

SMALL TOWN LOVE

Tracey Manuel

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Thoth Loving

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Chapter One

Nora

Home, sweet home.

It feels good to be home after a few years of absconding to enjoy my life. Or perhaps better myself.

I stand at the center of the airport with a big smile and watch as every other person tries to make their way hastily – either to board a taxi or to take the next flight. It is a sight I have missed. Being away from Kansas for the last four years feels like I have been gone for ten. Everything looks different and even warmer than in the United Kingdom. I feel so much at ease.

I watch families welcome each other, but I am standing alone, wishing for once that I had a little sister who could be wiggling her tail behind me. Everyone who could come and pick me up was already engaged.

So frustrating.

Now I am left wishing I had a man who could have picked me up and not one of those playboys or stupidly rich guys who flaunt ladies around like used toilet paper.

Even with those, I'll be grateful for the show, though.

I begin my journey out of the airport when I collide with something hard.

“Fuck,” I say, rubbing my forehead. “Excuse you, you bumped

into me, and the least you could do is apologize.”

“And the least you could do is pay attention,” he says without remorse.

I look at the clothes the man has on, business casual wear – and instead of ignoring his actions, I prepare for war against him.

I stand in front of him, saying, “You’re going to apologize to me this instant.”

Fuck. I look into his brownish-gray eyes, and I feel lost in them.

I see what he’s doing, looking at me with daring eyes, but hell no...

“I presume you have realized that you don’t scare me,” I say more boldly than usual.

He smirks before scolding me, “Get the fuck out of my way. I have better things to do than meddling with your kind,” he says before walking off.

“My kind?”

“Yes,” he starts. “Those who find any means to throw themselves at guys,” he pauses. “Just so they can feel good about themselves,” he concludes, whispering into my ears.

My body reacts a bit before I glance up and stare hard at his face.

But I see an expression I will not dare to forget.

A shocked face on a confident man.

“You think I am one of those women who chase after men like you, who think they have got it all figured out, but you know what, get the fuck away,” I say unexpectedly.

It appears that my life abroad in the UK has loosened my once-tied tongue. And hell yeah...I am grateful.

He smirks, a little bit of anger written on his face, before walking off.

I stand there, alone and angry that the stupid guy didn't apologize. I desire no need for a man like him to tell me sorry, but I am pissed with the attitude he used to convey it.

Men like him should be taught a lesson, and I would like to give him a good one. After all, it is a small town, and gossip is never far heard from these people.

I watch him walk away, and I swear, I feel like strangling him.

It's because of guys like him that I decided to veer away from the opposite sex and fuck; this guy just reminded me why.

I hail a taxi and try to get in the mood again to enjoy coming home.

After all, I will be living here for a long time until I am ready to move again.

Leaving my hometown was a big step. I took it because I needed to further my education. I wanted more than just to be in this town forever. But the funny thing is, I still found myself running back here after I completed my degree.

I smile, enjoying the old but new and refreshing view.

“Everything is so different,” I mutter to myself as I stare through the window.

“Oh, ma’am,” the taxi driver says. “Are you new here?”

“No. I’ve been out of Kansas for over four years, and boy, I must say, things are damn different,” I say with so much admiration.

The ride is a bit slow, but I can see the many buildings that hadn’t been there before I left.

“You have more than one restaurant?” I ask, surprised.

About five years ago, one was built, so seeing about three restaurants is a great feat.

“You ain’t seen anything yet. There are a lot more than all these. And it’s just one man that is making all the calls in this town. Well, not just him, he has a partner as well, and those two are great partners, I hear others say,” he cheerfully says.

Who is this man calling the shots in the town? I ponder with an uneasy feeling settling in.

Something feels off as I watch a Tesla and three SUVs drive past us.

“Who the hell is that?” I ask, full of surprise at the expensive cars. I don’t remember many people in my hometown who were able to afford such luxury. My town is, *was*, small *maybe it really has changed that much*. There was no need for a lot of the people who live here to have fancy rides.

“The man.” The taxi driver says as I watch him express

different emotions – fear, appreciation, warmth, uncertainty.

Steve

“Get me a fucking new shirt,” I say to my assistant as I enter the car.

“Sir,” she calls. “I...I just wanted to ask what is wrong with the one you are wearing?” she asks shakily.

Someone should remind me again why I decided to hire her, I ask myself, tempted to fire her on the spot. But if I do that then I will be at a disadvantage because of all the assistants I have employed in the last two months, she has proven to be the most efficient, except for her incessant questions which tire me.

“Lizzy,” I grit my teeth. “Just do as I say. That’s all.”

I cannot even dare to go to my meeting dressed like this. Not after that young lady collided with me.

I sit still, remembering the softness of her voice. I must say, she was beautiful, and the way she loosened her mouth to address me got to me. She must be new in town because I know no one in the town would dare lose their guard around me.

It’s not like I command them not to do so, but I mean, after all the developments they have experienced, they need to have some respect. While they might hate me, they adore and love my business partner, Mr. Bright. A very good friend and

business partner of mine. The old man has become as close as family to me.

But that young lady unnerved me, and I swear, I can still smell her on my shirt from when I bumped into her.

Yes, I admit *I* bumped into her.

I get dressed quickly and start to make my way to Mr. Bright's house. He had called me to finalize a new product he wanted us to release. Plus, he and his wife have been so excited all week, saying their daughter was returning home after over four years or so.

They are not like my parents of blessed memory, who, when I return from a trip, will greet me casually.

With them, it was always about work.

That's one of the reasons why I enjoy going over to Bright's house.

Now, I'm curious to meet their daughter, perhaps early twenties. I know she will look up to me based on my success.

People either admire what I have done or despise me. If she is anything like her parents, she will love me. I am certain of that.

I smile, remembering the smiles on their faces as I had watched them talk about their daughter on numerous occasions.

Now that I am in a new set of clothes, I feel more relieved, and I can breathe better.

But no matter how I try to distract myself from the woman I bumped into, my mind still waltzes there, thinking about her

and those blue eyes.

She was full of fire and reminded me strongly of my mother and her known presence.

Whoever she was, I must find out and then deal with her in my own way.

“Faster,” I tell the driver. “I can’t afford to be late for this meeting.”

Chapter Two

Nora

What the fuck is going on here? I ask myself as I get all my luggage from the trunk of the taxi. Parked in the front of the house are several cars that I don't recognize.

"Are you sure this is where you want to be dropped? This is Mr. Bright's house," he says.

"Oh yes, I live here. You didn't figure that?" I say casually.

He gasps.

And with the expression on his face, I knew that in a matter of days, the whole town would be aware of my presence.

I sigh. It is something I am certain about.

Afterall, I grew up here, and I am well aware that no secret is kept for so long.

"You are Mr. Bright's daughter? Oh my, we love that man," he says excitedly.

I gave him a weak smile while I checked to ensure I was not at the wrong house.

Why the hell are these cars parked in front of the house?

Hold up, why exactly am I angry? I was gone for four years but wasn't expecting to see so much of a change: it looked like an entirely different house from where I grew up.

Who knows what else has changed inside?

I hear the man mutter something about 'the man's car being at

our estate before he drove off, and it isn't until I see those four vehicles that sped past me earlier are now those parked cars that I realize what my driver means.

"So much for coming home to enjoy time with my parents," I grunt to myself and then see my mother approaching.

"Oh my God, honey, you are finally home!" my mother says as she rushes to hug me.

"Oh, my sweetheart. The UK looks good on you. Oh my, turn around, honey," she says as she peppers me with kisses.

"Hi, mommy. I've missed you, too. I can tell dad is taking care of you well," I tell her, causing her to laugh.

Yes, my mom still has the vibe and the body. You'll think we are sisters.

"Oh honey, leave these. I'll call the maids to get them for you," she says. "Welcome home."

I check around again and sigh as I follow her into the house.

Yeah, the same old house I grew up in, but the hangings on the walls and interior decorations are different.

That's weird.

My mom kept going and on about the many things she had to tell me and vice versa.

Well, I have questions loading up already.

One of which was *when did dad become the main man in the town?*

That's new.

When did we get *maids?*

When did all this happen?

I was gone for four years, and now all these unexpected changes are around me. I thought I would come back, and it would be like nothing had changed. But I just can't wrap my head around all this.

I know my parents have the money they would ever need to get whatever they want, which was exactly one of the reasons I decided to leave Kansas for the United Kingdom and also to learn how to become successful myself.

"I know. I know. Everything is a little bit different. We'll talk about that, lady," she says.

I keep quiet as she goes on about some meeting.

"Honey!" she shouts to my dad. "She is home. Don't mind him. He's in a meeting with one of his major business partners. They should be out soon. He's a young guy and a very handsome one at that."

Why is she telling me that? I look at her quizzically.

"Oh, come on, stop with that look. I know you are still single," she says, leading to a burst of laughter.

"Yes. But after what Kingsley did, mom. I'm done with guys for now," I say, running my hands through the new designs on the wall. "Everything looks really interesting. You didn't tell me about all these, Mom," I pout.

"Well, it was recent, and it was meant to be a surprise! We were not sure how you'd take it since you brought up the idea for

the designs on the wall when you were young."

I smile, understanding her. It was something I did when I was so little.

"Well, I love it, and it's-"

"Oh my God, look who we have here," my father says as he gives me a bear hug and lifts me.

"Dad," I gasp. "I'm too old for that," I say jokingly.

"I know, but you are still my little girl," he says as he puts me on the ground.

"I agree, but you can't be lifting me off the ground anymore."

"We will see about that," my father says, and he locks his hands with mine as he leads me farther into the house.

We come up on a young man seated on one of the couches with his head bent.

He is smartly dressed, and his long legs are crossed one over the other.

Without knowing who he is, I can see that he is, in fact, handsome, as my mother said. I feel a sense of attraction to him, although I don't want my mother to think she was right, and I try to brush it off.

"I know you have seen some of the changes that have happened to the house since you were last here. Let me show you the man that made it possible!" my father says with excitement.

Other than myself or my mother, I have never seen my father

excited about anyone or anything.

This business partner must be an interesting person.

Now, someone else is responsible for bringing a smile to my family's face.

I don't know whether to be thankful or angry, but I'm glad, though, my parents' finances have doubled, or should I say tripled?

Plus, maybe I might be thankful to this man if I get a good look at him.

Not knowing what to say, I give a small smile which my father takes as encouragement and heads toward the man.

"Steve, this is my daughter that I have been telling you about," my father says with pride, and I stand tall with a smile on my face, ready to be showcased.

The man seated before me lifts his head, and I remain frozen on the spot as anger courses through me.

My father turns to me and continues, "Nora, meet Steve Adams, the billionaire and my business partner," he says with a small laugh.

Not wanting to disappoint my father, I nod my head slightly and force a smile to acknowledge the man, but he keeps staring at me with his cold, indifferent look.

"I have to take this call." I hear my father say from a distant place as a loud noise rings through the house. Yes, we still have a cordless house phone. *At least that hasn't changed.* "You can get

to know each other," he adds before stepping out.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I ask slightly, raising my voice.

"I thought I had seen all the strains of your cluelessness at the airport. But you just seem to bring them out one after the other," he coolly says with a smug smile on his face.

"What? How dare you? In my own house!" I whisper shout.

"I believe this house belongs to your father."

I cannot remember ever feeling as angry as I feel right now. And I am not just angry at him but at myself.

All my life, no one has ever challenged me. Being an only child made it less likely to happen. But here I am, standing face to face with someone that so far has challenged me every step, and I am somehow attracted to him.

My eyes narrow as I watch him uncross his legs and act like I am not present.

I study his dress with a much closer look, and I can see the outline of his perfect body through his shirt, which is entirely different from what I saw him wearing earlier. *Of course, he would have a perfect body.*

"Why did you change your clothes?" I blurt out before I could stop myself, and I catch the brief look of surprise that showed on his face.

"Why would I not? When a certain someone bumped into me and wrinkled my clothes," he replies with disinterest, and I gasp

in surprise.

I begin to wonder how a little bump would cause a man to change his entire dress within minutes.

I am about to give a sassy reply when my father walks back in with a smile on his face.

"Aha... I hope you have been able to talk," he says.

I give Steve Adams a cold look which he returns before I turn to my father and tell him I want to rest.

He immediately releases me and goes to sit to continue their conversation from earlier.

I storm out of the room and head to my room.

It was indeed different from when I left, but there are still some similarities. It appears as if they were afraid to touch my stuff.

I lay in my neatly made bed as I think about the stranger that is in my house.

How did my father meet such a man? And how could he not tell Steve has such a bad attitude?

And to think, I will most likely be running into him frequently, especially in this small town.

A thought comes up to call my old friends and ask about it, but I decide not to. I will just wait to ask my father who he is and why he is in business with such a man.

Unable to rest as my mind is thinking about a certain somebody, I decide to start unpacking some of my suitcases and rearrange my room.

The moment he left, my father located me still in my room and hugged me again. I decide to take this as my opportunity to find out more about him.

"I see you have come back after your son left."

Understanding clouds my father's face, and he begins to explain to me how Steve came into their lives and brought all these dreams to life.

He explains how he and Steve met and how Steve invested in his business and passion, which has caused him to have the biggest car company in the town, including the surrounding town.

"You sound like you don't like him, but he is like a son to me," he adds.

"Am I not enough of an offspring for you?" I ask, feeling a pang of jealousy run through me.

"You are more than just my offspring, but Steve has been here while you are away, and our relationship has evolved from more than being business partners to being like a father and son."

"What about his parents?"

"They passed away a while ago."

"Is that why he is so cold and rude?"

"I don't know. He might act that way, but he is a nice person if you get to know him. Besides, for someone as rich as he is,

he cannot afford to be nice to everyone around."

"See the way you are defending him."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart, but I think you will change your mind about him if you get to know him. After you are well settled, I will tell you more about him and how he helped us."

I knew I was being childish, but I cannot help it. And my father appears to respect the man and even defended him despite knowing his true nature.

From what I have learned so far, we are both stubborn people, and it will take one of us to bend before we can be friends. And I am pretty sure it will not be me.

Chapter Three

Steve

The next week breezes by quickly, and my mind is still wandering about my encounter with Nora Bright.

It is not every day I am challenged by people. And the few times it happened, it left me angry. But there is something different about Nora.

Her challenge didn't bother me. Instead, it piques my interest in her and has since then been a distraction.

Who is she? What is she like? How much pressure can she take before she crumbles?

Knowing her relationship with my business partner, I *should* be nice to her, but I think it will all be a waste.

"Mr. Adams, you have a guest," my assistant calls out, breaking me free from my thoughts.

"Send them in," I say as I spot all the unfinished work I have to do on my desk.

Crap, how can I allow myself to be so distracted?

"Sorry to drop in unannounced, but I would like to request an investment from you into my business," the man says, going straight to the point just the way I like it.

"I have already drawn a proposal for the expansion, how much it will cost and how it will be carried out," the man adds and taps a black folder on his lap.

I am not a fan of responding to people's proposals or succumbing to their wishes as they are not the source of my wealth, but I will also not refuse a serious businessman who clearly puts in the time and effort.

Stretching forth my hand to receive the proposal, I say to him, "I will look through it and reach out to you."

Careful not to mention how long it will take, I collect the proposal and drop it on my desk before wishing him goodbye. Aside from reading the proposal, I will also run a background check on him and even put men in places to watch him. It will satisfy me before going into business with him.

Since I have amassed this massive amount of wealth, things have not been the same. People look at me differently and try to take from me without giving anything in return.

On my birthday two years ago, I received a visit from a lawyer informing me of all the things my father kept for me.

I was skeptical at first but had to put a call through to my father, who was still alive then, and confirm everything.

He explained that it was a tradition in the family that inheritance was usually stored up for their children until they reached a particular age when the inheritance would be released to them.

There was no fixed age, and the father usually determined when the time was right, and that was when my father decided it was time for mine to be released.

Sadly, and gratefully before his death.

That tradition has since then left me a fortune. Not knowing what to do with it, I began to invest in people's businesses and ideas. I helped people until I noticed they began to take advantage of me.

That was when I changed, and my status changed. It turned me into a fiery man.

I decided to take things up a notch and put up walls that would not make me easily accessible to everyone.

Soon, the fear of me began to spread through the town, and even though most of the images they portrayed of me were lies, I did nothing to correct it and chose to leave the people in suspense.

It was also around that time that I met Nora's father, who is now my business partner.

The man was well known and had good business sense but, at the time, lacked the resources to do anything tangible.

We initially met outside of town when we both went to fix our vehicles at an auto shop. It was then that I heard him talking to the mechanic about the parts of the vehicles. I became interested in their conversation and engaged the man, learning more about him, his love for automobiles, and the amazing plan he had that he was about to give up on.

We headed back to the city together and began to rub our minds until we came to an agreement that I would invest in his

dreams and that he would teach me more about business, something my father never did.

This partnership has since then been the basis of many of the developments that have happened in the town.

I have become a well-known businessman, and he has become a boss in the local automobile industry.

I can confidently leave my vehicles in his charge without the fear of things going wrong, and it leaves me surprised at how close he was to foregoing his dream because of a lack of money and resources.

Our relationship has progressed from strangers with the love of a good car to partners, and now we have a father-son kind of relationship.

My own father was always absent from my life, and when he died a year ago, it didn't mean so much to me. These past two years, Bright has been more of a father than mine was. Coupled with the fact that he took me in as a son.

This relationship is not hidden from the town as some believe he *is* my father and I was a long-lost son from another woman. I have no business in correcting the local people with that as long as we are making progress and they are ultimately staying out of my personal business.

Now, we are planning an expansion into the next town, and we will have to meet frequently, bringing me back to where I first started my thoughts, Nora.

Ever since I came to the city, no woman has caught my attention or even lingered in my thoughts but her. Not saying that the women of this town didn't try. They most certainly did.

Yes, she is pretty, but she is unlike most ladies. She does not bat her eyelids at me or try to seduce me, and neither does she give a fuck about my authority. And it makes me more attracted to her.

My assistant chooses this moment to walk in, and even though I know what she is about to say, I still snap at her.

“What?!”

She quivers a little before pulling herself together.

“This is a report of the happenings around the town and your tasks for the coming month, with special emphasis on the café that is about to be opened.”

“Café?”

“Yes, you made an agreement for one with Mr. Bright, your business partner.”

“Alright, anything else?”

“No, sir,” she says and walks out.

I angrily look through my schedule for the next month and stop when I see a familiar name.

Nora Bright the name of the only person that has succeeded in distracting me from working 100% this last week.

“This just got interesting,” I say with a smile.

“Let’s see how she will cope with pressure,” I add.

I add it to my reminders to personally visit her, and it is only after that I can finally focus on work.

Due to the many businesses, I am responsible for, I often read the progress reports of some to determine my continued business with them.

Chapter Four

Nora

Now that I have taken the time to rest and connect with old friends, I am back and ready to put all I have learned to work.

“I have spent the last three weeks in Kansas relaxing,” I tell my mother. “I can’t sit around doing nothing forever.”

“I don’t think so. You just came back from a journey, and now you are planning to work?”

“Mom! I am bored.”

“Okay, well, you don’t have to do it all by yourself. Some people have been assigned to do it.”

“What? Why? It is my shop; I have plans for how I want it to go.”

“Don’t worry; these people are very skilled.”

“Since when did we have all these people doing things for us?”

“Since your father’s dream came alive, thanks to his partner,” my mom replies.

I roll my eyes as I mutter to myself, “Steve again. I still don’t understand why everyone in the city runs around him and does stuff at his beck and call.”

“Because he has transformed this town. He is the one responsible for all the changes you have experienced in the town and, as you know, your father’s business.”

“But that does not make him the boss.”

“It does. People don’t actually fear him; they just respect him and know he is a busy man.”

I sigh, knowing fully well that no one would understand my view as regards him.

Everyone I have met so far has a form of awe for him, but in some people, the awe has morphed into fear.

Even some of the workers at home are not comfortable talking about him when I ask questions.

“Okay, Mom, let’s not argue further. Your men can do the moving, but I still have to go there and supervise. I need things to be the way I want them. And I also need to be there when they bring in some of the equipment.”

My mother sighs in return and nods.

“You are just like your father,” she says. “Always working, especially when he is with his partner. They can work for hours.”

I give my mom a quick hug and grab the first key I see as I head to my new shop.

This is not the first time I am going there, but anytime I do, I fall in love with it anew. I have so many ideas that I need to get going and people to train that I hired. Last week, I interviewed some of the people I would be working with.

I go into the shop and am partially surprised to see that everything is exactly how I want it. Strange. I spend more time

with the workers, making just a few corrections, and by the end of the week, everything should be settled. Now I have to complete my final touches, and then I am just waiting for Monday for my grand opening.

The weekend passes by in a blur as excitement courses through me for finally doing what I want and doing it on a grand scale. While I was in the United Kingdom, I saved some money that I planned to use so as not to burden my parents. But I did not have to use any of it as my parents were willing to foot the bill for everything.

They claimed that it was their joy to support me and that they had not spent money on me when I traveled. Thanks to my dad's new status, he was able to set up most of what I needed within the first two weeks I was home without me even knowing.

During those two weeks, I was busy or not really that busy, with my mind constantly wandering to Steve, but I often threw him out of my mind and part of my heart, and I am thankful I have not encountered him since my first day home.

To my surprise, word spread around the town about my café and people within the town, and some from the neighboring towns began to come for opening day.

Around noon, an unexpected guest arrives. I am in the kitchen of the café, but I notice the change in the atmosphere almost

immediately.

Everyone became tense in the kitchen, and my staff starts talking in hushed voices.

“What is wrong?” I ask, but no one answers.

“I need a response,” I demand and a bit afraid.

“Mr. Adams is here,” one of my workers says.

I hiss angrily before I speak, “Is that why all of you are this quiet?”

I storm out of the kitchen and head into the main café where all the customers too are quiet as well.

After finding him amongst the other customers, I head straight for him.

“What do you think you are doing here?” I ask angrily.

“Stop making a scene and take a seat,” he commands, which only heightens my anger.

I laugh before saying, “How dare you tell me to sit. Do you think you can control me as you do to everyone in the town?”

“Is that what you think of me?” he asks coolly as a smile appears on his face.

“This is not a joke.”

“I am not joking either. Sit, and let’s have a civilized conversation before your customers think there is trouble in paradise.”

Without knowing why, I look around and see the people staring at me with curious expressions on their faces.

I force a smile to my face and signal to them that everything is alright before sitting and glaring at him.

“You should have listened to me when I said you should sit.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Is this the way to treat a customer? Won’t you offer me a cup of coffee?”

“No, you can go and get coffee in the neighboring town; I don’t care, please just leave,” I say to him, and he responds with only a smile.

I don’t know why, but I am angry with him, and he seems to know what to say to get under my skin.

“This is my town, and I will get coffee wherever and whenever I want,” he replies and signals to one of my staff.

“This is my town as well. Plus, this is MY shop, and I sell coffee to whoever I want to sell it to. Can’t you see that everyone is scared of you and they are not having a good time?”

He laughs, “Then we’ll see. You will emerge as the real owner after, let’s say, a month. Plus, people’s fears are not my fault,” he responds, and I know he is partly right.

Because he knows that people are afraid of him, yet he does nothing about it.

From all the stories I have heard, there was none about him forcing anyone to work for him.

One of my staff runs up to us and takes his order.

I want to tell her to return, but I look at him and the smirk on

his face; I control myself.

“Make it two,” he says.

“Don’t you have something like snacks that can be combined with the coffee?” he asks.

“I am working on it. This is opening day and a hard open at that. I didn’t want to overwhelm the staff until I knew we got things right. And besides, it is none of your business.”

“It is, which is one of the reasons I am here,” he plainly states. I am about to react when his order arrives. The two cups were placed before him, and he gives her money that is way more than the amount of the coffee before dismissing the young lady.

He takes one of the cups and places it in front of me.

Touched by his actions, I visibly relax. I was not expecting such a nice gesture from him. I was not even expecting him to pay for the coffee.

“Thanks,” I mutter quietly, and he nods his head.

“See, I am not so evil after all. I am just a businessman that likes things done in a certain way.”

“Even if that way does not suit everyone.”

“You cannot always please people. The earlier you understand it, the better.”

His statement calms me down as I recall one encounter I had while in the United Kingdom where I was trying to please a classmate that turned out badly. I know he is right, and he

sounds like he is talking from experience.

My curiosity is piqued, and I desire to have that experience.

“You are right.”

“That’s a first,” he says, and I smile.

“That is the first thing we have agreed on since I arrived.”

“And this is the first time I have seen you smile,” he says and returns the smile.

“Same here,” I reply.

It is the first time I have seen him genuinely smile since I met him, and his smile completely melts every hardness that was starting to surround my heart concerning him.

He is good-looking, and a part of my heart is opening in his direction.

I can’t remember the last time my heart yearned for someone, and I chided myself when it dawns on me that it is heading toward the man in front of me.

“So, what brings you here?” I ask, trying to change the direction of the conversation.

“Yes, that. This is a new business, and the business opened on my terms. And the rules that apply to every business in this town would also apply to yours.”

“What is the rule?”

“You need to pitch to me the importance of your business and the plan for its expansion.”

“What? Why do I have to do that? I don’t have to answer you.”

“You are not answering to me; you are answering to the law that binds businesses in this town.”

“This is unbelievable; why am I just hearing about it?”

He shrugs and takes his coffee as I try to wrap my head around what he just said.

“If you have no further questions, that will be all,” he adds as he gets up to leave.

“By the way, I will be back in three days to hear your great plan,” he states and winks.

I watch him leave the shop, but there is no fight in me to stop him, and I want to avoid a scene with the town’s “hero.”

I know where to pick my fight, but I have to wait for the shop to close before I do.

The atmosphere around the shop changes immediately after he leaves, and everyone stops whispering.

I sigh. There’s a need to change that.

On my way home that evening, I plan my speech to my father and add in my conditions as well.

I cannot dance to the tunes of the town’s god.

So I present to my father, who laughs and responds that I have no choice but to present.

Oh, I have a choice, I tell myself.

“Does this rule not exempt the daughter of his partner?” I ask.

“No, sweetheart. It is actually for your own good. We set up

the structure together to avoid the shutting down or stagnancy of businesses in the town.”

I understand what he is saying, and from my time in the United Kingdom, I learned about it. But I never thought I would have to do it in this small town.

Yet, I am Nora Bright, and I don't back off without a fight.

As soon as I leave my father, he receives a call, and I realize that it is Steve who is calling him.

Does the guy never sleep? Or doesn't know when to call it a day?

Even though I do not disturb my father as he does, Steve is beginning to get on my nerves.

I mean, if he is someone I like, I wouldn't have issues with my father talking to him every day, but for Christ's sake, they are just business partners, and that is a whole lot of meetings.

I am about to retire for the night when an idea pops into my head. I close my eyes as I allow the thoughts to play around, making my way to my bedroom.

“Kiss me,” I say to Steve as I pull him by the tie.

He has some reservations but ignores them and instead kisses me passionately.

I wrap my hands around his neck and suck on him as much as I can.

He takes over as he begins to kiss my neck, and he unhooks

my bra. His hands cup my breasts, and I feel his palm raw on me.

I want more. I need more.

“Steve,” I call. “I want-“

A sound goes off, distracting me.

“Oh shit!” I exclaim, sitting up to stop the alarm. *Did I just have a sex dream about Steve?*

I give a sarcastic laugh before realizing that it is true.

I lay back on my bed again, thinking and angry that I can’t get him off my mind.

“It’s time to visit him then. I choose to be stubborn,” I say to the empty room, remembering what he said the previous day about owning the town.

I deliberate on how to start my day before making a call to one of the staff in the café that I’ll be running late.

“Hi honey,” my mom greets me with a hug. “You are up so early.”

With a mischievous smile, I reply, “Yes, I want to attend to something before going to work.”

“Okay. Akeem is available for you.”

I sigh, wanting to argue before deciding to allow myself to be driven to work.

“Akeem, let’s go. Our first stop will be to Mr. Adams’s office,”

I say and watch him flinch.

“Any problem with that?” I question.

“No, ma’am.”

This is becoming annoying by the day. At the mention of his name, the whole town wants to bow. I cannot allow this to happen. I will never dance to his tunes.

We reach our first location, and I scan around. The area looks nice, I must say.

“You like what you see?” I hear a voice behind me.

“Mr. Adams,” I say with a fake smile.

“Let’s leave the formality; Steve is the name,” he says with a genuine smile.

“Steve,” I say, allowing the name to linger on my tongue. I watch his reaction, and it feels like he reacts to it, but I ignore it.

He begins to walk into the building, and I follow. “To what do I owe this pleasant visit?”

“Too many things. But we will take it one after the other.”

“Good morning, sir,” his secretary and the other staff greet him.

He ignores them and walks into the office.

“I would assume that your mouth was too heavy to respond?”

I ask sarcastically.

“There is no need. I mean, they work for me. Money speaks and sorts out everything.”

I sigh, drop my bag on his table and take my seat. I inspect the room, and I must say, Steve Adams has a very exquisite taste.

“You don’t look satisfied with my response, Nora,” he says.

The way he calls my name affects me.

“Definitely. And I suggest we stick with the formality, Mr. Adams,” I sit emphatically.

He sighs.

“Okay, so I came to tell you that I do not buy into the vision of pitching to you about my business. I can give you my plans, but I do not see the need. I mean, what benefit is it going to be for you?”

He smiles, “I figured. This is my town, and the rules are clearly stated. So, you play by my rules, or you let go of your business,” he says with a smirk.

I give a deep sigh, “Fine. That will be all.”

Chapter Five

Steve

I look at the lady seated in front of me. Everything about her seems to entice me, her eyes, the way she talks, the way she reasons, her curves, and most especially, the way my name sounds on her lips.

I am not sure how to explain it, but it arouses a desire that no woman has ever stirred in me. Not like I have never been serious with any woman, but even when I tried, they were just not the one. They were always after my money and fame.

“Ste—” she starts, catching herself. “Mr. Adams, I should be on my way. I’ll see you in the next two days, I believe.” She says, getting up from the seat.

Fuck! Her smell – a mix of vanilla and strawberry – overwhelms me. This lady is dangerous to me and my senses.

“Yes,” I tell her, watching her leave my office. As soon as the door closes behind her, I switch to the monitor beside me as I watch her through the security camera. It appears that she is talking to someone over the phone, and she is laughing with the person.

Who could that be? A boyfriend? I ask myself, watching her until her car zooms off.

“Nora Bright,” I say with a smile. “Let’s get back to work,” I tell myself as I try to block out her scent and the smile on her

face.

But goddammit, she is beautiful.

Nora

What was I thinking when I decided to go to his place? I ask myself on the way to work.

It is not like he is a nice person to bend his rules. If there is anything I must do in this town, it is to break Steve Adams.

I hate cocky guys. I hate guys who make themselves number one.

And now, I have to prepare a proposal. Something I have not done for a long while, but trust me to give it my best.

I am Nora Bright, and if Steve Adams wants a show, then I will give him a show.

“Faster,” I tell Akeem as I start laying out my plans.

It is going to be a busy day today and tomorrow, and everything must be ready.

The day is going well, and I must say I have some of the best staff in the town.

I look at the drawing board again and smile; everything seems to be set.

My vision and mission statement is clearly written – the plan for each quarter over the next five years and the other products we will include over the first year.

Also, one of my staff suggested a special treat to be sold quarterly, and that is included as well. The plans are well written, and I must say, my staff, including my admin and the waiters, are amazing.

I smile, dropping the marker and looking at their faces. “You all deserve a treat this evening. A small gathering at my house,” I say, and instantly, everyone’s faces light up.

People management, I think.

“But something is missing,” I say.

“The revamp,” one of the staff, Collins, says.

“Perfect. Exactly. That is what I was thinking about. I think we should touch up the shop.”

And they all agree with nods.

“Collins, please handle it. Select three people and give me a plan in the next three hours. I want it to be doable for tomorrow,” I tell them before dismissing everyone.

“Whew,” I sigh, relaxing on my chair. “What a productive day. It is time to prepare for today’s gathering. I would prefer to do the cooking myself, or let’s see about ordering in. I need to rest as well.”

I wave to my staff, reminding them about the gathering before leaving.

My mom walks into the kitchen with a smile plastered on her face.

“You know, you do not need to make the snacks yourself,

darling,” my mother tells me for the tenth time in two hours. She has been in and out of the kitchen trying to keep me company as well as help me.

“I know, Mom, I want to do this. It has been a while. Plus, it’s just cake, and some pastries, chicken and chips, and some juice.”

My mother sighs, “I know I can’t convince you otherwise. So suit yourself,” she says before walking off.

It is not until 7 pm that I am done to my satisfaction in the kitchen. “Whew,” I say with a smile.

“Well done, honey,” my mom greets. “Your people are arriving already,” she adds.

“Oh, thank you. I’m sorry about the short notice. I think I should get my own house so I won’t stress you out.”

“No,” she responds too quickly. “Did I ever stop you from doing what you want?”

“No.”

“Then that’s it,” she says, walking off.

Weird.

I quickly go to my room to change into a more casual outfit and put on makeup before deciding it is time to go downstairs.

“Nora,” my father says, hugging me, and at the same instant, I see Steve. He looks at me with a funny expression before smiling.

What is he doing here? I ask myself. *For goodness sake, don’t they have*

a closing time for all their meetings?

“I hear your proposal is coming out fine, and you prepared some snacks for your staff. Well done,” my father says.

“Miss Nora,” Steve greets with a curt.

“Mr. Adams,” I say, giving him a wide smile.

“Yes, honey. Let someone bring in some of your snacks for us. I have missed them,” my father says before turning to Steve.

“She is good in the kitchen, you know,” he says, and I watch Steve’s amused face.

Come on, Dad, did you have to do that? I ask myself internally.

“She is good in the kitchen,” Steve whispers in my ear as he walks by. “See you in the next two days, Nora.”

The heat radiating all over my body is not expected.

Fuck you, Steve.

"Hi guys," I greet my team after regaining my composure, and from the look on everyone's faces, it's going to be a great evening.

Everything goes as planned and even better. My team members were exceptionally chatty and had a lot of fun experiences to share.

All the pastries and snacks I made were also completely devoured, and I smile at myself, knowing it would constitute a part of my proposal.

When it was around 10 pm, the first person yawned, and we agreed to call it a night, seeing as there was work the next day.

I assign my driver to drop them at their various locations before I go to work on my proposal.

Today is going to be a great day; I can feel it. Besides that, I want to present my proposal to the almighty Steve Adams. My friends, against my wish, hooked me up with a guy, and we will be having dinner tonight.

I suddenly notice that everywhere is quiet, and I realize that Steve is most likely around.

"Honestly, he can not keep scaring my staff. We should talk about that."

"Good morning Mr. Adams," I greet with a forced smile once I find him.

He chuckles at my reaction. "Miss Bright, good morning. I believe you are ready for me. Plus," he pauses, inspecting the room, "this looks nice. Definitely, somewhere I would like to have a coffee."

"What do you expect," I say with a big smile.

We get to the business of the day, and I start my presentation.

Steve

With my legs crossed, I continue watching the woman dressed in a bodycon dress in front of me.

I am not sure what to concentrate on, her body, her lips, or her words.

She knows her stuff, and with the plans she has for the business, I see her opening more branches soon.

She is a smart-ass lady, I must say, and now that I have time to rest, I can invest a lot of money into her business.

"That's all," she says with a smile, pulling me from my thoughts.

With the smile she has on her face, she knows she has crushed it.

I return her smile, "I am really impressed. I mean," I say, clearing my throat, "it's one of the best proposals I've heard in months. Well done. Now you have my blessing."

She looks at me, about to say something, before plastering a smile on her face again.

"Anything else?" she asks politely.

"I would love to invest in your business," I say, expecting her to look really excited about it.

"I mean, every business is looking for a great investor, and I am that great investor."

She replaces the shock with a smile - "I don't mean to be rude though, but my business and I would be fine without your investment."

"Ouch," I say, a bit pained.

No one ever rejects me.

"Why? I mean, you are a start-up business, and for all these plans, you need loads of cash to get it going."

She laughs, "I know. But Mr. Adams, do you want the real truth?" she asks, looking closely into my eyes.

I nod.

She sighs, "Let's say this. I prefer being broke to being indebted to you. Yes, I know you have the money, but you cannot own my business. I do not trust your schemes, Steve," she says.

"Plus, I think I have other solid investors, and that would work for now."

I look at her. She really looks happy, rubbing those words in my face, and as I watch her closely, I find no place in me to be angry with her.

If it was someone else, I guess I would have flared with anger. Actually, no, because they cannot dare say that to me.

I smile before standing and saying, "Your wish," and shake hands with her for the first time.

Oh my, the feel of her hand on mine is...is exhilarating.

"I'm off for my date," she says, waiting for me to leave.

Who can be her date in town?

Chapter Six

Nora

If I had known, I would have returned home yesterday instead of going on that useless date.

I am pissed off. I have been since yesterday, which was one of the reasons why I decided to come to work today.

I want to get my mind off the events of yesterday and keep myself busy. And the best way to do that is to work.

My café has decided to launch some new products this coming week, and there have been a lot of promotions going on during the week, keeping the customers excited.

The recipe has been made, and everything is set, but I still want to work on it, even if it is only for a little while.

While in the United Kingdom, we were taught different ways to make pastries alongside different kinds of pastries, and we're allowed to develop our recipe using some of the things we have been taught.

Since then, I have developed my recipe, but since I had to come back home, I was just able to try it during our get-together, and they really seemed to enjoy it. And from my presentation, I really think I have a good shot at expanding the business.

The only thing I do not foresee right now is the clogging of the sink.

Everything has been going well since I arrived, and I was starting to get my mind off last night's date. But the sink just had to get clogged, and now everything around me is gradually turning into a mess.

Why did I even decide to come to work today? I ask myself even though the answer has played through my mind a million times since I woke up.

Today is Saturday, for god's sake. I should be resting, but no, the entrepreneurial part of me will not listen.

I find the toolbox and bend to look under the sink to see if I can try to fix the clog, but nothing changes.

Should I call one of my workers? I muse but decide against it, seeing as their weekend belongs to them.

What do I do?

"Damn you, Anita, if I had known, I would have saved myself from the embarrassment of that guy. And this sink would probably not frustrate me as much as this. Oh god," I add before turning back to the problem at hand.

I did not hear the door open or close, but I suddenly feel a presence behind me.

I turn to see the person who was behind me.

"Oh my god! What are you doing here?!" I exclaim.

"I should be asking you the same," he says.

"You certainly do not have permission to just walk into any shop, at least my shop, anytime you feel like it."

He looks at me closely before saying, “Yes, I don’t quite have that permission, but I saw your car outside, and I felt to check if the door was open, and it was. If you were not expecting any guests, you should lock it. The town is small but can be dangerous.”

“I can take care of myself,” I respond, still trying to battle with the sink.

"And how is that working out?" I hear his amused voice asking. "Just perfect, without you present to ruin it," I snap, and he remains quiet.

I continued to battle with the sink knowing fully well that nothing is changing, but I was not willing to admit it.

After five minutes of no change, I rise to my feet and sigh, “I’m sorry.”

There is no response, and I turn to him to see him resting on the wall with an expressionless face.

Well, your business for not responding, I tell myself as I make a cup of coffee. Coffee with no sugar; something I am beginning to like.

I am about to take my coffee when the handle gives way, and the cup drops to the floor.

“Come on, not this again!” I say frustratedly. “First the date, then the sink, and now my cup – these twenty-four hours just keep getting worse.”

I look at Steve again, watching me with a smile on his face.

"If you are just going to stand there and do nothing, you can just leave and enjoy your weekend rather than remain stuck in this mess," I say.

"I think I prefer the mess," he responds, and I roll my eyes.

"Come here, let me help," he says further, and I look at him quizzically, thinking to myself.

Looking at him right now, it is hard for me to picture that he is a billionaire.

What can a billionaire like him do in the kitchen?

"It's fine; I can handle it," I say.

He smiles, "Like you are doing right now? It's okay. Just let me handle it."

I look at him again before stepping aside for him.

He undoes the sleeves of his shirt and unbuttons the first two buttons before pulling it off over his head.

Damn! *He looks really good.*

He is wearing a white top that fits his body perfectly, and I can see the outline of his perfectly formed abs.

How can a man be this arrogant and still look this good?

I take a seat on top of one of the tables and watch him. I watch as his muscles ripple through his arm and see how he effortlessly does what I have been struggling to do for some time.

The sight before me is the only good thing that has brought a smile to my face today, and I intend to enjoy it while it lasts.

As I watch him, I realize a few things about him and can see that he is more down to earth than I gave him credit for.

I mean, how can a billionaire, the whole city fears, strip himself and get under the sink for me?

Maybe he is not so bad after all. Maybe I should give him a chance and get to know him.

If for nothing but for the fact that he is my father's business partner and my father does not do business with bad people.

After a few minutes, he comes out and grins at me.

"All done."

"Really?"

"Yes, try it," he says, and I turn on the tap and watch as the water flows freely without stopping.

"Just like that?" I say.

"I don't think I will be able to fix the handle of the cup. You might have to get a new one," he says with a smile.

"Yeah, no worries."

"Anything else needs fixing?" he asks, and I shake my head, although in my mind, the word 'my heart' crosses my mind.

I am still angry at the time I wasted on the date the night before, and I blame it on not having a boyfriend.

If I had a boyfriend, I would have never had to go on a date in the first place.

"Nothing," I say, not trusting my thoughts. "Thank you so much."

"That will not do. You will have to make it up to me," he says, and I turn to him to respond, but something in his eyes catches my attention, and I simply nod.

He picks up his shirt from the chair he dropped it on earlier and begins to put it on.

I turn to him and glance at his body again before he is fully dressed.

Of course, the perfection of his body is still visible through his clothes, but it is better without them, and I wish I could run my hands through them.

Chapter Seven

Steve

I still cannot explain why I was anywhere near Nora's café, and I can't explain why I decided to go in even after I saw her car. But I am glad I did.

Whatever it is, that's what is responsible for me currently drinking coffee with her.

After walking in on her trying to fix the sink and deciding to help her, I am being rewarded with a coffee date.

I know she is trying to hide it, but I can see the gratitude in her eyes. And for the first time, she relaxes with me, and we begin to talk.

"What inspired you to open a café?"

"I have always had a flair for pastries and owning a business of my own. My parents could not afford to open a business for me, at least then, not now," she scoffs. "I also did not know how to effectively run a business, so..."

"You decided to go out and learn," I finish for her.

"Yes, and I am glad I did."

I raise my eyebrows, expecting her to say more, and she seems to get the hint.

"It was never easy leaving my parents and staying away for years. Only to come back to see everything in my hometown has changed."

"When you mean change, I bet you are referring to me, right?"

"You constitute a major part of the change," she says and laughs.

Her laughter is like music to my ears. Ever since her arrival, I have not been able to get her off my mind, and since then, I have enjoyed teasing her. But for the first time, there is this form of mutual connection between us.

She is not trying to talk me to death, and neither am I teasing her.

"As a reward for helping me out and seeing that I am in a good mood, I am going to offer you one of our newest pastries," she says and stands up.

I follow her to the kitchen and watch as she ties her hair back and puts on an apron.

In all my life, I have never seen someone look so sexy in an apron.

She begins to mix a couple of ingredients, and I sit quietly, watching her until she notices me.

"What? Why are you staring at me?"

"Nothing; I am just mesmerized by what I am seeing."

"And what is that?" she asks in a teasing voice.

"A very good-looking woman in an apron, making something for me."

For the first time, I see her blush, and something I have never felt rises within me.

It is like a warm fuzzy feeling.

She gets a grip on herself and puts a tray of whatever she is doing into the oven before she comes to join me.

"I know you don't like me, and I also know you don't consider me worthy, but will you believe me if I tell you that you are beautiful?" I say as I stare into her eyes.

She seems mesmerized by my face until she snaps out of it.

"I will only believe you because my father tells me frequently."

"He is a man with good eyesight," I say, an edge closer to her until our lips meet.

I was careful at first, waiting for her to pull back and even slap me, but she didn't. Instead, she responds to me, and I deepen the kiss until the timer of the oven goes off.

She immediately stands and heads toward the oven but not before I can see the look in her eyes.

If I didn't know better, I would have thought that she was caught taking from a jar of cookies without permission.

"Is my special delicacy ready?" I ask with excitement, trying to bring life back into the room.

She seems to catch on, and she laughs before saying, "Your special delicacy is ready."

Fresh from the oven, a tray is set before me with a cup of coffee.

"Try it," she says. "It is very good with coffee."

I did not bother to ask for the name. Instead, I picked up one

of the baked goods and take a bite.

My response is a moan. I try to keep my voice low, but I cannot. Whatever it is, it tastes amazing. And as a billionaire with exquisite taste, I have never tasted something that good before.

“Fuck!!! Did they teach you how to make this while you were away?”

“No, they gave us the basics. I worked on it and came out with this. Is it good?” she asks with a hopeful look on her face.

“It is more than good. It is amazing. Why did you not start the café with this?”

“I was not sure if it was good or if the people would like it,” she says timidly for someone that is very outspoken.

“You can trust my judgment on this. It will sell out fast. Take a bite,” I encourage, and she does.

The moment she gets past the crunchy first bite, her face bursts forth in bliss. It is a sight to behold, and she moans deeply. The sound makes my cock twitch.

“It is really good,” she says, and I agree.

From there, we launch into different discussions as we empty the tray before us with a highly charged sexual energy.

For the very first time in a long time, I feel at ease in this little town.

No one is scared of me or trying to rip money off me. Instead, there is just pure joy and laughter.

"Would you like to come home with me?" I ask amidst her laughter, and she narrows her eyes at me.

"Why Mr. Adams?" she asks in a sexy voice.

I am not sure if she is the one saying it or if the coffee and the pastry have gotten into her head, but I prefer this to her normal glares at me.

"What do you have in mind?" I ask in return.

"I can start with exploring your firm muscles," she says and reaches out to run her hands through my muscles.

"I saw them when you were working earlier; they are sexy," she slurs and smiles at me.

This is my cue. I immediately stand up and pull her along with me.

"We need to clean this place and head out," I say, and I begin to help her clean the shop.

To my surprise, she was very conscious as she arranged the dishes and ingredients from her baking, proving that she is focused on the task at hand.

She probably feels what I am feeling, and when we are done, I turn to her again to confirm.

"Are you sure you want to go home with me?"

"Yes," she confirms, and we head out to see that it is already dark.

The drive to my house is not eventful, but it is filled with laughter which does not often happen for me.

I can't remember the last time I even laughed on my way home from a day of work.

"Woah... This is huge. Do you stay here all alone?" she asks the moment we arrive at my place.

"If you don't count the people that work for me, then yes," I respond.

"That means you are always lonely," she says.

When it comes to companionship, she is right, but I have learned to focus on work in those moments rather than think about my predicament.

"It's not so bad," I say.

"Maybe I can come and keep you company," she says as we arrive home, and I close the gap between us.

"I would not mind," I respond before bending to kiss her.

The moment my lips touched hers, the sexual energy that I felt in the café comes back in full force, and she wraps her hands around my neck as she responds to the kiss.

I deepen the kiss, and my hands find their way to her breasts and gave them a light squeeze.

She moans in response, and I lift her off her feet, breaking the kiss as I head toward my room.

She groans more in response, and her hands find my muscles.

I never knew that my muscles were such sensitive spots.

"Kiss me," she says as I set her down, and I swiftly obey, breaking the kiss just to pull off her shirt from the top of her

head.

In a matter of minutes, she is standing naked before me, and my eyes run through her body, admiring every curve and every swell.

My hands find her breasts one more time, and I begin to fondle them as I slowly kiss her on the neck and down to her breasts, taking one nipple in my mouth.

She arches her back toward me, giving me more access, and I move from one breast to the other.

Leading her to the bed, I continue to tend to her until she stops me.

"Don't you think you are overdressed?" she asks as she runs her hands over my shirt, rubbing my stomach muscles.

Immediately I remove my clothes with the speed of light and stand naked before her.

My mouth finds her nipples again, and I continue my routine as my hands find her opening and push one finger into it.

She was already wet for me, and I insert a second finger into her, drawing out her pleasure until she orgasms in front of me.

Without wasting time, I insert my cock into her and watch her as she slowly accepts it before I begin to move inside of her.

She is so damn tight, and I am taking extra care not to hurt her. But the moment she wraps her legs around my waist, I quicken my pace and begin to move faster.

"Steve," she calls amidst my thrusts. "I am coming."

“Come for me, baby,” I respond. And she does while screaming my name.

I come shortly after, too, and slowly pull out of her before kissing her on the head.

She moans in satisfaction and snuggles her body close to mine.

Chapter Eight

Nora

Waking up this morning is a bit weird as I open my eyes to one of the most beautiful yet unfamiliar environments. Even where I lived during my stay in the United Kingdom was nothing compared to the room I am currently in.

It is beautifully designed, all in white, with gray curtains at the windows, a large desk, a chair in the far corner, bedside shelves, and lamps that are also gray.

Where am I? And how did I get here? I ask myself as I try to remember.

Then it dawns on me what happened the night before. And as soon as I remember, I hear the door open.

“Good morning, beautiful,” Steve says, and my brain automatically responds.

Fuck.

“Good morning.”

I still cannot believe I am in his bed and comfortable at that.

“What’s the time?” I ask.

“Nine in the morning.”

“Shit!!! I need to leave.”

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?”

“No, I just need to be at home,” I say and get out of bed to freshen up.

By the time I come out of the bathroom, he is dressed.

“Why are you dressed?”

“To drop you off.”

“There is no need for that. I can find my way on my own.”

“I know, but you left your car at your shop. The least I can do is drop you off there.”

“Then let’s go,” I say, and we head out.

In forty-five minutes, I finally arrive home. And as I was trying to make my way quietly to my room, my father stops me.

“Where are you off to?”

“I’m going to work.”

“On a Sunday?”

“Yes, I have some things to finish up,” I say.

“Did you sleep in this house last night?”

Knowing my father, he probably knows I did not spend the night in the house. I just hope he is not as resourceful as his partner.

“No.”

“Why, darling. You know how I feel about things like that. And seeing as you are just back in town, where could you have spent the night?”

Shit!!!! I know he has a point. I don’t have any long-term friends that I could have comfortably spent the night with.

Neither can I mention Steve, after all the trouble I have given my dad about his business partner.

“Nora, are you there?” he asks, bringing me out of my thoughts.

“Ah... Yes. I was working. I went out in the morning and then went to the shop to work on some new recipes, but I got carried away,” I say, which is partially true.

I couldn't tell him the truth, that I went to work *yesterday* to get some things done but got distracted by Steve. Hell no!

“Was Steve responsible for that?” he asks, looking directly into my eyes.

“What?!!!” I ask, not having the energy to deny it. “Are you spying on me now?”

“No, dear. I am just being careful. Besides, it was one of our workers that reported seeing Steve’s car parked beside yours at the café.”

“I thought Steve was your business partner, and you like him. Do you have a problem with me hanging around him?”

“Not at all, especially if it is that you are not trying to rip his head off his body. But if it goes further than that, then there would be a problem.”

“Why would there be a problem?” I ask, wanting to know more, especially since we have crossed a very big line.

“The thing is, when you were away, I met Steve. And how the business started like a partnership/mentor-mentee relationship where I will teach him what I know, and he invests in my business. Since then, I have taken him in like a son; that was

one of the reasons why I invited him over the day you arrived.”

“I understand, Dad, but I can’t see the problem,” I say, trying to understand him.

“Because of that, I prefer if things remain normal between you too. Let us just remain as partners, and him your boss, and not involve other things into it.”

“But dad, if you see him as a son, and let’s say for some reason, I get married to him, won’t he be your son legally?”

“Nora, let’s say you finally get along with him and start a relationship with him, and you break up. What would happen? You would have to keep running into him whenever we have a business, it would affect your café, and we might even end our partnership which is a lot all at once. So like I said before, let things remain normal,” he explains.

“Okay, Dad. I’m off to work now. Take care of yourself,” I say, and I kiss him on the cheek as my mind begins to come up with a solution.

I understand what my father just explained, and he has many correct points. I should have never let things get this far with Steve. But no. And just like that from enemies, I spent the night in his house.

If things go south between us, I will be the first to discard him, but I won’t be able to stand seeing him around, and neither would I want my father to lose the partnership because we are both angry at each other.

The drive to my shop is short as I arrive in no time. According to my plan, I am not supposed to go to work today. I was supposed to work on all my recipes for the last time yesterday and then start baking them on Monday.

Instead, I was distracted and only went through with one. I believe the feedback from that one was good enough because I know it was the truth.

Putting every thought of Steve aside, I begin to work on my already perfect recipes, looking for more creative ways to design and package them.

My staff, along with the two new employees Steve assigned to me, have already given their input, and I will be working on some of them.

Not knowing that the day has gone, a knock on my door reminds me of the present.

Who can that be? No one knows I am in the shop except my father.

“Who is there?” I ask cautiously.

The voice mentions a name I am not familiar with.

“Who?”

“I am here to deliver a message.”

Realizing that I cannot get anything done if I don't open the door, I decide to open the door, and I see a familiar face.

“Mr. Adams told me to bring this to you,” the man says and

hands me a bag.

I don't fully recognize him, but I know I have seen him around Steve before.

"How did he know I am here?" I ask, a little suspicious.

"Must have been your father. He is currently at your house with your father," he says.

"Thank you, and thank him for me," I say, then he nods and turns around.

Why does he find different ways to show up, especially when I am trying to forget about him? I check the time to see how long I have spent in the shop and I am surprised to see that almost the whole day has gone.

My stomach chooses that moment to growl, and I open the food. It is a combination of some of my favorite foods.

"How does he know what I like?" I ask as I begin to eat.

The food is delicious, and I empty my plate in one sitting.

"This is one hell of a meal," I comment as I pick up the package to find out where their store is located.

"How did he do it?" I ask when I saw that the store was located in the neighboring town.

Tears come to my eyes for such a nice gesture. I begin to formulate my speech on how I am going to tell him that we need to go back to being enemies.

When my speech is ready, I finish up what I am working on and arrange everything for work on Monday.

Throughout the previous weeks, the customers have been impressed by the advertising for the new products, and they are excited.

I am also excited, and I head home to rest. As I near the house, an incoming vehicle parks beside me, and the back window rolls down to reveal a smiling Steve.

“How are you this evening?” he asks, and the gentleness of his voice completely melts my heart and crashes my defenses.

I smile in return and respond, “I’m okay. Thanks for the food.”

“My pleasure.”

“But next time, you don’t have to go all the way to the neighboring city,” I say before I realize that I added ‘next time’ to the statement.

“I’m glad you liked it. Besides, I didn’t go myself. I was in your house all day hoping to catch a glimpse of you, and I’m glad I did.”

Before I can respond with something foolish, my phone rings, and I see my dad’s name on the screen. It immediately reminds me of my speech, and I straighten my face.

“I need to take this,” I say, even though I will see my father in just a few minutes. “We need to talk sometime this week when you are free,” I add, and I wave at him, not allowing him to respond before I pick up the phone.

“Hi, Dad.”

“Hi Nora, how is work going? I am just calling you to remind

you of the time so you won't get carried away.”

“Thanks, Dad; I am almost home. I'm around the corner,” I say and end the call.

I am not sure what or how to feel. On the one hand, I feel a serious physical and emotional attraction to Steve; on the other hand, I am trying to be a good daughter, and I am somewhere stuck in between.

Immediately, I go home. I head to my room and lock myself in it for the rest of the night.

Chapter Nine

Nora

Anything that has to do with Steve Adams is surely dangerous, and I should have known with our first encounter.

I always knew he was a pain in the ass, albeit a great distraction. Ever since I stepped into this town, I should have maintained my distance.

Well, I wanted to, but then when he happened to be my father's so-called mentee, all he does is come to our house.

I think it is time I get an apartment of my own. A little privacy would not be so much to ask.

"Honey," my mom calls as soon as I start my car. "You forgot to take these," she says, handing me some files.

"Oh shit," I say. "Thank you," I add, collecting the file.

I look at the folder again, and it contains the documented proposal I made and some new recipes that we want to include, and today, I will be sending one of my staff to deliver this to Steve's office.

Hopefully, I can successfully think about what I should tell him before mid-afternoon.

Sending an attractive woman to him, like Abigail, should distract him from whatever lust or spell is between us. I don't think I can cope with any more pressure.

And with my father breathing down my neck, he is damned to

find something soon if I don't cut the ties now.

But think, think, think, Nora, *how can you cut it off?*

'Let's say you finally get along with him and start a relationship with him, and you break up. What would happen? You would have to keep running into him whenever we have a business, it would affect your café, and we might even end our partnership which is a lot all at once. So like I said before, let things remain normal.' My father's words keep ringing in my head. And with all honesty, he is right. If anything goes wrong, it will end badly for not just me but my whole family. But what if it *doesn't* go wrong?

"Okay, Nora," I start. "Get a grip on yourself. You are going to have a civilized conversation with him and tell him that what happened that night was a mistake. Not," I add, hitting the steering.

"That is too cliché. How about if I tell him I enjoyed that night, but we cannot be together because of my father? No, that sounds babyish and too controlling. Fuck what do I say?"

The road is free, and I arrive at work in no time. Heading into my kitchen, everything is set and arranged for today, but I suddenly hear a noise from the front door.

"Who's there?" I ask, a little scared.

It was just a few minutes to seven; I don't expect anyone to be around at this time, even my staff.

I appear at the front of the café only to see Steve standing

somewhere in the middle.

“What are you doing here, and how did you get in?” I whisper.

Why did I just whisper? Get a grip on yourself, Nora Bright.

“The door was open...and I simply walked in,” he whispers back.

“Oh.”

“Why are we whispering?” he asks, and it dawns on me that he is too.

“Sorry, I guess I was not just expecting anyone this early. What are you doing here?” I ask loudly.

“You wanted to see me, and I could not get my mind off you from the moment I saw you yesterday, so I decided to come in early, hoping you would be around.”

“Come,” I say as I lead him into the kitchen.

Shit! Shit! I can't remember what I had already rehearsed so much for trying to stay away from this sexy devil.

Okay, I am beginning to remember. I want to tell him that we cannot be together.

He follows me to the kitchen and looks down at me with a sexy smile.

“Why did you want to see me, Miss Bright?” he asks with a seductive smile on his lips.

At this moment, I forget the bits I've started to remember, and I look at him sheepishly.

“Don't tell me it is what I am thinking,” he softly says, and I

shake my mind, too transfixed to speak.

“Then what is it, beautiful?” he asks as his face draws near to mine.

“I don’t think this is a good idea,” I say as he kisses me.

“What? Me being here? The kiss? Or what is about to happen?”

I hear him ask, but my brain does not process.

I stretch my neck toward him as I hope for another kiss, and he does not disappoint. He begins to kiss me, and I wrap my hands around his neck.

Soon he lifts me off my feet and places me on the table without breaking the kiss.

His hands slowly move up my thighs, pull my skirt up, and find my panties.

A part of my brain reminds me that I am at work and anyone can walk in at any time, but another part is focused on what his hands are going to do to me.

He slowly puts his hands into my panties and finds my opening. The moment his finger penetrates, I groan against his lips and push myself deeper into his hands.

“Hmmm...don’t stop,” I hear myself say.

“I don’t intend to,” he responds as he bites my earlobe, causing the feeling of pleasure to intensify.

The kiss deepens, and I run my hands through his hair as his fingers continue to pleasure me. I can feel an orgasm close by, but he suddenly stops.

“What?” I whine into his ears.

“Someone is around,” he whispers, and I am suddenly conscious of where I am and how I look.

I hear the sound of footsteps approaching, and I quickly jump down from the table and arrange myself before whoever is outside gets in.

Rather than help me, Steve just smiles at me and gives me a wink, and I shoot him a glare.

The footsteps edge closer, and this time, I have pulled myself together and even begin arranging a few things for work.

“Good morning, boss,” I hear a voice say. “Is everything alright? I saw Mr. Adam's car outside.”

“Everything is alright,” Steve answers. “I am just here to ensure that business is running smoothly, and perhaps I can get the documented proposal myself from Miss. Bright.” He answers on my behalf, leaving my staff shocked.

I get the file out and hand it over.

“Thank you,” he says, his hand brushing mine. “Now that I can see that things are going on well and you are serious about keeping this café, I will excuse you,” he says, still with a smile on his face.

“Have a great day,” he adds. “And see you soon.”

My staff looks in my direction, and I shrug in response as Steve walks out.

My staff is probably wondering what has come over him while

I am wondering when the 'soon' is going to be.

"Are you sure everything is fine? This is the first time I have ever seen him smile."

"Everything is fine. From what I have heard about him so far, he does not lie," I say, and my worker nods.

"That's true. How come you are early today?"

"Well, I am quite excited to see the acceptance of our new products; I just had to be here in time."

"Same here," he says and joins me as we get things ready.

The other staff members come around too, and several minutes before the opening time, they are ready for the day.

"It's going to be a great day," I say affirmatively, distracting myself from the moment I just had with Steve.

"You know, you have got to stop showing up without notice,"

I start. "I am beginning to think you are stalking me." I laugh.

"Stalk you?" He questions. "I wouldn't dare do that. Plus, there are other ways to get you to be somewhere," he says coolly.

"Like leaving you aching for more."

I clear my throat as I shift on the stool.

"So, tell me, how did your day go?" he asks.

I am torn between telling him the real answer and not.

"You know, the same busy day as expected. The customers loved the pastries, and some ordered more. I think we might be needing more equipment soon."

"I'm glad, but Nora," he calls.

Oh fuck, I love the way my name sounds in his mouth.

"How was your day?"

"Horny," I blurt out eventually.

He smirks as he pulls my stool toward him. "As was mine."

I smile and enjoy the feel of his hands as he runs them from my cheeks down to my neck.

"I can't seem to get enough of you," he says before taking hold of my mouth.

I don't resist. Instead, I allow myself to enjoy the feel of his lips on mine.

He is so gentle and allows me to enjoy the moment.

My phone suddenly starts ringing.

Fuck!

"Dad?" I say, looking at the caller.

"Hello honey bun, it's 8 p.m. I was wondering when you will be home?" he asks.

I calm down before responding, "Hi, Dad; I'm sorry, I got caught up with some work, so I'm still in the shop."

"Do you want me or the driver to come get you?"

"No," I respond sharply.

Shit!

"I brought my car, so I will clean up in the next fifteen minutes or so."

"Okay, I'll be expecting you."

My father is a snake; I am sure he called to figure out something.

"Fuck."

"Is everything okay?" Steve asks.

"Yes, everything is still okay. I need to go now," I tell him.

"Okay. So when are we going to see it? I can tell that these café meetings are not the best. Do we meet tomorrow evening?"

I think about that for a bit before agreeing to it.

The issue is, how am I going to tell my father that I will not be sleeping at home?

I'll figure something out. But at least I know that I don't have to be watching over my back to be with him.

I close the shop that evening, thinking of all the possible lies I can come up with. My father is a smart man, very smart, and right now, I am a bit disadvantaged because all my friends are not in town again.

Well, except I lie about it.

Nora. Nora. Think. You are smart. Think.

Days move into weeks, and Steve and I keep at it. It was from one lie to another with my father. He easily believed me.

Or I hoped he did.

My mother, on the other hand, never bothers to ask where I am coming from. She only teases me that I am seeing a guy.

Call it a mother's instinct; she says I have been glowing. But I

do not blame her accusation.

Being with Steve almost every night is enough to make me glow. And even as I lay on his bed, I feel so good about him.

"You could have just ordered it?" he says from the bathtub.

"Yes, but there is so much fun in cooking at night."

"Your phone is ringing. Shit, why is my father calling you?" I ask, panicking.

He shrugs and calms before picking up and putting it on the loudspeaker.

Listening to everything they were saying, my father mentions that he is coming over to Steve's place to discuss something with him.

Instantly, I jump out of bed to retrieve my scattered belongings.

Can't he discuss it over the phone?

"Calm down," Steve says, capturing me.

"Just calm down. It's just a visit. You don't have to panic. Your car is not outside. Besides, we can just tell him about us."

"US?" I say to myself, looking a bit confused.

For a split second, my eyes well with tears, and I kiss him until I am brought back to the present by a knock on the door.

I go inside the bedroom, and I allow him to tend to the person who knocked on the door.

Hopefully, it's not going to be a long conversation. And since

tomorrow is Saturday, I can stay over for the weekend.

I try to eavesdrop on the conversation, but I can't hear anything. It appears that Steve made the rooms soundproof; smart man.

The next thing I feel is a dip in bed. Finally, he is back. I had already dozed off while he was meeting with the person.

"It was your dad," he says.

"Has he left?"

"Yes. Sorry for keeping you waiting. I've ordered the food already. Do you want to eat it now, or will you just get it another time?"

I stir on the bed as I sit up.

I need food badly.

He talks to me about what my father came for while we are eating, and that is when I decide to voice my concern.

"Steve?" I call quietly. "I think we should stop seeing each other."

He doesn't flinch but instead gives one of his sexy smiles.

"Why? Because your father almost caught us today? I think we should come clean with them. It is a miracle the whole town hasn't heard about us."

"No, we can't," I state sharply. "According to my father, I am not supposed to be with you. You get that. And I have been trying to tell you this for days, but I just can't bring myself to do it."

"I know, but there is nothing wrong between us. I love you. You love me. We will make a great family if and when you are ready for it."

I smile at his words.

"You are missing my point. My father does not want me to be with someone like you, a strong business partner."

He scoffs, " Mr. Bright, I know cannot be petty. He does not strike me as such. You know what, I think you are overreacting."

I sigh, trying to explain further when he interrupts.

"Trust me. Nothing is wrong with this, and if he is thinking I am going to break your heart, why would I? I should be the one afraid of you breaking my heart in this town," he says playfully.

"But the fun part is, you can't break my heart. Because once I put a mark on you, nobody can dare to touch you," he says, causing us both to laugh.

"Okay," I breathe out finally. "Maybe I am just overreacting." We talk for a few minutes before we end up cuddling each other on the bed.

My favorite position is with him on the bed.

Chapter Ten

Steve

I look at the woman snuggled up beside me. I love the view, and I pull her closer to me again, her bum touching my dick.

She is one hell of a woman, and I am glad she is mine. Or, hopefully, she is mine. I might have been known for other good things, but falling in love with someone is not something I thought I was capable of doing.

With all the money I possess, I know I can be with any female of my choice, but no one has ever struck me. To date, it still surprises me how Nora was able to penetrate deep into me.

Maybe it was because she is strong-willed herself and does not back down at the slight of confrontation. Many things about her struck me, and as far as my business and I are concerned, she is the only business owner that never requested money from me. And in that way, I am not ruling over her business; a smart lady.

She stirs a bit, and I move her hair behind her ears. I do not want her to worry about anything, and I doubt her father meant what he said. But I would have to find a way to make it possible, yet this weekend is out of the question. Seeing her this weekend is out of the question. We already agreed that to avoid people gossiping; we would just stay quiet and meet on Monday or Tuesday.

I allow different thoughts about the beauty in front of me to run through my mind before I doze off.

My weekend is awfully quiet, and I am getting bored. Do I travel, or what do I do? I ask myself as I sit on the chair.

Nora left in the morning, leaving my bed and house cold again, and I am as bored as fuck. I have tried reading to no avail. I do not have any business work pending, plus I want to rest from work today.

What should I do? I ask myself for the hundredth time.

“I need to leave this fucking shit hole,” I tell myself as I grab my keys. But a miracle happens as I was about to leave.

Let’s meet at the golf club – a message from Mr. Bright.

“Finally, somewhere for me to go and something to do.”

I respond with an okay and take my leave, eager to see him. Hopefully, one day he will be my father-in-law. I do not think it will be a problem since the man considers me to be a mentee and son already. He should not have any problem trusting me. And I love hanging out like this because we get to talk about casual things, and I am sure he will spill a lot about how he feels about things, or I can make him talk. I know he adores Nora and talks a lot about her; maybe I can use that as bait.

“Mr. Bright,” I say upon getting to the club. “You are early.”

“Oh, Steve,” he says, stretching his hand for a shake. “I was getting bored being here alone. None of the players are as

challenging as you.”

I smile, “I will take that as a compliment.”

We get to work as we play a game, and I end up beating him again.

“You know, you should at least let this old man win sometimes,” he laughs.

“There is no fun in doing that.”

“Oh, the wife is calling,” he says with a lovely smile. “Hello, honey. Oh, I am sorry. I lost track of time playing golf with Steve. I will be on my way,” he says, ending the call.

“This woman,” he says. “You should get a lady for yourself as well, Steve. One who keeps driving you to your bones and loving you. She is the reason why I am like this, well, she and Nora. I think you should get yourself, someone, as well. You are not getting any younger, and if you don’t make a decision now, blah, you might get tired of working,” he says as he enters his car.

“Yes, sir.”

“Oh yes, that reminds me, Nora. Something has been up with her. I forgot to mention that to you; maybe you could render some solution? Let’s see at my place on Monday evening.”

“Okay, sir,” I reply curtly. “Bye.”

He waves, and the car drives off.

I smile. What could it be that he wants to tell me about? About Nora and I? That will just be perfect, I think.

I call Nora at that instant to tell her what her father just said. She does not sound optimistic, but right now, we can both hope for the best.

The following day is not as boring as the previous day, but it is ridiculously slow, judging by the fact that I am eager to hear what Mr. Bright has to say.

I can pop up in the house, and there will be no issue, but it is better to respect the wishes of the old man. And according to Nora, they are going to be having guests tomorrow.

“Monday, at last,” I say as my alarm goes off. “But I still need to wait for about more than twelve hours,” I add as I get up from bed.

Getting dressed up is not a problem, and by 7 a.m., I am ready to go. I check my mail briefly, only to be rewarded by tons of messages from another partner, then read – Check your company’s mail.

“What is going on?” I ask with concern.

My phone goes off, and I see the caller ID – Mr. Bright.

“Please get to the house now,” he thunders and does not wait for a response.

I get to the place in no time and see Nora’s car. But hold on; she is not the reason I am here. Focus Steve. Focus.

“Thanks for coming over,” Mr. Bright says, pacing the floor.

I already went through the company’s mail, so I have an idea of what is going on. The company where we order a lot of our

spare parts is being blackmailed, and they are trying to infer that we were aware of this.

“Have you read through the mail?” he asks.

“Yes. But something still looks vague. If they claim to have been frauds for many years, then they should be able to buy off the reporters. I mean, it is business.”

“Some reporters can’t be bought.”

“Oh, they can be. Also, when my father was still alive – of course, I knew he was a dangerous man, but I knew he could spot frauds from the real deal. I think all this news is fake news set to disorganize us.”

I meant to say ‘you’ not ‘us’ because the press knows that I cannot be disorganized, and the only reason they would include our partnership is that they want to offset Mr. Bright. But right now, as the old man is bubbling, I do not have the right to tell him that.

“Mr. Bright. I think we can sort this out in no time,” I start. I look at where we are in his study. “If you do not mind, I can call some of my staff to help solve this issue and make some calls to people around. Or we can decide to go ourselves and return back to normal in no time. This is not a big deal.”

He weighs the options for some moment before saying, “Let’s get there ourselves.”

I smile. He thinks like me – I love to get my hands dirty. If you want to get something done perfectly, you have got to learn to

get your hands dirty.

Monday was one heck of a day, and I must say, I am exhausted as fuck.

“I am glad we went this route ourselves. Rather than allow those local reporters and journalists to spread the wrong news.”

“Yes. Thanks to my father for teaching me how to deal with people like them. I should be on my way now,” I say.

“Who is that? Nora? Is that you? Why are you just returning? It’s past 8 p.m. already.”

Nora comes in, giving me a look before going to hug her father. “I lost track of time, and then I dozed off. There was a little accident,” she says, showing her father a red spot on her skin.

“Oh honey, you should be careful next time.”

She gives him a look before nodding her head violently. “I should consider getting my own place,” she states as a matter of fact before walking out, leaving her father stunned.

“Now, you see my concern. Something is off with Nora. Yes, that reminds me, we were meant to have a short conversation about her today; I hope you are not in a hurry?” he asks.

“Oh, not at all,” I say.

Finally, the wait is over.

“I believe Nora is hiding something from me,” he starts.

“Like what?”

“I am not sure. A guy. I doubt it is business related. She comes home late and sometimes does not come in at all. Then when she does come late, she sneaks in like a thief. I mean, this is her father’s house. Why does she need to sneak in?”

I smile.

“Have you ever considered asking her?”

“Nora,” he scoffs. “Casually. But she says everything is alright.”

“Then, my opinion, sir, I think you have to believe everything is alright.”

He scoffs, “Not with Nora. She is my only child, and I would not have any guy just come into her life without me having a background check on him. I do not want to see anyone with my daughter. One, she is still naïve, and two, guys nowadays are useless. Imagine the news I heard about a rich young lady who married a guy and was duped of all her inheritance. I can’t have just any guy marry her,” he says violently.

“What about even if the guy is rich, richer than her?”

“Oh, I think that is worse. He might think he can rub the money all over her or tell her not to work, and Nora loves working. Or he might even belittle her.”

I am short of words to say. Instead, I nod my head.

“You know, guys are so dangerous nowadays, and if care is not taken, I might have to search myself to find her a man I

consider as good and worthy. I do not want anyone near my daughter.”

This is the real shit! Now I understand Nora’s fears. Her father is something else.

“How about you allow her to choose?”

No response.

“Do you have anyone that you think is a good fit for her?”

Me – I think.

“Uhm...no. No sir.”

“Pssh... I was hoping you would. At least, I can trust someone from you to a great extent. Please let me know when you do. I would need to have several meetings with him.”

What the fuck? *Well, I am here, sir; pick me.*

“Okay, sir,” I say.

He sighs, “Oh, that’s all. That is what has been giving me concern lately, and I wanted to share. Please keep me updated,” he says. “You know, she is like a sister to you if you look at it closely.”

Fuck! She is not my sister, neither is she like a sister to me, Mr. Bright. She is the girlfriend I have been trying to hide for almost a month.

I smile with no response before saying my farewell.

It is not going to be as easy as I thought.

Chapter Eleven

Steve

I must say that I was restless all night as I kept tossing about and, most importantly, thinking about what Mr. Bright said yesterday. I mean, I cannot fathom it.

Nora is twenty-four or twenty-five, I guess, and he still wants to pick a husband for her. What choice do I have here? I mean, I am finished.

But I can't let her go. I mean, it's not possible. After eventually finding someone I love, now I am told to select another man for her?

No, I can't. I just can't.

I would prefer to stay strong throughout and wait for his wrath. "I think it is time we talk," I say, texting Nora that I would be coming over to the café to discuss some business issues.

Well, as a cover for anyone who might be snooping around.

"Oh my," one of the staff from the café says as she sees me.

"He is here. He is here!"

I cringe internally, knowing that Nora hates that effect, but I am not responsible.

"Good morning Mr. Adams," she greets as she stands fixated.

"Relax," I order unconsciously. But instead, she is more rigid.

All the staff is present, but upon seeing me, they all freeze up.

What can I do? I ask myself.

I can't certainly allow them to stay tense like this and have Nora biting down on my neck.

"I guess he is here to inspect again," one of them says.

"What could we have done this time?" another asks.

I am about to act when the door to the café flings open, and the boss walks in.

One of Nora's staff collects her bag. And as soon Nora notices the way the café is so quiet, she reacts, immediately walking toward me. Reminding me of the way we were when she opened her business – how she couldn't stand me.

"Mr. Adams, I have told you several times to stop making my staff feel so uncomfortable," she states, trying to calm her anger.

I am not sure if she is putting up a show directly, but I like this. I give her a cocky smile, but she doesn't bulge.

"It's not my fault. I did try to put them at ease, but they were averse to it. Look," I tell her.

"Relax," I say to one of them. Nothing changes. "See what I am saying. She just froze. I mean, show me how you do it."

"I must say, for a man as influential as you, you sure lack some basic things."

"Ouch," I feign hurt.

"It's okay, guys. He's not here to persecute us. He is just returning something," she says, and instantly that air is eased.

"See," she says with a wide smile.

"That's magic," I tease as I walk to her office with her.

"So, tell me," she starts, "you are not exactly here to fuck me, are you?"

"Oh, I wish I was. I can right now. On this desk."

She lets out a low laugh.

"Stop that. Let's get down to business. Thank you for returning this. But what exactly is bugging you?"

"Your father," I say deadpan.

"Shit! What is he up to this time?"

"You are his girl and now have no right to date any fucking man he has not vetted."

"You've got to be kidding me. He is insane."

"If he was my father, I would say he is insane as well."

"You know, so what's the plan?"

"Well, there is more. He asked me to introduce him to anyone that you could date."

This time, she gives a sarcastic laugh, "My father must be kidding. Is he serious? For Christ's sake, I am not a little girl anymore."

"He doesn't think so."

"Shit," she cusses angrily.

We sit in silence for a few minutes before I decide it's time to take my leave.

"I'll leave you to think about your decision for now. Dinner

here by 6 p.m.? You can call your driver to come to get your car."

"Sure," she says with a smile before stealing a kiss.

"Later."

The day is not as bad as I envisaged. Of course, I visit other stores for a progress report, but I am able to make leeway with them.

No calls from the old man today, and I am glad.

What if he finds out that I have been seeing Nora? What is the worst that could happen?

Decide to cut partnership? It would be our loss.

I may be rich, but I also have things to lose too.

"Hey Nora, I'm outside," I say over the phone.

She comes and opens the door, not before carefully searching around.

"Is everything okay?" I ask.

"I'm not sure. I feel someone is stalking me. There's just a feeling," she says.

"Really," I say.

If it is true, I have to find a way to get rid of the person without any blood stain, but for tonight, I am out to enjoy an evening with this beauty.

"Talk first or dinner?" she asks.

"Dinner."

"I guessed as much. So how was today? I heard some

customers say you came to terrorize them in their space," she says with a laugh.

I join in on the laughter. "Just a call to order," I tell her, remembering the people I had threatened.

"How many?"

"About five or six, you know."

She laughs as she tells me how her day went. Her voice arouses me. I can't explain. But I allow her to talk with no interruptions.

"What?" she asks when she is done.

"Nothing. I just want you to know that no matter what this is all about, I will always love you, and I am willing to stand by your side."

She does not say anything. Instead, removes her hands from mine and gets up.

"Is anything wrong? Did I say anything wrong?"

"No, you didn't. I am just thinking. Will this ever work? It will be from my side. But we are talking about your business here. Your life, for me. Are you willing to take that risk, Steve? If my father finds out, it will not be easy."

"I am willing to take that risk for you. Plus, he is going to lose more if he decides to pull away," I say, causing her to laugh.

"I love you too," she says as she initiates a kiss.

With that, I feel like all my senses are suspended. Her kiss conveyed a lot - promises, assurance, love, and commitment.

"Thank you," I tell her as I lift her off the ground.

"Let's go to your house," she says with a wide smile.

"Your wish is my command."

She gets her bag from the table and pulls me by my hand.

"Are you that eager?"

No response.

"Keys, please," she pouts.

"You want to drive me? Oh hell yeah, I am liking this," I tell her, handing over the keys.

The ride to the house was faster than I imagined, but something is odd about it. A car kept following us and turning at every junction.

I know she sees it as well because as soon as we enter the house, she says, "Tonight is about us; let's enjoy it, please," before kissing me with all the strength she can muster.

Chapter Twelve

Steve

A lot of unusual things have been happening, and I am beginning to get unsettled myself.

I have sensed someone following us whenever I am with Nora, and it's even more unsettling for me.

As much as she thinks her father is behind it, she cannot go and confront him or ask for his help. But she can trust my influence to sort it out.

"Please sort this out," she tells me.

Now I'm here, in front of one of my men, and he is telling me he lost the guy that has been tailing us.

How is that possible?

I am fucking tempted to get him fired, but he is one of my best, and loyalty should be considered here.

"Leave," I command. "And ensure you get the job done."

"Hey, is everything okay?" Nora asks, walking in.

"Oh," I say exasperatedly as I give her a hug.

"No," I start. "These guys are not giving me what I want. The person who has been tracking us escaped."

"Shhh...calm down. I know I told you to do something about it. But if it's stressing you out, you just need to take a deep breath," she says, settling on my lap.

"So, what are you going to do about it?" I ask her.

"Wait for my father to explode, I guess. If he knows something, he is not saying it. So when he is ready, he'll call me. Plus, I have not been seeing much of him at home, so who knows what he is up to."

I laugh, "You don't cease to amaze me."

She laughs.

"I just popped in. It's lunchtime, and I brought some pastries," she says, opening the plates.

"Your favorite, and a new recipe. As usual, you are my first customer," she adds.

"Thank you," I say while kissing her.

"Do you know that your father has not called me for anything for almost a week? I mean, that is so unusual. We normally talk or see each other at least every two days," I say, still unable to get it off my mind.

"Oh, come on, we are not here to talk about my father and his behavior. Can we just have some fun for a while?"

"Yes, we can. But I just find it unsettling. What could be the problem? Business is still running fine, but he is not talking. Feels like he is keeping something from me."

She gets up and reaches for her bag, "It seems I am unwanted here. I will see you-"

"I'm sorry," I apologize. "No more business talk."

We spend the next thirty minutes together before she returns to work. And just as though someone is monitoring our

movement, I receive a text from Mr. Bright, who calls for a brief meeting at his house the next morning.

Why morning? Not evening? Nora will not be at home. What is up his sleeve? I ask myself as I allow different questions to run through my mind.

Another text comes in again that reads - strictly business between you and me.

What does this mean?

It has an underlying threat that I should not dare tell Nora, and for her sake, I adhere to it. I will inform her after everything has been sorted.

Whatever his judgment is.

The following day comes in a rush, and I am glad and, at the same time, unsettled.

The last time I ever felt this way was when I was trying to get my father's approval for a business idea I came up with. And I had vowed that no man would ever make me feel that way again.

But with Mr. Bright, I feel like I am about to be scolded.

I get to the house by 10 a.m. Nora has left for work as her car is not in sight.

"Hello, Steve," Mrs. Bright greets. "It has been a long time since I have seen you. He's in the study," she says, smiling.

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Mr. Bright," I greet as soon as I enter the study.

"Steve Adams," he says with a smile. "I guess you have been so busy that you forgot to pop in during the week."

I respond with a smile.

"So, how have you been, son?"

"I've been great, sir. Very good. Work has also been progressing. I visited most of the stores I have my investments in this week, and they are going well."

"Oh, that's great to hear," he says with a smile.

He still looks so unassuming.

"You know, you could have still popped in."

"Yes, yes. I could have still popped in."

"Any update about any of your acquaintances for Nora?" he asks, looking squarely into my eyes.

I am taken aback but quickly regain my composure.

That was a direct question.

"Any?" he asks again, pulling me from a momentary trance.

"Oh no," I state. "I didn't have much time to talk to any of them."

"Oh, you don't have to meet up with them. Do you? You could think over it now," he suggests with a bit of pressure.

"Okay, let's go. Who exactly? Come on, mention their names," he adds with more pressure.

"Steve," he calls with a more authoritative voice, "Who do you think would be a perfect fit for my daughter," he asks.

I'm not sure what comes over me, but I respond with force as well.

"I am not sure there is anyone in this town that would be a perfect fit for her."

"And do you think that justifies the reason why you should be kissing her?" he finally asks, pulling out a file from his drawer and showing me a picture of me kissing Nora.

"Fuck," I mutter.

"How did you get this picture?" I manage to ask.

"I had both of you followed, of course. I knew she was acting strange, and I hardly saw you anymore."

"Do you know that this is a breach of privacy and trust?"

"You seeing my daughter, after everything I have said, is also a breach of trust," he responds.

He has a point there, and I decide to think about my next statement.

"Mr. Bright," I start, unsure of how to allow the conversation to go.

"I trusted you with something by asking who would be suitable for Nora; instead, you go behind me and stab me, Steve."

I am short of words at this point.

"I love Nora."

"No, you don't. You can't. All this is because I asked for your help."

"For god's sake, Nora Bright is not a child, and neither am I. We are old enough to make certain decisions," I say, losing my cool.

How else should I tell him that?

He doesn't flinch. But the room is quiet for a few seconds.

"I don't give a shit about what you say right now or later. All I know is that you cannot have anything to do with my Nora," he says, walking off before turning to me.

"And if you dare do anything stupid behind my back, that is the end of our partnership. I will not mind losing everything I have gained. And if I look at it closely, you also have a lot to lose."

"Fuck!" I cuss.

"That's not all. If you don't decide to leave my daughter alone, I will make sure that I tear you apart. You don't have the right to mess with my family. No one does, not even a business partner. Leave her alone or face the consequences of crashing," he adds.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!" I shout. "Fucccccckkkkkkk."

What if we make an agreement?

I run to him before he enters his car, "What if—"

"There are no 'what ifs.' You know fully well that we don't mix business with pleasure, and more so if the pleasure involves a family," he says as he looks back at me.

It was one of the things he taught me about business when

we first started, but I did not know it was going to backfire on me like this.

Nora, for some reason that I don't yet know, drives in at that exact moment and quickly comes down to figure out what is happening.

He hands her the folder before saying, "End whatever is going on between you two; I trust you know what to do."

He enters the car and orders the driver to zoom off.

"What happened? What did he say to you? Are you okay?" she asks angrily.

"I am okay; what about you?"

"I am good. He better be prepared for war," she says before heading into the house.

Oh, this is fucking great!

Chapter Thirteen

Steve

All my life, I never thought that love would be an issue for me. And better yet, I never imagined it would threaten my business.

All I have ever done in these past few weeks is love, Nora. And I can't fathom why it is a problem.

"Nora! Nora!!" I call after her as she heads inside.

Why is she here? And why did she come at this time?

I quickly rush after her and grab her arm before she enters her room.

"Nora, are you okay?" I ask, a little concerned.

"I will be fine; I just need to clear my head," she says, but I don't believe it.

"Nora, look at me; everything will be alright."

"Are you sure? Because this has gone beyond trying to keep us apart, this is starting to affect your businesses. I can't stand in the middle of that," she says.

"Nora, what are you trying to say?"

"I don't know. Just allow me to clear my head. By the way, what is inside the envelope?" she asks as she begins to open it.

One of the pictures falls out before I can stop it.

"What is this? So, he had us followed. This is the height of

it," she says as she dumps the envelope in my hands and enters her room, locking the door behind her.

"Shit!!! How did we get to this point?" I mutter as I lean against the wall.

I didn't even know I was capable of loving a woman until I met Nora. And now that I have met her, I can't just let her go.

Knowing it is impossible for me to get anything done at work, I head home and begin to go through our businesses and partnership details.

On my way home, the thought crosses my mind, *Is she worth losing everything for?* And I answer immediately that she is worth *more* than that.

From the documents in front of me, breaking this partnership will affect both of us a great deal.

I am a billionaire and might not have to worry about some things, but what about Nora's father?

From what he said earlier, he is willing to forgo everything just for me to end things with his daughter. And if I remember clearly, when she first came around, he was bothered about me building a good relationship with her, seeing as she is his only child.

I just wish he could tell me what the problem is, even though Nora already explained a few things to me.

I need a plan to convince him. If I promise never to hurt his

daughter, will it make a difference?

If I put my life on the line, will it work?

There are a thousand ways things could play out, but none of it includes leaving Nora.

If I leave her, how will either of us survive? I will come around and run into her each time I go to their house.

I will go to her shop to get coffee and the pastries, which I have fallen in love with since the moment I tasted them, or I will be carrying out my duties and coming face to face with her.

The only plan I can come up with after a full day of thinking is to call her father and explain things to him. Maybe if I apologize for going behind his back to date his daughter, he will not be so against the two of us together.

I pick up my phone and call Mr. Bright, hoping he will pick up, and he does.

“Mr. Bright, there is something I need to discuss with you,” I begin to say, “From the moment we met, I know you have taken me in like a son, and you have taught me everything you know. I never for once imagined that we would have to split up. I am sorry for breaking your trust and going behind you to date your daughter, especially after entrusting me with that task.”

“Good, I am glad you realize your mistake. This is one of the

many reasons why I chose to work with you.”

“Yes, sir, I know you are very protective of Nora, and I would love to relieve you of that duty, which will make me her sole protector. As you know, I have different means within my power to ensure that she is safe and well taken care of,” I say and continue before he can interrupt.

“I understand your fears about what might happen to us and our partnership if things don’t end well between us, and I want to promise on my life that things won’t go south. And I can give up anything to ensure this. And if you look at this situation from another angle, you will see that splitting us will bring all the things you fear into fulfillment. Please give us a chance,” I beg, and he is quiet for a long time.

“Mr. Bright, are you there?” I ask.

“Then maybe we should consider breaking our partnership,” he says in a soft voice and ends the call.

“Shit!!! Why is this man so adamant?” I shout to myself as his words replay in my head.

But the more I think about it, the more I realize that my words had a kind of effect on him. He didn’t sound as harsh as he did in the morning, and I wish to know if he had any other reservations about me dating his daughter apart from the possible damage it could cause to some of the people he loves the most and the businesses at large.

Now that my plan has failed, I need another plan to save my

reputation in the town. The people already see me as someone that should be feared.

Damage to my reputation will hurt a lot, depending on the way Mr. Bright decides to play his cards.

He can use the fact that I took advantage of his daughter or that I broke his trust by seeing her when I was supposed to find a spouse for her.

Whatever card he chooses, I am doomed. I wish I could speak to Nora to know what she is thinking, but I need to give her space.

“Or maybe we should elope?” I say aloud.

At least that way, business would continue, and whatever people say about me would not have any effect. It will just be her café that would suffer possibly. And if her workers trust her, they will keep the business alive.

I locate the list of all the people affiliated with me, and I begin to look through their files to find out the kind of agreement we still have.

I already know that I have some enemies, especially when it comes to the people I cut off when I notice a lack of progress in their businesses.

From everything that is set before me, the hit will be hard, and the persecution will be great.

“Steve, are you ready to take this on alone?” I ask myself out loud so the predicament of my situation sinks into my mind.

“Yes!!! Fuck yes!!!!” I screamed to myself, “I will do anything to keep her by my side, no matter what anyone says.”

Chapter Fourteen

Nora

Yesterday was certainly not one of my best days. Imagine waking up, and all you can remember is your father threatening the one person you love.

Yes, I am talking about myself. Steve and me.

I was surprised to see the lengths my father went to when it came to who I was seeing.

From the pictures in the envelope, he probably hired a professional.

I honestly thought the man was bluffing when he warned me about seeing Steve and finding out about the confrontation was by chance because I doubt Steve would have told me the whole story. It was my mom who told me how they were having it back and forth. Even she was clueless about the whole matter.

I remember I went over to Steve's office that morning as a surprise, only to be told by his secretary that he had a meeting, and my brain did the rest.

The only meeting he could have had that his secretary does not know the details of must be one in town, and most likely with my father. And if that was not enough, they had another argument yesterday that even left me more confused and scared. I am not sure what to make of it.

It was the first time seeing my father so pissed over a matter. The look on Steve's face, too, left me baffled. Ever since I have known him, he has always proven to be capable of handling everything. But this seems like a difficult one for him. And I think it is breaking him.

After their first confrontation, when my father showed him the picture, we still spoke and saw each other a few times. But since yesterday, we haven't even said anything. It is seriously killing me, and I just want my father's consent for our relationship.

Yesterday on its own, was another banter, but this time, I overheard their conversation over the phone.

I cannot tell why this matter is such a big deal for my father. Particularly since I am not related to Steve by blood, but he kept insinuating that. Maybe I have to ask my mother what he means by that.

"Honey, are you awake?" my mother calls as she knocks on the door. "I am coming in."

"Good morning," I greet her.

"Did you sleep well?" she asks.

"No. Should I have?"

"Depends. I was restless all night as well. What do you hope to do with this situation? Your father, Steve, your life, it is all so complicated right now."

I sigh. "What do you think I should do? What do you strongly

think I should do? What seems like the best thing? Or should I follow my heart?"

"Honey, whatever you choose, I guess I would just have to support you. But in my opinion, go for what is in your heart. That might not look like the wisest or easiest of things to do, but at least you would live fulfilled, with no regrets."

"What about the consequences?"

"There will always be a way out," she says.

Trying to appease my father is not going to turn out well. So the best choice I can make is to talk with Steve about what we should do. So I decide to call him.

"Hey, how was your night?" I ask as soon as he answers.

"Okay," he replies shortly.

"Are you at home? I think we should talk."

"Yes."

"Okay, I'll see you then," I say before thinking about the things I need to do before I get there.

I will have to make some pastries for him before heading over to his place because there is a high chance that he has no plans for breakfast.

And boy, I am correct. He certainly was not planning to eat anything.

The atmosphere feels a bit stiff as I sit on a cushion, but we need to talk. That is why I am here.

"So, what do you think is going to happen now?" I ask.

“Nothing. We keep on moving; we just have to be cautious. What were you thinking? That I would discard you because of the confrontations I have had with your father. Come on, you are worth more than that,” he says, running his hands over my lap.

Oh fuck, I have missed this.

“You know your business is involved here. I do not want you to regret whatever choice you make now, Steve.”

“I am thinking correctly, Nora. I should be the one concerned here, not you. Your father might still bulge, don't worry,” he says before taking possession of my lips.

I shouldn't be doing this, but fuck, I have missed the feel of his body on mine. His gentility and his scent. Oh. I moan.

I spend my night in his house, knowing full well that it will be my last because I am trying to save both my father and Steve from making costly mistakes. But right now, I have to be the bolder one to take a step.

I step into the house, and immediately I hear my father's voice.

"Nora," my father calls.

I pause.

There was no point pretending or lying to him about where I was coming from. I also know he is aware of my movement.

“Let's have a discussion.”

He sighs before commencing, “I don't know what you are

playing at or what you both are playing at, but I am trying to play safe. I do –“

I interrupt him. “You do not have to threaten any of us anymore. I would stop seeing him. I hope that satisfies you.”

“It benefits both of us.”

“This is not you, Dad. I do not know what happened, but whoever you are, I do not like you,” I add.

“It is all for our benefit. You will understand at the end.”

I am boiling inside, and I just have to let loose.

“Now that you are glad we will no longer be together. How do you think it would be when he comes over for some meetings, or we bump into each other?”

No response.

“I figured. Just to make things clear. Now that you have gained your partner back, you just lost your only daughter.”

My father stands, angry at the word, and starts, “Are you threa_”

“No. I am not threatening you, Mr. Bright. It is a matter of fact,” I say as I allow the tears to flow down my cheeks.

He flinches. The only time I call him Mr. Bright is when I am pissed, and right now - I am.

I am not sure of the number of minutes I sob, but I am interrupted when Steve calls me.

“What is going on?” he asked. “I just received a text from your dad that it was the right decision. What did you do, Nora?”

No response.

“Fuck, Nora. I told you we would sort this out. I told you that, Nora. Why the hell did you do the opposite?”

I start sobbing again, “I did what was best, Steve. You losing your business is going to kill you. I can’t let that happen.”

“No, that is not what is best for me. It was not about you just making a decision, Nora. It is; it was meant to be our decision. Fuck!” he says, hanging up.

Chapter Fifteen

Mr. Bright

I am not making the wrong choice by separating Nora and Steve; I think convincing myself.

But for the last three weeks, the house has been awfully quiet, and it is so unusual. Nora tries to leave for work as early as she can so she doesn't bump into me, and the few times I have tried to call Steve for a meeting, he was always in a meeting already.

They are just behaving like babies; give it more time, and they will forget about each other. I cannot have them trying to guilt-trip me.

My wife has tried to talk me into doing something, but I ignored her and merely told her they are trying to act funny, and it is true. I have seen countless people pick up even after breakups, so this cannot be the best. I think it is time I get a man for Nora, at least a distraction for her.

It is 6:30 a.m., and I am already hearing movements from Nora's room. Does she think she can escape today? But no way, I am faster than her.

I waylay her down the stairs. Feels like I haven't seen her in months, and she looks lean.

She sees me and stops in her tracks. "Good morning"

"Honey, how was night?"

“Oh, just the same old one,” she says hurriedly as she shouts ‘bye’ and leaves the house.

What just happened? I ask myself, a bit hurt by that. She did not even eat or make any attempt to make pastries.

I make myself busy that day but start observing her more closely. All she does now is mope around in the house. She is not bubbly as she was in the previous months, and I am beginning to get bothered.

Are a month and some days not enough for her to mourn his loss? For the weeks that I have observed her, she seems to have lost her zeal to do anything or even try out new recipes. And the weirdest thing, she allows the driver to drive her to work regularly, something she hated before.

She does not talk with me, only her mother, and it does not last for more than five minutes. I have to intervene here, I say as soon as I notice that she left her mother in the kitchen.

“Nora,” I call.

She doesn't reply but comes to meet me.

“You called,” she says, not rudely but deadpan. More like, I am here; say what you want to say and fuck off.

Oh my, Nora, I want to say, but I cannot lose control here.

“What is going on with you? I heard you haven't been eating. Do you eat out?” I ask.

No response.

“Nora, talk to me; what is going on?”

“Nothing,” she says adamantly. “I will be leaving now.”

“Wait right there,” I order, and she stops in her tracks. “What is wrong with you? And I demand an answer.”

“Fuck it,” she snaps. “You want to know what is wrong? It is because I am no longer a baby that you can control, and I can make my choices. Now since you have said that I should not be with someone that I love, then what else do you want? I have done what you asked for, and I would like to be alone. Is that too much for me to ask?” she adds before retrieving her keys and leaving the house.

I look at my wife; she does not say anything but retreats to the kitchen to continue her work. I do not need attitude from someone else in the house.

I retreat to my study quietly as I ponder on what to do next.

“What is the status report?” I ask my boys that I sent to spy on Steve.

“Negative, sir. He mopes all over, and all he does is get engrossed with work, and they do not end up being perfect. He is always indoors and goes to work just to approve some work. I fear that if nothing is done, he might end up approving the wrong deals that would cost you money because he rarely reads what he signs,” he says.

“Okay. Enough. No need to watch him again,” I say.

I am surprised by his response. I was hoping that Steve would have visited all the clubs and gotten any woman he wants since

he has not been around, but shit, I am wrong. Still, this does not justify anything. It can all be a façade; a billionaire like him can be full of shit.

We will see; I might soon need to call them to order.

The next week came with my wife being awfully quiet as well.

And it was killing me.

I feel I am making so little progress in my business nowadays, and with every support system, I have decided to be away on leave.

The door opens, and my wife comes in; she looks at me before acknowledging my presence with a smile.

“Honey, what is the matter?” I go to her.

“Nothing; what do you think is the matter?”

“You have been quiet for some days, and it is killing me. Nora is not talking to me, and I am lost. Did I do something wrong?”

She gives me a cold glare making it clear to me that I did something wrong.

She pulls me to the bed and sits me down.

“Okay. So, I am going to talk about this now. I think you are being petty and unfair with the relationship between Nora and Steve. If all this you are doing is because of business, then I disagree with you a lot. Your daughter and business partner’s happiness is involved here, and you’re still proving to me strong-headed?” she shakes her head. “That was not the man I married. Nora has not been herself for almost two or three

months, and all you are still concerned about is some business that she might not take from you?”

She sighs, holds my hands, and says, “If my father never allowed you to marry me, how would you have felt? Instead, he gave his blessings while it was painful. I think you are too hard on them. Give them a chance to love themselves, make mistakes and grow, and if they don’t end up being together, so be it. That’s fate,” she says, kissing me on the lips before attending to her business.

She didn’t have to say much. That was enough for all my defenses to crumble.

As much as I love both Nora and Steve, I should not make such decisions for them. I should not deny them ‘love.’

“We need to do something about that, then,” I tell her.

She gives me one of her heartfelt smiles that I have missed,

“It’s over to you.”

And I have just the perfect plan.

Chapter Sixteen

Nora

It has been almost three months, and Steve and I have tried as much as possible to avoid bumping into each other. Not that we didn't see each other from afar, but instead, we went our separate ways.

I can't tell if he is doing okay or not, but I am not doing okay. For how long, I am not sure. But I miss him with every fiber of my being.

I do not know what came over my father, but he has lost me. I lost it when he asked me what was going on with me. Is he blind? Wasn't he the originator of everything? The more I think about it, the better it is.

I look at my café once more, thinking if I should call it a day or I should sleep over. I agree.

"Who is sending me a message at this time of the day?" I ask myself as I pick up my phone.

"Dad?"

Hey honey, let's meet at Randy's cafe at 8 p.m., the message read.

"Why?" I ask myself.

The time reads 6:30 p.m., and I ponder on it for a while before agreeing to go. I can as well pretend that I was not with my phone.

I spent the next hour trying to make something light to eat before my alarm for 7:30 p.m. goes off.

"Here we go," I say. Thankfully I didn't have to order a taxi since I drove myself to work.

The drive is roughly fifteen minutes, and in no time, I am seated at a corner after ordering a smoothie.

I smell a familiar scent nearby but immediately discard the thought. There is no reason why he should be here, but alas, I am mistaken.

"Hi," I hear that soothing voice.

I don't look up, thinking that I am just hallucinating, but then the voice rings again.

"Nora."

"Steve," I say without looking up.

I know he is the one. I have those goosebumps whenever he is around.

"Hi," I say with a genuine smile, finally looking up.

"Hey," he replies with a smile as he joins me.

"How have you been?" I ask him.

"I've missed you," he says unapologetically.

I sigh, blushing hard. "Same here. I am sorry about the last time. I have not had the chance to apologize to you since."

"It's okay. I know you did it for me."

"You don't look good," I say.

He chuckles, "I could say the same thing about you. But

honestly, how have you been?" he asks, running his hands on mine.

"I have missed you," I tell him. "Do you have a meeting here?"

"No, I'm meant to meet up with my dad," I say, looking around. "And I don't know what is delaying him. If he's not here in the next ten to fifteen minutes, I'm off. Why are you here?"

"I got a message from a business partner for an impromptu meeting," he says.

That sounds tricky, I say in my head.

Steve's phone beeps, and he checks it before saying -

"Oh, he just canceled. Says he can't make it. I guess that leaves us together," he says with a wide smile.

We get talking and order food for the night until I finally speak up.

"It's time to go," I say. "But since I drank, I guess I can't go home tonight. Let's go to your place, Steve," I tell him.

He looks at me with no response.

"I'm serious. I am still sane. Let's go over to your place. I can drive by the way, but let's go to your place."

No response.

"Fine, if you want to have it that way, then so be it," I say angrily, picking up my purse.

"Hold on. I'm not saying I don't want you there. But-"

I scoff, "My father? He can fuck himself. I don't give a damn

about what he says again. As far as I am concerned, he lost that right months ago."

He smiles, "That's perfect," he says before planting a kiss on my lips.

"Hold on, let's get home first."

And for the first time, we walk out of the restaurant holding hands. I watch people stare at us, but right now, I am done trying to be a good child.

At the parking lot, I meet one of my father's men. I look him squarely in the eyes before walking off.

He dares not to stop me.

Fuck him. I don't give a damn about what anyone thinks. I am going to be with Steve Adams, and if they don't like that, it's their loss.

Steve parks his car at his usual spot. He does not even allow us to get in before he loses control.

"I have missed this. I have been dying to touch you since I saw you tonight," he says in between the kisses.

I moan as I allow him to take control. He knows how to make a woman feel good, and I am content with whatever tactics he has.

"I want all of you," I tell him with heaving breaths. "Whatever you are doing, don't stop."

I can't explain to you how my night felt, but with the smile and aroma feeling the room, it was a great night for Steve and me.

I get dressed in the shirt he had on yesterday and joined him in the kitchen.

"Finally awake?" he says with the most beautiful smile I have ever seen.

He laughs before adding, "Enough with the staring."

But I can't bring myself to stop. I have seen him with no shirt several times, but today feels like the first time.

I walk to him, wrapping him from behind as I feel his abs. They are real.

Oh shit, I want this guy. I need this guy.

A knock on the door distracts us.

"Are you expecting anyone?" I ask as he goes ahead to open the door.

"Oh, Mr. Bright," he says loud enough for me to hear.

And maybe hide. But I'm done hiding.

I join them in the living room, "Mr. Bright," I greet, resting on the wall.

My father just looks at me and smiles.

"Let's talk," he says rather casually and takes his seat.

I sit side by side, holding hands with Steve. Judging from my father's look, I can't tell if he is uncomfortable or not, but he ignores it.

"Ehmm...Mr. Bright," I start again.

"Nora. I am your father," he corrects.

I look at Steve before continuing, "I am...no, we are not sure why you are here. But we have come to an agreement that no matter what you choose to do, we are going to stand by each other's side together and marry."

"Even if it means me losing my business or going bankrupt," Steve adds.

I was not expecting that, so I mouth a "thank you."

My father looks at us before heaving a sigh, "I am not here to fight you guys. I am here to support the relationship."

"WHAT?!!" I exclaim. Not sure if I hear correctly.

"Yes. I realized that there is no point in separating you two. I can't afford to lose my daughter and a great business partner, all in the name of being a father figure. And judging from how you both have been in the past months, you have been unproductive. So, I guess I have no choice," he says with a wide smile.

None of us talk for a few seconds.

"You think I am joking," my father laughs. "I was the one who arranged the meeting you had yesterday because I knew you had been avoiding each other. I called Brent and told him about the plan to send you a message to meet her, and I sent a message to Nora. And trust me; you guys didn't disappoint."

Still no response.

"Okay," he gets up since we decided not to say anything. "If you both choose to ignore me today, that's fine."

No response.

He is about to shut the door behind him when I hug him from behind.

"Thank you," I say before letting him go.

Steve was speechless all through, but I know that deep down, he is glad, just short of words. As soon as I enter the room, he lifts me and spins me around.

"I love you. I love you. I love you. Will you marry me?" he asks, getting down on one knee, with a ring.

How on earth did he get the ring? Plus, the ring is beautiful.

"How did you-"

"That's another story. Will you marry me, Nora Bright?"

"Definitely," I say between tears as he puts the ring in its right position and kisses the hell out of me.

Finally, I get to live happily ever after in life.

THE END