

A man with dark, wavy hair and a light beard is lying down, wearing a white button-down shirt that is open at the collar. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight, intense gaze. His right hand is raised, with his index finger pointing towards his forehead. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a couch or bed.

Eleven
of a
Kind

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

SANDI LYNN

ELEVEN OF A KIND

KIND BROTHERS SERIES, BOOK SIXTEEN



SANDI LYNN

SANDI LYNN ROMANCE, LLC

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Bestselling Author

SANDI LYNN

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

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CHAPTER 1



G abriel

“Excuse me?” My brows furrowed as my heart pounded out of my chest.

“I know you’re in shock, Dad,” she said.

“Do not call me that!” I pointed my finger at her. “I don’t know who you are or where you came from, but you’re lying.”

“Does the name Ariana Livingston ring a bell? And take your hands off me.” She jerked out of Stan’s grip.

When she said Ariana’s name, I froze.

“What do you want me to do with her, Dr. Kind?” Stan asked.

“Ariana is your mother?” I asked her.

“She was my mother. She died a month ago.”

I looked over at Conner, Nathan, and Sebastian as they sat at the table, staring at me with shocked expressions on their faces.

“How old are you?”

“Fifteen.”

“It’s okay, Stan. You can go back down to the lobby,” I said as a sickness tore through me. “You said your name is Riley?”

“Yeah.”

“Sit down, Riley. Can you guys give us some time?” I asked my cousins.

“Yeah, of course,” Conner and Sebastian said as they stood up from their seats.

“Can I talk to you in the hall for a minute?” Nathan placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Riley, I’ll be right back. Do you want anything?”

“I’ll take that bottle of water you dropped on the floor,” she said.

“I’ll get it for her,” Conner said.

Nathan and I stepped out into the hallway. “Trust me, cousin. I know exactly what you’re feeling right now,” he said. “Did you know her mother?”

“Yeah. I did.” I sighed as I ran my hand down my face.

“Okay. The best thing you can do is calmly talk to Riley and find out what’s happening.”

“I can’t believe this, Nathan.”

“I know.” He gripped my shoulder. “It’ll all get straightened out. I have to get back to my patients. I’ll see you later.”

I walked back into the kitchen area, and Conner and Sebastian patted my back before walking out.

“Listen, Riley. I have patients who are waiting for me. Are you here by yourself?”

“Yeah.”

“How did you get here?”

“By plane, duh.”

“By yourself?” My brows furrowed.

“Yeah.”

I let out a sigh and ran my hand down my face.

“It was either come here and find you or get stuck living with those pretentious rich assholes who hate me.”

“First of all, watch your mouth. Second, who are you referring to?”

“The grandparents.”

“I literally cannot do this right now.” I ran my hand through my hair.

“I guess coming here was a mistake.” She grabbed her backpack from the floor and stood up. “You’re my father whether you like it or not. It was your sperm who impregnated my mother.”

“Jesus Christ, kid.” I shook my head.

I pulled my phone from my pocket and dialed my office.

“Dr. Kind’s office. Kelsey speaking.”

“Kelsey, it’s me. I need you to reschedule my patients for today. Tell them I had a family emergency.”

“Dr. Kind, there are three patients already here waiting for you.”

“I know. Reschedule and apologize for me. I do have a family emergency and need to leave.”

“Okay, Dr. Kind,” she said.

I stood there and stared at Riley. She sure looked like Ariana, except for one thing: she had my blue eyes.

“We’re leaving, and you’re going to tell me what the hell is going on and why you think I’m your father. Let’s go.” I began to walk away.

“Wait. I’m hungry. Can I have some of that food?” She pointed to the island.

“No. We’ll stop at IN-N-OUT on the way to my house and get you something.”

“What’s that?”

“A burger place. Let’s go.”

“Nice car,” Riley said as she climbed in and looked around.

“Thanks.” I pulled my seatbelt over me.

“You’re not wearing a wedding ring. You’re not married?”

“No. I’m not married,” I spoke with irritation.

“A girlfriend who’s going to flip out when she finds out about me?” she said.

“No. No girlfriend either.”

“You gay?”

“NO!” I shouted as I glanced at her.

“You don’t have to yell.”

I took in a deep breath. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to. You’re just asking way too many questions right now. Can you please just sit there and not say a word?”

“Whatever.”

I pulled into the drive-thru at IN-N-OUT. “What do you want?” I asked her.

She leaned over so she could read the menu.

“I’ll have combo #2 with a strawberry shake.”

“Why strawberry?” I narrowed my eye at her.

“Because I like it.” She narrowed her eye back at me. “Is that a problem?”

“No. It’s just that I like strawberry shakes too.”

I placed the order and pulled up to the window. As I was waiting for the food, I pulled out my phone and sent a text message to Grayson.

“I need you to come over the second you leave the hospital. It’s extremely important.”

“Combo #2 and two strawberry shakes,” the server said as she handed me the shakes and bag of food.

I pulled away and headed home. This was not happening to me. She couldn’t be my daughter. I was a bachelor living my best life, and this was nothing but a joke. A sick joke someone was playing on me.

CHAPTER 2



Gabriel

“Wow, this is where you live?” Riley stared at the house as I pulled into the driveway.

“Yes. This is where I live.” I grabbed the bag of food and my shake and climbed out of the car.

After unlocking the door, I stepped inside while she followed behind.

“Damn. I can’t believe this place.”

“Can you please not swear?” I asked her.

“Like you don’t? Oh my God.” She ran to the sliding door. “You have a pool!”

“Sit down and eat your food.” I pointed to the table.

“You don’t have to be so rude,” she spoke with irritation.

“I’m not being rude.”

“Yeah, you are.” She rolled her eyes and sat at the table.

I grabbed my shake and sat across from her.

“Tell me what happened to your mother,” I said.

“She died.” She shoved a French fry in her mouth.

“Yes, I know. You said that earlier. How did she die?”

“She and her new boyfriend went out to the bar. They both drank too much and didn’t have enough sense to call an Uber.

Frank got behind the wheel, lost control of the truck, and smashed into a tree.”

“I’m sorry, Riley.”

“Shit happens, right?” She took a bite of her cheeseburger.

I took in a deep breath. My phone pinged with a text from Grayson.

“Sorry, bro. I was tied up in surgery. What happened? Are you okay?”

“Just get over here as soon as you can.”

“How did you get a plane ticket to come here?”

“I used my mother’s credit card. She kept one for emergencies in the kitchen drawer. After she died, I took it in case I needed it. I booked the flight in my name using her card, then called the credit card company, pretended I was her, and canceled the card.”

“And where did you fly in from?”

“Hawaii.”

“Is that where you lived?”

“No. We lived in a small town in Georgia. After she died, social services did their research and contacted her parents. They flew in and took me back to Hawaii since they were my only family. I was only there two weeks before I got the hell out.”

“Wait a second. Are you saying you ran away?”

“I guess you could say that.” She shrugged.

“They must be worried sick about you,” I spoke with irritation.

“They were going to send me away to boarding school.”

“Why would they do that?”

“Because they’re terrible people.”

“And what makes you think I’m your father?”

She reached into her backpack, pulled out a folded document, and slid it across the table.

“This does.”

I picked it up, unfolded it, and stared at the birth certificate that listed my name as the father.

“She told me about you,” Riley said. “She told me all about that summer she spent in Hawaii.”

I closed my eyes for a moment because I remembered that summer all too well.

“I don’t blame you,” she said. “She told me she never told you about me. She found out she was pregnant when she went back to New York. When her mother found out, she was furious, and being the pretentious bitch she is, she sent her away so no one would know she was pregnant. She told everyone that she sent her to study abroad. She really sent her to a ranch in Montana for pregnant teens. She wasn’t allowed to have any contact with anyone outside of the ranch. The plan was that I would be put up for adoption after I was born, and my mother would return to New York and move on with her life as if it never happened. But my mom was smart. She grew close to one of the ranch hands, and he helped her after I was born.”

“Helped her how?”

“He snuck us out of the hospital and drove two hours away to his mother’s house, where we stayed until she was well enough to travel. After about a week, he gave her some money and an old car, and she took me and left Montana.”

“Is that how you ended up in Georgia?” I asked.

“No. We were only in Georgia for the past two years. We moved around a lot. We mostly stayed in small towns because those people hired private investigators to find us.”

“Your grandparents?”

“Don’t call them that,” she said. “Anyway, we took care of each other. It was always just the two of us.”

“She never married?”

“No. She didn’t have great taste in guys. No offense. They were all pretty much losers.”

“How did she make a living?”

“She was a waitress mostly. She did get a job once as a secretary, but that didn’t last long. Her boss wanted her to do more than secretarial work, if you know what I mean. We didn’t have much money, but we didn’t need it. We had each other.” Tears filled her eyes as she looked away from me.

“Hey.” I reached over to place my hand on hers, and she pulled it away.

“It’s cool. Like I said, shit happens.”

The sliding door opened, and Grayson walked in.

“Hey, bro. I got here as soon as I could. “Who’s this?” His brows furrowed.

“This is Riley. She says she’s my daughter.”

“Excuse me? What did you just say?”

“Riley, this is my twin brother, Grayson.”

“Hey, Uncle Grayson.”

“What the hell is going on here?” Grayson asked as he took a seat at the table.

“Her mother is Ariana Livingston,” I said.

“Oh shit. How old are you, Riley?” Grayson asked.

“I just turned fifteen.”

Grayson’s eyes widened as he looked at me. Riley reached into her backpack, pulled out a picture, and slid it across the table.

“She kept this all these years.”

I picked it up and stared at Ariana and me with our arms around each other on the beach in Hawaii.

“I took that picture,” Grayson said.

“Riley, why don’t you go check out the pool or go down to the beach while my brother and I talk.”

“Okay,” she said as she stood up and walked out the sliding door.

“Bro, what the fuck?” Grayson said. “There’s no denying she’s yours. I cannot believe how much she looks like Ariana.”

“I know.” I sighed.

“You told me that night after the two of you had sex that the condom broke, and you were worried.”

“Yeah, but she left two days later, and I never heard from her again. So, I stopped worrying about it.” I ran my hand down my face. “What the fuck am I going to do, Grayson?” I stared at him with panic in my eyes.

“Where’s Ariana? How did Riley even find you?”

I told him everything Riley had told me.

“Shit. Just to make one hundred percent sure that she’s your kid, you’ll have to do a paternity test. But you and I both know the outcome already,” he said.

I stood up from my chair, poured myself a scotch, and downed it.

“I can’t be a father to that kid, bro. I know nothing about raising a teenager.”

“Luckily for you, we have an entire village to help. You can’t send her back to her grandparents. Look at what they did to Ariana. I’m here for you and her. We all are, bro. I think the best person to talk about this with is Nathan. He went through the same thing, so he gets it.”

“But Ella wasn’t a teenager,” I said.

“It doesn’t matter, Gabriel. She’s your daughter regardless of her age.”

“We don’t know that for sure yet.”

Grayson walked over to where I stood and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Yeah, we do, brother, and you need to accept it.”

CHAPTER 3



Gabriel

“Riley,” I shouted from the patio. “Can you come back inside?”

“I’ll let you two talk,” Grayson said and went back to his house.

I stared at the fifteen-year-old girl with dark hair and blue eyes as she walked through the sand and up to the house.

“Let’s go inside,” I said as I opened the sliding door.

“Are you going to call the cops?” she asked.

I stared at her for a moment. “No. You look just like your mother.” I smiled.

“Yeah, I know. Everyone always thought we were sisters.”

“For fifteen years, Ariana kept you a secret from me. Why?”

“She told me that you had big dreams. She loved you and didn’t want to disrupt your life. She told me that if I ever wanted to meet you, I had to wait until I turned eighteen, and she would help me find you.”

“Were you going to?” I asked.

“I don’t know.” She shrugged as she looked down.

“We need to figure this out, Riley. Is that all you brought?” I pointed to her backpack.

“Yeah. I was in a hurry to leave. I didn’t even bring my phone because I knew they’d track me. Please don’t send me back to them,” she begged.

“I’m not denying you’re my daughter, but we have to make sure before we do anything. We’ll get a paternity test done tomorrow and go from there. In the meantime, I only have one guestroom with a bed in it. Let’s take your backpack upstairs.”

I grabbed her backpack and took it upstairs while she followed behind and set it on the bed.

“Where did Uncle Grayson go?” she asked.

“He went back to his house. He lives next door.”

“That’s cool. What about my grandfather?”

“My dad?” I asked.

“Yeah. My mom told me that your mother died when you were a baby, and your father raised you.” She sat on the edge of the bed.

“Unfortunately, he passed away.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“Thanks.” A small smile crossed my lips.

“So, it’s just you and Uncle Grayson?”

“Well, not exactly. All of my cousins, their wives, and their kids live on this stretch of the beach. I have a question for you. What last name did your mother give you?”

“Yours. She named me Riley Renae Kind.”

“It’s a beautiful name,” I said.

“Gabriel!” I heard Jenni’s voice shout from downstairs.

“Who’s that?” Riley asked.

“That would be Jenni. Upstairs, Jenni,” I shouted.

“There you are.” She walked into the bedroom and stopped when she saw Riley. “I heard.”

“Riley, this is Jenni.”

“Hey.” Riley gave her a small wave.

“Oh my gosh, you are beautiful.” She smiled. “She has your eyes, Gabriel.” She glanced at me.

“Yeah.” I tucked my hands into my pants pockets.

“The guys are meeting down at the beach. Let me take her and introduce her to the girls and the kids.”

“Riley?” I looked at her.

“Sure.” She stood up from the bed.

“Come on, sweetheart.” Jenni held out her hand. “Go talk to your cousins, Gabriel. They’re waiting for you.”

“The whole family knows?” I asked.

“Of course.” She walked out of the room with Riley.

I went downstairs, grabbed a couple of beers from the refrigerator, and headed down to the beach. When I got there, all of my cousins and brother stopped talking and stared at me.

“You okay?” Shaun asked.

“Not really. This is unbelievable.” I sighed as I sat down and twisted the cap off the bottle.

“I know.” Nathan placed his hand on my shoulder. “Trust me. I know exactly what you’re feeling.”

“Is she really yours?” Simon asked.

“I’m ninety-nine percent sure.” I tipped the bottle to my lips. “Ariana gave her our last name.”

“Damn.” Simon shook his head. “I can’t believe this. Did you not know what a condom was fifteen years ago?”

“It broke. Listen, I’m going to need your help with something.”

“What is it?” he asked.

“She ran away.”

“Ah, shit. Where and who did she run away from?”

“Hawaii and Ariana’s parents.”

“She flew here by herself?” Jackson’s brows furrowed.

“Yep.” I told them everything Riley said.

“I’ll check it out,” Simon said. “You do know that you’ll have to call her grandparents, right? Because if you don’t, and they find her, you’ll be in a lot of trouble. She’s a minor, cousin.”

“I know.” I sighed. “What the hell am I supposed to do?”

“Get to know her, love her, protect her, and make sure you keep her on the right path.” Nathan smiled.

“I’m sure Dad asked the same thing after Mom died,” Grayson said. “Don’t forget he raised the two of us alone. And look how we turned out.” He smiled.

“And don’t forget, you have all of us and the girls. Remember, we have a village here and take care of our own,” Stefan said.

“We want to meet her, Gabriel,” Sam said.

I stood up from my chair and walked to Shaun’s house. Opening the sliding door, I saw Riley talking to Lily and Ella.

“She’s beautiful, Gabriel. How are you holding up?” Charlotte asked.

“I guess as well as I can be. I don’t know, Charlotte.”

“She’s fifteen, her mother, whom she was very close to, just passed away, and she’s a runaway. I can tell just by talking to her that she’s a tough kid, but she’s broken. She needs you.” She placed her hand on my shoulder.

I tucked my hands into my pockets and stared across the room at her. Even her smile reminded me so much of Ariana.

“Riley, come meet the rest of the family,” I said.

“Okay.” She walked over, and we went down to the beach.

I introduced her to all of my cousins who sat around the bonfire. She seemed a little uncomfortable, so I took her home.

“It’s a little overwhelming, isn’t it?” I smiled.

“Yeah. This family is huge. But everyone seems cool.”

“Listen, I need to call your grandparents.”

“No!” She shouted as tears filled her eyes. “You can’t do that. Please, Dad.”

“I have to tell them you’re here with me.”

“No! You don’t understand.” Tears streamed down her face.

She ran up the stairs to her room and slammed the door. I stood there and ran my hand through my hair. Walking over to the table, I picked up her birth certificate and stared at my name. Ariana wouldn’t have put my name down as Riley’s father if I weren’t. It wasn’t like she slept around. She was a virgin when we met. I was eighteen, and she was seventeen. I picked up the picture of us on the table and swallowed hard.

I opened the door to Riley’s room and saw her sitting on the edge of the bed, staring out the window.

“Go away,” she said.

“I loved your mother very much.” I sat down next to her. “And as much as I wanted to be with her, it was impossible. Summer was almost over. She was going back to New York to finish high school, and I was returning to Harvard to start my second year of college. It broke my heart when I had to say goodbye to her. We had a long talk, and we both knew it would never work out with the distance. Her parents kept a very close eye on her. The only reason we were able to spend the time we did together in Hawaii was because her cousin was there. Her parents thought she was with her when she was actually with me.”

“I know. She told me. She also said that when she found out she was pregnant, they demanded to know who the father was. There was no way she was telling them about you, so she lied and gave them a fake name. She said they would have come after you if she had told them who you were. That’s the kind of people they are.”

“She told me all about them.” I sighed. “But you have to understand that I can get into a lot of trouble. You ran away from them, Riley. I need to tell them you’re safe and with me.”

You're my daughter." I reached over and placed my hand on hers. "I'm not going to let them take you away."

"You finally believe that I'm your daughter?" She looked over at me with tears in her eyes.

"Yeah, I do." A small smile crossed my lips. "But we do have to confirm it with a paternity test."

"I know."

"Okay." I gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "Tomorrow, you'll come to my practice with me, and then we'll go to the genetics lab at the hospital. I know someone who can do the test."

"I need a phone and a computer," she said.

"After work, I'll take you to the store and get you one. As for a computer, you can use mine in my office downstairs until I can get you a laptop."

"You don't have any porn on there, do you?" Her brow arched.

Shit.

"No." I furrowed my brows. "Why would you ask that?"

"Because you're a guy. Need I say more?"

I breathed out a laugh and shook my head.

"Can I have the other guestroom instead?" she asked.

"Why?"

"Because it's bigger, has a bigger closet, and a bathroom. Besides, it's further away from your bedroom. You know, just in case you bring a chick back one night. My virgin ears don't need to hear what's going on in there."

I stared at her because I couldn't believe she'd just said that. Now that she was staying with me, all hope of bringing women back here was out the window.

"What?" She cocked her head.

"Do you always say things you probably shouldn't?"

“I was just saying that I don’t care if you bring women here. I just want to be as far away from your room as possible.” A smirk crossed her lips.

I sighed as I stood up from the bed. “We’ll go this weekend, and you can pick out some bedroom furniture. Now, get some sleep. We have to be at the medical center tomorrow by eight o’clock.” I began to walk out of the room, stopped, and turned around. “We also have to get you enrolled in school. You were in school, right?”

“Of course I was.”

“Okay.” I walked out of the room.

CHAPTER 4



Gabriel

My eyes flew open when the buzzing sound of the alarm pierced my ears. Reaching over, I grabbed my phone and shut it off. Looking at the time, I slept a total of three hours last night. My mind went into overdrive with everything that had happened, and I didn't know if I could handle raising a fifteen-year-old girl.

After I showered and got dressed, I went downstairs and made a cup of coffee. The sliding door opened, and Simon walked in.

"Morning, cousin," he said.

"Morning. Coffee?"

"Nah. I'm good. I did some checking, and Riley's grandparents reported her missing and as a runaway. Here's their number for you to call them." He handed me a slip of paper.

"Thanks, Simon." I sighed.

"I wouldn't call them until you get the paternity test results back. That way, if they try to take her back, you have proof you're her father."

"We're doing the test today. I'll ask Sabrina at the genetics lab over at Cedars if she can put a rush on it. Hopefully, we'll have the results tomorrow."

"Sounds good. How is she?"

“If you’re talking about me, I’m fine.” Riley yawned as she walked down the stairs and over to the built-in coffee machine. “How the hell do you work this thing?” she asked, and Simon chuckled.

“Aren’t you a little young to be drinking coffee?” I asked.

“No.” Her brows furrowed.

“I’ll see you later, Gabriel,” Simon said as he walked over to the sliding door.

“Thanks again.” I gave him a nod.

I walked over to the coffee machine and showed her how it worked.

“We have to leave in thirty minutes,” I said.

“Why was Simon here so early?” she asked.

“He told me that your grandparents reported you missing and as a runaway. He gave me their number to call them.”

“Then you better wait until the paternity results come back,” she said.

“That’s what he said.”

“I’ll go get ready.” She took her coffee with her upstairs.

I introduced Riley to my staff when we arrived at the medical center. Everyone was in shock, to say the least. I had a two-hour block in the afternoon between patients, so we headed over to Cedars, where Sabrina in the genetics lab was waiting for us.

“I need these results ASAP,” I said to her. “Is there any way—”

“I’ll run it through now, Dr. Kind.” She smiled. “I’ll call you tomorrow morning with the results.”

“Thanks, Sabrina. I appreciate it.”

“How do you know her?” Riley asked as we walked out of the lab. “Did you sleep with her?”

“What? No!” I furrowed my brows as I raised my voice. “She’s a patient of mine.”

“You don’t need to get all defensive,” she said.

“And you need to stop talking like that.”

“I need a phone,” she said as we climbed into my car.

“I told you that I’d take you after work.”

“And what am I supposed to do until then? It’s boring at your work.”

“You can use the computer in my office,” I said.

When we walked back into my practice, Kelsey told me that my last patient of the day had canceled her appointment.

“Thank God. That means we can leave earlier and go get my phone,” Riley spoke.

“I guess it does.” I sighed.

After seeing my last patient, I took Riley to the store and got her the new iPhone.

“There. Are you happy now?” I asked as we walked out of the store with her phone in her hand.

“Yeah. Thanks, Dad.” She smiled.

Every time she called me that, a part of me cringed. I never saw myself being a father, especially a single father. I was happy being a bachelor and casually seeing a variety of women. My entire life was turned upside down, and I didn’t know what to do.

When we arrived home, Riley ran up to her room and shut the door. After changing into more comfortable clothes, I lightly knocked on her door.

“Come in.”

“What are you doing in here?” I asked.

“On my phone.” She held it up.

“Doing what?”

“Texting my friends back in Georgia.” Her brows furrowed.

I heard the doorbell ring.

“Are you expecting someone?” Riley asked.

“No.” I furrowed my brows and shut her door.

Walking down the stairs, I reached the front door and opened it to find an older man and woman standing on my porch with two police officers.

“Can I help you?”

“Are you Dr. Gabriel Kind?” the man asked.

“Yes.”

“Is Riley here with you?” the woman asked sternly.

“And you are?” I narrowed my eyes at them.

“We’re her grandparents, and you’re harboring a runaway. You’re in a lot of trouble, Dr. Kind,” the woman spoke authoritatively.

“Dr. Kind, do you know that Riley ran away from her home in Hawaii?” the male officer asked.

“Yes, I do know that.”

“May we come in?” the female officer asked.

I moved out of the way and gestured for them to step inside.

“You need to hand Riley over to her grandparents,” the male officer spoke.

“Riley isn’t going anywhere. She’s my daughter and staying with me,” I sternly spoke.

“Dad?” Riley walked down the stairs. “How did you find me?” she asked her grandparents.

“Your phone.” Her grandmother pulled it from her purse and held it up. “We saw all your text messages to your friends and your search history. It wasn’t hard to find you.”

The sliding door opened, and Simon walked in.

“Carl, Rosie, what are you two doing here?” He walked over.

“Hey, Detective Kind. Your cousin is facing misdemeanor charges for harboring an underaged runaway,” Rosie spoke.

“He’s not harboring anyone. Riley is his daughter.”

“Do you have proof of that, sir?” Carl asked me.

I walked over to the table where Riley’s birth certificate was and handed it to him.

“My name is on her birth certificate,” I said. “And Riley’s last name is Kind.”

He looked at the birth certificate and handed it back to me.

“Mr. and Mrs. Livingston, it appears Dr. Kind is her father. There’s nothing we can do. He has the right to have his daughter.”

“Yeah, that’s right! So get on a plane and get the hell back to Hawaii,” Riley shouted at her grandparents.

“You, young lady, are going to get your mouth washed out with soap,” her grandmother said as she walked toward her, and I extended my arm in front of my daughter.

“Don’t take another step, lady. I’m warning you.” I pointed my finger at her.

“Carl, Rosie, you can leave,” Simon said. “I’ve got this.”

“I’m sorry, but what are your names?” I asked.

“Jerome and Patricia Livingston,” Jerome spoke. “So, you’re the man that knocked up our daughter at the young age of seventeen when we were on vacation in Hawaii?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“I should have you arrested for statutory rape,” Patricia spoke sternly.

“Okay, that’s enough,” Simon said.

“She was seventeen and of legal age, Patricia!” Riley spewed. “Know your facts before you start running your mouth.”

“How dare you, child!” Patricia said.

“Riley, that’s enough,” I said. “I’m her father. She’s living with me, and I will be raising her.”

“Just because your name is on the birth certificate doesn’t mean she’s your daughter,” Jerome said.

“I had a paternity test done, and the results will be ready tomorrow.”

“Then you mustn’t be one hundred percent sure, or you wouldn’t have had one done,” Jerome spoke.

“She’s my daughter, Jerome. Why else would Ariana give her my last name?”

“I don’t know.” He looked away.

“We have rights,” Patricia said. “We are her grandparents.”

“Who wants to send her off to boarding school,” my voice raised. “Do you know what’s really sad? The fact that your daughter hated the two of you so much that she stayed on the run with a child for fifteen years. Moving from city to city and state to state to avoid ever having you find her. You just met Riley, and the first thing you want to do is send her to boarding school. You’re not fit to be parents, and any judge would agree. Riley is fifteen years old and can decide if she wants the two of you in her life.”

“Which I don’t,” Riley said. “I never want to see the two of you again.”

“The child has spoken, Patricia. Let’s go.” Jerome walked toward the front door.

“That’s it, Jerome? You’re going to let a child decide?”

“I’m not going through this again. It was your fault we lost Ariana in the first place. Let these people be.” He opened the door and walked out.

“I wish you the best of luck with that one, Dr. Kind.” She gestured to Riley.

I ignored her. As soon as the door shut, I looked at Riley.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you about them,” she said.

I let out a sigh. “Thanks, Simon.” I patted his shoulder. “I was just about to text you when you walked in.”

“I saw the cop cars down here when I pulled into my driveway. I guess that’s settled with them.” He smirked. “I’ll see you later down at the beach. You are coming, right?”

“Yeah. I’ll be down there.” I smiled.

CHAPTER 5



Gabriel

“I’ll order a pizza for dinner. What do you like on it?” I asked Riley.

“Pepperoni is fine.” She sat on the couch, scrolling on her phone.

Just as I called the order in, Aunt Barb walked through the front door.

“Gabriel, I heard about—” She stopped and stared at Riley.

“Riley, this is my Aunt Barb. Aunt Barb, meet Riley.”

“Oh, my goodness, look at you. You’re beautiful.” Aunt Barb placed her hand on Riley’s cheek.

“Uh, thanks,” Riley said.

“What a brave girl you are flying here all by yourself to find your father.” Aunt Barb hugged her. “You may call me Grandma Barb.”

I shrugged as Riley gave me a confused look.

“You’re here and safe with your family.” Aunt Barb smiled. “Have you enrolled her in school yet?” she asked me.

“I haven’t had a chance yet, Aunt Barb.”

“What are you doing with her tomorrow while you work?”

“She’ll come to the medical center with me like she did today.”

“No,” Riley whined. “It’s so boring there.”

“Then you’ll spend the day with me.” Aunt Barb smiled at her. “I’ll take you shopping and to lunch. We’ll have fun getting to know each other.”

“Aunt Barb, you don’t have to—”

“I’d love to.” Riley smiled.

“Excellent. I’ll be by to pick you up at ten a.m.” Aunt Barb ran her hand down the back of Riley’s head.

“I just ordered a pizza. Would you like to stay and join us?” I asked her.

“I’m afraid I can’t. Curtis and I have dinner plans.” She stood up from the couch.

“Call me when the pizza gets here. I’ll be up in my room,” Riley said. “See you tomorrow, Grandma Barb.” She ran up the stairs.

“How are you doing with all of this?” Aunt Barb asked me.

“I don’t know.” I sighed as I went into the kitchen and grabbed a beer from the refrigerator. “I’m still in shock.”

“Well, that’s to be expected, darling.” She patted my chest. “You need to get her into school right away.”

“I know that. I’ll make the call tomorrow.”

“I’m not going to lie, Gabriel. It won’t be easy raising a fifteen-year-old girl.”

“I figured as much.” I tipped the bottle to my lips.

She reached up and placed her hands on each side of my face.

“You’re a father, and that is one of God’s greatest gifts. I know you must feel overwhelmed and wonder how this will impact your bachelor life.”

“The thought did cross my mind.” I sighed.

“Just know that we’re all here for you.”

“Thanks, Aunt Barb.” I smiled.

“I have to run. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I walked her to the front door and saw the pizza delivery guy pull up. Pulling some cash from my wallet, I handed it to him as he handed me the pizza.

“Riley,” I shouted up the stairs. “The pizza is here.”

She sat at the table while I grabbed a couple of plates.

“No phones at the table,” I said. “Please put it down.”

“What?” Her brows furrowed. “What kind of stupid rule is that?”

“It’s my rule, and it’s not stupid. My father never allowed us to have our phones out at the table.”

“So? Just because your dad didn’t allow it doesn’t mean you have to follow.”

“It’s rude to be on your phone when you’re sitting and eating with someone.”

“Then I’ll go up to my room.” She grabbed her plate and stood up.

“Sit down.” My voice was authoritative. “No food up in your room either.”

“Wow.” Her eyes narrowed at me as she sat back down.

The sliding door opened, and Grayson walked in.

“Hey, my brother and beautiful niece.” He grinned. “Oh, you have pizza?” He grabbed a plate, put two slices of pizza on it, and sat down with us.

“Ava didn’t feed you?” I smirked.

“Ava isn’t home. She’s out shopping with a client.” He took a bite of his pizza. “How are you?” He smiled at Riley.

“Just dandy. Let me ask you something, Uncle Grayson.”

“Sure, kiddo.”

“Is it true that your dad didn’t allow you to have your phones out at the table?”

“Yeah.” He chuckled. “He was such a dick about that.”

Riley glared at me from across the table.

“Thanks a lot, bro.” I reached over and slapped the back of his head.

“Ouch. What the hell was that for? Oh, wait. He won’t let you have your phone out while eating?” He stared at Riley.

“Nope.” She popped her lips. “Which is dumb because my mom and I always had our phones out at the table. She never had a problem with it.”

“Your mom isn’t here now, is she?” I blurted without even thinking.

“No. She isn’t.” Tears formed in her eyes as she stood from her seat, ran up the stairs, and slammed her bedroom door.

“Shit.” I ran my hand down my face.

“Not cool, bro,” Grayson said.

“No shit.” I shook my head. “I better go talk to her.”

Grayson placed his hand on my shoulder as I went to get up. “Let her cool off first. You know it always made it worse when Dad tried to talk to us right after pissing us off.”

After putting the leftover pizza away and cleaning up, I went upstairs and lightly tapped on Riley’s door before opening it.

“Go away.” She sat on her bed, hugging her knees.

“I’m sorry, Riley.” I walked over and took a seat on the edge of the bed. “I didn’t mean to say what I did.”

“I miss her so much.” She brought her hand up and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“I know you do, and I’m sorry you have to go through this. Life can be really unfair sometimes. You know how I know you’re a Kind?”

“How?” She stared at me.

“Because you knew exactly what you wanted and didn’t let anything or anyone stand in your way.” The corners of my

mouth curved upward.

“You mean about coming here to find you?” she asked.

“That’s exactly what I mean.” I placed my hand on her knee. “It’s going to take time and effort on both of our parts.”

“I know.”

“Not only do you have me, Riley. You have a whole village here who are dying to get to know you better and love you the way you deserve to be loved.”

“I still can’t believe how big this family is. I also think it’s weird how you all live next to each other. And what’s up with your Aunt Barb wanting me to call her grandma?”

I chuckled. “Aunt Barb is complicated, and one day, I’ll tell you all about her. For now, humor her and call her grandma. She loves it.”

“Okay.” A soft smile crossed her face.

“By the way, I should tell you about Ava.”

“Uncle Grayson’s girlfriend?” she asked. “What about her? She seems really nice.”

“She is. She’s an extraordinary woman, but sometimes she’s not Ava.”

“Huh?” Her brows furrowed.

“She has a condition called dissociative identity disorder. When she was a child, she suffered extreme trauma at the hands of her mother. That trauma caused her brain to split into different personalities.”

Riley’s eyes widened. “She has multiple personalities?”

“Yes, and you’ll eventually meet them. So, I don’t want you to freak out if one of them comes out around you.”

“How many are there?”

“Five. And they’re all amazing.”

“That is so cool.”

“Yeah. It’s pretty cool. I’m going to head down to the beach. Do you want to come?”

“No. I’m just going to stick around here and text my friends.”

“Okay. You know where to find me if you need anything. I won’t be gone long.” I patted her knee and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER 6



Gabriel

“Here’s a key to the house. Don’t lose it.”

“I won’t.” Riley rolled her eyes as she opened the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of orange juice. “You literally have no food in this house.”

“We’ll go grocery shopping tonight when I get home. Have fun with Grandma Barb.” I smiled. “Oh, when I text you, I expect a text back within five minutes. If I call, you are to answer. Got it?”

“Got it, Dad.” She saluted me.

“Don’t be a smartass.” I pointed at her before walking out the door.

My phone rang as I was walking into the medical center. Pulling it from my pocket, I noticed it was from Cedars.

“Dr. Kind here.”

“Dr. Kind, it’s Sabrina. I have the results of your paternity test.”

“And?”

“Riley is definitely your daughter. Congratulations.”

“Thank you, Sabrina. I appreciate you getting the results so quickly. Have a great day.”

“You too, Dr. Kind.”

I let out a breath as I dialed Grayson's number. I knew he was at the hospital but wasn't sure if he'd be able to answer.

"What's up, bro?"

"Sabrina just called. Riley is my daughter."

"Duh." He chuckled. "That's great. I'm happy it's confirmed."

I reached my office and took a seat behind my desk. Leaning back in my chair, I ran my hand down my face. Picking up my phone, I called Riley. She didn't answer, so I called again. When she didn't answer a second time, I sent her a text message.

"I thought I told you that you're to answer when I call. Call me ASAP."

Fifteen minutes later, my phone rang, and it was her.

"What the hell, Riley?"

"Geez Louise, will you chill? I was in the shower."

"Oh. Sorry."

"Why are you calling me already?" she asked with irritation. "You left like two minutes ago."

"Sabrina called with the results of the paternity test."

"And?"

"I'm definitely your father."

"See, Mom wasn't lying. Can I finish getting ready before Grandma Barb comes over?"

"Yeah. Have fun today," I said.

"Bye, Dad. Wait. Before I hang up. Do you think you could refrain from stalking me all day?"

I rolled my eyes and let out a sigh. "Yeah. I promise not to stalk you via phone calls and text messages. Happy?"

"Thanks. Bye."

This was my life now. Not only was I responsible for myself, but I was also responsible for Riley. My office door

opened, and Ashley, my nurse, popped her head in.

“Dr. Kind, you have patients waiting. I know you don’t like to get behind.”

“I know, Ashley.” I sighed. “I’m coming.”

After seeing a few patients, I went down to the kitchen area. When I walked in, I saw Nathan making a cup of coffee.

“Hey,” I said. “Sabrina called earlier and confirmed that Riley is my daughter.”

“That’s good, Gabriel, but you already knew that.” He smiled.

“Yeah.” I opened the refrigerator and grabbed a bottle of water.

“You’re going to be okay, and so is Riley,” Nathan said. “Life as you know it has changed, and you’ll realize it changed for the better.” A smile crossed his lips.

“I never saw kids in my future.” I set the bottle of water on the island.

Nathan chuckled. “Neither did I, and now I’m having kid number three. You’ll be okay.” He patted my back.

After I saw my last patient of the day, I headed home. When I walked through the door, I didn’t see Riley, so I yelled her name.

“Riley?”

“Upstairs,” she shouted.

I walked up the stairs and stepped into her room, where her bed was filled with shopping bags.

“Did my Aunt Barb buy you all that?” I asked as I pointed to the bags.

“Yeah.” She smiled. “I tried telling her I didn’t need all this stuff, but she insisted.”

“I don’t believe you.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“She wanted to buy me all these clothes. Who am I to tell her no.” She grinned.

“I hope you thanked her.”

“I did, Dad.”

“We need to go grocery shopping. Let’s go now and get it over with because we’re having a bonfire tonight. By the way, I called the school today, and we have to be there Monday morning to enroll you.”

“Yeah. I figured. I know the drill.” She looked down.

“What’s wrong?”

“I just thought that my school in Georgia would be the last one I’d attend. Mom said that we weren’t moving anymore, so I made friends.”

“Well, you’ll make new friends here. Come on, let’s go shopping.”

While we were in the grocery store, Riley kept throwing things in the cart.

“Are you seriously going to eat all of this?” I asked as I turned down another aisle.

“Yeah. I need tampons.”

Shit. I didn’t want to hear that.

We turned down the next aisle where the feminine products were. She grabbed a box of tampons and threw it into the cart.

“Do you need a box of these?” A smirk crossed her lips as she grabbed a box of condoms and held them up.

“Put those down,” I spoke with irritation, and she laughed.

Shaking my head, we finished shopping and checked out. When we returned home, she helped me put the groceries away. I took a couple of things up to my bathroom, and when I walked into the bedroom, Riley was sitting on my bed with my guitar. I stopped and stared at her.

“Mom taught me how to play.” She looked up at me as she strummed a chord.

I smiled as I sat on the edge of the bed next to her.

“She told me that you taught her to play that summer,” Riley said.

“I did.” I smiled. “She had a guitar?”

“Yeah. She got one from a second-hand shop. It wasn’t as good as this one. Can I play it?”

“You can play it anytime you want, but for now, I want you to come down to the beach and hang with the family.”

“Do I have to?”

“Yeah. You do.”

“Fine.” She sighed and set my guitar on the bed. “Maybe Lily and Ella will want to go swimming.”

“Ask them.” I smiled.

I grabbed a couple of beers from the refrigerator and headed down to the beach.

“It’s about time,” Grayson said.

“We had to go grocery shopping. Tomorrow, I’m taking Riley to get some bedroom furniture. Any suggestions on where I should go?” I asked.

“Pottery Barn,” Nathan said.

“Totally.” Stefan grinned. “Best furniture around.”

“You should know—” Conner started to say, and Nathan reached over and slapped the back of his head.

“Damn, bro. What the fuck?” Conner rubbed the back of his head.

“I should know what?” I asked.

“My brother was going to say that you’ll be in there a long time,” Nathan said. “And the sales associate will try to talk you into things you don’t need. Right, bro?” Nathan glared at him.

“Um, yeah,” Conner said.

“So, cousin,” Simon said. “What was the story with you and Riley’s mom?”

“There is no story.” I tipped the bottle to my lips. “We met, spent the summer together, and apparently she got pregnant.”

“Dad!” Riley shouted. “Can you come here?”



G rayson

“It’s so weird hearing my brother being called ‘Dad.’”

“I know.” Jackson chuckled. “That’s how we felt when Ella came to live with Nathan.”

“What’s the real story with Gabriel and Riley’s mother?” Simon asked. “I can tell there was more to it.”

“To be honest, I think he really loved her. He was different that summer and broken up when we returned to Harvard. He wouldn’t talk about it and told me never to mention Ariana’s name again.”

“Different how?” Stefan asked.

“Heartbroken. When we got back to Harvard, it took him a long time before he’d even look at another girl.”

“Is she the reason he’s so adamant about women and relationships?” Sam asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe. I guess I never really thought about it. But you all know that our father played a significant role in that too, at least for me. Maybe Gabriel used him as the excuse when it was about Ariana all these years. Like I said, he wouldn’t talk about her again after that summer.”

“Quiet. Here he comes,” Sebastian said.

CHAPTER 7



G abriel

After we left Pottery Barn and thousands of dollars later, I took Riley to the Apple store to get a laptop.

“Can I get an Apple watch too? That way, I won’t miss any text messages.” She smiled.

“Your phone is glued to your hand. You don’t miss any text messages. We’ll stick with the MacBook for today.”

“Fine.” She sighed.

After we got home, she took her laptop to her room, and I went to Nathan’s house.

“Hey, Gabriel.” Sofia smiled.

“Hi, Sof. Where’s your husband?”

“I’m right here.” Nathan walked down the stairs. “How did shopping go?” He grinned.

“You didn’t tell me how expensive that place was.”

He hooked his arm around me. “But it’s for your daughter, and that’s all that matters. Besides, if we had to spend all that money, it was only fair that you did too.” His arm tightened around my neck.

“You’re a douchebag.” I laughed as I pushed him away.

“Just wait until she starts asking you for your credit card.” He pointed at me. “Your life just got really expensive, cousin. You better start seeing more patients than you already do.”

As I walked down the beach back to my house, I saw Riley in the pool. Grabbing a beer from the fridge, I sat down in the lounge, pulled up Facebook, and searched for her name. I found her page but couldn't see any of her posts because we weren't friends. So, I sent her a friend request.

She climbed out of the pool, grabbed a towel, and dried off. She grabbed her phone from the table and sat down.

"Seriously?" She glanced at me.

"What?"

"You sent me a friend request on Facebook?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"Because that's weird."

"Why is that weird? I'm your father."

"Exactly," she said.

"Are you hiding something you don't want me to see?" My brow arched.

"No." She furrowed her brows. "Fine, I'll accept you, but if you make one comment on any of my posts, I'm blocking you."

"Wow. You would do that to your dad?" A smirk crossed my lips.

"You bet I would."

"I promise not to comment on any of your posts."

"I don't post on there that much anyway," she said. "I'm going to change." She stood up and went inside.

When she accepted my friend request, I scrolled through her page. She hadn't posted anything since before Ariana passed away. Her last post was a picture of her and Ariana celebrating her fifteenth birthday. My heart started to ache as I stared at Ariana. She was still a beautiful woman, and the memories of that summer came flooding back.

"What's up, bro?" Grayson smiled as he walked over and sat down.

“Nothing.”

“What are you looking at?” He grabbed my phone from my hand. “Wow. Ariana still looked the same.”

“Yeah.” I tipped the beer bottle to my lips. “Can I have my phone back? Aren’t you and Ava doing anything today?” I asked him.

“Nah. We’re just relaxing.” He smiled.

His sliding door opened, and Ava/Freya walked out and put a canvas on the easel.

“Looks like Freya wants to get some painting done.” I smiled.

“Yeah. I guess so,” Grayson smiled.

“Hello, Gabriel.” She waved.

“Hi, Freya.” I waved back.

The sliding door opened, and Riley walked out.

“Hey, Uncle Grayson.”

“Hi, Riley.”

“I didn’t know Ava could paint,” she said.

“That’s Freya,” I said.

“Oh shit, really?”

“Watch your mouth.” I pointed at her.

“You must be Riley.” Freya smiled as she walked over, holding a paintbrush in her hand. “I’m Freya.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Freya.”

“I heard you went shopping today for bedroom furniture. When is it coming?” she asked.

“Two weeks,” Riley said.

“I have the best idea. I can paint a mural on one of the walls in your room. Anything you want.” Freya smiled.

“Really? That sounds cool.”

“Come on. Let’s go take a look at your room, and we can discuss it. Grayson, can you hold my paintbrush for me?”

“Sure.” Grayson smiled as he took it from her hand.

They went inside, and I looked at my brother.

“Are you okay with that?” I asked.

“Of course. You know that’s Freya’s thing.”



Two Weeks Later

G abriel

I wasn’t allowed to go into the bedroom where Freya was painting the mural until it was finished. I had no idea what she was painting because, for some reason, it was a secret between her and Riley. The furniture was coming tomorrow, and I was getting nervous.

“It’s done, Dad.” Riley ran down the stairs. “Come look.”

I walked into her bedroom and stared at the wall with the large Eiffel Tower painted pink, decorated with a floral design, and the words “Bon Jour Paris” written above it.

“Wow. That is really cool, Freya.”

“Thank you, Gabriel.” She grinned. “I do believe my work here is done.”

“Thanks, Freya. I love it.” Riley hugged her.

“You’re welcome, sweetheart. I need to get home and bring Ava back to Grayson. They have plans for tonight. Au revoir, you two.” She smiled as she walked out of the room.

“I love it.” Riley smiled.

“Freya did a beautiful job. Why that?” I asked her.

“It’s all my mom and I talked about. She told me that when I graduated from high school, she was going to take me to Paris as a graduation present. Her parents took her when she was twelve, and she said Paris was a place everyone should

experience at least once in their life. She told me that she opened a special account at the bank for our trip. I guess I wanted this as a tribute to her.” She looked down.

I hooked my arm around her and pulled her into me.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart.”

“Shit happens, right.” She pulled away from me. “I have some homework to do.” She started to walk out of the room.

“Hold on a second. I’m going out tonight.”

“With who?”

“This woman I know.”

“My dad has a date?” Her brow arched.

“It’s not a big deal. Anyway, I don’t want to leave you alone, so you’re going to stay at Uncle Grayson’s house.”

“I’m fifteen. I stayed home alone all the time when Mom went out. I don’t need a babysitter. In fact, I am a babysitter. I babysat the kids that lived next to us.”

“I don’t feel comfortable leaving you home at night.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’ll be fine. Besides, if anything happens, I have an entire beach full of people.”

I stood and stared at her. “Fine. But make sure you lock all the doors.”

“I will.” She began to walk out of the room, stopped, and turned around. “Don’t forget to bring a condom with you.” She smiled and walked out of the room.

“Knock it off, Riley!” I shouted and shook my head.

CHAPTER 8



Piper

When I pulled into the parking lot of my boutique, I saw my friend, Tara, getting out of her car, holding a cup holder with two coffees in it.

“You are a lifesaver.” I smiled.

“Long night with Jack?” she asked as I unlocked the door.

“Yes, and I won’t be seeing him anymore.” I turned on the lights.

“What?” Her eyes widened as she handed me a coffee. “He said it, didn’t he?”

“Yep. He sure did.” I brought the cup to my lips.

“Damn.” She shook her head. “I was waiting for that. He really likes you, Piper.”

“I know.” I sighed. “And I like him. Why did he have to go and ruin things?”

“So, what did you say after he said it?”

“It was awkward as hell. I waited a while and then told him I wasn’t feeling well. Then I went home.”

“And another one bites the dust. When are you going to tell him that you’re kicking him to the curb?”

“I’ll wait a few days. Anyway, I don’t want to talk about it anymore. We have to unpack those boxes that came in yesterday.”

I was the proud owner of Primrose—a clothing boutique in Santa Monica. A clothing store that did very well since opening its doors two years ago. It was the only thing in my life that I loved and devoted all my attention to. I was a happy, single, successful businesswoman who knew what I did and didn't want out of life.

Jack was a guy I'd been casually seeing over the past couple of months. Unfortunately, our time had to come to an end after those three words came out of his mouth last night during our date. I hated those words; anyone who knew me knew why. I never said them, and I didn't want to hear them.

As I was steaming the clothes Tara unpacked from the boxes, my phone pinged with a text message from Jack.

“How are you feeling? I was thinking I could come over tonight and take care of you.”

“Not a good idea. I don't want you to catch whatever I have. Sick as a dog this morning and just going to sleep all day.”

“I'm sorry to hear that. I hope you feel better soon. I miss you already.”

“Aw, he misses you,” Tara said as she stood over my shoulder.

“Get out of here.” I set my phone down.

“You better just tell him it's over. Get it over with and be done,” she said.

“I will.”

The boutique door opened, and Raj, one of my sales associates and best friends, walked in.

“Good morning, ladies.” He grinned as he held up a white bag in one hand and carried a coffee in the other.

“If those are Beignets, you're forgiven for being late.” I smirked.

He set the bag on the counter and looked at his watch.

“Darling, I’m two minutes late, and yes, there are Beignets in this bag.”

“You are a dream.” I smiled as I opened the bag and took one out.

“Guess what, Raj?” Tara said. “Jack said ‘the words’ last night.”

He placed his hand over his mouth as he stared at me with widened eyes.

“Oh no, he didn’t,” he said. “Come here, darling.” Raj wrapped his arms around me. “I’m so sorry.”

“Knock it off.” I laughed as I broke our embrace. “You are not.”

“Oh, did you think I meant that I’m sorry for you?” He wiggled his finger at me. “I feel sorry for Jack. Oh well. Another guy bites the dust.” He reached into the bag and pulled out a Beignet.

It was around three p.m. when the bell above the door dinged. I turned to see who entered the store and froze when I saw Jack.

“Sick as a dog, eh, Piper?” He stared at me.

“Jack, what are you doing here?”

“I stopped by your apartment to drop off some soup for you. As I was knocking on your door, Mrs. Lowes from next door opened her door and told me that you left early this morning for work. What the hell is going on, Piper?”

Damn that nosey Mrs. Lowes.

I sighed as I grabbed his hand and took him into the back room.

“Listen, Jack, I’m going through this thing right now, and I think it’s best we don’t see each other anymore.”

“What thing, Piper?”

“Just a thing. I don’t really know.”

“Bullshit. You’re lying.” He pointed his finger at me. “Does this have anything to do with telling you that I loved you last night?”

“Fine. Yeah, it does. It’s only been two months, Jack. You don’t love me. You can’t.”

“I can, and I do. You’re an incredible woman, Piper Primrose. I see a really great future for us.”

“Whoa, stop right there, mister.” I held up my finger. “You’re making me really uncomfortable, and I don’t like it one bit. You need to leave. We had some fun, and now it’s over. I don’t want to see you anymore.”

He stood there with his hands planted on his hips, shaking his head.

“You know what, Piper? Fine. It’s over. The fact that you’re freaking out over three words makes you an unstable woman. Thank you for showing your true colors so I don’t have to waste any more of my time.” He stormed out of the backroom.

I took a deep breath and walked out to the front of the store, where I saw Tara and Raj standing behind the counter as if they weren’t listening to our conversation.

“I know the two of you were at the door listening,” I said. “Don’t pretend you weren’t.”

“We won’t.” Raj smiled. “We heard every unstable word.”

“Can you believe he said I was unstable? Fuck him.”

“Well—” Tara rolled her eyes up to the ceiling.

“You’re not unstable, Piper.” Raj hooked his arm around me. “You’re just a woman who knows what she doesn’t want. Maybe next time, tell the guy it’s over right after he tells you he loves you.”

“I basically did,” I said.

“No. You lied about being sick first, darling. Let’s practice.” He gripped my shoulders. “Piper, you’re the best woman in the world and complete me. I love you.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way. It’s over between us. Please don’t call me again.”

“See.” Raj grinned. “Easy peasy.”

“You two are so dumb.” Tara laughed.

CHAPTER 9



Riley

I lay in my bed as tears streamed down my face while staring at the picture of my mom and me. I missed her so much, and the ache in my heart felt like it was there to stay forever. Adjusting to a new place wasn't hard for me because I'd done it my entire life. But I did it with her.

It was six a.m., and I was thirsty, so I went downstairs to the kitchen for a bottle of water. After grabbing it from the fridge, I turned around and saw a woman sneaking down the stairs.

"Who are you?" I asked.

She stopped and placed her hand over her heart. "You scared me, kid. Shouldn't you be sleeping?"

"Shouldn't you have left last night?" I arched my brow. "The others do."

"What's going on—" My dad stopped and stared at me. "Riley, why are you up already?" he asked with irritation.

"I wanted a bottle of water." I held it up.

"I'll call you, Brooke," he said to her as he opened the front door.

"Bye, Brooke," I said with a cocky attitude. "You're not going to call her. Why lie?"

"That's none of your business." He pointed at me as he walked over to the coffee maker. "You're not even supposed to

be up yet.”

“Whatever. I get it.” I sat down on the stool at the island.

“Get what?” my dad asked.

“You’re a man-whore.”

“Excuse me? I am not.”

“Yeah, you are. That’s the third woman you’ve brought home since I’ve been here.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” He tipped the coffee cup to his lips.

“I sure do, Dad. You don’t think I hear you and the giggles that come from those women when you’re walking up the stairs? All I can say is thank God I switched bedrooms.”

“Enough!” He pointed at me. “It’s too early to discuss this.”

“You don’t need to get so mad,” I said.

“Who I see is none of your business, Riley.”

“You mean who you sleep with.” I smirked.

“Okay, that’s enough, or you’re grounded.”

“Grounded? For what?”

“Your attitude, young lady.”

“Whatever. Samantha and I are going shopping today after school. Her mom is going to pick us up and drop us off.”

“Who’s Samantha?” His brows furrowed.

“My friend from school.”

“Why haven’t I met her yet?” he asked.

“You will. Maybe she can spend the night on Saturday. That’s if you don’t have plans on bringing another chick home. That would be really embarrassing.”

“You have three seconds to get up those stairs and get ready for school.” He pointed.

I rolled my eyes and went upstairs.



After school, Samantha's mom dropped us off in Santa Monica and told us she'd pick us up at six o'clock. We walked around, went into a few stores, and then got ice cream.

"Let's go into that store." Samantha pointed at the shop called Primrose.

"Hey, girls. Welcome to Primrose." A younger woman smiled at us. "Let me know if you need any help or want to try anything on."

"Thanks." I smiled at her.

Samantha and I looked around the store and saw a few cute things.

"I love this shirt. Oh my God, look how cute this dress is!"

"Try them on," Samantha said.

I looked at the price tags. "They're too expensive. I don't have the money."

"So what. Just try them on for fun. Come on." She grabbed my hand. "Excuse me. My friend would like to try these on."

"Follow me." The woman smiled as she led us to the dressing room.

I tried on the shirt first and then the dress. "Ugh. I love them." I looked at Samantha.

"Then take them. I'll grab the same shirt and dress in a different size, bring them in here, and you shove that shirt and the dress in your backpack." She looked around. "There are no cameras back here. They'll never know. I'll be right back."

"Sam, I—"

"Don't be a pussy, Riley. I do it all the time." She walked out of the dressing room.

She walked back in with the same shirt and dress in a different size. I shoved the correct sizes into my backpack and

zipped it up.

“I’m going to walk out of the store pretending I have to make a phone call,” she said. “You wait a few minutes and then come out.”

“What if I get caught?” I asked.

“You won’t. The sign right there says to leave the clothes on the rack over there. They’ll never know.”

I waited a few minutes, put the other shirt and dress on the rack, and left the dressing room.

“What did you think?” The saleswoman asked with a smile when I walked out.

“They didn’t look right on me.”

“Aw, that’s too bad. Have a good day.”

“Yeah, you too.”

I nervously walked to the front of the store, and when I went to open the door, the saleswoman stopped me.

“Can I see what’s in your backpack?” she asked.

“It’s just my school stuff,” I said.

“Well, you’re not leaving my store until I see what you have in there.”

Fuck.

CHAPTER 10



Piper

“Come on.” I lightly grabbed her arm.

“Let go of me!” She tried to get out of my grip as I took her into the backroom.

“Open it,” I said.

She set her backpack down, unzipped it, and took out the dress and shirt.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“How old are you? Fifteen?”

“Yeah. I said I’m sorry, lady. I won’t do it again.”

“Sit down.” I pointed to the chair. “Stealing is a serious offense. Where’s your friend?”

“She had to go make a phone call.”

“So, she made you do it and then left you to take the fall? She’s no friend. What’s your name?”

“Riley.”

“Well, Riley. I should call the police.”

“Don’t. Please. I’m sorry. Please don’t call the police.”

“Fine, then I’ll call your mom. What’s her phone number?”

“I don’t have a mom. She died a few months ago.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. Then I have to call your dad.”

“Oh, my God, don’t. He’ll kill me. Please. I’m begging you. I’m really sorry.”

“Take your pick. Your dad or the police?”

“Whatever. Call my dad. But just so you know, you’re the one who will be responsible for my death.”

“You’re being dramatic, Riley. What’s his number?”

I grabbed my phone, and she rattled it off.

“He’s probably in with a patient, so he might not answer.”

“He’s a doctor?” I asked as I held the phone up to my ear.

“Yep.”

After a few rings, it went to voicemail.

“Hi, this is Piper Primrose from Primrose Boutique in Santa Monica. I have your daughter, Riley, here, and I need you to come to my store. I’ll text you the address and explain when you get here.”

“Told you he wouldn’t answer,” she said.

I stared at her, for she reminded me of myself when I was her age.

“I’m really sorry about your mom, Riley.”

“Yeah, so am I.” She looked down. “I don’t know why you just can’t let me go. I said I’m sorry and I’ll never do it again. In fact, I’ll never step foot in this store again.”

“Like I said, stealing is an offense and should not be taken lightly.”

My phone rang with an unfamiliar number.

“Hello,” I answered.

“Is this Piper Primrose?”

“Yes.”

“This is Dr. Gabriel Kind. I just got your message. What is going on?”

“I’ll explain when you come to pick up your daughter.”

“I have one more patient to see, and then I’ll head over there.”

“That’s fine. She’ll be here.”

“Did he sound pissed?” Riley asked me.

“A little.” I softly smiled.

Her phone pinged. After reading her text message, she held the phone up to me.

“Whatever you did, you’re grounded for life!”

“See, I’m dead. You will come to my funeral, right?” she asked.

“He said you’re grounded, not that he’s going to kill you. You know what, Riley?”

“What?”

“Be grateful you have a dad who cares so much about you.”

“Um, Piper, Jack is—” Tara ran into the backroom.

“Jack, what are you—” I said as he stormed into the back.

“Here’s the shit you left at my house.” He threw a small box down on the floor. “I never want to see you again, Piper.” He shouted as he pointed at me.

“Who’s the unstable one, Jack?” I arched my brow.

“You’re a bitch, Piper!” he shouted. “And you need serious help.”

“Hey. You don’t call women a bitch, asshole!” Riley stood up.

“Mind your own business, kid.” He stormed out.

“Wow. Thanks for that.” I smiled at Riley.

“I take it he’s an ex-boyfriend?” She sat back down.

“We only dated for two months. I never considered him my boyfriend. He’s just being dramatic. I’m sorry you had to witness that.”

“It’s fine.” Riley shrugged.

I called Tara into the back and told her that Dr. Kind would be coming in and to let me know when he did.

“Do you want some snacks? Maybe a bottle of water?” I asked Riley.

“A bottle of water would be good,” she said.

I opened the refrigerator, grabbed a bottle, and handed it to her.

“So, this is your shop?” she asked.

“Yes. I’m happy you like the clothing I have.” I smirked.

“Again, I’m sorry.”

“Piper, Dr. Kind is here,” Tara said as she walked into the back.

I looked out the door and saw an incredibly handsome man standing in my shop.

“That’s your dad?” I whispered as I looked at Riley.

“Yep.” She popped her lips.

I walked out of the back and over to where Dr. Kind stood.

“Dr. Kind, I’m Piper Primrose, the owner of this shop.” I extended my hand.

“It’s nice to meet you.” He placed his hand in mine, and I swear I felt a bolt of lightning soar through me. “Where’s Riley? And what did she do?”

“She’s in the back.” I gestured for him to follow me.

“Riley, what is going on?” he asked in an angered tone.

“Go on. Tell him what you did,” I said.

“No. Can’t you?” Riley asked.

“Nope. You need to come clean yourself.”

“I shoved a shirt and a dress I really liked into my backpack. Please don’t kill me, Dad. I apologized to her a thousand times.”

“Wow.” He shook his head. “I cannot believe you did that. And where is your friend?”

“That little coward left her and the store first.” I smiled.

“You are grounded for life, young lady!” He pointed at her. “How much do I owe you? Even though she’s not keeping the items, I still want to pay for them for all the trouble she caused.”

“No need, Dr. Kind. Riley can have the shirt and the dress.”

“What?” Riley’s eyes widened.

“Absolutely not!” Dr. Kind spoke.

“Hear me out.” I put my hand up. “She will work for the shirt and the dress here at my store. She’ll come to my shop three days a week for a couple of hours after school. I could use the extra help unpacking boxes and odd things around here.”

“I have no way of getting her here. I own my own medical practice, and I just can’t leave. She usually takes the bus home.”

“No worries. I’ll pick her up from school and bring her here. Then you can pick her up when you finish work.” I smiled.

“I don’t want—” Riley started to speak.

“Too bad!” Dr. Kind pointed at her. “I can’t ask you to pick her up. I can try to arrange for someone to do it and bring her here.”

“It’s no trouble. I promise you.”

“Riley, go out there and wait for me while I talk to—” He scanned my left hand— “Miss Primrose. And do not touch a thing!”

She rolled her eyes and walked out of the back.

“Why are you doing this, Miss Primrose?” he asked.

“She told me that her mother passed away a few months ago. I’m very sorry for your loss,” I said.

“I appreciate it, but I haven’t seen her mother in fifteen years.”

“Oh,” I spoke with surprise.

“I just found out about Riley less than two months ago when she showed up at my practice.”

“I see. Well, in any case, Riley is a little misguided right now. She reminds me of myself when I was her age, and I think helping me out here to pay for the items she stole will help her gain some responsibility. All kids steal stuff at least once in their life, Dr. Kind. Don’t be too hard on her.”

He let out a sigh as he rubbed the back of his neck. “I guess. Thank you, Miss Primrose, for not calling the police.”

“Call me Piper.” I smiled. “And I gave Riley the choice. She chose you even though she was afraid you were going to put her six feet under.”

“Again, thank you.”

When we walked out of the back, I went over to where Riley stood talking to Tara.

“You start tomorrow. What time do you get out of school?”

“Three fifteen.”

“Give me your phone.” I held out my hand.

I typed my name and number under her contacts and handed it back to her.

“There. You have my number. Shoot me a text message right now with the name of your school.” I smiled.

My phone pinged, and I stored her number in my phone.

“I’ll see you tomorrow at three fifteen, Riley.”

“Yeah. See you tomorrow,” she spoke with irritation.

“Remember, Dr. Kind, don’t be too hard on her.”

“Thank you again, Piper. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He grabbed Riley's backpack, and the two of them left the shop.

"Holy hell, and Mother Mary of God," Tara said. "He's one DILF."

I furrowed my brows at her.

"You know. A dad I'd like to fuck." She cocked her head.

"He certainly is." I bit my bottom lip, and we both laughed.

"I don't understand why you're doing all this for that kid," Tara said.

"It's what Margaret Krosswood did for me." I smiled at her.

CHAPTER 11



Gabriel

“What the hell is the matter with you?” I shouted as we climbed into the car. “Why would you steal?”

“I don’t know,” Riley said as she slammed the door shut. “I can’t believe I have to go work there after school.” She crossed her arms and shook her head.

“You’re lucky she didn’t call the police and press charges against you.”

She sat there looking out the window and didn’t say a word. When I pulled into the driveway, she climbed out, slammed the door, and unlocked the house with her key. As she went to run up the stairs, I stopped her.

“Don’t you dare take another step. You’re grounded.”

“For how long?” she asked.

“For life!”

“Yeah, okay, Dad.”

“Give me your phone.” I held out my hand.

“Dad, no!”

“Riley, give me your phone. I’ll give it back to you when you leave for school, and you’ll give it back to me when you come home.”

“You are so unfair!” she shouted.

“Life isn’t fair, kid. You broke the law, and there are consequences for that. Hand it over.”

“I hate you.” She slammed her phone into my palm and ran up the stairs.

I wouldn’t lie and say I didn’t feel my heart break a little when I heard those words come out of her mouth.

“What is going on in here?” Grayson asked as he stepped through the sliding door. “I could hear you two shouting.”

“You’re never going to believe it. Riley was caught shoplifting.”

“What?” His brows furrowed.

“I got a call from a woman named Piper Primrose. She’s the owner of Primrose Boutique in Santa Monica. Riley shoved a shirt and a dress into her backpack and was going to leave the store when she got caught.” I walked over to the bar and poured myself a scotch.

“Damn. Did the owner call the police?”

“No. She called me instead. I had to go there and pick Riley up. But here’s the thing. She let Riley keep the shirt and dress, and Piper is making her come to the shop a couple of days after school to help her around the store and pay for the clothes.”

“I think that’s a good idea. It’ll teach Riley responsibility,” my brother said. “How is she getting there, though?”

“Piper said she’d pick her up from school and bring her to the shop. Then, I’ll pick her up after I leave the medical center.”

Grayson’s brows furrowed. “Why would she do that?”

“I have no idea.” I finished off my scotch. “And get this. Piper Primrose, the owner of the shop, is fucking gorgeous.”

“Excuse me?” His brow arched. “How old is she?”

“I’d say late twenties.”

The corners of Grayson's mouth curved upward. "Is she married?"

"I didn't see a ring on her finger."

"Oh, so you looked." A smirk crossed his lips.

"Yeah, I looked. Any man with two eyes would have. Riley told me she hated me because I grounded her and took away her phone."

"She doesn't mean it, bro. How many times did we tell Dad we hated him but didn't mean it?"

"True. But it's different when you're on the other end of it."

"Give her some time to cool off and then talk to her." He patted my shoulder. "I'll talk to you later."



Grayson

I stepped through the sliding door and grabbed hold of Ava's hand.

"What are you doing?" She laughed.

"Taking you shopping. Let's go." I grabbed my keys from the island.

"Shopping? Where?"

"A boutique called Primrose in Santa Monica. Pull it up on your phone and give me the address," I said as we climbed into the car.

"Grayson, what is going on?"

"Long story short. Riley shoplifted from there today, and the owner, Piper, called Gabriel to come pick her up. Gabriel said she's gorgeous."

"Okay?" Her brows furrowed. "Gabriel thinks a lot of women are gorgeous."

“No, you don’t understand, babe. He had a look on his face. A smitten look. Besides, it was the way he said she was gorgeous. There was a distinct tone in his voice.”

“Don’t you think you’re blowing this way out of proportion?” Ava asked.

“No, I don’t. He’s my twin, babe. I know him better than anyone.”

She pulled up the address, and I typed it into the GPS. When we entered the store, a young woman with black hair approached us.

“Welcome to Primrose. If I can help you find anything, let me know.” She smiled.

“Is that her?” Ava whispered.

“I don’t know. Excuse me, and your name is?” I asked.

“Tara.”

“Thank you, Tara. We’ll let you know. Nope, not her.” I whispered in Ava’s ear.

“There are some adorable things here,” Ava said as she pulled out a shirt and held it up. “How have I never been in this store?”

“Keep looking. I’ll buy you anything you want, babe.” I kept scanning the store for Piper.

“You’re out of control, Grayson.”

“No, I’m not.” I kissed the side of her head. “I love you and want you to have nice things.”

She rolled her eyes and continued shopping.

“Hey, Piper,” I heard Tara shout from the register. “We’re out of paper for the receipts.”

A woman with long blonde hair came out from the back.

“Here you go.” She smiled as she handed the roll to her.

“That’s her,” I whispered.

“Wow. She is gorgeous.” Ava smiled.

“Excuse me,” I said. “My girlfriend would like to try these items on.”

“I don’t need to—”

“Yes, you do, babe.”

Piper walked over and took the two shirts from Ava’s hand.

“Follow me.” Piper smiled.

After Ava shot me a look and closed the fitting room door, I looked at Piper.

“This is a really nice shop.”

“Thank you.” A bright smile crossed her lips.

“The owner has excellent taste in clothing.”

“Thank you for the compliment,” she said.

“You’re the owner?” My brows raised.

“Piper Primrose.” She extended her hand.

“Grayson.” I placed my hand in hers. “How long have you been in business?”

“A couple of years.”

The fitting room door opened, and Ava stepped out.

“Well, what did you think?” Piper asked her.

“I’ll take both of them.” Ava grinned.

“Excellent.” Piper took the shirts from Ava, and we headed up to the register.

After I paid, she handed Ava the bag and told us to enjoy the rest of our evening.

“You are unbelievable.” Ava shook her head.

“Why? Because I want my brother to find someone special? Besides, you got two nice shirts out of it.” I smirked. “And don’t you dare tell him about this either. In fact, tell the others to keep quiet as well. He’ll kill me if he finds out what we did.”

“Not ‘we’, Grayson. You!”

CHAPTER 12



Gabriel

“If Lily ever shoplifts, she’s one dead girl,” Stefan said as we sat around the bonfire.

“You know. If that Piper woman had called the police and pressed charges, I would have made it all go away,” Simon said.

“Thanks, Simon, but Riley needs to learn her lesson,” I said.

“It’s her first offense,” Sam said. “Everyone fucks up once in their lives.”

“And some more than others.” Simon coughed out Henry’s name.

“Or it’s just the first time she’s gotten caught.” I tipped the bottle of beer to my lips.

“I think what the owner is making Riley do is cool,” Shaun said. “She sounds like a nice woman.”

“Yeah, she is.” I smiled.

“How old is she?” Simon asked.

“She looks to be in her late twenties.”

“Is she hot?” he asked.

“She’s definitely hot.” I grinned.

“What does she look like?” Jackson asked.

“She’s about five foot six with long blonde hair and green eyes. She said something weird.”

“What did she say?” Christian asked.

“I asked her why she was doing this for Riley, and she said it was because Riley reminded her of herself at that age.”

“Huh, wonder what she meant by that?” Simon said. “Do us a favor and find out.” A grin crossed his face. “Maybe take her out for a nice dinner to thank her for what she’s doing for your daughter.”

“Shut up.” I laughed as I tossed my beer cap at him.

Grayson walked over and sat down next to me.

“Where were you?” I asked.

“Ava and I had to run to the store.” He twisted the cap off his beer bottle. “How’s Riley?”

“I’m sure she still hates me. I haven’t seen her since I took her phone away.”

“It’s tough when they tell you they hate you.” Stefan shook his head.

“Woohoo! Is there a party going on out here or what?!” We heard a voice shout from behind.

She reached over Grayson’s shoulder and grabbed the beer from his hands.

“Kate!” Simon grinned as he pointed at her.

“The one and only, detective.”

“It’s good to see you, Kate. What’s going on?” Grayson asked as he took back his beer.

“I heard about Riley, that little thief.” She smiled. “Gabriel, where is she? I think it’s time the two of us had a little chat.”

“She’s in her room,” I said. “What do you want to talk to her about?”

“Now that’s between her and me.” She started to walk away, stopped, and turned around. “By the way, that Piper

chick is pretty. You'd be dumb not to hit that at least once, Gabe." She winked.

"KATE!" Grayson shouted. "What the fuck?"

Her laughter could be heard down the beach.

"What the hell is she talking about?" I narrowed my eye at my brother. "How does she know what Piper looks like?"

"I don't know." He shrugged.

"Bro, I swear to God." I grabbed the back of his neck.

"Okay. Okay. Damn. I wanted to see her for myself, so Ava and I took a little shopping trip to her shop."

"Are you fucking serious?" I cocked my head.

"Calm down. What's the big deal? She doesn't know who we are. Anyway, you were right. She's very beautiful." He smiled. "Too beautiful for your dumb ass." He playfully smacked my arm.

I sat there shaking my head as I drank my beer.



Riley

I never should have listened to Samantha, that stupid bitch. I lay diagonally on my bed and stared up at the ceiling. I heard a knock on the door.

"Go away!" I shouted as I grabbed one of my pillows and covered my face with it.

I heard the creaking of the door, and when I looked over, I saw Ava standing there.

"Ava, I'm not—"

"Ava isn't here. I'm Kate. We haven't met yet." She shut the door and jumped on my bed.

"Kate?" My brows furrowed.

“The one and only, kid.” She grinned. “I heard you were helping yourself to some things that didn’t belong to you.”

“That’s nice. Does the entire freaking family know?”

“Yep. Pretty much. That’s how this family works. They tell each other everything, and I mean everything. So, why did you do it?” She climbed off my bed and looked around at the things in my room.

“I don’t know,” I said.

“Sure, you do. Freya did a great job with this wall.” She turned her head and looked at me. “Answer the question.”

“My friend told me to. She said I wouldn’t get caught.”

“So, if your friend told you to jump off a bridge and promised you wouldn’t die, you would trust her and do it?”

“No.” I furrowed my brows.

“Listen, kid.” She walked over and lay next to me on the bed. We both stared up at the ceiling. “First of all, I commend you on your bravery for flying out here by yourself to find your dad.” She held out her fist to me, and I fist-bumped it. “Fifteen is a hard enough age as it is, but you’re a smart girl. You’ve already proved that. Then you go and do something dumb like you did today. You knew better than that, so I’m not buying your bullshit story about how your friend pressured you into doing it. Spill it, girl.” She glanced at me.

“How old are you?” I asked her.

“Twenty-one. Don’t change the subject because I can stay here all night.”

“I miss my mom so much, Kate. When she died, a part of me died with her. It had always been just us, with an occasional guy thrown in. She was more my best friend than my mom. I’m so pissed off at her. Why did she have to get in that truck when she knew neither one of them was sober enough to drive?”

“I don’t know, kid. But what I do know is that you can’t keep asking yourself that. What’s done is done, and there’s no going back to how things were. Ophelia likes to tell us that

when life hands you lemons, make gallons of lemonade and store it away for when you need it most.”

“What?” My brows furrowed.

“Life is hard, and things won’t always go your way. Bad things will happen. It’s a part of life. You were born with the instinct of a fighter, just like your mom. And I suppose your dad.” She bopped her head from side to side. “Your mom fought to keep you and did everything she could to keep you safe. Don’t disappoint her. Even though she’s no longer here physically, she’ll always be watching over you. Just like Charles is watching over us.”

“Who’s Charles?”

“He was like a father to us over the years. That’s another story for another time. I’m sure Ava will tell you about him. My point is that life goes on. Make the lemonade, kid, and it’ll always be there to remind you that your mistakes are just mistakes. Learn from them, and don’t let them define you.”

“Have you ever made mistakes, Kate?”

“Fuck yeah. I’ve made a lot of them and caused a lot of people a lot of pain. You’ve got a good life here at Kind Beach.” She smirked. “Your dad is a great guy, and his punishments are only because he loves you and wants to protect you. If you don’t want his punishments, then I suggest you stop giving him a reason to do it.”

“Thanks, Kate.” I gave her hand a gentle squeeze. “You’re really cool.”

“I know.” She smiled. “Dump the friend. She’s a bad influence. You’re smarter than that.”

“I will.” I smiled.

CHAPTER 13



Gabriel

I saw Kate walking down the stairs as I stepped through the sliding door.

“How is she?” I asked.

“She’ll be fine. Give the kid back her phone. She learned her lesson.”

“Thanks, Kate.”

“No problem, Gabe.” She patted my chest and walked out the sliding door.

I let out a sigh and walked up the stairs to Riley’s room. Lightly knocking on the door, she told me to come in.

“Hey,” I said as I walked over to her bed.

“Hey.”

“How was your talk with Kate?” I sat down.

“Good. I really like her.”

“Yeah. She’s cool.” I smiled.

“I’m really sorry, Dad.” She threw her arms around my neck.

I closed my eyes as I hugged my daughter tightly.

“I know you are, Riley. Just promise me that you’ll never do it again.”

“I won’t, Dad. Can I borrow your guitar?” She broke our embrace. “I want to play something for you.”

“Sure.” I smiled as I kissed her forehead. “I’ll go get it.”

I went to my bedroom, grabbed my guitar, and handed it to her. She sat on the edge of the bed with the guitar in her lap and started strumming the chords to and singing Wonderwall by Oasis. She had a beautiful voice and reminded me so much of Ariana.

“That’s the song I used to play and sing to your mother,” I said.

“I know.” She smiled. “She told me.”

“You have a beautiful voice, Riley.” I hooked my arm around her and pressed my lips against the side of her head.

“Thanks, Dad. How long are you going to keep my phone from me?”

“You’ll get it back in the morning.”

“For good?” She looked up at me.

“Yeah. For good.” My grip around her tightened.

At that moment, I felt the bond between us strengthen, and I knew we would both be okay.



Piper

I grabbed my phone from the counter and sent a text message to Riley.

“Are you still alive? I would hate to show up at your school only to find out that you no longer exist in this world?”

“LOL. Yes, I’m still alive.”

“Good. I’ll see you at three fifteen. I drive a white Jeep Wrangler. Be on the lookout for me.”

“I will. Thanks, Piper. I’m excited to come help out today.”

I furrowed my brows.

“I’m happy to hear that, Riley. See you soon.”

What was that look for?” Raj asked as he set a box on the counter.

“Riley said she’s excited to come help out today. Why would she say that? Yesterday, she hated me and the thought of coming back here.”

“Maybe she and that hot daddy of hers had a little chat, and she’s feeling better about things.”

“How do you know he’s hot? You weren’t here.” I narrowed my eye at him.

“Tara snapped a pic and sent it to me. Girl, he is a total DILF.”

“I know.” I sighed. “He smells so good too.”

“Oh?” Raj leaned into me. “Do tell? I like me a good-smelling man.”

“He smelled clean with a touch of a woody scent and a hint of amber. It was intense.” I smiled.

“Damn, Piper. He is coming to pick Riley up, right?”

“Yeah. After he gets off work.”

“All I can say is you better introduce me to him.” His brow raised.

I glanced at my watch and grabbed my purse. “I have to go. Tara should be back any minute.”

“Have fun, darling. I can’t wait to meet Riley,” Raj shouted as I walked out of the shop.

When I reached the high school, I sighed when I saw the line of cars trying to get into the school to pick up their kids. Between the cars trying to get in and the cars trying to exit the school, it was a clusterfuck and an accident waiting to happen.

“Lady!” I heard someone shout. “Over here!” the parking guard pointed to the next lane.

I threw my hands up because there was no way I could get over there without hitting the car next to me.

“LADY!” she shouted again.

“I ignored her and stared straight ahead.

She walked over to my car with a sour look on her face.

“Don’t you hear me calling you? You’re holding up traffic,” she said.

“Me?” I pointed to myself. “How the hell do you expect me to get over there when this jackass next to me won’t pull up? Why aren’t you yelling at him?”

“Don’t act like this is your first time, lady,” she said.

“It is my first time!” I shouted.

“Then I suggest you get familiar with the program here if you’re going to do pick-ups,” she spoke with an attitude and walked away.

I saw Riley heading toward my car.

“Hey, Piper.” She smiled when she climbed inside.

“Hey, you. How was school?” I smiled.

“It was okay. I love your Jeep.”

“Thanks.”

We waited for traffic to move, and I was finally able to pull out.

“That is a really bad situation,” I said.

“I know.” Riley laughed.

“Are you hungry? I can stop somewhere if you want?”

“No. I’m good.”

“So, how did it go with your dad last night?” I glanced at her.

“It was brutal at first. He grounded me and took away my phone. But we talked, and I got my phone back.”

When we arrived back at my shop, I introduced Riley to Raj and had her unpack and hang some jewelry that had come in.

“So, what kind of doctor is your dad?” I casually asked her.

“Internal Medicine. He has his own practice at the Kind Medical Center, which his cousins own. His twin brother, my Uncle Grayson, is a trauma surgeon at Cedars-Sinai.”

“Oh, your dad is a twin?”

“Yeah.” She smiled. “Fraternal twins.”

“How about your dad’s girlfriend? How do you get along with her?” I curiously asked because I had to know if he was single.

“He doesn’t have a girlfriend.”

“Stop it.” My heart beat a little faster. “A handsome man like himself has to be taken.”

“Nope. He likes to date a lot of different women. I told him he was a man-whore. He didn’t appreciate it.” She laughed.

“I’m sure he didn’t.” I laughed with her. “Where are you from, Riley Kind? Your dad mentioned yesterday that he recently found out about you. Are you from California?”

“No. My mom and I moved around a lot. We were living in Georgia when she passed away.”

“I’m sorry. It must be tough for you to move here, get to know your dad, and start at a new school.”

“I’m used to moving around, so it’s really not a big deal.”

“Any boyfriends back in Georgia?” I smirked.

“I had one, but he turned out to be a jerk, so I dumped him.”

“Most men are,” I said. “You don’t need that complication in your life right now. You’re too young to have to deal with all the drama they bring to the table.” I winked.

“Like that Jack guy who was in here yesterday? What did he do that was so bad?”

“He’s not a bad guy. He’s just upset that I didn’t want to see him anymore.”

“Why don’t you want to see him if he’s not that bad?”

“It’s complicated.” I smiled.

The bell above the door rang, and I saw Dr. Kind walk in when I looked over.

“Hey, Dad.” Riley smiled.

“Hi, Riley. Hey, Piper.” He smiled as he tucked his hands into his pants pockets.

“Hi, Dr. Kind.” I stared into his dreamy blue eyes.

“I hope she wasn’t any trouble,” he said.

“No trouble at all. She put up this jewelry display for me.”

“It looks good. Are you ready, Riley?”

“Yeah. Let me grab my backpack from the back.”

Raj strutted over and stood next to me.

“Dr. Kind, this is one of my sales associates, Raj. Raj, Riley’s father, Dr. Kind.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Raj.” He extended his hand.

“The pleasure is all mine, sir.” Raj grinned, and I lightly kicked his foot with mine.

“You both can call me Gabriel.”

“I’m ready, Dad.” Riley walked over.

“Thanks for all of your hard work.” I smiled at her. “I’ll see you in a couple of days.”

“Thanks, Piper.” Gabriel smiled.

“You’re welcome, Gabriel. Enjoy the rest of your evening.”

“You too.” The corners of his mouth curved upward before he and Riley walked out of the shop.

“Be still my rapidly beating heart,” Raj said. “That man is sexy as fuck.”

“I know.” I sighed.

CHAPTER 14



Gabriel

“How was school today?” I asked Riley as we climbed into the car.

“It was okay. I’m really excited because we’re doing pottery in art class tomorrow.”

“You like to do pottery?” I glanced at her.

“I love it. My mom’s friend owns a pottery studio back in Georgia. I spent a lot of time there. Didn’t you see the pottery pieces I made on my Facebook page?”

“No. I didn’t.”

“I’m really good at it. Yasmin told me that I have a special kind of talent. She said I have excellent hand-eye coordination and great creative vision. Kind of like Freya with her paintings.”

“That’s great, Riley. Maybe we can find you a pottery studio around here, and you can take some classes.”

“I don’t take classes. I already know how to do it. Yasmin taught me everything I need to know. I just create what I want. What’s for dinner?”

“I was going to grill some burgers. Sound good?”

“That’s fine.” She shrugged. “I’m going for a swim before I start my homework.” She ran up the stairs.

While prepping the burgers, I couldn’t stop thinking about Piper Primrose. Why? She was beautiful, and I like beautiful

women. Something about her besides her looks intrigued me, but I couldn't put my finger on it. I took the plate of burgers to the grill on the patio and put them on.

"Don't forget the cheese," Riley said from the pool.

"I won't." I smiled. "Did Piper have any issues picking you up today?"

"One of the parking guards was yelling at her, and she was yelling back." She laughed as she climbed out of the pool, and I handed her a towel. "I know I don't know her very well, but I really like her, Dad."

"She seems nice," I said.

"You should have been there yesterday when she had me in the back. A guy named Jack stormed in, threw a box of her stuff at her, and told her he never wanted to see her again. Then he called her a bitch. She just calmly stood there and called him unstable." She laughed.

"Why would he do that?" My brows furrowed.

"She told me he was pissed because she told him she didn't want to see him anymore. I guess they were only dating for a couple of months. She said guys aren't worth the drama they bring to the table and that I should stay away from them."

"She gives excellent advice." I winked. "So, she's not seeing anyone?"

"Didn't you listen to what I just said?" She cocked her head.

"Well, yeah, but—"

"You like her." A bright grin crossed Riley's face.

"No, I don't. I don't even know her." I stood at the grill and flipped the burgers.

"But you think she's pretty."

"She is very pretty. That means nothing."

"I told her you were a man-whore."

"Riley!" I shouted. "Why the hell would you do that?"

“She asked if I got along with your girlfriend. I said you didn’t have one, and that’s when I told her you were a man-whore.”

“That’s really nice. What did she say?” I shook my head.

She laughed. “I think she was casually trying to find out if you were single. Are the burgers done yet? I’m starving.”

“Yes. Go change out of your bathing suit first.” I took the burgers off the grill. “By the way, we have a gender reveal party this Friday night at the Kind Brew House.”

“For Georgia and Jackson?” Riley asked.

“Yes. And since it’s around the corner from Primrose, we’ll head there after I pick you up.”

“Okay. Before, I forget. Can you teach me how to surf?” Riley asked.

“You really want to learn?” A smile crossed my lips.

“Yeah. I do. If I’m going to be living here, I should know how, right?”

“You bet I’ll teach you.” I winked.

After dinner, I grabbed a beer from the refrigerator and went down to the beach, where Stefan, Nathan, Jackson, Shaun, and Simon sat around the bonfire.

“You are never going to believe what Riley told Piper,” I said.

“What did she tell her?” Shaun asked.

“She told her that I was a man-whore.” I tipped the bottle to my lips.

“You are.” Simon chuckled.

“Shut up, douchebag.” I tossed the bottle cap at him.

“We all were at one point,” Nathan said. “You’ll hop off the man-whore train someday.” He grinned.

“Why do you care if Piper knows that, cousin?” Simon asked.

“I don’t.” I pulled out my phone.

“Are you texting Piper right now to tell her that you’re not a man-whore?” Jackson chuckled, and Simon high-fived him.

“You all think you’re so funny.” I brought up Riley’s Facebook page and started scrolling.

“That’s because we are.” Simon took a sip of his beer.

“Riley told me today that she loves to do pottery. I guess Ariana had a friend back in Georgia who owned a pottery studio, and Riley spent a lot of time there.”

“And she just told you this now?” Nathan asked.

“She brought it up because her art class is doing pottery tomorrow. I told her maybe we can try to find a pottery studio around here where she can go on the weekends or something.”

“Or I can just build her a pottery studio of her own.” Stefan smiled.

“Yeah, okay.” I chuckled. “And where the hell would you put one? I don’t want that stuff in my house.”

“We can build her a pottery shed over by the pool,” Stefan spoke.

“There isn’t enough room.”

“There could be.” Shaun grinned. “We’ll just extend your property. I wanted to wait and tell you guys what my plans are, but since we’re talking about property, I might as well tell you now. My company plans to buy every house that goes up for sale beyond the stretch of our beach.”

“So, what are you going to do? Own all of Venice Beach?” Simon laughed.

“Yeah. Pretty much.” Shaun grinned. “I plan to Airbnb them, and then our children will move in when the time comes.”

“And what makes you think our kids would want to live here next to their parents?” Stefan laughed.

“Yeah, bro. We couldn’t wait to get the hell away from ours when we graduated college.” Simon laughed.

“Good idea, cousin.” Nathan held up his beer bottle. “My kids are staying put, right here, on the beach, by us.”

“Damn right, they are.” Shaun smiled as he held up his beer bottle.

“Anyway, back to Riley’s pottery studio,” Stefan said. “It can be done.”

CHAPTER 15



Piper

I picked Riley up from school and took her back to my shop.

“What do you want me to do?” she asked.

“The clothes on this rack need steaming. All you do is hang the clothes here and move the wand over it to get the wrinkles out. Be careful, and don’t burn yourself.”

“Got it.” She smiled.

I walked behind the counter and stood there with Tara and Raj.

“It sure is nice when she’s here. Less work for us.” Raj grinned. “I bet you can’t wait for Daddy to pick her up.”

“Will you stop that.” I playfully smacked his arm.

“I know I can’t wait.” Tara smiled. “I need some good eye candy.”

“Piper, my dad just texted me. He has to run to the hospital to check on one of his patients who was brought into the ER after he leaves the medical center. So, when I’m done here, I’m going to walk to the Kind Brew House. It’s right around the corner,” Riley said.

“Why are you going there?”

“The family is having a gender reveal party for my cousins Jackson and Georgia.”

“Oh. I know you’re fifteen, but I’d feel better walking you there.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” I smiled.

After Riley was done steaming the clothes that needed to be done, I walked with her to the Kind Brew House. When we arrived, I noticed a sign on the door that said, “Closed tonight for a family party.”

“Come in with me and meet the rest of my family,” Riley said.

“Thanks, Riley, but I can’t do that.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s a family party, and I’m not family.”

“So what.” She grabbed my hand and pulled me inside. “They won’t mind.”

“Riley, sweetheart.” An older woman walked over and gave her a hug. “Who is this?”

“Grandma Barb, this is Piper. She owns Primrose around the corner. This is my Grandma Barb.”

“Piper, it’s nice to meet you.” She extended her hand. “I’ve been in your shop, and it’s lovely.”

“Thank you, Barb.” I smiled as I placed my hand in hers.

“Where’s your father, darling?” Barb asked Riley.

“He had to run to Cedars to check on a patient. He said he’ll be here as soon as he can.”

“Riley.” A handsome man walked over. “Who is this with you?”

“Simon, this is Piper. Piper, this is my cousin, Simon.”

“Piper.” He smiled. “It’s great to meet you. I’ve heard a lot about you from Gabriel.” He hooked his arm around me.

“You have?”

“Yep. He was telling us how beautiful you are. He was right.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Thank you. It’s great to meet you, Simon.”

I glanced over and saw the man who was in my shop last week walking toward us.

“Hello again.” He smiled. “I’m Dr. Grayson Kind, Riley’s uncle.”

“This is my dad’s twin brother,” Riley said.

“It’s nice to meet you, Dr. Kind. You were in my shop last week.”

“Please, call me Grayson. Yes, I was. Come with me and meet the rest of the family.”



G abriel

I walked into the brew house, and Riley ran over to me.

“Hi, Dad.” She hooked her arm around me.

“Hi, sweetheart.”

“It’s about time, bro.” Grayson walked over and fist-bumped me.

I looked around and saw Piper talking to the girls.

“Piper is here?” My brows furrowed.

“Yeah. She walked me here from the shop. I invited her in to meet the family.” Riley smiled.

“Dr. Kind.” Simon grinned as he walked over and tightly hooked his arm around me. “She’s beautiful. Go talk to her. Tell her you’re not the man-whore she thinks you are.”

“Knock it off, cousin.” I pulled away from his grip, and he and Grayson laughed. “You’re both douchebags.” I pointed at them as I walked away and over to where Piper stood talking to the girls. “Hi.” I smiled.

“Hey.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips.

“Thanks for walking Riley here.”

“You’re welcome. I was just going to leave her at the door, but she insisted I come in to meet your family. Everyone is so nice.”

“Yeah. They’re great people.”

“Okay, everyone!” Charlotte shouted. “Gather around. It’s time to find out the gender of Georgia’s and Jackson’s baby! On the count of three, both of you lift the lid off the box to reveal your baby’s gender!” She smiled.

“One. Two. Three!” We all shouted.

As soon as Jackson and Georgia lifted the lid, several blue balloons came flying out.

“It’s a boy!” Jackson threw his hands up in the air, grabbed Georgia, and kissed her.

We all shouted and clapped.

“That’s my cousin!” Simon shouted as he pointed at him. “Way to keep the Kind name going!”

“How exciting.” Piper smiled as she glanced at me. “Does your family always do this?”

“Yeah. We always get together for everything. Did you grab something to eat already?”

“No. I should get back to the shop,” she said.

“Well, you have to eat. So, text or call your sales associates and tell them you’re staying here. They can close up the shop, right?”

“Yeah, they can.”

“Then stay,” I spoke with seriousness.

“You really want me to stay?” Her beautiful cock raising green eyes stared into mine.

“Yeah. I do.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Okay. Maybe I will.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips. “I’ll go call Tara and tell her I’m not returning to the store.” She walked away.

Grayson walked over and handed me a glass of scotch.

“Thanks.” I smiled.

“Is Piper leaving?” he asked.

“No. She’s making a phone call. She’ll be right back.”

“I like her, bro.” Grayson grinned as he patted my shoulder.

“Knock it off.” My eye narrowed at him.

“What? I can’t tell you I like someone?”

“Be quiet. Here she comes. All set?” I asked Piper.

“All set.” She smiled.

“Then we better go grab some food.”

The two of us walked over to the table, where Sebastian laid out a spread of food. After making our plates, we sat down in a booth. I could feel the stares of my brother and cousins from across the restaurant.

“I met your Mom. She’s really nice.” Piper smiled.

“My mom?” My brow furrowed.

“Barb.”

“Oh.” I chuckled. “Barb isn’t my mother. She’s my aunt. Well, sort of my aunt.”

“But Riley called her grandma.”

“That’s because Barb asked her to. Barb was married to my Uncle Henry, who was my father’s brother. Before my father passed away, he and Barb had a relationship.”

“Oh.” Confusion swept over her face.

“It’s complicated.” I chuckled.

“Hey, Dad?” Riley walked over and sat next to me. “Alex is leaving because Rory isn’t feeling good. Can Lily spend the

night at our house?”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” I smiled.

“Okay. Then we’re leaving now with Alex. Thanks, Dad. Bye, Piper.”

“Bye, Riley.” She smiled.

CHAPTER 16



G abriel

I looked at Piper and let out a sigh.

“What’s wrong?” She laughed. “Can’t handle a teenage sleepover?”

“I’m not sure. I’ll let you know.” I smiled.

“It’s no big deal. They’ll just be up all night playing loud music and making a lot of noise.” A smirk crossed her lips.

“I hope not.” I chuckled.

“This has been a lot of fun, but I should get going,” Piper said.

“Okay. Let me drive you to your car.”

“If you insist, Dr. Kind.” The corners of her mouth curved upward into a sexy smile.

“Just let me go say goodbye to my family first,” I said as I climbed out of the booth. I walked over to where my brother and cousins were hanging out by the bar. “I’m going to drive Piper to her car.”

“That’s very gentlemen-like of you.” Grayson grinned as he patted my chest.

“Shut the fuck up. I’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

After Piper said goodbye to the girls, I pulled into the parking lot next to her car.

“Thanks for hanging out with us tonight.” I smiled as I stared into her beautiful eyes. It took everything I had in me not to lean over and kiss her.

“It was a lot of fun. I’m thinking to top the night off, you should come back to my place for a nightcap,” she said. “I only live five minutes from here.”

“I’d love to.” My cock started to spasm.

“Then follow me.” She smiled as she climbed out of my car and into hers.

I pulled into the parking spot next to her, and we took a flight of steps up to her apartment. After unlocking the door, she flipped the lights on and set her purse down.

“Nice place,” I said.

“Thanks.” She smiled as she wrapped her arms around my neck.

“I thought I was here for a nightcap?”

“I wasn’t talking about a drink,” she said as her eyes diverted to my lips. “My nightcap means something different.”

“I think I like what your nightcap means better.” I brushed my lips against hers.

“I was hoping you would.”

Our lips met again, and this time, my tongue slipped into her warm mouth. I picked her up, and her legs wrapped around my waist.

“Bedroom?” I asked.

“Up the stairs. First door on the left.”

I carried her up the stairs as our lips stayed locked in a passionate kiss. Setting her down on the bed, my fingers took hold of the bottom of her shirt and carefully lifted it over her head. I couldn’t help but stare down at the cleavage staring back at me. While kicking off my shoes and taking off my shirt, Piper stood up and shimmied out of her pants. My already hard cock throbbed with excitement as I stared at her sexy body.

“You are so sexy,” I said as I touched her cheek and softly kissed her lips.

“So are you,” she softly moaned as her fingers unbuttoned my pants, and she pushed them off my hips.

“I really need you to lay down so I can explore that gorgeous body of yours,” I said.

“No need to tell me twice.” A sexy smile crossed her lips as she lay on the bed.

“First, these need to come off.” I hooked my fingers around the thin waistband of her thong and pulled them down.

“That’s not fair,” she said.

“What’s not fair?” I smiled.

“Yours are still on. I need to see what I’m going to be dealing with. I need to see the bigger picture.” Her tongue slid around her lips, and I nearly orgasmed.

“Your wish is my command, beautiful.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I took my underwear down.

“Oh damn.” Her brows raised. “I can see I’m in for one hell of a ride.”

“It’ll be a ride you’ll never forget.” I spread her legs, and my tongue slid up her inner thigh.

Seductive moans escaped her as my mouth slowly and skillfully devoured her. Her fingers tangled through my hair, and I could feel her swelling against my lips. She was getting ready to have an orgasm, and I couldn’t wait.

“Oh, my God, Gabriel!” She moaned. “Yes, yes, yes!” Her body released itself.

My tongue traveled up her torso and swept over each of her breasts while my lips wrapped around her hardened peaks. Dipping my fingers inside, she gasped. Our lips met, and our tongues danced with excitement.

“Don’t move. I have to grab a condom.”

“Don’t *you* dare move,” she moaned as she reached over, opened her nightstand drawer, grabbed a condom, and tossed it on the bed.

“Why, thank you.” I smiled as I picked it up and tore the wrapper with my teeth.

After rolling it over my hard and throbbing cock, I thrust inside her, and all of my cares and worries fell away. Our soft moans synced in harmony at the pleasure we felt while our lips meshed. Her arms were wrapped tightly around me, and as her nails dug into my flesh, I felt this incredible feeling.

I rolled on my back and pulled her on top of me. Our eyes locked on each other as her hands were planted firmly on my chest while her hips moved back and forth. I could feel the swelling inside her as her body gave way to another orgasm. She threw her head back and let out a moan. I gripped her hips and held her down while I exploded inside her. Her body dropped on mine, and I held her against me, waiting for our breathing to settle down and our racing hearts to calm.

“That was fun.” She smiled as she climbed off me.

“It definitely was.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I stared at her. “What do you want me to do with this?” I asked as I took off the condom.

“There’s a trash can in the bathroom.”

I climbed out of bed, went into the bathroom, and tossed the condom in the can. When I walked back into the bedroom, Piper was standing there in her silk robe. I walked over to her and placed my hand on her cheek.

“I need to get home.”

“I know. You have a sleepover to monitor.” She grinned.

As I was putting my clothes on, my phone dinged. I grabbed it from my pants pocket and saw a text message from Riley.

“Where are you? It’s midnight.”

“I’m on my way home now.”

“Riley?” Piper asked.

“Yeah. She’s asking me where I am. I’m not used to this.”
I sighed.

“She’s worried about you, Dad.” A smirk crossed her lips.
“You better get home.”

“Thanks for the nightcap.” I smiled as my lips brushed
against hers.

“No, thank you, Dr. Kind. I had a great time tonight.”

“Me too. I’ll talk to you soon,” I said as I walked out the
door.

CHAPTER 17



Gabriel

I got up early the following morning, grabbed my surfboard, and headed down the beach.

“What happened to you last night?” Grayson asked.

“Yeah, we thought you were coming back to the brew house after you drove Piper to her car,” Shaun said.

I didn’t say a word as I put my board in the water and started paddling out.

“You slept with her!” Grayson said.

“Maybe.” I kept paddling.

“That’s my boy.” Simon grinned as he paddled next to me.

“Good for you, cousin,” Stefan said. “How were the girls last night?”

“Pretty good. They were dancing around the living room when I got home. Then they went upstairs to Riley’s room. I barely heard them after that.”

“Are you going to see Piper again?” Jackson asked with a smirk on his face.

“I don’t know. I’ll see her when I pick up Riley from her shop.”

“That’s not what we mean, bro,” Grayson said.

“She’s a great woman, but it was only sex.”

“Sure. Okay.” Sebastian laughed.

“Enough talk about last night. Let’s catch some waves,” I said.

When we were done surfing, I went back to the house. When I opened the sliding door, I saw Ava in my kitchen.

“Ophelia?” I stepped inside.

“Good morning, Gabriel. The girls are going to want a good breakfast when they get up.” She brightly smiled. “I hope you don’t mind.”

The sliding door opened, and Grayson popped his head in. “Is Ava—oh.” He stared at her. “Ophelia, what are you doing?”

“Making breakfast, Grayson. Come in and sit down. I’m making eggs benedict, brioche French toast topped with blueberries and strawberries, and homemade banana nut muffins.”

“What’s that smell?” Riley asked as she and Lily walked down the stairs.

“Ophelia!” Lily ran over and hugged her.

“Hello, sweetheart. Go sit down, and I’ll pour you a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice.”

“Dad?” Riley looked at me.

“Riley, this is Ophelia.”

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Riley.” Ophelia cupped Riley’s chin. “I heard you like coffee. How about I make you one of my special lattes?”

“I’d love that. Thanks, Ophelia.”

We all sat down at the table while Ophelia served us breakfast.

“This is amazing.” Riley smiled as she ate her French toast.

“So, Gabriel,” Lily said. “Where were you last night?”

“I was at the brew house, Lily.”

“No, you weren’t. We were outside when everyone else came home.”

“Yeah, Dad. Where were you?”

Shit.

“I was talking with Piper, and then I drove her to her car.”

Grayson snickered as he dug into his eggs benedict.

“Until midnight?” Riley cocked her head.

“Yes, until midnight. Now, eat your breakfast.”

“Where did Ophelia go?” Riley asked.

“I think she went upstairs,” Lily said.

“She’s probably straightening up your room,” Grayson spoke.

“Any idea why she’s out?” I asked my brother.

“She probably wanted to meet Riley,” he said.

“I like her.” Riley smiled. “This breakfast is the bomb.”

The sliding door opened, and Aunt Barb walked in.

“Oh, my. What is that wonderful smell?”

“Ophelia cooked breakfast for us,” Lily said.

“Morning, Aunt Barb. Why are you here so early?” I asked.

“I was down at Stefan’s, and he said Lily spent the night here. How would you girls like to spend the day with me? Curtis is on a golf outing, and I thought we could spend the day shopping.”

“Sounds fun, Grandma,” Lily said.

“Yeah, I’ll go.” Riley smiled.

“Hello, Barb.” Ophelia walked down the stairs. “Please sit down and have some breakfast.”

“Good morning, Ophelia. Do I smell banana nut muffins?”

“You do. Would you like one?”

“That would be wonderful, darling. Can I have one to go? I have to go down to Nathan’s house and ask Ella if she wants to go shopping with us.”

“Of course. I’ll package it up for you.” Ophelia smiled.

“I’ll be back to pick you girls up in a couple of hours,” Aunt Barb said.

Ophelia placed a muffin in a baggie and handed it to her.

“Thank you, Ophelia.” She kissed her cheek. “I’ll see you girls in a couple of hours.” She walked out the sliding door.

“Riley, your bed is made, and I’ve straightened up your room.”

“Uh, thanks, Ophelia. I appreciate it,” Riley said.

“You’re welcome, sweetheart. I’m so happy I finally got to meet you.” She smiled as she walked out the sliding door.

“Why don’t you two go upstairs and get ready,” I said.

“Come on, Lily.” Riley stood up from the table. “Dad, we’re going to have a little chat later.”

I furrowed my brows as she and Lily went upstairs.

“So, how was it last night?” Grayson asked.

“She asked me to come back to her place for a nightcap, but there wasn’t any alcohol involved.” I smirked.

“So, she initiated it?”

“Yeah, she did, and it was great. And whatever idea you have in your head, get it out. It was only sex.” I grabbed my plate and took it over to the sink.

“Are you sure about that?” he asked.

“I’ve never been so sure about anything in my life, bro.”

“Whatever you say, but maybe to her it was more.” He patted my back and walked out.

I gripped the edge of the island, pushed myself back, and lowered my head. The truth was that I hadn’t stopped thinking

about Piper and last night. She was incredible, and I wanted her again.

“Dad, what are you doing?” Riley asked as she and Lily walked into the kitchen.

“Nothing.” I opened the dishwasher and put the breakfast plates in it.

“Can Ophelia come and clean up my room every day?” she asked.

“No.” I furrowed my brows at her.

“I’m going home to grab my purse,” Lily said.

“I’ll go with you. I’ll text Grandma Barb and tell her to pick us up there,” Riley said. “Bye, Dad.”

“Bye, sweetheart. Don’t let Aunt Barb buy you anything.”

“Gabriel, you know if my grandma wants to spend money on us, there’s nothing we can do. You know how she is,” Lily said.

“True. But just try not to take advantage of her.”

CHAPTER 18



Piper

I sat in the chair, holding a warm cup of coffee between my hands as I stared at the water from my balcony. I was lost in my thoughts, and I couldn't get last night out of my head. Dr. Gabriel Kind was intense. I would say he was the most intense man I'd ever been with. My body still trembled from the things he did to me, and I couldn't shake the feeling. With a sigh, I went back inside, dressed, and headed to my shop, even though today was my day off.

When I stepped inside the shop, I was happy to see how busy it was. Raj was helping a customer on the floor, and Tara had a line of people waiting to be rung up.

"Where's Sylvie?" I asked Tara as I stepped behind the counter.

"Hey." She smiled. "She's on her break. What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I just stopped in to do some paperwork. How are you today?" I smiled at the customer standing before me. I logged in on the other register and helped Tara with the customers.

"Hey, Piper." Sylvie smiled as she set her purse under the counter.

"Hi, Sylvie. Tara, I'll be in the back doing some paperwork. I don't want to be disturbed."

"Okay." Her brows furrowed.

It took all of five minutes before Tara and Raj ran into the backroom.

“Spill it, darling,” Raj said.

“Yeah, Piper. You never come in on your day off. What’s going on?” Tara asked. “This has something to do with Dr. Gabriel, doesn’t it?”

“No.” I looked away from her.

“Liar, liar, pants on fire!” Raj exclaimed. “Look at me, Piper.”

“No.”

He grabbed my chin and turned my face to his.

“You slept with him!” he said.

“Fine. Maybe I did.”

“Was he that bad?” Tara’s face twisted.

“God, no. He was—” I stood up from my chair.

“Was what, Piper?” Tara asked.

“Absolutely fucking amazing.”

“Yay!” Raj smiled as he clapped his hands.

“I met his entire family last night, and they were all so nice. Then I invited him back to my place for a nightcap.”

“Ah, so you initiated it.” Tara smirked. “That’s my girl.”

“I don’t understand, Piper,” Raj said. “You had amazing sex last night. What is the problem here?”

“I can’t stop thinking about it and him.”

“Oh,” they both drew out the word at the same time.

“Exactly!” I pointed at both of them. “What am I supposed to do now?” I threw my hands up. “I have sex with a guy and forget it ever happened. Even with the guys I date consistently. I never once thought about the sex with Jack after we had it. Or the guy before him, and the guy before him, and the—”

“We know, you little sex kitten,” Raj said.

“Shit. Dr. Kind was that good?” Tara bit down on her bottom lip.

“He was that good.” I shook my head and sighed.

“Listen, darling.” Raj hooked his arm around me. “I think you’re overreacting. You’re still all caught up in the moment. Once you come back down, you’ll be fine.”

“I don’t know, Raj. I’ve never seen her like this before,” Tara said.

“You two need to get back out there and help Sylvie. I’m going to catch up on this paperwork and forget about Gabriel and last night.”

While I was going over the paperwork, my phone dinged. Looking over at it, I saw a text message from Gabriel, and my heart started racing.

“Hi. I was wondering if you had any dinner plans tonight.”

“I do now.” I sent the smiling emoji.

“Excellent. I’ll pick you up at five-thirty.”

“Are you an on-time guy or a casually late guy?”

“I’m an on-time guy.”

“Perfect. I’ll be ready at five-thirty.”

I set my phone down and cupped my face in my hands.

“Still thinking about Gabriel?” Raj walked in.

“He’s picking me up at five-thirty for dinner.” I looked at him.

“Then what are you waiting for.” He grabbed my hand and pulled me from my chair. “We have to find you something special to wear.” He grinned. “And I know just the outfit.”



abriel

G I didn't plan on texting Piper and asking her to dinner. But I found her interesting, and we really didn't have a chance to talk last night with my entire family hovering around us. I went upstairs and took a shower. After dressing, I dabbed on some of my cologne.

"Hey, Dad." Riley walked into the bathroom.

"You're back." I smiled and shook my head when I saw all the shopping bags in her hands.

"What? Grandma Barb wouldn't take no for an answer. Besides, she bought Lily and Ella a lot of stuff too. You're dressed up, and you put on cologne. Who's the victim tonight?"

I shot her a look as I walked out of the bathroom and grabbed my watch from the dresser.

"I don't appreciate you asking that."

"Fine. Who is the lovely woman you're going to lie to tonight?" She grinned.

"I think a grounding is in order."

"Okay." She threw herself down on my bed. "Who is the lucky lady that has the pleasure of your wonderful company tonight, Dad?"

"You smartass." I smiled. "I'm taking Piper to dinner."

"Really?" Her brows furrowed as she sat up.

"Yes, really. Are you okay with that?"

"Sure. I like Piper a lot. She's really cool. Did you sleep with her last night?"

"Riley!"

"I'm not stupid, Dad." She rolled her eyes. "You lied about being at the brew house and didn't get home until after midnight. Now, you're seeing her again." A soft smile crossed her lips.

"We didn't really have a chance to talk last night at the brew house with the whole family there."

“And you didn’t have a chance to talk when you went back to her place either, right?” She cocked her head.

“That is none of your business.” I pointed at her. “You shouldn’t even be talking like that to me. I’m your father.”

“So. Mom and I talked about sex all the time with each other.”

My heart dipped to my stomach.

“I’m fifteen, Dad. I know all there is to know about sex.”

“Have you—”

“No. Mom always told me that when I meet someone and feel like it’s time to take that step, talk to her first. I haven’t met someone yet who is worthy of my virginity.”

I swallowed hard as the uncomfortable feeling inside me rose.

“I’m happy to hear that, sweetheart.” I looked at my watch. “I have to go and pick Piper up. I won’t be late.” I kissed the top of her head. “What are your plans for tonight?”

“I don’t know. Is there a bonfire tonight?”

“It’s Saturday. Of course, there is.” I smiled.

“Maybe I’ll hang out with my cousins. I don’t know.”

“Well, you’re not to leave the beach,” I said as I walked down the stairs, and she followed.

“I know. Have fun with Piper and tell her I said hi.”

“I will. Behave yourself.”

“Dad, stop,” she whined.

CHAPTER 19



Gabriel

I stood there speechless when Piper opened the door.

“Hi.” She smiled.

“Hi. You look amazing.”

“Thanks. Come in for a minute while I grab my purse.”

I stepped inside and watched her walk away in her short, cream-colored dress and tall brown boots.

“I’m ready.” She grinned as she placed her purse over her shoulder.

I opened the car door for her, and she climbed inside. Climbing in next to her, I pulled out of the parking lot and drove us to 71Above.

“I love this place. I’ve only been here once,” she said as the hostess seated us.

“Good evening. My name is Roy, and I’ll be your server tonight. What can I get you to drink?”

“I’ll have a cosmopolitan.” Piper politely smiled.

“And for you, sir?”

“Scotch, 17 years, no ice.”

“Very good. I’ll bring those right over.”

“So, tell me about Piper Primrose.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I picked up my menu.

“What exactly do you want to know?” she asked as she looked over the menu.

“Anything and everything.” I closed my menu and set it down.

Roy walked over, set our drinks down, and took our order.

“I attended UCLA, where I graduated with an MBA and opened up Primrose.”

“It’s a great store. What made you want to open your own boutique?”

“Funny you should ask that.” A smirk crossed her lips. “I was a misguided teenager. I hung out with the wrong crowd and got into a lot of trouble. Primrose was formally known as Mademoiselle and was owned by a woman named Margaret Krosswood. When I was fifteen, I shoplifted from her store.”

I arched my brow at her.

“Don’t give me that look.” She laughed. “Anyway, Margaret caught me, gave me a stern lecture, and told me that if I wanted the items I stole, I would have to work for them. And if I refused, she would call the police and press charges. Believe me when I tell you that I took a lot more than a shirt and a dress.”

“Is that why you did that for Riley?” I brought my drink to my lips.

“Yeah. After she told me that her mother passed away a few months ago, I knew she was hurting. I could see it in her eyes. Margaret Krosswood saved me. I don’t know where I’d be today if it weren’t for her. She took me under her wing, taught me about the clothing business, and set me on the path to doing better in school and going to college.”

“What about your parents?”

“My father left us when I was ten. My mother was devastated and turned to alcohol for comfort.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Thanks, Gabriel, but everything worked out for me. After I graduated college, Margaret wanted to retire, so I bought the business from her, and Primrose was born.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips.

“It’s a nice store and must do well,” I said.

“It does very well. I’ve been very lucky.”

Roy walked over and set our food in front of us.

“Is there anything else I can get for you?”

“Another scotch, please,” I said.

“I’ll have another cosmopolitan.” Piper smiled. “Your turn, Dr. Kind. What’s your complicated story?”

“Complicated story?”

“Yeah. Last night you said it was complicated when I thought Aunt Barb was your mother.”

“Oh, that’s right. Well, Grayson and I were raised in Hawaii by my father. My mother passed away from a drug overdose when we were babies.”

“Oh, my God. I’m so sorry, Gabriel.”

“I appreciate it. After high school, Grayson and I attended Harvard.”

“You’re a Harvard man?” Her brow arched.

“I am.” I breathed out a laugh. “We both did our residencies at Massachusetts General and when Grayson finished his trauma fellowship, we moved here to be closer to our family. A family we didn’t know we had.”

“What do you mean?” Her brows furrowed.

I told her the story of my father, his family, and how he lied to us our entire lives.

“Wow. Now that’s dysfunctional.” She smirked.

“Totally dysfunctional, but it all turned out for the best.” I smiled.

“Yeah. Your family is really nice.” She took a sip of her drink. “You all seem really close.”

“We’re very close.”

“What’s the story with Riley?”

“I knew you were going to ask that.” I pointed my fork at her. “Riley’s mother, Ariana, spent a summer in Hawaii. We met, spent a lot of time together, and when it was time for her to go back to New York and for Grayson and me to go back to Harvard, we parted ways. I didn’t know she was pregnant.”

“She never called to tell you?”

“No. Her parents sent her away to some farm in Montana, so no one would know she was pregnant. After she had Riley, she was supposed to give her away and return to New York as if she had never been pregnant. Thankfully, she befriended one of the workers at the ranch, and he helped her escape after Riley was born. She raised her on her own and moved from state to state so her parents couldn’t find her. After Ariana passed away, Riley flew to Los Angeles to find me.”

“All by herself?” Piper asked.

“Yeah.”

“How did she know about you?”

“Ariana never kept me a secret from Riley. She told her all about me and said if Riley ever wanted to find and meet me, she could when she turned eighteen.”

“Wow.” She shook her head. “I’m happy she found you. Poor girl. She must have been terrified.”

I chuckled. “I don’t think so. She’s a tough kid. After Ariana died, social services in Georgia found Riley’s grandparents and contacted them. Apparently, they moved to Hawaii, so they came and took her back with them. Riley hates them based on what they did to Ariana, so she ran away, hopped on a plane, and came here.”

“She was a runaway when she came to you?”

“Yeah. Her grandparents and the police showed up at my door the second day she was with me and tried to take her. But my name is on her birth certificate, and Ariana gave Riley my last name, so there wasn’t anything they could do. Riley refused to go with them, and I wasn’t about to let them take her.”

“Wow. Now, that’s a story. You’re a good man, Dr. Gabriel Kind.” She smiled as she held up her glass to me.

“Thank you, Miss Primrose.” I picked up my drink and tipped it to hers.

CHAPTER 20



Piper

As I stared at his handsome face, I knew he was a good man. He was a doctor who wanted to help people and took in his fifteen-year-old daughter, whom he had never known about.

“How was the sleepover last night?” I smirked as I finished the last of my dinner.

“It wasn’t too bad.” A smile crossed his lips. “Do you have a relationship with your father?”

“God, no.” I finished off my drink. “I haven’t seen him since I was ten years old, and he walked out of our lives for good.”

“I’m really sorry, Piper.”

“Don’t be, Gabriel. I’m fine with it.”

“And what about your relationship with your mother?”

“It is what it is. She’s still drinking, dates a lot of guys, and can be annoying.”

“Speaking of guys.” A smirk crossed his lips. “Riley told me about some Jack guy at your store.”

“Well, what can I say? We dated for a couple of months, and I told him I didn’t want to see him anymore. He isn’t taking it well.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, why don’t you want to see him?”

“I’m going through a thing.”

“What kind of thing?” he asked.

“Just a thing.”

“You can tell me, Piper. I promise I won’t judge.”

“It’s just a thing. I don’t really know. I’m not a relationship type of girl. I prefer casual dating, and he wanted more. I’m going to presume you’re the same way since Riley told me you’re a man-whore.” A sly smile crossed my lips.

“She told me she told you that. I am not a man-whore, but you are correct. I prefer casual dating with no strings attached.”

“Looks like we have something in common.” I picked up my empty glass and looked at it. “Where’s Roy?”

“I have an idea. Forget another cosmopolitan, and let’s go back to my house. It’s a Saturday night, and my family does a bonfire on the beach. We gather around, drink, play music, and have a good time.”

“Sounds fun.” I smiled.

“It is. We can spend some time there, and then I’ll drive you home.” He held up his finger to get Roy’s attention, who was standing by a table not too far from us.

After he paid the bill, we climbed into his car and headed to his house. I stared at the two-story, beautifully landscaped home when he pulled into the driveway.

“Wow. This is your house?” I asked as I glanced at him.

“Yeah.” He smiled. “Wait until you see the inside.”

He walked around, opened the car door for me, and helped me out—the feel of my hand in his sent shivers down my spine.

“Is Riley home?” I asked as he opened the door.

“I’m not sure. We’ll find out.”

“You don’t know where your fifteen-year-old daughter is?” I arched my brow.

“If she’s not here, she’s down at the beach with my family. She knows she’s not allowed to leave.”

His home was stunning. It was an open-plan concept with gray walls, white moldings, and floor-to-ceiling windows with a panoramic view of the ocean.

“Damn. This view is amazing. Oh, you have a pool?” I smiled.

“Feel free to use it any time you want.” A grin crossed his handsome face.

“I just might take you up on that, Dr. Kind.”

“I’ll be right back. I’m going to see if Riley is in her room.”

“Okay. I’ll just be here staring at this spectacular view.”

“She’s not up there. She must be down at the beach,” he said as he walked into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, and grabbed two beers.

“Beer or wine? Or I can make you a drink.”

“Beer is fine.” I smiled.

He handed me the bottle and opened the sliding door. I could hear the laughter and music down the beach.

“It sounds like one big party down there,” I said.

“It’s always a party when we’re together. Come on.”

We walked down to where his family was gathered, and everyone stopped talking and stared at us.

“Dad?” Riley walked over. “Hey, Piper.” She hugged me.

“Hi, Riley. Hi again, everyone.” I brightly smiled as I waved.

“Oh my gosh. We’re so happy you’re here.” Jenni walked over and hugged her. “Come with me.” She grabbed her hand. “You don’t mind, Gabriel, do you?”

“Uh—”

“Of course, you don’t. We’re hanging out at Julia’s. I’ll bring her back. Don’t worry.” Jenni smiled at him.



G abriel

I sat next to Simon, and Riley stood before me with a look on her face.

“What?” I asked.

“You brought your date to hang with your family? Who does that?”

“She happens to like this family, Riley. I thought it would be fun to hang out for a while.”

“You’re weird. And if Piper is smart, she won’t go out with you again. Come on, Lily. Come on, Ella.” She grabbed Ella’s hand.

“God, I love that kid.” Simon laughed. “But she’s right. Why would you cut your date short and bring her here?”

“Are you trying to get away from her?” Jackson laughed.

“No, douchebag. And trust me. I’m not cutting this date short. I’ll be with her later.”

“Something isn’t adding up here,” Christian said.

“I agree.” Conner glanced at him.

“What are you two douchebags talking about?” I tipped the beer bottle to my lips.

“You’re bringing her around like she’s your woman.” Christian grinned.

“She’s not my woman. In fact, I found out a little something about her tonight.”

“What did you find out?” Sam asked.

“She doesn’t like relationships and only likes to date guys casually. Is she perfect or what?” I grinned.

“And why is that?” Sebastian asked.

“I don’t have a clue, nor do I care. The only thing that matters is she’s not looking for anything, and neither am I.”

“Dad!” Riley shouted, and I turned my head. “I’m going home to grab a few things. I’m spending the night at Lily’s.”

“Okay. By the way, where is my brother?” I asked the guys.

“He was here, and then there was an emergency at the hospital,” Nathan said.

I glanced at my watch. “It’s getting late. I should get Piper home.” I stood up.

“You mean get her into bed.” Simon grinned as he held up his beer bottle.

“That too.” I smiled.

I opened the sliding door to Sam’s house and stepped inside, where I saw the girls hanging out and laughing.

“Hey.” Piper turned her head and smiled.

“Are you ready to head back to your place?”

“Yeah.” She stood up and said goodbye to the girls.

I grabbed hold of her hand as we walked down the beach back to my house so I could grab my keys. I couldn’t wait to get her home and into bed and repeat the things I did to her last night.

The house was quiet when we stepped through the sliding door, and Riley was already down at Lily’s for the night.

“Where the hell are my keys?” I said, as they weren’t on the island where I thought I put them.

“They aren’t in your pants pocket?” Piper asked.

“No.” I patted my pockets.

“Looks like we might have to stay here.” Her finger ran down my chest.

I picked her up, set her on the island, and gripped her hips.

“Riley is spending the night at Lily’s.” I smiled as I softly brushed my lips against hers.

“I know, and I really would love to see your bedroom.” Her arms wrapped around my neck.

“We’d have to get up really early in the morning before Riley comes home,” I said.

“I think we can manage that.” A sexy smile crossed her lips.

CHAPTER 21



Piper

My fingers tightly gripped the sheets as his mouth explored every inch of my body. A riveting sensation tore through me as several moans escaped my lips while I orgasmed.

“Oh God!” I moaned with pleasure.

“That’s what I love to hear,” Gabriel spoke as his lips traveled up my body and to my lips. “Roll over,” he whispered.

I rolled onto my belly as his body hovered over me, and I could feel the hardness of his cock between my legs. I gasped as he powerfully thrust into me and took in the intoxicating ride. This man knew exactly how and what I wanted more than any other man I’d been with. Moan after moan came from our lips as we enjoyed each other’s bodies, and another orgasm tore through me. He slowed down his thrusting, buried himself deep inside, and came. Normally, the sounds that came from men’s mouths as they came made my jaw clench, but not with him. The sounds that escaped him were music to my ears.

His sweaty body dropped on mine as his lips pressed against the back of my shoulder.

“Did you enjoy that?” his seductive voice asked beside my ear.

“A little too much.” I smiled.

He chuckled and climbed off me, rolling onto his back and placing his hand over his heart. I propped myself up on my elbows and stared at him.

“You really know your way around a woman’s body, and I can’t express to you my sincere thanks.” I grinned.

“Thank you. That’s quite a compliment.” He smiled.

“I don’t give compliments out too often to guys, so take it as a win.”

“I definitely am.” He winked.

He rolled the condom off, climbed out of bed, and went into the bathroom. When we returned, I was snuggled tightly under the covers. He climbed in next to me and held out his arm. I placed my body against his and wrapped one leg around his while my head rested on his chest.

“You don’t mind, do you?” I asked.

“Mind what?”

“My body being twisted around yours,” I lifted my head and looked up at him.

“Not at all.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Okay. Good. Not all guys like to be so close.”

“What?” He chuckled.

“I dated this guy once, and after we—well, you know—he wanted me to stay the night, so I agreed. He got up, grabbed his pillow, and said he was sleeping in the guest bedroom. When I asked him why, he said he didn’t like sleeping next to another person because it interfered with his sleep patterns. So, he slept in the guestroom all night. He was weird anyway.”

“How long did you date him for?” Gabriel asked as his hand softly stroked my hair.

“Never again after that night.” I smirked. “Anyway, thank you for a great time tonight. I really like hanging out with your family. And you, of course. What time are we getting up in the morning?”

“I set my alarm for six a.m. That way, I can get you home and be back in plenty of time before Riley comes home.”

“Sounds like a plan, Dr. Kind.” I yawned. “Good night to you, sexy sir.”

“Good night, Piper.” I heard him chuckle.

I closed my eyes and felt the fire stirring inside me. The fire of—I didn’t know what the hell it was. All I knew was that if I continued seeing him, we’d both be in for serious heartache.



“**D**ad! Ewe, my eyes! My eyes!” Riley quickly shut the door.

“What the fuck?” Gabriel shot up and grabbed his phone from the nightstand.

“What time is it?” I asked as I sat up and held the sheet over me.

“It’s ten a.m.!” He jumped out of bed and pulled on a pair of sweatpants.

“What do you mean? You said you set the alarm.”

“I did! It didn’t go off,” he shouted.

“Calm down, Gabriel.”

“Don’t you dare tell me to calm down, Piper.” He pointed at me. “My fifteen-year-old daughter just caught us in bed together!”

I climbed off the bed and grabbed his hand. “Come here and sit down.”

“I don’t want to sit down. Fuck! I can’t believe this.” He broke out of my grip and placed his hands on his head.

I pushed him down, straddled him, and pushed his shoulders down into the bed.

“What the hell are you doing?” he asked.

“Breathe, Gabriel. This isn’t the end of the world. Riley is a teenager and knows what sex is. In fact, she probably knows more than we do. It’s not like she’s a little girl, and you have to go down and explain to her what she saw. I’m a little weirded out, but we were sleeping. It’s not like she caught my naked body riding you like a cowgirl.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“I guess you’re right.” He sighed.

“I know I am. So, I’ll get dressed, and we’ll go down and face the consequences of our actions together.”

“With any luck, she’s in her room, and we can sneak out.”

As we walked down the stairs, we heard Riley in the kitchen.

“So much for her being in her room.” I glanced at Gabriel. “Good morning, Riley.” I brightly smiled when I walked into the kitchen.

“Morning, Piper. Morning, Dad. Piper, I made you a cup of coffee.” She pointed to the cup on the island.

“Aw, you’re so sweet. Thank you.” I smiled at Gabriel as I sat down.

“Here, Dad.” She handed him a cup.

“Thank you, sweetheart. Why are you home already?” Gabriel asked her.

“Because Lily’s friend’s mom picked her up for soccer practice. I want you two to realize that my already scarred eyes are scarred even more forever. I thank the lord you two were sleeping, unlike when I caught Mom and one of her boyfriends doing the dirty deed one day. So, this is how we put a stop to you scarring my eyes any further, Dad. Mom had a piece of red yarn that she tied. Whenever she had a guy over, she put the red yarn on the doorknob. That way, I knew not to open the door.”

“I have an idea. How about I just put a lock on the door?”

“I’m surprised you don’t have one already.” I furrowed my brows at him.

“I lived here alone. I didn’t need a lock for my bedroom.”

“Ah, good point.” I took a sip of my coffee. “Are you mad?” I looked at Riley.

“No. I just didn’t expect it. I thought you two went back to your apartment last night.”

“Change of plans, kiddo,” I said. “We were supposed to be up and out at six a.m., but your dad’s alarm never went off.”

“That’s weird. Dad, let me see your phone.” Riley held her palm up. “You set it for six p.m., you dummy.” She handed it back to him.

“Oh.” Gabriel looked down at his phone. “Shit.”

“Anyway, there’s this pottery studio in Santa Monica, and Sundays are the only day anyone can just walk in and do pottery. Can you take me? They open at eleven.”

“Yeah, I’ll take you, and then I’ll drive you home, Piper.” Gabriel glanced at me.

“I know which studio you’re talking about, Riley. It’s literally a half a mile from my apartment.”

“How long do you think you’ll be?” Gabriel asked her.

“I don’t know. Why?”

“Because the big game is on at one o’clock, and I’m watching it with Uncle Grayson and the guys.”

“Don’t worry about it, Gabriel. Riley can text me when she’s finished, and I’ll pick her up and bring her home.”

“No, Piper. I can’t ask you to do that.”

“You didn’t. I volunteered. Good coffee, Riley.” I smiled as I stood up from the stool. “I’ll go get the rest of my things upstairs.”

Gabriel drove me home after we dropped Riley off at the pottery studio.

“Are you sure you don’t mind picking Riley up?” he asked.

“Not at all.” I smiled. “Thanks for last night.”

He reached over, grabbed my hand, and brought it up to his lips. "I had fun. I'll see you later."

I climbed out of the car and went up to my apartment. Riley was going to be at the studio for a few hours, so I decided I should go and see my mother. It had been a while.

"Piper." She smiled when I walked through the front door.

"Hi, Mom."

"What a surprise. If I would have known you were coming over, I would have cleaned up a bit." She walked into the living room, grabbed two empty tequila bottles off the coffee table, and took them into the kitchen.

"I just wanted to see how you were doing," I said, setting my purse down.

"I was going to call you," she said.

"You were?"

"Yeah." She grabbed a bottle of wine and poured some into a glass. "Would you like a glass?"

"Mom, it's noon."

"It's five o'clock somewhere." She smiled.

I sighed as I sat down at the kitchen table. "Why were you going to call me?"

"I need to borrow some money. I'm behind on the mortgage, and the stupid bank sent me a letter."

"How are you behind?"

"I lost my job a month ago, and I've been struggling."

"You were fired again, weren't you?"

"My boss was an asshole." She poured another glass of wine.

"Why this time? Wait. Don't tell me. You missed too many days because you were too hungover to go to work, right?"

"Piper, stop it!" she shouted. "I have problems in my life right now, and I don't need your judgment! Can you help me

or not?”

“How far behind in the mortgage are you?”

“Six months.”

“Six months? Mom, come on.”

“Don’t you dare!” She pointed at me. “I raised you by myself when your father walked out on us. You owe me.”

I stood up from my chair and grabbed my purse.

“The only thing you ever raised was a liquor bottle. I’ll go to the bank in the morning and pay the damn mortgage. But this is the last time.” I walked to the front door, stopped, and turned around. “Get some help, Mom.” I shook my head and walked out.

CHAPTER 22



Gabriel

I stepped through the sliding door at Shaun's house and put the six-pack of beer in the refrigerator.

"Where did you go this morning?" Grayson asked. "I noticed your car was gone."

"I had to drive Riley to a pottery studio in Santa Monica, and then I drove Piper home."

"I'm telling you, cousin," Stefan walked over and patted my back, "just build her one."

"Wait a second. What do you mean you drove Piper home?" Grayson asked. "I thought you did that last night when you left us."

I twisted the cap off the beer bottle and walked into the living room where my cousins were sitting.

"We didn't make it to her apartment last night. I was supposed to drive her home early this morning, but I set the alarm for six p.m. instead of a.m. Riley woke us up at ten o'clock."

"Oh shit." Simon laughed. "Who the hell are you? You don't sleep in until ten."

"He and Piper must have exhausted themselves last night." Jackson grinned.

"What did Riley say, bro?" Grayson asked.

“Not much. I need to go buy a new bedroom door handle with a lock.”

“That’s the first thing I did when Lily started getting older,” Stefan said.

“I already had a lock on my bedroom door when Ella came to live with me. I highly suggest you go out tomorrow and buy one,” Nathan said.

We were in the middle of watching the game when Sam’s phone dinged.

“Oh shit! Julia’s in labor.”

“Go!” Simon said.

“Good luck, Sam.” I smiled. “We’ll meet you there.”

“Simon, call Mom and tell her,” Sam said as he flew out the sliding door.

“There’s a big TV in the labor and delivery waiting room,” Christian said. “We can finish watching the game there while we wait for the baby to be born.”

Jenni flew through the sliding door with the twins. “Let’s go, Shaun!”

“Already getting the diaper bag packed, babe.”

I climbed into my car and called Piper.

“Hello.”

“Hi, it’s me. Julia is in labor.”

“Oh my gosh, how exciting!” she said.

“We’re all heading to the hospital. When you pick Riley up from the pottery studio, can you bring her to Cedars?”

“You bet.”

“Thanks, Piper. We’ll be in the labor and delivery waiting room.”

“I’ll see you there, Gabriel.”

Luckily, no one else was in the waiting room with us, so we were able to finish watching the game.

“Hey, Dad.” Riley walked in with Piper.

“How was pottery?” I smiled.

“It was good. Did Julia have the baby yet?”

“Georgia is doing the c-section now, so he should be here soon.”

“This is so exciting. I want another baby, Charlotte,” Conner said as he held Isabella.

“Okay, Conner. You go ahead and impregnate another woman, and you can have one.” She patted his chest.

His brow furrowed as he stared at her. “I can’t believe you just said that.”

“And I can’t believe you want another baby already.” She cocked her head.

“But we agreed on four kids, Charlotte. Tik Tok, time is running out.”

“We never agreed on four kids.” She frowned.

“Sure, we did.” He grinned. “You just don’t remember.”

“Come on, Isabella.” Charlotte took her from Conner. “Let Daddy live in his delusional world all by himself.” She walked away.

“Come on, babe. I love you,” he said as he followed her.

“I love her.” Piper laughed.

“Yeah. She’s great.” I smiled. “Thanks for bringing Riley here.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll be right back,” she said as she walked out of the waiting room.

She seemed off, and I could tell something was bothering her. I followed her out of the waiting room and over to the coffee machine.

“There’s much better coffee on the rooftop. It’s for hospital staff only, but no one will know.” I winked. “Come on.”

I took her up to the rooftop and got her a coffee.

“Thanks, Gabriel.”

“What’s wrong? You seem off.”

She let out a long sigh before taking a sip.

“I went to see my mom after you dropped me off. She lost her job and is six months behind on the mortgage. She asked for my help.”

“Are you going to?” I asked.

“I don’t have a choice. But I told her this was the last time. She can’t hold down a job for shit because of her drinking.”

“Have you tried talking her into getting help?”

“Of course. I’ve spent years trying to help her. She doesn’t want to help herself. There’s nothing more I can do for her. After this, I’m done. It’s all my father’s fault.” She shook her head.

“Any idea why he hasn’t reached out since he left you all those years ago?” I asked her.

“No, and I don’t want to talk about it anymore. We better get back down to the waiting room,” she said.

I could tell she was hurting, and all I wanted to do was hold her and tell her everything would be okay. Shortly after we returned to the waiting room, Sam walked in with a wide smile.

“My son is here. He’s very healthy and weighs a solid eight pounds.”

We all hugged and congratulated him.

“You all can come into the room to meet him in a while,” he said.

“And another generation of the Kind men has been born.” Simon grinned.

“This is amazing,” Piper said.

“What is?”

“Your family and how you’re all here for each other.”

“It’s what we do.” I smiled.

I glanced over at Riley sitting in the chair, holding up her phone and taking a video of all of us.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Posting on TikTok,” she said.

After Georgia walked into the waiting room and told us we could see Julia, we all headed to her room.

“Everyone, I’d like you to meet our son, Elijah Samuel Kind.” Sam smiled as he held his son in his arms.



One Week Later

Piper

I was having dinner with Gabriel at Four Kinds when his phone rang. After answering it, he handed it to me.

“It’s my brother, Grayson. He needs to speak to you.”

“Hello?”

“Piper, your mother was just brought into the ER.”

“For what?” I asked.

“She’s inebriated and fell in the bathroom. She’s pretty banged up.”

“I’m on my way, Grayson. Thank you for calling.”

“What’s wrong?” Gabriel’s brows furrowed.

“My inebriated mother fell and is in the ER.” I grabbed my purse.

“Let’s go.” Gabriel stood up and held out his hand.

When we climbed into the car, I stared out the window and didn’t say a word.

“Are you okay?” Gabriel asked as he grabbed hold of my hand.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

“I don’t think you are. Talk to me, Piper.”

“What do you want me to say, Gabriel?” I looked at him. “I’ve been dealing with her and her alcohol issue since I was ten years old. Do you know what she said to me that Sunday I went over there?”

“What did she say?”

“She told me that she raised me as a single parent, and I owed her for doing so. Can you believe that? Who says something like that to their child?”

“She’s sick, Piper, and she needs help. You need to try and get her into a rehab center. A patient of mine is the director at Ocean Ridge Treatment and Recovery. I can give him a call and see if he can get your mother in.”

“She won’t go. I’ve tried before. One of these days, I’m going to get a call that she’s dead.”

“Don’t say that. You’re a tough and strong woman. Use your strength to convince her to get the help she needs.”

“You can’t help someone who doesn’t want it, Gabriel.”

“I’m confident you can make her see things differently.” A soft smile crossed his lips as he winked at me.

CHAPTER 23



Piper

When we pulled into the parking lot by the emergency room, Gabriel sent a text to his brother to let him know we were there. Stepping through the double doors, Grayson was on the other side waiting for us.

“Come with me, and I’ll take you to her,” he said.

“How drunk is she?” I asked.

“Very drunk. She’s been unconscious since the paramedics brought her in, but she’s going to be fine.

I stopped in the doorway and stared at my mother, lying in the bed with facial swelling, bruising, and a large gash above her right eye.

“Who are you?” I asked the burly bald man as he sat in the chair.

“David. I was with Gloria at her home when she fell.”

“And how do you know my mother?” My brow arched.

“We’ve been seeing each other for about a month,” David said.

“So you know she’s an alcoholic, right?”

“I know she likes to drink. I heard a bang from downstairs and ran to see what happened. That’s when I found her on the bathroom floor. I immediately called 911.”

“Thank you for that.”

“Listen, I have to go. Do me a favor. When Gloria wakes up, tell her I won’t be coming around anymore and not to call me.”

“I’ll let her know.” I gave him a nod.

“I’ll check on her in a while,” Grayson said as he placed his hand on my arm.

I let out a sigh as I walked over to her bedside.

“Thanks for bringing me here, Gabriel. You don’t have to stay.”

He walked over and gripped my shoulders from behind. “I’m not going anywhere. When you’re ready, I’m taking you home.”

“I should just leave her here and never look back.”

“But you won’t.” His grip tightened. “I’m going to go out in the hallway and call Riley to let her know we’re here.”

“Okay.”

My mother stirred and slowly opened her eyes.

“Piper? What the hell happened?” She brought her hand up to her forehead.

“Long story short, Mom. You were so drunk that you passed out in the bathroom and totally fucked up your face.” I pursed my lips.

“Damn it. My head is killing me.”

“You’re going to be fine physically. By the way, David said to tell you that he won’t be coming around anymore and not to call him again.”

“That asshole. He was a loser anyway.”

“Pot meet kettle.” I sneered.

“If you’re going to stand there and berate me, then you can just take your skinny ass and leave,” she said.

“Fine.” I grabbed my purse.

As I was just about to step out the door, Gabriel walked in and gripped my arms.

“Where are you going?”

“She told me to take my skinny ass and leave. So, I am.”

He let out a sigh and turned me around. “You’re not going anywhere.”

“Who is that handsome man, Piper?” my mother asked.

“I’m Dr. Gabriel Kind, a friend of your daughter’s. It’s nice to meet you, Gloria.”

“Well, Dr. Kind, I wish it were under better circumstances. I must look a mess.”

“That’s an understatement.” I raised my brows as I stood there with my arms folded.

“Piper, please,” Gabriel said.

“You’re awake.” Grayson walked in. “How are you feeling, Ms. Primrose.”

“Tired, achy, and I have a killer headache. Who are you?”

“This is Dr. Grayson Kind, my twin brother,” Gabriel said.

“Two handsome doctors. How did I get so lucky,” my mother said. “When can I go home?”

“In a couple of hours. You need some rest, and I want you fully hydrated before I discharge you. Also, you’ll need someone to stay with you tonight.”

“You’ll stay at my place,” I said to my mother.

“No. I want to go home, Piper.”

“Too bad. You don’t get to decide this time.” I walked out of the room. “Can you drive me to her house?” I asked Gabriel.

“Let’s go.” He hooked his arm around me as we walked out of the ER.

“I’m sorry you have to see all of this,” I said.

“You have nothing to apologize for.” He reached over and grabbed my hand as he drove us to my mother’s house.

“Can you call your patient, the rehab center director, and find out if they can take her? She’s going whether she likes it or not.”

“Of course. I’ll look up his number when we get to the house.”

Gabriel called his patient while I threw away all the empty liquor bottles around the house and packed a small bag.

“Dustin said you can bring her tomorrow afternoon, and they’ll get her checked in.”

“Thank you, Gabriel.” I wrapped my arms around him and laid my head on his chest.

“You’re welcome.” His lips pressed against the top of my head.

After we picked my mother up from the hospital, Gabriel drove us back to my apartment.

“If you need anything at all, call me.”

“I will. Thanks again for tonight. This is probably the worst date you’ve ever been on.”

“I wouldn’t say that.” A smirk crossed his lips.

After he left, I went into the guest room, where my mother stood and stared at herself in the mirror.

“I need help, Piper.”

“You think?” I cocked my head.

“I’m serious this time.”

“Good because Ocean Ridge Treatment and Recovery Center is expecting you tomorrow afternoon.”

“What?” She turned her head and stared at me.

“Gabriel knows the director there. He made a call.”

“I can’t afford that, and I don’t have insurance,” she said.

“I’ll take care of the bill, Mom.”

She slowly walked over to the bed, sat down, and lowered her head.

“I don’t think I can do it.”

“Yes, you can, Mom.” I sat down next to her and took hold of her hand. “You’re a lot stronger than you think.”

“Your father destroyed both of our lives the day he walked out and never came back. Leaving me was one thing, but to leave his little girl was another. I know I’ve been a terrible mother over the years, and I wasn’t there for you.”

“You weren’t all that bad.”

“Yes, I was. And I wouldn’t blame you if you never forgave me.”

“You know what, Mom? I will forgive you one hundred percent as long as you commit to getting better.”

“You will?”

“Yeah.” I smiled. The rehab center is only an hour away. I can visit you all the time.”

“You would do that?”

“You bet I would.” I gently squeezed her hand.

CHAPTER 24



Gabriel

When I arrived home, I went upstairs to check on Riley. She was sitting up on her bed with her laptop.

“Hey.” She smiled. “How’s Piper’s mom?”

“She’s going to be okay.” I sat down on the edge of the bed. “What are you doing?”

“Finishing up my English assignment for tomorrow. I got an A+ on my pottery assignment in art class. I get to bring home the piece I made tomorrow.”

“That’s great. I can’t wait to see it.” I smiled.

“My art teacher said I have a real gift with clay. I wish I could do it more often.”

“It means that much to you?” I asked.

“Yeah, Dad. It does. It’s something I really love and am good at.”

“Finish your homework and go to bed.” I kissed her forehead.

I walked out of her room, went downstairs, and poured myself a scotch. Opening the sliding door, I stood on the patio, pulled out my phone, and sent a text to Stefan.

“Can you run down here for a minute?”

“Sure. Be there in a few.”

I finished my drink and set my glass on the table just as Stefan walked over.

“What’s up?” He smiled.

“Is that the spot you were thinking for Riley’s pottery studio?” I pointed.

“Yep. That’s the spot.” He grinned. “Are you thinking about doing it?”

“Yeah. I am.”

“It won’t be cheap, but you’ll get the family discount.” He patted my back. “Don’t forget to factor in all the equipment she needs.”

“I have fifteen birthdays and Christmases to make up for.” I glanced at him.

“Very true, cousin.” He smiled. “I’ll talk to Sammy in the morning and have him draw something up. Then we can present it to Riley and see what she thinks.”

“Sounds good. Thanks, Stefan. I appreciate it.”

After Stefan left, I heard Grayson’s sliding door open.

“Hey. What’s going on over there?” He smiled.

“Did you just get home?” I asked.

“Yeah. A trauma came in just as I was about to leave. Did I just see Stefan over here?” He walked over.

“Yeah. I’m going to build Riley her own pottery studio.”

“Wow. That’s awesome, bro. Does she know yet?”

“No. I’ll tell her when Sam and Stefan get the drawings done.”

“Damn.” He cocked his head at me.

“What?”

“You just slid into fatherhood like no big deal.” He grinned. “How’s Piper?”

“She seemed okay when I dropped her and her mom off.”

“You can deny it all you want, bro, but I know you have feelings for her.”

“I’m not denying anything.”

“Huh?” His brows furrowed. “You’re not?”

“Nah.” I sighed as I sat down in the lounge. “I really like her, Grayson, and I love spending time with her. Plus, Riley loves her. I was in love with Ariana.” I glanced at him.

“I know you were.”

“After we parted ways, it took what felt like forever to put all of the pieces of my heart back together. I hated that feeling and never wanted to experience it again. It takes less time to walk away before feelings get involved than it does to try and heal after your heart has been broken. But with Piper, I’m willing to take that chance. I haven’t felt this way about anyone since I was eighteen.”

“That’s because the ‘one’ hasn’t crossed your path until now. We all have that ‘one’ out there that we’re meant to spend the rest of our lives with, regardless of what Dad used to tell us. Look at all of us on this beach. We have met and fallen in love with the person we were meant to spend the rest of our lives with. You’re no exception.” He smirked. “The universe is showing you that bachelorhood ain’t all that, bro.”

I chuckled. “Maybe.”

“It’s the truth, and you know it. Tell Piper how you feel.”

“I will as soon as she gets her mom settled. I don’t want to overwhelm her.”

“I’m proud of you.” He hooked his arm around me.

After my brother went back to his house, I locked up, went upstairs, and opened Riley’s door. I smiled as I stood there and stared at her from the doorway while she slept. Suddenly, I felt a chill, and it startled me. Climbing into bed, I grabbed my phone and texted Piper.

“I know it’s late, but I wanted to see how you’re doing.”

“It is late, but I’m happy you texted me. I’m okay. My mom admitted she needed help and agreed to let me take her to Ocean Ridge tomorrow.”

“I’m happy to hear that. Call me tomorrow when you get back.”

“I will.”

“Goodnight, Piper.”

“Goodnight, Gabriel.”



*“H*ave a good day, Mrs. Collins.” I smiled as I walked her up to the reception desk.

“Dr. Kind, you have a patient in room four,” Kelsey said.

“I thought Mrs. Collins was my last patient until three-thirty?”

“Someone called and needed to see you right away, so I squeezed her in. Her file is in the room.”

“Alright.” I sighed as I walked to room four.

When I opened the door, the corners of my mouth curved upward when I saw Piper sitting on the exam table.

“You’re my patient who needed to see me right away?” I closed the door.

“Oh, Dr. Kind. I have a bad sore throat, and my body is aching from head to toe. I’ve heard you’re the best doctor in town.” She smiled.

“Open up.” I shined my penlight in the back of her throat. “Your throat looks beautiful. In fact, I don’t think I’ve ever seen a more beautiful throat before. I have something for you that will soothe it.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“I know you do, you pervert.” She laughed.

“On a serious note. Did you get your mom settled at Ocean Ridge?”

“I did. It’s a really nice place, and everyone was so friendly.”

“Good. I’m happy to hear that.” I gripped her hips and kissed her lips.

She glanced at her watch. “I have to go battle that horrendous school parking lot and those bitchy parking guards.”

“I have an idea if you’re up for it,” I said.

“I’m up for anything.” A bright smile crossed her lips.

“I have some steaks at home that I want to grill. If you bring Riley home when she’s done at the shop, I’ll make you a perfect steak dinner.”

“I love me a good steak. Count me in.” She jumped off the table. “Can I bring anything?”

“Just your beautiful self and my daughter.” I smiled.

“Consider it done, Dr. Kind.” She reached up and brushed her lips against mine. “I’ll see you later.” She opened the door.

“Don’t hurt any of those parking guards,” I said before she walked out.

“I can’t make any promises.” She winked.

I put the baked potatoes in the oven and made a salad when I got home. As I was seasoning the steaks, my phone pinged with a text from Riley.

“We’re on our way home.”

“Okay. See you soon.”

I had just put the steaks on and walked back into the house when the front door opened, and Riley and Piper stepped inside. Instantly, a smile crossed my lips.

“Hey, you two.”

“Hi, Dad.” Riley set her backpack down. “Look at my new pair of jeans.” She took them out of the bag and held them up.

“Nice, Riley.”

“They just came in today, and Piper made me try them on. They looked so good on me that she let me keep them.”

“Not for free.” Piper’s brow arched at me. “She’ll work for those jeans.”

“I hope so.” I chuckled as I went to check on the steaks.

“Is there anything I can do?” Piper asked.

“Can you take the baked potatoes out of the oven?”

“You bet.” She smiled.

I took the steaks off the grill and into the house. As I set the plate on the island, Riley walked over and handed me something wrapped in heavy paper.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“Open it and find out.”

Underneath the wrapping was a beautiful coffee mug in a deep blue color with brown shading.

“Is this what you made in art class?” I smiled.

“Yeah. I made it for you. It holds up to fourteen ounces and is microwave and dishwasher safe.”

“Wow, Riley. This is really beautiful. Thank you, sweetheart.” I hugged her.

“You’re welcome. I’m going to change my clothes. I’ll be right back.”

“Hurry up. Dinner is ready,” I shouted as she ran up the stairs.

“Your very first gift from your daughter. I think someone is emotional right now.” Piper smiled. “She did a beautiful job.” She brought her hand up and stroked the back of my neck.

“She certainly did. I can’t believe she made this for me.”

“Why? You’re her father. She loves you.”

Riley came back down, and we sat at the table and ate dinner together. My heart felt full as I stared at my daughter

and Piper. If this was a glimpse of my future, I was all in.

As we were cleaning up the dishes, the sliding door opened, and Sam and Stefan walked in.

“Hey, Piper.” Sam smiled.

“Hey, Sam. Stefan. How is Elijah doing?” Piper asked.

“He’s great.” Sam smiled.

“Is this a bad time?” Stefan asked.

“Not at all.” I grinned. “Riley, go have a seat at the table.”

“Why?” Her brows furrowed.

“Sam and Stefan want to show you something.”

“Okay.” She walked over to the table and sat down.

Sam opened the file folder he held in his hand, took out the design, and set it in front of Riley.

“That’s cool. What is it?” Riley looked up at me.

“It’s a pottery studio we’re going to build for you in the back by the pool.”

“Stop it!” I could see the tears in her eyes. “You are not.”

“Yeah, Riley, your dad is.” Sam smiled.

She placed her hands over her mouth and stared down at the design.

“Oh my God, Dad!” She jumped up from her chair and hugged me. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too, sweetheart.” I hugged her tight.

“I can’t believe this. Piper, did you know about this?” Riley asked.

“No. I didn’t.” She smiled.

“Come with us,” Stefan said as he hooked his arm around Riley. “We’ll show you where it’s going to go.”

“And we need you to approve the design,” Sam said. “If there’s anything you want to change, let me know. Or if there’s anything you want to add.”

They walked out the sliding door, and Piper took hold of my hand.

“You have made her one happy girl.” She smiled. “That was an excellent idea, Dr. Kind.”

“It’ll keep her busy and out of trouble.” I smirked.

CHAPTER 25



Piper

“You hope it will keep her out of trouble.” I smiled. “She is still only fifteen. By the way, I believe you said you have something to soothe my aching throat. Maybe we could go back to my place for a while, and you can show me.”

“Fuck, Piper.”

“Exactly.” I grinned.

“Hey, Riley?” Gabriel shouted out the sliding door. “Piper and I are going out for a while. I’ll be back later. Let’s get out of here.” He grabbed my hand, and we ran out of the house.

The moment we made it through my apartment door, I grabbed him by the waist of his pants and led him over to the couch. I sat down on the edge, unbuttoned his pants, and took them down. His cock was already hard, and my mouth was ready to devour it. This man had me horny 24/7.

I gripped his hard cock in my hand as my tongue circled around the tip as if I were eating an ice cream cone. Sexy groans rumbled in his chest as he threw his head back.

“Are you sure this will soothe my throat?” I seductively asked.

“God, baby. I promise it will,” he moaned.

He made me stop for a second while he took my shirt over my head and tossed it on the floor, with my bra following behind. I took his manhood into my mouth and sucked him like a lollipop, moaning with pleasure, knowing how much he

was enjoying it. His hands gripped the sides of my head as his fingers tangled through my hair.

“Stop,” he said.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing is wrong. I just need to be inside you so badly right now. Take your pants off while I grab a condom.”

“Fuck the condom. I have an IUD. We’re good,” I said as I stood up and removed my pants.

“Are you sure?”

“Shut up and sit down.” I pushed him back on the couch.

Climbing on top, I straddled him and slowly slid down until every thick inch of him was buried deep inside me. Our lips met for a passionate kiss while his hands groped my breasts. Loud moans could be heard throughout my apartment as we enjoyed each other’s bodies. A euphoric orgasm was nearing for both of us.

“Come with me, baby,” Gabriel breathlessly said.

The way his low voice told me what to do turned me on even more. I let out a moan as the intoxicating feeling flooded my body. His hands gripped my hips and held me down while he exploded inside me. I collapsed and buried my face into the side of his neck as we both waited for our breathing to return to normal.

“Fuck, Piper. That was incredible.” His hands softly stroked my back.

“Thank you, Dr. Kind. What do you know.” I smiled. “My sore throat is all healed.”

He chuckled as his lips met mine, and I climbed off him.

“I’ll be right back,” I said as I walked into the bedroom and grabbed my silk robe.

When I turned around, Gabriel walked into the room, buttoning his shirt.

“There’s something I want to talk to you about,” he said.

“Oh, okay. What is it?”

He walked over to where I stood, placed his hand on my cheek, and stared into my eyes.

“I’m so in love with you, Piper Primrose, and I think we should take this to the next level.”

My heart raced out of my chest as a tight knot formed in the pit of my belly.

“What did you say? No, Gabriel.” I turned away. “You don’t love me.”

“Yes, I do, Piper.”

“No, you don’t. You think you do because we have so much fun together.”

“I’m sorry, but you’re wrong.” His brows furrowed.

“No.” I pointed at him as I shook my head. “Don’t do this.” I ran out of the bedroom.

“Do what? Tell you that I love you?” He followed me into the kitchen.

“Yes! Stop saying those words!” I covered my ears.

“No, I won’t because it’s how I feel. I don’t think you understand what it took for me to tell you that. I’ve never spoken those words to any woman except Riley’s mother. I never thought I wanted a relationship with anyone after her, but then you walked into my life and showed me I was dead wrong. You make me happy, Piper, and I want us to be together.”

“No. You’re a casual dater. That’s what you told me! You don’t do relationships!” I pointed at him.

“That was before I met and fell in love with you,” he shouted.

I could feel the air around me constricting my lungs.

“Stop it, Gabriel. Why did you have to ruin everything by telling me that?”

“So, I mean nothing to you?” he asked.

“You’re a great guy, and the sex is amazing, but that’s all it is.”

“Wow.” He placed his hands on his hips and shook his head. “You’re a great actress. You actually had me convinced that you had feelings for me.”

“I’m sorry.” I looked down.

“Yeah, me too, Piper. We could have been great together. This casual thing that we had is over for good. In fact, Riley is done working at your shop. Fuck, I’m so stupid. I don’t ever want to see you again. Stay the hell away from my family as well.” He walked out and slammed the door shut.

I stood there shaking as I poured myself a glass of wine. After taking a sip, I threw the glass against the wall, and it shattered, leaving streaks of red dripping down it. Tears poured from my eyes as I sank to the kitchen floor and leaned up against the island, hugging my knees.

CHAPTER 26



Gabriel

I drove around for a while to compose myself before going home. I didn't need Riley to see me like this. I pulled into a park, climbed out of the car, and sat up on a picnic table facing the water. I couldn't believe I poured out my heart and soul to her, only to have her rip it to shreds. Bringing my hand up, I wiped the tears that were forming in my eyes. I refused to let them fall over someone like her.

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I sent a text message to Grayson.

"Are you home?"

"I just left the hospital. Why?"

"I need to talk to you."

"Okay. I'll come over as soon as I get home."

"I'm not home."

"Where the hell are you? Are you okay?"

"I'm at South Beach Park, sitting on a picnic table not too far from the entrance."

"I'm on my way."

Within thirty minutes, I heard Grayson's voice from behind.

"What the hell are you doing here by yourself?" He climbed up on the picnic table and sat next to me.

“I told Piper that I loved her.” I stared straight ahead at the water.

“And?”

“She doesn’t feel the same way about me.”

“Fuck. That’s not possible,” Grayson said.

“Yeah, bro, it is. She told me to stop telling her that I loved her and asked why I had to go and ruin everything. She said she was sorry that she didn’t feel the same.”

“I’m not buying it.” He placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Do you know what it took for me to tell her?”

“I know, Gabriel, and I’m sorry. But I’m calling bullshit. I’ve seen how she looks at you and it’s not in a friendship way. We’ve all seen it.”

“Doesn’t matter. She said things, I said things, and it’s over. I told her I never wanted to see her again and to stay away from the family, including Riley.”

“Bro, you can’t do that to Riley. She loves Piper.”

“Too fucking bad!” I spoke through gritted teeth.

“Calm down.” His grip on my shoulder tightened.

“I’m so stupid for allowing myself to fall in love with her.”

“No, you aren’t. You can’t help what the heart wants, bro.”

“Never again.” I shook my head. “Dad was right, and I will always stick by what he said.” I climbed off the picnic table. “Thanks for coming out here. You better get home to Ava, or she’ll be worried. I have to get home to my daughter.”

Grayson climbed off the picnic table and hugged me tight.

“I love you, bro. I’ll be right behind you.”

“I love you too.” I broke our embrace and went to my car.

When I got home, I yelled out for Riley. She didn’t respond, so I went up to her room and flung open the door.

“Jesus, Dad. You scared me.” She took one of her air pods out of her ear.

“I was yelling for you!” I loudly spoke.

“Sorry. I didn’t hear you. What’s going on?”

I stared at her for a moment and didn’t have the heart to tell her just yet.

“Nothing. I’m sorry. I freaked out because you didn’t come down when I called you. I’m sorry, sweetheart.” I walked over and kissed the top of her head.

“Okay.” Her brows furrowed. “Stefan said he can start building the pottery studio next week, so we need to get all the equipment I’ll need. You do realize how expensive this stuff is going to be, right? I don’t want you to have a heart attack.”

“I don’t care what it costs as long as you’re doing something that you love. Do your dad a favor and get to bed at a reasonable hour tonight.”

“I will. I love you, Dad.”

“I love you too, Riley.”

I went downstairs, grabbed the bottle of scotch and a glass, and took it up to my room. After I took a shower to wash the smell of her off my body, I grabbed my phone and deleted her number—a number I never wanted to see again. I drank a few more glasses of scotch than I should have and passed out.

The following morning, I went downstairs, and Riley was sitting at the table eating a bagel and cream cheese.

“You look like shit,” she said.

“Watch your mouth.” I sighed as I made a cup of coffee.

“Dad, what’s wrong? And don’t say nothing because I can tell. Did something happen between you and Piper?”

“Listen, Riley.” I sat down across from her. “I wanted to wait until after school to talk to you.”

“Something did happen,” she said.

“Piper and I won’t be seeing each other anymore.”

“Why?” Her brows furrowed.

I could see the hurt in her eyes as I stared at her.

“Things weren’t working out.”

“Bullshit, Dad. What did you do to her?” she shouted.

“I didn’t do anything! She’s the one, Riley. I told her last night that I love her and wanted us to be a couple. She freaked out and said she didn’t feel the same way. You won’t be going to her shop after school anymore.”

“Dad, that’s not fair! I like her.” Riley stood up from her chair. “Thanks for ruining my day. Both of you are idiots.” She grabbed her backpack and walked out the door.

I sighed as I ran my hand down my face.

I walked into the medical center and stopped in the kitchen area for a cup of coffee before I headed up to my practice. Jackson, Conner, and Charlotte all stopped talking when I walked in.

“You don’t have to stop talking about me,” I said. “I’m sure everyone heard what happened.”

“We did, and I’m sorry.” Conner walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“I have some time this afternoon if you want to come to my office and talk about it,” Charlotte said.

“There’s nothing to talk about. Piper doesn’t feel the same way, and it’s over. End of discussion. I don’t want to talk about her again.” I grabbed my cup and walked out.



Piper

“Daddy has to go on a trip.” My father knelt in front of me.

“When will you be back?”

“I won’t be gone too long.” He hugged me tightly. “I love you, Piper.”

“I love you, too, Daddy.”

I gasped as my eyes flew open, and I sat up. My heart was racing, my pajamas were soaked, and I couldn't breathe. Glancing at the clock, I saw it was almost time to get up and ready for work. The last thing I wanted to do was go into the shop today, but I needed to keep myself busy. Walking into the bathroom, I stared at my hot mess self in the mirror. Grabbing the eye drops, I put some in my eyes to clear the redness from crying all night. After I showered and dressed, I climbed into my car and drove to the shop.

"Good morning, darling." I heard Raj's chipper voice from behind.

"Morning." I took in a breath and turned around.

"What's this?" He wiggled his finger up and down.

"What?"

"You're a mess. What happened?"

"It's that obvious?" My shoulders slumped.

The bell above the door dinged, and Tara walked in.

"Good morning." She brightly smiled.

"It's not a good morning," Raj said. "Our little dove is wounded."

"What happened, Piper?"

"I don't want to talk about it." I stepped behind the counter.

"Too bad. You're going to," Tara said. "Did something happen between you and Gabriel?"

"Oh, my God!" Raj exclaimed. "He said it, didn't he?"

I stared at the two of them and didn't say a word.

"Well, I don't feel sorry for you," Tara said as she stood up tall.

"Wow. Thanks a lot, friend." I cocked my head.

"Nope." She shook her head. "I'm team Gabriel this time."

"She's right, Piper. I am too," Raj said.

“You both suck!” I pointed at them and went into the back.

“We love you, but this time it’s different,” Tara said as she and Raj followed me.

“Tara’s right. All the other guys were just—how do I put this? Plain and boring,” Raj said. “We’ve never seen you so happy as you were with Gabriel, Piper. Sorry, but it’s the truth. You were on a whole other level with him.”

“I won’t deny that,” I said. “But I am the way I am for a reason, and you both know that. He told me that Riley can’t come here after school anymore and to stay away from his family.”

“He’s hurting, just like you are,” Tara said.

“I’m not hurting.” I started to sob uncontrollably.

“Aw, come here.” Tara hugged me. “You can end this pain and suffering. Just go talk to him.”

“I can’t. He said it’s over for good. He was so angry.”

“Do you blame him?” Raj asked. “He’s heartbroken.”

“Yeah, and so am I. He wasn’t supposed to say that he loved me. He ruined everything.”

“I love you, Piper, but you’re the one who ruined everything, not him. He was only expressing his feelings like normal human beings do,” Raj said. “The man loves you.” He gripped my shoulders. “For once in your life, let someone love you without running away.”

We heard the shop bell ding.

“We better get out there and help the customers,” Tara said.

My phone pinged, and when I looked at it, there was a text from Riley.

“My dad told me what happened. How could you not love him? I’m mad at you, Piper.”

“I’m sorry, Riley. Please don’t hate me. I’m just going through a thing right now.”

“Like you were with that Jack guy? Spare me the bullshit. Maybe one day I can forgive you for hurting my dad and me. Bye, Piper.”

CHAPTER 27



ONE WEEK LATER

Piper

I was never good at communicating my feelings. Ever since my dad left us and I realized he wasn't coming back, I hid my emotions behind a wall deep inside my mind. The hurt and anguish I felt when I was ten years old set me on the path of not giving a fuck and never letting anyone inside. There were only two people in the entire world a child could and needed to depend on: their parents. The one thing I learned when my father left and never looked back was that love wasn't real.

I stepped into the elevator at the Kind Medical Center, and when the doors opened, I carefully stepped out to make sure Gabriel wasn't walking around. I opened the door to Charlotte's practice and checked in.

"Piper." Charlotte smiled. "Come back to my office."

"Hey, Charlotte."

"I'm happy you scheduled an appointment with me. How are you?" she asked as we stepped inside her office, and she shut the door.

"Obviously fucked up if I'm here." I sat down on the couch. "I appreciate you getting me in so quickly."

"That's because we're friends, and you're hurting." Her lips formed a sympathetic smile.

"Please don't tell Gabriel I was here. We have that whole patient/doctor confidentiality thing, right?"

“Of course. He’ll never know. So, why don’t you start by telling me what’s on your mind.”

“Men have this habit of falling in love with me, and when they tell me, I run for the hills as fast as I can.”

“Why is that? Why do you run?”

“My father left my mother and me when I was ten. His last words to me were, ‘I love you.’ I never saw him again.” I looked down as I played with my hands.

“You never had contact with him over the years?” she asked.

“No. He disappeared. He walked out of our lives as if we never meant anything to him. He was my father and my world. We were so close, and I was his angel.”

“You felt abandoned by the one person who was supposed to love you more than anyone else in the world,” she said.

“Yeah. I did. And he taught me that love isn’t a real thing. Because if it were, he wouldn’t have abandoned me the way he did.”

“Let me ask you something. Do you or have you ever blamed yourself for him leaving?”

“Yes. I would always ask myself what I did to make him leave. My mother couldn’t handle it, so she started drinking to ease her pain.”

“Did you feel abandoned by her as well?”

“Yep. I sure did. I remember the first time a boy told me that he loved me. I was sixteen years old.”

“What happened?”

“We dated for a few months. He was the captain of the football team. He was the guy that every girl would kill to date. He took my virginity, and right after, he told me that he loved me. When I heard those words, I became paralyzed. My body wouldn’t move. It felt like I had a huge weight on top of me, holding me down. After that, I stopped talking to him. Over time, the paralysis became less and less because I knew

I'd just walk away and be fine. Until Gabriel. I'm not fine, Charlotte."

"That's because you've fallen in love with him and conditioned yourself over the years to feel unworthy of someone's love. Am I right?"

"I guess. If my own father didn't love me enough to stay, how could anyone else?"

"You're self-sabotaging, Piper, and that's the worst thing anyone can do to themselves. What your father did had nothing to do with you. It was a problem he had inside himself. You weren't responsible for him leaving. You need to believe that."

"I try to believe it, Charlotte. But the scar of his abandonment runs too deep."

"Have you ever thought of trying to find and confront him?" she asked.

"I thought about it once when I was eighteen, but then I figured, why bother trying to find someone who didn't want to be found."

"I think you need to revisit the idea, Piper. You're a strong woman, but you do need closure. I'm positive you'll begin healing once you have that."

"I don't think I can do it," I softly spoke.

"You're not giving yourself enough credit. What would you do if someone screwed with your business and threatened to shut you down?"

"First, I'd kill them and then ask questions later."

"Exactly. Your father screwed with your life, and he shut you down emotionally. Don't you think you should ask him why? Leave out the killing part." She smirked. "Give it some thought."

"I will."

Our time was up, so I thanked and hugged her goodbye. When I opened the door to step out, I saw Gabriel walking

down the stairs. My heart raced as I shut the door and stood with my back against it.

“What are you doing?” Charlotte breathed out a laugh.

“Gabriel was walking down the stairs from the third floor. I didn’t want him to see me.”

When she walked over, I moved out of the way while she opened the door and looked out.

“All clear.” She smiled.



G abriel

When I arrived home from work, I saw Riley and her friend, Kourtney, sitting on the patio, staring at Stefan’s workers who were building the pottery studio.

“I’m home.” I opened the sliding door and stepped onto the patio.

“Hi, Dad.”

“Hey, Dr. Kind.” Kourtney smiled.

“Hi, Kourtney. What are you two doing out here?”

“Oh, nothing,” Riley said.

“Uh-huh. Why don’t you two come inside.”

“We’re good, Dad.”

I let out a sigh as I went back inside the house and went upstairs to change my clothes. When I went back downstairs, Riley and Kourtney were in the kitchen. Looking out the sliding door, I noticed the guys were done for the day.

“Really, you two?” I asked.

“What?” Riley asked.

“I know you were only out there because you thought one of them was cute,” I said.

“Actually, Dr. Kind, two of them were cute.” Kourtney brightly smiled.

“Can Kourtney spend the night?” Riley asked.

“If it’s okay with her mom,” I said.

“She’s out of the town for the weekend,” Kourtney said.

“Oh. Then you better ask your dad.”

“My dad died last year.”

“Oh gee, Kourtney. I’m sorry. I didn’t know. So, who’s staying with you?”

“No one.”

“I’ll tell you what. How about you stay the weekend until your mom gets back?”

“That’s nice of you, Dr. Kind. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome, sweetheart. I’m heading down to the beach,” I said as I opened the refrigerator and grabbed a couple of beers.

When I got down to the beach, I saw my brother, Stefan, Simon, Christian, Jackson, and Shaun sitting around the bonfire.

“Did the guys already leave for the day?” Stefan asked as I sat down.

“Yeah, they did.” I twisted the cap off my beer bottle.

“How are you, cousin?” Jackson asked.

“I’m fine.” I tipped the bottle to my lips.

“No, you’re not,” Simon said. “You’re far from it. You’ve been a miserable prick all week long.”

“Simon, don’t,” Shaun said.

“Too late. I already went there. Tell us how you really are, Gabriel.”

“What the fuck do you want me to say, Simon?” I shouted. “Things didn’t work out, and I’m over it. Now shut the fuck up.”

“I’ll shut the fuck up after I tell you how every one of us feels,” Simon said. “You’re a fucking Kind, and it’s time you start acting like one. We fight for what we want and don’t give up until we get it.”

“What’s going on out here?” Conner asked as he walked over, holding Isabella.

“I’m just telling our cousin to fight for what he wants.”

“I’m assuming you’re talking about Piper, and I agree. You know how it was with Charlotte and me after her accident. I had to fight hard to get her back.”

I looked over at my brother, who sat there staring at me. “Isn’t she worth it, bro?” he asked.

I glanced at my watch, handed my beer to Grayson, and stood up.

“I’ll talk to you guys later.” I walked away.

CHAPTER 28



Piper

“This dress would look fabulous on you.” Raj smiled as he held it up.

“It’s nice.” I sighed as I walked away.

“Come on, Piper. You’ve been a Debbie Downer all week, and frankly, I can’t take it anymore. I want my Piper back,” he said.

“Um, Piper,” Tara said. “Gabriel is walking up to the door.”

“What? Shit. I’m not here.” I ran into the back.

“I think your car in the parking lot says otherwise, darling,” Raj shouted.

I sat at my desk and placed my hands over my face. Why was he here?

“Piper?” I heard his voice.

I inhaled a deep breath and looked at him.

“Gabriel, what are you doing here?”

“You’re going through a thing, and I want to know what that thing is.” A smirk crossed his lips. “Regardless of what I said, you’re my friend, and friends are always there for each other during the good times and the bad.”

“I know you two are standing out there listening!” I yelled.

“Then maybe you two need to go talk somewhere private,” Raj said as he walked into the back room and handed me my purse. “Tara and I will close up. Run along.” He waved his hand.

“I know a place,” Gabriel said.

“Fine. Let’s go.”

Gabriel and I walked out of the shop. I climbed into my car and followed him to South Beach Park.

“Why here?” I asked as he led me to a picnic table and sat on it.

“This is where I came after I left your apartment that night. Come on up.” He patted the table.

I climbed up and sat next to him. My heart felt happy being with him again.

“You can talk to me,” he said. “You freaked the fuck out when I told you that I loved you and said I ruined everything. What’s going on with you, Piper?”

“The last words my father said to me were, ‘I love you.’ Then he left and never came back.”

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“You have nothing to be sorry for. I’m the one who’s sorry. I don’t believe in love, Gabriel, and I need to work on that for myself. I have a lot of issues that need to be addressed. Issues I tucked away all these years and ignored because it was too painful to deal with them.”

“I can relate to that.” He reached over and grabbed my hand. I tried to pull it away, but his grip was tight. “Just relax and hold my hand. I questioned everything after that summer I spent with Ariana. It wasn’t fair that she was thrown into my life, and we couldn’t stay together. We were both so young, but I loved her.”

“Why didn’t you stay in contact with each other?” I asked.

“Because it would never have worked. She was still in high school, and I was going back to Harvard. There was no

way we could see each other after that summer, and if we stayed in contact, it would only hurt more. It took a long time for me to get over her. That's why I stayed away from relationships and only kept things casual with women. I didn't want to feel that heartache again. But then I met you, and you brought out the one thing in me I avoided all these years." A smile crossed his handsome face. "You're a very special woman, Piper Primrose, and I'm not going anywhere whether you like it or not. I'll be here for you when you decide to deal with your issues. I'll hold you up and give you the strength to face them head on."

Tears fell down my cheek as I sat there and listened to him. He brought his other hand up and gently wiped them away.

"You don't need to cry, but if you want to, my shoulder is always available."

I swallowed hard as I stared into his perfect eyes.

"I care about you, Gabriel, and I appreciate you more than you'll ever know." I laid my head on his shoulder. "I need time to deal with my life. You made it such a mess."

He breathed out a laugh. "Sorry about that."

"You should be." I lifted my head and looked at him. "Riley hates me."

"No, she doesn't. She loves you, and she misses you."

"I need time, Gabriel."

"I understand that, and like I said, I'm not going anywhere. Take all the time you need," he said, bringing his hand up and placing it on my cheek.

I wanted nothing more than to ask him to come back to my apartment with me, but I couldn't.

"I should get home," he said. "Riley's girlfriend is spending the weekend with us. Her mom went away and left her home all alone. Am I the only one who doesn't think that's okay?"

"No. If she were eighteen, maybe, but leaving a fifteen-year-old home alone for the weekend is not cool. You're a

good man for letting her stay with you.” I smiled.

He leaned over and pressed his lips against my forehead.

“And you’re a good woman.”

We both climbed off the picnic table and headed to our cars. I could still feel the feeling of his lips on my skin, and I knew what I had to do.

“Have a good night, Piper.”

“You too, Gabriel.”

I climbed into my car and watched him pull away. Taking my phone from my purse, I called Grace.

“Hello.”

“Grace, it’s Piper. I need your help with something.”

“Anything, Piper. What do you need?”

“I need you to help me find my father.”

“Text me his name and any other information you can give me. I’ll call you if I find something.”

“Thanks, Grace.”

I went home and took a hot bath. As I was soaking in the tub, thoughts of Gabriel circled around in my head as my heart raced. I loved him, and it scared me. I needed to heal and deal with my issues before I could be with him because it wouldn’t do either of us any good if I didn’t.

The following morning, Grace texted me, said she had some information, and asked if we could meet. I gave her my address and told her to come over.

“Hi.” I smiled when I opened the door.

“It’s good to see you.” Grace hugged me when she stepped inside.” I brought doughnuts.” She held up a small white box.

“I love doughnuts. I’ll make the coffee.”

I made us each a cup of coffee and set the cups on the table.

“Take a doughnut.” She grinned as she opened the box and took one out for herself. “Are you ready to hear what I found out?”

“Hold on.” I took a large bite of the chocolate-frosted doughnut. “Okay. Now I’m ready.”

She opened the folder she brought and pulled out a piece of paper.

“Your father, Jonathan Eric Primrose, lives in Seattle and is the CFO for a large insurance company. He—” she paused.

“He what, Grace?”

“He’s married to a woman named Victoria and has two children, twin girls who are fourteen.”

“He has children?” A sick feeling soared through me.

“Yeah. I’m sorry, Piper.”

“Wow.” I stood up from my chair as I could feel the anxiety rearing its ugly head. “He left me and went and had more kids?” I shouted.

“Breathe, Piper.” Grace stood up, walked over to me, and gripped my shoulders. “Deep breaths.”

“That son of a bitch. How could he do that?”

“I don’t know. But I have his address if you want answers. Charlotte is on her way over. She was with me last night when you texted me. I told her what I found out this morning, and she said she’d be over as soon as she was done feeding the baby.”

There was a knock at the door, and Grace answered it while I paced around my apartment, trying to wrap my head around what she had just told me.

“How could he do that?” I looked at Charlotte.

“I don’t know.” She hugged me. “But I advise you to find out. You need closure, Piper, and the only way you’ll get it is by seeing and confronting him.”

CHAPTER 29



Gabriel

I grabbed my surfboard and headed down to the beach. My brother texted me and said there was an emergency at the hospital, and he wouldn't be joining us.

"What happened to you last night?" Simon asked. "I went down to your house to finish my speech, and Riley said you left but didn't know where you went."

"I went to Piper's shop."

"That's my boy." Simon grinned as we put our boards in the water.

"And?" Christian asked. "What happened?"

"We talked, and she said she needs time."

"Time for what?" Stefan asked.

"Time to deal with her issues. Her father's last words before he left and never returned were, 'I love you.' That's why she freaked out when I told her. She doesn't believe in love because of him."

"Then you make her believe," Simon said. "You do whatever it takes, cousin."

"I am, and I will. I told her I wasn't going anywhere and to take all the time she needed."

"That's a good start." Jackson smiled.

"I'm proud of you, cousin," Simon said.

After we surfed, I went back to the house and found Riley in the kitchen.

“Where’s Kourtney?”

“She’s still sleeping. We were up late.”

“I know you were.” I smirked.

“I need your credit card to order the equipment for my pottery studio,” she said.

“How much is it going to cost?”

“I think it’s best if you don’t know, Dad.”

“We’ll go over it together later. I want to talk to you about something.”

“Okay.” She sat at the island.

“I went and talked to Piper last night.”

“You did? Why?”

“Because I love her, and I’m not giving up.”

“What did she say?”

“She told me a few things she’s dealing with and that she needs time.”

“I really miss her, Dad.”

“I do too.” I sighed.

“Can I see her again?”

“Yeah. Of course, you can. She thinks you hate her.”

“I don’t hate her at all.”

“I told her that.” I handed her my phone. “Can you put her number back in my phone?”

“You deleted her number?” Riley’s brow arched.

“I was angry. Just do it, please.”

She put her number in my phone and handed it back to me. My brows furrowed when I saw what she put down for her name.

“Love of my life?” I looked at her.

“She is, isn’t she?” Riley grinned.

I chuckled and set my phone down.



It had been a week since I last saw Piper. I considered calling her but knew she’d reach out when she was ready. I took my bag and put it in the car and then stepped inside Grayson’s house.

“You be on your best behavior for Ava and Uncle Grayson.” I hugged Riley.

“She will be.” Ava smiled.

“I’ll be back in three days. Ava, I’m expecting a bunch of deliveries. If they come while I’m gone, have Grayson bring the boxes in and put them in the living room.”

“I will. Have a good trip.” She hugged me. “And don’t worry about your daughter. We’ll all take good care of her.” She winked.

“Do you think Kate can come out, and we can hang together?” Riley asked her.

“Maybe.” Ava smiled.

“I have to go, or I’ll miss my flight.” I kissed the top of Riley’s head and walked out the door.

On my way to the airport, I called my brother.

“Hey, bro.”

“Hey. I’m on my way to the airport. Riley is with Ava.”

“Okay. Have fun at the medical conference, and I’ll see you when you get back. It sucks that Shaun’s plane is being repaired, and you have to fly commercial again.”

“Yeah, I know. We’re spoiled now.”

“Yeah.” He chuckled. “Love you, bro.”

“Love you too, my brother.”



Piper

“Wait!” I shouted as I ran to my gate. “Don’t shut that door!”

“One more second, and you wouldn’t have been able to get on,” the attendant spoke with irritation.

“I’m sorry. Traffic was a bitch, and so was security.” I scanned my ticket.

I entered the plane and stopped when I saw Gabriel sitting in first class.

“Gabriel?”

He looked up with a shocked look on his face.

“Piper? What are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I have a medical conference in Seattle.”

“Well, I have a father to cuss out.”

“Miss, you need to take your seat,” the flight attendant said.

I had the aisle seat across from where Gabriel’s window seat was.

“Would you mind switching seats with me?” I asked the man who sat next to Gabriel.

“Um, yes, I do mind.”

I furrowed my brows as I sat down. “Why? What’s the difference? It’s the same seat, just a different side.”

“I happen to like this side. It’s the side I always sit on.”

“Life’s too short to be so boring. Mix things up. Please. Pretty please,” I said.

“No, lady. I’m not switching with you.”

“Why are you so mean?”

Gabriel snickered, and the guy looked at him.

“I’m not mean. This is the seat I paid for, and this is where I’m staying,” the grumpy man said.

“Fine.”

“May I get you something to drink?” the flight attendant asked.

“I’ll have a mimosa.” I leaned over to talk to Gabriel. “So, you’re attending a medical conference?”

“Yeah. I’ll be in Seattle for three days.” He leaned over the man. “I can’t believe you’re here.”

“I can’t believe you’re here.”

“How did you find your father?” he asked.

“Grace tracked him down for me.”

“Are you two going to do this for the whole flight?” the grumpy man asked.

“Yes.” I stared at him. “And as soon as we’re up in the air and the seatbelt light goes off, I’m getting up from my seat and standing over you so I can talk to my friend.”

“You better not.”

“Watch me.” I narrowed my eyes. “We have a lot to talk about.”

The flight attendant handed me my mimosa.

“Thank you.” I smiled. “Which hotel are you staying at?” I asked Gabriel.

“The Hyatt Regency. That’s where the conference is being held.”

“Really? Me too.” I smiled. “How’s Riley?”

“She’s good. She’s staying with my brother and Ava while I’m gone.”

“She texted me a couple of times this week. It was good to talk to her.”

“For fuck’s sake. This is ridiculous.” The grumpy man unfastened his seat belt. “Just sit here.”

“Why, thank you.” I smiled. “I bet you’re going to love this side more.” I stood up, and we switched seats.

“Good job.” Gabriel chuckled as he placed his hand on mine.

“I seriously can’t believe you’re here,” I said.

“I am only because Shaun’s plane is being serviced. Otherwise, I’d be on that plane. I can’t believe you’re going to see your father. What did Grace find out?”

“He’s married with twin girls who are fourteen years old. So, apparently, I have sisters.”

“I’m sorry, Piper. I know how hard this is going to be for you.” He gently squeezed my hand.

“Well, somehow, it doesn’t feel that scary anymore now that you’re going to be in Seattle with me. I know you said you’d be here for me, but wow, Gabriel.” I smiled.

“Everything happens for a reason.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too.” I laid my head on his shoulder. “I’m sorry I haven’t called. It’s been a crazy week with planning this trip and the shop. Like I said, my life is a mess right now.”

“It’s okay. I totally understand. That’s why I didn’t text or call you. I knew you’d reach out when you were ready, but I didn’t think it would be on a plane.”

“Me either.” I laughed as the plane lifted off the ground.

CHAPTER 30



Gabriel

I still couldn't believe she was sitting next to me on a flight to Seattle. If this was fate stepping in, I was a true believer.

Just as the plane landed, Piper reached over to the man who switched seats with her.

"You like that side, don't you?" she asked with a smile.

"No, lady. I don't."

"Okay then." Piper's brows furrowed. "I appreciate your suffering so I could talk to my friend." She rolled her eyes.

"Just drop it, lady, and leave me alone." He stood up and walked off the plane.

"Gee, what a grumpy man."

I laughed as I grabbed our bags and my guitar case from the overhead, and we exited the plane.

"I have a car waiting to drive us to the hotel," I said.

"Okay. I was just going to grab a cab, but a nice car sounds better." A beautiful smile crossed her lips. "You brought your guitar?"

"Yeah. I always bring it when I travel. It can sometimes get boring in a hotel room, so I like to play."

"You mean when you don't have a woman to entertain you?" A smirk crossed her lips.

“Very funny. How long are you here for?” I asked as we climbed into the car.

“A couple of days. As soon as I talk to my father, I’m out of here.”

When we reached the hotel, I glanced at my watch.

“Check-in isn’t until four o’clock, and it’s only two,” I said. “Hopefully, my room is ready.”

We walked up to the desk, and I set my bag down.

“Welcome to the Hyatt Regency Seattle. How can I help you?” A nice woman asked.

“I’m checking in. The name is Dr. Gabriel Kind.”

“Ah, yes, Dr. Kind. You’re here for the medical conference, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Your suite is ready.” She smiled as she handed him his room key. “Enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you.”

“How can I help you, miss?” she asked Piper.

“I’m checking in also. Piper Primrose.”

“Um, I don’t see a reservation for you, Miss Primrose.”

“Excuse me? I have a confirmation email.” I pulled out my phone and brought it up.

“Did you book your reservation online?” she asked.

“Yes. Three days ago.”

“I don’t know what happened, but we do have a medical conference for the next three days, and it seems we’re overbooked. We don’t have any rooms available. Unfortunately, when you booked your room, the website didn’t update. But don’t worry, I can find you a room at a nearby hotel.”

“Are you being serious right now, lady?” Piper cocked her head.

Fate was stepping in again, and I was grabbing the opportunity it gave me.

“You’ll stay in my suite with me,” I said as I grabbed her bag.

“Gabriel, I—”

“Quiet, and come on.” I walked away with our bags and guitar case and headed to the elevator.

“Gabriel, I—”

“Shush, Piper, and just relax.” I smiled.

I opened the door to my suite on the thirty-fifth floor and took our bags to the bedroom.

“This is a bad idea,” Piper said. “But wow, this suite is nice. There’s only one bed, Gabriel.”

“I know, but the couch pulls out into a bed. I’ll sleep on that while you sleep in the bedroom.”

“You would do that for me?” she asked.

“Of course, I would. I want you to be comfortable. I’m starving. We can order room service or go to a restaurant. Your pick.”

“I was planning on going to see my father.”

“We’ll eat first, and then I’ll go with you. The conference isn’t until tomorrow morning at eight a.m.”

“You’d really go with me?”

“Yes, I would. Isn’t that what friends are for?” I smiled. “Room service?” I asked.

“Yeah. Room service is fine.” She sighed.

We looked over the menu, and I placed our food order.

“I haven’t heard you play the guitar yet. How about showing off for me while we wait for our room service?”

“I can do that.” I smiled as I took my guitar from the case.

We took a seat on the couch, and I strummed a couple of chords.

“What are you going to play?” Piper asked.

“I have the perfect song for this occasion.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I strummed and sang Cry by James Blunt.

Tears filled her eyes as she stared at me. She brought her hand up and wiped them away as I strummed the last chord and sang the last word.

“You suck, Kind. I mean, you can play and sing like nobody’s business, but that fucking song.”

I set my guitar down and patted my shoulder. She laid her head down, and I slowly closed my eyes. I wanted so badly to tell her I loved her, but I couldn’t do that to her again.

“Room service,” a voice spoke from the other side of the door as the knock interrupted our moment.

I took some cash from my wallet for a tip and opened the door.

“Good afternoon, Dr. Kind.” He rolled the cart into the room. “Where would you like it set up?”

“Over there on the table is fine.”

After he set up our food, I handed him a tip.

“Thank you,” I said.

“Thank you, Dr. Kind. Enjoy your food.” He gave a nod.

“You’re barely eating,” I said to Piper as she sat in the chair across from me.

“I feel sick.”

“Why? Because of your father?” I asked.

“Yeah. I think so.” She looked down. “Since I realized he was never coming back, I had this scenario in my head about what I’d say if I ever saw him again.”

“Then say it.”

“Well, I was a kid then. The scenario has now changed. It’s much more graphic.” A small smile fell upon her lips.

I stood up, turned on some music, and held out my hand.

“Dance with me.”

“Gabriel, I—”

“It’s just a dance, Piper.”

She placed her hand in mine and stood up. Wrapping my arm around her waist, we slowly danced.

“You say to him exactly how you feel. Don’t hold back. He deserves to know what he did to you,” I said.

“Trust me. I will. Are you sure you want to come with me?” she asked. “You might see a side of me you won’t like.”

I let out a laugh. “Trust me. All of your sides are beautiful, no matter what.”

My eyes stared at her lips, and her phone rang as I leaned in to kiss her.

“I better see who that is.” She grabbed her phone from the table. “It’s a Facetime call from Raj.”

“Girl, you were supposed to call us when you landed,” Raj said.

“I’m sorry. I got distracted. Look who I found on the plane.” She held up her phone to me.

“Say what!” Raj said.

“Give me that phone.” Tara grabbed it from his hands. “Are you keeping secrets from us, Piper?”

“No.” She laughed. “He’s here for a medical conference. Weird, right?”

“Hi, Tara. Hi, Raj,” I said.

“Hi, Gabriel.” They both smiled. “Just so you know, we’re on Team Gabriel,” Raj said.

“Thank you.” I chuckled.

“Ugh, don’t listen to them. I have to go. I’ll call you later.” Piper ended the call.

“What did he mean they’re on ‘Team Gabriel?’” I asked.

“Nothing.” Piper shook her head. “They’re dumb.” She looked at her watch. “We should call a cab.”

“I was thinking about that, but the hotel has a car rental service. I’ll just rent a car,” I said.

“Are you sure, Gabriel? A cab is fine.”

“I’m positive. Let’s go down to the lobby and get one.”

CHAPTER 31



Piper

I gave Gabriel the address, and he typed it into the car's GPS. I should have been more nervous, but having him with me really calmed me down. When Gabriel turned down my father's street, he parked along the curb across from his house.

"Wow, look at that house." I swallowed the hard lump in my throat.

"Do you think he's home?" Gabriel asked.

"We'll find out." I placed my hand on the car's door handle and held it there.

"It's okay, Piper." Gabriel ran his hand down the back of my head. "I've noticed that you don't have an issue saying exactly how it is with people. He's no exception."

"You're right." I inhaled a deep breath. "Let's go and get this over with."

We climbed out of the car and walked up to the door. Gabriel rang the doorbell, and a nicely dressed woman, whom I assumed was step-mommy, opened the door.

"Can I help you?"

"Is Jonathan home?" I asked.

"Yes." Her brows furrowed as she just stood there.

"Can I speak to him?"

“Who are you, and what is this about?”

“Tell him his daughter is here to see him.” I pushed past her and stepped inside.

“Excuse me,” she said. “You just can’t—”

“Listen, lady. I can, and I am. Tell my father I’m here to see him.”

“Victoria, who—” My father stopped dead in his tracks when he saw me. “Piper? Is that you?”

“Hi, Dad. I’m surprised you recognized me after all these years. Surprised to see me?”

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

“Dad, who is she?” A fourteen-year-old girl walked into the foyer.

“Hello, sweetheart.” I smiled. “I’m your sister, Piper.” I extended my hand.

“What?” Her brows furrowed.

“Ashley, go upstairs right now,” Victoria spoke. “You need to leave. The girls don’t know about you.”

“I’m not going anywhere until I get some answers. If you’re uncomfortable, take your girls and go somewhere else,” I sternly spoke.

“Come into the living room, Piper,” my father said. “Who is this young man with you?”

“Oh, him?” I pointed to Gabriel. “He’s a friend, and the man that told me he loved me, and I freaked the fuck out. Want to know why, Daddy? Because of you!” I pointed at him.

“Piper, calm down,” my father spoke.

“No. I came here with guns blazing because I want to know why you left me and never came back.”

“It’s complicated.” He walked over to his bar and poured himself a drink.

“I’ve got all night,” I said.

“I’m Dr. Gabriel Kind.” He went to extend his hand, and I slapped it. “Don’t you dare.” I shot him a look.

Gabriel went and took a seat on the couch while Victoria planted her skinny ass on one of the wing-backed chairs.

“You’ve turned into such a beautiful woman, Piper.”

“Spare me the compliments, Jonathan. Now tell me why you abandoned me.”

He looked over at Victoria. It was then I knew he left us for her.

“She’s the reason?” I asked.

“Piper, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Hurt me?” I breathed out a laugh. “I’ve been hurt for the past nineteen years, Dad. No visits, phone calls, birthday or Christmas wishes, nothing!” I shouted. “Nothing you can tell me now is going to hurt me anymore than I already am and have been for the past nineteen years.”

“Your mother and I were having a lot of problems, and I was very unhappy. You need to remember that we were only twenty-one when we married and had you. Like I said, I was unhappy, and I felt trapped. After my promotion, my company started sending me to their offices here in Seattle for meetings.”

“I remember you started traveling a lot after that promotion,” I said.

“That’s right. Then, one day, I met Victoria. We started seeing each other every time I was here. When I was with her, I no longer felt trapped but happy. I was happier than I’d ever been, and leaving her to go back to Los Angeles grew harder and harder each time. One day, I asked my boss if I could transfer to the Seattle office. He agreed, and Victoria and I had a long discussion about you.”

“I bet you did,” I snapped.

“Maybe I’d get to see you on a holiday or two during the year, or maybe you’d spend the summers with us. Your life would have been disrupted, and you would have eventually

resented me for it. So, I thought it was best that I just leave you there. I knew your mother would never let me have contact with you if I kept in touch. She hated me for leaving and told me that she would see to it that I never saw you again.”

“What do you mean? She knew you were leaving?” My brows furrowed.

“Of course, she knew. She never told you that?”

“No. After a month had passed after you left, she told me that you called her and told her that you were never coming back and not to try to find you because you didn’t want to be found.”

“Well, she lied to you because the day I left, she knew I wasn’t coming back. You have no idea how hard it was to walk out on you. You were my little girl, and I loved you very much.”

“Don’t!” I shouted as I pointed my finger at him. “You’re a liar because if you really loved me, you wouldn’t have left me and completely shut me out of your life.”

“I had no choice. Your mother made it very clear that I wouldn’t have contact with you, and she would make sure you hated me for the rest of your life.”

“Have you ever heard of the courts, Dad? You could have fought for me, but you didn’t. You just walked away and into the arms of that woman.” I pointed to Victoria. “You went on with your life as if I never existed. You suck, and you’re not fit to be anyone’s father.”

“That’s enough!” Victoria shouted as she stood from her chair. “He is a wonderful father to our girls.”

“Yeah.” I breathed out a laugh. “And he was a wonderful father to me at one time. But all it took was for one woman to look his way to leave it all behind. I’d watch him like a hawk if I were you.”

“How dare you,” she said.

“No, how dare you, lady!”

“Piper,” Gabriel said.

“Be quiet, Gabriel. I bet you played a huge role in this, Victoria. I’m sure you couldn’t stand the thought of having a ten-year-old in your life and disrupting your perfect love affair with my father.”

“Piper, that’s enough. I was the one who made the final decision, not Victoria.”

“You have no idea the damage you caused Mom and me. My mother spent the last nineteen years of her life more drunk than not.”

“Your mother’s drinking started well before I left, Piper.”

“Do you know the psychological damage I suffer because of you? And the abandonment issues I have? Do you know what I do when a man tells me that he loves me? I run as fast as possible because those were your last words before disappearing. How am I supposed to trust anyone who says those words to me? While you were here living your fairytale life full of rainbows and unicorns, I was taking care of an alcoholic mother. Do you know what that does to a kid?”

“I’m sorry, Piper.” He looked down.

“No.” I shook my head. “No, you’re not. You could have reached out at some point when I was older, but you didn’t. You just pretended that I never existed. And you got really good at pretending because you didn’t even tell your daughters about me, their own sister. And now I know why you didn’t. You didn’t want them to know what a horrible person you are. Well, guess what, Daddy? The cat’s out of the bag. How does it feel?”

“I think it’s time for you to leave,” Victoria said.

“Victoria, be quiet,” my father’s stern voice echoed throughout the room.

“Jonathan—”

“I said be quiet. I haven’t seen my daughter in almost twenty years. I’ll decide when it’s time for her to leave.”

“No, Dad. You don’t get to make that decision. I meant nothing to you when I was ten years old, and I mean nothing to you now.”

“That’s not true, Piper. You have no idea the struggles I went through over the years about what I’d done.”

“You obviously didn’t struggle enough because if you were, you would have found a way to reach out to me.”

“I couldn’t because I already knew you hated me, and I didn’t want to disrupt your life. I want nothing more than to get to know my daughter. What are you doing in Los Angeles? You’re still living there, right? Where do you work? Did you go to college?”

I stood there with my head cocked and furrowed brows as I stared at him.

“That is none of your fucking business, Jonathan. You didn’t give two shits about my life growing up, and now I come here to confront you, and all of a sudden, you want to play daddy? I don’t think so. You lost the right to know anything about me. Come on, Gabriel. We’re leaving.”

Gabriel stood from the couch and walked over to where my father stood.

“It’s men like you who ruin it for us good men. You are nothing but a weak man. Thank God, Piper, didn’t inherit that trait from you. Her strength was built on your weakness. When I stand here and look at you, all I see is a coward. You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“By the way, Jonathan,” I said. “You still only have two daughters because my coming here doesn’t change anything. You will never see me again.” I walked out of the living room and out the front door.

I heard a voice from behind as Gabriel and I walked down the driveway.

“Wait!”

I stopped and turned around, only to see the twins standing there.

“Are you really our sister?” one of the girls asked.

“Yes, I am.”

“I’m Ashley.” She extended her hand.

“And I’m Annabelle.”

“My name is Piper.” I shook both of their hands.

“Why didn’t Dad ever tell us about you?” Ashley asked.

“Well, that’s something you’ll have to ask him and your mom.”

“Will we ever see you again?” Annabelle asked.

“I’m afraid not, sweetheart. I have to go. Take care of each other, okay?” I smiled.

“Okay,” Ashley said.

I climbed into the car and let out a breath. Gabriel immediately grabbed hold of my hand and squeezed it tight.

“Are you okay?”

“Would anyone be okay after that? Maybe a normal person wouldn’t be, but I can honestly say I’ve never felt so free in my life.”

“How do you mean?” he asked as he pulled away from the curb.

“I don’t know, Gabriel. I just feel like this huge weight has been lifted. I’ve wanted to tell that man off for years, and finally, I did.”

CHAPTER 32



G abriel

I was so proud of her for standing up to her father the way she did. When we returned to the hotel, I opened the door to our suite, walked over to the mini bar, and grabbed the bottle of complimentary champagne.

“Champagne?” I held up the bottle with a smile.

“Definitely.” Piper kicked off her shoes. “I can’t believe what you said to him, Gabriel. Thank you.”

“You know I have your back.” I smirked. “Besides, there’s no need to thank me. I only spoke the truth.”

“Well, I appreciate it more than you know.”

I handed her a glass of champagne, and she held it up.

“To new beginnings.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips.

“To new beginnings.” I grinned as I tipped my glass to hers.

“Now I have another problem to tackle,” she said.

“What problem?”

“My mother, and the fact that she knew he was leaving and where he was all these years. She lied to me for the last nineteen years, Gabriel.”

“She was probably trying to protect you.”

“It doesn’t matter. I still need to tell her that I know she lied.”

“Do you think that’s such a good idea, Piper? I mean, she is in rehab trying to get better. You confronting her might set her back.”

“You know what? That’s not my problem. I don’t mean to sound cruel, but I need to do what’s best for me and stop worrying about everyone else. I’m going to go in the bedroom and call Charlotte. She asked me to Facetime her after I saw him.”

“Okay. I’m going to call Riley and see how she’s doing.” I smiled.

I took my glass of champagne and my phone out to the balcony and sat down.

“Dad!” Riley smiled when she answered.

“Hey, sweetheart. How are you?”

“I’m good. All the pottery equipment was delivered today. Uncle Grayson put it in the living room for you. Stefan’s guys were here all day. Look at it now.” She walked over to the sliding door, stepped outside, and showed me.

“Wow. It’s looking good.” I smiled. “Are you having fun over at Uncle Grayson’s?”

“Yeah. I spent some time with Kate today.”

“You did?” My brows furrowed.

“Yeah. Ava texted me while I was in school and told me that she would pick me up and we would go to the mall. I guess the parking guard was yelling at her because she was in the wrong lane, so Kate fronted and told the lady off. After she peeled out of the parking lot, she took me to the mall, and we went to the food court and had pizza and ice cream. Guess who we ran into there?”

“Who?”

“Grandma Barb. Did you know that Kate calls her Barbie?” She laughed.

“Yeah, I know.” I chuckled.

“Anyway, Ava came back, and we shopped around for a while and came home. I texted Piper earlier, but she hasn’t responded. Have you heard from her?”

“I have, sweetheart. She’s here with me in Seattle.”

“What?” Her brows furrowed.

“We were on the same plane this morning. It’s a long story, and I’m sure she’ll tell you about it when she comes home.”

“So, you’ve seen her? What is she doing in Seattle?”

“She had some business to attend to here. I miss you, Riley.”

“I miss you too, Dad. What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing.” I smiled. “Can’t a father tell his daughter that he misses her?”

“Yeah, but it was so random.”

“Is Uncle Grayson home?”

“Yeah. He’s over at—Dad, did I just see Piper?”

I turned my head just as she opened the door and stepped onto the balcony.

“Hi, sweetheart.” She leaned over my shoulder.

“Hi, Piper. So, what’s going on there in Seattle? Are you and my dad sharing a room?”

“We are,” Piper said. “It’s a long story. I’ll tell you all about it when I get back. The hotel screwed up my room reservation, and your dad was kind enough to let me stay in his.”

“I bet he was.” Riley smirked.

“I’ll let you go, sweetheart. Tell your uncle that I’ll call him later.”

“Okay. Bye, Dad. Bye, Piper.”

“Bye.” We both said before I ended the call. “How was your call with Charlotte?” I asked as we went back inside the suite.

“It was good. She’s proud of me. So now, let the healing begin.” She smiled.

“I’m proud of you too.” I wrapped my arms around her and pulled her into me. “It took a lot of strength and bravery to do what you did.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t think I could have done it without you there by my side.”

“Nah, you would have been fine.”

“Can I ask you something?” She broke our embrace.

“You can ask me anything.”

“Do you still love me?”

“Yes, Piper. I do, and I always will.”

“Tell me, Gabriel.”

“Are you sure you want me to say it?”

“Yes. I need to hear it.”

“Piper Primrose, I love you.”

She stared into my eyes for a moment before a smile crossed her lips.

“Look at that. I’m still here and not freaking out. Dr. Gabriel Kind, I—I love you too. And if you’ll have me for your girlfriend, I’d be more than happy to take on that role.”

The corners of my mouth curved upward as I brought my hands up and held her face.

“Nothing would make me happier.” I leaned in and kissed her lips.

“But I come with issues that I still need to work on,” she said. “I thought you should know that I have a lot of baggage that I need to unpack.”

“And I’ll be here to help you unpack it. Just so you know, I have a teenage daughter that comes with me.” I smirked. “Is that okay with you?”

“Are you kidding? I already love that kid as if she were my own.”

“Then I guess we’re perfect for each other.” I smiled.

I could feel my phone blowing up in my pocket by all the vibrating that was happening.

“What is that noise?” Piper asked.

“My phone. I’m sure Riley ran and told the family you’re here with me, and they want answers.” I sighed.

“Maybe you should check it and find out.”

“Nah, my family can wait.” I swooped down, picked her up, and carried her into the bedroom. “All I want is you right now.” I laid her down on the bed.



I held her tight as her body wrapped around mine. I finally felt like my life was falling into place, and I had never been happier.

“When are you leaving?” I asked her.

“Why?” She lifted her head and looked at me.

“Because I don’t want you to. Stay with me in Seattle, and we’ll leave together. I know I have those damn conferences, but we’ll have the nights together.”

“I was hoping you’d ask me to stay.” She smiled. “I was planning on it anyway. I could go check out some boutiques and maybe get some ideas, book a lovely massage and facial at the spa downstairs, and do a few other things.”

“Well, don’t go sightseeing without me. The conferences end at four o’clock, so we’ll have some time to sightsee together.”

“Sounds like the perfect plan.” She leaned in and kissed me. “Is that your phone again?”

“Sure sounds like it.” I sighed. “My pants are on the floor on your side. Can you grab my phone for me?”

She reached over the side of the bed, took my phone from my pants pocket, and handed it to me. I had six text messages from Grayson and fifteen messages from our group chat.

“I love you, bro, and I’ll call you when I get a chance.”

After I sent a text to my brother, I responded in our group chat.

“Long story short. Piper and I love each other, and we’re together now. I’ll tell you guys everything when I get back to Los Angeles. Until then, I’m spending time alone with my girlfriend. I know you can all understand that. I love you guys. I’ll see you soon.”

“Thank God.” Simon responded. *“You have no idea how happy we are to hear that. We love you too. Have fun.”*

“I love your family so much,” Piper said.

“They are the best people in the world, and they love you too.” I ran my hand down her cheek. “Just like I do. I’m going to make you happy, Piper. I promise you that.”

“You already have, Gabriel.” She smiled. “I love you too.” Her lips met mine.

CHAPTER 33



Piper

For the next three mornings, roses were delivered to the suite about fifteen minutes after Gabriel left for the conference. He was an amazing man, and I still couldn't wrap my head around how I got so lucky to have him in my life. When I rebooked my flight home, only one first-class seat was available on the same flight as Gabriel's. It was in row four, two rows behind his. I wasn't worried, though, for I knew someone would be kind enough to switch seats with me.

I headed to the mall while Gabriel was attending his conference. A new boutique had just opened up, and I wanted to see what it was all about. After walking through the mall and finding its location, I stepped inside and looked around.

"What are you doing here? I thought you left." I heard a voice from behind.

"Victoria." I smiled. "I would say it's nice to see you again, but I'd just be lying. Don't get your panties in a bunch. I'm leaving Seattle in the morning."

"Good," she scowled. "Do you have any idea what you've done? My children are so angry with their father. They haven't spoken to him since the day you were at my house."

"And I haven't spoken to him in nineteen years, but you don't seem to care about that. You're just as much to blame as he is. Now, get out of my way."

"I better never see you again," she said.

“You don’t have to worry about that because you never will. But make no mistake. I will be keeping tabs on my sisters, and when they turn eighteen, I will be in contact with them, if not sooner, and there’s not a damn thing you can do about it.” I walked out of the store and went back to the hotel.

As soon as the door opened and Gabriel stepped inside the suite, I ran and jumped on him, wrapping my arms around his neck and my legs tightly around his waist.

“Now that’s the kind of greeting I like.” He smiled as he kissed me.

“I’m so happy to be leaving this godforsaken city in the morning,” I said.

“What happened?” He chuckled as he carried me over to the couch and sat down with me still wrapped around him.

“I was at the mall and ran into Victoria.”

“Uh, oh. You didn’t hurt her, did you?” He smirked.

“As badly as I wanted to, no. We exchanged some heated words, and then I left.”

“I’m proud of you. Seeing that it’s our last night here, I thought we could order room service and spend it in bed.”

“I like the way you think, Dr. Kind.” I grinned. “I’d be happy to stay locked in this hotel room all night with you and only you as long as you play the guitar and sing to me naked.

“If it’ll make you happy.” He chuckled.

“Oh, it will definitely make me happy.”

The following morning, after we showered together and got dressed, we headed to the airport.

“I can’t stand the thought of possibly not sitting next to you.” I reached over and stroked the back of his neck.

“I have no doubt in my mind that you will get whoever is in the seat next to me to switch with you.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“I love how much confidence you have in me.” I smiled.

We were two hours early to the airport, so we decided to sit in a restaurant and grab something to eat before heading to our gate. The service was awful and took longer than it should have. By the time Gabriel paid the bill, our plane was already boarding. When we stepped onto the plane, I took note of the little girl, who looked to be about eight years old, sitting in the seat next to Gabriel. The woman across the aisle must have been her mother, and there was no way I could ask her to switch seats with me.

“Shit.” I looked at Gabriel.

“Maybe whoever is sitting in the seat next to you will be willing to switch,” he said as he placed his bag and guitar case in the overhead.

“Maybe.” I pouted as I walked back to my row.

After getting settled in my seat, I looked up at the man standing in the aisle, glaring at me.

“Not you again?” He sighed as he put his bag in the overhead.

“You have got to be kidding me.” I looked up at him. “Listen.” I politely smiled. “My boyfriend is in the second row, window seat. How about doing a little switchy switch.”

“No. I hate the window seat,” he rudely spoke as he sat down.

“I can see this is your natural mood.” I rolled my eyes.

I heard my phone ping, and when I pulled it from my purse, I had a text from Gabriel.

“He’s next to you, isn’t he?”

“He sure is, and grumpy as hell. He hates the window seat and won’t switch.”

“I’m sorry, babe. I love you. Try to be nice to him.”

“I love you too and can’t make any promises.”

If he wouldn’t switch seats with Gabriel voluntarily, then I’d have no choice but to make him want to.

“So, how was your trip to Seattle?” I asked him.

“Fine.” He folded his hands and closed his eyes.

“Just fine? Let me tell you about mine.”

He opened one eye and looked at me. “Lady, I don’t care how your trip was. All I want to do is rest my eyes, so can you please be quiet?”

“Rest your eyes? It’s nine o’clock in the morning. Did you not sleep well last night?”

“I slept fine. Be quiet.”

“But you know I love to talk from the last time we were on a plane together. By the way, my name is Piper.” I extended my hand.

“I don’t care what your name is, lady.”

“Wow. You’re ruder than I thought. Anyway, my dad left me when I was ten years old, and I went to see him for the first time in nineteen years to confront him. He has this nasty woman of a wife and two beautiful twin fourteen-year-old girls who are my half-sisters. It was a shitshow, to say the least. You should have seen the expression on my father’s face when he saw me. His bitchy wife tried to kick me out but—”

“Okay, that’s it! I’ve heard enough.” He stood from his seat and blocked the others who were trying to make their way to their seats throughout the plane. He grabbed his bag from the overhead, and I watched him walk over to where Gabriel sat. Gabriel got up and walked his fine ass over to the seat next to mine.

“What the hell did you do to that man?” Gabriel asked with a smile. “He’s so pissed.”

“I talked him to death. He couldn’t stand it anymore.” I grinned.

“I knew you could do it.” He leaned over and kissed my lips. “By the way, we’re having a big get-together on the beach tonight.”

“Shocker.” I grinned, and Gabriel chuckled.

“When we land, and I drop you off at home, how about packing a bag for the weekend and staying at my house.”

“I will definitely do that, but I’ll meet you at home later. I have to go to the shop and make sure Raj and Tara didn’t burn the place down.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“Okay.” He laughed. “That’ll give me some alone time with Riley. Plus, she’ll want to unpack all the pottery equipment that was delivered.”

Before climbing out of the car, Gabriel and I shared a passionate kiss.

“I’ll see you later, babe.” He smiled.

“See you later, handsome.”

I grabbed my bag from the back seat and went up to my apartment. After changing my clothes, I headed to the shop.

“And she’s back.” Raj smiled as he hugged me. “Look at you. You’re glowing. How’s your handsome boyfriend?”

“Delicious as always.” I smiled. “Where’s Tara?”

“She had to run to the bank. She’ll be back in a few. So, how was Daddy?”

“Pathetic. He can have his little perfect family. But my sisters are so beautiful,” I whined.

“I bet they are if they’re related to you.”

“AH!” I heard Tara’s voice when she walked into the shop. She ran over and hugged me. “I’m so happy you’re back. “Oh, my God. What happened to you? You look amazing!”

“Haven’t I always?” I furrowed my brows.

“Yes, but now you look extra amazing,” she said.

“It’s all that yummy sex she’s having with Dr. Kind,” Raj spoke.

“That too.” I grinned. “Anyway, what happened while I was gone?”

“Nothing. Everything ran smoothly,” Tara said.

“So, you don’t need me here?” I arched my brow.

“What’s going on?” Raj said.

“Ugh, I need to go pay a little visit to my mother, and then I’m spending the weekend at Gabriel’s house.”

“Then go.” Tara picked up my purse and hooked it over my shoulder. “We’re good here. If anything comes up, we’ll call you.”

“Thanks. I love you both.”

“We love you too, darling,” Raj smiled.



I inhaled a deep breath when I stepped inside the Ocean Ridge Treatment Center.

“Hi, Mom.” I smiled when one of the nurses took me out to the garden where she was sitting at a small table.

“Piper. It’s so good to see you.” We hugged.

“How are you?”

“I’m good. They’re really helping me here. For the first time in years, I feel hopeful.”

“That’s good, Mom. I’m happy to hear that.”

“Listen, Piper. There’s something I have to tell you. I can no longer keep it a secret if I want to get better.”

I reached across the table and grabbed both of her hands.

“I already know.”

“How?” Her brows furrowed.

“I flew to Seattle and paid Dad a little visit.”

“What? Piper, why? How did you even know he was there?”

“I had someone find him for me. Mom, I needed closure on what he did to me. You’re not the only one who was affected by his leaving.”

“I’m so sorry. I never should have kept it from you, but I hated him so much and didn’t want him in your life.”

“I know, and if he really wanted me in his life, he would have fought for me. But he didn’t, and that told me everything.”

“How bad was it when you saw him?”

“Let’s just say that I popped the little fairytale world he lives in.” I smiled.

“Well, if I know my daughter, you didn’t hold back.”

“Absolutely not.” I shook my head. “It’s over now, Mom, and I’m never seeing him again. As far as I’m concerned, I don’t have a father floating out there in the world. Listen, Mom. None of this matters anymore. I want to put everything behind us. All I want is for you to get better.”

“So you forgive me?”

“I do forgive you, but you have to promise me that you’re not going to drink anymore once you get out of here. Because if I even suspect you’re drinking again, you’re out of my life. I don’t mean to hurt you, but I’m just being honest.”

“I promise you, Piper, that I won’t touch another drink as long as I live. I know it’s going to be difficult, but I want to get better. Not only for myself but for you too. I’ll have a sponsor, and I’ll be attending AA meetings. I’m committed to this.”

“I know you are.” I gently squeezed her hands.

“So, how is that handsome friend doctor of yours?” she asked.

“Dr. Gabriel Kind and I are in love, and he’s now my boyfriend.” I smiled.

“Oh, Piper. I am so happy to hear that. You deserve a great man in your life.”

“Thanks, Mom. He’s more than just a great man, and I’m deeply in love with him.”

CHAPTER 34



Gabriel

“Dad!” Riley ran into my arms.

“Hey, kiddo.” I hugged her and pressed my lips against the top of her head. “I missed you.”

“I missed you, too. Where’s Piper? I can’t wait to see her.”

“She’s coming over later and spending the weekend at the house. Is that okay?”

“Uh, yeah. I’d be fine with her moving in with us.”

“I appreciate it, but let’s take it one step at a time.” I smiled.

“Welcome home, brother.” Grayson walked over and hugged me.

“Thanks, bro. It’s good to be back.”

“Can I talk to you for a minute?” he asked.

“Yeah, sure.”

“Let’s go in my office.”

I followed behind him. “Riley, take your bag home, and I’ll be there soon. We can open the boxes and look at your stuff.”

“Okay, Dad.”

“What’s going on?” I asked as we stepped into his office, and he shut the door.

He walked over to his safe, opened it, and pulled out a small ring box.

“This.” He flipped the lid open. “I’m going to ask Ava to marry me tonight, and I’m nervous as hell.”

“Wow, Grayson. That’s a gorgeous ring. Congratulations.” I hugged him tightly. “I’m so happy for you. You know how much I love her, and I wouldn’t pick anyone else for you to call your wife.”

“Thanks, bro. What if she says no?”

“She’s not going to, and you know it. Even if she had the thought, the others would stop her. They all love you to death.”

“True.” He grinned.

“So stop worrying. You know how much Ava loves you.”

“I know, and I love her so much. How’s Piper?” He grinned.”

“Piper is perfect, and I’m really happy.”

“Okay. You can say it,” he said.

“Say what?”

“You can tell me how wrong you were when you insisted on how happy you were being a bachelor.”

I chuckled. “Fine. I guess I wasn’t as happy as I thought I was.”

I left Grayson’s house and went home.

“I think this house is haunted,” Riley said.

“Why do you say that?” I frowned.

“Every once in a while, I’ll feel a chill sweep over me. And let’s be honest, we live in California, and it’s a hundred degrees out right now.”

I wouldn’t lie and say I didn’t feel it every now and again because I did.

“Who knows, sweetheart. Let’s get these boxes opened.”

A couple of hours later, there was a knock at the door.

“Who could that be?” I grinned at Riley.

“It’s Piper!” She smiled as she jumped up and ran to the front door. “Piper!” She screamed.

“Riley!” Piper shouted back as she hugged her. “I’m so happy to see you, sweet girl.”

“I’m happy to see you too. Come in.”

I walked over and grabbed Piper’s bag from her hands.

“I’m happy to see you too, beautiful.” I kissed her.

“Not as happy as I am to see you, handsome.”

“Um, is this how it’s always going to be with you two? Because it’s kind of nauseating,” Riley said.

“You just wait, kiddo. You’re going to find yourself in this nauseating situation one day.” Piper winked. “This is what love looks like. Take it all in. Right, Gabriel?”

“You bet. I’ll take your bag upstairs.”

When I came back downstairs, I saw Riley outside with Piper, showing her the almost completed pottery studio.

“Wow, Gabriel. You really are the father of the year.” Piper grinned.

“Do you like it?” I asked as we stood inside it.

“I love it. Riley is going to make some great pieces in here.”

“I can’t wait,” Riley said.

“Welcome back, you two.” Shaun smiled as he stood in the doorway of the studio. “Riley, I have someone out here who wants to meet you.”

The three of us stepped out of the studio and I saw Asher and Everly standing by the pool.

“Asher. Everly. It’s good to see you.” I hugged her and shook Asher’s hand. “What are you two doing here?”

“Shaun and I have some business to go over. We’re only in town for a couple of days.

“You must be Riley.” Everly walked over to her with a smile. “My name is Everly, and I have a message for you from your mom.”

“Dad?” Riley looked at me.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. She has a special gift. The deceased talk to her.”

“That’s so cool.” Riley’s eyes widened. “What’s the message?”

“She’s happy that you found your dad, and she can rest now knowing you’re happy and being well taken care of.”

“She’s been here, hasn’t she?” Riley asked.

“Yes. She’s been watching over you. She told me that when the accident happened, she didn’t go right away, and the only thing she could think about was what would happen to you. She thought about it so much that when she did finally pass, her spirit was stuck here. She couldn’t move on until she knew you were going to be okay. She said she loves you so much and will always be watching over you.”

“Thank you, Everly.” Riley hugged her as tears fell from her eyes.

“You’re welcome, honey.”

“Everly, I’d like you to meet my girlfriend, Piper,” I said.

“It’s nice to meet you, Piper.” She extended her hand.

“Trust me, Everly. The pleasure is all mine. You have an amazing gift.”

“Sometimes, it’s amazing. Other times, it’s annoying.” She smiled. “Anyway, I think you should know that your room screw-up at the hotel wasn’t a coincidence.”

“How do you know about that?” I furrowed my brows.

“Ariana had a hand in making that happen.” Everly smirked. “She’s been watching you too, Gabriel, and she’s

sorry she never told you about Riley. But she's at peace knowing what a good father you are to her."

"Thank you, Everly."

"You're welcome." She placed her hand on my arm. "My work here is done. We'll see you both at the party tonight." She smiled.

"You're coming?" I asked.

"We wouldn't miss a Kind party for anything." Asher grinned.

"Dad, I'm going down to Lily's," Riley said.

"Okay." I hooked my arm around Piper and kissed the side of her head. "Guess what?"

"What?"

"Grayson is proposing to Ava tonight."

"Really?" Piper smiled. "That's wonderful! Is he doing it at the party?"

"Yep. You need to understand that everything we do in this family is a family affair. No one is ever left out."

"Again, I love your family." She smiled. "By the way, I have something to tell you as well."

"What did you do?" I smirked.

"I went and saw my mom."

"How is she?"

"She's doing really good. She came clean about my dad before I had the chance to confront her."

"Are you okay? You weren't too hard on her, were you?"

"Not at all. I told her I forgave her and that we were putting it behind us. What happened in the past is staying in the past, and we're moving forward."

"I'm happy to hear that, babe." I hugged her tight.

"I was thinking that maybe sometime soon, the three of us can go visit her. I would like her to meet Riley."

“Of course. Just let me know when, and we’ll go.”

“I love you, Gabriel.”

“I love you too. Do you think we have time for a quickie?”
I grinned.

“Yep. We sure do.” She grabbed my hand, and we ran up the stairs.

CHAPTER 35



G abriel

We walked down the beach to Sebastian's house, where tables of food were set up, and he was standing at his oversized barbecue, grilling hamburgers and hot dogs.

"Hey." I smiled as I walked over and handed him a beer.

"Thanks, cousin. Welcome home."

"Thank you. What kind of burgers are you grilling?"

"These ones over here are stuffed with feta and gorgonzola. These over here are stuffed with bacon and cheddar, and these are stuffed with jalapenos and cream cheese. These are the plain boring burgers." He smiled.

"You're the man." I patted his back.

"Come here." Simon grabbed and hugged me. "I'm so fucking happy for you and Piper. I knew you wouldn't let us down."

"Shut the fuck up." I laughed.

"I heard Everly paid you a visit," Simon said. "Was she here for you or Riley?"

"Mainly Riley. Ariana was stuck here until she knew Riley was going to be okay. Apparently, Ariana had something to do with Piper's room reservation fiasco at the hotel in Seattle."

"You know." Simon shook his head. "I never believed in any of that shit until my dad died and harassed Everly until we found that stuff pertaining to Shaun hidden under the

floorboard in his closet. And then again after we found out about Christian.”

“Yeah, I remember you telling us about that,” I said.

“It’s good to know that if I die before Emilia, I can stick around and haunt her.” Sebastian smiled.

“I heard that, babe.” Emilia walked over with Noah.

“I’m just saying, sweetheart, that you won’t be able to get rid of me that fast.”

I set my beer down and took Noah from Emilia. “Hey, little man.”

“Look at you, Dad,” Riley walked over. “Having baby fever already?”

“Shut your mouth.” I shot her a look. “I can barely raise you, let alone a baby.”

“Don’t worry, Riley.” Simon hooked his arm around her. “Our Kind sperm are strong, and one of your dads will eventually break through and create a sibling for you.”

“Dude, really?” I cocked my head.

“What? She’s fifteen. Right, kiddo?”

“Yeah, Dad. Relax. I know how babies are made. By the way, I invited one of my friends from school to the party. He just texted me. He’ll be here in five.” She began to walk away, and I immediately stopped her.

“STOP RIGHT THERE! Get back here.”

“What?”

“He?”

“Yeah. His name is Cody, and he’s super hot.”

“How old is this kid?” I asked.

“Sixteen. His parents just bought him a BMW Z4 for his birthday. Don’t worry. As soon as he gets here, you can meet him.” She walked away.

“Oh shit.” Simon patted my shoulder. “I’ll go get my gun ready.”

“Thanks, cousin. I appreciate it.” I ran my hand down my face and looked at Noah as he was smiling at me.

“She’s fifteen,” Sebastian said. “You know she’s interested in boys.”

“I know.” I sighed.

“Don’t worry, though.”

“Why?” I furrowed my brows at him.

“Have you forgotten that we have a Kate?” He grinned.

“Oh yeah. Why doesn’t that make me feel better?” I walked away and heard Sebastian chuckle.

I walked over to Grayson and whispered in his ear. “I might have to call on Kate.”

“Why?” He took Noah from me and held him.

“Because Riley invited some kid named Cody, who is sixteen and just got a BMW Z4, to the party.”

“Oh.” He laughed. “You know she’ll come out if need be.”

“I know. You nervous?”

“Yes. Very nervous.”

“When are you proposing?”

“After dinner. Listen, can you play something soft on the guitar while I’m proposing to her?”

“I got you, bro.” I patted his back.

Emilia walked over and took Noah from Grayson.

“I have to go feed this little guy.” She smiled.

I turned my head and saw Piper standing with Charlotte, Grace, Charleigh, Ava, and Julia, laughing, and having a great time.

“She really fits in with all of us,” Grayson said.

“Yeah. She really does.” I smiled.

Sebastian rang the bell, which meant the burgers and hot dogs were ready.

“Dad, I’ll be right back. Cody just pulled up,” Riley said.

“You got that gun handy?” I glanced at Simon.

He gave me a serious nod.

“We better grill that kid before Riley has a chance to coach his ass like Lily did with Logan.” Grayson laughed.

“No shit.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Piper walked over and grabbed a plate.

“Did Riley tell you that she invited Cody over?”

“Who’s Cody?” Piper asked.

“A sixteen-year-old boy with his own car.”

“It’s okay, babe. Relax. The only thing you can do is be really open with her about boys.”

“You’re in trouble,” Stefan whispered in my ear. “She sounds like Alex. Stand your ground.”

“Ha, like you do.” Simon laughed.

“Shut up, bro.”

I put some food on my plate and took it to the table set up for everyone. Piper followed and sat down next to me.

“Here she comes. Be nice,” Piper said.

I inhaled a deep breath as I saw this boy, who stood about six feet tall with his head shaved, walking toward us.

“No. Oh, hell no,” I whispered to Piper.

“Dad, this is Cody. Cody, this is my dad, Dr. Gabriel Kind.”

“Hey, Dr. Kind.” He extended his hand. “It’s nice to meet you. My mom is a patient of yours.”

“She is?” I shook his hand.

“Yeah. Gina Corelli.”

“You’re Gina’s son?” My heart broke for this kid. “It’s nice to meet you finally, Cody. Go grab a plate and some food.”

“Thanks, Dr. Kind.”

“Come on, Cody.” Riley grabbed hold of his hand.

“What happened here?” Simon asked. “What’s with the nice guy act? He’s preying on your daughter?”

“He has Leukemia,” I said. “His mother is a patient of mine, and she told me about him.”

“Oh shit,” Simon said. “You know, Gabriel, you should really tell me these things before I go off and get my gun to scare these boys.”

“I didn’t know!”

“That poor boy.” Piper placed her hand on my back. “Now, don’t you feel bad for judging because his head is shaved?” She cocked her head.

“Yes, I do.” I sat down and sighed.

“Sorry, we’re late.” Aunt Barb smiled as she walked over. “We were seeing a play downtown, and traffic was horrible getting back.”

“Don’t worry, Mom. We weren’t worried or anything, if that’s what you’re thinking,” Simon said.

“Ha, you’re funny,” Piper said.

“Thank you, Piper.” Simon grinned.

“Don’t encourage him, babe.” I smiled.

After we ate, Grayson ran home to grab Ava’s ring.

“Everyone gather around the bonfire, and we’ll play a little music,” Grayson said when he returned.

I grabbed my guitar and slowly strummed the song, Can’t Help Falling in Love. Grayson took Ava’s hand and stood her up from her seat.

“Ava, I love you more than anything else in this world. You know that, right?”

“Yeah, Grayson. I know. I love you too.”

He pulled the ring box from his pocket, got down on one knee, and flipped open the lid.

“You’re my one and only for life, babe. Ava, will you marry me?”

“Oh, Grayson! Yes! Yes, I’ll marry you.” Tears streamed from her eyes.

“What the fuck?” Jackson asked. “Why was that so short and sweet?”

“He was afraid the others would try to come out while he was proposing,” I said.

“Oh, okay. That’s understandable.”

We all cheered and congratulated them with hugs and kisses.

“Another Kind wedding. I’m so excited.” Aunt Barb beamed with excitement. “One left, Gabriel.” She smirked at me.

“One step at a time, Aunt Barb.”

“Who is the boy with the shaved head with Riley?” she asked.

“He’s a friend from school, and he has Leukemia.”

“Oh, dear. That’s sad.”

“Way to go, Ma. You can’t judge people like that,” Simon said. “Oh, wait. You’re the queen of judgment.” He grinned.

“Shut up, Simon.” She shook her head and walked away.

“You really shouldn’t tell your kids to shut up, Mom,” Simon shouted.

“Maybe you’re not one of my children, Simon.” She turned around and arched her brow at him. “You know how your father was.”

“Why would she say that?” He looked at Sam. “Sam, why would she say that?”

“I don’t know, bro.” He laughed, and we all laughed with him.

“Dad, Cody is going to go home now.” Riley walked over with him.

“Thanks for having me, Dr. Kind. It was nice to meet your family.”

“Thanks for coming, Cody. You take care of yourself.”

“I’m trying.” A small smile crossed his lips as he and Riley walked away.

It was getting late, and the beach was quiet. The girls went inside Sebastian’s house while we still gathered around the bonfire.

“One more beer before we all head home?” Sam asked.

“You bet.” I grinned.

“I did a thing?” Shaun grinned.

“What thing did you do?” Nathan asked.

“You know that house on the other side of the wood posts from Gabriel?”

“Let me guess, bro. You bought it. Shocker.” Simon grinned.

“You bet your ass I did. The owners called me and said they heard I wanted to buy more property on the beach. They asked if I’d be interested in buying their house before they contacted a realtor.”

“So, you’re going to fix it up and Airbnb it?” Stefan asked.

“Yeah. That’s the plan.” Shaun smiled.

CHAPTER 36



ONE MONTH LATER

G abriel

I thrust in and out of her as our lips meshed and our tongues met. Her nails dug into my back as an orgasm tore through her. The euphoric feeling of being inside her was something I craved more than ever. I halted and exploded inside her. Dropping my body on hers, her arms tightened around me as I buried my face into the side of her neck and pressed my lips against her.

Rolling off her, we both rolled on our sides and stared into each other's eyes.

"You are so beautiful." I smiled as I ran my hand down her cheek.

"You're only saying that because I give you great sex." She grinned.

"True, but I still think you're beautiful even when we're not having sex."

"I love you, Dr. Gabriel Kind."

"I love you too. I think you need to start packing up your things." My fingers played with the ends of her hair.

"Why?" Her brows furrowed.

"Because you're moving in with me."

"I am?"

"Yep. I know your lease is up for renewal in a couple of months, and I don't want you to renew it. You're at my house

24/7 as it is. Let's make it official. Move in with me, Piper."

"Nothing would make me happier than to move in with you, Gabriel." She kissed my lips.

"Let's get dressed, go back to my house, and tell Riley. She'll be really excited."

After getting dressed, we hopped on my motorcycle, and I drove home. When we stepped through the door, I called out for Riley. She didn't answer.

"She's probably working in the studio," Piper said.

We walked out the sliding door and to the studio. When I opened the door, Riley was sitting at her pottery wheel sculpting clay.

"Hey, you two." She smiled.

"What are you making?" I asked.

"What does it look like?"

"A vase?" I arched my brow.

"Very good, Dad. I'm actually making it for Piper. I think it'll look good in her apartment."

"Aw, you're so sweet." Piper smiled. "I can't wait until it's finished."

"Riley, we have some news to tell you."

She took her foot off the peddle and turned to us.

"You're pregnant?" she asked Piper.

"Oh, God, no." She laughed.

"I asked Piper to move in with us, so that vase you're making will have to stay here."

"Awesome." Riley grinned. "I would hug you, but my hands are full of clay. I'm happy you're moving in, Piper. When?"

"Today," I said.

"Today?" Piper cocked her head.

“Yep. You’re here now for good. We’ll pack up your apartment this weekend and move your things here.” I wrapped my arm around her. “The sooner, the better.”

My phone pinged, and when I pulled it from my pocket, there was a text from Nathan in our group chat.

“Sofia is in labor! We just got to the hospital.”

“Sofia’s in labor. Riley, get cleaned up so we can head to the hospital.”

We walked into the waiting room, where my family was sitting.

“Any word on how she’s doing?” I asked as I sat down next to my brother.

“Not yet.”

“I asked Piper to move in.” I smiled.

“Awesome, bro.” He hooked his arm around me. “I’m happy for you.”

“This is so exciting,” Aunt Barb walked into the waiting room. “Another Kind child is ready to be born into our family.”

“Can I have everyone’s attention,” Simon said, quieting the room. “Since we’re here waiting and celebrating the arrival of Nathan and Sofia’s baby, Grace and I have some news of our own to share with everyone.”

“We’re having a baby!” Grace exclaimed.

Everyone shouted, and we congratulated both of them.

“Congrats, cousin.” I hugged Simon. “I’m so happy for you and Grace.”

“Thanks, Gabriel. We’re very excited.”

“It’s about time, Simon.” Aunt Barb walked over and hugged him.

“Thanks, Mom.”

“You’ve already proven with Nora that you’re a good father, and this baby will be very lucky to have you, son.”

Nathan walked into the room with a smile on his face.

“Willow Rose Kind is here, and she’s beautiful.”



“*T*hat should be the last of it,” I said as I set down the last of Piper’s boxes.

“Hello, hello.” We heard a British accent as the sliding door opened.

“Hi, Ophelia.” Riley ran over and hugged her.

“Hello, darling. I just came over because I know how overwhelming it is to move in.” She smiled at Piper. “I’m here to help you get organized.”

“You are a Godsend, Ophelia.” Piper grinned.

“Ophelia, my room is kind of a mess,” Riley said.

“Riley.” I furrowed my brows.

“Don’t you worry, darling. I’ll get to it as soon as I’m done helping Piper.” She took Piper upstairs.

Riley looked at me and smiled as I shook my head.

“What? She loves to clean and organize. Let her do her thing, Dad.”

“You take advantage of her, and I don’t like it.” I pointed at her.

“Is it okay if I go out with Cody tonight?”

“Go where?” I narrowed my eyes at her.

“Dinner and a movie.”

“I want you home by ten o’clock.”

“Eleven,” she said. “It’s Saturday, Dad.”

I inhaled a deep breath because I wasn’t handling this very well.

“Piper!” Riley shouted up the stairs.

“What’s wrong?” Piper walked down.

“Cody wants to take me to dinner and to a movie tonight. What time do you think is reasonable for me to be home?”

“I’d say be home at eleven o’clock.”

Riley turned to me with a wide grin on her face.

“Fine. Eleven o’clock sharp. If you’re one minute late, you’re grounded.”

“Whatever, Dad.” She ran up the stairs.

“What time did you tell her?” Piper asked.

“Ten.”

“She’s fifteen, and it’s a weekend. Eleven o’clock is fine, Gabriel.”

“She’s lucky you’re here.” I smirked.

“I’m the lucky one.” She wrapped her arms around me.

CHAPTER 37



G abriel

“Are you stalking your daughter?” Grayson asked as we sat around the bonfire.

“You bet I am.” I stared at my phone. “They just got to the movie theater.”

“She shared her location with you?” Jackson asked.

“Well, not really. Her phone was unlocked the other day, so I grabbed it off the island and turned location sharing on. None of you better tell her either.” I pointed at them.

“She’s not stupid. She’s going to know.” Grayson laughed.

“Doesn’t matter. If she wants to go out on dates, she’s keeping it on.”

“I don’t blame you, cousin. I’ll do the same thing with Lily when she starts going out on dates.”

We drank some beer, talked, and played our guitars. I glanced at my watch, and it was ten forty-five. Grabbing my phone, I looked at it.

“Is she on her way home?” Grayson asked.

I furrowed my brows. “Um, she’s already home.”

“See. You’re worrying for nothing.” Sebastian chuckled. “She’s home fifteen minutes before her curfew.”

“I’ll talk to you guys tomorrow.” I stood up from my chair.

I stepped through the sliding door, and Piper walked down the stairs.

“Is Riley up in her room?” I asked her.

“She isn’t home yet.”

“According to this, she is.” I held up my phone.

“Oh, my God, Gabriel. You’re stalking her?”

“Yep.” I walked over to the front window and saw Cody’s car in the driveway. “Are they kissing?”

Piper walked over and pulled me back.

“Stop it. She’ll see you.”

“I don’t care if she sees me. She shouldn’t be kissing boys!”

“For God’s sake, Gabriel, relax and don’t make a thing of it.”

I heard the car door shut.

“She’s coming,” Piper said as she pulled me to the couch. “Act normal.” She hooked her arm around me and laid her head on my shoulder.

The front door opened, and Riley walked in.

“You can relax, Dad. I saw you in the window.”

“How was your date?” I asked her.

“It was fun. The movie was great. Cody is coming over tomorrow, and we’re hanging out. He has chemo on Monday, and I won’t be able to see him for a while. He gets really sick for a few days after.”

“Okay, sweetheart,” I said.

“Goodnight, you two.” She gave us both a kiss. “I love you, Dad, and I know you’re stalking me.” She started walking up the stairs.

“If you want to keep dating, you better leave it on.”

“I will, at least for now.” She ran up the stairs.

“See what you got yourself into.” I looked at Piper.

“I love what I got myself into.” She kissed my lips.

“Are you all unpacked?” I asked.

“Unpacked and fully organized. Ophelia moved some of your things around. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all.” I kissed her. “Are you ready to go to bed and celebrate your moving in?” I smiled.

“So ready, Dr. Kind.”



Two Months Later

I stood in the suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel with my cousins and stared at my brother.

“I can’t believe you’re getting married today.” I smiled.

“It came fast.” A grin crossed his face. “I usually hate when time flies, but in this case, I’m grateful that it did. I can’t wait to make Ava my wife.”

“I know you can’t, and I couldn’t be happier for you, my brother.” I hugged him.

“One more to go.” Christian grinned while his arm hooked around me. “You are going to marry Piper, right?”

“Yeah. I’m going to marry her. Don’t worry.”

I glanced at my watch. “I have to go. I’ll see you down there.”

I walked out of the room and went down to the suite where Ava and the girls were. Knocking on the door, a bright smile crossed my face when my beautiful girlfriend opened it.

“Damn.” I shook my head as my eyes raked over her. “You look incredible.”

“So do you, handsome.” Piper smiled as she grabbed my hand. “Get in here.”

I walked over to Ava, who stood in the middle of the room in her long, white, strapless gown, holding a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

“You are gorgeous.” I smiled as I took hold of her hand. “My brother isn’t going to know what hit him when he sees you.” I softly kissed her cheek.

“Thank you, Gabriel.” A tender and nervous smile crossed her lips.

“Are you ready?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be.”

“Oh, hey, Dad,” Riley said as she walked out of the bathroom.

I stood there and stared at my fifteen-year-old daughter, who looked like she could be twenty-one, with her hair elegantly pinned up and professionally done makeup. I wouldn’t lie and say a tear didn’t spring to my eye.

“You look so beautiful, Riley.”

“Thanks, Dad.” An innocent smile crossed her lips.

Piper walked over and hooked her arm around my waist.

“You’ll be walking your daughter down the aisle one day to the love of her life.”

“You had to bring that up, didn’t you?” I glanced at her.

“Yep.” She popped her lips and smiled.

All the girls left the suite to take their places.

“Thank you for walking me down the aisle,” Ava spoke.

“You’re welcome. I’m honored to walk you to my brother. There isn’t any other woman in this world who is more perfect for him. You make him so happy, Ava, and I love you for that. Are you ready to become Mrs. Grayson Kind?” I smiled as I held out my arm.

“I’m ready.”

We walked out of the suite and took our place behind the girls at the garden’s entrance. Once the music began playing,

the girls walked down the aisle one by one as we stood there and watched them. Georgia was the last to walk down, and when she made it to the end, she picked her violin up from the chair and began playing the wedding march.

“It’s time.” I smiled as I placed my hand on hers while it was wrapped around my arm.

Everyone stood from their seats as they watched us. My eyes focused on my brother as he stood there with a smile on his face. When we reached the beautifully decorated archway, I placed Ava’s hand in Grayson’s and noted the tears in his eyes. I took my place next to him and looked across at my daughter and Piper, who stood there with beautiful smiles on their faces.

“I now pronounce you husband and wife,” the minister spoke. “You may kiss your bride, Grayson.”

Everyone shouted and clapped as they shared their first kiss as husband and wife. My brother was now a married man, and I knew one day I’d be standing right where he was kissing my beautiful bride. Was I getting wedding fever? Yeah, I was. I loved Piper, and I’d ask her to marry me when the time was right. When I looked at her, all I saw was a beautiful future with her, Riley, and a couple of other children that our love for each other created.

“What a beautiful ceremony.” Piper smiled.

“It was beautiful.” I smiled as I kissed her lips.

After taking numerous pictures, we headed to the Crystal Ballroom to celebrate.

“Thank God.” Conner smiled as he took a bite of the cake on his plate. “God, I missed Gwen’s cakes.”

“Yeah, me too,” Simon said. “So much better than that crap my mother had at her wedding.”

“Promise me that when you decide to get married, you’ll have Gwen make the cake.” Conner pointed his fork at me, and I chuckled.

Another slow song played after Grayson and Ava danced to their wedding song. I walked over to Piper and whispered in her ear.

“I love you, and we’ll dance after. I need to dance with my daughter.”

“That is one reason why I’m so in love with you, Dr. Kind.” She smiled.

I walked over to Riley and grabbed her hand.

“Come dance with your dad.” I led her to the dancefloor. “Are you having a good time?”

“The best time ever. Are you going to marry Piper?”

“Yes, I am. When the time is right.” I smiled. “Why?”

“Because she’s perfect for you, and I don’t want anyone else for a stepmom. Promise me you won’t screw it up, Dad.”

“I promise you, Riley.” I hugged her.

“I need to start driver’s training. I’m ready to learn how to drive.”

“Shh. Don’t ruin this moment. We can talk about it in a few years.”

“Dad!”

The corners of my mouth curved upward as I spun her around.

We all danced the night away, and as soon as another slow song played, I grabbed Piper and pulled her into me.

“I love you, Piper Primrose, and I only keep thinking about taking you up to our suite and showing you how much.”

“Ah, I’ve been thinking the same thing.” She leaned in and started whispering in my ear.

I looked at her and pulled her closer as my cock began to rise.

“Now, we need to keep dancing until it goes down. Thanks a lot.”

She threw her head back and laughed. “You started it.”

Grayson walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Ava and I are going to head out now. Shaun’s plane is waiting for us.”

The entire family walked the two of them out to the front of the hotel, where a limo was waiting for them.

“I love you, bro.” I hugged him. “Have fun in Greece.”

“I love you too. Thanks for everything, brother.”

I turned to Ava and hugged her tight. “Welcome to the family.” I kissed her cheek. “Have fun on your honeymoon, and maybe give me a niece or nephew while you’re at it.”

She laughed as she placed her hand on my cheek. “You never know what’ll happen. Thanks, Gabriel.”

After everyone hugged and said goodbye to them, they climbed into the limo, and we watched it slowly pull away from the hotel.

“Dad, Lily and I are going up to our room now.”

“Okay. You better stay out of that mini bar.” I pointed at her.

“Don’t you trust me?” She winked and walked away.

“Don’t worry. I had the hotel take all the alcohol out this morning,” Piper said.

“You did?” I cocked my head.

“Yep. I was fifteen once.” She grinned.

“God, I love you.” I wrapped my arms around her.

“Then you better get me up to our suite and show me.”

I picked her up and threw her over my shoulder.

“What are you doing?” She laughed.

“Making your dreams come true, babe. By the time I’m done with you, you’ll be seeing stars.”

CHAPTER 38



ONE MONTH LATER

G abriel

It was toward the end of the day, and I was talking to Piper on the phone in my office when the door opened, and Kelsey popped her head in.

“Dr. Kind, there’s someone here to see you,” she said.

“Hold on, babe,” I said to Piper. “Who is it?”

“Some man. He said it was important that he speak with you.”

“Is he a patient or a drug rep?”

“No. I tried to tell him you were busy, but he said he’d wait until you had a free moment.”

“Send him in. Babe, I have to go. I’ll see you later. I love you.”

“I love you too, Gabriel.”

I set my phone down. The door opened, and a young man who appeared to be in his early thirties with short brown hair and blue eyes stepped inside.

“Thank you, Kelsey.” I stood up from my seat. “How can I help you?”

“Dr. Gabriel Kind?” he said.

“Yes, and you are?”

“I don’t quite know how to say this. My name is Carter Kind, and I’m your brother.”

“Excuse me?” My brows furrowed. “The only brother I have is my twin—”

“Grayson. I know. I’m sorry to show up here and spring it on you like this. Do you mind if I sit down?”

He didn’t look well, and I wasn’t sure what the fuck was going on.

“Not at all.” I gestured to the seat across from my desk. “I don’t know what’s happening here, and I have no idea why you think I’m your brother.”

“I know you’re in shock. I was too when I found out. My father, our father, Ian Kind, got my mother pregnant at the same time your mother was pregnant with you and Grayson.”

“I’m sorry, but this is ridiculous, and I don’t have time for this. I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing, but you need to leave.”

“I need you to listen to me.” He jammed his finger on my desk. “I need your help.”

I leaned back in my chair and stared at him. The resemblance to Grayson and me was uncanny. Maybe he was telling the truth, and I just needed to calm down and listen to him.

“If it’s money you want—”

“I don’t want your money. I have enough of my own. I’m sick, Gabriel.”

“Sick, how?” I furrowed my brows.

“I have a disease called aplastic anemia.”

“That’s very rare,” I said. “And the only cure for that is a bone marrow transplant.”

“Exactly. My best chance for a match is from a sibling. I know this sounds crazy, and I only found out that you and Grayson existed a month ago. I grew up thinking I was an only child until I got sick, and my aunt had no choice but to tell me that I had two siblings. I could die, Gabriel, and I don’t want to die.”

“Okay. This is a conversation the three of us need to have. I know Grayson’s shift at the hospital ends at five o’clock. Come to my house at six, and we’ll sit down and talk.”

“Really? You believe me?”

“I don’t know, Carter, but what reason do you have to lie? Where are you from?”

“North Carolina.”

“Who is your doctor?”

“Her name is Dr. Anna Chung. She’s a hematologist at Duke University Hospital.”

“I’ll give her a call and get a copy of your medical records sent over, but I need you to fill this out first.” I reached into my file cabinet and pulled out a medical records release form. “What’s your phone number?” I picked up my phone from my desk.

I sent him a text message with my address. “That’s my address. I’ll see you at six.”

“Thank you, Gabriel.” He signed the form, stood up from his seat, and extended his hand.

“You’re welcome.” I shook his hand. “You have to understand what a shock this is.”

“Trust me. I do.” A small smile formed on his lips as he walked out of my office.

I held my phone in my hand and stared at it before texting Grayson. I couldn’t tell him about Carter over the phone. It had to be done in person.

“Hey, can you come over right after work?”

“Sure. What’s up?”

“I need to talk to you about something.”

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah. I just need to talk to you.”

“I’ll be over as soon as I get home.”

“Thanks, bro.”

I made a call to Dr. Anna Chung and explained to her who I was and that Carter was here to see me. I faxed the release form to her, and she sent a copy of his medical records within the hour. She wasn't happy that he flew to Los Angeles.

When I got home, I went to the pottery studio and found Riley there making a new piece.

“Hey, Dad.”

“Hi, sweetheart.” I walked over and kissed the top of her head. “How was your day?”

“Good. How was yours?”

“Interesting.” I sighed. “Listen, as soon as Piper gets home, I need the two of you to go out to dinner.”

“Without you?” Her brows furrowed.

“Yeah. Someone is coming to the house—”

“There's my sexy man and beautiful girl.” Piper wrapped her arms around me from behind.

“Hey, babe.”

“Dad was just telling me that we need to go to dinner without him,” Riley said.

“Why?” Piper asked.

“He said someone is coming to the house.”

“What's going on, Gabriel?” Piper asked.

“Riley, get cleaned up and come into the house.” I glanced at my watch. “He'll be here in forty-five minutes.”

“Who?” Piper asked.

“A man who claims that he's my brother.” I walked out of the studio.

“WHAT!” Riley and Piper said together.

“Gabriel, what the hell is going on?” Piper asked as she followed me into the house.

“This guy, named Carter Kind, came to my office today and told me that he’s my and Grayson’s brother. He’s sick and needs our help.”

“And you believe him?” Piper asked.

“Yeah, sort of. I know he’s not lying about being sick. I had a copy of his medical records sent over from his doctor in North Carolina.”

“What’s wrong with him, Dad?” Riley asked.

“He has a rare disease called aplastic anemia.”

“What’s that?” Piper asked. “I’ve never heard of it.”

“It’s a disease where your white blood cells attack your bone marrow. A bone marrow transplant is the only cure.”

“And a sibling is the best match?” Piper asked.

“Yes. He wouldn’t have risked his immune system by coming here if he weren’t telling the truth. I asked Grayson to come over right from the hospital.”

“Did you tell him about your potential brother?” Riley asked.

“No. Not yet.”

“Gee, Dad. First me, and now Carter. What are the chances you’d find out you had a daughter and a brother you never knew about in a matter of months?” She laughed. “This family is like a freaking movie.”

“Riley.” Piper cocked her head at her.

“I’m sorry, Dad.” Riley wrapped her arms around me. “I love you, and everything will work out.”

“Thanks, sweetheart. I love you too.” I hugged her tight.

“And I love you.” Piper smiled and leaned in for a kiss.

“I love you, babe.” I wrapped my arms around her. “Riley’s right. This family is a freaking movie.”

“But nothing is as important as family, right?” A beautiful smile graced her lips. “If this man needs your help, then I

know you'll do the right thing. Come on, Riley. Let's go to Four Kinds for dinner. Alex is bartending tonight."

"Cool. Can we sit up at the bar and eat?"

"Sure." Piper smiled as she grabbed her purse. "How long do you need us gone for?"

"I don't know. Just come back home when you're finished," I said as I walked them to Piper's car.

CHAPTER 39



Gabriel

“It was six o’clock when the doorbell rang, and Grayson still wasn’t here yet. He texted me fifteen minutes ago and said he got held up but was on his way.

Opening the door, Carter stood there with his hands tucked into his pants pockets.

“Hi. Come on in.” I gestured.

“Wow. You have a great house, Gabriel.”

“Thank you. Can I get you something to drink?”

“Scotch, if you have any.”

“Are you kidding?” I grinned. “I have plenty of it.” I walked over to the bar. “Grayson is on his way. He got held up at the hospital.”

“I’m not surprised being a trauma surgeon.” He walked over to the sliding door and stared out. “What’s that?” He pointed to the pottery shed as I handed him his drink.

“That’s my daughter’s pottery studio.”

“You have a daughter?” His brows furrowed.

“Yeah. Her name is Riley, and she’s fifteen years old.”

“Fifteen?” His brows raised.

“Yeah.” I breathed out a laugh. “I’ve only known about her for months since she showed up at the medical center and told me I was her father.”

“Kind of like I just did.” He brought the glass to his lips.

“Yeah.” I smiled. “Let’s sit down and wait for Grayson.”

The sliding door opened, and Ella walked in. “Hi, Gabriel. Is Riley here?” she asked as she stopped and stared at Carter.

“No, sweetheart. She and Piper went out to dinner.”

“Who are you?” She walked over to Carter.

“My name is Carter. Who might you be?” His lips formed a smile.

“Ella Kind. I’m Dr. Nathan Kind’s daughter.” She cocked her head as she brought her hands up and placed them on each side of his face. “You’re a Kind,” she said, and Carter looked at me.

“How do you know that, Ella?” I asked.

“I can tell by his eyes. Just like I knew my Uncle Christian was my dad’s brother, and I knew you and Grayson were related to us before any of you did. I’m never wrong.”

“You’re a very smart girl, Ella Kind.” Carter smiled.

“I can tell by looking at you that you’re not well. What’s wrong?”

Carter looked at me.

“Our little Ella is a genius,” I said. “A literal genius. She’s already studying to be a doctor.”

“Is that so?” Carter asked.

“Yeah. So, what’s wrong with you?”

“Well, I have a rare disease called aplastic anemia.”

“Oh.” Her little brows furrowed. “That’s not good. Only two out of one million people are diagnosed yearly with that.”

“You’re right. I guess I wasn’t so lucky.”

“I’m sorry, Carter. The only cure for that is a bone marrow transplant. Is that why you’re here?”

“How do you know so much?” he asked.

“I’m a genius.” She smiled.

“Ella, we—”

“I know, Gabriel. You adults need to talk. I’ll go now.”

“Do me a favor, and please don’t mention this to anyone in the family yet.”

“I won’t. I’ll let you tell the family that you and Grayson have another brother. Welcome to the family, Carter.” She wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Thanks, little one. I appreciate it.”

Just as Ella left, Grayson walked in.

“Hey.” His brows furrowed when he saw us sitting in the living room. “What’s going on?”

“Carter, this is Dr. Grayson Kind. Grayson, this is Carter —” I paused. “Kind.”

“Kind?” Grayson extended his hand to Carter. “Are you a long lost relative?” He smiled.

“He says he’s our brother.”

“Excuse me? Grayson’s brows arched. “What did you just say?”

“Sit down, bro,” I said to Grayson. “That’s why I needed you to come right over. Carter, why don’t you tell us exactly what you know.”

“Well, when I was first diagnosed with aplastic anemia—”

“Wait, a second. You have aplastic anemia?” Grayson asked.

“Unfortunately, I do. My mother was a waitress at a restaurant in Hawaii when she was younger. She attended university there on a scholarship and was working part-time for extra money. Our dad walked in one day, and they got to talking, and he asked her out. They dated on and off for about three months.”

“Did she know he was a drug addict?” I asked.

“She knew, but she said he was an amazing man when he wasn’t using, and he promised that he’d stop and get clean for her. That was the one thing about her that made her so special. She always tried to help people, even when they didn’t want it or deserved it.”

“Was?” Grayson asked.

“She passed away three years ago from breast cancer.”

“I’m sorry,” I spoke.

“So am I,” Grayson said.

“Me too.” He looked down. “She was a wonderful person and a great mother, even though she lied to me all these years.”

“We can relate to that.” I sighed. “Sorry. Go on with your story.”

“A friend of hers that she worked with at the restaurant told her that our father got a woman pregnant, and she was having twins, and she should stay away from him because he was bad news and didn’t have any plans on sticking around for her or the kids.”

“How did this woman know that?” Grayson asked.

“Apparently, she was your mother’s friend.”

“So, my mother was furious and went to where he was staying at that time to confront him. When she arrived, he was as high as a kite with a syringe next to him. At that moment, she knew she had to stop seeing him. So, she told him it was over and never to contact her again. A couple of weeks later, when she went to North Carolina to visit her best friend, she found out she was pregnant with me. The last thing she wanted to do was go back to Hawaii and tell him, so she never went back. She quit college, moved in with my Auntie Fran, and she helped her out until she could find a job to support us.”

“I don’t understand,” I said. “If she told you all of that, why didn’t you come and try to find us sooner?”

“That’s the problem. As I grew older, she told me that my father died in a car accident right before I was born. The

information I gave you, was what my Auntie Fran told me. My mother's dying wish was that I never found out the truth because she didn't want me to go looking for my father. But Fran had no choice but to tell me after my diagnosis because she knew I had two siblings out there."

"If your mother didn't want you to know the truth, why would she give his last name?" Grayson asked.

"Because her last name is Carter." He breathed out a laugh. "She told me that she always had a dream as a child that one day she'd marry her prince and have a son named Carter. She loved the name for a boy but didn't have to worry about the last name being the same. So, she made the decision to fulfill part of her dream and named me Carter, with the last name of Kind, after my father. Excuse me, our father. I hired a private investigator to find him, and that's how I found you. I had no idea that he actually passed away."

"Wow." Grayson placed his hands on his head. "This is incredible."

"I think I need another scotch," I said as I walked over to Carter. "Refill?"

"Please," he said.

"Make mine a double," Grayson said.

"We're all getting doubles." I grinned.

"So, Carter Kind, tell us what you do for a living," Grayson said.

"I own one of the largest consulting firms in North Carolina. I also own several real estate properties and companies."

"How did you get into all that?" I asked as I handed him his drink.

"I started selling real estate on the side while I attended college and then got into consulting." He smiled.

"Our father was a real estate mogul," I said.

“I know. I read up on him when I found out that he didn’t die right before I was born. I guess you can say I inherited his talent.”

“Perhaps you did. Let’s get down to the other reason why you’re here besides wanting to meet us. You need us to test our bone marrow, don’t you?” Grayson asked.

“Yeah.” Carter looked down. “I wish I would have known about the two of you sooner. This wouldn’t be so awkward. I know it’s a lot to take in. I’m still trying to take it all in myself along with dealing with this debilitating disease.”

“You do realize that we’re only half-siblings, so the odds of one of us being a match is very low.”

“I know that, but I have to try.”

The sliding door opened, and Aunt Barb walked in.

“Hello, I just—oh.” She stopped, and it looked like she’d seen a ghost.

“Aunt Barb?” I said as I walked over to her. “Are you okay?”

“I’m sorry.” She stared at Carter. “You look just like someone I used to know when he was younger.”

“Aunt Barb, this is Carter Kind, our brother.”

“Say that again, Gabriel? I don’t think I heard you correctly.”

“You heard him just fine, Aunt Barb,” Grayson said.

Carter stood up. When Aunt Barb walked over to him, she placed her hands on his face.

“I don’t know how this is possible, but you are the spitting image of your father. I knew Grayson and Gabriel were, but my God. Where did you come from?”

“Um, North Carolina,” he replied. “My mother got pregnant with me at the same time their mother was pregnant with them.”

“Of course, she did. That seemed to be the Kind way back in the day.” She sighed, referring to Shaun’s mother and Uncle Henry. “All I can say is thank goodness I wasn’t involved with this one. Simon cannot say a word to me when he finds out.”

“Carter is sick, Aunt Barb, and needs a bone marrow transplant. He’s asking that Gabriel and I get tested to see if one of us is a match,” Grayson spoke.

“Well, of course, you will get tested. This is your brother, your family.”

“We know that, Aunt Barb.” I sighed. “We never said we wouldn’t. We just discovered all of this two hours ago. We’re still trying to digest it all.”

“It was nice to meet you, Barb, but I should get going. I’m really tired.”

“Which hotel are you staying at?” I asked.

“I don’t know yet. I came right from the airport to your medical practice. There are thousands of hotels in Los Angeles, I’ll find one.” He smiled.

“Nonsense. You’ll stay at my house.” Aunt Barb smiled.

“If you’ll excuse me. Can I use your bathroom?” Carter asked.

“Down the hall, first door on the left,” I said.

“Thanks.”

“Bro, we can’t let him stay with her,” Grayson whispered in my ear.

“What was that, Grayson?” Aunt Barb said.

“Uh, nothing. I was just saying I would invite him to stay with me, but it might be too much with Ava and the others since he just met us. You know Ophelia.” He smiled. “Always wants to make an impression.”

“I appreciate you asking him to stay with you, Aunt Barb, but we’re his brothers, and he’ll stay here with us in the guestroom.”

“Are you sure? I don’t mind.”

“I’m positive.”

Carter walked back into the living room.

“You’re going to stay with me,” I said to him.

“I appreciate all of you, but I can’t do—”

“You can and you will. You’re family. Besides, if something should happen while you’re here, we have a beach full of doctors.”

“I really appreciate that, Gabriel, but—”

“Just stop, bro.” I smiled. “We aren’t going to let our brother, who happens to be ill, stay alone in a hotel. Besides, we have a lot of getting to know each other, and you need to meet the rest of your family. We’re all here on the beach.”

“Yeah. Don’t argue with us.” Grayson patted his back.

“Are your bags in the car?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“I’ll go grab them,” Grayson said.

When Gabriel came back inside with Carter’s bags, Piper and Riley followed.

“Hi, babe. Hi, sweetheart. Come here.” I hooked my arms around them. “Carter, I’d like you to meet my girlfriend, Piper, and my daughter, Riley. This is my and Grayson’s brother, Carter Kind.”

“Oh my gosh, it’s so nice to meet you.” Piper smiled as she hugged him.

“Uncle Carter.” Riley nodded. “I like it.” She smiled as she hugged him. “Welcome to this crazy but cool family.”

“Thanks, Riley. It’s nice to meet both of you.” He chuckled.

“Carter is going to be staying with us for a while,” I said.

“Sounds good to me.” Piper grinned.

“Cool,” Riley said. “Come with me, and I’ll show you my pottery studio.” She grabbed his hand.

“I take it your talk went well?” Piper smiled as she wrapped her arms around my neck.

“Yeah. It went well.” I kissed her lips.

“I have to get home and tell Ava what’s going on. I’ll talk to you later,” Grayson said. “Bye, Aunt Barb.”

“Bye, darling.” She smiled. “I better get home to Curtis. I still can’t believe this.”

“Either can I, Aunt Barb.”

After she and Grayson left, I held Piper in my arms.

“I better go change the sheets in the guestroom,” she said.

“Why? Nobody’s been in that bed since Riley.”

“You’re such a guy.” She rolled her eyes and went upstairs.

CHAPTER 40



Gabriel

Carter went upstairs to lie down. He looked exhausted, and after seeing his latest test results, I wasn't sure how he was even walking around. Grayson stepped through the sliding door and asked if I was ready to join our cousins down at the beach.

"I'm coming." I opened the refrigerator and grabbed a couple of beers.

"Where's Carter?"

"He's upstairs resting."

"He can meet everyone tomorrow," Grayson said.

We walked down to the beach and sat down.

"What's going on?" Sam asked. "What's with the family meeting?"

I twisted off the cap to my beer and tipped the bottle to my lips.

"Grayson and I have some news to tell you," I said. "It's something that affects this whole family."

"Ah, shit. What is it?" Simon sighed. "You better not tell us you have a long-lost sibling or another kid."

I looked over at Grayson.

"Gabriel? Grayson?" Shaun furrowed his brows.

"It seems we have a brother," Grayson said.

“Yeah, right.” He chuckled. “Fuck you both.”

“We’re serious, Simon,” I said.

“What? How?” Shaun asked.

“It’s kind of like the situation you had with your father. Our father got two women pregnant at the same time.”

“What the fuck?” Simon said. “Who is this guy and where is he?”

“His name is Carter Kind, and he’s resting in my guestroom. He’ll be staying with us while he’s here.”

“Do you know what you’re doing?” Simon’s brow arched. “This guy can be a con or something. He just shows up out of the clear blue, and you welcome him with open arms? Have you learned nothing since you’ve met me?”

“He just recently found out about us because he’s very ill, and he needs a bone marrow transplant. Without it, he’ll die.”

“Jesus Christ,” Sebastian said.

“What’s wrong with him?” Jackson asked.

“He has aplastic anemia,” Grayson said.

“Oh shit,” Christian spoke. “If that goes untreated, it could affect his heart in a bad way.”

“His name is Carter?” Conner asked.

“Yeah. He’s a nice guy, and Grayson and I are going to get tested tomorrow. I just pray one of us is a match.”

“You know the odds of being a match are very low because you’re a half-sibling, right?” Christian asked.

“Yeah, we know.” I sighed.

Ella walked over and whispered in my ear. I looked at her with a smile.

“Yes. We just told them.”

“You knew about this, young lady?” Nathan cocked his head.

“Ella, I thought we were tight?” Conner said.

“Sorry, Dad. Sorry, Uncle Conner. But I promised Gabriel that I would keep quiet until he told you. So, now that I kept quiet, I want in,” Ella said.

“In on what, sweetheart?” I furrowed my brows.

“The whole process. Whoever is a match, I want to watch the extraction of the bone marrow.”

“If either of you are a match, I can do the procedure,” Conner said.

“How are you even one hundred percent sure this guy is your brother?” Simon asked.

“We aren’t yet, but your mother believes it,” I said.

“My mother? She knows about him?”

“She walked into my house earlier, and when she looked at him, it was as if she saw a ghost. She said he’s the spitting image of our father when he was younger.”

“So, she just found out about him? She knew nothing about this previously?” Simon asked.

“No.” Grayson chuckled. “She had no idea that he existed.”

“Simon, Carter is Grayson and Gabriel’s brother. I knew it the moment I saw him, and I’m never wrong.” Ella smiled. “I think I’ve proven that.”

“You’re right, kiddo.” Simon grinned. “If you say he is, then he is.” He winked at her.

“Is that him?” Shaun gestured with his head.

I turned around and saw Riley and Carter walking toward us.

“Yeah, that’s him.”

“Dad, Uncle Carter wants to meet everyone,” Riley said.

“Well, you don’t need to convince me anymore,” Simon said. “He looks just like the two of you. Goddamn our fathers.” He shook his head.



Grayson and I found out we were both a match for Carter and that he was definitely our brother. We weren't the perfect match since he was our half-brother, but a good enough match to donate. After further testing, Carter's doctor decided that I should be the one to donate. He was already back in North Carolina and in the hospital getting prepped for the transplant.

It took a few days for me to recover, but it was well spent with Piper and my daughter.

"I'll miss you." I hugged Piper tightly.

"I'll miss you too." She smiled as she broke our embrace, and our lips met.

"Bye, Dad. Be safe." Riley hugged me. "Tell Uncle Carter good luck."

"Thanks, sweetheart. I will. Be good for Piper while I'm gone."

"You act like I'm a child."

"You are." I kissed her forehead and grabbed my bag.

Walking out the front door, the entire family was waiting for Grayson and me. After hugging them and saying goodbye, Grayson and I climbed into the car waiting for us and headed to Shaun's plane.

"I'm going to ask Piper to marry me when we get back." I glanced at Grayson as the plane took off.

"You are?"

"Yep. If there's one thing this whole thing has taught me, it's that life's too short. I love that woman more than life and want her to be my wife." I smiled.

"I'm proud of you, bro." He hooked his arm around me. "Have you talked to Riley about it?"

“Yeah. I did yesterday, and she gave her full blessing. Piper’s birthday is next week, and that’s when I want to propose, so I have to think of something special.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll all help you with that,” he said. “Our village will come together and make it a moment neither of you will ever forget.”

CHAPTER 41



Gabriel

Carter's transplant went well, and after spending a few days with him at the hospital, it was time for us to head back home. Not only were we there with him, but the entire family was via Facetime every day. He was our brother, the newest member of the Kind family, and we all welcomed him with open arms. After we landed, my brother and I stopped at the jeweler to look at engagement rings.

"Do you know her ring size?" Grayson asked.

"I do." I grinned. "Riley found out for me."

"And that didn't make Piper suspicious?"

"No. Riley tried on the ring that Piper wears on her right hand, and when it was too big on her, she asked what size it was."

"Ah, smart girl." He smiled.

It didn't take long for me to find the perfect diamond ring for her. The moment I saw it, I knew it belonged on her finger. Her birthday was tomorrow, and all of my plans were in motion thanks to the help of my family.



"Happy birthday, babe." I leaned down and kissed her lips.

“Thank you, my love. You still haven’t told me what you have planned for us today.”

“I wanted it to be a surprise, but if you must know, we’re spending the day alone on the yacht, where we’ll make love, jet ski, swim, and anything else you want to do. Then, when we return, we’ll have dinner with Riley. Your birthday party with the family is tomorrow. I wanted you all to myself today.” I winked.

“You are the best boyfriend ever, Dr. Kind. I can’t wait to spend the day alone with you.”

“Me either, babe.”

We got up, dressed, and headed to the marina while my family stayed back and got everything prepped for tonight, making sure it was as special as I wanted it to be.

As promised, we made love on the boat, did some jet skiing, swam in the ocean, had a few drinks, and danced the day away.

“This was the best birthday ever.” Piper smiled as I held her in my arms, and we swayed back and forth on the deck.

“Good. That’s exactly how I wanted it to be. I love you, and all I want is to make you happy.” My lips met hers.

“Oh, you do. You make me incredibly happy, Gabriel.”

“And you make me incredibly happy, Piper. We should start heading back now.”

“Do we have to?” A pout crossed her lips.

“Yes. I have your present waiting for you at home.”

“What did you get me?” she asked with a beautiful smile.

“You’ll find out when we get home.” I kissed the tip of her nose.

When we arrived home, we went upstairs to change. When Piper walked into the bedroom, she saw the dress I had bought for her hanging on the closet door.

“What’s this?” She grinned as she walked over and looked at it.

“That’s the dress you’ll wear to dinner tonight.”

“You bought this? All by yourself?”

“I sure did. Do you like it?”

“I love it, Gabriel. Isn’t it kind of fancy? Where are you taking me to dinner?”

“That’s a surprise. Hurry up and get changed.”

“What about Riley? Where is she? She’s coming to dinner with us,” she said.

“I’ll text her. She’s probably down at Lily’s. Get dressed.” I kissed her forehead.

After changing into a pair of dress pants and a dressy button-down shirt, I walked back into the bedroom and saw Piper in the dress I’d bought her.

“Damn. You’re gorgeous.” I smiled.

“Thank you. You’re looking way too sexy. Maybe we can skip dinner and hit the sheets.” She grinned.

“We have plenty of time for that after dinner.” I smiled.

“Did you get a hold of Riley?”

“Yeah. She’s getting ready at Lily’s.”

“Why?” Piper’s brows furrowed.

“She’s a teenager. Isn’t that what they do?” I smirked.

Walking over to my nightstand, I opened the drawer and pulled out a blue velvet box.

“What’s that?” Piper smiled.

“Your birthday gift.” I handed her the box. “I hope you like it.”

She lifted the lid and stared at the open-heart pendant encased in diamonds.

“Oh, Gabriel. This is beautiful.” Tears filled her eyes as she looked up at me. “I love it so much. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, babe. Happy birthday.” I kissed her. “Let me put it on you.”

I took the pendant from the box and clasped it around her neck.

“Now you’ll have my heart with you everywhere you go. I love you, Piper.”

“I love you too, Gabriel.” She hugged me.

I glanced at my watch. “We better get going.”

“What about Riley?” she asked.

“We’ll pick her up on the way.”

I grabbed her hand, took her downstairs, and out the sliding door.

“Why are we going this way? We can pick Riley up in the car.”

“Shush, babe, and just follow my lead.”

“What is all that? What is going on, Gabriel?” she asked as she saw the elegantly decorated table by the water.

“This is where we’ll be having dinner tonight.” I smiled.

“What? What about Riley?”

“I’m here.” She smiled. “Happy birthday, Piper.” She hugged her.

“Thank you, sweetheart.”

“I decided not to have dinner with you. I hope you’re not mad,” Riley said.

“Why not?” Piper asked.

“Well, Cody is coming over. I’m really sorry, Piper.”

“Don’t be.” She smiled. “I get it. I’d dump plans with you for this handsome guy right here.” She winked.

“You are so cool.” Riley hugged her again. “I’ll see you two later.”

“Did you set all of this up?” Piper asked as she reached across the table and grabbed my hand.

“You bet I did.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “I thought having dinner by the water would be better than sitting in a crowded restaurant.”

Sebastian walked over with two glasses of champagne.

“Dinner will be served soon.” He smiled. “Happy birthday, Piper.” He leaned over and kissed her cheek.

“Thank you, Sebastian.”

“How about a little soft dinner music.” Grayson smiled as he walked over with his guitar and softly started strumming.

“Here’s to you, babe.” I picked up my glass and held it up. “Happy birthday.”

Piper picked up her glass, and when she went to raise it, she stared at the ring sitting at the bottom.

“Gabriel?” Tears filled her eyes when she looked at me.

With a smile, I took the glass from her hand, reached in, pulled out the ring, and dried it off with the white cloth napkin. Getting up from my seat, I got down on one knee and took hold of her left hand.

“Piper Primrose, I love you more than life itself. For years, I insisted I was happy being single and living the bachelor life, but I was wrong. I never knew what happiness was until you came into my life, and I can’t imagine my world without you in it. I love you so damn much, and I want nothing more than to marry you and make you my wife. Will you marry me, Piper?”

“Oh, my God, Gabriel!” Her hand shook. “Yes. Oh, my God, yes, I’ll marry you!”

I slipped the four-carat diamond on her finger, stood her up, and swung her around.

“You have made me the happiest man alive, babe.” I kissed her.

Our entire family walked down the beach, clapping, shouting, and whistling as they came to congratulate us. Riley ran over and hugged Piper.

“You knew about this, didn’t you?” Piper asked her.

“Of course I did. I love you, Piper, and I wouldn’t want anyone else for a stepmother. I know my mom would have loved you too.”

“Aw, thank you, Riley. I love you so much.” She hugged her tight.

“Can we eat now? I’m starving,” Riley said.

“I thought Cody was coming over,” Piper spoke.

“Nah, that was just a lie so my dad could propose privately.” She smiled as she sat down across from us.

“We’re going to leave the three of you alone to celebrate,” Jenni said. “Your big party is tomorrow, and we’re going to celebrate the night away.” She hugged Piper.

“I’m spending the night at Lily’s.” Riley looked at me.

“Good idea, kiddo.” I winked with a smile.

“Just don’t go be making any babies tonight. Between me, Uncle Carter, and leaving your bachelor life behind, you’ve had enough life changes for a while.”

Piper and I stared at her and couldn’t help but laugh.

CHAPTER 42



Piper

I sat on the beach and watched my sexy fiancé and future stepdaughter in the water with their surfboards. Gabriel was so proud that Riley wanted to learn how to surf, and he loved every minute of teaching her. Even Ella joined them a few times, and she was really good for a kid her age.

I held out my hand and stared at my beautiful ring. If someone had told me a year ago that I'd be engaged to a handsome doctor and living in a big house on the beach, I would have told them they were insane and to seek help immediately. Dr. Gabriel Kind didn't believe in love when he met me, just as much as I didn't. But together, we saw something magical in each other that neither of us thought we needed.

"What are you doing?" Gabriel smiled as he set his board down.

"Staring at my beautiful ring and giving thanks to the universe that your daughter chose my shop to steal from." I grinned as I handed him a towel.

He laughed as he dried himself off and sat down next to me in the sand, hooking his arm around me.

"Yeah, I thank God for that every day too." He kissed the side of my head.

"Jenni showed me a sketch of a wedding dress she designed for me earlier."

“And?”

“Like a fool, I started crying because it was so on point and beautiful. I’m just warning you now, Dr. Kind, that I might be a blubbering fool when we’re standing up at the altar.”

“That’s okay.” His grip around me tightened. “I’ll still love you anyway, blubbering fool and all.”

“You jerk!” I pushed him on his back and straddled him as I grabbed his arms and held them above his head. “Are you saying that you won’t be a blubbering fool with me?”

“I might be. We’ll have to wait and see.” A smile crossed his sexy face. “But for the record, you won’t be a blubbering fool. You’ll be my sexy as fuck, gorgeous bride who will become my wife forever and always, til death do us part.”

“Ewe, will you two knock it off.” Riley walked past us, carrying her surfboard under her arm. “Go get a room or something. Gee, you’re so embarrassing.”

“She won’t be seeing it as an embarrassment one day when her body is on top of the love of her life.” I smiled.

“Well, if I ever see that, she’s really going to know what being embarrassed is all about,” Gabriel said.

“Then it’s good I’m around to keep you calm.” I leaned down and brushed my lips against his.

“Have I told you today how much I love you?” he asked.

“You told me this morning when you invaded my private area while I was sleeping.”

“You loved it, and you know it.” He grinned. “And so did your body with the three orgasms you had.”

“True.” I grinned. “So, what are you going to do now with your growing problem down there?”

He laughed, got out of my grip, tossed me off him, and picked me up.

“I’m taking you into the ocean and showing you how much I love you for the second time today.”

“What if someone sees?”

He carried me into the water. “No one is out here but us. And if they do, they’ll just think we’re playing around like lovers do.” He smiled.



Carter

It had been three months since my transplant, and I was starting to feel like my old self again. My Auntie Fran wanted me to move in with her while I recovered, but being the independent man I was, I opted to recover at home with the help of a live-in home care nurse. Dorothy was a sweet older woman who never once complained when I was letting the recovery get the best of me.

The apartment phone rang as I sat on the couch with my laptop, keeping up with my company.

“I’ll answer it,” Dorothy said. “Carter, Shaun Kind is here to see you.”

“Really? Have him come up.”

The elevator dinged, and Shaun stepped into the foyer when the door opened.

“Wow. Look at this place.” He smiled as he walked into the living room.

“It’s good to see you, Shaun.” I grinned and stood up as we hugged.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m good. Have a seat. Can I get you something to drink?”

“Nah, I’m good. Thanks anyway.”

“To what do I owe this pleasure?” I asked as I sat down.

“I was just in New York on business, and I thought I’d swing by to North Carolina to see how you’re doing.”

“That’s really nice of you. I appreciate it. How’s the family?”

“Everyone is doing well. So, there’s another reason why I’m here.”

“Okay,” I said.

“In the past six years, you’ve built one hell of a profitable business. Since you opened its doors, Carter Management Group has pulled in eighty-six million dollars. That’s impressive to a guy like me.” A smile crossed his lips. “You have a great talent, Carter. But I’m not surprised, considering you’re a Kind, which brings me to my proposal.”

“Okay. What is it?” I asked.

“I want to offer you the opportunity to expand and set up offices within Sterling Capital. Think of it as a partnership.”

“You want me to become partners with you?”

“Yeah. We both have brilliant minds and a lot in common.” A smirk crossed his lips. “It would be an expansion of both of our companies. The perk would be working with you and the obscene amount of money we’d make.”

“We already make an obscene amount of money.” I chuckled.

“And we’d make more. We could do great things together, Carter. You wouldn’t have to move to Los Angeles if you didn’t want to. I could handle the business there, and you could handle the business here. Think about it.” He stood up.

“Thanks, Shaun. I definitely will.” I walked him to the elevator.

“You look good, cousin.” He smiled as we hugged again.

“Thank you. Have a safe flight home,” I said as he stepped into the elevator.

As the doors began to shut, he stopped them with his hand.

“By the way, I have a house on the beach for you next to Gabriel if you’re interested.” He winked and let the doors shut.

I tossed and turned all night, with thoughts of Shaun's proposal swirling through my head. Partnering with him and Sterling Capital would be an excellent investment. Although I talked to my brothers daily, I still missed them. Being as sick as I was, I never got the opportunity to get to know all of my family—a family I never knew I had.

With all the time I had while recovering from something that almost took my life, I realized how mysterious the universe really was, and at the end of the day, my life had come full circle. If I hadn't needed that bone marrow transplant, Auntie Fran never would have told me that I had two brothers out there in the world. My illness led me to find them and the discovery of more family members. The chances of my brothers being a match were slim, but somehow, they were, and it saved my life. But as I sat here, in my penthouse, I was just as alone as I was before I found them. I was a Kind, and it was time for me to go home where I belonged.

Grabbing my phone, I dialed Shaun.

"Hey, Carter. What's up, man?"

"Tell me more about that house on the beach next to Gabriel." I smiled.

Thank you for reading *Eleven of a Kind*! I hope you enjoyed it.

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