



BESTIE'S BILLIONAIRE

Bad's Secret

QUADRUPLETS

ELSA DUKE

*Bestie's Billionaire Dad's
Secret Quadruplets*

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CHAPTER 1

Queeneth

The last time I saw my children's father, he kissed me and swore he wouldn't lose touch.

Or correction: the last time I saw him, he was on my TV screen, winning an award at the VMAs.

But the last time we kissed... that was five years ago.

I was hoping to trap a billionaire at my best friend's wedding. I just never thought the man I'd snare would be my arrogant, domineering *irresistible* ex-lover and ex-boss.

Lord McCarthy looks positively sinful today. The suit he wore for Lady's wedding is fitted, with clean, sharp lines, his massive shoulders pressing against the supple fabric. Despite the years, he looks even better than he did last time.

That *sucks*.

I wasn't wishing him ill will, not necessarily. But balding? I was wishing him a bald head. And maybe enough wrinkles that people would think he was sixty-five, not forty-five that he is.

"Queeneth," he gestures to the front door of his mansion. It has been years since I've been here. It looks the same.

I hesitate over the threshold. When he invited me to his house— "Just down the road, you remember?"—I jumped at the chance. My best friend, Lady's wedding was beautiful, but it was *not* the place to lose it for Lord. Who, I now know, is her fucking *dad!*

Talk about the plot twist of the year.

I'm going to have a headache by the end of this conversation.

Now that I'm here, the chance to yell at Lord seems less and less like a good idea. Not only because yelling at him might give away more than I want to—namely, our four beautiful children that I never told him about.

It's also a bad idea because the look he's giving me is one that I know well. That my *body* knows well.

I absolutely cannot fall into bed with him. Not again.

His eyes are bright, that jade green that sparkles in the sunlight and contrasts so lovely against his dark lashes. His lips curl into not quite a smile—that would be too forward—but a soft smirk that says he can tell how affected I am by him.

Well, joke on him. Affected or not, I'm not going to drop my panties for him. Not this time. Not when I still have stretch marks to prove what good that gets me.

Okay, I think regretfully as I walk into the mansion, my kids are good things. Worth a million stretch marks.

The door is still open. Inviting. Lord waits casually, his posture relaxed. He isn't nervous, I'll say no, that I'll turn around. He's confident—cocky, even—that I'll go exactly where he wants me to.

I hate that he's right.

Passing through the door frame feels like stepping back in time. The foyer opens into the living room, as grand as it is bright. Despite knowing that Lord hasn't been living here recently, thanks to some gossip at the wedding, it looks pristine. The piano in the corner gleams, like it had been cleaned for use only recently.

Even though it's been a long time, I know my way around. I walk through the sitting room to the sunken living room. It's technically cozier in here, with fewer windows and more places to sit, but it's still just as unlived in as it felt when I was here last.

I feel so old here now. I miss my kids and I miss being younger.

God, was it really only five years ago? I feel like a completely different person. The girl I was at twenty-one was so carefree, so unbothered by anything and everything. I met Lord in January of that year, two days after celebrating my birthday. I got pregnant and gave birth to my precious quadruplet the same year.

I had been the worst kind of groupie, totally and overwhelmingly engulfed in the charmed dream of having the affections of an older more powerful man. I had let myself lose and I had done so without thinking.

Now, I've got my kids to think about.

Thinking about them now, and seeing how little has changed in Lord's house, let alone himself, settles my resolve. I won't let him come back to my life.

"I want you back in my life," Lord says.

Well, shit. Did he really just say that to me? Or was that the desperate inner me looking for a way out of the funk that was my life?

I cross my arms and turn to him. He's grinning. I scowl. I should probably take his words with a grain of salt.

"C'mon, Lord, what do you actually want?"

He walks towards me, his expression devious. "Aren't you happy to see me, Queeneth?"

"No," I answer immediately. My body says otherwise, but what he didn't know couldn't hurt.

Lord stops in front of me, and I realize I've backed up so that I'm against the wall. He runs his fingers down the side of my arm.

"I don't believe you," he murmurs.

Maybe I don't quite hide my body's reactions to him as well as I'd thought.

My pulse races. I hate how affected I am by him. I can't stop picturing our last night together—the night that most likely resulted in the quadruplets. He had been wilder than usual, more desperate. He hadn't let me get too tired, always bringing me over the brink again and again when I felt like I couldn't take any more. Lord had sparked something in me, ignited something. I hadn't forgotten, but, Jesus, I might have forgotten how *hot* that something was.

He leans in, one hand on the wall as he hovers over me, and I feel that heat now.

His eyes drag over my face, lingering on my lips so long that his gaze feels like a physical touch.

I am not confident I'm barely managing to breathe.

"You look even better than I remember," Lord compliments.

"You look worse," I snap. It comes out a bit breathy, though, and he just smiles, so I don't think it had the heat I was aiming for.

"Queeneth—" Lord leans in, and I jolt back so hard that my head hits the wall.

I yelp. He startles, eyes widening, and I take the opportunity to dart underneath his arm and put significant distance between us. I don't stop until there's a whole couch between us.

He raises one of his eyebrows at me. "Really?" he asks dryly.

I cross my arms again. His eyes fall to my breasts, which I realize belatedly I'm pushing out with this pose. I groan and drop my arms to my side.

"What am I doing here, Lord?" I sighed, knowing that I was the one who followed him, but he hadn't really given me much of a choice.

There was no way I would ruin Lady's special day by bringing my drama into the mix, coming here to avoid a scene was the best option.

Or was it?

For the first time since we saw each other at the wedding, Lord seems to falter. He runs a hand through his hair, tugging it. The movement ruffles his wavy brown hair and I imagine it is me running my fingers through those soft, thick stands. His expression pinches in a new way.

I know that I should leave. I should run out right now. But...

I don't know. I didn't think I missed him. I didn't think I would ever feel anything but anger for him again. But he seems... earnest in a way I haven't seen him before. Different.

Just as soon as I've seen it, it's gone. His mask of indifference is back, and he looks just as carefree as the first time I'd seen him on that day, five years ago.

He sits on one of the plush couches, leaning forward with his arms on his knees. He gestures for me to join him.

I sit on the opposite couch, pulling a pillow in my lap. It helps ground me.

"So, you and Lady..." he says, and my eyebrows shoot up. "How did you guys meet?"

"Seriously, Lord?" I'm not even mad—I'm too baffled. "Are you really asking me about that?"

It's the last thing I expect him to talk about, and frankly, I felt a little disappointed.

He shrugs. "I mean, if you only are hanging around her to get to me—"

"Oh, fuck off," I cut him off. I stand up, throwing the pillow to the side, it bounces off the couch and falls to the floor, but I ignore it.

"What?" He leans back, hands out like he's talking me down. The movement is so arrogant, that I want to take him down his high horse so badly.

"You seriously think I became friends with Lady because of *you*?" I let out a sharp laugh. "My best friend is your

daughter, who you left God only knows how long ago? And our friendship has nothing to do with you.”

Hurt flashes across his face, and I can’t feel guilty. All I can think about is Lady, my friend, who was abandoned by this man—and my anger for my kids, who won’t ever know him, either.

He went around thinking the world revolved around him, and really, I don’t blame him. It was the celebrity status; it had them thinking that everyone around them had an ulterior motive, and that was to exploit them.

It was a warped way to view the world, but it was the world they had created by their talent, money, and fame.

“I was just asking—”

“Well, you asked, I answered.” I snap. “Now, I’m leaving.” I stormed out of the living room.

Lord calls after me, but my anger and my high heels are loud enough to drown him out.

What was I even *thinking* about coming here? I thought I could get some closure. But all I had gotten was more questions, a large serving of guilt, and the stark realization that the attraction between us was nowhere near dead. And time and distance had done nothing to dull it.

“You don’t know what happened with me and *my* kid,” Lord says, voice booming.

I spin around, glaring. “Oh yeah? So, you didn’t just leave her and her mother? You actually did remember her birthday and file for joint custody and all of the things Lady says you never did?”

Lord’s face hardens. “I—I don’t expect you to understand. But I’m trying to be better this time around.”

My stomach falls to my shoes. This time... but he can’t know...

“I’m going to be a good father this time around.” He says it earnestly, almost to himself.

If he knows about our quadruplets, why didn't he say something? Is that why he wanted me to come here? When did he find out? I haven't told anyone, not even Lady, about my babies. How could he—

“Nina deserves the best.”

Wait. “Nina?”

Lord smiles at me. It's so genuine, that my breath catches in my throat. “Nina. My daughter.” I think I might be sick. The little girl at the wedding reception... So, she is really his daughter. Lord continues, clearly unaware of my spinning head. “She just turned five years last month.”

Five years...

Just like Luke, Jacob, Nolan, and Olivia. Just like my babies.

They are just one month older than Nina.

So that meant...

“You were with me five years ago,” I say.

Guilt flashes on Lord's face. Just a moment of it, but more than enough to tell me what happened.

“I was,” he says firmly.

That's it. No explanations, no telling me it was just a fling, or something to dull the sharp ache in my chest that I had been feeling so much for this man, while I had been nothing but a groupie to him.

“Well,” I gather myself up, trying to reign in the bitterness and shame clogging me down. “Best of luck with that.”

This time, I don't let him slow me down, even as he calls for me to *wait* and *stop* and *Jesus, don't you ever listen?*

This is such a mess. I can't believe I left Lady's wedding reception for this. I'm going straight back, and I'm going to have a drink and a dance and then I'm going to go home and call my babies. And then I'm going to forget this encounter ever happened, and who Lord McCarthy is.

“Have a good life, Lord,” I say over my shoulder as I yank the front door’s handle as hard as I can.

Except... nothing happens.

I yank again. Then, with two hands, I pull with all my might. I even try pushing.

“What the hell is wrong with this fucking door?” I snap.

Lord comes over and tries it himself. And then, with a careless smile and a shrug, he says, “I guess we’re locked in.” the panic in his voice earlier was gone and in its place was the knowing, cocky smirk that I thought I detested, but was able to turn my brain into mush.

Oh, hell no.

CHAPTER 2

Lord

When I saw Queeneth Roberts at my daughter's wedding, she was dressed in the most beautiful dress that hugged her perfectly curvy body. Her huge round hazel eyes were dazzling, as always. Such that you could not help but stare into them when she looked at you.

Even from the distance, I'd recognized her instantly.

It would be impossible not to, given I still spent an abominable amount of time thinking about those nights with her.

Nights that we had both never wanted to end. She had been all too eager to try anything, too eager to please me, and for a man in his early forties, it could be one of the best feelings in the world being with a woman like that.

But she had been too young, and I'd just come out of a relationship with Amelia. I had always planned to come back for her, but then Amelia had told me about Nina, and it felt like the wrong time to start anything new.

I had consoled myself with the fact that she was still young and would go on to meet someone else but now, seeing her after all these years, the thought of her with other men had me seeing red.

Somehow, I had found a way to convince her to come back to the house with me, back at the wedding, and she had been all too willing, to my surprise. Even more surprising was her level of antagonism towards me.

I had been hopeful that we would pick up from where we left off, but she had put up a wall so high, that I don't know if there would be any hope of knocking down the wall.

As I watch the surprise on her face transform into horror, I would find it comical, if it was not so insulting that the thought of being trapped in this house with me, had her horrified. I didn't *mean* to have Queeneth trapped in my mansion. But I'm not exactly upset about it.

It was the offending door's fault really, and not mine, and my handyman Eric was meant to have fixed this before the wedding.

"I need to get the fuck out of here, Lord. Or I swear to God I will scream the entire building down." She threatens, her eyes widening even more and her chest heaving lightly in her anger.

"You can definitely try, but we won't be leaving until Eric, my handyman, comes to let us out."

She folds her hands under her chest, the movement drags my attention to her breasts, which were significantly bigger than the last time I'd seen them. I stare at them without shame for longer than could be considered appropriate before I let my gaze back to her face.

She raises one eyebrow at me and then stares at my hand, I look down and realize she wants me to call the handyman right now in front of her.

Letting out a dry chuckle, I turn around and start to call Eric.

He answers almost instantly, "Hello?"

"Eric, where the fuck are you, I'm locked in at the house, and guess my reaction when I find out that you haven't fixed the door like you said you would, three days ago."

I am not exactly mad about this turn of events, but I am angry at my handyman for neglecting his duties. He goes into long strings of apologies and excuses about his sick mother and how he was out of town and would not return until tomorrow.

“Get back here as soon as you can.” I ordered, before hanging up on him while he was still apologizing and making promises about how it would never happen again.

I take one long breath before spinning back to face her, she was still waiting patiently.

“So, the bad news is we can’t leave until tomorrow. Eric’s the only one I entrusted the care of this house in, I am very specific about the people I give access to my security. As you already know, I don’t live here. I came because of my daughter’s wedding.”

Her face looks like I’d just told her the house was on fire and we were locked in.

I wait for a reaction, but none was forthcoming, so I take one step towards her, but her reaction to that is instant, she stretches one palm out, wordlessly telling me not to come closer.

I stop in my tracks.

“This cannot be happening.” She mutters to herself, shaking her head in disbelief as she walks past me, further into the house. She makes straight for the kitchen, and I follow from a short distance and then watching her from the doorway while she grabs a glass from the shelf like she had done it a hundred times in the past, and fetches a glass of tap water, downing the entire cup’s content, in one long swoop.

She sets the cup down with a light thud and turns back to me,

“So how about Nina? You left her at the wedding reception yard, remember? You can’t possibly leave your daughter with a stranger.” She tells me in a gotcha voice,

“Belle’s not a stranger. And I already took care of that. I asked Belle if she was busy then she said she was free for the next 8 days since the boy she nannies went on a vacation with his parents, and I asked her to take care of Nina for a special price then she agreed.

I did that because I knew we will need time to catch up even if this door had not trapped us in here.”

She stares at me for the longest time like she did not believe a word I was saying. And I wouldn't blame her. And then she sighs heavily and takes one long look around the room like she is remembering something.

And then as if shaking off them memories, she shakes her head and turns back to me.

My plans to hire Belle had not been done in the hopes of trapping her here with me. I had simply wanted longer than a few minutes with her. I figured we would need the time to catch up, and I did not just mean swapping past stories.

But that was before I figured out, she was mad at me. Something that still baffled me. I had not exactly ghosted her because we had not exactly been dating at that time.

We had never really defined what our relationship had been. We had simply been too busy fucking to talk about a lot of things.

“You can stay in your old room for the night, and until Eric returns. There are clothes in the closet if you need them.” I tell her after another long silence, but she does not acknowledge my words, she still looked deep in thought.

“You mean the room that I now know belongs to Lady? I can't believe my best friend of two years was your estranged daughter you talked about when we first met. I had no idea you were her father even if her last name was McCarthy.”

“I had no idea either Queeneth. I really don't get why you're so upset at me. I already apologized for not keeping in touch.”

She let out a dry chuckle and folded a few fingers to her temple shaking her head like she could not believe me.

“Really?” she says dryly, and I hear a hint of bitterness and regret in her voice, it tells me this is far deeper than I thought.

Had she loved me?

I had no way of knowing that, had my leaving her caused some major heartbreak that had taken months to recover from?

I had no way of knowing any of the answers to those. Queeneth was my assistant before we had become lovers after days of sexual tension between us.

She had been a lot mature at her age. At just twenty-one she had been one of the best PA's I'd ever had. With a stellar record and ingenious work ethic, none of my subsequent assistants had come close. And that made me to feel that it was a good idea when I decided to come to my hometown Prescott Arizona here without my personal assistant from New York where I live. For an auditioning programme I organized and named Prescott's next Lord of Rock, to help the youth that are interested to be like me. So, when I had left after a month of us being together, I had thought she would bounce back with no problems, it didn't seem like it now.

“You never to reach out after you left, Lord.

I tried to call you, tried to reach out for the longest time, but every time, I was blocked, and you never replied to anyone of my messages. Not one!”

Her voice breaks on the last word and she stops herself from going any further, I try to take one step towards her, and again she was not having it.

“Don't come closer, Lord!” She shrieks but I ignore her shaky voice and close the distance between us, my eyes never leaving hers until I was standing only a few feet away.

“I should have tried to reach out, but I swear I never got any of those messages. My security team demanded I changed my number for security reasons after I left.”

She scoffs at that, “of course, blame it all on your security again.”

“I'm serious Queeneth, I never got them.” I step even closer one of my fingers going to her chin to lift them so that her gaze would meet mine.

Our gazes hold for the longest time, my eyes sweeping her irresistible face, wishing I had the right to cup her face and kiss her like I'd been wanting to all day. Her eyes darts from my left to the right and she licks her bottom lip. Her eyes are

glassy from tears, I knew she would never allow herself shed and it feels like an ache in my chest, seeing how she was hurting from a past that I had caused.

Despite the fact we were bickering, I could still feel the unyielding cackling of energy between us, the desire to kiss her and never stop until we were both immovable, an entanglement of sweaty limbs and sated bodies.

The image alone is enough to give me a semi, and I say a silent prayer of control.

“I don’t know if I believe you, Lord.” She says blinking as her gaze darts to the floor and my fingers drop from her jaw.

I am not surprised she finds it hard to trust me, but it hurts all the same. I take one step back, wanting to lighten the moment, and move away towards the shelf where I kept the booze.

“I know I can’t say anything that will make you believe me. So, I’m going to let my actions do the talking then.” I tell her as I take the drink out, a single malt whiskey and pour us both a drink.

When I turn back to her, I saw a sign of her checking me out. She might hate me, but that was not preventing our body’s reaction to each other. Feeling confident in this, I walk back to her, and I raise one glass to her in question and she nods her head, still staring suspiciously at me. I give her the drink and we both down it in one long go.

Her brows bunched up as she swallows down the harsh liquid while I can’t stop staring at her, the drink makes her cheeks slightly pink, and she licks off the liquid from her lips.

I am fully hard by now, unable to think of anything else but kissing her.

When she takes her glass from her mouth, her gaze darts back to mine, there was no denying the need and desire I see in them, because they mirrored my own need for her.

So, I place my wine glass on the counter and slowly walk towards her to do the same with her glass too. I expect her to stop me, but she doesn’t.

Still doesn't, when I step even closer into her personal space and I lift her chin up with a finger, I expect her to stop me even then, but she licks her bottom lip again, and I take that as a clear invite and lean down to press my lips against hers in a soft kiss that rocks my world in those first seconds.

She takes in a sharp breath, that comes out as a tiny moan and I sneak my tongue into her mouth, tasting the whiskey on them, and the strawberry cake from the wedding.

She was sweet and ripe, and my hands cupped her face to kiss her even harder. She makes the softest noise that was both a moan and a whimper and I want to rip her dress right in that minute and then make her make that noise again.

It was my kryptonite, no doubt.

Her hands cover mine against her cheeks and I feel her standing on her tiptoes to get closer, one of my hands slides from her face to cup her ass and pull her even closer to me, and it seems to wake her up from her daze because she instantly stiffens.

The second I feel her insistent palm on my chest, I step away and she does the same staring at me with an aghast expression on her face, and then before I can say anything else, she takes to her heels, walking as fast as she could get out of the kitchen.

CHAPTER 3

Queeneth

I make my way to the front door, even though I know it is locked, and give it another go. It remains stiff and unyielding.

Just like his cock when I had been pressed against it less than a minute ago.

Fuck!

Thinking about his cock was not helping. This isn't good, I need to get out of here. I hurry towards the back, and I try the back door, but it's also locked, and I also know it doesn't go all the way around the house. I'm freaking out. I can't be locked in a house with the father of my adorable babies, even if he has no idea.

What did that say about me if I easily gave in to him after everything? I should hate him; I should not be feeling this desperate need for him. But I helplessly do, and the only way I could stop it was to get as far away from him as I possibly could.

The sound of his footsteps echoing behind me, makes my already racing heart to pound.

This was ridiculous, and at the same time, it was not really. I was afraid to face Lord McCarthy because my body obviously could not control the effect he had on me, the effect, he'd always had.

I saw him pacing around the small hallway between the kitchen the dining hall. He had a cautious look on his face, like he was not sure whether to approach me or not.

Clearly, he wanted to. I could tell, but I can see he was also fighting his urges to give me the space I was asking for. But was not sure, I needed it.

“What do you want, Lord?” the words come out more as an accusation than a question, but he answers all the same.

“The same thing you clearly want, although, I don’t understand why you’re denying what we both clearly want.”

“You’re delusional. And I’m not denying anything.” I lie through my teeth. Neither of us believes the lie, but he does not call me out on my bullshit. Instead, he starts towards me, slowly and with purpose, and my body sings, it aches for him to come and put out the fire he had started in the kitchen.

“I know you want this as much as I’m not ashamed to say I want it too. For every second, I’ve imagined getting you out of that dress.

I want to see that beautiful body again. Needing to feel the way your body always welcomed me, no matter how many times I fucked you.”

Hearing him say the words felt like he was already slowly undressing me, with his words.

I clench my thighs together to ease the nagging pressure between my legs. My panties already felt drenched with my body’s need for him and when he was finally standing only a hair’s breadth away, I was more than ready.

Lord grabs me by the hips, and I gasp. The heat of his palms against me is enough to have my head swim. I know I should push him away—I should, I really, really should—but I can’t. I lift my hands, and my head chants *push, push, push*, but instead, my fingers curl into the buttery soft coat of his tux, and I *pull*.

He lifts me up and pushes me back on the door, but we don’t kiss. Simply stare at each other, as if to heighten the tension roiling through our bodies. He carries me back to the kitchen setting me down on the wide, marble kitchen island. My dress hikes up, pooling right at the top of my upper thighs,

and he slides between my legs easily, like he's made to be there.

He *is* made to be there. Made for me.

God, I want him.

One of his hands remains on my waist. The other gently cups my face, and I lean into it.

"Queeneth," he murmurs. His thumb strokes across my bottom lip.

"Lord," I say. My voice comes out soft and whiny. I'd be embarrassed, but his eyes flash, and then he leans in to kiss me.

Right when I'm about to just give into this, he stops. His nose brushes against mine and frustration and need coils tightly within me.

My eyelashes flutter, and I can feel them against his face. He's so close, my lips tingle, but somehow aren't touching his. But I feel his breath on my face, hot and heavy,

"Queeneth," he says again, and my name sounds so *good* in his mouth that I squirm against the island. "Tell me what you want."

"You," I answer immediately. Fuck my reasons. Fuck my anger at him. Fuck anything except... well, fucking him.

He smiles, and I feel it on my lips.

His tongue moves against my bottom lip, gentle and meaningful. He moves with purpose, with desperation. I know I'm just as bad.

I wind my fingers in his hair, gripping him closer to me. I push up, his hand against the swell of my back the only thing keeping me from falling, pressing against him. My tits press against his chest, and the vibrations every time he breathes makes my nipples taut beneath the silk of my dress.

His hand falls from my face to my thighs, and I open them invitingly. As our tongues battle for dominance, the kiss languid and messy, his fingers skate over the sensitive skin on

my upper thighs. He's gentle but firm, just enough so that the pressure doesn't feel overwhelming.

Eventually, when the need to breathe outweighs how good his mouth feels, I pull away with a gasp.

Lord, apparently, does not need to breathe. He attaches his lips to my throat, kissing and sucking at the sensitive skin there.

I throw my head back, hands falling behind me on the marble countertop. I hold myself up as his knuckles graze against my panties.

"Mmm," I moan. His teeth and tongue are still making gentle work of my throat, my collarbone, up and around. His hand presses firmer and firmer against my cloth-covered clit.

"Queeneth," he breathes into my skin. One of my hands goes to his neck, holding onto him.

"Lord," I gasp. "Please..."

"Please what?" He pulls away long enough to look at me. His green eyes are dazzling right now, the center of his pupil swollen wide and black. His lips are swollen. He looks like he could eat me alive, and I would very much like him to do that.

"Please fuck me," I beg.

If anyone could hear me, I'd be humiliated. But with Lord... I don't care. No one had ever made me this unbridled, this wanton, that it feels like there was a fire, burning from inside me. A fire only he could put out.

The memory of his cock, hot and hard inside of me, has accompanied me and my vibrator on many lonely nights. He had been the star of every one of my sex dreams. I had made myself come so many times to thoughts of him that having him here now feels unreal.

I can't resist the urge to have him again, for real now that he's right here.

The hand around my waist tightens, and he yanks me forward. I let out a yelp, and he pushed himself against me.

His cock strains against his pants, a hard line pressing against my wet panties.

“Say it again,” he commands.

I grind my hips against him, watching his eyes flutter, and darken with molten desire. It fuels mine and removes every form of shame.

“Fuck me, Lord. Please.”

He curses, low and long. He fishes into his back pocket, pulling out his wallet. The condom he has there makes me raise an eyebrow, but he just grins, and I’m too grateful to care. As he unbuttons his dress pants, I slide forward a little and wiggle out of my underwear.

As soon as he pulls himself out, I’m the one cursing. I’m so wet, I can feel my damp curls against my thighs. Heat rushes through me watching him palm his own hard cock, his head tossed back and his throat a long line of tense muscle.

I reach forward, tightening my hands around his shoulders. He slides the condom on himself and then looks at me.

I nod.

He grins again, a slow, lethal smile like he was proud of himself now that he had me right where he wanted me.

When Lord slides into me, it’s as easy as it ever was. I’m so wet for him, he barely must slow down as he motions his hips forward. I cling to him, and he holds me just as close.

“Fuuuuck, Queeneth,” he groans out.

I wiggle, and his cock twitches inside of me. He curses, burying his face in the corner of my throat and neck. It had been a while since I had been with a man, but my dripping wetness made this so much easier.

“Fuck, you’re so wet,” he says.

“Fuck me,” I say, and Lord’s hips begin to rock.

He’s as big as I remember. The rub of his hard cock inside of me is so intense, my vision keeps whitening out. I try to give as good as I get, but by the time his hips are snapping and

his fingers are between our bodies to gently toy with my clit, I'm basically a rag doll in his strong arms. I twist and lift my hips up, but he's so powerful, and I'm so lost in it, that he holds me against him, using the island to help, as he fucks into me relentlessly.

When my orgasm comes, it hits me by surprise. One second, I'm riding his cock the best I can, and the next I'm slack in his arms, screaming.

As I come, I feel Lord loses the last bit of his control. He snaps his hips hard and fast, and before I can come down, he's crying out my name, his cock hard and heavy inside of me as he comes.

It takes several minutes for my breathing to return to normal. I lay back against the island, chest heaving, as Lord slowly moves out of me. I wince as he does so, knowing I'll be deliciously sore in the morning.

He disposes of the condom and does up his pants. Belatedly, I slide down from the island and find my panties over by the dishwasher.

That was... good.

Oh, shit.

CHAPTER 4

Lord

The sound of the shower running is my cue to leave, and I close the bedroom door softly behind me. I stand there for an undecided minute, wondering if she would kick me out or welcome me with open arms, and a sexy smile.

Just like she used to.

There was a time I would not have to consider, I just walked in with her, and we spend so much time in the bathroom until the water ran cold.

My dick was still semi hard even though I had just come harder than I had in a very long time. She had the ability to make me feel like I was twenty-five again, instead of forty-five. Around her, I was a hormone-crazed, teenage horn dog, on the ready to go at any time of day.

Not wanting to feel like a creep standing in front of her door while she showered, I make my way back to the kitchen. My eyes land on the two empty wine glasses on the counter, her panties on the dishwasher and my suit jacket discarded on the floor.

I still had on my shirt, although now missing the few buttons she had ripped off in our haste to get at each other.

I pick them up one after the other, slipping her underwear into my pocket and then rinsing off the two wine glasses.

It was already past midday by now and the wedding party would be winding down to the ending. By now Belle would be getting worried that I was not yet back, and I had yet to reach

out. The thought of my daughter reminds me of the hurt look on Queeneth's face when I mentioned Nina.

Anyone sensible person could do the math and get an estimate of Nina's age and it would be right around the same year that Queeneth and I had been together. She thought I had moved on to the next available person and she would be right. Although not quite in the way she imagines it.

Amelia, Nina's mother had been the first readily available woman I had found. I had known her for years before I even met Queeneth and before she became a regular hookup, we had tried dating to see if things could work out between us. Unfortunately, we were not compatible with each other.

But somehow, we always ended up in the same place at the same time. It became convenient that we fucked.

So long as Amelia was there, we hooked up. And then five years ago, one months after meeting Queeneth. I met Amelia in an award show in New York. And we I had ended up in the same hotel room.

I had been too drunk out of my mind trying to get rid of thoughts of Queeneth and it was the first time I'd had unprotected sex with Amelia.

I would never know if she had done it with the intent of getting pregnant, because even if I had been tipsy, she had not been. A couple of months later, I had tried to fuck another woman but all I could picture was her.

Queeneth.

I had wanted to reach out to Queeneth so badly. But Amelia had happened. And Nina had happened.

I regretted not trying to find Queeneth earlier, but I never regretted having my daughter, Nina. She was the best thing that happen to me. And I had sworn to myself to do better as a father with Nina than I did with Lady, my first lovely daughter.

Nina is my second chance to redeem myself. Lady nearly married a man she never loved against her will, because I was not there for her when she really needed me.

I am glad, Lady's marriage to her true love today, brought Queeneth and I together. But I am not happy she denied me the honor of walking her down the aisle at her beautiful wedding.

Punishment for choosing career over my family then.

Now here am I, a billionaire rock star whose pictures grace the rock hall of fame. I can afford anything money can buy. But I cannot turn the hands of time, nor eat my cake and have it.

But I will certainly make it up to my first daughter. And resolve not to make the same mistake with my second daughter.

My stomach rumbles in my reverie and it is a not-so-subtle reminder that I had not eaten anything all day. I doubt Queeneth had eaten too. Walking to the fridge to rummage through for something to eat and find a fruit bowl. I take it out, picking up an apple and biting into it.

And then I face time Belle.

Nina's face fills the camera as she stares at the screen, her eyes not settling on mine but on trying to steady the tab on her hands. I smile at the screen and then Belle appears almost immediately,

"Hello Daddy." my daughter's tiny voice comes through, and my smile grows wider,

"Hey honey, how are you doing?" I ask and she nods her head before answering like I'd gotten used to her doing no matter how many times I knew Amelia had tried to get her to stop the habit.

"Not so good. You missed all the good parts from Lady's wedding. We had lots of cake, and there was a puppy who tried to get into Lady's huge wedding dress. And then Lady said I could visit her whenever I wanted to. She is really nice, and I think she's my new favourite person, after you, and mommy -"

"Okay, Nina, why do not you give your dad and I, a minute. We need to talk about grown up stuff and then you can

tell him all about the wedding, okay?” Belle says to her, and she nods her head eagerly before giving me a soft wave,

“Just a minute honey, and then I want to hear everything.” I tell her and she smiles even wider before hopping off what I assume is the bed and I hear the patter of her feet running off.

“I don’t think I’m going to be able to make it back tonight.” I start once I was sure Nina was out of earshot. Belle’s eyes widens and I can tell she is surprised and very curious about what my relationship with Queeneth was.

I suspect, Queeneth had not told any of her friends the nature of our past, and Belle had watched us leave the wedding together. I could clearly see the questions swimming in her eyes, but she does not ask any of them.

“When can we expect you then? Is everything all right?” she asks the two questions in quick succession.

“Yeah, everything is good. Just a small hiccup. Queeneth and I are locked up at the house, and my handyperson can’t come fix it until tomorrow. So, I’ll probably not be back until tomorrow.” I explain to her, and she nods, heaving slightly.

“Can you take care of her until then, I know it was not what we agreed earlier, but I’ll double the pay.”

She nods, waving off my apology, “It’s alright. She’s a darling and what’s one more day. I’ll see you tomorrow then.”

“Will do. I appreciate you doing this.”

She calls Nina back and I listen to my daughter whine about how much she would miss me between tonight and tomorrow until I got back, and it warms my heart hearing her say it.

After hearing her talk more about the wedding and promising her two more trips to Disneyland this year, we say our goodbyes with her blowing me kisses before we finally hang up.

I am still smiling like slightly at the now blank screen when I feel movement above me and I glance up to find

Queeneth in the doorway staring at me with a wistful look in her eyes.

She is wearing a pair of shorts and a big shirt that is about three sizes too big for her but does nothing to hide the clear outline of her braless breasts. Her brown hair is still damp and curly from her shower and her clear pink face had a dewy glow to it under the florescent light.

Need, desire and warm affections roils through me all at once, and it was as if no time had passed, and I was as much in love with her now as I was five years ago.

Fuck!

“Your daughter?” she asks in a high falsetto tone that makes me think that she was forcing the brevity into her tone. Trying to act like none of this bothered her.

“Yeah.” I say and then frown slightly, “How long have you been standing there?”

“Not long. But long enough to know that your daughter has you wrapped around her tiny fingers.” she says with a warm smile that I don’t expect as she walks further into the kitchen and takes a seat opposite mine.

She takes an apple from the fruit bowl between us and takes a bite.

Her word about Nina makes me smile, but I am physically unable to look away from her face. Now that she was closer, I inhale the soft scent of lavender, not sure if it was her soap or shampoo. I get the crazy urge to go closer and inhale her scent, so I knew for sure, but I force my ass on the seat.

“She does, doesn’t she?” I tell her with a wry smile staring into those big hazel eyes.

The air charges as we both don’t look away for the longest minute until she breaks it first and takes another bite from her apple.

“Queeneth, about-

“We should nev-

We both start at the same time, and then stop, chuckling as we stare at each other.

“You go first.” I tell her, and she nods before speaking, reminding me slightly of Nina.

“I mean, I know you have a daughter. So... you know? It was a one-time thing. We should probably not blur the lines and stick to our side of the house before we must leave tomorrow.”

That had not at all been what I wanted to say, but I am quiet, and I don't respond to her words.

The silence stretches and she jerks up suddenly and begins to make us tea. I take the cup she hands out to me after another five minutes of silence.

“Well, we could at least talk while we're at it.” I say, ignoring her words that fucking her was a one-time thing. My hunger for her was nowhere near sated but for now we could do things her way.

“Queeneth, you might not believe this, given everything; but I did miss you, you know. Every time something reminded me of you, it could be something as little as your soft lavender scent, or as significant as staring into eyes the exact perfect shade of hazel, much like yours.

But I was a shit father to Lady, and I had to be better for Nina.”

She stares at me, nodding, even though her eyes had turned glassy like she was near to tears. I had no idea why she would want to cry though.

She takes only one sip from the teacup in her hand before she sets it back on the table and gets off her seat.

“You know what? I should probably go to take a nap.” her voice is a little shaky, and I stand with her, but she holds out her palms as if to tell me to stop, and I do, just before she rushes out of the kitchen and up the stairs.

A few minutes later, I hear the slamming door of her bedroom and the house is back to being silent.

CHAPTER 5

Queeneth

With my back pressed against the door and my eyes staring up at the white ceiling as I try to stave off the burning itch of tears threatening to stream down my face, I wonder how long this ache in my chest would take to stop hurting.

It was bad enough that I had just had sex with him, but bonding with him was a whole different thing. Seeing the way, he was with his daughter when he had four other kids who would never know about their father hurt so much, and this time, I let the tears fall.

Silently.

I could not let myself become attached to Lord McCarthy. Getting over him the last time had become easy, because I had hated him, hated how easily it had been for him to leave and ignore all my efforts to reach him, while I bore the consequence of our time together.

I don't see the kids as consequences though, they were treasures. Little blessings I had gotten from him, and I was grateful for that, but a part of me would resent him for leaving too. For trying to be a good father to his daughter when he'd made no effort with me.

Although to be fair, I had not given him the chance to.

Standing to my feet, I let my eyes take in the room in front of me. The walls are painted a light violet shade with floral designs etched into the walls and painted a deep purple. It had always been pristine clean, and it even smelled like lavender.

Lord told me back then it was the room he had for his daughter who he didn't get to see. Now, I know that it's my best friend Lady's. And I know for a fact that Lady had never spent a single night inside this room. He kept it clean for her though, always, like he was expecting her to visit one day, and then she would finally get to use the room.

It was a little sad, even I had to admit. I did not want to humanize Lord McCarthy in a way that made me soft towards him. No, I wanted to keep him exactly how he had always been in my head since he left.

I wanted to hate him, needed to consider him deadbeat. Because only then would what I was doing be justified. And keeping my kids from their father could not be considered a fault of mine.

I had done everything I could to reach him but to no avail.

There was only so much rejection one could take before they folded and cut their losses.

The bed was a four-stand canopy-styled with regal gold and purple colors. The floors were marble, and the cost of the furniture would probably be my entire annual salary, if not six or even more.

To the left, a sliding glass door led to the closet that was big enough to house my entire apartment and the bathroom with its wide modern-clawfoot bathtub and floor-to-ceiling mirrors lined with frames made from pure gold.

It was a waste truly, that Lady never got to live this lifestyle her father could have given her.

I wondered what kind of person she would have turned out to be if she had lived like this. If we would even be friends. Being here sort of made me miss her. She would have loved it, not the overly pricey stuff, but the airy feel of the room, the nice balcony on the right door where one could relax to enjoy the crisp air.

I realized I would miss her, Lady. I already missed her. She was starting a whole new life as a wife now, and I wondered what that would mean for our friendship.

In fact, what this all would mean. I had four kids, quadruplets from her father and I never told her in all the years we'd been friends.

Even though I had no idea that she was Lord McCarthy's daughter, I could still salvage things if I came clean to her now. But I knew I couldn't.

Telling Lady about the quadruplets meant that I had to tell Lord too. And I was not so keen on that, not after everything.

Whenever I felt like this, she was the first person I told, she was my best friend and go-to person for every time I needed to talk about anything. She would know what to do, what to say, not just to make me feel better, but give me some clarity on what I needed to do.

But I could not call Lady, and not just because she was on her honeymoon, but because Lord was her father.

Belle was another person I could talk to, but she would be too busy babysitting Nina.

Pushing away from the door, I walk to the end suite bathroom to wash my face, grabbing my phone from the edge of the bed where I'd left it earlier, and I call my mother.

When I glance at the time, it's already past 5pm, that meant that it would be two am in Calais, France. The kids would be asleep by now and there was no way mom would let me talk to them. I inwardly curse at Lord as the phone continues to ring. I had planned to call earlier before I got stuck in here, but I had been too preoccupied to remember.

My mother answers when I am almost giving up any chance of her picking up tonight and from the irritation in her voice, she had clearly been sleeping.

"Hey mama." I say and I hear the ruffling of the sheets and a few sighs from her before she responds.

"Queenie, is everything alright?" My mother's fresh accent comes out thicker than normal, as it always did whenever she did not have an audience or if she was caught off guard.

She had always tried to lose her accent in the past, especially before my father's death. She had wanted to sound American. It was why she had enforced the rule that my father spoke to me always in English, since he was an American and I spent most vacations here in Prescott with my grandmother.

"Yeah mom, everything is good. I just wanted to talk to Olivia and her brothers. I figured they would be asleep now, but I wanted to try."

My mother sighs again, and I hear more shuffled noises, this time I figured she was getting out of bed, and I am a little hopeful that she would wake up the kids, but the next thing I hear is the sound of tap running and then her drinking water.

"It's late, honey." She finally says. "And it was a struggle getting them to sleep earlier."

My heart dips from the frustration her words cause, but I try not to let it show, "It's alright, I understand mom."

My words come out a bit shaky and I take in one deep breath to steady myself. I hear my mother's sigh again, but this time she does not say anything. She lets me put myself together because she knew me all too well.

My pregnancy with the quadruplets had caused a friction between my mother and me. Before then, we had always been so close, I was an only child and my parents had doted on me, but my mother and I had grown especially closer when my father had died. We'd only had each other and clung to the other to get through our grief.

But my father had always wanted me to go to spend some time in the United States with his mother, it was why I had been in Arizona five years ago when I met Lord. A friend of a friend had helped me land the job which I had been pretty much over the moon about.

And then, the babies happened. My mother, Alice wanted me to tell her who their father was, but I was too ashamed to tell her, I had acted like so recklessly over a man I barely knew.

I was with my babies for the first few years of their lives, and I helped at the daycare center she and my dad had run, but taking care of four kids, three of which were boys who ate like there was an endless barrel of food storage in their bellies, was not an easy task and money was too tight. Since we only made money from the daycare whenever parents brought their kid.

And that made it an unreliable source of income for us.

To make matters worse, my grandma had gotten sick and since my father was an only child, there was no one to take care of her.

Coming to the United State with four little kids and looking after an older adult sick woman was out of the questions. The plan had been to come to Prescott and look after grandma, and then go back to my babies.

But I got a job as a pre-k teaching aide at Twinkle. When grandma was getting better, a few weeks later. And that was where I met Lady and Belle. The three of us became inseparable since then. And best friends. Then I got a gig as a flight attendant at Space Airline after a year. Which helped me to be able to visit my kids from time to time, while I tried to sustain our needs.

Grandma was better now, but moving back to France was still not possible since my position at Space Airline required me living right here in Arizona.

It was an impossible situation, and one that had made me cry myself to sleep more nights than I could count.

Being unable to be with my children in the way I wanted to be was a constant pain I'd lived with for the past the years, and knowing there was still no end in sight made it even worse.

There was only one silver lining, and it was that Lord would never find out about them. None of my friends knew about them either. It was a part of my life I never told anyone.

“Queenie?” my mother’s voice finally rouses me from my long reverie, and I realize she had been telling me something.

“Sorry, mom. I’m just a little tired today, what are you saying?”

“I was just telling you about the kids. Olivia’s finally outgrown her bed wetting and Luke and Nolan still don’t want to play with the other kids. I’m trying to get them to speak in English, but I guess they love French.”

I chuckle at my mother’s irritation that the kids spoke French. She’d only hired American nannies at the day care because she wanted the kids to speak English, but they were not having it.

“Mom, let them speak what they want to speak. If they understand English, and can speak it too, it doesn’t matter that they have an accent.” I tell her and she scoffs.

“You don’t know what you’re saying.” she says and I laugh again.

We spend another few minutes talking, and I try not to be too saddened that I’d not talked to the children.

I would try to reach them tomorrow after all this madness is over. My brain conjures up images of Lord talking to his daughter. It had felt a little strange because I had never pictured him as the doting father.

It was sweet to see Lord talk to Nina. But... if he could be that guy for someone else’s kid, why couldn’t he be that person for me? He didn’t even answer the phone when I called him. He changed his number.

It was hard to reconcile the Lord I knew from five years ago, the playboy, roguish man who had taught my body things that still made me blush to this day, to the father who had abandoned Lady, and now the doting father to another daughter.

I could not help but think about how Lady always spoke so badly about her father who had never reached out to her all through her life while she waited for him. She mentioned her fractured relationship with her father without saying anything about his personality or identity.

Maybe he had changed, or maybe he only ever stuck around while they were kids. I did not want my children to go through that same torture my best friend had gone through. It was better they did not know him at all, than they be disappointed by his actions in future, when he decided he was done with them.

After I hang up, I make a mental resolve not to let anything about the kids slip. It was imperative. I had gotten my heart broken once, but this time it was not just my heart on the line, but the little hearts of my four precious babies. And I would guard it with my life.

CHAPTER 6

Lord

The silence of the kitchen is entirely too lonely, and even though I am not alone in the house, it feels like I am.

Not for the first time that day, all I feel is guilt at how I'd left things with Queeneth. I should have tried harder to reach out to her. To find out if there was still a chance of us being together.

I had not at all planned this, even though she probably thought I did. Of course, I had hoped that we would rekindle our affair, I had just not expected this level of antagonism from her.

I had to make it up to her somehow. Raising my head from my palms on the table, it occurred to me that neither of us had eaten dinner, and I could start making my reparations by cooking her dinner.

Walking to the fridge, I rummage through for anything to make and come across some potatoes, chicken, and pasta sauce.

I had learned how to cook after taking a year-long break in Italy a few years ago. I had not had the time to put my talent to use, because I was either always on the road or I always had someone to prepare my meals.

Nina was almost always with her mother, so I had never had the pleasure of cooking for her yet. I spend the next hour making dinner, all the while Queeneth remains in the bedroom, and I don't hear a sound from upstairs.

When dinner is ready, I make my way up the stairs to knock on her door. For a second after I knock the room is silent, and then I hear soft shuffling and the soft sounds of her footsteps as she comes to open the door.

She is still in the shorts from after her shower and her hair was now packed atop her head in a messy bun.

“Hey, I made dinner.” I say and she nods.

“I’ll be down in a minute.” she replies, but makes no move to close the door, and I don’t move either. I am very much aware of the bed behind her just a few feet away, I want to kiss her so badly, walk her back to that bed and keep us both there until Eric returned to open the doors. But we needed to talk.

I break the spell first and walk away, and a second later, I hear the door closing behind her.

Barely five minutes after I leave her, she comes down the stairs and joins me in the kitchen settling down opposite where I am already seated, and I dish out her food. I don’t miss the doubtful look on her face as she stares from the plate to my face.

“I didn’t know you knew how to cook.” She asks, picking up her fork.

I smile at the clear doubt in her voice. “Not many people know that about me.” I tell her.

“I took a cooking course in Italy.”

She nods at that, and then digs into the food, gingerly tasting the first spoon. I wait patiently for her reaction and when I see her eyes widen as she stares from the plate to my face again, and she shakes her head in disbelief.

“Oh my god!” She moans closing her eyes and savoring the taste.

Oops.

Is all I can think. Arousal clouds my vision at the sound she makes. She takes another spoonful and does it again and I have to look away. She had no idea what that sound does to

me, or she would not be doing it if she knew what images were running through my mind in that moment.

“This is so good!” She gasps opening her eyes, incredulity filling her expression. “I almost don’t believe you cooked this.” she adds, and I laugh at that.

We spend the next few minutes in silence before I break it.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about me.” I tell her, staring at her as she puts more food into her mouth, she looks up then and meets my gaze and pauses.

“And there’s a lot I don’t know about you either. I brought you here because I wanted to correct that. I had no intention of locking us both in. Contrary to what you might think.”

“I don’t think you did this on purpose. I mean, you would not leave your daughter with someone else just so you can talk to a woman you haven’t seen in five years. That would make you a psychopath.” She says,

I nod at that, but I smile too.

“Well?” I say, dragging out the words and she gasps dramatically.

“You wouldn’t!” she says.

“No, of course I would not. I’m not a psychopath, Queeneth.” I tell her and she chuckles, her hazel eyes twinkling. I am mesmerized by them, and for a second, I can’t look away. She had that effect on me, and I could stare into her eyes forever.

“Tell me about your life here? I heard you’re now a flight attendant. I mean why the career flip. I always thought you were going into the entertainment industry, maybe become an agent or studio exec?”

A shadow flits across her face, but she masks it quickly, it almost feels like I imagine it. But I had been watching her closely,

“Well, I realize the entertainment industry is not for me, and I love my job as a flight attendant. Flying across different

countries, meeting new people and new cultures. It's a whole adventure." She speaks.

I get the feeling her words are a little forced. It was quite different from the tone she'd had when she told me about working in the industry. She'd talked about it with so much passion, there had been no doubt about it.

But now, I could see the shadows in her eyes, see the things she hid in those shadows, things she was never going to tell me, unless I earned her trust, if at all she gave me the chance.

"You're keeping a lot to yourself." I tell her and her eyes widen, almost in fear, "What are you hiding, a secret boyfriend you don't want me to know about?" I ask, I am serious, but I infuse a trail of humor in my voice.

As expected, she chuckles at that, "As if. That's more of your forte, don't you think?" she jabs, but I don't take the bait.

I wait for a second before I continue.

"Amelia, Nina's mother. Was my on and off-again girlfriend. We were together for a really long time. I never cheated on you while I was with you.

But when I got back, Amelia had returned and one thing led to another, and we had sex."

I refrain from telling her I missed her because I was not sure she would even believe me at this point.

"We co-parent Nina now, but there's nothing between us. Amelia is a good mother to Nina. And somewhat of a friend, but that's it."

We both finish our food after a while, talking and sharing old stories. Before long dinner is over and I move to clear the dining table. She would not have it and insists on cleaning the dishes with me after dinner.

We wash the dishes side by side, our shoulders brushing. All the while I am acutely aware of her presence by my side. The scent of lavender fills my nostrils, and I felt the urge to bury my head in her neck and inhale it deeply.

When we're done, I turn to her and she slowly does the same, her eyes lifting to meet mine.

"You smell so good." my voice is a hoarse whisper and I take one step towards her, entering her personal space. She makes no move to move away, her hands resting on the sink behind her.

"So, fucking good." I mutter, my eyes on her lips. Pink and full, I want to kiss her so badly especially when she was standing this close.

And then, I don't care to stop anymore, I lean in and pressed my mouth to hers.

Queeneth wraps her arms around me, and she kisses me back.

It takes a moment for my brain to catch up. This is what I wanted when I invited Queeneth to the house after the wedding, but I never expected it to feel so...

Right.

For a few minutes, we kiss languidly. I love the shape of her mouth. The feel of her tongue. The taste of her mouth. She's haunted me for years now, and having her back, I can't believe I will ever let her go.

I know it's more complicated than all of that, but with my cock hardening and Queeneth's soft body pressed against me, I don't fucking care.

I lead her to my bedroom, careful not to trip on anything along the way. Queeneth comes willingly, her gaze sharp even as she trusts me.

"I want to fuck you," I whisper. Watching her shiver makes me grow harder in my pants.

She nods, almost demure, and I kiss her again.

This time, I want more. The sex we had earlier in the kitchen was the best I'd had in years—it also wasn't even close to enough.

Slowly, I undress Queeneth. I move slowly, the fabric moving down her body, my hands chasing it with purpose. She trembles under my touch, and it's the best thing I've ever seen.

Queeneth leans against my bedroom wall, and I kiss down her throat, her collarbone, her chest. Her perfect breasts are still in a bra, but I tweak her nipples gently through the thin material before going down to my knees.

Looking up at her, Queeneth looks exactly like her name: like a Queen. Her hair spills out in a messy crown around her head, her eyes blazing dark and lips kiss-red.

She smiles at me, running her hand down the side of my face, and my cock twitches in response.

“You look good from down here,” I tell her, winking.

Queeneth laughs. “Right back atcha.”

God, I could swallow that sound. Since her mouth is too far away, I lean forward and kiss right on her panty-clad mound. She lets out a curse, almost like she's surprised, and I leave my mouth there, hot and panting over her.

I wait until her hands curl into fists on my shoulders and her hips are canting forward. When she begins to wiggle in my face, I look up at her.

“Is that a, yes?” I confirm.

She lets out a huff. “Yes.”

Permission granted; I stopped teasing her.

I hook two fingers around the edges of her panties, pulling them down. She steps out of them, and I grin at the sight of her. Her thick thighs are spread, damp curls nestled between them.

She looks different than the last time I had the pleasure of this sight—age and time having treated her well. The pale, wispy curves of stretch marks move up her waist, down her thighs. I trace them with my fingers, kissing them. I kiss the part of her belly that sticks out the farthest, the corners where her hips meet her thighs. Her skin tastes as good as anything I've ever tasted.

When I find my way back to her center, I feel like a man dying of thirst. She's writhing against the door, and when I slide my fingers between her slits, parting her for me, she's glistening and pink.

My tongue hits first, soft, and flat against her clit. She lets out a long, low moan, her thighs immediately tightening around my head.

Fuck, she tastes good.

I move my lips slowly, my tongue licking a stripe up and down.

It doesn't take long to lose myself in it. She keeps up a bruising pace, her hands around my face holding me to her, and it's so good, I might black out.

Somehow, I get my own hand inside of my pants. I fist my cock as I lick her, kissing her clit, wrapping my tongue around it. I love the feel of her, the trembling of her thighs, the filthy things falling from her lips.

"Fuck, right there, Lord," she cries. "That's right. Fuck, your mouth feels so good—you're so good at that."

Pride blooms in my chest as my cock swells. As her praises turn more high-pitched, her grip growing almost painful, I know she's close.

I slide my spare hand between her thighs and slowly press two fingers into her. She screams as she comes, clamping around my fingers.

I come hard, my fist tight enough to almost hurt around my cock. I lick Queeneth through it all.

When I pull back panting, she's leaning against the wall, eyes closed.

Carefully, I slide out of my pants and pull my boxers up.

"Queeneth?" I murmur.

"Hmm?" She cracks open her eyes. Her smile is a little dopey.

"Good?"

“Good,” she says. I kiss her, and she kisses me back, soft, and sweet.

I guide her to the bed and help take her bra off. Almost immediately, she curls under the covers.

I join her, and my heart stutters in my chest.

This is meant to be a fun, casual hook up with an ex-lover.

But watching Queeneth fall asleep... I'm worried it's more than that already.

CHAPTER 7

Queeneth

The light streaming from a slight open in the curtain stirs me awake and I flinch from the light turning back into the covers.

The memories from last night returns slowly with my consciousness as I realize while I am alone now on the bed, a dull ache between my thighs is a not-so-subtle reminder of the two times we'd had sex, none of those times had happened on a bed though.

No, we had been too eager to get into each other's panties, the kitchen counter had served us just fine.

His side of the bed is cold signalling that he'd been out of bed for quite some time, I don't know what to make of the slight disappointing feeling in my chest. I should not be looking forward to waking up by his side in bed. That would be relationship, falling in love shit. And the very last thing I needed to be thinking about when it came to Lord McCarthy.

Sitting up in bed, my breasts feel a little heavy, and there are slight marks of his stubble on them from last night. I get out of bed and move to the bathroom to shower and brush my teeth with the toothbrush I find in there. I suspect Lord had kept it for me since it had not been there yesterday.

I feel a little self-conscious that he had moved around the room while I had been asleep, hoping to God I had not been snoring. The thought of it alone was mortifying.

In the closet, there are more clothes in there than would be found in my own lived-in closet and I can't help but wonder

why he kept all these clothes here when the chances of Lady coming over was almost zero to none.

Maybe they're for his numerous hookups. Like you.

The thought whispers in my head, and I shake it off, angry with myself for being jealous when I had no right to be. He was a free man, and he could do anything he wanted to do, and the same goes for me too.

I find another pair of shorts and this time a tank top since the weather was a little hot and make my way out of the room. The smell of coffee greets me the second I open the door and the sounds coming from the kitchen tells me exactly where he is.

I see him before he notices me, and he has only his pyjama pants and nothing else. My body heats up almost instantly, heart racing and thighs clenching. My reaction to his bare chest is ridiculous. His pants are hung low that I can see the top of his ass. He is lean, leaner than he was five years ago but no less muscular.

My eyes roam his bare back, and they settle on his ass when his voice interrupts my ogling, it takes a second before I realize that he had been speaking to me.

“Like what you see?” his deep voice is seductive and more than a little distracting, and it also snaps me out of my sexual haze to the realization that I'd just been caught ogling his ass.

Snapping my attention away, I walk further into the kitchen and to the other side of the counter. He is behind the sink making eggs and it smelled heavenly. My eyes dart up to his face and he is watching me with a knowing smile in his lips that makes my heart skip. His hair is ruffled and there is a shadow of stubble on his chin that gives him his usual rakish look.

I get a flash vision of how our life would be if things had been different. If he had not skipped town suddenly and left me in the lurch.

Would we have fallen in love, would he be excited about the babies and maybe he would propose, and we would live

together, right here in this massive house where we would have room, and the kids would have lots of space to play instead of the tiny bedroom where their bunks were cramped to fit all four of them back in Calais.

I hated not being able to provide them with everything they needed, while he lived alone into his massive house with so much space he did not even need.

These thoughts make me angry as hell and I don't return his playful smile.

"When will Eric be here?" I ask him, ignoring his question and looking out the window so that I did not have to look at him.

There is a short pause before he answers, and I can feel his gaze on me, but I don't turn back to him.

"This afternoon." he replies without saying anything else. His tone is clipped, and I feel a little guilty for my shortness. But I don't say anything still to smoothen things over.

The silence lengthens and so does my guilt. I don't know who I am angrier at. Him for leaving, or me for not moving and realizing I still had all these unresolved feelings for him. All these years, I heard people talk about him, stumbled upon clips of him performing on tour on social media, or heard one of his numerous charts-topping songs, I tried to delude myself into thinking that it never bothered me.

That I was not still carrying a torch for a man who had probably forgotten all about me.

And to make things worse, Olivia had been obsessed with one of his popular releases early this year when I had visited, and it had taken every part of me not to get her to stop singing it. I hadn't because it would be ridiculous asking my daughter to stop singing a song because her father, whom she did not know had sang it.

I had avoided everything Lord McCarthy successfully until now, and never in my wildest dreams did I think that my past would collide so unexpectedly with the present.

“Do you want some eggs?” his question jolts me back to the present and I turn back to him. There is no more stiffness in his tone, and I see he is trying his best to be as cordial as possible. But cordial had gotten me into bed with him in the first place, who knows what else I would be willing to do if we continued to be friendly.

“No, thanks. I need to check in with work.” I tell him and walking out as fast as I can before he stops me.

Only when I am in the living room did I release the breath I did not know I had been holding. My eyes watered involuntarily, and I force it back. I had been more emotional in the last twenty-four hours than I had been in the last two years. And it was all because I had gotten a taste of something I never thought I would ever feel anymore.

My phone vibrates in my hand, and I unlock to see it is a text from Belle and Lady asking about my disappearance from the wedding. Clearly, I could not tell Lady I had disappeared to go have sex with her father who also happened to be the father of my children. I could not tell Belle too since neither of them knew about my past.

Things had gotten even more complicated now. It was bad enough I had never told them about my kids, now I would be lying to her too about her father.

I respond to their texts and tell them I’d been too sick to stay so I had left. They seemed to buy it, and it feels like I’d just stacked another domino of lies on top of the one I already had, and it was only a matter of time before they all came crumbling down.

A few minutes after I heard Lord walk back upstairs and the soft slam of his door, my stomach grumbles and I hurry back to the kitchen to find that he had saved me a plate. My heart moves with affection against my will and I settle down to finish the meal.

Hours later, I startle awake and find a blanket over me in the living room. My phone is lying on the floor where it must have dropped from my hand when I dozed off and I sit up letting the soft blanket fall off my body onto the couch.

I did not even remember dozing off, the last thing I remembered is mindless scrolling through TikTok and trying to come up with an excuse for Lady when she finally asked for details on why I had left her wedding because I knew she would still ask. And then the next thing I knew, two hours had passed.

I knew it had to be Lord who had covered me with the blanket because I did not remember doing it myself.

The soft sound of music interrupts my thoughts and I realize it must have been why I'd woken up. My eyes dart around the room, but I don't find any indication of where the music might be coming from. I walk out of the room towards the hallway and follow the sound. A short flight of stairs leads down into another living room, there is a small fireplace in the middle and the glass walls by the left opens the room to a lot of natural light.

It's a beautiful space, one I don't remember coming to the last time I'd been in this house. It had to have been added because there is also a large piano in the corner and Lord is seated backing the piano and playing his guitar. The sound, listening to it up close is so hollow and heart wrenching, a sound I'd never heard him produce that it almost brings tears to my eyes. My heart does the silly somersaults, and I knew I was in trouble where Lord McCarthy was concerned.

He strings the instrument to a stop and then he turns around to face me directly, like he already knew I had been standing there all along. I am bewildered at his ability to always feel my presence even though I'd been as quiet as possible.

"You're crying?" he asks, looking a little alarmed and my eyes instantly wipe at the tears I did not even know had slipped down my cheeks.

"It's so beautiful. What is it?" I ask him, taking a step into the room towards him, like he was magnet, and I could not resist. I move to the piano and rest my arms on one end of the massive wood opposite him.

“It’s a sound I was just playing around with. Nothing.” he says, his eyes don’t leave mine as he speaks, and I can’t look away either.

There seemed to be a cord that thickened between us with every second we spent together. I am fearful that if I don’t leave soon. It would only get harder to leave.

“I’m sorry I was a little short this morning.” I finally tell him after a few moments of silence, I look down at my fingers, feeling slightly ashamed of my pettiness this morning.

“Don’t be sorry. I deserve every single nuance of your anger. I just hope you’d be able to look past it and forgive me.”

I look up into his eyes sharply at his words, it was not something I’d expected from him, he sees my surprise smiles, his head drops down to the guitar, fingers thrumming on the strings, and I follow his gaze, my mood lightening up. Suddenly, I want to hear him play again.

“Play something else.” I tell him and he does, his eyes on me the whole time. It feels like he was serenading me, but without the words. The sound is a familiar song from his band. A love song, I almost quickly recognize but I don’t want to think about the words. Because thinking about it meant that he was telling me about those things without the words.

Telling me, he thought I was the most beautiful woman, and he could not wait to spend his every waking moment with me. Those were just some parts of the lyrics of the song, one of my favorites from the band.

I’d told him that five years ago, and I try to hide my surprise that he’d remembered. A few minutes later, he stops. The song was not over, and I look up at him, question in my eyes but his next words shock the breath out of me,

“Queeneth... what if we got married?”

CHAPTER 8

Lord

The idea came out of nowhere, but now that I've said it, I realize how perfect it is.

She takes one step back from the piano, "Excuse me?"

Taking the guitar from my neck and setting it down on the bench, I stand up and move towards her, but when she moves back, I stop following her and remain standing still.

"Just hear me out, please. I know I made this request impulsively, Queeneth." I tell her, and her gaze was still doubtful, but she did not look like she was ready to bolt at a moment's notice.

"Are you being serious?" She asks, her gaze darts around the room like she suspected this was a prank and she was searching for the punchline.

"I've never been more serious about anything in my life, Queeneth."

She must hear the graveness of my voice because her gaze snaps to mine and she looks aghast, as if just realizing that I was not kidding. She was halfway across the room and the gap between us felt too distant. I bridge it, and this time she does not try to run away.

"Oh my God you are?" she says.

I give her a moment to consider my words before I continue.

"I want to retire from being a rock star. I mean, it's about time, after all these years. Touring, and performing, and

moving from tour to another, it gets tiring at some point. And I've loved every minute of it. But I have a daughter now."

"You have more than one daughter." she interrupts me, her tone is hard, and it almost reminds me of the pain in Lady's voice. I realize it must annoy her as well, as her best friend.

I nod my head, "I have two daughters, but I have one who needs my attention more than the other currently. I also want to fix my relationship with Lady. And I can't do all that by touring around the world."

She watches me for a second, and then turns around, I think she wants to leave the room, but she moves to one of the couches and settles in, turning her attention back to me. She did not look totally convinced yet, but the fact that she was still listening told me a lot. I sit down a few couches away from her and continue.

"At the moment, Amelia's got full custody of our daughter and I want that to change. I want a stable, working, family environment for my kid. I know I need to fix this so that Amelia, Nina's mom, takes me seriously when I say I want Nina full time or at least genuine 50/50 custody. Right now, because of touring, I can't have her as much as I want. I know it's a lot to ask, and you don't owe me anything. In fact, if you tell me to go fuck myself right now, I will understand, but this isn't just about me, Queeneth.

There is something between us. I'm not the only one who feels it. You feel it too. Something tangible and real. I felt it five years ago, and it's still there now. I never stopped..."

I want to tell her that I never stopped loving her, but even I knew that it would be too soon. She will probably run the other way if I speak about that too soon, so I take a different route.

"If you feel like bringing feelings into all this would be too soon, or assumptive on my part, we could make it a business arrangement. Get married to me and adjust my image, give me some nanny support while I transition out of full-time rock star work.

I tell Queeneth I'll give her anything she wants. A mansion, fame, a fresh start: anything money can buy, I'll get her. Two years of a fake marriage in exchange for the rest of her life set up.

I mean anything at all, think of it as a blank cheque. And not just about money. It could be a career, either to move ahead as a flight attendant owning her own flight or going back to your other decision to go into the entertainment biz, I can help with that.

All I ask for is two years. Two years of us, married in the eyes of the whole world, and you whenever you ask for a divorce, I'll give it without any hassle.”

When I'm done, she is silent for the longest time, from the look on her face, digesting every single word I'd just said.

I try to read her mind or figure out what she's thinking but her expression tells me nothing about what her decision would be.

“I— I don't know what to say, Lord.” her voice is barely a whisper, but I hear her loud and clear.

“You don't have to say anything now, you can think about it. I'm in Prescott indefinitely and we can talk after you've had the time to think things through.”

She stands to her feet just then to pace, but the sound of the doorbell interrupts us. We both turn to the sound at the same time, and she turns back to me.

“Is that -” she starts asking but I am already off to the front door, I make my way past the hallway, and I hear her footsteps behind me. I see Eric in the front through the glass before I even get to the door and my heart dips.

I was not ready for her to leave, and I needed more time to convince her. I did not know what her answer to my question would be, and I thought I would have more time with her. She comes up to stand by my side and waves at him through the door.

“Is that him?” She asks and I nod, I hear her heavy sigh of relief and it annoys me that Eric had shown up at this time,

and her obvious excitement to be able to leave while I was feeling the opposite.

Eric works on the door from the outside, and the door clicks open in minutes,

“Oh, thank God.” I hear her whisper.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. McCarthy, I swear I had no idea you would be coming to the house. Duchess said you would be spending it with your daughter at the hotel.” Eric pleads.

Duchess was my housekeeper; she had taken the weekend off because I had planned to spend it with my daughter at the hotel. Coming back to the house with Queeneth had been unplanned.

We move back to the kitchen as Eric works on the security system at the back door while Queeneth goes up the stairs. I am hopeful that she has no plans to leave as well, but barely five minutes after she disappeared up the stairs, she is back downstairs. This time with a change of dress, the one she had been wearing at the wedding. Her shoes are in her hands, and she has on a pair of slippers she had been wearing all day.

“I’ll find a way to get the slippers back, but I need to leave now.” She says, and before I can ask her to stop, she moves with the speed of light and walks out the house.

From her hasty retreat, I can tell she was trying to escape any chance to talk about what we had been discussing.

I can’t help but wonder if I had ruined it all by bringing all this up too soon. I would not know until she decided to talk to me.

Only time would tell.

CHAPTER 9

Queeneth

All through my ride home, my mind is unsettled. My head feels like it's being pounded on all sides with a hammer and all I want to do is call my kids and sleep.

My apartment is on the extreme end of downtown, Prescott in between a bookshop and a trendy Chinese restaurant. The cab drops me in front of the restaurant and Mrs. Xhao, an elderly Chinese woman whose son owned the restaurant is standing outside throwing fixing the menu board. She looks up at me and waves and I wave back with a smile.

For months after I'd first moved into my apartment, she had tried to get me to date her only son who was so shy it was almost painful to talk to him. He was sweet though, and very much a gentleman, but I've never been one to be attracted to shy people. We had gone on only one date before I knew we were entirely too different to have anything going on.

We remained friends though, and her son, Andrew had gotten married a year later to a nice Korean girl he had met at a cousin's wedding. Now, Andrew was not so shy, but I had a feeling Mrs. Xhao still held a grudge with me for rejecting her son even though it had been a mutual thing.

"Good morning, Mrs. Xhao." I greet her just before I walk into my building and up the thousand stairs it took to get to mine. Even though I never went to the gym, I credited climbing these stairs every day.

My place is a simple two -room apartment. The tiny living room which gave way to the even tinier kitchen. A small

hallway that led to the bedroom and an end suite bathroom. And that would be the end of the tour of the entire house.

The entire space could fit into Lady's room and bathroom back at Lord's mansion. Although, it is a small space, I prided myself in how well I kept the place. It was compact and there was not a single hair out of place. My bedroom was the same, all my clothes fit into my tiny wardrobe since the space was too small for a closet and whatever did not fit the wardrobe was folded into my suitcases.

I waste no time changing out of the lavender-colored dress and into a big shirt hung on the chair of my small vanity table on the right corner of the room.

Even though, all I wanted when I got back to the apartment was to call my kids and sleep, I realize I am too restless to do just that, so I do the only thing that always seemed to calm me down when I was stressed, and I start cleaning. First, with laundry, then I rearrange the kitchen for the hundredth time. And then I vacuum the living room and clean my bathroom and bedroom.

By the time I finally fall flat on my back in the living room, two hours had passed, and I was exhausted, both physically and mentally. All the while I had tried not to dwell on Lord's proposal, and it had worked until now. It was almost 1pm by now and I realize I could talk to the kids by this time since it was almost their bedtime.

Picking up my phone from where I'd dumped it, I face time my mother.

When she answers, Olivia is on her lap already and she is smiling into the camera, her toothy grin hits me with a pang of nostalgia, I must work to stave off the tears.

"Hey baby!" she grins even wider and takes the phone from my mother who jokingly pulls her hair slightly.

"Mom! Why are you sweating so much?" my kids speak English whenever they're talking to me, their grandma's rules, but I know they speak French when talking each other. And

sometimes to mother as well, her thick accent comes through when she speaks, but her pronunciation is perfect.

“I’ve been cleaning, baby. How are you, looks like you got bigger since I talked to you two days ago?” she beams, because I knew just how much she liked to be told she looked bigger. Her brothers were a lot bigger than she was.

“I told Luke I was bigger than he was, he didn’t believe me.” She says with a hint of pride, and I smile even wider, my eyes search behind her for the boys but they’re nowhere to be found.

“Where are your brothers honey?” I ask her and she turns around to yell their names.

“Luke! Jacob! Nolan! Mom’s on the phone!” her tiny voice barely makes a dent, and I hear my mother cautioning her to stop yelling as it was unladylike.

I am afraid, she was going to become a tomboy in the not-so-distant future given how much she played and competed with her brothers. And her growing disdain for everything feminine.

In a matter of minutes I hear the bounding feet of the boys running straight towards her, and then the phone is snatched from her hands, she cries out, yelling at Nolan, who I suspect has taken the phone from her, and then I see a flash of brown hair, much like Lord’s hair and Nolan’s toothy grin before the phone wobbles again, this time Jacob is the one who’s got a hold of it.

He has almost the same hair color with Nolan, except his hair had a sprinkling of dusty brown at the tips, like my father’s hair.

Nolan and Jacob were identical, and Luke was the only one not as identical as the two, he also had a smattering of brown hair like his brothers, but he had more of my features than that of his father’s. Olivia on the other hand looked a lot like Lord as well, except she has blonde hair like my mother.

I hear my mother in the background yelling at the boys to stop with the bickering and I smile as they slowly quiet down,

and mom takes a hold of the phone while the boys flank her on all sides as they try to get a peek at my face.

“Mom! Luke’s been going around telling people you’re a supermodel because you fly around the world.” Nolan announces.

“Hey!” Luke, snaps at Nolan who peeks his tongue out at him, “Not true, mama. Nolan pranked Olivia while grandma wasn’t in, and she cried for a long time.”

It takes a while to settle all the bickering.

Luke was also the most calm and mature of the four. Olivia, struggled to catch up with their wild pranks and playing, but she could never meet up. Not only was she much smaller than they were, but my mother also almost always restricted her from playing too wildly, no matter how much I’d told her not to.

“It’s alright kids, tell me about school.” I ask and only Olivia talks about the new friend she’s already made. The boys on the other hand were more friends with each other and they almost always never invited an outsider into their group of three.

“When are you coming back, mom!” Nolan asks in a more reserved voice and all four of them wait for my answer like it had been on their minds all along. My heart breaks at the earnest look on their faces but I try my best not to let it show and be strong.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can afford to stay with you, my sweet babies. We already talked about it.” I tell them. They ask me the same question almost every time they sense it was time for me to say goodbye to them.

“When will you be able to afford it?” This time its Jacob who asks.

“When I get a job back in France, I’ll move, I promise. Grandma is already helping with the job search.” I tell them, but they still had doubts on their faces.

“But we want to see you every day!” Olivia cries.

“It was bringing your mama to school day on Friday, and everyone came with their moms.” Luke finally interferes.

I want to say something, but my voice catches and I realize I have no idea what to say. Tears choke me into silence, and I swallow and blink hard to stop the tears.

My mom must have sensed my silence was me being emotional because she takes the phone away from them.

“Alright kids, time to go prepare for bed. Say goodnight to mama and go on up.” she orders, and I hear their loud cries of ‘goodnight mama’ before the soft patter of their feet as they leave.

“Why didn’t you tell me about mom day?” I ask my mother when it’s just two of us on the phone, it’s a way to stop myself from bawling my eyes out, I needed someone to get mad at, and she was the closest to vent on.

“So that I can have you bawling your eyes out at me?” My mom says, although her voice is soft. My mother’s patience with me, makes me feel even worse and I immediately apologize for my shortness with her.

“I’m sorry.” I tell her and she nods, shrugging away my apology.

“It doesn’t matter mom cheri, all I ask is that you do all that you can to get back to your kids. It’s bad enough without their father.”

I nod my head, because I am still not in the right frame of mind to think well and tell my mother I would call her back in the morning.

Unable to stop it anymore, my brain bombards me with only thoughts of Lord’s offer. Being his wife while keeping the knowledge of his kids away from him was an almost impossible task. And what would happen to my plan to go back to France to be with my kids.

But on the other hand, I would have all the money I needed to move to France, and I could even bring my kids over to the States with me.

My mind whirls with the possibilities that being Lord's wife would come with. And I could not help but imagine how things would be in the bedroom. Would we have a sex life? Or would the business arrangement include not having sex.

Knowing how things were between us, I did not see how that could happen. I had barely spent twenty-four hours with him, and we'd had sex twice. What would happen if we lived together, shared the same space, and saw each other every day.

The thought alone is enough to make me wet. Thoughts of a free rein over Lord's body. Being with him whenever I wanted, letting him fuck me at his leisure...

My fingers trail slowly down between my thighs, and I slide my panties aside. I am already wet and pulsing. Images from last night, in the kitchen how rough he had been, how his stubble had felt between my thighs. I could still feel the ache of his presence, his imprint on me.

"Fuck."

My eyelids fall close as I slide one finger in, and then a second, slowly pleasing myself. I want him so badly; I almost regret my decision to leave so abruptly. My thumb slowly rubs on my clit and it does not take much before I feel the onslaught of my orgasm. My fingers move faster, thrusting and rubbing, harder and even harder still until I come so hard, eyes squeezing shut and thighs trembling.

When I open my eyes-only minutes later, I stare at the ceiling of my living room still lying on the bare floor with only one thought in my head; I needed to stay as far away from Lord McCarthy as humanly possible.

CHAPTER 10

Lord

“You can’t just decide you want to take a two-month break, Lord. There are protocols to these things.” Leonie, my manager who also doubled as my agent chants through the phone like she always did whenever I decided to take a break from the band.

I leave the phone on speaker and let her drone on and on about how my decision to leave was affecting the face of the band and not in a good way.

Leonie was the only one I had talked so far about my decision to retire from the band. Although, I had not even needed to tell her. We had worked together for so long that she was one of the only few people who knew me pretty much more than I knew myself sometimes.

“Lord, did you leave me on speaker again?” she asks, in a deadpan tone that tells me she was getting riled up.

“You know, I would never.” she scoffs before I even complete my sentence and I laugh at that, but I continue.

“I need some time with my kid, Leonie. You know how much I fucked it up the last time. I swore to Nina the first time I held her in my arms that I would always be there for her.”

I hear her heavy sigh and know that she was already close to capitulating. Although, even if she didn’t, I had no plans to leave Prescott in the next two months at least. I needed to spend as much time with Nina, and if Queeneth agrees to my proposal, then it was a step in the right direction of getting joint custody of my daughter.

“Two months, Lord of Rock. I know you never listen to me anyway, but this is important, Lord. We’ve got to do this as delicate as possible. Leaving a band after almost twenty years of international success is no easy feat -”

The sound of a car backing into the front driveway interrupts Leonie’s words, and I stop listening knowing it had to be Belle returning with Nina.

“You know what, Leonie, I’ve got to go. Nina’s back.” I tell her.

“Back? Where was -” Leonie starts up another round of lecture, but I don’t let her finish before I hang up and walk towards the front door.

Belle and Nina are climbing up the stairs already as soon as I open the door and walk out to meet them and my daughter bounds into my arms without hesitation with a babyish squeal,

“Daddy!”

My heart expands at the feel of her small arms wrapping tightly around my neck. I inhale her consistent baby powder scent closing my eyes and squeezing a little tightly. Even though it was not long since I’d seen her, I realize I’d missed her being away.

Was this what I’d missed all my life when I’d stayed away from my first daughter because I had thought she was better off without me?

Obviously, I had been wrong, because all I had succeeded in doing is letting my own kid grow up without a father, and now she hated my guts.

Belle was holding onto a small bag, and only then did I realize Nina was wearing a change of clothes and not what she had on at the wedding.

“Belle took me shopping and got me new clothes!” Nina launches into her escapades when she leans away from the hug. She was beaming at Belle like she’d just found a new best friend and I smile gratefully at the young woman.

To my surprise, Belle's reply is a cool nod, one I would not call friendly. It was like she saved her smile only for Nina, and to me, she was stoic and stiff.

"Come on in." I say to her, and walk into the house with Nina still in my arms, she was still going on about how they'd gone shopping and Belle had let her have two scoops of ice cream because she had been good.

I am very much grateful to Belle because it seemed they'd had a good time, but her cold reaction to me is a little baffling.

It was not a sign of me being conceited because I was used to the adulation of women, particularly those in her age group. She looked to be about the same age with Queeneth and my daughter.

She was blonde and attractive. All blue-eyed and long legs, she looked more like a super model than a nanny. But she probably had her own story, as to why a woman who looked like her earned her living by looking after other people's children.

"Sweetheart can you give Belle and I some room to talk about grown-up stuff." I say to Nina, and she nods her head before bounding to Belle and to both our surprises she hugs her.

"Thank you, Belle." my daughter says before running out of the room. There was no doubt Amelia was doing a good job in raising her to be polite.

Belle smiles widely at her, and she was still smiling in the direction Nina had disappeared to, seconds after she left a wistful expression on her face.

I clear my throat a little too loudly to gain her attention and the smile vanishes from her face when she turns to me. She walks closer to the counter but does not sit.

"Thank you very much for everything. You did a good job even though it was on such short notice. I'm grateful." I tell her and she nods pensively.

"It was nothing. She's a good kid." Belle says, "speaks highly of you." She says the last part as if she was surprised by

the admission.

It makes me chuckle as I take out my check book and start to write, "I'm her father, and of course she should speak highly of me." I say, still writing without looking up.

She says nothing in response to that and when I finish writing and meet her gaze, they are cold and unyielding. I wonder why she seemed antagonistic towards me, and she starts talking before I must ask.

"I am best friends with Lady McCarthy who became Lady Cox, yesterday! She told us all about her father who abandoned her when he was only a kid." there is accusation in her tone, and I am too surprised to say anything at first. She continues,

"I hope you don't do the same to Nina, she deserves a lot better." she adds.

"I know she does. And I would not repeat my past mistakes." I tell her, even though I know I should be telling her to mind her own business. I knew she was right.

A few moments later, I hand over the check to her and she leaves without another word. Standing in that same spot and wondering just how long my past would continue to haunt me. I recall my talk with Queeneth, and I wonder if she would agree to my proposal.

I would be kidding if I said I wasn't hurt and disappointed by her rejection, but I knew she had every right to walk away. All I could do at this point was give her the space she needed to think things through before coming to a hasty conclusion.

I walk towards the play pen where my daughter is laughing at her own joke and join her. As I stand in the hallway watching her talk to dolls in the massive barbie house, I'd had built for her, for whenever she visited, I could not help but recall my past mistakes.

I had been incredibly young when Lady had been born. Barely twenty-two and new to all the fame, the money, and the girls.

Now, thinking back to that time, I don't know if I would have done anything different but I knew for a fact that it was what I wanted now. I wanted to quit the band, I wanted to be there for my daughter at every milestone of her life.

Nina looks up just then and sees me. She grins widely and nothing in this world had ever prepared me for this pride that bubbles in my chest.

I don't know how long we play for. Nina much like me was a very commanding boss and she would not let me leave until we'd covered all the basis of holding a tea party for her dolls.

Hours later, I make us both dinner which we share over watching SpongeBob, until she dozes off in my arms.

When I am alone, after tucking Nina into bed, the events of the day bombard my thoughts, from my serenading Queeneth to asking her to be my temporary wife, and then her escape from the house. I have no idea what to say to make her want to accept and it was a maddening feeling, not being able to find an answer to this despite having all the money in the world.

In the shower, all I can think about is Queeneth in my arms in the kitchen. My hands find my already hard cock, and I stroke it, slowly at first imagining it is those soft plush lips wrapped around it, imagining the exquisite feeling of driving into her, hard.

And then I am coming, groans muffled and hands squeezing tight. It occurs to me before I go to bed that I have no way to reach her, no address, and no phone number, and I do not want to ask her friends. All I must do is wait for her to reach out.

And I can only be hopeful that it would not be a long wait.

CHAPTER 11

Queeneth

There has been a slow week with the airline and Bianca, my supervisor has asked me to take the week off. It is a much-needed vacation given the weekend I'd had. I was in no frame of mind to fly around the country when all I thought about morning and night was marrying Lord McCarthy.

The man was not making my decision process any easier for me. He had sent me a dm or Instagram barely a day after I'd fled from his stately mansion, and I had been too weak to not reply. Thanks to my very active social media, it did not take him long to find my address and then the deliveries began in earnest.

On the first day I had gotten a bouquet of red roses, vibrant and beautiful. I had been mesmerized by it and I could not deny that I was getting suckered in. He knew just what to do, what to say to make me want things that I know I shouldn't have but could not help wanting anyway.

On the second day, the flowers had come with a box of chocolate and a large stuffed animal that I knew would make Olivia's entire year. And on and on, all week he sent me different gifts, a laptop, a box of jewelleries that included a real diamond necklace.

I planned to return everything back to him but returning them meant having to see him and seeing him was out of the question since I did not trust myself where he was concerned. I feel so overwhelmed with it all that I knew I had to talk to someone about everything.

I could not talk to my mother because she had no idea Lord McCarthy was the kids' father, and I could not talk to Lady either. That was out of the question. That left me with Belle. She was the only one I suspected would not judge me if I told her about this.

I shoot her a quick text to meet me at our usual go-to bar in thirty minutes and she replies with a thumb's up emoji.

The bar is on the other side of town, but the girls and I usually braved traffic to go to it because they made the best cocktails and Belle had a crush on the eye candy bartender, so we went there to ogle him with her.

It is still relatively mid-day when I walk into the bar, and it is not surprising to find it almost empty. Only a smattering of people is seated, and Belle is nowhere to be found. My hands feel a little clammy while I wait for my friend to show up as it slowly dawns on me that I am about to reveal to my friend of three years that I had four kids I'd never told them about.

This could go in two ways; one she poured her drink in my face and ended our friendship, or two, she listened and understood my reasons for keeping all of these to myself and then she gave me some solid advice on what to do.

The latter was pushing it, but a girl could only hope. At least she would provide a pair of listening ears, and I would get some relief over the fact that I'd come clean to at least one person.

"Hey, babe!" Belle's voice, a little raspy around the edges calls from a few feet away and I turn to find her coming towards me. She glances around the bar for her crush, but he is nowhere to be found. I'd already found out from a different waiter that he worked only the night shifts and given that this was the earliest we'd visited the bar, Belle would be a little disappointed her 'man' was not here.

"Where's Eye candy?" is the first thing she asks me, taking her eyes from the bar to finally turn to me as she settles into her seat.

“He only works the night shift. I’m afraid he won’t be here to provide us with beautiful entertainment.” I tell her and she frowns.

“Dang it!” she cries but she does not look too crushed by the fact. We all knew that her crush in Eye candy was only on the surface. IN all the years I’d known Belle, I had never seen her get serious with any man, because of her past, and she was being careful not to fall again. Although it was a past, she never talked about too.

“You said you wanted to talk? I suspect Lord McCarthy has something to do with this?” she asks, getting serious and giving me her full attention.

I don’t respond instantly; my face must have portrayed my look because Belle’s face softens and her hands stroke my arm.

“Girl, Lord McCarthy is the biggest player there is. I don’t know what kind of relationship you have with the dude, but you’ve got to stop babe. It’s a recipe for heartbreak.”

“This isn’t about that.” I tell her, and then sigh before I continued, “First, I should probably start from the beginning if you want to understand this whole thing.”

A waitress comes to our table just then and we both order drinks. I order a gin and tonic, while Belle orders a dirty martini.

When we’re alone again, we turn back to each other.

“I don’t know how delicate I can put this, so I’m just going to come right out and say it.” I pause for a minute; “I’ve got kids, and I never told you or Lady.”

For a minute, Belle says nothing, and her shock is pretty much evident on her face. She had been holding her drink, but she sets it back on the table, eyes slightly wide and lips rounded in surprise.

“I mean, I was going to tell you guys at some point, I just never figured out the right time, and then more time passed. And it felt like too much time had passed, and I knew you two

would be really hurt about me not telling you something that is such a huge part of my life.

I would be hurt too....”

I was ranting, I did not need the raised brows of Belle’s face to tell me that, but it effectively shuts me up and I cover my face with my hand, running my fingers through my already messy hair. I feel a little overwhelmed about the whole thing. And I was not even done revealing.

“What’s this got to do with Lord McCarthy?” She asks, her brow furrows in confusion and I realize what I am about to say would sound crazy even to my own ears, if it had not happened to me.

“Uhm... it’s got everything to do with him because Lord is my kids’ father.” Her gasp is loud enough that we get a few stares from a few of the patrons at the bar, and I motion for her to keep her voice down, but I am ignored.

“Holy shit!” she finally says something, but she is still staring at me in shock, like she was trying to process the news, as unbelievable as it sounded.

“What? How?” She pauses, taking in one long breath, “I honestly, have no idea what to say to that, but I can say that makes the two of us.” She finally finishes and this time, it is my turn to look surprised.

“You slept with Lord too?” I ask her with wide-eyed shock.

“What?” She looks a little irritated, “No! Of course not. I meant that I had kids too. From a different man. Not Lord.”

She pauses for a second, and then leans closer towards me, both her hands resting on the table. On the other hand, I was reeling from how casually she had just announced to me that she had kids. I was not the only one keeping secrets and I could not even be hurt or angry at her because I had been doing the same.

“How did that even happen? I mean, he’s old enough to be your father and... oh my God! does Lady know?” She asks,

her eyes widening again, like she had not just dropped her own bombshell on my lap.

If this was her reaction to this news, I was not at all looking forward to how Lady would be taking the news. I blink and take a sip of my drink, trying to come to terms with the revelation that Belle also had kids too.

“She doesn’t. I mean, I don’t know, she hasn’t answered any of my calls all week. I’m getting worried that she might have figured it out somehow. But no one knows yet, except you.” I answer her question.

She leans back, this time, her gaze is cautious and directed at me, “Not even Lord?” She asks, and I nod, bowing my head, unable to meet her gaze.

“We got together five years ago. Long before I met you or even Lady. And I had no idea he was Lady’s father. I was his assistant for a month and we had a torrid weeks affair.

He left so suddenly even though, I already had feelings for him. And I did not figure out I was pregnant until months after he was gone.”

Belle takes in a deep sigh and drains the content of her glass in one long gulp. And then she motions to a passing waitress to get her a refill. I wanted to drink like that too, but I was driving back home. I was currently regretting that decision.

“But what about you? You just told me you had kids, like it meant nothing. Where are they?” I fire back at her, redirecting the attention from me to her.

She sits back and looks down at her empty glass. The waiter returns just then and swaps it for another martini, and she takes another small sip.

“I lost them. Their father was a doctor. I don’t like talking about it because it was a dark point in my life.” She says all this in one long breath and without meeting my eyes.

I realize the cold pain, I had always witnessed in her gaze, when she took care of other kids was because she could not

take care of hers. I had so many questions I wanted to ask her, but I respect her words and refrain from doing just that.

We remain silent like that for a long time before she breaks the silence.

“What did Lord McCarthy want with you. We all saw him walking out with you from the wedding?” She asks looking up, and I see that her mask covering her pain was now firmly in place.

I don't want to talk about my woes when she clearly had hers, but I knew she had changed the subject intentionally for that reason.

Sighing, I answer her question, “at first, he wanted to see me and just talk, but we ended up in bed. And just before I left, he proposed.”

Again, Belle looks at me in shock, I go on to lay out Lord's terms of marriage and ask for her opinion on the matter and if I should tell him. I also tell her about the time I'd found out I was pregnant and how I had tried to reach him, but all my efforts had proved abortive.

When I finish talking, I wait for her to say something, but she does not say anything for the longest time.

“I'm thinking of accepting his proposal.” I finally tell her, and I realize it was the truth. At the back of my mind, I already knew what to do. I needed the money more than anything. And this was the fastest way to get it.

“So, you're going to tell him about the kids?” Belle asks.

I don't say anything to that. I would cross that bridge when we got there, but today, I would accept the proposal.

On my way out of the bar, I shoot him a quick text.

“We need to talk.” Is all the text says.

CHAPTER 12

Lord

“You know I could have had her for more than just one weekend, right? I know her school, I could have driven her all week.”

Amelia’s sigh gravels on my nerves, but I keep my patience because I knew she held all the power in this scenario. I could not afford to make her angry.

I had spent most of my life not caring about a lot of things. One of those things was not caring about what others thought. Not caring how my actions affected the people around me. I did what I wanted whenever I wanted and there was no one to hold me back or stop me. Leonie had been my voice of reason most of the time, but even she had her limits and there was only so much she could say to me, that I would be willing to listen to.

Nina had changed all that. She had made me aware of the world in a way I had never been before she was born. Not even Lady had made me like that. With her, I had been too young to realize that there would be consequences for my youthful exuberance.

But with Nina, all I wanted to do, every decision I took was done with only her welfare in mind.

Amelia knew that about me and capitalized on it. She had secured sole custody of Nina at a time when I had been touring after an album release and could not afford the time to fight for my daughter. But I was letting go of the rock star part of my life and embracing the future. Nina was that future, and I

would do everything I could to ensure that we had a solid relationship.

“We already talked about this Lord, Nina has a routine she needs to follow, and you aren’t yet conversant with that routine. We stick to a few weekends until the court says so.” Amelia says.

I hear my daughter in the background, and I am hit with a wave of disappointment that she is not here. The house felt all too empty with just me and the sound of Duchess preparing dinner in the kitchen.

After I hang up from the call, I try to exert my frustrations on the piano.

I had been working on a new tune all day, but so far, the lyrics had been useless. There were pieces of paper scattered all around me, my hands were covered in ink from writing and striking out every single word like it was the cause of my every woe.

When did handwriting songs become such a chore for me? I ask myself. There was a time when it came so easy. I could write a number-one hit in my dream and not feel like I was working at all. But recently writing songs felt nothing like it used to.

Even though I was quitting the band, I still wrote songs, most times I wrote for other artists, other times I simply recorded them in my own personal home studio for future reference. I knew of a few artists who recorded a post-humous album.

My frustrations with Amelia coupled with the anxiety of not hearing from Queeneth was currently serving as a blinding force for me to be able to focus on work. Despite all my efforts to get through to her, which was bordering on stalking, there was still no response from her.

I take a sip of the scotch on the top of the piano and empty the glass pouring myself another.

At this rate, I would be drunk before dinner. I did not know what more I needed to do, and I was on the brink of calling

Leonie for some advice, but knowing my manager, she was more likely to talk me out of getting married than she would be in support of the marriage.

Although, if she figured that it was a marriage of convenience to save my image, she would probably be happy for me.

“Sir, dinner will be ready in an hour.” Duchess’ voice interrupts the silent room and I glance up to find her in the doorway. Her eyes sweep the room, and she looks at me like I’d gone crazy. She does not say anything to that though. She had worked for me long enough to know that I did not like to be disturbed when I was working on a song.

“I’ll be out in an hour then, Duchess.” I say to her, and she nods before walking back out. Fifteen minutes later I am on the verge of giving up when my phone pings on the table. I pick it up and I am shocked when I see it’s a text from Queeneth.

Music forgotten, I get off the bench more nervous than I’ve ever been and open the text. It is a simple message that says we needed to talk. My reply is instant, and I respond telling her I would meet her at her place.

She tells me she’s already on her way here and I am out of the room in an instant. After ordering Duchess to clean up the mess I’d made in the room, I make my way up to my bedroom to shower and get changed all the while nervous about what she wanted to talk about.

I knew it could be nothing, but the proposal and I can only wonder if she was coming over to give me a yes, or if it was to turn me down.

Either way, I am surprised at how excited I am to see her, but I try not to dwell too much on the feeling. Because even if she says yes, this was a business arrangement, a marriage of convenience, and adding feelings into it was only going to make this all the messier.

By the time I hear her car in the driveway, I am already waiting ‘casually’ for her in the living room. Duchess is finally

done with dinner, and I tell her to set the table for two. A few moments after I hear the doorbell and when I open it, she is standing in front of me, finally.

Her cheeks are slightly flushed, and her hair is a mass of curls atop her head like she had just packed it messily a second ago. Her eyes are a little flushed and the way she is staring at me... I reckon I had the same look on my face it takes a whole lot from me not to swoop her into my arms and take her up to my bedroom.

Her lips are a rosy shade of red, her eyes dark like a siren's. She is wearing a short, tight dress that highlights the wide curve of her hips and narrow waist seductively. So much so that all I could think about was peeling her clothes off her.

This time, I would have her in my bed, I would worship her body from head to toe fuck her like I'd had dreams of doing all week, and then do it all over again.

I have no idea how long I stand there staring until I catch myself and then step aside.

"Sorry, come on in." I say and she nods with a small smile before walking past me. Her soft scent of lavender fills the small space between us, and I am aroused beyond reason.

"We need to talk." her voice is a little raspy and her expression unreadable. I nod and motion for her to follow me slamming the door shut behind me.

"My housekeeper made dinner; we can talk while we eat." I tell her. It is not yet dark out, but I figured we would kill two birds with one stone since it was almost sundown anyway.

In the dining room, Duchess is finished with setting the table and the scent of the food fills the entire room.

We settle into opposite sides of the table, but she makes no effort to touch the food. "You're not hungry?" I ask her, brows raised, and she shakes her head.

"Not sure, I can't keep anything down right now." She says with a tight-lipped smile. It was as close to an admission that she was nervous, and I don't know what to make of it. Was she nervous because she was afraid of saying yes or was, she

nervous because she did not want to hurt my feelings when she turned me down.

“Oh.” is all I say, and then I wait for her to lead the conversation. It takes a second before she starts saying anything, and in the meantime, I don’t eat too. I realize I am just as nervous as she was.

“I have thought about your proposal, and my answer is yes.” her voice is soft, and I almost miss the word, but I am staring at her close enough to read her lips. Before I can think to be elated by her response, she is not done, she continues talking.

“I have a few conditions though. And without them, I walk.” she says.

“I would not expect anything less, Queeneth. Whatever you want, you will have it. And we will both get them down in writing.” I tell her and she nods, I gesture for her to name them, and she begins.

“We don’t have to talk about our past, or private matters. This is only on the surface, like you said, and I want the past to remain in the past.”

“Done.” At the back of my mind, I wonder why she would make a rule like that because it was not what I would expect from her. I expect her to ask for a house, or a career boost, or something along those lines, but she does not ask for anything of the sort.

“You will be given an open check, and you can fill in any amount you want. Of course, during our marriage, I’ll foot every bill and those bills would be considered outside the amount written in the check.”

She nods her head, and I wait for her to say something. When she doesn’t, I continue.

“We have to make it as real as we can to the public and that includes a lot of PDAS, whatever you’re comfortable with, of course. You don’t have to spend time with me outside the time stipulated in the contract, but you will be required to

live here and form some kind of relationship with my daughter.”

I give her a pointed look and expect her to protest that point, but to my surprise, she doesn't.

“I think that's all for now. We can make up the rest as we go, but we only go with rules that we will both agree on.” I say and again she nods.

Do you have anything else to add”? I asked her and she looked slightly uncomfortable, but she forges ahead with her question anyway.

“Uhm, what about bedroom activities, I was wondering if that was a requirement?” I am a little surprised by the question, but I answer anyway.

“That is entirely up to us, Queeneth. If it's what we want, then fine. And if not? Then we stick to our own sides of the house.”

We are both silent for a few seconds, staring into each other's eyes. The air cackles with sexual tension, and I get the feeling she was thinking about the last time we'd both been in the kitchen. Her cheeks redden, proving my point and she stands up abruptly.

“I should probably go.” She says and I stand with her too.

“What about dinner?” I ask her gesturing to the food, but she shakes her head.

“I'm good, thanks. I should get going before it gets dark.”

I escort her to her car and tell her my team would contact her on the way forward. We needed to plan a wedding, a press announcement, and a public outing where she would be seen with her ring. She digests all the information without uttering a word and as she drives away, I can't help but wonder if this was going to be a wonderful experience or a terrible one.

CHAPTER 13

Queeneth

“You know staring at it isn’t going to make it disappear into thin air, right?” Belle’s voice snaps me out of my reverie, and I startle up to stare at her. She has an empathetic smile on her face, and I look away.

I had always wondered what it felt like to be engaged, how it would feel to wear the ring of a man I was going to marry, and it was nothing like this. My head aches from thinking too much, the ring feels entirely too heavy and somewhat wrong on my fingers and all I want to do is take it off and board the next flight to France to be with my babies.

But I could do neither of those things. No, what I was doing now was what I needed to do to be able to board that flight finally and be with my children.

Which is why I was currently sitting on the soft plush cushions of My bride & Co. An exclusive, couture bridal dress shop, with Belle helping me pick out a dress. We had walked in twenty minutes ago, and a loafers-wearing, pink suited bald man had instantly walked towards us with a young woman following him, a tray of champagne flutes expertly sitting on one hand, each glass filled to the brim.

I pick up the glass almost instantly and down the entire content dropping it back on the tray and then picking up another glass. I am tempted to drink it just as fast, but the man in the pink suit was currently looking at me like I was growing a horn out of my nose, so I simply take a small sip and give him a chagrined smile.

“That kind of bride, huh?” he had joked, figuring out I was the bride instantly from the dazzling ring on my finger. Lord had spared no expense in getting the ring even though it was a fake marriage. He had put it on my finger just this morning after handing me his Amex card and the key to an expensive-looking Tesla Model S, I had instantly turned down because it had all felt too much, too soon.

The man had set us up on the plush sofa and the dress-hunting had begun in earnest. We were currently on our second dress, and I was already moody from the thoughts that none of this were real. Hunting for a wedding dress was supposed to be exciting with every one of your friends around you to cheer you up and hype your dress.

But Lady was not here, it was just Belle and me.

She was yet to answer any of my calls or texts, and it confirmed what I already suspected that she had somehow heard about her father and me. I had wanted to be the one to break the news to her, but it seemed the decision had been taken out of my hands.

“You heard from Lady yet?” Belle asks, when I don’t comment on the ring and my gaze flies up to hers.

“Nothing yet. You?” I ask and she gives an uncomfortable silence before she responds.

“Yeah, we talked.” is all she says, but I can sense there is more she isn’t telling me.

“And?” I ask giving her a pointed look.

“She’s back from her honeymoon.” Belle finally gives in and spills. My eyes widen in shock and there is a dull ache in my heart that Lady is so mad at me that she returned and would not even bother to get in touch.

“I think she knows about Lord and I.” is all I can say, but Belle does not reply. Her silence is all I need to know that I am right.

“Just give her some time to get used to the idea, I’m sure she’ll come around soon.” Belle tells me, I don’t say anything

to that, because I know she's right. And even worse was the fact that I had not told her about the babies yet.

"What do you think about an off-white, fancy lace with these dull trimmings." Pink-suited guy returns with yet another dress just then, and I am over the art of dress hunting that I get up and tell him that we would be back to continue with our shopping.

Needing something to get my mind off everything I was currently feeling, I turn to Belle and ask about her kids.

"What about your kids." I start and feel her stiffen, but I continue. We are walking along the walkway towards where her car is parked. "Can I see a picture of them?" I ask, still finding it hard to come to terms with the fact that Belle was a mother.

"I don't want to talk about it, Queeneth. I know it's not unfair given you've really opened to me about your four kids. But the difference is I don't have access to mine. And talking about them only makes things worse for me."

Her voice is tainted with a bitterness greater only by the pain I can see in her eyes. It's why I decide to heed her words and respect her choice not to talk about something that was clearly hurting her so much.

She is the one who changes the subject when I don't know what else to say, "What are you going to do after you get married, are you still going to keep the kids from him?" She asks me.

The question had been whirling in my mind ever since I'd made the decision to accept Lord's proposal and I still had no idea whether I was going to tell him. And how I planned to keep it from him in the span of two years, that I will be married to him.

"I have no idea what I'm going to do, but one thing I know is I'll do whatever's best for my kids."

After I escort Belle to where she's parked, I move back to my own car when I run into a group of familiar guys. There

are three of them, and I only know one of them a little more personally.

Benjamin spots me only a few seconds after I've seen him and his smiles widely at me. I wait for them to approach, and he walks into my personal space to hug me tightly and a little too handsy. I extricate myself from his arms as politely as I can, and he does not fail to notice.

The other two guys, Drew and Vince also notice as well, but they only nod in my direction and continue walking on while Benjamin remains.

“Hey baby. What are you doing here? And why you gotta be so cold?” His eyes roam my body and I take a step back, not liking the feel of his gaze on me. Like he owned me.

Benjamin was my ex-boyfriend. We only dated for a little while, right before I met Lord. Benjamin had been too controlling, so I had broken things off with him before it had gotten too far and serious. But being lonely in the city had a way of getting to you and it made you do things you would never do ordinarily. Like calling your asshole of an ex on a tipsy night and having sex with him. So, we have had a few random one-night stands since I got back to the states.

Even though Benjamin was an asshole, he had been familiar which was why I still called him even when Belle and Lady had advised me to stop.

“I came around to do some shopping.” I say to him with a smile that was very much forced.

“Haven't heard from you in a while. I was starting to think you were ghosting me.” he says, still eyeing me from head to toe.

“I can't ghost you, because we're not together, Benjamin. We only fuck occasionally, when either of us feel like it. And I haven't felt like it in a while.” I tell him, and he holds his chest in a dramatic way like he'd just been shot.

“Aw, babe. That's a little bit harsh don't you think.” he says, he is smiling but there is a hint of harshness in his tone. I

don't miss it. He goes stiff suddenly, and I follow his gaze to find he had been staring at my fingers. My ring finger.

“What's that? Don't tell me you're getting hitched, babe.” he asks,

I take that as an ample opportunity to put an end to this once and for all and show him the ring. “We haven't really announced it yet, but yeah. I'm engaged.”

His smile looks forced, but he holds it in place.

“Well, congratulations babe. And who's the lucky man. I mean, I'll definitely miss our hot nights together, but who's to say you won't come running back, eh?”

His words make my skin crawl with irritation, and I start to walk away. “You know what, Benjamin? I gotta go. There's something I need to do. I'll see you around, yeah?”

I walk away before he can stop me towards my car and drive off as fast as I can trying not to dwell too much on the encounter. I face time my mother on my way to break the news to her.

We barely talk for long, but the second I tell her it's a business marriage, she warns me not to do it, saying marriage is not a business arrangement. I don't tell her either that I am marrying the kid's father and after listening to her warn me over and over to be careful I hang up and head home.

Her words remain with me for the longest time, and I wonder if she was right. Was I making a big mistake going into this with all these lies and half-truths marring everything? I had no idea of knowing how Lord would react to me keeping his kids from him for years. He seemed to dote on Nina, but what if he had been like that with Lady too. And then he had abandoned them when things had gotten too hard.

I could not open my kids to that level of hurt. Not until I was sure he was worth it at least.

I am in the kitchen prepping to cook when my phone rings. Its Lord and my heart skip a beat. I wonder how long I would get used to him being back in my life. It still felt surreal that

we were getting married, and it felt like it had not fully sunk in yet.

“Hello?” I answer and there is a rough sound on his end, it sounds like noise from a microphone or a sound system, and I guess he was with the band or in the studio.

“Hey babe.” he starts, and I am surprised at how easily the words had come. I wonder if he meant it or of, he was doing for the benefit of whatever audience he had with him.

“Can you come over to the Richbelly. The guys would love to meet you.” he asks.

“Yeah, I guess I am free now.” I respond.

“Good. I’m sending a car over.” he replies and hangs up before I can say anymore. Staring at the phone in irritation at his commanding tone. I set it down before going into my bedroom to change into something more fitting to meet his band in.

The car arrives in under fifteen minutes, and I am already dressed and waiting. All through the ride, I am nervous as hell. Thinking about how his band would see me. Would they think the age gap between us was too much or would they think I was a gold digger.

I never really understood Lord’s relationship with his band. They were never really friends. But they were not enemies either since they had spent all these years together. It could only be described as complicated. And I was willingly going to get a front-seat witness to their dynamics.

We are in front of the Richbelly restaurant in less than twenty minutes and I square my shoulder before walking into the building, head held high.

CHAPTER 14

Lord

“Mama, I want to go home with Daddy.” Nina’s whiny voice warms my heart and I smile at her tantrum, while Amelia frowns, scolding her that she had school tomorrow and could not leave the house until the weekend.

“You do know I am pretty capable of taking her to school by myself, right? You don’t always have to play by the rules.” I tell Amelia but she frowns at me before turning to Nina and asking her to go to her room.

My daughter frowns as deeply as she could like it would stop her from having to leave, and then seeing there was no progress, she stomps her feet as she climbs the stairs up to her room.

“You should stop encouraging her tantrums if you don’t want her spoiled. You live in New York, and I know you will be going back soon. So, I don’t want her to get used to you taking her to school.” Amelia’s voice makes me turn my head from the stars where I’d been smiling at Nina go up and I shrug her words away.

“Don’t you think you’re being a little too strict with her?” I ask, “I mean, she’s just a child and it wouldn’t hurt to indulge her every once in a while.”

She scoffs like I’d just said the most ridiculous thing.

“Clearly you know nothing about raising kids. Everything she does, is a calculated play to know just how far you’d be willing to let her get away with stuff. And the further you go, the worse she gets.”

“Well, I never knew our daughter was a criminal mastermind.” I say and she gives me the stink eye.

“Why did you come here unannounced, Lord. We aren’t together anymore. You’ve made those clear numerous times. You don’t get to show up whenever you feel like it just because you are in town.” She says, although she doesn’t sound too angry.

“I wanted to come visit my daughter. Seeing her once or twice in two weeks is not nearly enough. You agreed I could see her more, so I would not have to institute a custody action.”

Amelia stiffens and her brow furrows in a frown, “Custody?” she says the words like it’s ridiculous and then she chuckles dryly.

“No court will grant us joint custody, Lord. You’re a rock star who is always on the road, touring more than half the time in a year. How exactly do you think you can have a kid with you on a tour.”

“That’s why I’m here actually.” I tell her and she pauses, suspicion filling her eyes, “I want to talk to you about that.”

She had been slicing cucumbers and she sets it down as if realizing that this was serious. She folds her hands to give me a pointed look.

“I’m getting married.” I say, at first, she just stares at me with a blank expression on her face, and then she starts laughing to my surprise.

I don’t crack a smile, and when she sees my face, it dawns on her that I am serious.

“Oh my God, you aren’t kidding.” She says, the smile on her face gives way to shock, and then something else, that looked close enough to jealousy. She resumes slicing the cucumbers and I can tell it is an act to look unbothered by the news when she was clearly bothered by it.

“We might be giving an official statement to the press soon. I wanted you to hear it from me.” I tell her ignoring the shock on her face.

She doesn't say anything for the longest time, all of which I wait her out and don't say anything else. She finally breaks the silence after almost five minutes.

"Congratulations." she finally says, and the smile on her face looks forced but I might be imagining it. "DO I know her?" She asks and I shake my head.

Things get pretty awkward after I tell Amelia about my impending nuptials. She says she is happy for me, but her actions say otherwise. I don't call her out on it. And I take my leave barely fifteen minutes after I give her the news.

We don't talk about Nina meeting Queeneth yet because I knew she would try to make a big deal of it. I could already tell she felt threatened by the fact that I was getting married, an act that would make me a lot more favourable for joint custody of our daughter in the eyes of a judge. I would let her stew on it for now, and then we would talk about it when the idea had fully sunk in.

I am driving out of Amelia's place when I get a text from Ricky, one of the members of the band. Our drummer. Who happened to be in Prescott now.

"Come meet us at the Richbelly, we've got a cool crowd." The text read.

I ponder my options, between going to the Richbelly and performing for a bunch of adoring strangers or going back home to an empty house. On the flip side, I could finally break it to the band that I was finally retiring and getting married. It was public enough that they would not want to make a scene, and private enough that not many people would hear the news, should any of them decide to go apeshit.

I shoot him a quick reply that I would be there in minutes and reverse the car back towards the route to the Richbelly.

The Richbelly was an exclusive bar, which was more of a club than a bar. But we all called it a bar. It was owned by former beauty queen and elitist Gigi Owens who also happened to be my ex. It was not my favorite spot, but it was not like I could tell them no.

The last time I had talked to them, they were in New York city. I had no idea they had come down here to Prescott. I suspected Leonie had a hand in their sudden appearance in my city, but that would be a discussion for another day.

The bar is not crowded when I arrive only luxury cars are parked out front, and the band was already finishing up with set ups when I arrive.

I spot Gigi almost instantly at the bar chatting up a stuffy-looking suit with an even stuffier drink in his hand as he looked around the bar bored.

Gigi waves slightly at me and I give her a single smile in return. She had not changed in the least since the last time I'd seen her which was over a year ago. Her blonde hair was bleached an even whiter blonde, her skin a shocking tan and her lips were slightly fuller than the last time I'd seen her.

“There he is!” Ricky calls from the stage where the rest of the band are lounging in front of their preferred instrument and I smile, joining them and hugging each one of them one after the other.

There were five of us all together, Ricky, our drummer, is a dark-haired green-eyed Greek god. Frankie: the bassist, has been divorced two times already, and swears he would never get married again, but he is currently seeing another woman, and the other guys have drawn bets on him proposing to her.

Todd and Paul were fraternal twins, both blonde and both tall but that was where their similarities ended. One played the guitar and the other played the piano and then there was me, the lead vocalist of the group.

Paul and Todd had been the first two to start the band and they'd recruited me first before we'd found Frankie and Ricky. But of all the four men, I was closest to Ricky.

“Where have you been hiding asshole.” Todd, the wildest of the group says, slapping my back as he hugged me.

After a few minutes of us making small talk and catching up, we play our first set for only ten minutes. We move to an inner room of the club where we go to relax and get served

drinks by Gigi, and it is here that I decide to break the news to them.

“So, I don’t know if you guys have heard the rumor, or if Leonie broke it to you somehow, but I plan to retire by the end of the year.” I announce, and the room instantly goes so silent you could hear a pin drop.

All of them have varying degrees of shock on their faces and I realize they’d had no idea I was going to do this.

Maybe Leonie had not broken the news to them after all.

“What? Why?” Ricky is the first to react and I can tell the news hits him even harder than the rest, I feel bad for not telling him about it sooner than the others.

“First, you all know I’ve been talking about this for a while. Especially since I had my daughter, but I’m finally doing it, and not just because of Nina.” I pause for a while, looking all four of them in the eye before I continue.

“I’m in love with someone, and I proposed to her a few days ago. We’re getting married.”

“Get the hell out!” Ricky snaps

“We want to meet her.” This time it’s Frankie who speaks, and the rest of them nod their agreement. I stare at their faces and realize that they think I’m making it all up.

“I mean, we believe the whole retiring thing, but you? Getting married? I got to see that one before I believe you.” Todd says and I am irritated by their conclusion that marriage was out of the cards for me.

“Y’all can’t be serious.” I tell them, but no one cracks a smile, and I see that they were serious about it.

Digging out my phone I dial Queeneth’s number. Thankfully, she answers almost instantly.

“Hey Babe.” I tell her, knowing I had to oversell it and Queeneth was smart enough to play along.

I tell her to meet me at the Richbelly and she agrees to be here in a few minutes. When the call is over, I turn back to

them, and all four of them are too shocked to say anything or do anything other than stare.

Gigi calls us back to the stage a few minutes later and it is while we're performing that Queeneth walks in.

All the while I am singing, I can't stop watching her from the stage and she was all smiles and radiance. I was still finding it hard to believe she had said yes to marrying me.

When the set is over, she is the only one in the bar who claps the loudest, hooting and hollering at me while she was at it. It was too cute, and I am laughing as she walks towards me, beaming. I can't tell if it's an act or if its real, but I play along and she does not stop until she is directly in front of me, her palms cup my face and she presses her lips to me. Letting go of the guitar, my arms circle around her waist and pull her even deeper into the kiss and she makes a soft noise at the back of her throat that is almost my undoing.

There are a lot of cheers when we finally break off and I introduce her to each of the band member as my soon to be bride. There is no doubt from their reaction to her that they loved her, and I knew I had made the right decision.

While I leave her to talk to the guys, I walk to the bar to grab her a drink from Gigi and my ex corners me.

"You're engaged to that woman?" Gigi asks eyes widened; she says 'that woman' like she would say the word maggot.

"You seem to have caught onto that pretty quick." I deadpan, not smiling at her blatant disregard for Queeneth.

"Isn't she a little too young for you. I would think a man like you would go after real women and not little girls barely out of their mother's cradle." Gigi says, and I am getting irritated by her words.

"It's funny because I don't remember asking you for permission on who and whom I cannot be with or kill. But to make myself clear, stay the hell away from her." I am about to walk away when her next words stop me in my tracks.

"Oh, I will. It's not me you need to be worried about. You see Queeneth is my nephew's ex. And I'm not very sure they

are even broken up.” Gigi says innocently like she was trying to help. But I know it’s just her jealousy doing the talking.

I ignore the stab of jealousy her words stir up in me, but I don’t let it consume me. I know Queeneth isn’t with anyone.

“Well, as much as I don’t appreciate your unsolicited PI job, we’re just going to have to see about that.” I tell her before walking away.

As I get to the table, I was happy to see Queeneth playing uno card game with my friends. I don’t get the same treatment from her, just her smiles which she bestows on me when she turns and sees me coming towards her.

She was exquisite, and for the moment, she was mine.

CHAPTER 15

Queeneth

I can't believe I've said yes to him. It's been a week, and I'm all moved in. I'm still sleeping in Lady's old room, even though my stuff is in his closets.

One week of living in his house and getting used to the idea of living under the same roof with him.

So far, it had been nothing like I'd expected. For one, I barely saw him given his bandmates were in town, and according to his agent he was obligated to write one more album with the band before his official retirement.

He was a hard worker. It was one thing I had always known from back when I had been his assistant, and it seemed his work ethic had not changed in the slightest.

It was Tuesday morning, I am in the kitchen with Duchess, his housekeeper. We'd become somewhat friends in the days I'd been here. I was a terrible cook and Duchess is teaching me my way around the kitchen.

It was funny because I never showed interest in learning how to cook in the past when my mother tried to teach me. But seeing Lord cook had been an eye opener and it'd made me want to learn. I did not stop to dwell too much on thoughts like that because it had nothing to do with our business marriage.

Or so I told myself.

Duchess was just dishing out the eggs into my plates when the doorbell rings and the front door opens before we can both make the move to go open it. The clock sound of heels hitting the cold tiles tells me instantly that it is a woman coming in,

although I have no idea what woman would be looking for Lord by barely eight a.m. in the morning.

“Lord?” A clear feminine voice calls out for Lord, but he is currently in the gym.

“Uh oh,” Duchess says, and I look at her, to see the realization dawning on her face, before I can ask her who the voice belongs to, the heels round the hallway and appear in front of us.

A very attractive woman who looked to be in between her mid to late forties appears and her wide eyes stare from my face to Duchess.

“You’re his soon-to-be bride?” She asks pointing at me like she already knew the answer to that but needed to ask anyway. And there is so much authority in her tone, that I can’t help but nod at her before I can even think about it.

“Good. You’re awake.” She says, then her eyes roam my body and land on the eggs. “Don’t eat that, you’re going in front of the cameras soon, and you don’t need them speculating your bloated belly for pregnancy.”

She says, the words so factual; it was hard to take offence. I did look down at my belly, touching it to see it was indeed looking a bit bloated. I shift the eggs aside and receive a frown from Duchess.

“Where the hell is Lord?” the woman continued, her eyes searching the room like she was expecting him to materialize out of nowhere.

“He’s in the gym.” I answer just as the sound of Lord’s footsteps sounds in the hallway. The woman looks up at him and frowns slightly.

“Why aren’t you ready?” she asks, staring from him to me and then realizing that I was also not ready for whatever we were supposed to be ready for.

“Dammit, Lord! Why don’t you ever read your emails. You two have a press conference in...” she checks her time and then glances back up at him.

“Twenty minutes.” She says aghast.

I have no idea who she is except that she looks vaguely familiar, and the fact that she’s the only one I’ve ever seen speak to Lord in a way that was anything other than deferential, told me a lot about their relationship.

“Leonie, you’re my manager. You could have just called me to tell me this,” he says, my gaze turns to him for the first time, and I forget every single thing they’d been talking about.

He is wearing gym shorts and a t-shirt already soaked with sweat. The bulge of his muscles and biceps is visible through them and I gulp a little loudly. All three of them turn to me and there is an arrogant smirk on Lord’s face when he sees the reaction his body elicits from me.

I blink away, my cheeks flaming up as I look down on the eggs, I had discarded wishing I could eat them and take some of the attention from me.

“Hey babe.” Lord says to me, and he is already walking towards me, before I know it, he spins me around on the chair and presses a small kiss to my lips. My face tingles, my toes curl, and my stomach dips.

All just from one kiss. I was in trouble with this man.

When we separate, I catch the tail end of Leonie, whom I now remember as his manager, rolling her eyes.

“You two can save the theatrics for the camera, I know it isn’t real.” She says and my eyes widens, she walks further into the kitchen and smiles when she sees my surprise.

“No need to be surprised, honey. There’s very little about this man that I don’t know. Now if you don’t have any skeletons up in your cupboards then this should be the best thing to happen to pop culture since the Clooney wedding.” she speaks.

I try not to let my guilt show on my face, and I hope to God that she does not find out about my kids. She looked like a real go-getter and one that should not be messed with.

“Do you speak, or are you too dazzled by your fiancé’s presence?” Leonie asks.

“Well, I would speak if you didn’t love your voice so much that you think it’s the only one, we would love to hear.” I tell her, eyebrows raised.

There is a stunned silence from all the parties, and I get the feeling very few people talked back at Leonie.

Her surprised morphs into a smile as she stares at me, and then she speaks, “Where did you find her, Lord. I think I love her already.” She says.

“Glad you approve.” Sarcasm drips out of my voice, but I am smiling too. Leonie might be a ballbuster, but anyone who could talk Lord McCarthy down a peg, was someone worth admiring.

One hour later, Lord leads me out of the conference as the press yell questions at us, and I’m shocked by how protective he is. He goes to get the car, and then I glance back feeling eyes on me, I am shocked to see Lady. For the first time since she got married. She should be 12 weeks pregnant now since she was 10 weeks pregnant at the time of her wedding, her belly is not as big as when my quadruplets pregnancy was that old. I got huge.

She looks furious. I want to tell her the truth, that I never knew he was her father, until on her wedding day but I promised Lord I wouldn’t say anything about this not being real. I had already told Belle and being honest with Lady meant that I had to come clean about the kids too. Something I suspected she would not take as good as Belle had.

Walking away from the car, I approach her, and I am surprised when she does not instantly tell me to get lost. I take that as good news.

“I am confused as to what I should call you now.” She starts before I have the chance to apologize or explain myself, “My best friend, or my stepmother.”

“Lady, I—” But she was already stopping me and not just stopping me, she starts walking away.

“Save your explanations and lies for someone who needs to hear it, Queeneth.” She storms away to the car that her husband is driving, and I watch her go, sadly. I really hope this chance at getting enough money to get my babies back doesn’t cost me our friendship.

I am afraid it already had, but I am hopeful that I could undo the damage with time.

I’m quiet on the drive home. When Lord pulls the car over, he moves a piece of my hair out of the way and asks if I’m okay.

I am not, but I don’t want to think about the mess, I want only to think about him for now, and the best way he could distract me from it all, I can’t help it. I kiss him, leaning away from my seat into him, my hands pulling at his hair and lips entangling with his in the best way.

When we pull back, I’m panting and so is he.

Lord’s eyes flicker across my face, something like concern on his expression. He strokes the side of my face, almost lovingly, and I decide, *fuck it*.

It’s not like I’ll be in *worse* trouble with Lady—or with my own warring feelings—if we have sex again.

I check out the window, but as expected, the yard is empty. Nina is with Amelia today. And for once, Lord’s obnoxious obsession with security comes in my favor: there are privacy fences surrounding the property, so high that no one could ever see in.

I kiss him languidly. My tongue strokes his, lips pressing and pulling. Gently, I bite his bottom lip, and then sooth it with my tongue. All the while, my hand trails lower and lower. When I reach his waist, I pull back.

“Let me,” I plead.

His green eyes are dark, pupils swollen. He nods, and his face tightens as he clearly tries to control himself from lifting his hips as I undo his belt.

I make fast work of his belt. Unbuttoning his pants and pulling down the zipper on his fly, I slip my fingers into the slit of his boxers.

“Fuck, Queeneth,” he gasps.

I bit his bottom lip again. “Not quite,” I tease.

He rolls his eyes, but his expression is too taut and wrecked for it to hold any heat. I let him kiss me lazily as I work his hardening erection.

Once he’s fully hard, I pull away a little and start leaving soft trails of kisses down his jaw, across his chin, on his neck. I swipe my thumb across the head of his dick, smearing precum down to help me pump his shaft.

“Don’t close your eyes,” I scold when I pull away and see that his head is thrown back, eyes squeezed shut.

On my command, his eyes open, and he stares at me with blatant desire.

“You’re so gorgeous,” he breathes, head lolling to the side as he looks at me.

“You’re gorgeous,” I say, and I squeeze him. It’s like stars are in his eyes, he reacts so brightly.

“Fuck!”

“Watch my fingers around your cock, Lord,” I say. His breathing stutters, and I feel his full cock twitch in my hand. “Watch how you fuck my hand so pretty.”

He does, and I watch, too. It’s obscene, watching my sticky fingers pull and twist and glide up and down him.

When it’s clear he’s about to come, his breathing uneven and his hips twisting, I press my lips against his in an open-mouth kiss. He comes all over my hand, the warm sensation sliding between my fingers, and I jerk him off slowly through it while he screams into my mouth.

We pull away from each other, and Lord looks at me like I’ve hung the moon. It fills me with arousal, and something closer to pride.

“I think,” I say softly, kissing him once more. He’s moving forward, chasing me, when I pull away. “That it’s time to go inside.”

CHAPTER 16

Lord

When I wake up the next morning, her hair is splayed over the pillow, covering more than half of her face. She looked a little paler than she had been the first time I'd seen her at the wedding two weeks ago.

I would attribute it to the fact that she had been indoors more than she had been outdoors in the week since she'd moved into the house. I'd noticed that she spent a lot of time on her own, a trait I'd not known about her five years ago. A part of me tells me she was hiding something, but I could not for the life of me figure out what she could be hiding.

If it was her past, I did not care about any of it. All I cared about was the present. She felt so soft against me. Soft and pliant, my fingers shift off some of her hair from her face to stare fully at her. Her slightly parted lips are tinged pink, and her pale cheeks was bunched against the pillows. She looked so cute, I wanted to store up this memory of her like this in a place where I could never forget.

After staring at her for a creepy length of time and wondering how she had not so much as moved in the one hour since I'd been awake. I get out of bed and make my way to the kitchen to make us both breakfast.

My phone pings with a text just as I am taking out the eggs from the fridge and I glance at it to see its from Lady. I had not heard from her since the wedding even though I had sent her a couple of texts. Queeneth had mentioned that she had been ignoring her ever since she left, and I hated how sad it made

her but even worse was knowing I could not do anything about it.

The text read that we needed to talk.

It sounds ominous and I did not know what to expect. I realize now she was one of the first persons I should have told since she was Queeneth's best friend.

I respond her text and tell her we could meet up whenever she was ready, and she tells me the next day was a good time.

Just as I am finishing up with the eggs, I hear Queeneth coming down the stairs. A few moments later, she appears in the doorway. Her hair is damp which meant that she'd showered, and she was wearing a pair of shorts and one of my shirts.

It was the first time she was putting on my clothes, and I am swept with a wave of possessiveness just by seeing her in my clothes. She smiles and I can't stop looking at her. Turning off the stove, eggs forgotten, I turn towards her, just as she walks into my arms, standing on her tiptoes and pressing her lips to mine.

"Good morning." she whispers against my lips after a small peck, her lips were still wide in her smile. She had never looked so perfect. Face free of makeup, eyes, glistening with excitement and lips slightly swollen from all our kisses last night.

Memory of last night, brings back the memories of my cock in those pretty pink lips and I am already hard as hell. But I knew she had to be sore from last night. I lean down to kiss her again; this time her hands trail down to my cock and she strokes it.

Chuckling lightly, I get a hold of her hand and bring it up to my mouth.

"You are insatiable." I tell her, and her smile turns seductive.

"I learned from the best."

Taking one step back despite her groan of protest, I move to the other side of the counter and set her plate down on the table before dishing out her food.

Without another word, she moves towards the food and settles in before taking one big bite groaning and shaking her head with eyes closed.

“If I knew that accepting to be your wife meant that I get to wake up to this breakfast everyday it would have been a no-brainer.” she says with a smile after eating the first spoon and it makes me chuckle at her enthusiasm over the food.

“I guess, I should have led with that then.” I say and she nods her head,

“I mean, I would have said yes on the spot.” she added with a laugh, we are smiling at each other like lovesick puppies before she breaks the contact first to look down at her food. Her smile slips and I have no idea what caused the slip in her mood.

“We should probably talk about the wedding.” I start and she looks up, a little surprised that I was asking. “I never asked about your dress-shopping.”

She groans softly slapping both her palms against her forehead, “Oh my God, I had no idea there were so many shades of white.”

Her words make me laugh and she raises her stare back up to me, “It’s not funny” She groans, and it makes me laugh even more.

“I know, I’m sorry. I mean, I used to think women were really into these kinds of stuff. I thought you found wedding planning exciting.”

“Believe me, babe. No one finds wedding planning exciting.”

The babe slides so easily out of her mouth, that I’m not even sure she’d noticed. She carries on talking about the dude in the pink loafers and pink suit she’d met at the shop and the way he probably hated her for not being like he’d expected.

“I don’t really want much for the wedding. Something small and intimate would be nice. I just wish my mom and the k-” she stops suddenly, her eyes widening, and I have no idea what she had been about to say and why she’d stopped so suddenly.

“What were you saying?” I ask and she shakes her head, she looks so guilty, I can’t help but wonder what she had to feel guilty about.

“Oh, nothing. Just that, I wished my family could come.” she says, a wistful note in her voice, and she continues, “I don’t want to lie to them. There’s no point telling them about this when we’re just going to get divorced in a couple of years.”

Her words hurt more than they should. I look away from her in a bid to hide just how much her words hurt. My feelings for her got complicated by the day. I wasn’t sure divorce was in the cards for me. Even if she did not know it yet.

We spend the rest of the day together, and it feels like no time at all had passed. That night we retire into the mini movie theatre in the basement of the house, and we watch a sappy love story film that had her crying against my chest and wiping her tears with my shirt.

By the time the movie is over, she was already fast asleep against me, and I carry her with me back to my bedroom. For now, it feels like it’s just us in the world. There was no press, no lies, no acting.

Just two people being with each other in the best way they knew how.

It takes me longer to fall asleep because all I can think about is how this marriage was not at all an arrangement for me, and how to make her see it that way.

CHAPTER 17

Queeneth

Bianca's email about my resignation from the airline stares back at me. I wonder if I've made the right decision.

But recalling the number of zeroes on the contract which Lord's lawyers had sent me consoles my near panic. I would not even make that amount of money from the airline in twenty years. And I was going to make it in two years, just by being married to Lord McCarthy.

Bianca threatened not to write me any recommendation letter because of the unexpectedness of my resignation and without any prior notice. I wonder how many people I would piss off by this decision.

Flinging my phone back on the bed, I stare up at the glass ceiling at my reflection. Lord's room was enormous and whoever had done the interiors deserve an architectural digest award or something.

The walls were a stunning white color, pristine and untainted. And it contrasted beautifully against the patterned black and white curtains covering the floor to ceiling glass walls. It overlooked the back where the bed of flowers separated the path that led to the pool.

His bed was so big it could comfortably house at least six people my size and we'd slept on it last night pressed against each other like we'd been doing since that first night we'd spent together.

The entire room, closet and end suite bathroom could fit about three sizes of my apartment, and I'd never seen a man

own so many clothes.

Ever since Lord and I slept together again, I've been sleeping in his bed. He's become attentive and loving—though I know it's just because he's trying to keep me happy before we get married. He's downstairs making coffee and breakfast, and I stay in bed on my phone for a bit. I try calling Lady, but she's still ignoring me. I'd seen others on the receiving end of Lady's anger in the past. She could hold a grudge for a very long time.

I'd seen her ignore her father's calls numerous times in the past even though I'd not known at the time that Lord was her father. And now, I feel sad to be on the receiving end of that anger, at the time she is trying to repair her fractured relationship with Lord.

So, I FaceTime Belle instead.

We talk for a bit about everything that's going on, and she tells me that she'll try talking to Lady. I hang up on her when I see my mom is calling me.

As soon as I answer, I hear the kids: they're screaming. Everyone is fine, but Luke broke his arm on the playground, and he wanted to talk to me. I do my best to calm everyone down, and I promise to get on the next plane to France.

I'm crying when I hang up, and Lord comes in with my coffee. He comes over, sweet and concerned, and asks me what's wrong. Before I can decide on whether to tell him, the sound of the doorbell interrupts the moment and we are both silent for a second as we stare at each other as if to be sure, we'd just heard the bell.

Then we heard a bang on the door, and Lord moves first. "Hold on." he says before walking out of the room.

I only hesitate for a second before I quickly grab my robe and follow him. As I reach the bottom of the stairs, Lord is already opening the door to a familiar woman standing in our doorstep all dressed in pink.

She looked like she was on her way to one of those rich housewives' brunch, with her pink tweed suit and pink boots

and in her hands, she held a tiny purse not even bigger than my fists and her phone.

Her eyes darts from Lord in front of her, to me coming down the stairs and her eyes widens.

“She’s here? Good. This will make it even easier.” She says and before Lord can stop her, she walks right past him, he turns to her, getting over his shock.

“What the hell is this, Gigi?” his voice is hard and quiet, and it stops her in her tracks, her bravado falters and she gives me a cold look before she turns back to him.

I realize why she looked familiar when he called her name. I’d seen her the other day at the Richbelly talking to Lord and I heard she ran the place.

“We need to talk about her, Lord. There’s a lot you don’t know about her, and I think you’re making a big mistake by marrying her gold-digging self.” there is so much irritation in her voice and I wonder what I had done to deserve her ire.

I also wonder about what she thinks she knows. There was no way she knew about my kids. I had no idea who she was, and I had been careful to keep that knowledge to myself. Only a handful of people knew about them. In fact, there were only two people, Belle, and Benjamin.

And Benjamin had only known about it because he’d seen their pictures on my phone, and I’d told him in a moment of weakness.

“You don’t get to come here unannounced and insult my fiancée. You must not know me at all, if you think I’ll listen to whatever bullshit story, you think you have.” Lord snaps at her and the door.

“Get out!” he orders coldly, but Gigi does not move an inch.

Instead, she takes a deep breath, Lord and I exchange a glance, my hands tighten on my robe and my heart is pounding in my chest.

“She has four kids. Quadruplets to be precise, and they are with her mother in France. She shuttles between her time here and in Calais.

I only know because they belong to her ex-boyfriend who happens to be my nephew, my brother’s son whom I have always bothered to get married.”

She says it all in one long breath and it feels like the world was closing in on me. I wanted the floor to open so I could disappear into it just so I did not have to face all these.

“What!” Lord’s voice is one of incredulity at first and I can tell he was struggling to believe a word she was saying, but his smile falters when he sees I don’t debunk her claims.

You have been depriving those kids of their father long enough. Benjamin needs to have his children back, and I won’t let you foist them onto another man for your selfish gains. Benjamin was at my place a few days ago, after he said he met you in town with your engagement ring, the day you guys came to Richbelly to rub it on my face, in the name of Lord introducing you to his band mates.”

“They aren’t Benjamin’s!” I snap at her, but she simply shakes her head, like nothing I said could be believed.

And then she turns to Lord who is still in shock, her eyes pleading “Come back to me, Lord. You know I only want what’s best for you. Girls like her, only want one thing from you; your money.”

“Get out.” Lord’s voice is shrill and cold, and I’d never heard him speak like that to anyone, ever. Gigi looks like she’d won, and she gives me a look like I was vermin. I want to start to plead with him, but he raises his head to Gigi and repeats himself to both our surprise.

“I said, get out.” he says, this time there is no doubt he was talking to her.

Her eyes widen in shock and she turns to me, eyes full of hate and then she storms out of the house leaving us alone.

Lord turns to me after the longest silence.

“Start talking”

CHAPTER 18

Lord

“Start talking.”

I almost don't recognize my voice as a mix of emotions whirls through me. Gigi's words reverberate over and over in my head, and I try to make sense of it, but it just did not make sense to me.

As I stare at the shocked look on her face, there is no doubt that there is some truth to her words, how much truth in it was what I could not make out. My eyes roam her small frame, swallowed up by the robe that is entirely too big for her, I wonder if it was possible that she had carried four kids and I had not been able to tell the difference.

I had chucked up the changes in her body to age, and time. Her breasts were fuller, her hips very much wider than before. But her stomach was still a bit flat and compact, other than a few stretch marks and a thin line underneath her abdomen, there was no other sign.

I had not dwelt much on the line because.... I did not know what I had thought, but it occurs to me now that I should have asked her about it.

When she does not say anything, I move towards the kitchen because I needed to sit down, the sound of her bare feet on the tiles tells me she was following.

“I can explain.” She says, her voice sounds resigned, and I chuckle the sound dry and humorless.

“Funny, since that is exactly what I just asked you to do.” I tell her, rounding the hallway into the kitchen, I settle into one

of the stools while she remains standing in the doorway. She is entirely too far away, but it feels like we needed the space.

Why would she keep something so significant from me, had Gigi been telling the truth and she had been using me all along? It did not make any sense.

I don't know what to believe. Anger and betrayal swirled within me, threatening to consume me, and I needed to know what was true or not.

My eyes dart up to hers, and she is still looking at me like a wounded Lion about to attack at any moment.

“Well?” I ask.

“Do you have kids, or did Gigi just make up the whole thing?” I ask her and she shakes her head.

“She wasn't lying about the fact that I have kids.” She says, “I do. Four of them.”

Even though, Gigi had already said it, hearing her confirm it hits different, I feel my heart break at the fact that maybe she had indeed been using me while I had been falling for her.

“But they aren't my ex's children.” She says, and then pauses, my eyes are staring deep into hers, and she looks ready to break down into tears any minute. I wait with bated breath for her to tell me the father of her children, but nothing prepares me for what she says next.

“They're yours. I was not pregnant before we met. I repeat, not pregnant. And I never had anything to do with any man until years after our babies were born.” She says and I get off the seat so abruptly that it crashes to the floor, she startles back but I am not fazed.

The kids are mine. She was pregnant when I left. At first, I'm upset—how could she have lied to me?

Why did she keep my kids away from me for years, and then accept to marry me, even if the marriage is fake. But as I think about it, I realize there were so many reasons why she would not tell me. None of them good, none of them paints me in a positive light and it fucking makes me mad as hell.

“Why?” I ask her, “Why didn’t you tell me? Were you even going to tell me after the wedding?” My questions come in droves as I take step after step towards her, but she stands her ground and even with the tears streaming down her cheeks, she is unmoving.

“No, don’t cry, Queeneth, you don’t get to play the victim!” I raise my voice at her, and she winces, but I am still unfazed, “You don’t get to cry and get a free pass. You kept my kids from me!”

“You think I wanted to!” she speaks for the first time and her voice is raised, stunning me into silence for the time being.

“What? You think I wanted to be a single mother of four babies in my early twenties” she continues to raise her voice, pushing herself from the wall and walking towards me. This time it’s me who takes a step backwards.

“You left, Lord! Your phone had been disconnected and your emails were unavailable.” her tears fell harder as she speaks and something akin to guilt prickles my chest.

“You were practically a ghost, but still, I tried to find you. And I did, I tried to reach you so many times, if I didn’t see you receiving an award on the television, I would think you were really a ghost. But I was turned away at every turn.” She cried, she releases a deep sob, and swallows it back. And then she wipes her cheeks angrily and continues.

“I flew to New York to see you too. But I was not allowed to see you, you were either too busy, or you were making music, or you were resting. No time for a groupie like me obviously.”

“You were not a groupie!” I snap the words, harsher than I intend for it to come out, but she ignores me and continues.

“Well, I was treated like one. And there’s only so much a person can beg before they come to the realization that they aren’t wanted.” Her voice is laced with a bitterness, her eyes staring faraway, like she was remembering a time I did not know.

“And I left with my babies.” She finally says going silent.

A deep overpowering sense of guilt and shame fills me, and I realize why she had been so angry with me that first day at the wedding. I thought she had been mad about me leaving and ghosting her, but she had been mad about something much deeper.

I had been so caught up in my own life, and ambitions that I had neglected to consider the consequences of my actions, just like with Lady.

Queeneth's words had struck a chord within me. And I realize the kind of man I was. The kind that was to focus on his own selfish desires to think about others. I had abandoned my kids yet again, even though it had been unintentional, it still felt like I had abandoned them. And now instead feeling sorry for myself, or getting angry at Queeneth, I needed to start making amends.

"Were you ever going to tell me about them, even after we got married?" I ask her the niggling question, wondering how she had planned to keep them from me.

Even though I had the bulk of the blame for not trying to find her those years ago, she had found me years later, and she had kept it from me, I did not understand her rationale behind that.

"To be honest?" She starts her eyes looking resigned, "I don't know what I was going to do. All I know is that I wanted to get the money settlement so that I could bring them back to the states with me, or at least move back to France to be with them."

She then tells me they were with her mother because she could not afford to be in France without a job.

I realize my absence had deprived my kids, not just one parent, but two and I feel extra guilty: all she needs is money, and I denied her that. The kids have been without both of us because of me. I feel the steely resolve in my mind to make it up to them, and not just them, to her too. I needed to prove myself to her and them that I could be the father they needed, and the man she wanted me to be.

In that moment, my feelings for her had never been clearer. I wanted her in my life, deceit, or no deceit. My feelings for her are genuine and all I wanted was for us all to be a family. Me, and her and all five of my kids.

“I’m sorry.” I finally tell her, “For all the pain I caused you. For not being there when you needed me to be and for leaving the way I did.”

She looks a little surprised by my apology and her eyes lowers as she looks sorry too.

“And I’m sorry too. I should have told you the second you came back into my life.”

After a few moments of silence, I break it first.

“I want to meet them.” I tell her and she raises her head in surprise, “As soon as I possible. I want to meet all four of them.”

CHAPTER 19

Queeneth

The soft cushions of Lord's private jet do nothing to calm my frayed nerves. The events of the past eight hours still feel surreal, and I feel like I could wake up from this dream at any possible time.

But this was no dream, Lord and I were really sitting in the back. We were on an eleven-hour flight to Calais. We were already six hours in already and I had still been unable to close my eyes for a nap.

Lord had dozed off after one of the hostesses, had served us lunch. It had felt a little off being served in the private jet, and I chucked it up to the fact that I was used to being the one doing the serving on a plane.

Now was probably the best time to tell my mother we were on the way. I had put it off until the very last minute because I did not know how to tell her that the father of my children was finally showing up to see them after five long years.

Lord had been unstoppable in the time it had taken after I told him about the kids, up until we boarded the plane. He had made just one phone call to his pilot and the entire staff of his jet, and they had everything ready for us in under four hours. When he said he wanted to see the kids, I had thought he meant, he wanted to see them in maybe a week or a month. At least to give them enough time to get used to the idea.

But hearing that Luke had suffered a dislocated arm had sped things up, and because I was also very much eager to see

my sweet kids, I did not tell him no when he'd suggested we leave asap.

Taking my phone out, I text my mother.

"We're on our way." is all I send, and her response is almost instant.

"We? I thought you said you quit your job to get married?" She replied, and I sigh.

"Please don't freak out. I'll explain when we get there. But I'm coming back with the children's father." The text was barely sent before my phone vibrates with her ringtone, but I don't pick it up. First, Lord could easily hear whatever we were saying, and I was not yet ready to get scolded by my mother.

I would put that off until the very final moment. Lord had no idea what he was in for. Her text follows only moments after the phone stops ringing.

"Answer your phone, Queenie. You can't just drop something this big on my lap and expect me not to freak out."

I sigh, knowing that I'd expected nothing less. My head was already aching, and I knew it was only just the beginning.

"Please mom. I'll explain everything when we arrive."

The three dots appear like she was still typing another reply, but then it disappears seconds later, and I heave a sigh of relief. I knew the worst was not yet over, but this was a reprieve.

Five hours later, someone taps me awake and I open my eyes to Lord sitting right beside me. It takes me a second to realize we were in Calais and almost instantly, my heart starts to race with a mix of anticipation and fear.

Anticipation that I was finally going to see my kids, and fear of the unknown, which was their reaction to Lord and vice versa.

What if he leaves after all this. I would not be able to forgive myself for introducing them to this kind of pain.

The thought runs through my mind, and I can't ignore the rightness of it. Even though I had always feared telling them about Lord, a part of me had always waited with inevitability for the time when they would ask about their father. Then, I would have no choice but to tell them, because lying to them would have been out of the question.

They would decide for themselves if they wanted to have a relationship with him or not. Much like Lady.

"We're here." Lord says, and my eyes look over to the window. There is a Rover waiting for us a small distance from the plane, and a man dressed in suit is standing by the car. I wonder how Lord had been able to make all these arrangements in such short time, but then I realize that with the right amount of money, anything was possible.

I look up into his face and I can't get a read on what he was thinking, or how he felt. If he was nervous or fearful, I had no idea.

"Aren't you scared?" I ask him, not moving from the seat and his gaze softens. For the first time since we get on the plane, he lets me see how he really feels.

"I'm terrified." He says with a humorless laugh, and I see the fear in his eyes. His shoulders sag only for a second as he stares into the space behind me for a second.

"I mean, they're just five-year olds, but I feel like how it would feel if I was on the final day of judgement after a long court case.

"You're going to be fine." I finally say, taking his hands in mine and staring down at our joined hands. He laces his fingers through mine after only a second, his huge hands swallowing up my much smaller ones.

"You don't know that." He says, and I glance up into his eyes.

"I do." I tell him, and he gives me a doubtful gaze, "I mean it!" I insist shaking our hands to keep his eyes on mine, so he knows just how serious I was.

“I’ve seen you with Nina, and you’re amazing. You would not be here, if I did not think that.” I tell him and he nods, and his eyes never leaving me.

Lord leads us out of the plane towards the waiting car.

“Queeneth,” Lord calls me, and I turn to him at the back of the car. The driver is in the front, quiet and we were yet to move.

“You need to give the driver an address.” Lord says and I gasp, realizing I was causing the holdup.

I give the driver my mother’s address off the tip of my head, and he finally moves. When we’re ten minutes away from the house, I shoot my mother a quick text to tell her we were close, but she does not reply. It leaves me apprehensive, but I try not to show it.

And then we’re backing into the driveway on the familiar street, my heart is pounding in my chest and my palms are ridiculously sweaty. To my surprise, when I turn to Lord, he looks so calm it was almost as if our roles were reversed, and I was the one meeting the kids for the first time.

“Why are you so calm?” I ask him and he smiles.

“I already told you, I’m not. I guess I’m just better at hiding my nerves,” he says and then he takes my hand again, I tighten my hold on his as we step out of the car and walk towards the front door.

My mother opens the door, her eyes move first to me, and then darts to Lord’s. She looked mad and ready to do what I do not know but her words die on her lips the second she recognizes it was Lord McCarthy.

“Oh my god!” She gasped, her gaze flying from my face back to his.

My mother and I were so much alike when it came to our looks. She had the exact same exact shade of brown eyes like me, but her hair was blonde while I had taken after my father’s brown hair. Her hair which used to be just like mine was now permanently trimmed to a perfect blunt-cut bob.

She always told me; my wide hips had been passed to me from my Italian grandmother whom I had never met.

Her shock morphs into anger and pure loathing as she stared at Lord, hands folded under her chest, and stance cold as ice as she remains unmoving against the doorway.

“Mom....”

She barely spares me a glance, her sole focus on Lord. “Go in, Queenie. I think this man and I are going to have a few words.”

I turn to him, and then to her and I am about to protest but Lord turns to me and stops me.

“It’s alright. Go on in.” he says. I want to ignore him and say more, but my mother’s face tells me that this was not up for debate. I had lived with her long enough to know that she would not budge when she was like this.

Casting another cautionary gaze on Lord, I make my way into the house.

The kids are in the living room with one of the nannies, and they glance up when I walk in. The shock on their faces tells me that my mother had not informed them that I was coming, and their screams and excited squeals make the past tumultuous hours more than worth it.

“Mama!”

All four of them scream at the top of their voices and other than Luke, the three of them tackle me to the floor, laughing and still screaming at the top of their voices. I am so excited, tears well up in my eyes and I let it fall.

My hands tighten on three of them before they give way for Luke whose arm is still in a cast and I hug him too before examining his wound.

“Welcome, Ms Queeneth.” the young nanny sitting with them greets when I finally stand to my feet and follow them deeper into the living room. Olivia remains by my side, hands refusing to leave mine. It tugs at my heart because I knew it

was fear of me leaving that has her holding on so tightly to me.

“Thanks Ava.” I reply.

We spend the next few minutes with them filling me in on all I’d missed, all the while I am still slightly apprehensive about my mother and Lord outside.

“Guys, I’ve got news for you.” I tell them, and their eyes widen with excitement. “There’s someone I want you to meet.”

I pause for a few seconds, not really sure how to proceed, before I continue.

“Is it your boyfriend?” Olivia asks smiling coyly and I chuckle at her words, the boys on the other hand did not look so happy about that.

“Well, I guess you could call it that, but this is not just my boyfriend.” I pause for a second, staring at their curious little faces, “He’s also your father. Your dad is here, and he wants to meet you all.”

The room is very silent after I make my announcement, and Olivia’s smile had vanished. Their tiny faces turns serious as they stare at the hallway leading to the front door.

“Guys? What do you think?” I ask them.

“I thought we didn’t have a dad.” Nolan asks, his brows furrows and he looks so much like his father in that instant it was almost uncanny.

“Everyone has a dad, silly.” Olivia scolds him and he frowns even deeper at her.

“Don’t call your brother silly, honey. But she’s right, Nolan. Everyone has a dad, and yours just didn’t know about you all until recently and he moved heaven and earth to come see you as soon as he did.”

Another short silence follows before Luke breaks the silence this time, he had been awfully quiet as usual, “Does that mean, you didn’t tell him about us?” he asks and my heart skips a beat, afraid that they would be too angry at me when

they heard the truth, but just then the front door opens and the sound of my mother's footsteps and Lord's echoes into the house.

"They're here." I tell them just before they got to us.

I stare at both my mother and Lord, but their expressions gives nothing away about what they had been discussing. And then Lord's eyes darts down to me and around to see his kids. His eyes soften like he was close to tears.

I hear my mother ask Ava to give us some privacy, but my entire attention was right here.

"Are you our daddy?" Olivia is the one who breaks the silence first and Lord nods, like his throat wads clogged and he could not manage to string any words together.

"Yes." He finally says, "yeah, I'm your father."

And then to both our surprises, our daughter bolts from my side and vaults across the room, straight into his arms. It takes only a second for the boys to start running towards him as well and he kneels down to gather all four into his arms.

My tears were uncontrollable at this point. And I realize how wrong it had been of me to keep them from their father all along.

And I knew without a doubt that my feelings for Lord McCarthy were real. I would never bring him to France if I did not fully trust him.

CHAPTER 20

Lord

In the span of hours, I've gone from a father of two children to six.

A part of me wants to be resentful for being kept away from my kids for the first, almost five years of their lives. But one thing I've come to realize in a long time is that with kids, you can never be too careful.

So, despite my regret that I had missed out on the early years of their lives I'd tried to understand her reasons for keeping them from me. She had been young when she had them, and it had taken a lot of courage to raise four kids on her own.

And I understood that her reasons for keeping them from me had not been born out of spite, but fear that I'd abandon them.

We'd had the longest talk that first night after the kids had gone to bed, Queeneth and I. She had told me her fears, and her reasons for not telling me. She'd also apologized more than she probably needed to, and I could see she had her own regrets as well for not telling me. We had both made mistakes, and we acknowledged them. And even when Alice, her mother had railed at me, I let her because a part of me knew I deserved no less.

That first night, Queeneth had asked me what her mother and I had talked about, but I never told her. There was no reason to. Alice had been a scared mother, and it was clear she loved the kids and would do anything for them. She had told

me to leave in that instant if I knew that I would not be willing to uphold my responsibility to the kids because even without me, they did not want for anything.

My ego had taken a hit at that, but they were my children, and I loved them even before I met the four of them. Olivia, Luke, Nolan, and Jacob; they were around Nina's age too, and each of them with distinct personalities that amazed me.

Queeneth and I had agreed to move the children back to the US. Alice had been sad and heartbroken, and it was clear she would miss them, but even she understood that the kids needed to be with their parents. And she could always come visit whenever she wanted to.

Despite our rocky start, we'd parted on a more cordial footing. We were not best friends yet, though she acknowledges being one of my fans. I could see that she still did not trust me, but she trusted her daughter, and she was willing to give me the benefit of doubt.

Now, almost a week after we'd moved the kids, we were finally starting to settle into the idea of having them here with us. The wedding planning was on an indefinite hold and all our focus was now directed at the kids.

I loved watching her with them, the gratitude and wonder in her eyes whenever she was with them made her even more breathtaking. She had told me on our second night back to Prescott that she had been afraid she would never be able to save enough to send them back to the states and that they would grow up to hate her.

The kids were situated in their rooms, the wonder and excitement of everything new was yet to fade from their eyes.

"What time did Amelia say she would be here?" Queeneth's voice makes me raise my eyes from the pancakes that I was making, and my brows rise in approval at the sight of her in the tight black dress.

Her hair had been done up in a ponytail, her face perfectly made up with her signature red lips and smoky eyes. I wanted to forget about everything and take her back upstairs to bed,

but my body was already getting used to my permanent desire for her. All she needed to do was walk into a room and I was hard for her.

Shoving down the dirty thoughts of fucking her right here in the kitchen, I answer her innocuous question.

“In... about two hours.” I tell her, glancing at the time on my phone first. She nods, adjusting her dress and then walking towards me to turn her back to me. Her zip was still not completely done so I help her with it.

It felt natural, how easily we'd slipped into the domesticated family routine, like we had been doing it for years.

We'd agreed to give the kids one week of rest, after which, they would have to start school and that explained why Queeneth was dressed to the nines this morning.

She was going to make enquiries about their school, while Amelia would be coming over with Nina so she would meet her new siblings. Queeneth was still stumped that she could not make it since she had been the one to plan the meeting.

A last-minute invite by our sweet quadruplet's new school was going to have her missing the meet up with the kids, but we could not shift it since the plans were already made.

“Dang it!” she muttered, “It takes at least twenty-five minutes to get to the school, and another twenty-five back with all this traffic. And I have and to make things worse I have no idea how long this is going to last for.” She goes on, frustration etched into her face.

” Hey, it's going to be fine. I'll be here the whole time. And they've gotten pretty used to me. I think I can navigate this. I see this as an opportunity to spend quality time with my babies. ” I tell her, my hands resting on her shoulders while I stare deep into her eyes.

She takes one long, deep breath and then releases it shakily.

“I just want them to get along. They kind of find it hard to make friends with other kids because they're so used to each

other.” She says.

“Well, Nina’s their sister too. Not just another kid. Okay? It’s going to be fine.” I assure her again, and she finally nods her head heavily and takes another deep breath.

“You’re right.” She finally agrees, “I’m just nervous.”

I lean down to press a soft kiss to her lips, and its slow at first, but her hands rests on my side, and it spurs me, I deepen the kiss and she lets out that soft whimper that never fails to drive me crazy.

Her tongue circles mine and her fingers sinks into my scalp, softly taking fistfuls of my hair and then releasing it. I back her into the counter, my hands palming her ass and pressing her against my already hard cock....

“Mommy and daddy are kissing!”

Olivia’s giggly voice is like ice water being dumped on the both of us and we pull apart so fast, she almost tumbles to the floor until I steady her weight. Only then did I perceive the smell of the pancake already burning.

“Shit!” I curse and turn off the stove and placing the pan into the sink.

“You said a curse word too!” Olivia continues, giggling and I turn to her. She is still in her pajamas and her hand latched onto a small stuffed animal while she continues, it would be annoying if she was not so cute.

“And daddy is very sorry, he said a curse word” I say to her, walking towards her and picking her off the floor while she squeals in excitement, when I turn to Queeneth, she is smiling at the two of us. She is wiping at her smudged lipstick as well and her cheeks are a flaming red.

“You’re awake early, baby.” She says walking towards us to kiss her cheeks while I lean lower for her to be able to reach her.

“The bed’s too big.” She complains and Queeneth and I both share a look. She looks slightly uncomfortable with Olivia’s admission, and I feel an ounce of guilt.

“It’s alright baby. I’m sure you’ll grow into the bed.” I tell her and her eyes widen.

“Does that mean we get to live here forever and ever?”

Again, Queeneth and I share a look and I nod my head before turning towards my daughter with a smile.

“As long as you like.” I tell her and she squeals again, and we both chuckle. Queeneth and I. She has a tender look on her face and my heart swelled with affection.

“I really need to leave now.” She says. “You and your brothers be good. Daddy is in charge until I get back.” She orders and Olivia nods her head.

We both stare at her, Olivia and I as she blows us both a kiss and then walks out.

Two hours later, the house is in chaos, and I realize Queeneth had been right to be worried. Amelia would be here any minute while I was still trying to get the boys to get dressed so they could meet their other sister.

“We don’t need another sister. I want a brother!” Nolan had quipped while Luke who was still nursing his hand in a cast backs him up.

“Me too!” he says.

“Hey! There are already three of you, I want a sister too!” Olivia had cried while Luke ever the diplomat stands neither here nor there.

“I want to see her before I decide. And then if we don’t like her, you can take her back Dad.” Luke says and I have to hold myself back from laughing my eyes off.

Just then, the front doorbell rings.

“There they are, I need you all to get dressed and meet downstairs in five minutes. And if you’re all good, we can all go out and get ice cream.”

Their answer is a deafening squeal, and I shake my head. Queeneth had warned me not to bribe them with ice cream, but it was my last resort.

Amelia is in shock when she sees the kids moments later. And there is no doubt they were mine; Luke and Jacob might be more similar to Queeneth's, and her side of the family, but Olivia and Nolan looked very much like me.

"I still can't believe it." Amelia says, when we were alone twenty minutes after we had gotten the kids together, to my surprise, it had gone smoother than expected and I suspect they were only on their best behaviour because of the ice cream.

"Why would she keep them from you! How could you forgive her so easily." Amelia was clearly angered on my behalf.

"Well, I did abandon and ignore her for years -"

"You didn't do it intentionally. She intended to hurt you by keeping this from you." Amelia cut in, not easily calmed by my explanation.

"She didn't do it intentionally either. She was afraid, and she thought she was doing what was best for the kids."

She seemed to accept my explanation and I go ahead to tell her about the faux marriage plans. She agreed to a joint custody for Nina, just so she could be closer to her siblings, but not after her warning that she would not hesitate to fight a joint custody court petition if she found out that this was not going well for Nina.

Queeneth arrives just as Amelia is about to leave, and they are cordial with each other, although I don't miss the weird vibe from Amelia. I chuck it up to her still being suspicious of Queeneth and protective of me.

In the night, after the kids have gone to bed, we find succour in each other's arms. It is a continuation of this morning. But for the first time, it feels different.

It was not just a physical experience, but an emotional one, an exchange of not just bodies, but hearts too. There was no doubt that things had changed between us.

CHAPTER 21

Queeneth

“Oh, fuck me!” Lord’s voice is a deep growl in my ears as he thrusts into me, slow and deep. His hands held tightly to my butt to keep me in place while he continued to pound into me and all I could do was take it.

My legs around his waist tighten as my second orgasm looms closer and closer, my nails scratch against his back drawing blood with intensity. But it does not faze him, it spurs him on to fuck me even harder, thrust deeper and then his fingers beneath me caresses the point where our bodies are joined and it’s all that I need, my body goes taut against him...

“Oh Lord!” My whimpers and moans are muffled into his shoulders because I was still very much conscious of the kids.

He does not let out until I am limp, and can’t take it anymore, and only then does he let out a loud groan and lets go to find his own release.

He collapses right by my side and we’re silent, both pressed against each other. The sun peaks through the space in the curtains as if to remind us that it’s already daylight and I can already hear the soft sounds of our kids’ footsteps in the hallways.

“They’re up already.” Lord says and I groan in protest nestling even closer into him until he chuckles deep, the sound reverberates against my skin.

“Do we have to go?” I cried.

My body feels entirely too languid. I could stay right here in this position forever and not regret it. I feel his soft gaze on

me, and when I open my eyes, he is staring deep into mine. The intensity of his gaze penetrated my heart in a way no words ever could.

“You’re so beautiful,” he says, his voice almost a whisper and it makes me smile.

“I don’t think beautiful is what I would call my morning face and messy hair, but I believe you if you say so,” I tell him, I try to bring some levity to the situation because despite our newfound closeness and all the sex, we’d never really talked about our feelings.

For all I knew this could be just like the last time for him, where I’d poured out my heart to him and all I’d gotten in return was to get abandoned.

A part of me tells me to let go of the past but it was difficult when you’d been burned once, the walls guarding your heart are there on autopilot and there’s very little you can do to knock it down on your own.

“You are.” he insists, and then he leans down to press a soft kiss on my forehead. It does pierce the wall, and crack it a little, but it was definitely still there.

“Thank you.” my cheeks heat up, and I wonder where my sudden shyness was coming from, given all we’d done together.

I get out of bed and make my way to the shower when his voice stops me.

“The tattoo on your back, it’s the birthstone of the kids, isn’t it?” he asks, and I turn back around to face him, he was still reclined on the bed, his hands folded behind his head and his mention about my tattoo takes my attention to his as well. A cute black and white rose on the left side of his neck.

“Yeah. I got it when they turned one.” I tell him resting my back against the wall leading to the bathroom, I remain still and stare at him. I see on his face he has a lot of questions, as do I.

“You did a really good job with them.” he finally says, and I smile looking down at my bare feet and then back at his face.

“My mother did most of the work, I can’t take full credit.” There is a hint of regret in my voice and when I see the pointed look he gives me, I know he hears it too.

“No, your mother helped, yes, but you had a hand in it too.” he says smiling at me “and you did good.”

His validation makes me bloom with pride. The fact that he recognized my effort when so very little people had, felt nicer than it should. But I was grateful all the same.

After we shower and get down to the kids, Lord gets a call from the band asking to meet and he leaves me alone with the kids.

While the kids are with the tutor, I had gotten for them before school starts, I get the urge to talk to Belle and Lady. I had yet to inform my friends that I had brought my kids down to the state since it had been a crazy couple of days and now that I had some breathing space, I decided to dial Belle to inform her.

I was still not sure Lady would pick up my call since she had not done so since she found out about her father and me.

“Hey babes” Belle answers on the second ring.

“Hey, what’s up?” I say to her, and we exchange pleasantries for only a few seconds before I break the news to her.

“Can you come over? I finally did it.” I tell her.

“Did what?” Her reply is instant, and her confusion is understandable.

“I told Lord about the kids. And then he was so eager to meet them, we flew to France on the same day, and we brought them back with us.”

There is a short silence before she speaks.

“You’re not serious.” She says the astonishment in her voice pretty evident. I chuckle slightly at that.

“I am. I want you to come meet them. I would call Lady too, but I’m afraid she wouldn’t come.”

“I’m with Lady actually.” Belle says and I am surprised. I am also a little hurt, given we always hung out together, the three of us. But with the silent treatment, they were hanging out without me.

“Oh!” is all I can say, and there is a moment of awkward silence.

“Well.... can she come too?” I ask Belle, and then she answers almost as quickly, “She doesn’t have to, if she doesn’t want to, though.”

“She said she’ll come.” Belle replies and I am shocked, but I am already nodding my head, very much relieved.

“Oh! That’s good. I’ll be waiting.”

I am slightly nervous to meet Lady again, but I missed her. I missed our friendship. I could only hope that we would be able to get past all these and move forward.

Barely thirty minutes after the call, the doorbell announces their presence and I move to open it. Luke, Olivia, Nolan, and Jacob are in the living room where I’d given them the talk for them to be on their best behavior. Although I doubted, they were interested.

When I open the front door, Belle is the one I see first, and she gives me a tight hug before her hands jokingly push me aside.

“Where are they?” She asks, ignoring me and walking into the house while I remain at the door with Lady. The silence stretches for an awkward length of time until I break it.

“You want to come in?” I ask her and she nods once, stepping into the house and closing it behind her. We still don’t move away from the door yet.

“I’m happy you came.” I tell her, and she shakes her head.

“I didn’t come because of you. I just wanted to meet my half-siblings.” Her words hurt me, and I was tired of the beef, so I didn’t let it slide.

“Really, Lady. You’re really going to keep this shit up?” I asked her not caring about her anger anymore, it was getting

frustrating that she was being stubborn about holding on to this grudge.

Her eyes widen in surprise, and she takes one step back, “Excuse me?” She asks.

“No, you’re not excused, Lady. SO, yeah, I fucked up. I was young, and I was stupid. Also, I should have told you when I found out that Lord was your father. I admit that, and I have apologized repeatedly. You have got to forgive me at some point.” I tell her, but she still looks pissed.

“No, Queeneth, I don’t have to do anything.” She insists, “you hid the truth from me!”

“It wasn’t intentional. I had no idea Lord was your father until the wedding. And even at that, we’d met long before I even met you. Our relationship has got nothing to do with you. I can keep apologizing as long as you want, I just need to know why you won’t forgive me.”

We both stare at each other, our stares unflinching. Lady is the first to relent, and I expect her to give a long list of why she won’t forgive me, but she breaks into a sob, and I am too shocked to do anything.

“You’re right.” She says, “I shouldn’t keep holding onto this anger.” She cries.

My eyes soften and she wipes at the tears that had leaked. My eyes are full of tears as well, but I don’t bother to wipe it off.

“I’m sorry,” I tell her, and she moves first, her arms wrap around my neck and we both squeeze each other tight.

“I’m sorry too.” She replies. And then the sound of hands clapping interrupts us, and we turn around to find Belle and the kids clapping their hands at us.

“Mommy, and Aunt Lady finally did it. We’re one big happy family again.” Belle says and we chuckle. I have no idea how she had become friends with the kids in a matter of minutes, it had something to do with her psychic nanny abilities.

After I've introduced the kids to my two best friends, and their half-sister. Belle, Lady, and I catch up. I fill Lady in on everything from the fake marriage proposal to my past with Lord five years ago.

The awkwardness passes in a short time, and it is as if the fight never happened. Lady also gives me the gist from her honeymoon and her pregnancy. She already had a tiny bump although it was still yet to be too visible through her clothes.

Two hours later, we are laughing hard at a joke Belle had told when Lord returns. The second I see the expression on his face, I knew something had gone wrong. And then his words confirm it, after he'd said hi to Belle and his first daughter, before they left.

"I have something to tell you. Queeneth, you should sit down." His tone is grave with a hint of foreboding, and I already feel bad about whatever it is he wants to tell me.

CHAPTER 22

Lord

The meeting with the band is pretty much what I'd expected. Leonie had already called me that their management was already planning a smear campaign that could do a lot of damage to me if I decided to go for my solo career.

I'd had plans of a solo career for when I finally quit the band. In fact, there was no doubt that it would be the next step given I'd already worked on a few solo projects in the past.

But with everything that's happened in recent years. My priorities had changed. I still wanted to make music, no doubt, but it was no longer the only thing that mattered to me. There are other things that mattered more now. And the band did not even know it.

So, they had threatened me with a smear campaign on the condition that I remained with the band for another five years. Release at least two more albums and join them on a world tour through the next four years.

That was a massive commitment even for a guy in his twenties who lived for the thrill of nights like the ones to follow, if I took the contract.

Leonie had already been informed about the ultimatum, and she had told me to my surprise that she supported whatever decision I chose. It was the first time she had not tried to talk me out of quitting. I was happy she was sticking with me.

After I had turned the men down, they'd taken another route and resorted to begging. I had told them to give me a few

days to think about it just to escape, but I had plans to discuss it extensively with both Leonie and Queeneth.

It felt different now that I had to ask her before I travelled, and Leonie was not just the only woman I trusted in my life.

When I walked out of the Richbelly, after meeting with the boys, my phone pings with a text from Amelia asking me to come right away. I stare at the clock, wondering what the rush was about and I dial her number to find out. She does not respond when I call her, and I am worried it might have something to do with Nina, I drive straight to her place.

Amelia lived at a pretty sub-urban part of the town. She had moved to Prescott to be closer to her mother and to grow a more stable home for our daughter although she shuttled between here and New York from time to time.

Her car is still parked in her neatly lawned driveway, so I park my car on the street and walk towards her front porch. The door opens before I even knock, and I lean back to stare at her in surprise. She was wearing comfy clothes, a knitted sweater, and shorts. Her hair had been let down and her lips were glossy.

She did not look like she was in pain, or a panic. If anything, she looked like she had dressed up, but put in more effort into looking like she had not dressed up. I noticed it from the little things. One, I always told her I liked her hair when we were together, and she knew I loved it when she wore lip-gloss.

It made her full lips, a little like Angelina Jolie's look even sexier.

I take in all these in one long clinical glance at her 5'ft 5 frame and finally meet her light blue gaze.

"You said to come right away, I thought something horrible had happened?" I ask her still standing in the front porch, my eyes dart behind me at the empty street before I turn back to her.

She takes a step back, gesturing for me to come in. "Come in, we should talk inside." She says and then she leaves the

door open and walks back, expecting me to follow behind her.

I feel my hackles rising at the set up already as I slowly follow her into the house. The cold silence of the house tells me that Nina isn't here, it's the first thing I ask her when I look around the hallway and descent the stairs that leads into the living room.

"Where's Nina?" I ask her, my eyes roaming the pristine white decor of the house. I always wondered how she managed to keep the house so clean, despite having Nina with her. But I knew even from experience that Nina was a well-behaved child. Maybe a little too well-behaved but most people saw that as a good thing, so I was never worried.

"She's at my mother's place. Mom complained they don't get enough time to bond. So, I let her come pick her up for the weekend." She says turning around to me. She is standing right next to a small decanter by the left corner of the living room where there are several casings of drink. They were not there the last time I'd been here, so I suspect she had only brought them out because of me, there was no way she would leave it out with Nina running around the house.

"Okay?" I say dragging the words out slowly as I recline against the wall with my back and cross my arms while waiting for her to get to the point of why I was here. But she does not say anything for a while instead she pours one of the bottles of scotch into two glasses and brings them to me handing me one glass.

She stands unnecessarily closer to me, and I realize she had not just worn lip gloss, but her face was made up as well. I see a hint of shadow on her eyelids, and I am instantly very much suspicious, but I don't voice it yet.

"What are we celebrating?" I ask, taking the glass from her hand and she smiles, her tongue sneaks out to lick her under lips and she twirls the drink in her hand.

"Your kids." She says, and then she pauses for effect before she continues, "That is, if of course they really are yours."

My anger is instant and torrid, but I don't give her the pleasure of a reaction. Instead, my reply is cold and hard, so she had no doubt that her words were infuriating me.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Her expression turns innocuous almost instantly, eyes widen as she tries to look innocent.

“I'm not trying to be the mean girl here, Lord. But I think I am the only one thinking clearly between the two of us.”

Again, her words hit a nerve, but I remain calm, still, and let her finish.

“I can see you're enamoured by this little girl, and the novelty of having someone as pretty as she is. But you need to be smart about this, Lord. For all we you, she's a gold digger -”

“I'm going to have to stop you right there, Amelia.” My words stop her mid-sentence as I push myself away from the wall and take one step towards her, her eyes widen with fright and she takes one step back too.

“The only reason I'm going to let this slide, is because I know you. And I know you're only trying to have my back. But you're crossing the line now.”

Her face stiffens and I see the way her hands tighten on the cup. And then she takes one step towards me again, bringing her even closer to me, she does not stop until we are almost nose to nose. And still, I don't move.

“Amelia?” My voice is muffled when she leans closer to rub her lips against mine, and I am about to push her and take a step back when her free fingers snake into my hair and she pressed her lips fully against mine in a kiss.

It only takes a second for me to react and I take one step back keeping her at arm's length. And then I take both our drinks and place them back on the decanter.

“What the hell, Amelia!” I snap, walking away from the space between her and the wall to move to the other side of the room. She turns back around to face me, and I see she is close to tears, making me feel all the worse for rejecting her. I

suspected she still had feelings for me, and she would be jealous of Queeneth and I, but I had not expected that she would be bold enough to make a move.

“We can be good together, Lord. I can’t do this on my own.” She cried and then takes one step towards me, “And you don’t even now that those are your kids!”

“Listen to me, Amelia. I understand that you’re hurt. But it doesn’t give you the right to say shit like that. And those kids are mine, I don’t need a DNA to prove it because I know it in my heart. Just as I know what my feelings for Queeneth are, and I know she won’t lie to me.”

She looks remorseful finally, taking one step back and turning around with her back to me. Her fingers fly to her mouth to muffle her sob, and I feel bad for her. I close the distance between us to pull her into a hug.

“Hey, hey. It’s alright. Don’t cry.” I tell her, but she holds on tighter and cries harder.

“I can’t do this alone.” She says leaning back after crying over my shirt. Her eyes are puffy, and her mascara had spilled.

“Who says you must. You’ve got me, and Nina has her siblings. She has her family, and we will be there for each other.”

She nods slowly while I speak and wipes away her tears.

“You’re right. We should do 50-50.” She finally says sniffing and my eyes widen in shock. She meets my gaze and smiles.

“We should have done it a long time ago; I just thought it would motivate you to want to be with me. It was cruel and selfish of me, and I’m sorry.” She speaks.

“It’s alright. You’re doing the right thing now, that’s all that matters.” I tell her and she nods. “I’ll get my lawyer to draw up an agreement.”

She nods at that.

And then I take the drinks she’d poured us and give her back her glass. We share a drink before I am finally able to

leave after minutes of talking about Nina's next stay with her siblings.

All through the drive back, I contemplate telling Queeneth about the kiss. I can't help the flash of panic that accompanies the thought of what her reaction to the kiss might be. But I also knew I could not keep it from her.

When I finally arrive, there is a dark Prado jeep in the driveway that I instantly recognized as Lady's. I walk into the house to find she is indeed here, and it seems she'd finally made up with Queeneth. They seemed to be in high spirit, and I hated to be the one to bring the bad news, but I knew I had to tell her before I lost my nerve.

"I have something to tell you. Queeneth, you should sit down."

CHAPTER 23

Queeneth

Anxiety fills my mind as I stare at Lord's pensive face, the light-heartedness of the past couple of hours had been soaked up by the gloom that his words had caused when he had walked in.

The kids were back with their tutor while Lord and I were in the piano room. He had his back to me standing against the piano while I am sitting on the couch, legs crossed as I wait.

I had no idea what he had discussed with his band mates, but it must have been bad if it had him in this mood. I want to tell him that whatever it is, that we would get through it together, but I did not even know yet what had him like this, so I wait patiently for him to speak.

"Lord, what is it?" I ask, unable to bear the silence anymore, and I stand to my feet, "Is this about the kids? Don't you wan-"

He cuts short my words when he turns to me so suddenly, I stop talking instantly, "It's got nothing to do with the kids." he says the word with enough emotion that I believe him, but I am still worried.

"Then what is it?" I ask him taking one step towards him wanting him closer, but his next words stop me in my tracks and I struggle to make sense of it.

"Amelia tried to kiss me." He confesses, catching me off guard. Eyebrows raised, I take one step back, not sure what to make of this. It did not make sense to me, and I feel the walls

around my heart harden, even though something tells me to hear him out first.

He would not be telling me about it if he did not have a legit explanation.

“Tried”? I inquire, hearing the mix of curiosity and confusion in my voice. My heart is beating so fast in my chest fear and panic mix with the confusion at the sudden thought that I was going to lose him. I had just gotten him back in my life, I did not know how I could survive another heartbreak, not after the last one left me so broken, I could never trust another man.

Lord hesitates before continuing, “She succeeded, not just tried. But I pushed her away. I mean, she caught me off guard at first, but I instantly turned away.”

Relief washes over me as I realize the situations isn't as dire as I had feared, although I am still cautious. First, he had told me he was going to see the band for a meeting. I had no idea he was going to see Amelia in the first place, so I start with that.

” Was Amelia at the Richbelly, because you said you were going to see the band while you were leaving,” I tell him, and his eyes widen in realization.

“Damn! I forgot about that. We did have the meeting, and I will get to that, but Amelia texted me just as I was leaving the meeting, and she claimed she wanted us to meet. She sounded panicked so I thought Nina was hurt, or in trouble.”

He goes further to recount the encounter with Amelia, describing how he had shown up to her place and she had offered him a drink. And then she'd thrown herself at him. Before he had ultimately turned down her advances, telling her he only wanted to co-parent in peace with her to avoid any more future dramas.

As he finishes recounting the details, the relief gives way to euphoria as I close my eyes. I am proud that he had not only refused her, but he'd been brave enough to come clean with me and prioritizing my feelings and our family first.

“I am sorry babe. I swear, if I knew she was going to do something like this, I would never have gone there in first place.”

“Hey, it’s alright. I’m not mad.” I tell him and he is taken aback by my unexpected reaction. I could not be mad or angry, although I was a little jealous and Amelia was definitely going to get an earful the next time I ran into her, but I was not surprised.

I had sensed the weird vibe coming from her the first time we’d met. She’d treated me, not as a friend but a competitor. And I did understand where she was coming from. Lord McCarthy was the kind of man, every woman wanted.

He was tall, masculine, hot and he had the body of a prime stallion. It was almost impossible to believe he was forty-five, despite the whitening of his hair at the temples.

“You aren’t?” he asks, and I shake my head smiling at him.

“I’m not. I mean, why should I be? You didn’t do anything wrong, if anything she would probably get bitch-slapped by me if she was standing here with us in the room, but I can’t blame you for another person’s actions. It’s not like you can control it.”

He chuckles at my crack about bitch-slapping her, “Alright, maybe we should use our words first before resorting to violence?” He says and I smile too.

“And what about the meeting with the band? What did they want?” I ask him and he sighs heavily.

“The usual. It’s not something I didn’t expect. They want me to stay with the band for the next five years. Produce a couple more albums and go on tour with them.”

My eyes widen as he casually lists the demands of the band, I knew for a fact that no studio executive would make those demands unless they needed the said musician. Lord wants to quit, but it was clear now that his team was not ready to let go of him yet.

“And what does Leonie say about this?” I ask him and he turns to me.

“She wants me to do what I think is best for me.” He says, and surprise colors my face. “I know. I was shocked too. But I think she really likes you.”

He adds and I chuckle, but I turn serious almost instantly, remembering his words about his meeting with the band.

“What are you going to do?” I ask him.

“You don’t have to worry about this, Babe. They’re making this demands because they’re desperate. They know I’ll never come back. I’ve told them about these enough times that they know that I’ve never meant it more than I do now.”

When he does not go on, I stare at him to continue.

“At this point, they’ll be the ones to come back with a better deal. The best thing I can give them is write a couple of songs for the label under contract, and maybe a few studio recordings, but nothing else.”

“Oh” I say, and he nods.

“So, it is nothing you need to worry about. I’ve got it under control.”

After we talk about the meeting, he tells me that Amelia had agreed to a 50-50 joint custody of Nina.

“Oh my God!” I squeal in excitement because I knew just how much he wanted to spend more time with his daughter. And I also knew that Olivia now saw her sister as her new best friend.

I had been an only child growing up. And I always feared for Olivia, who, although she had three brothers, I was afraid she would still feel like an outsider. But with Nina, things would be different. So, the knowledge that they would get to spend more time together gladdened my heart.

“That’s good news!” I say to him, moving into his arms. His hands slide over my back to my waist to pull me closer and he leans down to kiss me.

“It sure is.”

While we're preparing lunch for the kids, I recount my reconciliation with Lady, and he gets even more excited than me about it. I can see the relief in his eyes that Lady and I were no longer fighting, and I realize it had bothered him more than he had shown it in the past.

"I never thought I'd have this. My family. And now, I do. All thanks to you." He says to me, and my smile is almost teary. I force the tears back when he pulls me into his arms and kisses me like his life depended on it.

My grip is even tighter in his hair, and he lifts me up until my butt rests on the counter. My stomach tingles, butterflies giving way to euphoric feelings, feelings of contentment I'd never felt in a long time.

But he gave me that, my heart sang every single time he walked into a room. The imaginary walls I used to think were still guarding my heart had crumbled a long time ago no matter how much I told myself it was still there.

He'd barred them all down and solidified his position in my heart and it was the scariest feeling because he had the ability to hurt me more than any human being on earth other than my kids.

"Mommy and daddy are kissing again!" Olivia's voice from the doorway pulls us back to the present and chuckling, I look up to find him smiling down at me, that intense affectionate feeling in his eyes.

He presses a soft kiss on my nose before releasing me and letting me go to the kids.

I think I am in love with Lord McCarthy, the dilemma here was not knowing if he felt the same or not.

CHAPTER 24

Lord

“What does Leonie say about all of this?” Ricky’s voice is guarded, and without his usual humor. I don’t expect anything less given my announcement had left them in the rut and in need of a new male lead.

We are at the Richbelly, Paul and Todd are in the VIP room while Frankie is at the bar, sucking on his fourth bottle of beer. They had been giving me the silent treatment ever since my announcement and Ricky is the only one willing to talk to me, and even he had an attitude.

Let for the guys, they were willing to continue with the band until the wheels feel off. That meant that they had no plans to quit the band. I would not blame them, while I had been out and partying hard, living my best life.

Todd and Paul had married their long time loves, they had a family, two kids each from their wives who always showed their support to them when we were on our shows. Frankie had been divorced twice already, and he had one kid from each wife. He had no plans to ever get married again, although I doubted that to be true.

Ricky on the other hand had been with his partner, Giselle for the longest time, they had no kids and were not married but they were a team. Of the five of us, I’m the only one who had not talked about my family. Just a few people in my life had known about Lady and I had encouraged it because I had wanted to stay in brand.

Now that life no longer appealed to me, and not just because I wanted to focus on building my family relationships, but because I was a different person on tour, the band had built me up into an egotistical maniac who thought he didn't owe the world anything.

I had been arrogant, and selfish. And I had turned my back on my own daughter just so I could get rich and famous.

“Lord of Rock?” Ricky’s voice draws me back to the present, and I blink out of my reverie.

“Sorry, you were saying?” I ask him, and something catches my attention on the other side of the bar. Lady had just arrived with her husband, Noble and I wave them over. Noble sees me first before Lady, and they smile before walking towards us.

“Who are they?” Ricky asks, his questions forgotten as he stares at Lady and Noble.

“My daughter.” I tell him, my chest bolstering with pride, Lady catches the tail end of my words and she smiles wider at that.

I hear Ricky’s shocked gasp and when I turn to him he is staring wide eyed from me to Lady. He knew about Lady, but he had never met her, and I guessed he had no idea she was this grown.

They exchange pleasantries and Ricky excuses himself from the table after I promise him that we would talk about everything at a later date. He gives me a pointed look before he walks away and I sigh.

“What was that about?” Lady asks.

I watch how Noble is with her and again, I am happy that my daughter is married to a man like him. And he is a rock star like me. Her dress is big enough to cover her bump, but he'd had his hand below her back as they walk towards us, and he helps her into her seat before sitting down himself. He's had a protective hand over her ever since.

“Band stuff.” I answer my daughter and glance towards Ricky, who's gone to join Frankie at the bar. “I announced my

retirement to them, and they've hated me ever since I made the official announcement."

"Oh." Lady says.

"Well, you have told them for a while they should not be surprised you're following through." Noble says, with a shrug before he beckons towards a waitress.

"Queeneth said the same thing" I say to them, I don't miss the way Lady's attention shifts from her husband back to me when I mention Queeneth.

Noble orders the drinks and a Shirley Temple for Lady before we continue.

"Well, I'm sure they'll get used to it." Lady says. "You've got more important things to focus on." She says with a wink and I smile.

I am more than ecstatic she seems to have loosened up around me. We were cracking jokes and sharing smiles, I would never have thought it would happen so soon given how mad at me she had been. But I guess Queeneth and the kids had somehow changed her mind.

Thinking about Queeneth , makes me want to go back to her, even though it had been barely two hours since I had left her while she took the kids to school. Her dedication to our kids was out of this world. Seeing her with them showed her in a different light and I fell for her more and more with each passing day.

I had never been more certain of anything in my life. I wanted to marry her, not just for an arrangement, or an image I no longer cared to show the world.

But because I wanted to be with her. I wanted to wake up to her every morning and cook her breakfast all the while teaching her to cook while we both looked after our children.

Noble chooses that moment to excuse himself, something about getting a business call, so its just the two of us on the table, and I decide to confide in her.

“I want to marry Queeneth.” I say it to her, and I don’t miss the way Lady’s eyes widens but I continue.

“Not just for the press. For real. I want her in my life permanently.”

“Woah!” She says,

“I know you probably think I’m deadbeat because of our past. But I want to be a better man, and father. And I feel like Queeneth makes me want to be like that too. I can’t change the past, but all I want is to make amends for the future.”

“Hey, You don’t have to apologize anymore, you’ve done it enough, dad.” She says. “And I don’t think you’re deadbeat. Queeneth told us about how you left for France as soon as you heard about the kids. A deadbeat father would never do that.”

Hearing her say the words to me is one of my most humbling experiences and I smile to hide the emotions that clogs my chest.

“Thank you for saying that. You have no idea how much that means to me.” I tell her and her smile widens.

We are both silent for a few moments before she smiles in a manner that made me feel she was up to something, and breaks the silence.

“Lucky for you, there are a few perks to marrying your daughter’s best friend, and one of them is that I get to give you all the deets on everything you’re going to need to propose to her.”

She winks at me and I chuckle slightly leaning in closer to her by resting my hands on the table between us.

“I can’t wait to hear every last one of them.” I tell her and we both laugh at that. Noble chooses that time to join us back on the table, and we are both still smiling when he settles in.

“What’d I miss?” he asks and Lady shrugs, still smiling.

“A surprise for my best friend.” Is all she says and Noble glances from her face to mine, before he decides to give up.

We talk for some more minutes about the kids while Lady and Noble talk about the nursery they were building for the baby.

“I would love to see it.” I tell her, without thinking and her gaze rises up to mine, at first I think she is going to refuse, but to my surprise, she does the opposite of that.

”That sounds like a lovely idea. I would love that.” She says and all I can be is grateful for the second chance at having a relationship with her family.

A few minutes later, our drinks are gone, and I get off the table to move to the bar and get us a refill. I regret the decision almost immediately when I see that its Gigi manning the bar now.

“Didn’t think you’d be back here.” She says, eyes rolling as she delays getting me anything. I was in no mood for her antics.

“I need a Shirley Temple and two scotch.” I tell her, ignoring her words, but she does not take the hint.

“You need to cut that woman loose, Lord. You’re making a big mistake by marrying her. I care about you that’s why I’m telling you this.” she says.

“I never asked for your opinion, Gigi. I never have, and I never will. So stay out of something that isn’t your business and move on. Our relationship, if you can even call it that, ended years ago. And if you care about me like claim to, you would see that I was happy, and you would be happy for me too.”

Her eyes widen in shock, and I can see that she is angry too. She spins around to fetch our drinks and then she places it on the table.

“I hope you know what you’re doing Lord. You won’t say I didn’t warn you though.” her parting words is laced with bitterness as she gives me one last look and then walks out of the bar towards the inner part of her office, a hallway I know led to her office.

When I turn around to where I'd left Lady and Noble, the table is empty, and I realize they were no longer seated in their seats. My eyes dart around the club, but I am disappointed to find that they were really gone.

I polish off the drinks while Ricky and the band members join me. Ricky must have talked to them, because some of the animosity is gone, and we even share a few laughs before I have to leave. But not before I had told them about Lady and asked them not to share the news since Lady did not really like being in the public eye.

Going back home, I am slightly disappointed at the way Lady and Noble had left without any notice, despite the fact that we had still been talking. I try to dial her number, but the service was too poor.

When I get home, the hallway is silent, and I don't hear the sound of the kids even though it's barely dinner time.

“Babe?”

The sound of footsteps in the kitchen leads me towards it, and the pleasant smell of dinner greets me in the hallway. I round the corner to the kitchen and dining area and my jaw drops at what I find.

Queeneth is wearing the sexiest nightwear I'd ever seen, there is so much skin on display, I don't know where to look first. A red see through silky, lacy thing that screams sex!

She has on a matching red thong underneath and her nipples are visible beneath the top. Her hair is let down in wild rolled waves that I want to muss up with my hands while I drive into her. I am hard as rock, and not at all interested in the food, I see is already set on the table.

“Fuck me.” I mutter the words, but from her seductive smile, she'd heard them.

“Lady and Noble came to get the kids. They wanted us to have the house to ourselves tonight.” She says.

Walking towards her, my body on autopilot, and very much eager for her, I lift her into my arms and make my way up the stairs. She chuckles softly when I lift her up.

“But I made dinner?” She cries, although there is no real conviction in her voice.

“We can always come back for it.”

CHAPTER 25

Queeneth

The second we are inside the bedroom, Lord sets me down on my feet and takes one step back, his deep green eyes darkening to almost black with arousal. My body is on fire, everywhere his hot gaze touches and all I wanted was to be in his arms.

I grab him by the lapels and drag him towards me, my lips finding his at the same time, his tongue collides with mine.

Kissing him is like being on fire. It burns, but it doesn't hurt. It feels like I'm alive, inside my skin, for the first time in ages.

Everything... everything makes *sense*.

I can't remember ever feeling so alive. So right. So...

In love.

I want to tell him. I want to tell everyone, tell anyone. I want him to know that he's the love of my life.

I can't say it yet. I'm too afraid.

I decide I'll show him instead.

Lord wraps his arms around my waist, and I take the movement to leap. I press my hands against the tops of his shoulders, hopping up. He catches on immediately, gathering me in his arms. I wrap my legs around his waist, and he kisses me even harder.

His tongue is devilishly talented. Just kissing him has me wet between my thighs. I feel like I could fly, just from his

mouth against mine.

Lord walks me against the wall of our bedroom. His mouth attaches to my throat. I know he's leaving marks there, but each suck of his mouth around my sensitive skin sends a throb of pleasure in my core.

"Fuck," I whine.

"That's the idea, my queen," Lord says.

I would laugh if he said it any other time. But here, with his hard cock a hot presence against my thigh, my legs trembling around his body, it just makes me whimper.

Lord's hand fits around my ass perfectly. I use the momentum of the wall and his never-faltering strength to stretch against him. If I can just—

Oh, yes. Fuck, fuck, fuck—

My pussy lines up just right, and I swirl my hips. It sends delicious friction through me, and, from the groan that Lord lets out, through him, too.

Sparks of pleasure shoot through me as I fuck myself against his thigh. My panties are thin and dripping wet, and it's easy to ignore them as I rotate my hips over and over again.

"Such a pretty girl," Lord compliments, his voice deep and rumbling.

I grab his face between my hands and crash our lips together. His are swollen, and our teeth clash. I don't care. It feels *incredible*.

When I pull back, we're both panting. My whole body is trembling. I feel on the verge of coming, just like this.

It's like Lord can tell.

Without lowering me, he shifts so he's holding my weight with one arm. The free one, he slides between our bodies.

"I want to feel you," he murmurs.

"Yes, yes, please!" My whole body aches.

He slips two fingers between the wet fabric and my body. I moan loudly at the sensation.

“You’re so fucking hot,” he groans. “Your pussy is so wet for me, isn’t it, baby?”

“It is,” I cry. I writhe, pushing him deeper in me, and stars shoot behind my eyes.

“You’re so soft and wet and hot,” he continues, and the words are like licks to me. My clit throbs. Like he knows, his fingers move slowly until they find my clit. He begins to rub softly.

“Lord,” I breathe. “Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord—”

“Come for me, Queeneth,” he says, and I do. I come long and hard, all over his fingers, my body twisting and writhing. I don’t know if I’m screaming, if I say anything.

When I come back to, Lord has moved his hand from my body, and is softly laying me down in the middle of our bed.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, baby,” he says.

I blush. “You are, too, Lord.”

He smiles at me. Then he covers his body with mine and kisses me deeply.

As he does, he undresses both of us. I help where I can, lifting my hips and unbuttoning his shirt.

When we’re both fully naked, I realize how rare this is for me: this intimate moment, daylight still streaming in from the windows. Lord is so beautiful. The long lines of him, the parts of him that are soft, the parts of him that are bony. He’s—

Fuck, I love him so much.

Lord looks at me with blazing eyes, and he kisses me softly once more before moving down my body.

“Lord,” I gasp, as he takes one of my nipples in his mouth. He rolls it around gently with his tongue. My other breast gets his hand’s attention, and then he swaps.

By the time he's done with my tits, I'm writhing against the bed again. I can't believe how badly I want him, having just come so hard.

When he lowers himself between my legs, I make a soft sound of protest.

"It's my turn to make *you* feel good," I pout.

Lord grins. "Then let me do this."

He dips his head and licks me. I stop protesting.

He's so good at this, I would believe it was his job. He's deft and careful, his fingers teasing me enough to turn me on but not quite satisfy me—it makes me beg for his cock. As Lord's wet mouth takes me over the edge again, I think I could live here forever.

Lord's head pops up, and his chin shines with slickness. I moan at the obscenity, and he kisses his way up my body.

"Now?" I plead.

He kisses my nose. "Yes, dear."

I swat at him half-heartedly, so spent I feel like I could pass out if I didn't want him so badly.

He rolls on a condom quickly, and right before he slides in me, I topple him over. He grunts in surprise, and I laugh happily. Climbing on top of him, our laughter dies on our lips as I take him in.

I slide down him easily. I moan loudly, his cock filling me all the way up. This new angle for us lets him seat himself fully in me. The perfection of it has my eyes watering.

Lord looks up at me, his pupils blown and his lips parted. I press my hands to his chest and carefully lift myself up and down.

Once I'm fully situated, I stop being so careful.

Riding Lord is like nothing else I've ever done. His cock is so hot and heavy inside of me, as hard as any dildo I've ever used. I holds my hips steady as I slam down on him over and over again. I grab my hair with both hands, lifting it above my

head and dropping it down. Arching my back over him, I ride and ride and ride, losing any inhibition.

Lord's feet are planted flat on the bed, and he fucks up into me as best he can.

“Oh, shit, Queeneth,” he hisses. “I'm going—I'm so close —”

“Yes!” I know I must look frenzied, crazy, as I press closer to him, one hand curled around the headboard and the other on his chest. I snap my hips back and forth, desperate for it. “Please, please, please, please—Please!”

Lord comes inside of me, a shout leaving his throat, and the sensation of his hot come inside of me—even trapped with a condom—is so fucking hot that for the third time, I come hard.

The house is blissfully silent the next morning when we wake up. For the first time in a long time, Lord is still asleep right beside me and I smile, languidly, sliding to face him as slowly as I can so as not to wake him up.

His four o'clock shadow was more of a stubble now and my fingers slowly caress the soft strands. I lean up to stare more closely at the rose tattoo on his neck. Whoever had done it, had done a perfectly good job.

The intricate designs of the thorn around the body of the rose looked almost too real. My fingers trace the dark-red line and he shifts slightly, but still he remains asleep.

My heart shudders with so much affection, it feels like it could burst any moment. I can't stop touching him, his stubble, his tattoo, his soft hair. Even though I was already missing the kids, I was also grateful for the alone time.

We'd spent much of the past two weeks with the kids that we had not had enough time to ourselves. Not that we were not still having sex, we were, but the connection I'd felt last night had seemed to be missing. But we seemed to have gotten it back last night, and I could not be more glad.

“I love you.” I whisper softly before leaning down to press my lips to his.

He shifts then, and this time, he wakes up. His eyes opening to find mine atop his face. His face crinkles into a cute smile that makes me smile as well.

“You’re obsessed with me, this woman.” he says and I laugh at the unexpected statement but I don’t deny it. I press my lips against his and kiss him again. We are both still smiling, so the kiss is a soft brush of lips and tongue, and teeth that makes my heart to flutter wildly.

“I think you’re obsessed with me too.” I whisper back against his lips and he chuckles.

“There’s no debate.” he says the word with so much intent, his gaze holding a lot of meaning I am too afraid to put into words.

“You have no idea how much you’ve changed me, Queeneth. I was a different man before you, and I don’t know how, but being with you makes me conscious of the word. It makes me want to do better.

So yeah, I think I am obsessed with you.”

I don’t now what to say to his admission. And before I can come up with a plausible comeback to something like that, he presses his lips to mine and we don’t leave the bed all morning. Our bodies worshiping the other, passionate and intense.

We finally get out of bed just before noon, to go find something to eat when Lady calls to say they would be willing to keep the kids for an extra night.

“Well... I think we should go on a date tonight then.” he brings up the suggestion and I am a little surprised.

“Our first real date?” I tell him and he nods. Walking around the counter towards him, I wrap my hands around his waist and lean up on the tips of my toes to kiss him.

CHAPTER 26

Lord

“I have no idea what to do?” I glance up the stairs while I whispering in the hallway, for any sound of Queeneth coming back down.

It was almost mid-day and even though I had promised her our first real date, I was still floundering with the planning process.

I had enlisted the help of Belle and Lady in the planning and even Duchess had offered to help too. I am a nervous wreck, because this was not just going to be our first real date, but I was going to propose to her for real.

The thought of spending my life with her filled my heart with a kind of joy and anticipation that I had never thought would exist. All my life I had been averse to being tied down.

But the thought of being married to Queeneth did not feel like being tied down. No, it felt like spending the rest of your life doing something you loved, except in this case it was being with someone you really loved.

“Lord, this is important, try to remember. Did she say she wanted red velvet or chocolate?” Belle asks me.

“I think it was red velvet.”

“She’s always preferred chocolate.” Lady chimes into the call and I roll my eyes.

This was why planning events like this was better suited when women were involved. All I knew was that I wanted tonight to be an unforgettable one for Queeneth. I wanted it to

be special, and perfect, and I wanted to pay attention to every single detail.

I was slowly realizing that it was an almost impossible task when you had less than 12 hours to put it together. Duchess was looking after the kids back at Noble and Lady's home while Belle and Lady were putting the event together. I could not leave because it needed to be a surprise, and me leaving would raise too much suspicion.

I had already gotten the ring, so that was no problem. All we needed was the perfect dessert; her favourite, and the perfect music to set the air.

We had picked a venue, a rooftop restaurant for the venue, and it had been booked for the night so I'd had to pay triple the amount to convince the owners how serious we were.

Lady had called it bullying, while Belle claimed it was romantic. The most important thing was that we had our venue.

"I'm certain its red velvet." I tell them, and then I hear the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs and I hang up before either Belle or Lady could say anything else.

Walking out of the halls, I meet her at the foot of the stairs, her eyes looks like it had been searching before they settled on mine, she is wearing one of my big shirt and nothing else underneath and my eyes roam her bare legs, admiring them.

"Where have you been?" She asks and I shake my head, glancing back up to her face.

"IN the music room." I say, and she cocks her head to the side, clearly not believing me, especially given I had not been playing any music and claiming to be in the piano room.

"You should probably go get prepared for our date." I tell her, quickly changing the subject and she smiles.

"Don't you think its too early?" She says, her hands wraps around my middle her face pressed into my chest. She was so small compared to me that she barely reached the top of my collar bone.

My hands wrapped around her to pull her even closer.

“I think we should probably call Lady to talk to the kids.” She says raising her head up to mine suddenly, her eyes widening like she’d just gotten the idea of the century.

Panic fills my chest because I knew for a fact that Lady was nowhere near the kids. Duchess was currently the one watching them, while Belle and Lady looked over the plannings for the proposal.

“The kids are fine, Babe. I trust Lady with them. And they did give us this break so we could focus on ourselves.” I tell her and her forehead scrunches in a mock frown.

“I know. I just...” she looks too worried for it to just be about the kids, so I lean back to study her closely.

“What’s this really about? Is all this bothering you? I mean, us leaving the kids, the date?” For some reason I feel a little panicked that maybe I had jumped the gun and this was not really what she wanted.

“No! No, I love this, I love that we get to spend some time together, it just confuses me. You know? One minute, you’re asking me to be your fake wife for two years, but then, nothing about all this feels fake...” her voice trails off and she is unable to meet my gaze.

Realizing where she was going with this, a sign relief grazes my chest and my hands tighten around her waist. I rest my forehead on hers and we both inhale.

“I never wanted this to be just an arrangement, Queeneth. I know we haven’t talked much about our feelings but I’d hoped to show you everything I am feeling in every way that counts.”

I lean back to stare into her eyes.

“I’ve never felt this way about anyone else. Never.”

I was putting my feelings out there, and it felt exhilarating being able to tell her exactly how I was feeling.

“Nothing about this is fake, Queeneth. It never was.” I finish and she nods, her eyes glistens and I lean down to kiss her.

My hands fists my big shirt that is wearing, and she pulls it over her head, leaning her head away for just a second before I take back her lips.

I kiss her like I'd been starved, and I know I would never get tired of this. Never not feel this burning need for her, every time we kissed.

Her fingers grabs fistfuls of my hair and I lift her into my arms, her legs wraps around my waist on instinct.

There is a small table on the side of the hallway and I place her on it to undo my pants and let it drop to the floor, and then I lift her back into my arms spinning us around so that her back was against the walls.

“Hurry...” she whispers against my lips and I remove my big shirt on her. My hands caressed her center to find her already soaked for me.

“Fuck! Baby, you're always so wet for me.” I moan, my kiss grazing hotly down her neck, my palms cups the slender slope as my lips finds her taut nipples and I suck them into my mouth. She moans loudly, without a care in the world because we had the house to ourselves.

“I want you so badly.” She cried, “All the time.”

My heart soars at her words, my cock hardening to an impossible length, I don't know if I would be able to last.

I know I won't the second I lean down and pierce her center, her snug, wet heat welcomes me. And I lean my head away from her lips, with a deep growl.

It was too much, my hands slide from her neck to hold her waist and guide her movements. She has one hand pressed back against the wall and the other one holding onto the back of my neck.

“Shit!” She moans, and I open my eyes to stare at her face, eyes closed, hair a mess, and her breast bouncing with the force of my thrusts, she was a sight to behold.

My thrusts increase with velocity as I feel the onslaught of my orgasm, “Fuck! I'm coming.” I growl, leaning against her

to bury my face in the crook of my neck. She smelled like a mixture of her scent and mine. I love how we were already so intertwined. Like there was no separation where she ended and where I began.

I feel her walls tightening around my cock and I can no longer hold it off, I am fucking her like a man possessed as I feel my seed spilling into her while she pulsates around me, her thighs tightened around my waist. Our moans fusing together until we both find completion.

“I think I can go prepare for our date now.” She finally says after a few minutes of us being still and we both burst into laughter.

By the time Queeneth and I are step out of the house to make our way to the Marbella Hotel, Lady had texted me that the rooftop was ready, and she’d even sent photos as evidence.

“*Break a leg.*” She’d added to the text, with a wink emoji.

Other than the excitement of this being our real engagement, I was over joy with my new relationship with my daughter. We were not yet where I wanted us to be, but there was hope in the fact that we were making progress.

My driver Alfie makes the twenty minute-drive to the restaurant all the while, I hold Queeneth’s hands in mine.

She is wearing short black dress with spaghetti-straps and a low-cut neckline that reveals just a little bit of cleavage that was currently driving me crazy.

Her makeup was perfect with her signature smoky eyes and her hair had been let down on one side. In total, she looked perfect while I was dressed in a suit.

Alfie opens the door for us when we arrive and we make our way inside.

“Shouldn’t we find a table?” Queeneth asks when I lead her towards the elevator.

”Our table’s on the roof.” I tell her and she smiles, nodding and following me.

“A rooftop dinner. How romantic.” She says and I smile.

“That was the idea.” I tell her and she chuckles softly, the sound feels like music to my ears. I can’t stop staring at how beautiful she looked. She had no idea just what I would do to keep that smile on her face.

I would do anything. Move mountains and slay dragons to make sure that she never had to worry about anything ever again.

“Alright this is where you close your eyes.” I tell her when we’re close to the top. Her eyes widens in surprise and then suspicion as she stared at the door of the elevator like she would find the answers there.

When she makes no move, I move to stand behind her and shield her eyes from the door, she laughs again.

“What do you have behind the door.” She asks, but she does not move away.

” You’ll see. It’s a surprise.” I tell her.

The elevator opens up just then to rose petals lining the walkway from the elevator to the space where the table is set. On table and two seats on opposite sides.

There is a large backdrop of roses, beautifully decorated to write the words ‘marry me’. To the right the servers stood in front of the bouquet services and my bandmates are right beside them to play the music.

Lady, Noble and Belle are also there, but I know the kids are still back at their place with Duchess. Lady motions for the band to start playing and they do so, only then did I take my hands away from her face and step aside to stare at her reaction.

She had been smiling, but the smile freezes on her face as she slowly takes in the scene before her. Her eyes widened, and instantly glistens with tears as she covers her surprised face with both hands.

“Oh my God!” I hear her mutter under her lips, but I can see its an excited one, because she was smiling again.

Smiling and crying this time and I am filled with so much joy, it feels like my chest could burst.

She turns to her friends who have their phones out recording her reaction, and they are also laughing and crying with her.

“You guys are so dead.” She says to them, but she’s laughing too, and when she turns to me, her face softens, just like mine.

I get on my knees and take out the ring I’d gotten for her all along.

“I know I asked you to marry me, but you said so yourself, that wasn’t real, and it is nowhere near how you deserve to be asked.

So this is me, coming to you, just a man, who wants to spend the rest of his life with you. Not as some business arrangement, but because nothing had ever felt so right than you in my arms. Nothing ever felt so perfect than when you smile at me, and I know I put that smile on your face.”

Her tears were coming down harder, and my voice shakes with my own emotions, I feel the tear slid down my cheek, and I go on...

”Queeneth Roberts, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife, and letting me put that smile on your face for the rest of our lives?”

She was already nodding, walking towards me with her hands stretched, “Yes.” she mutters.

“Yes, yes and yes a hundred times over.” She says smiling, and laughing and crying all at the same time.

I slide the ring into her finger and stand up to envelope her in the tightest hug. The claps and screams and music fades to the background and she is the only thing that’s real before me, the only thing that matters.

CHAPTER 27

Queeneth

The breeze flows into the house through the open window in the living room, crisp and slightly chilly as summer gives way to fall.

It was the middle of September, and it feels like the past two months had been a roller coaster of emotions. I knew how fast things could change, but never in my wildest dreams did I think that they could take such a drastic and unbelievable turn.

It was officially two months since Lord came back into my life, and since then, the tides had changed. I had my precious kids with me so I no longer had to work like a slave for stipends so I could save enough to bring them back.

My relationship with my friends and my mother had developed. I realize only now that there had been some kind of invisible wall between the girls and I in the past, I blamed it on the part of myself I had been hiding from them. Now that it was all out in the open, everything felt lighter and easier. Although Belle was yet to tell us about her own kids, she insists it's a part of herself she would not like to talk about, so I had let her be on that aspect, I knew things would sort itself out when the timing was right.

The house was somewhat silent with the kids up with Duchess preparing for bed while Lord was still out at the studio recording for the band like he'd agreed to do as a condition for leaving the band.

"Ma'am, the kids are ready for bed. They want you to read them before they go to sleep." Duchess's voice interrupts my

reading in the living room, and I look up to find her standing in the hallway.

“You really need to stop with the ma’am thing, Duchess. It kind of makes me feel old, I thought we’ve talked about this.” I tell her and she smiles, but she does not say anything. I knew she would be sticking to calling me that. I don’t even know why I bother.

“Alright then,” I say with a sigh, setting my book down on the stool and getting to my feet. Duchess follows closely behind me.

“You can go, I’ll send them to bed while I wait for Lord.” I tell her, and she looks skeptical.

“Are you sure? I don’t know if its safe to leave you all alone in this big house without my boss being around.” She says.

“I have been alone in this house before, Duchess. No one is going to show up out of the blues to kidnap the kids and I. We’ll be fine. I promise.” I tell her and although she still looks doubtful, she nods and takes her leave.

“Alright, goodnight, ma’am.” She says and I smile at her retreating figure shaking my head before I head up the stairs towards the kids’ rooms.

“Mom! Nolan won’t give back my tablet!” Luke yelled the second I walk into the room and I smile at them. His hands had healed well, and the cast had been taken off two weeks ago. That meant that he was now twice as agile as he was before the cast.

He and Nolan were the menace of the house, pranking and teasing anyone that could fall easily into their prey.

“Nolan, give him back his tablet, and use yours please.” I tell him, as I stare around the room for Jacob and find him huddled in the corner in front of a book. He’d taken to reading books with pictures and sometimes he drew whatever he could. He was quite good for a five-year old and Lord and I were thinking of enrolling him in some art classes.

Although I argued that he was still too young for it, I was proud still and willing to see how far he would go with it.

“But mom, he broke mine, and promised to share his with me.” Nolan cried still holding on tightly to the tablet until I separated them, taking the tablet from them.

Nolan looked close to tears while Luke smiled victoriously at his brother.

“Luke, you know how unkind it is to go back on your word, don’t you?” I say to him, and his smile quickly turns innocuous.

“But mom, my hand was aching, and that’s why I accidentally dropped and broke his tablet.” he says.

I was beginning to see a pattern of him using his injury to try to get away with his naughtiness.

“Well, your hand no longer hurts, but your word still stands, so you must learn to share your tablet with your brother at least until he gets a new one.” I tell him before keeping it away.

“Alright boys, back to bed.” I say to them. Jacob is still engrossed in his book until I come to him and close it, he cries in protest, but when he sees my stern face, he walks over to bed.

I am barely two minutes into the book before they’re all snoring softly. Smiling, I press soft kisses on each of their foreheads and close the door before making my way to Olivia and Nina’s room.

The girls are giggling with each other under the covers when I walk in, and I repeat the process with them. It takes longer for them to sleep, as they’d kept on asking me questions, but by the time they finally do, I am exhausted, and it is already past nine pm.

I am a little worried that Lord isn’t back yet, and he does not answer the phone when I call. I knew from first-hand experience just how engrossed it could get when they worked in the studio so I am not too bothered.

I try to get back to my book in the living room when the doorbell rings barely ten minutes after I've settled in.

Staring at the clock, it's a few minutes to nine thirty. I'd not heard the car come in, so I know it isn't Lord. Thinking about Duchess' words about me being alone with the kids, a slight shiver of fear slides down my spine as I stand to my feet. The bell rings again and I make my way towards the door, heart racing.

I look through the small monitor by the side of the door and see its Benjamin at the door. I feel a mix of confusion and worry when I see him at my door. I had not seen Benjamin in weeks. In fact after the day I'd run into him after wedding dress shopping, I'd not seen or heard from him ever since. So, seeing him show up here unannounced was suspicious as hell.

I want to ignore him, so he got the hint and leaves on his own, but the doorbell is loud and when he rings it again, I am afraid he'll wake the kids so I open it, but not fully. I remain in between the door and the frame.

"Hey babe." His eyes widens when he sees me, they roam my body, the parts he could see and he smiles that his cringe-worthy smile that never fails to creep me out. I wonder what I had been thinking to go out with a guy like him. Loneliness really made people do things they would never ordinarily do.

"What do you want Benjamin?" I ask, ignoring his 'babe' quip because I knew correcting him was a waste of time.

"Huh, aren't you going to at least invite me inside?" He asks and I shake my head. "I've never met that husband of yours." He is wearing sweats and a dark hoodie that he's covered his head with. He looks ominous and I try not to show that I was bothered by his presence.

His words is loaded with subtexts I can't even beginning to explain or pick apart, and I don't waste my time trying to.

"No, Benjamin. Its late and I need to get back to bed." I snap and I expect him to snap back in return or say something hurtful, but he quickly looks remorseful.

“I know its late, but I heard about my auntie Gigi, coming over here and making some weird accusations, so I wanted to come apologize in person.” He says, throwing me off kilter for a second. It was the last thing I expected him to say, and I know that the only way he had known about it was if Gigi herself had told him.

That meant that they were still talking, and Gigi knew he was coming here, no matter how good he tried to perpetrate his lie.

“It’s alright. Benjamin, it’s all water under the bridge. And it was for the best too, it brought me and Lord even closer.” I tell him and I see the way his features harden, but he plays it off with a slow smile that looks anything but humorous or kind.

“Can I at least come inside? I feel like there’s a lot we need to talk about.” he says trying to step into the house.

I am very much uncomfortable with this, and worried that Lord would return to find my ex here. It was not a good look, and I did not want him to get the wrong idea.

“No! Benjamin, its late, we have nothing to talk about. And I want you to leave before...” I stop myself just before I tell mention to him that Lord was not in.

He is silent for a few seconds before he finally takes one step back and raises both hands in the air as if in surrender.

“You’re right. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be here, I just wanted to make sure you were alright. And apologize like I said.” He says, looking contrite and I nod at him.

He starts to leave, and I am about to close the door with relief when he takes one step back again.

“I’m sorry to inconvenience you but I need to use your restroom. It’ll only take a minute. “His smile looks harmless enough and I don’t want to be too difficult, so I let him in.

“Go through that hallway, it’s the first door on your right.” I tell him and he nods before moving towards the hallway to use the visitors restroom downstairs.

Ten minutes later, Benjamin is still not out yet and I come towards the restroom to knock on it when I hear the sound of Lord's car driving into the garage.

Confused as to whether to go to the front door, or to the restroom and get Benjamin to come out, the choice is taken out of my hands when Lord opens the door only moments later.

He is all smiles when he walks in and sees me, while I feel constipated just from the thought of Benjamin in the house. I start to tell him about our unexpected house guest when the restroom door opens and Benjamin comes out naked, his clothes in his hands.

I am too stunned to do anything but stare at him in shock, and when I turn to Lord, I realize exactly what this is; Benjamin and his aunt had set me up.

Lord's face is a mixture of horror, pain and anger as his gaze darts from Benjamin to mine.

"What the hell is this!" He roars taking one step towards Benjamin, but as if Benjamin had expected it, he bolts, darting the other way and out of the grasp of Lord towards the door. He is out of the house before either of us can stop him and the sound of his car peeling out of the driveway echoes back into the house.

"Lord, it's not what it looks like-" I start, but he is already shaking his head.

"Oh, and what exactly does this look like Queeneth!" He thunders, I take one step towards him, but he stops me with his hands and shakes his head.

"You know what, save the explanations." He snaps and then he walks out of the house ignoring my calls.

I crumble to the floor, my heart chattering into a thousand pieces as the sobs break out of me.

CHAPTER 28

Lord

My heart is in agony. Fighting both the feelings of anger, and pain. A gnawing desperation claws at my chest and I want to rail at the world, I want to pound my fist into a wall. But I settle for a walk.

Trying and failing to ignore the pain that felt like it was dismantling the organs that made my heart whole and, in its place, it was being replaced with a ghost of its former self. I could not believe what I had just seen and if I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would swear on my life and the lives of all my children that it was a lie.

That it was not possible that Queeneth would be having an affair with another man, right under my roof. With our kids in bed upstairs.

It was unbelievable... it was....

Impossible.

I stop right in my tracks as the scene played back on a replay in my mind. I did not see the two of them together, what I had seen was Queeneth in the hallway, fully dressed, and then the bastard running out of the guest bathroom - naked.

They were not together, and she knew I would be coming back to the house soon. There was no way she would do that with that knowledge.

There was no way she would do that at all, on any given circumstance.

The rational part of my mind tells me. I had been too blinded by my rage that I had jumped to the wrong conclusions, without even giving her the chance to tell me exactly what had happened. And as reason replaced anger, I realized that it had been unfair of me to lash out without hearing her side.

When I look around me, I realized I had walked almost a half a kilometer away from the house. Sighing heavily, I make my way back towards the house. All the while, I am thinking of what to say to diffuse the situation. She might have been set up, and I'd let her accusers win by judging her without cause.

By the time I get to the house, I was still in doubt of what to say. I walk into the house to still find her on the floor, in the hallway, exactly where she had been standing before I stormed out. She looks up, her gaze finds mine and she quickly gets to her feet.

"It was a set up. I swear, I didn't do anything." She cried, walking towards me, and I close the distance letting her fall into my arms and she heaves against me, her tears coming in heavy sobs.

"Hey, hey. It's okay I believe you." I tell her, but she is still crying, and she shakes her head.

"I can prove it to you, I can prove it that it was a set up. The security cameras!" She claps her hands together, and then hurriedly wipes at her tears as she leads me to the security room down basement.

I follow her when I see that she was intent on showing me the proof. I realize she would not stop unless I knew it without a doubt.

When we get to the room, she goes straight to the computer and plays back the footage of her with the intruder.

I watch as she goes to open the door for him, they spend a few minutes in front of the door. She had not even let him in, and just as she is about to close the door behind her, he stops her and then she let him in to go use the bathroom while she remained waiting in the hallway.

And then I walk into the house ten minutes later and the bastard runs out of the bathroom naked. Shame and disappointment in myself fills me as I watch the footage, and I realize she had been telling the truth all along, she had indeed been set up, and I had not even bothered to listen to her before jumping to the wrong conclusion.

“I would never do that to you.” Her voice breaks and there is an accusation in her eyes.

“I’m sorry.” I finally say, head hanging in shame, “I should have listened to you when you tried to explain.”

She does not say anything for a moment, “Who is he?” I ask her.

“Benjamin. He’s my ex.” She tells me, and I realize what this meant. A thought occurs to me that there was a chance Gigi had gotten her nephew to do her dirty work since all her attempt to get me to break up with Queeneth had fallen apart.

“He’s also Gigi Owen’s nephew.” I tell her and our eyes meet, I see she has the same look of suspicion in her gaze, and she voices out my thoughts first.

“You think they’re working together?” She asks.

“Gigi would go to any lengths to get what she want, I would not put this past her.” I tell her and her eyes widen in shock.

“And you dated this woman?” She asks incredulously, it was also unbelievable even for me, that Gigi would do something like this. It was extreme to say the least, and as the anger bubbles through me like molten magma, I know for a fact that I would not let it slide.

“I used to like drama back then.” I say, my voice is cold as ice and there no trace of humour in it, “Now, I hate playing games. And Gigi and her nephew just played the wrong game.”

“What are you going to do?” Queeneth asks.

I already know exactly what I wanted to do, but in the meantime, I wanted to earn her forgiveness.

“First, I want to apologize for not believing you. You could have been hurt, or assaulted, given you were all alone in the house, and I was too blinded by my rage to look out for your well-being.”

Her gaze softens, but she nods, “you were an asshole for bolting like that.” She says to me with a smile, and I smile in return, “And you should have tried to hear my side of the story, but the scene did look incriminating enough, and I don’t know that I would not react the same, if the roles were reversed.”

She takes one step towards me, shifting aside, the chair with wheels that stood in between us. “But you came back. And you told me you believed me even before you saw the footage.”

She leans up to me and presses her lips to mine in a soft kiss that I return, my arms circling her waist to pull her closer against me. And then we separate, and I simply hold her against me tightly.

“For a second there, I was afraid I’d lost you.” I whisper into her ears, and she shakes her head into the crook of my neck.

“Never.” her voice is muffled against my sleeve, but I hear her loud and clear.

The next morning, my first point of call is to the police. I take the footage and show it to them and they waste no time rounding up Benjamin, and he is arrested and booked.

Queeneth goes to drop the kids at school that morning and I am alone in the house with Duchess cleaning up after the kids when the doorbell rings.

Duchess goes to unlock the door, and she returns alone with her face in a frown.

“It’s the prissy lady in pink.” Duchess says going back to her chores. There was only one prissy lady I knew who was always in pink and it was Gigi Owens. I had somehow suspected she would visit at some point, given her nephew was in jail because I called the cops on him for what he’d done.

“Send her in.” I tell Duchess, but she makes no move to go.

“I don’t think that’s a very good idea, boss. This woman has already caused some deep rifts between your relationship with Queeneth. Don’t let her cause any more cracks.” Duchess says.

She sounded like my mother.

“It’s alright, Duchess. I’m just going to talk to her, she knows she’s at my mercy so she would behave herself.

Duchess merely shrugs and resumes her chores, so I make my way to the front door and unlock it. Like my housekeeper had said, Gigi was dressed in a different shade of bright pink tweed suit. This time, her boots were black, and she had a pin bow on her head. Even though she was in her forties, she still dressed like a high schooler. Although thanks to the Botox, age seemed not to have caught up with her yet.

She was the epitome of remorse when I open the door and find her standing there. Her eyes widen in surprise, and she looks like she would burst into tears any moment now.

“Can we talk?” She asks and I nod opening the door wider to let her in and she releases a grateful smile, and a muffled thank you.

“What do you want Gigi?” I ask her, only to be cordial, I already know she was here about her nephew, but I pretend not to know.

“To apologize.” She says, her voice is heavy, “I’m here to apologize, Lord. It’s all my fault, Benjamin shouldn’t be made to suffer for my greed and jealousy.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Gigi. What does me making your nephew pay for trespassing and setting up my fiancée, got to do with you?” I ask.

“I made him do it, I was jealous of the fact that she was with you. I wanted to be the one in her shoes. Richbelly isn’t doing very well. Ever since the band stopped playing regularly, I’ve lost a pretty decent client based, and I thought if I could keep you, you would help in that regard.

Please, Lord. Drop the charges against him, I swear it would never happen again. I don't want him to suffer for something I made him do."

I stare at her for a while, disappointed in what she had been reduced to. Knowing that she was not always like this. She had been fun, and industrious and a go-getter too. Although she had taken the go-getter trait too far.

"You and your nephew should suffer for this, Gigi. And your nephew isn't going to jail because you made him do anything. He's going because he could have said no to you. He could have done the right thing, but he'd chosen to commit a felony instead.

So, if I'm dropping the charges, its not because I believe he's innocent, but because I know who you used to be Gigi, and I know you are better than this."

She bursts into tears but I don't say anything else to her. I send her on her way with the promise that I would drop the charges while in return, she agreed to make him stay away from me and my family. I did not want him anywhere near Queeneth or my kids. And my warnings to Gigi had been pretty clear. She should also stay away or I would in fact ruin her and her Richbelly.

Point taken, she took the advice and left the house.

A few minutes later, Queeneth returns, and I meet her at the front of the house. I tell her about Gigi's visit, and she is shocked that I had been right after all.

"I'm sorry I doubted you." I tell her and she shakes her head,

"It's alright. What's the point of us being together, if I can't forgive a humanly error." She responds before slipping her hands around my neck to hug me.

The hug lasts for a real long time, before I lean back to kiss her.

CHAPTER 29

Queeneth

Two days after the Benjamin incident, I walk into the bar where the girls and I used to hang out after dropping off the kids at school.

Belle and Lady are already seated on our usual table, and I see Belle is already talking to the waiter, Eye candy is on duty for the day, even though it was still daylight and Belle is shamelessly flirting with him.

Lady spots me first and waves me over, and I am smiling when I join them. She is already visibly pregnant now.

“Give that poor boy a break, Belle.” I say to her once I settle into the seat and make my own order.

We wait until Eye candy leaves before she launches into her tirade about how she was considering on whether or not to spend the night with Eye candy.

“No, don’t do it.” I tell her and she gives me a frown.

“Why not!” She whines and I shake my head, glancing at Lady who merely shrugs and sucks on the straw of her drink.

“What do you mean, why not? Unless you’re planning on dating him, or marrying him, stay the hell away from his pants. I like the drinks here way too much and when things finally end with Eye candy over there, and I guarantee you, it will; we have to go find a new waterhole for our hangouts.”

She gives me a disproving glare, “Way to have faith in me, Queenie.” She snaps and takes a sip of her own drink.

I roll my eyes, “Spare me the guilty-conscience, Belle. You’ve never dated anyone past three months.”

“Hey! That was mean.” She says and realizing I did sound mean, I give her a remorseful smile.

“I’m sorry. I’ve kind of being on edge lately.” I tell them, and Lady’s eyes widens.

“I heard a rumor at the Richbelly about you and Benjamin.” Lady says, “I would have called but I had a doctor’s appointment yesterday.” She added.

“What rumor? How come I never hear anything.” Belle says, looking from my face to Lady’s.

I had not told them about the incident with Benjamin and it was why I had called this meeting, because I wanted to tell them about it.

“Yeah, it wasn’t a rumor. Benjamin showed up at the house two nights ago. I had no idea how he knew I was home alone, but he seemed to know, and he showed unannounced...”

I go on to tell them the events of that night, and how Gigi had come the next morning to plead with Lord not press charges and Lord had agreed to it on the promise that Benjamin would stay away from me.

By the time I round off the story, they are both staring at me with varying degrees of shock in their eyes.

Lady had reached over the table to hold my hand and Belle looks like she was ready to murder someone, I could not tell who she was more mad at, Gigi or Benjamin.

“Oh my God, I can’t believe you went through all that.” Belle spoke first, she sounded mad too. “I swear to God, I would definitely skin him alive if I ever saw him again.”

“And Gigi? I thought we had only Amelia to deal with, and now there’s Gigi too?” Lady says.

I had told them about the incident with Amelia too. It feels like my relationship with Lord was being tested through fire in these past two months since we’d been together. From the

roller coaster of emotions with the kids, and deceptions to the interference of jealous exes, on both our sides.

However, it was funny how all these incidents only seemed to bring us even closer.

“We have each other. I think that’s all that matters. I’m willing to battle any storm as long as we’ve got each other.” I tell them, staring unseeing at the glass in front of me.

I don’t realize the table is silent as I keep going and they watch me quietly.

“I guess, what I’m trying to say is, I’m crazy about your father, I love him, with my whole heart, and I can’t imagine myself with anyone else.” I raise my eyes to Lady’s and then to Belle’s.

“I really want this relationship to work, more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life.” I realize just how much I mean these words as I say it to them.

And when I don’t say anything else, I see that Lady’s eyes is tearing up, and Belle looks close to it herself.

“Hey, guys!” I say, chuckling, but I realize I am close to tears myself.

“Ignore me, its these pregnancy hormones, it makes me weep at the drop of a hat.” Lady says, and Belle just blows air into her eyes with both hands.

“It’s beautiful seeing you so happy with someone after everything you’ve been through babe. And knowing that you love my father this much makes me even happier.” Lady says.

Driving back to the house after leaving the girls, it takes a little less than fifteen minutes without traffic, and because I was going a little over the limit. It was a miracle I had not been pulled over.

I am to see Lord’s car still in the garage and I make my way inside. The sound of the piano coming from the music room tells me exactly where he is, and feeling like my heart would explode, I hurry towards the room.

He is sitting behind the piano, eyes closed as he played like he was in another realm. The melody is so hauntingly beautiful, it brings tears to my eyes. It was the same one he had been playing the first time I had seen him play the piano in this same room. Except he was not just playing it now, he was singing as well.

A song I'd never heard from the band, and one that he had not wanted me to hear until he'd perfected the song.

No other song had ever sounded so perfect to my ears. I take one step into the room and remain with my back pressed against the wall. He is so immersed in the song that he does not hear me or look up until he thrums the last melody of the song.

And then he sighs softly, smiling slowly and he speaks before he even opens his eyes.

“Are you going to keep standing there all day, or are you going to come over and kiss me.” he says and I smile.

“I love you, Lord McCarthy.” I whisper and before I finish getting the words out, he is kissing me hard. His lips pressing against mine like he was going to devour me whole. And I would let him, I match his kiss with my even desperate one, my hands grabbing at his hair, pulling him closer still even though my chest is already squashed against his bare chest.

I can feel the hardness of his cock against my stomach and he lifts me up into his arms and walks to the piano bench.

Fingers groping and pulling, I am naked within seconds, even though he still has his clothes on and my hands dig into his pants to pull out his cock, and then he lifts me ever so slowly until I am sinking down against his hard cock.

“Oh fuck” I moan out, eyes closed, neck arched. His hands tightens on my ass as he helps me ride him, up and down, up and down.

He sets the rhythm for our fucking and I am delirious with pleasure.

“You belong to me now, Queeneth Roberts, and I'm never letting you go.” He growls the word against my lips and I

smile.

“And you belong to me, Lord. Just me.” I respond and he lifts us up moving until my back is pressed against the wall. He does not break the rhythm through it all.

I am so close, I cry out his name on a whimper and his fingers slips underneath the crack of my ass to the point where we are joined and he rubs on it until my eyes roll back into my head and my orgasm rips through me.

I let out a loud scream, and his growl of completion merges with mine, he continues to thrust into me until he’s emptied himself into me, and we’re both limp, we sink to the cold floor, entangled in each other.

“I love you too, Queeneth Roberts.” He says against my lips. He is still inside me, and his fingers are lazily stroking my bare skin. His words fills my heart up, all the nooks and empty cranes of me; he fills them up and I know without a doubt that he was my soulmate.

And everything that had happened between us had led us to this very moment.

“Will you marry me Lord McCarthy?” I propose, smiling when he stops kissing me.

He laughs at that, “I thought I already proposed.” He says and I smile.

“It’s my turn to do the proposing, I guess.” I tell him and his smile widens.

He kisses me again before he responds, “Yes, without a doubt.” he says.

“Queeneth McCarthy.” I say, testing out the name on my lips.

“I love the sound of that” He says and I press my lips to the crook of his neck.

“I think, I could get used to it too.”

CHAPTER 30

Lord

Two months later...

We are in a tiny bathroom after our wedding, as I have my head buried underneath layers of white lace, the sounds of her moans spurring me on.

My fingers thrust into her, hard and unrelenting while my tongue laps at her juices. sucking on her clit and the point where my fingers stroked her.

“Oh my God! Lord!” She moans, her fingers grabs a fistful of my hair and she pulls at it, but I don’t stop. She had already come once, but I want her to come twice.

I lean back, only for a second to tell her that before I continue and then I feel her thighs tighten around my neck and she lets out a strangled scream, muffled by her own fingers. Her moans go on and on, and I don’t let up, milking every last drop of her orgasm until she goes lax in my arms.

“That was amazing.” She muttered before leaning up to kiss me.

But we were in a tiny bathroom stall of the Golden Love hotel, downstairs in the hall, we had almost two hundred and fifty guests waiting for us to come out to take our first dance, and we’d snuck out fifteen minutes ago while the hall had been busy and no one had noticed.

A loud knock interrupts our kiss and the loud sound of Belle’s voice pierces through the door.

“Queeneth?” She calls out, and we both pull apart and stare at each other with wide eyes, I raise one finger to my lips indicating she be just as quiet as me, and she nods but Belle’s voice only continues.

“I know you two are in there, your dress is peeking through the door.” She says and we both look down at the same time, our foreheads jamming into the other.

“Ouch!” Queeneth groans and I only rub at the spot.

“Sorry.” I mutter even though there was really no need for it again, now that it was clear we’d been caught.

“Open the door, or I’m calling the janitor to come and knock it down.” Belle threatens.

We both adjust our appearances in the tiny mirror on the wall before we open the door, our smiles a little sheepish while Belle’s frown only deepened.

“What the hell, guys! Everyone’s been waiting for you two, and you couldn’t wait until the wedding night to screw each other’s brains out!” Belle snaps at the two of us.

“Oh my God, Belle. I don’t need that kind of image in my head.” We both turn to find Lady also in the hallway, she had followed Belle to look for us too and both Queeneth and I are laughing now.

“We’re sorry.” Queeneth says but I am not in the least remorseful.

We follow them to the reception center and there is no doubt on the smile on the faces of my friends that they knew exactly what we had been up to.

Oh yeah, my band mates were here too. They had served on my team of groom’s men, including Noble. While Belle, Lady and Leonie were on the bridesmaid’s team.

The kids had been ring bearers, and it had been a cure sight earlier, when all five of them had done their bridal walk down the aisle. A walk the wedding planner had spent weeks teaching them before they mastered it.

Alice, Queeneth's mother had been the officiating minister and before the wedding we'd had a small talk, she had tried to apologize for how harsh she had been when we had first met, but I had stopped her because I had deserved it. And we'd agreed to put our differences aside and look forward to a brighter future.

Amelia was also present. Unlike Gigi, she had chosen to show her support for us, and she'd apologized to Queeneth too. They would never be best friends, but Queeneth was cordial to her. If for anything, she was Nina's mother and she had finally agreed to a fifty-fifty joint custody with Nina. She and Olivia were inseparable now and it was a beautiful sight watching how closer they got with each passing day.

It felt like I had been given a second chance at life ever since that day, four months ago when I had watched Queeneth walk down the aisle at Lady's wedding.

It was three days to thanksgiving, and we had fixed our wedding as soon as possible, because like we'd both agreed, we could not wait to get married.

Saying my vows to her had moved us both to tears. I had lost count of all the times we'd shed tears at the ceremony. And I knew without a doubt that she was the person for me. In the short time since our reunion, we'd already been through so much. But we had gotten through it all.

Our love had withstood the test and it was ready to withstand any more, life threw at us in the future.

The music played in the background as we danced with our beautiful kids, and then we'd both settled into our seats while Olivia, Nina, Luke, Jacob and Nolan performed a choreography they had practiced purposely for the wedding while everyone clapped, and Queeneth cried by my side.

After the dance, the bestman, and the bridesmaids, Ricky and Lady gave their speeches, but it is Lady's speech that moves me to tears.

"My best friend and my father met a long time ago when I had no idea who she was, and I hated Lord McCarthy with a

vehemence that had become exhausting.

But when Queeneth came into my life, she taught me a kind of friendship that I'd never experienced. And later on, she helped me see my father in a way I'd never cared to look before. She helped me see him as human.

And as humans, we're built to make mistakes. It's kind of in our DNA."

She pauses while everyone laughs at that, I hear Queeneth sniffle by my side and her fingers in mine tightens. Lady continued...

"We all make mistakes, but our humanity shows and errs itself when we own up to our mistakes and are willing to make sacrifices to correct them. And that's all my father has tried to do. So now, he is not just Lord McCarthy to me, he is human, and he is my father.

So, cheers to you both, Queenie. I love you more than you know, and I love you too, Dad." She finishes.

I let the tears fall freely and I stand up to move towards her and hug her as tightly as I can.

"I love you too, baby bug." I whisper into her ears, the name I'd called her as a kid and when I lean back, she has tears in her eyes too.

After the speech, Queeneth and I took the stage one more time, and the song I'd recorded for this particular dance plays in the background. I take her into my hands, and we slow dance to the melody.

She feels so small in my arms, so fragile, I make a committed vow to myself that I would protect her with everything in me.

She had not just given me a second chance, she had given me back my life, my daughter and my children.

"You know," I say into her ears, "You have given me much more than I could ever repay you for."

She leans back to smile up at me, but we don't stop swirling to the music.

“How so?” She asks.

“My daughter. I would never be this close with her, if it weren’t for you.” I say and she is already shaking her head.

“I would love to take that credit, but you worked on your relationship with Lady, all on your own Lord. You put in the work, and Lady’s smart. She knows you are earnest, and she sees just how sorry you are. It’s the reason you two have a relationship. Not because of me.”

“I believe everything you said, but I still believe you were an integral part in why all of that were possible. And I promise to spend the rest of my life, showing you just how grateful I am.”

Her eyes softens and she smiles, nodding her head. “I’ll spend the rest of my life showing you that you’re worth it all too, Lord. You are worth the love of your kids, no matter what your past is.”

I lean down and press my lips to hers. And we kiss languidly in front of all our family and friends.

“I love you, Queeneth McCarthy.” I whisper against her lips, and she smiles widely against me.

“And I love you more, Lord McCarthy.”

It was not the most perfect wedding, but it was perfect for us, and we were perfect for each other.

The End