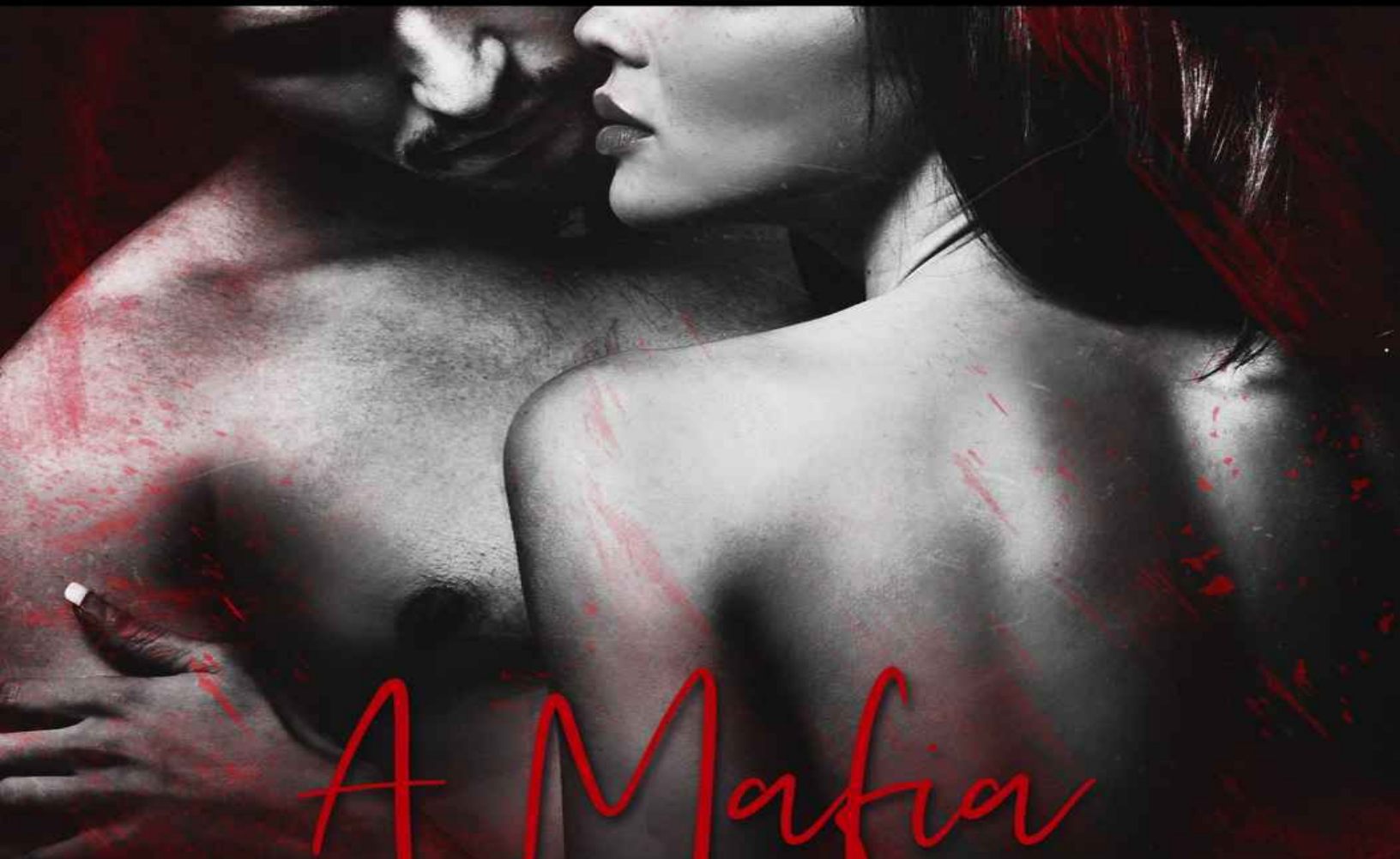


EVERNIGHT PUBLISHING®



*A Mafia*

# CHRISTMAS

MACLEAN MAFIA MEN



# LILAF OX

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LILA FOX





**EVERNIGHT PUBLISHING ®**

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## **DEDICATION**

I want to dedicate this book to my husband and children. Thank you for putting up with me for so long. I love you.

# **A MAFIA CHRISTMAS**

*Maclean Mafia Men, 10*

**Lila Fox**

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## Chapter One

Beth waited for Alastair to leave the bedroom before she raced to the bathroom and vomited like she had the last few weeks. This time was close. If she threw up in front of Alastair, he'd throw a fit.

She knew she looked pale and had lost a few pounds, enough for Alastair to see and comment on it. He wanted the doctor to come look at her, but she already knew what it was. A baby. She was pregnant with Alastair's child, and as much as it thrilled her, it terrified her, too.

After rinsing her mouth out, she stood in front of the mirror and pressed her hands against her stomach where the baby lay. Tears filled her eyes. What was she going to do? She wanted desperately to tell Alastair but was terrified he'd ask her to abort it and that would destroy her.

When they talked about it in the past, he'd always veto the idea. She asked him why, but she always got dismissed. They had never had a conversation about it, and she didn't bring it up anymore, but she'd heard a few of his comments about bringing a child into their family. There were so many dangers it would be hard to protect it. Then he said he had never seen himself as a father. When she hinted about wanting a child, he cut her off and changed the subject.

She needed to confide in the girls, but she worried that if someone besides her knew, he'd find out before she was ready.

She thought long and hard about what to do and still hadn't come up with anything, which stressed her out, making the nausea even worse.

Beth climbed into the shower and stayed there until she felt calm and centered. She leisurely washed her hair and body. Her hand instinctively went to her lower stomach, knowing she had to stop it or be found out before she was ready. She knew it would be only a few more weeks before she started to show, so she didn't have much time. The differences were already showing. She couldn't drink coffee or smell grease without getting nauseous. Her breasts were bigger, and her nipples were darker and more sensitive.

She'd been able to hide her body to an extent when Alastair made love to her. She kept the lights very low or off. So far, he hadn't caught on to anything. She knew that wouldn't last. It was only because he was busy that he hadn't noticed anything yet.

She turned off the water and wrapped a towel around her hair before reaching for another one for her body. After drying and rubbing lotion all



over her body, she pulled on a long dress, the kind Alastair liked to see her in. It was convenient because it would help hide her pregnancy longer.

She made her way down to the dining room. She was hungry but was afraid to eat anything, especially in front of people. She breathed a sigh of relief when she found only Faith and Hope at the table. The moment she sat down, a maid came to take her order.

“A piece of dry toast and fruit.”

“Can I get you a coffee, Miss Beth?” the maid asked.

Beth shook her head. “No, thank you. I’ll take an orange juice, though.”

She turned to the other two to find them staring at her. “What?”

“You always have coffee in the morning,” Faith said.

“So, I can’t change?” Beth asked and smiled.

Hope’s eyes narrowed on her. “What’s going on?”

Beth sighed. “Can we talk about this after breakfast? Somewhere quiet.”

“Sure,” Faith said and patted her hand.

Beth was able to hold the conversation off for an hour but could tell the girls were getting impatient. Beth stood. “Let’s go outside.”

The three women walked to a favorite part of the garden where they liked having lunch or tea in the afternoon. They sat down and the two girls waited for Beth to talk.

She looked at them and then down to her lap.

“You can tell us anything,” Faith said.

“I ... I’m pregnant,” Beth whispered.

It took a moment for it to sink in, and then they both smiled.

Faith’s smile slipped from her face, and she grabbed onto her sister’s arm. “You aren’t happy about it?”

Tears started to fill her eyes. “Oh, I’m happy about it, but...”

“But?” Hope asked.

“Alastair doesn’t want a child,” Beth said.

The other two sat back with stunned expressions.

“What are you going to do?” Faith asked.

“I have to leave. It will kill me if he tells me to abort it. I’d never forgive him.”

Hope nodded. “I understand that. What has he said to make you think he doesn’t want a baby?”

“He says he doesn’t want to bring children into the world we live in. He wanted to get a vasectomy, but I begged him not to.”

“Why doesn’t he want children?” Faith asked.

“Because of the danger, I guess,” Beth told them.

Faith scowled. “That can be handled. Just put more guards around the house.”

“That would work,” Hope said. “I imagine there are a few things they can do to secure the house.”

Beth nodded. “I know.”

“What has he said to you?”

“I’ve brought up having children for over a year, and he always cuts me off and changes the conversation. He also said that he couldn’t see himself as a father.”

“Why?” Hope asked.

Beth shrugged. “I don’t know. I think he’d be wonderful. He’s so patient with me, and I know he’d be patient with a child, too.”

“Some men are weird about that stuff. They act like they would lose a piece of themselves if they had a child, instead of seeing it as gaining a whole new world.”

Beth agreed with Faith.

“What are your options?” Hope asked.

“I don’t know. That’s why I’m freaking out. I have no place to live or job to support us. I know I’ll have to leave until he accepts it, but I don’t know how long that will be.”

Hope sat forward. “Let’s talk to Mom. I bet she’d let you live with them. She loves you. It would also give Rebecca another woman.”

Beth felt a burst of optimism. “God, that would be great. I’d like to move as soon as I can. I’m not showing yet, but I’m getting sick every morning. I’ve been able to hold back until Alastair leaves the room, but it’s been closed a few times. If he sees that, he’ll call the doctor. The doctor will know immediately, and he’ll tell Alastair. He wouldn’t be able to hold that information back.”

“We have to keep this between the three of us. I trust Angel, but the fewer people that know, the better. I’ll go call Mom now. We’ll figure out a way to get you out of here without you being seen,” Hope said. “When do you want this to happen?”

“Tomorrow. I want one more night with Alastair,” Beth said. God,

just the thought of never seeing him again made her stomach cramp and tears fill her eyes.

“Are you going to leave a note?” Faith said.

“I have to tell him in person. He’d think someone kidnapped me if I didn’t.”

“You look wiped out,” Hope said. “Why don’t you go and take a nap, and we’ll work on the problem? He’s going to freak out. Blake told me how cold and distant Alastair was before you came into his life. I’m afraid to guess how he’ll act after you leave.”

The women stood and hugged each other. It took effort to release them.

“I’m going to miss you guys.”

Faith gripped Beth’s arm. “You’ll be at our mother’s. We can visit all the time.”

“That’s true.”

“Let’s meet here before lunch,” Faith said. “We’ve got to look casual.”

Beth nodded. She had no idea if she could. She was a bad actress and had never been able to keep or hide anything from Alastair.

“Let’s go get this done,” Hope said.

They went their separate ways after walking into the house. Beth trudged up the long flight of stairs. She disliked the fatigue she felt more than the nausea. She knew it was normal for the first trimester, but it was hard to live with it.

She closed the bedroom door and lay on the bed. She felt a wave of despair when she thought of losing the man who held her soul in his hands and the one who had become a father to her. What was she going to say to him?

It was too much to think about, so she closed her eyes and slept.

## Chapter Two

Beth woke up when she heard what sounded like Alastair's voice down the hallway. She slipped off the bed, worried that if it was him and he caught her napping, he'd start asking questions.

When she stood, a wave of dizziness hit her, making her drop back to the bed. She took some deep breaths and tried again. When she went slow, she was fine. She hurried into the bathroom and splashed water on her face.

Her stomach started to cramp and revolt. "Oh, God, please. I can't be sick right now."

It went away as she was undressing. She had just stepped under the water in the shower when Alastair walked in.

"Beth. Why are you bathing now?"

She tried to laugh but thought it came out forced. "I was in the garden, and I got really sweaty. I didn't want to go to lunch like that because I'd feel gross and sticky. What are you doing?"

"I didn't find you downstairs, so I decided to look in our bedroom."

She ducked her head out that was full of shampoo. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine. It just concerned me."

She walked back under the water. "I have to rinse, or it will get in my eyes. Is there anything you need me for?"

"I'll always need you. But no. I just wanted to tell you I'll be out of the house for a few hours for a meeting."

"Okay. Be safe."

He stuck his head into the shower. "Come give me a kiss, love."

She smiled and walked over to him. He started to kiss her, and like always, it got intense very fast. When they realized what had happened, she was plastered to Alastair's body, making his shirt and pants wet.

"Oops," she said and giggled.

He tried to look stern. "You did that on purpose."

"You're the one that asked for a kiss," she reminded him.

He chuckled. "Now, I have to hurry because I have to change." His eyes went over her, and a look of heated desire flashed in his eyes. "Damn, I wish I could stay here with you."

Beth smiled. "I do, too."

"Later. I'll see you soon."

"Bye," she called out. She listened to him and waited until the

bedroom door closed, and the tears of grief started. She pressed her face into her hands and sobbed. How in the world was she going to do this? How was she going to leave the other half of her soul?

Beth had an idea that after the baby was born, he might come and want to see it and maybe, just maybe, fall in love with it. Then she'd be able to come home and be with him. It was a pipe dream, but she was praying for anything positive.

She finished washing and dressing. She left her hair damp and walked down the stairs and out to the garden. She didn't have long to wait. Faith and Hope hugged her before they sat down.

"I talked to my mom," Faith said. "She said you can absolutely live there. She'd be thrilled to have you."

Beth exhaled, and her stomach loosened enough for her to take a deep breath. "Did she have any suggestions on how I should get there without being seen? I don't want to take any chances with this baby, and Alastair always tells me people are watching and waiting to take him down."

"Mama asked if there was a gate you could sneak out of?"

Beth shook her head. "No. After I was taken because I followed what I thought was a kitten, Alastair had all the fences around the property improved so no one else could get to me."

Beth looked off down the garden path, and tears started to fill her eyes. "Am I doing the right thing?"

Her friends looked worried.

"I don't know. I do know that man loves you with a depth of emotion I never thought anyone could have. Blake loves me, I know that, but he doesn't have that ... I don't know what to call it — maybe *obsession* — to keep me safe and happy, that your husband has."

"Have you thought about Angus? This is going to break his heart," Hope said.

Beth nodded. It was almost as hard to leave her father-in-law as it was her husband. Angus had given her a taste of what it was like to have a parent that cared. Something she'd never felt before.

"What do I tell him?" Beth asked. "I don't want to hurt either of them or make them worry."

Faith tapped her arm. "Is there a chance you could tell him what's going on?"

"I thought about that, but I'm afraid he'd go right to Alastair."

All three women sat in silence, thinking their own thoughts for a moment.

“If he makes me stay locked up here, I couldn’t handle it. But I can’t think of a way I’d be able to escape?” God, that sounded horrible. She wasn’t in prison. It was just that Alastair worried about her safety.

“What if we made you look like one of us?” Hope said. “The three of us could be going to spend time with our mother.”

“How?”

“I wear glasses sometimes. We could braid your hair, put the glasses on you, and dress you in one of her outfits.”

Faith nodded. “I think that’s the only way.”

Beth nodded. “Okay, we’ll try it.”

“Three of us usually hold each other’s hands as we’re walking, so we’ll do that. We’ll think of more ways we can disguise you,” Hope said.

“What are you guys talking about?” Angel asked as she walked up to them.

Beth looked at the other two. “I think we need to tell her.”

Faith nodded. “Beth is pregnant.” She held up a hand when Angel started to get excited. “Alastair doesn’t want children.”

Angel sat down by her and held her hand. “I’m sorry. What can I do?”

“Mom said she can live with her,” Hope said.

“You really think he’ll kick you out?” Angel asked.

Beth shrugged. “I don’t know what he’ll do. I’ve thought of all the scenarios. If he grounds me, we’re going to sneak me out of the house to your mom’s. I’ll leave a note for Alastair and tell him what’s happening. I figure if he wants me, he’ll come for me.”

“Oh, he’ll want you,” Angel said.

Beth wasn’t so sure.

“I think you guys are making this too complicated,” Angel said. “I think you should tell him privately. He might surprise you and be happy.”

Beth looked at the other two. “I’m thinking about that.”

Faith squeezed her hand. “We’ll help with anything.”

Beth sighed. “I’ll just tell him. Angel’s right. It will be less complicated, and I’d like to see the expression on his face when I tell him.”

The girls nodded.

“I won’t until tomorrow, though. It just might be the last night I ever have with him.”

“I don’t believe that,” Hope said.

God, she didn’t want to believe it either, but she had to face reality. She’d find out tomorrow how much her husband loved her.

## Chapter Three

Alastair drew her down, wrapped an arm around her, and pulled her tight against him. It was after dinner, and they were in the family room for an after-dinner drink. Beth soaked up all the affection she could get from him because she was afraid of what was going to happen when she told him about the pregnancy. She listened as he talked to one of his brothers.

She glanced at the girls and saw they were acting as normally as they could, but it was enough not to have the guys ask questions.

Alastair kissed the top of her head. "Are you ready to go up to bed, love?"

She smiled up at him and nodded. "Yes."

He pulled her off the sofa. She waved at everyone and let him lead her up the stairs and into their bedroom. She heard the snick of the lock and turned to face him. He grinned at her as he started to unbutton his shirt.

"Strip the clothes off, love. I want to see what belongs to me."

Beth pulled the dress up and off her body. She worried he'd see the differences in her nipples or the slight bulge where the baby was, but he didn't say anything. It helped that the only low light on was the one by the bedside. She walked over to him when he stood naked and knelt before him.

One of his hands went to the top of her head. "Whoa, love. What do you think you're doing?"

She smiled up at him as she cradled his cock in her hands. "I want a taste of my husband. You never let me do this."

"Fuck. Fine, but only for a second. I need to be in your cunt when I come."

Her eyes stared up at his as she stuck her tongue out and swiped it over the head of his cock, making him hiss and her grin.

"Oh, you like that, do you?" he asked.

She nodded and sucked him to the back of her throat.

He threw back his head and yelled. "Goddamn it, woman."

She giggled but didn't release him.

He lifted her to her feet and then his arms. He lay her on the bed and stared down at her as he stroked his cock. "You're in such trouble, you know that?"

She nodded, and her grin widened.

He rolled his eyes. "Let's get the bra and panties off."



He stripped her before coming down beside her. He hugged her to his body and started to kiss her. She knew to open her mouth because he liked to devour her, and it always made her desire rise. They kissed and touched as much of each other as they could while breathing each other's air.

He raised his head and looked at her. "You are so fucking beautiful."

Beth ran her fingertips down his cheek. "You're everything."

His eyebrows rose. "What does that mean?" he asked and smiled.

"I will never have enough of you, and I could stare at you all day long. Other men don't exist." She cupped his face. "The depth of love I feel for you, has no bounds, and grows each day. I didn't believe in soulmates or destiny before you."

He cradled her face. "You're my world, and I love you so much it scares me sometimes."

Her eyes widened. "Why?"

"It feels like I can't breathe unless you're in the room."

Beth inhaled and felt tears fill her eyes. "I will never be whole unless I have you."

"That's good because that will never happen."

*God, I hope so,* Beth thought.

The kisses started again, but this time Alastair moved down her body. When he got to her breasts, she bit down on her lip to keep from flinching—one of the side effects of the pregnancy. She held his head to her so he wouldn't see some of her expressions. He started sliding down until he was between her legs.

"Alastair, I want you up here."

Alastair smiled and separated her tender folds. "You got to taste me, so now I get to taste you."

"So, you'll only take the amount of time you gave me?" Beth asked.

He snorted before he bent and started sucking on her clit. The sensation went through her body and pushed her into an orgasm she hadn't thought was that close—another effect of the pregnancy.

He lifted his head. "Damn. That was quick. I wonder how many times I can get you to come?"

Oh, God. She didn't know if she would survive. "Please, Alastair. I need you in me."

He crawled up her body and took her lips again. This time, he made sure she tasted herself. The first few times he'd done that, she'd been grossed

out, but when she saw how much he enjoyed it, she got used to it.

He raised her legs on either side of his hips and then slammed into her. She screamed as another wave of ecstasy rolled through her.

He chuckled. "Damn, tonight is going to be great."

She hoped it didn't hurt the baby. She thought about all the sex they had in the last few months, and if that hadn't affected the baby, this wouldn't.

He cradled the back of her head with one hand and wrapped the other around her waist. When he held her this way, she knew no air would be able to slide through their bodies. Alastair would make slow, deep lunges and then fast, shallow ones that kept her need high but didn't throw her over.

"Alastair..."

"I need to have all of you. You know what that means, right?"

"My bottom."

"That's right. Are you going to be able to handle it tonight?" he asked.

There was no way she was going to say no to this man. "Yes. Please."

"You're such a good girl."

"Do you want me to roll over?"

He shook his head. "No. I want to watch you."

She could feel her face heat up with a blush.

He didn't release her, but he did reach down and move the head of his cock to the tight opening and started pushing in.

"Tell me if it's too much."

She shivered at the guttural tone of his voice.

He would pull out and grab some more of the cream, sliding out of her and then back to her ass. A gasp tore from her when he slammed the last two inches into her. Alastair pressed his forehead to her shoulder and took a few shaky breaths. She ran her hands up and down his sweaty back, trying to soothe him.

"Being in your body, anywhere in your body, is paradise," he said. He lifted his head to stare down at her. "How are you? I know it's a bit tighter fucking you this way."

She smiled and raised her knees. "I think having you anywhere in my body is paradise."

He smiled gently down at her before kissing her sweetly. With their eyes staring at each other the whole time, he fucked her, and it seemed to go on and on.

She felt herself tighten up. “Alastair...”

“I know. I feel it. I’m close, too.” He adjusted his embrace. “Hold onto me, love.”

Her arms wrapped around his upper arms. He was so muscular she couldn’t hold on, but she could use her nails to brace herself. His lunges were smooth but hard enough that she knew she’d come quickly. She felt her body tighten, and it was soon becoming agonizing.

“Don’t close your eyes,” he growled.

She fought to keep them open. She felt him harden and grow bigger and knew he was ready.

“Come for me, love,” Alastair yelled.

That’s all it took for her to fly. The sounds of ecstasy they made echoed in the room.

Alastair turned them to the side but kept his cock in her. They both concentrated on slowing their heartbeats before they moved. Beth gasped when he pulled out of her.

He kissed her lips. “I’m sorry. I’m going to clean up, and then I’ll take care of you. Stay where you are.”

Beth nodded and watched him walk away. She pulled the throw blanket at the bottom of the bed over her when she started to shiver.

Alastair was back within five minutes and gently cleaned her before lifting her hips to pull the blanket out from under her and then sliding in next to her. He wrapped them up and cuddled her against the heat of his body.

“Hell, you pooped me out, woman.” He grinned down at her. “No pun intended.”

It took a moment to grasp what he was saying, and she gasped. “I can’t believe you just said that. That’s awful.”

He laughed so hard he pressed his face into her hair to take time to settle. She couldn’t help but smile. He looked down at her with a grin on his face and love that warmed her inside. This was a time she’d never forget.

“I love you so much,” she said.

He grew serious. “I love you.”

God, she just hoped it was enough to get them through the next day.

## Chapter Four

Beth smoothed her hair and studied herself in the mirror. She was shaking inside, and at times, it made her nauseous. She had already vomited and eaten a few crackers she kept hidden in her panty drawer.

She took a few deep breaths and placed her hands on her stomach. “Don’t worry. If he doesn’t want us anymore, we can make our own family.”

God, she loved the child so much because it was a part of him. She just hoped he would feel the same way.

She made her way downstairs. She knocked on his open office door.

He looked up from his desk and smiled. “There’s my beautiful wife.”

She tried to smile, but she knew he caught it. Her expression wasn’t real, and she trembled.

“What’s wrong?” he said and stood.

She put her hands up. “Wait.” She closed the door behind her and then faced him again. “You know how much I love you, right?”

He was starting to look concerned. “Yes, my Beth, I do. I also love you. Now, tell me what this is about.”

She swallowed and looked him in the eyes. “I’m pregnant.”

“You’re what?” he asked.

“I’m pregnant.”

She watched the shock hit him, and then several other emotions crossed his face. He started to pace.

“When did you know?”

“A week or so ago.”

“And you’re just now telling me?” he asked roughly.

“I was afraid.”

He started pacing again. “Okay, we can deal with this. I’ll ask Ben where we can go to get rid of it.”

Her mouth dropped open. She couldn’t believe that this man who had made such sweet love to her the night before could be this cold.

“Y-you want me to abort the baby?” she asked.

He stopped pacing to frown at her. “Of course. You know how I feel about having kids.”

This was her worst nightmare come true. She shook her head. “I can’t kill a baby that we both made together.”

“I didn’t want to have a baby!” he yelled.

She nodded and inhaled. "I know. Accidents happen."

His eyes narrowed. "Did you plan this?"

Her mouth dropped open again. "God, no. How can you even ask that?"

"You're on birth control. How did you get pregnant?" Every word out of his mouth was sharp and cold.

"I don't know. A doctor could tell us. I was on antibiotics, and that sometimes messes with their effectiveness."

"And you didn't tell me this?"

Beth held out her hand. "I didn't think about it. I'd been on the medicine before, and nothing happened. I just found out, too."

He rested his hands on his hips. "Listen, love. I'll take you myself. I'll be there the whole time and hold your hand."

She shook her head. "I can't abort this child."

"Can't or won't?" he asked.

She swallowed. "Both."

He started pacing again. "We can't keep the baby."

"Yes, we can."

He spun toward her and yelled. "No, the fuck we can't."

She sighed and looked down at the carpet. "Then what are we going to do?"

He rubbed his hand over his face before he stared at her. "You have to decide if you want me or the baby. You can't have both."

Beth gasped and almost fell but grabbed onto a chair. "Can't you just think about it for a while?"

He shook his head. "Fuck, no. I don't have to think about it. Make your decision now!" he barked.

"Please don't make me do this," she begged.

"I'm not doing anything. You are. We were doing great. I was so happy, and then you pulled this on me."

"Alastair," she said and took a step toward him with her hand out.

He backed up. "You're not choosing me, are you?"

"My soul would die if I did that to our child."

"What if I were to die? Would you be able to decide then?" He laughed, and his hand slashed through the air. "Never mind, I think I already know the answer. Get out."

She nodded. "Can we talk later tonight?"

“You’re not getting it. I want you out of my office, my house, and my life. I don’t want to see your face ever again.”

“You don’t mean that!” she cried.

He took a few steps toward her, and it was the first time she ever thought he’d hurt her.

“I do mean that. I want you out now,” he bellowed.

Beth knew people were hearing this but didn’t care.

“I’ll go pack...”

“No. Nothing here belongs to you.”

She blinked several times to hold back the tears. “You’re right. Can I at least get a ride?”

“No, Get the fuck away from me,” he yelled. “I don’t care where you go or what you do. Just get out.”

“You wouldn’t care if I died?” she asked.

It felt like another piece of glass was tearing up her insides when he shrugged.

“No.” They stared at each other before he cursed. “Someone get in here!” he yelled.

One of the security guards rushed in. “What, Boss?”

“I want this” — he pointed at her — “little whore out of here.”

She flinched but didn’t say anything.

“Where do you want me to take her?”

“To the end of the driveway.”

The guard’s eyes widened. “And leave her there?”

“Yes!” he yelled. “Do what I say, or I’ll put a bullet in your head.”

The guard stiffened and looked at her. “Come this way.”

“Don’t be nice to her. She betrayed me in the worst way possible,” Alastair said.

Beth took one more look at him, turned, and left. The guard closed the office door and followed her outside.

“You’re not going to grab a bag?”

“No.” She tried to laugh. “He said nothing here was mine.”

She looked at him. “Thank you. I don’t want to get you in trouble. Stay here.”

She got down to the bottom of the driveway and turned toward Aria and the girl’s house. It was several miles, but she could make it. She had several hours left in the day. She started to walk away. Each step away from

Alastair made her agony grow.

She hadn't gone two blocks before a car pulled up to her.

"Get in," Tony, the head of security, said.

"I can't. You'll get in trouble."

"Beth, now, you are not walking away from here on your own and with nothing. Let me take you somewhere. He'll never have to know."

Beth looked back at the way she came before slipping into the car.

"Do you have a place to go?" Tony asked.

She nodded. "Yes. Can you take me to the Mortelli's home?"

"Good. They'll take care of you."

They were silent for a moment.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Tony asked.

"I told him I was pregnant," Beth said.

Tony looked surprised and happy about it, but then his smile fell. "He's mad at you for that?"

"No. For not getting an abortion."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Tony said.

Beth shook her head, looked out her window, and blinked, trying to get the tears to go away.

Tony reached out and squeezed her arm. "He'll come around. Give him some time."

Beth sniffed, faced him, and spoke. "No. You didn't see him. He thinks I'm picking the baby over him." She sighed. "Maybe I am because I will not abort this baby, even if it means I have to lose him."

She pressed her face into her hands and sobbed. "How am I going to live without him?"

Tony grunted. "I can't see him giving you up, Beth."

"Oh, yes, he did. He never wants me back because he thinks I betrayed him. You know what he's like. Loyalty is everything to him."

Tony pressed the bridge of his nose before they pulled up to the Mortelli home.

She grasped his arm when he went to get out. "No. The fewer people that see you, the better."

"I think that might be too much..."

"He told the guard that took me out of the office he'd put a bullet in his head if he didn't move to get me out. Both the guard and I believed him. Please be careful. Thank you so much. I appreciate the ride more than you

know. Take care of him for me.”

He sighed and nodded. “I’ll try. You take care of yourself and the baby.”

Beth smiled. “I will.” She got out and waved one more time before walking up the stairs to the house.

The door opened, and Mateo stood with a scowl on his face. “What’s wrong, Beth?”

“Is Aria here? I need her.”

Mateo took her arm. “Sure. I’ll take you right to her. Whatever it is, we’ll deal with it.”

Beth tried to smile and nod.

They walked into the office, and Aria took one look at her expression and rushed to her. “Oh, God, what happened?”

Beth fell into her arms and sobbed. She was unable to talk for a long time because she couldn’t stop crying. She had to run to the bathroom and vomit once. She didn’t know if the baby was the cause of the upset stomach or the situation.

Aria got her settled on the sofa in her office and handed her the tissue box but said nothing, just waiting patiently for this to pass. Someone brought her in a glass of water, which she drank down.

When she was finally able to gain some control, she blew her nose and faced Aria. “I’m pregnant.”

Aria smiled and clutched her hand. “That’s wonderful.”

Beth shook her head.

“What? You don’t want the baby?”

Beth tried to laugh. “Oh, yes, I want it very much, but Alastair doesn’t.”

“It’s probably a shock to him. Give him time.”

Beth shook her head again. “No. He wants me to abort it.”

Aria gasped. “Surely he didn’t mean it.”

“He did. I said I couldn’t. He made me choose between him and the baby. When I said I couldn’t abort a piece of him, he kicked me out.”

Aria’s eyes widened, and she glanced at Mateo and then back to her. “Tell me what he said.”

Beth went through everything, and she could see the shock in Aria’s and Mateo’s faces and then anger.

“That bastard,” Aria said.



“He’s not,” Beth said. “He told me all along he didn’t want children. But even though we didn’t plan this child, it’s still part of both of us.”

Aria hugged her tightly. “You’re going to live here, and we’ll help with the baby. I’ll even go to Lamaze with you.”

Beth sighed and rested her head on her shoulder. “Thank you. I didn’t know what I was going to do. Alastair has everything I own.”

Aria patted her hand. “Everything will be okay.”

Beth nodded but didn’t believe a word of it.

## Chapter Five

Alastair sent off a text as he watched Beth walk down the driveway and turn out of sight. He wanted to howl because the pain was more than he'd ever dealt with. He'd been shot and stabbed several times, and it didn't amount to what he was feeling now.

He turned and looked down at his desk. He'd been going over some plans for a new business he wanted to build before she walked into his office. He'd been excited to see her, but now all he felt was anger, despair, disbelief, resentment, and anguish.

With a yell that came from his soul, he used his hands to swipe everything off his desk. He then started throwing anything he got his hands on. He could hear glass breaking, but he didn't care. The door opened once, and he threw a book. It hit the wood hard and startled Graham.

"Brother, what the hell?" Graham yelled.

"Get the fuck out! I don't want anyone in here until I'm ready."

Graham opened his mouth. Alastair growled, picked up another book, and threw it at him.

"Get the fuck out!" Alastair shouted again.

Graham scowled, but he closed the door. Alastair could hear him tell people to leave him alone, and it was a good thing. He was too close to losing any control he had left. He might shoot anyone—even his family. He threw things until he was tired and then looked at the destruction of his office. He walked to the bar, grabbed a glass, and filled it with whatever his hand touched first. He slammed that down and kept going until he felt the alcohol start to affect his body.

He poured one more drink and sat on the sofa. He stared at a picture of his father for so long he fell asleep. When he roused himself, he knew hours had passed because it was dark outside.

His father had knocked on the door at some point and called out his name.

"*Leave me the fuck alone!*" he yelled. For good measure, he picked up the object closest to him and threw it at the door. Fortunately, they stayed away.

The room darkened, and he didn't have the energy or the will to turn on a light. He just sat and stared at the cold fireplace. Thoughts filled his head, and he couldn't concentrate on just one of them.

He stood and walked over to the bar. It was dark, so he couldn't see where he was going, and he kicked or stepped on several things. He finally found the light on the table behind the sofa before pouring himself another drink.

Alastair took the bottle and glass back to the sofa and sat. He started to pour some of it into a glass but instead scowled at it before throwing the glass at the stone above the fireplace, making it shatter, and tipping the bottle up to his mouth. He didn't need a fucking glass.

Sometime during the night, he slid to his side on the sofa but never dropped the empty bottle. Alastair blinked a few times, pulled his feet up on the sofa, and passed out.

The sun shining in the room the next day woke him. With a groan, he fought to sit up and look around at his surroundings. At first, he was confused at the destruction but then remembered he'd lost his soul.

He sat forward with his elbows on his knees and rested his face in his hands, where a massive headache throbbed against his skull. When he thought he had enough energy, he stood and walked into the bathroom.

He pissed and then walked to the sink to wash his hands and face. One look in the mirror made him cringe. He'd never looked this bad in his life. The second thing that popped into his head was all the times he and Beth had fucked in the room.

A ball of fury burst from his throat as he slammed his fist against the mirror, smashing it and cutting his hand in several places. His hand dropped, and he stared at his shattered façade for a long moment, ignoring the fact that the blood dripped from his hand onto the floor.

He thought he'd feel a little better because he'd had a day to process it. But instead, the feelings about Beth just grew deeper and harsher. If it got worse every day, he would go bat-ass crazy by the end of the week.

"Fuck it," he growled. He got another bottle of booze, sat on the sofa, unscrewed the lid, and started drinking. It was the only thing he could think of to help curb the pain of loss.

Morning turned to afternoon, and then the room darkened. Half the bottle was gone, and it helped numb him enough to be able to breathe and not flip out and shoot someone.

He heard his phone ring a few times, and someone knocked on the door, but he ignored it. When someone tried to come in, he yelled to leave him alone. He woke up one time and had no idea what day or time it was. He

guessed it had been several days, and he was starting to stink, but the thought of leaving the room pissed him off. He didn't want people asking questions.

He hadn't had anything besides the booze, and it was starting to feel like it was eating him from the inside. But the thought of food made him nauseous.

He stood and had to grab the back of a chair because he was so dizzy. Some of the problems were the alcohol still in his system but also the fact he hadn't eaten or slept in days. He waited until it passed before he made his way to the door.

He ignored the crunch of glass under his shoes and the blood that had dried on his hand and leg. He had no idea what he looked like, and he didn't care, but he did know whoever saw him would think he'd lost it. Well, he had, and he didn't fucking care.

## Chapter Six

He was aware that he still held a bottle, but it was half full, and he'd need it later.

He heard a gasp and saw Graham and Faith.

"Jesus Christ," Graham said.

Alastair held up his hand. "Stay the fuck away from me."

Graham sighed. "Can I at least send some food up? I'll just help. I won't ask questions."

He was going to say no, but he had to do something about the hollow feeling in his gut. "Fine."

He started up the stairs, but even clutching the railing, he was still dragging his legs. He heard them behind him talking.

Graham came beside him. "Can I help you to your room?"

Alastair wanted to snap at him. "Just don't talk. Okay?"

Graham nodded and wrapped an arm around his waist, helping him up the stairs and into his bedroom. He stopped suddenly when he got a look in his room. The robe she used was at the bottom of the bed, and her scent was everywhere.

"I want all her things gone. Burn them in the backyard if you can."

Graham nodded but didn't say anything.

They made it to the bathroom. They stood in the middle of the bathroom, and he looked around at all her things. He'd never be able to get over her with this shit.

"Take me to the room across from here, and if you can, bring me my soaps and put some suits in the closet so I don't have to come back in here, I'd appreciate it."

"Yes."

"Good. Take me there and lock this room. I might want to burn it."

Graham nodded. They went to the other room and into the bathroom. The bed was made up, and there were a few things in the bathroom, but he wanted his things.

Graham got him to the counter where he could lean against it. He raised his hand. "Do you want me to take the bottle?"

Alastair shook his head and hugged the bottle tightly against his body. "No. It's the only way I can sleep."

"All right. Do you need help undressing?"

Alastair thought about it a moment and then shook his head. “Not right now. But stick close.”

Graham nodded. “Yell, I’ll be moving some things over here.” He looked at the blood on his brother’s hand. “What happened to your hand?”

Alastair looked down at it, confused for a moment. “Oh, I hit the mirror.”

“Do you want a doctor?”

Alastair shook his head. “No.”

“Can I have someone clean up your office?”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

Graham made it to the door when Alastair stopped him. “How many days?”

He knew Graham knew what he was talking about. “Four.”

It was more than he expected. “Thank you.”

Graham nodded and shut the door. The first glimpse he’d seen of himself in the mirror shocked him. He had dark circles under his eyes, but the rest of his face was pale, and he’d lost weight because his cheeks were sunken in.

He set the bottle on the counter and started undressing. He glanced at his hand and thought it could have stitches, but it had already started to heal, so he left it alone.

He turned the water on and made it as hot as he could stand it. He stood under it for a long time. He heard the bathroom door open and tensed up.

“It’s me. Here’s your shampoo and soap.”

Alastair nodded and reached out for them. “Thank you.”

He had no idea how long he had stayed underwater with his eyes closed. When his legs started to shake, he washed quickly, turned off the water, and reached for a towel. He dried his hair first and then wrapped it around his waist.

He sighed when he saw all his bathroom things on the counter. He brushed his teeth and put the oil on his mustache and beard. They were both longer than he liked, but he didn’t care enough to trim them.

Alastair grabbed the bottle, and then opened the door. Graham stood by the door. “If there’s nothing else, I’ll leave unless you want me to stay?”

“I’m not ready.”

His brother nodded. “I plugged your phone in, and it’s sitting on the

bedside table. Call if you need anything. We got most of your clothes and shoes in the closet, and there's a tray of food on the table."

Alastair looked around. "Thank you."

"We're here if you need us."

Alastair watched his brother leave and then locked the door behind him. He walked over to the closet and was shocked to see so many clothes. He pulled on a pair of sweats and sat down next to the food. He ate until he felt like he would puke and then pushed the tray aside before he opened the bottle. He took a drink of the booze and relaxed back in the chair. He tried his best to keep his mind blank, but ... that woman kept popping into it, and every time it happened, the pain would race through him.

He drank until the bottle was empty. He stood and grabbed the back of the chair to keep from taking a header and walked to the bed. He threw the covers back, slid in, and closed his eyes.

Alastair slept that night and all the next day. No one bothered him, which he appreciated. He called his brother later that day and asked for some whiskey. Graham didn't say anything. He just brought it to him with another tray of food.

Graham put the tray down and handed him the bottle. "Can I get you anything else?"

Alastair opened the bottle and took a long drink. "No."

"Dad wants to talk to you."

God, he dreaded talking to him because he knew he'd be on Beth's side. His father loved her so much, and the fact that she was pregnant with his first grandchild would make it even worse.

"Tell him to give me a few more days."

"I can do that," Graham said. "Call when you need anything."

"I will. Thank you."

Graham left. Alastair stayed in the chair until the room was dark. He drank most of the bottle and thought it would be enough to sleep, so he walked to the bed and passed out. It was his routine for the next several days.

Alastair lost track of the days. He was shocked when Graham told him ten days had passed.

He woke up the next morning with energy and a purpose. He wanted to get his life back on track, so he showered and dressed. He dialed his brother.

"I'll be in my office today. Stop by when you get a chance, and we'll

go over the things that need to be done and what I've missed.”

“You got it. I'm glad you're back,” Graham said.

“I am, too. I'm going to talk to Dad and then be down.”

“See you soon.”



## Chapter Seven

Alastair stood outside his father's room and straightened his tie before knocking.

"Come in."

He opened the door and could tell his father was shocked to see him.

"Ah, there's my handsome son. You look terrible. Do you need anything from anyone?"

Alastair stayed by the door and shook his head. "No. I'm going to be in my office today."

Angus nodded. "Good." The older man studied him. "Do you want to tell me what happened?"

Alastair pinched the bridge of his nose. He knew his father wasn't asking him but ordering him to talk. "All I'll say is Beth betrayed me, and now she's gone."

Angus looked surprised and then sad. "I see. Where did you take her?"

"Nowhere. I had a guard take her out of the house, and I told her to go."

"Who drove her?"

"No one. She walked."

His father's face darkened with fury, but his dad kept his cool. "Did you consider the fact that we have a lot of enemies and the things they'd do to her if they got their hands on her?"

Alastair hadn't thought of that. He shrugged.

"So, that's it. What did she do that was so bad? Tell me, what could be so horrible to do that to her?"

"She got pregnant."

His father's mouth dropped open. "Is that it?"

Alastair nodded. "She knew I didn't want to have children."

"I didn't know that. Why?" Angus asked.

Alastair felt his anger build again. "Does it matter?"

"Hell, yes, it does. Don't take that tone of voice with me, son."

His father waited for an answer, but the one he always used sounded crazy to him. "I don't want to bring a child into our lifestyle."

"Are you kidding me? Do you think I shouldn't have had so many kids?"

“You were able to handle it. I don’t think I’d be able to deal with it.”

“Losing someone you love?”

Alastair nodded. “Yes.”

“But you already did, son, and it was all your doing. You should have just taken her out back and shot her in the head.”

“You don’t fucking understand.”

“You take extra measures to protect them just like you did the girls. You can’t live your life saying what if…” Angus wiped a hand down his face. “Dammit, life is too short already. Why waste time on what could happen? Thinking like that poisons your mind, son.”

Alastair stiffened.

Angus sighed. “So, you’re going to give up the one thing in the world that made you happy?”

Alastair didn’t want to talk about it anymore. “You live your life the way you want, and I’ll do the same.”

“Do you really believe that Beth did this on purpose?”

“It doesn’t matter. I asked her to choose, and she chose the baby.”

Angus looked confused. “What did you want her to do?”

“Abort it.”

His father looked sick, sad, and pissed at the same time.

“I never would have expected you to ask for something like that. Jesus, we’re talking about Beth. She tried to save kittens and butterflies, and you expected her to kill your child? I’m disgusted and disappointed that you would even think that way. We don’t kill the innocent. Isn’t that what you’ve said for years?”

Alastair nodded.

“But you’d kill your own child because you’re afraid of what *might* happen?”

His father was yelling now. He was also making him feel like an idiot, which pissed him off. “I get to decide how I want to live my life.”

Angus sighed. “Yes, you do. But don’t you agree that things happen for a reason, and you must decide how to deal with it? Instead of any joy you should have felt, you threw your soulmate away.”

“There are others out there.”

Angus snorted. “No, there aren’t. I had one, and she was taken from me much too early, and I’ve never recovered. I’ve tried to move on, but I never quite get to the type of happiness your mom gave me, and you won’t

either. You only get one chance at destiny.”

Alastair looked down at his feet. He didn't need his father reprimanding him. But he had the feeling that everyone who knew what had happened would hate him.

“Can I go to work now?” he asked.

Angus ground his teeth together. “Yes. Go. I can't be around you right now. You're not the son I raised.”

Alastair turned and walked out. His mind kept circling. Was he being unreasonable? Fuck, he didn't know. He went with his feelings, and that shouldn't be a bad thing.

At the bottom of the steps, he saw Hope and Angel walk his way. When they saw him, they both had tears in their eyes, turned, and walked away. Great, he was now the pariah of the family.

He walked into his office to find the place clean, coffee and breakfast on the desk, and Graham was going over papers in one of the chairs. He closed the door. Alastair made his way to the chair he hadn't used for over a week. He sat down and had a long drink of coffee before he looked at his brother. He studied him for any resentment, but all he saw was a blank slate.

“You know what happened?” Alastair asked.

Graham sighed and put the papers down. “Yes. To a point. Beth is at the Mortelli house. Faith's mother called and told her what had happened, and of course, she told her sisters and so on.”

“But Dad didn't know.”

Graham shook his head. “Not that I know of. We were keeping it from him because I knew how he'd react. It didn't go well, I see.”

Alastair shook his head. “No. He's disappointed in me and said this wasn't the way he raised me.”

“I wasn't going to ask. But I don't think I got the story right. I've heard what Beth said, but I just can't believe some of it, and I don't think I got the whole story.”

“What did she say?” Alastair asked.

“Faith said Beth told her mom that she's pregnant, but you don't want the child.”

Alastair shook his head. “No, I don't.”

Graham straightened in his chair and scowled. “That's what happened? That's it?”

“Yes.”

“So, you did tell her to get an abortion?” The words came out of Graham’s mouth with anger and disgust.

Alastair leaned back in the chair and then nodded. “I did. She knew I didn’t want kids.”

Graham looked confused and in shock. “I told Faith that you’d never say that.”

Alastair looked away.

“Jesus Christ. You really expected Beth to kill your child?”

He stayed quiet but continued to stare at him.

“Goddammit,” Graham said as he stood. He placed the papers down on the desk. “I’m sorry, I can’t ... just read the papers. They’re self-explanatory. I can’t look at you right now.”

His brother had left, and he knew Graham thought less of him now. Everyone was turning against him. Didn’t anyone understand how he felt? He thought they’d be sad that Beth was gone, but not the hostility and disappointment he’d seen on everyone’s face. His whole world was imploding, and he didn’t know what to do.

## Chapter Eight

Faith held Beth's hand. "He's going crazy."

The sisters — Aria, Rebecca, and Sara — sat around the dining room table. They were all there to support her, and she'd never be able to repay them.

God, she didn't want that. "Is anyone helping him?" Beth asked.

"They've tried. He finally came out of his office after four days. God, he looked so bad. He hid in the bedroom across from his own for another six days, but Graham told me he was planning on going into his office."

Beth started crying. "I hate that he's hurting so bad."

Hope snorted. "After what he's done, he deserves every bit of it."

Beth was so sad that everything was out of control, and there was nothing she could do to fix it besides having an abortion. She'd rather die than do that.

"I have a female doctor coming in to give you a check-up," Aria said. "I've had one of the lower rooms turned into a medical center."

"Oh my God. You didn't have to do that," Beth said. She was affecting so many people's lives, and it made her incredibly sad.

Aria reached over her daughter to touch Beth's arm. "Oh, baby. I think I should have done it a long time ago. I'm thankful you reminded me of it, and now it's done."

Beth wiped her eyes. "I love each and every one of you, and I'll never be able to repay your kindness."

"That sucks," Angel growled.

Beth's eyes widened. "What?"

"I thought we were family," Angel said.

"Oh, but we are. I'll always consider you my family."

"Then stop saying you'll repay us, sis. This is what family does, and we are honored that you trust us enough to help you through this."

Beth smiled for the first time in days. It wasn't large, but her lips did turn up at the corners.

"Yeah, what she said," Sara said and then crossed her arms.

Everyone laughed, but Beth couldn't make herself go that far yet.

"You looked tired again," Aria said. "How about a nap before lunch? Then you'll see the doctor after that."

Hope tapped her shoulder. "You better do what your mother says."

She's quite mean when she wants to be."

Aria gasped, and the others laughed.

Aria huffed. "Well, you have to be a bit mean with this group I have. All my girls could drive me crazy very easily."

Faith snorted. "Did you ever think you would have seven daughters now, including Nala?"

Aria smiled. "I think God is blessing me because of your father. I need and want all the family I can get." She looked at Beth. "And I never let one go once I have my claws in them. Just remember that, darling daughter."

"Uh-oh, Beth's in trouble," Sara said.

Beth tried to smile again, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Faith, take Beth to her room for a nap," Aria said. "One of us will come get you for lunch if you're not already down here."

"Why does Faith get to do it?" Angel said.

"Oh, God, here we go," Aria grumbled.

Faith stood and fingered her sister. "Because I'm the best."

"Mom!" Angel yelled.

"Girls, get along." Aria turned to Angel. "She's the oldest. You'll all take turns helping me. Don't worry."

Faith got Beth up from her chair and clutched her hand. Beth watched her chin go up as they passed Angel's chair. "I'm the oldest and the best."

"Faith!" Aria said in a warning tone.

Faith stuck her tongue out at Angel behind their mother's back.

"Mom!" Angel cried out. "Did you see that?"

"Oh, Lord. I'm hiding in my office. I'll see you all later."

They walked up the stairs.

"I love pissing Angel off. It's so easy to do," Faith said.

Beth sighed and shook her head. "You should be nicer to your sister."

"Oh, man. You're a fun hater, aren't you?"

Beth smiled. "Your husband said that to me once."

"Really? When?"

"Una had hit me with a stick on the back, and Alastair ... he put lotion on the marks. They talked about burying her, and I said something like, 'Oh, she cares if you ruin her reputation.'"

Faith laughed.

"Both of them looked at me like I was crazy. It finally dawned on me what they really meant, and I told them they couldn't kill their stepmother.

That's when Graham said it."

That was a good memory. Even though her back hurt at the time, her husband had been so sweet and attentive.

Faith giggled. "I knew I loved that man."

Faith pulled back the blanket on the bed. "Do you want me to stick around? I could lay down with you, or if you want to talk."

"Actually, a nap sounds good. Can I catch up with you later?"

Faith kissed her cheek. "Of course. You know what to dial to get someone, so I'll see you later."

"Okay. Thank you."

Faith blew a kiss before she shut the door.

Beth rolled to her side and closed her eyes. Sleep would not come, but the tears did. She went through several tissues. Only when she'd been able to stop the crying did she finally go to sleep.

She woke up groggy and looked at the clock. She had time to wash her face and brush her hair before she went down.

After lunch with the girls, Aria took her to the room where the doctor was. At first, Beth was terrified, but Dr. Hollie put her at ease immediately. She was also very thorough. Beth got dressed behind a blind as the doctor wrote things down.

"Beth, let's have a seat."

Beth immediately got nervous. "Is everything okay with the baby?"

Hollie smiled. "Yes, I'm sorry I worried you. I'd just like to go over some things I want you to do, and I can answer any questions you have."

"Oh." Beth sat at a little table across from Hollie.

"Everything looks good," the doctor said. "I want you to take some vitamins I brought. I'd like you to get more rest and walk outside. The moving and air will help you feel better. You're also underweight. I'd like you to gain at least five pounds in the next two weeks. That's when I'll be by to do a check-up. I'd like to have your check-ups once a month and then increase that to every week in the last trimester."

Beth nodded. She felt better about having her here. "Dr..."

The doctor interrupted her with a smile. "Beth, please call me Hollie. I think you and I are going to be good friends."

Beth smiled. "Hollie. Can you tell how far along I am?"

"From what I can see with the measurements, you're into your second trimester, so about four or five months along."

Beth's eyes widened. "But I'm not really showing that much."

Hollie smiled. "That's normal. You'll start showing around the twentieth week, that's soon. That's when we'll be able to get more of a correct measurement, and you can get the sex of the baby if you want to know, when I do a sonogram."

"I think I do."

"Well, you have time to decide," Hollie said.

"When will I start feeling the kicking? I think I feel it move, but I'm not sure."

"It's definitely moving. The heartbeat is strong. With the vitamins, weight gain, and exercise, you'll be in great shape to carry this baby."

Beth exhaled. She was going to do everything she could to bring the baby into this crazy world.

"Okay, the last thing is something I'm going to recommend. Aria told me a bit about the situation and your personality. She was right. You are the sweetest person I've ever met."

Beth's mouth dropped open. "Really?"

Hollie reached across the table to hold her hand. "Yes, really. And so, because of that, I'd like to bring in a counselor. She's someone I know and trust. I think you need to talk to someone impartial, unlike anyone in the family."

"They all have strong opinions," Beth said and smiled.

"I can tell you're going through a rough time, so I'd like to help."

"I'll do whatever you think is best for the baby."

"And you, right?"

Beth nodded.

"The very last thing I want to tell you is that, by my guess, that baby is due on Christmas day."

Beth's smile brightened. "Oh, wow. I think that's wonderful."

Hollie grinned. "I do, too." She stood and shoved some of the papers into her computer bag. She weaved her arm through Beth's. "Would you show me out?"

"Sure." They walked to the front door. Beth was surprised and pleased that Hollie hugged her.

"I will see you soon. Don't forget the things I want you to do and if there are any problems, call me. I don't care what time it is."

"I will. Thank you."



Beth turned to see Aria by her office, smiling.

“It looks like it went well.”

Beth nodded. “I really like her.”

“Good. Anything we should know?”

“I have vitamins I have to take, and she wants me to gain some weight and exercise.”

“That’s easy. We can make that happen. You’ve got a lot of help,” Aria said.

“I do, and I’m thankful for it.”

“The girls are out in the garden. Some of your sisters had to go back to the place they live.”

“I’ll find the others.” Beth hugged her. “I love you, Mom.”

She heard Aria sniff.

“Don’t you dare make me cry,” Aria said.

Beth smiled. “I’ll try.”

She felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the family. The only thing better would be Alastair.

## Chapter Nine

Beth fidgeted and paced as she waited for the counselor Hollie had sent. She didn't know if she even wanted to talk to her, but her mom, Aria, encouraged her.

Someone cleared their throat behind her, making her twirl. She saw an average-looking person with a full figure but the sweetest smile.

"Hi," Beth said.

"Hi, my name is Kathrine, but people always call me Kit."

"Okay."

"You must be Beth? You're the only one I've seen that's pregnant."

Kit smiled.

Beth cradled her stomach. "You can tell?"

"It's not obvious, but I'm a woman and have had several kids. A few I'm giving away if you want one." Kit laughed.

Beth smiled.

"But I also saw you from the side. The dress hides it for the most part, but when you touch your stomach, I can see the roundness of it. Hollie said you're around twenty-two weeks along. How are you feeling?"

Beth looked down. "I ... feel fine."

"Do you mind if I have a seat?"

Beth gasped. "Oh, I'm so sorry. Yes, please. They brought in a pitcher of lemonade and cookies for us."

"That looks delicious. Would you mind if I poured us a glass?"

"I can do it."

"I know, but I want you to be relaxed."

Beth nodded and sat on a chair while Kit sat on the sofa close to her. Beth couldn't keep her hand from resting on her stomach. The baby was the only thing that kept her sane most days.

Kit sat down and pulled out a pad of paper and pen. "Do you mind if I write some things down? I tend to be forgetful."

"No, it's fine."

Kit looked at her. "If you're not comfortable with a question, just tell me. We've only just met."

"Okay."

"Can you tell me if you wanted to get pregnant?"

"I always wanted to have a large family. It didn't seem feasible when

I was on my own. I had no boyfriends, and I wasn't making enough money to support a child. I'd been alone for a long time, so that's what I knew. Then, when I went to live with the Macleans, my husband told me several times he didn't want any children."

"Would you have resented him later if you hadn't become pregnant?" Kit asked.

Beth thought about that for a moment. "You know, I've never thought of that. I want to say no, that I love him enough and have a fulfilling life, I didn't need one. I also planned to help the others with my nieces and nephews when they started coming. So, I don't think I would."

"Would you have been jealous of them?"

Beth shook her head. "I think I can positively say I'd be too thrilled for them to be envious. I want them to have everything they ever wanted."

"I can tell you love your family."

"I do, very much." Beth looked down and started to whisper. "You know they really aren't my family? Alastair brought me into the house. They accepted me and always made me feel like a part of them."

"But you don't?"

Beth shook her head. "Deep down, I don't. I've never felt worthy enough."

"Why is that?" Kit asked.

"I'm not sure. I've never been strong, and every one of them is so strong, it's amazing."

Kit smiled gently. "Do you want to tell me about this last incident that brought you here?"

Beth went through what happened and then stopped. It always made it come back with the feelings she had that day.

She hadn't known she was crying until Kit handed her a box of tissues. Beth took one and wiped her face. "I'm so sorry."

"Beth. This is what I'm here for. I don't care if you start throwing things. As long as you don't hit me, we're good." Kit laughed.

Beth smiled.

"I'm going to ask you some things, and if you don't want to talk about them, tell me to move on."

"Okay."

"If your husband walked into the room and begged for your forgiveness, would you give it?"

Beth's breath caught in her throat. She had never considered it. She shook her head. "I don't know what I would do. I'll love that man until I take my last breath, but I'm scared now."

"That's understandable. What if he wanted to hold the baby?"

Beth's heart felt like it would burst from her chest. "I think that would be okay. He's never hurt an innocent before."

Kit studied her for a moment. "But I can still see the fear."

Beth looked away. "It's just that I never thought he'd throw me away..." The tears started again.

Kit squeezed her hand.

"It's good to cry," Kit said.

"But that seems to be all I do anymore."

"Being pregnant messes with your emotions, then add this in, and of course it's going to make you sad." Kit patted her hand. "I'm going to ask another question, and I want an honest answer."

Beth nodded.

"Have you ever thought of harming or killing yourself?"

Beth flinched. "Doesn't everyone have those times where it would be easier to die than live?"

Kit squeezed her hand again. "No, honey. Not everyone."

Beth felt her face burn with embarrassment.

"That's why I'm here. You and I will deal with it all, and when you learn to trust me, it will help."

Beth sniffed and nodded.

"How about we stop for today? I can tell you're getting tired."

"I am."

"Would it be okay if I came again in a few days?"

"That's fine."

"One last question. Is it all right to talk to Aria about any of this?"

Beth thought about it for a moment. "I guess that would be okay. Please don't tell her about my thoughts about not being like the family. She gets upset."

"Absolutely." Kit stood and picked up her bag. "Are you going to rest for a bit?"

"Yes. I think I'll lie down."

"It's good to get as much rest as possible. I'm going to give you my card. Don't hesitate to call me. I don't care what time it is."

“Okay,” Beth said and nodded. “Thank you.”

Kit smiled and walked out of the office with her. Beth turned right to go up the stairs to her room, and Kit went in search of Aria.

At dinner, Beth could tell that Aria was subdued and hoped it didn't have anything to do with her. Several days later, Aria called her into the office.

“Hi, sweetheart. I want to go over some things with you.”

“Of course,” Beth said and sat in the chair on the other side of her desk.

“I wondered if you had thought about a divorce?”

Beth gasped. It had never entered her mind. “Oh, I don't know. It feels so ... permanent that way.”

“I know. I thought of shaking Alastair up a bit.”

“How?”

“Having papers taken to him to sign. One would be the divorce and another giving all rights to the baby away.”

“But this will hurt him. I don't want to do that.”

“I know. They'll be fake papers. Sometimes, you have to hit a man over the head to get him to act like an adult.”

“What do you think he'll do?”

“If I know the man at all, he'll fight it and come here to see you. He'd be angry, but at least he'd see you and how beautiful you look.”

“Is it you just don't want me here anymore?” Beth asked.

Arai's mouth dropped open, and she stood, walking around the desk, and sitting in the other chair to grab her hand. “Absolutely not. You'll have to fight me to leave. I'll only let you go if you and Alastair get the situation figured out. It's just something Kit said. She said that Alastair was probably the only one in the world who made you feel worthy. She'd probably kill me for even suggesting that, but something's got to shake the ass up.”

Beth wanted that, too. But she was so afraid. “W-what if he happily signs the sheets to get rid of me for good?”

“I've thought about that. I would bet this house that it won't happen. But if, by a tiny, tiny chance, he stays an idiot, you've got us, and you know where you stand. I think the not knowing about the future is stressing you out.”

Beth nodded. “It is.”

“It's up to you. It's just an idea I had. You know I'm not one to sit

back and let things happen.”

Beth smiled. “Okay, let’s try it.”

“I’ll have some official-looking documents made up and sent to him.”

Beth nodded. She really hoped this did shake him up enough to take a step.

## Chapter Ten

Alastair looked up when there was a knock on the door. "Come in."

Martin, his butler, walked in with an envelope. "Sir, this was delivered to you."

"All right. Thank you."

Alastair ripped the envelope open and read the papers. He read them again. He felt like someone punched him in the gut. He never would have believed Beth would try to write him out of her life.

He about lost it when he went to the second paper, giving up all rights with the baby. This wasn't Beth. This sounded like something Aria would do. But Beth had to know about it, didn't she?

Fuck this. If she wanted to play hardball, he was up for it. He walked out of the house and yelled for one of the drivers. He didn't trust himself to get there safely.

The driver pulled up to the Mortelli house. Alastair got out before the driver got to his door. He ran up the steps and growled at the guard who tried to stop him. The guy backed off. Alastair walked through the door and yelled for Beth.

Several people walked into the foyer to see what was going on.

Alastair narrowed his eyes when Aria came to stand in front of him. Several feet away and with both her men at her side. He shook the papers at her. "What the fuck is this?"

"If I'm not mistaken," Aria said. "Those papers will allow Beth to move on with her life. Why waste time?"

"Is this what she wants?" he yelled.

One of Aria's brows rose. "Does it matter what she wants? You don't want her, right?"

Alastair gritted his teeth.

"Why are you fighting this? I thought this is what you wanted?"

"None of this is any of your business."

"Bullshit," Aria said. "My daughter came to me devastated. You know she hasn't laughed once since she's been here and rarely smiles. You broke her, Alastair. If this is what you want, sign the papers."

"This is between Beth and me."

"Alastair," Beth said from the middle of the stairs. "Don't yell at her." He shook the papers again. "She made you do this?" he yelled.

Beth shook her head. “I want — no, I *need* — answers before my baby comes.”

His feelings were chaotic, and he wanted to bellow in fury. “Do you want to play hardball?”

“No. I don’t want to play at all,” Beth said.

Fuck, he couldn’t take his eyes off her. She was still the most beautiful woman he’d ever known. He watched her hand cradle the bump, and his thoughts went to the fact that there was a human in her body.

Fuck. He didn’t know how much he could take. “So be it. I’ll have my lawyer make up papers to take the child from you when it’s born.”

He heard several people gasp and a few swear, but it was the way she instantly went pale that got him. He wanted to stop, but he was lashing out and didn’t know how to stop. He watched her take a breath.

“It would kill me if that happened.” She stared at him. “Is that what you want?”

“I don’t know what I want,” he said.

“It’s finally sinking in. You never really loved me at all, did you?”

“Fuck, yes, I did.”

“Real love doesn’t die so quickly, and the last thing you’d want is for the person to die. You’ve said it enough times that it’s really sinking in.”

He saw the tears that ran down her face and hated himself a hundred times because he was the one hurting her.

“I never said I didn’t love you.”

Beth tried to smile. “But you never said you did either. Goodbye, Alastair. I hope you find the peace you need.”

Beth turned and walked up the stairs. “Beth. Wait...”

She didn’t come back.

When he turned, it was a shock to see Aria crying and the people around furious.

“You are destroying that beautiful woman,” Aria said.

Alastair wiped a hand down his face. Fuck, he hated himself. He tore up the papers. “I will not get a divorce or sign my rights away.”

“You don’t know what you want,” Aria said.

They all jerked when a woman screamed on the second floor. They all tore up the stairs to find one of the maids at the door to Beth’s bathroom with her hands over her mouth.

“Miss Aria. There’s blood...”



Alastair looked over the woman's head to see his wife in the bathtub and blood streaming around her wrist.

"No! Jesus," Alastair screamed.

"I need someone to call an ambulance, and a few of you men will take him away." She pointed at him. "He's the last person she needs to see."

Several men wrestled him out of the bathroom. "Let me go. I need to be with her."

"Man," Mateo said. "You're the one that's causing it. We have a counselor coming in to talk with her. The woman told us to be vigilant because Beth was very fragile and had thoughts of killing herself."

"Jesus." Alastair tore from their arms but didn't try to get through them again.

He heard the sirens and then two men racing up the stairs with a gurney. He heard them talking to each other and Beth, who didn't respond. He'd never been so scared in all his life.

They wheeled her out, strapped to the gurney, and Aria by her side. There was blood all over the two women and some on the men.

He listened, and it scared him even more.

"We have to hurry. She's lost a lot of blood," one of the paramedics said.

The last thing he heard was Beth.

"Tell him I'm sorry it didn't work and that he's free now."

"Just rest," Aria said.

A few guys stopped him when he went to follow them.

"Jesus, let me go. I have to be with her," Alastair said.

"Man, I think you're the last one she needs by her side," Trent said.

"I won't bother her. I promise. I just need to be as close to her as I can."

"Do you finally have your head out of your ass?" Mateo asked.

"Yes. She's the only thing in my life that I deeply love."

"Then why all this bullshit?" Trent asked.

"I hate admitting this, but I'm afraid. My mother bled out when she had me, so I didn't want to take a chance with my Beth."

"But she's already pregnant."

Alastair sighed. "I know. It's my secret dream but also my darkest nightmare. I know I'm not dealing with this the right way. I've never had to deal with this type of thing, and it's blowing me away."

“You better learn quick, man. Or you’ll lose that woman for good,” Mateo told him.

“Stick by her side as much as you can. She needs you. You could tell her what you just told us. It makes sense,” Trent said.

Alastair nodded. “You can let me go now.”

They reluctantly released him when the ambulance sped away with its sirens on. Alastair rushed outside and jumped into his car. “Follow the ambulance.”

“You got it.”

Alastair held onto something when the driver took corners fast and had to slam on the brakes a few times to prevent an accident.

They pulled up, and the paramedics had already wheeled her in. He followed but was stopped at the door.

“I was told to keep you out, sir,” the huge guard said.

“She’s my wife.”

He shrugged. “I just do what I’m told. You can have a seat. I’ll tell the desk clerk to give you updates.”

“I’ll do that,” Alastair said. He called his driver. “Go home, but a few of you bring back one of the cars for me. I’ll be here a while.”

“You got it, Boss. I’ll put the key in the door of the gas.”

“Thank you.”

Now, he had to wait. He waited for hours for any word. The lady at the desk would tell him a few updates, but not enough. The only thing holding him back was he knew she was alive. They’d worry about everything else later. But he wanted to be able to see and touch her, and no one was going to let him. He didn’t blame them, he blamed himself for all the damage he’d done, and he didn’t know how to fix it.

Jesus, first, he had to learn how to explain the panic he had when Beth told him about the baby. Thoughts of his mother bleeding out after she had him. Oh, he knew Freda, his aunt, had her hand in it, but it didn’t help the fear. Maybe it was because she gave birth to him, so he blamed himself to some degree.

The whole thing sounded delusional, but there was too much emotion and fear that filled him enough to destroy the very thing he wanted to save. His wife, Beth.

Jesus, he’d just about lost her. If that had happened, he’d put a bullet in his brain because he couldn’t live without her, especially when he was the

one that caused it. If she lived, he'd blame himself for the rest of his life because of this whole thing, but he'd have to learn to live with it.

He also had to come up with ways to fix the situation, and nothing came to mind. How did one go about saving something so broken? Was there even a chance Beth would ever forgive him?

Only time would tell.

## Chapter Eleven

Beth awoke when she heard voices. She looked around the room and was confused about where she was. It was only when she caught the bandage around her wrist that she remembered. She recalled the feeling that everything was pulling her down. The thought of Alastair not caring if she lived or died is what pushed her over the edge. She was ashamed of herself for taking an easy way out. She had to be stronger because a baby would depend on her.

She turned her head when the door opened. When she saw Aria and Kit, she burst into tears. "I'm so sorry. I don't want to die. I feel bad that I've put everyone through this."

The two women went on either side of her bed. Aria took her hand, and Kit smiled gently.

"Honey, of course you scared us, but we don't blame you at all," Aria said. "I'm just so glad we caught it in time."

Beth wiped her tears away. "I do, too." She looked at Kit. "Am I in trouble?"

Kit grinned. "With whom?"

"You?"

"Absolutely not, but I am planning on visiting more. The pregnancy hormones can make anyone's emotions worse. You've got a lot of hormones zipping away inside of you."

Beth exhaled.

"But I'm sorry to say that because you tried to hurt yourself, you have to stay in the hospital for seventy-two hours," Kit said.

"Oh. Where will I be?"

"People are usually taken up to the psych ward, but I'm pushing for you to stay in this private room. Neither Aria nor I want you around potentially violent people, and I promised to see you often. They'll still send one of their psychiatrists down to talk to you."

"That's okay."

The two women glanced at each other. "What?" Beth asked.

"Alastair has been in the waiting room."

"How long have I been here?" Beth asked.

"About nine hours," Kit said.

"He's been there the whole time?" Beth couldn't believe it. "Why?"

Aria sighed. "I'm not sure, but if I had to guess, the man loves you, but he's afraid of something that's holding him back and making him crazy."

Beth had to ask. "He tried to get in to see me?"

Aria nodded. "Yes. He's been told he can't see you yet. We wanted to ask you before we let him in."

Beth looked away. "I don't know. I thought he wanted me gone."

Aria squeezed her shoulder. "No. As much as I want to kick him, I know he never wanted you gone, but you terrified him. The thought of you having a baby made him go slightly insane."

"How?"

"I was told that after you left your house, he spent ten days alone. Part of it was in the office, and the rest in his bedroom. From what Faith told me, he went crazy and trashed his office. There was glass everywhere. He didn't eat and only slept when he passed out from the alcohol he was drinking. When Faith saw him, she didn't recognize him. He'd lost weight because he hadn't eaten in so long. His family has turned against him. His father won't even talk to him. Graham and a few other brothers or cousins have to work with him, but the girls say they do the work and leave instead of talking like they usually do."

Beth's heart hurt for him. "I don't want them to do that. I don't want him hurt."

Kit smiled and tapped her shoulder. "You are amazing. You have such a wholesome, pure heart, and I rarely see people like you."

"But I'm weak," Beth murmured.

Both women shook their heads.

"You are one of the strongest people I've met," Kit said.

"Out of all my girls, I depend on you to keep the rest of them out of trouble. They listen to you. Have you noticed that?" Aria asked.

Beth thought about that for a moment, and Aria was right. They even stopped bickering if she asked them to.

"I hadn't realized..."

Aria squeezed her hand and smiled. "You're the one that keeps me sane. I would add Sara and Rebecca to the list of helpful people in my life, but I see them already start to turn into devils."

Beth smiled. She loved all her sisters and Mom so much. Her thoughts went back to Alastair. "What should I do?"

"Do you want to see him?" Kit asked.

“Yes, but I’m afraid he’ll hurt me more.”

“So, if he promised not to be a jackass, you want him to come up to the room?” Aria told her.

“Then yes.”

Aria bent and kissed her on the forehead. “I’ll go talk to him. If I feel he’s safe for you, I’ll send him up. Kit and I will be outside the door, or we can stay in the room if you’d like.”

Beth inhaled. “I think I’d like you out in the hallway, but close.”

“You got it. I’ll stay here until Aria brings him up.”

“I’d like that,” Beth said.

Kit and she discussed mundane things to pass the time. It seemed to take forever before the door opened, and Aria walked in, followed by Alastair. She couldn’t take her eyes off him. He looked more broken than she felt.

“We’ll be out here,” Aria said.

Beth nodded at them, but then her attention was solely on her husband.

Alastair stood at the end of the bed, clutched the frame, and cleared his throat. “God, I don’t know where to start.”

Beth still felt the hurt he caused but was compassionate enough to hate he was in pain. “I didn’t send the papers, but I knew Aria was going to. They weren’t real.”

“Fuck, they looked real.”

“She knew how not knowing about the future was bothering me.”

Beth cataloged all the things different about her husband. He looked a decade older and had deep grooves around his mouth, eyes, and forehead.

“I don’t like how your family is treating you.”

“It’s our family.” Alastair shook his head. “Don’t get mad at them. I deserve every bit of pain I get.”

“No, you don’t.”

“I hurt you so much,” he said, and then his voice broke. “I can’t believe the things that came out of my mouth. I was insane after you left.”

Beth nodded. “Yes. You did hurt me. Can you tell me why?”

Alastair wiped his hand down his face. “Fuck, that’s the problem. I’m not sure. All I could see in my head was my mother bleeding out, but then it was your face I saw and not hers. Another thought was I’ve never been a patient person.”

“You were with me.”

Alastair turned his back to her for a moment.

She felt his pain as much as she did her own, and she wanted to reach out to him.

“I know I’m not going to say this right, but I don’t know how to explain it. In my mind, I’m frightened of the possibility you’ll leave me.”

“I would never have done that,” she said.

“You touched a part of me that no one could ever get close to. Only you can, so my emotions for you seem to grow faster and out of control easily. You can handle the depth of our feelings for each other better than me.”

“Why did you throw me away?” she asked, making him flinch.

“I was acting out. It hurt so much that you’d choose someone over me.”

“But I didn’t.”

“I know that now. No one could reason with me the first few weeks. I was close to shooting people because my fury was so big that I made everyone stay away from me,” he said.

“I’m glad you didn’t kill anyone.”

“You know, the thought that popped into my head was you telling me I couldn’t do that and you’d be ashamed of me. I would hate that.”

“When you settled a bit, why were you still willing to leave me?” She thought it had been the hardest thing that he was able to throw her away.

## Chapter Twelve

He shook his head. “Fuck, no. I was trying to find a way to fix what I had done. Then I got those letters, and I lost it again. I wanted to lash out at the one person in my life I needed more than breathing. You have the potential to hurt me more than anyone. You’re the only person I let past the wall I’ve had around me all my life.”

“I love you so much. You were my whole world and still are,” Beth said. “I never took my ring off, and I wasn’t planning to.”

“Now, we have a baby.”

“We?”

“Yes. I never would have let you abort it. A secret part of me was ecstatic about the thought of a little Beth that was part of each of us.”

Beth looked down. “The thing I’m having a problem with is you throwing me away so easily.”

“I wasn’t letting you go, and I made sure you were safe the whole time. I had Tony go for you and take you to Aria. There were several men following you. I still needed to protect you until you got to the Mortelli mansion. I trusted her to take care of you until I got my head on straight.”

He was happy to see some of the tension leave her body. He was afraid to ask the big questions. He moved to the side of the bed closer to her.

“Is there any chance you’ll forgive me?” he asked. His fingers turned white as he gripped the railing of the bed and waited.

“Alastair. I already do forgive you.”

He was afraid to hope she said what he thought she did. “You’re not mad?”

“No. It’s not the anger I feel. It feels like you tore my heart apart. The pain was excruciating.”

“I was having that same feeling, but you didn’t cause mine. I did that by pushing you away.”

“Would you ever come home to me?” His stomach twisted when she hesitated.

“I want to, more than anything. I’m just afraid you’ll do this again. I couldn’t handle it another time.”

“I want to tell you that I would never do this, but it will take time for you to trust me again. I know that.”

He walked closer to her and gently put his hand on her stomach. He



was surprised it was harder and larger than he thought because her clothes always hid her body.

“I want to be involved with your pregnancy and the baby. Do you trust me enough to let me?” he asked.

She put her hand over his. “I absolutely trust you. I know you would never hurt a child, much less your own.”

“I’m so sorry about today. You looked so perfect standing on the stairs, and I knew I couldn’t have you yet. I pushed you, and because of that, you hurt yourself.”

He picked up the arm that was injured and brushed his thumb lightly against the bandage. He’d never forget the scream and then watching her being wheeled out, not knowing if she would survive.

“I won’t be able to go on without you,” he said.

“What do you mean?” Beth asked.

“If you ... you know. Fuck I can’t even say it. Anyway, there’s no question I’d go with you.”

“What? No. You don’t mean that.” She grabbed onto his arm.

“I do with my whole heart. I can’t live in this world without you.”

He hated the tears that ran down her face. He sat next to her on the mattress, facing her, and wiped her tears with a thumb. “Please come home with me. I can’t be away from you another night. If you don’t want to, I can go to Aria’s to be with you if you’re more comfortable. Aria would love it.”

Beth giggled.

“Don’t tell her, but she’s the only woman I’ve been afraid would shoot me,” Alastair whispered.

Beth laughed. “I’d like to come home. The only thing is I don’t want them to know about this,” she said and raised the arm she cut.

He cradled it in his hands. “We’ll talk to Aria. She’ll have to get her staff and men to keep quiet, and I’m the only one that knows from our family. But you’ve got to know they won’t think any less of you. You’re the best friend, sister, daughter, and wife that anyone could want.”

Beth smiled and rolled her eyes.

“Do you want to do me a favor when we get home?” he asked.

“Sure.”

“Get my father to let me in his room or talk to me. The first day I came out of my ... I’ll call it my ‘disconnect from reality,’ he and I talked. He told me how angry he was and that he was disappointed in me. If you

could get him to talk to me before Christmas...” He grinned.

“Alastair. That’s when the baby is due.”

“Oh, wow. That’s going to be great. The whole family will be thrilled.” He couldn’t believe how perfect that was, and he already knew one of the presents his Beth would get from him. He had the picture in his mind, and now he had to tell the maker what he wanted.

“When can you leave?” he asked.

“Kit told me the hospital has to hold me for seventy-two hours. They’re trying to let them keep me here and not the psych ward upstairs. The thought terrifies me.”

“Baby, you’ve got to know I would never allow it. No one is going to touch you except me.”

She smiled. “Will you come to get me?”

“Sweetheart, you’re not getting it. I’m not leaving your side.”

Beth shook her head. “Oh, don’t do that, Alastair. You already look like you need to sleep for a week.”

“That’s what we’ll do when we get home. I’ll have food brought up, but I want — no, *need* — to have you to myself.”

“I’d like that.”

This is what he’d been thinking about ever since she was gone. He needed to do anything and everything to strengthen their bond. He just hoped it could get back to what it was before his fuck up, but he’d take anything.

## Chapter Thirteen

Beth couldn't help but shake as they pulled up to the house. Alastair squeezed her hand.

"Love, don't worry. Everyone is excited to see you. I'll let you talk for a moment, but then we go up for a nap. The kind where you actually sleep."

She grinned. "Let's go."

She lost count of how many people greeted her. She hadn't realized that people really cared.

Beth jumped, and Alastair growled when the three women, Faith, Hope, and Angel, screamed and then ran to them.

Alastair moved in front of her. "Girls. She's very tired, so I just want you to say hi, and then we're going up to our room."

Alastair moved behind her but kept an arm around her waist.

"I'm so glad you're home," Faith said. "We missed you so much."

The girls all talked and hugged her.

"How about a movie later? We'll call it Girls' Night," Beth said. She felt Alastair tense but ignored him.

"She'll come and find you," Alastair said before he took her hand and led her up to their suite.

They stopped at their bedroom door.

"Wait. I'd like to see Angus," Beth said.

Alastair nodded, but she could tell he didn't want to.

She knocked on the door.

"Come in," Angus yelled.

Beth opened the door and smiled brightly.

"There's my girl," Angus said. "Come give me a hug."

Beth rushed to him and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"I'm so glad you're home," Angus said.

"I'm glad to be home."

"I'm taking her in for a nap. She'll see you later," Alastair said.

Beth glanced between them. "Angus, if I can forgive him, you can too. I don't want discord between the two of you. Please."

Angus grumbled and then looked at Alastair. "Fine, I'll forgive him, but I'm telling you now," he said, pointing at Alastair. "If you do that shit again, I'll put a bullet in his head."

Beth gasped. “No...”

Alastair chuckled and wrapped an arm around her waist. “I’m not worried because it won’t happen again.”

Angus squeezed her hand. “Come and see me later. If you have time, play a game of chess with me.”

Alastair groaned, and Beth laughed.

“Sure. Get ready to rumble,” she yelled, making them both chuckle.

Alastair led her out of Angus’s room and down the hall to theirs.

He opened the door, and her mouth dropped open. It was the same as when she left it. The same book she was reading was on her bedside table, along with the bottle of lotion. Even her robe was where she threw it when she got dressed.

She walked in further. There was still a towel on the floor where Alastair had dropped it the morning of the fight.

She turned to face him to find him leaning against the door with his arms crossed. His face was as still as stone, but his eyes never left her.

“I couldn’t be here without you. I slept across the hall. I forbade anyone from coming into this room.”

Beth walked to him, wrapped her arms around his waist, and laid her head on his chest. “We’re home where we belong. Let the past go, Alastair. If we don’t, the separation will eat at us.”

He sighed, held her against his body, and pressed a kiss on the top of her head. “I’ll do my best, love.”

She looked up at him and set her chin on his chest so she could see his face. “I love you.”

She watched his eyes close.

He looked down at her. “You have no idea how much I love you. I can’t explain it. I never knew there was a love so deep it changed your soul.”

Beth pressed her cheek against him and closed her eyes.

“Let’s get you undressed...”

“I want to take a shower,” she said. “I know I took one at the hospital, but I still don’t feel clean.”

“I’ll bathe you. I want to see all the changes.”

She got a bit nervous because her body had changed. Her hips were a little wider, her stomach bulged where the baby was, and her breasts were humungous.

She put her hair up and let him start the shower before taking her

clothing off. She stood still and let him look.

“Jesus, I didn’t think you could be more beautiful, and then you pull this on me.”

She giggled at his growl.

He stripped his own off before he pulled her into the shower and under the water enough to wet her body. She already thought her breasts were sensitive, but her nipples tightened as he washed them. Her desire rose as his hands slid between her legs, and he thoroughly washed her cunt.

“Can I wash you now?” she asked.

“Next time. I’m too hot with desire, and we can’t do that right now.”

“Why not?”

“I want to talk to the doctor first. I won’t take any chances with you or the baby.”

She loved it when he acknowledged the baby and in a sweet, loving tone.

“What about if we did it differently,” she said.

Alastair finished rinsing himself off. “Oh, what are you thinking?”

Beth wrapped her arms around his waist. “I want you to take my...”

“Ass?” Alastair said.

Beth felt her face heat. “Yes. It helps strengthen our bond, doesn’t it?”

He nodded. “Yes.”

“And we need that. Besides, I won’t be able to rest because I’m so needy right now.”

He sighed and nodded. “We’ll have to be really careful.”

Alastair turned off the water and grabbed a towel. He thoroughly dried her and then himself before wrapping it around his hips.

He took her hand and led her to the bed. He piled several pillows in the middle and got her situated, so she was comfortable before he pulled out some lube and a condom.

“We’re going to take this slow,” he said.

She wanted to yell no but waited until he was in her.

“Now, let’s get you ready to take me.”

She hugged a pillow. “Yes, please.”

He chuckled. “Easy,” he said when she jerked. “I’ve got you.”

“I know. Your hands are cold.”

He laughed.

She felt a glob of gel drop down on the crack of her ass.

“Let’s see how tight you are.”

The first time his finger invaded her bottom, it always made her feel naughty, but then her mind usually floated away as the pleasure built inside of her.

“Oh, God.”

“You’re doing so good. Let’s try two.”

He worked two of his fingers into her ass and then scissored them, trying to stretch her a bit. She wanted to yell at him to start, but she knew that would only get him to slow down. Finally, she heard the condom wrapper and then felt the head of his cock press against her.

“You tell me if it’s uncomfortable.”

“I will.”

The sensation of his cock sliding in and out of her, getting deeper every time, made what felt like electric shocks down her back. She felt him grip her hips as he invaded her. He thrust in the last inch, making them both almost lose control.

She heard his accelerated breathing and could tell he was trying to get his strength back, so he didn’t come until she did. Every thought burst from her mind as he started a slow glide in and out of her.

“Oh, God. Faster.”

One of his hands gripped her hip and tightened to hold her steady while he ran the other one up and down her back.

“Relax, love. I’ll take care of you.”

She wanted to yell that he wasn’t going fast enough, but then his thrusts got harder and faster, a little at a time. The tension built in her until she couldn’t take another moment without flying apart.

“That’s it. Come for me, love. Tighten that ass on me.”

She didn’t answer. She couldn’t gather her thoughts or words.

The band ripped apart, letting her fly. The moans and cries bounced off the walls and mixed together. When she finally came down, she relaxed against the pillow and let Alastair finish his own orgasm.

They both took a minute to calm their hearts and breathe enough to move. She felt him press a kiss to her spine and pull out of her.

“I’ll be right back. Don’t move.”

She almost rolled her eyes. Yeah, like that could happen. She hissed when a warm cloth wiped the gel, sweat, and cum off of her.

“I’m going to shower. Let’s get you in a more comfortable position.”

He effortlessly lifted her and set her on the side of the bed facing the bathroom. He kissed her temple. "I'll be right back."

She hummed and closed her eyes. She must have dozed because he was sliding into bed and pulled her against his side.

Her heart about burst from her chest when he used his fingers to tip her chin up. He bent and gave her a few slow kisses. But the look on his face made tears come to her eyes.

"Are you okay?" He wiped the tears away with his thumb.

She smiled brightly. "Yes. I couldn't be better."

He grinned and pulled her head down onto his shoulder. "Sleep. We'll get up in a few hours."

She nodded and closed her eyes. The happiness that filled her made her feel so light. No worries or pain. She was where she was supposed to be, beside her husband.

## Epilogue

Beth laughed at the picture in front of her as she sat in the shade, rubbing her belly where another baby lay, ready to be born.

Her husband had a child on his shoulders, one by the back of the shirt, and another one tucked under an arm.

“Where do you want the monsters?” he asked and grinned.

“Take them into the kitchen. Clarice will get them fed, and our nannies will put them down for a nap.”

Alastair smiled. “I think we should take a nap, too. I’m feeling very tired.”

Beth rolled her eyes. “Sure, you do, but come back and get me after you drop off the monsters.”

“Oooh, Mommy,” their son Ben said as his father gripped his shirt.

“What, baby?” she said.

“What kind of monster am I?” Ben asked.

“Oh, well, if it’s okay with your father, you can pick one.”

Alastair narrowed his eyes at her.

“You know what you started, right?” he asked.

Beth chuckled and nodded.

“Mommy’s naughty,” Alastair said.

One of their daughters, Kat, gasped and gripped her father’s hair. “That’s not true. Mommy is never naughty.”

Beth hid her smile behind her hand.

“Does Mommy get spanked, too?” Ben asked.

Alastair smiled and nodded. “Oh, absolutely.”

Beth rolled her eyes again.

Kat, her oldest daughter, was named after Kathrine and Aria. They wanted it reversed, but Aria explained that since she was around more, it would get confusing. Her name was Kathrine Aria, but instead of Kit, as they had called her counselor-turned-close friend, they called her Kat.

Their son was named Benjamin Alastair. It was a big name, but he’d grow into it. In the meantime, they called him Ben.

The daughter under his arm, laughing hysterically, was named after his mother, Isabel. His father had cried when we told him that.

“I’ll be right back, love,” Alastair said.

Beth relaxed and lifted her face up to the sun, and slowly rubbed the



foot that was the baby trying to kick his way out. They had found out it would be a boy. This one was more active than the other three, and she hoped that didn't mean he'd be crazier than his siblings. In her tummy was a boy. They hadn't decided on a name for him yet.

She didn't open her eyes when she felt a large, warm body slide up against her. She felt his lips in her hair.

"Are you ready to go up? But I have to remind you the spanking has to wait until the baby's born."

Beth laughed. "Yes, I'm ready."

Alastair stood and then helped her up from her seat before wrapping around her waist.

"So, we decided this was going to be the last baby, right?" Alastair said.

"I didn't decide anything," Beth said.

Alastair groaned. "How many more?"

"Just a few," she said and smiled. She wasn't worried. Alastair gave in to any wish she had.

He spoiled her before, but in the last several years, it'd gotten even worse. If he didn't watch it, she might become an annoyance.

**The End**

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# **BONUS SAMPLE CHAPTER**

## **HER MAFIA DESTINY**

### ***Maclean Mafia Men, 1***

**Lila Fox**

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#### **Sample Chapter**

“Yo, brother, I think you need to go back home and mellow out.”

Alastair turned abruptly to face his brother, Calum, getting in his face and gritting his teeth. “Would you like to say that to me one more time?”

“Jesus Christ.” Calum raised his hands and took a hasty step back. “Man, it’s just that you’re really pissed off....”

“Aren’t you usually like this after talking to your mother?” Alastair asked.

“She’s your stepmother. That counts, nut fuck. But yes, I do. The woman’s a viper. It’s just when you’re pissed like this, someone usually ends up dead.”

Alastair rolled his eyes, turned, and walked down the long hallway. The woman, Calum’s mother, was his fourth stepmother. Alastair’s mother died a few days after giving birth to him, which ruined his father. From what his family had told him over the years, they had been passionately in love, surprising because of their lifestyle.

Being a part of the mafia was not easy. You had to be cold and vicious to survive. It was especially hard for the women. The wives and

mistresses had to deal with a lot.

His father had married four more times, trying to find the love he'd had with Isabella, Alastair's mother, and it had never happened. This last one, Una, Calum's mother, was the worst.

The first three stepmothers had died of surprisingly natural causes and not murder like one would expect living with the mafia—one in a car accident, one in an accidental drug overdose, and an accidental fall down the steps.

Alastair had liked that one the most. Nessa had been Logan, Ewen, and Rory's mother and had been sweet as can be. It had hit his father hard when she passed away. Not as hard as Alastair's mother, Isabella, but it took a while for him to want to have another woman in the house and in his life.

This last wife was a viper, and Alastair hated her, but he had to get along with her because his father was alive. After the stroke, his father had been unable to lead the Maclean clan, so Alastair had taken over the whole operation then, which was fine because he ran most of it anyway.

He shivered inside. Two minutes with his stepmother was torture. The woman was as mean as they came, and he couldn't understand what his father saw in her. She might have been attractive if not for the permanent sneer she had on her face.

His brother was probably right, but he couldn't stand the thought of going home to the same house his stepmother lived in, knowing she'd probably try to hunt him down to talk some more because he'd walked out on her tirade. The temptation to just kill her was too strong, and he didn't know if his father would ever forgive him.

"What exactly are we looking at?" Calum asked.

"Our strip joint in Newport needs new women, and I sent out some of our guys to find ones who were attractive and loved being a stripper. Most of the ones we have now are getting old and tired, so we'll get them other jobs in the business."

"Cool. Maybe think about taking one of them home," Duncan, another brother, said. "It might help your disposition."

"Fuck off," Alastair said without turning around.

Alastair opened the door to what could pass as a conference room. It had a long table and chairs and a small bar off to the side. Some meetings went late, and the guys were more pleasant if they had some alcohol in them. But not too much, or they started killing each other.

The women were already there waiting. The ones that noticed him stood as seductively as they could, begging for his or his brothers' attention. Being one of their mistresses was sought after not only for their good looks but mainly for the money.

"Hey," Stuart, one of his best men who had been with him for years, said and walked over to shake his hand. "I think we did well."

"You checked for diseases and made sure they had no children?"

"Sure, boss. I know what you like."

Alastair nodded. "Where's Ross? He was supposed to be helping you."

"He's coming in with the last one or two."

Alastair turned to Calum. "Can you get me a bourbon on the rocks?" He wouldn't admit it to his brothers, but he did need to mellow out, and a nice drink helped every time.

"Sure."

The first drink went down smoothly and helped calm his anger a bit as he talked to Stuart and ignored the women trying to vie for his notice and interest. He shook his head and snorted when his brothers did give the women their attention and had girls all over them.

"Craig is going to take these women to the club if you're okay with them," Stuart said.

Alastair turned and whistled for Duncan. "I'm going to put you in charge of this. Take them to Speedy's, get the women who will live in our apartments next to the club moved in, and take the rest back to their place but tell them they have to be at work tomorrow. If they are late, they're fired. There are no second chances."

"I got it," Duncan said.

His brother and a couple of the men rounded up the women and took them out a back door to the vans waiting.

"Are you going to wait for the last of them?" Stuart asked.

Alastair looked at his watch and sat down. "I'll give them a few minutes."

He hadn't finished with his second drink when a side door opened and Ross, one of his guys, walked in, dragging a woman. She was crying and fighting to get away from him.

"Shut up, bitch," Ross said and shook her.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Stuart yelled.

Alastair held up a hand, set down his drink, and stood to face Ross. He walked to stand in front of the man and crossed his arms over his chest to keep from strangling the man, trying to ignore the woman's pleas and cries. "Tell me."

Ross stuttered. "Oh, well, her uncle owed us some money, and I was supposed to get it, but he didn't have it, and so I thought we could use her as collateral until he pays up."

Calum, Stuart, and the rest of his guys cursed, and the tension rose in the room.

Alastair just stared at the woman. She was tiny but had curved hips and larger breasts. She was dressed in a long white nightgown with lace. Her dark hair was tousled like she'd been pulled from bed.

"Who gave you permission to do that?" Alastair asked when he turned back at Ross.

"Well, no one. I just thought..."

"Is it your job to think?" Alastair asked.

"Well, no."

"Jesus Christ, you dumbshit," Stuart said.

Alastair walked up, cupped the woman's chin, and raised her face. His breath stalled in his lungs because her eyes were the most beautiful he'd ever seen, even when they were red and swollen from crying. They were light blue in the middle and green on the other part, and they seemed to look right through him.

"Who is your family?" Alastair asked her.

She sniffed. "I don't have one besides an uncle I haven't seen in years."

"No husband?"

"No. Please, let me go home. I won't tell anyone. I don't even know you," she said.

For once in his life, he made a decision with his heart instead of his head. He pulled out a gun and shot Ross in the forehead in one smooth move.

Everyone in the room stood frozen and in shock until the woman screamed.

Alastair put his gun away and reached for her when it looked like she was going to faint, only to have her flinch in horror away from him. He knew why, but it still pissed him off, which was ridiculous. Of course, she would be terrified of him. He just murdered someone in front of her.

He didn't like the blood that had been sprayed over her from Ross's head, and he wanted her clean as soon as possible.

He kept a few feet away from the woman and waited for her to be calm enough to hear him. "My name is Alastair Maclean. We're the mafia in this part of the city."

Alastair heard his brother curse behind him and ignored him.

The woman was hunched against the wall. Tears mixed with blood and brain matter ran down her face. "Why are you telling me this? Are you going to kill me next?"

Alastair shook his head. "I'm making sure that you won't be able to go anywhere, ever."

"I don't understand. I've never done anything to you or anyone."

"I know. Sometimes your life takes a path you didn't expect." *No kidding.* He never predicted he'd kidnap a woman and plan to keep her forever. "My advice is to make the best of this. I'll treat you like a princess as long as you're loyal to me. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't. I don't understand any of this."

He sighed. "That's okay. We have plenty of time." He held out his hand and waited.

She shook her head.

"You can either take my hand and walk out of here with some dignity, or I can have a few of my men carry you out. Choose."

She studied him for a moment and before she reached for his hand. He could see how much she was trembling, but he would take care of her as soon as they got home. When her shaking, tiny cold hand slid into his hand, something inside of him settled, and a warmth filled him.

"That's good, baby." He pulled her along and looked at one of his men. "Take care of Ross."

"You got it, boss."

As he led her out to his car, he felt something shift in his universe, and he knew he'd forever be changed. He just didn't know if it would be for the good or bad. Only time would tell.

End of sample chapter

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