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Chapter 81 - 90

I didn't just have a bodyguard. I too have a babysitter. Not that I complain, it's just that the man seated next to me inside the cab was unbelievable not suited for the job, I'm not referring to his ability but I'm basing my opinion on his appearance. Not all men, especially as gorgeous as the demigod seated next to me could afford to fulfill the job Alexander Crawford hired him for...unless he was left with no option. I wonder if father forced him to take the job at gunpoint.

"Did I pass your standards, Madam?" He whispered in a husky tone that made my throat dry.

Warmth spread on my cheeks. Luckily the backseat was dimly lit, the dark shadow concealed the startled look on my face. I must have been too wrapped up in my thoughts that I didn't easily spot him. He was intently watching me the same way my eyes curiously glided to his remarkable facial features.

I have to blink several times to recover my wavering composure. It took me an excessive amount of effort to find my voice and when I did, I said the first thing that came to mind. "Don't worry Sir, you're overqualified."

Did I actually say that? Mortified, I bit my lower lip. A good thing to say to embarrass myself. But wasn't I telling the truth?

By the faint glow from the lights casually permeating the transparent glass window of the cab, I saw a faint smile stretched from his lips, it was a sexy sultry smile a professional photographer would kill to take a shot. I caught a flicker of amusement dancing on his exquisite blue eyes before he replied. "Thank you, Madam." He said humbly. There's a slight trace of humor on his tone.

I escaped his deeply penetrating eyes by looking away. He said nothing more and focused his attention on Faith Vienne who was peacefully snuggled into

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his arms. He adjusted the white cloth wrapped upon her fragile body and lifted gently brushed his hand on her head.

Silence hung between us but it was not an awkward kind of silence, it was a stillness that lifts the spirit and overwhelms the heart. I could close my eyes and feel nothing but a sense of serenity. Having him sit next to me seems the most natural thing in the world as if the only place I belong was next to his arms.

Pitch black darkness greeted my eyes after turning towards the window. Rain continues to pour heavily. Lightning casually danced from the sky followed by a loud clap of thunder. The gloomy weather no longer has its depressing effect on me. Perhaps the man sitting next to me was the reason why.

I leaned on the soft cushion of the seat and pressed my eyes from sleepiness and exhaustion. A warm, soft bed would be a great idea. A few more minutes and I would be able to rest comfortably inside a hotel room.

"Do you think Madam Stella would be fine?" It was Carter. I opened my eyes and glanced up at him in surprise. There was a slight tinge of worry in his tone, not that I could blame him, Stella nearly suffered a car accident an hour ago. By god's grace, her personal driver managed to step on the brakes before a drunk truck driver carelessly dragged their car off the bridge. There was a car collision but Madam Stella was lucky to be unharmed. Unfortunately, others weren't as lucky as her.

"I'm not sure but I pray she will be fine," I said softly and took a deep intake of breath. The memory of my earlier conversation with Madam Stella sent a shiver down my spine. I couldn't help but wonder what could possibly happen if the near-death experience happened on our way to her estates while Faith Vienne was inside the car. Dear Lord. I couldn't bear if something bad would happen to my daughter.

Madam Stella sounded frantic while she was talking to me on the phone. Her usually calm tone trembles. I was half expecting she would fall into hysterics but she miraculously kept her composure. She even said she would still

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proceed to the airport but she would be delayed for an hour due to the traffic and storm which was slowing the car down.

"No Madam Stella! I advise you to go back home. We will stay in a hotel for the night." I firmly said when she still insisted on fetching me at the airport. I fell into a long encouraging litany hoping she would agree. Unfortunately, she's hard-headed as I am and argued she would come. It was when I told her that Alexander would be worried that altered her decision. Her tone softened and before I knew it, she already agreed. Having Madam Stella agree to my advice was such a huge relief.

"You're worried." He observed. Surprise that he even noticed,? my gaze shifted to his.

"Am I that obvious?" I asked dubiously and scrunched my eyebrows in confusion as I peered at him closely.

"No, perhaps I'm just intuitive."? He said seriously which made me smile.

The cab finally pulled into a stop in front of a three-story hotel. The rain didn't stop pouring even after we reached our destination.? A Hotel Attendant opened the door and greeted us with a good evening. I smiled at the man in return. Carter on the other hand just nodded his head.

Heads turned as we made a beeline straight into the front desk. Carter was tall, well-built, muscular, and above all sexually appealing. His good qualities were more than enough reason to attract too much attention. By the time we reached the front desk, a dozen eyes were feasted on him as if he was a piece of a tasty morsel.

Carter was holding Faith Vienne into his left arm while he pulled the large suitcase on the other.? A large black backpack containing his clothes and personal necessities slung on his back. He was an epitome of grace and muscular strength. Until that moment I never knew that grace could be used to describe a man. But it was what came into my mind as I described him.

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"Good evening Ma'am and Sir, welcome to El Greco Hotel." The receptionists greeted, she blinked several times when her gaze landed on Carter, and then she blushed. "How may I help you?" She added giving me her sweetest smile.

"We need a room please," Carter said.

The receptionist stared at Faith Vienne, her face softened affectionately. "Oh, yes of course. We offered various hotel rooms of your taste. Unfortunately, we have a lot of guests tonight and that makes almost all our available rooms occupied." The receptionist paused, clasped her hands in front of her and her smile widened before she continues, "But you're lucky, the honeymoon suite is available, I guess that would do—"

"A what?" My hands nervously grasped the edge of the counter. Butterflies began to churn my stomach. My wide bulging eyes never leave her face.

"A honeymoon suite Ma'am." She repeated, this time a naughty smile tugged at the corner of her lips, her cheeks turned bright red. She even winked at me meaningfully.

"This is a misun—" Before I could explain further Carter cut my words off. "We will take the room." He said softly and cast me a warning glance enough to silence me. "Right honey." He added threateningly.

"Yeah, of course, honey," I replied sweetly, hooked my hand into his arms, and stomped on his feet hard just as the receptionist turned to retrieve our room key.

"Ouch!" Carter winced and shot me a pained look.

"What have you done, Carter!" I muttered, gritting my teeth. If looks could kill, he already burned into ashes.

"Get us a room, I think." He was sarcastic, his eyebrows scrunched in annoyance. For the first time, I saw how tired he looked. His eyes were half-open as he looked at me as if anytime soon he would fall into a deep

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slumber. "I'm not in the mood to search for another Hotel under a raging storm. If you want to go then you're free to leave."

I know how to accept defeat when I know I have no chance of winning. That's exactly what I'm trying to do as I followed behind him like a tail after the receptionist handed him the key. I hate to admit it but Carter was right it was raining so hard and we have no other option but to share the available room.

We entered the elevator and the door closed. Moments later, it opened to the second floor of the Hotel. We moved down the hallway in silence. His feet made no sound against the floor. He was moving fast and I had to half-run to match his long strides.

Finally, when I thought we would be walking down the endless hallway forever, he pulled into a stop.

Carter checked the room number attached to the key. After confirming he got the right door, he inserts the key into the door and pushed it open.

Chapter 82

You know you're in love

when you can't fall asleep

because reality is finally better

than your dreams.

— Dr. Seuss —

The honeymoon suite was large and spacious, the red and pink interior design set to establish a soft calming effect to guests has the opposite effect on my nerves. I found myself freaked out and uneasy. My pulse wild and jittery as I

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took a reluctant step further inside the room. I swallowed hard when my gaze landed on the fancy, canopied bed frowning at how small it was, wondering how a man with Carter's size could possibly fit in it. It was called a honeymoon bed for a reason, it was designed to be a bit small to keep lovers snuggled to each other's arms. Perhaps I could encourage Carter to sleep on the floor but I wonder if he would surrender to my wiles easily.? I wonder if social distancing would be a smart idea.

Carter moved closer. The size of the room seems to have shrunk and the walls constricted. I became totally aware of his presence as he inched closer until his arms brushed mine. "You okay?" He inquired, frowning. His observant eyes skimming on my flushed cheeks and startled eyes.

"Yes, of course." I lied avoiding his eyes. He was unconvinced but he made no comment. Instead, he moved to the bed and settled Faith Vienne on top. He unsling his backpack and let it drop to the floor beside my large suitcase. He breathed a sigh and untied his shoes before removing them. He sprawled on the bed with arms pillowed behind his head. He lay unmoving for so long that I wondered if he had fallen asleep. He must have been too tired.

Embarrassed to find myself looking at his feet I tried to turn my gaze away but couldn't. I never took considerable interest to a man's feet before and yet I found myself watching his feet with keen interest while using the word 'sexy' to describe them. I never knew sexy could be used to describe feet not until this moment.

I shook my head. Telling myself Carter would melt soon If I kept looking at him like this. Finally I tore my gaze off him and slid the backpack which seemed to grow heavier each minute down my shoulders. I

lowered the backpack on the foot of the bed. It dropped to the floor with a soft thud. My gaze landed back to Carter, his eyes remained close. Long, enviable eyelashes draped the skin under his eyes. His face was too close to Faith Vienne and I took the liberty to indulge myself by watching them.

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It was cold inside the room but I felt my heart warmed up. If only I could hire Carter to become my husband so Faith Vienne would have a father, I would. The idea was insane and I know it couldn't possibly happen. I still have propriety with me. One doesn't hire a husband unless of course, if one loses her mind.

"Are you hungry?"

I flinched at the sound of his voice. When my gaze shifted to his, he was looking at me with sleepy eyes. I wonder how he managed to still look good in that state. As if on cue, I heard a rumble. It took me a minute to realize the sound was coming from inside my stomach. "I think I am." I replied, embarrassed. I was half hoping he didn't hear the unattractive sound from my rumbling stomach.

"Obviously." He replied, amused, making me roll my eyes heavenward. So he heard. Too late to wish he hadn't.

He carefully climbed out of the bed and moved towards my direction. Panic rose inside me and at the same time butterflies began to flutter from inside my stomach. He continued to move closer and I found myself making a retrieving step backward from alarm. The round wooden table touched my back restricting my movements. It was a dead end and there's no escaping. Carter was inching closer and closer until he was alarmingly close to mine that my nose almost touched his broad chest.

"Carter?" I choked in panic. His musky perfume combined with the enchanting smell of his body invaded my nostrils. I breathed it in and found myself drowning at the addicted scent of his sweet natural scent. He was so tall that I barely his shoulders, my head fell just below his armpits. It took him a bit of effort to bow his head down so he could look at me.

He didn't respond. He continued to stare at me with his deeply penetrating eyes. I would bribe anything just to read his thoughts. I sucked in a breath when his hands moved to the table behind me. I found myself imprisoned by a pair of strong muscular arms. If he would take advantage of me tonight I

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would be helpless to fight for my life. But the thought didn't scare me at all, instead it sent shivering excitement down my spine. A part of me trusts him. I know I ought to. I believe he wouldn't do anything to harm me.

"What do you want to eat?"

Are you on the menu? I cleared my throat and banished? ideas running wild inside my thoughts. "Anything would be fine." I replied rather calmly, swallowing hard from the disturbing heat from his body.

"Well then I must go downstairs and order some food. I'm famished." He straightened. His arms fell into his side. I let go the breath I didn't know I was holding when he moved towards the bed to put slippers on his bare feet. He cast Faith Vienne a quick glance and his face softened. He then scurried to the door and closed it behind him.

Jeez. I wonder what just happened. My heart didn't calm down even after he's gone. Probably it would take me a little longer before I could regain my composure. I manage to reach the bed the bed using my slightly trembling legs. I sat there on the edge careful not to wake up Faith and waited for Carter to return. At this point the growling inside my stomach intensified.

I didn't wait long before Carter returned. He looked jubilant. A wide smile was stretched on his lips. I noticed it was the first time I saw him this lively. Gone was the trace of exhaustion I saw looming beneath his sleepy eyes. He appeared to recover his strength in such a short few minutes he was out.

"Our order is on the way Madam." He said cheerfully as he moved to arrange the chair around the round table.

Few minutes later there was a soft knock on the door. Carter opened the door to let the uniformed attendant in and pushed the food trolley until it reached the round table. Carter didn't move as he watched the attendant moved.? His eyes are keen and sharp and it reminds me of a strict supervisor eyeing a worker from under her department.

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The attendant appeared uncomfortable but he managed to fulfill his task well without spilling anything on the table. When he finished unloading the dishes on top he hurriedly moved to the door to escape, almost tripping on his way out.

"You don't need to terrorize the poor attendant, Carter." I told him in a reprimanding tone as I walked towards the table and occupied the seat he pulled for me.

"Sorry, just force of habit. I can't help it." He replied, shrugging his shoulders. He didn't sound apologetic.

I cast the attendant a quick glance to make sure Faith Vienne didn't awaken. When I was sure she was still safely asleep on the bed, my wide inquiring gaze averted to Carter. "So you worked in a Hotel before?" I asked pretending I wasn't interested.

"Sort of." He replied plainly. It was obvious he was uncomfortable with the topic. I didn't force the conversation to continue. Instead I poured my attention on the foods on top of the table. The mouth watering scent of food permeated my nostrils.

"Chop Suey!" My eyes widened in surprise. When I looked at him there was a smug smile on his lips. How did he know that it's my favorite. This man never ceases to amaze me.

We continue to eat in silence. I casually shot the attendant quick glances

to make sure Faith Vienne didn't fall off the bed. And from time to time, I stole glances from Carter who didn't appear to notice. He was too focused on his food. When I finished eating, I stretched my feet and caressed my full stomach contentedly.

Carter appeared to be done eating too. He leaned on his chair. Perspiration formed on his temples. "I'll call the front desk for a staff to bus out the plates." Carter said and moved to the night table where the telephone is

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located on top. Hwe dialed the number to the Front Desk and when he was done, he put the receiver down, and he walk towards me.

Chapter 83

The Hotel staff pushed the trolley with him until he reached the door and gently closed it behind him. The room was once more engulfed in silence while Carter sat on the chair opposite me, arms crossed beneath his chest, and lost in his thoughts. I wonder what he was thinking but whatever it is, he appeared to be content.

I vacated my seat and moved towards the flat tv screen and fumbled for the remote control. I could feel the weight of his stare as he followed my movement. I pretended not to notice he was looking at me and fumbled for the remote control beside the flat tv screen.

It was late in the night and there was no interesting show except late-night news and sports replays. After trying to find the right channel I finally gave up and turned the television off, and walk towards the bed without the slightest sound of footsteps.

My weight sunk on the soft cushion and my eyes tenderly landed on the sleeping angel who stirred but didn't open her eyes by the slight movement I created. I'm a bit sleepy but I wonder if I could get some sleep tonight especially that we aren't alone. Aside from that, Faith Vienne wakes up at unusual hours and I need to watch over her.

The slight flicker of moment tore my gaze away from Faith. When I looked up, Carter had abandoned his seat to take his shirt off. He hung his shirt on top of the chair. Beneath the chair, his denim jacket was folded neatly.

His back was turned towards me giving me the perfect view of his wide, muscular shoulders. My eyes widened. My throat has gone dry. I swallowed hard when my eyes sinfully moved from his broad muscular shoulders down

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to the sexy dimples of his lower back. But it was not his nakedness which shocked me but it was the tattoo of a black phoenix trailing behind his back.

The deep scar on his back was no longer visible. It even appeared as if it didn't exist anymore. The phoenix tattoo did the perfect job to hid the slight imperfection of the scar. No one would even notice the marred skin behind the beautiful black tattoo.

What's even more shocking was the name PHOENIX written in bold capital letters. It's just a strange coincidence. He just put the Phoenix word since it was the mythical bird's name, nothing more and nothing less. I bit my lower while discarding the disappointment welling inside me.

A logical part of me suggests I should look away before it's too late but I could not find the courage to do so. I was drawn to him like a piece of magnet. If looking at him is a sin, I'm willing to pay the price. And so I keep looking at his tattoo as if it would vanish anytime soon.

"I'm sorry, I hope you don't mind." He said to capture my attention. He didn't even move.

"Of course I don't," I respond, my voice sounded shaky.

"You probably dislike men with tattoos." His tone was so soft that I barely missed his meaning. When I didn't respond he shrugged his shoulders and moved to the bathroom.

"No," I muttered, watching him walk away. By the sound of my voice, he stopped and I took the opportunity to tell him the truth. "It's beautiful, Carter," I added. I'm not sugarcoating my words. The phoenix tattoo was breathtakingly beautiful. It perfectly matched his fierce personality.

When he whirled in my direction and crossed the short distance between us

The thump inside my chest resounded in my ears. Before I knew it, his large hands framed my face. His expression softened.

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"Say it again Beatrix." He murmured, his eyes burned brightly.

Carter's face was so close to my face that one wrong move and his parted lips would touch mine. I didn't pull away, instead, I found myself staring into the depths of a beautiful blue ocean. Warmth seeped through the palms cupping my cheeks. It took me an extraordinary amount of self-control not to close my eyes and savor the exciting thrill his nearness extracted to my senses.

"It's beautiful Carter." My response was soft and hoarse, breaking the last of his self-control. He groaned and crossed the tiny distance between us.

Wah wah! The soft cries from the bed shattered the moment before his lips could touch mine. The palm holding my face captive loosed and fell to his side. I turned away and hastily moved to the bed using my trembling legs. I avoided his gaze and focused my attention on Faith Vienne.

I lifted her into my arms and she instantly stopped crying but made no move to return to sleep. Her deep blue eyes intently look at me with wonder. Then she smiled at me and my heart melted.

Carter finally moved. I heard the door to the bathroom closed. When he was out of my sight, I finally let go of the breath I didn't know I was holding. He almost kissed me. I couldn't believe it. The memory flashed inside my thoughts over and over again.

"My little princess so you're awake."? I put her back to bed so she could move freely and brushed the tip of my nose to hers. A baby's soft giggle escaped her lips.

I was aware of the sound of the shower running inside the bathroom. A few minutes later, the water stopped and the door flung open. Carter, who was wearing a towel to cover the lower part of his body, emerged.

Water trickled from his hair down to his shoulder blades. He turned his gaze towards me and our eyes met. Heat crept on my cheeks and I turned away. I

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shifted my attention towards Faith Vienne who was playing with my fingers with her soft, tiny hands.

Carter moved beside the bed to pick his backpack on the floor. He pulled it open and took a fresh t-shirt and shorts inside. The door to the bathroom closed once more when it finally opened he was already dressed.

When he sat on the other side, the bed moved from his weight.? Faith Vienne turned her face in his direction. Her face instantly brightened and she giggled when her wide innocent eyes landed on Carter who watched her closely with a smile tugging on the corner of his lips. He didn't appear to mind that I was watching him. He shifted position until he was lying beside Faith and took her small hands into his fingers. He didn't say anything for a long while as he continued to play with her.

He looked younger at that moment. He became a totally different man. Gone was the man with an eternal paper blank expression and unsmiling countenance I knew from Crawford Mansion.

"I will watch over Faith Vienne. Go freshen up so you could have some good sleep." He said without taking his gaze to my daughter. I was about to argue but changed my mind at the last minute. Instead, I closed my eyes and agreed. A warm shower would be a brilliant idea, I told myself as I pulled myself together.

"I needed just that. Thank you." I replied, climbed out of the bed to select sleepwear from inside my large suitcase. I picked a matching silk blouse and shorts. Then proceeded to the bathroom and closed the door.

The scent of soap lingered in the air. I could almost smell Carter's scent in the air. I pushed him out of my thoughts. I peeled my clothes off and folded them neatly on top of the counter. I turned the shower on.

The relaxing warmth of the water dripping from the shower soothes my nerves. I found myself gradually relaxing. I closed my eyes and lifted my eyes to the ceiling letting the droplets of water kiss my face.

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I applied the sweet-smelling shampoo to my hair and gently massaged my scalp while humming a song. I lather the citrus-scented soap around my body. I was rinsing under the shower when there was a soft rattle on the door. I ignore the knock and continue with my business. But the knock I thought would fade became louder.

A frown scrunched my eyebrows when I stepped out of the shower. The sound of cries from outside the door made me panic. I snatched the towel hanging on the rack and wrapped it around my nakedness.

"Beatrix?"

Carter's urgent voice sounded once more. Then there was another knock on the door. Water dripped down my hair when I pulled the door open. Carter was standing just in front of the door, Faith Vienne who was crying wrapped around his arms, and doing his best to stop her tears.

"I think she's hungry." He said, his eyes lit with panic. He froze after he realized I was wearing a scanty towel that barely covered my thighs.

I self-consciously moved to the bed aware that his eyes follow my movement.

Chapter 84

"I'm rather surprised you didn't jump out of the shower naked, Madam," Carter said, eyes glowing with wry amusement as he surveyed me from head to toe. My hands automatically tightened around the bath towel securely. A faint trace of a smile tucked at the corner of his lips and it surprisingly filled me with annoying humiliation. It took me an extraordinary amount of self-control not to pounce and rip that playful smile on his lips. He was sitting on the bed after a seemingly difficult ordeal, right arm draped on the headboard and his vacant hand held a 'now empty baby bottle. There

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beside him, surrounded with pillows, and peacefully drifting into slumber is my daughter who nearly turned the whole room upside down with her fits.

Carter was still laughing at my expense when my gaze shifted back to his sparkling eyes. I tilted my chin defiantly in a display of false bravado before I retorted evenly, "By how violent you pounded the door a while ago, I'm rather surprised that the hinges didn't fall off, Sir." A wave of satisfaction seeped through me when his cheeks burned. I successfully reminded him of his panicky reaction when Faith Vienne wouldn't stop crying. It was now my turn to be amused. I imitated the wry smile on his lips and watched as he tried to hide his embarrassment with a frown.

Before he could think of a quick response, I hurriedly moved to the safety of the bathroom, leaving his mouth agape in astonishment. Before I reached the door, I felt his hot gaze upon my skin, spreading a tingling sensation on my nape. I hastily stepped inside and winced when the door slammed with more force than required. I was able to let go a huge sigh of relief when I was enclosed back into the bathroom privacy. When my gaze accidentally shifted on the mirror, my reflection made me cringe. Shampoo residue still bubbled on my hair and there on my shoulders a lather of soap was left unrinsed.

I groaned in frustration. I stripped the towel, hung it on the rack beside Carter's used bath towel, and moved under the shower. The warmth seeped through my skin, the calming effect on my nerves made me close my eyes. The fact that Carter was there on the bed made me want to stay in the bathroom for the rest of the night. Realizing I was taking so much time under

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the shower, I turned it off. A few minutes later I was comfortably wearing my nightwear on. My hair had dried after blow-drying, it draped behind my back like a cape as I hastily moved to the door. I took a deep steadying breath before pulling it open. My eyes softened seeing that Carter was sleeping on his side, Faith Vienne curled to his chest while his arms protectively around her.

I turned the lights off and turned the lampshade on before carefully climbing on the bed. For a few minutes, I just sat there while leaning on the headboard, staring unblinkingly at Carter's soft features. He looked ethereal in his sleep and for some reason he reminded me of a sleeping deity. My heavy eyelids fluttered close before I finally succumbed to slumber, I pulled the covers to Carter's waist and laid my head to the pillow, and drifted to the magical portals of dreamland.

Blood... There was blood flowing out of my broken skull. The pristine white long sleeve I wore was soaked with blood too. The wound in my head throbbed badly. I ignored the pain and fought the dizziness while trying to identify my surroundings.

The room I was in was so dark that I could barely see anything at first. I squinted my eyes at the corners and scanned the room until my vision finally adjusted to the available light from the weak moonlight permeating the glass window.

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A soft whisper of movement at the foot of the bed caught my attention. Seated on the bed was a stunning woman with sharp features and titian wavy hair framing her small face. She wore a white virginal wedding gown—her fingers clad in white gloves were stained with fresh blood—my blood to be exact.

The woman sat on the bed with the elegance of a queen. Her head tilted into an angle as if a photographer was just about to capture her pre-nup photos. But instead of holding a fresh bouquet in her hands, she was tightly clutching a gun around her long fingers.

"You're awake," She said in a tone that could have frozen the depths of the underworld with its coldness. She rose from the bed and slowly walked towards me. Fierce fear gripped my heart when her empty cold eyes delved to mine.

The events seem fast forward now.

Helplessly, I watched as the woman lift the gun and aimed it in my direction. There was not even a slight trace of remorse on her empty eyes as her fingers slowly moved to the trigger. I closed my eyes, wrapped my arms protectively around my womb. This must be my end.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

I lost track of everything. Amid the loud shattering of glass, I felt excruciating pain around my chest, there was blood.... So much blood.

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Then I was falling down the fifth floor of the building. The feeling was like falling down the Ferris wheel, except it was ten times worse and dreadful. I closed my eyes in resignation. I now let fate decide if I deserve to live or not.

Beatrix! Beatrix!

Wake up! Wake up!

My eyes snapped open. It's just a dream, a dreadful nightmare. Carter's worried eyes pierced through mine. His hands fearfully grabbed my shoulders in panic. "Are you okay?" He whispered weakly, his voice trembling from the intensity of his emotions.

I can't seem to summon my voice to respond. Instead, I just shook my head vigorously, tears blurring my vision. He pulled me into his chest. I didn't protest and buried my head on the crook of his neck.

A muffled sob erupted in my throat when the embers of the dream drifted back to my thoughts. No matter how I tried to tell myself it's a dream it gave me no consolation. I know deep within me that it's not just a dream but a fragment of a forgotten memory.

"I'm here Beatrix. Please stop crying." He whispered to my ears. His arms sneaked around my waist protectively as if he feared someone would take me away from him. He pulled me closer until I could hear the violent thump of his

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heart. "It's just a nightmare, Beatrix." He assured me, pressing the warmth of his lips into my temples.

I shook my head. I didn't stop crying. Instead, my cries intensified. How could I explain to him that dream wasn't only a dream but a real traumatic experience from my past? Carter's hands moved around my face to wipe the beads of sweat on my forehead using his palms before it moved to my cheeks to dry my tears. "I will never allow anyone to hurt you. They must kill me first before I would allow them." He vowed. His palms moved behind my back in a reassuring manner.

My palms slither around the crook of his neck and I buried my nose into his throat. He smells so damn good that I closed my eyes while savoring his sweet natural scent. The smell of aftershave still clung to his throat and it comforted me somehow. The stiffness on my shoulder loosened and I feel myself gradually calm down.

He buried his nose into my hair. The simple gesture sent sparks flying around me. He didn't seem to mind my heavy weight as I lay on top of him. No one moved to pull away in fear to shatter the magical moment. For a long time, he allowed me to lie on top of him while tangled in each other's arms like real lovers.

I listened to the drumming sound of his heart, it sounded as a beautiful song for me and it matches the rhythm of my own. "Carter?" I whispered. He didn't move. I assumed he fell asleep and I lifted my head to his.

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He was wide awake, I realized when my eyes landed to the depths of his exquisite blue eyes. Desire turned his eyes into a brighter shade. He crossed the tiny distance between us until his nose touched mine.

The time stopped turning when his lips captured mine. His mouth was warm, soft, and wet. He deliciously tastes like mint. I parted my lips to allow invasion. A deep groan emerges from his mouth when I begin to respond with equal ardor. He pulled me upward until I was seated astride his hips while his arms slither on my narrow waist trying to pull me as close as possible. In return my arms moved to his hair, brushing my trembling palms into his scalp.

Chapter 85

His strong hands moved to explore my back, a soft groan escaped my lips when the warmth of his palms seeped through the thin fabric of my nightwear. My fingers tightened their grip on his neck when he deepened the kiss. The room seemed to fade in the distance, the wild drumming of his heart and so my own was the only noise I could hear aside from our sharp intake of breath. The kiss lasted for almost an eternity and just when I hoped it would remain that way, it was over, leaving me reeling for more.

"I'm sorry Beatrix." He regretfully whispered, removing his mouth from my mouth. It took him an extraordinary amount of self-control to pull away. His

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palms framed my face and tilted it upward until my eyes were level to his own.
"I'm sorry." He repeated.

Shocked to hear an apology, I said nothing. But when I was able to recover
rage burned inside me. I pulled away from him but his strong fingers didn't
want to let go. "How dare you, Sir!" I spat angrily while I shot him with a
piercing glance. "Are you sorry because you kissed me?" I braced myself from
whatever his response. An apology was the last thing I wanted to hear after
what transpired between us and God knows what could happen if he didn't
pull away.

"Please don't jump to conclusions, Beatrix." He snapped when I tried to pull
away for the second time. I eluded his piercing eyes by looking at the wall as if
I found it more interesting than what he has to say.

"You don't have to explain," I whispered weakly.

"Do you mean it?" He inquired, his tone softening a bit.

"Yes."

"Then look at me, Beatrix." He ordered and I found myself doing just that.
When my gaze landed on his pleading eyes, I realized I made the wrong
move. I found myself in trance and I can't seem to tear my gaze off him.

"God knows I'm sorry not because I kissed you." He inhaled deeply before he
continued." I'm sorry because I liked it." He added without filters. When I

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looked deeper into his intense eyes, I saw nothing but sincerity. I realize he was telling the truth.

His confession caught me off guard and I could barely search for the right thing to say. Instead, I said the first thing that came to mind and the most reasonable thing I could think of.

"Goodnight Carter."

He didn't make an attempt to stop me when I pushed him away, his fingers holding my face gently loosened and I took the perfect opportunity to move to the opposite side of the bed. Faith Vienne stood as a boundary between us.

His mouth opened as if he wanted to say something but changed his mind at the last minute and closed it instead. I was thankful when he turned to the other side of the bed. That's far better than having to face him all night.

Awkward silence draped across the room. He didn't move for a very long time and I was afraid he fell asleep so quickly when I couldn't even keep my eyes close for a long time.

"Beatrix?" He said so softly that I thought I was imagining it at first. When I didn't respond he simply continued, "I don't want you to have regrets when you wake up in the morning. Things are far better this way. I'm just trying to protect you."

His words held meaning. I wanted to ask what he was talking about but I cowardly backed out in the end and kept my mouth shut. When he felt I wasn't

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in the mood to speak, he let go a resigned sigh. He gently turned towards me and whispered 'Goodnight Beatrix' before his eyes closed.

A few more minutes later Carter was snoring softly. I closed my eyes hoping I would fall asleep too. In god's grace, I fell asleep after an hour.

I felt someone looking at me. When my eyes opened I caught Carter staring at me, a gentle smile playing at the corner of his lips. I wonder how long he'd been watching me, I'm just quite surprised I didn't melt from the heat of his gaze.

"Good morning, Beatrix." He greeted me. A blush crept on my cheeks when last night's memory came to mind. It would be the last thing I want to remind myself.

I tore my gaze away from him and averted my gaze to Faith Vienne, she was wide awake too. She was so busy holding Carter's large fingers into her tiny hands that she didn't notice her 'poor mother' was waiting for her to look her way.

"What time did Madam Stella say she would pick us up today?"

"She said it would be around eight in the morning," I replied thinking it was too early.

"It's past seven. We have thirty minutes to get ready."

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Carter rose from the bed. Stretched his arms up in the air before picking his backpack to select what he would wear for the day. I was about to argue that it was still early when my eyes landed on the wall clock. I nearly fell off the bed after I realized he was right and there's only a short while left to prepare.

I overslept. I slumped on the bed and shot him an irritated glance in which he pretended not to see. He didn't wake me up. I shook my head in disbelief. He moved to the bathroom and closed the door behind him leaving me alone with my daughter.

I moved to the headboard and leaned my back on the soft cushion behind me as I wonder if Carter remembered the kiss we shared last night because for me I will never forget that kiss as long as I live.

Perhaps he forgot all about it. I told myself, shattering my romantic illusions before they could grow out of hand. I picked Faith Vienne into my arms and hugged her tight while reminding myself my daughter is more than enough for me and I don't need any complications in my life in the form of a demigod named Carter.

"Please do double check if we forgot something. Faith Vienne and I will wait for you downstairs, Beatrix."

I nodded my head and watched Carter move to the door with quick, long strides. A backpack was slung behind his back. Faith Vienne was settled on

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his left arm while on his vacant hand he pulled my large suitcase. The door clicked close and I hurriedly moved to the bathroom to have a quick pee.

When I was done with my business, I turned off the light inside the bathroom and hastily moved to survey the room to double-check if we left something behind. Madam Stella's van was already waiting outside the Hotel and I don't want to keep her waiting for long.

I picked my backpack on the floor and hung it behind my back. I was about to move to the door after checking nothing was left behind when something on the floor caught my attention.

A leather wallet as big as my palms was lying on the floor. It must have fallen off when Carter was rummaging inside his backpack. As if my feet have minds of their own it moved to where the wallet was and my fingers picked it up on the floor. When the wallet was already in my palms I noticed I was trembling.

The wallet isn't mine and I shouldn't be looking at what's inside but I was itched with a nagging curiosity I couldn't ignore. I will just check what's inside, that's all, I assured myself and summoned all the courage I could muster to pull the wallet open.

Perhaps, I would see a picture of Carter's ex-girlfriend or maybe a wife, if he has any. However, disappointment hit me when the space where a picture should have been was left empty making a curious frown emerge from my temples. There were some dollar bills inside the wallet, perhaps it's his savings I assumed.

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There was nothing remarkable inside the wallet except the money. I was about to pull it close when a paper slipped from inside the wallet and fell to the floor. I bent to pick it up only to realize that it was not paper but a small photograph.

The image was taken during a wedding ceremony. The woman was beaming at the camera while standing beside her with a lively grin on his face was Carter with his arms protectively wrapped all over the woman's shoulders.

I have to wrap my palms tightly around the night table to maintain my balance. "No, This can't be " I told myself while shaking my head vigorously. My eyes glued to the picture as if my life depended on it.

I shook my head in disbelief. How could it possibly happen? The woman in the photograph wearing a white beaded gown was me.

Chapter 86

"Is something wrong Beatrix?"

Carter's voice sent my thoughts crashing back to earth. He sounded bothered... and a little bit worried. But probably it's just my imagination.

He was casually seated inside Madam Stella's large van but it appeared smaller while he was inside, and the space seems to constrict from his presence.

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'Everything had been wrong from the very start, Carter. How could you explain the picture of us inside your wallet? Is the picture photoshopped and you're really an obsessed psychopath or there's some hidden truth which I have to know yet—and that truth is far more worse than I imagined. Let's say you're actually my ex-husband who mercilessly abandoned me before. There's a huge possibility you are but I don't have enough evidence to prove it yet except you're starting resemblance with my daughter. I don't know what to believe now.

It was what I wanted to say at first but decided to purse my lips. I'm not prepared to confront a stranger. How ironic, you just allowed a stranger to kiss you last night, a part of myself trying to remind me. God knows what could possibly happen if he didn't pull away. I shook my head and pushed the thoughts away.

"Nothing Carter. I'm fine."?I replied in a surprisingly calm manner that would have won me Oscar's Awards as the?best actress with my acting

"Are you sure?" He wasn't convinced. His piercing blue eyes never leave my gaze. I fought his piercing glare with unblinking eyes while he continues to read my expression.

"Of course," I exclaimed, irritated. I rolled my eyes heavenward. He simply wouldn't stop talking. I need peace and he's not giving it to me.

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He didn't say anything more and it's what surprised me more. Instead, he shrugged his shoulders and turned his gaze on the beautiful scenery outside the window as if it's far more interesting than mine.

I leaned on the fluffy seat and turned my attention outside the window to enjoy the view. Now that the rain subsided and the bright sun was perched higher on the blue sky, I have the chance to have a good look at the breathtaking scenery.

But despite the beautiful view, the surroundings could offer, I couldn't just clear my thoughts from what happened this morning. The shocking discovery left me shaking until now. Who could blame me when I just found out the man I thought was the gardener was no ordinary man. I wouldn't be surprised if he was keeping a box of deadly secrets with him.

I badly want to know the truth and I wouldn't be able to rest until I discover Carter's real identity. I have a feeling that I am bound to be surprised after learning the secrets he was keeping.

I have one solution to end this problem. It's time to resort to more practical ways. I would need to hire a man to help me uncover the truth.

The sooner I found the Private Investigator, the better.

After seemingly endless hours of sitting my numb butt inside the seat, we finally reached Madam Stella's luxurious estate house that reminded me

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of?Queen's elegant mansion. It's not the largest house I have seen on our way but it's the most regal looking and elegantly decorated. The three-story house stood proudly surrounded by an array of trees. The white walls and the large windows were a comforting sight. The long wait is all worth it.

Madam Stella directed us to our room the moment we arrived. Insisted that we needed rest. Who am I to argue? I was badly needing one after almost sleeping late last night. Carter helped move our suitcase inside the room after that he retreated towards his room located just beside my own on the second floor.

I changed into walking shorts and a loose t-shirt before sprawling on the Queen size bed where my daughter was sleeping. Faith Vienne had been sleeping on the van, in Madam Stella's arms, even after she was moved to the bed she didn't even stir. She must have been so tired of the long journey.

I closed my eyes so I could get some sleep but failed to achieve my goal after I realized I wasn't a bit sleepy anymore. Perhaps, I'm adjusting to my new room—a new environment. I gave up forcing myself and moved to the television. After I turned it on, I sat back on the bed and leaned on the headboard.

Shock hit me like a sharp bolt of lightning when my sight was welcomed with a woman's familiar face. I will never forget her face as long as I live.

The memory of a dream flashed in my thoughts in clear and exquisite details to confirm my suspicions.

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'A soft whisper of movement at the foot of the bed caught my attention. Seated on the bed was a stunning woman with sharp features and titian wavy hair framing her small face. She wore a white virginal wedding gown—her fingers clad in white gloves were stained with fresh blood.'

That's one of the scenes from my dream where I saw her face for the first time. This time I was so sure that my imagination wasn't playing a trick on me. From her titian hair to her sharp stunning features I know that I'm looking at the right her. She possesses an angelic face which is impossibly hard to forget. But I doubt if there's something angelic about her. She gave me an impression of an obsessed and ambitious woman, the kind which could never be trusted.

The woman on the television was the same face I'd seen in my dream. I couldn't be mistaken. It was her. What surprised me more was that Vince Greyson—the man I previously met at a party was with her. The caption flashing on the tv screen says that she is Vince Greyson's wife.

What a coincidence. Or was it not simply a coincidence but fate?

I could still remember the way Vince looked at me the first time we met. He paled under his skin as if he'd seen a ghost. I will never forget the aghast expression on his face as he looked at me.

One thing I was certain while I was with his company—I never like the man. Even if someone will put a shotgun to my head I will not like him. There was

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something dangerously menacing about his aura. He seems to be the type of man who will never do anything well.

The woman Vince was with, had something in common. They gave me a negative vibe. I've never been wrong in judging people, I have a powerful intuition, and my instinct couldn't lie. When I feel I can't trust someone, I'm sure they aren't worth being trusted.

Vince beamed at the woman. There was something off in the way he looked at her. Even a blind man could spot that the lack of affection between the two—theirs is not a love match.

He was the CEO of Greyson Enterprise...

The legitimate son of Ybbrahim Greyson, a rich and powerful businessman who founded the successful family business...

He has an illegitimate brother....

His name is Ace Carter Greyson.

I stopped watching the interview when my eyes read the name. Ace Carter Greyson. I repeated. The name was astonishingly familiar. I forgot where I heard that name.

Vince has an illegitimate brother then where was he? Why was he hidden under the spotlight?

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A familiar face crossed in my thoughts. No! It couldn't be... It doesn't seem possible at all... Perhaps my imagination is running wild again. But... But... they have undeniable similarities in physical features. Perhaps there's a possibility that the two could be related.

I found myself scurrying to the side of the bed where my large suitcase was located. I rummaged inside until I found my laptop and pulled it out. The sound of my frenzied heartbeat seemed to intensify as I settled on top of the bed and opened my laptop to begin my research.

If my initial assumption is correct then I have discovered the link between me and Vince Greyson. One discovery could lead to another. The small pieces are necessary to make a puzzle whole. The whole piece of the will fall into place before I know it. What I need to do for now is gather crucial information.

My hands trembled with apprehension as I typed on the keyboard. I could scarcely breath as I typed 'search.' I took a deep steadying breath before I finally allowed myself to look at the result.

Ace Carter Greyson image results...

Cold sweat formed on my temples when a man's familiar face greeted my vision. No! I covered my mouth with my palms in shock. My greatest fears finally came to life. This time I knew I could never run away. The shocking discovery was impossibly hard for me to digest. I gaze at the images with parted lips and no sound emerging from my mouth.

Carter had kept a lot of secrets right from the very start.

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Chapter 87

Three in the afternoon came. A soft knock then sounded on the door. It must be Elisa. Excitedly, I left the bed in a hurry and walked to the door and pulled it open. Elisah stood in the doorway, her eyes lit with glee. She has her large suitcase behind her.

My mood brightened at the sight of her.

"Please come in, Lis." I pulled the door wider. She mumbled 'thank you before entering.

She entered the door with ease as she pulled her large suitcase inside. I followed her with my gaze until she stopped at the foot of the bed before closing the door.

I noticed that she was still wearing her school uniform, a sophisticated tight-fitted long sleeves and black pencil cut skirt, the garment clung to her slender frame perfectly. She tied her hair into a ponytail using a pink ribbon.

Elisah is taking fashion designer at Harvey University and she is the classroom president in their section. She's smart, witty, and creative. Those are the reasons why she excels in her studies. Aside from that, she too is born talented. I've seen a few samples of her sketches and I'm quite impressed by her designs.

"I missed you Bea."

"I miss you too Lis."

We hug each other tight. We haven't seen each other for months but it almost felt like years. When the hug ended, Elisah moved to the bed and gently picked Faith Vienne. "You too my princess, I miss you too." She said chuckling

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and brushed the tip of her nose to Faith's cute upturned nose. The baby giggled.

Elisah sat on the edge of the bed. I watch her play with my daughter for a moment. I can't help but smile as I look at them.

"Beatrix, I haven't thank you enough for sharing this room with me. I just want to let you know I'm forever indebted with you."

"You don't need to thank me, Lis. Your parent's saved my life. If they didn't find me the night I will never have the chance to meet Faith Vienne and my whole family."

Slowly, she raised her head to me. "They just happened to be there.?Whoever was in their position will do the same Bea."

"Yes. But their kindness doesn't end there. They sheltered me after I lost my memory. And then I met you... You became the sister I never had."

Fondly, Elisah smiled, her eyes crinkled at the corner. "You will make me cry if you don't stop." She teased.

"I was doing it on purpose." I replied.

We both laugh.

Dinner was served around six in the evening. Madam Stella spoiled her guests with a lavish feast. The dinner is almost perfect if not for the idea that Carter was seated on the chair opposite me. If Elisah noticed the tension between Carter and me she didn't say anything.... That makes me safe... for now.

The mouth-watering aroma from the food served on the table permeated my nostrils. If the situation were a bit different and I just haven't discovered that 'the gardener' could possibly be my ex-husband, I would enjoy the food served at the dinner table.

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Awkward silence hung in the atmosphere. Madam Stella must have sensed it, that's why she'd spoken.

"Are you enjoying the food? Most of these dishes are from french cuisine. I just hope you like it."?Unperturbed by the strange atmosphere she provided a welcoming smile to her guests.

"Do not worry Madam. I assure you the foods are excellent." Carter spoke politely. "I'm sure Beatrix will have something to say about it?"

He was looking at me.

I roll my eyes heavenward. So much for my hopes for a quiet dinner. "Carter is right Madam Stella. The food is superb."

"Oh, thank you." She exclaimed and resumed eating.

After dinner, Madam Stella served a bottle of expensive vintage wine which I politely declined. "I apologize Madam, but I couldn't stay longer. I have return to my room. I'm worrying about Vienne." Madam Stella nodded in understanding and allowed me to retire early since Faith Vienne was waiting for me upstairs.

I rose from my seat and avoided Carter's eyes as much as I could before finally moving a beeline straight to the door. When I reached my room, I allowed the servant to leave and thank her for watching over my daughter.

My daughter had fallen asleep. I moved towards her and transferred her on the nearby crib. And then I sat there on the bed and watch the rise and fall of her chest.

Half an hour later, the door to my room opened. I don't need to look up to see Lisa enter. The door closed before approaching footsteps sounded. I felt the bed moved as she sat next to me.

"There's something you haven't tell me Beatrix." Elisa said, her tone was smooth and soft and full of understanding.

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Perhaps it's the perfect opportunity to tell Elisa. There might be no perfect timing such as this. I didn't tell her right away. Instead, I rose from the bed and paced back and forth. Arms folded beneath my breasts.

"Just say it, Beatrix." Lisa urged, she too left the bed and held both my shoulders when I stopped walking.

"I'm little by little recovering my memories, Lisa."

"Does that mean you recall the crucial part? Did you remember who attempted to murder you."

Lisa fingers tightened on my shoulders. Her beautiful eyes gleamed with worry. I should not tell her, it will fill her with alarm but I couldn't keep the truth either. If I don't tell her now, she will find another way to discover the truth.

"It's too complicated Lisa."

"No matter how complicated it is, I will patiently listen, Bea. We have all night."

I took a deep long breath, summoning all the courage I could muster to begin. "I found the woman who try to murder me."

Shock shot through her eyes, pure disbelief was written all over her face. As if strength escaped her legs, Lisa sat on the bed, her fingers flew to her mouth. "Oh my god."

"She knew I was pregnant, but it didn't stop her from killing me. She tried to shoot me thrice on the night of her wedding." My leg trembled while I narrated the short detail I could recall from the dream. I wonder how I survived that night. The thought fills me with dread. Fearing my legs would crumble, I stepped closer to the bed and slumped on the edge.

"Beatrix, the night Mama found you on the deck of the cargo ship she works as a supervisor, you're lying amid shattered glass. You have three badly bleeding gunshots—which you miraculously survived. I wonder what could possibly happen if the murderer didn't miss her target and the bullet didn't

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simply graze your skin. And I wonder what would possibly happen if you didn't fall on the heap of bed cushions which Mama ordered to be taken out on the deck before you fell from nowhere."

Shivers run down my spine and my blood run cold at the possibility. I abruptly rose from the bed, trying to shake my negative thoughts away. I picked the laptop on the night table and handed it to Lisa who was confused after I handed it to her. "That woman—I am one hundred percent sure—was the woman who try to murder me."

Elisa lifter her startled gaze to me. "I-I don't know what to say Bea. Are you really sure? This is Angela Smith.... She's no ordinary woman. She has a promising modelling career before she became a secretary of a CEO. Why would she kill you?"

"Good Question. That's what I'm trying to find out. I'm trying to find her ulterior motive."

With eyebrows scrunched in confusion, Elisa abandoned the bed, leaving the laptop behind, and paced back and forth in front of the tv. "It would be Ace Carter, I guess." She finally pulled into a stop. An idea hit her. "Yes, It would be Ace Carter." She repeated.

"You mean Carter?"

"Yes! That reminds me of?the question I've been itching to ask you. What was Mr. Greyson doing with you?"

"Would you believe it if I tell you he was our gardener? Papa promoted him and now he's my bodyguard?"

"This is proving to be more complicated than I thought." Lis exclaimed. She moved closer until her palms were resting on my shoulders. "Are you aware that before Angela married Vince, she was supposed to marry Ace Carter?"

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I shook my head. I almost read all available articles online concerning Ace Carter Greyson but I haven't found anything that points to the connection between Ace and Angela.

"Ace Carter might be the reason why Angela try to murder you Bea. Could it be possible that you're the ex-wife he's trying to hide from the world."

"That's possible." I muttered softly. "There's only one way for us to discover the truth."

When our eyes met, understanding dawned in Elsa's eyes and she nodded.

"I think I could help you with that Bea. I know a Private Investigator. I shall contact him tomorrow."

Chapter 88

I heard everything—from start to finish—all I could say is.... I'm a dead man. With her memory slowly returning, telling her the truth would be the best solution.

Before the door to Beatrix's room could open and someone would discover what I'm up to, I quickly retreated back to the privacy of my room dragging my sunken spirits behind me. I was about to talk to her, I told myself to ease my guilt, but when the topic of her memories came up, eavesdropping was my only option to acquire more valuable information.

Relieved to slip safely back to the privacy of my room, I sighed deeply and closed the door behind without the slightest sound. Lonely solitude welcomed me inside my dark dominion. Only the faint flicker of the lampshade helps illuminate the room, casting the unreachable corners with monstrous shadows.

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I'm a dead man. The words echoed inside my head over and over again, torturing my already tortured soul. I slipped into the moon lit balcony grasping the cold rails until my knuckles turned white.

Beatrix hates me now. She has all the reasons to. Somehow the thought filled me with unbearable anguish. The thought she will leave—take Faith Vienne with her—tortures me to no end. There's a possibility she would do just that after she realized how I kept the truth from her.

'I was merely trying to protect her.' But I doubt if she will appreciate me for that. If I am in her shoes I will probably erupt like a volcano.

I want to punch the wall, more so, I want to punch myself for creating this mess. It's all my fault but who could blame me for wanting to be with her. She's all I've got now. I gave up everything because of her and feel not a slight tinge of regret but if she will be the one I will lose I will die of loneliness.

I never wanted anyone as much as I want her. Oh, god help me.... I love her too much.?I love Beatrix—Or Phoenix—whatever her name is. She's the only woman who made me realize the true meaning of love. She was selfless, a brave woman who gives her love without doubts... without reservation.

But whatever love she felt for me undoubtedly faded by the recent discovery after she realized I'm the ex-husband who mercilessly abandoned her and left her pregnant with a child. Whatever feelings she has for me—if there's any—it's now replaced with hate, loathing, disgust, and distrust. She will never look at me the same way again. I simply became good for nothing monster in front of her eyes.

If one day comes that I could not have her, I would rather die a quick death than spend the rest of my life without her in it.

I cannot undo what I have done. I cannot erase the mistakes I made. And the saddest thing about my regret, Beatrix will never forgive me and I will never forget.

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'You're gonna die an old and lonely man, Ace, and it's all your fault. You deserve what you've got.' The devil taunted inside my head. Hell yeah, he was right. I deserved it all.

I brushed my fingers into my hair. My gaze shifted to the pale moonlight surrounded by the pitch-black clouds. How lonely is the moon tonight, no bright stars to make the darkness cheerful and lively. I'm like the moon—hopeless, and shrouded with dark shadows.

The door to the left side of the balcony opened, light from within spilled outside as a figure clad in pristine white night dress emerged. The sheer garment made her perfect curves clearly visible by the moonlight. Her extremely long hair loosely fell to her shoulders, in an endless cascade of the luscious waterfall. My breath caught in my throat upon her phoenix eyes met mine.

Beatrix.... The softly spoken words barely escaped my trembling lips.

Her form froze beneath the closed door, her shoulders stiffened, her feet stopped moving as if paralyzed. An eternity passed before she finally recovered her composure and slowly moved in my direction with furious energy screaming in her aura.

I closed my eyes, bracing myself for the confrontation. I counted her footsteps and when I heard it no more, my eyes fluttered open. My breath caught in my throat when I became aware she's standing too close to me that his sweet natural scent mingled with soap invaded my nostrils.

"Please... let me explain everything, Beatrix."

Slap!

"That was for keeping the truth from me, Ace."

Slap!

"And that... was for treating me like a fool."

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The slap came in all suddenness, leaving red imprints on both my cheeks before I could even recover. The bruised skin numbed from pain. I didn't even flinch, waiting for another painful blow that didn't arrive. Perhaps I deserved more than a slap. I deserved to be kicked in the crotch or pushed off from the balcony for keeping the truth she no doubt deserved to know.

"Since you goddam heard everything by eavesdropping on my room, tell me that everything's all a lie! Tell me!" Her tone rose several octaves. Her scathing eyes pierced through mine rendering me momentarily paralyzed to my place. She had spoken softly but coldly, but it was a weapon lethal enough to harshly slice my heart to pieces.

Beatrix undoubtedly discovered I was spying on her a while ago. It was obvious in the ways she spoke she's not letting the incident pass easily. She trembled with rage. If looks could kill I would have been a cold, lifeless corpse, moments ago.

I dreaded this confrontation. And the fact that I never saw her this angry before tripled my fear. Her reaction is not a good sign. She's like an active volcano showing the first signs of a dangerous rupture.

I moved closer, touched her arms reassuringly but she jerked my hands away as if disgusted by my touch. She made a single retrieving step then glared at me with fathomless rage. "Don't you dare touch me." She growled menacingly.

She continued to regard me with a look that could have frozen the depths of the underworld and could have melted the glaciers of Antarctica with their intensity.

She didn't simply hate me, it's an understatement. Beatrice loathed my very existence. Seeing her look at me with so much disdain was an act of brutal punishment that no amount of physical pain could match.

"Hiring a private investigator would prove to be a total waste of time. I must end this once and for all, Beatrix. I am your ex-husband."

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I wonder how I was able to say the words without breaking. The violent reaction I half expected she would burst into didn't come, instead, her face contorted into anguish, and a tear came tumbling down her cheeks.

"Why did you keep everything from me, Ace? Why?" She whimpered, her flushed cheeks were soaking with tears. Her legs gave up, and she slumped on the floor of the balcony as if all her strength had been drained by the confrontation.

"I am trying to protect you, Beatrix." The floor was hard and cold against my knee but it was the least of my concern. No matter how long I kneel in front of her it will not change anything. She abhorred me. No amount of words will make her forgive my foolishness. "I saw how happy you are. You've never been so cheerful before the way I've seen you now. I would be a fool to ruin the smile on your lips by telling you the truth."

"How could you be so cruel, Ace? Do you think I'd rather live with lies because I'm happy?" She shut her eyes tightly as if she's in so much pain. When she opened them again tears moved freely on her flushed cheeks. And when she continued speaking it was barely an audible whisper enough for me to hear. "Have you ever thought that countless times I lie awake at night wondering who I really am and what happened to me? You don't have any idea how many unanswerable questions kept me tortured over and over again."

Her rounded fist jabbed my shoulders repeatedly. I didn't shield myself from the blow. Instead, I allowed her to beat me until she could until she poured all her heart out. It's the only way to ease the weight off her chest.

Her soft tortured sobs were like acids burning through my heart. When her strength faded, her arms loosely fell to her sides, I took her hands before they could entirely reach the ground and pulled her to my arms, hugged her so tight until no demons, and nightmares, and villains could snatch her away from me.

She didn't push me away. Or she wanted to but had no strength left in her to do so. She stayed in my arms for a long time until her sobs subsided. Her

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body was warm and soft and perfectly molded into my arms as if she belonged there. A sense of possessiveness hit me hard, I almost didn't want to let her go.

"Tell me the truth, are you Faith Vienne's father?"

I took a deep, long breath before I replied. "There is without a doubt in my mind, Beatrix. I am Faith Vienne's father." I replied as sure as I needed air to breathe.

I stood up. Offer my palm and help her get up until she's steady on her feet. She moved closer to the rails and gripped it until her fingers paled from the exertion. She was leaning forward so I feared she might jump off from the balcony.

"Tell me, Ace.... What happened between us?"

Chapter 89

"I just want to let you know before I start to explain the truth, that you'd been the very best wife to me. Whatever happened in the past—it's entirely my fault." He spoke so gently, his tone trembled a bit. Pain and regret struck his exquisite blue eyes. Seeing his eyes glistened with tears broke my soft and fragile heart into a million pieces.

His bright eyes never once depart from mine in fear I would vanish from his sight if he dared to look away for even a second. His warm fingers slid to my arms and held me still in case I tried to flee. I closed my eyes for a moment and summoned just enough courage to face all he has to say knowing when this night is over, our lives will never be the same.

Moonlight shone on his breathtakingly handsome face. That unforgettable face haunted my dreams countless times. When I first met him, I know there's something about him I needed to know, it appears I wasn't mistaken.

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The silence hanging between us thickened and so the tension. The sound I could only hear was the sound of my heart beating wildly inside my chest. I was surprised that he didn't hear how violent my heart beat inside my rib cage.

"Just tell me everything, Ace. Start from the very first time we met." I said, breaking the silence swirling around us. I break free from him as if his touch burned my skin and hastened to the nearby bench to support my trembling legs about to collapse anytime soon.

The elegant steel bench provided the support I needed after I sat down. My racing heart which I thought would slow down didn't. It continues to pound on my chest while I wait for him to drop everything like an explosive bomb.

Ace didn't move a bit even after I glared at him impatiently. He just watched me with half-closed distant eyes as if he wasn't seeing me. It was the memories of the past he is looking at. Just when I thought he would keep quiet for eternity he took a deep, steadying breath, and spoke in his softest tone.

"We accidentally met in a bar, Beatrix. You're the first to approach me and ask for my number." His lips curved into a smile, wry amusement twinkled in his eyes while he recalled the memory. He then continues, "who am I to let a beautiful lady down?" Overwhelming tenderness made his cheeks flush with warmth.

I wasn't sure if that's actually what happened but I felt he's telling me the truth.

"Am I that desperate or something? I swear I couldn't imagine myself initiating a bold move such as that just to catch your attention."

"But you did Beatrix. You even told me valiantly that I was your ideal man. I assumed though you're drunk at that time."

"Was I drunk?"

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He shook his head. "No, you're surprisingly sane that time that I thought perhaps you're a mental patient who escaped from a mental institution."

"Perhaps, I could say I'm a candidate. I wouldn't talk with a random man if I'm sane in the first place... Well, please continue."

"I thought we would never see each other again after that incident but I was wrong. We kept bumping into each other wherever I went, a huge coincidence. It seems fate was trying to keep us together despite my best efforts?trying to steer clear of you."

"What made you decide that you like me too?"

"Like would be an understatement. I say I fell in love with you and your determination, Beatrix. And I realize how deep my feelings were to you when one of your obsessed, deranged suitors tried to kidnap you. And when you refused to let him have his way he got so angry and ordered his men to kill you instead."

"You try to save me," I said the words more of a statement than a question. "Is that how you acquire that fatal wound?"

"Yes," He admitted. There was a momentary pause. "And after that incident, you became even more desperate to have me. And guess what, after a month of speedy recovery I found myself married after you successfully seduced me. Your parents caught us in your room and I have no other options but to marry you after your father aimed a shotgun at my head. The next morning we were married by a judge."

A horrified gasp escaped my lips. I'm still in shock at the idea of how we became husband and wife. I straightened on my seat and looked up at him without the slightest trace of emotion on my face. "Did you regret marrying me?" I blurted the words aloud before I realized the enormity of what I've said. I bit my lips. Humiliated by my undisciplined behavior.

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"The truth is I never once regretted meeting you, Beatrix. Marrying you was the most beautiful decision I ever made in my whole life."

"Then what went wrong, Ace?" I said weakly, unable to prevent a tear from sliding down my flushed cheeks. "If we're almost perfect then why did we drift apart? Why did the almost perfect marriage end with shattering divorce?"

"I went wrong, Beatrix. It's all my fault. You got pregnant and—"

"And you assume that I cheated on you! That you're not the father of my child?" I forcefully abandoned my seat and glared at him furiously. If looks could kill he died a few seconds ago.

"Yes." He replied weakly. Anguish tortured his handsome face. "Vince—my brother drugged you one night—I caught you in bed with him."

"Oh Ace, I don't know how I will take this all. This is too much." I sobbed. An imaginary knife stabbed my heart repeatedly. I brushed my palms to my hair hoping it would help ease my distress... it didn't.

"I'm sorry Beatrix.... I'm sorry you have to suffer like this."

With tear-stricken eyes, I raise my head back to his. "Did something happen to us that night?" I braced myself for his response. The thought of another man touching me was enough to make me shudder with dread.

"Vince convinced me that something happened between the two of you and I believe him. He was too convincing, he made me believe the two of you were having an affair and foolish me jumped to the conclusion after he produced pictures... evidence... Who am I not to believe when the proof was right in front of my eyes."

"So Vince and I did it?"

He shook his head again. "No," He replied, he sounded relieved. "Before I went here in Cordova months ago, I contacted the servant who witnessed

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what exactly happened that night. She told me the truth.... nothing happened between you and Vince that night. I arrived in time to save you."

A burden was lifted off my chest. I let go a huge sigh of relief. I couldn't bear the thought of thinking I did have s*x with another man who is not my husband. I rather die than cheat.

"You should have confronted me instead of jumping to conclusions?" I muttered in between gritted teeth. "You could have asked me the truth."

"Asking you would be pointless. You're drugged. The next day you couldn't even remember a thing. How could I squeeze the truth from you if you don't even recall the tiniest detail about that night? You probably thought that it had only been a dream."

It was too painful to look at him. I turned my gaze away from his piercing eyes. and walked forward and gripped the rails tightly for support until my knuckles turned white. Ace was right, It's better that I'm not aware of the truth because it was too painful. But then, I could never escape from it. I will discover the truth sooner and later. Perhaps, things are far better this way.

"Then what made you believe that you're not the father of my child?" It took me a great amount of self-control not to hurl myself at him and beat him until I have no strength left.

"The paternity test result says I'm not the father. Who am I to contradict Science, Beatrix?" Anger flashed in his eyes. At first, I thought he was angry with me. It took me a moment to realize he was angry at himself.

Silence lapsed between us. No one dared to talk, too lost within our thoughts to even speak. It was me who couldn't take the deafening silence to stay any longer, I raised my head in his direction when he moved forward and stopped just beside me. "It was Vince who faked the DNA result. His now wife Angela, who previously was my secretary, was the one who helped him create a fake DNA result. I was blinded with fury that I didn't realize my mistake until it was too late."

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"What happened to our child, Ace?" My voice shook badly as I spoke. When his eyes clouded with tears, I knew at that moment I would not want to hear the answer.

"The night you thought I was having s*x with my secretary inside my room, you left the house in the middle of the night to go to your parents' house." He took a harsh intake of breath as if it was difficult for him to explain. "The car you're driving collided with a truck.... The same night Vien died."

The news was too much. My legs lost their strength and I collapsed. A warm stream of tears abundantly flowed down my cheeks. But before the hard floor could catch me, Ace was able to save me from the fall.

He held my rigid body while I wept into his arms.

Chapter 90

"It doesn't end there, Beatrix." He said carefully, watching the expression on my face. His arms tightened around me, crushing me into the hard muscles of his chest until I could barely breathe. He was holding me possessively, fearing I would escape if I have the chance.

His breathing roughened, his heartbeat intensified. He was having difficulty saying the next words out of his mouth. I closed my eyes firmly, bracing myself for another wave of seething pain as the words finally sprung free, making me painfully aware of reality. "On the day of our fifth wedding anniversary, I asked for a divorce." His voice broke when he said the last words.

I thought I was fully prepared to face the painful truth.... I was wrong. Nothing could have prepared me for that news. The harsh truth sliced through me like a steel knife. Losing my daughter was impossibly unbearable and hearing the man I'm in love with say he ended our marriage of five years is unbelievably difficult to believe.

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"Is there someone else that time, Ace?" I blurted out the words bravely and pushed him away until I sprung free from his tight hold. His pleading gaze locked through mine, he looked hesitant as if he feared the answer would hurt me more. But I doubt if there is something far more painful than hearing him say how I lost our first child. That's a kind of pain that leaves a scar for a lifetime.

"Yes," He admitted. The only choice he had was to tell the truth. No matter how difficult and heart-wrenching the truth is—we both must face it—it would set both of us free.

"Was it Angela?"

"Yes." He answered regretfully. His arms moved to touch my arms. When I flinched he didn't dare touch me again. Instead, his hands slowly fell to his side. His shoulders fell.

"Why, Ace? Am I not good enough?" I shot him a murderous glance that could have sliced him to pieces with their edge. I wish he was dead that very moment.... but then he was better alive. He would not be able to pay for his mistakes if he's but a cold, lifeless corpse.

"All I could think was to hurt you that time, the way you hurt me. I want you to feel how painful it is to be cheated. For me, I was only getting even."

"But I didn't cheat on you." I snapped, glared at him furiously.

"I didn't know the truth that time, I'm so sorry...." He swallowed a lump on his throat before he continued. It occurred to me I wasn't the only one suffering. He too was emotionally tortured as I am. "But that time I thought you cheated on me. I was too desperate to have my revenge to even think." He added. This time he looked away so I would not see the tears gleaming at the corners of his eyes but it's too late, I saw it already.

"How many times did you cheat, Ace? I want to hear the truth."

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I took a retrieving step backward in fear he would reach for me again and wrapped my arms beneath my breast to warm me against the cold night breeze.

"I only cheated once, Beatrix. Believe it or not and it's with Angela. And that's the greatest mistake I ever made. Until now I'm paying the price. The women I brought to the house—I wasn't romantically involved with them—I only hire them to spite you by bringing them to my room. Once I made sure you retire to your bed, I sent them home. I feel so cheated that I didn't realize I'd been a fool."

"Fool? That's an understatement, Ace. You're a jerk, an asshole, a chauvinist pig, an evil villain, and a selfish moron." I said the words in a surprisingly calm manner. My emotions calmed down a bit and I'm calmer than I did a while ago.

"You forgot, a cheating bastard." He added when I fell silent.

I nodded my head. "Yeah, that too."

The silence grew thicker in the balcony. I shifted my gaze towards the pitch-black sky and noted that no stars were present tonight. Only the moon with its pale light adorned the sky and it wasn't enough to help lift my mood. The depressing atmosphere was making my mood worse.

I could feel the weight of his stare on my shoulders but I made no move to look back to where he stood. All I wanted was to cherish the momentary silence while slowly digesting the things he told me.

It came to me that life had been unfair to both of us or rather it was the people around us who'd been extremely unfair. I was too damn young when I met him and he was too damn mature that our marriage didn't work out. Just like some failed marriage, we drifted apart.

I could continue hating him forever but I doubt if it would do me any good. True, he did hurt me and shattered my heart into pieces but it all happened in

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the past now. I couldn't forgive him now.... but perhaps time would heal all the wounds and it will forge a path to forgiveness one day.

"Beatrix?" He called. When I didn't look back he moved closer, "Please look at me" He whispered, it was so gently that it could melt even the hardest of stone with its caressing warmth.

His soft tone made me do what he just said. I shifted my gaze towards his direction. I found myself staring straight into a pair of exquisite blue eyes who seem to read right through my soul the way no one else could.

"I know you will never forgive me after the truth you heard tonight." His fingers brushed to my arms until they slither down to capture my hands. I was too startled to find my hands wrapped around his that I haven't thought to pull away. Too startled to even react.

Ace lowered his knees to the floor. A startled shriek escaped my lips when he carried my fingers and pressed it to his soft, warm lips. The gesture made the hairs on my nape stand on ends. My breathing was suspended.

"I never stopped loving you Phoenix...." He murmured. A tear slid down his cheeks. It took me a great amount of self-control not to fall into a heart-wrenching sob. "God knows I never stopped loving you even for a second. Until now I still do. I will continue to love you until my last breath. I know you don't feel a thing for me anymore. I understand that you hate me. I deserved it. But I just want to let you know that whatever happened in the past I regretted it all. It's too late to apologize but I think you deserve to know how remorseful I am. I'm so sorry for everything. I'm sorry for all the pain I caused you."

Ace's fingers tightened around mine as tears slowly drifted down the smoothness of his cheeks. I bit my lower lip and swallowed a lump in my throat while waiting for him to continue.

"I know that time will come and you will find the right guy for you," He smiled, but it barely reached his eyes. His lips even trembled a bit, "I will not stop you

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because I don't have the right to. Who am I to not allow you to be happy. And when that time comes I only have one wish for you. Please never take Faith Vienne away from me. It will kill me if you do. Please allow me more time to spend with her. She's the only one I've got now."

"Ace...."

"Please, I will do everything just don't take her away from me."

"I'm not going to take her away, Ace. Please take my word that I will allow you to be her father. Please don't fear I will never break my promise."

He abruptly rose from kneeling on the ground and pulled me into his arms. "Thank you." He murmured, kissing the top of my head.

Later that night when I tiptoed back to my room Faith Vienne was already asleep in her crib. Elisa had fallen asleep too. She was sprawled on the right side of the bed, a book she was reading was still on her chest. She must have fallen asleep while reading.

The chandelier hanging on the ceiling had been turned off. It was the pale light from the lampshade shade that illuminates the room. I kissed my daughter goodnight and gently climbed on the bed. I was thankful when Elisa didn't stir when I lay beside her.

I pulled the blanket closer to my chest and closed my eyes firmly. Minutes passed but sleep refused to come. I lay wide awake staring at the flawless white ceiling. I couldn't forget how Ace kneel in front of me while he pleaded that he could continue to be Faith Vienne's father.

I couldn't forget the pain and anguish glittering in his eyes. He indeed loves our daughter that much. I could feel it.

When he apologized, I felt his overflowing sincerity. The wall of ice I built around my heart melted as he pleaded, tears streamed down his cheeks. It was the first time I saw him cry up close. Until now the memory of him crying

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break my heart into a million pieces. In time when I am ready, I will learn how to forgive him for the things he did.

I wiped the tears that slither down my cheeks with my palms. I closed my eyes again. This time I actually fell asleep.

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