

The background is a solid red color. Overlaid on this are several dark red, wavy, concentric lines that originate from the left side and curve towards the right, creating a sense of motion or depth.

L. R. Wards

**The
Billionaire's
Secret
Desire**

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CHAPTER ONE

Lily laughed at something David said as her eyes slid past his shoulder at the polished dark green Jaguar that slid up next to the curb and she groaned. She was never one on attracting attention but there would be plenty with that car. If it wasn't the car that attracted the attention, as soon as the six foot four Irishman got out, heads really began to turn.

Maximilian King had everything going for him. Besides being disgustingly rich, he was handsome, sexy and gave off such a seductive presence that every woman within eyesight swivelled their heads in his direction as if some unseen force called to them.

Just like her.

She hated herself for it because she fell so easily in that trap. Yet watching him now, she really shouldn't be so hard on herself. He was utterly gorgeous to look at and she was more susceptible to his magnetism because she had known him forever. You'd think she would have built up some sort of immunity over a period of time. Isn't that what happened when exposed to something over and over again? Yet, the more she thought about it, the more she knew there was no such cure for what she had.

It wasn't just women that fell at his feet. Men were attracted to his charisma like a magnet because he wore his success like a neon sign. Most successful people were easily recognized by the cut and cost of their suits, but Max didn't need that, he had a certain poise and self confidence that told others that even if he were dressed in a sack.

To prove her point David noticed him immediately after he followed her gaze to the car. "What is it?" He said turning his head, "Wow, nice car." He paused, "Is he looking at you?"

“Yes, he’s my brother’s boss and apparently my ride home.” Obviously Luke couldn’t make it and Max took it upon himself to pick her up. David released a startled ‘wow’ when he spotted Max. Lily knew right then and there that David recognized him. Who wouldn’t? Maximilian King was no stranger around here. The library of the college she attended was named after his family and there was a framed picture of them near the entrance. His father was filthy rich and Max had followed in his footsteps setting up his own fortune five hundred company that had created cutting edge communication devices and he was known to have the Midas touch in everything he invested in.

Her brother, Luke and he had gone to high school, college and eventually university together. Max got a MBA and her brother received a degree in finance and now ran Max’s top communications company as his number one man.

She frowned as a young lady stopped and said something to him causing him to grin at her.

Wasn’t any female resistant to his charisma?

She fumed as she giggled and went on her way, but not without a flirtatious wave of her fingers. Maybe she wouldn’t be so angry if he had flashed her that sinful grin every now and then. Instead she only got the smiles that were reserved for the little sister of a good friend.

“Your brother works for *him*? That’s Max King, isn’t it? Wow he’s much taller than I thought.” David saw with apparent awe.

She shrugged and guided her eyes to David’s face that was now filled with wonder, “Yes it is.” *And sexy, gorgeous and heart stopping*, she thought to herself, *nothing like the man standing in front of me*. David wasn’t ugly by any means, but he was no Max King.

Though she really couldn’t fault David, not many men were

gifted like Max was. At least in her eyes.

“Wow.” He said again. “You never said anything.”

Annoyed, Lily tilted her head at him, “It wasn’t important.” Already she could see the interest in David’s eyes at the prospect of getting to know Max so he would hopefully have a job for the summer as an intern. She felt a sinking in the pit of her stomach knowing that he was already lost to her. If anyone had Max’s name on their resume they were guaranteed a job anywhere.

Somehow she was hoping he was different. All her life it was the same story. Just because they were friends with the Kings, people pretended to like them in hopes of getting close to the money.

“Of course not.” David brought his attention back to her realizing his mistake and trying to recover, “I just didn’t realize that you had such wealthy friends.”

“He’s my brother’s boss, that’s all.” She lied sparing a glance at the arrogantly handsome tall man who was now leaning against his car waiting patiently for her. He was in a totally relaxed pose with the first two buttons of his black silk shirt undone, his long legs crossed at the ankles and his hands in the pockets of his dark grey slacks. Currently, his attention was on something off to her left. Then he lifted his arm and spared a glance at the gold and platinum Rolex on his wrist, checking the time.

It wasn’t that he was impatient or anything like that, because if he wanted to leave, he would have just told her.

Even after all of the years she had known him, he still affected her. It didn’t help that he was devilishly striking with his dark Irish looks and grey eyes, impeccable taste in designer suits and had the sexual magnetism of an Alpha male in his prime. Always an enigma, yet charismatically appealing to her sex leaving a trail of heartbroken women in his wake. Unable to help

herself she let out a frustrated sigh. The man couldn't help but be attractive, even David was falling over himself.

"Sure, that's why he came to pick you up instead of your brother." David added about her statement of being her brother's boss and nothing else. He didn't believe her because he knew all about Max King, and he didn't seem the sort to pick up relatives of employees. He was rich enough to send someone else to do it.

She eyed him for a moment unable to squash down the frustration. She'd gone out with David a few times to do her best to erase Max from her mind thinking that it was just a childhood crush that made her feel the way she did, but it didn't work. She still felt undeniably attracted to Max and if there was any uncertainty it was just wiped clean when he drove up. David was nothing compared to the man that Max was. He was a yes man, and Max was a natural leader. He was innovative and exciting and masculine to the teeth, and she knew then no one could ever compare. "Whatever. I've got to go." She said suddenly fed up with him.

"Wait." He grabbed her arm.

Neither one of them saw Max suddenly stand straight and pull his hands out of his pockets balling them in fists with his pale eyes on the couple a distance away.

"Can you at least introduce me?" He asked hopefully.

Appalled, she pulled her arm out of his grasp and glared at him, "I should have known. Every time I get linked with Max King, I discover my friends' true intentions."

He blinked twice and straightened trying to compose himself again, "It's not like that Lily. Will I see you this weekend?"

Clearly he was lying and doing a terrible job of it. While he was talking, his eyes were still locked on Max. She stared at him. Now that things were clear to her on why he wanted to see her, she was no longer interested. She would not be used. "I

don't think so." She inclined her head toward Max, "My brother set me up with a job for Max this summer." She added with some satisfaction at the envy he couldn't hide, "I'm going to be busy."

David looked back at Max still unable to hide the awe he had for him, "Maybe you can put in a word..."

"I don't believe this! Goodbye David." She turned and walked away frustrated and angry. Why did Max have to show up? She couldn't help herself but glare at him as she neared him, "Where's Luke?" Not only that, all of the women around them were practically falling over themselves to get a better look at him and for some reason she wanted to pull out her claws and scratch all of their eyes out.

"Hong Kong." He answered with a smile while standing erect and looking down at her, "And hello to you to." He added seeing her expression and not seeming the least bit deterred by it.

She'd forgotten how sexy that deep voice of his was and stopped suddenly to stare at him as a shiver ran down her spine and he was so tall. She hadn't seen him in several months, but you'd think it was ten years by the emotions of longing he aroused in her. When she spoke, her voice nearly cracked, "Hong Kong?"

"Yes." He leaned down and opened the door for her, "He'll be back tomorrow night if things go well. I told him I would make sure someone was here to get you—get in button." He added the last bit softly.

Button? He had called her that since she could remember and she never knew why because she was too afraid to ask. It sounded like a cutesy name, but when he said it, it sounded salacious. She closed her eyes for a moment to savour the affect it had on her. She had to admit that she loved the way her body reacted around him. It was like some sort of electrical current that only he could ignite.

Before getting in the car she turned to him, "You could have sent someone else?" He smiled again and she thought her knees just turned to butter. Oh why did he have to be so darn handsome?

"Would you have recognized one of my other employees? I have over fifteen thousand." He smiled wryly.

She rolled her eyes, "Fine. Point taken." She protested because she was afraid of making a fool out of herself on the ride to Luke's apartment. His closeness always turned her into a bumbling fool. Silently she prayed from strength to resist his affect on her knowing that it was pointless.

He looked back at David who was still standing where she'd left him and his expression darkened, "who's your friend?"

"Nobody now, thanks to you." She shot, getting in the car missing the expression of relief that spread across his face.

After he closed her door, he walked around to the driver's side and took another opportunity to look at the man that was with Lily. Max knew an eager face when he saw one, and it was written all over that one. He didn't mind eager, but he didn't like people he cared about being used. Lily didn't know it, but Max knew all about this David. Then he actually handled her. He wanted to rip his arm off for touching Lily. *His Lily*. He pursed his lips and got in, started the engine and turned to her masking his ire, "Any stops?"

"No. Just take me home okay. I'm exhausted." She was trying not to look at him and instead focused her gaze on something outside, but she could still feel the heat from his scrutiny.

"Why so glum?"

Finally she turned to look at him, "Because every time you show up, I lose a date." He gave her a puzzled expression, "I mean, I liked that guy." She tossed a thumb in the direction of David who was still gaping, "and when he saw you, he fell all to

pieces wanting to get to know you. For once I would just like a guy to like me for me.”

“Then quit picking stupid ones.” He said dryly

Her mouth fell open as she stared at him in disbelief. David was in the top ten percentile of their class and far from stupid, but his next words clarified what he meant.

He gave her an amused lopsided smirk, “Really honey, if they can’t see you for what you are, then it’s their loss.”

Always the charmer, “I’m not one of your women Max, quit trying to flatter me.”

“One of my...” he burst into laughter and shifted the car into gear, pulling away from the curb, while she started fuming. “No you definitely aren’t.” he continued to laugh.

Even his laugh was downright sexy. Letting out another frustrated sigh she concentrated on the scenery preparing for the long two hour ride back home. She felt almost as if he was laughing directly at her. She always found herself being a tongue tied fumbling fool around him. Moments ago that sloppy smile near had her heart galloping out of her chest. Secretly she wished that he had some sort of attraction for her, but she knew better. He liked high society women, beautiful women, experienced women who could satisfy him in—*oh gosh stop it*, she scolded herself. Why did she always think of him in such a manner? How come she couldn’t get him out of her mind? Thankfully his voice interrupted the silence.

“Did Luke tell you what kind of job you’d be doing for me?”

She swung her head around to face him, “No.” She assumed filing, mail delivery or something along those lines.

He flicked her a glance before returning his attention to the road, “You are working on a business administrative degree, are you not?”

“I am...why?”

“Knowing you Lily, you’d think I’d have you deliver coffee to my employees or do a muffin run.” He glanced at her again seeing the rising color in her cheeks, “Not appropriate for an intern in that respect. You are my best friend’s sister. I have something better in mind.”

“Don’t do me any favours.” She returned with more sarcasm than she meant causing one of his brows to rise.

“I’m not.” He answered while studying her expression. Actually he was, but it was more for his benefit.

“Oh.” She added feeling foolish, and then crushed.

“I intend on giving you every opportunity to understand what it would be like to work for someone such as myself. I’m hiring you as my Personal Assistant and once you spend a week with me you won’t think I was doing you a favour.”

“You can’t be that bad.” she mused.

Smiling he glanced sideways at her, “I assure you I’m not an easy man to work for. I keep long hours, work weekends and I expect you to accompany me on my many trips abroad this summer. If you can work for me you can work for anyone. I’ve gone through six PAs this year alone.”

“You’re kidding, right? Six?” What woman in their right mind would quit working for him? It must’ve been brutal for them to quit. One thing she had going for her is that she knew Max better than they did. Not only that, she was certain he wouldn’t be so hard on her because of who she was. Hopefully she didn’t let him down.

Part of her was exhilarated at being with him, close to him, and the other part was scared stiff. Truth was, she was nuts about him and had been since she discovered boys. Although she couldn’t quite peg the year, it must’ve been when that boy asked her out in eleventh grade and she said no, because he didn’t even possess one-eighth of the qualities that Max had. Max was a beautiful image of masculinity. To her he was no less than

perfect, and unfortunately looking for those qualities in another man pretty much left her boyfriends looking plain and never lasting more than a few months as with David.

"No." he said dryly casting a once over glance in her direction, "Your wardrobe needs an upgrade."

Insulted and embarrassed she turned her head away. Just because he wears four thousand dollar suits doesn't mean she can afford the same. She looked at her worn jeans and t-shirt. "I just got out of school. We don't wear business suits in class."

"That's not what I meant Lily." He added in a softer tone, "Naturally you will have access to a company credit card and we have several boutiques that cater to my personal staff. I'll have Nancy set you up an appointment and get fitted." He was dying to see those legs of hers in a skirt.

"Max," she chagrined, "I am not a charity case! Luke has plenty of money; he can buy me what I need."

Sighing he pulled the car over to the side of the road and cut the engine. His piercing eyes searched her face for a moment, "Lily, where is all of this defensiveness coming from? This is nothing short of what I would do for another intern, PA, or otherwise. You are going to be my PA next week. You need to look the part. I can't possibly haul you all over the country looking like a cowgirl. There is a standard package for the position, including a company credit card, cell phone, personal data device, car service, excreta. You need to be at my beckoned call. I've already gone over the details with Luke. He seemed a lot more eager than you thinking it would be an excellent opportunity."

Lifting her chin slightly, she returned his steady gaze, although she'd never reveal how nerve racking it was. "Max, you are only doing this because of Luke. I wanted to try and do things on my own for once without the great Maximilian King

attached to my name.”

A slow smile spread across his handsome face, “Is that so? Didn’t anyone tell you, it’s who you know in this world that gets you places, or at least gets the door open. Then after that you can rely on your own attributes.” His eyes dropped to her mouth. He had to admit that if she did use her own attributes they would take her to the top. Especially that mouth. She had a perfect pouty mouth with lips the color of pale roses.

“I don’t want that kind of privilege.” What a smile. Could he possibly look any more appealing?

His brows rose, “Really? Then should I inform your brother that all the begging and pleading he did on your behalf last week was all in vain?”

Her mouth fell open. “He didn’t!”

Then his expression became unreadable, “Should I tell him that his sister doesn’t appreciate how well he looks out for her?” He frowned, “Your brother loves you very much, and wants the best for you. There are people out there that would die for this position and have it on their resume, yet you balk because it’s handed to you.”

Furious at his arrogance, she couldn’t keep the anger out of her voice, “What? Like the great Max King can make or break a career?”

“You’re bloody hell right I can.” He said allowing his temper to finally show, “I can break a career to the point of believing that reincarnation three times over won’t help them get a job. You are being ungrateful. I don’t ever recall that selfishness in you.” He didn’t mean to sound so harsh, but Lily had never been so defensive and it was surprising. Maybe she was more upset about David than he thought and that irritated him.

She gaped at him then felt ashamed at her behaviour and snapped her mouth shut. Never, in all the years had she known

him that he'd raised his voice to her. He was right, she was being ungrateful. If Luke did what Max said, it wouldn't have been easy for him. It was him that was bringing out this foul temper in her. She was crazy about the man, and he affected her to the point of craziness. "Oh God Max, I'm sorry. I must sound horrible."

Thankfully he seemed to relax. She'd never witnessed any sort of rise in his voice before, and certainly not toward her, so she knew she angered him. He had every right to be upset with her. "Finals always stress me out. Then David went all ga-ga when he saw you. I actually thought he liked me. It just seems that when I start getting somewhere on my own, you waft in and the world falls at your feet."

Of course it wasn't the whole truth, but it seemed to work because he finally gave her a sinfully delicious grin. The same grin she had wished for earlier, now she wished she didn't. It caused her stomach to momentarily spasm and she was thankful she was in the car not standing when he did it, because there was no way she'd be able to keep upright. His deep voice may have caused a quiver to go up her spine, but that grin ran through her whole body like a vibration. Despite her condition she was amazed that her voice sounded as steady as it did when she continued her explanation. "Now I know he's just like the rest of them that only want to date me because I know you." She waved a submissive hand and slumped in the leather seat feeling like a complete ass.

"Is that what you think? The world stops for Maximilian King?" he said with a glitter of amusement, erasing the annoyance he felt earlier.

She shrugged, "Always seems that way when you walk in a room." She mumbled. "The men suck up like there's no tomorrow, and the woman do everything shy of stripping off their clothes in a public place to get your attention."

“God Lily, what an exaggeration!” He chuckled while turning on the car and pulling back out onto the road. “If that were true, you would have made a pass at me a long time ago. I’ve spent more time with you than any other woman in my life.” He said absently choosing not to look at her to see her expression because she would see his. If Lily made a pass at him, he certainly wouldn’t turn her down. He hadn’t seen her in over a month and if it was possible that she’d grown more beautiful in her absence, she did. She must be about twenty now, and she had developed into a gorgeous woman. Of course he always thought she was, but with his plans coming into focus on his real intentions for her, she was even more appealing and not in the little sister of a best friend way.

He wanted her.

Lily thought her heart just tripled its pace at that confession and she turned away and looked out the side window so he couldn’t see the vulnerable expression on her face. First of all she wouldn’t know how to make a pass at him and it certainly wasn’t for lack of wanting to. She’d never had a steady boyfriend, and beyond a simple kiss here or there, had no idea of flirting or intimacy. It seemed that whenever she mentioned something to Luke about a potential beau by coincidence Max would walk into her life and the beau would turn into an ass kissing puppet. Yet, that confession, as brief as it was, nearly liquefied her internal organs.

“Are we okay?” he slanted her a look after he hid his expression of desire. In the past, he’d always kept an emotional distance from Lily treating her as his friend’s little sister, but this summer things were going to change, especially if she was with him every minute of every day. There was no way in hell he could ignore her.

“Sorry.” She said sheepishly, I don’t know what got into me.” He gave her an easy grin and turned his attention back to

the road. Max was a naturally dominant male through to the bone. To a man, he was intimidating, but to a woman, his demeanour screamed sexual perfection. He was confident, arrogant and highly intelligent so it was justified. Lily knew from an early age that God made him to torture her sex. Even now, while concentrating on the road in front of him he was appealing. His masculine features were perfection, a strong square jaw, straight aristocratic nose, sensual masculine mouth and those bloody eyes that could drag a confession from a corpse. Also, he had a body that you could fathom on a triathlon competitor. She would know, she'd been at his house when they'd used the pool, thankful that someone had invented sunglasses to stop her eyes from flying out of her head. If Adonis walked the earth, he would be a spitting image all beautiful and muscular, and moving with a confident virile grace.

Just thinking about that day sent an odd heat low in her pelvis. How could that happen so easily with him? Never did an image illicit such a physical response like it did with Max. She sighed heavily. She was hopeless.

"I could offer David a job, if you like, and then you could spend the summer together." He said cutting off her thoughts.

If it weren't for the teasing look in his eyes, she would have blasted him for such a suggestion after what she'd just told him, "Yeah, sure."

"Then I could fire him because he wasn't as good as you. Revenge can be sweet."

She actually laughed, "You really would wouldn't you?"

"Of course." He gave her a lopsided grin, "Anything for you button."

She had to force herself to breathe after that statement, "As mad as I am at him, I just couldn't subject him to that. I would feel too guilty." *If he says button one more time in that deep voice, I'm going to faint*, she thought.

“Ah, there’s the sweet Lily I know.” He flashed her another smile and his eyes went to her mouth again.

Sweet? Blood rushed into her cheeks at his flattering tone, “Okay...enough.” She held up her hand in surrender causing him to chuckle.

About ten minutes passed before she found her voice again, “Is it true that you’re dating that model Cybil Dawn?” He gave her an unreadable expression.

“Dating, yes.” His eyes roved over her with his expression not giving anything away, “Why?”

“She’s not your type.” She heard herself say wishing she’d just kept her mouth shut.

He chuckled, “No? Then what is my type honey?”

She shrugged trying to hide the shiver that just ran through her, doing her best on trying to act indifferent, “Someone who is down to earth, yet challenges you enough to keep you on your toes.” She cleared her throat, “You know, someone who’s witty—” she nearly said intelligent, but that was an unfair judgement because she didn’t know Cybil and for all she knew the woman had a two hundred I.Q.

“How do you know she doesn’t?” he said casting a careful look in her direction searching her expression for a betrayal of her indifferent tone. It was subtle, but he did see it. Her eyes glanced off of him and he didn’t miss the vulnerability that was displayed in them. A sense of satisfaction washed through him.

“She’s a model.” She said nonchalantly.

“There’s the stereotype.” He gave her a slanted grin, “And you’re one to talk. Didn’t you get offered a modelling job?”

“That’s different and I turned it down.” She cast him a shy sideways glance. It was embarrassing to be categorized along with the women he’d dated. She’d met quite a few of them over the years and they were mostly shallow and self absorbed. She never understood why an intelligent man like him was interested

in them. Years later, she began to understand that it wasn't their intelligence he was after. Yet, to know that he desired women like that made her feel insignificant modelling offer or not. There was no way on God's green earth that she could compete with those women.

"Turned it down? I thought Luke threatened to disown you." He offered watching her cheeks pink up.

"Oh God....he told you?" She groaned. "Just the same I turned it down. Luke said that lifestyle would ruin me. Geez, don't you guys keep secrets?"

"Luke's right." He added, "And no, he's my best friend." It was actually Max that told Luke not to allow Lily to go into modelling. Luke was almost willing to let her do it until Max reminded him of the lifestyle. Both of them had extensive experience in dating women like that and he didn't want Lily to be ruined. She was special to him. More than she knew.

"Regardless, you're one to talk. You're dating a model." She defended, "And you tell me I shouldn't choose that career."

He grinned, "That's different. I didn't know her before she was a model. What I see is what I got. With you, it would destroy that sweet quality you have."

She stared at him, sweet, he thought she was sweet? He's said it moments ago, but hearing it twice made her catch her breath. Max was always good to her, but he never really complimented her before.

"And then there's the dieting, the late nights, long hours..."

"Dating rich fabulously handsome men like you..." she added without thinking. She held her breath hoping he didn't hear her, but he caught it.

"Handsome?" his eyes glittered when he tossed her a look, "You think I'm handsome?"

Trying to recover she began to babble just making things

worse, “You think your handsome enough for the both of us with all that arrogant charm and sex appeal.” *God shut up*, she thought to herself. It was his fault! If he hadn’t had her all senseless with the ‘sweet’ comments, she might be able to control her big mouth.

He threw back his head and laughed, “Now I’m handsome, charming, and I have sex appeal. Honey, you do wonders for my ego.”

“That came out wrong.” She groaned and put her face in her hands knowing he didn’t need any help in that aspect. His poise alone wrote the book on ego.

“I would love to hear more on the subject of my sex appeal, but we’re at your brother’s building.” He said with clear amusement.

She could still hear the laughter in his tone and wanted to crawl into a hole. Feeling a tug on a lock of her hair she faced him still thoroughly embarrassed. He actually was playing with the strand between his fingers that had escaped her French twist, and his expression was no longer amused. It was something different that she hadn’t seen before.

‘How long is your hair?’ he said guiding his eyes to hers.

Tilting her head in question, she said, “To my waist. You’ve seen it down. Why?”

“Actually it seems like years that you wore it down around me, so I wasn’t sure if you cut it.” He frowned, “Don’t ever cut it. I’ve never seen this shade before...It looks like copper.”

Bewildered she just stared at him.

“And wear it up like this at work. I don’t want you to attract attention.” He added in a terse tone.

“Max...?” what on earth did that mean?

Seeing her confusion, he explained, “Women have a hard time in my business being taken seriously. I promised Luke I’d protect you. There are a lot of men in my main office building

and you are a beautiful young woman. Most of these men aren't married because they have careers that don't allow that. I don't want to start firing them because they start pawing you." What he didn't tell her is that he didn't want anyone else touching her besides him from now on.

Her jaw dropped. Max had never mentioned anything remotely related to her looks before in her life. She knew she wasn't ugly but Cybil Dawn was stunning, all blond and leggy, and she couldn't hold a candle to her. Perhaps he was being sexist? The men could be devils and the women must remain conservative. "So when your girlfriend shows up, does she have to wear a potato sack?"

"that's different," He shook a finger in her direction, "she's not the little sister of my best friend and in no way is she naïve in the what men want from her." *And I couldn't care less if another man touched Cybil.*

I'll bet. "For heaven's sake Max, I'm twenty years old."

"With the body of a supermodel, the face of an angel and the mind of Einstein." He cut in, "And naïve as the day is light."

Now she turned completely scarlet.

"My point exactly." He said studying her flushed cheeks, "You have no idea how appealing you are to my sex. Many men that I employ work hard, but they also play hard. I don't want you falling for the antics of a playboy and you'll be around them as much as I am. Why do you think I'm keep you close as my PA, not shipping you off to some other department? Even if I warn everyone off you, there's a chance that someone will take a chance at losing their job just to get you in bed..."

"God....Max..." she gasped. It was as if he just breached that barrier of comfort between them. Not that she was always comfortable around him, but now his dictation of her feminine attributes and what he thought of them, floored her. He just admitted that she was appealing to his sex. Did that mean him

too? His next words crushed her hopes.

“Luke would kill me if anything happened to his baby sister.” He held his hand up when she tried to interrupt him. “So, take what I say as advice, not an insult. I’m speaking from experience.”

Because you’re a playboy, she thought.

“Now for tomorrow...”

“Tomorrow is Saturday.”

He smiled, “Yes, but I don’t take the day off, and you need to come to the office and speak with Nancy, my secretary. She’ll set you up like I mentioned before, so you’ll be ready on Monday for work. There is only skeleton staff there on Saturday so she can take some time and show you the ropes and my expectations. I’ll pick you up tomorrow at seven-thirty.”

“Oh.” She said understanding what he meant and was actually thankful for his consideration. She could only imagine what it was like around there on a Monday.

He looked up at the building through the windshield, “You sure you want to stay here by yourself? I have several spare rooms at my place.”

And interfere with your love life? No thanks. She thought, “I’ll be fine. When’s Luke due home again?” she couldn’t handle it if he’d brought a woman home while she was there.

“Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow if things go well. Which I have no doubt.” He shrugged and smiled knowingly, “Luke’s the best I got so I expect him home tomorrow.”

“No doubt.” She smiled back at the flattery he gave her brother.

“We could go out to dinner tonight.” He found himself saying.

Dinner? Oh lord, could she possibly sit across from him and not fall to pieces. “I’m tired Max.” She would have loved to

have him to herself , but she wouldn't know how to behave with just him around and knew she couldn't keep up the facade of not being in love with him. Something would definitely slip and give herself away.

He resisted the temptation to brush a stray lock of hair off her cheek while studying her expression, "All right honey, I'll take a rain check then."

"Okay." She gave him a small unsure smile.

"So go on," he leaned over her and opened her door, "I'll pick you up first thing tomorrow, be up and ready by seven thirty." He repeated.

She nearly gasped as his body gently brushed against hers as he opened her door and when he erected himself there was something odd in his eyes that she'd never seen before. For a moment all they did was look at one another before she realized that she was ogling him again. Before the next blush hit her she said goodbye and jumped out of the car. What she didn't see was Max's gaze follow the sway of her backside as she entered her building.

He sighed and shook his head before putting the car into gear and pulling away from the curb, "Be patient Max." He said to himself.

Entering their penthouse made her breathe a sigh of relief. She shut the door and leaned against it for a moment. Max always left her so drained. It was near impossible keeping her attraction for him out of her body and facial expressions. Setting her bag on the hallway table she made her way to the kitchen to make herself some dinner when she stopped suddenly at the sight of two dozen lavender roses in a vase with various wisps of baby breath. Slowly she walked up to it spotting the card that said 'Lily' in no less than Max's handwriting. She felt like a kid at Christmas as she opened it. 'Welcome aboard' and he signed it. He actually wrote the card himself. Smiling her fingers

guided along one of the soft velvety peddles wondering if he'd even gone to the flower shop to pick out the flowers too. Then that got her thinking about his relationships with women. She was sure he bought them all sorts of things to flatter their beauty. Leave it to her to ruin her own brief happiness she thought as she sighed out loud.

CHAPTER TWO

The next morning an immaculate long stretched dark grey limousine pulled up in front of the building while she was waiting just inside the door with Bill Jenkins, the doorman.

"See you Bill." She said as he opened the door and she walked toward the Limo.

"Don't let him keep you out too late honey." The old man called after her causing her to laugh. He already knew from her that it was her boss. He'd met Max King before, and despite the man's formidable wealth he seemed decent enough. Something he wasn't quite sure about was the way the man looked at Lily when she wasn't paying attention. The man had a reputation with women, if you followed the tabloids. Not that he put such faith into that kind of gossip, but this was Lily. He'd known her since she was sixteen when they first moved into the building and she was as sweet as they come.

"How are you Miss Shayne?" said Oscar, Max's driver as he held the door.

"Fine Oscar," she paused, "I can't believe you still work for this guy," She teased.

"Get in the car Lily." Came Max's voice from the dark interior causing her to laugh and Oscar to smile.

"You do now too, so don't knock it." He grinned causing his cap to slide up on his brow a bit making him reach up and

adjust it. "Besides the benefits are fantastic."

"Rightly said." She answered ducking in the car.

Oscar closed the door behind her.

"You are definitely not winning any brownie points." Max said with a mock glare, glancing up from the computer screen he had on some sort of extension out from the side of the car. He sat against the leather seat with his long legs crossed at the knees.

When her eyes first set on him, she near lost her tongue. He was wearing a navy suit, yellow shirt and striped tie. His hair was neatly combed and she was certain not one ebony strand was out of place. The whole aura he gave off at that moment gave the impression of a powerful, wealthy man completely in control and confident in his abilities. Not to mention the overwhelming feeling of masculine appeal that seemed to just be tossed on her like a bucket of warm water. This time she faltered in her defences and found herself stuttering, "I—I was teasing." Her shaky voice brought his eyes back to hers and slowly a smile formed on his handsome face as his grey eyes studied hers. In her defence, she'd never seen him dressed for business. She'd only known him outside of work and thankfully so, because the sight before her just destroyed all of her defences.

"I know you were button." He paused watching her intently, "Are you a little nervous about today?"

I'm shaking, trembling, nervous about you, she thought as she got a whiff of his expensive cologne, *and God do you smell good,* "A little."

He smiled reassuringly, "Here," he pushed a small paper bag toward her, "I brought you a muffin." That caused her to laugh.

"I thought that was my job?" she said partially recovering enough to tease him.

"I told you that you were too good to do those things for me." He said with an edge of seriousness.

Did he say that? She was sure it wasn't put in that context.

"Now, I know you don't drink coffee, so I wasn't sure what you wanted to drink."

Vodka and tonic, "Water's fine." How did he know she didn't like coffee? Well, Max didn't get where he was by not being observant.

"There's some in the cooler there." He pointed to a partially concealed door next to her.

"Oh thank you." She leaned over and opened it to retrieve a bottle.

Max near groaned, the woman's derriere in that tan skirt was flawless. Perfectly smooth and round and he had the experienced eye to know that it was firm and smooth as silk like the rest of her skin. Leave it to her to bend over in front of him and not think twice about it. How easy it would be to flip up skirt and...He quickly averted his gaze back to the laptop feeling the rising heat in his groin. Christ, Luke would kill him if he knew how he thought about Lily at that moment. Totally lost in the images flashing in his mind, he started to recite the alphabet in his head to distract him. Something he never had to do before in his life around a beautiful woman. Maybe that's why he could only think of the alphabet at that exact moment. This was going to prove to be the longest summer of his life.

Nancy was a woman in her mid fifties who seemed very warm yet professional. Max introduced them and Lily shook her hand.

"You're Mr. Shayne's sister." She said smiling.

"Yes." Lily studied her expression to see if the favouritism bothered the older woman, but the smile she wore was genuine. It gave her some measure of relief.

"Nancy, set her up." Said Max, "I want her one hundred

percent ready for Monday. It's going to be busy."

"Right away Mr. King." She said

Max reached up and squeezed her shoulder, "Lily, when Nancy's done with you, I'll take you home. Just come and get me."

"Okay." She said still nervous.

"Take good care of her Nancy."

"I will." She said with a boy scout salute causing him to chuckle as he turned away.

After Max left, Nancy took her to a locked cupboard and retrieved a Personal Data device, a mobile phone, and a binder with Orientation printed on the front. For the next hour she went over Max's routine, then she took her to the security office to have a key card made with her photo on it.

Lily instantly liked Nancy. She answered her questions and made her feel welcome. By the time the morning was over, she was no longer as nervous.

"Now Max mentioned that you needed to be set up at the boutique." Nancy mentioned as she lifted her phone and dialled a number, "I'll get the car to take you over so you can get fitted." She said as the phone rang on the other end.

"Max was right, you are efficient." Lily had completely forgotten about that.

Nancy beamed at the compliment, "he's wonderful to work for." She momentarily spoke to someone on the other end of the phone while Lily waited patiently. She hung up, "There, it's all done."

"Thank you Nancy." She wondered about what Max had told her earlier about his personal assistants. "Max told me he went through six PAs this year."

"He also doesn't sleep." Nancy added with a wink. "They couldn't keep up."

"Oh. So he wasn't kidding."

‘Don’t worry honey, you’ll be fine. I’ll help you whenever you need it until you get rooted.’ Nancy reassured, ‘Besides you have an advantage. Luke would never let any harm come to his sister.’

‘Thanks. I would appreciate that.’ She looked at her shyly, ‘I hope that doesn’t create any animosity among the staff.’

‘We’re not going to tell them you’re related to one of the bosses Lily. They don’t need to know that business, and then they’ll see that you got the job because you’re good at it.’ She patted her hand, ‘Not only that, Max despises gossip and so do I.’

‘I appreciate the praise; I hope I don’t disappoint you.’

‘I know you won’t.’ What Nancy didn’t tell her was that Max had already pulled her into his office last Friday and read her the riot act on how Lily was to be treated. There was no doubt that he was protective of Luke’s sister and after seeing the woman everything made sense. She was stunning, but she also had a humility that wasn’t common in women who looked like her. Actually she shouldn’t have expected anything less. Luke was a very handsome man and there was no doubt his sister would be pretty.

She also knew there was going to be a lot of animosity toward her from the other secretaries in the outer office even if they didn’t know about her relationship with Luke and Max. They all had their eye on that position mostly because it entailed working next to Max. Nancy may have been middle aged and married, but Max was a dish and they all knew it.

Lily returned back to the office after two in the afternoon. Oscar had insisted on taking her new wardrobe to their apartment while she finished up with Nancy. The more time she spent with her the more she liked her. She was so patient as she taught her how to use the PDA. And she told her so.

‘Why don’t you apply to be his PA Nancy? You’re very

efficient.” Lily asked.

Nancy chuckled, “Because I like spending time with my husband. Max is a workaholic even though he pays well and I love the man like a son, I like having a life.”

Lily’s eyes widened, “He warned me, but is it really that bad?”

“You’ll do fine dear. You’re young and single.”

“How--?”

“I hear talk—” she grinned, “Actually, your brother told me.”

Lily rolled her eyes, “They’re both so protective.”

“I can see why,” She said looking at the beautiful younger woman as her cheeks pinked up at the compliment. It didn’t escape Nancy that she was very naïve either. It’s no wonder Max took her aside and insisted she look after her. She was very kind also, and most women who looked like Lily Shayne would be very self absorbed. She should know. She’d met a multitude of Max’s and Luke’s girlfriends and they all possessed that quality.

Finally when Lily was comfortable with her routine and the electronics, she went to tell Max that she was ready to go home.

However, when she entered his office, he was on the phone and it must’ve been Cybil by the way he was talking. She turned to leave when he spotted her and waved her in.

“I’ll see you next month—yes I miss you—” he added, “—look I’ve got to run, my assistant is waiting.”

Lily never felt so uncomfortable in her life. He sounded incredibly sexy while he spoke to the other woman and she felt entirely insignificant. There were some times in her life that he spoke to her with warmth in his voice, but nothing like that.

His eyes glanced up at hers while still on the phone, “—female—why?” he said.

Lily realized that Cybil was questioning him about his

new assistant and when he narrowed his gaze while listening to the person on the other end she could only imagine what she was saying.

“She’s the sister of my best friend Cybil and my employee. Enough of this.” He countered, “I’ll speak to you tonight. I’ve got to go.” He said right before he hung up.

“She doesn’t approve of me.” Lily said.

Max stood up and grabbed his Jacket off a hanger out of a nearby closet not looking at her while he put it on, “It doesn’t matter what she thinks Lily.” He said finally turning to her.

If he was upset, it certainly didn’t show. “I don’t want to make trouble.”

“First of all honey, it’s not you making trouble. Cybil’s been out of town for a few weeks and she’s worried I might stray. I don’t stray.” He added picking up his briefcase. What he didn’t say was petty jealousies were a major turn off for him. Cybil was on the way out as far as he was concerned. After ten minutes with Lily, the woman was very dull.

Just then his mobile rang and he pulled it out of his pocket, “It’s Luke,” he said checking the ID before he flipped it open.

Lily couldn’t help but grin. She hadn’t seen her big brother in over a month and loved him to death.

“Yeah Luke—“ he paused looking at Lily, “She’s with me, we’re on our way now. I’ll see you in about an hour.” He flipped his phone closed. “Luke’s home.”

“Oh good. I miss him so much.” She beamed with excitement at the prospect of seeing him. Like any little sister, she thought the sun rose and set on her big brother. She never took him for granted and knew the sacrifices he had to make to raise her after the death of their parents when she was twelve. He used the insurance money to put himself through college and

then her, but he was a millionaire now and when Max came into their lives they somehow shared responsibility of Lily.

"Come then," he said with an incline of his head toward the door, "He's waiting." *It would be nice*, he thought, if *she greeted me with such enthusiasm*. In fact, any man would love to be greeted with her lovely face lit up like that.

Once at their building Max told Oscar to wait for him as he escorted Lily up to Luke's penthouse. He shook hands with her brother after she let him go from a genuine hug.

"I started dinner honey," he said to Lily, "You're staying right?" he asked Max.

"For your cooking? Hell yes." Max agreed. Luke was a bit of a self taught chef. He had no choice raising his little sister after the death of their parents, but he went beyond that. It was his first choice when he went to college but decided a change of careers halfway through realizing he would never make as much money as he does now. However, he still studied cuisine on the side and thoroughly enjoyed it.

"How was your first day honey?" He asked his sister.

"Nancy was really nice." She said pulling her hair out of its chignon not noticing Max's eyes follow the movement with intensity. Then she shook her head allowing it to tumble down her back, "I'm going to go get washed up and change. I'll be back in a bit." She added rubbing her scalp with the tips of her fingers as she walked away.

"Sure thing." He said darting his eyes to Max and narrowing his gaze at the look he was giving his sister. After Lily was out of earshot he spoke to him, "*Jesus*, you're as readable as a book Max."

Max released a sigh and nodded, "I definitely need a drink."

"It can't be that bad." Luke arched his brows in surprise.

"Luke, speak to me when you go through this." He said

seriously as he eyed his friend, “She completely bewitches me.” He added while pulling out his phone, “I need to call Oscar and tell him to come back in an hour.”

“Make it two. I’m making desert.” He said over his shoulder as he headed back toward the kitchen, “Help yourself to the bar Max, pour me whatever you’re having.” He began to feel the urge to have one too. Max made his intentions clear years ago, but he still thought Lily was way too young to get involved with him. Although he had to admit, he’d never seen his friend look at a woman the way he looked at his sister. If he didn’t think Max was serious before, he knew he was now. Something like that couldn’t be faked. He cherished her.

Max poured himself a double scotch and by the time Lily came back he was on his second.

Lily had to admit having her two favourite men in the world at dinner was wonderful. They laughed and joked for several hours before she stifled a yawn and excused herself. Even though she wanted to stay to spend more time with them, she was thoroughly exhausted. It wasn’t often Max stayed for dinner anymore. It seemed the more wealthy he’d gotten, and the more his company expanded, he was busier.

Max watched her leave before he started asking Luke about Hong Kong. Every minute spent with her was precious to him and he wasn’t going to waste it talking about business. At work it was different but in the company of family he wouldn’t bring it up.

For Lily, the next week was brutal. He certainly hadn’t lied to her. She put in a twelve to fourteen hour day and when she got home , would collapse on her bed and fall asleep, sometimes with her clothes still on. How the hell did he do it? The man was a machine. Earlier that day, she was in the middle of setting up the boardroom for a meeting of directors when Max

strolled in to the room on his cell phone looking to handsome to be real. He was wearing a dark grey suit, blue silk shirt and striped tie. One of his hands was thrust into his pocket and he nodded to her briefly not breaking conversation on the phone. It sounded like he was speaking in Greek and a minute later he hung up and centered his gaze on her.

“Lily do you have a dress?”

“I have dresses.” She answered with a puzzled look. It was an odd conversation. Usually he kept his conversations short and professional with her around the office probably to not let on that he knew her more than just an employee. Actually she appreciated that he didn't show her favoritism because there was already some animosity brewing because of the position she held. So far it didn't bother her too much and she was hoping that it wouldn't.

“No, a cocktail dress. Cybil's out of town, I need a companion for dinner tonight.”

“I can go get one.” She answered trying to keep the tremor out of her voice and the excitement off her face.

“Do that.” He said casually as he studied her for a moment, “something green to match your eyes, and elegant, but simple.”

“Yes sir.” She said with a mock salute causing him to smile.

“How are you holding up? It's been a hectic first week for you.” His eyes searched hers with concern.

It was worth every minute she could spend with him, but she wouldn't tell him that, instead she teased him. “Hell.” She said. “You are a slave driver.”

He chuckled, “Yet not one complaint. I'm impressed, not many people could keep up with me.”

“I'm not arguing there.” She grinned setting out the last folder and pulled out her PDA to look at his schedule, “You don't

have a dinner scheduled.” She stared up at him.

“Last minute arrangement. I have some Greek associates that are interested in one of my new Global Positioning Systems. It’s a multimillion dollar deal and I need a beautiful woman to entice them.”

That stunned her. Max had access to hundreds of beautiful women. She was sure of it, yet he’d asked her? “Why me?”

Board members started to file into the room, so he took her by the elbow and led her to the far corner so they weren’t overheard.

“Remember Cybil is out of town and I wouldn’t ask this of you Lily, if you weren’t capable.” He spoke quietly so only she could hear.

“I’m flattered really. I’ll do my best to impress.” She went to leave, but paused and turned back, “Does Luke know that you asked this of me.”

“He does.”

“And he doesn’t mind if I go along to entertain clients. I find that hard to believe. He’s just as protective as you are.”

“He is, and he probably would protest, but he’s coming to.”

“Oh,” she laughed, “I should have known.”

He grinned, “Well, God forbid if your brother will let you come with me unsupervised. I may not behave.” He teased, but it didn’t reach his eyes. No, he definitely wouldn’t.

What did he just say? She was going to ask him when she was interrupted by Eugene DeWetter, his head accountant. She took her seat back against the wall behind his in case he needed assistance. She had to admit, she was getting better, but she still felt incredibly inadequate. Yet, he was very patient with her and he was right about her being with him the whole time. Very rarely did he leave her alone. In a way she was really thankful

because it was so intimidating the first Monday when the offices are in full swing that she just wanted to run into the nearest closet and hide. However, he put her to work immediately after a briefing with his head secretary Nancy, who was very kind. She may have been the only one though. There were another three ladies in the same office as Nancy's but none of them seemed to pay her much mind. One in particular, her name was Brittney, seemed to give her looks of contempt every now and then. She already knew what it was about. Max.

She was young blonde and pretty and stars entered the woman's brown eyes whenever he strode in the room giving off an aura of confidence and charisma like a comet tail, but he never noticed her beyond a cordial hello. In truth she felt sorry for her, because Max's undeniable appeal was a force to be reckoned with. So she did her best to not let the other girl's looks bother her. It was odd to receive looks from someone who was several years older than her. Didn't she know she wasn't any competition with her plain looks? Boys only seemed to date her because she was associated with Max. Not only that, Max liked blonde-blondes, and her hair was a strawberry blonde color, or copper as he called it.

The meeting started and she crossed her legs and set her day timer on her lap. Max immediately took charge of the meeting and she noticed that his employees treated him with great respect and hung on every word. When he spoke they listened and when he paid attention to them they swelled with pride. She knew respect like that couldn't be bought and she had to admit that she loved seeing this side of him.

About a half an hour later Brittney came in with a cart of snacks and drinks and she knew for sure now that the look she just gave her wasn't pleasant. It just so happened that Max had turned around and whispered something in Lily's ear and afterwards Lily realized that it looked intimate even though it

was only to take note of a certain date for a meeting with some Japanese associates. Regardless, Brittney didn't know her and as far as Lily was concerned, shouldn't be jumping to conclusions. It was common Knowledge that he was dating Estee Lauder's new top model and neither she nor Brittney had a hope in hell attracting his attention. Not only did he have a girlfriend, he also didn't date employees, ever. She had heard that from Nancy her second day here when she was getting orientated.

After the meeting she went to the bathroom and the object of her earlier thoughts walked in and paused when she saw her. Even when Lily washed her hands the woman just watched her. The look in her eyes wasn't the least bit flattering.

"I have been after that PA job for almost a year." She said suddenly guiding her eyes over Lily. "Yet you waltz in and none of us knew about you."

Lily just stared at her. It was obvious what she was insinuating, and she wasn't going to comment on it. "Has it occurred to you that I'm qualified for this job?" She said instead.

"Absolutely not." She narrowed her gaze on Lily's legs visible from her skirt, "I can see where your qualifications are."

"What a horrible assumption!" Lily shot seeing what she was looking at, "If you know Max he doesn't date his employees."

"Max is it?" She glared.

Lily almost groaned realizing her mistake. She called him Max and everyone else referred to him as Mr. King. No wonder people like Brittney thought they were sleeping together. "I work very hard and I'm between semesters of a business degree." She said trying to recover, "I got hired as a student."

Brittney shrugged, "sure you did." She said vehemently, not believing her.

It was no use trying to convince the woman of anything. Her mind was already made up. Lily gritted her teeth, "Excuse me." She said marching past the other woman and out of the

bathroom. Did Max's employees all think like that? That she got this job on her back? Would this upset her so much if she didn't care about him as much as she did? Probably not. Truth of it was, she wanted Max, she always had and as much as the woman insinuated she couldn't find it in herself to lie and deny it.

Later that evening, Lily had just finished dressing while thinking on Brittney's accusations. She was letting them bother her when she knew she shouldn't. Obviously the woman wanted the job to be close to Max and who could blame her? Lily knew that she had it good getting that job and it was because she was Luke's sister that gave it to her. Yet, she couldn't tell Brittney that. Why? Maybe part of her wanted the woman to think there was something going on more than she wanted her to know it was because of whom she knew that got her the job. Hopefully Nancy would straighten her out if Brittney said anything.

Regardless, she was going to try and enjoy tonight despite the incident today and she certainly wasn't going to mention it to Max or Luke. If she couldn't handle his employees herself, she didn't deserve the position she had. She went selected a faux fur stole and went to the living room to wait for Luke. She tossed the stole on the back of the sofa and walked over to the large patio doors to stare out at the lights of the city thinking that this thing with Brittney probably wasn't over. She'd seen the look in her eyes.

She quickly squashed her worries and smiled when Luke came out of his room adjusting his tie.

"Is this straight?" he said as he fidgeted with the knot.

If she showed him she was the least bit upset, she knew darn well he'd go to Max. She loved her older brother to death but he was insanely protective. It even surprised her that he let her go work for Max this summer because she knew how protective he could be. However, Max was no different after that

spiel he gave her about her hair when he picked her up from college.

Lily reached up and finished smoothing it out. "It is now." She'd learned at a young age how to fix Luke's ties. He was a handsome man, but he still couldn't seem to get it perfect. Unlike Max. She'd seen him flawlessly do up his ties without even using a mirror to check them. She sighed inwardly thinking how silly it was of her to even think that was perfect.

He grinned down at her, "You look beautiful Lily. You're going to knock our client's socks off."

She smiled shyly, "thanks. You look pretty good yourself."

"How much did that number cost me?" Luke said looking at the emerald satin dress. It wasn't too revealing but showed her figure nicely and had little spaghetti straps over the shoulders. Then again his sister was so beautiful she didn't need anything fancy to enhance her looks. At least he thought so.

"Max bought it." she looked down and fingered the expensive material. "Isn't it beautiful?"

One of his brows rose, "Really?" then an odd look came over his face, but he turned away to pick up and pocketed his cell phone before she could interpret it.

"Why?"

He shook his head like it was nothing. "Just glad it didn't take a bite out of my pay check." He teased. "Company card?"

"Of course. I'm a perfect tax write off." She added teasingly while doing a mock pose.

He chuckled, "I'll remember that." At that moment his cell phone rang and he pulled it out and answered it, while she went and got her handbag.

Hanging up, he picked up her sheer silver wrap, "Come on, Max is downstairs in the car." He draped it over her shoulders.

“Why didn’t he come up?”

He hesitated for a moment before he spoke, “Cybil’s with him.”

“Oh.” She couldn’t keep the disappointment out of her voice.

Luke let an expression of distaste cross his features but didn’t let his sister see it. He’d gone out with Max and Cybil before and the woman was a complete snob. Of course he knew why Max was dating her, and he’d done stupid things like that to, but she was becoming quite possessive and was sure that his friend was going to end the relationship soon. “She flew in several hours ago to surprise him and obviously insisted on coming.”

Of course she did. Obviously Cybil knew Max’s reputation and didn’t want him being out without her tonight. She didn’t forget that phone call when she walked in to Max’s office her first day and the possessiveness that Cybil displayed.

Lily wasn’t fortunate enough to meet the woman over the past week since she was working for Max, but she followed the gossip columns and knew the woman was a walking publicity stunt. There was no doubt that she was beautiful, but she had a string of successful men in her life and as far as Lily was concerned Max was just another boost to the woman’s publicity. Well, there was Max’s physical attributes.

Squashing the hateful feelings of her jealousy she allowed Luke to take her arm and escort her out of the building to the immaculate stretched limo. Oscar got out and held the door open and winked at her causing her to smile.

Sliding into her seat with her brother right beside her she set her attention on the other woman and wasn’t prepared for how really beautiful the woman was up close. Max cordially introduced them and Lily thought she was polite, unlike Cybil, who gave her a once over with a slight look of dislike. She

thought she might have imagined it, but Luke stiffened beside her. Obviously she wasn't the only one that noticed. She wanted to berate the snob, but instead gave her a ravishing smile and told her it was nice to finally meet her.

"But of course." Cybil said as if it was a privilege to know her. Then she turned to Max and started speaking in fluent French which he responded in a familiar tone that Lily recognized and made her feel a little better. He was polite but there was an edge of annoyance present. Then he flicked a glance in her direction and smiled subtly before continuing. "English Cybil." He said softly.

The woman cast a glance at the other occupants of the car, and then smiled sweetly, "Of course love." She cooed while slipping her arm possessively through his and unknown to her, Max glazed his eyes over Lily from the top of her head to the tip of her toes and gave her a sensual smile of approval.

If she moved any closer, she'd be on Max's lap, Lily thought, missing Max's look entirely. She looked up at her brother who shot her an amused smirk and shook his head slightly. Like Luke, Max knew that Lily spoke French and understood every rude thing the woman said about her. He should know. He tutored her when she was in high school. The first thing out of the woman's mouth was an insult over her gown, the same gown that Max had asked her to buy. Wouldn't it ruffle the woman's feathers if she knew that it was her boyfriend that suggested the style? She got a sense of smug satisfaction knowing that Cybil just insulted Max's taste not Lily's. It may have not been the three thousand dollar Christian Dior that the model was wearing but she did think it was just as nice.

Dinner started out well. The Greek clients happened to be a billionaire and his son who was about Max's and her brother's age. It was then that Lily realized that Greek men were ruthless at pursuing women and confident in their abilities just

as much as Max was. Nikos, the son, consistently flattered her throughout the evening regardless of the fact that she came with Luke, but no one had let on that she was his sister. Several times she began to tell them when either Max or her brother interrupted her. Finally she caught Luke's look which basically told her not to say anything and it wasn't until later that she found out why.

"I have a daughter your age." Said Nikos father Hektor, in broken English as he gave Lily a look of approval. Then a look of sadness seemed to fill his eyes. "She's nineteen."

"Then we're close." Offered Lily pleasantly, "I'm twenty as of last month." She said ignoring Cybil's indignant huff. Lily decided right then and there that she didn't like her. She'd been extremely condescending and no matter what she was talking about Cybil made some childish noise, even if it was a simple statement like now. How Max could be interested in someone like that went beyond her. After all, he was such a deeply intelligent man.

"She is very beautiful, like you." Nikos added and smiled seeing her rising blush. "Greece refers to her as their sweetheart. Even though she's nineteen, she does an enormous amount of charity work."

Wow, thought Lily, what a compliment.

The evening continued on and Cybil had long since given up trying to gain his attention and was now sulking despite having the most gorgeous man there sitting next to her she obviously wanted all of the attention. Lily noticed that Max didn't even take notice of her mood and clearly ignored it. She knew him well enough to know that he didn't put up with the pettiness that women were capable of. Lily on the other hand was raised with a brother, no sisters, so she didn't understand the cattiness that women showed each other. Because of that

most of her friends were male acquaintances, not female and she was closer to her brother than anyone.

Then when Nikos asked her out to dinner the next night, she suddenly felt Max's hand on her upper thigh squeezing a warning. Trying not to jump out of her chair at the unexpected touch and ignore the heat of his large hand she flicked him a puzzled glance and he subtly shook his head.

Gritting her teeth she politely turned him down. Although he didn't come close to Max, the man was still tall dark and gorgeous and Max took it upon himself to tell her she couldn't go out on a date with him. She sent a pleading look to her brother who frowned at her expression. *Strike two*, she fumed. She wasn't a baby anymore, yet both of the men in her life basically told her she wasn't old enough to make a decision on who she could date.

On the ride home she remained silent and looked out the tinted window at the lit boulevards with her arms folded under her breasts in anger while Cybil talked a mile a minute in French again. She was still angry at the both of them. Neither one seemed to trust her enough to make her own decisions and consistently interfered. No wonder she was still a virgin for crying out loud. All of her friends lost theirs years ago. Also, it didn't help her mood that she could understand everything Cybil was saying; no matter how hard she tried to ignore her.

This is ridiculous, thought Lily as she listened in. She may have been rich and beautiful, but the woman had absolutely no manners. Finally when Cybil mentioned something along the lines of her throwing herself at Nikos she swung her head abruptly in her direction ready to blast her, but Max beat her to it.

He answered her in French, but Lily understood every word. "I'm finding these petty jealousies annoying Cybil. I told you before Lily is the sister of my best friend." Although his voice

was calm and cool it was obvious for people who knew him as well as Luke and Lily did, that he was annoyed.

"She didn't even acknowledge her date Max, she was practically swimming all over that man. It was embarrassing."

Lily gaped at him. Max obviously didn't tell *her* that Luke was her brother either, so she thought he was her date. Now it made sense why she kept glaring at her all through the meal. Secondly, she certainly wasn't *swimming* all over him! She sat in between her brother and Max who acted like two sentinels guarding a Vestal Virgin while Nikos and his father sat across from them.

"Lily was very polite and did not indicate she was even interested in the man and that is why he went out of his way to get her attention. Nikos likes a challenge and her reservations toward him were appealing. Not only that, he knows a beautiful woman when he sees one."

After a sharp look at him, she snorted in disbelief, "It sounds like he wasn't the only one."

What did *that* mean? Lily could tell Max was irritated, but his voice never indicated even a hint of it. He was as smooth and calm as if he was talking to a small child. Several times his eyes darted past Cybil to her. "Your presumptions are unwarranted."

Cybil crossed her arms under her breasts, "there's no use even talking to you. You are gong to take her side no matter what. I flew halfway around the world to be with you tonight and this is how I'm treated."

"Of course I am. I've known her practically her whole life. She's my best friend's sister. I've only known you for several months and you are bringing this on yourself." He replied calmly. "I told you—"

"—That you invited someone else to go, so naturally I had to intervene." She inclined her head toward Lily without looking at her, "Of course she found a replacement equally as quick. Not

only that I thought Luke was your best friend.”

“He is.” Said Max with a raised brow.

So much for her intelligence, thought Lily. She couldn’t even figure out that Luke *was* her brother after all of those clues. Then at the same time something else occurred to her. Obviously, he never told Cybil that she was Luke’s sister. *So that’s it*. He had told Cybil that he was going out with *her*. No wonder why the woman was angry. Because of that she was being talked about like she didn’t exist and obviously she was so mad that she hadn’t heard Max basically say that she was Luke’s sister. In fact she continued ranting as if she hadn’t heard him.

“This is just an indication of her reputation.” Cybil continued visibly angry,” that she has no problem running around with another man when you were no longer available.”

That was it! One thing Lily wasn’t was a tramp. Lily saw Max’s gaze narrow finally showing a sign of anger, but she beat him to it, “Of all the things to slander my reputation, you...you...”

Luke fell his face in one of his hands as Lily launched into a string of insults in French.

Lily barely noticed the woman’s mouth fall open and pale at the words she used because she was too angry and clearly on a roll as the car pulled up to the curb outside their apartment. Luke grabbed her hand and pulled her out the door before the driver reached it, but not before she called the woman fat. He quickly slammed the door shut and continued to drag her along with him. Neither one of them noticed Max trying to suppress a smile.

“Not good sis.” He shot over his shoulder as he led her into his building but Lily was still trying to release his vice like grip so she could go back and continue.

Her face burned she was so mad. “You don’t know what she said! You don’t speak French.” She defended as the car pulled away from the curb with a squeal. She dropped her

shoulders and stopped fighting her brother's firm grip on her arm, "I wasn't finished."

He saw her posture and had to turn away so she couldn't see him trying not to laugh. His sister had fire when provoked. He had to give her that. He led her to the elevator. "I didn't need to speak French to know what she was saying Lily. Anyway, it doesn't matter, Max was handling it. He wouldn't allow the woman to insult you. You should know that. You mean more to him than a woman like that." Once inside the elevator, he turned to her, "He's more protective of you than himself. There was no need to tear that woman apart."

"Luke, he didn't even tell her that you were my brother, she thought I was your date and was throwing myself at Nikos." She said with exasperation, "Me! Throwing myself? How ridiculous!"

Surprisingly he grinned, "Lily, haven't you ever had to deal with jealousy before."

Taken back, she calmed down, "Jealousy? That woman was stunning. She's a model for crying out loud!"

"Also spoiled, selfish and quite a few years older than you. No match for my young sweet sister. Nikos was hooked, that's why Max invited you. Your innocence is very refreshing for a man like that."

"But Cybil..."

"Never even caught Nikos eyes...but I can guarantee we'll have a multi million dollar contract by tomorrow morning because of you."

"Me?" She stammered, taken back.

"Welcome to the world of business." He put his hand on her shoulder and unlocked the door to their penthouse, gently guiding her inside, "Max isn't successful just because he's a ruthless businessman, he knows people. He's a professional manipulator."

“He used me?” Is *that* why he didn’t let on that she was Luke’s sister?

Luke laughed, “In a way, but he mostly was just feeling you out, seeing how you could handle yourself. You did well until you cut loose on his girlfriend.”

“but she...”

He held up his hand, “Said nothing that meant a damn thing to either Max or me. We know you. There’s no need to get offended at some woman’s petty snits.”

When he put it that way she felt foolish. “She’s not right for him anyway.” She said with chagrin.

“Uh-huh.” He said absently as if he was thinking of other things.

Luke was loosening his tie and staring at his sister intently, “You’d better get some sleep. Next week won’t be easy.”

“Why?”

“Max won’t be seeing that woman anymore after her behaviour tonight, and he’s going to get cranky. You’re his PA and the path of least resistance.”

“Cranky?”

Luke turned around and stared at her, “Lily surely you understand that a man has needs. I mean you’re not a little girl anymore.” She blushed, “Max works eighty hours a week, and women like Cybil race to his bed without hesitation. For a man, sex is a the biggest stress release. Now he’ll have to spend time looking for another mistress, and that irritates him enough.” Although he didn’t let on, that last bit made him uncomfortable. Discussing sex with his sister was never an option with him. He knew for a fact that she was still a virgin. Unfortunately he’d seen to it, but she could never find out. After that display of temper, he knew she wouldn’t take it well. He was definitely overprotective of her, but she was too innocent and would easily fall for someone who turned on charm and flattered her like

Nikos did because she was kind and trustful.

“Oh God. I am an idiot.” She thought the previous week was hard enough. Then she felt sick in the pit of her stomach. She just chased Max from one woman to another.

Luke chuckled, “Just be prepared.” With that he went to his room to change

True to Luke's word Max was a bear. His coffee wasn't strong enough, she couldn't arrange his schedule fast enough, respond to his question with lightening capabilities, or even wear anything remotely acceptable.

“But these are clothes from your boutique, by *your* consultant.” She stood exasperated on the other side of his desk facing him.

He picked up the phone and started dialling, “then maybe you should seek a second opinion,” he said offhandedly. “Your skirt is too short...” he shot her a look, “And that blouse is cut too low.”

Fuming, she itched to wing the notepad at him. It was Nancy's job to take dictation, but he insisted that she do it. Then she had to sit there for a half an hour why he spoke on the phone in a language that sounded like German before he hung up and continued. How many languages did he speak anyway?

Just when she thought he couldn't get any worse, flowers started pouring in for her from Nikos with cards loaded with endearments.

“Damn it Lily!” He bellowed when another two dozen lilies arrived interrupting her telling him his appointments for the rest of the week. She let out a rush of air, thanked the delivery man who cast a wary glance at Max.

He watched as she quickly set them on a side table with another two dozen. “This is getting ridiculous.”

She swung around at him, “Well, if you didn't use me to procure a contract, I wouldn't be in this fix.” She accused, “You

knew how he would react and before you deny it, Luke confessed.”

He didn’t even look surprised at her confession. “Yes. I didn’t think you’d be this potent.” He sliced a hand toward the lilies, “It’s like a God damn flower shop in here.”

“Well he seemed nice...” She said looking at all the flowers, “And the lilies are a nice touch.”

Max was irritated over that statement. He didn’t want her liking any other man at all. “Nice hell! The man’s reputation is well known. Don’t even think about going out with him. I mean it.”

Her mouth fell open, “You’re one to talk. Your mistress dragged me through the mud!”

He stood erect, and shoved his hands in his pants pockets, “I had her under control until you called her an over the hills debutante.” He said calmly remembering how damn sexy she was when she lost control of her temper.

“Oh, I forgot about that.” She smiled.

Max just stared at her. “You also mentioned that a plastic surgeon should be able to remove those wrinkles next to her mouth.”

This time she laughed.

Max’s lips twitched as he resisted his own smile betraying his annoyance, “Lily, you shouldn’t worry about what my women think, or say about you.”

“Plural...how crude.” She sighed.

‘One of the reasons why I know what Nikos is like.” He finished, “Now I meant it. Stay away from him.”

Incredulous, she just stared at him, “Max, don’t even think about dictating who I can and can’t see.”

“You work for me. I bloody well can dictate what-the-hell-ever I like.” He said bluntly. “I’ll have you work to the bone to occupy every moment of your time if I even suspect you looked

at another man with so much as an inkling of interest.” His slip was out before he could stop it. Thankfully she didn’t catch it because she was too angry with him at the moment. He’d meant to say *that* man, not *another* man. *Hmm maybe Freud was right*, he thought.

Her mouth fell open, “You *wouldn’t*.”

“Try me.” He said with a hard look.

She fumed, “You sound like a jealous lover for heaven’s sake. Neither you nor Luke is being fair to me. I can’t have a life as it is! It’s either you or him that dictates every aspect of my existence, now you presume to tell me about my love life.” She stomped her foot, “Well for your information I’ve never had one! I can’t get out from under the iron fists of the Tsar!” she wheeled around stormed out of his office. “I quit!” she shouted over her shoulder.

Nancy looked up in time to see the door open to Max’s office and Lily make a hasty escape down the hall. She stood up and leaned over her desk to see her retreating back, seconds later Max set a purposeful stride after her swearing in three different languages. The older woman smiled, shrugged her shoulders and went back to work.

Max caught up with her while she was waiting for the elevator. She had her arms crossed under her breasts and was tapping her foot impatiently.

“Lily, get back in my office.” He spoke in a low voice so the rest of his employees around them wouldn’t hear. As it was they were already drawing attention. Thankfully it was lunch time and most of the employees were gone for something to eat.

She ignored him and pushed the elevator button harshly several more times.

Thrusting his hands in his pockets to reduce the temptation to fling her over his shoulder like a caveman, he leaned down so his mouth was inches from her ear, “I swear to

God, if you don't get your ass back in there. I'll make a scene and embarrass the hell out of you."

Green eyes defiantly met his grey ones. From that look, he wasn't lying.

"I mean it. I'm filthy rich and couldn't give two hoots about my reputation, but you might. Especially if we start arguing in the hall, people might think there's something going on between us." He raised his brows ever so slightly in a challenge.

That brought a look of surprise to her lovely face. She never thought that this might look like a lover's quarrel. Then her eyes darted around them noticing the curious stares of the other people. Quickly recovering, she shook her head twice, ground her teeth and shot him a scorching look before turning on her heel and marching back down the hall and into his office. She certainly didn't want to lend to the rumours already going on about her.

"Hold my calls Nance." He said without taking his eyes off the furious gorgeous woman in front of him. His eyes coasted down to the elegant curve of her backside. How nice it looked in such a rapid pace of anger.

"Of course Mr. King." She said without looking up as if this was an everyday occurrence.

Max shut the door, and turned to face her. She had her arms crossed angrily under her breasts again and her head was tilted defiantly making look utterly adorable. Max had trouble stifling the grin he felt would let loose. She may have been little but her temper compensated. She was a firecracker and God help him, utterly irresistible when lit. "Lily, the only reason Luke and I ride you so hard is because we know what you're capable of."

"Including my love life." She shot.

"Not Nikos." He said abruptly.

"Why? What's wrong with Nikos?"

“He’s not right for you. I’ve told you what he is like.” The truth was if Nikos had gotten his hands on her, he couldn’t protect her like he and Luke normally did with her past suitors. He was a powerful man and had resources of his own, when in the past it was easy to remove the potential admirers from Lily’s life. If she knew the things they did, she’d be even more furious.

“You don’t think I can say no? Max, I’m not some school girl!”

“Actually you are a school girl and I don’t approve of him.” He said tersely not liking her constant defence of Nikos. Did she actually like him?

“My God! There you go again.” She said throwing up her arms

He held up his hand, “I speak for Luke too. You don’t have the experience to handle a man like Nikos. He’ll have you completely seduced before you realize it.”

“I’m not a dummy!” Part of her wanted to call him up just to defy the two.

“No honey, you’re far from it, but I meant it when I said he wasn’t right for you.” If Nikos so much as touched her, Max was going to tear him to pieces.

She tilted her head, “Really? Just like Cybil was right for you? The woman was shallow, spoiled and selfish. Yet you tell me...”

“It wasn’t her attitude I was after. Do I need to spell it out for you?” When she didn’t answer, he continued, “She was great in bed, and looked good on my arm in public.”

“Oh.” She blushed feeling like an idiot.

“Now you know.” He paused, “like you said, you aren’t a little girl anymore—and don’t give me that look, Luke’s no innocent either. We’re both men, we have certain needs. Women like Cybil fill them. Nikos is the same way, that is why

Luke and I would prefer if you didn't date him. He'll just want to get you in bed."

"You don't know that." She could feel her blush deepen by the heat in her cheeks. This conversation was getting entirely too intimate for her.

"I do." He said with complete confidence while looking down at her.

"How can you be so sure?" she accused

"Because that's the first thing I thought of when you wore that dress the other night." He said bluntly dropping his eyes to her mouth.

She stilled and felt her jaw drop. "What did you just say?" As he continued talking, it seemed like her heart beat louder and faster in her chest.

"I'm not supposed to think like that about my best friend's little sister, but I did. Cybil picked up on it, that's why she became so jealous. You outshone the competition in that emerald satin number and Nikos knew it, I knew it, and so did Cybil. If anything you should have felt sorry for her, she was second best. Every man in that place couldn't take their eyes off of you including me. I kept thinking of how well you filled out every inch of that material and how much of a woman you grew into." He held up his hand when she opened her mouth to speak, "There are women like Cybil that a man fills their urges with, and women like you who they marry. Do not become a statistic to Nikos or any other man for that matter." He waved a hand in the air abruptly and turned away from her.

Who could make such a declaration and leave it at that? Obviously Max could, for he sat down behind his desk again and told her to pick up her note pad as if he said nothing so personal to her. Yet, he said it like he admitted things like that often, making it seem less personal. She rubbed her forehead. Her head hurt trying to figure him out. She should just give up.

Slowly she bent down to retrieve it where she tossed it on the floor still reeling from his confession despite the way he made it sound. "Isn't this Nancy's job?" Her voice sounded surprisingly vulnerable.

"Yes, but she doesn't pay attention to me when I yell at her. I'd much rather get in a row with you, it makes me feel better, now write!"

Well, he was full of confessions wasn't he? She silently churned and began to scribble, trying to keep up with him. It was no wonder Nancy had not even paid attention to her little tantrum, she probably expected it sooner or later remembering how many PAs he'd gone through this year.

The rest of the week seemed to rush by. Lily found a routine with Max and began to anticipate his moods and his schedule. At least the long hours of companionship were having an advantage. Not only that, she got to spend a lot of time with him. It was a dream come true for her and she never complained except that time he told her to stay away from Nikos. She also kept to herself around the rest of his staff because of Brittney's accusations the week before. Yet Max's mood had improved during the week and had even taken her to lunch a few times to a fancy restaurant. It must have something to do with the fact that Nikos stopped sending her flowers by mid week although she did wonder if Max or Luke had mentioned something to him.

On Friday something unexpected happened. She walked into his office while her brother and Max were in the middle of what seemed like an argument and hadn't noticed she was present.

"I told you this has to be done on her time, her choice Max." Luke said.

"I know. It has been, but this has moved things up a bit." Max countered.

"You *promised* me that you would take this slow. Taking

Lily to Athens is not slow.” Luke tapped the top of Max’s desk hard with his fingers in time with the last three words.

“Athens?”

Both men abruptly stopped talking and turned to her. If she didn’t know better, both of them looked embarrassed, like being caught with their hands simultaneously in the cookie jar.

Luke cast a quick speaking glance at Max before centering his attention on his sister, “I was just telling Max that you have been working too much.”

“I’m fine Luke. If this is what it’s like in the real world, I need to become accustomed to it. Besides, I seem to have found a routine.” She smiled at Max who’s expression remained unreadable. It made her think there was something else going on here. However, it was between them, and none of her business, even if they were discussing her work schedule. Besides it just looked like Luke was being her overprotective brother. She’d never gone out of the country before and quite frankly, it thrilled her to death that Max was thinking of taking her. Her brother’s next words confirmed it.

“Max wants to take you to Athens next week. It seems Nikos and his father quite big on family and trusting relationships in their business dealings. They have assured us that the contract is in the bag, but they would like to extend their hospitality to us.”

Lily pulled out her PDA, automatically checking Max’s schedule for next week. “I don’t know if you can do this Max, you have...”

“Lily,” Max’s voice interrupted her, “That can be cleared just as easily as it was filled. We need you to listen for a moment.”

She glanced up at the two men whose expressions remained serious, “What is really going on?”

“It wasn’t Max’s idea that you go. Nikos has specifically

asked for you to accompany Max.” Luke said. “It seems you really impressed him.”

“So? I’m his PA.”

“It’s more than that. He has plans for a party, boat tours around the island his brother in law owns.”

“...It seems, “ Max added sparing a wary look at Luke, “That he has his sights set on you. The man won’t take no for an answer.”

“Max wants to cancel the contract...” Luke added.

She was appalled, “What? No you can’t...you said yourself that this took almost a year and a half to set up. Big deal, I’ll go to Athens with you.”

“It’s not that simple button, Luke and I were going to spare you this, but Nikos seems to think you come with the deal.”

“*What?*” her mouth fell open.

“It seems you were *really* potent.” He added with a sheepish smile.

“There’s got to be a way around this without losing the contract. Talk to his father.” She suggested

“Actually,” Max started to explain, “He’s doing business for his brother in law, Demetrius Vassiliadas. Demetrius is unavailable for now and sent Nikos in his place so it’s Nikos that we’ll be dealing with in the future.”

“Vassiliadas?” Lily had heard of him. The billionaire shipping tycoon. She thought she’d seen him in the tabloids, who dubbed him the Patron Son of Greece. She was sure she had read that he’d taken a very young wife. She glanced at Max, remembering when she read the article that their age difference was not much difference from her and Max’s, that’s why it stuck in her head. If Nikos was his brother in law, then it was Nikos’ younger sister that Demetrius would have married. The same one Hektor mentioned at dinner. Max wasn’t lying when he said family meant a lot to him if Demetrius sent his brother in law to

do business for him which was worth millions. Then it dawned on her that this contract had to be worth more than she originally thought. She was sure a tycoon like Demetrius didn't deal in small change, "How much is this whole thing really worth?"

"About a hundred and fifty million." Luke answered.

Lily reached out and grabbed the back of a chair, "Oh my God!"

"Lily..." Luke started, but he was interrupted.

"I'll go." She quickly answered before she changed her mind.

"No, you won't." said Max seriously, "I'll cancel the contract." What she didn't realize is that it was a paltry sum in view of what she was worth to him. He was worried that Nikos would get his hands on her, literally, and there was nothing he or Luke could do short of shooting him. However, he had another idea which is what he and Luke were arguing about.

"You can't!" She protested, "That's a lot of money."

"Lily, I'm certainly not starving." Max finally smiled with a hint of arrogance.

She knew he was far from it. Luke was filthy rich because of Max and if he could afford to pay her brother such an outrageous salary, he could probably do without the contract, but she didn't want to be responsible for it.

"So what...I flash him a smile here or there."

"He's Greek," Max said, "The aggressive form of an Alpha male. A smile won't do. He'll manage to get you in a situation where you can't say no."

"You're joking....and that's not possible. I'll be with you. You'll look out for me." She saw something flash in his eyes, but it vanished just as quickly.

"Max has a solution Lily." Luke added solemnly. "Although I'm not sure if I like it, but the final word comes from you."

Lily turned back to Max, "All right. Let's hear it. I come down with the flu and stay locked up in my room in Greece?" she smiled trying to ease the tension between the two.

"No, not quite." Max came around his desk and approached her.

The strange determined look in his eyes caused her to let go of the chair and step back, but he managed to grab both of her hands in his. She flicked a glance at Luke who looked entirely helpless. "What are you doing?"

"You're brother and I." He gave Luke an odd look, "Thought that maybe we could convince Nikos that we're engaged."

Lily tilted her head at him completely puzzled. "Engaged?"

"It's just for cloaking purposes." Said Luke quickly, "To discourage him."

She was speechless.

"If we're convincing, Nikos will leave you alone. That way Luke and I can protect you from him."

She looked back and forth at the both of them, "You're serious."

"The idea has merit Lily." Said Luke.

"You two are *that* worried about Nikos." Like she said before, she could always say no. He was a man, a really nice looking man, but he still didn't hold a candle to Max and although she was flattered by his attention, she certainly wasn't going to hop into bed with him.

Luke nodded, "Max can protect you. Nikos will not let up his pursuit unless we give him reason."

"Like I told you before Max, I am a big girl. I can say 'no'."

Luke straightened himself to his full height and stared down at her, "Max will have his hands full trying to keep Nikos

away from you if he thinks you're single. Although I'm apprehensive about this, it does make sense. You need to hear him out. That boy that practically had you in his back pocket when Max went to pick you up and he is a long line in a string of men who will use you."

Lily swung her accusing eyes to Max, "You told him about David?"

"I did. He's your brother. He should know what kinds of men are interested in you. Before you argue. I checked the man out. He'd been inquiring about your relationship with me weeks before you dated him."

"How could you!" she glared at him and snatched her hands back.

"Lily," cut in Luke, "I'm not always here. In the past year, I've been away eight months. Max can take good care of you."

"I'm not a puppy!" She made her way around the front of the chair she was holding on to earlier and sat down, "I can't believe you two discussed me like a piece of meat." She placed her face in her hands. "It makes me feel so incapable."

Max winced, "Lily." He came around the front of her and crouched down to level his gaze with hers, "I apologize. You certainly aren't. We think you are very precious. Neither one of us mean to demoralize you in the least."

She looked up at him, "Too late."

Max took her hands again and held them in his, "Listen, have you even looked in the mirror lately." Her puzzled expression made him smile, "I don't think you realize how appealing you are to men. I've mentioned it before when we went out for dinner and Nikos couldn't take his eyes off of you."

He also mentioned that his thoughts turned toward the bedroom too, but she'd since brushed it off, because he said it as if it was nothing special. Although deep down she really wished it was. She wanted him to think of her as desirable like Cybil and

all of those other women he was attracted to in that way.

“If we are engaged then Nikos may think twice about coming on to you—I mean he may, not that he will. He’s been raised with privilege and is used to getting what he wishes.” Max continued.

Lily didn’t hear anything beyond ‘we are engaged’ because it sounded so wonderful, so thrilling, that she wished it was true from the bottom of her heart. Even though she knew better, it was still a nice fantasy. Max would never get married, he was a confirmed bachelor. Plus he had his pick of rich, beautiful and famous women. Lily could never compete with that. Her eyes guided to her brother who stood silent for the last few minutes, “Aren’t you coming?”

He shook his head and pursed his lips, “I’ve got to fly to Tokyo on Friday.” He nodded toward Max, “Do as he says Lily if you don’t want him to dump the contract.”

“I really don’t.” she said returning her attention to Max who was still crouched in front of her.

He smiled, “So—“ he said reaching into his pocket and pulled out a little velvet box. Her gasp was audible as he opened it.

“My Gosh! Max that’s beautiful.” She said running her fingers along the diamond and emerald engagement ring.

He removed it from the box and placed it on her ring finger, “There, now we’re engaged.” He said with a smile that didn’t reach the seriousness of his pale eyes.

She couldn’t help the look of amazement that crossed her expression and held it up to admire it. “Did you actually buy this? It must’ve cost a fortune and it fits perfectly.”

Luke watched the display and scrunched his hands into fists in the pockets of his slacks while casting Max a look of disapproval. Max gave him a look of understanding and stood up.

“Now my employees are going to notice this on your finger Lily, so we’ll need to keep up the pretence. Nikos is very resourceful.”

‘Of course.’ She said still looking at the ring with all sorts of thoughts roaming through her head hardly hearing what he said. For once she wished her fantasy was a reality.

CHAPTER THREE

Nikos himself met the couple at the airport. He stood outside the white limousine in anticipation and disbelief. Yet not one of his inner thoughts or emotions reached his six foot two rigid stature. Max had told him earlier that week that he’d recently become engaged to Lily. That woman with the supermodel looks without the spoiled demeanour. He was surprised because that night he’d met her for the first time, Max was dating Cybil Dawn and he was undeniably enchanted by the other woman. Cybil didn’t even appeal to him for he had his share of women like that and she dulled next to Lily. However, if he reflected back on that evening, Max’s attention was undeniably on the other woman during dinner. He was surprised he missed it, because he was usually more astute. Who could blame him? She was perhaps the most stunning specimen of feminine sexuality that he’d ever seen and he still meant to have her.

The familiar hum of a jet caught his attention. Glancing at his watch he smiled, *right on time*. Within minutes, Max’s private jet was just rumbling down the laneway toward him. Lily, he thought. He’d already come to terms with the fact that he was going to try and win her away from Max. Engaged or not engaged. Nikos may have only been twenty six but he’d had his

share of women and none gave him the rush that Lily did. First of all, he wasn't sure if this engagement was a ruse to deter him. It may be, but either way it didn't matter. Also, he'd found out that Luke was Lily's brother and it all began to make sense. Was the engagement a cover to protect Luke's precious gorgeous sister? He wasn't sure, but over the next few days he would certainly find out.

The jet's engines powered down and the door opened. Nikos watched Max emerge holding Lily's hand. Even though he expected her to be beautiful, she still surpassed his expectations. She was absolutely ravishing in a white strapless dress that fit her curves flatteringly coming to just above her knees. Her long sun-spun hair trailed about her shoulders and spilled to her waist. He stepped forward to greet them shaking Max's hand and kissing Lily politely on the cheek telling her she was beautiful. "My father wanted to greet you Max, but he wasn't feeling well. We'll see him at dinner."

"It's nothing serious is it?" said Lily with genuine concern that brought a rakish grin from Nikos.

His dark eyes settled on her with a warm glint, "No nothing unusual, just his diabetes. It makes him tired at times. He'll be flattered at your concern." He said watching her blush. *Priceless*, he thought, *you couldn't pay for that humility.*

Max tightened his grip on Lily's hand possessively not missing the look of interest in Nikos eyes, "That's good to hear."

If the man thought he was even getting near her he was out in left field. Unknown to Lily Max was sharing the same room with her whether she liked it or not. He was confident enough in his abilities as a man to know she wouldn't argue. He didn't miss the way she had been looking at him for the past few weeks when she thought he wasn't looking. Although he wouldn't compromise her virtue, he sure as hell wanted to. However Max wasn't the only protective man around Lily, Luke threatened to

disembowel him if he laid a hand on her like he wanted to. Lily wasn't the type for a one night stand and Max was well aware of it.

If she'd walked into his office sooner last week she would have heard the real argument between Luke and himself.

Luke knew of his affections and had asked him the first time he saw him look at his sister more than just a friend four years ago. He knew of Max's reputation with women and had no problem voicing his opinion on the matter. Although Luke was his employee, he treated him as an equal and respected him more than anyone else in his life. Luke had been a good friend to him and didn't let Max's wealth stand in the way of their friendship. If he disliked something Max did, he told him so. One good example is when he caught Max looking at his sister with desire clearly registering in his expression while she wasn't looking.

"What are your intentions toward my sister?" Luke had asked him shortly afterwards.

Max didn't pull any punches. He respected Luke too much as a friend to mislead him, "I want to marry her."

"She's sixteen!" Luke said with a mixture of disbelief and possessiveness.

"Yeah, I know Luke, I'll wait. Besides, she certainly doesn't act or look sixteen." He watched Luke purse his lips and stare at him. Max waited patiently for his reaction while he mulled it over. Luke was right, she was young and normally he would have found the age difference distasteful, but he wanted her. In fact, the more he was around her, the more infatuated he became over her. No other woman had brought that out in him in all of his life. This was an attraction that he had absolutely no control over and he wasn't a man to look a gift horse in the mouth.

He figured he'd wait until she was at least twenty-four before he sprung the question because he was twelve years older

than her. However, that was before she started getting noticed by every other male within a twenty foot radius. It cost him a lot of money to keep her single and make sure no other man touched her. He hired bodyguards and paid off several men over the following years to keep away from her. Others who wouldn't be discouraged were threatened.

Finally after a prolonged silence, Luke held out his hand and Max shook it, "I'll leave it to you to convince her then Max, because when she goes off to college, she's going to turn heads." Of course he was right and it led to him hire a team just to make sure that she was looked after. He had gotten weekly reports on her social life. Although he never interfered to the point of her knowing, but he made sure that her dates never got too far with her. He was thankful that she was virtuous and possessed high morals or he'd have his hands full with the amount of men that were interested in her. She never let them get beyond a brief kiss and that was hard enough but he did need to let her experience some of life without his interference.

Still, he couldn't handle that, someone else touching his Lily. Normally he wasn't so obsessive, but he was crazy about her and when Nikos made his desire known, he told Luke he had to move his proposal up.

As he thought, Luke disagreed. Lily was still too young and very naïve. Luke wanted her to at least finish her degree. So they came to an amicable agreement. The engagement was a cover to mislead Nikos, but the engagement ring was real and so was his proposal only Lily didn't know that. He'd bought the ring around three years ago when he saw it at the jeweller's and knew without a doubt it was for Lily. Now, she may not realize it but the engagement was not going to be broken—ever, even if she didn't have the ring on her finger. He looked down at her as she asked Nikos a few more questions about his father. Her compassion was real and so was her kindness. He couldn't ask

for anything more in a future wife. Already he knew she'd be passionate in bed, because he was experienced enough to see that unleashed desire in her eyes and if she loved like she fought him, he wouldn't be wrong. He studied her profile for another moment and she suddenly turned her head toward him and smiled. *Hell*, he thought looking down at her lovely upturned face, he sure hoped he could keep his hands off her this weekend or Luke will kill him.

The luggage was loaded and the three of them got in the car. As it cruised through the city towards his family's property Nikos explained the heritage of the buildings and surrounding scenery. Lily listened with intense interest. She'd never been out of Chicago before in her life.

Max saw the eagerness in her eyes and expression. After they were married, he would take her to his property in Spain for a month and he told her so. She swung her gaze to him with even more keen interest.

"Really?"

"Anything for you button." He said thickly forgetting Nikos sitting across from them and almost forgetting that she didn't know they *were* getting married. The look of excitement on her beautiful face was to blame for that. She was radiant.

Nikos surveyed the scene like a cat on the hunt. No, the affection was real, he thought. Then again, a man like Max could easily make any woman fall in love with him. However...he flicked his gaze to Max...obviously he was serious about her. That smile he just gave her was loaded with affection and it wasn't one you bestow on the sister of a friend either.

The car pulled up to a immaculate villa that must've had at least twenty rooms from the windows on the front of the place Lily surveyed impressively.

Equally impressive was the inside. Max still had a hold of her hand as their luggage was brought in. "Put it in the same

room.” He advised the servants in Greek who nodded and disappeared up the stairs. He turned to Lily, “Go with them, I need a word with Nikos.” He said softly. She nodded, glanced past him to Nikos, smiled, then turned and went up the stairs. Max watched her go admiring the sway of her sexy backside in that dress before he turned to Nikos.

Nikos couldn't help but be disappointed. Obviously Max had already laid claim to that delicious morsel and if his instincts served him right, she was virtually untouched. His eyes also followed Lily's walk up the stairs.

“We need to talk.” Max interrupted his view bringing his eyes to the pale grey ones he possessed, “Privately.” He added.

Nikos took a deep breath, “Obviously.” He motioned him forward to the side doors of his father's private study. Shutting the door he offered Max a drink which he accepted.

“She's mine Nikos.” He said with severity. “I would do anything for her.”

“I see that.” He answered without contest handing him a glass of amber liquid.

“I waited for years for her to grow up. Do not try to take her from me. She's been in love with me for four years.”

“She confessed this to you?”

“She did.” He lied while staring at the younger handsome man, “I considered dropping the deal with you over her. She's worth that much to me.”

Nikos brows rose, “A hundred and fifty million?”

“More if need be.” He waved a hand, “I am a wealthy man already, but this contract could make me more than that with your and the Vassiliadas connections. I won't lie to you. Lily is very important to me and I'm willing to give it up for her.”

After a length of silence, Nikos finally nodded. Any man that would risk such a deal must love the woman very much. He'd only seen it once before in Demetrius' eyes when he first

laid them on Sophie, his younger sister. He instantly gave up women and married her. Something Nikos would have never thought possible for he usually had two or more mistresses at a time.

“I wanted you to know the connection we have. It’s unbreakable.” Max added, “she means more to me than anything.”

He studied the older man for a minute, “I envy you Max. She is rare. I can see where her affections lie. However, I have one thing to ask of you.” He downed his drink, “Set aside the hundred and fifty million, the fact that I’m lusting after your future wife, or that we are both filthy rich.”

“Fire away.” He said with some apprehension.

“Does she have a sister?”

Max burst into laughter.

Upstairs in her room, Lily noticed that both sets of luggage were set on the large King sized bed but it really didn’t hit home until the servants left and she was standing there staring at Max’s suitcase. Shortly after, Max came in and started to undo his tie.

“Max?” she said pointing to the luggage.

“I told you we had to keep up the pretence.” He managed a slow sensual grin, “Afraid of sharing a bed with me button?”

She flushed instantly, “Share a bed?”

He walked up to her until their bodies were inches apart peering down at her with a heated gaze, “Yes, I’m afraid you’re at my mercy this weekend.”

She felt vulnerable and knew it was clear as day in her expression, “Max—what you’re suggesting—”

His laughter cut her off, and he leaned down and brushed his mouth across her forehead, “Don’t panic honey, I’ll be good. I promise. We just need to keep up the charade. You’re a big

girl, I'm sure you can handle sharing a bed with me in the most plutonic sense. I swear I don't even snore." He lifted his head and studied her expression, "You can't believe that I could put my hands on you without Luke tearing into me. I even brought pyjamas—and honey, I never wear pyjamas." He added with a sinful grin.

Hands on you...pyjamas...oh lord, "I don't know what to think." She exclaimed trying to ignore the tingling on her skin where he kissed her and his deeply voiced words, "You're such a mystery and after all, Luke said I chased your mistress away—"

He barked with laughter realizing what she was saying, "So you'd think any gal would do. Lily, for God's sake I'm not a sex maniac. I assure you I can do without if I need to."

"I can't talk about this." She mumbled and turned to leave, but he caught her shoulders.

"You're a grown woman Lily, are you telling me you can't discuss intimacy with a man?"

"It's a private matter." She said unable to look him in the eyes, but kept her gaze averted to the open buttons of his shirt. No she couldn't discuss it and especially not with him. He created that warm floppy feeling in the pit of her stomach whenever he broached the subject. Then she got distracted by his unbuttoned shirt. His tie hung loosely just below there because he hadn't finished removing it. She could see the swirls of black hair there too and it was almost impossible to drag her eyes away from that appealing sight. She knew when she saw him by the pool as a teenager that he had a healthy mat of hair there and wondered what it would be like to move her fingers through it.

Max saw where her eyes were and the longing in them. He reached up and finished removing his tie. Then he undid a few more buttons on his shirt. Finally her eyes guided up to his.

"W—what are you doing?"

“Changing my shirt,” he said huskily, “Greece is hot.”

“I’ll leave—“

“No you won’t.” he said, “You running it out of the room wearing that blush will make people think we’ve been busy.” Of course he couldn’t care one iota about that. She wanted to see him without his shirt and he was going to oblige her. He knew he had to take it slow with her and hopefully he could keep himself in check long enough to do just that but he wanted her hands on him as much as she wanted to touch him.

Lily’s blush deepened, “nothing happened.” She said with wide innocent eyes.

“Not yet.” He said stripping off his shirt lazily and tossing it on the bed.

Lily’s eyes were no longer controlled by her. They became independent of her brain’s warning as they slid over his male form. From a thick chest dusted with dark hair down a flat stomach to washboard abs where hair swirled around his navel and disappeared into the waistband of his belted gray slacks .He was beautiful! Unfortunately she said it out loud.

“You think so?” he said quietly reaching for one of her hands.

“Think what?” she said not understanding what he meant.

“You said I was beautiful.”

“Oh *God*, did I?” He had her so spellbound she didn’t know she’d spoken her thoughts.

“Here.” He chuckled huskily while lifting her hand and flattening it on his chest, “Touch me Lily.”

She froze and finally brought her eyes up to his, “What are you doing?”

“I’m doing what you want but don’t have the courage to follow through.” He answered as he guided his hand across the contours of his chest.

God he felt amazing! Warm and hard. She tried one last time to resist him. Where she got the effort while she was running her hand over him, God only knew. "Max we shouldn't—"

"We're engaged," he interrupted bending his head towards hers.

"It's not real." She murmured as her eyes flicked to his sensual mouth.

"No?" he said with amusement as his mouth lightly brushed hers causing it to part in a silent gasp. Her naiveté was refreshing and if anything, completely appealing. Just watching the discovery of her own desire while she moved her hand across his chest shattered his resistance. He had to kiss her. He had to taste those flush rose petal lips and see if they tasted as good as they looked.

She stood as stiff as a board, with her hand on his chest and her eyes shut too afraid to open them and find that she was dreaming. Then she heard her name, deeply spoken. Her eyes popped open and he was looking at her, with his face inches from hers.

Max smiled arrogantly and lowered his head again. This time he kissed her parted mouth and toyed with her bottom lip between his, suckling and teasing her. "Come on honey, you know you want to." He murmured against her still mouth before he pressed his lips to hers again.

Oh did she ever want to! But she wasn't sure how. She'd only experienced a few kisses in her life, and none of them were like this! Heat started building deep in her pelvis and her knees felt like jelly. Then he nibbled her bottom lip and ran his tongue along it in such a sensual gesture something within her uncoiled. Something liquid and hot. Without realizing it, her arms drifted around his neck and she opened her mouth further to comply with his coaxing.

Max slanted his head to capture her mouth completely and moved with a controlled rhythm meant to drive her wild. When she pressed against him and moaned, he knew he was successful. His arms wrapped around her and lifted her off the floor as their kisses grew more feverish. A small clunk was heard as one of her shoes fell off her foot as he began walking toward the bed. Slowly and carefully as not to break his hold on her he bent over and lowered her onto the mattress bringing his body down on top of her while edging one of his long legs between hers. Then he reached down and pushed the skirt of her dress up so he could grip her soft thigh and pull it up to his hip settling himself more intimately against her. If she noticed, she didn't let on and from the noises that were escaping her throat just to be captured by his mouth, he knew she was lost.

Everything about her was captivating and passionate. She responded to him with a newness of discovery and it was unexpectedly arousing. He shifted himself and pressed his obvious need into her pelvis and she gasped. Finally with the last shred of resistance he had he lifted his head and looked down at her. Her eyes were wide with wonder like two bright emeralds, her mouth was slightly swollen and her cheeks were flushed with passion. She was stunning and he could only imagine how much more beautiful she was with that flush all over her naked body. As it was, her soft clothed body was torturing him. He wanted to tear her clothes off and touch every soft warm inch of her with his tongue just to see if she tasted that good all over.

"Max—" she could barely say his name. He had momentarily stunned her.

"Hush up." He smiled while lifting himself up on his forearms to stare down at her, "There's nothing wrong with this."

"Oh there is." She argued. This was so wrong in so many ways! She thought she was in love with him before. This just pushed her past the point of no return.

He bent his head and took her mouth again for a long heated moment before lifting it. Again she showed no resistance. In fact, she responded to him like she was made for him. His eyes roved over her face, "Nothing that feels that good, is wrong." He repeated and to get his meaning through pushed his hips into hers again causing her eyes to widen. "See?"

There was a loud knock on the door interrupting them followed by a voice in Greek. Max turned his head and answered whoever it was without getting off her.

"Who was that?" she whispered, unable to find her voice.

He smiled searching her flushed face with his pale eyes, "dinner time."

He said it as if it had nothing to do with food, "Oh," she said starting to become aware of the position they were in and started getting more embarrassed, "Max—could you—"

He chuckled and rolled off her with a sigh. She took the opportunity to escape and jumped out of the bed. He just lay there flat on his back staring at the ceiling with a smile on his face and looking absolutely heavenly bare to the waist. His eyes suddenly flicked to her causing her to blush for being caught staring. "Sorry." She managed.

"What for?" he said sitting up and grabbing his suitcase like what had just occurred was a normal every day event, "I don't mind if you look at me Lily. Look all you want."

Without a word she turned and went into the bathroom completely ashamed at her behaviour.

Well that went well, he thought staring at the closed door. He opened his luggage and removed a cool white silk shirt and tan chinos. He purposely tried not to make a big deal about what had just happened between them because he knew she was knocked off balance and he didn't want to lend more to her discomfort. Truth was, he was in deep deep trouble. The alphabet wouldn't help him this time. Nothing would. She

surpassed his expectations in what he'd expected when he first touched and kissed her.

So much for trying to keep his mind on business. There was no way in hell he was going to be able to concentrate on anything but her.

In the bathroom, Lily was staring at her reflection in the mirror appalled at her behaviour and even more appalled at Max's. He kissed her. All sorts of things were flooding into her brain with that. Did he mean it when he said that he wasn't that desperate for sex? If he did, that meant he kissed her because he wanted to. It was too difficult for her to fathom. How could someone like Max King be interested in her when he could have his pick of any woman he wanted? Cybil Dawn was incredibly beautiful despite her venom. Any man would be willing to overlook her vices just to date her.

She blew a strand of hair out of her eyes and looked at the mess it was in. "Guard your heart Lily." She whispered to herself. She brushed out her hair and smoothed the lines of her dress before she went back out just to stop suddenly. Max was waiting for her and he looked so devastatingly handsome in his casual clothes with his hair mussed up while leaning against one of the bed posts with his arms across his chest. He gave her a boyish grin with a glint of new knowledge in his eyes when she emerged and the blush she just got rid of, came back with a vengeance.

"you look good enough to eat." He said straightening up and running his gaze over her.

"You are taking this engagement acting too far." She said wishing that their engagement was real. If that moment they shared moments ago was any indicator of what it would be like between them, she could live with that for the rest of her life. She knew she could.

"Am I?" he mused holding out his hand.

She just stared at him unable to figure this new mood of

his out. He was usually good to her, but now there was some deeper warmth there that made her uncomfortable. It wasn't because she didn't want it. She did more than anything else in her life, but she worried it was temporary.

"Come on button, I don't bite—" he grinned, "—unless you ask really nice."

"Max, you need to behave." She said finally taking his hand and shooting him a helpless look.

He chuckled, 'Would you believe that I am.' He was. Every cell in his body was screaming to drag her back to bed, have her naked and completely misbehave, but he needed to take this slow. Revealing his desire for her was already making her apprehensive.

"No, not in a minute." She said as he led her out the door causing him to grin mischievously.

Dinner wasn't as pleasant as Lily had hoped. Nikos' sister Helene joined them and flirted outrageously with Max. She was shameless about it too. Even Nikos shot her a disapproving look at one point during dinner. Also their father didn't seem too impressed, but no one said anything.

It didn't help that she was gorgeous. So much that she could give Cybil a run for her money. The woman was tall, slender, with dark hair and eyes befitting of her race. She made sure she sat on the other side of Max with her chair quite close, and at one point she was sure that Helene had moved her hand to his thigh by the angle of her arm next to him.

However, his expression didn't give it away and she started fuming. Maybe he enjoyed her advances and why not, she was beautiful and as far as Lily was concerned she couldn't compete. If she had any hope about what they had shared prior it was gone.

As the evening wore on she became less involved in the conversation. Max seemed thoroughly involved in Helene. He

had barely looked her way since dinner started. It hurt her, more than she liked to admit. It made her realized that all she was to him was a fill in for a woman. He kissed her because he could, because any woman would let him and he knew that. Just like she did.

“For tomorrow,” Nikos said bringing his eyes to Lily. “We’re going to Demetrius’ island. I thought you would enjoy a cruise on the yacht. It’s spectacular. We are throwing a party for our father whose birthday is on Sunday. They’ll be a lot of people there.”

“That sounds wonderful.” Lily said brightening up. She’d never been on a boat before let alone a yacht. Suddenly she felt Max’s hand squeeze hers. She was tempted to look at him but she was jealous and angry that he paid attention to Nikos sister. Also, her emotions were clearly registering on her face, and she didn’t want him to see how deeply rejected she felt. So instead she paid complete attention to Nikos who went on to explain what they had planned for their guests.

After dinner Nikos asked Max to join him for a drink. Lily feigned a headache and said she needed to lie down. She didn’t miss the smirk that Helene gave her when she stood up to leave. Obviously the woman knew she was no competition either and that just added to her hurt.

“I’ll walk you up.” Max said starting to rise.

“No, I’ll be fine.” She flicked a look to Helene, “Don’t leave our hosts on my account.” She said with a bit of an edge before she turned and walked away.

“It must be jet lag.” Said Nikos knowing it wasn’t. “She doesn’t travel much?”

“No.” Max said staring at the doorway she walked through. She was upset and he was sure it had something to do with their host’s promiscuous sister. Lily wasn’t used to competing for a man, not that there was competition but she

didn't know that.

He put up with Helene's advances but he didn't encourage them and he certainly didn't welcome them. He had spent the entire time through dinner fending off her advances although it looked entirely different to Lily because she wasn't used to Helene's experience and she obviously thought he was ignoring her. However he wasn't one to toss a woman on her ass either and there was also the consideration of her family. Truth of it was he couldn't take his attention off of her for a moment or she'd have been on his lap and had his cock in her hand if he'd let her despite her family being at the same table. She had attempted to grab his crotch several times under the table but he'd stopped her with his own hand. Frankly, he was disgusted with the woman's outrageous behaviour, but he wouldn't cause a scene. He would definitely set her straight but later, when he got her alone. Unfortunately Lily was ignored because of Helene's actions and Max knew was hurt over it.

Several hours later Lily was still awake staring at the ceiling. Was he with that other woman now? She really had no right to feel the way she did. It was a mock engagement, but did that mean he could have another liaison in Nikos' house? After going over everything in her mind for several hours she should know better than suspect that Max was with another woman. He'd gone through great lengths to protect her and he wouldn't drop it all for a night in another woman's bed, even one as beautiful as Helene. Wouldn't he? He was a smart man. She took a deep breath and hoped to God her faith wasn't misplaced. After all, it was her he kissed, not Helene. Oh, and what a kiss!

Just then the door opened and she shut her eyes rolling on her side pretending to sleep. She heard him moving around in the room then in the bathroom. A few moments later he emerged and she felt the bed shift with his weight.

"I know you're not sleeping button. People who are

asleep don't breathe like that." He said settling under the blankets.

She never said anything. She couldn't help being angry about what happened even though she shouldn't blame Max. Women couldn't help themselves around him. He was just too darn sexy for his own good.

She felt the bed shift and he got close enough so she felt warmth of his body at her back without coming in contact, then a hand on her shoulder.

"She's not my type."

"She seems to think so." She finally said quietly.

"We're engaged honey." He said with humour in his voice, but he didn't feel it at all. He was already hard with wanting her just knowing that her body was inches away from his. "I remember telling you before that I don't stray."

She could hear the smile in his voice and was sure he was smiling himself. "Someone should tell her that." He chuckled and it sounded surprisingly sexy in the dark.

"I did as soon as I got her alone."

She rolled toward him, putting her face inches from his, "You did?" she felt like weeping.

Hell, this is completely unfair, thought Max as he caught the scent of her skin. He was sure it smelled like lavender. Also, knowing that beautiful lush body was inches from his near had him undone. Surprisingly he was able to keep his voice from cracking when he spoke. "Yes." What he didn't tell her was Helene ignored him and started fidgeting with the buttons on his shirt. It was easy to stop her from undressing him, but the hand on his thigh at dinner was a little more difficult because of the company at the table. No matter how angry he was getting over it, he didn't want to embarrass her family.

First of all, he didn't like women who were not constricted with their blatant flirting and thought they were more

desirable than they really were. It presented as desperation. Not only that, it wasn't that long ago that he'd been on top of the gorgeous woman lying next to him now. Nothing could compare to the desire he felt when he touched her and felt her move under him. *Go slow, Max, Go slow*, he reminded himself silently. He'd promised Luke.

"Thank you." She replied thinking it was a stupid thing to say but she was a little tongue tied at his closeness. She could feel the heat from his body and they were about six inches apart. It would be so easy to reach out and touch him.

"you're welcome," he grinned, "Now go to sleep Lily, it sounds like we have a full day tomorrow and you're going to need your rest to play the part of a blissfully happy fiancé because I'm going to be all over you like white on rice." As it was, it was taking everything he had not to flatten her onto her back and seduce her.

"Oh." She said trying to stop the thrill that shot through her. She was distracted enough being in the same bed as him let alone knowing that he didn't sleep with Nikos' sister. Suddenly she felt his hand on her cheek with his thumb caressing her temple. Then it disappeared just as quick as he rolled away from her.

"Sleep button."

That was easy for him to say. Who could sleep with their heart going a hundred miles a minute? Then something occurred to her. It was odd that it hadn't sooner, but he had her all in knots. "Max?"

"Um-hmm."

"Does Luke know about our little sleeping arrangement?"

"What do you think?"

"I think as much as he cares about you, if he knew, he'd flip."

"probably." He answered letting himself smile. Luke may

seem like the distinguished gentlemen but they had come to blows more than once as rangy young adults. Usually in some stupid drunken brawl over something he couldn't remember, but they were as close as brothers and if Luke knew that he was sharing a bed with his baby sister, he wouldn't hesitate to put his fist through his jaw.

"then why—"

"Go to sleep honey." He interrupted.

Lily noticed that his voice was oddly quiet, not in volume, but tone almost as if it was hard for him to talk.

CHAPTER FOUR

When Lily awoke the next morning she was alone. Absently she stretched her arm across the bed and felt for him then shot up on her arms staring at the empty side of the bed. What would make her do such a thing? This whole weekend would be an eye opener on her weaknesses toward that man. She groaned and got out of bed, disgusted at her actions to fall so easily under his spell.

After a shower she picked out a pretty pale yellow dress with a flared skirt and white heels. She took time to do her makeup and left her hair down because he mentioned that he liked it that way. *White on rice*. The words sent a shiver through her.

Max was sitting on the back patio sharing conversation and coffee with Nikos. He couldn't help but like him. As far as he could see he was honest and seemed to really care about his family. Also, he hadn't made any movement toward Lily after Max had spoken to him. It must have been as hard as pulling teeth because Max was having tremendous difficulty refraining

from touching her like he wanted to.

Just then another tall man that Max recognized immediately came out on to the back patio with a long purposeful stride. Nikos stood to and held out his hand to greet him along with a smile of pleasant surprise. Max also stood to shake his hand as Nikos introduced him.

The tabloids went wild when Demetrius Vassiliadas married Nikos youngest sister Sophia—Sofie? However, contrary to how the tabloids usually portrayed the rich and famous, they gave him praise of a fairy tale wedding to his young bride. Maybe it was because he and Sophie where heavily involved in charity work and the public adored them. When they wed last year, it was called the wedding of the decade by the press. He hoped they were that gentle with Lily when they caught a hold of their engagement. Yet, the man who stood before him now, didn't look happy. Even as handsome as Demetrius was, he looked worn, tired and hardened.

“Won't you sit?” Nikos offered.

“No, my plane leaves in an hour for the U.S.” He cast a glance at Max, “I'll be back the day after with my wife.”

This made Nikos still, “Sophie?”

“yes.” He nodded to Max, “A pleasure to finally meet you. It is too bad I cannot sit and speak with you, but that is why Nikos is here. He is like a brother to me and I trust him.” He gave Nikos a look of pride.

Demetrius spoke very good English, but with an accent that was heavier than Nikos. “Maybe next time.” Max noted the look they shared as his wife's name was mentioned. Maybe his fatigue had something to do with his young bride because, as far as he knew, his wealth had increased tremendously this year, so it wasn't that. However, Max wasn't one to pry in other people's personal lives, because he didn't like his invaded.

He smiled, “Of course. I'll make time in the next few

months to fly to Chicago and we'll finalize things in person."

"Bring your wife Demetrius, from what I hear about her, Lily would love her."

"Lily?"

"My fiancé."

Demetrius managed a rare smile, "Let me offer my congratulations. I would like very much to take you up on your offer. I'll have Nikos work out the details for the future."

Max shook his hand again and watched him leave before he and Nikos sat down again. Nikos was oddly silent as he stirred his coffee. When he spoke it wasn't what Max expected. Nikos was a good businessman, there was no doubt. He also suspected that the man didn't speak about family problems often so when he started to explain, it was surprising.

"My youngest sister has been missing for nine months." He said quietly and took a sip of his coffee not meeting Max's curious eyes. "Demetrius has been distraught." Nikos continued finally bringing his eyes to his, "None of us know why she ran, not even Demetrius."

Max never said anything but it certainly explained the tycoon's condition. He was a nice looking man and could rival Max in height, but he looked oddly defeated. Another thing that was obvious was Nikos' pain at the mention of his sister. Max could understand to a point. If Lily ever took off like that, he'd be devastated.

"Demetrius spotted my sister by the pool one day and offered marriage not two hours later. So you'll have to excuse him, he is usually a force to be reckoned with when he deals with business. He wanted to complete this deal with you himself but he had gotten a lead on where Sophie was. Over the months there had been many but obviously this one was the real thing."

It was unusual that the press didn't get wind of this over the past nine months because they were a high profile couple,

“Was it another man?” Most men would take this as an insult but Nikos just grinned and shook his head.

“With other woman maybe, but not Sophie, she loved him very much. That’s why none of this made sense. I’m anxious to find out why she left.” He pursed his lips, “Unlike Helene, Sophie was virtuous. She had a softness about her that was addictive. When Demetrius first laid eyes on her it was a full five minutes before he spoke. I have never seen my friend speechless before.” He shot Max a look, “Much like you are with your Lily.”

Max lifted his cup and sipped his own coffee while his pale eyes remained on Nikos, “It’s that obvious is it?”

“As the sun shines.” He grinned spreading his hands under the bright light of the Grecian sun, “Why do you think I backed off? If it was any less than the look Demetrius gave Sophie, I would be in hot pursuit.”

“So you think.” He said seriously causing Nikos to laugh.

“Ah, speaking of Lily.” Nikos stood up followed by Max as Lily came out onto the back patio.

If the Grecian sun was bright, Lily entering the picture just made it seem dim. She was beautiful. Max couldn’t take his eyes off her. She wore a dress with a simple style but it was perfect showing her luscious curves to the point of make a man want to discover more.

Immediately Max left the table, went to her, and without warning gave her a long genuine kiss. Lily knew he was acting because of what he told her about Nikos but she still responded to him. It was easy to play a part when she was taking it seriously. Finally he lifted his head.

She looked tired. He already knew that she lay awake like he did last night although he was better at feigning sleep than she was. It didn’t help to know that he’d seen the thin satin nightgown she’d brought with her and knew she was wearing it. Images of her scantily clad body kept him awake until four in the

morning. She had fallen asleep a few hours before. It would have been easy to remove his pyjama bottoms and undershirt then move his body next to hers. Just thinking about it started the aching in his groin that kept him up most of the night. As it was he reached over and caressed the smooth skin of her face and fingered a lock of her hair. She didn't wake up with that, but she released a soft moan that turned him hard as a rock.

When she came out in the light of the bright Grecian sun, he couldn't help himself and had to kiss her. He craved the feel of her mouth and her taste. He was keeping up the pretence of the engagement just so she would play along. The more she played along, the more he had an excuse to touch her. "How did you sleep?"

She glanced shyly up at him, "Well enough."

His thumb caressed a darkened area under one of her eyes, "Liar." He murmured.

"Nikos is watching us." She said feeling her rising blush.

"So?" he smiled slowly, "I told you I was going to be all over you." What he didn't tell her and he wouldn't tell her is that Nikos had resigned his pursuit of Lily. Any moment to touch her and kiss her would be taken advantage of. Unfortunately now that he started, he doubted he could stop touching her even when they returned to Chicago.

Her heart jumped at his deeply voice statement, "I heard you last night."

"Did you honey?" He said pulling up one corner of his mouth.

"I did." She said tersely embarrassed at her reaction to him and equally embarrassed that she was jealous of Helene. "Once you told me that you dealt with your stalker."

He chuckled, "Was that what she was?" He took her hands and squeezed them while studying her flushed cheeks, "You sure play the part well. You acted like a jealous lover."

I wasn't playing, she thought, I wanted to scratch her eyes out. She was actually going to tell him that when Nikos interrupted.

"If you can unhand your fiancé for a minute or two," he said with amusement, "She should eat something before we leave for Aquinas."

Max agreed and took her hand to lead her back toward the table. After he pulled out a chair for her and sat next to her, several servants were at her side with platters of food.

She wasn't used to such attention and started to get uncomfortable. It didn't help that Max had moved his arm to the back of her chair and his hand absently rubbed her shoulder while he spoke to Nikos. The constant caressing was unnerving her. Not that she didn't want it, she wanted more. She wanted to feel his body on hers again and to have him kiss her that way. She lay awake last night for awhile after he'd fallen asleep hoping that he'd do just that. However he didn't and she was devastatingly disappointed. She was wondering if it was because he didn't desire her like she did him. In all her inexperience she didn't know if he was serious about all of this or maybe he was just playing the part and getting her into the role of it. What he didn't know is that she fell really hard for him and he was very convincing. Yet something deep down told her that Max wasn't that cruel, but he did tell her that this engagement was a cloak. The problem was, she stopped playing the moment he kissed her.

Then if things couldn't get any worse, out came Helene wearing a low cut blouse and a tight short skirt walking with an exaggerated sway of her hips as she approached the table. She immediately put herself next to Max despite his arm around her and proceeded to flirt outrageously with him. She didn't doubt for a moment that Max had spoken to her like he said, but obviously Helen wasn't one to be put off. Did the woman have no

scruples? Twice she reached across the table for something and brushed her breasts against Max's other arm and the second time Lily stiffened, tossed her napkin on her plate, and started to get out of her chair.

She'd had had it and she was going to say something to the woman or do what she wanted to in the first place, and scratch her eyes out! Max suddenly grabbed her and crushed his hard mouth down on hers. Somewhere in the back of her mind she heard and indignant gasp and the scraping of chairs. Then it was gone and the only awareness was his mouth on hers and the way his tongue---oh dear!

What neither one of them saw was Nikos take Helene's arm and remove her from the table to a distance away while he chastised her for her behaviour.

"Do not embarrass your family." Nikos ground out angrily. "He is engaged to that woman and your are throwing yourself at him shamelessly."

She placed her hands on her hips, "She is a timid little thing." She tossed her long black hair over her shoulder, "He is all man and needs a decent woman."

"Do not make yourself out to be something you're not Helene." He added harshly, "She is one of a kind and Max knows that."

She darted a look over her shoulder at the couple who were in a heated embrace, made a rough sound under her breath, and stomped out of there.

Nikos made sure his sister was out of sight before he turned back to the couple. Max had stopped kissing her but he had her face tilted up to his while his thumb ran across her bottom lip as he spoke softly to her while she seemed to hang on every word. Then he bent his head and placed a light kiss on his forehead in an adoring fashion. He definitely was in love with this woman.

The helicopter ride was exhilarating. Lily had never been on a helicopter before. Even the presence of Nikos' sister couldn't deter her from her excitement. Although she was still insisting on trying to draw attention from Max at least she didn't touch him again. Then her eyes widened as she saw the size of the yacht that was docked off the island and her mouth fell open, "My goodness. Mr. Vassiliadas doesn't do anything small!"

Nikos leaned over and started pointing out areas on the island that became visible as the helicopter circled it. Lily was amazed. There was a thriving village, sandy beaches and a large estate that bordered a private beach that Nikos explained was his brother in law's place. Tourism was very active on the Island because of the beautiful beaches and brought a lot of income for the locals.

Max only kept his eyes on her and smiled. He loved to see her so excited. After they married he made a note to keep his promise and take her to their villa in Spain. At that moment she turned and their eyes met. Nothing was said between them, but he didn't take his eyes off of hers. She glanced away for a moment then slowly returned her gaze almost as if she was gathering courage to stare back at him. She mouthed the word 'what?' and he shook his head subtly and gave her a charming smile. Slowly she returned it and he reached over and took her hand.

When the helicopter landed, he still had a hold of it and as far as he was concerned, he wasn't letting go.

Nikos led them around the estate for a tour before they hopped in the cars to the yacht. It was equally impressive. Lily couldn't have even imagined anything so beautiful if she tried. The place was like a paradise out of a novel and she instantly fell in love with it.

The cars were two white hummers with tinted windows. Nikos and Helene got in the first one and she and Max got in the

second one after their luggage was transferred.

“You like it here.” Said Max seeing her expression.

“Oh Max, it’s so amazing.” She breathed looking out over the ocean. “I never fathomed water to be so blue.”

“If we had more time, I’d take you swimming. Next time I promise I’ll set aside time for the both of us.”

“Really?” she was ecstatic. Did he really mean it? That they would have another trip to Nikos’ estate and Demetrius’ island? Even though it was for business, she didn’t care as long as she did have time with Max in this paradise.

“I promise.” He said and he meant it. She may think it’s about business, but he was already planning their honeymoon.

Thinking of the business deal reminded her of something, “I’ve been wondering how is it that it’s Nikos that you’re dealing with and not Demetrius? I mean this is a lot of money to spend— isn’t it?” She’d thought about it before but didn’t bring it up because they’d been so busy since they got to Greece, but now she had him alone.

“Demetrius is chasing after his wife.” Max said.

“Chasing?”

“Nikos said that she took off nine months ago and they don’t know why.” He stared at her a moment deep in thought.

“What?” she said seeing his expression.

He leaned toward her with a serious look. His pale eyes seemed to darken for a moment, “If you ever did that to me, I swear to God I’d track you down and lock you up for the rest of your life.”

What brought that on? Was he kidding? After a moment it was obvious that he was deadly serious. There was no teasing glint in his eyes or a hint of a smile, “Max, are you serious?”

“Very.” He said.

She blinked.

“Let me explain. If you put Luke and I through that much

worry, you'd better be prepared to see me at my worse. Demetrius came to Nikos this morning before you joined us and he looked like hell. Obviously he was clearly distraught and it had been nine months."

Luke and him. Whatever hope was just building in her got squashed. "He must love her very much." Lily said quietly, "I saw a picture of her in the tabloids. She's very beautiful."

Max stared at her, "You are too Lily."

She stilled, "Do you think so?"

"Don't you?"

She shrugged, "I can never seem to get a date and when I do, sooner or later they take off, or do what David did when he saw you."

Max didn't realize the repercussions of his actions by keeping men away from her. Lily was possibly the most beautiful woman he'd ever laid eyes on. He'd been with other women over the years but there was no personal attachment. What she didn't know is that he hadn't been with a woman for over a year. He had lied to her when he told her about Cybil being good in bed. That was one of the reasons Cybil was so angry. She'd seen the way he looked at Lily and it was a look that was covetous and heated. One that he didn't bestow on his own girlfriend. It was getting harder to keep his emotions out of his expression. Now, he'd given her a complex that she'd kept well hidden from him and everyone else that was close to her. He didn't realize that he'd done such a thing in his selfishness to keep her chaste. "Lily." He said reaching out and cupping her face in his hands, "I think you are possibly the most beautiful woman I've ever seen." His eyes guided to her mouth as it parted in a silent gasp, "If you weren't Luke's sister I'd have seduced you years ago."

That confession near made her faint. Was he just saying it because she looked crestfallen, or that he felt sorry for her? Regardless she couldn't help but feel her heart swell with it,

“Really?” After a moment she realized he really meant it. Especially with the serious look in his pale eyes and the tone of his voice. If Maximilian King thought she was attractive, maybe there was some truth in it.

“Truthfully.” He answered as the car stopped next to the docks. Max told the driver to get out and wait for them. He needed a few moments with her.

Still she had to ask, “You’re not doing this out of pity are you?”

“When have I done anything out of pity honey.” He bent his head and brushed his mouth across hers, “I love the way you taste.” He said against her mouth, “And you smell like wildflowers.”

“hmm-mm.” was the only sound she could manage.

That soft sound of surrender provoked the fire burning in him for her and he took her mouth completely under his. This time she opened hers in response to his gentle coaxing and his tongue slipped past those lush full lips to caress hers. He was thankful of the tilted windows of the hummer at that moment. It was not like him at all to do public displays of affection. Even holding hands with a woman wasn’t in his character, but he just couldn’t keep from touching her.

Lily groaned and leaned into him. She felt hot all over and the intimate touch of their tongues was surprisingly erotic. Her arms went around him and her fingers threaded through his hair trying to get closer.

He lifted his head to look at her and she slowly opened her eyes. Smiling he bent his head again and took her mouth again. Lily must have been the only woman who could possibly look more beautiful when flushed with passion. One day she would be completely his.

With the last of his will, he finally put his hands on her waist and pulled her away from him, “Okay button we have to

stop.” She looked disappointed and he almost kissed her again, “Look, there’s evidence on me of what we’ve been doing in here and although I’m enjoying this as much as you are, I don’t need to advertise it to the public.”

It took Lily a moment to understand his meaning than her eyes widened. “Oh, gosh. Max—I’m sorry.”

“You would be.” He said kissing her on the lips briefly, “but it’s not necessary, I like kissing you.”

She blushed as he grabbed her hand and opened the door before she could respond. Did he really mean that? He seemed so casual about the whole thing despite his confession that he thought she was beautiful. Part of her started to think he was only being a good friend by showering her with attention—but that kiss! If she thought she was warm before when he kissed her, she was scorching now. Then she began to think about his body on hers again. If he combined that with the way he just kissed her she’d be lost and there was no way she’d want him to stop.

It had taken her and Max a little longer because of what they’d been doing in the car, so Nikos and Helene walked down the dock already. The driver helped Max with their luggage and led the way.

Lily paused at the magnificent sight. “Oh Max, it’s beautiful!” The yacht looked like a small mountain but was beautiful. Lily had never seen anything like it. Then her excitement was crushed when she saw Helene leaning over the rail waving at them. Well, probably more at Max.

“Your girlfriend is here.” She mumbled.

“Yeah well let’s hope you don’t drive her one like you wanted to at breakfast.” He said with a glint of amusement while looking down at her.

She released a frustrated breath and didn’t look at him but her feet instead. She was a little ashamed at the jealousy

she'd been feeling because she had no right. Max wasn't hers, "You knew?"

"Why do you think I kissed you? I thought you were going to leap over me to get at her." He grinned, "Normally I wouldn't mind if you wanted to crawl on me, but Helene is a little more experienced with competition."

"Max, she was rubbing her breasts on you!" she said as he started leading her down the dock.

He chuckled and dropped his gaze to hers, "Yours are nicer." He said.

"Max!" she exclaimed wide-eyed.

"my point is, don't worry about her. She doesn't hold a candle to you."

"you say that but she has skills I couldn't imagine."

He narrowed his gaze at her, angry that she would put herself in such a category as Helene, "She has skills that are common with women like her, don't knock yourself Lily. If you knew how aroused I was in the car from one simple kiss, you wouldn't doubt yourself."

"Simple?" That was simple?

He grinned sinfully, "Oh honey you are a treat!" he said and then chuckled deeply and slid his arm around her waist. If she thought that was a kiss, he had a hell of a lot more to teach her.

"Stop it." She flushed.

He just continued to chuckle as he led her up the ramp onto the ship. Nikos was waiting and Helene raced over to his side, but she didn't touch max this time. It's too bad, thought Lily, she really did feel like hitting something or someone.

"I'll show you to your stateroom for the night." Said Nikos, "And then I'll take you on a tour of the boat."

"This is like a floating hotel." Said Lily in awe.

"My brother in law, does things in a big way, like you

said.” Grinned Nikos. He actually had this made as a wedding present for my sister Sophie.”

Helene made a noise under her breath and when Lily darted her eyes to her she was sure she saw her expression darken to the point of making the beautiful woman ugly. It was then she realized that Helene was incredibly jealous of her little sister. It was a hard concept for Lily to understand. She would have loved to have had a sister.

“It’s too bad you weren’t here tomorrow. My sister will hopefully be here by then. I have a distinct feeling you two would be good friends.”

“What?” shot Helene with an expression of shock, “Tomorrow?”

Nikos gave her a look of surprise, “Yes, Demetrius is on his way to get her now.” Helene actually paled causing Nikos to narrow his gaze at her. Something else was going on in his sister’s mind. “What is it?”

“Nothing.” She abruptly shook her head. “I just remembered I need to be somewhere else this evening.” Before anyone could say anything she was gone.

Nikos turned back to his other two guests with his expression masking the rage he was feeling toward his sister’s rudeness, “I apologize to both of you for Helene’s behaviour, it is shameful.” He focused on Lily, “Especially to you Lily, you have been very patient in this matter.” He held up his hand as she opened her mouth to say something, “No, please, I know what Helene is like, we all do. Unfortunately she was very spoiled by my parents and is used to getting what she wants. It is our hope that she will grow up someday.”

Lily thought about saying something in her defence, but then she couldn’t find anything to say at all so she kept her mouth shut. It wasn’t often that she came across someone she didn’t like, but Helene certainly sealed it when she kept making

passes at Max even though the enormous ring on Lily's finger was as obvious as a slap in the face. Not only did the woman practically run away after hearing that her sister was returning, she was missing her father's birthday celebration. She would give anything to celebrate another birthday with her father. He and her mother died in a car crash when she was fourteen.

"There's no need to explain Nikos." Max said relieving the other man of his discomfort, "Lily was very understanding." He flinched as she pinched him causing Nikos to bellow with laughter.

"Is that right? Come, I'll show you around the 'floating hotel'." He mused.

After an hour Lily took back her statement about this being a floating hotel. No hotel she'd ever been in was this immaculate. It was decorated in the colors of royalty, red and gold cloth, with brass accents, high polished wood and expensive oriental rugs. Although the man who insisted on holding on to her hand the whole time was more appealing to her. She felt strangely adored. Not in an uneasy way, but a warm gushy feeling way. You'd never know that he was acting by the way he paid attention to her. Regardless, she was going to soak it up.

Not too long after the guests started to arrive. By the looks of them, they must've been Greece's elite besides a few recognizable famous faces. Lily's jaw dropped seeing a famous director from the States. "Max, isn't that—"

"yes." He said, "come on, we have to get dressed for dinner." "I hope you brought a gorgeous gown."

She stopped, "Actually I don't think I did—not for this crowd." She didn't expect this affair to be so elaborate so she brought simple dinner dresses but nothing as fancy as this entailed.

"I have a solution." Nikos said. He had overheard the conversation and couldn't help but intervene, "come with me," he

held out his hand but Max only shook his head and took her arm causing Nikos to smile at his possessiveness.

He led them to the owner's suite which was about the size of a small apartment and opened the door to a large walk in closet revealing a multitude of designer gowns, "These are my sisters—"

"Nikos! I can't wear your sisters clothing—" she protested.

He held up his hand cutting her off, "If you knew Sophie, you wouldn't hesitate, please," he said sweeping his hand toward the interior of the closet, "I insist. You have the same figure so I'm positive they'll fit."

"Go on Lily, I'll come back in a half an hour and get you." Max encouraged her but gently pushing her into the closet.

"But—Max?" she said exasperated.

"See you in a bit honey." He said placing his hand on Nikos shoulder and leading him out of the room, "If you think you're staying, you're out of your mind."

Nikos laughed.

Lily was left alone after the men's muffled laughter faded through the closed door. She turned to examine the outrageously beautiful gowns in the closet. She nervously chewed her bottom lip as her fingers ran over the material as she walked down the aisle. These were exquisite! She never thought she'd ever own one in her lifetime let alone wear one for a night. She stopped when she saw the one she wanted. Taking it off the rack she held it up and smiled. If Max wasn't serious about her before, hopefully this would help him make up his mind.

Max finished smoothing the lapels of his tuxedo before he reached for his platinum cufflinks and checked his appearance in the mirror. Then he cast a glance over at the bed. It was queen sized and he knew that would be a problem. He had issues with the King sized bed they were in the night before not being big

enough. He definitely would play the charming fiancé, but he had to keep his distance or there was no way he was going to keep his hands off of her tonight.

Reaching up he smoothed a lock of hair above his temple while saying a silent prayer before he opened the door to get Lily.

Lily still wanted to do something with her hair and her makeup after she donned the dress. Nikos was right about one thing, the dress fit her perfectly. She'd thought that Sophie would be taller like Helene, but she was definitely around her height.

A knock on the door followed by Max's voice drew her attention. She went to it but didn't open it.

"I want to finish in our room." She smiled leaning against her shoulder against the door.

'you're beautiful enough button.' Came the muffled response.

"No I'm not." She grinned, "I'll meet you in about twenty minutes.'

"What are you up to?"

"Nothing." She said in a way that meant the opposite. "I'll meet you upstairs, I promise." A deep chuckle was her answer.

"Fine honey, but don't take too long."

Lily waited a few more minutes to make sure he left before she made her way to their stateroom.

Upstairs Nikos was taking Max around and introducing them to his relatives. Hektor, Nikos father arrived and Nikos excused himself to speak to him for a moment.

"Max King, isn't it?"

Max turned to the soft feminine voice and recognized her immediately. She was a close friend of Cybil's and also a fashion model. She was also about Lily's age and striking. She was tall dark haired, brown eyed and slender. He noticed immediately that her eyes had already given him an invitation. However,

there was one thing she didn't have.

She wasn't Lily.

"I am."

"I'm Melissa Lake."

"Yes." He said politely, "I remember." She gave him a sultry smile obviously impressed that he remembered her.

"I'm glad." She looked past him to Nikos, "You are a friend of Nikos."

"He's a business acquaintance."

"I see. So you're here on business." She raised a delicate brow, "Alone?"

The tone of her voice and the sensual posturing she displayed was an invitation. In the past he may have taken her up on it, but Lily would be up soon and knowing that Melissa paled next to her, made him easily turn her down. Not only that, he was done filling his bed with unemotional sex. It was no longer appealing to him. It wasn't the act itself; it was the emotional attachment he wanted to go along with it. Something he always had a problem with until Lily came along. Over the past twenty four hours the little bit of intimacy he shared with her was more sensual and passionate than anything he could remember to have experienced in a long time. He was ready to get married and have children when Lily was ready to do so.

He focused his attention back on Melissa ready to turn her down politely, "Actually—" he stopped as his eyes took in a stunning sight past her. An exquisite feminine body wearing a satin cream colored gown that clung superbly to every sensual curve she possessed. Her back was to him, but he knew it belonged to Lily. If her luscious body wasn't a hint, her hair was a dead giveaway and the copper color was a delicious contrast to the gown and the bare skin it showed as it dipped low down her back. "—Excuse me." He said without sparing Melissa another look and brushed by her as if she was a mere stranger.

“What on earth—“ she said watching him head toward another woman. Her mouth fell open as he came up behind her and slid his hand down to her lower back while bending down and kissing her on the cheek. Immediately she reached into her bag and pulled out her phone. Cybil should know that her multimillionaire boyfriend was a busy man. Of course she was hoping to hop into bed with him as easily as one two three, but he just brushed her off for some unknown. Max King was gorgeous and she'd been lusting after him since Cybil brought him to a party over a month ago. The man dripped sexual perfection and she'd heard rumours that he was a God between the sheets.

When Lily entered the large room now crowded with guests she had seen Max hovering by a model that she recognized and instantly felt discouraged. She had a burst of reality and remembered who he really was to the public, to women and that she was no less than insignificant. She didn't leave him alone for twenty minutes and one of the world's top models had zeroed in on him like a bee to honey. Turning she went to the bar and got a glass of wine while watching the couple.

The woman was leaning into him and she knew Max was having fake lashes batting at him and getting a none too subtle invitation. She tipped her glass and swallowed the contents, set it down and ordered another.

She was on her third glass when she felt a warm hand slide down the bare skin of her back.

“Hiding?” Max said while bending and brushing his mouth across her cheek, “My God woman, you could stop the rain with that dress.” He murmured in her ear before he lifted his head. Then he saw the glass of wine, “What is this? You don't drink.”

“I'm starting a new sin.” She said taking a large swallow not looking at him.

“You don’t even have any old ones.” He straightened and looked down at her trying to examine her tone. Finally he nodded, “I presume you saw me with Miss Lake.” It wasn’t a statement.

She shrugged and looked at him over the rim of the glass.

“Okay, that’s enough.” He said softly while taking the glass out of her hand. She had a good grip on it so it took a few tugs and a stern look.

She placed a hand on her hip, “you know,” she whispered harshly. “It’s not easy keeping up this mock engagement when you have women throwing themselves at you.” Slowly he smiled. It was sinfully devilish. “Stop that, it’s not helping.” She averted her gaze feeling silly at the wave of jealousy she just experienced. By rights he couldn’t help it, he was a force to be reckoned with wearing that expensive tuxedo and it wasn’t like he openly encouraged them.

“Let’s dance.” He said taking her hand and leading her toward the crowded dance floor. She wanted to resist him, she really did, but he looked so distinguished in that tuxedo and combined with the wine she felt oddly warm and submissive.

Before she could respond Max turned her about and clasped her body tight to his.

“I hate you.” She mumbled.

“no you don’t.” he mused pressing his hand into the small of her back and rubbing his thumb sensuously over bare skin.

She did, she really did. She had no control over her body around him and it seemed as if even her emotions betrayed her. Now he knew that she was horribly jealous. Yet, he insisted on dancing with her. Max didn’t like petty emotions from women especially after he dropped Cybil from the display she did. However, they weren’t in a relationship and she had the advantage of being the little sister of his best friend so chances

were, he was humouring her. That thought just made her angrier and it must've been visible in her expression because he bent his head to examine her eyes.

"Stop it honey, there's no need to be jealous."

"I know." She didn't deny it. It was too darn obvious. He was just confirming her previous thoughts that he was placating her.

"Do you?"

She lifted her eyes to his as he turned her about, "I'm being silly. I know I am, but I can't help but let it bother me Max. I know this is just a game to you, but I'm in trouble."

"Is that right?" He said staring down at her letting his smile falter. "Is this the wine talking?"

"No, the wine just eliminated my resistance to tell you." She confessed feeling like she just stepped off a cliff while eyeing him uncertainly. She expected him to be uncomfortable or turn her confession into a thing of humour to make her feel better, but there was none of that in his eyes. He looked completely absorbed in what she had just said.

Just as it looked as if Max was going to answer her, Nikos stood on a chair and tapped his glass with a spoon announcing that he wanted to make a toast to his father.

Lily couldn't think of a worse time to torture her. She had just told Max how she felt and now her confidence was slipping tremendously by every passing minute that Nikos stood up there and told stories of his father. She felt Max squeeze her hand and she brought her head up to look at him and what was in his eyes wasn't laughter or disappointment. It was the same look he gave her when he kissed her in the bedroom the day before. Somehow he knew how insecure she was feeling and let her know that he desired her too. He always seemed to know what she was thinking. Then he gave a subtle indication with his head toward the exit as he tightened his hand around her waist and slowly

moved out of the crowd as Nikos finished his speech followed by loud applause and cheers.

Max had barely gotten the door of their stateroom closed when he pushed her up against the wall and crushed his mouth against hers. He already knew he was going to have to replace the dress as he tore it off her shoulders. A small price to pay for what lay underneath.

CHAPTER FIVE

The next morning he woke with Lily's face buried in his neck and her soft body up against his with her arm strewn across his chest. His actions came flooding back like a typhoon, "Oh hell." He groaned sliding out from under her and sitting on the side of the bed with his head in his hands. Luke is going to kill him! He turned and looked at the thoroughly sated woman sleeping in the bed and felt another wave of anguish. He couldn't possibly fix this.

He stood up and went to the shower. He couldn't think straight with her naked next to him.

Turning on the taps he stepped in and allowed the water to pour over his body as he ducked his head and allowed it to stream down his back. Why didn't he stop it before he went too far? He knew the answer to that already. He couldn't stop. Maybe it was the romantic ambiance of the evening and the two glasses of scotch he had before she showed up. It didn't help that she'd been drinking either, but it wasn't a very good excuse. Regardless it seemed to strip away his common sense when he saw her in that dress. From that point on, nothing else existed but Lily.

He tipped his face up to the pouring water. He had to tell

Luke. He betrayed his best friend and regardless of the pleasure he had last night, the guilt washed it away. After they got back to Chicago, he would have to cool things with her for awhile. Luke wanted her to finish school and Max agreed with him. She was too young to marry him now. There was a twelve year difference in their ages and he'd promise Luke he'd wait another four years. If it was up to him, he would have married her when she turned eighteen. To him, the age difference was nothing compared to what he felt about her, but she needed to be mature enough to make some choices on her own.

Getting out of the shower he reached for a towel and swore to himself. Lily didn't deserve this, but it had to be done. He'd take the ring back and thank her for the best weekend of his life and tell her to carry on with hers. It was going to rip his heart out, but he had to do it.

Lily awoke alone and felt her cheeks heat up with the images flooding back in her mind from the night before. She never realized that a man and a woman could share such pleasure. Turning her head, she wished he was still with her as she surveyed the empty area beside her. Why did he feel the need to leave before she woke each morning?

Climbing out of bed she headed for the shower. Most likely he was up on deck taking in the glorious Grecian sun and breakfast with Nikos. According to her view from the porthole they must've docked sometime in the night, and that would mean they'd be heading home in a few hours. Something she didn't look forward to. For some reason she knew that the fairytale would end.

She finished showering and chose a pink blouse, white cotton shorts and sandals. Then she spent some extra time on her hair and makeup.

About an hour later she found Nikos and Max on the deck of the bow talking and they both stood as she approached. She

gave them both a glorious smile, but only Nikos returned it. Max leaned over and gave her a perfunctory kiss on the cheek completely opposite of his greeting the day before. She examined his expression and felt a knot in her stomach at the coolness there. All sorts of things began to fill her head, but only one hit her hard. She obviously was a disappointment in bed and now that he knew that, he was done with her. It hurt horribly but she did her best to not show it and remained silent through the meal. Nausea built up in the pit of her stomach and she couldn't even find it in her to eat the delicious buffet set out for them. She only moved food around on her plate. Unfortunately Nikos seemed to notice the change in her and she saw his eyes glance back and forth between them a couple of times.

It didn't matter. Today they would head home to Chicago and they would resume their normal routines for the next few weeks until she returned to College. If this moment was an indicator, he would never touch her again. Part of her died inside over that thought.

It wasn't long after that they said their goodbye's and the helicopter took them straight to the airport. Once aboard the plane Lily removed the ring and handed it back to Max. "I guess I don't need this anymore." Finally he centered his gaze on her with a flicker of emotion while he took it from her.

"It was fun Lily." He said searching her expression.

"I guess." She murmured.

He took a deep breath knowing he was hurting her with his cool restraint, "Look, what happened—"

"I—don't want to discuss this." She said waving a hand, "I can't." her eyes guided to his, "Just please don't tell Luke."

"Lily—"

"Can you at least promise me that? I just want to get on with my life. I'm sorry I disappointed you."

"Disappointed! Lily, what the hell are you talking about?"

he said incredulously.

“Just forget it.” She said feeling herself blush.

“No, I won’t. Do you think that’s what’s going on? That you disappointed me? Good lord button, that’s the furthest thing from the truth.” He never even considered that his aloofness toward her would be interpreted in such a way. Now he felt like a complete bastard. In truth he should have known better, she was inexperienced and naïve, and despite what they shared, she still was.

“Max please just stop!” She pleaded.

“You should let me explain.” He said wincing inwardly seeing her pain.

“I don’t want to talk about it. When we get back to Chicago, we’ll get on with our lives as if nothing has happened. It’s what I want. I’m going back to College in a few weeks.” She continued not looking him in the eyes for fear that he’d see how hurt she was.

But he already knew the damage he caused and her statement, though he agreed, cut him to the core. He’d promised Luke that he’d leave her be, and he didn’t. He got involved too early and he had to correct it. “All right, if that’s what you wish.” Although he said the words they were the hardest thing he ever had to say.

“It is.”

The days at work seemed to drift by in a fog. Lily tried her best to be professional, but when Brittney cornered her again and mocked her for a broken engagement saying that she couldn’t hold on to a man like Max, she near burst into tears. The engagement was a ruse but no one knew that and although she knew what it would be like when she returned, she didn’t expect to have it hurt so much. She didn’t blame Max as much as she blamed herself for what had happened between them.

It probably wouldn't have if she didn't know what it was like to hold him, or touch him the way she did. Now, she was hopelessly in love with him and he easily treated her as one of his employees as if nothing had happened.

Lily used to pride herself on her self-esteem, but only Max could make it crumble down around her. If this were any other man, she would have no problem walking away and continuing on with her life. But this wasn't any other man, this was Max, and her world always revolved around him. How was she supposed to get on with her life when it felt so empty?

He wasn't intentionally being mean, he was just being himself, but Lily had no experience with men, and Max could easily go through life because he'd been with so many women and didn't take their weekend in Athens as personally as she did.

Just then he strode into the office with a gaggle of men in tow hanging on his every word. He had such a presence about him that commanded respect and she couldn't help but let it affect her too. He was so handsome and tall enough to tower over everyone else there. It was no wonder she felt so insignificant and small around him. Well, she did now. Before Greece she always thought he favoured her somehow, but now it seemed as if she was less important to him than the rest of the women in the office. She had only just realized that. At the time it didn't seem as if he paid any special attention to her, but the comparison from then to now was obvious. She even started calling him Mr. King around everyone else except when they were alone. Funny thing was, he gave her an odd look the first time she said that but never said anything.

Then if things couldn't get any worse Cybil showed up one Friday afternoon claiming to have a dinner date with Max. Her eyes raked over Lily in obvious contempt before she released a cool smile that seemed to say that she was no challenge after all. "today little girl." Cybil repeated with a snap of her fingers. Lily

saw Nancy come to her feet behind the model glaring at the back of her head. Lily shot her a look that told her not to bother saying anything.

“Right this way,” she said forcing a smile.

Max was seated behind his desk when Lily opened the door and told him that Cybil was here for their dinner date. He stood up as the other woman sashayed into the room with an exaggerated sway of her hips.

“Cybil?” he said looking at her in question.

“I know I was supposed to show up later this evening, but I just couldn’t wait to see you again darling. I hope you don’t mind, I had your diver take my bag to your penthouse.” She reached up and managed to kiss him on the mouth while Lily pinched her eyes shut and left the office shutting the door behind her.

Nancy saw the younger woman make a bee line for the ladies room with her head held high, but she had also seen the quiver of her chin while her lips were pursed tightly to hold her emotions in.

She didn’t know what had happened between her boss and the young woman to sever their engagement, but for him to parade one of his mistresses through here to rub salt in the poor girl’s broken heart.

She would like to have said something but the reality of it was, he was her boss and like Lily she was an employee.

After Cybil left Max already knew the damage she caused and meant to cause. Yes, he did reluctantly agree to dinner after she harassed him over the phone to see him. He’d already told her that it was over that night she insulted Lily. However, it was obvious to him that Melissa had told Cybil that she’d seen him and Lily on Demetrius’ yacht and she called him the next evening to apologize for her behaviour. She had literally begged him to get together so she could apologize in person. Now he realized

that was a mistake. He should have known how devious she'd get. The look on Lily's face crushed him. Cybil made it seem as if they were together and it was the furthest from the truth.

After Lily left he bluntly told her to get out of his office and that the chance of them even remaining friends was not happening.

"How does it feel Max?" she asked with a cool smile, "To have your heart broken."

"I understand you think you know." Max answered with his expression unreadable, "But you'd have to have a heart in that cold blooded body to experience such a thing."

She released an indignant huff and stormed out of his office only to be stopped by an older woman who told her not to let the door hit her on the way out. At least she got her digs in to the younger beautiful woman that Max had set his sights on. She'd seen the devastation cross her expression when she kissed Max. He'd shoved her away from him, but she'd already gone. Now let him try and repair that damage.

Max pretended not to let on how he felt, but he could see that the light went out of her when they returned to Chicago. She tried her best to act professional, but he was certain on more than one occasion that her eyes were more moist than usual before she turned away from him. Then Cybil showed up and pulled that little stunt, and he knew he needed to straighten that out too. He ached to tell her the truth but every time he tried to broach the subject she would shut him down or leave. It tortured him to see her so hurt and he neglected to talk to Luke about what had happened, but Lily had asked him not to and he couldn't bring himself to hurt her anymore by letting Luke know. However, he was going to talk to Luke about moving his proposal up.

After he dismissed his team he turned to her and told her to shut the door. He could see her hesitate but did as he asked.

“We need to talk button.”

“Max, I already told you—“

“Listen.” He said holding up his hand and walking toward her. She took several steps back and he stopped, “I’m not going to hurt you.”

Too late for that she thought. She still couldn’t get that image of Cybil kissing him out of her mind. Every time she thought of it she was sure her heart tore a little more.

He didn’t take another step toward her after seeing her expression, “Lily, I want to take you to dinner tonight. Then we can talk.”

“I can’t.” she said tilting her head up and looking at him. It was hard. Those grey intelligent eyes of his could have whittled away her courage instantly, but lately she seemed numb. At least she thought she was until the seconds passed and she felt that familiar twinge in her chest. Obviously it was visible on her expression for what he said next.

“I’ve hurt you Lily, I can see that. Unfortunately that wasn’t my intent.” He said softly.

“I understand that Max. I really do.” She said honestly.

Seeing that she seemed a little less apprehensive, he took a couple of steps toward her and took her hand, “Dinner honey, that’s all.” He was glad she didn’t step back this time.

“I really can’t Max. I know you feel guilty, but we can’t change anything. I know I’m not what you expected—“

“I tried telling you that you were wrong.” He said narrowing his gaze. It stunned him that she could say that after he reassured her, but again, he knew she had nothing to compare him with and it was going to stay that way as far as he was concerned.

She knew he was trying not to make her feel any worse, but she still didn’t want to discuss it and pulled her hand out of his, “I’ll be all right.”

“You don’t look all right Lily.” He suddenly noticed the dark circles under her eyes and she looked a little pale. A twinge of guilt hit him again.

“I am.” Her eyes gave him a pleading look, “Just please don’t tell Luke.”

“I haven’t.” he answered looking down at her while shoving his hands in the pockets of his slacks to resist the urge to hold her. “I won’t.” He continued. His gut hurt over that. Luke should know. He’d never kept secrets from his best friend, especially where Lily was concerned even though it was very personal. He felt as if he betrayed him.

She nodded believing him before she opened the door and left.

It still didn’t heal his conscience, Lily looked terrible. This was getting ridiculous. Why the hell shouldn’t he have her like he wanted? Luke knew his intentions from the start. Now, Lily was suffering and it was eating him up with guilt that he couldn’t tell her anything. He ran his hand through his hair roughly and swore out loud feeling like he wanted to throw something. For the first time in his life he didn’t feel in control over a woman. His biggest fear was her not returning the affection he felt for her if he let this go on any longer. What if he did carry it too far and hurt her more than she let on? He never even considered that she didn’t want him, but would he in her position? First the brush off in Greece, then Cybil. Lily was precious and he knew when she hurt, it ran deep.

The next day, her last day, he walked into the coffee room fully intending on having it out with her after another sleepless night when another woman’s voice caught his attention. He recognized it as Brittney’s, one of his secretaries, but her tone was completely condescending.

He paused right outside the door at her tone listening, and got angrier with each passing second.

“I heard from Nancy it was your last day,” came Brittney’s scornful voice, “It’s too bad you couldn’t handle yourself around a man like Max.”

“It’s not what you think.”

Max heard the defeat in her voice and felt his chest tighten. Was this going on for awhile? She neglected to tell him about it. Knowing Lily it was because she was trying to prove she could handle interoffice conflict. However, had he known, Brittney wouldn’t have lasted one more day. All along he was worried about the men around her and neglected to realize that some of his female employees were going to have a problem with Lily. This was just one more thing she ended up dealing with.

“No? I think you’re leaving because you aren’t what a man like Max is used to. Maybe you can’t measure up in the bed—“

“I think that’s enough.” Max said stepping in at that moment cutting her off.

Lily ducked her head and rushed by them unable to keep her tears from falling this time. Nancy saw her rush through the office and got up to follow her.

“Lily?”

“I’ve got to go.” She said stepping into the elevator.

“What’s wrong?” Nancy said with genuine concern seeing the woman’s tear streaked face.

“It’s nothing. Tell Max I’m fine. Thanks for being so nice to me Nancy.” She said as the doors closed.

After the first couple of weeks of classes Lily began to feel unwell. She had trouble sleeping, she felt nauseous, but never to the point of losing her breakfast, and she lost her appetite. *Is this what a broken heart felt like?* She thought. Luke had noticed her fatigue and became worried. Try as she might, she couldn’t help but look depressed. It was getting hard forcing a smile when her

brother was around and he mentioned something about her not looking as cheerful as she usually was.

One day she came out of her building after classes and a glorious white Limousine was parked on the curb, and leaning against the car was Nikos wearing a navy suit and tie like he'd just come from a business meeting. He straightened when he saw her and gave her a devastating smile. It may have worked on her if she didn't know Max, but regardless, it was refreshing to see a friendly face.

"Bella!" he called outstretching his arms as she approached him.

She couldn't help but smile, as he cupped her shoulders and leaned down to kiss her cheek. "What are you doing here?"

"I came with Demetrius to finish off business with your fiancé." He said glancing at her empty finger, "or—am I speaking out of turn?"

"We—well, I mean—"

"Say no more. Join me for dinner." He could see the subject made her uncomfortable and Nikos wasn't one to make a woman feel in such a way. He loved women. Lily, however, was in a completely different category and he'd come to have affection for her like he would his little sister, and she looked sad. Obviously the engagement was off and he felt the need to cheer her up.

"I really shouldn't." she said looking around at the curious gazes from the other students.

"No one needs to know." He said, "We'll be discreet."

She cocked a brow suddenly feeling a little like her old self, "Max told me to be careful around you."

"I'll behave *Bella*, I promise," he said making a sign of the cross causing her to laugh.

Gosh that felt so good! "I don't know if I should believe you."

He tilted his head at her making himself look even more handsome, “I can see you need some cheering up. I promise, that I won’t do anything inappropriate.” Besides, thought Nikos, the ring may have been gone but for some reason he still knew Lily was off limits. He knew something was wrong the last day they were in Greece. Max was unusually cool to her and she looked taken back by it. He wasn’t sure what had happened between them, but whatever it was, it was just as much as a surprise to her as it was to Nikos. He knew he didn’t mistake the looks that Max had been bestowing on Lily. No man could mistake that kind of affection even if they tried. Finally to his relief she nodded.

“Just this one time Nikos. My brother is still very protective.” She said giving him a warning look followed by a smile. In the past she always included Max in that sentence, but he didn’t seem to care about her as much as he used to. The fact that he hadn’t even tried to contact her in the past few weeks since she left just confirmed that. Although she guess she could pick up the phone and call him, but she just couldn’t bring herself to do it.

“I’ll agree to that.” He grinned opening the door for her. She hesitated slightly before getting in the car.

A short distance away a man pulled out a cell phone and made a call.

The restaurant that Nikos took Lily too was very fancy and she felt out of place in her beige skirt and white blouse regardless of how much he reassured her. Nikos requested a fairly private table and slipped the maitre d something extra to get his request.

Once seated Nikos asked for a bottle of expensive wine and Lily couldn’t help but ask how he knew where to find her.

“I have my ways.” He said with a knowing smile as the waiter came over with the wine and filled their glasses. Nikos

waited until the man left before he continued, "I actually asked your brother which college you attended. The rest was easy enough."

"But there are quite a few buildings Nikos," she said suspiciously.

"I asked the registrar's office which classes you had and where."

'How--?'

He shrugged and gave her an arrogant smile, "She was a woman."

"Oh for heaven's sake!" she said laughing, "You men are all alike!"

"Drink your wine *Bella*, you could use a little time to loosen up. You look stressed." He said eyeing her expression carefully.

"Isn't that the truth." She mumbled taking a drink.

"How are your classes?"

"I enjoy them enough I think." What she didn't say was that she missed Max horribly and found it difficult to concentrate on anything but him. "How is your sister?" She said trying to change the subject. The smile that lit his face told her that he loved his sister very much. It was probably as much as Luke loved her.

"She is pregnant and expecting Demetrius first child."

Lily lit up, "Oh how wonderful!" she paused wondering how much she should let on that Max had told her about them but Nikos seemed to know.

"it was a misunderstanding Lily. Sophie is in as much love with Demetrius as before, but they need to work out some trust issues toward one another. I have faith because he worships the ground she walks on."

"What a wonderful way to put it." She said softly.

"It is true." He said raising his brows, "You should see

how he looks at her.” He paused thinking carefully before continuing, “Much like Maximilian King looks at you.” Instantly she shook her head causing him to chuckle, “You don’t see it Lily, but as a man, I do.”

“Nikos, there’s something you should know—about our engagement.”

“That it was a ruse to protect Luke’s precious innocent sister from a womanizer like me.” He finished with a knowing grin, “I already knew that.”

“But then why did you –?”

“I told you why. Max loves you.” He said easily, “I have faith in you two also. Love like that doesn’t fade. It only grows.”

He was so wrong, but Lily didn’t want to correct him. It just showed her what a good actor Max really was.

“Now, I would like to help.”

“Help?”

“Certainly.” He gave her another gorgeous grin. “My sister would love to meet you. Why don’t you come back to Greece for a few weeks. You look as though you could use another vacation. She’s currently on Aquinas, Demetrius’ island while he works out of Athens. She’s terribly lonely—“

“Oh—I don’t know—“

“Nonsense.” He interrupted, reaching into his pocket and taking out a card, “Just say the word and I’ll send the jet for you.” He gave her the card, “That’s my private number. Call me anytime.” Then he held up his hands, “as friends, like I said. Consider it a favour to me to spend time with my sister.”

“I don’t even know her.”

“She would grow fond of you as much as my father and I have.” He countered. Then leaned forward, “If you need me for anything, just know you can call, okay?”

“I appreciate that Nikos.” She said shyly. In truth she was surprised of how much he proclaimed to trust her the way he did

in thinking that his sister would like her. For all he knew she could be like Cybil.

No, she doubted that. He probably did know women well enough, just like Max said. It actually made her feel pretty good to think that he put as much faith in her as he said he did. She just might take him up on his offer during spring break and told him that.

Two hours later Lily did feel better. Nikos was a complete rake but could probably charm an angry cobra with that charisma he possessed. Yet it seemed lost on her. He seemed to know it.

"It is too bad Lily, that your heart belongs to Max, or I would have swept you off your feet." He said retrieving his credit card from the server and getting to his feet to help her up.

"I'm an open book." She answered not denying it.

"I find that very appealing." He said guiding her out of the restaurant, "It is a shame that your Max can't see that."

That was the last phrase he got out before he stopped suddenly, "Uh-oh".

Lily looked up at him but he wasn't looking at her. His attention was diverted elsewhere. She followed his gaze to the familiar grey limo parked behind his just as Oscar was opening the door and out stepped Max looking furious.

"What on earth—" Lily started to say when Max launched into a string of terse phrases directed solely at Nikos in Greek so she didn't understand a word. He didn't look at her once obviously because he was too angry and centered his gaze at the tall man beside her.

For a moment she forgot herself because the masculine aura he gave off when he was irate made him ten times as appealing than he usually was. If that was possible. Then she started to come to her senses and realized that this would get back to Luke and he would be just as livid. Right now she

couldn't deal with anymore of this in her life. She was still trying to mend her broken heart.

Nikos dropped his hand that was placed on the small of her back and answered him. Thankfully his tone was calmer.

"I told you." Max said to Nikos, *"That Lily was mine!"*

"She hasn't got a ring anymore Max." answered Nikos keeping his expression impassive. Although, inside he was grinning. Max still cared about Lily and regardless of her thoughts to the opposite, he still was possessive. Hopefully she could see this even if she couldn't understand what they were saying. Max's jealousy was like a neon sign.

"It makes no difference." He said casting a look at Lily who looked like she was ready to burst into tears. *"Stay away from my fiancé."*

Nikos lifted his chin, *"A man like you who has a woman like this would treat her better, no? She is sad, I cheered her up. We are friends. I would never go back on my word."*

"Lily get in the car." Max said sternly without taking his eyes off of Nikos.

Lily took a deep breath but didn't move. This made him drop his gaze to her and raise his brows.

"You heard me."

"Nikos can drive me back to college." She answered sounding a lot braver than she felt. Seeing those two tall men toe to toe was intimidating to the most courageous person, and it was obvious that Max was tearing a strip off of Nikos who acted as though it was no surprise and almost as if a smile of amusement touched his dark eyes.

"Like hell!" he said turning to face her to give her the full dose of his authority. *"You'll get in the bloody car or I'll toss you over my shoulder and drag you there."*

"You are not my brother!" she shouted back, *"I'm sick of listening to orders from the both of you!"*

He narrowed his gaze but never said anything

Lily lasted a whole ten seconds under that piercing stare before she released a huff of breath and went to Max's car. Oscar closed the door behind her and she sat against the far corner with her legs crossed at the knees and her arms folded under her breasts fuming.

Max turned back to Nikos after the car door closed and spoke in English, "I told you I would drop this contract over her, and I will."

"She is a woman who is hurting Max. I only tried to help her." Nikos explained.

"She is not your concern and don't presume you know what she needs." he said with a fierce glare, "Remember what I said." Max added coolly before he turned and walked toward his car with a long determined stride.

Nikos watched Max drive away with Lily and he felt very sad for her. He hoped his prediction between them was right. He'd seen it happen with his sister and his own best friend.

In the car, Max studied Lily for a long time before he finally spoke. "Lily." He said noticing her closed posture. Even as angry as she was, her beauty was still a force to be reckoned with. Images of their lovemaking filled his mind and he flattened the palms of his hands on his thighs to resist reaching for her. Christ, he missed her!

"I'm not speaking to you." She said not looking at him but keeping her eyes on the passing scenery.

He took a deep breath and prayed for patience. He knew he handled this whole thing badly, but he couldn't see straight when he saw her with Nikos. Then he noticed that Nikos was touching her even if it was a small gesture that a gentleman would give a woman. As far as he was concerned, he was the only man to touch Lily from now on especially after knowing her body

the way he did.

“How did you know where I was?” she said finally realizing that it would have taken him two hours to drive directly to the restaurant from his building in downtown Chicago. That meant that he would have known exactly when she went off with Nikos. When he didn’t answer she did look at him and what she saw wasn’t what she expected. He looked slightly guilty. “Well?”

“I have my sources.” He near winced at his confession knowing what was going to follow and he wasn’t wrong.

Her eyes widened, “You’re having me watched!” Although his expression never gave anything away, she saw him shift uncomfortably, “How long?”

He didn’t answer.

“Max?”

He took a deep breath and nodded. Maybe it was about time she knew. “It wasn’t just my idea. Luke and I worried—”

“My God! Do you mean you two have been spying on me since I went to college?”

“We couldn’t take any chances button—”

“Don’t call me that! Don’t ever call me that again!” she seethed feeling her temper overflowing, “I can’t believe you two!” Everything she knew was a lie. No wonder he knew all about David. How many other of her boyfriends had they checked out without her knowledge and—what did they do about it? So many of them had left her alone without explanation after the first few dates.

Max could see the emotions play over her face as she was figuring things out. He somehow expected that she’d discover this sooner or later, but he wanted to be the one to tell her, not have her find out while he was in the midst of a jealous rage. “What were you doing with Nikos?”

Her mouth fell open, “Don’t you dare put this back on me.”

“Lily, Luke and I are worth a lot of money. How the hell to you think we would feel if you ended up abducted?”

“It’s my life!”

“No, its not. Losing you was never an option. We are responsible for you—”

“Luke is! You gave up that right when you shunned me Max.”

“I tried telling you about that night we shared but you wouldn’t hear it.”

“No, because I don’t want to come in second best!” she said pointing a finger at her chest, “I can’t bear being compared to all of your other women. Do you have any idea how that makes someone like me feel? Of course not, because you are so self absorbed in your own world that you chose to act like nothing happened, but something did happen.” Tears started to fall from her eyes just as the car pulled to a halt outside her dorm room. She made a move to get out of the car, but Max grabbed her arm.

“Lily.” He said softly, “you keep running when I want to tell you—explain to you about that night.”

“Let me go Max.” she said, “Just leave me alone—please.”

The look of pain that crossed her face made him let her go and she got out of the car. He told Oscar to wait until she was safe inside before driving away. Then he rolled up the divider and spent the drive back to his penthouse seething. He was angry at her, at Nikos, but most of all himself. He should have never taken her to bed in Greece. It left her openly vulnerable towards him. He didn’t like the way their relationship changed dramatically after that. Part of him felt as though he’d lost her because of it, and another made him feel selfish like she said because he should have reassured her immediately after that, not leaving her to wake up alone. Then again he’d never been with someone so innocent so it escaped him to do such a thing.

He realized now that he made a huge sacrifice just to have a taste of her. A taste that he would never forget.

CHAPTER SIX

Lily went right to her room, thankful that she didn't have a roommate this semester. Her eyes were already red and puffy. Was it possible for her heart to hurt so much? She sobbed out loud and made her way to the bathroom to wash her face. Never had she let her emotions get so out of control, but that man drove her crazy! His confession of having her watched near pushed her over the edge with everything else that had been going on in her life. Nikos was only being a friend and Max had—had what? She paused looking at her reflection in the mirror as something dawned on her.

Max acted jealous.

After a moment she shook her head even considering what Nikos had said. Max never got jealous. He had his choice of the cream of the crop and for him to settle for her was impossible. Yet she couldn't help wonder if he had made sure that she had no suitors. He and Luke were in on this. When her brother got back in town she was going to confront him about this whole thing. She was so mixed up she didn't know which way was up at the moment. Not only that, she still couldn't beat this flu bug. If it was a bug. Luke already suspected she wasn't well, but she'd passed it off when he'd asked her about it.

What was she going to tell him? That she had a broken heart?

That weekend Luke had just come back from New York and picked his sister up from school to bring her home for the weekend and she went straight to bed claiming she wasn't feeling well. This seemed to be a regular occurrence with her, but he'd

been away quite a bit in the last month and really didn't take notice of it. However, he was sure she was ill when he brought her home a weekend last week to spend time with her too. She'd spent most of it in her bedroom.

After he started thinking about it, he recalled the way she looked when he returned from Tokyo and she from Athens. The life seemed to go out of her, but he attributed that to Jet lag the first couple of days, but he was gone again after that. Now he started to wonder if it was something else. Max seemed more subdued lately and if he had any suspicions he would think that something happened between them when they had gone together, but Max had promised him and his word was virtually unbreakable.

Yet, he still couldn't help but wonder, and first thing on Monday he would ask him. First, he was getting his sister a Doctor's appointment.

Monday was crazy and it took Luke half a day to finally get Max alone. He didn't waste any time. After Nancy left and shut the door behind them he turned to his friend, "What happened between you and Lily in Athens?"

Max kept his expression carefully guarded, "What did she tell you?"

Luke narrowed his gaze knowing his suspicions were correct, "Nothing."

"Then why do you ask?"

"She won't eat, she's lost weight and whenever I bring her home for the weekend she spends the whole time in her room. " He paused, "She says she hasn't been feeling well, but this has been continuous for the past month. " he stopped again and studying his expression for any clue of what he really thought he continued, "Did you sleep with her?"

"No." he said keeping the tone of his voice even.

He studied his friend's expression and narrowed his gaze.

He was one of the few people in the world that could read Max and although he knew he was telling him the truth, it wasn't the whole truth. "But something happened."

"Yes Luke, something happened, but your sister is still chaste." He admitted remembering that night then his composure faltered a little as he ran a hand through his thick hair, "We—we did get intimate, but not how you think, and as for her being pregnant, unless there's a star in the East, it's impossible." He sure as hell hoped he didn't ask what kind of intimacy that they shared because he didn't want to tell his best friend that he'd taught Lily oral sex. Over the past month he still couldn't erase that night from his mind. In all of her innocence it brought a new erotic pleasure to the act. One he couldn't forget and didn't want to. Somehow he was still able to restrain from making her completely his although he had no idea how he managed it. No matter how desirable and passionate Lily was, his promise to Luke managed to break through.

Luke released a sigh of relief, "I don't need any details Max." he shot him an accusing look, "But she's either extremely depressed or there's something seriously wrong with her. I'm getting worried."

"I'll speak to her." Truth was, he'd been anxious about her since he practically hauled her away from Nikos by the hair. Besides Cybil intruding at the office, there was her last day working for him. He knew she was crying, but he'd hurt her enough and didn't go after her. Instead he'd fired Brittney on the spot and told her she'd never get another job in the industry because of the way she treated Lily. He also went on to tell her that he *was* marrying Lily, and the insults she just gave his future wife were unforgivable. The shocked look on the woman's face gave him some satisfaction for Lily, but it still didn't heal his pain. He missed her more than he'd miss a part of himself. There had been many occasions that he nearly drove down to her

college and confessed everything to her, but right now she was hurt and upset with him and needed time to heal. Not only that, he was beholden to Luke. He'd promised him he'd leave her be until she was done College.

"No," Luke held his hand up, "I think you've done enough. It's not just the illness; I know there's some damage from you also."

Max pursed his lips and stared at his friend. He was right but Lily wouldn't always be Luke's responsibility and he told him that.

Luke narrowed his gaze, "You have no rights now Max, and I don't appreciate you seducing my sister when you know how vulnerable she was around you."

"Something I can't undo Luke, but I can make things right. I've tried to talk to her, but she wouldn't have it. Let me see her." He thrust sliced a hand through the air, "If I had things my way, I would be married to her already. You knew how I felt about her for years. The only reason I kept my distance was because you asked me to."

"She's only twenty." Luke reminded him.

"She's got the maturity of a woman ten years older than that, and you know it." He thrust his fingers through his hair again, "Look. I'm having a hell of a time concentrating on anything. I told you how I felt when I found her with Nikos. Now I know she won't give me the time of day because she's as angry as hell over the security team. She feels as though we betrayed her and she may forgive you because you're her brother, but for me it's just another mark against me."

Luke took a long deep breath. Max was right, but he couldn't help feel that they were rushing her, taking away her youth before she had experienced anything. However, he didn't miss the way Lily reacted to Cybil and the jealousy she portrayed. He knew she loved Max, what woman wouldn't? His shoulders

slumped in defeat and he nodded, "She looks terrible." He finally said looking back at Max helplessly, "I'm still pissed at you but, maybe I didn't help much."

"Maybe we both screwed up. We didn't give her a choice in anything." Max said seeing his friend's guilt.

"Yeah, maybe she's not too far off calling us overprotective louts."

"And because of it, she got hurt." Max winced. "Hell, I wish I could change the past but I can't. I've tried to talk to her, but she won't hear it and short of betraying you, I couldn't tell her anything."

Luke studied his friend's pained expression, "You love her that much?"

Max managed a bittersweet smile, "You have no idea."

Luke nodded and released a slow breath, "I'm taking her to the Doctor's today at three." He looked at his watch. "I kept her home from school because I wanted to go with her."

Max straightened himself and shoved his hands in the pockets of his dark slacks, "All right, however, I am marrying her in the future if she'll still have me, and I understand your anger with me, it's warranted, but as soon as you hear anything I'm entitled to know."

Luke thought about this for a moment. A man like Max really shouldn't be held at fault for hurting Lily. He was acting on Luke's wishes, yet he obviously did get carried away with her and he held him responsible for that. In a way he was hoping she was pregnant, then it would explain her symptoms, but now a new worry set in. Would depression explain all of what she was portraying? He wasn't a doctor so he didn't know but he had a sense of dread over it. "I'll call you Max. I promise."

"That's all I ask. Thank you."

After Doctor Chang was done her examination, she helped Lily don a hospital gown while pressing her lips together,

“Is your brother here?”

“I think he’s in the waiting room. Why?”

Doctor Chang had been Lily’s doctor since she was fourteen and moved to Chicago with Luke when he started working for Max. Despite her name she wasn’t Asian, but looked more Romanian with her dark hair and eyes. It seemed sort of funny to Lily when she first met her and actually asked her about her name. She said her husband was Asian and worked in the city as an engineer. She also told her with a smile that she got that a lot. Regardless, she was always very considerate to Lily. Maybe it was because her and Luke were looking after each other since the death of their parents and her Doctor knew that.

“He’s your guardian right?”

“What’s wrong?” She started to get worried.

“It may be nothing, but I should speak to him first.” She picked up Lily’s folder, “I’ll send the lab tech in to take some blood so I can run some tests.” She said, “I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

“Okay.” Lily said unable to keep the worry out of her expression.

Luke was sitting in the waiting room rubbing his forehead with his hand in obvious worry. Time seemed to pass slowly and it was excruciating waiting for the results. He stood immediately when the Doctor approached, “My sister—is she okay?”

Doctor Chang indicated for him to sit down and she took the seat next to him, “It may be nothing, but your sister has a lump in her breast.”

“Oh Jesus, Lily!” He could physically feel the blood drain from his face.

“I’m running some blood tests, but she says it’s been there for about two months.” The Doctor continued.

“I didn’t know—I’ve been away—” he said brokenly. She was the only family he had and he felt completely negligent over

not seeing the signs sooner. He'd also been away a lot in the last year, and Max had always made sure she was looked after, but now he felt guilty over it. It never bothered him before, because Max was right, she was mature for her age and could look after herself. Now everything had changed and his sister was going to need him.

Doctor Chang saw his guilt, and it was common among family to feel responsible, but unless you were a doctor, the signs weren't easy to see. "The last thing you need to do is blame yourself Mr. Shayne. She's young and breast cancer is not common in her age group. The lump is barely detectable, but it's significant enough to raise a flag. I won't lie to you. If you combine that with her symptoms, I'm afraid there's a high percentage that it's malignant, but we need to do a biopsy if the blood tests are conclusive to see how aggressive it is."

"does she know?"

"No, I needed to speak to you first."

"Don't tell her yet." He said pulling his mobile out of his pocket, "I need to call her fiancé. He's going to want to be here when we break the news to her. She's not going to take this well."

Max was in the middle of dictation when the phone rang. "Hold that Nance, I need to get this, it's Luke." He said looking at the caller id. Luke said he'd call when he got some information of Lily.

"Certainly Mr. King." She said patiently noticing that he glanced at his watch again. He'd been doing that constantly since he called her into the office as if anticipating this call. Then there was the slight urgency in his tone when he spoke to her.

"Luke? How's Lily?" He said before his friend could even get a word out.

"Max, do you have a pen?"

"I do." He said hearing the tone of his voice. He sounded

oddly subdued, "What's wrong?"

"I'm going to give you the address of the clinic that we're at. I need you here. I think Lily is seriously ill." He said giving him the address unable to stop his voice from cracking.

Max scribbled it on a piece of paper while doing his best to squash the dread that washed through him. Luke sounded worried, and it took a lot to worry his number one man. However, Lily being sick would do it for both of them. "I'll be there in twenty minutes." He hung up, "Nancy cancel my appointments for this afternoon and get Oscar to bring the car around."

She stood up, "Is everything okay? Is Lily all right?" Nancy remembered how upset she was when she left there the last day, followed by Max's bellowing voice as he fired one of the office girls publically which was completely unlike him. Whatever went on between the two women had been witnessed by Max and had obviously hurt Lily deeply. Shortly after Brittney, red faced and weeping, packed up her desk but Nancy didn't feel sorry for her at all. She knew the young woman had been drooling after Max and obviously had gone too far in belittling Lily.

Apparently as she found out from the other office girls that this had been going on for some time under Nancy's nose and she didn't see it. She would have fired Brittney herself if she'd known. She knew how much Max coveted Lily and rightly so. The girl was a complete doll. Nancy couldn't help feeling protective of her also. Then when rumour reached them about her and Max's engagement she wanted to jump for joy. She was perfect for him. At least that's what Nancy thought. She had time to ask Luke about it the next day when he was waiting patiently for Max to finish a meeting.

Luke sat on the corner of Nancy's desk with one foot on the floor while flipping through a magazine.

“So, when’s the date?”

Luke glanced down at Nancy who had her spectacles shoved to the end of her nose and was eyeing him intently over them. “Date?”

She pursed her lips impatiently, “The wedding Luke, don’t play dumb. Everyone here has seen the rock on Lily’s finger, and Max is floating on air.”

He laughed, leaned over and kissed her on the cheek like he would his own mother, “Nothing gets by you does it?”

She acted indifferent to his bold affection for her, and if he didn’t know her any better he would have thought so except for the warmth that filled her eyes, “It wasn’t exactly subtle.” She nodded toward the office doors, “When she wasn’t looking, he never took his eyes off of her, ever.” Smiling she continued, “it was like being at the zoo and watching a caged lion pace back and forth inside his cell while eyeing up some tasty morsel out of his reach.”

Luke grinned, “Nice analogy.”

She shrugged, “Who can blame him, your sister is gorgeous. She practically knocked the socks off of every male who caught sight of her. That’s why he kept her so close for the past few weeks, not to give any one of them the chance of asking her out.” She sighed, “It’s such a relief really because he’d been giving her all of my errands, now I’ll get my job back.”

Luke stared at the older woman with admiration, “You are a rare gem Nancy.”

Finally smiling, she nodded in agreement, “Don’t I know it. However, one of my boys is getting married, that only leaves you.”

“Whoa.” Luke practically jumped off her desk, “Not interested. Not for awhile at least. I like women too much.”

“Uh-huh, that will last until the one show up that’ll spin your world around. Beware Luke, not everyone is immune.”

“Thanks for spoiling my day mom.” He added in an endearment and tossed the magazine on her desk.

She actually laughed, “Anytime.” Watching him turn and head back to Max’s office.

At that time Nancy thought it was a time for celebration, but when the couple returned from Greece something had changed, and Nancy didn’t ask. Although Max still looked at Lily like she was still the last woman on earth, Lily looked sad. Something had happened between them to call off the engagement.

Now Max looked genuinely worried as he gathered his things to leave the office. In turn it made her concerned because his expression never faltered—ever, so this had to be serious. Max didn’t seem to hear her question a moment ago. “Mr. King?”

He stopped and looked at her trying to recall what she said. Then he spoke obviously distracted, “I don’t know yet. Just call me when Oscar is here.” He said picking up his briefcase and tossing things in it absently.

Nancy quickly left the office and did as he asked.

The ride to the clinic must’ve been the longest in his life. His angst built the closer he came. If Luke called him, it had to be serious. He didn’t wait for Oscar to open the door of the car for him as he practically bolted out of it and headed through the front doors of the clinic with a long determined stride.

Max was led into an examination room by a nurse and saw Luke sitting in a chair next to the bed. Lily was sitting on the side of it with a hospital gown on and her legs bare from the knee down. She looked so vulnerable to him it was all he could do not to gather her into his arms and ask for her forgiveness for the past month. It was hard enough for him to keep the pained expression off his face.

Lily was stunned at the sight of Max walking in the room.

What was he doing here? She darted her eyes back and forth between the two as he Max strode in. That caused more anxiety to creep in knowing that it was Luke's doing, so something more was going on than she realized.

"Max—Luke did you call him?" she accused her brother while gesturing her hand toward the Max, who couldn't look more devastating in a dove grey suit striped tie and white shirt. It seemed like she hadn't seen him forever even though it was just last week, but the memory was not pleasant. She wanted to weep at the sight of him and apologize for yelling at him then, but somehow she couldn't find the words. She missed him terribly and seeing him made a flood of emotions resurface. She clenched her jaw and pressed her lips together to prevent them from reaching her expression.

"I did." Luke admitted.

"What for, it's just the flu!" She argued, "You two are so overprotective!" Her eyes searched her brother's expression looking for any indication that Max told him what had happened between them in Greece, but he didn't give anything away even if he knew. At times his demeanour could rival Max's on how he presented himself. Hopefully Max kept his promise. The only reason she thinks he did, is Luke wouldn't be able to hide his animosity towards Max knowing how protective he was of her, but there was nothing and Luke looked at him as he always did with the affection of a friend.

"Yes we are Lily, because you are very special to us. Now, I asked the Doctor that I'm to be the one to tell you what she suspects it is. I wanted Max here because he's part of your life." Luke explained calmly.

She still couldn't bring herself to look at the other man, "not anymore."

"Stop it Lily." Said Max finally, "I am as much as you don't want me in it right now. As soon as you're done being

angry with me, you'll understand that."

"I'll never stop being angry at you." She answered knowing it was a lie. She wasn't angry she was hurt, heartbroken and devastated.

"Lily," Luke said finally, "I need you to listen to what the doctor told me—"

Her mouth fell open, "It's the flu." She said more quietly now unconvinced. Finding her courage, her eyes guided to Max. There was concern in his expression and it was genuine, "Isn't it?"

Luke stood up next to Max, "Actually honey, it may be worse than that. The doctor thinks you may have breast cancer." He watched her lip tremble after a brief pause for his words to sink in.

"Breast—" She choked unable to finish.

Luke went to reach for her but before he could, and contrary to her testimony only moments ago, she went to Max's outstretched arms who embraced her tightly without hesitation lowering his head on top of hers while speaking softly to her. It was then that Luke realized that he handled this whole thing with Lily and Max wrong. Had he allowed Max to marry her when he wanted, she wouldn't have gone through the stress of heartbreak besides the shock of what he'd just told her. Her actions were completely opposite of what she'd just voiced. In the end she needed Max to comfort her not her own brother.

As his eyes guided over the couple it was definitely more than just a reassuring hug. It was intimate and Luke almost felt as if he was intruding on the two. They loved each other. It was as obvious as a slap in the face. Why hadn't he seen it before? Was he that overprotective of his baby sister to realize that she was old enough to make mature decisions and that she was old enough to genuinely love someone? He already knew the answer to that.

He was.

Max held onto her like she would disappear any moment and spoke to her endearingly, “Look baby, don’t panic yet until we get the results, then we’ll go from there—” She released a muffled sob, “—I’ll hire the best oncologists the country has,” he continued soothing her in a soft deep voice while inside he felt like weeping himself. He could feel her fingers scrunch the cloth of his shirt as she wept clinging to him. Max kissed the top of her head before he lifted his eyes to Luke, “Go and find her doctor and see if the results are back yet. Then get Nancy on the phone and tell her to find out who the best Oncologist is in Chicago. I want appointments yesterday. Then we’ll go from there.”

“I’ll get right on it.” He said walking out of the room as he pulled out his phone. It should have been him comforting Lily, but she wanted Max and for some reason that was okay with him. Also, Max was able to take charge when he could hardly think right and although he hated to admit to feeling helpless, he was thankful for him. He nearly fell to pieces after seeing the look on Lily’s face when he broke the news to her. What good was he to his sister in that condition?

Back in the room Lily was completely inconsolable. She had soaked the front of his shirt and showed no sign of letting up. He didn’t blame her, the news was devastating.

“Honey, look at me.” Max finally said placing his hands on either side of her head and tilting her red tearstained face up to his, “I won’t let anything happen to you. I swear to God we’ll beat this.”

“We?” she managed to choke out.

“We.” He brushed his mouth across her forehead. “You don’t think I’ll let my girl go through this alone do you?”

She hiccupped, “no.” she said uncertainly. He gave her an adoring smile at her tone that literally pulled at her heart.

“First don’t get so upset until we hear the results. Then

we'll panic." He smiled. "Okay?"

"Okay." She said weakly.

"Hey, I won't abandon you and neither will Luke. You have family that love you button." She nodded and he pulled her into his arms again just as Luke came back in and mouthed the words 'how is she?', Max just shook his head and mouthed back 'not good'.

"Lily the doctor is coming back in to speak to all of us." Just then his phone rang, and he pulled it out, "It's Nance." And he turned away just as Doctor Chang entered.

She looked at Luke who was on the phone then held out her hand and introduced herself.

Max took her hand but kept his other wrapped tightly around Lily, "I'm Max King, Lily's fiancé."

That brought Lily's head up abruptly and she looked back and forth at Luke and Max, neither one of them looked at her.

"What did Nancy say?" Max asked Luke.

"Doctor Jenson." He answered.

Doctor Chang looked back and forth at the both of them recognizing the name, "Wow, you two move quickly."

"I'd like a referral to him." Max said.

"I was actually going to suggest it Mr. King." She said opening the folder she had and pulled out the lab results. "I had them double checked as Mr. Shayne asked, but they're not good. I'll phone Doctor Jenson and set up surgery for a biopsy."

"No—"

"Max?" Luke started but he held up his hand.

"No biopsy. Take the lump. I'm not wasting time finding out if it's benign or malignant. Take the whole damn thing, she's not going through two surgeries. Is that clear? You tell Jenson that if he gets rid of it, I'll fund his next research project and the amount of money he receives is based on her prognosis."

Her eyes widened, that was a dream for any researcher. She had meant to protest his request, but no smart physician would turn down such an offer, “Mr. king this may be nothing—“

“I’ll go somewhere else that complies with my wishes Doctor Chang. I’m serious. When you contact Doctor Jenson, set up an appointment as soon as possible, and I’ll discuss this with him. I know what it’s like waiting around for surgery or between surgeries for results. If it’s benign then it may be a pointless surgery but Lily won’t have anything to worry about.”

“All right Mr. King, I’ll speak to Doctor Jenson.” She resigned knowing that it was better not to argue with him. She’d dealt with plenty of determined families like this, but Max King had money and a reputation and she really didn’t want to cross it. She recognized his name immediately when he introduced himself and from the way he was holding her young patient, she knew that he meant every word he said.

“come on Honey,” he said reaching for her clothing, “You need to get dressed, you’re going home.” He glanced up at the Doctor, “I expect a call by this evening on those appointments Doctor Chang.”

“I’ll do my best.” She said as Max pulled the curtain to give Lily some privacy.

After the Doctor left Luke pulled Max aside, “Thanks.”

Max nodded, “I should be thanking you for that phone call. I may look in control, but I’m a fucking mess on the inside.” He whispered casting a glance over his shoulder at the curtain. “My mother—“

“yes, I remember Max. Breast cancer. Look, I’ll take her home, make her something to eat—“

“I’m coming.” He interrupted, “Luke, you know I love her more than my own life. I can’t leave her even for a minute. I’ll clear my schedule for the next few weeks.”

Luke saw the anguish in his friend’s face, and finally

nodded, "Okay. I'm not going to be greedy and demand that she spend every second with me, but we're not going to smother her either even though we're both dying to do it. So we'll take turns. That way there's always someone with her, and someone taking care of business."

"I may not be able to hear what you two are saying, but I know it's about me, so stop it." Came a voice from behind the curtain.

Max grinned. That sounded more like Lily. It even brought an expression of relief to Luke's face. "Sure honey," Luke said.

Once at home Luke sent Lily to her room to get ready for bed while he went to the kitchen to make her some decaffeinated tea and a snack. Max followed him.

"You'll have to manage in my absence," he told Luke. "I'm going to be spending a lot of time here."

"No problem." He said without turning around as he filled the kettle, "We can balance things out together."

"I'm staying the night to." Luke stilled, set down the kettle and turned to face his friend.

"With Lily." Max said.

"Max, she's my baby sister."

"Yeah, and she's my future wife." He countered. "You already know how I feel about her." He paused swallowing hard, "If this is serious, I don't want to miss out for a moment. You have to admit, she's more mature than her age, and she's a big girl. She can make her own decisions."

"I've seen the way she looks at you; she wouldn't deny you anything Max. This is my concern and she has enough to worry about."

"Something the three of us will take on together, but I'm not leaving." He said just as his phone rang. It was Doctor

Chang.

Luke finished making tea while Max was on the phone. Lily was sitting on the couch in a satin baby blue robe just staring at the far wall, “How are you holding up?” He said setting the tea down on the table in front of her before sitting beside her.

“I’m still trying to absorb it all. It seems like a really bad dream.”

Luke put his arm around her and pulled her into his embrace, “its okay sis, we’ll beat this.”

She looked up at him, “I think that’s one of the stages of grief—denial.”

He chuckled and flicked a finger over the tip of her nose, “Maybe, but we do have an advantage that a lot of people don’t have.”

“What’s that?”

“Max.” That made her smile.

“You love him don’t you sis?” he said seriously.

It took her a moment to respond, “I think from the moment I hit puberty.” She said releasing a small laugh. “I’m just another woman in a long line of women to fall for him.” She sighed taking a sip of her tea.

“Do you think that’s how he sees you?”

She shrugged a shoulder, “I don’t know—there are times I think—maybe, then something happens and he withdraws.”

Luke knew that was his fault. He made Max promise him that he would give her time to grow up. Despite Max’s love for his little sister, he had shown an incredible amount of restraint. He doubted he could do the same if it were him in that position.

“Did Max go home?”

“No he’s on the phone with the Doctor from the clinic.”

“About the specialist?”

“Yes.”

"Do you think he meant that—about funding a research project on my prognosis?"

"Definitely."

"Why?"

He studied Lily's expression of puzzlement for a moment to see if she even had a clue on how much Max cared for her, but there was nothing. He felt guilty over that, because it was his wishes that kept Max at a distance, and if this was a serious illness that she had, she would never know how much Max really cared. "Do you even have the slightest idea on how much he cares about you?"

"Yes, he loves me like a little sister of his best friend. He watched me grow up, he helped me with my homework, he was there for me today—" she stopped because her eyes began to water up remembering what he told the doctor.

"I suppose I should blame myself for you not knowing the truth Lily. I've asked Max to take it slow—"

"Slow?" she said blinking, "Take what slow?"

He turned to her with his expression serious, "Max wasn't saying he was your fiancé so he'd have rights over your care, which is what you're assuming. He really does want to marry you."

Lily's mouth hung open, "What—but he—I mean—"

"The only reason you aren't married to him now is because I told him to stay back and allow you to grow up for a few more years. As my friend he's respecting my wishes."

"You told him?"

"He wanted to tell you when you were sixteen. Way too young."

Lily just stared at him with a mixture of shock and anger on her expression. Everything started making sense to her. He didn't want to betray Luke and that's what kept him from making love to her completely in Greece. Then there was his coolness,

the guilt she thought she saw and his ever looming possessiveness.

“Listen. Don’t blame Max, I told him to wait at least until you were twenty-four, but when Nikos showed interest, he near went through the roof—“

She just gaped at him.

“He wanted to propose to you that day, I told him no, you were too young. You walked in after the argument was over. He finally conceded to a mock engagement. That ring he gave you was one he bought when you were seventeen.”

It was too much, she started weeping, “You mean that really was my ring?”

“Yes, and you’ll get it back, probably soon. I’m leaving you two alone. I think I messed up this relationship as much as I possibly could. I realize now that I should have let Max tell you how he felt all those years ago. It’s funny how something like this makes you really think.”

“Oh Luke!” she threw her arms around him hugging him tightly. “You have no idea how you just made me feel! I needed that! “ she pulled back and tried frowning but it was unsuccessful, “I’m still mad at you though.”

He grinned and kissed her cheek, “I can handle that.”

Just then Max came down the hall from the kitchen, “Luke I—“ he stopped when Lily got up from the sofa and launched herself at him. He was startled but easily embraced her, “Wow, what’s this for?” he said looking over her head at Luke.

“I’m going to the office for a bit,” Luke said standing up, “I’ll get a head start for Tuesday.” He glanced at his watch, “I’ll be home late, so don’t wait up.” He turned and walked out of the room leaving Max staring at him completely baffled. Then he felt Lily’s hands on either side of his face causing him to look down at her.

"I want my ring back."

He stared down at her still confused about the sudden affection not missing her tearstained eyes. Then he smiled slowly and reached into his pocket withdrawing the ring, "All right."

"You had it with you?" she said in awe as he slipped it back on her finger.

"I've had it with me for three years." He confessed deeply.

"All the time?"

"Every day."

"Is it really mine?" she looked up at him after admiring it.

"Luke's got a big mouth." He said pursing his lips.

"I would have said yes at sixteen."

He reached up and brushed her long hair back over her shoulders to cup her face in his hands and search her eyes for some sort of apprehension, there was none. "I would have married you then button, but Luke was right in a lot of ways."

"I'm not sixteen Max, I'm twenty now."

"Yes you are." He said huskily before he lowered his head and kissed her.

Luke came home a little after midnight and saw his sister and Max sleeping on the sofa covered by a quilt. He released a sigh of relief. Max still had his shirt on but it was unbuttoned and his sister was curled against him and he could see that she still wore her nightgown. Then his eyes guided to the hand on Max's bare chest noticing the engagement ring back where it belonged and he smiled. Quietly he made his way by the sleeping couple to his room. He had to give it to his friend because under the circumstances, he showed a great deal of restraint. If it was someone Luke loved the way Max loved Lily, he would want to be with her in every way after hearing such news.

Lily had never slept so well in her life. When she awoke

the next morning she was ecstatic to see that Max didn't get up and leave this time. He was still with her and asleep. He looked peaceful and incredibly handsome. She lifted her head and moved her gaze over his face. His jaw had a day's worth of stubble and it made him look worn but sinfully appealing. Having her body pressed against his hard form was doing amazing things to her insides too. She didn't forget what he looked and felt like naked and those feelings of desire rose within her like a volcano.

"Quit staring." He murmured.

"Oh for gosh sakes!" she flushed.

He opened his eyes and grinned, "Well, I can get used to this." He lifted his arm and looked at his watch, "I've got to get going. Go get dressed Lily, you're coming with me. I have some things to finish up at the office, and then we have a ten o'clock appointment with Doctor Jenson."

"Oh." She couldn't stop the tremor.

"Hey," he said softly nudging her chin so she'd look at him, "I'm with you every step of the way."

"I know. I'm terrified."

"I'm scared to honey, but we'll beat this together."

"Are you?" she said raising her brows. She was sure Max hadn't been scared of anything in his life. He faced adversary head on with horns out.

"Of course I am." He said softly, "Luke has finally let me near you and now that I've got you I certainly don't want anything to happen to you. You're my life."

She could feel her eyes moisten, "Do you really mean that?"

"Come here honey." He said shifting his body and easily lifting her over him so he could kiss her. It was a kiss of complete tenderness and it was loaded with affection.

Finally he lifted her off him and sat up. "Let's get going

before I drag you to your room.” He said in a strained voice.

Lily couldn't see anything wrong with that, but intimacy was still new to her and she didn't know how to tell him so she did as he said and made her way to her room to get dressed.

At the office Max made her sit in the waiting room across from Nancy, “Keep an eye on her Nance, I'll try not to be too long.”

“No problem.” She said looking past him to Lily. The girl looked pale and exhausted. “Lily, would you like some tea?”

“I'd love that.” She said.

When Nancy got up to go and get it, he turned back to her, “I'll try not to be too long, but stay here and wait for me, there's going to be a hundred people in and out of my office for the next hour as I try and clear my schedule. Luke can manage just fine, but he needs to be around you to.”

“I'll wait.” She said.

“That's my girl.” He gave her a genuine smile before he left her alone.

Shortly after Nancy returned with a cup of tea and squeezed her shoulder in reassurance telling her if she needed anything just to ask, before she returned back to her desk.

As Max promised, he was less than an hour and soon they were on their way to Doctor Jensen's clinic. The whole time he kept her close to him in the car, with his arm wrapped around her shoulders.

Doctor Jensen was an older doctor in his mid sixties and he was very polite and empathetic. He also had no problem agreeing to Max's request to take the whole lump.

“I've cleared my schedule tomorrow for the surgery,” he told Max and Lily, “It'll take me a few hours to have the results back to you about the tissue after that.”

“We'll wait for them.” Max said without hesitation.

“Certainly.” He said with a reassuring smile, “Then we’ll go from there if there’s any further treatment.”

“Afraid button?”

“Scared stiff.” She said honestly.

“Well, we’ll be with you every step of the way.” He reassured.

“Miss Shayne,” the doctor continued, “You can’t have anything to drink or eat after midnight and I want you back here by six thirty in the morning.”

“I’ll bring her.” Max said, “And what about recovery. Can I take her home tomorrow?”

“I don’t see a problem. We’ll like to keep her until around dinner time just to see how she does then I’ll release her.”

After the Doctor left Lily turned to Max, “Take me home.” She said gripping his arm. This was very terrifying. She had never had surgery before and never thought about the prospect of being put to sleep. What if she didn’t wake up? What if something went terribly wrong?

Max wrapped his arms around her, “Don’t worry honey, he’s the best they have.”

“Take me home.” She repeated no longer wanting to discuss this. Thankfully he seemed to know.

“Okay.”

“No, Max, I mean your home.”

He stilled, “Lily—“

She looked up at him, “Please—I just really need to be with you right now.” She saw a pained expression cross his face. “I know I didn’t measure up in Greece but—“

“Stop saying that Lily, you have no idea how I felt because you wouldn’t let me tell you.” She started to protest and he cut her off, “But you will listen now. I’ve never had a woman feel as good as you do. It’s like you were made specifically for me and I’ve missed you so much my heart hurts.”

She couldn't stop the tears from falling this time, but he continued.

"I always prided myself on my self-control, but I swear to God button, the day I laid eyes on you, I had none."

"—but Cybil—"

"I never slept with Cybil," He said softly, "I hadn't had a woman in over a year. I won't lie to you and tell you that I hadn't had anyone since I fell for you because there are just some things a man can't ignore. However, that night with you considerably blew my mind. I never knew that it would be like that when you actually love the woman that you make love to. If I had known I would have never touched another woman, but I also wasn't sure if you'd actually have me either."

"—Max—" she managed to choke out, "You love me?"

He bent his head and brushed his mouth across hers, "More than my own life honey. I'm so sorry I've hurt you."

"Luke told me what he asked of you."

"What a jerk." He managed with a smirk causing her to laugh despite her tears.

"I didn't know—I mean, I thought that I was invisible."

"No, you weren't. Far from it. I couldn't take my damn eyes off of you for a moment when you were around. I just wish I could have let you know sooner so you wouldn't have gotten hurt. It tore me apart knowing that you were hurting inside and there was nothing I could do about it."

"I'm tough."

"No you're not. Not where I'm concerned." He said, "You're a marshmallow."

"You are so conceited." She laughed despite her tears.

"Only because you make me feel on top of the world when you flash those gorgeous green eyes at me." He answered, "Now back to our moment in Greece. I wanted to make you mine in

every way, but something held me back. I couldn't betray Luke or you." He cupped her face in his hands and searched her eyes with his, "I want to be married to you first."

"It doesn't matter in this day and age Max." she surprised herself by saying that because she had pretty high morals, but she wanted him. She wanted to sleep next to him and waiting through a wedding was too long for her. Not only that she wasn't sure how long she had if the lump was cancerous. In view of it all, she didn't care anymore and wanted to live for the moment.

"It does to me and how I feel about you." He paused studying her expression seriously. "I could call my pilot and have the jet warmed up for a quick trip to Vegas if you don't want a big wedding with all the bells and whistles."

Her heart nearly leapt out of her chest. "You're serious." She whispered.

"Deadly." He answered as his hands went to her hips and pulled her against him, "If you want to make yourself mine as much as I want you next to me for the rest of my life, I'll do it in a heartbeat."

Lily felt more tears fall, but she managed a nod, and in an instant Max released her and pulled out his phone. If she thought he was just saying that to make her feel better she was wrong. He was giving commands over the phone like a Roman general and there was no mistaking the urgency in his voice.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was the plane ride back to Chicago that things started to sink in. Lily was sitting on Max's lap and they were sharing a glass of wine as she admired her wedding band. He took her to one of the most expensive jewellery shops in Vegas that cater to the very wealthy and allowed her to pick out their wedding bands. It had meant a lot to her. She instantly knew what she

wanted, but when the price was revealed she tried to stop him from handing over his credit card, but when he gave her a wry look she stopped. Obviously he could afford them, but she still felt guilty. However, as her eyes guided to his ring finger and the wide platinum decorative ring he wore, the guilt evaporated. It all seemed so surreal that she was married to a man that she was and had been hopelessly in love with forever.

Max had hauled her into the first wedding chapel he could find and when they stood before the minister, he phoned Luke long distance so he could hear the exchange of nuptials. She wasn't sure what Max had said to him before hand but she was sure he wasn't happy. For once she didn't care how Luke reacted. She wanted Max as her husband more than she feared Luke's anger.

Lily always wanted a big fairy tale wedding, but for some reason it didn't matter anymore, because she was Mrs Maximilian King. It was her dream come true. Nothing could spoil her happiness not even surgery. Even if things didn't go well, she at least had Max even if it was for a short time. When the minister told Max to kiss the bride, did he ever! If she had any doubts before they were gone with the force and passion in that kiss. It was the minister clearing his throat that broke the two apart. She was a little embarrassed, but looking up at her new husband she could see the promise in his eyes of more to come.

Oscar was waiting for them with the Limousine when the plane landed and he immediately congratulated Lily telling her it was about time the boss did something about his infatuation which got a mock look of anger from Max before they got in the car.

"It seems everyone knew how you felt about me, but me." She said feeling herself smile.

He tightened his arm around her waist, "It's because

you're full of humility honey. You never take anything for granted."

"Is that what that is?" She teased, "I thought I was just dumb."

"That is something you can never say," he continued with a serious expression, "I value your intelligence like a treasure. I've worked beside you remember? Dumb is something you're not nor ever will be. Now let me kiss my new wife."

She did just that.

Once at his building and after he inserted his key card in the slot of the elevator and entered a code in a separate panel to take them to his penthouse on the top floor Max scooped her up in his arms without warning.

"Max!"

He grinned, "You may not have a proper wedding honey, but I'm going to give you a proper wedding night."

She felt a thrill go through her at that deeply voiced promise, but the feel of his strong arms about her made her sigh and lay her head on his shoulder. Nothing could destroy her happiness at this moment, and she was going to savour every second of it. His arms were comforting and hard like the rest of him. She never forgot on how wonderful his body was when she slept naked next to him. Ever since then she craved that again, but was never able to tell him. In fact she hadn't had a restful night since the night on the yacht.

The doors to the elevator opened and he retrieved his key card from the slot before stepping through and marching down the hall to his room without breaking his stride. Once inside his bedroom he bent his head and kissed her but only released her legs letting them slide down his body. Then he turned her toward him and slowly backed her toward the bed all the time his mouth moved over hers.

"You'll have to excuse me Lily, if I seemed rushed, but I

waited a long time for this.” He murmured against her mouth.

She never said anything but her hands went to the buttons on his shirt, fumbling to get them undone.

“Well it looks like I’m not the only one.”

“Do you ever shut up?” She smiled against his mouth while shoving his shirt off of his shoulders forgetting that he wore a tie.

He chuckled while reaching up and loosening his tie causing her laugh at her own eagerness. Tossing the tie on the floor, he helped her strip off his jacket and shirt piling them on the floor beside them. Her hands went to the belt of his slacks and he stilled her. “No. It’s your turn.” He said huskily. Her cheeks pinked up but she started undoing the buttons of her blouse until it hung open revealing a light blue lacy bra.

“Nice.” He said while he slowly opened the ends of her blouse and moved his fingers up the inside of the collar to slide it off her shoulders. It fell in a soft swish behind her. Then his fingertips moved over the swell of her breasts as his eyes followed their path. “Touch me too Lily.”

She didn’t need to be asked twice. She missed the feel of him and easily ran her hands over the hard contours of his chest savouring the masculine feel of him, “I missed you.” She said softly guiding her eyes up to his slowly.

His hands framed her face so he could look down at her with rare affection, “Me too darling. I can’t even begin to describe how these past few weeks have been for me. I should have never touched you in Greece. It would have saved you so much heartache.”

She smiled faintly. “Then I would have never known how you felt Max. I never had regrets about that night ever—I thought you did.” If that was the only memory she had of him it would have been enough for the rest of her days.

“No, I cherished it.” He said releasing a long breath,

“More than you could possibly imagine. I thought it was just too soon for you.”

“Like I told you I would have married you when I was sixteen if you asked.” He gave her a sinful grin.

“I think twenty is fair button. I wouldn’t have touched you until now anyway. You are young, but now you’re my young wife.”

The word *wife* sounded so wonderful coming from his mouth. Her arms went around his neck as she stepped up to him and looped his arms around her pulling her tight against him as he bent his head and crushed her mouth under his.

Soon she was forming her body against his and responding as if someone lit a fire in her. His hands reached down and undid the button of her skirt followed by the zipper. His own belt had managed to get undone and was hanging loosely from the loops of his slacks.

HE threaded his fingers in her hair and pulled out the pins letting it tumble down her back while his other hand circled around her lower back and pulled her tight against his body. He knew she could feel the length of his erection against her soft belly but she didn’t move away, in fact she moved closer.

“Max you’re driving me crazy.” She moaned against his mouth.

“I am?” he chuckled moving her toward the bed, “I’m so hard it hurts.” He pulled her hips tighter toward him, “See?”

“Should that be turning me on so much?” she asked innocently, “I mean we never—“

“Oh, Christ honey! It’s your turn to shut up.” Her little naive statement nearly made him explode.

She released a laugh as he scooped her up and tossed her on the bed coming down on top of her. He wasn’t only tall but heavy with muscle and she loved the feel of his weight on her. Then she heard him chuckle and shift his weight. “What is it?”

“I forgot to take my pants off.” He said quickly sitting up and disposing of the rest of his clothing shaking his head at her soft giggle. He was so eager to be with her that he’d completely forgotten about his slacks. Then he turned and looked down the length of her body. She was still wearing her lacy undergarments, but he purposely did that. He wanted to slowly undress her himself. A pink tinge entered her cheeks and he shook his head again, “If you knew how beautiful you were to me, you wouldn’t be embarrassed Lily.” He said. He reached over and ran his fingers around the waistband of her panties slowly pulling them down her legs. He could see her embarrassment, but knew like last time, it wouldn’t take much to dispel it. “Remember this?” He said sliding his hands up her long silken legs until he reached the soft junction of her thighs. Then he slipped his fingers in her causing her to arch off the bed and moan. “Apparently you do.” He added with arrogant pride at her reaction to him while moving his hand with a practiced technique.

“Oh God Max!” She reached for him and he obliged by moving over her and using his other hand to quickly unsnap her bra exposing her beautiful breasts. He teased and tormented them with his tongue and hot mouth until she was sobbing while twisting her fingers in his hair almost painfully. Somehow she’d already managed to lift her legs and wrap them around his hips. He lifted himself up on his forearms and took her mouth with a possessive display of desire thrusting his tongue between her parted lips.

One of his hands reached over to the bedside table and vaguely Lily heard a door slide open and closed. She opened her eyes and watched him open a condom packet. “Max?”

“Shh, it won’t be for long Lily. I’ll give you all the children you want when this whole thing is over with. We can’t have that risk right now. Okay?”

She almost cried at his tenderness. How he even was able to think of her through his desire was beyond her. She couldn't even remember her own name at that time. He was right. If she had to go through any sort of treatment it would harm the baby. He knew she couldn't handle that and as always Max was taking care of her.

He centered himself back over her, "Let me know if I hurt you baby, I'll take it slow."

She nodded to afraid to say anything unless the tears she felt prick her eyes threatened to fall.

Then he shifted his hips and lowered them against hers probing for entrance, "One quick thrust Lily, then it'll be done." He said quietly bending his head to kiss her.

How his mouth made her forget all of her worries, she'd never know, but soon she was back in the fever of forgetting her name. Then he moved. It was quick and there was a stab of pain as his hips met the soft flesh of her inner thighs. She cried out unable to stop it and he instantly stilled smothering her with kisses.

"I have to move honey or I'm going to die." He murmured as he captured her mouth again. She was so tight that he could instantly feel himself pulse within her at the rapid beating of his own heart. There was no way in hell he could remain still for long.

She nodded responding to him as if there was no pain because he easily made her forget. When he pulled out there was a small stab but then just discomfort until he pushed back into her again. Her eyes flew wide and she released a gasp of wonder causing him to grin against her mouth.

"Again—please!" She said arching her head back into the mattress.

"Oh hell yes!" he growled beginning a slow torturous rhythm until she was begging him for more, but he still didn't

give in. She had to experience the pleasure of lovemaking to its fullest extent for her first time, and he was going to give it to her.

Finally, when her hands started clawing at his shoulders, she was writhing beneath him like a wanton goddess, and his own need could no longer be ignored, he raised himself up on his hands and began stroking more forcefully. "Open your eyes baby!" he rasped out. "I want to see you come."

She did as he asked and although he'd made her climax before during that night they shared, it was nothing like this. It was like someone set off firecrackers in her. Ripples of agonizing pleasure flushed out from her pelvis and rocketed through her. She actually heard herself scream his name which was cut off by a deep masculine shout of his own. She saw his expression of intense release as he arched over her before groaning in a rush of breath as he brought his full weight down on her capturing her mouth at the same time.

It was a good five minutes before he finally lifted his head and looked at her, "Sweet Jesus Lily, if I'd known it was going to be that good, I really wouldn't have waited until we were married."

"Are my toes supposed to be numb?" That got her one of the sexiest grins she'd ever seen on him.

"Mine are too." He shifted his hips and she released a gasp. "Don't start." He groaned, "I've got to let you rest for a bit before we make love again. It was your first time."

"I didn't know—realize that it would be so incredible." She said softly feeling like weeping.

"It isn't, but it is with us because we love each other."

He'd told her that earlier in the day but it still hit her with a wave of emotion. This time she did start weeping.

"Hush baby." He said softly kissing her tears tenderly, "I'll go draw us a bath and grab a bottle of champagne. Meet me there in twenty minutes."

“That sounds like heaven.” She managed with a smile.

“It will be.” He kissed the tip of her nose and rolled off her.

Lily rolled onto her side to watch his naked form as he walked into the bathroom. Then he stopped and spoke without turning around, “If you keep watching me like that, I’m going to change my mind and come back to bed.”

She released a laugh, “How did you know?” Slowly he turned around not the least bit shy about his body. *And why should he be*, she thought, *he was gorgeous.*

“Because Lily, only you could make my skin heat up from your gaze.”

She lifted herself up on her arms, “Really?”

“Every time you looked at me, I knew it.”

“You must’ve been warm a lot then.” She said without thinking.

He threw back his head and laughed, “twenty minutes.” He repeated leaving the room.

Almost twenty minutes later he led her toward his bathroom. “Wait,” he said, “this way.”

“It would help if you took the blindfold off.” She said in a laughing voice as he directed her from behind with his hands on her waist. She had her own arms thrust out in front of her.

“I don’t think you trust me. Put your arms down.” He said with laughter in his voice.

“No. you’ll throw me in the tub.”

“Will I?” he said in a very unconvincing voice, “Stop here.” He said releasing her waist to remove the blindfold.

“Oh!” Just when she thought he couldn’t surprise her anymore, “You did this in twenty minutes?” She said in disbelief. He had about a dozen candles lit surrounding the sunken tub which was loaded with bath bubbles. On the marble ledge beside the tub was a bottle of champagne and two glasses. “Max, this is

so sweet.” She felt overwhelmed with emotion.

He wrapped his arms around her from behind and kissed her neck, “I’ve waited years for you Lily. I’m never taking you for granted. Not for one minute.”

That confession coming from a man like Max was earth shattering. He was a womanizer through and through, yet he just laid his heart out for her. Without her saying anything she turned around in his arms, lifted herself up on her toes and pulled his head down towards her so she could kiss him.

“Another drink Mrs. King?” Max said reaching for the bottle. She was settled in between his legs with her back against his chest in the hot soapy water of the tub.

“Is it okay?”

He glanced up at the clock, “There’s still some time left before midnight. One more drink and then we’re going back to bed.”

“Oh, Mr. King, you certainly don’t have to get me drunk to take advantage of me.”

“No?” he said taking her glass from her hand and setting it beside the tub before running his hands up her body to cup her breasts. She sighed and tilted her head back into the crook of his neck causing him to groan. “Jesus honey, you respond like fire to my touch.”

She could feel the sudden jut of his erection against her back, “Apparently so do you.” She said turning around and facing him.

He lifted her up so she was level with him and kissed her hard, “No more Mr nice guy.” He said.

“Thank God!” she laughed just to have it cut off by the hard press of his mouth followed by a lot of splashing and another giggle

The next morning while she was lying on the stretcher to

be taken to surgery Max leaned over and gave her one last kiss on the forehead. Luke squeezed her hand.

"I'll be back." She smiled trying to alleviate their worries.

"We know button." Said Max, "But we just want you to know that we'll be here when you get out."

Luke leaned over, "Scared honey?"

"Terrified." She said still smiling, "But I believe I can do anything with you two behind me."

"We're ready." Said a nurse as she flipped the breaks off the gurney and gave the two men a reassuring smile as she wheeled it through the double doors that they weren't allowed through.

Luke and Max stepped next to one another until the doors closed. Luke put an arm on his shoulder causing Max to look at him.

"I'll buy you a coffee."

"That sounds good." Said Max. There was no mistaking the worry in Luke's eyes. He half expected him to tear a strip off of him for eloping with his sister, but obviously he was too anxious about Lily like he was to think it was important.

Luke led him to the coffee machine and threw some change in the slot. The cup dropped followed by the hum of coffee being poured, "How was she last night?"

"Worried, but—" he couldn't quite tell his best friend that he managed to keep her mind off it by ravishing her all night. With that thought came images of his new bride riding him with abandon while tilting her head back and moaning gloriously. It was possibly the most beautiful thing he'd ever witnessed. She was willing to try anything and when he made the suggestion that she get on top he was able to coax her until she overcame her initial embarrassment. Hell did she ever, once he showed her what he wanted she was wildly passionate. Even the thought alone made heat rise to his groin. "—she was happy Luke." He

said not elaborating.

Luke handed him his coffee with a slight look of embarrassment, "Sorry I asked."

Max couldn't help but grin, "She *is* my wife."

"But still my sister, don't forget that." He added slanting him an uncomfortable look.

"You wouldn't let me." He chuckled.

The next few hours were the longest of both the men's life as they waited for news of Lily. Finally Doctor Jenson walked into the waiting room wearing green OR scrubs and a surgical mask hanging from around his neck. Both men shot to their feet causing him to smile.

He lifted a hand, "She's fine. We're moving her to a private room and you can both go see her in about twenty minutes after the nurses are done their assessments and making her comfortable. Chances are she's not going to be much of a conversationalist until late this evening. People usually sleep for the first twelve hours straight and if they do wake up, they don't remember."

"And the lump?" asked Max.

The lump was encapsulated—

"What does that mean?" Luke interrupted.

"It means we got it all and that the chance of the cancer spreading is minimal—it's a good sign." Both of them visibly relaxed. "Remember, it may not even be cancerous." He added.

"When can you tell us?" Max asked.

"In a few hours at the latest." He answered. "The lab is on site here, so we should have full results by supper."

CHAPTER EIGHT

The light hurt Lily's eyes and she mumbled something to that effect. Suddenly the room dimmed after the sound of scraping of a chair. Then she felt a warm large hand on her forehead and another gripping her hand.

"Hey honey."

"Max?" Warm lips brushed her forehead.

"No other."

"You sound tired." She heard herself say.

"Well, if my wife didn't keep me up all night I'd probably have a couple of hours of sleep under my belt."

She couldn't help but smile and actually opened her eyes this time. She still was set back by how handsome he was. "you know—waking up to some stud hanging over me is such a treat."

He chuckled, "How do you feel? Are you in pain?"

"No, not really." She reached up and felt her breast but there was a bandage there. "How long was I sleeping?"

"All night."

Her eyes opened wider, "Really. Oh, poor Max, you must've been worried."

"I was, but we have good news." He smiled, "It's benign."

A sob burst from her followed by a string of tears causing him to bend over and hold her.

"Now we can begin to plan our future." He said.

"I want children Max, as soon as possible. I don't want to go back to school, I just want to be a wife and mother. This whole thing has put my life into perspective."

"Anything you want honey, it's yours. If you want babies, I'll give you as many as you want."

"Then you meant what you said the other night?"

"Lily, you should know by now that I never say anything I

don't mean. I never wanted children until I met you. Since then, it's all I think about. Starting a family. First though, you're going to need time to heal."

"I'm going to have a scar."

"So? It will be a reminder of how much we love each other. Every time I see it, I'll know how precious you are to me."

"Oh Gosh! I've done so much crying lately that I fear I have no fluid left in my body." She said feeling another tear slip down her cheek. Then her eyes darted around the room, "Where's Luke?"

"He's doing my job right now so I can be with you. He was here with us last night, then left early this morning. He already knows the results of your surgery. Remind me to give him a raise."

"Oh I will." She knew Luke loved her and for him to allow Max to be there when she woke up must've been hard for him.

He chuckled, "When you're better I'm taking you to Spain like I said for a honeymoon and we'll do our best to get you pregnant there."

She beamed, "Oh Max, you say the most wonderful things."

He laughed, and then became serious, "Nikos called."

"Oh?" she said pressing her lips together to keep from smiling. Seeing Max jealous was unusual and she couldn't help but feel good about it. Not once had she seen him jealous of other men.

"I promised myself not to make demands of you Lily, but I swear to God, I'm going to snap if that man comes near you again." Luke had told Nikos about Lily and he sent his regards from his and Demetrius' family along with another invitation for them to come and visit.

"Max, there's nothing going on between Nikos and I—"

"I know you think that Lily, but he's a man, and you're a

beautiful woman—“

She shook her head, “Nikos knows I’m crazy about you. He told me that you needed some help to see what you were letting go. He is not the type of man to betray your trust. I know he isn’t. Besides—“ she said finally letting her smile free, ”—I am a married woman.”

“Yes, you are,” he said possessively relaxing somewhat, “But Lily, you are so beautiful that any man would set aside their morals.”

“Stop that.” She said softly still not used to his compliments.

He bent down and kissed her, “it’s true. Can you imagine how beautiful our children would be?” His chest swelled at the thought of a little girl that looked like Lily. “Luke moved your things to our Penthouse by the way—“

“Our? How wonderful that sounds.” Then she thought of Luke and how alone he would be without her. “Poor Luke.”

“Don’t poor Luke, Lily, he has more than enough attention from women, but now he can have them over and not hide his love life from you.”

“He didn’t!” she said wide-eyed.

His grin was downright devilish this time, “Oh he certainly did honey, but that too, is none of your business. Just know that he isn’t as lonely as you think he is.”

She blushed and rolled her eyes, “fine, I don’t want to visualize my brother as a womanizer so I won’t bring it up again.” Luke was a very handsome man. He was just about Max’s opposite with his fair looks. He had blonde hair and hazel eyes and was around the same height if only an inch or two shorter.

Max chuckled at her embarrassment. Lily was extremely naïve if she thought Luke was innocent. He was sure she thought he had women, but he could probably put Max to shame with his adventures abroad. There were times when they travelled

together that Max went back to the hotel room alone, but Luke never did, or needed too. Max always had Lily in the back of his mind and only when his need became intolerable, did he take a woman to bed. Somehow he always felt guilty about it, but he knew he shouldn't. There was no commitment from her as of yet, and Max was a man. He actually confessed that to her the first night they made love and she was very understanding and told him that if he didn't have experience, then she would have no one to teach her. He shouldn't have expected anything less than understanding from her. She was really surprised that he hadn't had a woman in over a year because of his devotion to her and she knew nothing about it. Yet the other night she literally blew his mind. Even up until he had come to terms with his feelings for Lily, never did a woman affect him so emotionally.

"And tonight when I take you home, we are going to start planning our future. Next week we'll have a reception for our friends and family. By then you should be feeling better."

"I already am." The news he'd given her made her feel ecstatic.

"And the rest of our lives will be the same." He said genuinely.

She ran her eyes over his handsome face feeling almost too choked up to speak, "I love you." She saw his pale eyes darken as a sexy grin spread across his face.

"I never will get tired of hearing that." He said seriously, "And I will never stop saying it myself Lily. I love you button. So much my heart hurts whenever I lay eyes on you."

She reached for him and he embraced her.

Max had kept his word about never taking advantage of her feelings for him. Every day he told her how much he loved her and after four boys she finally gave him the girl he wanted. It was true that money couldn't buy happiness, but Max always thought he was the richest person in the world even if he was broke.



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