



Mine
of a
Kind

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

SANDILYNN

NINE OF A KIND

KIND BROTHERS SERIES, BOOK TEN



SANDI LYNN

SANDI LYNN ROMANCE, LLC

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NINE OF A KIND

Nine of a Kind
(Kind Brothers Series, Book Ten)

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

Sandi Lynn

Nine of a Kind

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MISSION STATEMENT

Sandi Lynn Romance

Providing readers with romance novels that will whisk them away to another world and from the daily grind of life – one book at a time.

ALSO BY SANDI LYNN

Looking for more romance reads about billionaires, second chances, and sports? Check out my other romance novels and escape to another world and from the daily grind of life – one book at a time.

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Being Julia (Forever, Book 4)

Collin (Forever, Book 5)

A Forever Family (Forever, Book 6)

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Wyatt Brothers

Love, Lust & A Millionaire (Wyatt Brothers, Book 1)

Love, Lust & Liam (Wyatt Brothers, Book 2)

A Millionaire's Love

Lie Next to Me (A Millionaire's Love, Book 1)

When I Lie with You (A Millionaire's Love, Book 2)

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Kind Brothers

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Two of a Kind (Kind Brothers Series, Book 2)

Three of a Kind (Kind Brothers Series, Book 3)

Four of a Kind (Kind Brothers Series, Book 4)

Five of a Kind (Kind Brothers Series, Book 5)

The Kind Brothers (Kind Brothers Series, Book 6)

Six of a Kind (Kind Brothers Series, Book 7)

Seven of a Kind (Kind Brothers Series, Book 8)

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Nine of a Kind (Kind Brothers Series, Book 10)

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His Proposed Deal

The Secret He Holds

The Seduction of Alex Parker

Something About Lorelei

One Night in London

The Exception

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CHAPTER 1



Christian

I pulled into my parent's driveway and sat in my car for a few moments before heading inside. The results of my second test with 23andMe still rattled me. One screw-up I could see, but a second screw-up, not likely. Taking a deep breath, I climbed out of my car and stepped through the front door of the house I grew up in—a home where many happy memories were made.

"There you are." My mother smiled as I walked into the kitchen.

"Hey, Mom." I kissed her cheek.

"What's wrong? I can tell something is wrong," she said.

"Nothing is wrong. I'm just hungry. I was in surgery all day and barely ate."

"Well, we'll take care of that in about ten minutes."

"Where's Dad?"

"He's upstairs changing. He'll be down shortly."

I walked out of the kitchen and over to the cabinet where my father kept his liquor. Pulling out a glass and the bottle of scotch, I poured myself a drink and threw it down the back of my throat. As I poured another, my father walked into the living room.

"Hey, son." He walked over and hugged me.

"Hey, Dad."

"Tough day?" A smirk crossed his lips.

"Yeah. Tough day."

"Dinner is ready, boys." We heard my mother shout.

My father and I walked into the dining room, and I sat in my usual seat.

I'd been sitting in the same chair since I was out of a highchair.

"So. How was your day?" my mother asked as she passed me the bowl of spaghetti and meatballs.

"It was okay. I was in surgery all day." I placed some on my plate.

As I sat there, different scenarios ran through my head at what those test results meant. Did my father have a secret family? Was I adopted, and they never told me? I couldn't wrap my head around it. As much as I didn't want to bring it up, I had no choice.

"The strangest thing happened," I said.

"Oh yeah? What happened, son?" my father asked.

"I got some results from a test I took a while ago."

"What test did you do?" my mother asked. "Are you okay?"

"Actually, I printed out a copy." I reached into my back pocket, took out the folded piece of paper, opened it, and handed it to my mother.

I sat there and watched the color drain from her face, almost as if she was going to pass out.

"Caroline, what is it?" My father reached over and took the paper from her.

The look on his face told me things were about to get ugly. My father stared at me as he cleared his throat.

"This is ridiculous. Why the hell would you do this test anyway? I thought we talked about this!" His voice raised. "Now your DNA is out there, and God knows what these people will do with it. This proves they're shady. It's a conspiracy!"

His voice was shaking, and when I looked at my mother, she lowered her head and refused to look at me.

"Those are the results of the first test. When I first got them, I was convinced they screwed up and mixed my DNA with someone else's. So, I bought another kit and tested it again. I just got the results back today. And guess what? They're the same results. You either have another family we don't know about, Dad, or I'm not your biological child."

My father went into a rage and slammed his fists on the table. "You are my son!" He stood from his chair and pointed at me.

"Who are these three brothers that share half my DNA?" I demanded to know.

"Christian, stop," my mother spoke in a low voice.

"No, Mom. I'm not going to stop until I find out what the hell is going

on!” I stood from my chair. “Why did two tests come back with the same results?” I shouted. “There’s something you aren’t telling me, and I want to know what it is!”

Suddenly, tears began to fall down my mother’s face.

“You are my boy. MINE!” she shouted. “We raised and loved you. You are MINE!”

“Caroline, shut up,” my father yelled.

My mother walked over to me and placed her hands on each side of my face.

“You are my son, Christian.”

“Caroline, stop it!”

“For God’s sake, William. We knew this day would eventually come.” She placed her hands on the table and sat down.

“Caroline, for the last time, keep your goddamn mouth shut! Do you want to go to prison?” my father blurted out.

“Prison?” I furrowed my brows. “What the fuck are you talking about?” I shouted. “You have two seconds to tell me before I walk out that door, and you will never see or hear from me again.”

“I knew it was a mistake,” my mother cried as she shook her head. “But when you were born, and your father called to tell me—”

“Caroline, I’m warning you.” My father spoke in a severe tone.

“Shut up, Dad!” I shouted at him.

“I had to have you, Christian. I wanted a child so badly, and I had lost mine.”

“Jesus Christ,” my father said as he sat down and buried his face in his hands.

“Mom.” I walked over, sat in the chair next to her, and took hold of her hand. “What did dad tell you when he called?” My voice was calm.

“He told me that he had a child for us. A boy. A beautiful five-pound five-ounce boy.”

“I don’t understand.”

I looked over at my father, who refused to look at me.

“Are you saying that Dad kidnapped me? ANSWER ME!” I shouted as I slammed my hand on the table, and my mother flinched.

She sat there sobbing as she nodded her head. My body went into shock as the air around me constricted. My father stood up and walked out of the dining room. Running after him, my hands gripped the front of his shirt.

“You are to tell me everything right now!” I screamed in his face. “Or I’m calling the police.”

He broke out of my grip and sat in his favorite chair.

“You can’t understand what your mother and I went through after she lost the baby. You have no idea,” he said. “I had to do something. It took us ten years to conceive, and she was slipping away from me.”

“Then you try again!” I shouted.

“We couldn’t. Your sister died inside the womb at eight months. There were complications, and the doctor had to do an emergency hysterectomy,” he yelled.

I ran my hand through my hair as I paced around the room. “So, you took me from someone else and raised me as your own?”

“As I said, I didn’t have a choice. Your mother wanted a child so badly, and I wouldn’t lose her over it.”

“OH MY GOD!” I placed my hands on my head. “I can’t fucking believe this!”

“The parents already had a child and a newborn.”

“What do you mean a newborn?” I furrowed my brows at him.

“She had two children, and she’d be fine. I didn’t have any, and I couldn’t have any!” My mother walked into the room.

I gasped as I tried to fill my lungs with air.

“Was I even born in Seattle?” I shouted.

Both of them refused to look at me.

“Fine. Maybe you can tell the cops then.” I pulled my phone from my pocket.

“STOP!” my father shouted. “No. We moved here after we took you. We couldn’t stay in Los Angeles. Too many people would ask too many questions.”

“Los Angeles? I was born in Los Angeles?”

“Yes,” my father said.

“Is my birthday even my real birthday?”

“Yes,” my mother said. “That day was so special to me. Your father wanted to change it, but I wouldn’t let him. Christian, we love you so much, and you have to understand—”

“You love me? Do you call what you did love? You stole me from my biological parents!” I screamed as tears filled my eyes. “How could you do that to those people and me?”

“I did what I had to do for our family,” my father said.

“What?” I placed my hands on my head. “Oh my God. What is wrong with you?! Who are my birth parents?”

“I don’t—” my father shouted. He gripped his chest and fell out of his chair to the floor.

“William!” my mother screamed as she ran to his side.

“God,” my father said. “I think I’m having a heart attack.” He gripped his chest. “I can’t breathe.”

“Mom, run to my car and grab my medical bag!” I shouted as I pulled out my phone and dialed 911.

Within seconds, she was back and set my bag on the floor next to me. Opening it, I grabbed the packet of nitroglycerin and shoved it under his tongue. He released the grip on his chest as he lay there, trying to catch his breath. The paramedics arrived, put him in the ambulance, and took him to the hospital. I followed behind in my car, and my mother looked at me as soon as we reached the ER.

“I hope you’re happy. Look at what you did to him. If anything happens to him, Christian.” She cried as she shook her head.

I stared at her with such disgust that I needed to get out of there.

CHAPTER 2



Christian

Tears streamed down my face as I drove to my apartment. I was tired and confused, and I couldn't think straight. I pulled into my spot in the parking garage and took the elevator up to the fourteenth floor, where my apartment was located. Stepping inside, I threw my keys down and poured myself a scotch. Anger and rage consumed me as I finished my drink and threw the glass against the wall. Walking into my bedroom, I stripped out of my clothes and started the shower. As the hot water streamed down my body, I stood there with my hands planted firmly against the tiled wall and lowered my head. This situation was nothing but a nightmare. A horrific nightmare that I couldn't wake from. Everything I was told and believed my entire life was a lie, and I no longer knew who I was.

After my shower, I threw on a pair of sweatpants and sat down at my desk. As much as I hated my parents at the moment, my father suffered a heart attack, and I'd just walked away. A hint of guilt resided inside me, but my anger trumped that guilt. How could they do what they did? I thought I knew them better than anyone, but I didn't know them at all.

I tossed and turned all night with the nightmares that plagued me. After getting dressed the following morning, I drove to the hospital. It was my day off, but I needed to check on William. As far as I was concerned, he no longer earned the right to be called Dad. When I stepped inside the room, I saw Caroline sitting beside him, holding his hand. I looked at his vitals first and then at his chart.

"What are you doing here?" Caroline asked in a low voice.

"I'm not the monster you two are," I spoke as I studied his chart. "Meet

me out in the hallway.” I walked out of the room, and she followed.

I led her to an empty room down the hall.

“Which hospital was I born at?”

“It doesn’t matter, Christian,” she nervously spoke.

“It matters to me,” I spoke through gritted teeth. “Who are my real parents?”

“I don’t know. Your father never told me. He said the less I knew, the better. When that nurse handed you to me that night—”

“What nurse? Who was she?”

“I don’t know. Your father called, gave me the address of a motel, and told me to go to room 112 and that he’d be there within a couple of hours. The moment I held you in my arms, I fell madly in love with you.” She went to place her hand on my cheek, and I grabbed her wrist.

“Don’t touch me. What kind of people are you?” Tears filled my eyes.

“People do desperate things when they want something they can’t have,” she said.

“That’s why the two of you freaked out when I mentioned the 23andMe test last year.”

“You listen to me.” She brought her finger up and shook it. “We loved you and gave you everything you ever wanted. That woman had her hands full as it was, and you wouldn’t have gotten the proper attention from her that you did from me. You are my life, Christian. You’re my son.”

“I am not your son!” I shouted. “I never belonged to you! I have to go.”

“Where are you going?”

“That’s none of your business.” I pointed at her as I walked out of the room.

I went to my office on the fifth floor.

“Dr. Chase.” Anna smiled. “Isn’t today your day off?”

“Yeah, Anna. It is. I need to do a few things. Don’t let anyone know I’m here. I don’t want to be disturbed.”

“Okay. Sure.” She smiled.

I stepped into my office, shut the door, and sat behind my desk. Grabbing a pen and a notepad, I started writing things down. I took my pen and circled Los Angeles over and over again. That’s where I would find the answers I was looking for. Looking around my office, I knew I couldn’t stay here and needed to get out of Seattle for good. I turned my computer on and typed up a resignation letter. Grabbing the letter from the printer, I walked out of my

office and over to Anna.

“Can you call down to the dock and have them bring me up a box?”

“Sure. What for?”

“Just do it.” I walked away.

When I reached Dr. Hannigan’s office, he was on the phone.

“I’ll call you back, Beatrice. Christian, I heard about your father’s heart attack.”

“Yeah, Ned. But he’ll be fine.” I walked over to his desk and handed him my resignation.

“What’s this?” He took it from me and looked it over. Immediately, his eyes diverted up to mine. “Is this a joke?”

“No. Yesterday was my last day. I’m sorry, Ned.”

“Did something happen? Because I can fix it.”

“Something did happen, but it’s personal, and it has nothing to do with the hospital. I’m moving to Los Angeles.”

“Los Angeles? Christian, please. Let’s work something out.”

“Trust me, Ned. This isn’t something I was planning. This personal thing happened, and I need to leave Seattle permanently.”

“Are you in trouble?”

“No. It’s nothing like that.”

“What about your parents? I know how close you are to them.”

“My parents are the reason I’m leaving. Please do not tell anyone. Just say I left for personal reasons. I have to go. I hope you can understand how sorry I am.”

“I can’t. But you do what you have to do. If you ever need anything, you call me.”

“Thanks, Ned.”

When I returned to my office, a box was sitting on my desk. Taking my doctorate from the wall, I put it in the box along with some of my awards and personal items. When I returned home, I grabbed my large suitcases and threw in everything that would fit. After pouring myself a scotch, I grabbed my phone, took it out on my terrace, and made a call.

“Hey, Christian. What’s up, man?”

“Shaun. Is that house on the beach still for sale?”

“Are you serious?” he asked.

“Yeah. I’m very serious.”

“Yes. I just turned down an offer today because—well, I just did. If you

want it, it's yours."

"I want to buy it."

"This makes me so happy, but I don't understand. Does that mean you're moving to Los Angeles, or are you just using it as a second home?"

"I'm moving. I think it's time I made a change in my life. Listen. I have to go. I'll be in touch."

"Sure. Okay."

As much as I liked Shaun and considered him a good friend, this was too personal to talk about.

The following morning, I threw my suitcases, guitar case, and backpack in the back of my BMW and was on the road to California by five a.m. It was eleven p.m. when I arrived at the Ritz Carleton in Los Angeles. I checked in and went to my suite on the fortieth floor. After the bellman set my luggage in the bedroom, I handed him a tip and poured myself a scotch. Between not getting much sleep and the long drive, I was exhausted—so tired that I was out the second my head hit the pillow.



"Dr. Christian Chase. It's good to see you again." Dr. George Sutherland, the CEO of Cedars, smiled. "Have a seat, please."

"Thanks for seeing me, George." I took a seat across from his desk. "For months, you and the board have been trying to get me to come here."

"I know, and you've politely turned us down every single time." He smirked.

"If the offer still stands, I'd like to join the staff here at Cedars."

"Are you serious, Christian?" A hint of excitement was heard in his voice.

"Yes. I've decided that maybe Cedars and Los Angeles are where I'm meant to be."

"My God. This is the best news I've heard all week. Yes. Of course. You're hired."

"Thank you, George. I appreciate it."

"The board is going to be thrilled about this. What made you change your mind?"

"Personal reasons that I'd rather not get into."

“No problem. Whatever they are, I’m happy they led you to us. When can you start?”

“Is next week okay? There are a few things I have to do first to get settled.”

“Next week is fine. Welcome to Cedars-Sinai, Dr. Chase.” He grinned as he extended his hand. “I will have the offer and contract drawn up, and I’ll give you a call when they’re ready to be signed.”

“Thank you, George. I appreciate it. I’m really looking forward to working here.”

“You won’t regret it, Christian.”

CHAPTER 3



Charleigh

“Hey, pumpkin.” My dad smiled from behind the bar.

I walked over and kissed his cheek. “Hi, Dad. Are you bartending tonight?” I arched my brow.

“Lara called in, and I told Dominic I’d cover for him while he went on break.”

“I can cover.” I set my purse down.

“I appreciate it, but you just got off your shift at the hospital.”

“It’s fine. Go and do whatever you have to. I got it covered.” I smiled.

“You are my favorite daughter.” He kissed my cheek.

“I’m your only daughter.” I laughed.

“You’re still my favorite. That guy at the end of the bar is cut off.” He pointed as he walked away.

I walked to where the guy had his forehead on the bar.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Just fucking peachy,” he slurred as his head slightly lifted and fell back down.

“Hey, Charleigh. I didn’t know you were coming in tonight.”

“Hi, Dominic. I just stopped by to see my dad. Is your break over?”

“Yeah. Is this guy still here? Shit.”

“How long has he been here?”

“At least four hours. He drank double scotches and did a few shots of whiskey.”

“He’s going to be feeling that in the morning.” I smirked.

“Hey, buddy.” Dominic tapped the man’s shoulder. “You need to pay up

now and leave.”

The man moaned as he reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and set it on the bar. Dominic looked at me, and I shrugged.

“Okay.” I stepped from behind the bar and stood next to him. “Do you want me to pay for you?”

“Sure,” he slurred.

I grabbed his wallet, and it was full of cash.

“Here’s his tab,” Dominic set the receipt down.

Looking at it, I pulled the bills from his wallet and handed them to Dominic.

“Thanks, Charleigh. I’ll call him an Uber.”

“No need. I’ll be his Uber.” I sighed. “I’m heading home anyway.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” I smiled. “Just don’t tell my dad. Come on, buddy.” I placed my hands on his head and lifted it from the bar. “Oh, hello.” I grinned at his sexiness. “Damn.” I turned my head and looked at Dominic. “He’s hot.”

Dominic let out a sigh while shaking his head.

“I’m going to need a little help here,” I said.

He walked out from behind the bar and placed one arm around his neck. I grabbed his other arm and put it around me.

“You don’t even know where this guy lives,” Dominic said as we walked the drunken man out of the bar.

“I have his wallet, and I’ll check his driver’s license.”

After helping him into the passenger seat, I pulled the seatbelt over him.

“Thanks, Dominic. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Be careful, Charleigh. I don’t need something happening and then your dad coming after me.”

“You worry too much.” A smirk crossed my lips.

I took out his wallet I’d tossed into my purse, and pulled out his driver’s license.

“Christian Michael Chase,” I spoke out loud. “Seattle? Shit.”

I stuck my hands in his front pockets to see if I could find a room key to a hotel. His pockets were empty except for his phone. Pulling it out, I noticed it was dead.

“Great.” I sighed. “Come on, Mr. Christian Michael Chase. Tell me where you’re staying.”

He let out a moan. I had a couple of choices. I could take him to the ER to

sleep off the alcohol, or I could take him home with me, and he could sleep it off on my couch because there was no way I could get him up the stairs to the guest bedroom. Shit. I've taken many guys back to my place I'd just met, and they could have been far more dangerous than this drunken man. He couldn't even keep his eyes open or walk.

"To my place, it is," I said.

I glanced over at Christian as he was passed out in his seat. When Dominic and I managed to get him up from the stool, he stood about six foot three. His hair was dark brown and cut aggressively short on the sides and in the back but with a longer and textured top. I couldn't tell the color of his eyes because he mostly kept them shut. But with his strong cheekbones and masculine jawline framed with a five o'clock shadow, I was sure they were dreamy. His full lips, which were accentuated by a light mustache, really completed his look. He wore a pair of tailored dark gray dress pants and a black button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up. When I lifted him from the barstool and placed my hand on his chest, the hardness beneath my palm told me he was incredibly fit. But I didn't have to feel him to know. You could tell just by looking at the man that he worked out.

I pulled into my spot in the parking garage at the same time as my best friend and neighbor, Oliver.

"Hey, Charleigh." He smiled. "Just getting home from work?"

"Sort of. Hey, can you help me with him?" I gestured to the passenger side of my car.

He walked over to my car and looked at Christian through the window.

"Who is that?"

"A very drunk man I brought home from my dad's bar."

"What?" He laughed.

"I didn't know what else to do with him. He's totally wasted. I was going to give him a ride home, but when I pulled his driver's license from his wallet, his address is in Seattle."

"Is he a tourist?"

"I don't know. I checked his pockets for a room key to a hotel, and he didn't have one. I'm just going to let him sleep it off on my couch."

"Well, at least he's too drunk to try anything." A smirk crossed his lips as he opened the car door.

"Come on, buddy. Let's get you up to Charleigh's apartment."

I grabbed hold of the other side of him, and Oliver and I took Christian up

to my apartment on the third floor. As soon as I opened the door, I thanked Oliver for his help.

“Are you sure you got him?” he asked.

“Yeah. I can get him to the couch. Thanks again. Tell Brady I’m having you two over for dinner next week. We’ll coordinate schedules.”

“I will. I’ll talk to you tomorrow,” he said as he walked across to his apartment.

I’d finally managed to get Christian to the couch. Pushing the button, the couch reclined back.

“Where am I?” he mumbled as his eyes opened for a moment.

His eyes were blue. A beautiful blue color that caught me off guard.

“A safe place.” I patted his chest before I ran upstairs and grabbed a pillow and a blanket for him.

By the time I returned downstairs, he was out cold. I took a bucket from the closet and set it next to the couch in case he got sick.

“Sweet dreams, Mr. Chase,” I said as I turned off the lights and went upstairs to bed.

I was up the following morning by six a.m. Grabbing the IV pole from the spare bedroom and an IV bag, I took it downstairs and hooked Christian up to it. I thought he'd wake once I inserted the IV into his hand, but he didn't even move.

I went upstairs, took a shower, and got dressed. After making a cup of coffee, I grabbed the bowl with the leftover popcorn and sat on the edge of the coffee table, staring at him while he slept and wondering what drove him to drink the way he did last night. It was time for him to wake up because he couldn't sleep here all day, so I grabbed a handful of popcorn and tossed it at him, one piece at a time, hitting him in the face.

CHAPTER 4



Christian

I could feel something hitting my face, so I forced my eyes open and lay there in confusion.

“It’s about time.” A woman smiled as she sat staring at me on the edge of the coffee table.

I looked down at my hand with the white tape over it and followed the line up until I saw the IV hanging next to me.

“Where the hell am I? Who are you? What the hell is going on?” I went to sit up and fell back as my head was pounding.

“Relax. You’re at my apartment. Just let the IV work its magic for a while longer.”

“How the hell did I get here?” I asked the woman with long brown wavy hair and blueish-gray eyes.

“I brought you here last night from the bar. You were so wasted that you couldn’t keep your head up.”

The last thing I remembered from last night was sitting on a bar stool and drinking a couple of scotches.

“Who the hell are you?” I asked.

“I’m Charleigh.” She smiled. “And according to your Seattle driver’s license, you’re Christian Chase.”

“Did you do this?” I held up my hand with the IV in it.

“Yes. You need to hydrate, and this will help you recover faster.”

“Who just keeps IV poles and bags of fluid around their house?” I furrowed my brows.

“I do. And it’s a good thing I do because you’d be a lot worse right now.”

Her lips formed a smile. “Coffee?”

“I have to go.” I went to get up, and she placed her hand on my chest and pushed me down.

“You need some more fluids. Just relax. I’ll get you some aspirin and a cup of coffee. Then you can go.”

She was right. I wasn’t in any condition at the moment to be going anywhere.

“Do you take cream or sugar in your coffee?” she asked.

“No. Just black.”

I reached over the side of the couch, feeling for the buttons to put the couch upright. Charleigh walked over, set the cup of coffee on the end table, shook two aspirin in my hand, and handed me a glass of water.

“Thanks. Were you throwing popcorn at me?” I asked as I saw pieces of popcorn around me.

“Yeah.” She grinned. “It was time for you to wake up.”

“And you couldn’t have woken me up like any normal person would?” I furrowed my brows.

“What fun would that have been?” She grinned.

“Did I hit on you or something? Why the hell would you bring me to your place?”

“No. You didn’t hit on me. I was going to drive you home, but I didn’t know where that was, and I didn’t know what else to do with you.”

“I’m staying at the Ritz Carlton. My keycard was in my pocket.”

She shook her head. “No. There was nothing in your pockets. Just your wallet and your phone.”

“Shit. It must have fallen out somewhere.” I picked up the coffee cup and brought it to my mouth. “How do you know how to do this?” I held up my hand with the IV.

“I’m a nurse. So, care to explain why you felt the need to get so inebriated last night?”

“No. I don’t. Why were you there? I don’t recall seeing you.”

“It’s my dad’s bar, and I stopped in to see him. You were in pretty bad shape, and Dominic, our bartender, was going to call you an Uber. Since I was leaving anyway, I said I’d drive you home. But I wasn’t about to drive you all the way to Seattle.” A smirk crossed her lips, and I couldn’t help but smile.

“I can see why you’re a nurse.”

“Why is that?” she asked.

“Because I can tell you take good care of people.”

“Well, I wasn’t about to let you end up on the street somewhere like a drunken fool. You’re not an alcoholic, are you?” Her eye narrowed.

“No.” I breathed out a laugh. “Not at all. I have a lot going on right now, and I guess I didn’t realize how much I was drinking.” I finished my coffee. “I should get going. Can you take this out for me?” I pointed to the IV.

“Sure.” She smiled as she walked over and seamlessly removed the IV from my hand. “How are you getting back to the Ritz Carlton?”

“I’ll call a cab or something.” I felt my pockets and noticed my phone was missing. “Shit. Have you seen my phone?”

“It’s on the counter. It was dead, so I charged it for you. I’ll drive you to the hotel.”

“You’ve done enough.” I stood up from the couch, walked to the kitchen, and pulled my phone from the charger.

“Stop being stubborn. I’ll drive you to the hotel. Why pay a cab or Uber fee when I’m free?” She grinned.

I stared at her from the kitchen and thought about how beautiful she was. Five foot seven, long brown wavy hair, blue eyes with a hint of gray, high cheekbones, a gorgeous smile, and a body that quickly caught my attention when she stood up from the coffee table to make me a cup of coffee.

“Fine. You can drive me to my hotel.”

“I’ll go put on some shoes, and then we’ll go.” A smile framed her face as she walked up the stairs.

I couldn’t believe I’d let myself get so drunk last night. Her father’s bar was within walking distance of the hotel, so I figured I’d have a couple of drinks, think, and then leave. The situation I was in had me so fucked up, and I wouldn’t rest until I had all the answers I was looking for.

“So, Mr. Chase. What are you doing here in Los Angeles if you’re from Seattle?” Charleigh asked, glancing over at me. “Are you on vacation or something?”

“Something like that. I’m visiting some friends.”

There was no way in hell I was telling her why I was really in Los Angeles.

“Then why were you alone in a bar drinking your problems away?” A smirk crossed her lips.

“Who said I was drinking my problems away?”

“There are two types of people who do what you did last night—alcoholics and people trying to escape whatever is going on in their life. You said you’re not an alcoholic, so you must have some problem you’re dealing with.”

I cocked my head at her and didn’t say a word.

“What? I basically grew up in a bar.” She smiled.

I chuckled as she pulled up to the entrance of the Ritz Carlton.

“Thanks again for everything. I appreciate it.” I opened the car door.

“You’re welcome. Besides, it was refreshing.”

“What do you mean?” I asked before climbing out.

“It’s not every day that I bring a guy home and don’t sleep with him.”

“Ah. I see.” I smiled. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Charleigh.”

“Same, Mr. Chase.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips.

I walked into the lobby of the hotel and got a new keycard. When I went up to my suite, I took a long hot shower, got dressed, and headed to see Shaun at Sterling Capital.



“Hi, Selena. Is he busy?”

“Hi, Dr. Chase. He’s on a conference call.”

I looked through the glass of Shaun’s office, and he gestured for me to come in.

“Can I get you a cup of coffee?” Selena asked.

“That would be great. Just black. Thanks, Selena.” I stepped inside Shaun’s office and sat across from his desk.

Shaun finished his call, stood up, and extended his hand.

“It’s great to see you, Christian.”

“You too, Shaun.” I shook his hand.

“I’ve been waiting to hear from you. George called me yesterday and said you’re joining Cedars.” He grinned.

“I am. I was going to call you last night, but I stopped in a bar for a couple of drinks, which turned into several.”

Selena stepped inside and handed me a piping hot cup of coffee.

“Thank you, Selena.” I smiled.

“You should have called. I would have joined you.”

“I know.” I sighed.

“I had no idea you were coming to Los Angeles so quickly,” he said. “I can have the purchase agreement for the house done by this afternoon.”

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

“New job, new house. Did something happen? Just a couple of months ago, you said you weren’t interested in moving here. You know you can talk to me.”

“I know, Shaun. I left Seattle for personal reasons, and I’m not ready to discuss what happened. I hope you can understand that.”

“Yeah. Of course, I do. When are you starting at Cedars?”

“Next week. There are a few things I need to get done before I start. I need to go shopping for furniture for the house.”

“You’re not bringing yours from Seattle?”

“No. I’m donating all the furniture. I called a moving company yesterday, and they’re going to pack up my personal things and deliver them at the end of this week. I’m hoping to get the furniture delivered this week as well, so I can get settled before I start at Cedars.”

He reached into his desk, pulled out a business card, and handed it to me.

“Go see Cheri. She’ll take care of you. With a little extra cash, she’ll bump you to the top of the delivery list.”

“Thanks, Shaun.” I smiled.

“When are you going?”

“Oh my gosh, Christian.” Jenni smiled as she walked into the office. “I didn’t know you were in L.A.”

“Hi, Jenni.” I stood up and hugged her.

“What are you doing here, babe?” Shaun asked.

“I dropped something off to Sam from Julia, and I couldn’t leave without seeing my handsome husband first.” She walked over, sat on his lap, and kissed him.

“Christian is here to stay, and he’s going furniture shopping for the house. I gave him Cheri’s card.”

“Oh! Let me go with you.” Jenni grinned. “I have a great eye, as you already know. I picked out all the furniture for our house. When are you going?”

“I was going to go right now.”

“Perfect.” She smiled.

“Are you sure you don’t mind?” I asked.

“Not at all.” She waved her hand. “I’ll just call the studio to let them know I’ll be in later.”

“Thanks, Jenni. I appreciate it.”

She walked out of Shaun’s office to make a phone call.

“Watch out for her.” Shaun smirked.

I chuckled. “Why?”

“You’ll see.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

CHAPTER 5



Christian

When Jenni and I entered through the doors of the furniture store, we were greeted by a tall man.

“Welcome. How can I help you today?”

“We’re here for Cheri,” Jenni spoke.

“I’ll go get her.”

Jenni and I were walking to the bedroom section when a woman with short blonde hair walked over to us.

“Hi, I’m Cheri.” She smiled as she extended her hand.

“Dr. Christian Chase.” I placed my hand in hers.

Jenni turned around and placed her arm around mine with a smile.

“Hello again, Cheri. I told Christian he had to buy all his furniture from you since you took good care of Mr. Sterling last time.”

“Uh, hello there. It’s nice to see you again. How is Mr. Sterling?”

“He’s fine. We’re married now.” She held up her ring. “If you happen to see Mr. Sterling, please don’t tell him we were in here together. That would cause all kinds of problems. Right, baby?” Jenni reached up and kissed my cheek.”

I glanced at her and didn’t know what to say.

“I won’t. My lips are sealed. What exactly are you looking for, Dr. Chase?”

“Furniture for the entire house.”

“He just bought the house down the beach from ours. Isn’t that so exciting?” Jenni grinned.

Cheri inhaled a sharp breath. “Yes. How exciting. Have a look around,

and I'll be around to answer any questions you may have."

"Thank you," I spoke.

Jenni and I walked away and continued looking around.

"Shaun warned me to watch out for you." I smirked.

"Please." Jenni waved her hand. "When I was here with Shaun, she was hitting on him so badly. She would have hit on you too. And the funny thing is, she thought he was married when we were here last. I pretended to be his mistress." She grinned.

I let out a laugh as we shopped. I picked out everything I needed with Jenni's guidance. She did have an eye for decorating, and I was happy she came with me.

"Everything you ordered is in stock, and the next available delivery date is the end of next week," Cheri said.

Reaching into my wallet, I pulled out a few hundred-dollar bills and discreetly set them down, covering them with my hand.

"The end of next week won't work. I really need that furniture this week." I slid the bills across to her.

"Oops. Did I say the end of next week?" Her lips flashed a smile. "I meant the end of this week. How is Friday?"

"Friday is perfect."

"Okay. You're scheduled for a Friday delivery."

"Thank you, Cheri." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

"You're very welcome, Dr. Chase."

When Jenni and I left the store, I walked her to her car.

"Thanks again for your help."

"Don't mention it. We're all very excited that you're moving to the beach. Why did you change your mind?" She cocked her head.

"It was time for a change."

"Good for you." She patted my chest. "Where are you staying?"

"The Ritz Carlton," I said.

"Pish. Go to the hotel, grab your bags, and come to our house. You're staying with us. We're way better company than that ritzy hotel." She smiled.

"I appreciate it. But I don't want to intrude on you and Shaun."

"Nonsense. You know Shaun's going to insist you stay with us. Besides, it's only for a few days. Wouldn't you love to wake up and run along the beach, go surfing, and drink with us at night? You'll practically have the house to yourself anyway since Shaun and I are at work all day."

My phone rang, and when I pulled it from my pocket, I saw Shaun was calling.

“See. He’s going to insist. I have to run. I’ll see you later when I get home from work.” She winked as she climbed into her car.

“Hey, Shaun,” I answered as I walked to my car.

“How did shopping go?”

“It went great. Cheri scheduled my delivery for this Friday.”

“Excellent. I’m afraid to ask how my wife was.”

“According to her, we’re having an affair, and she told Cheri that if she sees you, she’s not to mention she saw us together.”

Shaun laughed. “That’s my wife. By the way. I didn’t get a chance to ask you where you’re staying.”

“According to your wife, I’m moving in with you for a few days.”

“Good. I was just going to tell you that. I’ll bring the purchase agreement home with me. Listen, Christian, I have to run. My meeting is starting. I’ll see you later.”

“See you later, Shaun.”

As much as I wanted to be alone, being surrounded by friends was better for now.

My phone rang, and when I looked at it, I saw that my mother was calling. Swallowing hard, I answered it.

“What do you want, Caroline?” I climbed into my car.

“I just went to your apartment, and there’s a bunch of people there with boxes packing your things up. What the hell is going on, Christian?”

“I left Seattle, and I’m not coming back.”

“You can’t do that. What about your job?”

“I can get a job anywhere.”

“Where are you?”

“Don’t worry about where I’m at. You lost the right to know anything. You and William committed a crime, Caroline. Do you even understand that? Can you comprehend that you kidnapped me?”

There was silence on the other end.

“We love you, Christian. We gave you more love than anyone ever could. Come home, and we can try to put this behind us.”

Was she fucking serious?

“I have to go.” I hung up and then blocked her and my father’s number.

I drove back to the Ritz Carlton, and when I walked into the lobby,

Charleigh jumped up from one of the chairs and ran over to me.

“There you are. I was afraid I was going to have to wait all day. Well, actually, I was giving you another fifteen minutes, and then I was leaving.”

My brows furrowed. “What are you doing here?”

She reached inside her purse and held up my watch.

“You left this.”

“Oh my God. I didn’t even realize I didn’t have it on. Why was it off?”

“I took it off and set it on the end table when I put in your IV. It must have fallen because I found it in between the table and the couch. I know this an expensive watch, and I didn’t want you to freak out.”

“Thank you. You could have just left it at the front desk. You didn’t have to wait for me to return.”

“I could have. But like I said, it’s a very expensive watch. To be honest.” She looked around. “I’m not sure if I trust them enough to give it to you,” she whispered.

I chuckled. “Thank you. I appreciate it. Are you hungry?”

“A little. Why?”

“I’m starving, and I haven’t eaten a thing since dinner last night. Let me buy you lunch as a thank you for taking care of me last night and bringing me my watch.”

“Okay.” A beautiful grin crossed her face.

“We can just dine here at Savoca,” I said.

“Savoca is fine.”

We walked into the restaurant and were promptly seated at a table for two.

“Good afternoon, you two. I’m Andre, and I’ll be your server. What can I get you to drink?”

“I’ll have a glass of Chardonnay,” Charleigh said.

“And for you, sir?” Andre glanced at me.

“I’ll just stick with water.”

“Very good. I’ll let you two look over the menu, and I’ll be back with your Chardonnay, Madame.”

“It’s Charleigh.” She smiled.

“Very well, Charleigh.” Andre smiled as he nodded his head.

“Why did you tell him your name?” I asked.

“I don’t like personal titles like a miss, madame, Mrs., or ma’am. If someone is going to refer to me, I prefer my name.”

“I see.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I glanced at the menu.

“Here is your Chardonnay, Charleigh. Are you ready to order?”

“I’ll have the California Wagyu Burger,” she spoke.

“And for you, sir?”

“I’ll have the same.” I handed him my menu.

“Thank you, Andre.”

“You’re very welcome, Charleigh.”

“So, Mr. Christian Chase. What is it that you do in Seattle for work?”

“I’m a doctor.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Nice. What type of doctor? Family medicine, pediatrician, internist, ER doctor? Wait, don’t tell me.” She pulled her phone from her purse and started typing. Her eyes diverted to mine as she set down her phone. “You’re a cardiothoracic surgeon?”

“I am.” I smiled as I picked up my glass of water.

“You’re my favorite kind of doctor.”

She was pulling no stops with the flirting, and I was turned on.

Andre walked over and set our burgers in front of us.

“May I get you anything else?”

“I think we’re good. Thank you,” I said. “So, why am I your favorite kind of doctor?”

“You just are. This is so good.” She took a bite of her burger. “I’ve lived in California all my life and have never been inside this hotel. I bet the rooms are nice.”

“They are. I can give you a tour of mine after we eat.” My lips formed a smirk.

“I’d like that.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

She was the one flirting, so I took advantage of it. If she wanted sex, I was more than happy to give it to her. I welcomed it, considering all the stress I’d been under lately. After we finished lunch, I took her up to my suite. Stepping inside, she looked around.

“Wow. This is really nice.” She grinned. “Great view.”

“It certainly is.” My eyes raked over her. “Shall we?” I held out my hand.

“Yes. We shall.” The smile never left her face. “Wait. You don’t have a wife or girlfriend back home, do you?”

“No.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “I’m one hundred percent single.”

“Perfect.” She grinned.

CHAPTER 6



Christian

I led her to the bedroom, placed my hand on her cheek, and stared into her beautiful eyes before brushing my lips against hers. Our tongues met, and our kiss intensified. Her fingers deftly unbuttoned my shirt, and she pushed it off my shoulders. As I broke our kiss, I gripped the bottom of her shirt and pulled it over her head. When I went to unbutton her pants, I stopped when I noticed a surgical scar down her chest. My eyes diverted up to hers.

“That is why you’re my favorite kind of doctor.” A smile crossed her lips as she took down her pants.

I wrapped my arm around her waist and pushed her onto the bed. My lips devoured her neck as they made their way to her cleavage and along the scar that ran vertically down her chest. Gripping the sides of her panties, I pulled them down, and my mouth explored her. Soft moans escaped her lips as her fingers tangled in my hair. The sweet taste of her had my cock so hard I thought I would explode right then and there. Dipping a finger inside, her moans heightened, and I worked my magic with my mouth and hand. Her body tightened as she orgasmed. Standing up, I took my wallet from my back pocket, pulled out a condom, and took down my pants, releasing my throbbing cock that wanted to be buried deep inside her.

“Damn.” She smiled as she stared at me. “You better hurry up and get that thing on.”

She reached behind her, unhooked her bra, and tossed it over the side of the bed. Staring at her supple and beautiful breasts, I hovered over her and wrapped my lips around her hardened nipples before thrusting inside her. She

welcomed me in, and the feeling overwhelmed me. Her legs wrapped around my waist, and her fingers dug into my back as I thrust in and out of her. This was exactly what I needed. It was hard to hold back between the swelling and warmth inside her. Increasing my speed, she orgasmed again, and I was on the edge of exploding. After a couple more thrusts, I halted and let out a satisfying moan as I felt all my troubles fall away. Dropping my body on hers, I buried my face into her neck while I waited for my racing heart to calm, as her fingers softly stroked my back.

“You are one talented man, Dr. Chase.”

Lifting my head, I smiled as I stared into her eyes. Bringing my lips to hers, I softly kissed them before rolling off her and onto my back.

“So are you, Miss—” I glanced at her.

“Ellis.”

“Charleigh Ellis.” I brought my hand up and stroked her cheek.

She sat up against the headboard and covered herself with the sheet.

“I’m sure you have questions,” she spoke.

“I do. I have a lot of questions.”

“I had a heart transplant twelve years ago when I was twenty years old. I was born with a heart condition that was managed until one day, my heart decided it didn’t want to work anymore. I spent three months in the hospital, and then a donor’s heart became available. I remember the day the doctor walked in with a huge smile. He said, ‘Charleigh, we have a heart for you.’ Of course, I was happy, but I couldn’t stop thinking about the person who died to save my life.”

“Do you know who the donor was?” I asked.

“Yeah. She was a beautiful eighteen-year-old girl who was driving home one night and was hit by a drunk driver. She was in a coma for a few days and declared brain dead. Her parents had difficulty letting her go, so my doctor told them about me and asked if they wanted to meet me.”

“Did they?”

“Yeah. We talked for a long time. After our talk, they let their daughter go. They’re wonderful people. They stayed for my surgery and visited me afterward. We meet for lunch or dinner every year on my anniversary date. I hold high regard for cardiothoracic surgeons, and that’s why you are my favorite kind of doctor.” A smile crossed her lips.

The corners of my mouth curved upward as I ran my hand down her hair.

“This was fun.” She climbed out of bed. “And now, I have to go.” She

grabbed her clothes and got dressed.

I climbed out of bed, pulled on my pants, and walked her to the door.

“Thank you again for everything.”

“No problem. Thanks for lunch and the tour of your room.” She smirked.

“You’re welcome.” I chuckled. “It was nice to meet you, Charleigh Ellis.”

“It was nice to meet you too, Dr. Christian Chase. “Whatever life is throwing your way at the moment. Alcohol isn’t going to solve it.” She winked as she opened the door and walked out.

I smiled as I shook my head. My phone pinged, and when I pulled it from my pocket, I saw a text message from Shaun.

“I’m heading home if you want to come over.”

“I’ll grab my bags and be on my way. See you soon.”

I gathered my things, zipped up my suitcases, and went down to the lobby to check out. After the valet brought my car around, I climbed in and headed to Shaun’s. I parked my car in my driveway as not to take up space in Shaun’s. As I climbed out, Nathan walked over.

“I heard the excellent news.” He smiled as he gave me a bro hug. “Welcome to the beach, man.”

“Thanks, Nathan. It’s good to be here.”

“Dad! Can you—Christian!” Ella ran over and wrapped her arms around my legs.

“Hey, Ella. How are you?”

“I’m good. Why are you here?”

“Dr. Chase is moving in next door to us,” Nathan said.

“You are!” Her eyes lit up.

“I am.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “So, I’m at your disposal anytime you want to learn about the heart.” I smiled.

“That is so cool. I’m happy you’re our new neighbor.”

“Go get your shoes on, kiddo. We have to pick up Sofia from the studio.”

“Bye, Christian.” She waved as she ran back to her house.

“You shouldn’t have told her that.” Nathan smirked. “She’ll always be over at your house with questions.”

“That’s okay. I don’t mind. She’s a great kid.”

I pulled my luggage, duffel bag, and guitar case from the trunk.

“Are you heading to Shaun’s?”

“Yeah.”

“Let me help you.” He grabbed one of my suitcases.

“Thanks, Nathan.”

When we stepped through the front door of Shaun’s house, he walked over and grabbed my luggage from Nathan.

“I’ll take this up to the guestroom.” He smiled.

“I have to run,” Nathan spoke. “I’ll see you later.” He patted my shoulder.

“See ya, Nathan.”

I took the luggage I was carrying and my duffel bag up to the guestroom.

“Thanks again for letting me crash here until my furniture is delivered.”

“Don’t even mention it. You know you’re always welcome here. Let’s go grab a couple of beers and sit outside.”

We were sitting in the loungers on the patio when Simon walked over with a beer in his hand.

“Good to see you, Christian.” He extended his hand. “Welcome to the beach.”

“Thanks. It’s good to see you too, Simon.” My brows furrowed. “What happened?” I pointed to his black eye.

“That, my friend, is something you’ll get used to seeing.” Shaun laughed. “In fact, don’t be surprised if he shows up at your door one night asking you to stitch him up.”

“That’s right.” Simon pointed at me as he sat down. “It’s good to know there are four doctors living on the stretch of this beach now.” He smirked. “But seriously. I’m happy you changed your mind about L.A. All that rain in Seattle would depress the shit out of me.”

I chuckled. “You get used to it.”

“Why the sudden change of heart?” Simon asked.

“What can I say? I love hanging out with you guys, and I missed you when I wasn’t here.”

“Shut the fuck up.” Simon laughed. “Anyway, I’m out of here. Grace and I are going to dinner. I’ll catch you two later.”

“Speaking of dinner. Let’s order some Chinese,” Shaun said. “Jenni should be home soon.”

“Sounds good.” I followed him into the house.

“What happened to your hand?” Shaun asked as he pulled out the menu from the drawer and handed it to me.

“It’s embarrassing.”

“What did you do?” A smile crossed his lips.

“Remember how I told you I went to a bar last night for a drink and ended up drinking several?”

“Yeah.”

“I woke up this morning in some strange girl’s apartment, reclined on her couch, and hooked up to an IV.”

“What?” Shaun laughed. “Are you serious?”

“Unfortunately, I am. I guess I was so wasted that she took me back to her place. She didn’t know what to do with me since I had no key to my hotel room, and my driver’s license said Seattle.”

“Oh shit.” He continued to laugh. “She actually hooked you up to an IV?”

“Yeah. She’s a nurse.”

“Damn.” He shook his head. “How old is this woman?”

“Thirty-two.”

“Interesting. Is she hot?”

“Oh yeah. Very hot.” I grinned. “Her father owns the bar, and she was visiting him last night.”

“You’re lucky. Who knows where you would have ended up. But that’s what you get for not calling me and telling me you were in L.A.”

“Lord have mercy.” Jenni walked through the door. “How lucky am I to walk into such sexiness.” She grinned. “Hi, baby.” She walked over and kissed Shaun.

“Hi, babe.”

“Dr. Chase. It’s good to have you here with us again.”

“Thanks, Jenni.”

“I’m going to run upstairs and change. Can you pour me a glass of wine?” she asked Shaun.

“Of course, babe.”

“You’re a very lucky man,” I said. “Jenni is a great woman.”

“Yeah.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “She’s the love of my life. Now that you’re in L.A., maybe you’ll find someone special.”

“We’ve had this conversation before. I’m good with being a bachelor. The last thing I need right now is some woman complicating my life. I have enough shit going on.”

“Like what?” Shaun cocked his head and furrowed his brows.

“Just with the move and everything.”

“Well, you’ll be settled into your new home and job soon enough.” He picked up the manila folder from the counter. “Let’s get this purchase

agreement signed.” He grinned.

CHAPTER 7



Christian

As soon as Shaun handed over the keys to my new house, I walked down and went inside. As I looked around the empty twenty-seven-hundred-square-foot home, I'd never felt more alone, beaten, and battered in my whole life. Everything my parents told me my entire life was nothing but a lie. I placed my hands on the island in the kitchen and pushed myself back. I needed to start the search as to who I really was.

The sliding door opened, and when I looked up, Conner walked in.

"Hey." He smiled. "I heard the great news. Welcome to the beach." He walked over and shook my hand.

"Thanks, Conner. It's good to see you."

"Is everything okay?" he asked. "You looked like you were in a deep thought."

"I'm fine. Just taking in my brand-new house."

"It's beautiful. Sam, Stefan, and Shaun did a great job with the redesign and everything."

"Yeah. It looks amazing. I can't wait until my furniture is delivered so I can get settled."

"When are you starting over at Cedars?" he asked.

"Next week."

"It'll be great to have you there." He placed his hand on my shoulder. "We're all meeting down at the beach to welcome you. Are you in?" He smiled. "You better be in."

"Yeah. I'll be down in a bit." I smiled.

"Great. We'll have the beer waiting." He walked out.

I stared at him through the sliding door as he stepped off my patio and headed down to the beach. I really liked all of the Kind men. In fact, I considered them close friends. But there was something different about Conner, and I couldn't put my finger on it. I'd felt it the first time we met at the medical conference. The moment he walked into my house, the tension that tore through me subsided, and for a moment, I felt calm. I turned off the lights, locked up, and went down to the beach. Taking the seat next to Conner, he handed me a beer.

"To Christian. Welcome to the beach, man. We're all happy to have you with us." Sebastian smiled as he held up his beer bottle.

"Cheers," Everyone shouted as we all tipped our bottles to one another.

"Thank you. It's good to be here."

"How did your parents feel about you moving to Los Angeles?" Sam asked.

A knot formed in my stomach.

"Uh. They were cool about it." I lied as I brought the beer bottle to my lips.

"Do you play Call of Duty?" Conner asked as he glanced at me.

"I do."

"Awesome. We'll have to play sometime."

"Count me in. Maybe this weekend, once my furniture is delivered, you can come over, and we'll play."

"I'd like that. I'll even bring the alcohol," Conner said.

"Sounds like a plan." I smiled.

We talked for a while, and everyone headed home. I caught up with Simon and asked if he had a minute to talk.

"Sure. Come on over," he said.

We stepped through the sliding door and went into the living room.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"I was hoping you could do me a favor."

"Of course. Anything."

"I need you to do some digging on my father, Dr. William Chase."

"Why?" His brows furrowed.

"There's just some information I need to try and find out. I can't get into the specifics of it. Also, I need you to promise me that you won't mention this to any of the guys."

"Christian, what's going on?"

“That’s all I can say, Simon. I need your word that you won’t mention this.”

“I promise. I won’t. What kind of information are you looking for?”

“The hospital he worked out of thirty-three years ago is what I’m really looking for. But anything else you can learn about his past would be helpful.”

“I’ll see what I can dig up. But if you really want this, I suggest bringing Grace on board.”

“Simon—”

He put his hand up. “You can one hundred percent trust her. She’s the best at finding out anything about anyone. She has some unconventional ways of getting information. I can call her down if you want.”

I stared at him for a moment, undecided whether I should let him. I liked Grace, and a part of me knew I could trust her.

“Okay. Let’s bring her in on this.”

“Grace, come down here,” he shouted.

“What’s up?” She smiled as she walked into the living room.

“What is discussed here is not to be mentioned to anyone,” Simon said.

“Okay. You have my word.” She took a seat in the chair across from the couch.

“Christian needs us to dig up some past information on his father.”

“What kind of information are you looking for?” Grace asked.

“Which hospital he worked at thirty-three years ago, and anything else you can find out around that time. Before you ask, that’s all I can tell you. It’s something personal that I can’t get into right now.”

“Okay. I’ll see what I can find out tomorrow.” She got up, went into the kitchen, grabbed a notepad and a pen, and handed it to me. “Write down his full name and date of birth.”

I did as she asked and handed it to her. “Thanks, Grace. I appreciate it.”

“No problem, Christian.” A smile crossed her lips. “And don’t worry. This conversation never happened.”

I left Simon’s and headed next door to Shaun’s. When I stepped through the sliding door, he and Jenni were having a make out session in the kitchen.

“Don’t let me stop you.” I smiled. “I’m just going to head up to bed.”

“Everything okay?” Shaun asked.

“Yeah. I just wanted to ask Simon a couple of questions. I’ll see you two in the morning.” I walked up the stairs.

The following morning, I went downstairs and saw Shaun standing at the

coffee machine.

“Good morning. Coffee?” He smiled.

“Thanks.”

“How did you sleep?” he asked.

“Pretty good.” I took a seat at the island.

Shaun walked over and set the cup of coffee down in front of me.

“You know you can talk to me,” he said. “I know something’s going on with you. I saw it when you walked into my office.”

“It’s nothing, Shaun.”

“It’s something for you to go and talk to Simon.”

“Did he say something?” I brought the cup to my lips.

“No. He didn’t say a thing. But out of all of my brothers, you happen to want to talk to the detective. Not to mention your sudden move here out of the clear blue. Something’s changed, Christian.”

I felt bad for not telling Shaun what had happened. He was a close friend, and he’d done nothing but provided me with friendship and kindness.

“I asked Simon and Grace to look into my father’s past.”

“Why?” His brows furrowed.

“I can’t go into all the details just yet, but he did something years ago, and I need to find out what exactly happened. That’s all I can say right now.”

“I respect that. It must have been bad for you to pack up and leave Seattle.”

I swallowed hard. “It was.” I looked down. “It’s as if I don’t even know those people.”

Shaun reached over and placed his hand on my shoulder. “Remember. I’m here for you. We all are.”

“Thanks, Shaun.” A small smile crossed my lips.

“I have to get to the office. What are you doing today?”

“I have a few errands to run.”

“Okay. I’ll see you later, my friend.” Shaun grabbed his briefcase and headed out the door.

CHAPTER 8



Christian

After running a few errands, I went to my house, put things away, stepped out the sliding door, and headed down to the shoreline. Taking a seat in the sand, a light wind swept across my face as I sat and stared out into the blue ocean water. I thought about Charleigh and the scar from her heart transplant. I'd never been with a woman who had a heart transplant, not that it mattered. She was a sexy and energetic woman. I didn't know her, but what I did know was that I'd never met anyone like her.

"Hi, Christian!" Ella walked over.

"Hey, you." I smiled.

"Shouldn't you be at work saving people's hearts?"

"I'm on vacation. Shouldn't you be in school?" I glanced at my watch.

"I had a half day today. But I'm leaving soon.

"Why?"

"Sofia has a doctor's appointment with Georgia. I get to see my dad!" She grinned. "And my uncles."

"That sounds like a lot of fun."

"What are you doing out here?" She sat down next to me.

"Just staring at the water and thinking."

"About what?" She cocked her head.

"Nothing in particular."

"I bet you're thinking about how happy you are now that you're living with us on the beach."

The corners of my mouth curved upward. "I am thinking about that."

She stood up, placed her hands on each side of my face, and stared at me.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

“Nothing.”

“Ella, come on. We have to go. Hi, Christian.” Sofia waved.

“Hi, Sofia.” I waved back.

“I’ll talk to you later, Christian.” Ella ran up to the house.

“Bye, Ella,” I shouted.

Why did she do that? I thought to myself. Getting up from the sand, I dusted myself off, and when I went to grab my phone from my pocket, it wasn’t in there. Shit. I must have left it in the car. Walking to the front of my house, I opened my car door, grabbed my phone, and looked over at Sofia as she and Ella climbed out of the car.

“Is something wrong?” I shouted.

“My car is dead. It was fine when I picked Ella up from school. Now it won’t start.”

“Let me try,” I said as I climbed in and tried to start it. “It sounds like your alternator is bad.”

“Great.” She sighed as she placed her hand on her forehead.

“Ella told me you have a doctor’s appointment at the medical center. I can take you.”

“Oh my gosh, Christian. Thank you. But I can’t ask you to do that.”

“Yes, you can,” Ella said.

“You didn’t ask.” I smiled. “I’m offering. Come on.”

I helped Ella into the backseat and buckled her in. Climbing in on the driver’s side, I fastened my seatbelt and pulled out of the driveway.

“Thank you,” Sofia spoke.

“You’re welcome.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I glanced over at her. “How are you feeling?”

“Tired and nauseous. I don’t know why they call it morning sickness when it lasts all day.”

I chuckled. “Well, some women only have it in the morning. But don’t worry. It’ll subside in the second trimester.”

“I hope so.” She sighed.

We walked into the medical center and took the elevator up to the second floor.

“I’m going to see, Dad!” Ella let go of Sofia’s hand.

“I’ll go with her.” I smiled.

“Thank you, Christian.” Sofia placed her hand on my arm. “I shouldn’t be

too long.”

“Take your time.”

Ella opened the door to the Kind practice, and when Conner saw her, he smiled and scooped her up in his arms.

“What are you doing here?” he asked her. “Hey, Christian.”

“Sofia’s car is dead, so Christian drove us here.”

“That was very nice of him. Thanks for that.” Conner looked at me.

“It’s no problem at all.”

“Where’s my dad?” Ella asked.

“He’s in with a patient. Why don’t you ask June to take you to the kitchen? We have cookies in there.”

“Come on, sweet girl.” June smiled as Conner set Ella down.

Conner walked over and extended his hand. “Thanks again for getting Sofia to her appointment. I know Nathan will be very appreciative.”

“I’m happy to help out.” I shook his hand. “Besides, I’ve only known you all for a short time, but you already feel like family.”

“Good.” He smiled. “That’s what we aim for.”

Jackson walked up to the reception desk with a patient and then over to me.

“Good to see you, Christian. What are you doing here?”

“Sofia’s car wouldn’t start, and she had an appointment with Georgia, so I drove her and Ella here.”

“Thank you for that. Where is my niece?”

“I have a patient. I’ll see you two later,” Conner spoke as he walked away.

“She’s in the kitchen with June,” I said.

“I bet you’re looking forward to getting back to work.” Jackson smiled.

“I am. I miss surgery.” I sighed.

“Well, it’s better that you get settled first. You know. We’d love to have you join us here at the medical center.”

“I’d love to, but with my type of profession, I’m needed at a hospital full-time.”

“Yeah. I know.” He patted my back. “It was worth a try.”

My phone rang, and when I pulled it from my pocket, I saw Simon was calling.

“I have to take this. I’ll be right back,” I spoke to Jackson and walked out into the hallway. “Hello.”

“Christian, it’s Simon. Are you going to be around tonight? Grace has some information for you.”

“Yeah. Why don’t you and Grace stop by my house later? We’ll have a little more privacy. Shaun was already grilling me last night and this morning.”

“Sounds good. We’ll be over around seven.”

“Okay. Thanks, Simon.”

When I walked back into the practice, Nathan was standing there holding Ella.

“Hey, Christian. Thank you for getting Sofia to her appointment. I really appreciate it.”

“No problem, Nathan. I was more than happy to do it.”

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

“Georgia said she’s ready for us. We’re hearing the baby’s heartbeat,” he said.

“Go right ahead. I’ll wait.” I smiled.

After Sofia finished her appointment, I drove her and Ella home. Pulling my phone from my pocket, I sent Simon a text message.

“Hey. Is it okay if we meet at a bar called Charleigh’s?”

“Yeah. We’ll see you there.”

“Do you know where it’s at?” I asked.

“Sure do. Great bar. We’ll come right from the station, so we can be there around six-thirty.”

“Okay. I’ll see you there.”

The more I thought about it. It was better that we met and talked away from the beach. Everyone would start to ask questions if they saw me talking to Simon and Grace alone, and I wasn’t ready to tell them anything.

CHAPTER 9



Christian

I pulled up to the bar, climbed out of my car, and stepped inside. The first thing I did was glance around to see if Charleigh was there. Walking up to the bar, I took a seat on the stool.

“You’re back.” The bartender smiled.

“Dominic, right?”

“I’m shocked you remembered.” A smirk crossed his lips as he turned around and grabbed a bottle of scotch from the shelf.

He set a glass in front of me and poured the amber liquid into it.

“Thanks. Charleigh isn’t here, is she?”

“No. Why? Are you looking for another ride?”

“No.” I breathed out a laugh. “I just wanted to say hi if she was here.”

“If she comes in, I’ll let you know.” He walked away.

I felt a hand on my shoulder, and when I turned around, I saw Simon and Grace standing there.

“Hey.” I smiled.

“Let’s go grab a table,” Simon said.

“Dominic. A single malt scotch for my friend here, and—” I looked at Grace.

“Glass of white wine, please,” she said.

“A glass of white wine for the beautiful detective.”

We walked over to a booth in the corner, and I slid into the seat across from Simon and Grace. Grace reached into her bag and pulled out a file folder.

“Your father was on staff at Cedars as a pediatrician for ten years. His last

day was on July 24, 1989.”

“So, he quit a week after I was born,” I said.

“Oh yeah? What day is your birthday?” Simon asked.

“July 15, 1989.”

“No shit. That’s Conner’s birthday too.” He smiled.

“Really?” I cocked my head.

“Yeah. It looks like we’ll be celebrating two birthdays at the same time.”

He grinned.

“Did you find out anything else?” I asked Grace.

“Only that he moved to Seattle, obtained his license, and opened his own pediatric practice. But you already know that. Whatever you think he did, I can’t find anything.”

“Fuck.” I picked up my scotch and finished it.

“Listen, Christian. You can trust us with whatever is going on,” Simon said.

“I found out my parents have been lying to me my entire life.”

“How?” Grace asked.

“They aren’t my real parents.”

“So, you were adopted?” Simon’s brows furrowed.

“Illegally,” I said.

“Oh shit,” Grace said. “You’re trying to find your birth parents, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. I’m trying to find out who the fuck I am and where I came from. All I know is that I was born in Los Angeles and not Seattle like they told me.”

“Man, I’m so sorry,” Simon said. “That’s really fucked up. How did you find out?”

“I’d rather not get into that right now. If my father worked at Cedars when I was born, there have to be hospital records for me.”

“If you were adopted illegally, your records would have been destroyed,” Grace spoke. “I’m sure your birthdate isn’t even your real birthdate. People who illegally adopt take extreme measures to ensure nothing can be tracked.”

“July 15th is my real birthday. My mother told me my father wanted to change it, but she wouldn’t let him. I know I had to be born at Cedars.”

“They told you that?” Simon asked.

“No. They wouldn’t tell me. But since my father worked there, it makes sense.”

Simon narrowed his eye at me. “Why do I feel like you’re holding back a vital piece of information?”

“I need another drink.” I stood up from my seat and walked to the bar. “Dominic.” I held up my glass. “Make it a double.”

He walked over and refilled it.

“Thanks.”

I headed back to the table and slid into my seat. Tipping the glass to my mouth, I drank half of it.

“Fine. You want to know the whole damn truth? I was kidnapped. Stolen from the hospital and stolen from my biological parents by Dr. William Chase.”

“For fuck’s sake.” Simon sighed as he leaned back into the booth. “Are you one hundred percent sure?”

“It came right from his mouth.” I snapped.

“Jesus Christ, Christian.” Grace reached across the table and placed her hand on mine.

“That’s why I needed to know which hospital he worked at thirty-three years ago. Because I was always told he worked in Seattle his whole life.”

“How the hell does someone just do that?” Simon shook his head.

“There was a nurse involved. My mother told me my father called her and told her he had a baby for them. He gave her the name of a motel to go to. A nurse met her there and handed me over to her.”

“My God. I’m so sorry,” Grace said. “The first thing Simon and I will do is search the police database for any reports of missing children/babies the day you were born.”

“Why would they do what they did?” Simon asked.

“It took my mother ten years to conceive a child. The baby died before birth, and they had to do an emergency hysterectomy. She couldn’t have children after that.”

“How did you leave things in Seattle?” Grace asked.

“Well.” I picked up my glass. “During our heated confrontation, my father had a mild heart attack and had to be rushed to the ER.”

“Oh my God, Christian,” Grace said.

“He’ll be fine.” I finished off my scotch.

“This explains why you moved here out of the blue,” Simon said. “And here I thought it was because you missed our bright faces and shining personalities.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“I’ll be honest with you. I’m not sure what I would have done if I didn’t have you guys. As hard as this shit is, it’s nice to know I have friends here I can count on.”

“You do, bro. Don’t ever forget it. We will always be up in your business as if you’re one of our own. Are you ever going to tell Shaun?” he asked.

“Yeah.” I sighed. “It’s killing me to keep this from him. But I wanted to wait until I had all the information I needed first. I have a feeling he’ll want to step in.”

“Oh, he will. Trust me.” Simon chuckled. “He has people, and you have Grace, who can do some unethical work.” He grinned. “Between all of us, we’ll find out exactly who the hell you are and where you came from.”

Suddenly, Charleigh slid next to me, hooked her arm around my neck, and kissed my cheek.

“You’re still here.” She smiled.

“Who is this, Christian?” The corners of Simon’s mouth curved upward.

“Hi. I’m Charleigh.” She extended her hand with a bright smile.

“Simon. And this is my wife, Grace.” They shook her hand. “Charleigh? As in this bar?” Simon asked.

“Yes. It’s my dad’s. He named it after me when I was born.”

“That’s really cool. How do you know my friend Christian?”

“I took him back to my place a few nights ago.”

“Good for you.” Grace smiled.

Simon’s brow arched as he looked at me.

“I was wasted, and she didn’t know where else to take me. I’d lost the keycard to the hotel, so she didn’t know where I was staying.”

“You were that inebriated that you couldn’t tell her?” Simon asked.

“I could barely get him off the bar stool.” Charleigh smiled. “I took him home with me and let him sleep it off on the couch.”

“Along with an IV,” I said.

“What?” Simon chuckled. “You hooked him up to an IV?”

“I did. In case you’re wondering. I’m a nurse practitioner.”

Suddenly, Simon’s phone pinged. After glancing at it, he looked at Grace.

“Gotta go, babe. Our services are needed. We’ll talk later, Christian. It was a pleasure to meet you, Charleigh.”

“The pleasure was all mine.” She smiled. “Grace, I love your handbag.”

“Thank you.” Grace grinned. “It was great to meet you. Hopefully, we’ll see you again soon.”

“Wow. What great people. What do they do?” Charleigh asked.

“They’re detectives with the LAPD.”

“That’s awesome. So, how long are you in town for?” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Actually, I bought a house and live here now.”

She cocked her head as her gorgeous eyes stared into mine.

“I knew that was going to happen if we slept together,” she spoke in a serious tone.

My heart started rapidly beating.

“Just kidding.” She laughed. “You should have seen the look on your face. Where did you buy a house?”

“Venice Beach.”

“Nice. Are you all moved in?”

“Not yet. The truck with my things from Seattle is coming tomorrow, and my furniture is being delivered on Friday.”

She grabbed hold of my hand and pulled me out of the booth.

“What are you doing?”

“I want to see your house.”

“What? Now?”

“Yeah. I’ll follow you there.”

“Charleigh, I—”

“I won’t stay long.” She smiled as she turned her head and looked back at me.

I climbed into my car, and Charleigh climbed into hers. What was with this girl? I wasn’t in the mood for company, yet I couldn’t say no to her.

CHAPTER 10



Charleigh

Dr. Christian Chase. An overly sexy but wounded man. I watched him from across the bar when Dominic told me he was there. I saw the anguish on his face while he talked to his friends. The same anguish he had that night when I took him home. I'd already known he had moved here because the news was already all over the hospital—the infamous Dr. Christian Chase had joined Cedars-Sinai as the new cardiothoracic surgeon. Why he didn't tell me, I had no clue. But working with him would be exciting. I wouldn't tell him that I knew, and I wouldn't tell him that I also worked at Cedars. If he wanted me to know, he'd tell me. If not, he'd be surprised to see my smiling face next week.

I pulled into the driveway next to him and smiled when I saw his house—a charming beige Hampton-style home with a large bay window and French doors on the second level.

“Wow. I'm liking this already.” I grinned as I walked over to him.

“Thanks. Wait until you see the inside.”

We stepped onto the porch, where he unlocked the door, and we went inside. When he flipped the light switch, I stood in the foyer in awe as I looked around the empty space.

“I am in love with this kitchen. Oh my God! You have a coffee bar. I hope you're going to decorate it properly.” I smiled as I turned to him.

He chuckled. “I'm not much of a decorator. I had Jenni go with me to the furniture store to help pick out furniture.”

“Who's Jenni?”

“Shaun's wife. She's a fashion designer. They live a few houses down.

He's the one I bought the house from. In fact, all of his brothers and cousins live on this stretch. Starting with that house right there." He pointed from the window. "That's Nathan's house."

"Wait a second. Is she 'Simply Jenni?'" I asked.

"Yeah. That's her." The corners of his mouth curved upward.

"I love love love her clothing line! I'd love to meet her."

"I can arrange that. Would you like to see the upstairs?"

"I'd love to."

I followed him up the stairs as he gave me a tour of the rest of the house.

"This is one of the guestrooms," he said as he turned on the light.

"Why is there a bed in here?"

"It belonged to Nathan. When he bought his daughter a new bed, Shaun took it and put it in here in case whoever bought the house wanted it."

I glanced over at him with a smile. "Have you tested it out yet?"

"No. Not yet." A smirk crossed his lips.

I put my purse down and climbed on the bed, propping myself on my elbows. "Would you like to give it a test drive?"

He pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it on the floor. His ripped torso stunned me again. Climbing on top of me, he brought his lips to mine.

"I think we can take it for a test drive." He smiled.

His hand roamed up my shirt and grabbed my breast while our lips tangled with pleasure. Just as he unbuttoned my shorts and stuck his hand down the front of them, we heard a voice downstairs.

"Anyone home?"

"Shit." Christian jumped off the bed and quickly put on his shirt.

I buttoned my shorts and followed him down the stairs.

"Conner. Hey." Christian smiled.

"I'm not interrupting anything, am I?"

"No. I was giving Charleigh a tour of the house."

"Hi. I'm Dr. Conner Kind. I live a couple of houses down." He extended his hand.

I furrowed my brows at him for a moment before placing my hand in his.

"Charleigh Ellis."

"It's nice to meet you, Charleigh. Is something wrong?" Conner asked as I stared at him.

"Oh my God, no. I'm so sorry. Was your father Dr. Liam Kind?"

"Yes." He smiled. "Did you know him?"

I slightly pulled down the front of my shirt to expose my scar.

“It’s because of him I’m alive. He gave me a new heart.”

He stared at my scar for a moment and then looked up at me.

“You had a heart transplant?” he asked.

“I did. Twelve years ago. Not only was he my doctor, but he was my friend.”

“Wait a second. Oh my God. Yes. Charleigh. He used to talk about you.”

“He talked a lot about you and your brothers. I feel like I know you. You’re the orthopedic surgeon, right?”

“Yes. Wow. This is incredible. You have to meet my other brothers.”

His pager went off, and he sighed when he looked at it.

“Work calls. I have to run. Friday night. Beach bonfire. You better be there.” He smiled as he pointed at me.

“Okay. I’d love to come.”

“Awesome. See you later, Christian.”

“Bye, Conner. You didn’t tell me that Liam Kind was your doctor.” Christian glanced at me.

“You didn’t ask.” I smirked. “He wasn’t always my doctor. I didn’t see him until my heart got so bad that it needed to be replaced. Anyway, can we resume our test drive?” I smiled as I grabbed his shirt and led him up the stairs.



*H*e rolled off me and lay on his back while his hand rested over his rapidly beating heart. Turning on my side, I propped my head up and brought my other hand to his chest.

“That was quite a workout.” I smiled.

“Yeah. It definitely was.”

“We need to have a little chat, Dr. Chase.”

“Can you hold that thought while I take off the condom?”

“Where are you going to dispose of it?”

“For now, I’m going to set it on the floor and take it downstairs to the trash can I bought. What did you want to chat about?”

“We’ve had sex a couple of times, and I don’t want you to get the wrong impression.”

“I’m not sure what you mean?” His brows furrowed.

“I don’t want you to think we’re in or getting into a relationship.”

He lay there and steadily narrowed his eye at me.

“What?” I asked.

“I don’t think that, and I don’t want that. I’m not a committed relationship type of guy.”

“You’re not?” My finger traced his chest.

“No. The only commitment I want in my life is my career. Anything else takes a backseat. I don’t want to offend or upset you, but for me, this is casual fun and nothing more.”

“You are in no way offending or upsetting me. I feel the same way. I just wanted to make sure we were on the same page. I don’t do drama.”

“I’m happy you brought it up. Now that I’m living here, I’m sure we’ll run into each other now and again.”

“Yeah. We just might. Like on Friday night when I attend the beach bonfire.” I grinned. “Will you be there?”

“Yeah. I’ll be there.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Good.” I sat up, reached over the side of the bed, grabbed my clothes, and got dressed. “I need to get home. Are you going to be okay here all alone with absolutely nothing but a bed?”

“I’m staying at Shaun’s until my things and furniture arrive.”

“Okay. Good.”

He walked me down the stairs and to the front door.

“You have a beautiful home, Dr. Chase. I can’t wait to see it completely furnished.”

“Which you will on Friday since you’ll be attending the bonfire.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“You know. We never exchanged phone numbers. Do you mind?” I pulled out my phone.

“No. Not at all.”

I entered his phone number as he rattled it off and then sent him a text message.

“There. Now you have mine.” I grinned. “Thank you for the lovely tour and the test drive.”

“You’re welcome. Be careful driving home.”

“Not to worry, Dr. Chase.” I gave him a wave as I walked to my car.

CHAPTER 11



Christian

“So. Whose car was in your driveway last night?” Jenni asked as she handed me a cup of coffee.

“Babe, that’s none of our business,” Shaun said as he made his smoothie.

“Sure, it is, Shaun. He lives here now. Sorry, Christian. You’re going to have to get used to all of us being up in your business and personal life.”

“It’s okay.” I laughed. “Her name is Charleigh, and she’s dying to meet you. She loves your clothing line, and when I told her I knew you, she got all excited.”

“I love her already. When can I meet her?”

“Tomorrow night at the bonfire. Conner invited her when he stopped over last night.”

“Yay! I can’t wait. So, is she someone special?” Jenni bit down on her bottom lip.

“No. She’s a friend, and that’s all.”

“Are you sure about that?” Jenni inched closer to me.

“Jen, leave the poor man alone,” Shaun spoke.

“I’m sorry. What did you just say?” She narrowed her eye at him.

He walked over, kissed her lips, and smiled.

“Don’t you have a meeting in fifteen minutes?”

She glanced at her watch. “Oh shit!” She jumped up. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“Because you were too busy being nosy. I love you.” He kissed her.

“I love you too, you big dummy. Bye, Christian.”

“Bye, Jenni.” I laughed.

“Sorry about that. She loves to play matchmaker.”

“Nah. It’s okay.” I brought the cup to my lips.

“So, what is the deal with you and Charleigh?”

“Nothing, man. We’re just friends. She wanted to see the house. That girl is very persistent.”

“Those are the best kind.” He winked. “I have to get to the office. I’ll see you later.”

“See ya, Shaun.” I gave him a nod.

My phone pinged, and when I glanced at it, the moving company alerted me that they were about fifteen minutes away. Finishing the last of my coffee, I put the cup in the dishwasher, grabbed my phone and keys, and walked down to my house. On the way, I stopped when I saw Alex outside with Rori and Henry.

“Good morning, Alex.” I stopped.

“Morning, Christian.”

Henry ran over to me, and I picked him up. Alex walked over, holding Rori.

“Hey, little guy.” I smiled.

“How are you?” Alex asked.

“I’m good. The moving truck alerted me they’ll be here in about fifteen minutes.”

“That’s great.” She smiled. “I’m sure you’re more than ready to get settled in.”

“I am.”

“Do you need help getting organized or anything?”

“Nah. I’m good. But thank you for the offer.” I set Henry down.

“It looks like you have company.” Alex grinned.

Turning around, I saw Charleigh’s car in my driveway.

“Hi!” She beamed as she waved.

I let out a sigh as I waved back.

“She’s beautiful,” Alex said as she nudged my shoulder.

“She’s a friend. You’ll meet her tomorrow night at the bonfire. Conner invited her.”

“Interesting. I can’t wait.”

“I better go see what she’s doing here. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Bye, Christian.”

I walked over to my driveway as Charleigh stood holding a cup holder

with two cups of coffee.

“Good morning,” I said.

“Good morning. I brought coffee.” She grinned.

“That was thoughtful. Thank you. I didn’t know you were planning on dropping by.”

We walked to the porch, and I unlocked the door.

“I wasn’t planning on it. But then I thought you could use the help getting organized. So, here I am. Unless you don’t want me here.”

“No. It’s fine. I just don’t—don’t you have a job?” I cocked my head.

“I’m off the next four days.” The corners of her mouth curved upward. “So, I have all the time in the world to help you get settled, except for tomorrow. I’ll be at the homeless shelter all day.”

“The homeless shelter? Why?”

“I’m a volunteer there. I help where I’m needed. Plus, I give whatever medical attention I can if anyone is sick. We’re always seeking new donations.” She smiled. “Wow. This is some great coffee. I stopped at a place down the road called Mojo Madness. I was talking to the owner, Julia. She was so nice that I might visit that café more often. I loved the vibe in there.”

“Julia is Sam’s wife. They live a few houses down. She’s a great woman. You’ll see her at the bonfire.”

“Oh wow. That’s awesome.” Charleigh grinned. “Why does everyone seem to live on this stretch of the beach?”

“Shaun, my friend, has four brothers who are quadruplets. Sam, Stefan, Sebastian, and Simon, whom you met last night. Then their cousins who are brothers. Jackson, Conner, and Nathan.”

“Wait a second.” She cocked her head. “Dr. Kind used to talk about his nephews as well as his sons. This is crazy. I can’t wait to meet them tomorrow. So, you’re the odd man out on this beach if they’re all family.” She smirked.

“I guess I am.” I chuckled.

There was a knock on the door. Opening it, a man wearing all blue stood there.

“We have a delivery for Dr. Christian Chase.”

“That’s me.”

“Where do you want us to put the motorcycle? We need to get that out first.”

“Just put it in the driveway.”

“A motorcycle?” Charleigh walked over.

“Yeah.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“I never would have taken you for a motorcycle guy in a million years.”

“Where do you want all the boxes?” one of the movers asked.

“Just set them all in the living room over here.”

Once all the boxes were brought inside, I stood in the middle of the room and glanced over at Charleigh as she held out her hand.

“Piece of cake. We got this.” She smiled as I placed my hand in hers. “The kitchen is my favorite part of a house, so if you don’t mind, I’d love to organize that for you.”

“That’s fine. I’m going to take the boxes marked bedroom upstairs and start putting shit away in the closet.”

As I unpacked my clothes, I came across a sweater my mother had given me last Christmas. Sitting down on the floor, I held it in my hand. There was a time I loved my parents so much, and now I had nothing but hate for them. I threw the sweater across the room, brought my knees to my chest, and lowered my forehead.

“Christian?” I heard Charleigh’s soft voice.

She walked over and sat down next to me.

“What’s wrong?” She placed her hand on my back.

“Nothing.”

“Something is.”

“I said nothing is wrong,” I snapped at her.

“Okay. I’ll let you get back to sitting alone, lost in your thoughts, and pretending nothing is wrong.” She walked out of the room.

“Shit.” I shook my head as I stood up.

I went downstairs to the kitchen, where she was putting the glasses inside the cabinet.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you.”

“It’s okay. I shouldn’t have overstepped. It’s what I do when I see someone in pain.”

She reached up to put a glass in the cabinet, and I walked up behind her and placed my hand on her arm.

“Let’s go,” I said.

“Go where?”

“For a ride on my motorcycle.”

“Seriously?” She turned and looked at me.

“Yeah. I have an extra helmet.”

“Okay.” She smiled.

We stepped out the door. I handed her a helmet and then put on mine. Climbing on my motorcycle, I started it, and she climbed on behind me, wrapping her arms around my waist. I pulled out of the driveway and went for a ride. Instantly, I felt a sense of peace wash over me. The tension and stress dissipated the faster I went while the openness of the road and freedom coursed through my body.

CHAPTER 12



Charleigh

I was used to riding on the back of a bike. My father had one and always took me on rides with him. He always told me there was no greater feeling than riding the open road on a bike. He also used his motorcycle as a way to think and decompress. After seeing Christian sitting in the middle of his bedroom floor, I knew something was bothering him. Especially after the way he snapped at me. I'd give him the space he needed, and I would be there to listen when he felt like he wanted to talk about it.

He pulled into the driveway, and I climbed off. Removing the helmet, I handed it to him.

"Feel better now?" I smiled.

"I don't know what you mean."

I followed him to the front door, and we stepped inside.

"My dad has a motorcycle, and whenever times got tough, or there were things he had trouble dealing with, he'd always go for a ride to help clear his head. I'm not prying into your life, Christian, but I know you're dealing with something, and you can always talk to me about it. We're friends, right?" I smiled.

He stood in the kitchen and stared at me.

"Yeah. We're friends, Charleigh. And you're right. I'm dealing with some shit with my parents, and I don't want to talk about it."

"That's okay. You don't have to but know I'm here if you want to. I'm an excellent listener."

He walked over to me, ran both his hands down my hair, and then held my face as he stared into my eyes.

“You’re a good person, Charleigh Ellis.” He pressed his lips against my forehead.

After unpacking and putting as much as possible in its proper place, I stood in the kitchen and looked at the nook where his built-in coffeemaker was.

“Your head is spinning with ideas, isn’t it?” Christian smiled.

“It is. Do I have permission to take it over?” I grinned. “I can make it look great.”

“I have no doubt you can. Go ahead.”

“Okay.” I bit down on my bottom lip. “I’ll be back soon.”

“Where are you going?” His brows furrowed.

“I need to run an errand.” I grabbed my purse and walked out the door.

I drove to William Sonoma and picked up a set of white porcelain coffee cups, double insulated glass latte cups, coffee spoons, a white porcelain canister that said coffee, and a matching sugar bowl. After checking out, I stopped at a coffee shop where I knew they sold flavored coffee syrups.

I walked through the door of Christian’s house with one of the bags, and when I looked out the sliding door, I saw him sitting by the shoreline. I left him alone and finished bringing in the rest of the bags myself. The sliding door opened as I was decorating the coffee bar, and Christian stepped inside.

“You’re back. Why didn’t you come and get me?” he asked.

“I’ve been busy, and I was letting you have your peace.”

“You bought new coffee cups? I already have some.”

“They’re all mismatched and not suitable to be displayed. What do you think?” I smiled as I took a step back.

“It looks amazing. Wow. What a difference. Are those coffee syrups?”

“Yes. There’s caramel, hazelnut, and French vanilla. I’m going to want a good latte when I come over.” I smirked.

“And I shall make you one.” He winked.

“Do you know how?” I cocked my head.

“No. But I can figure it out.”

“I’ll teach you next time. Oh, and make sure you have oat milk. If not, I’ll bring my own. Anyway, I have to go. My dad called and asked me to join him for dinner at the bar. My mom is with her book club tonight.”

He placed his hands on my hips. “Thank you for everything today. I really do appreciate it. How much do I owe you?”

“You’re welcome, Dr. Chase. You owe me nothing. It was my

housewarming and welcome to L.A. gift to you. That's what friends are for." I reached up and kissed his cheek. "I'll see you tomorrow night."

"Okay. Have a good dinner with your dad."

"I always do." I smiled as I walked out the door.



"What were you up to today, pumpkin?" my dad asked as we sat at a table and had dinner.

"I helped Christian organize his house." I picked up a fry and dipped it into some ketchup.

"Who's Christian?" His brow arched.

"The guy who was in here a few nights ago. He sat at the end of the bar and got totally wasted."

"The one I told Dominic to cut off?" He frowned.

"Yep. He's the one."

"How do you know him? Oh, for God's sake, Charleigh. Don't tell me you drove him home."

"I didn't."

"Okay. You had me worried there for a minute."

"I took him back to my apartment."

"Charleigh Anne Ellis," he voiced loudly.

"Relax, Dad. He's a good man. His driver's license said Seattle, and he didn't have anything on him indicating where he was staying. What did you want me to do? Take him outside and set him up against the building until he sobered up? He needed help, so I provided it. Anyway, he's Dr. Christian Chase, and he's a well-known cardiothoracic surgeon."

"Really?" He cocked his head.

"Yes. He just moved here, bought a house, and his personal items were delivered this morning. So, I went over and helped him get organized. He's dealing with some shit with his parents, but he won't say what. I suspect that's the reason he was in here and drinking that night."

"Are you falling for this guy or something?"

"No, Dad. I'm not. We're friends. That's all."

"Did you tell him about—"

"Yes." I cut him off. "I told him all about my heart transplant after I told

him he was my favorite kind of doctor.” I smiled. “I think you’d like him. He has a motorcycle.”

“Does he now?” A smile crossed his lips.

“Yes. He took me for a ride earlier. I’ll bring him in one night, and you can meet him when he’s sober. Or I can bring him by the house for dinner so Mom can meet him too. We’ll have to coordinate schedules, however. He’s the new cardiothoracic surgeon at Cedars, starting next week.”

“Nice. So, the two of you will be working together.”

“Yeah. Only he doesn’t know I work there.”

“Why?”

“I never said, and he never asked.”

“Why didn’t you tell him when he told you he’s working at Cedars.”

“He didn’t tell me. But it’s buzzing all over the hospital.”

His eye narrowed at me as he picked up a French fry and put it in his mouth.

“Stop looking at me like that,” I said.

“You like this guy.”

“I do. As a friend.”

“When are you going to fall in love, Charleigh? You’re a beautiful woman. You’re smart, full of life, kind, and one of the most giving people I know. Any man would be lucky to have you.”

“I haven’t found the right guy yet, I guess. Besides, I love my life the way it is, Dad. It’s not complicated.”

“Are you sure the reason isn’t that you haven’t found the right guy yet? Is that the only reason, sweetheart?”

I picked up my napkin, leaned across the table, and wiped the ketchup from the corner of his mouth.

“Yes, Dad. When I meet him, you’ll be the first to know.”

CHAPTER 13



Christian

Simon had texted me and said he and Grace were heading over. Grabbing a beer from the refrigerator, I opened it and stared at the coffee bar that Charleigh had decorated for me. I heard the sliding door open, so I turned around and saw Grace and Simon walk in.

“Hey. Beer?” I asked.

“Sure,” Simon spoke.

“None for me,” Grace said.

I reached into the refrigerator, pulled out a beer bottle, took the cap off, and handed it to Simon.

“Wow. I love what you did with the coffee area. Why don’t we have one of these?” Grace turned to Simon.

He shrugged.

“I’m going to talk to Sam and Stefan about remodeling our kitchen,” she said. “I want this.”

“I wish I could take credit for it, but Charleigh was the one who put it all together.”

“She was over today?” Simon’s brow arched. “By the way, I thought maybe you had company. Whose motorcycle is parked in your driveway?”

“It’s mine.”

“Yours? Damn. I didn’t know you rode. I think I’m going to get myself one.”

“You can get your toy after we remodel the kitchen, and I get my coffee bar.” Grace smiled. “Anyway, Christian. We ran some information through the LAPD database, and there weren’t any reports of stolen babies from any

hospital in Los Angeles. There was, however, a report of a deceased newborn found in a basket right outside the E.R. that same day.”

“So, you’re thinking that—”

The sliding door opened, and Shaun walked in, interrupting our talk.

“Hey, bro. Grace. Christian. What’s going on?”

Simon looked at me and sighed. “You should tell him. We can’t keep this a secret much longer.”

“Tell me what?” Shaun’s brows furrowed.

“Thanks, Simon. Thank you, Grace. Let me talk with Shaun alone.”

Simon walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder. “We’re going to figure this out.”

“Figure what out? What is going on, Christian?” Shaun asked.

“I’ll tell you everything. But we’re going to need something a lot stronger than beer.”

I opened the cabinet where I stored a couple of bottles of scotch, took down two glasses, and set them on the island. After pouring the amber liquid, I handed Shaun his glass.

“I wanted to tell you when I found out, but I couldn’t. So much shit went down with my parents, and I wanted to gather as much information as possible before telling you.”

“Yet, you told Simon and Grace?” His brows furrowed.

“Only because they’re detectives, and I needed their help.”

“What the hell happened?” he asked as we stood up against the island.

I inhaled a sharp breath. “I did that 23andMe test you gave me. When I got the results back, I knew it wasn’t right, so I bought another test kit and retook it. The second result came back the same as the first one. I’d found out that my parents weren’t my biological parents. Because according to the results, I have a whole family out there. At first, I thought my dad had another family or I was adopted. I confronted them about it, and that’s when everything blew up—” I paused.

Shaun placed his hand on my back. “What did they tell you?”

“That I was born in Los Angeles, and my father kidnapped me. Right after he took me, he quit Cedars, packed up, and they moved to Seattle.”

“Jesus Christ, Christian. This is unbelievable.”

“Tell me about it.”

“He actually told you that he stole you from your biological parents?”

“Yes.”

“How? How the hell did they get away with it?”

“That’s what I’m trying to find out. My mother said there was a nurse involved. She’s the one who took me to the motel and handed me over to my mother. They won’t say anything else. My father had a mild heart attack that night during our blow-up.”

“Is he okay?”

“I don’t really know how he’s doing. I left Seattle and came here. I blocked their numbers on my phone, so they can’t reach me. I can’t even talk to them again.” Tears filled my eyes. “I have no idea who I am, Shaun. Everything I thought I knew about my life was a total lie.”

“That’s why you needed Simon’s help,” he said.

“Yeah.” I refilled both our glasses. “My parents only told me that I was born in Los Angeles, and my birthdate is the same. My father wanted to change it, but my mother wouldn’t let him. They wouldn’t say which hospital, but since my father worked as a pediatrician at Cedars, I know it has to be that one. Simon said there weren’t any reports of missing babies the day I was born, but an abandoned deceased newborn was found outside the hospital that same day.”

“When were you born?” he asked.

“July 15, 1989.”

His brows furrowed as he stared at me. “That’s the day Conner was born.”

“I know. Simon told me that. Weird, right? I had no idea we shared the same birthday.”

“Yeah. What a coincidence. I have to ask you something.”

“Okay.”

“What did your DNA results reveal?”

“I have three brothers who share half my DNA. Some cousins were also listed. Everything was set to private, so I don’t even know who these people are.”

I watched as the color drained from his face.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Nothing. This is just crazy.” He finished off his drink. “I know a little bit of what you’re going through. You know my story about my father. Listen, I have a guy that I can contact. He’s an excellent private investigator. He helped me track down my family. I know Grace and Simon are excellent, but they have their work with the LAPD, and my guy can devote one hundred

percent of his time to this.”

“That would be great, Shaun. I appreciate it.”

“I wish you would have come to me sooner,” he said.

“I wanted to. Trust me. It’s so embarrassing to even talk about. I need to keep this under wraps.”

“What are you going to do about your parents? They committed a crime, Christian.”

“I know, and I haven’t decided yet. We need to find out who that nurse was that helped my father.”

“I’ll call my guy now and give him your number. Stay strong, my friend.” He gave my shoulder a squeeze. “Are you coming back to my house?”

“Just to grab my bags. I’ll spend the night here tonight. My furniture is coming first thing in the morning.”

“Okay. I’ll talk to you later.”



Shaun

I left Christian’s house with a knot wound so tight in my stomach that I couldn’t breathe. Opening the sliding door to Simon’s house, I stepped inside.

“Hey, bro. Did he tell you?” Simon asked.

“Yeah. He told me.” I swallowed hard. “We need to talk, and it needs to stay between us.” I locked the sliding door and closed the blinds.

“Yeah, of course.” His brows furrowed.

Grace walked into the kitchen and looked at me.

“What’s going on?”

“Shaun said we need to talk, and it stays right here,” Simon said.

The three of us took a seat at the kitchen table.

“I need you to listen to me very carefully. I’m going to have my guy get on this immediately. I love both of you, but you can’t devote a hundred percent of your time to this with your jobs.”

“Okay. If you think that’s best,” Grace said.

“I do. I also believe this hits too close to home.”

“What are you talking about?” Simon’s brows furrowed.

“I could be way off base, but I don’t think I am. I asked Christian what

his 23andMe test results revealed. He told me he has three brothers who share half his DNA.”

“Okay. If he hands over that report, we could possibly find out who those people are,” Simon said.

“I think I already know, but I can’t piece it together without more information.”

“How the hell would you know?” Simon’s brows furrowed.

I stared at him and Grace.

“Shaun, what are you saying?” Grace asked.

“I think our family is Christian’s DNA match.”

“Come on.” Simon laughed. “What the fuck, bro? He can’t be. There are five of us. You said he shares the same DNA with three brothers.”

“Oh my God.” Grace reached over and gripped my arm. “But there’s three of them. Jackson, Conner, and Nathan.” Her eyes widened as she stared at me.

“Exactly. Do you remember that night when Nathan told us Sofia was pregnant, and we were gathered around the bonfire? Nathan received an email saying that someone with the initial’s DC was a fifty percent match.”

“Dr. Chase—DC. Jesus Christ.” Simon slammed his fist on the table. “But he was born the same day as Conner. Are you saying my Uncle Liam got two women pregnant at the same time, and they happened to be born on the same day at the same fucking hospital?”

“No. I’m not saying that. You told Christian there was a report of an abandoned deceased newborn found outside the hospital that day. What if—”

“Stop right there!” Simon shouted as he pointed at me and pushed himself up from his chair. “Don’t even, Shaun.”

“It’s possible,” Grace said.

“No. No, it isn’t!” Simon shouted as he gripped the marble island.

“Come on, bro. You’re the fucking detective here. You consider all possibilities. DNA results don’t lie! I got the same email. I share the same DNA as DC, and you do too. We all do!” I shouted.

“There’s only one way to find out,” Grace said. “We have to get a court order and—”

“Don’t say it, Grace.” He pointed at her.

“A crime was committed, and it’s our duty as officers to investigate.”

I stood up and walked over to him. “Listen, bro. I can’t even process all of this right now, but Conner has always felt off when Christian was around.

He said he couldn't put his finger on it, but there was something about him. Hell, even Ella said something to Nathan about it. She asked if he was sure Christian wasn't a part of the family because he had the same eyes and smile as Conner."

He shook his head as tears filled his eyes. "If this is true, do you know what this will do to those three? The pain and the suffering they endured all these years. Their mother who was in a severe depression for years over losing her child and committed suicide because of it?"

"I know. But everything is pointing that way. Even the fact that he's a cardiothoracic surgeon, just like Uncle Liam was. He has the blood of a doctor in him, Simon. And look at how quickly we all came to like him and invited him in as if he was one of our own."

"We have to get consent from Jackson, Conner, and Nathan to exhume Christopher's body to do a DNA test," he said. "How the fuck are we going to explain this to them? And what about Christian? Did you tell him that you think he could possibly be Conner's twin brother who died at birth?"

"No. Of course not. I needed to talk to you first about it."

"He switched the babies," Grace said.

"What?" Simon looked at her.

"He knew there was an abandoned deceased newborn in the hospital, and he knew they wouldn't be able to track down the mother. We need to get ahold of Christopher's medical records," she said. "We need to find out exactly what happened that day. You know Christian's father won't tell us."

"He will if he doesn't have a choice. We need to bring both his mom and dad here for questioning," Simon spoke.

"We can't do that until we have more evidence that a crime was committed."

"He admitted to Christian that he stole him, and his mom said some nurse handed him over to her at some motel," I said.

"We need to find that nurse," Simon said.

"We need to keep this under wraps, not only for the protection of Christian but also for the hospital. Don't forget that he's their new cardiothoracic surgeon. If this got out." I shook my head. "I'm heading home. I'll talk to you two tomorrow."

CHAPTER 14



Simon

“Captain, we need to speak to you,” I said as Grace and I stepped into his office and shut the door.

“Don’t tell me you two are divorcing already,” he said.

“Hell, no. Why would you even ask that?” I scowled.

“It’s either that or the two of you did something that will fall back on me. Sit down and spit it out.”

“We need to have a body exhumed,” Grace said.

“Excuse me?” His brow arched as he leaned back in his chair. “Who and for what reason?”

“We need to have the DNA tested on a deceased child from thirty-three years ago,” I spoke.

“What crime was involved?” he asked. “I didn’t know you two were working on cold cases.”

“We’re not,” Grace said. “It’s personal.”

“Actually, a crime was committed,” I said. “But the person of interest got away with it, and nobody was none the wiser.”

“What the hell are you talking about, Kind?” Captain Burroughs cocked his head.

“Thirty-three years ago, my aunt gave birth to twins. One of the twins died at birth. Someone has surfaced with a fifty percent DNA match for my cousin. We suspect the child my aunt and uncle buried is not their biological child, and this person is my cousin’s twin brother, who is alive and living in Los Angeles.”

“There was an abandoned deceased newborn found outside the hospital

the same day Simon's aunt gave birth to the twins." Grace handed him the report. "We suspect a doctor switched the babies and took the alive child home with him."

"You're saying that a baby was stolen?"

"Yes. That's exactly what we're saying," I said. "This doctor worked at Cedars all those years ago, and we're assuming he was working that night the twins were born. We also need to get ahold of some medical records. Also, he admitted that he stole the child."

"And this needs to stay in this office," Grace said. "Nobody can know what's going on or what we're doing."

"So, you want me to sign off so you can exhume the body of a newborn from thirty-three years ago and do DNA testing to see if the child is or isn't the biological twin of your cousin?"

"Yes," I said.

"Are you two out of your minds?"

"A crime was committed," Grace said. "A baby was stolen from a hospital by two people, and they raised him as their own."

"I can't do that, Grace. I'm sorry. Unless we open an investigation, I can't authorize that."

"Can we keep the investigation under wraps?" I asked. "Nobody but us would have to know."

"You need to get permission from the parents. Good luck with that."

"The parents are deceased."

"Then you'll need permission from the supposed twin."

"Jackson will sign off on it," I said as I looked at Grace.

"This department is not paying for someone to be exhumed and DNA tested without an open investigation. If said criminal confessed that he stole the child, then he needs to be brought in."

"He lives in Seattle," I said.

"So what? The crime was committed here."

"What if we pay for it out of our own pockets? The department won't be billed for it," Grace said.

"You're willing to do that?" He stared at us.

"Yes," I said.

"If you get Jackson to sign off on it, you two deal with it." He shook his head. "But I'm telling you both right now, if all of this is true, an investigation will be open, and those people will be brought back here to face

charges.”



Christian

I stood in the middle of my fully furnished house as everything was delivered and set in place. It looked great, and finally, I was settled. Come Monday, I would start my job as the new cardiothoracic surgeon at Cedars, and my life would return to somewhat normal. But I wouldn't fully be at peace until I found out who I really was. As I was brewing a cup of coffee, my phone pinged. Pulling it from my pocket, I saw a text message from Charleigh.

“Hey, you. I’m leaving the homeless shelter at five. Is it okay if I come by early for the bonfire?”

“Of course. You can come anytime you want. I’ll be here all day.”

“Great. Has the furniture come yet?”

“Yeah. It did.”

“I bet it looks awesome. I can’t wait to see it. I’ll TTYL.”

“See you later.”

It was five forty-five when there was a knock at the door. Opening it, I saw Charleigh standing there with a smile on her face.

“Hi. Come on in.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Oh my God. Look at this place! It looks amazing.” She beamed.

“Thank you. By the way, Grace was over last night and loved what you did with the coffee bar. She wants to remodel their kitchen now so she can have one. How was your day at the homeless shelter?”

“It was good. We got a lot of donations in, so I spent the day sorting through everything.”

“Speaking of donations. I have a couple of bags of clothes if you want to take them in,” I said.

“That would be great. Thank you. The homeless thanks you as well.” She smiled.

“You want to check out my new bedroom furniture?” A smirk crossed my lips.

“Definitely. I’d love to see what you bought.”

I took hold of her hand and led her upstairs.

“Wow. It looks good in here.” She threw herself on the bed. “Great mattress too.” She grinned. “Wanna try it out?”

“I was hoping you’d ask.” I smiled as I pulled my shirt off and tossed it on the floor.

As I unbuttoned and took down my pants, she stripped out of her clothes and tossed them over the side of the bed. I took in her exquisiteness as she lay there naked, staring at me. Grabbing a condom from my wallet, I tossed it on the bed and climbed over her. My cock was stiff and throbbing, and I couldn’t wait to be buried deep inside her. Bringing my mouth to hers, our lips tangled, and our tongues met. Her fingers swept through my hair as my tongue made its way down to her beautiful breasts, taking her hardened peaks in my mouth before sliding down her torso and over her clit. Moans escaped her as I devoured her with my mouth. The sweetness of her orgasm made my cock ache even more.

Climbing off her, I grabbed the condom, and her hand wrapped around my wrist.

“Wait. Don’t put that on yet.” She smiled as she sat up. “Your turn.”

Her hand gently gripped my balls as her mouth slid over my cock. My eyes closed as I took in the intense pleasure while warm vibrations trickled down my spine. She performed perfectly, and I was lost in oblivion. My fingers gripped her head as she continued with smooth and steady strokes, using the right amount of suction that sent my head spinning.

“You have to stop, or I’m coming,” I breathlessly spoke. “We can save that for another time. For now, I want to come inside you.”

She lifted her head and looked up at me. Pushing me down on the bed, she climbed on top, grabbed the condom, and ripped open the package. Watching her roll it over my hard cock, made me want to come right then and there. I had never been so turned on by a woman in my life.

Once the condom was secure, she slid down, taking my cock in inch by inch until I was buried deep inside her. Bringing my hands up to her breasts, I gripped them and stroked her hardened nipples with my thumbs. Steady moans escaped us both as she rode me back and forth until she came. The buildup was there, and I was about to come. Gripping her hips, I held her down as I thrust and exploded inside her, moaning my way through the exhilaration of the feeling. Her body collapsed on mine, and I could feel her heart racing. Something tore through me—a strange feeling.

She climbed off me and lay on her back as I removed the condom and set

it on the nightstand.

“Wow.” She smiled as she turned her head and looked at me.

“Wow, is right.” I brought my finger up and traced along her scar. “I know a lot of people are very conscious about scars like this. But you’re very comfortable with it, and I greatly admire you for it.”

“I’m a survivor and a warrior,” she spoke. “I’ve been through so much as a child until my transplant. I wasn’t going to let the scar of something that saved my life negatively affect me.”

“Has anyone ever said anything to you about it?” I asked.

“If you mean guys, then yes. A guy’s reaction to the scar tells me a lot about him. I’ve had my fair share of men who were hot and heavy into me until they saw the scar. One guy told me he was sorry, but it was a turn-off for him. Another guy told me he still wanted to have sex with me but asked me to lay on my stomach so he couldn’t see it.”

“Jesus, Charleigh. That’s terrible.”

“I know. I don’t hide it, and I won’t. Sometimes when I wear a bikini, people will stare at me with horrified looks. But I know it’s out of fear, and I’m okay with that.”

“You’re a beautiful woman inside and out. Don’t ever let anyone tell you otherwise.” I smiled.

“Thank you, Dr. Chase. We should get dressed and head down to the bonfire. I can’t wait to meet everyone.”

“Good idea.”

CHAPTER 15



Charleigh

As I was getting dressed, I noticed a guitar case sitting in the corner of Christian's bedroom.

"Do you play the guitar?" I asked.

"Yeah. I do."

"Me too. I also play the piano."

"Really?" A smile crossed his lips.

"Yeah. I learned when I was a kid. I couldn't do anything else, so I devoted my childhood to music."

"You'll have to play for me," Christian said. "Conner plays the piano, and so does Emilia."

"Only if you'll play for me." I grinned.

"I'll probably play tonight." He walked over and grabbed his guitar.

As we walked down the stairs, the sliding door opened, and a handsome man and a little girl stepped inside.

"Hey, Christian. Just checking to see if you're coming down to the beach. Hi, there." He smiled at me.

"Nathan, this is Charleigh Ellis. Charleigh, this is Dr. Nathan Kind and his daughter Ella."

"Dr. Kind, it's so nice to finally meet you." I hugged him.

"It's nice to meet you too, Charleigh. Conner told us that my father was the one who performed your heart transplant."

"You had a heart transplant?" Ella's eyes widened.

"I did." I smiled.

"Can I see?"

“Ella, you don’t—”

“It’s okay, Nathan.” I knelt and pulled the front of my shirt down until my scar was visible.

“That is so cool. Can I feel your heart?”

“You sure can.” I took her hand and placed it over my beating heart.

“Wow. Would you mind if we talked about it? Why you needed a transplant? What diseases were you battling?”

“Okay, kiddo. Go on outside, and we’ll be out in a minute. I think Lily is already down at the beach.”

“Fine, Dad.” She lowered her head. “It was nice to meet you, Charleigh.”

“You too, Ella.” I smiled.

“You’ll have to forgive her. She’s a genius.”

“Like a real genius? Or just a father saying his daughter is a genius?”

“Her IQ is 160,” Nathan said.

“Damn. She’s a real genius.” I grinned.

“She’s obsessed with the heart right now. She’s been grilling Christian any chance she gets about it.”

“That’s awesome. You must be very proud.”

“I am. Sometimes she can be a bit overwhelming. Anyway, I’ll see you two down at the bonfire.”

“Are you ready?” I smiled at Christian.

“I’m ready.” He grabbed a six-pack of beer and his guitar case.

We walked down to the bonfire, and Christian introduced me to his guy friends.

“Everyone, this is Charleigh. Charleigh, this is Shaun, Sam, Stefan, and Sebastian. You already met Simon. And next to him is Conner and Nathan, whom you’ve met, and Jackson.”

“Hi, everyone. Nice to meet you.” I smiled as I gave a small wave.

“Where are the women?” Christian asked.

“They’re down at Shaun’s. They’ll be here soon.”

“So, Charleigh. Conner told us that our father was your cardiothoracic surgeon,” Jackson spoke.

“He was. I was devastated when I heard he had passed. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you. We appreciate that.” Jackson smiled.

“He was a good doctor and a good friend to me while I was waiting for a new heart. I feel like I know all of you. He used to talk about you guys so

much. Especially the three of you.” I pointed to Jackson, Conner, and Nathan. “He was so proud of all of you.”

“How did you meet him? Did you live in San Francisco?” Conner asked.

“No. I met him here in Los Angeles. He was getting ready to head back to San Francisco when I was brought into the ER. After my heart stopped and he brought me back, he read my medical reports and ran some further tests. He told me that I needed a new heart, and he was now my doctor.”

“That was the time he was taking a helicopter back and forth from San Francisco to L.A.,” Jackson spoke.

“Yeah. I felt bad that he did that. But he said it was only a forty-five-minute flight, and he’d sit in traffic longer than that in San Francisco to get from point A to point B. He’d sit with me sometimes after my parents would leave, and we’d talk. He told me about his three sons, who were all in medical school and on their way to becoming brilliant surgeons. The one thing I admired most about him was that even though I had given up and was at peace with death, he never gave up hope that a new heart was coming. When one finally did, and I was taken to the O.R., he walked in, leaned over, and placed his hand on my forehead. He said, ‘Charleigh, today is the start of your new life. You’re going to do anything and everything you want to, and from this day forth, you will be unstoppable.’”

“Sounds like our dad.” Nathan smiled.

“He was an incredible man,” Conner said.

“He was,” Simon said. “Not sure how we ended up with Henry.”

“Shut up, douchebag.” Sam reached over and smacked his arm.

“I’m kidding. Sort of.” He brought the bottle up to his lips, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Come on. I’ll take you to meet the girls,” Christian said as we both got up from our seats and headed over to Shaun’s house.

Christian introduced me to all of them when we stepped through the sliding door.

“We didn’t know she was here yet.” Jenni walked over and hugged me. “It’s so nice to meet you, Charleigh.”

“Trust me. The pleasure is all mine. I adore your clothes.”

“You have excellent taste.” She grinned. “I can already tell we’re going to be terrific friends.”

“I’m going to head back down to the bonfire,” Christian said.

“Go ahead. We’ll be down soon,” Julia said.

“I’ve seen you at Cedars,” Georgia said as she walked over. “You work there, right?”

“I do. I’ve been there for a couple of months now. I work on the cardiac care floor as a nurse practitioner.”

“So, you’ll be working with Christian then,” Charlotte said.

“Yeah. But he doesn’t know it yet. He hasn’t told me he’s working there, and I haven’t told him I do.”

“Why not?” Emilia asked.

“He never asked.”

“But you’re sleeping with him. Right? Jenni smirked.

“Yes. But just as friends.”

“Uh-huh.” Georgia smirked. “I tried that with Jackson, and now look at us.”

“Christian is anti-relationship, and I have no interest in having one. Just give me awesome sex, and I’m good.” I grinned.

“Now you’re talking, sister.” Jenni held up her hand for a high-five. “Welcome to our sister tribe.” She hugged me.

Emilia handed me a glass of wine, and we all went down to join the guys around the bonfire. I’d never felt more comfortable around anyone than with this family and Christian.

“Whose turn is it to start playing?” Sebastian asked.

“Charleigh told me she plays. How about we let her lead?” Christian said.

“You play?” Stefan looked at me.

“I do.” A smile crossed my lips.

“Show us what you got.” He smiled as he handed me his guitar.

I strummed the chords for a test sound, then right into playing and singing Who Will Save Your Soul by Jewel. She was one of my favorite artists, and I knew every song she sang. Ella and Lily danced together while everyone sat in their seats and stared at me.

“Damn. She’s good.” Shaun smiled.

I glanced over at Christian, who sat next to me with a smile on his face. As I strummed the last chord, everyone shouted and clapped.

“You are invited to all of our bonfires!” Stefan pointed at me.

“Thank you.” I laughed as I handed him his guitar. “It’s your turn.” I smiled at Christian. “You promised you’d play something for me.”

“How the hell am I supposed to top what you just did?” A smirk crossed his lips as he picked up his guitar.

He strummed the chords and sang Long Way From Home by The Lumineers. He was fantastic and incredibly sexy when he played. They all were as we sang, talked, laughed, and had a fantastic time. There were only a few of us by the end of the night. Julia and Sam left to put the twins to bed. Stefan and Alex went to put their children to bed, as did Nathan and Sofia.

“I should get going. It’s late, and I need to get home,” I said to Christian.

“Okay.”

I said goodbye to everyone, and Christian walked me to my car.

“Thank you for an incredible evening. I had a really good time.” I smiled.

“I’m happy you had fun.” He kissed my forehead. “Shoot me a text when you get home. I want to know you made it safely.”

“Will do, my friend.” I opened the car door and climbed inside. “I’ll talk to you later.”

He nodded as he shut the door, and I pulled out of his driveway. When I arrived home, the door across from me opened as I slid the key into the lock.

“Are you just getting in?” Brady asked.

“I am.” I smiled.

“Judging by that pretty smile on your face, I’d say you had a great time.” He opened his door all the way, signaling for me to come over.

“I did. I had a great time. Hey, Olivier.” I smiled as he sat on the couch.

“Come over here, kitten, and tell us about your night.” He patted the seat next to him.

“So, who were you with?” Brady sat down next to me.

“Dr. Christian Chase and his friends.”

“Who?” Oliver’s brows furrowed.

“The drunk guy I brought home the other night.”

“Oh. Damn. You’re seeing him now?” Oliver asked with surprise.

“We’re friends.”

“Wait. He’s a doctor?” Brady asked.

“He’s a cardiothoracic surgeon.”

“Interesting. Does he know about—”

“Of course. He knew the minute he saw the scar right before we had sex.”

“Hold up. You slept with him already?” Oliver asked.

“Yeah. Look at him. Wouldn’t you?” I arched my brow.

“Well, yeah,” Oliver smiled. “If I was single, of course.” He looked at Brady.

“Anyway. Do you want to hear something crazy? All of his friends I met

are related to the surgeon who did my heart transplant. Jackson, Nathan, and Conner are his sons. Shaun, Sam, Stefan, Sebastian, and Simon are his nephews.”

“What a small freaking world,” Brady said.

“It sure is.” I stood up from the couch. “I’m going to head home. I’m exhausted.”

“Charleigh?” Oliver said.

“Yeah.” I turned around and looked at him.

“Do you have feelings for this doctor?”

“He’s a great guy, and he’s my friend. But to answer your question, yes. I have friendship feelings for him, nothing more than what I have for you two.” I opened the door and walked out.

CHAPTER 16



Christian

My alarm went off at six a.m. and jolted me from a sound sleep.

“Shit,” I grumbled as I reached over and shut it off.

Letting out a yawn and a long stretch, I stumbled out of bed, put on my wetsuit, and met the guys down at the beach to go surfing.

“Morning.” Sam grinned.

“Morning. You guys do this every fucking weekend?”

“We do. You’ll get used to it.” Shaun smiled as he patted my back. “How did you sleep in the new bed?”

“Pretty good. It’s really comfortable.”

We all put our boards in the water and paddled out.

“Charleigh didn’t stay the night?” Nathan asked.

“Nah. She left last night.”

“She’s a great girl,” Jackson spoke.

“Yeah. She is.” I smiled.

“It’s crazy how my dad was her surgeon,” Conner said. “The things she said last night really were nice to hear.”

“So, Christian. What the hell is going on between you two?” Simon asked.

“Nothing. We’re friends. That’s it.”

“Uh-huh.” Sebastian smiled. “I think we all got a different vibe last night.”

“Well, your vibe is wrong.” I smirked. “I’m not into relationships, and neither is she.”

“Did she tell you that?” Sam asked.

“She did. She told me she didn’t want me to think we were getting into a relationship because we’d slept together a couple of times. I explained to her that I didn’t do relationships and it was nothing more than casual fun. She agreed and wanted to make sure we were on the same page.”

“That could all change in the blink of an eye, my friend,” Sam said.

“Yeah. It can definitely change.” Jackson smirked.

“She’s a beautiful and sweet woman. Why doesn’t she like to be in relationships?” Shaun asked.

“I don’t know. I didn’t ask. I’m just going along with it.”

We surfed until the clouds rolled in and the winds picked up.

“It looks like it’s going to storm,” Stefan said.

“Yeah. We better call it a day,” Jackson spoke.

After taking our boards out of the water, I returned to the house. Walking to the coffee bar, I smiled as I pulled a cup from the shelf and brewed a cup. Grabbing my phone, I sent Charleigh a text message.

“Good morning. How did you sleep?”

“Good morning. I slept great. You?”

“Pretty good. Just got in from surfing with the guys.”

“Sounds like fun. I need to get up and get my ass moving. I’m going to brunch with Oliver and Brady.”

“Who?”

“My friends that live across the hall from me. Oliver helped me bring you up to my apartment that night.”

“Nice. I can imagine what he thinks of me.”

“Don’t worry. He doesn’t think anything. We’ve all been there before.”

“Have a good brunch with your friends. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Talk to you later, Dr. Chase.”



Jackson

I’d just finished brewing a cup of coffee when the sliding door opened, and Shaun and Simon walked in.

“Hey. Do you have a few? We need to talk to you.”

“Yeah. Of course. Coffee?” I asked.

“Sure,” Simon said.

“Thanks,” Shaun spoke. “Where’s Georgia?”

“She’s meeting a friend of hers for breakfast. She just left. Why?”

“Just asking because we need to talk in private,” Shaun said as he locked the sliding door and pulled the blinds shut.

“What is going on?”

I handed them each a cup of coffee as they both stood there and stared at me.

“You’re freaking me out. What happened?” I walked over to the table, and the three of us sat down.

“It’s about Christian and why he moved here out of the clear blue,” Shaun said.

“Okay.” I brought the cup to my lips.

“You need to promise me that what we’re about to tell you stays right here. You can’t tell Georgia, and you certainly cannot breathe a word to Nathan or Conner.”

“I don’t keep things from Georgia or my brothers.”

“I don’t keep anything from Jenni either, but this is a special circumstance,” Shaun said.

“Grace knows, but only because we’re trying to help him,” Simon spoke.

“Will the two of you stop beating around the bush and tell me what the fuck is going on?”

“Christian found out that his parents are not his biological parents,” Shaun said.

“He’s adopted? What’s the big deal?”

“No. He wasn’t adopted,” Simon said. “He was stolen from the hospital at birth.”

“Shit. Are you serious?” I cocked my head.

“Unfortunately, we are,” Shaun spoke.

“Christian’s birthdate is July 15, 1989,” Simon said.

“That’s the same day Conner was born.”

“We know. He was born in Los Angeles, and we’re almost certain he was born at Cedars,” Simon spoke.

“His father was a pediatrician on staff,” Shaun said.

“Okay. I’m not following you.” My brows furrowed.

“Christian took the 23andMe test that I’d given him. He got the results back and felt like they mixed his DNA up with someone else’s, so he bought another kit and retook the test. The same results came back,” Shaun said.

“According to the results, he has three brothers who share half his DNA.”

“Wow. He has another family out there somewhere?”

“Cousin, listen to me carefully. We’re pretty sure that—” Simon paused.

“Pretty sure about what?”

“I can’t.” Simon pushed himself up from the table.

“Shaun? What the hell is he talking about?”

“We think Christian is your biological brother.”

“What? That is absurd!” I pointed at him. “Simon?” I looked at him as he leaned against the island with his arms folded.

“It’s true, Jackson.”

“That is fucking impossible!” I stood up.

“There’s more,” Simon said.

“On the same night Conner and Christian were born, an abandoned deceased newborn was found outside the hospital. We think Christian’s father switched the babies and presented the deceased child to your parents as Christopher.”

My heart raced out of my chest as uncontrollable anger grew inside me.

“Are you saying that Christian is Conner’s twin? My brother?” I shouted.

“Calm down, Jackson,” Shaun said.

“Don’t you dare tell me to calm down! How dare you two come here with this bullshit!” I shouted.

“Christian’s 23andMe profile is DC,” Simon said. “Remember the email you got the night we celebrated Nathan and Sofia’s baby announcement?”

I gripped the edge of the table and slowly sat down in my chair.

“So, you’re telling me that Christian’s father stole and raised him as his own?”

“Yeah, Jackson.” Simon walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder. “That’s exactly what we’re saying. Christian doesn’t know any of this yet. He came to Grace and me and asked us to help him find out who his birth parents were. His parents confessed to taking him from the hospital that night. They said a nurse was involved, and we’re trying to track that nurse down.”

“I have my guy working on it as well,” Shaun said.

Tears streamed down my face as I took my hand and wiped them away.

“I can’t even comprehend any of this.” I shook my head. “Conner kept telling us that he felt different when Christian was around, and we all made fun of him. My God. This could destroy him.”

“And don’t forget what Ella asked Nathan,” Simon said. “We hate to ask this, but we need something from you.” Simon pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and slid it across the table.

“What is this?”

“We need you to sign that so we can exhume Christopher’s body and do a DNA test.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I cocked my head.

“I wish we were. But we have to start there and rule him out. Christian’s parents won’t say anything else, and we can’t bring them in unless we know for a fact that a crime was committed.”

I stood up, reached into the drawer, and pulled out a pen.

“Do what you have to do,” I said as I signed the paper. “All I can say is it’s a damn good thing Conner’s girlfriend and the love of his life is a psychologist. In fact, we’ll all need therapy if any of this is true.”

“Then we better start making our appointments now,” Simon said.



Christian

I had just hung a piece of artwork on the wall when my phone pinged with a text message from Conner.

“Are you doing anything?”

“Not really.”

“Since it’s storming out, do you want to come over and play some Call of Duty?”

“Sure. I’ll be over in a few.”

I put away my tools, threw on a hoodie, and ran to Conner’s house. I couldn’t believe how bad it was storming out.

“Hey.” Conner smiled when I stepped through the sliding door.

“Ella’s not here, right?” I smirked.

“God, no. I’m never playing Call of Duty with that kid again.”

“Hi, Christian,” Charlotte smiled. “You might not have a choice. Nathan just asked if we could keep an eye on Ella while he and Sofia go out.”

“What? Where the hell are they going in this weather?” Conner asked.

“They have lunch plans with a couple of friends of theirs. Ella was supposed to go to Lily’s, but Alex called and said Lily is throwing up and has

a slight fever.”

“Shit. Can’t Jackson and Georgia watch her?”

“Conner!” Charlotte exclaimed. “She specifically asked for you.”

“That’s because I’m her favorite.” He grinned. “Come on, Christian. Let’s get playing before she gets here.”

I let out a chuckle as I followed him into the living room, and we began playing.

“Uncle Conner!” Ella jumped on his lap.

“Hello, my favorite niece.” He kissed her cheek.

“Hi, Christian. I didn’t know you’d be here.”

“Your uncle asked me to play Call of Duty with him.”

“Can I play?”

“No!” Conner exclaimed. “I love you and everything, but Christian and I want to play together.”

“Can I watch?” she asked.

“Don’t you want to hang out with Charlotte? Maybe you two can bake my favorite cookies.”

“No. I want to hang out with you, Uncle Conner.” She placed both of her hands on his face.

“How can you say no to that?” I pouted as I looked at Conner.

“Fine. You can sit right here.” He put her down in between us.

As we played, I noticed she kept staring at us as her head turned from one side to the other.

“I’ll be right back,” she said.

Conner let out a sigh. “I love that little girl more than anything, but I’m hoping she’ll go hang out with Charlotte.”

I let out a chuckle.

Suddenly, she stood in front of us, holding up Charlotte’s phone.

“Ella, what are you doing?” Conner paused the game.

“Taking your picture. Christian, lean in, please.” She gestured with her hand. “Smile. Okay. Thanks. You can go back to playing your game now.”

Conner looked over at me with furrowed brows. “What the hell was all that about?”

I shrugged. “Maybe she’s making a scrapbook or something.”

“I don’t think she’s the scrapbooking type. Has she asked you to sit in on one of your surgeries yet?” Conner asked.

“Yeah. She has.” I smiled. “Shit! You beat me.” I playfully punched his

arm.

“I have once again regained my title! Another beer?”

“Sure.”

Being here and playing Call of Duty with him was a much-needed break from the chaos of my life, and I knew I had made the right decision moving here.

“Look who dropped by,” Conner said as he handed me a beer.

“Hey, Jackson.” I smiled.

“Hi, Christian. Are you two playing Call of Duty?”

“We just finished, bro. I kicked his ass.” Conner grinned.

“Only this one time.” I smirked as I pointed at him.

“Uncle Jackson!” Ella ran into the room.

“Hey, pumpkin.” He picked her up and kissed her. “Look at this picture I took of Uncle Conner and Christian.”

“Wow. That’s a really nice picture.” He looked at the two of us.

“Charlotte and I are going to bake cookies now.”

Jackson put her down, and she ran into the kitchen. The three of us sat in the living room, talked for a while, and then I went home.

CHAPTER 17



Christian

The following day, I decided to go to the hospital and take a look around. I wasn't a stranger by any means to Cedars, but I wanted to go and see what was going on. I took the elevator up to the cardiac care unit, and when I stepped through the double doors, I saw a few familiar faces.

"Dr. Chase. Welcome to Cedars. We heard the great news."

"Thank you, Beverly. It's good to be here."

"You're starting tomorrow?" she asked.

"Yeah. I am. I was wondering if I could see some of the charts of the patients up here. I want to familiarize myself with them before I see them in the morning."

"Of course." She smiled. "Oh. Hey, Charleigh. Look who's here."

I turned around and saw Charleigh standing there in a pair of scrubs.

"Looks like the cat's out of the bag." She grinned.

"You work here?" My brows furrowed.

"I do. Hey, Charleigh. Good to see you." She cocked her head.

"Sorry. It is good to see you. Why didn't you tell me you worked here?"

"You didn't ask, and you didn't seem to care where I worked. Because if you did, you would have said at some point, 'By the way, Charleigh. Where do you work?'"

"But you knew I was working here?" I asked her.

"Yeah. The hospital is buzzing with the news."

"Why didn't you say something to me about it?"

She shrugged. "I figured if you wanted me to know where you were working, you would have told me. He won't be needing those, Beverly. I'll

take him around and fill him in on the patients. Come with me, Dr. Chase.”

Shit. I couldn't believe this.

“You're a cardiac nurse practitioner?” I asked as she led me down the hall.

“Yeah. Are you really surprised?” She grinned.

“Wait a second. Why are you here? You said you had four days off.”

“That nasty flu is going around, and two nurses called in. So, they called me and asked if I could cover.”

“Lily has that flu,” I said.

“Poor girl. I hope she feels better soon,” she said as we entered one of the rooms. “Mrs. Coldstone, this is Dr. Christian Chase, Cedars' new cardiothoracic surgeon.”

“My oh my. You are definitely handsome, young man.” She smiled. “You better watch out for this one.” She pointed at Charleigh. “She's a heartbreaker.”

“Is she, now?” I smiled.

“Okay, Mrs. Coldstone. You get some rest, and the hot doctor will be back in the morning.” Charleigh smiled as she squeezed Mrs. Coldstone's hand.

“I still can't believe you didn't tell me you work here,” I said as we left the unit.

“And I still can't believe you didn't tell me you got a job here,” she said.

“You never asked me about a job.”

“And you, Dr. Chase, never asked me either.” She glanced at her watch.

“I'm on my lunch break now. Want to come to the cafeteria with me?”

“Sure.”

We both got a salad and sat at a table by the window.

“How long have you worked here?” I asked Charleigh.

“A couple of months. I used to work at the UCLA Medical Center.”

“Why did you come here?”

“I pretty much grew up here, and this is where I wanted to work. Unfortunately, they didn't have any openings once I became a licensed N.P., so I waited until they did. You're still not going to tell me why you left Seattle, are you?”

“No. I'm sorry.”

“It's fine. As long as you're thriving here, it doesn't matter. You have a beautiful new home on the beach, amazing friends, and you start your new

job here tomorrow. Plus, you met me.” A bright smile crossed her face. “You have a lot to be grateful for, Dr. Chase.”

“I wish it was that simple.” I looked down at my salad.

“Hey.” She reached across the table and placed her hand on mine. “You must walk through life’s storms to reach the sunshine.”

I stared into her beautiful eyes and pulled my hand away from hers.

“I think this storm will be around for a long time.”

“All storms pass, Christian. It’s up to you to decide how long you want it to stick around.”

“You don’t have a clue what’s going on with me, Charleigh, so spare me your wisdom.”

“Got it.” She wiped her mouth with her napkin and threw it down on her plate. “I need to get back to work. Enjoy the rest of your day, Dr. Chase.” She got up, took her tray, and walked away.

“Charleigh?”

She ignored me and walked out of the cafeteria. After finishing my salad, I left the hospital, hopped on my bike, and went home. When I pulled into the driveway, Jackson walked over with his hands tucked tightly in his pants pockets.

“Hey, man,” I said as I took my helmet off.

“Hey. I need to talk to you. Do you have some time?”

“Yeah. Sure. Come on in.”

I pushed the key into the lock and opened the front door.

“Do you want a beer? It’s five o’clock somewhere, right?” I smiled.

“Yeah. If you’re having one.”

I reached into the refrigerator, pulled out two beer bottles, and handed him one.

“Thanks. Listen, Christian. God, I don’t know where to start.” He rubbed the back of his neck.

“Jackson, what’s going on?” I furrowed my brows.

“I promised I wouldn’t say anything, but I can’t just sit back and fucking ignore it. Simon and Shaun told me about your situation.”

“Fuck.” I shook my head. “They promised me—”

“Don’t be angry with them. They had a good reason. Nobody else knows, and they’re going to be pissed as hell when they find out I talked to you. But like I said, I can’t ignore the situation.”

“I don’t understand. My situation has nothing to do with you, Jackson.”

“But it does. I’m going to tell you something that happened thirty-three years ago. Of course, I was only thirteen months old at the time but what happened that night affected us our entire lives.”

“Okay.” I furrowed my brows.

“My mother was pregnant with twin boys—Conner and Christopher. As you know, you and Conner share the same birthday. They had to rush my mother in for an emergency C-section because the babies' heart rates were dropping quickly. When they took Christopher out, the cord was wrapped around his neck, and he wasn’t breathing. The pediatrician rushed him to the NICU. He told my parents that he tried to bring Christopher back, but it was too late, and he had passed away. I logged into the hospital’s medical records for my mother, and after doing some digging, I found out the pediatrician who cared for Christopher that night was Dr. William Chase.”

I swallowed hard as a sickness rushed through me.

“My mother refused to believe it when she woke up and demanded they bring her Christopher. So, they did, and she held Conner in one arm and Christopher’s lifeless body in the other. There was a funeral for him, and he’s buried next to my mother and father.”

“I’m sorry, Jackson. But I don’t understand where you’re going with this.”

“About a month ago, when we were all down at the beach celebrating the news of Nathan and Sofia’s baby, I opened an email I got from 23andMe, telling me that someone, a male, shared fifty percent of my brothers and I DNA.” He pulled his phone from his pocket, brought up the email, and showed it to me.

I gasped as I stared at it, and my heart started racing.

“This is impossible.” I looked up at him as I set his phone down.

“That’s what I said when Shaun and Simon talked to me about it. Then I spent the day yesterday digging for any information I could find at Cedars.”

“Are you saying that you, Conner, and Nathan are my brothers? You’re the fifty percent DNA match.”

“Yeah, Christian. That’s what I’m saying.” Tears filled his eyes. “You’re Conner’s twin. The twin who supposedly died at birth and the reason why our mother couldn’t cope and committed suicide.” Tears streamed down his face.

I didn’t know what to say or do. I was in shock, and everything was spinning out of control. Tears streamed down my face as I walked over to him and hugged him tight. His grip tightened around me as we held each

other and cried.

CHAPTER 18



Christian

“I always felt something was missing from my life, and I could never figure out what it was.” I broke our embrace as I wiped my eyes.

“Conner felt the same. For years he told us he felt a void and a loss in his soul. Don’t tell him I told you this, but he said something felt weird when he met you. He couldn’t explain the feeling or describe it. But every time you were around, he got this look on his face. Charlotte was convinced the two of you knew each other in a past life because she didn’t have any answers for him. Then one day, he told Nathan that the loss he felt would disappear whenever you were around. None of us saw the resemblance because why would we? But one person did.”

“Ella,” I said.

“Yeah. After meeting you, she asked Nathan if he was positive that you weren’t related to us. He asked her why she would ask that, and she told him it was because you reminded her of us and had the same eyes and smile as Conner.”

“The other day, when I was down at the beach, she placed both hands on my face and stared at me. I asked what she was doing, and she said nothing. Then yesterday, when I was at Conner’s playing Call of Duty, she was sitting between us and staring at both of us.”

He picked up his phone. “That’s why she took this picture.”

I took his phone and stared at it. “Can I send this to my phone?” I asked.

“Yeah. Of course.”

“I can’t believe I’m a twin. It all makes sense now.”

“What does?” Jackson asked.

“Why I felt a sense of peace when Conner was around. So now what?”

“We call Shaun and Simon down here, let them rip me a new asshole for talking to you, and then I give Simon the nurse’s name who was also there that night.”

“You have it?” My brows furrowed.

“It was in the medical report. She was also the one who was a witness in the signing of Christopher’s death certificate. I understand why they didn’t come to me first, and I’m sure I’ll get in trouble for accessing my mother’s records. But I don’t care, and I’ll deal with it when the time comes.”

“We’ll all deal with it.” I placed my hand on his shoulder.

Jackson sent a text message to both Simon and Shaun. Within minutes, the sliding door opened, and they both stepped inside.

“What’s going on over here?” Shaun asked with panic on his face.

“Jackson?” Simon cocked his head.

“I told him everything. And before you yell, I had no choice.”

“Christian?” Shaun walked over to me.

“I won’t lie and say I’m not a little mad at you two for not telling me your suspicions, but now isn’t the time for that. I need to know the truth to move on with my life and put this behind me.”

“I have the name of the nurse who was there that night,” Jackson said to Simon.

“How?” His brows furrowed.

“I accessed my mother’s medical records.”

“Oh boy.” Shaun sighed.

“Yeah. But I don’t care. It was worth it.”

“What’s her name? I’ll have Grace get us the information,” Simon said.

“Lilian C. Donohue.”

“Okay. Give me a second.” Simon pulled out his phone. “Hey, babe. I need everything you can find on Lilian C. Donohue. She is or was a nurse at Cedars, and she was working the night Christian and Conner were born. Thanks, babe. She’s on it now.” He looked at us.

“If Jackson, Conner, and Nathan are my brothers, that means you all are my cousins.”

“That’s right.” Shaun placed his hand on my back with a smile.

“And your father is Dr. Liam Kind.” Simon smiled. “One of the greatest cardiothoracic surgeons there was.”

The sting of tears in my eyes caught me off guard.

“It’s okay.” Shaun hooked his arm around me and squeezed tight. Simon’s phone pinged, and he smiled when he looked at it.

“Let’s go,” he said.

“Where?”

“S. 3rd Street in Inglewood.”



We pulled into the driveway, stepped onto the porch, and Simon knocked on the door.

“Can I help you?” An older woman asked as she slightly opened her door.

“Lilian Donohue?” Simon asked.

“No. I’m her homecare nurse. Who are you?”

“I’m Detective Simon Kind with the LAPD.” He flashed his badge. “We need to ask Lilian some questions. May we come in?”

She stared at him for a moment, and then she looked at us.

“Hold on a second.” She shut the door, and we waited. “You can come in.”

We stepped inside the house, and she led us to the living room, where a hospital bed and equipment were set up, and a frail older woman lay.

“Lilian Donohue?” Simon asked.

“Yes, Detective Kind. I’m her.”

“I have a few questions—”

“I already know your questions. Clara, can you please leave us to talk in private?”

“Sure, Lilian. If you need anything, I’ll be in the next room.”

“Well, go ahead, detective. I don’t have all day.”

“We need you to tell us what happened the night of July 15, 1989, at Cedars Hospital involving Dr. William Chase.”

“I always knew one day this would come back to haunt me. The dead don’t stay buried, and I warned Dr. Chase, but he wouldn’t listen. I didn’t want to do it because I really liked Dr. Kind, but I was desperate, and Dr. Chase knew it.”

“Do what, Lilian?” Simon asked.

“He made me take the child to his wife.”

“What child?” Shaun asked.

“Dr. Kind’s child.”

“I was in the NICU that night. The other nurse that was with me was on her break. Dr. Chase saved that child’s life. He told me he would pay me one hundred thousand dollars to keep quiet about it. You must understand that my husband had left me, and I was drowning in debt. I was about to lose our home, and I had a son I was raising as a single parent. Dr. Chase knew that. He knew how badly I was struggling. He told me all I had to do was be a witness for the death certificate and then take the child to his wife. I asked him how he planned on getting away with it if Dr. Kind and his wife requested to see the baby. He told me not to worry about it, and if I did what he asked, he’d give me the money the following morning.”

“How did you get the baby out of the hospital without anyone knowing?” Jackson asked.

“Earlier that day, I had taken one of the supply boxes because I needed to start packing. Everyone knew I was planning on moving, so no one questioned it when I walked out of the hospital with a large box in my hand. When I got to the car, I laid a blanket down on the front seat and set the child on it, so I could make sure he was okay. The motel was less than a ten-minute drive from the hospital. I handed the child over to Mrs. Chase and left. As promised, Dr. Chase handed me an envelope full of cash the next morning. He quit two weeks later and told management that he and his wife were moving to Seattle to take care of her dying mother, and he would open his own practice there. I never heard from him again.”

“Nobody ever questioned what happened to the abandoned baby that was left outside the hospital?” Simon asked.

“As far as everyone knew, the child was taken to the funeral home for cremation. A week later, Dr. Chase destroyed the records. He told me no one would ever know and to forget about it. But I couldn’t, and I never did. I’ve lived with what I had done for the past thirty-three years.”

I walked over to her bedside and stared straight into her eyes.

“That was me. I’m the child you handed over to Mrs. Chase.” I spoke through gritted teeth. “You robbed me of my real family.”

“Christian.” Shaun grabbed hold of my arm.

“You have no idea what you’ve done,” Jackson said. “Because of you and Dr. Chase, our mother never got over her son’s death and killed herself because of it. Not only did we lose our brother, but we also lost our mother. All you had to do was say no, walk away, and notify someone of Dr. Chase’s

plan.”

“I wish I would have, and I’m sorry. I have terminal cancer and could be gone within a week, two weeks, or a month. This is my punishment. I need you all to leave. I’m tired, and I need my rest.”

I walked out of the house and placed my hands on the hood of Shaun’s car, leaning forward, trying to catch my breath.

“Are you okay?” Jackson walked over and placed his hand on my back.

“No, Jackson. I’m not okay.”

“Well, I think you got the answers you were looking for,” Simon said. “And as hard as this is right now, you will be okay. Especially being surrounded by family. Your real family, cousin.”

“When are you exhuming Christopher’s body?” I asked him.

“Tomorrow. But I think we already know what the results are. That woman in there confessed to taking you out of the hospital and handing you over to Mrs. Chase. We can arrest her for kidnapping.”

“Really?” Shaun said. “She’s terminally ill and probably won’t last a month.”

“Shaun’s right. She’s received her punishment,” I said.

“What about the people who raised you?” he asked. “I can put in a call to the Seattle P.D., have them arrested, and bring them back here to face charges. There is no statute of limitation for kidnapping here.”

“I, for one, want to see them go to prison for what they’ve done to our family,” Jackson said. “And I’m sure our other brothers will agree, especially Conner.” He patted my back.

“Then this entire thing goes public. Do you really want that chaos in our lives?” I spoke. “The reporters, the hospital being under fire, the invasion of privacy? As much as I want them punished, they are almost seventy years old. I was the most important thing in their lives, and now they’ve lost me forever. I think that’s punishment enough. Besides, this could go on for years, and I want to put everything behind me and move on.”

“Listen. I know you’ve already done the 23andMe test, but I think it’s a good idea for the four of you to do another DNA test,” Shaun said.

“I agree with my brother, Simon said. “But you’re going to need to tell Nathan and Conner first what’s going on.”

“I’m worried about Conner,” Jackson said.

“Why?” I glanced at him.

“I’m not sure how he’s going to deal with this. Don’t get me wrong, he’s

going to be happy, but wounds will be reopened and—I don't know.”

“Then it's a good thing we have Charlotte,” Shaun said. “When do you want to do this?”

“I want to do it right when we get back,” I said. The sooner, the better. Then we all can process it together and move on.”

“I agree,” Jackson said.

CHAPTER 19



Christian

Shaun, Jackson, Simon, and I walked into my house, and the first thing I did was grab the bottle of scotch.

“Simon and I are going to head out and let you guys talk about it alone. When you’re ready, let us know,” Shaun said.

“Thanks, Shaun,” Jackson said. “I’m going to text Conner and Nathan and have them come over. Are you ready for this?” he asked.

“As ready as I’ll ever be.” I grabbed four glasses from the cabinet.

“What’s up?” Conner smiled as he and Nathan stepped through the sliding door.

I handed each of them a scotch.

“Thanks, man. What’s this for?” Nathan asked.

“Trust me. You’re going to need it,” Jackson said.

My heart wouldn’t stop racing as I stared at Nathan and then at Conner—my twin brother.

“Everyone needs to sit down,” Jackson said.

“Bro, why do I get the feeling you’re going to tell us someone died?” Conner said.

Jackson chuckled. “What I’m about to tell you is the opposite.”

“What are you talking about?” Nathan’s brows furrowed.

“There’s no easy way to tell you what’s been going on,” Jackson said.

“Let me start,” I said as I brought the glass to my lips. “I left Seattle because I discovered something about my parents and myself. I took the 23andMe test, and it revealed that I share fifty percent of my DNA with three other men.”

“But you’re an only child,” Nathan said.

“Does your dad or mom have some secret family or something?” Conner asked.

“No. Caroline and William Chase are not my biological parents.”

“Oh. So, you’re adopted,” Nathan said.

“No. I’m not adopted. My father kidnapped me from my biological parents when I was born, and he and Caroline raised me as their son.”

“Damn, Christian.” Conner’s brows furrowed. “How did they do that?”

“On July 15, 1989, at Cedars-Sinai Hospital, Dr. William Chase told a couple that their baby boy died.” Tears stung my eyes as I became choked up and could barely speak.

“It’s okay.” Jackson reached over and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Wait a second. I was born at Cedars-Sinai on July 15, 1989.” Conner’s brows furrowed.

“I know.” Tears streamed down my face.

“Jackson, what is happening here?” Conner shouted. “Why are you telling us this?”

“I can’t believe it.” Nathan shook his head as tears filled his eyes. “It’s not possible.”

“Conner, there’s no easy way to say this. Christian is our biological brother. He’s your twin brother.”

Conner stared across at me as tears filled his eyes. “That’s not even fucking funny.” He stood up from his chair. “What kind of sick joke is this?” he shouted. “And how long have you known?!” He pointed at Jackson.

“I just found out yesterday. Calm down.” Jackson walked over and gripped his shoulders. “Calm down.”

“You’re DC? The one who shares fifty percent of our DNA,” Nathan said.

“Yeah. I am.” I wiped the tears from my eyes.

“So, you’re telling me that my brother never died?” Conner asked. “Then who the hell is buried in the ground?”

“It’s most likely a baby that was abandoned outside the hospital the night you were born,” Jackson said. “Simon is exhuming the body tomorrow and having his DNA tested. That’s why you feel different when Christian is around. After all these years, you still felt that connection to him, even though you didn’t know him.”

Tears streamed down Conner’s face as I stood up, and he walked over to

me. Placing his hands on each side of my face, his eyes stared into mine before pulling me into him. We hugged each other tightly as we both cried. He broke our embrace and placed his hand on the back of my head.

“Welcome home, brother. Welcome home.” He cried and pulled me into him again.

Nathan walked over and hugged me as tears streamed down his face. “I can’t believe this is really happening,” he said.

“Trust me. I can’t either.” I cried.

The four of us sat down, and Jackson and I explained the entire story to them.

“Shaun said we still need to do another DNA test. He’s going to have his guy come and collect the samples. He said he’ll let us know when,” Jackson said.

“Ella was right this whole time,” Nathan spoke. “My six-year-old daughter saw it, and we didn’t.”

“She’s going to make one hell of a doctor,” I breathed out a laugh. “She pays attention to detail like nobody’s business.”

“She came to me last night and told me you’re her uncle. I just assumed she wanted to call you that because she likes you and you live next door. But somehow, she knew.”

“What did you say to her when she said that?” Conner asked.

“I just said okay. What could I say?”

“Mom, wait!” We heard Simon shout as the sliding door opened.

Barb walked in, threw her purse down, and walked over to me.

“My God. I can’t believe it.” She placed her hands on each side of my face. “You poor boy.” She pulled me into her.

“Sorry. You know we can’t control her,” Sam said as he and his brothers all stood there.

“I knew there was something familiar about you.” She broke our embrace. “You have your father’s eyes, just as your brothers do.”

“Thank you, Barb. How are you feeling?” I asked.

“I’m fine, Christian. I’m fine, thanks to you. And it’s Aunt Barb.” She hugged me.

“Welcome to the family, cousin,” Sam held out his arms.

I took turns hugging each of my cousins as they welcomed me into their family.

“I know we told you before that you’re one of us now, but you truly are

one of us. You're a Kind." Sebastian hugged me.

"Dad," I heard Ella's voice. "What's going on?"

"Come here, sweetheart." He picked her up. "We just learned that Christian is our biological brother, which makes him your Uncle Christian."

"I know. I've been trying to tell you that, but you wouldn't listen to me."

"Come here." I smiled as Nathan handed her over to me. "You are brilliant, and I'm so proud to have you as my niece." I hugged her.

"Does this mean you'll let me watch one of your open-heart surgeries now?"

We all laughed.

"Even if you won't, I'll still love you, Uncle Christian."

"I love you too, Ella."

"We all better get home and tell the girls what's going on," Stefan said.

"Grace was taking care of that while we were all here. But we should give Christian and Conner some time alone," Simon said.

"I'm his brother too." Nathan arched his brow.

"Yes, Nate. You are." Simon hooked his arm around him. "But you didn't share a womb with him for nine months, and you are not his twin. You'll get your turn." He led him out the sliding door.

Conner stayed back as everyone left.

"Another drink?" I held up the bottle of scotch.

"Yes. God, yes." He smiled. "I still can't believe this. It somehow doesn't feel real yet."

"Yeah. I know. I've been an only child my entire life, and now I find out I'm a twin and have three brothers. It's really overwhelming."

"If you get too overwhelmed, talk to Charlotte. She's an excellent therapist, and she's helped me a lot."

"Helped you with what?" I asked.

"Do you have about a year to discuss it?" The corners of his mouth curved upward.

"I have a lifetime." I smiled.

We sat down on the couch and talked. When he told me about our mother, I felt his pain, and it killed me knowing how badly she hurt because of what William and Caroline had done. The more we talked, the more I wanted them punished. After Conner left, I sent a text message to Simon.

"I want the people who raised me prosecuted for what they'd done."

"Good. I'll talk to my captain tomorrow, and we'll move forward with it."

I'll keep you posted."

I turned off all the lights and went upstairs. Climbing into bed, I tried to calm my racing mind. Shit. I thought about Charleigh and what I'd said to her earlier at the hospital. Looking at the time, it was too late to text her. She was mad at me, and it bothered me that she was. I had enough going on in my life, and I didn't need to add her being mad at me thrown into the mix. It was my fault because of what I'd said. She had no clue what was happening with me, and she was only trying to help. I was a dick. I brought up her number and sent her a text message. I needed to say my peace now.

"Hey. I'm sorry about earlier. I know you were only trying to help."

I was shocked when I saw the cloud with the three dots appear on the screen.

"Don't worry about it. I'm not mad."

"You were mad. You stormed out of the cafeteria."

"I didn't storm out."

"Sure, you did." I sent the smiley emoji.

"I saw you were bothered, so I gave you space. That's all. I'll see you tomorrow, yeah?"

"Yeah. I'll see you tomorrow. Sleep well, Charleigh."

"You too, Dr. Chase. Goodnight."

I smiled, and just as I set my phone down, a text message from Conner came through.

"If you can't sleep tonight, call me, and we can talk."

"Thanks, Conner. I will if I can't."

I tossed and turned all night long, and I couldn't quiet the chaos in my head. The last I'd looked at the time, it was two a.m.

My alarm went off, and I climbed out of bed. Today had been the day I was looking forward to. I needed patients, and I needed to perform surgery. After brewing a cup of coffee, I showered, got dressed, climbed on my motorcycle, and watched the sunrise on my way to work.

"The cool doctor has arrived." I heard Charleigh's voice from behind as I took off my helmet.

"Good morning." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

"Indeed, it is." She smiled. "Are you ready to tackle today's cases?"

"More than ready," I said as we walked into the hospital.

CHAPTER 20



Christian

I walked out of a patient's room and saw George Sutherland standing at the nurse's desk.

"George," I extended my hand.

"Dr. Christian Chase." He smiled as he shook my hand. "I came down to welcome you and ask if you need anything."

"I appreciate it. Do you have some time? I need to talk to you."

"Yeah. Of course." He looked at his watch. "Let's go up to my office. Have a seat," he said as he closed his door. "I hope everything is okay."

"There's something I need to tell you, and it's very personal. I would appreciate it if it doesn't leave this room."

"Of course, Christian," he spoke with concern.

I inhaled a breath and told him everything.

"Jesus Christ. I cannot believe this," he said.

"You and me both. Anyway, that's the reason I left Seattle. I have no plans on going public with this. What happened thirty-three years ago isn't this hospital's responsibility now. I, in no way, hold Cedars accountable. As for the nurse who helped Dr. William Chase, she's in hospice and is only expected to live a few more weeks. The people who raised me will be dealt with. I am not letting them get away with what they did. Not only did they keep me from knowing my brothers, but I also won't get the chance to know my biological parents because they are no longer here, especially my father. A man who was an inspiration to me and why I wanted to become a cardiothoracic surgeon."

"Your father was a brilliant man, Christian. To be honest, you remind me

of him. Have you thought about changing your last name?" he asked.

"I have, and I am. The thing that worries me is what kind of attention it's going to bring. People are going to want to know what happened and why I'm taking the Kind last name."

"Then we'll come up with a story for the staff here. I'll want you to make an announcement when it's finalized. The hospital is a gossip mill, and a lot of mistruths will be spread if we don't address it right away."

"I will. Thanks, George." I stood from my chair and extended my hand.

"You're welcome. I'm sorry this happened to you, and I appreciate you telling me about it."

"I figured I had no choice considering I'm changing my last name." My pager went off. "I have to go. I'll talk to you later, George." I walked out of his office and took the elevator down to the lobby.

"Mr. Fletcher, I presume." I extended my hand.

"You must be Dr. Christian Chase." He placed his hand in mine. "It's a pleasure to meet you. This will only take a couple of minutes. Is there somewhere private we can go?"

"We can go up to my office. Have you tested my brothers yet?"

"I have. I just came from the medical center."

We stepped into my office, and I closed the door. Mr. Fletcher took the samples he needed and put them in his bag.

"I told Shaun the results would be ready in twenty-four hours."

"Thank you." I opened the door, and Mr. Fletcher nearly ran into Charleigh.

"I'm so sorry, young lady."

"No need to apologize." She smiled. "Patient of yours?" she asked me.

"No." My pager went off. "I'm needed down in the ER. We'll talk later. Dinner at my house tonight." I pointed at her as I walked away.

"Excuse me. What if I have plans?"

"Then you'll cancel them." I turned and flashed her a smile. "I need to tell you something."



Charleigh

I furrowed my brows as I watched him walk down the hall.

“I didn’t know you and Dr. Chase were dating,” Wendy said as she walked over to me.

“We’re not. We’re just friends.”

“Then you wouldn’t mind if I make a move on him?”

“Not at all.” I smiled as I walked away.

It was four o’clock when I went into the locker room and changed from my scrubs into my regular clothes. After freshening up my makeup, I ran a brush through my hair, grabbed my bag and my purse, and headed out of the hospital. Pulling into Christian’s driveway, I knew he wasn’t home, so I grabbed my purse, went around the back, took off my shoes, and walked down to the water.

“Charleigh!” I heard a little voice exclaim.

“Ella!” I smiled as she ran over to me, and I hugged her.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“Waiting for Christian to get home from work.”

Her eyes lit up. “Did you hear the great news? Christian is my uncle! My real uncle.”

“What do you mean?” I cocked my head.

“My dad told me yesterday that Christian is his long-lost brother, making him my uncle!”

A funny feeling settled inside me. “Is your dad sure about that?”

“Yeah. It all started with a 23andMe test. I have to go. Sofia and I are going to her dance studio.”

“Okay. Have fun, sweetie.”

I walked up to the patio of Christian’s house and took a seat in one of his new loungers. As I sat there staring out at the water, my head was spinning with what Ella had told me. The sliding door opened, and I saw Christian standing there when I turned my head.

“There you are.” He smiled.

“Hey.” I smiled back as I stood up and went inside.

“Sorry I wasn’t here. I stopped at the grocery store to pick up some things for dinner.”

“It’s okay. Are you cooking?” I asked.

“Yeah. I am.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

He walked over to the island where the bags of groceries sat.

“I bought some salmon to throw on the grill, asparagus, sweet potatoes, and salad.”

“Sounds delicious. Can I help?”

“If you want to,” he said.

“I do. I love to cook.” I helped him unpack the groceries.

I pulled out a bag of lettuce and looked at him.

“What’s this?”

“What do you mean?” He laughed. “It’s a salad kit.”

“No, no, no, no.” I shook my head. “You really eat this stuff?” I cocked my head.

“It’s a salad, Charleigh.”

“No, Christian. It’s not. This lettuce could be weeks old. It’s also washed in chlorinated water, and all the healthy goodness you get from lettuce is already gone. Not to mention that this said lettuce,” I held up the bag, “is mixed with different gases for a longer shelf life. Bye, bye nutrients.”

He grabbed the bag from me, walked over to the trash can, and threw it out.

“Happy?” His brow arched.

I walked over to the trash can, pulled the bagged salad from it, and stuck it in the refrigerator.

“That’s wasteful. I’ll take it back to the store tomorrow on my way to work and exchange it for fresh lettuce. Then we can try this again.” A smirk crossed my lips.

He let out a chuckle. “Are you serious?”

“Very.”

“So, I guess no salad now,” he said.

“It’s okay. We have enough food. You seem to be in a better mood today than yesterday.” I grabbed the sweet potatoes and washed them.

“Being back at work helps. That’s actually why I wanted to have dinner with you tonight. There’s something I want to tell you.”

“Is it the fact that you just found out Nathan, Jackson, and Conner, are your biological brothers?”

He stopped cutting the asparagus and stared at me.

“I was down at the beach earlier, and Ella told me. She’s very excited.”

“The man you saw me with earlier today was a man from LabCorp. He took a sample of my DNA. He also took my brothers. It’s just an extra measure to be one hundred percent sure. I’ll tell you everything over dinner, where we can sit and talk.”

“Okay.” I gave him a small smile. “Oh, I’m giving you a heads up.”

“About what?” he asked.

“Wendy wants to make a move on you, and she asked if I would mind.”

“Wendy, the nurse?”

“Yes.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I told her to go ahead.” I grinned. “Who am I to keep you all to myself, you sexy thing.” I winked at him with a smile. “Alexa, play You Sexy Thing.”

“What are you doing?” He smiled.

The song started playing. Placing my hands on his chest, I started singing and dancing around him while my hands roamed over his body.

“You’re crazy.” He laughed as he began to move his body with mine.

We danced around the kitchen while we sang, and he took my hand and twirled me around, bringing me into him while his arm tightened around my waist as our hips swayed back and forth. When the song ended, he dipped me, and laughter escaped us.

I grabbed a bottle of wine from his built-in wine cooler and took down two glasses.

“You don’t mind, right?” I asked as I held up the bottle.

“Not at all.”

“Your cousin really pulled out no stops when it came to redesigning this house.” I smiled.

“He went above and beyond. The house is worth every penny.”

“Just so you know, I’m going to be spending a lot of time here,” I said. “I like the vibe and the beach. And I like your new family.” I poured some wine into a glass and handed it to him.

“They’re great people. I’m going to get the salmon off the grill, and then we can eat.”

“I’ll get the table set.”

I took the sweet potatoes from the oven and the asparagus from the steamer. After he brought in the salmon, we sat down at the table.

“Why don’t you start by telling me what happened in Seattle,” I spoke as I placed my napkin on my lap.

CHAPTER 21



Christian

I told her everything. Talking about it was hard, but she needed to know.

“Your father, Dr. Liam Kind, told me about you. Well, he told me about what happened.”

I sat there and furrowed my brows at her. “You two were that close that he talked about something so personal?”

“I was having a bad day and feeling sorry for myself. I’d accepted the fact that I was going to die, and I told your father just to let me. I was getting worse. I was miserable, and I wanted to go home and die peacefully. He sat with me the entire night and held my hand while we talked. He told me that I was a warrior and wouldn’t let me give up on myself because he wasn’t giving up on me. Then he told me about your mom and how she had given up on life after your supposed death.”

She reached across the table and took hold of my hand.

“I know it’s hard to bear, and I know you’re struggling with everything. Your life is such a shitstorm right now, Christian, and that’s okay. Ride it out with grace and make peace with it because all shitstorms pass. Remember when I told you yesterday that you must walk through the storm to reach the sun?”

“Yeah. How could I forget.” I smirked.

“The sun is closer than you think. But it’s how you choose to walk through it that gets you there. You can choose to slow down and stay surrounded by darkness, or you can hold your head up and keep walking straight through. Your sunshine is waiting for you, Dr. Chase. It’s so bright

that you better have your sunglasses ready.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips. “And one day, when you think back about this storm that changed your entire life, you’re going to realize how much better and stronger of a person it made you.”

“How are you so wise?” I asked.

“Your father said those same words to me that night.”

Tears filled my eyes as I stood up and grabbed my plate from the table. Taking it over to the island, I set it down and gripped the edges, pushing myself back as I leaned over it. Charleigh walked over, wrapped her arms around my waist, and laid her head on my back.

“I would give anything to have known him,” I spoke in a low voice. “I was robbed of that privilege by those people.”

“All you need to know right now is that he was a good man who cared a great deal for other people. He always put others first before himself, and I know your brothers will tell you the same thing. You’re his son, and you are just like him. Take comfort in that. Besides, you have the same taste as him in friends.”

I breathed out a laugh as I turned around and wrapped my arms around her.

“You are a good friend, Charleigh Ellis, and I can see why my father liked you so much.”

I stared into her eyes and brought my hand up to her cheek while I softly stroked it. Leaning in, I brushed my lips against hers. Swooping down and picking her up, I carried her upstairs to the bedroom while our lips stayed locked.

While I stripped out of my clothes, she stripped out of hers, pulled back the covers to my bed, climbed under, and held them up for me with a smile. I climbed in and wasted no time devouring her beautiful body, starting with her neck and slowly moving downward. The wetness that emerged from her was incredible as my tongue circled around her. Moans escaped her beautiful lips as her fingers tangled in my hair. She was close to an orgasm, and I wouldn’t stop until she came.

“If you even think about stopping, I will kill you myself,” she moaned.

I smiled as I dipped my finger inside her. Her moans intensified as her legs tightened around me, and she came. Making her orgasm was what I loved most about having sex with her. It was so easy and turned me on to the point that my cock throbbed to be inside her. I rolled her on her belly and

pulled out a condom from the nightstand. She quickly grabbed it from my hand and tossed it across the room.

“No condom needed tonight,” she said. “I trust you, and you can trust me.”

Fuck. If I wasn't already hard enough.

“Spread those legs for me,” I said.

“With pleasure.”

I hastily thrust inside her because I couldn't take it anymore. A gasp fell from my mouth as the warmth and wetness of her enveloped my cock. She took me in with ease, inch by inch, until I was buried deep inside her. Listening to the pleasing sounds she made while I moved in and out of her was music to my ears. I started slow and took my time, basking in the euphoria that overtook me. I pulled out, rolled her on her back, and brought her up to me while I thrust into her again, and her legs wrapped tightly around my waist. Our lips tangled, and our tongues met as my hands roamed up and down the soft flesh of her back. She orgasmed as her nails firmly dug into my back, and she threw her head back. My tongue stroked the front of her neck as my cock spasmed and was ready to explode. Two more thrusts were all it took, and I released myself inside her, holding her tightly against me and feeling the beat of her racing heart.

I broke our embrace and ran my hand down her hair as I softly kissed her.

“That was incredible.” She smiled.

“It sure was.” I kissed her again.

“I noticed that amazing fancy tub you have in your bathroom. Can we try it out?” she asked with a smile.

“You want to take a bath?” I asked.

“Yeah. I do. A nice hot bubble bath.”

“I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I don't have any bubble bath.”

Instantly, her brows furrowed. “Say what?”

“I'm a guy. Why would I have that?”

“Okay. I got you. You have no idea what you're missing.” She grinned. “Go start the bath and I'll be right back.”

“Where are you going?” I asked as she grabbed my t-shirt from the floor and slipped it on.

“Out to my car. I have some in my bag.”

“Umm. You aren't going out front in just that.”

“Why?”

“Because I said so. Where’s your bag?”

“In my back seat.”

“I’ll go grab it.” I pulled a pair of sweatpants from my drawer and slipped them on. “You can start the bath.”

“If you say so.”

I ran out to her car and saw Nathan and Conner standing in Nathan’s driveway.

“Hey.” I smiled as I waved.

“Looks to me like someone is having a good time.” Conner grinned as he and Nathan walked over.

It was a damn good thing I didn’t let Charleigh get her bag.

“Charleigh needs her bag.”

“Ah.” Nathan smiled. “Good for you. She’s a great girl.” He patted my shoulder.

“Yeah. She’s a good friend. I better get back inside. I’ll talk to you two later.”

“See ya, bro.” Conner smiled.

“See ya, bro.” I smiled back and went inside the house.

Taking her bag upstairs, I set it on the bed.

“What took you so long?”

“I ran into Nathan and Conner out front. What is in that thing?” I pointed to the bag.

“Some clothes, makeup, hair accessories, toothbrush, toothpaste, mouthwash, supplements, bubble bath.” She grinned as she held up the bottle.

“Why do you keep all of that in there?”

“It’s for when I work a double or triple at the hospital. It’s better to be prepared, just in case.”

I took down my sweatpants and climbed into the tub while Charleigh put her hair up in a clip.

“Why bubble bath? There aren’t any bathtubs in the hospital.”

“One of the nurses gave it to me for my birthday when I worked at the UCLA Medical Center. I tossed it in my bag and forgot about it until now.”

She climbed in and snuggled her naked body against me.

“Oh my God, this tub is amazing.”

“You know what I realized?” I asked.

“What?”

“Other than your job, your heart transplant, knowing my father, and that

you're a little bit crazy, I know nothing else about you."

"Let's see. My favorite color is pink, but it has to be the right shade of pink, and my favorite flower is the pink peony."

"Why that flower?" I asked as I softly stroked her arm.

"Not only are they beautiful, but they represent honor, healing, and prosperity. My favorite kind of food is Japanese. I have a great passion for sushi. I like to hike, swim in the ocean, watch sunrises and sunsets, dance, and the biggest thing you don't know about me is that I love helping people." She tilted her head back and looked up at me with a smile.

"Oh, I know you love to help people. I'm living proof of that." I brought my finger to her nose and placed some bubbles on it.

"Life is so precious and something everyone takes for granted. We're all so busy with our own lives, wants, and needs that it's easy to forget those who struggle and need help. Ever since the transplant, I see life differently. I was saved to make a difference in people's lives."

I pressed my lips on the top of her head as my arms tightened around her and slowly closed my eyes.

"You definitely make a difference in people's lives, Charleigh."

"Aw, you're sweet. Thank you, Christian." She turned her head and pressed her lips against my arms that held her.

I heard my phone ringing in the bedroom and couldn't imagine who was calling this late.

"Should you get that?" Charleigh asked.

"Nah. It can wait until we get out."

"The bubbles are dissipating, so I think we should get out now." She stood up.

She climbed out first, grabbed two towels, and handed me one.

"Thanks." I smiled as I dried off and wrapped the towel around my waist.

Walking over to the dresser where my phone was, I picked it up and saw I had a missed call from Simon and a voice message.

"Christian, I saw Charleigh's car is at your house, so I didn't just want to walk over, but it's important that I talk to you right away. Call me back as soon as you get this."

I sent him a text message.

"Come on over."

"You better get dressed. Simon is on his way over. He said he needs to talk to me," I spoke as I slipped on my sweatpants and a t-shirt.

“Do you want me to go?” she asked.

“No. I was going to tell you to spend the night. You have everything you need.” I smirked as I pointed to her bag.

“Really?” A grin crossed her face. “Do you have popcorn?”

“Yeah. I think so.”

“Then I’ll spend the night.”

Just as we walked down the stairs, the sliding door opened, and Simon and Grace stepped inside.

“Hey, Simon. Grace,” I said.

Charleigh walked over and hugged Grace. “It’s good to see you again.” She smiled.

“It’s good to see you too.”

“I told Charleigh everything,” I spoke to Simon.

“Oh. Okay. Let’s go sit down.” He placed his hand on my back and led me to the couch.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

He inhaled a sharp breath. “Listen, Christian. There’s no easy way to tell you this. I got a call from the Seattle Police Department. They went over to arrest William and Caroline. No one answered when they got to the house, so they used forceful entry to get inside. They found your parents in their car in the garage. I’m sorry.” He placed his hand on my shoulder.

I swallowed hard as my heart raced. Charleigh reached over and tightly gripped my hand.

“They’re dead?” I asked.

“Yeah, man. I’m so sorry.”

“Did they leave a note?” I asked.

“The officers said there wasn’t a note lying around anywhere.”

“Those fucking cowards,” I shouted as I stood up from the couch.

CHAPTER 22



Charleigh

“Christian, I’m—”

“I got this, Simon,” I said as I placed my hand on his arm.

“Okay. Thanks, Charleigh.”

“I’ll see you soon.” Grace hugged me.

I walked over to where Christian stood in the middle of the room and wrapped my arms around his waist from behind.

“I can’t believe they would do that,” Christian spoke.

“They most likely knew what was coming. Let’s go upstairs.” I took hold of his hand.

“You go. I’ll be right up. I’m going to grab the bottle of scotch,” he said.

“Okay.”

As I walked up the stairs, I couldn’t believe it. He had been through so much already, and I feared this would be his final straw. I sat on the bed with my back against the headboard and waited for him. A few moments later, he walked into the room with a glass and a bottle of scotch. He sat down on the bed next to me and stared straight ahead while he held his drink. I moved closer, wrapped my arm around his, and laid my head on his shoulder. We sat there in silence.

“Talk to me, Christian.”

“I don’t feel like talking.” He brought the glass to his lips.

“Do you want me to go and give you some space?”

“No. You can stay.”

I reached across him, grabbed the bottle of scotch from the nightstand, and brought it to my lips.

“What are you doing?” He looked at me.

“Look at that. I got you to stop staring at that wall.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know you drank scotch. I should have brought you a glass.”

“It’s fine. Just another thing you didn’t know about me. Besides, I don’t drink it that often. Refill?” I held up the bottle.

He held his glass out to me, and I refilled it.

“Thanks,” he said. “I feel so numb inside.”

“You’re in your darkest moment right now, and that’s okay. Just don’t become a victim of it.”

“Easier said than done.” He brought the glass to his lips. “There is no other family, so I’m going to have to fly back to Seattle and deal with their funeral and shit. Fuck. I’m not even their son. This shouldn’t be my responsibility.”

“They raised you, Christian.”

“They kidnapped me!” he snapped.

“I know, and I’m not saying you don’t have the right to be angry. But it would be best if you stepped outside of your anger lane for a minute. Just for a minute.”

“What are you talking about, Charleigh?” he sighed.

“Those people loved you and raised you to become the man you are today. You need to remember that part.”

“How can you sit there and say that after everything I told you earlier?” His brows furrowed. “They did nothing but lie to me my entire life.”

“Yes. They did lie to you, and they did a horrible thing. They did the unthinkable. But you need to forget what they did for just a moment and remember the love they gave you and how they made you feel safe and secure. You must remember how much you loved them before finding out the truth.”

“Maybe you should go,” he said.

“Okay.”

As I went to climb off the bed, his hand gripped my wrist.

“No. Don’t. I’m sorry. I don’t want you to go.”

“Are you sure? Because if I get off this bed, I’m not getting back on it.” I arched my brow at him, and a soft smile crossed his lips.

“I’m sure.” He finished off his drink. “We should get some sleep. We

have to be at work early.”

He set his glass on the nightstand, and we both stood up, stripped out of our clothes, and climbed under the covers. He held out his arm, and I snuggled my body tightly against his, placing my hand and my head on his chest.

“Thanks for staying, Charleigh.”

“That’s what friends are for.” I pressed my lips against his chest.

I lay there as all kinds of thoughts infiltrated my head. It was going to be hard for him to go back to Seattle and bury the people who betrayed him when he was filled with such hate and anger.

The next morning, I woke up before the alarm went off. Christian had tossed and turned all night, and I didn’t think he got much sleep. Carefully climbing out of bed, I slipped on his t-shirt and went down to the kitchen to make a cup of coffee. I heard him walking down the stairs, so I grabbed a cup and brewed him some coffee.

“There you are,” he said. “I hope I didn’t keep you up all night. If I did, I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t.” I handed him the freshly made coffee.

“Thanks. I need to call the funeral home and make the arrangements for this weekend.” He brought the cup to his lips. I’ll take Friday off, fly out, and fly back on Sunday.”

“I’ll go with you,” I said.

“Really?” He cocked his head. “Why?”

“Why not. I have Friday off, and I can get someone to cover the weekend for me.”

“You don’t have to do that, Charleigh.”

“Friends are there for friends in their time of need.”

“I appreciate it, but I’m not in a time of need. I want to get it over with and get back. I forgot to tell you something else last night.”

“What?”

“I’m changing my last name to Kind. I can’t and won’t keep the name of those people.”

“Dr. Christian Kind. I love it.” I grinned. “You’re entitled to and deserve the name of your family and that of your father.”

“Thank you.” He sipped his coffee.

“How are you going to explain that to everyone?” I asked.

“George and I are going to come up with a story to tell the staff. I don’t

know. I'm afraid the real truth will come out, and it'll cause more chaos."

"Then you need to start with the truth. Just don't give all of the details. Honesty is the best policy. That way, you can avoid the shitshow."

"Yeah. Maybe you're right. I'll give it some thought. We better go get ready for work."

After we got dressed, we headed out the door. I threw my bag in the backseat and climbed into my car while Christian climbed on his motorcycle.



Christian

I was in the O.R. performing a triple bypass. A surgery I desperately needed today to clear my head. I'd called the funeral home in Seattle and made arrangements for William and Caroline to be laid to rest on Saturday. I also called a moving company and arranged to have their house and their personal belongings packed up and donated to the various homeless shelters in the area. I wanted nothing, and I wanted this over with. The only thing left was to contact a realtor and sell the house.

I walked out of the O.R. and felt the vibration of my phone in my scrubs pocket. Pulling it out, I had a call from Louis Vasquez.

"Dr. Chase."

"Christian, it's Louis."

"Hello, Louis. What can I do for you?"

"I'm so sorry to hear about your parents. I'm calling because I need to discuss their will with you."

Shit.

"I'll be back in Seattle on Friday. We can meet then."

"Sounds good. What time are you flying in?"

"I don't know yet. I can let you know later."

"Okay, Christian. Keep me posted."

I ended the call as I saw Conner walking toward me.

"Hey," I spoke.

"Hey." He hugged me. "I heard about what happened in Seattle."

"I was going to tell you all when I got home. I was in surgery pretty much all day."

"I know. I saw your name on the board. How are you?"

“I’m fine,” I said.

“I need to check on a few patients. Let’s meet down at the beach later,” Conner said.

“Okay. I’ll see you later.” I patted his back.

When I entered through the doors of the cardiac care unit, I saw Wendy standing there.

“Hi, Dr. Chase.” She flirtatiously smiled.

“Hi, Wendy.” I walked past her.

“Dr. Chase, wait.”

I stopped and turned around.

“I was thinking that maybe we could go for a drink later.”

“I’m sorry, Wendy. I can’t. I have plans tonight. Maybe another time.”

“Sure. Okay.”

I turned around and ran right into Charleigh, who was practically standing on top of me.

“Hi.” She smiled.

“Jesus, Charleigh.”

“What?”

“I didn’t expect you to be right behind me.”

“I heard Wendy ask you out.” She smirked as we entered Mr. Tilling’s room.

I let out a sigh. “We’ll talk about that later. Mr. Tilling. How are you feeling?” I looked over his chart.

“I’m feeling okay, Dr. Chase.”

“Your blood pressure looks great.” I smiled. “In fact, all of your vitals look good. You might be getting out of here tomorrow.”

“As great as that sounds, whatever will I do without my Charleigh bear to keep me company.” He smiled as he held out his hand to her.

“Aw, Mr. Tilling. You’re sweet. I will definitely miss you, but you have Mrs. Tilling at home to keep you company.” She placed her hand in his.

“She’s not as special as you are, doll. I’ll miss our conversations.”

“I’ll see you when you come back for your post-op visits. We can resume our conversations then.” A bright smile crossed her face.

“I’ll check on you in the morning, and then we’ll go from there,” I said.

“Thanks, doc.”

Charleigh and I walked out of the room, and I glanced over at her.

“Charleigh bear?” I arched my brow.

“He’s old and sweet. Leave him alone. I don’t know if you have plans, but I’m having dinner with my parents at my dad’s bar tonight. You’re more than welcome to join us.”

“I can’t. I’m meeting my brothers and cousins down at the beach later. Another time?”

“Okay. Sounds good. I have two more patients to tend to, and then I’m out of here. Talk to you later, yeah?”

“Definitely.” I smiled as she walked away.

My phone rang, and when I pulled it from my pocket, I saw Mr. Fletcher from LabCorp was calling.

“Mr. Fletcher,” I answered as I stopped in the hallway.

“Good day, Dr. Chase. I have the results of your DNA test.”

“Already?”

“Mr. Kind paid for top priority. You, Jackson, Conner, and Nathan all share the same DNA. They are, without a doubt, your brothers, just as the 23andMe results showed.”

“Thank you, Mr. Fletcher. I appreciate you calling.”

“You’re welcome. Have a good day.”

“You as well.”

I let out a deep breath as I stood against the wall and lowered my head.

“Hey. Are you okay?” Charleigh walked up and placed her hand on my arm.

“Yeah. I’m good. Mr. Fletcher just called to confirm that my brothers are indeed my brothers.”

The corners of her mouth curved upward. “That’s great news, Christian. You didn’t doubt they were, did you?”

“No. I didn’t. But actually hearing it come from someone’s mouth instead of seeing it on a piece of paper made it that much more real.”

“Then you all have a lot of celebrating to do tonight.” She glanced at her watch. “I have to run. Call me later?”

“Yeah. I will.”

She started to walk away, and I called her name.

Charleigh?”

“Yeah?” She turned her head with a smile.

“Thank you for everything.”

“You’re welcome. Don’t forget to call me, no matter how drunk you are.” She smirked.

“I won’t.” I chuckled.

CHAPTER 23



Christian

When I got home, I quickly ran upstairs, changed my clothes, grabbed a beer from the refrigerator, and stepped out the sliding door. When I looked down at the bonfire, I saw my three brothers staring at me. Walking over to them with tears in my eyes, I hugged Conner first.

“Best news of my life,” he cried.

“I know.” I hugged him tightly.

“Get over here, bro.” Jackson pulled me away from Conner and hugged me.

“My turn,” Nathan said as he hugged me.

I wiped the tears from my eyes as my brothers did the same. My five cousins walked over, and each of them hugged me.

“We already knew, but now it’s triple confirmed,” Simon said as he dried his eyes.

The ten of us sat in front of the bonfire while it kept us warm.

“Jackson, Nathan, and I are going with you to Seattle,” Conner said.

“You don’t have to do that. I know how busy you all are.”

“Family comes first, bro,” Jackson said.

“Family will always come first,” Conner said as he reached over and hooked his arm around me.

“The plane will be waiting for you on Friday morning,” Shaun spoke.

“Thanks, Shaun. I appreciate it.”

“No need to thank me. The plane is ours and available whenever any of us need it.”

“You three really don’t need to come with me. I’ll be okay.”

“We aren’t going to let you go through that alone,” Conner said. “You’re our brother. We all have each other’s backs no matter what’s going on.”

“Where’s Charleigh tonight?” Sam asked.

“She’s having dinner with her parents. By the way, Simon. Did you exhume Christopher’s body?”

“Nah. Jackson called me last night and told me to hold off until you four got your test results back. There’s no need to disturb that child. We already know he’s not related.”

“Did you tell your brothers yet?” Shaun asked.

“Tell us what?” Conner glanced at me.

“Not yet. I was planning on it tonight.”

“Come on, bro. What?” Nathan asked.

“I filled out the paperwork to legally change my last name to Kind and have a new birth certificate made with Mom and Dad’s names on it. Just as it should have been thirty-three years ago.”

“Damn you.” Conner wiped the tears in his eyes.

“Come here, you baby.” I smiled as I reached over and hugged him.

“Dr. Jackson Kind, Dr. Conner Kind, Dr. Nathan Kind, and Dr. Christian Kind. Damn.” Simon shook his head. “What a fucking family we have. But this is it, right?” He looked at Shaun.

“You’ll be the first to know, my brother, if anyone else pops up on 23andMe.”

“Actually, I don’t want to know.” He put his hand up, and we all laughed.



*M*y brothers and I stepped into the conference room where Mr. Vasquez was already seated.

“Christian. It’s good to see you again.” He extended his hand.

“Good to see you, too, Louis. These are my friends. Dr. Jackson Kind, Dr. Conner Kind, and Dr. Nathan Kind.”

I wasn’t about to explain to him who they really were.

“It’s nice to meet all three of you. Please. Have a seat.” He gestured. Opening his file folder, he pulled out a packet of papers. “You are the sole heir of your family’s estate. The family home, your parent’s belongings, and a total of fifteen million dollars between three bank accounts, stocks, and

bonds. All I need is your signature right here.” He slid the paper to me.

When I first got the call from Louis, I was going to tell him I didn’t want any of it. I didn’t want a dime from those people. But the more I thought about it, the more I wanted to right their wrongs.

“Thank you, Louis. Is that it?” I asked.

“Yes, Christian. Again, I’m sorry for your loss.”

“I appreciate it, but you don’t know the bad and horrific things they’ve done.” I stood up from my seat. “Enjoy your evening.”

“Damn, bro. You’re fifteen million dollars richer,” Conner said as he hooked his arm around me.

“I’m not keeping a dime of that money.”

“What are you going to do with it?” Jackson asked.

“Put it to good use.” I smiled.

I had decided not to be present when William and Caroline’s caskets were put into the ground. Several years ago, they purchased their plots and bought their own caskets to make it easier for me when the time came. All I did was make a call, and everything was taken care of. There was no obituary, no viewing, and no service. The faster I could get out of Seattle, the better for me.

My brothers and I left Seattle and flew back to Los Angeles Saturday afternoon. My plan was to stay until Sunday, but there wasn’t any reason to. All arrangements for the house and their things were already in motion.

“There’s someplace we want to take you,” Jackson said as we landed and climbed into his car.

“Okay.”

He pulled into the cemetery and pulled along the side. Climbing out, I followed them to where our parents were buried.

“This is where Mom and Dad are buried,” Conner said.

“And Christopher,” Nathan spoke.

“Over here is where our Uncle Henry is buried,” Jackson said. “This whole section is the Kind family plot. Dad and Uncle Henry went in together and purchased it years ago.”

“This entire section?” I cocked my head.

“Yep. Dad used to say that even in death, our family will always be together,” Nathan said.

“And there’s room for you too.” Conner smiled as he hooked his arm around me. “Right next to me.”

“Where’s your plot?” I asked.

“I haven’t decided yet. But we have our pick.” He held out his arms.

“Thank you, guys, for bringing me here.” I hugged all three of them.

“Now you can visit Mom and Dad whenever you want,” Nathan said.

CHAPTER 24



Christian

After we arrived home, I sent Charleigh a text message.

“Hey, you. What time does your shift end?”

“Hey. I get off in an hour.”

“Up for some fun tonight?” I asked.

“In Seattle?” She sent the confused emoji.

“No. Lol. I just got back to L.A.”

“Does it involve a bed?”

“Yes.” I sent the smiling emoji.

“And this?” She sent the eggplant emoji, and I laughed.

“Of course.”

“Then I’m up for some fun tonight. I’ll be over after my shift.”

“I can come to your place.”

“Isn’t tonight bonfire night?”

“Oh yeah. It is.”

“Then I’m coming to your place.”

“Okay. I’ll see you when you get here. What time does your shift start tomorrow?”

“I’m not working tomorrow. I’ll explain when I see you.”

“Plan on spending the night then.”

“I already am.”

I smiled as I set my phone down and made myself a coffee. The sliding door opened.

“Hi, Uncle Christian.” Ella smiled as she ran over and threw her arms around my legs.

“Hey, sweetheart.” I reached down and picked her up. “What are you up to?” I smiled.

“Not much. I got to thinking about something.”

“Oh yeah? What are you thinking about?” I set her down.

“We have something in common.”

“I know. We have a lot in common.” I winked.

“Besides being super smart and loving science.” She giggled.

“What else do we have in common?” I asked.

“We’re both new to the family. I remember how I felt when I first came here. I was so scared and sad. My dad, cousins, and uncles were strangers to me. It’s okay if you’re scared too, and if you ever want to talk about it, I’m here for you.”

A fucking tear sprung to my eye as I inhaled a sharp breath.

“Come here.” I picked her up and held her tightly against me. “You are such a special little girl. Thanks, Ella. I promise to come and talk to you if I need to.”

“Okay.” She stared at me.

The sliding door opened, and Nathan stepped inside.

“There you are. Ella, you can’t run off like that.”

“I told you I was running over here, Dad.”

“No. You didn’t.”

“Yes. I did. You were on the phone and nodded your head at me.”

“Okay. Next time I’m on the phone, and you say you’re doing something, write it down and hand it to me.”

“Why? You can’t listen to two people at once?” she asked him, and I tried to hold back my laughter.

He narrowed his eye at her. “Let’s go. Leave Uncle Christian alone.”

“It’s all good, bro.” I smiled.

“Is Charleigh coming over tonight?” he asked.

“Yeah. I just texted her. She’ll be here in about an hour or so.”

“Great. That’s about when we’ll meet down at the bonfire.”

“Are the two of you dating?” Ella asked.

“Nope. She’s just a friend.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Okay, kiddo. Time to go. We’ll see you down at the beach.” Nathan rolled his eyes.

I chuckled as they walked out the sliding door. After grabbing my laptop

from my office, I took it over to the couch and sat down, placing my feet up on the coffee table. I brought up some old articles that my father had published in the medical journal and read them. Just as I finished reading the last one, the front door opened. Turning my head, I saw Charleigh walk in.

“Hello there, Dr. Kind.” She grinned.

“Hi. Not Kind yet.”

She walked over and threw herself down next to me.

“It doesn’t matter. I have to get used to calling you that.” A beautiful smile crossed her face as she grabbed my hand. “How did it go in Seattle.”

“It went fine.”

“How was the cemetery?” she asked.

“I don’t know. I didn’t go. Don’t be mad.”

“I’m not mad.” She brought her hand up to the back of my head, and her fingers played with my hair. “You needed to do what was best for you.”

“And for my brothers. Their childhood was ruined because of William and Caroline. They didn’t need to be there either.”

“So, how are you feeling right now?” she asked.

“I’m good. I feel like I can put all of this behind me and focus on my future and career. By the way, why aren’t you working tomorrow?”

“One of the other nurses needed Monday off, so she asked if we could switch shifts. I’m working Monday for her, and she’s working for me tomorrow.”

“Good. Do you want to hang out tomorrow?” I asked.

“I would love to, but I’m cooking dinner for my parents and my friends Oliver and Brady, who live across the hall. Say you’ll come. I didn’t invite you because I didn’t think you’d be back in L.A. in time. Plus, it was a last-minute decision since I was supposed to be working. Please come. Please.” She begged.

I stared into her beautiful eyes for a moment. It was the least I could do since she had done so much for me.

“I’d love to come to your dinner.” I smiled.

“Yay.” She threw her arms around my neck. “Since I’m spending the night tonight, you can come with me to the grocery store tomorrow, and then we can go back to my place. That way, we can hang out all day.” She grinned.

“Sounds like a plan.” I kissed her lips.

I glanced at my watch. “Do you want to grab a couple of beers and head

outside?”

“Yeah. Let’s go.” She grabbed my hand and pulled me up from the couch.

Charleigh grabbed the beer from the refrigerator, I picked up my guitar case, and we headed down to the bonfire. I kept staring at her as she stood on Sebastian’s patio, talking and laughing with the girls.

“I know that look.” Conner smirked as he sat next to me.

“What look?”

“You can’t take your eyes off Charleigh.”

“Yeah. Don’t think we haven’t noticed,” Simon said.

“She invited me over for dinner tomorrow to meet her friends and her parents.”

“Taking that friendship to the next level, I see.” Jackson grinned.

“Nah. She’s just a good friend.”

“Bro, come on. You can’t bullshit fellow bullshitters,” Nathan said.

“Don’t make me have the ‘talk’ with you.” Simon pointed at me.

“What talk?” I chuckled.

“The talk when you deny your feelings, shit blows up, and the two of you are left heartbroken and missing each other because you’re too damn stubborn and scared to give into the overwhelming range of emotions going through your head. In fact, I’m just going to get it over with now. We’ve all been there. We broke their hearts, our hearts, and for what? To be miserable when it all could have been avoided in the first place. Please don’t go down that same road we all did. In fact, the eight of us are your roadblocks. We’re stopping you right now from making the mistakes we did. We’re not stupid; we can see how much she means to you. So, just let it all go, cousin, and enjoy the gift fate put in your path.”

“Damn, bro.” Sam glanced over at him. “Well said.”

“Thanks.” Simon grinned.

“There’s room in your life for more than just your career,” Conner said.

“I’m going to tell you what I told Ella and what she said back to me when I was going through shit with Sofia. You can’t worry about certain things because you won’t enjoy life. And there’s so much of it to enjoy. More than just your career, bro,” Nathan said.

I tipped the beer bottle to my lips as I stared at Charleigh.

“She doesn’t want to be in a relationship,” I said.

“So she says. She’s a woman, and all women want the fairytale romance,”

Shaun spoke. “Regardless of what they say.”

“You think?”

“We know,” Sebastian said. “Don’t let her fool you.”

My pager went off, and I sighed when I looked at it.

“Shit. The ER just paged me. I have to go. I’ll talk to you guys later.” I walked over to where Charleigh stood, lightly took hold of her arm, and pulled her to the side.

“The ER just paged me. I have to go.”

“The life of a cardiothoracic surgeon.” She smiled as she placed her hand on my chest.

“Stay the night still, and I’ll try to be back as soon as I can.”

“Okay. I’ll see you later.” She smiled.



I was needed for an emergency bypass surgery, and when I arrived home, it was one a.m. Quietly walking up the stairs, I went into my bedroom and stared at Charleigh, sound asleep in my bed. A feeling erupted inside me—a sense of peace, comfort, and love. I couldn’t deny my feelings for her. As hard as I tried, there was no stopping it. Even in my darkest hours and days, she was the ray of sunshine I needed.

Stripping out of my clothes, I climbed into bed, snuggled against her, and securely wrapped my arm around her, pressing my lips against her shoulder. She stirred as she brought her hand up to my arm.

“You’re back,” she whispered as she rolled over and faced me.

“Shh. Go back to sleep. We can talk tomorrow.” I kissed her forehead.

“Okay.”

I lay there, holding her in my arms, and everything in my life felt right. The one thing I ran from my entire life was right here, and I didn’t want to run anymore.

CHAPTER 25



Charleigh

I opened my eyes as the sunlight streamed through the slits of the blinds, and a smile crossed my lips as I was wrapped in Christian's arms. Staring at him while he slept, he looked so peaceful and sexy. When I was a little girl and battled my heart condition, I'd lay in bed and dream of a future that included a handsome man who loved me for who I was. A man who didn't care how sick I was. Someone who would whisk me away from my world of illness and give me the life I dared to dream of. The thing I learned was that behind every dream is a truth. My truth was that I was on borrowed time, and my dreams were just that—dreams.

"Good morning." The corners of Christian's mouth curved upward when he opened his eyes. "Were you watching me sleep?"

"Good morning. Maybe just for a minute." I smiled. "What happened last night at the hospital?"

"A patient needed an emergency bypass, and no one was available."

"Dr. Christian Kind to the rescue."

"I'm not sure I'll ever get used to hearing that."

"Then I'll keep whispering it in your ear until you do." I climbed on top of him. "Now, I believe someone promised me some fun last night." I brushed my lips against his.



e headed to my apartment after picking up the things I needed from the

grocery store. Taking a couple of bags from the back seat, Christian grabbed the rest, and we went to my apartment.

“What time is everyone coming over?” he asked.

“Five o’clock. So, I need to get this chicken started. Can you make the salad?”

“Yeah. Is there a special way you want me to cut the lettuce?” A smirk crossed his lips.

“Are you making fun of me?”

“Not at all.” The corners of his mouth curved upward as he winked at me.

I prepped the chicken while he made the salad. I kept glancing over at him as he cut up the cucumbers and celery.

“What?” he asked. “Am I doing it wrong?”

“You’re doing it perfectly. I admire the way you’re cutting with such precision.”

“I am an expert with a knife. These vegetables are like my patients. I will treat them no differently as I’m cutting into them.”

“Ah. I’m sure those vegetables appreciate that.” I smirked.

“They do. You don’t hear them complaining, do you?”

I laughed as I put the chicken in the oven.

“We need some music,” I said. “Alexa, play Wild Thing.”

“Good choice, Miss Ellis.”

As the song began to play, I sang and danced around him while he tried to finish making the salad. He put down the knife and joined me. We sang and danced to the beat until the door opened, and my parents walked in.

“Alexa, stop. “Mom. Dad. You’re early.” I walked over and hugged them.

“What’s going on in here?” my dad asked with a grin.

“We’re just prepping dinner. “Mom. Dad. I’d like you to meet Dr. Christian Kind. Christian, my parents. Jillian and Gordy Ellis.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet both of you.” He shook their hand.

“You as well, Dr. Kind.” A wide grin crossed my mother’s face.

“So, you’re the guy my daughter brought home from my bar.” My father smirked.

“Dad. Stop.”

“I apologize for that,” Christian said.

“Nah. Don’t apologize, son. We’ve all been there at one time or another.” He patted Christian’s back.

I grabbed two beers from the refrigerator and handed them to my father

and Christian as they went and sat down in the living room.

“My goodness, Charleigh. He is one handsome man.” She smiled as she poured us each a glass of wine.

“He is, Mom.”

“So, is there something you’re not telling us?” She cocked her head.

“No. He’s my friend, and that’s it.”

“It seems like the two of you were having a blast when we walked in.”

“We always have a blast. That’s why we’re friends.”

“You know, Charleigh, you aren’t—”

“Mom, stop.” I cut her off.

The door opened, and Brady and Oliver stepped inside.

“Hello, darling.” Oliver walked over and kissed both my cheeks. “We brought a homemade apple pie for dessert.”

“Thank you. Hi, Brady.” We kissed.

“Hello, love.”

After they said hello to my parents, I introduced them to Christian.

“Christian, I’d like you to meet my two best friends. This is Brady, and this is Oliver. They live directly across the hall.”

“Hello, Christian. It’s nice to finally meet you properly.” Oliver smiled.

“Oliver was the one who helped me get you up to my apartment that night,” I said.

“Oh. Well, thank you for that.” He shook his hand and then Brady’s.

CHAPTER 26



Christian

“Let’s go outside on the terrace,” Charleigh’s father spoke.

“Sure.”

We stood on the terrace and leaned against the railing while holding our beer bottles.

“Charleigh told me about your situation, and I just want to say that I’m very sorry for what you went through.”

“Thank you, Gordy. I appreciate it.”

“The only reason she told me was because of your father. He was an outstanding and brilliant man. I thank God every day he was in that ER when Charleigh was brought in. She was crushed when she couldn’t attend his funeral.”

“She didn’t tell me about that. Why couldn’t she attend?” I furrowed my brows.

“She came down with a bacterial infection that landed her in the hospital for a week. The doctors were being cautious because of her transplant—”

“And they were worried about endocarditis,” I interrupted.

“Exactly.”

“Your daughter is a special woman.” I smiled.

“She definitely is, and she’s a fighter who lives life on her own terms. If I tell her she shouldn’t do something, she does it anyway.” He breathed out a laugh, and I chuckled.

The sliding door opened, and Charleigh told us dinner was ready. It was a great night meeting her parents and her friends. A night that made me appreciate her even more.

“Everyone likes you.” She smiled as we cleaned up the kitchen. “You made quite the impression.”

“I think, at this point, any impression is better than the one I made before with your dad and Oliver.” I laughed. “Alexa, play Beautiful Stranger by Marcus King.”

“Are we dancing now?” She smiled.

“We are.” I wrapped my arm around her waist and took hold of her hand.

We swayed back and forth to the melody. She let go of my hand, wrapped her arms around my neck, and laid her head on my shoulder. Slowly closing my eyes, I inhaled the sweet scent of her hair, and everything felt right. So right that I never wanted to let her go. As the song ended, she lifted her head and stared into my eyes as I brushed my lips against hers. Picking her up, I carried her into the bedroom and slowly undressed her.



Charleigh

My nails dug into his back as he slowly thrust in and out of me. Something was different this time. It was more intense than it ever had been. Not just physically but emotionally as well. Another orgasm took over me as I moaned with pleasure, and my body shook. One more thrust, and he exploded inside me, moaning as he strained to release every last drop. His body collapsed on mine, and as I lay there, holding him, everything felt perfect. Every time I was with him, it felt perfect. Perfect enough that he made me forget why I never allowed myself to feel anything for someone, which I had successfully done until he walked into my life. Memories of a conversation I had long ago with someone started to surface—a conversation that made me who I was today.

“Hey, are you okay?” he asked.

“Yeah. I’m good.” I smiled.

“Come here.” He held out his arm, and I snuggled against him.

He pressed his lips against the top of my head, and my body trembled. I was in love with him. He’d already been through so much, and he deserved to be happy and live a life without worry, especially when it came to me.



One Week Later

Christian

I sat in the courtroom next to my lawyer, with my three brothers sitting behind me.

“Christian Michael Chase. You’re here because you want to change your name to Christian Kind. Am I correct?” Judge Carraway asked.

“Yes, your Honor.”

“And you’re omitting Michael from your name, correct?”

“Correct, your Honor.”

“I called you into my courtroom today for two reasons. One is that I owe your attorney a favor, and the other is because your father, Dr. Liam Kind, saved my life ten years ago. I read your petition, and your attorney presented your case file. What happened to you all those years ago is every parent’s nightmare. Given what happened and for privacy reasons, you will not be permitted to publicly publish your legal name change for one month before my decision. Therefore, this court is granting your petition for a legal name change from Christian Michael Chase to Christian Kind, effective immediately. Congratulations, Dr. Kind.”

“Thank you, your Honor. Thank you very much.”

“Your father was a brilliant doctor. He found my problem when no one else could. I wouldn’t be here today if it weren’t for him and his dedication. My children wouldn’t have their father, and I would never have gotten to know my grandchildren. May you put what happened behind you and move on with your life. I know your father would be very proud. Court is adjourned.”

With a smile, I shook my lawyer’s hand and turned to my brothers, whom I hugged tightly.

“A big celebration is in order.” Conner hooked his arm around me as we exited the courthouse.

“Damn right,” Jackson said.

After we left the courthouse, I went straight to the hospital and up to George’s office.

“Christian, come in and have a seat.”

“Thanks, George. I wanted to let you know that my name has been legally changed, and I’m now Dr. Christian Kind.”

“Congratulations.” He extended his hand from across his desk.

“Thank you.”

“I’ll need a copy of the court order, and we’ll get it down to human resources and have all your paperwork changed. What about your medical license?”

“My lawyer is handling all of that.”

“Excellent. How does it feel?”

“It feels good to carry the Kind name—the name I was born with.”

“I’m happy you stopped up here. I was going to wait to tell you something, but now is as good a time as any. As you’re aware, the Kind Cardiac Center is almost complete.”

“I’m aware, and there’s something I wanted to tell you as well about that.”

“Okay. Go ahead.” He leaned back in his chair.

“I’m donating the sum of ten million dollars to it.”

“Christian, I don’t know what to say. That’s very generous of you.”

“It’s the least I can do. That center is special to the Kind name, considering my father’s and Uncle Henry’s reputation. I never had the privilege of knowing both men but would like to carry on their legacy.”

“This is excellent news and goes with what I’m about to tell you. I presented this to the board, and they all agreed that we want you to head up the center. Your name and picture will be put on a billboard outside the hospital to represent Cedar’s new Kind Cardiac Care Center.”

“Wow, George. I wasn’t expecting this. Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome, Christian. We’re planning the grand opening next month, and we’re having a gala benefit here at the hospital, so get your speech ready.” He smiled.

CHAPTER 27



Christian

After I left George's office, I headed down to see Charleigh.

"Wendy, have you seen Charleigh?"

"She's in room 3512."

"Thanks." I smiled as I headed down the hall.

Just as I approached room 3512, Charleigh walked out.

"Oh, hey." She grinned. "Is it official?"

"It is." I smiled.

"Congratulations, Dr. Kind. Let's go to dinner tonight to celebrate. My treat." She smiled.

"I'd love to, but only on one condition."

"What's your condition?" Her brow arched.

"I'm buying you dinner tonight."

"Well then, I have a condition also," she said.

"Which is?"

"We go to Four Kinds. I've been craving that damn cherry butter and bread Sebastian serves."

"Deal. I'll call him and have him hold a table for us."

"Okay. I'll just come to your house, and we can go from there. There's no use for you to drive back this way when the restaurant is so close to your house."

"I don't mind picking you up, Charleigh."

"I know you don't." She reached up and kissed my cheek. "I'm coming to your house. I have another patient to see. I'll see you later." She walked away.

“See you later.”

I pulled my phone from my pocket as I left the cardiac unit and sent Sebastian a text message.

“Hey. Is there any way you can save a table for Charleigh and me for dinner tonight?”

“Consider it done. I’m working tonight, so I’ll see you later.”

“Sounds good. Thanks, Sebastian.”

When I got home, I changed into my wetsuit, grabbed my surfboard, and put it in the water. After paddling out, I sat on my board and stared into the distance. I thought about a lot of things—my brothers, my cousins, my life, my job, and most importantly, Charleigh. Everything had happened so fast. My life felt like a movie that quickly moved from one scene to the next. I’d barely had time to breathe, and now, I felt like I had all the time in the world. The hurt inside was still there, and I knew it would lessen over time, but I wasn’t sure if it would ever completely go away. The one thing I was sure of was that I couldn’t escape or deny the intense feelings I felt for Charleigh. I was in love with her, and I would tell her exactly how I felt tonight. We both said we weren’t relationship-type of people, but the chemistry between us was undeniable. I knew she felt things for me that went way beyond the friendship level.

I pulled my board out of the water and returned to the house. After a quick shower, I got dressed and glanced at my watch. I still had enough time to run to the florist before Charleigh arrived.

I stepped inside the flower shop and looked around.

“May I help you?” an older woman asked as she walked over.

“Do you have pink peonies?”

“We do.” She smiled. “Follow me.”

She led me to a cooler in the back of the shop where the peonies were.

“I’ll take a dozen.”

“If you’d like, I can arrange them in a beautiful vase.”

“That would be great. Thank you.”

While she arranged the peonies for me, I looked around the shop, admiring the different kinds of flowers they had.

“What do you think?” She walked over and presented the arrangement to me.

“They’re beautiful.”

After handing her my credit card, I grabbed the box she set the

arrangement in and headed home. Just as I put the floral arrangement in the laundry room and shut the door so she wouldn't see them, the front door opened.

"Hi." Charleigh grinned.

"Hi." I smiled.

"Are you ready to go? I'm starving like you wouldn't believe," she said.

"I'm ready. Car or bike?" I smirked.

"Bike." The corners of her mouth curved upward.

Grabbing the key to my bike, we climbed on, and I drove us to Four Kinds. When we stepped through the door, I saw Sebastian walk by.

"Oh, hey." He smiled. "Charleigh. It's great to see you again." He kissed her cheek.

"You too, Sebastian."

"Follow me, and I'll take you to your table," he said.

He took us to the back of the restaurant, where there were double doors. When he opened them, everyone yelled "surprise" and began clapping.

"What the hell?" I grinned as I walked into the room. "Did you know about this?" I asked Charleigh.

"Duh. Of course, I did." She placed her hand on my back.

"Come here." Conner grabbed me and hugged me. "We're celebrating your name change, bro. We weren't about to let another second go by."

After my brothers hugged me, my cousins walked over and took their turns.

"It's official, cousin. The Kind name is yours. There's no turning back now." Simon hugged me.

"Thanks, Simon."

I hugged and kissed all the girls. Ella ran over to me, and I picked her up as she threw her arms around me.

"We both have the same last name now." She smiled.

"We sure do, Ella. We sure do." I hugged her.

I turned around when I felt a hand on my back and set Ella down.

"Aunt Barb." I smiled.

"Dr. Christian Kind. Your father would be so proud." She hugged me. "I just wish both of your parents were here right now."

"So do I, Aunt Barb."

It was a night of celebration with my family, excellent food, and great conversations. As much as I enjoyed it, I couldn't wait to get Charleigh back

to my place.



Our lips stayed locked as I unlocked the door and pushed her inside. Within seconds, our clothes were scattered on the floor, and I had her naked body sitting on top of my island in the kitchen. Her legs tightly wrapped around my waist as I thrust inside her, taking in a deep pleasure that shrouded me. Picking her up, I took her over to the wall and moved in and out of her rapidly while I held her up. The buildup was there for both of us as she spasmed around my cock, gripping and forcing me to explode. Our eyes locked on each other as I strained to pour every last satisfying drop inside her. The corners of her mouth curved upward as her fingers tangled through my hair. Leaning in, I brushed my lips against hers before setting her down.

“I have something for you,” I spoke as I pulled on my pants.

“You do?” She smiled as she grabbed her clothes and got dressed.

“Stay right there.”

I walked into the laundry room and grabbed the vase of peonies.

“Oh my gosh, Christian. They’re gorgeous.” She grinned as I handed her the vase. “What are they for?”

I took them from her, set the vase on the table, and grabbed her hand. I was nervous as hell, and she knew something was up.

“Christian, what’s going on?”

“Come here.” I led her to the couch. “You are an amazing woman, Charleigh Ellis, and as much as I love our friendship, I want more with you.”

CHAPTER 28



Charleigh

“What do you mean?” I asked as a sickness formed in the pit of my belly.

He brought his hand up to my cheek and softly stroked it as his eyes stared into mine.

“The best day of my life was when I woke up on your couch to you tossing pieces of popcorn at me. Ever since that day, you’ve been on my mind non-stop. Even through all the chaos of everything that happened, I never once stopped thinking about you, and I want you for more than just this friendship thing we have going on.”

I swallowed hard as tears filled my eyes.

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because I’m in love with you, Charleigh, and I’m not going to deny it.”

“Christian, stop,” I spoke with irritation as I stood up from the couch.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“We agreed. We both agreed that we’re friends and nothing more. You don’t do relationships, remember? You don’t have time in your life to focus on anything or anyone but your career. You said that!” my voice raised.

“I know I said that, and that’s how I felt until I met you. You changed all that for me, Charleigh. I’m so in love with you, babe.” He inched closer to me, and I backed up.

“Stop!” Tears streamed down my face. “You weren’t supposed to fall in love. You were supposed to be my friend and nothing else!”

“I can’t help but fall in love with you. My God, Charleigh. You’re an amazing woman. You’re a beautiful and sexy woman both inside and out.

You changed everything for me.”

“No. You think you love me because I was there for you like I am with all my friends.” I walked over to where he stood and desperately wrapped my hands around his biceps. “You just got caught up because I was there for you, so you’re misinterpreting your feelings.”

“What the hell is wrong with you?” His brows furrowed. “You are not going to stand there and tell me how I feel. I’m in love with you, Charleigh. I don’t say that to anyone, ever. But I’m saying it to you because it’s the truth.” He broke free from my grip. “When I’m with you, everything in my life feels right. You complete me.”

“Christian, just stop!” I covered my ears. “This isn’t how this was supposed to work. We’re friends, and you crossed that line. I meant it when I said I don’t get involved in relationships.”

“You are not going to stand there and tell me that you don’t have feelings other than friendship for me.” He pointed.

“I don’t!” I lied. “You’re my best friend, and that’s all you’ll ever be!”

I stood there and watched his eyes swell with tears as he placed his hand on the back of his neck and lowered his head.

“Something else is going on with you, Charleigh. I’m not stupid. There’s something you aren’t telling me.”

“There’s nothing, Christian,” I lied again.

“Bullshit!” he shouted. He stared into my eyes and slowly shook his head. “If we can’t be together as a couple, then I’m afraid we can no longer be friends. I can’t pretend I’m not in love with you every day because I am! If you don’t feel the same, then you can go.”

I pursed my lips as the tears continued to fall. Grabbing my shoes and my purse, I walked to the front door and placed my hand on the handle, stopping for a moment. Turning my head, I stared at him as he had his back turned to me. The pain was too much, but I didn’t have a choice. Opening the door, I walked out and headed to my car.

“Charleigh.” I heard him shout from the porch.

Turning around, I looked at him.

“Don’t call me, don’t text me, and don’t talk to me at work. We’re done,” he shouted.

I could barely breathe as I looked over at Nathan’s house and saw him and Simon walking down the driveway. Climbing into my car, I drove away.



Christian

“Fuck!” I went back inside, grabbed the vase of peonies, and threw it at the wall. It shattered as glass, water, and flowers went everywhere.

“Bro, what the fuck?” The front door opened, and Nathan and Simon walked in.

“What the fuck? You want to know what the fuck? I took your advice and told her how I felt and that I was in love with her. We see how that worked out!” I shouted. “Go. Please leave me alone! I don’t want to talk to anyone right now.”

“Come on, Nathan. Give him some space,” Simon said.

“Bro—”

“Nathan, come on.” They both left.

I stared at the mess I’d made on the floor in my fit of rage. Grabbing a garbage bag, I hastily started picking up the pieces of glass, slicing the side of my hand.

“FUCK!” I screamed.

Getting up, I grabbed the paper towel, tore off a few sheets, and wrapped it around my hand. The sliding door opened, and Conner walked in.

“Jesus Christ. What happened to your hand?” He ran over.

“Not now, Conner. I’m fine. I need you to leave.”

“Too bad. I’m your twin brother, and I’m here for you whether you like it or not. Sit down and let me look at your hand.” He commanded.

“Conner—”

“I said shut the fuck up and sit down!”

He walked over to the bar, grabbed the bottle of scotch and two glasses, and set them on the table. Pouring some scotch into one of the glasses, he slid it to me as he sat down.

“First, I’m taking care of your hand, and then you’re going to tell me what the hell happened and why there’s glass, water, and peonies all over the damn floor,” he said as he removed the paper towel from my hand.

Picking up the scotch with my other hand, I tipped the glass to my lips.

“Good news is the majority of this cut only needs a butterfly. But the end of the cut needs a couple of stitches. Do you keep a suture kit around?”

“In the bathroom and under the sink,” I said.

“Stay right there.” He pointed at me.

The sliding door opened. Jackson, Nathan, Simon, and Shaun walked in.

“I’ll get that mess cleaned up,” Shaun said.

“Good, you’re here. Where is everyone else?” Conner asked Nathan.

“Sebastian is still at the restaurant. Sam is feeding one of the girls, and Stefan ran to the store to buy diapers. They said they’ll be over as soon as they could.”

“Listen. I appreciate your concern, but—”

“Yeah. Yeah. You want to be alone. You don’t want to talk about it. Blah, blah. Too bad. This is what this family does. If someone in our family is hurting, we don’t leave you alone. You will never be alone in this family,” Conner said as he began to stitch my hand. “Now tell us what happened between you and Charleigh.”

“I told her how I felt about her. I laid it all out there. She freaked out and told me that she doesn’t feel the same way and that I’m her best friend, and that’s all I ever will be.”

“Shit,” Jackson said.

“What do you mean she ‘freaked out?’” Shaun asked.

“She yelled at me and said that I wasn’t supposed to fall in love with her and that I just thought I loved her because she was there for me like she was with all her friends. She accused me of misinterpreting my feelings. She told me I crossed the line and that she meant it when she said she didn’t get involved in relationships. Then she told me she didn’t feel the same way and I would only be a friend to her.”

“What the fuck?” Nathan said. “She sounds like us.”

“Damn.” Simon shook his head. “I didn’t see this coming. This is new territory, and I’m unsure how to deal with this situation.” He sat down at the table.

“Something is going on with her. I can feel it. I’d barely seen her all week. Whenever I suggested going out or getting together, she was suddenly always busy. I mean, she is busy between her job at the hospital, her dad’s bar, and volunteering at the homeless shelter,” I spoke. “But—I don’t know.” I finished off my scotch.

“Was she hurt in the past by someone?” Conner asked.

“She never told me if she was. I know a few guys were total dicks to her about her scar.”

“It’s not her scar,” Conner said. “She would have tried to hide it from you and the world. She’s really open about it and shows it off with pride.”

“Maybe we were all wrong,” Shaun said.

“Nah, bro. We’re never wrong. I can’t believe you would even say that,” Simon said as he looked at him.

“She rejected Christian for a reason,” Shaun said.

“She did it out of fear,” Jackson said. “Just like we all did with our women. She’s scared about something.”

“Well, whatever it is. It’s her problem. I’m done,” I said. “This. This is the very reason why I never got involved with anyone. I don’t need this shit in my life. Not now, not ever. She rejected me, and I’m moving on. I need a favor from you all.”

“What do you need?” Nathan asked.

“Tonight is the last time we will ever talk about this again. Promise me.”

“We promise,” they all spoke at the same time.

“Thanks, bro, for fixing my hand, but if you don’t mind, I’m heading to bed. I’ll talk to you guys tomorrow.” I walked over, opened the sliding door, and they all left.

After locking it, I grabbed the bottle of scotch and went upstairs.

CHAPTER 29



Charleigh

I sat in the tub with my knees up. Wrapping my arms around them, I sobbed. I trusted him when he told me he didn't get involved in relationships, and he let me down. It didn't matter that I was madly in love with him. He wasn't supposed to fall in love with me. The pain in his eyes and the sadness on his face were something I'd never forget. I never wanted to hurt him, and he'd get over it a lot quicker now than in the future.

I climbed out of the bath, wrapped the towel around me, and stared at myself in the mirror. Unwrapping the towel, I brought my finger up and ran it along my scar. The words of someone I once loved infiltrated my mind.

“Charleigh. Do you think it’s fair for someone to love you so much only not to be able to spend a lifetime with you? Do you really want to put someone through that? It isn’t fair to them or you. And frankly, I find it very selfish of you to want someone to fall in love with you so you can have your happily ever after. What happens when you’re gone, and the other person is left behind, destroyed, and heartbroken? Think about that. You’re a wonderful and strong woman, but you’re on borrowed time. Men get into relationships to spend a lifetime with someone they deeply love. You have no right taking that away from us.”

I'd thought about that conversation over the years, which was why I was so careful about dating. I never loved anyone after Camden until Christian walked into my life. It didn't matter that I fell in love with him, and I thought I was safe because he was so adamant about relationships. I could love him for as long as I was alive, and I didn't care if he didn't love me back because I didn't want him to. I would do anything to protect him from the future and

the pain of what was yet to come.

I'd never told a soul about that conversation, not even Brady or Oliver. They just thought I was too picky when it came to men over the three years we'd known each other. On the other hand, my parents constantly questioned me about my dating life and why I hadn't found anyone to settle down with yet. I told them I hadn't found the right guy yet and was too busy with my career and volunteering to commit to a serious relationship. They'd be heartbroken if they knew the real reason, and I couldn't allow that.

The following morning, I thought about calling in sick so I didn't have to see Christian. But I'd have to see him sooner or later, so I decided not to. Maybe one day, he would be able to forgive me, and we could talk again. But for now, it was best that I kept my distance from him.

I walked into Mrs. Parsons's room, and Christian was standing at her bedside talking to her.

"Charleigh. There you are." Mrs. Parsons smiled.

Christian turned and looked at me and then quickly turned away.

"So, I'll go ahead and get that procedure scheduled for you," Christian told her. "Once I'm finished, your heart will be as good as new."

"Thank you, Dr. Kind." She smiled at him.

He walked past me and out of the room. Trying to stop the tears that filled my eyes, I put on a fake smile for Mrs. Parsons and tended to her.

As the day went on and Christian and I crossed paths, he wouldn't even look or speak to me. I knew it would be difficult, but it hurt me so badly that I needed to say something to him.

"Christian, do you have a minute?" I asked as he stood at the nurse's station.

"No. I don't." He walked away.

Taking in a deep breath, I followed him down the hallway.

"All I need is a minute." I caught up to him.

He stopped and looked at me.

"I thought I made it clear last night not to talk to me at work."

"We have to talk. We work together," I said.

"Okay fine. Is what you have to say work-related?"

"No." I chewed my bottom lip. "I just—"

"Then there's no reason for us to talk." He walked away.

"Listen, I know you're hurt," I shouted down the hallway for everyone to hear.

Once again, he stopped, turned around, took hold of my arm, and pulled me into an empty room.

“What are you doing?” he asked through gritted teeth. “Do you want the whole hospital to know our business?”

“I’m sorry, Christian. You have to believe how sorry I am.”

“Sorry for what, Charleigh? And for the record, I’m not hurt. I feel like a total fool. That’s what I’m pissed about. I’m pissed for allowing myself to fall in love with you in the first place. You need to leave me alone. If you need to talk to me about a patient, fine. But that’s it. We are not friends anymore.”

“Why? Because I won’t return your affection? You’re acting like a child,” I spewed.

Anger filled his eyes as he stared at me.

“You won’t, or you can’t? Because I know for a fact that you have feelings for me, and there’s something you’re hiding. Something you’re afraid of.”

“You couldn’t be more wrong,” I lied.

“Then you missed your calling as an actress because you sure as hell fooled me. We’re done here. Work issues only, Nurse Ellis.” He walked out of the room.

I swallowed hard as I looked up at the ceiling to prevent the tears from streaming down my face.

CHAPTER 30



TWO WEEKS LATER

Christian

It was a busy couple of weeks as far as surgeries went. I spent more time in the OR and welcomed every second of it. Charleigh hadn't tried to talk to me since that day, and I was grateful. It was bad enough that I had to see her beautiful face all day as it was. I was still deeply hurt, and as hard as I tried to forget about what happened and her, I couldn't. It reminded me that I still needed to donate to the homeless center she volunteered at. Just because things went sideways between us didn't mean I wouldn't still do it.

When I arrived home, I changed my clothes and texted Shaun to see if he was home. He texted back and said he was and to come down. Stepping through the sliding door, I found him and Jenni making out in the middle of the kitchen, so I cleared my throat to alert them that I had walked in.

"Sorry." Shaun smiled.

"No. Don't apologize. I can come back later."

"Don't be silly." Jenni smiled as she walked over and kissed my cheek. "I'm going to go and get ready before we have to meet Asher and Everly."

"Okay, babe. Don't take too long," Shaun spoke. "I don't want to get caught up in too much traffic."

"Yeah. Okay, Mr. Kind. We live in Los Angeles. There's no such thing."

"Isn't Asher and Everly the couple I met at the wedding?" I asked.

"Yeah. Asher is in town for business, and we're meeting up for dinner."

"I won't keep you. I want to make a donation to the homeless shelter for five million dollars."

"Oh. Okay. That's great, Christian. I'll have my company distribute the funds. Just give me the name and the address."

“I’ll text that over to you. Thanks, Shaun.”

“No problem. It’s the homeless shelter Charleigh volunteers at, yeah?”

“Yeah. Regardless of what happened, I planned on donating the money anyway. It’s for a good cause.”

“It definitely is, and the shelter will be very grateful. Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m okay.”

The doorbell rang, and Shaun furrowed his brows.

“I wonder who that is,” he said as he went to answer it. “Asher. Everly. I thought we were meeting at the restaurant.” I heard him say.

“We were until—well, you know,” Asher said.

“Shaun, I need to speak with Christian. It’s important. Can you please let him know?”

“You’re in luck. He’s right here. Christian, you remember Asher and Everly.”

“Yes. It’s good to see you again.” I extended my hand to them.

“Good to see you too, Christian.” Asher smiled as he shook my hand.

“I need to speak with you,” Everly said.

“What’s this about?” Shaun’s eyes narrowed.

“Really?” Asher glanced at him.

“Christian, let’s sit down,” Everly said as we walked over and took a seat on the couch. “When we landed in Los Angeles, I had a visitor. He’s a persistent man who won’t leave until I give you a message.”

“Who is it?” I frowned.

“Your father.”

“Excuse me?” I cocked my head.

“Your biological father,” she said. “Dr. Liam Kind.”

“How do you—”

Asher put his hand up and slowly shook his head. Everly reached over and placed her hand on top of mine.

“Your father wants you to finish what he started before he passed away.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Some type of research. He said all his notes and recordings are locked away in a trunk he kept.”

“I don’t know anything about that?” My brows furrowed.

“Jackson, Nathan, and Conner might,” Shaun said as he pulled his phone from his pocket. “They’re on their way over.”

“He wants you to know that he loves you very much, and he’s sorry for

what you've been through," Everly said.

Tears filled my eyes.

"Oh, hey." Jenni smiled. "I thought we were meeting—what's going on?" Her brows furrowed.

"Everly has a message for Christian from his father," Shaun said.

"Really? Well, you can tell that son-of-a-bitch—"

"Not that one, babe," Shaun interrupted her.

"Oh. Sorry."

The sliding door opened, and my brothers walked in.

"What's going on?" Jackson said. "Hey, Asher. Everly. Good to see you again."

"It's good to see all three of you too. Listen. Do either of you know of a trunk your father had?"

"Yeah. I have it stored at my house. It's filled with a bunch of pictures of us when we were kids and some of my father's personal things we wanted to keep. Why?" Jackson asked.

"There's research notes and recordings in there that he wants Christian to have."

"Say what?" Conner spoke.

"There aren't any of those things in there," Nathan said. "We went through everything in that trunk right after he passed away."

"Besides, we didn't know our father was working on any research," Jackson said.

"May I see the trunk?" Everly asked.

"Yeah. Of course. It's at my house."

We all went over to Jackson's house and upstairs to one of the guestrooms.

"It's right here," he said.

"I'm sorry, but can you please take everything out?" Everly asked. "He said there's a hidden compartment underneath, and you'll need a knife or screwdriver to lift up the bottom."

"I'll go grab one," Nathan said as Conner and Jackson removed everything from the trunk.

When he returned, he handed Jackson the knife, and he lifted the bottom.

"Look at that," Conner said. "It's like finding buried treasure."

Jackson reached in and took out a couple of journals and a hand-held recorder.

“I do believe our father wants you to have these.” He smiled.

“Is he here?” I asked Everly.

“No. He’s not. Once I promised to get you the message, he thanked me and left. He wanted you to have what he was working on with the hope you’d finish what he started.”

“What are these?”

“He didn’t elaborate. I’m sure you’ll figure it out once you sit down and look through his notes.” She smiled.

I went home, and my brothers followed behind.

“I can’t believe Dad was working on something and didn’t tell us,” Conner said.

“Right?” Nathan glanced at him.

I sat down at the kitchen table and opened the first journal.

“Bro, what is it?” Jackson asked.

“Research notes.” I looked at my brothers.

“On what?” Nathan asked.

“It looks like he was trying to develop a way to stop the body from rejecting a new heart and eliminating the need for lifelong immunosuppressants.”

“That’s impossible,” Jackson said.

“Anything’s possible, bro. Who is Chenglei Song?” I asked. “His name is in here, and it’s circled.”

“I have no idea,” Nathan said. “Never heard of him.”

“You could ask Simon to find out,” Conner said.

“Yeah. Maybe I will. I can’t believe this.” I furrowed my brows at my brothers.

“I guess even the deceased can see what’s going on from beyond the grave,” Jackson spoke. “He chose you because it’s your specialty, and you’re his son.” Jackson placed his hand on my shoulder.

CHAPTER 31



Charleigh

“Hey, Charleigh. Someone out in the hallway needs to speak with you,” Rhonda, my coworker, said.

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know. Some lady.”

“Okay.”

I opened the double doors to the cardiac unit and stepped out into the hallway.

“Charleigh Ellis?” A beautiful woman asked.

“Yes. I’m Charleigh.”

“My name is Everly Remington. Do you have a few moments to talk?”

I glanced at my watch. “Yeah. It’s actually my break time. We can go to the lobby, grab a cup of coffee, and talk there.”

“Sounds good.” She smiled.

“What’s this about?” I asked as I pushed the button to the elevator.

“I have a message for you from a friend of yours.”

The doors opened, and we stepped inside.

“Oh yeah? Who?”

“Dr. Liam Kind,” she said.

“I’m sorry, but Dr. Kind is deceased. So, that’s impossible.”

“I know he is deceased, but he’s using me to get a message to you.”

“What?” I cocked my head as the elevator doors opened.

“I have an ability. The dead like to talk to me. They have me relay messages to their family and friends if it’s important enough.”

“Oh my gosh. Are you a psychic?”

“Something like that.” She smiled.

I ordered us two coffees, and we took them over to a small table in the lobby.

“Okay. I’m listening. But I’m not sure what he would want to tell me.”

“He wanted me to tell you that he gave you a precious gift, and he’s disappointed in you.”

“What? Why on earth would he say that?”

“He said you’re not living your best life as you promised him you would.”

“Yes, I am. I am living my best life. I’m doing everything I want to do and more.”

“He said no.”

“Is he here?” I looked around.

“Yes, and he said you’re being stubborn. Just like you were when you wanted to give up.”

“Dr. Kind, that isn’t fair.”

“He says what isn’t fair is that you’re denying yourself the chance to receive the greatest gift of all because of some arrogant, pompous ass boy who talked you into believing you were selfish to want someone to love you the way you deserve to be loved. He didn’t give you that new heart to only give love, but also to receive it. What’s selfish is deciding for someone whether or not they can love you. I’m sorry. Just remember this isn’t coming from me.”

I lowered my head as I played with my hands.

“Do you know what he’s talking about?” Everly asked.

“Yeah. I do.” I looked up at her.

“He wants me to tell you that you reached the sunshine, but you turned around and went back into the storm. Get back on the right road and let your heart lead you exactly where you’re supposed to be. He’s gone now.”

Everly reached over and grabbed hold of my hand. She held it for a moment as the corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Now I see what he’s talking about,” she said. “You’ve been to the other side.”

“Yeah. I have. Not for very long, though.”

“Take his advice and consider yourself lucky that you got the chance to know him. He seems like a wise man.”

“He is a wise man.”

“It was nice to meet you, Charleigh, and I’m happy I did. I have to get back to my husband at the hotel. Hopefully, I’ll see you again soon.”

“Thank you, Everly. Thank you for everything.”

“You’re welcome.”

I couldn’t stop thinking about my conversation with Everly and the things Dr. Kind told her to tell me. He was right, and I was ashamed of how I believed what Camden had told me all those years ago. When my shift ended, I climbed into my car and drove to Christian’s house. When I pulled into the driveway, it was ten thirty p.m. It took everything I had to hold it together, but when I rang his doorbell, and he answered it, I completely lost it.

“Charleigh? What are you doing here?”

I could barely speak, for I was sobbing so hard.

“What happened?” He took hold of my arm and pulled me inside.

“I—I—”

“Charleigh, calm down. He wrapped his arms around me and held me tight. “You have to tell me why you’re crying. What happened?”

“I’m an idiot.”

He broke our embrace and held my face in his hands.

“What did you do?” he asked.

“I hurt you, and I didn’t want to. I love you, Christian, but if we get together, it’ll hurt you even more, and I can’t stand the thought of that.”

“Okay. Calm down. Deep breath, Charleigh. Let’s go sit down.” He hooked his arm around me and led me over to the couch. “What do you mean if we get together, it’ll hurt me even more?”

“I’m on borrowed time, and if I let you love me, it will destroy you when I die.”

“We’re all going to die, Charleigh. I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

“Come on, Christian. You know better than anyone that a heart transplant can last fifteen years in the best of cases. I’m already at the twelve-year mark. I’m even lucky I made it this long. We could only have three years left together.”

“Oh my God. Is that what you’re worried about?” He pulled me into him.

“Camden told me years ago that it was selfish of me to want a man to love me because when people fall in love, they want a lifetime with their partner, not just a few lousy years.”

“Who the hell is Camden?”

“A guy I loved years ago.” I broke our embrace and wiped my eyes. “I met him after I had my heart transplant. He’s not important. Then your dad said that he didn’t give me my new heart to give love, but also to receive it and that it was selfish for me to decide whether someone could love me or not. I’m so stupid, and I’m so sorry for hurting you. I lied to you when I told you I didn’t feel the same way. I’m so in love with you, Christian Kind, and now you hate me.”

“I could never hate you, Charleigh. I am still so in love with you that it’s driving me crazy. Wait a second, what do you mean my father told you that?”

“A woman named Everly came to see me at the hospital this evening. She told me she had a message for me from him. He also said that I found my sunshine, turned around, and went back into the storm. I’m so scared.” More tears fell from my eyes.

“Stop.” He held my face in his hands. “There is nothing to be scared of.”

“I could die next week.”

“So, could I. So could anyone. There are no certainties in life, babe. Anything could happen to any one of us. That’s why we have to live our lives the best way we know how and without any regrets. Besides, I’m not going to let anything happen to you, and you are not going to die next week. If your heart decides to give out at some point, I’ll get you a new one, and I will personally put it in myself. You aren’t going anywhere, Charleigh Ellis. I’m going to make damn sure of that. I love you, and I’ll never stop loving you.”

CHAPTER 32



Christian

I pulled her into me and held onto her for dear life. The thought of her being so scared to let someone love her because she could die at any moment hurt me more than anything. I should have known that, but it never occurred to me that she could even think that way. She probably never would have if it wasn't for that damn Camden guy. That fucker better hope I never run into him.

"There's something I want to show you before I take you up to my bed." I smiled as I wiped her tears away.

I took hold of her hand and led her to the table where my father's journals and recorder sat.

"What's this?" she asked.

"My father's journals with his research before he passed away."

"What kind of research?"

"He was trying to develop a way to stop the body from rejecting a new heart and eliminating the need for lifelong immunosuppressants. He wants me to continue his research."

"Oh my God, Christian. That is amazing. Do you know what this will do to the future of heart transplant patients?"

"I do." I smiled. "I'm going to talk with George tomorrow."

"Wait. How did you come across all of this?" she asked.

"Everly paid me a visit as well earlier." I smiled as I swooped down and picked her up. "Are you ready for me to take you to bed?"

"I've been ready since I walked through your door." She grinned as she kissed my lips.

“Are you working tomorrow?” I asked as I carried her up the stairs.

“Yes.”

“Good. Then I won’t have to miss you all day.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I lay her on the bed.

“Your phone keeps going off.” She smiled.

“It’s probably my brothers and cousins wanting to know what’s happening. I’m sure they saw your car in the driveway.”

“Maybe you should check. What if it’s an emergency?” she said.

I reached over, grabbed my phone, looked at it, and sent a text message in our group chat.

“Everything is good. Now, if you all don’t mind, my girlfriend and I have some making up to do. Good night.”

“Where were we?” I smiled as my tongue trailed across her neck.



The sound of the alarm jolted us out of a sound sleep. Something neither one of us got very much of last night. Rolling over, I shut it off, securely wrapped my arm around Charleigh, and pressed my lips against her bare shoulder.

“We need to get up and get in the shower,” I whispered.

“Together, I hope.”

“Of course. Your days of taking showers alone are over, Miss Ellis.”

“I love the sound of that.” She smiled.

“Come on. Let’s get moving.” I slapped her ass before climbing out of bed.

I went into the bathroom and turned on the shower.

“When we get out, I’ll make you the perfect latte.” She smiled as she stepped inside.

“I can’t wait.” I softly kissed her lips as the hot water streamed down our bodies.

My hands roamed up and down her sexy body before my fingers dipped inside her. Her hand wrapped around my hard cock, stroking it up and down before kneeling on the tile floor and wrapping her soft lips around me. I threw my head back and gasped as my fingers tangled through her hair. I let her work me for a bit before I pulled away and lifted her from her knees,

kissing her lips before I turned her around and took her from behind. Once I was buried deep inside her, I placed my hands over hers, which were planted firmly against the tiled wall as I moved in and out of her at a steady pace. Several moans escaped our lips as the intense pleasure overtook us, and we came at the same time.

“I love you,” I leaned in and whispered in her ear.

“I love you more.”

We finished our shower and got ready to head to the hospital. As I put on my shirt, Charleigh walked into the bedroom and handed me a cup of coffee.

“Thanks, babe.” I kissed her lips.

“You’re lucky I keep an extra pair of clothes in my car, Dr. Kind. What if I didn’t?”

“Then you’d grab a pair of scrubs from the hospital and change there.” I smirked. “Anyway, I have a solution to that problem because it’s going to happen a lot.”

“What’s your solution?” she asked.

“You’re going to keep some clothes here at my house.” I smiled as I set my coffee cup down and put on my watch.

“And you’ll keep some clothes at my apartment?” Her brow arched.

“Yep. I’ll bring some over this weekend.” I winked.

We headed downstairs, and when we reached the kitchen, Conner and Jackson were leaned up against the island with their arms folded.

“Hey. Good morning.” I smiled.

“Good morning, bro. Good morning, Charleigh.” Conner grinned.

“Good morning, you two.” She set her cup in the sink.

“Everything good here?” Jackson smirked.

“Everything is perfect.” Charleigh smiled as she wrapped her arms around me. “You can thank your dad for knocking some sense into my head. I’ll see you at the hospital.” She kissed my lips. “Bye, Jackson. Bye Conner. Have a good day.”

“You too, Charleigh,” Conner said.

“Bro, what did she mean about Dad?” Jackson asked.

“I’ll tell you all about it tonight at the beach. I’ll bring the beer.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Conner patted my shoulder.

As soon as they left, I locked up the house and headed to the hospital.



“George, do you have a minute?” I asked as I stepped inside his office.

“I do. Have a seat, Christian.”

“Thanks. You know that money I told you I was donating to the cardiac center?”

“Yeah.”

“I want to use it for something else. I want to fund the research my father was working on before he passed away.”

“What was your father working on?”

“A way to stop the body’s rejection of a new heart once it’s transplanted and eliminating the need for lifelong immunosuppressants. I have his journals and his recordings. I want to pick up where he left off.”

“Damn, Christian. Something like that could revolutionize the world of transplanting. You’re going to do it here at Cedars, right?”

“Of course.”

“This is excellent news, and I’m sure we can get more private funding for it. Draw up the proposal, and I’ll have you present it to the board.”

“I will, and Sterling Capital is going to fund the rest.”

“Even better.” He smiled.

My pager went off. When I looked at it, I was needed down in the ER.

“Work calls. Thanks for your approval, George.” I stood up and extended my hand.

“You’re welcome, Christian. Great things are happening here.” He smiled.



After a four-hour surgery, I walked out of the O.R. and saw Charleigh standing up against the wall waiting for me.

“Has anyone ever told you how sexy you look in a surgical cap?” She grinned.

“All the time.” I placed my hands on her hips and kissed her lips. “What are you doing here?”

“My shift is over, and I was going to head back to my place, grab some clothes, and go to your house.”

“I love that idea.” I glanced at my watch. “I have one more surgery scheduled, and then I’ll be home.”

“Okay. I’m going to need the key to your house.”

“Follow me to my office, and I’ll grab it for you. In fact, why don’t you stop and have an extra one made?”

“Really?” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Really.” I winked. “Actually, if you wouldn’t mind. Could you have one made as well for my brothers and my cousins?”

“Of course I will. I’ll see you later. I love you, Dr. Kind.”

“I love you more, Nurse Ellis.” I softly kissed her lips.

CHAPTER 33



Christian

When I arrived home and walked through the front door, I smiled when I saw Charleigh sleeping peacefully on the couch. Grabbing a blanket from the corner, I carefully covered her with it. I wasn't surprised at all she was tired, considering the events of last night and this morning when we woke up. Walking to the refrigerator, I grabbed the beer and my guitar case and headed down to the beach, where my brothers were already sitting.

"Hey, bro." Conner grinned. "Where's Charleigh?"

"She's sleeping on the couch."

"Is she feeling okay?" Jackson asked.

"Yeah. She's just worn out from last night." I smiled.

Conner held his hand up, and I high-fived him.

"There are my favorite douchebags." Simon grinned as he, Shaun, Stefan, and Sam walked over and sat down.

"Where's Sebastian?" Jackson asked.

"Over at the brewhouse," Sam spoke.

"He's opening in a few weeks," Stefan said.

"I can't wait to check it out." I smiled as I tipped the beer bottle to my lips.

"So, cousin. What made Charleigh change her mind about you?" Simon smirked.

"Oh yeah." Conner glanced at me. "Tell us about what happened with Dad."

"What are you talking about?" Sam asked.

"After Everly visited us, she had a message for Charleigh from our father.

The reason she didn't want to get involved in a relationship is that some douchebag from her past told her she was selfish for wanting a man to love her. She believes she's on borrowed time with the transplant, and she didn't want me to love her because it would destroy me when she dies."

"That's really sad she thought that way." Sam's brows furrowed.

"I guess Dad had a few things to say about it," I said.

"Damn." Simon shook his head. "Even from the grave, they're still involved in all our lives. And to think I was ready to deliver my speech to her."

"Shut up, douchebag." Stefan reached over and smacked the back of his head.

"Oh yeah? You wanna go, bro? You know I'll take your ass down with one hit."

"Really? And I'll tell Mom."

"You would, you little tattletale." He smiled at Stefan.

"Hey, Charleigh." Shaun smiled.

Turning around, I saw her walking toward us.

"Hey, babe." I held out my arms. "Are you okay?"

"I'm better now that I slept for a while." She smiled as she sat down on my lap and wrapped her arms around my neck. "What's going on out here?"

"I was just telling them what my dad had to say to you."

"Yeah." She smiled. "I miss him."

"We all do," Conner said.

"Do you mind?" She pointed to my guitar.

"Not at all."

She got up from my lap, and I handed it to her. Taking the empty seat next to mine, she sat down and strummed the chords.

"Back when I was in the hospital, waiting for my new heart, I used to play the guitar to pass the time. I asked your dad what his favorite song was and when he told me, I learned it and played it for him." She strummed the chords and started singing *Leaving on a Jet Plane*.

Her voice was beautiful, and when I glanced over at my brothers, I saw the tears in their eyes.

"Dad would always play that song, and he and Mom would dance to it while he sang it to her," Jackson said as he wiped his eyes.

"And after Mom died, and we were in the car, he'd put it on and turn up the volume," Conner said. "Damn it." He wiped his eyes.

“That was beautiful, babe.” I kissed the side of her head.



Two Weeks Later

“Wow.” I stood in the bedroom doorway and stared at Charleigh in her long black dress.

“You like?” She grinned as she turned around.

“You are stunning.” I walked over and zipped up the back of her dress.

“I never thought a man could look so sexy in a tuxedo as you do. Damn, Dr. Kind. I am so wet right now just looking at you.”

“You’re bad, and if we weren’t already running late, I’d tear that dress off you and throw you down on the bed.”

“I look forward to that later.” A beautiful smile crossed her lips. “I’m ready to go now.”

“Well, you’re just going to have to wait a second.”

I walked over to the dresser, opened the drawer, and pulled out a blue velvet box.

“I bought you something.” I handed her the box.

She opened the lid and looked up at me.

“Christian, this is beautiful. Oh my gosh.”

“The two hearts represent my heart and your heart. See how they’re intertwined? It represents our togetherness as a couple and that you will have my heart forever.”

“Okay.” She brought her hand up and fanned her face. “You are making me cry. I love this and you so much. Can you put it on me?”

“You bet, babe.”

I took the necklace from the box and placed it around her neck.

“It looks beautiful on you. Just like I knew it would.” I smiled as I softly kissed her lips. “We really need to go now.”

This night was extremely important to my family and me. It was the opening of the Kind Cardiac Care Center that was in honor of my father and Uncle Henry. Everyone in attendance was formally dressed, and the elegant décor, food, and drinks made it even more special. I took my place at the podium after George introduced me as the head of the Kind Cardiac Care

Center.

“I would like to thank everyone for joining us tonight. It is a privilege and an honor to share this night with all of you. The Kind Cardiac Care Center was built to honor my father, Dr. Liam Kind, and my Uncle Henry Kind, who generously donated to this hospital over the years to ensure the hospital could provide patients with exceptional care with ground-breaking technology and services. I am pleased to welcome you to the Kind Cardiac Care Center. Thank you, and please enjoy the rest of your evening.”

Everyone clapped, and as I stepped away from the podium, Charleigh walked over and placed her arm around me.

“You were amazing.” She kissed my cheek.

“Just so you know. I’m still thinking about getting you out of that dress.” I winked.

“You’re bad. I can’t wait.” She smiled.

“Excuse me, Dr. Kind.” A man walked over. “I’m Chenglei Song. I heard you’ve been looking for me.” He extended his hand.

“Mr. Song.” I shook his hand. “Yes. I was looking for you. I heard you were out of the country.”

“I was, and I decided to come back early. We should talk about the work your father and I were doing before he passed away. Let’s have dinner tomorrow evening.”

“Sounds good. Thank you, Mr. Song.”

“Call me Chen. That’s what your father always called me.” He smiled as he walked away.

“Who was that?” Conner walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Chenglei Song. We’re having dinner tomorrow to discuss the research he and Dad were working on.”

“Excellent. I can’t wait to hear all about it.” He smiled.

CHAPTER 34



ONE MONTH LATER

Charleigh

I stood before Dr. Liam Kind's grave and laid down two pink peonies.

"You know these were always my favorite flowers, Dr. Kind. I just wanted to thank you for your wonderful lecture. You always had a way of knocking sense into me. I also wanted you to know that your son, Christian, and myself, are living our best lives. I've never been happier in my life, and I'm soaking up every second of it. There's one thing you forgot to tell me all those years ago. You told me that my sunshine was waiting for me at the end of the storm. You didn't tell me that there was a beautiful rainbow with it. Anyway, thanks for looking out for me, and I promise to continue putting this heart to good use. I love you, Dr. Kind." I brought my fingers to my lips and then pressed them on his gravestone.

Thanksgiving had come and gone. We celebrated at Four Kinds, where Sebastian cooked us a beautiful Thanksgiving dinner. Everyone was there, including my parents, Julia and Jenni's parents, Sofia's friends, and Oliver and Brady.

We were officially in the Christmas season, and I had the most amazing decorating ideas for Christian's house. We both had the weekend off, and we needed to go shopping.

"Are you ready to go, babe," I said as I ran down the stairs.

"Go where?" He blankly stared at me.

"Christmas decorating shopping." I grinned.

"Shit. Is that today?"

"What do you mean?" I furrowed my brows.

“Babe, me and the guys are watching the game over at Shaun’s house.”

“No, you’re not. The girls told me the guys are hanging the lights on the houses today.”

“Oh. Well, they’re not. I love you. Don’t be mad. It’s a big game. We’ll go tomorrow. I promise.” He kissed me, walked to the fridge, and grabbed the beer.

“Christian!”

“I love you so much, babe. So much, it hurts. Tomorrow. I promise.” He walked out the sliding door.

I stood there and shook my head. Grabbing my keys, I climbed into my car and drove to the store. I didn’t hear my phone in my purse while I was shopping, and when I pulled it out, I saw several text messages from Christian.

“I love you.”

“Please don’t be mad.”

“Okay. I guess you’re mad since you’re not responding.”

“I promise to make it up to you.”

“I just came home to check on you. Where are you?”

“Oh my God, Christian. I ran to the store. I’m not mad. Go back to Shaun’s, and I’ll see you later.”

“Okay. I love you, babe.”

“I know. You’ve said it a hundred times. I love you too. Now leave me alone. I’m driving.”

“Be careful.”

When I pulled into the driveway, I opened the trunk of my car and smiled at all the bags of décor I’d bought with Christian’s credit card I’d forgotten to give back to him yesterday. After bringing the bags in, I began decorating the house. Everything looked perfect, including the coffee bar, where I had replaced all the coffee mugs with Christmas ones. The house was Christmas-ready, with everything except the outside lights and the tree. All of which would be done tomorrow.

The sliding door opened, and as Christian stepped inside, he stopped.

“Wow. You did all this by yourself?”

“Yes. What do you think?” I grinned.

“It’s beautiful. Why didn’t you wait for me?” He walked over and kissed my lips.

“This was nothing. Your job is putting the lights up and getting the tree

tomorrow.”

“Yeah. We’re all heading out early tomorrow morning to pick out the trees.”

“That’ll be fun.” I smiled. “I bought you something today.”

“You did?” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Yes. You wait right here, and I’ll go get it. In fact, go have a seat on the couch.”

I ran upstairs and put on the sexy red Santa lingerie I had bought while I was out. Placing the Santa hat on my head, I grabbed the remote, and when I was halfway down the stairs, I stopped and pressed play.



Christian

I was sitting on the couch when all of a sudden, I heard music starting to play. Turning my head, my cock instantly rose when I saw Charleigh walk down the stairs in sexy red lingerie and a Santa hat singing Santa Baby. The grin on my face grew wide as she took my hand and stood me up from the couch, grinding her body all over mine as she sang the words. I could barely breathe, for my cock was ready to explode, watching her.

“Do you have any idea what you’re doing to me?”

She smiled as she continued to sing and placed her hand over my stiff and throbbing cock. When the song ended, I swooped down and picked her up.

“Are you ready to unwrap me?” She grinned.

“You have no idea what I’m about to do to you. You aren’t even going to be able to walk once I’m through.” I carried her up the stairs.



The following morning, we all hopped into our cars and met at the tree lot to pick our trees.

“Dad, I want this one!” Ella exclaimed.

“Sorry, my favorite niece. That one is taken,” Conner said.

“By whom?” Ella whined.

“By me.” Conner grinned. “Looks like we have the same taste, sweetheart.”

She stood there and narrowed her eye at him.

“Oh, I can’t wait to see what she does to him.” Charleigh smiled.

“Me either.” I grinned.

“But I like that one the best,” she whined. “And I want it.”

“Me too, Ella. It’s the best tree on the lot, and it’s all mine.”

“Just so you know. You are on my bad uncle list.” She turned her nose up and walked away.

“What? What do you mean?” He ran after her. “I was only kidding, sweetheart. It’s yours. All yours. Hey, how about we play some Call of Duty together later?”

“Go away, Uncle Conner. We aren’t on speaking terms anymore.”

Charleigh and I stood there and laughed, along with Nathan and Sofia.

“Bro, make her talk to me,” Conner said to Nathan.

“You know how she gets once she makes up her mind. You shouldn’t have played with her like that.”

“Ugh. What kind of brother are you? Ella, come back here!” He went after her.

After we picked out our trees, we went home, and Charleigh and I put on the lights and the ornaments.

“We still need to put up the tree at my place,” she said.

“Why?”

“What do you mean, why?” She laughed.

I turned and gripped her hips. “Listen to me. I want you to move in.”

“Christian, are you serious?”

“Of course, I’m serious. Don’t you want to live with me?” My brow arched.

“Yes. I want to live with you. It’s just that I have four months left on my lease.”

“Well, if you think I’m waiting another four months, you’re crazy.”

“You already know I’m crazy.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“True.” I smiled as I kissed her forehead. “Fuck your lease. Break it, and I’ll cover the cost. You are worth every single penny. Merry Christmas, baby.”

“That’s my gift?” She frowned.

“Is there a better gift out there than moving in with me?” I smirked.

“You really want me to answer that, Dr. Kind.”

“You know what. No sex for you.” He pointed at me.

“Yeah, right.” She smiled as she lifted her shirt. “You can’t resist these.”
Fuck.

I slapped her ass and picked her up.

“What are you doing?” She giggled.

“Taking you upstairs before we put up the lights outside.”

“You mean when *you* put the lights up outside.” She smirked.

“Whatever you say, babe.” I kissed her lips. “By the way. I found the receipt for what you spent on all the Christmas decorations. Really?” I carried her up the stairs.

“But I’m worth every penny, remember?”

I sighed as I laid her down on the bed.

“You are worth every penny, and I love you.”

“I love you too, Christian.”

CHAPTER 35



Christian

“Have you bought Charleigh’s Christmas gift yet?” Conner asked as we all sat around the bonfire with our jackets and knit hats, trying to stay warm.

“No. I keep asking her what she wants, and she keeps telling me the same thing.”

“What’s that?” Jackson asked.

“There’s this twenty-two-year-old girl at the hospital who needs a heart transplant. Charleigh keeps telling me she wants a heart for her, and that’s all she wants.”

“Okay. Go get a heart for the girl.” Simon smirked.

“If only it were that easy.” I sighed.

“That explains why you haven’t been really drinking at our get-togethers,” Nathan said. “In case one comes, and you need to rush to the hospital.”

“Yep.” I tipped the water bottle to my lips.

“Where is Charleigh now?” Sam asked.

“She’s at the hospital. She decorated Allie’s room with all kinds of Christmas decorations. It’s like she’s reliving her own experience.”

“Wasn’t Charleigh twenty when she had her transplant?” Sebastian asked.

“Yeah. So, Allie is only a couple of years older. She’s a sweet girl, and I’m doing everything I can for her. But without a new heart, she only has a few weeks, if that.”

“Let’s pray one becomes available.” Conner placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Yeah, bro. We’re all praying for a Christmas miracle for that girl.” Jackson held up his beer bottle.

Shaun pulled his phone from his pocket.

“Oh, look at that. We have new DNA relatives.” He smiled.

“Give me that!” Simon reached over and grabbed his phone out of his hand. “Not anymore, we don’t.” He handed Shaun back his phone.

“What the fuck, bro?”

“We have all the DNA we need right here. You stop getting those emails and shut down that account. If you don’t, I’ll have Grace hack it and do it for you.” He pointed at him, and we all laughed.



It was one a.m. on Christmas Eve when my pager went off. Reaching over, I grabbed it from the nightstand and looked at it.

“Shit.” I quickly sat up. “Charleigh, get up.”

“What? What’s wrong?”

“There’s a heart for Allie. We have to get dressed and go.”

“Oh my God!” She jumped out of bed.

I threw on a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt and brushed my teeth.

“Are you ready?” I asked her as I put on my tennis shoes.

“Yes. Let’s go.” She grabbed her purse and my keys.

“We’re taking the motorcycle. We’ll get there faster,” I said.

We arrived at the hospital, and Charleigh and I went up to see Allie.

“Allie, wake up,” Charleigh spoke.

“Charleigh? Dr. Kind?” She looked confused.

“You’re getting a new heart for Christmas, Allie.” I smiled as I took hold of her hand.

“I called your parents, and they’re on their way.” Charleigh smiled at her.

“I’m going to make sure everything is in order, and we’ll get you prepped,” I spoke and walked out of the room.

As I was scrubbing in, Charleigh walked in.

“I’m going to be right up there watching.” She smiled.

“Okay. I know how much this means to you, but if you get tired, I want you to go lay down in one of the rooms.”

“I’m fine, Dr. Kind. I’ll see you later. Good luck. I love you.”

“I love you too, babe.”

I stood in the middle of the O.R. and looked at the team of doctors and nurses there to assist me.

“This young girl has a long life to live, and we’re going to make sure she lives it. Are you ready?”

“We’re ready, Dr. Kind.”

“Okay. Let’s give Allie her new heart.”

Four hours later, the transplant was complete, and Allie’s new heart was beating beautifully in her chest.

“You all did great work. Merry Christmas, everyone.” I smiled as I walked out of the OR.

“You were amazing!” Charleigh threw her arms around me.

“Thanks. Let’s go tell Allie’s parents that their daughter has a new heart.” I smiled as I hooked my arm around Charleigh.

Allie’s parents were grateful and very relieved.

“Thank you, Dr. Kind.” Allie’s mother hugged me tight.

“You’re welcome. And Merry Christmas to you both.”

“Same to you.”

“You ready to go home?” I hooked my arm around Charleigh and pulled her into me.

“Yeah. But I’m not tired at all. I feel so wired after watching that.”

“Yeah. I’m always wired after a transplant.”

“On the way home, can we stop at the homeless shelter? I want to show you what your five-million-dollar donation has bought so far.” She laid her head on my shoulder.

“You bet we can, babe.” I kissed the side of her head.

Charleigh and I spent Christmas eve with her parents, and we’d spend Christmas day with my family. First, we’d go to Sebastian’s for Christmas breakfast. Then later in the day, we’d go to Aunt Barb’s house for Christmas dinner.

I was sitting in the living room of Sebastian’s house after the amazing breakfast he cooked for all of us when Ella climbed on my lap.

“Hey, you.” I smiled.

“You know what I was thinking about?” she asked.

“Something to do with the heart?”

“No. I was thinking about how this is our first Christmas with our new family.”

“You’re right. So, what do you think?” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“I like it.” She grinned. “You?”

“I like it too, kiddo.”

“I really miss my mom. I hope she’s celebrating Christmas up in heaven.”

“I know she is, and she’s watching over you.”

“Do you really think so? How can you be so sure?” she asked.

“I just know, kiddo. Your parents never stop looking out for you, even after they’re gone.”

“Okay.” She smiled as she hugged me. “Merry Christmas, Uncle Christian.”

“Merry Christmas, Ella.”

“So, what’s going on over here?” Conner walked over.

“We’re just talking, Uncle Conner.”

“I’m still your favorite uncle, right?” He narrowed his eye at her as he picked her up from my lap.

She placed her hand on his cheek. “I have two other uncles, and I need to divide my love equally, Uncle Conner.”

“No, Ella. You don’t.”

“Would you have a favorite child if you had more than one?”

“I don’t have any kids, so it’s irrelevant.”

“It’s a simple yes or no answer,” she said.

He whispered in her ear, and I watched her face light up.

“You are the best uncle in the world.” She hugged him. “I can’t wait to tell my dad.” She wiggled out of his arms. “Dad! Dad!” She ran away.

“What did you tell her?” I chuckled.

“I told her she could come and watch one of my surgeries.”

“I don’t think Nathan is going to allow it.” I smirked.

“That’s why I need your help convincing him.” He grinned.

CHAPTER 36



Christian

“Babe, are you ready yet?” I shouted up the stairs. “We need to hit the road.”

“Coming.” She ran down the stairs with her bag.

“Ha.” I grinned. “I love your melon.” I patted her head.

“Very funny, Dr. Kind. “Anyway, what do you think?” She handed me her bag.

“Considering I bought it for you for Christmas, I think you look absolutely adorable in it.” I kissed her lips. “Now let’s go. Everyone already left.”

We were all spending New Year’s Eve and part of New Year’s Day at the cabin. When we pulled up, Jenni and Shaun had just arrived and were getting their bags from the car.

“Oh my God! I love your beanie.” Jenni smiled. “Is that Love Your Melon?”

“Yeah. Christian bought it for me for Christmas. It’s part of their Disney collection. Don’t you just love the ears?”

“So adorable. Hey, babe. Why didn’t you buy me one of those beanies like Christian bought for Charleigh.”

“Umm. I didn’t know you wanted one?” He glanced at her.

“I didn’t know Charleigh wanted one either.” I smiled. “I saw it and thought it would look cute on her.”

“Are you seriously trying to get me in trouble here?” Shaun whispered.

“Well, aren’t you just the perfect boyfriend.” She patted my chest and shot Shaun a look before walking away.

“Thanks a lot, cousin.”

“Please. All you have to do is offer her cake. She’ll forget all about the beanie.”

“You’re right. I wonder if there’s any here. In fact, I’m going to see if the local bakery can deliver one.” He patted my back with a smile.

I chuckled as we went inside the house.

“Man, this is exactly what I needed after this crazy busy week,” I said as I stepped out on the patio and stared out at the snowy lake. It’s beautiful up here.”

“It sure is, my brother.” Conner smiled as he hooked his arm around me. “We have snowmobiles in the garage we’re going to take out. Thank God there’s enough snow up here this year. Last year there was barely any.”

“Sounds like fun.” I grinned. “How many are there?”

“There’s five. So, we need to take turns taking them out. In fact, let’s go.” Conner grinned.

Conner, Jackson, Simon, Shaun, and I put on our gear and took the snowmobiles out for about an hour. These guys were fucking crazy with what they were doing, but it was so much fun, and the hour passed quickly.

“Damn, you guys.” I smiled as we stopped, and I took off my helmet.

“Shit. We forgot to tell him about the rule,” Simon said.

“What rule?”

“You cannot tell the girls what we do. They will freaking kill us. That’s why we drive slowly and cautiously when we take them out with us. That way, they think we’re being responsible and not reckless like the wild animals we are.” He grinned.

“Ha. Okay.” I laughed.

“Come on. We better head back,” Jackson said.

“Let’s take the other way back to the cabin,” Conner said.

We started to head back, and something caught my attention out of the corner of my eye.

Flashing my light, I signaled for the rest of them to stop.

“What’s wrong?” Jackson yelled as he pulled up next to me.

“Something isn’t right over there.” I pointed. “We need to go check it out.”

We turned our snowmobiles to the left and headed down the trail, where we stumbled upon a snowmobile that had hit a tree and a man lying a few feet away from it.

“Shit.” I hopped off the snowmobile, as did my brothers and cousins.

“He’s not breathing,” Jackson said. “Starting CPR.”

“His leg is shattered,” Conner said.

“Any of you have bars?” Simon asked as he held up his phone.

“Man, this guy reeks of alcohol,” Conner spoke. “We have to stabilize his leg.”

I happened to look over to my right and saw a bright pink jacket in the snow.

“You guys, there’s someone over here,” I shouted as I ran, and Shaun followed.

I brushed away the light dusting of snow and saw the body of a little girl. She was unconscious. Leaning my ear against her mouth, her breathing was shallow, and her pulse was weak. She had two major cuts on her face, which required stitches.

“She’s hypothermic.” I looked at Shaun. “We have to get her out of these wet clothes and warm her up, or she’s going to die.”

“Bro, you and Shaun take her back to the cabin. There are a ton of medical supplies there. Call 911 and tell them where we’re at,” Conner said. “Wait. Let me check her for any broken bones. Her ankle is broken, but that appears to be it. Unfortunately, the guy didn’t make it.”

“Yeah. Well, she will.” I climbed on the snowmobile, and Shaun placed the girl against my chest. I tightly held on to her with one hand while I drove back to the cabin with Shaun following behind.

“Nathan, Charleigh, Emilia!” I shouted when I pulled up.

Nathan came running out as I climbed off the snowmobile.

“What the hell happened?”

“Shallow breathing, weak pulse, and she’s hypothermic with a broken ankle.”

I ran with her inside the house.

“Oh my God, Christian,” Charleigh shouted.

I lay the little girl on the bed and began removing all her clothing.

“We have warming blankets,” Emilia said as she ran out of the room.

“I’ll go get some hot compresses,” Charleigh said.

“We need to stabilize that ankle,” Nathan said.

We wrapped the girl in a warming blanket, and Charleigh applied the warm compresses to her neck.

“You need this, Uncle Christian,” Ella said as she handed me the blood

pressure kit.

“Thanks, kiddo.” I smiled.

Nathan walked over with his suture kit and began cleaning her wounds.

“What the hell happened out there?” he asked. “Where is everyone else?”

“They’re with the guy who unfortunately didn’t make it. They’re waiting for the rescue team.”

“Charleigh, can you stabilize her ankle while I stitch her up?” Nathan asked.

“Of course.”

I checked her breathing and her pulse.

“Her breathing is stabilizing.”

“I have some more warm compresses,” Emilia said as she walked over and placed them across her head and under her neck.

The little girl started to regain consciousness and slowly opened her eyes.

“Don’t let her move,” Nathan said. “I’m almost done.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart. You’re safe. But you must stay still so Dr. Nathan can finish up.” I smiled as I placed my hand on her forehead.

“I made some hot apple cider,” Sebastian walked in, holding a mug in his hand.

“Thanks, Sebastian.”

“It hurts,” she spoke. “My ankle.”

“I know, and the paramedics are on the way.”

“Okay. I’m done,” Nathan said. “She can’t be any older than Ella. What was she doing out there?”

“The guy, whom I’m assuming is her dad, reeked of alcohol. I don’t know how long they were out there.”

We heard the sirens outside. Within seconds, the paramedics ran in with a stretcher.

“She was hypothermic, and we warmed her up. Her ankle is broken, and my brother stitched the cuts on her face.”

“Are you doctors?” One of the paramedics asked.

“Yeah. We are.”

They put the little girl on the stretcher and wheeled her out of the house. We all followed outside, and as they were loading her in the ambulance, Conner, Jackson, and Simon pulled up on their snowmobiles.

“Is she okay?” Conner asked.

“Yeah. She’s going to be fine.” I sighed.

Charleigh hooked her arm around me, and we all went back inside.

“I think it’s safe to say this is one New Year’s Eve we will never forget,” Simon said.

“It’s a good thing you keep all these medical supplies here.” I rubbed the back of my neck.

“We really have no choice since these morons act like wild beasts on those damn snowmobiles,” Jenni said as she glared at Shaun.

“Yeah. Don’t think we don’t know because we do, Simon.” Grace glared at him.

“The one thing you are missing is IV poles and bags of fluid,” Charleigh said.

“We will be ordering those immediately,” Sam said.

I couldn’t help but chuckle. We all sat down to the wonderful surf and turf dinner that Sebastian had prepared for us. After we ate, we lit the firepit outside, grabbed our guitars, and sat around it.

“It’s a good thing we took the other trail back,” I said.

“No shit. That little girl wouldn’t have made it if she was out there any longer.”

“Our doctor duties never stop. No matter where we are,” Nathan held up his beer bottle.

“They sure don’t.” I tipped my bottle to his.

“How do the girls know what we do out there?” Simon asked.

“Haven’t you learned by now that they know everything?” Shaun smirked.

“Damn. Did you see the look Grace gave me? What the hell?”

“You? Jenni’s eyes were shooting daggers at me.” Shaun chuckled.

“Come on in, you guys. We’re starting our dance party.” Jenni grinned as she opened the sliding door.

“Yay!” Conner smiled as he jumped up from his chair.

Simon sat there and shook his head.

“Come on.” I pulled him from his seat. “Let me see those cool detective moves.”

“I’m not sure you want to see that.” Sam laughed.

“Shut up, douchebag. “Cool detective moves coming right up.”

When we walked through the door, the girls had Johnny B. Goode blasting as they danced around the living room. I walked over to Charleigh, grabbed her hand, and danced with her.

“See, I got moves.” Simon grinned as he and Grace danced over to us.

“You sure do, cousin.” I laughed.

I needed a breather, so I sat in one of the chairs and stared at my family, who sang and danced around the room. This was by far one of the best New Year’s Eve I’d ever celebrated, and I was proud to be a part of it. This family, my family. The family I’d only known for a short time but felt like I’d known my entire life.

“Hey. Are you okay?” Charleigh asked as she sat on my lap.

“I’m great.” I smiled as I wrapped my arms around her.

“It’s almost midnight,” she said.

“And almost the start of a brand-new year.”

“Are you happy to put this year behind you?” she asked.

“Absolutely not. Despite the bad that happened, I couldn’t be more grateful for all the good that came from it. Especially you.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“I love you so much.” She leaned in and kissed my lips.

“I love you more, babe.”

“Okay, everyone! Grab your party hats and champagne bottle confetti. It’s almost midnight!” Jenni shouted with excitement.

“Babe, you promised you wouldn’t have those this year,” Shaun said.

“Julia?” Sam looked at her.

“You know I can’t control my sister. Don’t worry. We’ll clean it all up, babe.”

“Tonight, right?” Sam asked.

“Sure, baby. Whatever you say.” She kissed his lips.

Charleigh and I put on our party hats and grabbed a champagne bottle. We all stood in the middle of the room, holding our champagne bottles up.

“10. 9. 8. 7. 6. 5. 4. 3. 2.1. HAPPY NEW YEAR!” We all shouted and popped our champagne bottles as confetti filled the room. I wrapped my arm around Charleigh’s waist and pulled her into me.

“Happy New Year, Charleigh.”

“Happy New Year, Christian.” She smiled as our lips met for a passionate kiss.

We all took turns hugging and kissing each other.

“Come here, my brother.” Conner grabbed me. “This year has been one of the best years of my life.”

“Mine too, brother. Mine too.” I hugged him tightly.

“Can I have everyone’s attention?” Jackson shouted.

The room quieted down, and all eyes were on him.

“Nothing could have prepared us for this past year. Our family grew in ways we never imagined. My brother became a father, and I gained a beautiful niece. And the brother we thought we lost thirty-three years ago stands with us tonight, celebrating this new year. Everything we do, we do as a family, and we all have a lot to be grateful for. And what I’m most grateful for is this beautiful woman right here.” He smiled as he took hold of Georgia’s hand and turned to her.

“Georgia, you are the love of my life. You are my heart, soul, and the air I breathe. I have never loved anyone the way I love you, and I want us to be together forever.” He got down on one knee and pulled the ring box from his pocket. “Georgia, will you marry me and spend the rest of your life with me?”

Tears streamed down Georgia’s face as she placed her hands over her mouth.

“Yes, Jackson! Yes. Yes. I will marry you!”

He took the ring from the box and placed it on her finger. We all clapped and shouted as Jackson picked her up, and they shared their first kiss as an engaged couple. After celebrating their engagement and New Year’s with a bottle of champagne, I grabbed my guitar and glanced over at Conner and Nathan.

“Do you two know Give A Little Bit?” I asked them.

“You bet we do.” Conner grinned.

“Grab your guitars, and let’s play.”

“You got it, bro.” Nathan and Conner grabbed their guitars.

“This song goes out to my brother and his beautiful fiancée.” I smiled as I strummed the chords first, and my two brothers followed as we played and sang the song together.

“Thanks, my brothers.” Jackson smiled.

“You three were amazing.” Charleigh walked over and sat on my lap as I set my guitar down.

“I don’t know about anyone else, but Grace and I are heading to bed,” Simon said.

“Yeah. We are too.” Sebastian smiled. “I think we all have some celebrating to do privately.”

“Julia, you go ahead. I’ll be in bed in a few,” Sam spoke as he kissed her

lips.

Julia gripped his arm as she placed her hand over his eyes. “Don’t look, Sam. Just don’t look. It’ll be okay.” She pushed him into the bedroom.

“You too, Shaun. Just keep walking. We’ll clean it up in the morning.” Jenni held onto him as they went up the stairs.

“Are Sam and Shaun going to be okay?” I asked Simon.

“I doubt it.” He smirked. “They’ll most likely get up when the girls are asleep and start cleaning. You mark my words.” He pointed at me. “I love you two. Good night and Happy New Year.”

I couldn’t help but laugh as I picked Charleigh up.

“We have our own private celebrating to do.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“We certainly do, Dr. Kind. “I’m all yours.” Her mouth smashed against mine.

The following morning, I was up before anyone else. I didn’t want to wake Charleigh up because I knew how tired she was, and she looked so peaceful sleeping beside me. Pulling on a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt, I chuckled when I walked down the stairs and saw everything was cleaned up. After making a cup of coffee, I put on my boots, opened the sliding door, and stepped outside as the snow lightly fell. I took in the beauty and peacefulness of my surroundings while sipping my coffee.

“Bro, what are you doing out here?” I heard Conner’s voice as the sliding door opened.

“Thinking.”

“Thinking about what?” He walked out and stood next to me.

“The moment I found out what William and Caroline had done, I lost all sense of myself. Suddenly, I had no idea who I was. It felt like the person I spent the last thirty-three years creating fell away. It was the worst feeling in the world, bro. Then I came to Los Angeles, got to know my real family, met the most amazing woman, and suddenly, I became the man I was always meant to be.”

“We have that affect people.” He smirked, and I chuckled. “So, tell me. Who are you?”

I glanced over at him, and the corners of my mouth curved upward.

“I’m fucking Dr. Christian Kind, Cardiothoracic Surgeon and head of the Kind Cardiac Care Center. I’m a brother, uncle, cousin, friend, and boyfriend.”

“Damn right you are.” He hooked his arm around me. “Let’s go inside. Sebastian is cooking us a big breakfast.”

We stepped through the sliding door, and everyone was up, including my beautiful girlfriend. Walking over to her, I wrapped my arms around her.

“Good morning, beautiful.”

“Good morning. I saw you out there with Conner, and I didn’t want to interrupt.”

“What did I tell you?” Simon grinned as he walked over to us. “I told you those freaks who call themselves my brothers would have this place cleaned up before dawn.”

“Sam, you better not have gotten up after I fell asleep and cleaned this house.”

“Same, Shaun.” Jenni narrowed her eye at him.

“Actually, I was up very early, and I cleaned it up.” I looked over at Shaun and Sam and gave them a wink.

I was born a Kind. These people were my family, and I’d always have their backs. It was what we Kind men did, no matter the cost.

Thank you for reading *Nine of a Kind*! I hope you enjoyed it.

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