



BILLIONAIRE'S
Lost Lover

JENNA JAX

BILLIONAIRE'S LOST
LOVER

JENNA JAX

© Copyright 2024 - All rights reserved.

The content contained within this book may not be reproduced, duplicated or transmitted without direct written permission from the author or the publisher.

Under no circumstances will any blame or legal responsibility be held against the publisher, or author, for any damages, reparation, or monetary loss due to the information contained within this book, either directly or indirectly.

Legal Notice:

This book is copyright protected. It is only for personal use. You cannot amend, distribute, sell, use, quote or paraphrase any part, or the content within this book, without the consent of the author or publisher.

Disclaimer Notice:

Please note the information contained within this document is for educational and entertainment purposes only. All effort has been executed to present accurate, up to date, reliable, complete information. No warranties of any kind are declared or implied. Readers acknowledge that the author is not engaged in the rendering of legal, financial, medical or professional advice. The content within this book has been derived from various sources. Please consult a licensed professional before attempting any techniques outlined in this book.

By reading this document, the reader agrees that under no circumstances is the author responsible for any losses, direct or indirect, that are incurred as a result of the use of the information contained within this document, including, but not limited to, errors, omissions, or inaccuracies.

CONTENTS

[You Matter!](#)

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

[Thank you!](#)

YOU MATTER!

Thank you for spending time with my book creations. Bringing my stories to you is a dream come true for me and I have so many more bursting to get out.

I want to spend my time delivering these stories to you and focus less on the marketing. The best way for that to happen is for you as reader to leave an honest review on Amazon.

To say that Amazon reviews are important is a massive understatement. It is one of the most crucial pathways to broadening the exposure of my stories.

Please enjoy Tanya and Chandler's love story.

If you would like to help out a passionate author, please leave a review when the option appears.

Thank you!

On to the story!

TANYA

I have to get out of here.

In a blind panic, I quickly snatch my keys off the bed, but I hit them too hard, and they fly off the mattress, hitting the floor with a sound that feels like electric jolts are shooting through my body and into my frayed nerves. Quickly grabbing the keys from the floor, I stumble my way through the penthouse. My shoulder is knocking into the walls as I go. By the time I'm in the elevator, my breathing is labored, and it feels like I can't get any air.

The elevator dings as it reaches the garage, and I run to the car that I rented yesterday to escape, I just need to get out of this apartment and clear my head. Even just for a day. My hands are shaking so badly that it takes me three tries to push the right button to unlock the doors. The car finally beeps, and I yank the door open, sliding into the seat and quickly buckling before starting the car and backing out the spot faster than I probably should have. The tires squeal against the pavement as I turn the car around the corner to head to the exit of the garage.

I have to work at not speeding through the city as I head for the highway. Surrounded by all the buildings and people I still feel trapped. I make it to the highway and find the first exit that I know will take me to a back road.

Once I get to the road and see it's clear, I'm able to push the pedal a little more and watch as the speedometer creeps up higher and higher.

The further I am from the city, the easier it is to breathe. I can finally take a deep breath and feel my shoulders relax away from my ears.

The road ahead of me is just an empty straight shot, no one in sight and no buildings to make me feel like I'm being trapped. Just the open road and green as far as I can see. I roll down the windows and let the air rush into the car, and as the wind whips my hair around, I start to feel the freedom that I was looking for.

Here on this road, I don't have to worry about anything. I don't have to make any decisions. I just focus on the pavement in front of me and let it lead me to wherever it goes.

After about thirty minutes of driving, I finally feel like myself fully. After all the panic and desperation I felt this morning, I know that I'm not going to last much longer and my adrenaline is going to wear off. I need to start thinking of what to do.

Do I go back?

Do I find a place to stay for the night?

What am I going to tell him?

The road starts to curve and wind.

I know he's going to be happy about this, but I don't know if I am.

When I first read the test and it was positive, I was in shock. I had wanted to run. Run from the apartment and run from him. I didn't know if I could do something like that to him, but I did know that I was terrified of what was going to happen. The life he has doesn't have much room for any kind of changes, and this is a big change.

Everything happens in a split second. I see the flash of brown, the deer appears in front of me, then I'm headed toward the ditch. My foot is stuck to the pedal as I fly off the shoulder of the road.

Suddenly, my body feels like it's floating, my hands are forced above my head, and glass is flying all over the car. I can't tell

what I'm looking at out the windshield, it's just a swirl of green and gray. Once the car stops moving and my hands are touching the roof of the car, I realize the car flipped and that I'm looking at the outside world still spinning around after the car flew through the air in a spiral.

I can't move and my whole body aches. I groan and look around to see if there is anyone nearby to help. Placing my hand on the roof, I try and push myself up to see if I can try and get out of the seatbelt, but it's digging into my stomach, and I'm trapped. I reach toward the lap belt and try to move it away from my stomach, but it's stuck too tightly. I let go of the belt since I can't hold my arm up any longer at this angle. I let it drop back to the roof, and I'm suddenly very lightheaded and can't keep my eyes open.

"MA'AM? Can you hear me? It's alright. If you can hear me, I've called for help; just stay still and they will be here soon. No, don't move; they told me to tell you to stay as still as possible."

I can hear someone talking, but I don't know who it is or what they are talking about. I try to move my head so I can see who is talking, but I'm too tired and fall back to sleep.

"HOLD her head and neck steady, I'm going to cut the belt, then we can pull her out."

There are more voices all around me, and I just want them to go away. I just want to sleep. I don't know why they are here, but they need to go.

Tell them to go away.

"Ch-Ch—" I try to talk, but I can't get out any more before I start to cough. Something warm and wet lands on my lips as I cough something up. It tastes like blood. I try to move my hand to wipe it away, but someone stops me.

"No, it's okay. Don't move. We need you to keep very still, okay?"

I think I nod. I stop moving, then I feel like I'm falling for a split second before hands are all over me and I'm floating. The sun hits my closed eyes, and I squint against it.

The voices that are surrounding me are starting to fade, and I'm grateful that whoever is here has finally decided to leave and let me sleep.

I'M STARING at my reflection in the bathroom mirror when I should be getting ready for my shift at that local café. I take in my dark brown, almost black, curly hair that comes to just below my chest, my emerald green eyes, and my small round nose in the middle of my round face. I twist and turn my body to look at all of my curves in the Cozy Corner Café T-shirt and blue jeans I'm wearing. The shirt is a little on the small side, but I've gotten used to wearing clothes that don't fit. That's what happens when you live in a small town without much around and mainly buy from thrift stores.

It's my reflection that I'm staring at, my own eyes that I'm meeting when I look at the woman in front of me, but I have no idea who she is.

Not like I'm a floundering millennial, but more like I have zero recollection of my life prior to the last nine years.

The only thing I can remember about my past is the day I woke up in the hospital of Willow Creek, a very small town an hour outside of New York City, after a very serious car accident. I have no idea why I was in Willow Creek; no one here seems to have known me before the accident. The only things that I know for certain about me are that I was three months pregnant when I had the accident and that my name is Tanya.

The car I had been driving didn't have anything inside of it when the paramedics rescued me, and mine had been the only car involved in the accident, or the only one that was still at the scene. The only other tangible thing that I had on me was a mysterious locket that I had around my neck. Inside of the locket was a small inscription that read:

To my sweet Tanya,

I'm ready to face the world with you. I love you.

C.

Something about the necklace made me feel drawn to it, like whoever gave it to me was important. I wore it around my neck every day.

“Mommy! We’re going to be late!”

I smile when I hear Sophia’s voice yell for me down the hall.

“I’m coming, I’m coming. We aren’t going to be late.” I roll my eyes at her dramatics.

If there is one thing to say about my girl, it’s that she is a stickler for a set schedule. I walk into our kitchen to see Sophia standing at our side door with her backpack on and her little fists balled on her hips. I raise my eyebrow at her stance and try not to let her see how much I’m trying not to laugh.

“And what exactly is your problem, Little Lady?”

I move about the small kitchen of the modest cottage that we live in and make my coffee while I wait for her to decide to tell me.

When I was released from the hospital after the accident, I still had no idea who I was, and no one had come around to claim me. I needed a place to live, and the kind residents of Willow Creek helped me get back on my feet; they found me a place to rent and a job. I have lived in this cabin and worked as a barista at Cozy Corner Café since the day I left the hospital.

Today is the ninth anniversary of the day that Mr. Robert found me in that car. Every year on this day, I can’t help but think back on everything that has happened. I’ve created this new life, and I honestly have no idea what I would do if my old one came knocking. I’ve made sure to make this our home; I even decided to use the last name Roberts in a way to anchor us to these people and this place.

“Mommy, I don’t want to be late for the first day of school.”

I just finish making my coffee when Sophia finally speaks up.

“And what makes you think we are going to be late?”

I close the lid of my coffee mug and turn to face her.

“Because I’m done getting ready, and we still haven’t gone. You are always telling me that we are going to be late while I’m still getting ready.”

I sputter out a laugh as I take a sip of my coffee and have to catch some that dribbles down my chin.

She’s not wrong.

I have to clear my throat before speaking. “Well, I woke you up a little early today so that I could take you. We are leaving just on time, so don’t worry, okay?”

I can see her visibly relax.

“Oh, okay.”

A snort escapes me before I can stop it.

“Don’t you think this is a good time to think about how you need to listen to me in the mornings, though?”

She rolls her eyes, and I can’t really reprimand her about it when I’m the one she learned it from.

“I know, Mommy.”

The sass is strong in this one.

I smile down at her as she shuffles from foot to foot, obviously nervous about her first day of second grade. I still can’t believe that she’s eight already and in second grade. All my memories have her in them. I don’t know what I would do without her. She means everything to me. She has my dark curly hair, but her eyes are a stranger’s eyes, they are a beautiful sea blue with a golden circle surrounding the pupil.

Every time I meet a new person, I can’t help but study their eyes to see if I can find someone with her eyes. I haven’t found a single person with matching eyes, and it always makes me wonder if she gets them from her father.

“Alright, let’s go, sweet pea.”

I hold my hand out for her to take, and we head out to walk to her elementary school. Luckily for me, Willow Creek is a small enough town that we can walk everywhere we need to go. Our cabin is just on the edge of town, but there is a shortcut through a small patch of woods that has a trail leading straight to the town square. We've walked this road almost every day for the last nine years, back and forth from home to town and back.

The road is lined with red maple trees on each side, and since it's September, the leaves are just starting to change their colors. It's one of the things that I love about Willow Creek. The beautiful trees that change colors in the fall and how the town was built around nature and didn't destroy it. I feel so much peace being here, and again, I have to wonder why I was headed here all those years ago.

Did its landscape appeal to me then as well?

It's been hard not knowing who I am.

I had been terrified when I left the hospital. I felt like they were just sending me off into the world without a hand to hold. They expected me to take care of myself and the unborn child in me without having any understanding of what was happening.

I look down at Sophia skipping next to me now and wish that I could tell that scared, lost girl that everything would work out in the end. That we would make it through with our baby and be happy. That there was nothing to be scared of.

After dropping Sophia off for her first day of second grade, I make my way to the café for my shift. The bell over the door rings out as I open it, and everyone behind the counter calls out a hello.

I smile and wave at everyone as I make my way behind the counter and into the back area to put my things up and grab my apron.

“Happy ninth birthday!”

Laughing, I turn to face the owner of the café and one of my closet friends, Ms. Poppy. Over the years, it has become a

running joke that my birthday is the day I arrived here and had my accident. Ms. Poppy said that if the people who had birthdays on leap day were able to claim being younger, then so should I. I tried to tell her years ago that it didn't matter to me, but she's been insistent that everyone should celebrate their own birth with the people they love. None of us really know my age, but we guess I'm somewhere in my late twenties or early to mid-thirties.

"Thanks, Ms. Poppy. Were we busy this morning?"

I would rather not acknowledge today if I could help it, I didn't like all the attention on me, and it reminded me of everything I still didn't know about myself.

Ms. Poppy tells me about the morning as I get started on some of the drink orders that are waiting; it seems that with it being the first day of school, we had more customers than usual, and it stays that way all day. I love days like this one. Where we have a constant flow of people coming and going. It keeps me busy and out of my own head.

ON THE WALK home after I pick up Sophia, she tells me all about her first day. I lucked out with my kid; she loves school and hates when she has to miss even half a day.

"My new teacher, Miss Hale, says that we get to have both reading time and recess time during the week."

"Really?"

I barely have to say anything as she prattles on, and I love nothing more than to listen to her talk. By the time we make it home, it's time for me to get dinner started. I get her set up at the kitchen counter where I can help her with her homework if she needs it and start getting dinner ready for the two of us.

Some people may see how my life is and think that there has to be more to it. They may think that I should be doing everything in my power to find out about my past, but I don't see it that way. I have no idea what I would find if I went looking for who I was before Willow Creek. I have no way of

knowing if my life was a good one, if I was a good person, or why I was coming to Willow Creek.

Just as I'm putting dinner into the oven, my phone rings from where I left it in my bag by the door.

"Will you grab that for me, Soph?"

Sophia jumps down from her chair and runs to grab my phone for me as I get the timer started. When she brings me my phone, I see it's Kayla, one of the nurses that took care of me. She has become one of my best friends over the years.

"Hey, you. I thought you were working the night shift tonight?"

I set the phone on speaker and start to clean up the dishes I used to make the casserole.

"I am. I'm here now, but I wanted to ask you something. Well, kinda, you can't say no."

I scoff in response.

"So, why are you asking me if I can't say no?"

"Just listen to everything *before* you say no."

It's never good when Kayla wants me to do something for her and she's already preparing for me to say no.

"Just get on with it, Kayla."

"Alright, alright. So, the hospital is hosting this charity gala this weekend, and all the staff are able to attend for free and are being strongly encouraged to go."

I stop what I'm doing and hold the phone in my hand, already knowing where she is going with this.

"Kayla."

"Wait! Let me finish. Anyway, we are all strongly being encouraged to go, and since I'm woefully single right now, I need you to come with me. You can even bring Sophia. They told us that it is a gala for children's education, and it would be great to have children there."

I don't like the idea of going somewhere with a lot of people around that I don't know. I'm not comfortable in crowds, and Kayla knows this.

"Come on, Tanya. We can make it a girls' day, and the three of us will have so much fun. When are we ever going to be able to say that we went to a fancy charity gala? Sophia would love it."

I look over to see Sophia looking very hopeful. She's heard everything Kayla has said, and I don't know if I have it in me to tell them both no and crush the excitement I see in Soph's eyes. She sits on her knees on the chair and puts her hands on the table, leaning toward me.

"I don't know. Isn't it expected for people to bid on things and donate? I don't really have the money for that."

I'm scrambling for reasons not to go and both Kayla and Sophia know it.

"Nope. None of the staff or the people they bring are expected to bid on anything. The bigwigs will be there and will have enough money to spend, anything more is just going to be extra."

I know no matter what I say she is going to have a comeback, and eventually, I'm going to agree to go. I let out a long sigh and Sophia starts bouncing in her chair.

"Neither Sophia nor I have anything to wear to a charity gala."

"Mommy!"

I laugh at Sophia's exasperated tone, and Kayla's next words match her frustration.

"That's fine. You and I are the same size, and then we can go out and buy little miss Sophia a cute new dress for her to wear. Come on, it will be so fun! We can go shopping and get our hair and nails done in the morning, and then go back to your place to get ready before going to the hospital for the event."

I really need to learn not to talk to Kayla on speaker.

"Fine. We'll go."

Sophia squeals and jumps down from the chair and starts running around the cabin.

“Sophia, slow down!”

Kayla laughs as I try and get my overexcited eight-year-old to calm down.

“Well, at least I know you won’t back out on me since she already knows about it.”

“Yeah, thanks for that. Now she’s not going to stop asking me about it, and then she’s going to wake me up at an ungodly hour the morning of.”

Kayla’s snicker comes through the phone, and I roll my eyes.

“Just be ready by eight Saturday morning, and I will come pick you guys up; we’ll make it a day.”

We say a quick goodbye, and when I end the call, Sophia is still running around the house and has now made up a song to go along with her excitement.

“Girls’ day! Girls’ day! We’re going to a party! Girls’ day! Girls’ day!”

I laugh and shake my head at her enthusiasm. There are so many things that she does on a daily basis that make me wonder if she got it from whoever her father is. That familiar guilt turns my stomach as I think about the fact that she only has me. I dread the day she asks me about her daddy. How do you explain to an eight-year-old that you don’t know who her daddy is because you don’t even know who you are?

“Alright, crazy girl. Come back here, you need to finish your homework before dinner is ready.”

She jump-hops across the living room and into the dining room to sit back in her chair.

“Mommy, how many days is it until Saturday?”

Here we go.

“Five days.”

The look of horror that crosses her face makes me smile.

“It is going to go by quicker than you think, baby girl. You are going to be too busy having fun at school to notice the time passing. Now, is there anything that I need to do for you for school?”

We go over all of the first day paperwork that we both have to fill out and get her binder set up. It’s odd to me that I am able to do everyday tasks and obviously have the knowledge needed to function, but I have no memory of learning any of it. I can’t remember my time in school or if I liked it like Sophia does or not.

Once the timer for dinner goes off, Sophia puts her school things away and I take the casserole out of the oven. I’m distracted through dinner as Sophia talks about what kind of dress she wants to wear to the charity gala. I had to explain to her what it was and that we needed to dress up for it. It might have been a mistake to do so because it just amped up her excitement. I’m happy that she is excited for it, but I’m not looking forward to going to this event.

Sophia crawls into her bed, and as I sit on the edge to tuck her in, she looks up at me with her unique eyes and says, “I can’t wait for Saturday.”

I laugh and kiss her head, picking up a book to read to her. She’s asleep before I can finish it, and as I climb into bed with my body aching from being up all day, I can’t shake the feeling that something big is about to happen.

CHANDLER

“Have the marketing team come up with a plan for this idea and tell them that I want them to have something to present by Monday afternoon.”

I hand my assistant the paper with the mockup advertisement for the company and wait for her to finish taking notes on her tablet.

“Is there anything specific you want them to do with it?”

I take a moment to think about how I want them to do the ad, but I’m too distracted today to come up with anything.

“No, just tell them to go with their guts on this one, and we can figure it out after they present it to me.”

Jillian nods and, after collecting all of her things, turns to leave my office.

I sit back in my chair and run a hand over my face. The stubble on my chin scratches against my palm, and I realize that I don’t know when I last shaved, which is unlike me. I take a lot of pride in my appearance. I thought staying fit and looking put together was enough, but Jillian once told me that it was the bare minimum. I stand from my desk and walk into the bathroom that is connected to my office. I keep extra things in here for the times when things are busy and I don’t have time to go home. Picking up the shaving cream I shake the can and spray some out onto my hand before spreading it over my jaw.

I look over myself while I shave, my dirty blonde hair is longer than I usually let it get. The sides are starting to grow

out, and the top is falling into my eyes. My black dress pants and dark blue button up shirt that I spent a lot of money to have fit my tall built form perfectly are wrinkled and twisted around my body. I stand at six feet tall exactly and work hard to keep my body in shape; I like my clothes to show it off. There are dark circles under my sea blue eyes, emphasizing the golden ring around the pupil, but they are only noticeable if someone is looking close enough.

Once done, I wash my face off and check my watch. It's only eleven in the morning and it feels like I've been here a full day.

Sighing, I turn out the light of the bathroom and make my way back to my desk to drown myself in work some more.

I don't want to think about what today is. I don't want to think about how I will be going home tonight to an empty penthouse apartment once again.

It's been nine years, Chandler.

I minimize the emails I have open on my desktop and click on the folder labeled *DON'T OPEN* at the top right corner of the screen. I labeled it that to try and keep myself from staring at the pictures I stored in there all day. The cursor hovers over the folder while I debate with myself to open it or not. If there is a time that would be okay to open it, it would be today. I lift my finger, just about to double click on the folder when a knock sounds at my door.

"Come in."

I'm relieved at the interruption. It keeps me from making a mistake and looking at the pictures in the folder.

Jillian opens the door and peeks around it at me.

"Marketing has a few questions for you about the presentation. Do you want me to transfer them to you or do you want to go down to see them?"

I lock my computer and stand.

"I'll go down."

Jillian grabs her tablet and follows me to the elevator to go down to the third floor. I need to stay busy today. I've been too distracted, and I need to get my head in the game. I'm the CEO of Bishop Enterprises, a billion-dollar company, and I can't afford to slack off. Not even on a day like today.

THE WORKDAY finally comes to an end, and I feel like I've just been through the ringer. I'm exhausted and hungry, and all I want to do is go home and go to sleep, but I know I won't.

If I go home now to that big, empty apartment that I just can't seem to get warm enough, I will lay awake. I climb into the back of my car and tell Steven, my driver, to take me to the club that my best friend Josh owns.

I need to get drunk and find someone to keep me warm.

I know I'm going to wake up tomorrow and feel terrible, but I don't care. I need this tonight.

Even though it's a Monday night, Josh's club is still packed with people by the time I get there. It's what happens when you live in New York City; the nightlife never stops, and the city never sleeps.

As I step into Josh's club, the thumping from the music travels through the floor and up my feet until I can feel it in my chest. I take a quick look around the place; it's a typical New York club, a flashy bar that stands out in the dark atmosphere, beckoning people to buy more drinks as they dance together out on the floor. Small spotlights are pointed to the dance floor, and red and purple lights are attached to the walls to give the place some kind of way to see. There are tables and couches set to one side of the room for people to take a break, and behind them, a set of stairs that leads to the VIP area. I make a beeline for the VIP section where I know I'm going to find Josh. He stays up here for most of the night, a constant flow of drinks and women coming through. It's decorated similar to the rest of the area, just with bigger couches made of more expensive materials.

I step past the rope that blocks off the section, and Josh is sitting exactly where I knew he was going to be, a woman on each side of him.

“Chandler! I didn’t know you were going to show tonight!”

He stands to greet me, and we shake hands before he pats me on the back and leads me over to sit. He motions for the women to leave, and they get up without question.

“So, decided to come out into the land of the living this year instead of wallowing away in your apartment?”

I shoot him a glare, and he just laughs while signaling the waiter for drinks.

“Hey, don’t give me that look. I’m just glad you’re out. I’ve been telling you for years to come out with me. It’s been too long for you to still be spending today locked away in your tower.”

The waiter brings our drinks, and I knock mine back as soon as he hands it to me.

“I wasn’t locking myself away, Josh. I was, *I am*, mourning the loss of the love of my life.”

He rolls his eyes at me.

“She didn’t die, Chandler. She left your ass.”

For the past nine years, he and I have been having the same argument over and over again. I had been out with him on this day nine years ago, and when we arrived back to my place late in the evening, the woman that I had been dating for just over a year had been gone. There was a bag half packed on the bed, and her phone was sitting next to it. I had called the police and tried to file a missing person report, but they had told me it looked like she had left and there was no sign of forced entry. There was a hastily written note that they found under the bed that simply said, *I need time*, and they took that as a sign she simply left, but I know better. Something had to have happened for Tanya to never come back.

Now, nine years later, Josh and I are still fighting over what really happened. I don’t know what, but I know with every

fiber of my being that something happened to her. She wouldn't just run away and leave everything behind. Josh thinks that's exactly what she did. He thinks she left her phone and all the clothes behind because they were things I bought her. He thinks that she didn't want to take anything that reminded her of me or that I could use to find her after she took off. There's no way he could be right, though.

We were in love, and I was planning on proposing to her. How could she have been so unhappy as to leave without me noticing that something was wrong?

I shake myself from those thoughts and lift my empty glass for the waiter to bring me another.

"Either way, she's gone, and I need time to get past that."

He stares at me for a moment with a look of disappointment before shaking his head.

"Hey, give me a break. I rarely turn you down when you ask me to hangout. Can't you give me that? You know I don't party that much."

He smirks at me and turns to face two women that have been eyeing us since I sat down.

"Well, you're out now, so we need to make the most of it."

Sipping my drink, I make eye contact with one of the women, and she smiles at me. I let my eyes trail over her body, and it hits me how much she looks like Tanya. She has dark brown hair, and her eyes look dark from this distance, but I can't tell what color they are in this lighting. She has a curvy body, and her legs look a mile long with her stiletto heels.

My stomach tightens with both lust and pain. She's beautiful, but I don't think I could even have a conversation with her without picturing Tanya, never mind having her in my bed.

I turn quickly to Josh before he can call his ridiculous dibs on one of them.

"I call dibs on the blonde."

He turns to me in shock and an incredulous smile spreads across his face.

“Would you look at that! Chandler Bishop calling dibs on a woman. You really are coming out of your cave.”

I roll my eyes and slowly uncurl myself from my seat. I’m not about to tell him that the only reason I am is because I can’t stand to look at her friend all night long and see Tanya in her.

“Whatever, man. Are we going to make a move or are we just going to sit here like insecure boys waiting for them to make theirs?”

If there was anything to get Josh to shut up and get moving, it was a threat to his masculinity.

“You keep talking like that, and I’m going to be taking home both women.”

I snort at his bravado and shove him as he walks by me. I follow after him and watch as he turns on his charm and smiles at the women. I don’t know if I’m up to this. I’ve been with my fair share of women in the last nine years, but every time feels like a betrayal to Tanya. Like I’m cheating on her.

Josh turns to me and introduces me to the ladies, and I do my best to pull myself out of the dark hole I can feel myself start to fall down. Josh is right, it’s time that I pull myself up and start to move on. I will always love Tanya, but I can’t take the empty, lonely feeling anymore. My world has been cold since she’s been gone, and I want to find the warmth again.

I’M SITTING on one of the black leather couches in the VIP section, in a secluded dark corner where the lights from the main floor don’t quite reach, with the tall, strawberry blonde woman from before straddling my lap. Her body is thin and lean, and I can’t stop running my hands all over her. Her long legs are on either side of me, and her black dress has risen to the curve of her ass. Her long, thick hair is tickling my hands as I run them up her back to cup her head. We’ve both had a few drinks, and Josh and her friend ditched us long ago. Probably in a similar position as we are. We’ve been making out pretty heavily for a while now, and by the way she keeps grinding into me, I know where she’s wanting this to go. Back

to one of our places. We're both too tall for this couch, and there isn't much room for us to do more.

I run my hands back down her back before sliding them around her back and down to squeeze her ass in my hands. She moans when I pull her closer and cause her center to grind into me. She pulls away to breathe, and I trail my lips down her neck, pulling the strap of her dress off her shoulder to reveal more of her cleavage. I nip at her skin, and she gasps.

"Let's get out of here." Her voice is breathless.

I pull away from her and look up into her eyes. They're a hazel greenish color.

They're the wrong shade.

The thought crosses my mind before I can stop it, and it leaves a bitter taste in my mouth.

"I don't think that's a good idea."

I remove my hands from her body and gently push her off of my lap and onto the cushion next to me.

"In fact, I think we should stop. I apologize for making you think there was going to be more, but I can't."

I don't look at her as I stand from the couch. I know she's probably pissed that I ended things the way I did and right when she is expecting us to take things further, and I don't want to wait around for the argument.

"She wrecked you, didn't she?"

I freeze at her words, then spin around to face her.

"What?"

If Josh told her about Tanya, I'm going to kill him.

"Whoever broke your heart. She did a number on you, huh?"

She stands from the couch and fixes her dress as she steps closer to me.

"Did Josh tell you this? Did he want you to get to know me so that we would sleep together?"

She tilts her head to the side and furrows her brow in confusion. I feel a little bad jumping down her throat, but I need to know if Josh is trying to pull strings. Her eyes search mine like she's looking into my soul.

"No, he didn't say anything to me. I can just see it."

My back straightens at her words, and I start to turn away, but she gently grabs my arm.

"Wait, I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything by it. It just takes one to know one, you know?"

I turn back to look at her, surprised that she knows what I'm going through.

"It's a long story."

She nods and rubs my arm. The motion is meant to be comforting, but, for some reason, all that I feel from her touch is pity and bitterness. I gently move away from her until her hand drops from my arm.

"I understand. It's not easy to talk about. I also don't blame you for stopping this. It's been three months since he broke up with me, and I thought I was ready for it, but I'll admit that I'm relieved you turned me down."

Three months?

I shuffle my feet, ready to bolt if she asks me how long Tanya has been gone. The fact that she's ready to start moving on after three months makes me feel like maybe Josh is right about me taking so long, but on the other hand, her boyfriend broke up with her; Tanya just disappeared.

There has been no closure for me. I don't know if she really did run away. If someone took her. I have no idea what has happened to her and where she has been for the last nine years.

One day she was here, and the next she was gone. I didn't bother trying to find her family. She wasn't close to any of them and had cut off contact with them before we met. I knew that if she did run, there was no way she would run to any of them.

I clear my throat and take another step away from her.

“Yeah, well, I’m still sorry I let it go so far before stopping us.”

I can’t meet her eyes, and I want nothing more than to run out of this club. She smiles at me and grabs her purse from the table.

“Don’t sweat it. I’m going to go find our friends.”

She turns and walks out of the VIP area, and I let out a forceful breath before taking a seat. I know Josh is going to come find me and complain at me. I run my hands through the short strands of my hair and sit with my head in my hands until Josh comes to find me.

“Dude, what the hell? I thought you were going to take her home. Now her friend won’t leave her alone and is going to go with her.”

I look up at him, and when he sees the look on my face, he stops and sighs.

“You really need to move on, man. No matter what happened, she’s not coming back.”

He shoves his hands into his pockets and turns to leave the section again. With him gone and the night now a bust, I just want to go home. Hopefully, now that I’ve had plenty of alcohol, I will be able to fall asleep quickly.

Steven is waiting for me outside, next to the dark gray Toyota Land Cruiser that I just recently purchased. It’s the newest model and its sleek but bulky build drew me in. The seats are black fabric, and the backseat is roomy for someone of my height. When I walk out of the club, swaying side to side, he gets out and walks around to open the back door for me. I stumble and nearly trip getting into the back, and I see his eyebrows come together over his eyes in a look of concern before he closes the door and gets back into the driver seat.

“Everything alright, sir?”

I nod my head once in response, then turn to stare out the window. He takes the hint that I am not going to talk about it with him, and he starts the car and pulls away from the curb.

I go on autopilot on the way home. My brain is numb from the many drinks, and the passing scenery lulls me into a type of trance. I don't even notice that we've arrived home until my driver clears his throat.

"Sir, we're back."

I look around and see that we've parked in one of my spots in the garage, and Steven is waiting for me to get out. I thank him and fumble my way out of the car and to the elevator. I have to lean against the wall while I wait for the elevator to arrive, the drinks finally catching up to me and making me drowsy.

The doors finally open, and I have to put in a code to get up to the penthouse. It takes me a few tries, but I finally get it in and stand against the back wall while it gains speed as it rises. I must have started to doze off, because the ding of the elevator arriving at my floor jerks me awake and I jump.

I take one step into my cold apartment and stare around at the dark room. It's an open floor plan, and from where I stand in the entryway, I can see the whole first floor. Across from me is the living room with the back wall made of windows overlooking Central Park, and all I can see at this time of night past my balcony are lights from the city. My housekeeper, a middle-aged woman who has been with me since I got started, has already gone to bed and has left a light on for me.

I start toward my bedroom and stop just in front of the door. I don't want to spend another night in there without someone next to me. I turn as quickly as I can without falling over and make my way to my office. I have some emails waiting for me, and I want to look them over before I fall sleep on the couch that I have in there. There have been many nights over the years where that couch has been my safe haven late into the night.

I make it to my office and stare at the giant mahogany desk with my laptop on it and decide that I don't have the energy to open emails right now. I turn to the couch against the windows and fall face first into the couch, hoping that I can fall asleep before my mind can start to wander again. I don't want to

think anymore, but one last thought drifts through my mind before I can stop it.

I'm going to find you, Tanya, no matter how long it takes me.

CHANDLER

The week passed too slowly for me, but I'm glad it's finally Friday and I can do absolutely nothing for the next two days. My schedule has been packed lately, and I need some time off before I burn out. I learned my lesson early on when I started my company and worked nonstop. It took a while for me to pull myself out of that rut, and I promised myself I would never get to that point again.

I hit the intercom button on my desk phone that connects me with my assistant.

"Jillian, will you come in here and bring the schedule?"

I release the button and wait for her reply.

A beep sounds just before her voice comes through. "Of course, I'll be right there."

I start collecting all of my things to take home with me while I wait for Jillian to come in. I want to get out of here as soon as we are done going over the schedule for the next week. She breezes in and smiles at me as she takes a seat across from me, and I can't help but smile back. Jillian has worked for me for six years, and she's the best assistant I've ever had. She is like a little sister to me, and I'm grateful that she continues to work for me.

"Do you want to go over everything that you have for the next week or are you wanting to shuffle things around?"

"List off what I have for next week. I've lost track of who needs what and when."

With my things packed and ready to go, I sit in my chair and rub tiredly at my face. I drop my hand and look over to Jillian and see that she is giving me a reproachful look.

“What?”

She raises one eyebrow at me.

“You’re overworking again. Have you been sleeping at all?”

I smile innocently at her, and she simply rolls her eyes.

“I’m fine, it’s just been a long week. Let’s go over this so I can get home and sleep.”

She looks down at her tablet in her lap and taps at the screen a few times until she has the schedule in front of her.

“The beginning of the week is pretty clear. You have one meeting Monday afternoon, then you are pretty busy Thursday and Friday with quite a few meetings both days. Marketing is going to be ready to present Friday afternoon as well, so we’ll have to fit them in somewhere.”

She pauses as she scrolls through her notes and calendar, and I wait for her to finish.

“That looks to be about it for next week. Don’t forget that you already RSVPed to the charity gala tomorrow at Willow Creek Memorial. Do you want to drive down or take the helicopter?”

I groan and slump down in my chair.

“I did forget about that. I’ll take the copter. I don’t want to have to waste most of the day to get ready and drive an hour there. Plus, I’m going to want to drink.”

She nods and starts tapping away at the tablet again. I’m assuming to make plans for the helicopter to be ready for me to use. There is always someone on standby to get my private jet or helicopter ready for me to take on a moment’s notice.

“Alright, done. They will have the helicopter ready at four. Do you want me to get you a suite at the local hotel so you can get ready there?”

The gala doesn’t start until eight, and I’ll probably wait until nine to go. The later I go, the less time I will have to spend

there mingling with people.

“Yeah, go ahead and see what they have available. Book whatever you can find on short notice; I don’t care what it is. Send me the information then go home. I’m getting out of here.”

She nods her head but doesn’t bother to look up at me when I stand. I chuckle to myself, she’s as bad as I am at working too much.

I need to make sure she gets another raise.

I grab my bookbag with all my things and swing it over my shoulder as I leave the office. I know I don’t have to worry about leaving her in my office on her own. She’s too absorbed in doing her job to even think about doing anything. She’s also the most loyal employee I’ve ever had.

Steven is waiting for me out front of the Bishop Enterprise building, and once he sees me, he opens the back door for me.

“Good afternoon, Steven. I’m not going to need you tomorrow. I’ll be taking the copter to Willow Creek, so you’ll have the night off.”

He nods once in acknowledgement, and I climb into the car. On the drive home, I debate whether or not I should cancel going to the gala, but ultimately, I know that I need to go. There are going to be a lot of important people there, and it’s for a good cause. I don’t have any children, but I still like to donate to education causes to help the future generations. I struggled through college and had to work to pay for my classes and support myself, and if I can help one child not have to deal with that, I will feel like I’ve accomplished something.

AS SOON AS I woke up this morning, I went over every excuse I could think of to get out of going to the gala. I didn’t have to go, but there had been promises made, and people were expecting to see me there. I spent the morning reading the news on my tablet and flipping through the channels until I

found some old movie to keep my attention until I had to get ready to go.

Now I'm on my way down the elevator to meet Steven so he can take me to the airfield for the helicopter. I put on a pair of old jeans and a T-shirt to travel in, and my suit for tonight is in a garment bag thrown over my arm. We should arrive in Willow Creek at 4:30 p.m. at the earliest, and it will give me about three and a half hours to try and get a nap in before I have to get ready for the gala.

I've never been to Willow Creek before. It's a very small town, and I'm surprised that Jillian was able to find a hotel room for me at all. I wouldn't be surprised if the people of this town just set up visitors in their own homes, it's so small. They can't get that many visitors.

The copter ride is quick, only thirty minutes compared to the hour it would have taken to drive here. The small airport is right next to the hotel I'm staying at, so by 4:50 p.m. I've arrived, checked in, and set up in my room, which gives me plenty of time to sleep some, since I'm going to need to rest as much as possible if I'm going to be able to mingle with people tonight. It's exhausting to even think about. Constantly having to charm people and make sure I keep their support for my business was getting tiring, and I was losing the fight to keep on doing it.

I hang my suit on the back of the bathroom door and collapse onto the bed, instantly falling asleep. It's easier for me to sleep away from my apartment.

MY ALARM JERKS me from a deep sleep, and for a moment, I'm disoriented. I look around the room, and I remember where I am and why. Sighing, I sit up and try to rub at my face to wake myself up some. I have thirty minutes to get ready and make it to the hospital where the gala is being held. I pick up my phone, and as I go into the bathroom to get ready, I pull up the app to find a car to take me to the hospital. I'm surprised when I find that there are none near.

Fucking small towns.

I throw my phone onto the bed and get ready. I'll have to get the address to the hospital and see where it's located.

Looks like I'll be walking.

Luckily, it's early September, so it's not too hot for a walk. I take a quick shower and finish getting ready with ten minutes to spare. When I pull up the hospital address, it's only a mile from the hotel. I'll arrive a little later than I had planned, but that just means that I will have to spend even less time there than I planned.

On the walk to the hospital, I take in the town as I go. It's straight from a fairy tale story, locally owned mom and pop shops line the one main road that leads in and out of the town. There's one coffee shop in the middle of town, and it looks like none of the big franchises have made it to this town.

Probably the last place on Earth that doesn't have a Starbucks.

The only thing this town has going for it is the beautiful scenery. Living in New York City, the only view of nature is from my penthouse window where I can see Central Park. Here, I'm surrounded by nature. Trees outnumber the number of buildings; it's quiet except for the sounds of animals chirping and shuffling through the grass. There are wildflowers everywhere I look, and the shops are decorated with more colorful flowers and plants.

I have to admit that it's a very peaceful walk.

I finally arrive at the hospital, and I'm grateful that I'm not a sweating mess as I walk through the sliding doors. There are people milling about, nurses and patients, and as I walk through in my black-tie suit, I get curious looks. There is a sign near the elevators telling people that are here for the gala to go to the cafeteria for the event.

I head down the hallway that the sign is pointing, and I'm assuming the cafeteria is through the double doors. Just as I'm reaching for the door handle, the door opens and a group of young kids run out. Laughter following after them as they run

down the hall. Laughing at the excitement of kids, I grab the edge of the door and pull it fully open so I can walk in.

The room is fuller than I thought it would be in such a small place, but I'm glad to see that this charity is getting traction. I wave to some of the event planners that I know and see more familiar faces than I thought I would. I look around the large room, there are big round tables taking over most of the area. A table is set up close to the door for a greeting area, and across from it is a table with a sign that is labeled "auction items." The lights are dim, and there is a spotlight pointing at a podium at the front of the room. They paid good money for a decorator and caterer. The food is spread out like it's an art piece, and the table and chair are covered with maroon-colored covers and table clothes.

There is a welcome table set up to my left, and the woman behind it smiles at me. She's pretty in a sweet girl next door kind of way. She has short blonde hair, bright blue eyes, and the dress she is wearing hugs her slight curves. I smile back at her and make my way over to the table. When I'm close enough, I see her name tag says Kayla.

"Welcome! Thank you for coming to support our charity. Over here are the name tags, and with it you will find your table number and a paper of the items for sale tonight. Over there is the table for things that you would like to put up for auction, and we should be getting started on bidding in fifteen minutes."

I follow her hand with my eyes as she points everything out, then reach over to grab my name tag and the papers that are with it.

"Thanks. Is there a goal for the night?"

"Nothing specific, we just want to raise as much as possible tonight."

I nod and look over the list of items while I turn to go to the auction table. I have a couple of items that I could probably list and want to put them down to help raise money. Just as I'm looking up to walk across the room, the group of kids from before runs back in; they are giggling and tripping over

each other as they push their way into the room. There are three little boys, but the little girl catches my eye.

It strikes me that she looks like I did at her age, but with dark brown curly hair. She looks so much like I did that it stops me in my tracks.

A woman's voice comes from behind me, and at the sound of her voice, ice fills my veins.

“Sophia, it's time to take our seats, sweetheart.”

Tanya?

I turn around so fast that I get lightheaded for a moment, and when the room stabilizes again, my eyes lock on Tanya. My Tanya. Her dark brown hair is longer, down to the middle of her back, her curves are more defined, more mature than they were, and her tight red dress hugs her body perfectly. She's lost the young girl look and is now a woman in every meaning of the word. I stumble a couple of steps in her direction at the same time the little girl who caught my attention moments ago races past me. I can do nothing but watch as Tanya takes the little curly haired girl's hand.

She doesn't just look a little like me, she looks exactly like me.

Suddenly, Tanya looks up and her eyes land on me. Those same emerald green eyes that I've loved for so long. My breath gets caught in my chest as her eyes meet mine for the first time in nine years. My heart is racing, and my chest is clenched tight in a vice. The smile she had on her face slowly fades as she catches me staring at her, and I can tell I'm making her uncomfortable, but I can't take my eyes off of her. I'm afraid that if I so much as blink, she will disappear.

She stares at me for a moment, and I can only imagine what my face looks like. I wait for the recognition to show on her face and for whatever is to come next, but instead her eyes stay tight and guarded, and she gives me a polite smile and walks away. Like she doesn't even know who I am, like she's looking at a stranger.

What's going on?

I can't move my body. I want to follow after her and demand she talk to me. Tell me where she's been all these years and why she's acting like she doesn't know me, but I can't move.

"Do you know Tanya and Sophia?"

The woman from the welcome table, Kayla, is suddenly next to me, and it makes me jump. I turn my head in her direction and look at her for a split second before turning to look back at Tanya's retreating form.

"Is Sophia her daughter?"

Kayla smiles fondly after the two.

"Yeah, sweetest little girl. It's just the two of them. Sophia just turned eight, and they've been living here since just before Sophia was born; they've become such a huge part of our community."

I block out whatever else Kayla is saying and do the math in my head again.

That little girl is mine. Is that why she disappeared? Because she was having my child?

My heart rate increases along with my breathing, and Kayla places a hand on my arm, a concerned look on her face.

"Are you alright, sir?"

I know I need to calm down. I need to get information on Tanya, and I can't do that if I scare off the people close to her.

I clear my throat. "Yes, sorry. I just thought she was someone else. You said her name is Tanya?"

Still looking worried about me, Kayla slowly nods her head.

"Yes, she's my best friend. She has the most unique story."

I try to make my face as open and friendly as possible so she will feel comfortable telling me more.

"Really? Do you mind me asking what it is?"

Tell me why Tanya ran away from me, pregnant with our child.

I can feel anger start to burn in my chest at the thought that she didn't want to have the child with me.

“Oh, I’m sure she wouldn’t mind. It’s not like it wasn’t all the town talked about when it happened. Nine years ago, she was found in a single car accident. It was terrible. I was one of the nurses that took care of her. We have no idea what caused her to crash; she had no identification on her, nothing that could tell us who she was; when she woke up from her coma, we found that she had no idea who she was. She has amnesia from the accident, and she’s never recovered her memories.”

The anger I was starting to feel vanishes in an instant. That’s why she looked at me like she didn’t know me, she doesn’t. I am a stranger to her, and she has no idea I’m the father of her child.

“Was she pregnant with Sophia when the accident happened?”

If she was, it will confirm that Sophia is mine.

“Yeah, she was about three months along, I believe. I honestly think that little girl saved her, you know? She is the only thing that connects Tanya to her past.”

She was pregnant when she disappeared.

“Thank you for telling me her story. It is a very unique one. If you will excuse me, I’m going to write some things down for auction before the bidding starts.”

Kayla smiles at me, and I turn and walk to a door at the side of the room that is labeled *EXIT*. I need a moment to collect myself. I open the door, and the cool air rushes over my heated body. In the span of two minutes, I found out that Tanya is alive, she’s been living with our daughter an hour away, and she has no idea who I am.

I have no idea what I’m supposed to do. Do I just let her keep on living as she has been for nine years, or do I let her know who I am? Who she is?

Does she really have amnesia or is all of this just a ploy?

I write down my items on the page, then go and find the table I am supposed to be sitting at. Once I’m settled, I look around the room, trying to find Tanya. I catch sight of her straight ahead of me, where I have the perfect view of her and Sophia for the rest of the night.

She's still so beautiful. Seeing her tend to our daughter while dinner is served has me emotional, and it's taking everything in me to focus on the conversation that is going on at my own table. I watch Tanya cut up her food and place a napkin inside the collar of her dress. She smooths our daughter's hair out of her face, a soft maternal smile on her face. I'm grateful when dinner is done and everyone shifts to look at the makeshift stage set up at the front of the room. While everyone is distracted by the bidding, I can take this time to focus on Tanya again.

My body is tense as I sit in my chair, fisting my hands to physically keep myself still so I don't march over to her and take her and our daughter and make them come back home with me. I don't want to scare either of them.

I take my phone out of my pocket and text Jillian.

Me: Something has come up. Please cancel the helicopter, extend my hotel room another night, and have a rental car delivered to me in the morning.

Jillian: Will do. Is everything okay?

Me: I will explain when I get back.

I put my phone away and bring my attention back to Tanya. Sophia gets down from her chair and crawls into Tanya's lap, letting out a big yawn before snuggling into her mother's chest and closing her eyes. Tanya sits back in her chair to make room for her on her lap and wraps her arms around the sleepy little girl. She gently rocks side to side and kisses the top of her head. Our daughter's face is turned so I can see it, and her little cherub face is peaceful as she falls asleep in her mother's arms, feeling safe to do so in a room full of people. An ache pinches inside my chest at the sight. I've missed out on the first eight years of my daughter's life. I missed out on Tanya carrying our child.

As the thoughts of how much I've missed out on swirl around my head, I decide right then that I will tell Tanya everything tomorrow. I'm not going to miss out on having her and our daughter back, even if she is faking it all. Right now, I feel like

I'm going to suffocate in this room. I don't want to make a scene, and I need time to calm down before approaching her.

TANYA

I have an early shift at the café this morning. As I make my way behind the counter and into the back, I curse Kayla in my head. I never should have let her talk me into going last night. Sophia was a bear to get up this morning because she went to sleep so late last night. I did get some satisfaction when I rang Kayla's doorbell and woke her up so I could drop Sophia off. I know they both probably went back to sleep, but small wins are still wins.

The café has already been open for thirty minutes when I arrive, and there are a couple of customers waiting to get their coffee and breakfast. Ms. Poppy is already taking people's orders at the register, and there are two people working on the drink orders.

"Tanya, could you run things out to people? There is an order ready to go to that gentleman in the corner."

"Sure, no problem."

I finish tying the apron around my waist and pick up the coffee and chocolate chip muffin to take to the customer. When I step up next to him, he looks up at me and our eyes meet, making my breath catch in my throat.

He has Soph's eyes.

He smiles at me, and I realize that I've just been standing here staring at him.

"Oh, sorry. Here is your coffee and muffin. Let me know if there is anything else you need."

I turn quickly and make my way back to the safety of the counter. Ms. Poppy gives me a look.

“What was that about? Did his beauty dazzle you to the point that you forgot what you were doing?”

She smirks at me, and I roll my eyes.

I really need to stop doing that so Sophia stops rolling her eyes at me.

I glance at the stranger out of the corner of my eye. He is the first person in nine years that I have ever seen with the same sea blue eyes with a golden ring around the pupil. They're the same shade as Sophia's. I fiddle with the locket around my neck and lean back against the counter behind me. One of my coworkers comes up next to me to fill a cup with coffee.

“Why don't you talk to him? He's beyond attractive, and you haven't been on a date in a while.”

I scoff at her. “I have an eight-year-old daughter at home; when exactly do you expect me to date? Plus, he's not from around here.”

I glance back over at him, and just as I do, he looks up and our eyes lock again. He smiles at me, and I can feel my cheeks heat as I quickly look away. The girls laugh at my bashfulness, and I turn my back to the customers to stick my tongue out at them.

“Do you let Sophia see you do that?”

I laugh and turn around to walk the order I'm holding over to the couple that is sitting in the middle of the room. We're hit with a constant flow of customers coming and going for the next hour, but the entire time I am hyperaware of the man with eyes like my daughter's sitting by the window.

There is a tension in the air that has me on edge, and a tugging sensation in my chest that keeps me aware of him at all times. Once the flow of customers slows a bit, I take the chance to take a quick break in the back. I need a minute to breathe and escape the intense connection I feel toward a man I don't know.

“Mommy!”

Sophia’s voice calling for me from the lobby makes me smile, and I go out to see what she and Kayla are up to. I plaster on a smile and work to ignore the man and focus on my daughter.

“Hey, you. What are you guys doing here? I figured you’d sleep at least until lunch.”

Sophia runs and jumps into my arms when I walk around the counter, and Kayla glares at me.

“We could have, but your mini me there is an early riser. I got her to sleep for another hour before she was bouncing off the walls to do something. We’re stopping in for one coffee and one chocolate milk.”

I kiss Sophia on the head, then set her down so I can make their drinks. Sophia comes to help me, and I see Kayla look around before her eyes land on the strange man and she smiles.

“Hey, you. Did you enjoy the gala last night?”

I turn to watch her approach the man, and he smiles politely at her.

“I did. All of my items sold, so that was a great ending to the night.”

I don’t hear what else they say as Soph pulls my attention back to her and the drink we are making. We get them made, and as Sophia carefully carries her drink back to the other side of the counter, I pack a few treats for them to take with them. I ring everything up under my employee ID and hand everything to Kayla as she and the man walk up to the counter.

“Well, it was nice meeting you, Chandler. I’ve got to keep this one occupied while her mother works. Thanks, Tan. Sophia, say bye to your momma and Mr. Chandler.”

Sophia looks up at the man and smiles shyly at him. When he smiles back and waves at her, she blushes, and I’m shocked to see it. My girl is not usually shy. I watch as she grabs Kayla’s hand and shuffles closer to her side. Chandler watches her too,

and his smile turns soft. He clears his throat, as if he's overcome with emotions, and I can't figure out why.

I wave at them as they leave to go do whatever Kayla has planned for the day, and once they are out the door, I turn to the man, Chandler, where he stands in line.

"Another coffee, sir?"

He smiles at me and my stomach flutters at the sight, he really is attractive. His dirty blonde hair is cut in a stylish fashion, the top longer than the sides. He has a sharp jawline that makes me want to drool, and from the way his clothes fit his tall form, I can tell he takes care of himself.

"Please, and another chocolate chip muffin. I have a concerning weakness for chocolate."

I laugh nervously and put in his order before turning back to him. He's close to me now, leaning toward me with his arms bracing his body as his hands are spread out on the counter. I can feel heat spread across my face again, and it bugs me that I'm blushing like a schoolgirl around him, like my eight-year-old daughter did.

"This is a nice café. I've never been to Willow Creek before last night, and I'm surprised by how much I like it."

"Where are you from?"

"I live in the city, I only flew in for the gala, never had a reason to travel here before. Though, that may change."

He looks intensely at me, his eyes darken, and he won't look away. I have to clear my throat at the feel of the heat that is coming from his eyes.

"You met Kayla last night at the gala? What made you stay around?"

He pauses and a strange look crosses his face.

"I was there because of some connections I have. They know I like to donate to educational causes, and I decided to check the town out."

I nod in understanding, and there is an awkward silence before his order is ready and I turn to grab it for him.

“Here you go. Is there anything else I can get for you?”

I give him my customer service smile and clasp my hands in front of me. He’s making me nervous, and I just want him to go sit down.

“What time are you done here today?”

I’m taken aback by his question.

“Uh, I’m done at one.”

He nods.

“When you clock out, come sit with me. I think we should talk.”

My brows come together at his words.

Is he hitting on me?

“Oh, um, I’m not sure. I have to pick up my daughter.”

His eyes spark, and he smiles at me. I don’t like that it’s his reaction to me, but I ignore it.

“What if I promise that what I have to say is going to be the most interesting thing I’m sure you’ve heard in a long time?”

I hum doubtfully in reply.

“You think pretty highly of yourself, don’t you?”

His smile widens, and it just ticks me off more.

“I do have a high opinion of myself, but that has nothing to do with what we need to talk about.”

I cross my arms over my chest, and his eyes catch on my locket. He puts his things back down on the counter and leans closer to me. I don’t move and just narrow my eyes at him.

“Come on, just sit with me for a little bit. We don’t have to leave here.”

I study him, his eyes and smile are soft, like he’s trying to show me that he isn’t a threat to just talk to.

“I guess I can talk for a few minutes.”

His smile widens, and he straightens again, picking up his things.

“Great! I look forward to it.”

He turns and walks back to his seat, and I feel Ms. Poppy nudge me.

“What a hottie.”

I roll my eyes and prepare myself for the teasing that I know is going to happen.

I'M DISTRACTED for the rest of my shift. I kept giving the wrong orders to the wrong customers, and by the fifth time it happens, Ms. Poppy puts me behind the counter to make the orders instead.

Why does he want to talk to me?

I keep an eye on him while I work. He stays at the same table, working away on his laptop. He makes a few phone calls, but I can't hear what he says to know what he does for work. He's caught me watching him a couple of times, and every time he does, he smiles and winks at me, causing me to jerk my head away and a blush to spread across my face.

The girls tease me every time I blush. They are excited at the thought of me meeting a guy. I try to downplay it and tell them it doesn't mean anything, but I don't think they take me seriously.

My shift ends, and Ms. Poppy gives me a look.

“What?”

She places her hands on her hips, a dish towel hanging from one.

“Don't let your fear stop you from making a connection.”

Another thing about this small town is the gossip. There isn't a thing that can get by the older ladies of this town, and Ms. Poppy is the leading gossip. If there is something to know, you

can count on them to have the information, and they will insert themselves and give their opinions without question.

“What if he’s just trying to get in my pants?”

She tilts her head back and laughs her hearty, booming laugh. Everyone in the café turns to look at her.

“Honey, would that be such a bad thing? You don’t get out much; it could help you relax.”

She waggles her eyebrows at me as I blush and roll my eyes at her.

I turn to look at him and try to make a list of pros and cons.

“You’re never going to know unless you get over there and talk to him. I’ll be right here the whole time, so you don’t have to worry about anything.”

I know she’s right; it’s just been a while since I’ve flirted with a guy.

What if I hate it? What if he’s a jerk?

I take a deep breath and straighten my back, roll my shoulders back, and walk over to this very attractive man. As I walk around the counter, I hear Ms. Poppy’s voice coming softly behind me.

“That’s my girl.”

My lips twitch with a smile. Ms. Poppy has become a maternal figure to me and her approval means the world to me. I step up next to Chandler, and he looks up at me with a smile before extending his hand to the empty chair across from him.

“Please, sit. I promise that I just want to talk.”

I slowly take a seat and pull out my phone.

“I need to text Kayla first to make sure she’s okay with my daughter.”

He nods, a serious look on his face as he gestures to my phone.

“Of course, go ahead.”

I send a quick message to Kayla telling her something came up and asking if she was good with Soph. She texts back with an

all good and thumbs up emoji. I place my phone face down on the table and look to Chandler.

“So, you wanted to talk.”

My heart is beating so fast in my chest that I’m afraid it’s going to give out. I haven’t experienced this much excitement since Sophia was born. He crosses his arms on the table and leans closer to me.

“I do, but first, I want you to know that Kayla told me some of your story last night at the gala.”

She told him about me?

“And why would she do that?”

Kayla would never tell a stranger about me without talking to me first.

“She saw me looking at you and mentioned something about you having an interesting story; I simply asked her to tell me about it.”

That’s it? That’s all it took for my best friend to spill her guts about me?

I study his face, trying to figure out his motive behind all of this.

“I knew you years ago.”

My entire body tenses and freezes at his words.

“What?”

He nods his chin toward me, his eyes on the locket around my neck.

“I gave you that.”

I reach up and grab my locket in my hand, still staring at him.

“Prove it.”

He smirks at me before saying, “To my sweet Tanya, I’m ready to face the world with you. I love you. C.”

I’m at a loss for words. My chest feels tight, and I have the sudden urge to run.

“And why are you coming here now?”

I watch as the corners of his eyes tighten.

“I didn’t know what happened to you or where you were. Last night was the first time I even knew you were alive.”

Now that I know that I have a connection to him, the look on his face last night makes more sense. I had been confused about why this man had been looking at me the way he had been, I hadn’t been able to tell what his expression meant, but now I can see it for what it was, recognition.

His eyes are locked intensely on me, and his eye color catches my attention once again. Panic starts to fill my chest, and my breathing picks up.

I can barely get the next words out of my mouth, and they come out strangled and no louder than a whisper.

“You’re her father.”

His face turns serious, and I can see his jaw tick as he clenches his teeth before nodding once.

“At least, I believe I am. She looks a lot like me when I was a kid, but with darker hair and she’s around the right age.”

I know nothing about him, but something deep in my gut is telling me that he is her dad.

I still can’t talk above a whisper as I ask, “Are you here to take her?”

His eyes widen and he places a hand on the table in front of me, but I sit back, not wanting him to touch me.

“No! God, no. I would never do that. I didn’t even know about her until last night. I didn’t know you were pregnant when you disappeared.”

“Disappeared?”

It never occurred to me before now that there are people out there that have no idea what happened to me. That may be looking for me.

“I’m assuming because of Sophia’s existence that we were an item?”

His lips twist into a smirk, and I can tell he’s trying to fight it.

“We were. We were together for a year and living together.”

It is a lot of information to take in all at once, and I have so many questions that I don’t know where to start.

“So, the locket? Oh, you’re C?”

I open to look at the inscription again.

I look up to meet his eye again, and he’s staring at the locket in my hand with a look of grief. A feeling of compassion, along with a sense of guilt, hit me in the chest over the fact that I can’t remember anything about him. I shift in my seat, uncomfortable with the feelings that this man is bringing out in me. It’s not my fault I can’t remember him, but I still feel sympathetic for him. He lost his lover, and now he’s found her, me, yet I have no idea who he is.

It’s been a long time since I’ve wished that I could just wake up in the morning and have all my memories back.

“Everything is ready for you to come back home. I haven’t changed anything or gotten rid of any of your stuff, so when you come home, maybe it will jog something for you. I can set up some therapy appointments for you if you would like, to help you and Sophia get used to everything.”

Come back home?

I sit up straight.

“What do you mean come back home?”

He pauses mid-sentence and looks at me with a wary expression.

“Well, now that you know who you are and where you come from, I figured you would want to go back home. To where you belong.”

Everything is getting to be too much, and it’s getting hard to breathe. I frantically search around the room, the tables and chairs seem closer than ever, and the walls feel like they are

slowly closing in on me. I take a deep breath to try and calm myself before speaking.

“Listen, I appreciate you approaching me and telling me who I am, but I’m not leaving with you. I still don’t know who you are. This is my home. This is where I’ve raised my daughter, and it’s all either of us know. For all I know, you could be lying. I’m not leaving. You can’t force to me leave.”

I’m feeling panicked, and I can’t be around him. I never thought I would end this day with my entire past being held out to me on a platter.

He looks irritated, and I prepare myself for an argument.

“Don’t you want to try and get your memories back? Being where you belong is the best way for that to happen.”

Anger surges through me, and I stand.

“I’ve given up on expecting them to come back; it’s been nine years, and I’ve built a life here. I’m not leaving just because you think I belong with you. I belong here, now I need to go pick up my daughter.”

I spin on my heel and rush out the door. The truth is I don’t know if I even want my memories to come back. I don’t know if I want to know who I was. I never thought I would have to choose to get them back or not.

TANYA

I meet up with Kayla and Sophia at a nearby park; there are kids running around and screaming with excitement and joy, and I struggle to find Sophia. As soon as Kayla sees me, I can tell that she already knows that something is wrong. Her smile drops from her face, and her eyebrows come together in a look of concern. I plop down on to the bench she has claimed for herself and let out a long sigh as I watch Sophia running and laughing with other kids her age.

“Tough day at work?”

I give a pointed look at Sophia, and then look back at Kayla.

“I’ll explain later. You aren’t going to believe what happened. All I can say is that it involves your new friend from last night.”

Kayla’s eyebrows raise in interest.

“The unbelievably good-looking one that couldn’t keep his eyes off of you?”

I roll my eyes at her, but before I can reply, Sophia spots me.

“Mommy!”

I smile at her as she runs and jumps into my arms.

“Hey, baby girl. Did you have fun with Aunt Kayla today?”

She nods excitedly.

“Do we have to leave now? I don’t want to go yet.”

Kayla and I laugh at her pouty look.

“No, you can keep playing; Aunt Kayla and I will sit here and talk.”

She smiles widely at me, then runs off to play with the group of kids that are waiting for her.

I let out a tired sigh and lean back on the bench. This day has turned into one that I never saw coming. How do I even come to terms with all that has happened? I know Kayla is going to freak out just as much as I did. I can feel myself ready to blurt everything out to her.

“So, what happened with Chandler?”

“He knows me from before. Apparently, we were living together when I had my accident.”

Kayla is taking a sip of her drink as I speak, and when what I say registers, she starts coughing and choking. I can’t help but laugh as I pat her on the back.

In a strangled voice she says, “I’m sorry, what?”

I tell her about everything that happened with Chandler, and by the time I’m done explaining our conversation, she is staring at me with her mouth wide open.

“So, he just happened to go to a charity event that you were attending and found his long-lost love after nine years?”

I cringe at her words.

“Please, don’t call me that. I still don’t know him. Seeing him didn’t cause all my memories to magically come back. No matter how much he seems to want them to.”

I don’t like the feeling of guilt I’m having over something I have no control over.

“It’s not like I’ve forgotten everything on purpose. Doesn’t he think that if I could simply make my memories come back, I would? And how the hell does he expect me to just drop everything and follow him wherever?”

The look of pity that Kayla gives me just angers me more. She looks at me with her eyes full of sadness and her lips turned

down at the corners, like she just can't help but feel bad for the woman with no memories.

"Don't look at me like that. I've come to terms with the fact that they will never return. Nine years is a long time. I'm just pissed that he has the audacity to expect me to just move back in with him like nothing happened. He's a stranger to me. I wouldn't do that to myself, and I won't have some random man around my daughter."

My breathing has picked up with my rant, and Kayla's next words knock the breath right out of my chest.

"That random man is her dad."

Tears fill my eyes as I look over to Kayla.

"I don't know what to do."

She sets her drink down next to her, wraps her arm around my shoulders, and pulls me close to her side.

"We will figure it out. You don't have to move in with him. I agree that it's way too much for him to ask, but I do think you need to get to know him again. For Sophia's sake, and so you can get to know yourself again. I'm sure he can answer all the burning questions I know you've had all these years."

Sighing, I sink further into her side and watch Sophia laughing and running around with the other kids.

"She has his eyes."

Kayla doesn't say anything, she just squeezes me tighter and rubs my arm. I feel so lost at the moment, and it angers me that I do. I haven't felt this way since I first woke up that dreadful day nine years ago.

BOTH SOPHIA and I are exhausted by the time we make it home from the park. I send her off to take a shower while I search for something to order for dinner. I don't have the mental or physical ability to cook dinner tonight. I order the food, and once Sophia is done with the shower, I help her dry off and change into a pair of pj's. I can't help but wonder how

she's going to react to Chandler. So far, she hasn't asked any questions about having a dad, and I've been grateful to not have to explain it to her.

I get her set up with a movie in the living room and sit with my laptop at the kitchen table. I want to do some research on Chandler.

Me: Hey, can you get his last name for me?

Kayla: Not a problem, give me a minute.

I wait for her to contact whoever she needs to as I tap my fingers on the keys. My stomach full of butterflies as I do.

Kayla: Bishop.

It's an interesting last name, and I look over at Sophia on the couch.

Sophia Bishop.

Somehow it fits her perfectly, and I'm not comfortable with the thought. I type his name into the search bar and pages and pages of news articles load about him.

He's thirty-nine and has built a very successful business for himself, an architecture business that focuses on designing office buildings that are made with environmentally safe materials, both from where they get them and what the materials are made from. He's worth billions and has been named the most eligible bachelor in New York City.

All the articles talk about how he refuses to do interviews about it. The last page that I look at is dated from eight years ago, a year after I had the accident. The more I read, the more I feel sick to my stomach. It's all about how he lost the love of his life and the lengths that he went to find her. There are a couple of photos from before and after. It's obvious how much of a toll it took on him.

I can't finish the article, and I quickly hit the back button so that I can go back to the search browser page. I click on images at the top and start scrolling down the page of pictures of him. I make it to the end of the page and have to wait for

more photos to load, and when they do, my breath catches in my throat.

There are hundreds of pictures of him and me. Dressed in fancy clothes at some kind of events. Walking down the street holding hands. There is one that I click on and can't take my eyes off of it. It's the two of us standing on the sidewalk outside of what looks to be an apartment building. His arms are wrapped around my waist and mine are around his neck. We are staring into each other's eyes, and I look happy and in love.

I quickly close the laptop. The woman on the screen isn't me. She may look like me, but she isn't. Not anymore. Lost in thought, I am startled by our dinner delivery.

"Sophia, pause the movie while I pay for dinner and get the TV trays out."

Her eyes light up and she runs around the room to do as I said. We don't eat in front of the TV often, but I like to make a night of it every once in a while, and after the day I've had, I just want to spend some time with my girl, doing things that make her happy.

Maybe I'll even let her stay up late again tonight.

I answer the door and smile at the kid that is holding the bags with our food in them. I thank him and take the bags. When I get back into the living room, Sophia already has everything set up and is ready to go. I laugh and set the bags down on the coffee table.

The rest of the night I make an effort to push all thoughts of Chandler and my past out of my head and just focus on Sophia. It takes me some time to fully relax, but listening to her sweet giggles helps me to let go of the day. I love the bond I have with my daughter, and I'm worried about how it will change once I introduce Chandler into her life.

I know I will eventually tell her about him and let them get to know each other, I owe it to Sophia. I just don't know what will happen between Chandler and I. Part of me wonders what could be between us. Even though I know nothing about him,

there is still a piece of me that feels drawn to him. There's a pull there that I can't explain.

IT'S MONDAY, and I'm grateful that Sophia didn't stay up too late last night, she would have been an absolute bear if she had. She was in a great mood for the start of her second week. I have the day off since I worked the weekend, and I plan to deep clean the cabin. It doesn't really need it, but I need something to keep me occupied. I dress in my cut off jean shorts that are covered in bleach stains and paint, an old baggy T-shirt from the hospital, and a bandana around my head. I start with the upstairs and work my way downstairs, where I am hoping to end with the kitchen.

I turn on some music on my phone, a 2000s rock station on Spotify, and turn the volume up loud to drown out my thoughts. By noon, I finish with the upstairs and gather all of my cleaning supplies to bring downstairs. My hands are full of all the bottles and the bucket I've been using to clean, and just as I reach the last step, a knock sounds at my door.

Since it's the middle of the day on a Monday, I'm not expecting it, and it makes me jump. I drop everything in my arms, and it makes a loud crashing sound, my phone dropping with all of it and the music coming to a dramatic stop. The door flies open at the sound, and I'm surprised to see Chandler rushing into the cabin. The door slams into the wall behind it, and I stare in shock as he comes in looking around, his eyes wild like he's looking for an intruder other than himself. When he sees me standing on the stairs, he freezes and looks me up and down.

"I heard a crash. Are you okay?"

He eyes the things around my feet, and I see the moment he realizes what the sound was; he looks embarrassed.

"I dropped the stuff when you knocked. I wasn't expecting it, and it made me jump."

He clears his throat, shuffling from side to side, and runs his fingers through his hair self-consciously, looking everywhere

but at me.

“Oh, uh, sorry. I didn’t mean to just barge in; I just reacted.”

He cringes, and I have to work at keeping the smile off my face. I must not do a very good job, because when he looks up at me again, I can see his lips twitch before we both burst into laughter at the ridiculous situation.

I squat down to pick everything up off the floor, and I’m surprised again when Chandler comes over to help.

“I was just doing some deep cleaning on my day off while Soph is at school. Wanna tell me why you’re here?”

He nods and follows me to the kitchen where we put everything down on the counter. There is an awkward feeling around the room, and I shuffle on my feet as I wait for him to tell me why he’s here. It hits me then that I have no idea *how* he’s here.

“How did you know where I live?”

In a move that seems rather shy for a man like Chandler Bishop, he rubs the back of his neck as his cheeks turn a light pink.

Is he blushing?

I stare in shock at this very successful businessman as he blushes, and something about it makes him endearing to me.

“I asked around town to see if anyone knew. This town is full of people who are way too trusting, and it makes me even more concerned that your door was unlocked. You should make sure it stays locked.”

I don’t like that he’s trying to tell me what to do again, but I ignore it this time.

“Why are you here, Chandler? I thought I was pretty clear about where I stood yesterday.”

I would have rather approached him when I was ready, but now he’s here, and I don’t really have a choice.

“I want to talk some more. We can’t just leave things like that. We have too much between us, whether you remember some

of it or not. Our daughter, for one.”

Our daughter:

I jerk at the words. The thought brings out a myriad of emotions in me. Sophia is *our* daughter, not just mine.

“What else is there to say? You want to go back to how things were, and I’m not comfortable with moving in with you. You forget that I don’t know you now.”

He cringes slightly, and the guilt from yesterday is back. I push it down and steady my resolve. He is not going to get his way just because he’s some rich businessman that knows things about me that I don’t.

“I know, and after you left yesterday, I realized how unrealistic that was of me to think. Of course you wouldn’t be comfortable with me, but I’ve come here today to suggest a different alternative.”

It makes me nervous to see the hope in his eyes.

“I want to provide for you and Sophia. She is my daughter. I want to take care of you two and make sure neither of you want for anything.”

He reaches into his jean pocket and pulls out a set of keys.

“I understand you not wanting to live with me, but I want to be part of Sophia’s life, and yours, if you would let me. These are the keys to an apartment in my building. You wouldn’t be living with me, but you would be close. I know Sophia still has school here, so it would just be for the weekends until summer, then we could revisit this conversation and see how we want to handle things. In the meantime, we could all get to know each other?”

It comes out like a question, and I’m left overwhelmed with everything he just said.

“How did you get an apartment in the city while you’ve been here?”

I don’t know why that’s the part that stands out to me, but it’s all I can focus on at the moment.

“Uh, my assistant handled it for me.”

Of course he has an assistant.

“Why would you do this? You didn’t even talk to me about it.”

I don’t understand this man at all, and he clearly doesn’t understand me.

“I did this because I want to make sure you have a place to go that isn’t my home. I can’t stay here, and I want to get to know my daughter; I want the both of you to get to know me. I didn’t talk to you about it beforehand because I just want the place to be there for when you’re ready for it. It’s not like I can’t afford it.”

I scoff at his ego. Just because he has more money than us, it doesn’t mean he needs to go around buying apartments. It makes me nervous to think about being back in his world of wealth and power. I know nothing of that world anymore, and I’m already feeling overwhelmed by it all. It would be a drastic change to our lives, and I don’t know if I’m ready for that.

“You realize how crazy this is, right?”

I’m worried that with my amnesia I will be taken advantage of or trampled over. I stare at the keys on the counter in front of me, a symbolic bridge between my past and my future. Chandler must see the indecision on my face. He leans over the counter and places one of his hands over mine.

“I promise you that I will take care of you and Sophia no matter what. I’m not in this for anything other than getting to know my daughter and her mother again. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

They are nice words to hear, but I don’t know him enough for them to bring me comfort.

I gently slide my hand out from under his and take a step back from the counter. I can see the hurt in his eyes before he closes off and keeps a neutral look on his face.

“I need time to process this. Everything is happening very fast. How am I going to explain this to Soph? She doesn’t know

about the accident and how I lost my memories; I have to tell her that before I can tell her about you, but I don't even know where to start with that. She's so young."

He nods in understanding, but I can see that it's hard for him to hear. I can't let that get to me, I need to focus on Sophia and me before I can worry about him.

"Do you mind if I'm there when you tell her about me?"

It only seems fair that he be there to tell his daughter about him. I need to start thinking about how to include him in things that are about Sophia.

"I don't see why not, but I need to prepare her for that. This is going to be confusing for her, and we'll need to take it slow."

He nods again, and this time, he can't hide the excitement in his eyes, they brighten, and a smile slowly starts to take over his face.

"Do you have any other kids?"

He hesitates before answering.

"Uh, no. I haven't been in another relationship since, uh, everything happened."

Right, he was with me for a year, deeply in love with me, and then I was just gone.

Great going, Tanya.

He clears his throat and taps the counter with his knuckle.

"I have to get back to the city. Here's my number, let me know what you decide."

He slides a business card over to me and backs to the door. We don't say anything, and he doesn't take his eyes off me as he walks backward. Almost like he doesn't want me to leave his sight. His back hits the door and he just smiles at me before turning and walking out; I let out a breath once he's gone. All the tension leaving the room with him.

CHANDLER

I didn't want to leave Willow Creek and Tanya and Sophia, but I had to get back for my meetings. I'm driving the rental car Jillian got for me back to the city, and the hour drive gives me time to process everything that has happened. It all seems like a dream. I never expected to find Tanya living in the same state as me, alive and well, and raising our daughter.

Josh is going to lose his mind.

I hit the speaker button on the wheel and tell the machine to call Josh. He answers after two rings, impressive for him.

"Why is Jillian telling me that we can't schedule a lunch for today because you are still out of town? I thought you were only gone for a night. What kept you in Mayberry?"

"I found Tanya; she's living in Willow Creek and has been this whole time."

The line is silent on the other end, and I'm breathless from having said it out loud.

"Holy shit."

I laugh, and it comes out sounding a little manic.

"My thoughts exactly."

"So she did run?"

I don't know why she was driving to Willow Creek without all her things.

"I don't know what happened and neither does she. The day she disappeared, she was in a bad car accident and has been

suffering from amnesia this whole time. She looked right at me and had no idea who I was, Josh.”

I replay that moment in my head as I wait for him to respond.

“She’s been living an hour away for nine years with amnesia?”

His tone is full of doubt, and it makes the hair on the back of my neck rise.

“Yes, I spoke with one of the nurses that took care of her. Apparently, it was a really bad accident. Oh, and that’s not all.”

“There’s more besides her just forgetting about her whole life?”

I ignore his sarcasm.

“She was pregnant with my daughter when she left. I have a beautiful eight-year-old daughter who looks just like I did as a kid.”

“Holy shit.”

I never thought I would see the day where Joshua Sanders would be at a loss for words.

“I know, her name is Sophia. In a matter of minutes, I found out that Tanya is alive and that I have a kid. It’s why I’m not back yet. I’m driving back now for some meetings, but I left her my number to get in contact with me. I bought them an apartment in my building; Tanya doesn’t feel comfortable yet to move back in, but I’m not going to let them get away.”

A thought starts to form, and I know that it will be the only way I can make sure that Tanya and Sophia will be with me from now on.

“Wait, slow down. How can you be sure that all of this is even true? Are you sure the kid is yours? Are you sure she really has amnesia? Why was she driving to Willow Creek in a car that wasn’t yours without all her things?”

I don’t like that he’s making it seem that Tanya is faking everything, and I’m not about to let him talk about her like that.

“*That kid* is Sophia, and I’m sure. Why would she lie about it? Besides, once you meet her and see how much she looks like I did as a kid, you’ll see it. I have things that I need to get done. I’ll talk to you later this week.”

I hit the end button before he can say anything. For the rest of the drive, I make a few phone calls to move things around, mostly to Jillian. I want to make sure that I can come back to Willow Creek at the end of the week. I don’t want to give Tanya any time to doubt us, and I have a proposal for her.

Once I make it back to the office, I don’t have time to do any of my planning, let alone think. We had to move most of my meetings to this afternoon and tomorrow morning so that I can take Friday off.

I finally get a break around four, and I’m telling Jillian what to get me to eat since I haven’t had anything since this morning when my phone chimes with an incoming text. I absentmindedly pull my phone out and open it as I continuing telling Jillian what I want.

“Get a side of fries too, and whatever you want for yourself.”

I stop talking when I finally look down at my phone, and I can’t stop the smile from spreading across my face.

“Wow, I don’t think I’ve ever seen that expression on your face.”

I turn my phone so that Jillian can see the screen. It’s a picture of Sophia, smiling up at the camera, what looks like ice cream on her face. A message is under the photo.

Unknown number: I figured you’d like a picture of her.

“She’s adorable. She’s got your unique eyes.”

I bring the phone back down so I can look at the picture. I told Jillian everything on the drive here, and she was just as surprised as Josh. I quickly program Tanya’s number into my phone and turn my attention back to Jillian.

“When you get that order, I need you to come up with a plan on how to keep all of this out of the papers. Call the PR department and make them aware of the situation so they can

run interference. I don't want them to be surrounded by the paparazzi if I can help it."

She nods and collects her things. As she exits my office, closing the door behind her, I hit the green call button next to Tanya's name. Just as I think she's not going to answer, her voice comes through the line.

"Hello?"

"Thank you for the picture. I love it."

It's an odd feeling, to be talking to Tanya on the phone again. I feel like a teenager talking to his crush for the first time.

"You're welcome. I didn't know if you would want it or not. I have more if you do."

I lean back in my chair and turn to look out the window over the city.

"I would love whatever you want to send me."

She awkwardly clears her throat.

"I also wanted to let you know that I will be telling her about everything this weekend. I can hold off until you can make it here before telling her about you, but I figured I'd get started on everything else."

Nerves fill my stomach at the thought of telling Sophia I'm her dad so soon. I can't help but wonder if she would be okay with it.

Would she even want me in her life?

"That's actually perfect, I've cleared my day Friday and plan on driving down that morning."

I don't know why all of this feels so awkward, but I can't get past the nerves; I wonder if she is feeling the same way.

"Oh, okay then. I guess that works out."

I want to make my proposal to her now so that she has time to think about it until Friday, but I don't really want to do it over the phone. I take a deep breath, turn back to my desk, and sit up. I need to feel more in control for this conversation.

“I’ve been thinking about some things, and I wanted to run something by you.”

Her voice comes through the phone hesitantly. “Okay...”

How do you tell your long-lost lover who doesn't remember you that you want to get married?

“I think we should get married.”

Silence greets me from the other end of the phone, and I have to pull it away from my ear to check if she hung up.

“I’m sorry. What?”

Here goes nothing.

“I think we should get married. I think it will help us in the long run. Having you as my wife after this story gets out will help ease some of the publicity that we are going to have to deal with. It will help with my business image, and you and Sophia will have everything you need no matter what happens to me.”

She still doesn’t say anything, and my nerves are making me feel like I have to keep talking.

“It will only be a marriage in name. We won’t have to act like husband and wife out of the public view. You can have your own room at my place, and we will even keep the new apartment just in case.”

“Slow down, Chandler. What the hell are you talking about? We can’t get married. I still don’t know anything about you. I just met you a few days ago. I didn’t even want to move in with you!”

Her words and shrill tone make me cringe.

“I know, but this really could be the best for us. You and Sophia are taken care of, and my legacy and business remain intact.”

I will her through the phone to agree. If she does, then I will be able to keep them both close and safe. I will be able to start making Tanya fall for me again while being a father to Sophia.

I'm not willing to miss out on any more time with either of them.

"Just think about it, okay? I will be down Friday, and we can talk about it more if you would like, but I told you I want to provide for you and Sophia. I want to be her dad, and this is the way for it to happen."

I can hear her let out a tired sigh.

"I will think about it, but I don't know, Chandler, this seems like a ridiculous thing to do. I don't know you, and it's been nine years since you've known me."

I don't want to push her, but I also want to make sure she really thinks this through. This move would open the door for everything I want.

"I'll think about it, but if I say yes, we agree it's only a marriage of convenience, yes?"

At first.

I smile at the fact that I got her to agree to at least think about it, it's the first step.

THE REST of the week drags by. I don't hear anymore from Tanya, and I'm worried that she is going to say no. I want her to say yes with everything in me. We were supposed to be married already. We were supposed to be raising Sophia in my penthouse and have her go to a private school with the best education possible.

It's been nine years in the making, and I don't want to wait any longer. I also haven't heard anything else from Josh. It's not too out of the ordinary for us to go a while without talking, but I can't help but feel like this time has something to do with Tanya. I don't get it, he never had a problem with her before, but ever since the day she went missing, he has made it his mission to cast her in a bad light.

It's Thursday night, and I'm filled with anxious energy, waiting until the time I can leave and head to Willow Creek.

I need to distract myself from my nerves, so I pick up my phone, grab a beer from the fridge, and go to sit out on the balcony. The air has a slight chill to it, but it helps to clear my head some as I push the call button for Josh. It rings and rings, and I'm getting more and more irritated as I wait. His voicemail picks up, and as I listen to the automated voice telling me to leave a message, I debate if I should.

"Hey, I don't know if you just got busy or not, but I thought you should know I'm going to Willow Creek tomorrow and I'm going to try and persuade Tanya to marry me. Call me back."

I end the call and take a long pull from my beer. I really wanted him to pick up so he could keep me distracted for a while. It's too early to go to sleep, and I'm too wired to even try. I slowly finish my beer, taking small sips as I enjoy the cool breeze and the sight of the lights coming on one by one over the city as it grows darker and darker. Little dots in the night that signify a living person cozy in their home. It's the city's replacement for the stars in the sky.

Once my beer is empty, I stand from the chair, relaxed from my time just sitting outside, and go back inside. I walk around the apartment, checking windows and doors to make sure everything is locked up tight, before I finally take some melatonin and climb into my king size bed, sinking into the soft mattress, ready for the next day to come.

I WAKE up extremely early and start my drive to Willow Creek. I don't know if Tanya is working today, but I want to make sure I make it early enough to bring her something before she has to go in. I want her to know that I'm here, and that I'm ready for my answer.

With it being so early, and the fact that I'm not watching my speed on the way there, I make it in just under an hour. I had Jillian book me the same room again, but I don't bother stopping there, instead I go straight to Tanya's. I stopped by a Starbucks just out of town and got her the Pineapple Cloud Cake she used to order all the time, but now that I have it and

I'm about to give it to her, I'm nervous that she will no longer like it.

The small cabin they live in is dark when I arrive, and I look at the clock to see it's just after eight. I'm not sure if they are still sleeping or if they have already left. I grab my coffee and her cake before getting out of my car. Just as I'm about to knock on her door, Tanya's voice comes from the side of house.

"You made it here early."

I turn to see her walking out of a small wooded area, she's a vision walking out of the trees that are dotted with orange and yellow. She's in a tight pair of jeans and a sweatshirt that looks to be a little big for her. Her hair is up in a messy bun, and I can't take my eyes off her. I look behind her to try and see where she is coming from.

"Do you usually walk around the woods so early in the morning?"

Her lips form into a smirk, and the same look she used to get before saying something sarcastic flashes across her face. For some reason, it sends heat shooting through my body.

"It's not really the woods. I had to take Soph to school and the town square is just on the other side of this."

"Oh, right. It's a school day. I didn't think about that."

She walks up the steps of her porch and stops a foot away from me. I hold the cake out to her.

"I got you this. It's what you used to order; I don't even know if you still like it or not, but I didn't know what else to get, and I didn't want to risk waking you to ask."

I shrug, hearing how ridiculous I sound. She stares at the bag with interest for a moment, before she takes it and peeks inside. She carefully takes it out, sniffs it, and takes the tiniest bite. The face she makes causes me to burst into laughter.

"Not your thing anymore, huh?"

It's a sad thought, but I don't allow myself to dwell on it.

People change all the time.

“I can’t believe I used to eat that. It’s incredibly sweet.”

I chuckle again and hand her my drink.

“Here, try this. See if it’s more your speed.”

It’s a simple hot coffee with cream and sugar. Not overly sweet or bitter. I watch her face as she takes a sip, and my eyes lock on her lips touching the edge of the cup where mine have already been. I shift on my feet and clear my throat once she pulls it away, making a humming sound.

“That is much better.”

She tries to hand me back my cup, but I hold my hands up.

“Keep it; I can deal. I messed up not asking you anyways.”

She shakes her head and shoves the cup into my hand.

“I work at a coffee shop, I’m good.”

I take it from her and keep my eyes on her as I bring the cup up to my lips and take a sip. Her eyes drop to my lips and her tongue peeks out to wet her lips. I try to hide my smirk by wiping my mouth, and it pulls her from her stare.

“Do you want to come in?”

She walks around me to her front door, and I frown when she simply opens it and walks in having left it unlocked. I choose not to say anything as I follow her to the kitchen. I don’t want to start this conversation off on a bad note.

“So, did you get a chance to think about my proposal?”

I watch her face to try and see if I can see how she feels about it, but her face stays neutral.

“I did.”

My hands are actually starting to sweat. I don’t think my hands have ever sweat from nerves in my life.

“Did you come to a decision?”

She stares down at her hands and rubs at her fingers; the sight brings me comfort. She used to do this when she was nervous.

It’s nice to see my Tanya is still in there.

“I think we have a lot to talk about before we can discuss getting married.”

Hope fills my chest.

“I completely agree. I wasn’t thinking we would just jump in feet first. We have a lot to think about, Sophia being the most important.”

Her eyes lift to mine, and I see relief reflected back at me. I reach across the counter slowly, giving her time to move her hands, and place mine on top of hers.

“I promise you all that I want is to provide for you and Sophia. I know you don’t know me anymore, but that’s all that is important to me, that the two of you are safe and happy. We can take our time getting to know each other.”

She searches my face, and I try to keep my expression as open and honest as I can. When she is satisfied with what she sees, she nods her head, and I move my hand back to my side of the counter.

“So, what has you hesitating about agreeing to marry me, besides not knowing me anymore?”

I have to admit it still hurts that she doesn’t know me. I was hoping that when she saw me at the café something about me would seem familiar to her, but when she still didn’t know me, I had to accept that this was going to be harder than I thought.

It doesn’t matter, though. I will do whatever she needs to feel secure, and I will make sure I never lose her again. We talk for the rest of the morning, going over all of her fears and talking through her doubts. I admit that I also have some, and I think it helps to ease hers some.

She offers for me to go with her to pick up Sophia from school later on, and we part ways until it’s time to go. I go back to the hotel to get some work down until three, then meet up with Tanya at the cabin to walk with her to Sophia’s school. My stomach is filled with nerves as we go.

“I have to admit that telling her who I am is making me nervous.”

Tanya smiles at me.

“Me too, but I know she is going to be happy to have a dad.”

The thought comforts me some, but the doubt I have over if I can be a good dad for her or not overpowers that.

TANYA

I'm staring at myself in a full-length mirror in a room that I'm not familiar with. I'm wearing a red dress that hugs my curves and shows off more cleavage than I'm comfortable with. I'm in a pair of matching red heels that have to be at least four inches tall. It's me in the mirror, but I seem different somehow, almost like a stranger.

I watch the mirror version of me smile as a strong pair of arms wrap around my waist, and when I look up, a man appears behind me, but I can't make out his face. He leans down to whisper in my ear, and I can feel the heat of his breath on my neck.

"You look stunning tonight, baby. Everyone was watching you the whole night."

Without so much as a thought, I turn around in his arms and wrap my arms around his neck. It's like I'm watching from inside someone else's body as they make the movements. I can feel my lips curl up into a smile. I lean forward and kiss the faceless man as his hands travel up and down my back, pulling me closer to his body until the length of mine is pressed tightly to his.

I let out a moan as his hands travel lower, and he grips my ass in his hands, kneading it as he tugs me against his growing erection. I pull back to breathe and tilt my head back as he trails his lips across my jawline and down my neck. My body is heating up, and I've never felt this kind of arousal before.

I'm gripping his shoulders as tightly as I can, hoping that his solid body will help ground me. The sensations that he is bringing out of me are becoming overwhelming.

He pulls back from me suddenly before bending down and lifting me into his arms, bridal style. He walks us over to the bed and gently sits me on the edge as he kneels in front of me and works on taking off my heels. His face is bent down, and all I can see is the top of his head and his dirty blonde hair. Reaching forward, I run one hand through his hair; it's soft to the touch.

He finishes taking off my heels and drags his hands up both of my calves. Once his hands reach the edge of my dress, he pauses a moment before continuing up my thighs, pushing my dress up as he goes. His touch leaves searing heat behind, and I feel my head drop back and my eyes close. I can feel my chest rising and falling with my rapid breaths.

His simple touches are making me feel crazy and drunk. I can't focus on the fact that I don't know where I am or who he is. All I can think about is how good his hands feel on me.

His hands reach to the edge of my underwear, and he traces each side with his fingers as he leans down and starts kissing up and down my now exposed thighs. I lean back on my hands without a thought, and he moves so that he is nestled between my thighs, still kneeling on the floor in front of me. The bed is high enough that his face is level with my thighs and my feet are dangling off the edge.

Just when I think he's going to kiss me between my thighs, where I desperately want him to, he backs off and starts over, kissing his way up my other thigh. I can feel the groan of desperation leave my throat. I want him too badly for him to be teasing me.

"Don't tease me. I need you."

I can feel his lips form into a smile against my skin as he kisses higher and higher this time, not stopping at the top of my thigh. He moves his face so that I can feel his hot breath through the lace of my underwear. He keeps still for a moment, making me squirm with anticipation, then he lowers his head

and gently kisses my center. Even with a barrier between us, heat shoots through me.

I want this man with everything in me. I don't care that I don't know what's going on, something deep within me is desperate to have him.

"I want you."

He hums against me, and it makes me jerk up. He tightens his hold on my hips to keep me still before he wraps his fingers around the band of my underwear and starts to slowly pull it down my legs, backing up to remove them fully and standing once they are off.

I lean back on my hands and let my eyes roam over his form as he starts to remove his clothes. First his suit jacket, then this shirt. I can clearly see his well-toned body, but I still can't make out his face. It's like a film is covering him from me.

Once he's full undressed, he stops and stares at me.

"Let me watch you undress now."

I slowly sit up straight and stand from the edge of the bed. My dress is bunched around my waist, and I grip the edge and pull it up to just under my breasts. I realize in this moment that I'm not wearing a bra, and I cross my arms over to pull the dress the rest of the way up and over my head, my breasts exposed to him in one movement.

As I stand fully naked in front of him, it's the first time I've wished I could see his face. He stalks toward me and grips my face in his hands a moment before his lips crush into mine and he kisses me. It's hard and full of want, and I'm instantly breathless. I spread my hands over his chest before dragging them down his stomach. I want to touch all of him; I want to make him feel as good as he's making me feel. Before I can wrap his hard length in my hand, he pushes me back until I'm against the bed again. This time, when he puts me on the bed, he climbs up to follow me.

He crawls forward, pushing me up the bed until we reach the pillows where he gently pushes me to lay back. He leans down and kisses and licks along my neck before he moves to my

breasts, circling first one nipple then the other with his tongue. I thread my fingers through his hair, gripping the strands in my hands and pulling him closer to my chest, making him chuckle.

“Patience, baby.”

Something about his voice seems familiar to me, but I’m too lost in my lust to be able to figure out why. I don’t care that I don’t know who he is, or if I know him at all, I want him, and I don’t want him to stop.

“Please, I can’t take anymore teasing, I want you.”

I reach for him and try to tug him down onto me. He resists for a moment, teasing me more, before he lowers his body down to lay along the length of mine, and the feel of his body heat does nothing to calm the flames inside of me. He places his arms on either side of my head and kisses me slowly. I wrap my legs around his waist and pull him against me, creating friction that makes me moan.

He pulls back and lifts up so that he can line his length up with my entrance and slowly pushes inside of me. I moan at the feeling, and I can feel the muscles in his back tense with restraint as he waits for me to adjust to him.

“Please, move. I need you to move.”

I drag my nails down his back, and he lets out a deep groan. I do it again, and he jerks his hips, making me gasp. He pushes up onto his hands and beings a slow pace, pulling out of me before thrusting back in just as slowly. It feels so good to have him inside of me, but if he keeps moving so slowly, I’m going to go crazy.

He lowers his body back down and slides one hand between us to squeeze my breast, rolling my nipple between two fingers. He trails kisses wherever he can reach from his position, and I grip his hair in my hands again.

“Faster, faster.”

He’s driving me crazy with his slow rhythm, and I can’t think straight. He moves the hand that was on my breast and slides

it down my body until he pushes down on my clit before circling it. I see stars as I yell out.

“Yes! Don’t stop that. Keep going.”

I can’t catch my breath as I squirm underneath him. I can feel my orgasm building as he finally thrusts into me faster and starts circling my clit at the same speed. I can’t stop my orgasm from building, and as the sensations grow and grow, I wrap my legs and arms around him as much as I can. He starts moving faster and harder as he feels me get close, and when he whispers in my ear, everything inside of me snaps.

“Let go, baby. I can feel you’re so close. Let go.”

My vision goes white as my orgasm washes over me, and for a moment, I lose my breath before I gasp a lungful in and yell out, surprising myself when I hear his name leave my lips.

“Chandler!”

He keeps thrusting into me as I come down from my orgasm, and just before it becomes too much, he thrusts once more and shouts my name as he comes.

“Tanya!”

He collapses on top of me, and once we catch our breaths, he lifts his head and looks down at me; I can now clearly make out his face. Chandler’s sea blue eyes with the golden ring.

I JERK awake in my own bed, breathless and sweaty.

What the hell was that?

Sitting up in bed, I rub my hands over my face. That dream felt so real, I don’t think I’ve ever had a dream that vivid before. For a moment, I wonder if maybe this was a memory, but I know better than that. If they haven’t come back in nine years, why would they come back now? It’s just because Chandler has been around the last couple of days and my subconscious mind is aware of him.

I shake myself, trying to forget about the dream, and reach for my phone to check the time. There is a message from

Chandler confirming the time we are supposed to arrive today.

After he went with me to pick up Sophia from school, we spent some time together at the park, and he took us out to dinner where we told her about him being her dad. She had a lot of questions, and we both did our best to answer them, but I think she is still trying to figure things out. She and Chandler both are. She hasn't called him daddy yet, and part of me wonders if he wants her to or not.

He stayed the weekend and spent as much time with us as possible. Today though, Sophia and I are going to spend the day with him and meet some people close to him, there's apparently some kind of party that he wants us to attend. I'm nervous about being in the car for so long. I've only ever taken short rides when I didn't have any other choice, and now I was going to have to spend an hour in the car.

Just the thought of it is making me anxious. I climb out of bed and go about my morning routine before I need to wake Sophia up. I make my way downstairs and into the kitchen to start the coffee pot, but just as I'm reaching for it, a knock sounds at my door. I know it's Chandler, he's the only person who would show up this early in the morning, and I can feel my face heat as I turn to answer the door.

I hope he can't tell that I had a sex dream about him just by looking at me.

It's a ridiculous thought, I know that, but I can't help but worry that he's going to take one look at me and just *know*. I take a deep breath and slowly walk over to the door and pull it open. I freeze when I see a young, petite woman standing just behind him. She smiles at me with her straight white teeth, her short blonde hair tucked behind her ears. A wave of jealousy washes over me unexpectedly, and I have no idea why. I have no right to feel jealous. There is no reason to believe that she is his girlfriend when he asked me to marry him, even if it wasn't real.

"Um, good morning?"

I have no idea how to react. Soph and I were supposed to meet Chandler at the café at seven thirty to leave for the city, and

there was no mention of another woman. Chandler's face lights up with his smile as he takes a step closer to me and surprises me when he leans in and kisses my cheek.

"Good morning, we have a change of plans, hope that's okay."

He moves past me and into the cabin, leaving me to stand and look between his retreating form and the woman standing on my porch.

"Excuse him, he's used to me knowing who everyone is and not having to introduce me. I'm Jillian. Mr. Bishop's assistant."

She holds her hand out to me, and I take it, relieved that she's his assistant and not a girlfriend I knew nothing about when I agreed to our fake marriage.

"Hello, I'm Tanya. Please come in."

She smiles at me again and goes to follow after Chandler. I close the door and make my way into the kitchen, where Chandler has pulled out a tablet from the bag I am just now noticing that Jillian has over her shoulder.

"So, I got to thinking, and I don't think taking the car back to the city would be a smart move. I had Jillian come down in the helicopter, and I'm hoping the two of you can get to know each other some; she can help you get ready for the party tonight, and we can take the copter back. It's quicker."

"The copter?"

I look between the two, confused. Chandler looks up at me sheepishly.

"Uh, yeah. I have a helicopter to get around for business."

I stare at him, not really seeing him, and blink slowly.

"Right. Anyone want coffee?"

I turn around and face the counter grabbing the coffee pot and filling it with water.

He owns a helicopter? How rich is he?

They both say please, and I make a pot of coffee on autopilot as they talk behind me. I'm too shocked about his copter to really hear what they are talking about. Once the coffee is brewing and I no longer have an excuse to avoid looking at them, I turn and face them, crossing my arms over my chest and leaning back against the counter.

They are both leaning over the tablet and talking about the local stores and what kind of clothes they have.

"Why are you looking at clothes?"

Neither of them look up at me as Chandler answers.

"You and Sophia are going to need something to wear tonight; we need to see what Willow Creek has to offer."

He glances up at me quickly and smiles at me before focusing back on the tablet.

Would the clothes we already have not work?

"Oh, I can't really afford new clothes for us right now, but we have things in the closet I'm sure would work."

Chandler waves a hand through the air.

"Don't worry about it. I've got it covered."

I don't really like that he just waves off my concern, and a burning rage fires up in me, causing me to straighten my spine. For a moment, I think about arguing with him. Instead, I just sigh and push away from the counter.

"Well, while you two figure that out, I need to wake up Soph."

Chandler's head whips up to look at me again.

"Can I do it?"

My steps falter at his question.

"Oh, um, I don't see why not?"

His smile is bright as he jumps up from his chair and quietly makes his way upstairs. I watch him go until he is out of my sight. When I turn back to face Jillian, she is already looking at me, her face is curious.

“Chandler told me about what happened to you, and I know you don’t know him enough yet to know this, but he’s a really good man.”

I study her for a moment, trying to see if she seems familiar to me at all.

“Did I meet you before the accident?”

I hate that I have to ask people if I know them. Jillian smiles sweetly at me, and I see some sadness in her expression.

“No, I didn’t start working for Mr. Bishop until after you had disappeared.”

A look crosses her face, and she walks around the counter to come stand next to me.

“You know, being Mr. Bishop’s personal assistant means that I know him better than he knows himself; it’s literally my job.”

I nod my head slowly, not sure where she is going with this.

“What if I become a type of adviser for you? I attend most of the events with Mr. Bishop, and I can be there for you to help you learn who everyone is and how to act. It might make things easier for you.”

Relief floods me, this woman has no idea how much she has just helped me. I drop my arms and have to resist the urge to throw them around her.

“I would greatly appreciate that, Jillian. You have no idea.”

She perks up, and her smile is near blindly at this point. She skips back over to the tablet and starts babbling away about the dresses Sophia and I can wear to the event tonight. I can’t focus on what she is saying, though; I’m too preoccupied that Chandler and Sophia haven’t come down yet.

“Tanya.”

I turn back to face Jillian and realize that she has asked me something and is waiting for my reply.

“I’m sorry. I was lost in thought; can you repeat that?”

“I was just asking your opinion on this dress.”

She points at the tablet, and I lean over to look.

“I’m not going to pretend to understand what you’re going through right now, but I do know that it has to be scary, having all these people know you and having no idea who they are, but I think you should give Mr. Bishop a chance.”

Looking up at her, I cock my head to the side in question. She must take my curiosity for something else because she holds her hands up, palms facing me.

“I’m sorry, I know it’s not my place, but I’ve worked for him for six years, and in that time, I’ve seen what lengths he’s gone for you. I don’t think he’s ever given up on you.”

Before I can reply to her, Chandler comes down the stairs holding a sleepy Sophia in his arms. The sight makes my heart clench as I watch him carefully make his way to the kitchen, one arm supporting her and the other resting against her back and rubbing small circles. It doesn’t even seem like he’s struggling with her weight like I do. My baby girl is getting big, and I’ve been worrying about her outgrowing being held. Her head is pressed into his neck, and her crazy curly hair is messy and all over the place from her sleep. It’s so funny to see how they look exactly the same but light and dark. Her dark brown hair is a contrast against his blonde.

What lengths has he gone for me?

I watch him with our daughter, trying to *see* what kind of man he is. I turn to look at Jillian and know she’s the best person to answer my questions. She’ll tell me things that Chandler won’t.

TANYA

I don't get a chance to talk to Jillian any further about Chandler for the rest of the morning. I want to drill her about what kinds of things he did to find me over the years. I want to ask her if she knew why he's held on for so long.

Why not give up? Why hold on for so long?

None of it makes any sense to me, but I know that because of my amnesia I don't know the whole story. How can I judge him and question his motives without remembering our past?

After Sophia and Chandler came downstairs, we introduced Jillian to Sophia, and I made breakfast for everyone while Jillian and Sophia talked about dresses. Soph's eyes lit up when she heard that she got to pick out a new dress. It was a simple, peaceful moment in the middle of the craziest time of my life: the smell of bacon and waffles filling up the kitchen, the sound of Sophia and Jillian talking excitedly about the dresses, Sophia bouncing in her seat as she looked at all the pretty dresses.

We are now on our way to pick up the dresses and then are heading to the small airport where Chandler's helicopter awaits us. I have to admit that the thought of being on one is making me nervous, and I don't know which would be the lesser evil, the helicopter or the car. As we walk into town, Chandler and Sophia are walking ahead of Jillian; the sight of them walking hand in hand does something to me, and I don't know if I like it or not, but I'm too nervous about everything else to come to focus on it.

“You know, when he came home last weekend after finding you, it was the first time I have ever seen him so frantic. Since I’ve been working for him, he’s always been the cool and collected businessman. That day, though, he was almost unhinged. I don’t think he knew what to do. I do know that he didn’t want to be in the city without you two.”

I realize now might be the only time I have to grill Jillian without Chandler overhearing us. He’s too occupied with Sophia to listen to our conversation.

“What did you mean this morning when you said you’ve seen the lengths he’s gone for us?”

She looks almost guilty at my question.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything; I know it’s not my place, but I know he won’t say anything.”

“Will you tell me more, though? I would really like to know more about him and maybe knowing what he did will help.”

I can tell she’s torn about what to do, but I need to know something about him. I need to know if I’m doing the right thing, especially for Sophia.

“Please? If you know he’s not going to say anything, I need someone to tell me. He’s acting like if he just does what he did before, then I’ll magically remember, but it doesn’t work that way. I need to know who he is without my memories.”

She lets out a sigh, and I know I’ve convinced her. I can feel my body tense in preparation for what she’s going to tell me.

“Has he told you anything about your past?”

I think over the few conversations I’ve had with Chandler.

“Not much.”

Jillian rolls her eyes and doesn’t seem surprised.

“I don’t know the extent of everything he’s done, especially before I started working for him, but I’ve handled things for him, and I’ve heard about how he was before.”

I keep my eyes on Chandler’s back as we walk behind him and Soph. We’ve made it into town and now just have to go to the

other side to the dress store.

“When I first started at Bishop Enterprises, he was this quiet, moody man; honestly, I was intimidated by him.”

I can't picture the man walking hand in hand with my daughter being intimidating to anyone.

“I remember thinking how sad he looked before I found out about you. He had dark circles under his eyes, and he always had scruff going on. His hair was a little longer too. Apparently, when I started, he had just cut back the time he paid the private investigator to look into what happened.”

He hired a private investigator?

“He paid the guy a lot of money to only take his case. From his point of view, you just disappeared from your home without taking anything with you, and he was convinced you were taken.”

My head is swimming with everything she is saying, and I'm not sure if I'm relieved or irritated when we arrive at the store.

“Mommy! Can I go in?!”

Sophia turns to me when she reaches the door, her face full of excitement. I nod at her, and she drags Chandler in behind her. Jillian and I follow after them, and I hold off on asking her more questions for now. I want to focus on helping Sophia try on her dress and be in this moment with her. There is a part of me that worries that all of this isn't going to last. That Chandler is going to see that I'm not the woman he used to know and not want us to be a part of his life. I don't want Sophia to get used to things like this just in case it doesn't work out, but I don't want to miss out on seeing her experience certain things either.

Jillian goes to talk to the store owner about our dresses, and I watch as Soph stands in the middle of the store and stares at all the pretty dresses. It's a small store, we can pretty much see the whole thing from where we are standing. The owner, a sweet middle-aged woman, likes to make sure she is fully stocked on the latest fashion trends. We've been in this store many times, and Soph's always fascinated by the dresses, but

this is going to be the first time that she gets one of the nicer ones that cost more.

“Are you excited to see your dress, baby girl?”

She turns to face me and jumps up and down, a bright smile on her face.

“Yep! I’m gonna look like a princess!”

I love seeing her excited and so happy. I smile at her, then look up at Chandler, and the look on his face leaves me bewildered. He is smiling down at her, and there is so much love and joy reflected in his eyes. I don’t know why this surprises me, she is his daughter, but it still isn’t something I was prepared to see. For her whole life, I have been her only parent, the only person who has loved her completely.

“You already look like a princess, now you are just going to have a super fancy dress.”

Her smile widens as she jumps up and down some more.

“Alright, ladies! To the dressing rooms!”

Jillian comes from the back of the store with two garment bags folded over her arm. Soph squeals and takes off to where two dressing rooms are set up. I follow her at a slower pace, and Chandler steps in beside me. I’ve been fully aware of him all day; it’s almost been like a string is attached to each of us, and every time one of us moves, I can feel it tug.

I’m nervous with him so near, he’s been distracted all day with planning and then with Soph, so this is the first time his focus has been solely on me.

“Are you excited about your dress?”

His voice is low, and it makes me think about the dream I had about him.

I clear my throat before answering him. “Um, I’m more excited about Soph’s. She’s going to look so sweet.”

I keep my eyes on the dressing room curtains, but I can see him smile out of the corner of my eye.

“I can’t wait to see the both of you in them.”

His words make my stomach drop, something about getting into a dress that will most likely be form fitting and walking out to show off for him makes me nervous. I think the dream is making me more aware of him as a man and not just some person from my past. I don't know what to say to him, so I just walk over to the curtain that Soph has disappeared behind.

"Do you want my help getting into your dress?"

"No! I wanna do it and come out to show everyone!"

I roll my eyes at a laughing Jillian, and she just hands me my dress.

"The girl has spoken."

I reluctantly take it from her and go into the empty dressing room.

The dress Jillian and I picked out is really beautiful. It's not a black-tie event, so it's nothing too over the top fancy. It was a lavender sundress that would come to just above my knees. The sleeves rest off the shoulder and are puffy at the top, and the sweetheart neckline will draw attention to my bust a bit more than I'm used to. I put the dress on and spend a minute staring at myself and making adjustment to the hem and cleavage, trying to get it to sit just right before I show everyone.

"I think it fits fine, Jillian. I don't need any adjustments, so I'm just going to change back into my clothes."

The curtain is ripped open before I can even finish talking.

"I don't think so. Get out here. We had Sophia wait until you were out here to see her. Come on."

I turn toward her with a sigh and walk out to the small waiting area. I keep my eyes on the ground as I walk over to the mirrors, too nervous to look up and see anyone's expression. Jillian and the shop owner, Meg, walk over to see how the dress fits me. As their hands pick at the dress, making sure everything falls where it should, I look up and meet Chandler's eyes in the mirror.

They remind me of how they looked in the dream when he looked down at me just before I woke up. They're dark and full of heat as they trail up from my bare feet all the way to my eyes again. It's like he was waiting for me to look at him, so I knew he was checking me out. My body erupts in goosebumps, and I can't take my eyes off of him. He leans back in the chair that he is sitting in and brings his hand to his lips, his index finger running along the seam. I can see a smirk starting to form.

"Even if I didn't know everything he is doing for you, the looks he is giving you tell me everything I need to know."

I pull my eyes away from Chandler to look over at Jillian again.

"What looks?"

She looks over at Meg with a deadpan expression, making her giggle.

"I see that what I've already told you isn't enough. That man over there is obsessed with you. And as soon as he heard about your daughter, he instantly went into Dad mode. He's had me busy setting things up."

"Setting things up? What does that mean?"

"Of course he hasn't told you. The man needs to learn to communicate."

She walks behind me to check the back with Meg, and I look between her and Chandler, who still has his eyes locked on me.

"What has he set up?"

Jillian says a few words to Meg about how the dress falls, then turns back to me.

"Well, first he had me make sure that all of your bank accounts were reopened. He had them frozen when you disappeared, then he had me open a new one and start a fund for Sophia's schooling. I didn't even know that he wanted kids, but seeing the way he's been since finding you two is like nothing I've

ever seen. He's come alive and is making many plans for the three of you. It's so romantic."

She and Meg let out sighs, like everything he is doing is the sweetest thing they have ever heard.

He set up an education fund for Sophia?

My eyes lock with his through the mirror again, and something in my face makes him stand quickly. Before he can walk over, Sophia's voice echoes from her dressing room.

"I'm ready!"

I want to interrogate him about all the money; I'm not comfortable with him just giving it to us. He should have talked to me before opening an account for her. He knows nothing about my plans for her future. Just because he's her father doesn't give him the right to come in here and just start making decisions for her; I've been raising her all this time without any help.

I break eye contact with him, and we all move so that we can see Sophia when she steps out. She makes a big show of ripping the curtain open and stepping out with her arms out to her sides.

"Ta-da!"

We all laugh at her dramatics as Meg and Jillian rush to her side to fawn over her. I watch her enjoy the attention from these two women. Since we didn't have any family, I always loved to see Sophia interacting with the people from the town. They have become our family in so many ways.

I feel the heat from Chandler's body up against my back as he steps up behind me and leans over to look at our daughter with me.

"She really loves being the center of attention, doesn't she?"

His voice is full of humor.

"You have no idea."

I keep my eyes on Sophia, too unnerved by Chandler to turn and look at him.

“Actually, I do, and you can blame me for it.”

Confused by what he could mean, I turn my head to look at him, his face is closer to me than I thought it would be, and I get caught up in staring at his lips for a moment.

“I was the exact same way when I was her age. Loved to be right in the middle of everything. Everyone’s eyes on me as I made a fool of myself.”

My eyes jump from his lips to his eyes in shock.

“Really?”

He looks at me from the corner of his eye and smirks.

“Oh yeah, I was a big showoff. Still am if I’m being honest.”

I cover my mouth with my hand to stop a laugh from escaping, and he turns to face me, humor making his eyes spark. I get lost staring into his eyes, and after a moment, the humor fades from his face and his expression become serious. A spark lights a tense heat between us and my breathing picks up at the heat that is slowly starting to fill his eyes.

Just like in the dream.

The more I think about the dream and see him make the same expression, the more I wonder if it wasn’t a dream at all, it was a memory. I feel a small brush of his hand on my lower back, and I suck in a quick breath at the touch.

“Mommy! What do you think of my dress?”

Sophia’s voice makes us jump apart, and we both turn to look at her and the two smirking women behind her.

“It’s beautiful, baby girl, just like you.”

I walk over to her and squat in front of her, making sure I don’t flash anyone. She is in a pretty pink little dress that has spaghetti straps and crosses at her back. There are little bows on top of each of her shoulders. It also comes to just above her knees, and I make a mental note to grab some shorts on our way out.

Jillian claps her hands, making everyone jump. “Alright, the dresses are perfect; I don’t think we will need to make any

adjustments to either, Meg. Now, you two go change; I will pay for everything, and we can get going.”

I stand and go back to my dressing room while Sophia spins around and goes back into hers. As I turn to pull the curtain closed, my eyes meet Chandler’s again, and the heat is still there. I keep his eye until the curtain closes behind us, taking a calming breath once he can’t see me.

THE EVENT TURNS out to be a type of outside luncheon that one of Chandler’s investors is holding. We’ve met a lot of people today, and it’s felt very overwhelming; some people know who I am, and some people don’t. I prefer the ones that don’t, I feel more in control when dealing with them. Luckily, it seems to be a smaller get-together, and there aren’t too many people.

Sophia is in her element with all the attention. I’m currently hiding by the table that has all the drinks, watching as she walks around holding Chandler’s hand as he introduces her to more people and talks with them. It’s the most he’s ever been alone with her, and I want to take the chance to watch how he does with her without me right next to them.

From what I’ve seen so far, he’s been great. He never forgets to introduce her, and he’s attentive that she’s with him. He never lets go of her hand, and when she tries to get his attention while he is talking, he instantly turns to her.

Now, I watch as he talks with an older gentleman and Sophia just watches as her dress swishes around her legs as she twists, still holding on to Chandler’s hand.

“Hey, you. What are you doing over here all by yourself?”

Jillian steps up next to me and places her hand on my upper arm. I turn and give her a smile before turning back to my daughter and her father.

“I’m just taking a breather and watching them together.”

She turns to look over to where I’ve pointed and smiles at what she sees.

“They are really adorable together. I’m impressed with my boss and how he’s adapting to being a dad.”

I nod in agreement, but I don’t really know what to say to her.

“I know I was only giving you bits and pieces about him today before we got interrupted, but if you have any questions, you can always come to me. Whether it’s about him or about this world. I can tell you whatever you need to know.”

I squeeze her hand still resting on my arm and smile at her.

“Thank you for that. I really appreciate it. I have no idea how to be a part of this world. I don’t remember anything about it. I don’t even know how to be near Chandler, you know? He’s still a stranger to me.”

We both look back toward him and Sophia, and Jillian rubs my arm.

“I know it’s difficult right now, but I promise you he’s a good guy. You can trust him. He wants nothing more than to be there for the two of you. Once he decides to tell you everything himself, you will see that what he’s been doing will prove that to you.”

Her words are meant to be comforting, but they have the opposite effect on me. I don’t want him to feel like he has to prove anything to me. I don’t even know if I want to be involved with him past our fake marriage and our daughter.

I agreed to the marriage because it will help Sophia in the long run, but there’s a big part of me that wonders if this is a bad idea. I don’t like feeling obligated to do things for him.

CHANDLER

It's been a week since I took the girls to the luncheon, and I am trying to take everything with Tanya and Sophia step by step and not rush them, but I would be lying if I said I didn't want to hurry up and get to the point where I could have them with me at all times. I want to take them from their small cabin and move them in with me, preferably with Tanya in my room with me again. The more I'm around her lately, the more I have to work at not reaching out to pull her into my arms.

I was able to talk Tanya into coming up to the city with Sophia this weekend, and I have plans to try and convince her to at least move into the apartment I bought them. I don't like that I can't see them when I want to. They are too far away from me living in Willow Creek, and I can't move my business there, it wouldn't be a smart business decision.

I've glanced at the clock throughout the day today I don't know how many times, and I'm sure it should have been closer to the end of the day by now, but when I look again, it's only just lunchtime. Groaning, I stand from my chair and walk out of my office to Jillian's desk.

"Do you want to grab us some lunch or did you bring yours?"

She doesn't even look up at me as she says, "I already ordered from the Mexican place down the road. I'm going to pick it up at twelve so you can eat before your meeting."

She is typing away at whatever I have her working on as I make my way back to my office. I had hoped to leave after lunch, but I forgot about the meeting I have with another

distributor. We are trying to find more people to provide us with environmentally safe materials to use on our buildings. It is important to me that what we build is going to last and enhance the environments around it, not do more harm.

The meeting I have after lunch is with someone who will help us to figure out a gap with some of our materials that we've been desperately trying to fill for more than a few months now. No matter how much I want to cancel it, I can't.

I sit back at my desk and pull up the file that I have on them, going over everything to give myself something to do to pass the time. I get distracted not even five minutes into reading the report and pick up my phone to look at the picture I have as my lock screen. I took it the day I took Sophia and Tanya to the luncheon. Tanya had been sitting at the table after everyone had gotten up to mingle, and Sophia was standing in front of her, leaning in for a kiss. I quickly took out my phone and snapped a picture of the two together.

It still blew my mind every day that Tanya was back and that we have a daughter together. Before she disappeared, I never even thought about us having kids, but when she was gone, I thought about all kinds of possibilities; now, some of them are right in front of me, so close but still so far out of reach.

I don't know what I can do to convince Tanya that I'm what is best for her and Sophia. I can fully support them in any way that is needed, give them whatever they want, and answer every question Tanya has about her past. I know that woman better than anyone in the world, and I just want her to give me a chance to prove it to her.

My desk phone rings just before Jillian's voice comes through.

"Mr. Bishop, your appointment is here."

I hit the intercom button on the phone and lean forward to get up as I speak to Jillian.

"Thank you, show them to the main conference room and I will be there in a minute."

I know I don't have to tell her to do anything else, she is a great assistant and will have everything handled before I can

get there. I put my phone in my pocket and get myself back in working mode. I need to put all of my concentration into this meeting.

THE MEETING LASTS AN HOUR, and as soon as it's over, I tell Jillian to finish up what she's doing and to leave for the day. I pack up all my things and head out. I can't stay in this office any longer knowing that Tanya and Sophia are going to be with me this weekend. I'm anxious for them to just be here already. I'm worried about how Tanya is going to take the trip. Kayla is driving them up today, and I've been told that they are going to take their time and that Tanya has medication to help her with the anxiety.

Once I get home, I try to call Tanya's cell, but she doesn't answer. I don't want to bother her or cause her more stress, so I send her a quick text before throwing my phone on the couch and going to my room to change into some sweats and a tank so I can get a work out in before they get here. Hopefully, it will help me burn off some of this excess energy I have. I have all the top equipment, including a bag for boxing. I wrap my knuckles and set some music up loud to get out of my head and in the zone.

Thirty minutes later, I'm dripping with sweat and breathless. I pause for a second to catch my breath and movement catches my attention from the corner of my eye. I stop and turn to see Tanya standing in the doorway. I'm surprised to see her, and my heart jumps in my chest at the sight of her.

"Hey, I didn't think you were going to be here so soon."

I drop my arms and walk in her direction, taking in her expression as I do. My steps slow when her look registers with me. I know that look, I've seen that look on her face before. It's the look she used to give me before she jumped me.

She's turned on by the way I look.

Heat fills my stomach, and I trail my eyes down her body and back up to her eyes as I slowly make my way to her.

"Penny for your thoughts?" My voice is low and rough.

Her cheeks flush, and I can only imagine what she's thinking. My lips curl at the corner as I try to hold back a smirk. I stop with only an inch of space between us, and she's forced to look up at me.

“Are you going to tell me what you're thinking?”

She shakes her head no and blushes even more. Even without her voicing how she is feeling, this moment means so much to me. This moment lets me know that, at a base level, she's at least still physically attracted to me.

If she's still attracted to the way I look, then I have a chance at winning her over again.

Lowering my head closer to hers, I whisper, “Are you enjoying the view?”

Our noses are nearly touching, and her captivating green eyes are locked on mine. She doesn't say anything, but I can see that she was. I lightly brush the tip of my nose against hers, and I can hear her breath hitch. We're standing so close that I can feel her breasts brush against my chest as her breathing picks up.

I want her so much right now. It's been too long since I last felt her body against mine, and I can't focus on anything other than the thought of her naked and pressed against me. I can't wait any longer and reach out to grip her waist in my hands, lightly brushing my lips against hers, testing to see if she's okay with this. When she doesn't pull back, I yank her against me and kiss her. I take one step toward her and twist us so that she is pressed against the door frame, pressing the length of my body against hers. A moan escapes me at the contact, and her hands come up to my sides and grasp my tank with her fists. She feels so good against me.

I trace my tongue along her lips, and she lets out a sigh, but before we can deepen the kiss, a little voice calls out down the hallway.

“Mommy!”

Tanya yanks back from me, turns, and rushes out the door and toward our daughter's voice.

“Right here, honey.”

Her reaction is too amusing for me to be upset that we were interrupted. I have to wait a moment to take some deep breaths before I can follow her.

This woman is going to be the death of me.

I unwrap the tape from my hands and make my way down the hall to the main living area where I can hear Sophia’s voice. When I walk into the room, Tanya’s face heats again, and Sophia’s face lights up.

“Our house can fit inside of yours!”

A laugh bursts out of me. “Looks that way, doesn’t it? Do you like my place?”

Having these two approve of my space is more important to me than I thought it would be, but I know if they both like it, it’s just one more step closer to convincing Tanya to move in. I’m going to try and settle for them moving in downstairs, but that is only a stepping stone to getting them to move in here.

“Yeah, but it’s kind of...”

Sophia stops mid-sentence and looks around the place. My stomach drops at the word but. I walk over to her and kneel in front of her so that we are eye to eye.

“It’s kind of what? Tell me what you think it needs.”

I want her to be comfortable here, to see my home as her own, and I will get whatever she thinks it needs to do so.

“You need more pictures of Mommy and me.”

I stare at her in shock, this isn’t what I thought she was going to say, and my stomach does a little swoop at the thought that she wants to be included in my space.

“You are absolutely right. While you’re here this weekend, why don’t we work on that? We will take so many pictures that there won’t be any room for them all on the walls by the time we’re done.”

Her smile lights up her face, and it hits me again that she’s really mine. I haven’t been around a lot of children in my life.

I'm an only child, and none of my close friends have any children. I'm still nervous around Sophia, scared that I'm going to mess up with her, so when she smiles up at me like this, I feel ten feet tall.

If I could only get her mother to smile at me like that.

“Do you guys have all your things in the car?”

Tanya nods and pulls out her phone to check for messages.

“Yeah, Kayla is downstairs talking with your driver about everything that needs to come up. She needs to leave after he gets everything out.”

Nodding, I stand and turn toward the hall to my room.

“Let me just take a quick shower and change, and then I can take you two downstairs to show you the other apartment.”

Once I'm fully facing away from them, a gasp sounds from behind me, and I quickly spin back around to see what happened. Tanya is staring at me with her hand covering her mouth.

“Are you okay? What happened?”

Her eyes lift from where she was staring at my shoulder, and she looks at me with a mixture of shock and confusion.

“Your tattoo.” Her words are soft.

I tense when I realize that she's seen the tattoo I have on my right shoulder blade. It never even occurred to me that it was something I should probably mention to her. I had honestly forgotten about it.

“You have a tattoo! Let me see! Let me see!”

Sophia bounces around me to see my tattoo, and I keep my eyes on Tanya as I feel her little hands grabbing at my shirt.

“It's Mommy!”

A year after she had been gone, I had taken my favorite picture of her and gotten a tattoo of it on my back. It was a close up of her face from the side, she has a soft, sweet smile on her lips and her eyes are cast down. The tattoo artist had done an

amazing job. I guess they would have, with how much money I paid for it.

I keep my eyes locked on Tanya, trying to figure out what she's feeling.

“Mommy, you look so pretty. Can I get a tattoo?”

The question comes so far out of left field that it takes both Tanya and I by surprise. The look on Tanya's face makes me bust out into laughter, my hand going to my chest as I laugh. She looks absolutely scandalized at the thought of her eight-year-old daughter getting a tattoo. I see her lips twitch as she tries to hold back her smile, and it only makes me laugh harder. Soph is looking back and forth between us, smiling but also confused on why we are laughing.

I finally get control over my laughter and suck in a deep breath.

“Maybe we can revisit that conversation when you're older.”

I'm still chuckling as I look between the two, and Tanya just shakes her head.

“I'll be right back.”

I turn again to go to my room and shower; I can't seem to keep the smile off of my face.

ONCE I'M DONE showering and changing, I take Tanya and Sophia down a level of my building and enter the code to get into their new apartment. I had my house keeper set everything up before they got here, and she should be here now stocking the fridge and cabinets for them.

“My housekeeper should be here. I had her go to the store and get stuff that you would need while here. Let me know if there is anything either of you want or need so I can get it. Uh, also, Tanya, I feel like I should warn you. You knew Lisa before everything happened.”

I glance over at her to gauge her reaction, and she looks uncomfortable to say the least.

The door beeps, and as I grab the handle and start to turn it, I look back at them; they are standing side by side, looking more like mother and daughter than ever, with matching expressions of excitement and nerves.

Each step I take with them fills me with nerves, and my stomach flutters with butterflies. I want them to be happy with me, but I don't know what to do for that happen. I have more than enough money to buy them whatever they want, and I will do anything they ask of me. I feel like the more I buy for them, the more I can prove to them that I want them in my life.

I finish opening the door, and they follow me in as I walk into the kitchen to introduce them to Lisa.

“Lisa, I want you to meet my daughter Sophia, and you remember Tanya?”

It was odd for me to introduce Tanya to people she technically already knows, but I know she needs it. Lisa turns around, and I can see that her eyes are watery as she looks between Soph and Tanya. She has to clear her throat a couple of time before she can say anything.

“Of course, nice to see you, Tanya, and so nice to meet you, Miss Sophia.”

She smiles at my daughter, and I can see her tracing Soph's features, looking at how much she looks like me.

“I'm going to show them around the place and help them get settled. Will you have Steven bring up extra keys please?”

Lisa nods, and I motion for the girls, my girls, to walk ahead of me to the living area. The first thing I want to show them is the view. I have the same one from my apartment, but I feel like seeing it in a space that is meant for them would be better. The main area of the apartment is an open floor plan and one whole side of the room is a floor to ceiling window, just like mine. The only difference is that the furnishings are softer looking than mine. The couches are a light gray color and covered in purple pillows. There are vases of flowers placed all around the apartment, and it has a homey feeling to it. Lisa did a good job at giving the place a woman's touch. The

curtains are drawn, and as I push the button for them to part, Sophia lets out an excited gasp and rushes over to my side, gripping onto my pant leg.

“We’re so high up!”

Her eyes are glued to the window and wide with excitement. You can see all of the buildings that surround us, and just past it all, the trees of Central Park.

“We are. The only thing above us right now is my apartment, and then above that is the roof. When we are done here, I can show you what’s up there.”

Her wide blue eyes, so much like mine, look up at me, and already I have so much love for this little girl. Tanya steps up next to us, and I can tell that she is staying as far away from the windows as possible.

Even if she doesn’t remember why, she’s still afraid of heights.

The thought strikes me as funny, but it’s also fascinating how she’s still the woman I knew and yet so different at the same time. Little things, like her fear of heights, have been showing themselves, and I find comfort in the things that remind me of the woman before the accident.

“You have access to the roof?”

“Yep, there are only two ways to get to it. A staircase in my place and a service elevator for the staff to reach it.”

She nods, still looking nervous to be so close to the windows. I take pity on her and close the curtains again.

“Come on, I want to show you to your rooms.”

I take Sophia’s hand and lead them through the hallway to the right of the living room, but before we can get to the room, my phone chimes in my pocket. I pull it out and see it’s from Jillian.

“I’m actually going to have to leave you two to explore the place on your own. It’s work, and it seems that there is some kind of emergency that I’m going to have to take care of. You guys look around, set your things up, and I will be back tonight.”

I put my phone away, and Sophia looks up at me with a sad expression.

“But what about the surprise on the roof?”

I kneel down in front of her and nudge her chin with my knuckle.

“I’ll just have to show you another day. I’m glad you two are here. I’ll see you later.”

I stand and head back to the main area, Tanya and Sophia shuffling behind me. I can hear Tanya whispering to Sophia about something. When I reach the front door, I turn to smile at them and find Sophia wrapped in her mother’s arms, her head resting on her stomach and a frown on her face. Tanya’s expression makes me pause for a moment. She has placed a mask of indifference on her face, but I can see the anger burning in her eyes.

I want to ask her what’s happened, but my phone starts ringing, so I have to answer it and get going. I make a mental note to ask her about it later before turning and leaving the apartment. I’m completely unaware of how leaving right then was a colossal mistake.

TANYA

This weekend is supposed to be the first of many that Sophia and I are going to spend in this new apartment. I wanted to do a trial run before we stayed more than a few days. I know that Chandler wants us to move into his place, especially since we are supposed to be engaged and getting married, but there is still something holding me back.

A sense of trepidation has settled in the pit of my stomach, and no matter what I do, I can't shake it. The way he just blew off Sophia about seeing the roof for work doesn't make the feeling any better either. I watch him walk out of the apartment with her in my arms, sniffing and on the verge of tears, and the rage I feel is making my blood boil.

This isn't how parents are supposed to act, and he has another thing coming if he thinks he can just put things off. A noise from the kitchen reminds me that we are not alone. I turn and make eye contact with Lisa, and she gives me a sympathetic smile. I lean down and kiss the top of Soph's head and pat her back so she will let go of my waist.

"Are you hungry, baby?"

She nods solemnly at me, and my heart breaks at her sadness. Lisa is just finishing putting the food away, and when I set Sophia up at the huge island that is in the middle of the kitchen and living room, she turns to face us.

"Would you like me to cook you something? I can make whatever you want."

It's sweet of her to offer, but I'm not comfortable having someone take care of us when I'm perfectly capable of doing so myself.

"Thank you, but I think I'll handle it. It's a lot to take in, and I think some normalcy will be good for the both of us."

I smile at her, hoping to soften the blow of the rejection.

"Of course. I understand."

She looks like she wants to say more, but stops when she looks over at Soph.

"Do you mind if I say something?"

My stomach flip-flops at her question.

"Uh, sure."

She walks to the end of the kitchen, a good distance away, where, with our voices pitched low, Sophia won't hear us.

"I know all of this must be overwhelming for you and you don't know who you can trust right now, but I'm here if you have any questions. I can try and help you figure out who you were before the accident. Who better than the person who takes care of your home, right?"

She says it as a joke, and I laugh politely in reply, but it makes me worry about how I may have treated her.

Was I a terrible person who demanded people to wait on me hand and foot?

One of my biggest fears is finding out that I hate who I was before, and this woman might be able to tell me who I was. I don't think I can handle finding out more about past me right now with everything else going on, but I know I will have to one day.

"Thank you for that. I may take you up on it, but just not right now. I'm still trying to get used to the idea that I have a past to learn about now, and my main focus has to be Sophia in all of this."

She nods and pats my hand that is resting on the counter next to us.

“I understand. Just know I’m here if you need me.”

For some reason, her kindness makes me emotional, and as she turns and walks back over to Soph, I have to take a moment to collect myself and swallow down the lump in my throat. She’s right that I don’t know who I can trust. These people know me, but I have no idea who any of them are. I don’t know if they are going to tell me what they want me to hear or the truth.

There are bound to be snakes in the den, and I needed to be careful. Not everyone is going to be like the people of Willow Creek.

AFTER LISA LEFT, I made Soph and I a quick and easy dinner before she and I got to work setting up the few things we bought with us around the apartment. I don’t want to move us too fast. Sophia still has her school and friends, but I want her to get used to having two parents now.

Chandler still hasn’t come back by the time I’ve finished giving Soph her bath, and as she’s changing into her pj’s, my phone chimes with a text. I leave Sophia in the bathroom to change and grab my phone from where I left it in the kitchen.

Chandler: I’m still at work, but I want to extend an invite to you and Soph to join me tomorrow for a gala at an art gallery. It’s for charity and should be a lot of fun.

We haven’t seen him since he walked out earlier after disappointing Soph, and now he wants us to drop what we may have planned to go with him to a work thing. Instead of answering him right away, I turn and go to Soph’s new room to ask what she thinks. She’s not in her room, and when I find the bathroom empty as well, my stomach drops as I rush out to the main area and search for her.

“Sophia?!”

Her voice is just barely audible down the hallway on the other side of the place.

“In here Mommy!”

I follow her voice down the hall and find her getting comfortable in the middle of the king size bed in my new room. I stop in the doorway and cross my arms, trying to look stern.

“And who said you could sleep in here?”

She smiles sweetly at me, and her bashful look is just too cute.

“Can I?”

I drop my arms and walk over to the bed, climbing in next to her and tucking her into my side.

“Of course you can. Do you want me to read to you?”

She nods and snuggles deeper into the blankets and into my side.

“Alright, first, I want to talk to you about something.”

How are you supposed to check on how your kid's doing with life when even you don't know what's going on?

She waits for me to talk and plays with one of my hands.

“Are you okay with us living here on the weekends?”

She shrugs one shoulder, a tell of hers that she has either something to say or wants to ask a question.

“Come on, out with it.”

She heaves a big, dramatic sigh and sits up to face me. We both move around a minute until we are both on the bed, sitting cross-legged and facing each other.

“I like this place, but why do we have to live away from Chandler?”

Surprise makes me fumble for my words. I didn't expect her to *want* to live with him just yet. She's been acting like he's just another person in her life and it's not a big deal he's here.

“Well, there are a lot of reasons. Do you want us all to live together?”

She shrugs again, and I place my pointer finger on her forehead and nudge her a little, making her giggle.

“All my friends at school have both a mom and a dad, and they all live together. I thought, since we found my dad, that we would all live together like they do.”

I really have no idea what I'm doing.

“Well, that’s the goal, but I want us all to take it slow. We all need to get used to each other, we can’t just move in together and be a family right away.”

Her big blue eyes look up to me for all the answers.

“Why not?”

Blowing out a breath, I try to think of a way to explain this messed up situation to an eight-year-old.

“Well, you know how Mommy can’t remember her life before a certain time right?”

She nods, her little eyebrows furrowed.

“Okay, that means that I don’t know Chandler anymore. Just like you don’t know him, so to be safe and make sure everyone is happy, we all have to get to know each other. Plus, we are only going to be here on the weekends for now. You are still in school; don’t you want to keep going to school with your friends?”

She nods, but the look on her face tells me I’m not doing a good job at explaining this to her.

“How about this? Why don’t we take this day by day, and if you have any questions for me or Chandler, you can just ask, okay?”

“Okay, but...”

I wait for her to think about her question.

“Why can’t I call him daddy? I call you mommy.”

My heart squeezes in my chest.

“That is something that you would have to ask him, but I don’t think he would have a problem with it, he may just be waiting on you to be comfortable with it.”

This seems to lift her spirits some, and it makes me realize that I haven't been paying close enough attention to how she's been feeling in all of this.

“Okay, I have another question for you. What do you say about going to a charity event with him this weekend? He invited us to go, and if you want, maybe you can talk about it with him then?”

Her eyes light up and she nods happily. I smile at her, and we both get back into a better position for me to read to her. She falls asleep halfway through the book, and I slip out of bed carefully to get ready for bed myself. Quickly sending a replay to Chandler before going to sleep.

Me: We would love to.

I HAVE no idea what time Chandler got home last night, or if he even made it home, but when I wake up the next morning, there is a text waiting from him.

Chandler: Great, I will have outfits delivered to you today.

Rolling my eyes, I place my phone on the bed and climb out, trying not to wake Sophia. I don't like that he spends so much money on me. Sophia is his daughter; he should focus on her.

You agreed to marry him.

I cringe at the thought. I don't know why I did it. He made it all make sense at the time, and I wanted the best for Sophia, but I'm starting to second-guess agreeing to it. We haven't spoken about it since, and I'm starting to think it was some kind of fever dream.

I make breakfast on autopilot, too caught inside my own head to pay attention to anything around me. I jump at the sound of someone knocking at the door and end up burning my thumb on the pan I'm using to fry bacon.

“Shit, ow.”

I place the tip of my thumb in my mouth and go to answer the door. My hand is still to my mouth when I pull the door open

and Chandler is standing on the other side, his eyes instantly going to my mouth. His eyes darken as he clears his throat.

“You okay?”

I take my thumb out of my mouth and look at the burn.

“Yeah, I just burned my thumb on the bacon pan.”

His heated look turns to concern, and he takes a step closer to me.

“Let me see.”

He gently takes my hand in his and inspects my thumb. He lowers his head and blows on the burn, and I no longer care about the pain. I can't even feel the pain anymore. My entire focus is on his mouth and my hand.

“It doesn't look too bad; do you feel like you need some burn cream?”

I slowly shake my head no, just barely able to answer him. His mouth curls into a smirk, and my eyes lift to see that he is watching me and knows what I was thinking.

“Um, no. It's fine; I'm fine.”

He drops my hand, still smirking

“I have to get breakfast off the stove.”

I turn around quickly and head to the kitchen, my face hot and my heart racing. I can hear his footsteps behind me as I get to the stove and take the bacon off the burner.

“Is Soph still sleeping?”

“Yeah, she slept in my bed last night if you want to go check on her.”

I'm hoping he does so I can get a moment to catch my breath. Every time I'm around him I lose all sense.

“No, let her sleep some more. I wanted to talk to you about tonight.”

Breakfast is finished and I no longer have an excuse to not face him. I turn and lean against the counter next to the stove.

“I had Jillian pick out dresses for the two of you for tonight. They should be here about noon so that you can get ready. I’ll stop by here to get you at seven. Is that enough time for you to get ready?”

Cocking my head to the side, I say, “Is seven hours enough time to get ready? Yeah, I think.”

He chuckles and rubs at the back of his neck.

“I know, I just wanted to be sure. I don’t want you to feel overwhelmed; I know you aren’t used to this world anymore.”

That heavy weight in my stomach appears again. It’s there every time someone points out that I don’t remember anything about being in this world.

“Yeah, we will be ready at seven.”

He nods while looking around the apartment, and suddenly it feels awkward.

“Do you want some breakfast?”

“No, thank you. I’m actually going to head up to my place. There is so more work that I need to get done. Let me know when Soph is up. I’d like to say good morning to her.”

I have to clench my jaw to keep from saying anything about his work. I understand that he has a business to run, but I thought with us being here he would tone it down, at least take the days off. The smile I give him feels forced, and I know he sees it, but he doesn’t comment on it; he just turns and leaves the apartment.

As I watch him leave again, I get a sense of déjà vu that doesn’t sit well with me.

SOPH WOKE up thirty minutes after Chandler left, and I feel a bit better when he comes down and spends some time with her, leaving only when our dresses arrive so we can get ready.

I made sure Sophia ate, had a bath, and was ready so that all she had to do was put on her dress and shoes just before it was time to leave. After she was done, I got myself ready. I took a

long shower, making sure to shave and moisturize everything. I take the time to slowly do my hair and makeup. I focus on every little task to keep from having a panic attack over going out tonight.

So far, our outings have been small, and I've been able to handle them, but something about tonight feels bigger than the rest.

Just as I finish getting Soph's shoes on, a knock sounds from the door, and when I look at the clock, I see it's seven on the dot.

"Alright, girlie. You ready?"

She nods before taking off for the door. I follow behind her at a slower pace, and when she rips open the door, she surprises everyone, including herself, when she yells, "Hi, Daddy!"

As soon as the words leave her mouth, she freezes. I keep my eyes pinned on Chandler to watch his reaction. I was going to warn him that she was going to ask about calling him that, but I think she got overexcited about the idea.

Chandler is frozen too, his face a picture of shock, and I'm about to step forward and smooth the situation over, but before I can, his face splits into a huge smile and he kneels in front of her, holding his arms out.

"Hey, baby girl."

She jumps into his arms, and as he hugs her, I can see tears in his eyes. I can feel my eyes well up as well. This is what I've always wanted for her. To have a father in her life that can wrap her in his arms and protect her at all costs.

Oblivious to the emotional moment she created, Sophia pulls out of his arms and jumps around.

"Let's go!"

Chandler stands and snuffles as he chuckles and holds his hand out for Sophia to go to the elevator.

"After you."

She takes off, and as I reach Chandler's side, he stops me.

“I want to give you this. I know we need to talk about it more, but I figured we could start with this tonight.”

I’m not sure what he’s talking about until he reaches into the inside pocket of his suit jacket and pulls out a little square box. My heart stutters in my chest as I stare at the ring box. I don’t know why this never occurred to me, wearing a ring, but I’m taken aback by the sight of it. He opens it to reveal a silver ring with a large diamond in the center and smaller ones running along the band.

The only thought I have in my head is the fact that I’m going to get it caught on everything.

“Wow.”

Chandler laughs and takes the ring out of the box before taking my left hand in his right.

“I hope that’s a good wow.”

He doesn’t put the ring on yet, just holds it up to my finger as he waits for my answer. Once I look up into his hopeful eyes, I don’t have the heart to tell him I would never wear something so large.

“Do you like it?”

No.

“Yes, it’s beautiful.”

He smiles and slides the ring onto my finger before leaning over and kissing me on the temple.

“I’m so happy that I found the two of you.”

His words are soft, and I’m not sure if he meant to say them out loud or not. Before I can reply, he takes my arm and loops it through his, leading us down the hall to where Sophia is waiting for us by the elevators.

I’m in a trance as the two of them talk about what’s going to happen tonight. I can’t focus on anything other than the feel of the ring on my finger. It’s heavy, like he tied a weight to my finger with a cold string.

I know what all of this means, I know what it means to him, but something is telling me that we shouldn't be doing this. It's too soon, and just because he knows things about me that I don't even know and he is the father of my child, it doesn't mean we have to get married.

When we get outside, Chandler's driver is waiting for us by a SUV. We all climb in, and the whole ride to the art gallery I feel like my chest is being squeezed tight by an invisible force. It's hard to breathe, and I'm thankful that Chandler and Sophia are too busy talking to each other to notice my panic.

I have no idea what is going to happen, but I do know this night could change everything; there's no way it won't.

TANYA

We are about a block away from the art gallery when Chandler turns to me.

“You should know there is going to be paparazzi tonight. We should only have to deal with them outside of the gallery and there will be security there to keep them back, but I wanted you to know so that you aren’t surprised.”

I shift in my seat, uncomfortable with the thought of people taking my and Sophia’s pictures like that. My mind flashes back to the pictures of Chandler and me that I found on my Google search.

“I don’t know if I’m comfortable with that. Sophia is so young; I don’t want her to be scared.”

He waves a hand through the air.

“It will be fine. I’ll be there with you guys. Besides, having her first exposure to the paps in this environment is better than us being ambushed in the street, right?”

I don’t like the way he is blowing off my concern; I’m not some child who is acting out, but before I can say anything, Steven pulls the car up to the curb in front of the gallery. I still want to tell Chandler off for being so flippant about my worries, but my stomach fills with butterflies as I see all the people with cameras lining each side of a makeshift walkway, and I have to take a deep breath.

“Alright, ladies, are you ready?”

Chandler smiles at us as someone opens the door for Chandler, he gets out and holds his hand out for Sophia to take, and I follow close behind her, ready for her if she needs me. There are people packed together on either side of the walkway and bright flashes of light are blinding us every few seconds. I can hear people yelling, trying to get the attention of whoever is on the walkway. It's more intense than I could have ever thought. The people are pushing and shoving each other to try and get a picture, and as they spot Chandler, they start yelling his name and shouting questions. Sophia takes Chandler's hand, and for a moment, I think she's going to handle the flashing camera lights and people yelling okay, but then someone shoves a mic in her face, and she gets shy. I place my hands on her shoulders and pull her back against me, ready to rip the reporter a new one, but Chandler steps between us and directs the reporter's focus to himself.

I kneel in front of Sophia. "You okay, sweet pea?"

She shrugs her shoulder and my heart breaks for her.

"Come here."

She steps into my arms immediately, and I try to think of a way that I can pick her up while wearing this dress and heels. It's a skin tight red dress that reminds me of the dream I had the other night. The one where Chandler and I slept together.

"I've got her."

Chandler turns away from the blushing blonde bimbo reporter and turns Sophia to face him so he can lift her into his arms. She buries her face into his neck and hides the rest of the way into the gallery. I make sure I hide it, but inside I'm fuming. At the reporter for scaring my child, then flirting with Chandler, and at Chandler for blowing off my concern and putting us in this situation to begin with. I want to say something to him, but I know now isn't the time.

We are inside the building now, and I follow behind Chandler as he makes his way over to the hostess to grab the information on what is here tonight for sale.

“Hello and welcome! Here is a list of all the items that are for sale tonight for the charity and their prices. There are pieces from many artists from all over the city, and you can find information on them on the pamphlets that are next to each of their works.”

She hands Chandler a piece of paper, and I can't help but notice that her eyes are glued to him and her smile is awfully bright. My mood darkens when I realize that I will most likely have to deal with this kind of behavior all night, women flirting with Chandler. Can't she see that he's holding a child? It's like Sophia is invisible to her.

I clear my throat and step up next to him, placing my hand on the arm that is holding our daughter with a smile at the woman.

“Thank you so much, we'll be sure to check those out.”

I turn to Chandler and Sophia and make sure the hostess hears me when I speak to Sophia.

“Sweetheart, do you want to come with Mommy to the restroom or do you want to stay with Daddy?”

Soph turns her face to peek out at me and softly says, “Stay with Daddy.”

I nod and rub her back, my heart giving a little jolt at the fact that he is making her feel safe after what happened outside.

“Okay, I'm going to run to the restroom real fast, and then I will catch up with you two.”

When I look up at Chandler, he is smirking at me and his eyes are dark. He's been giving me this look a lot lately, and every time I see it, my stomach fills with heat. I don't want to admit it, but I like it when he looks at me that way.

He turns so that his back is to the hostess and leans down so that he can place his lips to my temple.

His voice is soft as he whispers, “I know what that was about. It's incredibly sexy when you're jealous and staking your claim.”

I jerk back from him in surprise, my face flaming with heat.

“I-I wasn’t doing that.”

His smirk deepens, and I roll my eyes at him before turning quickly and heading to the restrooms. I need a minute to myself. In the span of ten minutes, I’ve had to deal with being thrust into the limelight, watching my daughter be frightened by rude people, and then watching a very attractive, younger woman flirt with Chandler. The night has just begun, and I’m already exhausted.

It’s going to be a long night.

I’m able to finish in the restroom quickly, and I’m back by Chandler’s side before he and Soph can get too far. I don’t look at Chandler as I step up to his side, but I can feel him looking at me. Sophia squirms in his arms to be let down, and as he places her on her feet, someone comes up to us from his other side.

“Chandler! I’m so glad you could make it!”

A very tall blonde woman wraps her arms around Chandler, and it doesn’t escape my notice that she is incredibly beautiful. Chandler pats her politely on the back, not turning to face her fully.

“Victoria, nice to see you. I heard you were holding a function, and I had to come and show my support.”

Victoria pulls back some but keeps an arm around Chandler’s waist so that her body stays close to his.

“You just couldn’t stay away from me, could you?”

I must make some kind of sound because the both of them turn to look at me. Chandler is amused and Victoria looks like she is going to say something rude until she sees me and her face turns to shock.

“Tanya?”

Her face pales and she looks like she’s seen a ghost, and in some way, I guess she has. I don’t say anything; I just look between her and Chandler, pulling Sophia closer to me. The

movement draws Victoria's attention to her and her head snaps to Chandler.

"You have a child?"

I really don't want Sophia here to witness this conversation. I have no idea how Chandler is going to react; we haven't talked about how to handle telling people about us.

"I do. Tanya here was in a bad accident when she disappeared and has been dealing with amnesia. We just recently found each other."

I don't like that he is telling people about what happened to me, but I don't really see any other choice for him. Most of these people knew me and are going to want an explanation.

"Amnesia?" Her tone is snarking, and she gives me a disbelieving look.

Chandler either doesn't hear the snark or chooses to ignore it. He removes Victoria's hands from around himself and steps back to my side. It's a good feeling to see him reject her and come to my side. Her face darkens at the move, but she quickly covers it up with a fake smile.

"Well, isn't that a fairy tale story. When did you make your way back, Tanya?"

I don't want to talk to this woman about my life, but I can't figure out a way to avoid it.

"I've been living in Willow Creek. Chandler attended a gala there and found me."

She eyes me up and down, and I get the feeling that she was counting on me staying gone.

"How nice. Chandler, you should have let everyone know that she was back. I'll get the word out that your lovely Tanya is back so we can all celebrate. I've got to mingle now; don't leave without saying goodbye."

She kisses Chandler on the cheek and spins around, her hair flipping behind her as she stalks off.

"She seemed nice."

Chandler snorts and turns to face Soph and I.

“Come on, let’s look around and see what they have. Sophia, point out some of the art you think would look good in your and Mommy’s new place.”

Sophia nods her head determinedly, and I know she’s going to point out just about every piece of art here tonight.

She runs off, and Chandler and I let her go ahead for a minute.

“Victoria and her parents are close friends of my family. Her parents are actually my godparents.”

I don’t know if that makes me feel better or worse about her.

“I grew up with her; she’s practically my cousin.”

I can’t help the snort that escapes me.

“I don’t think she views you the same way.”

He gives me a questioning look, but I just point to Sophia and walk ahead to catch up to her.

We let Sophia guide us through the gallery, and I’m surprised how much she likes it. I thought she would be bored within ten minutes of arriving, but with Chandler reading her all the stories behind the art and the artists, she seems to be entertained.

We spend thirty minutes looking around at everything, and I’m just starting to relax when a deep voice calls out for Chandler.

“Chandler Bishop, since when did you start coming to art galleries?”

The three of us turn to find a man headed in our direction. He’s about Chandler’s height with light brown hair that falls around his face and dark brown eyes that look almost black. He looks like he might be a few years younger than Chandler. His walk is confident, and you can tell that he grabs the attention of the room as he moves through it.

I turn to look at Chandler’s reaction to him, and the scowl on his face tells me he does not like this man. It’s interesting to me that there is someone he visibly shows disinterest in. I thought he liked everyone.

Once the man is close enough, Chandler nods at him.

“Damien.” His voice is cold and pitched deeper than normal.

He moves to stand just in front of Soph and I, blocking us from the man’s view, but it has the opposite effect, and the man’s eyes lock on me.

“And who is this beautiful woman?”

I’m surprised to find that he doesn’t know who I am. Everyone we’ve seen so far has known who I am. He holds his hand for me to take, and when I place mine in his, he turns it and brings the back of my hand to his mouth. I’m sure it’s meant to be a charming gesture, but all I want to do is yank my hand from his and wipe it off.

“Pleasure to meet you; I’m Damien Hawthorne. Chandler’s only competition.”

I look over at Chandler and he’s glaring daggers at Damien, he should be thankful looks really can’t kill.

“I’m Tanya and this is Sophia.”

Damien looks down like he’s just noticing Soph for the first time, and when she meets his eye, she takes a step back into me and scrunches up her nose.

“You’re not going to kiss my hand like that, right?”

Chandler lets out a guffaw, and I squeeze Soph’s shoulder.

“Sophia Roberts, that is not polite.”

She keeps eyeing him disdainfully, and I look to Chandler for help.

“Well, Damien. I think you’ve made my daughter and *fiancé* uncomfortable; I’d appreciate it if you backed off.”

His expression is open, and there is a smile on his face, but even I can hear the venom behind his words. Damien straightens and looks to Chandler with an expression that looks like he just discovered something great.

“Daughter? I didn’t know you had a kid, let alone were engaged.”

Damien looks to me again, and the predatory look he gives me makes my skin crawl. This is the second person to make me feel like I was just a pawn in some larger game that I don't understand. The feeling of not belonging from earlier resurfaces.

"You don't have that deep of an insight into my life, Damien. There is a lot you don't know."

This only causes Damien's smirk to deepen. Ignoring Chandler, he turns back to face me and reaches into his pocket for something. He holds out a white card for me to take.

"Call me when you get bored with this one."

The fact that he is doing this in front of Chandler and our daughter makes me sick. I don't move to take the card, and Damien just smiles wider as he puts it back in his pocket.

"Understandable, I'll just leave you with my name to look up later then, Damien Hawthorne."

He smiles at each of us, winking at Soph before he turns and walks back the way he came.

"What a creep."

Chandler is fuming next to me, almost shaking with his anger. I reach over and place my hand on his arm to get his attention.

"I don't know what's going on between you two but ignore him. He just wants to get under your skin."

He gives me a tense nod and motions for Sophia to lead the way again to more of the art. He's quiet for the rest of the time we are there, and after an hour of him brooding, I suggest we leave when I see Sophia yawn.

"I think we've seen everything here, let's just go home."

Chandler relaxes at my words and smiles for the first time since Damien Hawthorne showed himself.

"Good idea."

He picks Sophia up and settles her on his hip before taking my hand and leading us out the front doors and straight to where Steven has the car parked across the street. He doesn't slow for

the paparazzi and doesn't stop until we are at the car. He waits for Soph and I to get in before climbing in after us. Steven takes off without a word, and for the first time today, I relax fully.

No one talks on the way back home, and Sophia falls asleep just before we pull into the garage. Her head is slumped over, leaning against Chandler's arm. I watch the two of them as he stares down at her, stroking her hair out of her face, there's so much love and wonder on his face. It's a sight to see someone else who loves her as much as I do.

Steven pulls into the garage, and Chandler doesn't even hesitate to pick up Sophia to carry her up to the apartment. She stirs a little at the movement, and he just softly shushes her back to sleep. I can't take my eyes off of them and how much they look alike, not only do they have the same eye color, but the shape is the same too, both shaped like almonds. They both have straight noses and one sweet dimple on their left cheeks. I sneakily take my phone out of my purse and snap a picture. Chandler must see because he gives me a look that says he saw what I did, and I just smile sweetly at him.

Once the doors of the elevator open, I walk ahead of him to unlock the apartment and guide him through the dark place, moving toys and clothes out of his way and opening Soph's bedroom door for him. He lays her in bed, and I take over getting her changed into her pj's and tucking her in. Chandler leans against the door frame and waits for me, smiling when I turn to walk out of the room. We make our way to the living room, and I find that I don't want him to leave.

"Do you want a drink?"

"Sure."

I pour us both a glass of wine, and we settle onto the couch. He lets out a long sigh, and I can see how tired he is.

"You really don't like that Damien guy, do you?"

He groans at the mention of Damien.

"No, he's a pain in my ass and is constantly trying to steal my clients. It's worse now that he's set his eye on you. He knows

it will drive me crazy.”

I don't know if it's from the wine or having him so close, but for some reason, I have the urge to tease him.

“I don't know; he is pretty attractive. Maybe he was just being nice.”

His head snaps in my direction, and I have to work to keep from laughing.

“Don't even think about saying anything else. I can't even wrap my head around you finding him attractive.”

I shrug one of my shoulders.

“I'm just saying. He's a good-looking businessman; he could get anyone he wants.”

Chandler sits forward and places his wine glass on the coffee table before turning to me and yanking me over so that I'm pressed into his chest.

“You're going to regret teasing me, Tanya.”

He digs his hand into my side, and I let out a surprised laugh, not expecting him to tickle me.

“Hey! Stop that.”

I push him away from me, and the smile on his face makes me smile in return.

“You deserve it for saying that Damien Hawthorne of all people is attractive.”

I open my mouth to tease him some more about it, but he narrows his eyes at me and lunges at me until he is laying on top of me, and I can't help but laugh.

“Don't even think about it, woman. I can't be held responsible for my actions if you keep going.”

I smile up at him, and we both realize at the same time what position we're in. My smile slowly fades from my face as his eyes darken and trail over my face. His head lowers an inch, almost like he doesn't even realize he's doing it. My heart is

racing in my chest, and I know he can feel it with how tightly he is pressed against me.

“Can I kiss you?”

Before I can even think about his question, I nod my head, and he slowly lowers his face to mine until our lips are pressed together. It starts off as a soft kiss. His lips simply pressed into mine, but when I sigh into it, he groans and runs his tongue along my lips, seeking entrance. I open my mouth to him, and as he deepens the kiss, I can't help but tug on his suit jacket to try and pull him closer.

He doesn't try to take it any further than the kiss, but it's starting to drive me crazy that he's not touching me. I push his jacket off his shoulders and run my hands up and down his broad back. I pull my lips away from his just enough to whisper in his ear.

“Touch me, Chandler. I want to feel your hands on me.”

I know it's probably not smart for us to sleep together, but I haven't felt this kind of passion in years. In the last nine years I've only slept with one person, and it was when Sophia was around two. I feel desperate for Chandler now. Ever since I had that dream of us, I haven't been able to stop thinking about it, and I want him. Right now. I can deal with the outcome of it later.

Chandler lets out a breath and presses his forehead to mine, squeezing his eyes closed.

“Are you sure? If we go any further than this, I don't know that I will have the strength to stop.”

His words have the opposite effect on me that I'm sure he meant them to. My body fills with heat, and I squirm under him at the thought of him losing control with me.

“I didn't say anything about stopping.”

“Baby.” He groans the word, and my whole body clenches with how good he sounds saying it.

He stands suddenly, and just when I think he is going to stop this anyway, he leans down and picks me up bridal style and

rushes to my bedroom. He bursts through the cracked door and falls onto the bed with me under him. He starts kissing and sucking along my neck, and I almost can't get the words out with how good it feels.

"The door. You have to... you have to close and lock it."

He jumps up from the bed and sprints to the door closing and locking it quickly before sprinting back over to me. He stops at the end of the bed and stares down at me, his eyes trailing over my body. It reminds me of the dream.

"I still can't believe you're here."

I don't know what to say to that, so I sit up and pull the straps of my dress down and pull it until the top of my dress is around my waist, showing him my lacy red bra. He takes one step to me and traces one finger along the edge of it where my breasts are spilling over the cups. His touch feels electric, and my breathing becomes shallow.

"You are so beautiful."

He cups my face in his hands and leans down to kiss me, slowly lowering us back down to the bed. His hands slide down my neck to the straps of my bra. He pulls them down before moving to undo the clasps at my back, freeing my breasts. His mouth never stops moving down my body, and as he flings the bra off to the side, he captures one of my nipples into his mouth.

"Chandler." His name comes out on a gasp.

He finishes pulling my dress off of me, forcing my hips to lift so he can slide it past my butt. He pulls away from my breasts when he can't reach further down to take the dress off my feet and starts trailing kisses down my sternum, to my navel, stopping at the edge of my matching red panties. With the dress finally off, all that I'm wearing is my underwear, so he stops to sit up and look at my body.

"You are far too dressed." I reach for his shirt as I say this and start to pull the hem from out of his pants where he has it tucked.

He lets me unbutton his shirt before he stands and undresses at the edge of the bed.

“Move up the bed.”

I can't take my eyes off of him as I move to do as he says, until my head hits the pillows. Once he is fully undressed, he climbs into bed and starts kissing up my legs until his face is level with my stomach. He lays gentle kisses along the stretch marks there, and if they were ever going to be an insecurity of mine, they weren't going to be anymore. He pulls my panties down my legs and lifts my legs into the air so that he can pull them off. Once he throws them in the same direction as my bra, he grabs onto my thighs and holds them against his chest. Kissing up and down my calf, one hand sliding down until he cups me between my thighs, making me moan.

“Already so ready for me, baby.”

He pushes one finger against my clit and circles it slowly until I'm squirming uncontrollably.

“Chandler, please.”

He slides his finger down my slit and pushes it inside of me, the feel easing some of the tension, but not enough for me. I want more.

“Are you ready?”

I nod frantically, just wanting him inside of me already. He spread his thighs to settle on either side of my hips, my legs still up against his chest, and runs his tip up and down my center, pushing to press into my clit. My hips jerk up at the feeling, and he chuckles deep from his chest. I grip the sheets in my hands on either side of me. My body tight with tension from waiting for him to thrust into me.

He takes one hand from my legs and lines himself up with me, pausing for a second before very slowly pushing inside of me. He groans as I arch off the bed; the feel of him inside of me is so good.

“Fuck, baby. You feel so good.”

He doesn't keep a slow pace, as soon as he is all the way inside of me, he starts thrusting hard and fast. His hips shaking the bed with how hard he is moving in me. I can't stop from yelling out at the sensation, and I can already feel my orgasm starting to build.

"I'm not going to last long, baby. It's been too long since I've felt you wrapped around me. God, it's better than I remember."

We're both panting, and I watch his face as I slide my hand down to where we are connected and start to circle my clit. He moans as he focuses on my hand and starts to thrust harder into me.

I know it's not going to take me long to come, and from the way his thrusts are becoming frantic, I know he's not far off either. He moves my legs to settle around his hips and leans forward to place his hands on the bed next to me, the angle making him thrust deeper into me.

"Yes! There, right there."

He doesn't let up, and as my orgasm starts to flood my body, I can't help but arch up, my body tensing as I break apart. Chandler not far behind me.

"Fuck."

He grunts through his teeth and thrusts one more time into me before stilling. We're both out of breath, and I watch as his body shakes with aftershocks. It's the sexiest thing I have ever seen. I cup his face in my hands and softly kiss his lips.

I don't know what is to come from all of this, but something deep inside of me knows that this is right, closely followed by that sense of dread again. Like there is something important that I need to remember. Something that could change everything about how I feel.

CHANDLER

I never wanted to push her to do something too fast, but when she told me to touch her, the tight grip I had on my control snapped. I had gone nine years thinking that I would never get to hold her in my arms again, let alone feel her body under me as she came apart.

I moved to lay beside her after we both caught our breath and pulled her into my arms, where she still lay, her head on my chest. I can't keep my hands from touching her soft skin. On some level, I'm scared that all of this will be a dream.

I glance down at her face to see if she's fallen asleep and find her studying her ring with a serious expression.

“Are you sure you're okay with that arrangement?”

She doesn't answer me immediately, she just keeps her eyes on the ring. She sits up and pulls one of the pillows to cover herself as she turns to face me, crossing her legs. She is a vision, sitting there with her hair a mess, nothing but the pillow to cover her curvy, naked form, her cheeks flushed.

“Everything is happening really fast. I know it doesn't seem to be for you, but it is for me. I know nothing about you. I don't even know anything about myself, and yet I'm supposed to be marrying you simply because we were together before I lost my memories? Aren't you curious about what happened?”

I want to tell her that I'm not, but that's not the whole truth. I am curious, but I'm terrified to find out the reason why she was going to Willow Creek. I lift up to lean on my elbow and

turn my body to face her, trying to convey with my body language that I am an open book for her.

“What do you want to know?”

Her brows come together over her eyes in confusion.

“What?”

I wave my hand in between us.

“What do you want to know? Ask me anything about either of us; I will tell you anything you want to know.”

Her eyes dart back and forth between mine, and I can see her mind turning as she thinks about what she wants to ask.

“Do I have any family? Jillian told me that you hired a PI to try and find me, but wasn’t anyone else trying to find me?”

I’ve dreaded her asking this question.

“You do have family, but you’ve been estranged from them since before you and I met.”

I can tell this surprises her.

“Estranged? Why?”

“You told me once that there were times when someone had to cut off people that weren’t healthy for them to be around. You said that they had outdated views and there was nothing you could do to change them.”

I never wanted to pry into her life, but I always wondered what really happened to force her to cut them off.

“That’s all I said? I never told you *why* I felt that way?”

I shake my head no and she rolls her eyes, making me smile at how Sophia has picked up that habit from her.

“Okay, how old am I? When is my birthday?”

“You were born on October 22nd, 1988. You are thirty-five, about to be thirty-six.”

“What is my last name? I was using the name of the man who saved me as my last name. I’m going to have to change Sophia’s.”

Hope that she will change it to my last name fills my chest, but I'll let that be her choice.

"Carter."

I watch as she takes in this information.

"What about you? Do you have any family?"

"I have my parents. I'm an only child, so no siblings."

"Have you told them about us?"

I cringe because I know how this is going to sound.

"Not yet. I know my mother, and if I tell her I found you and she has a granddaughter, I'm not going to have a moment of peace with you two. She is going to come here and steal you away from me."

She laughs, and I know she thinks I'm joking, but I'm not. My mother will move in here if she has the chance.

"Am I still the same as I was before?"

This question throws me. I don't know why but for some reason I wasn't expecting it.

"In most ways, you are. There are some differences, but I think that's from growing up and going through what you have."

Her shoulders drop from where they were tensed. I hadn't realized how much this worried her.

"Where you scared you would be a completely different person?"

She nods. "Yeah, I was worried that I wouldn't like who I was before."

A pang hits me in the chest at the realization that she was worried about such a thing.

You're failing her by not telling her about her past, jackass.

"Do you want to know anything else?"

I've been too caught up in my own shit to realize that it's important to her to know these simple little things that are just natural for a person to know.

“How much did you pay to try and find me?”

This is something that I never planned on telling her about. Jillian must have told her about what I did, to some extent.

“Not enough, apparently, because all I had to do was go to an education charity in a small little town an hour away from here.”

I want to make her laugh, but the way she is looking at me tells me that I’m not off the hook.

“Why don’t you want to tell me?”

I move so that I’m lying on my back again and reach around her waist to pull her down onto my chest. Her face level with mine.

“Because I don’t want you to put a number on something that I would ultimately spend every penny I have on.”

Her hair has fallen in her face, and I reach up to brush it away.

“There isn’t a limit to what I would do for you.”

She searches my face, and I hope that she can see how much I mean it.

I DON’T SEE much of my girls on Sunday. I have work to do, and I spend most of the day locked away in my home office trying to fix the presentation that marketing gave me. They didn’t do bad with it, but I want, no, need it to be perfect. We need more customers.

Around one, I get a text from Tanya.

Tanya: If you want to say goodbye to your daughter, you need to do so now. We are getting ready to leave. Kayla is here.

The tone of the text worries me, but I brush it off as her being nervous about the drive back to Willow Creek.

Me: On my way down.

I close the documents I’ve been working on and make my way down to the girl’s apartment. The door is partially open, so I walk in.

“I’m here.”

I listen to see where they are in the apartment and follow the sound of soft voices coming from the kitchen. Tanya and Kayla are standing at the island, talking, and from the looks of it, it’s about something important.

“Hey, you guys ready to go?”

Tanya doesn’t even look at me as she nods her head toward the hall that leads to the spare rooms.

“Soph’s in her room grabbing some things.”

Feeling dismissed, I head over to the hall, trying to catch Tanya’s eye as I do.

What happened between last night and now?

When I get to her room, Sophia is shoving things into a book bag.

“What in the world are you doing?”

She doesn’t even flinch as I walk in and sit on her bed.

“Mommy said to pack only the stuffies I can’t leave behind and to set the rest up on my bed, but when I was trying to choose who to leave, I couldn’t decide. I can’t just leave some of them behind.”

A reasonable dilemma to have.

I have to work to keep my laughter back; I don’t want her to think that I’m making fun of her.

“I don’t think all of them are going to fit in your bag, and I think Mommy wanted you to keep some here so you don’t have to bring them back and forth every time you come here.”

Her little shoulders drop and her lip pouts out some.

“Aww, come here.”

I open my arms for her, and she climbs into my lap, laying her head on my shoulder.

“How about this, whatever ones you were thinking of leaving here, I’ll take back to my apartment so they can stay on the couch in my office while you are back in Willow Creek?”

She springs up and jumps off my lap, bouncing up and down on her toes.

“Really?!”

I love the fact that I can make her so happy with such a little thing.

“Really, and whenever you are missing them, you can let me know and I will let you video call them whenever I’m home.”

She jumps up and down, pumping her arms in the air.

“Yay! Thank you, Daddy!”

Every time she calls me Daddy, my heart expands three sizes bigger, and I have to swallow back the tears that rise in my throat. Just a few weeks ago, I never thought I would have this; I never thought I would have Tanya back, and now here stands our little girl.

Kayla appears in the doorway and smiles at Sophia as she digs out stuffed animals from her bag.

“Your momma wants to know if you’re ready to go, missy. Did you choose which stuffies are staying here?”

I find it odd that Tanya sent Kayla in here to get her, but I don’t say anything about it in front of Soph.

“Yep! Daddy is going to keep them for me, and he said I can video call them whenever I want.”

Kayla smiles at her but avoids eye contact with me.

Alright, now I know something is wrong.

I stand from the bed and say to Soph, “Aunt Kayla can help you gather them for me; I’m going to talk to Mommy really quick.”

Before Kayla can say anything, I make it out the door and down the hall. Tanya is in the kitchen, cleaning out the fridge. I’m assuming from things that will go bad in the next week.

Is she doing this to avoid me?

“Hey, you. I wanted to say goodbye to you too.”

She moves around the island to grab the trash can as I make my way toward her.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yep, I’m just trying to get everything done. We need to make it back before it gets too late so Soph can go to bed at a decent hour for school tomorrow.”

It’s a valid reason, but something tells me it’s not entirely the truth.

“Right, of course.”

An awkward silence falls over the room, and I’m at a loss for what to say to her. Last night had been amazing, and I felt like it had opened a door for us, and now she won’t even look at me. Kayla and Sophia come into the room just as Tanya closes the fridge.

“Alright, sweet pea, give your daddy a hug and a kiss. We’ve got to get going.”

Sophia skips over to me, and I kneel down so that she can wrap her arms around my neck. I hold her close to me for a moment, not wanting to let her go. I wish we were at the point where they didn’t have to leave. I want them to be living with me already, but I understand that Tanya wants to take things slow. No matter how much I want to move things along, I will move as slow as she needs me to. I won’t risk losing her again. I almost didn’t get to meet my daughter, and now that I have, I can’t even imagine what my life would have been like.

I let Soph go and stand. Kayla ushers her out of the apartment, and as Tanya tries to rush past me, I put my hand on her stomach.

“I’m not sure what’s happened between last night and now, but when you’re ready, I’ll listen to whatever it is.”

I kiss her temple, breathing in her scent for a moment before pulling back.

“Let me know when you make it there, please. No matter how late.”

I step to the side, and she looks at me before walking out and following our daughter. It kills me to watch them go.

THE WEEK GOES BY SLOWLY, and by Wednesday I'm ready to cancel all meetings and drive to Willow Creek. I've barely spoken to Tanya or Sophia this week; my schedule has been jam-packed with meetings. I miss my girls and knowing that they are just an hour away is worse than before, when I didn't know what happened to Tanya. They are just out of reach now.

I glance at the clock and see that it's just before five in the evening, so I decide that the rest of the work can wait until tomorrow. I want to get home at a decent hour and FaceTime Sophia so she can see her stuffies. So far, she's only called one other time to see them.

After I pack the things I want to take home, I wave goodbye to Jillian and head out. On days like this one, where I'm exhausted and want nothing more than to lay down, I'm even more grateful to have Steven under my employment. I didn't want to have to fight five o'clock traffic.

As soon as I get into my apartment, I notice that the cold chill is back. Even though Soph and Tanya didn't stay here with me, they were still present, warming it up simply by being near to me. I send Tanya a text to see if I can call to talk to her and Soph, and as soon as I get the go ahead, I hit the button and wait for them to pick up.

Soph's sweet face fills the screen.

"Hi, Daddy!"

I smile at her.

"Hey, baby girl. How was your day at school?"

I listen as she prattles on about everything that she did at school. Happy that I can just sit and listen to her talk. I show her the stuffies that I set up along the cushions of the couch in my office and she has me put the phone up to each one so she

can inspect them. Once she has looked over each and every one, her mother calls her to take a shower.

“You go take your shower. Hand Mommy the phone so I can talk to her, okay?”

I watch as the cabin flashes by on the screen as Soph runs through the rooms, and I listen as Tanya tells her to make sure she washes everything. She puts the phone up to her face for a moment.

“Just one second, Chandler.”

She puts the phone back down, and as I wait for her to walk to wherever she is going, I shift around in my seat. I feel like a teenager again. Nervous to talk to my crush. She sits down, and I can see the stairs behind her, which tells me she is in the living room. Far enough away from Sophia that she can't hear us talk, but close enough so Tanya can still hear her if needed.

“Sophia said you wanted to talk to me.”

Something is still wrong, and I can't wait to see her in person to find out. If we are to get married, even if she thinks it's just for the status, I need to make sure she's happy.

“Are you finally ready to tell me what's wrong? You've been acting off since Sunday.”

She studies me through the phone, something that I've noticed she does a lot.

“I was upset Sunday, but I didn't want to say anything in case it was just a timing thing, but the last few days have shown me that it wasn't.”

I clench my fist around the phone. I don't like that she has been upset with me and never said anything.

“So why haven't you called me? Communication is important in a relationship, Tanya. You can't just be mad at me and expect me to figure it out on my own and fix it.”

My tone is ruder than I intended it to be, but I don't like mind games.

“I don’t know how to be in a relationship, Chandler! You keep on acting like this should all be as if nothing ever happened to me. Like I should have known you and remembered everything from nine years ago as soon as I saw you, but that’s not going to happen. All I know are the last nine years.”

Realizing that she is right and that I’ve been acting like we were never apart, I take a deep breath to try and calm down. We are both angry, and if we don’t calm down, we aren’t going to get anywhere with this conversation.

“Fine, I’m sorry. I don’t know how to handle all of this either. I’m going to fuck up, and I need you to tell me when I do. Now, why have you been mad at me this week? I thought what happened Saturday night was amazing.”

She blushes, and I take it as a good sign.

“It was, but the next day, when you chose to work instead of being with Sophia and I on our last day with you, it wasn’t.”

My head jerks back in surprise. I didn’t realize that’s what I had done. Yes, I got busy with work, but I didn’t choose it over them.

“Anytime we are with you, whether you are here or we are there, you work. Don’t get me wrong, I admire your drive, but it shouldn’t be more important than your daughter. You still haven’t shown her the roof because you keep getting pulled away for work. This isn’t how you get to know people and bond with them, Chandler. How am I supposed to know that I can trust you if you aren’t around? And the fact that you chose to work after what happened Saturday really hurt. It was like it meant nothing to you.”

I feel like I’ve been punched in the gut. I’ve always been somewhat of a workaholic; it’s just who I am, and everyone seems to understand that. Hearing that I hurt Tanya and let Sophia down guts me.

“How are we supposed to be a family if you would rather work?”

I blow out a breath and lean forward, holding the phone in one hand and my head in the other.

“I didn’t think of it that way. It’s no excuse, but it’s what I’m used to. I’m sorry that I hurt you. I will work on working less.”

I can see her trying not to smile at my choice of words, and I smile sadly at her.

“I’m really sorry. I’ll make it up to you and Sophia.”

Her sigh sounds tired.

“You don’t need to make it up to us, you just need to decide what is more important. Your work or us. I’m not saying you have to stop working, but you do need to realize spending time together is important for our daughter, regardless of if it’s convenient for you or not.”

I nod, feeling like an absolute ass and like a terrible father.

How am I going to prove to her that I can be a good father and husband when I have no idea what I’m doing?

TANYA

I woke up this morning after having another one of those dreams that I'm not entirely sure are just dreams. I've had one almost every night this week. Some include Chandler, and others have people that I think I'm supposed to know but can't place. The dreams the last two nights have been more flashes of moments than actual dreams.

Chandler and I were at some cabin, not my cabin, but one by a lake. Both dreams have started the same way. Chandler and I are out on a deck, having a nice dinner with candles and wine, and then the dream turns into flashes of Chandler and I all over each other inside the cabin. Flash after flash of us deep in the throes of passion. Him kissing my neck and lifting me into his arms. Flashes of me unbuttoning his shirt and kissing down his chest. Pictures of him over me, sliding into me as I arch up to meet him.

It's proven to be a distracting week. Ms. Poppy has called me out on my daydreaming multiple times at the café. I keep drifting off and thinking about all the things we did in my dreams. It makes me want to see him; I'm almost desperate to see him.

It's Friday, and he is supposed to be coming here this weekend to spend time with us. Ever since our conversation over the phone about his work, he has made it a goal to call us at least once a day. He talks to Sophia and lets her check over the stuffies she left with him, and once it's time for her shower, I get the chance to speak with him. He's been telling me about things from my past and filling in a lot of blanks that I had

about who I was. Things like why I'm afraid of heights—I had a fall as a child from a rock I was climbing at the beach and broke my arm. Apparently, ever since then I've had issues begin up high.

It's interesting to see how the things I can't remember are still affecting my everyday life. Like my body still remembers things, even though my mind can't.

Along with the dreams, there have been things that I know about Chandler that I'm not sure how I know them. I don't even realize that it's something I probably shouldn't know until later on when I think back on our conversations.

I'm starting to think that some of my memories are resurfacing. I haven't said anything to anyone about the dreams or things I'm remembering because I'm scared of getting my hopes up. I don't want them to tell me that I'm not remembering things correctly and that these things never happened.

What if my dreams are just dream? What if the things I remember about Chandler, like his hatred of mushrooms, are just things that I've picked up unconsciously over the last few weeks?

I want to be hopeful that my memories are finally coming back some, but after nine years of nothing, I feel like I need to resign myself to the fact that it could just be a fluke.

“Tanya, it's time for you to go pick up Sophia.”

Ms. Poppy's voice pulls me from the trance I was in, and when I turn to face her, she has a concerned look on her face.

“You okay, hun? You've been pretty out of it lately.”

I give her a reassuring smile and move to get my things.

“I'm fine, just tired. It's been a crazy few weeks.”

She nods, but I don't think my answer makes her feel any better. Seeing her concern makes me want to spill my guts about my theory. I have the sudden urge to blurt out that I think I'm getting my memories back, but I'm afraid to speak it out loud.

I take a deep breath, and as I exhale, I tell her, “I think I’m starting to remember things.”

Her eyes widen some, and I can tell she’s trying to hold back her excitement.

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

I groan and lean back against the counter, dropping my head in my hands.

“Yes, but what if I’m wrong? Or what if I am remembering things but this is all I get?”

I feel her arm wrap around my shoulders before she squeezes me to her.

“You’ve gone nine years not remembering anything about your life and you’ve been just fine. If you aren’t remembering things, then it will be no different, but if you are, you have a man that would do anything to fill in the gaps for you.”

I lower my hands and look to her.

“Do you think we’re moving too fast? Technically, I just met him.”

Her smile is maternal and knowing at the same time.

“Your mind has just met him, but your soul remembers him. Tell me there isn’t a pull you feel toward him.”

I can’t tell her that; I’ve felt it since that first day.

“It’s been nine years, and I don’t know anything about him.”

“So get to know him. You fell for him once; don’t you owe it to yourself to see if you will again? Don’t let fear stop you from getting back to the man you’re meant to be with.”

But how do I know I’m meant to be with Chandler?

She pats my arm and lets me go.

“Don’t stress yourself out over the what-ifs. Take it day by day. Now, go get your sweet girl; I know she doesn’t like it when you’re late.”

I push off the counter and walk into the back to put my apron up and grab my things. She’s right, I need to focus on the here

and now and not worry over the things I can't control. It's much easier said than done though.

I make it to Sophia's school just as the bell rings, and I watch as she walks out the doors chatting away with her friends. Seeing her laughing and smiling makes me realize that we haven't had her friends over in a while; I need to arrange a playdate for her. She's so social and loves to have her friends around. She hasn't looked up yet to see me, so I just wait for her to be done and let her have her time with her friends.

"She really loves to talk, doesn't she?"

I jump at the sound of Chandler's voice, and when I turn around, he is standing a couple of feet behind me, smiling at Sophia. My heart races at the sight of him. My dreams don't do him justice. He's dressed in a black pair of slacks and a dark blue button up with the sleeves rolled up.

"Hey, I didn't know you were going to be here already."

He looks down at me and walks over until he is only an inch away.

"I was going crazy not seeing you two. I only had one meeting that ended earlier than I had planned, so I left straight from the office."

I can smell his cologne now that he is closer, and I can't stop my mind from picturing the things we did in my dream.

"Oh." The word is a breathy whisper, my mind too full of images of me and him in bed to think of a better reply.

He raises an eyebrow at me, and I shudder as his eyes trail down the length of my body and back up.

"What are you thinking right now?"

I can feel my face flush at his question, so I look around to avoid his eyes.

His chuckle is low, and it makes my stomach clench.

"I think I can tell."

I lift my eyes back up to his, and he takes another step closer to me, just barely touching me. His eyes are dark, his lips are

pulled into a smirk, and all I want is for him to kiss me.

“Daddy!”

We jerk apart at the sound of Sophia’s voice, and he groans and says, “Hold that thought.”

He squats down to scoop her into his arms, and I look around again at all the parents and kids, making sure no one saw us. There is a group of moms to the side of us; they are all watching Chandler, and I recognize the look in their eyes.

Back off, ladies; he’s mine.

I surprise myself with that thought and turn away from the women to point my hand toward the road home.

“Alright, Soph, lead the way home. You can tell Daddy about your day on the way.”

I just want to get out of here and away from all the women giving Chandler bedroom eyes. I don’t like being jealous. I follow behind them and watch as they walk hand in hand on the way home. I take a quick picture and send it to Chandler. He takes his phone out, and when he sees what I sent him, he turns to me and smiles.

Him being here right now makes the worries and stress I had earlier fade. No matter what happens between him and me, at least I know that he loves Sophia as much as I do. She deserves to have the love of both parents, and he can provide her with things that I can’t. He has enough money that I know she will want for nothing in her life, and I can’t risk messing that up for her.

We make it home, and the two of them set up at the kitchen table to do her homework while I figure out what to make for dinner tonight. While I walk around the kitchen looking to see what all we have, I am fully aware of Chandler’s presence.

I need to tell him about my dreams and ask him if the things I’m remembering are real. I need to know if my memories are truly coming back or not. If he tells me that none of it happened, then I will know that they are never coming back. But if he says these things did happen and the little things I’m remembering are true, then there is some hope.

Please let these be real memories.

AFTER DINNER, I get Sophia in the shower, and after she's in her pj's, the three of us gather on the couch and watch a movie. Sophia sits in Chandler's lap and pulls me close so that I'm pressed into Chandler's side and she can put her feet in my lap. She covers us with a blanket that I keep on the couch for movie nights and cuddles in with one of her stuffies held to her chest.

Chandler looks over at me when she's settled, and we both have to work at not laughing.

My girl is just too cute.

I start the movie, and about ten minutes in, I feel Chandler shift; he has one arm wrapped around Sophia and lifts the one I'm leaning on to settle it on the back of the couch behind me, his hand resting on my shoulder. I turn my head to look at him and raise a questioning eyebrow at him. He just smiles at me, his eyes glinting with how happy he is in this moment.

Can we really get past everything and be a family?

Even though I was once part of his world at one point, it feels as if we are from two different places. I can't help but wonder if we are just getting caught up in it all. Is he just holding on to someone from his past that no longer exists? Am I holding on to someone that connects me to a past I don't remember? It's hard to tell what is real and what is just us trying to make real. There is still a little voice in the back of my head that questions why I left him in the first place. If we were so in love, then what would cause me to flee?

I don't pay much attention to the movie, too lost in thought to care about what's going on, but at one point Chandler and Sophia laugh at something, and I'm hit with a picture of another time.

CHANDLER and I are sitting on a bench swing on someone's porch. His arm is around me as he rocks us back and forth

gently. He's laughing at something someone said, and I look up at him as he turns to me.

"If we have kids someday, remind me to never let Josh watch them."

I shake my head and laugh, standing up from the swing and collecting the bottles of beer from the table.

IT'S like a slide show of images in my head, each moment a freeze frame from a movie. I look to Chandler, and when he looks at me, he cocks his head to the side as if to ask me what's going on. I don't want to disturb Sophia and ruin the bonding moment we are having, so I shake my head at him and turn back to the movie, trying to figure out if what I just saw was a memory.

It felt like a memory.

We put on a second movie after Sophia practically begs us to, and about halfway through, I look over to see that she has fallen asleep on Chandler's chest.

Quietly, so I don't wake her, I whisper, "Do you want me to take her to bed?"

He shakes his head and tightens his arm around her.

"Not yet, let's just sit here until the movie is over and enjoy the moment."

Smiling, I lean back under his arm and cuddle in close to the two of them. I push all thoughts of my memories coming back to the back of my mind and do what he says and just enjoy this moment.

Moments like this are still so new to me. For nine years, it's just been Soph and me. I haven't dated anyone seriously, and there has never been another person involved in her and my times together. It's nice to have a pair of strong arms to lay in and feel safe.

Once the end credits start running on the screen, Chandler lifts his arm from around me and moves so he can lift Soph and

stand from the couch.

“Stay there while I put her to bed. We still have unfinished business from earlier to attend to.”

Heat floods my body at his words, and I watch him carefully walk up the stairs to put our daughter to bed. I’m suddenly nervous for him to come back down. We’ve already slept together, but I’m nervous about doing it again. My desire for him, though, is stronger than my nerves. I listen to his footsteps creaking above me as he walks to her room, then listen as he heads back to the stairs and walks down. Each sound of the wood squeaking makes my heart beat faster and my breathing accelerate. As soon as he hits the bottom step, his eyes are on me, and they are dark with desire.

As he walks over to me, my nerves make me blurt out the first thing that comes to mind.

“Who’s Josh?”

He stops short and stares down at me with a confused expression.

“Where did you hear that name? Did I mention him to you?”

He finishes walking over to me and sits down on the couch next to me.

“No, while we were watching the movie I think I remembered something.”

His head snaps over to look at me, and he scoops me up and moves me so that I’m straddling his lap, facing him. He cups my face and looks deeply into my eyes.

“Are you getting your memories back?”

I shrug, not really knowing how to answer him.

“I’m not sure. I’ve been having these dreams, and every once in a while, like tonight, I get these pictures in my head, but I don’t know if any of it has happened.”

He lets out a long breath, lets go of my face, and leans back against the back of the couch.

“Well, Josh is my best friend, and if I haven’t mentioned him before, I think you may be remembering some things. Tell me about your dreams.”

He shifts deeper into the couch and places his hands on my hips. I’m distracted for a moment by our position, and he smirks up at me.

“Tell me about the dreams, and then we will get to that.”

I blush and roll my eyes at him. I tell him about the first dream I had. The one where I was wearing a red dress and we slept together after some kind of night out. I told him about the lakeside cabin and about sitting on the porch swing and him talking about Josh. I stare at his chest while I tell him everything, and when I’m done, I look up to find that he has tears in his eyes.

“Those are memories, baby. All those things happened.”

His voice is tight with emotion, and I’m enthralled by his reaction. He snuffles and blow out a breath before he sits up suddenly and kisses me.

I gasp in surprise, and he takes the opportunity to deepen the kiss, sliding his tongue into my mouth and making me moan. I slide my hands into his hair and tug on the strands. He groans and grips my hips in his hands, grinding me down onto his rapidly hardening length. I pull back to whisper.

“Upstairs. Now.”

He stands with me still in his arms, and I wrap my legs around his waist as he carefully makes his way upstairs and to my bedroom. He quietly closes the door and locks it before walking over to my bed and sitting down on the edge. He yanks my shirt over my head and lowers his mouth to suck and nip at my cleavage. I squirm on his lap and reach between us to cup his erection constricted by his slacks. The material is thin enough that I can feel his heat.

“I need to be inside of you right now. This isn’t going to be sweet and slow, baby. I need to feel you come apart around me. A week is too long.”

His words are frantic, and I quickly climb off his lap to undress. He stands and does the same, and for a moment, it's a frenzy of flying clothes until we are both naked. I place my hands on his chest and push him until he sits back down on the edge of the bed, then I climb back over him and grab his length to line him up with my entrance. I slowly slide down onto him, and we both moan at the sensation.

“You always feel so amazing.”

Chandler wraps his arms around my back, placing one hand on my butt and the other threading through my hair. He lowers his head to lick and kiss as much of my breasts as he can, and I can't help but start rocking my hips. The feel of him inside of me too good to keep still.

“That's it, baby. Ride me.”

I'm already panting, and as I place my hands on his shoulders and lift up, I know that he was right about this being quick. After sleeping with him once and constantly dreaming about us having sex this whole week, I need a release fast.

I don't know if it's from the years being apart, but each time we've been together has been frantic and fast, with each of us racing to the finish line as quickly as we can.

I start to set a quick rhythm, lifting up slowly before quickly slamming back down. The moans and groans that are coming from him just make me hotter and hotter. I want to keep making him make those sounds. It drives me closer and closer to my orgasm.

Every sensation feels like it's been amped up to the extreme. I let my head fall back as I wrap my arms around Chandler's neck. His hands keep me up and provide just the right amount of support for me to lean back and move my hips faster against him.

“You look so sexy right now, fuck. I love watching you ride me.”

I can't catch my breath as I push us both closer to our release. Chandler releases his grip on my butt and slides his hand

around to my front, pressing his thumb on my clit and making me yell out.

“Come for me, Tanya. Let go and fall apart for me.”

His thumb circling my clit and his words are all it takes to push me over the edge. He takes over thrusting up inside of me, and as I reach that pinnacle point, he thrusts into me one more time; using the grip on my hips to pull me down on him, he shouts as he too reaches his release.

We stay like that while we catch our breaths. Chandler’s head resting on my chest while I run my fingers through his hair.

“I want to take you somewhere.”

He sits up to look at me.

“What do you mean?”

“I booked us a trip to the Maldives for a week. Just the two of us. I think we need some time alone to get reacquainted with each other. Especially if we are going to go ahead with the marriage.”

The Maldives for a week?

“What about Sophia?”

He looks nervous about my reaction.

“I talked to Kayla before I came to the school, and she said she’s okay with watching over her for us while we get away. You have time to decide; I booked it for the week of your birthday. I figured we can celebrate all the ones I missed at once.”

I hear Ms. Poppy’s voice in my head and her words from earlier today.

Don’t let fear stop you from getting back to the man you’re meant to be with.

“Do you want to think about it before giving me your answer?”

Don’t hold yourself back, Tanya.

Shaking my head no, I say, “No, I would love to go away with you for a week.”

His smile is blinding as he kisses me.

If we can make it to my birthday without any issues, then I’ll know that we have a chance. We’ve been doing so well and getting along so nicely, what could possibly go wrong now?

CHANDLER

The next three weeks go by quickly. The day after I told Tanya about the trip, we both sat down with Sophia and asked her if she would be okay with it. Tanya had never been away from her for more than a night before and was worried about her reaction. She was ecstatic about the thought of staying with Aunt Kayla for a whole week. I think Tanya was struggling with the idea more than Sophia. The only problem Sophia had was the fact that she wouldn't see Tanya on her birthday, but when I told her she could FaceTime us *and* we would do something with her when we got home, she was alright.

I tried to be supportive and help her through it when I could, but I don't think I'm really going to be able to get her to relax until we get to the island.

I stayed with them at their cabin this weekend so that we could spend time with Sophia and not have to worry about getting her back to Willow Creek. I had my jet ready and waiting for us at the small airport here. The best thing about being able to afford one is not having to worry about boarding times. We could leave whenever Tanya was ready to go.

We are at Kayla's now to drop Sophia off, but Tanya won't let her go.

"Mommy!"

Sophia tries to pull out of Tanya's arms, but she doesn't get very far.

"Let Mommy hug you, child. I'm not going to see you for a whole week!"

I snicker from my spot on the couch, and Tanya glares at me. I hold my hands up.

“We don’t have to go.”

Sophia looks at me with a pout.

“But I want to stay with Aunt Kayla.”

“Alright, alright. We’re going. I’m going to miss you so much.”

Tanya grabs Sophia’s face in her hands and kisses her all over her face until Sophia is in a fit of giggles. She finally lets her go, and Sophia walks over to me, her face serious.

“Don’t let Mommy stay. I want to spend the week with Aunt Kayla.”

I snort, and Tanya throws a pillow at me. I dodge it and lean over to kiss Sophia’s head.

“I won’t; I promise. I’m going to miss you, Soph.”

She smiles up at me with her sweet little face and jumps into my arms. I hug her tightly to me and then let her go to go stand by her aunt while I try to get her stubborn mother out the door.

“Come on, babe. We want to get there today.”

She rolls her eyes at me and waves at Sophia the whole way to the car. Steven opens the door for us, and I can see him holding back a smile at her dramatics. We get in the car, and once we are settled and Steven takes off for the airport, Tanya turns to me.

“She wasn’t even a little upset that she’s not going to see me for a week.”

I pick up her hand and kiss the back of it.

“She will miss you, and once we get back, she is going to be so excited to see you.”

“She better.”

“Are you going to be okay with this drive?”

She looks out the window nervously before looking back at me.

“Yeah, it’s a short drive so I can handle it; I’m not sure how I’m going to handle the plane though. I have no memories of ever being on one.”

I nod in understanding. We talked about this over the last few weeks. Whenever we flew before, she never seemed to have any issues and never told me of any, but that was before she was in a horrific accident.

“It will be okay. We won’t be on a crowded plane, and there is plenty that we can do to keep you busy.”

She raises an eyebrow at me and crosses her arms.

“I’m not having sex with you on a plane.”

I burst into laughter.

“I didn’t mean that but let me know if you change your mind. I like that it’s where your mind goes.”

I watch as she blushes and turns to face out the window. The rest of the drive is quiet. I’m nervous about how this trip is going to go. She thinks it’s just for us to get to know each other better and see if we can continue on with a friendly marriage, but I want to make her fall in love with me again. I want to show her that we are meant to be together and that we can have a happy future. I know she’s been having second thoughts about us lately.

I will do anything to prove to her that she can count on me. That I will be the best husband and father that she could want.

We get to the airport and board the jet right away. The flight is going to take around eighteen hours with one stop halfway there for the plane to refuel. Luckily there is a bed at the back of it so that we can try and get some sleep on the way there.

WE FINALLY ARRIVE on the island in the early morning hours the next day. We are both too exhausted from the flight to appreciate anything about our destination. We make our

way to the Villa that we will be staying in for the week and collapse onto the bed, falling asleep instantly. I just barely remember to set an alarm to wake us up at a decent hour so that we can get over the jet lag.

It feels like I've been asleep for just a few minutes when the alarm sounds. I hear a muffled groan from beside me, and when I turn to look at Tanya, she has buried her head under the pillow. I smile and roll over to wrap my arm around her waist. Seeing her lying next to me wakes me up instantly.

I start kissing along any exposed skin that I can reach, and she groans again.

“Time to get up, baby. I want to see that body of yours sunning in a bikini. Or better yet, with nothing on.”

She shoves me away, and I laugh before rolling on top of her.

“Chandler!”

She is awake now and when she opens her eyes, I start kissing my way down her body. We have all day to do whatever we want, and then the rest of the week to do more of the same. I intend to take my time. She moans as I disappear under the blanket, and I love that she is so responsive to me. I kiss my way down her body, starting from her collarbone, between the valley of her breasts, only stopping when I reach her belly button. I nip her skin, causing her to gasp and arch her back up to try and get closer to me. I slide lower down the bed until I'm laying level with her lower half. I grip her hips in my hands and hold her tightly, so she doesn't move, and slowly lower my face until she can feel my breath washing over her. She squirms under my hands, aching for me to touch her, taste her.

“Chandler. Oh god, please.”

Her breathless voice breaks my resolve, I place a kiss at the top of her slit, right where she will feel it against her clit. She moans, and I can feel her hands reach down and take hold of my head over the blanket. I smile against her before dragging my tongue over her slit and lightly circling her clit with the tip of my tongue, her thighs clench around my head. I don't have

the patience today to tease her, I'm too keyed up already to wait any longer.

I shift so I can hold onto her hips better and double my efforts, I want to make her lose control with how good my mouth feels on her. I want to make her legs shake with how hard I make her come undone. Her moans grow louder and louder and her thighs clench around my head harder. Her hands are gripping the blanket against my head, and I regret not removing it completely so I can watch her come apart.

Her legs start to tremble, and I suction my mouth to her and suck on her clit as I move one hand down from her hip and under her thigh so I can slide one finger inside of her. She gasps loudly and then lets out a long desperate moan as she breaks over the edge of her orgasm.

She's panting when I climb back up her body.

"I'm nowhere near done with you yet, baby."

IT'S PASSED noon by the time we venture out of the villa. I booked us one of the beach front villas that comes with our own private section of the beach. While Tanya changes into her bathing suit, I order us some food and drinks to be delivered to us. I have stuff planned for us to do all week except for today. Today is for relaxing by the sea and being together.

Just as I finish getting our lunch ordered, Tanya walks out of the bathroom and my mouth goes dry.

"Damn, baby. You are so sexy."

She blushes a pretty pink and smiles at me, turning from side to side to show me the midnight blue bikini she has on. The top ties behind her neck, keeping her perfect breasts held high, and the bottoms have a tie at each side of her hips that makes me want to reach over and pull on one of the strings.

"You don't look so bad yourself."

I'm in my swim trunks already and nothing else. Her eyes trail down my bare chest and to the growing bulge in my trunks.

“Good thing it’s a private beach.”

I know she means so that no one sees me in this state, but I can’t help but tease her.

I raise my eyebrows. “Does that mean beach sex is on the table?”

Her shocked face makes me laugh.

“Chandler!”

Chuckling, I get up from the chair I’m in and walk over to her, grabbing her hips and pulling her body against mine.

“I’m kidding. I just like seeing your shocked look.”

She wraps her hands around my neck and that look takes over her face, warning me that she is going to say something sassy.

“Well, I wouldn’t be opposed to topless fooling around on the beach.”

I groan and she laughs.

“That is not going to help my situation, baby.”

I slide my hands down her sides and around to squeeze her ass in my hands, grinding her into me. She moans and drops her head back, exposing her neck to me.

“You have such an amazing body. I think regular clothing should be banned while we are here.”

I lean down and kiss along her neck, feeling the vibrations of her moan with my lips.

She’s always been gorgeous, a curvy body to die for and beautiful green eyes, silky dark brown hair. A man’s wet dream. With all the changes she has gone through over the last nine years, she is still the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

She pulls back some to look at me.

“If you keep doing that, we are never going to leave the villa.”

“Fine by me.”

I lean back into her neck and slide one hand up into her hair, gripping it at the base of her neck and gently tilting her head back. Starting behind her ear, I lick and nip my way down her neck to the top of her breasts that are pushed up against my chest and bite down on the swell of one of them.

“Hey!”

She jerks back and shoves my chest. I smile at her and pull back so we can head out to the beach. Our lunch should be arriving soon, and I don't want to leave it out in the sun for too long.

“Come on, beautiful. Lunch should be arriving, and I need to feed you.”

WE SPEND the whole day sunning on the beach. The only time we go inside is when one of us needs to use the bathroom or grab more sunscreen. Tanya starts to get a nice golden glow to her, and I haven't been able to take my eyes off of her.

The sun is starting to set, and we both decide that it's time to head inside. I had groceries delivered while we were out, and as Tanya goes to take a shower, I look to see what we can make for dinner.

“Any suggestions for dinner?”

I raise my voice loud enough for her to hear over the sound of the shower and wait for her reply.

“Something light after so much time in the sun! We'll get sick from it!”

I love that even without Sophia here she's still in mom mode. Turning back to the cabinets, I find the ingredients to make pasta. I have everything cooking on the stove when Tanya comes out, and she looks just as good in her short pajama shorts and tank top.

“Mind watching this while I take my turn?”

She waves her hand toward the bathroom, and as we pass by each other, I reach out and kiss her. Giving her a preview of

what's to come later. When I pull back, she gives me a goofy smile, and I fall harder for her.

I take a quick shower, wanting to get back to my girl and settle my grumbling stomach. When I walk back into the kitchen, Tanya is standing by the sink with her hand over her mouth, looking absolutely green.

“Hey, you okay?”

I rush to her side and place my hand on her back, rubbing small circles. She takes a moment and then stands straight and turns to me.

“I'm fine. I just had a wave of nausea and thought I was going to be sick.”

I guide her to a chair at the table and squat in front of her.

“You look a little green; why don't you lay down and I'll bring you some water?”

She nods and shakily gets up to go to the bedroom. I get her a glass of water, and when I get to the room, she is laying on the bed already.

“We probably spent too much time in the sun. You lay in here, and I'll turn the air down and maybe the cold will help you feel better.”

She sits up to take the glass of water from me, sipping it slowly.

“I'm okay; it's already passed. You're probably right and it was just the sun.”

I eye her to make sure she's telling me the truth, and when she gets settled into the bed, I go back to the kitchen to finish dinner.

I hope that she's not sick for the rest of the week. I want to make this trip a memorable one for her, and I would hate for her to be sick on her birthday.

I WAKE up early the next morning. It's the first birthday that I've been able to celebrate with Tanya in nine years; I want to

make sure it's the best one yet. I sneak out of bed, making sure not to wake her and stare at her bare back as I get dressed. I'm tempted to crawl back in bed and wake her up, but I have phone calls to make before we can start the day.

I have the entire day planned, I'm taking her snorkeling at the Banana Reef where we can see beautiful coral reefs and all kinds of fish. We are going to go back to where we first landed in North Malé Atoll to do some sightseeing and visit the shops. Then, I'm taking her out to the nicest restaurant we can find and buying her a nice dinner, before we come back here and spend the night devouring each other.

I can tell that even while being on this beautiful island surrounded by blue waters and white sands, she is still holding back. I don't blame her, everything has been moving rather fast since that first day, but I don't want her to doubt anything about me, about us. She is meant to be with me, and I'm going to spend the rest of my life proving that to her.

I finish making phone calls to set up times for us to be at all of our destinations and making sure we have a way to get to each of them before quietly going back into the room to wake up my sleeping beauty. She's still sleeping peacefully but has now turned on to her back, her breasts on full display for my eyes.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, I place my hands on either side of her torso and lean down to whisper in her ear.

"Time to get up, birthday girl. I have a big day planned for you."

She opens her beautiful green eyes and blinks up at me sleepily. She smiles, and I want to cancel all the plans I just made and stay in bed with her all day, worshipping her body.

But I don't.

"Come on, let's go celebrate your birthday together."

I'm going to make this the best birthday for her. I can't wait to see her reactions to everything.

TANYA

Waking up with Chandler's warm body over mine and his whispered words in my ear is not a bad way to wake up. I don't register what he says at first, I just know I heard his voice in my dream. I turn my head to face him and stretch my arms up over my head.

"Good morning,"

He smiles at me, and as his eyes trace down my face and to the rest of my body, it occurs to me that I can feel the cool air on my chest. I look down and see that I am unknowingly putting on a show for him.

"Geez!"

I yank the blanket up and cover myself, and Chandler bursts into laughter.

"Sweetheart, I've seen every part of your body. Why are you embarrassed?"

I shove him back so I can sit up, the blanket tucked tightly under my arms.

"I'm not embarrassed you are seeing me; I just didn't realize the blanket was down. I pretty much shoved them in your face. It's a bit early for that."

He shakes his head at me still chuckling before leaning in and kissing me lightly on the lips.

"Happy birthday."

It's an odd feeling. Just a short time ago Ms. Poppy was saying this same thing to me, and at the time I had no interest in celebrating when I wasn't sure when my actual birthday was. Now here I am, in bed with the father of my child on a beautiful island about to get ready to spend my actual birthday with him.

"Come on; I have a full day planned for us."

He kisses me again and gets up from the bed, tossing me one of the robes that the villa provides. I'm curious about what he could have planned and a little excited to see what we are going to do today.

I get out of bed and slip on the robe. "What do I need to wear for the day?"

"Something that you can wear a bathing suit under."

So we will be in the water at some point.

I have no idea what to expect; I don't know what kind of things we can do here besides going to the beach.

It's the first time I've been excited to celebrate my birthday in years.

I quickly search through my luggage to find something to wear. I find my dark green bikini and a matching sundress to wear over it before going to take a quick shower. Luckily, my hair won't need much attention, and since we will be in the water at some point today, I only apply some mascara and am ready in less than twenty minutes.

Chandler is sitting on the bed when I come out of the bathroom. He's dressed in a pair of swim trunks and a short sleeve button up shirt. His eyes trace over the length of my body and his eyes darken.

"Beautiful as ever. You ready to go?"

"Yep, what are we doing first?"

He stands from the bed and walks over to stand in front of me.

"First, we are getting breakfast. We need to keep our energy up for the rest of the day."

CHANDLER WAS NOT KIDDING when he said he had planned a full day for us. We called Sophia while we were at breakfast, and it made me feel better about leaving her with Kayla. She told us all about what they've already done and informed me that she had a surprise for me when we got home.

The rest of the day was amazing. We saw so many beautiful things. The different color fish and reef while we were snorkeling; the friendly local people as we walked around the city. It was a once in a life time experience, and I loved every moment of it. My cheeks were hurting from smiling so much. It's a beautiful place, surrounded by so much life and the blue water as a captivating background.

The only issue I've had is the constant waves of nausea that I've been having along with dizzy spells. I haven't said anything to Chandler about feeling ill. I don't want to worry him or ruin this perfect day.

He's disappeared somewhere after telling me to wait for him. Moving seems to help ease the nausea, so I'm walking around and window shopping while I wait for him. A store that kind of looks like a drug store catches my attention, and I enter it to see if I can find something to help.

I grab a ginger ale, some crackers, and I search for something that I can take to make the constant sick feel fade. I turn down one of the aisles and freeze. As soon as I see the pregnancy tests, it hits me what is going on with me. I know just by seeing them.

I'm pregnant.

We've been sleeping together for over a month now. It could have happened at any time.

I quickly walk over and grab two different brands off the shelf and rush to the checkout to buy everything before Chandler comes back. I have no idea how I'm going to handle this. Fortunately, I'm the only person at the counter, and I'm able to get out quickly, and just as I'm stepping out of the store, I see Chandler looking around for me.

“Hey, over here.”

He turns at my voice, and when he smiles at me, I try to smile back but my face feels off.

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah, I just needed a drink.”

He studies me for a moment, and I make sure to keep my face neutral so he doesn't ask any more questions. I don't want to tell him until I am absolutely sure that I'm carrying another one of his children.

Sophia is going to be so happy to be a big sister.

The last of the plans that Chandler has for the day include going to a nice dinner before going back home to have a nice night swim. I'm distracted all throughout dinner. The tests are burning a hole in my bag, and all I want to do is go back to the villa and take them.

WHEN WE FINALLY GET BACK TO the villa, Chandler is all ready to go swimming, and I have to tell him I need a moment so I can sneak off to the bathroom and take the tests. I can't wait until after we are done with our swim. I need to know now.

I grab my purse and rush into the bathroom while Chandler is distracted with a phone call. I don't remember doing this the first time, with Sophia. When I found out about her, it was in the hospital, from the staff. I had already been farther along than I probably am now.

I read each of the boxes slowly and carefully before taking each test out and laying them on the counter. My hands are shaking so bad that I have to take a few deep breaths to calm myself. Once the shaking stops, I pick up one of the tests and sit on the toilet to take them.

Once done, I set them back on the counter and set a timer on my phone to wait. I pace back and forth in front of the sink and wait. Luckily, they both take the same amount of time, so once the alarm goes off, I can look at them both.

I watch the timer tick down, and it feels way longer than two minutes. My mind is spinning with all kinds of different scenarios as I wait.

I don't think either Chandler or I are ready to have another child. He is still getting used to being a father to Sophia; I have no idea how he would be able to handle two. I don't even know if I want to marry him, let alone have a second baby with him.

I'm still getting used to his world and what I've experienced so far hasn't made a good impression on me. How can I rise two children in the midst of this? How can I make sure that Chandler is the best choice for their father? Even after our conversation about his working, he still works a lot. I don't want to have to constantly console my children whenever their dad lets them down. I don't want to have to make excuses for him every time he doesn't show up.

The timer on my phone starts ringing, letting me know that time's up. I can't move my feet toward the sink. I'm too scared to see what they say, so I just stare at them from where I'm standing.

I take a tentative step closer to the sink, my heart pounding away in my chest. Every step I take feels like there are lead weights strapped to my feet.

What am I going to do?

I step up to the counter and pick up one of the tests and look at it. The word pregnant flashes at me. I set it down and pick up the other stick. A dark red plus sign stares up at me.

I'm definitely pregnant.

I put the second stick down and stare at myself in the mirror.

Happy birthday to me, I guess.

Chandler knocks on the door, and it makes me jump.

"Is everything okay, Tanya?"

Not really.

"Yes, everything is fine. I'm almost done."

I know I need to tell him, but I don't know how to bring it up; I have no idea how he is going to react. In all this time we've been getting to know each other, whether he wanted kids or not never came up; for all I know, he never wanted kids and just accepted the fact that I already had Soph.

I throw the sticks in the trash, making sure they are covered up, then wash my hands. When I exit the bathroom, Chandler is nowhere to be seen. I walk through the villa to try and find him, and just as I'm starting to worry, I see flickering lights coming from outside.

Stepping through the sliding glass door, I see candles spread out around the porch, their flames the only lights to see by. Chandler is standing by the edge of the water that's not too far away with his back to me. I kick off my sandals and walk up behind him, wrapping my arms around his waist, running my hand over the tattoo of me on his shoulder before resting my head against his back.

"Thank you for today. I had such a great time."

His warm hands slide along my arm, and even though I'm panicking inside, his touch brings me some comfort.

"My pleasure; we still have the whole week here, but I haven't planned anything else. I figured we could take it day by day and do whatever you want while we're here."

We are quiet for a while, just standing on the beach, holding each other. He shifts so that he is facing me, his expression full of mischief.

"Want to go skinny dipping?"

A smile tugs at the corner of my lips.

Why the hell not? When in Rome, right?

"You don't think anyone will see us?"

He looks around the area before shaking his head no.

"Nah, we are complete secluded out here, plus we won't go out too far, so the villa will cover us."

I look around the area as well before taking a step back from him and lifting my sundress over my head in one move.

His face lights up with his smile and his eyes are filled with desire and excitement. We don't say anything as we watch each other undress. Once there isn't any clothing left, he holds his hand out to me and leads me into the water until it is up to his hips and my navel.

He pulls me close, so we are standing front to front and lowers his head to kiss me sweetly.

“You are so beautiful. Happy birthday, baby.”

His words are sweet and everything about today has been so perfect. I don't want to ruin anything by telling him about the baby and him not having a good reaction. Or causing us to get into an argument, but I know I need to tell him.

He missed out on everything with our first, so he deserves to know about this one right away.

His hands start to roam all over my body, smoothing down my ribs, sliding behind me to squeeze my butt, and one going into my hair and gripping it at the base of my neck, tugging it a little and making me moan. He watches me as he explores my body, and I love having his eyes on me.

I place my hands on the center of his chest and push him back some.

“I have to tell you something.”

CHANDLER

Tanya stares up at me, her eyebrows furrowed low over her eyes, her forehead crinkled. I have no idea what she could possibly have to tell me that has her looking so anxious. I pull her closer to my body, wrapping my arms around her hips, needing her close for both my comfort and to give her some.

This look has crossed her face many times since I found her. It's like she waiting for something to happen. Like she was preparing to run. If I'm being honest, the look scares me. I believe it when she looks like she is going to run, and I don't know how to make sure that she doesn't.

“You can tell me anything. I'll be right here.”

She looks down at her hands on my chest and starts rubbing her fingers back and forth across my skin. It's very distracting, and I have to work at focusing on her face. Having her naked form pressed into me and her hands touching me is not really a good time for a serious conversation.

She doesn't say anything for a while, and now I'm starting to really worry.

“Tanya, what is it?”

She inhales a slow breath, holds it a second, then lets it out just as slowly.

“I'm pregnant.”

I hear the words that she says. I understand each word, but my brain doesn't absorb them.

“I'm sorry, what?”

I stare at her in shock. This isn't what I thought she was going to tell me at all. I think over the last few days and how she's been trying to hide that she's been nauseous. I thought maybe she was just embarrassed about being sick, so I didn't want to make it worse.

"You're pregnant?"

She finally looks up at me and nods.

"I've been feeling sick, so I went into the store to get something to settle my stomach; when I saw the tests, it hit me. I don't remember how I felt when I first got pregnant with Sophia, so I didn't know, but when I saw them, I *instantly* knew. So I bought two tests and just got finished taking them; they both say I'm pregnant."

She's rambling, and when she stops to breathe, I cup her face in my hands, my thumbs rubbing her cheeks.

"Sophia is going to be the best big sister."

Her eyes well with tears.

"She is, but I'm scared. This is not the right time to be having another child."

I can admit that there are better times for this kind of thing, but it doesn't make me any less excited.

"Is that the only reason you're scared? Because you think the timing isn't right?"

She avoids my eyes again and that nagging feeling I have that she's going to bolt grows stronger.

Her next words come out in a whisper. "We don't know each other, Chandler."

"I know you are worried about not knowing me, but you did at one point, enough to have a child with me, doesn't that tell you something? I know you better than anyone in the world, I know everything I need to."

"You *used* to know me. It's been nine years, even without the amnesia, I'm a completely different person."

My heart breaks at her doubt. I had thought we were making progress. That we were moving forward in the right direction, but now I find out it was just me.

I need to do damage control.

“If you think we need to slow down, we can. I know I said that we should get married for Soph and for my business, but we can just stay engaged for a while if marrying me makes you uncomfortable.”

I cringe saying the words. I would do anything to marry her, but I understand that all of this is overwhelming for her. No matter how desperate I am to have her be mine officially, I need to slow down.

She looks up at me and her eyes dart back and forth between mine, looking for some kind of answer.

“I don’t know what I want to do. Everything is so confusing.”

I move my hands from her face and put them back on her hips. I don’t want her to feel crowded by me.

“So why don’t we slow down? We stay engaged, we celebrate our daughter and new baby, and we take the rest day by day?”

Her shoulders drop away from her ears, and I can tell that this plan makes her feel a bit better.

“I know that feeling like we don’t know each other is causing you stress, and I know that you are concerned about my workload, but I can promise you that I’m going to do better. I am going to *be* better. I’m going to scale back on my work, hire more people, and I’m going to be present in our kids’ lives and be there for you as well. I’m going to do everything I can to make sure you don’t regret this.”

The tears that have been filing her eyes as we speak finally spill over, and I wipe them away with my knuckle.

“Everything that you are worried about now will work out. We will figure everything out and give our kids the *best* life possible.”

I don’t let her look away from me this time; I want her to see that I mean every word. I want her to look into my eyes and

know that I'm telling the truth without a doubt.

“Do you think that it's a problem that we are having this very serious conversation while we are standing completely naked in the Indian Ocean?”

A roar of laughter bursts out of me at her words.

“I do think we could have chosen a better place for it, but what better way to bare our souls, right?”

She smiles and snuffles. I hate to see her so upset.

“Come on; it's your birthday. You aren't supposed to be upset and crying.”

I take one step back and take her hands in mine, leading her a little further out into the water until it's up to our chests. A shame to cover up her amazing body, but I want her to enjoy the moment. To laugh and have fun.

She wraps her arms around my neck, and because of our height difference, she ends up just floating in the water, her feet kicking to keep her above water.

“Are you happy about the baby?”

I know she's only asking because she's worried about how everything is going turn out. I smile reassuringly at her and bring my face closer to hers, kissing her nose, then eyes, then forehead.

“I am thrilled. We are going to have two beautiful children, but I think we should definitely have a boy this time.”

She snorts at me.

“Why? Wanna even the odds?” Her question makes me chuckle.

“Definitely. Plus, a little boy with your deep emerald green eyes and my blonde hair? He'd be fucking adorable.”

She smiles, and I can tell that she's picturing us having a baby boy. I get caught up in a daydream of what our future could look like too. The four of us together, Tanya, Sophia, the new baby, and me. A happy little family living in New York City. It

would be a dream come true for a future I didn't even think I wanted.

Tanya pulls me from my thoughts when she pushes away from me and starts swimming around. I watch her enjoy the feel of the water; it's warmer than I thought it'd be.

That feeling clutches at my gut again. She's pregnant with my child, and I still get the feeling that she's going to slip through my fingers. I don't know if it's because the last time she was pregnant she disappeared from my life for nearly a decade, or if it's the look in her eyes. The one that looks like she's preparing to say goodbye to me. I don't know what more I can do to prove to her that this is where she belongs.

It kills me that she doesn't remember the year we were together, but even if she never regains her memories, it won't matter to me. I will tell her everything she wants to know, and if she doesn't want to know any of it, that's fine too. We can have a beautiful life with our children and never think about it again.

She swims closer to me, and I gently take her arm and pull her to me, sinking into the water so we are face to face.

"What are you thinking about?"

She shrugs and a smile pulls at my lips. I love whenever I can see Sophia in her. They are so similar.

"I know you want Soph and I to move in to your penthouse, but I don't know if I can give up my cabin. It's where I raised Sophia for all of her life. We've made a life in Willow Creek. It's our home, and we have people we love there. They have been our family for the last nine years; I can't just leave them behind."

"Then don't give up your cabin."

She turns her face to me and gives me an incredulous look.

"We can't keep the cabin and have two penthouse apartments, Chandler. That's not only crazy, but it's also greedy."

I smile at her adorable outrage and pull her even closer to my body; I need to distract her from her thoughts.

“Well, then you and Soph are just going to have to give up your apartment and move in with me. That or sell the cabin.”

I wink at her to let her know I’m teasing, and she rolls her eyes at me.

“You know, you’ve taught our daughter that nasty habit. I think I’m going to have to break it out of you.”

Her eyes darken and my groin tightens.

“And how exactly do you think you’re going to do that?”

I slide my hands down her sides and grip her thighs in my hands, pulling her up so that her legs are on either side of me, but I don’t let her wrap them around me. Her breathing picks up and her look tells me that I have her right where I want her. Before she can do anything, I stand quickly and toss her further out into the water. She lets out a squeal before going under, and I’m laughing when she surfaces.

“You ass!”

This only makes me laugh harder, and I can see her trying to hide her smile. I swim to her, my smile not fading, and cup her face in my hands.

“We will figure everything out. Right now, it’s your birthday, and I want to make you feel special.”

I kiss her softly, letting her feel how precious she is to me.

We are going to have a wonderful life, Tanya, please trust me.

We spend hours on the beach, going back and forth between the water to swim and laying out on chairs, the nice, warm night breeze brushing over us. It reminds me of before the accident, like the old times, but even better. Everything is perfect between us, and nothing can ruin it.

TANYA

The rest of our vacation is just as amazing as that first day. We went snorkeling almost every day and spent the rest of it on our own little private part of the beach outside of our villa.

I tried my hardest to stay out of my head and enjoy the moment. Chandler said that since I was so concerned about us not knowing each other, then the only solution was to get to know each other. Every night we spent our time from dinner until we went to bed asking each other questions.

It felt good to talk. I learned a lot about him, like his parents traveled constantly when he was a kid, so they often left him with nannies. He's lived in the city since he was two and has traveled all over the world. I haven't had the courage to ask about how we met; every time I try to ask him any questions about us, I get nervous and change the topic.

He's been open about everything, even telling me things I can tell that he doesn't really want to, and I'm grateful for it. It lets me know that I can trust him.

Our last night on the island I decide that I need to meet him halfway. I can see the effort he is putting in, and I want him to know that I see it. That I want us to try, even with all my fears and worries.

I wake up early, before Chandler for once, and I quietly slip out of bed and put on my robe. He's lying on his stomach, his arms folded under the pillow and his broad back on full display. We've both gotten a nice tan from all our time spent outside, and I stand there appreciating his form for a minute.

Shaking myself from my thoughts, I turn and leave the bedroom to start some breakfast for us.

I know exactly what I want to do today, and it starts with making him something to eat. I open a pack of bacon and my stomach rolls. I have to cover my mouth and turn away to breathe for a moment.

Placing my hand on my stomach, I talk to the baby. “Alright there, sweetheart. I need you to give Mommy a break. I’ve got to make your daddy breakfast, and you having a negative reaction to any kind of food is not going to help.”

I take a deep breath through my nose and slowly exhale. A deep chuckle sounds behind me just before Chandler’s strong arms wrap around me and he spreads his large hands over my stomach.

“Take it easy on your momma, baby boy. She’s a good one and deserves some rest.”

He kisses my neck and tries to guide me toward the kitchen table, but I don’t budge.

“You go sit and I’ll make breakfast. I don’t think you’re far enough along for us to convince him to ease up.”

“We could be having a girl, you know. What are you going to do if she gets here, and you’ve been referring to her as a boy?”

He tries to get me to move again, but I still don’t move.

“*If* that happens, then I will apologize to her, but it’s a moot point ‘cause we are having a boy. Now, go sit.”

He smacks my butt, making me yelp, and when I turn to glare at him, rubbing where he hit, he smiles at me.

“I’m supposed to be making you breakfast.”

He’s standing between me and the stove so I can’t move around him to start cooking.

“I don’t think that’s going to happen when you can’t even open the bacon without almost hurling all over the place.”

Sighing, I turn and go to the table. He’s right, and I don’t like it.

He follows me and leans his hands on the table and chair to hold himself up as he leans down and kisses me.

“You can do all the cooking when he’s here.”

I roll my eyes at him because we both know that’s not happening.

“I wanted to do something special for you.”

He cocks his head to the side, searching my face.

“What for? This week is for you and your birthday.”

I sit up straight and cup his face in my hands.

“To thank you for everything.” My words are soft as I speak them.

He smiles, and it’s a shy, sweet smile that melts my heart.

“You don’t have to do that. You’ve given me a beautiful daughter and are going to give me another baby. You’ve given me everything.”

I can feel tears start to form as I lean in and kiss him softly. It’s moments like this when I want to allow myself to fall for him the most. I can see why I did the first time, even though I can’t remember it.

He pulls back first, smiles at me, then stands and turns to cook us breakfast while I watch him move around the kitchen with ease. He makes us a quick meal with the stuff I left out and brings everything to the table, making sure I have a ginger ale to help with my nausea. Luckily, I no longer need it and I’m able to eat my food without any issues.

“I don’t remember the part of my pregnancy with Sophia where I had morning sickness. It kind of feels like I’m going through this for the first time.”

I lick some of the syrup off my fork, and the look that Chandler gives me makes my whole body fill with liquid heat.

“I think we should plan to have a dinner party when we get back. I’m sure people are starting to find out that you’re back, and they are going to want to see you and find out what happened. It doesn’t have to be anything big, just people that

were important to us. If you don't feel comfortable with it, we can always cancel. Ever since we went to the gallery the press has been on my neck about getting a story."

I grimace at the thought of the press. I'm still not happy about how things were handled, but I know this is a part of being in Chandler's world. Which is another reason I'm worried about raising our children in it.

Before my thoughts can spiral and put me in a funk for our last day, I shake myself and clear my throat.

"We can do that, and while we're at it, maybe we can work on moving Sophia and I into your apartment instead of staying in the extra one."

His eyes light up.

"You want to move in permanently?"

Hearing the words come out of his mouth makes my chest squeeze with panic, but I stay strong.

"Yes, but it's still only going to be on the weekends. I'm not going to take Sophia out of school in the middle of the year, but if we are going to be a family, then we need to be together. After she finishes the school year, we can talk to her about what she wants to do and figure out what to do from there."

He stands and pulls me up with him before cupping my face in his hands and kissing me. I could feel all of his joy and excitement in this kiss. It almost made me feel bad that I still wasn't one hundred percent on board with us.

His eyes are bright and happy when he pulls back.

"You have no idea how happy you've made me."

He places kisses all over my face until I'm laughing and trying to push him away.

"Stop, you weirdo. Let me clean up the dishes so we can start our day of doing nothing."

He chuckles and lets me go, but he doesn't let me start cleaning. Instead, he pushes me to the chair again.

"You sit; I'll clean."

I raise an eyebrow at him.

“You cooked; I can clean, especially when *I* was supposed to be cooking for *you*.”

He swats his hand through the air and starts picking up dishes.

“You’re pregnant and that tops everything. Stay there and keep me company while I clean.”

I shake my head at him, but I can’t keep the smile off my face. I don’t know if it’s because we are on vacation or because of where we are, but he has seemed so relaxed since we got here. I like seeing him this way. Unplugged from his work and not worried about having to deal with emergencies or have a ton of meetings to go to. I only wish that Sophia was here to enjoy this as well. She hasn’t seen him this way.

This is the kind of dad I want my children to have, and it’s reassuring that I can see this side of him. He starts some music on his phone and keeps the volume low enough that we can talk without having to yell over it. I’m suddenly hit with a sense of déjà vu.

It feels like we have been here before. Not in the literal sense, not in the Maldives, but like what is happening in this moment has happened before. For a moment, I feel like I’m seeing two. I’m seeing Chandler as he is now cleaning up our breakfast dishes in the small villa kitchen, and at the same time, I’m seeing him in his kitchen at the penthouse in New York. I can almost see him in one of his suits, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, doing the dishes.

I don’t know if it’s a memory that I’m seeing or if I’m just picturing what it would be like for us in the future but seeing double is making me dizzy and giving me a headache. I blink to clear my vision and stand shakily to move over to his side, lifting myself onto the counter beside the sink. I want to be close to his side, being near him makes me feel better.

AFTER BREAKFAST, we change into our bathing suits again and head outside. Chandler agreed that spending our last day

just the two of us without anyone else around was the best way to end our amazing vacation.

We've been outside for thirty minutes, and I haven't been able to take my eyes off of Chandler's body. I don't know if it's the hormones or the fact that I've finally let myself want him, but all week all I've wanted was to touch him and have him touch me. We've had sex every night we've been here, just about all over the villa, and I still don't feel like I've gotten enough of him.

I wonder if I was this insatiable before the accident.

"I can feel your eyes on me, baby."

A smirk takes over his lips, and I roll my eyes at his cockiness.

"I'm simply taking stock of the changes in your body that are telling of you turning forty."

His eyes pop open and he sits up.

"Hey! There isn't an inch of me that says forty, woman. You should know after the last week."

I laugh loudly at his scandalized expression, and he throws a towel at me, but I see the smile on his lips.

"Okay, okay. You're still hot for almost forty."

He turns to look at me, and the look on his face makes me sit up as well. Instead of waiting for him to come to me when he stands, I stand as well, and when he smiles in response, taking a step closer to me and most likely expecting me to do the same, I walk around my lounge chair and walk to the water.

"I'm going for a swim."

I hear him growl behind me, but I don't turn to look at him. I want to tease him and rile him up some more. Just as I reach the edge of the water, I feel his arms wrap around me as he lifts me into the air.

"Hey!"

He puts me right back on my feet and turns me to face him, cupping my face with one hand, his thumb holding my chin and his fingers behind my ear.

“It’s not nice to tease people.”

We end up just smiling at each other for a moment, and in a split second, I can see that I could end up falling in love with him without my memories. As he stands before me, I can see that he is a man worth loving. I reach up and trace his jaw line. It scares me that I can feel myself falling.

The smile falls from his face, and he pulls me closer, burying his face in my neck and taking a deep breath. I lose track of how long we stand there, just holding onto each other.

I turn my head so that I can whisper in his ear.

“Let’s go inside.”

I feel him shiver as my lips brush his ear before he stands up straight and unwinds himself from around me.

“You don’t want to spend the day out here?”

I shake my head no and walk around him, turning my body so that I keep facing him and start to walk backwards toward the villa.

“Nope. I want to spend our last day in paradise in bed.”

He stops following me and yanks me to his body before lifting me into his arms and wrapping my legs around his waist.

“Fine by me.”

He walks us into the villa with me kissing up and down his neck the whole way. We make it into the kitchen, where he sets me down on top of the table. I move my lips up his neck and across his jaw, nipping him along the way, until I can press my lips against his. He groans into my mouth, and the sound makes me feral.

His chest is bare, and I smooth my hands from his shoulders down to the waist band of his swim trunks. I slide my fingers into them and rub them back and forth on his stomach. He groans again and pulls back, his breathing is heavy, and I love the fact that I have this effect on him.

“I love the feeling of your hands on me. It drives me crazy.”

I slide one hand fully into his trunks and wrap my hand around him. He lets out a breath and drops his head to my shoulder.

“*Baby.*” His voice is rough with desire.

I stroke his length once before he pulls my hand out and holds it behind my back.

“I can’t handle that right now; I won’t last long if you do that.”

He takes my free hand and brings it behind my back with the other and holds both of my wrists in one of his hands. My chest is pushed out toward him, the perfect level for him to lean down and start trailing kisses along the edge of my bathing suit top. I want to put my hands on him again, but he won’t let me go, so all I can do is squirm under his mouth.

“Chandler.”

He bites down on my breast, making me gasp and arch my back.

“Chandler, please. I want to touch you.”

He finally releases my hands, and as soon as they are free, I run them all over his torso. His skin is warm from the sun and smooth. He moves up to my neck and sucks on the spot behind my ear. His hands work at untying my top, and once my breasts are exposed, he dips his head and sucks on my nipples, cupping my breasts in his hand and kneading them.

My head falls back as the shocks of lust shoot through my body, and I just want him to do *more*, so much more.

“I need more.”

He moans, and I can feel the vibrations travel from my breasts down to my core. He pulls back, and I regret saying anything.

“What do you need, baby? Tell me.”

He looks into my eyes, and I lose all thoughts. I wrap my legs around his hips and pull him tightly to me. I reach around and squeeze his butt in my hands, causing him to grind into me.

“You. I need you. All of you. Right now.”

He quickly shoves his trunks down, just far enough to release his cock, and I pull my bottoms to the side so he can thrust into me. Once he's inside of me, it's like all the stress and anxiety I was feeling fades.

"Lean back on your hands. I want to see your body."

I do as he says and place my hands on the table behind me. My breasts thrust forward, and his eyes lock on them as he starts to thrust inside of me. He starts a slow, easy pace and gradually thrusts harder and harder into me, never going any faster. The strength of his thrusts is moving the table, and he has to grab onto my hips to keep me from moving away.

"You're so sexy like this. I love watching you. Watching your breasts bounce, your skin flushing a pretty pink. Fuck, you're beautiful."

I can't focus enough to respond to him, but his words are driving me crazy, and I want him to keep going.

"More."

One of his hands grazes over my hip and up my stomach, between my breasts, and around the side of my neck to the back where he grips me tightly.

"More what? You want me to keep telling you how much I love being with you?"

I nod, and he softens his thrusts. He leans forward and rests his forehead against mine.

"Every time I'm with you, every time I'm connected to you like this, it's like I've come home. We fit so perfectly together. Every time feels like it can't get any better."

I'm breathless, both from his words and from what he's doing to my body. It's different this time; we aren't just having sex. We're making love. He's showing me with his body how he feels for me, and every sensation is overwhelming.

"God, Chandler, yes, please."

He brings his other hand up and grips my neck from the other side, keeping his head to mine. He starts thrusting harder and

faster, and I can feel my orgasm starting to build. It's building quick and strong, and I can't do anything to stop it.

"That's it. Let go, baby."

I yell out, and all the sound in the room fades as I come apart around him. He keeps thrusting into me, bringing me through the most intense orgasm I can remember having.

"Chandler." My voice comes out as a whine, and he pulls out of me before lifting me from the table and carrying me to the couch, where he sits down with me straddling his lap. I lift up enough for him to line himself up with me before I slowly lower myself down onto him, both of us moaning at the feeling of him being back inside of me.

We spend the rest of the day making love all around the villa, only stopping to eat, and even then we're touching and kissing every part of each other's bodies that we can reach.

Being close to him like this helps me feel more connected to him. It makes me feel like we can make it, that having a future together is not only possible, but that it will be amazing.

A part of me, though, deep down and hidden, worries that it won't be like this when we get back home. It won't be like this when he goes back to work, and Sophia and I go back to Willow Creek during the week. I want things to work out, both for our children and for myself. Even though I haven't wanted to admit it, these last couple of months have been great with Chandler in our lives, and I'm scared of losing that.

How are we supposed to get past everything that has happened? How can we get past the fact that I may never get my memories fully back?

CHANDLER

The week we get home is hectic. We got home Sunday morning and spent the day with Sophia. She was excited and had so much to tell us about her week with Aunt Kayla. I missed her so much while we were gone. I was on cloud nine when Tanya said that they would move into my apartment when they were there. Now we just needed to figure out what to do to get all of us together permanently.

I have Lisa plan for the dinner party, and Tanya and I discuss when we should tell Sophia that she's going to be a big sister. Tanya is worried about telling people too early, but I want to shout it for everyone to hear. I know everything will be okay. We are going to have a healthy baby and there won't be any need for worry.

"I want to make it a special moment for her."

It's Thursday afternoon, and Tanya didn't even say hello when I answered her call.

"Hello to you too, beautiful. How has your day been?"

"Yeah, yeah, small talk and pleasantries. I want to make the moment we tell Soph about the baby special for her."

I snort and rub my hand over my face.

This woman is something else.

"I agree. What were you thinking?"

She groans.

“I have no idea, but this is going to be a big change for her, and I want her to be excited. I don’t want her to feel left out or replaced.”

“Sweetheart.” My heart breaks for her. “That’s not going to happen. She is going to be so excited to have a little sister or brother, and she’s going to want to help out with everything. You don’t have to worry about her feeling replaced. She knows how much you love her.”

She sighs into the phone, and I know my words are only helping her so much.

“Have you had any idea of what to do?”

“No.”

I have to work at not chuckling at her petulant tone.

“I was planning on calling my mother today and telling her about everything. She found out through the press and isn’t happy with me, but maybe she could have some advice on this; would you like me to ask her?”

“Chandler, you’re an only child.”

I do laugh this time. “You’ve got a point, but I think she could still help.”

She’s quiet for a moment, then her voice comes through almost too soft for me to hear.

“You’re telling your mother?”

There’s no way she’s nervous.

“Yes, I should have called her as soon as I found you two, but I got caught up in the moment with everything going on.”

“Chandler, I don’t remember her. I don’t remember if we got along; I don’t even remember if she liked me.”

I can hear the stress in her voice.

“She loves you. You two got along great, but I’m sorry to say, you’re probably going to be pushed aside ‘cause now you’ve given her a grand-baby to fawn over.”

Her laugh is weak, and I can tell she is still nervous.

“We don’t have to do the dinner party tomorrow. We can cancel and just tell everyone something came up.”

“No, let’s have it. Sophia and I need to get used to being in your world and that includes the people you’re close to. Besides, we don’t want your mother finding out about the new baby in the press. She may disown you then.”

She has a point about that; I just feel bad that she’s feeling so anxious about all of this.

“If you’re sure. Are you guys still heading down tonight?”

Every time they come to me for the weekend, I can’t help but worry about Tanya. It’s a long drive, and even though she’s done it before, I wish there was something I could do so she didn’t have to be in the car for so long.

“Yeah, Kayla and I are going to pick Sophia up from school and head out from there. Are you sure you’re okay with Kayla staying with us?”

Kayla will be driving my girls to the city and staying with us so that she can be here for the dinner and Tanya has someone other than me and Soph there that she knows.

“Of course, she’s your best friend and Soph’s aunt. You need her support, and besides, I’d love to get to know her better. She’s important to you.”

I want her to feel as comfortable as possible ‘in my world’, as she calls it. I want her to see it as *our* world.

“Okay, well, I’ll let you get back to work, and I’ll come up with ideas on how to tell Soph so we can decide on one tonight.”

“Okay, sounds good, lo—I’ll see you later.”

I love you almost slipped out. I’ve been wanting to tell her since the moment I saw her that I love her, that I never stopped loving her.

“See you later.”

She hangs up the phone, and I want to smack myself. She just now agreed to live in the same apartment as me on the

weekends; she's nowhere near ready to hear that I love her.

I refocus myself on my work and make sure I get everything done that can't wait for next week. I told Tanya that I was going to try harder to be there for her and Soph, and that means working less. I'm trying to do that, which includes not working on the weekends. With Sophia still in school, we don't get to be together during the week, the least I can do is make sure I'm one hundred percent present on the weekends.

I LEAVE work early so that I can get home before the girls do, and while I wait, I go ahead and make a call to my mother.

Here goes nothing.

I sit on the couch in my living room and hit the call button.

“Why in the world do I have to find out that my son has found the love of his life and that I have a granddaughter in the news?”

“Hey, Mom.”

She scoffs. “I don't think so. You don't get to be cute. You knew the press was there, and you knew that I would see the pictures. Why didn't you at least call me then?”

The guilt I've been feeling over not contacting her grabs hold of my chest so hard that I try and rub at my chest to ease it.

“I got caught up in the moment; I just wanted to keep them to myself for a while. I wanted to make sure it was all real.”

I can hear her sigh, and I don't want to make her feel guilty as well.

“There is also something else that the news didn't mention and that only a few people know about.”

“You can't tell me that baby girl isn't yours. She looks just like you did at that age.”

I smile at the thought. I love that she looks so much like me.

“No, the reason Tanya disappeared is because she was in a car accident and has been dealing with amnesia. She hasn't known

who I am for the past nine years. She still technically doesn't, but we've been getting to know each other."

Mom is quiet on the other side of the phone.

"Mom? You okay?"

A small snuffle comes through the phone before she speaks.

"I misjudged her; I thought she left you."

Most people did.

"I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I should have listened to you more when you told us that something had happened."

The only person who believed me when I said Tanya didn't leave me was my dad. I had many long conversations with him over the years.

"I know, Mom. It's okay. I understand. Everyone thought that she left me."

"I'm not everyone; I'm your mother and I should have listened to you."

I can't help but chuckle, my mother is fiercely protective, even when it comes to herself.

"Mom, I promise I understand, everything pointed to her leaving, besides, now we don't have to worry about any of that. I've got her back and also a beautiful daughter."

She snuffles again, louder this time.

"I can't believe I'm a grandma!"

She starts blubbing, and I can't help but laugh. I honestly think that she is more excited to be a grandmother than the fact that Tanya is back.

She's going to lose her mind when she finds out about the baby.

"Mom, I've got to go. They are going to be here soon, but I wanted to extend an invite to you and Dad to join us for a dinner party tomorrow. We want to reintroduce her to everyone close to us, and I want you to meet Sophia."

More snuffles and she clears her throat.

“Of course we’ll be there. I can’t wait to meet her.”

We say goodbye, and I’m in higher spirits, talking with my parents always puts me in a good mood. I put my phone down on the coffee table in front of me and sit for a moment, just taking everything in.

Tanya, Sophia, and Kayla should be here soon. They took the drive here slowly so Tanya wouldn’t get too anxious while in the car. I want to take the three of them out for dinner, to just relax and have fun tonight. Between the drive here and tomorrow’s dinner, I know Tanya is going to be exhausted. The only things I want to focus on are telling Sophia about the baby and making sure Tanya is comfortable and relaxed for tomorrow. I have to admit, though, that I’m nervous to be around Kayla all weekend. She means a lot to both Sophia and Tanya, and I want her to approve of me.

For the first time in almost ten years, I feel like my life is back on track and everything is going the way it should be, it’s going perfect, and I can’t wait to tell everyone I love.

THEY GET to the house about five thirty, and I’m still on the couch watching TV.

“Daddy!”

Sophia comes running into the living room and jumps onto the couch next to me. She bounces up and down, and I see the giant rainbow color lollipop in her hand. I quickly grab it from her.

“Hey there, bouncy. Be careful. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

She giggles, and I stare at her, I’ve never seen her like this.

“She may be on a sugar high because I may have let her pick out two different pieces of candy on the way here.”

I turn to see Tanya standing behind the couch, and she looks both ashamed and completely stressed out. A smile spreads across my face, and she glares at me.

“Daddy, Mommy said that when we got here you had a secret to tell me. I want to know the secret.”

I look between the two.

“Is this the secret we talked about over the phone today?”

Tanya nods when I look back over at her, and I can feel the excitement building in me.

“Did you come up with a way to do it?”

Another nod. I jump up and walk around the couch to her side to quietly whisper to her.

“What are we going to do?”

She smiles at me and shakes her head.

“Sophia, go to your room so we can get it ready; I’ll call you when you can come out.”

She jumps off the couch and takes off down the hall to her room, the door slams shut followed by her muffled yell.

“Sorry!”

Tanya snorts and bends to pick up her purse from where she placed it on the floor.

“Where’s Kayla?”

“Since we haven’t sold the apartment yet, I told her she could stay there this weekend as long as she pulls her weight as a best friend tomorrow during the dinner.”

She starts to walk over to the dining table, but I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her to me, kissing her softly on the lips.

“I missed you. I got used to seeing you for a whole week.”

Her smile is soft as she wraps her arms around my neck, her purse bumping my back.

“I missed you too. My bed has been lonely.”

Groaning, I bury my face in her neck and just breathe her in.

A muffled little voice makes us laugh and pull apart.

“Are you done?!”

Tanya walks over to the table and sets her purse down.

“Almost!”

I lean back on the table and cross my arms.

“So, what are we doing to tell her?”

She pulls a small box out of her purse and places it on the table, gesturing with her hands toward it.

“This. I looked it up on Pinterest and got the idea. Inside of it is a pink and blue cupcake with a little sign on it that says Best Big Sister and confetti around it, and I got a card that says, ‘promoted to big sister,’ and I figure you can write something in it for us both.”

She pulls the card out and hands it to me. It’s a cute little pink card, the front says Promoted to Big Sister, like Tanya said, and when you open it, there is a sweet cartoon picture of a little girl holding the hand of a baby.

I grab a pen I can see sticking out of her purse and sit down to write in it.

Sophia,

You are going to be the best big sister. There is no one like you, and Mommy and Daddy will always love you so much.

Love, Daddy and Mommy

Tanya reads it over my shoulder and nods.

“Okay, ready?”

She nods and sets the box and card on the table in front of one of the chairs while I call out to Soph.

“Come on out, Soph!”

The door to her bedroom flies open, and she comes tearing through the apartment. I point her to the chair, and she sits, bouncing while she waits for us to give her the go ahead to open the box.

“Go ahead.”

She snatches the box first, and Tanya has to show her how to open it. Her brows furrow at the cupcake.

“Best Big Sister? I’m not a big sister?”

Before either of us can respond, her eyes light up.

“Am I going to be a big sister?!”

That’s a good sign.

“You are.”

I hand her the card, and she opens it and reads it slowly. Her reading has gotten better, but it still takes her some time to read something.

“I’m going to be a big sister!”

She gets down from the chair and starts jumping up and down. Tanya and I laugh, and I can see her sigh of relief. I laugh as Sophia jumps about the room, and that feeling that my life is exactly as it should be hits me again.

I’m relieved that she’s so happy about this. She stops jumping around and turns to look at us.

“Is it a girl or boy?”

Tanya sits down on one of the chairs and pulls her to her lap.

“We don’t know yet. The baby is too little, and it’s too early for us to tell.”

I sit in a chair next to them and turn it to face them.

“Wanna know another secret, though?” Sophia turns quickly to face me.

“Yeah.”

I smile at her and whisper.

“Daddy already knows what the baby is.”

She gasps and covers her mouth.

“What is it?” she whispers like it’s the biggest secret ever.

“A boy.”

“Wait a minute. Daddy does not know what the baby is, this is just what he wants it to be. It could be a girl.”

She looks between us, and I smile at Tanya.

“I agree with Daddy. It’s a boy.”

She says it with so much conviction I laugh, and Tanya just rolls her eyes.

Life is perfect.

YESTERDAY, after Tanya and I told Sophia about the baby, the three of us spent the afternoon together until it was time for our reservation at my favorite pizza place. Tanya seemed a lot more relaxed with Kayla around, and I loved to see her that way. It was nice to get to know Kayla more, and all through dinner, I could see the bond the three of them had developed over the years.

It made me feel more comfortable about the dinner tonight. As the time for people to show gets closer and closer, I can tell Tanya gets more and more tense.

The three of them are downstairs in the other apartment, getting ready, while I’m up here in my apartment getting dressed and waiting for the guests to arrive. It’s going to be a small dinner, only about ten of us or so. The four of us, my parents, Josh, Victoria, and her parents. I’m not sure how Tanya is going to feel about Victoria being here, but I knew that if I invited the DeWitts, then she would be coming too. Her parents and mine are close, and I have to keep the peace. I have a feeling that even if I made a point to not invite her, she would show up anyway.

I make my way down the hallway to the living room while I roll up my shirt sleeves, and I can hear Sophia’s voice. The three of them are sitting on the couch, wearing dresses and ready for dinner when I get to the end of the hallway.

“You three look nice. Everyone ready?”

They all nod, and I hold my arm up to Tanya. “Help me out?”

She stands and I meet her halfway behind the couch so she can roll my sleeve up to my elbow for me. We stand close, and as she works on my sleeves, I stare down at her beautiful face. She's got her hair up, some wispy pieces falling around her face. Her makeup is light, and she's wearing a black dress that comes to mid thigh on her and has short sleeves and a square neckline that shows off all of her perfect curves.

"You look stunning, baby."

She smiles up at me as she finishes with my sleeve, and I can't help but lean in and kiss her nose.

"You clean up pretty well yourself."

I chuckle at her cuteness. I hope that even with everyone coming tonight, she will be able to keep this easygoing attitude. It makes me realize that I need to warn her about Victoria. They didn't seem to have the best reaction to each other at the gala, and to be honest, they didn't really get along before the accident either.

"Do you remember meeting Victoria at the art gallery?"

She grimaces, and I take it as a bad sign for what's to come later.

"The woman who was convinced you went there for her? The one who couldn't keep her hands off of you? The one who knows me and was less than thrilled to see me after disappearing for nine years?"

This isn't going to end well.

"Uh, yeah. That one. She's coming tonight. I invited her and her parents."

Tanya freezes before looking up at me and raising an eyebrow.

"You invited her? Why?"

She drops her hands from my arm and takes a step back.

"I had to. I told you her parents and mine are close, and I couldn't just invite them."

She opens her mouth to say something, but before she can, the guests arrive. I hear my mother's voice coming from the entry,

she's never been one to wait for admittance.

"Sounds like they're here. Are you ready?"

The tense look fades from her face, and she turns pale and looks worried.

"Hey, hey. It's okay. I'm going to be here the entire time, and everything is going to be okay. You'll see. Everyone wants to see you, and I want you to get to know the people who were important to us before."

I lean in closer to her and lower my voice.

"And we get to tell everyone about our little boy."

Some color returns to her face as she rolls her eyes.

"Or girl. I'm telling you, if you keep it up, the baby is going to come out a girl, and you'll have to eat your words."

I smile at her, but everyone enters the room before I can say more.

"Chandler, honey, where's my granddaughter?"

"Hi, Mom."

I smirk at Tanya and turn to look for Sophia, who is curled into her aunt's side looking nervous.

"Come here, sweetheart."

Sophia gets up and slowly comes to Tanya and I. Tanya gives her a reassuring smile and holds her hand out to her. She kneels down to speak with her, and I head over to our guests.

"Hello everyone, come on in."

I'm hoping that while they were on their way up that Mom caught them up on everything about Tanya. She walks over to my side and kisses my cheek.

"I let them all know that she doesn't know who any of them are."

Relief floods me. I can always count on my mom to make things better.

“Thank you. I know she’s nervous enough as it is.” I hug her quickly, then turn to everyone else.

My eyes land on Victoria first, and the person’s arm she is hanging on to makes me tense.

“Damien.”

I have no idea what he is doing here, and I don’t care, I just want him gone.

“Chandler.” He smirks at me like he knows I’m not going to make a scene.

Mom places her hand on my arm to try and get me to calm down.

“I didn’t know you two knew each other, Chandler. He is Victoria’s date for tonight. She didn’t feel comfortable coming on her own.”

I bet she didn’t.

Looking between the two, I can’t help the feeling that this whole thing was planned. Victoria smiles sweetly at me and snuggles closer into Damien’s side. I walk over and kiss her cheek quickly before turning to her parents.

“Uncle Brandon, Aunt Sarah. It’s so good to see you two.”

I shake Mr. Dewitt’s hand and kiss his wife’s cheek.

“Please, everyone, come on in.” I wave my hand for them to walk further into the room. I go to Tanya’s side and squeeze her around the waist.

“You all know Tanya. This is Tanya’s best friend, Kayla. Tanya these are my parents Darla and Jimmy, Victoria and Damien you know, and these are her parents, Brandon and Sarah. And this...”

I reach over and pick Sophia up, I know she’s probably too big for this, but as long as I’m able to, I’ll hold her in my arms.

“This is Sophia. Our daughter.”

She smiles shyly at everyone and clings to me. Everyone just stares at her, Victoria and Damien the only ones who have met

her. Mom snuffles and then takes a tentative step forward.

“Hello, sweetheart. Do you know you look just like your daddy did at your age? So beautiful.”

Sophia blushes, making Mom and Aunt Sarah gush.

“Oh, what a sweetheart.”

I notice Mom’s eyes keep darting over to Tanya, and I know she’s dying to talk to her, but she doesn’t want to overstep.

“How are you, Tanya?”

She shuffles from foot to foot. “I’m well. Would anyone like a drink?”

Everyone responds in kind, and I tell them to sit as she and Kayla go to the kitchen to get the drinks from Lisa.

“It’s so good to see her. I know she doesn’t know who we are, but still.”

Uncle Brandon pats his wife’s knee as they sit.

“Hey! The party can start, I’ve arrived!”

Josh’s voice arrives before his body does, and I find that I’m annoyed with him. I haven’t talked to him since our argument over Tanya’s amnesia. I sent him a simple text to invite him to tonight’s dinner, and he replied with a thumbs up emoji.

He walks into the room and immediately goes to charm the women.

“Hello, ladies; how is everyone doing?”

He kisses them each on the cheek and shakes my dad’s and Uncle Brandon’s hands, ignoring Damien, who just laughs. He gets to Sophia, who has stuck to my side, and she stops him in his tracks when she asks, “Why do you kiss everyone?”

He blinks in surprise as my dad and I laugh.

“Well, sweetheart, it’s the way that gentlemen greet a pretty lady.”

She gives him a doubtful look and shakes her head.

“No, thank you.”

God, I love my kid.

Dad laughs louder, and Sophia lets out a small giggle in return. Josh rolls his eyes.

“She’s definitely your daughter.”

“Don’t feel bad, Joshua; she didn’t want me to kiss her hand the first time I met her either, if it makes you feel better.”

Josh grunts. “It doesn’t, she shouldn’t want you to touch her.”

Tanya and Kayla walk back into the room, each carrying a tray with drinks on it. Josh straightens and goes tense at the sight of Tanya, and I don’t like the reaction. They hand out the drinks, and when Tanya turns to greet Josh, she pauses as a confused look takes over her face.

“Hello.”

She holds the tray in front of her, and Josh just nods at her.

“Josh.” He faces me when I call his name, and it breaks whatever weird spell took over him.

Lisa comes out of the kitchen and announces that dinner is ready. Everyone moves to the dining room, and as we sit around the table, I look at Tanya to see if she’s ready. She gives me a small nod, and once everyone is settled, I stand back up and grab my drink.

“So, there is another reason that we wanted to have this dinner with you all. We have news we would like to share with you.”

Tanya is sitting next to me, and I reach over to take her hand in mine, smiling down at her; she gives me a weak one back, and I want to ask her what’s wrong, but everyone is waiting for the news. I stare at her another moment, then turn back to the table.

“We’re having another baby.”

Mom gasps and Aunt Sarah covers her mouth.

“That’s great news, son. Definitely a boy this time; I can tell.”

I point at Dad, and Tanya lets out a startled laugh that makes everyone else laugh too.

“He is definitely your son; he has been saying the same thing.”

Dad smiles at Tanya, a fond fatherly smile. I know this is hard for him; they had a close relationship before everything happened. I sit back down, and the table comes alive as everyone starts talking about babies. Sophia even joins in some, and I’m really happy to see everyone including her. Even with Damien here, I don’t think my mood could be ruined.

Lisa serves a delicious dinner with salad and baked chicken. Sitting there with every person in my life who is important to me, my beautiful daughter and her mother next to me, a child on the way, it all seems so surreal. Everyone is done eating, and I’m just sitting back, enjoying the view of everyone around the table.

“Why don’t we move to the living room? I have some gifts for someone.”

Mom winks at Sophia, and she perks up in interest, rushing out of the dining room ahead of everyone.

We all follow, and as we are walking through the threshold, I reach back and take hold of Tanya’s hand. She smiles at me, but again, it’s off.

“Hey, you okay?”

“I’m fine; just a bit of a headache. You go out there. I’m going to run to the restroom.”

I study her face. Something is off, and I can’t figure out what, but I just kiss her head and go to the living room with everyone else. Something has been off with her all day, and I’m worried that maybe this dinner was too much.

“So, Chandler, have you decided to give up and give me the Delaney client?”

I glare at Damien. “Now is not the time for business. The only reason you are still here is because Victoria invited you.”

I’ve done my best all night to ignore him, and if he starts something now, I don’t know how I’m going to be able to

handle it. He looks like he's about to say something, but Mom interrupts him.

"Here you go, sweetie!"

We all turn to watch Sophia open the gifts my parents brought her, and I see Josh out of the corner of my eye, sneaking off down the hall. I'm distracted as I watch the way he just went. It's in the same direction Tanya went, and the fact that he didn't say anything and seemingly didn't want anyone to know, makes me nervous.

It takes ten minutes for them both to emerge from the hallway. Josh looks angry and Tanya looks pale. I get up and rush over to them as Josh puts on a happy fake smile.

"Hey, man. Congrats on the new baby, and I guess on the first one too."

He slaps me on the back and walks past me, too quickly for me to say anything. I turn to Tanya, and she avoids my eyes.

"What did he say to you?"

"Nothing, we just ran into each other at the door of the bathroom."

"Then why are you so pale?"

I cup her face in my hands, and she smiles at me as she takes hold of my wrists.

"I'm fine; just tired and the headache. Don't worry; let's go back out there."

She kisses my palm and walks past me as well. I follow behind her and keep an eye on her the rest of the night. Something is off with her, but I don't know what it is, and I don't want to make her uncomfortable in front of everyone.

I will find out what Josh said to her, though. I know he said something.

TANYA

I woke up this morning with a headache, and it's only gotten worse as the day has gone on. I figured it was just stress from waiting for the dinner to start—for the group of people I don't remember to show up and start reminiscing about time I have no memory of.

But as everyone arrived, and I started to relax around them, it didn't ease up any. It's a constant throbbing pain in my temples. Once everyone moves to the living room after dinner, I take the opportunity to sneak off. I just need a moment to breathe. I've been having these flashes all night. Images of the people that are in the apartment, but in situations that I'm not sure are real or not.

I saw an image of Chandler's dad and I sitting in the kitchen, talking about something over coffee. An image of his mother and I sitting together in the living room next to a tree decorated in lights.

I get to the guest bathroom and quickly close myself away. I lean against the sink and try breathing through the dizziness that is now taking over.

I know what is happening. It's obvious what this is. I'm getting my memories back. There are still things that I can't remember, but moments of my past are coming back. I can't help but wonder if all of them are eventually going to come back or if this is how it's going to be for the rest of my life. Flashes of moments from my past that I will never fully remember.

The dizzy spell passes, and I stand up straight, making sure I look okay before going back out there where I know I will be watched closely by everyone. I fix a few pieces of my hair that are trying to escape the low bun I have it in, take one more deep breath, and exit the bathroom.

I stop just inside the doorway when I catch sight of Josh leaning against the wall across the way. Something about him makes me nervous. Ever since he got here tonight, I've been on edge.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know anyone was waiting to get in."

I don't want to be near him, but I have to move out of the doorway for him to enter the bathroom. I move to the side so he can walk in, and then I can walk down the hall, but he doesn't move from his spot.

"What game are you playing here, Tanya?"

I tilt my head to the side, not sure what he is talking about.

"What do you mean? I'm not playing any games?"

I hate that it comes out sounding like a question, but I'm so confused by what he said.

"I know you're faking the amnesia. There is no way that you've spent the last decade not knowing anything about your life. What? Did you not expect Chandler to find you and that was the only way you could make him think you didn't run away?"

I'm completely dumbfounded by his accusation. I have no idea how he could think that I would fake such a thing.

"I'm not faking anything. I don't know why you think that."

He scoffs and pushes away from the wall.

"Don't play cute. You never wanted to be part of his life. You hated the fame and the money. You resented him for working so much, and as soon as you found out you were pregnant, you took off."

Could that have been why I was traveling to Willow Creek without anything personal?

“I don’t know what you are talking about, Josh. I can’t even deny that claim against me because I. Don’t. Know.”

I say the last few words through my clenched teeth. I don’t know if this is out of some kind of protective instinct for his friend or because he never liked me, but I don’t like being called a liar. Especially over the one thing that has haunted my life for nine years.

“Cut the bullshit, Tanya. I know you’re lying, and I’m going to prove it to Chandler. Then he’ll kick your ass to the curb, and you can go back to your cozy little life in that piece of shit town. And if you think for one second you’re going to take any of his money, you have another think coming.”

He turns and storms back down the hall toward the living room, and I’m frozen in shock. I shake myself out of it and follow behind him. I don’t want to ruin this night for Chandler, and I don’t want anything to happen in front of Sophia.

I need to talk to Kayla.

Chandler makes his way over to us once we make it back to the living room. Josh stopping him with a slap on the back.

“Hey, man. Congrats on the new baby, and I guess on the first one too.”

He keeps his voice upbeat and cheery and walks by Chandler before he can say anything. He turns to me, and I avoid his eyes, if I look into them, I will tell him everything.

“What did he say to you?”

I shouldn’t be surprised that he can tell something is off, this man knows me like a map he studied for years.

“Nothing, we just ran into each other at the door of the bathroom.”

“Then why are you so pale?”

He cups my face, and I can’t help but smile. His hands are always so warm, and one touch from him calms me.

“I’m fine; just tired and the headache. Don’t worry; let’s go back out there.”

I take one of his hands from my face and kiss his palm, thankful that he's always here for me. I walk past him, and he follows close behind. I know he isn't going to let this go, I just pray he doesn't try and get it out of me in front of everyone.

Sophia is tearing through her gifts as we sit down on the loveseat. I smile at her as she holds up a bracelet making kit and squeals. Her family is growing, and it's bittersweet to see. I love that she has all of these people to love her, but it also means that my time with her is limited. Mr. and Mrs. Bishop are her grandparents, and they are going to want to spend time with her.

I place my hand on my stomach. It's going to be odd having so many people around this time. I had the people in Willow Creek with Sophia, but they weren't family to us at that point. These people are Sophia's and the baby's blood.

It's not just going to be me and Soph anymore.

Chandler gets up and sits on the floor with Soph to help her open up some of the things that she got from her grandparents, and as I sit back and watch the two together, Chandler's mother comes and sits next to me.

"How are you doing, sweetheart?"

I shift in my seat to sit up straighter, for some reason, the woman next to me intimidates me more than anyone else.

"I'm doing fine, thank you. It's nice to see Soph around family."

She smiles at the two and pats my leg.

"I know you are uncomfortable and don't know any of us, but I'm glad that you are back safely with us and have brought these two new miracles into our lives."

Her words make my throat tighten with emotions, and I clear it to try and get the feeling to pass. I'm not sure what to say to her, and when she just smiles reassuringly at me, I know I don't have to say anything.

I'm surprised that during the rest of the night Chandler and Damien are able to ignore each other. I see them exchange

glares every once in a while, but then I see Chandler glance at Soph and take a deep breath. Victoria has been all over Damien, to the point that I start to feel uncomfortable with Sophia in the room, but Mrs. Bishop is doing a good job at keeping her distracted. She's trying to make Chandler jealous, and it doesn't take long for me to reach my breaking point.

She slides her hand up Damien's thigh higher than is appropriate with people in the room, and I give Chandler a look. If he doesn't get them out now, I will. Sophia lets out a long yawn, and I'm surprised again when Mr. Bishop speaks up.

"Well, everyone. I think that's our cue to go. Someone looks like they're ready for bed."

Sophia pouts at him.

"But I'm not tired."

Everyone laughs quietly, and Chandler picks her up.

"Come on, sweets. Give everyone hugs and tell them goodnight."

She does as he says with her little lip poking out, and once everyone has said their goodbye, they all finally leave. Chandler gets Sophia ready for bed while Kayla and I talk as I walk her to the elevator.

"How are you holding up?"

I blow out a breath, and she laughs.

"I'm exhausted."

"I bet. His friend didn't seem too fond of you all night."

She looks angry on my behalf, and I'm grateful she was here with us.

"Yeah, he thinks I'm faking the amnesia. Told me that I'm trying to get Chandler's money and that I ran off when I found out I was pregnant."

She stares at me with her mouth open.

"What an ass."

I laugh, but there is no humor in it.

“Agreed. Are you going to be okay down there by yourself?”

She waves me off. “Alone in a huge apartment? Oh yeah. That big comfy bed is calling my name.”

She waves at me as she gets on the elevator and the doors close. I walk back into the apartment just as Lisa is grabbing her things to leave.

“Thank you for tonight, everything was delicious.”

“My pleasure. Get some sleep.”

I close the door behind her and make my way to Sophia’s room to say goodnight, but she’s already asleep when I get there. Chandler’s tucking the blankets in around her.

“She passed out pretty much as soon as her head hit the pillow.”

My poor baby was exhausted.

I wait for Chandler to kiss her on the head, and then we both head to our bedroom. The headache still present and throbbing away. We both get ready for bed without saying anything, and as we climb into bed and Chandler pulls me in close, I finally relax fully.

“You okay?”

I nod and bury my face in his chest, wrapping my arms around his torso. I feel his lips on the top of my head before his quiet words.

“What did Josh say to you?”

I pull back to look at his face; his worried expression makes me tell him.

“He thinks I ran away from you and am faking the amnesia.”

Rage takes over his features, and I place my hand on his cheek, smoothing my thumb over it.

“Don’t be mad, he’s just being protective of you. You can’t blame him for being suspicious. It’s a crazy story.”

“He’s an ass and never should have told you that. I’ll talk to him about it tomorrow.”

I don’t bother arguing with him. I know I’m not going to be able to stop him, and the headache I’ve been fighting all day is at a new peak. I just want him to hold me as I fall asleep.

“Just hold me.”

He tightens his arms around me, and I start to drift off in seconds.

I WAKE WITH A JOLT. I had been dreaming about the day that I was in the accident.

Everything comes rushing back to me in flash after flash. I remember everything. I remember being a child and living with my parents. I remember the day that I cut them off, the screaming and name calling that followed me out the door the last time I saw them. I remember the day I found out I was pregnant and packing all of my things, considering leaving Chandler.

My whole body is shaking, and I quietly slip out of bed, trying desperately not to wake Chandler. I grab my robe and slip it on as I walk out of the room, softly closing the door. I quickly make my way to Sophia’s room. She’s sound asleep, and I don’t want to wake her. I leave her door opened a crack and make my way out the penthouse and down the elevator to the second apartment. Kayla will know what to do.

It takes a few minutes of knocking to get her to answer the door, and when she opens the door, her hair is a mess and she’s squinting at me.

“What is it with you and your child waking me up so early?”

“I remember everything. I remember my whole life, and I was thinking about leaving Chandler when I found out about Sophia.”

She blinks at me, then her eyes widen, and she steps aside so that I can walk into the apartment.

“I’ll make coffee. Or do we need alcohol? Is it too early for alcohol?”

“I want to say it’s not too early, but I can’t drink right now.”

She nods, and I follow her to the kitchen and watch as she gets the coffee pot going.

“Lisa had to show me how to use this damn thing. It’s nothing like what we have in Willow Creek, not even at the Cozy Corner.”

She gets it brewing, and we take a seat at the island while we wait for it to finish.

“So, tell me what happened.”

I tell her about my dream and how when I woke up the images kept coming.

“I know things that I didn’t before. I remember everything about my life. Including why I was on my way to Willow Creek.”

“Which was?”

I don’t want to admit it aloud to anyone, not even myself.

“I found out I was pregnant the day of the accident. I had panicked. All I could think about was the fact that we never had a moment to ourselves. Every important event in our lives was followed up and documented by paparazzi. We were constantly surrounded by people, and Chandler worked so much that there were times that I had to handle it on my own. I started packing my things, ready to leave him. I was going to tell him about the baby, but that I was leaving and would raise her somewhere out of the public eye. Away from his money and everything that comes with it.”

Kayla’s eyes drop to my hands, where I’m twisting my ring around my finger.

“Do you know why you were traveling with nothing on you in a car that had no ties to you?”

I shrug at her.

“I was having doubts. As I was shoving things into a bag, my mind was racing, and I kept going back and forth on what I wanted to do. I loved him and didn’t want to leave him, but I also knew that I didn’t want to raise a child in his world. I knew if I stayed, I would be doing it all alone. I rented a car, and I was just going to be gone for the day. I rushed out of the house once the rental was delivered, and I just forgot everything on the bed. It’s why I crashed. I was distracted and a deer jumped out in front of me; I swerved to miss hitting it and lost control of the car.”

Kayla covers her mouth with her hand. “Shit.”

I nod my agreement.

“Well, what now? You have your memories back; you know why you left in the first place. How are you feeling now? I mean, you’re practically in the same position as you were nine years ago.”

I rub my hand across my stomach.

“I know.” My voice is low, almost a whisper, but it’s still heavy with meaning.

I’m fully aware that I’m in the same exact place I was nine years ago when I chose to run.

“What are you going to do, Tanya?”

I place my head in my hands, too exhausted, emotionally and physically to hold it up any more.

“I don’t know, Kayla. I have no idea what to do.”

I feel her hand on mine as she takes it away from my face and holds it.

“Look at me.” She waits until I do, her eyes serious and determined.

“Are you having second thoughts about marrying him now? Do you want to go back to Willow Creek permanently?”

I look back and forth between her eyes, trying to find the right answer in them.

“I love him, and the way he was these last few months after finding out what happened and being so patient with me made me love him even more.”

I stop to think about how to say this next part.

“But?”

“But I don’t know if I can do it. His world has always been so overwhelming for me. He’s had to work so hard to keep everyone away from us after he found us. I don’t know if I can raise a child, let alone two, in this world.”

I wish I could just see into the future to know how things will be if I stay with Chandler.

“Do you want my advice?”

“Please. I am desperate for someone to just tell me what to do.”

She raises an eyebrow at me and twists her mouth to the side, telling me that there is no way she’s going to do that.

“I think you need to take the week back in Willow Creek and think about everything. This is a big moment. You have your memories back and now have two lives you have to figure out how to mesh together. That isn’t something you are going to be able to figure out in one day. Then, I think you need to have a serious conversation with Chandler. These are his kids too. You can’t just leave.”

She’s right, and we both know it. A knock sounds on the door, and before she can open it, I know it’s Chandler. She lets him and Sophia in and leaves to go change.

“Good morning, beautiful.”

Chandler walks over to my side, kisses me on the head, then leans down and kisses my stomach.

“Good morning, baby boy.”

Tears well up in my eyes, and I push them back before either of them can see me cry. Sophia giggles and comes over, wrapping her arms around me and putting her face into my stomach.

“Good morning, baby brother! Good morning, Mommy!”

I lean down to kiss her forehead, and then give Chandler a look.

“Good morning, baby. You know, your daddy could be wrong, and you could be having a baby sister.”

Chandler smirks at me, and Sophia just shakes her head.

“Nope. Daddy’s right.”

Chandler laughs, and I roll my eyes, trying to keep the smile off my face.

The four of us hang out in the penthouse for the rest of the weekend. We watch movies and play games, and after Sophia goes to bed us adults talk and get to know each other. I don’t say anything to Chandler about getting my memories back just yet. I know that conversation will bring on a lot more and I’m not ready for them.

Kayla is right; I need to take the next week back at home and really think things through. As Chandler says goodbye to us on Sunday morning, I can’t help but feel like this is more than goodbye just for the week.

It feels like goodbye forever. Like we ultimately aren’t meant to be, and we’re not going to make it.

CHANDLER

I haven't spoken to Tanya in a week. An entire week. Every time I call her phone, Sophia picks up, and when I ask her if I can talk to her mother when we are done, she tells me that her mother said she's busy.

I have no idea what happened, but I do know that Josh had something to do with it. I've tried calling him as well, and he's also ignoring me. It's Friday, and I'm at my breaking point. If Tanya doesn't show up tonight, then I'm taking the helicopter to Willow Creek and forcing her to talk to me. Everything had been going great. We were becoming closer as a couple and as a family, she is carrying my child for God's sake. She can't just disappear on me again.

The past three nights I've had vivid dreams about her disappearance. I keep reliving the moment I came home to find her things on the bed and Tanya nowhere to be found. I wake with a start, covered in sweat and unable to go back to sleep. The only thing that is saving me from going insane is the fact that Tanya is letting me continue to talk to Sophia. Soph is my lifeline to Tanya right now, and I can tell that she's starting to see that something is off as well. It's the look in her eyes. Like she's trying to figure out a word problem.

She still calls me to check in on her stuffies while they are at the cabin. It gets harder and harder to be away from them, especially with the new baby. I missed out on Tanya carrying Sophia, and I feel like I'm missing out on this baby as well.

"Sir? Your meeting is about to start."

I turn my chair around to face the door where Jillian is standing, a look of concern on her face.

“Is everything okay?”

I gather my things for the meeting and stand.

“Everything is fine, Jillian. I’ve just got a lot on my mind.”

I meet her at the door, but she doesn’t move out of the way. She stands in front of me and puts her hands on her hips.

“Everything is not fine. What happened?”

A voice comes from behind her, and my eyes lift to meet Josh’s.

“He’s reliving his past and is too stubborn to admit it.”

This is just what I need.

“Now you want to talk to me? I’m on my way to a meeting.”

He shoves his hands into his pockets and shrugs.

“I’ll just wait for you in your office then.”

I sigh, and Jillian and I move aside so that Josh can enter.

“Don’t go through my shit. I should be done in about an hour.”

He nods and takes a seat in one of the chairs I have set up by the windows. I stare at him for a moment.

“Sir, your meeting. You don’t have to worry; I will be able to see him from my desk.”

Jillian is a saving grace in my life.

“Don’t let him out of your sight.”

She nods, and I make my way to the meeting room. I need to keep my head in the game, I need to focus on work, then on Josh, then on Tanya.

It’s going to be a long day.

THE MEETING ENDS up lasting an hour and a half, and by the time I’m heading back to my office, I’m already on the verge of losing it. I don’t know what it is with this week, but

it's like everyone got together and decided that today was a good day to be absolutely useless.

I have meeting after meeting today, and I don't want to deal with Josh right now, but I know he's not going to leave until we talk.

He's got the worst timing.

I glance at Jillian as I pass her desk, and she gives me a smile and a thumbs up. She's young, and at times like this, I can't help but wonder why she chooses to work here. She could have more time to be young if she chose to work somewhere else. She wouldn't have to worry about missing out on big moments with her kids, or losing the love of her life because she works too much.

I shake myself out of my thoughts before I spiral any further. I've got to keep my head in the game.

I can see Josh before I get to my office, just like Jillian said she would, and he's slumped into the seat reading one of the business magazines I leave on the tables. He doesn't so much as move his eyes to look at me when I enter and walk over to my desk.

"If you want to talk now, you're going to have to do so while I work. I don't have time to stop and focus on you now that you've decided to talk to me."

He tosses the magazine onto the table, unfolds himself from the chair, and walks over to my desk to sit in the chair across from me. He doesn't say anything, and when I look up at him, he's staring at me.

"What do you want, Josh? You obviously have something to say."

"What did she tell you?"

Every muscle in my body tenses.

"I knew it. I knew you said something to her. What did you do?"

He looks shocked to hear that Tanya didn't say anything to me.

“You don’t know? She didn’t say anything?”

I rub at my temples and take a deep breath.

“No, she didn’t say anything. I saw you sneak off at the party and when you both came back, she looked off. She said she was fine and that you two just ran into each other, and now she hasn’t spoken to me in a week.”

He looks away from me when I look up at him again.

“Josh, just tell me what you said to her.”

I’m already working at not lunging across this desk and decking him, and I know what he tells me next is going to force me to use all of my will power. I can’t go around punching people, even if I do own the company.

“I told her what I really think. I think she ran from you, and when you found her, she had to come up with a reason and it was amnesia. I think she wants your money and having another kid is the way for her to get it.”

I’m going to kill him.

“Get out.”

I have to clench my jaw tight so I don’t start screaming at him.

“What?”

I slowly stand and rest my hands on my desk, keeping my eyes locked on the dark wood under them.

“Get. Out.”

He still doesn’t move, and I’m losing the very thin grasp I have on my control.

“Josh, get out now or I’m going to beat the shit out of you.”

He stands but still doesn’t make a move to leave.

“I’m just trying to protect you, Chandler. You have a very successful business, and if she’s after any of it, I don’t want you to do something stupid to lose it.”

“She’s not after my money and she’s not faking the amnesia!”

My voice echoes through my office and Josh stands there, staring at me like I've lost my mind.

“Get out. You don't want me to talk to you right now. I can promise you that it won't turn out the way you think it will. Leave or I'll have Jillian call security.”

“They have already been advised to be on standby.”

Jillian's voice comes from the doorway, but I keep my eyes trained on Josh. He sighs and shakes his head like he is disappointed in me.

“Fine, I'll go, but don't say I didn't warn you.”

He turns and storms out of my office, nearly knocking Jillian over on his way out. Once he's gone, my body starts to shake with how much I'm having to tense my muscles to hold back.

“Do you want me to cancel the rest of your meetings?”

“No. It's fine. Everything will stay right on track. I just need a moment.”

She nods and turns to leave, but I can tell that she wants to say more.

“I'm fine, Jillian. Please just order us some lunch so that I can have it after my next meeting. Order from wherever you want.”

She nods again and leaves, closing my office door. As soon as I hear the click of the door latching, I sink into my chair. I don't know how much worse this week can get, but at this point, I wouldn't be surprised by anything.

I give myself one minute. One minute to stress over the fact that the mother of my children is ignoring me for unknown reasons. One minute to be angry with my best friend and his bullshit. One minute to worry that the perfect future I could see for myself wasn't going to happen. I allow myself one minute to wonder if I'm going to lose Tanya all over again.

After that one minute is over, I shake myself and focus on work. I get all the papers I need for my next meeting and check my schedule to reorient myself on what I'm supposed to be doing. Now is not the time to be worried or stressed out

over things I cannot control, now is the time to focus on my company and what I need to do to keep it running.

Even if Tanya runs, I have to think about our children's future. This company is going to guarantee that they want for nothing in their lives, and that's what matters most. I will focus on what to do to make sure she doesn't run later.

JUST AS I was leaving my last meeting of the day, I got a text from Tanya saying that she and Sophia would be at the penthouse by six o'clock. I felt both relieved and anxious at her text. I was relieved that she was going to be here, present and within reach, and anxious that she was going to tell me that she wanted to end things.

A part of me worried that Josh and my mom were right, that she had run from me nine years ago. That she ran, got in a car accident that almost took her life, and forgot about me. I could deal with her never getting her memories back. I could handle her never remembering our life before. I can't handle her leaving me again. I barely survived it last time and I wouldn't survive it again. Especially if she takes my children with her.

No, don't think like that, Chandler. Give her a chance to talk.

I gather my things and tell Jillian to go home. It's a quarter past five, and I told Tanya I was going to do better at being around and working less. Jillian should benefit from that as well. I make it home with just enough time to change out of my suit and into a pair of jeans and a nice long sleeve Henley shirt. It was chilly out tonight, but I plan on finally keeping my word to Sophia and show her the roof.

I grab the key to the door for the roof from my office and take it to the kitchen so I have it ready and nearby when they arrive. For a moment, I think about getting dinner set up there for us to enjoy, but with the chill, I don't want the food to get cold or anyone to get sick. Lisa made something simple for us and left directions for me to heat it up before leaving for the night. I don't know how tonight is going to go, but if it goes the way I want, then I just want a night for the three of us to be a family.

I need to keep my hands busy, so I get everything out of the fridge for dinner and start to get everything heated up. Lisa made Tanya and me a steak salad that looks amazing and made some homemade chicken nuggets and mac and cheese for Sophia.

Ten minutes after dinner is ready, they arrive, and as soon as I see Tanya, my stomach is full of nerves.

“Hello, ladies. I hope you’re hungry.”

I wave my hand toward the table with everything set out, and Sophia runs over to me, hugs me quickly around the waist, and takes a seat.

“I’m starving!”

I laugh and turn to face Tanya. She looks tired, and I just want to hold her, but I don’t know if that’s what she wants right now.

“You okay? How was the drive?”

Relief hits me so strongly when she walks up to me and places her hands on my chest that my knees nearly give out on me.

“It’s getting easier the more we come up here. Exposure and all that. Kayla dropped us off but had to head back. She has to work a shift tomorrow night.”

She smooths her hand across my chest and up to wrap around my shoulders. I let out a breath and pull her body closer to mine, resting my head against hers.

“I missed you this week.” My words are soft. I don’t want to spook her away from me again.

“We missed you too. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to talk to you more. I had some stuff to think over.”

Stuff to think over?

My stomach twists at the thought, and I pull back to look into her eyes.

“Everything okay?”

She gives me a soft smile and nods.

“Yeah, we can talk about it after Soph goes to bed. Right now, baby is hungry.”

Smiling, I reach down to rest my hand against her stomach.

“I can’t wait until I can feel him move.”

She shakes her head at me and steps around me to go to the table where Sophia is waiting not so patiently for us. Tanya and I sit down at either end of the table so Sophia is between us, and I pile food onto each of their plates before getting my food.

“How was school this week, baby girl?”

Sophia’s eyes light up at my question, and I love that she enjoys school so much. She tells me all about the art projects that she and her friends made and how she was the fastest at running at recess. I smirk at Tanya at her competitive nature, and she just rolls her eyes.

Moments like this are a balm to my soul. After such a terrible week, having my girls with me having a simple dinner and just listening to Sophia chatter on brings me so much peace.

After dinner, I can clean up the dishes and put away the leftovers while Tanya gets Sophia in the bath and puts their weekend stuff away. I hate that they have weekend stuff, I just want them with me always, and I don’t know how to get us there.

I need to figure out how to get us together as a family before I lose them.

After Sophia is done with her shower, I tell Tanya to get their coats on and meet me in the kitchen.

“Are we going somewhere?”

She looks confused, and I just shake my head smiling. They quickly get on some coats, and I unlock the door to the roof and wait for them, a nervous excitement making me jittery.

“I told you I had a surprise for you on the roof, didn’t I?”

Sophia’s eyes grow wide with excitement and Tanya smiles almost knowingly. I almost ask her if she remembers what is

up here, then check myself, she's probably just remembering I had a surprise to show Soph.

I hold my hand out to Soph, and she skips over to take it. I lead them up the stairs and turn to face them so I can see their expressions as I open the door. I push the door open with my foot and watch as Sophia's face breaks out into a wide smile and Tanya laughs at her expression. She doesn't look surprised by the sight, and it makes me stop for a moment.

Does she remember this?

Before I can say anything, Sophia darts by me and starts checking out our rooftop garden. I had it created for Tanya for our one-year anniversary and never had the heart to tear it down after she disappeared.

Tanya and I follow Soph at a slower pace, and I keep a close eye on Tanya's face as she watches our daughter explore the flowers and various other plants that cover the roof.

"You don't seem surprised to see this."

Hope is starting to climb up my throat, and I try to push it down. It's not important to me that she gets her memories back. It will change nothing between us if she gets them back or not, but the thought that she does makes me hopeful.

She turns to face me, and her expression seems guarded. She motions to a bench nearby, and we sit on it where we can still see Sophia while we talk.

"Part of the reason I made myself scarce this week is because I've been trying to figure out how to deal with everything. Last weekend, my memories started to come back."

My breath catches in my throat, and I can feel the burn of tears behind my eyes.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

She looks down and starts rubbing her hands.

"I needed to sort through some things, and I wanted to make sure that it was real. That I was getting all of them back."

"And did you? Get them all back?"

“I think so.”

I blow out a breath and lean forward to rest my elbows on my knees and rest my head in my hands.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner.”

I turn to her quickly and take her hands in mine.

“Baby, no. You don’t have to be sorry. That’s your choice. I just can’t believe it.”

She nods her head in a way that says, “I know it’s crazy.”

“There’s more that I want to talk to you about, but I don’t know how you’re going to take it.”

I don’t know why, but I know what she’s going to say before she does.

“You really did leave me, didn’t you?”

Tears well up in her eyes.

“I was thinking about it. I wasn’t leaving you when I had my accident. I needed space and was going to spend just the day in Willow Creek to think things through, but then the accident happened.”

It hurts to hear that she was even thinking about it.

“Are you still wanting to leave? Is that why you needed space again?”

Her hands tighten over mine.

“I won’t lie and say it wasn’t a thought. I’m just scared to be in this world. This isn’t what I wanted for my life, and I don’t want to raise our kids constantly being bombarded by the paparazzi and people following them. I want our kids to have a normal life, and I don’t want to have to do it on my own because you work all the time.”

I feel like she’s punched me in the stomach.

“But I’m more scared of being without you.”

Her words are soft, and yet I feel like she screamed them to the world. I blow out the breath I was holding and pull her into my arms.

“I’m so sorry I ever made you feel that way. I’m so sorry that I caused all of this. If I had just paid more attention and did as you asked, none of this would have happened. I promise you I’m going to do better. I’m going to work less, and I’m going to be the best father to our kids, and if you still want to, I promise to be the best husband to you if you marry me.”

She sniffles and holds me tighter.

“I do want to marry you. I do want us to be a family; I’m just scared. I love Willow Creek so much. It’s where Soph was born, and she’s spent her whole life with the people there. What are we going to do?”

I push her back some to look into her eyes. Tears are streaming down her face, and I wipe them away with my thumbs.

“We will figure everything out, together. We will give our kids the best life possible, and I’m going to make sure that all three of you are happy and never want for anything. I’m not going to mess up again.”

She sniffles and nods her head. A small, pitiful smile on her face.

“Will you marry me, Tanya Roberts?”

CHANDLER

For the next month, I spend all of my time with Sophia and Tanya in Willow Creek, living with them in their little cabin. After Tanya admitted her fears to me on the rooftop of the penthouse, I made it my life's mission to make sure she never has them again. I don't want her to ever have to sacrifice anything again. Almost losing her the first time should have woken me up but hearing that I was so close to it happening again gave me the kick in the ass that I needed.

We've been spending all our free time planning for the baby, the wedding, and the rest of our lives. I didn't want them to have to give up the place that has been their home for so long, so I made some changes to make sure that wouldn't happen.

I gave Jillian a raise and a promotion so that she could be me while I'm in Willow Creek. Tanya and I have decided that during the school year we will all live here in Willow Creek, I will travel to the city for important meetings that I can't schedule over Zoom, and Jillian will handle anything that needs to be done in person when I can't be there. During the summers, we will live in the penthouse in the city so that Sophia and the baby can have exposure to both worlds.

I was able to convince Tanya that she didn't have to work during the summers, but she wanted to keep working at the Cozy Corner Café while we are in Willow Creek. I have more than enough money for her to never have to work, but she's determined to keep a job. At this point, I think she knows that she can get anything she wants from me. I will never be dumb enough to push her away again.

I made a promise to her on that roof a month ago that I would do everything in my power to make sure she and our children were happy, and I'm going to do that. Sophia has been ecstatic that I'm living with them permanently, and we've developed a routine as a family.

So far, I've been able to handle working less. I don't think it would have happened without Jillian, and both Tanya and I are grateful for everything she has done. She has proven that she can handle the company well, and sometimes, I think she gives me a run for my money. Tanya likes to joke that Jillian is going to take over the company one day and run it for me. Honestly, I wouldn't mind it. My focus is my family, like it should have been from the beginning.

I've been able to be there for all of Sophia's school events and go to all of Tanya's doctor's appointments for the baby, and I don't know how I ever could have let myself miss all of this.

It's November, and the house is decorated for Thanksgiving; it's the first time in many years that I haven't worked the holiday season. Sophia is off for the week, and I'm currently sitting outside on the porch of the cabin, drinking a hot cup of tea while I wait for Tanya to get home from a night out with Kayla. Sophia is already in bed, and I have plans for my fiancé when she gets home.

We've been taking things slow again. Trying to work on our relationship for real this time before we add more intimate things into the mix, but tonight I want my girl in my arms all night. I miss feeling her naked body against mine, and I know she's been missing it too. All week I've been catching her checking me out, and the heated look in her eyes tells me exactly what she's thinking.

Her beautiful form appears at the edge of the trees that lead to the center of town, and I watch her as she walks up to the house and up the stairs. My eyes track up and down her body, lingering on the small bump that is starting to show under her shirt. She smiles at me, and when she sees the look on my face, her smile drops and her eyes heat.

“And what exactly are you doing out here?”

She walks right up to me and steps between my legs, placing her hands on my shoulders before placing her legs on either side of me and straddling my lap on the loveseat we have set up at the end of the porch.

I put my tea down on the railing next to me and grip her hips in my hands, squeezing and pulling her center tight against me. She sighs and wraps her arms around my neck, pulling herself even closer, until there is no room left between us.

“I’ve been out here thinking about how I can’t wait for my fiancé to get home so that I can take her upstairs and worship every inch of her perfect body.”

Her breathing picks up, and I lean in to run my lips up and down her neck, making her moan and squirm on my lap, creating a friction that has me hard in an instant.

“Is Soph asleep?”

I nod and bite down on the swell of her breast that is peeking out of her shirt.

“She’s been out for half an hour.”

Tanya stands and takes my hand in hers, walking backward a few steps and pulling me to stand and follow her.

“I want you.” Her voice is low with desire, and heat spreads through my body.

I lift her into my arms, her legs wrapping around my hips, and walk us into the house. Her little bump where she carries our baby boy presses into my stomach, and it makes me smile. I love seeing her pregnant with our child. I stop at the bottom of the stairs and cup the back of her head, pulling her face to mine and kissing her hard until she has to pull back to breathe. I set her down on her feet, making sure her body slides against mine the whole time, then turn her and push her gently to start walking up the stairs. I don’t want to risk tripping and falling with her in my arms.

On the way to our room, she stops to check on Sophia and make sure she’s still sound asleep while I stand in the doorway and watch as she tucks our baby girl in and softly kisses her head. Seeing my girls always makes me realize how lucky I

am to have them. It makes me emotional at times to see them together.

Tanya softly closes her door and takes me by the hands again, dragging me into our room and closing the door behind us, making sure it's locked. She pushes me back onto it and starts kissing and sucking at my neck. I groan and pull her hips flush with mine, grinding into her.

"It's been way too long since you've been inside of me, Chandler Bishop. I want you."

"Fuck, baby. I want you too."

I spin us so that her back is to the door and kiss my way down her body until I'm kneeling in front of her. I lift her shirt up and let her take over taking it off as I place a kiss on her stomach before undoing her jeans and sliding them down her thick thighs, reaching around to squeeze her perfect ass in my hands. I can hear how breathless she is as I lean in and kiss the top of her mound through her panties.

She slides her hands into my hair that's much longer than I usually have it and tugs gently, making me moan into her. I grip the sides of her panties and slide them down her legs, not bothering to wait for them to hit the floor before I lean in and lick her slit from bottom to top, sliding my tongue in and circling her clit.

"Chandler." Her voice is needy and whiny, and I love that I make her sound like that.

I don't have the willpower I need to tease her tonight. She was right when she said it's been too long. I devour her center until her legs start to shake, and as she starts to come undone, I pull her closer to my face and suck on her until she breaks apart and shoves my head away from her.

"Chandler! Oh god."

I pin her hands to the door behind her and put my mouth back on her, sucking her clit into my mouth and flicking it with my tongue.

"Chandler, stop. God, I can't take any more."

She's squirming against me, and I smile against her heat before standing and lifting her again, taking her to the bed and setting her down before I start to take my clothes off. Her eyes trailing every inch of my skin that is exposed to her. She leans back on her hands and my eyes can't help but trail down her gorgeous body.

"You're perfect, Tanya."

She smiles cheekily at me, and I gently push her back and crawl over her body. I lay my body along hers, every inch of us touching, and look deep into her eyes.

"I love you. I love you so much that sometimes I can't breathe. I almost lost you; I did lose you for nine years, and I will do everything in my power to make sure that never happens again. The only thing I want in life is to keep you and our children happy and safe. I don't care about anything else."

Tears well up in her eyes as she cups my face in her hands.

"I love you too. So much. I've never been happier in my life, and I know you are going to be an amazing father to our children for the rest of our lives. Now, stop talking and make love to me."

I laugh and lean down to take her lips with mine in what starts off as a soft, loving kiss. It quickly heats up, and as I slide my tongue against hers, she grinds up into me, showing me with her body that she wants me. I roll us until she is on top of me, straddling me as I stare up at her perfect face and body.

"Ride me, baby. I want to watch you."

She smirks down at me and leans forward to rest her hands on my chest and lifts up so that I can line my length up with her center before she slowly lowers herself onto me. It feels so good to be inside of her after so long. I tilt my head back at the sensation of her wet heat sliding down over me, and once I'm fully inside of her, she stops.

"I thought you wanted to watch me." Her voice is breathless and raspy with desire.

I lower my chin back down and focus all of my attention on her. She starts rocking back and forth, and I spread my hands

up her thighs, over her hips, and up her sides until I reach her perfect breasts and move my hands to cup them. I take note of the small changes that are already happening in her body. Her curves are becoming more obvious, her breasts are becoming heavier.

I squeeze them and roll her nipples between my fingers, making her moan and tilt her head back.

“That’s it; feel how good I make your body feel, baby.”

She moans and grinds down on me before lifting and starting to ride me at a pace that has us both gasping and moaning.

We make love for the rest of the night. I watch her as she rides me until she comes apart with my name on her lips.

I take her as she is on all fours on the bed. Then later, after we had fallen asleep, I wake her up with my mouth before sliding into her from behind while we lay on our sides.

I love how connected I feel to her when we are making love. It gets more and more amazing every time we’re together, and I hope that it’s this way for the rest of our lives.

As we lay together, her back to my front, catching our breaths, I can’t help but think about how I just want her to be my wife already. I bury my face into her hair and breathe in her scent.

“I can’t wait to be married to you already and call you my wife.”

I see her cheek lift as she smiles, and it makes me smile in return.

“I want you to know that the ring on your finger is the one that I bought before the accident.”

She turns her head to look at me, and there’s wonder on her face.

“Really?”

I nod. “Really, I wanted you to be mine for the rest of our lives the moment I met you. I bought the ring months before the accident and had been trying to figure out the right time to propose before everything happened.”

She turns and holds her hand out so we can look at the ring on her finger.

“I can’t believe we almost missed out on all of this.”

I don’t like to think about that, so I kiss her on the head and turn to lay on my back, tugging her to turn and lay her head on my chest.

“Your ultrasound appointment is next week. The doctor said we may be able to see the sex of the baby; do you want to confirm it’s a boy then or wait until he’s here?”

She scoffs and hits my chest with the back of her hand, making me laugh.

“It’s up to you if you want to find out what the baby is, *boy or girl*, I’m fine either way.”

“We are definitely having a boy.”

She laughs; a sound I love hearing and vow to hear forever.

“I kind of want to wait until he gets here.”

She lifts her head and rests her chin on my chest. Her eyes are light and happy.

“Okay, then we’ll wait to see if you’re wrong.”

I smile and slap her butt, making her yelp. I stare into her happy face.

“I want you to know how sorry I am for causing us so much stress. I never should have put you in a position to question how I feel about you.”

Her face softens as she caresses my cheek with the back on her finger.

“There’s nothing for you to apologize for. Things happen, and we’ve made it to the other side. We are stronger for what we went through, and now we have the rest of our lives ahead of us.”

God, I love this woman.

I bring her face to mine and kiss her softly, pulling back to say, “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

She lays her head back on my chest, and we hold each other as we drift back to sleep. My thoughts full of her and our children. I don't know what I did to deserve her or this life, but I'm not going to risk it again. She was made for me, and I know that I was made for her. No matter what has happened or what will happen, as long as she's next to me, I know I can make it through anything.

WE SPEND Thanksgiving in Willow Creek, my parents come over to spend it with us. I can see why Tanya and Soph love this place so much. It's right out of a fairy tale book. I haven't been able to stop smiling the entire day. I love seeing my parents with Tanya and Sophia. Mom has been all over Tanya, doing everything for her and not letting her lift a finger.

The best has been seeing Dad be the best Pop Pops to Sophia. They have been attached at the hip since the night they met at the dinner party. He is the best dad and seeing him be the best grandpa to my daughter warms my heart.

“How are you doing, son?”

Dad sits next to me on the steps of the gazebo in the center of town, and we watch Sophia run around with the other kids of town and sip on some hot chocolate.

“I'm great, Dad. What about you?”

He pats me on the back once and grips my shoulder.

“I just want you to know that I'm proud of you. You've become a wonderful man and have done well for yourself and your family.”

My throat tightens with emotion at his words.

“Thanks, Dad.” My voice sounds tight.

He smiles at me and turns back to the view in front of us, saying nothing more. He was never a man of many words, and the fact that he said this to me means so much.

“You know, before the accident and everything happened, I wasn’t even sure if I wanted kids. I never really thought about it, but now that I see Sophia and the new baby is on the way, I want to have as many as she’ll let me.”

Dad laughs loudly, causing the people nearby to turn and look at us.

“That’s usually how it goes. Your mother and I wanted more kids, things didn’t work out that way for us, but I can tell you that if she had wanted a whole baseball team and we could have done it, I would have given them all to her.”

Seeing how much my dad and I are alike makes me laugh, and in this moment, nothing could bring me down.

The holidays over the last nine years have been hard for me. Mom was always so worried about me, but I could never fake it enough to ease her worry, no matter how much I tried.

“I’ve given my assistant a promotion and delegated my work between the two of us.”

I see Dad’s head snap over to look at me. I know he’s surprised without me having to look at him.

“I owe it to all three of them to make sure I’m present in their lives. I need to make sure that I’m there for my family, both physically and emotionally. They deserve that and so much more, Dad. They are my everything.”

He reaches over again to pat me on the shoulder, and I don’t need his words to know that he agrees with me and is proud of my choice. There was a time in my life where the only thing I wanted was to make him proud of me.

Tanya makes her way over to us, and I smile down at her as she climbs the steps, coming to sit on the one just below me so she can lean against my chest. I wrap her in my arms, burying my face into her neck and spreading my hands over her swollen stomach. I haven’t felt any movements yet, and I’m getting anxious for them to start.

Unbeknownst to me, in that moment, my mother was snapping a picture of the two of us like this and another when Sophia runs over and joins us. The two pictures get a place of honor in

our two homes and my office after Mom gives them to me as a Christmas gift a month later.

I stare at those pictures every time I'm feeling grateful for my life. They are beautiful pictures of me with my little family that I'll treasure for the rest of my life.

I just hope that we can get through this next chapter in our lives without losing each other or ourselves. We still have a lot to get through.

TANYA

Christmas came and went quicker than I could pay attention. We spent it at the penthouse, and it was the most magical Christmas I have ever had. Waking up and watching my sweet baby girl open presents in front of the giant tree with the view of Central Park behind her, my hand resting on my stomach and the baby that was growing there, Chandler sitting on the floor with our daughter and handing her present after present. It was a memory I would hold onto when things get hard. To think that by this time next year, we will have another little one to join us. New Years was just as magical. We let Sophia stay up until the ball dropped, then, after she went to sleep, we stayed up early into the morning making love in our bed. I don't know how, but it only ever gets better when we have sex. It's like the closer we get emotionally, the more intense the sex is.

I rub my stomach as Chandler and I sit in the waiting room of the OB's office. It's time for another ultrasound to check on the baby. Chandler has come to every appointment since we talked on the roof.

After we had that talk, I made a promise to myself that I would put my all into this relationship. I can handle whatever life throws at me as long as I have Chandler by my side. The fear of not having him with me is greater than the fear I have over being in his world. The week I spent trying to figure things out had been torture. I thought it was best if I kept my distance from him during that time until I figured out what I wanted to do, but instead I just missed him.

It was like every inch of my body knew that I belonged with him. I had spent nine years without him, and by the end of that week, I knew that I didn't want to spend any more time without him.

“Ms. Roberts?”

The nurse calling my name pulls me from my thoughts, and I look up to find Chandler already standing and holding his hand out to help me up. I smile at him and take his hand. He doesn't let me go the whole way to the back until he has to for them to get my weight and vitals. The nurse gets all of my information and leaves us in a room to wait while she grabs the ultrasound machine.

“Last chance, you sure you don't want to find out if you're wrong or not?”

I smirk at Chandler, and he takes a page out of my book and rolls his eyes.

“I'm sure and I'm not wrong. We're going to have a boy.”

I laugh, and he comes to my side as I lay on the table and lifts my shirt to rest under my breasts, sliding his finger under my bra for a split second, then lowering my maternity pants down. I give him a look, telling him that I know what he was doing, and he smiles innocently at me, all the while my body heats from his simple touch. This man can get me going with just a touch or a simple look, and he knows it.

His smile turns soft as he spreads his hand over as much of my stomach as he can and lays his lips against me to talk to our baby. Something he does often.

“Hey there, baby boy. How you doing in there? Momma keeping you comfy?”

I love to watch him talk to my stomach. I still say there is a possibility that he's wrong about the gender of our child, but I secretly hope he's right. I would love to have a little boy who looks just like him running around with Sophia.

Chandler kisses my stomach before standing and sitting in the chair that's close to my head for partners to be close. The nurse comes back in just as he sits and smiles at us.

“Ready to see your baby?”

We both nod excitedly, even though we’ve seen him or her many times at this point.

“Okay, if we can see, are we wanting to know what we’re having?”

I always find it funny that they use “we” when talking about the baby.

“Nope, I already know, but we want to wait until the birth to confirm.”

The nurse laughs at Chandler’s confidence, squirts the cold gel onto my stomach, and starts moving the wand around and clicking away at the machine.

“Okay, well, I can already see what you’re having so if you change your minds, let me know; in the meantime, there is your baby’s sweet face.”

Chandler moves closer to my side and takes my hand in his as we stare at our baby. I love these appointments. Seeing the profile of our baby growing inside of me. It’s such a wonder to see.

I can’t take my eyes off of the black and white picture of the little life that Chandler and I created, and it makes me think of when I was pregnant with Sophia. How different this time is. I feel Chandler’s thumb rub the back of my hand, and I can’t keep the smile off my face.

“That’s our baby.” He whispers next to my ear, and I shiver at the feeling.

“That’s our baby.”

I turn to the nurse for my next question.

“Are we going to be able to take a sonogram picture home today? We have an anxious big sister at home who is collecting picture of the baby.”

“Oh, that’s so sweet. Of course, I’ll even give you two so you can keep one as well.”

We all laugh, and she finishes up the scan and hands me a towel to clean up my stomach. Chandler takes it from her and gently cleans me before fixing my clothes and helping me sit up.

“Alright, everything is all set. The doctor will be in to see you in just a moment to see if you have any questions.”

She smiles at us, then leaves the room with the machine. As soon as the door is shut, Chandler leans over and kisses me, taking my breath away.

“What has gotten into you?”

I’m out of breath when he pulls away.

“I’m just happy. I love ultrasound days.”

I laugh at his boyish excitement and pick up the pictures the nurse gave us.

“Can you believe we are already halfway there? In just a few short months we are going to have a newborn.”

We stare at the sonogram in wonder, Chandler’s hand in its usual spot on my stomach until the doctor comes in.

“Hello, how is everything with mom and baby?”

We go over everything with the doctor, and she tells us that everything looks great with the baby and his or her growth. Chandler asks question after question about what I should be doing and not doing, just like he does every appointment, and I love that he is so invested. She answers all of his questions and never seems to be frustrated with him, for which I’m grateful.

She gives baby and me a clean bill of health and sends us on our way. By the time we make it home, it’s time to pick Sophia up from school, so Chandler parks the car at home, and we walk to the school the same way that Sophia and I have been since she started school. I love the fact that Chandler understands our love for Willow Creek. Not once has he seemed to hate it here or want to go back to the city. He understands that Sophia needs to stay here for school, with the friends and teachers that she has grown up with. He has

become very invested in the community here and is even involved in the PTA.

It's a great source of amusement for me to watch him being fawned over by all the mothers. His involvement in Sophia's school is where I got the idea for my new project.

A week after I told Chandler I got my memories back, he tried to convince me that I didn't have to keep working at the café. Now that I remembered my life before the accident, I know that I held a bachelor's degree in psychology. I hadn't been working at the time of the accident, and Chandler wanted me to go back to that. He wanted to take care of us and didn't want me to have to worry about that stuff. I told him that I wanted to work and that I would stay at the café but only work part-time during the school year and take time off in the summers so that I could be home with Sophia and the baby.

I want to do more, though. I love how our life is, and I love that I have the choice to stay home with the kids. It will make things easier during the summers when Sophia doesn't have school, but I also don't want to just lay around the house all day. There wouldn't even be anything for me to clean when we stayed at the penthouse; Chandler had Lisa and a cleaning crew that came once a week.

While we wait for the school bell to ring to release the kids for the day, I decide that now is the best time to talk to Chandler about my idea.

"I want to run an idea by you."

He turns to face me and gives me his undivided attention. Having his eyes on me so fully stills makes me flustered, and I have to shake myself to focus again. I don't miss the smirk on his lips when I do so. I roll my eyes at him and clear my throat.

"I was thinking that since I won't be working during the summers that I could get into charity work."

I watch his face closely as I explain what I want to do with my time and the newfound money I'll have when we get married next autumn.

“Sophia will want to have sleepovers and playdates, and I figured that during the time she’s over at someone else’s house, when the baby is a little older, I could start a charity that focuses on education.”

A smile starts to pull at his lips, and I feel emboldened by his reaction.

“I want us to contribute to education for kids, and I want to start a scholarship and work with other foundations. I think it would be a good use of our money and my time, don’t you?”

His smile widens into a full one, his perfectly white, straight teeth showing, and I can hear a few sighs from the mothers around us. He hooks his fingers into my belt loops and pulls me as close as he can with my belly in the way.

“I think you are amazing and would do amazingly handling something like that. Mom would be able to help you get the numbers if there are any you need. She has connections in education.”

I sigh in relief, and he tilts his head in confusion.

“Did you think I wouldn’t agree with you?”

I shrug. “I wasn’t sure if you would let me. You seem pretty set on me not working at all.”

His face softens with understanding.

“Baby, I’m set on your not working if you don’t want to. I want to make sure you know that if you want to stay home with the babies, we can do that. I want you to do whatever you want; do whatever makes you happy. If you want me to quit my company and let you run it, I would in a heartbeat.”

I laugh at his ridiculous statement, but he continues before I can say anything.

“I would never try and control what you do with your life, as long as you’re happy, then I’m happy. We have more than enough money for you to do whatever you want. It’s important to me that you know that.”

I wrap my arms around his neck and smile up at him.

“I know. I love you for that, but I also want you to be happy and do what you want.”

“You and our babies are all I want. I’m happier now than I have ever been in my entire life. The only thing I want from you is for you to be happy, healthy, and safe. Same goes for our kids. And you know, maybe a few more kids.”

A startled laugh leaves me.

“A *few* more kids? Geez, Chandler Bishop, how about having the one I’m currently carrying in my womb and then we can talk?”

He chuckles and leans down to kiss my forehead.

“I can deal with that.”

The school bell rings, and we both turn to wait for our girl to come running to us. She comes out five minutes later, waving goodbye to her friends before running full speed to us and jumping into her Daddy’s arms.

“Hi, Daddy! Hi, Mommy!”

Chandler leans down so that I can kiss her cheek.

“Hi, baby. How was school?”

We head off toward home, and Chandler puts her down so she can skip between us, holding each of our hands, and tell us about her day. It’s my favorite time of day. The three of us, soon to be four, walking home from her school, and she excitedly telling us about what happened at school.

I hope she never grows out of this phase.

We go through our nightly routine. I cook while Chandler sits at the kitchen table with Sophia and helps her with her homework, we eat dinner together, then I get Sophia ready for bed while Chandler does the dishes, and finally we have family time until it’s time for Sophia to go to sleep.

Most nights, we settle in and watch a movie or two, but sometimes we play a board game. Tonight, Sophia has decided she wants to watch a movie, and as she is getting it all set up, I pull the sonogram picture out of my purse. I wait until

Chandler is done with the dishes, and when he sits next to me, I call her over to us.

“Soph, I have something for you.”

She finishes getting the movie loaded and then comes over and jumps on the couch, settling in between us.

“What is it?”

I hand her the picture, and she squeals.

“A new one?!”

She brings the picture close to her face and studies it. We had to point out what she was looking at for the first few pictures, but now she knows what to look for.

“Can’t you have him already? I don’t want to wait anymore.”

Chandler laughs, and I try not to, so she doesn’t think we are laughing at her.

“Not yet, sweetheart. He *or she* has some more cooking to do before it’s safe for them to be here.”

She heaves a heavy sigh. “Fine.”

I snort as she sets the picture carefully on her lap and starts the movie. It’s a movie that we’ve seen countless times. I watch Sophia and Chandler through the whole film and just enjoy watching them laugh at whatever is on the screen.

FOR THE REST of Sophia’s school year, I work on coming up with a business plan for the charity work I want to do. I get together with Chandler’s mom, and she helps me come up with a list of people who are big supporters of education. She’s a big help throughout the entire process, and I learn a lot from her about what it takes to start, run, and keep going a charity.

I don’t think I would have been able to do it if it wasn’t for her help. We developed a bond during the process, and I’ve never felt closer to her. Before the accident, I wasn’t even sure if she liked me, and now we talk on the phone almost daily.

If you would have told me a year ago this is where my life would end up, I would think you were crazy, but here we are. I'm engaged to the love of my life. We have a beautiful daughter with another baby on the way, and I'm starting a charity that will hopefully turn into a successful one to help kids in all walks of life with their education.

I don't know what I did in another life to get where I am, but I wouldn't change anything about it. Even the accident and the nine years where I didn't remember Chandler. To me, it made us stronger and got us to where we are now.

I was worried about being in this world. About raising children in this world, but I'm so glad that I took that leap of faith with Chandler. I'm so glad that I didn't let all of this go because of my fear. It took a little while, but eventually, I came to forgive Chandler; I hadn't even realized that I needed to until the moment I did. I didn't realize how important it was for us both for me to forgive him and for him to forgive me.

It still makes me nervous to have to deal with the paparazzi and having to worry about them around my children, but I know that in the long run, everything will work out. Chandler will never let anything bad happen to us, and now that I trust that, it's easier to deal with everything.

We've decided to have our wedding on the one-year anniversary of when Chandler found us. It felt right to us both to become one on the day that everything came together. It was a nice way to bring that chapter of our lives to an end and start the next one. It was going to be a small wedding, just his parents and some close friends of his. Kayla will be there as my maid of honor, and if they pull their heads out of their asses, Josh will be there as Chandler's best man.

We are going to have it in Willow Creek in the middle of town, and Chandler is already setting up security so that we don't have to worry about anyone showing up who isn't supposed to. We have been trying to come up with plans on how to handle the press, and Jillian has been a godsend with that. She is going to handle everything to do with the press for us with the wedding and the baby's birth.

“Hey, you.”

I turn away from my computer and find Chandler leaning against the doorframe of our room at the cabin. I smile at him from my spot in the middle of the bed and hold my hand out for him to join me. He slides into the bed behind me and looks around me at the computer showing my business plan for the charity.

“You’ve been busy. This looks great.”

“Thank you.”

He reads what I have on the screen, his arm wrapped around my body so his hand can rest on our baby. I feel a kick, and when his whole body jerks, I know he felt it too.

“Was that a kick?!”

He jumps up and gently pushes me to lie back on the bed, kneeling over me, with one hand holding himself up on the bed and the other on my belly. He leans down so his mouth is on my stomach too, and I can’t help but laugh.

“Was that you, little man? Do it again for Daddy. Kick so I can feel you.”

His whole body freezes so he can focus on my stomach, and when another kick comes right under his hand, his face lights up as he looks up at me with tears in his eyes.

“God, I love you.”

I laugh as tears fill my eyes and bring his face to mine for a kiss.

“I love you too, so much.”

It’s a peaceful moment between us. We’ve been having more and more of them lately, and there’s a piece of me that still worries it’s not going to last. I have this feeling deep in my gut that everything is going to change.

CHANDLER

During Sophia's last week of school, Tanya and I focus on packing, cleaning, and getting the cabin set for us to stay in the city for the summer. Kayla will be checking in on it for us while we are away, but being in Willow Creek, I doubt we will even need that; it does give Tanya some peace of mind since we won't be traveling back here very often. I have to admit, though, that it's been nice staying in Willow Creek the past few months.

We spent Sophia's ninth birthday in Willow Creek, since it was in March and she was still in school, but once we are in the city, I have a day planned for her and me to spend the day together, just the two of us, and celebrate all of her first eight years that I missed out on. On her actual birthday, we had a party for her at the cabin with all her friends. It was an interesting experience for me. Tanya handled it like a pro, but we were both exhausted by the end of the day.

Finally living with them full time opened my eyes to a lot of different things, and I would always be in awe of Tanya and her strength. It's our last night in the cabin before we move to the city, and Sophia is staying the night with one of her friends while Tanya and I finish up packing. Tanya is sitting in the living room while I bring her the last of Sophia's things that need to be packed. She's been on her feet all day, and I've just convinced her to rest. She's eight months pregnant, and I'm trying to keep her off her feet as much as possible, but she's the most independent, stubborn woman I have ever met, and it's difficult.

“Alright, these are the last of her stuffies that she demanded go with us.”

I drop the five stuffed animals that Sophia just can't live without on top of Tanya, and she laughs.

“Our girl loves her stuffies.”

I get distracted staring down at her, her face bright and happy, and she raises an eyebrow at me.

“What are you staring at?”

I don't even think about the words that come out of my mouth.

“My gorgeous pregnant wife.”

Her eyes widen, and it takes me a moment to realize what I said.

“I didn't mean for that to come out, but I think I like it.”

I lean down and place my hands on the arms of the chair that she's sitting in and bring my face close to hers.

“Wife.”

She blushes and shoves me.

“I'm not your wife yet, buddy.”

I shrug. “Soon enough.”

We smile at each other, and I get lost in her emerald green eyes again.

“Don't give me that look; we have to finish packing, and I am way too pregnant for us to even think about it.”

I laugh and kiss her temple before turning and sitting on the couch next to her chair.

“Alright, alright.”

We finish getting everything packed away, and then she sits back and watches me walk in and out as I pack everything in the car so it's ready for us to leave in the morning. I plop down on the couch again after I'm done, and she gets up to join me, sitting so she pressed into my side.

“Thank you for doing all the heavy lifting.”

I smile and rest my head against her chest, my hand going to her stomach.

“You’ve been doing all the heavy lifting for the past eight months; it’s the least I can do.”

I feel a thump under my hand and laugh.

“See? Our son agrees.”

I know without looking that Tanya rolls her eyes.

“I swear, we are going to have a girl just because of the simple fact that you refuse to admit there’s a chance.”

I don’t know what it is, but I know we’re going to have a boy. Since she told me she was pregnant, I’ve felt it deep in my gut.

“You know I wouldn’t care either way, right? I mean, another sweet little girl as perfect as Sophia isn’t going to be a bad thing.”

She chuckles and starts running her fingers through my hair.

“I know. I don’t mind either. I just want another healthy one, and to be completely honest, he or she just needs to get here already, I’m exhausted.”

I lower my head to her stomach and talk to our baby.

“Go easy on your momma, baby boy. She needs all her strength for when you get here.”

The closer her due date gets, the more worried I get. I know she’s been through this before and women have babies every day, but I’m still worried about her having to deal with the pain. This will be my first time involved in a birth, and I’m a nervous wreck. She’s tried talking me through it, but just the thought that she’s going to hurt stresses me out.

“Let’s go to bed, we’ve got to get up early to pick up our girl before we hit the road.”

I stand and help Tanya up off the couch, the both of us laughing at how much effort it takes her. She waits for me at the bottom of the stairs while I check and make sure the house is locked up, a routine that she has told me repeatedly is not needed, and then I follow her up the stairs and to our room.

We've become a well-oiled machine when it comes to our nightly routine. We take turns in the bathroom and then pull down the covers of the bed and climb in together. I help her get comfortable with her pregnancy pillow and then pull her in as close as I can get her. Her belly and our son pressed in against my stomach.

"I love being pregnant, but the last couple of months are hard."

I try to stifle my chuckle, but she still hears me and hits me in the chest.

"It's not funny." I can hear the laughter in her voice.

"I'm sorry, baby; I didn't mean to laugh. He'll be here soon enough. We just need you to hold on for another month."

She groans.

"It will be over before you know it, and then we'll be able to hold our boy in our arms."

She sighs and settles into my arms. It doesn't take long for her to drift off to sleep, lately she has been so tired that she falls asleep almost as soon as her head hits the pillow. I watch her sleep for a little while, feeling our boy moving around in his momma's belly.

"You have the best mommy in the world, baby boy."

I rub her stomach and softly kiss her head before moving into a more comfortable position and drifting to sleep myself.

WE MAKE it to the city and the apartment with just enough time to have Steven help me unpack our things and bring everything upstairs before the end of his work day. He's got a smile on his face the entire time, and I can't keep one off my own lips. Sophia immediately gets all her stuffies, the ones we brought today and the ones that have been staying in my office and brings them to her room.

I make Tanya sit and put her feet up after such a long drive. She starts to argue but then thinks better of it and sits down.

"At least bring me something to unpack."

The woman does not know how to relax.

I bring her one of Sophia's bags and then get Sophia from her room to help her while I put everything into the room that they belong in. It takes us about an hour to get everything settled, and something about the moment, something so simple, makes me feel like we are really a family for the first time.

I order us pizza for dinner and Lisa takes my card to pay for it while I gather plates and cups to bring to the living room so Tanya doesn't have to move.

"Soph! Come in here and grab these!"

I hear her feet running through the apartment, and she comes skidding into the room.

"Walk these to the coffee table and come back for the cups."

She nods and takes the plates, and I search the fridge for drinks. Lisa comes in with the pizza and sets it on the counter.

"There is apple juice for the little one in the door, decaf tea for Tanya in the back, and beer for you in the wine cooler."

I don't know what I would do without Lisa.

I smile at her and open the pizza.

"Are you going to join us? You are more than welcome to."

She gives me a motherly smile and pats me on the arm.

"Not tonight. You enjoy your first night officially together in the apartment before the baby comes."

She gathers her things and says goodbye to the girls before heading out for the night. I bring the pizza into the living room, and Sophia is already searching for something for us to watch while we eat. Tanya smiles at me as I take a seat on the floor in front of where she's reclined on the couch and reaches over to run her fingers through my hair. She looks so beautiful right now. I watch as she rubs her stomach and talks Sophia through how to find certain movie, and even though she looks tired, I can't keep my eyes off of her.

Sophia finally gets the movie she wants started and comes over to sit in my lap while we all eat out pizza and watch the

movie. I'm exhausted and need a shower, but this has been one of the best days for me.

All my favorite times have been with these two doing the most mundane, simple tasks. I almost want to let Sophia stay up as late as she wants tonight, but by the third yawn I know that's not going to happen. She snuggles further into my chest, and I see her eyes start to droop. I rub her back until she falls asleep and then look over to Tanya, whispering so I don't wake Soph.

"Is it always going to be like this?"

"What?"

I pointed look down at Sophia.

"Is the love that I feel for her always going to be this consuming?"

She smiles at me and rubs a wide circle around her stomach.

"Just wait till this one gets here. It's going to be twice as bad."

We both laugh quietly, and I turn back to stare down at my daughter, sleeping peacefully in my arms. It's still a wonder to me that I have a daughter. She's a perfect mix of her mother and me, and every day I see how she's becoming more and more her own little person. I have so much fear and excitement for the years to come with both her and the baby.

I have so much I want to teach them both, and I just pray that I can do as good a job as my parents did. I hear a clicking sound and turn to see Tanya holding her phone out to take a picture of us.

She snorts at the fact that she got caught.

"Send it to me."

She nods, and I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket.

"I think I should take her to bed."

I don't move, and she snickers.

"If you want to put her to bed, you will actually have to move."

I shush her.

“I’m comfortable and I don’t want this to end.” Even I can hear the petulant tone to my voice, and when I turn to look at Tanya, she has her mouth covered, trying to hide her laughter.

I turn Sophia gently so that I can stand more easily, and once I’m on my feet and steady, I lean down so Tanya can kiss her head.

“Goodnight, baby girl.”

I stand back up and take her to her room, tucking her into her bed and watching as she turns to her side and snuggles into one of her many, many stuffies.

I still don’t know how this is my life. I don’t know what lead me here or why I got to have everything, but I’m never going to give this up. I smooth her hair from her face, kiss her temple and make my way back to her mother.

“Did she stay asleep?”

I nod and lift her feet to place them into my lap and shift so that I can face her, resting my arm on the back of the couch.

“How did we get so lucky that this is our life?”

“I’ve been thinking the same thing lately. We really lucked out, huh?”

I lean over and kiss her.

“We did; are you ready to go to bed?”

She shakes her head no. “I want to watch another movie and snuggle with you.”

I grab the remote off the table, and we both shift around until she can lean back against my chest and I can wrap my arm around her. For the first night of the summer, I’d say we had a good day. I think the weekends they spent here, even in the other apartment, helped get Sophia comfortable here, and if today was any indication, it was going to be a good summer.

WE’RE HALFWAY through a second movie, and Tanya has not been able to sit still.

“You okay, baby?”

She huffs and tries to move into a more comfortable position.

“I don’t know. I just can’t get comfortable all of a sudden.”

When she can’t move anymore, she huffs again and flops back against the cushions. I sit up and look her over. Her face is flushed, and she looks like she’s in pain.

“What’s hurting?”

She puts her hands on the seats on either side of her and pushes herself up some.

“My back is tight, and my hips are killing me.”

“Do you want to move to the bed? Maybe laying down will help ease some of the tightness.”

She thinks for a moment, and then nods her head. I stand and help her up from the couch. She groans as she stands, and I wait to let her go until I know she’s steady on her feet.

“You okay?” She nods and tries to stretch out her back.

“Wait here for a second while I go make sure the bed is all ready for you to get in, okay?”

She nods again, her face contorted in pain. I kiss her forehead and rush off to the bedroom. The first thing I do is pull back the covers and position the pillows so that she can lean back against them when she gets in the bed. On my way back to Tanya, I turn down the AC and take a quick look in on Sophia. She’s still sleeping peacefully, now spread out across her bed.

I quietly close her door again and continue back to Tanya. I turn the corner of the hall to the living room, and she’s standing between the couch and the island in the kitchen with a look of panic on her face, staring down at her feet where a puddle of water is.

“Tanya?”

Her eyes dart up to mine.

“My water just broke.”

We stare at each other for a minute before her words finally click in my head and I run to her side.

“Shit. Okay, well, we need to get to the hospital then. Um, right. Uh, here, sit here.”

I drag one of the table chairs over and help her ease into it. Once she’s sitting, I run to our room and grab the baby bag that we just finished packing last night before coming here.

Bag, keys, phone, Sophia. Bag, keys, phone, Sophia.

I repeat the list of everything we need, including our daughter. I have the bag and my phone, now I just need to grab Sophia and find my keys. I dig my phone out of my pocket as I make my way to Sophia’s room and pull up Steven’s number. He answers after two rings.

“Sir? Is everything okay?”

I don’t blame him for sounding worried. I don’t think I have ever called him after hours.

“Tanya’s water just broke, and I need you to drive us to the hospital. I have Sophia here, and I don’t want to leave her alone. I also need you to call Lisa and tell her to inform everyone that needs to be, she already has a list of people.”

I can hear his keys jingling through the phone.

“I’m on my way. I’ll call her from the car.”

We hang up without saying anything else, and I slowly open Sophia’s door and walk to her side. I kneel by her bed and softly stroke her hair.

“Hey, baby girl. You’ve got to wake up.”

She doesn’t even move, so I raise my voice some.

“Sophia, sweetheart. It’s time to get up.”

I shake her shoulder, and she grumbles before sitting up, rubbing her eyes.

“Why, Daddy? There’s no school.”

I chuckle at how cute she looks and wait for her to look at me.

“It’s time for Mommy to have your baby brother.”

Her eyes widen and she's wide awake in an instant.

"Really?!"

I stand and hold my arms out to pick her up. She stands quickly and jumps into my arms.

"Really. Mr. Steven is on his way here to drive us to the hospital, and we have to help Mommy get downstairs so when he gets here, we can get in the car; can you do that with me?"

Her sweet little face is serious as she nods.

"Good girl."

I walk us into the main area where Tanya is sitting and set Sophia down so she can go to her mommy. She rushes to Tanya's side while I look for the keys, and Tanya smooths her hair out of her face.

"Are you ready to be a big sister?"

Sophia nods, and I can tell that she's starting to get scared.

"Everything is okay. Mommy is going to be okay; Daddy is going to get us to the hospital, and he and I are going to go to a room that you can't come with, okay? Grandma and Pop Pops will be there, and they are going to stay with you, okay?"

Sophia nods again and looks a little better.

"Alright, ladies. It's time to move, come on. Sophia, will you carry the bag, please, and go put on your shoes."

She does as told while I help Tanya stand. Once she's up and checks that Sophia isn't paying attention, she faces me and whispers to me.

"The contractions are getting stronger, and I don't want to scare her anymore. Once we get into the car get her tablet and headphones out and play a movie for her, please."

I nod and guide her to the door.

"I already have them ready, and the tablet is fully charged."

She smiles weakly, and we make our way to the front door. The whole way out of the apartment and down the elevator

I'm a nervous wreck. I hide it so neither of my girls see it and get scared, but inside I'm the one that's scared.

"Hey."

Tanya's soft voice pulls me out of my head, and I turn to face her as we wait for the elevator to reach the garage.

"Everything is going to be okay."

I laugh, realizing that I'm not hiding my fear as well as I thought.

"I know; I love you."

I rest my head on hers and she cups my cheek.

"I love you too; are you ready to meet your son?"

TANYA

The first thing I hear when I wake up is a deep voice speaking softly across the room. I blink my eyes until I can focus them and then turn my head toward the window where my soon-to-be husband is holding our sweet baby boy in the early morning light.

The look on Chandler's face when the nurse set him on my chest and confirmed that we had a healthy baby boy will forever be ingrained in my head. We both burst into watery laughter as we cried with joy over our son.

I keep quiet so I can listen to what Chandler is saying to him.

"You are so loved, baby boy. You have an amazing mommy and the best big sister ever."

I watch as he brushes the back of his finger down our son's sweet little chubby face.

"I'm your daddy, and I love you so much already. I promise that I am going to be there for you and your mommy and your sister, always. I'm going to protect you from all the bad and give you the best life I can."

The baby starts to fuss, and I watch as Chandler starts bouncing him and shushing him.

"Is he okay?"

Chandler looks up and sees that I'm awake. He smiles at me and slowly walks over to me and places the baby in my arms.

"He's fine. I think he's just getting hungry."

I snuggle him close to my chest and bring him to my breasts, helping him latch on so he can eat. I stare at his sweet little face for a moment while he eats. I still can't believe that he's here. He has a head of light blonde hair like his daddy's. He has my nose and face shape.

"I can't wait to see what color his eyes are going to be."

Right now they are that newborn baby blue, but I'm hoping that he's going to have his dad's blue eyes.

"He looks just like you."

Chandler settles in the chair next to the bed and leans his arm next to my legs to rest his head in his propped hand, staring at us. I make sure the baby is settled, then reach over and cup Chandler's chin.

"How are you doing, Dad?"

His eyes are soft, and he hasn't stopped smiling all night.

"I'm perfect. How are you feeling?"

"I'm perfect."

We smile goofily at each other, our son having his fill of milk.

"We have an anxious little girl outside waiting to meet her baby brother. Are you ready for her to come in now that you've gotten some rest?"

I'm itching to see Sophia and watch her meet the baby.

"Let's let him finish eating and get him settled before we bring her in. I don't want him to be crying when she first meets him."

In perfect timing, he unlatches from me and starts squirming around, Chandler sits up and takes him from me to burp him.

"What do you want to name him? We never talked about names."

We thought we had another month before he was going to be here, but that just goes to show that nothing in life goes as planned and you should prepare for anything.

We bounce names back and forth as Chandler burps the baby, and once we settle on one and get him swaddled and comfortable in my arms, he leaves the room to get Sophia. When they get back to the room Sophia looks so nervous.

“Hey, baby girl. Do you want to meet your brother?”

She nods excitedly, and Chandler helps her to carefully climb onto the bed next to me. I watch her face as she stares at his face. She gently reaches over and touches his nose with the tip of her finger.

“Do you want to hold him?”

She looks between us, and I can see the nerves she’s feeling.

“Can I?”

I nod and shift the baby so that I can place him in her arms and still support his head while she holds him.

They say that when you have a second child, your firstborn starts to look bigger, older, and in this moment, I can see what they mean. Sophia looks so much older holding her little brother.

“What’s his name?”

Chandler and I smile at each other as he leans over and moves the blanket away from the baby’s face.

“Sophia, this is your little brother, Benjamin Blake Bishop.”

She smiles up at Chandler, and seeing the three loves of my life huddled together makes my heart grow with so much love.

“Baby BB.”

I laugh at the nickname, and it startles Benjamin. He starts to squirm in Sophia’s arms and fuss, so Chandler takes him from her and now that both her and my arms are free, I pull her to me and hold her as we watch her daddy and baby brother.

I sit holding my little girl, watching my fiancé hold our little boy, and I don’t think it’s possible for me to feel any happier.

I think over everything that has happened over the years, and it amazes me that this is where we’ve ended up. Chandler and I

are going to get married in just a couple of months. We have two beautiful children and family and friends who love us.

“We should start letting everyone come and see him.”

Chandler makes a face, and Sophia giggles.

“Do we have to? I like it being just the four of us; as soon as we let my mother in, she’s going to take him from me and not let me hold him.”

Sophia and I burst into laughter, and Chandler just rolls his eyes at us.

“Fine, I’ll go get them. Just let me rock him back to sleep.”

He gets Benjamin to sleep and places him in the bassinet by the bed. Just within my reach if I need to get to him. He kisses all of us on the head and reluctantly leaves the room. Sophia giggles the whole time.

I turn her to face me.

“So, how are you feeling about all of this, big sissy?”

She smiles shyly at me and shrugs.

“Okay.”

“It’s hard to figure out what to do now that he’s here, huh?”

She nods and leans over to look at Benjamin sleeping.

“Is this all he does?”

I laugh and smooth her hair back from her face so I can see her.

“For now, yes. Babies sleep a lot when they are firstborn because they do a lot of growing. He’s just going to be eating, sleeping, and needing diaper changes for the first few months.”

She scrunches her nose up at the diaper changes.

“But eventually he is going to start playing with you. He’s going to laugh and squeal, and he’s going to watch everything you do because he is going to love his big sissy so much.”

She smiles widely at me and sits back in my lap.

“Will I be able to help you?”

“Of course. With whatever you want, but if you don’t want to do something, then you don’t have to.”

She nods and the door opens as Chandler leads his parents and Kayla into the room. They all greet me and Sophia and then crowd around the baby as Sophia stands on the chair next to the bed and holds her hands out toward him.

“This is Baby BB, my little brother.”

She says it so proudly that everyone starts talking to her about how great of a big sister she already is. Chandler comes and sits on the bed next to me and wraps his arm around me.

His mom comes over to me first and hugs me tightly to her chest.

“How are you doing, sweetheart? Do you need anything?”

“I’m fine, just tired.”

She smooths my hair from my head, just like I do with Sophia all the time, and smiles at me.

“Is the baby okay? He’s not here too early, is he?”

Her concern is sweet and makes me love her even more.

“He’s completely healthy. The doctors have checked him out and given him a clean bill of health. They want to keep the both of us a couple of days just to be sure, but they said that we will most likely get to go home the day after tomorrow.”

She sighs with relief. “Good, now excuse me, I’m going to get my grandson.”

She turns and leaves us sitting on the bed by ourselves and goes and take Benjamin right out of her husband’s hands.

“I told you she was gonna take him from me.”

I laugh and pat his leg as he pouts over the fact that his own mother has taken his son from him.

“I think you better get used to the idea of him being stolen. We have a very protective big sister on our hands who’s going to fight you for him.”

We both look over at Sophia who is standing guard over her brother.

“She has a bedtime that I’m allowed to enforce.”

I love that he is acting so boyish over his baby boy.

“I also find that I’m not as upset over the thought of her stealing him from me. Look how freaking cute she is.”

She is pretty damn cute.

“You know we are going to have our hands full with those two, right?”

His smile widens even more.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

I pull his face down to mine and kiss him softly. When he pulls back, his eyes are watery, and it surprises me.

“Thank you.” His voice is also tight with tears.

“For what?”

“Giving me this life. Giving me two beautiful and healthy kids. I don’t know what I did to deserves this, but I’m never going to risk losing you again.”

He kisses me again and then wraps me in his arms as we turn and look at the people that came to see our new baby and show us all the love and support they have for us. I love that we have such people by our sides for this happy moment in our lives, hopefully one of many.

As we sit and watch our family fawn over both of our kids, I can’t help but think about the future. About all the moments we are going to have simply because Chandler chose to go to a small town hospital charity gala for children’s education and found me after nine years.

This man has given me a life that I never thought was possible growing up. I grew up with parents who were constantly fighting and became so toxic to those around them that I had to cut them off for my own sanity. Then I met Chandler, and my life has changed so much that I don’t even remember the girl from before him.

He somehow had the chance to make me fall for him two different times, and I stood no chance against it each time. We were made for each other, and if anything came out of the last nine years, it is proof of that.

Everyone stays for another hour, passing the baby around and interacting with Sophia. Chandler and I have become chopped liver, left to our own devices at the side of the room. Honestly, I wouldn't have it any other way. The birth of Benjamin is a new beginning for us. Everything is changing in our lives, and the fact that he decided to come today, in the middle of everything, just signifies that whatever is to come is going to be great.

I know that everything we've gone through has only made us stronger and has given us the tools to get through anything else that comes our way. We are in it together and nothing is going to get in between us.

Once everyone leaves, and it's just our little family again, Sophia falls asleep in Chandler's lap as I feed Benjamin again. It's quiet now that everyone has left, so when the door creaks open, we both turn to look.

Josh is standing in the doorway with his hands in his pockets, looking very out of place.

"Your mother called me and told me that the baby was here and gave me the room number. I hope it's okay that I'm here."

I look over to Chandler, not wanting to speak on his behalf. Josh is his best friend, and the two of them need to work this out. I watch Chandler's face as he studies his best friend and lets out a breath.

"Come on in. Tanya has the baby."

Josh nods and makes his way over to me; he keeps his hands in his pocket as he leans over to look at Benjamin's face.

"Thank God, he looks like his mother."

I snort and Chandler glares at the both of us.

"I'll have you know our daughter looks just like me, and she's beautiful. Are you saying she's not?"

A smirk pulls at Josh's lips.

"Nope, she is beautiful. I'm saying your looks are better suited for a girl."

Chandler flicks Josh off, and I hold Benjamin out for Josh to take.

"Oh, no. I don't hold babies. They're fragile."

"Pick up my kid, Josh."

He stares at Chandler before breathing deeply through his nose and holding out his arms to me. I talk him through how to hold a baby, and when he stands up with Benjamin in his arms, I can't help but laugh at how awkward he looks.

"Look at that, something the amazing Josh can't do."

"Leave him alone, he's never held a baby before."

Josh nods his head toward the bed, asking with his eyes if he can sit. I move over so he can sit, and he very gingerly sits on the edge of the bed, facing me. Chandler and I watch him stare at our baby, and when I look over to Chandler, he gives me a small smile. Sophia wakes up and sees Josh holding Benjamin.

"That's my baby brother."

Her voice is sleepy, and she rubs at her eyes as she looks Josh up and down, gauging if he's worthy of holding her Baby BB. Chandler looks absolutely proud of her judging his best friend.

"Oh yeah? I thought he was a potato with arms."

The look that she gives him makes us all burst into laughter, and she rolls her eyes. Her sassy little nine-year-old attitude coming out.

"He's obviously a baby."

Chandler snickers and pats her back.

"Daddy, I have to go potty."

"Alright then, let's go to the bathroom."

They stand and Chandler kisses me on the head, then Benjamin before heading out of the room holding Sophia's hand; I watch them go until I can't see them anymore.

Josh clears his throat, and I bring my attention back to him.

“I, uh, I wanted to apologize for what I said to you at the dinner party.”

He keeps his eyes on the baby.

“I was there the day you disappeared. I saw your stuff half packed into bags, and all signs pointed to the fact that you left him. I was just worried that you were taking advantage of him and trying to get his money. It was hard watching him become the man he was the last nine years again. He wasn’t himself, and I didn’t want to see that happen again.”

I don’t know what to say to him. I wasn’t expecting an apology from him, I didn’t even need one, but it means a lot to me that he did.

“I get it. He’s your best friend. You don’t have to apologize to me. Just know that he’s not going to make it easy for you to make amends with him.”

He nods, his eyes still on Benjamin.

“Yeah, I know, but the first step to that is making amends with you. Maybe it will be easier if I have you on my side.”

Benjamin lets out a loud cry all of a sudden, and a panicked look crosses Josh’s face, making me laugh as I reach over and take my son from him.

“What did you do to my boy, Joshua?”

Chandler and Sophia come back into the room, and the matching looks of irritation on their faces make their similarities even more pronounced. Josh stares at them and then turns to me.

“You’ve got your hands full with those two, good luck.”

Josh stands from the bed and moves out of the way as Chandler comes to my side. He leans down, kisses my temple and whispers to me.

“Is everything okay? Did he say anything stupid?”

I cup his cheek in my hand and smooth my thumb over his stubbled cheekbone.

“No, everything is perfect.”

Everything *is* perfect. We have two healthy children, we have each other and our family and friends, and we have a bright future ahead of us.

THANK YOU!

Thank you for reading Billionaire's Lost Lover.

If you loved this book, then you will love another of my novels, Damaged Bodyguard!

A hilarious rom com with unforgettable characters!

[CLICK HERE](#) to get [Damaged Bodyguard!](#)

WHEN I'M TARGETED for a crime, I turn to a bodyguard for help.

Didn't expect to fall for him.

Someone tried to ruin my freakin' life! I need protection, and fast.

Enter Tony Bonetti: He's intense, sexy as sin and my only hope.

He rubs me the wrong way without even trying.

I question if he's the right man for the job.

But when I witness his tender moments with his daughter,

I glimpse the protector beneath the grumpy exterior.

He moves in with me as my pretend boyfriend, his vulnerability is exposed and we are drawn closer.

When we find ourselves in a steamy dance club, every brush of skin and lingering gaze ignites a searing kiss.

The connection between us is too much and we dance right into bed.

A relationship meant to keep me safe is starting to feel very real.

Uncovering the accuser is critical to saving my life; but who is going to save my heart

[Click here](#) to get [Damaged Bodyguard!](#)

DAMAGED Bodyguard

Ophelia

“Here you go, ladies! Two Cinnamon Sisters specials with cinnamon tea. Enjoy!”

I give my two favorite customers a big smile as I set down their usual breakfast order of two massive frosted cinnamon rolls. *Each.*

These adorable 84-year-old twin sisters have been regulars at my cafe since it opened five years ago. They've also never

missed a session of the belly dancing class I teach on the beach out back.

Dahlia and Daisy Anderson are legends here in Bonnie Tide, Connecticut. They know everybody and every bit of gossip worth sharing. They're cheeky single gals, wear sunny yellow cardigans no matter the weather, and think Marvin Gaye hung the moon.

Their preference for all things cinnamon-flavored is why they're known as the Cinnamon Sisters all over this small coastal town.

Dahlia and Daisy are also known for rarely speaking directly to anyone but each other. Even when I'm standing right here. Even if they're talking about me.

"She thinks she's hot stuff since this place got a mention on YouTube last month," Dahlia says to her sister as she lifts her teacup with a shaky hand. It makes the belly dancer illustration on the porcelain cup shimmy as if she were coming to life.

"Ophelia *is* hot stuff! You've seen those hips wiggle in her tiny tinsel skirts. Those are birthin' hips. Made for *sin*." Daisy gives her sister a wicked grin.

"Whoa! OK, Ladies! I'll let you enjoy your breakfast." I tuck one of my honey-colored curls back into a loose hair net that barely contained my messy bun. "Can you believe how high our traffic has soared since that travel channel video aired? It's hoppin' in here!"

My kitschy belly-dancer-themed seaside cafe has done pretty well as a tourist stop since it opened. As good as things were, it grew insanely popular overnight when the YouTube channel *Coastal Characters* included a feature here last month.

Now, just a couple days before July begins, our summertime business is off the charts. Things had been so good lately that I had to hire extra staff and expand my hours. Despite keeping the menu simple amidst the surge, it remained flooded since people come here mainly for the selfie-friendly atmosphere.

And yeah, my "tiny tinsel skirts" might be part of the draw. I've always loved quirky, colorful outfits; the more garish, the

better. As a kid, my unique style earned me years of bullying and inner shame. As a grown-ass woman, my flashy, gaudy, maximalist flair translates into being a successful entrepreneur who lives on the freakin' beach.

So there.

Having a curvaceous bod built for belly dancing is icing on the cake. However, it took me years to develop enough confidence to show off my hourglass shape. I had spent my teens hiding under funky, oversized clothing from neck to knees. It wasn't until after graduating high school and leaving my horrible peers behind that I started feeling better in my skin.

"Looks like the paparazzi want a glimpse of her sinful hips, too." Dahlia points her sticky fork at the window above the gold vinyl cafe booth. Daisy and I follow the direction of Dahlia's gaze to see three men climbing out of the local news station's blue van in front of the cafe.

"It's Harlan Nickerson from KLFC-TV. His grandma tried to kill me in high school," Daisy says matter-of-factly as she licks frosting off her pink, wrinkled lips.

"She thought it was you who put glue in her girdle. But it was me." Dahlia chuckles, gaze still directed at Harlan and crew as they grab recording equipment from the back of the van.

"Excuse me, Sisters! I think I'm about to be interviewed again!"

I yank the hair net off my head and jog past the wall-to-wall patrons and servers toward the nearest mirror, which hangs in my tiny office off the kitchen. After dabbing on concealer and topping off my mascara, I let my wavy hair tumble over my shoulders.

"Lookin' good, Ophelia Rose. You've waited your whole life for this. Soak it up!" I tell my reflection, then give my cleavage a jiggle and boost for maximum impact in my purple plunge-neck halter top.

Signature gold tinsel mini skirt detangled and looking cute?
Check!

Chunky gold jewelry all a'sparkle? *Yep!*

Belly dancer's belly button on full display? *You said it, Sailor. Let's do this.*

I wish those mean kids back at Bonnie Tide Middle School could see me now. Or all the assholes I've dated who made me feel like nothing.

Or like a freak. And a joke.

Apparently, I hadn't moved on from those memories as much as I thought I had.

The climb up from childhood depression to embracing my authentic self took ages. Now, at age 28, I can finally say I'm proud of who I've become and the life I've built.

I dab on some dark red lipstick and kiss the mirror for good luck. I throw a happy wave to the cooks on duty as I walk back through the swinging door to the dining room with a big ole swing in my step.

Until a few seconds later, when a bright light blinds me, and Harlan Nickerson's microphone is shoved up my nose. I can barely see Harlan and his crew through the piercing spotlight as his cameraman gets as close to my pores as possible.

Then he asks me a shocking question in a disturbingly accusing tone. "Ophelia Rose, do you have anything to say about your affair with Mayor Roger Fielding?"

Keep Reading!

[Click here](#) to get [Damaged Bodyguard!](#)

I WOULD ALSO LIKE to give you a free gift!

Check out [Bad Boy Bodyguard!](#)

One sizzling night.

Two people who don't belong together.

Three sexy words: "Bad Boy Bodyguard".

Everyone else would *love* to have him as a bodyguard.

Tall, cocky, arrogant and ridiculously hot.

Best friend to my overprotective brother, a bad boy, and known for getting under my skin.

Definitely not someone I want to spend time with.

A death threat in red lipstick on my mirror forces our lives together.

All I want to do is find out who wants me dead, get back to my life, and be back on stage.

Mr. Walks-Around-In-His-Bath-Towel bodyguard is off-limits to me.

Spending time with the hottest man I know turns my enemy into my lover.

The way I feel with him goes *way* past safe.

But what if our fling puts both of us in great danger?

It's a dance between temptation and protection, and I'm not sure who'll lead.

This is an enemies to lovers, bad boy, forced proximity, and brother's best friend novel.

[Click here](#) for your free copy.