



*Ten*  
of a  
*Kind*

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

**SANDI LYNN**

TEN OF A KIND

KIND BROTHERS SERIES, BOOK FIFTEEN



SANDI LYNN

SANDI LYNN ROMANCE, LLC

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# TEN OF A KIND

(Kind Brothers Series, Book Fifteen)


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



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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.

## MORE SIZZLING ROMANCE

**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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Nathan Wolfe (Wolfe Brothers, Book 2)  
Mason Wolfe (Wolfe Brothers, Book 3)

*Kind Brothers*

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A Kind Wedding: Jackson & Georgia (Kind Brothers Series, Book 11)  
A Kind Wedding: Conner & Charlotte (Kind Brothers Series, Book 12)  
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A Beautiful Sight  
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One Night in Paris  
Perfectly You  
The Escort  
The Ring  
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The Property Brokers

# CHAPTER 1



## TWO WEEKS AGO

*A*<sup>va</sup> I lifted the sheet and stared at my naked body when I opened my eyes.

“Shit,” I said as I glanced at the other side of the bed, where it was evident someone had been.

The pillows were messed up, and the essence of a man’s cologne clung to the wrinkled sheets. Glancing at the nightstand, I saw an empty condom wrapper. Placing my hand over my eyes, I sighed. Throwing back the sheets, I climbed out of bed, slipped on my robe, and walked over to my desk to check the journal. Nothing. No entry from last night. The last thing I remembered was sitting at the bar having a drink before heading home.

“Dammit, Freya. What did you do? I know it was you!”

I searched my mind and couldn’t find her because she knew she’d broken one of our rules. Grabbing the condom wrapper from the nightstand, I tossed it into the trash can in the bathroom, where I saw the used condom. Opening the glass door, I started the shower, slipped off my robe, and stepped inside, letting the hot water stream down my body as I tried to relax.

After getting dressed, I grabbed my keys and headed to the hospital to visit Charles.

“Ava, sweetheart.” He smiled when I walked into his room.

“Hi, Charles.” I kissed his forehead and then sat down in the chair next to his bed. “How are you feeling today?”

“Pretty much the same. I’m happy you stopped by. There’s something I need to discuss with you.”

“What is it?” I placed my hand on his.

“There’s a therapist I want you to schedule an appointment with, and before you say a word, hear me out.”

“Okay. I’ll listen.”

“Her name is Dr. Charlotte Roman-Kind. She was one of my brightest students. She’s an exceptional therapist, and I think you’ll like her. I think you’ll all like her.”

“Then why didn’t you suggest her before instead of sending us to those other doctors?”

“Because your condition isn’t her area of specialty.”

“So, you’re sending us to someone who isn’t familiar with this?” My brows furrowed.

“She’ll become familiar, Ava. The one thing I highly respect about her is her ability to research. As I said, she was one of my brightest students. I took her under my wing and gave her complex cases—cases I never gave my other students. She was very ambitious and wanted to learn everything she could about the human brain.”

“Why is that?”

“She had her reasons, but it’s not my story to tell. She’s not only an exceptional therapist, but she’s also a caring, warm, and sweet woman. I’ve spoken with her and gave her your file. She’s agreed to take you on as a patient. This is new territory for her as well as for you. You need to give Dr. Kind a chance.”

“The others might not agree with you, Charles. I never even got to meet the other doctors you sent us to.”

“I know.” He patted my hand. “But I think this time, Freya will behave.”

“Speaking of Freya. I woke up this morning to the smell of a man’s cologne on my sheets and an empty condom wrapper on my nightstand.” I sighed heavily.

“What’s the last thing you remember?” he asked.

“I had just left a client’s house, and I stopped at a bar and grill down the road for a drink before heading home. The last thing I really remember was sitting on the bar stool having a drink.”

“Something or someone triggered her to front,” he said.

“I don’t know. But I’m pissed that she went into hiding.”

“Do the others know about this?” he asked.

“Everyone has gone radio silent,” I said.

After leaving the hospital, I went home. Picking up the dress I wore last



night from the floor, I noticed a large stain down the front of it. Bringing it up to my nose, it smelled of alcohol—a memory stirred in my head. A man bumped into me, and my drink spilled down the front of my dress. He kept apologizing, and I told him it was okay. He must have been the man Freya brought home.



### Two Weeks Later

I inhaled a deep breath as I stepped into the Kind Medical Center. Nerves flooded my body as I didn't know what to expect. Pushing the button to the elevator, the doors opened, and I stepped inside. When they opened on the second floor, I was startled when I stepped out, and a man ran over to me.

“Hey, it's good to see you again.” A smile graced his handsome face.

“I'm sorry, but have we met?” I furrowed my brows.

“You're kidding, right?” His eye narrowed slightly at me. “It's me. Grayson.”

There was something about him that seemed vaguely familiar.

“Sorry, Grayson. You seem like a nice guy, but I would have remembered if we met.” I began to walk away.

“Are you serious?” His irritated voice asked.

I stopped dead in my tracks, turned my head, and stared at him.

“Lucky's Bar & Grill? Two weeks ago? We shared a drink and then went back to your place?”

Shit. Shit. Shit. He was the man who bumped into me and made me spill my drink. Then Freya must have fronted and decided to bring him home. Even though he was incredibly handsome, it wasn't me he slept with.

“Again, I'm sorry. You must have me confused with someone else. I have an appointment to get to.”

I placed my hand on the door handle of Dr. Kind's practice and stepped inside. After signing in at the reception desk, I took a seat in the waiting room. I felt a headache coming on as I swallowed hard and closed my eyes for a moment.

## CHAPTER 2



Ava/Freya

“Ava, Dr. Kind can see you now.” The receptionist opened the door, and I followed her into the office. “Please, have a seat. Dr. Kind will be back in a minute.” She smiled.

I set my purse down and looked around the office. Walking over to Dr. Kind’s desk, I picked up a picture in a clear glass frame—a picture of a handsome man and a baby.

“Ava, I’m sorry about that.” A pretty woman smiled as she stepped inside. “Hi, I’m Dr. Charlotte Roman-Kind.” She extended her hand, and I lightly shook it. “Please, have a seat anywhere you will feel comfortable.”

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to stand.”

“Oh, okay. If that makes you more comfortable, Ava.”

“I guess I should tell you that Ava isn’t here right now, Dr. Kind. My name is Freya, and it is a pleasure to meet you.”

She stared at me for a moment. “It’s nice to meet you, Freya. May I ask where Ava is?”

“She’s asleep at the moment. I couldn’t let her walk in here until I met you first. She’s having a hard time accepting the fact that Dr. Lenox is dying. I will determine if you’re the right fit for us. The last doctors Dr. Lenox had us see didn’t quite work out.”

“Why is that?” she asked.

“You know that feeling you get when you meet someone for the first time? The feeling that’s deep in your gut? The one that lets you know if that person is trustworthy enough to spend your time with?”

“Yes. I know that feeling.”

“There was something about the other doctors I knew weren’t worthy of our time. Is this your husband and baby?” I asked as I picked up the picture again.

“Yes. That is my husband, Conner, and our daughter, Isabella.” A small but concerned smile crossed her face.

“He’s handsome, and she is adorable. Congratulations.”

“Thank you, Freya.”

I set the picture down on her desk. “Dr. Lenox speaks very highly of you, Dr. Kind.”

“Enough for you to trust me?” Her brow arched.

“Perhaps. Shall we?” I smiled as I walked over and took a seat on the couch.

“You may call me Charlotte.” A small smile framed her face as she sat in the leather chair across from me. “I know this must be hard for you—for all of you. You’ve been seeing Dr. Lenox for ten years and have built a relationship with him. Trusting someone new isn’t easy. But I can assure you that I’ll be here for you every step of the way.”

“I appreciate that, Charlotte. Ava is a little pissed off at me.”

“Why is that?”

“I broke one of our rules. But I did it for her.”

“What did you do?” she asked.

“Two weeks ago, we were at a bar. A man got pushed into us, and Ava’s drink spilled all over her dress. The moment her eyes met the sexy stranger, I could feel what she felt.”

“Which was?”

“I don’t know. An interest, perhaps. Some type of connection. We had never felt that before with anyone. She was thinking about him a lot after the incident. She kept looking at him from across the bar, and I knew she wouldn’t do anything about it, so I decided to. I wanted to see for myself if he was as nice as she thought he was.”

“So, you slept with him?”

“I did. I know it wasn’t my decision to make, but I couldn’t help myself. After it happened, I sent him home and went into hiding. She never would have known if I wasn’t careless.”

“Careless, how?” she asked.

“I forgot to make up the other side of the bed and left the empty condom wrapper on the nightstand. But it didn’t matter anyway. His scent was

embedded into the sheets. Anyone with a sense of smell would have known a guy was there. His scent was alluring.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “Earthy with a touch of spice.” I closed my eyes.



A<sup>va</sup>

I opened my eyes, looked at my surroundings, and then at Dr. Kind.

“Ava?” A soft smile crossed her face.

“It’s nice to meet you, Dr. Kind. How long was Freya here?”

“About fifteen minutes. Please, call me Charlotte.”

“If I’m still here, she must approve,” I said.

“I’m pretty confident she does. Can I get you some water or coffee?”

“No, thank you. I’m fine.”

“I want you to know, Ava, that I will work as hard as Dr. Lenox has with helping you. He’s concerned you’ll regress with your progress because of his illness.”

“I already feel like it’s starting to happen. For example, Freya broke one of our rules, and instead of explaining to me why she did what she did, she hid. That hasn’t happened in a very long time. Perhaps she’s also having a hard time with Dr. Lenox’s illness. She’d never admit it, though.”

“Why do you think that?” Charlotte asked.

“Because she doesn’t feel.”

“I’ve read over your file multiple times, and you have made tremendous progress since you started seeing Dr. Lenox. You should be very proud of yourself.”

“I am. We all are. We’ve all made a lot of progress.”

Her timer went off, and she glanced at her watch. “Our time is up.” She stood from her chair. “I want to see you three times a week to start. I think that will help us get to know each other better.”

“I can do that, Charlotte.” A small smile crossed my lips.

“Before you go, I want to make sure you have my pager number. If something happens or you find yourself in a situation where you need me, call the number, and I will be paged immediately.”

“Thank you, Charlotte. I appreciate it.”

## CHAPTER 3



G rayson

It was a quiet day in the ER, so I was lucky enough to leave on time when my shift ended. When I got home, I grabbed a beer from the refrigerator and went to see my brother.

“What’s up?” Gabriel smiled when I stepped through the sliding door. “Did you eat? I just picked up a pizza.” He held up the box.

“Thanks, bro.” I set my beer bottle on the table, walked over to the island, and grabbed a plate and two slices of pizza.

“Grab your beer, and let’s go eat on the patio,” Gabriel said as he walked over to the sliding door.

I followed him outside and took a seat in one of the loungers. Setting my beer on the table, I picked up a slice of pizza and bit into it.

“Sorry I couldn’t see you this morning when you came to my office,” Gabriel said.

“Nah, that’s okay. You were in with a patient.”

“What’s up, fam?” Christian smiled as he and Simon walked over.

“There’s pizza in the kitchen if you want,” Gabriel said.

“I grabbed something at the hospital,” Christian spoke.

“Grace and I just finished dinner.” Simon took his shirt off and jumped into the pool.

I looked over and saw Conner heading toward us with Isabella.

“Hey, bro.” Christian smiled as he held out his arms to hold the baby.

“You can have her in a while. I just got home and need my snuggly time with my daughter.”

“Wasn’t she with you all day at work?” Christian asked with irritation.

“Yeah. What’s your point, bro?” Conner stared at his brother.

Christian sighed as he tipped the beer bottle to his lips.

“Are you okay?” Conner asked me.

“Why are you asking him if he’s okay?” Simon asked as he stood in the pool.

“What’s going on?” Gabriel’s brows furrowed.

“You haven’t told them yet?” Conner asked.

“I haven’t had a chance. I saw that woman today from the bar.” I stared at my brother and cousins.

“Where at?” Christian asked.

“The medical center. When I approached her and said hi, she acted like we’d never met. Then she told me she would remember if we had and that I must have her confused with someone else.”

“Damn.” Simon chuckled. “Even we never took it that far.”

“What did you say when she said that?” Gabriel asked.

“I couldn’t say anything. She walked away and into Charlotte’s practice.”

“She’s a patient of Charlotte’s?” Simon climbed out of the pool and wrapped a towel around his waist.

“I told him he dodged a bullet with that one and to forget about her,” Conner said as he stole Christian’s beer and took a sip.

Christian grabbed it from him. “No baby, no beer.” His brow arched.

“Wow, bro. Your uncle is so mean to your daddy, Isabella.”

“For fuck’s sake. Give her to me.” Christian reached over, took her, and we all laughed.

“I agree with Conner about dodging a bullet. Ask Charlotte about her,” Simon said as he sat down.

“Charlotte can’t say a word about her,” I said.

I glanced over and saw Charlotte heading toward us.

“Do not let that woman take my baby.” Conner sternly looked at his brother.

“I heard that Conner.” Charlotte walked over. “It’s our bath time, and I need your help.” A smirk crossed her lips.

“Give me my baby, bro.” Conner quickly stood up.

“Hey, Charlotte,” Simon said. “Grayson slept with one of your patients, and not only is she pretending it didn’t happen, but she’s also insisting they never even met. What’s up with her?”

“Douchebag.” I reached over and slapped the back of his head.

Charlotte stared at me momentarily, and I knew she knew exactly what Simon was talking about. She walked over, leaned down, and sniffed my neck.

“What are you doing, Charlotte?” Conner’s brows furrowed.

“Nothing. Let’s go, Conner.”

“What the fuck.” Simon laughed. “What was that all about?”

I shook my head as I tipped the beer bottle to my lips.



### One Week Later

“*H*ey, Dr. Kind.” Vera, one of the nurses, flirtatiously smiled as she walked over to me.

“Hi, Vera.” I glanced at her.

“So, I was thinking that I could buy you a drink after our shift ends.” She chewed the bottom of her lip.

“That’s sweet of you, but can I let you in on a little secret?”

“Of course.” Her grin widened.

I leaned in and whispered in her ear. “I don’t date co-workers. Period. Do me a favor and spread the word.” I winked at her before walking away.

“Breaking hearts already?” Christian grinned as he walked up and hooked his arm around me.

“Just making sure the word gets out.” I sighed.

“Are you meeting us around the bonfire tonight?” he asked. “The girls are going out.”

“You bet. I get off in an hour, and then I have to make a Target run before I head home. Do you need anything?”

“Nah, I’m good. Thanks, though.” He patted my back. “I’ll see you later.”

After my shift, and as I walked to my car, I texted Gabriel.

“*Target run. Do you need anything?*”

“*Yeah. A Starbucks. You know what I like.*”

I rolled my eyes and climbed into my car. Grabbing a basket, I walked down the central aisle until I found where the shaving products were. After throwing a new razor and shaving cream in my cart, I saw *her* turning down the aisle. She stopped, and our eyes locked on each other.

“Are you still going to pretend you don’t know me?” I smirked.

“I don’t have to pretend because I don’t.” A fragile smile crossed her lips.

“Ah, okay. Do you do that often?”

“Do what?” she asked.

“Sleep with a guy, kick him out after, and then pretend it never happened.”

She stared at me for a moment. “Okay. You win. Obviously, I hurt your feelings, and I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t hurt my feelings.” My brows furrowed. “I do it all the time. The difference is when I see the woman again, I don’t pretend we never met.”

“Again, I’m sorry, Grayson. If you’ll excuse me, I have more shopping to do.”

I moved my cart out of the way so she could get by. “Enjoy your evening,” I spoke.

“You too.”

I sighed and continued shopping. After checking out, I grabbed my bags from the cart and walked to Starbucks. I was pleasantly surprised at the woman standing before me in line.

“Looks like we had the same idea,” I said.

She turned and looked at me. “You again?” Her brow arched.

“Me again.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“What can I get for you?” the barista asked her.

“A Grande Iced Cinnamon Dolce latte with almond milk, please.”

“Name?”

“Ava.”

Instantly, my brows furrowed. “Put her coffee on mine,” I said to the barista.

“That’s not necessary,” she said.

“Too bad. I’m buying. I’ll have a Grande Iced Toasted Vanilla Oat Milk Shaken Espresso.”

“Name?”

“Grayson.”

I pulled out some cash and handed it to him. I couldn’t believe she lied to me about her name.

“Nice name, Ava.” I cocked my head.

She looked away from me as she waited for her drink.

“Care to explain?” I asked.



“Drink for Ava,” the barista said as he set down her coffee.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I tried. Thanks for the coffee, Grayson.” She walked away and left the store.

Grabbing my brother’s coffee, I shook my head and climbed into my car. When I got home, I set the bags on the island, grabbed a beer out of the fridge, and headed down to the beach.

“Here’s your damn coffee.” I handed it to him and took a seat.

“Bro, what the hell is your problem?” Gabriel asked.

“Tough day at work?” Sam asked.

“Work was fine.” I twisted the cap off the bottle.

“Spill it, cousin,” Jackson said.

“I was at Target and ran into that woman from the bar.”

“She still pretending she doesn’t know you exist?” Simon chuckled.

“She apologized, but when I went to Starbucks to get Gabriel his coffee, she was in front of me.”

“And? What happened?” Christian asked.

“When the barista asked for her name, she told him it was Ava.”

“I thought her name was Freya.” Gabriel’s brows furrowed.

“Ha, she reminds me of Georgia sunshine when she first met Jackson.” Conner grinned.

“That’s what she told me, so she lied. She lied about never meeting me, and she lied about her name.”

“She’s just a compulsive little liar,” Simon said. “That’s probably why she’s one of Charlotte’s patients.”

“Did you confront her about her name?” Nathan asked.

“I did, and I asked her to explain. She said I wouldn’t believe her if she tried. Then she walked out.”

“You sure know how to pick them.” Gabriel grinned as he patted my shoulder.

“Shut the fuck up and drink your coffee.” I tipped the beer bottle to my lips.

## CHAPTER 4



*A*<sup>va</sup>

After leaving Target, I drove home, put my things away, and sat down on the couch with my coffee. I couldn't stop thinking about my encounter with Grayson. His six-foot-three built body, short, meticulously styled dark hair, masculine jawline, and bright blue eyes made him the sexiest man I'd ever seen. I vaguely remember thinking that same thing at the bar that night. What bothered me was that he thought I was terrible for pretending we had never met or slept together. The truth was I had no memory of him, but I couldn't very well tell him the truth. If he thought I was already crazy, he'd think it more if I had. Only a few close friends knew about my condition, and that's how I liked it. I'd been through enough with guys over the years and was finally okay with being alone.

The following morning, I awoke to a note on my nightstand.

"Two new paintings are ready to be taken to the gallery. – Freya."

Freya was not only one of my protectors, but she was also an incredible artist. She could paint anything, and the meticulous detail in all her paintings blew me away. She wanted to be seen and noticed, which was how she fulfilled her needs by painting. A local art gallery fell in love with her work and agreed to display some of her art. In addition to my interior decorating job, selling her paintings helped secure our livelihood. Sometimes, she brought the paintings in herself; sometimes, I did it for her. She wanted me to take them in for her today since I had a lot of work to do. That was how we worked as a system, mostly. We respected each other and everyone's time except when Freya put me to sleep and brought Grayson home from the bar.

After showering and getting ready, I took the wrapped artwork from the

other bedroom, loaded them in my car, and headed to the gallery.

“Good morning, Ava.” Lucian smiled when I walked in. “No Freya today?”

“She asked me to bring them in for her. She has a busy day.” I smiled as I handed him the paintings.

“Excellent. I’ll get these hung as quickly as possible.” He reached into the top drawer behind the counter and handed me a check. “Here is the commission for the other sold paintings.”

“Thanks, Lucian. I’ll make sure she gets it. Have a good day.”

“You too, Ava.”

Lucian was under the assumption that Freya and I were sisters. We’d been doing this for the past four years, and her paintings sold faster than she could paint them.

I climbed into my car and headed to the paint store to pick up some paint samples for a living room I was redecorating for a client.

“I never would have picked those colors myself,” Colette said when she walked into the room.

I turned to her and smiled. “You wanted the room to look more open, and these colors will do just that.”

After we sat down and I showed her some furniture ideas on my laptop, I left. I was driving down the highway, listening to music, when two cars started road raging, wreaking havoc. Everything went black.

“Welcome back, Ava Williams.” Grayson smiled as he stood over me.

I was confused and had no idea what had happened.

“What happened?” I asked. “Where am I?”

“You’re in the emergency room at Cedars. You were in a car accident. You don’t remember?”

“No.” I slowly shook my head as I looked away from him.

“That’s strange. The good news is that you have a few scrapes and bruises, and you’re going to be okay.”

I turned my head and looked at him, taking note of the medical scrubs he wore. My eyes focused on his badge—Dr. Grayson Kind, Trauma Surgeon.

“You’re a doctor?” I tried to sit up, but he stopped me.

“Just relax for a bit.” He placed his hand on my shoulder. “I’ll be right back.”

“Can I get you anything?” one of the nurses asked.

“Some water.”

“Sure thing.” She smiled.

I couldn’t believe he was a doctor, and his last name was Kind. I’d wondered if he was related to Charlotte. Grayson walked back into the room, and I asked him to put the head of the bed up. He did as I asked and stared at me as a small smile framed his lips.

“I’m happy you’re okay. Imagine my surprise when they brought you in.”

“How long was I out for?”

“A couple of hours. When they brought you in, you were alert and cussing about the two drivers who were road-raging. We had to give you something to relax you. That’s why I’m surprised you don’t remember what happened.”

*Shit. Kate must have fronted when the accident happened.*

“Was anyone hurt?” I asked.

“Not seriously, believe it or not.”

“Here’s your water.” The nurse walked in and handed the cup with a straw to me.

“Thank you.” I took a sip. “Can I ask you something?”

“Of course.” He smiled.

“Do you know Dr. Charlotte Roman-Kind?”

“Yes. She’s my cousin’s wife.”

A tall and handsome man wearing blue scrubs walked into the room.

“How’s the patient?” He walked over to me and shined his penlight in my eyes.

“Ava, meet my cousin, Dr. Jackson Kind. He’s a neurosurgeon.”

“Another Dr. Kind?” I asked.

“There’s a lot of us.” Jackson smiled.

“Jackson is one of the owners of the Kind Medical Center,” Grayson spoke.

“Why do I need to see a neurosurgeon?” I asked.

“You don’t. Jackson was here at the hospital when they brought you in, so I had him come down to check you out just to make sure there wasn’t any type of head injury.” Grayson winked.

“It was nice to meet you, Ava.” Jackson extended his hand.

“You too, Dr. Kind.” I lightly shook his hand.

“I’ll see you later, cousin.” He turned and patted Grayson’s back before walking out of the room.

“When can I go home?” I stared at Grayson.

“In a couple of hours.”

“Why can’t I leave now? I feel fine.”

“I still want to observe you. Besides, my shift ends in a couple of hours, and I’m driving you home.”

“No, Grayson. I—”

“It’s not up for debate, Ava. You don’t have a car, and I know where you live.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “I want to drive you home.”

“And what if I don’t want you to?”

“Why wouldn’t you? It’s only a ride, and I’m a nice guy.”

I could hear the chatter in my head and Freya telling me to let him drive us home.

“Fine. You can drive me home.”

“Excuse me, Miss Williams.” Two police officers stepped into the room.

“Yes?”

“We were hoping you could give us some information about the accident,” one of the officers spoke.

I stared blankly at them for a moment.

“Miss Williams?”

“I’ll tell you exactly what happened, officers. The asshole in the blue Mustang and the other asshole in the red Corvette were having some kind of road rage. The Mustang was weaving in and out of traffic, and the corvette was on his ass like a bee on honey. The Corvette cut into the other lane, pulled up next to the Mustang, and quickly cut over behind the Mustang again. The asshole in the Mustang slammed on his brakes, and the Corvette hit him and spun out. I couldn’t brake fast enough. So, when my car hit him, it sent me over the median and into oncoming traffic. Both of those motherfuckers are at fault, and I want their names.”

## CHAPTER 5



Grayson

I stood there and stared at her as my brows furrowed. Her voice was completely different, as were the expressions on her face. She stared at the police officers, and when she turned to me, a softness overtook her face.

“Thank you, Miss Williams.” The police officers looked at me strangely before walking out of the room.

“Wow, that was quite a description you gave.” I smiled. “When you woke up, you said you didn’t remember the accident happening, but you just gave the officers all the details.”

“I guess I’m starting to remember.” She looked away.

“Get some rest. I’ll be back to check on you soon.” I placed my hand on hers and gave it a gentle squeeze.

Walking out of the room, I pulled my phone from my pocket and called Charlotte.

“Hey, Grayson. What’s up?”

“Your patient, Ava Williams, is in the ER. She was in a car accident. I thought you would want to know since you’re her therapist.”

“Did she tell you I was her therapist?” Charlotte asked.

“No. But I know you are. I ran into her at the medical center last week and saw her enter your office. Besides, you didn’t deny anything when Simon made that comment about her.”

“Is she okay?”

“She has a few scrapes and bruises, but she’ll be fine.”

“Okay. Thanks for letting me know.”

I went up to the surgical floor and found Jackson.

“Hey.” I walked over to him. “Listen, I won’t be able to hang out with you guys tonight.”

“Why?” His brows furrowed.

“I’m driving Ava home. Her car is totaled, and I want to make sure she gets home safely.”

“That’s very noble of you, cousin. What’s going on with you and her?” His brows furrowed.

“Nothing.”

“Need I remind you that she lured you to her apartment, slept with you, kicked your ass out immediately after, and then denied ever meeting you?”

His brow arched. “Not to mention that she gave you a fake name.”

“So did Georgia when you first met.”

“That was different.” He sighed.

“How?” I cocked my head. “Georgia had her reasons, and so did Ava. You forgave Georgia, didn’t you?”

“Well, yes, but—”

“There are no ‘buts,’ cousin. Do me a favor and tell the family I had an emergency at the hospital. I don’t want to hear shit from Gabriel or anyone else. Can you do that for me?” I placed my hand on his shoulder. “I know there were times you kept things from them because you didn’t want to hear it.”

“Maybe once or twice.” A smirk crossed his lips. “I got your back, cousin.”

“Thanks, Jackson. I owe you one.” I smiled as I walked away.

When I walked back into Ava’s room, I saw one of the paramedics walking out.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“I was giving your patient her belongings from her car. We had them in the back of the ambulance. When we put her on the stretcher, she screamed at us to grab her purse, leather bag, and laptop. It’s so bizarre.”

“What is?” I asked.

“I can say with confidence that the woman lying in that bed isn’t the same woman we brought in.”

“Well, you know accidents can rattle people. Thanks for bringing her things to her.”

“No problem.” He walked away.

I entered the room and stared at Ava, sitting on the edge of the bed.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay.” A soft smile crossed her beautiful lips.

“Are you ready to go home?”

“Yes. I’m more than ready.”

“You sit tight for a minute.” I grabbed her things. “Transport is going to wheel you out while I bring my car around.”

“Grayson, I don’t need—”

“It’s hospital policy, Ava. I have no control over that.” I gave her a wink as I walked out of the room.

Ava was sitting in the wheelchair, waiting for me, when I pulled my car up to the ER’s entrance. Climbing out, I opened the passenger side door, and when I went to help her up from the chair, she stopped me.

“I can get up just fine.” She smiled as she stood up.

“Maybe you can now, but come tomorrow morning, it’ll be a different story.”

She climbed into the car, and I shut the door.

“I can’t believe my laptop didn’t get broken in the accident,” she said as I pulled away from the hospital. “That was really nice of the paramedics to grab my things for me.”

“The paramedic told me that when they put you on the stretcher, you were screaming at them to get your stuff.” I glanced at her.

“Right. Maybe I do remember that.” She bit her bottom lip and looked out the passenger window.

When we arrived at her building, I took her things from the back seat and took the elevator to the fifth floor, where her apartment was located. Inserting the key into the lock, she opened the door, and we stepped inside.

“Thank you, Grayson, for driving me home. Maybe we’ll see each other again sometime.”

“Are you kicking me out again? Because I’m staying.”

“What?” Her brows furrowed.

“You need to eat, and I’m not going anywhere until I make sure that happens.”

“Grayson, I’m fine. I can make myself something.”

“Nah. You need your rest. What kind of food do you like? I’ll order anything you want.”

“Grayson, really—”

“Shh.” I placed my finger over her lips. “We’re having dinner together.”



“Fine. I could go for some Thai food. There’s a great place around the corner.” She walked to the kitchen, opened a drawer, and pulled out a menu. “I’ll have the Pad Almond with chicken, medium spice. Don’t forget the spring rolls. I’m going to take an Epsom salt bath, so make yourself comfortable. There’s beer in the refrigerator or hard liquor in the cabinet. It’s your choice.”

“Do you need any help?” I grinned.

“I can manage on my own.” A smirk crossed her lips.

After placing our order, I looked around her apartment, noting how beautifully decorated it was. I’d noticed it somewhat the night I was here. But I was in and out so fast that I didn’t get a chance to really take a look. Walking over to one of the end tables, I picked up a picture of her and an older man, whom I presumed was her father. My phone pinged, and when I pulled it from my pocket, I had a text message from Gabriel.

*“I’m at the hospital checking on one of my patients. There’s no emergency, and one of the nurses said you left with a woman. What the hell is going on, bro?”*

*“Ava was in a car accident and brought in by ambulance. I drove her home.”*

*“Is she okay?”*

*“A few scrapes and bruises. I just ordered us some food, and I’ll be home later.”*

*“Okay. So that you know, we’re having a brotherly chat when you get home. I’ll be waiting for you.”*

I rolled my eyes and slipped my phone into my pocket. The doorbell rang, and when I opened it, the delivery guy stood there with our food.

“Thanks.” I pulled out some cash from my wallet and handed it to him.

“You’re welcome, sir. Have a good night.”

“You too.” I shut the door.

Setting the bag of food on the kitchen counter, I opened her cabinets until I found the plates.

“Is the food here?” Ava asked as she walked in, wearing a pair of black pajama bottoms and a black tank top.

“It sure is. How was your bath?” I smiled.

“Relaxing.” She grabbed a couple of forks from the drawer, set them on the plates, and took them over to the table.

I brought the food to the table and sat down across from her.

“Did you decorate this place yourself?” I asked as I plated my food.

“Yes.” A bright smile crossed her lips.

“It’s really nice. You did a great job. You have an eye for décor.”

“I hope so since I’m an interior decorator.” She smirked.

“You are?” I cocked my head as the corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Yes, I am. Why do you seem surprised?”

“I’m not. I just wish I would have known you when I moved here. I would have had you decorate my house for me.”

“Where do you live?”

“Venice Beach. My twin brother and I moved here from Boston a couple of months ago.”

“You’re a twin?” she asked.

“Yeah. My brother’s name is Gabriel. He’s an internal medicine doctor over at the Kind Medical Center.”

“Just how many ‘Kind’ doctors are there?” Her brow arched.

“Jackson and his brothers, Conner, and Nathan, own the center. Jackson, as you know, is a neurosurgeon. His brother Conner is an orthopedic surgeon, and his brother Nathan is a plastic surgeon. Their other brother, Christian, is a cardiothoracic surgeon at Cedars. My cousin, Sebastian, has a wife named Emilia. She’s a pediatrician at the medical center, and Jackson’s wife, Georgia, is an OB/GYN/Fertility Specialist there. Also, Conner’s wife, Charlotte, is a Clinical Psychologist with a practice there as well.”

I waited to see her reaction because she knew I saw her walk into Charlotte’s office that day.

“I didn’t realize that practically the whole family worked there,” she said. “I’m sure you’re wondering why I’m seeing Charlotte. I know you saw me walk into her office that day we saw each other at the medical center.”

“The thought did cross my mind,” I said.

She got up from the table, grabbed the wine bottle, and poured a glass.

“I have some issues I’m working on,” she said as she sat back down.

“Everyone has issues, Ava. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I’m not ashamed, Grayson.” She brought the glass to her lips.

## CHAPTER 6



*A* va

“Back to your new house. Did you decorate it or have someone do it for you?” I asked to change the subject quickly.

“I had someone come in and do it for me. His name is Lars. Do you know him?”

“I do.” I smiled. “He’s excellent. I’ve done some work for him before.”

“Did you work for him?” Grayson asked.

“No. I’m a freelance interior decorator. He doesn’t like to take on smaller projects, so he contracts them out. We met a couple of years ago. He liked my portfolio and asked if I’d be interested in doing some smaller projects for him. I’d love to see what he did with your house someday.”

“I can arrange that.” A grin crossed his handsome face. “But, like I said, had I met you a couple of months ago, I would have hired you instead.”

“You’re sweet. Thank you.” I smiled as I took a sip of my wine. “So, do you and your twin brother live together?”

“No. But we do live next door to each other. We live on the beach with the rest of our family.”

“What do you mean?” I furrowed my brows.

“Let me break it down for you because it’s a lot.” He chuckled. “Our cousins, Sam, Stefan, Sebastian, and Simon, are brothers. They also have a brother named Shaun from another mother. Jackson, Conner, Nathan, and Christian are brothers and also our cousins. We all live next to each other on one stretch of the beach. They’re all married, and most of them have children. It’s one big happy Kind family over there.” He grinned. “We’re all really close and have a lot of fun.”

“Wow. That sounds really nice.”

“How about you? Do you have any siblings?”

I hated when men asked that question because I could never tell them the full truth.

“I’m an only child.”

“Have you lived in Los Angeles your whole life?” he asked.

“Yeah, I have.”

“What about your parents? I noticed that picture on your table of you and your father.”

Anxiety started to creep inside me because I wasn’t ready to tell him about me. Freya was trying so hard to front, and I stopped her.

“*No. I can handle this.*” I silently spoke to her.

“He’s a great man.” I smiled.

“And your mother?”

I knocked over my glass of wine on purpose.

“Oh shit,” I said as I got up from the table. “I’m so clumsy.”

“It’s okay. Sit down. I can clean it up.”

He grabbed a paper towel from the counter, brought it to the table, and cleaned up my mess. It was enough of a deterrence that made him forget the question he asked about my mother. After cleaning up the wine, we sat back down and finished eating.

“I’m really tired,” I said as I grabbed the plates from the table and took them over to the sink.

“It’s getting late. I should get going.” He leaned over me from behind and set the forks in the sink.

My body started to tremble. I turned and stared into his eyes.

“Thank you for driving me home and for dinner.”

“You’re welcome.” He brought his hand up to my face and slowly stroked my cheek. “I’m happy you’re okay.”

“Thanks to you.” I smiled.

“Can I get your phone number?” he asked.

“Why do you want my phone number?”

“Maybe I want to take you out to dinner one night.”

“I think I’d like that.” I bit down on my bottom lip. “Give me your phone.” I held out my hand.

He reached inside his pocket, pulled out and unlocked his phone, and handed it to me. I quickly entered my name and number into his contacts.

“There, you have my number.” I handed him his phone back and walked him to the door.

“Thanks.” A handsome smile crossed his lips. “I really want to kiss you, Ava.”

“I really want you to,” I said.

He leaned in and softly brushed his lips against mine.

“Get some rest.” He smiled as he walked out.

Shutting the door, I leaned against it and placed my fingers on my lips. I could still feel his touch, and it scared me.

I was up early the following morning and called an Uber to drive me to the car rental shop. After securing a vehicle, I drove to the hospice center, where Charles was transferred, before heading to my appointment with Charlotte.

“Ava, sweetheart.” A weak smile crossed his face.

“Hi, Charles.” I placed my hand on his.

“What on earth happened?” He stared at me, noticing the bruising on my face.

“I was in a car accident yesterday, but I’m okay.” I stared blankly at him for a moment and closed my eyes.

“Don’t let her fool you, doc. This body is very sore and stiff. Those motherfuckers need to pay for causing that accident.”

“Hello, Kate. It’s been a while.” He smiled. “What happened?”

“Two assholes were road raging like morons and caused the whole thing. I took control because I saw it coming.”

“That was noble of you, Kate, but remember what we’ve discussed before.”

“Yeah, I know, Doc, but it’s what I do. You know that. I always have.”

“And you always doing that isn’t helping her either.”

“Anyway, she met someone, and I don’t think she’s going to tell you about him. I thought you should know.”

My eyes closed again, and when I opened them, Charles was staring at me.

“Who is this man you’ve met, Ava?”

“Damn you, Kate.” I shook my head.

My phone dinged, and when I pulled it from my purse, I had a text message from an unfamiliar number.

*“Good morning. It’s Grayson. How are you feeling today?”*

A smile crossed my face.

*“Good morning. Sore and stiff, just like you said I would be.”*

*“Ah, not too bad, I hope. About that dinner. Are you free tomorrow night?”*

*“Yes. I am free tomorrow night.”*

*“Excellent. I’ll pick you up at six-thirty.”*

*“Sounds good. I’ll see you then.”*

“I take it that was him?” Charles asked.

“Yes. He’s taking me to dinner tomorrow night.”

“May I ask who this man is?”

“Dr. Grayson Kind. He’s the man Freya brought home from the bar.” I sighed.

“Kind? Is he any relation to Dr. Charlotte Roman-Kind and Dr. Christian Kind?”

“Charlotte is his cousin by marriage.”

I explained the events of our unexpected run-ins—the one at the medical center, Target, and at the hospital.

“He drove me home last night, and we had dinner together at my place. He seems like a really good man, Charles. I’m attracted to him, and I’m scared. You know my track record.”

“It’s perfectly natural to be scared, Ava. But you need to remember you were in a different place with your other relationships. You chose the wrong men based on the fear of being alone. You’ve worked hard to heal that part of yourself and are a lot stronger because of it.” He reached over, grabbed my hand, and gently squeezed it. “You deserve to live a happy and fulfilled life. If you’re interested in Dr. Kind, then see where it goes. But you have to tell him about the others. It’s not even an option.”

“I know. I’m pretty sure he thinks I’m crazy as it is.” I breathed out a laugh.

“If he did, he wouldn’t be wanting to spend time with you, would he?”



**G**rayson

When I got home from Ava’s, I found Gabriel sitting on my patio with a beer in his hand. I sighed as I opened the sliding door and sat in the

lounger next to him.

“What’s going on with you, bro?” he asked. “You know you can’t hide anything from me.”

I grabbed a beer from the table and twisted off the cap. “I don’t know, Gabriel. There’s something about her.” I tipped the bottle to my lips.

“Other than the shit she’s pulled?” His brow arched.

“Yeah.” I breathed out a laugh.

“Bro, I don’t think—”

“I know you don’t think it’s a good idea, but it’s not going to stop me from seeing her again.”

“What does she do for a living?” he asked.

“She’s an interior decorator.”

“Oh yeah? Who does she work for?”

“She’s freelance. You should see how she decorated her apartment. It’s really nice.”

“What else do you know about her?”

“She’s an only child and has lived in Los Angeles her whole life. I’ll learn more about her when I take her to dinner.”

“Has my brother caught some feelings?” The corners of his mouth slightly curved upward as his eye narrowed.

“No. Don’t be ridiculous. She’s an interesting girl. She’s complex, and you know I like figuring out complex things.”

“Are you sure that’s all it is?” he asked in a serious tone.

“Yeah. I’m sure.” I took a sip of my beer.

## CHAPTER 7



A<sup>va</sup>

“Can I ask you something, Charlotte?”

“Of course.” She smiled as she sat in her chair across from the couch.

“Charles told me that you were very ambitious to learn everything you could about the human brain. He said you had your reasons and that it wasn’t his story to tell. He also told me you’re not an expert in my condition, but he knew we’d somehow connect, and you would help me.”

“Ah.” She slowly nodded her head. “When I was twelve years old, my brother, Aiden, stabbed my parents to death in their bed. Then, he came into my room, woke me up, told me he had just killed our parents, and started stabbing me multiple times.”

“Oh my God, Charlotte.” I placed my hand over my mouth.

“Like you, I grew up in many foster homes. Nobody wanted to care for a child who had so many issues. I ended up staying in a group home until I was eighteen. I became obsessed with how the brain worked and needed to find out why my brother did what he did.”

“Did you get your answer?” I asked.

“Yes.” She smiled. “He had a condition called antisocial personality disorder. I’ve made it my mission to help treat people like him and other conditions.”

“That’s why Charles knew we’d connect,” I said.

“We’ve both suffered childhood trauma, Ava.”

“At least you’re aware of what your trauma was.” I looked down.

“Don’t worry. We’re going to pick up where Charles left off before he became ill.”



“Grayson drove me home after my accident, and we had dinner together. He texted me earlier and asked if he could take me to dinner tomorrow night.”

“How does that make you feel?” she asked.

“Good.” I smiled. “He’s a persistent man.” I breathed out a laugh.

“He’s a Kind. They’re all like that.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.



I had just slipped into my heels when I heard a knock at the door. My stomach was tied in knots, and I was nervous as hell. Opening the door, Grayson stood on the other side looking as sexy as ever.

“Hi.” His lips formed a smile. “You look beautiful.”

“Thank you.” A bashful smile crossed my lips. “Come in while I grab my purse.”

“I hope you’re hungry,” he said.

“I’m starving,” I said as I grabbed my purse from the table.

“I made reservations for us at my cousin’s restaurant. It’s called Four Kinds. Have you ever been?”

“In Venice?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“I’ve never been there but heard good things about it.”

“It’s close to my house. You mentioned you’d like to see what Lars did, so I thought I would show you afterward.”

“I’d love that.”

We left my building and climbed into his car. His alluring scent infiltrated the space as he drove us to the restaurant. When we stepped through the door, I took note of the elegantly styled place. The hostess led us to a table outside, where a waiter immediately walked over and poured our water.

“Dr. Kind.” He smiled at Grayson.

“Brandon.” Grayson nodded.

“Can I start the two of you off with something to drink?”

“I’ll have a scotch,” Grayson said.

“And I’ll have a glass of Merlot.” I smiled as I picked up my menu. “This restaurant is really nice.”

“It’s Sebastian’s pride and joy. He also owns Emilia’s in downtown L.A. and the Kind Brewhouse in Santa Monica.”

“I’ve been to Emilia’s. Excellent food,” I said.

“You’ll love the food here just as much.” He winked as the corners of his mouth curved upward.

After Brandon set our drinks in front of us, he took our order. A tall and handsome man walked over to the table when he walked away.

“Hey, cousin.” He smiled as Grayson stood up, and they lightly hugged.

“Sebastian, I’d like you to meet Ava. Ava, this is my cousin Sebastian and the owner of this fine restaurant.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Ava.” Sebastian smiled as he extended his hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Sebastian. I’ve eaten at Emilia’s, and the food is excellent.”

“Thank you. I appreciate it. I see you two have your drinks already. Is there anything else I can get you?”

“I think we’re good, cousin.” Grayson smiled.

“Okay. Let me know if you need anything.” He patted Grayson’s back and walked away.

“He seems very nice.” I grabbed a piece of bread from the breadbasket.

“He’s the best. In fact, my whole family is.” His eyes stared into mine.

“So, Dr. Grayson Kind, tell me about yourself. Start from the beginning.” I smiled as I sipped my wine.

“Well, I was born a twin and raised in Hawaii by our father. Before you ask, I never knew my mother. She passed away from a drug overdose when we were babies.”

“Grayson, I’m so sorry.”

“Thank you. Our father raised us on his own until we were eighteen and went off to Harvard.”

“Harvard, eh?” I grinned.

“Yeah.” He chuckled in a way that made him sexier than he already was.

“You said you just moved here a couple of months ago. May I ask why you left Boston?”

“It’s a complicated story. We moved here to be close to our family. Before our father passed away, he confessed to us that he wasn’t an only child, as he led us to believe our entire lives.”

As he was in the middle of telling his story, a man and woman walked over to the table.

“Hey, cousin.” The handsome man smiled as he fist-bumped him. The moment he turned and looked at me, the smile on his face fell flat.

“Ava, I’d like you to meet my other cousin, Simon, and his wife, Grace.”

“It’s so nice to meet you.” Grace grinned as she extended her hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too.” I lightly shook her hand. “Simon, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, you too. We’ll let you two get back to your dinner,” Simon spoke as he looked at Grayson.

“Look at that. You already met two more of my cousins.” Grayson grinned.

Grace and Simon were seated at a table not too far from us. The way Simon kept staring at me from his table started to unnerve me. I could feel someone starting to front, but I couldn’t tell who it was.

“I need to use the ladies’ room.” I softly smiled as I stood up from my chair.

I went into the bathroom, gripped the sink, and stared at myself in the mirror before closing my eyes. When they opened, I smiled as I ran my fingers through my hair. Opening the door, I saw Detective Simon Kind standing across from the bathroom, staring at me.

“Kate Williams,” he spoke.

“Good to see you again, detective.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“I don’t know what kind of game you’re playing, but it’s going to stop right now.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“First, you tell my cousin that your name is Freya, and then you lied to him again and told him it’s Ava. This is my family you’re fucking with, and I’m not having it. So, let me tell you what’s going to happen. You’re returning to the table and telling Grayson you’re not feeling well. When he drives you home, you’re going to say goodbye, delete his number from your phone, and never see him again. If you don’t, I’ll tell him about that little incident two years ago with your ex.”

“He deserved it, and you know it.” My brow arched.

“Your game is over.” He pointed at me and walked away.

*My job here was done.*

I opened my eyes and found myself standing outside of the ladies’ room. Walking back to the table, I sat down and placed the napkin on my lap.

“Is everything okay?” Grayson asked.

“Yeah.” I smiled as I picked up my glass of wine.

## CHAPTER 8



*A*<sup>va</sup>

I didn't know what was up with Grayson's cousin, Simon, but something told me that he knew me or one of us. I didn't know what to make of it but decided to ignore his death stares. After we finished eating, Grayson took me to his home.

"See all these houses right here." He pointed as we drove down his street.

"Yeah."

"These are my cousin's houses. And the one to the right," he pointed as we pulled into the driveway, "is my brother's."

"They all look so nice," I said as we climbed out of the car.

"They are." He smiled at me while he unlocked the front door.

When we stepped inside the foyer, the lights automatically turned on. Three steps led up to the living room, where high ceilings, light gray walls, and strategically placed oversized windows with a spectacular ocean view complemented the space.

"I bet the light that filters through those windows during the day is spectacular," I said.

"It truly is." He grinned. "You might not want to take my word for it and see for yourself."

"Maybe I will." I chewed my bottom lip.

The first floor of his home was an open concept where the kitchen, dining room, and living room seamlessly flowed together. His kitchen featured a fifteen-foot center Italian marble island, custom white cabinets, top-of-the-line appliances, a built-in coffee maker, and a walk-in pantry.

"This kitchen is every woman's dream." I ran my hand across the Italian

marble as he grabbed a bottle of wine.

I walked over to the large glass double sliding door and stared out at the beautiful patio and infinity pool. Grayson walked over and handed me my drink.

“Thank you.” I smiled. “Lars did a great job. Everything is on point with the décor, and I wouldn’t change a thing.”

“Are you sure?” His brow arched.

“Yes. Why?” I laughed.

“I don’t know. I thought maybe it would have been nice to have you redo a few things.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“Like?” I asked.

“I haven’t a clue.” He chuckled. “If you’ll follow me down this hallway, there’s a bathroom and my office. The bedrooms and more bathrooms are upstairs, along with a rooftop deck. If you would like, we can take our drinks up there. You have to see the view.”

“I’d like that.” A smile crossed my lips.

He grabbed the bottle of wine and led me up to the rooftop deck, where two loungers sat with a small round table between them.

“Wow. This view is incredible.”

“It’s my favorite spot in the house.” He stood next to me as we stared out into the moonlit water.

“It must have been hard for you to move from Hawaii to Boston.”

“It was. My brother and I gave up a lot: the incredible weather, surfing, the beautiful scenery. Don’t get me wrong, Boston is nice, but I never got used to the cold and snow. I’m happy to be back somewhere without that shit.” He chuckled.

He set his glass down on the table and brought his hand up to my cheek.

“You are a very beautiful woman, Ava Williams.” He softly stroked it. “You caught my attention the moment you turned and looked at me after I caused you to spill your drink all over you.”

Our eyes stayed locked on each other for a moment until he dipped his head, and his soft lips brushed against mine. He was so sexy and charming, and I couldn’t help but want him. I returned his kiss, and he looked at me with his hungry but unsure eyes. He was waiting for me to give him the signal to take me to his bedroom. I kicked off my shoes and smiled. He took hold of my hand and led me from the rooftop deck and down to his bedroom.

His hands reached around and unzipped my dress. He’d made love to me

before, but since I had no memory of that night, this was my first time with him. Fear crept inside me because I was afraid that Freya was way better than I was, and he'd be disappointed.

He slowly pushed my dress down and onto the floor. My fingers unbuttoned his shirt as I slid it off his shoulders, revealing his muscular body. He wrapped one arm around me and gently laid me down on the bed. His lips met mine for a moment until they made their way across my neck, and his hand traveled down my torso. My skin trembled under his touch as shivers ran down my spine. His lips met mine again while his hand slipped down the front of my panties. I gasped when he dipped a finger inside, and low moans escaped him.

“God, you're so wet.”

His mouth left mine and made its way down to my breasts. His lips puckered around each of my hardened nipples before moving down my torso. He wrapped his fingers around the sides of my panties and pulled them down. Spreading my legs, his mouth explored me in a way I had never been explored before. Pleasurable moans escaped me as his tongue worked its magic around me. My fingers tangled in his hair as an orgasm erupted. He lifted his head with a smile, stood up, and took down his pants. He was incredibly blessed in the goods department, and I knew I was in for a wild ride.

After putting on a condom, he made his way back to me, one soft kiss at a time, up my body. When his lips met mine for a passionate kiss, he thrust inside me slowly until every inch of him was buried deep inside. We both gasped at the feeling as my arms wrapped securely around him. His thrusting increased, as did the sounds of satisfaction that came from us.

“You have no idea how much I wanted this again after that night,” he spoke breathlessly.

I didn't say a word because I couldn't. Damn Freya for taking that night away from me. He pulled out, rolled me on my belly, and took me from behind. His hands gripped my ass as he thrust in and out of me with long and rapid strokes. Another orgasm was brewing, and he felt it.

“That's it, baby. Come with me. I'm so close.”

I let out a howl as my body shook, and the wave overtook me. Groans rumbled in his throat as he slowed down and exploded inside me. He leaned forward and pressed his lips against my shoulder as my heart rapidly beat.

He pulled out of me, removed the condom, and tossed it in the bathroom.

I lay there naked, and a bright smile crossed his face when he returned to the bedroom.

“You’re staying the night,” he said as he pulled back the covers on his side. “No argument. You may have kicked me out of your apartment that night, but I’m not doing that. I want you here, in my bed, with me, all night.”

The corners of my mouth curved upward as I climbed off the bed and under the covers.

“No argument from me.” I snuggled against his warm body. “Was it good for you?” My fingers softly stroked his chest.

“It was amazing. I hope it was for you.”

“It was.” I lifted my head and smiled at him.



## CHAPTER 9



Grayson

“Good. I’m happy you enjoyed it.” My grip around her beautiful body tightened. “You know, I still don’t know much about you. It seemed like we spent all of dinner talking about me.”

“I love hearing about you and what makes Dr. Grayson Kind tick.” A bright smile crossed her lips.

“I want to know what makes Ava Williams tick. I want to know about your childhood and what made you want to become an interior decorator.”

“My childhood wasn’t that great. As you know, I’m seeing Charlotte.”

“So? A lot of people see therapists. I’m sure I could use some sessions with Charlotte myself.” I winked to try and make her feel more comfortable. “Do you want to tell me why you’re seeing her?”

“Not really.” She crinkled her nose.

“That’s okay. I get it. And I respect your decision.”

“I appreciate it, Grayson.”

“But I want you to tell me what made you want to become an interior decorator.”

“I like helping people put together their vision for their space. I love to transform an empty room into something beautiful—the same with a room that’s already decorated. I love furniture and décor and have a knack for putting things together. A few clients hire me consistently to transform their homes according to the seasons, especially fall and Christmas.”

“It sounds like you’re doing well for yourself.”

“I am.” She laid her head on my chest.

“We better get some sleep,” I said. “Goodnight, Ava.”

“Goodnight, Grayson.”

I lay there and stared at her while she slept. She was so fucking beautiful, and tonight was everything I hoped it would be. Even though I did respect her decision not to tell me why she was seeing Charlotte, I couldn't help but wonder what I was getting myself into. After Claudia, back in Boston, the last thing I needed was to be leading on another woman who would create problems for me. Maybe I needed to pull back for a while and seriously consider what I was doing.

The following morning, I awoke, and Ava wasn't in bed. Pulling on a pair of sweatpants, I went downstairs and found her sitting out on the patio, wrapped in a blanket, sipping a cup of coffee. After making myself a cup, I joined her.

“There you are.” I smiled. “Good morning.” I kissed the top of her head.

“Good morning. I didn't want to wake you,” she said. “I hope you don't mind?” She held up her cup.

“Not at all. Help yourself to anything in my kitchen.” I brought the cup to my lips.

“After I finish this, I'll head out.”

“And how are you getting home?” I arched my brow.

“Ah, that's right. You drove.” She laughed in such a cute way that my cock started to rise.

“I did. So, when I'm ready, I'll drive you home.”

“I can just call an Uber.”

“What kind of gentleman would I be if I let you do that?”

“Hey,” A man's voice spoke as he walked over.

“Gabriel, this is Ava. Ava, this is my brother, Gabriel.”

“The twin.” She smiled.

“The one and only.” Gabriel extended his hand. “It's nice to meet you, Ava.”

“You too, Gabriel. I'll let you two talk. Would you mind if I used your shower?” She looked at me.

“Not at all.”

“Thanks.” She got up from the lounge and went inside.

“I can't believe you walked over here, bro.” I smacked his arm.

“Why? I wanted to meet the infamous Ava/Freya or whatever the hell she's calling herself.”

“Enough,” I said.

“Sorry. That was out of line. Listen, Grayson. I just worry. I can totally see why you’re into her. She’s gorgeous but also a liar, which is the one thing you hate.”

“Yeah, I know.” I sighed as I sipped my coffee. “I asked her last night why she was seeing Charlotte, and she wouldn’t tell me. But it seems like everyone is in therapy these days. It doesn’t mean shit.”

“But Charlotte isn’t just an ordinary therapist. She deals with a lot of complex cases. Besides, have you forgotten how unstable Claudia was back in Boston?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“I’m just trying to look out for my brother. We’re always there for each other, and if the situation were reversed, you’d be saying the same thing to me. Just be careful.” He placed his hand on my shoulder and stood up. “I’ll talk to you later.”

After finishing my coffee, I went inside and upstairs to check on Ava. She was out of the shower and already dressed. My pager that was on the nightstand went off. Walking over, I grabbed it.

“Shit. The hospital needs me to come in. I can drop you off on my way.”

“Seriously, Grayson. I can call an Uber. I don’t mind.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Just give me a minute to get ready, and we’ll leave.”

I pulled up to the curb of her building.

“I had a great time last night.” I smiled.

“So did I. Thank you for dinner and showing me your beautiful home.”

“You’re welcome. Thank you for staying the night.” I brought my hand up to her cheek. “I’ll call you later.”

“Sounds good.” She reached over and kissed my lips before climbing out of the car.

I took in a deep breath as I watched her walk into the building and then headed to the hospital.

## CHAPTER 10



*A*<sup>va</sup>

I stepped into my apartment with a smile on my face. Dr. Grayson Kind was different from any man I'd ever known, and after last night, I could safely say that the feelings emerging inside me were ones I'd never experienced before. It felt good, but it also scared the shit out of me. There were too many factors at play. One was that his cousin was Charlotte, my therapist. Another was the fact that if things were to progress between us, I'd have to tell him about my family, my system. He deserved to know the truth about me. My biggest fear was how he would handle it and how his family would handle it.

It had been a couple of days, and I hadn't heard from him. He told me when he dropped me off the other day, he would call that night. I hadn't stopped thinking about him and kept looking at my phone more than I should have. I could sit and make up excuses for why he didn't call or text all day, but I wasn't going down that road.

I was at a client's house looking at online furniture with her when my phone rang. Pulling it from my purse, I noticed it was from the hospice center where Charles was.

"Excuse me. I have to take this call," I said to Valerie as I stood up and walked into the foyer. "Hello."

"Is this Ava Williams?" A sweet voice on the other end asked.

"Yes. This is she."

"Miss Williams, I'm calling about Dr. Charles Lenox. We need you to come to the hospice center as soon as possible. He's asking for you."

I could tell by the sympathetic sound of her voice that something was

wrong.

“I’m on my way. Thank you for calling.” I ended the call and walked back into the living room. “Valerie, I’m sorry, but I have to go. It’s an emergency.”

“I hope everything is okay, Ava. Don’t worry. We can look at furniture another time.”

“Thank you for understanding. I’ll be in touch.” I grabbed my laptop and my purse and flew out the door.

When I arrived at the hospice center, I walked into his room, where his nurse, Devon, was checking his vitals.

“He’s been asking for you,” she spoke.

“I came as soon as I got the call.”

I set my purse down, walked over to his bedside, and took hold of his hand. His eyes slowly opened as he stared at me.

“Ava,” he whispered.

“Charles.” I lightly squeezed his hand.

Devon moved the recliner closer to the bed for me to sit down.

“Thank you, Devon.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll leave you two alone.” She walked out of the room.

“I’m being called home, but I need to make sure you’re okay before I go.” He could barely get out the words.

“I’m fine.” I softly smiled to reassure him. “All is well with me. You have nothing to worry about. But what am I going to do without you?”

“You’re going to go on and live your life the best way you know how. Promise me something.”

“What?” I asked.

“That you’ll continue to see Charlotte and let her help you and the others.”

“I promise I will, Charles.” Tears sprung to my eyes.

Suddenly, he let out a gasp, and the monitors started beeping. The nurses ran into the room as tears streamed down my face.

“Charles, no.” I sobbed. “Not yet.”

“I’m sorry, Ava,” Devon said as she turned off the monitors. “He’s at peace now and no longer suffering. If you want, you can stay with him a little longer.” She placed her hand on my shoulder.

I lay my head on his arm as my hand still gripped his. A headache started to emerge, so I closed my eyes.



Freya

I opened my eyes, took in a deep breath, and stood from the chair.

“I’m sorry, Charles. Rest in peace.” I pressed my lips against his forehead.

Walking out of the center, I climbed into the car and drove home. I would have to take over for a while. Pulling my phone out, I dialed Charlotte’s office number.

“Dr. Roman-Kind’s office. How can I help you?”

“Would it be possible to speak with Dr. Kind? I have some news to share with her regarding a friend of hers.”

“May I ask who’s calling?”

“Freya Williams.”

“Let me see if she’s available.”

“Freya?” Charlotte picked up the phone.

“Hello, Charlotte. I just wanted to inform you that Dr. Charles Lenox passed away today.”

“Oh my gosh. I’m so sorry. Can you come to the office to see me at two o’clock? I’d like to speak with you.”

“Of course. I’ll see you then, Charlotte.”

After taking a shower, I did my makeup the way I liked it and put on my auburn-colored wig.

“That’s better.” I smiled as I stared at myself in the mirror.

Grabbing my purse, I left the apartment, climbed into my car, and headed to the Kind Medical Center. When I reached Charlotte’s office, I opened the door and stepped inside, where I saw her standing at the reception desk.

“Freya?” She stared at me.

“It’s good to see you, Charlotte.”

“Let’s go to my office,” she said. “Have a seat.” She gestured to the couch. “I’m so sorry to hear about Charles.”

“Thank you. We appreciate it. Ava was with him until he took his last breath, and she fell to pieces. Poor girl.”

“Is that why you decided to front?” Charlotte asked.

“Yes. She can’t handle his death right now. She needs time to process it without having to worry about the other stuff. Charles doesn’t have any

family, so when he found out he was dying, he made all of the funeral arrangements himself. His attorney is in charge and will notify the funeral home of his passing. As soon as he calls me and tells me when the funeral is, I'll let you know if you would like to attend."

"I would appreciate that. Thank you. I do have to tell you that I like your look, Freya."

"Thank you, Charlotte." I smiled. "This is how I normally look when I have full control over the body."

"How long do you plan on having control?" she asked.

"Until things with Charles is settled. I can handle things more clearly than Ava."

"And how are the others?"

"Kate is trying to control her anger. Even though she and Charles didn't get along at first, she grew to love him. Little Luna is in her room crying—poor child. Ophelia is trying to console her like any mother would. I'm not sure where Seraphina is."

"I have yet to meet them," Charlotte spoke.

"You will in due time. Anyway, I have to go." I stood up from the couch.

"Freya, wait. You really need to let Ava attend the funeral. In fact, I can pick you up, and we can go together."

"That's nice of you. Perhaps that can be arranged. I'll be in touch." I walked out of her office.

## CHAPTER 11



Grayson

I hadn't reached out to Ava like I said I would because I'd given a lot of thought to what Gabriel said. But the truth was, she was on my mind non-stop the past week. No matter what I did or how busy I was, I was thinking about her.

I had some spare time at work, so I pulled my phone out and texted her.

*"Hi. I'm sorry I haven't been in touch. Life's been really busy. How are you?"*

I didn't think she'd respond immediately, but I still heard nothing from her as the hours passed. After my shift ended, I climbed into my car and sent her another message.

*"Hey. You okay? I'd like to see you again."*

When I arrived home, I went upstairs and changed my clothes, grabbed a beer from the refrigerator, and headed down to the beach where my brother and cousins were.

"It's about time." Conner smiled. "Say hi to your cousin Grayson, Bella." He took her arm and lifted it in the air.

"Hi, baby girl." I smiled as I waved at her.

"What about me?" Conner asked.

"What about you? You're invisible now. All we see is your sweet baby girl." I grinned.

He shot me a look, and we all laughed.

"Is my brother still at the hospital?" Jackson asked.

"Yeah. He got pulled into an emergency surgery just as I was leaving." I pulled out my phone and looked at it—still nothing from Ava.



As we all were talking and drinking our beers, I kept glancing at my phone.

“Are you expecting a call or something?” Gabriel asked.

“I think I fucked up.” I sighed.

“With whom, when, and where?” Nathan laughed.

“Ava. I told her that I'd call her that night when I drove her home last week. I didn't, and I sent her a couple of text messages today, and she's not responding.” I tipped the bottle to my lips.

“Since when are you bothered by that?” Gabriel's brows furrowed.

“I don't know.” I shrugged.

“Bro, we talked about this and her,” he said.

“Talked about what?” Sam asked.

“The fact that Ava lied to him from the start,” Gabriel spoke.

“Grayson, Gabriel is right. It's best you stay away from her,” Simon said. “Listen, man. There's something you should know.”

“What is it?” I stared at him.

“I met her two years ago, and at that time, she said her name was Kate. A domestic dispute was called into the station, and I just happened to be in the same apartment building on another case, so they asked if I could check it out. When I went up to the apartment and knocked on the door, she answered. When I stepped inside, her boyfriend was lying on the ground in rough shape and barely conscious. He was bleeding, broken ribs, and beaten up pretty badly. The furniture in the place was practically destroyed.”

“What?” My brows furrowed.

“She said it was self-defense because he was beating her.”

“Did she have marks on her to prove it?” I asked.

“Yeah. Unfortunately, she did. He wouldn't press charges, and neither would she, so there was nothing we could do. When I asked her why she didn't want to press assault charges, she said that he'd learned his lesson and they were never seeing each other again. I don't know, but the dude seemed scared of her.”

“And she told you her name was Kate?” I asked.

“Yeah, she did. She has some mad ninja skills or something because that guy she beat up was pretty big.”

“But that night at the restaurant,” I said. “She acted like she'd never met you.”

“To be fair, she didn't seem like the same person I met two years ago

until I saw her coming out of the bathroom.”

“What do you mean?” Sam asked.

“I confronted her, called her Kate, and she said it was nice to see me again. But something’s been bothering me since that night, and I can’t seem to shake it off.”

“Like what?” Shaun asked.

“Her voice and demeanor were completely different from when I met her at the table.”

“How do you mean?” Jackson asked.

“I can’t put my finger on it. But she seemed like two different people. I don’t know how else to explain it.”

“Were you drunk?” Sebastian laughed. “I thought she seemed very nice.”

“No, douchebag. I wasn’t drunk. Anyway, I just thought you should know, cousin. That woman is bad news, and I’d stay as far away from her as possible.”

“Stay away from who?” Charlotte walked over, and Conner’s grip around Isabella tightened.

“Your patient, Ava, or whatever her name is,” Simon said. “That chick has some serious issues.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Simon,” she said.

“Oh, but I do. She calls herself Kate, and two years ago, she beat up her ex-boyfriend. The guy was in rough shape, Charlotte. It kind of reminds me of what Grace can do to someone.”

“You’re all going to stop discussing my patient right now. Come on, sweetheart.” She went to take Isabella from Conner, and he turned away from her.

“Just a little longer, babe,” he said. “She loves sitting out here with us. Don’t you, princess?”

“I have to change her and give her a bottle. So, hand her over.”

“Fine.” He held her up and kissed her cheek. “Daddy will be home to see you soon. Don’t let her go to sleep before I get home.”

“I’ll try my best, Conner.” She sighed. “Don’t forget I have to leave early in the morning for that funeral, so you’ll have the baby all to yourself.”

“Oh yeah. That’s right.” Conner grinned.

“Whose funeral is she going to?” Nathan asked.

“One of her professors passed away,” Conner replied.

I grabbed my phone and stood up from my chair. “I’m going to head

home. It's been a long day."

"Oh, come on, bro. Don't go. It's still early," Gabriel said.

"I'll see you guys tomorrow." I walked back to my house.

As I was grabbing another beer from the refrigerator, the sliding door opened, and Simon walked in.

"Listen, Grayson. I'm really sorry."

"Don't be. You're just looking out for my best interest."

"You bet I am." He placed his hand on my shoulder. "If you developed feelings for her—"

"I haven't. I just felt bad because I said I'd call, and I didn't. That's all. Like you and everybody else said, she's nothing but a liar. We had our fun, and that's it."

"Are you sure that's it?" His eye narrowed.

"Hell yeah, that's it. Do you not know me by now?" I smirked.

"I don't know. Do I?" He cocked his head. "I thought I knew my brothers when they had the same look on their faces when they met their wives."

"Get out of here." I laughed. "She really beat that guy up?"

"To a pulp. It was crazy." He patted my back and walked out.

I leaned against the island, sipped my beer, and thought about what Simon said. I believed him because he had no reason to lie to me. But I couldn't believe Ava could do that to someone. Shit.



*F*reya

There was a knock at the door, and when I opened it, Charlotte stood there.

"Ava?" She smiled.

"No, Charlotte. It's still me, Freya. Come in."

"I'm sorry. It's just you're not wearing your auburn hair."

"Well, as much as I wanted to dress as myself, I gave some thought to what you said about letting Ava attend the funeral. I've done my part, and now I need you to do yours. She's going to need you when I go back inside."

"And I'll be here for her. I'm here for all of you."

"We appreciate it, but we're fine. We better get going." I grabbed my purse.



A<sup>va</sup>

When I opened my eyes, I found myself standing in the cemetery as words were being said about Charles. Looking over, I saw Charlotte next to me.

“Welcome back.” She hooked her arm around mine.

Tears streamed down my face as they lowered his casket into the ground.

“I can’t believe he’s gone.” I wiped my tears. “How long was I gone for?”

“About a week.” Her grip around my arm tightened. “Freya—”

“Yeah, I know. She was giving me some time. Thank you for coming, Charlotte.”

“You’re welcome. I wouldn’t have missed it.”

“Excuse me, Ava?” Mr. Dilbert walked over.

“Hi, Mr. Dilbert. Charlotte, this is Mr. Dilbert, Charles’s attorney. Mr. Dilbert, this is Dr. Charlotte Roman-Kind.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Dr. Kind.” He extended his hand. “I’m glad you’re here as well. I can kill two birds with one stone. Ava, would you and Dr. Kind mind coming back to my office with me? There’s something I need to discuss with the two of you.”

“We’ll meet you there, Mr. Dilbert,” Charlotte said.

“Perfect.” He pulled a business card from his pocket. “Here’s the address.”

We climbed into Charlotte’s car and drove to Mr. Dilbert’s office. When we arrived, we took the elevator up to the tenth floor and entered his practice. His secretary took us to a conference room and told us that Mr. Dilbert would be in to see us soon.

“Thank you both for coming.” Mr. Dilbert stepped into the room with a folder in his hand.

“What is this about?” I asked.

“Dr. Lenox’s will.” He took a seat at the table. “Dr. Kind, Charles left you a collection of his books. He said you always admired them in his office. He wanted you to have them as a token of his appreciation for continuing on with Ava.” He smiled.

“Wow. I don’t know what to say.”

I reached over, placed my hand on hers, and gave her a small smile.

“Ava, Charles has left you everything else. The money from the sale of his condo, his life insurance policy, and his bank accounts.”

“You can’t be serious,” I said.

“I am. Besides a few friends, he didn’t have any family. You’ve always been like a daughter to him. He wanted to make sure you were taken care of before he passed. All the funds will be deposited into your bank account in a few days. As soon as the check for the life insurance comes in, I’ll give you a call.”

After Charlotte dropped me off at my apartment, I pulled my phone from my purse and went through my text messages to see if I’d missed anything important. Freya answered all of my messages from my clients. She was always good at keeping up with my business when she was out. I noticed I had a couple of messages from Grayson that were left unanswered. It was best that I left them that way.

## CHAPTER 12



Grayson

I went up to the rooftop for a cup of coffee. When I stepped off the elevator, I saw Christian sitting at one of the tables. Grabbing a cup, I walked over and sat across from him.

“Hey.” He smiled. “What’s up?”

“Nothing much.” I sighed.

“Have you heard from Ava yet?”

“No, and I don’t think I will. I just can’t believe what Simon told me.”

“I heard about that,” he said.

“The more I think about her, the angrier I get.”

“Then you need to put it to rest by going to see her and getting some answers. Here’s what I think.” A smirk crossed his lips. “I think you’re falling for her.”

“No, I’m not.” I brought the cup to my lips.

“You can’t fool me, cousin. It was only a matter of time.” His pager went off. “Shit. I have to go. We’ll talk later.” He stood up, threw his cup in the trash can, and walked away.

I sighed as I ran my hand down my face. Maybe Christian was right. I needed to find exactly who this woman was.

I drove to her apartment after I left the hospital. I didn’t know if she was home or not, but I took my chances. Entering her building, I took the elevator up to the fifth floor and knocked on her door.

“Grayson, what are you doing here?”

“We need to talk. Can I come in?”

“Now isn’t really a—”

“Too bad, Ava. I sent you a couple of text messages, and you never responded. We need to talk.”

She sighed as she gestured for me to come inside.

“Can I get you something to drink?” she asked as I followed her into the kitchen.

“No, thanks.”

She pulled out a bottle of wine and poured some into a glass.

“Why didn’t you respond to my messages?” I asked.

“I’ve been busy, Grayson. Just like you were too busy to call me that night like you said you would. Then I don’t hear from you for a week, and you come over here wanting to know why I didn’t respond to your messages?”

“I’m sorry I didn’t call. It’s just—”

“Just what?”

“Simon told me about your encounter outside of the bathroom at Four Kinds.”

“What encounter?”

“Oh, come on, Ava.” My voice raised. “Enough with the fucking lies already.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. But I do know that I don’t think he likes me. He kept glaring at me from across the restaurant that night.”

“Who’s Kate?”

“What?” Her eyes widened.

“Simon told me that he responded to a call at some apartment building two years ago. When he arrived, you were there, and your ex-boyfriend was almost beaten to death on the floor by you. You told him your name was Kate.”

She brought her hands up and covered her face.

“So, it’s true?” I asked.

“You need to leave, Grayson.”

“I’m not going anywhere until I get the truth, Ava. You have done nothing but lie to me since the night I met you in the bar. If there’s one thing I don’t tolerate, it’s liars. I’ve been lied to enough in my life. Now tell me the fucking truth!” I shouted.



A<sup>va</sup>

I could feel Kate wanting to come out as I stared into his angry eyes, but I stopped her. Walking over to the refrigerator, I pulled out a bottle of beer, twisted off the cap, and handed it to him.

“If you want to know the truth, then you’re going to need this.” I went over to the couch, and he followed. “I never once lied to you, Grayson.”

“Yeah, sure.” He breathed out a laugh. “If you think I’m going to sit here while you spew more lies, you’re crazy.” He stood up from the couch, set his beer on the coffee table, and began to walk away.

“Freya and Kate are a part of me.”

He stopped dead in his tracks and slowly turned around.

“What?” His eyes narrowed.

“I have a condition called dissociative identity disorder. Being a doctor, I’m sure you’ve heard of it.”

“I’ve heard of it.” He walked over to the couch and sat down next to me.

“When you approached me that day at the medical center, and I told you that we’d never met, I wasn’t lying. You were with Freya that night. She fronted and brought you back here. When I woke up the next morning, I had no memory of what happened. My only memory was you bumping into me and me spilling my drink all over my dress. After that, I couldn’t remember a thing. As for Simon, I never saw him outside the bathroom at Four Kinds. Kate must have come forth and talked to him because I had no idea she’d done what she did. I remember waking up one day a couple of years ago, and I had lost a chunk of time. I had a few bruises on my face and arms but had no idea where they came from. Then I looked at my journal, and Kate had written down that Gary was bad news, and he was never going to hurt us again. She left out the part of beating him up. I never saw or heard from him again.”

“You’re serious, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I’m serious. You can talk to Charlotte about my condition.” I got up from the couch, picked up the picture of Charles and I, and handed it to him. “This is Dr. Charles Lenox. He was like a father to me and a dear friend. He was also my psychiatrist. I’d been seeing him for ten years. He was the only one who believed and diagnosed me. A few months ago, he was diagnosed with congestive heart failure and was rapidly deteriorating. He reached out to Charlotte and asked her to take me on as a patient. He just recently passed away.”



“I’m so sorry, Ava. I had no idea. Is that whose funeral Charlotte had to go to?”

“Yes. We went together. I know this is a lot to take in, and I wouldn’t blame you if you walked out that door and never looked back. But I do want to tell you that I don’t want you to feel sorry for me because I’m a survivor, not a victim. Once I was diagnosed, I finally understood why I had all the issues I had growing up. I finally got to meet my alters, and over the past ten years, we’ve worked hard together as a system.”

“How many alters are there?” he asked.

“There’s Freya, Kate, Luna, Ophelia, and Seraphina.”

“Simon told me that at the restaurant that night, he felt like he was talking to two different people. He said that your voice and demeanor were completely different as Kate.”

“That’s because they are their own person with their own lives and their own looks. They’ve protected me since I was a child.”

“What happened to you?” he asked as he reached over and took hold of my hand.

“All I know is that my mother was a very bad person, and I was taken away from her when I was six years old. I don’t hold many of the traumatic memories. The others do and haven’t been willing to share with me. It’s something Dr. Lenox and I have been working on since we first met. I should let you know that I didn’t respond to your text messages because I wasn’t here. Freya was for the last week or so. I last remember sitting with Charles as he took his last breath. Then, when I woke up, I was at his funeral, standing next to Charlotte. Freya’s job is to step in if I’m feeling overwhelmed. She knew how hard I would take it when Charles died, so she took over and handled the day-to-day things.”

“Does anyone know about your condition?” he asked.

“I have a few very close friends who know. I don’t go around telling everyone I meet that I have D.I.D. But I’m not ashamed of it. It’s hard for people to understand it. I appreciate you coming over, but it’s getting late, and I have to be up early to meet with a client in the morning.”

“Okay.” He stood up from the couch. “Thank you for telling me, Ava. I know that must have been hard for you.” He took hold of my hand and helped me from the couch.

“Well, I really didn’t have a choice, did I?” A smirk crossed my lips. “I like you, Grayson, and I hated the fact that you thought I’d done nothing but

lie to you.” I walked him to the door.

He turned and pressed his lips against my forehead. “I’ll be in touch.”

“Yeah, okay.” I gave him a soft smile.

As soon as he walked out, I shut the door, sunk to the ground, and hugged my knees. After tonight, I needed to accept the fact that I’d probably never see him again.

## CHAPTER 13



Grayson

I pulled into Conner's driveway, walked around the back, and stepped through the sliding door.

"Hey." Conner smiled.

"Hey. Is Charlotte around? I need to speak with her."

"Yeah. Hey, babe? Grayson is here and needs to talk to you," he shouted up the stairs.

"Hey, Grayson." Charlotte smiled as she handed Isabella over to Conner. "What's up?"

"Is it true about Ava?"

"Is what true? And you know I can't talk about my patient with you."

"I just left her apartment. She told me about her dissociative identity disorder. She said I can talk to you about it."

"She told you?" Her brow arched.

"Yes. She didn't go into detail, but she told me about Freya, Kate, Ophelia, Luna, and Seraphina. She also told me about Dr. Lenox passing away and how you went to the funeral with her."

"Wait a second. Ava is the patient Dr. Lenox wanted you to take over?" Conner asked. "She has D.I.D.?"

"I cannot talk about this, and both of you know it!"

"That's pretty cool. I knew someone in college that had it," Conner said.

"You did?" Charlotte looked at him.

"Yeah. His name was Darrin. Well, it was really Erica, but Darrin was one of her alters. Cool guy. Wait a second. That's what you've been researching all this time, isn't it?"

“Yes, Conner.”

“You’re not specialized in that area, Charlotte. Why would Dr. Lenox want you to take Ava on as a patient?”

“Are you saying that I’m incapable of treating someone with D.I.D., Conner?”

“Nope. I’m not saying that at all. You are a highly intelligent woman and an excellent therapist.” He kissed her forehead. “Say goodnight to Mommy, princess. And to your cousin, Grayson.”

“Goodnight, sweetheart.” I smiled as he took her upstairs.

“If Ava told you, that means she trusts you,” Charlotte said.

“I really didn’t give her a choice.” I sighed. “I was angry about her lying and then what Simon told me. I wanted to know what kind of game she was playing, and I wanted the truth.”

“And now you have the truth.” She placed her hand on my arm. “What you do with that truth is up to you. You know I can’t say anymore.”

“I know. Thanks, Charlotte. I appreciate it.”

I went home, poured myself a scotch, and texted Gabriel.

*“I don’t see your car in the driveway. Where are you?”*

*“Still at the medical center trying to find out what’s wrong with a patient of mine.”*

*“I need to talk to you when you get home. It’s important.”*

*“I’ll be leaving here shortly and come over. Are you okay?”*

*“Yeah. I just need my brother.”*

After pouring myself a scotch, I went into my office and sat behind my desk. Turning on my computer, I started researching dissociative identity disorder. Leaning back in my chair, I sipped my scotch and thought about the time Ava was brought into the hospital. I didn’t give much thought about it then, but now that I knew the truth, things started to make sense about her behavior.

“There you are,” Gabriel said as he walked into my office. “What’s going on?” He sat in the chair across from my desk.

“I went to Ava’s apartment after leaving the hospital.”

“And?”

“I found out the truth about her.” I tipped the glass to my lips.

“Okay. So, what’s up with her?”

“She has dissociative identity disorder.” I set my empty glass down.

Gabriel’s brows furrowed as he stared at me. “Wow. I don’t know what to

say, bro.”

“Freya and Kate are two of her alters.”

“How many does she have?” he asked.

“From what she said, there are five different people living inside her.”

“Damn. You know that happens when a child has suffered extreme trauma.”

“I know. She doesn’t remember much of her childhood at all. She said all she knows is that her mother was a very bad person.”

He sat there and shook his head. “Do you believe her?”

“Yeah, I do. Charlotte pretty much confirmed it.” I sighed. “Thinking back to everything since the day we met, it all makes sense now.”

“How did you leave things with her when you left her apartment?” he asked.

“I told her I’d be in touch.”

“Is that the truth? Are you still going to see her?”

“I don’t know.” I ran my hand down my face.



A week had passed since I saw Ava. I was still trying to wrap my head around what she’d told me. I’d thought about her non-stop and did as much research on her condition as I could.

I had the day off and was sitting on my patio lounge chair with my laptop when Ella came over.

“Hi, Grayson. Can I go swimming?”

“Hey, Ella. You sure can.” I smiled. “No school today?”

“I already did my online classes.” She jumped into the pool. “No work today?”

“It’s my day off.” I smiled.

She swam for a while, climbed out of the pool, dried herself off, and sat in the lounge next to me.

“What are you researching?” She glanced at my laptop.

“Dissociative Identity Disorder. Someone I know has it.”

“That’s so cool. Can I meet her?”

“How do you know it’s a ‘her?’ I smirked.

“Because if it were a guy, I don’t think you’d be researching it.”

“Do you even know what it is?” I asked.

She stared at me for a moment. “How can you ask that? Of course, I know what it is. I do a lot of brain research.”

“Right. Sometimes I forget what a little genius you are.” I tapped the end of her nose.

“If you’re researching it, then that means you like her.” A smirk crossed her lips.

“She’s a nice girl.” I smiled.

“Then that’s all that matters.”

Sofia walked over with Nicholas.

“Hey, Sof.”

“Hi, Grayson. Ella, you need to go home and get ready. We’re leaving for the dance studio in thirty minutes.”

“Okay, Mom. Thanks for letting me swim, Grayson.” She threw her arms around me.

“You’re welcome, sweetheart. Have fun at the dance studio.”

My phone dinged, and when I glanced at it, I saw a text from Gabriel.

*“Lunch? Sebastian is sending food over to the medical center. It’ll be here in thirty minutes. Come join us since it’s your day off.”*

*“On my way.”*

I went inside the house, grabbed my keys, and headed to the medical center. As I walked through the door, I took the stairs up to the second floor. The elevator dinged when I reached the top step, and Ava walked out.

“Hey,” I said as I placed my hands in my pants pockets.

“Grayson, hi. What are you doing here?”

“Having lunch with my brother.”

“Oh. Enjoy.” She smiled and began to walk away.

“Ava, wait.”

She stopped and turned around.

“I’m sorry I haven’t called.”

“Don’t be. I didn’t expect you to.” She opened the door to Charlotte’s practice and stepped inside.

I let out a sigh and went to the kitchen area where Gabriel, Jackson, and Conner were sitting at the table.

“There you are. Grab a sandwich,” Gabriel said.

I grabbed one of the wrapped turkey sandwiches and a bottle of water from the refrigerator.

“I just saw Ava,” I said.

“She must have an appointment with Charlotte,” Conner spoke.

“Yeah. She walked into her practice.”

“Did you talk to her?” Jackson asked.

“For a minute. I apologized for not calling her.”

“What did she say?” Gabriel asked.

“She said it was fine and that she didn’t expect me to.”

“Want my advice?” Conner asked.

“No,” Gabriel and Jackson both spoke at the same time.

“Shut up, douchebags. Anyway, there’s something about her that you’re attracted to, even before you found out about her condition. Remember that.” He pointed at me.

“I think it’s fascinating,” Jackson said. “It still amazes me what the brain can do. But my brother is right. You’re attracted to her. I know it’s more than just her looks. And don’t sit there and deny it.”

After we ate, my brother and cousins had patients to see. I stuck around for a while, waiting for Ava to finish her session with Charlotte. As I was walking out of the kitchen area and down the hall, I saw Ava step out the door of Charlotte’s practice.

“Hi.” I walked over to her before she reached the elevator.

“Hi.” She pushed the button.

“How did your session with Charlotte go?”

“Fine.”

“That’s good. I was thinking maybe we could grab some dinner tonight.”

“I don’t think so, Grayson.” She stepped into the elevator when the door opened.

“Why not, Ava?” I followed her in.

“Because it’s best we don’t see each other.”

“I disagree.”

“You know what?” She turned and stared into my eyes. “I don’t care if you disagree. The answer is no. I don’t want to have dinner with you.”

The elevator door opened, and we stepped out.

“Why not? Are you afraid one of your alters will come out and scare me off?”

She stopped and looked at me the second we left the medical center. “What the fuck, Grayson?”

“Okay, I shouldn’t have said that, and I apologize. I’m a very persistent

man who knows where you live.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“So, you’re going to stalk me?” Her brow arched.

“If I have to.”

“I’ll call the police.”

“Have you forgotten that my cousin Simon is a detective?”

“Okay, well, I can’t make any promises that Kate won’t front and kick your ass.”

“Tell her to bring it on.” I held my arms out.

A small smile framed her beautiful face. “Fine. I’ll have dinner with you tonight.”

“Excellent. Be at my house at six o’clock.”

“Your house?” Her brow arched.

“I’m cooking.”

“You cook?”

“Yes, and I’m pretty good at it.”

“Okay. I’ll be over at six o’clock,” she said. “Can I go to my car now?”

“Yeah.” I smiled.

On the way home, I stopped at the grocery store. While I was shopping, I ran into Alex and the kids.

“Hi, Grayson.” She smiled.

“Hey, Alex. Hi, Rory. Hi, Henry.”

“Doing some shopping?” she asked.

“Yeah. I’m cooking for Ava tonight.”

“Ah.” A wide grin crossed her lips. “What are you making?”

“Chicken with a cherry-wine pan sauce, roasted potatoes, grilled asparagus, and rolls.”

“Sound delicious. And for dessert?” she asked.

“Shit. I don’t know. I forgot about the dessert. What should I get?”

“Sebastian will take care of you. Give him a call, and you can pick up the dessert on the way home.”

“You’re the best, Alex.” I smiled as I pulled out my phone.

“Have fun tonight. I want to meet her,” Alex said as she walked away.

I dialed Sebastian’s number.

“What’s up, cousin?” he answered.

“I’m cooking dinner for Ava tonight and need a dessert.”

“Just a dessert? I can whip something up for the two of you.”

“Thanks, but I’m cooking.”



“You sure about that?” He chuckled.

“I can cook. I’m just not a good baker.”

“Don’t worry. I got you. I can bring it down to you when I get home.”

“I’ll just pick it up on my way home. Which restaurant are you at?”

“Four Kinds.”

“I’ll be leaving the store in about twenty minutes.”

“Okay. I’ll have it ready for you.”

“You’re the best. Thanks, Sebastian.”

After I checked out, I climbed into my car and headed to Four Kinds. When I stepped inside, I went back to the kitchen.

“Just in time.” Sebastian smiled as he handed me a large plastic bag.

“Two buttermilk lime mini cakes with vanilla mascarpone buttercream.”

“Oh my God. You are awesome.” I placed my hand on his shoulder.

“I also threw in some fresh homemade rolls and cherry butter.” He smiled.

“I bought rolls.”

He cocked his head and narrowed his eye.

“Right. Homemade rolls are better. Thanks, cousin. What do I owe you?”

“Nothing. It’s on the house. Just enjoy your evening.”

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

“Are you sure you don’t want me to whip something up and bring it over for dinner?”

“Positive. I got this.” I smiled as I walked out of the kitchen.

## CHAPTER 14



A<sup>va</sup>

When I arrived back at my apartment, I stripped out of my clothes and showered. The chatter in my head made me smile because they were talking about Grayson, and not in a bad way. As I was putting on my makeup, my phone rang with a Facetime call from my best friend, Hannah.

“Bonjour, madame.” I smiled as I answered.

“Bonjour! I know it’s been a while, and I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. I know you’re living your best life in France.” I smiled. “It’s one thirty in the morning over there. Did you just get home?”

“No.” She sighed. “I’m coming home, Ava.”

“What?”

“Xavier and I broke up, and I miss the U.S.”

“Oh no, Hannah. I’m sorry. What happened?”

“A French whore named Genevieve.”

“Shit. Seriously?”

“It’s fine. Things between us haven’t been good for the last year.”

“You never told me that.”

“Because I never wanted to admit it. Anyway, I’ll be back in a couple of days. Can I stay with you until I find a place?”

“Of course, you can!” I smiled. “Send me your flight details, and I’ll pick you up from the airport.”

“Thanks. I’ll do that. What are you getting all dolled up for?” A smirk crossed her lips.

“I’m going over to Grayson’s house, and he’s cooking me dinner.”

“The last time we talked, you said you hadn’t heard from him.”

“Then I heard from him, and then I didn’t. It’s a long story. He knows about the others.”

“What?” Her eyes widened. “You told him already?”

“He didn’t give me a choice. I’ll tell you everything when you get in.”

“Are you okay, Ava?”

“I’m fine, Hannah. You’re the one I’m worried about.”

“Pfft. I’m good. I’ll let you get ready for your date with the doctor. I’ll see you in a couple of days.”

I couldn’t believe she was moving back to the United States. I’d missed her so much since she moved to France with Xavier two years ago. After finishing my makeup and hair, I slipped on my shoes and drove to Grayson’s house.

“Hi.” Grayson smiled when he answered the door.

“Hi.” I smiled back.

“You look beautiful. Come in.”

“Thank you. I picked up a bottle of wine.” I handed it to him.

“You didn’t have to do that.”

“It’s the least I could do since you’re cooking dinner.” I followed him into the kitchen. “It smells delicious in here.”

“Thanks. I hope you like what I’ve made.”

“I’m sure I will.”

He grabbed two wine glasses and set them on the island. Opening the bottle of wine, he poured some into each glass and handed it to me.

“Can I help you with anything?” I asked.

“Nope. Everything is just about ready. Do you cook?”

“I don’t, but Ophelia does. She’s like a gourmet chef.”

“Really?” He smiled.

“Yeah. She can cook and bake just about anything.”

“We’ll have to introduce her to Sebastian.” He winked.

After Grayson plated our food, we took a seat at the table.

“Tell me about them,” he said.

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m sure. If I want to get to know you better, then I need to get to know them too.”

“Well, Freya is thirty years old, the same age I am. She’s the same height as me and has long auburn colored hair. She’s an artist, and her artwork is displayed at an art gallery downtown.”

“She paints?”

“Yeah. My second bedroom at my apartment is her art studio. Her artwork sells really well.”

“Interesting. I’d love to see some of her paintings sometime.”

“Then there’s Kate. She’s twenty-one.”

“What does she look like?”

“She’s about five foot nine and has short blonde wavy hair. She was the reason I lost two years of my life. When I turned eighteen, I had nowhere to go. I couldn’t stay in the system anymore, and the group home couldn’t kick me out fast enough. It was so overwhelming, and I didn’t know what I would do. So, Kate took over the body and decided it was a good idea to join the army.”

“You were in the army?” His brows furrowed.

“I wasn’t. Kate was. She served for two years before being kicked out.”

“Kicked out for what?”

“Apparently, another officer tried to have his way with her, and she defended herself.”

“How bad was it for the guy?” he asked.

“Pretty bad. She had discipline issues from the start, which was the final straw. I woke up one day, sitting against a brick wall outside of a deli downtown in the pouring rain. I had no idea where I was or what happened. A nice man stopped and asked me if I was okay. I asked him what day and month it was, and when he told me, I was relieved because, in my mind, it had only been a week. Until I found out what year it was, that’s when I lost it. I had nothing but the clothes on my back and nowhere to go. I went to the emergency room and told them I couldn’t remember the last two years of my life and needed help. After running some tests, they admitted me to their psychiatric ward, where I met Dr. Lenox. That’s when I found out about my condition and the alters.”

“You had no idea up until then about them?”

“Not really. The voices were always there, but I didn’t know what they were. A couple of therapists I saw growing up told my foster families that I was a deeply troubled child and most likely schizophrenic. Once they heard that, I was tossed around from family to family until I was put in a group home at the age of sixteen.”

“I’m sorry you went through that,” he said.

“I don’t remember much of it, though. The others were out a lot during

those years.”

“So, how did Dr. Lenox diagnose you?”

“After a few sessions, the others trusted him and showed themselves. Dr. Lenox worked with me very closely, and we developed a close relationship. He didn’t have a wife or a family, so he kind of adopted me as a daughter. I even lived with him for a few years. He was the closest thing to a family we ever had.”

“Why did you move out of his house?”

“One of my biggest issues was the fear of being alone. That’s why I got into some really shitty relationships. Once we worked on that, I healed and was ready to live on my own. Being alone no longer scares me like it once did.”

“That’s good to hear. Tell me about Luna,” he said.

“She’s ten years old with long brown hair and brown eyes. She’s a wonderful little girl. She has an angelic voice and loves to sing.” I smiled. “She isn’t shy and loves to explore the world. Ophelia looks after her.”

“The one who is like a gourmet chef?”

“Yes. And she can clean like nobody’s business.”

“That’s why your apartment is so meticulous.” He smirked.

“Yeah.” I breathed out a laugh. “She has OCD. When she feels I’m not doing a good enough job, she fronts and takes over.”

“Sounds like Sam and Shaun.” He chuckled. “They’d get along great. What does she look like?”

“She’s around forty years old, has longer black hair and green eyes. She also has an English accent.”

“Seriously?” His brow arched.

“Yep.”

“What about Seraphina?”

“She’s the gatekeeper of the system. She has this beautiful platinum-white hair and brown eyes. She ensures everything inside is in order and that the others front when needed. She’s the one responsible for keeping the traumatic memories away from me. If I start to have a small memory, a wall instantly goes up, and I can’t remember anything else.”

“How old is she?” he asked.

“She’s infinite and doesn’t have an age.”

## CHAPTER 15



Grayson

As I sat across and listened to her describe each of the different people living inside her, the only thing I could think about was how beautiful she was and how something stirred inside me every time she smiled.

The sliding door opened, and when I looked over, Ella walked in.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t know you had anyone over,” she said as she walked over to the island and set down the book I’d lent her.

“Hey, Ella. It’s okay.” I smiled. “I’d like you to meet Ava. Ava, this is Ella. She’s Nathan’s daughter.”

“Hi, Ella. It’s nice to meet you.” Ava extended her hand with a smile.

“It’s nice to meet you too. You’re the one with dissociative identity disorder, right?”

“Um, Ella—” I said.

“It’s okay, Grayson,” Ava spoke. “Yes, I do have dissociative identity disorder.”

“That’s cool. I’ve studied it. In case Grayson didn’t tell you, I’m a genius and studied the brain and heart. I’ve sat in on brain, open-heart, and orthopedic surgeries with my uncles. I’ve also sat in on a couple of my dad’s reconstructive surgeries. I’m in high school now and taking advanced college courses. I’m also an artist. I’d love to show you my paintings someday.”

“Wow. You truly are a special little girl.” The corners of Ava’s mouth curved upward.

“Nothing gets past me.” Ella grinned.

“Freya, one of my alters, is also an artist. She paints beautiful pictures and sells them at an art gallery downtown.”

“Oh! I’d love to meet her.”

“I’m sure she’d like to meet you too.”

“I’ll let you two get back to dinner. I’m sorry I interrupted your date. Thanks again for the book. It was really interesting.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart, and you’re welcome. I’m happy you enjoyed it.”

“Bye, Ava.” Ella smiled as she gave her a small wave.

“Bye, Ella. My gosh, she’s adorable.”

“Yeah. She’s a great kid. I’ve never known anyone as smart as her.” I smiled.

I stood up from my seat, grabbed the small remote from the kitchen counter, and turned on some music.

“Would you like to dance with me?” I extended my hand.

“I would love to.” She smiled as she placed her hand in mine.

I held her hand as my other arm wrapped tightly around her waist.

“You told her about me?” Ava’s brow arched. “Does your whole family know?”

“I’m sure they do by now. I didn’t exactly come out and tell her. She saw me researching it.”

“Your family must think I’m a freak.”

“Why would you say that?” My brows furrowed.

“Because, like I told you before, people can’t understand.”

“My family isn’t like that, and once you get to know them, you’ll see for yourself. They are the most incredible and kind people I’ve ever known. They don’t judge anyone. Well, except maybe Aunt Barb.” I chuckled.

“Aunt Barb?”

“She’s a story for another time.”

“Simon doesn’t like me.”

“That’s not true. He just didn’t know the truth. He’s an amazing guy. I have to ask you something, and I need the truth.”

“Okay.”

“Why did Freya front that night at the bar?”

“I was wondering when you were going to ask me that. I don’t know, Grayson, and that’s the truth. Oh, God. Not now.” She inhaled a deep breath.

“Ava, are you okay?”

She leaned closer and lay her head on my shoulder. Suddenly, she lifted her head, and the corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Hello again, handsome.”

I narrowed my eyes for a moment as I stared at her.

“Freya?”

“The one and only. You want an answer that she can’t give you. Only I can.”

“Which is?” I let go of her hand and took a step back.

“My job is to protect. I’ve been doing it since she was four years old and in the grips of that horrible woman. You seemed nice that night at the bar, and Ava felt it. I was merely checking you out for myself. I’m sorry. I broke the rules, and it shouldn’t have happened. But it did, and we both need to forget and move on. Deal?” She extended her hand.

“Deal.” I placed my hand in hers.

“Besides, I never thought we’d see you again, but here we are.” She smiled.

She closed her eyes for a moment, and when she opened them, she stared at me.

“Welcome back.” I smiled as I wrapped my arms around her waist.

“Freya?” she asked.

“Yeah. She apologized for that night at the bar.”

Ava pushed away from me and placed her hands on her head.

“I’m sorry. My God, what you must think.”

“Ava, stop it.” I wrapped one arm around her waist and brought my finger up to her lips. “It’s okay.” I lowered my head and brushed my lips against hers.

Our soft kiss turned passionate, and I swooped down, picked her up, and carried her upstairs to my bedroom. Pushing the straps of her dress off her shoulders, it fell to the ground, and my cock grew in length as I stared at her sexy body. I had never wanted any woman the way I wanted her.



*A*<sup>va</sup>

It was six a.m. when Grayson jumped up and grabbed his pager from the nightstand.

“What is it?” I sleepily asked.

“It’s the hospital. I have to get ready and go. Go back to sleep.” He kissed my shoulder as I rolled over.



I lay there, eyes wide open, while he took a quick shower. Climbing out of bed, I slipped into last night's dress.

"You don't have to leave," he said as he walked out of the bathroom. "Make a cup of coffee and relax."

"I have a client meeting at eleven," I spoke.

"Then you're in no rush." He smiled as he threw on some clothes, and we went downstairs.

"Are you sure you don't mind if I stay for a bit?"

"Not at all. Just lock the door when you leave." He kissed my lips. "I'll call you later."

I made a cup of coffee and took it outside on the patio. It was a beautiful morning as the sun rose over the ocean. I thought about last night as I sat in the lounge with my hands wrapped around the white mug. My body was still on fire from the things he did to me.

"Good morning," Simon said as he walked over.

"Good morning."

"Is Grayson around?"

"No. The hospital paged him. I'm leaving as soon as I finish this cup of coffee. Can I make you one?"

"No, thanks. I saw you sitting out here, so I thought I'd stop by for a minute before I head to work. I heard about your—" he paused, and I could tell he was uncomfortable.

"Condition." I smiled.

"Yeah. I'm sorry for the things I said to you outside the bathroom at Four Kinds."

"There's no need to apologize, Simon. I have no idea what you said to me. Besides, you said them to Kate."

"Right. It's strange because I told Grayson I felt as if I were talking to two different people."

"You were." I smirked.

"I did some research on—" he paused again.

"Dissociative Identity Disorder. You can say it. It's not a bad word."

"Anyway, I'm sorry. I just assumed you were some type of con artist or something."

"You're not the first one to assume that. Honestly, I appreciate it."

"Can I let you in on a little secret?" His lips formed a smirk.

"Sure."

“When I walked into that apartment and saw what you, I mean, Kate, had done to that guy, I was impressed. Where did she learn those skills?”

“The army.”

“Huh?” His brows furrowed.

“It’s a long story. Maybe the four of us can get together for dinner one night.”

“Grace and I would like that.” He began to walk away and stopped. “Actually, we’re all going out on the boats Saturday for the day. Join us. We’d love to have you.”

“Is Grayson going?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. He said he had to check his schedule at the hospital. But even if he doesn’t, we still want you to come.”

“Thanks, Simon. I’ll give it some thought.”

Grayson was right. Simon was a great guy. Glancing at my watch, I needed to get home, shower, and get ready for my client meeting. Taking my coffee cup into the kitchen, I rinsed it out, and when I went to place it in the dishwasher, I noticed it was full of clean dishes, so I set it down in the sink. As I began to walk away, I could feel Ophelia starting to front.

*“Not now, Ophelia.”*

*“Don’t be silly. It could use a little tidying up,”* she said.

She didn’t listen, took over, and began cleaning Grayson’s house and doing laundry. His house was already clean as it was, but I guess it wasn’t up to her standards.

## CHAPTER 16



G rayson

My brows furrowed as I pulled into my driveway and saw Ava's car still there. Climbing out, I walked through the front door, and instantly, a delicious smell smacked me in the face, as well as the clean, fresh scent of the house.

"Ava?" I walked into the kitchen.

"Hello, Dr. Kind," she spoke in a British accent as she smiled at me. "Ophelia." She walked over and extended her hand.

"It's nice to meet you, Ophelia." I placed my hand in hers.

"The pleasure is all mine. I hope you don't mind. I took the liberty of tidying up for you. I also did all of your laundry and made a wonderful home-cooked meal for you. After all, you did work all day."

"Um, thank you. You didn't have to do that."

"Of course, I did. You have a beautiful home. May I ask who organized for you?"

"My Aunt Barb helped when I moved in. Why?"

"No offense to your Aunt Barb, but her organizing skills aren't that good."

I couldn't help but chuckle.

"I went ahead and reorganized some things for you. You'll find it's more convenient my way. Go sit down, and I'll serve you your dinner."

"What did you make?" I asked out of curiosity.

"Beef Wellington, duchess potatoes, parmesan asparagus, and for dessert, Lemon Posset."

I sat down at the table and stared at her as she plated my food.

“Ophelia, can I ask you something?”

“Yes, Dr. Kind. What is it?”

“First off, call me Grayson. Second, did Ava meet with her client today?”

“Don’t worry. I alerted Ava’s client that she had an emergency and needed to reschedule. Her client said not to worry, and they’ll meet next week.” She set my plate in front of me.

“Wow. This looks and smells delicious.”

“Thank you.” She walked over to the sink and started doing the dishes.

“Aren’t you going to join me?” I asked.

“No, I couldn’t do that.” She shook her head.

“Why? You spent all day cooking this great meal and should enjoy it. Fix yourself a plate and sit down.”

“I—”

I stood up from my seat, took down a plate from the cabinet, and handed it to her. “Please, Ophelia, join me for dinner.”

She blushed as she took the plate from me. “If you insist.”

The sliding door opened, and Gabriel stepped in.

“Oh, sorry, bro. I didn’t—”

“You must be Dr. Gabriel Kind.” Ophelia smiled.

“Yes, I am.” His brows furrowed as he glanced at me.

“Gabriel, this is Ophelia. She was kind enough to clean my house and cook this wonderful dinner.”

“That’s why it smells so clean in here.” My brother smiled.

“Sit down, Dr. Kind, and I’ll fix you a plate,” Ophelia spoke.

“Thank you, but I can’t—”

“Yes, you can.” She pulled out a chair for him.

I looked at him and gestured for him to sit down.

“Well, okay,” Gabriel said.

After fixing him a plate, she set it in front of him and took a seat.

“My God, this is delicious,” Gabriel spoke.

“Thank you, Dr. Kind.” Ophelia smiled. “Hard-working men like yourselves deserve to come home to a home-cooked meal. Make sure to save room for dessert.”

“She made Lemon Posset.” I smiled at my brother.

Suddenly, she set down her fork, closed her eyes, and lowered her head.

“Ophelia?” I asked.

She lifted her head and stared at me from across the table.

“Shit.”

“Hi.” I smiled at Ava.

“She’s been here all day?” she asked in a panic as she got up and grabbed her phone from the island.

“Ophelia said she texted your client, and you’re meeting next week,” I said.

“Hi, Ava,” Gabriel said.

“Hi, Gabriel. God, what you must think.”

“All I’m thinking about is this amazing meal Ophelia cooked.” He grinned.

“Do you know why she fronted?” I asked.

“It was over a dirty coffee cup.” I shook my head.

“What?” I laughed.

“When I went to leave this morning, your dishwasher was full and clean, so I set the coffee cup in the sink. That’s when she came out.”

“No complaints from me.” I smiled. “I don’t think this house ever smelled this good. Besides, she basically said my Aunt Barb’s organization skills sucked and reorganized some things.”

“I’m sorry, Grayson.” I placed my hand on my forehead.

“Don’t apologize. You have nothing to be sorry for. I’m happy I got to meet her. Why don’t you sit down and finish your dinner?”

She took a seat across from me, picked up her fork, and breathed out a laugh.

“What?” I smiled.

“Beef Wellington is Ophelia’s signature dish. She always makes it when she wants to make an impression. I guess she really wanted to meet you.”

“She didn’t have to go to all this trouble to meet me,” I said.

“I’m happy she did.” Gabriel grinned as he took his last bite of food. “I’m going to leave the two of you alone.” He stood up from his chair, grabbed a dish of Lemon Posset from the fridge, and opened the sliding door. “I’ll bring back the dish tomorrow.”

“I’m going to clean this up and head home,” Ava said.

“You don’t have to leave.”

“I really do, Grayson. I’ve been here since last night. I have some work to do before I pick up my friend, Hannah, from the airport tomorrow.”

“Where is she flying in from?” I asked.

“Paris. She’s moving back here and staying with me until she finds a

place.”

“Why would anyone ever leave Paris?” A smirk crossed my lips.

“She found out her boyfriend cheated on her.”

“That’s a good enough reason.” I smiled.

She started clearing the table, and I grabbed her hand.

“I’ll clean this up. You go home.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m positive.” A small smile crossed my lips.

“Okay.” She grabbed her purse and hooked it over her shoulder as I walked her to the door.

“I’ll call you.” I pressed my lips against her forehead. “Drive safe.”

“I will.” She walked out the door.

After cleaning up from dinner, I grabbed a beer from the refrigerator and stepped out onto the patio. I saw the bonfire lit and some of my cousins and Gabriel sitting around it.

“Did Ava leave already?” Gabriel asked as I sat in the empty seat next to him.

“Yeah.” I sighed. “She had some work to do.”

“What exactly does she do?” Shaun asked.

“She’s an interior decorator.” I tipped the bottle to my lips.

“Does she work for someone?”

“No. She’s independent. She also sells artwork at a gallery downtown. Well, Freya does.”

“Ophelia cooks and cleans like nobody’s business,” Gabriel said.

“And from what I saw, Kate can kick some ass,” Simon spoke.

“Hey, Dad.” Lily walked over, climbed on Stefan’s lap, and wrapped her arms around his neck. “I love you.”

“I love you too, Lily. What do you want?”

“Why do you always think I want something? Can’t a daughter tell her father that she loves him?”

“Yes, but a ‘want’ is usually attached to that.”

“Fine. I invited a friend of mine to come on the boat with us Saturday. Mom said it was okay, but I had to tell you myself.”

“Uh-oh.” Simon chuckled.

“Who is this friend of yours?”

“Logan Pierce. Now, before you get all mad, hear me out.”

“Go on,” Stefan stared at her.

“He’s really nice, plays soccer, and he’s smart. We’re friends, Dad. You’ll like him.”

“No, I won’t.”

“Dad, stop it. He’s coming, and you better not embarrass me. None of you better embarrass me.” She stared at all of us. Especially you, Uncle Simon.”

“Aw, come on, kiddo. Would I do that?” Simon tipped the beer bottle to his lips with a smile.

She cocked her head and narrowed her eyes at him.

“I mean it,” she said.

“We can talk about this later,” Stefan said.

Lily climbed off his lap. “There’s nothing to talk about. Mom already said he can come with us. I was just telling you now so you can get over it before Saturday.” She ran back to the house.

Stefan sat there, shaking his head.

“Teenagers and hormones. Gotta love them.” Simon grinned.

“Shut up, douchebag,” Stefan said.

“Speaking of Saturday. I invited Ava to come with us,” Simon said.

“You did?” I glanced at him. “When?”

“This morning. I went to your house and apologized for that night at the restaurant.”

“Is she coming?”

“She said maybe. If you’re coming with us, you better ask her yourself,” he said.

“I’m coming.” I smiled. “I’ll text her later.”

## CHAPTER 17



*A*va “I’ve missed you so much,” I said as I hugged Hannah.

“I missed you too.”

We grabbed her luggage and headed to my car.

“So, I want to hear all about this Grayson guy.” She smiled as we climbed into the car.

“He’s amazing.” I grinned as I buckled my seatbelt. “He lives on the beach in Venice in this gorgeous house, has a twin brother who lives next door, and is a trauma surgeon at Cedars.”

“Wait a second. He’s a freaking surgeon? You said he was a doctor, not a surgeon.”

“Many of his cousins are surgeons and live on the beach by him.”

“What about his twin? What does he do?”

“He’s an internist at the Kind Medical Center. I don’t know, Hannah. I think I’m falling in love with him.”

“Girl, stop it. You barely know the guy.” She playfully slapped my arm.

“I know, but I’ve never felt this way about anyone before.” I glanced at her.

“Now, for the most important question,” she said. “How is he in bed?”

“Perfection.” A grin crossed my face. “Everything about him is perfect. He met Ophelia the other night.”

“What?” Her eyes widened. “She actually came out?”

“Yeah. She cleaned and reorganized his house and then cooked her special Beef Wellington for him.”

“Damn. She must have been really curious about him. How’s your new



therapist?”

“Charlotte is great. I miss Charles, though.”

“I know you do, but at least he left you in good hands, not to mention all that money he left you.”

“Enough about me. How are you really doing?” I reached over and grabbed her hand.

“I’m fine, Ava. I’m starting a new chapter of my life, and this time, I’m not making any bad decisions.”

I helped bring her luggage up to my apartment and took them into the guest bedroom.

“By the way, Grayson asked me to go on the boat with him and his family tomorrow. He said to bring you.”

“That sounds like fun, but I have some appointments scheduled to look at apartments.”

“I can go with you,” I said.

“Nope. You’re spending the day on a boat with your dream guy.” She smiled. “When do I get to meet him?”

“He’s picking me up tomorrow morning at eight o’clock. So, if you’re up, you can meet him then.”

“Trust me. I’ll be up.” A grin crossed her lips.



When I opened the door, I smiled as Grayson stood there looking as sexy as ever in his khaki shorts and button-down short-sleeve shirt.

“Hi.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Hi. Come in. Grayson, I’d like you to meet Hannah. Hannah, this is Dr. Grayson Kind.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Hannah.” Grayson extended his hand.

“Nice to meet you, Grayson.” She shook his hand.

“I just have to grab my bag,” I said as I walked to the bedroom.

“Holy hell, Ava. You didn’t tell me he looked like that,” Hannah followed me.

“Yes, I did. I told you he was sexy.” I smiled.

“You said he was ‘sexy’ not S.E.X.Y.”

I let out a laugh as I hugged her. “Good luck apartment hunting.”

“Good luck trying to control yourself in his presence all day.”

I grabbed my bag and headed back to the living room.

“Ready?” Grayson asked.

“I’m ready.”

My body trembled when he placed his hand on the small of my back as we walked out the door.

“I’m nervous about meeting your family,” I said.

“Don’t be. You’re going to love them.” He smiled.

When we reached the marina, we climbed out of the car and headed to the boat.

“There’s two boats,” Grayson said. “One is Shaun’s and his brothers, and the other is Jackson’s and his brothers.”

I couldn’t believe my eyes when Grayson stopped in front of the boats.

“You didn’t say they were yachts,” I said.

“I didn’t?” A grin crossed his handsome face.

“No.” I playfully smacked his arm.

“Ava.” Charlotte smiled as she walked over and hugged me. “I’m happy you came.”

“Thanks, Charlotte. I’m happy to be here.”

“Ava!” Ella ran over and threw her arms around my legs.

“Hi, Ella.” I reached down and hugged her.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you finally, Ava. I’m Conner, Charlotte’s husband.”

“It’s nice to meet you too, Conner. And this must be Isabella.” I smiled.

“She’s my princess. Say hi to Ava.”

“She’s beautiful.”

Grayson introduced me to the rest of his family. I could feel my intense anxiety slowly moving away from me as they all made me feel so welcomed.

## CHAPTER 18



Grayson

I couldn't stop stealing small glances at Ava as she stood with a beer in her hand and talked to the girls.

"Earth to Grayson," Gabriel said.

"What?" I looked at him.

"He's got the look." Conner smiled.

"The total look," Shaun said.

"We all know that look too well." Stefan grinned.

"What look? What are you fools talking about?" I asked.

"The look of love." Simon hooked his arm around me.

"Knock it off. I do not."

"Yes, you do," Sam said.

"Yeah, cousin. Don't try to deny it. We all see it," Sebastian chimed in.

"Ava is a beautiful woman, and I enjoy spending time with her. It doesn't mean I'm in love with her."

"Uh-huh," Nathan said.

"Sorry, Grayson, but I have the proof right here." Christian held up his phone with a picture of me staring Ava's way.

"Ah, look at that." Simon grinned as he patted my back. "We all told you it would be a matter of time when you moved here."

"You're all a bunch of douchebags." I pointed at them. "Stefan, how are you holding up?" I chuckled.

"I'm keeping a close eye on those two. I already told Lily that she's to stay up here at all times with us."

"Did you find out anything about the kid?" Sam asked.

“He didn’t say much in the car. I think he’s nervous.”

“And he damn well better be,” Simon said. “Hey, Logan,” he shouted. “Come over here.”

Logan and Lily walked over and stood in front of us.

“What do you want, Uncle Simon?” Lily narrowed her eye at him.

“I just want to know more about your friend.”

“Dad?” Lily cocked her head at Stefan.

“Sorry, baby girl. You know I can’t control my brother.”

“What are your future plans, kid?” Simon asked Logan.

“I want to be a detective.”

“No shit, really?” The corners of Simon’s mouth curved upward.

“Yeah. Police officers are heroes to me, and I want to be a hero. After I graduate, I’m going to join the academy and learn everything so I can be the best and become the detective I know I can be.”

“Wow. Right there, brother.” Simon grinned as he held his fist out to him, and Logan fist-bumped it. “I see a bright future for you, kid. If you have any questions, come see me.”

“Thanks, Detective Kind. I certainly will.”

“Come on, Logan.” Lily grabbed his hand, and they walked away.

We all started laughing our asses off.

“What the fuck is so funny?” Simon asked.

“I thought you were smart, bro.” Sam laughed.

“What are you talking about?”

“That kid totally fucking played you.” Shaun chuckled.

“Yeah, Lily is no fool. She saw this coming and coached him.” Sebastian laughed.

“Nah, she wouldn’t do that,” Simon said.

“She’s a Kind. The fuck she wouldn’t.” Jackson laughed.

“And don’t forget that she watches how Alex plays Stefan all the time,” Sam said. “She’s learning from the best.”

“My wife does not play me, bro.” Stefan furrowed his brows.

“Okay.” Shaun laughed. “If you say so.”

“Who’s going jet skiing?” Conner asked.

“I’ll go ask Ava if she wants to,” I said.

I walked over to Ava and lightly took hold of her arm.

“We’re taking the jet skis out. Do you want to join me?” I smiled.

“I’d love to.”

We walked over to where the jet skis were, and she lifted her shirt over her head and took down her shorts, revealing her perfect bikini-clad body.

“Nice bikini,” I smiled as I handed her a life vest.

“Thanks.”

We climbed on, and her arms tightly secured themselves around my waist. I could feel my cock spasming as I tried to ignore the feeling of her wrapped around me.

“Hold on tight.” I smiled as I turned my head and looked back at her.

I took off with Gabriel, Conner and Charlotte, Jackson and Georgia, and Simon and Grace following behind. The speed, spray of the ocean, and the wind provided enough of an adrenaline rush to satisfy me.

“You okay?” I shouted to her.

“I’m great.”

After riding for a while, we brought the jet skis back to the boat so the others could take them out.

“That was so much fun.” Ava smiled as she removed her life vest.

“I love jet skiing. Gabriel and I used to do it all the time when we lived in Hawaii.”

She glanced over at Ella playing games with Nora, Lorelei, and Lena.

“They’re cute, right?” I asked her.

Suddenly, her eyes closed for a moment, and I became familiar with what that meant. When she opened them, she ran over to Ella and sat down.

“Hi, I’m Luna. Can I play?” she asked in a childish voice.

“Hi, Luna. I’m Ella, and this is Nora and the twins, Lorelei and Lena.”

“Charlotte?” I spoke.

She placed her hand on my arm before walking over to them. I followed.

“Hi, Luna.” Charlotte smiled as she sat down on the deck. “I’m Charlotte. We haven’t met yet.”

“I know who you are. You’ve been helping Ava since Dr. Lenox passed away.”

“That’s right. Can you tell me where Ava is right now?”

“She’s sleeping. I wanted to play with the kids. I haven’t played with kids in a long time. Seraphina tried to stop me, but I pushed my way through.”

“This is incredible,” Jackson said as he walked over and stood next to me.

“It’s okay.” Charlotte smiled. “You can play with the kids if you want to.”

“Is it okay, Grayson?” Luna squinted her eyes as she looked up at me.

“Yeah, Luna. It’s okay.” I softly smiled at her.

I grabbed a beer and took a seat as I watched her with Ella and the others. Lily ditched Logan and ran over there.

“You okay, bro.” Gabriel sat down next to me with his guitar.

“Yeah. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I’m just making sure.”

Ella walked over holding Ava/Luna’s hand.

“She saw the guitar and wants to sing,” Ella said to Gabriel.

“Okay. What do you want to sing, Luna?”

“Part of your world from the Little Mermaid.”

“Um, I’m afraid I don’t know how to play that song,” he said.

“My dad does. Dad!” Ella shouted across the boat.

Nathan walked over. “What is it, Ella?”

“Can you play Part of Your World on Gabriel’s guitar? Luna wants to sing it.”

“Sure. I can do that.” He smiled as Gabriel handed him his guitar, and Nathan sat down. “Are you ready, Luna?”

“I’m ready.” She smiled brightly.

My family gathered around as Nathan started strumming the song. From the first word she sang, I couldn’t believe my ears. I glanced over at Jenni, who stood there with tears streaming down her face. When she sang the last word, we all whistled and clapped. Her eyes closed, and I knew Ava was back when they reopened. She stood there with a look of panic on her face. I jumped up, grabbed her hand, and took her over to the railing.

“I tried to stop her, but she was too strong,” Ava spoke as tears filled her eyes.

“She has a beautiful voice, and I’m happy she wanted to share it with us.”

“Your family is amazing, Grayson, but I can only imagine what they think.”

“We don’t think anything.” Conner walked over and hooked his arm around her. “Well, we do think one thing, and that is you’re an amazing woman with many talents.” He smiled. “I don’t know if you know this, but back in college, I had a friend who had dissociative identity disorder. She had an alter that was a guy, and we became friends. I was also friends with her. She was beautiful inside and out and one of the friendliest people I knew. I say if the others want to come out, let them. We’d love to get to know them.”

“I second that.” Sam held up his beer bottle.

“So do we.” The rest of my family held up their drinks.  
“We love you already,” Jenni said as she hugged Ava tightly.

## CHAPTER 19



*A* va

“Thank you, Jenni. I really appreciate all of you welcoming me here today. I need to use the bathroom. I’ll be right back.” I placed my hand on Grayson’s arm.

I went down to the cabin, went into the bathroom, and shut the door. Closing the toilet lid, I sat down and took a long deep breath. I wasn’t ready for Grayson to meet Luna yet, but it happened, and I could do nothing about it. I just prayed he wasn’t freaked out.

After leaving the bathroom, I walked past the kitchen and saw Jackson grabbing a beer from the refrigerator.

“Want one?” He asked with a smile.

“Sure. Thanks.”

“Can I talk to you about something for a moment?” he asked.

“Sure. What is it?”

“Please don’t be offended by what I’m about to say.”

“Okay.” I breathed out a laugh. “I’ll try not to be.”

“I really need to see your brain. Would you be willing to let me do a brain scan?”

“Dr. Jackson Kind,” Charlotte snapped as she walked down into the cabin. “You better not be asking her what I think you are.”

“It’s okay, Charlotte. Yes, Jackson. You may do a brain scan on my brain.”

“You are the best.” He hugged me. “We’ll set up something for next week.”

“Sounds good.” I smiled.



“You’re not a guinea pig, Ava,” Charlotte said.

“I know I’m not, and he’s not using me like one. He’s a neurosurgeon, Charlotte. The brain is his expertise. If it’ll help him understand it better, then so be it. I don’t mind.”

“The others might,” she said.

“They won’t. I’ll have a talk with them.”

“Hey, what’s going on down here?” Grayson walked over to us.

“Just having some girl talk.” I smiled.

“The sun is starting to set. Come up and watch it with me,” he said as he hooked his arm around me.

“It would be my pleasure, Dr. Kind.” I laid my head on his shoulder.

“By the way, I forgot to ask you. We’re all going over to my Aunt Barb’s tomorrow for her fiancé’s birthday. Would you come with me?”

“Yeah. That sounds like fun.”

My phone dinged, and when I looked at it, I saw a text message from Hannah.

*“Hey, I won’t be home tonight. I met up with Austin, and, well, you know. I’ll see you sometime tomorrow.”*

*“What happened to making better decisions?”*

*“Blah. Blah. You know how it is with us. Love you.”*

*“Love you too. Have fun.”*

“Hannah won’t be coming home tonight,” I said.

“Why?”

“She’s hooking up with one of her exes.”

“What?” Grayson chuckled.

“Austin is a great guy. They dated on and off for over a year. She broke it off with him because she claimed he was boring. Who knows.”

“Since she won’t be there, I guess that means you don’t have to go home tonight either.” He softly ran his finger up and down my arm.

“No?”

“No. Spend the night with me at my house. Maybe I’ll even treat you to a midnight swim.” The corners of his mouth curved upward.

“Sounds sexy.”

“I can guarantee you that it will be.” His lips met mine.

“I want to hear you play the guitar and sing.” I smiled.

“Okay.” I grabbed Gabriel’s guitar. “I’m calling on my brother and cousins for help.”

“What are we singing,” Simon asked.

“You’ll see.” Grayson smiled.

He started strumming the chords to California Dreaming.

“Fuck yeah.” Stefan grinned. “We’re ready.”

The second I heard the tune, a flashback and a switch happened.



*F*reya

I smiled as I clapped my hands to the tune. When the song was over, I couldn’t let anyone know I was out, so I needed to pretend I was Ava.

“That was amazing!”

“Thank you.” Grayson smiled.

“We better start heading back,” Shaun said.

I excused myself and went to the bathroom. When I was finished, I opened the door and saw Grayson standing there.

“Isn’t there more than one bathroom on this yacht?” I smirked.

“Freya, what’s going on?”

“My, aren’t you quite the observer. How did you know?”

“I just do. Why are you here?”

I inhaled a sharp breath as I went and sat on one of the couches.

“Sit down.” I patted the spot next to me. “Ava started having a flashback, and we couldn’t let that happen. It was that song you played.”

“I don’t understand,” he said.

“It’s the same song that played over and over again, non-stop upstairs at our childhood home.”

“Who played it?”

“The mother did.”

“Tell me something, Freya. Why won’t any of you let Ava remember what happened to her? You’re hindering her healing.”

“As long as that woman is alive, Ava can never remember.”

“Are you referring to her mother? She’s alive?”

“I’ve said enough, Grayson.” I closed my eyes.



A<sup>va</sup>

I opened my eyes and looked around in confusion.

“Come on,” I said. “Who was it this time?”

“Freya.” He grabbed hold of my hand.

“What the fuck, Grayson? What did she want?”

“She wanted to join the party.” I lied.

I let go of his hand and placed both my hands over my face.

“This is happening too much. I’m losing control.”

“Ava, calm down.” He gripped my shoulders.

“Calm down? Really? They never let anyone see them. We had an agreement. But with you, they won’t stop.”

“They like me.” He smiled. “Is that so bad?”

I stared at him for a moment and let out a sigh. “No. It’s not bad.”

“Come here.” He pulled me into him and held my head against his chest.

“We’ll be docking soon. Are you hungry?”

“Yeah. A little bit.”

“How about we stop at IN-N-OUT and grab a couple of burgers and fries.”

“With a chocolate shake?” I smiled.

“A double chocolate shake if you want.” He winked.

“They don’t have double chocolate shakes.” I laughed.

“Then I’ll buy you two and pour them into one tall glass when we get to my house.”

“One chocolate shake is enough.”

Conner and Charlotte walked down with Isabella.

“Hey, you two.” Conner smiled. “Having a make-out session on the couch?”

“No. We’re talking,” Grayson said. “Why don’t you go up on the deck, and I’ll meet you up there. I have to use the bathroom.”

“Okay. I’ll see you up there. You are so adorable.” I smiled at Isabella.

“Ava, please. My wife is standing right here.” Conner smiled.

“Ignore him, Ava.” Charlotte rolled her eyes.

“You’re adorable too, Conner.” I patted his chest.

## CHAPTER 20



Grayson

“Can I talk to you for a minute, Charlotte?”

“Sure. What’s up? Conner, can you please take the baby in one of the rooms and put her in her pajamas?”

“On it, babe.”

“Freya was out.”

“When?” Her brows furrowed.

“When I was playing California Dreaming. She told me that Ava started having a flashback, so she fronted. Did you know her mother is alive?”

“Yeah. Charles told me before he passed away. Did Freya say why the song was a trigger?”

“She said it was the song her mother used to play over and over again upstairs. She also said that as long as that woman is alive, Ava can never remember what happened.”

“She told you that?”

“Yeah.”

“Interesting. Thanks for telling me, Grayson.”

“Where is her mother?” I asked.

“California State Penitentiary. Don’t say anything to Ava about it.”

“I won’t.”

I went up on the deck just as we docked. Walking over to where Ava was talking to Georgia, Sofia, and Charleigh, I grabbed hold of her hand.

“Ready for IN-N-OUT?”

“Oh, my God, that sounds so good!” Charleigh exclaimed. “Christian, can we stop at IN-N-OUT on the way home?”

“Not good for the heart, babe,” he shouted from across the boat.

“Shit. Too bad. We’re stopping anyway.” Charleigh smiled. “I’ll see you two tomorrow at Aunt Barb’s.”

We ate all of our burgers and fries in the car on the way to my house. When we arrived back at my house, I grabbed a bottle of wine and two wine glasses and took them out to the patio, where Ava was already in the pool.

“For you, madame.” I handed her a glass.

“Thank you, sir.” She smiled.

I climbed into the pool with my glass and stood next to her.

“So, what did you think about today?”

“Aside from the others making an appearance, I had a wonderful time. Your family is a lot of fun.” She set her glass down on the edge of the pool and wrapped her arms around my neck. “Tell me something, Dr. Kind. Why are you single?”

“Relationships were never my thing.”

“How come?”

“My independence and life dream of becoming a trauma surgeon took precedence over anything else. My father always told my brother and me that relationships complicate life and hold you back. When we were growing up, women came and went all the time. My father always seemed happy, and he was so successful. I don’t know. I guess growing up and seeing how he viewed relationships had an impact on Gabriel and me.”

“So, no girlfriends back in Boston begging you to stay?” A smirk crossed her lips.

I breathed out a laugh. “No. Just a stalker.”

“What?” She laughed.

I told her the story about Claudia and everything she did.

“She sounds like she has issues. But I’ll let you in on a little secret.” She smirked.

“And what is that?” I asked.

“I can’t blame her.” The corners of her mouth curved upward. “You’re a stalkable guy.”

“Is that so?” I pulled her into me and brushed my lips against hers.

“Very much so.”

Our kiss turned passionate, and I couldn’t wait any longer to bury myself deep inside her. I hooked my fingers around the straps of her bikini bottom and took them down. Dipping my fingers inside her, she gasped as she stared

into my eyes.

“I can’t wait any longer,” I said.

“Neither can I.” Her hands pulled down my bathing suit and wrapped around my throbbing cock.

I let out a gasp as she stroked it under the water.

“God, I want you so badly,” I moaned. “Shit. I forgot about the condom.”

“I’m on birth control.” Her mouth smashed into mine.

“Turn around,” I said.

She did as I asked and supported herself on the pool’s edge. I thrust inside her from behind. Soft moans escaped our lips. As good as it felt, I wanted to see her face when she came, so I pulled out and turned her around, grabbing her waist and lifting her up. Her legs wrapped tightly around me as I thrust in and out. Our lips met with pleasure, and I could feel the build-up happening. She let out a quiet moan as she came, forcing me to explode inside her and releasing every last drop I had inside me. I held her tight as our breathing calmed. Pulling out of her, my mouth curved upward as I ran my hand down her hair.

“That was incredible,” I spoke.

“I’ve never had pool sex before, and I can honestly say it was amazing.” She grinned.

“I’m happy you enjoyed it.” I kissed her lips. “We better dry off and get inside.”

After drying off, we went upstairs.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to sleep naked unless you have a t-shirt I can borrow,” she said.

“I’d prefer you naked under my sheets.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“Only if you’re naked with me.”

“Trust me. I will be.” I pulled back the covers.

We climbed in, and she wrapped her beautiful naked body around mine. I needed to talk to her about something that had been bothering me lately.

“Can I ask you something? Please don’t get mad or offended because I don’t mean to do that to you.”

“I already know what you’re going to ask, Grayson.” She sat up and covered herself with the sheet. “When we have sex, it’s me and only me. I promise you that. As I told you before, we have rules in the system.”

“Sometimes they like to break the rules,” I said as I ran my fingers down her arm.

“Not the sex rule. I don’t want you to worry about that. Besides, they’d only come out like that if someone was hurting me or being forced to have sex.”

“Okay. I’m sorry for asking.”

“Don’t be. I totally get it.”

“Come here.” I pulled her into me. “Let’s get some sleep. Tomorrow, I’ll drive you home so you can change before we go to my Aunt Barb’s.”

I lay there and held her tight. The feelings I’d been having lately were overwhelming because they were feelings I’d never experienced before. The problem was she just wasn’t one woman. She was five plus a ten-year-old girl. It pissed me off that she was like that because of the trauma she suffered as a child. I needed to know what happened to her, and I wasn’t going to stop until I found out the truth.

## CHAPTER 21



G rayson

My phone pinged at six a.m., and when I looked at it, I saw a text message from Gabriel.

*“We’re heading down to the water. Grab your surfboard and get your ass out here.”*

“What’s wrong?” Ava opened her eyes.

“Nothing. It’s a text from Gabriel saying they’re going surfing.” I set my phone down.

“Go and have some surf time with your family.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yes.” A smile framed her face. “If you don’t mind, I’m going back to sleep.”

“Sleep as long as you want.” I kissed her lips.

I grabbed my surfboard and ran down to the beach where my brother and cousins were.

“There he is.” Stefan smiled.

“Did Ava stay the night?” Gabriel asked.

“Yeah. Hey, Simon.” I put my board in the water next to his.

“Glad you could join us.” He smiled. “What’s up?”

“I need you and Grace to do me a favor.”

“Anything. What do you need?”

“I need you to see what you can find out about Ava. Her mother is in the California State Penitentiary. Why is she there?”

“What’s her mother’s name?”

“I don’t know, and I can’t ask Ava. She doesn’t know about her mother.”



“Then how do you?” His brows furrowed as we paddled out.

“Freya told me last night. She came out when I was playing California Dreaming. Apparently, the song triggered a flashback for Ava, and Freya immediately stopped it. She told me that it was the song that her mother constantly played. That’s when she told me where she was.”

“Okay. Grace and I will see what we can find out.”

“Thanks, Simon.”

“No problem, cousin. You know I got you.” He winked.

After we surfed for a while, we took our boards out of the water.

“Grayson.” Jackson walked over. “Did Ava tell you about our conversation yesterday?”

“No. She didn’t. What conversation?”

“I asked her if she’d be willing to let me do a brain scan on her.”

“And? What did she say?”

“She said yes and was cool about it. I’m doing it for research purposes. This is new territory for me, and I want to explore it.”

“She’s not a test subject, Jackson.”

“I know that, and so does she. As I said, she’s cool with it. We’re going to set up something next week.”

“I want to be there, so do it at the hospital.”

“I was planning on it.” He placed his hand on my shoulder.

I went back to the house. When I stepped through the sliding door, Ava was standing in the kitchen, holding a cup of coffee in her hand while scrolling on her phone.

“Nice outfit.” I smiled as I walked over to her.

“Thanks. Your T-shirts are very comfy. Don’t get mad at me, but I have to ask you something.”

“Okay.” I grabbed a mug from the cabinet.

“When I was looking for a T-shirt, I opened the drawer where you keep your underwear. I’ve never met anyone who has them folded perfectly and sorted by color.” She tried to hold back her laughter. “Who are you?”

“That was not me.” I pointed at her. “That was Ophelia. Didn’t you see my closet?”

“No.”

“She rearranged everything by the type of shirt and color. She did the same with my pants.”

“Oh. I should have known. I’m sorry.”

“For what?” My brows furrowed. “I like it.” I gave her a wink.

After finishing my coffee, I showered, dressed, and drove Ava back to her apartment. While she was changing, I opened the door to the guestroom and stared at the painting that sat on the easel.

“That’s Freya’s work.” Ava startled me as she stood in the doorway.

“It’s beautiful.” I turned and looked at her. “Tell me something. Who takes the paintings to the art gallery?”

“She does mostly. When I do, the owner thinks I’m her sister.”

“I don’t understand.” My brows furrowed. “Does he think you’re identical twins?”

“No. When Freya takes over, she has her own style.”

She opened the closet door, and I stared at all the clothes that hung there, along with a few different colored wigs.

“They all have their own style. This is Freya’s hair.” She took down the long auburn-colored wig.”

“I see.” I placed my hands in my pockets.

“So, how often does Freya front so she can paint?”

“Quite a bit. I’m co-conscious with her when she does.”

“What exactly does that mean?” I asked.

“I’m present, but I don’t have control over the body. It took us many years to get to that stage of our system.”

Her phone rang, and when she looked at it, she told me she had to take the call. I followed her out of the room.

“Thank you, Mr. Dilbert. I appreciate it,” she said and ended the call. “The check from Charles’s life insurance is in. I’ll have to stop by Mr. Dilbert’s office tomorrow and pick it up.” She turned and looked at me.

“Why?”

“Didn’t I tell you? He left me everything, including the life insurance money. He always considered me the daughter he never had. Honestly, I was shocked when Mr. Dilbert told me. Grayson, he left me a lot of money, and I would give it all away just to have him back.”

I walked over and wrapped my arms around her.

“I know you would.” My lips pressed against the top of her head. “I’m sure he just wanted to ensure you lived a comfortable life.”

“Yeah. He always looked out for me,” she said as she broke our embrace.

“We should get going,” I said. “Aunt Barb does not like it when people are late.”

## CHAPTER 22



Grayson

“Grayson, darling.” Aunt Barb hugged me when we stepped through the door.

“Hi, Aunt Barb.”

“And who is this beautiful girl?” she asked.

“Aunt Barb, I’d like you to meet Ava. Ava, this is my Aunt Barb.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ava.” She hugged her.

“It’s nice to meet you, Barb.”

As we walked through the living room, Ava stopped and stared at Aunt Barb's painting on the wall.

“Isn’t it lovely?” she asked. “I just bought it a few days ago at an art gallery downtown.”

I looked in the bottom right-hand corner and saw Freya’s name.

“She’s a very talented artist. You should see her collection,” Aunt Barb spoke.

I looked at Ava as she stared at the painting. Her eyes closed, and a bright smile crossed her face when they opened.

“Thank you, Barb. You have excellent taste. This is one of my favorites. It only took me two days to paint it.”

“Excuse me?” Aunt Barb’s brows furrowed.

I inhaled a sharp breath.

“It’s so nice when people appreciate my work. It looks beautiful in your living room.” Freya grinned.

“Grayson?” Aunt Barb asked.

I didn’t know what to say.

“It’s okay, Grayson. I’ll introduce myself. I’m Freya, the artist. It’s nice to meet you, Barb.” She extended her hand.

“Grayson, what is going on?”

“Hey, you two.” Conner walked into the living room with a grin on his face, holding Isabella.

“I thought you said her name was Ava?” Aunt Barb spoke sternly.

“Freya, now isn’t the time,” I said. “Please bring Ava back.”

“Poo. You’re no fun.” She closed her eyes.

When she opened them, Ava stared at Aunt Barb.

“I’m sorry about that.”

“Is someone going to tell me what the hell is going on?” She threw her arms up.

“Ava, come with me. The girls are outside,” Conner said.

When they left the room, I sighed and tucked my hands into my shorts pocket.

“Ava has what’s called dissociative identity disorder. It stems from childhood trauma.”

“I don’t understand, Grayson,” Aunt Barb said.

“She has five different people living inside her.”

“She has multiple personalities?” Her eyes widened.

“Yes, and Freya, the artist, is one of them.”

“So, you’re telling me that Ava painted that picture on the wall?”

“Freya painted it.”

The front door opened, and when I turned around, Gabriel walked in.

“Hi.” He smiled.

“Gabriel, do you know about Ava?”

“Yeah, why? The whole family knows. What’s going on?”

“Aunt Barb bought one of Freya’s paintings.” I pointed to the wall.

“When Ava saw it, Freya fronted and introduced herself.”

“Wow. That’s beautiful.” He walked over to the painting and looked at it.

“Will someone please help me understand!” Aunt Barb exclaimed.

“I will, Aunt Barb.” Charlotte walked into the room. “Come with me.”

I looked at Gabriel as he hooked his arm around me, and we went out on the patio.

“She hates me,” Ava said.

“No, she doesn’t. She’s just confused. Don’t worry about her.”

“This was a bad idea. Maybe you should take me home,” Ava said.

“Ava, relax.” I gripped her shoulders. “It’ll be okay.”

“Grayson is right.” Simon walked over. “My mother can be a piece of work and has no business judging anyone after all the shit she’s done in her life. You are not to let it bother you. Besides, I got your back.” He smiled.

“Thanks, Simon.”

Aunt Barb walked over and cleared her throat.

“Ava—”

“You better watch it, Mom,” Simon said.

“Be quiet, Simon. Ava, I’m sorry for my rude behavior earlier.”

“It’s okay, Barb.”

“We’ll talk later.” She placed her hand on her arm. “Dinner is almost ready.”



A<sup>va</sup>

“Is there anything I can help you with?” I asked Barb as I stepped through the sliding door.

“Can you throw the green beans in the steamer while I finish making the salad?”

“Yes, of course.”

I took the bowl that held the green beans and stood in the middle of the kitchen. Ophelia was trying to push her way through, and I tried to stop her.

“NO!” I silently exclaimed.

“*The steamer is all wrong,*” she said. “*I can make green beans they’ll never forget.*”

“*Ophelia, stop!*”

“Barb, where are your sauté pans?”

She blankly stared at me.

“I’m being so rude. Forgive me. I’m Ophelia, and I’m going to make these green beans in a way your family will never forget.”

“Um, the pans are in the bottom cabinet.” She pointed.

“Excellent.” I grinned.

“There you are,” Grayson said as he stepped inside. “What are you doing?”

“Your Aunt Barb was going to steam these beans, but I have a better way

of doing it.” I smiled.

“Ophelia. Nice to see you again,” he said.

“Nice to see you too, Grayson. Don’t worry. I won’t be here long. I’ll whip up these beans and let Ava come back.”

“Um, okay.” He walked out the sliding door.

“So, you cook?” Barb asked.

“I do. I made Grayson a wonderful home-cooked meal for when he came home after a long hard day at the hospital. I don’t mean to insult you, Barb.”

“Go ahead. It’s okay to insult her.” Simon grinned when he stepped into the kitchen.

“I don’t believe I had the pleasure of meeting you yet, detective. I’m Ophelia.”

“Great to meet you, Ophelia. I love your accent,” Simon said.

“You’re too kind. Anyway, Barb, when I was at Grayson’s, I did some re-organizing. He told me you helped him when you moved in.”

“I did,” Barb spoke as she crossed her arms, and Simon chuckled.

“I know you tried, but I have a system. If you’d like, I can help you re-organize.”

“There is nothing wrong with my organizational skills,” Barb snapped.

“I beg to differ by looking at this kitchen.”

Simon started laughing as he walked over, hooked his arm around me, and kissed my cheek.

“I love you, Ophelia.” He laughed.

“Simon, go outside.” Barb pointed to the sliding door.

I rummaged through Barb’s cabinets and refrigerator and gathered all the ingredients. Once the beans were finished, I closed my eyes and brought Ava back.

I stared down at the green beans on the stove and then looked at Barb.

“I’m sorry.” I looked down.

“Ava?” She walked over to me and placed her hand on my arm. “You don’t need to apologize. Let me give these green beans a taste.” She smiled as she grabbed a fork. “Oh, my goodness. These are delicious. I think Ophelia can give Sebastian a run for his money.”

I walked out the sliding door and sat down next to Grayson, who saved a seat for me.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m fine.” I smiled.

After we celebrated Curtis's birthday, Grayson drove me home.

"I'd ask you to come up, but Hannah is back."

"That's okay." He grabbed my hand. "Listen, I have a really busy schedule at the hospital next week. I took a couple of extra shifts for one of the doctors who needed off. So, I'm not sure when I'll be able to see you."

"That's okay. I have a busy week also. Have a good night, Grayson." I kissed his cheek and climbed out of the car.

Maybe he had a busy week, or maybe he didn't. Maybe my switching so much lately was too much for him. I had a feeling he was using work as an excuse.

## CHAPTER 23



Grayson

I could see the hurt in her eyes when I told her I had a busy week and wasn't sure when I'd be able to see her again. The truth was, I felt like things were spinning out of control, not only with her but with the feelings that resided inside me.

When I walked into the house, the scent of her perfume lingered. Jasmine, freesia, and rose. I didn't have to be near her to smell it. The scent radiated off her body, knowing it drove me crazy. I set my keys on the island, walked over to the mini bar, and poured myself a scotch. The sliding door opened, and Simon and my brother walked in.

"We saw you pull up," Gabriel said.

"Grace and I were able to find some information on Ava if you still want to know," Simon said.

"Yeah, I do want to know. Scotch?" I held up the bottle.

"Sure," Simon said.

"Go sit down, bro. I'll pour," Gabriel said.

I took my glass and sat on the couch.

"So, what did you find out?"

"Her mother's name is Dawn Williams, and she's currently serving a twenty-five-year sentence for child abuse and torture. She served two of those years in a mental institution. She's up for parole next month. Ava was taken away from her when she was six years old and placed in foster care. Apparently, a man whom her mother was seeing found Ava locked in a cage in the basement."

"What kind of fucking cage?"



“An animal cage. I’m not really sure,” Simon said. “I guess her mother had to run to the store and left this guy at the house. That’s when he went into the basement and found her. He let her out and took her to the emergency room. Then he called the police, told them about her, and cars were sent immediately to the house to arrest the mother.”

I threw back my drink, set it on the coffee table, and ran my hands through my hair.

“A cage?” I cocked my head at Simon.

“Yeah, man. I’m sorry. I’ll be honest with you. Grace and I couldn’t even finish reading the report. It’s no wonder she has D.I.D. I’m surprised she even survived.”

“Thanks, Simon.” I placed my hand on his shoulder.

“You’re welcome. I have to get home. I promised Nora that I’d read her a bedtime story. I’ll see you two tomorrow.” He walked out of the house.

“Are you okay, bro?” Gabriel asked as he sat next to me.

“I told Ava when I dropped her off that I have a busy work week and didn’t know when I’d be able to see her.”

“Do you?” he asked.

“Yeah. I picked up a couple of Dr. Nelson’s shifts.”

“What’s really going on with you?”

“I don’t know, bro.” I stood up from the couch. “I really like her, but—”

“But what, Grayson?”

“I think it might be too much with her.”

“What have you done with my brother?” he asked.

“What are you talking about?”

He stood up from the couch and walked over to me. “My brother loves chaos. That’s why he chose to become a trauma surgeon. He thrives when chaos is present. He once told me that chaos and the challenges that come with it make him feel alive. You’re different since she walked into your life.”

“Different how?”

“More alive. You’ve spent more time with her than you ever have with any other woman. I’m not sure the problem lies with her D.I.D. I think it’s your feelings for her that have you scared.” He placed his hand on my shoulder. “Whatever you decide, I’m here for you.”



A few days had passed, and I hadn't talked to Ava. I figured I'd leave her and let her spend some time with her friend, Hannah. At least, that's what I told myself. I removed my surgical cap as I walked out of the O.R. and went up to the rooftop for a cup of coffee.

"I was just going to page you." Jackson smiled.

"For?"

"Today is Ava's brain scan. Didn't you know?"

"No, I didn't. I haven't spoken to her in a few days. I've been busy here at the hospital."

"I guess that explains why we haven't seen you. You said you wanted to be in there when she had it done. She'll be here in thirty minutes."

My pager went off, and when I looked at it, it was from the ER.

"That's the ER. If I can make it, I will. I'll talk to you later." I walked away.



Ava I walked through the doors of the hospital lobby, where Jackson was waiting for me.

"Hi, Ava." He smiled.

"Hi, Jackson."

"I really appreciate you doing this," he said.

"No problem." I smiled as we stepped onto the elevator. "I spoke with the others, and they're on board, except for Seraphina. She won't front."

"That's okay. If she doesn't feel comfortable, I understand."

He led me into the imaging room, where a nurse named Linda was waiting for us.

"Linda is going to give you a gown to change into. Then we'll get you hooked up and into the MRI machine."

After I changed into the gown, I climbed on the table and laid down. Jackson walked over and took hold of my hand.

"If you don't feel comfortable or need me to get you out at any time, press this button."

"I will. Have you spoken to Grayson?"

"Yeah, I just saw him about a half hour ago. The ER paged him, but he

said he'll try to be here if he can."

"Oh, okay."

"When you feel a switch coming on, I want you to squeeze this ball," he said. "I'll be right in the control room."

"Got it." I smiled.



Jackson

The door to the control room opened, and Christian and Charlotte walked in.

"I didn't think I was going to make it," she said.

"You're just in time. Okay, Ava, we're going to put you in now."

"Okay, Jackson. I'm ready."

The images of her brain started to load as I carefully studied them.

"Ava, it's Charlotte. Can Freya come out?"

One area of her brain started to light up. "She's dissociating," I spoke.

Another area lit up, and then another, especially in the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex. When the MRI was complete, Charlotte and I walked into the MRI room.

"You did great, Ava." I smiled as I helped her up from the table.

"She's not Ava," Charlotte spoke. "Hello, Kate."

"Very observant, Dr. Kind." She smiled. "Ava couldn't handle being in there. She has a problem with enclosed spaces. We had no choice but to put her to sleep for a while."

"How long have you been here?" Charlotte asked.

"Since we walked into the hospital."

I stared at her for a moment. "I had no idea."

"We're good at keeping who we are a secret when need be." I winked. "I need to get dressed and get the hell out of here."

"Don't forget that you have an appointment at three o'clock in my office," Charlotte said.



ate

*K* I left the imaging room, pressed the elevator button, and took it down to the lobby. When the doors opened, I saw Grayson standing on the other side.

“Ava, I was just on my way up.”

“Sucks to be you.” I pushed past him.

He grabbed my arm and spun me around.

“Hold on a second.”

I looked down at his hand and then up at him.

“Unless you want me to break that hand of yours, I suggest you let go of my arm.”

He narrowed his eyes at me. “You’re not Ava, Freya, Luna, or Ophelia. You must be Kate.”

“Damn right, I am.”

“Why isn’t Ava here?” he asked.

“Why do you care?”

“Excuse me?”

“You make up some lame excuse about being super busy at the hospital this week, don’t call or text her to see how she is, and you didn’t show up for the testing. She was nervous as hell, so I stepped in.”

“This week being busy isn’t a lame excuse. It’s the truth, Kate.”

“For a trauma surgeon, you sure are an idiot. It takes three seconds to pick up the phone and send a text. You don’t have three seconds to spare?” I cocked my head. “Anyway, you’re wasting my time. Ava isn’t playing this game with you anymore. I’ll see to that. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll leave her and us the hell alone. Fuck off, Dr. Kind.” I smiled and stuck up both middle fingers at him as I walked away and out of the hospital.

## CHAPTER 24



Grayson

“What the fuck?” I said as I ran my hand through my hair.

“Grayson?” I heard Charlotte’s voice from behind.

Turning around, she knew something was wrong.

“What’s wrong?”

“I just had an encounter with Kate.”

“Ah, I see. And?”

“She told me to leave Ava and the others alone and then told me to fuck off, all while sticking both of her middle fingers up at me.”

“Oh.” Charlotte let out a light laugh.

“It isn’t funny, Charlotte!”

“No, it’s not. I’m sorry. You need to remember that Kate is the angry part of Ava. I’ll have a talk with her later at therapy. Hang in there, Grayson, and remember that isn’t Ava.” She patted my back and walked away.

I pulled out my phone and called Simon.

“What’s up, Grayson?”

“The man who found Ava when she was a child. Does he still live here in California?”

“I’ll have to check. Why?”

“Because I want to pay him a visit.”

“Grayson, I’m not sure—”

“Just get his address and text it to me, Simon.” I ended the call.

Fifteen minutes later, my phone pinged with a text from Simon.

*“His name is John Lafferty. He owns Lafferty Auto Repair on East 1<sup>st</sup> Street.”*

*“Thanks, Simon.”*

I pulled up the website on Google and saw the shop was open until seven. My shift ended at six, and if no emergencies came in, I would be able to make it to his shop in plenty of time.

It was six thirty when I pulled into the parking lot of Lafferty Auto Repair. Climbing out of my car, a young man walked out of the garage, wiping his hands with a cloth.

“Can I help you?”

“I’m looking to speak to John Lafferty.”

“He’s my dad. Who are you?”

“Dr. Grayson Kind. It’s important that I speak with him.”

“He’s in the garage, follow me,” he said. “Dad, Dr. Grayson Kind here needs to speak with you.”

John lifted his head out from under the hood and looked at me.

“What can I do for you, Dr. Kind?”

“I need to speak with you about Dawn and Ava Williams.”

He stared at me for a moment, then glanced at his watch.

“Dooley’s Bar is down the street. I’ll meet you there in about fifteen minutes, and we can talk.”

“Thank you, Mr. Lafferty.”

“Call me John.”

I climbed into my car and drove to Dooley’s. When I stepped inside, I grabbed a small table in the corner of the bar.

“Hey, handsome.” A perky server with long blonde hair walked over. “What can I get you?”

“Double scotch, no ice.”

“Coming right up.”

I sipped my drink while I waited for John to show up. The bar door opened, and he stepped inside and looked around until he saw me. Walking over to the table, he took the seat across from me.

“Hey, John. The usual?” the server asked.

“Yeah. Thanks, Lorraine.” He smiled at her. “So, what’s this about, Dr. Kind?”

“Please, call me Grayson. I need to know about that night you found Ava locked in that basement.”

“Are you her shrink or something?” he asked.

“No. I’m just someone who cares about her very much.”

“I’ve always regretted my bad decisions back then, but dating her mother wasn’t one of them. I’m not sure that child would be alive if I hadn’t. She always kept the basement door locked, and when I asked her why she did that, she said the people she was renting the house from kept it locked because they had some of their stuff down there. I got up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom and could have sworn I heard noises coming through the bathroom vent. I chalked it up to the fact that I was high and hearing things. One night after work, I went over to the house for dinner. Dawn was in the middle of cooking when she realized she didn’t have a couple of ingredients she thought she had. I’d had a long day, and the last thing I wanted to do was go back out to the store, so Dawn grabbed a beer from the fridge, handed it to me, and told me to sit on the couch and relax. Normally, I would turn on the TV, but that night, I had a headache and just wanted to sit quietly until she got back. That’s when I heard that noise in the basement again.”

“What type of noise was it?” I asked.

“It was like a squeaking noise. I figured it was rats or something, and if that was the case, Dawn had to notify the owners of the house. I went out to my truck, grabbed a pair of cutters from my toolbox, and cut the lock. When I opened the door, I could see a small light, almost like a nightlight. When I walked down the stairs and flipped the light switch, I saw the cage. It took my eyes a few seconds to process that a child was locked in there. I ran over to it, cut the lock with the cutters, and held my hand out to Ava.” He slowly shook his head. “I’d never seen anything like it before. The way that child looked has haunted my dreams ever since. She immediately came to me, and I carried her up the stairs and put her in my truck. I needed to get her out of there before Dawn returned. Just as I was pulling away, Dawn pulled up and began honking her horn. I just kept going and headed straight to the emergency room. I called 911, told them what I’d found, and gave them Dawn’s address.”

“She never told you she had a child?”

“No. In fact, she told me she never wanted kids. How is Ava? She looked good the last time I saw her.”

“You saw her?” My brows furrowed.

“Yeah. She came to the shop about three years ago and thanked me for saving her.”

I pulled up a picture on my phone that she’d taken of us on the yacht and

sent to me.

“Was this her?”

“Looks like her, but she had long auburn colored hair when I saw her last. We talked briefly, and she seemed to be doing well. She told me she was an artist and sold paintings at an art gallery.”

“I’m assuming you had to testify against Dawn,” I said.

“I did. I always knew she was a little strange, but I never imagined she could have done what she did. Anyway, after that, I cleaned myself up, found God, got my life in order, met the love of my life, opened up my shop, got married, and had a son.”

“Thank you, John, for speaking to me. I know it can’t be easy reliving that night.”

“It’s not, Grayson, but I do thank God every day that I was there to save that child. There’s something I don’t understand. Why did you have to come to me about that night? If you and Ava are close, wouldn’t she have told you herself?”

“She can’t because she doesn’t remember.”

“I don’t understand. She seemed to remember just fine when she came to see me three years ago.”

“Have you ever heard of dissociative identity disorder?” I asked.

“No. I can’t say that I have.”

“It used to be called multiple personality disorder.”

“Are you saying that Ava has that?” His brows furrowed.

“The woman who came to you three years ago wasn’t Ava. It was one of her alters/personalities named Freya. Ava barely has any recollection of her childhood due to the severe trauma she suffered.”

“Damn. I’m sorry to hear that. I had no idea.”

“I’m trying to understand better what happened to her, but the others won’t tell me. That’s why I sought you out.”

“Well, I hope I was of some help.”

“You were, John.”

“If that’s all, I need to get home to my family.” He stood from his chair and extended his hand.

“I need to get home too. Thanks again for meeting me.” I placed my hand in his.

When I got to my car, I pulled my phone out and sent a text to Charlotte.

*“Did you talk with Kate?”*



*“She never showed up for our session. I tried calling her, but it went straight to voicemail.”*

“Fuck,” I said as I climbed into my car and slammed the door shut. I sat there for a moment, gripping the steering wheel, trying to figure out what to do.

## CHAPTER 25



G rayson

I pulled out of the bar's parking lot and headed straight to Ava's. When I approached her door, loud music was blasting from inside. I banged on the door, and when it opened, Kate stood there in a skin-tight short black skirt, black tank top, and high black boots, holding a bottle of whiskey in her hand.

"Go away." She tried to slam the door in my face, but I stopped it with my hand.

I pushed my way inside and turned off the music.

"What the hell are you doing, Kate?"

"Having a little fun. Go home, Dr. Kind."

"I'm not going anywhere. Where's Hannah?"

"She's out. Why are you here? I thought I told you to fuck off earlier."

She set the whiskey bottle down.

"You missed your appointment with Charlotte," I said.

"So what? It's none of your business. Now get the fuck out before I throw you out. Do I need to remind you what happened to Gary?"

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me." Her brow raised.

"You wouldn't because you know it would hurt Ava. Isn't it your job to protect her?"

"I would be protecting her from the likes of you," she spat.

"Why do you hate me, Kate? The others like me."

"Only because you have them fooled with your good looks and your charm. But not me, Kind. I'm not fooled by you."

“What are you so afraid of?” I asked.

“I’m not afraid of anything. That’s one of the perks of being me.”

“Bullshit. Everyone is scared of something.” I raised my voice as I pointed at her.

“What could I possibly be afraid of? I am the fear. I was there. The one who took the abuse when Ava went away. I took that for her, to protect her. She was such a fragile child and couldn’t handle that woman when she went crazy. So, fuck you for saying that I’m afraid.”

As I stood and stared at her, suddenly, it hit me.

“You know, don’t you?” I asked.

“Know what?”

“That Dawn is up for parole next month. You’re afraid she’s going to get out.”

“That bitch isn’t getting out. I’ll see to that. How do you know about that?”

“I had Simon look into Ava’s past.”

“Why would you do that?” she calmly asked.

“Because I care about Ava a lot, and since none of you will tell me what happened to all of you, I had no choice but to go to him. All I want is to know the truth and understand. I spoke with John Lafferty today. He told me about the night he found you locked in that cage. He also told me that Freya paid him a visit three years ago and thanked him.”

“You just won’t stop, will you?” she asked.

“I can’t, and I won’t. Like I said, I care a great deal about Ava and want to help her. She brings out a side of me I never knew I had.”

“You want to send us all away. I’m not stupid.”

“No, Kate, I don’t. Ava needs all of you, especially you. I know if she were ever in a bad situation, you’d protect her if I wasn’t around.”

“Damn right, I would.”

“What more could I ask for?” I gave her a small smile.

She stood there and stared at me for a moment. Our eyes never breaking contact.

“Maybe you’re not such a bad guy after all, Dr. Kind.”

“Thanks, but please call me Grayson.”

“I can do that.” A smile framed her lips.

“I think it’s time that you brought Ava back. I need to speak to her.”

“Fine. Goodbye for now, Grayson.” She closed her eyes and lowered her

head.

“Grayson? What happened?” Ava looked down at her clothing. “Kate.” Her jaw clenched.

“Yeah, Kate.” I smiled as I wrapped my arms around her.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“Kate and I had a little talk. What’s the last thing you remember?”

“I was in my car on the way to the hospital for the brain scan. Everything else is a blank. Where’s Hannah?”

“Kate said she’s out. I’m sorry I haven’t been in touch the past few days. We need to talk, Ava.”

“I already know what you’re going to say, so let me save you the trouble. I understand how hard it is to see someone like me. We had a great time, and I’ll always be grateful for that.” She looked down. “I’ll be fine, Grayson, and I don’t blame you.”

I lifted my finger under her chin until her eyes were locked on mine.

“We do have a great time, and we’re going to continue having more great times. That’s if you want to.”

“What? But I thought—”

“You thought wrong, Ava. I don’t want to stop seeing you.”

“You don’t?”

“No. You are the only person who has been able to stir up feelings inside me. No matter how hard I tried to fight them, it’s a losing battle.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “I think we should date and see where things go.”

“If you’re sure, I’d like that.” A beautiful smile framed her face.

“Good. Go pack a small bag, and let’s go back to my house.” My lips brushed against hers.

“Let me change out of these clothes.” She sighed as she shook her head. “I’ll be right back.”

## CHAPTER 26



*A*<sup>va</sup>

His strong arms wrapped around my naked body as he slowly lowered me on the bed. Being with him this way was always so easy for me because of my feelings for him. I'd never felt so connected to any man the way I do to him.

His mouth devoured me in the sensual way it always did. I gripped the sheets as an orgasm tore through me. The corners of his mouth curved upward as his tongue traveled up my torso, over my breasts, and his lips met mine.

"Did you like that?" he asked in a mere whisper.

"What do you think?" I smiled.

The way he stared into my eyes sent shivers down my spine. He slowly thrust inside me as our lips met. Soft moans escaped me as my arms tightened around him. His hold on me was tight, and I felt a sense of security that I'd be longing for my entire life.

"Stop," I said. "It's my turn." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

He rolled off me and onto his back. I climbed on top and took him inside me, inch by inch until he was buried deep inside. Our eyes locked on each other as I moved back and forth. His hands groped my breasts as his thumbs circled around my hardened peaks. Pleasurable moans escaped his lips as he enjoyed the ride.

"God, you are so beautiful," he moaned.

I could feel the volcano ready to erupt inside my body as another orgasm tore through me. I let out a satisfying scream as I threw my head back. He gripped my hips and held me down as he exploded inside me.

“Oh, my God,” he moaned.

I leaned forward and buried my face into the side of his neck as his arms tightened around me, and his hands softly moved up and down my back. My heart was pounding, and my body was on fire.

“Damn,” he breathlessly spoke.

I laughed lightly as I climbed off him, rolled on my side, and stared at him.

“You’re amazing.” He smiled as he rolled on his side and brought his hand up to my cheek.

“You’re the amazing one,” I said.

“I am, aren’t I?” He grinned, and I laughed.

“You definitely are, Dr. Kind. Oh shit.” I sat up.

“What’s wrong?”

“I had an appointment with Charlotte today. Do you know if Kate went?”

“She didn’t show.”

“Fuck! She knows we have to keep appointments.” I brought my hands up to my face. “What happened between you two?” I asked.

“She told me to fuck off, but we’re good now.”

“Oh, my God. What did you talk about?” I asked with furrowed brows. It felt like he was hiding something from me.

“She was worried that I wanted to send her and the others away. I told her that I wouldn’t do that because you need them.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes. That’s all. Come here.” He held his arms out.

I snuggled against him as I laid my head on his chest.



Grayson had to get up early to get to the hospital the following morning. While he was in the shower, I grabbed my phone and saw a text message from Hannah.

*“I hope you don’t mind, but Austin is going to crash with us for a while. His roommate is having some work done on his house, and it’s really noisy.”*

I sat there and shook my head. It wasn’t okay with me, but I didn’t know how to tell her.

“What’s wrong?” Grayson asked as he emerged from the bathroom with a

towel wrapped around his waist.

“Hannah invited Austin to stay at the apartment for a while.”

“Why?” His brows furrowed.

“Apparently, his roommate is having work done on his house, and it’s too noisy. I really don’t feel comfortable with him staying there.”

“Then stay here until he leaves,” Grayson said.

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not?” He sat on the edge of the bed.

“I just can’t.”

“Sure, you can.” He smiled as his hand softly stroked my cheek. “After you’re done with work, grab some stuff from your apartment and bring it here.”

“Are you sure, Grayson? I don’t want to be a bother.”

“I’m positive, and you’re not a bother. If I didn’t want you here, I wouldn’t have asked. I have to finish getting ready.” He leaned over and kissed my lips.

I sent a message to Hannah.

*“That’s fine. I’m going to be staying at Grayson’s for a while. Let’s meet up for lunch today.”*

*“Okay. I have a job interview at eleven o’clock. Can we meet around noon?”*

*“Noon is fine. I should be done with my client before then. How about Cara Cara?”*

*“Oh, my favorite. I’ll see you there.”*

“I have to run.” Grayson walked over to the bed and kissed me. “Everything good with Hannah?”

“Yeah. We’re going to meet at Cara Cara for lunch.”

“Sounds good. I wish I could join you. I’ll see you later tonight.”

“Have a good day.” I smiled.

Before walking out of the bedroom, he turned and gave me a wink and smile. I wouldn’t lie and say I didn’t melt when he did that because I did. He was so sexy and handsome, and I couldn’t believe we were officially dating. I jumped out of bed and went downstairs to make a cup of coffee.

“Shit,” I said, realizing I didn’t have my car.

My phone rang and Grayson was calling.

“Miss me already?” I smiled as I answered the phone.

“Always. You don’t have a car, and I just realized that.”

“I know. I’ll call an Uber to take me to my apartment.”

“I’m sorry, Ava. I didn’t even think about that.”

“It’s not your fault, so don’t apologize. It’s not a big deal. Like I said, I’ll call an Uber.”

“Okay. Be safe. I’ll talk to you later,” he said.

As I was making a cup of coffee, there was a knock on the sliding door. Looking over at it, I saw Simon standing there.

“Hi.” I smiled as I unlocked and opened the door.

“Good morning. Is Grayson still here?”

“No. He already left.”

“I didn’t know you were here. I didn’t see your car in the driveway.”

“Grayson picked me up last night. I have to meet a client soon, so I’m calling an Uber to pick me up and take me to my apartment.”

“I can drive you,” he said.

“Thanks, Simon, but I don’t want to bother you.”

“Stop it. I’m going to the station, and it’s on the way. When will you be ready?”

“Can you give me thirty minutes?” I asked.

“Yeah. Just come over when you’re ready.”



## CHAPTER 27



A<sup>va</sup>

I ran upstairs, took a quick shower, threw on some makeup, brushed my hair, and got dressed with three minutes to spare. After slipping on my shoes, I walked over to Simon's house and knocked on the door.

"Hey, you." Grace smiled. "Simon told me he's dropping you off at your apartment."

"Yeah. That's really nice of him." I stepped inside.

"So, Ava, tell me what's going on with you and Grayson." A smirk crossed her lips.

"We're officially dating." I smiled.

"Yay!" She clapped her hands in excitement and hugged me. "I'm happy for you."

"You ready?" Simon walked into the living room, holding Nora.

"I am."

"Bye, sweetheart." He kissed the side of Nora's head and then handed her to Grace. "I love you, babe. I'll see you later."

"Good luck with your new partner," she said.

"I don't want to talk about it. Come on, Ava."

"Bye, Grace. Bye, Nora." I smiled.

We climbed into Simon's car, and as he pulled out of the driveway, I could feel someone wanting to front. The chatter inside was loud, making it hard for me to know who wanted to come out. I tried to fight it, but when a headache appeared, I closed my eyes and gripped the bridge of my nose.

"Ava, are you okay?"

"Hello, detective." I smiled. "It's good to see you again."

“Kate?”

“Yes. It’s me. We need to have a little chat.”

“About?” He glanced at me.

“I know you were digging into our past. I need to make sure you keep what you found a secret.”

“I won’t tell anyone. You were there, weren’t you?” he asked.

“Yes, I was there. I was there for almost all of it. Sometimes, Freya would step in and take over when I needed to rest.”

“I’m sorry you had to go through that. I can see why you are the way you are.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I asked with a narrowed eye.

“Don’t take that the wrong way. I only meant that I can see why you’re such a fighter. A good one at that.” He winked.

“When you’re harmed the way we were, you have no choice but to fight through life to protect the others so they never have to experience such harmful acts again. That’s my job, and that’s why I’m here right now to make sure you also hold the secrets we do.”

“I told you that I won’t tell anyone, and that’s a promise. You have my word, Kate.”

“Okay, detective. You’re pretty cool.”

“Um, excuse me, but I’m more than pretty cool.” His mouth curved into a smile.

I smiled back as I closed my eyes and woke Ava up.

“How did we get to my apartment so fast?” I asked with furrowed brows.

“Kate paid me a visit on the way here,” he said.

“Fuck.”

“Nah, she was cool. She just wanted to say hi again.”

I looked down at my purse that was sitting on my lap.

“Hey, it’s okay.” He reached over and placed his hand on mine. “I like you, Ava, and I think you and Grayson are good together. Don’t be ashamed of who you are.”

“I’m not ashamed. I just know that sometimes it’s hard for others when my other parts decide to make an appearance.”

“It’s not hard for any of us, and we’re all that matter.” He winked. “Fuck everyone else and what they think.”

“Thanks, Simon.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“You’re welcome. Have a good day, Ava.”

“You too.” I climbed out of the car and went up to my apartment.

I grabbed my small suitcase, threw my essentials in, and some clothes. As I was zipping it up, I heard a voice in the doorway.

“Hey, Ava.”

“Austin, you scared me.” I placed my hand over my heart. “I didn’t know you were here.”

“I spent the night. You cool with me staying here?”

“Yeah. It’s fine. I won’t really be around. I’m staying at Grayson’s house.”

“Oh, okay. I hope it’s not because of me.”

“No.” I lied.

“Okay, good. I’m going to hop in the shower.”

“I’m leaving now. I have a client meeting.”

“It was good seeing you. How’s Luna?”

“She’s good. Thanks for asking.” I smiled.



*A*fter meeting with my client and picking out the perfect drapery, I headed to Cara Cara to meet Hannah.

“Grayson and I are officially dating now.” I smiled.

“Ah, I’m so happy for you.” She reached across the table and grabbed my hand. “You deserve someone like him.”

“So, you need to tell me what’s up with you and Austin.” I picked up my wine glass.

“He’s different now, Ava. I don’t know.” She chewed her bottom lip. “I could see us together for a long time.”

“A life time?” My brow arched.

“Now, don’t get all crazy on me.” She laughed.

Her phone rang, and she smiled brightly when she took the call.

“That was the human resources director for the company I just interviewed with. I got the job!” She shrieked.

“Oh, my God. Congratulations.” I reached over the table and hugged her.

“Austin and I are going to have to celebrate big tonight. Join us. Call Grayson and ask him to come along.”

“Grayson and I already have plans for tonight. Maybe next time.”

The only thing I wanted to do tonight was spend a quiet evening with Dr. Grayson Kind.

“Okay. Next time.” She pointed at me.

After I left the restaurant, I hugged Hannah goodbye and climbed into my car. I drove to Grayson’s house, took my suitcase up to his room, and grabbed my laptop. Taking it downstairs, I opened the sliding door and sat in one of the loungers to do some work. When I was finished, I decided to run to the store and pick up something to make for dinner. Ophelia was begging me to let her help, but I told her no and wanted to do this alone. After I picked up a few things, I stopped by Four Kinds for some rolls and cherry butter. When I walked through the door, Sebastian saw me and stopped. He looked stressed out.

“Ava? Hi. What brings you in?”

“Hi, Sebastian. I was hoping to buy some rolls and that delicious cherry butter. I’m making pasta tonight for Grayson and me.”

“Of course.”

“Sebastian, table four is complaining that their food is taking too long.” One of the waitresses walked over to him.

“Apologize for me and tell them it’s coming.” He sighed. “Ava, give me a few minutes. It’s crazy here today. Two of my chefs are sick, and we’re really short-handed.”

“Sure, Sebastian. No rush.”

I looked around at the people that packed the place. I closed my eyes, and when I opened them, I headed straight to the kitchen.

“Ava, a fresh batch of rolls are in the oven. They’ll be ready in about five minutes,” Sebastian said.

“No worries, Sebastian. I’m here to help.” I smiled.

His brows furrowed as he stared at me. “Ophelia?”

“You are correct, Chef Kind. Point me in the direction so I can get started.”

“Ophelia, I can’t—”

“Of course, you can. You’re short-staffed, customers are complaining, and I can help.”

“I appreciate it, but—”

“No buts. It’s time to chop chop.” I clapped my hands. “I did study at one of the best cooking schools in Paris while I was an au pair for a wealthy family.”

“Boss, if she can cook and wants to help, let her. You know our top priority is ensuring customers are happy,” one of the cooks spoke.

“Okay. Here’s a list of today’s specials. If you can work on those, we should be good.”

“Not a problem.” I grinned.

## CHAPTER 28



Grayson

I tried calling Ava several times, but she didn't answer. After three of my text messages went unanswered, I sent a group text to my family.

*"If anyone is home, can you check to see if Ava's car is at my house?"*

*"Ava is here at Four Kinds," Sebastian texted. "Or I should say, Ophelia is here. She's helping in the kitchen."*

*"What do you mean?"*

*"She came in to pick up some rolls and butter and saw we were short-staffed due to a couple of my chefs being sick. She insisted she help out. She wouldn't take no for an answer."*

I couldn't help but laugh.

*"Okay. I'll swing by after my shift."*

*"You're lucky. She's an awesome cook," Gabriel texted.*

*"Tell Ophelia I said hi and that I love her," Simon texted.*

*"Be careful, Grayson, or else my brother will steal her from you like he did my wife," Stefan texted.*

*"Are you ever going to let that go?" Sebastian texted.*

*"Nope. Never."*

I chuckled as I placed my phone in my pocket.

"Grayson." I heard my name, and my heart started rapidly beating when I turned around.

"Claudia? What are you doing here? How did you know where I worked?"

"It's not hard to find out where a doctor works, Grayson. I have a job interview tomorrow not too far from here, so I thought I'd stop by and say

hi.”

“Why do you have a job interview?” My eye narrowed at her.

“I have a cousin who lives here, and I was thinking about moving and starting over. How have you been?”

“I’ve been great. I have patients to see.”

“Okay. How about dinner later?”

“No, Claudia. I am not having dinner with you. I’m seeing someone.”

“Is that so?” she asked with an arch in her brow.

“Yes, it is.”

“What’s going on, cousin?” Christian walked over and placed his hand on my shoulder.

“Nothing. Goodbye, Claudia.” I walked away, and Christian followed.

“What was that all about?” he asked. “Who is that girl?”

“That’s Claudia.”

“Claudia? As in stalker Claudia from Boston?”

“Yeah.” I sighed.

“What the hell is she doing here?”

“She’s thinking about moving here. Apparently, she has a job interview tomorrow.”

“Oh shit. What are you going to do?”

“I’m not doing anything. She asked me to dinner, and I told her I was seeing someone.”

“And you think by you telling her that, she’s not going to come around anymore?”

“I don’t know. I can only hope.” I sighed.

“If you need us, let us know, especially Simon. He can take care of her.”

“Yeah. I just hope it doesn’t come to that.”

After my shift ended, I climbed into my car and headed over to Four Kinds. When I walked into the kitchen, I smiled as I saw Ophelia removing a pan of fish from one of the ovens.

“Hey.” Sebastian walked over.

“How’s it going?” I asked.

“Honestly, that woman can cook like nobody’s business. I knew the green beans were fantastic when she made them at my mother’s house, but shit, cousin.”

“I know.” I laughed.

“Grayson, how was your day?” She walked over with a smile, wiping her

hands with a towel.

“It was good, Ophelia. How was yours?”

“Wonderful.” She grinned. “It felt good to be back in a kitchen like this.”

“You are welcome in my kitchen any time, Ophelia.” Sebastian smiled.

“You are too sweet, Sebastian. Thank you for letting me help out today.”

“No, thank you. We would have had a lot of angry customers if you hadn’t stepped in.”

“Are you ready to give Ava back to me?” I asked.

“Yes. She’s excited you’re here.” She closed her eyes.

When she opened them, I knew Ava was back.

“Hi.” She smiled.

“Hi.” I wrapped my arms around her. “Are you ready to go home?”

“Yes. I was going to make pasta for dinner, but—”

“Don’t worry. I’m sending the two of you home with food.” Sebastian smiled as he walked over and handed me a large brown bag.

“You’re the best, cousin. Thanks.”

“Thanks, Sebastian,” Ava spoke.

“You’re welcome. Now, get out of here and go enjoy the food.”

Ava followed me back to my house in her car. She set her purse and the groceries down when we stepped through the door while I grabbed a couple of plates from the cabinet.

“How was your day?” She wrapped her arms around me from behind.

“Not as exciting as yours was.” I smirked as I turned around. “Were you co-conscious with her?”

“Yeah. I even learned a few things. I knew she wanted to help, and I couldn’t deny her that. Plus, Sebastian seemed so stressed out.”

“Good thing you were there.” I kissed her forehead. “Let’s eat. I’m starving. Are you working tomorrow?” I asked as we sat down at the table.

“I don’t have any client meetings. Why?”

“I don’t have to go into the hospital tomorrow, but I am on call. I thought we could spend the day together and do something.”

“Like?” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Anything you want.”

“Oh wait. I do have a therapy appointment tomorrow.”

“What time?”

“Nine o’clock.”

“Okay. I’ll drive you, and we’ll do something after.” I smiled.



“I’d like that.”

The sliding door opened, and Jenni walked in, holding Sawyer.

“Hey, you two.” She grinned. “Grayson, would you mind if I stole Ava for a while? The guys are going down to the beach, and we girls are hanging at my house for a while.”

“Ava?” I looked at her.

“I’d love to.” She grinned.

“Great. Come on,” Jenni said.

“I should clean up from dinner first,” Ava said.

“Nah. Grayson will clean it up, won’t you?” Jenni’s brow arched.

“Yep. You go.” I stood up from my seat and kissed her lips. “I’ll clean this up.”

“Are you sure?” Ava asked.

“He’s sure. Come on.” Jenni held out her hand.

## CHAPTER 29



G rayson

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

“There you are,” Gabriel said, patting my back when I sat down.

“How’s it going?” Shaun asked.

“It’s going.” I smiled as I tipped the bottle to my lips.

“Did you tell Ava about Claudia?” Christian asked.

“Claudia? Who the fuck is Claudia?” Simon asked.

“What about Claudia?” Gabriel narrowed his eyes at me.

“I didn’t have a chance to tell you yet, but Claudia paid me a visit at the hospital today.”

“She’s here? In Los Angeles?” Gabriel sternly spoke.

“Unfortunately. She told me she’s here for a job interview.”

“Again, who is Claudia?” Simon asked.

“She’s the one who was stalking my brother back in Boston. The chick has some serious issues,” Gabriel spoke.

“Do you think she wants to move here because of you?” Sam asked.

“That’s my guess. She asked me to have dinner with her. I told her I was seeing someone, and she didn’t seem happy about that.”

“What do you need me to do?” Simon asked. “Warn her, threaten her? Anything you need, just say the word.”

“I’m hoping she’ll just leave me the hell alone,” I said. “Especially since she knows I’m seeing someone.”

“Did you tell Ava?” Christian asked.

“No, and I don’t want her knowing or worrying about it.” I took a drink

of my beer. “I wanted to let you guys know that you’ll be seeing Ava around a lot more. She’s staying at my house for a while.”

“Damn.” Simon laughed. “That didn’t take long.”

“She’s only staying because her friend, Hannah, invited some guy she’s seeing to crash at the apartment.”

“And you suggested she stay with you?” Gabriel asked.

“Yeah. She didn’t feel comfortable with him staying there.” I glanced at him. “How are the plans coming along for the gala?” I asked Shaun.

“They’re coming along great.” He grinned. “Selena is doing an amazing job.”

“Is she bitching?” Jackson asked.

“Always.” Shaun smiled. “But my day wouldn’t be complete if she didn’t storm into my office with an attitude.”

We all laughed.

“It’s been fun, fam, but I’m going to grab my girl and go home.” I stood up from my chair.

“Did you hear that?” Sam asked. “He said ‘his girl.’”

“I didn’t say that.” I smirked as I walked away and headed to Shaun’s house.

“Good thing I didn’t have the balls to shoot down Cupid when he came knocking on your door,” Simon shouted.

I chuckled as I shook my head. Opening the sliding door, I stepped into Jenni and Shaun’s house and saw the girls gathered in the living room. A smile crossed my lips when I saw Ava sitting on the couch, holding Stella, and bouncing her on her knee.

“I’m heading back to the house,” I told Ava.

“And?” Jenni looked at me.

“I was hoping Ava would like to come back with me.”

“She’s having fun with us, Grayson,” Grace said.

“I’m happy to hear that, but I was going to draw her a nice hot bubble bath and pour her a glass of wine.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“Would you be joining me?” Ava smiled.

“What do you think?”

“Give me my baby and go.” Jenni grinned as she held out her arms. “We wouldn’t want to be responsible for holding up sexy time with this fine doctor. Right girls?”

“Right,” they all spoke at the same time.

Ava laughed as she handed Stella to Jenni. "I'll talk to you girls later."  
I hooked my arm around her as we walked out the sliding door.

"A hot bubble bath sounds nice." She laid her head on my shoulder as we walked back to my house.

"I think so, too." I pressed my lips against her head.

After starting the water, I stripped out of my clothes and climbed in. As the tub filled with water and bubbles, I stared at Ava while she pinned her hair up so it didn't get wet. The moment she slipped out of her dress, my cock hardened. I held out my hand, and she placed hers in mine as I helped her into the tub. Sitting between my legs, she snuggled her back against my chest as my arms wrapped around her.

"Wasn't this a good idea?" I asked.

"A wonderful idea." Her fingers softly stroked my arm.

"Next Saturday is the gala for Shaun's company. Will you go with me?"

"I was wondering when you were going to ask." She smiled as she tilted her head back and stared at me.

"You know about it?"

"Jenni mentioned it earlier. She wants me to stop by her studio tomorrow to try on some dresses."

"Perfect." I leaned down and kissed her lips.

"I can't even begin to tell you how much I really like all the girls."

"Yeah. They're great. We Kind men have excellent taste in women."

"I agree." She scrunched up her nose. "They're such good mothers too. I can feel the love they have for their children. Just like mothers should."

"You don't remember anything about your mother?" I treaded carefully.

"I have a few memories here and there. I need to know what happened to me, Grayson. The others don't think I can handle it, but they're wrong. I've known about my condition for ten years and am a lot stronger. The thing that pisses me off is that we're a family, and families shouldn't keep secrets."

"I agree, but they're only doing what they were created to do," I said.

"I understand that, but I will never completely heal until I find out why I was taken away from her. I tried to find her once."

"You did?"

"Yeah. When I was sixteen, but then I lost a month's worth of time, and when I woke up, I was in a psychiatric hospital. I guess I had some sort of mental breakdown at my foster home. I broke just about everything I could get my hands on and practically destroyed the place. That's when I was

committed to the mental facility under the care of Dr. Robbins. When I woke up and told him that I didn't know where I was and asked why I was there, he told me that I had a schizophrenic episode. They had me pumped full of different medications that made me tired and numb. After working with Charles for a while, it came out that Kate was the one who did all the damage. She was trying to stop me from finding my mother."

"I'm sorry you had to go through all of that." My grip around her tightened.

"I was relieved when I found out about the others and met them because, finally, for the first time in my life, I didn't feel like I was crazy. I felt a sense of peace. But even though I had these other people living inside me, I was still scared to be alone, hence the reason I found myself in many bad relationships."

"That's all in the past." I pressed my lips against the top of her head. "We all make mistakes in our lifetime, and we can't dwell on them. We can only move forward, which you've done."



I awoke, and Ava wasn't in bed. Picking up my phone, I saw it was two a.m. I heard whimpering sounds, so I turned on the lamp on the nightstand and saw Ava huddled in the corner of the bedroom.

"Ava, what's wrong?" I climbed out of bed.

"I had a bad dream," she spoke in a childlike voice. "I'm scared, Grayson."

It was then I knew she wasn't Ava.

"Luna?"

She slowly nodded her head as her face stayed buried in her knees. Shit. I didn't know what to do.

"It's okay. I'm here." I placed my hands on her arms.

She lifted her head, and her teary eyes stared into mine. "It was so scary."

"It was only a dream. Come here." I helped her up from the floor and wrapped my arms around her, pressing her head into my chest. "Let's get you back in bed."

"Will you stay with me?" she asked.

"Of course I will."

I helped her back into bed and covered her with the sheet. Walking back to my side, I sat on the edge of the bed with my feet planted on the ground while running my hand down my face.

“Grayson?” Ava’s voice spoke. “What’s wrong?” She reached over and rubbed my back.

I didn’t know what to say because now wasn’t the time to tell her that Luna was out and afraid.

“I had a leg cramp.” I laid down. “It’s better now.” I held out my arm, and she snuggled her body against mine.

## CHAPTER 30



*A*<sup>va</sup>

Grayson and I rolled out of bed at six-thirty a.m., took a long shower together, and got ready for the day. As I was in the bathroom, applying my makeup, he walked in and set a cup of much-needed coffee down on the counter.

“You are a Godsend.” I smiled as I kissed his lips and then sipped my coffee.

“I am a God, aren’t I?” He grinned.

“Shut up.” I laughed as I playfully smacked his arm.

“How did you sleep last night?” he asked as he took down his shaving cream from the cabinet.

“Great. Aside from your leg cramp, how did you sleep?”

“Pretty good. There’s something I need to tell you.” He lathered his face.

“What is it?” I started applying my mascara.

“I woke up last night to Luna huddled in the corner crying.”

“What?” I stared at him through the mirror.

“She said she had a nightmare, and she was scared.”

I set down my mascara tube and gripped the edge of the counter. “I didn’t know she fronted. I’m sorry.”

“There’s nothing for you to be sorry about.”

“Did she say what her nightmare was about?” I asked.

“No. I put her back in bed, and that’s when you woke up.”

“So, that’s why you were sitting on the edge of the bed? Did you or did you not have a leg cramp?”

“I didn’t. I just didn’t want to tell you last night.”

“Why? Because you didn’t know how to handle it?” I stormed out of the bathroom.

“Ava, get back here. That’s not true. It scared me to see you, I mean her, like that. I didn’t know what to do.” He followed me into the bedroom.

I stood there and stared at him with his face full of shaving cream and couldn’t help but laugh.

“What’s so funny?” he asked.

“You and your face full of shaving cream.”

“Oh really?” He leaned in closer, and I ran for I didn’t want him to ruin my makeup.

He chased me down the stairs and caught me before I made it into the kitchen. Turning me around, he pressed the side of his face against mine.

“You asshole.” I laughed as I pushed him away. “Now I have to redo my foundation.”

“I think it goes nice with your one made-up eye. You talk about my shaving cream face?” He swooped down and picked me up.

“I hate you.” I smiled as my arms wrapped around his neck.

“No, you don’t.” He kissed my forehead.

“Oh, but I do,” I said as he carried me up the stairs.

“You’ll get over it.” He winked with a smile.



“*W*hat are you going to do while I’m in therapy?” I asked him as we walked up the stairs, hand in hand, to the second floor.

“I’ll go see if my brother has time to talk. If not, I’ll visit my cousins or hang out in the kitchen if they’re busy.”

“Sounds like a plan.” I smiled as we reached Charlotte’s practice.

“Have a good session.” He kissed my lips.

“I will.”

I walked into Charlotte’s practice and saw her at the reception desk.

“Good morning.” She smiled. “Come on back. Was that Grayson I saw?”

“Yeah. He has the day off, but he’s on call. We’re going to do something today,” I said as we walked into her office, and I took a seat on the couch.

“How was your bubble bath last night?” She grinned.

“Amazing. Something happened last night.”



“What?” Her brows furrowed.

“Grayson told me this morning that Luna was huddled in the corner crying from a nightmare last night.”

“You have no recollection of that?”

“No. When I woke up, I saw him sitting on the edge of the bed. I think Luna freaked him out.”

“He’s met Luna before,” she said.

“I know, but this was different. A crying child in an adult body. He didn’t know what to do.”

“He’ll figure it out. Grayson really likes you, and if he couldn’t handle the others, he wouldn’t have asked you to stay at his house with him.”

“I’m in love with him, Charlotte.”

“I know you are. I can tell. We all can.” She smiled.

“If I’m going to be in a relationship with him, I need to find out what my mother did to me and why I was taken away from her.” I lowered my head and closed my eyes.

“Hello, Charlotte.”

“Freya, it’s nice to see you again.” She smiled.

“Charles tried for years to get Ava to remember what happened, and we wouldn’t let him. Why should we let you? What’s done is done and can’t be undone.”

“You’re right, but it’s time she knew the truth. I still struggle with the loss of my memories from the accident. Ava’s been nothing but kind to all of you. She listens to you, understands you, and lets each of you do your own thing. You’ve all come so far since the diagnosis. Now, it’s time for you to listen to her and understand why she wants to remember. I’ll be here when she does, and so will all of you. Together, we can help her get through it. Let me ask you something. Do you trust Grayson?”

“Yes. We all trust him, even Kate, and she’s never trusted anyone in her life except Charles.”

“Then you know he’ll protect Ava as well. I want to put Ava under hypnosis and ask that none of you interfere. I know Charles has tried it several times, but you stopped it. She’s ready, Freya.”

“I’ll have to consult with the others first. Until next time, Charlotte.” I lowered my head and closed my eyes.

“I’m sorry, what were we talking about?” I asked as I lifted my head.

“I was talking to Freya,” Charlotte said.

“Oh. What did she have to say?”

“I need you to have a meeting with the others, Ava, and tell them what you want. Tell them that you’re ready to learn the truth about what happened to you.”

“Okay. I’ll do that.”

She looked at her watch. “Our time is up. Go have an amazing day with Grayson.” She smiled as she stood from her chair.

“Thanks, Charlotte.” I hugged her.

## CHAPTER 31



Grayson

I took the elevator up to the third floor and entered my brother's practice. A smile crossed my face when I saw a waiting room filled with patients. His practice was thriving, and I couldn't be happier for him.

"Hey." I smiled when I stepped into his office. "You have a waiting room full of patients."

"Isn't it great? What's up, bro?"

"I was just seeing if you had time to talk. Ava is in her appointment with Charlotte."

"I wish I did, but you saw the waiting room." He smiled.

"Yeah, and I'm happy for you. I'll talk to you later."

"Maybe the three of us can have dinner tonight," he said.

"Sounds good. I'll let you know."

I went to the kitchen area and made a cup of coffee while waiting for Ava to finish her session with Charlotte.

"Hey, Grayson." Shaun walked in and over to the coffee machine.

"Shaun, what are you doing here?" I asked.

"Board meeting. How about you?"

"I'm waiting for Ava to finish up with Charlotte."

"Ah, that's right. You two are spending the day together." A smile crossed his lips. "By the way, I meant to ask you and Gabriel last night. Did your motorcycles come in yet?"

"Not yet. I'll give Larry a call later and see what's going on with them."

"Good. The sooner you get them, the sooner we can all ride together."

My phone pinged with a text message from Ava.

*“I’m done.”*

*“I’ll meet you outside Charlotte’s office.”*

“I have to go. Ava’s finished with her appointment. I’ll see you later, Shaun.”

“Enjoy your day with your woman.” He smiled and winked.

“I fully intend to.”

I walked out of the kitchen area and over to Charlotte’s practice.

“How did your session go?” I hooked my arm around her and kissed the side of her head.

“It went well. I told her that I’m ready to learn the truth about what happened to me, but first, I need to have a meeting with the others.”

The elevator doors opened, and we stepped inside.

“How do you do that? Have a meeting with them?” I asked.

“I sit in a quiet place and go inside my mind. We have this room with a round table that seats six, and we all gather around it and talk. I know it sounds crazy to you.”

“Not at all.” I smiled as we walked out of the medical center. “What do you want to do?”

“I want to spend the day on the beach, have a picnic, and swim in the ocean with you.” A wide grin crossed her face.

“Sounds like an excellent plan.” I leaned in and kissed her lips.

We stopped at the store, grabbed some things for our picnic, and headed back to the house. After changing into our bathing suits, I grabbed a blanket, and we set up down by the water.

“I’m going in.” She smiled as she stood up and ran to the water.

I quickly stood up and chased her. She screamed when I grabbed her from behind, picked her up, and carried her in with me. We laughed as the water flew over us while I held her up and her arms wrapped tightly around my neck.

“Don’t let go,” she said as her eyes stared into mine.

“I’m never letting go.” My lips brushed against hers.

We played around in the ocean for a while and swam back to shore. After drying off, we sat on the blanket and ate some of the food.

“What a perfect day.” Ava smiled.

“It is.” I kissed the side of her head.

My phone pinged with a text from an unknown number.

*“Hi, Grayson. I got the job! I went to the hospital to tell you the good*

*news, and they told me it was your day off. I was hoping we could go out and celebrate tonight.”*

“What the fuck?” I silently spoke to myself.

“Grayson, are you okay?” Ava asked.

“Yeah.” I set my phone down. “It was Gabriel asking if we wanted to have dinner with him tonight.” I lied.

“Sounds good to me.” She smiled.

My pager went off.

“No,” Ava whined.

I grabbed it and let out a sigh.

“I’m sorry. A patient that I performed surgery on yesterday isn’t doing well. I have to go to the hospital. Hopefully, I won’t be gone long.”

“It’s okay. While you’re at the hospital, I’ll head over to Jenni’s studio and look at dresses for the gala.”

“Perfect. I can’t wait to see you in it.” I leaned in and kissed her lips.

We gathered up our things and headed back to the house.

“I’ll see you later.” I kissed her.

“I can’t wait.” A smile framed her face.

I was still rattled by the fact that Claudia had the nerve to text me. She must have gotten a new number because I blocked her back in Boston. As I was driving to the hospital, another text came through from her.

*“You didn’t answer me about tonight.”*

I inhaled a deep breath and messaged her back when I was stopped at a traffic light.

*“The answer is no, Claudia! Don’t contact me again!”* I blocked her number and threw my phone down on the seat.



*A*va

I sent Jenni a text telling her that I was on my way to the studio. When I arrived, I walked up the stairs and found her in her office.

“You’re here.” She ran over and hugged me. “Where’s Grayson? I thought the two of you were spending the day together.”

“The hospital paged him.”

“Life of a trauma surgeon.” She sighed. “Georgia, Charlotte, Sofia, and

Charleigh can relate to that. Come on. I have the perfect dress for you.” She grabbed my hand. “Well, what do you think?” A grin crossed her face.

I stood there in awe of the beautiful, long, wine-colored, one-shoulder neckline dress that was displayed proudly on a mannequin.

“Jenni, it’s gorgeous.”

She removed the dress and handed it to me. “Go try it on, and let’s see if it needs to be altered.”

I went into the fitting room and slipped into the dress. I’d never worn anything so elegant before, and I felt like a princess. When I stepped out of the fitting room, Jenni placed her hands over her mouth.

“You look gorgeous, Ava. And it looks like a perfect fit.” She walked over to me. “What do you think?”

“I love it, Jenni.”

“The color is beautiful on you. Grayson is going to be walking around that gala all night as stiff as a board.” The corners of her mouth curved upward, and I laughed.

“How much do I owe you?” I asked.

“I can’t believe you are seriously asking me that.” Her brows furrowed. “It’s on me.”

“I can’t do that. Let me pay you something. Charles left me an obscene amount of money when he passed away, and I don’t know what to do with it.”

“Really? Well, the first thing you need to do is talk to Shaun and invest it. He can help you.”

“I think I’ll do that.” I smiled. “Thank you, Jenni. You are really sweet. You all are. I’ve never felt so welcomed into a family.” Tears started to fill my eyes.

“Hey.” She placed her hand on my arm. “No tears. We love you.”

I changed out of my dress and headed home. When I pulled into the driveway, I noticed a car with a woman sitting in it parked across the street from Grayson’s house. I stared at her for a moment as she stared at me. Grabbing my dress from the back, I went inside.

## CHAPTER 32



G rayson

I walked through the door and saw Ava on the couch with her laptop.

“Hey.” I smiled as I walked over, sat beside her, and kissed her lips.

“How’s your patient?”

“I had to go back in and repair something. He’ll be fine. Did you get your dress from Jenni?”

“I did.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“Can I see it?”

“You can see it when I put it on for the gala. Is that car still parked across the street?”

“What car?” My brows furrowed.

“When I came back from Jenni’s studio, there was a car with a woman sitting in it parked across from the house.”

My heart began to race. “What did she look like?”

“I really didn’t get a good look at her. Why?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t see a car when I pulled up. Anyway, what are you doing?”

“Looking for a specific couch and chair that one of my clients wants for her living room. By the way, Jenni told me that I should talk to Shaun about investing some of the money Charles left me.”

“I was going to suggest that to you. We’re meeting Gabriel at Four Kinds for dinner. When we get back, we can go over to Shaun’s, and you can talk to him.”

“Sounds good.” She smiled as her lips met mine. “When are we meeting

your brother?”

I glanced at my watch. “We should leave now.”

I was bothered by what Ava told me about a car being parked across the street from my house. If it was Claudia, how did she know where I lived? She was taking this too far, and I was going to have to stop it.

When we arrived at Four Kinds, Gabriel was already sitting at a table waiting for us.

“Hey, bro.” I smiled.

“Hey, you two.”

“Hi, Gabriel,” Ava said as I pulled the chair out for her. “Is Sebastian here tonight?”

“Yeah, he is. He said he’ll be back over when you two get here.”

The waiter walked over and set a basket of bread down with the cherry butter.

“I love this bread and butter.” Ava grinned as she reached inside the basket and took a piece.

“Look who’s here.” Aunt Barb smiled as she and Curtis walked over to our table.

“Hi, Aunt Barb,” I said. “Curtis.” I gave a nod.

“Would you mind if we joined you?” she asked.

“Not at all,” Gabriel spoke.

“Ava. You are Ava, correct?”

“Aunt Barb.” I furrowed my brows at her.

“Yes, it’s me.” Ava smiled as Aunt Barb took the seat next to her.

“Okay. Just making sure, dear.” She placed her hand on hers.

Sebastian walked over with a bottle of wine and talked to us for a bit.

“Sebastian, darling, when will you be home?” Aunt Barb asked.

“I plan on leaving here now and stopping at the brew house. I should be home in about an hour or so. Why?”

“Message your brothers and cousins for a family meeting. A bonfire will do.” She smiled. “Curtis and I have an important announcement.”

“Okay, Mom. I’ll do that now. Enjoy your dinner, and I’ll see you all later.”

“What’s the big announcement, Aunt Barb?” I asked.

“You’ll find out later with the rest of the family, darling.”

After having a nice dinner, we headed home.

“I’ll grab a couple of beers,” I said as I walked over to the refrigerator.



“What do you think your Aunt Barb’s news is?” Ava asked.

“She’s probably going to tell us when she and Curtis are getting married.” I smiled as I handed Ava a bottle of beer.

“Thanks.” She leaned in and kissed my lips.

“You’re welcome. You ready to head down to the beach?”

“Let’s go.” She held out her hand.

When we walked down to the bonfire, just about everyone was there except for Nathan.

“Where’s Nathan?” I asked as we sat down next to Shaun and Sam.

“The hospital paged him. There was a house fire, and a kid got trapped inside. When they pulled him out, he was alive but had third-degree burns on the left side of his body, including his face,” Jackson said.

“Shit. I hope the kid is going to be okay,” I said.

“Mom called this meeting, yet she isn’t here,” Simon said, shaking his head.

“Hello, my beautiful family.” Aunt Barb smiled as she and Curtis walked toward us.

After we all said hello, she and Curtis sat down.

“Get on with it, Mom. What’s this about?” Simon asked.

“I know this is short notice, but Curtis and I are getting married two weeks from Saturday and you’re all going to be there. So, start rearranging your schedules now.”

“Where are you getting married, Mom?” Sam asked.

“The Ritz Carlton in Naples, Florida.” She smiled.

“What?” Simon spit out his beer. “Why the hell can’t you get married here in Los Angeles?”

“Because I love Naples and the Ritz Carlton. A friend of mine is the manager there, and she called me to say the groom canceled the wedding they had scheduled for that weekend, and if Curtis and I wanted to fly out and get married, the date is ours.”

“Good for you, Mom. Congratulations. We’ll all be there over Facetime or Zoom. Whichever you prefer,” Simon said.

“Simon, be quiet. You’re all attending, or you’ll be written out of the will. Understand me? We’re getting married on Saturday. So, we’ll fly out on Shaun’s jet on Thursday and fly back on Sunday. This is more than enough notice to get your schedules rearranged.”

“Is it just going to be us at the wedding, Mom?” Stefan asked.

“No. Our friends will be attending, as well as the friends we have in Naples.”

“How many people?” Shaun asked.

“About one hundred and fifty.”

“You and Curtis already had a big wedding once. Why can’t you have a private and intimate wedding with just us?” Sebastian asked.

“That’s what I’m saying.” Simon held up his beer bottle.

“That is small, Sebastian. Also, as much as I’d love to have all of you stand up in our wedding, Curtis and I decided not to have anyone. Don’t be offended.”

“Trust us, Ma, none of us are.” Simon tipped the bottle to his lips.

“Jenni, darling—”

“Don’t worry. I got you.” Jenni smiled. “Come to the studio tomorrow.”

“Thank you, darling,” Aunt Barb spoke.

“Mom, how are you pulling this off so fast?” Stefan asked.

“I’ve sent out an announcement on Facebook and spoke to our friends in Florida. The quick responses were amazing.” She smiled. “Also, my friend who manages the hotel has set me up with the hotel’s event planner, and I’ve been working with her over Facetime.”

“And why the hell are we the last to know about this?” Simon snapped.

“Darling, it’s only been a couple of days. I’ve been busy and haven’t had a chance to tell all of you. I’ve already blocked a bunch of suites at the hotel for the family. Just give them a call and reserve one. Come on, Curtis. We should get back home and go over our list.”

“I say we all stand together and don’t go,” Simon said. “We’ve already been to one of their weddings.”

“You know we can’t do that, bro.” Sam laughed.

“Besides, Gabriel and I weren’t at the first wedding.” I smirked.

“I’m supposed to go to New York that Friday for a meeting at one of my companies,” Shaun said.

“Then you better reschedule it for another time,” Simon said. “The woman whose husband cheated on her with your mother has spoken. Besides, we’ll all be really pissed if you don’t go.”

“I’ll reschedule. Don’t worry.” Shaun laughed.

After we finished our beer, Ava and I went home. As she stood in the bathroom brushing her hair, I walked in and took the brush from her hand.

“What are you doing?” She smiled at me through the mirror.

“Brushing your hair for you. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Not at all.”

I softly ran the brush down the back of her head. “You do know this is turning me on, right?” I asked.

“Is it?”

I pushed my hard cock against her back as I continued brushing. She reached back, grabbed my wrist, and took the brush from my hand. Turning around, she leaned against the counter while her arms wrapped around my neck.

“You’re bad, Dr. Kind.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

I stuck my hand inside her robe and softly grabbed ahold of her bare breast.

“I’m all kinds of bad, Miss Williams.”

She let out a gasp as I untied her robe and pushed it off her shoulders. Lifting her up, I set her on the bathroom counter. Getting down on my knees, my mouth seductively explored the part of her that gave me such pleasure before I had my way with her.

## CHAPTER 33



*A*va

I stepped off the elevator and into the lobby of Sterling Capital.

“May I help you?” A young woman behind the large curvature desk asked.

“She’s here for a meeting with me.” Shaun smiled as he walked over.

“Hi, Ava.”

“Hi, Shaun.” I grinned.

“Let’s go up to my office. Can I have my assistant get you some water or coffee?” he asked as we walked up the stairs.

“Coffee would be great.”

“Perfect. Selena, meet Ava. Ava, this is my wonder woman of an assistant, Selena.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Ava.” She smiled.

“The pleasure is mine, Selena.”

“Two coffees, please, Selena,” he said to her as we stepped into his office, and he shut the door.

“So, Jenni tells me you’re looking to invest some money.” He grinned as he sat down behind his desk.

“I am.” I leaned over and handed him the file folder.

He opened the file, and instantly, his eyes darted up at me.

“This is all yours?” His brow arched.

“Charles left it to me after he passed away.”

“Charles was a very generous man,” he spoke.

The door opened, and Selena walked in and handed me a cup of coffee.

“Thank you, Selena.”

“You’re welcome, Ava. Here.” She set Shaun’s cup down with an attitude. “You’re lucky I didn’t put rat poison in it. Or did I?” She glared at him.

“I actually wouldn’t put it past you.” He chuckled as she walked out of the office.

“Is she okay?”

“She gets like this every year while planning the gala. I’m used to it. “Anyway, I can help you invest this, and you’ll be set for life.”

“Thank you, Shaun. Also, I want to give you this.” I pulled a check out of my purse and handed it to him. It’s a donation for the charity you’re sponsoring at the gala.”

He took the check from me and looked at it.

“Ava, this is for two million dollars.” Shock swept over his face.

“I know. I took it out of the investment money. I think what you’re doing is amazing, Shaun. Raising money to help the homeless with shelter, food, and medical expenses is a wonderful thing. I was homeless once. Well, almost homeless until Kate decided to take over and join the army. And I would have been homeless the day I woke up on the streets if Charles didn’t believe me when I told him that I had no memory of the last two years and there were voices in my head.”

“I don’t know what to say, Ava, except thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome. May I ask why you wanted me to bring my portfolio?”

“Yes, that’s right. You caught me off guard with that donation that I almost forgot. Can I see it, please?” He held out his hand.

I handed him my portfolio and sat there while he looked through it.

“You have a great eye for detail. You remind me of my wife.” The corners of his mouth curved upward. “I bought an apartment building in Marina Del Rey, and I’m having all of the apartments remodeled. This particular building is for people who travel back and forth for work, long distance. I’m looking for an interior decorator who can make the apartments feel like a home away from home.” A smile crossed his lips. “If you’re interested, the job is yours.”

“Seriously, Shaun?”

“Seriously, Ava.”

“Don’t you have an interior decorator already?”

“I did. She was good, but she had the personality of Satan. Nobody liked her, and they couldn’t work with her. I finally had to let her go. So, when

Grayson mentioned what you did for work, I was intrigued.”

“Thank you for the opportunity, Shaun.”

“Don’t mention it. Are you excited for your first gala tonight?”

“I am.” A bright smile crossed my lips.

“And we’re happy you’ll be joining us.”



**G**rayson

I exited through the operating room doors and pulled my phone from my pocket. My heart started racing when I saw I had ten text messages, all from an unknown number.

*"Hi, handsome. Are you free tonight?"*

*"I would love to see you again."*

*"I'm sure you're saving lives, which is why you haven't texted me back yet."*

*"I know you said never to bother you again, but I know you didn't mean it."*

*"Grayson, please text me back. I've changed. I can prove it."*

*"I was thinking about the things you said to me back in Boston, and I totally get it. I know I overstepped and I'm sorry."*

*"The girl staying at your house is pretty. But I'm prettier, and I know you think so."*

*"Please call me, Grayson. I miss you."*

*"I love how you live on the beach. I envision us taking romantic walks at sunset."*

*"I'll be waiting for your text or call."*

I ran my hand through my hair and then blocked her number. My pager went off, and it was the ER. When I got down to room five, my heart raced as I stopped in the doorway.

“Hi.” Claudia smiled.

“What are you doing here?” I spoke through gritted teeth.

“I was worried about you since you haven’t returned any of my text messages or called me like I asked you to.”

“As you can see, I’m fine, Claudia.”

“I’m sorry, Dr. Kind. She wouldn’t stop causing a scene until we paged

you. She was upsetting the other patients,” Karla, one of the nurses, spoke when she walked in.

“It’s fine, Karla. What the hell do you want, Claudia?” I stared into her unstable eyes.

“I want you and what we shared back in Boston. Is that so much to ask, Grayson?”

I needed to be careful with my words because I already knew how unstable she was, and I wasn’t sure how far she would take it.

“Listen, Claudia, we had a good thing when we were seeing each other, but people grow apart. You’re a beautiful woman, and any man would be lucky to have you.” I choked out the words.

“But I don’t want any other man. I only want you. I love you so much, Grayson.”

“No, Claudia, you don’t. You just think you do.”

“Don’t you tell me how I feel!” she spoke through gritted teeth. “My love for you is real, and it’s heartfelt. I know you’ll come around and see that whore you’re with is nothing compared to me. You’re using her because you missed me, right?”

I took in a deep breath as I ran my hand through my hair.

“You leave Ava out of this, and you’re to leave her alone. Do you understand me?” I spoke angrily.

“She can’t love you like I can!”

“Karla?” I shouted out the door. “Call security.”

“Don’t bother. I’ll leave. But this isn’t over, Grayson.” She walked out of the room.

## CHAPTER 34



G rayson

I wrapped the towel around my waist as I stepped out of the shower. Walking into the bedroom, I gasped when I saw Ava standing there in her gown.

“What do you think?” A beautiful smile crossed her lips.

“You have literally taken my breath away.” I smiled as I walked over to where she stood and gripped her hips. “You are the most stunning and beautiful woman in the world.” I brushed my lips against hers.

“Thank you. Can you help me with my necklace?” she asked, handing it to me and turning around.

After clasping her necklace around her neck, my lips pressed against her bare shoulder.

“You’re going to be the highlight of the gala. Is it bad that I want to skip it and make love to you in and out of this dress?”

She turned around and playfully smacked my chest. “Go get ready, or we’re going to be late. You can have your fun when we get home.”

“But I’m already hard.” I smirked.

“Sorry, Dr. Kind, but if you recall, you got home later than you said you would be.”

“I got held up at the hospital.” I sighed as I turned and went back into the bathroom.

I hated lying to her and not telling her that Claudia was in town and stalking me. But she didn’t need to know that because I would take care of it, and I didn’t want her to worry.

The gala was being held at L.A.’s Live Event Deck. When Ava and I



stepped inside, I looked around for my family.

“Oh my gosh. This place is amazing.” Ava grinned.

A server walked over with glasses of champagne on a silver tray. I grabbed two glasses and handed one to Ava.

“Thank you, handsome.”

“You can thank me later,” I whispered in her ear.

“Stop thinking about sex.” A smile crossed her lips.

“With you, never.”

We found my family amongst the crowd of people who attended Shaun’s big night.

“What’s up, bro?” I hooked my arm around Gabriel as he stood and talked with our cousins.

“Why are you so late?” Gabriel asked.

“Can I talk to you for a moment?”

“Sure, bro.”

We walked away and went somewhere private.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Claudia.”

“Again?” His brows furrowed.

“She won’t stop texting or calling me from a bunch of different numbers. As soon as I block her, a new one pops up. She came to the hospital today, causing a scene in the ER, until they paged me. The girl is psycho, bro. She went on and on about how she was in love with me and wanted what we had back in Boston. She’s not going to stop.”

“Then we’ll have to make her. Simon told you to tell him if you need his help. I think it’s time you call in that favor.”

“I’ll talk to him about it tomorrow. I don’t want Ava to know anything about this.”

“I understand.” He patted my back. “But make sure you talk to Simon first thing tomorrow.”

“I will.”

I walked over to where Shaun stood and held my glass of champagne up to him.

“Excellent job, cousin. This is amazing. Selena really knows how to put a gala together.” I smiled.

“I swear every year she gets better and better.” He grinned as he tapped his glass against mine. “Did Ava tell you about the job I offered her?”

“Yeah, she told me on the way here. Thanks, Shaun. She’s really excited about it.”

“She deserves it. Her work is impeccable.”

After Shaun made his speech and we ate some of the finest food in Los Angeles, Ava excused herself to the bathroom.



*A* va

The night was incredible and perfect. I felt like Cinderella at the ball, and Grayson was my prince charming. I was in the bathroom touching up my lipstick when the door opened, and a woman walked in.

“Hello, Ava.” She walked over to the sink and took out her compact from her purse.

“I’m sorry, but do we know each other?” I asked.

“You don’t know me, but I know you. You’re the whore who’s fucking my boyfriend.”

“Excuse me?” My heart raced.

“Dr. Grayson Kind is my man. I had him first, and I don’t take too kindly to other women trying to steal him from me. This is your one and only warning, bitch. Stay away from him, or something bad is going to happen to you.” She placed her compact in her purse and left the bathroom.

I stood there shaking, trying to catch my breath. I could feel Freya with me, trying to keep me calm. I left the bathroom and walked over to Grayson, who stood talking with Gabriel, Sam, Conner, and Jackson. He immediately knew something was wrong the second he looked at me.

“Ava, what’s wrong?”

“Some woman approached me in the bathroom, told me that you were hers, and warned me to stay away from you. What the fuck, Grayson?” Tears filled my eyes.

“What did she look like?” he asked in a panic.

“She was about five foot six with long blonde hair and green eyes.”

“Fuck.” He looked around the place. “What color dress was she wearing?”

“A short black dress,” I said.

“Jesus Christ,” Gabriel said. “You try to find her, and I’ll get Simon.”

“Ava, stay with Sam, Conner, and Jackson. Promise me.”

“We won’t let her out of our sight,” Jackson said.



*K*ate

I opened my eyes and smiled as I stared at the guys.

“Hello, fellas. Kate is in the house and ready for some ass-kicking.” I grinned. “Now, where is that little bitch.” I looked around.

“Uh-oh,” Conner said.

“Hello, boys. Ava.” Aunt Barb smiled.

“Hey, Barbie. As much as I’d love to chat, I can’t stick around.” I took off my heels and walked away.

I knew she wouldn’t be stupid enough to hang around and get caught by Grayson, so I ran down the escalators to the ground level of the parking garage. I caught a glimpse of her scurrying out of the garage and onto the streets of L.A. I threw my shoes down and ran after her, and just as I was almost out of the garage, I heard Grayson’s commanding voice.

“STOP, KATE!”

I let out a sigh, stopped, and turned around as he, Simon, and Gabriel stood there staring at me.

“How did you know?” I asked.

“Jackson called me,” he said.

“Hey, Kate.” Simon smiled.

“Hello, detective.” I smiled back.

“You’re no fun, Grayson. I almost had her.”

“You can’t go around beating people up,” he said.

Simon chuckled. “I used to say that to Grace all the time.”

“She threatened us, and I don’t take kindly to threats.”

“You let us handle her,” Grayson spoke. “Bring Ava back.”

“You have a lot of explaining to do to her,” I said.

“I know, and I’ll tell her everything.”

“Whatever.” I closed my eyes.

## CHAPTER 35



*A* va

I opened my eyes and found myself standing in the middle of the parking garage with Grayson, Simon, and Gabriel staring at me.

“What happened? Don’t tell me.” I put my hand up. “I already know. It was Kate, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah. I stopped her. Come here.” Grayson wrapped his arms around me. “The woman who approached you in the bathroom was Claudia.”

“As in your psycho stalker from Boston?” I broke our embrace and glared at him.

“Yes. I’ll call for the car, and we’ll go home. I’ll tell you everything.”

“How long have you known she was here?” I asked.

“A couple of weeks.”

“What the fuck, Grayson!” I snapped. “You’ve known for two weeks and didn’t tell me? I’m staying and enjoying the rest of the evening with the girls.” I walked away.

“What about with me?”

“Right now, I don’t want to be anywhere near you.” I stopped and turned around. “You had no right to stop Kate.” I pointed my finger at him. “That bitch had it coming after what she said to me in the bathroom. Just stay away from me.” I shook my head.

I took the elevator back up to the venue and grabbed a glass of champagne as the server walked by.

“Are you okay?” Charlotte ran over to me.

“I’m fine.” I downed my drink. “I can’t believe he didn’t tell me she was here in Los Angeles.”

“Well, in his defense, he was just trying to protect you.”

“I hate secrets, and the fact that he kept that from me makes me not want to trust him anymore.”

“You don’t mean that, Ava.” Charlotte placed her hand on my arm. “It’s okay to be angry with him. Trust me. He knows what he did was wrong. For the Kind men it usually only takes one lie or secret, and they never do it again.” A smirk crossed her lips. “Come on. Let’s go get the other girls and have a man-bashing session.”

I breathed out a laugh as she hooked her arm around me.

As the girls and I were talking, Grayson kept staring at me from across the venue.

“He won’t stop staring at me.”

“That’s because he’s infatuated with you and knows you’re mad at him. He’s trying to figure out a way to apologize, and he won’t stop until he thinks it’s perfect,” Jenni said.

“How do you know that?” I asked.

“He has the Kind blood running through him. They’re all alike.” Charleigh smiled. “I really noticed a lot of similarities between Grayson and all the guys when he stayed with us while his house was being built.”

“I noticed it in Gabriel as well,” Georgia said.

“They mean well even if their way isn’t right.” Julia smiled.

“Let him sweat it out for a while,” Grace said.

“Yeah. He needs to learn what he did was wrong,” Georgia spoke.



**G**rayson

“You know they’re all coaching her, right?” Shaun said.

“They sure are.” Conner sighed.

“Don’t worry,” Sam said. “Give her some time, and she’ll come around.”

“Oh, you mean like Julia did after what you said to her?” Stefan said. “Because if I recall, she kept slamming the door in your face, and you had to beg her for forgiveness.”

“We all did,” Sebastian said.

“Not me.” Christian grinned. “I didn’t do anything wrong but want a relationship with Charleigh. She’s the one who ran. But, when she came to

her senses, she ran back to me.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Nathan said, and we all laughed.

“This is why I don’t get involved in relationships. Dad had the right idea. To the single life.” Gabriel smiled as he held up his drink, and we all glared at him. “What? It’s the truth.”

Every time I looked at her, she turned away. She was so pissed, and I didn’t blame her. It was all my fault because I should have known better than to keep that from her.

“Fuck this. I’m going over there.” I walked over to where Ava sat with the girls. “Ava, can—”

“No, Grayson! I want you to leave me alone. I need some time to think. In fact, I’m just going home to my apartment tonight.”

“Then when can we talk?” I asked.

“I don’t know.” She looked down.

I inhaled a deep breath, tucked my hands in my pants pockets, and walked away. I looked up at the stage where the band played music all night and noticed one of their acoustic guitars sitting on its stand. I walked over to the bar where they were on break, having a drink.

“Hey, I need to seriously apologize to my girlfriend. Would you mind if I borrowed your guitar up there and played some music?”

“Nah, man. Go ahead.” One of the band members smiled. “Let us help you. Boys, let’s help this man apologize to his girl.”

I got up on the stage and told the band what I was playing. Thankfully, they knew it. I grabbed the guitar and stood in front of the microphone.

“Ava, this is for you.” I started strumming and singing the lyrics to Don’t Give Up On Me.



*A* va

I placed my hands over my mouth as tears filled my eyes while I stood up and stared at him singing on stage.

“I’d say he’s forgiven.” Jenni smiled and hooked her arm around me.

When he sang the last verse, everyone in the place shouted and clapped. He set the guitar down, jumped off the stage, and walked over to where I stood.

“Let’s go home.” I wrapped my arms around his neck and hugged him tight.

“It would be my pleasure.” He swooped down, picked me up, and carried me through the crowd of people and over to the elevator.

“I can’t believe you did that.” I smiled.

“Why? People do crazy things when they’re in love.” A sly smile fell upon his lips as the elevator door opened.

“You love me, Dr. Kind?”

“I do. I’m so in love with you, Ava Williams.”

“I’m so in love with you too.” Our lips met. “You can put me down now,” I said as the elevator opened to the parking garage.

“Nope. Never.” He winked.

He carried me to the car that was waiting for us and set me down in the back seat. Climbing in next to me, he grabbed my hand and brought it up to his lips.

“I’m sorry for not telling you about Claudia.”

“You’re forgiven, but never do it again.” My lips formed a smile.

“Trust me. I won’t.”

On the way home, he told me about her and everything she had done since she came to Los Angeles.

“I wanted to protect you from all of this. You have enough going on and didn’t need to worry about her.”

“I wouldn’t have worried. Do you know why?”

“Why?” His hand swept across my cheek.

“Because we have a Kate.” I smiled.

Grayson chuckled. “We do have a Kate, don’t we?” He pulled me into him.

“So, does this mean we’re officially a couple, as in boyfriend and girlfriend?” A smirk crossed my lips.

“Yeah. It does.”

“Grayson, I really need to make sure that you know what you’re—”

“Shh.” He placed his finger over my lips. “I already know what you’re going to say, and I’m fully aware of what I’m getting myself into by dating you. I know it won’t be just the two of us living together; there will be the seven of us, and I’m okay with that. I love you, Ava, for who you are. All the others are just a bonus.” A tender smile crossed his lips as he pressed his forehead against mine.

## CHAPTER 36



Grayson

I held her arms above her head and stared into her beautiful eyes as I thrust inside her. The feeling was euphoric because now, she was officially mine. Soft moans erupted from her as I slowly moved in and out. The warmth inside gripped me, as did the adrenaline running through me. With each rhythmic movement, I could feel her tightening around my cock.

“Come for me, baby.”

Her moans heightened as a rush of warmth enveloped me, and her legs gripped my waist. It was enough to send me over the edge as I picked up the pace, rapidly pounded into her, and exploded, straining to push out every last drop I had in me. I let go of her wrists and dropped my body on hers. Her arms wrapped around me as I buried my face in her neck, trying to regain my breath.

I lifted myself up, and our lips met one last time before rolling off her and onto my back. She snuggled against me and pressed her lips into my chest.

“That was incredible,” she softly spoke.

“It sure was.” I smiled.

“I don’t want to bring it up, but I feel like I have to.” She sat up and looked at me. “What are you going to do about Claudia?”

“I’ll have to have Simon get me a restraining order. She claims she got a job here.”

“Where?” I asked.

“I have no idea, nor do I care. Listen, don’t worry about her.”

“Trust me, Grayson. I’m not worried.”

I brought my hand up to her cheek. “I love you.”



“I love you too.” She leaned down and kissed me.

The following morning, I heard my phone ding. Opening my eyes, I grabbed it from the nightstand and saw a text from my brother.

*“If you’re up, get your ass down to the water. We decided to catch some waves this morning.”*

Ava stirred and lifted her head from my chest.

“Morning.” She smiled. “Go.”

“How did you know?” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“Who else would text you this early?”

“Are you sure you don’t mind?”

“Not at all. Go surf with your family.”

I kissed her and climbed out of bed. Grabbing my surfboard, I ran down to the water where my brother and cousins were already paddled out.

“Get your ass out here!” Gabriel shouted.

I put my board in and joined them. Aside from being with Ava, this was my favorite part of the weekends.

“Everything good with you and Ava?” Gabriel asked.

“Yeah.” I smiled. “Things are great. I told her last night that I loved her.”

“Way to go, cousin.” Sebastian grinned.

“We’re happy for you,” Sam said.

“Yeah, bro. I’m happy for you.” Gabriel reached over and patted my back.

“Thanks. But I still have to deal with Claudia. I want to get a restraining order.”

“I’ll call my attorney today, and he’ll meet with you tomorrow,” Shaun said. “He’ll get it done quickly.”

“Thanks, Shaun. I appreciate it.”

We surfed for a while, and then Gabriel and I headed back to our houses.

“Looks like Ava is enjoying the pool.” Gabriel smiled. “You should join her.”

“I think I might. I’ll see you later, bro. Um, who is that chick sitting on your patio?”

“Shit. She said she was leaving.”

“You brought a girl home last night and didn’t tell me?” I narrowed my eye at him.

“I didn’t have a chance.”

“What’s her name?” I asked him.

“I can’t remember, bro.” He chuckled. “Now, I have to be the bad guy and kick her out. I have no idea why she’s still there.”

“Good luck. Yell if you need help.” I smiled. I set my board down and jumped in the pool.

“Who’s that girl over at Gabriel’s?” Ava wrapped her arms around my neck.

“I have no idea. He thought she left already.”

“Oh. She said good morning to me. She seems nice.”

“You won’t see her again.” The corners of my mouth curved upward. “What do you want to do today?” My lips met hers.

“I have to go back to my apartment and grab a few things.”

“Has Hannah found an apartment yet?” I asked.

“She said she’s still looking. I honestly don’t know what is taking her so long to find one.”

“Sublet your apartment to her and permanently move in with me.”

“Are you sure?” She smiled.

“Positive. You’re already here, and I do not intend to let you return to your place.”

“So, you’re holding me hostage here?”

“You bet I am.” A smirk crossed my lips.

“There’s no other place in the world I’d rather be held hostage at.”

“Good. Then we’ll get the rest of your things later. But first, I have something going on down there that needs to be taken care of.”

## CHAPTER 37



A<sup>va</sup>

After meeting with a couple of my clients, I returned to my apartment to finish packing. My phone pinged, and when I grabbed it, I had a text message from Grayson.

*“Hey, babe. I just met with Shaun’s lawyer, and he’s going to file the restraining order against Claudia.”*

*“That’s great news. I’m at my apartment packing the last few things.”*

*“Okay. I’ll see you later. I love you.”*

*“I love you too.”*

I couldn’t shake what Claudia said to me in the bathroom the night of the gala. It kept playing over and over in my mind. I suddenly felt really tired, so I went and laid down on the couch for a minute.



K<sup>ate</sup>

I pulled my black leather pants and tank top from the box Ava had packed. After changing, I went back to Grayson’s to do my makeup the way I liked it. I was out now and had some business to attend to. The first was a phone call to an old guy friend of mine named Leo. After slipping my feet into my tall black boots, I heard a knock at the door. Opening it, Barbie stood there staring at me.

*“Ava?”* Her eyes scanned me from head to toe.

*“Barbie, it’s good to see you, but I was just about to leave.”*

“Oh, wait. You must be Kate.”

“That’s right.” I grinned as I stepped out the front door and locked it. “By the way, I like you.” I hooked my arm around her as we stepped off the porch. “I heard you shot a guy.”

“It was self-defense,” Barb said.

“Still, it takes some balls to pull the trigger.” I smiled. “I’m proud of you, Barbie.” My grip around her tightened. “I’ll see you later.” I opened the door to the car and climbed in. Barb stood speechless in the driveway as I pulled out.

I’d found out that Claudia worked for an accounting firm downtown. After Grayson spilled her last name to Ava, I got online, did some digging, and found her Facebook page and where she worked. According to her post from yesterday, today was her first day on the job. It was also going to be her last.

I walked into the building and over to the directory. The firm was located on the fourth floor. Taking the elevator up, I stepped into the office and was promptly greeted by an older woman sitting behind a desk.

“May I help you?”

“I’m looking for Claudia Moore. I want to give her this flower arrangement to congratulate her on her new job here.” I held up the arrangement I picked up on the way over.

“Go down the hall and make a left. She’s the second cubicle.”

“Thank you.” I smiled brightly at her.

When I approached Claudia’s cubicle, I couldn’t believe the pictures of Grayson on her wall.

“Can I help you?” She looked up at me.

“No, but I can help you.” I set the flower arrangement on her desk. I leaned over and quietly spoke in her ear. “This is how it’s going to go. You’re going to get your purse and come with me.”

“Excuse me? Who the hell are you?”

I reached into my back pocket, pulled out my pocketknife, flipped it open, and discreetly held it up to her neck. She flinched when she felt the blade touch the flesh of her skin.

“I’m a friend of Grayson’s, and you’re not welcome here in Los Angeles. Get your purse, and let’s go.”

She was shaking as she opened her drawer and took out her purse.

“I don’t want to hurt you. Well, I do, but I can’t. But I will not hesitate to

drive this knife into your neck if you try anything stupid.”

I hooked my arm around her and led her down the hall.

“Excuse me, Claudia.” A man stepped out of his office. “What’s going on?”

“Tell him you quit,” I whispered in her ear.

“I’m afraid this job isn’t for me. I quit, Mr. Ryan.”

“Good girl. Now keep walking,” I said.

“But, Claudia, I don’t understand,” Mr. Ryan shouted.

“Ignore him.”

We took the elevator down to the lobby and I led her out the door and put her in my car. Grabbing the handcuffs I brought, I cuffed both her hands to the inside of the car, buckled her in and climbed in on the other side.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked with a panicked voice.

“To your place so you can quickly pack your things.” I reached into my purse and pulled out an airline ticket. “See this. This is a one-way ticket back to Boston. You will never come back to Los Angeles again. Understand me? What’s your address?”

She rattled it off, and I punched it into the GPS. My phone was blowing up with text messages from Grayson. I sighed as I turned it off.

“Did Grayson put you up to this?” Claudia asked.

“No. He knows nothing about it. See, here’s the thing, Claudia. You have issues, and you need help. Stalking Grayson and threatening his girlfriend was not a smart move. We don’t take kindly to threats.”

“I promise not to bother him anymore. Please, just let me go. I swear I’ll stay away.”

“You’re right. You will stay away because you’ll be back in Boston where you belong. Which apartment is yours?” I asked as I pulled into a parking spot.

“The last one on the right.”

I uncuffed her, took out my knife as I helped her from the car, and held on tightly to her.

“Pack quickly. Your flight leaves in three hours,” I said when we entered her apartment.

I stayed in the bedroom with her the entire time while she packed, waving my knife back and forth.

“You’re a sad woman, Claudia Moore.”

“Just shut up!” she shouted.

Her phone was pinging, so I grabbed it, threw it on the floor, and smashed it with my boot.

“What the hell, lady?!”

“You can get a new one when you get to Boston. One that doesn’t have Grayson’s number stored in it.” I smiled.

She packed her suitcase, and we headed to my car. After handcuffing her again, I threw the suitcase in the back of the car.

“You’re the one who’s a psycho bitch!” she yelled.

“I’ve been called worse.”

“My movers are supposed to bring all of my things from Boston tomorrow,” she said.

“Then I guess you better call them when you get to Boston and tell them to turn around.”

We reached the airport, and I threw the car in park. Climbing out, I grabbed her suitcase, uncuffed her, and took hold of her arm while we walked inside the airport. After checking her suitcase, I led her to security.

“It’s been a pleasure, Claudia. See that man standing on the other side of security?” I pointed, and he waved at us. “His name is Leo, and he’s going to walk you to your gate and make sure you get on that plane. He’ll also be your seat mate.” I smiled. “If you ever try to contact Dr. Grayson Kind again, I will fly to Boston and hurt you. If you ever step foot in L.A. again, I’ll know, and you’ll never leave. You’ll be buried here six feet under. Understand me?”

“Yeah, I understand.”

“Good girl. Have a good flight.”

I stood and watched as she went through security. Once Leo had a hold of her, I walked out of the airport and headed home.

## CHAPTER 38



*K*ate

I saw Grayson and Simon standing in the living room when I stepped through the front door.

“Where the fuck were you?” Grayson shouted.

“Calm down, Grayson.” I patted his chest, walked over to the bar, and poured myself a whiskey.

“Don’t you dare tell me to calm down, Kate. I’ve been trying to call and text Ava all day.”

“I know, and it was annoying, so I turned the phone off.”

“Wow, Kate.” Simon smiled. “I like your style.”

“Thanks, detective.” I downed my drink and poured another.

“Answer my question, Kate. Why are you here, and where were you?”

“Taking care of Claudia. You don’t have to worry about her anymore.”

“Oh shit. What did you do?” Simon asked with a sigh.

“Don’t worry. I didn’t hurt her. As much as I wanted to, I restrained myself. I put her on a one-way trip back to Boston.”

“Okay. Good idea.” Simon nodded his head.

“And she just voluntarily went?” Grayson narrowed his eyes at me.

“This helped.” I pulled my knife from my back pocket.”

“Jesus Christ.” Grayson ran his hand through his hair.

“Oh, stop it. She’s gone, and that’s all that matters. She will never contact you again. So, you can cancel that restraining order.”

“Well, cousin.” Simon walked over and patted Grayson’s back. “Kate took care of her legally, and you have nothing to worry about. I have to get home. I can’t wait to tell Grace about this.” He grinned.

“See you later, detective.” I waved. “I do believe you owe me a thank you, Dr. Kind.”

“I don’t like what you did, but thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” I downed my drink and closed my eyes.



Grayson

“Grayson?” Ava opened her eyes. “Oh shit.” She looked down at her clothing and then pulled off her wig. “What did she do?”

I walked over and wrapped my arms around her.

“She sent Claudia back to Boston,” I said as I held her tight. “Like you said, we have a Kate.” I couldn’t help but chuckle.

She broke our embrace and stared at me. “Why do I have the taste of whiskey in my mouth? Was she drinking?”

“She poured herself a couple of glasses when she came home.”

“Ugh. She knows I hate that stuff. So, Claudia is really gone? She didn’t hurt her, did she?”

“She said she didn’t.”

“I’m going to change out of these clothes and take off all this makeup.”

When she began to walk away, I grabbed her hand. “I love you, babe.”

“I love you too.” She smiled. “I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for. She was just protecting us.” I winked. “I’m going to head down to the beach. Join us when you’re ready.”

“Okay. I’ll be down there in a while,” she said and went upstairs.

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

“Claudia’s gone,” I said to Gabriel and Jackson.

“What do you mean she’s gone?” Gabriel’s brows furrowed.

“Kate sent her on a one-way trip back to Boston.”

“Oh my God.” Gabriel laughed. “Are you serious?”

“Yep.” I tipped the bottle to my lips.

“And how did she convince her to go?” Jackson asked.

“Besides the pocketknife she pulled on her, I’m sure she threatened her.”

“Damn. I wish I could have seen that.” Gabriel laughed.

“What’s so funny out here?” Simon smiled as he sat down.



“Grayson was just telling us about Kate and Claudia,” Jackson said.

“Oh.” He laughed. “That girl is impressive. Grace was dying when I told her.”

“I’m happy you think this is funny. She could have gotten hurt,” I said. “Claudia is one unstable woman.”

“It sounds to me like Kate can take care of herself.” Jackson smiled.

“Is Kate still around, or is Ava back?” Gabriel asked.

“Ava’s back. She’ll be down shortly.”

“Are you sure you can handle all of them?” Jackson asked.

“Yeah, I’m sure. The only one I have to worry about is Kate. Freya is the calm one, Ophelia is the loving motherly type, and Luna is just a kid. I’ve never met Seraphina.”

“And who is she again?” Simon asked.

“Ava told me she’s the gatekeeper of the system. She protects the system and stores the memories of the trauma. If Ava starts having flashbacks or a bad memory, she blocks them so she doesn’t remember.”

“Do you think you’ll ever meet her?” Gabriel asked.

“I don’t know.” I took a sip of my beer.

“Hey, family.” Sam smiled as he sat down.

“What’s up, my brother and cousins.” Conner grinned as he walked over, holding Isabella.

“Can I hold my niece?” Jackson held out his arms.

“I have an idea. Why don’t you have a baby of your own.” Conner cocked his head.

The corners of Jackson’s mouth curved upward.

“Holy shit. Georgia’s pregnant?” Conner asked.

“This stays between us. Got it?” He pointed at us. “We just found out this afternoon. We want to wait and tell the family when we’re all together.”

“Here.” Conner smiled as he handed Isabella to him. “You need the practice. Congratulations, brother. I’m so happy for you.”

“Congrats!” We all spoke at the same time and held up our beers.

“Well, you better do it this week before we go to Naples. Everyone is going to know when Georgia isn’t drinking,” Conner said.

“I know. We already thought about that.”

“Shit. Mom alert,” Simon said.

I turned my head and saw Aunt Barb walking toward us.

“Hello, my handsome boys.” She smiled. “Where is the rest of the gang?”

“I don’t know, Mom. Why don’t you go to their houses and find out,” Simon said.

“Anyway, I want to make sure you all have your tuxedos for the wedding.”

“Yep. I think we’re all set,” Sam said.

“Grayson, did you find Kate?”

“I did, Aunt Barb. Thank you for calling me after you saw her.”

“Well, I was worried. Is she still around? I would like to have a little chat with her and ask her to stop calling me Barbie.”

Simon laughed and spit out his beer. “She calls you that?”

“Yes, and I don’t find it funny.”

“I’ve got news for you, Mom. You can’t tell Kate anything. If she wants to call you Barbie, she’s going to no matter what you say.” He continued laughing.

“Well, she seemed a little rough around the edges. I like Ophelia much better.”

“What about Ophelia?” Ava walked over.

I held out my arm, and she sat on my lap.

“Nothing, darling. Just that she seems so nice. If you talk to Kate, can you please tell her that my name is Barbara or Barb and not Barbie?”

“I’m sorry, Barb. I’ll have a chat with her.”

“Thank you, darling. I’ll see you boys on the plane.” She smiled and walked away.

“Don’t you dare tell Kate to stop calling her Barbie.” Simon pointed at Ava. “And next time we’re all together, and my mother is with us, please ask Kate to come out and say hi.” He grinned.

“Seriously, Simon?” I cocked my head.

“Yeah, seriously, cousin. It would be the highlight of my day.” He laughed.

## CHAPTER 39



*A* va

“I have a confession to make,” I said to Grayson as he made us a cup of coffee.

“What’s your confession?” he asked with a smile.

“I’ve never been on an airplane before and am kind of nervous.”

His brows furrowed as he handed me a piping hot coffee. “I don’t understand. What about—oh, wait. That was Kate.” He set down his cup and wrapped his arms around me. “You have nothing to be nervous about. You’re going to love Shaun’s private plane. It’s like you’re not even on one.” His lips met mine. “Besides, I’ll do everything possible to make sure you’re comfortable.”

“Have I told you how much I love you?” I grinned.

“I think you only told me twice this morning, which nearly isn’t enough.”

A smirk crossed his lips.

“I love you, Dr. Kind.”

“I love you too, babe. I have to get to the hospital. Have a good day and a good session with Charlotte.” He kissed me.

“I will.”

The day was a busy one. I had two client meetings and some shopping to do for them before I headed to the medical center to meet Charlotte.

“I think I’ve decided to let go of the fact that I want to remember what happened,” I said.

“Okay. Why the sudden change of mind?” she asked.

“Does it really matter anymore, Charlotte? I’m the happiest I’ve ever been. I never thought I would find someone like Grayson and have the life I

do. I don't want to fuck things up by remembering. Knowing isn't going to erase what happened. My mother hurt me because she's a bad person. I can't change the past, but I can move forward with my future. I've come to realize that the future is more important than the past. I don't want to live in the past, and remembering all the bad stuff that happened will only keep me there. I feel a sense of peace for the first time in my life, and I want to keep that feeling."

"I can understand that." Charlotte smiled. "But, if you ever do decide you want to travel down that road, I'll be here for you."

"I know you will be." The corners of my mouth curved upward.

"You know that you don't have just me, right? You have the entire Kind family by your side."

"Yeah. I know, and I'm so grateful for all of you."

When I arrived home, Freya was dying to come out and paint. It had been a while, and she was getting antsy.



Grayson

I walked into the house, set my keys down, and looked out the sliding door. Opening it, I stepped onto the patio.

"Hello, Freya."

"Hello, Grayson." Her paintbrush stroked the canvas.

"I texted Ava to tell her I was going to be late, and she didn't respond."

"Sorry about that. I don't answer Ava's phone while I'm painting."

"That is really beautiful," I said as I walked over and took a closer look.

"Thank you, Dr. Kind. How was your day?"

"Busy. There was a bus accident, and several people were injured."

"Sorry to hear that. I hope they all survived."

"Thankfully, there were no casualties. Have you eaten dinner?"

"Yes. Ophelia made a casserole before I started painting. It's in the warming oven."

"Great. I'll let you get back to painting."

I pulled the casserole from the warming oven, grabbed a plate, and took it out to the patio. I glanced over at Freya and noticed she had set her paintbrush down. When she turned and looked at me, I knew Ava was back.

“Hi.” I smiled.

“Hi.” She walked over and wrapped her arms around my neck from behind. “I missed you.” She kissed my cheek.

“I missed you too. How was therapy today?”

“It was good.” She sat down next to me. “I’m giving up on trying to remember my past. I’m in a good place, and that’s how I want to stay.”

“Are you sure?” I asked. “That’s a big decision.”

“Yeah, I’m sure.” A bright smile crossed her face.

“Come here.” I set my fork down and pulled her onto my lap. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Finish your dinner so we can go upstairs and start packing for our trip.”

My phone pinged with a text message in our group chat. It was from Jackson wanting everyone to meet down at the beach.

“Packing is going to have to wait. We’ve been summoned down to the beach by Jackson.” I smiled. “He and Georgia will probably announce the pregnancy, so act surprised.”

“I will.” I laughed.

Everyone stepped out of their houses and gathered around the firepit.

“Georgia and I want to share some news with you before we head to Florida tomorrow.” Jackson grinned.

“We’re having a baby!” Georgia excitedly spoke.

We all shouted and clapped even though everyone already knew.

“Congratulations, Georgia.” I hugged her. “Congrats, Dad.” I hugged Jackson.

“You are going to make a wonderful mother.” Ava hugged Georgia. “I’m so happy for you both.”

After hanging out with the family, we headed back to the house to start packing.

## CHAPTER 40



Grayson

“How do I look?” Ava asked as she stood there in a long, black, strapless dress.”

“You don’t even have to ask. You look as stunning as always.” I smiled and kissed her lips.

“And you look as sexy as always.” She grinned as she straightened my bowtie. “Have you seen my necklace?”

“No. Did you bring one?”

“Yeah. I know I packed it.” She dug through her suitcase. “Shit. Where is it?”

I reached into my suitcase and pulled out a blue velvet box.

“Maybe you can wear this instead.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I handed it to her.

“Grayson.” She smiled. “What is this?”

“Open it and find out.”

She lifted the lid and placed her hand over her mouth as she stared at the diamond necklace.

“Oh, my God. This is beautiful.” She removed it from the box and held it up.

“It’s an eternal love pendant that symbolizes my love for you.”

I took it from her and placed it around her neck.

“Grayson, I love it. Thank you.” She threw her arms around me. “I love you.”

“You’re welcome, babe. I love you too. As for the necklace you packed, I took it out and put it back in the dresser drawer when you weren’t looking.”

“You are the best boyfriend ever.” Her lips met mine.

“I am, aren’t I?” I grinned. “You bring that out in me.”

A beautiful smile graced her face as she brought her thumb up to my lips.

“You have lipstick on you.” She wiped it away.

“Thank you. Are you ready to head down and watch Aunt Barb and Curtis say their vows for the second time?”

“I just have to grab my clutch.”

We met the rest of the family down in the lobby and climbed on the shuttle to take us to the golf course where the ceremony was taking place.

“Who was that girl you talked to earlier at the champagne bar?” I asked my brother. “Don’t think we didn’t see you.”

“Just a girl I met. She’s here with her family on vacation. She’s going to meet me later for a drink.” He grinned. “She’s hot, right?”

“She’s attractive.” I patted his back.

We arrived at the golf course elegantly decorated with a white runner sprinkled with rose petals, an archway with tulle and flowers, and several white chairs lined up for the guests.

“This is beautiful.” Ava smiled as we took our seats in the second row.

“Curtis looks nervous,” I leaned over and spoke to Simon.

“He’s probably up there wondering what the hell he’s doing.” He chuckled.

“Be nice,” Grace said, holding Nora on her lap.

When it was time, Georgia stood up, grabbed her violin, and walked up to the archway to play the wedding march. We all stood and looked back as Aunt Barb walked down the aisle, looking as elegant as ever.

We sat there and watched as they exchanged their vows. I couldn’t help but envision myself up there saying the words from my heart to Ava. I knew it was too soon to even think about marriage, but I loved her more than anything, and a future with her was the only thing I saw.

We stood and clapped after Aunt Barb and Curtis were pronounced husband and wife. After congratulating them, we climbed back on the shuttle and headed to the hotel for the reception. After we ate, Ava went off with the girls while I stood with my cousins by the bar, sipping on scotch.

“Who’s that chick your brother is talking to?” Sebastian asked.

“I don’t know. Some girl he met at the champagne bar.”

“She’s cute,” Simon said. “I foresee a one-night stand in the making.” He chuckled.

“You’re probably right.” I laughed.

“Cake?” A server walked over with plates of cake on a silver tray.

“Hell yeah.” Conner grinned as she handed him and all of us a piece.  
“Ewe, what the fuck?” What is this?”

“I do believe this is carrot cake,” I said. “It’s good.”

“Who has carrot cake at their wedding?” Conner frowned as he set his plate down on the bar. “I hate carrot cake.”

“See, this is why my mother should have gotten married in L.A. Gwen could have made the cake and made us all happy. Yuck.” Simon set down his plate, and we all laughed.

Aunt Barb walked over.

“You all look so handsome. Are you having fun?” She smiled.

“Mom, seriously, what is with this cake?” Simon asked.

“What’s wrong with it? It’s delicious.”

“No, Aunt Barb. Just no.” Conner shook his head.

“What he’s trying to say is, what were you thinking having carrot cake?”  
Simon asked.

“Curtis loves carrot cake. If you don’t like it, don’t eat it.”

“I’m not,” Simon said.

Aunt Barb let out a sigh as she patted Simon’s chest. “I love you, but you are really good at testing my patience.” She walked away, and we all laughed.

“Is she serious? That woman has been testing my patience since I was a kid.”

A slow song came on when we finished our drinks, and we all grabbed our women and danced.

“Are you having a good time?” I smiled as I held Ava close to me.

“The best time ever.” Her lips met mine.

I glanced over and saw Gabriel dancing with that girl.

“Looks like your brother is having a good time as well.” Ava smirked.

“Yeah.” I smiled. “He just needs to find someone he can love the way I love you.”

“He will someday.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

“I hope so. He deserves to be as happy as I am.”

“I love dancing with you,” she said. “But I love something even more, and I’m ready to head back to the room if you are.”

“Say no more.” I swooped down and picked her up.

“What are you doing?” She laughed.



“Taking you back to the room.” I grinned.

“Hey, where are you going?” Conner shouted.

“We have pressing matters to attend to.” I winked.

# CHAPTER 41



## ONE MONTH LATER

*A*va

“Time to get up, Dr. Kind.” I smiled as I softly kissed his lips.

His eyes opened and then shut again. “I want to stay in bed with you all day.” His arm around me tightened.

“As amazing as that sounds, you have lives to save.”

His eyes opened and stared into mine. “I know, babe. I’m getting up.”

“I’ll go make the coffee.” I smiled.

“No. You’re going to get that sweet ass of yours in the shower first. Then, when I’m done having my way with you, you can make the coffee. Deal?” He pulled me into him.

“Deal.” The corners of my mouth curved upward as I kissed him and climbed out of bed.

After our long, hot, and sexy shower, I went downstairs and made us each a cup of coffee.

The sliding door opened, and Shaun walked in.

“Good morning.” He grinned.

“Good morning. Coffee?”

“No thanks. I just stopped by to ask if we can meet at one o’clock instead of twelve?”

“One o’clock is fine.”

“Hey, Shaun.” Grayson smiled when we walked down the stairs.

“Hey, Grayson.” He smiled. “I have to get to the office for a meeting. I’ll see you later, Ava. See you, Grayson.”

“See you, cousin. Why was he here?” Grayson asked as I handed him his coffee.

“He pushed our meeting to one o’clock.”

“Oh. I know he’s going to love what you picked for the apartments.” He kissed my lips. “I have to really get moving, or I’m going to be late.”

“And whose fault is that, Dr. Kind?” I smirked.

“It’s your fault for being so sexy.” He winked and ran up the stairs.

I took my coffee upstairs and sat on the edge of the bed while Grayson finished getting ready for work.

“What are you thinking about?” he asked.

“How do you know I’m thinking about something?”

“I can tell.” He smiled.

“I was just thinking about how quiet it’s been the past month.”

“You mean with the others?” He sat on the bed and pulled on his socks.

“Yeah.”

“Freya was out the other day finishing her painting,” he said.

“I know, but it’s been very quiet up here.” I pointed to my head.

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

“Yeah, it is.” I smiled.

“I love you.” He kissed the top of my head. “I’ll see you later. Be safe.”

“I love you too.” I smiled.

I had finished all of my client’s jobs I had and hadn’t taken on anything new since Shaun gave me the apartments to decorate. That was a big project and would take up a lot of my time.

I had some errands to run before meeting Shaun at his office. When the elevator doors opened, I said hi to Selena and walked up to his office.

“Hi, Barb.” I smiled.

“Ava, darling. How are you?” She gave me a light hug.

“I’m good. What are you doing here?”

“I was just talking to Shaun about some investments I want to make,” she said.

“I’ll walk you out, Barb. I’ll be right back, Ava,” Shaun said.

“I’m going to grab a cup of coffee,” I spoke as I followed them down the stairs and to the main area of Sterling Capital. I stopped dead in my tracks when the elevator doors opened, and a man walked in with a gun.

“Everyone down on the floor!” he shouted as he shot the gun off in the air.

Everyone screamed, and we all got down on the floor. I couldn’t breathe, and my heart raced out of my chest.

“Lloyd, put the gun down,” Shaun said as he put his hands up.

“I want everyone’s phones. NOW!” he shouted as he walked around with a large paper bag, collecting everyone’s phones.

“Lloyd. Your problem is with me,” Shaun said. “We can talk about this calmly.”

“Talk about what, calmly? How you ruined my fucking life?” he shouted.

“It wasn’t personal, Lloyd. It was just business,” Shaun said. “I’ll give you anything you want. Just let my employees go.”

“It’s too late for that, Kind,” Lloyd said. “You took over my company, and I lost everything, including my wife and kids. They left me because of you!” He pointed the gun at Shaun.



*K*ate

I loved me a good fight, but this was one situation I wasn’t prepared for. I had to think and do it quickly, or this man was going to start shooting up the place. Barb was on the floor next to me, shaking like a leaf.

“Hey, Barbie.” I smiled.

“Kate?” Her brows furrowed.

“Yeah. Try to stay calm.”

“I want everyone sitting up. Come on. Sit up!” Lloyd shouted.

“Do what he says, Barbie,” I whispered.

“Will you stop calling me that!” she said.

“What’s going on over here?” Lloyd walked over, grabbed Barb’s arm, and stood her up.

“You let go of me. What is wrong with you?” Barb spoke sternly.

“Barb, don’t,” Shaun spoke.

“I’ll have you know that my son is a detective with the LAPD.”

“So what, lady? You’ll be dead by the time he finds you. Now, sit your ass down and shut the fuck up.” He threw her on the ground.

“Name your price,” Shaun said. “I’ll give you whatever you want. Please, just don’t hurt them. They have nothing to do with this.”

“Don’t hurt them? You hurt me and my family. Now, it’s time for paybacks, Kind. First, I’m going to kill everyone here one by one and make you watch. I want you to suffer like I did watching you take over my

company.”

“Oh, my God! Will you shut up!” I shouted. “We get it. He took over your company and ruined your life. Blah, blah, blah. How many times are you going to say it?”

Shaun looked at me and knew exactly who I was.

“What the fuck did you say, bitch?” Lloyd walked over and hit me in the head with his gun.

“Kate!” Shaun shouted.

“Ouch.” I placed my hand on my forehead and felt the blood dripping. “You’re fucking crazy, dude.”

He knelt down in front of me as his crazy eyes stared into mine. “I think you’ll be the first to go,” he said.

“I don’t think so.” I grabbed his face and pushed my thumbs into his eyes while I smashed my bleeding forehead into his.

“You bitch!” He screamed, and as he fell back, the gun went off and hit Barb.

“Barb!” Shaun shouted.

I straddled Lloyd, kicked the gun out of his hand with my foot, and punched him several times in the face until he passed out. Shaun walked over and grabbed me.

“That’s enough, Kate.” He wrapped his arms around me from behind and held me tight. I took my foot and kicked Lloyd in the ribs as hard as I could—one last gesture for threatening us.

“Barbie.” I got out of Shaun’s grip and ran over to her as she held her arm. “Let me check. Thank God, it’s just a flesh wound.”

“Your head.” Barb brought her hand up to my forehead.

“Nah, I’m okay.” I smiled.

“The police and Simon are on their way,” Shaun said.

“Thank you.” Selena ran over and hugged me tight. “I’m going to get a cloth for your head.”

Lloyd moaned and tried to move.

“Oh no, you don’t. This is for threatening my family.” I walked over and punched him again.

The elevator doors opened, and Simon and the police ran in along with the paramedics.

“Over here!” Shaun yelled.

“Mom!” Simon ran over to her.

“I’m okay, darling. Kate said it was just a flesh wound.”

Simon glanced over at me as the paramedics examined my head.

“You?” He gestured toward Lloyd’s body.

“Yeah. He threatened my family.”

The corners of Simon’s mouth curved upward as he held out his fist to me. I fist-bumped him as the paramedics put me on the stretcher.

“Go be with your mom,” I said.

“I’ll call Grayson and let him know you’re on your way in.” He placed his hand on mine.

“Shaun, grab my purse for me. It’s in your office,” I shouted as the paramedics stepped onto the elevator.

## CHAPTER 42



Grayson

I was sitting in the cafeteria having lunch with Christian and Charleigh when my phone rang. Pulling it from my pocket, I saw it was Simon.

“Hey, Simon.”

“Grayson, I don’t want you to freak out.”

“What happened!”

“Ava, I mean, Kate, is being brought in by ambulance. She has a bad gash on her head that needs stitching.”

“WHAT!” I shouted and looked at Christian and Charleigh.

“Calm down. She’s okay. My mother is also being brought in for a flesh wound.”

“A flesh wound? What the fuck happened?” I got up and headed down to the ER. Christian and Charleigh followed.

“I’ll explain when I get there. Just relax. Kate is okay.”

I went out to the ambulance entrance and waited for it to arrive.

“I got Kate. You two take a look at Aunt Barb.”

“What the hell happened?” Christian asked.

“I don’t know. Simon said he’ll explain when he gets here.”

One of the ambulances pulled up, and I ran up to it and opened the door.

“Oh, my God. Are you okay?”

“Relax, Dr. Kind. I’m fine. The other guy, not so much.” Kate smiled. “I have to stick around for a while and give my statement to the cops.”

“I know.” I smiled as the paramedics wheeled her into the hospital and to Bay 1. “What happened, and why were you with my Aunt Barb?”



“It’s my fault,” Shaun stood in the doorway.

I turned my head and looked at him.

“It’s not his fault. Don’t listen to him. It’s the psycho man’s fault. People are really unstable these days. Is everyone else okay, Shaun?” I asked.

“They’re shaken up, but I think they’ll be okay. I told everyone to take the rest of the week off. I have to go check on Barb.”

“You should have been there, Grayson. It was intense.”

“How did Aunt Barb get shot?” he asked as he cleaned my wound.

“Well, that part was unexpected. See, I had this plan. I yelled at the guy to get his attention because I knew he’d come over to me. I needed to distract him. He didn’t like what I said, so he hit me in the head with his gun. It’s not the first time I’ve been hit in the head with a gun.” She smirked. “Anyway, he knelt in front of me and said he was going to kill me first, so I dug my thumbs into his eyes as hard as I could, headbutted him, and when he fell back, the gun went off and unfortunately hit Barbie. Once I had him on the ground, I kept punching him until he passed out. When Shaun grabbed me and pulled me off him, I jammed my foot into his ribs for one last hit.”

“Jesus Christ, Kate. Was that necessary?”

“Yes, Grayson. It was.”

“I’ll be right back.” I grabbed her hand. “I have to get the suture kit. Don’t you dare move.” I pointed at her.

“Yes, sir.” She saluted me.

“Carly, go stay with her, please.”

“On it, Dr. Kind.”

“Hey, come in here,” Simon said as he pulled me into Bay 4. “Look.”

“She did that to him?”

“Yep.” Simon grinned. “That’s our Kate.” He patted my shoulder. “I have to go check on my mother. The rest of the family is on their way.”

I grabbed a suture kit and took it back to the room.

“Let’s get that head stitched up.” I smiled when I walked in. “You’re lucky this is all he did to you.”

“I wouldn’t have let him do anything else,” she said. “He threw your Aunt Barb to the ground, threatened to kill everyone in that office one by one, and was going to make Shaun watch. The guy is a certified psychopath.”

“I just came from his room. You roughed him up pretty badly.”

“Not bad enough as far as I’m concerned.” She smirked.

“Thank you. Thank you for saving Ava, Shaun, Aunt Barb, and everyone

in that office.”

“You’re welcome, Grayson.”

“There. All done.” I smiled.

“You know, Ava is going to kill you if there’s a scar.”

“There might be a small one, but I’ll just keep reminding her it’s the scar of a warrior.” I winked.

She flashed a smile and closed her eyes. When she opened them, Ava was back.

“Grayson? What the—”

“Shh. You’re okay.” I leaned over and kissed her lips.

“Why does my head hurt so bad?”

“You have stitches in your head, but you’re going to be okay.”

“The last thing I remember is being at Shaun’s office and this guy coming in with a gun. He shot it up in the air and was yelling at everyone.”

“Kate took over, babe.”

“Is the guy okay?” She chewed her bottom lip.

“He’ll be fine once he heals.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“How is your Aunt Barb? She was there. What about Shaun?”

“They’re both fine. I need you to relax. I’ll be right back, and then I’m taking you home.”

“Dr. Kind,” Carly ran in. “There’s a trauma coming in. ETA is ten minutes.”

“Shit.” I shook my head.

“Grayson, I’ll be fine. Go.”

“I’ll take her home,” Shaun said as he walked into the room.

“Are you sure, Shaun?”

“Yes. I’ll stay with her until you get home. Go save some lives. Be a hero like Kate was today.” He smiled.

“Thanks, cousin.” I hugged him.

I walked over to Ava and kissed her lips. “I want you to go home and get into bed. You need to rest. I’ll be home as soon as I can. I love you so much, babe.”

“I will, and I love you so much too.”



A<sup>va</sup>

“I’m sorry, Ava,” Shaun said as he helped me in the car.

“Don’t be. People are crazy. What happened?” I asked.

“His company was on the verge of bankruptcy, and I offered him a way out. He refused, so I took it to his board of directors, and they voted him out. Upon further investigation, they discovered that he’d been stealing from the company for years. The board members reported it, and all his bank accounts and assets were frozen.”

“I’m sorry about Barb,” I said as he drove me home.

“That was not your fault.”

“But she could have been—”

“But she wasn’t.” He reached over and grabbed my hand. “If Kate wouldn’t have done what she did, he would have killed us all.”

He pulled into my driveway, and Jenni flew out of their house and ran over to us. After hugging Shaun, she began to pound on his chest.

“You asshole. You could have been killed.”

“Babe, stop. I’m fine.” He grabbed her wrists and then pulled her into him.

She looked at me, broke their embrace, and walked over and hugged me.

“Come on. Let’s get you inside. You need to change into some comfy clothes. I’ll make a cup of tea.” She hooked her arm around me.

“Babe, is Laura with the twins?”

“Of course, she’s with the twins, Shaun. But they were screaming when I left. You better go check on them.”

Jenni sat on the edge of the bed while I changed into a pair of baggy sweatpants and a tank top.

“I can’t imagine what you went through,” she said.

“It’s a good thing I don’t remember.” I smiled as I glanced at her.

“Right. You weren’t there. Well, you were, but you weren’t. Kate is my hero, and I must thank her for what she did.”

“She’s gone radio silent. Next time she’s around, I’ll tell her.” I sat down next to her and took hold of her hand.

“Things could have been very different.” Jenni lowered her head. “Instead of Shaun calling me, it could have been the morgue.”

“Hey. Shaun is okay, and so is everyone else. That’s all we need to focus on.”

“You’re right.” She sighed.

“Let’s go downstairs. Didn’t you promise me some tea?” I smirked.  
“Yes! Let’s go make some tea.” She smiled.

## CHAPTER 43



*A*va

As Jenni was making me a cup of tea, the sliding door opened, and Grace walked in with Nora.

“Hey, you.” She smiled as she walked over to the couch. “How are you?”

“I’m fine, Grace. Hi, sweetheart.” I took hold of Nora’s hand.

“I think we’ll have matching scars.” Grace smiled as she pointed to her head.

“Well, Grayson was the one who stitched me up, so I’m trusting it won’t leave a scar.”

“It most likely will, but that’s okay. I like to call them badass girl scars.” A smirk crossed her lips.

“Grace, want some tea?” Jenni asked.

“No thanks. I have to get back home and finish cooking. I just wanted to stop by and make sure Ava was okay, but thanks for the offer.”

The front door opened, and Grayson walked in. He set his keys down, walked over, and kissed my head.

“I think this is our cue to leave, Jen,” Grace said. “Come on, Nora. Let’s go fill your tummy with yummy food.” She tickled her belly. “Call me if you need anything.”

“I will. Thanks, Grace.”

“I’ll talk to you later.” Jenni hugged me. “Take care of her, Dr. Kind.”

“You know I will. Thanks, Jen.” He sat on the couch and held me.

“I’m happy you’re home,” I said.

“Me too, babe. I thought I told you to get in bed when you got home,”

“I didn’t want to be in there without you. I’m fine right here.”

“Are you hungry?” he asked.

“Yes. Can we order in?”

“I’ll go grab the menus.” He kissed the top of my head and stood up from the couch.

The sliding door opened, and Gabriel stepped inside.

“I got here as soon as I could. Traffic is a bitch. Ava, how are you?” He sat down next to me and grabbed hold of my hand.

“I’m fine. It’s just a few stitches.”

“And a possible concussion since Kate headbutted the guy,” Grayson said as he walked over with the menus. “What do you want to eat?” he asked.

“I don’t care. Gabriel, stay and have dinner with us,” I said.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, I’m sure.” I smiled. “Let’s have Thai. You know what I like.” I stood up and kissed Grayson’s lips. “I’m going to take a bath. Let me know when the food gets here.”

“Okay. Not too hot, though,” Grayson spoke as I walked up the stairs.

“Got it, Dr. Kind.”



Grayson

“Bro, that’s some scary shit that happened today,” Gabriel said. “I hate to say it, but if Ava wasn’t there, God knows what that guy would have done to Shaun and everyone else.”

“I thought the same thing, but I hate that Ava was put in harm’s way like that.”

“Kate wouldn’t let anything happen to her. You know that.”

“You should have seen what she did to the guy.” I breathed out a laugh. “She broke his jaw, cheekbone, and three of his ribs. He deserved it, though. I can say that with confidence.”

“I want you to know, bro, that I love Ava.”

“Excuse me?” My brow arched.

“Shut the fuck up. Not in that way, and you know it. She’s a special woman, and you make a special couple. I’m just really happy for you.”

“Ah, is my brother starting to crave a relationship with someone special?”

“Not in your wildest dreams.” He grinned.

“You’re such a douchebag.” I chuckled as I punched his arm.

After the three of us finished eating dinner, I locked up the house and took Ava upstairs.

“Get in bed,” I said as I walked into the bathroom.

“My knuckles are hurting really bad,” she whined.

When I was done in the bathroom, I sat on the edge of the bed, took hold of both her hands, and kissed each of her knuckles.

“Better?” I asked.

“Not quite.” She smiled.

I brought them up to my lips again and softly kissed them.

“How about now?”

“Maybe one more time will do the trick.” A soft smile crossed her lips.

I kissed them again. “Now?” I arched my brow.

“Yeah. They feel better. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” I leaned in and kissed her lips. “I’ll go get some ice, and we’ll lay here for the rest of the night.”

“I love that idea.” She smiled.



### One Week Later

*I* was sitting around the bonfire with my brother and cousins when Charlotte walked over.

“Can I talk to you for a second?” she asked.

“Sure.” I stood up and walked back to her house with her.

“I thought you should know that Ava’s mother’s parole was denied. I submitted my report to the court about Ava’s condition and how it stemmed from her mother’s abuse. I also submitted all of Dr. Lenox’s reports. The parole board reviewed it and denied her parole. You may want to thank Shaun as well.”

“Why Shaun?” I furrowed my brows.

“He has a lot of influence in this state and personally knows two of the parole board members. He may or may not have paid them a visit. That’s all I’m saying.” She smirked.

“Thanks for telling me, Charlotte.”

“You’re welcome. Can you do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

She stepped inside the house and picked the baby up from under her activity gym on the floor.

“Can you take her to her daddy? I’m going to take a bath. It’s been a long day.”

“Come here, sweet girl.” I smiled as I took her from Charlotte’s arms.

I walked back to the firepit and sat down with Isabella.

“Hey. Why do you have my baby?” Conner’s brows furrowed.

“Charlotte is taking a bath and asked me to bring her down here with us.”

“Come to Daddy, Princess.” Conner held out his arms.

“Not happening, Conner.” I held Isabella tight. “She’s staying right here with me for a while. If she starts to cry, then I’ll hand her over.” I smirked.

He sat across from the firepit and glared at me.

“You’ll be okay. I promise.” I chuckled. “Oh, by the way. Gabriel and I got the call today. Our motorcycles are finally in.”

“Shit. It’s about time,” Shaun said.

“Awesome news.” Christian smiled. “I can drive you guys tomorrow to pick them up.”

“We appreciate it, cousin.” Gabriel grinned as he held up his beer bottle.

After finishing my beer, I handed the baby to Conner and followed Shaun back to his house.

“Charlotte told me what you did. Thanks, Shaun.”

“Well, we all love Ava and want to protect her too. I can’t help it that two of the three parole board members are friends of mine.” He smirked. “Besides, that woman needs to spend every second of her sentence in prison for what she did. The problem is, what are you going to do when her sentence is up and she decides to come looking for Ava?”

“We’ll cross that bridge when and if we get there. Plus, you know the others won’t allow it to happen.”

“Very true.” He patted my shoulder.

“Sam told me you’re installing metal detectors in the building.”

“Yeah. They were put in today. I also hired two security guards for the office.”

“Good. You don’t want to take any more chances. Have a good night, and I’ll see you tomorrow when we pull up on our new bikes.” I grinned.

“You bet. We’re all going for a ride tomorrow.”



Ava was sitting on the couch on her laptop when I stepped through the sliding door.

“Hi.” She smiled. “How are the guys?”

“They’re good.” I walked over and joined her on the couch. “What are you doing?” I lay my head on her shoulder.

“Looking for a different dining set for Shaun’s apartments.”

“Sounds fun.” I smirked. “Christian is going to drive Gabriel and me to pick up our motorcycles tomorrow. You in?” I lifted my head.

“I’m in.” She smiled.

“Good.” I kissed her lips. “Are you almost ready for bed?”

“Yes.” She closed her laptop, set it down, and took hold of my hand. “Let’s go, Dr. Kind. I’m not feeling well and need a check-up.” The corners of her mouth curved upward.

## CHAPTER 44



G rayson

As I lay there and held her against me, I couldn't stop thinking about her mother. The last thing I wanted to do was keep secrets from her, and I knew one day it would come back and bite me in the ass. I needed to tell her and deal with the consequences.

The following day, Christian drove us to pick up our motorcycles. After putting on our helmets, Ava climbed on the back and wrapped her arms around me.

"Are you ready?" I smiled as I looked back at her.

"I'm ready!" She grinned.

We pulled out of the parking lot and headed home. The feeling was surreal, and even more so having the girl I loved so much with me. Gabriel knew of my plan to tell Ava about her mother, so once we got home, he left us alone.

"That was amazing." Ava smiled as she climbed off.

"I'm happy you enjoyed it because we're going to ride a lot. Let's go down to the beach and take a walk along the shoreline."

"Okay." The smile never left her face.

I grabbed her hand and held it tight as we walked down by the water while the sun was setting.

"There's something I need to tell you," I said.

"Okay. What is it?"

"Your mother is in the California State Penitentiary and serving a twenty-five-year sentence." I blurted out before the others had a chance to front and stop me.

“How do you know this?” She stopped walking and stared at me.

“Freya told me.”

“Okay,” she said, and I was confused.

“That’s it?” I furrowed my brows.

“She’s not my mother. She’s a terrible person who obviously deserves to be locked up. Charlotte, Emilia, Julia, Alex, Sofia, Jenni, and Grace are mothers. They are everything a mother should be, not that woman sitting in a prison cell. I appreciate your telling me, and I love you even more, but it doesn’t matter. I barely even remember her, and that’s how it’s going to stay.”

I was shocked yet amazed by her strength.

I brought my hands up and cupped her face. “I am so in love with you.” I smiled.

“I love you, too.” Our lips met.

I pulled her into me and held her head against my chest as the waves crashed against the shore. When we got back to the house, I ran upstairs to change my shirt because we were going to Four Kinds for dinner.

“That was a brave and bold move, Grayson.”

I turned around and looked at Freya as I grabbed a new shirt from the closet.

“I’m not keeping secrets from her, Freya. She had the right to know. Why didn’t you stop me?” I asked.

“Because we know she’s in a better place since she met and fell in love with you. She’s stronger than ever. She knows it, and so do we. But that doesn’t mean we’re going anywhere.” She waved her finger at me with a smile.

“I wouldn’t expect nor want you to.” I walked over and kissed her forehead.

She closed her eyes, and when they opened, her brows furrowed.

“Why did I come up here?” Ava asked.

“You said you wanted to freshen up your makeup before we headed to the restaurant.” I smiled.

“That’s right.” She kissed me and went into the bathroom.



## Two Weeks Later

It was a Saturday afternoon, and we all gathered for a barbecue. We set up the volleyball net, water games for the kids and spent the day hanging out together as a family. Christian, Charleigh, and I had the weekend off from the hospital, so we decided to make the most of it.

As I tipped the beer bottle to my mouth, I couldn't help but chuckle when I saw Logan and Lily holding hands.

"Does Stefan see what's going on over there?" I glanced at Sam.

"I think he just did." Sam laughed as we watched Stefan walk over there. He took his hand, karate-chopped theirs apart, and walked away.

"Dad!" Lily shouted.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kind," Logan shouted.

"I don't think you are, kid."

We sat there and laughed as we drank our beer. After we ate and the sun set, we lit the bonfire, gathered around it with our guitars, and played some music. I glanced over at my brother and smiled at him as he strummed his guitar. The happiest times of our lives were when we moved to Venice Beach to be with our family. If we hadn't, I would never have met Ava and become the man I am today. She changed my views on love and relationships and made me the happiest man in the world. My heart had never felt so full as it did being with her. Not only did she love me, but all the parts of her loved me too. They accepted me as much as I accepted them. I felt like the luckiest man alive to be loved by not just one woman but by six.

She walked over and sat on my lap. Wrapping my arms around her, I held her tight.

"I love you." I smiled.

"I love you too." Her lips met mine.



Gabriel

I shut off my alarm, climbed out of bed, threw on a pair of sweatpants, and went downstairs for a cup of coffee. When I opened the blinds on the sliding door, I smiled as the sun started rising over the water.

After making my coffee, I stepped onto the patio to enjoy the morning air

before I had to get ready for work.

“Morning, bro.” Grayson smiled from his pool.

“Morning. Enjoying your swim?” I smirked.

“Always.”

I walked over to his patio and took a seat in the lounge.

“Are you working today?” I asked him.

“Yeah. I just wanted to get a swim in before I head out. How’s your day looking?”

“I have a patient-filled day, so it’s going to be busy.”

“That’s good. Keep making that money.” He smiled as he climbed out of the pool.

“Is Ava up yet?” I asked.

“No. She’s still sleeping. We were up late last night.” A smirk crossed his lips.

“I bet you were.” I brought the cup to my mouth.

“There’s no better feeling in the world than waking up to the woman you love every morning.”

“I can think of some better things.” The corners of my mouth curved upward.

“You do realize you’re the only single guy left in the family, right?”

“I do realize that, and it makes me happy.”

Grayson reached over and hit me with his wet towel. “Stop being a douchebag.”

“How am I a douchebag because I’m happy being single?” I cocked my head at him.

“You just think you’re happy, but you’re not.”

“I am, brother. Trust me.”

“Keep telling yourself that, bro.”

“I have to get ready for work. I suggest you do the same.” I stood up from the lounge and fist-bumped him.

“You’re not happy, Gabriel!” he shouted as I walked over to my house.

“Says you, bro!” I chuckled.

Jackson and I pulled into the medical center at the same time.

“Morning.” I smiled as I climbed out of my car.

“Morning, cousin.”

“I thought you were in surgery this morning,” I said as we walked into the building.

“My seven a.m. surgery got canceled last night, and my next one isn’t until noon. So, I thought I’d come in and catch up on some reports.”

“Good idea. Have a good day.” I patted his back as we reached the second floor.

“You too.” He smiled.

I took the third flight of stairs up to my practice.

“Morning, Kelsey.” I smiled when I walked in.

“Good morning, Dr. Kind.”

“Can you grab me a coffee and bring it to my office?”

“Of course,” she said.

“Thank you.” I walked into my office and set my leather bag down.

My office staff consisted of my medical receptionist, Kelsey, my medical assistant, Myra, and my nurse, Ashley. My patient load was growing by the day, and I seriously needed to consider hiring a physician’s assistant.

“Here you are, Dr. Kind.” Kelsey set the cup of coffee on my desk.

“Thanks, Kelsey.” I picked up the cup and took a sip.

The morning was busy with back-to-back patients. Luckily, I kept on schedule, which allowed me a thirty-minute lunch break until I started seeing patients again at one o’clock. Conner had texted me earlier and told me that a patient of his sent in some food for all of us and to come down and grab a bite.

“Who sent all this in?” I asked as I walked into the kitchen area and saw all the food sitting on the island.

“A patient of mine who loves me.” Conner grinned. “Dig in. There’s pasta, chicken, potatoes, green beans, and a salad.”

“Don’t mind if I do.” I grabbed a plate.

Georgia walked in with her hand covering her nose and mouth.

“What’s wrong, Georgia sunshine? Morning sickness getting the best of you?” Conner asked.

“Yep, and if I smell that food, I’m going to lose it right here.” She walked over to the refrigerator and grabbed a bottle of water.”

Nathan walked in and grabbed a plate. “I literally have ten minutes to eat, and then I have to get back to my patients.”

“Running behind today?” I smirked.

“Yeah. One of my patients didn’t like what I had to tell her, and she spent thirty minutes arguing with me.” He shook his head.

“We’ve all been there, bro.” Conner patted Nathan’s back.

While the three of us sat down at the table and ate, Sebastian walked in, holding Noah.

“What the hell is this?” His brow arched as he stared at the food on the island. “Who made this?”

“A patient of mine sent it in,” Conner said. “It’s good. Have some.”

“Hey, Noah.” I smiled as I held my arms out, and Sebastian handed him over to me. “What are you doing here?” I asked him.

“We were out running errands, and I thought I’d bring him by to see Emilia.”

“You’re not working today?” Nathan asked.

“No. I took the day off to spend some time with my son.”

“You are the epitome of a perfect father.” I smiled, for I knew that would offend Conner.

“Excuse me, douchebag?” Both Conner and Nathan said at the same time.

I let out a chuckle as I held Noah up in the air. “Look at how big you’re getting. As much as I would love to stay and shoot the shit with you guys, I have patients to see.” I glanced at my watch and handed Noah over to Sebastian. “Nathan, I do believe you’re over your ten-minute lunch.” I smirked.

“Fuck it. I’ll just be behind all day. I’m enjoying this food too much.”

Sebastian shot him a look. “The chicken is dry, and the pasta is overcooked.”

“You’re right. Your cooking is way better than this.” Nathan shoved his fork in his mouth.

I laughed as I patted Sebastian’s back. “You know nobody cooks better than you. Well, except maybe Ophelia.”

“I’m not going to argue with that.” Sebastian smiled.

I reached into the refrigerator to grab another bottle of water before heading up to my practice.

“Excuse me, Dr. Kind?”

“Which one, Stan?” Conner asked.

“Sorry. Dr. Gabriel Kind.”

When I grabbed a bottle of water and turned around, I saw Stan, the security guard, holding onto a young girl who appeared to be fourteen or fifteen years old.

“I caught this young lady lurking around the lobby by herself.”

“I wasn’t lurking, you idiot.”

“Watch your mouth, kid. I asked her what she was doing, and she said she was looking for you. Your receptionist said you were down here.”

“For me?” My brows furrowed.

“So, you’re Dr. Gabriel Kind?” She cocked her head.

“I am. And who might you be?”

“I’m Riley, your daughter.”

The bottle of water fell out of my hand and onto the floor as I stood there and stared at her.

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