



RUTHLESS  
BILLIONAIRES

*Ruthless*  
KNIGHT

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
FAITH SUMMERS

# Ruthless Knight

---

Ruthless Billionaires

**Khardine Gray**

**Faith Summers**

# Contents

[Ruthless Knight](#)

[Author Note](#)

[Dark Romance Note](#)

[Also by Faith Summers](#)

[My villain. My monster. My Ruthless knight...](#)

[Playlist](#)

[You are mine now...](#)

1. [Knight](#)
2. [Aurora](#)
3. [Aurora](#)
4. [Aurora](#)
5. [Knight](#)
6. [Aurora](#)
7. [Knight](#)
8. [Aurora](#)
9. [Knight](#)
10. [Aurora](#)
11. [Aurora](#)
12. [Aurora](#)
13. [Knight](#)
14. [Knight](#)
15. [Aurora](#)
16. [Aurora](#)
17. [Knight](#)
18. [Aurora](#)
19. [Aurora](#)
20. [Knight](#)
21. [Aurora](#)
22. [Knight](#)
23. [Knight](#)
24. [Aurora](#)
25. [Knight](#)

26. [Aurora](#)
27. [Aurora](#)
28. [Knight](#)
29. [Aurora](#)
30. [Aurora](#)
31. [Aurora](#)
32. [Knight](#)
33. [Aurora](#)
34. [Knight](#)
35. [Aurora](#)
36. [Knight](#)
37. [Aurora](#)
38. [Aurora](#)
39. [Knight](#)
40. [Aurora](#)
41. [Knight](#)
42. [Aurora](#)
43. [Knight](#)
44. [Aurora](#)
45. [Knight](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Also by Faith Summers](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

*Ruthless*  
KNIGHT

USA Today Bestselling Author

Khardine Gray

writing as

Faith Summers

Copyright © 2023 by Khardine Gray Please note : Faith Summers is the Dark  
Romance pen name of USA Today Bestselling Author Khardine Gray

All rights reserved.

Ruthless Knight Copyright © 2023 by Khardine Gray

Cover design © 2023 by Book Cover Couture

Photographer- Wander Aguiar

Cover Model- Gui

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This work is copyrighted. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced, copied, scanned, stored in a retrieval system, recorded or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

The author asserts that all characters and situations depicted in this work of fiction are entirely imaginary and bear no relation to any real person.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

The following story contains mature themes, strong language and sexual situations.

It is intended for mature readers. All characters are 18+ years of age and all sexual acts are consensual.

## Author Note

**Please** note Faith Summers is the Dark romance pen name of USA Today Bestselling Author Khardine Gray



## Dark Romance Note

Dear reader friend ,

Thank you so much for picking my book to read. I hope you enjoy it.

I just have to warn you that this book is a dark steamy billionaire romance.

It contains scenes that may be triggering to some readers .

Best of wishes xx

# Also by Faith Summers

## FAITH SUMMERS COLLECTION

### SERIES

#### **Ruthless Billionaires**

Ruthless Knight

Ruthless Rebel

#### **Empire of Sinners**

Ruthless Sinner

Merciless Sinner

#### **Savage Legacy**

Devil's Kiss

Villain's Obsession

Hunter's Revenge

#### **Dark Syndicate**

Ruthless Prince

Dark Captor

Wicked Liar

Merciless Hunter

Heartless Lover

Ruthless King

#### **Dark Odyssey**

Tease Me

Taunt Me

Thrill Me

Tempt Me

Take Me

Original Sins

#### **Dark Odyssey Fantasies**

Entice

Tease

Play

Tempt

Theirs

### DUETS

#### **Blood and Thorns Duet**

Merciless Vows

Merciless Union

**Cruel Secrets**

Cruel Lies

Cruel Promises

**Standalones**

Deceptive Vows

Deadly Games

Bad Blood

**NOVELLAS**

The Boss' Girl

The Player

Tainted Beginnings

SIGN UP TO FAITH SUMMERS' NEWSLETTER FOR NEWS ABOUT FUTURE RELEASES  
AND AN [EXCLUSIVE GIFT](#).

# My villain. My monster. My Ruthless knight...

## **My villain. My monster. My Ruthless knight...**

Knight Grayson isn't just one of New York's elite billionaires.

He's the embodiment of Hades in a tailored suit and a beautiful devil waiting to destroy.

He always gets what he wants, no matter the cost.

*Including me.*

One harmless, sexy encounter places him in my path and before I know it, I'm caught in his strategic trap.

Although he insists I'm not his Persephone, he steals me away from my almost-fiancé.

And my life.

This isn't like the mythical tale of old driven by love.

To him, I'm a pawn in a game of power because I have something he wants.

In order to build his empire and get his legacy, he needs my inheritance.

Since the only way to get that is to marry me, he forces my hand by using my father.

**Six months of marriage, along with the ownership of my inheritance, and my father's extortionate debts will go away.**

To save my father, I signed Knight's contract, binding myself to every term and condition.

But then, the boundaries between us begin to blur.

Each public kiss, intended for show, feels dangerously genuine and pulses with undeniable attraction.

As his hunger for power evolves into a craving for me, we start to forget that our marriage is a contract.

Yearning for his touch was never part of the plan.

Neither was becoming his new obsession.

But when the veil lifts, revealing his dark secrets and twisted lies, we both realize we have more to lose than just ourselves.

***Ruthless Knight is a billionaire, forced proximity, fake relationship, and arranged marriage novel inspired by the Hades and Persephone myth. It is a complete standalone with mature language, themes, and content intended for mature readers only.***

# Playlist

Ode to my Family – The Cranberries

Señorita- Shawn Mendes and Camilla Cabello

Hollow- Four Star Mary

Wash it Away – Black Lab

Mine Again- Black Lab

Torn- Natalia Imbruglia

Dilate- Four Star Mary

Wildest Dreams- Taylor Swift

Lucky Ones- Bif Naked

Jar of Hearts- Christina Perri

You are mine now...



# Chapter 1



# *Knight*



I loathe Mondays.

The only thing worse than that dreaded first day of the week is a Monday morning meeting summoned by my grandfather—head honcho here at Grayson Inc.

But it's not him who concerns me. My grandfather is undoubtedly one of the few people I can stand in this world and the reason I choose to still work here. I'd even go as far as calling him my idol.

My problem is the *others*—my father and Bastian, my half-brother. AKA the sharks.

I'm early, the first one here. Not because I'm eager. It's more the case of knowing how to position myself for the upcoming battle I expect from today's meeting.

For me, that position is sitting here in the last chair at the end of the long, walnut-top table in the executive boardroom. A room that has hosted countless disputes amongst the Grayson men.

While waiting for the others to arrive, I've contemplated what changes today might bring. We've all been dying to hear the latest update about my grandfather's retirement.

He made the announcement of his departure a few weeks ago. It came as a shock as most people believed the infamous Bradford Grayson would never part with his beloved multi-billion empire.

I never saw it coming, and he gave me no clues. But maybe there was a reason for that—he knows *I'll* leave when he does.

And I will. That's the plan. Although I've worked my ass off for years to earn my stripes and become the senior development and investment manager, leaving has *always* been the plan. I will never lower myself to work for my father.

My brother Jericho, and I are planning to branch out and set up our own property development company. We only work here out of respect for our grandfather.

As if the weather has sensed my sullen mood, the rain starts pouring down. It turns the scene through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows into a mass of gray.

Footsteps sound on the marble floors outside the boardroom door, then it opens, and in walks my father, tall and proud with his graying head lifted like a king who's about to address his subjects.

His sharp blue eyes, which mirror my own, rivet to me with distaste, and just like always, he looks at me as if I don't exist. I've had years to perfect the subtle art of not giving a fuck, so I look at him the same way.

Whilst eyeing him up, I note there's something off with him. It's in his eyes. There's something about his usual confidence that's waning.

Grandfather enters next with Bastian at his side, who looks like a younger, blond replica of our father. The only difference is that he has grandfather's lean build and medium height, so while Jericho and I are six feet four, he's five-nine.

Grandfather tucks a lock of his white hair behind his ear and addresses me with his habitual nod, but Bastian gives me the same I-wish-you-weren't-here stare I got from our father.

Bastian sits next to Father, and Grandfather moves to the head of the table to assume his post. In his hands is a large manila envelope, which he places on the table before him.

“Good, nearly everyone is here.” Grandfather speaks in a stern voice and glances toward the door.

As if on cue, Jericho walks in. At least he showed up.

He's the rebel and the more outspoken between us. At twenty-nine, he's a year younger than me, but we look like twins and have a similar temperament.

Unlike the rest of us, who are suited and booted, Jericho is wearing a black button-down shirt and slacks. Knowing how much our father hates his tattoos, he's also made a point of rolling up the sleeves so we see the inky black dragons crawling up his forearms.

That's my art on his arms. In another life, before we hit our twenties and joined the host of America's richest men on Wall Street, Jericho and I owned a tattoo parlor in the Bronx.

Our lives are so different now that those years feel like they happened to people we used to know.

Jericho walks over to sit next to me, solidifying the us-against-them tension filling the room like a cloud of thick black smoke.

When we look at each other, I can almost hear his disparaging thoughts. He doesn't want to be in this meeting any more than I do, but we're here.

Grandfather straightens and stares at each of us in turn.

It's strange, he seems younger than his sixty-nine years and more at ease than I've ever seen him in all the seven years I've worked here. Perhaps it's because he's leaving.

"I know I've been quiet about the plans for the company following my retirement, but I've had a good reason for this." He glances at me again and makes a point of ensuring I am watching him. "I've been thinking about the best course of action to secure the legacy I've made for Grayson Inc."

*Interesting.* The general assumption was that when he left, my father would take control of everything. Hence, the reason Jericho and I would be leaving.

The one solid thing everyone knows about our dear father, Tobias Grayson, is the bad blood between us. He's made it

clear on several occasions that Bastian is his only legitimate son.

He continues to deny Jericho's and my existence. I'm sure if he could go back in time, he would skew the results of the paternity test Grandfather made him take, which proved him to be our father. The asshole knew full well we were his. While we inherited the dark hair and olive skin from our mother's French ancestry, we fucking look like him.

"What exactly does that mean, Grandfather?" Bastian asks with raised brows.

I can't fault him for the question because I want to know too.

"It means I'm shaking things up." Grandfather nods.

One look at my father and his sour expression tells me he's already gotten the memo on whatever this is.

Over the last few weeks, he's practically been walking in the clouds like the god he thinks he is. It would appear that Grandfather's plans have trimmed my father's ego down by several notches.

"In what ways?" Bastian's inquisitive tone reveals his panic, showing he's clearly worried about his plans to gain power.

Grandfather pulls in a breath and steeples his fingers on top of the table. "I've been keeping a close eye on the Park Avenue branch for the last year. I've noticed that it is on par with us here. In fact, as it governs the branches worldwide, it does so much more, and the scope to expand is vast."

He's right. Anyone paying close enough attention would have picked that up.

I work across all branches of Grayson Inc. From New York to Hong Kong. My marketing analysis two years ago predicted Park Avenue overtaking us here at the flagship.

"As such..." Grandfather sets his palms down flat. Almost like a sign to show the decisions we're about to find out has been finalized with no exceptions. "I've decided to divide the

company and make them separate entities. The branch here at Wall Street will remain the headquarters under the Grayson Inc. brand, and Park Avenue will become Graysons L.P.”

Jericho and I exchange curious glances while Bastian goes pale. Father’s expression remains the same, confirming he knew what was happening beforehand.

Given the fact that Bastian was just as clueless as Jericho and me, I’m guessing Father was given the news sometime this morning, leaving him no room to give Bastian the heads-up.

“With that said,” Grandfather continues, “on my departure, your father will automatically take over things here at Wall Street, but I’ll be giving Park Avenue to one of you three brothers. Whoever receives that role will become the new CEO, and the brother who comes in second place will become the CFO. The CEO will receive seventy percent ownership of the company and the CFO thirty. I’m sure you can imagine with the growth of the company, those numbers are exponential.”

*Fuck me.* This news...

It *could* change things. Change plans. *My* plans.

“And how will that be decided?” I speak for the first time since ordering my coffee earlier at the building’s onsite café.

Grandfather looks at me. “You’ll have to work for it and prove yourself worthy of the role. Essentially, you’ll have to impress me.” He switches his gaze from mine and looks at Bastian and Jericho. “You’ll *all* have to compete.”

“You can’t be serious,” Bastian sneers, shaking his head. “*Compete?*”

“Yes. This is what I believe is fair. You are all leaders in your own right, but I don’t believe this is something I should just hand to you, so the best way for me to choose is for *you* to show me you want the role.”

Bastian glares back at him and then looks at our father, who responds by cutting him a hard stare. “Father, don’t you have anything to say about this?”

“I have said everything that could be said.” His mirthless tone is dripping with such potent disdain, I can just imagine what went down after Grandfather dropped this bomb on him. “Your grandfather’s decision is final.”

“Indeed.” Grandfather takes back control of the conversation. “And my decision is not up for any further discussion or compromise. As there is a lot of work to be done across all branches of Grayson Inc., I have set the date for my retirement to eighteen months from today. During the time I’m here, I will select the new leaders and train everyone in the ways I would like for the continued success of the company. The leadership of Park Avenue will be chosen based on your performance in the past and all that you do between now and my departure. This is not to say that it will take eighteen months to impress me or prove yourself. It will depend on what you do. Do you all understand?”

We nod. Slowly, hesitantly, but surely. Jericho and I exchange glances again, and I can tell he’s thinking about this new shift in the tide.

“Perfect.” Grandfather clasps his hands. “That’s it from me. I will meet with each of you in due course.”

Father and Bastian are the first to stand. Jericho and I, next.

“Knight, can you hang back, please?” Grandfather asks, garnering probing stares from Father and Bastian.

“Of course.”

I receive harder stares before Father and Bastian proceed through the door.

Jericho leans in. “Guess you’ll tell me all about it later.” His tone is amused, the slight hint of his French accent sounding more distinct than mine.

He saunters away. When he goes through the door, I make my way to Grandfather, stopping in front of him with my brows raised.

With the others gone, he assumes the easygoing persona he uses when it's just the two of us hanging out.

"You certainly know how to shake things up." I incline my head and look him over, wondering what he wants to talk to me about. My grandfather is a man of many mysteries. Being with him sometimes feels like trying to figure out a hundred and one clues in an escape room.

"It wouldn't be like me not to do something. This is the grand finale, son." The corners of his lips lift into a proud smile, but then seriousness returns to his pale gray eyes.

"It definitely is."

He regards me as if he's looking for something deeper inside me. "The main question is, did I stir *you*?"

There we go. This has to be the mystery part I was waiting for.

"Maybe. I wasn't expecting you to split the company. That's a huge decision."

"I've been thinking about it for quite some time. It made good business sense. But you would have guessed that, right?" His stare becomes increasingly inquisitive.

"I did." I offer him a smile.

"I know you and Jericho will leave when I'm gone." His tone is open and transparent. "Given the terrible relationship you have with your father and Bastian, leaving is the logical thing for you boys."

It's no surprise he figured that out. "Is that what you want to talk to me about?"

"Yes. And no. I can't stop you from leaving. But I can try. I know the worth of good men when I see it. You, in particular, have helped me take this company to the next level."

We've been close all my life, and he's more like a father to me, but he's always been firm, so compliments like that are as rare as diamonds being found in someone's backyard.

“It should be you.” Grandfather continues with a nod. “*You* should be CEO of Park Avenue.”

I blink several times, processing his words. So few things excite me these days, and there are even fewer things I want. I’m a man used to *taking* ruthlessly, so I never lack for anything, be it the latest vehicle on the market or the most gorgeous woman wrapped in the silk sheets of my bed.

But this... this is different.

I *want* this.

“If that’s how you feel, why don’t you just give it to me?” I search his face, looking past the lines of age embedded deep in his skin, each one telling a story of the journey taken to get to where he is today.

“I want to give everyone a fair chance.” His expression loosens, taking the edge off the conquering leader he shows the world. “But, I suppose, I’ve always had a softer spot for you, Knight. You’re the eldest, yet I know if I were to leave everything to your father, he wouldn’t give you, or Jericho, anything.”

“He can hardly stand the sight of us.” That’s a hard truth I had to learn at an age when a boy needs his father most.

“That’s why I’m taking the reins, but I must do it fairly.”

“I understand.”

“Good. *But...*” He brings his hands together again, touching each finger to the other one by one.

“But what?” He’s piqued my interest.

“Fairness doesn’t stop me from telling you what would impress me.” Something wicked dances in his eyes and he picks up the envelope before him. “*This* would impress me.”

“What is it?” I stare down at the envelope as he opens the seal and takes out a picture of a hotel resort. It’s beautiful but worn down by my standards.

The surrounding scenery tells me it’s in the Hamptons.

“This is Sunset Cove,” he replies.



“In the Hamptons?”

He smiles. “Yes.”

“Is it for sale?”

He shakes his head. “No, son. This building isn’t for sale. The owner isn’t selling, and even if it were for sale, *we’re* not buying it.”

From the conspiratorial stare he issues me and his cryptic words, I suspect there’s more to this story he wants me to find out.

“So, if we’re not buying it, you somehow want me to *take* it.”

He chuckles. “You’re a man after my own heart.”

He reaches into the envelope again and takes out another picture.

This one is of a stunning young woman with long platinum hair and silvery-blue eyes that look like slices of the sky on a clear summer’s day.

She has a heart-shaped face with light freckles dusted over her nose. Her lips are the kind of porn-star plump you can’t help but imagine sliding around your cock.

The sun-kissed skin on her elegant neck looks like buttermilk, and I’m honestly stunned this picture of a woman I don’t know has managed to illicit such a reaction from me, much less *any*.

“Who is this?” I tear my gaze away from her and look at my grandfather.

He’s smiling wider. “This is Aurora Wright. The current owner of Sunset Cove. I’m sure you can find whatever means you see *fit* to strike a deal with her.”

I nod. “Okay. I’ll do it.” There’s nothing I can’t do, even if that means striking a deal without money on the table. Everyone has a price.

“Perfect.” Grandfather’s face brightens and he taps his knuckles on the table. “Knight, if you get this, I’ll give you the

company. You'll be the CEO of Park Avenue. It will be the start of your own empire."

That's all I need to hear. Power is the perfect bait for a man like me.

Becoming CEO of the Park Avenue branch of Grayson Inc. is something more valuable than anything I could have conjured.

My eyes drift back to the beautiful young woman I'm about to meet.

Things have definitely just gotten more interesting.

*Aurora Wright. I certainly look forward to meeting you...*

## Chapter 2

## *Aurora*



No. 11 is one of those exquisite and lively restaurants located near the harbor. Just last week, it was featured in *Stylish Restaurants* as one of New York's

finest for the great food and cosmopolitan ambiance where the classical meets modern world décor.

It's the place for lovers to be lovers, friends to become better friends, and sentimental moments to be shared.

Judging from the fusion of exuberant conversation floating around the room, everyone here is either one or all of the above. So, in my sullen mood of doom and gloom, I'm as out of place as a bright yellow duck amongst a brood of puppies.

It's Thursday night, one of the busiest nights at No.11, and I'm sitting at a table by myself amongst a sea of happy, *shiny* people.

Before me is an untouched plate of delicious fettuccine alfredo and a flute of sweet red wine. Both are a total waste because I don't think I have the stomach for either of them.

Coming here tonight was obviously a mistake. I thought being here would cheer me up, but truthfully, I'm not sure anything can.

My life has officially gone to hell, and I have to accept it's going to take every ounce of strength I can muster to not give up on my dreams of becoming a writer.

It's just that I never thought I could be sitting here today with a double honors degree in English literature and

journalism from Brown University, a multitude of experience under my belt, and a shelf full of awards, and still feel like I have no future.

People have all sorts of pep talks about being strong, but what happens when all seems lost and you find yourself sitting alone in your favorite restaurant with nothing but darkness to look forward to?

I guess for the moment, I should just be grateful that being a regular here makes me look less like a loser than I am.

The staff who know me will remember my happier days here when my mother was alive. We'd come by at least three times a week when I wasn't away at college, and even more during the summer. That time together held many special memories I'll always, *always* cherish.

My eyes drop from the half-moon-shaped Kokomo opalescent glass windows and land on the heart-breaking rejection letter that sent me here.

It's from *Montrose Magazine*. I have the letter opened and placed on the table next to my wine glass. I've read it several times since I received it. Part of me hopes that each time my eyes find the words, they'll be different. That they'll be the words I want to hear.

But they aren't. They're the same.

That first paragraph explaining my non-acceptance is enough to make me throw in the towel on my career for good

---

*Thank you for your interest in joining our team at Montrose Magazine. We wanted to let you know that although your resume and work experience are very compelling, our hiring team reviewed your application and did not select it for further consideration for the writer's position.*

Utter bullshit.

Last year, I was assured by the same *hiring team* that as soon as a writing position came up, I'd have first pickings. *And*, given the fact that I'd interned for them for four summers and worked at the magazine for a year after college, *Montrose*

was the only place I wholeheartedly believed would accept me.

They were the ones I was waiting for as I worked my last temp job and counted down the days for their recruitment season to open.

More than anything, I felt for sure *Montrose* would remain untouched by the nemesis hellbent on destroying me. But I'm sure, even without any evidence of her tampering, that she got to them too.

Just like she did with all the other magazines I'd applied at. Her devilish fingers and thirst for revenge are the only way I can explain this unfortunate event.

As the heiress to Lachlan Caseros, one of the biggest media moguls in the US, Rachel Caseros has the power to burn all bridges for me before I can even think of crossing them.

I wish I could call her a bitch, along with every heinous name on this side of the solar system, but I can't.

I can't because she's the result of my one very bad mistake.

One bad choice. One bad thing I can never take back.

I should have known better than to get involved with Scott. He was my college professor. All the red flags were waving in my face, telling me to run away. But I didn't listen. It wasn't until after the jet-ski accident that took his life, that I found out he was married to Rachel. Married with two children.

He took me for the fool I played right into his unfaithful game, becoming a convenient *thing* to pass the time whenever he was teaching at the university.

When I got involved with Scott, I didn't think about what would happen to my father's good name if our secret ever got out.

Our affair has only been kept a secret because Rachel doesn't want people to know what kind of asshole her husband

was. The only person who knows about it on my side is Madison, my best friend.

I trusted her with the truth because I needed someone to talk to. She also figured it out while I was seeing him in secret because we were roommates in college.

Although my sordid affair went down close to two years ago, I still wonder if I fell for his charms because I was grieving the loss of my mother, or if I really did love him.

My heart tells me the bitter truth is both.

Everything I've been through is enough for one person to experience in one lifetime. But sadly, it's just the tip of the iceberg.

The job at *Montrose* was supposed to be the silver lining to the dark cloud covering the life that will barely belong to me once I marry Nathan Gilmar in a handful of months. Once I say, 'I do,' I'll be little more than the nightingale locked away in its cage.

Elena, one of the waitresses who always serves me, makes her way over. She's grinning from ear to ear as if she's got some amazing news to share.

Before she reaches me, I grab the letter and shove it into my bag. I wouldn't want her to see the contents and *really* pity me.

"Hey, Aurora." Her expression brightens.

"Hi." I smile back, hoping she hasn't come to ask me why I haven't touched my food. When a glint of amusement forms in her eyes, I decide it can't be that.

"Guess what? The gentleman in the far corner of the bar is requesting that you join him for a drink on the terrace." Her voice takes on an excited sing-song edge.

At first, I wonder if I heard her right, then I squint and intensify my stare. "*Excuse me?*"

"The gentleman at the bar." She gestures to the bar, where my eyes lock with the Nordic blue ones of a man so striking, I have to look hard to establish that he's real.

Dressed in a black button-down shirt and beige slacks, his presence takes over everything in the room with an elegant yet rugged masculine charm.

To simply call him handsome feels too meager a word. It's like there's *handsome*, and then there's him.

Him with his thick black hair cut into a neat faux hawk, dark brows, sharp exotic cheekbones, and olive skin that looks like it's been caressed by the sun.

He looks Italian, or like he's from somewhere in the Mediterranean.

And Jesus, I'm staring at him. As my brain returns to earth, heat skates over my skin, making my entire body blush. Swiftly, I return my focus to Elena, my throat and mouth dry.

I lean in closer to her and whisper, "Are you sure you have the right table?"

Elena nods vigorously. "Yes, I'm *completely* sure."

"Did he say why he wanted *me* to join him?" I know that's a silly question for several reasons. One, I'm obviously eating alone, and two, he's a guy. A man would only request a woman to join him for dinner if there was something he liked about her.

Elena gives me a deadpan stare. "No, but why wouldn't he?" The blunt ends of her brown hair swish over her shoulders. "You're gorgeous."

"Thank you, but I feel like shit right now." I sigh, hesitation gripping me. "I'm not sure I should—"

"You should." She cuts me off faster than a bolt of lightning crackling through the sky in an angry storm, then wiggles her French-manicured fingernails before me. "Don't you know who he is?" She lowers her voice a notch.

*God.* This is going to be one of those times when living in the writing cave is going to make me look like some sort of social recluse.

"No." My tone is careful, my voice a fraction above a whisper.



“He’s literally been in the press for the last month.” She stares at me wide-eyed.

*A month?* That’s roughly about the same time my brain has lived on Mars, but just to double-check, I risk glancing back at the beautiful man. I groan inwardly when nothing comes to mind. Even in recluse mode, I would surely remember a man as good-looking as him.

“I’m drawing a blank.” My shoulders slump.

She gives me a saucy smile. “Then maybe it would be more fun if you did join him for a drink.”

“He wasn’t in the press for anything bad, was he?” That’s the last thing I need.

“No, I would be the first to warn you away if that were the case.”

“Can’t you at least give me a clue on who he is?”

Elena thinks for a moment before her playful smile returns. “Let’s just say he’s one of New York’s most sought-after men and of the mega-billionaire variety.” Stars practically glitter in her eyes as she speaks. “As in, he’s on the *Forbes* Billionaire list. *And* that spot on the terrace he’s talking about is usually booked out for weeks, but whenever he’s here, it’s *his*.”

*Okay, then. And dayum.*

Hesitation grips me again. This time, for other reasons. The *right* reasons. Like my official engagement on Saturday, where Nathan will give me his ring. As that’s only two days away, I’m practically engaged now.

*But realistically, am I?*

Nathan and I are exactly what you would expect from people who are about to enter a business marriage. We’re falling in line with what our families requested of us.

Although I’m trying to be the dutiful daughter I should have been back in college, I don’t want to marry him.

Sure, he’s nice to me and likes the idea of having me on his arm, but apart from that, we’re not together at all. We’ve

never even been on a date.

I can also guarantee that if Nathan isn't knocking boots with some woman in his car or his bed, he's definitely not thinking about me.

It was only last week that Madison caught him having sex with his secretary in the parking lot of the DoubleTree. Thankfully, he didn't see her. They were at the hotel for the wedding of a mutual friend.

Madison has been my partner in crime since we were twelve. She's been my eyes where I can't see and my ears where I can't hear. She's also been the voice of reason telling me that if I can't get out of this wedding, then I should live it up until I can't.

My experience with Scott taught me to make better decisions in life, but this...

This is *nothing*, right?

It's just a drink.

I look back at the beautiful man again. The sight of him has my heart thumping.

This might just be an invitation for a drink, but it's an invite from a ridiculously gorgeous man who's so gorgeous it feels sinful to look at him. And he has my body tingling in places I forgot existed.

"*Well?*" Elena prods, shuffling impatiently from one foot to the other.

As if the beautiful man can hear us, he raises those thick story-book prince brows, the same question as Elena's on his face.

"Yes," I hear myself say.

*Yes.* I should do this.

*Why not?*

After all, it would be rude to refuse, and I'm sure no woman in their right mind would turn down a man like that.

# Chapter 3

## *Aurora*



I stride toward the handsome man staring back at me.

When he does a full sweep of my body, my trembling legs feel like they're going to dissolve into pools of water.

His gaze wanders over my body from head to toe with whispers of sin emanating from his stare.

I'm still in the young and inexperienced department, but I can honestly say I've never had a man look at me the way he is. As if he wants to strip off my clothes and devour me right here with everyone watching.

The thought and the look send a sudden rush of liquid fire pumping through my blood. I have to swallow hard to chase away the sensation.

I'm not by any means a nervous person, but this guy is doing all sorts of unexpected things to my body.

As I get closer, he straightens, looking like a giant in comparison to my five feet and four inches. And *my God...*

From afar, he was already gorgeous, but up close, his face and muscular body are a whole other masterpiece. I would definitely have to say that he's the most beautiful man I've ever seen in all my twenty-four years.

His straight nose and square jaw give his masculinity a sharp edge. Fire dances in his arctic eyes with a hint of predatory menace, tangoing with the overhead light beaming down on his obsidian hair.

His hair is so dark that against my platinum blonde, we must look like night and day.

He's what you call dangerously beautiful. Being around a man like him wouldn't make you think twice about losing yourself in him. Among other things, like dignity and common sense.

When I reach him, I try to summon confidence despite the bats fluttering around in my belly.

"Hi," I say, mentally giving myself points for channeling my inner Marilyn Monroe. "Here at your request."

The beautiful man stretches out one long arm with a thick Rolex strapped around his wrist, and the corners of his lips lift into a sexy smile. The sight makes me think of forbidden things I shouldn't contemplate. Definitely not when I promised Dad I'd give Nathan a chance.

*But Dad isn't here right now.*

I take his hand, and he gives me a brief handshake. His hand is warm and dominating in contrast to my dainty one.

"Knight Grayson," he speaks in a deep voice that matches the opulence of his presence.

I work his name through my mind and confirm I definitely haven't heard of him. Trust me to be the only woman in New York who hasn't heard of a man who's been in the news for a month.

"Pleased you accepted my request," he adds. There's a slight accent to his voice I can't quite place. It makes me believe I was right about him being from the Mediterranean. I'm not sensing Italian, though.

My father works with a lot of Italians at Wright Investments, so I'd pick up on the accent straightaway.

"Me too. I'm... Aurora Wright."

"Nice name."

I smile back at him, appreciating the compliment. "I'm glad you like it. Thank you for the offer to join you for a

drink.”

“I figured you’d have more fun with me than staring at your plate.” His voice pours over me, warm and cool like light rain on a hot summer’s day. “Food not to your liking, *Goddess?*”

*Goddess?*

*Me?*

I’ve been called beautiful several times in my life, but goddess is next-level perfection. Coming from him, it feels like a huge compliment when he’s the one who looks like the statue of a Greek god come to life. The closest I ever got to being a goddess was in tenth grade when I played Persephone in the school play.

When Knight intensifies his stare, I remember he asked me a question. About the food. The food that Elena is now clearing away.

“No, it wasn’t the food.” I place a hand to my heart, as if to give my words more truth. “I’m... just kind of having a bad day.”

He searches my face. “I see. Well, maybe you’ll have a different kind of night with me.”

“Maybe.”

He flashes me a crooked grin and motions toward the frosted glass doors leading out onto the terrace. “Follow me.”

When he moves, I fall in step with him, and he presses his palm to the small of my back, radiating ripples of heat through my body.

My day already feels like it could be different because of this unexpected turn of events. I wonder how the rest of the night will play out.

We walk onto the terrace, where we’re bathed in a mixture of moonlight and amber from the overhead lights. The same metallic colors of champagne and burgundy inside the restaurant are out here.

One of the new waiters approaches us with a gracious smile.

“This way, please.” He waves toward the furthest booth in the VIP area, and I understand why this section is booked out for months.

With the wooden gazebo built around the seats and long white curtains flowing down like wings, it looks like something you’d see in the Caribbean. The ships in the harbor behind us add to that vision.

The waiter seats us, then stands by Knight to take our orders.

“A bottle of Château Lafite Rothschild Pauillac, please,” Knight asks, his accent thicker. Now that I’ve heard it clearer, I guess it to be French.

I also haven’t failed to notice how he ordered a thousand-plus-dollar bottle of wine as if it were water.

“Sure.” The waiter gives him a curt nod and leaves us.

Relaxing my shoulders, I stare back at Knight when he looks at me. The light of interest in his eyes reignites that heat I felt moments ago.

“I like it out here.” I nod, taking in the view.

“Thought you might.”

I smile at the thoughtfulness behind the comment but tamp down the bubble of excitement rising inside me.

I need to remember that this is *just* a drink, not a date, and no matter how ridiculously gorgeous Knight Grayson is, I need to be sensible.

Even if it’s hard.

He places his elbow on the table, making things even harder when he leans in, and our knees touch. “So, what made your day so bad?”

*Should I tell him?*

I quickly mull over what I could say and decide that telling him the truth might be harmless. It's not like I have to go into *all* the details.

I take a quick breath of the cool night air to steady my mind, then I think of the easiest way to begin. "There was a job I really wanted, but I didn't get it."

Sympathy softens his godly face, but the emotion looks as odd on him as an ill-fitted suit. As if sympathy is not an emotion he often expresses.

"Sorry to hear that. What kind of work do you do?"

*Good question.* Right now, I'm all over the place, from writing to managing Sunset Cove, another big change in my life. One thing, however, has been consistent—*writing*.

"I'm a writer. I want to write for a lifestyle magazine."

That's the ultimate dream, but currently, the only writing I've been doing is erotic romance novels and serials under the pen name Cordelia Harris. It's my side hustle and a well-hidden secret I've kept for the last three years. Again, nobody knows about it except Madison. Mom knew, too, but due to the nature of what I write, we agreed to keep it from my father.

For as loving and nurturing as he is, Dad is strict and old school. He definitely wouldn't be too happy if he ever found out what I do on the side.

"Sounds like a good career choice." Knight dips his head.

"It will be." *If I ever make it.* With the spell of bad luck I've been experiencing, that dream is getting further away from me. "What do you do?"

My question comes with the confirmation that I know nothing about this man who Elena deemed as one of the most sought-after in New York.

Pride spreads across his handsome face. "Property development. I'm a senior investment manager at Grayson Inc., my family's business. Essentially, I look for acquisitions. Then I turn them into multimillion-dollar investments." His



tone gives off a mysterious vibe. Like there's something hidden beneath the meaning of his words.

Maybe I'm being paranoid. God knows I've been the classic worrywart lately, so anything that doesn't sound right to me will appear mysterious, but I brush the notion aside and school my mind.

"That sounds exciting but like a lot of work." *And* there's no way I would have known about his background. I can't quite blame my recluse lifestyle on my lack of knowledge on who's who and what's up and happening in New York. I just didn't grow up that way. Unlike most of these socialites and debutantes who float around ignorant of reality, I had a different life once.

"Like everything, it has its darker moments, but I do enjoy my work." He sits back, and the moonlight catches his eyes, making them seem almost opaque.

"That's always good." I think of what else we can talk about to keep the conversation rolling. I'd hate for that awkward silence people fear to sneak up on us. His accent comes to my mind, so I choose that. "Do I sense a hint of an accent in your voice?"

"It's French." He confirms my previous assumption, giving me a wide grin that unleashes deep dimples I'm tempted to swim in. "My mother is French. My brother and I were born here, but we lived in Marseille until I was fourteen."

"Oh, wow. France sounds amazing. I hope to go there someday."

"You should. It's an amazing country."

I love hearing about people who have lived in other countries and those who have traveled.

The crunch of footsteps on the gravel path draws our attention toward the sound. It's the waiter coming back with the wine and two long-stemmed glasses.

"Your wine," he announces, setting the glasses on the table. He uncorks the bottle, pours us each a glass, then places the bottle on the table. "Is there anything else I can get you?"

“Not at this moment,” Knight replies, glancing back at me. “I’ll send for you if I need anything more.”

The waiter bows and leaves us once more. I watch him make his way down the path to where the other booths are, and I think of how far away we are from everyone else.

Knight picks up my wine glass and holds it out for me to take.

“Thank you.” I take it and sip at the same time he drinks his. The wine tastes sweet and flavorful. The combination is intense, but so good I could drink the entire bottle. “This is delicious.”

“It’s one of my favorites.” Knight places a finger on the label on the bottle. “This one always has a great mixture of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.”

*God, his accent.* It’s so sexy when he speaks French words, I’m tempted to ask him to say more.

“You sound like you know your wine.” I grin.

“I know a good thing when I see it.” The tone of his voice and the glint of desire in his eyes suggest he’s not exactly talking about the wine.

He sets his glass down, and that desire in his eyes I previously witnessed deepens. “So, other than the fact that you’re beautiful and you want to be a writer, what else should I know about Aurora Wright?”

The mixture of calling me beautiful and the sensual way he said my name has me flushing like a shy schoolgirl talking to the most popular guy.

“I’m sure... there are other interesting things about you.” His voice dips to a hypnotic timbre that makes my pulse gallop.

My cheeks burning, I ask, “What do you want to know?” I sound as if I’m an open book aching to be read. But I’m so far from that. Even if I were, there are many things I can’t talk about. It’s just nice to flirt and pretend I can.

Knight's gaze drops to my mouth and lingers there for far too long. Longer than what's socially acceptable, if you can call looking at someone's mouth acceptable. But I have a feeling the general rules of society don't apply to this man.

When his eyes move from my lips, and down to my breasts, my nipples tighten and pucker as if he caressed them with lust-filled invisible fingers.

My entire body is electrified from the sight of him assessing me, and my heart is pounding so hard I'm sure he can hear it.

When his gaze eventually climbs back up to meet mine, he places a finger at his temple.

"Tell me about your writing. How did you get into it?"

The question surprises me. From the salacious way he looked at me, I expected a different question. It seems he decided to go with a safer topic than whatever was on his mind as he checked me out.

"I did a piece for the school paper in my sophomore year of high school," I answer. My heart expands at the memory of the opportunity that changed my life. "I was filling in for one of the other writers who came down with chicken pox. The piece I did was so good, the head decided to keep me. Everything sort of took off from there." The longing in my voice makes me sad that I haven't accomplished my dream yet.

"Tell me more." He looks genuinely fascinated to hear more.

I smile back at him, proud to talk about my accomplishments. "I did my first internship at *Time Magazine*. It was only a summer placement, but I loved it."

I continue telling him about my writing journey while we drink, then our conversation switches to traveling, where I listen to him regale me with stories about all the countries he's visited.

Soon, I loosen up completely, and it gets to a point where we stop pouring glasses and start passing the bottle between us

as casually as if we do this all the time.

Quite possibly, the wine could be the reason I've mellowed out. I'm not over my limit, but the wine was stronger than I'm used to. Thank goodness I'd already decided I was going to take a taxi home.

Time fades into the ether while we captivate each other. It's not until the lights go out in one of the buildings across the street that I glance at my bracelet watch and nearly jump out of my skin when I see it's a few minutes before midnight. We've been talking for a little over three hours.

I can't remember the last time I did that with anyone. The closest time I can think of is staying up late with Madison at summer camp. But that was eons ago. Neither of us has time like that now. Even when we take a girls' trip where it's just the two of us or with our other friends, we never talk for as long as we used to.

And here I am, talking it up with a man I've only known for over three hours.

Knight looks at his watch, too, and straightens.

"Late?" He quirks a brow.

"Yes. I should probably get going." Except, I'm not ready to step back into the shoes of the girl I was when I first got here. I'm dreading it.

"Do you want to?" His words come out a little like a challenge. As if he's daring me to tell the truth.

I feel like I can't lie. Although, on this occasion, I probably should.

"No."

"Then stay."

I chuckle. "I think the restaurant's going to be closing soon."

"They'll stay open if I want them to." His words exude arrogance but are tamed by the flirtatious wink he gives me.

“I don’t doubt that.” I smirk, leaning my head to the side as I give him an amused stare.

“Then you should stay.” His voice drops on that last word, and the sensuality in his deep tenor makes my stomach flutter.

Heat rolls over my skin again like hot coals. I want to indulge in the feeling and allow it to take me to wherever this could go, but that voice of warning returns, reminding me to be sensible.

It’s obvious we’re attracted to each other. That attraction is as tangible as the empty bottle of wine on the table, so staying is something I shouldn’t entertain.

“I shouldn’t stay.” I bite the inside of my lip.

“*Shouldn’t?* What if I want to see you again?”

*He wants to see me again?*

An angry blush sweeps over my body, and I know there’s no way I can hide my reaction, especially since I want to see him again, too.

Whether it would be good or bad for me, I’d actually love to. Tonight was the most fun I’ve had with a man in years. *Years.*

I almost felt like the old me during the time we’ve spent together.

But... realistically, stretching this out is going to make everything worse. At the stroke of midnight, I’ll turn right back into a pumpkin with the shitty life I was trying to escape when I came here. The sensible thing to do is use the little resolve I have left to thank him for a great evening and call it a night.

“I probably shouldn’t do that either.” Saying those words feels wrong.

I’m surprised when he gives me a wide grin. “I’m hearing this word again—*shouldn’t.*” He narrows one eye and stares at me as if he’s trying to probe into my mind. “Perhaps if you say you *can’t*, I’d be more inclined to believe you.”

*Can't.*

Given that I really can't, that word should be easy to say, so I try.

"I...." I try and fail miserably.

And I know why.

I failed, and I'm still failing, to say the words because this handsome stranger has awakened my body with a carnal desire I know I shouldn't entertain but want to. I should chase the feeling away and focus, but it's been so long since my body has been given any attention and adoration, I'm starving for both.

It doesn't help that Knight is looking at me again as if he wants to consume me, with a wanton darkness of lust lurking in the corners of his eyes.

Suddenly, I'm momentarily breathless, caught in a war of emotions that seems to have snuck up on me.

Noticing my conundrum, Knight inches closer, and I become hyperaware of how close we are. We're so close we're sharing the same air.

"Having trouble?" His voice almost takes on a sing-song edge.

"My life's a little complicated at the moment." That's the best way I can explain my situation without going into any of the unsavory details.

"*Complicated?* That's the same kind of asshole word as *shouldn't*."

"I know." My voice dips to a reflective whisper. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. *But...*" His gaze rivets to mine, and he searches my eyes again.

Eagerly, I wait for him to continue. The interest inside me rises with each passing second.

I realize when his smile widens that he wants me to ask a question. That *but* was some sort of invitation. Like dropping

breadcrumbs and waiting for me to follow, but where is he going to lead me? I'll only know if I ask the question.

“But what?” I ask.

Knight inclines his head. As if on cue, the wind sweeps a lock of his hair over his eye, ruffling his neat perfection and making him look more rugged. *Sexier.*

“What if... I made it easier for you?” His voice pumps temptation through his words like an aphrodisiac, piquing my interest even more with another handful of breadcrumbs.

“How?” Another question he wanted me to ask.

One thick finger floats down to the pulse point on my wrist, and raw heat spreads through me, fueling the desire I've been keeping on a tight leash.

The simple touch takes control of my body. And I think he knows.

The wild, possessive look on his handsome face suggests Knight Grayson is fully aware of the effect he's having on me. He has been all along.

“What if...” His voice breaks purposely, like before, and his chiseled jaw hardens. “What if I told you I want you?”

# Chapter 4



## *Aurora*



I glare back at him, trying to process what he just said.  
*He wants me.*

My lips part to say something, but my brain struggles and nothing comes out.

It's then I notice that although my mouth is watering like I'm a hungry dog, my throat is drier than the Sahara in the summer.

The feeling worsens when Knight moves even closer. So close, he's a breath away from my lips and we're eye to eye.

“What if I told you that in my mind, while we've been sitting here, I've already fucked you at least five times in five different ways. And in five different places.”

Those words are filled with carnal desire and send shards of electricity straight to my core while shivers of heat erupt all over my body.

Instantly, my mind conjures the type of scandalous images I'd usually think of when writing my books. But instead of some made-up person, the heroine in my story receiving all that pleasure is *me*.

I'm thinking of him with me. Him taking me just the way he said he imagined— five times, five different ways, five different places.

Knight Grayson looks like the kind of man who would outdo any book boyfriend. I imagine that when he claims you,

he would own you in every sense of the word and devour every inch of your naked body until there's nothing left.

And you'd still beg for more.

*I would...*

“Um...” I attempt to reply as I try to compose myself, but the sudden hunger for him has wild desire pooling deep inside my pussy, aching so badly for him I have to squeeze my thighs.

“Still having trouble?” A faint smile of amusement touches Knight's lips.

*Jesus*, I can't breathe, and I go completely numb when his fingers trail up my arm. He pauses at the crook of my elbow and lifts his hand up to my chin. There, he lingers, holding me in place with his touch and a penetrating stare.

*What's he going to do next?*

Or say?

His warm breath whispers over my skin, and he brushes his nose against my cheek.

I close my eyes to savor the feeling of having him so close and the fact that we just floated over the line of whatever we were moments ago.

“Want me to show you what else I imagine?”

*Like my life depends on it.* “Yes.” My answer comes out in a rush, slipping out of my lips along with the breath I've been holding.

“Then give me a few more minutes with you. Will you, Goddess?”

As if my body is attached to strings, I nod, becoming his puppet.

He comes back to face me, his lips curving into a sinful smile.

My heart pounds harder at the anticipation of what he's going to do to me.

I don't have to wait long to find out. Knight brushes his mouth over mine and slides the tip of his tongue through my parted lips. The impact sends currents of pleasure sweeping through me.

The longing in my body is amplified by my two-year hiatus, and suddenly, I'm greedy for more.

The kiss changes from exploratory to carnal in a breath. He slides his tongue right into my mouth for a hungry kiss, devouring and consuming all my thoughts that aren't him.

Our tongues tangle with the same fiery passion he uses to claim me, making my body melt into the hard planes of his.

I feel his heart beating wildly against my taunt nipples. The rapid beat increases the longer we kiss. Then he surprises me by lifting me onto his lap.

He positions himself so I can feel the massive bulge of his cock pressing into my ass, and a wicked smile glides over his lips.

"Spread your legs for me, Goddess," he beckons, kissing down the side of my neck.

Panic surges through me as my awareness returns, and I remember we're in public.

"*Here?*" I can barely speak. "What if the waiter comes back or people see us?"

"No. The waiter won't come unless I call him." He points to the little buzzer on the edge of the table. "And look where we are. No one can see us."

I lift my head, and look around. We're so far away it's like this booth was made for sinning.

"So, spread your legs for me," his husky voice sounds again while his fingers flutter over my sex, pressing into me through my skirt. "Let me finger-fuck you and make you come so hard you'll feel me long after I've unraveled you."

His promise and dirty words lure me right back to the dark side. I realize just how badly I want him to slide his fingers inside me and touch me where I crave him most.

*Fuck it. I'm doing this.*

This moment belongs to me, so I can choose what I do with it.

I choose him.

All thoughts of my promise to Dad and my upcoming engagement to Nathan fly out of my head, and I nod, parting my legs for the beautiful man who wants me.

Knight rolls my skirt up to my hips and cups my pussy. He loops a finger through the band of my panties and strokes that smooth skin there. His touch sends hot arousal coiling through me from the top of my head to the tips of my toes.

But that's just the prelude for what's to come.

Pushing aside my panties, he slides one finger into my pussy. I moan, completely unable to help myself.

"You're so wet for me." He grins. "Bad girl, if you wanted me so badly, we could have been doing this all along."

"I—" My words cut out when he pumps his finger into my slick passage.

*Oh fuck. God, that feels so damn good.*

My breath dissolves inside my chest the more he gives me what I've craved for so long. And I want more of that sweet pleasure sizzling in every molecule of my blood.

My body arches when he pumps harder and speeds up, truly finger-fucking me. I moan out loud. Embarrassingly loud. And I don't care if it was loud enough for my voice to have traveled down to the other booths.

Knight presses his lips to my neck again and licks the skin there. "You like that, mon cherie."

*Mon cherie... God. I love it, and I love his accent. I could listen to it forever. "Yessss."*

"You want more?" He slows his pace, rolling teasing circles around my clit. My entire body shakes, stirring the beginnings of an orgasm deep inside my core.

“Yes, more. Give... me *more*.”

I moan mindlessly. He rattles off a series of words in French in a deep, husky voice that sounds sexy as hell. If he didn't have me squirming over his rock-hard cock and my mind reeling, I might have been able to pick out one or two words, but the only thing my body can function enough to do is indulge in the pleasure he's giving me.

That pleasure courses through me as my orgasm rises, and I allow my hands to roam over the cascade of hard sinewy muscles beneath his shirt.

His massive erection grows harder the more I touch him, but he takes back control by adding another finger.

A thrill shoots through my nerves, severing me from reality, and then everything explodes as I come.

I come so hard I fear I might faint, and still he keeps going, pumping into my pussy at such a speed that I come again.

I grab his shirt, my fingernails digging into the solid flesh of his thick shoulders, then he laces his hands through my hair, guiding me back to his lips for another ravishing kiss.

His tongue dancing with mine makes me wet again, then he pulls out of the kiss, leaving me breathless.

Knight removes his fingers from my passage. My jaw slackens when he casually slips them into his mouth and licks off my glistening juices.

He stares back at me with a satisfied look on his face, showing he's savoring the taste of me.

He comes back to my lips for a quick kiss but lingers before me.

“We'd better leave it at this.” His voice is rough with need.

My mind and body are still rattling from what we just did, so it takes me a moment to process what he's saying. Once I do, I'm even more dazed.

How can we leave this? It feels like we've only just begun.

“Leave it?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” I search those clear eyes.

He sighs. “Because, mon cherie, the next time we meet may be different. We don’t know yet if we’ll be friends or foes.”

The air around me is already thin. Now it feels tight from his cryptic words.

“What do you mean?”

“We’ll both have to see.”

With that, he eases me off his lap, rises to his feet, looking taller than he did before, and walks away.

*Just like that.*

All I’m left with is the image of him leaving and those words bouncing around in my head.

*The next time we meet may be different. We don’t know yet if we’ll be friends or foes.*

An uneasy feeling I can’t quite label stirs deep in the pit of my stomach, and my insides twist into knots the longer I think about those words. It was the way he said them. So strange. So... ominous.

Almost like a threat.

*Knight, what did you mean?*

# Chapter 5

# *Knight*



**C**uriosity is the billionaire's curse.

It's worse than karma, fate, or destiny. It can either kill you or lead you to your next venture.

Or if you're me, it can leave you stuck somewhere in the in-between. Right there in that gray area where you can't predict what the hell will happen next. You have to keep going to find out.

That was the inherent choice I made to play a game where you have to make up the rules as you go along.

The automatic lights pop on when I step through the large oak doors of my ten-bedroom manor home in Lloyd Harbor.

I make my way down the marble-floored hallway, where I'm greeted by the still sound of silence—my favorite thing.

Usually, I'd savor it because it indicates that all my live-in staff have gone to bed, and I have the time I like to myself. But tonight, not so much.

Instead of my usual thoughts surrounding Grayson Inc. and my plans for the week, the only things living in my mind right now are Aurora Wright's mindless moans of pleasure and the way she looked when she came on my fingers.

That look of wild pleasure on her angelic face will forever be engraved in my mind.

I swear, the taste of her is still lingering on my tongue, like a fine meal prepared at a Michelin-starred restaurant. Her



arousal tasted sweet like Tupelo honey, and her decadent body is the sort that was made to be corrupted.

Even I, with the usual ironclad control I always keep on my dick, was lost in her.

Business is business. I know that. But fuck me, the moment I first saw her, I wanted her.

As bad as that would be for me, I wasn't lying when I said that.

Everything about her made it hard to look away, let alone resist. From that long wavy white hair running down her tanned shoulders, leading to her perky, rounded tits, to the wrap-over skirt that showed off her tight little ass.

Her enticing bright blue eyes delivered a punch to my gut, and all it took for me to cave was one look.

And fuck if I don't want to go back outside to find her so I can fuck her raw.

Fucking her with my hand was too much for tonight, yet not enough.

Like the bear caught with his hand in the honeypot, I wanted more.

I still do.

Even as I held back and walked away, I wanted nothing more than to be balls deep inside her and feel her tight little pussy squeezing my dick as I emptied myself inside her.

Nothing about the woman followed my normal rules right from the get-go.

Against my better judgment, as soon as I saw her, a surge of something primal rushed through my veins, and I needed more than just the mere glimpse I initially planned. Tonight was supposed to be a 'look but don't touch' mission, but curiosity worked its way into my bloodstream, silently and lethal like a deadly poison.

If I'm being honest, curiosity hooked me right from the moment Grandfather showed me that first picture of the

goddess, then it took me straight to the doorstep of No. 11 to find her.

In my world, it's common practice to meet your opponents before you face off on the battlefield. But my meeting with Aurora Wright was anything other and didn't feel like war.

Maybe that was because she was so much different from what I expected to find in William Wright's daughter.

Although the man doesn't hold a candle to my family's wealth, his status is close enough, so I expected Aurora to be a daddy's little princess. Or at least like one of the typical high-society women who flock around me every chance they get in an attempt to better their lives and status with a billionaire husband.

But Aurora Wright was... *normal*.

Normal, with real dreams she wanted to work hard to achieve.

I've lived this life for so long that I've forgotten what normal feels like.

As she spoke about her aspirations to write for a lifestyle magazine, I wanted to bottle the passion lacing through her voice and store it away as a reminder of what it feels like to have dreams you wish for with your heart.

It's a contradictory thing for me to want, given the fact we met tonight because of my own career desires. But the difference between us is she'll do everything by the book to achieve what she wants, whereas I'll take it, sparing no thought for what I have to do to reach my goals.

And the goddess just happens to own the thing I want.

Miss Aurora Wright became the proud owner of Sunset Cove after her mother died two years ago. The resort, a highly sought-after idyllic getaway destination that has been favored by celebs from as far back as the 1940s, was willed to her.

It's currently on a lease, which runs out next week. It was supposed to be renewed, but Aurora's mother decided against

it because she wanted to run the place herself. Which is why Aurora is currently managing the resort.

That's as much as I know. The termination of the lease is what attracted my grandfather to the place, but I don't know what we'll do with it once it's ours.

I'm still in the early stages of my master plan, but I think it's safe to say that tonight, I stepped over the first hurdle.

Everything else should come together over the next few days.

*Or sooner.*

As I approach the study, the crackling sound of paper catches my attention.

The sound is faint but there, and I know—at this hour—it can only have come from one person.

I make my way into the study, where I find Jericho sitting in one of the leather chairs. He has a Cohiba cigar slinked to the side of his mouth while he flicks through a copy of *The Economist*.

He's got his feet up on the stained-glass coffee table Mom bought me in China when I first bought this house. Right next to his feet is a bottle of thirty-year-old scotch, which is nearly finished. That, too, was a present. Grandfather gave it to me months ago for my birthday. I was saving it for a special occasion, like when I originally planned to leave Grayson Inc., but it's just like Jericho to dive in headfirst.

The fact that he's here isn't the thing that's piqued my interest. We often spend most of our days floating back and forth between each other's homes. But I know he wouldn't have come by in the breadth between night and day if he didn't have something important to give me. Or tell me. Or both.

Jericho lifts his head when I stop by the wall of bookshelves and gives me a Cheshire cat smile. "About damn time, brother. I've been waiting here for hours." He emphasizes every syllable of those last words and taps his wristwatch like the impatient father waiting for his daughter to come home from a party.

“*Hours?*” Now I believe even more that he’s here for all the reasons I want. “Don’t tell me all the women of New York got the memo that you’re an asshole.”

People call me one of the most sought-after in New York, but it’s a well-known fact that when my brother isn’t working, he spends his spare time switching women faster than people breathe air.

Jericho chuckles off key then sneers at me. “Very funny. So, tell me, did you wine and bed the princess? Because that would be very unbecoming of you, Knight Grayson. More than what you’ve already done.”

He’s talking about my decision to go to No. 11.

I won’t argue with him. We both know it was an unnecessary task, and that I was only there because I was thinking with my dick. The picture I got of Aurora would have sufficed. I didn’t actually *have to* meet her.

“Not yet,” I say that as if I plan to bed the goddess, but I don’t.

As badly as I would love to plunge my cock into that decadent body of hers, I know I shouldn’t.

*Shouldn’t*—there’s that asshole word again, but it’s the best word choice to explain my situation.

I *shouldn’t* and *can’t* go there with Aurora for many reasons. The first is that even a devil like me knows she deserves better. After meeting her tonight and realizing she’s just a regular girl with dreams, I know she’s not the kind of girl you fuck and leave after as if nothing happened.

That leads to the other reason: I can’t be the guy who would stay.

The goddess might have managed to throw me off balance, but in all my years, there has only ever been one real exception, and that’s not a path I’ll be traveling again. *Ever*.

Aurora Wright is a means to a very profitable end, so I’m just going to have to exert better control of my dick.

Jericho's sinister chuckle interrupts my thoughts. "And it looks as if she was as pretty as her pictures."

Those pictures were good, but they were nothing in comparison to the real-life Aurora Wright. The woman holds the kind of rare beauty that inspires art and forbidden fantasies.

"Or *better*," he adds in a melodical voice upon seeing my reaction and added silence. A cunning smile spreads across his face. "This is going to be very interesting."

"Jericho, stop pussyfooting around shit and playing with me. What did you find?"

That smile of his grows wider. "*Everything* you need."

I straighten, this key piece of news sending euphoria surging through me. "Everything?"

He nods, displaying the proud smile of the exceptional MIT graduate he is. "You were right. Everyone, even William Wright, has their secrets. And I found them. *All* of them."

Jericho never fails me, and I always have his back. That's what makes us a good team.

I go in for the kill when we want something, and he digs deep for all the tools I need to get that something. He's the best financial analyst on this side of the planet and a world-class hacker who can get whatever intel you need. From what a person ate for dinner to who they've fucked.

Name it, Jericho can do it.

It was he who told me Aurora would be at No.11 earlier, and he helped me sow the seeds for my plan. Now, I can take it to the next level.

He leans over the arm of the chair and picks up a manila envelope from the floor. I walk over to take it when he holds it out to me.

It's heavy. Heavy is always good.

"Thank you. What kind of secrets am I up against?"

“Serious shit. Believe me when I say you have this in the bag all six ways to Sunday.”

*Jesus.*

Which means all I have to do now is name the price.

I gaze at Jericho, grateful for his help, but since Grandfather unleashed this new path for us, I’ve been curious about what Jericho wants too.

I filled him in on my task within minutes of my private meeting with Grandfather, and all he said was, “What do you need me to do?”

That was days ago. Every time I try to talk to him about it, he changes the subject. I know he spoke briefly with Grandfather today, but he hasn’t told me anything yet.

“You helped me,” I point out.

“Don’t I always?” He raises a brow, but the smile he gives me suggests he knows what I mean.

“Don’t you want the chance to lead the company?”

His smile widens. “Do you want the short or the long answer?”

“Obviously, the long version because it includes the short.”

He swivels his legs off the table and sits straighter, staring at me head-on. “I’d love a company of my own. I’d love to take the lead, but on this occasion, I do believe this position is for you. You want it. I *know* you want it, and I’m not going up against you. We planned to leave and start our own company anyway. You were going to take the lead on that, too.”

“I saw us as partners.”

He smirks and shakes his head. “You can call it that if you want.”

“What do you want, Jericho?”

“My legacy. So, there’s no fucking way I’m going to allow Bastian to take the CFO position, and I can’t see you working with him either.”

“No. But Grandfather already knew that. You haven’t told me what he said to you.”

“Because he didn’t say shit.” He chuckles, but there’s no humor behind his laughter. “He called me into his office, and looked at me for a full minute before he said he couldn’t figure out what to do with me yet. But he’d let me know. *Soon.*”

And the plot thickens. “That’s *all* he said?”

“Yeah, so who knows what the old man could be planning?”

“Whatever it is, I know he wants us to run the company.”

“Sure, but rest assured our father and Bastian will be doing everything to work against that.”

“I know. If I know nothing else, I know that. Our dear father was shitting himself when Grandfather asked me to stay back after Monday’s meeting. I’ve seen him hedging around the office, watching me closer than usual, and asking about my whereabouts.”

“Expect more of that. Neither of them wants us in their lives, let alone to have any part of the Grayson legacy.”

Behold the story of our lives. One that framed our past and will shape our future. It always makes me sick, and I think of how our mother would have suffered.

She had the misfortune of meeting our asshole father when she was eighteen. She came to the US to further her studies and get work experience. She was hoping to make it here as an artist.

She met my father when he was working on a building he was going to purchase. It was opposite the college she attended.

He got involved with her even though he was already engaged to his bitch wife, Sloane. When Mom got pregnant with me, he made her think they were going to be the happy family. That’s why she got pregnant with Jericho just after she had me. But it was at that time that he was scheduled to marry Sloane.

As Sloane was set to inherit her father's diamond mining company after their marriage, our father chose her. But he was always going to do that.

He disowned my mother and never looked back, even after she lost her job and had to live on the streets, pregnant and with a baby. My grandfather only happened to find out about us by chance. Mom wanted to go back to France, so he helped her get back there. After that, we never wanted for anything.

Grandfather just had one request—that we return for high school and prepare to be part of Graysons when the time came. That's how we came to be and where we're at now.

"We can't let them win, Jericho." I stare back at him with renewed determination.

"No, I don't plan to. I'm ready to fight fire with fire."

"Then let's do this."

He nods, and I mull over what I need to do next.

I probably shouldn't have told Aurora that when we meet next, we might not know if we'll be friends or foes.

I already know the answer, and it's not friends.

Then again, we never were.

Friends *shouldn't* know what the other tastes like.

And they *shouldn't* want a chance for another taste.



# Chapter 6

## *Aurora*



*“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul – and  
sings the tunes without the words – and never stops at all.”-  
Emily Dickinson*

**H**ow fitting that my horoscope should quote my favorite poet on today of all days. And that particular quote, too —*about hope*.

God, do I truly need hope.

Perhaps the universe stepped in when it saw how disjointed I was and provided me with a message I needed to hear.

It's Saturday. *D-Day*.

I'm at the Langford Hotel for my engagement party.

My guests of thirty people, which includes Nathan and his family, are gathered in the grand hall waiting for me.

Madison is finishing my makeup. We're in one of the French Provincial-inspired boudoirs, where I'm sitting in front of a vintage dressing table, staring mindlessly at my reflection in its gold-rimmed mirror.

We have twenty minutes before we have to join everyone.

Madison has done a great job with my makeup. She's chosen smoky colors for my eyes and neutral tones on my cheeks and lips. My hair is rolled into a neat chignon, and I'm wearing a soft camel-colored dress.

I look beautiful, but inside, I feel like shit.

I've carried hope in my heart all day like a secret locked away in a treasure chest buried beneath the sea, but now that my engagement is upon me, I'm a *hot* mess.

Madison is talking about something, but my mind has tuned her out so it can jump back on the train carrying all my worries.

Those worries existed long before my encounter with Knight Grayson, but like an idiot, I added him to the load.

Over the last few days, I've fluttered from obsessing over all the wild things I did with him, to worrying about what will happen following my engagement to Nathan.

Admittedly, I've been thinking about *Knight* a hell of a lot more than Nathan.

That night, the moment I got home, I jumped onto Google to check out what the World Wide Web had to tell me about the man.

Knight is a thirty-year-old business magnate and property investor. He graduated from Princeton with honors and finished his MBA at Harvard. By the time he was twenty-five, he was already appearing on various renowned lists for his wealth, skills, and prestige. According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index and *Forbes's* Real Time Billionaires list, his current estimated net worth is 20 billion US dollars.

The two people ahead of him on both lists are his father and grandfather. The two people after him are his brothers, Jericho and Bastian.

Bastian Grayson is Knight's half-brother, whose mother is Sloane Belafonte—as in the diamond company Belafonte.

There was nothing online about Knight's mother. I figured she was purposely left out, and there was an obvious story there they didn't want to share with the world.

Littering the blogs and articles cascaded over Google was coverage of the event Elena hinted at back at No. 11. It was an extravagant yacht party Knight hosted for the Hawks, New

York's NHL team. His best friend, Luc, is one of the team's defensemen.

The press went wild because of the throng of celebs and royalty who attended. It was like a mini version of the Emmys.

On Knight's arm was one of the princesses of Monaco, who could easily have been a Victoria's Secret model. She was exactly the kind of woman you'd expect to find on Knight Grayson's arm.

The combination of seeing *her* and everything I read about Knight bamboozled me, making me wonder why the hell he'd even looked in my direction.

It doesn't make sense.

Then there were his famous last words.

*The next time we meet may be different. We don't know yet if we'll be friends or foes.*

Those ominous words have crashed around in my mind like a ship on rough waters, trapped in a tempest. Each day that has passed since has seen me looking out for something to happen. Or to see him again.

As there's been no sighting of the gorgeous billionaire, part of me wonders if I'm being paranoid. But I don't think so.

It's all driving me crazy. Thank God I have Madison. She's the only person keeping me grounded—her being here with me now and us working together at Sunset Cove to fulfill my mother's final wishes.

Months before Mom died, she was given the chance to buy the resort, but it was still under a lease. That lease expires in a few weeks. Mom managed the place for over ten years and had dreamt of refurbishing it in a 1940s theme.

That's what I'm planning to do, and Madison is going to help me. She runs her own full service marketing firm. She's offered to help me outsource all the companies I need to bring Mom's dream to life and do all the advertising campaigns once the refurbishment is complete.

“*Lord Jesus*, girl,” comes Madison’s deep Georgian accent right in my ear. She’s so loud I jump right out of my thoughts and glare at her.

“*What?*”

She shakes her head at me, and her long honey-blond curls bounce like springs.

Madison has the petite, fairy-like body and features of Tinkerbell, but when she’s annoyed, she becomes as fierce as a dragon.

“You didn’t hear a word I said, did you?” Her brows furrow.

“Sorry. I’m a little spaced out.” My shoulders sag, and my chest caves.

“A *little* spaced would be good. Miss Lady, you are more like zombified.”

I haven’t told her about Knight yet. Since I can’t quite figure him out or get over the fact that I was so intimate with a total stranger, I’ve been keeping him on the shelf of things to never speak about. Needless to say, Madison would have a field day if she ever found out what I did.

I lift my hand to my temple and note my skin feels hot. “I just need to get through tonight.”

“*Tonight?* This is just the beginning. It’s nothing compared to the rest of forever with that prick.” Madison’s dark eyes grow larger with displeasure. “I don’t care what your daddy says. This whole Nathan thing is a disaster. How the hell are you supposed to act like you’re in love with an asshole?”

“I don’t know.” I sound as hopeless as I feel.

One of my biggest peeves about this arrangement is that Nathan and I are supposed to pretend we’re head over heels in love and have been dating in secret.

Our families don’t want people to suspect we’re arranged, as it would be bad press for Nathan’s family. Mine, too, but it would be worse for him.

So, on Monday, when we share the news of our engagement to the world, I'm not supposed to look like I'd rather be pulling off my toenails.

"Oh, Aurora." Madison takes my hands into hers. "I just wanted a better guy for you. One like mine."

I give her a faint smile. It means a lot to hear her wish that for me. Madison has been dating the most perfect man on Earth for the last three years. Her boyfriend, Chad, is a six-foot-six lieutenant in the Marines who treats her like a queen. He's currently on duty in the Middle East. My guess is he'll be putting a ring on it when he sees her in a few weeks.

I know Chad is the *one* for her, and I'm happy for Madison, but I've accepted that not everyone gets to find their true love.

"I want that for myself too. But... you know why I'm doing this."

Understanding forms in her eyes, and eventually, she nods.

I've confided in her again with more secrets. This time about my suspicions regarding my upcoming marriage and the trouble my father's business might be in.

"Knowing doesn't make me feel any better."

"I know. It doesn't make me feel any better either," I agree, my tone flat.

After I had the freakout-argument when my father first broached the subject of marrying Nathan, I worried Dad would exercise stricter controls over my inheritance.

Until I turn twenty-five, he's my executor. He controls all my income that doesn't come from the meager earnings I make from my books.

With my dismal job situation growing worse, my choices were next to nothing, but then I overheard a conversation I shouldn't have between him and Conrad and realized Dad's business was in trouble. That's when I suspected there was more to this marriage arrangement than what he told me.

From what he'd said I also realized the reason for the trouble—Mom's death.

Her death broke him. Everything, including the business, suffered immensely.

There was a time in my life when Mom and I were in trouble too, and that's when my father stepped in. It was the first time I actually met him.

He saved us in a way that only an angel could. It's not something I'll ever forget. That's the crux of why I'm doing what I'm doing and the reason I'm so forgiving of his actions and decisions.

As Nathan and his family aren't that far down the ladder from the Graysons, marrying into such a family would open doors and fix my father's problems.

Madison sighs and releases my hands. "Okay, back to plan B."

"Remind me what that is again."

"Praying Nathan gets syphilis, and his dick falls off." Her tone is as casual as if she were talking about buying a new purse.

Despite my mood, I burst out laughing. "Madison, only you could say something like that with such a straight face."

"I just hope the good Lord sees it fit to bless you. Being afflicted with a terrible STD and dickless is a perfectly good reason to call off a wedding."

We both start laughing. It feels good until we're interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Aurora." It's Dad, which means my time is officially up.

I glance at Madison, and she straightens.

"Come in," I call back, biting the inside of my lip to hide my nerves.

Dad walks in and gives us a sparse smile that makes me long for the days when he used to really smile. Those smiles came easily, straight from his heart.

Looking at him makes me sad that those days seem to be gone forever.

“I’ll let you two talk and see you outside.” Madison dips her head and makes her way to the door. Before she leaves, she glances back at me, sympathy returning to her eyes.

Although my heart sinks, I summon strength and stand when Dad moves closer.

The only resemblance I have of him is his eyes. Everything else is my mother’s.

Dad is a giant with a marathon runner build and light brown hair. He still looks good for a man in his late fifties, but grief has aged him immensely.

“You look beautiful.” He touches my cheek and looks me over with pride.

“Thank you.”

“I just wanted to see how you’re doing before you go out there.”

“I’m okay.” We both know that’s a lie and that I’m far from okay.

“I know you’re not fond of marrying Nathan, but I know love will come in time. He’s very fond of you.”

*No, Dad, I just happen to be to his liking because I have the right breast size.*

I would say that, but there’s no point. He believes Nathan will change after our marriage.

“Conrad and I want you to give this a fair shot.”

Translation: *don’t fuck this up.*

Conrad and Dad have been friends since they were children. They’ve been business partners for the same time too. If I didn’t have my suspicions about Dad’s business, I would understand the sentiment of having their children get married to each other.

“You don’t have to worry about me.” *Another lie.*



“Okay. It’s time to go out. Are you ready?”

*As ready as I’ll ever be.* “Yes.”

“Good. Let’s go.”

I pull in one last breath to try to calm my mind before we leave.

Dad and I proceed down the corridor and head to the hall. When we enter, everyone cheers at the sight of me.

I smile back at each person as Dad leads me further inside, and I assume the role of the ecstatic bride-to-be.

Nathan meets us in the middle and beams at me with his Ken-doll smile and razor-sharp good looks. Like every other time I’ve seen him, he looks photo-shoot-ready.

When he plants a loving kiss on my forehead, I mentally give him credit. He really does know how to play the game. That kiss almost felt genuine.

A spark of interest lights up his eyes as he looks me over. He’s about to say something when the doors on the other side of the hall crash open and in storms a group of FBI agents.

An audible chorus of gasps—including mine—ripples throughout the room at the sight of them.

The sound of our astonishment grows louder when the agents march up to Conrad. One agent starts reading him his rights while another cuffs him the moment he protests and calls to Jennifer, Nathan’s mother, to call their lawyer.

The arresting agent says something about securities fraud and embezzlement. It’s then that it hits me he’s being arrested for serious shit.

*My God.*

*Nathan’s father?*

“You can’t do this!” Nathan demands, rushing over to the group.

That’s all he gets to say before two agents take hold of him and arrest him too.

A sinister part of my mind wonders if this is the universe intervening, until I feel eyes burning into me.

The feeling is so intense that I look straight up to the second floor, from where I feel the pull. Just like at the restaurant nights ago, my eyes lock with the Nordic blues of Knight Grayson.

He's resting his hands on the stone balcony, gazing right at me.

*Only me.*

Dressed in a long black coat, he looks like the Grim Reaper coming to collect souls. The arched windows behind him are open, letting in a breeze which lifts his coat and hair, adding to that element of darkness and doom he's exuding.

The sight of him stuns me, and I'm instantly taken back to the intimate, forbidden moment we shared when I would have given myself to him.

The memory is only fleeting, as common sense slams into me like a fifty-ton truck, along with reality, and the first question that hits me is, *what is he doing here?*

The question is followed by those last words that have haunted me.

*The next time we meet may be different. We don't know yet if we'll be friends or foes.*

Not even a second passes before something dark and twisted dawns on me.

*This...what's happening now. Nathan and Conrad being arrested.*

This is what Knight Grayson is doing here.

And those words...

I think this was what he meant and why he's standing in a position where he was sure I would see him.

Knight straightens, then turns and walks away, blending with the shadows.

He's gone.

But I have a feeling that won't be the last time I'll see him.

# Chapter 7

# *Knight*



“Be extremely mysterious, even to the point of soundlessness. Thereby you can be the director of the opponent’s fate.”- Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*.

**T**hat famous quote plays through my mind like a glorious song as I walk up the wide stone steps leading to the doors of Wright’s Investments.

By the time I was sixteen, I’d read every philosophy book worth reading and memorized every page of *The Art of War*.

I took a liking to that book in particular. Maybe it’s because of that primal competitive streak inside me that continuously fuels my thirst to win. Or it could have been my desire for revenge. By sixteen, I was well versed in my father’s treachery, and I despised everything about him. I’d made it my life’s mission to simply be better than him and Bastian. Better than both of them *at everything*.

As such, I’ve prided myself on being the guy who always gets what he wants.

Thanks to Jericho’s expertise, last night was the prime illustration of that truth.

Within the hour of the FBI raid, the story hit the national news that Conrad Gilmar had been arrested for securities fraud and embezzling eighty million from his clients.

It’s barely mid-day, but the press is running wild, spreading the story through every household in New York faster than an Australian bushfire. It’s on every news channel and in every paper with the headline:

*Conrad Gilmar's losses estimated at \$85 billion. Long prison sentence inevitable...*

Nathan is still in custody. Although Jericho didn't find too much on him, there was enough to link him as a possible accomplice to his father's dirty dealings.

If he's lucky to be released, I suspect he'll be under investigation for quite some time.

Just enough time to get him out of my way, but more importantly, take him out of the game.

Anyone would think those two had crossed me, but no. Until last night, although I'd heard of the Gilmars, I'd never met them in my life.

By being best pals with William, Aurora's father, poor Nathan and Conrad simply had the misfortune of being obstacles in my way.

Now that the path has been cleared, I'm free to carry out the rest of the plan.

Which is why I'm here. And the large envelope in my hands is not that different from a doomsday device.

I walk through the doors and proceed toward the elevator bank.

The interior of the building is as grand as the outside with glass-paneled walls and marble floors. Minus the scent of indulgence and greed, the place reminds me of the Grayson building. There's a homey feeling here that's almost welcoming. As it's Sunday and there's hardly anyone around, things might be different during the busier times of the week.

The guard at the concierge's desk acknowledges me with a clipped nod.

No words are spoken between us. A sign William must have briefed him about my visit.

*Good.* Nobody likes problems, especially with me.

However, I do wonder if William will fight, even though he's backed into one of the darkest corners in Hell.

I called him last night after the news hit and requested we meet today.

He was quick to accept the meeting when I gave him a summary of the incriminating intel I have on him.

The man is no fool. He would have known what Conrad was up to.

He would have also been aware that only someone with high-tech skills could have figured out what was going on, and said person could have been the only one to rat Conrad and Nathan out.

Last night, I'm sure William thought the Feds were there for him too. I saw it in his face as they marched in. The truth is they should have been. His crimes were substantially worse than Conrad's.

The only reason he's not behind bars is because I chose it.

I need William Wright on the outside as much as I need his beautiful, fiery daughter, who is stuck in my head, haunting me as badly as the ghost from my past.

Aurora figured me out. She knows last night was my doing.

I wanted her to.

From where I stood on that balcony, I could see the realization forming in those bright blue eyes as she stared back at me trying to work out why I was there.

I knew the moment she put two and two together and came up with the answer.

Seeing her again like that fit right into the gray area of my life where things are neither good nor bad. Certainly, seeing her there with her almost-fiancé wasn't good.

That shit had to be arranged. I didn't peg her as the type of woman to hook up with a stranger when she has a serious boyfriend.

What do I know, though?

Maybe I'm just being a possessive fucker because the taste of her still lingers in my mouth, and for those few moments that I had her, she was all mine.

Feeling her lush body pressing into me as I pleased her and having her come on my hands is still riding my mind like the devil.

After crashing her engagement party with the Feds and sending her *almost-fiancé* and his father off to jail, I'm sure our next meeting will be full of fireworks.

I take the elevator up to the fifteenth floor and make my way to William's

office. It's the large one at the end with the open door.

I walk right up to the door and find him inside. He's sitting behind an elaborate mahogany desk that looks like it belongs in the president's office. Scattered across the surface are stacks of papers and file folders.

I look William over, sizing him up. The only thing about him that resembles Aurora is his eyes. Other than that, I wouldn't even know they were related. Aurora's white hair gives her a Scandinavian look, while William looks like the standard all-American guy.

Seconds pass of me just standing there watching him, but William doesn't see me.

He's too busy shuffling through the papers, searching in an almost frantic manner. His face is a portrait of creases and wrinkles from the worry.

His mouth is wide open like he wants to shout with distress, but there is no sound.

Everything in the room looks as out of cadence as him. From the stack of books on the far side of the room that looks like the leaning tower at Pisa to the scatter of papers on the floor by the chaotic bookshelf.

Finally, he looks up and notices me. In that moment, his face turns a sickly shade of white. *Corpse white.*



He straightens and tries to look unfazed by my presence, but the sight of his Adam's apple bobbling as he swallows is a tell he's shitting himself.

"Knight Grayson." Another hard swallow, then a sheen of sweat emerges on the side of his face.

I return his greeting with a humorless smile. "William Wright." I walk into the office but stop when I'm a few paces in and point back at the door. "Open or closed?"

"Closed." He sets his shoulders back and keeps his gaze pinned to me, analyzing my actions.

I close the door and make my way to the chair before him. There I plant myself, cross my right leg over my left, and place the envelope on my lap. Once I've settled, I already look like I've stolen his power.

"So, we finally meet."

"Finally." He presses his lips together briefly, then pulls in a breath as his eyes drift toward the envelope. "Is it all true? I mean, what you know about me?"

"Yes."

Our conversation last night was brief and straight to the point. All I really had to say to make this meeting happen was one name—*Falcone*.

Giovanni Falcone is an Italian mafia boss a respectable man like William Wright shouldn't know. Yet he does.

"It's all here." I hand him the envelope, and he takes it as eagerly as a vulture tearing the bones off a carcass.

He pulls out all the documents, and as he starts flicking through the evidence, his face falls further, becoming paler if possible.

I have pictures—a lot of them. I also have whole email conversations, offshore bank transactions, and transcripts of phone conversations.

William might not have had anything to do with Conrad's setup, but he had his own thing going on to steal from his

clients when he gambled away all his money.

To me, it looked like he started gambling in high-stakes poker games and started drinking. There are also records of him going into rehab months after his wife's death. Things got worse financially for his business, and he was never able to recoup his losses.

That was when he turned to Falcone, who is notorious for buying and selling on the black market. It's so much easier for men like him to have his very own investment banker at his fingertips—aka, William. A man who can manipulate stocks and shares and anything he wants. Which is exactly what he did.

But what Falcone doesn't know is that William was also stealing from him.

The reason behind the plan of Aurora marrying Nathan was to replace that money, along with client investments William lost. Nathan's family would get shares in Wright's Investments, and William was going to get an investment handout. Except he didn't tell his friend the whole truth about what the money was for. He left out the part about Falcone.

The whole thing is like a Mexican standoff where everyone has a gun pointed at them, and nobody knows who will pull the trigger first.

When William finishes looking through the documents, he brings a trembling hand to his forehead.

It's a full minute before he's able to look me in the eye.

He knows what I have there is enough to put him away for a good twenty years. That's if I play nice and keep my silence to Falcone. If *he* discovers what William has done, he'll kill him and do whatever he sees fit to recoup his losses, including taking his daughter.

“What do you want?” William speaks in a rusty voice, sounding like he hasn't said a word in centuries. “You obviously want something, or I'd be in prison or six feet under.”

That ruthless smile returns to my face, and I sit forward, keeping my gaze trained on him.

“I want Sunset Cove.”

His brows knit, falling so deep they almost touch. “Sunset Cove isn’t mine to give.”

“Oh, but it is. You are the executor of your daughter’s estate until she turns twenty-five.”

“That is her gift from her mother,” he argues. “It’s the only valuable thing her mother had in this world to give her.”

From the meaningfulness in his tone, I sense that this mess he’s in isn’t the real him. He sounds the way a father should. One who cares but ended up screwing himself over with one bad mistake.

But this is business. He did what he had to do. I’m doing the same.

“I believe your wife left a separate provision that allowed you to act on Aurora’s behalf in exceptional circumstances.”

His jaw drops because I’m not supposed to know that.

The intel was literally in a separate proviso Aurora’s mother only shared with William. Susana Wright was a wise woman who tried to foresee and make provisions for all eventualities. That letter was one of them.

“How the hell did you find out about that? I haven’t even shared that information with Aurora.” He shakes his head in utter disbelief, and I smile wider.

“I know everything I need to know, and I believe this is an *exceptional circumstance* given that you just lost your only ticket to fixing your *dire* financial situation.”

William stares back at me, unblinking beneath his craggy brows, alarm spreading across his face as the seconds tick by.

He knows I’m right. Nathan and Conrad are completely out of the picture.

When the Feds finish taking everything from them, they won’t even be able to rub two beans together, so William has

no one. At least not anyone who is willing to give him the amount of money he needs, which is several million.

“What are you offering me?” he asks.

*There.* I’ve cracked him.

“I think the better way to phrase that question is, will you give me what I want in return for *my silence and my help*?” I intensify my stare, so he knows not to fuck with me.

“Your silence and your help? And what does your help include?” His bottom lip trembles with worry and rage.

“My *help* includes paying off Falcone. Along with providing all the money you need to stop Wright’s Investments from going into liquidation, and yourself in subsequent bankruptcy.”

William bites down hard on his back teeth and clenches his jaw so tight it looks like it might snap.

“You do know that Sunset Cove can only be yours through marriage, right? There are also a number of other terms that need to be adhered to. Those parts were specifically set out in an irrevocable living trust. I can’t just *make* my daughter give it to you, even if I am the executor.”

“I know.” I knew that little detail all along. Getting married is something I never wanted, but the ends will justify the means.

William’s hawk eyes narrow, assessing me once more. “I’ll have to speak to her.”

“By ten tomorrow morning,” I cut in before he can continue. My tone is sharp and succinct enough to make him know there is no room for negotiation.

He thinks for a moment, then nods. “Please don’t tell her what I did. Don’t tell her about my rehab stay, and don’t tell her about her mother’s letter. *Please.*” His eyes continue pleading with me moments after he’s spoken. “I’m already breaking my wife’s heart by entertaining this *offer*. This is not an *exceptional* circumstance. This is you blackmailing me, Knight Grayson. And it’s all my fault.”

“Call it whatever you want.”

“Just, please, don’t tell Aurora. That is all I’m asking for.”

I owe him nothing, but I won’t make the situation harder than it already is. “Okay, but she’ll know what she needs to know in order to comply. Understand?”

His frown deepens. “I understand.”

“Perfect. Well, it looks like I just became your future son-in-law.”

# Chapter 8

## *Aurora*



**M**y stomach coils into tight knots as I walk down the hallway leading to my father's office at Wright's Investments.

Rain is pouring outside. Through the floor-to-ceiling glass walls on either side of me, it looks like I'm trapped in a tropical storm. The forecast states it will be like that all day.

It's nearly ten. Dad wants to meet with me to talk.

Usually, we meet here once a week for lunch and have dinner at the family home two nights a week. That's our family time. A chance to catch up and spend precious time together.

I already know today won't be anything of the sort.

Dad was brief on the phone last night when he extended the invite, but I guessed he wants to talk about the Conrad and Nathan situation, which has exploded across New York into a colossal mess.

Over the last twenty hours, the news has reported details of how Conrad stole millions from his clients. *Millions*.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. How a person could think it was okay to steal millions is beyond me, and Conrad never seemed to be the kind of person who would do something so terrible. But he did.

Like the rest of New York, I saw the evidence for myself broadcasted on the national news.

Now, the Gilmars have nothing. The last piece of news I heard was that all their assets had been seized by the government. From their ten-million-dollar home in the suburbs to their holiday home in The Hamptons. Everything is gone.

They've gone from billionaires to paupers in the space of hours.

The whole ordeal hit Dad hard, but I have to wonder if he was really in the dark about his best friend's unsavory activities.

Somehow, I feel that he wasn't, and I pray this meeting of ours isn't to tell me he was implicated in some way.

I don't think it's that. At least, I hope not. With the pace the investigation is moving, I think if Dad were implicated, we'd know by now. Regardless, I'm hoping to broach the subject about what's going on with the business with him and that he'll be honest with me.

Witnessing Conrad's secrets unravel like an Agatha Christie mystery has shown me how we never know who people truly are. Also, that your life can change before you can blink.

Like the fact that Monday is here, and I'm not engaged to Nathan.

There won't be any announcement going out to the world later, and from the way things are looking, there will be no wedding to worry about.

Nathan will remain in custody, and if there's evidence to link him to his father's activities, he'll receive a similar sentence—prison for a *very* long time.

While Madison literally broke out the champagne because she thinks God answered her prayers, I've been treading softly, because I still don't know what purpose Knight Grayson served in bringing the truth to light.

That's if I'm right about him, which my heart tells me I am.

Knight knew who I was right from the start.



The whole restaurant thing was a setup.

For what, though? To make a fool out of me just because he could?

Isn't that what these billionaire types do, though?

What a complete asshole.

Going to the engagement party to see Nathan and Conrad's disaster was part of that fiasco too.

I've wondered if Knight was watching me after because I never told him I was getting engaged. Maybe he wanted me to witness the terrible fate of a man I was supposed to marry and know who brought that fate to him.

Knight wouldn't have known that such emotion is totally lost on me.

Nathan might have been in my life since I was twelve, but I don't care one way or the other about him, especially if he's guilty.

I purge Knight from my thoughts as I approach Dad's office.

The door is already open, so I walk in.

Dad is standing by the window, watching the rain fall.

From here, I can already see the worry in his composure. His shoulders have even dropped, as if he's carrying everyone in the world across the ocean.

It's not a good sign.

When I reach his desk, he turns to face me, and the first thing I note is how gaunt his face looks. On Saturday, he looked worn down. Now he looks worse.

He looks similar to when Mom died—a shadow of his former self. My nerves spike, and my previous worry of his implication with Conrad comes back.

*Please, God, don't let it be that.*

*Please.*

“Dad?” I say that with a question in my voice, as if I’m checking it’s him.

“Morning, sweet girl.” He steps away from the window and walks over to give me a quick hug. “Are you okay?”

“Yes.” I search his bloodshot eyes. It’s clear he hasn’t slept. “Are *you* okay?” That feels like a rhetorical question, given the fact I can see he’s far from okay.

“I’ve seen better days.” He gives me a clipped nod. “Sit. We have a lot to talk about.”

*A lot to talk about?*

Newsflash, Dad, we’ve had a lot to talk about for years now. The list of things keeps expanding as fast as Elon Musk’s empire.

I sit in the soft leatherback chair he points to, and he moves his chair around so he’s in front of me. Usually, he’s behind his desk. It’s a simple gesture, but it makes me so nervous the knots already living in my stomach flip-flop.

“What’s going on, Dad? Please don’t tell me you got mixed up with Conrad’s crimes.” Normally, I would never step over the line and ask him something like that, but anxiety is slowly killing me.

“No, of course not.” His voice is firm, but there’s a look in his eyes that suggests his answer wasn’t the whole truth. I hate that.

I hate lies of any kind, and he’s told me so many.

I want to ask if he knew what Conrad was doing but decide against it. I don’t want to upset him with the implication and cut off my chances to ask the questions I really need answers to.

“You don’t have to worry about me like that,” Dad adds, his eyebrows pinching together as he sits forward and rests one elbow on his knee. “But I do need to talk to you about how Conrad and Nathan’s situation has affected us. I assume you’ve seen the news.”

“I have.” My voice curls with the implication that I’ve seen *all* the news there is to see. “Is it true that they’re losing everything?”

He nods. “Yes, but if Nathan is cleared, he’ll get to keep whatever belongs to him. However, those assets are few and far between.”

I thought so, too, although the pompous asshole acted like he owned the world.

“The point is, the purpose of the marriage to Nathan is no longer a viable option for us.”

At that comment, I see the opening to ask about the business.

“Is that because of the business?” When he nods, I’m prompted to continue. “I know things haven’t been great. What’s the situation now?”

“It’s not good, but I have found another suitable candidate for you to marry.”

My heart nose-dives to my feet and continues plummeting through the layers of the floor, going down, down, down.

I’m still staring back at him, but I can’t get my brain to work as it struggles to process the words that just filled the room.

“*Wha...*” My mouth opens and closes, my eyes narrow, and my lungs squeeze.

I stand because I can’t sit anymore.

If I do, my entire body might dissolve into a pool of water.

“Aurora.” Dad rises, too, and steps closer.

I step away and hold up my hands. “What are you saying to me? What do you mean, you found someone else for me to marry? As in someone I don’t know?”

“Yes, but, marriage is an expectation that—”

“Don’t give me that bullshit, Dad.” I shake my head as if it’s filled with a swarm of bees.

Dad's face becomes a mask of grief, and I find something beneath the surface of his hard exterior—*desperation*.

Desperation is something I'm not used to seeing on my father, the mighty William Wright. And now he wants me to marry someone I don't know?

"You had the truest love with Mom. She loved you with her last breath, but you want this for me."

"No." It sounds like the first piece of truth he's shared in years.

"Then why? Why do you think it's okay for me to marry someone I don't know? At least I knew Nathan." My voice rises into the heavens, showing I'm at my breaking point.

"This particular person is interested in owning Sunset Cove."

My ears start ringing and burning at the same time. "But Sunset Cove is mine. Mom left that for me. You can't take it."

"I'm not taking it. I'm simply investing it."

"In a way that it won't be mine anymore."

He doesn't answer.

*Oh, Jesus.* Just the other day, I wondered what would happen if he decided to wield his powers of executor over my head. I thought he would never do that, but here it is. And why?

"Things must be terrible for you to do this to me," I blurt. "What is actually happening, Dad?"

It's obvious he's trying to keep me in the dark again. Just like he did with Mom. He knew Mom had an inoperable brain tumor and never told me.

He never told me about the numerous treatments she went through in an attempt to save her life, or the pain she suffered when I was away at college. I only found out my mother had a terminal condition after she dropped dead in front of me.

I never had time to prepare the way he did.

“I’d rather not talk about it.”

“I think we need to. This is my life,” I cut him off again. “Tell me what’s going on, and don’t lie to me. This isn’t like you, so why are you doing this?”

“Because your father is mere breaths away from bankruptcy,” comes a deep, silky voice from behind me.

That voice is one I would unfortunately recognize asleep or awake.

My body was already in its peak of shock, so I’m stunned that I can feel worse.

I turn toward the direction the voice came from, and when I find Knight Grayson leaning casually against the doorframe, my pulse ripples across my skin like hot lava pouring out of an erupting volcano.

I study him with frantic eyes, having another bamboozling déjà vu moment where I’m trying to figure out why he’s here.

Last time, I figured him out.

This time, I’m drawing a blank, and I have to wonder if maybe I’ve thought about him so much that my eyes are screwing with me.

No. It’s not that. Even if my eyes were doing a number on me, my ears aren’t.

I know what I just heard, and I know what I’m seeing is real.

Dressed in full black again, he’s the Grim Reaper. But what has he come to collect today?

“*You.*” The word leaves my lips on the edge of a breath.

I can feel Dad’s eyes on me, and I know he’s wondering just as much as I am how I know Knight. Dad’s gaze is so intense I want to look at him, but I know it’s not smart to look away from a predator when he’s already struck.

“Me.” A faint smile lifts Knight’s sensual lips, revealing those gorgeous dimples. I loathe the pang of longing that curls

through my body. “I’m curious, what did you choose, friend or foe?”

“I think that’s a trick question. Obviously, we were foes all along.”

“Well, we certainly weren’t friends.” He straightens, and his eyes roam over me in that scandalous way that would make a nun drop her panties. If a nun had no chance of resisting the seductive wiles of this man, I have *nothing* to restrain my body from reacting like it wants to be touched.

The most I can do is school my mind and harden my expression.

Now is not the time to get all weak-kneed over this man, not when he just dropped a bomb on me.

“What are you talking about bankruptcy?” I bring the conversation back to the main focus and glare at him.

“Let me clarify it for you. Your father is about to lose everything. One bad business decision sent him down the rabbit hole of despair, and he lost it all.” Knight waves a hand around the room. “This is all an illusion because your father has nothing. When what you see here fades and the hard truth comes out, he’ll be little more than his friend with nothing left in the world but the clothes on his back.”

My mouth goes dry. This can’t be true. I look from Knight to Dad, and the defeat in my father’s eyes freezes me.

Dad actually looks afraid. Afraid of Knight.

My father has never been afraid of anything.

“Dad? Is this true?”

He closes his eyes for a few seconds, and when he opens them again and nods, the ground shifts beneath me. But the fabric of reality rips open at the seams when something else dawns on me.

Knight is here.

He just said Dad is practically bankrupt.

Dad told me moments ago that he'd found someone else for me to marry. Someone who was interested in Sunset Cove.

It follows that...

I start shaking my head at my father. "Dad, who is this new person you found for me to marry?" Although the words have exited my brain, I'm still shaking my head.

"I think you already know the answer to that, *Goddess*," Knight answers for Dad.

I stare back at him, and all the equations that didn't make sense click together in my mind. As each one fuses with the missing answers, I feel physically sick.

It's him.

*Him.*

Knight Grayson. And everything that's happened over the last few days was all about getting Sunset Cove.

Meeting me at the restaurant, getting rid of my almost-fiancé, now this.

The revelation renders me speechless, and I swear everything inside me stops working as shock fuses with every atom of my body.

On seeing my dumbfounded state, Knight moves closer and stops a breath away, so the scent of his musky cologne tickles my nose. Without taking his eyes off me, he retrieves an envelope from the inside of his jacket pocket and places it beside me on the desk.

"Your contract, should you wish to accept." He taps the envelope. "Along with the details of where to find me. You have until sundown to sign the contract and hand-deliver it to me. But if I were you, I wouldn't allow the sun to go down before I made my choice."

Knight inches away, cuts Dad a hard stare, then turns and leaves.

I watch him until he turns the corner, disappearing from my sight, then I look back at Dad.

We stare at each other, unblinking, unmoving, unbelieving.

How the actual hell did we get here?

How *could* this happen?

Knight said Dad made a bad business decision. My father never makes *bad* business decisions. People from all over the world come to him because he's renowned for what he does.

So, what happened?

"Dad. What did you do?" My voice is softer than that of a terrified child.

"I... tried to save your mother." He swallows hard, and the brightness in his eyes fades like a dying star. "It cost me everything. I tried one bizarre treatment after another to save her. All of them failed. I didn't want to lose her again, but I did."

My lips part, and a tear seeps out of the walls of my heart.

He was trying to save her *again*. Just like the past.

Hearing the truth pierces me. Understanding hits me, along with the decision of what I must do.

I can't let my father lose everything.

If that were to happen, knowing I could have stopped it, it would break me.



# Chapter 9

## *Knight*



I slide my cigar to the side of my mouth and lean over the wooden edge of the pool table, lining up my cue stick to take my shot.

The set of remaining cue balls are on the smooth black surface waiting for me to strike, but all I can see is Aurora Wright swirling around in my mind. That murderous expression is entrenched on her beautiful face, and she's glaring at me as if she wants to gouge out my eyes with her heels.

Even I couldn't fault the beauty if she stepped over to the dark side and tried to kill me. Today, she witnessed the conqueror in me and saw the cruel extent of my ruthlessness.

Our encounter this morning was the summoning of all the participants to the battlefield. Now the war has truly begun.

I take the shot, and the balls scatter. All, including the eight-ball, roll straight into the nearest hole.

I win. *Again.*

"Damn you," Jericho hisses, slamming down five hundred dollars on the edge of the table.

I straighten, take a drag of smoke, and release the fumes into the ether with a smile on my face.

We're at the Astoria Club playing pool.

The Astoria is an invite-only association for the world's elite. Apart from the fundraisers and other gatherings that are hosted here, most of the men come by during the week to be

social and hold meetings for the businesses and charities they support. I'm sure the lure of the beautiful women who work here is also a reason they come in droves.

Most Sundays, Jericho and I meet here with our friends from high school to hang out.

The Astoria also happens to be one of the few places I can stand to see my father and Bastian outside of work. That's probably because the grandiose mansion we're based in has enough space and rooms so we can coexist without actually seeing each other.

As usual, Jericho and I are the first here. The other guys will come later. Luc will be the only one missing tonight because he's doing extra training with his team for the hockey championships in a few weeks.

"Want another game?" I quirk a brow when Jericho sneers at me. This is the third game I've won, and he's out of pocket by a grand.

He hates losing to me and won't stop until he finds a way to win back all the money he lost.

"Fuck yeah. I'll beat you this time. Let's put two grand on the table."

"Game on." I chuckle.

"Hey." He taps his stick on the table. "Don't get cocky just because you're on a winning streak. Sunset Cove today, Park Avenue tomorrow."

"Why don't we just wait and see what happens." I blow out another ring of smoke.

"But you already know you've got Sunset Cove, don't you?" He gives me a quizzical stare.

"Not until Aurora gets here with that contract." I don't doubt she'll come. I *know* she will. I'm simply being vigilant by wanting the signed contract in my hands before claiming my victory.

I know how people behave when their backs are up against the wall and they're blocked in. Ninety-nine percent of them

will cave. But then there's that one percent—the fighters who won't give up. They realize they still have a chance, and no matter how bleak the outcome may seem, they'll fight tooth and nail.

There's a remedy for those sorts of people, or rather a work-around. Either you snuff away their hope, or you provide a sufficient counterattack that will force them to bend to your will.

Aurora Wright fits into that one percent, but my counterattack is her father. By using him, I also had the doubled-edged effect of stealing away her hope because she won't be willing to take any risks that will affect him. Unlike me, the goddess has a heart. She won't let her old man suffer or lose his life's work.

That's why, although the sun has nearly set, I expect to see her soon.

She's left coming to see me purposely late because she wants to hold on to whatever power she thinks she might still have until the absolute last moment when she'll have to let go and accept her new state of powerlessness.

The goddess is also not going to be in any hurry to see me again.

Jericho sets down a new stack of balls, and I take my shot, nearly winning again.

Instead of taking his turn, he leans against the table and stares back at me, assessing me with newfound scrutiny.

“Knight, have you thought about how this is really going to play out?” He blinks several times and releases a thoughtful sigh. “This is where my help stops, so I'm curious. You're going to marry this girl and take her resort, but she's going to live with you. In your *house*. You hate the idea of women in your home.”

Apart from Mom and my staff, I don't like *any* woman knowing where I live, so this is going to be a first for me.

Only a select few are privileged with my address, and that already feels like too much. At least one or two have abused

that privilege when I least expected it, and I hope I won't have any unnecessary drama in the weeks to come.

My life is already in enough upheaval, which will only increase *when* Miss Wright chooses to grace me with her presence.

"I'll cross that bridge when I get there," I tell him, glancing away from that stare of his that's still trying to probe too deep. "The house is big enough that we'll hardly see each other."

"Does that mean you won't be sharing your bed with her?" Mischief lights up his eyes.

The image of Aurora Wright lying on my bed with my sheets wrapped around her naked body sends a rush of blood straight to my dick. My artistic mind runs wild with the vision, and I barely manage to contain it.

"This is business, not the Playboy Mansion." My jaw tenses.

Jericho eyeballs me and tsks. "Stop acting like you don't want to fuck her."

"Like I said, this is *business*." Although my voice is firm, even that sounds like a lie to me.

"Well, this is going to be one hell of a thing to watch. I'm glad I got front-row tickets." He swivels around and takes his shot. "One thing's for sure, you've got this in the bag. Park Avenue is practically yours. Have you spoken to Grandfather yet?"

"I've updated him." Grandfather was thoroughly impressed with what I'd done so far. I think I even outdid his expectations. "I'm seeing him on Wednesday when he gets back from Hong Kong. I want to have all the loose ends tied up by then."

"I'm sure you will. I, on the other hand, am *still* waiting to know what I'm supposed to do to secure the damn CFO position. I swear Grandfather wants to torture me."

“I don’t think it’s that. Knowing him, you’re already doing what he wants you to do.” As the days have gone by, I’ve tried to think about the empire from my grandfather’s perspective. “He just wants things to be done a certain way because this is his end. Once he leaves, he won’t look back.”

“That’s going to be weird. He’s always there. Always involved and around. I can’t imagine that coming to an end.”

“Me neither, but it will. I think he wants a clean break and to be sure that everyone gets what they deserve, but he also wants to secure the empire with the right people.”

“Yeah, I suppose so. It’s just hard not knowing where I stand so I can start working on what I need to do. Dad and Bastian have each other. Even though Grandfather knows we won’t want to work together, in the end, he’ll always choose the right person for the job. That’s what worries me.”

I shake my head. “I don’t think you need to worry about that.”

“Hope you’re right because the longer I wait, the more I want the damn position.”

“Maybe that’s part of Grandfather’s plan too. Fuck knows.”

We both laugh.

The creak of the door to our left cuts into our conversation. We turn and see my lovely bride-to-be entering the room.

In her little pea-green coat with her face bare of makeup and her cotton-white hair braided into a fishtail, she looks no older than eighteen.

Her eyes rivet to me with that villainous expression again. And God, if looks could kill, I would be ashes and dust in the wind.

She came, just like I knew she would. And in her hands is the envelope containing the contract.

The contract declaring her *mine*.

The thought of her belonging to me ignites that primal rush again, and I stare at her with deeper fascination, my fucking cock hardening the closer she gets.

Although she's just come out from the rain and is looking at me as if she wants to kill me, she's still one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen in my life.

Aurora Wright has the type of striking beauty that could fascinate a man for eons and make him do all sorts of shit to make her his.

When she gets closer, she switches her gaze from me and cuts Jericho the same razor-sharp stare.

Our billion-dollar portfolio is usually powerful enough to tame even the worst of shrews, but Aurora looks like she couldn't give two shits who we are.

"I'm gonna call Luc and leave you to it," Jericho mutters in a sing-song tone. I don't have to look at my brother to know he's grinning from ear to ear. "Looks like you're gonna have your hands full."

I don't answer.

When he leaves, Aurora looks back at me.

She stops a breath away and intensifies her glare.

"I was beginning to wonder if you weren't going to accept my proposal—"

A slap from her dainty hand connects with my jaw, cutting out my next words and shocking the hell out of me. The last person who was bold enough to hit me ended up picking all their teeth up off the ground.

"Yes, I accept. I will marry you. And if you think that was a real *proposal*, you have another thing coming."

*Well, damn*, looks like the goddess has some balls on her. "Given the circumstances, I didn't think I needed to get down on a bended knee."

"How about nothing at all." She wrinkles her nose. "Let's get something clear. This is for my father. I'm nobody's fool,

so don't make the mistake of thinking so or believing I'm anything like one of your groupies."

I want to tell her that she certainly acted like one at the restaurant, and she liked me well enough when I was finger-fucking her pussy, but I'm more intrigued to hear what else she has to say. It's not often people challenge me, especially women.

"I wasn't myself at the restaurant the other night," she points out as if reading my thoughts. Her cheeks are flushed, so maybe she can. "Had I been, I would have seen you for the asshole you truly are and have nothing to do with you."

Her eyes darken to a stormy blue, and I half expect to see lightning crackling around her irises.

She's enraged, as she should be, but I wonder if she knows she's still looking at me like she wants to fuck me.

I smile, take a drag from my cigar, and blow out a plume of smoke over her head. As it settles like a halo, I lean forward, slicing into her personal space.

My closeness makes her shoulders tense, but she continues to stand her ground, doing her best to look unfazed but failing when her gaze drops to my lips for the briefest moment.

I look at her lips too, and remember kissing her. I shouldn't have done that. It's screwing with me now.

Ignoring her vapid bitch warning, I say, "I'll send my driver to pick you up Tuesday morning at eight. Make sure you're packed and ready to go." I move even closer and catch her scent. That fucking scent of honey and roses mixed with rain. "I'd hate for us to start off on the wrong foot."

She steps back and lifts her chin. "Everything about you is wrong, *Mr. Grayson. Everything.*" She shoves the envelope into my chest, turns on her heels, and heads back toward the door, never looking back.

I blow out another ring of smoke and my eyes drop to her perfect round ass, which I can just about see from the curve of her coat.



Jericho chooses that moment to return—I'm sure he didn't really go that far or call Luc. It's more his thing to eavesdrop, so I know he heard everything that was said.

He wolf-whistles when he reaches me. "So, that was her." His voice holds a spark of amusement.

"That was her."

"I like her." He nods and nudges his elbow into mine. "She's beautiful, fiery, ballsy even, and I think she might hate you. Looks like you're definitely going to have your hands full."

I think I'll have more than my hands full when it comes to Aurora Wright.

And this is only the beginning.

# Chapter 10

# *Aurora*



**T**he preliminary terms and conditions of this contract are as follows:

1. We will be married six weeks from the date of this contract, and you will adhere to all the rules and stipulations listed in section G. In order for this contract to be satisfied in full, we must remain married for a minimum of six months from the date of the wedding.
2. Once this contract has been signed, 90% of the ownership of Sunset Cove will be mine with immediate effect, and you will retain 10%. As I will own the ruling shares and ownership rights, I will be able to do as I see fit with the resort without the need to consult you.
3. Upon receipt of the signed contract, I will provide your father, William Wright, with all the funds he requires for his business and any debts owed.
4. You are required to move into my home by no later than Tuesday the 14<sup>th</sup> of June. You are also required to attend all functions and social gatherings I request of you.
5. Your discretion for our business arrangement is required at all times. Any contact with the press or other streams of media will result in the immediate termination of this contract, along with a recovery of financial gains allocated to you or your father.

6. You are required to fulfill **ALL** the activities I require in your role as my fiancée during our engagement, and my wife following our marriage. Any activities deemed inappropriate, will also result in the immediate termination of this contract. These include but are not limited to fraternizing or engaging in sexual activities with other men.

*Blah, blah, blah...*

There are ten more terms like that, followed by sections A-G, which list all

sorts of shit to do with my new life and my new normal for the next seven and a half months.

I've read the contract several times since it was given to me.

I'm looking at it again now for lack of something better to do as I make my way to Knight's house. My new home.

I'm sitting in the back of the Maybach Knight sent to collect me at eight a.m. sharp. In front is Ryan, his driver, who I was thankful didn't try to make small talk with me.

I'm not in the mood. I used my last ounce of energy to tell Madison what happened and all that will be happening. Yesterday, she helped me pack my things and sat with me as I signed the contract. Then she held my hand when I cried after that feeling of helplessness struck my soul.

Madison looked helpless, too, and other than telling me to be strong, there was nothing more she could say. I wouldn't have known what to tell me either if I were her.

She'll be coming by to see me at lunchtime. I've been counting down the hours since she left yesterday, and honestly, I didn't want her to leave me. She would have stayed and even gone with me to see Knight if it weren't her mom's birthday.

By the time I braved up to see Knight at the Astoria, I was as hollow as a shell.

The only ounce of satisfaction I got was when I slapped him. I don't care about the repercussions that might come for me down the line. He deserved it.

I had to give myself some compensation for what he did to me at the restaurant.

The way I see it, whatever he stands to gain from getting Sunset Cove is worth him doing all of this—marrying me and paying my father's debt to save his business.

I've been so consumed with everything that I didn't really think of what Knight would get from Sunset Cove.

Nothing further outside of the information in the contract has been given to me, and I only hope whatever he's doing won't interfere with my plans to renovate the place.

We turn down a road I'm familiar with as it leads to Sunset Cove. I was aware Knight lived close by, but I wasn't sure how close.

I get my answer thirty minutes later when we pull up in front of a black and gold metal gate that is as tall and wide as the one at the White House.

It opens automatically for us, and the car drives through onto a long driveway.

I allow my gaze to slide over the scenery, taking in the tall trees and vast expanse of green, then the sea in the background. A ginormous mansion comes into view. It looks like something you'd imagine in a Jane Austin novel, like *Pride and Prejudice*, but there's a gothic edge to the architecture that gives it a darker vibe. Like a lair.

It seems fitting for Knight because I imagine him right at home in the darkest corner of Hell, sitting on his throne with screaming souls all around him.

The car rolls to a stop in front of the house.

We get out and step onto the stone driveway. Ryan begins unloading my suitcases while I continue admiring the scenic grounds. Everything is immaculate and breathtaking. As expected.

The massive wooden front door opens, and a man who reminds me of Lurch from the Adam's Family steps out. As opposed to the butler's uniform Lurch is always in, this man is wearing a dark suit with a beige turtleneck jumper beneath.

He has graying sideburns, a stony face, cold gray eyes, and he's as hench as a Bond villain. I peg him to be in his late fifties or early sixties.

He makes his way down the wide stone steps. When he reaches us, I get an almost smile out of him, and he looks me over with what I'd class as a haughty glare.

What did I expect, though? Definitely not the welcome mat or even a full smile.

I'm guessing from my high, messy bun and the T-shirt and jeans I'm wearing, he can tell I'm nothing like the usual women who probably frequent the place—aka the princess of Monaco or one of Knight's other groupies.

I'm also sure this man must know the reason I'm here.

"Good morning," he speaks with a rich English accent. "I'm Claude, Mr. Grayson's assistant and custodian."

*Assistant and custodian*—yes, he definitely knows why I'm here.

"Good morning. I'm Aurora. Pleased to meet you."

My answer seems to soften his face. "And you. Mr. Grayson won't be around today, so I'll be taking care of you."

"That's fine." It's actually better than okay. At least I'll have the day away from Knight. It will give me more time to regroup. Being around him is confusing because he had me so fooled at the restaurant.

"Ryan will take care of your luggage while I show you around the house and grounds. Then I'll take you to your room. The movers should be here by then with the rest of your things."

"Okay." Thank God I get a room. That contract was a breath away from telling me I had to share a bed with Knight. Hopefully, this room of mine will be on the furthest side of the

house. Somewhere I can wait out the next seven and a half months.

*God*, every time I think of how long this is all going to take, my insides squeeze as if a vice is wrapping around my internal organs.

I follow Claude when he turns back to walk back up the steps.

He spends the next two hours introducing me to the rest of the staff here and showing me around.

Grayson Manor, as I've christened it, has seven bedrooms, three halls you could easily fit a hundred people in, two living rooms, a library that looks like it belongs at Hogwarts, a kitchen suitable for a palace, two garages, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a tennis court, and a sailing yacht docked at the end of the boardwalk.

Oh, and there was a section of the house that Claude referred to as Mr. Grayson's private quarters. I wasn't shown that part, but it was between the furthest garage and the swimming pool, and absolutely huge.

I also wasn't shown the location of Knight's bedroom.

Of course, being practically told it was somewhere I wasn't supposed to go, made me curious about what Knight could be keeping in his *private* quarters.

Who would even think to have anything like that in a house this big? There are only three members of staff who live on the grounds—Claude, Denise the head maid, and Belinda the chef.

There are also so many hallways and sections of the house that I'm lost just thinking about it.

I suppose that's one more mystery to add to Knight Grayson.

Claude finishes the tour by taking me to my room, which is nearly as big as my entire apartment and truly, truly stunning.

The satin wallpaper, wooden furniture, and king-sized bed covered in powder-pink sheets give it the elegance of the presidential suite at some fabulous hotel. But its striking rose gold colors and pewter candlesticks carry the sophistication of something designed for a princess.

Dare I say I love it.

The boxes containing all my belongings are neatly stacked in a corner, as is the luggage I traveled with.

“Denise will prepare some food and come up and get you when your friend arrives,” Claude informs me when I walk over to the long French windows and look at the beautiful balcony. “Do you need anything else?”

I turn back to face him. “No, thanks. I’m okay.”

“If you need anything, you know where to find me, or just dial 0 on the phone. The line will go straight through to me.”

*Wow*, I’ve never been anywhere where you could do that except in a store or some business office.

“Thanks.”

He leaves, then I’m left alone to my thoughts.

I look around the room once more, and the gravity of everything hits me. I’m out of my depth just for being here, and *this*—everything about the house and the man I’m supposed to marry is way out of my league.

My father gave me a cushy lifestyle where we traveled to all sorts of fun and fantastic places. But this... this is a whole other sphere of existence where everything screams of not just wealth but power. It’s in everything I see.

Nathan and his family don’t even come close to this. They definitely don’t *now*.

Feeling like my life is draining again, I lower myself to the bed and take my phone from my purse to check for messages. Sure enough, there’s a message from Madison telling me she’ll be here soon. There’s also one from Dad that came through half an hour ago.



It's a simple text asking me how I am, but I can almost hear the angst in his words. I message back letting him know I'm okay, so he won't worry any more than he already is.

I know he feels terrible about what's happened and has felt so for a long time.

He wouldn't tell me the extent of his debts and how he continued getting into more debt after Mom died, but I managed to get him to tell me a little more about how it began and what he did to try and save Mom.

He confessed that he literally spent *everything*. For a man who was already wealthy, that would have been a hell of a lot of money.

Mom had a glioma that the doctors had instantly classified as inoperable due to the high risk of death or serious complications following any attempt at surgery.

With that knowledge, I can just imagine what my father must have done to try and defy fate.

Dad told me that when they'd used up all the options in the States, they traveled to all four corners of the Earth, trying different innovative medical treatments and programs. But nothing worked. The most they got from their attempts was extending Mom's life by another two years from her diagnosis.

All that time, I thought my parents were off vacationing and living their best lives. But really, Mom was dying, and my parents were both trying to shield me from the truth.

I wish I'd known what was going on. Had I known, I wouldn't have been so crushed after Mom died when I found out Dad knew all along that she was so sick.

But I'm no stranger to the both of them hiding the truth from me. Mom did it, too.

I didn't know who my father was until days before my twelfth birthday.

My parents had a summer romance when they were in their late teens.

Back then, Dad was in the Navy. He was serving in the Bahamas, where Mom happened to be vacationing with her sisters. They met and fell in love, but they came from two different worlds. At the end of the summer, Dad sailed off to the Mediterranean, and Mom came back to Florida, not knowing she was pregnant with me.

She raised me by herself, and whenever I asked about my father, she'd make up some story about him living far away. Thank God I was just a child at the time who didn't question her, but perhaps that was why she made him sound like an angel.

My parents didn't see each other until eleven years later when my father ran into Mom at the diner she worked in. He was on a business trip and recognized her straight away. I was there eating dinner. I remember him taking one look at me, and I knew he was my father.

It was his eyes. Not just the color but the way he looked at me. Like I belonged to him.

The problem was, at the time, Mom and I lived with Jack, her abusive boyfriend, who would beat the hell out of her and roughed me up every chance he got. Mom wouldn't leave him because she was scared he would kill us.

On the day of my twelfth birthday, he nearly did. But my father stopped him.

It was like watching a movie where just as the bad guy is about to take his final strike, the hero bursts in and saves the day. That was what my father did.

Jack had beaten my mother senseless with the same baseball bat he used to hit me when I told him not to shout at her. He took out his gun and was just about to shoot us both when my father crashed through the door. That apartment we lived in was so rundown the door flew off its hinges and smashed.

Dad fought Jack and won with a punch that knocked him straight to the ground.

He saved us. Had he been a second later, I wouldn't be here today.

From that night on, Dad took care of us.

He took us back to New York to live with him, married Mom two days after we landed, and gave us everything we ever wanted, including a new life.

But most of all, he loved us so very much.

And still continues to.

That's why I'm here, doing *this*.

It's my turn to save him.

In the grand scheme of things, giving the next seven and a half months of my life to Knight Grayson is nothing in comparison to all my father has done for me and my mother.

I just hope I survive it and keep my head above water. I've never met anyone like Knight before. A beautiful devil with a twisted heart.

People say monsters aren't born. They're made.

I wonder...what made him.

## Chapter II

## *Aurora*



“**D**rink up, honey.” Madison raises her voice and a glass of champagne.

My shoulders slump. “Madison, it’s barely eleven in the morning.”

“And I’m sure it’s five o’clock somewhere in the world.”

Trust her to say that.

I bite back a smile and sink into the hard back of the wicker chair.

We’re sitting under one of the gazebos in the garden overlooking the beach.

Madison arrived fifteen minutes ago. Denise brought us out here to a fine spread of sandwiches and delicious finger foods. As soon as she left, Madison pulled a bottle of champagne from her bag. It was supposed to be the celebratory drink she got the other day when we knew I wouldn’t be marrying Nathan. Now it’s a drink-away-your-sorrows drink.

I’m still not in the mood to drink, but I need it to calm me down.

“Come on, Aurora, don’t let me drink by myself.” She holds out the glass she poured for me.

I take it, smelling the scented bubbles. “If I get drunk, I blame you.” I pretend to scowl.

“Darlin, just be thankful for small mercies like pink champagne.” She raises her glass like she’s going to toast, then I realize she is. “To strength in tough times.”

My heart squeezes. Boy, do I need the strength of an army to get through the next few months. “To strength.”

We drink, and I allow the bubbles and the tangy taste to take my mind away for a few seconds.

“Good, right?” She smiles.

“The best.”

She picks up one of the mango and lime chicken sandwiches and starts nibbling on it. “Good Lord, these are divine,” she drawls.

I take a triangle from the platter and eat one, and wow, it truly is delicious. “This tastes like heaven.”

“At least the food is good.” She nods and reaches for another sandwich. I do the same.

“Yeah. At least.”

“Have you seen his royal highness yet?” She shuffles in her seat, moving closer to the table between us as if we need to watch what we’re saying.

“No. Apparently, he’s away for the day, which is fine. I would prefer not to see him for as long as possible.”

“That’s completely understandable. I, for one, am still stunned to hell. Like *literally*. I’m still trying to wrap my head around it. First, I had to get over the shock of you meeting the guy because, *hello*, it’s not every day you meet someone like *Knight Grayson*, then being told everything else... well, it’s a lot for a girl to process.”

“Try being me, Madison.” I rest my hands on the table.

“Oh, honey.” She reaches across and taps the top of my hand. “I’m so sorry. I truly am. I know this is tough, and a definite out of the frying pan and into the fire situation, but... maybe we can hope that it might not be so bad.”

I give her an incredulous glare, staring back at her as if she just slapped me with her bag. “Are you serious?”

“I’m just trying to be positive for you, and...please don’t bite my head off, but it sounded like you *might* have liked him back at the restaurant.” She gives me a careful smile, then purses her lips and gives me a narrowed stare. “It also sounded like more happened between you two that you haven’t shared.” She raises her brows, and curiosity fills her face as fast as light chasing away darkness.

“Enough happened between us to tell me he’s an asshole.” I dodge the spot-on accusation, giving my head a shake to rid my mind of the clandestine memory.

“Okay, asshole it is.” The careful smile returns, but the curiosity lurking in her eyes tells me she’s only backing down because she can see my state of angst.

I’m glad she is, because yes, I did hold back on what I told her. All she knows is Knight and I met at No. 11 and had a drink. I absolutely did not tell her all the sexy, crazy stuff I allowed him to do to me. Apart from being utterly embarrassed and humiliated, I don’t want her to complicate the situation anymore than it is by reading too much into what I did.

Like she is now. I, obviously, know I liked Knight when we met. I just want to forget I did.

“It doesn’t matter what I felt.” I gulp down the rest of my drink. “He was all a lie. Given what I’ve been through, I should have known better. You would.”

*She would.* Women like Madison don’t fall for such asshole trickery. She would have spotted his deceit straightaway and sent his ass packing before he could even say hello.

The fact that she isn’t commenting is proof enough that I’m right.

“Honey, it might be that I just have a little more experience with men than you.

So, please don't be too hard on yourself." She presses her lips together and retrieves another sandwich.

"I just wish I wasn't at the restaurant that night. I blame that stupid letter from Montrose for sending me there."

Madison wrinkles her nose. "Forget *Montrose* and that fucking Rachel. I pray that nasty bitch gets what's coming to her."

Madison was the last person I spoke to before I ventured to the restaurant on doom's night. Before I even got down to the details of my rejection from *Montrose*, she guessed that Rachel must have had something to do with it.

"I'd tell you to fight, but there's no point fighting for a place like that when they clearly never valued your hard work in the first place."

"They're under Rachel's spell. Even if they valued me, they were probably scared because of what her *daddy* could do to them."

"It's just not fair."

I bow my head briefly in unforgettable shame. "It's my fault I—"

"Don't you dare, Aurora." She raises her voice. I lift my head to meet her intense stare. "Don't you dare blame yourself. Scott was an asshole who never had to answer for his part in this mess. While you're still suffering for it."

"It looks like I'm going to be suffering for a long time."

"Please don't say that."

"It's true. At least for as long as Rachel wants me to."

As it stands now, I have no one powerful enough to try to fight for me. When Rachel first found out about Scott and me, and threatened to destroy me and my family if I ever thought I could fight her, I should have at least told Dad.

I only kept it from him because apart from being ashamed, I was still grieving for Mom, and Dad had gone into meltdown mode. Back then, he was barely talking. I doubted he even



factored in that I was mad at him because he was a mess. Now I'm alone, and the future of my career hangs in the balance of probabilities.

"There are plenty of other magazines you can work for. *Montrose* was just one of them."

"Yeah, one of five who turned me down and my most likely prospect."

"It's not your most likely prospect."

"You know what I mean." A haggard breath leaves my lips. "I thought it was a given that I'd get the job."

"What about *People Magazine*?"

"I don't know, Madison." *People Magazine* was actually the dream, but, of course, getting a job there is incredibly competitive. I tried to apply for an internship there years before, but I never made it to the interview stage because I didn't have enough experience. That's how I ended up interning at *Montrose* and working with them over consecutive summers.

Last year, I registered for the job notification service at *People*, so I'd know when they were opening positions for staff writers. It was a long shot because such positions seldom, if ever, come up, but with the hold Rachel has on me, I'm not sure there's any point in hoping I can even get an interview. *People Magazine* is the cr me of the crop, but they're most likely right in the heart of all the magazines Rachel's father controls.

"The world is an ocean, Aurora. You mustn't stop trying." Madison's spirited voice pulls me back from my doomed thoughts and anchors me.

I nod, agreeing. "I won't stop. I'll try not to stop."

"Good, because I know your mama would be so upset with me if I didn't tell you to keep going."

I smile at that as it lifts my heart. "And I suppose she'd be upset with me if I stopped."

“She’d be madder than a wet hen that was tossed in a river.”

I burst out laughing, and I can’t believe the sound is coming from me. After this weekend, I was sure I’d never be able to laugh again.

Madison laughs, too. “Knew I could make you laugh.”

“You always find a way.”

“Right, so, here’s what I think you should do: try to focus on one day at a time. At least you can get away from everything when you’re at Sunset Cove, and there’s nothing like decorating and renovating to take your mind off things.”

“Yeah. At least. Assuming Knight stays the hell away. Apart from ownership of the resort, I don’t know anything more.”

The shadow of worry touches her face. “Let’s just hope he wanted the ownership and nothing more. Owning a resort like that in The Hamptons is prestigious by itself.”

It is, but not for a billionaire who went through all sorts of trouble to get it.

I’ll try to find out. I have to. The six months of marriage is a stipulation of the inheritance rules, but that’s just for protection. The pressing matter is Knight owns ninety percent of the place, and when the six months are up, and we go our separate ways, he’ll still own ninety percent.

He could do anything with it.

Madison taps my hand again. “Stop worrying. Just stop and think of today as one day less.”

At least time is moving slowly but surely. “One day less.” But, out of so many more to come.

She nods and straightens. “Now let’s eat the rest of this delicious food and unpack your stuff.”

Today, it’s the simple things, but soon, I’ll be planning a wedding.

Last week, I was in the same boat, but this week, I've simply swapped one beast for another.

\* \* \*

Madison stays with me for the rest of the day, and we manage to unpack all my things. By the time we're finished, the room looks as if I've always lived inside it.

The shelves on the wall have my books sitting on them, the wardrobes are filled with my clothes and shoes, my computer is set up on my desk waiting for me to write the next chapter in my book, and the peony-and freesia-scented candle from Jo Malone makes it smell like home.

It's late by the time Madison leaves. Late enough for me to head to bed, so that's what I do.

Except, I can't sleep.

There's far too much on my mind, and I keep wondering if Knight is home. It unnerves me to think we're in the same house, even if we're rooms or wings away.

By the time midnight approaches, I'm even more awake than I was when I first tried to sleep.

Realizing sleep is a lost cause tonight, I get up and do what I often do when I have bad spells like this—head outside for a walk.

As my apartment was right near Central Park, it wasn't uncommon for me to find a coffee shop that was open and hang out for a few hours with some hot chocolate. I started having more nights like that when I first realized what Rachel was doing to screw with me.

Cautiously and quietly, I leave my room and make my way down the stairs.

The house is as quiet as a church during prayer time. There's absolutely no one around. Even if Knight is here, he's not near.

With that reasoning, I head outside, walk through the gardens, and continue down to the beach.

It was beautiful to look at during the day, but with the bright full moon in the background and the silver light shimmering down on the surface of the water, it looks like something out of a fantasy.

The cool air and the sight of the waves inhaling and exhaling by the shoreline soothe me. I stay for an hour before I make my way back, but I choose to take the longer route instead. This passes the woodland area and the swimming pool.

Nearby are Knight's private quarters.

I stop when I get there and look at the large section that's almost big enough to be a separate house. In fact, most people would say it was, although the doors are similar to that of a barn.

I stare at it, wondering what's inside and how anyone would think it was reasonable to get married to someone—for business or love—and not be able to enter various sections of their home.

It's a little ridiculous to me, and right now, I feel like I'm being presented with two options.

1. Keep heading to the left and go back inside the house  
or
2. Go inside and check out the place.

As curiosity is practically begging me to select option B, I don't see why I shouldn't. To be fair, I wasn't specifically told I couldn't go in there.

I'm moving toward the door before doubt can take fruition in my mind.

I try the handle, and I'm surprised when it turns and the door unlocks.

I slip inside, and the automatic lights come on, brightening the entire room and revealing... a workspace?

A workspace with oil paintings of landscapes and sketches of angels on easels, and art supplies everywhere.

My imagination was filling this room with all sorts of things, from dead bodies to drug dealers, but I never expected to find this. I walk in and gravitate toward the nearest table, which has all sorts of art tools laid out on it and stacks of sketchpads.

I move deeper inside and through another set of doors, where I'm stunned to the core when my gaze lands on a collection of breathtaking figurative bronze sculptures.

There are twelve of them—a portion of a face rising from the ground with roots crawling up to the eyes, a beautiful mermaid with long flowing hair and her breasts exposed, a ballerina standing on pointe, an angel riding a winged horse, and the rest are of the same girl.

The largest is of her walking through the waves of the sea, carrying a rose with the petals falling off. The rest are of her in different poses, each with a rose in her hand.

There's something gripping about the largest. The girl looks so real, I expect her to come over and talk to me or hand me the rose.

I'm having a hard time believing she won't. I get closer, and the artistic effect is so potent, goose bumps erupt all over my skin.

Who did these?

Surely not Knight. He doesn't look like the kind of person who would have the patience to create something like this. Or like he'd be this in tune with the world of art.

But maybe he is.

Maybe this is a different version of him.

Perhaps one I'll never meet.

Ahead of me is another table that holds some old sketchpads and a photo album. I make my way over to it and open the oldest-looking sketchpad.

The first thing I see are sketches of a very beautiful girl who looks to be no more than eighteen, maybe younger.

She's on every page with different poses. Each sketch is striking and holds its own beauty. It's not until I reach the middle of the pad that I realize the girl is the same as the sculpture because there are sketches of it.

She must have been a real person.

I open the photo album next and get my answer. She is indeed a real person.

An incredibly beautiful girl with jet-black hair and bright green eyes and an almost angelic presence. The word *Giselle* is written at the bottom of the first picture, so I guess that to be her name.

There are pictures galore of just her. Some with her smiling and some with her posing. There are a few with her on the beach carrying roses.

The last picture is of Knight with his arm around her, but they both look like they were still in high school.

This girl must have been his girlfriend.

Where is she now?

From the amount of pictures, sketches, and the life-size sculpture, I can tell he must have not just loved her, but he was *in love* with her.

The sound of footsteps outside cuts into my thoughts.

*Shit.* Someone's out there. And I'm in here intruding on what I now see is definitely private.

Anyone nearby will know that someone is in here because the lights are on. They'd be able to see it from the windows.

The footsteps grow louder and closer. Frantically, I rush back the way I came in, but stop when the door handle turns.

Damn it. I don't want to get caught in here, and on my first day.

I look to my left and spot another door. If that leads outside, it will take me back to the terrace.

I make a run for it and dash through the door without looking back to check to see if the person came inside.

This exit leads me back outside, but even though I'm near the terrace, I've gone right into one of the prickly bushes. It's so dark I can't see properly to make my way out.

Eventually I do, but not without scrapes on my arms and legs.

Just as I'm about to make my way over to the terrace, a low, deep growl that sounded like the wrath of God makes me stop mid-stride.

Then three pairs of glowing eyes emerge from the darkness, covering my lungs in a sheath of ice.

My body turns to stone as they come closer into the moonlit path and I realize the eyes belong to three enormous Siberian huskies.

The three of them have thick black fur, glass-like eyes, and now they're bearing their long, sharp fangs at me and growling louder.

When I first arrived at the house, I thought of it as a lair in hell.

I have that feeling again and I recall the mythical story of Hades and his three-headed dog, Cerberus, who guarded the entrance to the underworld.

I'll be damned if this isn't exactly like that.

The moment I think that, I see him. Knight Grayson.

He steps into the moonlight too, looking like an angry god.

# Chapter 12



## *Aurora*



**T**he dogs bark at me, and the sound snaps Knight's cold, hard stare.

He switches his gaze from me to them and proceeds to give a command in French that has them backing down and retracting their fangs.

When he advances closer, they look at him, giving their undivided attention to their master, but he's focusing on me again, those eyes of his burning holes into mine.

Dressed in black slacks and a long-sleeved T-shirt the same color, he blends in with the night, looking like he's part of the shadows. His beard is fuller than the other day, drawing attention to his sharp jawline, and the cold breeze rippling against his shirt makes him appear bigger.

"A bit late for a walk, don't you think?" Knight looks me up and down, then glances at the door behind me. The one I clearly just came out of.

He knows. Knows where I just came from. Knows I was snooping.

"I was having trouble sleeping." I try to sound like I'm not shaken to my core by his foreboding presence, but the bottom of my belly is contracting like a fist is clamped around it. "What about you? Is this the time you walk your dogs?"

"They prefer this time of day, or rather morning." His gaze drifts back to the door. When he looks at me again, he hits me with an I-know-you-were-looking-at-my-stuff stare. "Find anything that interested you?"

As there's little point denying my guilt, I decide to play it safe.

"Maybe." The word feels like an understatement for the masterpieces I just witnessed, but there's no way I'm adding to his egomaniac personality. I wouldn't want it to metastasize into something neither of us can control.

"*Maybe?*" His tone is lighter.

"Yes." I give him a little shrug to compliment my indifference.

For an instant, something that looks like amusement flickers in his eyes, but it's gone just as quickly.

The biggest dog approaches me and uses its snout to stroke my leg.

"Are you afraid of dogs?"

"Only if they look like they're going to kill me." I keep my eyes on the dog. It seems more puppy-like now, but as it seemed hell bent on ripping me apart mere moments ago, I'm still wary.

"You're no good to me dead." Knight's cool, detached tone has me snapping my gaze back to him, and I level him a poison-tipped glare.

"Well, that's comforting." *What an absolute asshole.*

With a sexy half-smile, he says something in French to the dogs, but he's still looking at me. It makes me wonder if he's talking about me. God knows what he could be saying.

When he's finished talking, the other two dogs bounce over to me. One sits back and holds its paw out as if to shake my hand. The other runs around my legs in circles, wagging its fluffy tail.

Wow, this tamed version of them is actually cute.

"You can pet them if you want to," Knight says. "They won't bite. Or *kill* you."

I only trust his words because, like he said, I'm no good to him dead.

I lower my hand to the dog with its paw out. When I tap it, it bends its head for me to stroke. I do, and the other two join in, so I can touch them.

Their fur is so soft, that I keep going, running my fingers through the silky fibers, enjoying the interaction.

“What are their names?” I glance back at Knight, who is watching me keenly with a tickle of fascination on his face.

“Poseidon, Aries, and Artemis.”

All Greek names. No surprise there. “How fitting. Although, I half expected at least one of them to be called Cerberus.”

Knight clenches his jaw, clearly unimpressed. “So, you think I’m Hades?”

I straighten. “Aren’t you? When last I checked, you stole me away from my fiancé and forced me to sign a contract to marry you.”

“Nathan Gilmar wasn’t your fiancé.” His voice is firm, but there’s a hint of something I can’t quite describe. It sounds like it could be possession.

“That changes nothing. You still acted like a hell god.”

His lips twitch. “Perhaps. Except, Hades was in love with Persephone. Just because I know what you taste like, doesn’t mean I’m your Hades.”

The molten heat in his eyes and words sparks the memory of the night he tasted me. A sudden flush of desire shoots to my core. It feels like lava inside my skin.

I school my mind and stare back at him with all the disgust in the world. But truthfully, I’m madder at myself. I’d love nothing more than to forget that night, but my body won’t let me, and the wicked smile on his face suggests he’s not going to allow me to either.

“I guess not.” It’s time to go. I’ve overstayed my tolerance, and I shouldn’t even be standing out here talking to him anyway, petting his dogs as if we’re friends. We’re enemies. End of story. There are *no* exceptions. “I should get going.”

“Why don’t you come with me instead?” The suggestion, although sounding like a challenge, surprises me.

“I don’t think so.” My voice is stiffer than a dry board. The last time I went anywhere with him, he robbed me of my dignity and turned me into a fool. “I’m not doing that again.”

“But I have something to give you. And I’m sure you have questions about our little arrangement.”

I do have questions. A ton about our situation. And after what I just saw in his workshop, of course, I have lots of questions about his art and the multitude of pictures of that girl—*Giselle*. But those are private questions I’d never ask. As for the other kind, I’d love answers for them sooner rather than later.

Maybe I could tolerate him for just a little longer. I’d also like to find out what he has to give me.

“Okay, where are we going?”

“My office.”

Knight gives the dogs a command in French, and the three of them rush away in the opposite direction, then he starts walking toward the path leading back to the house, and I follow.

We pass through the living room with the sliding doors and continue past the library. His office is on the right.

When we walk inside, I see the exquisite décor, which doesn’t look that much different from the study.

A large mahogany desk sits in the center, and ornate bookshelves cover the entire wall to our left in classical literature and books about art. Renaissance art in particular. And sculpting.

Near the wall to our right is a sofa area with a glass drinks cabinet behind. In front is a coffee table with a wooden chess board sitting in the center with all the chess pieces waiting to be played.

Every room in this house looks like it belongs in a hotel suite. It’s hard to believe this is all just for him.

I stop near the sofa, but Knight continues to the drinks cabinet and takes out a few bottles of liquor. One looks like wine, but I could be wrong. The others have French writing on the labels, so I'm not entirely sure what they are, or what Knight Grayson is up to.

Drinking isn't something I should entertain, let alone drinking with him. I've already had way too much alcohol over the last few hours with Madison.

"What are you doing?" I ask, giving him a questioning stare.

"Making a *tame* cocktail." He sets the bottles down on the counter and glances back at me.

"*Tame* cocktail? How can a cocktail be tame?"

"Just try it." He gives me a clipped nod and grabs two glasses.

Knight adds a little of each of the drinks to our glasses until they're both half full, and the mixture turns a muddy gray color with streams of brown in it.

I wrinkle my nose at the sight.

"That looks like rat poison." I have a distinct memory of Mom making rat poison for the infestation we had in Florida.

Knight gives me an incredulous glare. "Rat poison? Of all the things you can think of, that comes to mind?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's not rat poison, or any other."

When he holds my glass out for me to take, I stare at it with the hesitation of a deer crossing the freeway.

"Take it," he insists.

Against my better judgment, I do and give it a sniff to check it's okay for human consumption. Surprisingly, it has the sweet smell of cotton candy.

I brave tasting it and am pleasantly surprised by the delicious orange and strawberry flavor. It reminds me of days

spent at the carnival when I was little.

“Wow, it actually tastes good. What is it?”

Knight flashes me a wolfish grin, cunning and calculative. “Some secrets shouldn’t be shared.”

“Fair enough.” I smirk. “At least it tastes good. And as far as I know, it’s not poisonous.”

“Nope.” He finishes his drink in one gulp, sets the empty glass on the counter, then makes his way to the desk to lean against it. There he watches me while I finish off my drink. “What are your questions for me?”

I allow my gaze to roam his face and try to look past his hard exterior.

Everything about him seems thought out and guarded. I imagine being that way must help him stay one step ahead at all times. But what’s his story? Something about him doesn’t match up with who he presents to the world. Like those sculptures and sketches in the workshop.

As curious as I am about them, they don’t matter. What matters is his next steps for me and the one asset of value to my name.

“What do you want with Sunset Cove?” I keep my gaze fixed on him, letting him see this question is most important to me. “I’m sure it’s not just one of your collection of assets.”

“No, it’s not.”

“So, what do you want with it?”

“I’m still trying to figure out that part. However, I’m sure you can imagine how lucrative owning such an establishment is, given its location, popularity, and especially its rich history.”

“I can.” The history part was why Mom loved it and what sparked her ideas for the 1940s theme.

The forties were when Sunset Cove all began and every celeb in Hollywood stayed there. Old pictures hang in the hallways of Frank Sinatra and other members of the Rat Pack,

Bing Crosby, Cole Porter, and then later in the fifties, stars like Marilyn Monroe and Vivien Leigh.

“With the right help, a resort like that can turn an easy seven-figure sum with little effort.” He rests his palms on the edge of the desk. “With the lease set to expire in a matter of days, I wanted in. As far as I’m aware, you weren’t looking to renew the lease with the current subcontractors or anyone else.”

“We weren’t going to renew anything. *I wasn’t.*”

I steel my spine and stare at him head on. His explanation makes sense, but why do I feel he’s leaving something out?

*Because he is.*

If it’s one thing I’ve learned about this man, it’s that he’s crafty as fuck and he’ll only let you in on his plans when you’ve been dragged in headfirst and you’re already fighting for your life.

“Sunset Cove was never supposed to go back on the market.” My gaze travels over the smooth tan skin of his neck.

“Well, *I* found a way.”

His simple tone infuriates me, reminding me he’s nothing but a well-dressed shark. He stole me and my legacy, and it means nothing more to him than a lucrative investment. One my father could have used and didn’t. Dad didn’t even seem to contemplate it.

“You certainly did.” As it stands now, once this is over, I walk away with nothing but my ten percent ownership and the knowledge that I saved my father. Other than saving Dad, I’ll have so much less than what I started out with. Before this disaster, at least I knew if things went south with my career, I’d have Sunset Cove. “What next?”

“Tomorrow, we’ll sign a prenup.”

*Of course, we will.* “What about the wedding?”

“I’ve scheduled it for the second Saturday in June.”

“Oh.” My tone is flat and colder than a fish.

“From tomorrow onward you’ll liaise with one of my assistants, who will organize everything. Your dress, the invitations, and all other documents we need to sign. My grandparents’ anniversary dinner is on Friday at the Astoria. There, we’ll officially announce our engagement. The press will be there asking questions, so I need you to play the part. Our story is that we’ve been dating on and off for months and now we’re engaged.”

“What about all the people who were at my engagement party? They’ll know that’s not true.”

“You don’t have to worry about them.” The malicious smile he gives me makes him look more evil. “I took care of that situation. Did you also notice you and your father were kept out of the press when the scandal broke about Conrad?”

“Yes.” My voice is quiet, my lungs squeezing with the recognition of his power.

All the time I spent following the coverage of the scandal, I never once thought about Dad and me. I was so shocked by what Conrad did, and worried about Dad that nothing else crossed my mind.

“All you have to do on Friday is whatever I tell you. And *behave*.”

I sneer at him. “*Behave?*” Who the hell does he think he’s talking to?

“Yes, behave. Given your propensity, you need fair warning.”

“What the hell do you mean by my *propensity*?” And who talks like that anyway?

“I seem to remember you sneaking out of *my* private quarters not fifteen minutes ago. I also remember you bitch-slapping me in public, so yes, you have a propensity to *misbehave*.”

I bite down hard on my back teeth, fighting the urge to argue and tell him to go fuck himself.



He's right about the sneaking-around part, but I still maintain that he more than deserved the slap. I'll hold my tongue, though, and decide to choose my battles wisely. I don't just have myself to worry about, and this is just day one.

*Only* day one. And I already want to rip my hair out. And *his*, too.

"What else is there? You said you had something to give me." I do my best to keep the indignation out of my voice, but I still sound as if I want to claw the skin off his face.

Sin prowls in Knight's eyes like a predatory cat waiting to strike. "Come here."

I hate the way the deep timbre of his voice soaks into me, but I ignore it and walk up to him, stopping an arm's length away.

Knight straightens, reaches into his back pocket, and pulls out a small black velvet pouch. He loosens the silky drawstrings, and everything inside me stills when he pulls out a blue sapphire engagement ring with a cluster of diamonds delicately placed around it.

The sight of the sapphire alone steals my senses. I'm sure there's not a woman alive who wouldn't be just as dazed and breathless. I can't begin to imagine how much it must have cost.

And it's mine.

I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't this. Then again, I had no expectations of him.

That sensation of being out of my depth hits me again, and my lungs squeeze.

I drag my gaze from the ring to meet his eyes and steady my nerves in slow, measured breaths.

"Give me your hand." Knight keeps his cold, observing eyes on me, watching my every move.

I hold out my hand, shoving my emotions to the back of my mind because *this*...

This is my life. Receiving a breathtakingly gorgeous engagement ring from a ruthless billionaire who stole me away for his own selfish purposes.

*This* is the closest I'll ever get to the real thing.

When Knight slides the ring on my finger, there's nothing remotely romantic about the gesture. I could have put it on myself. His ring on my finger makes me feel no different from one of his dogs with a collar around its neck.

I'm about to pull my hand away, but he secures a tighter grip.

"There are a few other things I need to go over." A sense of danger that I don't like emanates from him.

"Like what?" I lift my chin higher.

"You are to wear this ring at all times. From now on, you are to act the part of my fiancée, and when we're married, you are my wife." Those words—*fiancée and wife*—sound strange coming from *his* lips. Reading them on the contract was bad enough, but hearing them spoken really hits. "That means we look like a couple in public. And there will be no fucking around."

"I don't fuck around."

He gives me another malicious smile that's equally as sinful as the first. "Given the fact I had my hands in your pussy when you were days away from your engagement party, I'm not so sure I believe that."

My skin blazes hot, as if I've been shoved inside a furnace, and there's not a goddamn thing I can say to refute his accusation without sounding like a slut.

Because he's right.

"That was a mistake." My lame answer is the best I can do to save my image. It does nothing, but I had to try.

Knight releases my hand but inches closer into my personal space. When I step back, he follows. I take another few steps backward, and he pursues me until my back leans flush against the wall.

He plants one hand above my head and the other by my waist, trapping me the same way he has with our upcoming marriage.

“Let’s hope you won’t be making any more mistakes like that, especially now that your ex-beloved has been cleared and set free.”

“Nathan was cleared?” I’m surprised to hear that. I felt for sure the FBI would find something on him.

“He was.” When Knight searches my eyes again, I realize what he’s looking for. It’s emotion. He seems to be checking to see how I feel about Nathan, and I understand why. It’s because I’ve said next to nothing about him, and I haven’t acted like the distraught girlfriend who’s lost the chance to wed the man of her dreams. “Nathan’s release isn’t going to be a problem for us, is it?”

“No.” Surely, he must know the whole thing between Nathan and me is the same kind of arrangement we are. But the wild possession in his eyes suggests he might not.

“It better not be, mon cherie.” I’m not ready for how impossibly close he gets, or for how fast my heart starts beating. “I don’t share. *Ever*. What’s mine is mine, even if it belongs to me for seven and a half months.”

My God...he’s talking about me.

The thought barely registers before Knight lifts a lock of my hair and touches it to his nose, inhaling the scent the way an addict would with their favorite drug. “I don’t want him near you. Do you understand me?”

He traces a finger up to the hollow of my neck and lingers there, brushing over the start of my cleavage. My breath comes short, and a maddening cacophony of arousal and confusion has my body doing everything I don’t want it to.

“Answer me, mon cherie.” His tone has the urgency of a drill sergeant.

“Yes.”

“Are you sure you understand me?”

“Yes. I understand you.” My voice is firmer but regrettably breathy with desire.

“Perfect, because if you cross me, let’s just say you won’t like it.”

My nerves scatter, and a callous chill crawls down my spine. “You’d hurt me?”

He releases my hair. “That depends on your definition of hurt. Sometimes, pain is pleasure and pleasure is pain.” His lips curl into a mirthless smile that does all sorts of sinful things to my body. “You like to slap. I like to spank, so cross me, and I’ll spank your tight little pussy so hard, you won’t be able to walk for days.”

I’m so stunned, I’m not sure how my eyes haven’t popped out of my head yet.

No man has ever spoken to me like that. And my God, that accent. It’s stronger, and I don’t know which hits me more—that or his crass, lustful words.

I’m shocked, but shit, I’m wet, and my nipples are so tight and sharp they could cut through glass. How the hell can I be turned on by this man after everything that’s happened and all he’s done? Something must be very wrong with me if I can even admit to getting all worked up over him.

“I think it’s time I head back to my room.” Despite my inner turmoil, I keep my tone level. This guy is an asshole. I don’t want to give him the benefit of seeing how much he affects me, or confirm he freaks me out.

“What? Scared you might like that kind of thing?” A flicker of something wicked brightens his eyes. “You’ve already felt what I can do with my hands. I *know* you liked it. Maybe you want more.”

His words take my mind straight back to the restaurant, and for the millionth time, I recall our wild encounter. How he touched me, how he tasted me, how his dirty words affected me.

Those words—how he’d already fucked me five different ways and in five different places in his mind—dance inside

me. The memory has me wanting to clench my thighs.

I'm appalled at myself and my body for betraying me in such a traitorous way, but the impact of him intensifies when he leans into me so closely that I can feel the bulge of his cock pressing into my belly. It's huge and hard, dominating and demanding, firm and fierce.

Against my will, my thoughts run wild, and just for one forbidden moment, I wonder what his cock would feel like inside me. The desire deepening in his eyes pushes me further down paths I shouldn't venture. But before I can go deeper, I catch myself with the reminder that Knight Grayson is still the beautiful devil.

Take away that beauty, and all that's left is the part I should stay far, far away from.

"No, Mr. Grayson. I don't want anything like that from you." The harshness in my voice pierces the vicious entity rippling between us, but it does very little to curb the growing ache between my thighs. "And just for the record, you will never have me like that again."

He gives me a full smile. "Are you sure? Because you're still looking at me like you want to fuck me."

The air in my lungs freezes, making them burn as if hot coals have been shoved down my throat.

"I'm *sure* you must be seeing things." My damn voice is breathy again, much to his amusement.

"I don't think so." Knight borrows my words from earlier, using the same I'm-not-wrong tone. "But, just for tonight, how about we agree to disagree."

His sketchy words, a cross between a threat and a promise, seep into my mind.

At that moment, I suddenly realize with the deepest shock that the attraction between us at the restaurant was ... *real*.

I feel it again now. It's as real as his cock growing harder against my belly.

Knight can feel me, too. Feel the weight of my breasts growing heavier alongside the solid walls of his chest and feel my breath becoming short and ragged.

But real or not, I must never be that foolish again.

“Can I go now?” I’m happy I can talk and get the words out of my head.

“Of course.” He gives me a look that says he has me where he wants me, then inches away.

Even though I’m released from his entrapment, my mind continues spinning.

Without another word, I shuffle out of his path and walk away from him as fast as I can.

I feel his eyes searing into me like hot pokers with every step I take, but I will myself not to look back.

When I reach the stairs, a warning rings through my mind to be careful with this guy. No matter how alluring he is, I need to stay focused at all times. Given my track record with men, it would be wise.

Beautiful things are always wrapped in pretty packages. Sometimes, that’s done by design to hide the ugliness of what’s inside. My situation is already bad. There’s no point making everything worse than it already is.

All I need to do is control that raw, ravenous desire Knight unlocks in me.

I might not be his Persephone, but he is most definitely my Hades.

That’s why I mustn’t allow him to take any more from me than he already has.

# Chapter 13

# *Knight*



I speed down the road on my Ninja ZX 6R motorcycle, my latest toy from Kawasaki. I had it custom made in midnight black with a variety of modifications to suit my extraordinary need for lightning-fast speed.

I'm on my way to Grayson Inc. I felt like taking the motorcycle out today instead of my car. The adrenaline rush that comes with riding it first thing in the morning is like adding a dose of napalm to a triple-shot espresso.

This is also my attempt to work off the steam built up after another mind-numbing encounter with Aurora Wright.

*She thinks I'm her Hades.*

Although she isn't my Persephone, she might not be entirely wrong.

I'm just as ruthless and merciless as the god of the underworld, and just like him, I don't stop until I get what I want. It also hasn't escaped me that since I met the goddess, obsession has slithered into my system like a malicious snake waiting for the right moment to strike.

I'm not sure if that's something I can control.

Last night, as I had her pressed up against me, I was seconds away from fucking her against the wall.

Inhaling her scent and watching her body react to me did a number on my dick. I could barely contain myself.

While she did her best to resist me, I wanted to peel her clothes away layer by layer and taste all the parts of her I



haven't touched.

*Fuck me.* Listen to me. I'm inviting her into my mind again. Then again, she never left.

Aurora Wright has lived in my head since my grandfather waved her picture in front of me like temptation on a platter.

But if she's not my Persephone, what is she to me?

*A pawn?*

*Collateral damage?*

*My forced bride-to-be?*

For the last few hours, the question has rung through my mind over and over and over like the church bells at Notre Dame. And still, I don't fucking know.

Aurora seems to be an anomaly. A little bit of everything and something more.

Something that revealed itself when I saw her coming out of my workshop.

The sight of her stirred buried emotions. Probably because there are elements about her that remind me of my ghost—*Giselle*.

Maybe Giselle decided to take a break from her angelic duties and play one last joke on me. A prank that would spark elements of the old me. *Me* before I became the devil.

Both Jericho and I have experienced some dark shit from the past that changed us forever. Shit outside of the way our father has treated us.

While Jericho deals with his demons with silence—not even speaking to me about them—I never had that luxury, and it fucked me up all six ways to Sunday.

Aurora would have definitely seen my sculptures and most likely looked through my sketch pads. They weren't exactly hidden. The curiosity on her face was also confirmation.

The sculptures are part of a collection I started over a decade ago. I have one left to do. When I'm finished,

everything will be shipped to my mother's gallery in France for this year's showcase, where they'll be staying permanently.

They've been with me for far too long. It's time to say goodbye now, the same way I should part with the ghost of the girl who inspired them.

That's a story for another time. She always is.

Right now, I need to keep my eyes on my goals.

I'm meeting with my grandfather the moment I get into work, so today is when things really start moving.

Now that I've secured Sunset Cove, the next part of the plan is all about me.

Nothing should ruin what I have lined up, not even Nathan's release.

The fucker has nothing of worth to his name, but I gave Aurora the warning to stay away from him because I'm possessive that way.

I arrive at Grayson Inc. twenty minutes later and get changed for work. I always keep a set of clothes here for days like this when I need them.

On my way to my grandfather's office, I spot Bastian in the foyer.

The fact he's leaning against the wall in the far corner, with his eyes fixed on me as predatory as a vulture, suggests he was waiting for me.

The blood-thirsty look deepens the closer I get. Usually, I ignore him. Over the years, we've never had anything to say to each other, except insults that cut skin deep.

Those decreased after a few New Year's Eves ago when I beat the shit out of him for calling my mother a slut. His broken bones, missing teeth, and the lengthy stay in the hospital put him in his place and showed him not to mess with me or mine ever again.

I suppose, given the uncertain circumstances of what's going on with our legacy, he's decided confronting me is

worth the risk.

The look on his face is so potent I can't keep walking by, so I stop.

He gives me a mocking smile, filled with a deadly cocktail of venom and rage.

"I know what you and the old man are up to." His tone is accusatory, reflecting the look on his face.

Now, what do I say here?

I could easily tell him to fuck the hell off, or I could say nothing, but I want to indulge the part of me that feels I should say something.

"And what is that?" I square my shoulders and keep my gaze riveted to him, gearing up for a fight if it comes to that.

"You know what I fucking mean." He pushes off the wall and inches closer. His second mistake. His first was to speak to me. "Grandfather wants you to get the company, doesn't he? As usual, he's always taking pity on the bastard children. Especially *you*."

Words like that don't bother me anymore. But they used to. They used to slice into my heart like a jagged-edged knife. Now they roll off my back like sweat.

My guess is his presence here and decision to confront me, means he's desperate for intel. He and our father obviously couldn't figure out what I've been up to, but they know my actions over the past week could only be for one reason—*getting the company*.

"What the fuck do you want?" I decide to get to the crux of the shit.

"I want to tell you that no matter what you do and what happens, I'll find a way to take everything from you. All the things you think you'll have and all the things you shouldn't have had."

The fool is foolish enough to get up in my face. His only advantage is his height. He's as tall as I am, but that's it. He doesn't have the muscles or an ounce of the brains I have.

“It seems you’ve forgotten the last lesson I taught you. I’m more than happy to give you a reminder.” With the rage of a bull, I take a step forward. Another step would allow me to ram my head into his and knock him out before he could take his next breath. “Doesn’t seem as if you got the message last time to stay the fuck away.”

“That’s enough,” comes the harsh arctic voice of our father.

The sound of his heavy footsteps has us both turning toward him.

Tobias Grayson is standing by the largest pillar, staring at me with all the hatred in the world. It would be a cold day in Hell before we actually acknowledge each other as father and son, but damn.

“Bastian, we have a meeting at ten for the Japanese project.” Although he’s talking to Bastian, he hasn’t looked away from me. I’m still looking at him too. “I need you to get everything ready.”

“Yes, Father.” Bastian moves away from me, most likely pissed that we didn’t get to finish what he started.

I keep my gaze on our father, and it feels like we’re in an old-fashioned duel.

A challenge, yet a threat for the man who looks away first.

Normally, I keep my distance from him. And we never talk. Not even when I put Bastian in the hospital.

He said nothing to me then because he knew I was right. But what’s he going to say now?

Fuck that. I’m not waiting to find out. Whatever it is won’t be anything good, so I might as well have my say first.

“Keep him away from me.” I do nothing to contain the threat in my voice. I don’t want to.

“He’s right, you know.” A storm stirs in his stony expression, lightning striking in his eyes. “Your grandfather has always taken far too much pity on my bastard children. But it’s time to put a stop to that.”

His message is received loud and clear like a bullet straight to the heart, but I say nothing. Not because I can't or because I feel any sort of threat from him, but because it's better I don't.

I remember having the same thought at ten years old when he told me to stay the fuck away from his family, and he'd wished I'd never been born.

Back then, I was the eager little boy who refused to believe his father didn't want him.

Mom had brought Jericho and me back to New York to visit our grandparents for the summer. During that time, I was hellbent on meeting my father. Every time we'd visited in the years before, Mom told me I couldn't. When I did, against my mother's wishes and warnings, I regretted it.

It's funny, the sting of his words has always stayed with me. As strong as I am, it's there now as I watch him walk away with Bastian. Those words never leave, even when they turn the corner, and I can't see them anymore.

Monsters aren't born; they're made. My father can take a bow for that one.

And if he or that bastard Bastian believes they're going to take my legacy from me, they have another thing coming. For now, I'll allow them to think they can threaten me and break me down with their words, but I will never give either of them the satisfaction of seeing me fall.

I shake off the angst from the confrontation and proceed to my grandfather's office. I find him inside, sitting behind his desk with a cup of coffee. He looks like his trip to Hong Kong was more of a vacation than work.

"My boy." He raises a hand in greeting and gives me a warm smile that erases the sordid encounter from my mind.

"Morning." I return the smile and make my way over to sit in front of him.

"You alright?" He searches my face, probably noticing the remnants of my rage.

“I’m good.” All thoughts of Bastian and Father are already non-existent to me. It’s like the last five minutes never happened.

“Great. Do you want some coffee?”

“No. I’ll grab some later.” I sit back and cross one leg over the other.

We look at each other and smile like two villains who’ve just come up with a super plan.

“So, how are things at home? Is your *bride-to-be* settling in okay?”

“As good as can be.”

“I’m sure she’ll do what she must to ensure things go smoothly.”

“Don’t worry. She will.” I have to give him credit. He already knew what I’d have to do to get Sunset Cove. Get rid of Nathan, dig up dirt on William, then steal his maiden daughter and marry her. My grandfather knew all of that before he even sent me on this quest. He just needed me to action the plan by getting the incriminating evidence to make it all happen.

“Wonderful, and will I be meeting her officially at my party on Friday?”

“You will.”

“I take it she’s aware of *all* that is required of her.”

He means the fine print. The part that covers no talking shit to the media, and the other part I covered with Aurora last night about no fucking around with Tom, Dick, or *Nathan*.

We have to look and act like a couple. The press are like bloodhounds, always searching for some secret something they can reveal to the world, so I know I must never give them anything to talk about.

“She’s aware of what she needs to do.” I sound confident, but there’s a hint of doubt in my voice, revealing the part of me that questions whether or not Aurora will honor my terms

and conditions. I mostly believe she will because of her father, but I'm not certain of her feelings for Nathan.

It might be logical to think that a woman who's in love would never allow a stranger to get so intimate with her at any time, much less their first meeting. But I'm not sure.

So far, their engagement seemed no different from ours. But the fact that she's known him for years makes me question my assumption. It doesn't matter. Whatever she feels for him doesn't affect me one way or another. As long as he keeps his dick to himself.

Grandfather nods his approval. "And Sunset Cove is?"

"Ours."

"*Yours*," he corrects."

I smirk. "Okay, mine. But what do you want me to do with it?"

We'd only spoken briefly about Sunset Cove since that first meeting.

Everything else we've spoken about has been about Grandfather's vision for the Park Avenue branch.

I assumed Sunset Cove would require some renovations, which I already see Aurora has in the works. Renovations are my area of expertise. I turn dumps into palaces and shitholes into luxury apartments you can sell for a million dollars apiece.

"Has all the paperwork been finalized?" He sets his coffee mug down and leans back in his chair.

"As of yesterday." I take pleasure in securing another win, so I don't tamp down the pride in my voice. Even when you know you never fail, it's always good to succeed and get the job done. "I'm just waiting for William to get the transfer of assets document." That will name me alongside Aurora on the property, then I'll receive the official title of ownership after the sixth-month mark of our marriage.

Grandfather gives me his I-knew-you-could-do-it smile. "Perfect."

Things are as perfect as they can be for now. After talking to Aurora last night, I got a good glimpse of how important Sunset Cove is to her.

She was protective of the place. As she spoke, I knew if she ever found out I blackmailed her father to get Sunset Cove, it would break her.

Finding out how I forced him to use his executive powers to undercut her would probably make her hate him as much as she hates me.

I'm sure Aurora is aware of how her father initially got in debt. I am too. I found that part out without Jericho's help.

Although it's admirable the man tried to save his wife, I won't condone love turning anybody into a fool.

How can I when I've been there and done that? I have the physical and mental scars to prove it, and I could have written the unabridged version of the idiot's manual.

In the end, when love has to compete with death, death will always be stronger. It will always win, always take precedent, always, always be the master. And there's nothing anyone can do about it. God or mortal.

"Well, here are the next steps." Grandfather straightens and rests his elbows on the desk. "Vladimir Markov wants to buy Sunset Cove."

My brows rise. Vladimir Markov is one of the richest men in this world. He's a Russian oligarch who practically owns Europe. There's hardly a square mile on the continent without some asset that belongs to him. "He wants Sunset Cove?"

"He approached me about it months ago. Initially, he wanted to purchase the resort, but William Wright told him it wasn't for sale."

On hearing that, something pinches in my gut. It feels like guilt, but that's an emotion I haven't felt in years.

The feeling only surfaces now because I know William would have been eyeball-deep in debt at the time Vladimir



approached him, yet he never considered parting with Sunset Cove until I forced his hand.

“He offered three hundred million,” Grandfather continues with an amused expression.

“Seriously?” My mouth loosens. I wasn’t expecting to hear that, but the offer is definitely in line with the value. If I’m being honest, it might not even be enough. That old Hollywood clientele from the past has raised the value of Sunset Cove substantially. There’s even a fucking wall containing the signatures of some of the most famous people in history. Musicians, artists, actors, actresses, and supermodels. Name it, they’re there.

“Vladimir is willing to pay for the history of the place.” Grandfather gives me a ruthless smile. “I told him I could definitely get it for him for that offer. Obviously, the money is yours when the sale has been finalized.”

“Thank you.”

“It’s well deserved.” He gives me a clipped nod. “We need to do state-of-the-art renovations to bring the place up to speed. Vladimir wants to keep all the sentimental elements but give it a completely new look.”

Sounds good, and right up my alley, but this will fan the flames on the infernal fire blazing between Aurora and me.

When she finds out about the plans for Sunset Cove, it will be hell to pay. But there’s nothing she can do to stop me, even with her ten percent ownership.

That percentage was the bare minimum I had to leave her with in accordance to her mother’s will. But it will only be relevant until the end of our marriage. Once that time has passed, all other rules come into effect. Particularly, the separate contract I signed with her father giving me certain permissions in regard to Sunset Cove.

It means I can sell the place without any problems, or legal backlash from Aurora. Those are the parts she doesn’t know.

I think it’s wise I keep it that way, given the tension in our relationship. I’ll take things one step at a time and she’ll just

have to deal with whatever happens as it happens.

“Sunset Cove needs to beat the competition,” Grandfather booms in a spirited voice. “What do you think?”

“I think I can have my team working on it straight away.”

Pride slides over his face like a mask, giving life to his eyes. “This is what I love about you, Knight. You’re a real go-getter. With that said, I’m going to let your father and brothers know I’ve preliminarily selected you for the CEO position of Park Avenue.” He gives me a proud-father smile, and I appreciate it, like I always do. “I’ll make it official in seven months once everything is complete with your marriage and the transfer of Sunset Cove. But you’re more than three quarters of the way there, son.”

“Thank you for giving me this chance.” My father and Bastian are not going to like this one bit, but I don’t care. They can go straight to hell.

“Like I said, well deserved. Now, it looks like you have a wedding to plan.”

“I do,” I answer, no pun intended.

The word *wedding* in relation to me still feels foreign.

And so does the woman I’ll be giving my name.

# Chapter 14

# *Knight*



“Well hello to you too, Knight. It’s so good of you to not ask how I am. Thank God, I’m used to your assholery,” Chelle drones in a sarcastic monotone, which waters down her usual Valley-girl accent. Usually, she acts and sounds as if she permanently lives on the set of *Clueless*.

With her long brown hair that’s always styled and the trendy, fashionable clothes she’s always in, she even looks like one of the main characters.

Thankfully, the voice and attitude don’t match her brain. She’s been my assistant since I started working at Grayson Inc. My grandfather allocated her to me because of her inept knowledge of the industry. He also thought I’d prefer working with someone closer to my age. She’s twenty-eight now, so only two years younger than me.

I’ve continued working with her over the years because of her ability to keep up with me. I also pay her enough to keep her lips sealed when it comes to the press.

That makes her the perfect candidate to assist me with Aurora, although, I haven’t given her *all* the specific details of my latest conquest. None of my staff are that trustworthy. They know my upcoming marriage is arranged, but as Chelle is doing all the paperwork, she knows a little more than that.

“It’s been a long-ass day,” I tell her, as she falls in step with me when I turn down the hallway.

I was hoping she'd be gone by the time I got home, but she's still here.

I have another million things to do so I don't need her updates. After meeting with my grandfather, I spent the day trying to organize the next few weeks, which includes a business trip to Europe that could span over a few weeks.

"Doesn't mean you have to be rude," Chelle scuffs, her heels clicking on the stone floor. "I thought you'd want to know how today went."

"Go on, tell me." I sigh.

She follows me outside on to the balcony overlooking the garden. I always walk this way when I get in so I can check on my dogs. I can't see them, so they must be with Barry my caretaker.

"You'll be pleased to hear you can cross off all the legal stuff. I've also pretty much organized the entire wedding." There's a smile in her voice although she's not smiling. "You also don't appear to have a gold-digger on your hands. Your wife-to-be told me she'll sign whatever she's required to for the prenup when the lawyers get here later. She was hardly interested in hearing the specifics."

I expected no less from Aurora. Unlike most women I associate with, Aurora has never been interested in my net worth. She didn't even know who I was when we met.

I'm not bigheaded enough to think that everyone should know me, but my yacht party last month was covered on all four corners of the globe.

"You sound disappointed." I glance at her and try to assess her mood further. She looks less than impressed.

"I'm not disappointed, but if it were me, I'd at least want five percent of what you're worth for spousal allowance and your black card to use whenever I want."

"Money is the least of her worries, and she won't need it while she's married to me."

“Lucky girl.” Her tone turns sour with hidden envy. Given our past, I won’t pretend not to know why. “I have to admit, I didn’t think I’d ever see the day when I’d be planning *your* wedding. Not that it didn’t cross my mind. I suppose I thought you’d get someone else to do it. Even you can agree that it might be poor taste to have a former bed-friend organize your wedding.”

I give her a hard stare. Screwing around with Chelle was not one of my finest moments. Along with the constant stream of alcohol and fast women, both were demons that came with the black hole my life had become after Giselle’s death.

*Giselle’s death.*

Wow... those words in my head hurt a little less than they did five years ago. Therapists say that’s the first sign of healing.

“The past is the past.” That was supposed to be my response to Chelle’s comment, but it felt like it was more for me. “You work for me, so you will do whatever I need you to do.”

“I can think of a number of things you’ve needed me to do, but you haven’t asked.” Her voice is riddled with the seduction I’ve staved off since I broke things off with her.

Like every other woman I’ve been with, Chelle has been eager to get back in my bed, but I established a long time ago that mixing business and pleasure with her is like drinking acid, so I don’t have time for shit. She knows nothing will ever happen between us again, but the wedding has obviously rubbed her the wrong way.

I’m about to chastise her again, but my attention is instantly diverted to the platinum-haired beauty doing backstrokes in the pool across from us.

Like the goddess I’ve christened her to be, Aurora is swimming in my pool as effortlessly as if she were walking, her arms slicing through the water with the grace and poise of a prima ballerina.

On her body is a black bikini, hiding all the parts of her body that would bring a man to his knees to worship her.

My mind drifts as I watch her, and need and greed rush down to my dick.

I'm not even aware that I've stopped walking until Chelle nudges me.

"Well, well, this is very interesting indeed," she coos. "Looks like somebody has your interest in more ways than one."

"Chelle, unless you have something for me to sign or something business related to tell me, you can go."

She laughs without humor. "It's just fascinating to watch you watch her. I wonder if she'll get to see all the wild, wicked things that live inside your head."

"Maybe."

Chelle looks out to the pool just as Aurora lifts herself out and gives us a better view of her body. The sun beams down on her golden legs I'd love to lick and highlights rounded breasts I'm dying to feast on. From here, I can just make out the outline of tight nipples pressing against the fabric of her bikini top.

This is the first time I've seen so much of her. She's been fully clothed every other time. Now that I've finally seen what she's been hiding away from me, I can state with absolute certainty, Aurora Wright could be on every cover of *Sports Illustrated* or in *Playboy's* centerfold.

But I wouldn't want her there. I'd want this vision of her to be for my eyes only.

Oblivious to my seedy stare, Aurora flashes her wet hair over her shoulder and makes her way over to the deck chair to grab a towel.

As if feeling our eyes on her, she looks right at us.

*At me.*

Her gaze switches from me to Chelle and darkens. It makes me wonder what sort of interaction the two must have had. Chelle takes pride in being a bitch, so I didn't expect her to roll out the welcome mat. She wouldn't do it for a client, let alone for a woman she's fully aware I'm practically forcing to marry me.

"She's too nice for someone like you." Chelle's whisper-soft voice breaks my stare. "Farm-girl nice and fairy-sweet. But that's just my opinion."

Chelle isn't wrong, but I won't tell her that.

"Chelle, I don't want any problems from you. I have enough."

"I can see that. So, I won't add to it. Your pretty little mind can rest now, *boss*. See you tomorrow."

She gives me one last smile, then floats away.

I return my focus to Aurora as she gathers some things she has laid out on the chair. There are a few books that look like reference books, a notebook, and some stationery.

With the towel wrapped around her bottom half and the bag slinked over her shoulder, she walks away, but unlike last night, she looks back.

I'm not sure what I see in her eyes; it's a flicker of something that reflects the want I shouldn't feel for a woman I've labeled as a business project.

I'll be seeing her later. Maybe with the lawyers there, it will even out this tension between us.

Aurora walks through the door on the opposite side, and I continue to my office, hoping I can purge the goddess from my mind so I can work.

Aurora has been in my head all fucking day, and even though I can't see her anymore, the image of her perfect body continues to harden my dick. I already know I'm going to have to take care of myself later if this continues.

The moment I step inside my office, my phone buzzes with a text.



I pull it from my jacket pocket and see the message is from Jericho.

I open it and read the contents. It says:

*Found something interesting about your wifey you definitely should see. Go to your computer and click on the email I just sent you.*

*Aurora, aka Cordelia Harris, has one hell of a dirty mind.*

*Make sure you start with the last chapter of Girl. No.9.*

*You can thank me later. LOL*

What the hell is Jericho talking about now? And what did he find?

*Aurora, aka Cordelia Harris.*

This is the kind of message I would give a hard pass. The last time Jericho sent me a message like this, I accidentally signed up to a year's supply of Viagra.

I'm only checking this out because I want to see what he found out about my wife-to-be and what seems to be some kind of pseudonym.

I head to my desk and switch on the computer. As it's set to open to my emails, I sit and open the message Jericho sent me.

I click on the link inside, and it takes me to the reader portal of Red Cat Publishing, a romance novel website.

On the home page is an announcement that Cordelia Harris published the latest chapter of her serial *Girl No.9* five hours ago. The comments in the chat section are going crazy, filling up with one comment after another in just the mere seconds I've been on here.

Well, I'll be damned. Looks like the goddess has a pen name and she does a little more with her writing talents than dream of working for a lifestyle magazine.

I click into her biography, which states:

*Cordelia Harris is an erotic romance author who has penned ten erotic romance novels and twenty serials exclusive to Red Cat Publishing.*

*She enjoys writing dirty, forbidden fantasies best reserved for late nights. All are based on her own desires. Check out her stories to dive into her world.*

I read it again, sucked in by the words *dirty, forbidden fantasies* that are all based on hers. Then I follow the prompt to check out her stories because I would love to see what my sweet goddess has created in her world.

Jericho said I should start with the last chapter of *Girl No. 9*, and from the buzz created by the readers, I wouldn't dream of starting anywhere else.

I click into the story, scroll down to the last chapter, and I'm hooked from the first line.

## ***Chapter seventeen***

### **Laila**

*Javier sucks on my breasts until my nipples are raw.*

*I moan, filling the room with the wild sound of my pleasure and indulgence in this forbidden moment.*

*We both know we shouldn't be doing this again, but that hasn't stopped us.*

*Javier will always be my father's enemy, and I will always be the daughter of the man his family forbade him to see. But our need for each other has surpassed everything that doesn't exist in our world.*

*That need has driven us insane. That's the only thing that would explain why we thought we should meet here tonight at the Dark Odyssey, a sex club. It's the most taboo of all places, but also, a safe space where no one would ever find us.*

*So, here we are, in one of their fantasy rooms, consuming each other.*

*He kisses his way from my breasts to my neck, then up to my lips, where he devours me whole.*

*“Sit on my face, mi alma.” His Spanish accent sounds husky with lust. “Put your pussy on my face, so I can eat you out.”*

*“Wait, I want to suck your cock first.” My voice is strained, filled with all the fantasies I’ve had of this man.*

*“You don’t have to ask me twice.”*

*He gives me a satisfied smile, which speaks of all the naughty things he wants to do to me, then he sets me down on the bed and stands so he can shove his pants down his waist.*

*His cock juts free, long, and massive. It’s all I can look at. This is the first time I’ve seen it. The first time we had sex was late at night in the back alley behind Dad’s restaurant.*

*The wait was worth it because he’s beautiful, and the sight of his huge cock, at least five inches long, is perfect. It’s the biggest I’ve seen, and I want him wherever he can slide into me.*

*“Get on your knees and let me fuck your face.”*

*I drop to my knees, doing what I’m told, and when I take his cock into my mouth, I feel glorious, so glorious, I start touching myself, rubbing my pussy while I suck him off.*

There’s at least another three pages, but I stop reading for my own sanity.

Because fucking hell, does little Miss Wright have a wild kinky side. My fucking cock is so hard it’s pushing against my pants, aching for release.

It’s the kind of hard that needs to be emptied in a warm, hot mouth, or a slick, wet pussy.

*Sorry, Chelle, it turns out you’re wrong.*

Aurora Wright isn’t too nice for me. She’s not farm-girl sweet or fairy-nice.

There's a seductress inside that good girl waiting to break free, and I'm the kind of guy who would love to corrupt her.

# Chapter 15

## *Aurora*



I've just arrived at Sunset Cove with Madison and Skye—the third member of our trio. We met an hour ago at our favorite coffeehouse for some much-needed luxury hot chocolate, cream cakes, and girly catch-up time. I was desperate for the latter.

Now we're heading to the Green Room, one of the function halls where events are held on a weekly basis. It's also the home of the famous Hollywood wall which boasts over a hundred classic Hollywood stars' signatures.

We walk in and seat ourselves around one of the round dinner tables on the sidelines, ready to work on Mom's plans for the renovations.

As Skye works with her father in his interior design company, I had to enlist her expert services. Madison is here to get an idea of the timeline so she can organize the marketing campaign. Of course, her presence here is also to lend me her continued support.

The lease on Sunset Cove ran out yesterday, so this is my first official meeting. I'm trying my best to look as thrilled and excited as I should be, but my mind is still stuck on yesterday. Another day of my life in the *Twilight Zone* with Knight Grayson, just worse than the days that preceded it.

“Ready to see what I have for you? I know you're gonna love it.” Skye grins from ear to ear, the blunt ends of her long brown bob brushing over her shoulders as she nods with pride.

She knows how much it means to me to fulfill my mother's wishes, so I know she gave me her best.

"I really appreciate your help on this." I look from Skye to Madison, and the two of them respond with appreciative smiles. "*Both* of you."

"Of course," they say in unison and giggle like they used to back in high school. The two were famous for doing that. At one point, they even finished each other's sentences.

I laugh, feeling more grateful for their company.

"This is what I have so far." Skye opens her portfolio and slides it over to me. "I thought of selecting a little of everything from the forties interior design style that people loved."

I can see what she means right from page one, which steals my breath away.

It's a mockup of the piano lounge. Skye has placed an emerald-green suede suite inside and positioned it to surround the glossy grand piano. On the three-seater is a mustard-yellow mohair throw, and in the center on the floor is an Ikat-patterned rug which was popular throughout the world during that time.

"You love it, right?" Skye's voice rises an octave on the last word, squeaky with satisfaction. She already knows she did a good job.

"Yes." I clap my hands and clasp them together, genuinely enjoying the ripple of awe sweeping through me. "This is it. Mom would have loved this."

"She definitely would," Madison agrees, reaching across the table to tap the tops of my hands. "Sugar, it's important that you love it too. This is for you now."

I nod, blinking back tears and smiling. "I love it for myself too."

"Perfect."

"I wanted to do something that would blow your mind." Skye rubs her bony hands together, and her hazel eyes

brighten.

“Consider my mind blown to kingdom come.”

“Then my job is done. Think of it as an early wedding present.” She laughs heartily and guilt tugs at the hem of my heart.

Unlike Madison, Skye doesn't know the full story of the recent developments of my life. Madison and I exchange glances. Hers is troubled, but mine remains the mask of pretense I've sported all morning that I'm the dotting bride-to-be of the deadly handsome Knight Grayson.

I take a measured breath to clear my mind. “I can't thank you enough.”

“Don't be silly. *Although*”—she pretends to pout—“I'm still annoyed you didn't tell me you were secretly dating *Knight Grayson*. But I've decided to forgive you. I love you too much to stay mad for longer than five minutes, and I'm so excited for you.” Her voice rises even higher.

Nervous laughter falls from my lips. I was nothing but a bag of apologies when we met earlier, but I still feel like I owe her more of an explanation than the flimsy one I gave. “Everything all just sort of happened so quickly. Knight and I met after his yacht party and hit it off so well we started dating. The next thing I knew, his ring was on my finger.”

That's exactly what happened, even if I'm making it sound like Knight and I have been dating on and off for months, and we actually like each other. There's no way in hell I'm telling her the truth that Knight is a wolf in sheep's clothing, who took advantage of my father's situation to take ownership of Sunset Cove. It was hard enough telling Madison.

“My God, it's such a beautiful story. I love that you had love at first sight. My parents got married after two weeks of knowing each other. They've been together for thirty-five years.” Her voice swells with emotion, and she touches a hand to her heart. “I wish that for you.”

“That means a lot.” I glance at Madison again, noticing that she's said very little. Her stoic expression is a tell she's



allowing me to take the lead on this so we can get our stories straight.

As close as the three of us are as friends, Madison is the one I've chosen to keep my secrets. That's no offense to Skye at all. There are just some things I don't feel comfortable sharing with anyone besides Madison. My recent trauma is one of them. Even if I weren't practically sworn to secrecy, it's also not the sort of thing to broadcast anyway.

I never even told Skye when I was getting engaged to Nathan. I knew she would make a big deal out of it when I would have hated that.

As she was away the week of the engagement party, and the only other friend I had at that party was Madison, I managed to keep it all away from her and slip right into the current story without having to go into any deep explanation.

With the big-ass rock on my finger, it was harder to hide my engagement to Knight. It also didn't feel right for her to find out tomorrow through a press release when I knew I was going to see her today.

"Keep looking, keep looking," Skye squeaks, pointing to the portfolio, her expression the perfect combination of ecstatic and honored. "I want to see your face once you see everything I've done. The forties are my favorite time period, so I really went to town."

I love seeing her this excited. "I can already tell you I'm going to love all of it." I pull the portfolio closer and flick through each page, my heart swelling as I take in all the gorgeous designs.

Immersing myself in this today is like food for my soul.

Yesterday was just horrendous, and it grieves me to have to go back to Knight's house tonight.

I'm not sure which worries me more—having to deal with Chelle, Knight's uppity assistant, or *him*.

After the other night, I decided I was going to try and focus on all the parts of my life I could still control. It was a mental decision to keep going even in the face of doom and

uncertainty. I took that strength and spent yesterday morning working with my editor on the next chapter for my serial *Girl No. 9*.

Seeing my readers' reactions and comments after I uploaded it to the reader platform, gave me more strength. But the euphoria died within seconds of meeting Chelle. One, because she sized me up like a puma marking its territory, then proceeded to treat me like I was dog shit she was trying not to step in.

And two...

Well, if I'm being completely honest, the second reason is all on me and my imagination because my stomach turned over when I suspected she could be Giselle.

*Chelle—Giselle.* Since the dawn of time, people have had strange nicknames and shortened versions of their full names. Like Liam and William, Dick and Richard, Charles and Chuck. So, Chelle could very well be Giselle.

I also thought she could be her because of the striking similarities between Chelle and the pictures of Giselle in Knight's photo album.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that assistant or not, Chelle acted like a jealous girlfriend, and I wasn't sure why Knight would think it was okay to have his ex-love or whatever she is organize our wedding. Even if we aren't real.

The hours I spent with Chelle felt like several lifetimes. My swimming break was most welcomed after feeling like I'd been thrown in with a den of wild wolves.

I didn't see her again until she was walking on the balcony with Knight.

And damn me, a stab of unwarranted envy cut through me just from seeing them together.

That was bad enough, because I have *nothing* to feel jealous for, but then Knight was weirder than usual when we met with the lawyers to sign the prenup.

The actual signing was fine, but he kept doing that assessing thing whenever he looked at me. It just seemed amplified and made me more uncomfortable than ever.

I would have happily gone back to my room after the lawyers were finished with us, but then Denise prepared dinner and dressed the table like it was Christmas.

As she's gone out of her way to be super nice to me and make me feel comfortable, I felt it would have been rude not to sit down and eat, even if I had to do it with Hades watching me like a hawk.

Knight and I ate in silence. Not the kind of silence that's simply awkward. It was more the kind where the person you're with knows something you don't.

When I reach the last page of the portfolio, I look up at Skye and offer her a smile that I hope displays the depth of my appreciation.

All the designs in the portfolio are completely and utterly on point with my mother's notes. If Skye were playing a football game, this would be the winning touchdown.

"I'm completely floored." If my smile lacked in showing her my gratitude, my voice makes up for it. "These are all amazing. Truly, truly amazing."

Skye squeals again. "Yayyy! I'm so thrilled. All we have to do now is speak with the design team and get everything ordered."

"And once we have that going, I'll start working with my team," Madison chimes in. "We can have this place whipped up and back in shape in no time."

"That sounds like a dream."

"A dream that's gonna come true." Madison chuckles, bringing her hands together with delight.

My entire body sighs with relief that we're making a move in all the right direction. I'm very aware that the popularity of Sunset Cove has taken a nosedive in recent years. Mom identified that years ago and tried to step in. As she was

simply the custodian, and the contractors who leased the place were set in their ways, they always fought back.

All they wanted to do was make quick money on the tourists who frequented the resort and didn't care for banking on the rich history.

"I want to—" My voice cuts out when the roar of an engine surrounds us like an angry storm cloud.

It sounds like it belongs to a... *truck?*

The answer comes when we all look through the window and see a bright yellow digger truck driving by the courtyard with a team of construction workers walking next to it.

Time slows as I watch everything play out before me, and my brain battles to process what I'm seeing.

*Digger truck.*

*Construction workers.*

Neither of which were hired by me.

I look back at Madison and Skye, who look as confused as I feel. The truck with its horrendous sound drives by, but I'm frozen in thought.

"I didn't know you'd started renovations," Skye states, still glancing through the window.

"I didn't." I sound choked up, as if someone just poured dirt down my throat.

"Then who did?" Madison asks, but then the sudden I-know-who look that hits her nanoseconds later, strikes me too.

I *do* know who.

The only person who could have done this who isn't me is my very own dearly beloved asshole.

Knight's words from the restaurant about what he does for work come back to me. He said he acquires properties and fixes them up.

Funny how those words had seemed ominous at the time and piqued my suspicion, and even after all that's happened

between us, it wasn't until just now that I figured it out.

*This* is what owning 90% of Sunset Cove means. And now I finally have some idea of what he wants with the place.

Before my next thought can take fruition, I bolt out of my chair and run to the courtyard.

The construction workers have rallied around the bay of benches, and the digger truck has started to dig. Sure, the bay looks awful, and it was first on my list to go, but *I* wanted to do it.

There are at least fifty construction workers milling around. Some are carrying planks of wood, others carrying tools. Some dressed in the full getup you'd expect to see a construction worker in, while others are shirtless.

Frantically, I look around for someone in charge—or Knight.

I spot a beefy-looking bald-headed guy wearing a yellow hazard jacket issuing instructions by the truck.

I'm about to rush toward him, but I stop short when a shirtless Knight walks by, carrying a huge plank of wood on his shoulder.

Seeing him would make me stop anyway, but seeing him looking like he walked off a Davidoff advert makes everything inside me come to an abrupt halt as if someone switched me off.

My eyes are glued to the god-like man walking before me, and I take in every inch of skin on show, along with the inky designs intricately tattooed on his torso.

A row of Japanese characters line the side of his waist, swirling with the tapered V of his hips. As he walks away and sets down the wood, a black fantasy dragon covering his entire back looks as if it's growling at me as it soars into the sky.

When Knight straightens, I catch sight of the rigid muscles and the fine line of dark hair on his happy trail running right down through the waistband of his Levi's and straight to his...

"Oh, my Lord," comes Madison's voice from my right.

“I agree. If God were a man, that is exactly what he’d look like,” Skye says dreamingly, walking up on my other side.

I was so lost in the vision of the man I didn’t even know that my friends had joined me. And still, I’m so sucked into him I can’t talk.

I’ve always seen Knight dressed up with that polished businessman look, even in what might pass for casual for him. I would never have thought he could be a hot shirtless Levi’s guy with ruffled just-had-wild-sex hair.

“He has a brother, right?” Skye leans into me, brushing my shoulder. “They actually look like twins. Do you know if they look the same everywhere? Better yet, do you think you could introduce me?”

I snap my gaze to her, my face hot with rage and arousal and more rage because yes, I saw the brother—*Jericho*—and yes, he and Knight could be twins, but why in the hell would I know if he looks the same as Knight everywhere?

I don’t answer, and the look I give her tells her I *never* will.

When I look back at Knight, he’s staring at me with a lazy, sexy grin that just makes him look more alluring.

“Hey, Goddess,” he calls out as if he calls me that in public all the time.

“Is that what he calls you?” Skye sounds as if she’s about to break out into a song.

I agree the endearment is definitely *endearing*. It’s just coming from the wrong man. As I stare at him, I’m reminded of the devilish things in beautiful packaging analogy again. That sets me straight, and I’m able to forget how hot he is and focus on the fact that he’s about to ruin everything.

That thought moves me, and I march right over to him as if I have the fires of Hell on my heels.

When I reach him, his gaze slides over me with the menace of a fox, cunning and crafty. He knows what he did, and I’m within my right to be pissed.

“Knight.” I sound like my mother did that summer I drove her car in the river.

“Goddess.” He tilts his head like a Southern gentleman would when greeting a lady. But Knight Grayson is no gentleman.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“*Working.*” He says that like it should be obvious.

My mind leaps over the parts that have stunned me, like the fact that he clearly gets hands-on with his team and there’s no differentiation between them. I jump straight to the part that affects me.

“Working doing what? I have my own plans to renovate the place.” I wave my hands around, looking like a crazy person. “I was going to do what my mother wanted. She had specific wishes. I’ve waited all this time to start on them. Please tell me this isn’t real. You’re not really here with these people ruining everything.”

Something flickers in his eyes that reminds me of the touch of sympathy I witnessed that first night we met, but before the emotion can fully present itself, it floats away.

“Sorry, mon cherie, that won’t be happening.”

“What do you mean? Why the hell not?”

“Because I’m renovating Sunset Cove.”

“Oh no, no, no.” I wag my finger and my head at the same time. “You most certainly won’t be doing anything of the sort. *I’m* renovating Sunset Cove.”

He closes the space between us, getting as close as he did the other night when he had me pressed against the wall. His mere closeness sends a shiver of desire rippling through me. It pulls on my nerves and continues south, heating me up all over.

He leans down, and I look up. We look like we’re about to kiss.

“No.” Knight shakes his head.

His answer yanks me back to the argument, and the gravity of what he's saying cuts me deep.

"Why are you such a fucking asshole? You can't do this."

"Sorry, mon cherie, but that contract of ours says I can. I own 90% of Sunset Cove. You own ten. Translation: I can do whatever the fuck I want."

"I hate you for this." I blink back tears.

He leans closer with a crafty look in his eyes. "Tell you what, Goddess, why don't you leave me to do this, and you can go back to focusing on Javier's big dick?"

My hands fly up to my mouth, and my heart jumps like it's going to tumble out of my chest and continue rolling down the path.

*Oh God.*

Knight knows my pen name. *And* he's been reading my work. What he just said was from the last chapter of *Girl No. 9*. The chapter I uploaded yesterday.

As I look him over, I just know this new information about me was why he was so weird yesterday, and he's giving me the same assessing look now.

"How..." My voice fades into the ether as it hits me that it's pointless asking him *how* he knew. He found out the same way he did everything else.

Knight shifts his weight from one leg to the other, the cunning in his eyes deepening.

"And just so you know..."—he gives me an I-have-you-right-where-I-want-you smile—"your five-inch dick hero has nothing on me. Mine is six point three inches."

As if I weren't in enough shock, he leans in again and plants a kiss on my forehead, then walks back to where he left the plank.

That kiss was a lethal cocktail of mockery and the dark attraction between us I now loathe. The potent effect has left



me feeling as empty as a bottomless well with nothing but a void inside.

A dainty hand rests on my shoulder. It's Madison's. I don't know how much she heard, but she can see I'm shaken. Skye has hung back, looking on with uncertainty.

Madison and I look at each other, but I have nothing to say.

What is there to talk about when everything has officially gone straight to hell?

*Everything.*

# Chapter 16

## *Aurora*



I wasn't supposed to visit my father until next week, but after what happened earlier, I had to see him. For strength, for support, for answers.

I've just arrived at the home where I spent my happiest years. It still holds that scent of love and warmth, and Mom's cinnamon spice she'd use for baking in the fall.

The scent means home and memories of what used to be.

I've retreated to the living room, where I'm slumped against the armchair with a fluffy cushion in my arms. Dad is in the kitchen making me chamomile tea. He took one look at me when I walked in, saw the lost look in my eyes and probably my soul, then headed off to make me tea.

Mom used to say chamomile could relax the mind and comfort your soul, putting you in a better position to think.

Right now, I would take any of those.

From the disheveled look of the photo albums and documents scattered on the coffee table before me, I can see I've interrupted whatever plans my father had for them. I just hope he hasn't sunken into that despair again, where he'd spend hours looking through the photo albums of him and Mom. That's all he did in the weeks that followed her death.

Today is his half day at work. These days used to be reserved for date nights. It never changed even after Mom died.

Dad walks in carrying a tray. On it is the cup of chamomile tea and a plate with all my favorite pastries and what I know is sliced pumpkin pie. That explains the cinnamon smell.

He makes a space on the coffee table and sets the tray down.

“You baked?” I look from him to the pie.

The corners of his eyes crinkle with a touch of pride when he smiles. “I did my best. I was going to drop it off at Knight’s house later, but as you’re here, you can have a slice now and take the rest home.”

I want to tell him that this is home and nowhere else has felt like it since I left and started adulting, but I hold back the words.

“Thank you.”

He pulls in a slow breath and sits in the chair opposite me.

I glance at the albums on the table, then back at him. “What were you doing, Dad?”

“Don’t worry, it’s not like before.” He nods, giving me added assurance. “But as I took the whole day off and it is still date day, I thought I’d sort out some pictures and other things. Things to do with Conrad and Nathan.”

My heart shies away. Dad never takes unplanned days off. Never. “What things?”

“It’s not anything for you to worry about.” The way he says that makes me believe otherwise.

I think of the feeling I got when the truth was unearthed. That there was more to what had happened with his debts than he explained, and he’s keeping the full truth from me.

“I heard Nathan has been released?” I ask the question hoping he’ll be open with me.

“Yes. He came by to see me. He’s hoping I’ll take him under my wings. And he still wants to marry you.”

*Asshole.*

“Clearly, that’s not going to happen now. What did you tell him?”

“I explained the situation with Knight. Of course, Nathan wasn’t too happy about that, but he still wants to work with me. I know he needs a job, but I’m no fool. I’m aware he has hopes of maintaining connections with you, so after we’re done with Knight, you might consider him.” He nods when I frown. “You are my *heir*. I don’t have as much as his father had, but I have something, which means it’s not just Sunset Cove you own. With my debts cleared, you will still get the assets I have lined up for you when you turn twenty-five. And of course, you will inherit everything I own. Nathan knows that.”

*Great. Just great.* Is there any point wondering if I’ll ever be with a guy who will just want me because they actually want me?

“I’m not interested in that.”

“Well, don’t be surprised if you see him at some point. He was an asshole, but he had some feelings for you. The worst thing for a man, no matter the situation, is to lose a woman to another. Particularly if he wants something from her.”

“It’s best he stays away from me.” That is one problem I really don’t need.

“I think so, too, but he looked such a wreck I didn’t have the heart to warn him away. Given the circumstances with his father, he’s laying low at the moment and heading to Europe. So, you might not have to worry about seeing him for a while.”

That’s some relief, but I still have to prepare myself for whenever it happens.

“Are you going to work with him? I don’t think you should. The connotations with his name alone could ruin your business.”

“I know, but... he’s innocent, Aurora. I can’t shoot a man down when he’s innocent. Losing everything has given him a rude awakening. As I’ve known him all his life, it’s natural for

him to turn to me. I'm probably the only person in the industry who can help him. That said, I've told him I'll think about it. He's not my worry right now. You are."

Those words soften the angst in my heart, as does the tremble in his hands.

He looks away from me and stares out the window at the rose garden Mom created. His eyes become glassy, and he looks weak.

"Dad, don't worry about me. I will be okay."

He looks back at me and smiles without humor. "I'm happy to see you. I wasn't sure how we'd be after everything that's happened."

I shake my head, realizing he thought I'd be angry at him again. I was, but the moment he told me why we were in this mess, I couldn't be. I would have done the same thing he did to save Mom. He knows, even though she's not with us anymore, that he tried everything.

"I love you." I sound like a child again saying those words for the first time.

Dad rubs a hand over his face, and that aged look he's been sporting for the last few years intensifies. "I love you too, but I *have* failed you."

"Dad—"

"No." He holds up a hand to stop me from continuing, then folds it into a fist and places it at his heart with a thump. "Don't try to make this into something it's not. Everything that has happened is my fault. I would try to save your mother again in a heartbeat, so I won't apologize for that, but I failed you the moment I made the marriage arrangements with Conrad and Nathan."

"I understand why you did it. Arranged marriages are common in our circles."

"Maybe so, but I wanted you to have the real thing. With the amount of debt I was in, my back was against the wall, and I stopped thinking. After losing your mother, I didn't want us

to lose everything else. I told myself you'd be okay because we knew Nathan. I also hoped his fondness for you would turn to love. None of that mattered, though, because everything went to hell when Knight came on the scene."

"Yeah, they did." There's no way I can refute that.

"I assume he did something to upset you."

I nod slowly and take small sips of the tea.

Knight hasn't just done one *something* to send me here. It's everything.

"What did he do, sweet girl? He hasn't hurt you, has he?" Dad straightens, fire flashing in his eyes, as if suddenly realizing that could be a possibility.

"He hasn't hurt me. Not like that. But I just found out he's going to be renovating Sunset Cove without me, so I have to forget Mom's plans."

Dad's expression dissolves, melting from his face like ice in the heat. "What?" He sounds as empty as I feel. "I didn't know that was going to happen."

"Well... that answers my main question."

"Sweetheart, I would have told you if I'd known. Especially knowing your plans to fulfill your mother's wishes."

"Is there really nothing we can do? How can he overrule me and start these renovations if we aren't even married yet?"

Dad's shoulder's drop. "The terms and conditions of the contract allow him to do so. He holds the ruling shares, so it's like he already has ownership, but after six months of marriage, he'll get the official document listing him on the title deeds. It's not a common practice, but people like him can find a way. They find loopholes, no matter how small, they can slither into."

*Jesus.* This just shows me how dangerous Knight Grayson is.

"There's nothing either of us can do."

My heart hurts even more to hear that. I set the cup back down on the tray and hang my head. Dad moves closer and slips and arm around me.

“Aurora. I know what Sunset Cove means to you. You wanted to keep the place alive because of your mother. I think it’s admirable you wanted to fulfill her wishes, but don’t be like me. This isn’t a fight I want you to get sucked into because it’s not your path.”

I understand what he’s saying, but I can’t accept it. “It’s all I own from her. She loved that place so much.”

“I know, but you are a writer. You were born to write. That is your path. In the grand scheme of things, you might not even know Knight Grayson in seven months’ time, but writing is who you are and who you will be forever. That is what you should be focusing on.”

How do I explain that it’s not as easy as he thinks with that evil bitch, Rachel, trying to ruin me? How do I tell him that being Cordelia Harris, and writing about forbidden men and fantasies is probably the closest I’ll get to fulfilling my writing dreams?

I’m older now, and things have changed, so he might not be so prudish. He would most likely want me to live some element of my dream, but it’s not where my heart lies. I know other romance authors who make millions writing novels. If I tried hard enough, I might be able to do that, too. But my heart is still set on working for a lifestyle magazine. I would never drop writing novels, but I wouldn’t feel complete if this were it.

The truth is, I don’t know what’s going to happen to me. Time is passing with every year and my chances are fading.

Dad takes my hand and gives it a gentle squeeze. “Promise me you will, sweet girl. Promise me.”

“I promise I will.”

“Good. That means a lot to me.” He places my hand to his lips and kisses my knuckles. “Your promise gives me hope that you will have the life you’ve always wanted.”



My promise isn't empty, even though my chances are slim. I will never stop trying to get to where I want to go in the writing world.

*But...* I also feel the same way about Sunset Cove. It is the only other thing in this world that means anything to me.

Earlier, when Madison said the place was for me too, I felt that connection.

The same connection Mom must have felt the day she started working there.

The two of us came from nothing. I still remember those days when the future looked so uncertain, I couldn't see one.

Dad gave us a good life, but Sunset Cove was something Mom achieved on her own. She always wanted to own a hotel. She was so happy when she got the job there, her goal was to save and buy something just like it. But she loved the place so much, I don't think she would ever have parted with it. Dad offered to get her something many times, but her heart was always with Sunset Cove.

When the owner saw how much Mom loved it, she gave it to her.

Mom gave it to me because she knew I would cherish it the same way she did.

That's why I can't let it go.

I can't allow Knight Grayson to overrule me because he's an asshole who thinks he owns the world and people inside it.

He might own ninety percent of Sunset Cove, but I still own ten. It means I still have a chance, and I have to fight for this one thing.

But with men like him, you can't fight with your fists or with your words.

You have to beat them at their own game by playing the *game*.

When I was in Knight's office, I saw a copy of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.

*I've read that book too, Knight.*

It has many phenomenal quotes, but my favorite is this:

*“In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity.”*

I just have to look for an opening and take it.

Beauty tamed the Beast, and Persephone, Hades.

So, I can do this.

# Chapter 17

## *Knight*



**J**ericho and I stride into the grand hall of the Astoria, joining the other formally dressed guests who are here for my grandparents' anniversary party.

In the far corner of the hall, my father stands with his arm around Sloane, Bastian's mother. Bastian is with them, along with this week's side piece attached to his arm.

My father notices me first, and his face becomes infused with stone, his eyes brimming with the warning of our last encounter. Bastian looks across at me, too.

They were told today that I've been preliminarily selected for the CEO position of the Park Avenue branch. That's why they're looking at me with a myriad of emotions engraved on their faces. Rage. Fury. Wrath. And so much more. They're all there with front row seats, witnessing our rivalry.

I look away. Father and Bastian can't do shit to me. At least not tonight.

Tonight, I'm still the untouchable winner.

Jericho and I spot our grandparents by the chocolate fondue fountain.

Grandma is laughing at something my grandfather is saying. Like always, he has some joke to tell her. He's confessed on many occasions that his favorite thing is hearing her laugh.

Both are dressed in black, but my grandmother's strapless gown has silver trimmings around the hem the same color as

her hair.

We make our way over.

I have my own agenda for tonight in releasing the official details of my engagement, but the fifty years my grandparents have spent together is a sentiment I celebrate too. I'm happy to have them still together, still as healthy as they were twenty years ago, and still alive in love.

Grandma spots us first and clasps her hands for her habitual swoon. "Look at you boys in your suits. You look so handsome."

"You look beautiful, Grandma," I tell her.

"Thank you, my love. I do my best." She laughs heartily and makes a show of twirling around.

"Yes, you do."

"And you, but you're still my sweet, *cute* little boys."

Neither of us corrects her. We haven't been cute or sweet in such a long time, the years that we were don't count anymore.

Especially now. My grandmother would probably have a heart attack if she knew I was forcing Aurora to marry me. She knows about the engagement, but she thinks it's real.

Grandma reaches up and tries to touch Jericho's cheeks. Another habit of hers. Jericho had chubby cheeks when he was little that Grandma adored. As she's a short little thing, even in her heels, Jericho indulges her by leaning forward to meet her more than halfway.

"Always, Grandma." Jericho humors her with one of his faux angelic smiles he usually reserves for her. Apart from our mother, Grandma is the only other woman in our lives who gets to see such niceties.

"Aww." She continues doting on him by patting his cheeks, then she moves to me. I dip my head, so she can plant a kiss on my forehead.

"Happy anniversary," I tell them both when I straighten.

“Thank you, my boy.” Grandfather smiles and holds out his hand to shake mine.

“And may you have another fifty more years together,” Jericho adds, his gaze focused and expression relaxed. It’s his meaningful face. The one we see when he’s showing us the real him.

While Grandma looks like she’s about to burst into tears of happiness, Grandfather rests a hand on his shoulder.

“I appreciate that, son.”

“I know.”

“So, where is your beautiful bride-to-be?” Grandma bubbles, looking at me. “I’m dying to meet her.”

“She’s on her way.”

Aurora should be here very soon. Jericho and I had a meeting that ran over. I wouldn’t have had time to go home, so we came straight here from the office.

I sent one of my personal shoppers to the house to make sure Aurora looked the part tonight. She also had her hair and makeup professionally done.

She doesn’t need all that, but after our showdown yesterday at Sunset Cove, I didn’t trust her not to wear a garbage bag and make me look bad.

I actually don’t know what mood or version of Aurora I’m going to get tonight.

I haven’t seen her since yesterday. I got home late last night and left before sunrise, but I’m assuming she still hates me.

“I’m so excited for you.” Grandma takes both my hands into hers. “I hear she’s beautiful.”

“She is.”

“Well done.” Another hearty laugh fills the space between us.

Two of my grandparents' friends approach, and Grandma releases my hands.

"We'll come find you boys in a little while," Grandfather says to us. "Grab some drinks."

"Sure."

He saunters away with Grandma and their friends. The two falling into an easy conversation about their plans for the evening.

Jericho turns back to me with a hopeful expression. "Well, at least they're as happy as they always are."

"Yeah, fifty years of happiness. It's a long time to be together."

"It's a long time for a lot of things. I feel like I've been waiting for fifty years for Grandfather to talk to me about the company. But I've decided I'm not going to think about it. It's not like we don't have work to do."

I couldn't agree more. "We have a lot on our hands."

"Speaking of which, you've hardly said anything about your dearly beloved."

He's been trying to pump me for information since he sent the message about Aurora's secret pen name. As we were so busy today with back-to-back meetings, he seized the chance to grill me again on the way here, but I didn't give him anything.

"Things have only gotten worse."

"How?" His stare is as skeptical as if I just said I was having lunch with leprechauns. "Things were already terrible, but surely, her wicked, wild fantasies must sweeten the deal. Come on, Knight, she's a fucking hot romance author who writes dirty."

I'm very aware of who my bride-to-be is. And today's chapter was dirtier than the last. *Fucking hell*, the woman is all things sinful.

“It hasn’t escaped me, brother. But right now, she hates my guts.” And I can’t blame her. “Things went all the way south yesterday at Sunset Cove.”

“What happened?”

I quickly fill him in, and as I speak, even he frowns at the parts where I explain how Aurora found out I was renovating the place. I feel like the asshole I am.

Even I know I could have done it better. I could have found another way.

I wasn’t campaigning for the world’s biggest asshole. I just felt what I did was best. Like ripping off a Band-Aid, you just get it done and deal with the consequences after.

The reality is no matter what happened, we would have had an argument anyway, but yesterday was made so much worse when Aurora told me about her mother’s plans for Sunset Cove, and how she wanted to make them reality.

I already felt Aurora was too attached to the place but hearing that amplified my reasoning for standing my ground because there’s no point doing something that carries such a sentiment when Sunset Cove is going to be sold off.

I would break her more, and I’m not about to suddenly grow a heart and lose what I want.

I could see the loss in her eyes and the pure hatred toward me. That’s what made me confess I knew about her secret pen name. And her recent work. Up until then, I had no plans of telling her. Doing so was to show her that she can’t fight me, even when she thinks she’s buried a secret deep in the earth.

I do wonder, however, if there is more to my goddess that she’s keeping under some rock in Hell.

“Jesus, Knight.” Jericho blinks several times. “Sometimes I think you make me look like a saint.”

“It was for the best, and when she finds out what I have planned, it’s going to be Armageddon.”

Suddenly, something sparks in his eyes. He looks past me, and his eyes grow large, but then he looks back at me and



nods.

“So, what you’re saying is, you’re hardcore enemies, right?”

“Yeah.”

“And you feel nothing for the girl. You’d pretty much be okay if someone else had her before you say ‘I do?’”

A pang of rage twists in my gut at the idea of anyone touching or having what’s mine before or after I say ‘I do.’ Even my brother.

“Jericho, touch her, and you die. I mean it.” I do. It would be the first time we fight. I always knew if that happened, it would be to the death.

“Oh, I figured as such, and of course, *I* wouldn’t do that to you. But you might want to put every other fucker in this room looking at your girl in his place.” He lifts his chin, gesturing to look behind me.

When I do, and my gaze lands on Aurora Wright, my heart slams into the walls of my chest and my pulse clatters around like beads falling to the floor.

My guard momentarily slips, and I allow myself to be a man admiring her for the beautiful woman she is.

The long lustrous strands of her hair flow down like a shower of moonlight, curving around her upper body in loose sexy waves. The style compliments the silver sequin gown hugging her body with its glamorous mermaid hem.

She’s glowing and nothing but delicious delight with those perky tits, shapely hips, and curves for miles and miles.

It’s like she just stepped out of a myth. Because only a goddess like Persephone would look like that. Like a woman worth stealing from another man. Or this world.

It’s a dangerous thought that could get me in trouble, but so will the men looking at what’s mine. It’s true, there’s not a man in here who doesn’t have his eyes on her.

I walk away without another word to Jericho and head toward Aurora.

She doesn't see me until I'm nearly with her. When she does, she looks at me with caution.

"You're late," I say, although she's not really. Especially when I've barely been here for five minutes. "Still hate me?"

Her gaze hardens. "Never stopped."

"Good, you mustn't." I wink at her, my answer and attitude never failing to surprise her. "Were you working on chapter 19 of *Girl No. 9*?"

"I did that this morning."

"So, why didn't you release it? Do you like keeping your readers in suspense on a huge cliffhanger?"

"It's called a hook."

"I beg to differ. It's more like torture." My eyes drop to her body and climb back up slowly, oh so slowly, to meet hers, as if I have eons left in this world to admire her. It's almost torture not doing so.

Aurora doesn't miss the double meaning of my words. Her cheeks flush, and I can see her doing her best to chase away the effect I have on her.

"It's to keep people coming back."

"Just out of interest, why'd you call the title *Girl No.9*?"

"Oh, so you didn't read the whole thing?" She feigns surprise.

"Just the parts with all your dirty fantasies, mon cherie. So, tell me, why is Laila *Girl No. 9*?"

"She has a controlling father who wants her to marry one of his business associates. In order to escape the marriage, she needed a lot of money, so she signs up to be a call girl. That's how she becomes *Girl No. 9*. Javier finds out about it and gives her the money, but he wants her for thirty days. He thinks it will be enough and that he'll be able to let her go, but then he decides to fight for her."

I'm impressed. Seriously. "Good stuff."

"I would say thanks, but it feels weird."

"That's fine. Anyway, Chapter 18 ended when Javier couldn't find a condom. What happens next? Do they still do it?"

Her jaw sets, and she searches my eyes, trying to see what I'm up to. "Why?"

"I want to know if your fantasies include bareback fucking." Yes, I *am* trying to shock her.

"Yes, Mr. Grayson, my fantasies just so happen to include bareback fucking." She borrows my words, but such filthiness coming from a sweet girl like her should be illegal.

"Does that mean you're on the pill, mon cherie?" I never thought about that before because I promised myself I wouldn't go there with her, but the question comes now that my body has overridden common sense.

"Yes. If you must know."

Now that I know, of course, all I can think of is bareback fucking *her*. My skin on hers. Me inside her. Me taking all the parts she hasn't given me yet.

Maybe all the parts she's given that simpering idiot, Nathan.

"And is Javier inspired by your former beloved?" It's a question I shouldn't ask because it doesn't matter. It shouldn't.

"No, all my characters are fictional. In any event, please stop calling him my beloved. You've dug around enough, I'm sure you must know Nathan and I weren't even dating."

"Just double checking, Goddess." I was right, their marriage was going to be as arranged as ours. But maybe I shouldn't have pressed for that information. It was something to keep me in line.

"There's nothing to double check."

*Nothing*. The put out look in her eyes tells me she might never have slept with the asshole, so those parts of her I want

to taste, could still be all mine.

I'm so sucked in with the seductress she's playing, that I almost miss the warning in my gut that's telling me there's something different about her tonight.

Something softer that shouldn't be there so soon after yesterday's angst.

She should still want to rip my skin off. Still hate me. Still want to run a million miles from me.

There's no way she's gotten over the bomb I dropped on her so quickly. I expected her to come back with more pleas for a negotiation, or something. Not this.

Although, I do like her like this—soft and sexy and absolutely fuckable.

I look a little deeper into those eyes of hers and find what I'm looking for—desperation masked by arousal. The sight reveals what's truly happening here.

This *is* it. The first steps of her attempted negotiation.

Aurora Wright hasn't given up on anything.

Her tactics have just changed. She's trying to reach me from a different angle to get what she wants.

*Sorry, mon cherie, you can't try to fool the devil in his own game.*

Not even Hades truly gave Persephone what she wanted. That's why we have spring and winter.

“Good to know.” My delayed answer after my prolonged silence snaps the connection.

“Do I want to know how you found out about my secret pen name when I've only told one person in this world?”

That one person is Madison, the best friend.

“No. Best you don't know, Goddess. In any event, much as I'm enjoying this little conversation of ours, it's showtime.” I'm aware that people have started looking at us, whispering

and wondering who the beautiful mystery woman is standing with me. "Time to be mine."

Her eyes turn contemplative, acknowledging that this is the moment when everything changes. After tonight, we'll be in the public's eyes. "What do you want me to do?"

I have several answers for that.

*Ride my face, so I can feast on her tight little pussy.*

*Ride my dick until it's raw.*

*Pretend I'm Javier from the story and let me fuck her in the back alley.*

I push all those options away and think of something safer.

"Kiss me."

A flicker of uncertainty dances in her eyes, and it almost seems as if she's worried about what effect kissing me might have on her.

I crook my finger, beckoning her to come closer.

She takes a quick sip of air and obeys.

My lips meet hers, and I recognize the sweet taste. It feels like coming home, so I indulge myself and go through the door we just opened. I flick my tongue through the seam of her lips and suck on her tongue in a full open-mouthed kiss, imploring and exploring her like I did only a week ago.

It's only been a day over a week. It feels like it must be longer, but it's not.

I kiss her like I never have before but like we should have always been kissing. She kisses me back, unable to resist and listen to whatever voice is telling her to beware of me.

Her soft body fuses to mine. At that moment, I stop thinking and start feeling.

And I think she was right.

She is my Persephone.

But she mustn't be.

# Chapter 18

## *Aurora*



**M**y heart hammers hard in my chest, and my pulse pounds across my body as fast as a race car competing in the Grand Prix.

Knight's lips pressed to my mouth, with his tongue tangled with mine, sends currents of pleasure sweeping through me.

I try to remember this is supposed to be fake. But it feels real, probably because we've kissed before.

That shouldn't mean anything. Knight is the last man on this side of the universe I should allow myself to feel such aching desire for.

Everything about us is too ugly, and I hate him for being such a bastard about Sunset Cove.

I came here tonight ready for war. But this kiss, this very real kiss, has stalled my mind. And Knight ...

He makes me forget I'm standing on a crowded floor.

He makes me forget I'm supposed to hate him.

He makes me forget everything as effortlessly as he did the first night we kissed.

Then, in the split of a second, Knight stops kissing me and pulls away, his expression an unreadable mask. It's the kind of face a judge would pull to sentence a man to death without losing his composure, and you'd always be left wondering how he truly felt.

It reminds me that we're still enemies and I mustn't lose sight of my goals.

But there's something else I just figured out.

*Attraction.* It's my opening, my foot in the door, my opportunity.

No matter what has happened, I can't deny that I'm attracted to him, and he is to me.

I can use that.

It's the wild card between us and the thing I'm sure Persephone used to get Hades to meet her halfway. I don't even need as much as that. I just need an ounce of compassion.

A flash of a camera snaps our tension-filled stare.

It was someone taking pictures from the corner of the room. *The press.*

It's begun.

I expect that picture to be in some newspaper tomorrow like all the others that will be taken before the night is out.

"Oh, my goodness, she is absolutely gorgeous," says an elderly woman floating toward us. Although she's thin, she reminds me of the fairy godmother in *Cinderella*. She comes right up to me and takes both my hands. "I'm Etta, Knight's grandmother. I've simply been dying to meet you."

"It's great to meet you too. I'm Aurora."

"Like *Sleeping Beauty*. I love it." A gleam of interest flashes in her pale eyes.

I give her a little smile. She seems really nice. Glamorous grandmother nice.

I knew I'd be meeting Knight's family tonight, but I kind of expected them to have horns on their heads.

"My mother had a thing for fairytales," I explain with awe.

"Well, she made a good call. My dear, you are just as lovely as your name."

"Thank you."



She gives my hands a squeeze before releasing them, then looks from me to Knight with glowing excitement.

A man I recognize from Google as Knight's grandfather comes up next.

"Hi, I'm Bradford Grayson, Knight's grandfather." His tone is businesslike, as if he's in a boardroom meeting.

"Good to meet you."

"And you." He puts out his hand for me to shake, and I do, but I don't miss the look of wonder he gives Knight.

Something tells me it's because of that kiss, and I wonder just how much he knows about us. I get the feeling he knows a lot. Or everything.

He exudes the kind of authority that demands that no secrets are hidden from him.

"I must introduce you to everyone." Knight's grandmother takes my hand again, and before I can say anything, I'm led away.

I look back at Knight, who is already looking at me.

He said nothing after that kiss. Not to me and not to his grandparents. And still, his face remains the same.

I'm taken to meet Knight's grandmother's friends, who fuss over me, my dress, and my ring. I meet more people than I've probably met in the last five years, and that's saying something given that I went away for college and worked in two states.

I get invites to dinners, fundraisers here at the Astoria, and other venues I'd never be invited to in this lifetime. My personal favorite is an invite to a poodle fashion show put together by a new designer. Apparently, I'm lucky to get an invitation because it's an early viewing specifically arranged for the celebs who will be attending New York Fashion Week.

The time comes for Knight's grandfather to make his toast. When Knight finds me and slips an arm around my waist, I know the announcement about us is going to be made.

I was right.

Knight's grandfather thanks everyone for coming out tonight, proceeds to make a speech about his wife that sounds like vows of undying love, then he makes the announcement, declaring how proud he is that his eldest grandson has just gotten engaged.

That's when things really take off and it's like the party is more about us. The press swarm us with their congratulations and questions. Knight and I are asked everything from how we met to how he popped the question. Someone cheekily even asks if the Princess of Monaco would be invited to the wedding, seeing as how she was Knight's date for the yacht party.

As fake as we are, I am happy when Knight answers that she wouldn't be in attendance, then he makes the journalist apologize to me for being disrespectful and messy.

Said journalist is then shown the door.

The night wears on, and more pictures are taken with more kisses that feel far too real. I play the game, play the fiancée, play with fate.

Soon, the night ends. I survive my first official day on the job, but something sinister becomes quite obvious to me.

Of all the people I met tonight, Knight's father wasn't one of them. Neither was his half-brother Bastian, nor his stepmother, Sloane. But they were all there. I saw them.

At one point, when I was talking to Knight and Jericho, I looked right at them, wondering if they were going to come over. They were talking to other people, so I thought that might be why they didn't at the time, but they made no attempt at any other times.

I couldn't have been more surprised, and it was extremely obvious that they weren't anything called close. I also noticed his father was like that with Jericho, too, and seemed to favor Bastian.

To me, Knight's grandfather acted more like a father than his father did. I don't know his mother, as she lives in France,

but I noticed how his grandmother took on the role of mother too.

It made me wonder what happened between them. I couldn't imagine not being close to my father or speaking to him when he's right there in a room with me.

The goal for tonight was to get to a place where I could speak to Knight about Sunset Cove, but as the night ends and we bid goodbye to everyone, the questions about him and his family fill my mind.

Both matters, however, slip away when we slide into the fog of tension in the back of the Maybach, and Ryan starts the journey home.

Now that Knight and I are practically alone, it feels weird. We just spent hours pretending to be a couple engaged and in love.

Going back to the people we were before is harder than I expected.

It's harder to un-believe that we didn't belong to each other every time we kissed, and we're just a contract.

The tension thickens the further we drive away. But it's not the angsty tension we had before. There's an undertone of something sinful and sexual.

I know Knight feels it too, because he keeps stealing glances at me. At one point, out the corner of my eye, I catch him staring at my bare thigh where the dress splits.

I purposely don't move because I want to see how long he will do it. He stares, and stares, and stares, until Ryan drives over a little bump in the road. That is the only time Knight looks away.

We continue the journey in silence, but it's loud, almost deafening.

I can't even think straight, and when I do, I keep remembering all the sinful things he said to me tonight and other nights, and the way he kissed me.

Finally, we look at each other and a moment of unspoken words fill the space between us. I wish I knew what he is thinking.

As if to show me, he leans forward, as if to kiss me again. I'm stunned at myself when I stay there, waiting for the kiss to come.

But it doesn't. The moment is interrupted when the car pulls to a stop and Ryan announces that we're home.

Knight gets out first. I follow, suddenly realizing the night is over.

He'll leave and go back to his cave, then I'll have to wait until tomorrow or whenever I next see him to recreate this moment of truce to negotiate the renovation plans for Sunset Cove. Right now feels like the perfect opening, so I have to take it.

"Knight." I rush up to him before he reaches the stairs, but he keeps going.

"It's bedtime, Goddess."

We walk inside, into the bright hallway, and he continues walking away from me. Not in the direction of his room, but his office.

"Knight." I say his name with more force. He stops this time.

When he turns to look at me, and I take in the smoldering fire burning within his eyes, I freeze, knowing exactly why he's trying to get away from me.

It's that thing. That thing that made him almost kiss me again when no one was watching.

For a moment, we feel like a couple on a first date who have through-the-roof chemistry, and it's gotten to the point of the night where they're supposed to say goodbye. Except they don't want to, but they know they'll end up in bed if they spend another minute with each other. That's never happened to me, but I've written about it.

“Good night, Aurora.” This is one of the few times he’s said my name, and it’s with a clipped edge, a final warning that I need to stop pursuing him. Except I can’t.

“I need to talk to you about—”

“No.” His voice is filled with the same finality as before, but for a different reason this time, alerting me to the fact that he’s fully aware of what I want to talk about.

Of course, he would be aware. That was to be expected.

“You haven’t even allowed me to finish telling you what I want to talk about, and you’re saying no?” My gaze remains riveted to his as if attached by nails.

“You want to talk about the renovation plans for Sunset Cove, and that’s not up for discussion.”

Fury roars in my ears at his stubbornness. “Why the hell not? Why won’t you even hear me out?”

“Because there’s a reason I’m so good at my job. I don’t need to hear what you have to say about your mother’s plans to know it’s not going to be something I’m interested in.”

*Arrogant pig.* I want to call him that, but I hold my tongue. My God, do I hold my tongue.

“That’s a little egotistical, don’t you think?”

“Yes. You’re talking to me as if we just met. I’m all about ego. It is what it is. You don’t have to like it, or *me*.” His voice drops at the same time his eyes do to my breasts, and he makes no attempt to hide that he’s checking me out right in front of me.

Raw arousal awakens in my core again, but I shove it away and will myself to focus. I can’t allow my brain to turn to soup every time he looks at me like that. I have to get my damn act together.

Ignoring his comment, I decide to say what I need to say whether he wants to hear it or not. Just like an actress at an audition who’s just been rejected, but she keeps going anyway, hoping her judges will change their minds. “Sunset Cove was created in the forties. That’s when it became famous and

attracted people from everywhere. My mother wanted to revive that era and bring back all the things everyone loved. I think it's a fantastic idea."

The whole forties idea is the kind of unique selling point that should spark excitement and interest. I don't know anyone who doesn't love the forties. But from the distasteful look on Knight's face, it seems as if I've just met the first person to prove me wrong.

"Jesus, no." He wrinkles his nose, furrows his brows, and glares back at me as if I just spat on his Armani suit. "The forties were left in the forties for a reason. We won't be doing that."

My God, he actually hates the idea.

No. *Hate* is too meager a word. It's more like he despises it.

"Won't you even look at my mother's designs? I get that you're good at what you do, but my mother was extremely talented. She had this dream of owning her own hotel. When she got Sunset Cove, she—"

"Stop, Aurora. Just stop."

"But—"

"No. We're done here."

He turns and continues down the hallway. I watch him go, feeling like a failure all over again.

I can't believe he won't give me a chance. Not even an ounce of a chance when he's taken so much from me.

*No.* I can't just give up or have him dismiss me for the night like I'm a petulant child. We're not done yet. *I'm* not done.

Gathering my courage, I rush after him.

He knows I'm behind him, but he keeps walking. I follow him right into the office, slipping through the door when he enters before he closes it.

“You don’t give up, do you?” He grits his teeth, shakes his head, and walks to the humidor on the coffee table to grab a cigar.

“Not on this, no. It’s important to me.” I steel my spine and imbue my voice with all the passion I feel for Sunset Cove. “Knight, you have taken everything from me.”

“When last I checked, I saved your father from a fate worse than death.” He shrugs out of his jacket and lights up the cigar. “I’m not sure you realize what being bankrupt means, or owing serious money to people you can’t write off.”

“I understand, and I’m fulfilling my part of the contract, but that is all for my father. Not me.” I bring my hands to my chest. “You have left me with ten percent of the one thing I own. Sunset Cove is the last piece of my mother. You knew I was going to renovate it, and you undercut me. Can’t you have the decency to look at my mom’s designs?”

He narrows his eyes and sits in front of his computer as if getting ready to work. “I already told you how I feel.”

“Is there really nothing I can do?”

“No.” He looks away and focuses on the computer screen, dismissing me from his sight.

I swallow past the Texas-sized lump clogging my throat and rummage through my mind for something more to help me.

Something I can do to prove to Knight that Mom’s ideas are the best for Sunset Cove. I can imagine him modernizing everything and ruining the nostalgia and heart of the place. Some things are best preserved, and you aren’t supposed to change them.

Knight starts tapping away on his keyboard with his cigar slinked to the side of his mouth.

“I’ll do anything,” I mutter in a reverent-careful voice.

My offer gets his attention. His fingers still on the keyboard, and a sinful look that should warn me away enters

his eyes. I imagine that's how the devil would look if you offered yourself to him.

"*Anything?*" He inclines his head.

"Yes." Although I feel like I'm about to sign a contract without knowing what I've agreed to, I have to try.

He pulls on his cigar and releases a waft of smoke that surrounds him in a sexy fog. The sight reminds me of one of those neo-noir posters of classic Hollywood films like *Casablanca*, or maybe with Knight, it would more be like *The Godfather*.

He glances across the room and scans the area. Then it's as if an idea comes to him, and when he looks back at me, his eyes are alive with malice.

"Okay." Malevolence snakes through his voice, slithering through every syllable.

I don't care about the chills rushing across my body with the warning not to do this. I feel hope. I got him to say okay.

"You will?"

"Yeah, I'll look over the designs and consider them with my own plans for the renovations. But, you need to beat me at a game of chess."

He glances at the wooden chessboard in the corner of the room. I do the same, noting how the pieces suddenly look real.

I hate chess, and it was so long ago that I played the game, I can barely remember the rules.

But I'll do it. I'll play if that's what I need to do.

"What happens if you win?" I ask.

I don't like the smile that spreads across his face. It would make Jack Nicholson's in *The Shining* look like your regular mailman.

"You already said it, Mon Cherie." He leans forward, resting his elbow on the table. "If I win, you do *anything* I want."



I press my lips together, knowing I'm heading into trouble here, but what choice do I have? I can walk away or do this.

“Still want to play?” He searches my eyes.

“Yes.” While I nod with determination, I pray to whoever will listen that I'll beat him.

# Chapter 19

## *Aurora*



**M**y pieces are white. His are black.

It suits him. Suits the color of his soul and the coldness of his heart.

I keep looking at the rigid texture of the black knight and thinking how much it reminds me of him.

Knight is sitting opposite me, still smoking his cigar, watching me with eagle-sharp eyes.

I have my hands folded in my lap, an attempt to hide my nerves as I try to recall the rules of the game.

All I remember is the king mustn't die and the queen is the strongest piece on the board. Next to the queen is the knight.

All the other pieces need to be played with well-thought-out strategy, so when you strike with your strongest pieces, you hit where it counts to weaken your opponent.

At least that's what I remember.

When did I last play a game? I think it might have been ten or fifteen summer camps ago, and I can't remember who won or lost. The people I tend to play with always end up in some argument, and the best course of action is to forget the game.

"You first, mon cherie, vas-y doucement avec moi maintenant." Knight soulful French accent has me hanging on every word.

"What did you say?"

The sexy Frenchman simply shakes his head and takes another drag on his cigar. “Just play.”

Deciding not to press him—because I’m sure he couldn’t have said anything good—I move the pawn in the center forward.

He follows with his center pawn, doing the same thing. After a number of turns, I realize he’s mostly been mirroring my moves. I don’t know why, but I have a bad feeling he’s doing it for a reason.

He takes my first pawn, and I take his. He takes my castle, and I take his, but then, out of nowhere, his queen glides over and captures my knight. I never even saw the opening.

My next good move is with my other knight, but all it will do is get me closer to his bishop. I take the chance.

“Check mate, game over,” Knight announces as simply as if we were talking about the weather, then moves his queen right up to my king.

My eyes bulge and my nerves seize. “No, that can’t be right.”

“Oh, but it is, Goddess, and I have you in checkmate at least four different ways.”

I look down at the board.

*It’s true.* Even if his queen didn’t get me, my king is on the edge of the board and is right in the path of his knight, castle, and bishop.

My heart sinks, and I suck in a shivering breath.

*I lost.*

Knight’s menacing smile returns, this time amplified to a degree that sends a shiver to my soul.

“Could we have a rematch? It happened so quickly.”

“No.” He gives me his usual clipped answer and laughs.

At the sound of his laughter, I realize something I should have before, and the deepest dread spreads over me.

He knew I'd lose.

The realization pushes my heart deeper into the abyss of desolation.

The bastard is so arrogant and self-assured, he knew there was no way I'd beat him. That's why he chose chess.

Knight probably plays the damn game all the time. That's why it's here, set up in his office, ready to be played.

Knight played me, played on my desperation to be heard, and played on my hopes.

"You lost. I won," he reminds me, his voice rising higher with every syllable spoken. "So, now I get to pick *anything* from you."

I stare at him for a few seconds, mentally adding this moment to the ever-growing list of worst mistakes I've ever made in my life.

"This isn't fair." My voice is as frail as shattered glass. "You knew I'd lose."

He raises his hand, opens his palm, and shakes his head. The expression on his face softens, feigning innocence. But I can see straight through his bullshit.

"I knew no such thing." He observes me through lowered lashes.

"Yes, you did."

"Pray do tell. Tell me how I'd know you'd lose, Mon Cherie? Am I psychic, now?" He dips his head, and a lock of his hair falls over his eye. "For all I know you could have been some chess wiz in high school."

He knows I wasn't anything of the sort. Also, this argument is fruitless and stupid. He set me up.

"Regardless..." The wanton look in his eyes is a sign that I'm about to see more of the real him. "I won, so now I want my prize."

I stifle an enraged growl and summon my last drop of courage, preparing myself to hear his prize. I just hate that I

know, whatever *it* is, will only be something to further humiliate me. That is all Knight Grayson has ever done since I've met him. It would be unbecoming of him to prove me wrong.

“Okay. What do you want from me?”

He puts out his cigar in the ashtray. I watch the smoke wither and wane, along with the embers on the butt of the cigar.

Dark lust sneaks into his eyes when he looks at me, and he sets his shoulders back as if gearing up for something. Me. My retaliation.

“I want you to suck my cock, naked. Then I want you to ride my face so I can feast on your pussy until you come.”

My insides turn to stone, becoming no different from the lifeless sculptures in his workshop.

I gasp and push to my feet, my legs feeling like they're barely beneath me.

He can't be serious. But he is.

The devilish look on his face that could command the host of Hell tells me that he is.

And those words ...

*Damn it*, they're not that much different from what my characters said to each other in the last chapter of *Girl No.9*. But that was fantasy. *Fiction*. This is very real. He's real, too, and damn *me*...the sudden ache between my thighs and beading moisture in my core serve as a reminder of what this man does to me.

The look on his face deepens, wrapping around me like invisible threads of arousal, and I know if I do what he requests, it will push me further down the rabbit hole. It might even be near impossible to climb back out.

I can't do that to myself.

“No.” My voice echoes in my chest like another heartbeat.

A grin so scandalous it could make the headline of every tabloid slides across his sensual lips. “Sorry, Goddess, that appears to be the wrong answer. I seem to remember you promising me *anything*.” His tone is colder than ice but melts my insides like boiling lava. “I would have been bound to consider your mother’s designs if you’d won, so you can’t suddenly backpedal because you don’t like my request. Then again, you *are* giving me that fuck-me look again, so maybe you do like it.”

My eyes snap wide, and something I don’t want to acknowledge sparks in my chest. Regret. Longing. *Truth?*

“No. You are such an asshole.” The tremble in my voice makes me sound weaker. “You—”

“If I remember correctly,” he starts talking over me, “term fifteen of our *legally* binding contract, which we both signed, states you agree to do whatever I request of you while in the pursuit of the activities listed in the terms and conditions. This is what I want. I want you.”

*I want you...*

That last part ricochets off the walls of my mind, rumbling down to the soles of my feet. It’s like he’s check-mating me again but in a different way.

“I assume you wouldn’t want to be in breach of our contract now, would you?” He adds. “We all know what happens if you are.”

Those harsh words pull me from the reverie of hearing he wants me.

*What an absolute asshole.* He wouldn’t really do that. *Would he?*

And what a fucking threat. Using my father against me to get me naked. It’s so low, so dark, and so like Hades.

Every time I question the extent of his villainous mind, I get an affirmative answer that Knight Grayson is just as despicable as I imagine him to be. And more.

“Fine.” I sound as if I’ve just agreed to go to the gallows and chop off my own head, yet, at the confirmation of what I’m about to do, my traitorous body betrays me all over again.

A secret voice inside my core whispers tempting desire, taunting me that I want this. I try to push it away, but it returns with company.

My mouth is watering at the thought of getting to taste him, and my pulse is throbbing at the scandalous image of me sitting on his face while he eats me out.

I’ve never even done that before.

What will it feel like to have him do that to me?

And... what else will we do?

What else would *I* want him to do?

God, I really should have said good night when I had the chance. I still lost anyway. If I’d left the devil when I could, at least I’d still have my dignity. All I would have needed to do is reconvene a new plan to negotiate.

I would have saved myself this.

“Clothes off, now, mon cherie.” Like flames, his gaze flicks over me, scorching everywhere his eyes touch. “Or would you like me to do it for you? Just say.”

“No.” I look away, my eyes dropping to the faded square patterns on the marble floor. I wish I could disappear into them as I flick the straps of my dress down.

I pull the zipper on the side down next, trying to steady the tremble in my hands.

Knight’s heated gaze hasn’t left me. Not even for a second. Neither has the maddening lust curling in the pit of my belly.

With the zipper down, my dress floats to the floor, pooling at my feet. All that’s left on me is my strapless bra, thong, and my heels.

“Keep going. When I say naked, I mean naked.” His voice is deeper, more accented and huskier.



I undo my bra and allow it to join my dress on the floor, then I bend to take off my panties, my breasts bobbling, my skin tingling.

My heels are the last to come off, and I step down onto the cold floor, allowing the coolness to balance the heat flowing through me.

Finally, I meet Knight's gaze, and the air in my lungs stills when I take in the feral look in his eyes. There's something about seeing him looking at me like that that freezes me in place.

The rawness sends a shudder through me, and I fear that I might shatter as his gaze continues roaming my naked body like a nomad searching for a home.

I can't imagine the countless women who would have dropped their panties effortlessly for this man. Ones he wanted and others he might have used to pass the time. Yet the look he's giving me now makes me feel like I'm the only woman he's ever seen like this. And wanted. I could almost, almost believe it.

He stands, steps around the table, and moves toward me, his height making me feel as if I've suddenly shrunk.

He walks around me, studying every inch of my body, fueling the fire flowing through my veins. It's nothing short of a miracle that I haven't combusted into a pile of ash.

Knight stops in front of me and inches as close as we were earlier when we were kissing. "On your knees, Goddess, now."

Swallowing hard, I lower to my knees and gaze up at the big bulge pressing against his pants.

I'm distracted from the trepidation twisting through my nerves when he undoes his belt buckle, pulls the zipper down on his pants, and frees his massive perfectly erect cock.

At the sight, my lips part and my body goes taut.

His cock is thick and hard and just as *big* as he graciously informed me when he told me he was six point three inches long. I can see for myself that he wasn't exaggerating.

Knight takes his length, fisting it, and I grow wetter from watching him touch himself. Then the sexy French man lifts my jaw and directs his cock to my parted lips.

“Open for me.”

I’m so turned on, I can’t even breathe, but I try to hide it.

I don’t want him to know.

Opening my mouth, I lower my head and lick the crown of his length. Pre-cum seeps out of the tip, and I lick that off, too, making him flinch.

He threads his fingers through my hair and cups the back of my head as I take him deep into my mouth and suck.

The feeling of him sliding in and out of my mouth makes all the gray areas of this moment vanish.

He groans, the sound instantly turning me on, and I’m so wet I know any second now, my arousal will start running down my thighs.

Suddenly, he’s pushing far enough to make me deep-throat him. It hurts, but it’s a good type of pain. Like the sort he talked about the other night, where pain is pleasure and pleasure is pain.

I’m so lost in the sensation and feeling like I own his pleasure that I fight off my gag reflex and keep going. Even when tears are stinging my eyes and begin streaming down my cheeks, I don’t stop.

The sound of his groans and grunts hook me like long sharp talons, making me never want to stop. I shock myself further when the thought hits me that I could bask in the sound of his pleasure forever.

Knight fists my hair with his large hands and guides me to take him even deeper, then he pounds faster, fucking my face.

The way he owns my mouth is nothing short of dominant. And I let him.

I drink up his dominance, shoving aside everything warning me away from him, and I let him take and take and

take with his long, wild, untamed thrusts.

His cock hardens further in my mouth, and I feel he's close.

"Oh, fuck," he stutters with a deep masculine rumble of ecstasy.

I look up at him, wanting nothing more than to see him come undone at my hands.

He does, flooding my mouth with hot cum. It hits the back of my throat, and the warmth sends a shock to my system, spreading electricity through me.

With his grip tightened on my hair, I swallow even without him telling me.

The salty, sexy taste of him flows down my throat, leaving me shamefully hungry for more.

He stares down at me, wide-eyed and fierce, then he grabs my arm and lifts me to stand. Before I can catch my next breath, his lips are on mine.

He's kissing me as if he wants to own my mouth in other ways, and I'm kissing him with the same reckless passion.

We bump into the chessboard, knocking it over, and the pieces go flying everywhere, erasing the evidence of our game.

Our bodies crash into the wall, and he deepens the kiss, consuming me. My head spins, and it's like I've been waiting for this moment forever.

A thrill races over me when I feel his cock pressing into my belly, hardening all over again.

Knowing I've made him hard, boosts me with a confidence I never thought I could feel, and I tug on his shirt, needing to feel more of him.

He lets me undo the buttons and run my hands up his bare chest. I trace the definition of hard muscles beneath my fingers, marveling at the way he feels.

God, he feels so damn good, and so do I.

It's not supposed to be like this. I know it's not, and it's unnerving, but I'm too drunk on the pleasure to care. And my body doesn't seem to care about anything other than him.

Leaving my mouth, Knight traces hot kisses down the length of my neck, and I press my naked body against him, absorbing the attention he's giving every inch of my skin.

He goes all the way down to my breasts and cups both with heated palms. Then he clasps his lips around my right nipple and takes as much of my breast into his mouth as he can. Tremors erupt all over my body as he starts to suck.

He sucks hard, moving from one breast to the other, then he flicks and swirls his tongue over the tight peaks, making them harder with need.

*I love this. Too much.*

I know I shouldn't. *Mustn't* even. But I can't stop loving his mouth on me any more than I can this wild moment.

I hate that I want more, and that I don't want it to end, or go back to who we used to be.

My head falls back with a moan on my lips, and I slip my hand through his hair, running my fingers through the thick, silky fibers.

His teeth scrape the overly sensitive parts of my nipple, and I push against his cock, loving that too, and feeling it grow against me.

He catches my face and kisses over the bridge of my nose. "I want to eat out your pussy, Goddess."

I remember the part of his request, and pleasure stokes through me like a heated furnace. "Take me." I sound selfish and greedy and like I'm saying what I truly want to say for the first time in years.

With a cruel smile, he picks me up and carries me to the sofa.

There, he takes off his shirt, revealing those steel abs and inky art on hot tanned skin.

He swivels me around to face him. I suck in a sharp breath when he kneels at the edge of the sofa in front of me. Seeing him on his knees is so freaking hot, I could lose my mind just from watching him do that.

“Open your legs for me.”

My nerve endings throb at the possession in his tone, and I’m held hostage by his sinful words.

I spread my legs wide, and he stares at my bare pussy, looking at me as if he wants to consume me.

I’ve never felt so exposed before, yet so desired and wanted.

Licking his lips, he slides his fingers over my wet folds.

“Fucking beautiful and perfect,” he husks, driving his finger deeper into me, tunneling into my passage.

I arch into his touch, moaning out so loudly, I instinctively clamp a hand over my mouth.

Frowning, Knight reaches up and clasps his hand over mine.

“Don’t you fucking dare do that.” His burning eyes hold me still. “I want to hear every moan that leaves your hot little mouth. They all belong to me. The same as your pussy. It’s all mine.”

He pounds harder and... *Holy. Fucking. Shit.*

My mouth drops, but that’s the only reaction he allows me to have in that split second. My next breath sees him burying his face between my thighs and thrusting his tongue into my passage.

The impact makes my body bow, and mindless moans fall from my lips.

I’m louder than before, but I don’t care.

His tongue thrashing around inside my passage, giving me ultimate pleasure, feels so damn good, I don’t care about anything.

The sweet luxuriating sensation pulses through me like the waves of the sea, and I fall into the blissful pleasure of having his mouth on me as he eats me out.

I'm not ready for him to stop. But thankfully, it's only brief.

A cunning smirk lights up his face, and he gets on the sofa with me.

He lies down and lifts me onto him, positioning me so that I'm actually sitting on his face.

Realizing how crazy and indecent this is, I squirm against him.

“Knight.” His name is trapped in my throat. “This feels...”

“Stay right there. Just. Like. That. But feel free to suck my cock if you need something to do.” A smile dances in his words.

He spreads his hands over my ass and shoves his tongue back into my passage.

In this position, it feels different. He's able to go deeper inside me and awaken new pleasure. Pleasure I'm desperate for. Pleasure he gives to me.

Seeing his cock—erect again—bouncing before me, I lower my head and take him into my mouth once more, sucking and pleasuring him while he pleases me.

I rub my pussy over his face as he thrusts his tongue into my passage and swirls around the hard nub of my clit. It feels too good, and I can feel my orgasm rising like the intense waves of a tsunami.

It's so strong, I feel I might pass out. With my head feeling like it might fall off my body and keep going through the earth, I stop sucking him and straighten up so I can take the strong waves of pleasure pulsing through me.

Knight increases his wild assault on my core, but then he switches to sucking on my clit.

That does it. *That* pushes me over my limit. I come instantly with a shriek that pours out of me, hot and filthy, the sound touching every corner of the room like air.

The ruthless orgasm tears through me, shattering my mind, savage and merciless, just like him. I ride the feeling, the pleasurable wave, allowing it to take me higher and higher. So high I feel like I could almost touch the sky. I reach my arms up and behind me as if I can.

I hate when my awareness starts trickling back and the tingles of pleasure begin to fade.

Knight slips out from under me and pulls me onto his lap for another kiss. A slow, slow sensual kiss that feels too tender for us, then he stops and presses his forehead to mine.

I expect him to do something more. I can feel him hard against my core. He's mere inches away from sliding into me. So, why isn't he?

"It's time for you to go upstairs." His voice is back to normal. Cold, uncaring, and arrogant.

"What?" I pull back to look at him and notice the guard sliding back over his eyes like a gate. Part of me wants to fight to keep it open, but it happens so fast my choice is taken away.

"It's time to say good night." The low timbre of his voice tightens my stomach.

"Why?"

"We can't. We're done here, so go to bed."

His answer makes me flinch like he just slapped me, then I remember this is what he does. *Humiliate me.*

Why am I even surprised? It's not like this is the first time he's done this to me. Except the last time, I got a heads-up of the devil he was.

This time, I was the fool.

I feel even worse when he slides me off his lap and stands to tuck himself back into his pants and zip up.

I don't allow another second of damning humiliation to pass before I rush over to my pile of clothes on the floor.

I'm so stupid. Why does this kind of shit keep happening to me?

I manage to pull on my dress. Forget the bra and panties.

I'm about to bolt through the door when he grabs my arm and pulls me close to his chest.

The look in his eyes is hard and passionless with a lethal calmness that makes my skin crawl.

"Don't play games with me ever again, Aurora. You won't win, no matter what the game is. Do you understand me?"

Red-hot anger heats up my blood. He sounds like he's talking to a child again, and as if everything we did moments ago never happened.

"Yes, *Knigh*t, I understand you perfectly." I make a point of staring deeply into his eyes, so he knows I can see him for the asshole he is.

"Good, and we will not talk about Sunset Cove again. You can keep managing the place and doing what you were previously doing, but you stay out of my way when it comes to the renovations."

I didn't know my heart could sink any further, or break into any more pieces, but it practically falls out of my chest and smashes on the floor.

I've never met anyone who could stir such deep emotions in me, and such a wide, raw mixture. I've also never met anyone who could make me go from wanting them to hating them within the space of minutes.

Defeat pulls me further under as I realize with regret that I lost.

I've lost for good. I won't get to fulfill my mother's dreams for Sunset Cove. Because of him and his greed.

"I hate you." I speak the words on my mind as a tear slides down my cheek.



Like the asshole he is, Knight simply nods and gives me a mocking smile. “Never stop, Mon Cherie. Never... stop.”

I yank my arm out of his grasp and continue my escape through the doors I shouldn't have entered.

Everything was a mistake, and I was wrong.

Some monsters can't be tamed, and I need to get my head out of the clouds. Knight isn't Hades. Even he had a heart.

Knight is something else entirely.

He's my destroyer.

# Chapter 20

# *Knight*



I lean over the table in my workshop, picking up where I left off on my last sketch. I'm using a different pad from the one Aurora would have seen when she was in here.

I keep erasing what I've done and starting over because all I can see on the cream-colored cartridge paper laid out before me is Aurora's face.

Her beautiful, disappointed, anguished face with a teardrop streaming down the smooth skin of her cheek.

Aurora Wright was pure, raw sin, and I'll never get the image of her perfect naked body out of my head with those full breasts and sexy curves.

But nothing cut me deeper than watching her cry.

*If you play with fire, you will get burned.*

Everyone knows that. Even the moth who was drawn to the open flame.

So, why do we play with fire, knowing it could potentially destroy us?

I think it's the call of adventure, and the thirst to taste the thing you should resist. You crave it even when you know good and well you'll never be the same again once you touch it.

That's what happened to me last night when the goddess told me she'd do *anything*.

Poor lamb. Poor, poor, innocent lamb. She didn't know better. I take it nobody ever told her she should never offer such things to men like me.

I was already consumed by lust.

When I'm around Aurora, lust seems to supersede everything. It opens the doors to the wide halls of temptation, and like a fool, I run straight inside.

Last night, I don't know what pushed me over the line, kissing her, acting like a couple for the cameras, or knowing I wasn't really acting.

When I kissed her, I was really kissing her, and when we got back, all I wanted to do was bury myself balls deep inside her.

*I nearly did.*

A dark soul like me touching a woman so hallowed and perfect is hardly any different from rubbing tar over Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel.

Like so many things I do, I knew everything I wanted from her was wrong, but I selfishly indulged my desire.

She was ready to give herself to me. It was a twist on my game that she wanted me too.

And now?

Now Aurora truly hates me.

She thought I was playing with her, but I stopped myself from going further because I didn't want to complicate things any more than they are, or blur lines that need to stay firm between us.

This is business, a game of thrones where kings fight each other to conquer power. Sunset Cove is my ticket to get what I want. Without it, I don't have Park Avenue, and everything I've done over the last two weeks would be for nothing.

With the declaration out there that I'll be taking over the Park Avenue branch, I can't afford to slip up and give my

father and Bastian the opening they seek to get me out of the picture.

That aside, even if I weren't selling Sunset Cove, I couldn't even contemplate giving Aurora a chance to implement her mother's designs in the renovations because I genuinely loathe the idea of a forties-themed resort.

I completely disagree that we should bank on the history in such a way, and I truly don't believe it would suit the Hamptons. It needs a French Provincial touch with a cosmopolitan edge to make it trendy. I've already contacted my team in France who can make that happen.

There is no room for any other designs or ideas but my own, so it's better for Aurora to hate me now.

Better for us both, but for me in other ways too.

Awakening my taste for a woman who reminds me of my ghost is not my wisest of moves. The sculptures surrounding me are testament of that. They—*all of them*—are reminders I must never be that version of myself again.

Definitely not when I can admit that I've never lost myself to anyone the way I do when I'm with Aurora.

After what I went through with my ghost, I never expected to meet a woman who could have such an effect on me, and in so little time.

That's something I don't want.

When it comes to Aurora, there are also secrets between us that I don't want to feel guilty for if they were ever to resurface.

Poseidon runs up to me and brushes against my leg, a signal that I've been in here for too long and it's time to go for a walk.

He's right. I've been in here for hours. I went to work today to sign off some contracts, and when I got back, I came straight in here.

Art is my medicine.

Jericho and I inherited the talent from our mother.

Like her, I've always been into sculpting, but Jericho loved tattoo design.

He did all the artwork on my back. I did everything else. The two of us had the time of our lives when we had that tattoo parlor, but then we outgrew it, and Grandfather summoned us to the world of Wall Street.

Jericho still does tattoos for the odd client—mostly women who use an excuse to see him again—but I keep my love for art going by showcasing a few pieces every year in my mother's gallery. I do it for her too. It would break her heart if I ever stopped.

I don't think either of us ever have to worry about that. I imagine myself old and gray and still finding something to sculpt.

Aries and Artemis join us, and the three dogs circle me like they're putting on a show.

"Alright, guys, I hear you." I give them a pat each on their furry heads.

Poseidon pads to the bowl of doggie biscuits and barks at it.

When he looks at me, I realize it's not the biscuit he wants. It's the person who gave him the last one—the girl.

*Aurora.*

I was told she spent the entire morning with my dogs. They seem to like her.

"She's not coming back tonight, mon ami."

His eyes turn sad, lacking understanding, then he looks across at the last sculpture I did of Giselle and barks at it the same way he did for the biscuits.

Sorrow cuts into me, another emotion I've pushed away.

It's amazing how these emotions resurface after years of slumber. Like old friends you don't speak to anymore. I've had my reasons for keeping them at bay.

"She's not coming back either. Sorry." I look at the sculpture and remember the first time I had to tell the dogs their owner was never coming back.

That was one of many hard days to follow.

I remember the day when I finished that particular sculpture. Getting the rose petals to look like they were falling from Giselle's hands was such a task, but I did it.

She loved it.

That sculpture was the last piece of my work she saw before she got really sick.

The sculpture I'm currently working on is the last of the collection. I started it months before Giselle died, and I haven't been able to finish it. Sometimes I wonder if I'm not supposed to. I stopped working on it when it became clear I was going to lose her.

I've done many pieces since, all featured in my mother's gallery, but this one is a real mystery. I've only ever been able to get as far as the base. That's it.

I redid the design a few times, thinking something fresh might help, but it's all been to no avail.

The sketch I was doing is today's attempt, but it's looking like another no-go.

The curves I've drawn for the structure look way off the mark, and I'll have to erase them again.

Honestly, I'm not sure I'm going to be able to finish it in time for the show.

I'm only working on it because I hate leaving anything incomplete, but with this, I can't see the finished product in my mind anymore. Maybe that's because I was in a different place in my life when I first had the vision.

Most artists and creative people will agree that they always see the end result of their product before they even begin. I've always been like that.

This might just have to be one time I bend my rules.

I close the sketch pad and lift my chin at the dogs when they sit. "Come on guys, let's go. A walk on the beach might do us all some good."

I need some of the crisp night air and the calm of the sea.

We leave the workshop and head out down the path leading to the beach.

The beach and extensive grounds were the main features that made me purchase this property. The house itself needed work after being damaged in a fire. I used it as a passion project and restructured the entire thing myself.

I get that part from my grandfather.

He's a man who always believed he should be out in the field with his team. If they had to work from sunup until sundown, he would be there right beside them.

His work ethic and zest for success are what has made Grayson Inc. so successful.

It's only in recent years, as he got older, that he stopped working so hard, but he still does what he can.

I know I shocked Aurora the other day when she saw me working with the contractors, but that's what I do, and the reasons I'm so successful.

When I get down to the bottom of the garden, I stop at the sight of the woman I rejected almost twenty-four hours ago. She's sitting under the willow tree writing in a little notebook.

The moon shines down on her, turning her hair silver and reminding me of one of those lustrous foil paintings.

She's so engrossed in what she's doing, she doesn't see me. I'm not that far away, but as it's dark and I'm wearing black, it would be difficult to spot me.



I doubt she'd want to see me anyway. Even if I don't believe she would have heeded my warning to drop her request for Sunset Cove. I don't expect her to forget something so important. I understand more than most that feeling of doing something because you want to honor a person. But for her, it's her mother.

As I would do anything in the universe for mine, I expect Aurora to regroup, but it will just be another fight between us.

A fight that will end up where?

Lust is the driver of those fights of ours. Raw, primal, carnal lust.

It's stirring in my soul again, willing me to go to her. Get a closer look.

*Get another taste.*

But I do the thing I should have always done and push temptation away.

Business has to be business when it comes to us, so I need to leave her alone.

She'll only be my wife on paper until she's not, then it won't matter how either of us feels.

At that point, when we say goodbye, it will be like none of this ever happened, and she'll become another ghost to me.

With that reasoning, I walk away.

# Chapter 21

# *Aurora*



**D** ear Aurora,

*This is a notification to inform you that the recruitment window for a staff writer position with us is now open.*

*Please click the link below to review the specifications for this job and submit your resume for consideration.*

*Please also note that the deadline for applications is July 31<sup>st</sup>.*

*Thank you for your interest. We look forward to receiving your application.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Heather Bailey,*

*Human Resources Manager*

*People Magazine*

I look over the message that's just come through in my inbox.

As I scan the words, I feel excited for the first time in forever. Madison is

standing behind me, reading it over my shoulder too. I needed a second pair of eyes to ensure I wasn't seeing things. Although this same message would have gone out to thousands of people who signed up for the notification alerts, it's something to give me hope in the dark hole I've been living in for the last month.

"Holy shit, I'm so happy for you." Madison claps, bouncing up and down with a shriek. The frosted windows of the sunroom catch her reflection and split her in two as she moves. "This is just the thing you need right now."

"My God, is it ever." I beam back at her, my shoulders relaxing as the weight of worry decreases. I know this is minor in the grand scheme of things, but as I signed up for this notification so long ago—as in *years*—I felt Rachel might have sabotaged me again. Clearly, she hasn't. At least not yet.

*No, Aurora, don't think like that.*

*Just don't.*

This is something good. It shows that good things, no matter how small, can still happen to me.

"I told you to hang in there."

"You did." Lord knows how badly I need something like this in my life now.

I don't know how I managed to live through the last three and a half weeks.

That's how long it's been since I last saw Knight.

I was told he was on a business trip for two weeks, but there was all the time before and after that I realized he was outrightly avoiding any contact with me, and relaying messages through his staff. Staff like Chelle, who I loathe more than ever.

Apart from feeling like I failed my mother in regard to Sunset Cove, my life has felt like it belonged to someone else. Like I've been playing one of the characters in my books.

The press have also been all over me. Some wanting to cover my journey to the day of the wedding. Others wanted

interviews—which, of course, I didn't give.

According to my contract, I'm not supposed to, but I hate anything like that anyway.

Knight has turned my world every which way in the short space of time I've known him, and now it's two weeks until our wedding.

*Only* two mere weeks.

"You have to apply now." Madison rests her hands on the back of my chair. "Be the first one in. Maybe you'll hear back from them sooner."

I shake my head, although my hands are itching to apply. "No, I won't hear from them until at least a month after the deadline. They'll start looking at all the applications after the deadline has passed, so I'm going to give myself a few weeks to look over my resume and maybe give it a makeover."

I had a contact in a recruitment agency who gave me some useful tips for dealing with high-end elite magazines like *People*. She said to use the time they've given to write a resume that will blow them away. Once that's done, go over it with the eyes of a hawk, then send the application a week to a few days before the deadline. That's what I'm going to do and hope all the stars will align to give me that success I've craved for so long.

"You will apply, though, right?" Madison sits back on her chair opposite me, worry furrowing her arched brows. "I hope you do."

"Of course." I give her a reassuring smile, understanding why she thinks I might shove this under the rug. Maybe if it were another company I felt Rachel might be able to control, I would. But here's hoping that's not the case for *People*. "No matter what's happening, and all things Rachel aside, I would never forgive myself if I didn't try."

"Yayyy." She sighs and gives her shoulders a cheerleader-shimmy, making me laugh. "That's the spirit. This will put you back on track to where you should be." Her voice is filled with

the kind of aspiration you expect from a friend who wants the best in the world for you.

Madison is that kind of friend, and nobody but her knows how hard I've worked. Back in college, she saw firsthand the extent of my hard work. I also feel that sometimes, she might feel bad because she has her own company, but I'm still stuck in the in-between.

"It would be my dream to get this job."

"And I'm sure it would make up for the shit over the last few years."

"It would, but don't jinx it by talking like I already have the job." I give her a lighthearted chuckle. "I haven't even applied yet."

"I have faith in you. Honey, you have one hell of a resume. Your first internship was with *Time*, and you've had several notable placements and jobs. Not a lot of people can say that."

She's right, but the craziness with Rachel has made me doubt myself. I guess to move forward, I'll have to try and remember who I am. And who I still can be.

"Thanks for the pep talk. I needed it."

"You did. Girl, what on earth would you do without me?"

"God knows."

We both laugh, but honestly, I don't think I would have been able to get through the last few years without her. Madison has been extraordinary, and I hope I can be that for her too, if she ever needs me the way I've needed her.

I look back at my story notes on the table next to me. As exciting as my email was, I need to get back to that.

*Girl No. 9* has exceeded everyone's expectations. It's done so well on the reading platform that my publishers want me to have another serial ready to go the same week *Girl No. 9* ends. That was something good too, but the kind that provided an avenue for me to lose myself in a great distraction.

Madison and I have been in here for over five hours, brainstorming ideas for my next serial. I always enlist her help when I'm writing something new. Sort of like an alpha reader, but we talk it through. She loves reading my kind of romance and always has a good eye for trending tropes.

"How about we finish this up and go out for dinner?" I hold up the notebook.

"Hold your horses, Miss Lady, but yes to all of that." She brings her hands together. A sign she's about to expand on the pep talk. "Can we talk about *People Magazine* for another minute? It's kind of a huge deal."

"I know, but I don't want to get ahead of myself." I grit my teeth. "I might not get the job."

"But what if you did?" Her eyes gleam with all the hopes she has for me. "You wouldn't be able to carry on working at Sunset Cove. You know that, right?"

"I know." There's a heaviness in my tone that grips me. It's like my heart is speaking, showing its sadness.

"What would you do?"

This question has come up because after Mom died, I was adamant that I had to be *the one* to take over her job. I didn't think anyone else could do it, and I refused all suggestions. But that was just my grief acting out.

Now the question has come up again, and it's something I have to seriously think about. Especially with the recent developments regarding the renovations.

I've been avoiding the topic of Sunset Cove entirely for the last few weeks because it's too painful to talk about. Madison is aware of what's happening with the renovations, or rather what's not. She's also been there with me to see Knight's fancy French team doing their thing on the premises.

It broke my heart to tell Skye that I had to hold off on using her services because Knight didn't like the forties theme. I had to be truthful about the latter, but I embellished the story that Knight was putting up all the funds to do a fuller renovation than I planned. She mostly believed me.

“I guess I’d have to hire someone,” I answer when Madison deepens her stare. “I was hoping to still be around, but honestly, maybe it’s best if I’m not. Maybe it’s time to let go.”

The luster recedes from her face like a dimmer on a light switch. “Aurora, no. You can’t do that. What, and let Knight have it?”

“No, I wouldn’t let him have it, but as I’m not able to do what I want with the place, maybe it’s best if I’m not there at all. I can’t stand to see it being torn apart, knowing it’s going to look completely different from what Mom wanted.”

“I still think you should fight back.”

My chest caves. I want to fight back too, but I don’t know how.

“It’s a little difficult to do anything when Knight has been avoiding me.”

Maybe *avoid* is too strong a word. To avoid me, he would have to consider me, and I don’t think he even does that.

The truth is, I’m little more than a house plant here. As long as I’m watered and fed, I can still carry out my function to marry him.

Not seeing Knight shouldn’t bother me as much as it does. I should be happy I haven’t seen him. He’s the most wretched person I’ve ever met.

At the same time, his avoidance of me has closed the door on any chance to reason with him. And...

It’s opened another door I don’t want to go through. The one where I’m wondering where he is. And what he’s doing.

*Who he’s with.*

My mind has provided several possibilities for that last question, but I keep imagining him with Chelle/Giselle.

Madison taps my knuckles, cutting into the thoughts I shouldn’t be having. “How about you make him stop avoiding



you? You're going to have to see him at some point before the wedding."

I blink, wiping the thoughts of Knight and Chelle from my mind. "At the rate things are going, I won't see him until the fundraiser." That's three days before the wedding. "As for talking, the man is too difficult and stubborn. Getting through to someone like him for something like this requires power, which I don't have." I gave all my power away when I signed Knight's contract.

"Power might not be what you need. Knight is used to fighting people with power, so you have to find something else to work with. I don't know what that is, but there must be something."

I haven't, and *won't*, tell her that I already tried that angle by working with stupid attraction. Actually, scratch that—it's me who's stupid to think that plan would have worked.

The indecent events of that night have been sealed away in the back of my mind along with the night I first met Knight. I won't be revealing the humiliating details of either encounter to anyone. Especially Madison. Confirming my attraction to my Hades when I know she already suspects it, will only make everything worse.

"Knight's plans and reluctance to listen to you just feel mean spirited to me," Madison continues. "God knows his net worth this week. I can't see why he won't allow you this one thing, given it meant so much to your mother. And you. I don't want you to let go of something you want and get more hurt in the process."

I fear the same thing will happen to me. "I'd love nothing more than to fight him tooth and nail."

"Then do it. When you start working for *People*, you won't have time to worry about this."

I chuckle. "When?"

"Yes, *when*." Her smile returns to the radiance it was moments ago.

“Alright. I just need to get through the next few weeks, though. It’s going to be hard. I mean the marriage.” And all the parts about marrying a man who has no love for me. It was going to be the same with Nathan, but for some reason, with Knight, it feels different. *More hurtful*. Probably because I didn’t start off hating him.

The shadow of worry touches Madison’s face. “I have faith you can do that too, and it will all be over before you can blink.”

My next thought stalls in my mind when Denise comes in carrying a tray of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies.

Denise is my favorite person in this house. She’s been a mother hen to me over the last few weeks and has gone above board to make sure that I’m okay.

She’s sixty and has two daughters who are in their early thirties but her trendy dress sense and youthful personality makes her appear much, much younger.

Today she has her long brown hair in a high ponytail which shows off her cheekbones, and she’s wearing a cute mid-length summer dress. She is the balance to all the other staff here who are always in business mode.

“I heard laughter, so I thought it was time to bring out these babies.” Denise beams with pride, setting the tray down on the little table next to us.

“Yummy.” Madison licks her lips at the glorious sight of the delicious looking cookies.

“You’re the best, Denise,” I tell her with the deepest gratitude. The one thing I have loved about being here is her delicious meals and continuous spoilage of chocolate everything.

“I love baking for you girls.” Denise clasps her hands together and gives us a radiant smile.

“We love your baking too.” Madison is already diving into the cookies.

“Looks like I came out at the right time. Do you girls need anything else?” The question is addressed to Madison and I, but Denise looks at me specifically.

“This is great.” I smile back, doing my best to look like I’m fine. I don’t want her to think I’m freaking out about the wedding—although I am, *again*—and more importantly, I don’t want to give her anything to report back to Knight.

I trust that she’s been genuine toward me, but I have to remember that she works for Knight and is basically second in command to Claude.

“Okay, there’s more cookies in the kitchen if you finish these and want more.”

“Thank you so much.”

As Denise leaves us, Chelle saunters in not a second later, stealing the warmth Denise left behind with the coldness of winter.

She has her phone balanced between her shoulder and the crook of her neck while a Prada shopping bag dangles from her arm.

Madison instantly wrinkles her nose and cuts me a withered stare. She developed her own dislike for Chelle all by herself. I didn’t need to say a word.

I think Chelle must thrive on the horrid effect she has on people.

She stops by the wicker sofa, sets down the bag, and taps one studded Louboutin heel on the floor while she continues her conversation.

“Knight, baby, you know I always deliver,” she chortles, her voice heavy with seduction.

That annoying little voice that’s been living in my head since the nightmare started is telling me those words were all for my benefit. It doesn’t help that she’s looking right at me.

“Of course. Can’t wait to see you tonight,” she continues. “Be sure to book my favorite table and order me a glass of chardonnay.”

So, she's having dinner with him.

*Wow.*

Madison glances at me again. This time with sympathy.

Chelle hangs up and slips her phone into her purse.

“That’s for you.” She points to the Prada bag. “It’s your wedding shoes. Your dress will be ready on Saturday, so you’ll need to schedule some time to try it on.”

“Sure.” My voice is purposely flat. “Do you know what time Knight will be home?”

I didn’t think the question was one she could use against me, but the cunning look that sneaks into her eyes proves me wrong.

“Depends on when he’s finished with me. That boy has a lot of stamina. I wouldn’t wait up if I were you.”

As intended, those words feel like a punch to my lungs.

She gives me an I-win-you-lose smile then floats back the way she came, heels clicking, hips swaying in full-on bitch mode.

*God, I hate my life.*

Madison looks back at me, shaking her head. “What an absolute bitch.”

“I’m sure she takes pride in the title.”

“Ughh. Don’t worry about her. Come on, let’s get back to working on your story and get out of here. How about we head to that Mexican restaurant you love?”

My poor friend. She must be so tired of trying to find ways to make me feel better or distract me. Regardless of what she thinks I feel about Knight, I know she can see Chelle rattled me.

“Yeah, let’s do that,” I agree.

It’s foolish to worry about Chelle and Knight. I’ve already been that kind of fool.

*Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.*

Fool me three times...

Well, I think that's when you become the fool.

The fool is exactly what I become later that night when I find myself unable to sleep.

Knight hasn't come home again, and the fact that I *know* he was with Chelle has conjured all sorts of scandalous things in my head.

I'm sure he's still with her. Why wouldn't he be?

Everything I've questioned about him so far has been true, so why not?

It's just a pity for me that I've decided to make my situation worse by thinking about him.

I haven't stopped, and I don't see myself ridding the devil from my mind anytime soon.

The worst thing is, there's no point asking myself if I'm jealous.

Unfortunately, I *know* I am.

I'm also not sure at what stage Knight Grayson took more than my body captive, but now it's clear he's taken more of me, infiltrating all the parts I keep guarded under lock and key.

*When did I let him in?*

More importantly, how do I get him out?

# Chapter 22

# *Knight*



**I** t's *Wednesday*.

In three days' time, I'll have a wife.

The thought stalls in my mind like a ship stuck in a fog and I stare out my office window.

It's sunny outside. Nearly evening, but still as bright as the noon day sun.

As if the weather is mocking me with a juxtaposition to the storm brewing inside me.

Or maybe it's just not about me today.

Maybe the universe has better things to do than follow my ever-changing shift of emotions.

I should feel better than I do. I did what I said I was going to do and avoided Aurora like you would a used car salesman trying to earn a commission. It's been nearly five weeks since I last saw her, yet my fucking dick is still hard as ever, and she's still living in my damn head.

If I'd truly wanted to forget her, the worst thing I could have done is ask her to strip for me and suck my cock. Add riding my face and coming in my mouth to the mix, and there's no wonder I had no hope. All I did was shift her out of my sight.

And I'll be seeing her later tonight for the fundraiser.

I'd hoped I'd be in a better frame of mind by now, but I'm as far from it as Jupiter is from the sun.

My staff have been keeping tabs on her and everything else in my absence. I know she and Chelle are always at each other's throats, but I'm aware that's a Chelle thing.

I also know that Nathan has been in touch with Aurora's father several times. He wants to work with him, but I know the asshole wants a little more than that.

In various email correspondence, Aurora's name was mentioned several times. The asshole has hopes of getting his foot in the door once my marriage to her is over.

It's hard to think of the beginning of our marriage in two days when I slip another ring on Aurora's finger, much less how we'll be in six months' time when we say goodbye.

My office door opens with such sudden force, I feel the breeze it creates as it swings forward. Jericho marches in. His face is red and flustered, and his hair and clothes ruffled. He stalks up to my desk with a newspaper dangling from his hand.

"Hey, what's going on?" I look him over when he stops before me, revealing he looks much worse up close. The last time he looked this bad, he'd gone on a six-day bender and turned up on my college campus wearing a Wendy's uniform. "What the hell happened to you?"

"Jesus, Knight. Have you seen the papers?"

"No." I frown inwardly. *What did he do now?*

He lays the newspaper down on the desk, and I see he's made the front page.

There's a picture of him shirtless with a very naked woman giving him a lap dance. Her tits and ass are blurred out. From the rails and padded seats, I'm guessing they're on a yacht.

The headline above reads:

*Billionaire Playboy gets frisky with the Preacher Man's Wife.*

A flash of annoyance tingles my skin, and I look from the newspaper to him and back again.



“A preacher man’s wife, Jericho?” I glower at him with raised brows.

“I didn’t know who she was. She came to Luc’s party, and I got carried away. I was drinking too much because of the damn stress over Park Avenue. I also had a fucking run-in with Bastian, and it pissed me off.”

That would piss anyone off.

But wait...there has to be more significance to the story. The papers wouldn’t care about any old preacher man. He’d have to be someone big.

I scan the first line of the article, and my shoulders drop.

Yeah, I was right.

The preacher man in question is Paul Linco, one of the biggest gospel ministers in New York. He’s obviously a little more than a preacher man, but I get that the title had a cool ring to it for a headline.

The *wife* is his third wife. She’s a twenty-five-year-old ex-pro football cheerleader who is fifty years his junior, and it looks like she thought my brother was a good pick for the night.

But this is bad on the scale of fucked to hell. Paul Linco is one of our leading clients. Our father’s client.

“What does this mean?” I ask the question because he’d only be here if the shit had already hit the fan and scattered around the room.

“It’s all over the fucking press. Grandfather obviously saw it and called me to chew my ass out. Paul Linco pulled all his contracts from us.”

“Oh, fuck. Are you serious?” Why the hell do I bother asking?

“Yes.” He slumps into the chair in front of me and places his head on the desk.

“There has to be a way around this.”

“No. Grandfather already talked to him. He wants nothing to do with us. He’s also going to tell his little friends to jump ship as well. Of course, Father is pissed as fuck and wants me gone.” Warily, he lifts his head and stares back at me through bloodshot eyes. “I don’t know what to do.”

I can’t believe all of this happened today and I’m only just finding out. Seems like I really do have my head elsewhere.

I’m also not sure what the hell I’m going to do to help him.

“Did you sleep with her?” If he didn’t, I might be able to reason with Paul.

“Of course I did.”

“Jericho.” I shake my head at him. “Why the fuck did you have to do this? You know we’re under serious scrutiny.”

“I know. I know I fucked up, and at the worst time, too.” He closes his eyes and releases a haggard breath. “I didn’t know the press was tracking us, but I know that’s no excuse. Last night, I just needed a fucking break, and I slipped up.”

I can see the recent situation has taken its toll on him. Truthfully, I’m stressed out as well, but the problem here is Jericho is Jericho.

This shit is not unusual for him. Ordinarily, he’d brush it off. We all would.

But this time, it’s impossible to overlook his actions because he’s just lost us a major, longtime client. One with influence in the wider society that will indeed cause a domino effect. It already has.

I’m pissed at that and the fucked-up timing. This is the last thing either of us needs. It’s juvenile and reckless and makes us both look bad.

But ... I still have to help him. Right now, I don’t know what I can do, but I’ll

figure out something. Jericho would help me even if I’d just robbed a bank and swore I didn’t, but the cash was falling out of my ass.

“Let me speak to Grandfather.” I rest my hands on the table and think about when it will be appropriate. The fundraiser isn’t the right place or time. “Maybe I can come up with something.”

“I’m not sure you can. I’m not really here for help. I just thought I’d come by and tell you what’s going on. I also think it’s best I give the fundraiser a miss. I don’t want to attract the wrong kind of attention.” He facepalms himself and keeps his hand at his forehead. “Damn it, Knight. This is going to come back and bite me. I just know it will. I’m aware Grandfather is taking his own sweet time in speaking to me about the company because of shit like this. Normally, I don’t give a fuck because I’m so good at what I do, but that doesn’t mean I’m not replaceable. Or that Bastian can’t do my job.”

Although I don’t want to think like that, he’s right. No one, no matter who you are or how good you are at what you do, is irreplaceable. *No one.*

My phone rings. It’s Claude’s ringtone. He never calls me unless there’s something going on at the house.

“I have to take this.” I retrieve my phone from my pocket.

“Sure. Don’t mind me.” He places his hands up like he’s under arrest.

I answer the phone, momentarily pushing this debacle out of my mind so I can prepare myself for what Claude has to tell me.

I can only imagine his call must have something to do with Aurora. But what?

“Hey, Claude, what’s going on?”

“A lot. It seems your wife-to-be has decided she’s not going to the fundraiser.” His British accent deepens with distaste on those last words. “Ryan went to Sunset Cove to pick her up and she sent him away.”

Jesus, I can’t deal with this now. “Tell her she has to go. That is not up for discussion.”

“She says, and I quote, ‘If *Knight* wants me there, he’ll have to drag my ass there kicking and screaming himself.”

My chest gives, and I look up heavenward, as if I can grab answers or help from the universe. Aurora has been playing nice the whole time. What’s changed?

Us. *Her*.

She’s fed up.

I glance at the clock. It’s nearly time for me to leave. If I send someone else to get her, I risk the same rejection. I’m also the closest to Sunset Cove.

“I’ll take care of it.” I drag in a ragged breath and pray for strength.

“Alright, I’ll let Ryan know. See you later.”

He hangs up, and I run my hand across my forehead.

“Everything okay?” Jericho searches my eyes.

“When is it ever? I have to go. I’ll check in with you later.”

“Cool. Call me if you need me.”

I just might. It sounds like I’m about to get reacquainted with the pissed-off version of Aurora Wright who bitch-slapped me and confessed her undying hatred in the same breath.

If that’s her, there’s a chance I might indeed have to drag her sweet little ass kicking and screaming to the fundraiser.

That’s not the way I wanted to see her again after so long.

But we’ll see.

I won’t have her defy me and get away with it so easily.

# Chapter 23

# *Knight*



I reach Sunset Cove in record time, just managing to get through the start of the rush hour traffic.

I make my way to Aurora's office. There I find my beautiful wife-to-be sitting behind her desk in the corner of the room.

The sun is beaming down on her, making her white hair glow with angelic radiance. It feels like another attempt to mock me, like a spotlight shining down on the thing I mustn't touch, mustn't think about, mustn't want.

I stop by the doorframe, an instinctive response to observe her beauty from a safe distance and school my thoughts.

Being away from her for the last five weeks has done fuck all for me.

I could literally be standing exactly where I was weeks ago.

Everything is the same.

The only difference is the time and setting.

Unaware of my presence, she's tapping away at her keyboard with her eyes glued to her computer screen.

I scan over her clothes, instantly feeling annoyed. She's wearing a nude-colored camisole top that makes her look like she's naked. The little strap has slid down her left shoulder, an invitation to ogle the soft swell of her breast peeking over her strapless bra.

The mini chocolate-brown skirt she's wearing is hardly any better. I'm seeing way too much skin for my liking. Why the hell is she dressed like that with all the contractors milling around? No wonder they don't mind working late, and they're not quick to take breaks either.

Aurora is sex on legs with a messy fuck-me-librarian bun rolled up at the back of her head.

I don't even know why she needs to be here—*working*.

I've wondered on several occasions why she hangs on to this job so much. I understand that it was her mother's and maybe holding on to it is like keeping her mother close to her heart. But I don't get her.

In one breath she's telling me her dreams for writing, and in another she's here doing administrative work.

She's an amazing author who could write whatever she wants. Many would kill to have the kind of platform and success she has. Not to mention her other writing experience. Her resume is beyond impressive, so why the hell isn't she working for some lifestyle mag like she wants to?

And why the fuck did the last place turn her down when she'd worked for them for years?

I looked into all her records, so I know the level of expertise under her name and the work she put in to harness it.

The bottom line is she shouldn't be here for a number of reasons.

One of them is me.

I take a step forward. The sound of my footstep turns her head toward me.

Her hands still on the keyboard, mid-typing. Aurora stares at me, her expression changing like the colors on a chameleon. They drift from uncertainty to anger and pause on rage. All look sexy on her.

The uncertainty is because she didn't think I'd come. Everything else on her face are whispers of the woman scorned.

I stop a few paces away, my gaze unwavering, masking the wave of arousal crawling up my insides like a nest of fire ants on a hunt.

“Working on Javier’s quivering dick again, mon cherie?” My gaze flicks from her to the computer screen. I can’t actually see anything from the angle it’s facing, but I like the rattled look on her face.

“What are you doing here?” Indignation flows through her words like a river in a storm.

“Well, hello to you, too, Goddess. I was about to ask you the same thing.” I’m drawn to her bare shoulders when she adjusts the strap of her top. She straightens then stands holding some files, ignoring my comment. “You know we have a fundraiser to attend.”

“I’m not going. I already told your henchmen.”

“Yes, I got the message. That’s why I’m here to get you myself, so come, we’re going.”

“Take *Chelle* with you.” Her eyes harden and fill with something I’ve never seen on her—*envy*. It looks misplaced on her beautiful face. Women like her have no reason to be jealous of anybody, yet here she is. “She already has an outfit picked out for the evening. Something low and sexy, just the way you like her.”

Those sound like Chelle’s words.

“Chelle is my assistant.”

She gives me the kind of ill-fated laugh you’d hear from a psychotic prisoner on death row. “Please don’t take me for some kind of idiot. Nobody would be that stupid to believe you. We both know she’s not simply *just* your assistant.”

“She *is*.” Even though I try to emphasize the truthfulness in my words, there’s an undercut of hidden silence revealing the things I’m *not* saying.

“You have dinner late at night with your assistant? Or invite her to the Four Seasons to spend the night with you in



the presidential suite? *Or* make sure she knows where you are twenty-four seven so she can tend to your *needs*?”

Well, damn. She *is* jealous.

*And fuck.* Thanks, Chelle, thank you so damn much for spinning everything into shit.

Over the last few weeks, I’ve had to sleep at various hotels for conference calls to my clients in Hong Kong. It was my grandfather who was with me. Not Chelle. She just made the bookings and arrangements. There was one instance when she joined us for dinner, but that was to take notes while we brainstormed.

“I can assure you I was working.”

“Be that as it may, you can’t tell me that you two don’t have a past.” Aurora wrinkles her nose and looks me up and down as if she’s sizing me up. “A past she’s clearly still hung up on, but I can completely understand why she would be. Your workshop is covered in sculptures of *her*.”

Her words pierce the rigid control I usually have on my emotions.

I guess she did look through my sketch book. The photo album, too.

That’s why she thinks Chelle is Giselle. I see why she would. Their names are similar and easily mistaken for a nickname or an abbreviation.

The similarity in appearance was what screwed with me when I thought it was a good idea to hook up with Chelle. Again, not my finest moment.

“Those sculptures are not of Chelle,” I clarify, searching her eyes.

Just for a moment, she looks as if she knows she’s touched a subject she shouldn’t have. When I don’t elaborate and give her more intel, her face softens.

I’m glad she doesn’t push me. Giselle is not a topic I want to talk about now or ever, and definitely not with Aurora.

She sets her shoulders back and lifts her chin as if she's about to tell me to fuck off. "Regardless, Chelle doesn't act like your assistant."

I'm not going to entertain any further discussion about Chelle when it's irrelevant, but I will deal with her the next time we see each other. As for now, temptation entices me to play with this streak of envy growing on Aurora's face.

"Careful, you look so worked up, I might think you're jealous."

She makes a face as if she's just tasted bad fish. "Are you serious? You need to get over yourself." She shuffles past me and pads over to the file cabinet to put her documents away.

My eyes go straight to her curvy ass and stay there. "You sound jealous to me."

"I'm not. You can be with whomever you want. I don't give a shit. Just keep them away from me."

Something about that comment pokes at my insides. I don't like it. It suggests she thinks she can be with whomever she wants too. Contract or not, I won't stand for that.

"I don't cheat. Ever."

"Good for you." She turns and finds me checking her out. Instantly, her cheeks glow stoplight-red and she glares at me. "You know, you can leave now. I'm not going to the fundraiser."

I give her a humorless smile. "Do you really believe that's how this is going to work? When last I checked, I own your ass."

Slowly, I walk up to her. She backs away, but like she knew I would, I follow.

"You don't own me." The slight tremor in her voice gives her fear away. She can act ballsy all she wants, but there's a part of her that's afraid of me. She wouldn't be wrong to feel that way. "Just because I agree to something doesn't mean you own me."

She's about to slip past me, but I catch her arm and pull her back, then capture her face.

She gasps, but her breath catches. "Let go of me."

"Not until we get a few things straight."

"Like what?"

"Like no one must touch you while you're mine. And I *do* own you." I run my finger over the smooth skin of her jaw and stop where her pulse leaps like a heartbeat. "Every single part of you belongs to me. So, if I wanted, I could haul your ass to anywhere in this world. Or get you to strip for me again and keep you on your knees sucking my cock all night."

"You are such an asshole." Her jaw clenches, a sign she wants to hold on to her anger. But her body has already begun reacting to me.

Her nipples have pebbled, and her eyes dilated with desire. And I can smell her.

Under the soft fragrance of sweet strawberries and magnolia covering her skin and hair is the feminine scent of her arousal. I lean closer and inhale her, my mouth watering for a taste like I've been starved of food for days.

"Sweet Aurora, you like me exactly like this."

"I don't like you." Her voice sounds orgasm husky.

"We both know that's a lie. If you truly despised me, you wouldn't still be standing here, and you wouldn't be wet for me."

"I'm not."

She gasps as I grab her wrists and pin them above her head on the wall, then I press my body into hers to keep her still. Her breasts heave against my chest, and her breath comes out in short quivering rasps.

"Knight—"

"No. I'm going to check for myself. Then we'll see just how much you don't like me."

Guilt steals the color from her face. “But—”

I hold her still, silencing her, then I roll up her skirt and slip my fingers under the lace of her panties, feeling over the smooth lips of her pussy.

When I plunge right into her wetness, I see I was completely right.

She’s not just wet for me, she’s soaked, so wet the cotton of her panties is drenched.

I hit her with a ruthless smile and make her tense when I rub over her clit.

“Bad girl. I told you not to play games with me. You won’t win.”

I pull out my fingers, slick with her wetness, and lick them off, shocking her.

That taste ... the taste of her ... fucking hell, it’s like coming home.

And fuck it. Fuck all of it. I know what I want. I want her.

I want her too much to even try to resist wanting her.

It’s commendable that I’ve even lasted this long. Like Jericho, I need a break too. A long one inside her.

Those soft pouty lips of hers part, begging me to take her, so I release her wrists and claim her mouth.

“Knight,” she tries to speak, but I kiss her words away.

“I’m going to fuck you,” I speak against her lips, my words feeling like the first right thing I’ve ever said to her. “I’m going to fuck you so hard you won’t forget you belong to me.”

I kiss her harder, and she lets me. Her body melts into mine, no longer fighting, only yielding and becoming a part of me. It feels like I’m picking up where I left off weeks ago. Except this time won’t end with her running away from me.

I won’t let her.

# Chapter 24

## *Aurora*



**G**od, I never stood a chance.

This wasn't supposed to happen to me again, but here I am, pinned against Knight with my senses exploding as he kisses me hungrily.

His rock-hard cock is thick and heavy between us. I want nothing more than for him to fuck me like he said he would, satisfying that deep dark craving I've had since I first met him.

*No. No.* God, I mustn't want that.

I should try and stop him. Do something more than give in—*anything* but this.

We get married in three days, but we won't be real.

I'll be nothing more than a temporary wife, so I can't want this man the way I do. I know I mustn't for my own sanity, so why is my body acting like this?

Why can't I remember all the promises I made myself when it comes to this man?

I hate him. I'm *supposed* to hate him.

But, as he continues to devour my mouth, I kiss him back with the same intensity—*shamefully not even trying to resist*—and it's evident from the delicious fire burning through my body that I want him too.

I think of nothing but my desire for him as he kisses his way down my body, then pauses to pull down my top and feast

on my nipples. Sweet pleasure pulls passionate moans from my lips and sends jolts of wild pleasure to my pussy.

I feel like I'm flying on the edge of each sensation.

He sucks my breasts until they're both aching and sore, then he pulls my top off and takes his shirt off too.

With that crazy, wicked smile I've grown accustomed to, he crouches down and pulls my skirt and panties down my legs, leaving me naked and vulnerable to him again.

The way he looks at me is unreal. How could he be looking at me the same way he did when he first saw me naked? Like this is the first time all over again, and I'm a work of art he's admiring.

"You're beautiful and mine." He runs his hands over my body and kisses the skin of my mound, licking my slick opening. That's when I remember the door is wide open.

Most of the regular staff would have left by now, but there are contractors around every part of the building until late.

"Knight, the door." The arousal is so thick in my throat I can hardly get the words out. "Someone could see us."

"And they better pray they keep walking. I'll kill any man who looks at you." The possession in his tone scares me, and I think he means every word he says. "I'm not stopping. I want you."

Those words again—*I want you.*

Every time I hear him say them, they do something to me I can't describe, but feel. Because I want him too.

I've tried not to. Lord knows I have, but every time, I fail miserably.

Knight comes back to kiss me, but this time, he grips my hip with one hand and slips his fingers back into my panties, so he can circle my clit.

Convulsive waves grip me at his touch, and I throw my head back. "Oh my God!"

Knight smiles down at me, loving to watch me come undone. “Goddess, you were simply made for corruption.” He rubs my clit harder, and I feel the tug of an orgasm pulling at my insides. “You want more, don’t you?”

“Knight...”

“Tell me you want more. I can feel you do.” There’s a sudden roughness to his touch, demanding I answer with nothing but the truth.

“Yessss...give me more,” I cry out, the words feeling freeing.

“Yes, mon cherie. Let’s try out some more of those fantasies of yours.”

With that, he goes right back to my pussy, forces my thighs wider apart, and pushes his tongue deep inside me.

His tongue licking at my walls feels so, so damn good, I drive my heels into the floor in an attempt to control the surge of pleasure threatening to devour me. But that does absolutely nothing. The continuous onslaught of wild pleasure rips into me with fire and unquenchable heat.

All from him. My beautiful French devil.

My stories and heroes have nothing on this man. He’s something else entirely. Knight Grayson is the kind of guy who’s the inspiration for all stories. The villain and the hero rolled into one.

You can try to write about him and marginally succeed, but you can’t capture it all on paper. He’s too much, and still so much more.

His teeth graze my outer lips, and he sucks down hard on my clit. I come straight away, falling over the edge into a sea of pleasure as my juices flow into his mouth.

My body bows to the ruthless sensation sizzling through every part of me, then I’m consumed by the spikes of electricity that set my nerves on fire.

Knight drinks me up, never stopping until he’s lapped and licked me clean. Only then does he push to his feet, shove his



pants down his hips, and free his cock, which looks bigger than ever.

My head is still spinning from the wild orgasm he just gave me, but I don't get another second to prepare before he takes my leg, hooks it around his waist, and powers forward with his cock in one brutal thrust.

The moment he pierces into my body, he starts pumping fast and faster, pistoning into me as if he's been dying to do so for a millennium. There is no prelude, no easing in slowly, or gradual build-up. His powerful thrusts wrack my body, each sending me reeling with cries of ecstasy falling from my lips.

I was wet and ready for him, but he's so big, and it's been so long since I've done anything like this.

Pleasure and pain mix together, becoming one.

Pleasure and pain created from the line we just crossed.

He's inside me now. We're not just simply playing around. We're actually having sex—*fucking*.

We've only just begun, but this doesn't feel like mere sex. It's the cold, hard scandalous type of fucking that people have dark fantasies about and keep them locked away in the secret parts of their minds.

Catching my breath, I whimper and place my hands against his hard, muscular chest.

“Stay with me, Goddess, we're just getting started.” He winks at me, then he continues his relentless pounding, moving deeper and harder.

Chaos erupts inside me, and I grab his shoulders, my nails digging into the solid skin as I come again, harder than ever before. Knight gives me no time to recover. He keeps going, his movements seeming to be fueled by my pleasure.

It feels as if I'm completely at his mercy now and the only push and pull between us is this moment where he's fucking me.

Suddenly, he pulls out and turns me around to face the wall.

Positioning himself behind me, he thrust back into my passage, and a jolt of shock paralyzes my whole body.

This position feels so damn good, I feel him all over in every pore, cell, and particle that makes me, me. His thrusts are more powerful, hitting my G-spot with every pound.

My hair comes loose from my bun and falls over my face, blinding my view, but I shove it away so I can press my hands to the wall for support.

All I can hear now is the erotic sloppy sounds of us filling every corner of the room, then my thoughts shatter when Knight starts fucking me like he owns me and in such a way that I truly won't forget who I belong to. Not now. Not ever.

Fire rushes over my skin, creating a delicious friction that makes me delirious.

This moment is where it feels like he truly takes me and we stay like this for what feels like eons, where he hammers into me and every nerve in my body awakens with new life.

I lose count of how many times I come. It seems to happen as effortlessly as breathing, until I feel weak from his unwavering power, but I take it knowing that we might not have this moment ever again.

If this is it, I'll have it and deal with what comes next later.

Finally, his cock pulses against my walls and he comes with a deep, primal roar, sounding almost animalistic, like a beast. Or the Hell god I've christened him.

I come again, too, and we share the release, feeling the spellbinding pleasure that seems to ripple on into eternity as his hot cum floods my insides.

When his pumps slow and he pulls out, my knees give. I collapse against the wall, but Knight catches me, pulling me back against his chest, which is now dripping with sweat.

I'm sweating too. As if I've been in the sauna for a month.

His breath whispers over the nape of my neck, and I take a moment to take in the perfect synchronicity of our pounding

hearts and the air around us buzzing with the energy of what we just did.

God, it feels like my Hades and I have just shattered the fabric of reality.

*But what now?*

My body becomes floppy like a ragdoll when he turns me to face him, but he keeps me cocooned against him, trapped in the scent of our wild lovemaking.

Knight rests his chin on top of my head, and we stand like that for a few heartbeats before he pulls back and gazes down at me with something wicked flashing in the corners of his eyes.

“Get your clothes back on.” His rusty voice is a mixture of lust and sex.

My heart squeezes. I really don’t want to go to the fundraiser. I just can’t do it tonight for so many reasons. The worst being, I’m tired of the show we have to be, and I’ve had several weeks of hell with Chelle.

Although it gives me marginal comfort to know she isn’t Giselle, I still don’t want to see her tonight, or go back to the real world where I lose this moment and everything becomes a stage.

“Where are we going?” I search his eyes, praying he doesn’t say the fundraiser.

“Home.” The corners of his lips lift into a sexy smile when my shoulders sag with relief.

“Home?”

“The rest of the night takes place in my bed.”

*His bed.*

All thoughts of the fundraiser float out of my mind. I’ve never even seen his bedroom. Now he wants me in his bed.

A different type of hunger writhes through me as I imagine us together in his bed *all night*. That hunger awakens the hot arousal I felt earlier.

“Come on.” Knight picks up my top and hands it to me.  
“It’s going to be a long night.”

# Chapter 25

## *Knight*



“**R**ide me, Goddess.” My gravelly voice cuts into the blanket of silence settling over my bedroom. It mixes with the moonlight and the electrifying presence Aurora and I have created between us.

The goddess lifts her beautiful body onto mine, her silver hair shining, competing with the shimmer of the moon.

She bites back a smile when her clear blue eyes settle on me. I don’t know why she’s still trying to hide how much she’s enjoying me. I won’t tell her that there’s almost no point now.

This is us on round number eight.

Eight times, yet her skin still flushes with innocence.

I can’t help but think in art, so I imagine we look like a dark fantasy version of Hades and Persephone. But the contrast of shadows and silver and the redness of her cheeks, nipples, and lips give us the flair of a neo-noir painting.

I run my hands over the bareness of her silky-smooth thighs as she straddles me, impaling herself on my cock. Her sweet wetness and warmth wrap around me, luring me deeper and deeper into her body.

“Is this what you want?” she moans, her pupils dilating with lust.

“You know it is, Goddess.”

She starts moving her little hips over me, and I lose my mind all over again, my senses consumed by owning her one more time.

*One more time?*

No.

It won't be.

I'll keep going for as long as we can.

I don't know what the hell time it is, but it's still dark outside. As long as I have the cover of darkness, it means I don't have to think about anything else besides her.

As her fuckable breasts with dusky-pink nipples bounce before my face, I

know I'll come to suffer for this like a lost fool, but I couldn't possibly entertain the idea of stopping yet.

So, I choose this.

I choose my pleasure, my poison, my downfall.

Voracious lust is calling the shots again, and all I can see are the colors of arousal and my power to keep her with me.

Every time I take her, I get to a point where I hate to love the potent surge of pleasure she gives me, and I almost feel she needs to suffer for it.

Suffer for making me feel things I haven't felt in forever.

Suffer for the elation that fucking her brings me.

Suffer for being the first woman to sleep in this bed.

Aurora Wright has staked a claim on the dark soul lurking beneath my skin, and I can't shift it.

Because I don't want to.

Cupping her ass, I take back some of the control and grind into her.

She arches her back and moans hum from her entire body like the perfect chorus of angels.

"Knight!" she screams my name for the first time tonight. It's a glorious sound.

"Scream my name again." My demand is harsh yet desperate. I want to hear her again so I can commit the sound

to memory the way a blind person would by touching a face.

“Knight! Knight! Knight!” She moans out, and I soak it all up.

*Jesus Christ.* I can't get enough of this.

Consumed by greed to take more of her, I grab her waist and power up into her body like I've lost my shit, then I pick her off me and flip her so she's on her hands and knees.

I settle behind her and plunge back in, shattering my last shred of control as I tighten my grip on her waist and fuck her like I never have before.

Nothing has ever felt so good in my life as her or this moment.

The walls of her pussy contract and expand, exploding around my length.

That happens several times before my own climax slams me outside of reality and I finally erupt inside her, filling her with my cum.

We both collapse into a sticky heap, her lithe, limp body pressed against mine.

Sliding out of her, I pull her close and turn her to face me so I can look at her.

Her eyes meet mine, and we kiss like it's habit.

She runs her fingers along my jaw, feeling the scruff of my beard, then continues down, down, down to my chest and flutters over the line of Japanese characters tattooed on my abs.

I wonder if she can feel the scar beneath. The deepest one.

Maybe it's been so long that it can't be felt anymore. It was already fading when I decided to cover it up with art.

Some people keep theirs to remember what they did. I covered mine to forget, but at least I did it with a Samurai death poem about honor.

I felt I owed that part to myself.



It also seemed fitting at the time.

Whether or not Aurora can feel it, I'm sure she wouldn't let on that she can.

That's one more mystery about me I don't want to talk about.

Eventually, her hand moves straight down to my cock.

I smile into her kiss, groaning long into her mouth as she strokes my length.

"You want me again, Goddess?" I lick over her lips.

"Yes," she whispers.

Her confirmation makes me hard again, as if I didn't just empty myself inside her seconds ago.

"I'm all yours." I get on top of her, and she wraps her long legs around my waist as I slam back into her body.

I devour her again. And we don't stop there.

We keep going.

\* \* \*

The bright morning sun looks just as good on her as the moonlight did.

I'm sitting on the window bay, absorbing the last few minutes I have to admire Aurora's beauty.

She's wrapped in my sheets with her hair sprawled around her in a sexy mess, just like the fantasy. She still looks like a piece of art in my bed. And in my room.

Everything in here is so dark and dusky with rich colors of burgundy and Aegean blue, but her fairness adds light like a candle in a dark cave.

I want nothing more than to climb back in bed with her, wake her up, and spend the day making up for the last five weeks.

But I need to resist. If only for the sake of work. Both my absence and Jericho's at the fundraiser did not go down well last night.

When I eventually looked at my phone, I saw the host of messages from my grandfather and Chelle asking me where I was.

I didn't reply to Chelle, but I sent my grandfather a message letting him know I'd speak with him later. I phrased it that way to open the floor to talk to him about Jericho.

I've also decided it's better to tell him I was absent last night because Aurora was sick. I hate lying to him, but no way in hell am I going to tell him I spent the night balls deep in my wife—*wife-to-be*—a woman we both know is supposed to be a pawn in my mission to secure my legacy.

Which leads me to the other reason I need to be careful. The one I keep coming back to—*her*.

Last night blew my mind, but even before I met Aurora, I knew she deserved better.

She deserves better than the raw hand life dished her with the loss of her mother, and she deserves better than me.

Going down this road is also not good for me. Although I feel like I'm past the point where I might have been able to turn back.

There's a little knock on my door.

It's either going to be Claude or Denise. It's ten. They would have come up to check on me sooner, but I'm sure with the raucous noises Aurora and I made, they stayed away.

I pull on a T-shirt and walk to the door quietly, opening it with the same care.

Claude stands on the other side with an uneasy look on his face.

He knows Aurora is in here. As it was he who delivered that message to me last night, he's probably also thinking that this is where attempting to drag my bride off kicking and screaming led me.

“Morning.” I step outside and close the door behind me so we can talk.

“Sorry to disturb you, but Aurora’s father is here to see you.”

Hearing her father is here cracks the glass around the sphere of existence Aurora and I have lived in since last night.

I give Claude a narrowed stare. “What’s he doing here?”

“He says he has paperwork. He went by Grayson Inc. earlier and was told you weren’t there, so he came here instead.”

*Interesting.*

William Wright is here to see me for paperwork.

All the paperwork that required us to sign in person was done weeks ago. The only thing I’m waiting for is the transfer of assets document for Sunset Cove. There was no need for him to bring me that when it could have been posted or couriered.

Unless he needed to speak to me. No doubt about his daughter. Maybe he wants to give me some parting wisdom before our nuptials, which are now only two days away.

“What should I tell him?” Claude asks.

“I’ll go see him. Where is he?”

“The grand hall. He was looking at the paintings.”

“Alright. I’ll head down in a few seconds.”

“Sure.”

Claude leaves, and I take those few seconds to gather my thoughts before I head downstairs to the hall. There I find William looking at the biggest painting, an artist’s rendition of Rembrandt’s *The Storm on The Sea of Galilee*.

The painting is close enough to the original and old enough to cost me five million in an auction in Italy.

On hearing my footsteps on the wooden floor, William looks at me and straightens.

He looks just as broken as he did weeks ago when we met in his office and we made the deal of destiny. In his hands is a small envelope.

“Morning,” he says first when I stop a few paces away.

“Good morning.”

“Sorry to drop by unannounced. This has all been finalized. It’s the assets document we were waiting for.” He holds out the envelope, and I take it.

“You know you didn’t have to go through the trouble of getting this to me.”

“I know.”

“But I’m assuming you want to speak with me.” I raise a questioning brow.

He nods, slowly, and glances over my shoulder, probably checking for Aurora.

“She’s sleeping,” I fill in.

His gaze snaps back to mine with suspicion in his eyes, as if my knowledge that Aurora is sleeping means something happened between us. It does, but I won’t tell him that he’s right.

“I suppose that’s better.”

“What did you want to talk to me about?” I sound less abrasive than I did when we first met.

“Aurora. How is she? How is she really?”

Aurora sees him a couple of times a week, so on the surface, that might be an odd question to ask. But I know every time she would have been in his presence, she would have slipped on a brave face so he wouldn’t worry.

“She’s okay. And I’ve still kept my silence.” That was a promise I didn’t need to keep. If I were as loathsome as I allow most to believe, Aurora would have known by now her father got mixed up with drugs, alcohol, gambling, the mafia, and shit.

“I thank you for that. Just so you know, I’ve continued my treatment, and while things are hard, I’m not in that place anymore. Obviously, I owe you a great debt for getting the worry of Falcone off my mind. It is a debt I will pay.”

“You’ve already paid.”

“No. Paying with my daughter, her trust, and her inheritance is not paying. I will repay everything. Just give me time to get back on my feet.”

I feel like I shouldn’t be shocked by his honor, but I am. “Is that what you came here to tell me?”

“No. I also wanted to talk about the wedding. Aurora is nervous about it. I am too. It might be business to you and mean nothing, but it means everything to me. She’s my daughter. On Saturday, when I give her to you, it will be worse than signing any contract.”

I take in the agony dulling his eyes. Strangely, it pulls on my insides.

“I need to ask one more favor.” He closes his hand into a fist and holds it by his side.

“What is it?”

“Please, don’t hurt her.”

It’s such a simple yet powerful request.

“No harm has come to her since she’s been in my care for the last six weeks, and I’m sure you can see she’s well taken care of.”

“That’s not exactly what I mean. She’s been through her fair share of life. Aurora is also one of the few people who still believe marriage means something. I know I might sound like a hypocrite saying that, but here I am. When she was supposed to marry Nathan, I knew he was a poor choice, but he knew her, so I didn’t have the additional worry.”

“And you think you will with me?”

“Mr. Grayson, I’m well versed in who you are and what men like you do. My daughter is the most precious thing in my

world. Aurora came into my life when she was twelve because I didn't know about her. I promised myself and her mother I would take care of her, but I haven't."

That gives me pause. All my research, and I never knew that part of Aurora's past. It explains quite a lot, though. I expected a spoiled daddy's little girl when I first met her, but she wasn't even a little bit like that.

"I saved her and her mother," William continues. "*Literally*. Both of them were a gunshot away from not being in my life." Sadness fills his eyes and pierces me when I think of Aurora in that kind of danger at such a young age. "Through all of this, I've felt that Aurora might agree to do certain things because she may think she owes me. She doesn't. A father's first duty is to protect, no matter how long or short he's known his child. I feel like I've failed her in so many ways, even when it came to her mother."

"Why would you think that?"

"I never told her her mother was sick. She only knew when Susana dropped dead in front of her. Things have been awful since, and I've just kept making one bad choice after another."

Knowing Aurora lost her mother in such a cruel, callous way unearths the familiar feeling of grief in what remains of my soul. I know what it's like to see someone you love die.

No matter what, I never would have wanted that for her.

"All I'm asking is if you could respect her." William nods with slow reflection. "Please don't judge her based on my actions. She's not like anyone else you'll ever meet in this world."

I might not have spent the entire six weeks with her, but I can believe him. I knew she was different to anyone I'd ever met within five minutes of speaking to her that first night at No. 11.

"You have my word. Your daughter will have my full respect." I already sound like I'm taking my wedding vows.

"Thank you. I appreciate that." He dips his head, and his expression appears lighter. "Well, I should get going. I won't

take up any more of your time. Thanks again.”

He turns to leave, but I think of one last thing I need to say to him. “William.”

He stops and looks back at me. “Yes.”

“Nathan. I hear he’s in touch.”

His expression dulls like an overcast sky before a downpour of torrential rain. “He has.”

“Let’s not kid ourselves. You know he wants more than that job he’s asking for.” I cut to the chase, also letting him know I’m keeping tabs on both of them.

“Yes. I know.”

“He’s not having your daughter.”

William searches my eyes as if he’s trying to see beyond the walls of my carefully placed barriers. “No?”

“No. If I don’t deserve her, neither does he. And for the record, if I were you, I wouldn’t hire him for anything. He might not be guilty of the same things as his father, but mark my word, he’s guilty of something. It’s just not on paper.”

He nods, understanding. “Message received, Knight Grayson.”

With another curt nod, he leaves, and I think about everything he said about Aurora.

She already has my respect, and I would never set out to intentionally hurt her, although as she once said, everything about me is wrong. Especially when it comes to Sunset Cove.

If I were a better man, I’d stop what I started last night in its tracks and never touch her again.

But I selfishly still want her for myself.

# Chapter 26



## *Aurora*



I inhale the cool night air, allowing it to whisper over my skin.

I'm heading back to the house now.

I went for a walk on the beach to think.

Think about everything, but mostly my fears for the future, and my marriage tomorrow.

By this time tomorrow night, I'll be Mrs. Knight Grayson, and I haven't seen my husband-to-be since the other night when we first slept together.

The next time I see him will be before the priest when we take our vows.

But that's not even the part that worries me. It's how he makes me feel.

My emotions were already mixed up, but now here I am, the night before our wedding, trying to work out what's going on in my head.

I know I shouldn't trust my attraction to Knight, but whenever he's around, my guard slips. I haven't been able to put it back up since the other night.

To say we were intense is a huge understatement. I've never given myself to anybody the way I did with him, and he unlocked something inside me I never knew I wanted.

When I woke up in his bed and saw he was gone, I expected it.

Sex, to men like him, no matter where they get it from, is just supposed to be fun.

It doesn't mean anything. But I was still disappointed.

It wasn't that I expected anything to change between us, but I felt a connection with him I thought he felt too.

I think I was just seeing what I wanted to see. Just like with Scott.

Scott screwed me over in the worst way possible because I couldn't see him for the liar he was. I'm scared of ever being in that position again, where I play the fool who is so blinded by love they stop seeing what's really in front of them.

Mom used to say that fear can be a person's biggest downfall.

Fear stops you from dreaming, makes you worry yourself sick, pushes you to do things that aren't you, and stops you from being what you were supposed to be.

I never understood what she fully meant until I got older and started experiencing life for myself.

If Mom were still alive, I'd ask her what I should do when I have every right to be afraid of tomorrow. What should I do when there's nothing I can do but wait it out to see what happens?

What should I do when I meet someone like Knight, who confuses me in all the right ways?

I surely don't know.

I've been out here for hours, but I feel just as conflicted as when I first stepped through the door.

I was going to hang out with Knight's dogs, but when I get to the terrace and glance at his workshop, I'm drawn to go inside.

I haven't been back since that first night. I didn't plan to go back either, but perhaps the secrets behind his mysteries are calling to me now because of tomorrow.

I allow the lure to take me inside.

Once the automatic lights come on, I find the section with the sculptures.

Frozen in time, they look the same.

*She* looks the same—Giselle.

I walk up to the sculpture of her that hooked me most and stand before it. The beauty in the craftsmanship is so stunning, I'm awed all over again.

Perhaps I'm a little more besotted with Knight's talent tonight because I know Giselle isn't Chelle.

But the question still stands. Who is Giselle?

Who was she to Knight?

So far, all I know is she must have captured his heart.

How did she do it?

Do I want to know?

Do I *truly* want the answer?

Capturing Knight's heart seems as mythical as finding the fountain of youth.

There are things in my life that I want. None of them should include discovering the secrets to capturing Knight Grayson's heart.

The door scrapes open, and my stomach tightens when I think it's him, but then I turn and see Madison walking in.

"Hey, there." She smiles and comes forward. "Denise said you were out here. I saw you come in, so I—"

Her voice cuts when she sees the collection of sculptures.

"Oh my God." She moves closer and looks from them to me. "Who did these?"

"Knight." I give her a little smile.

"Well, I'll be blessed. I would have never imagined that he could do anything like these."

"Me neither. Imagine my surprise."

“Oh, I’m definitely right there with you.” She walks around and looks over each of the sculptures, one by one. “These are gorgeous. Absolutely breathtaking.”

“They most certainly are.”

“I’m guessing this is his workshop?”

“It is. There are all kind of things in here. I think he spends most of his time here when he’s home.”

A nervous smile spreads over her face when she comes back to me. “So, you’re marrying a billionaire who’s also an artist?”

“Yeah. Looks that way.”

Madison stares at the sculpture of Giselle I was looking at, then looks back at me.

“There are several sculptures of this girl. Is she someone he knew?”

“Her name is Giselle. I think she was an ex.”

Realization of my reasons for being here dawns on Madison’s face. “I see. Now I’m *really* glad I came by to see how you are.”

“Thank you.” I wasn’t in the mood to see anyone, but she is always the exception when I get like this.

“I was worried about you. You didn’t come to work today and, um... the night receptionist said she saw you leaving with Knight the other night.” The mischief she’s known for lights up her eyes. “She said you guys were kissing.”

*My God.* People saw us. What else did they see? *And hear?*

I close my eyes and groan inwardly, but to my surprise, Madison bursts out laughing.

“Why is that funny, Madison? Obviously, I’ve lost my mind. Finding out your best friend is insane is not supposed to be funny.”

“Bless your heart.” She makes a show of putting both her hands over her heart and amplifying her accent. “You’re not insane, honey. And what’s funny is you thinking you are when *most of us* could see you’ve been smitten with the man from the get-go.”

I give her a withered stare. I knew she *knew* and it was only a matter of time before she said something.

“But he’s the devil and ... just not a good person.” My answer couldn’t be lamer if I tried.

“But you kind of like him?” Her red coffin-shaped fingernails clasp together. “You have since the first night you met him.”

I sigh and lower my head. When I look back at her, the words get stuck in my throat.

“It’s complicated.” My voice is whisper-soft, like a careful breath.

The humor fades from her face. “Looks like you need to talk.”

“I probably do.”

“Come, let’s sit over there.” She slips her arm around me and ushers me over to the work bench in the corner. It looks like the equivalent of my thinking spot at my old apartment. We sit next to each other, and Madison looks me over.

“So, let’s hear it. I’m all ears.” She opens her palms.

“I don’t even know where to start. Things have always been weird with Knight and me.”

“Did the other night make them weirder?”

“Yes.”

She bites back a smile and fails. “You slept with him?” That entire sentence comes out like a gasp. “Oh my God, I want to hear everything. Weren’t you supposed to be at some fancy fundraiser?”

“Madison, please.”

“Okay, I’m calming down. Just talk, talk to me. Say what you need to.”

“I hate liking him,” I begin, then backtrack to the beginning. I tell her the actual story of how I first met Knight, without leaving out the sexy parts, then I round up to the other night.

It feels like I’ve downloaded all that information in one breath, but I’ve been talking for almost an hour.

“I can’t believe you’re only just telling me this.” She shakes her head at me.

“I didn’t want to talk about it because it was confusing and completely inappropriate. I shouldn’t have any sort of feelings for him after everything. Look how he’s been with Sunset Cove, and God knows how he must have dealt with my father behind my back.”

Madison’s brows knit. “You know you can’t help who you have feelings for.”

“But I should. If I don’t, then I’m destined to repeat the past.” She knows exactly what I mean by that comment.

“I don’t believe that. Scott was *Scott*. What happened between you two was his own game of manipulation. He took advantage of your innocence and feelings for him.” She stares at me in a way that suggests she’s given much thought to her reasoning. “I can’t speak for Knight, but he doesn’t strike me as the kind of man who *needs* to do that.”

She raises a valid point. Knight doesn’t need to do anything. He could catch a woman in his dreams, and he’d wake up with her right next to him.

He doesn’t need me. But that doesn’t mean I should read too much into anything we did.

“I think I need to be careful.”

“Of course, you do. Definitely be careful. But please listen to me when I say this—there’s such a thing as being *too* careful.”

That sounds like a conflict of advice. “How can that be a bad thing? Hardly anything bad ever happens to people who are too careful.”

She flicks her palms over, suggesting I’ve hit the mark. “But those sorts of people never truly live. All they do is worry so much about all the bad things that *could* happen that they stop living. It’s called being stuck in a perpetual comfort zone.”

Clarity seeps into my mind with a warning that I’ve been that kind of person for the last few years, but that isn’t who I want to be.

“I don’t want to be in a perpetual comfort zone,” I scuff.

“Then don’t be. With the wedding a breath away, it might not be a bad thing to see where things go.”

That sounds so simple.

*Could it be?*

A glance at that sculpture of Giselle tells me it’s not, but like her, I’m stuck.

Stuck on the man, everything he does to me, and everything I still want him to do to me.

I could sit here and try to convince myself that I should be sensible and careful.

But I know I’ll do neither of those things.

So maybe the only option I have is to let whatever is happening between Knight and I take its course.

I return my gaze to Madison and nod. “Okay.”

# Chapter 27



# *Aurora*



**I** *t's time.*

The moment has finally arrived.

I'm getting married in the next few minutes.

I'm at the NYIT de Seversky Mansion, a prestigious estate located on Long Island's historic Gold Coast. It's the kind of elegant stately mansion you'd see on TV or a lifestyle magazine listed as the location for some celeb wedding. I never thought I would visit it, let alone get married here.

I'm standing behind the large oak doors of the grand hallway with Dad and my wedding party, which includes Madison, Skye, and three of my other friends.

We're waiting for the doors to open so we can walk outside, where the ceremony will take place.

We all look amazing, but I look like a fairy tale princess in my beautiful wedding dress.

Elizabeth Herman, celebrity wedding designer, did a phenomenal job with my one-of-a-kind dress that has a sleeveless lace bodice covered in specks of diamonds and a long flowing satin skirt.

Everything would be perfect if this were real, but today is just another act in the show.

"Are you okay?" Dad asks, touching my cheek.

"I'm fine." I must sound like a broken record. That's all I've been saying all week, in that same hushed monotone my

father will recognize as the voice I use when I'm actually not fine.

"You look beautiful."

"Thank you."

This would almost feel like a déjà vu moment crossing over with the night I was supposed to get engaged to Nathan.

I try to breathe past the knots rising into my throat, but it's no easier for me than steadying my mind.

At least I am breathing. And I'm here.

I made it this far. Now I just have to get through this part.

The part that feels like the hardest to me.

My thoughts cut when the doors open, and harp music playing *The Wedding March* fills the air.

Dad and I exchange glances of strength, then he gives my hand a gentle squeeze and leans in to plant a kiss on my forehead.

"Thank you," he mutters just low enough for me to hear.

"Always." I smile back at him, then we take the first step outside together and walk onto the terrace.

The wedding party follows, and we make our descent down the wide, sweeping stone steps leading out to the breathtakingly gorgeous garden I've seen in movies and TV shows.

There, three hundred guests are gathered together sitting on rose gold Chiavari chairs with chiffon sashes connecting each row.

But my eyes go straight to Knight standing at the bottom of the garden under the white rose-covered gazebo.

My heart stops at the sight of him and the rawness of his striking looks that overpower everything and everyone here.

Dressed in a black tux with his hair cut shorter and his beard neatly trimmed, he's the absolute definition of GQ handsome.

Everything and everyone fade into the background the longer I look at him and the closer I get. It's not until I'm nearly with Knight that I see the priest in front of him and Jericho and his grandfather next to him.

I notice there's no sign of his father, or that side of his family. To me, it's sad, but as I still don't know the story behind them and suspect it's not a good one, perhaps it's a good thing they're not here.

In the front row I do, however, spot a woman standing next to Knight's grandmother. She has to be his mother. She appears too young to be his mother but looks like him and has the same untamed beauty and elegance with her waist-length black hair, heart-shaped face, and slim build like a fashion model.

She's looking at me the same way his grandmother is, as if she thinks I'm truly Knight's dream bride. The heartfelt smile she's giving me could almost make me believe everything will be okay.

I manage to push my nerves aside and smile back briefly, but then I look back at Knight, who is now a breath away.

We close the space between us, and suddenly, Dad is giving Knight my hand.

His large hand swallows mine, and there's a sharp shift in the air I feel in my core. It tells me everything as I know it will change forever from this moment on.

Our eyes lock, and I gaze deeply into those eyes as blue as the point where the sky meets the sea. I find myself slipping away into the depths as memories of how he consumed me nights ago fill my mind. Each image covers every corner of my mind and flows through my body like liquid fire, reigniting scandalous pleasure.

I have to blink to focus and compose my thoughts.

This is it.

There's no turning back now.

“Welcome, everyone,” the priest begins and proceeds to give a speech about love, vows, and marriage.

Soon, Knight and I are taking those vows.

I speak mine, and he speaks his, repeating after the priest.

The rings are exchanged, then suddenly, we’re being pronounced husband and wife, and I’m no longer Aurora Wright.

I remember being twelve and having my surname changed from my mother’s maiden name to my father’s. That was such a happy day. I felt complete in ways I couldn’t describe.

Now I’m Aurora Grayson; it doesn’t have the same feeling. It can’t because this is a broken fairy tale.

“You may now kiss the bride,” the priest declares.

Knight leans down to kiss me. When his lips touch mine, I expect the gloom I experienced to amplify, but it doesn’t. Then I remember our kisses have never felt fake.

This kiss is one of those, but it holds whispers of the other night hidden in every brush of his lips against mine.

When he pulls away, I have to compose myself again because the heat of his kiss is still burning my lips.

Knight moves to my ear and brushes a kiss on my cheek. “Careful, mon cherie,” he whispers. “With a kiss like that, I might think you like being married to me.”

“I’m a good actress,” I whisper back, a half lie.

“But you weren’t acting.”

Just then the press descends on us like a flock of vultures, robbing me of my chance to answer. I don’t know what I would have said anyway that wouldn’t prove him right.

Pictures of us get taken left and right. Every time I blink, there’s a flash from some camera or some journalist wishing us congratulations whilst trying to sneak in a mini-interview.

I was already aware, well in advance, that getting married to one of the most sought-after men in New York would cause

a stir, but this is something else.

After what feels like an eternity of a never-ending photoshoot, Knight's grandfather and bodyguards put a stop to it so we can continue with the planned activities for the rest of the day.

It's only at that moment that Knight's mother approaches us with who I presume must be her husband because his arm is around her and she's wearing a wedding ring.

"Hello," she greets in a rich French accent, giving me a hug.

"Hi."

"I'm Elodie, Knight's mother, but you probably already guessed that." She looks from me to Knight, who seems more at ease in the presence of his mother.

"I did."

"This is my husband, Maurice."

Maurice dips his head and offers me a smile.

"It's great to meet you both," I say.

"Welcome to the family." Elodie beams.

"Thank you."

"I can't imagine where my son has been hiding you, but I'm glad we've finally met. Now I might get the chance to paint you."

I laugh, but it clicks that she must be where Knight gets his artistic talents from.

"Mother, please." Knight rolls his eyes, and the two launch into a conversation in French.

It ends with Elodie tapping his shoulder as she has the last word.

"She insists on painting you," Knight explains.

"I'd be honored, but I've never done anything like that before." I grin.

An easy smile plays at the corners of her full red lips. “I just need you.”

“That sounds great.”

Well, at least I don’t have to worry about her liking me. She does.

We fall into an easy conversation about her galleries in France and the art shows she puts on throughout the course of the year. Most of the day is spent with her, Maurice, and my father, right up to the reception where Knight and I have our first dance, then we sit together at the head table with our friends and family for dinner.

Knight goes off with his grandfather after, and we lose each other.

When an hour passes and he doesn’t come back, Madison and I head to the ladies’ room for a little break. I get a face towel when we walk inside and dampen it with cold water to dab my cheeks.

“Are you okay? You seem to be holding up well.” A hopeful smile brightens her face.

I lean against the wall and hold the towel to my cheek. “I’m okay. Just tired now.” I’m actually exhausted. After she left last night, it took me awhile to get to sleep. “I’m barely awake.”

She laughs. “At least you still look fabulous. You wear tiredness well. When are you guys leaving?”

“I have no idea.” It’s already eight. I can’t imagine us being here for much longer as most people, including Dad, have already left.

I don’t know what’s happening tomorrow either. When Knight was asked about our honeymoon by one of the reporters, he said we were going to a secret location. I assumed he meant home because I haven’t been told anything about that. All I was told was to block off next week for various post-wedding activities.

“Well, let’s grab some more champagne and make the most of the night.” Madison rubs her hands together. “Might as well enjoy ourselves while we can.”

“Sure.” I sound chirpy about the idea, but I was hoping to look for Knight.

We leave the bathroom, and her phone rings when we reach the hallway.

“Oh, I have to take this.” She winces, checking her phone. “It’s Chad. Grab me a drink. I’ll be with you in a minute.”

“Sure. Tell him I said hi.” I grin, loving the sight of the flush in her cheeks.

“I will.” She walks the other way, and I continue down the hallway.

I feel slightly lighter now that the day is practically over, but the blanket of uncertainty still hangs heavy in the air. That uncertainty is something I know I’ll have to face as the days go by.

Today is the start of the countdown to the end. Things will be very different now that Knight and I are married, but I don’t know how *we’ll* be with each other.

I don’t even know when I’ll see him again after tonight.

Or what will happen when I do.

I glance at the ring on my finger for the umpteenth time and think about what it symbolizes.

I’m Knight’s wife now.

Weeks ago, we didn’t even know each other, and now we’re till death do us part. Or rather until we sign those divorce papers in six months’ time.

What will that be like?

I continue down the hallway, shaking the perturbed thought from my head. Even in my situation, it’s not exactly the best thought for a bride on her wedding day.

I turn off onto the short cut I discovered earlier. This route will take me back to the rear entrance of the reception hall where my table is.

I'm thankful that there's no one around to stop me and strike up any new conversations. I'm kind of all talked out.

Just before I reach the door, I hear Knight's voice. And *Chelle's*.

Is this where he's been for the last hour?

*With her?*

All day, I've ignored Chelle as if she wasn't even here, but hearing her with Knight irks me the same way it did the other day when she dropped her little comments about her relationship with Knight. I'm still on the fence about that.

I follow the sound of their voices and find them in one of the function rooms.

As the door is partly open, they can't see me, and I don't intend to alert them to my presence.

It might be crafty, and yes, I may be feeding my envy, but if I were ever going to find out what they are and aren't, it will be at a time like now.

"Write an official letter on Monday and make sure Jeffery understands he can't change his offer based on those reasons." Knight steps in front of Chelle and squares his shoulders.

At least they're talking about business.

"And if he insists?" Chelle sets her hands on her hips.

"If he insists, then I'm not working with him anymore. It's as simple as that, and there will be no further discussion."

"Testy, testy." Chelle steps closer to him, too close for my liking, and tugs on his already loose tie. "I remember when you used to be fun. And when you'd go wild whenever I wore pink."

*Bitch.* That's why she's wearing a Barbie-pink cocktail dress.



How tasteless and classless of her. My marriage might be arranged, but couldn't she be respectful today of all the days?

Maybe she thinks because it's nighttime now, she's already paid her dues.

"I think you need to go home now, Chelle," Knight replies, his voice firm.

Her smile becomes a seductive grin, and she flutters her fingers over his chest. "I remember when *you* used to take me home and we'd stay in bed for days."

So, I was right. They do have a past. But what about now, the present?

"Chelle, try to stay on my good side. We already talked about this."

"We did. But I think you're just stressed."

"I'm not stressed."

"I think you are," she coos. "Let's face it. That little bookworm of a wife you have isn't going to satisfy your needs the way I can." She presses herself against him.

When he doesn't push her away, my temper flares.

"Come on, Knight, look at me. I'm all yours, and I'm not wearing any panties. Just the way you like me. Give me five minutes. We can slip away like we used to, and I can take care of your needs."

She stands on the tips of her toes and kisses his jaw, then she starts loosening his tie.

When he doesn't stop her, I back away. I don't need to see him kiss her or slip away into one of the rooms to know what will happen next.

I guess I got my answer, though.

Knight and Chelle are more than work colleagues. And this... this is what my life will be like for the next six months.

That crap talk about not cheating was complete bullshit, but I was stupid enough to believe him. Like an idiot, I

believed all the other stuff he said too.

Sorry, Madison, I can't take your advice. I have to be perpetual-comfort-zone careful for the next six months. If I'm not, I can see this craziness pushing me over the edge of insanity.

But honestly, I feel like I'm already there at the bottom looking up.

With a hole in my heart, I continue down the path until I'm back in the reception hall. I need to find Madison and leave.

"More wine for the bride?" a waiter asks, floating up to me with a celebratory smile. He holds up a bottle of wine and a long-stemmed crystal glass.

I blink back tears. If I don't, they might spill out with my words when I speak.

"Yes, thanks," I answer, trying to sound as cheerful as I can.

When he goes to pour the drink in the glass, I have a better idea, so I stop him.

"Can I just have the bottle, please?"

"Of course." He hands it to me, and I turn back the way I came, grabbing another bottle of champagne from a table by the door.

I walk back into the hallway and take a gulp of the wine.

It's strong and bitter. *Good*. I need strong and bitter.

Something to help me forget this nightmare and everything else to come.

This is that thing again coming back to bite me in the ass.

That thing—*my feelings for Knight*.

Something I didn't want to acknowledge even when they were staring me in the face.

I knew what I signed up for, and who and what Knight Grayson was when I signed my life over to him, so this hurt I feel is all my fault.

*All mine.*

Not his.

He was always the devil.

Right from the start.

# Chapter 28

# *Knight*



**D**amn it.

I've been gone from Aurora for far too long.

I shouldn't have allowed my grandfather to draft me into a game of poker when I was trying to get back to her.

I know what he's like when he gets into these types of games. He's competitive at the best of times, but when he's amongst his friends, he loves to show off just because he can.

I'm sitting in the atrium around a poker table with my grandfather and those friends of his who are just as competitive as he is. I only agreed to join the game to indulge him because he was in one of those hearty moods.

I'd said I couldn't stay long, but that just got swept under the rug.

Now I've nearly been gone for two hours.

First, I had to deal with Jeffrey, that fucking moron who wanted to change the terms of our contract on a billion-dollar project, then I had Chelle coming on to me, practically ready to mount me in the function hall.

I'm not sure if she had one too many to drink, but she hasn't been like that in years. And that talk I had with her days ago about her and Aurora just rolled off her back like nothing was said.

I sent her home, but I can see her being a problem I don't need.

It's been years since she's been so forthright with me.

Aurora's presence, my marriage to her, and the fact that she lives in my house have pushed Chelle back to being how she was when I first broke things off with her.

No matter how good she is at her job, there's a line, and things are different now. Today makes things different.

Well, *some* things.

The only thing that hasn't changed is my intense desire for Aurora.

*My wife.*

*Wife*, as in mine.

The word in my head fans the flames of that wild, possessive lust that's consumed me since I first met her.

I simply can't wait to get home and bury myself inside her. Inside her is where I plan to stay for the next few days.

During my absence from her yesterday, I went from being adamant that I should rebuild those barriers between us to changing my mind in the same breath, then, I started counting down the hours until I next saw her.

I was only away for the day because I had another busy day at work. By the time I got home, it was long after midnight, and she was asleep.

Asleep on top of her sheets with a copy of her post-romantic poetry collection in her hands and dainty slippers on her feet.

Unknown to her, it was I who put her book on the nightstand, took off her slippers, and tucked her into bed. Like a fucking boy scout, I didn't touch her, much as I wanted to.

But I jerked off in the shower, imagining her on her knees with my cock in her mouth and my cum running all over her face and tits when I came.

The moment the priest declared us man and wife, the decision was made in my head that I couldn't avoid this woman even if I tried.

I'm aware that means I've shoved more shit onto my plate, but all I know right now, at this moment, at this second, is that I want her.

And I need to get the hell out of this game so I can find her.

There are four players left, including me. Jericho would have joined us if he weren't in Grandfather's bad books.

The two aren't really speaking. Grandfather said he'll talk to me about the Jericho fiasco when he gets back from his vacation. That's in ten days' time, which means he's seriously pissed at Jericho and needs time to think.

At least he's been his usual self today.

"How about we take things up a notch and put a million on the table?" Carl Jenson hollers.

He's an oil tycoon who would drill for oil on Mars if he could get there. The man is the perpetual conqueror who hates losing. So far, he's lost half a million to my grandfather.

"Let's do it." Grandfather accepts the challenge with his cigar raised like a sword.

"Fold," Porter Freeman says, holding his hands up. "Sorry, guys, you cleaned me out."

He's next to me. With him out of the game, that leaves three of us. I'll be gone by the next round. I would have left before, but I know my grandfather wants me to win.

"Let's go," I chime in.

Grandfather goes first with the smile of a victor spreading across his face as he shows his hand of cards. It's a full house—three aces and two threes.

Carl is about to play next, but Jericho rushes through the door with a peeved-off look on his face.

Avoiding Grandfather's intense stare, he walks straight up to me. The moment he leans down to whisper, I know something is wrong.

“I need you to come outside with me. *Now.*” He keeps his voice extra low, and there’s an urgency in his tone.

“What’s happened?” I twist to face him.

He bites the inside of his lip. “It’s Aurora. Just come.”

What could have possibly happened here? I left her with Madison and my mother. When last I checked, the three were talking about shopping and shoes.

“Sorry, guys, I have to go.” I place my cards down face up, showing I have a royal flush. From the defeated look on Carl’s face and the bright smile on my grandfather’s, I know I won. *Mission accomplished.*

Knowing Aurora needs me, I would have left anyway.

Sensing the need for discretion, I wait until Jericho and I walk into the hallway before I speak.

“What’s going on? Is she okay?”

“Physically, yes. Anything else, not so much. She’s fucking wasted. One of the waiters found her outside in the rose garden.”

“What?” That doesn’t sound like her. “Wasn’t she with Mom and Madison?”

“Mom and Maurice had to leave to catch their flight, and Madison was doing damage control with the other crazy little friend. Apparently, there was a flood in her apartment.”

That crazy little friend he’s talking about is Skye. He’s calling her crazy because, within five minutes of meeting him, she asked if she could have his babies.

“Whatever sent Aurora out there must have pissed her right the fuck off,” Jericho continues. “I assume you’d know all about that.”

I snap my gaze to him with my brows raised. “No. I haven’t done anything.” There’s a silent *today* at the end of that sentence. “What makes you think she’s mad at me?”

“When I went to help her, she thought I was you, so she cussed my ass from here to kingdom come and told me to eat



shit and die.” He gives me a narrowed stare and clenches his jaw. “I figured I’d get *you* to deal with her.”

I don’t even know what to say to him, so I keep quiet. I’m at a complete loss when it comes to figuring out what the hell could have happened.

Minutes later, we walk outside and make our way through the moor.

There’s no one else in this section, so I spot Aurora straight away in the rose garden with her arms wrapped around the trunk of the willow tree.

With her dress spread out around her, she looks like she’s part of the sea of flowers.

As she’s got her head pressed to the tree, I can’t tell if she’s sleeping or awake. Next to her are two bottles of wine and a bottle of champagne. All are empty, so no wonder she’s wasted.

While Jericho hangs back, I rush forward and crouch by her side, then touch her arm lightly so I don’t startle her.

“Goddess, hey there.” I rub her arm, loving the silky smoothness of her bare skin beneath my fingertips.

Aurora lifts her head and looks at me, squinting then frowning when she realizes it’s me. “*You*.” Her voice is a notch above a whisper but is filled with venom.

“Me.” I nod and give her a hope-filled smile, to which she frowns and looks me up and down as if I just contaminated her air space. “Is there a reason you’re hugging the tree?”

“I don’t want to fall over,” she mumbles, holding on to the tree trunk tighter.

“Baby, you’re already on the ground.” I lower my voice on purpose.

She looks back at me. “I don’t believe you.”

“It’s time to go home now, so I need you to come with me.”

“No. All I want from you is a divorce.”

Okay, this is definitely about me. The only thing I can think of is Chelle.

Everything else I could have done is still safely buried deep in the earth, along with my other secrets.

Did Chelle say something to Aurora?

If so, when? Chelle didn't see her before or after our little encounter.

"We just got married. You want to leave me so soon?" I reach out to touch her again, and she swats my hand away.

"Go back to Chelle. I saw you. The *two* of you. She wanted five minutes, but I'm sure you gave her much more than that."

*Oh fuck.* Aurora saw us, but clearly, she didn't stick around long enough to see the rest of what happened.

"Aurora, nothing happened."

"I don't believe you, and I hate you for this, Knight Grayson." A soft whimper escapes her lips. "I hate you for making me feel anything for you because I shouldn't even know you, but this...watching you with her...congratulations, you broke me."

A wayward tear tracks down her cheek, and she looks away.

Her words and her tears grip me, although I know I wouldn't have heard ninety percent of what she just said if she were sober.

At the same time, I've always been told that people tell the truth when they're drunk.

"Nothing happened between us, I promise." I take her arm again. This time, she doesn't push me away.

"I don't believe you," she drawls, her words slurring.

"You need to. Come on, Aurora, you can't stay out here."

"Just leave me alone. I'm fine."

I stare back at her and try to think of something to lure her to come with me. It takes me a few solid seconds, but the perfect idea comes to my mind. I just hope it works. “If you come with me, I can tell you all my favorite parts of your article on why everyone should have an *Eat, Pray, Love* journey.”

She looks back at me, surprise spreading across her face, and I know I’ve found a winning excuse to get her to come with me.

I came by the article published in an earlier edition of *Montrose Magazine* from years ago. I assumed it was when she was interning for them. The article was one of their special headliners. I understood why the article garnered such credit the instant I started reading it.

“That was years ago. You read that?” I can see sparks of the real her peeking through the drunken haziness.

“Yeah, I thought it was great.”

“Really?”

“You know it was. Want to come with me and we can talk about it?”

She thinks for a moment, then nods. “I don’t think I can walk. The ground keeps moving.” Her fingers tremble when she releases the tree.

“I’ll carry you.”

The moment I say that, she comes to me, slipping her arms around my neck like a noose.

I scoop her up, noting how featherlight she is, even with the layers and layers of fabric and lace on her wedding gown.

She rests her downy head on my shoulder when I stand, filling me with the scent of her mixed with wine. To me, the combination smells like sex.

I turn and meet my brother’s amused expression, and I know exactly what he’s thinking—that I’ve gone soft, or at the very least, that I’ve become human. *Again.*

*Maybe.*

Jericho opens his mouth to say something, but I shake my head.

“Not one damn word,” I warn.

“Alright.” He chuckles and falls in step with me. “My lips are sealed.”

As we walk down the path, I realize I’m probably still in for one hell of a night with my new bride, and I’ll most likely have to shuffle around all my plans for us.

But maybe she’ll hate me less tomorrow.

# Chapter 29

## *Aurora*



**E** *verything is spinning in my head.*  
Faces, places, spaces.

Objects, people, colors, emotions.

I can't pick anything apart, and it feels like there's a rock band playing in every corner of my mind.

I twist and turn, but I can't seem to break free of this space.

This strange space I've been trapped in for what feels like eons and eons.

Every now and again, I see a flicker of Knight's face and hear his voice, but I have no idea what he's saying.

Suddenly, a sphere of light pushes at the chaotic mess in my mind, and I'm able to open my eyes, but it's too bright, too painful, too sharp.

I screw my eyes shut, then try again, grateful that this attempt is slightly less painful.

As my awareness returns and the fog covering my mind lifts, I realize the light is the sun.

I roll my head from side to side. *Ugh*, big mistake. I shouldn't have done that.

Pain shoots from my head to the rest of my body like shards of thunder.

What the hell happened to me? I feel like shit.

The last time I remember feeling like this was when I found out about Scott. Not his death, but the truth about who he was and who I was to him, or rather who I wasn't supposed to be. That night, I drank myself into oblivion.

Images of me downing a bottle of wine flash through my mind, so

I guess that's what I must have done again.

I roll onto my side and am met with the purest blue. Turquoise blue.

It takes me a moment before I realize I'm staring at the sea, and it's not the seaside view I have from my bedroom in New York.

This is exotic. Holiday destination *exotic*.

The thought makes me bolt upright. Another big mistake that makes my head feel like it's going to fall off, but when I take in my surroundings, I shove the pain away.

The pain can wait because I'm somewhere I've never been before.

The wide archway to my left, carved into a sandstone-colored wall, reveals the idyllic scene of soft waves rolling across the surface of the sea with jagged rock formations off in the distance.

My God. Where *am* I?

I tear my eyes away from the screensaver-like view and look around the medieval-style room in one sweep, then down at the king-sized bed where I'm sitting.

It's only at that moment I realize I'm completely naked and the only thing covering me is a flimsy white sheet.

*Holy shit.*

My jaw drops. Clearly, I'm no longer in New York, and I must have gotten up to all hell last night, but I can't remember a damn thing.

I must have also drunk a whole brewery to achieve this epic fucked-up state of memory loss.

I pull the sheet up to cover my breasts and rummage through my mind for answers, trying to track back to the last thing I remember.

The wedding comes to my mind.

I got married. Was that yesterday? It feels like a long time ago.

I remember kissing Knight and what he said to me, then speaking with his mother, Jericho, and his grandparents.

It was actually a nice day until...

*Knight and Chelle.*

I remember that part and how hurt I was.

I remember grabbing the wine from the waiter and going outside to drink.

Then I remember nothing more.

Everything else is a blurred blob as if someone shoved a mass of gray into my mind.

And where am I now?

I look around the room again and take in the beauty. It's huge, and the Baroque design makes it look like one of the paintings from my poetry books.

The furniture is wooden and ornate with carvings in the fixtures, and the walls are covered with blue and brass satin wallpaper. There's a wrought iron chandelier hanging over my head and pewter-toned candlesticks by the window.

I slip off the bed, stepping onto the cool stone floor, and wrap my body with the sheet, then I look around for clothes. Even my wedding dress would do, but I don't see anything anywhere.

I head to the door and walk through, stepping onto a landing with another archway revealing more of the sea.

Wherever I am is completely surrounded by the sea. I think back to what I heard about us supposedly honeymooning in some secret location, and I try to guess where I am. It's a little



hard because I thought that was some made-up story Knight told the press to add to the perfect image of us.

A scan of what I can see confirms that I'm *definitely* not anywhere near New York.

Maybe I'm somewhere like Cape Cod, or we went down south to Wilmington. I've never been to either.

Cape Cod makes me think of the setting in TV shows like *Dawson's Creek*, while Wilmington conjures all my favorite Nicholas Sparks films.

I walk down wide stone steps, holding my hands at my heart as if I'm trying to keep it from leaping out.

When I reach the bottom, I make my way into a spacious living room with white and gold furniture. There I find Knight in the furthest corner, standing in the frame of another archway.

With his back turned to me, he's staring out at the sea, which looks more alive from this view. He's shirtless, with only a pair of gray joggers hanging low on his hips. A cigar dangles from his fingers and he looks sexy as hell.

It takes me a moment before I remember he's my husband.

I take in the tattoos on his back that make him look so different from the man he is when he's wearing a suit and his Wall Street face.

Slowly, he turns to face me as he takes a drag from the cigar. I remember when I first thought he looked Mediterranean. Well, with the gorgeous sea behind him and his olive skin, he definitely looks the part now.

"Finally, she's awake, and she looks sober." He blows out a ring of smoke. It settles around his face in a haze before it floats away on the edge of the wind.

"Where am I?" I glance around, still trying to figure it out as I look at the bright sun and stunning sea.

"Saint-Tropez."

I flick my gaze back to him and gasp. “What? *Saint-Tropez*?” Excitement overrides my shock for a minute. Saint-Tropez is one of the holiday destinations I would kill to go to. Of course, Mom loved Brigitte Bardot, so I grew up looking at pictures of her walking along the scenic beach Saint-Tropez is known for.

That’s where I am now. Good God, my life has surely changed.

“We’re seriously in Saint-Tropez?” My head is spinning with so much excitement I had to ask him again.

“Yes, but on my private island just off the coast.”

My eyes widen even more than they have. “You have your own *island* off the coast of Saint-Tropez?”

“Yeah. I kind of do.” A playful smile dances across his lips.

Just when I thought I was getting used to the extent of his wealth, he went and proved me wrong. Now we’re standing in another mansion-style house on his island off the coast of Saint-Tropez. And I have no memory of how I got here.

“What day is it?” A stab of humiliation grips me for having to ask that question and reveal how drunk I was, but I swallow my pride because I need to know the answer.

“*Monday*.” His voice is slow and teasing, and his expression becomes more animated when he sees the horror in mine.

Monday! I don’t know how many more shocks I can take.

How can it be Monday?

We got married on Saturday. So, I’ve been spaced out for over a *day*?

“It’s really Monday?”

“Yes, but if it makes you feel better, the time here is six hours ahead.”

“Of course that doesn’t make me feel any better.” I cast him an incredulous glare. “When did we leave New York?”

“We boarded my jet straight after we left the wedding. I felt it was best, given your state, to head out while we still could. Once I *managed* to get you on the plane, you slept for most of the journey, but you’ve been in and out of it since we got here.”

“Oh my God.” I pant, bringing a hand to my cheek. All that happened, and I didn’t know. “I can’t remember any of that.”

“*Seriously?*” As his brows rise, panic races over me when I think about what I must have done in my drunken state.

“Yes.” I’ve never been that drunk to forget whole events, so this is more than alarming. “I remember bits and pieces but not enough to put things together. Like how I ended up naked.”

“Well, maybe it’s best you don’t remember.”

“How is that best? I flew from one country to the next, and I have no recollection of even getting on a plane.”

He smirks and pushes off the wall. “It’s definitely best you don’t remember that part. Let’s just say you’re not exactly a fun drunk.”

I think of the reason I was drinking in the first place and my infuriation returns.

Chelle’s inappropriate words and behavior flash through my mind with perfect clarity, and I level him a hard stare. I know he’s not really mine and I’ve fallen for this game of pretense, but the memory of seeing him with Chelle still hurts just as badly as it did when it happened.

“Maybe I’m not a fun drunk because of what made me drink in the first place.”

Knight gives me a wide smile as if I just said something hilarious. The mocking sight only fuels my aggravation.

“Something funny?” I lift my chin, ready to challenge him.

“A little bit.”

“I saw you and Chelle.” I decide to cut to the chase, but as I say those words, I feel like I’ve said them before. But of course, I can’t remember.

“I got that memo.” He confirms my thoughts.

“And you think it’s funny for your assistant to be all over you on our wedding day?”

“No, but I do think what’s amusing is you getting all worked up when you supposedly dislike me so much.”

I see his obvious point, and I know I totally landed myself in that comment, but I decide to cover my emotions.

“I do dislike you.” I might sound more believable if I knew that wasn’t entirely a lie.

His smile brightens with another spark of humor, but this time, it’s darker, laced with a smooth blend of malice.

He puts the cigar out and makes his way over to me, closing the distance between us.

Aware that I have nothing but the bed sheet covering my body, I pull it closer and closer when he comes right up to me.

Forget about personal space. He swallowed what was left of mine whole with his mere presence and foreboding arrogance.

A lopsided grin tilts his lips, and he angles even closer into the danger zone, a breath away from my lips. His warm breath tickles my nose, but I feel it right down to my toes.

“You didn’t dislike me when my cock was buried deep inside you, *wife*.” He touches the edge of my jaw, stoking the delicious heat of carnal attraction. “You didn’t dislike me when you had your pussy in my face, and I ate you out until you came over and over again.” His voice drops lower and lower, igniting desire deep in my core.

“That was...different.” I take a sip of air to clear the numbness from my mind. It doesn’t work. He’s too close for me to think or do anything besides remember what he does to me when I’m with him.

“No, it wasn’t different.” He traces a finger down to the swells of my breasts and stays there. “You didn’t dislike me when I had you pressed up against the walls of my shower or when I fucked you on the hood of my car. You didn’t dislike me when you rode my cock until you were sore, and I most definitely don’t remember you disliking me when you came with my name falling off your lips like air.”

My lips part as the oxygen leaves my brain and the world tilts like a scale.

A hot blush creeps over my neck when his fingers slide lower and hook the sheet.

“Perhaps...you need a reminder of how much you *like* me.”

“I...” I should step away and put a stop to what I know will happen next if he continues to touch me, but it’s that same thing that keeps me standing still.

“You what, Aurora?” He pries the sheet from my fingers. “You want me?”

“No?” My voice is a hushed whisper of denial we both can see.

“Liar.”

“I’m not.”

“Then stop me.” He crushes his lips to mine and kisses me, paralyzing my will, so I can’t do anything to stop him from tugging the sheet off my body.

Pleasure explodes inside me as his tongue sweeps over mine and every pore in my body awakens from the strength of his touch, his scent, his possession.

His hands glide up my waist, and he pulls me against his chest so his hard cock is pushing into me.

He cups my breasts and squeezes them, making me moan.

“You’re perfect.” His words rumble across my lips, the rawness in his tone unlocking my desire for him without

restraint. “Naked and perfect and all mine. Just the way I want you.”

“Me?”

“You.”

I barely have time to absorb his words. He kisses me harder, then backs me up against the archway wall. I manage a quick glance to my left and see we’re by the terrace. I can also see the start of a beach with pure white sand.

And I’m naked. Anyone passing will definitely see me.

“There’s no one on the island but you and me.” Knight places playful kisses over my cheek when he notices me looking outside.

“Only you and me?” God, if I’m still dreaming, this is one hell of a fantasy. Being taken to an exotic island by my billionaire husband, where it’s just the two of us is right up there with all my wildest dreams.

“Only you and me, Goddess. So, I can fuck you anywhere I want. Outside or inside.”

With that declaration, he picks me up, and I instinctively wrap my legs around his waist, so our bodies mold together.

Knight shoves his pants down, takes out his cock, and slides into me, the feeling of his skin on mine sensational. My body was so ready for him he’s buried to the hilt within seconds and hits that spot deep inside me that wants him most.

“Always wet and ready for me.” He kisses up my neck.

“Knight...” I throw my head back and moan into the slow, grinding wave he’s giving me. The pressure builds in my core, rising and burning until I can’t take it anymore.

“Do you want me to fuck you, mon cherie?”

“Yes. Do it. *Please.*” I’m past caring about right and wrong. All I want is what only he can give me. “Take me.”

On my word, he devours me.

Wave after wave of pleasure takes my body and my mind, and I don't remember who I am or where I am, then I'm coming and coming and coming. Orgasm after orgasm coils through my body, but he keeps going. Pounding and hammering up into me.

All I can do is hold on to him, wrapping my arms and legs around his powerful body.

We slam into the wall, and I lift my hips to meet his thrusts. That's when he fucks me harder, and I see stars.

The cadence and rhythm between us are like magic. It's so overwhelming, every nerve in my body is saturated with it.

We keep going until we come, and somehow, everything feels different from the last time.

Holding me against the wall with our bodies covered in sweat, he kisses my cheek and catches my face, guiding my gaze to meet his.

"The next time you eavesdrop on me when another woman is coming on to me, make sure you stay to the end." He stares deep into my eyes, pushing past my soul. "Stay to the end and watch me choose you."

I blink several times as my brain refocuses on what he's saying and attempts to process his unexpected words.

*Nothing happened between him and Chelle.*

"You chose me?"

"Yes, *wife*. I did. And I'm about to choose you again."

Another kiss covers my mouth, and I'm pulled back into our world of unending pleasure.

He takes me back upstairs.

*To bed.*

# Chapter 30



## *Aurora*



**W**e spent the entire morning in bed.

There Knight took me over and over again like he was making up for lost time and all the time he hadn't been in my life.

We ended our wild session with a bath together in the freestanding stone tub that made me feel as if I'd been transported to some exotic spa in the Middle East.

While we sat together with my back pressed to his chest and his arm around me, he smoked a cigar and gave me a history lesson about the house and the island.

The house, or rather the Chateau de Botticelli, is over eight hundred years old. It was built on the island as a getaway for a noble family who worked for the King of France during the Middle Ages.

It was also a secret hiding place used to smuggle, hide people, and other things. To this day, it isn't on any map.

Much of the house still bears some of the original features, like the stone walls and gargoyles on the roof and archways. Knight renovated the rest of the house himself.

It has its own beach and a narrow strip of land with a road that takes you back to the mainland of Saint-Tropez.

That's where we are now.

We're cruising down the road in Knight's two-seater classic convertible that looks like something from a 1950s James Bond film.

We're on our way to meet Knight's mom for lunch, and we'll be spending the rest of the day with her.

As we speed along, I admire the lustrous sea on either side of us. I've never seen anything like it. From far away, I'm sure we look like we could be driving in the sea.

I keep looking around, wondering if this is really happening to me.

Am I really in Saint-Tropez?

*With him?*

I glance at Knight. He looks at me, too, and flicks his finger across my thigh, playing with the hem of my skirt.

It turns out I did have clothes here. All packed by Denise. Knight had placed them in the walk-in wardrobe, which I didn't see in my panicked state when I first woke up.

We're going to be here for a week.

One week of just the two of us on a private island where we can get up to anything we want.

I keep thinking I'll wake up from this fantasy soon. But I don't want to. Something has shifted between us and I like it.

I felt that shift from days ago, maybe even before that.

It makes me feel nervous and excited at the same time.

Weeks ago, I would've thought this would've been the opening I sought to getting what I want for Sunset Cove, but I haven't even thought about that since the first time we slept together.

This is the first time since we've been in each other's lives that I've been thinking about myself.

Knight has opened a door to something inside me, and dare I say it, it feels good.

He glances across at me again and speeds up. "You're not nervous, are you?"

"Nervous?"

“About seeing my mother again so soon. If you don’t want her to do that painting of you, I’m sure she’ll understand.”

I smile back at him. “I actually want to do it, and I really like your mom. She’s cool.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.” It’s been a while since I got on so well with someone so soon after meeting them.

I thought Knight’s grandmother was amazing, but I haven’t spent the same amount of time with her as I have with Knight’s mother.

“My mom is very cool. She taught me how to paint and sculpt. I don’t do many paintings. I never took to it the way I do with sculpting.”

He’s actually talking to me and telling me about himself, but not just that—his art.

“Why didn’t you go to art school? I’ve never seen anything like your sculptures.”

“Thank you, but you might change your mind when you see my mother’s work.” He presses his lips together and pauses for a beat. “I wanted to go to art school, but my duty as a Grayson was to work in the family business.”

“Couldn’t you have done both?” I can’t imagine why not with all the family’s wealth.

He shakes his head. “No, that wasn’t for me.”

“Why?”

“I had to prove a point that I could be the best in our business and the best anyone had ever seen.”

I have a feeling this has to do with his father and the other side of the family.

I’ve thought about the situation several times. Every time I want to ask about it, it feels like bad timing or just plain inappropriate. It feels like that now, but it also feels like the perfect opening.

“Is that because of your dad?”

When Knight glances at me again, there’s an unreadable expression on his face, but it soon softens, and I feel less guilty for prying.

“I suppose it was only a matter of time before you asked me about him and that side of my family. I’m sure you can tell things are tense between us, to say the least.”

“It was obvious. And they weren’t at the wedding?”

“No, they wouldn’t have been.”

“But it was our wedding. Why wouldn’t they be there? Why wouldn’t your father be there?”

“My father is not like yours, Aurora.”

“Given the fact that you and my father didn’t start off on the best foot, I’m not sure if you’re insulting him.” I felt it was best to check, although his comment doesn’t feel like an insult.

He gives me a slight chuckle before the seriousness returns to his face. “It’s not an insult. Your father is a real father. Mine isn’t.”

That’s the first time I’ve ever heard him sound so distant.

“Did you two have a falling out?”

“No, it wasn’t anything like that. I’m sure you’ve noticed he treats Jericho the same way too, and neither he nor his family speak to us.”

“I have noticed.” And I’m still waiting to be introduced to him.

“My father doesn’t acknowledge us as his kids.”

I hear him, but I can’t comprehend what he’s saying. “What do you mean he doesn’t acknowledge you? You’re his kids.”

“Not to him.”

“*Really?*” I would never have guessed that about Tobias Grayson. Although we’ve never spoken, the impression I got from him was that he was a respectable man.

“Unfortunately, yes.” Knight’s jaw sets, and the outline appears sharp enough to slice through stone. “It has always been that way.”

“Always?”

“Always.” In the second that he cuts me a glance, I catch a glimpse of a sad little boy lurking in the corners of his eyes. But the vision is gone just as quickly as I imagined it. “Jericho and I are only in the *Graysons*’ lives because of my grandfather.”

“You seem quite close to him.” That much I could tell straightaway from our first meeting.

“As close as can be. He became a replacement father.” He pulls in a deep breath and tightens his grip on the steering wheel. “My parents got together when my mother was very young. My father had no intention of being with her, but she didn’t know. It’s just one of those things. She was young, in love, and didn’t know what he was truly like until it was too late. We lived in France because my mother couldn’t stand being in the US. The idea of going back here to be on the same plot of land as my father made her sick, but we went back every summer and Easter because my grandparents wanted to see us as often as they could. My grandfather wanted us to be part of the legacy he built, so Jericho and I went to live with our grandparents when we were in our early teens. My grandfather wanted us to go to high school there and college, and essentially train to take over the company.”

“Did you enjoy living with your grandfather?”

“He was strict as fuck, but I loved living with him. I seemed to take more after him than anybody else. I suppose I’m his protege in many ways. I always felt like I had to be the best because my father treated me as if I didn’t belong in their lives. I wanted to show him I was exactly where I should be.” He grins, but his expression is still stony.

“I’m sorry. I can’t imagine how hard it must have been for you to have such a strained relationship with your father.”

“It’s one of the worst experiences of my life.”

“I’m sure you must know about my past with my father. I didn’t know him until I was twelve.” I assume he knows, like he does with everything else.

“He told me.”

“My life changed because of him in all the right ways. Maybe you could try to mend your relationship with your father by talking to him.” I’m aiming for positivity, but Knight laughs off-key at my suggestion, sounding as unhinged and uncanny as nails scraping across board.

“No, mon cherie. Been there, done that, won’t be doing it ever again. Like I said, my father is not like yours. Your father wanted you. Mine would kill me if he could.”

My stomach squeezes on hearing that. I can’t conceive such a horrid relationship with a parent, but now I feel more fortunate to have had two good parents who loved me to death.

As I stare at Knight, it feels like pieces of the puzzle surrounding him—this mysterious man—are falling into place, creating the picture of the layers that live beneath his iron skin. The picture I’m seeing makes me want to know more about him.

“I’m sorry,” I say in a tone best reserved for condolences.

“That’s okay. I got used to it. It hasn’t killed me yet, so it’s only made me stronger. Things turned out the way they were supposed to. My mom is extremely happy. She met Maurice a few years after we moved back to France, and she’s been with him ever since.”

“She looks happy,” I offer, remembering how she looked at the wedding.

“As long as she has the love of her life and her art, she’s fine.” He gives me a boyish grin, seeming less tense now that the difficult discussion about his father has passed. “The house we’re heading to has a big workshop, which I’m sure you’ll see. It also has a vineyard. My mother and Maurice are here for most of the summer, then back in Marseilles for the rest of the year.”

“I can’t wait to see it, and, um... I like it here. I really like it here. I didn’t expect this *honeymoon*.”

“Me neither.”

We stare at each other for a long moment, and I feel that shift again. Knight turns away first to look ahead at the road, and my gaze drops to my hands, to the ring on my finger.

Our marriage is a sign of our contract, but it doesn’t feel that way.

Whatever is happening inside me feels like something good.

I haven’t had that feeling in years.

\* \* \*

“Welcome to my humble abode,” Elodie says in a sing-song voice when Knight and I step out of the car.

*Humble?*

I look at the spectacular French Tudor country-style home before me and the vast expanse of rolling hills surrounding it. There’s nothing humble about the place, but it has a serene vibe or a homey presence of warmth every home should have.

Elodie approaches us with her long hair floating in the wind and her elegant arms stretched wide, reminding me of a swan or a ballet dancer.

Knight meets her half-way and gives her a kiss on the cheek. “Bonjour, Mom.”

“Bonjour, I’m so thrilled you could join us.” She hugs Knight first, then me when I reach them.

“It’s nice to see you again,” I say, hoping she didn’t see me in my drunken state. I still can’t remember one iota of what happened. It’s like I blacked out of existence for that entire time.

“And you, my love.” She cups my face with awe. “You look so stunning, even better than on your wedding day.”

“Thank you.” *Please, God, please don’t let her see that’s probably because of all the sex I’ve been having with her son.* I’ve been in permanent afterglow all morning. “You look great too.”

“I do my best. Come on in. Lunch is just about ready.”

“Can’t wait to eat your delicious food,” Knight says with a relaxed chuckle, his entire composure softer for seeing his mother. I noticed he was like that at the wedding too.

“I made all your favorites.” A proud-mom smile spreads across her face, then she glances at me and hope sparks in her eyes. “Stuff I hope you like too, Aurora, as I’m told I’m a good cook.”

I smile back at her. “I’m sure you are, but I’ll eat anything.” I’ve always been grateful that I’ve never been a fussy eater. I’ve felt that being that way makes you miss out on all sorts of great food, especially when you’re in another country.

“Perfect, come on.”

Elodie leads us into the house, where I’m impressed even more by the interior décor.

Everything is the kind of breathtaking that would make you want to move house and country straightaway to have something like this.

Muted colors blend together with toil fabrics, extravagant lighting, and tapestries hanging on the wall. There are touches of gold here and there with the rustic touch of an artist.

It’s obvious an artist lives here, but also that the artist is a woman who loves the finer things of life.

My mother would have loved all of this.

Maurice walks out from the kitchen to join us with a bright smile on his face.

“Hey, everyone,” he greets us, and we acknowledge him. “Right this way.” He motions toward the dining room, and we follow.



Once inside, we're greeted with a table covered in a delicious spread of excellence. There are all sorts of meats, from chicken to beef, pork and fish. Fried, baked, and roasted. The platters of vegetables and savory dishes of the same assortment. It's like I'm looking at the feasts from the Harry Potter films.

Moments later, we're seated and eating, then we eat and talk for eons.

The atmosphere is more relaxed than at the wedding because we know each other. I also figured that Elodie and Maurice must not have seen me in my drunken state, but if they did, they're doing a good job of not bringing it up.

Our conversation feels like an extension of the one we had at the wedding where it felt like we talked about every and anything, except now we're including traveling to life in France.

When we're finished eating, Knight heads to the vineyard with Maurice, and Elodie takes me to her beloved workshop I've heard so much about.

The moment we walk in, I love it. The space is as spacious and endless as a warehouse and seems to go down on a slope.

On one side are her artistry tools and a workspace like Knight's with tables, shelves, and a row of cupboards.

The other side holds several large pieces of sculptures and paintings covered in white cloth and plastic bubble wrap, so I can't really see what they are.

"Those are for the show," she explains, pointing at the display. "They've been prepped for transportation to the gallery in Marseille. Over here is still my work in progress." She gestures ahead to the area sectioned off by a wooden sliding door.

It's not completely closed, so I can just about see the edge of one of the sculptures.

"What I see looks great." I smile back at her and try to get a better look.

“Wait until you see everything. I’m very proud of what I’ve done this year.” She nods. “That’s also where I’d love to paint you later in the week if we get the chance.”

I laugh. “Sure. I’ve never had anyone who wanted to paint me before.”

“Thank you for indulging me. I love painting people and landscapes. I obviously love sculpting too, but it requires more work and effort. Painting for me is like breathing. Not a day goes by when I don’t do it.”

“Really? That’s so impressive.”

“Thank you. Knight tells me you’re a writer.” As she looks at me, I wonder if this is the part where I’m going to have that one-to-one with her where she tries to get more information out of me about who I am.

It probably is, and I couldn’t fault her for it. I don’t know how much she knows about Knight and me, but even if she knew the truth, I would still look like some girl who’s hitched up with her son who’s worth billions. She’s bound to be inquisitive.

I’ve been preparing for this conversation, if it’s that, but I don’t want to lie to her.

“I want to write for a lifestyle magazine,” I tell her.

“He told me that too.”

I wonder if he also told her about my pen name. Probably not. He seems to have kept that as a saucy secret between us.

“I had a look at some of your old articles. I thought they were wonderful.” She touches her heart as if to show she really means what she’s saying. “Please tell me you’ll be writing for some fabulous magazine soon.”

“Hopefully. I’m applying for a writer position with *People Magazine*. Here’s hoping I get it.”

Her face brightens, and she gives my shoulders a gentle squeeze. “That would be fantastic. I pray you get it.”

“Me too. It would be a dream come true.”

“Then I hope for it to happen even more. Come, let me show you some of the pieces I just finished this morning for the show. You’ll get a first view of them.”

She takes my elbow and steers me through the doors to the gathering of her masterpiece sculptures.

There are fifty of them. All a little bigger than life-size.

Standing this close gives me a firsthand view of what Knight meant when he was talking about his mother’s talent.

She does the same bronze sculptures of living figures like Knight but has a Renaissance-meets-contemporary edge to her work.

Most of the sculptures are of women with long flowing hair and see-through dresses that look like air caressing their bodies. I was already blown away when I saw Knight’s work, but this has a different opulence to it that borders on legendary.

“My God, wow.” My voice comes out in a reverent rasp. “These are astounding.”

Elodie smiles. “I’m glad you think so. I went for something different this year. I tend to do figures of women anyway, but not so much like this. I call this collection Dance of the Sea Nymphs.”

“I’m in love.”

She laughs heartily and brings her hands together. “I guess my job is done, then.”

I walk around each piece, admiring the craftsmanship in her work. Everything is so precise and perfect.

“How long does it take you to finish them?”

She sighs and looks at each one. “Sometimes, it can take me a day, sometimes months. It depends on what I see in my mind and the inspiration behind it. This was the quickest one. I had it done within a few hours.” She points to a sculpture of a girl with a flower in her hair. The girl is smiling and reaching out like she’s about to touch someone. “This was inspired by a girl I saw in the park who’d just met her father for the first time.”

Of course, I think of myself the moment she says that. The girl also looks to be about the same age I was when I met my father.

The radiance in the girl's eyes reminds me of that light that sparked in my soul when my father came into my life.

"It's absolutely beautiful."

"I tried to capture the moment as best as I could. I don't know her, and I'll most likely never see her again, but she inspired me that day. I was simply sitting in the park and happened to hear their conversation. This was how she looked when she first saw him." Pride fills her voice. "These, on the other hand, are the kind that took me months."

She shows me a gathering of women who look like mermaids without the tails.

We walk around, and I get lost in the fantasy world she's created, but I stop when I see a sculpture with a familiar face.

It's Giselle.

She's here, like a ghost haunting me. I walk up to her, and my blood runs cold all of a sudden.

This sculpture is no less perfect than the others in here, but I can tell from the crafting techniques that it wasn't done by Elodie. It was sculpted by Knight.

This must be one from the same collection in New York and is the most beautiful.

Giselle is sitting on a rock with a rose in her hand. She always holds a rose, whether it's intact or the petals are falling.

She's looking ahead, gazing out to the distance with a thirst for life in her eyes.

Elodie comes up to me and rests her hands on my shoulders.

"Are you okay?" she asks, looking from me to Giselle.

"Yes." I offer a half smile, but I know it looks forced. "Knight did this one?"

She seems surprised that I know that. “He did.”

“I’ve seen others of her at home.”

“I am hoping he’ll send those to me for the show. He gave me this one many years ago. It was the best in the collection. He’s supposed to be working on the final one, but he’s been doing so for the same amount of time I’ve had this.”

That sounds like a long time. She said years.

“Do you know who this girl is?” There’s a carefulness in her voice.

“Giselle.”

“Yes. Has Knight ever spoken to you about her?”

I won’t tell her that today was the first time Knight has opened up to me about *anything*. “He hasn’t, but I figured she must be somebody who meant a lot to him.”

“She was.”

“Who was she?”

“His first and last girlfriend.” The carefulness returns, but there’s a hint of sadness hidden in her words.

“What happened to her?”

“She died five years ago.”

My heart folds in on itself like a glove, then something sharp grips my insides, squeezing then pulling as if attached to tight ropes.

In all this time, I’ve never once thought that Giselle was dead. God, I even thought she was Chelle.

“She died?” I search her eyes.

She nods with the slowness of a mourner at a funeral. “It was a combination of different things, but that’s a discussion I think Knight should have with you one day.”

*Translation*—whatever happened was so bad she can’t talk about it.

“I hope so.” Invisible threads pull on my nerves, tightening my scalp with a combination of emotions that assail me. Sadness, shock, and...good old envy. I feel ashamed for feeling the latter.

“Just give Knight some time. My son can be very stubborn, but that’s because he never wants to appear weak. *Weak* is not a word associated with Knight Grayson, but every now and again, he’ll show you glimpses of himself.”

I might have witnessed that once. Maybe twice.

The drive here was one of them.

“I might have to wait a while for that to happen.”

“Don’t be so sure. You’re very good for him.”

Again, I wonder how much she knows. If it’s the truth, then I don’t think she would be saying that. But I’m interested to know what she sees.

“You think so?”

A smile inches across her lips. “Yes. I can tell from the way he looks at you, and the way he is around you.”

“What way is that?”

“As if he’s alive again.”

Her words bring light to my heart, and I return her smile. “That’s nice to know.”

“It’s the truth.”

I’ve learned two things about Knight today I never knew before.

Now I know what turned him into the ruthless being I’ve witnessed on countless occasions. It makes me want to peel away all the layers of darkness to find the real him.

Still, I like it all. His light and his darkness.

Everything that makes him, him.

Sometimes, the darkness is what protects the light.

# Chapter 31

## *Aurora*



**T**he next few days are amazing.

It feels like we live here in Saint-Tropez and this is our life.

Knight and I either spend our time in bed tangled with each other, sightseeing on the mainland where we wine and dine in the best restaurants, or with his mother and Maurice.

Yesterday, I went to the gallery in Marseille, where I saw many more of Elodie's masterpieces and other works from Knight.

Apparently, that's what he does, too. He finishes a certain amount of pieces a year, and they're shipped over to the gallery either for sale or for display.

I've learned more about him in the five days we've been here than in the last six weeks.

We have two days left here, then it's back to New York.

I keep wondering what will happen when we get back. Out here, we act like a couple, like we're really newlyweds, and it doesn't feel like we're on a stage.

We're sitting on the beach now with Elodie and Maurice. It's super late, but we have a bonfire going that Knight made.

He's wearing nothing but a pair of shorts, so all his sexiness is on show. His beard is also a little fuller, giving him that rugged edge I go crazy for.



Knight is beside Maurice, getting the next round of marshmallows ready while Maurice regales us with ghost stories about the island. I'm next to Elodie. The two of us are sitting on one blanket while we snuggle together under another.

Weeks ago, if anyone had ever told me I'd be sitting on the beach of Knight's private Island snuggled with his mom while he roasts marshmallows and his stepfather tells us stories, I would have laughed them to scorn.

I also wouldn't have known which of those parts sounded more incredulous and unbelievable, yet here we are.

"And that's a wrap. The bottom line is, the island is haunted by all sorts of ghosts," Maurice says in his TV presenter voice. "The worst of them all is the weeping witch, but chances are you won't see her except in an eclipse."

"We'll keep that in mind." Elodie laughs with a shake of her head.

I'm not usually one for ghost stories because I scare easily, but his were very interesting and blockbuster-worthy. Maurice served us everything from pillaging pirates to sea witches, and cursed jewels that passed through the island.

"Thank you for providing some much-needed entertainment." Knight laughs and hands us each a roasted marshmallow.

"My pleasure." Maurice takes a bow.

Elodie laughs again. "You are so crazy."

"Only for you." He bows again.

"You better be." She looks across at Knight, and he relaxes his shoulders. "I think it's time we head out and leave you newlyweds to enjoy the night. Not much time left to go until you're back home."

"No, not much."

Elodie brushes her shoulder against mine. "I'll have your painting finished tomorrow evening so you can get a look at it."

“Thank you. I’d like that.”

“I hope I did you justice.”

“I don’t think you ever have to worry about that.” I saw parts of it already, and there’s no question on whether she did me justice. She made me look amazing and to me, better than what I look like in real life.

“We’ll see.” She stands, and Maurice joins her. “Good night, you two. Enjoy.”

“Bye.” I wave, and they head back to their car.

When they drive away, I look back at Knight and find him already gazing at me. His eyes are bright with desire like he’s drinking me in.

During the course of the last few days, I’ve remembered parts of my drunken disaster. The most relevant, being me telling him he broke me when I saw him with Chelle, then him telling me his favorite parts about one of my first articles.

As I look at him now, I still can’t believe he actively sought out my work and read it enough to have favorite parts.

“You’re giving me that look again,” I mutter, pulling the blanket closer to my chest.

“I give you several looks.” His mouth quirks into a grin, and he flexes his muscles, leaning forward and allowing the light from the fire to flicker over his bare skin.

“You’re looking at me like you’re trying to figure me out.”

“I’m always trying to figure you out. Right now, I’m wondering what you’ll write about next. What wild fantasies will you conjure up as Cordelia Harris?”

I try to hide a smile but fail. “I have a few new ones.”

“Tell me what they are, Goddess.”

I think for a moment, then decide to play. “In one of them, my heroine has just arrived at the beach and sees a guy coming out of the sea. When he notices her watching him, he walks over, and the two start talking. He’s a straight-to-the-point

kind of guy, so he just kisses her when he realizes they like each other.”

Knight grins. “I like where this is going, but that sounds way too Hallmark for you. Where’s the dirt?”

“He takes her clothes off right there.”

His smile widens and his gaze roams over me. “Now we’re talking.” In the flicker of the orange flames, the lust-filled stare he gives me looks sexier. “But are there people around?”

“No, it’s almost evening, and that part of the beach is always empty at that time.”

“I see.” He moves closer and pulls the blanket from my legs, then he takes my left foot and runs a finger from the tips of my toes right up to my ankle. “Keep going. Tell me what he does to her next.”

“He tells her to spread her legs.”

His lips brush my knees, and he kisses his way up to my inner thigh. “Keep going.”

“He starts eating her out.”

“Oh yeah?” His deep baritone sounds deeper.

“Yes.”

“Tell me more.”

My mind struggles when his hands flutter over the zipper of my shorts and he pulls it down.

“He um...” My breath hitches when he pulls my shorts and panties down together, casting them to the side and leaving me with my bare pussy exposed to him.

“Keep going.” He grins wide and wild, reaching for my top.

“He eats her out until she comes.”

Knight takes off my top and bra, and now I’m completely naked.

“What else does he do to her?” His lips close over my left nipple, and he draws it into his mouth to suck.

He begins alternating between sucking and licking my breasts, and the words slip from my mind. “He...” I moan, arching against him.

“Keep going, Goddess. Tell me your fantasy while I taste every inch of you.” Every word spoken from his lips heightens my senses, and I lose my mind when he slides down to my pussy and begins eating me out. “I want to hear more, Aurora.”

“I can’t... that feels too good.” Against the cool night air, my skin feels hotter than ever against his lips.

“Does that mean I’m better than your fantasy?” He nips at my clit and takes his time licking at the folds of my pussy lips until I can feel my juices leaking out of my passage. “Answer me, Goddess.”

“Yesss.” God, everything he’s doing to me feels so damn good.

“Good, because the next time you have a fantasy, that guy needs to be me,” he murmurs, with a smile in his words. My body trembles as he continues his feasting, then he swaps from his tongue to his fingers so he can look at me.

“Knight—”

My voice cuts as he adds another finger and starts finger-fucking me, taking complete control over my body.

“That fantasy guy needs to be *me* stripping you naked on my beach. He needs to be me spreading your legs wide and eating out your sweet pussy until you come.”

As soon as he says that word, I come.

I grab his shoulders, moaning my release.

“Knight...I...” I can’t talk, and I don’t know how he can remain so calm when I’m unraveling against him like I’m going to evaporate.

“You know this is only the beginning, Goddess. Our end is always going to be me inside you.”

He crushes his mouth to mine for a hungry kiss, then guides me to my hands and knees.

I'm still soaked and throbbing from my orgasm, but my body welcomes him when he slams into my passage.

He slides his hands up to grip my hips and drives deeper into me, making me cry out.

His thick cock stretches my pussy with his deep hard thrusts, then he speeds up.

“Your pussy is fucking incredible, Aurora,” he murmurs.

We move like that until we find a steady pace, and he has my already throbbing body aching for release again.

The second orgasm takes me, making my whole body quiver. That makes him pound harder. My breasts bounce against my chest, and I feel like I'm on fire.

He pounds harder and faster, then groans his finish. His cock stabbing into me makes me come again, and I scream.

It takes a while for us to climb down from the high. When we do, he pulls me close to lie next to him, with his arm slipped around me.

Together we lie there, our limbs entangled, our eyes locked on one another, and he guides me to rest my head on his chest.

We stay just like that until we're ready for round two, and Knight is back inside me again. We repeat that cycle all night, making the sand our bed under the covers of the starry sky, and I find myself wishing this moment could last forever.

Even if I know it can't.

No matter what I do, I know I mustn't fall for my husband.

I know if he hurt me, there'd be no coming back.

# Chapter 32

# *Knight*



**T**he sun has just started peeking through the sky, lifting the blanket of night.

I watch the rays creep through the window, through each sliver of the blinds and the archways, until they find Aurora.

Then they slide over her skin like warm honey, placing the spotlight on her, then on me.

The goddess is cocooned in my arms, asleep. We've been waking up in each other's arms every morning, whether that's on the beach or in bed.

This is our last day here.

By tonight, I won't even have this part. I fly off to Germany to meet Jericho, and she will return to the States.

I hate the break that will give us, but this last-minute business trip snuck up on me.

Perhaps it's for the best. Every moment I spend with Aurora makes me crazier for her. I'm not sure if that's good or bad yet for me.

I've been lying here for the last two hours contemplating everything. Every single thing, past, present, and future.

I'm not sure at what point Aurora slipped into my soul. Now it feels like she's swimming through every nerve in my body as if she belongs there.

She stirs but doesn't wake. Her hand slips from my chest, and I look at her wedding ring.

She was mine when I put my engagement ring on her finger. But that wedding ring feels like it means something more.

Of course, it does. That's why you have it, but for me, it's more than just a mark of ownership. It's like it's sending a message, a reminder that I wanted this woman from *hello*.

I sit up with that thought and decide to go outside to watch the rest of the sunrise. Maybe the cool air will soothe my mind. I drag on some clothes and do just that.

I sit on the beach for an hour. Two. Three.

I still feel the same.

My thoughts don't shift until I see my mother's car coming up the narrow strip.

I expected her. She always does this when I'm here. We'll say goodbye the night before. Then she'll come and see me the next morning. No matter how early it is, she always stops by.

The car pulls up, and she gets out. I shuffle to face her, watching her walking toward me. In her hands is the little wafer bar of chocolate she always gives me.

Right from when I was a kid, she'd make it a thing to hand me and Jericho one each every morning before we went to school. When we went to live in the States, she would send packages for us with the same things.

Her smile brightens when she approaches, and I get up to give her a hug.

"Hey there," she says, reaching out to tap my cheeks.

"Hi, Mom. You know you didn't have to do this."

She gives me a wide grin. "I know, but I always have, so why would I stop now?" She hands me the chocolate, and I take it.

"Thank you."

"Where's Aurora?" She glances toward the house.

"Still sleeping, I think. I've been out here for a while."



“Thinking?” she asks, glancing now at the beautiful sunny view of the Saint-Tropez sea shore and the sun in the backdrop.

“Yeah, thinking.”

“Mind if I join you for a while?”

“Not at all.”

We sit together, like we have many times before on this beach.

The moment she looks at me, I know she’s about to talk about Aurora and other things I’m not ready for.

“Do you want to share what you were thinking about?” She rubs my shoulder.

“Life in general.”

“Does life in general include your new bride?”

“Yes.” My mother is the only other person who knows the full story about Aurora and me. I couldn’t lie to her, and I didn’t want anyone else to.

Getting married is something she would’ve wanted to be real for me, so I felt I had to explain what was going on that led me to that marriage.

“I like her,” Mom says. “I really do, and like I said to her the other day, I think she’s good for you.”

“You said that?” The last thing I need in my state of conflict is my mother putting ideas in Aurora’s head. Nobody knows me better than she does, so for her to say that, it’s truth.

“Of course, I said that. It’s very clear to me you care for her. Don’t deny it.”

I let out a heavy sigh. “I do care for her, but you know if she finds out about certain things, it will ruin everything. We’re going to clash. Her interest and mine don’t align.”

“I understand that but take away all of those things and think of what you have left. You care for her. That has to count for something, given it’s been so long since you’ve met

anyone you cared about. It means something to *me* to watch you heal after Giselle.”

I gaze into her eyes, knowing she’s right. “It’s not that simple.”

“Nobody expects it to be, but as your mother, I have to point these things out when I see them.”

“I suppose that’s understandable.”

“It has to be. That’s my God-given duty.” She pulls in a deep breath and gives my arm a gentle squeeze. “You should also know that Aurora saw your sculpture of Giselle and asked about her.” There’s a fervency in her voice that grips me.

The same way I was waiting for her to ask me about my father, I’ve been waiting for her to ask me about Giselle too. I know she’s been dying to know who she is, what happened, and why the fuck I have so many sculptures of her.

“What did you say?”

“I told her she died, but as I thought it was a discussion you should have with her, I left it at that. I think you should talk to her, and I think you should give her a chance. I don’t think it would be good for you to close your mind off to possibilities. Okay?”

I think for a moment and nod, partly to appease her. The other part of me is listening.

“Okay.”

We sit there for a little while longer until it’s time for her to go.

In the quiet, I wonder if I really could open my mind to any possibilities with Aurora.

That would include a future beyond the next six months.

It would also mean coming clean with the truth and clearing away the lies.

\* \* \*

I'm away from Aurora for the next three days.

Apart from a few phone calls and text messages here and there, we haven't really spoken to each other.

I've been busy in meetings, and the time difference has made it difficult to keep in touch.

The ruthless part of me has seen that as a tool I could use to take the coward's way out and allow my absence to naturally bleed my obsession of her from my mind. But the part of me that wants nothing more than to be back inside her suffocated all those thoughts, and I've ended up wanting her more than I ever have.

Now I'm back in New York, taking the elevator up to my grandfather's office.

The first thing on my schedule today is the meeting I've been waiting for between him, myself, and Jericho. Instead of speaking to me directly, Grandfather wanted to see us together.

God knows what that means. It can't be good, but I haven't been able to focus on anything else besides Aurora to give much thought to what I might be walking into.

It hasn't helped that I haven't seen Aurora yet. I landed roughly two hours ago. By the time I got home, she'd already left for Sunset Cove.

With the back-to-back meetings I have today, I'm not likely to see her until tomorrow night—*late*—or possibly even the next night.

Tomorrow is Luc's hockey match. It's the first time I don't particularly want to attend, but I promised I'd be there with Jericho and all the other guys because it's the championship finals.

I get out of the elevator, and I'm so lost in my mind that I don't see Bastian standing by the column until he clears his throat.

That's what he always does when the fucker wants my attention. It's annoying and irritating. One day, I might just rip

out his jugular and crush it to dust, then he won't do that again.

I keep walking because I don't want to talk to him.

"Your bride was beautiful," he calls out, but I keep going. "There were several shots of you and her in Sant-Tropez. You guys almost look real to me. The picture in the *Chronicle* shows Aurora looking at you like you're really the loving husband."

That makes me stop. I knew we'd have the press following us at some point when we were on the mainland of Sant-Tropez, but that's not why I stopped.

It's Aurora's name on his lips. I don't like it. I face him and narrow my eyes with seething rage.

"Leave my wife alone. Don't think about her, don't speak about her, don't look at her." The warning in my voice is evident, but he laughs. "What's so fucking funny, Bastian?"

He moves closer. "You, *brother*. Anyone who knows you would know straight away. That marriage of yours is fucking arranged. I just don't know for *what*. I'll find out, though. Something tells me it's to do with the company. In the meantime, you might not want to wear your weakness on your sleeve. It looks like you're falling for your own game. She is pretty, though. I can see why you fell into your own trap."

He gives me the filthiest look he can summon, then walks back the way he came and keeps going.

I loathe what he said to me, but the fact that he can see straight through me is what I worry about most.

You never show a man your weaknesses.

Mine has become Aurora.

It's not for anyone to see that, let alone Bastian.

With a heavy sigh, I continue to Grandfather's office. I'm surprised when I walk in and find Jericho already there.

I'm not late by any means. In fact, I'm two minutes early. But the fact that Jericho is here early signifies how worried he

is about Grandfather's decision.

"Great, now that Knight is here, let's start," Grandfather says, acknowledging me with a nod.

I sit next to Jericho, noting how different Grandfather seems from how he was when we spoke on the phone to check in. All those times, he seemed like he'd cooled off, but now he's back to being his old business self. This is the face we see when he's talking about his empire.

I glance at Jericho, but he doesn't look back. Another sign of tension.

"Now that we've had a few weeks to digest the scandal, I wanted to speak to you both. I also wanted to speak to the two of you because you work together." He focuses on Jericho for a moment and says, "This is not going to be a situation where Knight can talk me out of whatever I decide."

"I figured as much," Jericho replies, sounding empty but keeping the coolness he's known for.

"Good, because I've now come to my decision." Grandfather looks at both of us. "I admire the two of you in more ways than I should, and it's obvious to everyone that I do. So, I don't like it when you make me look like an idiot."

"That wasn't my intention," Jericho attempts, but Grandfather holds up his hand to stop him from continuing.

"Jericho, I know it wasn't your intention, but that doesn't change the fact that it happened and made me look bad. This is not the time to be losing anything. Word of mouth has been the key marketing tool for this company. I state my name and my life on making us who we are. When you screw with a man like Paul Linco, you don't just throw a stone at the window of our empire. You hit it with a bulldozer." He bares his teeth and gives Jericho a hard stare.

"I'm sorry. I truly am."

I could count the number of times I've ever heard Jericho apologize in my life on one hand and still have several fingers left. That includes just now.

“Fortunately, I have managed to talk Paul out of his departure, but it’s cost me a great deal,” Grandfather says, ignoring Jericho’s apology. “Throughout the course of my attempts to fix things, I finally came up with what I want from you. It has taken me a while to speak to you anyway because I didn’t know what you could do that you haven’t already done.”

“What do you want from me? Tell me, and I’ll do anything to fix the situation.”

“I’m glad you say that because my request will fall into the anything category. I want you to find a wife.”

At first, the two of us freeze and stare back at him as if he just told us we’ve been fired, then I wait for him to tell us he’s joking.

But he doesn’t.

Grandfather looks serious as fuck, and I realize the joke and laughter at such a crazy request isn’t going to come.

Sure, I essentially had to find a wife to get what I wanted from the empire, but it wasn’t like that. It was a choice. It was a quest.

This is different.

“What do you mean, find a wife?” Jericho looks at Grandfather as if he’s lost his mind.

“You heard me, son.”

“How the hell does that fix anything?” Jericho’s voice is so high I swear the glass in the windows rattles.

“It fixes your image. That’s what I need you to do. Finding a wife will do just that.”

“Grandfather, don’t you think this is a little harsh?” I speak for the first time. “Jericho isn’t exactly the marrying type.”

“Neither are you, but you did it. You did what you had to to get what you want.” His voice is filled with pride, but I feel nothing but shame. “You already had the image, but now people think Jericho is some playboy, and I have to agree.”

“I’m not a fucking playboy,” Jericho jumps back in.

“Yes, you are.” Grandfather emphasizes his words.

I hate to side with him, but I can’t disagree. Jericho might be as callous as me, and some people call him a wolf, but he’s seen as a playboy. That’s exactly why the press ran with their story.

“You have three months to think about it. The investors, the board of directors, and worse, your father believes you make this company look bad. But I believe we can turn this around with this resolution.”

Jericho shakes his head and raises balled fists. “There must be some other way.”

“My decision is final, son. That’s what I want. If you don’t want to do things my way, the position goes to Bastian. It is as simple as that.”

“This is bullshit. Absolute fucking bullshit.” Jericho gets up and storms out so fast I’m surprised he doesn’t leave a cloud of smoke in his wake.

“I’ll go talk to him,” I say to Grandfather. “But I don’t agree with this. It’s not right.”

“It is what it is,” he simply replies and glances toward the door.

Realizing there is no fight here, I go after Jericho.

He’s already way ahead of me, but I catch up to him and call him. He doesn’t stop. He keeps walking ahead.

“Jericho, just fucking wait.” I grab his arm, yanking him to a stop. “We need to talk about this. This is important.”

He faces me and pulls his arm away. “Knight, if you tell me not to be mad about this fucked-up request, I’ll literally knock your teeth down your throat. And since I know you’d fight back, let’s just agree to fight.”

“We’re not going to fight.”

“Okay, so what are you going to say?” He searches my eyes in an exaggerated manner. “You know he’s wrong, right?”

Can you at least jump out of his ass for two minutes to acknowledge Grandfather is wrong?"

"I'm not in his *ass*." I grit my teeth. I hate when people assume I live up my grandfather's ass when I fucking don't. I just know how to choose my battles. "I just think we need to figure things out."

"How the fuck are we going to do that? You can't even figure out your own life."

The accusation throws me out of sync. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Okay, let's do this. You're in love with your wife, Knight," he announces as if the notion is as clear daylight.

It feels like he's been talking to Bastian, but I know that would never happen.

"What—"

"Don't." His nostrils flare, his eyes blaze, and he stares at me with a face ready to fight. "Don't do that to me. Lie to everyone else, but don't do it to me, Knight. Don't tell me you're not in love with her, and don't tell me it's going to be easy for you to hurt her when you sell Sunset Cove. You and I both know the minute Vladimir gets his hands on Sunset Cove, you lose Aurora. Don't fucking tell me that's going to be *easy* for you."

He looks me up and down, and when I don't answer, he whirls around and keeps walking.

I let him go because I don't have anything else to say.

Everything he mentioned is shit I've already been thinking about.

That's why everything is so damn hard.

*Sell Sunset Cove. Lose Aurora.*

*Tell her the truth. Lose Aurora.*

*Keep lying. Lose Aurora.*

There is no scenario where I win and keep her.



But I want her.

It turns out I'm really her Hades after all.

I'm not just obsessed with her.

I'm in love her.

# Chapter 33

## *Aurora*



All the words on my computer screen blur together in one mass of floating letters, looking like I've been pulled into the Matrix.

This is what normally happens to me when I'm tired. Except I'm not tired at all.

I just can't focus today.

I'm at Sunset Cove working on my application for *People Magazine*.

I needed something to distract myself, but given my fluctuating state of mind, working on something so important might not be the best idea.

It's been four days since I last saw Knight.

As he kissed me goodbye before I boarded the jet to head back to New York, I wished it wouldn't be the last time we were like that. But in my heart, I knew it *could* be.

Although I was aware I wouldn't see him for a few days because of his business trip, I can't help but feel that we've slipped back into the shoes of the people we were before the wedding.

I especially feel that way today because I know he's back in New York.

He got back yesterday morning. Apart from one text asking me how I was and another telling me he'd be at a hockey game tonight, we haven't spoken.

I don't know if that's because he's genuinely busy or if he's gone back to avoiding me.

That makes me sound like one of those needy, clingy girlfriends who freak out about everything. But I'm not his girlfriend. I'm his wife.

His...business-arranged wife who's crossed the line and thinks her relationship with her husband is real.

A buzzing sound grabs my attention. I grab my phone, thinking it's a text from Knight coming through, but it's not. It's actually an email from the car wax suppliers offering me a year's supply for a discount.

I delete it and will myself to push Knight out of my mind.

*I need to.*

"There she is." Madison bounces into my office as if springs are attached to her stilettos.

The sudden sight of her is just what I need. "Yay, you're here."

"I am."

I rush over to hug her, feeling like we haven't seen each other in years, although it's only been a little over a week since the wedding.

When I got back from Saint-Tropez, she happened to be away in Paris for an impromptu trip with Chad. Our friends and I suspect the trip was a surprise engagement.

"So, what happened in Paris?" I ask when we pull apart.

Madison stretches out her left hand and shows off the beautiful diamond engagement ring on her finger.

At the sight, the two of us scream at the top of our lungs and hug again.

I'm not surprised to see a ring on her finger, but the euphoria is the same as if I didn't know.

"Oh my gosh, I'm so happy for you." I clasp my hands, remembering when Chad and Madison got together. I always

thought they'd be a match made in heaven. I'm so glad I was right.

"Thank you so much," Madison says, tears pooling in the corners of her eyes.

"I *knew* he was going to propose to you."

She drops her shoulders. "Well, I thought he might, but, I didn't want to assume."

"Oh, please, of course, you can assume when it comes to him. The man is utterly in love with you. *And* you've always wanted to be proposed to in Paris. It was a given that this trip was going to be *the* proposal." I laugh and place my clasped hands on my cheek, awed by this news. "Was it exactly what you wanted it to be?"

Madison sighs and gives me a dreamy expression. "It was better, Aurora. It was just beautiful. He got a string quartet, got down on one knee and just asked me to be his wife with tears in his eyes."

My heart warms, and I feel the way every good friend does when she sees her best friend end up with her dream guy.

"That sounds more than beautiful. I'm so, so happy for you." I take both her hands into mine and give them a reassuring squeeze.

"I just can't believe it's really happening. We're seriously about to enter the next stage of our lives."

"Yes, you are. So, when's the wedding?"

"In the fall. We haven't decided on a date yet, but we both love that time of year, and he'll be on leave for a month."

"Are you still worried about him being on duty?" That's always been her worry. I would worry, too. Once, Chad was in Afghanistan for nearly a year. I thought she was going to go crazy with worry.

"Yes, but I've accepted that I can't worry about that all the time. However, because he's a lieutenant now, he's thinking of transferring to the training center here in New York next year."

Her cheeks flush pink. “We think we might be ready for babies by then.”

*Babies*, my goodness.

The thought of children sends a rush of longing through my heart.

I was the friend who wanted marriage and babies once upon a time. I still want that, but my heart has been broken in ways that restrict me from seeing that vision anymore.

I certainly can't see it happening with Knight.

By the time Madison gets married, I'll be divorced. The word feels like poison in my head.

“I'm thrilled for you, Madison. The two of you deserve this.” I shove away my own worries so I can be happy for her.

“I knew you'd be ecstatic for me. Apart from my parents, you're the second person to know.”

“I feel truly honored.” I give her a curt bow.

“Speaking of honored, of course, I'd love for you to be my maid of honor. Or *matron* of honor.” She quirks her arched brows and gives me big hopeful eyes.

“I'd love to.” I smile back at her, feeling even more honored, but sad at the same time when I think of what my situation will be by then. “I'll be back to being a maid by the time you say, ‘I do.’”

She nibbles on the inside of her lip. “You're still seeing how things go with Knight, right?”

I shrug and keep my palms up. “I don't know.”

“Okay, let's put me on pause for a moment and talk about Saint-Tropez.”

“It might not be best to talk about that.” I can't help the dullness in my tone.

Her smile fades. “What happened? In the little time we spoke while you were away, it sounded like you were having a blast. “

“I was.”

We didn't get a chance to speak that much on the phone. I usually don't call her at all when she's with Chad because I respect the time she has with him. Also, this was the first time I had a man in my life who made me think of nothing else but him.

“Tell me what happened. I was so excited to hear he took you to Saint-Tropez. And you sounded happy. What's changed?”

“Everything, and I suppose nothing.”

“Tell me everything and we'll figure it out.”

We sit together on the sofas near my desk, and I give her the full rundown of my stay in Saint-Tropez with Knight and his family and the beautiful time we had.

“That sounds amazing, Aurora.”

“I know, but I think things have gone back to how they were before.”

“How can they be? Maybe he really is just busy.” She nods as if she's certain that's the answer.

“Or maybe things have just run its course.”

“I don't believe that for a second.”

“He's Knight Grayson. He can do anything.” If he chooses to, he can decide to drop you in a heartbeat before you take your next breath.

“You're his wife. And, Aurora, don't you see this newly found closeness could be the opening to get him to come around to using your mother's designs?”

I've already thought of that. There were moments when we were in Saint-Tropez when I wanted to bring it up, but I didn't want to spoil what we had going on. Now that I'm back in the sphere of uncertainty, I'm not sure how I would approach him. Everything just feels so stagnant to me.

“I'm going to ask. I just don't know when. Things are always so unpredictable when it comes to Knight.”

“Listen to me. Your time in Saint-Tropez sounds too precious for him to forget what happened. It sounds like you guys really bonded.”

“We did.” That wasn’t my imagination. Those parts were all real because it was just us on an island enjoying each other. “It was amazing, Madison.”

“Sounds amazing to me, too,” a deep, cold voice says from the door.

I haven’t heard that voice—the voice of my almost-fiancé—in such a long time I almost believe I imagined it, but I get the confirmation when Madison and I look across the room and find Nathan standing by the door.

My stomach squeezes on seeing him. The last time we were together, he was being led away by the FBI with his father. I almost married this man.

*Almost.*

The conversation I had with Dad weeks ago comes back to my mind. Dad said Nathan had left the country for a while to lay low after the scandal.

It seems he’s back. And here. *For me?*

I certainly hope not. Of course, I remember the other thing Dad told me about Nathan. That he still hoped to be with me.

He would know by now that I’m married. Is he here to start the clock?

Madison stiffens next to me, and disgust curls her lips. It’s strange that for all that Knight has done, she’s never hated him the way she does Nathan.

“Nathan.” Lord knows I tried to say that without the cringe in my voice.

“Hi.”

“I’ll leave you two to talk.” Madison stands. I noticed how she didn’t even say hi to him. “I’ll grab some coffee and come back in a bit.”



“Sure,” I answer, trying to push aside the angst I feel for seeing him.

With her head held high, she struts past Nathan.

Her overt rudeness has never bothered him, and it doesn't now.

Nathan walks in. This is the most casual I've seen him in a while. He's wearing a ribbed, long-sleeved T-shirt and dark jeans. He doesn't look like he's been suffering, either. He still wears arrogance like no one I've ever met. Not even Knight.

On Knight, it's sexy. On Nathan, it's like the kind of arrogance you want to avoid at all cost.

“No hug?” He raises a brow. “You were mine the last time I saw you.”

I get up and give him a hug. Then I try to think of being cordial for Dad's sake. “I just wasn't expecting you. Dad told me you were away.”

“I got back last night. Thought I'd swing by to see you. And congratulate you, I suppose.” He glances at my rings.

“Thanks.”

“Your father told me the situation, but it sounds like you like this guy.”

“He's good to me. There's nothing not to like.” That's a bold-faced lie. There are tons about Knight I still dislike, but Nathan doesn't need to know that.

“Be careful of Knight Grayson, Aurora. He's not the kind of guy to fall for, and definitely not the kind of guy you should trust.”

“You sound like you know him.”

“I know *enough*.” There's a bitter edge to his words I don't like. “I was far from perfect, but you *knew* me. We've known each other since we were kids. You know I would have always honored that relationship if I were with you. I still want that chance.”

I didn't expect him to jump right in and get to the point so quickly.

"You know I'm married." I swallow hard.

"But that will come to an end in six months' time. By then, I'm hoping to have rebuilt what I've lost. And if your father agrees, I'll be working with him soon. It would make perfect sense for us to be together."

*Business, business.* Nothing is ever mentioned about love.

I could never love him, though. Even if we'd known each other for a hundred years, this is all we'd ever be—children of our fathers who were best friends.

"I only have your best interest at heart," he adds. "At least you know that. Knight Grayson is only in this for himself. Don't make the mistake of forgetting that."

"Well, it's been good to see you," I say in a hurried tone, changing the subject with the hope of getting rid of him. The last thing I need is to have anyone confuse me more about Knight. Least of all Nathan.

He grins, the look in his eyes understanding the hint. "Alright, I see. It was good to see you too."

He leans forward and plants a kiss on my forehead. It's harmless, but it makes me feel awkward.

"Just remember what I said. See you again soon."

I say nothing.

I just watch him as he turns and leaves. I'm sure he could see that I'm different from what I was before.

Back then, I was thinking of my father, and I didn't even know just how bad things were. That debt has already been paid with my marriage to Knight, so the only allegiance I owe when my six months are up with Knight is to myself.

I don't know what I'll be doing then, but I certainly won't be with anybody because it makes business sense.

Madison walks back through the door, nibbling on her inside lip in that habitual way.

“Did you hear what he said to me?” I know she wouldn’t have gone too far that she couldn’t hear, and I don’t think she’d want to leave me alone with him either.

“Not everything, but enough to get that he doesn’t think you should trust Knight.”

“What do you think?” I search my best friend’s eyes, knowing she’s the person with my *best interests* at heart.

“I don’t care what that puffer fish said to you. He’s just a nasty little cockroach waiting to spread his bed and make a nest.” She rests her hands on my shoulders. “Girl, what you need to do is go find your husband. Only you know how you feel. If you think he’s avoiding you, go get his attention.”

“What if it doesn’t work?” I’d hate it if Knight shunned me away or put me in my place by reminding me I’m just a business contract. It’s not like Nathan is completely wrong.

“It will work.” Madison gives me a reassuring nod.

“How are you so sure?”

A saucy smile spreads across her glossy lips. “The man is crazy about you, so I *know* it will work. He’ll want to see you. Doing it this way will also be on your terms. You don’t have to sit up at home waiting for him.” She tightens her grip on my shoulders. “And while you’re at it, it wouldn’t hurt if you kill two birds with the same stone and get him to see the light with your mother’s designs. Do those two things, and you’ll ease a chunk of your worries.”

I shove Nathan out of my mind and think about what I could do to see Knight. The more I think, the more attractive the idea sounds.

I already know where Knight is going to be later. He’ll be at that hockey game.

*And* I just might have the perfect idea.

Or in the worst-case scenario, it’ll be a perfect disaster.

Either way, I need to do something. I don’t think I could go back to how we were before, where I didn’t see him at all for weeks on end.

God ... listen to me.

What has this ruthless devil done to me?

*Everything I never wanted but never knew I needed.*

# Chapter 34

## *Knight*



**J**ericho and I are sitting side by side in the premium rink-side seats at Madison Square Garden for tonight's ice hockey game.

Tonight is a battle for the final cup in the championships that will end the season. It's against the Hawks and the Berserkers.

Luc plays defense for the Hawks and is a force to be reckoned with. I imagine he and his team will win the cup.

We're here to support him, along with our other friends from high school. They're pumped, but Jericho and I are like two storm clouds floating together in the sky.

Understandably, Jericho is still riled up about Grandfather's request.

And I'm still stuck in my feelings about Aurora and the sale of Sunset Cove.

I should be at home, but I'm here out of duty to Luc, as this is the biggest game of his career.

Our trio has always been inseparable. No matter what we're doing or wherever we are in the world, we always try to be there for each other for these sorts of important events.

Luc flew across the country for my wedding just to watch me say 'I do'. He left straight after the ceremony to get back in time for a game he was playing that night, so I most definitely owed him my presence on what could be the most important night of his life.

I suppose I'm also here because I'm a little concerned about Jericho. At the moment, I have no idea what he's going to do, but I know he wants his share of the empire. Which means finding a wife.

Although he hasn't said anything to me, I think the idea might be harder to wrap around his mind because of whatever dark secrets lie in his past.

Dark secrets he won't tell me.

The closest thing he's had to a serious relationship was with a girl back in high school he wasn't supposed to be seeing. He never spoke about her, not even to tell me her name. I only knew she existed because that's all he told me. I suspected she might have been linked to his dark secrets because he went through a spell of depression. Every time I've tried to ask him about it, he shoots me down.

I just know whatever happened was of the fucked up variety. At the time I was going through my own shit with Giselle. I'd just found out how sick she was, so I might not have been there for Jericho as much as he needed me.

The whistle blows cutting into my unhinged thoughts and the game starts. The crowd goes wild, and the players start the battle for the cup. That's when my mind checks out and drifts right back to Aurora.

When it comes to her, I'm stuck between the decisions of what I need to do and what I *should* do.

It's that fucking gray area again, the intersection between right and wrong. I've existed in that sphere for so many years, I should know how to play this game by now, but I don't. It's not as simple as selecting one thing or another without repercussions I don't want.

Time checks out, ticking on and on, and suddenly, the game is over.

The Hawks have won. People are cheering, standing, and screaming. Fans are going wild. Luc is holding the cup, and I missed it all.

I missed whatever he did. I missed whatever his team did. I missed the moment I came to witness.

I glance at Jericho, who's already looking at me and shaking his head.

He hasn't said much tonight, but I know his thoughts about me haven't changed. He still thinks I'm in love with my wife and that I'm living up Grandfather's ass.

The more time I've had to think about his accusations, the more I realize he could be right about both.

The closing ceremony rounds up the night, and we make our way to the locker room area to wait for Luc.

Once he's finished signing autographs for his admiring fans and puck bunnies, we're going to the sports bar for a drink with the other guys.

One drink, then I'm heading home.

I need to see Aurora. I don't want to get back too late and risk finding her asleep again.

I don't know what I'm going to say or do when I see her, but I have to see her.

Jericho and I stand by a wall with posters of the leading hockey players from both teams who were playing tonight. Fans and puck bunnies have already started to gather down the corridor where Luc and his team are stationed.

As usual, there are a lot, and more filling the space. I just pray this doesn't take too long. The security here is usually good with setting limits on how many people they allow down here, so here's hoping that stands tonight.

"I'm going to head home as soon as I can," I tell Jericho when he leans against the wall.

"I think you should." He raises a questioning brow. "You haven't seen Aurora since you've been back, have you?"

"No."

"Have you spoken to her?"



“Not really.” I rest my back against the space next to him.

“Is that wise, Knight?”

“She knows I’ve been in meetings.”

“Even I know that’s not good enough.” He chuckles. “But then again, I’m not the one who’s pussy whipped.”

“I’m not fucking pussy whipped.” I frown.

After a beat, an amused expression brightens his face, making him look more like himself, then he takes out a cigarette and lights up even though this is a no-smoking zone.

“How about we see about that?” He glances over my shoulder. “But please don’t kill anybody tonight. I think we’re in enough trouble as it is.”

I turn to where Jericho is looking, and my eyes land on Luc standing outside his locker room with a host of puck bunnies gathered together, ready to fall at his feet and worship him.

He smiles and kneels down to sign his name on a leggy platinum blonde wearing a pair of short shorts and a tied-up shirt pushing up her breasts.

But there’s something familiar about that girl.

I take a good look when she turns and see she’s not any old blonde.

She’s *mine*.

My wife.

*My* girl.

The sight of her stirs every lust-filled memory I’ve tried to keep at bay and my mind clutters with all sorts of scandalous images of her.

The way she looked when I was buried deep inside her sweet pussy. The way she looked when I brought her to orgasm again and again. The way she looked naked and pressed up against my body as we lay on the beach under the stars that filled the Saint-Tropez sky.

What is Aurora doing here?

*And with Luc?*

He knows she's not his to touch, and he definitely knows not to touch what's mine.

The motherfucker runs his finger over her smooth thigh and holds her in place so he can start scribbling his name on her.

My temper flares like someone added a dose of napalm to my nerves, and I'm moving like a raging bull toward him before the next thought can process in my mind.

"Thank you so much. I've never had a professional hockey player sign his name on me before," Aurora says, giggling, a sound only I should hear in that sassy, sexy tone.

"Anytime, Mrs. G," Luc replies, looking at her like a gibbering fool, absorbing her beauty. How typical of him, thinking with his dick.

*And Mrs. G?*

Now that I've heard him say that, the fool can't even use the excuse of not knowing who Aurora is. He couldn't have tried it anyway because he was at my fucking wedding and watched her take her vows to me. But knowing Luc, he would try anything.

I see red as his wandering eyes drift over her ass when he starts writing his surname.

That's all he gets to do—*start*. When I reach him, he notices me just in time to stand and register that it's me coming for his ass.

I growl as I shove his chest so hard he goes flying back into the lockers behind him, making the ones that aren't fixed to the wall crash to the ground.

The puck bunnies scatter like mice, and Luc glares at me as if I'm death emerging from the flames of Hell ready to scald the flesh off his body.

We're both big guys with the same sort of muscle and height. Luc gets into fights all the time on the ice, so he's used to it, but me... I only do it if I have to or if someone pisses me the fuck off. Like now.

At these times, there's no reasoning with me, and it doesn't matter who you are or how experienced you are at beating the shit out of someone. I will be your equal.

"Knight, what the fuck is wrong with you?" Luc shouts, shoving me back when he regains his footing.

"Are you serious?" My voice carries down the hall and probably into the heavens. "How fucking dare you sign your damn name on my *wife*?" I shove him again, harder, and it's like we're in high school again, fighting over shit, except we're not. This isn't high school anymore and I might have lost my mind since.

"Goddamn it, Knight, it's just a fucking signature."

"I don't give a shit. You don't touch my wife. She's not one of your damn groupies. She's mine."

"Knight, stop it." Aurora grabs my arm with dainty, warm hands and tries to pull me toward her.

I look down at her. When I take in the guilt mingling with the hint of surprise in her bright eyes, I realize why she's here.

She's not here for Luc or anybody else. She's here for me. She would have seen me standing in the hallway with Jericho before she saw Luc, and she would have most definitely known him touching her dressed like that would have made me go batshit crazy.

Regardless, I'm still mad as hell for seeing another man—a man who isn't me—touch her.

Luc doesn't come for me again, and I hold off too, knowing my next hit will either cause serious damage to a lot of bones or maybe kill his ass.

"Be grateful we're friends," I seethe.

"Yes, *friend*. Thank God I know you're fucking crazy." He smirks. "Knight, it was just a signature, man."

“I don’t care. Don’t do it again.”

I pull Aurora to me and crouch down to wipe Luc’s name off her leg, but when I try, the ink doesn’t give. There’s not even a smear when I rub my finger hard over her skin.

*Permanent ink.*

*Motherfucker.*

I glare back at Luc, who is now holding back a smile. Jericho has joined him, and the two can see what’s happening to me, but I know when they look at me with that sinister humor lining their expressions like the silver on a cloud that they see more than me being pissed over a signature.

They’re watching me unfold with every emotion this woman I’ve claimed has pumped into me, and they know I’m not just fucking pussy whipped.

I straighten, take Aurora’s hand and lead her away. “We’re going home.”

Home, where I can gather myself and lick my wounds in private.

*And her.*

# Chapter 35

## *Aurora*



**D**ear Madison,

*You know how you said I should do something to get my husband's attention. I did. Behold, it worked, but now I think he's gone crazy.*

As Madison would say, crazier than a sack full of raccoons.

We march down the hallway like we're heading out to battle, the thud of Knight's heavy boots and the click of my heels mingling with the excited chatter coming from groups of people gathering to see their favorite hockey players.

I don't think I've ever seen Knight look so enraged.

I thought he was going to kill Luc. If I'd known he was going to lose his shit the way he did, I would have done something else.

The signature thing just sort of happened out of the blue. I didn't even go down to the locker rooms to get it. I went to find Knight.

The guard upstairs directed me down there because he was told that's where Knight and Jericho were meeting Luc after the game. It was like getting a backstage pass, which I got with no problem because the guard recognized me from all the wedding publicity, the run up to it, and most of all, being the wife of one of the most popular men in New York.

I saw Knight in the hallway with Jericho straightaway when I went down.

Luc came out of the locker room at that moment to his host of admiring fans. I simply stopped to say hi because we briefly met at the wedding, and then I made a joke about getting his autograph next time as I didn't have any paper. That's how he ended up signing my leg.

It was supposed to be harmless fun, which seemed so at the time, but I totally realize now why it wouldn't be. Especially since Luc's name is inked on me in permanent ink. I almost feel that might have been on purpose. I saw the way Luc smirked at Jericho when they watched Knight trying to get it off me.

"Knight, slow down. I'm going to trip." I was struggling to keep up with his pace as it was, but he speeds up as we walk out of the stadium.

"If you wanted to walk like a normal person, you shouldn't have worn those things." He glances at my heels with that permanent scowl riding his face.

"They're called heels," I scuff.

He flicks the collar of his leather jacket up, then looks away. "They look like weapons to me."

"Then I should keep them far away from you. Isn't Luc supposed to be your best friend?"

He glares at me. "You are my wife. *He's* not supposed to have his hands all over you."

"But his hands weren't all over me."

That glare of his intensifies, telling me that's the wrong answer.

"Why are you here, Aurora?" He looks me up and down, taking in my not-like-me attire of short-shorts, sky-high heels, and a shirt I've tied up in the front with nothing but my bra underneath. It was all for him. This was supposed to be how I planned to get his attention, not that other thing.

"I wasn't sure if I was going to see you tonight, and I needed to speak to you."

"I was just on my way home." He looks me over again.

“Like last night?” I can’t hide the sarcasm in my voice. It’s as plain as the anger oozing out of his pores. “This is the first time I’ve seen you since Saint-Tropez.”

He clenches his jaw. “We’ll finish this conversation at home.”

We take the corner, then we’re in the parking lot.

My jaw nearly hits the ground when we stop at a black motorcycle and he’s handing me the helmet that was hooked on the handle.

I stare at the helmet as if it might kill me if I touch it.

“What is this?” I switch my gaze back and forth between Knight and the motorcycle. “Where is your car? Or Ryan?” I search the area for one of his many Porsches or Ryan sitting in the front of the Maybach, but I find nothing.

“The car’s at home, and Ryan is wherever he is. He doesn’t drive me everywhere. This is my motorcycle and how we’re getting home.”

*Oh my God.* I should have stayed home. There’s no way I’m riding on that thing with him. Motorcycles have always terrified me. I don’t even like bicycles.

Once again, Knight Grayson has managed to shock the hell out of me. I would never imagine him riding around on a motorcycle, of all things. But look at him dressed in his leather biker jacket and black jeans—he looks like the guy who would. This is just like that day when I saw him working with the contractors at Sunset Cove.

“I’m walking or taking a taxi.” I press my lips together with open displeasure.

“Oh no, no, no. Don’t skip out on me now, Mon Cherie. I’m just getting started with you.”

I swallow hard. “What does that mean?”

“You think you’re going to get off easy for tonight? No. Now, get on the bike.”



“I don’t like motorcycles. They’re too fast. I’ve never ridden on one. I don’t know how.”

The corners of his lips lift into a wicked smile, and he moves in so close I expect him to kiss me. “You ride it the same way you ride me, by holding on tight. When you get tired, I’ll do the rest of the work, *wife*.”

My nerves slip at the erotic mental image of us consuming everything else in my mind.

His smile widens, and he pushes the helmet toward me again.

I take it and pray I survive this trip, let alone the night.

He gets on the motorcycle first and slips on a pair of Oakleys.

Taking a deep, deep breath, I put the helmet on. At least it smells like him, and somehow, the scent of woodland and musk gives me comfort.

Knight helps me get on the back of the motorcycle, and I mold myself to him like plaster on a wall, securing my arms around his waist, my fingers digging into the raw granite muscles beneath his jacket.

“Hold on to me,” he reminds me, as if I could forget.

At the roar of the engine, I’m already tightening my grip, then we take off and it feels like we’re going to fly up into the sky.

I close my eyes because everything is going by too fast and too quickly.

My heart is in my throat, pounding right up into my head.

Fear assails my nerves, and I feel like I’m going to have a panic attack, but then I begin to calm slowly, slowly, slowly as I focus on Knight’s scent and his hard body against mine when we cruise down the road.

The thrill of the speed seeps into me, and the trepidation I first felt slips away drop by drop. I even open my eyes from

time to time so I can see what everything looks like when it seems like you're going at warp speed.

I get lost in time until we slow down and turn onto a familiar road. It's then I realize we're nearly home. Another five minutes, and we are.

The gates swing open, and we're rolling down the driveway, then we slow to a stop outside *his* garage—a place I've never been.

The automatic doors open like the entrance to the Batcave, and we drive into the large spacious garage filled with an assortment of cars and motorcycles.

At first view, I count ten cars and six motorcycles, and they're all of the hundreds-of-thousands-dollar and above variety.

I assumed he had a lot of cars because I've seen him with at least three and the garage looked massive from the outside, but this is way more than I imagined.

I can't believe I've lived in this house for almost two months and not known all these vehicles were inside here.

We park. Knight gets off the bike first, then helps me. I'm grateful he's holding me because my legs give when I try to stand on my own.

“Steady?” The hint of a smile touches his face, but it's brief.

“Yes.”

“Good. Come.”

“Where are we going now?”

He takes my hand and starts leading me in the opposite direction of where I thought we'd go—which was inside the house.

“I'm going to get that thing off you. I'm not fucking my wife with another man's name written on her.”

My mouth falls open, and I glare at him, but he's not looking back at me. Knight has his head held high, his jaw set,

and his focus on the door ahead, which must lead to the back of the house.

I keep my gaze locked on him, but it hasn't escaped me that the mention of *fucking* has stated his obvious intentions for me later. The anticipation of having him inside me again has me shamefully wet. I'm so wet I can feel the moisture beading between my thighs. My damn mouth is also watering, and my skin is flushing all over with the wild fire of need.

Damn me, and damn him too. I realize I want this man so badly he could walk me to the edge of the earth, and I'd still follow him just for one kiss.

It's been too long since the last time I felt his lips on mine and even longer

since my body joined with his.

That last time, we made love on the beach just before we left our little paradise island. Now we're here.

Knight opens the door and ushers me outside at the back of the house. I recognize this section very well after my countless walks to the beach.

Across from us is his workshop. That's exactly where he leads me.

We go inside but approach the section in the back that houses another worktable. The sculptures of Giselle and the other figures are on the other side, so I can't see them.

*Good.* For some reason, since being back in New York and knowing what happened to Giselle, the thought of looking at replicas of her twists my insides. I also don't want to feel guilty for that pang of envy which hasn't left me.

It's there now, even though I can't see her.

Knight walks me up to the table, then moves to the row of drawers next to us.

"What are you going to do to me?" I watch him rummaging through the drawers. "I've had permanent ink on me many times. It comes off in a few days. A week max. Can't we just go to bed? It's late."

He cuts me a sharp glance. “You heard what I said before, Goddess. And like I said, you’re not going to get off that easy.”

“I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“*Really?*”

“Yes, and like *I* said before,”—I borrow his tone—“I was looking for you.”

Another hard glance comes my way, but he focuses back on the drawers and grabs a bottle of some kind of solvent and a bag of cotton wool.

He makes his way back to me with it, opening the solvent and dabbing a swab of cotton wool onto the top.

He sets it on the floor then grabs my leg and begins wiping away Luc’s name. The ink fades and blurs out, becoming a dark smudge marring my skin until Knight wipes that away too.

“Good, it’s now gone.” He gazes up at me with a wicked glint in his eyes. “Lesson time.”

“*Lesson time?*”

He pushes to his feet, towering over me. “Yes, wife.”

My composure retreats like a losing army running for their lives as that darkness I’ve witnessed in him on several occasions returns.

He loops a finger around the back of my shorts and pulls down the zipper in front.

“Take this off for me. And your panties.”

“Knight—”

“Do it. But keep the heels on.” Dark heat pulses in his eyes, reaching out to me with invisible fingers.

I do as he says, rolling my shorts and panties down my legs.

“Good girl. Now bend over the table.”

My breath catches, but the deep sexual hunger stirring within me makes me obey that command too.

I watch him when he walks away again and grabs a mirror that was wedged between the cupboard and the wall.

He sets the mirror down so I can see myself, then he goes back and gets something that looks like a tattoo gun from one of the bottom drawers.

No, it doesn't just look like a tattoo gun. It *is* one.

“Knight, what the hell are you doing?”

A heavy hand rests on the center of my back, holding me still, then he glides a finger over the slit of my wet opening, and I can see him smiling in the mirror.

“You're wet again for me, Aurora.” He rubs my folds, silencing any further protests when he pushes his fingers into my pussy.

God, that feels so good. So, so damn good. And I'm like a hungry dog, salivating for his touch.

“If you want anything more from me tonight, you better keep still.” The deep, dusty murmur of his voice is laced with an edge of control.

I must have lost my mind somewhere in the ocean because here I am again, obeying at the promise of having more of him tonight.

Knight fills ink into the gun, and then he's grabbing my ass cheek. All I hear next is a buzzing sound as he starts writing something onto my skin.

I keep my eyes on the mirror, but I can't see what he's writing/tattooing on me.

“You wanted to talk. How about we talk now?” he says after a few beats of silence. “Lesson number one, you never go to a hockey game dressed like that without me. Luc is my best friend, but he's a dog.”

“And what are you? Aren't you a dog too?”

“No, mon cherie. If I’m with you, I’m with you.” He runs his hand up my back and laces his hands through my hair so he can get a handful, then he lowers to the back of my head and makes a point of making sure I’m watching us in the mirror. “The moment you come on my dick without a condom, you’re mine.”

My breath stalls in my lungs at this realization.

“You’re mine, contract or not.” His voice dips low, and I feel it deep in my core, stroking me from the inside out. “You’re mine wife or not, you’re mine till death do us part, but since you call me Hades, I might just keep you in death, too.”

The buzzing of the gun continues, but his fingers on my skin are heated as his meaningful words in my ears awaken every cell in my body.

“Do you hear me, Aurora?” Gently, he tugs on my hair.

“Yes,” I breathe out.

“Lesson number two, mon cherie. If you want my attention, just call me. Don’t do *this* again to me, ever. I will kill for you.” He licks the lobe of my ear and guides my face to his.

I wait for his lips to press against mine, but they never come. He teases me with the expectation, smiles like the devil he is, and pulls back.

I look at him, taking in those words, but he shifts away, so I have to return my gaze to the mirror.

“Lesson number three: always tell me the truth. The whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

“I never lied.” I speak to his reflection in the mirror.

“No, but you weren’t completely honest either.” He rubs over my ass and finds his way to my pussy. There he plays with me and lowers his mouth to lick from the start of my clit and suck on the hard nub until I’m moaning. “So, here’s that question again: why were you at the arena tonight?”

“I told you.” I pant when he increases his suckle and begins swirling his tongue around my clit. “I... went looking

for you. To talk.”

He stops his suckle and strokes my back. “Talk about what?” A playful smile dances on his lips.

“Sunset Cove. I haven’t spoken to you about it for weeks. I want you to use my mother’s designs. I don’t think it’s fair to push me out. It’s important to me, and I can’t see why you won’t allow me such a small thing.”

He kisses my shoulder. “I’m listening, Goddess, but I don’t believe that’s why you came to see me. If you wanted to talk about Sunset Cove, you would have done so in Saint-Tropez. There were several times when you could have gotten me to agree to *anything*.”

“*Anything*?” This new information hits me hard, and I’m listening too.

“Anything.”

His hand drifts down to where my shirt is tied, and he undoes it, sliding it down my shoulders until it comes off.

He takes off my bra next, leaving my heaving breasts bobbling. He catches the nipple of my right breast and massages the tip.

“Now tell me.” He catches my nipple between his thumb and forefinger, gently squeezing. “Give me the real reason you wanted to see me tonight.”

His eyes in the mirror’s reflection hold me in place. I stare back at myself, bent over his table, with him fondling my breast with one hand and holding the tattoo gun in the other.

“Tell me, Aurora.”

*Tell him and bare my truth?*

Do I have a choice? Probably not. I think if I kept quiet, he’d know anyway and try to tease it out of me so he could hear me say it.

He wants to hear me confess that my walls of defense have come crashing down around me and all I want is him.

I'm not the woman who walked into the Astoria months ago, handed him that contract, and told him that all of this was for her father.

The truth is it was, but it wasn't.

It was for me.

"Say the words," he whispers over my skin, unlocking the words from my mind.

"I want you," I say. "I wanted you."

"That's exactly what I thought." He turns me to face him. "Look back in the mirror, Goddess."

I do and widen my eyes when my gaze lands on my reflection in the mirror and I see he's tattooed the words *Mrs. Knight Grayson* on my ass.

The inky black swirling letters on my fair skin should shock me, but they feel so right on me, they look perfect. *Everything* looks perfect.

He catches my face and guides me back to him.

"*Mine*. Now you won't forget who you belong to," he mutters. "You're mine. *Mrs. Knight Grayson*."

With those potent words spoken, he finally, finally kisses me, sending a maddening dose of need and pleasure rocketing through me.

We kiss like we need each other to survive and like we might die if we stop. Then he sets me on the table, shrugs out of his clothes, and fucks me with the same possession.

His ruthless cock slams into me over and over again, and that's how we continue the rest of the night.

\* \* \*

The sun wakes me the next morning with its luminous rays.

The moment I open my eyes, and my gaze connects with the walnut wood wardrobe and the scent of musk tickles my



nose I know I'm in Knight's room.

I haven't been in here since before the wedding. When I got back from Saint-Tropez, I didn't want to risk being presumptuous, so I retreated to my room.

Now I'm here, but where is he?

The last time I woke up in here, he was gone, and it felt like we just had a one-night stand where I was supposed to leave after with no questions asked, no strings attached, and no expectations.

I truly hope this time won't be like that. Last night was different. Different than even when we were in Saint-Tropez. It felt like I truly gave myself to him and bared my soul.

I roll onto my side and get my answer. My heart lifts with shameless delight when I see Knight sitting on the window bay, smoking a cigar. And good heavens is the man something to look at.

His hair is just-had-wild-sex-with-my-wife messy. His olive skin still has a deeper tan from the island sun, and with his muscles and tattoos on show, he looks like he could have walked out of a fantasy.

Truth be told, he did. He walked right out of one of mine and materialized into the vision before me.

God help me, I want him all over again.

I sit up, pulling the sheets up over my breasts, and we stare at each other for a few languid seconds of silence.

"Sleep well?" Knight asks, taking a draw from his cigar and blowing out a plume of smoke.

"Yes. You?"

"I didn't sleep all that much. I like watching you sleep more." He gives me a boyish grin. "You're like a mermaid."

I giggle. "Is that good or bad?"

"Good." His gaze runs over me. "So, last night was intense."

“And you seriously tattooed your name on me.”

“It will come off in about a month.” His smile brightens with mischief and charm. “That’s the sort of ink I use when people want to test out a design but aren’t sure.”

I pull my knees up to my chest, mesmerized to learn something more about him. “You did tattoos?”

“I used to.” He stretches his arms wide, showing off the display of artwork on his torso. “I did these and the ones on my leg. Jericho did the one on my back.”

I chuckle. “Wow. What else am I going to find out about you, Knight Grayson? Every day there’s something new.”

“There’s so much more. I’m sure there’s more to you too.”

“There is.” Things I want him to know and things I don’t. Like my sordid past with Scott. I’m hoping I can push that into the back of the beyond if I get the job with *People Magazine*.

“I’m moving your things in here later,” he suddenly declares, surprising me.

“What?”

“This is your room now. We can turn one of the other rooms into an office for you to write in, but you sleep in here with me from now on.” The fervency in his tone suggests he’s thought about this idea a lot. I have, too.

“Really?” I rasp.

“Yes. If there’s anything else you need, I’ll sort it out.”

There is one thing. The one and only thing I’ve wanted from him.

“Last night you said there were moments in Saint-Tropez when I could have gotten you to do anything. Did you mean it?”

He pulls in a slow, measured breath, clearly knowing what I’m going to say next.

“I did.”

“Is that still true?”

“Yes,” he answers without thought.

“Sunset Cove, Knight. I know you hate the forties, but you have so much, I don’t think this would bother you. My mother and I came from nothing.” It’s always so hard for me to talk about that time in my life. It feels like reopening a wound once it’s healed. “We were so poor at one point, we couldn’t eat. Getting a place like Sunset Cove was her life’s work. She couldn’t wait to bring her designs to life. That’s why it would mean everything to me if you could just allow me to use them. It wouldn’t affect any of the renovation work or rebuild. I was going to renovate the place anyway. The plans for the interior design are all I’m asking about. Please.” My voice drops to a hush.

He leans forward, puts his cigar out, and my entire body lifts when he nods.

“Okay, alright. You can do it.”

The exhilaration of hearing him agree has me scrambling off the bed and rushing over to him with the sheet barely wrapped around me.

I rush to his arms, and he takes me, pulling me into his lap.

“Thank you so much.” I touch his face, running my fingers over his beard.

“It’s okay.” He smiles, but there’s an uneasiness in his eyes. “Aurora, I might want to do different things with Sunset Cove.”

“I just want to use my mother’s designs. That’s all. Something from her that will never die.”

“Okay. Looks like you got me wrapped around your finger.” He briefly brushes his forehead over mine.

“Does that mean you’re mine too?”

He touches my face and strokes my cheek. “Do you want me to be?”

The question feels like the most important one I’ve ever been asked. “Yes.”

“Then I’m yours.”

I smile down at him, feeling whole for the first time in forever.

I lean down and kiss him, allowing the thrill of being Mrs. Knight Grayson to steal my heart away, the same way he did.

*My Hades.*

# Chapter 36

# *Knight*



I feel like the ultimate betrayer sitting here across from my grandfather and Vladimir in the meeting room.

They're looking through Aurora's mother's designs on the table, along with Skye's portfolio.

As I watch them I feel no different to the friend who stabbed Julius Caesar in the heart or Judas with his betraying kiss.

This meeting is to touch base with the developments of Sunset Cove, which both Vladimir and my grandfather are happy about.

It's been two weeks since I agreed to using Aurora's mother's designs, and not a day has gone by where I didn't feel like I'd thrown myself into an open grave.

I've been dreading this meeting since I found out about it the other day. I knew it would happen at some point. I just didn't know when.

Now I'm sitting here trying to look composed, but inside, I'm a mess of conflict.

I'm essentially discussing my future with two of the most powerful men on the planet and I'm in a position where I feel like I truly belong.

Both of which prove my father wrong. I'm at a level where my father can't touch me, and I have the added bonus that he never attained this level of accomplishment when he was my age.

Neither will Bastian. I worked for this through blood and sweat, but Bastian will always be handed things on a silver platter. That type of hand out works until it doesn't. That's when people begin to see you for who you are and what you can do.

It's the moment that defines you.

Getting control of Park Avenue is everything I could ever dream of and it seals my place in the Grayson line. More than anything, I know I've made my mother proud and everything I do and have done will provide some redemption from the horrible past we all had with my father.

But then, there's Aurora.

There's the knowledge that everything I do next will hurt her, and I know I've made things so much worse by agreeing to use her mother's designs.

I couldn't tell her no, though.

That last time she asked, I couldn't say no. Saying that word didn't come as easy as it had on the night of my grandparents' party.

After feeling that strong, magical connection between us, and hearing her speak so passionately about her mother's dreams and her own past, there was no way I could have denied her.

There are still things from my past that I haven't spoken about. Like everything to do with Giselle, so I understand why Aurora has never spoken to me about her past the way her father had, or talked about the way she watched her mother die. Both are dark elements that could taint your soul forever, and you become just like me. But I love that she seems to choose to remember the good things and the dreams people hold on to.

That's why I said yes. I agreed knowing the consequences could and most likely will fuck me over. But I'm hoping that maybe, just *maybe*, things might work out.

Maybe having her mother's designs put to use will be enough for Aurora, and perhaps seeing them come to life

might make her be okay with the sale of Sunset Cove in a few months.

As for everything else—*the darker parts of my plan and all my dirty work to blackmail her father and essentially steal her inheritance*—maybe those can stay buried with Pandora’s box in Hell.

“These are absolutely magnificent,” Vladimir says in a thick Russian accent, with a continuous nod of his head. His dark, shoulder-length hair brushes over his shoulders as he looks from me to my grandfather and his smile widens.

From what I know of this man, he rarely ever smiles. A smile isn’t something you’d expect to see on his face. His pit bull build and abrasive exterior make him look more like an old mafia don who has a permanent hit list inked in his mind, than a businessman.

“I’m glad you’re pleased with the developments.” Grandfather nods, matching the vibrancy in Vladimir’s smile.

“I’m more than pleased. I think the idea to use the forties as an inspiration is absolutely phenomenal. It will bring in the nostalgia which people associate with Sunset Cove from the classic Hollywood era.”

“We thought so too,” Grandfather booms.

At least Aurora was right. And surprisingly, I was wrong. Another rarity.

“What is the estimated finish date?” Vladimir’s eyes brighten, and I half expect to see dollar signs forming in his irises. I know he’s already thinking of how he’ll be able to monetize Sunset Cove once it’s done and its potential yearly turnover.

“We should be on schedule to finish everything in the next few months,” I answer, feeling like the betrayer again.

“Perfect. I would love to have this ready for the fall for my wedding anniversary. My wife is going to love this.”

*His wife.*

I have a wife too. A wife who is in love with Sunset Cove.



“Fall should be doable.” My voice holds an edge of listlessness, as if my mind has detached from my body.

“Great. Well, I’d best be on my way. It seems like everything is in hand here. I’m very happy about this investment.” Vladimir switches his gaze from me to Grandfather. “You always deliver, Bradford.”

“You know me.” Grandfather claps his hands. “We’ll continue to keep you updated along the way, and if you have any questions in the meantime, you know where to find us.”

“Certainly.” Vladimir dips his head. “Speak to you in a few weeks, then.”

“Until then.”

When he leaves, Grandfather stares at me with pride.

“Today marks another step in expanding the empire,” he states. “Vladimir is one of our biggest clients, not because of his money, but his contacts.”

“I know.” A man like Vladimir could earn us an easy extra billion just from those contacts, so his investment is not something I take lightly. It’s just the conflict of interest with everything else.

“Knight, you’ve truly exceeded my expectations on this project and gone above and beyond to seal this deal. I’ll be damn proud of you being the CEO of Park Avenue.”

“I appreciate that, Grandfather.” Every word I speak feels like I’m twisting that knife deeper into Aurora’s heart. I can’t even muster the strength to pretend I’m as happy as I should be about working on a project for a man like Vladimir.

“I know you do.” Grandfather smiles with pride. “I can’t wait to make everything official. As expected, Bastian is still trying to win me over. He’s secured several contracts in Japan to expand. While that’s truly impressive, you are who I want.”

“I appreciate that.” Fuck, this is so damn hard. Of course, fucking Bastian would still be trying to outdo me, even knowing I practically have this in the bag.

“How are things at home? You and Aurora seem to be getting on okay.”

“We are.” I’m not surprised he mentioned Aurora and me. He’s seen the way we are together. Everyone has.

“Looks like you got something else out of this. Not just Park Avenue.”

“I hope so.” All I have to do is find a way not to fuck things up.

“I like her, and it’s nice to see you happy. Married life suits you. You look settled.”

“I guess I am, and she does make me happy.”

“Then she’s a keeper, contract or not.”

I consider this and nod.

“I want the same for Jericho.” He sighs. “He might not be able to see my reasoning now, but if he takes me up on my offer, I’m sure he’ll see what I mean.”

“We can hope.” That is all I can say when it comes to Jericho.

The phone rings on the desk, and I feel like I’ve been saved from continuing this conversation.

“I’ll let you get that.” I stand.

“See you later. Well done again.”

I give him my usual respectful nod and leave the office.

I make my way to the second floor. There’s an indoor garden on the entire left side. I head there and walk out onto the balcony. I come here sometimes when I need a change of scenery and some extra peace to brainstorm my projects.

Resting my hands on the metal railings, I gaze ahead at the skyline, my thoughts clashing together worse than ever before.

What the hell am I going to do?

Aurora is never going to be okay with me selling Sunset Cove.

My heart was so fixed on getting the empire that this was never something I thought I had to worry about.

The door at the end of the balcony opens, and Jericho steps out.

He walks up to me, resting his hands on the balcony next to me. I can see he's the same as he was when we last saw each other.

"Just saw Vladimir leaving," he says. "He looked happy."

"He should be. He knows he's going to make a fortune from Sunset Cove."

"I take it you haven't spoken to Aurora yet."

My chest caves. "I can't. I keep thinking that maybe I can sort this out, so I get the girl and the empire."

"Unless Grandfather finds something else for you to do, or Aurora decides she wants to sell, I can't see that happening." He turns to lean against the rail.

"That's what worries me."

"I worry for you too." He releases a slow sigh. "Did you hear Bastian secured Japan?"

"I heard, and Grandfather is impressed."

"It is impressive. I know that Grandfather has tried to make sure we get a piece of the pie, but if you don't follow through with Sunset Cove, he *will* pick Bastian. No question about it."

As if the universe can hear us, Bastian and Father emerge from the coffee shop below.

We're too high and far away from them to see us, but if they looked up, they would.

The two are laughing the way father and son would.

The sight doesn't get to me like it used to, but today, it hits me in other ways, screaming at me that I mustn't lose the empire.

Jericho is right. Unless something changes with Grandfather—which is unlikely—or Aurora agrees to the sale—*which is even more unlikely*—I can't have the girl and the empire.

But that doesn't stop me from trying to find a way.

There has to be something I can do.

As unlikely as Aurora is to agree, she's my easiest option. Perhaps I can find a way to break the news of the sale to her gently, then take it from there.

If I do that, I have to pray it doesn't instigate another war between us where I still lose her. Especially if she finds out about everything else.

Regardless, I have to try.

I'm Knight Grayson, and that's what I do.

If a way exists, I'll find it because, my God, do I want both.

The girl and the empire.

# Chapter 37

## *Aurora*



**T**he next few months roll by seeing Knight and me in a blissful state of happiness.

I can hardly believe it's us. We've gone from being what we were to who we are now, the married couple who've spent the last three and a half months in a perpetual honeymoon state.

Life has also progressed in all the right ways outside of us.

*People Magazine* offered me an interview three days after receiving my application. I'll be seeing them a month from now. It's also been amazing watching Mom's designs come to life at Sunset Cove.

Both are astounding achievements, but the greatest feeling comes from being with Knight and the moments when I realize I love him.

I've fallen head over heels in love with my Hades. I can't even pinpoint the exact time it happened, like that special aha-moment you see in movies or read in books.

Love just became a part of me as if it was always there, then it grew and grew until it was flowing through my body like the blood in my veins.

I've been so, so happy.

Still, there are moments when I step outside that ball of bliss because I know something's not right with Knight.

During those moments, I witness a dark discomfort creep into his eyes. I'm always prompted to ask him about it, but I

feel I can't.

I get the same feeling when I want to ask him about Giselle.

Enough time has passed for me to broach the subject, but every time the thought enters my mind, I push it away hoping Knight will tell me on his own.

Since he hasn't, I can only assume he might not.

When he heads to his workshop, I know he's trying to work on the sculpture. That last one of her.

My envy metastasizes into something as huge as the universe when his mother visits and I hear Knight calling the sculptures The Giselle Collection.

He's in his workshop again now.

His mother left earlier, and he went straight inside the moment she was gone.

As it's nearly midnight, I decide to go out and see him. Just to check if he's okay. I find him sketching away at his desk with the dogs sitting by his feet. They perk up when they notice me. Knight looks at me too.

This is the first time I've actually seen him working on a sculpture, but I thought there would be more of it. All I can see is a stump of stone with nothing really done to it.

"Hi." I smile at Knight and give him a quick kiss when I reach him. "I thought I'd come by and check on you. Hope I didn't disturb you."

"No." He shakes his head. "You didn't disturb me at all."

"How's it going?" I look over the work in progress again.

"It's not going anywhere." His shoulders drop, and he raises a weary arm to rest on top of his head. "I don't think I'm going to be able to finish it."

"Maybe you just need some rest."

He shakes his head and drops his hands to his side. "No, it's not that. I've been resting for the last five years on this

one. I think it might be time to call it.”

He looks so tired and drained, but not the kind of tiredness or drained you’d feel from exhaustion. It’s more from the tiredness of grief. I know what that feels like.

“I don’t think I could finish it on time even if I tried.” He sighs. “The show is in a few months, and I’m just not feeling the inspiration to create this last piece. I hate leaving anything undone, but I think I’ve lost the vision for it. Or maybe I’m not supposed to finish it.”

I stare back at him, thinking of what to say. This is the most we’ve spoken about his sculptures, and given that we’re loosely talking about Giselle, it would be weird not to mention her in some way or another. This also feels like another opening I should take to talk to him about her, so I decide to take it.

“Maybe this last piece is difficult because it’s Giselle’s way of telling you what you’ve done is enough,” I offer with care and compassion. When Knight looks at me as if he appreciates my words, I feel like I’ve helped in some way.

“Maybe.” His gaze rivets to mine with a hint of sadness. “I’m sorry I haven’t spoken to you about her yet. I know my mother told you she died. It’s a difficult subject for me.”

“I figured it was.” I give him a smile of sympathy and understanding.

“You probably think all of this is odd too.” He motions at the collection in the other section.

“I don’t think it’s odd to honor someone you love who isn’t here anymore.” I touch his cheek and love the openness in his eyes. “I’d be the last person to think it was odd. Look at me with Sunset Cove.”

“I guess we have more in common than what I first realized. Death is never easy.”

“No. It’s not. My mother um ...” My voice catches in my throat and I have to drag in a deep breath to compose my mind and clear the bad memories from my sight. “It was awful the way I lost her.”



More sadness bleeds into his expression, reaching his eyes. "I'm sorry you went through that. Your father told me what happened."

That surprises me. "Did he?"

"Yes. He was worried about you. I assured him I'd take care of you."

I give him a gentle smile. "You have taken care of me."

"Not as much as I could have. I wanted to say something about your mother before but I didn't want to stir up any painful memories. I understand when you just can't talk about something that hurts you. It's the same for me."

"I thought so. That's why I haven't asked you about Giselle. I've wanted to for a while, though."

"I know."

"What happened to her, Knight?"

He glances at the floor for a moment. When he looks back at me, the guard that's normally covering his eyes is gone. "She had a rare form of Huntington's disease that became active in her teenage years. Unfortunately, she also had lupus."

"My God. I didn't know you could have those illnesses at the same time."

"It's incredibly rare." He nods, pressing his lips together. "We met in high school when I came to live in New York. When we were about sixteen, she took a turn for the worst. The years went by, and the doctors tried all sorts of different treatments to keep her going, but nothing worked. By the time we finished college, she had to live in a home. That's when things got really bad, and we knew by then that she only had a few years left to live. I did everything I could to give her more time, but I couldn't. It just didn't work."

As I listen to him, I swear I could be watching my father talk about all he did to save my mother.

"Is that how she died?" I search his eyes when they grow sadder.

“No. When the last treatment failed, she took her life, and I...found her. I don't think I was supposed to, but I did.”

My stomach turns inside out, sending tremors shooting down my spine. My hands fly up to my mouth and my breath stills. I never expected him to say that. Everything he told me was already bad, but that...

I can't imagine how he must have felt.

“Oh God, Knight. I'm so, so sorry”. My expression of sorrow doesn't feel like it's enough, especially when I read all the pain in his eyes.

“It's okay. She wanted to go out on her own terms, not because of her illness. She saw what the worry of it did to her family. And me. So she decided to leave us while she still had her dignity.”

My insides have tightened with sorrow wrapping around my lungs like a vice. I don't know what to tell him that sounds like the right thing. What could anyone say that sounds right after hearing such sad truths?

“I'm truly, truly sorry.” I reach out and take his hand. “I can't begin to imagine what you went through. Or her. She must have gone through so much to get to that stage.”

“She did. It was a difficult time in all our lives, but now... it's time to let go. That's why I'm sending this collection to my mother. Not being able to finish this last piece feels like I'm still hanging on, and I don't want to be.”

“I think you need to do what's best for you.”

“I think so, too, Goddess.” He brushes my cheek with his thumb and gives me a small smile.

“Thank you for telling me what happened to Giselle. I know it must have been difficult to open old wounds.”

“It was, but you needed to know. I don't want you to think I'm still hung up on my dead girlfriend.”

“I didn't think that.” I do my best to sound like the notion was the furthest thing from my mind, but it's a half lie. I don't think he's hung up on Giselle, but I also don't think he got

over her either. I can't blame him for that. I don't believe the relationship they appeared to have is something you ever get over, especially with how he lost her.

"Good. Come on, let's go to bed. It's late."

"Okay." We leave with the dogs, put them to sleep, then head up to bed, but I can't drift off.

I can't get Giselle out of my mind.

Knight and Giselle's story was full of sorrow, but it was also full of love.

As I watch night turn into day, I realize my problem, and it's not that I'm jealous of Giselle as a person.

I'm jealous that she was the keeper of all the parts of Knight I can't touch.

The parts I can't own with the ring on my finger.

Those are the sacred parts of his heart that make him create art inspired by her.

No matter what Knight and I have become, I will probably never own those parts of him, because we are a contract waiting to expire.

The thought hits me with a wave of desolation, and I realize the crux of my problem is that I *don't* want us to end.

The hard truth opens my eyes to this paradox I've fallen in. It's one I never saw coming and never thought I'd have to worry about.

I don't need to be told the Giselle and Knight would have been forever, it feels like that was a given.

But I'm just the temporary wife.

I get out of the bed and head down to the beach, where I sit for hours. As it's Saturday, I don't have to worry about going anywhere else for the day.

I sit there and think about what I'm doing, and what I'll do when I reach the end of my marriage.

It's funny how I've sat on this beach so many times wondering how I would survive living with Knight, yet now I'm wondering how I'm supposed to stop loving him.

It starts to drizzle, so I make my way back to the house, but damn me, just as I'm walking by the workshop, I'm drawn to go in.

Given my mood, I should keep walking and avoid the place, but as I've always succumbed to curiosity and all things bad for me, I go inside.

I head straight to the main statue of Giselle and stop before her. As usual, she's looking at me with that spark in her eyes. That radiance for life Knight captured so well, I can only imagine how many hours he must have spent staring at her.

As I observe her, I wonder what it must have been like for her to go through so much pain. What did she feel when she knew she was going to die and leave the man she loved behind?

Knight loved her, but she obviously loved him back. I can see it in her eyes.

"I see you found your way to the truth," a syrupy voice says from the door, shocking the hell out of me.

I nearly jump out of my skin but compose myself when I turn and find Chelle standing there.

She comes closer, holding a stack of folders to her chest. I'm surprised to see her here so early, but those folders are probably something Knight asked her to bring by.

She must have seen me come in here and decided to follow and torture me.

I've been thankful not to have any run-ins with her since the wedding, but from the I'm-the-head-bitch look on her face, it seems she's back in action.

"Is there something I can help you with, Chelle?" I ask, keeping my tone level.

"Nope." She smiles wide. "Seeing you looking at dear old Giselle is plenty enough. It looks like you figured out like the

rest of us that you can't compete with the dead girlfriend."

Her words hit me like a left hook to my gut, and I try to mask the truth with a hard glare.

"Why would I need to compete? I'm Knight's wife." I really, really try to sound confident, but I know I don't. So does she.

"Oh, please. Knight would've married *her* the proper way. She would've been proposed to, in some grand hall with the world watching. He would've put her on a pedestal for everyone to see and know that he made *that* girl his wife. You are just a contract, Aurora Wright." The sourness in her voice grips me to my core, as does her use of my maiden name. "It's only a matter of time before you see there is no competition with Giselle."

"That's enough!" Knight's voice cuts through the air with the sharpness of a blade.

Chelle and I turn to find him walking in, his eyes blazing, looking like he would incinerate her where she stands for what she said.

"Hi, Knight." She tries to compose herself but fails when she takes note of the rage oozing from him. "I was just—"

"Stop." The last time he looked this angry was the night of the hockey match, but I have to say right now is worse. "I can see and *hear* quite clearly what you're doing here."

"I was only telling her the truth." Chelle squares her shoulders while she stares back at Knight as if she had every right to say what she did to me. "You can't fault me for that."

"I don't think I'm in need of your services any longer," Knight declares, sounding like he's her judge, jury, and executioner.

My mouth hits the floor at the same time Chelle gasps, then she glares back at him as if he's just pulled the earth from beneath her feet and shoved her onto her ass.

"What? What the hell do you mean, you're no longer in need of my services?"

“It means you’re fired. I warned you that your job was on the line, but you wouldn’t listen. You have no respect for my wife, and you definitely have none for me. This is the end. Now leave.”

I’ve never seen Chelle look so defeated. A deadly shade of white has stolen the color from her skin, and although her mouth works as if she’s going to try and argue, she doesn’t.

She must know she won’t win against a man like Knight.

She’s worked with him long enough to know that would be like signing her own death certificate.

“Okay.” The simple word leaves her lips in a hushed whisper, and she walks toward him, handing over the files.

She glances back at me, giving me an icy stare. Then she walks out.

Knight comes closer, touches my cheek, and shakes his head. “I’m sorry for what she said to you.”

“It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not. Everything she said was completely unacceptable.”

“I know, but are you sure you should fire her?”

“Yes.” There’s a newfound determination I haven’t heard before in his voice.

“She’s been your assistant for years.” I don’t know why I’m bothering to say anything of the sort. I actually hate Chelle. I just feel bad she got fired because of me.

“Her years of service were the only reason I’ve given her chance after chance. Obviously, if she can talk to you like that, and with that attitude, she was never going to change.” He makes a really good point. I just can’t believe those words are coming from him.

“She’s been nothing but horrible to me, but I feel bad it came to this.”

“Don’t. Firing her was a long time coming, so please don’t worry about her. I’m sure she will be fine. Okay?” He holds

my gaze.

“Alright.”

“How about we go out for a late breakfast? You look like you could use a change of scenery.”

He glances back at the sculpture of Giselle, and I’m not sure if he suspects the reason I came in here. Chances are he might. The Knight I know would have asked me why I was in here in the first place. And if what Chelle said wasn’t true, he might reassure me that it’s not.

“I’d like that,” I answer despite the doubt in my tone.

“Let’s go.”

We leave, but Chelle’s cruel words stay with me.

She might be horrible in many ways and the queen of bitches, but she wasn’t wrong. I did find the truth.

And clarity. There’s no competition with Giselle because she was Knight’s soulmate.

I’m not.

# Chapter 38



## *Aurora*



**A**ll the sculptures are gone now—The Giselle Collection, and the others.

They left yesterday and are enroute to Marseilles.

I'm not sure if they were scheduled to leave so soon, but after what happened last week with Chelle in the workshop, I think Knight wanted them to depart sooner rather than later.

That workspace is clear now, as if he's going to start something new, but to me, the ghost of each sculpture of Giselle still haunts the place.

Her presence is still there, along with Chelle's haunting words of not being able to compete with Knight's dead girlfriend.

Worrying about things you can't control has never helped anybody. I know that all too well, especially when it comes to Knight and me, but I can't shake the sadness of our upcoming end from my heart.

It makes me want to pull back, fall back, and protect my heart from the grief of what I know will break me, but I know I can't do that either.

I just have to go with the motions like I'm trapped in a losing game.

We're supposed to be going out for dinner tonight. Knight is meeting me in an hour, but I'm not in the mood to do anything.

I've been working late at Sunset Cove every night this week, and I'm here again tonight trying to get all the bookings arranged for the next few weeks.

This month has been particularly busy because of the time of year, but the resort has also garnered more attention because of the renovations, and the forties theme people are now talking about.

I'm sure Mom is smiling somewhere in heaven to see how much people are raving about her ideas. Knowing her, she probably threw a party with the rest of the angels.

Everything is pretty much done now. By the end of the month, the interior design will be completed, then all that will be left is the structural work on some of the buildings outside and the grounds.

I just hope I don't wither away by then.

I'm exhausted, and quite honestly, I just want to go home and sleep. I don't know if I have the strength to stay out late.

But when have I ever said no to Knight?

I won't start now, knowing this could be one of the last few times we do this in the months to come.

Stifling a yawn, I down the rest of my espresso and focus on the spreadsheet I have open on my computer screen.

I get lost in my work until I feel a presence at the door. When I lift my head and find Nathan standing there watching me, I gasp, stifling a scream.

He looks absolutely terrible, and I have to admit I'm uncomfortable for seeing him.

Dad hasn't mentioned him in months, and I haven't seen him either, so why is he here again?

And at this time?

"Hi, Nathan," I greet him with care.

"Hello, beautiful." He walks in and closes the door behind him.

I always keep that door open, so it makes my skin crawl that he's just closed it on me, locking me in here with him.

"I'm really busy at the moment, Nathan. Now isn't a good time." I look him over, assessing the sway in his next step when he moves even closer.

He's drunk. He looks it, smells it, and is acting like it.

"You're always dismissing me now that I'm broke." He laughs as off-balanced as he looks. "Everything has gone to hell, and everybody screwed me over, even my own father. Now yours."

God, what's happened now?

"What do you mean?" I think I have an idea, but it's best I don't say anything and play ignorant.

This could only be about the job he wanted with my father. Dad said he was going to come to a decision this week after he'd finished one of his contracts.

I'm guessing from what Nathan is saying and how he's acting, Dad turned him down.

"For all the years I've known your father, he couldn't even give me a job when I needed it most." Pain presses into his features as if he's physically hurt. "Your asshole of a father knows my situation and that everything I've set out to do has failed like fuck, but he couldn't help me."

"I'm sorry to hear that." I can't think of anything else to say, but it's clearly the wrong thing because his face contorts with the same kind of rage you'd expect to see if I'd attacked him.

"*Sorry?* You little bitch, you're just as bad as he is. How fucking dare you say sorry to me when you feel no such thing?"

The increase in his anger heightens my senses, and suddenly, I feel very afraid. I've never been around him when he's been drunk before, and I doubt he had reason to be an angry drunk before now when he had everything.

I wish he would either leave or that Knight would come soon. But Nathan doesn't look like he's going anywhere fast, and Knight isn't supposed to get here for at least another half an hour.

"I am sorry for all that happened to you—"

"Shut the fuck up. You're not sorry one bit. Marrying Knight Grayson ensured that things worked out for you better than you could have ever imagined. You had no loyalty to me whatsoever, just the man with the deepest pockets."

"That's not true. You know what happened."

"I do, but the two of you look so cushy to me, I can't see you parting ways in the next few months."

This discussion is not something I want to have with *him* when the end of my marriage is all I've been worrying about for the last few weeks.

"Nathan, you're drunk. I think you should go home." I try to sound calm, but the tremble in my voice gives me away.

My nerves spike when he rushes up to my desk and slams his fist into it, making my documents tumble to the floor.

"Fuck you."

I jump up and back away. I need to call security or get to the panic button, but he's right there in front of me. My cell phone is in my bag, the office phone is on the desk, and the panic button is under it.

And Nathan is coming toward me.

"Nathan, go home!" I cry, moving toward the door, but he grabs me, holding on to my arm so tightly it feels like he might break the bone and keep going.

"I'm not going anywhere until I've had my fill." The dark look in his eyes tells me I need to get the hell away from him right now, before it's too late.

With that fear, I pull against his vice-like grip, but I'm too weak, and all he does is laugh at my fruitless attempt to escape him.

“Let go of me!” I scream in hopes that anyone nearby, inside the building or out, will hear, but no one comes.

In my panic, I dig my nails into Nathan’s knuckles. He releases me momentarily, but only to backhand me right across my face. The impact and effect are so intense and painful I fall straight to the ground, hitting my head on the edge of the flowerpot.

The room spins, and I feel like I might be sick, but that’s the least of my worries because Nathan jumps on top of me and pins me down with his body weight.

When he tears off my top in one swift move and covers my mouth to muffle my screams, I know I’m in so much more trouble than I could ever imagine.

I can’t believe this is the man who only months ago professed to have my best interests at heart. This was also the man I was least worried about because I thought I knew him.

But what was that thing people say?

It’s the ones you know who surprise you the most and hurt you the deepest. In any crime of passion, the law always looks to the people who are close to the victim.

The people they thought they knew and could trust.

“You fucking bitch.” Nathan wedges his knee between my thighs and rips at my skirt and my panties. His roughness and unwanted touch make tears pour out of my eyes like a broken tap that can’t be fixed. “You act so fucking perfect, but I know all your dirty secrets. I know how you fucked your college professor and wrecked his home.”

*My God.* He knew? How did he know about that?

How the hell did he find out? I know for a fact Madison would never have told him.

So, how?

But maybe ... it wasn’t that hard to find out if you were looking for something or keeping tabs on me.

“Seriously, Aurora. What a whore you are.” His harsh voice grates over my skin, along with the strong scent of rum on his breath. “You didn’t think to check up on a man like that? If you had, you would have known about his wife and kids long before his wife threatened to destroy you. You spread your legs for him. Now it’s my turn, you whore, whore, whore you—”

Suddenly, Nathan is yanked off me and is flying back into the wall.

Like an angry god, Knight flashes before me in the sliver of my tears, and then he’s on Nathan, punching the life out of him.

“Motherfucker!” Knight shouts into the flow of punches he delivers to Nathan’s face. “How dare you hurt her. I’ll kill you. I’ll fucking kill you.”

Terror has me crippled, but I manage to push through it just enough to sit up and see that Knight is battering Nathan.

Those words he said months ago come rushing back to my mind—*I’ll kill for you.*

He meant it. In all the time I’ve known him, he’s never said anything he didn’t mean.

Those words are the only thing that snap me into focus because I can’t allow him to do that. Even if Nathan deserves it.

“Knight, no, stop.” I rush toward him and wrap my arms around his back in an attempt to stop him.

It works, but Nathan looks like he’s been beaten to a bloody pulp.

He’s barely moving his head from side to side and groaning with pain, but at least he’s moving.

“Knight, please,” I stutter through my tears. “I need you.”

Those words loosen the tension in his shoulders like a magic spell. Knight moves away from Nathan and shuffles to face me, pulling me into the safety of his arms.

“Are you okay?” he mutters, cupping my face to inspect it for damage. “He hurt you.”

I taste blood on my lips, and my face is so swollen from where Nathan hit me, I can't even lie. I'm hurt and in pain.

My lips part to answer, but all I can do is cry.

\* \* \*

Knight insists on taking me to the hospital after the police arrive to take Nathan away.

Apart from the massive shiner over my eye and the black and blue bruises on my cheek, I'm okay physically. Emotionally and mentally, no.

The last time I had such a horrible experience was the night so long ago when I nearly died, and Dad saved Mom and me. It's the kind of thing you try to forget, but from time to time, the memory resurfaces.

Tonight stirred the dark remnants of that experience in my soul and created its own wretchedness.

Knight happened to get to Sunset Cove early because he had a cancellation. Such a thing rarely happens in his schedule. Maybe Mom was looking out for me again.

If Knight had been a minute later ... well, Nathan would have raped me, then I don't know what I would have done.

He did enough damage by hitting me and practically tearing my clothes off my body.

I can still feel him on me with his horrible breath and venomous words.

He called me a whore repeatedly. No one knows just how damn much I loathe that word.

I know Knight heard that part, but I'm not sure if he heard the reasons for it.

I think he might have, but he's being careful with me because he can see I'm a mess.

He takes care of me for the rest of the evening, and I cling to him, barely allowing him to leave my side.

The next morning, we wake at sunrise and head out to the wicker chairs on the terrace. He makes me tea and cookies, but I have no appetite, and everything tastes like soap.

When we got in last night, he had Denise make me all my favorite things.

I wasn't in the mood to eat, but I did it to be polite. I'm not sure I can do that again today.

"You don't have to have it if you don't want it," Knight says, taking the teacup from me. He sets it down and returns his gaze to me.

"I'll have some later."

"Is there anything else you need me to do?"

I shake my head. "No, I'm just...still shaken."

"Of course, you are. I wish I'd gotten there sooner. I hate you seeing me fighting, but I feel like I didn't do enough."

"You did enough."

"Not to me. I don't feel like I dealt with Nathan properly, but I'm not finished with him. He'll pay for what he did."

"Please don't get in any trouble for me, Knight."

He runs his finger over my knuckles. "There are many ways to make that asshole pay. Prison isn't enough for him. By the time I'm finished with him, he'll beg for death. He attacked you physically and verbally. I can't let him get away with just a mere prison sentence."

I dip my head and fight more tears, which come anyway. I grab a napkin and dab at the corners of my eyes. When I look at him again, I feel like it's time I explain myself and clarify that I'm not a whore.

"Did you hear what he was talking about?" I meet his curious gaze.



“The professor and his wife?” Knight asks cautiously, confirming my thoughts.

“Yes.”

“Was any of that true?”

Feeling embarrassed, I look down at my hands, then back to him. “Yes, but I’m not a whore.”

“Of course not.”

“It’s important that you understand that I’ve only ever been with two men in my life. One of them is you.”

On hearing that, his eyes widen slightly, with obvious surprise. “What happened?”

“After my mother died, I had an affair with my college professor. It was so stupid of me, but what was worse was that I never knew he was married. Married with two kids. He had an accident and died. Days before his funeral, his wife paid me a visit with the truth.” It feels so strange to say those words outside my head. I’ve never actually had to say that much to Madison. By the time I found myself in trouble, she already knew ninety percent of the story. “I was so very foolish. That was my biggest mistake.”

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“It was,” I insist because it’s true, and I have to own my part. “I should have known better. Everything about him was so secretive, more than what we were, but I couldn’t see. I believed him and allowed him to charm me out of my dignity. That wasn’t even the worst part. His wife is Rachel Caseros, daughter of Lachlan Caseros, the media mogul. She threatened to destroy me because of what I did, so every time I apply for a job with a magazine I want to work for, she gets them to reject me. That’s what happened the first night you and I met.”

The light of understanding forms in his eyes.

“How long has this been going on?”

“Years now. That’s why I ended up doing my mother’s job at Sunset Cove and not writing for a magazine. I kept it a

secret from everyone except Madison, so I have no idea how Nathan found out. She definitely wouldn't have told him."

"There are ways of finding things out if you're looking in the right places. I suspect he had you checked out to ensure he knew your secrets."

"I just wish he didn't know. The whole thing is bad enough as it is. While I was writing my application for *People Magazine*, I worried Rachel would get to them too, but I didn't let it stop me from trying. Even if she has the power to stop me from getting my dream job, I at least wanted to try."

"Listen to me." He takes my hands into his. "Don't worry about this anymore. I'll take care of it."

I search his eyes, feeling hope in this awkward time. "How will you?"

"Let me worry about that. Try to push last night behind you and the past. That's all I want you to do. I'll take care of everything else, and you won't have to worry about Rachel or anybody else ever again."

I study his face, checking if he's serious. As always, he is. "Knight, you don't know what you're offering me. This has been a hole in my heart, crushing me for years."

"I'll always take care of you, Aurora. Always." The promise in his eyes warms my heart, healing the scars that have lived on the surface for so long I can't remember what it's like to feel normal.

"*Always* sounds like a long time, Knight. Longer than the next three months."

"I know, but maybe I stopped thinking about the next three months when I realized I want *always* with you." For once, that darkness that always resides in his expression isn't anywhere to be found. What I see in him is light and hope. It makes me believe we have our own special connection that's sacred to him and me. It's something that makes me feel that I never had to compete with Giselle. "We could have *always* if you want it, too."

I'm nodding before he can even finish the sentence. "Yes. I do. I absolutely do want always with you too." It feels like we're taking our vows again, but unlike on our wedding day, my heart is soaring into the heavens with the joy of loving him.

"Then let's do *always*, Aurora Grayson."

"Let's do it."

Knight pulls me into his arms and holds me close to his heart.

Locked in his embrace, I feel love as strong and as tangible as we are, and I contemplate this pivotal moment between us.

There will be no end.

No divorce at the end of our six months of marriage.

I'd already fallen so hard for this man I couldn't see a future without him, but now I love him even more.

I already know that's how I'll feel, *always*.

# Chapter 39

## *Knight*



“I came as soon as I could,” William says, rushing into my office.

“You’re here now.” I close the door.

He’s here to see Aurora, but I wanted to talk to him first.

I called him last night to tell him what transpired between Aurora and Nathan, but he was in Florida for a business trip. He took the first flight he could get back to New York.

I won’t keep him for too long because I know he’s eager to see his daughter. What I have to talk to him about won’t take much time.

“How is she?” He’s so worried he’s paler than I’ve ever seen him.

“She’s not too bad. Bruised and shaken up, but I’ll take care of her.”

“Thank God you were there.” He rests a weary hand at his temple. “I can’t believe what almost happened to her. Where is Nathan now?”

“Behind bars.” *And barely alive.* While Aurora was asleep, I paid that motherfucker a visit. Let’s just say once he’s finished doing time, he won’t want to show his face in New York ever again.

“I didn’t give him the job. That’s why he did this. Even if I gave it to him, he fully believed Aurora was going to marry him once the contract with you ends.”

I stare back at him, those last words feeling foreign to me, and that brings me to the reason I wanted to speak to him.

“That’s not happening.” My voice is as firm as I am in my decision.

William watches me as I lean over my desk and pick up the envelope I prepared before he got here. I hand it to him, and he takes it with a puzzled look on his face.

“What’s this?”

“All the evidence I have on you. Everything’s there. You don’t have to worry about it anymore.”

He stares back at me with wide, surprised eyes. “What? Why are you doing this?”

“Because it’s the right thing to do if I want to move forward with your daughter.”

Awe replaces surprise as the color returns to his face. “You’re not letting her go, are you?”

I shake my head. “No.”

He smiles, but then his expression falters, and I know why.

“But Sunset Cove, Knight—”

“I know. I ... know.” I sound like I have a solution for that too, but I don’t. I still don’t. At least not one that sees me getting my legacy. All these months have passed and I haven’t found a way. “I’ll figure it out. Go see her. She’s expecting you.”

He nods but reaches out and touches my shoulder the way a father would when they’re offering reassurance. My grandfather has done that many times, but it feels different coming from William.

I guess he’s so good at being a father that he can offer me some of his parental support too.

“Thank you. For this.” He holds up the envelope. “But mostly for loving my Aurora. She needed it.”

The words reach my cold heart. It's still covered with the black fog of desolation, but at least it's clearing, and I feel human again.

"I needed it too."

With a final nod, he leaves, and I'm left with the thoughts that have plagued me for the last few months. *The girl of my dreams and the empire.*

Or rather, the girl of my dreams *or* the empire.

I've never been in a situation I couldn't get out of until now.

The last few months have felt like I've been thrown into a pit of conflict. Like tar, it's swallowed me whole.

I've either had to watch Bastian continue his pursuits to outdo me with his expansion of the company in Japan. Or, watch Aurora glow with happiness as the work on Sunset Cove has progressed.

The moment the decorators started their work using her mother's designs, I knew I couldn't even mention the word *sale*. I saw how happy she was, and I couldn't hurt her.

Apart from that, I've been selfish again when it comes to her. I've had several chances to talk to her about the sale, but I didn't want to spoil a second of what we've shared between us.

Aurora makes me feel things I didn't think possible for a dark soul like me. I've come to crave it like air to my lungs and food to my soul.

When I told her about Giselle, it was hard, but telling her released that grief that has lived in my soul for what has felt like eons.

There's more to my story that I didn't share. More pain, more wounds, more scars. All deep.

In ways, it feels like Aurora has healed me, but this conundrum I've found myself in can only get worse if I don't find a way to fix it fast.

\* \* \*

The next two weeks go by, and Aurora gets better, although she clings to me as if she's afraid something will happen to her if I'm not around.

She starts loosening up and going back to Sunset Cove when Madison offers to stay with her for a week.

Madison has been an amazing support, providing the distraction Aurora needed by doing practice interviews in prep for the upcoming interview at *People Magazine*.

I took care of that Rachel problem with one phone call. In circumstances of shit like that, all you have to do is roar the loudest and stake your claim to being at the top of the food chain. I threatened to get their investors to pull all their funding on her father's biggest project if she didn't cease and desist her threats against Aurora.

Of course, she agreed.

I also got her to fix what she'd done in the past to restore Aurora's good name and compensate her with a year's salary she would have made at *Montrose Magazine*. Money like that is nothing to people like her, so she agreed to that too.

It was a triumph that made my wife happy, and I wished I could revel in the euphoria the way she did. I could see the burden lift from her shoulders, but it was nothing in the grand scheme of my worries.

Fast forward to today when I'm supposed to be meeting with Vladimir and my grandfather again.

The thought of sitting there like I did before makes my insides feel like they've been twisted with barbwire.

I'm even late for work.

Aurora left for Sunset Cove an hour ago, but I've been stuck here, stuck in my mind.

This can't go on. More and more, I feel like a coward running away with his tail tucked between his legs. That's not



me.

My phone rings when I'm getting ready. It's Jericho.

I answer it, wondering what he could want to talk about at this time of morning that couldn't wait until he saw me at the office.

"Hey." I press the phone to my ear while I button up my shirt.

"Knight, we have a big problem."

My hands still, lingering on the loop of the last button. "What's going on?"

"We've been hacked. Your computer and mine."

My scalp tightens, and my blood boils with fury. "What the fuck do you mean we've been hacked? That's near impossible." Because of all the shit we do, the systems Jericho has in place are supposed to be tighter than at the White House. No one can simply *hack* us.

"It must have been some high-tech off-the-grid hacker. Because of the files they copied, I know someone hired them to get to you."

"What files?"

"Everything to do with William and his mafia connections, his debt, addictions, and other shit. There was everything about Conrad and Nathan, the inheritance provisos for Sunset Cove, Aurora, and plans we have for Park Avenue. Knight, my computer had all that evidence, so it won't take a genius to figure out what we did. It's hard dirt."

The instant he says that, one name comes to mind—*Bastian*.

Fucking Bastian.

As I'm sure he's done worse shit than me finding out any of that stuff won't lose me Sunset Cove, but there is one other thing I stand to lose.

*Aurora*.

My last encounter with Bastian comes back to my mind.

He told me he'd find out what I was up to, why my marriage was arranged, and that I shouldn't wear my weakness on my sleeve for the world to see.

Cut off the head so the body is weak. Carve out a man's heart, and there'll be nothing left of him.

All he would need to do is spill my secrets to Aurora for me to lose her. Then nothing will matter.

Bastian's knowledge with the supporting evidence doesn't just hurt Aurora and me. There's also her father to think about, and I assured William he wouldn't need to worry about the evidence anymore.

The fucking evidence on Jericho's computer contains a multitude of things Aurora doesn't know. Like all the hardcore shit that could get her father killed if word gets back to his mafia friends about the millions he stole.

Bastian wouldn't care about that. That motherfucker would use such a threat to his advantage.

"When did this happen, Jericho?" My voice sounds like a hollow rasp.

"Earlier this morning, a few hours before I got in. I've been here for about an hour checking things out."

I glance at the clock on the wall. It's ten. Aurora would either be at work now or still on her way there if she met with her friends first.

"I have to go."

"But, Knight, I think—"

I hang up and rush out the door, following that sick feeling in my gut that's moving me forward and telling me I need to get to Aurora.

I just hope I'm not too late.

# Chapter 40

## *Aurora*



**T**oday, I'm going to take it easy. I'm even going to have a half day and head out to the spa around lunchtime.

I've been doing all sorts of things over the last few weeks in prep for my interview. I finished off my next serial, so I wouldn't have to worry about deadlines over the next few weeks. Everything is scheduled to be on autopilot.

I head to my office, feeling lighter in my steps. After the spa, I'll be good and ready to go to dinner with Knight later.

We're going to this Japanese restaurant on Main that I haven't been to before.

Things have changed between us again since we agreed we'd be staying together. With that tension gone, we feel like a married couple, and dare I say it... I'm truly happy.

I'm truly, truly happy, and so in love with him it feels unreal sometimes.

I love everything he does for me and how he goes out of his way to make sure I don't have to worry.

The way he took down Nathan and dealt with the whole Rachel thing has lifted a massive burden from my shoulders in such a way that I feel like I've been given a new life.

As soon as Knight put a stop to her madness, I got a call from *Montrose Magazine* letting me know they'd reconsidered my application and wanted me to work for them.

I respectfully declined, and it felt good.

There was a time when I would have done backflips to receive such an offer. But I didn't want to work for a company that didn't value me after I'd worked so hard for them, and for so many years. The years I interned for them were some of the best in my life.

Now it's time to fold over a new page and start afresh on the path to success.

I reach the corridor leading to my office, and my breath stills when I see that the door is wide open. As I'm the only person who would have gone in there between last night and today, it shouldn't be.

Security wouldn't have opened it without messaging me to let me know they had and why.

I think of Nathan, but he shouldn't be here. He's in prison.

But what if he got out and came back for me?

The cameras would have surely picked him up, and again, security would have alerted me or Knight.

So, who opened my door?

At first, I stop, then curiosity gets the better of me and I move forward like one of those naïve, unsuspecting characters in a horror film that the people watching scream at to run away because they know the killer is inside waiting.

By the time I reach the door, my nerves have tangled into double fisherman's knots, but who I find inside sitting on my chair with their feet up on my desk freezes my skin colder than an arctic wind.

It's Bastian Grayson. Knight's brother.

His eyes, just like Knight's, fix on me. It's strange how all the Grayson men except their grandfather have those cold, uncaring azure-blue eyes designed to make you feel unhinged in every way.

But Bastian, when he stares at me, it's with a soulless, heartless look that makes my skin feel like it might flee from my body.

What the hell is he doing here?

We've never spoken at all throughout this entire time, and I never needed to be told that I shouldn't speak to him.

What does he want from me?

"Relax, poor girl. You look as if you've seen a ghost." His voice is feather soft but as cold as a tomb.

"It's just that you and I have never spoken before. Obviously, I'm shocked to find you in my office." He grins with a malevolence that turns my blood to ice water.

"Of course, it would be a shock. Do forgive me." Although he says that, it's clear it's not something he means. Men like him only use words like *forgive* as props. "The guard let me in. I told him I was your brother-in-law, and I had some very important information I needed to tell you. Call it an emergency if you will."

What the hell could *he* want to tell me?

I narrow my eyes at him and look him over from the neat blond faux hawk on top of his head to the brown leather Brogues on his feet.

"What sort of information do you have?"

"The truth about your dearly beloved."

I smirk and shake my head, disgusted by whatever attempt this must be to tarnish Knight's character. "I'm not interested in hearing anything about my husband from you."

His smile becomes as wide as a football pitch, taking up most of his face. Then he flicks his feet off the desk and straightens, resting his arms on the top as if this is his office, and I'm the one who's the unwanted guest.

"Believe me, you'll want to know this, along with all the sordid details about your arranged marriage, the reasons your husband wanted Sunset Cove, and what he did to take it from you."

"I'm fully aware of the details of my marriage and Sunset Cove."

He makes a face feigning surprise, then shakes his head. “Oh no, no, no. The things you know are only what Knight has allowed you to know. He wouldn’t have told you how he blackmailed your father to usurp his power and steal your inheritance from you.”

My mouth goes bone dry, then the bitter taste of shock clogs my throat. “What are you talking about?”

“Why don’t you come closer and find out?”

I slink toward him, my legs suddenly a quivering mess, feeling like they don’t belong to me. I stop in front of my desk and see he has a big brown envelope resting in his lap.

That’s never a good sign.

*Blackmail.*

Bastian said Knight blackmailed my father.

*Did he?*

Is that what he really did?

Would he have done something like that?

Something always felt like it didn’t add up right from the start between Dad and Knight, but everything else was so bad that I couldn’t conceive what that something might be.

Could it be this?

“What do you think Knight blackmailed my father with? He paid my father’s debts in exchange for Sunset Cove. The only way he could get that is by marrying me.”

“You really believe it was as simple as that?” He quirks a hard brow and looks at me as if I’m so naïve I’d believe pink elephants are zooming across the sky right at this moment.

“What more is there?”

Bastian steepled his fingers on the desk and regards me with keen, observant eyes.

“Months ago, my grandfather announced he was retiring and splitting the main two branches of Grayson Inc. into two separate companies.” He pulls his fingers apart and sits back in

my chair. “The flagship company would go to my father, and the other company on Park Avenue, which is just as good as the main, if not better, would be led by two of the three Grayson brothers. One would be CEO and take full leadership, the other would be chief financial officer. It’s an empire waiting to happen, and my grandfather, being the crafty man he is, made us compete for the role, when really he wanted Knight to take control.”

I’ve been completely kept out of all business matters, so this is surprising. I didn’t even know their grandfather was retiring. “Why didn’t your grandfather just give it to him?”

“No, not this time. Not with his precious legacy. He wanted us to earn it and impress him to get it. To impress him, he asked Knight to get Sunset Cove, and that’s what he did. Here’s where you come in, sweetheart. First, Knight got rid of the man set to marry you. Then he twisted your father into a corner so deep there was no way out other than for him to agree to whatever Knight wanted. Your father is your executor, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“Here. It’s important that you read this first. It’s a grant of permission letter from your mother to your father in regard to Sunset Cove.” He reaches into the envelope and pulls out what looks like a printout of a handwritten letter then he holds it out for me to take.

I wasn’t aware that anything else existed outside of Mom’s will.

I take the letter from him and read.

It says:

*Dearest William,*

*I am writing this letter to give you additional flexibility in handling the administration of Sunset Cove.*

*Certain situations may arise where I would prefer for you to handle them with the love and discretion of a parent, as*



*opposed to the matter being decided in court.*

*This letter gives you full rights and permission to act on Aurora's behalf in the event of any extenuating circumstances while you remain her executor.*

*This includes but is not limited to the permission to sell the property and any associated measures in relation to the ownership.*

*Everything else should remain as stated in the will.*

*I trust you will always make the right decisions for our daughter.*

*All my love,*

*Susana*

I'm gripping the letter as if I want to hold on to what would have been part of my mother's final words. The more I read and re-read, the more the words sink in, and I understand the power this gives my father.

With this letter, he could decide anything for me and bend the rules in extenuating circumstances. I'd say he took his debts to mean exactly that.

"*Finished?*" Bastian asks with a broken melody to his tone. It sounds like an off-key note on a piano.

"Yes." My voice is barely audible over the drumming of my heart in my ears.

"Good, now here's the first punch. Sunset Cove is a nice little investment, especially if you're going to do it up and sell it to a Russian oligarch looking to spread his wings in the Hamptons."

"*Sell?*" The word falls from my lips like a rock hitting the bottom of the ocean. "Knight wouldn't do that."

“Oh, but he is,” Bastian answers and slides another document toward me. This one is an offer from Vladimir Markovich for the sale of Sunset Cove for three hundred million.

*Fucking hell ...*

*Three. Hundred. Million.* I’ve never even seen that figure written down before in my life.

But, three hundred million for something I consider priceless?

Am I crazy to think that?

In the grand scheme of things, I have nothing, but realistically, it’s not like that money would be mine.

There at the bottom of the offer is Knight’s name and signature with the agreement that Sunset Cove will be sold seven months from the date of the offer, pending all the terms and conditions are met. There’s nothing mentioned about me. It’s like I don’t exist when it comes to this one asset that was so precious to my mother.

“How can he do this without my permission?” I can barely form the words as they scramble in my brain. “I still own ten percent.”

“Sorry, sweetheart, your ten percent means fuck all. With the provision of your mother’s letter, when your father agreed to Knight’s contract, he also gave authorization to act on your behalf in *all* circumstances. Meaning he could sell without your knowledge, but the sale wouldn’t be finalized until the six months of your marriage was up.”

*My God.*

How could Knight do this to me?

He would have known I would never agree to sell Sunset Cove for *anything*.

“Now, how about we get to all the ways Knight blackmailed your father into doing this?” Bastian proceeds to take out a wad of printouts from the envelope and spreads them out on the desk.

“This is evidence of your father stealing millions from his clients and the Italian mafia to save his company. But instead of using the money for the intended purposes, he gambled it away and drank himself to sickness. Rehab barely helped him get back on his feet.”

My stomach plummets to the earth, pulling my lungs inside out.

My head feels so light from the sudden loss of air that my knees give and I have to grab on to the edge of the desk to keep myself from falling over.

Dad ...

No.

*Dad?* My father stealing millions from his clients.

And the *mafia*? Then getting addicted to gambling and alcohol?

*Jesus.*

“That can’t be true.”

With an I’m-taking-pleasure-in-your-misery smile on his fucking face, Bastian pulls out document after document after document from the envelope. All evidence of the bomb he just dropped on me.

There are bank statements showing the debts owed by Wright Investments, bank statements from offshore accounts in Switzerland showing millions, then going down to zero in the space of a month, medical reports showing Dad’s stay at various clinics, and details of medications for depression and therapy bills. And there is a numerous amount of emails between Dad and men with Italian names.

There’s a lot to read through, but I’ve seen enough to get the picture of what happened.

I can’t even be mad at my father for anything because it was clear he was floundering, drowning in sorrow, debt, and grief. If anything, I feel awful I wasn’t there for him.

“Knight threatened to expose your father.” Bastian runs his fingers over the documents. “If he had, your father would have lost everything, but worst of all, the mafia would have killed him, and you too.”

My breath becomes staccato sips of air. I feel like such a fool.

This is pure evil, and I can't believe we're talking about the same man I fell for.

But once again, I'm the fool. I fell so deeply into the web of lies and deceit Knight set for me that I didn't even know I was trapped.

Bastian places a hand over his heart as if he has one. “I've done some fucked-up things in my time, but damn, my brother takes the award for the world's biggest asshole. And you know what's worse? It was clear your father was a man who was deeply troubled, grieving the loss of his wife and doing what he could to keep his sanity. This all started when he lost everything to save your mother. If anybody should understand what it feels like to be in such a position, it's Knight.” He switches his gaze behind me, looking at the door, and smiles the way you would expect a snake to. “Isn't that right, *brother?*”

I look behind me, and my heart triple-beats when my gaze lands on Knight standing in the doorway looking like death.

Although I'm looking at him with a million questions in my eyes, he's not focusing on me. His gaze, filled with revulsion, is fixed on Bastian with that same soulless look.

“Nobody should have understood what it's like to fight to save someone you love more than you.” Bastian keeps his gaze riveted to Knight. “Didn't you give Giselle your left kidney so she could have a few more years of life? It didn't work, but *still*, you did it.”

*My God in Heaven.*

Knight gave Giselle his kidney!

This news hits me almost harder than anything else and despite the truth I now know, my heart still goes out to him.

I think back to the conversation we had weeks ago about Giselle. Knight mentioned that the failure of her last treatment led to her death.

It was his kidney. He gave her his kidney. But it didn't work.

I can't begin to think of what he must have gone through.

But how could Knight go through something so similar to my father and treat him the way he did?

I stare at him and the rest of the puzzle surrounding Knight Grayson completes. I see him for who he is. A man who's broken and deadly, heartless and desolate, callous and not who I believed him to be.

"This poor man was no different to you, and you took advantage," Bastian continues. "But it's so, so typical of you because you're ruthless, Knight."

Bastian is ... right.

He's actually right, even if I don't want him to be.

Knight obviously loved Giselle enough to sacrifice a part of himself. I know if my father could have done that for my mother, he would.

Knight should have understood what my father went through, and if anything he ever said to me was true, then there were several moments over the last few months when he could have come clean and at the very least tell me he was planning to sell Sunset Cove.

But he wanted the empire more than me.

Bastian stands and points to the litter of documents on my desk. "There's more where that came from, sweetheart. That's just your copy. I'll leave you two to talk."

With that, he walks out, knocking his shoulder into Knight's as he passes him. I'm sure if circumstances were different, Knight would have bodychecked him into the wall.

Knight finally looks at me, his face reflecting a myriad of emotions. He looks like a person who thought he already lost

everything, then discovered there was more to lose.

He steps forward and even comes close enough that I catch that scent of musk, the forest, and him, but I put my hand up and shake my head.

I can't do this.

*I won't.*

It's too much.

"Aurora..." His voice sounds as rusty as a pipe that hasn't been used in a hundred years.

"No. Just no." I shake my head with more vigor, trying to hold back my tears.

"I'm sorry."

"*Are you?* I don't think you are. I think you're sorry because you were exposed. How could you take such advantage of my father? How could you be so selfish? And Sunset Cove, Knight?" My breath hitches on the wave of emotion that cuts into me when I think of the lengths he went through to screw me over. "Look how much you have. What's your net worth this week, Knight? What is it today? But you had to tie my father's hands behind his back to take the one thing my mother left me. Then you made me beg to use her designs. Now I'm being told it's up for sale. You knew I wouldn't be okay with that. But congratulations, you got what you wanted, and it wasn't me."

"Aurora, please—"

"Leave me alone. Just leave me alone. Bastian is right, but you're not just ruthless, you have no heart. I wish I'd never met you."

I walk away before the tears come, and I'm glad he doesn't follow.

My heart shatters with every step I take.

As my soul weeps, I curse the night I met Knight Grayson.

He truly was my destroyer.

# Chapter 41

# *Knight*



I lean back in my chair and stare at the picture of Aurora and me sitting on my desk.

My mother took it on our second day in Saint-Tropez. We were on the beach, and we looked so happy and in love.

There was no confusion in our faces as we smiled back at the camera. Even if we didn't know it, love was already there. Only love.

I had the picture framed when I got home, and I thought it would look good in here, so I put it right next to my computer.

This office has always looked as businesslike as the one at Grayson Inc. I

wanted to add a touch of humanity to give it some life. It was very

unbecoming of me, but I did it anyway because of how I felt about Aurora.

Now this vision of us is just a dream. There one minute, gone the next, only existing in memories.

It's been three days since everything went to fucking hell.

On that day, I watched my life—*the dream one I created with my wife*—blow up in my face like a nuclear bomb, and it just kept going and going and going, turning to shit before my eyes.

There wasn't a damn thing I could have done to stop it from happening because I was too late.



But my lateness didn't happen on that day.

I was too late from the moment I realized I loved Aurora and loving her meant I needed to fix the mess I created if I wanted to keep her in my life.

The moment I lost my girl—in that split second as I watched Bastian unleash the truth—I realized the choices I had were always easy. Because ... there *was* no choice when it came to Aurora.

There was no either or.

There was always just her.

I was so caught up in my past and the horrendous relationship with my father and Bastian that I wasn't thinking about what mattered most.

All I can do now is throw myself into damage control, in which I've enlisted Jericho's help.

Fuck knows what Bastian might be conjuring. I'm sure Aurora took note that the asshole made a point of telling her the evidence he brought was her copy and there was more where it came from.

Meaning she needed to watch her back. He made that threat to my wife right in front of me because he knew I couldn't do shit about anything.

Not to him and not about the bomb he'd dropped on Aurora.

She doesn't want to see me or speak to me. I must have called her at least a million times over the last few days. On the hour, every hour. Each time, the call goes straight to voicemail. I've sent text messages too. All to no avail.

What we said to each other in those final moments was it—the breakup.

She's staying with her father now. She went straight to him that day.

I've spoken to him only to assure him that I'll do my best to make sure Bastian doesn't put him or Aurora in danger.

William didn't sound hopeful or like he believed I'd care enough to honor any such promise. I can't blame him.

I created this mess. It was borne out of my own greed.

I can't blame Aurora either for not wanting to have anything to do with me.

Even when she finds out I'm not going to sell Sunset Cove.

It will be quite the shock to my grandfather too, who has no inkling of what's happened between Bastian and me.

I postponed the meeting with Vladimir until next week, but hopefully, before then, I'll let him know I won't be selling.

Before the week is out, I'm hoping to have the documentation that will remove my name from the ownership of Sunset Cove. And from Aurora's life.

I've come to the decision that I need to let her go.

She said herself, that she wished she'd never met me.

I wish that too.

What I did to her, and her father for the matter, was truly, truly despicable. And that's putting it mildly.

When Bastian brought up the past with Giselle and threw the dirt at me, I was more than ashamed of myself. I'm sure even Giselle was ashamed of me.

I hated that Bastian knew what I did during that time. When I told Aurora what happened to Giselle, I purposely left out specific parts that hurt me the most.

At the time I gave Giselle my kidney, I thought I'd found a way to keep her alive. The doctors had said that people with Huntington's could live for up to twenty years after the start of their symptoms, but she was at the stage where her lupus was making her kidneys fail.

Twenty years was worth it to me, so I gave her a piece of me. But it didn't work.

All I got was another two years before her body began to reject my kidney, then she deteriorated and was given a year to live.

After that everything was all wrong. Especially me.

I always felt guilty for showing my grief around her because she was in so much pain.

At times, I've felt that if I'd put on a braver face, she might not have killed herself. I know that's not true, but it never stopped me from thinking it.

Now I've lost another love, this one different from any other. Even Giselle.

I never thought that could be possible, and my acknowledgment of that doesn't take anything away from what I had with Giselle.

It's shown me that true love is a never-ending entity, and you're more than fortunate to find it once, let alone twice.

Especially for someone like me who came from a broken home.

When I first met Aurora, I might have appeared to be still holding on to Giselle, but I wasn't. What held me back was seeing something in her that I wanted and was scared to have. I knew if I wanted it I'd have to bare my soul and leave myself as vulnerable as I had in the past.

What I saw in Aurora was happiness and a future that didn't see me in the dark.

So many things banded together to create the monster in me, but Aurora unraveled each one and released the man inside who just wanted to live.

She was a wild card I never saw coming.

But ... in my heart, I know she's better off without me.

A snake can't be anything other than a snake, even if it tries not to be, but an angel will always be an angel. That's her.

She always deserved better, so this is me loving her enough to let her go and live in a world where she can have

everything in it that's good.

Good isn't me.

My thoughts snap when the door opens and Jericho walks in.

His expression is more relaxed than at work earlier. Seeing him gives me strength, but the envelope he's carrying gives me hope.

"I got something for you." He walks up to the desk.

I pray that something is what I need to stop Bastian in his tracks.

"Just tell me we got Bastian."

Outside of keeping a close eye on Bastian, finding good dirt on him was all I could do in this situation to fight fire with fire. You can't threaten fuckers like Bastian without holding an axe over his head.

"Believe me, we've got his fucking ass right where we need it to be." The smile on Jericho's face clears my worries like a summer breeze blowing in on a fog.

"What have you got?" I sit straighter, the anticipation pumping me full of adrenaline.

"This." Jericho pulls out a picture from the envelope. It's of Bastian at the beach with a topless girl sitting on his lap. I don't know who she is, but if Jericho thinks this is dirt, it's serious shit that will fuck Bastian over.

"Who's the girl?"

Jericho gives me an I'm-the-real-shit smile. "Teddy Jamison's seventeen-year-old daughter."

"Holy fucking shit." My scalp tightens, all my nerves buzzing with this information.

Teddy Jamison is the fucking governor of New York. Not only would Bastian be looking at jail time for being with a minor, but he'd be skinned alive for going anywhere near Teddy's daughter.

That man is overprotective of his entire family. Bastian would be obliterated if this ever got out.

“Want more to back that up?” Jericho pulls out a USB stick from his pocket. “How about a *sex tape*?”

My jaw drops. “No way.”

He smiles wide. “Yes. You should know by now I’m a very dangerous man.”

I already knew that. It’s the lengths he goes to that intrigue me the most, and if I’m being honest, it’s a little scary.

There’s nothing on paper or recorded that he can’t find, and even then.

“Jesus, Jericho, how did you get this?”

“I have my ways.” His smile spreads to the corners of his lips. “And I take pleasure in saying that Bastian makes me look like a saint.”

“He definitely does. Thanks for doing this.”

“Always, brother.” He takes a well-deserved bow and raises his brows when he sees me standing. “What next?”

“I need to sort this out now.” I can’t afford to waste any more time. “Bastian will be at the Astoria for the usual meetup.”

“I’ll come with you. I definitely need to see this.”

“Let’s go.” Fueled with wrath, I march out of my office like I’m heading into battle. I might have lost everything else, but this will be a win for me.

\* \* \*

Bastian is standing by the pool table with a bunch of his asshole friends.

He’s smoking a cigar and talking shit as usual. Next to him is tonight’s brunette. At least she looks to be in her mid-to-late twenties.

Our father is sitting in the corner of the room with one of his associates.

Bastian and Father notice Jericho and me straight away when we walk in, and the speed in which we're moving.

They know we're there for trouble.

I keep my head straight, my eyes fixed on Bastian as I walk.

Amusement fills his eyes for a fleeting second, but then it disappears.

“Coming for another round? Shouldn't you be groveling at your wife's feet or something?” Bastian speaks out loud for his audience.

I answer by grabbing his throat. Shock steals the blood from his face along with his confidence, and it takes him a second before he tries to break free.

Jericho grabs Bastian's arms and secures them behind him, cutting off his escape attempt. Then he puts him in a lock that allows us to push him backward, moving with him across the room.

We go into the next room, which is a little boardroom. Of course, Father Dearest has joined us by now to make sure we don't kill his precious son.

“What the fuck are the two of you doing?” Father shouts, but I ignore him.

Jericho releases Bastian, but I keep my hand around his neck, so I can shove him against the wall.

“Jericho, close the door,” I order.

When the door swings shut, I squeeze Bastian's throat tighter.

As he gasps and splutters, Father rushes up to me and grabs my arm.

I look at him. The coldness in my eyes should tell him I don't care anymore. I think he can see it because he loosens his grip on me.

This is the third time in my life that my father has touched me. The first was to physically pick me up and throw me out of his house and into the street when I was ten years old. The second was to stop me from killing Bastian years ago when we had that fight. Now here we are again.

“Let him go, Knight.” His voice shakes like that of an old man about to take his last breath.

“Get your hand off me. Now.” I keep my eyes riveted to his until he releases me, doing as he’s told, then I look back at Bastian and loosen my hand to allow him some air.

“You’re fucking insane,” Bastian coughs.

“As you live and breathe. Do. Not. Come. For. Me. Ever *again*.” My voice rises with every word. “Don’t fucking do it, and don’t you ever, ever dare go near my wife again, or speak to her.” The venom and power in my voice keep him in place, showing him I’m serious as fuck. “Do you understand me?”

The fool smiles, still thinking he has the upper hand, even though I practically have him by the balls. “I don’t think you’re in any position to make demands of me.”

I return the smile, but I know I look like a psycho. “Oh no, mon frere. It’s *you* who isn’t in any position to make demands.”

I pull out the picture of him and Teddy Jamison’s daughter from the inside of my pocket and shove it in his face.

The instant he sees it, his skin turns alabaster pale and his eyes become dark pools of shock.

“How did you...” His voice cuts out like a wire being short-circuited.

“What is that?” Father demands.

I hand him the picture, and clearly, he must know who Teddy’s daughter is because he turns as pale as Bastian.

“You fool.” Father shakes his head at him. It’s the first time I’ve ever seen him show such disdain toward Bastian. I might have to write it in my memoirs.

“We also have a recording of Bastian having sex with her,” I inform them both.

Bastian attempts to defend himself but stops, knowing whatever he says is going to make him sound like an idiot. He’s been caught red-handed, and there’s no bullshitting his way out of this.

Bastian stiffens. “How did you get this information?”

“Don’t worry about that. Just know there’s more where that came from, but this is your copy to keep.” I borrow the words he threw at Aurora. “Answer my questions and agree to my demands, and this stays between us.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Who have you spoken to about Aurora’s father?”

His jaw tenses. “I’m waiting for Giovanni Falcone’s secretary to get back to me with a date for a meeting.”

*Fuck*, what an asshole. He was really going to put Aurora and her father in danger.

“You’re going to cancel that the moment we’re done here.” I press into his windpipe. “Did you speak to anyone else?”

“Only Father.” He cuts a glance at Father, who glares back at him.

“You’re going to keep it that way and destroy every motherfucking file you have on William. If you as much as breathe a word to anyone about anything, I will destroy you. Got it?”

“Yes,” Bastian answers through gritted teeth.

“I mean it, Bastian. I’m going to fucking destroy your ass, and no one will be able to save you.” I look at Father as I say that because I’m talking about *him*. “Understand *Father*?”

“Yes,” he replies in a stiff voice.

“Good.” Oh, how he must loathe the power I hold over him right now.



I release Bastian, wanting to do so much more, but I leave it at that. I won this round, and he lost. They both did.

But I'm still the bigger loser.

I don't have my wife.

# Chapter 42

## *Aurora*



**T**he shutters of my old bedroom windows shiver from the strong gust of wind, rattling like they're talking to each other.

The oncoming storm is a reflection of the heaviness in my soul.

Another day has passed with the sun rising and setting, watching me in this state of flux.

I'm sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall like I did when Mom died and the world felt like it was ending.

At the time, I was still at college, but my childhood bedroom, with its shell-pink walls, pine wood furniture, and countless bookshelves, was my place and space of solace. I'm grateful my parents kept the room the same over the years.

These four walls have seen so much. And here I am again. Trapped in my thoughts once more for a different reason this time, but my heart still aches the same. Maybe that's just what happens with all types of loss.

Loss in life, and loss in death.

I've practically lived in here for the last few days, watching the scenery unravel from perfect sunny days to the dark stormy night tonight will be.

The last two days have been particularly bad because Knight's phone calls have stopped. So have his messages.

I'm mad as hell at him, but at least his efforts to speak to me meant he was trying.

Now I don't know what's worse, hearing from him or knowing he's stopped and is probably in the process of moving on with one of his many admiring fans.

Both prospects have shoved me into a state of confliction that I don't know how to handle.

The other night, Dad told me Knight took care of Bastian, so we don't have to worry about him anymore. That should have been good news considering the gravity of the destructive information Bastian was in possession of, but I couldn't see past Knight's part in this mess. I couldn't stop thinking that if he hadn't unearthed secrets that could get Dad in serious trouble, we wouldn't need to worry about Bastian.

I'm fully aware the said *mess* was created by my father, and I haven't excused his guilt, but at least I understand his actions were driven from Mom's death.

Knight isn't the same.

Everything he did was borne out of selfishness.

That's why I'm so deeply hurt.

I can't even cushion the blow with all the good things he did for me, like sorting out my Rachel problem.

There would have been several points during our relationship when he would have felt he should come clean, but he didn't.

I understand that he wanted the empire because of the awful feud with his father and Bastian, and I understand the devastation he must have suffered after losing Giselle so tragically.

I still care enough about him to consider that his life couldn't have been easy to go through so much.

But what about me?

Everything he did was just so ruthless and cold hearted there was never any regard for me, or how I might feel after losing everything.

If Bastian hadn't told me what was going on, I would never know. Or rather, I'd find out about Sunset Cove once the place was sold. Then what?

I hate that Knight did so much shit to me, and I truly hate the position he put Dad and me in. I hate that he ruined the beautiful relationship he and I had.

But what I hate the most of all is the fact that I can't seem to hate *him*.

My heart won't turn away from him the way it did when I found out about Scott's treachery. The moment the news hit me that Scott was married with kids, and I was just his side piece, I hated him straight away.

Knight has done so much more to me and my father.

This should be easier.

So, why can't I hate him?

Every time I try to, I keep hearing him say those words that hooked me.

*I want always with you.*

Like some magical spell, those words captured my heart and fused him to my soul. I wouldn't know where to begin unraveling Knight Grayson from my being.

My door creaks open, and Madison walks in, pulling me from my thoughts.

I roll my head to the side to acknowledge her. She offers me the same look of sympathy I've seen so many times before that if I went blind, I'd still be able to see it.

She knows everything that's happened, and this moment could be a déjà vu of several others over the last decade when my best friend came to my rescue.

"Hey there, how are you feeling?" She walks toward me, her heels clicking against the hardwood floor.

"The same." My lips barely move as I speak.

Although Madison is wearing a beautiful blue cocktail dress, she gets down on the floor next to me, leaning against the wall too.

Now that she's here, I vaguely remember her saying she had a date with Chad. I wasn't expecting to see her tonight in any event, but like the dutiful friend, here she is.

Her engagement party is in two weeks. I hope by then I can summon the

strength to shake this dismal mood from my system.

"Did anything happen today?" She brushes my shoulder with hers.

"No."

"Your dad said you haven't left the house since the other day, and you've barely eaten."

"I can't help it." My barely there words come out on the edge of a sigh.

"Don't you think that you should probably go to Sunset Cove?" A little smile dances across her lips. "I'll stay with you all day tomorrow."

"No," I rasp, shaking my head. "It's best I don't go anywhere near that place ever again."

"Aurora." She frowns and swallows hard. "Regardless of what's happening to it, I don't think you should do that."

"I can't be there knowing it's going to be sold. Who knows, my office may already be cleaned out and everything thrown away."

"I don't think Knight would do that to you."

I give her a deadpan stare. "You were there that morning when he came with his team of contractors to work on the place. He didn't tell me about that, and he didn't tell me he was selling the place. So, why wouldn't he clean out my office and throw my things away?"

"I just don't think he would do that to you, given what's happened."

“Well, I do. I won’t give Knight Grayson the benefit of any doubt and end up looking like a bigger fool. My heart can’t take any more.”

She pulls in a deep breath and rests her hand on top of mine. “I think you should talk to him. I really do.”

I shake my head. “We have nothing to say to each other, and he’s stopped calling. So ... it’s over.” Hearing those words outside my head hurts my heart the same as if I’d ripped it from my chest. “The next time I hear from him, it will be with divorce papers. Or he might get his lawyers or someone to serve them to me.”

That shouldn’t be too far away now. We’re heading into our fourth month of marriage. In another few weeks, the six months will be up, and he can complete the sale of Sunset Cove.

Madison stares at me long and hard, the way you would when you’re waiting for some sort of reaction from someone.

“What?” I mutter after the silence becomes tense.

“Do you want a divorce, Aurora? Is that what you really want?”

“What kind of question is that?” I know why she’s asking, but I feel like I’m trying to convince myself of what I’m supposed to want. “Of course, I should want a divorce. Look at everything he did.”

“You said *should*.” Her tone is reflective and fervent, a soft hush that speaks to my heart.

I stare back at her and take a breath to clear my head. It doesn’t work.

“This is so hard and painful.” I press my hands into the floor as if it can absorb all my rage and pain.

“Because it’s real. That’s how you know it’s real.” She taps my hand and leans in closer. “I will never condone what Knight has done. I mostly want to skin him alive, but I watched you change and fall in love with him. I watched him love you back.”

“Maybe you just saw what you wanted to see.”

“No. I saw what was happening right in front of me, and you know I’m right because you felt it too. I watched the two of you on your wedding day. There was nothing fake about you. Not a damn thing. It was always real, Aurora.” She nods again. “That’s why you love him.”

I open my mouth to protest, but I can’t.

“If you can’t unlove him, the way to fix this is to either forgive him or forget about him.” She holds my gaze as if she’s cradling my pain. “The choice is yours, Aurora.”

I think about those fate-driven choices.

*Forgive Knight or forget him?*

Both options seem like the hardest things in the world right now, but I know there will come a point when I’ll have to choose.

The problem is, forgetting Knight Grayson was never something I could do.

He hooked me from the moment I first saw him.



# Chapter 43

## *Knight*



“Just checking on you,” Jericho says. Concern fills his expression as he lowers to sit next to me on the sand.

I’ve spent the last two days on the beach sketching. I knew I’d see Jericho at some point today because I haven’t been at work for a few days. I needed to disappear for a while to wrap my head around my new normal.

I set my sketchbook down and look at him. He looks like he’s come to some decisions, too.

“You look like shit,” he adds.

“Thanks.” I know I look like hell, but at least I feel slightly better for not having to worry about Bastian. The moment we were done with him, I also messaged William to let him know I’d taken care of that problem.

“This isn’t the time for sarcasm.” Jericho gives me a sidelong glance, disapproval etched into his face. “What’s going on with you? You’ve been quiet. Quiet is never good when it comes to you.”

“I’m fine.”

“You know you’re far from it, so don’t tell me that.” The skepticism in his voice reminds me that he’s my brother and I can’t hide anything from him.

“What do you want me to say? Do you want me to wallow in my sorrow and vent about all the ways I fucked things up with Aurora?”

“Yes. It’s the human thing to do when we fuck up, but just so you know, I believe you could still fix this if you wanted to.”

I shake my head. “I can’t. It’s better this way. I’ve done all I can do to fix the parts that needed fixing.” By tonight, I’ll have the documents for Sunset Cove and the divorce papers. I’ll take them to Aurora’s father in the morning, and that will be it. I’ll be gone from their lives.

My next task will be to talk to my grandfather. One more person to disappoint. “So, you’ve seriously come to a final decision on *everything*?” Jericho searches my eyes with caution.

“Yes.” I keep my gaze fixed on him. He knows my plans and knows what they mean for us both in terms of work. I’ve avoided talking to him until this was all over. I know he’s done the same, probably because he needed to think too. But it looks like he’s ready to talk.

My decision to stop the sale of Sunset Cove obviously means I won’t get Park Avenue.

As we know, Grandfather wants Jericho to be the CFO. It follows that Bastian will take the lead in my place. That is what my decision will mean, providing Jericho decides to fulfill Grandfather’s wishes to get married.

“What will you do?” he asks.

I look out to the sea, gazing at the horizon as my options swirl around in my head. They’re all good options, but they feel dead without my wife.

I return my gaze to meet his and compose my mind enough to give him an answer.

“I’m going to head back out to Saint-Tropez for a few months and help Mom with the gallery. When I get back, I’ll set up my business like I planned before.” Back to the original plan. “Have you decided what you want to do?”

“I want the CFO position. The other night got me thinking that as we have Bastian in the palm of our hands, I might be able to work with him if I need to. Of course, I would prefer

not to. I wish it were you, but I don't want to rob myself of my legacy."

"And you mustn't. I would hate that."

"I know, but it means we won't be working together anymore. That's going to be strange." As far as sentimentality goes, this is one of the rare occasions I've witnessed the emotion in him. "I wholeheartedly respect and agree with your decision for Sunset Cove, but it's a huge change for us."

"It is, but I think we both knew the day would come when we'd need to stop working together."

"We did." His voice holds the solemn edge of remorse.

"So, you're seriously agreeing to get married?" I raise my brows.

He lets out a haggard sigh and nods. "Fuck... I guess I am. But I don't expect to have what you have."

"Have?" I shake my head again. "You mean *had*."

"No. I mean exactly what I said. Knight, if you're going to lose the empire, don't lose the girl too. You love her. If you didn't, you wouldn't think she was worth all this."

"I've done too much to her."

"That doesn't mean it can't be fixed." An earnest look sneaks into his expression. "I hate to bring this up now, but if I didn't, I know Giselle would be furious with me."

At the mention of Giselle, I tense. "What is it?"

"Giselle's letter. Go read it again and listen to her this time. Just listen to her."

The letter he's talking about is what I classed as a suicide note, except it was a letter written months before she died.

"Or simply listen to me." He straightens, keeping his gaze leveled with mine. "I'm a guy with many regrets that I can't change."

The hollow in his voice suggests he's talking about the darkness from his past.

“The sort of regrets you still won’t tell me about?” I stare at him, wondering if this might be the day he decides to talk to me.

“Yes, those.”

“You just gave me a lecture on being human and talking things out.”

“Because your mistakes can be fixed. Mine can’t.” He places a hand to his heart. “My girl got away and I’ll never see her again.”

That’s the most he’s told me in the twelve years I’ve been waiting for him to talk.

“*Your girl?*”

“Story for another day, brother.”

“Will you ever tell me?”

“Yes, but not today. Today, you must only think of her.” Jericho opens my sketchbook, revealing the sketches of Aurora I’ve done. Once again, he’s showing how much he knows me. He taps the page with his index finger and gives me a small smile. “Told you you’d have your hands full with this one.”

“Yeah, you did.”

With that, he rests his hands on my shoulder, pushes to his feet, and leaves.

I watch him until I can’t see him anymore and I think of what he said to me about himself and my situation that he believes can be fixed.

Can it really?

Could I even dare to hope that Aurora would forgive me?

I wait until the sun sets before I go inside the house, then I head up to my bedroom and straight to the cupboard in the walk-in wardrobe where I keep my old things.

There’s a box at the back of the shelf where I keep the things I wanted to remember Giselle by.

It contains little things from the years we knew each other right up to her death with that letter.

I open the box and find the letter on top, right where I left it years ago when I sealed everything away, never to look at again.

Instinct wants me to close the box and put it away, but I hear Jericho's words in my head telling me to read it and listen, so I take out the blue envelope containing the letter that pushed me over to the dark side and set the box down.

It was Giselle's mother who gave the letter to me a week after her funeral. She's said Giselle had given it to her lawyer. But I always wondered if that

was true and if her mother ever suspected what Giselle planned to do.

It doesn't matter now.

I lean against the wall and open the letter. The familiarity of her words seeps into me the moment I start reading, but this time as I read, I try to listen.

*To my Knight,*

*If you're reading this, it means I'm not here anymore.*

*You'll also know how I decided to leave. Please forgive me.*

*I know you won't understand what I did, but it hurt me to think of what my future would look like in just a few months when I start dying, and everyone I love will be in more pain.*

*As I write this letter, I'm watching you sleeping in the chair next to me in my hospital bed for yet another treatment we both know won't work.*

*But I love you for trying. If nothing else, these moments between us mean more time spent together that I will always cherish.*

*I wanted to write this letter because I know you will feel everything under the sun, and you'll probably hate me for*

*what I did. But knowing you, hate is not an emotion that will ever come from you toward me.*

*I seem to be the exception to your rules.*

*I wanted my parting words to be something to help you find the same happiness you gave me.*

*It's my turn to take care of you now and tell you to live and love and never stop trying to do either.*

*Live the life you want to live and enjoy every single moment of it. But most importantly, I want you to love.*

*I will always say that we were meant to be for this time only, but there is someone else out there who you're meant to spend the rest of your life with.*

*When you see her, you'll know her.*

*I don't want you to be afraid to love her with everything inside you.*

*Don't be afraid to choose her and make sure she knows she belongs to you, and never stop fighting for that love, even if you're the one standing in your way.*

*Thank you so much for loving me and being my white knight. You saved me in every way possible. Now it's time for you to save someone else.*

*Love you always,*

*Giselle*

I stare at the letter, my soul trembling as those parting words flow into me and light touches my heart with peace.

Each word fuses with my mind, blending letter by letter, speaking directly to my soul.

When I first read this letter, it broke me, and I hated the idea of her telling me to love again.

The last time I read this letter, I couldn't conceive what she was telling me, but now, her words whisper to my core, clearing the darkness from my view with one message.

One resounding message telling me I can't lose Aurora.

No matter what I do, I mustn't.

I fell for her when I first saw her. It was always what that feeling was—*love*. Not confusion, or curiosity, or lust.

Like a seed, it was love planting itself in my heart. Now it's in full bloom, and I can't lose it.

If I do, I lose myself forever, so now I have to find a way to get my love back.

My wife.

My Aurora.

I nod at the letter as if Giselle is standing before me.

"Thank you, Giselle. I *will* live and love and never stop trying."

\* \* \*

"So, it's true." Grandfather walks into my office, his face ashen and his eyes big and sad as he looks at the box on my desk, filled with the things I'm packing.

I stare back at him and give him a hopeful smile. I wanted to see him first when he got in, but I guess his PA gave him the rundown of what I was doing. She came in here an hour ago and found me packing. I told her I was leaving.

"Yes." My voice sounds faraway and emotionless, but there's a lot inside me, including the regret for my departure.

"No. I didn't want this." Grandfather shakes his head.

"I know. But I couldn't do what you wanted me to do. I'm not selling Sunset Cove."

He comes closer and stops in front of me.

"I told Vladimir earlier that the deal is off," I explain further

"What happened? Everything seemed to be going so well."



“It wasn’t. Aurora doesn’t want Sunset Cove to be sold, so I couldn’t do it. I know that’s disappointing to you, but this is what I had to do.”

“Couldn’t you guys have come to an agreement? The offer from Vladimir was substantial.”

“No. One of the things you’ve taught me is that some things are priceless. This is one of them. Aurora doesn’t want to sell the place, and when she found out about all the things I did to her father to get Sunset Cove, she left me.”

Understanding forms in his eyes. He’s fully aware of everything I did. He was right there with me every step of the way, commending my ruthlessness, so he should definitely understand the gravity of the situation.

“I see.” He presses his lips together. “I’m truly sorry to hear that. I really am. Anybody who looks at you can see that you love your wife. Your relationship with Aurora is something beautiful that came out of this arrangement, and I truly, truly hope you can get her back. In the same breath, it’s difficult for me to accept your decision to leave.”

“I know. I already knew that was going to be hard, and I never want you to think that I didn’t appreciate what you did for me.”

“I know you appreciate it, son, but I don’t want you to leave. I don’t want you to go, but whatever I do to keep you from this point on would place me in a conflicting position with your father and brothers. I want Jericho to be the CFO at Park Avenue if he follows through with my terms, but Bastian has done some impressive work with the foreign market that I can’t overlook if you choose this path.”

I’m already nodding before he can finish talking. “I understand. That’s why I’m taking myself out of the equation. I understood from the get-go that you wanted us to earn our way fairly. So, this is me making the decision easier.”

“It’s not easier, Knight.” He stares back at me as if he’s trying to speak to the inner part of me who still wants the empire.

“But this is my choice.” My solid, unwavering tone speaks for itself, showing there’s no chance I’ll change my mind.

A pained look washes over Grandfather’s face. “Are you sure this is what you choose?”

“Yes. I’ll start my own legacy with everything you taught me, and hopefully, that will be with my wife by my side.” Getting Aurora back is my only priority. Nothing else. “Fifty years from now, I want to have my own anniversary party where our grandkids are wishing us another fifty years of happiness. That vision starts right now.”

A newfound respect fills his eyes, and he nods, resting his hand on my shoulder.

“I wish that for you too, Knight.” He gives me a warm smile. “I can tell you it’s a wonderful feeling.”

“Thank you. For everything.”

“You are most welcome.”

I pick up my box and go, closing the chapter on this part of my life with the hope to start another.

# Chapter 44

## *Aurora*



**M**y fingers still over the keyboard of my laptop as my brain stalls again.

I decided to change things up today by working on my next serial novel in the living room while my father was away.

This one is called *Forbidden Strangers*, and it's garnered the same success as *Girl No. 9*.

The inspiration behind it is the fantasy I told Knight about that night on the beach in Saint-Tropez. Of course, because he told me he should be the guy in all my fantasies, the hero ended up being completely based on him.

I expanded the story to include that after the heroine slept with this fantasy guy, she not only discovers that he's her new boss but also that his family has arranged for him to marry a fashion heiress.

I'm at the part where they hook up again, but since my big blow-up with Knight, I haven't been able to write much.

Usually, when I sit down to work, I can write a few chapters per day, but I've barely managed to finish one and a half today. The half might possibly be unusable because there are parts that sound like gibberish.

That's all I can show for twelve hours of work. Now that night has fallen again, I don't see myself doing much more.

I just can't think straight. Or at all.

Those choices Madison laid out for me keep resurfacing in my mind, flowing in and out of my thoughts like the tide of

the sea.

Nothing has changed for me, and I'm nowhere closer to figuring out what I'm going to do than I was the other night.

The only thing that seems to be moving forward is time.

I hear the front door open, meaning Dad is home.

I save my document, shut down my computer, and wait for him to come and find me.

He does exactly that and his face brightens when he sees me.

"Hi." I smile back at him as he walks in.

"Hey, there. I'm glad you're down here."

"Yeah, I thought I'd work in here today." During one of our talks earlier in the week, I told him about my pen name. He was okay with it, but I think that was only because we were talking about all the serious things he's done. He was in no position to cast any form of judgment on me.

"That's good. Did you get a lot done?" He comes closer and sits across from me in the armchair.

"As much as I could do."

"I'm glad." He presses his lips together, and the brightness in his eyes falters. "I wanted to talk to you about Knight, Aurora."

At the mention of Knight, I sit straighter. "Has something happened?"

"Yes. I saw him earlier. He gave me this to give you." He pulls a small envelope from the inside of his jacket.

My insides tighten instantly. *Are those our divorce papers?*

I imagined them to be bigger.

I also didn't think I'd get them so soon because we need to stay married for the full six months for him to gain complete ownership of Sunset Cove.

Dad holds the envelope out for me to take. I hesitate. Every envelope I've opened over the last few months has

contained bad news.

Why would this be any different? But if I think receiving our divorce papers is bad news, that has to count for something, right? That must mean I don't want to go down that path.

If this envelope does contain the divorce papers, how would I feel on seeing them?

How would I feel seeing Knight's signature sitting at the bottom, waiting for mine to join it?

As if my life is flashing before my eyes, I think of my time with Knight and the special moments we shared that stayed with me. Like the night we met, the night he gave me his ring, the way we kissed every chance we got at his grandparents' anniversary party, the first time we made love, Saint-Tropez, and him telling me 'I want always with you.'

I see them all as if they are scenes from a movie.

Dad takes my hand and warms it with his. "It's not what you think."

I must look so obvious he can read my mind.

"Isn't it?"

"No. It's something good. Go on, take a look." The assurance in his voice and the gentleness in his eyes feel like a balm soothing my nerves.

The moment I take the envelope, I know it's definitely not anything bad. It's too light. I open it and look inside to find one document and a piece of notepaper.

I pull them both out. The document is Sunset Cove's assets document.

When I find only my name listed at the bottom of it in black swirling letters, my heart skips several beats, then stills in my chest as if someone placed a hand over it.

My name is stated as Aurora Wright, just like it was before, but instead of the year Mom died, the date has changed to yesterday's.

This means Knight returned full ownership of Sunset Cove to me.

He gave it back to me. All of it.

So, he's not selling.

I look at the note next, my hands trembling. It's handwritten by him with these simple words:

*The choice was always you.*

I stare at the words, taking them into my heart, mind, and soul, and I feel that love again I saw every time I looked at him.

I look at my father, note the softness in his expression, and show him the note.

Dad nods with respectful conviction. "I believe him, Aurora. I really do and hope you can too."

"I do."

He pulls in a small breath and leans forward, resting his elbows on the tops of his thighs. "When I first met your mother, I knew she was the one. But I thought it was absurd for me to act on that because we hadn't even known each other for a week, and we were just kids. She was eighteen to my nineteen. When we parted, I regretted it so much I went looking for her but couldn't find her anywhere. I thought I'd lost her forever, but she never left my heart. I never met anyone like her, and I knew I never would. When I found you both twelve years later, I couldn't believe my luck. Having the two of you in my life completed me."

Warmth surrounds my heart on hearing his sentimental words. "Oh, Dad. It felt that way for me too."

"I know. We had a good life together, but what I'm trying to say is, when you meet that special person, hold on to them with everything you have. I will never excuse my guilt in what's happened and the way my actions brought Knight into our lives, but I also have to acknowledge what he means to you and what you mean to him. None of us started off on the right foot, but it doesn't have to end that way. I think Knight

has more than proved that he's sorry for what he did and that you are special to him. Death and life can make you lose your soul. I think he found his redemption in you. Please think about that."

I'm already nodding before he can finish. "I will."

"Good, because he's coming here tomorrow morning to see you. I know you're deeply hurt by what he did, but I think you should see him, Aurora, and hear him out." A heartwarming smile inches across his lips. "Can you promise me you will?"

"Yes. I promise." There's a lightness to my tone that reflects the forgiveness in my heart.

"Good. I don't think you'll regret it."

Dad stands and plants a kiss on my forehead. Then he leaves me with the documents, the note, and my thoughts.

Several minutes pass by, and all I can think of is seeing Knight in the morning, then my eyes drift to the grandfather clock on the wall.

It's ten.

It's not that late.

Can I really wait until morning to see him?

I stand and grab my jacket from the coat rack in the hall before the answer can process in my mind.

"I'm going out for a bit, Dad," I call out.

Dad comes to the top of the stairs and smiles at me, looking like he knows where I'm going. "Alright, be careful."

I return his smile with a newfound hope in my heart, then head out to find my husband.

\* \* \*

When I reach the house I went from calling a prison to a home, Denise and Claude welcome me with open arms and



inform me that Knight is outside in his workshop.

I head out there to see him, my nerves tangled in those tight knots I've grown accustomed to and the bats nestling in the pit of my stomach going crazy.

I walk into the workshop but don't see him, so I go around to the side room where the Giselle collection used to live.

The moment I turn the corner, a giant sculpture of a beautiful woman in a flowing Greek tunic takes my breath away, slowing my steps.

*Wow*, Knight is sculpting again, and this style is closer to his mother's with its gracefulness and awe that hits you right in the heart.

It has the same bronze finish as his others, but he's painted her dress white.

The woman looks exactly like one of those sculptures of Greek Goddesses you'd see in a museum or in the movies. She has long, flowing hair that appears to ripple like she's in the water. Her arms are outstretched like she's reaching out to someone. But she's holding something in the palm of her left hand.

When I get closer, I realize it's an opened pomegranate. A few more steps closer, and as I study the woman's face, knowledge strikes me like lightning crackling in the sky that she's me.

My hands fly up to my mouth and I gasp. Shock slams into my chest, then it ripples through my body like sparks of wildfire.

I walk right up to it and take in the magnificent beauty, my heart overflowing with everything good in this world.

I remember when I first saw the sculptures of Giselle and thought how Knight must have loved her to be so inspired to create such art. I never thought I would be standing here in the same spot, looking at a sculpture of myself.

Just as I'm about to walk around to admire the back, Knight enters through the side door, carrying a tin of what

must be paint.

He stops short when he notices me, and he stares back at me as if he's trying to make sure that I'm real.

I look at him, take in the ruffle of his hair that looks longer than the last time I saw it, and his fuller beard. He's wearing a black long-sleeved T-shirt, cream joggers, and my God, is he handsome.

Those bright blue eyes the color of the sea stare back at me, and in them I find my soul. I realize in that moment that I gave this man all of me.

"You're here." His gentle caress of a voice sounds so freaking amazing to my ears.

"Yes. I hope it was okay that I—"

"It's more than okay." He sets the paint can down and walks up to me like his mission is to take me in his arms and keep me there. I wish he would, but he stops a breath away and reaches out to touch my face.

I offer him a small smile and glance at the sculpture. "This is beautiful."

"Not as beautiful as my wife. The woman behind the inspiration."

"Really? Because this is one hell of a masterpiece."

"My wife is too." He releases me and steps a little closer.

"Thank you." Despite everything, I find myself blushing as if we just met. "What's this for?" I look at the sculpture again.

"A present for you."

My eyes widen. "Me? You did this for me?"

"Yeah. I was trying to get it finished by tomorrow."

"I love it. I truly do."

"Then I'm glad. I... told you once that you weren't my Persephone, but life proved me wrong, showing me how blind I was to see what was right in front of me." Shame steals the

spark from the awe in his expression. “I lost you for the sake of money and power.”

“I’m here, though.” I dip my head.

“Not to tell me you’re leaving me?” He lifts my chin, and as our eyes lock, I think of all the things I wanted to say when I jumped in my car and drove here.

“No.” At that confirmation, hope fills his eyes. “My dad gave me the asset document, and I just wanted to see you. I wanted to thank you *now*.”

“It shouldn’t have had my name on it in the first place.”

“I understand why you did what you did.”

“But it’s not understandable that I hurt you.” He intensifies his stare. “No matter what I stood to gain.”

“You must think I’m foolish for not wanting to sell the place for the three hundred million when I have nothing. It’s a ton of money. Money I can’t even conceive, so maybe I am foolish.” I smirk, although my choice would remain the same.

“You aren’t foolish at all.” He gives me a warm smile. “Of course, three hundred million is a ton of money, but it’s not like I needed it. You didn’t need it either at the time you found out about the sale. I understand there are some things you can’t put a price on. Sunset Cove is one of them. I’m also aware that if someone is willing to offer you that much money for something, it means it’s worth more to you to keep it. In this case, there is no price to match the value.”

I nod, grateful he understands me. At the same time, I acknowledge things couldn’t have worked out for him the way he wanted.

“What does that mean for you? If you gave me back Sunset Cove, did your grandfather sort things out for you to still take control of the company?”

“No.” His voice sounds heavy. “I left Grayson Inc. the other day.”

My heart tumbles, falling into the pit of my stomach, where it continues to sink lower and lower.

“What?” I didn’t expect this. “You left?”

“It was for the best. That was my original plan when I first found out my grandfather was retiring. I never planned to work under my father or Bastian, so I’ll start my own company when I get around to it.”

“But you wanted the CEO position at Park Avenue. I thought your grandfather might have worked something out.”

“He wanted to, but it wouldn’t have been fair. I made the right choice, Aurora.”

“But you worked so hard.”

“I love you.” He says those three words I’ve longed to hear without any prelude or preamble. They just fall from his lips as effortlessly as a gentle breath and wrap around me like warm sunlight. “I love you, and that is all that matters to me. I’m so sorry for everything I did. I’m sorry for ever making you feel like I didn’t choose you, and I’m sorry for hurting you, but most of all, I’m sorry for not telling you how much I love you before now. I could have told you the moment we met.”

His words dissolve the pain and angst I’ve held in my heart for the last few days, allowing the love I feel for him to flow through me like a never-ending river.

Love welcomes the forgiveness I found so hard days ago, and I feel like I’ve been placed on another path. A path that can only lead to happiness.

“Knight...” My voice trails off, captured by the swirl of emotion swelling in my soul.

He takes my hand, presses it to his chest, and I feel his vibrant heartbeat, beating with conviction to prove the determination in his words.

“I won’t let you go, Aurora.” He smiles. “I meant what I said when I told you I want always with you, so I won’t allow you to leave me *ever* again. I’ll do whatever it takes to win you back for good, even if it takes me until the rest of forever.”

I touch his jaw and trace my finger over his beard, loving the feeling of him beneath my fingers.

“I love you too, Knight. You’ve already won me back, and I’m not going anywhere, so how about we spend the rest of forever loving each other as husband and wife?”

He smiles back at me, the tension in his face fading along with the guard in his eyes, opening the doors to his soul.

“I love that idea, wife.”

He lowers his lips to mine, and I taste the promise of forever and everything good that will come with our love.

# Chapter 45

# *Knight*



I'm obsessed with my wife.

I'm absolutely, utterly, fucking obsessed, and I don't know how I could have ever looked at this woman and thought I could allow her to leave me.

I soul kiss her, and she kisses me back recklessly and as ruthlessly as I claim her lips.

We crash into the wall within moments, and I take a break from her lips to pin her arms above her head and stare at her perfect naked body in the moonlight.

We're in Saint-Tropez again. We've been here for the last five days.

We flew out here the day after she came back to me. Since then, this has been us. Two people on an exotic island, lost in love and so wrapped up in each other, nothing outside exists or matters.

"I'm going to feast on you all night," I promise like I'm taking an oath.

She giggles, and it's a glorious sound. "Only if I can feast on you."

"That's a given. Me first, though." I can't help my selfishness when it comes to her or her delicious body. This woman was made for me.

I release her hands, wrap her leg around my waist, then plunge my cock deep, deep inside her pretty pussy.

She arches into my pumps, then allows me to own her with every thrust of my cock into her decadent body.

I own every part of her the way I always do in these moments where we join together, and we're so close there is no distinction to where we begin or end.

There is only us.

Us, fucking like it's the first time we've touched and the last time we ever will.

Us, fucking as if we've been given the last few minutes on earth to have each other.

Every moment I'm with her makes me realize I'd marry her all over again.

No contract, no empire at the end, no legacy to claim.

I'd marry her just because I love her.

I take her this way, against the wall of my island home until the sounds of her glorious orgasm echo from her lips and the walls of her pussy are squeezing my cock so hard I nearly blow my load. But I'm not done with her yet.

We head to the bed, and there we stay until morning, then we're outside frolicking in the sea.

Soon, the days start blending and bleeding into each other and time passes along with it.

It's funny how I was so consumed with my work at Grayson Inc. that I forgot how to live. Technically, I have no work to speak of, but I have so much that if I choose to never work again and live out the rest of my days on this island with my wife, we'd be okay for several lifetimes.

Here, there is no alarm clock waking me, no secretary telling me I have back-to-back meetings until God knows what hour, and I have no thoughts of actually getting to work. My only care is my wife wrapped in my arms or around my body.

I won't lie and say that I don't miss being part of my grandfather's empire, but nothing beats this.

Nothing at all. I know I could have lost Aurora for good.



Another few days pass, and although I know we should head back to New York soon, I have no desire to do so. Neither does she.

Our family and friends have left us alone, and I purposely made sure I switched off everything to do with life in New York. We haven't even seen my mom.

The weekend goes by, and we start Monday morning on the beach.

We're just about to head into the sea when a car comes into view, rolling down the strip in the distance.

It's not my mother's car. It looks like a rental, but there's only one man I know of who would set out to drive a classic Land Rover that looks like it could belong to Crocodile Dundee.

"Who is that?" Aurora asks, slipping into my arms.

"My grandfather." I'm guessing, but I sound as certain as if I knew beforehand that he'd be coming to visit us.

We exchange a curious glance, and moments later, I'm proven right when the car pulls up outside the house and my grandfather jumps out, but I wonder what would bring him all this way to see me.

Unlike his usual office attire, he's wearing a straw fedora with a loose short-sleeved shirt and shorts.

We look different, too. I'm wearing shorts, and Aurora is in her bikini. The two of us are so tanned from being out in the sun all day, we might look unrecognizable.

Grandfather smiles at us with adoration, his gaze taking in our lackadaisical appearance. "Mr. and Mrs. Grayson, I apologize for crashing in on your love nest."

"You know you never have to apologize." I smile back at him and hold out my hand to give him a firm handshake.

"Hi, Mr. Grayson." Aurora leaves my side and gives my grandfather a quick hug.

"Please, dear, I think it's time you called me Bradford."

Aurora smiles. “Okay, *Bradford*. It’s really good to see you.”

“And you. I hope you don’t mind if I steal your husband away for a few minutes.”

“Not at all.” She glances back at me with a spark of excitement in her eyes. I know she’s thinking his presence must mean something to do with the company. I’m thinking the same, but I’ve taught myself to never assume.

“Goddess, why don’t you put on that coffee you like? We’ll join you in a little while,” I tell her.

“Sure.” She nods and saunters away, glancing back at me before she disappears into the house.

“Knight Grayson, you’re a hard man to find when you want to get lost.” Grandfather gives me a once-over and shifts his weight from one foot to the other.

I search his eyes and study his face, taking note of the lightness in his expression. “Didn’t think anyone would be looking for me so soon.”

“Only someone with an offer that might tempt you back to New York. Then again, you and your wife look real homey out here. And I see the appeal of being the only two people on this island of yours.”

“We’re happy.” Although my tone reflects my positivity, I’m sure he can see he’s got my interest hooked like a fish to an irresistible bait.

“It’s wonderful to see you two together again and happy, but I’m hoping you’ll hear me out.”

“Of course, I will. Let’s go sit over here.” I cock my head toward the chairs across from us.

We walk over and sit, then he looks at me with that pride I’ve only ever seen when he conquers some asset or lands a deal.

“So, what’s this offer of yours?” I ask.

“Since you left, I’ve been thinking long and hard about what to do, until the answer came to me.” He chuckles.

“What answer would that be?”

“That technically, you did exactly your part. You got Sunset Cove for me. That was all I asked of you.”

I straighten and contemplate what he’s saying. “Are you suggesting what I think you are?”

“Yes. Of course, it would have been good to fulfill the rest of the plan and sell Sunset Cove to Vladimir, but sometimes deals fall through. At least that’s the analysis I’ve told myself to make my decision fair.” He grins with that pride again. “Realistically, the bottom line is Grayson Inc. is my company. Regardless of whom I might upset, I can select whoever I want to take over from me. That is fair to *me*, and I want you. I have always wanted you to have a part in my empire, and I want you to create your own on the foundation of what we’ve already built.”

I can’t believe what I’m hearing. “You’re seriously picking me?”

“I am. I would be a fool to let you go when you’re the right man for the job. I also know what it means to you and what you almost lost in your pursuit to impress me. So, with that said, I would love if you took over the Park Avenue branch with immediate effect. Of course, you have whatever time you need to think about it, but the position is yours.”

I smile back at him. There is no need to think about anything. “I want it. Thanks so much for picking me. This is a huge surprise. A good one, of course.”

He gives me a hearty laugh. “I’m glad.”

“What about my father and Bastian?” I need to know if this is going to cause any backlash.

“I’ve spoken to both. Surprisingly, your father was in agreement with my decision, and Bastian didn’t try to refute. I figured there must have been something going on in the background for them to be so agreeable.” He raises a quizzical brow.

That something must clearly be the pictures and sex tape Jericho got on Bastian. Looks like my father must have decided to back out to give added assurance that I won't spill all Bastian's dirty secrets. *Good.* That was a wise choice.

"Let's just say they shouldn't be causing any problems anytime soon."

"That's always good. Of course, the CFO position is still there. The position will be down to Jericho or Bastian, but I'm not averse to finding another suitable match. Jericho has agreed to get married, so we'll see what happens. I'm sure you two will talk about that, though. He'll be happy to hear you've accepted my offer."

"I'm sure he will. Thanks again, Grandfather." I extend my hand.

"It is well deserved, son." He gives me a firm handshake and nods earnestly. "Absolutely well deserved."

My God, I got the girl and the empire.

I got them both, but it's strange I never thought I'd be sitting here today thinking the two aren't comparable.

The empire is a thing. Just another thing.

But love is forever.

I look toward the window, where I can see Aurora in the kitchen.

Every time I look at her, I see more than I have ever imagined.

I see love, light, and happiness.

I see everything I've ever wanted.

Always and forever, my girl.

# Epilogue

# Aurora

## Three months later

“Open your mouth. Before you start eating, suck the syrup off first. Just think of other long, hard things you like sucking.” Knight holds up a forkful of sticky maple and pecan roll to my mouth. On his handsome face is a saucy, sexy smile that instantly has my body heating and my thighs clenching. His eyes drop to my lips, and there’s no mistake about what he’s thinking. “It’s the same sort of sucking. You just won’t get the same pleasure.”

I laugh. “You are so bad, Knight Grayson.”

“Just the way you like me, Goddess.” He taps a hand to his heart and gives me a wolfish grin. “Believe me, life would be very boring if I were any other way.”

“I agree, and I love you just the way you are.” I open my mouth, and he eases the dessert inside. This is my first time trying it. I don’t usually like anything with pecans, but I do exactly what he says and I’m pleasantly surprised by the delicious combination of the sweet, nutty taste.

“Good, right?”

“Yes. I like it.”

He cuts off another piece and feeds it to me, watching my lips as I open my mouth.

He feeds me like this at home, too, except we don’t usually stay decent for this long. I’d either be on the table, in bed, or up against the wall by now with him buried deep inside me.

We’re at No.11, the place where we began and started this journey together.

Tonight, we're celebrating our sixth-month wedding anniversary.

Our official anniversary day was two weeks ago, but today was the day we were supposed to get divorced and go our separate ways.

But here we are, together, looking forward to all the wild fantasies and adventures we can think of creating for the rest of forever.

Over the last few months, we've spent the most remarkable time together, traveling everywhere. Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean—our second love nest.

Tonight, we're sitting at the same table we shared on the rooftop on our first date. This is the first time we've been back to No. 11 since that night.

That night, I was lamenting the loss of another job and the doomed shadow hanging over my career. Tonight, I'm sitting here with my dream job at *People Magazine*. I've been working there for the last two months, and I couldn't be happier. My serial *Girl No. 9* has also been optioned for a TV series on Netflix.

Words can't express the depth of my happiness when it comes to my career. It's unbelievable how it's taken off in ways I never imagined.

But the best thing about my life is my husband, the beautiful man sitting in front of me who changed my life.

Tonight is about the celebration of finding each other and being together, but I also have a surprise for him. *Another* big reason to celebrate.

We arrived forty minutes ago, and I've been dying to tell him what it is.

I gave him a little clue earlier when we sat down to eat, but I wanted to wait for the perfect moment.

"Is it time to tell me this surprise of yours yet?" Knight feeds me another bite of the scrolls.

"Yes." I giggle.

“Do I have to guess what it is?”

I smile wider. “That would be fun.”

“Okay, is it that you’re not wearing panties? Because that would definitely be fun.” He glides his finger up my thighs, rolling my skirt up. A frown mars his face when he touches the edge of my panties. “You *are* wearing panties.”

I giggle. “I just wanted you to touch me.”

“Okay, I’ll keep touching you while I guess.”

“That works.”

He gives me a soft stare. “Is it ... your newest article? Did you get a million readers?”

“Nope, but that would be nice.”

He strokes my thigh, picks up his glass of wine, and holds it out to my lips. “Drink. It’s easier to get you to spill secrets when you’ve had one too many.”

I shake my head. “I’m afraid I can’t drink that tonight or anything alcoholic for a while.”

We ordered the same wine we did that first night, but he hasn’t noticed that I’ve only been drinking water since we’ve been here.

Knight glances at my glass of water, then I watch realization form on his face and he pulls me into his lap.

I slip my arms around him, and the excitement that fills his eyes as he gazes at me pulls on my heart.

“Why can’t you drink the wine, Aurora?” He presses his nose to mine. “*Please* tell me it’s the usual reason most women stop drinking. Usually for around nine months.”

My smile radiates from my core, reflecting my joy from the inside out. “Yes, I’m pregnant. Only two weeks. That food my dad cooked was just fine.” I went to the doctor days ago after we had dinner with my father when I couldn’t stop throwing up.



Knight stares back at me as if he wants to savor every word I've said, then he cups my face and strokes my cheek.

“Aurora...I'm going to be a father?”

We've never spoken about children, so I hope he's not too shocked.

“Yes. Are you happy I—”

He pulls me in for a kiss, showing me without words the extent of his happiness. I've kissed this man so many times that I know what each kiss means. This one is coming straight from his soul.

“I'm the happiest man alive.” He murmurs against my lips with a warmth to his voice that whispers of all the things he's longed for. “You have no idea how happy you've made me. You are everything I've ever wanted and more.”

“So are you, Knight Grayson.” I gaze into his eyes, falling for him all over again.

That sexy smile returns, and he reaches across the table to pick up a few grains of pomegranate. He ordered it earlier as a joke, but there's a deeper sentiment to it now.

He feeds it to me, and I smile while crunching on the seeds.

“It's official now. You're staying with me forever, Goddess of Spring. And I'm going to enjoy filling your belly with all my babies.”

“*All?*” I laugh. “How many kids are we having, Knight?”

“Why don't we just let the universe decide that part, and we can work on creating them?”

“That sounds like fun, Hades.”

“It will be.”

He kisses me again, and I press my hand to his heart, feeling it beat for me.

Mine beats for him too.

\* \* \*

# Knight

It's Monday morning.

I don't hate days like these so much anymore.

Mondays now feel like another chance to start a fresh week filled with all sorts of new adventures.

*Like now.*

I'm at the Park Avenue branch of Grayson Inc., gazing out the floor-to-ceiling glass windows in my new office.

I smile at the view of the skyline and the bright sunshine bouncing off the neighboring skyscrapers.

It's truly glorious.

Although I've been taking care of this branch for a few months now, today is the first spent in my actual office.

My grandfather renovated the entire management floor so it would reflect the new leadership and have the same feeling as the building on Wall Street.

It feels better to me. Not because my father and Bastian aren't here.

*Everything* feels better than ever. Because I'm going to be a father.

It was only eighteen hours ago that I sat with my wife in the restaurant that first saw us come together and she told me the news. I haven't stopped smiling since, and I still can't believe it.

Me, a father.

I get to do it now and be the kind of father I would have wanted for myself.

I get to do *everything* the door to marrying Aurora has opened, and I simply can't wait.

I've come to learn that it really didn't matter that I had such a horrendous relationship with my own father. I had the prime example in my grandfather, one I'll definitely be following.

I never knew anything more could make me as happy as having the woman of my dreams at my side, but now I have her and my baby growing in her belly.

Our child and the host of others to come will be remnants of our love. Until then, we'll live the life we always wanted.

Jericho walks through my opened door, carrying two Cohiba cigars—our way of celebrating everything.

He's moved over here now too. But *only* because we work together and it made sense for him to come with me. His position as CFO is still pending the final criteria of marriage.

Jericho has three months from today to find a wife, and he has to stay married to her for another six before he's given the highly-desired position.

It's clear that my grandfather has used all obvious tactics to make sure my brother takes his demands seriously.

"Great view." Jericho nods as he walks up to me and hands me my cigar. "And you are still beaming like a spotlight from your baby news."

"I can't help it." I chuckle. "It's the best news."

He flicks on his lighter and lights up my cigar, then his. "It is good news, for *you*. I'm happy to be the uncle. There will be no kids in the cards for me."

"*No*?" I'm joking. I totally believe him. I'm just happy Grandfather didn't include the stipulation of an heir for Jericho. That might have been the only thing to change his mind about getting his position and share of the company.

"Fuck no. It's bad enough I have to find a wife. But I'll do it." He gives me a mirthless smile and a devious nod. "I'll do it *my way*."

"And what does that mean?"

“Let me worry about that part.” He puffs on his cigar and taps my shoulder.

“You *are* getting married, right?” I quirk a brow.

“Of course. You know me.”

“I do.”

“Great, so may God help the woman who marries me.” He smirks. “She’s in for one hell of a ride.”

I don’t doubt him, but I think back to what he said to me that day about losing his girl.

My wish for him is to find a goddess like mine.

A woman who will complete him and help him find his way back to himself.

That’s what Aurora did for me. She was the light in the darkness of my world.

If Jericho is lucky enough to find a girl like mine, then it’s him who’ll be in for one hell of a ride, but I guess we’ll have to see what happens next...

\* \* \*

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING

KNIGHT AND AURORA’S STORY.

JERICO AND RIVER’S STORY IS NEXT IN RUTHLESS REBEL, SO  
GET READY FOR ONE SEXY, STEAMY RIDE , COMING SOON XX

# Also by Faith Summers

## FAITH SUMMERS COLLECTION

### SERIES

#### **Empire of Sinners**

Ruthless Sinner

Merciless Sinner

#### **Savage Legacy**

Devil's Kiss

Villain's Obsession

Hunter's Revenge

#### **Dark Syndicate**

Ruthless Prince

Dark Captor

Wicked Liar

Merciless Hunter

Heartless Lover

Ruthless King

#### **Dark Odyssey**

Tease Me

Taunt Me

Thrill Me

Tempt Me

Take Me

Original Sins

#### **Dark Odyssey Fantasies**

Entice

Tease

Play

Tempt

Theirs

### DUETS

#### **Blood and Thorns Duet**

Merciless Vows

Merciless Union

#### **Cruel Secrets**

Cruel Lies

Cruel Promises

**Standalones**

Deceptive Vows

Deadly Games

Bad Blood

**NOVELLAS**

The Boss' Girl

The Player

Tainted Beginnings

SIGN UP TO FAITH SUMMERS' NEWSLETTER FOR NEWS ABOUT FUTURE RELEASES  
AND AN [EXCLUSIVE GIFT](#).

# Acknowledgments

To my friend Dana Pittman.

Thank you for helping me bring this story to life and breathe life into my characters.

Couldn't have done it without you.

Only you could put up with my craziness.

You know it's true. Lol. xx

And for my readers.

Always for you.

Thank you for reading my stories.

I hope you continue to enjoy my wild adventures xx



# About the Author



Faith Summers is the Dark Contemporary Romance pen name of USA Today Bestselling Author, Khardine Gray.

Warning !! Expect wild romance stories of the scorching hot variety and deliciously dark romance with the kind of alpha male bad boys best reserved for your fantasies.

Be sure to join her reader group - The Dark Odyssey

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/462522887995800/>

Check out her other books at [www.faithsummers.com](http://www.faithsummers.com)

