have to get him up to the O.R. stat!”

“We’re losing him,” one of the residents shouted.

Suddenly, the beeps of a flatline infiltrated the room. I tried to bring him back, but his internal injuries were too extensive. I looked at the clock on the wall.

“Time of death, eighteen fifty-two.”

I ran out of the room and into trauma room six, where Dr. Bennati, the trauma surgeon on call, called Celeste’s time of death. I walked out to the hallway and slid down the wall until I hit the ground. With a slight turn of my head, I saw Jackson running toward me.

“Christian.”

“She’s gone,” I said with tears in my eyes as I looked up at him.

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