

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE
BOOK THREE

Pushing
The

LIMIT

ANNA ALBO

Pushing the Limit

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Pushing the Limit

Book 3 – Life in the Fast Lane

Chapter One

Luna

Blake wasn't officially dead.

But the outcome was inevitable. I was still processing this when race officials contemplated restarting the race. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Restart the damn race? What were they thinking? One of the greatest race car drivers in history had died while millions watched, but the all-mighty dollar was more important. No, I wouldn't stand for it. I wouldn't let it happen. And I wasn't alone. Almost all team principals and every single driver protested. It was a rare sign of unity.

Gregory Brown and others within the federation top brass insisted that teams and drivers get back on the track, but even after pressure from sponsors and owners that the show must go on, the drivers stood pat in their decision. In honor of Blake Carlton, the race was over.

I insisted on going to the hospital. Rafe joined me while Devin stayed behind and reported to his team. I'd never seen my brother become so unraveled before, and I somehow found strength in his anguish. I would have to be the strong one for a change and carry Rafe through this difficult time when I wasn't sure myself if I could do it. Maybe there was some self-preservation there— now I had to be strong, and grief could come later. Or maybe, deep down, I didn't want to believe he was gone.

When we arrived at the hospital, news of Blake's condition had begun to filter through to the media. He'd suffered severe head injuries and was being kept alive by machines. Doctors

confirmed that there was no possibility of recovery. His sister had been called and would have to make any final decisions on Blake's behalf.

"I'd like to go see him," Rafe said to Andre Boudreau, the federation doctor. He'd been the first to attend to Blake on the track. He'd also been the first to attend to my father when he'd died.

"I think it's better that you don't."

I had a fleeting image of my father after his crash, but I quickly wiped it from my mind. Rafe needed me, and so did Blake, and there was no way I was going to let either of them down.

"He was a dear friend, and I want to see him," Rafe protested.

The two men stared at each other for a long time before Andre backed down. "All right," Andre said. "Come with me."

I watched them walk down the hall. Wisely, I'd stayed behind, away from all the gossip that had trickled into the hospital. All the Roche officials were milling about, speaking in hushed tones, still in shock that Blake was gone. Although machines were keeping him alive, I was already grieving. I was grieving the loss of a friend, sometimes foe, and a man who truly cared for me even though he drove me batty.

And his loss was catastrophic.

Maybe I hadn't known him long, but at the same time, it was like I'd known him my entire life. And now that he was gone, I had so many regrets. Some I didn't even understand. And all of me struggled to believe it, hoping that I'd wake up from a terrible nightmare. But the faces of the Roche team said it all. I was living the nightmare.

Devin and Erich arrived together. Erich immediately went in search of Blake's doctors while Devin took the vacant seat next to me. He said nothing. He simply stared at the beige-tiled floors, lost in his own thoughts. After several minutes, he took my hand and squeezed it tightly.

“As long as I’ve been doing this—and that’s been most of my life—I’ve never witnessed someone die so violently,” Devin said just above a whisper.

I huffed. “Quick and painless, isn’t that what you said?”

“I suppose I did. I’m sure he didn’t suffer.”

I took in a lungful of air, trying to process it all. “Maybe he didn’t suffer, but what about all of those around him? His family, his friends, they are all going to suffer.”

“I can’t believe Carlton is gone,” Devin said sadly.

It was fortuitous that Helen Watters, Blake’s younger sister, was in London on business. She reached the hospital early that evening. Blake was being kept alive as per Helen’s wishes. Well, actually, it turned out they were also Blake’s wishes. He’d signed up to be an organ donor, and the doctors were checking to see which of his organs were viable for donation and where they’d be going.

While everyone milled around the hospital, I was the one who found the strength to console Helen. She took the news with great poise. She listened as the doctors explained that his head injuries were catastrophic. I put my arm around her as she made arrangements for her brother. After his organs were harvested, she would accompany his body back to Dallas. Harvesting his organs—damn, just the way the doctors said it tore me up inside—would take a few days, the doctors said. Helen agreed to it all with grace. I wasn’t sure I could be that stoic.

“I suppose I’ll have to go to his hotel and gather his belongings,” she said once the doctors had left.

“Would you like me to come? I’d be happy to help.”

Helen looked at me. Her blue eyes seemed dull and dark. “Would you mind?”

“No, not at all.” And really, it was the least I could do. Helen was alone in a country she didn’t know, dealing with the sudden loss of her brother. I couldn’t imagine what she was going through.

The Roche team escorted us to Blake's hotel. Helen was quiet, still absorbing the shock of Blake's death. His death had begun to hit me. I'd been so numb to the whole event, but it suddenly became painfully clear that I'd never see him again. I'd never look again into his lively blue eyes, or see his infectious smile. I quickly put the thoughts from my head. I wouldn't allow myself to cry, not in front of Helen.

The hotel manager let us into Blake's room. The moment we stepped inside, I could feel his presence all around us. The first thing that hit me was the lingering fragrance of his cologne, the woody scent of it, and my knees nearly buckled. His luggage was neatly placed in the corner, ready for his departure from Hungary. There was a magazine next to his bed that was turned open to an article on the Hungarian Revolution.

Helen stared at the luggage for some time before walking toward it. She picked it up, placed it on the bed, and opened it.

"They asked me to bring something for him to wear on his journey home," Helen said, her bottom lip quivering. "He always brought along a dark suit, just in case. Can you believe it? He was always prepared for death, whether it was him or someone else."

I swallowed hard when I saw the shirt he'd been wearing the evening before, folded in one corner. If I could turn back time and change things ... As Helen pulled out Blake's suit, I picked up the shirt, held it up to my face. I could smell him. I didn't want to let go for fear that if I did, I'd have to accept his loss.

"He loved you," Helen said quietly.

There were tears in her eyes as she watched me clutch the red shirt.

"Don't say that," I whispered. And all at once, the tears came. I quickly wiped my eyes.

"You and your brother were good to him, and he cared for you both. Blake and I were close, and he told me all about you. Some spectacular quest to win your heart. I never

understood it because you seemed so happy with your boyfriend, but when Blake wanted something, he tried his hardest to get it.”

My bottom lip quivered. “I’m sorry that I couldn’t love him.”

“I’m sorry too. You seem very sweet.” She looked around the room, and her body trembled. “I don’t want to stay any longer,” Helen said, taking in a deep breath. “I’ll have someone get his luggage.” Helen took the suit and placed it over her arm.

I put the shirt back into the luggage and closed it. As we drove back to the hospital, she looked at the suit Blake would soon be wearing. I wondered who would change him, who would be the person to clothe the great Blake Carlton for the last time. Would they see Blake’s beautiful blue eyes? They would certainly not see his smile.

He would just be another body to dress, a once great man who no longer lived and breathed. Dead at thirty-six.

Chapter Two

Devin

I hated the guy, but I didn't want him dead. Carlton had been a thorn in my side for months, but seeing the crash ... anyone who knew anything about racing had to know it was fatal. My hands still shook from the ordeal, and my heart was pounding as I went in search of Luna at the hospital. Riedl insisted on coming along, and I couldn't exactly say no. Getting through security had been a bitch until someone had recognized me and Riedl. Media had swarmed the hospital, looking for something to break first. Bloodthirsty assholes.

I kept thinking of the accident as we made our way down the hospital hallway. I'd seen some pretty bad injuries, but I'd never seen someone die—or have a fatal accident, since Carlton wasn't dead yet. "I'll meet you in the waiting room," I said to Riedl. "I need to use the loo."

Riedl shrugged and headed off without me. I popped into the washroom and into a stall. I needed to calm myself for Luna's sake. A million thoughts buzzed through my brain. She'd be sad. Despite everything he'd put us through, I knew she had a soft spot for the old guy, and on top of that, in a business sense, his death would prove devastating for the Perez team. Carlton was supposed to be their savior. I wondered if Luna had any time to think of that yet, or if this was still just a personal loss for her.

A drink would settle my nerves, but I was in a bloody hospital, so no chance of that. I took a few more deep breaths, then left the empty men's room. I headed down the bleak, sterile hallways.

I ran into Riedl again on my way to find Luna. He'd been searching for Carlton's doctors and had come up empty. I wasn't sure what he thought he was going to accomplish, but I didn't begrudge him.

"This place is unacceptably disorganized," Riedl said. "I can't get an answer anywhere."

He didn't really deserve one. In the grand scheme of things, he was nobody to Carlton.

I finally found Luna seated in the waiting room, her normally tanned face ashen. She bit her lip when she saw me, and I put my arms around her. She rested her head against my shoulder and wiped a stray tear. I tried not to let any of this bother me. Carlton had tried everything to snatch her from me, but through it all, she'd also come to regard him as a friend. So, of course she'd be emotional. Part of me resented that, and I had to deal with that on my own. For now, I had to be her literal shoulder to cry on.

We chatted for a bit, and I tried to keep her mind on other things before Carlton's sister showed up, and Luna went with her to Carlton's hotel room. One of the drivers had arranged for a chartered plane to bring her from London, and she'd arrived within hours of the accident. By then, more drivers had assembled at the hospital, and Riedl was the one who organized us into a room. He was angry and frustrated as he looked around at all the different faces.

"I'm sure you all know that the federation wanted us to continue the race today."

We all nodded, some drivers visibly disgusted with the prospect of it.

"Out of respect for what happened today, I think we need to insist that not only must this track be modified to our satisfaction but that next week's race should be canceled. I'm sure many of us would like that time to reflect and perhaps go to Blake's funeral."

"Is he dead?" Pedro asked.

Riedl frowned in consternation, and it was then I realized no official word had come out. And there Riedl had gone and shot off his big mouth.

“I expect that we can all be trusted to keep this quiet for the sake of Blake’s family, but I’ve been informed that he’s not going to make it.”

Murmurs rippled through the group, and I closed my eyes to absorb it all. My eyes shot back open when Riedl continued.

“As I was saying, I think it’s imperative that we all unite on this. No race here next year without drastic modifications that we all approve, and next week’s race must be postponed. Do I have any dissenters?”

What kind of asshole would dissent? As expected, no one did.

“All right, then. If you all agree, I’ll take this to Gregory.”

No one disagreed, and why would they? Dealing with Gregory was worse than a root canal. A few of the guys offered any assistance to Riedl while others wandered out of the room, many still in a haze. I was one of them. I took a cab back to the hotel, avoiding anything racing related. I didn’t even take Enzo’s call. I sent a text to my parents to let them know I was all right, another to Luna to let her know where I’d gone, then I collapsed onto my bed, exhaustion setting in.

When I opened my eyes, hours had passed, and Luna was crawling into bed next to me. She tucked her head up against my neck and sighed.

“You okay?” I asked, caressing her arm.

“I think so. I went to see Rafe, and I think he’s shell-shocked. I suggested he ask the team doctor for something to help him sleep tonight, but he refused. I know he’s upset about Blake, but then he started in on the team, how we’re ruined. Part of me wanted to slap him for even thinking about that right now. Who cares about the damn team!”

“Maybe it’s his way of coping. You know, like avoidance?”

“Possibly,” she said, and her body seemed to deflate next to me. She was tired, so I let the silence hang between us. Within minutes, she was asleep.

* * *

Back home in Milan the next day, I was barely through the door when Enzo showed up. We sat outside by the pool, drinking beers and discussing the race. Enzo seemed more interested than usual, but he did love his damn gossip.

“Where’s Luna?”

“Still in Budapest.” At Enzo’s skeptical expression, I added, “Her brother’s still there, and she’s helping Carlton’s sister make arrangements.”

“What, she’s putting together a funeral for the guy who tried to steal her from you?”

“Drop it, Enzo.” Did I find it odd that she was staying to help Carlton’s sister make arrangements? Yes, but it also wasn’t out of her character. She always wanted to help, and knowing that Carlton’s sister had no one sealed the deal.

“He’s technically dead, then?” Enzo asked, nearly foaming at the mouth, looking for gossip.

“It appears that way.”

Enzo shook his head as if he was impressed by this development. Had the man gone completely mad? “You must be happy about this,” he said with a smirk. “Now he’s out of your way.”

Yup. He’d gone fucking mad. “No, this doesn’t make me happy. The man was a thorn in my side, sure, but you’re asking me if I am glad he’s dead? Enzo, come on, what’s wrong with you?”

Enzo held up his hands in apology. “You’re right. I’m not suggesting that you should be ecstatic, but he isn’t a problem for you anymore.”

I set down my beer. “Yes, he’s not a problem for me, but he’s also fucking dead! And a normal person would find that sad, even for a guy I bloody hated. But you seem to be excited by the news. Almost giddy. Why don’t you explain yourself before I punch that smile right off your face.”

The smile faded and the smugness disappeared. He fiddled with a button on his dress shirt before making eye contact with me again. “You’re right. I suppose I thought you’d be more happy about it.”

I felt my mouth gape open. This side of Enzo was beyond disgusting. “I hated Carlton, and yeah, maybe I wanted to run him off the track a time or two. But I didn’t want the guy to die. I wouldn’t wish that on anyone, nor would I be happy about it. Give your head a shake, and stop being an asshole.”

Enzo nodded. Maybe I’d finally shamed the piece of shit enough. “You’re right. I wasn’t seeing it from that perspective.”

I didn’t say anything to that, just stared at him, wondering if it was time that he and I parted ways. This side of him wasn’t the least bit charming, and even though he made me piles of money, I had to wonder if it was worth it.

“Anyway, it’s been a long couple of days, so if you don’t mind, I could use some sleep.”

“Of course,” he said, getting the hint. “Again, I apologize for crossing the line. It was inappropriate.”

“Right. We’ll talk later.”

I showed him to the door to the sound of my phone pinging incessantly. Once I was sure he was gone, I checked my texts. They were from Nigel, one of the drivers I’d actually call a mate, with a couple of links. I hit one, and then I saw the headline:

“Blake Carlton, Dead From Massive Injuries Sustained at the Hungarian Grand Prix.

It was official now, and I had no idea what the fallout would be.

Chapter Three

Luna

The next few days were like walking through a dark haze that followed me wherever I went. Simple tasks like taking a shower or eating had suddenly become a chore. I couldn't even muster the energy for my usual morning run. Devin would find me sitting on the sofa, staring at a dark television. I was lost in my own world, but I didn't cry.

I couldn't find any tears. Even seeing Blake Carlton's face on the cover of every Italian newspaper and all over the internet did little to move me. The Monday morning following his death, I stared at the team photo a Milan paper had used. I was thinking of Blake and what he'd said to me. He had wanted to protect me, but how would he protect me from beyond the grave?

Friday morning, Devin and I flew to Dallas, Blake's hometown. The funeral service was being held that Monday, and every driver was going to be there. It was a touching sign of unity and respect for a fallen hero. Many had gathered Wednesday night at one of the hotels to reminisce about Blake Carlton. I hadn't gone, mostly because I couldn't face it, but when Devin returned, his face was somber.

"How was it?" I asked. I didn't really want to know, but I needed to ask. Since Sunday, I'd refused to watch any television or read newspapers. The pain of seeing and hearing about him was crushing. I also found myself becoming more and more protective of Devin. I wanted to know where he was at all times, and I'd grow anxious if I was all alone. Would this feeling ever go away?

“Emotional. I’ve never seen so many grown men cry,” Devin said sadly.

“He was an amazing person. I know a lot of people thought he was arrogant, but I didn’t see him that way.”

“He was different with you.”

I couldn’t argue. “He did respect you, Devin. He may have treated you badly, but I think deep down, he did see you as an equal. He would compare himself to you at your age, and I think he just resented getting older and knowing that his career was nearing its end.”

Devin climbed into bed and put his arms around me. “Gagnon was inconsolable tonight,” he said, brushing curls from my face. Right, the junior driver on Roche. I didn’t know him personally. “Even though Carlton was leaving the team, they had a good working relationship. He couldn’t stop telling stories about Carlton and his driving pointers. Apparently, he knew that Carlton wanted to quit racing after this upcoming year; he wanted to settle down and have a family. He had his life all planned out.”

“Don’t they always,” I said just above a whisper. After this upcoming year—the year he had agreed to leave the fading glory of Roche to help build up Perez instead. His swan song.

I couldn’t help but wonder if he had the future all planned out with me, not that it mattered anymore.

* * *

The funeral was by invitation only. Thousands crowded around the church to catch a glimpse of all the celebrity guests who had come to pay their last respects. Devin and I sat with Rafe, Erich, and his wife, Monica. Team lines had all been forgotten today, people from Roche, Merrick, Perez, and others, all sitting together. Most of the drivers sat together, faces drawn.

Helen gave a moving eulogy that brought most people to tears. Rafe teared up and wiped his eyes when Helen related

stories about her brother's youth, his love for racing, and his hero, Marco Perez. I put my arm around Rafe's shoulder. Our father had inspired so many drivers. I'd never seen my brother so moved and shaken by someone's death, and before I knew it, he had me crying too. It was, strangely, a relief after my days of numbness.

Devin sat next to us, his face set in stone. He stared straight ahead as Helen spoke, never once showing any emotion. I wondered if he was truly unbothered or if he was just holding his emotions inside.

Did Devin care? Maybe he was happy that Blake was out of the picture. Or was I being cynical?

When we got to the cemetery, my floodgates finally, truly, let loose. I could barely stand as the priest spoke the final few words. I leaned on Devin for support, sobbing, and while he put his arm around me, it was almost cold and stiff.

As a final remembrance, everyone placed a flower on Blake's casket before driving to the Carlton family home for the wake. His parents hadn't shown any outward emotion, either, but I could see they were both devastated. June, his mother, kept up appearances and made sure everyone had food and drink. His father mingled, a pained smile on his face. They both probably wanted to be anywhere but here.

I spent the afternoon consoling Rafe while Devin circulated as if this were a dinner party. I'd seen him talking to John Merrick. He was working the crowd, getting business done. It was remarkable how little death moved him—or, I suppose, the death of people he didn't care about. Because I couldn't stop myself from coming to that conclusion.

"Luna and Rafe?" June Carlton said. We'd been sitting in a quiet corner by ourselves when she found us. She was an older lady with silver hair and Blake's piercing blue eyes. Despite losing her only son, she remained composed and unflappable.

"Yes," I said, trying to smile. "We wanted to express our sincerest condolences on the loss of your son."

“Thank you. He spoke highly of you, my dear,” the woman said, taking my hand. “I’d like you both to come with me. I have something for you.”

Confused, Rafe and I looked at each other. We followed her upstairs and into one of the bedrooms. Mrs. Carlton closed the door behind them.

“My son loved your father, and when he was a teenager, posters of your father and his car were all over these walls. A year ago, my son purchased this at an auction, and I thought the two of you might want it.” From a drawer, she pulled out a small velvet box. “He was going to give it to you, but he never had the chance,” she said, handing the box to Rafe. Rafe’s hands trembled as he took the box. He opened it, and inside was a gold chain and cross. It was our father’s gold cross. Seeing it made me gasp. He’d worn it all the time, a gift to him from our grandparents. After Dad’s accident, it had been lost. We’d never thought we’d see it again.

Rafe’s entire body shook. “How did he know?” he asked.

“Blake had assumed it was stolen. It came up for auction, and no one knew for sure where it had come from or who it belonged to. The initials on the back proved to Blake that it was your father’s. He was in the process of having that verified before he returned it to your family. I believe that verification happened about a month ago, but he hadn’t been home to collect it yet.”

I reached out to touch my brother’s hand. “You have it, Rafe,” I said, wiping the tears that had fallen down my face. It had more significance to him than to me. I took it from his hand and placed it around his neck. “You wear it all the time and honor Dad.”

He nodded, unable to speak.

“And I have something for you, Ms. Perez. My son had this for you. I found this in his things.”

I opened the box. Inside was gold chain and a pendant of a diamond-encrusted half-moon. I choked back my tears as I slipped the box into my pocket. Rafe and I then hugged Mrs.

Carlton and thanked her for everything. Leaving her in Blake's bedroom, we returned downstairs to the rest of the guests.

“What was that about?” Devin murmured, joining us at the base of the stairs.

“Mrs. Carlton wanted to talk to us. Even in death, Carlton amazes me,” I said, running a finger along the velvet box in my pocket.

He grimaced, but if that hurt Devin's feelings, I didn't care. Today was about Blake, and he'd have to get over it.

Chapter Four

Luna

With Blake's death so fresh on everyone's minds, many teams gave their drivers extended time off. While I rarely picked apart the business side of racing, even I was well aware of the significance. In the world of racing, this was a huge financial hit, but that's how big Blake Carlton was.

Devin was given ten days off, as was Erich Riedl. No good would come from pressuring the drivers back too soon. An investigation had been launched into the crash, and many teams wanted to keep everything low-key.

Rafe and I owned Perez, of course, so Rafe didn't need anyone's permission. He took the time to get his mind off Blake and search for his replacement for next year. At least my brother had some kind of distraction. For me, it was time to reflect on the past week. Unlike Devin and all the other drivers who had to get past the events of Hungary, I couldn't bring myself to let it go. Every time I closed my eyes, I could see the last few seconds of Blake Carlton's life, and I wished there was something I could have done to stop the crash.

Every time Devin left, even to go to the market, I had to force myself not to ask for his route or text him repeatedly to find out if he was still alive. I was afraid, and that fear terrified me. Every night for a week, I woke in the middle of the night, my heart racing after helplessly reliving the nightmare of Blake's crash. Sometimes, my mind would add my father's body to images of the crash. Sometimes it would add Devin's. I'd lie there, gasping for air, trying so hard not to wake Devin up. I couldn't let him know. I was even more terrified of that.

Of letting him see how crazy I was going, of realizing how needy I'd become.

One evening as Devin spoke to Enzo on the phone, I watched television and was suddenly gripped by a fear that blindsided me. My heartbeat quickened, and I found myself suddenly cold and shaking, gasping for breath. It brought me back to that day in Cortese, when I'd looked up my dad's accident. All those feelings came flooding back. The panic. The fear. It drove me to my feet. I had to do something.

I gathered myself as best I could and hurried to Devin's office. His feet were up on his desk, and he was leaning back in his chair, laughing at whatever Enzo had to say. I walked over to him, standing across from him. He finally noticed and placed one hand over the phone.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"I'm not feeling well," I said quietly.

"Why don't you drink that tea you always take when you have an upset stomach?"

I couldn't find a full breath. "It's not that, Devin," I said. I felt as if someone were pushing down on my shoulders, trying to snuff me out like a cigarette. When had my hands started to tremble?

"Enzo, I'm going to have to call you back," he said and hung up the phone. He rose and put his arms around me. "What's wrong?"

"I feel as though I want to leap out of my skin," I said, trying not to cry. "I feel like I'm being tormented by some unknown ... thing. And it's frightening. I can't control it."

"I don't understand."

I broke away from his grip and took a few steps back. "I just can't take this anymore," I cried. "I can't take this pressure. It's like I'm slowly losing all my points of reference. With Blake gone, I've lost a friend. I don't have many of those. Why did Blake have to die? Why him?"

"Luna, you're not yourself."

“What if it had been you?” I said desperately. “What if you had died? What would I do? Devin, I-I think I might have killed myself. I can’t lose what I have, Devin. I’ve already lost too much. You must think I’m crazy. I can’t stop these feelings. I’m freaking out!”

“Let me help you,” he said, walking toward me.

I stepped farther away from him. “I’m a burden to you, aren’t I?”

“No, you’re not,” he said, trying to hide his alarm. His wide eyes were trying to figure out what to do with me.

“I’m more than you can handle.”

He shook his head before reaching out a hand to me that I didn’t take. “That’s not true.”

“How could you love someone like me? I’m not normal, Devin.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m not like those other girls! You’ve sacrificed so much for me, and I don’t want you to have to anymore. You can do much better than me. I have to leave now before you really hate and resent me.”

His face was marred in confusion. “Please, Luna, stop this,” he said, trying to reach out to me again.

“I’m so sorry, Devin. I should leave and let you have a normal life. I was never good enough for you anyway. I have to go,” I said, turning and running out of the room.

“Luna, stop,” Devin said, chasing after me.

I ran out the door and away from the house. Devin caught me before I reached the gate. I wildly fought him as he struggled to subdue me. I eventually gave up the fight and collapsed into his arms.

“I’m going crazy, Devin,” I whispered. “Completely insane.”

* * *

Devin picked up the phone while I furiously paced the room. I had one hand covering my mouth as my body still trembled. I was still in a highly agitated state, but he had managed to calm me down.

“Gianni, it’s Devin here,” he said, watching me pick things up and then put them back down. I felt frantic, and I could see him growing increasingly worried. And I was so consumed by wanting to run—to where, I didn’t know—that I didn’t even ask who Gianni was. “I need some sedatives or something.”

I didn’t pay much attention to the call. I was more worried I’d have a heart attack from the thumping of my heart. I needed to keep busy and began fumbling through magazines and then throwing them down. Unspent energy bubbled up to the surface of my skin with nowhere to go, and Devin was seeing it all. I’d been upset around him before, but this was like nothing he’d seen. He made more attempts to calm me and sighed in relief when Gianni showed up. The man asked me a few questions and then handed a small bottle to Devin. There was a note attached with instructions on how it should be administered. Devin went to the kitchen, poured a glass of water, and handed the glass and two of the pills to me. I didn’t question him; I simply swallowed the pills.

He helped me up into bed and stayed with me until I fell asleep.

Chapter Five

Devin

Gianni came by the next morning to check on Luna. I'd met him years ago at a club I used to frequent. He was a plastic surgeon whose clientele was mostly European celebrities and models. He lived less than five minutes away and had come over the second I'd called. We hadn't had much time to talk the night before, but I gave him all the details now, including what had happened months ago when she'd discovered the graphic pictures of her father.

"Is she bipolar? What is it?" I asked, almost afraid of the answer.

Gianni waved his hand at me dismissively. "No, nothing like that. Based on what you've told me, the woman is under a tremendous amount of stress. You must understand, I'm not a psychiatrist, but from what I can tell, she's had a panic attack. What I think she needs is for someone to talk to, maybe look into some medication for the anxiety. Has she been sleeping well?"

"Not since the accident," I said, letting the dread slowly slip away from me. All night I'd worried that she was having some kind of mental breakdown, that I'd be shipping her off to some kind of institution.

"That contributes to the anxiety. I think a few days of real sleep and time away from all this madness will do her good. But please get her to look into therapy and to see her physician."

“I will. And thank you, Gianni. I can assume you’ll be discreet.”

“Discreet is all I do.”

I escorted him out, then went back to our bedroom. Luna was sitting up in bed, wiping her eyes and yawning. Her dark curls were falling over her shoulders, and I couldn’t help but notice how adorable she was.

“How long did I sleep?”

“Almost twelve hours. How are you feeling this morning?” I asked.

“Rested but a bit groggy.”

“I bet you’re hungry too. I’ll whip up some breakfast while you freshen up.”

“I like that idea.”

I headed for the kitchen and pulled out some eggs, cheese, ham, and onions. I’d make her a hearty omelet and some toast to get her going. She’d eaten little since Carlton’s crash, and I wondered if she’d lost weight. Her face looked gaunt. I’d tried to get her to eat, and now that I thought about it, everything Gianni had said was making sense. She’d barely eaten, hadn’t slept much, and was worrying about everything. The perfect recipe for a breakdown.

She wandered into the kitchen, her hair wet from a shower. She was in a pair of black yoga pants that accentuated all her curves and a T-shirt. After a yawn and stretch, she settled onto one of the bistro chairs at my kitchen island. I poured her a cup of coffee, and she took in a whiff of it.

“Smells great. So does breakfast.”

“My world-famous omelet and a side of whole wheat toast. And you better eat it all.”

She smiled sheepishly. “I’m sorry about last night. It was a strange feeling, as if I were under water. I guess it was a panic attack, and I’ve had them before, but this was a bad one.”

I leaned over the counter and kissed the tip of her nose. “It’s fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“But I made you worry.”

“Just a little, but that’s why I have doctors for friends.”

“Is that who that guy was?” she asked, taking a sip of her coffee.

“He’s a plastic surgeon, but he’s seen it all.”

She tilted her head and teased, “Are you trying to tell me something?”

A smile. Shit, how much I’d missed that. “No. Not even close. But I knew he could help. He gave you a sleeping pill to make you relax. And for the record, if anyone needs some plastic surgery, it’s me for my ugly mug.”

She laughed! I made her laugh.

“The pill helped. I don’t think I’ve slept eight hours in the last week.”

“Or eaten.”

She nodded solemnly.

I took in a deep breath, knowing what I was about to do needed to be handled delicately. “I had a long talk with Gianni. He’s a decent guy, and he had a lot of helpful things to say. He thinks you’re probably dealing with a lot of stress. The team, Carlton’s death, your mother, maybe even me?”

I waited for her to react, and she sighed in agreement.

“I know you mentioned it before, but have you thought about doing therapy again? As an outlet for all this stress?” She hadn’t thrown her omelet at me yet, so the delicate approach seemed to be working.

She took in a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “I hadn’t thought about it, but it’s not a bad idea. Sometimes it’s nice to talk to someone who isn’t connected to all this.”

“Right. I think you should seriously consider it. And it’s okay to take something for the stress.”

“No.”

I frowned. “It’s not a failure or something, Luna. It’s just medicine.”

She didn’t seem as receptive to that. “I wonder if maybe I should take a few days off. Maybe not go to the next race. It’s just too soon.”

I reached across the island and grasped her hand. “I think that’s a great idea. And I think I know who might cheer you up.”

“Who would that be?” she asked.

“Your sister. When I see you and Catia together, it’s like you glow. And your sister looks up to you. I think she’s the perfect stress-free outlet.”

“But my mother.”

“Forget about her. It’s Cat you should spend all your time with.”

“It’s not a bad idea.”

“That’s settled, then. And when you come home, think about talking to someone. I can ask Gianni if he knows someone.”

“Sure. That would be nice.”

I didn’t know if this was the right moment to ask, but I did have something else I wanted to talk to her about. Maybe she’d be okay with it, or maybe she’d slug me. I couldn’t know for sure.

“I had a thought. What if you met my parents and Paige.” Shit, it was hard getting that last part out. If she bonded with Paige, and I knew she would, then what? But if I didn’t introduce her to my parents soon, Mum would have my head.

To my surprise, her face lit up. “I’d like that,” she said. “I’ve wanted to meet your family for a while.” She stopped eating and gave me a piercing gaze. “You’re okay with me meeting Paige?”

“Of course I am,” I said, lying through my bloody teeth.

“Then I’m up for it too.”

“Swell.”

I sat down to share breakfast, and I was thrilled when she finished her omelet and her toast. Breakfast seemed to liven her up. My old Luna was slowly coming back to me, even if she had to meet my parents.

* * *

To my utter shock, Luna took another sleeping pill before bed. Gianni had left enough to last a week, but I didn’t think she’d touch them again. She settled into bed early, reading a book on her phone, and it didn’t take long for the sedative to kick in. When she was sound asleep, I took her phone and gently placed it on the nightstand. I then made my way to the living room and made the call I fucking dreaded.

Luna’s mother answered right away.

“Hello, Maria, how are you?”

“I’m fine. And you, Devin?” she asked, with ice lacing her voice.

“I’m all right.” But enough with the niceties. I needed to dive in. “I’m not sure if you’ve spoken to Luna since Blake Carlton’s accident.”

“Just a few texts here and there.”

I noted the change in her voice. She was curious about the reason for my call.

“Luna hasn’t taken the accident well. She isn’t taking Carlton’s death well.”

Maria was silent for so long, I thought she’d either hung up or we’d lost our connection. But then she spoke. “I have warned her many times about this life. And honestly, this brings up bad memories for me too. That’s why I try not to pay much attention to racing.”

“Understandable, but I think she needs to be away from this for a bit. To be around family. I’m proposing that she comes home for a few days to unwind. And I figured the best place would be in Cortese, where racing would be a faraway thought.”

“I certainly won’t bring it up, but I want to make something clear. And perhaps you will think I’m being selfish, but I don’t want to talk about my dead husband, or this Blake Carlton while she is here. I will make that perfectly clear to her. That is my old life, and I would like to keep it in the past. So I’m not sure this is the right place for her if she needs to talk about what happened.”

I appreciated what Maria was saying, but I had a counterpoint. “She needs to be removed from racing. And that’s why I think being with you, Tony, and Catia is the perfect place for her.”

“I will never turn my daughter away. If she needs me, then I’m here for her.”

“Good. I’ll come with her in the next few days. Thank you, Maria.”

“You don’t need to thank me. I’d do anything for Luna, and right now, it sounds like she needs her family.”

Chapter Six

Luna

Devin had to be in England the following week before the race in Portugal. He insisted on going with me to Cortese to visit my family. The moment Mom saw my frown, her face soured.

“I don’t want to hear about it, Luna,” she said, her voice tinged with frustration. “You and your brother have chosen that life for yourselves, and I want nothing to do with it. I warned you! I told you what you were getting yourself into. Now don’t come into my house with a long face. I won’t allow it!”

I’d been eating lunch with Rosa when Mom had entered the room and broke out into her speech. She hadn’t even said hello yet. So much for a relaxing few days.

“It’s nice seeing you too,” I said, annoyed.

“I’m sorry, Luna, I just don’t want to hear anything about that man and his death. I’ve already had reporters calling here wanting me to comment on it. I stopped caring about that damn sport years ago. So not one word of it will be mentioned in my home.”

Having finished saying what she’d wanted to say, Mom left the dining room as quickly as she’d come. Rosa and I looked at each other.

“It’s been hard on her since that accident,” Rosa said, pouring herself another cup of coffee. “They keep comparing the death to your father’s. This Carlton died at almost the same age in nearly the same manner. The similarities are unsettling.”

I hadn't even considered that. Was that part of why I was freaking out so much? "Rosa, Blake had Dad's gold cross. Do you remember the one Dad used to wear, the one that was lost after the accident?"

Rosa looked startled. "How can I forget? You mother searched frantically for it for days."

"Yes. Blake found out that someone was selling it. I don't know who, if they were the thief or what, but Blake was going to return it to me and Rafe. He never had the chance. His mother gave it to us at the wake."

"You should tell your mother."

"You've just heard her. She doesn't want to know anything."

"Give her some time, and she will come around. I think this is something she'd want to know about." Rosa frowned and pushed a plate of biscotti my way. "What else is bothering you?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said, rising from the table. I didn't want to talk about Blake Carlton, at least not at that moment. I needed fresh air. "Let's talk later. I think I need some exercise."

I went for a run and stopped at the creek to drink some water. I'd neglected my routine and was glad to be getting back to my normal self. The mountainside was peaceful and quiet, other than the sounds of gently rippling water and the birds singing from the trees. I sat on a boulder and listened to the sounds of rustling leaves. Autumn was on its way, my favorite season. I'd spent four autumns in Montreal, watching the trees change color. Then winter would come along, and we'd go skiing in the Laurentians or snowshoeing through whatever park we could find. Those were good years, and I'd loved being on my own, with no family watching over me, overprotecting me. Since coming on board with Rafe's team over two years ago, I'd traded that freedom away, and I'd kill to have a bit of it back.

I sat there for a couple of hours, thinking about how much my life had changed in a year and a half. I'd fallen in love with

a man I could never have imagined seeing myself with. My idea of falling in love had been with someone who didn't know my family name, who had never seen my father race, and who had come from a nice family with no past to speak of.

Instead, I fell in love with a man who exemplified all that my family had lost. Devin Flynn was everything I'd never wanted in a man, and yet I'd still managed to fall in love with him, despite all his faults, and there were many. Our belief systems were contradictory. His past affairs seemed to follow me around like a shadow. I was thankful that I'd not run into any former girlfriends, a feat in itself.

I'd managed to ignore the scores of women who constantly tried to attract his attention. At first it had upset me, especially when I compared myself to the seemingly perfect women. Often they'd shove their phone numbers into his hands or send him articles of clothing or simply bare it all in public places. Although Devin never missed an opportunity to check out the lovely ladies, it was nothing more than a joke to him. I felt more secure now, like I wouldn't lose him to the first pretty woman who turned his head.

And then there was Paige, the most startling revelation. I felt a pang of anger and jealousy each time I thought of the little girl. But what had I expected? A perfect man? They didn't exist. I didn't love that he shirked responsibility for her or that he kept her a secret, but at least he made sure she was financially taken care of. Plus, it seemed like she was close with his family. As much as his past bothered me, I still loved him terribly. He was never far from my thoughts, and as much as I hated all his awful habits, the good things about him far outweighed the bad.

Why was I thinking about all this now? Maybe with Blake gone, I felt exposed, as if some hidden predator was going to attack. My safety shield was gone, and I didn't know how to react. These were the same feelings I'd had in Milan, though more subdued. I'd managed to put the demons to rest for now, but they were just below the surface. Devin was right. I needed to find someone to talk to.

As the day turned into evening, I came to a realization. Blake Carlton had been a security blanket for me. I had never trusted Devin entirely—if he'd strayed or made a mistake, Blake was going to sweep in and save me, or at least that was what I wanted to believe. He would protect me from the pain and carry me off into the sunset, because deep down I did have feelings for him. I could hear exactly how my best friend, Jess, would put it: Blake was my backup plan. Such a gross thought now.

But neither Blake Carlton nor Devin Flynn could save me from pain. I could only save myself.

Dusk settled in. I heard a car driving down the street and could see it stop. A figure got out and called my name. It was my stepfather, and he sounded worried. Shit. I'd been gone way too long and hadn't bothered to send a text. I'd just given Mom one more thing to be pissed about.

"Tony, I'm here," I said, coming out from behind some brush.

"My God, where have you been?" he asked with relief. "We've all been worried sick about you."

"Time got away from me."

"What were you doing?" he asked as I got into the car.

"I was thinking about my life. It isn't turning out the way I expected."

He nodded knowingly as he pulled away from the shoulder. "I think we all feel that way. How did you expect it to turn out?"

"I wanted to live in Montreal and become a teacher. I wanted to marry some nice guy and never again be known only as the daughter of Marco Perez."

"I had an idea, too, about my life when I was your age. I was going to get married and have a thousand children. Instead, I didn't get married until thirty-nine, and I was lucky enough to have one daughter." He smiled at me. "Although I consider you and your brother as my children."

I returned the smile warmly. “When you met Mom, how did you feel about her having children with another man?”

Tony pursed his lips together. “I didn’t really give it much thought. When I met your mother, she was almost forty. I didn’t expect her to have been sitting around waiting for me to come along. I also knew you long before I knew your mother. I used to see you almost every day with Rosa, in the store.” I remembered that. With Mom consumed by grief, and Rafe already off at school, Rosa had all but raised me. Tony had always been so kind to us. He went on, “Once your mother and I fell in love, you were already like a daughter to me. It was very easy for me to step into your family. Why do you ask?”

“No reason. I was curious. How did you know where to find me?”

“Devin phoned, and your mother realized you’d been gone all afternoon. Devin was also worried and suggested we try here.”

He did know me well. I’d mentioned this place to him a few times.

Mom was a mixture of angry and relieved when we got back. She scolded me for disappearing, then Rosa fed me a huge dinner. I’d forgotten all about food while having my catharsis at the creek. As I finished eating, Rafe called.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

He sounded sad. Rafe had always been the strong one, but now the cracks were showing. Losing Blake had been devastating in a few ways. First, Rafe had lost a friend and mentor. Second, Perez had lost a world-class driver. Third, I could only imagine how this might be bringing up fears and memories associated with our father for him.

“I just ate dinner. Why do you ask?”

“I’ve been thinking about the race in Portugal on Sunday. I know you decided not to come, but would you consider changing your mind?” he asked softly. “I could use the company.”

I smiled. He'd never shown that kind of weakness before, and there was no way I could let him down. "I'll be there."

"Thank you. And when you do come, we have some big decisions to make."

Chapter Seven

Luna

Friday morning, I was in my usual position in the Perez pits. Rafe rarely smiled, but when he saw me enter the paddock, his face lit up. He put his arm around my shoulder as we walked down pit lane. I couldn't remember him ever being so happy to see me. The previous day he'd answered a barrage of questions from the press concerning the team's choice for a new second driver. Rafe had evaded the question as Perez scrambled to find a replacement. Our PR guy, Juan, and I would have to come up with a canned response to deal with this.

"I didn't even get a chance to call Devin," I said as we neared the Russo pits. Devin's team was busy at work. I'd sent him a few texts, but he hadn't responded. "Do you mind if I go say hello to him?"

"No, no," Rafe said cheerfully. "When you come back, I want to talk about something important."

I was told by a Russo mechanic that Devin was in the Russo motorhome. I walked inside and was directed to a room in the back. I found him out of his clothes with a very attractive blonde, her hands all over him.

"You son of a bitch!" I said.

Devin jumped. He was lying on his stomach while a new physiotherapist worked on his neck and shoulders. The woman was startled, too, but quickly caught on to the ruse when I laughed and said, "Kidding!"

Devin leaped off the table and threw his arms around me, showering my face with kisses.

“I’m done here anyway,” the woman said, shooting me a smile before leaving the room.

“You scared the shit out of me,” Devin said, grinning at me.

“That was the idea. How is the new physiotherapist working out?”

“It’s too soon to tell, but I had her work on my neck. It’s been killing me all day long.”

“Should I finish where she left off?” I asked.

“I was thinking maybe we could take it one step further.”

My pulse quickened. This was the first time I’d felt a flicker of desire since the accident, and I smiled slowly. “Are you sure?”

“We’ll lock the door.”

* * *

I returned to the Perez garage with a wide smile on my face. Erich and Rafe were talking about Blake. I swerved around them to freshen up in my office, wanting to avoid their conversation. Blake was all people were talking about, and if I wanted to make it through the weekend, I’d decided to avoid the subject.

“Erich left?” I asked, taking his seat as I reentered the main part of the garage.

Rafe nodded. “He’s headed back to Merrick. He just had a few minutes to catch up.”

The mechanics were working on both cars, so the garage was uncharacteristically quiet. We could still hear the rumble of other engines, but it was nice to have a normal-pitched conversation.

“What did you want to talk to me about?”

“I think we should talk in the office,” he said.

I followed him inside and shut the door behind us. Whatever Rafe wanted to talk about, it seemed important. His tense jaw was a dead giveaway.

“I was thinking about who we would replace Blake with for next year, and I came up with only one solution. There is only one driver, and that’s Pedro.”

“I had exactly the same thought,” I said, relieved. I’d planned to suggest Pedro at the first opportunity, and thankfully, he hadn’t yet signed with another team. “I think that’s a perfect solution. If he’ll have us.”

Pedro Martinez was the second driver on Team Perez. He was young and raw, but he was talented. The only reason we’d terminated his contract was to make room for Blake. No one in their right mind would have turned down a legend like Blake wanting to join their team. Still, it had hurt us both to cut the younger driver loose. He’d been pretty gracious about it, all things considered. He was still here, finishing out this season rather than telling Rafe where to shove it, but I knew it hadn’t been easy on him. Because the rest of the teams had already solidified their rosters for next season, Pedro hadn’t been able to find another seat. So he’d be available, but would he want anything to do with us after we’d fired him?

Rafe sighed, and I was sure I wasn’t going to like what he had to say next.

“I think it would be better if you talked to him. You have a better rapport with him, and ever since we let him go in Austria, he’s been very cold to me.”

I didn’t want to hear this. “What makes you think he likes me more?”

“He just does.”

Thoughts whirled through my head. A year ago, I wouldn’t have even considered it, but I’d gained some confidence, and I’d always had an excellent relationship with Pedro. “He’s going to want to be compensated for all that’s gone on in the last few months.”

Rafe grabbed my hands and squeezed them tightly. “Luna, do what you have to in order to keep him. We can’t afford to take on a less-qualified driver. It will kill us.”

“All right. What can I offer him? I need the specifics.”

With all the details hammered out and stored in my head, I left the office and went in search of him. He was with his racing engineer discussing the track. I took him aside and tried to act as casual as possible.

“Pedro, how are you doing?”

“Fine,” he said tentatively.

“I was wondering if you’d be available tonight. I’d like for us to have dinner.”

Pedro’s ebony eyes studied me. We’d always been friendly, often exchanging jokes or funny stories. He wasn’t smiling now as he said, “You’re the boss.”

“Seven, then? The hotel restaurant is suitable?”

“I’ll be there.”

* * *

I sat in the restaurant waiting for Pedro. I’d never negotiated with anyone before and was flattered that Rafe had chosen me for this task. I was also happy to be busy and doing something meaningful. I feared that if I had too much idle time, my thoughts would turn to Blake Carlton. The last thing I wanted to think about was his crash or the fact he wasn’t around to talk to. It would immediately make me worry for both Devin and Rafe come Sunday.

“Hello, Luna,” Pedro said, taking the seat across from me. He was dressed casually in jeans and a black polo shirt. I tried to gauge his demeanor, but he was giving nothing away.

He ordered himself a mineral water and leaned back in his chair. It occurred to me that Pedro knew precisely why he was meeting with me and that he had the upper hand.

“Thank you for meeting me.”

“You’re the boss,” he said, repeating his earlier sentiment with a polite smile.

“How are things going? How do you feel about the car this weekend?” I asked, trying to break the ice between us. While I felt a little uncomfortable about what I had to do, Pedro wasn’t the enemy. In some ways we were even alike. He did his job and stayed behind the scenes, just like I had, at least before I got involved with Devin ... and Blake. How I wished to be again.

“Good, to both questions.”

“Any prospects for next year?” I said.

“A few. I’ve thought about driving in America.”

I needed to jump in and forgo small talk. “We want you back, Pedro.”

He nodded and fiddled with the napkin in front of him, tearing off a small piece and balling it up. “I’m not sure I want to be back,” he said candidly. He looked me in the eye, and I withered under his gaze. He had us scrambling, and it occurred to me why Rafe had me here. My brother would have argued and tried to bully Pedro, and for once, my brother recognized what a terrible strategy that would be.

“I know we treated you badly.”

“Horribly. The rumors were flying for *months* that Carlton wanted to join Perez, and Rafe denied it to my face. Neither you nor your brother had the decency to tell me to look elsewhere next year. Now with Carlton dead, you want me back. Forgive me, but I don’t trust you.”

Nothing he said was wrong, and I deserved it all. “You’re right. We should have handled it so much better.”

“I expected that from Rafe, but I didn’t expect it from you. It hurt me, Luna, because out of everyone I have ever come across in this world, I always had the highest respect for you. What you did was dishonest.”

I absorbed it all. He needed to vent, and there was no way I was about to begrudge him that. To be fair, I hadn't known how close Rafe had been to cutting a deal with Blake, but maybe that was my fault too. I'd kept myself deliberately in the dark.

But that wasn't what Pedro needed to hear. "I apologize, for myself and on behalf of Rafe. And now I want to make amends."

He settled into his seat a little more and crossed his arms over his chest. "I want more money and a three-year contract."

I tried to hide my surprise, but I knew my eyes shot open. "I can give you more money, but I can't promise three years."

"Well, that's what I want," he said, rising. "If you can't get me three years, you'd better find another driver."

* * *

"Three years and more money?" Rafe grunted his displeasure the next morning as I relayed the meeting to him. "Go back to him and tell him one year and a small raise."

I narrowed my eyes. One year? A small raise? We were desperate for a driver of his caliber, and my brother was going to screw around with Pedro and make me the bad guy? Nope and nope.

"Shouldn't we get our negotiators to talk to his manager?"

"No way! I want Pedro to think we are sincere about welcoming him back."

I rolled my eyes. "One year and a small raise is insincere. Come on, Rafe. You know that!"

Rafe rubbed his temples. "He's asking for too much. It's not like any other team snapped him up."

"Because we released him so late in the season. Now you're not even being fair."

"I think I am."

This was why he'd sent me to negotiate. My brother was a total hardass, and we both knew he'd have blown it with Pedro right away. "Let's compromise," I said. "How about two years and bonuses based on his performance. And a decent raise. Vallenta has threatened to cut back sponsorship next year if we don't get Pedro back, so it's worth the few extra dollars we might have to pay him."

"How did you know about Vallenta?"

"I own one-third of this team, Rafe, so I get information when I want it." Vallenta, a Mexican sponsor, hadn't been thrilled that we'd cut our Mexican rising-star driver.

Rafe sighed. "All right, two years, but don't give the damn team away."

My brother was finally starting to smarten up.

Chapter Eight

Luna

I walked up and down pit lane. This race weekend was different from all the others. For one thing, I'd spent most of the weekend with Rafe, handling more of the business side of the team than I'd ever done before. He was so tense, and if I knew anything about racing, it was that you couldn't be tense or nervous—or worst of all, both—on a race day. I'd asked him to withdraw from the race, but he insisted on going through with it, and that decision had me on edge. If Rafe had one lapse of concentration during the race, he could easily end up like Blake.

His sudden dependence on me meant that I spent almost no time with Devin. Normally it would have bothered me, but I knew I would be taking a week off with Devin to visit his parents in Birmingham. I wanted to look forward to the trip but I was anxious. It would be the first time meeting them, and meeting Paige as well. From what little Devin had told me about them, I had no idea what to expect.

And there was no Roche team on the track. They'd withdrawn from the final two races of the season in honor of their fallen driver. And, of course, there was no Blake Carlton to light up the track. There was no entourage of famous people following him around like he was a god. Instead, there were somber faces trying to put the tragedy out of their minds. The race had to go on, and all concerned had to focus on that.

Yet Blake's death was still fresh. People couldn't stop talking about him and the extent of his loss, and it *was* a great loss. We had lost the most dynamic and entertaining driver of

the modern era. The federation wondered privately to the team owners who would take over the mantle for Blake Carlton. Who was gifted enough to be exciting, competitive, and beloved like Blake. I didn't see any candidates.

Blake might have been getting ready to retire, but he'd still been young. He was popular wherever he went. He had a way of drawing people to him, rich and poor, young and old. He was a charismatic man in a community of less-interesting men. Of the drivers who remained, the talented ones lacked charm and appeal, and the ones with charm and appeal lacked the raw talent. Devin was the only driver who resembled him in character, but both he and I could admit that he in no way matched Carlton's driving prowess.

I did have one small thing to celebrate on this strange weekend, and yet it felt like a betrayal of Blake's memory because I'd already replaced him—on the team at least. After a bit of back-and-forth with Pedro, he'd agreed to the two-year term and a healthy raise. If nothing else, that put Rafe at ease, and based on his demeanor, he needed all the reassurance he could get.

"Hello, Leo," I said as I entered the Russo pits. Leo owned the team that Erich and Devin raced for. He was inspecting one of the cars with Erich's racing engineer.

"Hello, Luna," he said with a strange smile. It was as if he knew something I didn't.

"Is Devin around?"

"He's in the motorhome, eating. See if you can stop him."

Russo was still going on about that? "Thank you," I said.

I found him eating lunch with Erich. Devin was tucking into a plate of spaghetti and meatballs, his favorite. He was in great shape, but this sport could have an unhealthy fixation on weight. Devin loved food like he loved alcohol and women, and the team needled him incessantly about the slightest weight gain. Erich, on the other hand, was quite specific about his meals. The Russo chefs had to prepare everything for him in a certain manner or face his wrath.

“Hello, gentlemen,” I said.

Devin waved but didn’t stop eating for a proper hello. Erich was polite and put down his fork. He was eating steamed rice with vegetables, and a piece of what looked like boiled chicken. It looked wholly unappetizing.

“Hello, Luna, how are you?” Erich asked, moving over so I could sit next to him.

“I’ve been better.”

“Are you hungry? I’m sure the chef can put something together for you.”

“I ate earlier,” I said, motioning to Devin that he had sauce on his chin.

“You shouldn’t have told him,” Erich said with a laugh. “I was hoping he would do interviews with the sauce on his face.”

Devin gave a mock laugh, glaring.

I needed to step in before he triggered Devin. To divert Erich’s attention, I asked, “How are you doing? How’s the baby?”

“Getting bigger. Another few weeks and I’ll be able to spend as much time as I want with him. I hate being here knowing he is so far away. Monica does a great job, and her parents are staying with us right now, but I miss seeing my son.”

If only Devin felt that way about Paige. “Do you have a picture?” I asked.

“Yes. That reminds me. I should text one to your mom as well.”

“She’d like that.” Erich had been a family friend for a long time, and Mom would be touched to see Erich’s son, even if she professed to not want to know anything about the racing world.

Devin pointedly ignored us as we looked at pictures until Erich was called away by his racing engineer.

“I’ll be right back,” he said.

He disappeared into one of the rooms, and I glanced at Devin, thinking he could learn a thing or two from Erich, a proud father who adored his son.

Devin wiped his mouth with a napkin. “I know what you’re thinking, so you can stop thinking about it,” he said coolly.

“And what was that?”

“Riedl carries around pictures, and I don’t even have one at all.”

“That’s not what I was thinking.” But it was close.

Erich returned, and he resumed scrolling through pictures.

“He looks like you, Erich.”

“I know. Monica can’t stand hearing that anymore. But enough about me and my boy. How is your mom? I hear they were hounding her about Blake’s death.”

“People are comparing it to my dad’s death.”

Erich’s face soured. “How is she taking all of the attention?”

“Not well. She won’t even talk about it.”

“I don’t know what the big deal is,” Devin put in. “When you get into the car, you take risks. You know that if you aren’t careful, you’re going to die. He knew what he was getting into. If I died tomorrow, I wouldn’t want all this bellyaching, and that’s the way Carlton would have felt.”

Erich and I looked at Devin in disbelief. I didn’t how to respond to Devin’s lack of tact. Finally, Erich found his voice.

“Flynn, you aren’t the most sensitive man, I know that, but I wouldn’t express these views of yours publicly. The man is a hero. I don’t think he wanted to die two weeks ago. I don’t know about you, but when I get behind the wheel of the car today, I’m going to be extra careful. I have a wife and son who need me.”

“If you’re so worried about your wife and kid, you should quit racing,” Devin said. He left the table and walked out of the motorhome, leaving us openmouthed. Where was the sensitive boyfriend who had taken care of me through my panic attacks? I had no idea why he was being a jerk, and I certainly didn’t like it.

* * *

There was a moment of silence before the race. All the drivers had gathered together, heads bowed in honor of Blake Carlton. In the distance, I could hear the rumbling of cars, and this irritated me. They couldn’t keep the cars silent for a few minutes?

I buzzed with nervousness, different from anything I’d ever felt before. I didn’t realize it, but as the cars took to the grid, my feet were tapping incessantly on the ground. Carlos, the pit boss, politely asked me to stop. I began chewing gum. I normally hated it, and thought it was a terrible habit, but it was better than nothing.

The race went off without a hitch. The drivers were more tentative at first, but by mid-race, they were all back to normal. Hans Lauder won easily, and Erich came in second with Collins a close third. Devin finished fifth with Rafe taking sixth. The race was cause for a muted celebration. The demons that had haunted Rafe the entire weekend all but disappeared. He thanked me several times for coming to the race.

“I know you didn’t want to be here,” he said as we drove back to the hotel.

“It wasn’t easy.”

“Blake was watching us today. I felt him. He was happy for us.”

“I know, Rafe.” But was he? Rafe had always held close to his faith, but I wasn’t so sure. Just like our father, Blake was gone forever, but if it gave Rafe some solace, who was I to take that away from him?

Chapter Nine

Devin

Sometimes Enzo's happy comments about Carlton's death came back to haunt me. I wasn't an asshole, and I wasn't happy or relieved that Carlton was dead. If he hadn't died, he would have been here now, a pain in my ass and trying to steal my woman. But the fact he was dead bothered me even more.

Thinking of his attempts at seduction was infuriating, because I felt like a wanker being angry at a dead man. But seeing Luna's reaction to his death, how she seemed almost lost, made me wonder how she'd really felt about him. She'd sworn there was nothing between them, and I knew she loved me, but still ...

"Lost in thought?" Riedl asked.

We were in a conference room in Manta, working through some last-minute changes for the race in Japan and discussed options and strategies for next year—likely my last with Russo. I suspected they'd only kept me on this year because of the sponsorships and attention that had come from my high-profile relationship with Luna. I hated being used like that almost as much as I hated Riedl's smug face and always having to sacrifice my position in the races to help him come out better.

"I was thinking about the cars," I said vaguely, though really I'd been scrolling through my phone and brooding.

Riedl pasted on the fakest smile. I couldn't stand him, and maybe the fact that Russo was going to turf me was a good

thing.

“Good that you’re thinking about work. How is Luna?”

“Fine.”

“I hear she’s not taking Carlton’s death well. Seems they had a very special friendship.”

I put my phone down to give Riedl my full attention and a killer glare for good measure. “He was supposed to race for her team next year. That makes it a working relationship.”

“Such a sad thing. He would have been an asset to the team. And while I know that’s why Rafe is devastated, I’m not sure that’s why Luna’s taking it so hard.”

I wanted to throttle him. Was this asshole really trying to leverage his so-called friend’s death just to piss me off? “Like you said, they were friends. But he’s gone now.”

Riedl leaned back in his chair with that fucking smug smile. “It’s a good thing for you. I’m not sure she would have held out so long. Carlton did care for her a lot, and he was a good man, some say great. A true professional and a Southern gentleman.”

What did Riedl know about Southern gentlemen and professionalism? I blew out a breath. “I’m not sure where you’re going with this, but you can let it go now. Carlton is gone.”

“I heard a lot of people saw them together. Having dinner, being on his boat. I think they even spent some time together in Montreal and Monte Carlo.”

That was the gut-punch. I hadn’t realized that Riedl knew about all that.

“It would be so embarrassing if that got out,” he continued. “I heard there were pictures of the two of them together. On his boat. Seems rather intimate. A shame if they surfaced. Seems like people would hate you even more for coming between Luna and her lost love.”

I only just managed to stop my jaw from dropping. All along I’d thought Carlton had been behind those photos. But

the only way Riedl could know about them was if *he'd* been the one to hire the private eye who'd all but stalked Luna to get them. "So let me get this straight. You would embarrass Luna to spite me? Are you nuts?"

Riedl glanced around, probably to make sure we were truly alone before setting his sights back on me. "I thought Blake was going to win her over. Who do you think encouraged him to join the Perez team? I was certain it wouldn't take long for Luna to fall under his spell—and get out from under yours. And then he went and died on me. Can you imagine my luck? So now I've moved on to plan B. Do I need to spell this out for you, Flynn?"

He seemed almost gleeful, like he'd been waiting to rub my face in this. He was fucking sadistic. I swallowed a hard lump, wishing I could hit the record button on my phone. "Yes, I think you should. I'm dying to know what fucked-up scheme you're cooking up."

"Let me break it down for you so that you understand. You're done with Russo ... unless I step in. One call to Leonardo, and you can drive with Russo for as long as you want. All you have to do is break up with Luna."

Why did I always want to resort to violence with Riedl? "Are you still going on about this? She's happy with me, so get a fucking life."

"The Perez family is too important to my family to let me watch you destroy Luna. This should be an easy decision for you—save your career, save her the inevitable heartbreak. Why don't you take some time and think about it? But not too long because you're pretty easy to replace. Do you know how many people would love to drive for Russo?"

"Why don't you shove—" I stopped when both our racing teams began filing in. This discussion wasn't over, and then I'd deal with Riedl once and for all.

* * *

I was in a sour mood when I saw Luna a few hours later. She was packing an overnight bag for a quick trip to London. I would have loved to join her, but I had more Russo meetings the next day with fucking Riedl.

“I’m thinking of moving more of my things here and letting Jess have the flat on a more permanent basis,” Luna was saying. Her best friend often crashed at the Perez flat where Luna had lived before things got serious with us. “Rafe said he didn’t care as long as he could crash there when he was in town. And since you and I spend more time at your place when we’re in London, it seems like a good idea.”

Luna making her presence here more permanent sounded good to me—something that would have sent me running and screaming from any other woman in my past. Plus, if Luna moved more of her things in, that would enrage Riedl even more. I just needed to make sure he found out.

“I think it’s a great idea.” I walked up behind her and put my arms around her waist, resting my head on her shoulder. Her hair smelled of lilacs. Lately, everything about her smelled like lilacs. It was all so heavenly. “I’ll miss you while you’re gone.”

“You could join me. Then we could finally meet your parents.”

I hated when she was a buzzkill. “We will do that. I promise you. When the season ends.”

“I wish you’d talk about them more,” she said, leaning into me. “You don’t even talk about your sisters.”

“We’re not as close as we used to be. They have their lives, and I have mine. Unlike you, I don’t see my siblings all the time.”

“Good point, I suppose. And I will meet your grandmother?”

“Of course. She’s looking forward to it.” That was the one family introduction I *was* looking forward to. I hadn’t seen my gram in such a long time, since she’d taken ill the previous year. She was doing better, and we spoke often, even if only

for a few minutes here and there. I'd even taught her to text and set her up with a phone that was linked to her iPad. Of course, that meant she was sending me shrewd advice and slightly out-of-touch memes all the time, and I loved it.

"The way you talk about her, I know she means a lot to you." She smiled over her shoulder at me. "Now, let me get back to packing."

I sat on the bed as she went through some drawers. Riedl popped into my head again, like an evil little leprechaun. "How is your brother coping with what's going on with Perez?"

"Losing Blake and taking Pedro back on?"

"Yes, that."

"Obviously, he's still shaken up. He doesn't talk about it much, but that's Rafe. He's giving me more responsibility, though, so that's good."

I knew I had to be delicate here. "And you're doing okay too? About Blake?"

She stopped rifling through T-shirts as if lost in thought. She broke out of the mini-trance and shrugged. "He's gone. Nothing changes that."

"And it changes nothing about us?"

She turned to me, her expression puzzled. "Why would it change anything about us?"

"It doesn't change how I feel about you ... but I wonder how you feel. If you miss him." I sounded pathetic, but it was coming from the heart.

She came over to me, pushing me back on the bed, and straddling me. Intense emotions or not, my cock took immediate notice. Damn, I was always ready for my Luna.

"Don't you worry about that," she said, leaning down to kiss me. "Yes, he was interested in me, but I chose *you*. It's you and me, here and now." She reached down to the button on my jeans. "And right now, I'd like to enjoy my time with you."

I smiled. Riedl could go fuck himself.

Chapter Ten

Luna

The last race was in Japan, more than four weeks away. It gave the teams and drivers the opportunity to take a much-needed rest and reset. Devin was given a ten-day break while Riedl got two weeks. I met up with Devin a few days after the race. I was moving more of my things from London to Devin's place in Milan. I offered Jess the flat to stay in and she quickly accepted. The Perez flat was more central, more spacious, and, of course, free.

"Have you officially moved in yet?" Devin asked from the doorway into our bedroom. He was eating ice cream with chocolate syrup, topped with peanuts. I was unpacking my luggage and putting clothes in the closet.

"I'd say it's official. Jess's moved into my place in London."

"The last time I lived with someone it was Nigel. We had a small basement flat in London, even smaller than your place in Montreal. I used to sleep on the floor, and if we were lucky, we could afford electricity and eat a decent meal. There were many dark and cold nights."

"And you pretended to be so shocked at how tiny my Montreal place was!" I laughed. "You've come a long way, baby."

I now had to pack for our trip to Birmingham. As usual, Devin hadn't even pulled out luggage. We were leaving that night. I didn't pack much since it was a short trip, but I did put on the necklace Blake had given me. I'd had it tucked away all

these weeks, but I'd decided to wear it as a symbol of the friendship we had, and maybe as a special reminder of him.

"I've never seen you wear that before," Devin said.

He rarely noticed things like my jewelry, but trust him to pick up on this pendant right away. "It was a gift from Blake."

He arched his brow. "From beyond the grave?" Devin said with a chuckle.

"You are such an ass," I snapped.

"Where the hell did it come from?"

"His mother gave it to me. Blake had my father's gold cross, and he was going to give it back to Rafe and me before he died. He never had the chance to give us the cross. He also wanted to give me this necklace."

"That's quite the gift."

Did I sense a hint of jealousy? It certainly wasn't becoming.

"I guess he saw the half-moon and thought of me."

"Part of his campaign to get in your pants, but we know how that ended."

This was an ugly side to Devin that I didn't like. "Drop it already," I said. He was really pissing me off, and the last thing I wanted before our trip to see his family was a fight.

"Fine. Whatever you say."

I packed my things and brought my small luggage downstairs, leaving Devin to pack his things alone. The day before I'd gone to a toy store and bought a doll for Paige, and I tucked it into my luggage now. I had no idea what the girl would like and knew Devin would be no help.

We caught our evening flight to London and drove the remainder of the way to Birmingham. It was late in the evening when we arrived at his parents' home. Devin had purchased the house for his parents two years ago, and in the driveway were two brand-new cars. They had been Christmas gifts.

“Is Paige going to be here?”

“Probably,” Devin said, taking my hand. He unlocked the front door without knocking and led me inside. The house was quiet apart from the sound of a TV tuned to the news. We followed the sound to a small sitting room where both of his parents were watching TV. They stood and Devin introduced me.

“Hello, Luna,” Maureen Flynn said loudly and deliberately. She was careful to stress every syllable.

“Mum, she speaks English,” Devin said with exasperation.

The small woman looked slightly embarrassed. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” I said, shaking their hands. I was beginning to wonder if he’d told his family anything about me.

“And very good English. We’ve heard so much about you,” Harold Flynn said, smiling warmly. Devin was the spitting image of his father, with the exception of the gray hair.

“*You’ve* heard about her. Our son won’t even talk to me about Luna,” Maureen said in disgust.

Okay, this was getting stranger by the second.

“Maureen, please,” Harold said, taking my hand and staring at me intently. I was beginning to feel self-conscious.

“Would you like anything, dear?” Maureen asked.

“I’m fine, thank you.”

“I’ll take our stuff up to our room,” Devin said, happy to leave.

“Be quiet. Paige is sleeping,” Maureen warned.

She was here. I could feel my stomach coil into painful knots. I kept a smile on my face even though my nerves were kicking up my nausea.

Maureen bustled into the kitchen, saying something about a late-night snack over my protests that I wasn’t hungry.

“Devin has told you about Paige?” Harold asked.

“Yes,” I said.

“That’s good. Maureen and I have never seen our son so happy. He’s always with one woman or another, and we never get to meet them. But when he met you, everything changed. Whatever you did, please don’t stop. He’s made his mother happy, for once.”

I couldn’t help smiling at that. “He’s made me happy.”

Harold motioned for me to move in closer. “He clashes with his mother. She wants him to settle down, so this is a good start.”

I chose a chair, and as I sat, my eyes were drawn to a pile of toys in the corner. There were building blocks, coloring books, and crayons. On the wall were photos of Devin and his two sisters. Below was a photo of Paige.

Maureen returned with a tray of cookies and a pot of tea. I tried to decline, but she overruled me, pouring a generous cup of tea and pushing the plate of cookies at me.

“When Devin was young, all he ever wanted to be was a race car driver,” Harold said with a fond smile. “Your father was definitely his favorite.”

“He’s told me that he idolized my father.”

Maureen made an odd scoffing sound, but Harold said, “He even met him. It was the best day of his life.”

Devin reappeared and took a couple of cookies. His mother hounded him to drink a cup of tea. He politely declined, explaining the caffeine would keep him up. Maureen insisted until Devin shot her an angry glare.

Soon after, he extricated us from his parents’ excited grasp and ushered me upstairs. “Unlike your uptight family, my parents have no objections to us sleeping together,” Devin said, closing the bedroom door. He reached for me.

“This doesn’t feel right,” I said as Devin began to unbutton my blouse.

“What doesn’t feel right?”

“Having sex in your parents’ house with them in it.”

“Do you know how many girls I’ve brought up here?” He leaned in to kiss my neck.

I shivered. He made a good argument. “Even at a young age, you got around.”

“Come on, it’ll be exciting. We’ll be quiet,” he whispered.

I swayed toward him, then pulled back. “I can’t. I’m sorry.”

He sighed, pecked me on the forehead, and stepped back. “How did I know you were going to say that?”

It wasn’t just the Catholic guilt or unease about his parents. I had a big day planned and needed a good night’s sleep. I was finally going to meet Devin Flynn’s daughter.

Chapter Eleven

Luna

I awoke early in the morning after a mostly sleepless night. While Devin slept soundly, all I could do was think about was the tea I shouldn't have had, wreaking havoc on me. I quietly got out of bed and heard activity coming from downstairs. I braced myself for my first meeting with Paige. Should I wake Devin? He was dead asleep, so I dressed quietly and slipped out into the cold hallway. My heart raced as I descended the stairs. I heard two voices: Harold's and Maureen's. They were in the kitchen. I paused, eavesdropping on their conversation.

"I don't see why you must pester him all the time," Harold said in a scolding voice. "If you keep that up, he'll never come home. He barely comes as it is. How long has he been seeing this woman, and this is the first time we've met her?"

"The only reason he's here is to show off his rich and famous girlfriend."

"All of his girlfriends are rich and famous," Harold pointed out. "This one is down to earth. I like her."

"*Pfft.* He's changed, Harry. You just don't want to see it. He's not our innocent little boy anymore."

Harold groaned. "He's nearly thirty years old! What do you expect, Mo?"

"I expect my son to treat me with some respect. Now that he has all this money to throw around, he thinks he's better than us."

“No, he doesn’t. You’re unhappy because you can’t control him anymore.”

Maureen *pfited* again at her husband. “Why can’t he come see his daughter? He’s only here to show off some famous driver’s daughter. Did you hear her last night? *Oh, he idolized my father.* So arrogant! Do you really think this one will last any longer than the others?”

Okay. I didn’t like Maureen. It was official.

“You complain when you don’t meet his girlfriends, and now he’s finally brought one home to meet us and you’re complaining.”

“He’s here for the wrong reasons.”

“Well, I like her. She seems like a nice young lady.”

“What’s Paige doing?” Maureen asked. She clearly didn’t like the direction of the conversation and decided to change it.

“Still playing. I’m watching, don’t worry.”

“You don’t think he’s actually going to marry this girl?”

Or not. I couldn’t keep track of what Maureen wanted to talk about.

“I haven’t a clue.”

“What is she anyway?”

My jaw dropped. Surely I had misheard that.

“Her father was Mexican. Or American. Or both. I don’t know. Isn’t her mother Italian?”

“Mexican?” Maureen said with dismay. “Bloody hell, I tolerated that half-Japanese girl; now he’s with a Mexican. Our son has dated the bloody United Nations.”

So not only did I dislike Maureen; she was also a shitty, racist human being. Not once had I ever seen or heard Devin use that kind of language, and if he had, I’d set him straight, then tell him to fuck off.

“Come on, Mo, that’s not nice.”

“No wonder her skin is so dark. I suppose that’s the Mexican and Italian in her,” Maureen said unpleasantly.

“Woman, why can’t you just be happy for him?” Harold said with exasperation.

“Because he should have married Natalie.”

I didn’t hear the response. Devin had snuck up from behind and covered my mouth with his hand so I wouldn’t scream.

“What are they talking about?” he whispered in my ear.

“Me and you,” I whispered back.

“Dad loves you, and Mum hates you?”

“Something like that. And your mom ...”

Devin pressed his lips into a thin line. “Yeah, I should have warned you about Mum. She’s a lot to handle.”

Should I confront this? Maybe he didn’t fully comprehend what a vile person his mother was. And was it right for me to point it out? Probably not.

“She has a problem with my background,” I said, taking the gentlest of approaches.

He grimaced. “Shit. Mum’s a raging racist, but she thinks she’s not. She’s one of those people who prefaces everything with, ‘I’m not a racist, but ...’ I should have told you about that. I’m sorry, Luna.”

At least he knew who his mother was, not that he could possibly change her. “It’s fine,” I said. Would I have liked to have set Maureen straight? Hell yes! Was it worth my time and effort? No way!

Devin took me by the hand, and we made our grand entrance into the kitchen. Maureen was making breakfast while Harold stood gazing out the window. No sign of the little girl indoors, so he must be watching her in the garden.

“Good morning,” Devin said jubilantly. He poured himself some coffee and sat at the small kitchen table to read the newspaper.

I greeted his parents, and it was even more awkward now that I knew who Maureen truly was. Maureen insisted I sit down while she prepared breakfast.

The back door banged open, and my stomach knotted as Paige sprang through and into her grandfather's arms. "I saw a butterfly and—" She paused mid-sentence, startled to see Devin and me at the table.

Paige stared at me intently with her sea-green eyes, so like Devin's. I smiled, but the girl didn't smile back. Devin hadn't even looked up from his paper.

"Paige, this is Luna," Harold said, taking the seat next to me and settling his granddaughter in his lap.

"Hello, Paige," I said with a warm smile. "You are a very beautiful girl." She turned shy, burying her head in Harold's chest. I took in her long and silky, dirty-blond hair. With the exception of her eyes, she resembled Devin very little. She watched me carefully from the corner of her eye.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Four," she said, holding up four fingers.

"You're a big girl."

"How old are you?" Paige asked, becoming braver.

"I'm twenty-four."

"You're old!"

Devin flipped the page of his newspaper, still not looking up from it. I knew he didn't keep a close relationship with her, but this shocked me. Paige didn't seem to notice. She was staring at me openly now, ignoring Devin as hard as he was ignoring her.

"I have something for you," I said. "Devin and I brought it from home."

"You did?" she asked wide-eyed.

"If you come with me, I'll show you."

“Okay,” she said, crawling out of her grandfather’s arms. She took my hand, and we went up to the room I was sharing with Devin. Paige hauled herself up onto the bed and sat quietly while I retrieved the doll from my luggage. Paige’s eyes lit up. I handed it to her, and she began to play with the doll’s long blonde hair. I’d picked the doll at random, but she seemed thrilled to share a resemblance with it.

She jumped off the bed and ran down the stairs to show her grandparents. I followed behind and found her showing Harold how the eyes opened and closed. Devin still took no notice, and Paige took no notice of him.

“Well, you’ve won her over,” Harold said with a chuckle as Paige dropped to the floor to play with her new doll.

“She is a beautiful little girl.”

“She looks like her mother,” Maureen said.

I caught the obvious insult but remained pleasant. I’d always presumed the mysterious Natalie was gorgeous. Devin did have standards.

Maureen served breakfast, and finally Devin looked up from the newspaper. He glanced quickly at Paige, then turned his attention to me. He tried to play with my feet under the table, and given my first opportunity, I kicked him in the shin. He immediately stopped playing his silly game.

“Where are you from, Luna?” Maureen asked.

“She’s a nomad,” Devin joked. “She travels from country to country and calls no place home.”

“Don’t be cheeky,” Maureen sniped.

“Yes, don’t be cheeky,” I said. It was the first time I’d agreed with Maureen on anything. “Mrs. Flynn, I was born in Santa Barbara, California, and spent part of my childhood there. But my real home is in Cortese, my mother’s hometown.”

“Italy,” Maureen sniffed.

“Yes?” It came out like a question.

“Is that near Milan?”

“Just a shot away, ten hours to be exact,” Devin said, teasing his mother.

“Definitely your son,” Maureen said to Harold, taking away the empty breakfast dishes.

Devin was about to get up, but his father cleared his throat, and Devin sat back down.

“Don’t forget to visit your grandmother today,” Harold said. “She’s been asking why you haven’t come visit.”

“I know, I know. How is she doing?”

“Remarkably well. She’s almost back to her normal self. She’s happy to be at home again. The rehabilitation was slow going, but she’s made tremendous progress.”

“She’d be better *in* a home,” Maureen said.

“She wanted to go back to *her* home. And what do you care? I pay for it,” Devin said bitterly.

“That mouth of yours,” Maureen said, clenching her jaw the way Devin did when he was angry.

“Can I see Great-Granny Ruth?” Paige asked Harold, his eyes wide in anticipation.

“No, you can’t,” Devin said, addressing his daughter for the first time. He spoke to the girl as if she were a nosy little sister and not a daughter.

“Grandpa, please,” Paige begged.

“Oh, Devin, take her with you,” Harold said.

Everyone in the room was staring at him, and he knew he was outnumbered.

“Fine. Somebody get her ready. We’re leaving in fifteen minutes.”

Chapter Twelve

Luna

Ruth lived a few blocks from Harold and Maureen's house, but Devin had us there in less than two minutes. I was furious with him for driving so fast with a child in the car. It was so strange watching the two of them. Paige acted just as indifferent to Devin as he did to her. He didn't even buckle her into the car seat or help her back out, leaving me to take care of that.

When we arrived, he stormed off ahead of me and Paige and went inside the small redbrick house. I scowled after him before putting a smile on my face and taking Paige's little hand.

I was looking forward to meeting Ruth. Devin had always spoken of her with the highest regard. He said he'd always been close to his grandmother. She seemed to have some power over him, and I wanted to know Ruth's secret. I was pretty sure Maureen wanted in on the secret too.

"Oh, my darling Devin," I could hear the older woman say. I was busy taking off Paige's shoes before the little girl ran into the living room. I followed and found Devin hunched over, hugging a small woman seated in a rocking chair. Her hair was white and full around her face as if she'd just had it done. Her eyes were glittering with tears as a smile spread across her face.

"I've missed you, sweetheart."

"I've missed you too," he said, his face bright and cheerful.

Ruth fixed her pale-green-eyed gaze on me. “And this must be Luna,” she said.

I walked toward her, wondering if I should shake her hand, but she immediately reached her right arm out, beckoning me in for a hug. She was skin and bones, but her hug was firm. She was confined to her seat and had trouble moving the left side of her body, but that didn’t seem to stop her.

“What a beautiful young woman,” she said, bringing her wrinkled hands to touch my face.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Mrs. Flynn.”

“Please, you must call me Ruth.”

“I want to hug Great-Granny Ruth too,” Paige said, attempting to climb onto Ruth’s lap.

“Maybe you shouldn’t do that,” I said nicely.

“That’s okay, Luna, Great-Granny doesn’t mind,” Paige said, struggling to straddle the chair. Devin was horrified with the spectacle as Ruth attempted to help her great-granddaughter onto her lap. Finally, he grabbed Paige under the arms and placed her gently on Ruth’s lap. I was surprised he made contact with his daughter and didn’t self-combust.

“Tell me about yourself,” Ruth said, motioning for me to sit on the old floral sofa next to her chair. I did, and she took my hand in hers. She stared keenly at me with her watery eyes. Those must have been the most magnificent eyes when Ruth had been younger, just like Devin’s. And Paige’s.

“What would you like to know?” I said, feeling accepted by Ruth unlike all my interactions with Maureen.

“Devin says you look after him and that you’re a great cook. That’s very important.”

“Yes, it is. I try to keep him healthy.”

Ruth shifted her gaze to Devin. “Darling, take Paige into the kitchen and give her some milk and biscuits. While you’re there, make us some tea.”

I was amazed that Devin did it without protest. He muttered something to Paige, and she skipped behind him into the kitchen. Ruth turned to me again.

“You are changing him,” she said, and her tone was much warmer than Maureen’s had been in the conversation I’d overheard.

“I am?”

“He’s different. My eyes may be bad, and my hearing not what it used to be, but I read about my grandson in the papers, and I watch him on television. He can be a sorry little bastard, his nose up in the air. He wasn’t raised to be that way, but money can destroy a person’s nature. Ever since he fell in love with you, he’s finally become an adult. I don’t think much of these driving-around shenanigans he does. It makes no sense to me, driving around and around with no place to go. But it’s his father, you know. It was my Harry that encouraged it, and I suppose Devin’s got a talent for it. The money went straight to Devin’s head, and he became an uppity little devil.

“But now he’s a sweet lad, the sweet young thing who used to come around and help me with the yard work or carry my groceries. I see it in his eyes; he’s going to make you a good husband.”

She was jumping to all sorts of conclusions, but who was I to tell her there was no plans for marriage? “I don’t think I deserve all these kind words, Ruth.”

“Sure you do. You changed that child for the better. Now I want you to see if you can get him to accept that beautiful little girl of his.”

“That is my mission.” I hadn’t even realized it was true until I said it.

“And you make sure you have babies. He will make a great father.”

That was up for debate, but I said, “I will, Ruth. But I worry about his relationship with Paige. I don’t know how to make him want to be in her life.”

Ruth shifted in her seat and leaned in a little closer. “He’s being stubborn. The more we want him to spend time with her, the more he resists. And there’s the problem of Maureen.” Ruth paused for a long moment, weighing something. “She’s my daughter-in-law, and she means well, but she pushes Devin away. She tries to shame and bully him into his responsibilities, and that just makes him dig his heels in. Look at you. She tried to force him into bringing you here, and what happens? He’s dating you for a year, and this is the first time we’re meeting you. She needs to leave the boy alone. Then I think he’ll come around to being a father.”

“I don’t know what I can do.”

“I think once he spends time with Paige, he’ll see what an amazing little girl he has. He’ll fall in love. I see a lot of her in him. They’re both stubborn and strong-willed.”

I thought about this for a moment. “Okay, let me see what I can come up with. Even if she spends some time with us, or I coax him back here more often. It’s a start.”

Ruth smiled. “I trust my gut, Luna, and I have a gut feeling about you. I like you, dear, and I want you and Devin to be happy together. He’d better marry you soon before you discover what a little bugger he can be.”

“Too late, Ruth, I already know.”

She laughed. “When he told me about you, I wanted to cry. He finally fell in love.”

Devin returned with Paige behind him. She had a handful of cookies and a milk mustache. Bits of cookie were on her pink dress, and Devin was oblivious, not that I was surprised. He handed me and Ruth a cup of tea before directing me to move so he could sit close to his grandmother.

“So when are you going to get married?” Ruth asked, sipping her tea.

“Grandma says not over her dead body,” Paige said innocently, munching away on her cookie.

Everyone looked at Paige, stunned.

“That mother of yours can be a real cow sometimes,” Ruth said angrily to Devin. And to Paige, she said, “Don’t tell her that.” Then to me, she added, “Don’t take it personally, Luna, dear.”

I liked this feisty side of Ruth. “I won’t,” I said, still absorbing the blow.

“I’m going to give that woman a piece of my mind. What is wrong with her? I really wish your father would grow a backbone and stand up to her.” And once again, to Paige, she said, “And don’t repeat that, either, sweetie, even though part of me doesn’t care if you do.”

Devin looked pained. “Please don’t start anything with Mum, Grandma. What Mum has to say doesn’t mean a rat’s ass to me.”

“Good attitude, Devin.”

We visited with Ruth for an hour. I watched, perplexed, as Devin and Paige interacted with Ruth and ignored each other. Finally, the old woman shooed us out, telling us her caretaker would be arriving soon for her physical therapy.

We drove back to his parents’ house with Paige asleep in the back seat from all the cookies, chocolates, and other treats Ruth plied her with.

“About my mum, don’t let that bother you. She hates anyone I love. It’s in her nature.”

Though, apparently, she didn’t hate Natalie.

When I said nothing, he added, “There’s a reason I haven’t had you come meet my folks sooner. It’s just ... she’s a lot.”

“I won’t let it bother me.” I bit my lip. “But Devin, it’s not just that she’s a lot. She’s racist. I can’t just forgive that.” And she was raising his child. Yikes.

“We’ll work on it,” he promised.

The words did nothing to make me feel better, but at least I had Ruth on my side.

Chapter Thirteen

Devin

The race in Japan marked the end of the season. Hans Lauder won the world championship and promptly dedicated it to the memory of Blake Carlton. I finished a respectable fifth in the driver's standings, and the Perez team had its best finish in its five-year existence, which pleased Luna and made Rafe crack the beginnings of a smile. The man was a perennial grouch.

Then it was December, and finally time for a break. For the first time, Luna and I had a full month to ourselves without worrying about sponsor events or team obligations. We spent a week skiing in Switzerland and another two at home in Milan. I was soaking up as much Luna time as I could before our planned travel to see my family in London and hers in Cortese for Christmas. But the peace was ruined before we even left Milan when I was called in for a team meeting with the Russo brass.

It was all boring shit, "team building," and a round table of what we all thought worked and didn't work. Why did we bother? No one cared what I had to say, and I didn't care to put in the effort for a team that wouldn't renew my contract after the upcoming season.

Two espressos and three Danishes later, the stupid meeting was over. I wanted to make a hasty exit, but Leo had already let me know through Enzo that he wanted a one-on-one. Fuck me. I sat in the boardroom waiting, and as people filed out, Matteo, my racing engineer, hung back. He clearly wanted to talk to me about something too. He looked around the room,

then motioned for me to follow him outside. It was unlike Matteo to be so clandestine.

We stepped outside the building, and he slipped on his sunglasses and lit a cigarette. He glanced around once more, then slowly shook his head. “Some things are happening, and we don’t have much time to talk.”

I moved in closer to him, intrigued. “What’s going on?”

“I’m hearing things. From Giorgio.”

Riedl’s chief mechanic. Matteo had every ounce of my attention. We might have been on the same team, but Riedl acted like he was my competitor. Very little filtered out from Riedl’s personal team. “What’s he heard?”

“Shitty things, mostly. Look, I like Giorgio, and I love this job. I also like you a lot, so you can’t get me in trouble for what I’m going to tell you.”

I shifted uncomfortably. “I won’t. What’s going on?”

“Riedl wants you gone.” Well, that wasn’t news. He continued, “He’s doing everything in his power to get rid of you, short of sabotaging your car. He’s also been talking to Rafe Perez more than he normally does. Giorgio doesn’t know what’s going on, but he thinks that if you aren’t gone next year, Riedl may bolt to Perez.”

Okay, *that* was news. I couldn’t imagine Riedl going to Perez. Riedl and Rafe were pals, but Riedl was the superior driver. He wouldn’t be Rafe’s second, and Rafe wouldn’t be second on his own team, would he? The move from world-class Russo to underdog Perez was far too much for him.

So if he wasn’t plotting to jump ship to Team Perez, that meant he and Rafe were up to something else. And all I could think was that it concerned me and Luna. “Thanks, mate. Anything else?”

He looked around again. “We think the team is recording conversations within the motorhome and offices. It’s just a hunch, but we’re fairly certain. Watch what you say and do. They’ve been hinting something about thefts, but that’s all bullshit.”

That had me more on edge. I'd said and done some stupid things. I patted Matteo on the shoulder. "Thank you. What you've told me won't be repeated." And I'd see to him getting an extra Christmas bonus too.

He nodded, and I set off to the boardroom again. Not only was Leo waiting for me, Davide and Sara were there. Just my fucking luck. I sat down, determined to remain as pleasant as possible. I could stomach Leo, but having Davide and Sara along as well? Deadly.

"How are your holidays going?" Leo asked, although we all knew he didn't care.

"Great, even better once I can get back to Luna. And yours?"

"Lovely. So, you're likely wondering why we asked you here today."

"Yes, I was wondering," I said, biting back the snark.

Leo leaned forward, steepling his hands together. "As you know, physicals are about a month away, and ... well, we're not sure you are going to pass yours."

I blinked a few times. "Excuse me?"

"You're not in the best shape," Davide said. "And this is something we've brought to your attention before. It seems you lose the weight and get back in shape, and then before you know it, the weight is back on. It makes it hard to balance and track the progress of the car properly."

"It's Christmas. I'm maybe eating a bit more."

"You're too fat for a professional driver," Sara said blandly.

I tried to hide how flustered I was. "I'm sure by the time the season rolls around, I'll be in shape."

"Your statement lacks some confidence, Mr. Flynn," Leo said. "And that's a problem."

It dawned on me then. This was their way of getting me out. "I will be in shape by the time we do our physicals. That's

a guarantee.”

“I know you already know this,” Davide said, “but for every ounce of extra weight you carry, it slows the car down. We need you in top form.”

“And if you don’t pass the physical, you’re gone,” Sara said.

Right, that was the reason she was here. To do Leo’s dirty work.

“Per the terms of the contract you signed,” she continued, “you will be fired with cause, but you won’t be allowed to drive with another team until your contract with us is up.”

Shit. I knew they wanted me gone, but no one had ever pulled the trigger on one of those clauses. If I was the first, and over my weight, no less, I’d be humiliated. No team would hire me.

“I’ll be in shape.”

“That’s good,” Leo said. “I think we’re done here, but I’d like to speak to you for a moment. Alone.”

Davide and Sara got the hint and left. Once they were gone, Leo’s menacing gaze trained on me. I wanted to hide under the table, not a feeling I was used to.

“Davide has informed me that he thinks I should allow you to do testing again. So I’m allowing it. But unless you have some information that would be helpful to me, this will be your last year with Russo.”

I kept from clenching my hands into fists, trying to remain calm. “Leo, I don’t have anything to tell you.”

“How is it that you didn’t even know they’d changed engine suppliers?”

No need to explain who “they” were. Perez had performed better this year because their cars had improved substantially. “Because we don’t talk about it. Ever. Riedl probably knows more than I do, with all the time he’s been spending with Rafe Perez.”

That got an arched brow out of Leo. I hadn't ratted Matteo out, instead using the information wisely and throwing my teammate under the bus. Win-win.

"I suggest you keep yourself out of trouble, Mr. Flynn. And my decision about you for next year hasn't changed. You won't be driving with Russo. And if for some reason you end up at Perez, I'll make sure your license is revoked and you never drive these tracks again. Is that understood?"

I was stunned. It had never occurred to me that I would drive for Perez. Why would that worry Leo? "Perfectly," I gritted out.

"Wonderful. This meeting is over."

Chapter Fourteen

Luna

Devin and I celebrated the new year in Sandrine with Devin's friends and Jess. It had been too long since I'd seen her. We all went to Thirst to ring in the new year. By eleven, Devin was drunk and singing songs. His friend Colin, equally as drunk, joined in. By midnight he had passed out in a corner. I drove them home. I would have left Devin in the car to sleep it off, but it was a cold night.

While Devin slept off his hangover the next morning, Jess and I made pancakes and coffee and chatted about life. She'd had a fabulous Christmas on a yacht with her mother, and I caught her up on my own hectic December. After Milan, we'd spent Christmas in Cortese. As always, Rosa had prepared a huge feast, and I'd a blast spending time with my little sister.

"And then you were with his family, right?" Jess was saying as I poured pancake batter into the pan.

"Yes," I said. "His mother blamed me for making him 'miss' Christmas by going to Cortese, but he hasn't spent Christmas with them in the past ... I don't know how many years!"

"Maureen's a bitch, but what about the rest of the family?"

"I met both of Devin's sisters. They're great. Nothing like Maureen. And, of course, his granny is lovely." I only wished Paige had been there, but she'd been with her mother. The Flynns had celebrated with their granddaughter two weeks earlier. I wondered if Devin knew that, if he'd chosen to go later deliberately. I didn't mention any of this to Jess, though.

Paige was a secret that wasn't mine to share—even with my best friend.

I shoveled a stack of pancakes onto each of our plates and said, “So other than dear Mo and whatever’s going on with Russo, it’s been a good holiday.”

“Bad news at Russo?” she asked.

“The team gives him shit all the time. We don’t talk details, easier to keep the professional stuff out of our personal lives,” I said. “But I could sense that something was wrong. Probably about his contract. They never sign him for more than a year so he always feels close to being let go.” Truthfully, I’d asked him what had gone on, but he refused to speak about it. My hackles were up, but what could I do? I couldn’t make him tell me.

“And what about you? You doing okay with Blake Carlton dying?”

“I’m fine. It was a blow to us all.”

She pursed her lips, but I was happy she didn’t pursue it. “Are you going to Danielle’s wedding?” she asked, then lathered her pancakes in butter and syrup.

“I sent my RSVP. How about you?”

“I’d rather dig my own eyes out.”

“Charming,” I said between laughs. Danielle was my friend Elizabeth’s younger sister. An absolute princess. I couldn’t stand her and had been surprised to get the invite. That didn’t stop me from checking my and Devin’s calendars. I’d mapped out all our commitments and was pleasantly surprised that nothing conflicted with Danielle’s wedding the first week of February. I dropped the reply card in the mail.

“I can’t believe you’re going,” she said.

“I know you don’t love Danielle, but it would be nice to catch up.”

“You don’t love Danielle, either, and honestly, I’m not up for pretending to like her and Elizabeth all night.”

I wasn't going to push it. I had always been close to both Jess and Elizabeth, and they put up with each other when they had to because of me. "We really don't see enough of each other," I said. "We need to spend more time together, especially when I'm staying in Sandrine."

"We don't even have an excuse." We ate in silence for a moment when her face suddenly lit up. "You have a very special birthday coming up in a few months."

"Right. Twenty-five."

"I am going to plan the party. We'll do it in London, and I'll even invite Danielle and Elizabeth."

"I don't want a party."

"What about something small? This is a big day for you. Financial independence from your mother! The last of your trust fund."

A pit suddenly formed in my stomach. I had no idea if that trust fund was in jeopardy.

Jess reached out and touched my hand. "Hey, are you okay?"

"I've got a lot on my mind."

"I'm betting it's about Perez."

She knew me well. "The trust fund isn't the nest egg I always imagined it would be. I'll need to infuse more money into the team. I was so sure that Blake Carlton was going to solve all our problems."

Sympathy was etched all over Jess's face. "I can't tell you what to do, but can't you sell your stake in the team?"

"Who would want it?"

"Living in London, I've learned a few things. One of those things is that there are a lot of filthy-rich race car drivers who would love to drive with a top-tier team. Couldn't one of those drivers buy you out?"

The thought hadn't occurred to me, but it was a good one. There was one small problem. "Rafe would kill me."

“It’s just a thought. I hate that you’re stuck doing something you hate.”

Did I hate it? It had never been the life I wanted, but I was getting pretty good at handling the sponsorships. If nothing else, she had me thinking. Maybe that was a potential solution.

* * *

For the first two weeks of January, Devin was testing the cars at the Manta track. I went to London where Rafe had arranged to have our own cars revealed for the upcoming season. Unlike past years, it was a big extravaganza. Alexander Wheaton, our biggest sponsor, made sure that extra media was flown out for the unveiling. With completely redesigned engines from Davies, an English supplier and sponsor that Wheaton had brought on board, Perez was going to launch its most competitive team ever. It felt odd doing all this without Blake, but the team had to go on. There was guarded optimism about the upcoming year.

By the time I saw Devin, it was the end of January. We spent a few days relaxing before packing for our trip to Montreal and Danielle’s wedding.

“Who the fuck gets married in February?” Devin asked as we took an Uber to our hotel. Devin refused to stay at my little place. He claimed that since he’d stayed there once, that was enough, and we deserved luxury instead. “Especially in an arctic climate. It’s mad!”

“Apparently, she wanted a winter wedding. And I told you to bring warmer clothes.”

A cold snap had gripped Montreal. Winds coming off the St. Lawrence seemed to slice through my clothes and straight to the bone. I’d spent many cold days in Montreal, but this was one of the coldest. I sat in our hotel room for several minutes, still in my winter coat, trying to warm up.

Elizabeth had left a voice message that I’d finally checked once my fingers were no longer numb. There was a pre-wedding party at a bar only a few blocks from the hotel.

“We have to go,” I said to Devin as he flipped on the television.

“I’m exhausted.”

“Are you turning down a visit to a bar? No wonder it’s so cold outside; hell is freezing over.”

“Amusing,” Devin sniped.

“We have to go, just for a couple of hours.”

I put on my heavy black wool coat and watched Devin shrug into his thin leather jacket. I pulled out my scarf and mittens. I’d brought two pairs because I had a history of losing them.

“Come here,” I said as he walked toward the door.

“Why?”

“Just do it.”

“Fine,” he said.

I wrapped the wool scarf around his face, then handed him the mittens.

“At least I’ll be warm,” he said with a sigh.

Despite the cold, the bar was packed. We checked our coats and went in search of Elizabeth and the rest of her friends. Devin stopped at the bar to get two beers. The one thing he liked about Montreal was not being recognized.

Elizabeth waved us over. A group of the old Montreal crowd was seated in the corner. Danielle was there with her fiancé, Guy. Danielle took one look at Devin, and I could see a scowl on her face. Danielle had always been transparent. Although Guy was a handsome man—and six inches taller than Devin—Devin still gave off the aura of affluence, something Danielle could only aspire to.

I took pleasure in introducing Devin to Danielle and Guy. Danielle used her usual charms to gain Devin’s full attention. She swung her bleached-blond hair over her shoulder, leaning forward to reveal her abundant cleavage. In typical Flynn fashion, Devin didn’t miss the action, but his glance had been

so subtle that I'd almost missed it. Even after all these years, Danielle tried so hard to be Jess, and failed miserably.

I took the empty seat next to Elizabeth while Devin chatted with Guy and a few other guys. What I appreciated most about Devin was his ability to make friends easily. He could mingle with monks if he had to and have a million things to talk about.

"How are you doing?" Elizabeth asked, placing her arm around my shoulder.

She was referring to Blake Carlton. "I'm all right. I think about it a lot. Before races I never used to worry about Rafe or Devin, but now I'm almost terrified."

"It's understandable."

"I miss Blake too," I said, feeling my body tense.

"Let's talk about other things," Elizabeth said, seeing me tear up. "Did you see Danielle when you walked in with Devin?"

"How could I miss it?"

"She's going to be all over him tonight. I give it ten minutes, and she's going to have him out on the dance floor."

"And Devin's going to enjoy every minute of it. If Danielle thinks I'm going to be jealous, she can forget it."

True to form, Danielle was dragging Devin out to the dance floor. What Danielle didn't know was that Devin was exhausted. He wasn't going to be very good company, and I took comfort in that.

Just then, a tall, handsome guy approached the table, and Elizabeth beamed. "About time you got here! Luna, do you know Tyler McCaffery?"

"Nice to meet you," I said, shaking his hand.

"Tyler is Guy's best man and an all-around great guy."

"You're embellishing," Tyler said, flashing a boyish smile. He was tall and fit, with broad shoulders. He had steel-blue

eyes, and blond hair that was cut short. He could have come off the cover of any men's magazine.

Instead of joining Guy and Devin and the rest, Tyler grabbed a chair across from me. He stared at me intently. I could feel my cheeks blush.

"I bet you and Tyler have a lot in common," Elizabeth said. "He's just as obsessed about fitness as you are."

"Is that right," I said, smiling shyly. What had gotten into me? Sure, the guy was cute, but I was with Devin, who was looking as though he was ready to pass out from exhaustion on the dance floor. I chalked it up to getting attention I wasn't used to.

"He works out every day."

I nearly blurted out that I could see that, but recovered with a less-intrusive question. "What do you do?" I asked, staring into his eyes. I was nervously tapping my feet on my stool. Geez, he was adorable.

"I'm a police officer," he said.

"That's why he's in such great shape," Elizabeth said.

"I'd ask you what you do, but Elizabeth has already told me a million times. I must admit I'm not very familiar with race car driving."

"I'm not very familiar with it either," I said with a laugh. Tyler laughed too. Elizabeth took the chance to leave for a round of beers.

"My dad is a real fan," Tyler said, taking the seat Elizabeth had vacated. "I told him that I was going to meet you and what's-his-name tonight. He asked me to get him an autograph, but I refused."

"His name is Devin, and I'll get one for your dad. What's your father's name?"

"Scott, and I appreciate it. How long have you been dating?"

“A little more than a year,” I said. I could smell Tyler’s cologne and I liked it. Okay, this had to stop right now.

“Elizabeth tells me you trained and ran in the Boston Marathon.”

I scoffed at that. “Years ago. I haven’t trained that hard since.”

“I’m working on my cardiovascular strength. I thought I might run the Montreal half marathon this year.”

“Let me tell you, it’s grueling. I still can’t believe I did it. In the shape I’m in right now I don’t think I could do it.”

“That’s too bad. I’d like to see you running in it next year.”

Now I was blushing, but the place was so dark, he probably couldn’t tell. “I have a job that keeps me away; otherwise, I’d be all over it.”

“You should train again. I’ll run it if you do.”

Oh. “Is that a challenge?”

“Sometimes people need a little motivation.”

I took a hard look at him and he seemed sincere. “If my schedule permits, I’ll be there. Are we talking the full marathon?”

“Let’s say half. I’m not that ambitious.”

“You’re on, Mr. McCaffery.”

We were talking about our fitness regimens when Devin returned to the table. He had a strange look on his face when he sat down on the other side of me. He looked at Tyler with narrowed eyes, and I instantly knew he was jealous. It was the same look he’d given me with Blake Carlton. I introduced them.

“Nice to meet you,” he said, barely cracking a smile. I knew Devin was tired and irritated.

“You must have an exciting life,” Tyler said to me, seeming to take note of Devin’s iciness. He made no attempt at conversation with him.

“Not as exciting as Devin’s. I don’t get to drive the cars.” My attempt to draw Devin into the conversation wasn’t working. He stared out at the crowd instead. “How about you? You risk your life every day.”

“I’m a lowly traffic officer right now. I’ve only been on the force a couple of years. I’m slowly working my way up to the top.”

Elizabeth reappeared and kept Devin company. Every so often he would look over at Tyler and glare at him, which amused me.

“Have you always wanted to be a police officer?” I asked.

“Yes. My father was a police officer. He’s retired now. So I guess it runs in the family.”

“Isn’t it strange how children follow the paths of their parents? My father was a race car driver and so is my brother.”

“He must be proud of your brother—”

“He’s dead,” Devin said, interrupting the conversation. He seemed rather pleased with his interruption.

“I’m sorry, was it recent?” Tyler asked with a mixture of embarrassment and confusion.

“No, he died when I was nine.”

“You were young. How did he pass?”

“A racing accident. He died doing what he loved.”

Guy came to take his friend away for important groom stuff—a drinking contest. I said goodbye and turned to Devin and scowled.

“What?” he asked innocently.

“Tell me you are tired.”

“Why?”

“So I can convince myself that you aren’t a complete asshole.”

He rolled his eyes, something he had picked up from me. “I’m bored and he’s an idiot.”

“Why is he an idiot?”

“He knew nothing about racing.”

“What do you know about being a police officer? Other than being apprehended?”

He snorted.

“You just like to humiliate people, that’s all,” I said, feeling the stress of the last few months pushing against my frayed nerves. “He took an interest in me, and it made you possessive, so you went into asshole mode.”

“I hear someone calling my name,” Elizabeth said, leaving the table.

“Everything we do has to be your idea, and if it isn’t, you have a long face. I know you don’t want to be here, but could you at least pretend? Do you think I like having to do what you want all the time?”

“Do you know how hot you are when you get all flustered like this?” he said with a mischievous smile.

“This is exactly what I mean!” I said with frustration. “Are you hearing anything I’m saying?”

“Yes, and I’m really turned on.”

“Do you want to have sex with me?” I asked calmly.

“Without a doubt.”

“Good, because it’s not going to happen.”

I grabbed my purse and said goodbye to my friends.

Chapter Fifteen

Luna

I stomped down the narrow hallway to the coat check. Devin followed closely behind.

“I don’t mind giving up control once in a while,” he said as I got our jackets.

“You are unbelievable! When have you ever given up control of a situation?”

“I’m here, aren’t I?”

“Yes, but you’ve made it miserable. I can’t have a civil conversation with someone because you’re ready to tear his head off. Here’s a news flash for you, big guy,” I said, poking my finger into his chest. “Tyler McCaffery is about five inches taller and fifty pounds heavier. He could eat you for breakfast.”

“So I’m not a giant. I bet he’s no good in bed.”

“Maybe I should find out.”

“Not funny,” he said. “Aren’t you going to help me with this?” He had out the pink scarf and wanted me to wrap it up for him.

“I thought I’d let you take control of the situation.”

Devin huffed. “What kind of control do you want?” he asked as we walked down the street. He’d wrapped the scarf pathetically around his face.

“Well, I want to stay at my apartment for starters and not an expensive hotel. I want to decide where we eat once in a

while and not be dragged to the same restaurants you happen to like all the time. When we have sex, I want to lead and I want you to follow. And why am I always at your beck and call? You're not some prima donna, you know. And I want to drive the Ferrari!"

He stared at me. I was on a roll, months of pent-up frustration I hadn't known was there, bursting out of me. Finally, he said, "I don't mind letting you pick the restaurants once in a while."

"Just shut up," I said, walking more quickly down the street. Devin had to jog to keep up.

"Fine, you can pick the restaurants all the time."

I shot him a glare.

"What? I'm making concessions here."

I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk. Downtown was almost deserted. "Why are you keeping things from me?"

"What things?" he asked, giving me a puzzled look.

"What is going on at Russo? We can't move on if you keep things from me. The last few months you've come home from Manta with a long face. What is going on over there? If there's trouble, I think I have a right to know."

"This isn't a control issue. Have we changed topics?"

"Don't get smart; you know exactly what I mean. You never tell me anything. Don't you trust me?"

"Of course I do."

"Then why be so secretive?"

He took in a deep breath and slowly puffed it out. Something was weighing on him, and I was close to finding out. "It's not like that."

"Then clear it up for me. If it's not an issue of trust, then why won't you talk about it?"

"It's too cold to tell you here," he said, walking.

"Are you going to tell me when we get to the hotel?"

“There really isn’t anything to tell.”

“I don’t believe you,” I said, my voice rising. “I feel like you are holding me at arm’s length. I tell you everything; you are my confidant. Why can’t you open up to me?”

He shook his head. “What I have to say, you aren’t going to like. Why should I upset you? It’s not worth it.”

“So keep me in the dark, that’s much better? You asked me not to treat you like a child, so I’d appreciate the same courtesy.”

We reached the hotel and walked inside.

“Fine, if you want to know, then I won’t hold anything back. And after I’ve finished, if you still want to know everything that goes on at Russo, I’d be very surprised.”

“What could be so bad?” I asked as we stepped onto the elevator. There was another couple on the elevator, and Devin wasn’t going to talk with them around.

“Let’s just say the people at Russo can be very unkind,” he said in Italian.

“Am I supposed to guess what the problem is?”

“Luna, can you wait two minutes till we get to our room?”

Once we got to our suite, Devin took off his jacket and threw it on a nearby chair. He collapsed onto the bed and stared up at the ceiling.

“Let me start by saying Leo and the rest of the team, including your good friend Mr. Riedl, can’t stand me. I think the mere sight of me makes them sick to their stomachs.” Devin sat up and stared at me. I was standing in the middle of the room watching him closely. “There are two reasons I’m still with the team. They couldn’t persuade Harris to leave his team, and Riedl wants me around to make him look good. You see, he wants everyone to think that we are great friends because it looks good for the team and because he’s close to you. If he let his true feelings about me be known, your family might turn on him. His father would be furious. So for you and

the cameras, he's my best friend. When we're alone, he's the biggest fucking asshole on the face of the earth!

“And that's just the beginning. Last month, they basically told me that if I gained any more weight, they'd need a crane to get me out of the car. If I fail the physical in March, I'm off the team. There is something in my contract about being in shape, so they're using this whole fitness thing as a means of sacking me. They're just waiting for me to fuck up. They know I'm sick and tired of being their servant!”

I sat next to him and dropped a hand onto his shoulder. That meeting in Milan ... no wonder he'd been so angry.

“I want to race for myself, not for Riedl,” he said tiredly. “I hate showing up to a race knowing I can't win it, and it's not because I'm not a good driver or I have a shitty car. No, it's my job to make sure Riedl finishes ahead of me. The only way I am going to win a race is if Riedl isn't in it.”

I'd never seen him so upset. His hands were shaking with anger.

“It's like walking on fucking eggshells,” he said, taking in a deep breath. “It's like I'm standing on the edge of a cliff, and Leo and Riedl can't wait to push me off it. They salivate when I get bad press. They are waiting for the media to shit all over me so they have an excuse to get rid of me. That way they can say I deserved it.

“And that's not all. The final insult is that they won't be renewing my contract.”

I was absorbing this and trying not to get angry with everyone at Russo, including Erich. “Why didn't you tell me sooner?” I asked. I took his hand into mine and held it tightly.

“Because I didn't want you to think I was using you to keep my job.”

“You should know me better than that.”

He winced. “There's more. Matteo said that he's heard that the motorhome was bugged and that they were recording everything we do.”

“That’s an invasion of privacy,” I said angrily. “How can they do that?”

“They want to know what people are saying and doing.” Devin looked at me intently, and then it hit me.

“They’ve been recording *us*?”

“Yup. They are convinced I’m telling you everything about the cars. They suggested to me that the improvement of the Perez team had something to do with me. They watch me all the time. I can’t even piss without them knowing. And they are holding something over our heads.”

“Okay, that’s all bad but also ... we’ve done some pretty hot and heavy stuff in the motorhome.” I covered my mouth with both hands. Oh, if that ever got out, I’d be mortified! Embarrassed. And if my mother, sister, or stepfather saw it? “Oh God! What are they going to do with it?”

“Nothing, as long as I play by their rules.”

“If my mother saw it! If Rafe saw it! Devin, can’t you get it back?” I pleaded. I was staring into his eyes, searching for reassurance.

“I’m not even supposed to know about it.”

“How many people have seen it?”

“I don’t know. Maybe no one.”

“Those assholes,” I spat. “I hate them!”

“I told you that you weren’t going to like it.”

“What are we going to do?”

“You’re going to get me into shape. I’m serious about it. I’m going to show up lean and strong. And I can be their stable boy for one more year, and I’ll play by their fucking rules. But when I show up for my first race in Australia, I’m not going to let them crap all over me. I’m going to show them I’m a good driver, and I’m just as good as Riedl.”

Chapter Sixteen

Luna

I barely noticed much about the wedding. Sure, it was nice. The food was great, I loved catching up with old friends, and I managed to avoid Danielle as much as possible. What I found myself doing for much of the night was devising a brutal fitness regimen. I had only four weeks to get Devin into peak physical condition.

My first order of business when we got home was to purge the house of the junk food that Devin craved late at night like cheesy crackers and potato chips. His weaknesses were many. He had an unnatural appetite for pork rinds and cookies. Devin's idea of grocery shopping was as many bags of chips as possible and all the beer he could carry. Both were eliminated from his new diet as was cheese and all the carbohydrates he ate. He liked starch for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I changed all that.

He ran or cycled with me every morning, and afternoon workouts consisted of weight training. The first few weeks were trying. Far too many mornings I had to plead with him to get out of bed. I took to posting a photo of Leonardo above the toilet where I knew he wouldn't miss it. He would suddenly become motivated.

"You're looking good," I said after he'd showered from yet another workout. We'd run five kilometers before working on weights. He had definition, and he was leaner than he'd ever been. He was looking like an elite athlete.

"I feel good," he said. "When I went to test the new engine, they took one look at me and didn't say a word. It was

nice not to be berated for once. No fat jokes.”

“You were hardly fat.”

He came over to me and put his arms around me, getting me all wet. “Next to Riedl, I was a cow. But now because of my superhot girlfriend, I’m a Greek god.”

“Now they can eat their words.”

He smirked. “Or shove them up their ass.”

* * *

The press had caught on to Devin’s new image. To help things along, I took a photo of him in nothing but a low-slung towel, fresh out of the shower. I made sure it wasn’t too revealing when I posted it on social media. As I expected, it blew up and gave him the positive attention he deserved. I took more pictures of us at the beach in Tropea. Jess came along with her latest boyfriend, and we spent the weekend having fun and taking pictures and videos. I was determined to make him a TikTok star. A day later, a photographer got a picture of Devin and I on the beach. Neither of us had seen the photographer. The picture was all over social media, next to a shirtless photo of Devin from the year before. There was no comparison. Devin wasn’t the same.

“Did I really look that way?” Devin asked, looking at the before photo closely.

“The camera adds ten pounds.”

“I was hoping you would say fifty pounds.”

“Devin, you looked fine. Now you look great.”

I was fixing my hair. We were off to a charity dinner put on by one of the Russo sponsors. There was going to be talk about Devin, positive talk, and we knew Russo would hate every moment of it.

It was raining as we got into the Ferrari. I’d forgotten an umbrella and was cursing myself as we drove away. The night was black for only six in the evening. I couldn’t wait for the

long summer nights when sunshine was abundant and the rain and cold stayed away.

“If I have a good season this year, I think I can get on with Roche or Merrick for next year,” Devin said as we pulled out onto the highway. With only three weeks before the first race in Australia, there was a buzz of excitement about the upcoming season for Russo. They were convinced they could be world champions with Erich Riedl at the helm. No mention of Devin, though.

“Do you think Collins is leaving Merrick?”

“He’s not happy being number two to Lauder.”

“But wouldn’t you be number two?”

“If I have a good season, maybe they will give me a chance to be a co-number one.”

I didn’t want to burst his bubble, but there was no chance of that. “And Roche?” As Blake had pointed out to me many times, Roche was on the decline, but it was still one of the top four teams. He’d have a chance to race for himself and be on par car-wise with Russo.

“With Carlton gone, they are giving Juneau one year to make a name for himself. My guess is he won’t. I’ve driven with him in the past, and he lacks the ambition.”

“Merrick is the better team,” I said, watching Devin weave through traffic. The rain was getting heavier, and I wished he would slow down.

“I know, but I have a better chance with Roche.”

If he got a seat with Roche, it would be so strange seeing him dressed in gray rather than the familiar red.

The rain was coming down so fast, we could barely make out the cars in front of us. Devin slowed a little, then suddenly he swore as taillights loomed before us. Traffic had stopped despite the green light. Devin veered hard to the left, and the car began to hydroplane. I braced myself as we slid off the road, felt a scream in my throat as the car rolled over once. My head slammed against the door, knocking the wind out of me.

Everything after that went fuzzy. I tried to open my eyes, but they were too heavy. I was sure I could hear Devin, but I couldn't make out the words. Were we underwater? All I wanted to do was sleep, then everything went black.

* * *

I opened my eyes. My head was pounding. I was lying in an unfamiliar bed, and for a few moments, I had no idea where I was. I lifted my right arm and felt a sharp stab of pain. My arm felt like it weighed a ton. I slowly turned my head and saw a cast that ran from my knuckles to my elbow.

Devin was sitting contorted in a chair next to my bed. He'd clearly been asleep and had woken suddenly when he heard me groan in pain. He jumped out of his seat and sat at the edge of my hospital bed.

"Thank God, you're awake," Devin said. His eyes were rimmed red, and I could see them glazed over with tears. "I thought I lost you. I'm so sorry, Luna." He shielded his face with his hands.

I struggled to sit up with what had to be the worst headache I'd ever had and touched his arm with my left hand, pulling him closer and embracing him. He began to sob. I held him tightly, insisting it was not his fault.

"I could have killed you tonight," he said, breaking the embrace and staring into my eyes.

I kissed his salty lips. "It was an accident."

"Your mother started yelling at me when I called."

Oh yeah, she'd have definitely guilt-tripped him over this. "She was upset. She reacts that way. Once she's calmed down, she will see things differently."

"You're sure you're all right?" he asked, looking me over carefully. He was now in full control of his emotions.

"My head is pounding and I'm a little sore. Besides that, I feel like partying."

“Don’t joke,” Devin said, taking a tissue from next to the bed and wiping his eyes.

“How are you?” I asked, settling back into bed.

“I’m fine.”

“And the car?”

“I can buy another one.”

“Any press yet?”

“Yes, news travels fast,” Devin said, shaking his head.

“We’ll deal with them later.”

“You need some sleep. They said I can spring you out of here tomorrow morning.”

“You don’t need to stay,” I said when Devin sat back down in the metal chair. It hardly looked comfortable.

“I want to stay,” he said.

“Devin, go home. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, and how else will we get home tomorrow? We’re going to need a car.”

“I love you,” he said, kissing my forehead.

“See you in the morning.”

Chapter Seventeen

Luna

The paparazzi waited for us to exit the hospital the next day. The staff was sympathetic, and security had Devin's car brought around to the back. The press caught wind of the change and was waiting as we left the building. I heard the clicking of the cameras as I climbed into the car. Security tried to keep back the reporters and allow Devin into the car. I kept my head down until we'd driven away.

"There were so many of them," I said with surprise.

"We're popular. Everyone wants to know about us."

I was too exhausted to digest the news that much. I slept much of the afternoon thanks to some painkillers. That evening I called Mom, who gave me an earful about Devin's so-called dangerous driving, then Jess, and finally Rafe. My brother was concerned. The accident had made it to the sports section in Santa Barbara, where he was staying with his family.

After my conversation with Rafe, I stretched myself out on the bed. Devin came into the room and snuggled up next to me. We stared at each other, enjoying the quiet moment.

"How is your wrist?" he asked, gently caressing it.

"Better."

He pulled a marker from out of his back pocket. He gently held my right arm in his hand and began to write on the cast. He was careful not to cause me any pain. When he was done, he placed my arm back down on the bed. I read what he'd

written. He'd drawn hearts and written "Devin loves Luna" all over it.

"Just in case there was any doubt," he said, kissing me lightly on the lips.

"You're going to have to do a lot of things for me now," I said with a smile. "You're going to have to help me get dressed."

"And undressed."

"And fix my hair, and make dinner."

"Will I have to help you eat?"

"I can do that with my left hand. But I may need help in the shower. I can't get my cast wet."

"I could bathe you."

"That would be nice."

"I think that since your right hand is getting a break from all the work, your left one deserves a reward."

"What kind of reward?" I asked coyly.

Devin sat up and took my left hand into both of his. "First a massage," he said, working on each finger. I closed my eyes as he kissed each one. Without warning, he slipped something on to my finger. I opened my eyes, and he was smiling at me. I took my hand from him and stared at it. He had placed a diamond ring on my ring finger.

"I was wondering if you would like to marry me?" he asked, biting his lip.

I hadn't expected this. Not once had the thought of marriage crossed my mind. We'd only talked about it the one time, and now he was asking me. I gazed at the ring for a long time before looking back at Devin. His expression was expectant and nervous. I sat up and stared into his sea-green eyes. For only the second time, I saw his eyes well up with tears.

"Of course I'll marry you," I said, throwing my arms around him ... well, as gently as I could.

“I love you so much,” he said, kissing me over and over again. “You’ve made me the happiest man!”

He had no idea how happy he’d made me.

Chapter Eighteen

Devin

I tried to do everything for Luna, but she insisted on doing it all herself. At least for the first little while, she didn't push herself, but she kept me active, and when I showed up for my physical, I aced it. No one said a word, not even congratulations. Fuck all of them. I didn't care because I'd passed their bloody physical with flying colors, and Luna had slipped some pictures of me to Jess, who had run wild with them. Luna kept feeding her more, and before I knew it, fitness magazines wanted to do pieces on me. Leo could choke on that.

More importantly, though, Luna had a major milestone coming, and she had no idea I'd planned a huge party. I'd invited all her friends from Montreal and flew them out to Milan, including Danielle, the one she didn't like. Jess had helped me with some of the arrangements—I don't think she trusted me to pull it off—and even all her family was coming out. And despite my better judgment, I'd even invited Riedl.

The morning of the party, I made her breakfast. When she wandered into the kitchen, she stopped dead at the sight of the poached eggs, bacon, pancakes, and mimosas I'd laid out. She settled onto one of the bistro chairs and took it all in.

“What's this?” she asked.

I came around from the stove where I was finishing up pancakes. “I wanted to make something special for my fiancée on her twenty-fifth birthday. Happy birthday, beautiful.”

She got misty-eyed for a moment but quickly recovered. She'd become quite the expert at holding in her emotions. I suppose being around Rafe all day could harden a person, but I also thought it had to do with personal growth. She was better at handling situations, taking control, being the smartest person in the room, as she often was.

"Thank you," she said. "It's wonderful."

"And there's more. I've gotten us a table at Riso tonight."

"That sounds nice," she said, eyes widening. It wasn't one of my favorite haunts; it was a new place she'd been dying to try.

In two short weeks, she'd mastered using her left hand to make up for the right. She'd also figured out the limits of her right hand and arm and was able to do some things without pushing herself. She certainly had no trouble using both hands to send off text messages.

"What else would you like to do today?" I asked.

"I think I'd like to do nothing for the day. Especially since we're eating out tonight."

"I like that idea," I said, sitting across from her and piling my plate high with food. I was going to consider today a cheat day.

"And lucky me, so far the only text from Rafe is to wish me a happy birthday, and not asking for more money from the last installment of my trust fund."

I frowned. This was weighing on her and I hated it. I hated that her brother kept hitting her up for money when this team was what *he* wanted. "Is he going to?"

She shrugged as she cut into a pancake. "Likely. We had such high hopes this year, but with Blake gone, nothing has changed. And my uncle has mentioned wanting to sell his stake in the team. He told us the other day. I think he's finally realized he won't be coming back. So either Rafe and I buy him out, or we bring in someone new. Both options are terrible."

No wonder she'd seemed gloomy the past few days. "I hate that you're dealing with it."

"It's fine. We can always sell the team."

I stopped chewing. "Sell it?"

"I think about that once in a while. Rafe would hate me for suggesting it, but maybe it's time to cut our losses before we end up bankrupt."

"The team is more valuable than you think. Have you ever had a proper evaluation done?"

"No, but we'll have to do it now, since my uncle wants out."

She needed a lift, and I was about to provide it. "I'm going to tell you something. If you and your brother wanted to start a team today, it would cost double what it initially cost. And if you decided now to sell it, you'd make a ton of money on the sale. You have an established team that's halfway decent. I don't want to put things in your head, but you can force a sale no matter what Rafe thinks, if that's what you really want to do. And you'd make out like a fucking bandit."

Her face lightened a little. "Really?"

"I guarantee it. I'm sure Rafe never positions it that way because he doesn't want to sell. I'm not suggesting this, but if you do decide to put more money into the team, consider it for what it really is—an investment, not a gift to your brother. And if you do it, just make sure you keep your brother on a leash."

We had the quiet day she wanted, then got ready to go out. I made sure to encourage her to really dress up. She had no idea of the party that awaited her, and I knew she'd want to look her best. As we headed to the restaurant, she brought up the idea again of selling the team.

"What if we sold my uncle's third to Alexander Wheaton? I mean, I have no idea if he's even interested, but he loves the team, and with his marketing potential, I think that could work. And I would like to take a bigger role in the day-to-day

operations of the team, while Rafe focuses on the on-track product.”

I couldn't help but smile. The woman was brilliant. “I think that's a great plan.”

“I like Alexander. I think he'd be a great asset to our team. I think Rafe likes him too. We could make this work.”

“I think you should approach your partners.”

“I will,” she said with a nod.

At the restaurant, I held open the door for Luna and then approached the hostess. She escorted us to the back where they had a private room. Luna seemed none the wiser. The hostess slid open two doors, and when Luna stepped inside, she was greeted with a chorus of “Surprise!”

She jumped back into me and immediately giggled in shock. With wide eyes, she took in all her friends and family. Jess was the first to jump forward and give Luna a big hug, followed by Luna's little sister, Catia. I hung back as Luna greeted all her guests. It was nice to see so many happy faces, even her mother's. But one face didn't look as happy. Rafe had a phony smile on his face, and when our eyes met, I was sure he was shooting me daggers. What had I done now?

Luna was in the middle of a laughing group of friends when I heard Jess gasp, “Luna what is *that*?” She'd grabbed Luna's left hand in hers. Rafe's expression darkened further.

Luna gathered herself quickly and called out, “Hello, everyone! First, I wanted to thank you all for coming today. I can tell you how much it means to me to have all the most important people I love around me. And with that said, Devin and I have an announcement to make.”

I was sure I heard Maria and Rafe gasp at the same time.

“We are engaged!”

Jess and Elizabeth were on Luna immediately, and friends and family came over to pat me on the back. Maria, Rafe, and Riedl even made their way around to congratulating us, but I was sure that deep down it was killing them.

“Let’s celebrate with some drinks,” I said to Luna. “I’ll get them.”

I was grabbing Luna a wine from the small bar when Maria cornered me. I’d hoped to avoid her all evening, but since the accident, we hadn’t chatted much. I expected that she was going to have a few choice words for me. I couldn’t chug enough beer to keep from dreading this.

“Hello, Devin,” she said. Her fake smile mirrored that of her son’s.

“Hello, Maria. It’s so nice to see you again.”

“I’m sure.”

At least we both felt the same way about each other.

“Thank you again for inviting us to this lovely evening. My other daughter was excited to come.”

“Luna would want you here.” The lies were flying so easily now.

“Yes. Well, since we won’t have much time to talk, I think you and I need to discuss your engagement to my daughter. I know she loves you as I’m sure you love her. Given that, my lawyers will be drawing up a prenuptial agreement that you will be signing. Correct?”

She certainly enjoyed cutting to the chase. “Of course. And you’ve mentioned it to Luna?”

“I’ve mentioned it to her in the past. She knows the importance of one.”

“I don’t want her money.”

“I’m sure you don’t, but as she’s just turned twenty-five, her circumstances have changed.”

I smiled now, as genuinely as I could. “I don’t want her money,” I repeated. “I will sign anything.”

She nodded and patted me on the shoulder. “You make her happy. Let’s just continue that, all right?”

The woman fucking scared me.

I brought Luna her wine where she, Jess, and Elizabeth were trying to play nice. I hadn't seen Elizabeth and Jess together before, and Luna appeared to be playing referee as the other two women sniped at each other. That was my cue to get the hell out of there.

I passed by Riedl and Rafe, and both stopped talking. Not suspicious at all. Rafe maintained his frigid expression, while Riedl gave a sarcastic smile. Whatever those two had going on, it couldn't be good. I stopped when I reached Enzo. The man was fidgeting more than usual. He needed to cut back on the caffeine.

"You okay?" I asked.

He seemed surprised by the question. "I'm fine."

"You don't seem yourself."

"Not at all!" he said rather defensively. What was wrong with him?

"Any news on driving prospects for next year?"

"A few. Wolfe is in the mix."

I supposed I could do worse. "Well, keep me informed."

I looked around the room. Damn. I should have invited some of my own friends. I didn't want to be stuck chatting with my twitchy agent the whole time. The room was hostile, and it was going to be a long night.

Chapter Nineteen

Luna

I was still on a high from my party and couldn't believe Devin had pulled it off, even with a little help. Not once had I suspected a thing. It also happened to be the perfect venue to announce our engagement, much to my mother's and brother's chagrin.

Since my family and friends knew now, Devin was quick to call his own family the next day. They were pleasantly surprised, even Maureen, from what Devin said. They'd expected Devin to remain a swinging bachelor for life.

Enzo Potenza and Juan Garcia issued a joint press release from our two teams regarding the engagement. The announcement caught many off guard, and we were both pleased that the attention stole Russo's thunder for the upcoming season, placing Devin in an even more positive light.

For the first race of the season in Australia, we were photographed at every opportunity. They all wanted to see the ring and the broken wrist. People had noticed the little love notes written all over my cast, giving Devin even more positive press. We posed for several pictures as we left the airport in Melbourne for our hotel. Elizabeth even sent me links to the Montreal papers the next day. We'd made the news in Canada, where they barely knew who Devin was.

But then Devin's punishment at the hands of Russo began, and this time he made sure I knew all the details. After a brief team meeting Friday morning, he came in search of me in the

Perez pits. We walked down to the end of pit lane to a lonely grassy knoll.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Let’s say the knives are out. Leo berated me in front of my mechanics, claiming I’d asked you to marry me to keep my job. I think my racing engineer and mechanics are starting to feel sorry for me.”

“And Erich?”

“He didn’t say a word, which was refreshing. I’m used to being told that my driving is the height of mediocrity. At least I’m good at being mediocre.”

“You know you’re better than that,” I said with a frown. “I knew Erich had a bit of a mean streak, but I never imagined this. And he knows how much I care about you, so why would he do this?”

“Because he knows I’ve not going to be his lap dog anymore. In the past I had no choice, but last year I had a good season, and I showed a lot of people that I’m capable of being a great driver, given the chance. They played themselves, telling me in advance that this is my last year. I don’t have to toe the line nearly as much.”

I nodded. “Any word from Roche and Merrick?”

“Leo’s been telling them I’m a troublemaker. But, Luna, with you by my side, they can’t touch me.”

We parted ways shortly after so we could both get to work. Devin and Rafe both qualified for the race, and I had a stack of paperwork to get to. I returned to my room late that evening. A manila envelope was on the floor, and I could only assume it had been slipped under the door. My name was on it, and I picked it up and opened it. Inside was an upcoming issue of a racing magazine. The feature article was on Devin Flynn. Someone had gone to the trouble of marking the page of the article. I searched for a note, but there wasn’t one. I sat on the bed and flipped open the magazine to the article.

Just a few short weeks ago, racing's bad boy smashed up his beloved Ferrari, almost killing his girlfriend, Luna Perez, daughter of Marco Perez. But the real question is, how did such an ordinary driver get himself on to such an extraordinary team?

Back when Russo signed the Englishman, he showed promise. He was a refreshing change from the boring predictability of racing. He was young and impressionable and easily fit into Russo's scheme of things. They paid him to do what he was told, and for a while that's what he did, but it all came at a price.

He's outspoken and has gotten more bad press than good. He's criticized everyone from Erich Riedl to Blake Carlton, making light of his death in one interview. He's thumbed his nose at Russo management, claiming that he will no longer play by the rules. He wants to be a world champion, despite the fact he has no business being one. If it weren't for Russo, Devin Flynn would be a gas station attendant somewhere in Sheffield.

They took an average driver, put him in an exceptional car, and watched him perform. Anyone could have done what Devin Flynn has done in the past few years. Given the capabilities of his car, he should have done better. Much better. He has never been on pole; he's never come close. His results have been adequate but far from spectacular.

Rumor has it that this is Devin Flynn's final year with the team. Russo wants new, young blood to take over and help create a winner. It seems Devin Flynn has accepted his fate. Both Merrick and Roche have no interest in him. The greatest Italian team of all time won't even look in his direction, so who is left?

Barlow and Wolfe are the only good teams looking for a driver. They have the money to pay him, and they both need a high-profile driver, even if he's not worth the money.

So what has Flynn done to push the stakes? It seems as though he has a master plan. The first part is to link himself with a famous family, the Perez family. By marrying into the name, not only has he secured himself financially, but if things don't work out, he could always join that team. Why else would he marry her?

I stopped reading and threw the magazine against the wall. I didn't need to read on about how unattractive I was or how the change in Devin's personality was insincere. I was fed up with that garbage. If Blake were alive, I would have suspected he'd sent the magazine, but I was pretty sure it was the people at Russo. Who else would have an advance copy?

Devin came back to the room shortly before ten, looking more upbeat than he had in the past few weeks. He scooped the magazine off the floor.

"What's this?" he asked, skimming through the pages.

"Someone sent it to me. Must have been someone at Russo. I couldn't be bothered to finish the article."

Devin read it closely. I watched his jaw clench before he ripped out the pages, tearing them into tiny pieces. "Those bastards! Now they have the media going after me, and they are trying to get you."

"Devin, I'm on your side. There is nothing they can do to change that."

But the article had affected him, and if I were honest, it had affected me too.

Chapter Twenty

Luna

Devin was an impressive third at the race in Australia. Erich Riedl was a distant sixth and furious that his teammate had finished ahead of him, but he was careful not to let it show. Erich was too in control to let anyone see him ruffled.

In Brazil, Devin was fifth, with Riedl third; however, both trailed Hans Lauder who had placed first in Australia and second in Brazil.

In Argentina, Devin and I spent a few relaxing days before he prepared for the race. Unlike the previous year, Russo had Devin testing very little, making it even more obvious that his presence wasn't required. Despite his lack of testing, he came in second at the Argentine Grand Prix to the horror of Russo team boss, Leonardo Martino. He was so furious, he didn't congratulate Devin on the second-place finish. What had infuriated Russo was that Riedl was a close third, and Devin had refused to let him pass even after he was given orders to move over.

The war had finally begun.

* * *

The internal feud between Devin and Russo had an added bonus for me. It meant that he spent more time at home and less time testing the cars. I used my time with Devin wisely. I wanted to start planning a wedding. Despite Devin's teasing

suggestions that we elope, we managed to set a date: November twenty-first, about six months away.

As expected, Mom took immediate control. She kept me on the phone for long “wedding strategy” calls. I wondered if I’d made a mistake allowing Mom to plan the wedding. But it gave her something to do, and it also made her feel included, something I hadn’t done with her in a long time.

“About a dress,” Mom said after calling me for what seemed like the millionth time. “I was wondering if you’d like to wear the dress I married your father in.”

I was stunned. I’d always admired the dress, and she’d once scolded me when I’d pulled it out of storage. Uncle Dario had designed the dress. It had a medieval look to it with long, hanging arms and was fitted at the waist before flowing down to the ground. My gaze always went to Mom in that beautiful dress in her wedding photos.

“Are you sure?” I asked, choking back tears.

“That’s why I’ve kept it all these years.”

“I’d be honored to wear it.”

“I’ll have it sent to you so your uncle can make any necessary alterations. You may want to modernize it a bit. I don’t want you to think you can’t. Have you thought about who is going to walk you down the aisle?”

That was a no-brainer. “I’m going to ask Rafe.”

“I’m sure he’ll be delighted. And I want a list of guests from Devin’s family, Luna. I have to make accommodations for these people. This town isn’t very big, and we want everyone to be comfortable.”

“I’m on it.” Or I’d get Devin to do that.

“Is there anything else I need to know?”

He has a daughter, I thought to say but kept it to myself. I would tell Mom closer to the wedding date. “No, that’s it.”

“Where are you off to this weekend?”

“San Marino.”

“Call me when you get back. We have to discuss flowers.”

* * *

“Mom is pushing me over the edge,” I said to Rafe after the Friday practice session in San Marino. We were on our way to dinner. For once it was just the two of us.

“She feels robbed. She couldn’t plan my wedding.”

“You’re a man; it’s different for you. She calls every day to complain or demand something.”

“That’s just Mom. What can you do?”

We sat down at a table, and I fidgeted as I waited to find the right opening to talk to my brother. “I wanted to ask you something,” I said after we’d ordered dinner. We’d chosen to eat at the hotel restaurant. Whenever I could, I arranged to have the Perez team stay in the same hotel as Russo.

“What’s that?” Rafe asked, grabbing a piece of bread and loading butter on top of it. Very un-Italian, I mused.

“I’d like you to walk me down the aisle.”

He smiled warmly. “I’d never say no to that.”

Dinner came and I ate slowly. “Rafe, there are some things I want to tell you,” I said, putting down my fork. I’d suddenly lost my appetite.

“You aren’t pregnant, are you?”

“Nothing like that,” I said with a small smile. “It’s about Devin.”

“Is he pregnant?”

A joke. I didn’t think my brother was capable of that. “Stop being a jerk. No. It’s about what he’s going through.”

“There’s been a lot of mudslinging lately between Flynn and Russo.”

Rafe was being cautious, which told me he knew more than he was letting on. Rafe had never been a nosy person. He

didn't try to find out more than he needed or deserved to know. I admired that about him.

“Russo wants him out.”

Rafe was nodding. He wanted me to do all the talking.

“He doesn't like being in the role of number two, and Russo doesn't want him as a number one. There has been a lot of inner squabbles going on.”

“I don't know that you should be telling me this,” Rafe said, pushing his plate to one side.

“I need your advice. I'm not sure Devin is doing the right thing. In Argentina, he pushed Russo and Erich over the edge. What if the other teams think he is a troublemaker? What's going to happen to him?”

Rafe groaned as if it pained him. “I don't know that I should say anything.”

“Come on, you're on the inside, more so than I am. What should Devin be doing?”

Rafe took a deep breath and exhaled. “Devin should have kept his mouth shut and pretended to enjoy his job, but it's way too late for that now. Luna, is he finished with Russo? Is that definite?”

“Yes.”

“What's he trying to prove? That's he's difficult?”

“He thinks this is his only chance to win a world championship.”

Rafe leaned in closer to the table, and I did the same. I knew Rafe had valuable information for me.

“This is what I've heard. Besides Knight and a few of the other inferior teams, the only good team who has shown an interest in him is Barlow. Do you know if he's talked to them?”

“No, I haven't asked.”

“Before things get any worse, push him to negotiate with Barlow for next season. If he gets a reputation of being difficult, no one is going to ask him to drive, and you’ll be supporting him next year and forever. He doesn’t think he can drive with us, does he?”

“We’ve never talked about it, and I’d never go for that. It would be too awkward.”

Rafe seemed relieved. “Just tell him to start negotiating.”

“What about Erich? Has he said anything to you about Devin?”

“Nah. He’s not into these backroom dealings.”

That didn’t sit well with me. “He’s in on this, Rafe. He wants to bring Devin down.”

“Why?”

“He doesn’t want Devin to upstage him.”

Rafe frowned, clearly unconvinced. “Are you sure that’s all there is to it? Erich isn’t that kind of person.”

“When your pride is involved, nothing seems to matter anymore.”

“Perhaps, but if your fiancé wants to keep a seat, he better figure this out. And soon.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Luna

As usual, after the team dinner on Friday, Devin was agitated.

“Only a few more months,” he muttered as he climbed into bed. He put his arms around me and kissed me lightly on the cheek.

“Did anything interesting happen?”

“The usual. Leo could barely look at me, and Riedl lobbed a few insults in my direction. Nothing out of the ordinary.”

“What about next year?”

“What about it?”

“I hear Barlow is interested in you.”

He sighed, and I could feel his body deflate. “I’d rather drive for a better team.”

I didn’t pursue the issue, but anxiety settled in my gut. I’d rather he drive for Barlow than no team at all.

* * *

Russo had gone on the offensive. There was a scathing article written in an Italian newspaper the next morning. It claimed that a Russo insider had come forward to detail the extent of the brawls going on within the team, with Devin Flynn at the center of them all. He was compared to a child who couldn’t get his way. There were reports of temper tantrums, including

coming to blows with Erich Riedl. Of course, not all of the allegations were true, but they'd managed to tarnish Devin's already fragile image. I was furious, so I couldn't imagine how angry Devin was.

Devin took the article in stride, joking about it with other reporters. He smiled the whole day until he reached the Perez pits, but his fury was evident as we climbed into the Perez motorhome.

"Two can play at this game," Devin said angrily. He looked around the room to see if we could be heard. When he was sure there was no one else around, he pulled me close to whisper something in my ear. "Riedl's car has an illegal gearbox."

I stepped back from him and gasped. "What!"

"You didn't hear it from me, but you should tell someone," Devin said calmly.

"No, I won't. They will know where it came from."

"So what. Tell your brother."

"Devin, this will make life hell for you."

"It can't get worse."

"Yes it can. No one will give you a ride if you sabotage your teammate."

"If you don't say something, then I will."

I grabbed on to his arm before he could leave. "This is wrong. It's a mistake."

"Are you going to tell your brother or am I?" he asked.

I swallowed the huge lump in my throat. I felt as though I was going to be sick. We'd always been so careful not to discuss anything, but this crossed so many lines. "Are you sure?" I whispered.

"Go do it. Wait until I'm gone. Better yet, have someone tell Pedro's chief mechanic. That way the trail gets longer."

I watched Devin leave the motorhome. I took a few deep breaths. My throat was dry, and I drank some water before exiting the motorhome. Rafe was consulting Carlos Boreno about track conditions. I walked past them to one of Pedro's race engineers. We chatted a moment before I was struck with an idea. I went back to the motorhome, pulled out my phone, and downloaded a VPN app. Phone number and IP address thus disguised, I sent a message to Nigel Webb, Hans Lauder, and Pedro. I could count on one, if not all, of them to report the illegal gearbox to officials. I braced myself for what was about to come.

* * *

Erich Riedl went on a tirade when he was informed he would be starting the race in last place. His gearbox had indeed been illegal and further investigations were to follow. Devin finished the race in third place, with Riedl taking a respectable fifth placing showing after starting last on the grid. Rafe's engine blew and he didn't finish. Devin was in second place behind Hans Lauder in the championship standings, but Russo wasn't going to let Devin get away without being punished. Two days after the race they announced that their test driver, Billy Lane, would be driving the race in Monaco. It was a stunning announcement that sent the media into a frenzy. How could Russo not allow their early hope for a world championship to drive?

Russo explained that Devin was being reprimanded for actions he had taken in San Marino. Those actions weren't revealed publicly, but everyone knew it had been Devin who had revealed the issue with the gearbox. There were mixed feelings about how Russo was dealing with the issue, but most were sympathetic to Devin's plight. I was relieved.

The battle continued. In Madrid, Devin was once again allowed to drive after the Russo plan had backfired. Billy Lane, the young American driver, had finished in seventeenth place, an embarrassing finish for an Russo car. The press had crucified Russo and their decision to suspend Devin. Thursday

evening Devin and I had drinks in the hotel lounge. He wanted to unwind before another hectic weekend. He sipped his beer and was strangely silent.

“Are you going to update me on the Russo soap opera?”

“They’ve come up with a really good one, Luna. I think you’re going to like this.”

“I can’t wait to hear it.”

“You aren’t allowed in our pits anymore.”

“You’re kidding,” I said in disbelief. “Let’s go public with this. The papers would have a field day.”

“I think I’ve antagonized them enough. Let’s cool off for a while.”

Now I was a bit miffed. “That’s a change.”

“I don’t want to push them any harder. I’ve already gone too far. I talked to Enzo last night for over an hour, and he advised me to play nice. I’m close to thirty; my career isn’t over yet.”

I’d been telling him that all season. “So what are the plans for next year?”

He tapped his fingers on the table and sighed. “You were right. Barlow is interested. But I’m not,” he said dejectedly. “There are better teams.”

“Barlow isn’t bad.”

“They’re never going to have a world champion on their team.”

Was it time for some tough love? I saw no path for Devin to be on a top team. He was a good driver, having a great season, but the top teams wouldn’t touch him with all this drama going on. And without a top-tier car, he was never going to be a world champion. If he could land on the Barlow team, he’d at least be allowed to drive for himself. “What’s the offer?”

“One year, and they’ll pay me the same as Russo.”

“That’s not a bad deal,” I hedged. It wasn’t a great deal either. One year didn’t show any sign of a long-term commitment.

“I suppose so ... but it’s not what I wanted.”

“Are you asking me for my advice?”

He looked at me, and I could see the indecision on his face. “Yeah.”

“Take the deal.”

He nodded and downed his beer. “I think you’re probably right. So much for ever being a world champion.”

* * *

I played by Russo’s new rules and stayed as far from the team as possible. I spent my extra time tending to my own team’s needs. I was at the track before eight on Sunday morning. I watched the race engineers and mechanics work on the cars for their final setup. Pedro was doing an interview with a Spanish newspaper while Rafe relaxed with his hydration drink in hand. He’d spoken to Erich the previous afternoon, but I hadn’t asked them what they’d spoken about. I was beginning to resent Erich. He had appeared so brotherly on the outside, but on the inside he wanted to destroy Devin’s life.

“What are you thinking about?” Carlos asked, putting his arm around my shoulder.

I jumped at hearing his voice. “Nothing much,” I said with a smile.

“Where has your boyfriend disappeared to this weekend? The two of you aren’t fighting, are you?”

“No, not at all. He’s just busy this weekend.”

“He’s gotten himself into a lot of trouble, hasn’t he?”

“That’s definitely no secret.”

“I admire him for both his courage and his stupidity. He has to be courageous and stupid to take on Russo.”

“I won’t argue with you, Carlos.”

“I’ve heard a few things,” he said quietly. He wanted to make sure our conversation could not be overheard.

“What things?”

“I wish I knew for certain. I’ve heard they have something planned for Devin, and you can imagine that it’s not something he’s going to like. I’ve been digging around, but they are very tight-lipped over there. I wonder how Devin stays sane. If I were him, I’d always be looking over my shoulder, wondering when they are going to stab me in the back.”

That was exactly what it was like for Devin, and it was taking its toll on him. “How bad do you think it is?”

“Well, he’s the enemy now. I’ve been around these tracks for a very long time. I know what happens when a driver loses favor with his team. All the people you considered friends are now enemies. People stop talking to you, and it becomes a very lonely place. You only hope that they have enough respect for you not to play around with the car. You’d hate to be going a hundred miles an hour and realize the brakes aren’t working.”

I was aghast. “They wouldn’t do that, would they?”

“Of course not, but it doesn’t stop one from wondering.”

Thanks to Carlos, I was anxious as the beginning of the race drew closer. I passed Devin in pit lane and wished him luck. What amazed me was how he managed to keep a smile on his face as if nothing bothered him. I nervously watched him as he climbed in the car. Russo couldn’t be capable of tampering with Devin’s car. If something were to happen to him, everyone would know. But would they care? The early sympathy Devin had garnered for his suspension had ebbed away. Each day Devin was vilified in the press for not being a team player. Would they say he deserved it?

During the warm-up lap, I took my seat next to Carlos and watched the monitors. My heart was pounding wildly as the cars took their places on the grid. Lauder had taken the pole with Erich second. Devin was fourth with Rafe seventh. The

race began, and on the first corner Devin had moved up to third position. Laps later, Erich was the first to pit. Lauder came in a few laps after that, but as he exited pit lane, he collided with his own teammate Andy Collins. Collins was forced out of the race, but Lauder was able to continue, though he dropped to fifth. Devin had a spectacular pit stop. As he left pit lane, he had only Harris and Erich in front of him.

The chase began, and I felt excitement edging out my anxiety. I held my breath as Devin passed Harris on a tight corner. Devin began to close in on Erich, who pitted for a second time. There was confusion when Erich pitted. The crew hadn't expected him so early and weren't prepared, scrambling to fuel his car, and by the time he had exited pit lane, he was more than ten seconds behind Devin. I knew this would be the test. Would Devin's crew sabotage his second pit stop?

I watched in anticipation as Devin carefully drove his red-and-blue car down pit lane. There was no confusion for Devin's pit stop. He was in and out in a matter of seconds, and as his car sped back onto the track, he was still in first place, though Erich was only three seconds behind now. I was on the edge of my seat as Erich cut into Devin's lead with every passing lap. With only two laps left, Erich's car was right behind Devin's, and he was pressing Devin to let him pass. Devin refused. Each time he tried to pass, Devin blocked the opening. As they neared the checkered flag, Erich made one last attempt to pass, but it was in vain. Devin had won his first-ever race. I screamed in victory, and even Carlos was grinning.

Erich didn't join his teammate on his victory lap. He was so disgusted, he returned the car to the garage and waited in the Russo pits for the trophy presentation. As Devin parked his car, Hans Lauder congratulated him, and they walked to the podium for the trophy presentation. I watched as Erich appeared beside them, putting on a good show and congratulating Devin, but I knew it was insincere. We all knew it was insincere. I was disgusted with my old family friend.

That evening at the hotel, Nigel Webb and a few other drivers wanted to celebrate Devin's first win. Even Rafe had come along, but the only member of the Russo team was

Devin's racing engineer, Matteo. He was the only Russo team member truly loyal to Devin. It wasn't the huge celebration it would have been if the team had been behind Devin, and despite his joy at winning, I could tell he wasn't thrilled. We both knew this was only going to make his life harder at Russo.

Still, the party went until late into the night. I was exhausted but kept a smile on my face. There wouldn't be many celebrations in the days ahead, and I wanted Devin to enjoy each and every one of them.

We returned to our hotel room after three in the morning. Devin had already sobered up, and I could see the lost expression on his face. In his greatest moment of victory, he looked defeated. There was no ecstasy in finally achieving something that had eluded him for so very long. The pressure had begun to eat away at him. I saw less of his familiar smile and heard less of his witty, often dry comments. Instead, deep lines had begun to appear around his eyes and mouth. He'd aged ten years in less than six months.

He fell onto the bed without changing out of his clothes. He sighed deeply.

"Why do I have a feeling this is as good as it gets?"

Chapter Twenty-Two

Devin

I hadn't told Luna yet, but I was going to sign with Barlow. It was a few steps down, but at least I'd have a place to drive. Enzo assured me it was the best deal he could get me. I went by his office to sign the papers and noticed he'd hired a new agent to work with him along with more support staff. He also had all new furniture.

"You sign a few more drivers and football players?" I asked as I took a seat in one of the new plush black leather chairs in his office.

He chuckled, but there was a nervousness to it. I had no idea why he thought I cared. He made money and he was spending it. Simple.

"I decided to make some improvements."

We walked through the contract and all the specifics. If nothing else, I would have parity with my teammate, something I was never going to have with Russo.

"I could have done better for you if you hadn't gone out of your way to antagonize Leo and the rest of the Russo team," he mused, pulling out some scotch. We always had a drink after signing a contract.

"I don't give a fuck anymore. They've been treating me like shit for over a year, and I've had enough."

"Around the time you started seeing Luna Perez," he said, arching a brow. "Are you sure she was worth it?"

"Of course she's worth it!"

Enzo threw up his hands. “Sorry, no need to get so angry. At least she’s loaded, right?”

I growled, “Do you expect me to say that I started dating her for the money? That she’s going to take care of me financially for the rest of my life?”

“Well, no. I’m sure you *like* her.”

“I *love* her, you asshole. I want to marry her. I don’t need her money, and I don’t want it. So let me make this clear to you because I think you keep forgetting it. I want to be with her. If you bring this shit up again, you’re going to regret it.”

Enzo nodded and sipped his scotch. “You’re right. It was inappropriate. I’m just surprised, that’s all. I’m having a hard time believing it, but the way you talk about her, I see you care about her a lot. Consider this subject dropped forever.”

“Good.” I finished my scotch and stood. Maybe it was time to find a new agent too. I wanted the hell out of there. “We’ll talk soon.”

* * *

Before the two races in North America, we had a few days off—well, I was given even more time off now that I was persona non grata around Russo—so we went to Cortese to spend some time with Luna’s family. I wasn’t looking forward to spending a few days with Maria, but Luna had wedding plans to discuss with her.

Sure enough, that evening while Luna and Catia played board games, Maria ambushed me on the porch where I was watching hilarious cat and dog videos. She interrupted me watching a dog moo and burp on command.

“Devin,” she said with her faux smile. She handed me a plate of tiramisu. Apparently, Rosa found out it was my favorite dessert and made it just for me. I’d already had a helping, but I wasn’t about to turn down another.

“How are you this evening?” I asked, accepting the plate from Maria.

“Exhausted, but wedding plans can do that to you.”

Why did I feel a lecture about to come on? “I’m sure no one wants me involved in those plans, but I’d be happy to assist.”

“You’re right: no one wants you involved.”

I gritted my teeth. “Right. Well, I’m always available if needed.”

“About the prenuptial agreement, Luna has told me it’s with your lawyer to review. If you could have that back next week? *Signed.*”

“Of course.” I hadn’t fought it. In fact, Luna had been the one to fight me on it, while I insisted it get done as soon as possible. It was one less thing Maria could hound me about.

She leaned back in her seat and crossed her legs. “I’m glad. I do appreciate that. I’ve had some reservations about you, but you’re good to my daughter, and that’s what is important.”

She actually seemed sincere. I looked around. Was the world about to end? “Thank you for that, Maria.”

“Luna mentioned the possibility of her uncle selling his third of the team.”

I tensed up a bit. I wanted nothing to do with this conversation. “I’ve heard.”

“I don’t want her or her brother to buy out Roberto.”

Was she hinting at something? “I can’t afford to buy them out.”

That elicited a laugh. “Oh, I know you can’t afford it.”

Yes, hilarious.

“But she mentioned Alexander Wheaton. What’s your opinion of him?”

Was this a trap? “I think he’d be great for Perez. He’s smart, he’s got the money, and I think he’s a marketing wizard. It’s what the team needs.”

“And it would keep my children from digging a deeper hole.”

I ate my dessert, trying to appear as neutral as possible. But when she looked at me again, I could see she was waiting for an answer. “I don’t know the specifics of what’s going on at Perez. You must know we keep that kind of business talk out of our relationship. but I think Wheaton would be an asset.”

“I agree. Have you told her that?”

Okay, now I knew where this was going. “I have, and she’s very open to it.”

“Good,” Maria said, rising. “It’s been a good chat, Devin. I’ll let you get back to your burping cows.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

Luna

Devin and I arrived in Montreal the Tuesday before the race. We were relieved to leave Cortese Monday morning. Mom had made the few days tedious. I'd pored over all the minute details with Mom while Catia or Tony entertained Devin. My sister had spent a lot of time trying to teach him how to play Scopa, and Italian card game, but it wasn't sinking in for him.

On Wednesday night, Elizabeth and Danielle threw us an engagement party. Jess had even flown from London to attend. The party was being held at Danielle and Guy's new home in Westmount. It was no shock that Danielle wanted to use my party to show off their expensive house.

"Look at that rock," Elizabeth said, inspecting the ring on my finger. "It must be five carats."

"You exaggerate."

"He spared no expense," Elizabeth said as we looked across the room to where Devin was standing with Guy, and Elizabeth's boyfriend, Simon. Elizabeth had met him a few months ago, and I was happy to see my friend dating. "Devin looks great. You've finally whipped him into shape."

"He needed to do it for himself."

"He does look tired, though."

Elizabeth knew an abbreviated version of what was going on. She didn't fully understand the racing world, but she was sympathetic. It was funny, when we were in the thick of it, it felt so serious, but here in Montreal, there was something

childish about Devin's struggles with Russo. His career was at stake over a few extra pounds and an issue of the team favoring Erich. It made no sense that Devin didn't have a fair shot at a world championship.

Suddenly, Tyler McCaffery appeared before us. "Congratulations on your engagement," Tyler said, kissing each of my cheeks.

I would have to ask him what cologne he used and buy it for Devin. He smelled amazing. "Thank you."

"Have you set a date?"

"November twenty-first."

He arched a brow. "That's only five months away. Are you getting nervous?"

"Not really. My mother is taking care of all the arrangements. Devin and I just need to show up."

"Does this mean you won't be able to make the marathon in September?"

"I'll be there," I said, smiling that he'd remembered our little challenge. "I've already registered."

His face lit up with the biggest smile. "Good, I should do the same. In fact, I'll put a reminder on my phone to do it in the morning."

"When I make a promise, I keep it." I took a sip of my drink and stole a quick glance at him. If I wasn't engaged to Devin ... I shook the thought from my head.

"Hey, thank you again for getting me Devin's autograph. My dad loved it."

Something occurred to me. "I have a great idea. Why don't I get you tickets to Sunday's race? You and your dad can have a guided tour of our pits. It's not Ferrari or Russo, but it's the best I can do. You can be our guests for the entire weekend."

Tyler beamed. "My dad would really like that."

We swapped contact info, and then I said, "Do you mind if we sit? My feet are killing me." I was used to wearing

sneakers, and to be forced to wear heels hurt my feet.

“Sure, of course,” he said, and we took two empty seats. “If you don’t mind my saying, I’m surprised Danielle is having an engagement party for you.”

“Oh really?” I asked, grabbing some pretzels from a bowl sitting in front of us. I didn’t think it was obvious how little we liked each other.

“She’s jealous of you,” Tyler said with confidence.

Okay, maybe it was obvious. “I’m not surprised. She’s always been that way. And you noticed that?”

“Guy’s my best friend, and I don’t know how he puts up with her.”

I couldn’t help but laugh.

Tyler leaned back in his chair and extended his long legs out in front of him. He stared at me intently, and I could feel my cheeks blush. Did he find me attractive too? I quickly dismissed the idea. My situation was clear, and if he did think I was cute, I was definitely flattered but taken.

“You’re very laid back,” Tyler said.

“I have to be,” I said, briefly making eye contact with Tyler before focusing my attention on my hands. I was so used to being seen as anxious that this was a nice change. “I try not to take things too seriously because all it’s going to do is eat me up inside.”

“It seems like a lot of pressure.”

“There are times I’ll read a news article on me or Devin, and it will upset me. I think I have thicker skin now; it doesn’t anger me as much.”

“Do you ever wish you could walk away from it?”

He had the most quizzical look on his face. It gave him a boyish quality. “Who wouldn’t? But I have Devin and my brother. They help to keep me sane, and I hope I help them stay sane.”

Devin came around a corner and saw me and Tyler sitting on the sofa. He seemed annoyed. He tried to be casual as he strolled into the room and stood next to me. It was the only time he had a height advantage over Tyler.

“Nice to see you again,” Tyler said. “Congratulations on your engagement. You’re a very lucky man.”

“Thanks.” Devin turned to me. “People are looking for you.”

I wasn’t convinced that was true, but I didn’t want to subject Tyler to any more of Devin’s attitude. I rose, and Devin quickly took my hand. “See you this weekend,” I said before being pulled away.

* * *

“Now that you have guests for the weekend, does that mean you aren’t going to have time for me?” Devin asked with irritation as we walked toward the paddock.

“I should have some spare time,” I said, checking my watch. “Don’t I always make time for you? Besides, it’s not like I can hang around the Russo garage.” It was just after nine, and I was expecting Tyler and his father Scott around ten.

“And if you don’t have any spare time?”

“You’ll survive,” I said as security checked my pass and let me through.

“He likes you. How do I know he isn’t going to hit on you while I’m being ridiculed and disparaged by my team?”

“I guess you’ll have to take that chance,” I said. He’d certainly learned to get over my jealousy about the women who threw themselves at him.

“I’ll be watching him.”

“You do that.”

We parted ways, and before I could make it into the Perez motorhome, I heard someone calling my name.

I slowly turned and smiled. Jane Edwards, the reporter, was waving. “Jane, long time, no see.”

“I want to talk to you,” she said, putting her arm through mine and leading me to a quiet area.

“What about?”

“This engagement of yours. Any date set yet?”

“Jane, I thought I told you, at the track we talk about my professional life, not my personal life.”

“Fine, let’s talk about the professional side of racing. What are Devin’s plans for next year? Is he going to Barlow, or are you going to feel sorry for him and take him on at Perez?”

Jane was infuriating. “I can’t speak for Devin.”

“There are rumors that he and Riedl can’t stand the sight of one another.”

“Let me modify what I said earlier. I’ll talk about *my* professional life concerning Perez.”

“But that’s boring. I think an exclusive interview could really help Devin’s career. Think about it.”

I finally freed myself of Jane. I climbed into the motorhome and found Rafe and Erich in the corner. I suddenly felt my blood boil. I walked toward them, and when Rafe saw me, he stopped talking.

“You’re not welcome here,” I spat at Erich.

“Luna, what’s wrong with you?” Rafe asked with alarm.

“I’m not welcome in your pits; you’re not welcome here.”

Rafe jumped to his feet to try to quell the situation. “He came to see me.”

“I’m sure he did,” I said. “Now you can get out of here.”

“What has gotten into you?” Rafe asked angrily.

“As long as you aspire to ruin Devin’s career, you have no business being anywhere near me or my family.”

Erich nodded. “I understand,” he said calmly.

“Erich, you don’t have to leave,” Rafe protested.

“No, I should go,” he said. There was no anger or animosity in his eyes; however, I did see pity, and I resented it. “I’m sorry that my differences with Devin have put our relationship in jeopardy.”

“Jeopardy? Our relationship is dead!”

Erich sighed and left the motorhome.

I turned to face Rafe. His face was blotched red with rage, but I had reason to be furious too. The veins in his neck bulged as if he were going to explode. The last time I’d seen him that angry was when I’d accidentally smashed up his new car when I was sixteen.

“What the hell was that?” he yelled.

“He’s trying to sabotage Devin’s career. I don’t want him anywhere near me.”

“Next time, speak for yourself,” Rafe said, pushing past me and slamming the door behind him.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Luna

I stewed in the motorhome, waiting for my guests. I'd spent almost an hour going through Perez's financial records from our accountants. Uncle Roberto wanted to sell his stake in Perez as soon as he could, and that meant we needed some kind of valuation. The good news was that Alexander was excited about the prospect of owning part of the team. I'd be lying if I said that didn't scare me a bit. How would the dynamic change?

Juan came to tell me that Tyler and his father had arrived. I jumped out of my seat and put away my laptop. I then tamed my curls before greeting my two guests. Tyler was standing next to his father, Scott, who was having the car explained to him by one of Rafe's mechanics. Tyler saw me and waved.

"I see you're getting a close-up look," I said, standing next to Tyler.

"Yes, I didn't realize how low to the ground these cars are," Tyler said, sounding surprised. "And the space inside is so small. Must be a tight fit."

"It can be."

He turned to get his father's attention. "Dad, this is Luna Perez."

Scott McCaffery looked to be around sixty. His hair was white, and he had vivid blue eyes, lighter than those of his son. He was a tall man, in great shape for his age.

"Hello, Luna, I've heard a lot about you," Scott said with a firm handshake. "Thank you for inviting us today."

“Tyler told me how interested you were in racing, and I thought you needed to see it firsthand.”

“I used to watch your father race. I must admit he wasn’t my favorite. I had a soft spot for David Remple.”

“So did my mother. I think he was her favorite driver as well.”

We laughed, and that seemed to put everyone at ease, and when Rafe came over to introduce himself, Scott couldn’t stop asking him questions. I’d already arranged for Rafe to go through the cars with Tyler and Scott. He was still angry with me, but he was careful not to let our guests catch on. Scott became enamored with Rafe, and Rafe enjoyed having his ego stroked. Within minutes, the two of them had forgotten that Tyler and I were there.

“So your boyfriend doesn’t drive for this team, right?” Tyler asked as we went into the motorhome for refreshments.

I laughed. “God no! He’s over in the Russo pits.”

“He doesn’t like me much, does he?” Tyler said.

“Usually Devin doesn’t care what’s going on. For some reason, you agitate him. It doesn’t make sense.”

“Maybe he feels threatened because I’m taller,” Tyler said with a shifty smile. “I think I’m the tallest guy here.”

“You are, but don’t go around making fun of the guys. It hurts their feelings.” I handed Tyler a bottle of water.

Devin barreled through the door an hour later as Tyler and I enjoyed a late breakfast. His eyes narrowed when he saw us. He plopped down next to me, and within minutes, George handed him a plate of food. It was light, since Devin had to be in his car in a few hours. Devin ate silently while Tyler and I chatted. I didn’t think he cared what was going on, until he pushed his empty plate away.

“You’re not married? No girlfriend?” Devin asked.

Tyler’s gaze fell on Devin, and he seemed surprised by the questions. “I’ve never been married, and no girlfriend right now.”

Devin nodded, his expression almost cold. “How did I guess that?”

I had no idea where Devin was going with this, so I glanced at my watch and suggested he get back to the Russo pits before he got in trouble. He didn’t get up right away, instead staring at Tyler.

Finally, he said, “Right. I should get back.” He gave me a quick kiss before glaring at Tyler one last time.

“He *really* doesn’t like me,” Tyler said as we made our way out to the garage. Scott and Carlos were talking about the car as if they were old friends.

“He’s just being difficult. Women throw themselves at him all the time, and I don’t give it a second thought. I trust him. He sees me talking with a man, and he’s jumping to all sorts of conclusions. But it keeps him on his toes, and I like that.”

“So you’re just using me,” Tyler said, feigning injured pride.

I laughed. “You could look at it that way, but I wanted the company and to offer your dad a chance to see the cars up close.”

“And again, I would like to thank you for that. This is the thrill of a lifetime for him.”

“It was my pleasure.”

Scott McCaffery took my usual position in front of the monitors while Tyler and I watched the race from the motorhome. I explained all the racing lingo to him. He seemed interested in the intricate workings of the teams but still didn’t get the appeal of the actual sport. And when Devin’s engine blew on the sixteenth lap, I explained the possible reasons why it had happened. Tyler listened intently.

“You know so much about this.”

“Are you surprised because I’m a woman?” I asked with a smile.

“I didn’t mean it that way.”

“I’m by no means an expert, and I really should know more about these cars. I used to drive.” He looked impressed, and I continued, “My Uncle Roberto thought I could make the Perez name household again. He used to enter me in all sorts of races, and I did quite well, but I always thought there was more to life than driving around a racetrack. I mean, where are you going? Nowhere. It didn’t make a lot of sense to me. My uncle was disappointed. I think he thought with hard work I could eventually drive at this caliber. It was never going to happen. I lost interest when I was sixteen or so.”

“But you’re more interested now?”

I thought about that. “At first, I hated it. It was more an obligation than anything else, but I’ve met a lot of people, and I’m invested in the team. I want it to be successful.”

“Fair enough. And where are you off to next? After this race?”

“Detroit. The race is next Sunday, and it doesn’t leave us a lot of time to breathe. We have to pack up the team as fast as possible and move it to the States.”

“How much longer do you think you’re going to do this?”

“I don’t know. Sometimes I think forever. It doesn’t seem right to abandon the team. I own part of it, with Rafe and my uncle.” I didn’t tell him about Alexander because the acquisition was in its infancy. I couldn’t risk letting it get out.

“Is your uncle here?”

It was kind of nice to talk through this stuff with someone who wasn’t involved. “He rarely comes out. Two and a half years ago he was involved in a car accident. They thought he’d be paralyzed, but he threw himself into his physio, so he can walk with a cane now. But he’s in constant pain. It’s just too difficult for him to travel with the team. When all that went down, Rafe asked me to get involved. I really shouldn’t complain. This is how I met Devin.”

“That’s true.” He didn’t sound impressed by *that*.

Rafe finished fourth, his best finish ever. The Perez team had improved dramatically with the addition of the new

engines. We were no longer regarded as back markers, cars destined to be lapped. By no means were we in the same class as Russo, Roche, and Merrick, but there was promise.

I invited Tyler and his father to a postrace celebration dinner. The whole team celebrated at a French restaurant in the east end. I hadn't seen my brother so happy in a long time. He even allowed himself a few celebratory drinks. Devin didn't join us until late in the evening. He looked dejected. His romantic thoughts of being world champion were slipping away. Riedl had won the race with Lauder a close second. Both men had pulled away from Devin in the points standings.

"I'll call you," I said to Tyler as he and his father prepared to leave.

"We have a date in September."

"Yes, we do. And if you ever need anything, please don't hesitate to give me a call."

"Thank you. This was a dream for my dad, and it's all thanks to you."

I watched him leave. A little part of me was sad to see him go, and I didn't even know why.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Devin

Nigel Webb and I had been friends since our cart days. We'd been competing together since forever, and he was one of the few drivers on the circuit that I considered a friend. We weren't best buds like I was with Colin, but we used to hang out all the time when we first made it to the big leagues. And we still did when we both had time, so I didn't think too much of it when he texted to see if I was free a few days before the next race.

We met up for drinks in a sports lounge. The great thing about Detroit was that no one recognized us. We weren't exactly household names in America.

"How are you doing?" I asked Webb after we'd ordered some beers. The server recommended the wings, so we ordered those too.

"I'm good. I hear you're going to Barlow next year."

I shrugged. I still had to be cagey until the deal was officially announced. "I'll definitely have a ride somewhere next year."

"I bet you're glad to be done with Russo."

"I'm counting the bloody days. How about you? All things are good?"

"Yeah, I can't complain. I've been thinking about dumping my agent, and I was considering Enzo. That's actually why I wanted to chat."

I raised an eyebrow. "You want my recommendation?"

Nigel tapped the side of his beer a few times. “Well, no. The thing is ... after what I’ve heard, I don’t want anything to do with him.”

Enzo was a world-renowned gossip, but he’d always kept things professional. If Nigel was worried about that, I’d be able to assure him that wasn’t a problem. “I know he talks too much, but he’s negotiated some fucking fantastic deals for me. You don’t need to worry about that.”

Nigel groaned and leaned back in his seat. “Dev, you’ve got to sack him.”

I tilted my head in confusion. I certainly hadn’t expected that. “Why?”

“Your agent, who talks too much, has been telling people that you’re marrying Luna to set yourself up for the rest of your life. He’s even implied that he can prove it.”

The server brought our wings, but the smell of barbecue sauce was suddenly turning my stomach. “How do you know this? Where did you hear it?”

“Damn,” Nigel muttered to himself. “I hope I don’t regret this, but he told me directly. I met with him, thinking he might be a good choice for me. He told me he was responsible for setting the two of you up, and that you were sacrificing your old lifestyle because securing a future with Luna meant you’d never have another care in the world. He was just tossing it out there, like his own achievement. Like something he was proud of.”

My hands balled into fists. How many times had I tried to set Enzo straight. Either he wasn’t listening or he was trying to sabotage me, but I wasn’t sure why. And taking credit for setting me and Luna up? That was a new one.

“One more thing,” Nigel said, as if he hadn’t said enough. “He made it painfully clear that Riedl loathes you and has something up his sleeve that could bring you down. I was shocked that he was saying all this to me. He thinks I’d trust him with my own career after all that? Anyway, I suppose he wanted me to ask for more information, but I wasn’t getting

involved in that. I thought you should know about this because Enzo is single-handedly trying to ruin your reputation. I don't understand it. He's your agent, and he's also screwing you over. Does he have a death wish?"

My head was a jumble of thoughts that made it impossible to focus on anything. "I don't know, but I appreciate that you told me."

* * *

I got back to the hotel and didn't say a word about Enzo to Luna, even though I was panicking. What the hell was going on?

At three o'clock in the morning, I slipped out of bed and left a sleeping Luna and went to the lobby, where I called my lawyer in London. I'd stayed up all night waiting to make this call.

I told her everything. She listened intently, and the first thing out of her mouth was the recommendation to fire Enzo.

"He could come at you for breaking your agreement with him, but if he's doing and saying all of this, I think we can get him to back off. I need to look at your contract with him again, but I think you're stuck paying him for any deals he's negotiated."

"Can we put a hold on that until I find out more?"

"How do you plan to find out more?"

"I've hired a PI before, and I'll do it again. Someone with no connection to Enzo. Do you have any names?"

"I have a few I can recommend."

"Let's get started with one straight away. I have no idea what he's up to, but it must be bad. I can't believe he would do this to me. I made him. We've worked together for years. He wouldn't be where he is today if not for me."

Gloria cleared her throat. "Are you sure you can trust Nigel Webb? Could he have another motive?"

I shook my head vehemently, not that Gloria could see it. “Nigel’s a good one.”

“I had to ask. I’m sorry this happened. If Enzo has done something nefarious, we have ways of proceeding.”

“Thank you for this, Gloria. I’m going to fire him immediately.”

“Yes, and have him refer any questions he has back to me. It’s a good thing you’ve signed off on that Barlow deal, otherwise we’d have to worry about that.”

“Yes, good thing.”

I ended the call and wondered if he’d made sure I’d signed that deal instead of getting something better.

* * *

I waited a few hours before calling Enzo. I didn’t want to seem to anxious and call him first thing. He answered in a sunny and pleasant voice, and all I could think about was his phony smile, and how I’d love to knock it off his face.

“Something wrong? You don’t normally call on a race weekend.”

Yeah, something was definitely wrong. I’d had barely two hours of sleep. I was fucking exhausted, and the last thing I wanted to do was deal with Enzo and his bullshit. But it had to be done. “You’re fired, Enzo.” I figured cutting straight to the point was the best way to handle this.

“Excuse me?” he said with a nervous laugh.

“You’re fired. Normally, I would have done this in person, but I’m past niceties. I’ve already talked to Gloria, and she’s dealing with our split. If you have any questions, you can contact her.”

“Wait!” he said as I was about to hang up. “What’s going on? Are you serious? Is this a joke?”

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him how I'd expected him to be loyal to me, to be on my side, but I remembered Gloria's words. The best thing to do was fire him and be done with it. "No joke. Talk to Gloria." I paused, but I couldn't help adding, "If you slander me in any way or accuse me of things that aren't true, I'll sue you into your next fucking life, you piece of shit."

I hung up, feeling sick.

I went back to the room. It was nearly six in the morning. I couldn't function like this. Thankfully, other than a team meeting, nothing else was planned. I sent Matteo a text to tell him I had a stomach bug and needed to sleep it off. Part of that was true. I did need some sleep. Luna was stirring in bed, and I told her the same lie. I took a sleeping pill that I kept around for occasions like this, and before my eyes closed, I told Luna that I'd fired Enzo.

"What?" The shock in her voice was clearly evident despite my sleepy haze. "Why?"

"He's an asshole who needed to go. We'll talk more later."

And I fell into a long sleep.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Luna

We'd been in Detroit a couple of days when Devin had some sponsor-organized public appearances to make. He was signing autographs at a huge department store on behalf of the clothing label that supported the team. He barely smiled as he and Riedl sat next to each other signing autographs. The only consolation for Devin was that more women swooned for him than they did for Riedl.

That night we lay in bed after making love. It had been more intense than usual, which intrigued me. I was able to read him so easily now. There was something he wanted to talk about, and I was waiting for him to launch into it. Was it the tributes to my father? Pressure from his team? The fact he'd fired Enzo out of nowhere and still hadn't given me any details?

"Let's get married," he said in the darkness.

"We are. In November."

"No, I mean right away. After Detroit, I have a few days off. They don't want me for any testing, so we could fly to Las Vegas, get married, and make this official. That way they can't prevent you from staying away from me."

Had he hit his head and I missed it? "I'd love to, but my mother has been planning our wedding day for the last four months."

"Who says we can't get married again? This will be a civil ceremony, and then we'll have the religious ceremony in

November with the huge party your mother wants to have. I want to marry you as soon as possible.”

“Why?”

He rolled onto his side to face me and caressed my cheek. “To prove to all those bastards that I love you more than any other woman and not because you can further my career. I want to be able to say this is my wife. Once we’re married, the press will leave us alone. Who is ever interested in a married couple? They’re boring.”

I laughed. “You’re losing your mind.”

“I’ll lose my mind if you don’t marry me.”

“But Las Vegas?” I groaned at the prospect. “It’s so unromantic.”

“I have a friend in California. I’ll invite him out. You call up Elizabeth, and we can make it a small little gathering, nice and romantic. We won’t be married by an Elvis look-alike, I promise. Just think, the wedding in November is going to be busy. Reporters and paparazzi will be all over the place, but if we get married now, we’ll take the wind out of their sails. Who is going to want pictures of a couple who’s already married?”

“I don’t know about this,” I said, unconvinced.

“Do you love me?”

He seemed so desperate. “From the depths of my heart.”

“Then why not?”

“And what about the wrath of my mother?”

“We can handle it together.”

* * *

He’d taken me by surprise, but my excitement grew, and the next morning, I said yes to Devin’s elopement plan. I hid my excitement all throughout the stay in Detroit. Not even the tributes to my father could get me down. Hoping not to arouse

any suspicion, I took a quick trip to Montreal to ask Elizabeth to be my maid of honor—Jess wouldn't have to know, and besides, she couldn't get away if I wanted her to. Next, I'd flown to New York to meet with Alexander Wheaton for a preplanned meeting to discuss his interest in buying into the team. Other than Elizabeth, he was the only one I told about the wedding.

He'd immediately taken on the task of creating a dress for me in ten days. I'd told him that I didn't want anything fancy, just a simple white dress. He assured me that it would be waiting at our hotel in Vegas. He also asked that I send him a photograph for him to put in his office. I was touched by the request. After my brief meeting, I flew back to Detroit. Rafe didn't seem the wiser when I was back Wednesday evening. If he knew of my plans, he would surely try to convince me to wait, and I no longer wanted to wait.

I didn't doubt my love for Devin, and I didn't doubt his love for me. My family would be angry for a little while—Mom would go ballistic—but eventually all would be forgotten. I still wanted a wedding with all my family and friends.

“Why are you acting so strange?” Rafe asked before the race on Sunday.

“I'm in a good mood.”

He narrowed his eyes. “You seem nervous.”

“I'm not,” I lied.

My mind was so focused on our trip, I barely registered Devin finished third in the race behind Lauder and Riedl. He was satisfied with the finish and on the podium, and he and Erich congratulated one another. Relations with Russo had improved slightly for Devin, especially after Erich had surpassed Devin's point total, and he was becoming less and less of a threat to Erich's aspirations of being world champion.

“So where are you going?” Rafe asked as we rode back to the hotel.

“Devin and I are going to spend a few days in California. He has friends there, and I plan to visit Lita,” I said, unable to look my brother in the eye. I hated having to lie to him, especially because I didn’t plan to visit my grandmother. I was going to go straight to hell for that lie.

We parted company at the hotel. It was three weeks before the race in England, and I wouldn’t see my brother until then. Hopefully, it would be enough time for him to accept the wedding news when I finally told him.

I kissed Rafe on the cheek and raced up to my hotel room. Devin was there on the phone with his friend Kyle from Los Angeles. He waved to me when I walked in. There was a garment bag hanging in the closet. I was disappointed to discover it was Devin’s suit and not my wedding dress.

“I thought you said it was going to meet us in Las Vegas,” Devin said after ending his conversation with Kyle.

“I was just hoping,” I said, jumping onto the bed.

Devin joined me on the bed and kissed me lightly on the lips.

“In less than two days, you are going to be my wife,” he said, playing with my hair.

“And you are going to be my husband.”

“If someone told me I would meet a woman on another team, fall in love with her, then marry her, I would have laughed in his face. But it’s happening, Luna, and I love you.”

“I love you too. There isn’t anything else I should know about you?” I asked, running my finger up and down his chest.

“You know everything there is to know.”

“There is one thing. Enzo ...”

Devin flopped back on the bed and rubbed his temples. “It came to my attention that he’s been gossiping and spreading some lies. Nigel told me about it. I consulted with my lawyer, and she advised me to fire him.”

“What was he saying?” I asked, propping myself up on an elbow.

Devin wrinkled his nose and sighed. “Shit about me wanting to marry you for the money. He knows I signed a prenup. I think he thinks that if he gossips about me, it brings me attention. But I don’t want him to do that. I’ve told him that many times. I’d just had enough.”

I’d always thought Enzo was a slimy bastard, and this confirmed it. “I’m glad he’s gone.”

“So am I.”

* * *

Just as Alexander had promised, my dress was waiting for me in our hotel room in Las Vegas. I carefully took it out of its garment bag. It was a simple, fitted dress that fell to my ankles. I quickly tried it on and stared at my reflection in the mirror, knowing I looked great. Elizabeth who had arrived early that afternoon, beamed at me. She was excited to be involved in my ultra-secret wedding.

“Where’s Devin?”

“I don’t know. He just said he wanted us to meet him there. He’s going to have a car pick us up around seven.”

“It’s bad luck to see the bride in her dress. Maybe that’s why he wants us to meet them there.”

“I think he’s out buying rings.”

Elizabeth did my hair and makeup. I was too nervous to do anything right, and I hadn’t even thought to arrange for any stylists.

“Tyler is going to be upset when he finds out,” Elizabeth said, as she applied my foundation. “I think he really likes you. All he could do was talk about you after you gave him that tour.”

“He’s a nice guy, and I hope he meets a great woman.”

“He’s a lot of things. I don’t know many guys as sincere as Tyler,” Elizabeth said. “So what possessed you two to get married now?”

“We’re hoping people will leave us alone once we’re married. Devin made a good point: who cares about people once they are married?”

“In your case, I hope that’s true. But ... don’t you think people will want to see the marriage fail?”

I laughed. “By then I won’t care.”

As seven o’clock neared, we left the hotel room and went down into the lobby. The car was waiting for us, and we climbed inside. The chapel wasn’t far from the hotel. It was small and quaint. I waited in the lobby while Elizabeth went in search of Devin and Kyle. She returned moments later with a nervous smile on her face.

“The pastor says he’s ready when you are.”

I took a deep breath as butterflies fluttered in my stomach. “Why am I shaking?” I asked.

“Because you’re marrying the man of your dreams, and you didn’t tell your mother.”

She really got me. “My family is never going to forgive me.”

“You aren’t getting cold feet, are you?”

“No, never.”

She nodded decisively. “Then let’s go.”

I followed Elizabeth inside the chapel and toward the threshold. Devin was standing with Kyle, looking just as nervous as me, but he looked great in his black suit. I smiled at him, and when we stood next to each other, he told me how beautiful he thought I was. This truly was the most amazing moment of my life.

Throughout the short service, my eyes were filled with tears of joy. When the pastor pronounced us husband and wife,

Devin took me in his arms and kissed me as if he'd never kiss me again. Elizabeth and Kyle clapped.

Devin had hired a photographer, who took several shots of us. The whole thing overwhelmed me and not until Devin and I were alone later that evening did I fully grasp what we'd done.

After we made love as a married couple, I stared at my left hand with only a simple gold band. Until the wedding in November, that was all I was going to wear, and I loved it. Devin was having my engagement ring custom-made, and it wouldn't be ready until the second ceremony.

"My God, you're my husband!" I said, lying in bed, my chin resting on my folded hands.

"And you are my wife."

"It sounds so strange saying it."

"Are you going to change your name to Flynn?"

"I haven't decided yet. Would you be offended if I didn't?"

He seemed to consider. "No, as long as our children are named Flynn."

I nearly choked. "Our children? That sounds strange too. I don't want children for a while."

"Neither do I," Devin said, grasping ringlets of my hair.

"I sort of figured you didn't want them at all."

He *pfited*. "Maybe I've changed my mind about kids. I just don't want them this second."

Even though that shock had me bowled over, I had an even bigger problem to deal with. "I'll have to call my mother in the morning. She'll be furious."

"My parents will be ecstatic. Or at least my grandmother will be."

"And the press?"

"After we've notified all the important parties, I'm going to have Gemma send one of the photos to the media with a

short press release announcing our marriage.”

Gemma was his new agent, and I couldn't be more excited that he'd hired a woman. She apparently was a negotiating wizard, and a few other drivers had hired her on as well.

“And what do you think Russo is going to do?”

“They are going to wish they had signed me next year and not Jamie Kildare.”

* * *

I had expected my mother's wrath and I wasn't disappointed. Mom became so angry, she actually cried and hung up on me. Rafe was mostly silent when he heard the news. He listened as I explained my reasons for not waiting until November. I'd expected Rafe to understand. He'd barely been twenty when he'd married Eva, and he couldn't wait to marry her.

“You would have never done this if Dad were here,” he said quietly.

The words stung. “I was going to marry Devin anyway. Why does this make a difference?”

“Because you weren't supposed to get married in some tacky chapel without even telling your family. You were supposed to be married with your family there. I have no doubt this was Flynn's idea. Luna, what you did really saddens me, especially because Mom was looking forward to doing this for you.”

I wanted to slap him. “You always have a way of making me feel like shit.”

“You feel like shit because you should. I hope he married you for the right reasons.”

I thought of Enzo's lies and Erich's vendetta against Devin. “Are you suggesting something?”

“I won't comment.”

That statement had my back up. “And what does that mean?”

“Nothing,” Rafe said quickly.

“Has a particular member of the Russo team been poisoning your mind?”

“I could ask you the same thing.”

“Look, I’m still going to have my church wedding in November, and Mom can still plan her big party. Nothing is going to change.”

“You’re naïve. And when this blows up in your face, don’t come crying to me.”

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Luna

Devin and I were the new darlings of motorsport. We were mobbed at parties and functions for photo opportunities. At first the media assumed I was pregnant and that was why we'd gotten married so quickly. I dispelled the rumor, though I found it amusing. When no baby bump appeared, that settled that.

We finally granted our first interview together to a British racing magazine that Devin had a favorable history with, much to Jess's irritation. She understood why we'd kept the elopement secret but thought she should have gotten an exclusive article out of it. The interview took place in our home outside Milan. A photographer and crew were brought in, including a makeup artist and hairstylist. We would have final approval on every aspect of the article before it hit newsstands in August.

Mom hadn't spoken to me for three weeks. It wasn't until I went to visit her at the end of July that she finally allowed herself to have a conversation with me. She expressed her anger for being left out of my plans, and I listened, nodding here and there. I didn't agree with her, but for the sake of our relationship, there was no other way. By the time I left Cortese, all had been forgiven—however, certainly not forgotten.

“Are you sure you don't want a baby soon?” Devin asked the night before the race in Hungary. “Maybe we should.”

“Where did that come from?” I asked with surprise. We were having dinner in Devin's favorite Italian restaurant.

“I thought I’d give fatherhood a chance,” Devin said. “I’m going to be thirty in a few months.”

“I’m not interested in motherhood right now, thank you very much, and if you’re so interested in fatherhood, you do have a daughter.”

He nodded thoughtfully. “You have me there. It’s just something to think about.”

He’d never seemed so calm about all this. Was marriage mellowing him? “Let’s forge a relationship with Paige first, before we think about kids of our own. Is that something you’d consider?”

After a careful moment, he said, “Yeah, I’ll consider it.”

I took that as a huge victory and decided to change the subject before he changed his mind. “How are things with Barlow?”

“I should have the contracts to sign any day now.”

“And they will let you be number one?”

“That’s the deal.”

I took a bite of my cannelloni. Since our marriage in June, Devin’s chances of being a world champion had all but evaporated. His car had spun out in the rain at Caldwell. In France he placed a disappointing tenth. Austria was a bright spot with a third-place showing, but Germany, Italy, and Belgium had all ended in DNFs. Ironically, Hungary had always been a good track for Devin, and he hoped it would bring him some luck.

I was still haunted by this track and hated being anywhere near it. I couldn’t believe it had been a year. Every time I saw it, I relived the last moments of Blake Carlton’s life. The images repeated themselves over and over again in my head. I often wondered if the feelings toward Hungary would ever change. The spot where Blake had crashed had been completely revamped with added safety measures, as well as all the other changes the federation had finally demanded. The track was up to snuff at last. It only took Blake’s life to change

it. I'd put on the half-moon pendant Blake had given me. It would stay on all throughout our time here.

"What the hell were you doing?" Rafe asked the next morning as I scrambled around the motorhome looking for my notes.

"Mom called. She wanted to know if a pasta sculpture was tacky. I said it was. She then argued with me that she thought so, too, but felt the need to defend the idea anyway. She thought this was an emergency."

"That's nice," Rafe said casually.

Okay, Rafe hadn't heard a word I'd said and he looked stiff. "You're tense."

He looked at me, and I could see how tired he was. "Hungary does that to me."

"Me too."

"Are you leaving right after the race?" he asked.

"Yeah. Devin has a couple of days of filming some kind of commercial his new agent secured, so it's not like we'll be together anyway. Why do you ask?"

"Tomorrow night, I'm meeting with a new sponsor. He wants to meet you too."

"Here in Budapest?"

"Yes, can you stay an extra day?"

I could never say no to a new sponsor. "I don't see why not. Who is the sponsor?"

"A software company," Rafe said quickly.

"What's their name?"

"I don't remember."

"You don't remember?" Rafe remembered everything.

"Uncle Roberto told me about them. I don't know all the details. I probably should have been paying better attention, but my mind has been elsewhere."

It was unlike Rafe not to have every single detail. I thought the whole thing sounded strange, but I wasn't going to turn his request down. We needed all the sponsorship we could get.

* * *

The race saw Rafe finish fourth and Devin fifth. Erich won, which brought him within two points of Hans Lauder, with only a handful of races left. It was going to be a spectacular end to the racing season. Devin headed out the next day.

It rained all of Monday. I spent the afternoon on the phone with Mom deciding on flowers and decorations for the reception. With the wedding a little more than two months away, I was growing more and more frazzled each time she called. I was happy when Rafe came to my room to fetch me for the meeting with our new sponsor.

“Where are we headed?” I asked as we walked down the street.

“At a hotel a few blocks from here. I thought we would walk.”

I sensed some uneasiness in Rafe's voice. “What's wrong?” I asked.

“Nothing is wrong,” Rafe said, staring straight ahead, down the busy sidewalk.

“You've been acting odd for weeks.”

“I think it's the stress of being in Hungary. It upsets me every time I'm here.”

We entered a posh hotel and took the elevator to the top floor. I was already impressed with our new sponsor. We exited the elevator. There were only two suites on the floor, and Rafe led me to one of the doors. He opened it and motioned for me to step inside. I did, and the first person I saw was Erich Riedl standing in front of the window, looking out. He turned when he heard the door open. My body stiffened.

“What the hell is going on here?” I demanded.

“Luna, we need to talk,” Erich said, walking toward me.

“No way,” I spat. I turned to leave, but Rafe was blocking the door.

“You can’t leave,” Rafe said just above a whisper.

My blood was boiling. I had no idea what these two had cooked up together, but I wanted no part of it. “Rafe, get out of the way.”

“Erich has some things to tell you.”

“I don’t want to hear them,” I yelled. I turned to face Erich again. “Why won’t you leave us alone? Why must you try to ruin us?”

“Luna, just give me a few minutes,” Erich pleaded.

“Why should I? You’ve done all you can to destroy me and Devin.”

“That’s because he’s playing you for a fool.”

I balled my hands into fists. “I’m not going to listen to this shit,” I said, trying to push Rafe away from the door.

“Just give me ten minutes,” Erich said, grasping on to my arm.

“Don’t touch me,” I said, yanking my arm away.

Rafe grabbed me by the shoulders. “My God, just listen to the man,” he cried. “Why do you have to be so stubborn? He’s trying to help you, but you’re so blinded by what you think is love that nothing else matters.”

I was taken aback by Rafe’s actions. I stepped away from him, feeling Riedl’s presence right behind me. I was about to hear what they had to say whether I liked it or not, and I had no control over whether I’d like it.

“Luna,” Erich said quietly, “if what I have to show you doesn’t sway you in any way, I will never bother you or Devin again. That is my promise to you.”

I faced Riedl and took a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart. “You have ten minutes,” I said in a dull

monotone.

Erich had me sit in front of a huge television. Rafe still stood by the door, no longer afraid that I'd leave. Riedl pulled up a chair and sat across from me, the TV remote in hand.

"I don't know where to begin," he said, and he sounded devastated. "I've known you since the day you were born. Me and Rafe used to fight over who got to feed you your bottle. I've watched you grow up the last few years into a beautiful young woman. But when you got yourself mixed up with Flynn, I thought eventually he would nauseate you enough that you would end things with him. When that didn't happen, I began to worry. I admit, I even encouraged Carlton to pursue you. I knew he liked you, and I thought if you had a better option, you'd drop Flynn."

"Well, that's insulting," I snarked.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Look, I started to investigate him a little, just in case he thought he'd try to weasel his way into your life. When the two of you got engaged, I knew I didn't have much time. What I didn't know was that he'd convince you to marry him so fast. I should have seen it coming, but by the time I did, it was too late. But then I realized it was never too late. I met with Rafe some weeks ago to show him the evidence I have on Flynn. We both decided you needed to see it."

My nerves were frayed, and I was losing patience. "What kind of evidence?" I asked.

"What Flynn doesn't know is that we've had an audio and video unit set up in the Russo motorhome. It had been installed quite harmlessly. There were thefts going on, so Russo decided to catch the thieves in the act. What the cameras did catch was something altogether more sinister."

"If this is about an encounter Devin and I had, maybe you should both cover your eyes ..." My sarcasm was coming through as I lost what little patience I had left.

"It's not *that* kind of recording."

"I don't want to know," I said passively.

“You need to know.”

I held my breath as Riedl switched the television on. “This video consists of bits and pieces I’ve obtained from the motorhome videos over the last few years.”

Years? This was bordering on creepy, and I had to wonder how much footage Erich had of me, but another part of me felt a pit in my stomach. Erich had something; otherwise, we wouldn’t be here.

“Why?” I asked. “Why would you do this?”

“It was Carlton who warned me. I don’t know how he knew, but he took me aside and told me to gather whatever evidence I could.”

I turned to Rafe. His gaze was downcast. I knew then that this wasn’t going to be good. I clutched my stomach as Riedl played the video. In almost every shot, it was Devin sitting casually in the motorhome with Enzo Potenza.

“How was the golf tournament?” Enzo asked.

“Not bad. The Perez woman kicked my ass.”

“I told you not to lie about your handicap.”

Devin leaned back in one of the comfortable black leather chairs and crossed his legs at his ankles. “What do you think she’s worth?”

“Millions.”

“See if you can find out a more exact number than that.”

“Why? Are you interested?”

“I might be.”

There was a pause in the video before it leaped to a later time.

“So what happened?” Enzo asked.

“I have her wrapped around my finger. It couldn’t have gone any better. I went out to her place unannounced, and she welcomed me with open arms. I worked my charms, batted my

eyelashes a few times, and had her in bed by the end of the weekend.”

“I wish I had your talents.”

“She’s a nice girl.”

“But not your usual fare.”

“I can learn to like her.”

I sucked in a breath. The comment felt like a stab to my heart, yet I was transfixed by the images. Once again, the video cut to just some audio.

“I’m banging her to make a buck? Sure, it would make sense to do something like that, you know, advance my career, get under Riedl’s skin, drive Rafe Perez mad, maybe even needle Carlton since he seems to have an interest in her.”

It cut to video again.

“Carlton is nosing around,” Devin said, pacing around the motorhome, coming in and out of camera range.

“What’s he been doing?”

“He’s been filling her head with bullshit. He might become a problem.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know yet. I’m not going to blow this, because he’s getting too close.”

“What’s his motivation?”

“I think he likes her,” he said as if it were impossible to believe.

“Carlton? What would he want with her?”

“He probably thinks he can be closer to her father if he’s fucking her. Who knows? The guy is a parasite.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I’m going to pour on the charms. The last thing I want to do is lose her to him. Can you imagine the humiliation!”

Another cut to audio.

“The bastard is still hanging around, but I don’t think he’s much of a factor. I’m fairly certain I’ve taken care of that. He put up a good fight, but I wasn’t going to let him walk over me. And I know what he thinks. He thinks my relationship with Luna is superficial, that she’s helped me make money with all the publicity, and she’s a decent fuck. What more could a guy ask for?”

Yet another audio clip.

“You look like shit,” Enzo said.

“Too much drinking,” Devin said, massaging his temples.

“I hear that too often from you, paisano,” Enzo said, shaking his head. “Drinking where and with whom?”

“Just some friends.”

“Tell me you went home alone.”

“Sort of.”

Enzo’s eyes opened wide. “Did anyone see you?”

“First of all, she was a friend and nothing happened. And I have no idea if anyone saw me. I haven’t seen it all over Instagram, so I’m guessing I’m fine.”

“You have to be careful.”

“No lectures today. Okay?”

Another cut. Devin eating lunch, Enzo watching.

“Nice touch with the tattoo,” Enzo said, grabbing a meatball from Devin’s plate.

“Only a guy in love would do that,” Devin drawled.

“You should write a book on how to fool a woman.”

“Hey, I like the girl.”

“And she’s madly in love with you.”

“Can you blame her?”

Enzo laughed nastily. “Well, you found yourself a rich woman to take care of you when you get old. You know, her father was a very shrewd businessman, and it seems that he taught his wife well. She tripled the fortune.”

“I’m impressed.”

“Anything else we need to cover? How are things with Carlton?”

“The bastard is still hanging around, but I don’t think he’s much of a factor.”

“What were you saying about some kind of nervous breakdown?”

“Sounds like a family of loons,” Devin said, rolling his eyes.

“Her mother had a nervous breakdown when Perez died, and she had a nervous breakdown before Spain. What a thing to pass down from one generation to the next. But hey, she’s made me millions. What more could a guy ask for?”

My stomach tightened. Erich stopped the video. “He must have learned that everything in the motorhome was being recorded because he stopped talking to his manager there. In fact, the only time he said anything at all was when he was talking casually to people hanging around. I knew I had to find out what more was going on. So I hired someone, and this is what he compiled from the hotel room you shared with Flynn.”

Erich hit play. This time it was Devin sitting in our hotel room in Brazil. He was with Enzo yet again.

“What the fuck am I supposed to do?” Devin said angrily. “We’re engaged, and now Riedl wants me out more than ever. Do you think someone’s shown him the videos?”

“Anything is possible.”

“When he heard about the engagement, he vowed the marriage would never happen.”

“Marry her sooner.”

“Her damn mother won’t let that happen.”

“So convince her. Devin, if you want your career to last a few more years, you better marry your little security blanket as soon as possible.”

“But that will only antagonize Riedl further.”

“Face it, you’re finished with Russo. They want new blood. So go after the brass ring—and Devin, marry that woman as soon as possible. If Riedl has the motorhome videos, you’re fucked either way. At least if you’re married, you can get some money out of her or get lucky and he backs off. And if you really want to seal the deal, get her pregnant.”

The video ended. I stared at the blank screen. Erich pulled a flash drive out of his pocket and handed it to me.

“I wanted to wait until I had everything together before I showed you this, but then he went and convinced you to elope with him. Luna, I didn’t do this to hurt or humiliate you. I just wanted you to know the kind of man he was. This is why I wanted him off my team. I thought if I could get to you in time, I could get him out your life too. I pray that you do the right thing and get as far away from him as possible.”

I stood and walked toward the door. “Rafe, take me back to the hotel,” I said, clutching the flash drive. He tried to reach out to me, but I rebuffed him. I needed to be alone.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Luna

That night, I flew to London, and Jess was there to meet me at the airport. I cried as we sat in our flat. I detailed every moment with Erich, the humiliation I felt at being duped by Devin. Jess hugged me as I ugly-sobbed.

“I just want my belongings and to get as far away from him as possible,” I said in between sobs.

“We’ll go together to get your things,” Jess said, trying desperately to comfort me. “I think you need to tell him it’s over to his face. I’ll be there for you, but it’s something you need to do.”

The prospect of doing that made my stomach flip. “I don’t even want to see him.”

“You need to do it for yourself.”

“Jess, I’ve been so stupid. Everyone warned me, and like the fool that I am, I fell for all his deceptive charms. How am I going to face everyone?”

“Don’t beat yourself up. You loved him. You aren’t the bad guy here.”

Jess stayed up with me most of the night until I was calm enough to devise a plan. She agreed to fly back with me to Milan. She’d stay with my Uncle Dario while I confronted Devin with the incriminating evidence. What I would do after that, I didn’t know.

I thought to go to Cortese, but I couldn’t bear to face my mother. There was nothing in London for me other than Jess,

and she was too busy with her career to have me around anyway. So the choice was obvious. I had already planned to fly out to Montreal for the marathon, so why not extend the trip? I could stay in my old place, if it hadn't been rented out.

Wednesday evening we got to Milan. No one was home when I let myself in, so I quickly I pulled out an empty suitcase and began to pack the belongings I needed most. I would send for the rest later. I no longer felt the urge to cry. I had spent two days feeling sorry for myself while avoiding Devin's calls. I'd returned a few of his texts so he'd be none the wiser.

Rage now replaced the hurt. I'd never been so betrayed by someone I loved so dearly. He had boldly lied to me for so long without a single ounce of remorse. He was truly the worst person I'd ever met, had ever allowed myself to be associated with—and I was now married to him!

The signs had been there, but I hadn't allowed myself to see them, not until they had been put before my very eyes, in Devin's own words. I thought I'd be nervous, but I was anticipating what would happen that evening. He would try to talk his way out of it somehow, but I didn't care. The evidence was overwhelming. He had no defense.

I heard the front door of the house close. I quickly texted Jess and told her to be at the house in an hour. I wasn't going to need more time than that with my *husband*. I put down my phone and resumed packing. Devin walked into the bedroom and stopped when he saw me.

"Where are you going?" he asked innocently.

I looked at him. The expression on my face must have given him a clue that something was amiss.

"I'm leaving," I said evenly.

"I can see that. Where are you going?"

"Montreal."

"For that marathon thing?"

"That's right," I said.

Did he sense something in my voice? How could he not? It was neither friendly nor angry. It was foreign.

“When are you coming back?” he asked. He was standing on the opposite side of the bed, watching my every move.

“I’m not coming back,” I said coldly.

His brows furrowed. “What’s going on?” For the first time, concern was evident in his body language. His jaw clenched, and his gaze was piercing through me.

“I’m leaving you.”

He swallowed hard. “Why?” he asked, not blinking his eyes.

“Because you are the lowest life-form on the planet.”

His mouth fell open, and he blinked a few times. “What have I done?”

I handed him my phone, where I’d downloaded the video. “Sit down and I’ll show you,” I said and hit play.

For once, he listened and dutifully sat on the edge of the bed. The moment the images came on the screen, he cringed. He tried to get up and hand me my phone, but I pushed him back down.

“You’re going to watch,” I said, barely holding back my rage.

He watched the video stone-faced. As it ended, he looked down at the floor, unable to look me in the eye.

“Disgusting, isn’t it. I’d slap your face, but I wouldn’t want to waste the energy on you.”

“These videos have been edited. There is more to them than this,” he protested. “I didn’t say those words. Not like that!”

“Don’t insult my intelligence any further, you asshole. To think, I actually loved you and thought you loved me back.”

“I do!”

“Oh, just shut up! Stop these damn lies! Admit it, you married me for the money,” I said, pushing him.

“I love you, Luna,” he cried. “This is all Riedl; you *know* he’s been out to get me.”

“Everyone is out to get you! You’re just some innocent bystander who gets shit all over. You may have fooled me once, but you can’t do it twice. Thank God my mother insisted you sign that prenup. She must have known.”

“Please, Luna, let me explain,” he begged.

“What’s to explain? You didn’t mean any of those words? Oh, come on, Devin, you were with Enzo, your most trusted friend. Were you lying to him?” And then it dawned on me. “That’s why you fired him. You found out he was going to talk. Now it makes sense.”

“It’s not like that! There are more to these videos. Riedl just showed you what he wanted. He has an agenda.”

“Yes, he does. It’s to save me from you.”

Devin’s face was blotched red. “After everything we’ve been through, do you really think I don’t love you?”

“You know, Devin, if these videos were a year old, I might believe that you love me now. But some of this is from only a few months ago. Who are you trying to fool here?”

Devin shook his head angrily. “I knew Riedl had something on me.”

He was sounding pathetic, and it infuriated me even more. “You knew about these videos, didn’t you?” I asked in a calmer voice. “You knew about them, so you had to work fast before Erich could get organized. You set a little plan into motion. If you married me and got me pregnant—since that seemed to be your new plan—where would I go? I’d be saddled with you for life. That was the plan, Devin. Why can’t you just admit it?”

“But I love you.”

“That’s as good as an admission.”

I packed the last of my things as Devin watched helplessly. “I’m assuming you will announce the separation,” I said sedately.

“I’m not giving up on us,” he said. He was crying in frustration, and he quickly wiped away the tears.

“Well, you should. I’m going to contact my lawyer as soon as possible,” I said, snatching my phone. “I’m going to keep these videos so that every time I feel sorry for you, I will remember why I shouldn’t.”

“This doesn’t have to end this way!”

“I know. Just think, if we had been married a few more years and had a couple of kids, you’d be entitled to more of my money.”

“Why won’t you listen to what I have to say?”

“I have been listening, and I have it on video so that I won’t forget.”

“This isn’t over, Luna!”

I looked at Devin one last time. “Blake Carlton was a better man than you will ever be. I just wish it had been you that died and not him.”

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Devin

“U h, Flynn, you’re late,” Riedl said, looking at his watch.

It was Friday night, just before the team meeting and the first time he had seen me since Hungary. Erich was standing outside the meeting room, leaning casually against the wall. Rafe Perez had informed me the night before by text that Luna had flown to Montreal indefinitely.

My head was a mess. For two days I’d tried to reach Luna, to no avail. She refused all my calls. The only thing she had communicated to me was a copy of that damn video, which I’d sent along to Gemma, Gloria, and my private investigator. Everything started to make sense now. Enzo had sold me out to Riedl. I thought of Enzo’s flashy new offices, his new Ferrari. Had Riedl funded it all? When I finally proved it, Luna would understand. She had to.

I’d still not given Gemma the go-ahead to send a press release, but there were whispers around the paddock concerning the end of my short marriage. I ignored the gossip, but I knew it would only be days before the truth would get out. Riedl wouldn’t let it remain a secret, and he was giddy with what he’d done. He was a sadistic monster. Gemma was working furiously on how to spin it all.

I barely looked at the bastard. “What do you want, Riedl?”

“Nothing. I got what I wanted.”

Smug asshole. He hated me so much that not only would he ruin my life, but he’d ruin Luna’s as well. And for what? I

had no idea. I wasn't driving with Russo next year. We'd never have to play nice again, so why the fucking vendetta? Why hurt someone he claimed to care about? And when the truth came out, Luna would hate him for the rest of her life, that much I knew about her.

“You're pretty proud of yourself, aren't you?”

If Riedl could dance a jig, he would. “I warned you, Flynn. I play to win. And you lost.”

“You know, I get why you'd do this to me, but why to Luna?”

He tilted his head and sighed. “Because I don't like you, and more importantly, you're no good for her. She'll be thanking me one day.”

I'd never felt so much rage toward a person, and keeping it inside was nearly impossible. “You know that video is bullshit.”

Riedl flashed a smile. “Is it?”

Another few races and I'd never have to share team space with him again. “The truth will come out.”

He shrugged.

“This isn't over.”

“I think it is, because I've won. Luna left you, Russo dumped you, and I still have the chance to be world champion. What exactly do you have?” Riedl asked with a smile. “I guess your health. Maybe.”

“I'll prove to her that I love her and that you're a vindictive liar who wants nothing but revenge.”

Riedl smirked. “Good luck, loser.”

* * *

I went to see Rafe at the Perez garage. He saw me coming, and by the look on his face, he wanted to crawl away. But he took me to one of their cramped offices and waited for me to speak.

“That video is a lie.”

Rafe’s face didn’t hide his disgust. “I saw it. Was someone impersonating you? Your evil twin, perhaps?”

This wasn’t going to go well. “It was all spliced together. My former agent was in on it. Do you believe I’d say all those things about Luna?”

“Actually, I do.”

I wanted to slam my fist against the wall. “You have to believe I love her.”

“I did. Until Erich showed me that video.”

“Erich *created* that video. It’s not real!”

Rafe looked to the door. “I can’t help you. My sister has made her decision. If I were you, I’d let the season finish, then announce your separation. Move on with your life, Flynn, and never speak to my sister again.”

* * *

My car spun out in the next two races, and both times it was my fault. I couldn’t concentrate. People kept asking where Luna was. I had no answers. I was still trying to talk to her, to explain things, but she had cut off all contact. The only bright spot—if you could call it one—was that Barlow announced that I’d be driving for them next year. They did a splashy reveal complete with press, but even then, everyone wanted to know where Luna was. I laughed it off because what else could I do?

While in London for the Barlow do, I met with Gemma. Her office was near the Gherkin, and I couldn’t stop staring at the building. I’d driven past the thing how many times, so why did it interest me today? Because I was fucking exhausted and had the attention span of a gnat?

“I had a long look at that video, and it’s definitely been edited,” Gemma said, and I turned back to face her. “It’s a good edit. Someone went to a lot of trouble to make it

seamless. I've got a guy looking at it to see what he can come up with. Obviously, at this stage, we can't prove Potenza was in on it, but if I had to guess, the sneaky bastard was. It's like he's leading you to say particular things in all those private conversations."

"I knew he was a piece of shit, but I didn't realize he'd stab me in the back to make a few extra bucks."

"I've heard things about him being shady. If he is behind this, he'll be ruined."

"And he can kiss that new Ferrari of his goodbye," I added.

Gemma perched her reading glasses on her head. She had her light brown hair cut short. She had to be in her forties, but there was something youthful about her, like she'd be fun at a party without getting herself wasted.

"If it's all right with you, I'm going to have a chat with Gloria about this and see how we should proceed. Your PI has already been helpful, so if we can find a way to successfully go after Potenza, this may help you out."

"I want to nail Enzo to the wall." *Then smash his new Ferrari to bits while he watches.*

She had on her sympathetic face now. "We will do what we can. If Potenza is as sloppy as I think he is, that shouldn't be hard."

If that asshole were in front of me, I'd kill him.

"We have one more thing to discuss. It's how you want to handle the announcement of your separation."

"We aren't doing anything until we nail Enzo."

Gemma pursed her lips and steepled her hands on her desk. "That could take months to uncover. There is no way you can hold this off until then. In fact, I was contacted by Juan Diaz. He is Luna's rep. He asked for a joint statement as soon as the racing season is over."

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

“Can you hold him off?”

“I don’t think I can. And the last thing we want is for him to make a statement without us. Look, people who break up get back together all the time. Just because we put out a statement, it doesn’t mean it’s written in stone.”

The weight of this was becoming unbearable, but she had a point. “Okay, but do you think we can speed up the Enzo investigation?”

She smiled warmly. “I am going to throw everything I have at it. I’m fairly certain we’ll get him. And if he values his career—if not staying out of jail—he’ll come clean.”

Chapter Thirty

Luna

The thought of divorce seemed unbelievable to me. When I'd married Devin, it had been for life, or so I thought. I decided to wait until I was safely on another continent before telling my mother I'd left Devin. I couldn't face Mom with the news and the fact she'd probably tell me she wasn't surprised.

The moment I reached Montreal, I went into hiding, renting a car and a hotel room and holing up there. I called none of my friends. I didn't want to tell the story, at least not yet. Word hadn't gotten out yet about the separation, though I knew people would be asking about my absence.

I'd been in contact with only Jess. She called me twice a day to see what was going on while I was away.

"Have you talked to your mom yet?" she asked.

"No. I've been delaying it, but I really need to get it over with."

"It won't be long before rumors start."

"I know. But you will have the exclusive. I just have to make sure to tell my mother first."

My third day in Montreal, I went in search of a place to live. I'd decided it wasn't a good idea to stay with Elizabeth and Cecilia. I needed more space and more privacy. I rented a loft in old Montreal and purchased a car. I'd been lucky to find a place to move into almost immediately. By the end of my first week, both I and all the new furniture I'd ordered arrived at the loft.

I spent some time decorating and training for the marathon. The more I threw myself into things, the less I thought about Devin ... or so I thought. Nights were the worst. When I was alone, all I could do was think about him and those videos.

I called Lou Bedard, an old friend of Jess's family. He was a lawyer in New York, and he would be able to give me some advice. He arrived at my new home that evening. He looked a lot older than the last time I'd seen him, which was around the time Jess's father had passed away. Lou had handled it all. There was no evidence of the wavy black hair he once had. It was replaced by a shiny white mass.

He hugged me. "It's been a long time," he said.

"It has. You look great."

"Bah! I've aged a million years, but you've turned into a lovely young lady. Just like Jess."

"Thank you."

He looked around the loft and nodded his approval. "How did you get this place together in such a hurry?"

"Money talks," I said, showing him to a seat on my new sofa.

"It certainly does."

"How have you been? Can I get you anything?"

"I don't need a thing, and I've been good, but the question is, how are you?"

"I've been better."

"I'm sure this is hard for you. I want to recap what we talked about over the phone. You have evidence that his intentions for marriage were deceptive?"

"I have it on video. Should we watch it?"

"Yes, I'd like to see it."

It hurt no less watching Devin say all the awful and hurtful things. I still cried when it was over, and Lou hugged me.

“I know this is difficult for you.”

“I really loved him.”

“I know,” he said, stroking my back. He was like a dad, and that was why Jess’s family loved him so much.

“So what can we do?”

Lou had scribbled down some notes while he’d watched the video. “This video has been heavily edited. Can you get access to original copies?”

“I can try.”

“What you have right now isn’t worth much to you. There are far too many missing pieces. If we can get a complete video, we may have grounds for annulment, but I’d have to look into it further. Otherwise, I would advise you to file for divorce as soon as possible. You’ve been married for such a short time, so it’s not like he’d be entitled to much.”

“We have a prenup,” I said, wiping my eyes.

He arched a bushy eyebrow. “That’s also interesting. Okay. Still, if you want to get rid of him fast, we can offer him some money to go away. In terms of jurisdiction, I took a look, and your best bet is an English divorce, as it seems you resided there the longest. Although you could try Italy, but then you’re looking at maybe two years before it’s settled.”

“Two years?!”

“Maybe eighteen months in England. It’s all about the rules.”

“There’s no way to make this happen faster?”

“An unedited video might help us, but I’m going to have to talk to some of my colleagues and see what our options are. We might not even be able to use the video. It might be wise to file for divorce as soon as possible and negotiate a quick settlement.”

I frowned. “I don’t know that a payoff will motivate him.”

“We’ll look into it. In the meantime, do not contact him unless necessary. I’ll get the proceedings in order.”

I hadn't expected this all to move so fast, and I panicked a little, even though I knew this was what I had to do. Devin and I were finished. Forever.

* * *

I called Elizabeth and invited her over for dinner. We got takeout and settled in to catch up in the privacy of my new home.

Elizabeth listened as I related the tale of the video and my quick move to Montreal. She frequently nodded but said nothing more. When I was finished, I got up to make us some tea.

Elizabeth didn't say anything at first as I placed the teapot on the coffee table. She looked at me for a long moment before she spoke. "I'm not going to lie to you, Luna, because you're one of my most dear friends. Devin called me a few days ago to ask how you were. At first I had no idea what he was talking about. It didn't occur to me that something was wrong, so I pressed him. I'm sorry that I invaded your privacy."

"He called you?" I asked quietly.

"He said he was worried, and I believed him. I don't want to take sides here, especially because you're a great friend, but do you really think he is capable of this? He sounded so distraught on the phone, and if that was an act, he should be up for an award."

"But, Elizabeth, if you had seen the video! It was so humiliating. It was like I was the butt of some horrible joke. He was with me for the money, not because he wanted to be. I think of all the times we made love and how much I wanted him, and it was all just a game to him. It was all a lie."

Elizabeth bit her lip in consternation. "Are you sure? The few times he was here I saw love in his eyes. He doted on you, and I thought it was sweet. How many times was he jealous when Tyler was in the room? If he was putting on a show, he was doing a very good job."

“I didn’t expect you to defend him,” I said, feeling depressed. It was the first time I’d thought of Devin in a better light.

“I don’t want you to think that I’m defending him, but I talked to him for two hours, Luna. He was truly devastated.”

Two hours? “What else did he say?” I asked, bringing my knees to my chest.

“He was surprised that I didn’t know about what happened. He called me because he assumed you would be next door. At first I didn’t know who it was, he sounded so different. He was quiet, not what I’m accustomed to from him. Then he told me you left him and that he had done some very stupid things. I assumed it was an affair, but I didn’t ask. He started to tell me just how much he loved you and that he hasn’t slept since you left. When I told him you hadn’t called me, he was worried. He was worried something was wrong and asked me to call him when I did hear from you. Do you mind if I call him?”

“No, go ahead,” I said without much energy.

“He asked me to look out for you. I think it was genuine.”

“This isn’t what I want to hear,” I said, feeling my eyes well up with tears.

She stayed for a while, but she didn’t press me about Devin or ask to see the video. I was grateful for that. At last, I walked her to the elevator. I returned to the loft, realizing how foreign it felt. I’d lived on my own for years, but then I’d met Devin. I was used to living with him and knowing he would come home and slip into bed with me. A warm, familiar body. I missed the way he would snuggle up to me, his arms around my waist, his breath on my neck.

As I climbed into bed, even that felt wrong. There was nothing around that made me feel at home. I stared at the clock as the minutes slowly ticked by. I picked up the phone and dialed. I knew it was late, but I didn’t care. A voice answered, a tired one.

“Hi, it’s Luna.”

Chapter Thirty-One

Luna

He walked into the little downtown café I had chosen. He saw me sitting at the other end of the room and headed toward me with a smile. He took his seat, and the server came over to take his order. He ordered a regular coffee, no cream, and no sugar. I was drinking a latte.

“I was surprised to hear from you.”

“I’ve been in town a couple of days. I thought it would be nice to call and catch up. We have a marathon to run in a week.”

Tyler had a boyish smile I couldn’t resist. “Yes we do. How has training been?”

“I haven’t been working out to my full potential,” I said. “I worry I won’t be in my best form.”

“You look terrific; I wouldn’t worry about that.”

The server returned with Tyler’s coffee. He thanked her before returning his gaze to me. I wondered what he was thinking. I was the first to look away.

“So how are you? Congratulations on your marriage,” he said, trying to sound elated but failing miserably.

“Yes, thank you,” I said dryly.

“It came out of nowhere. I’d only seen you a few weeks before and you hadn’t mentioned it.”

I sipped my latte before saying, “It was a spur-of-the-moment thing. Silly and spontaneous.”

He cocked a brow. “Is something wrong?” Tyler asked.

“Well, there is no use keeping it a secret,” I said, taking my spoon and stirring my drink. “I’ve left my husband, and after next Sunday, the whole world is going to know.”

He had a difficult time hiding his delight at the news. He took a deep breath and bit down on his tongue so he wouldn’t smile. Maybe Elizabeth was right about him liking me.

“This place is a bit stuffy, and I’m worried about people overhearing our conversation. Why don’t we get these coffees to go and take a walk?”

“I like that idea.”

We walked all the way toward the docks. I leaned over the rail to look at the St. Lawrence River below. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon, and people were milling around, enjoying the beautiful view. I hadn’t told Tyler much about my breakup with Devin, and he hadn’t asked. Instead, we talked of more mundane things like the weather and the upcoming marathon. But as I leaned over the railing, I felt a need to purge my anger, to free myself from its smothering grip.

“He betrayed me,” I said, catching Tyler off guard. He was leaning on the rail next to me, watching the ships in the distance.

“What did he do?”

The wind had picked up and blew harmlessly through my hair. I tried to tame it, but it was a losing battle.

“He married me for my money,” I said, staring straight out at the water. I was unable to look at him for fear of crying. “A family friend knew what was going on and managed to catch Devin admitting the whole thing on video. It’s quite a sight to see. Especially when you learn that the man you loved saw you as nothing more than a security blanket. A nice retirement package with fringe benefits.”

Tyler groaned. “And you know this for sure?”

“There is no disputing it.”

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

I sighed, trying to forget everything Elizabeth had said to me. “Divorce him.”

“I’m sorry, Luna.”

“Don’t be. At least I found out now and not when we had children, because that was his next step. To solidify the marriage, he wanted to get me pregnant. He doesn’t even like kids! He had the whole thing planned out. What’s the most humiliating part is that we weren’t even married a year. Two months, and I’m suing him for divorce! I’ll be a laughingstock.”

“It happens all the time,” Tyler said, turning to face me.

“And I may have to stay married to him until we hammer out a divorce. It could be a year or longer. It just doesn’t seem fair. Please don’t tell anyone until after the marathon. I can’t bear anyone’s pity.”

“You have my word.”

* * *

I was in better shape than I’d thought. Tyler and I ran the marathon in an impressive time for people who hadn’t fully trained for it. Reporters were waiting at the finish line—not for the winner, but for Luna Perez-Flynn. They wanted me to confirm reports that my marriage to Devin was over. I was exhausted when I was mobbed and could barely get any words out. I knew Devin hadn’t made the press release, so I denied the rumors but added nothing else.

Tyler stepped in to shield me from any more questions, and we eventually made our way out of there.

That evening, my friends had a dinner to celebrate the marathon runners. I was mentally and physically exhausted, but I couldn’t say no. We sat around a huge table in a Greek restaurant, Danielle on one side of me and Tyler on the other. I wondered why Danielle had come.

“So where’s your husband?” Danielle asked, pushing her salad around her plate.

“He couldn’t get away,” I said casually.

“Really, that’s too bad,” Danielle said.

By her tone, she didn’t believe me. I didn’t believe me.

“I was reading something online, and it said you and Devin are having trouble. That can’t possibly be true.”

I wanted to push her over in her chair but I didn’t have the energy. “You know just as well as I do, new marriages take some getting used to.”

“Oh, of course,” Danielle said too nicely.

I left the party early. I wasn’t in a celebratory mood. Within a few short days, everyone would know that I’d left Devin. They would be looking for me, demanding an explanation. The public was never satisfied. I had a day or two to get my life in order and hunker down before the onslaught began.

* * *

A week passed and there was nothing. Another week passed and still there was no announcement. By then the tabloids in Europe had begun to come to their own conclusions. I still hadn’t returned to Milan or Sandrine, and I hadn’t shown up to any races.

Devin denied the rumors, and I grew more and more agitated. I connected with my new lawyer. Baxter Marston had come highly recommended by Lou and made me his first priority. With the decision to proceed with the divorce in England, I’d needed an English lawyer. He’d already informed me that an annulment was impossible and that my only course of action was a divorce. If all went well, and Devin didn’t contest it, I would have my freedom in twelve to eighteen months. It wasn’t the best of news, but I had no choice.

“Baxter, what is going on?” I asked angrily. “By agreement, Devin was supposed to make the announcement. Then we were going to issue a joint statement on social media. Why hasn’t he done this?”

“I’m not sure, Luna. I’ve spoken to his lawyer, and he assured me that an announcement was forthcoming. That was ten days ago. I can’t hold off much longer. If you want him to be served with papers after an announcement, or even have it coincide with an announcement, I need to hear something in the next couple of days.”

“I’m going to call him.”

“I wouldn’t recommend that.”

At this point, I was pretty sure I was the only one who was going to get through to Devin. This had to be his way of getting me to call him. “I have to get on with my life. I don’t want reporters phoning my family at all hours of the night. I don’t want to be followed down the street. I want this over with, and I don’t understand why he’s dragging his feet.”

“Let me just say again, I think this is unwise.”

I rolled my eyes. “Thank you for your advice. I’ll talk to you soon.”

I stared at my phone. I had no idea where Devin would be. But I needed to do this and now. Wherever he was in Europe, it would be evening and not too late to call.

While I contemplated this, phone started to ring, and I dropped it in surprise. I quickly picked it up again. I saw the caller ID. My heart felt as though it had stopped. “Hello,” I said.

“Hi, Luna.”

“I was just going to call you,” I said diplomatically. There was no need to start out aggressively.

“I’m not bothering you, am I?” Devin asked.

He sounded depressed. The usual spark in his voice was gone, replaced by something tired and distant. “Why are you calling?” I asked.

“I need you to do something for me.”

That was rich. “I need you to do something for me too. I want you to tell the world that our marriage is over.”

He sighed heavily. “Luna, my grandmother’s eightieth birthday is next Friday, and she wants you there. Can we put our failure aside for just ten days to make an old woman happy?”

Shit. I hadn’t expected this. I was fond of Ruth. Besides Harold, she was the only other person in Devin’s family who had liked me. But still ...

“I won’t do it.”

“You wouldn’t be doing it for me, you’d be doing it for her.” Desperation hung in his voice.

“Is this why you haven’t done anything? An explanation would have been nice.”

“I’m an asshole. What more do you want from me?” he said, sounding defeated. “I can’t do one fucking thing right! Why does my grandmother have to suffer for it? The woman is on her deathbed as it is. Can’t you just pretend for a few days?”

I took a second to focus and not let the anger win out. “What would this entail?”

I heard him take a deep breath. “Since I haven’t told my family yet, we’d need to go together. You come to Sandrine, and then we drive to Sheffield. We might have to spend one night together and that’s all. After that, we wait a few days. Then I’ll tell my family and have Gemma make the announcement. Is that good enough for you?”

“And what do I get out of this?”

“You make an old woman happy.”

For a few days, anyway. What would she think when she heard the news? “I’ll think about it,” I said.

After I hung up, I stared at the phone feeling mixed emotions. Hearing his voice again made a piece of my heart ache for him. Deep down I knew that it wasn’t going to take much for him to convince me to go to England. And that was what scared me most.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Luna

I only told Elizabeth where I was going. I hadn't told anyone else, not Baxter Marston and not my family. I thought to tell Tyler, but I knew he would disapprove and maybe try to talk me out of it. Since our marathon run, we'd spent lots of time together. He did what he could to get my mind off Devin. We went to the movies, took runs together, and joined the same gym. Things couples did, something I was keenly aware of.

I drove from London to Sandrine in a rented car. Devin wasn't at the house, and I took the liberty to pack some of my clothes and have some sent to Montreal and the rest to the London flat to store for now. We hadn't spent much time in Sandrine; however, I'd managed to accumulate more things than I'd expected.

There was coffee in the pot, so Devin had been there earlier. There was an empty mug in the sink, and in the garbage was an empty bag of chips and three empty cans of beer. I shook my head as I went up to the bedroom. I'd found a few empty boxes in the garage and noticed then that his Jaguar was gone. He had left no note, and I really didn't care where he was.

The bedroom was a disaster. Clothes were thrown all over the place, along with old newspapers and more empty beer cans. I picked up the discarded clothes but stopped myself. His mess had nothing to do with me anymore.

I set the empty boxes on the bed and saw the photo of me on the nightstand next to his side of the bed. He had taken the

photo when we were on the beach in Argentina. It was a close-up, and I had been angry with him at the time. But when he'd had the photo framed, I was surprised how well it had turned out.

I shook the memory from my thoughts and pulled clothes from the closet. I folded them neatly into the box. I set one of the boxes near the door and worked on the second box. I was startled when Devin walked into the bedroom. We both jumped in surprise.

"I didn't know you were there," he said, catching his breath.

"That's all right," I said, looking at him for a long time. He was staring back at me, and neither of us knew what to say. He looked as if he'd aged ten years in the last few months.

"Thank you again for coming," he said. He began to pick up his scattered clothes and piled them into the corner. "Sorry for the mess."

"Don't be sorry. This is the way you always live. I'm just not here to clean up after you."

He absorbed the insult without a retort. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"Packing my clothes. I'll arrange to have them sent to me."

He stared at me for a long time as I continued to gather my things. "Don't you ever wonder why Riedl didn't show you all the videos?"

Nope. We weren't doing this. "Because I didn't have five days to watch them all?"

"If he'd showed you all the videos, you wouldn't have left me."

"I don't want to talk about this."

"Do you really think I'm capable of what those videos implied?"

I started shoving clothes haphazardly in the box. "It was in your own words, Devin."

“But you’re missing the context.”

“Is this why I’m here? For you to try to convince me that there is some kind of conspiracy going on? If that’s the case, I can stay at a hotel and head back to Montreal tomorrow.”

“No, no,” he said apologetically.

“About the announcement?”

“I want to wait a week, no longer. Gemma is going to say that it is a separation.”

“She can say whatever she wants. It’s going to be a divorce.”

Devin said nothing, which bothered me. He simply left the room and went to watch television. It was already late in the evening. I finished packing and carried my boxes down to the garage. I found Devin sitting in front of the television with a bag of potato chips and a can of beer.

“Your dinner?” I sniped.

“If you’re hungry, I think there is something in the fridge,” he said, not looking away from the television. He hadn’t shaved, and his hair was unkempt. It was rare for Devin not to look his best.

“You can give away the rest of my things,” I said.

“Fine.”

I went to the kitchen in search of some kind of dinner. I found a can of tomato soup and some crackers. I was amazed at my luck. I made the soup and ate it in the kitchen as far away from Devin as possible. There was another pile of newspapers and I flipped through them. Some were weeks old, and I threw them into the recycling bin when I was done.

“What time are we driving to Sheffield?” I asked, returning to the living room. He was watching a documentary on the Second World War. I was a sucker for a good history doc. I would have stayed to watch, but being in the same room with him angered me.

“Around ten,” he said quietly.

“There’s some soup if you want.”

He looked up at me as if my simple statement meant more than it did. His eyes were no longer vibrant but dark and somber. His face was paler than usual, as if the color had been drained from it. The lines around his eyes and mouth were more prominent, and I hadn’t seen him smile once. He no longer cared about his appearance, something he had prided himself on.

At least I was reassured that he wasn’t sleeping around. He lacked the energy. Not that it mattered to me.

“I’m not hungry,” he said after a long moment.

“Am I supposed to feel sorry for you?” I asked aloud. I hadn’t realized I’d said it until he responded.

“Would it make a difference? Would it make you stay?”

“Nothing would make me stay.”

“Then no, you aren’t supposed to feel sorry for me,” he said, returning his gaze to the television.

I left him to his own devices. I went into the spare bedroom and read a book and turned in early. Hours later, I woke suddenly. A light was still shining in through the crack in the door, and I could hear the TV. It was almost two in the morning, and Devin was still downstairs.

I stared at the small beam of light until I fell asleep again. I didn’t wake until eight the next morning. I took a long shower and prepared for my overnight excursion to Sheffield. I’d brought a gift for Ruth and a little present for Paige. Even if she wasn’t there, I would leave the gift behind. It was likely I’d never have contact with the girl again.

I checked my watch. It was nearing nine, and there was no sign of Devin. I entered the bedroom we had once shared and found him asleep in bed. He was lying on his stomach, his face pressed up against the pillow. I pondered if I should let him sleep. It probably didn’t matter if we were a few hours late.

Suddenly his eyes opened. He had a knack for knowing when people were staring at him. He brought one hand to his

face and rubbed his eyes. “What time is it?” he asked sleepily.

“After nine. I thought I’d wake you up.”

He pulled himself up and sat at the edge of the bed. He massaged his face with both hands before yawning. “I guess I’ll shower and get ready.”

“I’ll wait for you downstairs.”

I ate toast and read the paper. Devin came down twenty minutes later, showered and dressed. He looked much better than the night before. He had shaved and was dressed casually in jeans and a polo shirt. He grabbed a cup of coffee and an aspirin. I watched him from the corner of my eye. Even after everything that happened, even looking so tired and drawn, he still had the power to attract me. And it made me angry.

Deep down I knew that if he tried hard enough, he could easily get me into bed. I also knew that by the next morning I’d be gone.

“I feel like shit, not that you care,” he said, taking a tissue and blowing his nose.

I wondered if he was coming down with something. “You could turn up the heat in this place for starters,” I said snidely. “Eating a healthy dinner and going to bed at a decent hour might help.”

“I ate your bloody soup.”

“And what time did you go to bed?”

“I wasn’t tired.”

“Suffer, then.”

I had packed an overnight bag, and as usual, Devin waited until the last possible second to throw together a few of his things. I was already waiting in the car by the time he was finally ready to leave. The hour drive to Sheffield was in complete silence. When we arrived, I took in a few deep breaths and smiled. I would have to put on a show for twenty-four hours until I was finally free of him.

As we stepped into the Flynn home, I wasn't sure I could do it. We would have to act like a newly married couple, and if we didn't, we'd arouse suspicion. The last thing I wanted to do was ruin Ruth's day. The old woman didn't deserve to have her birthday upstaged by two people who no longer wanted to be together.

"Luna!" Harold said in delight. He threw his arms around me and hugged me tightly. I smiled, feeling as though it was forced and contrived, but no one seemed to notice. Devin's sisters were oblivious to the fact that he barely spoke to me and didn't touch me. If they'd heard the rumors, they didn't let on or notice the evidence.

I hugged Ruth and handed her the present. Ruth kissed my cheeks and smiled from ear to ear.

"I am so happy my grandson married such a lovely and kind woman. Welcome to our family, dear."

"Thank you," I said, holding back tears.

Thankfully, it was a sunny day. The party was set up in the backyard with two long tables, for lunch. I took her seat next to Devin. As the Flynn's passed around various dishes, I could feel Maureen staring at me. I met the woman's gaze and realized she sensed that something was wrong. She'd always been wary of me and watched my every move. She couldn't have missed that Devin and I had appeared distant. He didn't look in my direction all through lunch and had almost shifted his seat so he didn't have to talk to me.

I tore my eyes away from Maureen and leaned over to Devin. "Pass me the carrots," I whispered in his ear.

He turned to look at me with a confused expression on his face. I smiled and motioned to the carrots. He reached across the table and handed them to me before returning to his conversation with his father.

I took the carrots, hoping the simple action had put Maureen at ease. When I looked at Maureen again, the woman seemed satisfied and had begun a conversation with her daughter. Mission accomplished.

“So when are we going to have another grandchild running around the yard,” Harold asked, pushing his empty plate aside and resting his elbows on the table.

“I want to wait a few more years for kids,” I said with a forced smile.

“Don’t wait too long. I want to enjoy my grandchildren just like my mother has.”

“There are no plans for children any time soon,” Devin said.

“See what you can do, son,” Harold said, winking at Devin.

Devin smiled uneasily.

“What’s all this talk of you and Luna having problems?” Gwen asked her brother. His younger sister was more like Devin. She was outspoken and could be blunt like her brother. No one would mistake her for being shy.

“It’s just gossip,” Devin said.

“The London tabloids won’t stop talking about it. The other day this reporter called me and asked me to comment.”

“Don’t talk to anyone,” Devin warned.

I rose from the table and began gathering the dishes and bringing them into the house with Maureen and Victoria, Devin’s older sister. Devin took a long walk with his father. I wondered if he was telling him what was going on. Other than Ruth, Harold was who Devin was closest to in his family. I knew he’d be the first person Devin would tell.

When they returned from the walk, I was serving coffee, while Maureen and Gwen cut and served the cake. More guests arrived later in the evening and the dinner meal was repeated the same way. Paige and Natalie showed up along with Harold’s brother and his family. Paige insisted that I color with her. I obliged the little girl while Devin engaged in a lengthy conversation with Natalie.

Natalie had quite a presence around the Flynn home. It was obvious Maureen would have preferred Natalie as her

daughter-in-law. She was beautiful. I could see why Devin had been attracted to her.

Every so often I would glance at the two of them talking, and even once Devin had laughed. It was the first time he seemed to be jovial about anything. I realized that I didn't want him to be happy, and it angered me that Natalie could make him happy. I no longer had the power to make Devin smile, only be miserable. I'd never wanted it to be that way, and it troubled me. There were so many mixed emotions going on inside me that I didn't know which ones to follow.

Many of the guests went home that evening with the exception of Paige, Natalie, Gwen, me, and Devin. In order not to arouse any more suspicion, Devin and I went to bed together. I thought to make him sleep on the floor but feared someone might come bursting in the next morning and the ruse would be blown. Instead, I said nothing as he climbed into bed with me. He was careful to make sure he didn't touch me. We lay on the bed as far away from each other as possible.

"I told my dad," he said in the darkness. "I've never seen him so disappointed."

"I'm sorry that we had to hurt him."

"He really likes you."

"I'll miss him and Paige. I'll also miss Ruth."

"But you won't miss me," he whispered.

"I might miss you too. Who knows," I said sadly. "Maybe one day I'll be able to look back on the good times and not think it was a part of some bigger scheme. There are times I know that you were genuine and sincere, but I wonder about the rest."

"We can agree on one thing: I wish it was me who died in Hungary too."

I gasped. "I didn't mean that. I regret saying that."

"But it's true. At least Carlton was honest, a good man. I'm just the shit on the bottom of your shoe."

“I wish I hadn’t said that. I regretted it the moment it left my lips.”

He huffed out a breath. “One day he took me aside and told me how lucky I was to have such a great woman love me unconditionally. He asked me how long I thought it would take for me to fuck it up. Now that I think about it, so did Riedl. I told them both that I wasn’t going to. I had met a woman who understood me, who knew me like no one else. And I fucked it up anyway. I’m just a big fuckup. Look at my career. I threw that down the toilet too. What exactly have I done right?”

I reached out to touch his arm. He jumped when my fingers lightly brushed his bicep. The moonlight shone into the room, and I could make out his face in the dim light. He was staring in the opposite direction, his face desolate. He wasn’t putting on an act; he was too tired to play any more games. He was vulnerable.

“For just a little while I don’t want to be angry,” I whispered.

He turned to face me. He brought his hand to my cheek and caressed it lightly. The touch made me shiver. I moved closer to him and kissed his full lips. He returned the kiss, pulling me closer to him. Then I was on top of him, kissing him hungrily. First his lips, then I moved down to his neck. His hands ran up and down my back, sending shivers through me. I should have stopped what we were doing, but ...

We slowly slipped out of our pajamas. Neither of us wanted to rush the moment, likely our last. I’d missed feeling his body next to mine and the way his hands explored every one of my curves. He knew exactly how to make me come alive. As we made love, each time he knew I would cry out, he would cover my mouth with his own to muffle the noise. He knew me that well.

We lay in bed afterward without exchanging any words. I wondered how I would live without him. Would any other man make me feel the way he did?

The next morning as we drove back to Sandrine, neither of us spoke of the night before. He couldn’t bring himself to say

goodbye as I left his house. He simply stared at me from the window as I climbed into my Uber. I cried all the way to the airport.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Devin

With two races left in the season, I couldn't wait for it all to be done. To be done with Riedl, to be done with Russo, and to be done with the fucking mess I'd caused. My PI was no closer to finding any shit on Enzo, and Gloria had informed me that Enzo was threatening to sue for monies he was owed. That piece of shit could go fuck himself. But I had a plan, and I hoped it would work.

Gemma was preparing the statement about my separation from Luna, but news was leaking out from all different directions. Every time I was out in public, someone hounded me to the point that I went out only when necessary. But the penultimate race was in Vegas, and it was hard to keep a low profile there. I did all the promotion and sponsorship duties that were expected of me, then tried to focus on the race. The announcement would come out Monday.

I was eating breakfast in the Russo dining area when Riedl came storming in. Veins were bulging in his neck and forehead. I had a feeling I knew what this was about.

“Why did I receive a letter from your solicitor?”

“Right, glad you got it. Are you hungry? Franco made the best poached eggs.”

“Oh, fuck off.”

I was taken aback. I'd never heard Riedl swear. “You seem annoyed. Maybe take a few deep breaths to calm yourself down.”

He wagged his finger at me. “I don’t know what your solicitor wants, but I can’t help you. And even if could help you, I wouldn’t!”

I chuckled. “I think you can help me. See, you’re in possession of a video, and my solicitor wants to know how you got it. She also wants to see all the original footage. We both know that you know that Luna has left me. So no secret there. And when I contest the prenup, that video will become important. Also, she’s going to want to see your financial records, so I hope you have an excellent bookkeeper. You’d hate to get in trouble with the taxman.”

Riedl blew out his cheeks, and his eyes had fire in them. “You’re exactly who I thought you were. You think the unedited video is going to help you? Well, I can’t help you. I don’t know where it came from and your solicitor can buzz off.”

First, I had no intention of contesting the prenup, but I knew that would piss Riedl off to hear it. Second, I was fairly certain he knew where the video came from and who created it. And he likely had the actual receipts to prove it.

“I think you do. And when my solicitor subpoenas your financial records, I’m sure she’ll see something she doesn’t like. Not to mention a whole lot of other things you want to keep private. Or you can just hand over the footage and keep all that other stuff to yourself.”

“You think you have deep pockets? You’re no match for me.”

“I’m pretty sure Perez has deep pockets, and they can fund my little project. And let me tell you something else, Riedl. If I find out you were behind any of this, I’ll tell anyone who will listen. Every newspaper, every blog, every podcast, you name it. Everyone will know who you really are. Or you can hand over the video and its originals.”

“Eat shit.”

I sighed. “Have it your way. But mark my words, it won’t end well for you.”

* * *

I stared at my phone for a long time. Part of me hoped Luna would call, and she'd tell me to stop everything, and that maybe we could try to work it out. I couldn't stop thinking of that night back home, the way my heart ached for her. How the gentle smell of her lilac-scented perfume drove me wild. And when she'd kissed and touched me, too much was there. She couldn't deny those feelings, yet here we were. On the eve of making our breakup official.

And while I wanted to call Luna so badly, I found myself dialing another number, another woman I'd hurt.

“What have you done now?”

I appreciated that Natalie still took my calls. She certainly didn't need to put up with me, but after all this time, I still cared about her, and though I didn't deserve it, she still cared about me. And yet I fucked up with Paige.

“I've stepped in it, that's for sure,” I said, heading for the fridge and pulling out a beer. I popped back the tab and took a swig. “A big announcement is coming out tomorrow. My short-lived marriage is over.”

“Oh shit,” she said with genuine sympathy. “So what did you do?”

I gave her a quick rundown, and she groaned a few times. “You're a plonker.”

“I know, but it was all spliced together and taken out of context. My old agent has to be behind this. I trusted him, Nat.”

“Didn't you once say he was the biggest gossip? Why on earth would you trust him?”

“Because I'm a plonker,” I said and sighed.

“So what are you going to do about it?”

“I've got a PI on it, and my solicitor is shaking down Riedl for the original video. If the video gets out the way it is now,

I'm fucked. My solicitor is sealing up all those avenues for now. As far as I know, only Riedl and Luna have it, and I know Luna won't release it."

She cleared her throat, and that meant a lecture was coming. "You love her?"

"I do."

"Then you fight for her. You grow the fuck up, stop drinking, ditch all your loser friends, and get serious. I see you starting to do that, but I have a feeling that once this announcement comes out, you'll go back to your old ways and mess things up further. So stay out of trouble!"

"I'll try."

"No trying. You better bloody well do it. And if what you say is true, and these videos are some edited bullshit, then you'll get to the bottom of this. Just delay the divorce as best you can."

"She won't even talk to me."

"Figure it out. I know you're resourceful when you want to be."

"Thank you, Nat." And I meant it.

"Don't you have friends you can call?"

I wanted to laugh. Did I? I had fun with Colin and Nigel, but could I really talk to them? When it came down to it, my two best friends were Luna and Natalie, and I'd screwed over the both of them. "No true friends. Not like you."

She chuckled. "You really frustrate me, you know?"

"I do know. I know I've let you down." I paused for a second. "I've been doing a lot of thinking, and maybe it's time to be in Paige's life. I know you're probably going to tell me to fuck off, but I'm serious. She's a good kid, and you've done an amazing job of raising her, and if you think it's okay, I'd like to spend more time with her. Get to know her. Maybe even be a dad before she gets too old and realizes I'm an asshole who fucked up her life by not being around for her."

The silence hung between us for so long that I'd thought Natalie had hung up.

“Do you really mean that? Because the last thing I want you to do is come in and out of her life. Either you're in or you're out. And that means she becomes a priority for you. She's still small, and the last thing I want is for her memories of you to be this fleeting presence in her life.”

I had been thinking about it for a while. About having a family with Luna. Every time I thought about it, it always included Paige. “I'm definitely in. And I want to start after the last race of the season. I want to spend time with her. She's my kid, and I need to be a dad to her. I need to be a better man.”

Chapter Thirty-Four

Luna

The day after the race in Las Vegas, I heard my phone buzzing on the nightstand. It was the four in the morning Montreal time. I crawled out of bed and stumbled to the makeshift office I'd set up in one of the corners of my loft. I grabbed my phone and checked the email marked urgent. It was from Baxter. A press release that Gemma Hargrave was going to be distributing in less than an hour. It was short and vague, just the way Devin wanted.

It is with deep sadness that Luna Perez and Devin Flynn announce their separation. After almost two years, the couple has decided on a mutual separation with no plans for divorce at this time. They are asking for their privacy at this difficult time.

I picked up the phone and called Baxter. My hand shook. He was on his phone somewhere on the streets of London.

“Shouldn't you be asleep?” Baxter asked. “It must be the middle of the night in Montreal.”

“It is, and I got your email.”

“The release just went out. I'm on my way to file the papers as we speak. You haven't called to change your mind, have you?”

“No.”

“Okay, then why the call?”

“I don't know.” Why was I calling him?

“Luna, if you’re having any doubts, we can hold off. Flynn’s lawyer has made it clear he has no intention of proceeding unless you do so first.”

I didn’t hesitate. “No, file the papers.”

“All right, then. You are absolutely sure?”

“Yes.”

“And Luna, don’t speak to any reporters. News should break any second, so keep a low profile.”

“I will.”

* * *

News didn’t travel quite so fast in Montreal, mostly because we weren’t as well-known here. But my phone began to ring. I had no idea how reporters had gotten my number. I quickly shut off my phone and sat in front of my tablet, taking in all the gossip from overseas. I watched footage from earlier in the day of Devin being hounded by reporters. He was struggling to get to his car. He was wearing a new pair of sunglasses and rebuffing all requests for a comment. When he was finally able to get into his car, he quickly sped away.

The speculation began. What had gone wrong? Why had I left my husband after only three months of marriage?

Mom called the next morning. “Timothy Merrick has a special request,” she said. “The Merrick team wants to honor your father’s memory by having a gala dinner to recognize and coincide with the twentieth anniversary of his last world championship. He wants both you and your brother to say a few words.”

“When is this?”

“December fourth in London, of course. It’s a little short notice, and I told him I would attend but would take no part in the festivities. Do you want his number, or should I call him back?”

“Give me the number.” I jotted it down and dreaded the phone call.

“How are you doing?”

I was a bit surprised Mom asked the question. She never mentioned anything about Devin, and I hadn't expected her to bring up the separation. According to her, he no longer existed. Mom spoke as if I'd never married the man, never loved him, and had never lived with him. She had easily wiped Devin Flynn from her mind.

“Considering the week I've had, I'm not too bad.”

“I'll rue the day I ever invited that man into my home. What was I thinking? I had been warned, but I just wanted you to be happy. And to think people compared him to your father. The whole notion sickens me.”

“Hopefully this will be over in a year. In the meantime, I'm moving on with my life.”

“Good.”

There was a knock on my door. I told Mom I'd call her later. I wondered if it was a reporter at the door. A few had tried to gain access to the building, but no one seemed to know what unit I lived in. I'd complained to the landlord that security had been breached, and he promised to fix the problem. As I opened the door I was prepared to tell the reporter to go away but was pleasantly surprised to see that it was Tyler.

“I saw it on the news and thought you might like some company.”

“Come in,” I said with a smile. I did need the company. “How did you get past security?”

“I don't want you to think I abuse it, but I showed the guard my badge.”

“Very clever.”

“I don't abuse it, though,” he said again.

“I'm sure you don't. Can I get you anything?”

“No, but can I get you anything?”

“A quick divorce?”

We both had a chuckle at that. “If I could, I would do it in a heartbeat.”

“Have people been talking?”

He followed me to the living room, and I collapsed into my plush new sofa. “Danielle called me this afternoon and asked if it was true. She knows that you and I have become friends in the past few weeks, and she thought she’d pump me for information instead of her sister.”

“She must have been thrilled.”

“Let’s just say that she isn’t sad.”

I grimaced. “I ask myself why I still consider her a friend.”

“If it weren’t for Guy, I wouldn’t have anything to do with her. But the guy loves her, so what can I do? But let’s not waste breath on them. How are you really holding up?”

“I’ve been reading the tabloids. They’ve been harassing Devin at every opportunity. I know I shouldn’t feel sorry for him, but I do. I’ve escaped; very few people know where I am. He has nowhere to go. He’s being subjected to all the attention.”

“It seems fitting, though, doesn’t it?”

“It’s still must be difficult, not that I want to deflect any of the attention in my direction.”

“You left for a few days. Where did you go?”

Tyler was seated in the plush chair opposite me, staring intently. I wanted to lie, but I hated doing it. I’d hoped no one would ask, then I could keep my whereabouts to myself.

“I was in Sheffield.”

“Doing what?”

“It was Ruth Flynn’s eightieth birthday, and Devin asked me to attend.”

Tyler's brow furled. "And you went?" he asked in disbelief.

"Ruth has always been good to me. I couldn't disappoint her."

Tyler didn't hide his displeasure. "Did anything interesting happen?" he asked.

I stared at the window, remembering my two days with Devin. All I could think about when I'd gotten home was how it felt for him to hold me again. To make love to me, to have his lips on mine. Just the thought of his touch made me feel warm all over.

"Nothing interesting happened. He and I pretended to be happy together, and then I came home."

"It was nice of you to do that."

"I guess. Are you sure you don't want anything? Water? Coffee?" I needed to change the subject fast.

"I'm good. You know," he said, wringing his hands together, "you're probably pretty lonely around here. What if I came back later tonight and we got some takeout? Watch some silly movies? Maybe get your mind off things?"

It sounded suspiciously like a date, but he had to know I wasn't interested in dating just yet. But maybe he was just being a friend?

"Sure. I'd like that."

"I'll stop by later. Chinese?"

"Sure. See you later."

* * *

I had my small table ready for dinner. Tyler showed up right on time with dinner and some beer. I was starving by then, and dove into the broccoli and beef, fried rice, and vegetables. I snatched two spring rolls in case he ate them all.

“Thank you for this,” I said. “It’s nice to have company and some delicious food.”

“I love this Chinese place. I go all the time.”

We scarfed down our food, and then I realized I didn’t know very much about Tyler. Elizabeth had told me bits and pieces, but nothing of real substance.

“So why don’t you tell me something about yourself. I barely know anything about you,” I said.

“What do you want to know?”

“Tell me about your family.”

He pushed aside his empty plate, and a small smile curled up on his lips. “I have an older brother and a younger sister. My mother is French, and my father is English. They met while they were both at McGill. They fell in love, and my father decided to stay here instead of moving back to Edmonton, where he’s from originally.”

“Really,” I said with surprise. I was learning so much.

“Yes. My sister, Eden, is in university doing an English major. My brother, Jack, has a small business selling athletic supplies. He’s married and has a daughter and son.”

He sounded like he had a great family. “Are you all close?”

“I think so. We’re all in each other’s business. How about you?”

“I have three nephews; they are all Rafe’s sons. My little sister Catia is only eleven.”

“And you were born in the US, right? I think you mentioned that?”

I was pretty sure I hadn’t mentioned it, and I wondered if he’d looked that up. “Santa Barbara.”

“I’ve always wanted to visit California.”

It was on the tip of my tongue to invite him there, but why would I do that? “I love it there, although I haven’t been back

recently.”

“And you grew up in Italy?”

He’d definitely done his research.

“It’s a long story. I lived in California until I was about eleven years old. My mom was having a hard time living in the States with all the reminders of my dad. Besides, it wasn’t where she grew up. So I moved with her to her hometown in Cortese where I lived until I was eighteen. I left to go to school in Montreal, and when I was twenty-three, I joined the team. Now I’m twenty-five.”

“So where do you consider yourself from?”

“I don’t know. Devin used to call me a wanderer. But I am a Perez, and I’m my father and mother’s daughter.”

I gathered up our plates, and he helped me take them to the kitchen. To my shock, as I was putting away leftovers, he started washing the dishes. I had to stop comparing him to Devin, but I couldn’t remember the last time Devin washed a dish. I dried and put the dishes away, and we both grabbed another beer and headed to the living room. We hadn’t picked out a movie yet, and neither of us seemed to care.

“Your life must have been difficult. You’re always living your life in the spotlight.”

“There were some quiet years before I joined Perez. Back then, no one knew who I was.”

“When you and Devin got together, were you followed around a lot?”

“I don’t know for sure. Most times I didn’t notice, or I was prepared for them. For a while, Devin and I were popular fodder, but after a year or so, we were old news.”

“You still speak of him with fondness.”

I guess I did. “Despite what happened, I have to admit that I still have a soft spot for him. He brought me out of my shell, so to speak. I used to be very introverted. My idea of a good time was reading a book and being uninterrupted. He opened my world to a lot of excitement. I can look back on my life

with him and thank him for those times. I can't lie: I still love him, but I love the man I thought he was and not the man he actually is."

Tyler pondered this for a moment and said, "If he walked through your door right now, what would you do?"

I laughed. "That's easy. I'd throw him out."

Chapter Thirty-Five

Luna

To the chagrin of Hans Lauder and Devin Flynn, Erich Riedl won the last race of the season and the world championship by one point. I watched the race live on television Saturday night with Tyler. He had quickly become my new best friend. I'd made popcorn and iced tea for the event. Rafe had raced impressively and finished fifth. He was in sixth position for the year, and there was talk that the Perez team was finally coming into its own.

For Devin, there was no celebration. Although he'd finished fourth in the points standings, he would race for a less-competitive team the following year. During an interview after the race, he reflected on the season.

"It's been a lot of ups and downs for me," Devin said, taking a sip of water. He looked even more worn and tired than he had in Sandrine. "I want to put this year behind me and concentrate on the upcoming year."

"What are your thoughts on the Barlow team?"

"They are a good team, and I want to make them better."

"Do you think your wife will rejoin the Perez team next year?"

"You should ask her," Devin said angrily and walked away from the reporter.

I switched off the television. It was almost three in the morning. I faced Tyler and shook my head.

"He's self-destructing."

“You can tell that from a two-minute interview?”

“It’s more than the interview,” I said with a sigh. “He’s feeling sorry for himself.”

“He should get professional help.”

I noted the sarcasm but said nothing. I couldn’t expect Tyler to understand. But I thought about Devin as I went to bed that night.

* * *

“Hello, Luna. Baxter here.” It was six in the morning, and I’d been jarred from my sleep by my ringing phone.

“What can I do for you?” I asked with a yawn.

“I have bad news, I’m afraid.”

“What kind of bad news?” I asked, rubbing sleep from my eyes. Baxter had my full attention.

It was November twenty-first, the date of my canceled wedding. I’d hoped the day would pass by quickly, and I could focus my attention on December third and my trip to London for the Merrick dinner to honor my father. I’d already been informed that Devin would attend. The Merrick people had asked me first if I’d minded. They were inviting all the current drivers, but if I took exception to Devin, they would make sure he didn’t receive an invitation. And I wasn’t about to do that and get gossip raging.

“Devin’s lawyer called this morning. He’s contesting aspects of the divorce. He’s trying to compel Erich Riedl to reveal where he got the video. He’s also going after his old manager. It’s all nonsense, but it’s a delay tactic. I’ll be discussing this with his lawyer, but the woman seems to be busy and unavailable a lot.”

I growled. Typical Devin. I was sure he was up to something. “How long can this go on?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What can we do?”

“We can fight him on it. I’ll talk to the judge. Do you think you can get a complete copy of the video? Maybe there is something on it that we can use to persuade him to move ahead with the proceedings. As it stands now, you might be stuck with him indefinitely.”

I flopped back on the bed. “He’s not going to get away with this. I’m taking the first flight I can to London.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I am going to change his bloody mind!”

* * *

Devin had rented out the house in Milan, so there was no other place for him to be but in Sandrine. I’d called him in advance from a blocked number to make sure he was there. When he’d answered the phone, I’d hung up. I wanted to catch him by surprise.

My blood boiled as I drove from London to Sandrine. Jess had been surprised by the visit and was happy to share the flat with me. There was no time to catch up with her just yet. I had other matters to attend to. I almost hoped I’d catch Devin in bed with another woman. It would make me even angrier.

I parked my rental in his driveway and stormed up the porch and unlocked the front door with my key. He still hadn’t bothered to change the locks. I slammed the door behind me and went in search of him. He had heard the door slam and came out of the kitchen to see who it was. He was stunned to see me staring back at him, rage all over my face.

“You asshole,” I screamed.

“I see my lawyer has contacted yours.” He set down the protein shake he had in his hand.

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I don’t think this marriage is over.”

I wanted to punch the wall. “What do you mean this marriage isn’t over? Have I given you any indication that I want to be with you? I’ve moved to another continent; I can’t get any farther away from you.”

“When we made love, I knew it wasn’t over.”

Damn it. I knew that had been a mistake. “Made love? That was sex, Devin. That’s all. I think you read too much into that.”

“I don’t think I did.”

He was frustratingly calm, and that had my blood boiling even hotter. “How much do you want?”

The question offended him as it was designed to do. His mouth opened slightly. “I don’t want anything.”

“I’ll give you half of what I have if that means you’ll grant me a divorce. Don’t you understand that I don’t want you in my life anymore? You humiliated me in front of my family and the whole world. Why would I still want to be married to you? What do I have to do to make you see that?”

“I don’t want your money, Luna.”

I rolled my eyes.

He remained calm. “You have to watch the footage. All of it. Unedited.”

“Not this again! It would probably do more damage than good.”

“Then why won’t Riedl hand it over?”

“Because I haven’t asked. I bet if I did he would gladly turn it over to me.”

“Then ask him, because he won’t turn it over to me or my lawyer. If after watching the footage, your mind is still made up, I’ll grant you a divorce.”

“And until then?”

“Until then, I will make it as difficult as possible for you to divorce me.”

Chapter Thirty-Six

Luna

There were faces at the Merrick party that I hadn't seen in years, including David Remple and Michael Riedl, two of my father's contemporaries. Rafe and Eva had come with the children. All current and past drivers were in attendance, and I knew that Devin would be there as well. Timothy Merrick, the founder of the team, had graciously arranged himself for Devin to sit with the Barlow team, far away from any Perezes present.

The night before the gala, Timothy Merrick called me. He was a kind man whom my father had always held in high regard. He had driven almost his entire career with Merrick, other than those first few years when he'd cracked elite racing.

"Luna, dear," the Englishman said, "I wanted to run something past you. We have a little video presentation. I'm sure you know about that."

"Yes, I saw that," I said, setting down the book I'd been reading in my room. I was expecting Jess back shortly, and we'd planned a dinner out.

"Your mother saw it last night and objected to one of the photos we used and suggested that I personally ask you if it was all right. At the end of the video tribute we show a photo of your brother and his family. We also used a photo of you and Devin Flynn. Your mother made it very clear that she wanted the photograph omitted, but I wanted to ask you first."

I was silent for a long moment. "What photograph is it?" I asked.

The man looked slightly bewildered. “The photo? We got it from the *British Racer* magazine.”

I nodded. I knew what photo it was. There was one with me sitting cross-legged with Devin sitting behind me, his arms around my waist and his chin resting on my shoulder. That was the photo I’d kept next to my bed in his Sandrine home.

“He’s still my husband,” I said. “Leave the photo in.”

I hoped I didn’t regret it.

Uncle Dario had made me a beautiful green chiffon dress, but I didn’t feel beautiful in it. I couldn’t wait to go home. I dreaded the whole evening as I rehearsed my short speech over and over again in my head. Rafe escorted me to the head table with Timothy Merrick, Gregory Brown, and some foreign faces.

I sat between Timothy and Rafe. I scanned the room and saw Mom seated with Catia and Tony. Rafe’s wife, Eva, and their boys were also sitting quietly, waiting for dinner to be served. At another table I saw Erich and Monica. They both smiled and I returned the smile. I finally found the Barlow table and saw one empty seat, that of Devin Flynn’s. For a split second I was disappointed, but soon anger replaced the disappointment. He had no right being here, but if he didn’t attend, he had the nerve to thumb his nose at my family. Either way, he couldn’t win.

“Your father would have me running in circles,” I heard Timothy tell Rafe. “He wanted everything to be his way or no way at all. There were times he threatened not to drive for me!”

“He was an intense man.”

I sipped my wine. I needed to loosen up. I’d spent days writing and rewriting my short speech. I’d made Tyler sit through my speech for what seemed like a million times, and he never complained. He didn’t have suggestions, either, so I found myself calling Elizabeth at work, late at night, or first thing in the morning, making her listen. Jess was forced to listen too.

“One time he refused to come to the track because we hadn’t changed the company we used to order water from. He wanted one kind of water, and that water only.”

“He was the same way at home,” Rafe said with a chuckle.

I thought to invite Tyler, but the press would have gone wild to see me with a tall, blond Canadian so shortly after the breakup of my marriage. I wanted Devin to make the first move and be seen with some groupie, and I knew it wouldn’t take long. He had a healthy sex drive that needed satisfying. But would he allow himself to be caught? That’s what I feared. If he wasn’t caught, he left me in a state of limbo. I needed the press to be sympathetic to me.

“This soup is fantastic,” Rafe commented.

I hadn’t even realized that I’d been served soup. I picked up my spoon and tried the consommé. It was nothing special and I barely ate any.

“Mr. Merrick, what prompted you to do this?” Rafe asked.

“Your father might have been a pain in the ass, but I had great respect for him. This was the least I could do.”

I took a lock of my hair that had slipped down my shoulder. My hair hadn’t changed since I was a child. I’d consistently kept it long, almost halfway down my back. It was easiest to tame it that way. *Maybe I’ll cut it*, I thought. I wanted change in my life, a fresh start. If I cut off my signature hair, maybe it would be a symbol of growth and, more importantly, a clear sign to Devin Flynn. He had always loved my hair.

“I’m just sick of the rain,” Timothy commented.

“How long has it been raining?” Rafe asked.

“Almost three weeks.”

I wished I had a pen and paper, and pulling out my phone was too conspicuous. I wanted to arrange to have movers pick up my belongings from Devin’s place in Sandrine. I was annoyed that he still hadn’t sent my things from Milan. He’d rented the house, and I wondered where everything had gone,

especially my car. I hope he hadn't planned to leave it all there with strangers. I would just tell him to sell it and keep the money. I also wanted to pick up a gift for Tyler and Elizabeth for sitting through my speech so many times. There were some shops in London I wanted to visit before flying back to Montreal.

I casually looked back at the Barlow table and the empty seat had been filled and Devin was talking to the team owner, Nathan Barlow. I felt my heart leap. I quickly looked away before he caught me staring.

"Luna, what are your thoughts on new tires?" Timothy asked.

"It depends on how you feel about safety," I said dryly. Really, I didn't care.

Timothy and Rafe talked about tires while I played with the gold band on my finger. Tyler had asked me why I continued to wear it, and it was hard for me to express my reasons. I would wear it while I was married and have the pleasure of removing it the day I was finally divorced. He wasn't satisfied with the response, and I knew that he assumed it was because deep down he thought I wanted to go back to Devin. Ha!

A rice dish was served, and I ate a few bites. I pushed the food around my plate and stole glances at the Barlow table when I could. Devin was putting on a good show for his seatmates. He kept a smile on his face even though he looked run-down. His shoulders were slightly hunched, and I knew he wasn't as confident as he perceived himself to be. I looked away from him, feeling Rafe's eyes on me.

"He had guts to come here," Rafe said in disgust.

"He's one of the drivers," I reminded him. "He was invited."

"Why do you still wear that ring?" So much hate rumbled through Rafe's voice.

"Because he's still my husband."

And that was the end of that conversation.

After the meal, everyone took some time to mingle before the speeches. I went to the Perez family table and threw my arms around Catia. My nearly twelve-year-old sister was growing up right before my eyes. She was a gifted writer for her age. She would send me poetry she'd written to get my opinion. Her teachers at school had suggested that Mom enter her into poetry and writing contests. Catia's gift had been clear, and I wanted to nurture it.

"Luna, can I go say hi to Devin?" she asked, her blue eyes pleading.

"I already told you no," Mom said angrily.

"But we are his family. Why does he have to sit over there?"

"Why is she arguing with me?" Mom asked Tony.

"Mom, it's all right," I said.

"No, it's not all right," Mom said, lowering her voice. "I don't want him to have anything to do with this family."

"I'll take her," Tony said, rising from his seat. "Maria, this is ridiculous. The man is still part of this family whether you like it or not. You've already banished him from this table; the least we can do is be adult about this and say hello to him."

He took Catia's hand, and they walked toward the Barlow table. I watched as Catia let go of Tony's hand and ran straight toward Devin's extended arms. I turned away and sat down in Tony's seat. I looked at Mom, who seemed more agitated than she should have been. It wasn't Devin Flynn that was bothering her, it was the whole evening. She hated being reminded of Dad, especially in front of some five hundred guests. She was expressing her sorrow with anger, a common female trait among the woman in my family.

"Are you okay, Mom?"

"I'm fine," she said bitterly.

"It's okay to be sad."

She scoffed. "Sad about what?"

How long was she going to put on this charade? “I know this evening can’t be easy for you.”

“I’m not going to talk about this now. We still have a long night ahead of us, and I want to keep my wits about me.”

I gave up on her and chatted with Eva. The previous month Rafe had informed the family that Eva was pregnant with their fourth child. They were both hoping for a girl, but I had a sneaking suspicion it would be another boy.

I envied my brother. He had a wonderful wife who was also a fantastic mother. She devoted her life to their three sons partly because she was married to a man who was hardly ever around.

Catia and Tony returned to the table. Catia was pleased with herself and let Mom know it. Tony was more reserved, and I rose to give him back his seat. He did have to go home with Mom, after all. Mom and I waited for him to say something about his discussion with Devin. He didn’t realize that we were waiting until he looked up and saw us staring at him impatiently.

“What?” Tony asked.

“Well, what did he have to say for himself?” Mom asked.

“Not much. He moved out of his Milan home, and he’s moving back to England permanently. He’s thinking about selling the place now that he’s not stationed in Italy anymore. He asked how Luna was, and that was about it.”

“You were there twenty minutes. That’s all you talked about?” Mom asked.

“Yes, that’s all.”

Mom wasn’t buying it, and poor Tony was going to hear about it later in private.

Rafe came to get me for the presentation part of the ceremony. Gregory Brown was the first to speak on behalf of the federation. He rambled on for fifteen long minutes. The second speaker was Timothy Merrick. He told both humorous and touching stories about Dad.

“But ladies and gentlemen, there was one constant in Marco Perez’s life, and that was his family. In my many years in motorsport, I have never known a man to be more devoted to his wife and children. I remember the day his son was born. He took a late-night flight from London to be with his wife. He was crying when he told me Maria had given birth to a son. He said it was the happiest day of his life.

“And Maria ... could a man love a woman more? Marco Perez was a complex man, a very difficult person to get to know, but Maria knew him inside and out. When he was outraged that another driver had intentionally blocked him, only Maria could settle down the wild beast inside him. When he was upset with himself for making a wrong move, it was Maria there to console him. She was his perfect match, his ideal partner. And then another young lady came along to steal his heart, and her name was Luna.”

I felt a tug at my heart. I took a tissue that I’d carefully put in my purse.

“Luna Sylvia Perez immediately won her father’s heart. He never tired of his little princess, and he kept us constantly updated on all her firsts. When she first crawled, we celebrated. When she took her first step, we celebrated. When she said her first word, well ... you know what we did. And to make a great story even better, her first word was ‘daddy.’ Marco Perez, normally a very quiet and reserved man, was animated and delighted when speaking of his daughter. He taught her to blow him kisses, and whenever little Luna was at the track, she bypassed all the others to fly straight into her father’s arms. She was definitely daddy’s little girl.

“Rafe and Luna, if he were here today, he would be proud of what you have both accomplished. You’re outstanding human beings, and in you both, I see Marco Perez. He is never far from our thoughts, and that is why we are all here tonight to celebrate his life.”

The lights dimmed, and a curtain that had been covering a huge screen was removed. A musical score by Marco Passerini began. It was the same song he had performed at our father’s funeral. It was a beautiful song, and every time I heard it I

cried. Various pictures filled the screen. The first few were of my father racing in the Merrick cars. There were pictures of him with Mom, then shots of the entire family back when Mom insisted on the whole family posing for a Christmas photo.

I was always on Dad's lap. There was a photo of Marco holding a three-year-old me in his arms. The picture made me cry. The next photo was of Rafe and Marco at one of the tracks, Rafe sitting in the car our father drove. There was the famous photo of me blowing my father's casket a kiss.

The photos that followed were of Rafe and me through our teenage years. The final three pictures were the most recent. The first was of Rafe, Eva, and the children. The second was of me and Devin. The final one of Rafe and me had been taken that summer at Mom's house.

The lights came back on. I dabbed the last of my tears as Rafe rose to the podium. He'd also been shaken by the display but managed to hide it well. He spoke briefly. He wasn't much of a public speaker, and I knew that he had little in the way of warm stories to tell about Dad. I was the one who had been closer to him.

When Rafe was finished, I took a deep breath and walked to the microphone. I first looked out to my family, then quickly at the Barlow table. Devin was watching me, no expression on his face. I looked away, gazing down at my cue cards.

"A great race car driver once said that my father was the greatest driver to ever live, and that was a compliment coming from Blake Carlton. Wherever you are, Blake, I know you're watching this. You were a part of a driving generation that regarded my father as a hero. While I was only nine when my father was taken from me, it was through Blake Carlton, Devin Flynn, Erich Riedl, and Rafe Perez that I got to know my father better. I learned what a master he was at his craft and how he inspired a young American to become world champion two years in a row. I learned how much my father nurtured the feelings of a little boy from Sheffield who was so excited to meet him that he couldn't get out the words to ask him for an

autograph, and that my father, knowing this, took the little boy's pen and paper and signed his name. Dad, if only you had known."

A few people laughed even though I hadn't meant for it to be amusing.

"And Erich Riedl, you relayed stories of amusing tales that made Marco Perez more of a father and less of a race car driver. Your recollections of a time when I was too young to remember have been both invaluable and near to my heart. The thought that your father and mine had arranged our marriage always brings a smile to my face. And Rafe, you are the most important piece of the puzzle. You've been the one to fill in all the missing pieces. It's through your eyes that I see a man who adored me. Although our father will never be able to walk me down the aisle on my wedding day, or comfort me in times of turmoil, or was never there to pick me up when I had fallen, you were there, Rafe. You were the constant in my life, and you still are. Dear brother, you've made our father proud."

Rafe wiped a tear from his eyes. "You too," he mouthed to me.

"You once said we were his legacy, and you were right. I take only one solace in our father's death. He died young and handsome, and he shall always remain that way. So goodbye, Dad. We miss you."

I took a deep breath and returned to my seat. Mom was crying and Tony was consoling her. I looked at Devin and he smiled gently at me. I wanted to smile back, but the weight of my speech had made me sad. Rafe hugged me and I hugged him back. We both began to cry, a rare sign of emotion from him.

Timothy concluded the presentation and encouraged everyone to stay and celebrate with the Merrick team and the Perez family. Rafe and I joined our family. Mom had composed herself and congratulated us on our speeches.

A familiar hand touched my back. I immediately knew it was Devin. I turned to face him, hoping he wouldn't notice how nervous I was.

“You did a good job,” he said, kissing each of my cheeks.

I wondered what Mom was thinking at that moment. Would she try to take a swing at him? “Thank you.”

“The photo surprised me.”

“Don’t read too much into it.”

He nodded. “I won’t.”

“It was nice of you to come.”

“It was nice of you to mention me in your speech.”

He looked so handsome, and I wanted to reach out and hug him, but I couldn’t. No, he’d betrayed me. “What you told me about my dad was important to me.”

“I’m happy I could tell you that story. But anyway, I’m leaving. You have a very nice evening.”

I was surprised but didn’t protest. He said goodbye to the rest of the family and disappeared through the large oak doors. I wondered where he was going.

I caught up with Erich Riedl in the lobby. He was having a drink with Andy Collins. The Irishman wandered away when I approached.

“I hope he didn’t leave on my account?” I said.

“Collins? Not at all. He’s going to refill his drink and try his luck with the ladies. Good speech, by the way.”

“Thank you.”

“Is Flynn still lurking around?”

“No, he’s left.”

Erich’s eyes went cold at the subject of Devin. “He’s trying to get me involved in your divorce. Something about a deposition. The man is a loon.”

I thought of what Baxter had said. “Erich, I need something from you,” I said, becoming serious.

“I’ll do whatever it is that you want.”

“I want all the footage from the motorhome that includes Devin, unedited. As well as the audio you have.”

Erich looked surprised. “What do you need that for?”

“Devin won’t give me a speedy divorce unless I see the footage in their entirety. I have a dilemma. I can’t use the video I have now because it’s been edited, so he knows that he has leverage over me. He promises that if after watching the footage I still want the divorce, he will grant it. So I need to see the original stuff.”

“I’ll see what I can do, Luna, but I’m not sure it’s even still in existence.”

That struck me as odd. “Where did the video come from?”

“It was given to me. It just showed up one day. I suppose someone from Russo put it together, likely someone who didn’t like Devin much.”

That bothered me as well. Erich had made a big deal out of how he’d been trying to gather evidence for me. Yet someone had just handed him this video? “Please try to find them.”

“I’ll do my best.”

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Devin

Mum had a huge Christmas do to accommodate everyone's schedules. Strangely, for the first time, she wasn't accommodating me. Gwen and Victoria wanted to spend the day with their significant others, and Natalie wanted to spend it with her parents. So Mum did the Flynn Christmas a few days early.

To get my mind off my shit life, I'd been helping around Gram's house. I'd also spent time with Dad in the garage, getting my hands dirty and tinkering around with cars. He was trying to get a 1970 Chevelle up and running, and I did what I could to help.

"How are you doing?" he asked as we finished up and put away our tools so Mum wouldn't kill us for leaving a mess.

"I'm okay. It's all fine."

"Anything new to report?"

I'd filled in Dad on everything. Fucking Enzo, Riedl and his bullshit video, and the fact I couldn't get Luna to see reason.

"Riedl won't turn over the footage and claims he doesn't know where it is. Enzo wants to be paid even though he stabbed me in the back. Luna doesn't return calls or texts."

Dad patted me on the back. "You're doing what you can. But if Enzo's as motivated by money as you say he is, why don't you go on the offensive? You know most of his clients. Why not let slip the shit he has done?"

“I don’t want to get myself in any more trouble.”

“Then take him to court, and with that comes the court of public opinion.”

Dad was onto something. I sent Gloria a quick email even though she was on holidays until the new year. Didn’t hurt to try. If I did let the world know what kind of arse Enzo was, maybe the little prick would come around. I had to try everything.

After Dad and I had finished cleaning up, he thanked me for the new heated garage I’d had installed so he could fix up the Chevelle. I think Mum wanted to throttle me when the guys had come in last month to build it. I kindly told her that it kept him out of her hair. She said I had a point.

We drove the short distance to pick Gram up. She’d be staying with my parents for a few days. She’d slowed down some, and it would be nice for her not to go back and forth to her home during the holidays. Dad insisted on helping her get into the car while I packed her walker in the boot.

“I’m sorry Luna won’t be coming this year,” Gram said. “Such a sweet girl. I do hope the two of you can work things out.”

“Me too, Gram.”

Her hands were shaking a bit, but Dad said that was from the stroke. When had Gram gotten so small?

Once we were settled back at Mum and Dad’s, Gram and I watched *It’s a Wonderful Life* while we waited for Gwen and Vicky to show up. Neither were bringing their new boyfriends, and we all knew why. Mum would give them the third degree, poor shmucks, and my sisters didn’t want to scare off their new blokes.

We were also waiting for Natalie and Paige. True to my word, I’d been spending some time with the kid. I had to admit, she did crack me up with her brutal “kid” honesty. The first few times Nat and I spent time with her together, we’d gone to an ice cream shop and then to a village fair. She was too small for most of the rides, but she insisted on going on all

the kiddie ones, and since Nat didn't do well with motion, I was on the rides with her. It didn't compare to driving two hundred miles per hour, but it was fun to listen to her scream with joy as the teacup swirled around.

Paige was wary of me at first, and I was uncomfortable around her. I had limited experience with kids, so relating to one wasn't easy. But I wasn't a foreign entity either. Paige knew *of* me, just didn't *know* me. She knew my parents were her grandparents, and I was around every so often, but we'd never interacted much. So while she wasn't scared of me, she also didn't know what to expect. Unfortunately for Nat, the only thing I knew how to do was buy her sweets and toys. I even bought her a toy racetrack, and showed her the cars I drove. Her little nose wrinkled, but when I set up the track in Mum's basement and showed her what to do, she had the wireless controller snatched from my hands in no time. I was pretty sure I had a future racer on my hands.

When everyone had finally arrived, it was time to eat. Paige sat between me and Nat. Dinner was perfect, except that we were missing Luna.

"Devin, can I have another sugar cookie?" Paige asked.

"You may not," Nat said from across the room.

Paige frowned. "Half a cookie?"

"Tell you what," I said, taking her little hand in mine. "Let's go into the living room and split one where Mum can't see."

I saw that devilish look in her eyes. "Okay."

Three sugar cookies later, it was time to open presents. Nat had given me a list for Paige and told me to pick one thing. She'd been very specific when she'd said one, but when I'd gone to the toy store, it was so hard to pick just one. So I told the associate to pack it all up, and I drove the car around the front to pile it all in. Mum had helped me wrap the presents—Mum went and rewrapped all of mine later—and now as we opened gifts, Nat gave me a look after Paige opened her third gift. I wasn't sorry. The kid was ecstatic.

“I’m going to kill you,” Nat said as I helped Nat take the toys out to her car. “I said *one*. Not one hundred.”

“My bad. I thought you meant one list.”

Nat shook her head and laughed. “You thought no such thing. But you made her day, once she comes down from the sugar high. How many cookies did you *share* with her?”

“Just the one.”

“You bloody liar.”

Once we’d packed up the last of Paige’s gifts, Nat grabbed my arm before I could go. “I was thinking, maybe now is the right time to tell Paige the truth. It’s been a few months, and you haven’t flaked out yet, so I think we’re good.”

I rolled my eyes. “So you had no faith in me?”

“Not even a little.”

We leaned up against her car and looked at the lights on the house. Mum had gone all out this year.

“Thank you for letting me into Paige’s life. I certainly didn’t deserve it.”

“Well, she already loves you because you’re her partner in crime. You’re going to have to be a dad, too, okay? You can’t always be the fun one who lets her get away with things, leaving me to be the bad guy.”

“I know, but I want to win her over first. I can be a *meanie* later.”

She surveyed me before laughing. “You have come a long way, Devin. I think you’ve finally grown up, and that’s nice to see. You still fighting for Luna?”

“I’m trying, and getting nowhere.”

“She’s clearly good for you, so don’t stop trying.” She pushed off from the car. “We better get going. It’s already past Paige’s bedtime. Let me know how it goes, okay?”

“Of course.”

I walked Nat and Paige to the car to make sure they were all buckled in, and as they drove off, a part of me was still missing, and I needed to fix that soon.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Luna

Two days before Christmas I got a piece of mail postmarked from Sandrine. I opened it to find a handmade Christmas card from Paige. Devin had included a small note that wished me a merry Christmas. It had been the first contact since the Merrick dinner. I could only assume that he got my address from Elizabeth.

I put the card on the refrigerator and thought to call Paige, but decided against it. I needed to distance myself from the Flynn family. Instead, I ordered Paige a little Christmas gift online from a local shop to be sure it would reach her in time.

It would be the first Christmas I spent away from home. Even during my four years in Montreal, I'd spent every Christmas in Cortese or California. But this holiday season was different for so many reasons. I didn't feel comfortable going home. As much as I wished to see my family, especially Catia, I couldn't bear looking at Mom's disappointed face. She was still upset with me for the Merrick dinner, and I didn't want to ruin everyone's Christmas with a huge fight.

"Please come to my cousin's house," Elizabeth pleaded one last time on Christmas Eve.

"I'll be fine," I said. "The last thing I want is to be a stranger at your cousin's dinner table. Don't worry about me."

"Are you absolutely sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. I have a thousand things to keep me busy."

"I'll give you the address just in case."

I pretended to write it down to make my friend happy. We said goodbye, and I found myself all alone with nothing to do. I'd lied to Elizabeth: I had no work. I made myself some dinner and watched old Christmas movies. I made sure to watch *It's a Wonderful Life*. I tried to watch it every year.

I called Cortese to wish everyone a merry Christmas before they went to midnight Mass. Mom was upset that I hadn't come home and said very little to me. Instead, I spoke at length with Tony and Rosa.

"You sound sad," Rosa said.

I hated how well she knew me. "Maybe because I'm all alone."

"You should have come home. Or you could have gone to Santa Barbara and spent it with your grandmother."

I had gone home for a few days and spent them all with my grandmother. She insisted on teaching me to quilt, and we spent the whole time doing that as she reminisced about Dad. I also went to visit my uncle to make sure he was still intent on selling. Nothing had changed there, but in a short time he'd now started using a walker instead of a cane.

"After the year I've had, I didn't want to put Mom through a miserable holiday. I think it's best that I stayed away. As for Lita, I would have ruined her Christmas, too, with all the disappointment I've brought to the family."

"You haven't disappointed anyone. And your mom wanted you here, Luna. Don't kid yourself."

"Maybe I just didn't want to be around her."

And that was the reality of it. We would have made each other miserable.

After my phone call home, I put on my jacket and mitts and walked to a movie theater that was only a few blocks from my loft. I'd done a lot of things alone, but I'd never gone to a movie alone and was surprised to see how many other people had gone alone too. We were all alone together.

The movie was a terrible war drama and probably not the best thing to watch during Christmas. As I walked back home, I wondered why I'd picked it.

As I neared my loft, I saw a bright red sports car parked outside my building. My heartbeat quickened and I picked up the pace. I pulled out my keys and unlocked the front door. I fully expected to see Devin sitting in the cramped lobby, but there was no one there. I turned to look back outside and saw a couple from across the street walk to the car and get inside.

I tried to mask my disappointment by convincing myself that I didn't care. I climbed into the elevator, ashamed of myself for hoping he was there. Jess had warned me that it would take a long time to get Devin out of my system. I had allowed myself to love him fully and completely, and now I was paying the price.

My loft suddenly seemed cold. It was too neat. I was used to an organized mess with Devin. He lived like a troll and still managed to know exactly where everything was. I would have to follow him around and clean up after him. He had no concept of order and loved mess. He thrived in mess and would become nervous when I picked up after him. Initially during our relationship, he hadn't tried to hide his bad habits. It was his way of telling me that he was that way and there was no changing him.

Instead of hanging up my coat, I let it drop to the floor, Devin style. I flung off my boots and let them land carelessly on the hardwood floors. I didn't bother to arrange them neatly in the closet. I made myself a cup of hot chocolate and left the spoon on the kitchen counter instead of placing it in the dishwasher. I padded up to the bedroom and changed into my flannel teddy bear pajamas. I read a mystery novel but found it dull. I put down the book and looked at the clock. It was just past ten o'clock.

I picked up my phone and stared at the numbers. Suddenly, I found myself punching in numbers and waited as the phone rang on the other side of the ocean. It was three o'clock in the morning where I was calling, and I knew there was going to be no answer.

“It’s Devin, leave me a message, and if I think it’s a call worth returning, you’ll hear from me, otherwise, too bloody bad.”

I cleared my throat and waited for the beep. “Hi, Devin, it’s Luna. I just wanted to wish you and your family a merry Christmas. I received the card from Paige, and I wanted you to thank her for me.”

My phone beeped with another call. Devin’s name popped up. I bit my lip as I answered.

“Luna?” Devin asked. I could tell by his voice that he’d been sleeping.

“I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“You call in the middle of the night, what do you expect?” He wasn’t annoyed but rather sounded happy to hear from me.

“I didn’t think you would be home.”

“Where else would I be?” he asked softly.

“With your family.”

“We celebrated early.”

“How is Ruth?”

“She’s all right. She’s slowing down, but she gets around. How are you?”

“I’m okay.”

“Where are you calling from?”

“Montreal.”

“You didn’t go home for the holidays?”

I paced around my room, wondering if calling him had been a bad idea. “I don’t think my mother could stand me in the same room for more than an hour.”

“Is that my fault?”

“It’s her fault, and she should get over it.”

There was a short silence.

“I miss you,” Devin said quietly.

I closed my eyes and sat on the bed. “Devin, don’t do this.”

“But it’s true. A moment doesn’t go by that I don’t think about you.”

“Nothing has changed for me.”

“So why did you call me?” he asked with exasperation. “I don’t understand you. If you want me out of your life so badly, then why did you have me invited to that Merrick dinner? Why did you let them use the photograph of us? More importantly, if you hate me so much, why did you sleep with me?”

“I don’t know,” I said, massaging my temples.

“You still love me.”

“You betrayed me.”

“No, I didn’t! If you saw the raw footage, you would know otherwise.”

“I asked Erich for it, he doesn’t think it exists anymore.”

“Oh, wonderful and convenient. They probably destroyed them once they got the juicy parts, right? And what if they did destroy them, what does that mean for me?”

“With or without the footage, I still want a divorce.”

“It exists, Luna. He just doesn’t want you to see it. What sickens me is how he professes to care about you and wants to protect you. That fucker was more interested in destroying me, and he has. I have nothing, and who is happy here? Only Erich Riedl. Doesn’t that bother you?”

I swallowed hard. “Maybe we can put this all behind us. You grant me a divorce, and we can salvage some kind of friendship.”

He laughed humorlessly. “Friendship? Are you mad? With this hanging over us, how could we possibly be friends? I would always wonder what you were thinking of me, when in reality I know what was said in that video.”

“The video speaks for itself.”

“Everything was taken out of context!”

“I’ve done all I can, Devin. I asked Erich for the footage.”

“And you’ll never see it. He’ll make sure of that.”

“I don’t think it would have mattered.”

“You’re right. Maybe it doesn’t matter. You’ve already made up your mind about me. But I can wait forever for you, Luna. I can wait until the day I die if it takes that long because I know the truth, and maybe one day so will you.”

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Luna

The phone call to Devin bothered me all the next day. The only bright spot was when Tyler came over. He was on duty but made a quick stop by my loft. He had a small gift with him that turned out to be a some new books I'd been thinking of buying. I was touched by the gesture.

“So how was Elizabeth’s?” he asked.

“I’m sure it was very nice, but I wasn’t there.”

His face contorted in confusion. “Elizabeth told me you were spending Christmas Eve with her. If I knew you were going to be alone, I would have invited you to my place.”

“Don’t worry. I went to see a movie. I kept myself entertained.”

“And tonight?”

“I’ll think of something.”

He frowned. “You’re coming to my house. My dad would love to have you there.”

I shook my head vehemently. “It’s a time to be with family, not strangers.”

“You aren’t a stranger.”

“Not to you, but to the rest of your family.”

“Be ready for five thirty. I’ll come pick you up.”

He left before I could protest further.

* * *

I was waiting at five thirty in the lobby of my building. I was carrying a bottle of wine in one hand and assorted dainties in the other. I'd found a small grocery store that was open and purchased the last of what they had. Tyler pulled up in his Jeep and I climbed in.

"What's all this?" he asked, driving through the snow-covered streets. It had been snowing the entire day but remained mild. The perfect Christmas Day.

"Dessert and some wine."

"You didn't have to."

"Guests don't show up without something." My mother had instilled that in me.

The McCafferys lived on the west end of the city in a beautiful brown brick two-story. As I walked up to the door, I knew that the McCafferys must have been well-off, but I didn't ask Tyler since it really wasn't my business.

We walked inside, and I could immediately smell a mixture of turkey and baking of some kind. Shortbread? My stomach began to rumble. It had been a long time since I'd had a good home-cooked meal.

Tyler took my coat as two children ran past us, chasing each other through the hallways. I heard a woman scold them, but they only laughed. Tyler shrugged and smiled. He took my hand, which caught me off guard, but I didn't snatch it away. It was nice to hold his warm and rough hand as we walked into the living room where everyone was gathered around.

"Hey, everyone, I'd like you to meet Luna."

All the faces overwhelmed me. I knew immediately who Jack was, Tyler's brother. He was just as tall, with the same blond hair, but lighter blue eyes. He stepped forward first and shook my hand, then introduced his wife. Audrey was a petite woman with a nice smile.

“Our children are destroying the place as we speak. Samantha, Adam,” he called out.

The children didn't respond.

“This is Eden,” Tyler said, pointing to his younger sister. She had long, dark hair and light-brown eyes. She looked like neither of her brothers.

“It's a pleasure.”

“You know my dad,” he said.

Scott McCaffery waved, but his gaze was glued to the television. He was watching a football game.

“My mom is in the kitchen,” he said.

We walked into the spacious kitchen. Claudia McCaffery was tending to the turkey. She closed the oven door and turned to greet me. She was a lovely woman with dark hair and warm brown eyes. She was wearing an apron that she wiped her hands on before shaking my hand.

“It's a pleasure to have you here,” Claudia said.

“I'm not imposing, am I?”

“Not at all. The more the merrier.”

“I brought these,” I said, setting down the wine and dessert.

“Thank you, Luna.”

So much bustle was going on, and I felt lost. “Can I help with anything?” I asked as Audrey set the table for dinner.

“I have a pot of water on the stove. Could you watch it and let me know when it's boiling?” Claudia asked.

“I can do that,” I said, standing next to the stove and out of the way.

I saw a variety of dishes on the stove and was salivating at the thought of eating them. The smell of comfort food made me relax.

“My son tells me you speak Italian.”

“My mother is Italian. I also speak Spanish and French.”

“It’s been a long time since I’ve spoken. I was never very good, but would you mind if we bantered around in Italian?”

“Not at all,” I answered in Italian.

“Ah, how I’ve missed that,” the woman replied in her dialect. “My parents used to speak at home, but never stressed that me or my brother speak. So it’s pretty much been lost to us.”

“Your children never learned?”

“No. I only spoke the language at home, and since Scott doesn’t speak it, I rarely do anymore.”

The water began to boil, and Claudia emptied the contents of two bags of rigatoni into the pot. I stirred occasionally as per her orders.

“Tyler says you are separated from your husband.”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry to hear about that,” Claudia said, prepping vegetables for a salad.

“Sometimes marriages aren’t meant to work out.”

“Yes, that is very true. Are you here to stay in Montreal?”

“I haven’t decided yet. I have a job that requires me in March, but I may not go back to it.”

“That’s where your husband is?”

“Tyler’s told you everything, huh?”

“My son and I are close,” Claudia said, basting the turkey.

“It’s difficult being separated from your husband, then having to see him all the time. I don’t know that I can do it.”

Claudia finished up with the tomatoes and patted me on the hand. “I don’t know why you separated from your husband, but if you think there is any chance that the two of you will get back together, you at least owe that to yourself.”

“There is no chance of that,” I said firmly. I found it odd she even suggested it.

Dinner was entertaining. I enjoyed the McCaffery family. I learned that both Eden and Claudia were vegetarians and that Claudia had no idea how to cook a turkey. It was painfully dry. I needed several glasses of water to get it down. All the other dishes were spectacular. Claudia made an eggplant parmigiana that was superb and a salad with a blue cheese and balsamic vinegar dressing.

“Dad, next time you make the turkey,” Jack pleaded.

“Next time bring your own,” Claudia said to her son.

After dinner, I helped Claudia with the dishes while Eden served coffee and my desserts, along with shortbread, gingerbread, and other holiday classics. Later, Scott cornered me for more about my life.

“So tell me, do you think you could get me passes to this year’s race?” he asked with a glint in his eyes.

“Mr. McCaffery, it would be my pleasure.”

“Please, call me Scott.”

“I’ll have them sent to you well in advance, Scott. VIP, of course.”

“I never liked Devin Flynn. I always thought he was bit of a troublemaker,” Scott said, shoving his fork into fruit cake and taking a bite.

“He is that.”

“I always liked Blake Carlton. It was a tragedy what happened to him. Did you know him?”

My heart lurched. “I considered him a friend.”

“He could be outspoken, but he was the best out there.”

“Even better than Hans Lauder?”

“Lauder is one-dimensional. Carlton had the whole package: speed, smarts, and the desire. I just don’t know what

happened to him that day. Maybe he got distracted. Were you there?"

I closed my eyes and saw Blake's limp body being placed onto a stretcher. I would never again see his piercing blue eyes. "Yes, I was," I said sadly.

"It was a bad day for motorsport."

"Scott, do you mind if we talk about something else?"

"Of course, dear," he said, sensing my discomfort.

We talked about the unusually warm weather, before Tyler took me away for the annual McCaffery Christmas tradition of playing charades. I'd never been involved with a family that was so close and loving. I envied them.

"You have a great family," I said as we drove to my loft hours later.

"I have two great parents."

"They are so loving toward one another. How long have then been married?"

"Almost twenty-nine years."

He walked me to the front door. "You are coming to New Year's, right?"

"Yes, Elizabeth made me promise."

"Why don't I pick you up? We could go together."

"Yes, that would be nice."

"If I don't see you before then, have a great week."

I watched him leave, with mixed emotions. It was too soon to date again, and I was pretty sure my heart wasn't it. Or was it? I had no idea anymore, and I needed to figure that out fast.

Chapter Forty

Luna

There was a Canadian tradition that I loved, and that was Boxing Day shopping. Elizabeth and I were among the thousands who would crowd into stores to get after-Christmas bargains. Elizabeth was at the loft by eight the next morning. She was going to park her car at my place, and we'd walk down to the department stores and malls that all linked together.

We were in shopping heaven. After a few hours, and several bags to carry, we stopped for lattes and cinnamon buns. Our version of breakfast.

"You do know that Tyler likes you," Elizabeth said as we finally found a place to sit and eat.

"We've become good friends," I agreed.

"You must be completely blind! He foams at the mouth when you walk into the room."

"We're just friends," I said, unconvinced.

"You may think that, but he's falling for you."

"Did you forget I'm married?"

Elizabeth looked curious. "I thought that ship had sailed."

"It has, but still ..." I paused. "I called him Christmas Eve."

Elizabeth put down her cup and stared at me in disbelief. "You called him?"

“It was a moment of weakness. I wanted to wish him a merry Christmas.”

Elizabeth wagged her finger at me. “Do me and Tyler a favor, and hop on the first flight to London and go back to him before he gets too attached.”

I gasped. “Don’t say that.”

“Since you’ve left him, how many times have you seen him or been in contact with him?”

“I had to each time.”

“Bullshit,” Elizabeth said, shaking her head. “You wanted to see him. You even slept with him.”

“It was just sex.”

“You are not the ‘just sex’ type. Do you actually think you are fooling me?”

I was growing agitated. “Elizabeth, he’s the first man I ever loved. Am I just supposed to get over it in a few days?”

“That’s just it, you don’t want to get over it. And it hasn’t been a few days. You think by coming to Montreal that you’re far away and removed. You aren’t. All you are is far away. I bet you *do* think there is more to those videos, but you want him to suffer for a little while. I think you’re happy he’s contesting the divorce. This gives you time to punish him for whatever you think he’s done.”

I was horrified. Mostly because there was a ring of truth to what she was saying. “I don’t want to talk about this.”

“Because I’m right. Don’t string Tyler along. He really likes you, and if your heart is with another man, he deserves to know that he doesn’t stand a chance.”

* * *

The New Year’s Eve party was at a banquet hall in the west end of the city. It was a formal affair, and it felt good dressing up again. I put on a dress I’d worn to one of the Perez sponsor

parties. It was one of the last parties Devin and I had been to before our separation.

Tyler picked me up around six. We arrived at the hall and found our friends at a table near the dance floor. Dinner was served, and I enjoyed everything right down to dessert. It was nice to be out again, with people I loved spending time with.

We danced until shortly before midnight. Guy and Tyler poured champagne in preparation for midnight. Elizabeth was passing around noisemakers and hats. I found myself getting more and more excited. I'd enjoyed being surrounded by friends. The year before, Devin and I had gone to Thirst, and he was so drunk by midnight, he was incapable of ringing in the new year. What bothered me was that I had to celebrate with his friends since Jess had gone to spend New Year's with yet another boyfriend she'd met in France.

The countdown began. Everyone grabbed a glass, and as we reached zero, we all raised our glasses and toasted the new year. I watched as all the couples around me celebrated with their significant others. I slowly turned to Tyler, who looked just as uncomfortable as I did.

"Happy New Year," he said, leaning over to kiss me on the cheek. He put his arms around me and hugged me tightly. I did the same and closed my eyes as his lips brushed mine. It was a quick kiss, but Tyler found some courage and kissed me again more passionately. My head was spinning, and I responded without thinking. He was a good kisser, and I could feel my skin tingle. There was something uncomplicated about this. Easy.

When we stepped apart, I saw Elizabeth and Simon staring at us. I turned away from them and wished Danielle and Guy a happy new year.

"What was that?" Elizabeth asked twenty minutes later in the ladies' room.

"A kiss."

"It looked pretty heavy."

"It was a kiss, that's all," I said.

“Remember what I said the other day.”

I waved her off and returned to the party.

Tyler and I left shortly before three that morning. We walked to my building, hand in hand. It was a beautiful evening, mild and peaceful. The snow was melting, and I felt like spring was on its way, which was far too early for Montreal.

“Do you want to come up?” I asked.

“I’d better not. I might be tempted.”

I smiled. “Are you going to kiss me good night?” I asked.

“Would you like me to?”

I nodded.

He pulled me into his arms. He kissed me warmly before stepping away and toward the street. I was still holding on to his hand, and I pulled him close to me again and kissed him. I wrapped my arms around his neck, and we stood on the sidewalk kissing for some time before Tyler reluctantly broke the embrace.

“I have to go,” he said with a laugh.

“You’ll be back,” I said coyly.

“I know, I know.”

* * *

I thought I was having a nightmare, but it was my phone ringing. I picked it up and said a very sleepy hello. It was Jess calling from some place unknown.

“It’s seven o’clock in the morning; I’m trying to sleep,” I said with irritation.

“You’ll never guess who I saw last night.”

“The Loch Ness Monster.”

“No, I had a Flynn sighting.”

I groaned and rubbed my tired eyes. “What made you think you needed to call me to tell me that?”

“He asked about you.”

“That’s nice.”

“You called him Christmas Eve.”

“He told you that?” I said angrily. Jess now had my full attention.

“He was extremely inebriated. He told me a lot of things. I didn’t know you liked to have sex when it rained.”

“Oh God,” I said, covering my face with my hands. “What else did he say?”

“Let’s just say he left nothing out. He must have gone on for over an hour about how much he loves you and how he can’t go on without you. It was a pitiful sight. He went on about how you made his life complete, and now that you’re gone, he has nothing left to live for. He seemed to be drowning his sorrows in any kind of alcohol he could find.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“If I had to sit through it, so do you. What possessed you to call him? Are you giving him some sort of faint hope? The guy looked destroyed.”

“He’s destroyed because millions of dollars walked out of his life. And I don’t have a rain fetish.”

“He rang in the new year, puking up his guts. His friend Colin ended up bringing him home. Luna, Devin is a mess.”

“I’m moving on, Jess.”

“Moving on, how, exactly?”

“Possibly with Tyler.”

Jess was silent. “I think it’s too soon,” she said finally.

“I’m not going to sit around worrying about Devin Flynn when there is a man who cares about me for me and not for my money.”

“You aren’t ready to get into another serious relationship. You and Devin were pretty intense.”

“Just because he is a mess doesn’t mean that I have to put my life on hold because I may not be ready. There is a man who cares about me; why shouldn’t I give him a chance?”

“You’re going to hurt him.”

“And why is that?”

“Because you love another man.”

Chapter Forty-One

Luna

That Sunday, Tyler and I spent an evening in, watching movies. It was moments like these that I appreciated the most about my new life. There was no rush to dress up and attend another boring sponsorship event or smiling for endless cameras. I'd hated attending those functions. Devin and I would spend hours pretending to care what other people thought and said. I often found myself tuning in and out of conversations and when asked a question, had no clue what was even being discussed. I had longed for the rare occasions Devin and I could just sit and relax with no cares in the world.

"What movie did you pick?" I asked, snuggling up next to him on the sofa. My loft was cold as usual with the heat kicking in when it felt like it. I'd asked the landlord several times to have the heat properly fixed, but I'd already asked a lot of him and didn't want to push my luck. For some reason, I'd already garnered the reputation of being difficult.

"A classic," he said, taking the remote control and flipping on his choice. With his other arm, he wrapped it around my shoulder. "*The Pink Panther*."

I smiled even though I'd already seen it and hated it. I didn't enjoy slapstick comedies, but I pretended to tonight. At least Devin had liked true classics like *Gone With the Wind*, *Casablanca*, and anything starring Sophia Loren, Laurence Olivier, or Steve McQueen.

I fell asleep halfway through the movie, not waking until the end credits rolled. I sat up and yawned while Tyler stretched.

“You were tired,” he said.

“Exhausted,” I lied.

“I should get going,” he said, looking out the window at the freezing rain coming down. “If you don’t need to go anywhere, you should probably stay home tomorrow. This is looking nasty.”

I walked him to the door, and then he kissed me briefly. It was ... nice. He didn’t have the same magic touch that Devin did, but I ignored that. Devin had been the first true love of my life. He had that power over me and would most likely always have it. I accepted it as my fate.

* * *

By morning a thick layer of ice covered the streets, making it treacherous to drive. Tyler called me first thing in the morning and warned me not to go anywhere. As the rain continued to fall, I watched it accumulate on trees and cars parked on the narrow street below. It looked pretty, glistening like diamonds.

In the afternoon I received a package from Baxter. My hands shook at the thought of Devin finally consenting to a divorce. If he wanted to make me truly happy, he would speed up the process, and I might even be divorced in less than a year. At the same time I hoped that wasn’t true. A thought had begun to nag at me. Why was Devin so confident that the raw footage would exonerate him? And why was Erich Riedl being uncooperative?

I tore open the manila envelope and stared at pages upon pages of numbers and names I’d never seen before. Devin’s name came up frequently, including what appeared to be monetary sums. The document was completely foreign to me. I called Baxter for an explanation.

“Baxter, I received something in the mail from you today. What is it?”

“Do you have any accountant friends in Montreal?”

“I might know someone. Why?”

“It’s your husband’s financial statements and tax documents. His lawyer sent them to me the other day.”

“His financial statements and tax documents? I don’t understand.”

“Neither did I. I called his lawyer and asked what this was all about. James informed me that his client insisted that you see his financial statements. I think Mr. Flynn is trying to make some kind of point.”

“And what would that be?”

“He made more money last year than you did by threefold.”

“What?” I asked, stunned by this revelation.

“He’s amazing with money. I don’t know how he does it. His salary last year is only a small fraction of what he accumulated through endorsements and some very shrewd investments. Whoever his adviser is, I’d like to meet them. However, whatever the motivation for this gesture, let’s not be fooled by it.”

I looked over the financial statements, thinking about what Baxter had said. I knew Devin was good with money, but as I looked over the statements, I was astounded. What I found even more interesting was that Devin hadn’t included very much from the previous few months. Since the end of our relationship, he had taken some financial blows. All the huge endorsement money he’d had from Russo disappeared when he was relieved of his duties, and the federation advertisements that we had done together were canceled.

Public opinion of him had soured of late, with people thinking the relationship had ended because he’d done something wrong. He was no longer the fun-loving guy he’d once been. I knew if the video Erich showed me was ever released, his career would be over. Who would want anything to do with the man who betrayed Marco Perez’s daughter?

I pored over the financial statements through the afternoon. It was still raining, and as day turned to night, the rain turned to ice. There seemed to be no end to the rain, and as my lights

began to flicker, I realized the full enormity of what was happening all around me.

I put on a pair of boots and a light jacket. I stepped out of my building and nearly wiped out. I grabbed the side of the building and a handrail, and it, too, was covered in ice. Other people were walking down the street struggling not to fall. I sensed something was very wrong. I ran back up to my loft in search of an umbrella and my wallet. I went to Harvest, a nearby grocery store, and bought all that I could carry. I slipped and fell a few times on the way home but made it back to my loft with only a few bruises and no damaged food.

As the rain continued to fall into sleet and ice, I stared out my window. The lights continued to flicker. My building was old, the heat faulty, and now I was losing electricity? I plugged in my laptop and phone to make sure they were at full charge. Then I gathered up extra blankets, candles, matches, a flashlight, batteries, and anything else I could think of. My phone rang, breaking me from my thoughts.

“How are you?” Tyler asked.

“Good, so far. What the hell is happening outside?”

“I don’t know, but it doesn’t look good. You okay?”

“I picked up some groceries, and I’ve got flashlights and blankets.”

Tyler chuckled. “Are you afraid it’s Armageddon?”

“I have a bad feeling.”

“I might not be able to come over later. I’ll let you know. They have us on call today and tomorrow. But we’ll talk soon. Stay safe.”

I kept myself busy looking over the papers Baxter had sent me. I wanted to get my mind off the dreary weather. The flickering of the lights continued until I went to bed. The lightness of the sky was deceiving. It felt warm and comforting, but when I awoke the next morning, I realized the full extent of the rain. Trees were covered in thick ice, some bending, while others looked ready to break. Once again I ventured out to Harvest. By now, their shelves were depleted,

and a sign in the window indicated that they planned to close at 4:00 p.m. and remain closed until further notice. Delivery trucks had been unable to deliver, and there was little in way of produce. I bought what I could and struggled to get home. The rain continued to pelt down as the air grew colder.

That night Tyler came over after his shift. He was still in his police uniform, and he looked exhausted. I made some dinner, and as we were eating, the power finally gave out. We sat in total darkness for a few minutes, waiting for the lights to come on, but they didn't. I lit a few candles and we waited. There was nothing.

"Pack some clothes. You're coming to my place," Tyler said.

"I'm sure the lights will come back on."

But maybe he could hear the edge of panic in my voice, because Tyler shook his head. I could see the grave expression on his face made somehow harsher by the candlelight. "This isn't good, Luna."

I could feel the now familiar edge of an anxiety attack coming on. Maybe being alone in a dark, freezing loft was a bad idea. I packed up some of the food and an overnight bag, and we loaded up Tyler's SUV. The rain was colder, almost ice. We drove slowly to Tyler's small house in the east end. There were very few cars on the road and some fallen trees. It was almost like a war zone, as the fallen trees had taken down power lines, leaving entire blocks in darkness. At least Tyler's block had been spared ... for now. We carefully exited the car and made our way into the house.

Tyler switched on the news and shook his head as reports of even more power outages came through. Trees weighed down with ice were no longer able to withstand the pressure and as they fell, they took out power lines and anything else standing in their way. All the schools would be closed the next day.

I slept in the spare bedroom after refusing to take Tyler's bed. I lay in bed listening to the sound of the hard rain pelting

against my window. Was it ever going to end? At least with Tyler, I felt safe. I knew he was ready for any situation.

Suddenly, there was a large crash that made the house shake. I felt myself beginning to shake, the familiar signs of a panic attack causing my heart to race. I tried to breathe, to calm myself as I heard furious activity within the house. I knew Tyler had gone to see what had happened. I jumped out of bed and found him staring out his living room window. I stood next to him and looked out. A tree had crushed a car that had been parked outside. For the first time, I felt truly fearful. I was shaking and Tyler put his arms around me. I knew three things for certain: it was cold, at any moment the electricity and heat could go, and having Tyler near was helping me calm down.

* * *

It was the middle of the night, but we watched the updated news reports on television. I stared out at the rain and wondered when it would stop. Colder weather was forecasted for the end of the weekend.

“Do you know what this means?” I asked, my hands shaking. I didn’t know why I was so scared.

“Yes,” Tyler said. “A lot of people are going to be in trouble.”

The lights and TV went out. I gasped. Tyler put his arms around me for comfort. He tried to coax me away from the window, but I didn’t move. Suddenly, there was a flash in the dark sky before the thundering sound of another tree falling. When the lights came on an hour later, the houses across the street were still plunged in darkness.

“Let’s try to sleep,” Tyler suggested.

This time we crawled into the same bed. I was too afraid to sleep alone. Tyler held me close to him, and I felt comforted. From outside I could still hear the icy rain slamming up against the window. I closed my eyes, feeling the warmth of Tyler’s body. It was all I needed to fall asleep. And if I

pretended for just a little while that I was in Devin's arms instead, no one had to know.

Chapter Forty-Two

Luna

The next morning was mostly mayhem. I awoke to find the bed empty but the power back on. I got up and changed into some warm clothes. I looked around Tyler's small house and found him nowhere before I spied him out the window, talking to the neighbor. What I saw next warmed my heart. Extension cords from his side of the house crossed the street and found their way into the homes of the people on the opposite side. They were blue, red, and yellow, whatever colors people could find.

I put on my jacket and boots. I almost slipped and fell on the porch steps but was quick to grab on to the railing. I slid all over the walkway until I reached Tyler. He introduced me to the young French Canadian man. He and his family had slept through the night in cold and darkness. It was then that I looked down the street and saw the mangled tree that had claimed their power.

"Pierre, if you need anything else, please call me," Tyler said in his flawless French.

"Yes, and thank you for the power."

"I just hope it lasts."

We returned to the house. I made breakfast while Tyler got on the phone with various people. I listened as he spoke gravely to his superior at work and then friends. When he hung up to sit down to breakfast, his face looked bleak.

"The rain isn't supposed to stop," he said.

"What's going to happen?"

“The city is having a hard time getting out to the scene of downed power lines. I’ve been called into work this afternoon to manage the crowds flocking to malls to stay warm. I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“Can I do anything?”

“I’ve called Elizabeth. She isn’t going to work today, and she still has power. I’m going to drop you off there.”

“That isn’t doing anything! I’ll be sitting around all day.”

“Luna, I want you where I know you’re safe.”

“What about my place?”

“What about it?”

“I want to go back there.”

He pressed his lips together in what I assumed was irritation. “I don’t want you to be alone. It’s best we stick to a buddy system in times like these.”

I couldn’t really argue with that. Yet I also couldn’t help thinking of Devin, who understood my independent streak and would have gotten why I wanted to check on my own home. He’d probably also have been trying to find ways to make me laugh rather than trying to impress the seriousness of the situation on me. I was serious enough for the both of us.

But that wasn’t fair. I forced some of the horrible audio from his conversations with Enzo to play through my mind. Fuck him. Tyler was taking care of me, and I needed that right now.

That afternoon, as promised, he brought me to Elizabeth’s. We ate lunch with Cecilia before returning to Elizabeth’s place and trying to find something to occupy our time. I phoned Mom to tell her what was going on. I made it sound tame in comparison to the slow dying power grid happening all over Montreal and all the surrounding cities and towns. I don’t know why I lied when she could just google it.

“How is everything going with Tyler?” Elizabeth asked as we played cards to kill time.

“Good,” I said, sensing something different in Elizabeth’s voice. “Why do you ask?”

“No reason,” Elizabeth said too casually.

There was another crack, and the tree outside Elizabeth’s place had finally fallen. It had been leaning over badly when Tyler had dropped me off. He had even told us to stay as far away from that tree as possible. What bothered me more was that I was beginning to get used to the sounds of trees toppling.

“Why are you so opposed to this?”

“Because I know he really cares about you, and you don’t feel the same way about him.”

I put down my cards and gave her a hard look. “Have you and Jess been talking?”

“No, and don’t you think that’s the last person I’d talk to?”

“I had the same conversation with her the other day.”

Elizabeth sighed. “Tyler is a good man, and he doesn’t deserve this. And if we are all having the same conversation with you, then maybe there’s something to it.”

I groaned. “Do you honestly think I’m going back to Devin?”

“I don’t know, but what I do know is that you still love him.”

“And like I told Jess, I’m not putting my life on hold. Devin and I are finished. Can we talk about something else?”

We watched the news. More freezing rain was forecasted and another storm. I couldn’t quell the churning in my stomach. I wished I were somewhere else, and I hated being trapped with no escape. This wasn’t a time when I could simply hop on a plane and fly to any destination on earth. There was no chance of leaving now.

By evening, the bridges were closed, the airport was closed, businesses shut down, and more and more people ate dinner in the cold and the dark. When Tyler returned from his

shift, I could see the strain on his face. He didn't want to stay when Elizabeth invited him in for dinner. He was too exhausted from a long day trying to comfort and reassure people. As we slowly drove back to his house on the mostly deserted streets, it rained.

The power still hadn't been restored across the street, though thankfully Tyler's side still had its power. He ate dinner while I kept him company, since I'd eaten at Cecilia's. He looked as if the blood had been drained from his face, and he said very little. I stared at his hands. They were large with bulging veins. His fingers were long, and I wondered what they would feel like touching my skin. I quickly wiped the image from my mind.

"You haven't said much about your day."

"It wasn't a very good one. I didn't want to drag you down."

"I don't want to be left in the dark either. Pardon the pun."

He didn't find the comment humorous. "You don't know how many people were flooding the malls today. There were parents with screaming children just trying to stay warm. The whole time I thought if the power goes out here, there is going to be mayhem. And then I heard a few rumors about the water-processing plants. One has already lost electricity. If the other two go down, what the hell is going to happen? What if there is a major fire? People are going to die. Backup generators can only last so long."

I'd regretted asking.

"Did you buy a lot of water?" he asked.

"I bought some from Harvest. I couldn't carry much."

"A lot of the grocery stores have been cleaned out. I looked around after my shift, but it was no use. I'm going to start an emergency supply of food. Maybe we should drive over to your place and see what we can get."

What was normally a fifteen-minute drive took two hours. Fallen trees and abandoned cars littered the streets. As we walked through the halls of my building, I learned that my old

building had somehow been spared and had power. We began to pack up food and anything else useful. As it neared midnight, Tyler suggested we stay at my place that night.

I checked my phone for messages. Two from Jess. I'd call her later. There was also a message from Rafe, saying he wanted to talk to me as soon as possible. It was too late to call him.

I found Tyler sitting on the sofa looking over Devin's papers, which I'd left out. I panicked. "What are you doing?" I asked calmly, but the strain in my voice was evident. What he was looking at was none of his business.

"Sorry, I saw this on your coffee table and wondered what it was."

"Devin's lawyer sent it," I said, putting the financial statements back in the manila envelope.

"I don't want you to think I was snooping."

"I didn't," I said, angry with myself for leaving such sensitive material in plain sight.

We went to bed, but I didn't fall asleep right away. Tyler was beyond exhausted and was quietly snoring. An hour later, I woke up freezing. The power was out again. I slipped out of bed to check on things: whether the windows were still shut up tight or whether any light was coming in from other buildings. The block was dark and silent.

I got back into bed, regretting my excursion through the loft. I was an icicle, and I lay there trying not to shiver. No amount of clothes or blankets was going to warm me. Tyler sat up in bed, and I could make out his silhouette. He took off the sweater he had been wearing and the shirt underneath.

"Take off your clothes," he said in the darkness of the night.

"What?" I asked nervously.

"Body heat, that's the only way we will stay warm."

I'd do anything to stay warm. I shed my clothes until I was only in my bra and panties. He slid his arms around me, and

his body was warm against mine. I continued to shiver for a few moments, but soon I was warm.

“Sorry that my hands and feet are so cold,” I said.

The first thing I’d noticed was how nice he smelled. The fresh scent of soap mixed in with his fabulous cologne. His skin was soft and his body hard. Few men could look the way he did.

Our faces were inches apart, and I could lightly feel his breath on my cheek. I knew he was awake, and I wished I could see his face and his steel-blue eyes. Without him I wasn’t sure I would have survived the past few days. He’d known what to do at every moment, and he’d taken care of me.

“Are you awake?” I asked in the stillness of the night.

“Yes.”

I brought my hand to touch his face. I caressed his cheek, and the movement made him shudder. Was this what a man did when he truly loved a woman? Did he shake when I touched him, or was it the coldness of the room?

I kissed his lips and felt his body tense. He returned the kiss. I explored his body with my hands and lips and felt him quiver with each movement. We made love in the blackness. It was slow and deliberate. Safe. Not too exciting, but of course, we were both exhausted. And when he held me in his arms as the night turned into dawn, I wondered if what I’d done was wrong. With his arms securely around me, as if I’d fly away at any moment, I stared out the window wondering what Devin Flynn was doing at that very moment.

Chapter Forty-Three

Luna

Power was back on the next morning, and I insisted Tyler go to work and leave me at the loft. He knew it would be a long day and was anxious about leaving me alone, but I had insisted. There was business to attend to, and I needed to contact Rafe about the upcoming season. I still hadn't decided what part I was going to take. Rafe didn't always need me on-site even though that was where he wanted me.

With my phone fully charged, I went through all my texts. A few from Jess, a couple from Mom, and a few from Devin wondering if I was all right. I wasn't sure I wanted to respond, but ultimately, I sent a generic text to tell him I was okay. In my order of return calls, Mom was first.

"Hi, Mom. I got your texts, and I see that you tried to call."

"How could you not tell me he had a daughter," Mom screamed into the phone.

I was taken aback. "Daughter?" Suddenly it all seemed to come together. How had Mom heard about Paige? My heart began to pound. "How did you find out?"

"It's all over the tabloids. They are claiming you left him because of the little girl."

I massaged my temples. There was only one person who could have released the information. "It wasn't about Paige," I said, just above a whisper.

"You knew? How could you keep that from me?"

“He didn’t want anyone to know.” And frankly, it wasn’t Mom’s business.

“Why not?”

“He’s not in her life, that’s why.”

“He should be ashamed of himself. How old is this girl?”

“She’s four.” Or was she five now?

“You shouldn’t keep these things from me. Why did you do this?”

“Because I knew you would be disappointed. It was clear how much you didn’t like him.”

“Can you blame me? You couldn’t have chosen a worse man.”

“I can’t do anything right, can I?” I said bitterly. “I can’t make you happy no matter how hard I try. Well, I’m sorry to have embarrassed you, Mom, yet again.”

She softened a bit at my outburst. “Don’t get so upset.”

“Too late, I’m upset. I’m a screwup. Are you happy now? I should have told you what a louse the man I married was.”

“Enough, Luna.”

“Yes, enough. I have to go.” I was sobbing. Mom had always been able to get to me like no other. Compounded with everything going on around me, it was too much. I regained my composure and splashed some cold water on my face. I worked on some paperwork Rafe had sent me. It would be a whole new year for Perez. With the influx of Wheaton money and connections now that Alexander had agreed to buy my uncle’s third of the team, I knew what Rafe was thinking. The team would finally be a contender. Sure, there were changes to be made. Wheaton suggested a change in the team livery from forest green to blue. I thought that was a great idea. The team was semi-based in California, why not blue?

Rafe was opposed at first. Green had always been associated with our father, but Rafe came around. The royal blue was an eye-catching color, and I pointed out to Rafe that

Dad had only chosen green because Enrique Diaz was the more established racer at the time, and he had already adopted blue as his color.

I called Rafe in Spain. He was sitting on the beach with the children, and I envied him. He was enjoying the heat while I wondered if I would ever make it out of Montreal alive.

“How’s the weather?”

“You haven’t heard?”

“No, what?”

“The city is paralyzed with some sort of ice storm. It’s rained every day since Monday. The electricity comes and goes, and last night there was no heat at all, but besides that, it’s fantastic. How about you?” I asked sarcastically.

“Balmy.”

“So, what can I do for you, Rafe?”

“I need you February fifth. We are revealing the new cars that day.”

“You can have a few days. If I can ever get out of here, that is.”

“Then we need you in Australia and definitely the California and Dallas race.”

“Rafe, I’ve been thinking ...” Damn, this was going to be hard. “I don’t want to be involved this year.”

Silence stretched between us. “What’s Flynn done now?”

“Nothing. It would just be too uncomfortable.”

“I can’t do this alone,” Rafe said. “With Roberto gone, I can’t take on Wheaton alone. I’m glad to have him on board, but without you, me and Pedro will be dressed in suits with fluffy collars and all that shit. I need you, Luna. Can’t you put your differences with Flynn aside?”

“I need some more time; that’s all I’m asking. Why don’t we compromise? I’ll be there in California and Dallas, but not

Australia. And if all goes well, I'll be back in Montreal and I'll be around for good after that."

I heard Rafe sigh on the other end of the line. "Montreal? That's not until June."

"I need that time, Rafe. I really do."

"Fine, but you'll be back in Montreal for good?"

"Yes, it's a promise. Have you seen the papers this morning?" I asked, changing the subject.

"No, but Mom called. You should have said something."

"I'm divorcing him; isn't that good enough?"

"Apparently not."

I played telephone tag with Jess and opted for a text instead. I had a feeling all her calls and texts had to do with the Paige news coming out. That made me think of Devin. Erich should have never revealed Paige's existence. I was angry with him for continuing the vendetta he had against Devin. I felt more sorry for Paige than I did for Devin. At least the little girl could have lived her life not knowing who her father was, but accepting that he wanted nothing to do with her—now the whole world knew he was an absentee father, and she would have to face that knowledge in the public eye. What Erich had done was cruel.

I phoned Devin next. I wanted that call out of the way before Tyler came back. Every time Devin's name would come up, there was an expression on Tyler's face that let me know his displeasure, but he tried to mask it. He wanted to appear open about the topic of my husband, but I could sense he loathed Devin just as much as Devin loathed him.

Devin answered the phone, sounding tired.

"Hi, it's me," I said nervously. "Did I wake you?"

"It's eight thirty in the evening; why would I be sleeping?" he said, his voice slurred just a bit.

How long had he been drinking? "Excuse me, I mistook a tired voice for a drunk one."

He feigned laughter. “What do you want?”

“What do *you* want? You left several messages.”

“You fell off the fucking face of the earth,” he said angrily. “I heard about this storm, and I wanted to make sure you were okay.”

“I’m alive and kicking.” I paused for a moment. “I heard about Paige.”

“Riedl again,” he spat. “The man won’t sleep until I have nothing.”

“That shouldn’t be anytime soon. I saw the statements you sent. Maybe I shouldn’t divorce you. We could make a lot of money together.”

“Always taking the wrong fucking spin, aren’t you?” he said.

I could hear him drinking while he was talking to me.

“Are you drinking alone?”

“Is there any better company?”

I sighed. “I’m sorry about Paige.”

“You should be sorry about Riedl. If I get my chance ...”

“Don’t even say it,” I warned.

“I’d be world-famous, wouldn’t I?” he said with a sinister laugh.

“Why can’t you put this behind you?”

“Like you have? How is the officer anyway?”

I fell silent. How did he know? I took a moment too long and he commented, “Struck a nerve, have I?”

“Who told you?”

“A little birdie.”

Elizabeth. “We’re just friends.”

“Is that where you were last night?”

“None of your business,” I said defensively.

“Is he a good fuck? Surely not as good as me.”

“Why do you have to be this way?”

“Why not? Why do I need to be nice? Are you fucking him or not?”

“What difference does it make?”

“Am I better?” he asked in a challenging voice. “Of course I am. I could always make you scream.”

“I’m not having this conversation with you anymore.”

“Sure, fine. Say hi to the cop for me. I can replace you, too, Luna.”

“Why don’t you,” I said, my voice rising. “Fuck whomever you want. Maybe you can dupe some other rich girl, and if I’m lucky, you’ll fall in love with her, too, and I use that term loosely. Maybe then, and only then, you will give me a divorce!”

“Don’t hold your breath, Perez.”

“Fuck you,” I said, slamming down my phone. I was furious, and my body was shaking from anger. He knew how to set me off, and someone had given him the information to do it with. Elizabeth had some explaining to do.

Chapter Forty-Four

Devin

Riedl outing Paige didn't bother me. In fact, the asshole had done me a favor. I didn't care that the world knew I had a daughter. Would I have liked to do it on my terms? Sure. But where Riedl saw an opportunity to damage my reputation, I saw one to redeem it. I put Gemma on it right away, and she had a few reporters wanting a scoop. With Nat's blessing, I did a sit-down with one of the few English reporters I liked. Within days, the article was all over the internet, complete with pictures of me and Paige. Nat had opted to not be involved.

On the subject of Nat and Paige, we'd made the decision to tell her I was her dad. I'd been spending at least one full day a week with her, sometimes even on my own. I'd also taken her to all her swim lessons and preschool. If all the other parents had caught on that I was her dad, none of them let on, and while they could have spilled the beans, I was certain it was Riedl.

We took Paige to her favorite park where she ran wild on all the play structures while Nat and I watched. We'd let her play a while and then have a picnic where we'd make the big reveal. I'd be lying if I didn't say I was nervous. I thought about this as Paige chased one of the boys up and down the slide. Would she reject me? I so rarely had females turn me down.

"How are things going with the divorce?" Nat asked.

"I'm stalling. But I have bigger problems. Luna's dating someone."

Nat's blue eyes narrowed. "Already? *Pfft*. Total rebound. Don't worry about it."

I smiled. No matter what happened between us, she'd always have a piece of my heart, but our lives had gone in two different directions, and I'd been a total shit to her. I didn't deserve her friendship now. "You think so?"

She patted my hand. "From what I could tell, she was madly in love with you. And right now she's feeling hurt and confused. I'm sure seeing that video was a gut-punch. So when you get the entire set of videos, I think she's going to come around. This new guy will be history."

"I hope so. How about you? Still dating your bloke?"

Her face lit up in an instant. "Yup. He's a great guy, and he's so good with Paige. I can't be sure, but I think he's going to pop the question."

"I'm happy for you."

"And I'm happy that you finally decided to be in Paige's life. She'll be blessed with two dads."

We let her play for a little longer, then I went to collect her for our picnic. Nat had packed all her favorites, and Paige munched on her peanut butter and banana sandwich while I devoured the ham and cheese.

"Mummy and Devin want to talk to you about something," Nat said.

Paige looked at us both with her big green eyes. She nodded as she took another bite of her sandwich. Apparently, the kid could live on peanut butter and banana sandwiches if Nat let her.

"So, I'm sure you've noticed that Devin has been spending a lot more time with us. Isn't that nice?"

"Yeah. He's okay."

The kid ate with her mouth full, and it was adorable. As for me being just "okay," I'd take it.

“And you know that Granny and Grandad are Devin’s parents.”

She nodded and ate more of her sandwich.

“Do you know what that makes Devin?”

“My daddy. I heard Granny say that to Grandad a few times.”

Holy shit. The stinker knew all along? Nat’s blue eyes opened wide at the revelation. “Right. Have you known that for a long time?”

“I don’t know. Can I have some pie?”

Nat seemed a bit frazzled as she pulled out some apple pie and gave Paige a small piece. Paige washed it down with some apple juice that Nat watered down. Something about Paige consuming too much sugar.

“Do you understand what that means, sweetie? That he’s your dad?”

“Yeah. He just doesn’t live with us like most dads. But Emma’s dad doesn’t live with her.”

Who the hell was Emma?

“And that’s okay,” Nat said. “But Devin wants to spend lots of time with you. More time than he spends now. Is that okay?”

She looked at me and pursed her lips. “That’s okay. He buys me sweets and toys.”

Nat shot me a look and I smiled sheepishly. The kid had some serious loose lips. I’d have to remember that in the future.

“He’s also going to be someone you have to listen to because all kids listen to their dads. So if he tells you that you can’t do something, you have to listen. Okay?”

She nodded.

Nat was being a downer, but I realized I couldn’t give Paige what she wanted all the time. I’d have to research this

whole parenting gig.

“That means that while we are going to have fun, sometimes we have to do things we don’t like, you know, naps. Or cleaning up your toys. Stuff like that,” I said, because I couldn’t think of anything else.

“Okay,” she said, and finished her pie. “Can I go play again?”

“You can, but take it easy,” I said. “You just ate.”

That seemed to impress Nat because she was beaming. “Welcome to parenting, Dev. I think you’re going to get the hang of it.”

* * *

Barlow team meetings meant I couldn’t see as much of Paige as I wanted to, but Nat and I made a schedule of when I could pick her up from preschool and when I could take her to swim classes. I put all the reminders in my phone because I wasn’t going to miss even one obligation. Nat would have my balls if I did.

The nice thing about racing for Barlow was that team HQ was in England, and that kept me close to Paige and the rest of my family. It also kept me close to Gemma, and she had news for me. I met her at her office where she shared tea and cookies. She always had both on hand.

“I scored you some sweet endorsement deals I’d like you to look over.”

She handed me some papers I’d review later.

“Anything on Enzo?”

She sipped her tea and set her cup down in a flurry. “I do have some news. Just talked to Gloria this morning. She’s fairly sure she can get him on some ethics charges. I mean, clearly he was contracted to work for you and was working with your enemy behind your back. I can’t see how his license

won't be revoked, and from there, anyone would be nuts to work with him."

I shook my head in confusion. "I don't get it. Why risk it all?"

"Could be a few things," Gemma said, snatching another sugar cookie. "He probably didn't think you'd figure it out, which is supremely stupid on his part. Maybe he thought he'd covered his bases with strong enough lies. Again, major miscalculation."

"What about the footage?"

Gemma pushed her cup away and wrinkled her nose. "Well, now, there's the rub. He hasn't helped us with that yet, but I'm thinking if we squeeze him hard enough and threaten all his future livelihood, maybe we can get him to crack."

"I sense a 'but' coming."

"Right, there is a but. It would require you giving a bit too. Say, letting him off the hook?"

I wanted to crush him like a bug, so letting him off the hook wasn't in the cards. But if it won me Luna back, it would be worth it.

"When you say 'letting him off the hook,' how off the hook are we talking?"

"Probably completely."

I pondered this for a moment. "Okay, I'd consider it on one condition: I want his brand-new Ferrari."

So I could crush it right before his eyes.

Chapter Forty-Five

Luna

Devin's charms had obviously won over Elizabeth, and I was having no more of it. I was still fuming when Tyler returned to my loft sometime after nine that evening. He looked haggard. I'd been waiting for him by candlelight. Once again, my power had gone out, and I feared it was for good. Tyler hadn't changed from his uniform and hurried me out the door.

"We need supplies," he said.

"What sort of supplies?" I asked, putting on my gloves and braving the sidewalk outside.

"Water, lots of water. We should also get some propane, matches, and food. Whatever we can find."

He sounded ominous. "What do you know?" I asked.

"A second water-processing plant has lost electricity, and the third could go down any second. The city is setting up shelters, and they are going to call in the military as soon as possible. Hospitals are overrun. Luna, this is not good, and I want us to be protected."

The word "us" stuck out. I smiled as we drove to the nearest hardware store.

"Why are you smiling?" he asked, smiling himself. The last few days had left nothing to be happy about.

"Nothing," I said with a giggle.

"Come on, tell me."

“You said ‘us.’”

“So?”

“It means *us*.”

He arched his brow in confusion. “I know.”

“As long as you know. You can’t just throw around words like that.”

“Believe me, I don’t.”

The hardware store was a zoo. People were crowded like wolves around fresh meat, and that fresh meat happened to be supplies. Tyler grabbed some small propane cans and handed them to me. He also found some kerosene for a lamp he had. Our next stop was the grocery store. The store had water, but was limiting quantities, so we bought what we could and returned to his house.

“I might get called into work tomorrow,” he said as we ate dinner. It was nearing midnight, and once again we were plunged in darkness. Tyler lit his kerosene lamp while I placed strategic candles all around the house. His power came on and off throughout the day and night, but when it did go out, the house would quickly cool, and it was cold now. I watched him eat. He was so different from Devin. Instead of beer and potato chips for dinner, Tyler carefully planned out his meals. Although he had to rely on a different diet for the time being, he still managed to mix together raw vegetables and make an interesting salad.

I poured some of the bottled water and grabbed a banana. Some of the fruit I had bought at Harvest was starting to bruise and overripen. The banana peel had started to brown. As I ate, I wondered what would have happened if I were stuck with Devin and not Tyler. He would have panicked without electricity. He couldn’t let a moment go by without his television. The cold would drive him insane and a banana that was browning? He would rather starve.

He finished his salad and washed the bowl. He kept an immaculate house. There was nothing out of place even though it had a bachelor appeal. The furniture was the bare

minimum, and there were very few pictures around the house with the exception of one photo of his niece and nephew. There were a few football trophies from his high school days and a photo of his graduation from the police academy. I was looking at a piece of artwork on top of the television. It looked Indigenous.

“My sister gave that to me for Christmas,” he said, coming up behind me and putting his arms around my waist.

“It’s different.”

“It’s not my usual style, but she gave it to me, so I feel compelled to display it. I think she’s trying to make me more interesting.”

I turned and put my arms around his neck. I had to stand on tiptoes just to reach his lips. I always had to initiate the kiss; he wasn’t bold in that respect. He *was* quick to return the kiss.

“Tyler, what is happening here?”

“I don’t know.”

“I should be honest with you because you deserve that. I don’t want to rush into anything serious, but I care for you a lot. But if Devin gets his way, I could be legally bound to him for a while. I want you to know all this.”

“I know,” he said, tracing one of his fingers along my cheek. Maybe we didn’t have to figure it all out right now.

The lights came on for an hour and went down again. During the night I could hear the sounds of cracking and tumbling trees falling to their deaths. It was another cold night, and we used our bodies to stay warm. Again, we made love, and I finally admitted to myself that there wasn’t the same spark I felt with Devin, but I quickly pushed those thoughts from my head. It would come with time, wouldn’t it?

* * *

Black Friday arrived, and not the shopping kind. The temperature climbed above freezing, which led to rain again. We braved the drive out to Tyler's parents' place. He wanted to be sure they were all right, and he once again said he'd rather me be with someone than alone. I tried to see that for the kind gesture it was and not be irritated.

Occasionally, it would snow and then rain some more. Tyler watched the weather anxiously, waiting for a call to come down to work. The call finally came midmorning. Any stores that managed to remain open were inundated with people searching for basic necessities. Tyler was required to maintain order especially since there were fears that the third water-processing plant was going to give out at any moment. He and other officers were sent to secure supplies for shelters that were being set up throughout the city.

I played board games with Devin's parents, enjoying the relaxed vibe despite the stressful storm. I couldn't think of any two other people who had been married for so long and were still so fun-loving. Mom and Tony, maybe, but there was still some kind of fight every other day in Cortese. I felt my body release some of the tension it had been holding.

Later, I retreated to Tyler's old bedroom and called Elizabeth. "Did Devin call you?"

"No," she said in a hitched voice.

"Let me rephrase. *When* did he call?"

Elizabeth sighed. "How did I get myself involved in this?"

"When he calls, hang up on him," I said angrily. "Why did you tell him about Tyler?"

"It slipped out. I didn't mean it."

"Next time, please don't talk to him."

"I won't. I promise. I'm staying out of this."

Claudia called down the hall, asking if I wanted tea. I called back a no-thanks.

"Who was that?" Elizabeth asked, her tone shrewd. "Was that *Tyler's mother*?"

I winced. “That was something else I wanted to talk to you about,” I said, feeling my cheeks blush. “Tyler and I have gotten closer.”

Elizabeth gasped. “You had sex!”

I listened down the hall, but his mom wasn’t there. “Twice, actually.”

“Really?” Elizabeth said with astonishment. “The two of you are moving awfully fast.”

“Do you think so?”

“Hell yes!”

At least this time she’d dropped all the judgment. “It was one of those times in your life when you know it’s right.”

“I’m going to ask you something Jess would ask. How was he?”

“It was nice.”

Elizabeth’s brow furrowed. “Nice? That’s all?”

I shrugged.

“If I remember correctly, you described sex with Devin as mind-blowing, the most unbelievable experience you’ve ever had. You said that he did things to your body that you had never imagined before and made you feel like screaming from every rooftop. But Tyler was nice. I guess that’s good.”

“You’re being facetious.”

“That’s the way you described Devin.”

“When it comes to sex, Devin is a seasoned veteran.”

“Tyler was a virgin?” Elizabeth asked in a mocking voice.

“I’m not suggesting that. I’m simply saying that Tyler seems more vanilla.”

“Don’t tell me what Devin was.”

I hunched over on the twin bed as if there were thousands of people in the room ready to overhear the conversation. “Devin is the type of lover to wake you up in the middle of the

night, find your most vulnerable spot, and work it to his advantage. It didn't matter, day or night, with one touch, he could make me melt. And we did things I would never have imagined doing, but Devin made it seem so right. Tyler is just more ordinary. And that's okay!"

I could practically hear Elizabeth wrinkle her nose. "That is not a ringing endorsement."

"I know, but it will get better." Wouldn't it?

Chapter Forty-Six

Luna

Montreal began to wake up from the ice storm on Saturday. Sunshine. A welcome sight. It gave people hope after so many days of darkness. With the military's support, bulldozers began to come down streets, taking away fallen trees and trying to restore power as quickly as possible. I could imagine Devin laughing at the idea that all Canada's military was good for was tree removal.

Slowly, life was going back to normal. But there was a price. People had died, property was damaged, and some people still had no power. Everywhere I went, I saw the damage. I'd seen the photos of mangled steel power lines, as if the hand of God had come down and pounded it with His own fist.

I tried to explain the extent of the damage to people who rarely if ever had seen snow. Eva and the boys listened in awe as I related the stories of ice one foot thick and trees bending beyond their capacity and snapping like twigs from the pressure. I texted photographs that kept the boys entertained. Eva sent back photos of her and the boys—my brother included—and she looked good at five months pregnant. I could barely spot a bump.

Eva had told me it was the most beautiful experience of her life. I listened, feeling a tug at my heart. If all had gone well with Devin, I would have thought of children in a few years, maybe even sooner. I would have insisted on having Paige in our lives, but now that seemed so far away, like another life.

Speaking to Eva and Rafe reminded me that I had work to get back to. Alexander Wheaton had organized a huge party for the unveiling of the new cars, and that meant an escape from the storm and its remnants. I flew to New York, where Alexander's headquarters were, and where he wanted to make a splash with the unveiling of the cars. I felt a little bad escaping the carnage of Montreal, but also relieved. I was free for a while.

Alexander had designed an outfit for me that I tried on that first day in New York. I'd also seen the cars for the first time, and the royal blue looked sleek and impressive. The color was the darker blue of the American flag.

As we drove to the unveiling the next day, to the warehouse that had been transformed into a hall to house the party, I was shocked to realize how much I missed this. Maybe I didn't hate it so much, and now with the huge American car manufacturer Lewis supplying engines, another Wheaton coup, Perez was in a position to challenge the top three teams.

I kept a low profile at the unveiling of the cars, leaving the spotlight to Rafe and Alexander. He was taking a hands-on approach, and whenever his schedule permitted, he planned on being at the track to see his "kids." He even purchased a motorhome to entertain VIPs.

The Perez team was now one-third his, and he was clearly loving every moment. I hoped he and Rafe wouldn't clash. Rafe was the type of man who shied away from the spotlight, but who wanted to keep control for himself. I wondered for the first time if that was why he'd wanted me there. His quiet sister, backing his moves. Now that I was taking more of a back seat, Rafe would be required for more public appearances and schmoozing with sponsors—not his strong suit—at least until I came back full time.

Following the unveiling, I flew back to Montreal. The city had finally begun to recover, but one last blast of winter gripped the city before relenting for spring. It would be a year that many would want to put behind them, me included. And before I knew it, it was my twenty-sixth birthday. This had been the rockiest year of my life since my father had died.

Tyler took me to a quiet French restaurant for dinner, followed by a romantic evening at my loft, complete with chocolate fondue and a cheesy rom-com movie. I was getting used to the fact that Tyler wasn't Devin. He didn't have the same wit that challenged me to come up with better one liners than Devin. Tyler was a more sedate person and serious person. He wasn't the type to make me laugh. Tyler was predictable, while Devin was spontaneous. They were so different, and I couldn't help but notice how obvious it was. But it was okay because it had to be. Even though my heart kept telling me he wasn't right for me, my brain tried to convince me he was good enough. But he shouldn't have been just good enough, and if I didn't figure out what I wanted, then I had some tough decisions to make.

* * *

I had Tyler over for a movie, and this time I'd picked it. It was a Fredrico Fellini film that I'd always wanted to see, *La Strada*. It was obvious that Tyler was not overwhelmed by the choice, but I intended to widen his horizons, whether he wanted them widened or not. Halfway through the movie, my phone trilled. I considered not answering it, but the incessant ringing and chimes from texts was interrupting the movie.

"Hello," I said annoyed.

There was a pause. Why hadn't I checked the caller ID? Was this just another spam call I was about to hang up on? But then there was a voice—Devin's voice.

"Luna," he said quietly.

Oh damn. I could kick myself for answering. What new drama did Devin have going on now. "Yes," I said impatiently. I wasn't in the mood for another argument with a drunken Devin.

"My grandmother is dead," he said in a whisper.

I jumped out of my seat and left the living room and went to sit in the bedroom. I was stunned by Devin's words and

wanted to be alone to process them. I sat on my bed as my eyes welled with tears.

“What happened?”

“We don’t know for sure,” he said, his voice breaking.

“When did it happen?” I asked. My heart was breaking at the thought that Ruth was gone.

“This morning. Her caregiver found her. She passed peacefully in her sleep.”

“Not Ruth,” I said, feeling every inch of my body grow heavy with grief.

“I wanted you to know,” he said sadly. “She liked you a lot.”

“I liked her a lot. When is the funeral?”

“We’re still working out all the details, but we think in four days.”

“I’m going to come,” I said, surprising myself.

“You don’t have to. My family would understand if you didn’t, considering the circumstances.”

“No, I need to come. She meant a lot to me. I’ll book a flight right now.” I paused for a moment. “How are you doing?” It seemed like the right thing to ask.

“I’m okay. This didn’t come as a big surprise. She’d been declining the last few months, and she’d agreed to go to a care home, but you’re never prepared, you know?”

“I’m sorry, Devin.”

“I know you are. Text me with your flight arrangements. I’ll come to get you from the airport.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

“Just being there will be enough.”

When I hung up, Tyler was standing in the doorway to my room.

“Bad news?” he asked.

“It was Devin. His grandmother died.”

Tyler was nodding, but I knew he didn't understand. “Did I hear you say you're going?”

“It's Ruth, and she was always good to me. I have to go.”

Tyler's jaw tensed. “Whenever Devin calls, you go running. How does he continue to suck you in?”

His statement took me aback. “This is different. His grandmother died, someone I knew and liked a lot. This isn't about Devin. It's about Ruth.”

“No, Luna, it's all the same.”

Was this going to be my first fight with Tyler? Because I wasn't about to back down. “As much as you think it's the same, Ruth was a wonderful woman who always treated me with respect. And that has nothing to do with Devin. I'm paying my respects. Period. I'm not sure what you don't understand.”

He huffed. “Listen, I'm going to leave before I say something I regret.”

“I think that's a great idea. And I'm not going to stop you.”

Chapter Forty-Seven

Luna

I was lucky to get a flight out two days later. Travel was backed up considerably after the storm. I arrived at Heathrow shortly after nine in the evening. Devin was there to pick me up. He was wearing an old baseball cap and trying to blend in with the crowd. I'd easily picked him out because, to me, he was unmistakable. I walked to him and hugged him tightly, and I didn't care who saw it. He made a valiant attempt to appear strong. He even smiled when I gave his hand a squeeze.

"You're doing okay?"

"I've been better."

"I'm so sorry. I loved Ruth."

He nodded. "We should drive to Sheffield tonight," he said solemnly. He hadn't shaved in a few days, and there was stubble on his face.

"That's fine," I said. I was tired from all the travel.

"I booked you a room at a hotel. I thought you would be most happy there."

"Yes, thank you. Is there anything I can do?"

"Coming was enough. You made my dad really happy."

I noted that he didn't mention his mom. "How did Ruth die?" I asked.

"Another stroke in the middle of the night. At least that's what the doctor thinks. She's likely right."

“And you’re sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine.”

“Where are you staying?”

“With my parents.”

We reached the hotel just before midnight. Devin helped me up to my room. He placed my bags down on the floor and let out a deep breath. “A car will come get you in the morning.”

We stared at each other. He looked as if he had been up for days. I wanted to comfort him, but I remained motionless. It seemed like the safe thing to do; otherwise, I’d be asking him to spend the night. “Do you want to talk?” I asked.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. His eyes were glistening with tears, and I knew I was about to cry too.

“I don’t want you to think I can’t be a shoulder for you to lean on,” I said.

He hunched and exhaled a breath that seemed to come from deep within him. “Why is all this shit happening to me?”

I walked toward him and hugged him. He returned the embrace, as if he were allowing me to absorb all his sorrow.

“My grandmother was the only one who really understood me.”

“She may be gone from here, but her spirit is all around you,” I said.

He gave me a look that said it was all bullshit and he didn’t believe a word. “I should go.”

I’d never seen him so vulnerable. I wanted to be a crutch for him, but I still didn’t trust myself. Instead, I kept a careful distance.

“You’ve always been strong, Devin. You’ll get through this.”

“My parents are waiting for me. I’ll see you in the morning.”

I watched him leave and wished I could have helped more.

* * *

The next morning I ate breakfast in my room. I wondered who would pick me up and what my role was. Likely nothing, if Maureen had her way. I had called Jess earlier and asked her what the protocol was when you were the separated wife of the bereaved grandson.

“It depends on your relationship with the family and the relationship with the separated spouse. In your case, I think Devin would probably rather have you by his side,” she’d said.

“But his mom wouldn’t.”

“His mom can fuck off.”

I loved Jess.

There was a knock at the door. I opened it and found Devin standing there dressed in a dark suit. There were bruised circles under his eyes, and his skin looked paler than usual. He was clean-shaven, which made him look washed-out. He attempted to smile, but his face would not cooperate.

“I didn’t expect you to pick me up,” I said, grabbing my coat and purse.

“You’re sitting with me and my sisters,” he said quietly. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all.”

We walked toward the limousine that was waiting outside. We drove back to the Flynn house where close family and friends had gathered before the church service. Paige and Natalie were there, and the little girl immediately ran toward me and into my arms. Natalie threw me a smile, and I smiled back. I didn’t know her all that well, but she seemed to be nice.

“Thank you for the Christmas card,” I said, balancing the little girl on my hip.

“Mummy said we wouldn’t see you at Christmas and that if I mailed it to Daddy, you would get it.”

I nearly choked. Daddy? I looked to Devin and he nodded. Just that alone made me want to cry. Had he connected with Paige? If he had, that was amazing.

“And I did. Did you get my gift?”

“Yes, thank you,” Paige said with a wide smile. She was going to be the only bright spot to the day.

Harold approached me and kissed my cheek. “Thank you for coming, dear.”

“Ruth was very dear to me,” I said.

“She loved you, and we’re happy you came.”

“How are you holding up?” I asked, setting Paige down on the ground. The little girl found some toys to occupy herself.

“Not too badly. I can’t say the same for Devin. Luna, could you do me one favor today?”

“Anything at all.”

“Watch him; don’t let him drink too much.”

I frowned. “Is his drinking becoming a problem?” I asked in a hushed tone. Devin was standing at the other end of the house talking to his sister Gwen.

“I don’t know, but the boy is worrying his mother and me. Every time I talk to him he’s on his way to a pub or coming back from one. This isn’t like his partying days before he met you. This whole divorce is taking the life out of him. Compounded with losing his seat at Russo and then his grandmother ... it’s all begun to weigh him down.”

“I’ll keep my eye on him, but I don’t think I can help beyond today.”

“Let me worry about tomorrow; you just take care of him today.”

Shortly after my conversation with Harold, I climbed into a limousine with Devin. His parents and two sisters were in a

separate limousine. As we drove to the church, I watched Devin as he sat across from me. He would look out the window and seemed lost in thought. Other times he would stare down at his hands or feet, his back hunched as if he were carrying a heavy burden. A frown was etched on his face. I reached out and grasped both of his hands into mine.

“I’m here for you,” I said, staring at his downcast head.

He nodded but said nothing. I reached out to touch his face. I placed my fingers under his chin and made him look at me. “What can I do?” I asked.

“Nothing,” he whispered back.

“You were my best friend, Devin. Don’t you trust me?”

“Of course I do,” he said, looking away from me. “But you can’t be here for me because you’re leaving tomorrow. Why should I lean on you when you’re set to jet off the first chance you have?”

“It has to be that way.” I paused for a moment. “Paige called you daddy.”

He smiled then. “Yeah, Nat and I have been working on me being a proper father to her. She’s a good kid, and I finally realized that.”

“I’m glad. And you’re right, she’s a good kid.”

During the service, I sat at the end of the family pew with Devin to my right. He sobbed through much of the service and sought solace from his older sister, Victoria. I remained stoic even though I was feeling hurt and wounded inside. The simple fact that Devin wasn’t depending on me in his time of need left me feeling a void. As much as he had put me through, I still wanted to be his support, and he was rebuffing me the way I had rejected him so many times before.

And then it occurred to me that I wasn’t being fair, and that Devin didn’t owe me a thing. I had left him, so why should he rely on me. And that got me thinking even more. Why was I here? Maybe Tyler was right. But then I thought of Ruth. No, I was here for her. Screw everyone else.

After the wake at his parents' house, I said what I thought would be final goodbyes to the Flynn family—hugs from Harold, Paige, and even Nat, polite smiles from Devin's sisters, a chilly stare from Maureen—and Devin drove me back to the hotel.

“Are you going to Australia?” he asked. He had broken a silence that had been lingering in the car since the moment we'd left his parents' house.

“I can't.”

“Why is that?” he asked.

I suspected he thought it had something to do with him, and it sort of did. “I need a break, that's all.”

“You aren't attending any races, then?”

“A few, then all the races this summer and beyond. How is Barlow coming along?” I said, thinking a change of subject was a good idea.

“It's not Russo.”

So reality had set in. That was inevitable.

“You're a good driver, you'll get on to a better team soon.”

“I hope so. The Barlow people aren't bad; they just aren't competitive.”

He drove up to the front entrance of my hotel.

“Do you want to come up?” I asked.

He shook his head. “I'd rather not,” he said, looking away from me and straight ahead.

“I'll see you next month,” I said, stepping out of the car. He'd screeched off before I'd made it through the revolving doors.

I went to my hotel room and lay in bed thinking. As hard as I tried to distance myself from Devin, I always found myself back in the fold. I saw and spoke to Devin more often than I did my own family. Even though I didn't want to admit it to myself, I felt more at ease with Devin around. He was my

safety net, someone who knew my every move and action. With Tyler, I was still trying to iron out our differences, and to see how we fit in each other's lives. It was little things about him that bothered me. I hadn't realized it at first, but he smothered me and my independence. He tried to do everything for me when I wanted so desperately to be my own person.

We were constantly together, and I hadn't been used to it. I was more accustomed to looking forward to seeing Devin when we had such limited time together. If he wasn't away testing a car or fulfilling sponsor obligations, I was halfway around the world tending to the Perez team. Tyler wanted all of my time, and I'd allowed him to have it. And once I'd given it up, how was I supposed to get it back? The ice storm had given us too much together time, and that was a huge problem.

I thought of how much I liked his family, how warmly they'd welcomed me. Spending time with them was easier than with Devin's family or even my own, sometimes. Was that part of Tyler's charm? Did I like his family more than I liked him?

I also missed Devin's dry humor. We were like two gossipers when we wanted to be. When I didn't have my friends around, I had the next best thing. Devin knew everyone's dirty laundry, and he kept nothing from me. I was amazed by the information he knew. He also considered himself a fashion and movie critic, sometimes both at the same time.

I couldn't forget his ridiculous jokes, which were never in short supply. He and his mechanics would sit around and tell stupid jokes all day long, and with Devin's impeccable memory, he would remember every single one and relay them all back to me. His memory really was astounding! He could remember things I'd said to him months before as if I'd just said the words. I got into the habit of being careful of what I said and how I said it. Long-forgotten comments could be revisited quite easily when Devin was on a role.

I looked at the clock next to my bed. It was only ten. My flight back to Montreal wasn't scheduled until two the next afternoon. I hadn't asked Devin for a ride back to London. It

was better that we parted company sooner rather than later. I wanted to get home. And back to Tyler. The sooner I put Devin behind me, the better.

A knock on the door startled me. I stumbled out of bed and walked to the door. I opened it to see Devin standing there in a pair of blue jeans, a gray polo top, and a jacket. He was staring at me intensely, and I felt as though I were shrinking under his gaze. His face was flushed, and he was agitated or nervous. I didn't know which.

"It's late. What are you doing here?"

"Either I was going to come here, or I was going to get myself as pissed as possible," he said evenly.

"I'd glad you chose to come here," I said, motioning him into the room.

Devin stepped inside and I shut the door. We both stood in the middle of the room uncomfortably. Devin tapped his foot on the floor and slowly met my stare.

"Do you love your cop?" he asked.

"Not yet."

Devin began to massage his temples. "Do you still love me?"

"I loved you before the video."

"Forget about the video."

I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "You know I do," I whispered.

He walked toward me and touched my cheek. A tear had slipped down my face and Devin wiped it away. With his other hand, he tenderly grasped the hair that had fallen over my shoulder.

"I love you too," he said, bringing my mouth to his.

I kissed him, and I knew it was wrong. We stumbled back into bed, both of us hungry for each other. We made love, and in the early hours of the morning, he woke me up, and we made love again. Every touch of his made me come alive.

How I had missed this. I held on to him for dear life, never wanting to let go but knowing it was fleeting.

There were no words exchanged, and in the morning I packed quietly so that he could sleep. He awoke as I was getting dressed, my luggage neatly placed near the door. He sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Home.”

“Home, where?”

“Montreal.”

He blinked a few times and shook his head. “What!”

I gave him a perplexed look. “You didn’t think I was going to stay, did you?”

“Yes, I did,” he said, stupefied.

I hated hurting him, but this was for the best. We both had to move on. “I told you I still loved you; it didn’t mean I was going back to you. Honestly, Devin, I have to go home.” I realized it was better for both of us if I took a cooler approach to this. Not cold, but indifferent, and doing it was a punch to the gut.

“And you think I have no scruples,” he said, hastily putting on his clothes. “Screw your brains out with your estranged husband and then go home to your little boyfriend. I wonder what he would think of that.”

“You aren’t going to tell him,” I warned.

“Why? Are you going to divorce me?” he asked, wide-eyed.

“I wish you would divorce me!”

“Luna, you just might get your wish. I don’t like who you’ve become,” he said, crossing the room and standing only inches away from me. Little did he know that I didn’t like me, either, right now. “When we met, you were this sweet girl, unassuming and tough. I immediately thought, this is the woman I have been looking for my entire life. I have never

been so in love or devoted to a woman before. Whether or not you believe it, I really don't give a fuck, because that woman is gone. A woman who uses people to her own advantage and then casts them aside has replaced her. I fell for your little game twice, but not again. I just realized something ... I don't want you back. Since we separated, I haven't had sex with anyone else. I can't say the same about you. Do you know what that makes you?"

He was about to leave, but I grabbed his arm. "You made me this way. I was good before I met you, and you made me bad!"

He shook his head. "Give me a break. I'm leaving here, and the less I see of you, the better. If all goes well, you and I should be divorced within months, and then you can go on your merry little way destroying lives and pretending to care about people. You're very good at it."

"I hate you," I said, my eyes stinging with tears as he walked toward the door.

"And I feel sorry for you."

Chapter Forty-Eight

Devin

I spent a lot of time with Paige, but then I had to explain to her that I had to go back to work, and that would take me away for long periods of time. At first she didn't understand, but I promised that we'd talk all the time on FaceTime, and that she could call me whenever she wanted. That seemed to placate the kid a bit, until she asked me if I was taking her to swimming lessons, and I had to explain that I was halfway around the world. That ended in tears.

I was still getting used to this dad deal, but I was working on it. I had to stop giving her everything she wanted, otherwise Nat would give me shit. But how could I say no? Especially when she started to cry? I wanted to fly home that second and take her to swimming classes.

"Don't be a dolt," Nat had said. "She's playing you, and you're falling for it. You better learn to say no because I can't be the bad cop all the time."

She had a point, so I was learning. Slowly.

I couldn't help noticing that Luna wasn't at the first few races of the season. She'd missed the race in Saudia Arabia and Australia. I tried not to think about it, but the damn Perez cars were always in front of me both races. I suddenly appreciated how good a car Russo had. That bastard Riedl was going to be world champion if Lauder didn't get his shit together. But I didn't regret being off the team. No way could I have been his lackey for another year. Maybe I raced for an inferior team, but I had the freedom to find myself behind Perez cars all the time.

And on the subject of Perez, everyone had noticed how much better the team was. They'd gone from middle of the pack to a top-five team. Maybe top three. I figured that was Wheaton's doing, with all the money he'd brought in. I was glad I made Luna parade around with his shopping bags what felt like ages ago. Look where it had gotten Perez. Her brother owed it all to her.

After those first two races, we had almost a month off before the race in the United States. I went home to take Paige to swimming classes and school, and also to meet with Gemma. She kept tabs on what Gloria and the PI were up to, and that made it easier for me. As usual, we met in her office. She even had regular meetings with James, the solicitor Gloria had recommended to handle the divorce. Gemma was worth every euro I paid her.

“Anything?” I asked.

“Just Erich Riedl and Enzo Potenza wasting time. They are doing everything possible not to sit for a statement.” Gemma put on her sympathetic face as she offered me a cookie. “Have you thought of throwing in the towel? This is costing you a small fortune, and so far it hasn't gotten anywhere. I know you're passionate about getting your wife back, but I hate to see you burn through money like this.”

I didn't think Gemma was a quitter. “No, I'm not giving up. I don't care how much this costs. Once she sees the unedited footage, she'll know.” I was still bewildered and furious with Luna about her choice to go back to her boring cop, but I needed her to understand that I wasn't the bad guy here. I'd never cared more about another person's opinion of me.

She nodded and hit her fist on her desk. “You're right. Enzo really is the lowest lifeform, and I'm not saying that because I want all his clients—and I do want them. If we find out he's gone and screwed you over, I'll have his license. No one will work with him again.”

Now, that's what I wanted to hear. “If we need to get more people on this, then that's what we'll have to do.”

“You’re in good hands with Gloria on the legal front. And I’ve got some ideas on how to deal with Enzo.”

I leaned in closer to her. “And so do I.”

Her brow perked at that. “Do tell.”

I’d already run this past Gloria. I plan to let everyone know, who would listen to me—and I liked to think that was a lot of people—what Enzo had done. How he’d gone behind my back to help Riedl and likely recorded all our conversations without my consent. I’d been pondering that one for a while. Not all the audio-only bits had been recorded in the motorhome. So how had Riedl gotten hold of them?

Gloria had warned me I could get myself in trouble but stressed that what I had to say was my opinion and what I felt to be the truth, and it would be hard for Enzo to do much about it. Enzo had only two other federation drivers he managed, but he worked with guys in lower circuits and dabbled with managing football stars. That could all come crashing down if anyone thought he would betray them.

I ran down my plan with Gemma. She drummed her fingers while I spoke, and when I was done, she chuckled.

“You’re diabolical, Devin. Tell you what, not that you need the money, but if any of his clients come to me, I’ll reward you for it.”

I’d hold her to her word on that.

I drove home feeling no better or worse about my situation, but I did like the idea of sticking it to Enzo.

I kicked myself for not planning a short holiday somewhere warm when I ran up my walk through the rain. I hated how quiet the house was without Luna. I missed the music she played while she worked out, or the sound of her pattering in the kitchen. I really missed the little noises she made when she slept. A sigh here, a satisfied groan there. I was thinking about that when my phone buzzed.

Are you behind the new car that showed up in my carport?

I see my gift had arrived. I hoped Elizabeth didn't see it as my way of buying her off. She'd been nice to me, and I was simply paying it forward—or in this case, backward.

I know nothing about it.

LIAR!

I suppose I wasn't going to get this one past her. I collapsed onto my sofa and typed up my response, which was what? I'd made sure the car was practical and not too flashy. If I'd gone overboard, she wouldn't accept it, although I wasn't sure she was going to accept it now.

You've always been kind and generous with me. I wanted to return the favor. Just so you know, cars are nonrefundable.

I could see the three dots as she typed. It was taking a long time for the message to come through, or it was the longest message ever. Finally, it popped up.

First of all, how am I going to explain my new car to Luna? Also, this gift is far too expensive, and a bottle of wine and chocolates would have sufficed. I'm sure cars are refundable.

I chuckled and typed, *1. Don't explain it to Luna. 2. I was worried the bottle would break and the chocolates would melt. 3. They are not refundable.*

Seconds later, my phone trilled and Elizabeth's name popped up on the screen.

"I'm going to kill you; do you know that?"

"Save all that, and just take the car. Tell Luna you got a bonus at work and you leased the car. How will she know? Just take the gift. I want you to have it."

She grunted in frustration. "Fine. All right. I could use the new car, but please do not send anything else. I mean it. This sort of feels like payment for me giving you the tea on Luna and Tyler, and I still feel guilty about that."

"I appreciate all you've done."

She laughed sarcastically. “I’m sure you do. And you’ve already gotten me in trouble once, so don’t shoot off your mouth again.”

“I won’t. Speaking of Luna and Tyler ...”

“No, no, no. I’m out of the gossip business.”

“Come on, I just gave you a car.”

“Aha! So it is a bribe.”

I couldn’t help smiling. I liked Elizabeth a lot and could see why she was a good friend to Luna. “It’s not, but I’d still like to know.”

Elizabeth sighed and was silent for a long time. “I don’t think they are a good match, but that didn’t come from me,” she said, her voice rising for the last bit. “I think Luna’s trying to make it work as a way to get over you, and Tyler’s infatuated with her, but it’s all wrong. Look, if you can get your shit together, she’s going to come back to you.”

“I’m working on it.”

“She wants to believe you’re that good guy she fell in love with. She just needs the evidence.”

“At least I have some time,” I said. Not a lot of time, but I planned to make every damn second count.

Chapter Forty-Nine

Luna

Baxter called the day before Tyler and I were set to leave for Los Angeles. My heart plunged when I heard his voice. I knew Devin’s lawyers had contacted him and filed the appropriate papers that would allow us to have a faster divorce. My hands shook as I held the phone in my hand.

“Mr. Flynn’s lawyer called me last night,” Baxter said. “He got the go-ahead from his client to proceed, and he won’t contest any part of the divorce. We went ahead with some of the paperwork, for an official separation. You are aware that the earliest we can proceed with the divorce is December, but the legal separation is in order.”

“Right,” I asked, feeling my throat constrict. “There is something ironic about having to *stay* married longer than I wanted to *be* married.”

“Unfortunately, those are the rules. A divorce in Italy would have had even more delays. There is an upside. He’s asked for nothing, absolutely nothing, just a divorce. It can’t get more straightforward than that.”

“I appreciate the update, Baxter.”

“If anything else develops, I’ll call you.”

* * *

The race in Los Angeles would be the first time I’d seen Devin since our blowup in Sheffield. To add further insult to injury, I

knew Devin would be on the defensive, especially when he saw Tyler. And maybe it was a bad idea to bring him along. Why was I doing that? To show him off? If I were honest with myself, I'd invited him on a whim to prove to myself I'd moved on. I hadn't told him about sleeping with Devin after the funeral, and it was eating at me. I was trying to convince myself that this trip marked the real start of our relationship. No more fooling around with Devin. The times before now didn't count.

As we flew to Los Angeles, Tyler sat in the seat next to me fast asleep. I thought of the conversation I'd had with Elizabeth after returning from England. I'd been upset about what had happened between me and Devin. Not to my surprise, Elizabeth had sided with Devin.

"I'm so disappointed in you," Elizabeth had said. "I don't know what is possessing you to do all these stupid things. If you want him out of your life, you shouldn't have gone to the funeral, and you definitely should not have slept with him! And what about Tyler? If he doesn't fulfill you, let him go. This is not fair to him."

"I know, I know," I'd said, feeling an enormous sense of guilt. "I was supposed to be the one with all the morals, and Devin was supposed to be the louse. I wish I knew why I was behaving like this."

"Because you still love Devin, but you're afraid of what people might think if you go back to him. That's what it comes down to."

During that talk, I couldn't help but notice a new car she had. She hadn't mentioned anything about getting a new one, and it looked suspiciously like something Devin would pick out, minus the flash.

"When did you get that new car?"

She'd been making tea when I'd asked, which had been my first mistake. I couldn't see her reaction.

"The ice storm damaged my car, and since the loss was more than it was worth, I took the payout. I decided to get

something more reliable, and the lease was affordable.”

Her voice had changed its pitch, so I assumed it to be true. Why would Devin buy her a new car anyway?

The flight attendant came around with drinks. I asked for a glass of wine even though I probably needed a bottle. I sipped it slowly, hoping it would make me sleepy. I dreaded seeing Devin. Before England, I knew that if I ran into him, he would be courteous. Now, he had every right to be wretched to me. I also knew what he was capable of, and that was what frightened me most. He could let slip to Tyler that he and I had slept together, and maybe that was why I was wondering if having Tyler on this trip was a good idea.

There was a car at the airport to pick us up. It was late Monday evening, and I wanted to head straight to bed after not sleeping a wink on the long flight. Compounding the flight was the two-hour drive to the Perez house where we would spend the first two nights before transferring to a hotel to be closer to the track.

Rafe had much of my time accounted for, so there wasn't much relaxation in my schedule. I was to be at an autograph and photo session Wednesday to launch a new Wheaton clothing campaign featuring Rafe and Pedro. Alexander was going to take the opportunity to coax me into being in one of the ad campaigns, and I knew I couldn't refuse much longer. Alexander had been good to Perez, and I wanted to maintain the Alexander-Wheaton image.

But before that, we tried to relax at the Perez house. When Tyler met my grandmother, everything felt wrong. Tyler didn't have the same spark and charm that Devin had. My grandmother smiled at him, but I instantly knew she wasn't impressed. The language barrier was even more evident with Tyler. At least Devin would attempt to chat with my grandmother with his terrible Italian that he thought was similar to Spanish. With Eva and the kids, Tyler was on the outside, and I found myself trying to bring it all together and failing miserably.

Tuesday morning, I went to the cemetery. I didn't feel that it was appropriate to have Tyler there. Rafe offered to go to the cemetery with me, and Tyler assured me that he would keep himself busy. I didn't want to leave him alone, but he had insisted.

"You don't look yourself," Rafe said as we drove.

"Devin and I had a big blowup, and I'm not looking forward to seeing him this weekend."

"If you stay clear of the Barlow garage, you shouldn't have a problem."

Rafe seemed to have all the really helpful insight when I needed it least. "Believe me, I'm going to do that."

"And what about this Tyler person?"

"What about him?"

"How serious is it with him?"

I groaned louder than I wanted to. "Why does everyone ask me that? I don't know, Rafe. I just want to take things easy."

"So why did you bring him here? That was a pretty bold move. Everyone is going to talk about it, and if that's what you want ..."

"I'm beginning to think it was a bad idea."

"It wasn't one of your better ones. It's going to antagonize Flynn."

"At this point, everything is going to antagonize Devin."

A few people were visiting loved ones at the cemetery, but none took notice of us, which made me happy. I hated an audience. Several times I'd been to visit my father's grave and had people gawk. Some had even taken photographs! I'd found the whole thing revolting.

Rafe and I walked arm in arm to Dad's grave. There were a dozen white roses positioned neatly against the headstone that caught my eye. There was a note attached, and I took it from the bouquet.

“What are you doing?” Rafe asked.

“Who would leave a note?” I asked, opening the small envelope.

Inside were written only a few words: Marco Perez, *risposa in piace*.

I recognized the handwriting.

“Do you know who it’s from?” Rafe asked, seeing the surprised expression on my face.

“No,” I said quietly and returned the note to the bouquet.

As was customary for us, we didn’t stay long. We returned to the house, and my grandmother informed me that Tyler was out on the beach. I put on my bathing suit and joined him. He was lying on a towel, taking in the warm spring day.

“Is there any room for me?” I asked coyly.

“Lots of room,” he said, sliding over.

We enjoyed the beautiful weather by taking a swim, followed by a long walk on the beach. Tyler and I didn’t have the connection Devin and I had, but we were working on it, and our day at the beach had helped a lot. That evening, Rafe and I took Tyler out to some of the nearby attractions. It was a rare occasion that Rafe had allowed himself some leisure time. I was pretty sure it was his way of learning more about Tyler and whether he liked him.

The next morning I had the shock of my life. In one of the racing blogs with a huge following was a photograph of me and Tyler walking down the beach hand in hand. The headline splashed, “Her New Life.” I was mortified. I knew it was all the ammunition Devin would need to go berserk.

I quickly scanned the blog piece. It had gone on to say that a close friend of mine—of course, an unnamed friend—claimed that Tyler and I were deeply in love and that the moment my divorce became final, the two of us would marry. The story continued by claiming that the breakdown of my marriage had been caused by Devin’s desire to marry me for my money and the Perez name. The “friend” had been quoted

as saying he had never loved me, and he'd married me to secure a comfortable lifestyle in his later years.

"Erich," I whispered to myself.

"What was that?" Rafe asked, coming up behind me. He saw the photo on my phone and shook his head in disgust. "Why won't they leave you alone?"

I looked at my brother. "This is Riedl."

His brows furrowed. "How can you be sure?"

"He's the only one who would do this. I thought the incident with Devin's daughter was an isolated one, but this is going too far. I'm going to talk to him."

* * *

I went to Erich's hotel room Wednesday night after my afternoon of smiling for cameras and signing my name until my hand felt like it was going to break off. Erich wanted to have dinner together with Tyler, but that was never going to happen. I wanted to talk to him and get back to Tyler. I'd abandoned him for much of our holiday.

"How have you been?" Erich asked, kissing each of my cheeks. I wanted to forgo small talk, mostly because I didn't want to be in the same room with him.

"You leaked the story about Devin's daughter, didn't you?"

His eyes opened wide. "I did no such thing."

"Are we going to play this game?"

I could see how hard he was trying to keep an innocent, doe-eyed expression on his face, but I wasn't having it. "I'm not the only one who knew about her." His face looked so guilty.

"But it was you."

He pursed his lips together and sighed heavily. "I couldn't let him get away with what he's done. He should take responsibility for his actions."

I rolled my eyes. “But it had nothing to do with you,” I said, disappointed with Erich.

“He’s had it very easy, Luna. He needed to come back to reality.”

I was so confused. “And why is that your responsibility? Why don’t you just leave him alone and move on. He’s moved on.” It was a low blow, but I didn’t care.

“Maybe I overstepped,” he said as insincerely as possible.

“And the article this morning? What do you know about it?”

“Not a thing.”

He looked guilty once again.

“Erich, do something for me.”

“What’s that?”

“Leave Devin alone.”

“Is he finally out of your life?”

“He’s granted me the divorce. That means I’m moving on, he’s moving on, and *you* need to move on.”

He nodded at that. “Fine, you have my word.”

“And the motorhome footage?”

I could see him swallowing hard at that. “I’m still trying to secure it.”

“And I’m still waiting.”

Something told me I was never going to see it.

Chapter Fifty

Luna

Thursday morning I was in the Perez pits, just like the old days. I was sporting the new team look. The blue had been a huge improvement from the dark green that had often been criticized as unfriendly and not appealing to television audiences. Alexander was extremely satisfied with himself, especially when Rafe had finished fifth in Australia and had a third-place showing in Brazil, a podium position that had let the racing world know there was another Perez on the horizon. Pedro was doing well too. Playing his part as second driver but placing better than ever this year. The team was in good shape.

I was careful not to venture too far from the Perez pits. The Barlow team was right next door, and I didn't want to run into Devin. I spent time in the motorhome entertaining Alexander Wheaton and Tyler. As the Perez team put together the garage and readied the cars, I ventured to the press room. Nigel Webb was chatting with Luigi Verti. There were rumors that Nigel would drive for Barlow the following year and possibly replace Devin. It was too early in the season, but rumors were already spreading. If Devin was out at Barlow, where would he end up?

So far the day had gone perfectly, without a Devin sighting, and when Tyler and I went back to the hotel, we had dinner in the restaurant. I was beyond tired and ready for bed. I'd forgotten how much a race weekend took out of me, yet somehow I was also enjoying myself more than I'd remembered.

As we made our way to the elevator and to our room, I saw Henry Barlow enter the lobby. He walked toward us, and I could feel my heart constrict.

“Hello, Luna,” he said pleasantly. He smiled at Tyler who was most definitely the object of his attention.

“Hello, Henry, how have you been?”

“Good,” he said. The elevator door opened, and we all stepped inside.

“This is Tyler McCaffery,” I said, biting my lip.

“Nice to meet you,” the Englishman said.

“This is your team hotel too?” I asked, trying to smile. I was sure he knew why I was asking.

“Yes,” he said as if he were sorry.

We got off at our floor, and I said goodbye.

“Who was that?” Tyler asked as we walked to our room.

“One of the team owners.”

Half an hour later, I’d changed into a comfy pair of yoga pants and a new Perez shirt when my phone rang. Pedro was calling? How strange.

“Hi. I’m surprised to hear from you. Something wrong?”

“Luna, I don’t know if this is any of my business, but I’m in the hotel lounge right now, and Devin is completely drunk. I thought to call his teammate or Henry Barlow, but this would be too damaging. Everyone knows he’s drunk, and if his team has to drag him out of here, it could be pretty bad for him.”

I looked at Tyler. He was busy watching a movie. “Is he being unruly?” I asked in Spanish.

“Not yet, but you know Flynn.”

I thought of the mess Devin was making and leaped into damage control for him. “I’ll be there in five minutes.”

“I’ll wait here.”

I hung up and looked over at Tyler. “I’ve got to step out. Team thing,” I said vaguely and left him to his action movie.

My heart was beating a mile a minute as I went downstairs to the lounge. I hoped I wasn’t making a mistake. Devin was drunk, and that meant anything was possible. As I neared the lounge, I saw Pedro standing outside. It surprised me that he cared anything about Devin. Neither had been close, and when Devin used to frequent the Perez pits, he rarely gave Pedro a second look. Devin had always thought of Pedro as a second-rate driver. The irony.

“The bartender won’t stop serving him,” Pedro said, shaking his head in disgust. “The man is obviously very drunk.”

“If things look like they are getting out of hand, I want you to call Rafe and no one else. Is that clear?”

“Yes, of course.”

I took one more deep breath and walked into the lounge. It was quiet with relatively few people milling around. Devin was seated at the bar watching a television perched on the wall. There were a few empty glasses of beer in front of him and one full one. I walked toward him and leaned up against the bar. He slowly turned to face me, his eyes bloodshot. The expression on his face told me to walk away and not look back, but I ignored it.

“What the fuck do you want?” he spat.

“I want you to go to your room. I’ll take care of your tab.”

“Fuck off,” he said slowly and deliberately.

I took several breaths. This wasn’t going to be easy. “I just want to help.”

“You can help me by going away.”

“I promised your dad I’d watch out for you.”

He chuckled at that. “Did you also promise my dad that you would fuck me at your convenience and then bugger off to your boyfriend and your new life together?”

“Devin, don’t self-destruct.”

“Are you fucking deaf? Go away,” he said, raising his voice.

A few people in the lounge had taken notice. “I’m not here because I have nothing better to do. I’m here because I don’t want to see you throw your life and your career away. You look like shit, as if you haven’t slept in two months! Do yourself a favor and go get some sleep.”

He looked at me with contempt. “You’re like a fucking parasite. Wherever I am and whatever I do, there you are. So be self-righteous with someone who gives a shit.”

He wasn’t about to deter me. “I’m just trying to help,” I said calmly.

“I know someone you can help. Go find Riedl, and maybe the two of you can ruin someone else’s life. I hear he’s got the knives out for Lauder. Here’s an idea. Weasel your way into his life. Fuck him around like you fucked me around. Riedl can then own the world.”

“You always think everyone is out to get you, but never once have you taken responsibility for anything.”

He glared at me with hatred, something I’d never seen from him before. “Luna, for the last time, get the fuck away from me.”

“I’m sorry that you allowed this to happen to yourself.”

“Don’t be.”

“What happened to the man who loved to play practical jokes, who always had a smile on his face? Where is the man whose desire to win was so formidable that he took on a whole racing team when they would have rather made him disappear. Where has he gone, Devin? He’s there somewhere, and I know that because you wouldn’t have left the flowers at my father’s grave otherwise.”

His body stiffened, but he didn’t let up. “You are really good at playing the innocent, aren’t you? I wish I had never laid eyes on you. But I can replace you just like you replaced

me. But your cop is boring; otherwise, you wouldn't have slept with me a month ago. You know what the irony is? I was the one expected to sleep around, not the high-and-mighty Luna Perez. What a fucking joke!"

"You can be such an asshole," I said with disgust.

"The cop still doesn't know, does he?" Devin said with a poisonous smile.

"No, he doesn't," I said. I was aware that half the lounge was listening now, but I couldn't stop this argument. It had been coming for months.

"I wonder what he would think if he knew the woman he loved was fucking her husband whenever she could. Do you think that might upset him? I bet if you gave me five minutes, I could have you in bed screaming my name. He doesn't do that for you, does he? If he did, you wouldn't have slept with me. Twice. How do you live with yourself? Do you fake orgasms, or do you just lie there and hope he doesn't notice that you're bored out of your mind? "

Pedro was standing next to me, motioning for me to walk away. I pushed him away and stared at Devin. I couldn't take my eyes off him.

"Why are you still here?" Devin spat.

I said nothing.

"Go away," he screamed. "You're neither here nor there, Luna. You just hope you end up somewhere. Rafe doesn't need you, I don't need you, and that officer upstairs that you like to string along doesn't need you. Do us all a favor and disappear. Get on a plane to nowhere and leave us all alone! I can't believe I allowed myself to waste two years of my life on a spoiled bitch like you."

Adrenaline surged through my body, and for a moment, my mind left my body and rage took over. I slapped him as hard as I could. Maybe he was caught off guard or maybe it was the booze, but it sent him tumbling to the floor.

It felt a hand on my shoulder—Rafe. He held me back as Pedro went to help Devin up.

“You’re a fucking lunatic,” Devin said, massaging his cheek.

“You’re a fucking asshole,” I yelled.

“That’s it, Luna,” Rafe said angrily. He dragged me out of the lounge and escorted me back to my room. When I entered the room with Rafe, my face was flushed and I was shaking with rage. Rafe was furious and paced around the room. Tyler watched in confusion, having no idea what was going on.

“What were you thinking?” he screamed.

“I don’t know,” I screamed back. “He provoked me.”

“I don’t need this, Luna. I have enough to worry about. You acted like a child down there, and a very unhinged one! The last thing we need is this kind of attention. If this is the way it’s going to be, stay home next time!”

He stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Tyler watched him leave, and then his gaze fell on me. “What was that all about?” Tyler asked.

Now I had to deal with Tyler, and this wasn’t going to be easy. “Devin was drunk in the lounge. I tried to get him to go to his room and he refused. We had a fight and I slapped him.”

“You what?” Tyler asked, his mouth open in surprise.

“I made a promise to his father to watch his drinking.”

“Why do you keep involving yourself with that family? I just don’t understand why you can’t make a clean break. It makes me wonder if you still love him.”

“I just tried to kill him, so shouldn’t that prove that I don’t?”

“Obviously you still care about him; otherwise, you wouldn’t have gone to see him. And you lied to me.”

“I knew you’d be angry.”

Tyler stood and walked to the door. “I need some air,” he said.

Shit. What had I done?

Chapter Fifty-One

Luna

By the time Tyler had returned to our room, I'd fallen asleep from pure exhaustion. I awoke early the next morning and didn't want to look at my phone, fully expecting it to have blown up overnight. But I looked anyway, because I was a glutton for punishment.

As expected, there was news of the altercation from the lounge. It had gotten exaggerated, with descriptions of me punching Devin and him bleeding on the ground. Thankfully, no one had taken any pictures. How lucky had we all been about that?

Tyler didn't say much that morning as we drove to the track. And as we walked into the Perez pits, the usual murmurs suddenly quieted. They were surprised to see me. Did they assume I wouldn't show up to the first practice session? No way. I was done hiding.

Tyler stayed in the motorhome with Juan while I took my seat at the monitors with Carlos. Not one person had mentioned the altercation in the hotel, not even Carlos, and I pretended it hadn't happened.

After the practice session, Rafe grasped me by the arm and escorted me to the Friday press conference. I usually didn't attend them, but I didn't argue. He hadn't spoken to me the entire day, and I didn't want to anger him any more than I already had. As we entered the pressroom, I quickly realized why I was there. Devin was one of the selected drivers for the press conference, along with Rafe. Rafe had something planned, and I wanted no part of it. I tried to inconspicuously

break his grip, but he simply held on to my arm more tightly. He dragged me unwillingly across the room within inches of Devin. People were standing all around, looking on.

“Flynn,” Rafe said.

Devin turned to face Rafe. He hadn’t expected me, and when he saw me, his eyes narrowed. His cheek was bruised and what looked like a split lip. I knew I’d hit him hard, but I hadn’t imagined this.

“Luna would like to say a few words,” Rafe said, looking at me severely.

I looked at Rafe, then at Devin. His sea-green eyes were dark, and I knew he was angry with me. I’d beaten him up before witnesses. I had an advantage knowing that he wouldn’t have fought back. I certainly wasn’t proud of myself. Now we were playing for the media, at least that is what Rafe wanted.

“I’m sorry you provoked me into hitting you,” I said.

He looked at me, blinking his eyes several times. All the people around were waiting eagerly for Devin Flynn to say something. I knew he was thinking of something clever to say, to shoot down my non-apology, but accept it at the same time. He was usually quicker on his feet, but he just stared at me.

“Remind me not to cross you again,” he finally said, stone-faced.

Cameras flashed, and I groaned inwardly.

* * *

I was happy to leave Los Angeles and Devin Flynn behind. My assault on Devin had been the highlight of the race weekend, and he’d never had his picture taken so many times. Rafe was almost happy that he wouldn’t see me again until Montreal. As for Tyler, what had felt suffocating before now seemed like a huge, gaping hole between us. By the time we got to Montreal, we’d agreed to slow things down.

It wasn't exactly a breakup. We still saw each other once a week or so, more often in a group of friends than one-on-one. We didn't sleep together again, and I didn't miss it. That told me a lot.

Two months flew by. I did some sponsorship duties, traveled once to see Jess in London, and before I knew it, the end of May had crept up on me, and so had the race in Montreal. I spent a day in team meetings, feeling good about being back at work. The only difficult part of the day was when Devin and I saw each other at a press conference. I started toward him without thinking. Then our eyes locked for a moment, and he turned away from me.

Tyler was working during the event, which I wasn't sure I was comfortable with, but I didn't know why. I had no idea where he was that first day, and after team meetings and a long day, we had agreed to go to dinner at Elizabeth's that night. I wished we hadn't agreed to it, but it was too late to back out now. I wanted to crawl into bed and sleep.

At Tyler's knock on the door, I let him inside and knew something was wrong. He had a frown on his face.

"Is everything okay?"

He ran his hand through his hair, and it dawned on me that something was amiss.

"I went for a run to sort some things out."

I was so confused. "Is something wrong?" I asked with concern.

"Yes, something is wrong. I realized that the woman I've fallen in love with doesn't love me back, and she never will."

I stumbled a little and had to sit on my sofa. What the hell was going on? "What are you talking about?" I asked, feeling a hardening in my stomach.

"I saw the way you looked at him today. You still love him."

Where was this suddenly coming from? "No, I don't."

“Yes, you do,” he said confidently. “I think I’ve known all along, but I hoped that you would eventually fall in love with me, but that’s not going to happen. Do yourself a favor: if you love him, try to salvage something.”

I massaged my temples, trying to make sense of this. “All this from seeing me look at him once today?”

Tyler bit his lip. “After, I went to see him.”

Oh. I hadn’t expected that. “And he told you I was still in love with him?”

“He told me you slept with him. Right after his grandmother’s funeral?”

“It was a mistake.”

“Twice?” Tyler asked skeptically. “I mean, once is a stretch, but twice? Come on.”

I could feel my body deflate. “So he told you everything?”

“He didn’t volunteer the information,” Tyler said cautiously. “I had to get it out of him. And he didn’t even tell me that much. I put it all together, and you just confirmed it.”

Shit, shit, shit. I didn’t know what to do. Did I fight for him? Did I want to? And didn’t that say it all? My lack of desire to fight for us really did say it all. “I’m sorry. For ... everything.”

He saw it too. “We’re done, aren’t we? I nodded. “I’m going to go. Maybe after a while, we can be friends or something?”

“I’m sorry, Tyler.”

“Look, I know you’re not over him. Seems like he’s totally messed up over you too. If you love him, you owe it to yourself to figure this whole thing out. Goodbye, Luna.”

I should have been devastated, but part of me was relieved. I liked Tyler a lot and hated the way it had ended, but it was for the best. As for Devin, nothing had changed there. I had no intention of going back to him.

Chapter Fifty-Two

Devin

I was on my way to the track, thinking about the odd visit I'd had from Luna's goddamned cop boyfriend the day before. He'd shown up to the Barlow pits unannounced, demanded to speak to me, and wouldn't leave until I did. I didn't like that he'd shown up in his officer's uniform, so I insisted he meet me later at my hotel. No way was I giving anyone fodder for gossip.

And then he'd confronted me and maybe I'd confronted him. We hadn't been hostile to each other, but the guy was good at his job. I found myself admitting things I'd never expected to say. I hadn't kissed and told much, but he'd figured it out fast. I wondered if he'd gone to see Luna. I couldn't help worrying whether she was all right.

But I couldn't linger on that now. I had more important things to worry about. My so-far lackluster performance with Barlow already had me fighting for my seat. My best showing all season had been a sixth-place finish in Los Angeles, when I'd been driving on adrenaline after my run-in with Luna and made driving choices that were borderline questionable and unsafe.

The placing was hardly anything to hang my hat on. If the rumors were true, there was talk I'd be replaced as soon as next year. If Barlow turfed me, the only place to go for me was down. And I was certainly too young to call it a career.

Even so, everything about Barlow was lacking, right down to the car that came to get me for the track. While Russo had never spared an expense, Barlow always sent some lousy

sedan that wasn't even sporty. The dining options had been abysmal. Some days there wasn't even hot food. I'd let Henry Barlow know in the politest way possible how unacceptable that was. He'd seemed to understand, but so far, still cold fucking lunches.

I got into our garage without looking at the Perez garage. How convenient of the federation to place us right next door. Could I blame them? No. They wanted to cash in on the drama, except that so far, Luna had made herself pretty scarce.

Sean, my new racing engineer, ran over when he saw me. The guy was trying hard, but he hadn't quite figured out his role as my chief race engineer. He'd been promoted when I'd joined the team, and he wasn't ready. So I often helped him with race setup, and he absorbed all the information. The season was still fairly young, so he had time to learn. I had to admit, I was enjoying this mentorship thing. I hated a lot of things about Barlow, but being a big fish on a younger team had some advantages I hadn't expected.

"Devin, so glad you're here early," he said. "I thought we could talk race setup before you get changed."

"Sure," I said to the baby-faced kid. He wasn't that much younger than me, but he looked eighteen, with the big blue eyes and floppy blond hair.

He suggested a tire choice that I changed. He wanted to tweak the handling one way, and I wanted another. This went on for nearly an hour before I decided I needed to eat something before I got hangry. Mercifully, Sean let me cut our chat short, and I was pleasantly surprised to find some hot oatmeal in the dining tent. After a small breakfast, I headed back to the garage with my hydration drink the dining crew had prepared for me after I'd given them Luna's recipe.

I passed the Perez garage again and this time I looked in. Why? I don't know, but I saw her there, her side profile. She'd tamed her mound of wavy curls over her shoulder and was talking to Carlos Boreno. They looked to be in an intense conversation, and I couldn't help but take her in. Her toned legs in fitted black pants, the new blue shirt tailored to fit her

trim frame. I should have kept walking, but instead, I'd turned around and walked into their garage. The moment the Perez crew noticed me, one by one they fell silent. Not until I'd almost reached her, had Luna noticed me coming. She turned, and her warm brown eyes were staring at me. Carlos said something to her and slunk off.

"Hi," I said, because I had no idea what else to say.

"Hi," she said back. Unlike other times, she wasn't shooting daggers at me with her eyes.

"I'm not sure why I'm here. But I wanted to come over."

"Okay," she said, her face masked with confusion.

I looked around, and everyone was staring at us. "Can we talk a second? I know you're probably busy, but it won't take long."

She fidgeted a few times, but relented. "Sure. This way."

Everyone watched us go into one of the offices, and Luna made quick work of the blinds. I appreciated that.

"What did you want?" she asked. The usual hatred was gone from her voice. Progress.

"I wanted to say that I was sorry for my behavior the last little while. I'm cleaning my shit up, so no more outbursts. I've also decided to cut out booze." I couldn't even remember what I'd said to her to piss her off so much that she'd decked me. I'd promised myself that I had to stop.

"That's good. I'm glad to hear it."

"I also think you should know that your officer boyfriend came to see me. I had no idea he was coming, and I didn't say much, but he figured some things out. I'm sorry about that. I didn't intentionally tell him to piss you off. He kept saying that he knew we'd slept together, and when I asked him how he knew that ... well, I guess I said more than I should have. Again, I apologize."

"It's fine," she said, her body rigid and cold even though her eyes were saying otherwise. "It's ... that's good of you. To come tell me."

“If I’ve fucked things up for you, I’ll try to right it.”

She shook her head. “No need. In fact, maybe it was a good thing. We broke up. Maybe it was too soon for me to get into another relationship.”

They’d broken up. I took a second to school my features into a neutral mask. “I’m sorry to hear about that.”

She quirked an eyebrow. “Really?”

I couldn’t help but smile just a touch. “No, not really, but I’m trying hard not to be an ass. Look ...” I closed my eyes for a second. I couldn’t ignore the relief flooding through me. She’d broken up with the cop. She wasn’t screaming at me or telling me she hated me. I’d never felt so happy to be not hated. I couldn’t help but add, “And there’s one more thing. I know we’re finished, but I do hope that maybe we can try to salvage a friendship. I don’t want us hating each other. You still mean a lot to me even if we couldn’t make this work out.”

She stared at me for such a long time, and I felt myself shrinking under her gaze.

“Yes, we can try that. Slowly, okay? I want to get myself settled back with the team and not have to worry about people speculating about our friendship.”

“That’s all fair.” I glanced at my watch. “I should head back. It was nice talking to you.”

I was about to leave, but she grabbed on to my arm. “Before you go, I wanted to say something too.” She shuffled her feet and looked down before slowly lifting her gaze to me. I saw so much sincerity in her eyes. “I’m sorry about what happened in Los Angeles too. I should have kept my anger in check.”

I shook my head. “No need. I deserved exactly what I got.”

She wanted to protest, but I held my hand up.

“I was the drunken shit. I was to blame. I won’t have it any other way.”

She smiled now. “Okay. If you insist.”

“So don’t be a stranger, okay?”

“You either.”

I’d said goodbye to a lot of women in my life, and even though Luna and I had agreed to try to be friends, I was fairly certain that was never going to happen, so this was by far the hardest goodbye of my life.

Chapter Fifty-Three

Luna

I returned to Europe for the summer. I spent a week in Cortese catching up with Rosa and spending time with Catia. Right, and Mom was there too. For the entire week me and my little sister were inseparable. We spent every day at the beach and every evening playing board games, occasionally roping Tony in to play too. Although Catia was now at an age where her phone had become her lifeblood, so it was sad to see my losing her to technology, there was nothing I could do to stop that.

I then went to the flat in London to find that Jess had taken a holiday with Cameron, her latest boyfriend. I settled back into London life for the time being. I still hadn't decided on my future, but I had thought a lot about my conversation with Devin. I didn't think we could be friends, not anytime soon. But maybe I could try. And I felt a lot better about the idea of being around the racetrack again.

Four days before the race at Delaware, Jess finally returned home. She found me sitting in front of my laptop, working on some long-neglected paperwork. I filled Jess in on the last few weeks. She listened intently to the tale before proclaiming, "There's a party tonight. Let's go and get drunk. Maybe you'll meet some gorgeous guy."

I was up for a party. Jess picked out my outfit, a pair of tight-fitting black pants and a skintight, shiny blue blouse. I felt ridiculous in the outfit, but it made Jess happy, and it showed off my toned physique. The party was in an estate just outside London. There were people milling all around, some

ultrarich businessmen, some actors and actresses, and a bevy of beautiful men and women hoping to get noticed.

Jess's freelance career was bustling, and a tabloid had been knocking down her door to hire her full time. Jess had a way of landing all the scoops. I think it had a lot to do with her confidence, and it didn't hurt that she was gorgeous. And this was how she got invited to parties like this, with the promise of dirt in exchange for a positive piece. The positive piece would be on the house we were partying in, and the dirt, well, that was for Jess to find out.

"I was thinking, with you back in London, you could start motivating me to get back into shape," Jess said.

"For starters, you have to motivate yourself. Secondly, I'm not going to be in London for long stretches of time. I'm going to be all over the place."

"Well, you can try to motivate me when you're around."

I got myself a drink and tried to remember everyone Jess was introducing me to. I was amazed at how many people she knew. There were rock stars, big-shot lawyers, and athletes, including some football players from some of England's premier teams. I'd never really been a part of this life, and I astounded how much I hated it.

I excused myself to go to use the restroom. As I walked toward it, I saw Enzo Potenza chatting with one of the football players. I smiled to myself. He was trying to gain another client in the wake of losing Devin. And from what I'd heard, Devin had been mounting some kind of campaign against Enzo. I tried not to concern myself about that. I was about to tap him on the shoulder to say hello, just to make him squirm, but stopped when I heard Devin's name. Instead, I ducked around a corner, unseen, and listened to what he had to say. Jess would probably be proud of me.

"So I said sign with the Barlow team. I know they're the shits, but what can you do?" Enzo said. I felt a cold slither of guilt in my stomach. Enzo had encouraged me to encourage Devin to sign with Barlow. And I'd done it, no questions

asked. I hadn't believed in Devin enough to help him push for something better.

"And what did he say?" Will Gilder asked. He played with one of football's elite teams, and I immediately recognized him, but for the life of me, couldn't remember the team he played for.

"I hear he wants to drive in America. Can you believe that? America? Who wants to drive there?"

"Maybe he sees his career going down the crapper."

"He drinks like it's going out of style. You can't drive a car with a hangover. One of these days he'll be six feet under and he'll probably deserve it."

I recoiled. I knew they had a strained relationship, but Enzo was taking it a little too far.

"I saw him a few weeks back at Thirst. He looked the shits," Gilder said.

"Drunk off his ass," Enzo said knowingly. The irony was, Enzo himself was slurring his words.

"Relatively sober, I think."

"He's not the man I knew ten years ago. He used to have ambition. He wanted to be the best. I thought he was going places. Thought I'd hitched my wagon to a star." He made a sound that was half hiccup, half belch. I rolled my eyes. "And even though he wasn't, he made himself look like the best. There was nothing second-rate about him. The best clothes, the best car, beautiful women falling all over him, and, of course, he had the walk and the talk. He'd saunter around like a prince, and speak as if it were the word of God. He made me a lot of money—no, wait, we made each *other* a lot of money. I'm good at that, right? I can make you a lot of money too."

The football player didn't sound impressed. "You talk like he's dead."

"He's dead to me." I noted the hate in his voice.

"What even happened with you two, if it was so sweet and you were making so much money?"

Enzo groaned. “It started a few years ago in Germany. There was this race, see, and Riedl was poised to win. It was very important; he needed the points to secure the world championship. It’d be his first ever. Back then, Blake Carlton was mopping the floor with everyone. But then Devin was having a good year too. The race starts, and Devin builds up a serious lead. It would have been his first-ever win. He was excited. All of a sudden, team orders, he’s told to move over for Riedl. Devin didn’t want to. He wanted to win. Ambitious, like I said. Riedl thought he was going to move over, and when he didn’t, the two of them collided. Race over. That race cost Riedl any chance at the world championship.”

“Yikes.”

“It nearly cost me everything too. Devin’s career starts flagging. The team doesn’t trust him anymore; sponsors start getting twitchy. And his contract with Russo is up in a year, and there’s no word about whether he’ll get renewed. I’ve put all my eggs in his basket, right? And he’s basically ruined us both with his ego.”

After an awkward silence, the football player murmured, “Okay, well, good talking to—”

“Wait, stop. Listen, I do anything for my top-paying clients, right? I take care of them. I’d take care of you the same.” There was a pause. I wished I could see what was going on, but I didn’t want to be discovered. Then, in a hushed voice, Enzo continued, “This is between you and me, right, William?”

“Sure, Enzo.”

“Riedl wanted Devin out. He’s the kind of man who gets his way, no matter what. He demanded Russo get rid of Flynn. Russo was ready to do it, to let Devin’s contract run out to make their number-one driver happy. Riedl is the bread and butter of the team, and when he’s not happy, no one’s happy.”

“What happened?”

“Sometimes life intervenes and destroys all your little plans. Devin starts seeing Luna Perez.”

My spine stiffened. *What the hell?*

“Okaaay ... Enzo, you’re losing me here.”

“You know motorsport, yeah? She’s Marco Perez’s daughter? Okay. So, when Luna came into Devin’s life, he was suddenly more popular than Riedl. Russo had never gotten so much attention until that day. I was impressed that Devin thought of it. Great publicity stunt. They were everywhere, the daughter of Marco Perez dating Devin Flynn. Who could believe it? And how could Russo then get rid of him? He was making them too much damn money. They did the only thing they could do ... they signed him on for one more year.

“Riedl was beside himself. Just when he thought Devin Flynn was out of his life forever! And Riedl has a real soft spot for the Perez woman. Some family connection? Whatever. He’s furious that Devin’s using sweet little Luna, and the relationship throws him over the edge—and to do that to Erich Riedl is not an easy feat.

“That’s when he came to me and made me a very attractive offer. Dump Flynn and Riedl will sign with me. I’m not so sure, but Riedl reminds me that I’m the best. I’m the best there is, Will; don’t forget it. *Erich Riedl* says so.” I rolled my eyes again. Was Enzo really trying to tell this story like it was going to convince Gilder to sign with him? “So we get to talking. Erich says the Perez woman is loyal to a fault, and he’s worried she’ll never leave Devin. We need proof that Flynn’s using her, so we come up with a brilliant plan. Erich makes a stink about some alleged thefts in the Russo motorhome, so they install some cameras. It’s the perfect place. I’m in and out of there all the time with Devin, right? I just needed to get him talking about Luna anytime we were in the motorhome. Get him to admit some juicy stuff if possible.”

“What did you do, Enzo?” Gilder asked, sounding appalled but fascinated.

“Erich wanted me to bring up Luna’s wealth, her fame, what she had done for Devin financially, those kinds of things. In simple terms, get it on tape that he was interested in her for the money.”

I wanted to weep. I nearly turned to go when I heard Enzo add, “But Flynn actually loves her. It was a pain in the ass because Devin never said anything very damaging, for over a year of trying to get him to! I even—” He hiccuped again. “I even innovated. On Riedl’s behalf. Spread stories to anyone who listened about how smart Flynn was to go after the girl for her money. Anyway, I guess Riedl got enough footage to string together some questionable implications. I know he showed her something, and in the end she left Flynn.”

“Jesus Christ, why are you telling me this?” Gilder said.

“Because that’s what I do for my clients, see? I did anything Erich needed, and I’d do the same for you. Now he’s got his revenge, I got my Ferrari, and everyone’s happy.”

I didn’t stick around to hear the rest. I walked back to Jess who was chatting with an attractive man in his late thirties. They were discussing art.

“We have to go,” I said, my head swimming.

“We just got here.”

“Please, Jess, we need to go. I’ll tell you everything in the car.”

Chapter Fifty-Four

Luna

For several days I was beside myself. Enzo Potenza's words thundered in my head over and over again. Erich Riedl, a man I'd considered a good friend, had been hellbent on revenge over a lost race? I'd seen him as a protector of sorts, but he was only protecting himself and his own interests, and in the process he'd watched me destroy my marriage without giving it a second thought. The only man I'd allowed myself to love, allowed myself to trust, had vanished from my life because of Erich. Tied up in my grief was a renewed sense of loss over Blake Carlton too. Knowing Erich had pushed him into pursuing me sickened me. Without that pressure, our friendship would have been less fraught. And now I had to fight to keep these revelations from tainting my memories of Blake entirely. He had never been the bad guy, just like Devin had never been the bad guy.

I cried for days while Jess consoled me. But nothing she could say helped. I was angry at myself. I'd blown it.

"Why don't you just call him?" Jess said. "Maybe he'll come around."

"Come around?" I spat. "I've thrown everything away because I didn't want to trust him. He's finally giving me the divorce. He even pulled the 'let's be friends' talk with me. It's over, for sure. I believed Erich, and look what he's done to me."

I was so upset, I couldn't bring myself to attend the race in France. I watched on TV, though. Erich was still at the top of the heap, with Rafe and Lauder breathing down his neck.

Devin acquitted himself well, considering how terrible the Barlow cars were, coming in at a respectable eighth. With my anger at him dissipating, I had to admit that he had a shitload of talent, especially now that he was laying off the booze. Imagine what he could do with a good car and a good team backing him.

I needed time to think, and to plan my next move. I did agree to go to Belgium at the end of the month, where Rafe threw me yet another curveball. He'd assembled a meeting with Carlos and Alexander Wheaton in our private and cramped office in the Perez motorhome.

"Great news," Rafe said, his face lighting up. "Erich has accepted all the terms of the contract."

I was baffled. "Contract? What the hell are you talking about?"

"The contract, Luna, don't you remember? Riedl wants to drive with us next year."

I sucked in a breath. What the hell was going on? "This is the first I'm hearing about it."

Rafe smiled condescendingly. "Well, maybe you missed the memos. You've been largely absent from work this year because of the Flynn drama."

My mind was racing. "Since when is Russo even releasing him?"

Rafe made a vague gesture. "You remember there was that ridiculous accusation about his gearbox being illegal?" It had been true, but I didn't say so then. "I guess between that and all this Flynn business, they decided that after everything, it might be better to part ways."

I couldn't believe it. Had Riedl's machinations actually screwed him over too? To buy time, I asked, "What about Pedro?"

Rafe shrugged. "His contract's up. I've heard Barlow and even Roche have been sniffing after him."

I wouldn't begrudge Pedro a better team. We'd treated him so badly, and if I could help him get set up in a better position on a great team, I'd do it—and I'd make sure to encourage him to go with Roche over Barlow. Calmly, I asked, "Does this contract require my signature?"

"What doesn't?" Rafe asked with irritation.

That didn't surprise me at least. After all, I'd signed Blake's contract, and then Pedro's after we'd lost Blake. And even while I was all but on sabbatical in Montreal, he'd gone to great lengths to make sure I'd signed all the appropriate documents in the allotted time.

I couldn't believe how smug my brother was. Did he really think I'd just agree to this? For once, he'd pushed me too far. My mind was racing, but I needed to buy myself some time to figure things out. "Fabulous," I said. "Look, it's a busy weekend, so why don't you send me the contract to go over, and we can see about getting it signed in the next few weeks?"

Rafe looked surprised but pleased. As far as he knew, Erich was still simply a good friend. Why wouldn't I be delighted?

He made his exit, and I turned to Carlos. "Now I want you to have one more contract made up, and I want it to be exactly the same except for one thing. Wherever there is Erich's name, I want Devin's name."

Shocked silence fell over the room. Carlos cleared his throat and spoke while the other men were speechless. "Luna, did I hear you right?"

"Yes, you did," I said without any sign of emotion.

"Is this some kind of strategy you thought up to get Riedl to take less money?" Alexander suggested.

"No, nothing like that at all."

"Forgive me, then. I don't understand."

"I'd just like you to do it, that's all. I'll explain later. And don't mention it to Rafe, okay? Just like he forgot to mention Erich to me?"

Perhaps they were too stunned and baffled to protest, or maybe they thought I was playing a joke on Rafe to get back at him for cutting me out of Erich's contract negotiations. But as I left the motorhome, I had their assurance that they would, in fact, make up the second contract. I couldn't believe how easy it had been, and I needed to work fast. There was only a small window of opportunity.

* * *

I sat impatiently in a small coffee shop and waited. I'd cornered Devin after the Friday press conference. He'd initially smiled at me, then seemed to check himself. He'd been wary, but he agreed to meet me this evening. I'd grabbed a table in the far corner away from the windows and away from other tables. I wanted to make the conversation as private as possible.

I tapped my foot nervously on the floor and watched as pedestrians walked past the large window. It began to rain, and people pulled out umbrellas. I checked my watch, the one Devin had given me, and worried he wouldn't come. He was five minutes late, but that wasn't unusual.

Finally, I saw him walk past the window and reach for the handle to the door. His back was hunched as if that would somehow protect him from the rain. He was wearing a new pair of sunglasses and a baseball cap. He hated being recognized and was fortunate that no one in the coffee shop noticed him, or if they did, they didn't care.

I waved, and he walked toward me and took the seat across from me. He pulled off the cap and set it down on the table before placing his sunglasses inside. He looked a little pale and gaunt, with dark circles under his eyes. But he also looked better than he had for the past few months.

"Thanks for coming," I said.

He stared at me with curiosity. "Of course, what's this about?"

I took a deep breath and promised myself I wouldn't cry. If I wanted him back, I would have to be smart about it. I knew how much he hated tears. Before I could speak, a waitress appeared and I ordered an espresso.

"Do you serve chips?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman said.

"And gravy?"

"Yes."

"All right, mix up the chips and gravy, then add some cheese and bring it to me."

The woman looked displeased but nodded. Devin returned his attention to me. I wanted to smile, but I stopped myself. He was reinventing poutine, and I thought it was amusing.

"How are you?" I asked, mixing a spoon in my tea.

"I'm hungry," he said.

"And how is everything going at Barlow?"

"Good."

"And next year?"

"Luna, you said you had something you needed to tell me. I'd like to forgo the small talk."

I nodded. "Fair enough," I said. I shifted in my seat uncomfortably. "You know I would never lie to you, right?"

He pondered the question, which annoyed me. "I suppose you wouldn't lie."

"Not the most emphatic answer."

"I had to think about it," he said as the server set down my espresso.

I waited for the server to leave and also for this barb to pass before I continued. "I went to a party with Jess a few weeks ago."

"Sounds fun."

"Are you going to interrupt, or are you going to listen?"

He bowed his head and motioned with his hand for me to continue.

“I was at a party a few weeks ago with Jess, and Enzo Potenza was there with Will Gilder.”

Devin’s face soured at the mention of Enzo. “I heard he’s been courting Gilder. So what?”

“They were talking about you, Devin.”

Devin snorted. “Only good things, I hope.”

The server returned once again with Devin’s food. It looked terrible, and he stared at it for a few moments before sticking a fork into it and shoving the fries into his mouth.

“So was he bitching about my lawsuits against him?” he asked around his faux poutine.

“No. First of all, did you ever tell me what happened in Germany three years ago with Erich Riedl? The race where you crashed?”

Devin’s eyes narrowed. I could see he was racking his brain. “No, probably not.”

“Well, you didn’t, but Enzo did. I should mention that I was eavesdropping on the conversation, and he didn’t know I was there.”

Now he seemed genuinely intrigued. “Go on.”

“You were in the lead during that race, and you had team orders to let him pass. You didn’t, and when he tried to pass you, the two of you collided and he was out of the race. Is that how it happened more or less?”

He nodded. He was more interested in food than the conversation. I wanted to slap him.

“Erich was furious with you?”

“That’s an understatement. But this is ancient history. I apologized, and all was forgiven.”

“No, it wasn’t, Devin,” I said, lowering my voice. A couple was sitting at a table nearby, and I didn’t want them to

hear. “He never forgave you for that race. He claimed it cost him the championship.”

Devin scoffed. “There was no way in hell he would have won that year. No. Fucking. Way. Is that what he told you?”

“That’s what he told Enzo, and that’s what Enzo told Gilder.”

He frowned. “What?”

“Erich wanted you off the team, and he went to whatever lengths it took to make that happen.”

Devin stopped eating. He put down the fork and stared at me for some time. “What else did he say?” Devin said, his voice nothing but serious now.

“After the crash, he wanted you gone, but you had already signed on for another year. Russo couldn’t get rid of you, and even if they did, it would have cost them a fortune to break the contract. So Erich decided that he could tolerate you for another year; at least after that you would be gone. When I came along, and we started getting all that positive attention, Russo had to keep you on. So Erich paid Enzo to get you into the motorhome and in front of the cameras. His job was to keep you talking, coax you into saying things you might not have normally said. In return, Erich got what he wanted. You off the team and out of my life.”

His knuckles were white where he gripped his fork. Quieter than I’d ever heard him speak before, he said, “I knew this, or at least suspected it, but I couldn’t prove it.”

“If none of this had happened, we’d be living happily ever after.”

Devin rose from the table and threw some money down. He was going to say something, but he stopped himself. He grabbed his cap and sunglasses and left in a hurry.

Chapter Fifty-Five

Luna

I didn't see Devin for the rest of the race weekend. I stayed in the motorhome entertaining guests and sponsors. I thought to call or text Devin, just to talk to him, but thought better of it. He would come around when he wanted to.

In Austria I saw him at the Friday press conference. We didn't get a chance to speak. I went back to the Perez motorhome and was annoyed to see Erich there, chatting with Rafe. I put on a smile even though there was no other person in the world I hated more.

"Luna, I'm so happy you're back," Erich said, kissing my cheek. I'd been around for four races, and this was the first occasion I'd run into Riedl.

"It's nice to be back," I said with a fake smile. The motorhome door opened, and Juan appeared.

"Someone is here to see you," he said.

"You'll have to excuse me, gentlemen," I said, relieved to be leaving. I exited the motorhome and found Devin in his Barlow overalls. White made him look even paler.

"Hi," I said with surprise.

"Juan told me that Riedl was inside."

"He and Rafe are talking."

Devin sneered. "I hear he wants to drive with Perez next year."

“Over my dead body.”

“He’ll do whatever he has to.”

We both chuckled.

“I wanted to talk to you, somewhere more private,” he said.

We ventured down pit lane and to the pit wall in a secluded area. I leaned my elbow on the wall and looked at Devin intently.

“I passed along the info you heard to my new agent and my lawyer,” he said.

I knew that he had believed me, and maybe we’d be able to find a way to salvage our relationship. At least I could hope.

“You should be suing him,” I said quietly.

“It’s over, Luna. It’s not worth going after him.”

“I’m sorry for what’s happened. I’m sorry for what I’ve done. That I didn’t trust you.”

He looked pained. “Riedl played us all for fools.”

“It’s not over, Devin, and that is a promise.”

“I should go,” Devin said. “I don’t want to have people start gossiping about us again. I ...” He held my gaze, and I felt my knees weaken. “You know it was never about that for me, right?”

I nodded without speaking and returned to the Perez pits. I was happy to see Erich gone. I went in search of Rafe. He was in the office discussing car setup for the race. The Friday morning practice had given some indication that the car was understeering in tight corners, and Rafe wanted the problem rectified.

“What did Erich want?” I asked Rafe once he’d finished up with his mechanics and racing engineer.

“He wants to know when I’m going to have a contract ready for him to sign.”

“First things first.” I walked over to the filing cabinet and rifled through it before locating the contract Carlos had drawn up at my request. I held it out to him to look at it.

Rafe shook his head. “What is this all about? What are you going to do with this contract?”

“I’m going to give it to Devin.”

Rafe laughed. “Are you trying to tease him or something? Nice. I like this side of you.”

Gritting my teeth, I sat across from him and signed wherever it was required, not saying another word. Then I thrust it at Rafe.

“Aren’t you going to sign the bloody thing?”

Once again, Rafe found something humorous.

“Sign it? Have you hit your head? Then it would be a valid contract.”

“That’s the idea!” I shouted in frustration.

Rafe put down his fork. He was eating pasta. “Would you please enlighten me because I have no idea what is going on.”

I took a deep breath. There were several people hanging around, interested in the conversation. I spoke in quiet Italian, knowing that most of them wouldn’t be able to pick up more than a word or two.

“Let me give you the abbreviated version of the last two and half years of my life. Devin took Erich off the track in Germany three years ago, and Riedl never forgave him. Riedl wanted to get Devin off the Russo team. Then I fell in love with Devin, and he fell in love with me, and incidentally, he and Russo were making truckloads of money because of it. So Russo wouldn’t budge, and Riedl took matters into his own hands, paid Enzo Potenza to get Devin on video saying garbage, and voilà, my life and Devin’s are both ruined. Now sign the fucking contract.”

Rafe was overwhelmed. “Riedl wouldn’t do that.”

“He did, and I’d love to go into more detail, but we have an audience. So if you would please sign these papers, I’ll be on my way.”

“What if Flynn accepts the contract?”

“We’ll have a driver for next year.”

“Absolutely not!”

“Why not?”

He hedged, “Well, at least not with the conditions outlined in this contract, not for Flynn.”

“If Riedl can have it, so can Devin.”

“I’m not throwing away my team so you can make Flynn happy.”

“It’s my team too.”

“I won’t do it, Luna.”

“You will, Rafe.”

“No I won’t. I don’t want Flynn.”

My gaze burned through my brother. “You will, Rafe. You will sign this. I’m done being your silent partner and your lackey.”

Rafe was surprised by the tone of my voice. I kind of sounded like Mom. I took the contract and stormed out of the motorhome, slamming the door behind me.

* * *

I met with Alexander Wheaton that evening in his lavish hotel room. He would always make time for me, no matter what the situation. We had a lovely dinner together, and it was the first time that Wheaton opened up about himself. He spoke fondly of his parents—both deceased—and his only sister and her family. He talked about his long-term partner and his regrets that they hadn’t adopted any children. He laid so much of himself bare.

“But you and Rafe are my kids,” he said affectionately.

“And I look up to you like a father,” I said.

He beamed at me. “I’ve missed having you around, Luna. I thought we’d get to work closer together this year.”

I nodded thoughtfully. “I’m ready to come back full time,” I said at last. “I thought I wasn’t happy working with the team. I think ... I think it’s more that I didn’t like the role I’d allowed myself to take on.” *The one Rafe had forced me into*, but I didn’t say that out loud. “Being away, I realized how much I missed everything about this life. I’m throwing myself into it now.”

“I’m delighted to hear it!” He grinned. “Was that what you wanted to tell me when you asked to meet?”

I told Alexander Wheaton the entire tale, leaving nothing out. The story tugged at Wheaton’s heart, as it was supposed to. I knew that Alexander was the kind of man who liked to see the people around him happy. He was also fair.

“I’d always wondered what tore you and Devin Flynn apart.”

“Now you know.”

“And you have concluded that all this is true, even without seeing this infamous footage?”

“I don’t need to see it anymore, Alexander. I know Devin loves me, and he loves me for me.”

“I’m not sure this is the right way to make amends.”

“There is no other way. I betrayed his trust as badly as I thought he’d betrayed mine. So if this fails, I’ll do all I can to repay you.”

“And your brother?”

“He’s still holding out on me, but I’ll make him come around.”

“And you’re sure you know what you are doing?”

“I’ve never been more sure.”

Alexander smiled and pulled me in for a hug. “Give me that contract.”

I watched anxiously as Alexander signed in all the appropriate places.

“Thank you, Alexander, you don’t know how much this means to me.”

* * *

Before the race in Germany I went to see my brother in his hotel room. There was something poetic about making my demand in Germany, the very track that had started Riedl’s vendetta against Devin.

Rafe was watching race videos from the Austrian race. He was currently in the fight for the world championship and was keen on making no mistakes. That was how much the financial infusion from Alexander Wheaton had leveled the playing field. With superior engines, Rafe was now a contender.

He had spun out in Austria and wanted to make sure he didn’t throw away points again. I had the contract in hand, and Rafe groaned when he saw it. I handed it to him along with a pen.

“I thought you would forget all about this nonsense.”

“Rafe, we are a lot alike. When I want something, I don’t rest until I have it.”

“I’m not signing it unless Alex does,” he said flatly.

“Then it must be my lucky day,” I said, pointing out Alexander’s signature.

Rafe was mortified. “How did you manage to get him to sign this?”

“I used my charms. Now sign it.”

“Absolutely not.”

“Don’t fuck with me, Rafe. You just said if Alexander signed it, so would you.”

Rafe was growing angry himself. “Flynn’s a lousy driver and a worse teammate. I don’t want him. Maybe you don’t understand, but this isn’t a popsicle stand we’re running, a place where you can give jobs to all your friends and boyfriends. This is serious business with serious money involved. I’m not going to throw away good money on a guy who can’t drive, and even if he could, he’s a drunk. Do you think I want that guy around? I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing or how you got Alexander to sign this, but you can forget about me.”

“And you can forget about Riedl,” I said calmly.

“Why are you doing this?” he said, raising his voice. “Why are you throwing away my dream, Luna?”

I laughed, and not because any of this was funny. “Why do you think Riedl even wants the seat? I’ve learned something about Erich Riedl and its that he cares for only himself. He never thought to join our team until his own idiocy cost him his ride at Russo, and Perez became a contender.”

He sputtered but I held a hand up.

“You might think he’s your friend, Rafe. Damn it, I thought he was my friend, but he has his own agenda. Why didn’t he want to drive for us when we could barely put a car on the road? The answer is obvious: we weren’t good enough for him. But now we are one of the top teams and there is Erich, ready to swoop in and be the hero? Don’t be fooled. He’s in it for the money and for himself. If you think he’s going to help you become world champion, you’re an idiot.”

Rafe’s face was as red as a fire truck. “Flynn can’t even stay sober!”

“That’s bullshit. He’s cleaned up his act this year.” He scoffed, and I said, “Enough, Rafe. I’m done backing you without question. This is my team, too, and don’t forget the clause Mom put into my initial buy-in. She can buy the team out from under us if she wants to.” Rafe paled. I hadn’t thrown that in his face before, but if ever there was a time for it, it was now. “And you seem to have forgotten something very important, dear brother. If it hadn’t been for Devin and me,

you wouldn't be where you are today. You'd still be praying for sponsors to give you enough money to outfit a team. It was Devin who got Alexander on board, and it's me who kept him. We owe Devin a seat on the Perez team for that alone, and you're going to help me give it to him."

"And if he turns you down?"

"I still won't allow Erich to drive for our team." I gritted my teeth. "Rafe, before everything went to hell with Devin, you and I were ..."

"Getting along?" he asked.

"Closer than we'd ever been," I agreed. "And it was nice. It felt like we were becoming more of a family. But after all this ... Do you really want to choose Erich over me, after everything I've told you?"

That seemed to get through to him. Rafe looked over the contract one last time. "I hope I'm not making a mistake."

"You aren't."

He signed the marked pages and handed it to me.

Chapter Fifty-Six

Luna

“**W**here are you going?” Jess asked.

It was the Monday after the race. I’d flown in late Sunday night from Germany and hadn’t seen Jess. I was getting ready for my excursion to see Devin.

“Sandrine.”

“You’re going to Devin’s?” Jess asked with a smirk.

“Actually, I thought I’d go visit one of your many ex-boyfriends.”

“Say hi to Devin for me,” Jess said, ignoring the comment.

I checked my purse several times as I walked down to my car. The contract was safely tucked away. My heart was beating a mile a minute during the drive over, and I thought I might faint as I walked up the few steps to his door and knocked. I heard him wrestle with the locks before the huge wooden door swung open. He was startled to see me.

“Don’t tell me you were in the neighborhood,” he said with his familiar smile. I hadn’t seen that smile in a very long time.

“I wasn’t. I came to see you.”

“Come in,” he said, stepping aside.

I walked inside. Nothing had changed. There was still little in way of furniture. The few plants that I’d bought to liven up the place were almost all dead. I’d have to water those before I left.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

“I thought we’d talk.”

“You came all this way to talk? You could have called or sent a text.”

“I needed to do this in person.”

We went into the kitchen, and I sat at his island, where I was shocked to see clean dishes on the drying rack. The place was surprisingly tidy for Devin, though there were some empty soda cans lying around. Devin made coffee before joining me at the island.

“So, what do you want to talk about?” he asked pleasantly. In the last few weeks he’d looked happier, more rested. He’d even begun to joke around with people again. I’d heard that he’d even played a practical joke on Nigel Webb, although I didn’t know any of the details. I was happy to see that he was starting to bounce back to his former self.

“I came here to thank you.”

His eyes widened. “Thank me? For what?”

“For helping me to see the world and opening my life up to love and happiness. My only regret was that I didn’t have the sense to trust you when you needed me most. When in reality you were the only person I could trust. Before I met you, Devin, I led a very sheltered life, and people used to walk all over me. Rafe would say jump and I’d say how high. My mother could control my every action until I had her approval. You were the one to point out that I could be in control of my destiny. I know I made some very stupid choices, but that’s all part of the learning experience.”

“And you accused me of controlling you.”

“I was rebelling,” I said with a small smile.

“I was never happier than when we were together,” he said simply.

My heart skipped a beat. “I’m so sorry for what happened, Devin. I should have known better, but the proof seemed so overwhelming.”

“Riedl did a good job. He almost convinced me that I said all those things.”

“So what now?” I asked, feeling small under his gaze.

“I don’t know,” he said.

“What are my chances of winning you back?” I bit my lip.

“I don’t know,” he said again.

My heart plummeted. At least it wasn’t a flat-out no. “I’m sorry about Los Angeles.”

He snorted. “I deserved it. I shouldn’t have said what I did. It was the beer talking. Knowing you and the cop were together upset me. I said a lot of stupid things.”

“I’m sorry about him. He was a friend, and he should have never been anything more than a friend.”

“So much has happened, Luna. I don’t know if there is anything left for us to work out.”

I was panicking now, my heart beating wildly. If he didn’t want us back together, I couldn’t make him. But I could at least fight. “If I could take back every awful thing I’ve said or done, I would do it in an instant. I’m sorry for making the last year a living hell for you. The video was humiliating, and I was terrified that it was true ... that everything people had ever said about me not being pretty enough or interesting enough for you was true. That people would think badly of me if I went back to you. But now I know it was all an act of cruelty on Erich’s part. I know you don’t trust me the way you used to. I always thought about you, Devin, and now I realize how much I love you. If you won’t take me back, I’ll understand. But if you do, I promise to make it up to you.”

I pulled the contract from my purse and laid it out of the table. “As a sign of my sincerity, this is for you.”

He picked up the contract and stared at it. “What’s this?” he asked, flipping through the pages.

“It’s a contract I had made up for you. It’s a three-year term with Perez.”

I could see the surprise on his face. He set the contract down on the table. “I don’t want it,” he said flatly.

“What?” I said, horrified.

“I don’t want it,” he said. “I want to drive in America with a fresh new start.”

“You can’t be serious! Did you see the terms of this contract?”

He shook his head, but his smile was warm. “I took a quick glance. It’s impressive, but I still don’t want it.”

I felt the blood draining from my face. I’d never thought he would turn it down. “But you can’t.”

“I can and I am,” he said with a shrug.

“But why?”

His smile was warm and open now. “You’re right, this has been a hellish year. But it’s also put some things into perspective for me. All the politicking and garbage that goes on with the teams, the difference that just having enough money for a good engine makes, no matter how talented or shite the driver is ... I always knew it, but I really got to *see* it this year. Especially when I started to clean up my act, hoping to win you back.”

I blanched but didn’t say anything. I’d wasted so many opportunities to make things right with him.

“And the other thing ...” He was grinning now. “Nat got a job offer in Denver. Which means my daughter will be in America, and I want to be close to her.”

I felt tears well in my eyes. “Your daughter ... That’s so great, Devin. I’m happy for you.” And I was. I had to be.

He nodded. “That’s what really solidified the choice for me. I see opportunity there, Luna. I want a second chance. Racing there is very different, and I think I can help it grow. Bring my expertise somewhere it’s appreciated. Maybe I’ll come back one day, but for now, that’s my decision.”

I took a deep breath. It was obvious he was leaving me behind in order to go after his new life. “I see,” I said, trying to remain upbeat.

“While you’re here, I have something for you,” he said, rising from the table. I followed him up to the bedroom we’d once shared. I was pleasantly surprised to see that it wasn’t the usual mess he liked to leave it in. There were a few shirts thrown on the bed, but little else. From the chest of drawers, he pulled out a small velvet box. I immediately knew it was the engagement ring. I looked away and tried not to become emotional. He was breaking the final ties between us.

“I don’t want it,” I said as he extended the box out to me.

“It’s your ring.”

“Give it away, or sell it,” I said as he walked toward me. I stepped back, and he looked at me with a peculiar expression.

“Come here,” he said, grabbing at my hand.

“I don’t want it back. What am I going to do with it?”

“You’re going to wear it.”

My throat tightened. I looked at him and saw him smiling. He opened the box, gently took my hand, and placed the ring on my finger.

“I was going to take you back the moment I saw you at my door,” he said, kissing my forehead.

I threw my arms around him and began to cry. For the first time in a year, they were tears of joy.

* * *

“So, if I had signed this thing, would Rafe have shit his pants?” Devin asked, flipping through the contract. We were lying in bed, my head on his shoulder.

“Probably! I was sure you were going to sign it.”

He burst out laughing.

“What?”

He shook his head. “How did you manage it? Rafe signing this?”

“I could bring the team to its knees if I wanted to. Rafe had no choice.”

“So tell me, did you just have them swap in my name for Riedl’s?”

“How could you tell?”

“There is a provision here for me to spend at least ten days of each month in Monaco and have the team fly me to testing and to the races. Monaco is nice, but I don’t need to spend that much time there. And the provision about the water? Did Riedl ask for specifically only that brand of water?”

“Seems that way.”

“And now that I’m not going to sign this? Who will drive for Perez?”

“Anyone but Riedl. I’ll talk to Pedro, figure out whether it’s better for his career to stay with us on better terms or go to Roche.” I looked up at him. “Are you really sure about this? Not signing the contract?”

“Well, the personal trainer, physiotherapist, and reflexologist that would be traveling with me does sound attractive, but I have my sights set across the Atlantic. But we can see each other during our off weeks. It would be a lot of flying around, but we could make it work.”

“Do you have this all planned out?”

“I’ve been thinking about it for a while. We can get married again in December around Christmas, and your mum can throw us the wedding she’d so meticulously planned. Then I start testing with my new American team. I’ve been working on a contract with them for a few months.”

“And you are sure? No hesitations?”

“None whatsoever. You and I are together, and that’s all that matters.”

“I love you, Devin Flynn,” I said, snuggling in closer to him.

“I love you too, Luna Perez-Flynn.”

End

If you enjoyed this book and want to read a bonus chapter about Luna and Devin, check it out on [Ream](#). It's free to read if you follow me there. Following doesn't cost you a thing.

If you love hockey romances, check out my upcoming release. [Dump and Chase](#).

Dump and Chase

Kodiaks Hockey - Book 1

Playing games on and off the ice...

Tangi Kildare has no regrets. Not about falling for sweet, serious, sexy Ethan Grant. Not about giving up college and moving to a different country to support his pro hockey career. And definitely not about breaking up with him—she wasted half her twenties on his commitment phobia.

But sleeping with him three years later? That might be a regret. Especially when she discovers the consequences...

Ethan's world is turned upside-down when she tells him she's pregnant, but he's sure of one thing: he's going to be part of his baby's life. The best way to achieve that is to have Tangi close by. Step one: getting her a job as the Ravens' physiotherapist, the Kodiaks' farm team that just happens to play in the same town—what's the point of being the Kodiaks' star center if he can't pull a few strings?

Tangi will work for the farm team in the same building and make plans to co-parent, but that's all she wants from Ethan. She's got her college degree, her career...and a close new friendship with one of Ethan's teammates. The more time Ethan spends with her, the more he knows it's not just the baby he wants in his life. He's always regretted letting Tangi go, and now he has to find a way to win her back for good... before it's too late.

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Anna was born and raised in Canada. She's a prairie girl who loves the city.

From new adult to chick lit and everything in between, Anna writes contemporary romance and women's fiction that makes people laugh and love.

When Anna isn't writing her latest book, she's enjoying a cup of tea while attempting to create a culinary masterpiece.

She lives with her partner and their furry babies.

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