



Rebellion

A DANGEROUS MAN #2
SERENA GREY

Also by Serena Grey

A Dangerous Man
Awakening
Rebellion

Rebellion

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Serena Grey

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REBELLION: A DANGEROUS MAN
#2

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For MNC
You I love, always.

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Chapter One

THE JOURNEY TO SEATTLE IS SILENT. Steve, the chauffeur, keeps his eyes on the road, and David, my husband - I still can't believe he's my husband - studies some papers on his lap, totally ignoring me.

I can't stop looking at his face in profile, his straight nose, firm jaw and thick, wavy hair. He really is perfect, I think, captivated.

It's still hard to believe that this man, who I only met three days ago, is my husband, and that I am leaving the life I have always known to go with him to his home, his city, his life, of which I know nothing. I don't care though, I feel

as if I've been trapped in a box for years, and he has shown me what it means to fly.

Between his reading and the brief, authoritative phone calls he's made, he hasn't looked at me at all. It's unfair, especially since I can't take my eyes off him. I don't understand how he can make such wonderful love to me, tease me until I'm blushing, and in the next moment, act as if I don't even exist.

Feeling suddenly insecure, I look away from him. I can almost hear Aunt Josephine's voice, telling me how foolish I am. 'Have you stopped to ask yourself why a man like him would marry a girl like you? Don't you think he has an ulterior motive?'

I push the doubting thoughts away. What ulterior motive could he possibly have? I'm neither rich nor successful, nor exceptionally beautiful. In fact, I was the one who begged him not to leave me.

Turning back to look at him, I see that he's still engrossed in his reading. As I watch his strong fingers flip through his papers, my mind drifts to last night, our wedding night, and I feel my skin heat up. Last night, I was the one he was engrossed in.

After the short ceremony, we all went back to the hotel where he was staying for drinks and dinner. Halfway through dinner, which I was too tense to eat, he suddenly stood up, and announced to our few guests that he was

retiring for the night with his new wife.

The look in his eyes had filled me with such want that I almost couldn't stand. The next thing I knew, he picked me up and carried me out of the restaurant and into the elevator, amidst self-conscious cheers from our guests.

We were alone in the elevator, and as soon as the doors closed, he claimed my lips, his tongue delving hungrily in my mouth. His hands found their way under my dress and started to knead me gently through my new lace panties. I was whimpering with pleasure by the time we reached his floor.

Then he lifted me again and carried me to his room. Someone, probably his assistant, Linda, had arranged for wine

in an ice bucket, and strawberries. He ignored those. He dropped me, barely able to stand, at the foot of the bed and pulled down the zipper of my dress, pulling it off my shoulder along with the straps of my bra.

When my breasts were free, he covered them with his hands. I moaned softly as he massaged them gently, arousing me until I fell against him, and he had to guide me unto the bed.

He pulled my dress up around my waist and pushed my panties aside, then his tongue was between my legs, and I was moaning and whimpering, my fingers clutching his hair. In only a few moments, my body was pulsing uncontrollably, shattering around his

mouth. Then he stopped suddenly. While I was still wondering why, he pulled down his pants and in the next moment, he had filled me completely.

I came immediately, crying out as the warm sweetness shattered my body into a million pieces, then as he continued to move, I felt the pleasure build up again, heat starting up in my core and spreading until even my fingertips were filled with pleasure. I screamed my release the same moment as he groaned loudly and collapsed on top of me.

Then I said it. I love you.

And he didn't say anything.

~§~§~§~§~

The pleasure of my memories fades into a faint heartache. No matter how I

think about it, I can't find a way to convince myself that I shouldn't be worried about his silence after I said those words.

How does he feel about me?

I have no answer to my question. It's scary, especially because my own feelings have taken over every part of me. It's as if I've stepped off the edge of a cliff, and even though my heart's in my mouth and my stomach is in knots, I'm the most excited I've ever been in my life. I'm totally enthralled by him. I want him, every part of him, and I desperately want him to feel the same way about me.

"If you keep staring at me like that I'm going to think you're having second thoughts already." His deep voice cuts

into my thoughts. He is looking at me, his blue eyes probing into mine, and his perfect lips curved into a faint smile.

I stare helplessly at him for a moment, my skin flushing. He is so insanely beautiful to look at. Will I ever get used to being around all that perfection? It doesn't seem likely. Right now, he looks enticing, dangerous, and incredibly sexy. His snowy white shirt is open at the collar, exposing the strong column of his throat. His dark hair curls softly into the back of his collar, making me want to run my fingers through it, and his dark blue pants stretch over the long length of his legs. Just from looking at him, my fingers are itching to touch him. I want him so much. I don't think I'll

ever stop wanting him.

“I’m not having second thoughts.” I deny softly. Second thoughts are the farthest thing from my mind. I just wish I knew how he felt about me. If I did, then maybe I wouldn’t feel so out of my depth. Next to his perfection, his obvious wealth, his incredibly good looks, I can’t help feeling extremely ordinary.

His eyes linger on my face for a moment, as if he’s reading my thoughts in my expression. He puts a hand on my thigh and strokes it lightly, in a gesture that should be reassuring but only fills my mind with images of the things those hands have done to me.

“Don’t worry,” He says, turning

back to his work, his hand still on my thigh. He sounds relaxed, his voice faintly teasing. “I promise I don’t have a firing squad waiting for you.”

“That’s not what I was thinking.” I reply with a self-conscious laugh.

“Then what are you so afraid of? An underground torture chamber?”

“No.” I protest. “Of course not, I was just thinking that I know so little about you.”

He chuckles as he turns back to me, and one of his eyebrows rises just a little higher than the other. “Really,” His eyes dip to my lips, and stay there for a second before rising back to my eyes, with a teasing and unmistakably sensual look. “I would say you know a lot about

me, Sophie.”

I don't miss his meaning, and I blush fiercely. We've spent the last twenty-four hours more naked in bed than out of it. The memories are enough to make my body clench with helpless desire. I cast an embarrassed glance towards Steve, but he is totally occupied with driving, his eyes straight ahead.

“I meant... about your life, your work...” I can't stop stammering. I look up at David in despair. Around him, I've obviously lost the ability to be coherent.

He studies me as I trip over my tongue. “You're charming.” He says, amusement dancing on his lips. The compliment only makes me blush harder, and I bend my face to hide my flaming

cheeks.

He puts a hand under my chin and lifts up my face, so I'm looking at him. "Don't hide your face when you blush," His voice is soft and compelling. "I like it."

I nod helplessly. With his fingers under my chin and his blue eyes doing things to my heart, it's not as if I can refuse him anything.

I'm still thinking of what to say when he bends over to brush his lips across mine in the lightest of kisses. I lean into it, as pleasure flutters through my body. By the time he lifts his head, my whole body is shaking with anticipation. I can't believe how much I want him. Nobody told me it would be like this. My body

feels as if it's in a permanent state of sexual hunger.

“We'll be home soon.” He says, his eyes dark with desire. It's as if he can read my mind and knows exactly what I want.

I can't wait.

Chapter Two

I FALL ASLEEP SOON AFTER, LULLED by the steady hum of the car engine. When I wake up, my head is resting on David's shoulder, and he is stroking my hair, his fingers gentle and soothing. I realize that the car is no longer moving. I open my eyes and sit up, wondering how long I've been asleep.

“I was beginning to think I would have to kiss you to get you to wake up.” His hand leaves my hair. “You were very determined to use me as a pillow.” He adds wryly. I wonder if he is teasing me, but I can't tell from his face.

I stretch self-consciously and smooth

my hair. Steve is already opening the door on my side, so I step out of the car, looking around to get a feel of my surroundings.

We're parked on a tree-lined street, in front of a towering stone and glass apartment block. I have to crane my neck to try to see all of it. The walls are cream stone, and the glass gleams blue in the sun. It's massive and yet elegantly beautiful.

Right in front of me, a pair of glass double doors stands under a wide curved awning. As I take it in, David comes to my side, slipping his hand around my waist with a touch that is both firm and proprietary. As always, I immediately respond to the contact, my

skin tingling where I can feel the pressure of his fingers.

He starts to lead me inside. When we reach the entrance, a doorman holds the door open.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Preston, Mr. Preston.” The man greets me with a smile as David and I step inside the building. I look at him in surprise, and smile back. “Good afternoon.” I reply, inexplicably pleased at being addressed by my new name.

“Thank you Jimmy.” David’s voice is curt. He doesn’t pause. His hand on my waist urges me forward, and I follow him into the spacious lobby.

I take a second to look around, taking in the magnificent space. The floors are

perfect gleaming marble, so well-polished that I can see my reflection when I look down. The walls are richly detailed and paneled, and the ceiling is at least two-storeys high, and adorned with a sparkling crystal chandelier. Everything carries an air of unmistakable luxury.

I would stand and admire, but David's hand at my waist is firm and insistent, and I have no choice but to follow him. I turn a questioning glance at him, wondering at his haste, but his face is impassive. I assume he has no time to watch me appreciate the beauty that's probably commonplace to him.

The man at the front desk gives us a greeting too, also calling me Mrs.

Preston, and making me wonder if Linda has been passing a picture of me around. We acknowledge him without stopping as David leads me further towards the elevators. In only a matter of moments, we've crossed the lobby and are in the private elevator that leads to his penthouse apartment.

As the doors close, he turns to me, and using his body, presses me against the wall, pinning my arms at my sides. His face is only inches from mine, and the desire in his eyes turns my bones to liquid. I swallow hard as my body heats up from the close contact with his. Then his lips dip, and he claims my senses in a scorching kiss.

I open my lips to him, hungry for

him, and hungry for more.

“I’m going to make love to you until your voice is hoarse from screaming my name.” He promises softly when we come up for air, making my heart pound with excitement, his sudden passion erasing any doubts I have had in the past hour. He kisses me again. “Your lips are so soft.” He whispers huskily. He continues to kiss me, his lips tracing a path from the sensitive spot below my ear, down to where the neckline of my blouse covers the top of my breasts, which are heavy and aching with need. My breath starts to come in short moans. I want him here, now.

He straightens with a low chuckle. “Don’t be in such a rush, sweetheart,”

His voice is gently teasing, “We’re almost there.”

I don’t understand how he can be so calm, when the torrent of need flowing through me has made me almost incapable of speech. My hands are shaking with the need to touch him, even the sound of his voice is like an aphrodisiac, stirring me on. I take a deep breath to steady myself.

The bell dings and the doors open into an immaculate foyer, which is bigger than the living room of my apartment back in Ashford. The honey-toned wall paneling complements the perfectly finished dark wood floors, and lovely paintings of subjects ranging from wildflowers to waterfalls add definition

to the walls. At one end of the room, a set of polished wood double doors lead out into a large living room.

It's exceptionally beautiful. On two sides, the walls are windows, with exquisite views of the Sound, the city, the Mountains beyond, and many landmarks I can't yet identify. A couple of artfully placed rugs cover the polished wood floors. In the perfectly arranged lounge area, there are two comfortable looking couches and a window seat, where I can instantly see myself curled up and reading. Further inside, in another carpeted area, there is a large dining table, with a vase of beautifully arranged flowers sitting on top of the gleaming wood surface.

Everything is perfect. “Wow.” I breathe, entranced. “It’s so beautiful.”

He nuzzles my neck, sending a quiver of pleasure flowing across my body, reminding me of our unfinished business in the elevator, my body responds immediately, but then he straightens, leaving me feeling a little disappointed.

I don’t notice the smallish, middle-aged woman until I hear her voice. “Good afternoon.” She says. Startled at the intrusion, I turn around, and see her standing behind us. “Welcome to Seattle, Mrs. Preston.” She continues.

She is smiling at me, her face open and friendly. I smile back. “Thank you.”

“Sophie, this is Mrs. Daniels, your

housekeeper.” David introduces us as the elevator bell dings and Steve comes in, carrying David’s suitcase and my luggage as if they weigh nothing.

“Come on,” David turns to me, “let me show you the rest of the apartment. Mrs. Daniels will unpack your things.”

I nod, wondering as Steve carries my luggage further into the apartment, if I’ll ever get used to people doing things for me that I’ve always done by myself.

I let David lead me through the rest of his home, my new home. I can’t help being excited that I’m going to live in this insanely beautiful place. Beyond the dining area is a modern kitchen, with equipment I can’t even identify, let alone use. It has a marble-topped island in the

middle, and a comfortable looking breakfast nook for four.

There is more. David's study, with dark wood wall paneling and a soft dark rug, bookshelves filled with books, and another set of floor to ceiling windows, which provide more spectacular views of the city. Two guest bedrooms that look beautiful, if unused, and a staircase that leads to a private terrace with a sparkling blue swimming pool.

I already know that he is rich, but this is luxury. "It's more beautiful than I imagined." I tell him, enchanted with it all.

He doesn't reply, instead he leads me down the hall to the last door, the door to the master suite. He places his

hand on the door handle and smiles at me. “Are you ready to see your room, Mrs. Preston?”

My heart quickens. “I believe I am, Mr. Preston.”

He chuckles and opens the door into a huge bedroom.

A soft rug covers the entire floor, and the windows are hung from floor to ceiling with long white drapes. There are two armchairs and a coffee table in a corner, and a dressing table with a wide mirror. But it's the bed that catches my attention. It is huge, perfectly made and very inviting, taking up most of the space on one side of the room. It's a bed to roll around in, a bed to make love in. I step towards it, moving almost involuntarily.

At the foot of the bed, I stop and run my hands along the soft linen bedspread. I turn to see if David is following me, and find that he is right behind me.

His face dips to the back of my neck, moving my hair out of the way, as he uses his lips to tease the sensitive skin. "Do you like it?" He whispers, his voice is unmistakably sensual.

I arch my neck, exposing more of my skin to his lips. "Yes." I whisper.

He pulls me to him, his hands circling my waist, and molding my body against his. Sighing softly, I lean back, pressing myself against his hard body. I feel his erection against the back of my thighs and my body clenches in sweet need. I moan softly.

“You’re an aphrodisiac.” He murmurs in my ear, his voice husky. “I want you every minute,” His hands finds my breasts through my clothes and start to rub them gently from behind.

I close my eyes, luxuriating in the feel of his hands and the sound of his voice. His hands roam down from my breasts to my thighs. Gripping the hem of my skirt, he pulls it up until it’s around my waist. I feel the cool air on my exposed flesh, then his hands, warm, strong, caressing the softness of my butt, until the heat building between my legs is a pulsing, raging fire, and I want so much more.

We’re still standing, and my legs are so weak that I have to lean back against

him. He unbuttons my blouse and undoes my bra, pushing it up until my breasts spill naked into his hands.

I sigh with pleasure when he grabs them, massaging them with a slow, rhythmic motion while playing with my aching nipples. I moan and press harder against him, wet and aching, desperate for him to give me what I need.

Still standing, he pulls my panties down and spreads my legs, stroking me with his fingers. I am so wet, they slip into me very easily, I hear him groan, and the sound fires my blood. I reach back for his belt, but he's faster than I am. He releases me for a moment while he undoes his pants, the next moment I can feel him, rock hard, pressing

insistently against my thighs.

I shimmy until my panties fall all the way down, and then step out of them, leaving them discarded on the floor. I spread my legs, aching for him to fill me. His fingers start to stroke me again, I hear myself panting as he rubs back and forth, in and out, pleasuring me. I groan loudly, moving my hips to his rhythm. He strokes me until my hips are jerking uncontrollably, then he pulls his fingers away and replaces them with his thick, hard length.

I press backward, and he pushes into me, making me whimper uncontrollably as he fills me. I can't stop myself from crying out again and again as he thrusts, still gripping my hips. I match his

strokes, pushing him deeper into my core. I feel out of balance, like any moment I'll fall, but I don't care, the only thing that matters is each sure thrust, each sweet burst of pleasure. My whole body is heating up, and getting slick with sweat, but I don't care, I only want more. He groans and grips my waist tighter, thrusting harder and faster. I can't feel my fingers or my toes, I can't feel anything, only him and the devastating pleasure he is giving me. I cry hoarsely as my brain reduces to nothing but sweetness. My body stiffens and I lose myself, falling against him with a moan, as he groans and comes in a hot rush inside me.

I can't catch my breath. I can feel his

heart beating against my back, and his breath coming in deep gasps. He slips out of me and my body shivers with residual pleasure. My legs give way, and we both collapse on the soft rug.

When I catch my breath, I turn to look at him, unable to suppress a giggle at how ridiculous we both look, half-undressed, and lying on the floor.

David follows my gaze, and chuckles. He kicks off his pants, then gets up and, lifting me as easily as if I weigh nothing, he carries me over to the bed, collapsing on top of me on the soft mattress.

“Welcome home, Mrs. Preston.”

“Thank you, Mr. Preston.”

I am still giggling. He gets up and

starts to take off the rest of his clothing. As I watch him undress, my body starts to throb again. He is so magnificent.

I sit up and pull off my half-discarded blouse. My bra and skirt follow. He starts to watch me, and I revel in the pleasure of seeing him grow hard again. By the time I am completely undressed, I know we're not leaving the bed anytime soon.

“What are you trying to do to me?” He growls as he kneels on the bed, right between my spread legs.

I can't hide my pleasure. “Have I done something wrong? I ask, mock contrite.

He chuckles, “No sweetheart,” he says, as he enters me slowly. “You're

doing everything right.”

Chapter Three

HOURS LATER, I FINALLY DRIFT OFF, EXHAUSTED. I can't remember how many times David has brought me to a brain-shattering climax. I feel boneless and liquid, aching sweetly. He's made love to me slowly, then fast, then slowly again, each time until I cry out his name in senseless surrender.

When I wake up, the room is dimmer, telling me I've slept until evening. I'm alone on the bed. I stretch luxuriously. My body feels delicious.

I'm completely naked underneath the covers, so I take them with me as I get off the bed. My clothes are no longer on the floor where I dropped them earlier.

Baffled, I wonder if Mrs. Daniels has been in to tidy up while I was asleep.

Apart from the door we came in, another door leads off the bedroom. I open it and step into a huge, brightly lit closet. On one side, rows upon rows of suits hang side by side, with shirts, pants, shoes and a vast array of all sorts of men's clothing. On the opposite side from the suits, the racks are almost bare, sparsely populated with my few clothes, which Mrs. Daniels has unpacked. My underwear is neatly arranged in a drawer, my shoes tidily placed.

On the far wall, there's a full-length mirror. I walk forward, staring at my mussed hair and wide eyes. My skin is still flushed from all the lovemaking,

with a smooth healthy glow. Making love suits me, I decide, giggling, I look far better than I remember.

A frosted glass door leads off the dressing room into a luxurious bathroom. I step inside, admiring the gleaming cream tile walls and the clear marble floors. A deep sunken bath sits in the middle of the room, with solid looking gold taps. A marble-topped sink stands below a wide, mirrored wall cabinet, frosted glass hides a shower stall, and a door leads off to what must be the toilet.

At the sink, I splash some water on my face. Opening the cabinet above, I notice that my toiletries have been arranged inside. I'm impressed. I make my way back to the dressing room to

look for something to wear. My jeans and blouses feel like too much of a bother, and the few dresses I bought while shopping for my wedding seem too dressy. An impulse makes me put on one of David's shirts. It's soft, and feels heavenly on my skin. It's probably insanely expensive, I think, walking out of the room to look for him.

At first, the apartment seems remarkably silent, then I hear David's voice coming from the direction of his study, I follow the sound, then pause at the door to eat him up with my eyes.

He is standing with his back to me, looking towards the view of the city from the windows. He's wearing only sweatpants, and his back is bare,

showing me his defined muscles up to where they curve into his firm ass. As I watch him, I can't help thinking of a colossus, bestriding the world. He looks magnificent, powerful, and potent.

And he's mine.

I have to try very hard to resist the urge to go to him and run my hands all over his glorious body.

He says something again and I realize that he is talking into a small earpiece attached to his ear.

“How many percent total?” I hear him say, his voice is terse and commanding. He pauses and listens for a while, “Everything hinges on Carole,” He says finally, “Leave her to me, I know exactly how to deal with her.”

Even though it's not me he's talking to, I'm hit by the steely hardness in his voice. There is something ruthless in the sound. Vaguely, I wonder who Carole is. The sound of another woman's name on his lips is enough to make my heart constrict with jealousy.

I stay where I am at the door, not sure whether to go in to him. I don't want to interrupt if he's busy. However, as if he can feel me standing there, he turns around. I step back at the coldness I see in his eyes, the blue is faded almost to grey, and his face seems almost cruel.

“Sophie.” He smiles, his expression softening as he removes the earpiece and comes around the desk to meet me. I shiver slightly, the fear I felt only

moments before, melting as he runs his hand over my arm, draped in the soft material of his shirt. “This looks very good on you.” He says, his eyes travelling down to my bare legs, then back to my face.

“Thank you.” I say shyly. Outside the windows, it’s already dark. I must have slept for hours. “I didn’t mean to sleep for so long.”

David shrugs. “You were tired.” He raises his hand and runs a finger along my lower lip, making me shiver again. “I’m sure I had something to do with that.” He says tenderly.

I blush, and he chuckles, pulling me to him, and running his hands over my body, which is naked under the shirt.

“You should wear this all the time with nothing underneath.” He suggests, the teasing light in his eyes making him look his age, with none of the steeliness I saw in his face earlier.

I laugh. “I would never be able to go out.” I point out.

“Hmm...mm,” His eyes are on my lips, “you’d always be here, half naked and ready for me.” He growls softly and gives me a quick kiss on my lips. “I’d like to show you what that thought does to me,” He says, “But I’m sure you are hungry.”

My stomach rumbles loudly, reminding me that I haven’t eaten all day. “I am.”

“Good.” He is already pulling me

out of the study, his hand gentle on my elbow. “Let’s eat.”

Dinner is a home cooked feast Mrs. Daniels must have prepared before she left for the day. In the kitchen, David fills our plates from the silver chafing dishes, his fingers moving with superb grace. Is there anything he doesn’t do perfectly well? I help him load the plates unto a tray and follow him as he takes them to the living room.

The food is delicious, as is the red wine David pours for me. We eat, seated on the rug, the couch at our backs, and the gleaming lights of the city laid out at our feet.

There’s something about the intimacy of the moment. I feel close to him

somehow. "Tell me about yourself." I whisper.

He leans back on the couch, watching me through hooded eyes.

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything." I say hopefully.

"My life isn't half as interesting as yours," he states coolly. "My father died when I was young, my mother remarried almost immediately and lived happily ever after till her husband died last year." He shrugs, his voice sounding detached.

Something in his tone gets to me. "Didn't you get along with your step-father?" I ask, concerned. He doesn't sound too happy about his mother's marriage.

“I have no idea.” He says cryptically. “I never saw either of them.”

“How come?”

He looks at me over the top of his glass. “He was very rich, and he liked to travel, my mother followed him everywhere because that was what he wanted.”

My heart goes out to him as I imagine him growing up without the attention of his mother. At least my mother didn't abandon me. She died.

“They never took you with them?” I ask, a small frown on my face.

He shakes his head. “No, they didn't.” He says, looking a little bored. “My step-father had a house not very far from here. I lived there.”

“Oh.” I watch as he leans back on the couch, his face relaxed, his eyes hooded by half closed lids. His lashes are incredibly long, I think, momentarily distracted. “Does your mother still live there?”

“When she’s in town, yes.”

He doesn’t seem eager to talk about his mother, so I decide to switch subjects.

“Tell me about your work.” I say, leaning forward. I already know that his company is called Preston Corp and that it has something to do with software, but I’m curious to know more.

“I invest in developing computer software.” He says. “There are a lot of products out there with the ability to

provide enormous user satisfaction. Some of them never get to reach their target market. I make it possible for them to do so.”

I'm impressed, and even more so by the confidence in his tone. “How did you get started?”

“A videogame.” He grins boyishly, again looking his age. I have a sudden urge to wrap my arms around him and hold him close, to soothe the lonely little boy my imagination has conjured out of his words.

“Did you miss her?” the question pops out of my mouth before I have the time to consider it. I'm thinking of my own mother, how I've spent my whole life with the faint ache of missing her,

even though I never knew her.

“Who?”

“Your mother.”

He is silent for a moment, but only a single moment.

“Never.” He states finally, his voice cool. He gets up and picks up the tray, and taking it to the kitchen. He loads the dishwasher while I dump the empty bottle of wine in the chrome bin with the ‘recycle’ icon. It seems our moment of intimacy has passed. We clean up in silence. He works quickly, efficiently, and self-sufficiently. I may as well not even be there. As soon as we’re done, he goes back to his study.

I sit at the window seat in the living room, alternately admiring the view, and

thumbing through a glossy magazine on interior design. I can't really concentrate though. My thoughts are full of David as I piece the things I now know about him together. I know more than I did when I married him, but he is still a mystery in so many ways.

After a while, I'm filled with a longing to recapture the feeling of intimacy I had earlier while we were talking, so I drift towards the study, hoping that David would be finished with whatever he is doing.

I find him seated at the desk, his face lit by the glow from a desk lamp and his computer screen. He looks hard as he sits there alone, the planes and angles of his face made pronounced by the dim

light. Watching him, I get the feeling that he is someone that's used to being on his own. I imagine him as a solemn, dark haired little boy, left alone while his mother chose to spend her time with her new husband. It makes me sad.

Reluctant to disturb him, I walk on to our room, and lie waiting in bed. I don't sleep until much later, when he comes to join me and makes love to me until I fall asleep in his arms.

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The next morning when I wake up, my body is sweet and tender from another night of intense lovemaking. I move, wanting to snuggle close to David, but he's not in bed with me. Disappointed, I get up. The bed feels

incredibly empty with me as its sole occupant.

On my way to the bathroom, I see the note propped upright on the dressing table. 'Gone to the office.' It says, in a firm elegant scrawl. I'm already missing him as I go into the bathroom and take a warm shower.

Afterwards, I dress and find my way to the kitchen, following the unmistakable smell of breakfast cooking. I find Mrs. Daniels making pancakes. Still feeling let down that David has already left, I say a friendly hello to her, silently telling myself that it's unrealistic to expect that David and I would spend all our time together, making love. Of course, he has to go to work, he has a

business to run after all.

Mrs. Daniels pours me some tea and places a large plate of pancakes dripping with maple syrup in front of me. I'm not particularly hungry, but the pancakes are light, fluffy, and delicious. As I eat, we talk about the apartment, and she tells me the things I need to know, like the names of some of the building staff and all the security codes and emergency numbers I might need. She seems to vibrate with warmth as she talks, and I soon relax in her company.

After my breakfast, she has other work to do, and I'm left on my own again. I find myself missing Stacey and her constant concern. I imagine her sitting at her desk with a frown on her

face, wondering if David has turned out to be Bluebeard. I don't have a mobile, I'm sure that if I did she would be calling me every hour. I decide to put her mind at rest.

“Sophie honey,” I can hear the relief in her voice that I've finally called, “How are you?” It's so like her to keep fretting about me, even though I've assured her that I'm happy.

“I'm fine.” I say, laughing.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” I insist. “I'm perfectly happy.”

“Okay.” I try not to hear the skepticism in her voice. Thankfully, she starts to tell me about the reactions to my sudden marriage. I listen silently, but I

don't really care. Ashford seems like a very long time ago.

"Mrs. Newton seems to think you broke poor Eddie's heart," She says, catching my attention, "Apparently he was always sweet on you."

"He wasn't." I say defensively, trying to forget the look on Eddie's face when he confronted David at my apartment. Good thing Stacey doesn't know about that. I think, relieved.

"Oh well," She sighs. "Don't hesitate to let me know if you need anything." She says finally.

"I won't," I assure her, "but don't worry about me Stacey, I promise I'll be fine."

The rest of the day passes slowly.

Mrs. Daniels clucks in disapproval when I tell her not to bother about lunch. She disappears again, leaving me by myself. I swim laps in the pool, lie on the lounge in the terrace reading magazines, and watching the city from the height of the penthouse. I can't help feeling as if I'm on a solo vacation instead of a honeymoon.

I wander through the apartment, exploring on my own. In David's study, I look through the numerous books on business, and philosophy. Thankfully, there are also some literary classics, Charles Dickens, Thackeray, and even Fitzgerald. They are all sturdy looking, leather bound volumes. Probably very expensive, I think, wondering if he reads

them.

I spend the rest of the day drawing. The sound of my pencil scratching the paper of my sketchbook is soothing and familiar. I draw until it gets a little dark outside. As I put my sketchpad away, I realize with a vague feeling of sadness that it's the third day of my marriage, and I have been alone all day.

I'm at the window seat reading a book when David returns. He steps into the living room, filling the space with his striking presence. I spring up from my seat, unable to contain how happy and relieved I am to see him. At the back of my mind, I berate myself for being so pathetically dependent on him, but I forget those thoughts when he drops his

briefcase and claims my lips in a soul-searing kiss.

I forget that I have been alone all day, I forget the gloominess of my feelings earlier. Surrounded by the taste and feel of him, I can't think of anything besides how he makes me feel.

“Are you hungry?” I ask when he finally releases me.

The smile spreads slowly across his lips. “I am.” He says, his eyes devouring me.

I take a deep breath. “Mrs. Daniels left something for dinner.”

“Oh that.” He chuckles, his eyes telling me that his hunger was for something else. “I'll be out in a minute.” He says, picking up his briefcase and

going to our room to change out of his suit.

I set the table in the kitchen. After we eat, David gives me another long kiss before disappearing into his study. Confused, I wonder if all my days are going to be spent like this, waiting for him to come home to make love to me, and staying out of his way when he wants to work. I may not have a lot of experience, but I'm sure there should be a lot more intimacy in a marriage.

It's not as if I blame him for working, but we're supposed to be on our honeymoon. I understand that with the rushed wedding, there would have been little time to arrange his schedule to put a trip together. But it's not even a

trip I want. I want him. I want him to be mine the way I've surrendered to being his. I don't want to be like Psyche, wandering all day around a beautiful house, with a husband I don't know, who only comes to make love to me in the dark.

I'm still awake when he comes into our bedroom. I watch him as he comes to sit on the bed. I'm trying to find the words to tell him how I feel without seeming needy. I've told him my feelings once, and the only answer he gave me was silence. I don't know if I can expect anything better this time.

"You left so early this morning." I say finally, when the silence becomes too much.

“I always leave early.” His tone is dismissive.

That was before you had a wife. I want to say, but I bite the words back. I understand that he has to work hard. You don't get to have the things he does at his age by being laid back, but I need to know that I'm not just a warm body he comes to at night. I think of all the things I want to tell him. That I was lonely without him, bored, wishing he was here. That we're newlyweds, supposed to be spending this time together.

“You were gone all day.” I say instead, my voice low.

He sighs tiredly, “Sophie, maybe in your imagination being married means spending every single moment together,

but real life isn't a fantasy, I have a business to run." His voice is harsh, and I flinch, unable to hide my pain and surprise.

"I was just..." I stop, unsure what to say.

He turns to look at me. Something in my face seems to get to him. "I had a hard day Sophie, I was incredibly busy." He explains, before getting up and going to the bathroom.

I frown at my hands on my lap. I've told him that I loved him, and he said nothing. I'm telling him I'd like to spent more time with him, and his response is to treat me as if I don't know what I'm talking about. Hurt, I lie back on the bed and turn on my stomach. I hate that I feel

like crying. I've lied to Stacey, I realize, I'm not happy. I'm afraid. I have a husband who can set my body on fire with just one look, and who is everything to me, but has no desire to be close to me, or to let me get close to him.

I feel him return and slide into the bed beside me, but I don't look up. I try not to react to the warmth of his skin as it touches mine. I try to stay still as he runs a hand gently down my back. When he raises the thigh length t-shirt I'm wearing and spreads my legs, I bite my lip to keep from moaning. The thought that this is all he wants from me is painful. I want to be angry with him, not to respond to what he's doing, but

already I'm eager, wanting him so much that it's an intense throbbing ache that needs to be filled.

My resistance lasts until he dips his head between my legs, and starts to lick me, his tongue moving rapidly, swirling round and round my sensitive core until I am breathless and gasping, moaning his name. At the back of my mind, I accept that I need more than this from him, but for now, I don't care. I'm too lost in the pleasure.

I let out a long moan, and he grips my thighs tightly so that I can't move. My fingers dig into the pillow. Imprisoned between his hands and his tongue, I surrender myself to the exquisite pleasure. He teases me to a frenzy until I

reach a shattering climax, crying out my pleasure as my hips jerk wildly against his delicious tongue.

Afterwards, while my body is still shuddering with the aftershocks of my climax, I run my fingers down his chest. He lies back on the bed, watching me through half closed eyes as I explore his body. I watch his face, eager to see the signs that I'm pleasing him.

My fingers travel down over his belly, until they close around him. I marvel at the hardness encased in the soft skin, like steel under silk. He feels warm, strong and powerful, I stroke him with eager fingers, loving the feeling. His breathing changes, becoming faster and more ragged, encouraged, I bend my

head and take him into my mouth.

He groans, and his hips move, grinding a little. Instinctively, I take him deeper, running my tongue over his swollen tip, and then allowing him to slide further inside my mouth. He tastes of skin, of salt, and a flavor that is all him. I steal a look at his face. His eyes are closed, his lips parted. He likes it. I purse my lips and suck on him, moving my head, so he goes slowly in and out of my mouth.

“Sophie.” His groan is deep and raspy, the pleasure in his voice makes me feel powerful and sexy... all woman. I suck harder, feeling him grow harder in my mouth as his hands run feverishly through my hair, but I don't stop. In

every other way, I already feel powerless, but in this, I want to see him lose control of himself.

He doesn't give me the chance. He rises from the bed, moving faster than I could have anticipated, and lifts me, pulling me forward until my hips are poised over his erection. Then, with his hands on my waist, he guides me down slowly until I'm completely filled with him. I moan at the exquisite sensation of him inside me. My whole body is tingling. I forget everything but what he's doing to me. I want this, I want this so much.

Even though I am on top, he defines our movements, guiding my hips as he grinds his, stroking my sensitive insides

with each deep thrust.

My body starts to shake. I'm moaning incoherently, crying out his name over and over. He quickens his pace, thrusting faster, until his body stiffens, and he groans, exploding into me in a warm surge. At the same moment, I shout his name one final time, and then collapse onto his chest.

Chapter Four

THE NEXT MORNING, WHEN I WAKE up to find myself alone on the bed, my first thought is that David has left for work again. I feel a little depressed until I hear him in the dressing room. It's embarrassing how relieved I am when I see him standing there almost fully dressed, putting on his cufflinks. I lean on the doorframe, watching him as he concentrates on fastening the links.

“Good morning.” I say softly, my heart constricting with longing as I look at him. Watching him makes me feel happy and sad at the same time, happy that he's mine, and sad because, somehow, I know he doesn't truly

belong to me.

He looks up at me, “Good morning Sophie.” He says, finishing with the links. There’s a tie hanging loosely around his neck, and his fingers move to knot it.

I don’t want to rehash our conversation of last night, but I don’t want to spend the whole day missing him either. “I wish you wouldn’t leave so early,” I say.

He walks away from me, towards the mirror. In the face of his silence, I start to wish I hadn’t said anything. I watch as he starts to knot his tie.

“I know you’re really busy...” I start.

He turns to me. The expression on his face is one of sincere apology. “I’m

sorry Sophie,” he says, “Yes, I’ve been busy. I’ve had to deal with certain issues at work which were there even before I met you.” He stops, “but that’s no excuse.”

I walk across the room to him, “I understand, really. I’m not complaining, I just wish we had a little more time for us.” I look at his face as I say the word, ‘Us’. That’s what’s important to me. I want us to be a success. I want this to last. I don’t want to be a short statistic in his life. The thought of not being with him fills me with a sad sort of desperation.

He raises one of his hands, tracing a finger across my lips. “Things will clear up soon,” he assures me, “and then I’ll

make it up to you, I promise. We'll go somewhere that will blow your mind."

I smile, excited as much by his promise as his touch. "You blow my mind." I whisper.

He smiles and moves his finger from my lips to my chin, lifting it up, so I'm looking into his eyes. My lips tingle, waiting for his kiss, but he doesn't make any move to touch me.

I lift myself unto my toes and touch my lips to his. He kisses me back, his brow furrowing in surprise when I gently push him away, running my hands down the front of his shirt. He watches me as my hands move down. I'm not sure what I'm doing, but I want to show him how much I want him. I want to

finish what I started last night.

I drop to my knees on the soft carpet in front of him, stroking him through his trousers, and feeling him harden and push against my palm. I loosen his belt and undo his zipper, reaching in to pull down his briefs just enough for him to spring free, hard, rigid, and eager.

Immediately I cover the head with my lips. I feel him stiffen, but I don't look up. I suck on the tip, pulling him deeper with my lips and stroking him with my tongue. His fingers tangle in my hair, and I hear him groan softly.

I love this. I love the feel, the smell, the warmth of him. I move my head slowly, letting him go in and out of my mouth while I suck deeply. He groans

again, and the sound of his arousal causes a warm, insistent need to start in my core, and spread till my whole body is suffused with my desire for him.

I take him in as deeply as I can, he moans, and his hands stiffen in my hair, moving my head in the rhythm that he wants, as he starts to grind into my mouth. I tighten my lips around him, sucking him in as he grinds faster. There is something so erotic about what we're doing. A small moan escapes my lips. The sound does something to him, and his whole body stiffens, the muscles of his hips tightening under my hands, then he jerks forward and with a loud groan, comes into my mouth.

I swallow quickly, I can't believe

what I've just done, but I'd do it again and again. He slips out of my mouth, his body shuddering. His breathing is deep and heavy as he comes down on his knees beside me.

“You're a bag of surprises, aren't you?” he says huskily, moments before his lips descend on mine as his fingers find my wet arousal under my t-shirt.

I'm already so hot for him, I moan as his fingers stroke me.

“You're ready for me.” His whisper is warm against my mouth.

“Hmm.” I nod, I'm so ready.

His fingers rub me until I have to hold on to him to steady myself, but he doesn't stop slipping them in and out of me until I'm squirming wildly, begging

him to give me more. Suddenly, he turns me around and enters me from behind.

I bend forward, my hands on the floor as he thrusts into me. He is so incredibly hard, so sweet, so fast. I can't catch my breath. I'm already so far gone when his fingers find my nipples under my shirt, and start to tease them, I explode into a million pieces of pure pleasure, screaming my release in a garbled version of his name.

He pulls out of me, still hard, and turns me around until I am lying on my back and he is still kneeling, poised in front of me. He lifts my legs, raising them around his hips, and enters me again. My body tightens around him, unraveling as he starts to move again. He

doesn't stop until we both climax, and he collapses on the rug beside me.

Later, while I'm still trying to catch my breath, he gets up and starts to adjust his clothes.

I watch him through a haze of sexual fulfillment. "Have I made you late for work?"

"Not really." His movements are swift as he knots his tie and pulls his trousers back up. It looks like he has already pushed me to the back of his mind. I watch him silently.

"I've asked Linda to make a few appointments for you." He says suddenly.

"What kind of appointments?" I frown, I would never admit it to him, but

Linda Mays, his assistant, with her glossy black hair, and her skirts that put the ‘p’ in pencil, intimidates me to heaven and back.

“Things to do with clothes, and shopping, and other stuff you need.” He gives me a hand up, dropping a kiss on my nose. “Linda will tell you all about it.” His eyes go to my side of the dressing room, which is still sadly sparse.

“Okay.” I’m sure I should be more excited about shopping, but there are things I want more than new clothes, to be closer to him, for one.

My day progresses much better than the day before. The new tablet and smartphone arrive only about an hour

after David leaves. The note in the package says ‘Some toys you can play with while I’m gone.’ Even though I find it unsatisfactory that he’s trying to take away my loneliness at his absence by buying me electronic gadgets, I fall in love with them immediately.

They’re both already programmed, the phone with David’s mobile and office numbers, and the tablet with a couple of apps, books, and internet access. At first, I stumble a little with the tablet, but then I find that it’s much like using a computer.

Linda has arranged multiple appointments. She calls me in the morning, sounding incredibly busy and efficient as she tells me she had sent my

schedule to my new phone. It would be funny if not that as soon as I cut the connection I see the updates to my calendar. There's a hairdresser, in fact, a beauty team, with hairs, nails, and makeup people, and a personal shopper too. I'm stupefied.

The beauty team arrives before noon. I get my hair cut and styled by a hilariously funny French man called Jasper, who calls Mrs. Daniels 'my love', causing her to blush to the roots of her silver hair. My nails are fixed to perfection, and the makeup artist, a fierce looking girl with purple hair and a lip ring, spends nearly an hour making me up to look as if I'm not wearing any makeup. She leads me through it, finally

leaving me with the products that ‘fit my complexion’.

After they leave, I get a visit from the personal shopper, a petite but lively girl in her twenties. Her name is Reiko Nakano, she tells me, eagerly shaking my hand. I can't help staring at her. She's incredibly beautiful in an unusual, exotic way, with grey almond eyes, tilted upwards at the corners, pale skin, and straight, waist-length black hair with deep scarlet streaks.

She talks non-stop as she shows me the samples she's brought based on Linda's description of me. I soon discover that her father is a Japanese-American heart surgeon, and her mother is a Spanish jewelry designer. She

chatters without pause for almost thirty minutes, but I don't mind, in fact, I like it.

“My father wanted me to be a doctor,” She tells me, as she shows me another beautiful outfit, “so I went to pre-med and got accepted to medical school.” She shudders, “but I decided I liked clothes more.”

I laugh, “Your father must have hated that.”

“Yes he did, especially since I'm such a genius,” she sighs, “I'm a great loss to the profession of medicine.” She smiles impishly, “but a great gain to women who love the way I dress them, right?”

I have to agree. From what I can see,

she does know what she is doing. Based on what she has shown me, my new style is part casual, part classy, innocent, and sexy. I flatter myself that she's clothing me in my own personality. "Seattle is not really a dressy city," She tells me with a grimace, "But we do have a little fashion." She winks at me, promising to deliver all my new clothes over the course of the week.

David is still extremely busy, so over the next few days, we fall into a routine. We have breakfast together before he leaves for work. Afterwards, I read on my tablet, mostly books, but I also read the news, especially news about software companies, eager to learn more about what David does when

he's not with me.

The little news I find about Preston Corp is mostly what I already know. It's a top-notch software entrepreneurial and investment company, with David as the CEO. There is some information about their investments, but it's mostly abstract. David is as much of an enigma to the public as he is to me, I soon decide. There's nothing about his personal life, only a little about his charity work supporting educational programs all over the world.

When I'm not reading, I draw, filling my sketchbook with more and more pages of jewelry. Sometimes Mrs. Daniels comes to watch me, exclaiming about how talented I am.

The day Reiko delivers the first batch of my clothes, I've been in Seattle for a little less than a week. As soon as Mrs. Daniel's lets her in, she fills the apartment with her chatter.

"Wait till you see your new clothes." She tells me, as Mrs. Daniels wheels the full clothes rack into the apartment.

I've been sitting in the living room, sketching at the window seat. As I get up to join them, Reiko comes over to me. "I didn't know you were an artist." She remarks, her eyes on the sketchpad I just abandoned on the coffee table.

"I'm not." I deny, suddenly a little shy of my work. "I just like to draw jewelry.

"May I?" She looks closer, thumbing

through a few pages, “These are really good.” She looks up at me, her eyes shining, “Why are you keeping them hidden?”

I laugh, “Please don’t spare my feelings.”

“No, really!” She nods, “I know what I’m talking about. My mother designs jewelry.”

I vaguely remember, her mentioning something like that.

She sound excited. “I’d totally rock these.” She turns to me “Have you made any of them?”

“No.” I shake my head. “I haven’t been to art school or anything.”

Reiko’s curtain of black and scarlet hair moves as she shrugs, “My mother

didn't go either. She took a private course and learned how to smith herself.”

“Really!” I'm impressed.

“Do you have any plans to make them?” she asks. Mrs. Daniels is wheeling the rack of clothes towards the door that leads to my dressing room from the hallway while we follow her behind.

I give a little grimace. “Not really, no.” I say, “at least, not for now. I just like to draw.”

She gives me a look. “You should though, with your talent, you could make a name for yourself.” She sounds serious. “I wish I could talk to my mother about you,” she says, “but I'm

sure that would violate the NDA.”

Mrs. Daniels is already inside the dressing room. I stop at the door. What NDA? I think.

“What NDA?” I ask, an involuntary frown working its way to my face.

Reiko studies my face. “I...” for the first time since I met her she seems unsure what to say. She frowns, obviously uncomfortable. “I’m just not supposed to tell anyone about you.” She says finally.

I swallow, trying to keep my face calm even though my mind is churning. “Of course.” I pause outside for a moment while she joins Mrs. Daniels in the dressing room. A Non-Disclosure Agreement! Why? I don’t understand.

Is David keeping me a secret?

I think of the beauty team, the only other people I've met. Do they have orders not to mention me to anyone too?

Reiko and Mrs. Daniels are hanging up clothes, talking pleasantly about how to organize the closet. I can't bring myself to join them. The questions are raging in my mind. Why am I a secret?

Why am I such a secret that people have to sign a contract before they can see me.

My mind goes into overdrive, churning out possibilities.

Is he ashamed of me, ashamed of his spur of the moment decision to tie himself to me? As far as I know, he could be working with his lawyers now

trying to find a quiet way to get rid of me.

Is there someone else, someone he would rather be with maybe, someone he wouldn't want to find out about me?

Everything starts to fall into place. Almost a week in Seattle, and I have never been anywhere with him.

Leaving Reiko and Mrs. Daniels in the dressing room, I find my tablet and go to David's study. There is a soft leather sofa near the door, and I sit there, starting the tablet and going straight to the web browser.

I've looked at the web encyclopedia page on him before, but I didn't really read it. I was just psyched that he had one. Now I go through the little summary

window at the side. It has all the information, like his date and place of birth, alma mater, etc. but there is no field for spouse.

There would be one if anyone knew about me.

I'm a secret.

Why?

My phone rings, startling me.

I look at the screen and see David's name. I spend a few seconds debating whether I want to talk to him. With all the emotions raging within me, I'll probably get hysterical if I try to ask him what it all means.

I take a deep breath. "Hello." I say quietly.

"Sophie." I try not to get lost in the

warmth of his voice, at least not until I understand what's going on.

“I hope you can go out tonight.” He says, putting a big hole in all the conclusions I've drawn.

I'm silent for a few moments, confused. “You want us to go out together?”

There is a short pause at his end. “Yes.” He says finally.

So apparently, I'm not going to be a secret anymore, but that doesn't change the fact that he's had people sign a document to keep my existence quiet. “Where?” I ask.

“Just dinner.” He says, naming one of the more popular restaurants in the city.

“Oh. Okay.” I still don’t understand any of it, but I decide to wait until he comes home to ask him about the NDA.

When I finally come out of the study, Reiko has already left. I spent a few minutes putting away my sketches, still deep in thought. A few minutes ago, I was convinced that he was keeping our marriage silent because he wants to end it with as little fuss as possible, now I’m not sure of anything. It’s frustrating not to know where you stand with someone who means so much to you.

I should select something to wear from my new wardrobe, but my thoughts are in too much of a mess. I think about calling Stacey to pour out my confusions to her, but I know how worried she’ll

get.

Finally, I return to the living room, still deep in thought, and find myself face to face with a stranger.

She is an older woman, in her late fifties or early sixties, tall and slender, with thick wavy black hair and sparkling blue eyes. There's something vaguely familiar about her straight nose, determined chin and sharp cheekbones. She smiles at me, the expression on her face welcoming and warm, as if we've known each other for a long time, and are on the best of terms. I cast a curious glance at Mrs. Daniels, who's standing by the foyer door, not looking happy at all. I turn back to the woman.

“You must be Sophie.” She declares,

still smiling, and immediately I know who she is.

She moves towards me, determined and graceful. I'm not expecting the warm hug she gives me.

"I'm Marianne Weber," She coos, stepping back to take a good look at me, "David's mother."

I've already guessed as much, but I still turn to Mrs. Daniel's for confirmation, which she gives with a small nod, still looking extremely unhappy.

Briefly, I wonder at the misgivings that are so clear on the housekeeper's face, then I turn back to my guest. "I'm pleased to meet you." I say politely.

"I didn't believe it when I heard,"

She exclaims. She sounds playful and intimate as she leads me to a couch, “and you are so cute.” She gives me a smile that is so like her son’s. “Won’t you tell me about yourself? How did you meet David?” There’s something about her that instantly invites confidence, or maybe it’s just that I’ve gone through life desperately wanting a mother. I find myself wanting to talk to her. It makes me feel awkward.

“Well...” I notice Mrs. Daniels disappear into the kitchen. This is really odd. It’s obvious that whoever told his mother about me, it wasn’t David. I’m sure he has no idea that she’s here... and yet as she smiles at me, her sparkling eyes urging me to answer her question, I

realize that I want to.

“He came into the gift shop where I was working as an assistant,” I say, “he wanted to buy a gift.” I pause, “for you actually.”

She laughs merrily, as if I’ve said something terribly funny, “and then it was love at first sight.” She states.

For me, it probably was, but I still don’t know about David, so I don’t say anything

She wants to know everything about me. As we talk, I try my best not to give away too much, and not to sound evasive either.

“You should go out,” she states finally, “make friends, meet people, and discover the city on your own.” Her

voice is earnest. "I'm only here a few weeks every year these days, but whenever I'm in town we could have lunch, get to know each other better.

"That would be lovely." I mean it.

I hear the elevator bell. Moments later, David walks into the living room, his face hardening to stone when he sees who I'm with.

It's really early for him to come home. I immediately suspect that Mrs. Daniels called him to tell him his mother was with me. I look from him to his mother, and I'm sad to see the longing on her face. She loves him, I realize, and he's shut her out. That's his revenge for all the years she ignored him.

I get up from the couch. "I was just

getting to know your mother.” I say cheerfully. I’m annoyed that he has kept her from me, but I’m also eager to ease the tension I can sense in the room.

“Isn’t that wonderful,” His smile seems made of ice, “and now she is leaving.”

“David...” her voice is a plea.

“David!” I exclaim at the same time, shocked at his rudeness.

He ignores me. “Why did you come here?” he says to her, the contempt in his voice unrelenting.

She sighs. “David, my son got married, and I had no idea.” She looks exasperated, “I just wanted to meet Sophie.”

Her answer doesn’t get anywhere

with him. “I don’t want you here,” his voice is steel, “The next time you cajole anyone to let you in I will fire them.”

I see her stiffen, and square her shoulders. I hate that he is humiliating her. No matter their history she is still his mother.

“No, you won’t.” my voice is hesitant, but I can see that he’s hurting her, and I don’t like it, “and you may not want her here, but I do.”

David looks at me in surprise, his expression soon changes to exasperation. “Sophie...” he starts.

“No stop,” I interrupt, “Why don’t you want her here? Is it because you want to continue keeping me a secret? Why don’t you make her sign a non-

disclosure agreement?”

His eyes narrow. “You don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Don’t I?” I stare at him squarely, “didn’t you make the beauty team, the personal shopper, every person I’ve spoken to in all the days you’ve kept me hidden in this apartment sign a document to prevent them for saying anything to anyone about me?”

He runs a hand through his hair and glares past me at his mother. She shrugs, the movement of her shoulders saying she knew nothing about it. “You wouldn’t understand.” He says finally, his eyes meeting mine.

My annoyance turns to pain. It’s bad enough that he thinks it’s okay to keep

me a secret, but to keep things from me because he think I don't have the capacity to understand them is just insulting. Of course, I tell myself. It's already clear that he doesn't have any feelings for me. I'm just a willing body to him, a warm body he doesn't have to tell anything.

I turn away from him and walk out of the room. At that moment, I almost wish that I'd never met him. I'm tired of the feelings that have taken over me, the love, the frustration, the desperation, the deep sadness that comes with knowing I mean nothing to him.

"I hope you're glad." I hear him say to his mother as I step out of the room. His voice is like gravel.

I pause, “I’m sorry,” I hear her say apologetically. “I had no idea.”

“Well now you do.”

There is a short pause, and then I hear her voice again. “An NDA seems rather extreme... Does this have anything to do with Carole Banks?”

I don’t hear what he says to her, but I hear her footsteps as she leaves. Carole Banks, I remember I’ve heard that name before, that first night in his study. Who is she, and what does she have to do with anything?

Chapter Five

MY TABLET IS STILL IN DAVID'S STUDY, so that's where I go, hoping that he won't follow me. I hate that I have to find things out about my husband from the internet.

I start up the tablet again as I settle on the leather sofa, and search for Carole Banks. I sift through all the many profiles until I find one that seems likely. She's a heiress, with a social life that spans New York, Palm Beach and Europe. Born in Seattle, her father was Marshall Banks, a name that's only vaguely familiar until I remember the name of the investor who helped to make David's first fortune by investing in a

video game company David started with a couple of his friends while they were still in college.

I search for her name coupled with David's and the articles that come up fill me with dismay. I click on images, and what I see is the story of a long relationship that seems to span several countries and numerous events. There are pictures of them together at gallery openings, benefits, nightclubs, vacations, and even at her father's funeral where she leans on him while he holds her hand.

It wouldn't be so painful if they didn't look so good together, he tall handsome and intense, she with her wavy red hair, deep green eyes and

languid smile. A hot stab of jealousy passes through me, coupled with sadness. How could I have thought any of this was real? I can't imagine how even for a moment, he'll prefer me to her.

In all the articles, there's a strong indication that the writers consider them a couple. The latest, which has them together at a book launch, is only a few weeks before I met David in Ashford.

The door opens and David steps into the room, looking worried. His expression changes to relief when he sees me sitting there.

“I've been looking for you.”

I shrug, turning back to the tablet, I'm angry, jealous and in love. It's not a very

good combination.

He comes closer to me and his eyes take in the search pages I have open on screen of the tablet. “Nothing you find there has anything to do with me and you.” He says.

I can feel my heart breaking as I look at him. Is there a ‘him’ and ‘me’? Right now, I’m not so sure. I want to ask him once and for all, how he actually feels about me, but I’m afraid I won’t like the answer. I turn back to the pictures on my tablet and stare at them for a long moment.

“Tell me about her.” I ask.

“There’s nothing to tell.”

“Really?” I glare at him, “because it’s very clear here that she was your

girlfriend only a short time ago.

He shrugs, “Don’t believe everything you read in the papers Sophie. We saw each other on and off for a while, but it’s been over for a long time.”

“Do you love her?” I ask, unable to keep the jealousy I feel from creeping into my voice. “Is that why you’re keeping me hidden, so that she won’t find out about me?”

He sighs and walks over to me, coming to sit beside me. I try not to be distracted by how beautiful he is, by the intensity in his eyes. I have to try very hard to breathe. “You don’t need to concern yourself about Carole.” He says, his eyes holding mine and keeping me captive.

I want to believe him so much, even though he hasn't even bothered to answer my question.

“Her father invested a lot in your career.” I start, looking away from him.

“In return for a huge profit,” He says coaxingly, “It was good business, and he made money from Preston Corp every day we've been in existence.”

I close my eyes and take a breath. “All those pictures of the two of you...”

“Mean nothing,” he says, “We went to a lot of the same places, and people are used to mentioning our names together.”

I sniff, unconvinced. “Why don't you want anyone to know about me?” I ask.

There is a long pause as I wait for

him to answer my question. My breath catches in my throat.

He doesn't reply. Abruptly, I get up, abandoning the tablet on the sofa. "Fine, don't tell me." I mutter, making for the door. If I needed any proof that I mean nothing to him, this is it. If he cared about me, he would tell me what I need to know. He wouldn't keep me living in this limbo of not knowing where I stand.

His hand closes around mine before I get to the door.

"Sophie." I turn around, hopeful, waiting for him to say something, but he stays silent.

I pull my hand from his. "Don't touch me." I say, my voice catching in my throat. "Don't ever touch me again."

He looks annoyed. “Stop being childish Sophie.”

His words are more hurtful than his silence, I turn from him and rush towards our room. I need to get away from him. I don't care where I go. I just want to stop feeling as if I'm drowning in emotions I can't control.

“Sophie, for God's sake.”

I hear him, but I don't stop. I rush through the bedroom towards the closet. The thought of leaving him fills me with physical pain, but I can't stay with him if he won't even talk to me.

He catches up with me before I get to the closet door. He pulls me into his arms, crushing me to his chest. “Stop,” He whispers in my ear, “Stop.”

I close my eyes, losing myself in his embrace, realizing, as I breathe in the scent of his skin, and feel the warmth of his arms around me, that I could never leave him, not when he can make me feel like this. I melt into him, so overwhelmed by the depth of my emotions, that I can feel the wetness of tears in my eyes.

He starts to stroke my hair, and I press myself to his chest. I can hear the rhythm of his heart beating. In this moment, it feels as if he's mine, as if the deep longing I feel for him is being fulfilled. But I can't be sure, I can't be sure until he tells me how he feels.

“Why did you marry me David?” My voice is hardly higher than a whisper.

He pulls back a little, looking down at my face. “Because I wanted you,” He says, stroking my arms. My skin tingles where his fingers touch me, and I feel the last of my resistance melting. “I wanted you the moment I saw you standing outside that little shop in that small town, looking so lost and alone. I wanted your innocence, your beauty,” he leans over and drops a soft kiss on the sensitive corner of my lips, “I wanted your body Sophie, I wanted to see your face when I make you scream my name.”

His words set a desperate fire to my blood. I lean into him, hungry for him. When it comes to this, I can't fight him. I make one last attempt. ‘You didn't have to marry me,’ I whisper, “You already

had me.”

“And then I wanted no one else to ever have the pleasure. Understand that Sophie,” He says, moments before his mouth descends on mine in a scorching kiss. “You are mine.”

My body melts and I press myself against him, aching to give him everything I am. I want this. I want him to belong to me, even if only for these few moments.

Soon my clothes are on the floor, and his soon follow. He carried me over to one of the two armchairs in the room and sets me down, kneeling on the floor between my legs. I wrap my legs around his waist and press my body against him, rubbing myself against the hard swell of

his erection. I want him so much I'm aching. Impatiently, I use my hand to guide him inside me, moaning as his tip slides into my body.

He grips my ass and lifts me off the chair, pressing me towards him as he enters me all the way. My whole body weakens and I fall against him with a low moan. He moves out and plunges into me again, and I cry out, my body shaking. He continues to move, each stroke of his rock hard shaft driving me to a pleasurable madness.

Later, when I am weak from my climax, he carries me to bed, stroking my hair as we lie side by side on the bed, my head resting on his shoulder. I can't help wishing that we would always

be like this.

“You know,” He says musingly. “I owe you a honeymoon.”

“Yes you do,” I agree, “Somewhere that will ‘blow my mind’” I tease.

“Is there anywhere in particular you would like to go?” He doesn’t stop stroking my hair.

I sigh. “I would go anywhere with you.” I tell him, and I mean it.

He turns over, until he is leaning over me. The kiss he gives me is gentle and undemanding. I close my eyes. I can almost feel my consciousness dissolve into him. I’ve lost myself, I think. This is how love feels.

“I think I know just the place.” He pauses long enough to say before starting

to kiss me again.”

“I thought we were going out for dinner,” I ask breathlessly, when we stop for air.

“Forget dinner.” He says, his lips dipping to my breasts, and in a few moments, I have.

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In the morning, David is in his study arranging our trip, while Mrs. Daniels and I pack a few clothes.

He has refused to tell me where we're going. Even when I asked him what I should pack. “Just a few things,” He'd replied, “You're not going to be dressed most of the time.”

I've succeeded in pushing all thoughts of Carole Banks to the back of

my mind. I don't want to think about her, or about the NDA. I don't want anything to ruin my happiness.

“Won't you tell me where we're going?” I ask David later, as Steve drives us to the airport.

“I like to keep you guessing.” He replies. He's wearing jeans and a white T-shirt, with a black leather jacket, he looks so young and cool, I have to hold myself back from slobbering all over him. We pass through cursory security checks at the airport, after which we go out to his plane, which is waiting for us on the runway. I feel like a star as I stroll to the plane, hands linked with David's, my halter neck dress flowing in the breeze, my eyes covered by wide

sunshades.

A pilot and steward greet us as we enter the plane. The interior is luxurious. The main cabin is superbly furnished with comfortable looking couches, and well placed coffee tables. There is also a private bedroom, with a bathroom and closet space.

We take off after an immigration official comes to check our passports. I give him my new passport, still unable to believe how quickly it was prepared. An agent arrived in the apartment in the morning with some forms, and watched me fill and sign them. A few hours later, the passport arrived by courier.

The plane sails smoothly through the air. If not for the puffy white clouds I can

see through the windows, I can actually forget that we're flying. I stretch happily, taking sips from the glass of white wine the steward serves me.

“It must be exciting travelling like this all the time.” I tell David.

He looks up from the newspaper he's reading and shrugs. “Yeah, probably.”

I roll my eyes at his nonchalance, and he gives me a teasing smile.

I spent the next few minutes bugging him about where we are going. When I finally fall asleep, he still hasn't given me any clues.

When I wake up a couple of hours later, I'm lying in David's arms on the bed in the private cabin. He must have

undressed me, because I'm only wearing one of his t-shirts and my panties. Beside me, he is asleep.

The cabin is dark, but I can see his face in the faint light of dawn stealing in through the windows. I trace a finger along his chin, marveling at how handsome he looks while sleeping, boyish, careless, and relaxed, with his thick hair tousled and all over the place.

His wakes up and stares at me groggily for a moment before the film of sleep clears from his eyes.

“I hope I haven't grown horns.” He says.

If only he knew. “You're still not going to tell me where we are going?”

He shakes his head and pulls me

toward him until I'm lying on top of him.

“You'll see when we get there.”

I roll my eyes. “I'm getting impatient.”

In response, he pulls my face down and kisses me. “I can distract you.” He offers, grabbing my butt and rolling until he's on top of me. I start to laugh, but he silences me with his lips, kissing me until laughing is the farthest thing from my mind. He makes slow love to me, taking his time as he initiates me to the pleasures of the mile-high club.

A few hours later, the plane lands in Italy. We shower in the small but well equipped private bathroom, and get ready to disembark. As we go through customs, I discover that David speaks

flawless Italian. He'll probably never stop surprising me. I decide.

“How many languages do you speak?” I ask him, curious.

He grimaces slightly. “A few,” He tells me. “French, Italian, enough of Russian and Spanish to have a sensible conversation.”

I'm staring at him, mouth open, “and that's a few?”

He winks. “I know, I'm incredible.”

I giggle at his words, allowing him to lead me out of the airport.

We've landed in Florence. It's very early in the morning, so the city is still asleep as the black SUV that picks us at the airport drives through it. We travel through the countryside with me dozing

on David's shoulder. It's just getting light when we arrive at our destination.

The car drives through a pair of wrought iron gates, and down a paved driveway, which ends in a circular cul-de-sac, with a stone fountain in the middle. The house beyond the driveway is a stunningly beautiful villa. In the early light, I can see the tiled terracotta colored walls, elegant white-painted stone arches, and the lawns that surround it, bounded by groves of trees.

I step out of the car, marveling. I turn to David. "Do you own this place?" I ask.

"We own this place." He replies, making my heart expand. He takes my hand, and we walk inside the house hand

in hand.

Inside, it is charmingly furnished and spacious, with French windows leading to outside terraces from almost every room on the ground floor. Upstairs, our bedroom has a marble bathroom and an attached study. I gaze out of the windows at the countryside as the orange light of morning comes over the hills. It's too beautiful for words.

“You are too rich.” I accuse him.

“I think that's an oxymoron.” I turn to him and see that he is teasing. I laugh softly, and he joins in my merriment. Suddenly I feel so incredibly happy.

I go into the circle of his arms. “I hope you're not tired.”

“I'm not.” His eyes twinkle, as he

leans back to look into my face. “Why?”

“Because I have a burning desire to make love to my husband, in our beautiful villa in Italy.”

“I’m never too tired to fulfill your desires.” He says capturing my lips in a lush kiss. We sink unto the bed, oblivious to anything else but the pleasure we know we can give each other.

Chapter Six

THE NEXT TWO WEEKS ARE THE height of bliss. The villa is fully staffed and stocked for our arrival. There is a cook, a maid, and a gardener, all Italian. They don't speak a word of English between them, so David does most of the talking. The first evening, we have dinner in the small town closest to us, and attend a Puccini opera about a Japanese girl in the turn of the century Japan, who kills herself out of love for an American soldier. I leave the opera crying even though I didn't understand any of the Italian words.

We also visit the marble caves where Michelangelo is supposed to have

gotten the stone for his famous sculptures. Some days, we drive to Florence in the Audi Convertible David has in the garage, where we visit galleries, museums, and landmarks, enjoying the experience of being anonymous tourists, as we walk around hand in hand, dressed casually in jeans, t-shirts, and sunglasses.

A few afternoons, David has to take long phone calls from the office. I try not to mind, because I know how busy he is. Luckily, I brought my sketchpad along, so while he works, I draw.

“So I’m going to be one of those men married to famous artists,” David teases me one day, looking over my shoulder at my work.

“Maybe I’ll be so successful, you’ll have to quit your job and let me support you.”

He laughs as he looks through my finished drawings. “A life of ease,” He says musingly. “I ought to take you up on that.”

Towards the end of the first week, we have a visitor, a charming Italian called Carlo Marconi, he lives near Florence, and was at Harvard with David. He arrives for lunch with his wife and two small children, and we eat on the terrace overlooking the lawns and the trees that stretch as far as the nearby town. After lunch, while the children run around playing, David and Carlo exchange stories of their college days,

and a summer spent in Italy with Carlo's family. Carlo's wife Gina and I laugh cheerfully at their stories, but I can't take my eyes off my husband, I have never seen this side of him. He looks so relaxed.

"You two look happy." Gina tells me, in lightly accented English. "David especially, I have not seen him like this before." She pauses. "You are good for him."

And he is good for me, I think in silence. "I'm glad you think so." I reply.

She shrugs. "Love can change anyone." She states, smiling at me. The children are demanding to be let into the pool. I smile back at her as we go to prepare them for a swim.

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Back in Seattle, David has work to catch up on, I don't mind. My life feels charmed. Even though he still hasn't said anything about love, I feel more secure and happy in our relationship. I feel loved, and that means a lot to me.

I seem to have made a lot of friends in my absence, probably due to the fact that there has finally been an announcement in the newspapers about our wedding. While David leaves immediately for work, Mrs. Daniel's cheerfully hands me my mail, mostly invitations, requesting my presence at a variety of events.

I go through them, wondering which ones to accept and which ones to put

under consideration. At times like these, a girl needs her mother or her mother in law. I'm thinking of calling David's mother when my phone rings.

"Hey." It's David. Even after two weeks when I've had him all to myself, the sound of his voice can still turn my insides to liquid.

"Hey." I reply.

"Would you like to go to this charity thing tonight?" He asks, "A dinner to raise money for the alliance for education."

"Oh!" I look through my invites again. "I have an invitation for that." It says black tie, evening dress. Hmm.

"Yes, that makes sense." He pauses. "So, do I get to show you off tonight?"

My heart flutters in my chest. “Of course.”

“Good,” he chuckles, “see you around seven.”

After we talk, I go through my new clothes, trying to choose something to wear. I finally decide on a pale blue strapless gown with a sweetheart neckline, which hugs my figure all the way to my thighs, and then flares softly to my feet. The label has the name of a very famous designer. It’s probably insanely expensive, I think, as I lay it out on the bed, but it’s also incredibly beautiful.

I shower and blow-dry my hair, brushing it until it is a soft, wavy mass around my shoulders. I use a thick strand

to secure it into a loose ponytail at the nape of my neck, and then sweep the mass of hair over my shoulder.

My makeup is simple, mainly because I don't want to make a mistake and end up looking scary. By the time David arrives from work, I'm almost ready, all that's left is to take off my silk dressing robe and put on my underwear and dress.

I revel in the look of appreciation he gives me when he walks into the apartment. He pulls me to him, careful not to mess up my make-up. "How much damage will I do if I kiss you?" He asks, his fingers finding my nipples through the silk dressing gown.

I'm not sure I care, I'd let him

damage my make up whenever he wants. “A lot.” I murmur, trying to be sensible. We don’t have time for this.

He unties the knot holding my dressing gown together. “Too bad,” He murmurs, “because I’ve been thinking of this all day.”

“While you should have been working?” My laugh sounds a little breathless, maybe because his fingers have found my nipples again. “What will the shareholders think of that?”

“Who cares?” his voice is husky as he lifts me, wrapping my legs around his waist. I wrap my arms around his neck, reveling in the hardness of his erection pressing against me as he carries me to our room.

He sits on the bed, narrowly avoiding wrinkling my dress. I'm straddling him, my knees on the bed. While he removes his jacket and loosens his tie, I eagerly undo his trousers. When he springs free of the restraint of his clothes, I sigh softly, and wrap my fingers around him, stroking him up and down. He groans and grabs my hips, lifting me until I'm poised over him, wet and ready, then I lower myself unto him, letting out a low moan as he fills me.

He braces his hands on the mattress while I hold on to his shoulders, and starts to thrust into me with an intensity that is both surprising and extremely arousing. It feels so good. I tighten my arms around him, pressing my heaving

breasts to his face. He sucks on my nipples, his pace never slowing. My climax is raw and forceful. I scream his name, weak and trembling, as I lose control of my body. Vaguely, I feel him stiffen inside me, and hear his groan as he comes.

I hold on to him, sweaty and satisfied. We're both breathing deeply. Sighing, he lifts me off him and sets me on my shaking legs.

“We still have an event to attend.” He says regretfully, his eyes on my exposed body.

I have to fight the urge to climb back onto his lap. “Yes, we do,” I try to frown disapprovingly through my haze of pleasure, “and I'm sure you've ruined

my makeup.

I go to the bathroom to clean up, and then back to the dressing table to smooth my hair and get my make up back in order. David has disappeared into the dressing room to get ready. While he changes, I retrieve my dress and underwear from the bed and put them on. I'm about to zip the dress up when I feel David's strong hands on my back. He fastens the zip and steps back to look at me.

“You look lovely.” He says.

I can see the admiration in his eyes, and it warms me from inside. He looks magnificent, in a black tux, and a dark grey tie. Even though he has just brought me to an earth-shattering climax, I am

overwhelmed by the strong wave of desire that passes through me.

“You look wonderful too.” I murmur, it’s strange how even though we’re married he can make me feel like a fifteen year old in the presence of her first crush.

He smiles at the compliment. “I have something for you,” he tells me, taking my hand and pulling me towards the dressing table. He gestures for me to sit and as I do, I notice a black velvet box on the table. Before I have time to wonder what’s in it, he opens it to reveal a beautiful earring and necklace set.

It looks very familiar. I frown, turning to look at him. “Is this...?”

“Your design?” he interrupts, he is studying my face intently, as if he’s wondering if I’ll like it. “Yes.”

I stare at the sparkling diamond arrangement, mouth open. “But, how did you...?”

I made a copy of one of your sketches and sent it off to a jeweler while we were in Italy.” He says, fastening the necklace around my neck as I watch him in the mirror. It’s more beautiful than I could have imagined it, even while I drew it. I sigh softly. “It’s so beautiful.”

“You’re a rich man’s wife.” He says without conceit, “It’s normal for you to have beautiful things.”

I would have preferred him to say

something more romantic, but I stifle the thought. I don't want to be ungrateful. I put on the earrings, watching them twinkle in the light. They really are gorgeous.

Steve drives us to the event, characteristically silent as he maneuvers the evening traffic. He drops us off in front of the brilliantly lit entrance of an upscale hotel. There are a few pressmen standing outside and one or two flashbulbs go off. I try not to flinch from the sudden bursts of light as David leads me inside, his hand at my back.

At the door to what looks like a grand ballroom, a smiling blonde woman in a flowing, cream silk gown comes to meet us.

“David,” She smiles in greeting, kissing both his cheeks, I guess her to be anywhere between her forties and sixties. She looks beautiful, with a well-preserved figure and glowing skin. She turns to me. “You must be the beautiful Sophie.” Her eyes sparkle as she looks me over, “I’ve only recently heard about you, you know. David has been keeping you a terrible secret.” She laughs, “Aren’t you a pretty thing though.”

I turn to David, not sure what to say. He looks faintly amused by the woman’s chattering. “Sophie sweetheart,” he says with a slight smile, “this exceptionally beautiful lady is the incomparable Peggy Hart.”

Her name registers in my head. Her

husband was Simon Hart, a recently deceased software billionaire, she is one of the richest women in the country, and a passionate philanthropist.

“I’m very honored to meet you.” I say sincerely.

She dimples. “Thank you darling.” She says, kissing my cheek. She turns to David and snorts playfully, “I’m not even going to respond to your flattery.”

He laughs as she leads the way into the room, which is filled with men in tuxedos and women in evening dresses. A low hum of conversation fills the room, as well as the sound of glasses clinking, and silvery laughter of the women.

“Your table is over there.” She says

to David, pointing him in the right direction.

We're stopped at least five times before we get to our table. I watch David socialize, feeling the effects of his magnetic personality. He pays attention to people, but always remains somehow aloof. It makes them more eager to get his attention. But it's not their attention he wants, I decide, he really just prefers to stand alone.

Where does that leave me?

Our table seats about twelve. David pulls out a seat for me and takes the one beside it. I feel everybody's eyes on me as we take our seats. They must be curious about me, I realize, I wonder what they're thinking.

The table is almost completely filled, with only two empty seats. We arrived late, so dinner is already being served. As we eat, David converses quietly with the man on his other side, I recognize him as Leon Boise, a website entrepreneur. I've seen his picture while reading the news on my tablet.

As I eat, I play a game of adding names to the faces around me. I only recognize a few, politicians, businessmen, internet pioneers. I have to try not to be intimidated by it all.

After dinner, someone goes up to the podium and after a short applause starts to give a speech about the importance of literacy. As I toy with the program on the table in front of me, I see that one of the

sponsors is Preston Corp. I was right, I decide, David will never cease to surprise me.

“I’ve never been anywhere like this before,” the man at my other side whispers to me. I look up at him in surprise.

“I’m Rick Cruzman,” he says, proffering his hand, I take it. On closer inspection, I see that he is a boy, really, just a little older than I am.

“Me neither.” I respond with a smile.

He grins, revealing a crooked front tooth. For some reason, it makes me warm to him. There is something endearing and boyish about it.

“I keep imagining that someone will

come along and ask me what I'm doing on this table." He laughs nervously.

I keep silent, I don't want to tell him that I almost feel the same way. I look over at David. Done with his conversation, he is staring straight ahead, towards the podium. He belongs here, I can see that, with these glamorous people and their sparkling jewelry.

"What do you do?" I ask my new friend.

"Well," His eyes light up, "your husband just acquired a new software I developed. My company is now part of Preston Corp." he grins, "I swear he's totally changed my life in a matter of days."

The expression of gratitude in his

eyes as they move to David and back to me fills me with pride. I remember David telling me that he was in Ashford to buy a software. I realize I have this man to thank for the fact that I met David at all. The thought makes me smile at him. “Good for you.” I say.

The speech ends, and we all applaud, stopping when someone else takes the podium. I’m trying to pay attention when I notice Rick’s eyes skip to something beyond the table and widen discernibly. I turn in the direction he’s looking to see a woman approaching our table.

The only way to describe her is extraordinarily beautiful. Her hair is a deep copper, and piled on top of her

head in a mass of burnished curls. Her shoulders are slim and pale, and exposed in the scarlet dress that clings to her curves as if she was poured into it. Her only jewelry is a green stone that sits between her breasts, matching the flashing green of her eyes.

She comes straight for our table, a gloved hand lightly resting on the arm of the youngish, handsome man who is escorting her. I stiffen, watching as they take the empty seats. I recognize her from the pictures I've seen. Carole Banks, David's old girlfriend. As she settles into her seat, she looks towards me, and the venom I see in her beautiful eyes almost knocks me off my seat.

I look towards David, he doesn't

seem surprised, he was expecting this, I realize, he was expecting her to be here.

“Carole!” The exclamation comes from Leon Boise. “How nice to see you again.”

She acknowledges him with a small smile. I notice that she doesn't look at David at all. There's more going on here than I know.

“I had forgotten to congratulate you David,” Leon continues, “I read about the attempted takeover,” he turns to Carole again. “I hear David has you to thank for retaining his control on the board.”

For the first time, Carole looks at David, her eyes absolutely poisonous, but there is something else in them, hurt,

desire, I can't say.

“Yes,” She says softly. Her voice is as beautiful as the rest of her, “I sold him the shares of his company I got when my father died.” She laughs a little, without any merriment. “Which means David Preston will always control Preston Corp.”

David's response is a smile. “As he should, Carole,” his hand comes to rest on mine on the table, a little gesture of intimacy that's not lost on her. “Have you met my wife?” He asks.

I actually flinch at the look she gives me. Her face tightens, but only for a second, and then her perfect mask is back in place. “No,” she says, “I don't believe I have had the pleasure.”

The tone of her voice says it will be anything but a pleasure.

“Carole this is Sophie, my wife.” He turns to me, “this is Carole Banks.” He doesn’t offer anything more than that.

I have no idea what’s going on between her and David, but I give her a hesitant smile. I can feel her animosity towards me coming in waves, but I decide to be polite even in the face of that. “Nice to meet you.” I say.

She chuckles, and it has a mocking ring to it. “The pleasure is mine.” She replies, and takes a long sip from her glass of wine.

The second speech ends, and we applaud again. People start to get up from their tables to socialize some more,

and to dance to the soft music from the orchestra. Carole is the first to leave our table, taking her companion with her.

I turn as David put a hand on my arm. “Would you like to dance?” he asks.

No, I would like to know what that was all about. But I don’t say the words, instead, I allow him to lead me out to the ballroom, where couples of different ages are moving to the live music.

“What was that?” I ask as we start to move. I learned how to dance at school, thankfully, so I don’t trip over his feet.

“What was what?” He asks, nuzzling my hair.

He is deliberately avoiding my question. “What just happened at our

table, with that woman?" I insist.

He shrugs. "Carole isn't too happy with the price she got for her shares, that's all."

"You didn't pay her as much as she wanted?"

"I couldn't." he says, twirling me.

I frown, puzzled, "Then how did you get her to sell them to you?"

He shrugs again. "I have my ways."

A sneaking suspicion dawns on me.

"Wait," I ask, "what did she want?"

He pauses. "She wanted me," he says without any hint of conceit. "Either me or my destruction," he pulls me close and guides me in a spin. I stare at him open-mouthed.

"I don't understand." I say as the

music ends. But he doesn't explain. He kisses me on the forehead as the man he had been talking to at our table, Leon Boise, comes to claim me for the next dance.

David hands me over with a curt smile, "handle with extreme care," he says, before turning around and walking away from us.

"I'm Leon Boise," my new partner tells me as we start to dance.

"I know." I smile.

"You do?" he laughs, his silver hair gleaming in the lights, "I didn't think I was famous."

"I may have read some news articles." I tell him.

He seems surprised, but is happy

enough to tell me about his business as we dance.

Afterwards, I excuse myself and go to the ladies room. While I'm checking my makeup, the door opens, and my eyes meet Carole Bank's in the mirror. She pauses at the door, giving me a long hard look.

For a few moments, we just look at each other, her gaze shrewd and assessing, mine puzzled and expecting the worst. She doesn't disappoint.

“Oh look, it's the child bride.” She says disparagingly.

I debate whether to reply, then I decide to ignore her, and turn back to the mirror.

“So how's marriage to David

treating you?” She asks. “You look happy?”

I turn to look at her, unwilling to be affected by her animosity. “I am, actually.” I tell her, not that it’s any of her business.

Her expression changes to one of faux concern. “Doesn’t it bother you that it won’t last?”

I swallow. “Why shouldn’t it? Because I didn’t try to buy David’s love with a couple of shares?”

Her eyes narrow, and then suddenly, she starts to laugh. “You have no idea, do you? You really are as innocent and trusting as you look.” She makes the words sound like ‘stupid and dumb’. She comes closer to me, as if she has some

secret of vital importance to impart. “Sophie, David uses people. That’s how he got where he is. He used me, he used my father, and now he’s using you.”

“You’re just saying that because you’re...”

“Jealous?” she interrupts, “well maybe I am. But darling the truth is, he married you for a reason, and now that he’s got what he wanted, he no longer needs you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Well, he never would have had his company without my father, and he would have lost control of it if I had sold my shares to the wrong person.”

“So you told him you would sell your shares to him if he married you?” I

mirror her expression of scorn, “That sounds pretty desperate to me.”

She ignores me. “So your husband blackmailed me and forced me to do what he wanted. He is a snake, and he always plays dirty.” She pauses, “of course it wasn’t enough to him to win, he had to marry a green little country rat from the backwater to teach me a lesson.”

Her words touch me. Wasn’t that the answer to the question I had been asking myself all this time. ‘Why did David marry me?’

“You know I’m right,” she gives me a measuring look. “Be careful Sophie, David is a dangerous man, he won’t hesitate to toss you away as soon he’s be

done with you.”

“I don’t believe you.” I say with false bravado.

“Believe what you want.” She shakes her head “Who cares, just don’t get too comfortable in his life, you’ll be alone as soon as he gets tired of all that,” she gestures in the general direction of my body.

I search my head for a retort, but she has already swung out of the room.

It’s only after she has gone that I realize that my fists are clenched so tight, my nails are cutting into the skin of my palms. I don’t want to believe the things she’s said, but deep down, I know she’s telling the truth.

Chapter Seven

WHEN I LEAVE THE LADIES ROOM, all I want to do is find David and make him deny the things Carole said to me. He's not in the ballroom, and the dining room is already empty. I go in the direction of a wide stairway that leads from the ballroom to a mezzanine floor, where there are some chairs and many French doors that lead to a long balcony.

David's not anywhere on the mezzanine floor either, I'm about to turn back down the stairs when I decide to check outside.

The balcony runs along the whole length of the hotel and is filled with different species of potted plants. There

are a few people close to the doors, mostly smoking and conversing. I decide to walk a little further, mainly because, there is a cool breeze coming from the sea.

I take only a few steps before I see them.

Carole has her hands on David arm, and she's saying something to him, her expression full of passion. I freeze on the spot, unable to take my eyes off them.

I can only see David's back, but he seems to be listening to her, whatever it is that she's saying. Suddenly she pulls his face down and starts to kiss him.

I stand there waiting for him to push her away, but he doesn't. When I can't look anymore, I turn on my heel and rush

back into the hotel. I hurry down the stairs, feeling an actual pain in my chest. It's heavy and aching, and it's spreading all over my body. I need to get away from here. Away from him.

At the lobby, I ask for a cab. It only takes a few minutes before one arrives. I look back only once to see if maybe David has noticed that I'm gone, but I suppose he's too busy reconciling with his old love.

I can't shake the image of them kissing from my head, in my mind it turns to something else, and I can almost see him making love to her. The thoughts fill me with a desperate sadness. I want to go back and pull her off him. I want to do many things, but I know there's only

one thing I should do.

When I get to the apartment, I find my bags, the one that came with me from Ashford. I pack my sketchpad, and my old clothes. I don't want to take anything of his. I don't want to take anything that will remind me of this life. I hear my phone ringing in my purse, but I ignore it, I'm not interested in whatever it is he has to say. I'm zipping the last bag closed when the door bursts open and David walks in.

He looks worried, but then he takes in the bags on the bed, the tears on my face, and his expression changes to steel. "What are you doing?" he asks slowly.

"What does it look like?" I retort without pausing.

“I left you for a few moments at a party, and now you’re leaving me?”

“You left me for far longer than a few minutes, to make out with your old girlfriend.” I throw the words at him, angry at the tears that are filling my eyes.

“So now you’re running off back to Ashford,” The hardness in his voice intensifies almost enough to scare me. He comes towards me. “Tell me, is it Eddie Newton who’s going to be picking up the pieces of your broken heart, or will it be somebody else?”

“What do you care?” I cry.

“For God’s sake Sophie!” the words are harsh.

I try to back away, but the bed is behind me, he is standing so close, I

can't see anything but his chest. "Let me go." I whisper, "I don't belong here, in this big apartment, or in your luxurious life, and we both know it."

"You don't know what you're saying," For a moment, I think there is a pleading note in his voice, but it must be my imagination because his expression remains like stone.

The truth is, if I knew how he felt about me, if I thought, even for one moment, that he cared about me, that I'm not just someone he likes to sleep with, I would never think of going anywhere.

I swallow. "David, do you love me?" I ask, looking up into his face. My voice is trembling, maybe because I already know what the answer is.

He looks irritated, “What has come over you?”

“Do you love me, David?” I ask again.

His face freezes again, and I know he has shut me out. “What do you want from me?” he says, turning away.

I stare at his back. Somewhere inside, I still had hope, that maybe he would tell me that he loved me and make me stay with him. “You don’t love me do you?” I accuse, shaking my head and feeling all my childish dreams and expectations crumbling around my feet. How could I have thought, even for one moment that he could love me? I am just a means to an end, and he has used me because that’s what he does, he uses

people. Carole was right.

He turns back towards me. “Love isn’t all it’s cracked up to be Sophie.” His voice is almost gentle, “other people would take what they have and be grateful for it.”

Maybe he meant for his words to comfort me, but I feel as if he has just crushed the last of my hopes.

“And what do I have?” I turn back to him. “Tell me the truth David. Why did you marry me?”

His silence tells me what I need to know. I turn away from him, back to my bags on the bed. I’m not looking at him, so I’m not expecting it when he takes hold of my arm.

I turn around and stare up at him,

breathing deeply. He looks determined, and I wonder, filled with hope and dread, what he is going to say. He moves closer to me and puts a hand on my cheek, stroking it slowly. I wait, confused. His hand moves down to my neck, and then to my shoulders, his eyes never leaving mine. Despite myself, I stare at him hypnotized.

As his fingers run down my arm, I can't prevent the shiver that runs through my body.

He notices, "Because of that." He says. His expression doesn't change, but his fingers continue their journey, lightly skimming over my body as I stand in front of him.

When my whole body is shivering

and aching for him, he leans in closer and whispers in my ear. “Because of this, Sophie. This is what we have between us.”

“This is only sex.” I whisper helplessly, sadness and sexual arousal fighting for supremacy. “We have nothing.”

His fingers skim lightly over a nipple. As I shudder in pleasure, he smiles. “Is this nothing, Sophie?” He has the voice of the devil, tempting and persuasive. I want to throw aside everything I know to be true, and allow him to make love to me.

He leans forwards and whispers in my ear, arousing me with his warm breath on my nape. “Don’t you want this

Sophie?" Don't you want me to touch you? To make love to you, over and over again?" his lips make a trail from my neck to my shoulder. "Isn't it enough?"

I shake my head, tears stinging my eyes. "No."

"Don't lie to yourself? Sophie, what else is there?" His hand slide down over my dress and pull down the zip, making it fall to the ground. His hands skim up over my waist and toward my breasts. He stops just shy of touching them, teasing me.

I look up at him, my eyes pleading. I don't know what I want anymore. I want him to love me, but I also want him to keep touching me, more than anything. My breasts are heavy and straining

through my bra. My breath is coming in short gasps.

“What do you want Sophie?”

His fingers move upwards, skimming the lower curve of my breasts. I moan softly.

He cups my breasts, squeezing them until my whole body is aching with desire.

“Isn’t this enough?” he asks again, I shake my head.

He sighs and undoes my bra, freeing my breasts. I feel exposed, yet full of expectation. I want this. I want him, despite everything.

He starts to take off his clothes, I stand transfixed as he removes his jacket and tie, his shirt, then his pants. By the

time he's totally naked, I'm shaking with arousal, hungry for him.

He guides my hand to his hard length. I touch him, glorying in the stiffness. He wants me as much as I want him. Stroking him, I get down on my knees, trying to pleasure him with my hands and my mouth. Muttering an oath, he pulls me up, turns me around, and bends me over the bed. He starts to stroke me through my panties, and in moments, I'm burning for him. He doesn't make any move to end my torment. His fingers continue to stroke me until my panties are soaked.

“Please.” I beg him brokenly.
“Please David.”

“Tell me what you want.” His voice

torments me.

“Please.”

“Tell me.”

“I want you.” I cry, grinding my hips against his fingers.

“You want what?”

“I want you to make love to me, David, please.”

He pulls my panties down to my knees. Spreading my legs as far as my stretched panties will allow, he enters me, slowly, teasingly, pushing in inch by inch until I'm going crazy and begging him to give me more. I brace my hands on the mattress and push my hips back, urging him further in. He stiffens, then moves, bending over me and grabbing each of my breasts in each hand, and

pinning me to his body until I can't move.

Then he starts to thrust into me, His hips slamming into mine while each stroke brings me to screaming, throbbing life.

The pleasure is exquisite. It feels as if I'm going to die. My body explodes over and over, but he doesn't stop. As my body goes limp, I hear him whisper in my ear.

“Isn't this enough?”

When I don't say anything, he starts to thrust again, making me come over and over again until I'm screaming “Yes, yes, yes,” to anything he asks.

Later when I'm lying on the bed, unable to move, my body limp with

exhaustion and pleasure, he turns to me.

“Don’t mistake what we have” he says, his voice like cold water on my skin, “and don’t underestimate it either.”

I want to cry, to lash out at him, I feel so hurt and humiliated. “And what about Carole?” I ask, “What do you two have?”

“Is that what this is all about? Carole?” He sits up, “Did she say something to you?”

“You used her,” I accuse, “just like you’re using me.” I choke on my words. “You wanted the shares she had in your company.”

“And she threatened to sell them to the man who wanted to take over my company if I didn’t marry her.” he states

without feeling, “A man she was sleeping with I might add, along with a few others.”

I stare at him, my mouth open. “You’re just saying that.”

He laughs. “Maybe you should try to get your information accurate before you start throwing accusations.”

“It doesn’t make any difference.” I say. “Even if she did all those things, it doesn’t change the fact that you don’t love me. I’m just the girl who was foolish enough to marry you so you could teach your ex-girlfriend a lesson.” I choke back a sob. “I can’t take it David.” I get up, filled with resolve.

“What are you doing?” he asks, watching me.

“I am leaving.”

“Don’t threaten me.” The hardness in his voice almost makes me pause. He rises to his feet, towering over me.

“Why not?” I spit at him. “Will you marry someone else to teach me a lesson?”

He takes hold of my arm. “Don’t test me Sophie.”

I ignore him.

He turns away. “Fine, do whatever you like. Go back to Ashford. I’m sure your little boyfriend will be more than eager to find you a place in his bed. But while you’re at it, you might want to ask yourself why you married me.”

“I love you.” I almost choke on the words, saying them makes me want to

burst into tears.

He laughs cruelly, “What love. Did you fall in love with some stranger you hardly knew Sophie, just because he asked you out to dinner. Get real sweetheart, this has always been about sex.”

“Not for me.”

“Then you’re a liar as well as a fool.”

I stare at him, tears filling my eyes. I don’t care that I’ve nowhere to go. I can’t stay here.

“I hate you,” I tell him before I leave the bedroom, “I hope I never have to see you again. Carole was right about you, you use people, and when you’re done with them you toss them away like

rubbish, you're not worthy of my love.”

He flinches, and for a moment, a wounded expression flits over his face, then he turns away from me. “Do whatever you want Sophie.”

I spend the night in one of the guest rooms, with my bags for company. Early in the morning, I hear him come into the room. After a few moments, while I pretend to be asleep, he leaves. After he's gone, I take a quick shower and leave the apartment. A few weeks ago, I had a plan to go to Bellevue and find a job, and now, that is exactly what I'm going to do.

Short Note

Psyche, as mentioned in this book, was, in Greek and Roman mythology, the youngest daughter of a king in ancient Greece. The fame of her beauty was so much that even Venus, the goddess of love, grew jealous, and sent Cupid, her son the god of love to work revenge on Psyche by making her fall in love with someone horrible.

However, Cupid falls in love with Psyche and through a fake divination, deceives her family into believing that Psyche must be made to marry a monster. They take her to the mountains, from where she is borne to Cupid's beautiful palace by the west wind.

There, he visits her at night and makes love to her, always leaving before morning, and never showing her his face. When Psyche's sisters come to visit her, they are jealous of the luxury of the palace, and convince her that her husband is in reality a monster who will kill her and her unborn child.

That night, while Cupid sleeps, Psyche fetches a lamp and sees his face for the first time. Struck by his beauty, she pricks her finger on one of his arrows and is filled with a feverish passion for him. When he wakes up and sees what she has done, he leaves her.

From the Author

If you enjoyed this book, please consider leaving a review at [Amazon](#), Barnes and Noble, iBookstore, Kobobooks, or [Goodreads](#). I would love to know what you think.

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Thank you for reading Rebellion.

Love,

Serena Grey.

Keep scrolling to read the Teaser for Claim (A Dangerous Man #3) by Serena Grey.

About The Author

Serena Grey discovered her first love when she was a child, and that love, reading, has been her constant companion since then.

She still loves to read, but now she also writes, because the stories in her head won't leave her in peace otherwise. When she's not reading and writing, she enjoys cocktails, coffee, the Vampire Diaries, Smash, and constantly drools over Gabriel Macht as Harvey Specter in Suits.

Claim

A Dangerous Man #3

Serena Grey

Teaser

“MAY I DRIVE NOW?” I ASK STEVE as he maneuvers the car through the gates into the paved driveway.

He turns to look at me. His head is completely shaved, giving him the look of a member of the criminal underworld. At least I think so, in actual fact he is an ex-marine. “Not today.” he tells me.

He doesn't talk much, but he always lets me drive when we get to the house, even though I still have two years to go before I can get a license. He says he has extreme confidence in my ability to drive, after all he taught me himself.

When we get to the end of the drive,

I see why he didn't let me drive. The shiny black Bentley that's always covered up in the garage is parked close to the front door. That can only mean one thing. They're back.

I frown, "See you later kid." Steve says as he stops the car by the door. I climb out, shouldering my backpack. I'm not very eager to go into the house. I drag my feet to the door, hoping I don't run into them.

Inside the house, all is quiet. Maybe they're tired from their flight, or sailing or whatever, and have gone to bed already. I move quietly. With any luck, I can hide out in my room until they go out to one of the numerous parties they probably have lined up.

No such luck. When I open the door to my room, I find my mother waiting for me.

Her eyes are bright and excited, as if she's spent all the time during her absence waiting to see me again. "David!" she exclaims, wrapping me in a cloud of soft perfume as she gives me a hug, "You've grown so tall."

I mumble something in reply. I wish she would go already. When I was really little. I lived for these moments, the returns, when she would float back into my life after a long absence with stories of places they had gone, and parties she'd been to. She would come with her beauty and her exotic adventures, and my life in her absence,

filled with school, reading, and servants would fade to dull grey.

Now I just wish she would leave me alone.

She starts to talk about how she missed me. They were gone for almost six months this time. I tune her out and sit at the edge of my bed, looking at the picture on my desk of my father carrying me around his neck when I was little more than a baby. He died when I was six. A drunk driver ran a red light and crushed his car. My mother married Henry Weber almost immediately. An idle millionaire who's only desire is to travel and socialize. She's been travelling and socializing with him for nine years.

“You’re beginning to look so much like your father.” The soft words cut into my thoughts, and I turn to her. She looks wistful.

I don’t say anything. I turn back to the picture.

She leaves soon after. They are going out to a dinner party, and she has to prepare. I go downstairs to find Steve, he has an apartment over the garage, and sometimes if I plead enough, he teaches me some of his martial arts moves.

It’s while I’m walking across the lawn towards the garage that I hear the voices. I turn back towards the house and see my mother and Henry’s arguing through their bedroom

window. I'm not surprised. They argue a lot. Henry is a jerk. I can't stand him, he can't stand me, and I have no idea how my mother can stand him.

I'm about to turn away, when he raises a hand and strikes my mother across the face. I stand there frozen as she holds a hand to her cheek. He turns towards the window, and seeing me, walks towards it and abruptly pulls the curtains closed.

That was the first time I saw him hit her, but it wasn't the last.

Someone is trying to buy my company.

That's what on my mind as Steve drives through the streets of Ashford, the small town where I came to do a friend a

favor.

The favor is a community college drop-out called Rick Cruzman. He's developed an innovative software for managing virtual money for online trading and has been trying to market it for months. He got a few minutes to sell it at a mediocre software conference at a business resort, Ashcroft Hills, and because my friend, who's happily retired from business, asked me to look into him, I took a forty-five minute drive from my office in Seattle.

I was also curious, and restless, and desperately in need of space to clear my head.

The software was interesting. I offered to buy it, and I did.

I turn to look out of the window, my mind going back to my original thoughts. Someone has acquired a sizable amount of Preston Corp stock on the stock market. I shouldn't be worried. With forty-five percent of the company stock, I'll retain control even if they buy every stock they can find, as long as Carole doesn't sell her twenty five percent, or as long as she sells them to me.

Carole.

I can't control the small flash of irritation I feel when I think of her. Capricious, selfish, and vengeful Carole. We're not currently seeing each other, and these days, I'm mostly regretful that we ever did, and I'm not a man who spends time being regretful.

Steve slows down to take a turn. From the back seat, I can see his smooth shaved head, the same as when he used to drive me as a teenager. He's a little more bulky now, but still as taciturn as the day we first met.

I'm about to go back to reading the paper on my lap when my eyes go to the window again, and I see the girl.

Her hair is gold, pale and wavy, and held back from her face in a ponytail. Her figure is slight, yet curvy, and her eyes, as she gazes at the car passing by are a deep, innocent green. She looks lost. Beautiful and lost.

For a moment, I just stare at her, even as Steve picks up speed and I have to crane my neck.

“Stop.”

Immediately the car stops.

“Back.” I say, still looking towards the girl. She’s gone into the building where she was standing, but I can still see her through the glass front.

Steve puts the car on reverse and backs up until he’s parked by the spot where she was standing just a few moments ago.

I only pause for a moment before I follow my instincts and step out of the car.

Carver’s Gifts. That’s what the sign says. Through the glass, my eyes meet hers again. She is staring at me, looking frozen. I wonder what I’m doing, going to talk to her.

For a moment, I consider getting back in the car.

But I don't, instead, I walk to the door and push it open, walking into the shop, and approaching her where she stands staring at me.

Her eyes are bright, her cheeks red, and her soft pink lips are gently parted.

Immediately I'm filled with an insane urge to take her in my arms and kiss those lips. It makes no sense.

"Good afternoon." I say before I do something ridiculous.

She keeps looking at me, her eyes look strangely confused. "Good afternoon," She replies finally. Her voice is breathy and light, like a soft breeze on a moonlit night.

The fact that I'm having poetic impulses makes me smile slightly.

“Would you like to buy something?” She asks, in that breathy voice. Her cheeks are very red, I notice. Why is she blushing?

I hadn't even thought up a reason for being there. “Of course,” I reply, “I'd like ah...” I look around, taking in the shop, I can see a lot of pretty things in ceramic and glass “a gift for my mother.” I turn back to her, and watch her eyes widen slightly.

“Okay.” She says, still looking at me. She moves towards me, almost touching me as she walks past me deeper into the shop. She smells clean and fresh, shampoo and soap. As her

ponytail bounces past me, I have to try extremely hard to keep my fingers from touching the soft waves.

“What do you have in mind?” I hear her ask as I follow her through the shop, “We have um... a selection of items you can consider.” I’m only half listening. I’m watching her slender waist and the smooth curve into her hips. She turns back, and I have to look back up at her face. She looks so innocent, I almost feel guilty for checking her out.

She steps back, away from me. She looks tense all of a sudden. “We have um... These glass sculptures are all made locally,” she says. She continues to talk, her words gaining speed with each second. I cannot tear my eyes away from

the natural pinkness of her lips as she speaks. I really want to kiss those lips.

“What’s your name?” I interrupt her speech.

She looks bewildered. “Sophie.” She tells me after a short pause. “Sophie Bennett.”

“Sophie.” I repeat. The name suits her, I study her for a moment. She looks quite young. I find myself desperately hoping that she’s not in high school or something else that’ll make me feel like a pervert for checking her out. “And how long have you worked here, Sophie?” I ask.

“I... um...” She blinks a few times, and my eyes follow the movement of her long lashes, “a few months.” She says.

“Interesting,” I’m curious.

“College?”

She shakes her head.

She looks like she should be in college. “How old are you?”

She pauses, frowning as she licks her lips in a quick movement, and the sudden hardness in my pants tells me how much I want her. “Eighteen.” I hear her whisper.

Eighteen! I’m lusting after a baby.

I take a small step back. “You’re very young.” I say unnecessarily. I’m disappointed. Her eyes drop from my face, and then she looks back up again. We look at each other for a long while, my mind full of images of all the things I want to do to her. I am a pervert.

My eyes catch on a small glass sculpture beside her. “I’d like the glass swan.” I say.

She looks like I just spoke in Greek. “The what?”

I smile at the expression on her face and incline my head towards the sculpture. She looks embarrassed as she picks it up, taking it to the desk at the front of the shop.

“Do you want it wrapped?” She asks, looking up at me.

“Yes, and delivered.” I give her my address in Seattle, and she jots it down in neat handwriting on a notepad.

I hand her my card. As she takes it, her fingers brush against mine, cool and soft. I’m filled with an urge to take her

hand and kiss it, or something equally stupid. The contact is only for a few moments, but those moments seem to last for a long time. I look at her face, and she's staring up at me like a deer caught in headlamps. She feels it too, I think, whatever this is.

Abruptly, she pulls her hand away and swipes my card, not looking at me.

"I want to see you." The words escape my lips without any input from my brain. She stops what she is doing, and those green eyes find mine again. "What are you doing tonight?" I continue.

"Nothing." She whispers softly.

"Then have dinner with me."

She looks as if she's thinking about

it, confusion, and a whole lot of other emotions running through her features. "Please." I say. I give her a smile for good measure. Somehow, I want this very badly.

"Yes." She says.

I feel like I've won a major triumph. I realize that I've been leaning over her, eagerly waiting for her reply. I straighten. "When do you finish here?" I ask.

"Five." She tells me.

"I'll be here." I smile at her, backing slowly towards the door. Outside Steve is waiting patiently in the car. He doesn't ask me why I'm grinning so widely as I climb into the back seat.

Also by Serena Grey

A Dangerous Man
Awakening
Rebellion